



**The professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa as  
a strategy to facilitate ethical practice**

**By**

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# Declaration

I, Charuna Naidoo, declare that:

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C. Naidoo

Signed by Student:.....

22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my first human resource manager, Anesa Naidoo. You have provided me with the solid foundation and learning, on which I have built my human resource management career. You have instilled in me the strength I need on difficult days, the courage to question, and the determination to always do the right thing for the right reasons, even if it would be career limiting. I thank you!



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Lastly, to all of those who have supported me, I thank you all.

My PhD journey in a nutshell . . .

*“Life is Amazing*

*And then it’s awful. And then it’s amazing  
again. And in between the amazing and awful  
it’s ordinary and mundane and routine. Breathe  
in the amazing, hold on through the awful, and  
relax and exhale during the ordinary. That’s  
just living heartbreaking, soul-healing,  
amazing, awful, ordinary life. And  
it’s breathtakingly beautiful”*

By L. R. Knost

## Abstract

---

*“The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything”* by Albert Einstein

Human resource management has made great strides as a profession in South Africa, from its initial function as the payroll department to now being a strategic business partner and confidant to the C-suite. This profession, however, faces its fair share of challenges. In particular, the issue of ethics and lack of professionalism has become a dilemma for the profession, which, together with the absence of statutory professionalisation, has made it increasingly difficult for human resource management professionals to survive this volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment within a South African ecosystem. While there is literature confirming that human resource management is in fact a profession, in the absence of statutory professionalisation it is essential to explore the experiences and opinions of human resource management professionals who do not belong to a professional body, and to compare these with the views of those who do belong to a professional body, as well as the perceptions of clients of both professionals and non-professionals. In this research the first participant group is called non-professionals, the second is professionals, and the last are the human resource management clients, without whom this profession would not exist. The framework and analysis that was applied in this study is a four themed framework used to investigate the participants’ understanding of general human resource management, human resource management ethics and the King Reports (with specific reference to the last King IV Report), human resource management professionalism and lastly human resource management professionalisation. The theoretical and conceptual model is based on a multilayer framework from the field of ethics, the sociology of professions, specifically from Evetts’ contribution on professions, professionalism and professionalisation, and finally, the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model. The data gathered from the in-depth interviews with participants was analysed using thematic analysis which generated the findings in the study. It is argued, based on previous literature and the data emanating from this study, that in the last two decades human resource management has continued to progress as a profession. There is a relationship between the professional development of human resource management and codes of ethical practice, as statutory professionalisation and ethical practice does affect human resource managements’ professional development. Lastly, this study offers recommendations for statutory

professionalisation as a strategy for ethical practice in human resource management in South Africa.

**Keywords:** Ethics, human resource management, King Reports, SABPP, professionalisation.

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## List of Acronyms

<b>AGM</b>	Annual general meeting
<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>BP</b>	Business partner
<b>CCMA</b>	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>CFO</b>	Chief Financial Officer
<b>CIPD</b>	Chartered Institute of Personnel Development
<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>DTI</b>	Department of Trade and Industry
<b>HCM</b>	Human Capital Management
<b>HPCSA</b>	Health Professions Council of South Africa
<b>HRDC</b>	Human Resource Development Council of South Africa
<b>IPM</b>	The Institute of People Management
<b>IR</b>	Industrial relations
<b>JSE</b>	Johannesburg Stock Exchange
<b>King I</b>	King I Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa 1999
<b>King II</b>	King II Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa 2002
<b>King III</b>	King III Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa 2009
<b>King IV</b>	King IV Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa 2016
<b>KPI's</b>	Key performance indicator's
<b>MBA</b>	Master in Business Administration
<b>MD</b>	Managing Director
<b>NICD</b>	National Institute for Communicable Diseases
<b>NVivo</b>	Software program for qualitative and mixed-methods research
<b>NIPR</b>	National Institute of Personnel Research
<b>OD</b>	Organisation Development
<b>SABPP</b>	South African Board for People Practice
<b>SAICA</b>	The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants
<b>SIOPSA</b>	Society for Industrial Organisational Psychology Association
<b>VUCA</b>	Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous

# Chapter 1: Introduction

---

*“We must use time wisely and forever realise that the time is always ripe to do right”*

by Nelson Mandela

## 1.1 Introduction

During the Second World War Abraham Wald, a mathematician, worked for the Statistical Research Group (SRG), which was a secret programme that brought together the elite statisticians of their time to aid in the war effort. However, their focus was not on weapons or explosives, but on equations. Wald’s talent was abstraction, thus moving away from direct applications like other statisticians. So, when the SRG were asked to assist the American Navy to establish where they should armour their fighter planes to guarantee their safe return, they conducted various analyses of where the fighter planes had been shot and made the following recommendations. The obvious conclusion for the Navy was to armour the fuselage since that was where the planes were being shot the most (Ellenberg, 2016). However, Wald disagreed; his conclusion and recommendation was that they armour the engine, a notion which was considered crazy, as that was not where the fighter planes were being shot. Interestingly, Wald’s aptitude for the abstract made him consider the problem from a different point of view, a view that his peers did not consider. He explained that the armour should not go where the bullet holes are; however, it should go where the bullet holes are not, and that was the engine. He simply considered, ‘where are the missing holes?’ (Ellenberg, 2016). The missing holes, according to his examination, were on the fighter planes that did not make it home, since the fighter planes that were making it back home had fewer hits on their engines. He concluded that the fighter planes that were hit in the engine did not make it home, and the fighter planes that did had what he termed a ‘Swiss cheese fuselage’. This made it evident to him that the fuselage could endure the damage inflicted by bullet holes. Therefore, he concluded that the Navy should put the armour where there were no bullet holes. When the Navy understood Wald’s recommendation, they took the necessary measures to armour the planes appropriately (Ellenberg, 2016).

Wald’s talent for abstraction made him consider the problem from a different point of view, which is what the researcher hopes to achieve in this exploratory study that will focus on contemporary perceptions of human resource professionalisation and ethics in a volatile,

uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment within a South African ecosystem, which is imperative to the time period of this study. Corporate South Africa has gradually increased its focus on business ethics and corporate governance in light of the progress and development of the King I (1994), King II (2002), King III (2009) and the latest King IV (2016) reports. Consequently, the notion of human resource management has evolved from a focus on the payroll department to the people management department and now to human resource management as a strategic business partner and leader in an organisation. The journey of human resource management and the contemporary evolution and development of the profession in South Africa will be the focal point of this research. Currently, there is no statutory recognition for those who work in human resource management in South Africa, thus human resource practitioners are not required to belong to a professional body and do not function within a specific professional human resource management regulated paradigm. This, together with low barriers of entry, which in this study refers to the minimal criteria in terms of relevant work experience, qualifications, or related certification, should be a prerequisite for employment in the human resource management profession in South Africa.

The lack of minimum criteria implies that anyone, regardless of relevant work experience and qualifications, can work in this profession, which makes the field vulnerable to criticism from human resource management clients from professions that have more rigorous criteria, as well as from businesses and highly qualified human resource management professionals. Therefore, these developments in business ethics and human resource management have resulted in widespread questioning of the need to establish whether statutory recognition for human resource management professionalisation in South Africa is required. Professionalisation will positively influence the human resource management profession, specifically in terms of practitioners' professional development, ethical practice, and professionalism; and will allow for human resource management to find a place in the next King Report on Corporate Governance.

This study will delve into the insights and experiences of human resource management practitioners and will also investigate their clients' experiences with human resource management professionals. Insights include a comprehensive review of general human resource management, human resource management ethics, the King Reports (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016) and human resource management professionalism, which constitutes the four themed framework applied to this research, based on the methodological approach that employs

thematic analysis. Consideration must be given to the unexpected rate of change and complexity that the world has experienced since 2019, which has encouraged innovation and growth at an exponential rate. The COVID-19 global pandemic has forced industries and sectors worldwide to adjust and adapt at an unprecedented rate. As a result, a new era of business and education has emerged, with terms such as ‘you are on mute’ and ‘my connection is bad’, presenting insurmountable challenges to human resource management, making this research significant to the human resource management profession at present in South Africa.

## **1.2 Research problem**

The existing human resource management literature presents two debates relating to this dilemma of ethics and professionalism in human resource management: firstly, the question of whether the human resource management profession can be trusted to be the custodian of ethics in an organisation; and secondly, whether human resource management’s reputation and lack of professionalism have become questionable, with little or no respect and accountability for their aberrant, unethical behaviour (De Beer & Du Toit, 2015; Van Der Westhuizen, Keightley-Smith, & Kathrada, 2021). Although there are human resource management professional bodies in South Africa, the South African Board for People Practice (SABPP) has been most active in eliciting attention in legislating human resource management as a profession. However, human resource professionalisation has no statutory recognition in South Africa, in that it is not mandatory for human resource management professionals to belong to a professional body to work in human resource management. In countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, and Kenya, it is mandatory for human resource management practitioners to belong to a professional organisation (Balthazard, 2014a; Balthazard, 2014b; CIPD, 2015; Omuya, Kwasira, & Kanali, 2017; Society for Human Resource Management, 2016).

The research problem addressed in this study emanates from a need to explore the current situation in South Africa where there is no compulsory or statutory requirement for all human resource management professionals to become members of a professional body to function in the human resource management department. Hence, not all human resource management professionals in South Africa have statutory human resource management standards, are not guided by an ethical code of conduct, and do not abide by professionalism as a vocation. Therefore, understanding the lack of ethics and professionalism in human resource

management becomes significant. Currently, human resource management professionals are divided between those who choose to belong to a professional body and those who do not but continue to work in human resource management. In professions such as commercial fields and engineering in South Africa, it is mandatory to belong to the relevant national professional bodies, while international body membership is by choice. Belonging to a national professional body should not be a personal choice in any profession, thus highlighting the importance and necessity of this research within the South African context.

### **1.3 Background, rationale and contribution of this study**

Parkes and Davis' (2013) research offers some of the justification for this current research, in that they suggest that human resource management is a result of its history, demands by business, the need for ethical practice, and the innovation and agility required to keep up with these evolving times. Kochan (2007, as cited in Parkes & Davis, 2013) affirms that these evolving times have continued through the social and economic changes of the twentieth century until the failure of trade unionism. This failure permitted human resource management professionals to adopt a unitarist view, based on the notion that an organisation is a cohesive group of people with sole power which has a set of mutual ethics, interests and goals collective to all members. To this end, the human resource management profession is pursuant to increasing its influence, trust, and reputation, thus positioning its function in an organisation to contribute to the bottom line and the organisational strategy and dissociating itself from the more human aspects of the process (Parkes & Davis, 2013).

The development and correlation between human resource management ethics and professionalism is another paradigm to consider for this research. The relationship between ethics and human resource management has been the subject of significant discussion in recent years as a response to what has been dubbed an "ethical turn" in human resource management (Rhodes & Harvey, 2012, p.49). This turning point was the clearly established proposition that ethics and ethical practice should be a matter deemed central to the human resource management function (Rhodes & Harvey, 2012). Especially after a global recession and a COVID-19 global pandemic, the profession finds itself in an unprecedented VUCA environment. This term was coined in the 1990's and was derived from the military environment, which signals the surge of instability and a swiftly evolving business world (Lawrence, 2013). Therefore, the current VUCA environment will require human resource

management as a strategic business partner to refocus and adjust to business needs and challenges during the COVID-19 global pandemic and beyond.

The first part of the VUCA acronym, 'V' (volatile), represents external factors that have an unpredictable effect on the business. Within the context of this research, this refers to the COVID-19 global pandemic and its impact on companies' ability to become agile during a challenging time. 'U' (uncertainty) in the acronym represents the lack of dependability. This implies understanding the external factors but not the timing or the magnitude of the challenge (Parker, 2018). In the case of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the South African President announced a level 5 lockdown on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020, consistent with the international response to the pandemic. Human resource management, both nationally and internationally, did not know how to respond to the pandemic at the onset, and were not prepared for the length of time that the pandemic stunted economies and the resultant effect on people's daily lives. This had severe implications for leadership and employees, specifically in terms of being set up for remote working and being equipped with adequate tools to adjust to the pandemic; this transition had to take place within a period of mere days. Human resource management professionals had to equip employees to work remotely and also had to support leadership to structure guidelines during this uncertain period.

The third part of the acronym is 'C' (complex), which means connecting in multiple interconnected parts. In recent times during the COVID-19 pandemic this translated into supporting employees' mental health by checking in on them via various online platforms and offering crisis counselling. Physical support also included arranging for chairs, laptops and stationery to be delivered to employees' homes, with organisations having no clear idea of the duration of the lockdown. The last letter of the acronym is 'A' (ambiguous), which refers to being vulnerable to more than one version of a situation (Parker, 2018). The human resource management support has no precedents in a business sense and requires being agile during challenging times.

In addition, to develop into perfect agents of top management and therefore implement and deliver on business strategy, it has been argued that human resource management has gone astray from its origins and, more significantly, from its function to bring the 'human' to human resource management of an organisation. Matten and Moon (2008, as cited in Parkes & Davis, 2013), similarly affirm that this is an appealing position for human resource management since

business seems to be more accepting of its responsibility to social obligations with corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a fundamental business goal for organisations globally. However, human resource management seems firmly devoted to its commitment to profitability and dissociating itself from any association with employee wellbeing, and most certainly its responsibility to society, thus losing the connection to the ‘human’ in human resource management. Parkes and Davis (2013) refer to the fracture in human resource management’s new-aged strategy as its failure to respond to changes. Sadly, human resource management has prioritised its roles in building business partners to intensify profits. Human resource management has thus neglected to ensure a balance between people and profit, which is mandatory for organisational sustainability in a VUCA environment (Parkes & Davis, 2013).

Therefore, the need to be perfect agents has exposed the detachment of human resource management from human resources in a complex South African context. South Africa has failed to establish a mandatory board and statutory human resource management council for practitioner regulation. Human resource management ethical practice is vital for human resource management recognition despite the presence of South African human resource management professional bodies. Professional standards thus remain unregulated. The lack of a regulated code of ethics makes human resource management vulnerable to unethical behaviour and a lack of ethical practice and professionalism, regardless of being considered a profession in South Africa. Brint (2001) and Ruiz Ben (2009), both cited in Evetts (2013), explain that the concept of professionalisation continues to be important in the analysis of new and emerging professions, such as information technology consultancy, human resource management, psychology, and social care work. Since seeking status and recognition, the profession requires regulation in the form of education, training, and best practice qualifications (Evetts, 2013), which is the case in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, and Kenya (Balthazard, 2014a; Balthazard, 2014b; CIPD, 2015; Omuya, Kwasira, & Kanali, 2017; Society for Human Resource Management, 2016), where human resource management has been successfully regulated. Evetts (1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2005; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018) has contributed significantly to the body of literature on professions, professionalism and professionalisation. The SABPP focuses on ethics, professionalism, a duty to society, as well as human resource management and business knowledge as crucial pillars in the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021).

Currently, there is an outcry from South Africans who are demanding a clampdown on corruption and unethical behaviour. This research inquiry hopes to keep this research relevant within the context of everyday ethical practice and professionalism by human resource management generalists and it is anticipated that the findings of this research could contribute to the human resource management profession that has drastically evolved. This research will also contribute to the sociology of professions literature in South Africa. The triple contribution of this research shall be on methodological, theoretical, and empirical grounds. This empirical investigation is one of the first studies that draws a correlation between human resource management ethics, professional development, professionalism and professionalisation.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

The research will be approached from the basis that since the profession of human resource management is not statutorily professionalised in South Africa, there is a significant need for an empirical investigation into this area of interest due to ethical challenges faced in the profession and the importance of professional development. Existing literature touches on research relating to these issues (Dawood, 2015; Legg, 2004; Syrigou, 2018; Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b). However, the statutory professionalisation of human resource management as a strategy for ethical practice in South Africa has not been sufficiently investigated. The following research questions were developed that emanate from the pressing need to investigate the topic of statutory professionalisation and whether it could promote ethical behaviour in the human resource management profession:

1. What is the significance of how human resource management has developed as a profession in South Africa?
2. How has human resource management professional development converged with codes of ethical practice?
3. In what way has statutory professionalisation and ethical practice contributed to the professional development of the human resource management profession?
4. How can statutory professionalisation be a strategy for ethical practice in human resource management in South Africa?

## 1.5 Research objectives

This empirical study intends to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To examine the development of human resource management as a profession in South Africa.

Interrogating the development and history of human resource management as a profession will provide the basis for this study but will also consolidate existing information. Notably, the last discussion that was compiled on human resource management as a profession in South Africa was undertaken nearly two decades ago, therefore this objective will provide an updated view. The findings related to this objective will also strengthen the human resource management profession's development, will contribute to new literature, and will support the fourth objective of this study.

2. To establish the relationship between the professional development of human resource management and codes of ethical practice.

There is very little literature that has been published on the relationship between the professional development of human resource management and ethical practice in South Africa. This dissertation aims to identify and explore this relationship in some depth and to therefore contribute to filling this gap in the existing literature.

3. To determine how statutory professionalisation and ethical practice affect human resource management's professional development.

Human resource management is not statutorily professionalised in South Africa. Therefore, there is a need to determine how statutory professionalisation and ethical practice, together, can contribute to this profession's development, through a theoretical and conceptual point of view.

4. To establish recommendations for statutory professionalisation to be a strategy for ethical practice in human resource management in South Africa.

This empirical study will provide recommendations and an original contribution to knowledge which could be of benefit to professional human resource management organisations that may want to pursue an application to the South African government for statutory professionalisation, thus contributing to a theoretical, conceptual and legislative perspective for future applications in South Africa.

## **1.6 Structure of the dissertation**

The main focus of this research is three critical areas of scholarship, which is human resource management, ethics and professionalisation. This will be presented in eight chapters, starting with this chapter which has presented the research problem, background, rationale, and the contribution of such a study in the pursuit of the application for human resource management professionalisation in South Africa. The literature review chapters have been split into two parts. The first part will bring to the surface the conceptual challenges, such as the COVID-19 global pandemic and the effect this pandemic has had on the human resource management department, as well as defining and conceptualising the human resource management profession. Furthermore, the discussion presented in this chapter will emphasise current human resource management trends from the late Marius Meyer (2019) who offered his take on the 2019 trends. In addition, Mackenzie's (2021) discussion of Josh Bersin's recruiting and human resource management trends for 2021 is outlined. Then, a general overview of the history and the evolving nature of the human resource management profession is offered, which will demonstrate the development of human resource management over time in South Africa. Chapter Two also interrogates literature on human resource management ethics, and analyses the contribution of the King Reports, with specific focus on the last King Report that was published in 2016. Finally, the chapter considers the downside of professionalisation, strategy and competencies of the human resource management profession as these topics all contribute to the understanding of the profession, which is pertinent to this study.

The second part of the literature review in Chapter Three consists of a consideration of the sociology of professions, specifically focusing on notions of professions, professionalism and professionalisation relative to human resource management ethics. It is essential to trace the history of human resource management in South Africa, from its inception to where it has progressed to date, with specific reference to the establishment and early history of the SABPP. The SABPP is a professional registering body of human resource management, as well as the statutory quality assurance body under the South African Qualifications Authority. They promulgate the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008. Understanding the concept of professionalism when establishing the SABPP and through the history of professionalisation is a vital benchmark (Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b), even though Bonnin and Ruggunan (2013) state that the sociology of professions has not achieved much influence within South African sociology. Hence, to comprehend the related themes of professions, professionalism

and professionalisation, one must consider that the sociology of professions provides context, as it also supports a methodical framework. Drawing specifically on Evetts (1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2005; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018), a sociology of professions theorist, the sociological analysis of professional work has separated professionalism as a particular means of classifying work and regulating workers, in contrast to the hierarchical, bureaucratic, and managerial controls of the business. However, professional work is transforming as professionals find professional control of their work, with flexible decision making progressively becoming challenging to sustain (Evetts, 2012a), as it is with the complexity of human resource management's role in business.

Chapter Four comprises of the theoretical framework that relies on a three-knowledge system that begins with the field of ethics, specifically business ethics, that is, teleological and deontological theories. Significantly, both teleological (consequentialist) and deontological (duty) ethics theory concur that any action is prompted by the desired consequence, making it evident that the motive for the action develops from the external VUCA environment. However, teleological and deontological ethics are indecisive regarding this result. Teleological ethics claims that the right thing to do is to create the best effect. As the moral opposite to deontological ethics, extreme consequentialism would validate the use of all methods needed, as one must amplify the good and, therefore, diminish the bad (Hatcher & Aragon, 2000; Macdonald & Beck-Dudley, 1994; Micewski & Troy, 2007; Xing Xu & Keung Ma, 2016).

In contrast, according to deontological ethics, the ends of any alleged action can never validate the use of any or all means, for one must act out of regard for the greater moral good. The deontological approach, consequently, is the way to balance the teleological difference of means and ends by adding the dimension of moral duty, which establishes itself in chosen restrictions, irrespective of possible unnecessary consequences (Hatcher & Aragon, 2000; Macdonald & Beck-Dudley, 1994; Micewski & Troy, 2007; Xing Xu & Keung Ma, 2016). Hence, the latter is more relevant to the complexities of the human resource management profession when these professionals find themselves in various situations in their present-day world of work.

The second body of knowledge that will be applied from the sociology of professions focuses on professions as a particular category of occupations, further to the literature which details

Evetts' (1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2005; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018) views on the three concepts of professions, professionalism and professionalisation, as well as the use of the discourse of professionalism that varies between different occupational groups. Furthermore, Evetts' (2012a) application of McClelland's (1990) categorisation theory to differentiate between professionalisation and professionalism from 'within and from above' will be articulated. The application of categorisation theory will be developed in greater detail in the theoretical framework and conceptual model presented in Chapter Four.

The last section of Chapter Four will detail the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021). Reference is made to the SABPP Human Resource Management Competency Model, focusing on ethics, professionalism, human resource management and business knowledge as the four pillars, as well as the foundation that refers to human resource management's duty to society. Various literature from the SABPP is considered, as the professional body in South Africa has exhibited considerable strides in shifting the human resource management paradigm from the previous conceptualisation of payroll department to a reputable profession in business, whose reach extends across academia, government, and other international human resource management professional bodies, including their significant interaction with business. Collectively, the model and the SABPP's definition of human resource management professional, Chartered human resource management professional, and Master human resource management professional are all categories of membership that have been established for the professionalisation of human resource management professionals that choose to register with the SABPP and the criteria that each professional body in South Africa must meet, which has to be recognised by South African Qualifications Authority. Jointly, this theoretical framework has greatly influenced the development of the conceptual model used in this study.

The methodological approach presented in Chapter Five includes the motivation for the qualitative, interpretative approach used in the study. Quantitative research is based on the capacity or amount. It applies to trends that can be expressed in terms of measure (Kothari, 2004). Quantitative research is described as a unique research approach that involves the gathering of numerical data; hence it favours the relationship between theory and research as empirical and adopts an objectivist notion of social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2014). On the other hand, qualitative research is concerned with trends relating to or involving quality, such as examining the reasons for human behaviour, that is, why people think or do certain things

(Kothari, 2004). Hence, this type of research collects and analyses primarily non-numerical data (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Therefore, qualitative research was used in this interpretive and exploratory study to investigate human resource management's ethics and ethical practice. This was done firstly by examining participants' perceptions of human resource management professionalism and secondly their views concerning statutory recognition for human resource management professionalisation in South Africa. Using purposive and snowball sampling methods to determine the total number of participants included in the study, in-depth interviews were conducted, and the findings were analysed using thematic analysis (Dawson, 2002).

The empirical findings obtained from the in-depth interviews are presented in Chapter Six, while Chapter Seven applies a four themed framework to analyse and discuss the findings and intensify existing literature. The empirical data gathered in the course of the study strengthens a comprehensive understanding of human resource management's current ethical practice and professionalisation. The findings increase the ability to interpret and analyse human resource management professional frameworks. Finally, Chapter Eight summarises the critical research findings, explores how the research objectives are addressed in light of the findings obtained, provides recommendations, and emphasises this study's unique contribution to human resource management and the South African sociology of professions field.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Part 1: Human Resource Management, Human Resource Management Ethics, and the King Reports

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*“In looking for people to hire, look for three qualities, integrity, intelligence, and energy.*

*And if they don't have the first, the other two will kill you”* by Warren Buffet

#### 2.1 Introduction

It would be easy to refer to the COVID-19 global pandemic as a ‘black swan’, which is a phrase used to describe a random, rare, catastrophic occurrence. However, the author of the bestseller ‘The Black Swan’, Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2007, as cited in Avishai, 2020), clarifies in a Bloomberg interview that his book was designed to explain why, in a connected world, business practices and social norms need to be transformed. The phrase was not meant to describe every negative matter that surprises society, and arguably the COVID-19 global pandemic was not a surprise. It was predicted by individuals such as Bill Gates and Laurie Garrett (2020), among others, thereby making the COVID-19 global pandemic a “white swan” (Avishai, 2020, p.1). This white swan has evolved from the pre-COVID-19 VUCA environment, through the drastic changes experienced during the pandemic and has developed to the next level globally. This highly transmittable virus jeopardises the health of world economies and their people. Pre-pandemic organisations faced growing uncertainty as they navigated diverse challenges ranging from complex issues such as the recession, climate change, corruption and fraud, and political instability (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). In South Africa, these diverse pre-pandemic challenges ranged from Cape Town’s drought to load shedding<sup>1</sup> and the Zondo Commission<sup>2</sup> that continued into 2021. The lack of ethical practices has continued even during the pandemic as corruption and fraud persist, as exemplified by the Personal Protective Equipment scandal and the questionable procurement of COVID-19 vaccines (Bhengu, 2021).

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<sup>1</sup> Load shedding is a way to allocate demand for electrical power throughout multiple power sources. It is therefore a means to relieve pressure on a primary energy source when demand for electricity is greater than the primary power source can supply in South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> The Commission was established in January 2018 by former President Jacob Zuma, to investigate allegations of state capture, corruption, and fraud in the public sector in South Africa.

During the turbulent pre-pandemic economic times, the human resource management community had mostly evaded blame in the global and local financial collapse, as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) were named the lawbreakers in previous ethical scandals. South Africa has a highly active economic, social, technological, and political environment at the helm of principled leadership and governance (PwC, 2016), which led to the development of the King I (1994), King II (2002), King III (2009), and the latest King IV (2016) corporate governance compliance reports. The PwC steering report (2016) portrays the King IV (2016) as an initiative to build trust between organisations and society, hence the triple bottom line, that is, financial, social, and environmental (PwC, 2016). Regardless of the King Reports, Parkes and Davis (2013) explained that the lack of accountability by human resource management professionals may have been a blessing to the human resource management profession, compared to their finance counterparts who were held criminally accountable in various scandals. Ulrich (1997, as cited in Parkes & Davis, 2013), posits that human resource management was born out of concern for human wellbeing and practices, highlighted by ethical and social values.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, organisations were thrust into the unknown and had to support employees in order for them to acclimatise and endure drastic work pattern transformation termed the ‘new world of work’ (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). During the COVID-19 global pandemic, national lockdowns, remote working<sup>3</sup>, online shopping, online gyms, drive-through services, and online funerals have been accepted as the norm. This pandemic has created a different challenge for human resource management, extending the focus of human wellbeing and procedures from the office to the employee's home, as human resource management professionals continues to support leadership and employees during these VUCA times.

## **2.2 Human resource management challenges and influence in the COVID-19 global pandemic**

Kose, Sugawara and Terrones (2020) examined world economies such as the United States of America, Germany, the United Kingdom, and China post the 2009 global recession. Pickert

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<sup>3</sup> Similar to flexible working, which is within the terms and conditions of an employee's employment contract, but it should not be confused with agile working, which allows employees to work how, where and when they chose to.

and Bloomberg (2020) and The World Bank Flagship Report also evaluated post 2009 global recession and detailed the effect of the COVID-19 global pandemic on world economies (Kose, Sugawara, & Terrones, 2020; Pickert & Bloomberg, 2020; The World Bank Group, 2022). Subsequently, The World Bank published a report (Ayhan Kose & Ohnsorge, 2021) stating that the COVID-19 global pandemic has caused another global recession whose complexity has transcended the two World Wars and the Great Depression over the past century and a half. Although global economic activity is growing again nearly two years after the initial outbreak of the pandemic, it is impossible to resume business as usual any time soon (The World Bank Group, 2021; 2022). In South Africa, PwC (2021, as cited in The World Bank Group, 2021) states that the strict lockdown<sup>4</sup> rules implemented when the pandemic began abruptly reduced workplace activity and cost South Africa 1.3 million jobs. The restrictions that were imposed on human movement and commerce led to a substantial decrease in workplace activity. Hence, it is estimated that the South African economy shrunk by 8.8% in 2020 (The World Bank Group, 2021). Given the 2020 recession, The World Bank (Ayhan Kose & Ohnsorge, 2021) and Investec (Bishop, 2021) reports predicted that the global economy would gain traction in 2022. This forecast depended on the effective distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and progressive fiscal, financial and monetary conditions (Ayhan Kose & Ohnsorge, 2021; Bishop, 2021).

Conversely, The World Bank (2021) report predicted that by early 2022 global markets would yield pre-COVID-19 international pandemic levels of production (Bishop, 2021; The World Bank Group, 2021). In his State of the Nation Address (SONA) on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2021, President Cyril Ramaphosa (2021) noted that the most significant number of jobs generated in the 2021 economic recovery would come from the private sector. Therefore, the government would support a more favourable business environment to facilitate job creation (The World Bank Group, 2021), contributing to the war on talent.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that the country would be going into a twenty-one-day lockdown from the 26<sup>th</sup> of March to the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2020. Within three days, South Africa had to adjust to regulated remote working. Organisations found themselves supporting employees' transition to working from home and ensuring that they had the equipment to do so. In addition, they had to support employees to maintain a work-life

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<sup>4</sup> South Africa's lockdown rules were amongst the strictest 25% of countries in the world.

balance and good mental health due to the heightened anxiety from the closure of schools and the lack of aftercare services or domestic help. While these work-family interdependencies seem incredibly demanding for employees with children, single and childless workers are not impervious to the adverse effects of remote working. There may actually be a greater chance of an unhealthy state of well-being, mental and general health issues among these groups (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021).

The two departments that had to step up within numerous organisations and swiftly support employees working remotely were the information technology and human resource management<sup>5</sup> departments. This was especially difficult in smaller organisations that were not set up for remote working, such as small businesses or law firms which did not have the resources such as laptops. This meant that employees were allowed to take their desktops home, and due to the rush preceding the lockdown, in many instances no records of this were accurately tracked. In addition, human resource management professionals had to create increased forms of communication via WhatsApp video calls, Skype for Business, Zoom and Microsoft Teams to connect with their respective portfolios. Human resource management generalists promptly became 'crisis coaches' to support employees as they attempted this new way of working. Nearly two years after the initial level five lockdown was implemented, South Africa was in the midst of a level one lockdown restriction, during which various vaccination drives were being rolled out, local government elections had taken place and a fourth wave of COVID-19 was experienced in the country in December 2021.

Aside from supporting employees and the organisation during this VUCA time, human resource management professionals were expected to be compliant and report COVID-19 cases to the company COVID-19 Health and Safety Officer. One of the first human resource management initiatives was to survey geographical sites to understand employees' situations, such as living with elders or health care workers, or employees and household members having comorbidities. The information was analysed and used by human resource management managers to support their employees in their portfolios. This was also updated when new employees started. Subsequently, human resource management had to keep track of positive

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<sup>5</sup> In some organisations human resource management is also called the Talent Department, even though Talent is usually associated to Recruitment.

cases, first with the Department of Labour and Department of Health and then with the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD).

Human resource management departments continue to be involved in various return to work initiatives. However, most employees continue to work remotely, as different variants and waves affect employees' return to the office and their ability to continue with business as usual. Kulik (2021) discussed the opportunity for human resource management professionals to step up and support employees in terms of their psychological safety, mental health, operational support, and business strategy (Kulik, 2021). The COVID-19 global pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on business, specifically on information technology and human resource management departments. Since the pandemic is still continuing, it may be too early to ascertain if human resource management professionals have fully played a role in the initiatives that were necessary to change the way in which employees engaged in work. However, the reputation of human resource management from the perspective of organisational leadership has positively transformed as a result of the supported transitions required due to the pandemic.

Butterick and Charlwood (2020) contend that although there are no definitive next steps for human resource management, it is important for various human resource management departments to connect, communicate and discuss challenges during the pandemic to benchmark and support each other as a fraternity. These conversations should be initiated by academic institutions, human resource management professional bodies and human resource management professionals that do not belong to a professional body. Butterick and Charlwood (2020) also suggest including businesses, specifically managers that work with human resource management professionals, unions, policymakers, and government that regulates lockdown levels globally, as there have been patterns in the different waves that trend similarly across the globe. The CEO of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), Peter Cheese (2020, as cited in Butterick & Charlwood, 2020), advises that human resource management should work through developments surrounding the COVID-19 global pandemic as it has forced businesses to focus on employee engagement and wellbeing. However, Butterick and Charlwood (2020) articulate that this is unrealistic as not all organisations would disclose ruinous employment practices during the pandemic, such as the ineffectiveness to regulate social distancing and the wearing of masks in the office environment. Moreover, there has been a rise in unemployment due to the pandemic, which gives employers more labour market power and creates opportunities based on the natural attrition of employees. Policy and regulations

should guide employee engagement and wellbeing and allow human resource management to provide job security and a safe space for employees to cope during these difficult times (Butterick & Charlwood, 2020).

Consequently, Sayer (2011, as cited in Butterick and Charlwood, 2020) advises that ethical behaviour depends on unethical behaviour. Instead of focusing on what is unethical, human resource management should focus on avoiding harm and promoting ethical practices. Professional bodies can enable this. In addition, Butterick and Charlwood (2020) suggest that if human resource management professionals do not adhere to professional codes of conduct, their transgressions should have consequences, such as exclusion from membership to a human resource management professional body. However, for professional bodies to influence business and promote ethical practices, they need to make progressive developments in their support for human resource management professionals during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted challenges, dilemmas and new trends experienced by human resource management professions globally (Butterick & Charlwood, 2020). One such trend is 'the great resignation'. Associate Professor Anthony Klotz (2021) first coined the term at a Bloomberg interview on the high levels of attrition in the United States of America during which he warned that the 'great resignation' was approaching. In early 2021, four million Americans left their jobs at an unprecedented rate, with one of the main reasons being the need for greater flexibility and work-life balance (Allen, 2021). Another survey conducted by Workhuman (2021) advised that other reasons for employees leaving are low salary concerns, better job title, better work culture and issues with management (Workhuman, 2021).

Even though the 'great resignation' may not yet have reached South African shores, some trends indicate this possibility. A survey conducted by Remchannel (2021), an Old Mutual Corporate reward management platform (Fokazi, 2021), revealed that 88% of companies who responded to the survey stated that employees across the board are working longer hours during remote working due to the pandemic instead of the hours worked in an office workday. The survey also indicated that 32% of employees were expected to respond to work emails outside of traditional working hours. Contributing factors to why employees may choose to resign in South Africa include working too hard, restricted travel, which results in employees not taking their leave, and toxic workplace culture. Employees in South Africa are choosing not to tolerate these factors anymore (Fokazi, 2021).

Furthermore, attrition has increased in South Africa by 16% across all sectors. The war on talent is undoubtedly at a loss, with 69% of organisations that participated in the Remchannel (2021) survey stating that they struggled to attract new talent and to retain current talent. Fokazi (2021) advises that the reason for the high levels of attrition are retirement, termination of contracts, and downsizing due to the pandemic. 60% of employees who left their employment between April to October 2021 had resigned, thus suggesting the start of the ‘great resignation’ trend in South Africa. The Managing Director of Remchannel, Rene Richter, indicates that there is a possible connection between high levels of attrition, a shift in work expectations, such as working remotely, and the highest leave liability<sup>6</sup> due to travel restrictions, as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic (Fokazi, 2021). One of the participants of the Remchannel (2021) survey succinctly stated:

*“I don’t want more of the same. I need balance, and I want to work the way I want to work to avoid this burnout phenomenon. Even in a job-scarce country like South Africa, where you expect to see workers clinging to their jobs, we’re seeing aspects of this global trend”* (Fokazi, 2021, p.3).

As companies contend with the ‘new normal’, returning to work is no longer an issue as the pandemic has changed where and how employees work. The new workplace can exist anywhere. During this workplace evolution, it has also moved the balance of power from business to employees (BusinessTech, 2021; Workhuman, 2021). LinkedIn (2020) is an American business and employment-oriented virtual service that operates via websites and a mobile app. This platform is used globally, particularly by professionals interacting for employment opportunities, career development, training and conferences, and professional networking opportunities. This social platform advertises vacancies and separates remote and onsite vacancies for easy access to candidates seeking job opportunities that are purely remote working (LinkedIn, 2020), which has become a preference for job seekers who have re-thought and re-imagined their careers. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in professionals who worked eight-hour days, engaged in home-schooling during lockdown, together with domestic household chores, after which they would log on again after all home duties for another two to four hours of work in the evening. This stress, burnout, anxiety and isolation to do it all has led employees to opt for remote or flexible working opportunities. If a business cannot put

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<sup>6</sup> Leave liability is the financial cost of not taking leave.

employees first, and if human resource management cannot focus on the human at the core of work, employees are now deciding to opt for better opportunities for themselves. Interestingly, the preference for remote and flexible working has also allowed international companies to recruit South Africans for their unique skills and diverse profiles, which has enabled these South Africans to work remotely on contract without relocating or leaving family and friends (BusinessTech, 2021; Workhuman, 2021).

The COVID-19 global pandemic has created, while it may be unprecedented, yet another VUCA situation for organisations and employees to deal with. However, this pandemic has also presented the opportunity to shift power from leadership to employees. During the last recession in 2009, employees globally were stuck in their jobs due to fear of retrenchment or restructuring. In South Africa, Section 189 in the Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995 authorises employers to dismiss employees for operational requirements based on the organisation's economic, technological, and structural needs. Section 197 of the Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995 allocates the transfer of a business and the rights of employees affected by such a complex transaction, both of which permit firms to choose the bottom line over employee well-being, thus disempowering and challenging employees' dual responsibility to their organisation and profession. Once more, the human resource management profession is presented with numerous challenges due to the 'great resignation'. They have the multiple responsibilities of supporting organisations that are being inflexible with employees' requests for better working conditions, ensuring employee engagement when navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, and trusting and respecting that the work will be done regardless of where and how an employee achieves this.

Three industrial revolutions<sup>7</sup> have already transformed the world and humanity, and now so has the fourth industrial revolution, which began in 2016 and has set up individuals globally to move between digital domains and offline reality with the use of connected technology to enable and manage their lives (Xu, David, & Kim, 2018). The fourth industrial revolution has brought about challenges such as the automation of technologies. An example may include automated or driverless cars that would replace Uber drivers. Schwab (2015, as cited in Xu,

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<sup>7</sup> The first industrial revolution began in 1760 with the invention of the steam engine. Then the second industrial revolution commenced in 1900 with the invention of the internal combustion engine, and the third Industrial revolution started in 1960 that saw the implementation of electronics and information technology and automated production (Xu, David, & Kim, 2018).

David, & Hi Kim, 2018) states that we are at the edge of a technological revolution that will essentially alter people's way of life and work, and most certainly will connect one with the other. The scale, scope and complexity of this revolution described in Schwab's (2015) article, according to Xu, David and Hi Kim (2018), will be unlike anything humankind has ever experienced previously. Schwab (2015, as cited in Xu, David, & Hi Kim, 2018) argues that it is difficult to know how the fourth industrial revolution will develop. Still, the response will be met globally by the private and public sector, governments, academia, and society (Xu, David, & Kim, 2018).

Even though Schwab (2015, as cited in Xu, David, & Hi Kim, 2018)) could not have predicted a global pandemic of this magnitude and its challenges to world economies, the digital revolution has provided organisations and employees with the opportunity to work remotely. Moreover, it has enabled employees to prove that the workplace does not have to be in a physical office. While the COVID-19 global pandemic and the 'great resignation' is proving to be challenging to business and human resource management alike, the fourth industrial revolution will continue to challenge the human resource management profession to enhance technologies and competencies, and to develop the ability to adjust to the digital revolution that is currently underway (Hecklau, Galeitzke, Flachs, & Kohl, 2016; Nankervis, Connell, Cameron, Montague, & Prikshat, 2021).

### **2.3 Defining and conceptualising human resource management**

Ekuma and Akobo (2015) acknowledge a wealth of literature on human resource management's ability to respond to competitive pressures. Moreover, the literature highlights the value of people as a source of competitive advantage, thus the importance of human resource management as a core part of business and human resource management practices to support people in organisations. Such approaches are founded on the belief that achieving employee commitment is required to accomplish organisational business strategy and objectives (Foote, 2001, as cited in Ekuma & Akobo, 2015). With the current dilemmas faced in human resource management such as restructuring, de-motivation and demoralisation of employees, approaches that value people within an organisation may determine if human resource management can achieve employee commitment and support business leaders to attain their business strategy and goals, whilst maintaining human resource management's ethical practice. Considering these demands on human resource management to support employees

and business fairly means that human resource management has a dual responsibility. Ekuma and Akobo (2015) refer to this as ‘dual memberships’ to business and the human resource management profession, sometimes making human resource management’s professional allegiance run contrary to organisational business strategy and goals. In this instance, human resource management values may conflict with corporate values (Ekuma & Akobo, 2015).

These scenarios make it “exciting and frightening times for professionals in human resource and other human capital roles” (Ulrich, Schiemann, & Sartain, 2015, p. iii), an appropriate statement in these uncertain times. Kulik’s (2021) analogy of human resources is apt of being Clark Kent’s disciplinary equivalent, and his alter ego, Superman. Recognition needs to be given as to why this is an appropriate analogy for this research. Kulik (2021) refers to Clark’s mild-mannered persona, similar to human resource management biding its time, waiting for the right moment to dash into a telephone booth. This is analogous to the current situation in that human resource management professionals and researchers now face the challenge and opportunity of the prevailing situation within human resource management during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, Kulik (2021) refers to human resource management as once dull and bureaucratic, yet currently positioned to transform and place itself at the forefront of human resource management innovation. Human resource management practitioners and researchers are now set to influence and support leadership during this VUCA time (Kulik, 2021). Consequently, human resource management is mild-mannered no more.

Ulrich, Schiemann, and Sartain (2015) dedicate their book ‘The Rise of HR: Wisdom from 73 Thought Leaders’ to human resource management professionals worldwide. One could argue that there may be a bias towards professionalised human resource management professionals. However, Ulrich, Schiemann, and Sartain (2015) pose an essential question of “what do human resource management professionals need to know or do to be effective in today’s and tomorrow’s business world?” (Ulrich, Schiemann, & Sartain, 2015, p. IV). The result is a compilation of essays from human resource management thought leaders who have provided insight into the role of human resource management as it evolves. These essays addressed a series of questions relevant to the current human resource management profession and the current research. These questions ranged from:

*“What will customers and investors expect of our organisations, and how will human resource management leaders help grow value for these*

*external stakeholders? What can human resource management do to deliver and optimize talent? How can human resource management professionals build organisations with capabilities in innovation, collaboration, culture, and execution? How can changing technology and advanced analytics be applied to human capital management? How will the human resource management function be governed in the future? What competencies will be critical to success as a human resource management professional tomorrow?” (Ulrich, Schiemann, & Sartain, 2015, p. IV).*

While these are all relevant questions to the profession globally, one could also pose these questions within the South African human resource management context. Regardless of the response and the extensive discussion, it would be essential to note that human resource management is not compulsorily professionalised in South Africa. The issue of why human resource management professionals are not professionalised, and whether human resource management is even regarded as a profession in South Africa has become a pressing one. Furthermore, the question of whether current professional development of human resource management is connected to human resource ethical practice is also of crucial importance.

#### **2.4 Understanding human resource management**

Marchington and Wilkinson (2008, as cited in Farnham, 2015, p. 4), simply define human resource management as the “management of employment”. However, according to Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, and Drake (2009), numerous attempts have been made to explain and define the influence of human resource management over the last thirty years. Moreover, the debate surround what actually constitutes human resource management will continue as the field evolves.

Van Vuuren and Eiselen (2006) offer a basic definition since it is evident from the name that the human resource management function manages the human factor within the organisation, hence,

*“Ethical behaviour is about human behaviour. Since human resources practitioners need to be experts on human behaviour, it stands to reason then that human resources must, in some way, be able to understand and*

*have a substantial influence on organisational ethical behaviour. It is for this reason that professional human resources associations and their members (human resource practitioners) should embrace their ethics management responsibility”(Van Vuuren & Eiselen, 2006, p.27).*

Consequently, Wilton (2016) states that human resource management can also be defined as a field of professional occupation with the capacity to be expressed together with Price’s (2007, as cited in Wilton, 2016), explanation that recognises a broader selection of management styles and related practices.

Van der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren and Visser (2003) share definitions from the 1980’s and 1990’s from Hall and Goodale’s (1986) explanation that is in line with Cascio (1998) and Singer (1990). They describe human resource management as the affiliation between employees, positions, organisations, and the environment. Human resource management has two central points from these various descriptions: the employee and the organisation. The employee can obtain success and work satisfaction stages, as the organisation attains its goals in return. Hence, when studying human resource management, it is essential to gauge the employee's significance and the management of the employee within the organisation (Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003). These explanations correlate with human resource management’s current focus on talent, thus addressing the war on talent. Therefore, a recurring theme is maintaining and managing talent under human resource management recruitment.

Perhaps the most popular definitions of human resource management are those proposed by Storey (1995) and Armstrong (1995), as these explanations are a systematic review of earlier works from American and European human resource management debates. Storey (1995), refers to this discipline as “a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce using an integrated array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques”. It may be worth mentioning that human resource management emphasises employee management techniques focused on expanding competitive advantage that is subject to business or organisational strategy. Armstrong (1995) recognises the vital role of strategy, emphasising the need for robust employee systems that prioritise employee care (including individuals and teams) and investing in essential resources. Furthermore, Armstrong (1995) identifies human resource management as a planned and logical method of managing an

organisation's employees who independently and jointly support attaining business goals. Wilton's (2016) explanation of human resource management seeks to define a process that manages employees in the following two ways. Firstly, Wilton (2016) refers to Boxall and Purcell's (2003) definition that implies that anything associated with human resource management may include all references to the supervision of occupational relationships in an organisation (Wilton, 2016). Storey (2007) dubs this a formula for managing people, while Price (2007, as cited in Wilton, 2016) explains human resource management as the management of people to attain business success. Therefore, an organisation can gain a competitive advantage by developing its employees, thus utilising their knowledge and initiative to meet performance goals and develop crucial competencies (Wilton, 2016).

Itika (2011) offers philosophies that have been indifferent to the human experience as functional relationships since they are, in many ways, constricting aspects of employment that benefit the organisation and not the employee. Consequently, strategies would be used to diminish what appeared to be challenging human resource management philosophies and practices (organisations becoming too egocentric, idiosyncratic<sup>8</sup> and materialistic), thus attempting to exploit whatever potential advantages at the sacrifice of employees. However, the emphasis in the 1990s altered significantly. The trend has since moved to teamwork, employee empowerment, organisational learning, and competency-based human resource management. This is still pertinent to human resource management, as these still feature in current human resource management trends. Hence, the 1990's and 2000's were dedicated to comprehending these fresh new concepts to improve the human resource management function in contemporary organisations. In addition to this, are the different levels of the local and international strategy of human resource management, thus the impact of the current rate of change on human resource management, particularly in the developing economies such as South Africa (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007; Harzing & Van Ruysseveldt, 2004; Itika, 2011; Wilton, 2016).

In the last two decades, human resource management as a field in managing employees has evolved and developed into diverse spheres. With its basket of sub-disciplines and practices, this field has undergone trial and error, harnessing theory and accessing various concepts by practising managers and academics alike. The fundamental influences following the evolution

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<sup>8</sup> An eccentric or unusual habit or way to conduct yourself, or a feature that someone or something has.

and development of human resource management have been, and still are environmental<sup>9</sup>, and in the pursuit for knowledge to augment ways of procuring and employing labour (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007; Deadrich & Stone, 2014; Itika, 2011; Oracle Report, 2014). Hence, an overview of human resource management history will present a basic timeline within which this has been achieved or not. The role of human resource management in an organisation has matured over time. According to Mash and Adler (2018), a functionalist approach to a function refers to norms, rules and values determining an individual's behaviour within society. A role can also refer to a position in an organisation. Hence an organisational role can become part of an individual's sociology, connecting the individual's behaviour, relationships and interactions in society and an organisation (Marsh & Adler, 2018).

However, with the many hats that human resource management wears, there is a description that any human resource management practitioner can relate to the following state:

*“I am responsible for taking action, asking questions, getting answers, and making decisions. I won't wait for someone to tell me. If I need to know, I am responsible for asking. I have no right to be offended that I didn't 'get this sooner.' If I am doing something others should know about, I am responsible for telling them”* (Ulrich, Schiemann, & Sartain, 2015, p. 515).

This statement by Ridge and Sewtich (2015, as cited in Ulrich, Schiemann, & Sartain, 2015) labelled this the 'Maniac Pledge', as the usage of the word 'maniac' refers to an obsessive enthusiast. Ridge and Sewtich (2015) describe this as servant leadership, not to be mistaken as being subservient, instead the phrase explains the dedication by human resource management to the employees and, therefore, to business (Ulrich, Schiemann, & Sartain, 2015).

As much as supporting employees in an organisation and fulfilling their purpose of supporting human resource management, one would have to consider the converse. Being in the age of talent, Mester (2015, as cited in Ulrich, Schiemann, & Sartain, 2015) contemplates whether this could be the age of human resource management. According to Mester (2015), the answer

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<sup>9</sup> According to The Oxford Handbook of Human Resource Management, environmental refers to the triple bottom line that is, social, economic, and political factors. These may include labour law, unions, labour markets, technology, and management values. These may vary between countries (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007, p. 51 - 52).

should be human resource management leadership, thus forcing human resource management professionals to let go of the legacy of merely being employee-focused and a support function. Human resource management leaders need to reengineer and transform human resource management's DNA (Ulrich, Schiemann, & Sartain, 2015).

## **2.5 Human resource management trending in South Africa**

The Society of Human Resource Management, founded in 1948, is considered to have one of the world's largest memberships. Through affiliations in the United States of America, China and India, their focus is on the professional development and needs of human resource management professionals (Society for Human Resource Management, 2016). Jerath (2018) published an article with the Society of Human Resource Management detailing trends in human resource management, focusing on themes that overlap with this research, specifically on ethics and professionalism together with other related topics in human resource management, such as the VUCA environment, blockchain technologies and their effect on human resource management professionals, and the need to go green with human resource management (Jerath, 2018). The late Marius Meyer (2019) offered his take on the 2019 trends, and Mackenzie (2021) discusses Josh Bersin's (2021) recruiting and human resource management trends for 2021, which are explained in a list of ten key lessons (Mackenzie, 2021).

Meyer (2019) states that it is essential for human resource management to be at the cutting-edge of the latest trends. It is not always easy to distinguish between a trend and a fad. Social media and its various platforms offer an abundance of fads. In referring to the South African context, Meyer (2019) explains:

*“As a profession that has not yet achieved a high level of consistency and maturity in human resource management practice, some human resource management practitioners are vulnerable to respond to the latest opinions and fads that are not necessarily based on scientific research or agreed human resource management standards. They are also more susceptible to being dominated or manipulated by line managers who may want them to allow non-compliant, illegal, or other forms of unprofessional human*

*resource management work or exploitative people practices”* (Meyer, 2019, p. 1).

Hence, past, and present trends in human resource management correlate to themes in this research and the professional development of human resource management in South Africa. Specifically, concerning ethics, professionalism and professionalisation, corporate South Africa nudges its way towards 2022 and 2023, aiming to drive the current business strategy.

The following human resource management trends were highlighted in 2018 (Jerath, 2018, p.1):

- a. Finding the right talent: The war on talent has become a common topic for discussion, with the intricacy of corporate South Africa, international investment, and the exit of key talent due to the brain drain.
- b. Upskill, Reskill, Upskill: Related to the first point, this has proven to be essential and has been neglected in the past. Training not just in one’s area of expertise but extended beyond one’s scope, that is, an engineer gaining business knowledge beyond their technical area of expertise.
- c. Online Learning: As the preceding trends are significant, online learning has become an essential tool to upskill employees, saving time on travel expenses and time away from the office and is popular with millennials. Online applications such as Udemy, LinkedIn Learning and EdX are trending on social media and are used in corporate training.
- d. Human Resource Chatbots: In South Africa, Pepper, a humanoid chat robot, was unveiled in 2018 at Nedbank's digital branch, the NZone, at the Gautrain Station in Sandton. The primary function is to rest the terminator-phobia of robots in customer-facing positions (Creamer Media’s Engineering News, 2018).
- e. Flexible Work Arrangements: Due to the overpopulation of urban areas and lack of business space and parking, now more companies allow employees flexible work practices. Many organisations use this trend as a retention strategy instead of losing good talent to orthodox working arrangements. Millennials and young moms want work-life balance flexibility, and this arrangement allows them this choice.
- f. Employee Experience: This has become just as important as customer service; from the time an employee is contacted by a recruitment specialist for an interview, to going through the

interview process, onboarding, and induction. Employee experience has found a place in an organisation's business and people strategy and long-term goals.

- g. Global Leaders: Leadership development has been recognised as being significant to business sustainability in this new age. These global leaders are agile, innovative and they redefine traditional leadership.
- h. Community Focus: Conducting business within the interest of society is progressively becoming a factor for a sustainable business, as featured in all the King Reports. Here, human resource management has a role to play in steering people in organisations to become responsible citizens and empathic leaders.
- i. Artificial Intelligence, also known as AI and technology in human resource management: The capacity and potential growth for artificial intelligence has not yet been fully explored in human resource management, hence envisaging this trend as emerging in 2018. Blockchain technology is also new to human resource management and will be a game changer going forward.
- j. Continuous Performance Management: The traditional performance management process championed by human resource management and run by management will go beyond just being a tick in the box process. Outstanding performers will be guided, those trailing behind will be coached and mentored, and non-performers will be asked to leave. Proactive rather than reactive performance management will be administered.

The top human resource management trends in 2019 were as follows (Meyer, 2019, pp. 1-3):

- a. Business driven integrated human resource management strategy: human resource management practitioners need to ensure that they develop and deliver a strategic human resource management plan aligned to the organisation's overall business strategy. The need for a business driven integrated human resource management strategy remains the top human resource management trend worldwide.
- b. High performance organisation culture: As specialists in organisational behaviour and culture, building, nurturing, and growing a high-performance organisation culture is not only a key trend but one of the most essential contributions human resource management can make to the success of an organisation.
- c. Future focused human resource management 4.0: The fourth industrial revolution ushered in transformative ways of doing business such as new business models, disruption, innovation, robotics, and artificial intelligence requiring human resource

management to reconfigure human resource management practices aligned to the new world of business and work.

- d. Innovative and diversity driven talent management: More dynamic and innovative approaches to talent management will be needed to ensure that businesses' performance is driven by the best possible talent within organisations leveraging the diversity of talent available. Effective talent management will become the most critical source of competitive advantage.
- e. Human resource management risk management: Human resource management leaders are not only organisation behaviour specialists but also the custodian of human resource management risk management and responsible for identifying and mitigating human resource management risks while simultaneously leveraging opportunities for optimising people-driven business performance.
- f. Human resource management governance and ethics: The human resource management trend for governance is practical and ethical human resource management leadership. Unfortunately, the current examples of corporate scandals, fraud, corruption, and state capture constitute major incidents of poor governance and unethical behaviour committed by managers and human resource management professionals alike. Therefore, the need to make the right decisions about people was critical if companies were to be successful in 2019. This can only be overcome by a strong focus on human resource management governance and ethics.
- g. Workforce planning: Proper workforce planning is a crucial need of line managers that human resource management needs to facilitate in ensuring that the right people are available at the right time. Therefore, a professional and systematic approach to workforce planning is of utmost importance, notwithstanding the need for flexibility in addressing short-term needs and unexpected circumstances such as the loss of critical skills when organisations can least afford it.
- h. Learning and development: The speed and complexity of change requires a competent workforce; thus, more proactive, and dynamic approaches to learning and development are a top trend affecting all organisations. Learning will be faster, more focused and should be just-in-time in setting employees up for delivering their best.
- i. Digital human resource management: While significant progress has been made to leverage human resource management technology over the last two decades, a fully integrated approach to digital human resource management has not yet been realised in all organisations, hence the need for a digital human resource management strategy.

Human resource management teams need robust discussions on digital human resource management, followed by an articulated digital human resource management strategy and plan.

- j. Leadership development: Given the fact that leadership is the most important factor driving business success, the role of human resource management in enabling leadership development is under-estimated. Significant human resource management work is needed to improve in the area of leadership development of all managers in organisations. However, current efforts at leadership development do not have the desired effect, thus prompting a need to address leadership challenges, gaps, and overall under-performance of leaders in many organisations.
- k. Employee experience: While a focus on employee engagement dominated the previous decade, the latest trend is towards creating a great employee experience similar to top companies' emphasis on customer experience. The reality is that an exceptional employee experience is needed for employees to provide the best possible customer experience.
- l. Employee health and wellness: The healthy lifestyle change programme of Discovery Health has achieved some significant successes in changing the behaviour of employees from a reactive treatment approach to a new proactive health model. However, more emphasis is needed to create a higher level of employee health and wellness regarding physical health and emotional, mental, and financial wellness.
- m. Employer branding: Top employers have shown leadership in repositioning themselves and following leading practices in employer branding. This helps top companies attract and retain the best employees, but average or mediocre employers cannot compete with top employers for talent. Therefore, it is imperative for all employers to step up in achieving excellence in employer branding.
- n. Flexible work practices: Top talent thrives on flexible work practices in specific industries and occupations, but its prevalence remains the exception rather than the norm. In 2019, the trend towards flexible work practices was expected to grow as co-working spaces had gained momentum over the preceding few years.
- o. Change management: To ensure that all these trends and other business projects and initiatives are implemented effectively in the workplace requires a professional approach to change management. Human resource management must be more visible in enabling professional change management in the workplace.

- p. Employment relations: Given the increase in workplace violence and industrial action, improving employment relations remained a top priority for human resource management leaders in 2019.
- q. Organisational design: Most organisations have not yet managed to establish an appropriate organisational design that is fit for its purpose in enabling it to achieve its business objectives. Human resource management needs to look at more design thinking, planning and configuration and less unnecessary and disruptive restructuring.
- r. Data driven people analytics: Now that South Africa has a draft human resource management metrics framework in place, the trend towards more formalised approaches to people analytics and human resource management data management has become a reality, primarily because of the exponential growth in the inclusion of human capital part of integrated reporting.
- s. Human resource management professionalisation: None of the above trends will manifest if the overall level of human resource management professionalism remains the same, hence the continuous need for human resource management professionalisation. The current focus on human resource management competencies, standards, and metrics, both locally and internationally, will further reinforce the need for increased efforts towards human resource management professionalisation. Thus, by making human resource management capability building the top priority in 2019, the results will be better and more dynamic human resource management professional departments.

Bersin's (2021, as cited in Mackenzie, 2021, p. 1) apt reflection explains the current times and future forecast as "and the word that the researcher found interesting today is effervescence. So, we're entering an effervescent time"

The top high-level human resource management trends for 2021, according to Josh Bersin (2021, as cited in Mackenzie, 2021) were:

- a. The COVID-19 global pandemic is the latest in a series of developments.
- b. The focus is on people.
- c. Leadership styles are changing and evolving.
- d. Human skills are valued more than ever.
- e. Employee morale is no longer just about benefits.

- f. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are critical, but action and accountability are needed.
- g. A safe space is a decisive space.
- h. Develop and grow your people.

To accomplish these goals, human resource management must increase the participation rate with businesses. Talent acquisition will be the principal driver of business growth and the war on talent. Human resource management professionals essentially need to familiarise themselves with the above trends to keep up with the latest developments and best practices in the evolving field of human resource management. The SABPP has human resource standards for almost 80% of the identified trends. This means those clear guidelines are available on how to respond to and implement most of these trends. Where standards are not yet known, such as human resource governance, the SABPP Human Resource Governance Committee now has a position paper and guide for Human Resource Directors on implementing Human Resource Governance in the workplace. Similarly, the SABPP has addressed areas requiring more attention, such as organisation culture, digital human resources and flexible work practices (Meyer, 2019).

## **2.6 A historical overview of human resource management**

Businesses recognise that their favourable or superior business position remains with their employees (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Wilton, 2016). The business practice has become more multifaceted and robust, thus changing the environment in which most businesses compete to stay relevant. Hence, this chapter explores a synopsis of the history of human resource management, which allows for understanding and rationalising the changes that have transpired in the human resource profession.

Various publications have acknowledged that human resource management has a long history of both successes and challenges (Budd, 2015; Cohen, 2015; De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009; Deadrich & Stone, 2014; Harzing & Van Ruysseveldt, 2004; Itika, 2011; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Ulrich & Beatty, 2001). While various shifts in the social and economic environment have affected the metamorphosis of human resource management, literature on human resource management began in the nineteenth century, which was a time of rapid industrial development in the United States of America (Deadrich & Stone, 2014). However, Deadrich and Stone (2014) refer to a time much earlier, with the progress of tribes,

apprenticeship, and independent contractor systems of the late medieval era. The change in approach highlighted the shifts in the employment relationship over time to recognise the developments made by human resource management (Deadrach & Stone, 2014).

In the history of formalised work, the term human resource management essentially referred to personnel management, and in the 1940's it signified labour management. Before that, in the 1920's it referred to welfare, which originated in the ammunitions factories of World War I. Human resource management essentially restored the human relations practice to managing people established by Elton Mayo in 1933. He created principles based on the results from his research project in the 1920's, identified as the Hawthorne studies. This school of thought alleged that output was connected to job satisfaction and that the productivity of individuals would increase if someone they revered took a liking to them and their work. Likert (1961) and McGregor (1960) maintained that human resource management moved the importance away from humanism (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Cohen, 2015; Itika, 2011; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003; Wilton, 2016).

Notably, Bakke (1966) alluded to human resource management as the essential resource, but Armstrong (1977) later stated that the essential resource is people in business. Later in 1987, human resource management was referred to as "old wine in new bottles" (Adeniji & Osibanjo, 2012, p. 5). However, human resource management did not fully materialise till the 1980s during what is referred to as the era of the founding fathers of human resource management. These included the American academic Charles Fombrun and his partners who developed the 'matching model' (Fombrun, Tichy, & Devanna, 1984) and Michael Beer and colleagues who established the Harvard framework (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Quinn Mills, & Walton, 1984). In the United Kingdom, some critics disapproved of the notion of human resource management. Hendry and Pettigrew (1990) affirmed that human resource management was heavily normative while emphasising apparent inadequacies (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Itika, 2011).

Human resource management in the 1980's was underpinned by a theoretical framework involving a philosophy that reinforced several theories obtained from the behavioural sciences and the fields of strategic management, human capital, and industrial relations. Over time commentators such as Guest (1987) and Storey (1995) interpreted human resource management as a considerably singular paradigm developed on unitarist, individualism, high commitment, and strategic alignment. There were assertions that human resource management

was more universal (holistic) than conventional (traditional) personnel management as it essentially emphasised the belief that individuals ought to be viewed as assets instead of variable costs. Notably, many human resource management philosophies at the time had been seriously disparaged by academics as being managerialist and manipulative. However, this disparagement has diminished, possibly since the discipline of human resource management has developed progressively. It is now apparent from an array of current literature that the term human resource management had been chosen as a synonym for what used to be called personnel management (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014).

Alternatively, Boxall, Purcell and Wright (2007) offered Bruce Kaufman's (2007) detailed review of human resource management history, outlining significant academic and professional progress over the last century. Developments from the United States of America certainly feature in Kaufman's (2007) assessment as well as research from the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Japan, to name a few countries (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007). The practice and academic study of human resource management has made tremendous progress; although at the turn of the twentieth century, the notion of human resource management had not yet been conceived. Its status in business was very casual and often unproductive and discriminatory, as no structured research or training on human resource management existed. At the start of the twenty-first century, the opinion of human resource management has altered (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007; Budd, 2015).

Appropriately, Itika (2011) delivers the aforementioned evolution of human resource management in a succinct diagram below (Illustration 1 on the following page) to highlight the stages from the notion of personnel management in the 1900's to the current conception of strategic human resource management in the twenty-first century.

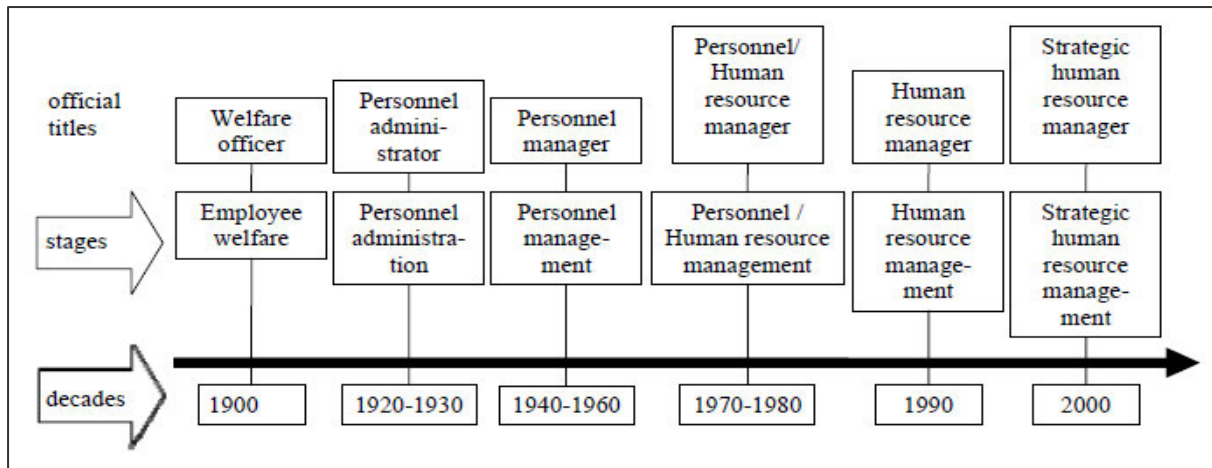


Illustration 1: The stages in the evolution of human resource management

(Source: Itika, 2011, p. 7)

In the South African context, organisations have realised a drive from people management as a support occupation to a much more strategic function to attract, retain and engage talent that remains true to what is presently trending in human resource management in current society. Subsequently, this has led to the significance of strategy in human resource management and a further emphasis on the human resource function and its portfolio in an organisation (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016). Further to this is a concise timeline below (Illustration 2 on the following page) that displays the historical progress of the human resource management discipline in South Africa and globally (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016).

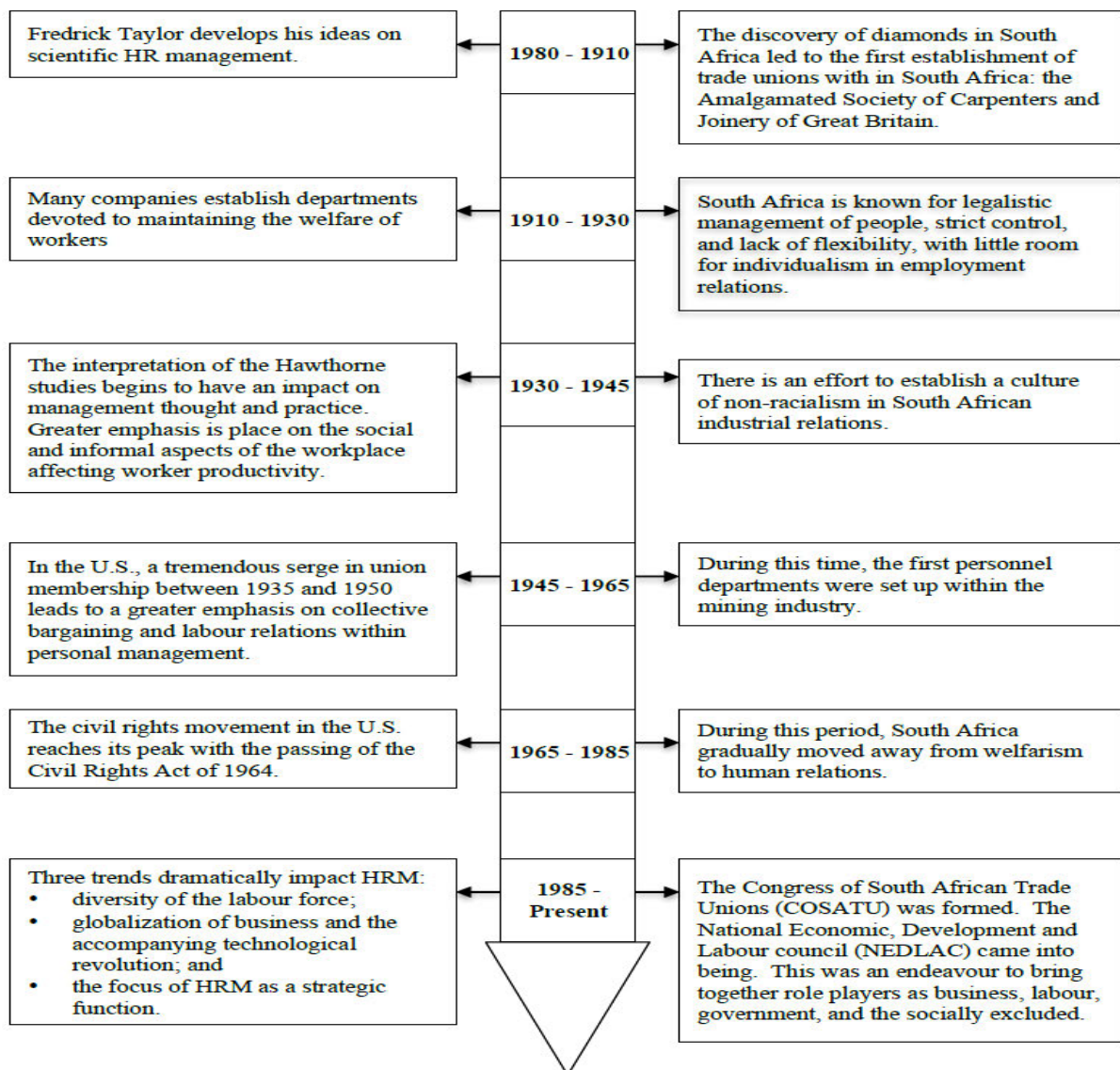


Illustration 2: Global evolution of human resource management

(Source: Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016, p. 496).

Consequently, there is a need to conduct an in-depth analysis of the historical roots of the human resource management discipline in South Africa, as it has shaped current human resource management practices and will continue to do so in the future. It is necessary to trace the history of human resource management as a profession in South Africa, from its inception to where it has evolved to date, with specific reference to the establishment and early history of the Institute of Personnel Management (IPM). Since the IPM and the SABPP are professional bodies for human resource management and the statutory quality assurance body under the South African Qualifications Authority Act No. 58 of 1995, understanding the concept of professionalism at the time of the establishment of the IPM and the SABPP and through the history of professionalisation is an essential benchmark for this study (Janse van

Rensburg, 2009; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a, Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b). This shall be detailed in the second part of the literature review to follow.

## **2.7 Human resource management evolution**

De Gama, McKenna and Peticca-Harris (2012) maintain that the terms ‘human resource’ and ‘human resource management’ may encourage a depersonalised and dehumanised view of the employment relationship (de Gama, McKenna, & Peticca-Harris, 2012). Armstrong and Taylor (2014) advance that the custom of referring to people as resources as if they were any other element of creation is unfavourable. It appears that the term ‘human resources’ diminishes people to the same classification as materials, money, and technology, all of which are resources. However, these resources, including people, are mostly appreciated until they may be misused to turn a profit (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Originally, people management was an alternate name to human resource management. However, according to several authors (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007; de Gama, McKenna, & Peticca-Harris, 2012; Itika, 2011; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003), human resource management as the title or label of a department is preferred and is also well documented. Notably, Talent Management is also a name preferred by some organisations, even though it overlaps with recruitment function within the human resource management department.

Human resource management has evolved through the various phases and is now not just a resource for profit. Human resource professionals have progressed from traditional human resource practices and have brought about much-needed change in human resource competencies, skills, strategic roles, and professionalism to position human resource management to achieve organisational strategies (De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009; O’Riordan, 2017; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2015a). This justifies the scope of human resource management to perform a strategic versus an operational function in organisations (Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2015a).

Subsequently, human resource management now entails all attributes of how people are employed and managed in an organisation. It includes the activities of strategic human resource management, human capital management, knowledge management, corporate social responsibility, organisational development, resourcing (workforce planning, recruitment and

selection, and talent management), learning and development, performance and reward management, employee relations, employee well-being, and the provision of employee services. Furthermore, human resource management is actioned through the human resource architecture of systems and structures, the human resource management function itself that champions the people, and most importantly, through line managers that are responsible for people in the organisation (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Boxall, Purcell & Wright, 2007; Brewster, Sparrow, Vernon, & Houldsworth, 2011; Mathews, 2017; Harvard Business Review Report, 2015; Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren & Visser, 2003; Wilton, 2016). Notably, there is also the global element that needs to be recognised.

Therefore, it is fair to conclude that human resource management is concerned with how people are employed and managed in organisations (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). The human resource management fraternity has shifted past its polite (people-focused) and police (regulation-focused) function and is now involved in the execution of organisational strategy (Ulrich & Beatty, 2001). Consequently, human resource management professionals are also known as human resource management generalists and are accountable for all human resource management processes in a business. In larger organisations, human resource management specialises in one or more specific areas, such as rewards, coaching or diversity. Significantly, human resource management incorporates those activities that are the duty of a designated human resource management department or specialist and those actions completed by line managers in all areas of the business who are responsible for the management of their employees (Wilton, 2016). In addition, Wilton (2016) presents a typology of human resource management roles, that is, human resource management's diverse classifications that have been identified and quantified over a period by Ulrich and Brockbank (2005). In this typology (Table 1 below), there are five distinct roles that human resource management professionals ought to embrace to respond to the changing business context, that is, a VUCA environment, and should therefore combine efficiency in the present with preparing for the future (Wilton, 2016).

Table 1: Typology of human resource management roles (Source: Wilton, 2016, p. 17)

<b>HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ROLES</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
Strategic Partner	Incorporating the roles of change agent, business expert, strategic human resource management planner, and manager of organisation 'knowledge'.
Functional Expert	Emphasising concern for administration efficiency and the design of human resource management policies and interventions.
Employee Advocate	Addressing the needs of an organisation's current workforce.
Human Capital Developer	Preparing employees to meet future challenges.
Leader	Incorporating leadership of the human resource management function itself, working collaboratively with other areas of the business, and being effective in the preceding four roles.

Ulrich, Younger and Brockbank (2008) suggest that human resource management is expected to function as a business within a business instead of an impartial and independent set of human resource management practices and therefore establish value for critical stakeholders through the following:

- a. Employees have precise competencies and are dedicated to the organisation and its goals.
- b. Line managers have greater assurance that business strategies will be accomplished.
- c. External customers procure more products or services, developing greater loyalty and commitment.
- d. Investor confidence increases market value by recognising the organisation's growth estimates, measured by intangible shareholder value.
- e. Communities in which organisations exist have greater confidence in the organisation's capacity to honour its social responsibilities (Ulrich, Younger, & Brockbank, 2008, p. 829).

Regardless of the nuisances facing human resource management in organisations, the ability to meet those difficulties comes down to one key factor featured in various human resource management literature in a VUCA environment. The talent is the organisation's people and has recently become a key focus of human resource management in business. In an Accenture survey of more than 1,000 senior executives, it was contended that attracting, retaining, and developing skilled talent is crucial (Accenture & Oracle, 2014). Top talent in an organisation is at the top of the agenda for many members of the C-Suite<sup>10</sup>. Hence, human resource management has an extraordinary opportunity to influence an organisation significantly. Even though human resource management is usually tasked with engaging in the war for talent, it too tackles its own complexities (Abdullah, Musa, & Ali, 2011; Accenture & Oracle, 2014; De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009; Itika, 2011; Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2015a; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2004).

It is concerning that the Global Competitiveness Report (World Economic Forum, 2014) consistently gives South Africa a poor ranking in people development and human resource management practices. This report, albeit eight years old, states that South Africa is ranked 113<sup>th</sup> out of 144 countries for labour relations practices, 143<sup>rd</sup> for hiring and firing patterns due to rigidity, and 144<sup>th</sup> for labour relations, due to significant tensions. Similarly, the Global Talent Competitive Index (Lanvin & Evans, 2014, as cited in Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2015a) ranked South Africa last out of 93 countries for labour employer co-operation and 74<sup>th</sup> for effective hiring practices. Hence, it appears as though the human resource management profession in South Africa is not providing the much-needed competitive advantage, regardless of the evolving nature of human resource management as a human resource management business partner and professional. Instead, the Global Competitiveness Report (World Economic Forum, 2014) makes one question the current level of ethical practice and professionalism of human resource management in South Africa.

Knically (1997, as cited in Van der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003) state that the best way for human resource management practitioners to be successful in the future is to focus on their human resource management credibility, competency, and courage. Firstly, credibility embraces doing what one says one will do, preserving a level of integrity beyond criticism, and

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<sup>10</sup> The C Suite name is derived from the titles of top senior executives which tend to start with the letter C, for Chief, as in Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), and Chief Information Officer (CIO).

keeping one's convictions. Secondly, competency is constantly upgrading business and human resource management skills, thus broadening the professional toolkit to address changing organisational needs and being aware of shortcomings and using good judgment to seek out best practices. Finally, courage signifies the development of how things are done, pushing for continuous improvement, and demonstrating a willingness to take risks (Van der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003). Knicely (1997, as cited in Van der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003) steers this research to explore the credibility of human resource ethics, competency in professionalism, and courage in ethical practice, all of which contribute to the pursuit of human resource management ethics and professionalism, that could contribute to compulsory statutory professionalisation.



Illustration 3: Credibility, competency and courage (Adapted from Knicely, 1997, as cited in Van der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003, p. 2)

Since the nature of work is changing, with progressively global operations in South Africa and a growing need for specialised skills and knowledge, it must be considered that mobile, social and other technologies such as human resource management blockchain are now aiding in better partnerships and new developments. This makes it even more critical and more challenging to find and retain the right people (Abdullah, Musa, & Ali, 2011; Accenture & Oracle, 2014; De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009; Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2015a). Human resource management is encountering new challenges, and the human resource management fraternity will need to

reconsider and adjust its strategy to keep up (Accenture & Oracle, 2014). Thus, the greater human resource management focus on strategic issues highlights the significance of human resource management activity and stresses the influence of human resource management towards the realisation of organisational objectives through the innovative strategy and the application of value-adding policies and practices (Wilton, 2016).

## **2.8 Human resource management ethics**

The fundamental concern of business is to secure the best possible return on investment. Any waning of this focus will lead to the distortion of a finely balanced system called business. There is a belief that organisations that seek to be ethical, as well as profitable, will collapse economically, after which the entire community may suffer, thus justifying unethical behaviour. Rose (2007) states that this should not be a choice. Under the current dimension, it has become imperative to understand the ethical practice of business and human resource management in the VUCA environment (Rose, 2007). Human resource management in an organisation face many challenges. These may vary between organisations and can be categorised. However, human resource management ethics is complex to grasp (Adeniji & Osibanjo, 2012). Thus, research on ethics and human resource management is more than asserting ethics theory and incorporating it into human resource management (Greenwood, 2013). Various academics hold firm opinions on the responsibility of human resource management in managing ethics in an organisation and have consequently published multiple articles on the several approaches influencing the themes of ethics and human resource management (e.g., Djurkovic & Maric, 2010; Felty, 2014; Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012; Lloyd & Mey, 2010; Parkes & Davis, 2013; Rhodes & Harvey, 2012; Van Vuuren & Eiselen, 2006; Wilton, 2016). However, for this research, human resource management ethical practice is of particular concern.

Legge (2000) has emphasised the dilemmas and uncertainties of the human resource management function and therefore proposed that there is a chance for human resource management to embrace a more ethical approach promoting human resource management practices that have as their purpose to increase productivity and employee wellbeing (Caldwell, Truong, Link, & Tuan, 2011; Guest & Woodrow, 2012; Pinnington, Macklin, & Campbell, 2007). Legge (2000) examined whether the management of people can genuinely be ethical or unethical by focusing on concerns such as rights, justice, fairness, and trust. She argued that

the evidence suggests that the importance is placed on organisational commitment, unitarist ideology, and the pursuit of power through utilitarian instrumentalism (de Gama, McKenna, & Peticca-Harris, 2012; Greenwood & Freeman, 2011; Guest & Woodrow, 2012; Pinnington, Macklin, & Campbell, 2007; Wilcox, 2012).

Thus, the human resource management discipline as a practice or profession is concerned with managing resources and is the management of human beings in an organisation. At the core of this reality are ethical pressures connecting labour as a commodity associated with numerous discussions and philosophical traditions (Caldwell, Truong, Link, & Tuan, 2011; Greenwood & Freeman, 2011; Islam, 2012; Pinnington, Macklin, & Campbell, 2007). Two of the most pertinent philosophies shall be discussed. Marx (1954, as cited in Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012) references the labour process that dictates the separation of being human, refers to humans as a commodity and denies one the core of being human. On the other hand, Kant (1956, as cited in Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012) was troubled by the value placed on a person concerning their accomplishment and not as a human being (Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012; Michaelson, Pratt, & Grant, 2014; Pinnington, Macklin, & Campbell, 2007). Even though both philosophies are relevant to this research, the different perspectives and applications thereof assess the relationship between ethics and human resource management not just as an expectation of human resource management professionals but rather as an obligation that should be honoured for ethical human resource management practice.

The consensus focuses on the responsibility of human resource management in encouraging and sustaining ethical and accountable business practice as a dual approach. Primarily this guarantees that human resource management strategies, policies and practices are ethical, and that the organisation's culture is trustworthy in its application. Furthermore, the human resource management profession itself should exhibit ethical conduct through the individual professional conduct of the human resource management professional in the organisation (Adeniji & Osibanjo, 2012; de Gama, McKenna, & Peticca-Harris, 2012; Guest & Woodrow, 2012; Parkes & Davis, 2013; Pinnington, Macklin, & Campbell, 2007).

Adeniji and Osibanjo (2012) offer a tabular overview of human resource management's role as a custodian, propagating and imposing business ethics (Table 2 on the following page). Hence, some spheres of ethical misconduct, as illustrated below, are related to human resource management activities that are fundamentally ethical issues that are essentially along the lines

of fairness, justice, and truthfulness, consequently making the study of ethics broad and complex (Adeniji & Osibanjo, 2012).

Table 2: Ethical misconduct in human resource management

(Source: Adeniji & Osibanjo, 2012, p. 15)

<b>TYPES OF MISCONDUCT</b>	<b>EXAMPLES OF EMPLOYEE, SUPERVISOR, AND MANAGEMENT BEHAVIOUR</b>
Compensation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Falsifying expense reports.</li> <li>2. Inappropriate overtime classifications.</li> <li>3. Misrepresenting hours and time worked.</li> <li>4. Personal bias in performance appraisals and pay increases.</li> </ol>
Employee Relations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Personal gains and gifts from vendors.</li> <li>2. Intentionally violating safety and health regulations.</li> <li>3. Misusing and stealing organisational assets and supplies.</li> <li>4. Employee lying to supervisors.</li> <li>5. Executive and Managers providing false information to the public, customers, and vendors.</li> </ol>
Staffing and Equal Employment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sexual harassment.</li> <li>2. Sex, race, and age discrimination in hiring, discipline, and termination.</li> <li>3. Favouritism in hiring and promotion.</li> </ol>

Jack, Greenwood and Schapper (2012) acknowledged a need to reignite the topic of ethics and human resource management and analysed research papers accordingly. The systematic review of these papers is consolidated and summarised in Table 3 of the following page.

Table 3: Theoretical and conceptual analyses of ethical issues in human resource management

(Source: Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012, pp. 3-4)

AUTHORS	ETHICS FOCUS	HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT FOCUS	INTERSECTION AND CONTRIBUTION
Dale (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012)	The ethical framing of employment and the aesthetics of commodification	Employee relations (including employee rewards and development)	The employee is a consuming and consumed subject of contemporary human resource management practices. Such commodification undermines the possibilities for ethical being within organisations.
Costea, Amiridis, & Crump (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012)	Simmel (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012) and the concept of the <i>tragedy of culture</i> .	Human resource management's ethos of ideal future employees and their employability ( <i>principle of potentiality</i> ), and the dangers these pose, are explored through the case of University students and graduates in the United Kingdom.	Human resource management's attempt to shape the character of future workers as de-recognising human limits and making a false promise of absolute freedom. The extension of human resource management via recruitment into higher education brings false closure to the most important questions of education and self-information (such as 'who am I?')
Islam (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012)	The ethical framing of employment. Juxtaposes conceptions of recognition and reification as ethical standpoints on work.	The employment relationship; employee dignity and human resource management practices.	Recognition is possible and desirable in economic exchanges like human resource management. Hence, human resource practices should serve to cultivate recognition and affirm the dignity of the employee.

Rhodes and Harvey (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012)	The ethical framing of employment. Agonism, democracy and dissensus as ethical forms.	The human resource management function as a guardian of organisational ethics.	The ethics of the employment relations is currently subordinated to managerial prerogative via the human resource management function. Offers an alternative model for ethics human resource management based on agonism, a particular type of antagonism based on respect for the differences amongst legitimate opponents.
Janssens & Steyaert (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012)	Cosmopolitan theory and self-other relations understood from political, cultural, and social perspectives.	Research in international human resource management; research on global labour practices and the race to the bottom.	International human resource management research requires a more explicit ethical stance and ethical research agenda. Cosmopolitan theory provides one possible answer, illustrated with regard to research on labour practices.
Van Dijk, Van Engen & Paauwe (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012)	Critical engagements with utilitarianism, deontology and virtue ethics.	Diversity management (in teams and organisations).	Equality and business case approaches to managing diversity represent irreconcilable ethical perspectives. Virtue ethics offers an alternative framework to address prejudice and enhance organisational performance.
Wilcox ( as cited in Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012)	MacIntyre (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012) and the concept of moral agency	An empirical study on the interactions between structural positioning and human resource management agency explored through a theorised ethnographic account.	Despite institutional system constraints, human resource management is not inherently unethical as human resource managers may have the capacity to exercise moral agency (depending on specific context).

<p>de Gama, McKenna, &amp; Peticca-Harris (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, &amp; Schapper, 2012)</p>	<p>Bauman &amp; Levinas (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, &amp; Schapper, 2012) concept of moral impulse</p>	<p>Empirical study on the discourse, activities and lived experiences of human resource management professionals.</p>	<p>Human resource management, as it is practiced, is concerned with distancing, depersonalising and dissembling, and thus acts against moral impulse and in support of the moral requirements of business, not of people.</p>
<p>Guest &amp; Woodrow (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, &amp; Schapper, 2012)</p>	<p>Legge's (2000) conception of personnel managers as either conformist or deviant innovators and Kant (1975).</p>	<p>The role and capacity of human resource management professionals to represent the interests of both management and workers are explored through the case of bullying in a large United Kingdom organisation.</p>	<p>Neither of the current foci on the human resource management role or the human resource management performance link allows for the ethical responsibilities of human resource management professionals (understood as a Kantian imperative to treat workers well). Constraints on, and boundaries of, the human resource management role confirm that human resource management managers cannot ensure an ethical human resource management. Kantian ethics, at best, offer a challenge and aspiration for human resource management professionals.</p>
<p>Bolton, Houlihan, Anand, and Laaser (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, &amp; Schapper, 2012)</p>	<p>The concept of a moral economy, notably connected with Sayer (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, &amp; Schapper, 2012)</p>	<p>Contingent work and various forms of non-standard employment.</p>	<p>The employment relationship is embedded in a web of social dependencies. A moral economy framework acknowledges this and provides a more holistic notion for appraising the opportunities and costs of contingent work.</p>

<p>Morand &amp; Merriman (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, &amp; Schapper, 2012)</p>	<p>Equality principles from Enlightenment philosophy such as Rawls, Locke, Sen, and others (as cited in Jack, Greenwood, &amp; Schapper, 2012)</p>	<p>Equality as a preferred basis (rather than equity) for distributive justice in organisations.</p>	<p>A philosophical and practical shift from distribution based on equity to distribution based on equality (enacted through aspects of human resource management such as allocated space, job titles, even monetary rewards). May reduce inequities in organisations and society.</p>
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Jack, Greenwood and Schapper (2012) endeavoured to establish the theoretical and conceptual analyses of ethical issues in human resource management, from the professional, academic, and practical points of view, exploring ethics and human resource management. The breakdown of the eleven papers have created a framework of four tenors (ethical-declarative, ethical-subjunctive, ethical ethnographic and ethical-systemic), each of which offers a unique and possibly interconnected argument for the analysis of ethics and human resource management. Diversely, they connect the core concepts of each term to re-evaluate and theoretically re-create human resource management and therefore place ethics at the heart of this significant analysis (Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012).

In addition, research in ethics and human resource management has been limited. Greenwood (2013) stated that from 2007 to 2010, the top three human resource management journals published only eight articles with the words 'ethics and ethical' in their title or abstract. Greenwood (2013) indicates that ethics and human resource management are underdeveloped, and there is therefore a need for a deeper analysis. During this research, articles on ethics and human resource management, and human resource management ethics specifically in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, feature more from 2012 onwards.

Van Vuuren and Eiselen (2006) maintain that protecting the company is human resource management's function, as human resource management does have the skills acquired through formal and informal training to take responsibility for the management of ethics in an organisation. However, human resource management finds itself somewhere amidst two extremes of having to take on an independent, neutral, and impartial position in balancing the burden of the bottom line from management, and the cruciality of holding the interests of their employees. Similarly, human resource management finds that they are viewed as pro-union by management and pro-management by unions (Van Vuuren & Eiselen, 2006). Regardless, human resource management taking responsibility for ethics, together with the complexity of their role in business, begs the discussion of the need for human resource management to display elevated levels of ethical practice and professionalism.

Thus, standard accounts of ethics and human resource management are unforgiving in affirming that human resource management professionals ought to embrace their role as ethical

stewardship<sup>11</sup> by becoming more cognisant of their ethical responsibilities to their organisations and more helpful in assisting their organisations in establishing escalated wealth, to attain anticipated organisational results, and to create working conditions that are more rewarding to employees. Consequently, ethics becomes integrated under human resource management with such reasoning, which is passive to corporate strategy and fixed on the success of the bottom-line performance and competitive advantage (Rhodes & Harvey, 2012). Thus, the intention of ethics and human resource management aims for the human resource management function to play a fundamental role in guaranteeing organisational ethicality<sup>12</sup> related to employee wellbeing (Rhodes & Harvey, 2012).

## **2.9 Business ethics and human resource management ethics**

Scholars have found the subject of ethics relevant and significant, specifically in the business context, that is, business ethics (Donaldson, 2015). There has been a move from the traditional focus of business ethics, away from corporate social responsibility to managing ethical performance within an organisation. According to Van Vuuren and Eiselen's (2006) research, most respondents in their study believed that human resource management practitioners should be involved in business ethics and that business ethics should be included in the training of human resource management practitioners. Business ethics is the ethical practice of a business towards its actions and impact on employees and society. This consideration can be shown in the emphasis on corporate values and culture, specifically upon integrity, accountability, honesty, trust, fairness, respect for religious belief, responsibility, cooperation, mutuality, professionalism, and open communication (Adda, Azigwe, & Awuni, 2016; Chan, Fung, & Yau, 2010; Crossman & Doshi, 2015; Dames, 2008; Erasmus & Wordsworth, 2006; Riivari & La ¨msa, 2014; Su, 2014). Business ethicists have been examining a common theme that weaves through much of the ethics literature: why leaders engage in unethical behaviour. Research has emphasised how the ethical viewpoints of business leaders have played a significant role in the recent surge of ethical lapses (Crossman & Doshi, 2015; Drover, Franczak, & Beltramini, 2012; Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2014; Felty, 2014; Levine & Boaks, 2014; Mihelič, Lipičnik, & Tekavčič, 2010, ; Pendse, 2012; Stevens, 2013).

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<sup>11</sup> Taking charge of raising awareness about ethical issues and promoting organisational ethics.

<sup>12</sup> Being in accordance with the accepted principles of right and wrong that govern the conduct of a profession, thus an ethical act.

South African businesses are embarking on focused and structured attempts to manage ethics. Over the past two decades, the King Reports on Corporate Governance from 1994, 2002, 2009 to 2016, have stipulated the institutionalisation and management of ethics as a primary focus of good governance (Lloyd & Mey, 2010; Van Vuuren & Eiselen, 2006). Janse van Rensburg (2009) conducted interviews with the then President of the Human resource management Council of South Africa (HRCOSA), Shaun Schwanzer, and chair of the King Committee on Corporate Governance in South Africa, Judge Mervyn King. King emphasised his support for the statutory regulation of the human resource management function to ensure compliance with an applicable code of conduct (Janse van Rensburg, 2009). He saw the enforcement of a code of conduct as the essential requirement for good practice. In South Africa, increased awareness of the negative consequences of corruption and sub-standard services has contributed to the demand for codes of conduct and negotiated charters endorsed by the government in all business spheres. Furthermore, Janse van Rensburg (2009) stated that many human resource management professionals have admitted to some form of statutory regulation in human resource management.

### **2.10 Human resource management ethics and the King Reports**

Corporate South Africa has gradually increased its focus on business ethics and corporate governance with the progress and development of the King I (1994), King II (2002), King III (2009), and most recently the King IV (2016) reports. Consequently, human resource management has evolved from the payroll department to the people management department, to now being considered a human resource management strategic business partner and leader in an organisation. Research has revealed the journey of human resource management and its evolution into a profession in South Africa. However, there is no statutory recognition for those who work in human resource management, that is, there is no compulsory mandate for those who work in human resource management to belong to a human resource management professional body and to function within a specific professional human resource management paradigm. This, together with low barriers of entry, which refers to the minimal criteria in terms of relevant work experience, qualifications or related certification required to be employed in the human resource management profession in South Africa, implies that anyone can work in this profession. Human resource management as a profession becomes vulnerable to criticism from human resource management clients that come from professions that have more rigorous criteria, as well as from businesses and human resource management professionals themselves

who do have the relevant work experience and qualifications. The development in business ethics and human resource management does offer a discussion on the need to establish whether statutory recognition of human resource management professionalisation in South Africa will positively influence the profession, specifically, the development and focus on human resource management ethics and professionalism. If the development of human resource management is established, then it is possible that human resource management could find a place in the next King Report on Corporate Governance.

De Beer (2013) identified the position of human resource management as a custodian of the then King III (2009) code of compliance and the Companies Act No. 71 of 2008, which became effective in 2011. The aim was to determine human resource management's knowledge and understanding of the King III (2009) code and identify the role of human resource management in corporate governance (De Beer, 2013; De Beer & Du Toit, 2015). De Beer's (2013) study revealed that senior human resource management managers did not have in-depth knowledge and understanding of the King III (2009) code, as it was found that corporate governance was the responsibility of all the senior employees in the organisation. Human resource management also seems to lack the expertise and confidence to play a more significant role in corporate governance matters. However, this does reflect poorly on human resource ethics, ethical practice and the governance required by human resource management professionals (De Beer, 2013; De Beer & Du Toit, 2015).

In studies by De Beer (2013) and De Beer and Du Toit (2015) it was recommended that human resource practitioners be educated more rigorously on ethics, and human resource management's role in corporate governance. Human resource management was still seen as having an administrative function without influence or integrity at the board level (De Beer & Du Toit, 2015). This would mean that professional bodies can support human resource management in providing leadership and developmental interventions. Human resource management had a very restricted role in the codes regarding the first and second King Reports. In the King III (2009) code, the emphasis was more on operational leadership, sustainability, and corporate citizenship (De Beer & Du Toit, 2015), which does involve human resource management, but not to the extent that the human resource management community obliges, that is, to be more effective at ethics and corporate governance in business.

Furthermore, the King Committee published the King IV (2016) Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa, released on the 1st of November 2016, and implemented for the fiscal year that commenced from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017. It replaced the King III entirely (Deloitte Report, 2016; KPMG, 2016). The King IV (2016) report, if summed up in one word, would be ‘transparency’. The report builds on its predecessor’s standing of sound corporate governance as a vital component of good corporate citizenship (PwC, 2016), contributing to the public’s greater good and business. With international governance codes and best practices, it has been revised towards inclusive and integrated thinking. Furthermore, it takes account of specific corporate governance advances concerning operational governing bodies, improved compliance obligations, new governance structures, such as social and ethics committees, developing possibilities and prospects from modern technologies, and new reporting and disclosure conditions, for example, integrated reporting (KPMG, 2016).

Summarised, the King IV (2016) Report on Corporate Governance is a better point of reference and guide to ethical principles, good governance, and professionalism within the South African context, which is now up to date with international governance codes and best practices. Since human resource management’s fundamental core is concerned with working with people, according to Greenwood (2013), the notion of human resource management automatically raises ethical considerations by focusing on when human resource management is unethical and lacking in professionalism, compromising ethical responsibility, accountability, and delivery. This raises concern about the current economic climate. With the increase in global and local scandals, the lack of ethics and professionalism and lack of duty is not acceptable, especially for human resource management responsible for treating people (humans) in business.

### **2.11 Human resource management strategy**

Charan, Barton and Carey (2015) confirm that McKinsey CEOs globally consider human capital as a challenge and therefore rank human resource management as the eighth and ninth most crucial function. Quite contradictory, if businesses do not create value, people do. Consequently, it would be expected that human resource management should rank higher than they currently do, and dialogue on employees should come before deliberations on strategy (Charan, Barton, & Carey, 2015). “It is time to say goodbye to the human resource management department”, a statement from an article by Charan (2014, p. 1) that he argues will undoubtedly

get the attention of any human resource management professional, which it is assumed was his intention. Charan (2014) expected opposition to this, and the reason he stirred up such debate and argument in his article was based on his interaction with global leaders. These leaders expressed apparent disappointment in their human resource management to support them, as their CFOs did, “as sounding boards and trusted partners” (Charan, 2014, p. 1). Furthermore, he explains that human resource management can deal with internal issues such as cultural issues, but he does not understand why or how business decisions are made in light of big picture thinking regarding business performance goals, which is vital to business strategy.

A split was suggested for the human resource management department into functions: Human resource management-A (for Administration) and Human resource management-LO (for Leadership and Organisation). The former would be in Finance, reporting to the CFOs, who would manage the compensation and benefits and therefore see compensation as a “talent magnet, not just a major cost” (Charan, 2014, p. 1). The latter would pay attention to cultivating the people capabilities of the business and would report to the CEOs. Charan (2014) acknowledges that there is a problem in human resource management. Hence, human resource management needs to understand business acumen to support business performance, therefore being a business partner and not just administration operational support (Charan, 2014).

Antoine (2015) offers a critique of Charan’s (2014) article and explains the importance of human resource management using business strategy to support human resource management activities through various behaviours so that human resource management leadership can become respected business partners rather than human resource management caretakers. Antoine (2015, p. 464) advises that all business leadership and peers of this profession “need strong, smart, and capable human resource management leaders that are true business partners”. Human resource management needs to show credibility, provide reasonable solutions, be trusted counsel and be agents of change. Then only will human resource management be a valued business partner and support business strategy.

In Ulrich’s (2014) response to Charan’s (2014) article, he refers to the twenty-sixty-twenty rules, that is, 20% of professionals are brilliant at what they do, they do not need help, and should be a role model to others, and therefore are key to organisation growth (as they would be in finance or information technology). Conversely, the other 20% he refers to has a rigid mind-set and lacks competency or commitment to the profession, thus they do not help others,

and therefore do not support human resource management or organisational growth. Ulrich (2014) admits that it would be fair to judge this bottom 20% negatively. However, it would not be appropriate to negatively consider the entire human resource management profession, as Charan (2014) has done in his article. Finally, the 60% in the middle are those that Ulrich (2014) views as being enthusiastically involved in learning, growing, and supporting organisational growth. This is also the group that is foiled by their lack of ability and is often not supported by senior management, and thus not appreciated for their possible offering to the human resource management profession or their organisations (Ulrich, 2014).

Ulrich (2014) asserts that teaching and developing this group can have positive impacts. He further explains that the top 20% and hopefully most of the 60% focus on the following three attributes, which include:

- a. Talent (delivering competency and commitment and contribution of all employees towards organisational growth);
- b. Leadership (ensuring leaders at all levels); and
- c. Capability which refers to organisational capabilities that allow the organisation to grow over time.

These would vary depending on strategy, culture, and innovation. Ulrich's (2014) consistent viewpoint is that this outside-in vision for human resource management will support human resource management strategic objectives. Finally, he suggests that the human resource management department should have a centralised and decentralised focus, that is:

*“human resource management should be in three groups: the embedded human resource management generalists who work with business leaders on talent, leadership, and capabilities; centres of expertise that offer analytics and insights into human resource management knowledge domains; and service centres that do the administrative work of human resource management. All can be governed under the human resource management umbrella—just the way finance and accounting or marketing and sales work together”* (Ulrich, 2014, p. 2).

Traditionally, the primary strategic relationship in organisations has been between the CEOs and CFOs. However, talent has developed as a significant corporate and human resource management challenge, thus permitting human resource management to enter this strategic relationship. This makes it the ‘golden triangle’, through the inclusion of the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) in an unofficial trinity with the CEOs and CFOs, which merges strategic, financial, and people concerns into business strategy (Harvard Business Review Report, 2015). Anthony Hesketh of Lancaster University refers to the golden triangle in a Harvard Business Review report (Harvard Business Review Report, 2015).

Boxall, Purcell, and Wright (2007) refer to Wright and McMahan’s (1992) definition of strategic human resource management as the design of deliberate human resource operations, where activities are meant to enable the firm to accomplish its objectives (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007). However, De Bruyn and Roodt (2009) suggest that the Society of Human Resource Management is a complex process that is continuously developing and is researched and scrutinised by academics and analysts alike. Significant inquiries are now raised on human resource management, and the human resource management function must focus on more strategic concerns.

For this study, the main point of reference in this discussion is Ulrich (1995; 1997; 1998; 2005; 2013; 2014) and fellow authors (Grobler & Wörnich, 2002; Wilton, 2016) who have contributed to the meeting of the Society of Human Resource Management. As a university professor, speaker, management coach, management consultant, and author of over 30 books that have shaped the human resource management profession, Dave Ulrich refers to refining efficiency that will shape human resource management’s credibility, which will allow human resource management to become a partner in executing strategy. He affirms that human resource management cannot develop its responsibility in an organisation without the essential expertise. Therefore, growing as a strategic partner requires knowledge about strategy, markets and the economy. If human resource management is to accomplish actual change, it should be created with individuals who can operate with maturity in the profession (Grobler & Wörnich, 2002; Ulrich, 1998; Wilton, 2016). For this study, reference will be made to Ulrich and Brockbank’s (2005) research, which has suggested a framework for reviewing the human resource management function that draws on an eighteen-year study of more than twenty nine thousand human resource management professionals and line managers globally. Table 4

below displays the five elements and the fourteen criteria of the human resource management value proposition to become a strategic human resource management business partner.

Table 4: Ulrich & Brockbank’ human resource management value proposition, with the five elements and fourteen criteria (Source: De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009, p. 3)

<b>PREMISE OF THE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT VALUE PROPOSITION</b>	<b>ELEMENTS OF THE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT VALUE PROPOSITION</b>	<b>CRITERIA FOR AN EFFECTIVE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT FUNCTION</b>
Human resource management succeeds when it creates value	Knowing external business realities	1. Recognises external business realities and adapts practices and allocates resources accordingly.
	Serving external and internal stakeholders	2. Creates market value for investors by increasing intangibles.
	Crafting human resource management practices	3. Increases customer share by connecting with target customers.
	Building human resource management resources	4. Helps line managers deliver strategy by building organisational capabilities.
	Ensuring human resource management professionalism	5. Clarifies and establishes an employee value proposition and ensures employees have the abilities to do their jobs.
		6. Manages people processes in ways that add value.
7. Manages performance-management processes and practices in ways that add value.		

		8. Manages information processes and practices in ways that add value.
		9. Manages workflow processes and practices in ways that add value.
		10. Has a clear strategic planning process for aligning human resource management investments with business goals.
		11. Aligns its organisation with the strategy of the business.
		12. Has staff who play clear and appropriate roles.
		13. Builds staff ability to demonstrate human resource management competencies.
		14. Invests in professionalism through training and development experiences.

This framework provides value-focused principles for human resource management and recognises human resource management's actions to become a strategic business partner (De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009). The purpose of this study was to evaluate, by qualitative analysis, whether the human resource management function meets the requirements of the five competency elements and fourteen criteria (as illustrated by Table 4 above) developed by Ulrich and Brockbank (2005), to become a strategic business partner.

The narrative explains that an organisation's human resource management function evolves from an operational human resource management to a more strategically motivated function. This research suggests that human resource management should become a fundamental function of a business operation, thus including business partners who appreciate the nature of the business and human resource management attending to its external and internal stakeholders more effectively. Organisations are cognisant of their external business responsibilities to society and strategies are being established accordingly, but the strategy

execution appears to be challenging. Organisations are also becoming more engaged on the most significant value they gain from their people, even though they may need to assimilate, regulate, and connect processes more efficiently (De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009). Line managers also acknowledge human resource management's involvement in their management roles and appreciate human resource management competency, which sanctions a more strategic human resource management. Hence, human resource practitioners are becoming more professional, as there is an emphasis on detailed responsibilities and competencies, as the culture within human resource management is starting to develop towards service excellence (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007; De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009; Galanga & Osman, 2016; Harvard Business Review Report, 2015; Harzing & Van Ruysseveldt, 2004; Itika, 2011; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2015a; Ulrich & Beatty, 2001; Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2004; Wilton, 2016).

Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) affirmed that the universal value premise is defined by the recipient more than the contributor. This forces human resource management professionals to concentrate less on what they do and more on what they deliver, as the contributor of valuable service to the recipient is the organisation. Consequently, human resource management professionals must recognise evolving fundamental trends and maintain their integrity at the strategic table (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade and Drake (2009) present seven themes of Society of Human Resource Management that have been adapted (as depicted previously in Illustration 2). Respectively, each of these themes played a significant role in the field's evolution. Through the developing phase of the Society of Human Resource Management, three research streams set the outline. This three stream model the Society of Human Resource Management research schedule since the early 1980's. Primary analyses highlighted possible assessments to connect human resource management policies and practices to various strategy elements. However, over time this line of investigation extended to including competing frameworks for assessing the connection and evaluating diverse frameworks as dependent factors. In the second line of investigation, early analyses grappled with the importance of human resource management as a source of significant strategic input versus an emphasis on people management. Over time this research stream extended to embrace human and social capital contributions and human resource management in increasingly complex systems. Through this changing period, the third area of importance was affected by the increasing capacity of Society of Human Resource

Management actions further than standard organisational restrictions. Nevertheless, the emphasis of this stream moved more to the international Society of Human Resource Management concerns (Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, & Drake, 2009).

Two other themes developed during the early 1990's; one stream of analysis explains the format and elements of human resource systems. The new line of investigation highlighted the significance of successful implementation of human resource policies and practices and confirmation that the strategic goal is achieved. Later in the 1990's, as the field became recognised, a more significant concern with evaluating the consequences of Society of Human Resource Management actions appeared. Since 2000, as the area has developed, methodological considerations and inquiries have expanded as a result of rising interest in the areas of concern. The following segments trace the sequence of assessment through each of these themes. Here the focus is on the primary abilities and contributors to outline maturity in the Society of Human Resource Management field (Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, & Drake, 2009).

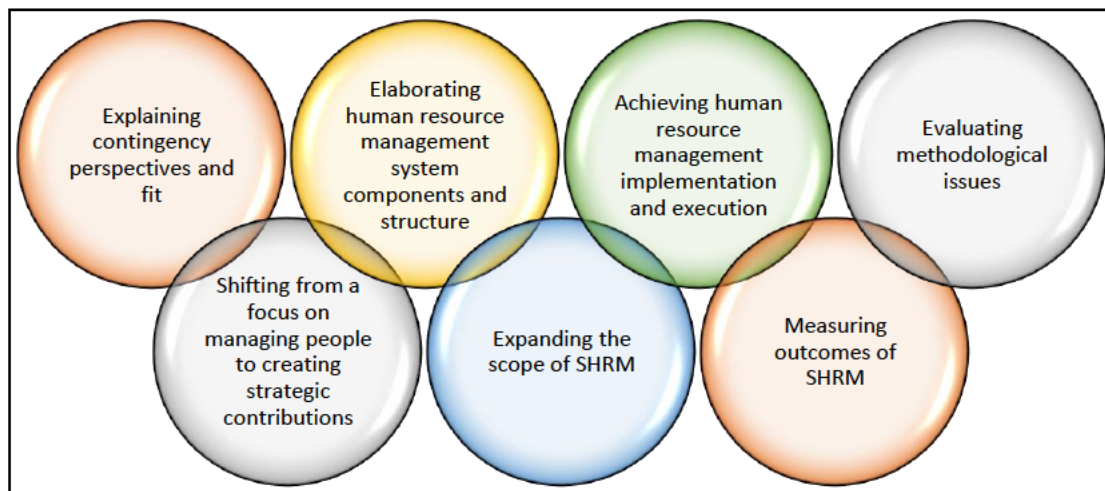


Illustration 4: Sequence of assessment (Adapted from Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, & Drake, 2009, p. 65).

Furthermore, Boxall, Purcell, and Wright (2007) emphasise that future research of strategic human resource management should theoretically develop into what is thought to be the principal role of strategy in human resource management. Traditionally, strategic human resource management has been considered the link between human resource management and strategic management, emphasising how the human resource management function can

contribute to maintaining a competitive advantage in business. Thus, the concern with how human resource management practices can contribute to strategy formulation and implementation while continuing with current human resource management practices is essential (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007). Subsequently, some claim that there has been criticism against human resource management being more strategic. Some critics imply that the term strategic human resource management has been excessively used, arguing that occasionally there is very little non-strategic human resource management going on, which is not the case (O’Riordan, 2017).

Although strategic human resource management is relatively young, considerable developments have rapidly been made. Scholars have delivered notable theoretical and empirical progress in a period of just over twenty-five years. Still, the connection between human resource management and strategic management can be strengthened by breaking away from the focus on Society of Human Resource Management practices (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007). Contrary to other topics under the human resource management banner, namely total quality management, which has faded away, strategic human resource management has what Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade and Drake (2009) refer to as staying power.

## **2.12 Human resource management competencies**

The concept of competence or competency governed by the management strategy literature of the 1990’s has highlighted core competency as a significant organisational resource that could be manipulated to achieve competitive advantage. Authors such as Le Deist and Winterton (2005) have suggested that a competency-based approach to human resource management is highly successful in an evolving workplace. It transfers the emphasis away from occupations toward individuals and their competencies (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005) McClelland (1973, as cited in Yusoff & Ramayah, 2012) was the first to introduce competency into human resource management literature. He recognised that this concept represented the knowledge, skills, traits, attitudes, self-concepts, values, and motives directly related to job performance and vital results (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016, p. 497)

Recently, some effort has been made to distinguish views on the competency required for future human resource leaders in the critical competencies desired to succeed in the human resource management profession. Core competencies, or those that cut across occupations, have

developed gradually as divisions among individual disciplines established were more one-sided, as work roles transformed, and the environment was less fixed. In addition, competencies offer the components against which people should be measured for skill or proficiency to progress into occupations, against which they should be evaluated, and should therefore be developed (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016). Furthermore, competency models may help South African human resource practitioners progress their workforce selection and productivity to balance changing market conditions amidst aggressive business challenges.

The assertion of competency models to advance human resource practitioner proficiency is a collective feature of the United States of America human resource society, though not a general practice in South Africa (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016). The object is to acquire a reliable and rational typology of competency in a framework with clear variations in the methodologies even within countries. The conventional American method has established the significance of distinct qualities and the use of behavioural competency as a process of cultivating exceptional performance. The unconventional United Kingdom method has exhibited the importance of occupationally-defined principles of practical competency and their importance to a profession (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005). An innovative human resource competency model is required as business functions in the current VUCA environment and evolves and develops at an increasing rate.

The preferred competency models should be frequently assessed and revised to remain driven and significant. Hence, the international financial insecurity, industrial advancements, client pressure, demographic changes, and business mergers have led to human resource management concerns being more critical to leadership, now more than ever (Hall & Fourie, 2007; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016). Caldwell (2008) claims that competency models are generally successful in choosing business partners but less successful in advancing these business partners or connecting human resource strategy with business strategy itself. Thus, different human resource professionals and investors have altered opinions and expectations of human resource management and its function and use various standards to measure its efficiency (Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016).

As demonstrated from this literature, human resource management competencies display significance to human resource management progression in South Africa. Therefore, based on

this research, there is an appeal to create a competency model that can be functional for human resource practitioners in the South African context. For this research, the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021) will be examined as part of the theoretical framework and has contributed to the conceptual model used in the study. The SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021) is directly linked to the SABPP standards and represents what human resource practitioners need to present in terms of knowledge, skills, and behaviour to establish a professional benchmark.

Regardless of the various aspects of human resource management and the relationship with competency models, the discussions unfolding on human resource management are continuously evolving, thus leading to academic theory and organisational opportunities. Therefore, the need to conduct a comprehensive investigation of the historical roots of the human resource management discipline in South Africa, as it has moulded the current human resource management practices and will continue to do so in the future, according to Schutte and Barkhuizen (2016).

### **2.13 Conclusion**

Human resource management's role in organisations is the focus of this ongoing discussion. In line with Ulrich's (1997; 2005; 2013) work, many scholars have advocated that human resource management should be moving away from an administrative function with little autonomy, to play a more strategic role in organisations (Abbott, Goosen, & Coetzee, 2013; De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2015a; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2015b; Ulrich, Schiemann, & Sartain, 2015; Van Vuuren & Eiselen, 2006). Longbottom (2005) argued that the human resource management function is effectively employed through the leadership of people matters to deliver a competitive advantage and sustain human value. Consequently, human resource management is increasingly central to management decisions, reflecting on the pivotal role of people in the delivery of business strategy (De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009; Kulik, 2021; Longbottom, 2005; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2015a; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2015b), especially considering the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Continuous change has long been predetermined in business, but today's organisations confront an evolving environment that is increasingly complex and erratic. This rate of change is to encourage innovation and growth. However, the path to innovation and development is not always straightforward. Markets are often unstable, and global competitors move quickly to

take advantage of opportunities. Hence both innovation and growth are now taking place at an accelerated pace. Therefore, customer expectations are constantly escalating and fluctuating. Organisations operate in an increasingly VUCA world known as a VUCA environment (Accenture & Oracle, 2014; Lawrence, 2013). Efficiency and agility are increasingly crucial from operational and human resource structures to survive this new world of work amidst a global pandemic. Human resource management have been forced to be proactive rather than traditionally reactive, disrupting the status quo and opening new possibilities for the profession and business by understanding the unique labour and human challenges (Accenture & Oracle, 2014; Erasmus & Wordsworth, 2004).

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

### Part 2: Professions, Professionalism and Professionalisation

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*“You can't make a good deal with a bad person”*

by Warren Buffet

#### 3.1 Introduction

As the world of work rapidly evolves, human resource management has no golden rule or best practice to guide human resource management professionals in the prevailing VUCA environment (CIPD, 2015). The need for human resource management professionals to identify and to solve ethical dilemmas is essential in order for human resource management to successfully increase trust with business when applying professional judgment and professionalism (CIPD, 2015; van Mook, de Grave, Wass, O'Sullivan, Zwaveling, Schuwirth, & van der Vleuten, 2009). However, what qualifies as a human resource management professional, and whether human resource management is actually a profession in South Africa, is highly debatable. Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) state that human resource management professional associations that have been established with statutory recognition have emphasised that human resource management requires specialist proficiencies and dexterities, guided by statutory professional standards. Therefore, to understand this within the South African context, and particularly for this research, this second chapter of the literature review will focus on understanding human resource management as a profession, human resource management professionalism, and human resource management professionalisation in South Africa. Furthermore, the relationship between human resource management ethics, professionalism and professionalisation, and the human resource management profession's responsibilities to society (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015) will be examined in some depth and contextualised within this study.

Supported by Evetts (2012a), insights on professions, professionalism and professionalisation, together with the discourse of professionalism, which is considered the most difficult of all three concepts, will be explored. The theoretical framework underpinning this study is made up of a multilateral framework that relies on a three-knowledge system, starting with, firstly, the field of ethics, specifically business ethics, that is, teleological and deontological theories,

which will be expounded on in this chapter. Secondly, Evetts (2012a) also uses McClelland's (1990) categorisation theory from 'within and above' on professionalisation and professionalism, which contributed to the conceptual model used in this study and will therefore be elucidated. The last of these three-knowledge systems is the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021), comprising of the foundation that is the profession's duty to society and the four pillars which include ethics, professionalism and human resource and business knowledge, which will also be explored in this chapter.

### **3.2 Profession, professionalism and professionalisation**

Evetts (2013), Dawood (2015) and Syrigou (2018) advocate that there is ample research within the sociology of professions, a domain within the sociology of work, to support this research on what constitutes a profession (Evetts, 2006; Hughes, 1963; Freidson, 1973; Freidson, 1988; Sciulli, 2005; Siegrist, 2004). Evetts (2013) advises that Hughes (1963) was perhaps the first sociologist to explore the difference between professions and occupations. He proposed that professions and occupations postulate to the rest of society what is good and right, but also, they present a way to problem solve within their field (Evetts, 1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018).

Evetts (1999; 2003b; 2013) contributes to the understanding of the concepts of a profession and professionalism that have over time increased in different occupational groups, work contexts and social systems. The Anglo-American research refers to a profession as a distinct category of a privileged occupation; however, there is some disagreement on the subject of what makes a profession different from other fields of work. In the 1950's and 1960's, sociologists attempted to create a list of attributes or traits representing what would be considered core to a professional occupation. This was termed the 'trait approach', which was later dismissed due to the responses from authors such as Johnson (1972; 1992) who considered this approach not useful to distinguish what would be core to professional occupations. Later, professions were defined as occupations that are knowledge-based; this knowledge is gained from tertiary education and training (Evetts, 2003b).

Analytically, professions have been described as having unique relationships with clients and society while being established on values and occupational control. These varied interpretations are central to a dual character or profile. Furthermore, two other factors have

been considered. First, the difference between Anglo-American and continental European insights, since in Europe, professions are not considered to be significantly dissimilar, but instead are considered as privileged occupations. Secondly, trades and professions share a few other standard features, such as the process of formation, identity construction, work cultures and regulatory objectives. This process results in paid work that becomes an occupation, with different levels of control that can be recognised as a profession (Evetts, 1999; 2003a).

Evetts (2003b) refers to operational definitions of professions to be pragmatic, reinforcing the knowledge-base attained through higher education, training, and work experience, which can be gained on the job. This is the case with human resource management, thus regardless of previous researchers discarding the traits approach, the sociology of professions agrees on the need for the knowledge-based profession, which is gained from higher education and job learning. In the human resource management profession, irrespective of the low barriers of entry into the profession, there are human resource management degrees and diplomas and on-the-job training such as secondments and learnerships that allow junior human resource management professionals to develop their skills whilst gaining work experience in the field.

Furthermore, to support the knowledge-based definition, there are two different forms of professionalism, according to the knowledge-based approach, namely organisational and occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2012a; 2013). The characteristics of each of these forms of professionalism are summarised in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Two different forms of professionalism in knowledge-based work (Source: Evetts, 2012a, p. 7; 2013, p.788)

<b>NO'S</b>	<b>ORGANISATIONAL PROFESSIONALISM</b>	<b>OCCUPATIONAL PROFESSIONALISM</b>
<b>1</b>	The discourse of control is used increasingly by managers in work organisations.	Discourse constructed within professional groups.
<b>2</b>	Rational-legal forms of authority.	Collegial authority.
<b>3</b>	Standardised procedures.	Discretion and occupational control of the work.

4	Hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making.	Practitioner trust by both clients and employers.
5	Managerialism.	Controls operationalized by practitioners.
6	Accountability and externalized forms of regulation, target setting and performance review.	Professional ethics are monitored by institutions and associations.
7	It is linked to Weberian models of organisation.	Located in Durkheim's (1992) model of occupations as moral communities

Evetts (2005) also examines contemporary society as an ideal type of organisational professionalism as a debate built within professional occupational groups and includes mutual authority. The significance of professionals' relationship with their clients and employers is that it is centred on independence, flexible judgment, and evaluation by the professional in difficult situations. There is an emphasis on tertiary education and a connection to professional identity and work cultures. Regulations provide guidance and control to the professional, guided by a code of ethics connected to a professional body or institution. Hence, this debate links these two different forms of professionalism and classical interpretations of Weber (1968) and Durkheim (1992). Thus, this reference to Weber's (1968) analysis of the increased importance of competency and Durkheim's (1992) understanding of occupation ethics and professional identity (Evetts, 2005).

Consequently, the continuous difficulties in conceptualising professionalism and the complexity in quantifying the characteristics of professions have been expressed by theorists such as Saks (2012; 2016) and Millerson (1964). However, an interesting sentiment by Higgins and Lo (2018) is that a possible lift for the professional status of human resource management and successful professionalisation will lie in the ability to dominate power and privilege. Freidson (1994, as cited in Evans, 2008) refers to interpretations of professions and professionalism, which states that a profession dominates its work methodically by traditional beliefs and ideology of knowledge and service (Evans, 2008). Furthermore, Evetts (2006) suggests a connection between trust and professionalism. At the time, reference was made to other professions such as medicine and law, which were trusted to deliver altruistic advice

within society. From the ninth century to the twentieth century, this connection was further categorised into occupational groups. However, linking trust and professionalism can also be associated with resultant negative consequences such as negligence. Malpractice scandals have frequently been associated with the same professions such as medicine and law. Hence, questioning the connection between trust and professionalism is valid, which results in the same or similar professions that are examined or treated with suspicion (Evetts, 2006).

Therefore, the sociology of professions offers sociological literature to connect trust and professionalism, which has contributed positively when it comes to clients since the concept of professionalism has become more prevalent in organisations, especially in management literature and the inclusion in training modules. The discourse of professionalism can be considered across various occupational groups, facilitating occupational changes (Evetts, 2006), which makes it relevant to this research. The discourse of professionalism will thus be detailed in the theoretical framework that supports this study.

Reference to the ideology of professionalism as an occupational value comprises various viewpoints, depending on the occupational groups, as per the following characteristics (Evetts, 2011; 2018, p.411 & pp. 48 - 49):

- a. Control of the work systems, processes, procedures, and priorities to be determined;
- b. Primarily by the practitioner/s;
- c. Professional institutions and associations as the primary providers of codes of ethics, constructors of the discourse of professionalism, providers of licensing and admission procedures, controllers of competencies and their acquisition and maintenance, overseeing discipline, due investigation of complaints and appropriate sanctions in cases of professional incompetency;
- d. Collegial authority, legitimacy, mutual support, and cooperation;
- e. Common and lengthy (perhaps expensive) periods of shared education, training, and apprenticeship;
- f. Development of strong occupational identities and work cultures;
- g. Strong sense of purpose and the importance, function, contribution, and significance of the work;
- h. Discretionary judgment, assessment evaluation and decision-making, often in highly complex cases, and of confidential advice-giving, treatment and means of taking forward;

- i. Trust and confidence characterize the relations between practitioner and client, practitioner and employer, and fellow practitioners.

It is important to note that these aspects are not intended to be regarded as the describing characteristics of a profession, but instead are aspects of the ideology of professionalism which can explain the attractiveness of professionalism as an occupational value and can also contribute as a tool in organisations. Hence, the relevance of human resource management within the context of this study, as these aspects of professionalism could be used as guiding principles to human resource management professionals in the absence of the requirement of being statutorily professionalised. As presented in the Table 6 below, Evetts (2011; 2018) has referred to these aspects in her literature since professionalism is changing and should be considered when understanding professionalism and changing occupational values.

Table 6: Changes and continuities in professionalism as occupational value (Source: Evetts, 2011, p.414; 2018, p.51)

CHANGES	CONTINUITIES
Governance	Authority
Management	Legitimacy
External forms of regulation.	Prestige, status, power, dominance.
Audit and measurement.	Competency, knowledge.
Targets and performance indicators.	Identity and work culture.
Work standardization.	Discretion to deal with complex cases, respect, trust.
Financial control.	Collegial relations and jurisdictional competitions.
Competition, individualism, stratification.	Gender differences in careers and strategies.
Organisational control of the work priorities.	Procedures and solutions discussed and agreed upon within specialist teams.
The possible range of solutions and procedures defined by the organisation.	

Table 6 above encapsulates aspects of change and continuity in the interpretation of professionalism as an occupational value for professions. In short, the factors highlighted in

the table are highly complex and constantly changing based on specific situations within organisations. Professional occupations are different within and between countries and are continually changing, evolving, and developing. This is significant in terms of organisations' abilities to adapt and moderate in actual practice. Evetts (2011; 2018) warns that these changes and continuities should be used with caution. These aspects might enable a valuation of the importance of organisational and occupational professionalism that can be applied to different professions. These changes and continuities include both fundamental and relationship aspects and characteristics. Interestingly, the changes are more fundamental, while the continuities tend to emphasise relations. In addition, these changes and continuities have been recognised and demonstrated at macro and meso levels of analysis, but there might also be noteworthy micro differences in diverse workplaces and organisational contexts (Evetts, 2011; 2018).

Saks (2010) refers to a taxonomic approach that was widely applied in the 1960s as an earlier methodology to the study of professions within the sociology of professions approach. Here, the professions were considered in terms of the distinctive characteristics separating professions from other occupations, thus contributing constructively to society. Furthermore, the distinction of the taxonomic approach focused on the varied collection of what were commonly ad hoc lists of distinguishing attributes of professions. This list included elevated skill levels and altruism. This taxonomic approach is also embodied in a more theoretically oriented, system-based functionalist viewpoint, which can be considered a privileged viewpoint. In addition, Saks (2010) believes that Parsons' (1952) contribution is based on ideal types, which ironically was drawn from Weber's (1968) thought on the characteristics credited to both variants of the approach. This leads to the higher-level system analysis of functionalism, particularly the status of occupation power and self-interest in the process. Lastly, Parkin's (1982) contribution to the taxonomic perspective can also be roughly connected to Weber's (1968) social action, based on the profession's unique expertise and ethicality.

Three debates have contributed to understanding what a profession is and what it encompasses, to understanding human resource management as a profession, and to establishing the association to professionalism. A further contribution by Evetts (1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018) is the claim that there are three arguments to the debate surrounding influences on the sociology of professions. The first debate between the functionalist and neo-Weberian theorists found its place on either side of the inclusion and exclusion debate, and most recently has been theorised concerning value systems and ideology

(Dawood, 2015; Evetts, 2013; 2014a; 2014b). Freidson (1994, as cited in Evans, 2008) advises that the debate about professionalism is blurred by vague assumptions and unreliable and partial explanations since professionalism means different things to different people. Therefore, in the absence of policy, it is improbable that the term professionalism will be used in one concrete and singular way; this, within a human resource management context, makes sense (Evans, 2008). What human resource management professionalism means to one professional does not mean the same to another within the human resource management profession. Hence, with no set standards, competencies, or code of conduct, this will surely be open to interpretation and sometimes misunderstanding by human resource management professionals.

Saks (2010) also refers to a Marxist approach to the sociology of professions. He suggests that Marxist contribution does not fall short in positioning professional groups in their macro-structural and historical setting, even though there are different clarifications of their place in the hierarchy class within this contribution. According to the literature, the Marxist contribution is less relevant following the collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe; however, it did have a place in the 1970's and 1980's, when such classifications suggested the professions needed to be placed in the broader capitalist class structure. Hence, professions were positioned on either side of the divide between capital and labour. Therefore, higher-level professions were members of the professional-managerial class, regarded as the bourgeoisie rather than the proletariat. On the other hand, the Marxist critics claimed that the contribution of proletarianisation, specifically the lower professions, was happening under capitalism. This divide was demonstrated by professions such as medicine, where the debate by the Marxist jury was uncertain as to whether it was recognised as part of the capitalist class or progressing towards de-professionalisation.

Furthermore, the appeal of Foucauldian contribution is supported by Johnson (1995). He used Foucault's (1973; 1979) concept of governmentality and applied it to the professions, integrating governance in the modern state through the institutionalisation of expertise. Thus, the principle of Foucauldian influence on the sociology of professions is based on knowledge gained over time, together with the results and contributions provided by Saks (2010) to the sociology of professions. He emphasises that the neo-Weberian framework should have been embraced by more sociology of professions theorists to address the deficits in the other perspectives. Analytically, this allows for the nature and role of professions to be explored

empirically in a receptive manner, without supporting the assumptions made about professional groups that the functionalist approach has implied. Further, it should be considered beyond the limits of interactions between structural and historical processes to support professionalisation at a macro level that wrestles between occupational groups. Finally, the neo-Weberian framework is not attached to the capitalist state's limiting assumptions that are entrenched in the Marxist perspective on professions that have been overlooked by Foucauldian (Saks, 2010).

Professionalism may be the most complex of the three concepts; however, the idea of professionalisation is better understood, with various contributions and not just a singular process of understanding professionalisation. Therefore, the sociology of professions has reflected on the processes of professionalisation. The Anglo-American models of professionalisation have worked with tertiary institutions for professional expertise, thus focusing on the knowledge-based contribution of professionalisation to professionals (Evetts, 1999).

### **3.3 Conceptualising profession and professionalism**

Evetts (2003b) advances that a change of focus is required in the pursuit of defining a profession, compared to the exploration into professionalism as a reason for the occupational change (Evetts, 2003b; 2013), which is human resource management as a profession. The discussion around professions is an age-old discussion; hence Evetts (2003b) advises focusing on the early concepts before even trying to understand professionalism. Evetts (2003b) and Dawood (2015) refer to Hanlon (1998), Abbott (1988) and Crompton (1990), explaining that researchers have eluded specifically defining a profession and would instead refer to occupational groups. Furthermore, there are inconsistencies and ambiguities within a profession, thus many authors have focused on the general discussions and the pressures in sociologies of work, occupation, and employment (Evetts, 2003b; 2006; 2011; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018). Evetts (2003, as cited in Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009) states that profession and professionalism are progressively applied to current employment, explicitly referring to trust, discretion and competency deemed necessary for any professional practice. These behaviours are now being challenged, changed, and regulated (Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009). Even though Evetts' (2003b; 2006; 2011; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018) focus has been on other occupational groups, the same may apply to human resource management professionals.

Saks (2014) also maintains that professions and professionalism have had a crucial part in the occupational structures of modern societies, thus explaining the progress of professional bodies over time in professions such as medicine, accounting, and law. The progressions of professional bodies have also contributed to the association of professionalism in modern times. Hence, the theoretical perspectives on professions and professionalism is central to appreciating their nature and role within the bounds of society. Saks (2014) and other theorists have contributed to the sociology of professions journey through the development of theories that have promoted, at first, with attributes and functionalist versions, all the way through to understanding approaches based on Marxist, Foucauldian and neo-Weberian perspectives. The main theories of professions and their key tenets are outlined in Table 7 below. Furthermore, the contributions by taxonomic writers in the 1950's and 1960's described professional groups as owning exclusive qualities which differentiates them from other occupations and, most notably, views them as having attributes of altruism based on codes of ethics. Professions and professionalism have demonstrated an effective and active influence in the rapidly transforming framework of contemporary society. However, the role they play has been dependent on various theoretical interpretations (Saks, 2014).

Table 7: Mainstream social scientific theories of professions, organisations, and society  
(Source: Saks, 2016, p. 13)

<b>THEORIES OF PROFESSIONS</b>	<b>ORGANISATIONS</b>	<b>SOCIETY</b>	<b>MAIN TIME PERIOD</b>
Trait Approach	Classificatory, so little interest in the organisational role of professions	Professions not typically located in a wider social structure	1950's-1960's
Functionalism	A key focus is on the link between professions and organisations	Perceived functional trade-off between professions and society	1950's-1960s
Interactionism	Professions viewed as socially negotiated labels in organisations	Little interest in broader structures of power or historical processes	1960's-1970's

Marxism	The class-based organisational context of professions is critical	Professions are seen as engaging in social control under capitalism	1970's-
Foucauldian	Interest in rationality of progress in organisational contexts	Professional incorporation into state governance is central	1970's-
Neo-Weberian	Concerned with tensions between professions and organisations	Professional interests and power structures linked to social closure	1970's-
Discourse of analysis	Focus on discourse in professional culture in organisations	Analysis not usually pitched at the macro societal level	1990's-
Neo-institutionalism	Professional service firms and other organisational contexts are key	Professions are part of a global ecology of competing institutions	2000's-

In Dawood's (2015) study on emerging professions, specifically mechatronics engineering as an emerging profession in South Africa, she goes as far back as Hughes (1963), who ties the term profession to its medieval origin meaning to 'profess' (Dawood, 2015, p.14). Hughes (1963) connected the term to religious meaning, that is, to take a vow. Thus, practitioners of a profession were expected to place more significance on adhering to the profession's moral code, ethics, and group solidarity. Flexner (1915, as cited in Halmos, 1973) identified principles of a profession, referring to intellect, having the knowledge and the ability to learn, with the purpose of gaining specific techniques that can be connected, and a greater desire to contribute to society (Dawood, 2015). This makes sense when doctors take the Hippocratic Oath (van Mook, de Grave, Wass, O'Sullivan, Zwaveling, Schuwirth, & van der Vleuten, 2009; Vivanco & Delgado-Bolton, 2015), which is an oath to adhere to ethical standards and behaviour and a pledge to do no harm. If human resource management professionals in South

Africa are statutorily recognised, they would also take such an oath of ethics and would pledge to refrain from doing any harm, consequently improving their ethical practice.

Evetts (2003b) and the CIPD (2015) similarly offer noteworthy attributes associated with a profession and knowledge, technical and tacit qualities. This implies completing tertiary education, engaging in professional training, and also gaining work experience. Another classification of professions is more structural and formal work dealing with uncertainties in this VUCA world, thus acknowledging that professionals engage in higher risk and risk assessment by using their expert knowledge when consulting customers and clients (Evetts, 2003b). Furthermore, Evetts (2003b) refers to Olgiati, Orzack and Saks (1998), stating that professions are involved in the inception and existence, physical and mental health, problem-solving and general well-being of those in an occupation (Evetts, 2003b). This does not refer to human resource management specifically; however, the essence describes human resource management's contribution to the profession.

Weckert and Lucas (2013, p. 1) maintain that “professionalism, it's not the job you do, it's how you do the job” and there is a sense that this meaning is more important in some occupations than others. One such profession would be medicine, where life and death decisions are made. Considering the evolution of technologies in this new world of work, one's occupation and its ethical, moral and community responsibility are important. A response is also supported by van Mook, de Grave, Wass, O'Sullivan, Zwaveling, Schuwirth and van der Vleuten (2009) and Vivanco and Delgado-Bolton (2015). Weckert and Lucas (2013) have a similar view to Higgins and Lo's (2018) sentiment that professionals have power over those who do not have the knowledge, and that those who do not have power therefore are vulnerable to those who do. Thus, there is a sense of moral responsibility to those that do not know.

Trust and a trusting environment have been a constant theme throughout the literature review presented so far in this chapter, and reference has been made to trust as social capital and for people to work together for a common purpose and good (van Mook, de Grave, Wass, O'Sullivan, Zwaveling, Schuwirth, & van der Vleuten, 2009; Weckert & Lucas, 2013). Weckert and Lucas (2013) focus on the Information and Communication Technology industry, which like human resource management, is challenging to regulate and has experienced evolution over time. To a lesser extent, regulation means more autonomy, giving more scope for doing the right thing and ensuring trustworthiness. In these current times, the employee working in

their profession has the opportunity and not the obligation to be professional and thus to display professionalism. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that businesses would want to recruit trained information technology specialists that belong to a profession, and who can guarantee professionalism (Weckert & Lucas, 2013). Information technology and human resource management are two professions that are not compulsorily professionalised in South Africa and are the two departments that were most vital to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, considering professionalisation would certainly have benefits for both professions that played an important role in business during this VUCA time.

According to Evetts (2003, as cited in Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009), professionalism means increased training, development, professional standards, and continuous update of those standards and knowledge, in order for professionals to maintain their professionalisation (Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009). Notably, aspects of professionalism also relate to using knowledge for the good of society, implying ethical responsibility (CIPD, 2015). Human resource management professionals are expected to make informed decisions rather than ignore their obligations. An example is reporting unethical behaviour by human resource management, such as allowing foreigners to work on a holiday permit instead of a work permit required by law. If this is not reported, it diminishes employment opportunities for South Africans.

As described by the CIPD (2015), professionalism can be vague and elusive. The CIPD (2015) supports Evetts' (2003, as cited in Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009) reference in that knowledge and expertise would be associated with a profession, irrespective of that occupational group being recognised as a formal profession. Therefore, professionalism is connected with numerous significant attributes which would differentiate any specific occupational group from a profession recognised by society (CIPD, 2015; Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009). The gist of professionalism is variable in the sociological analysis. It has developed over a period in terms of its understanding and meaning of professionalism and its attraction to new and old occupations to encourage and enable occupational change (Evetts, 1999; 2003b; 2006; 2011; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018; Watson, 2002).

Finally, a different viewpoint by Dawood (2015) offers a debate on what constitutes the attributes and characteristics of a profession. Bucher and Strauss (1961) recognised that there is a combination of sections or contributions that have been presented in a diverse manner that

is referred to in a specific period of time, as it has been documented thus far by the various sociology of professions theorists. Dawood (2015) describes professions as a mere combination of arbitrary occupations that have traditionally been, in what is referred to as 'our culture'. Furthermore, professions as a concept is reliant on relations, which Dawood (2015) believes to be a progressive view. Therefore, professions are seen as networks that are created, expanded, and connected, a view that also appeared in literature in the 1900's (Dawood, 2015). Thus, Dawood (2015, p.18) addresses the debate on characteristics and provides the following description by Burrage, Jarausch and Siegrist (1990 as cited in Sciulli, 2005):

- a. It is a full-time, liberal (non-manual) occupation;
- b. It establishes a monopoly in the labour market for expert services;
- c. It attains self-governance or autonomy, that is, freedom from control by any outsiders, whether the state, clients, laypersons, or others;
- d. Training is specialised, and yet also systematic and scholarly. Examinations, diplomas, and titles control entry to the occupation and also sanction the monopoly; and
- e. Member rewards, both material and symbolic, are tied to their occupational competency and workplace ethics and contemporaries' belief that their expert service is essential for society and the commonwealth.

However, Dawood (2015, p.18) also advises that ten years later, Siegrist (2002, as cited in Sciulli, 2005) contributed to the list of characteristics with these additional attributes:

- a. Capabilities and skills that are justified scientifically or systematically;
- b. The knowledge that is exclusive, profound, inaccessible, or not easily accessible by laypersons, and acquired in particular institutions of advanced education; and
- c. Rules and attitudes regarding applications of this knowledge, from formal procedures to collegiality and a general orientation toward the common good, are designed to promote trust more generally across civil society.

Since this is a study on human resource management ethics and professionalisation, not all of the above apply to human resource management when reviewing these characteristics and attributes. The following points as they apply to human resource management must be considered within the context of this research:

- a. Human resource management is certainly not always a full-time job, it could be done as temporary employment, part-time consultancy, or as a fixed term contract. Human resource management consultancy is a big industry, with private consultancy and big businesses such as Ernst and Young, and Price Waterhouse Coopers.
- b. Due to no statutory professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa, there are low barriers of entry into human resource management as a profession. There are human resource management practitioners that are not registered with a professional body and those that register with a professional body by choice. Hence, all human resource management professionals do not monopolise the labour market as experts, as anyone can work in human resource management in South Africa.
- c. Unfortunately, human resource management is not self-governed and not independent due to a lack of statutory professionalisation.
- d. Training and tertiary education is not regulated for human resource management in South Africa, and titles do not control entry into the occupation. For example, a human resource management business partner could be a professional who has worked for three to five, or five to ten years, or a senior human resource management business partner who has been working in human resource management for more than ten years. These criteria do not guarantee entry into the profession at any specific level or even sanction a monopoly to a position.
- e. Based on the previous point, tenure requirements for human resource management business partners and senior business partners do not guarantee salary or bonuses based on work experience, as is the case with other professions such as engineering and accounting.
- f. Human resource management capabilities and skills are regulated in the form of government law, due to the lack of human resource management statutory regulation.
- g. Human resource management knowledge is not exclusive, profound, or inaccessible; even with the low barriers to entry, a student can study for a human resource management degree or diploma. Human resource management is also a module in an MBA program, and various online human resource management courses can be done.
- h. Lastly, due to the lack of statutory professionalisation, human resource management is not governed by rules, knowledge, formal procedures, and altruism.

Dawood (2015) also suggests that professions need to be theorised in different ways, both historically and sociologically, to expand the significance of professions. Therefore, whilst all of these attributes and characteristics relate to existing professions, it is a far reach to human

resource management's current standing, hence the need to understand human resource management as a profession in South Africa. With its current status as being a profession that is not statutorily professionalised in South Africa, this can be used as a baseline of its current status and sociological influence, thus building a case for statutory professionalisation concerning human resource management ethics and professionalism.

### **3.4 South African human resource management**

During the current VUCA times, the rise of human resource management as a strategic business partner and contributor to business performance has allowed for human resource management's professional status to improve during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Syrigou (2018) advises that human resource management professionals have been receiving attention as they are considered an emerging managerial profession and an aspiring profession that has seen the most development and growth in achieving professionalism. Even though Syrigou's (2018) study was conducted in the United Kingdom, the terms used, and findings of her study are relevant to the South African context, specifically the exploration of the nature of human resource management and their sense of community, as a profession.

The review of literature presented in Chapter Two included defining and conceptualising human resource management, reflecting on a historical overview of human resource management, and human resource management evolution, strategy, and competencies. Combined with literature from the sociology of professions, contribution on professions, professionalism, and professionalisation, this section will explore whether human resource management can be considered to be a profession in South Africa. The material in both the previous literature review chapter as well as in this one has influenced the four themed framework that was applied in this study and responded to calls and contributions from similar research on the human resource management profession previously conducted in South Africa (e.g. Abbott, Goosen, & Coetzee, 2013; De Beer, 2013; De Beer & Du Toit, 2015; Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren and Visser, 2003; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b). Therefore, the insights and perceptions on human resource management as a profession will speak to the professional status of human resource management in South Africa. Hence, the attempts by the human resource management community, as a distinct function to professionalise, are viewed within the lens of organisational or occupational terms, as presented by Evetts (2012a; 2013).

Janse van Rensburg (2009) refers to leading authors in the human resource management field such as Armstrong (2000), Losey, Meisinger and Ulrich (2005), Ulrich and Brockbank (2005), and various institutions, for example, Harvard, Cornell, and the American Business Association, which use the term ‘human resource management professionals’ in their writings as a matter of course (Janse van Rensburg, 2009, p.3). In an article by Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011a), the researchers reviewed the literature on the engineering, accounting, medical and legal professions and established that all recognised primary professions have four core elements in common. These are referred to as the four pillars of professionalism (displayed in Table 8 below), which also ties in with the theoretical framework and conceptual model that support this study. The results of their study confirm that human resource management in South Africa is a bona fide profession (Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a). These studies provide another platform for evaluating the professional standing of human resource management as a profession in South Africa.

Table 8: The four pillars of professionalism  
(Source: Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a, p. 5)

<b>PILLAR NUMBER</b>	<b>NAME OF PILLAR</b>
<b>1</b>	Mastery of a complex body of knowledge and skills
<b>2</b>	Commitment to integrity and morality through a code of conduct
<b>3</b>	Autonomy in practice and the privilege of self-regulation
<b>4</b>	Acceptance of a duty to society as a whole

Legg (2004) and Janse van Rensburg’s (2009) studies have both provided a detailed overview of the history of human resource management in South Africa, as well as work by Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011a; 2011b). Mainly, documenting the interrelationship of the different professional bodies provides some insight into the thinking at the time, the motivation, and the subsequent processes and actions, all of which are relevant to this research. Therefore, it is interesting to note that the establishment of the IPM in South Africa as an ad-hoc committee to set up the SABPP was synchronised for the development and regulation of human resource management in South Africa. The United Kingdom professional body, known as the CIPD, was established in 1946. In 1976, the Human Resource Management Certification

Institute in the United States of America was established, parallel to the establishment of the IPM (mid-forties) and the SABPP (the late seventies) in South Africa (Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Legg, 2004; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b). Gold and Bratton's (2003) study from the early 2000's established that the failure of statutory professionalisation would marginalise human resource management's influence and professional status. Furthermore, Janse van Rensburg's (2009) research to outline and describe a profession in South Africa was originated by the Langenhoven and Daniels (1980) study.

### **3.5 Human resource management ethics, professionalism and professionalisation**

The need for human resource management to reconcile their dual responsibility to business and the human resource management profession appeals to the requirement for professionalism under pressure, firstly for profit growth and secondly to encourage definite values and ethical standards to increase employee engagement. Hence, there is a need to explore the perceptions and practices on ethical dilemmas with human resource management in contemporary times. Ekuma and Akobo (2015) state that there are not enough studies dedicated to ethics constructed on a theoretical positioning, but more especially there is a lack of research focusing on insights and perceptions of human resource management professionals and, within the context of this study, also few studies that consider the views and opinions of human resource management clients (Ekuma & Akobo, 2015). Based on this notion, Stewart and Rigg (2011, as cited in Ekuma & Akobo, 2015, p. 48), state that "ethics cannot be taught"; instead, individuals need to determine their ethical practice. Further, Legge (2007, as cited in Ekuma & Akobo, 2015) asserts that identifying the good and its just or fair distribution supports Stewart and Rigg's (2011) sentiments and thus contributes to an understanding of what the difference between right and wrong is (Ekuma & Akobo, 2015). Consequently, the ethical approaches to human resource management are diverse when considering the varied theoretical frameworks.

Weckert and Lucas (2013, p. 175) refer to the current situation where 95% of leadership in Fortune 500 companies are not entirely doing what they are legally, morally, and ethically expected to do when conducting business, and supporting those ethics is generally not prepared to survive in uncertainty. Current human resource management literature offers two debates relating to the dilemma of ethics and professionalism in human resource management. First is the issue of whether human resource management can be trusted to be the custodian of ethics in an organisation. Second, there are concerns around human resource management's reputation and lack of professionalism which have become questionable, with human resource

management practitioners showing little or no respect and accountability for their unethical aberrant behaviour. Even though there are human resource management professional bodies in South Africa, the SABPP appears to be more active in eliciting attention in legislating human resource management as a profession. However, human resource management professionalisation has no statutory recognition in South Africa; that is, it is not compulsory for human resource management professionals to belong to a professional body to work in human resource management, as it is in many other countries, such as the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, and Kenya (CIPD, 2015; Balthazard, 2014a; Balthazard, 2014b; Omuya, Kwasira, & Kanali; 2017 Society for Human Resource Management, 2016).

In order to understand professions and their related themes of professionalism and professionalisation, one must consider that the sociology of professions provides context, as it also supports the systematic framework of this South African research. Even though Bonnin and Ruggunan (2013) state that the sociology of professions has not achieved much leverage within South African sociology, they believe that South African sociology of professions has much to offer. Furthermore, according to Evetts (2012a; 2012b), a sociology of professions theorist, the sociological analysis of professional work has separated professionalism as a unique means of classifying work and regulating workers, in contrast to the business's hierarchical, bureaucratic, and managerial controls. Professional work is changing as professionals take control of their work, with flexible decisions making it progressively challenging to sustain (Evetts, 1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018), with the complexity of human resource management.

In June 2012, the South African Qualifications Authority accredited the SABPP as a professional body, signalling the process to register the SABPP's human resource management professional qualifications on the National Learner's Record Database. This milestone occurred 30 years after the SABPP was founded. The original objectives of the SABPP were thus achieved in that there was official recognition for human resource management professionals who are registered with the SABPP (SABPP, 2016). Three years later, in 2015, the Minister of Justice gazetted specific designations of the SABPP registered professionals as ex-officio Commissioners of Oaths. As a result, SABPP members registered in the categories of Master Human Resource Professional, Chartered Human Resource Professional, Human Resource Professional, and Human Resource Associate may now administer oaths or affirmations, take solemn or attested declarations, and certify documents to be a true copy of

the original (Meyer, 2015). This reflects human resource management's progress from only being responsible for the payroll and people management to being recognised as a profession and having the responsibility of ex-officio Commissioner of Oath. The responsibility is equivalent to that of lawyers and legal advisors, who are already officially professionalised in South Africa and have attained their formal education, obtained training, written a board exam, and registered with the Legal Practice Council to practice law (Meyer, 2015; SABPP, 2016).

The legal and medical professions have developed over hundreds of years to their current professional status, and, comparatively, human resource management is certainly a fledgling profession (Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a). Moreover, previous research has shown that human resource management's role in attempting to take accountability for good governance, human resource management ethics and professionalism, together with continued professional development, has created awareness of the benefits of human resource management professionalisation to business and society (Van Rensburg Basson & Carrim, 2011a). Hence, the conclusion that human resource management is professional in every sense of the word is undeniable. Consequently, there is an expectation that the human resource management profession will continue to develop and further establish itself in business in South Africa with ethics and professionalism as the criteria, together with standards and competencies, as set out by a professional body (Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren & Visser, 2003; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a).

Djurkovic and Maric's (2010) study recognised that successful business ethics requires the professional application of principles and activities of human resource management. In 2013, The Human Resources Professionals Association in Ontario, Canada, asked their annual members the following question, 'Do you agree that the professionalisation of human resource management is, or should be, an important issue for the profession?'. 89.4% of the respondents either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' (Balthazard, 2014a; Balthazard, 2014b). The professionalisation of human resource management is an essential issue to the profession, not just in Canada but also in South Africa.

The CIPD (2015) research report supports the notion that professionalism and ethics are inseparable. However, human resource practitioners may not feel comfortable talking about ethics. Findings of the CIPD report imply that talking about ethics will clash with being business savvy and having a winning reputation (CIPD, 2015). Alternatively, the report

suggests that ethics is multi-layered, multifaceted, and dependent on a particular definition of morality, and as such are too difficult to define at a profession-wide or global level. Nevertheless, as a professional body in the United Kingdom and Europe, the CIPD (2015) supports addressing ethics and human resource management's ethical competency and how the business serves a range of stakeholders, including business owners, people, economies, and most importantly, their communities. The Institute also promotes the drive for professionalism and sound ethical practice (CIPD, 2015; Slater, 2019).

Evetts (2003, as cited in Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009) clarifies the concept of profession used in Anglo-American literature on privileged, high-income occupational groups in societies. The development of knowledge-based work and occupations is associated with the increasing capacity of tertiary education systems that produce educated and trained professionals and the need for employers and managers in the business to regulate knowledge and output (Evetts, 1999; Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009). Furthermore, the transition from an analytical focus to the concepts of profession and professionalisation, and towards the further examination of the idea of professionalism and how it is being used, are themes within the discourse of professionalism which will be explained in the overview of the theoretical framework (Evetts, 1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018).

Furthermore, the new professionalism is a concept that includes occupation value, organisational professionalism, and discourse. The importance of trust, transparency and accountability seems to go hand in hand with increased regulations and assessment (Evetts, 2011). Thus, the critical element is that trust is essential for a professional-client relationship, is the essence of professionalism, and is the most significant component, which can be called a hallmark of the evolution of professionalism. Syrigou (2018) suggests that trust allows professions to deliver a service if professionalism is described as an amalgamation of knowledge, skills, autonomy, trustworthiness, and altruism. Therefore, if professionals cannot display these attributes, they will be taken for granted by society, as public trust is essential to any profession. Hence, regulated professions are structured to support the development of trust, within the context of professional engagements that could include ethical codes of conduct and personal attention (Syrigou, 2018).

Ethical standards and expert knowledge are connected with trust. Hence, professional ethics and altruism are also interconnected. There is an assumption that professionals, regardless of the profession they belong to, will always act ethically with their clients' best interests in mind and with the belief that professionals have expert knowledge that is anticipated to hold them in good stead to handle client issues. These may be considered valuable attributes that will contribute to being professional and displaying levels of professionalism. Interestingly, some professions enjoy being trusted due to their professional status and expert knowledge, such as doctors and lawyers. Together with trust and the independence of work characterised by professional competency and skill level, one can connect professionalism to the expectation of high levels of remuneration, authority, and power, requiring professionals to be trusted. This means that trust concerning clients combines professionalism, ethics, and interconnectedness (Syrigou, 2018).

Syrigou's (2018) study refers to a professional identity associated with professions and the processes of professionalisation. Within the context of this research, Evetts (2014a) connects ethics, expertise, and trust. To process this connection, it would be essential to understand what it is and how it was created, and its influences and threats (Evetts, 2014a). Thus, professional occupation shares the same features as professional identity. When it comes to one's identity in a professional situation, this requires a different personality with attributes necessary for a professional role, such as judgment, business acumen, competency, creativity, and, most importantly, trustworthiness. Syrigou (2018) connects these attributes to a professional's emotional state that is important in a professional environment and shaped in the early years of one's professional career. A professional identity requires delivering on work based on expert knowledge and the ability to problem-solve and provide employment to a professional standard (Syrigou, 2018).

Syrigou (2018) details the studies that support the formation of a professional identity, such as Lamote and Engels (2010), the influence on the process by Raz, Jensen, Walter, and Drake (1991), and most importantly, the implications of maintaining one's professional identity by Sutherland, Howard and Markauskaite (2010) and Worthington, Salamonson, Weaver and Cleary (2012). Practitioners will evolve as their careers develop and grow (Ladge, Clair & Greenberg, 2012; Rettinger, 2011; Williams, 2010). Most importantly, when professionals move to middle and senior management roles, they would have adapted to function at a professional level required by senior management, thus modifying the professional identity at

the higher level (Ibarra, 1999). There is therefore interconnection between expertise gained over time and with knowledge acquired, which contributes to the trust that professionals accumulate over time. Lastly, professional ethics emerge through the professional personality that grows and develops (Syrigou, 2018).

### **3.6 Considering the downside of professionalisation**

Notably, Syrigou (2018) also examines human resource management professional identity with regards to aspects of belonging to a wider human resource community and how these professionals would relate to statutory professionalisation, which could in some instances present a downside of belonging to a professional body. Firstly, she refers to participants in her study that had reservations regarding telling people that they worked in the human resource management profession. According to the participants, this was due to a general lack of knowledge of what human resource management entails, or to their previous negative reactions based on a bad experience with human resource management. Secondly, participants also made reference to characteristics of a conventional professional occupation, such as holding formal qualifications or certifications that would raise their self-confidence, self-esteem and contribute to their professional development of human resource management professionals. However, Syrigou's (2018) data showed that professionals encountered difficulty when pursuing a human resource management qualification or certification that could be used as an instrument to endorse their professional identity in this discipline.

Conversely, the data showed that human resource management professionals were required to apply themselves in other subject matter, such as business or leadership certification or qualification, in order to progress in their careers. This was rationalised in light of the fact that human resource management specific qualification or certification could actually be acquired later in their career. Third, Syrigou (2018) refers to professional identity in relation to professional status and suggests that human resource management professionals may become self-absorbed, which is what she refers to as the 'human resource ego effect'. Therefore, she advises that human resource management professionals may focus on attaining and then maintaining their professional status, instead of actually being effective and competent in their field of work. Consequently, they may separate themselves by using a higher level of terminology to portray a level of professionalism and professional status and, as a result, could make human resource management unapproachable and obscure (Syrigou; 2018). Syrigou

(2018) also examines the reasons as to why people may believe that the professionalisation of human resource management would benefit the people in the profession by way of professionalisation. Previous bad experiences with this profession, not understanding what human resource management actually does, assuming certification and qualification would allow for major career progression in the field, and the 'human resource ego effect' should also be considered even though this was not considered at the onset of Syrigou's (2018) study and therefore was not tested with the participants.

Furthermore, Wilkinson, Hislop and Coupland (2016) offer another viewpoint that could also be identified as a downside to structuring a professional identity in a way that would require what is referred to as 'co-activation of identities'. Rothbard and Ramarajan (2009, as cited in Wilkinson, Hislop, & Coupland, 2016) explain that professionals experience 'opposition or tension' when dealing with their individual and professional identity. This could result in human resource management professionals leaning towards simplifying their professional identity in social situations, thus presenting themselves differently. However, despite a professional's best efforts of separating their personal and professional identity, a 'co-activation of identities' occurs (Wilkinson, Hislop, & Coupland, 2016). This concept could also explain why participants in Syrigou's (2018) research were reluctant to reveal their professional identity in social situations.

Finally, James' (2016) study on humanitarian professionals found that the process of professionalisation does have clear downsides and costs. First, the author starts the discussion by setting four criteria that have already been presented in various parts of this literature review. However, for the purpose of this review these are: specialisation of knowledge; establishment of the profession as a livelihood; organisation and institutionalisation; and legitimacy and authority. Hence, the author presents potential downsides that should be considered for tightening this process. Within the context of James' (2016, pp. 186) study on humanitarian community, these include the "distance of the relief workers from the beneficiary, barriers to entry into the humanitarian sector, and adding to risk aversion and a decline in innovation amongst those in the field. Based on these findings, professionalisation should be approached with some caution and not seen as a panacea for perceived ills". All of these potential downsides are not relevant to this study, however barriers to entry, being risk averse and a decline in innovation could be considered as downsides for the professionalisation of human resource management.

To explain further, the statutory professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa could create barriers to entry to professionals that would not qualify for membership to the SABPP or IPM if regulated. Secondly, whether professionals become risk averse once professionalised for the fear of losing power, authority, prestige or just getting comfortable at the boardroom table is an issue that should be considered. Lastly, a decline in innovation may result, which has appeared many times in this study in relation to professional development, agility, growth, evolving times, accelerated pace and, more recently, the fourth industrial revolution that creates opportunities for artificial intelligence and robotics in human resource management. A decline in any of these would put the human resource management profession on a back foot in its fledgling existence.

### **3.7 Human resource management accountability**

According to researchers De Prins, Van Beirendonck, De Vos and Segers (2014), the debate between corporate social responsibility and human resource management is still developing. There have also been recent developments in business ethics and corporate social responsibility, which has resulted in similar growth in ethics and human resource management, with the hope of making business more ethical and bringing ethical awareness to managing people in business (Pinnington, Macklin, & Campbell, 2007). It is an undertaking that has collectively increased attention in the past decade and is rooted in the concept of sustainable development, which implies that an organisation delivers on current needs without jeopardising the needs of future generations. Notwithstanding the lack of any comprehensively accepted definition of corporate social responsibility, it is regularly deemed the organisation's accountability for its influence on society. Keeping in mind the tradition of the triple bottom line, which includes financial, social, and environmental concerns, corporate social responsibility signifies continuous improvement, and the development of continuous improvement is vital. This development can be understood as an organisation's capacity to volunteer and methodically incorporate what De Prins, Van Beirendonck, De Vos and Segers (2014) describe as economic, environmental (also referred to as ecological), and social considerations. This description implies 'profit', 'planet' and 'people', referred to as the three P's, as significant to an organisation's general commercial operations. Consequently, transparency and being open to discussions with organisational stakeholders are part of corporate social responsibility development (De Prins, Van Beirendonck, De Vos, & Segers, 2014).

Baisier (2013) advises that a comparative case study conducted in Belgium has indicated that the application of corporate social responsibility remains a developing process for the majority of organisations that tend to only roll out certain aspects of the process. Some companies, on the other hand, do proceed from a fully integrated vision that addresses all three dimensions. Furthermore, organisations tend to introduce a framework; however, they do not associate the correct terminology. According to this case study, considerable attention is given to corporate social responsibility efforts concerning the environment and society. Still, the economy is considered the most important as it affects the survival of an organisation. It supports the organisation's existence and involves the social, which are the people and external stakeholders (clients). In practice, corporate social responsibility initiatives related to their employees or other internal stakeholders tend to receive less attention (De Prins, Van Beirendonck, De Vos, & Segers, 2014).

Furthermore, Pfeffer (2010) offers a comparable conclusion from an academic perspective. By conducting a Google Scholar search, the imbalance between the three P's of corporate social responsibility was distinguishable in their research. The result was that there were 20 800 records for the term ecological sustainability, with 53 000 for environmental sustainability, a mere 12 900 for social sustainability, and only 569 for human sustainability (De Prins, Van Beirendonck, De Vos, & Segers, 2014). This begged the question in their study as to why deforestation is more important than people, not only in research conducted but also in terms of organisational initiative, which results in a case for affirming the sustainability perspective within human resource management. This will require a shift towards the social aspect of corporate social responsibility, thus refining and re-positioning the people, planet, and profit factors (De Prins, Van Beirendonck, De Vos, & Segers, 2014).

Gond, Igalens, Swaen and Akremi (2011) refer to human resource management's role in responsible leadership as miscalculated, thus overlooking the link between functional, practical, and relational attributes. Gond, Igalens, Swaen and Akremi (2011) assert that the human resource management department can endorse positive behaviour in producing an involved workforce and in establishing an environment where corporate social responsibility is embedded in every aspect of the employee's responsibility (Gond, Igalens, Swaen, & Akremi, 2011). To contextualise, the connection of human resource management and corporate social responsibility to society is referred to for this study.

Gond, Igalens, Swaen and Akreimi (2011) contend that it is no longer a fad or fashionable to support corporate social responsibility. However, in these VUCA times, organisations are in pursuit of amalgamating their position in emerging fields of corporate social responsibility and sustainability. Organisations now embrace and even partner with global institutions and non-governmental organisations to do good. An example is Nedbank's corporate social responsibility focus on education, health, community development, children's welfare, economic development, arts and culture, sports development, the environment, and volunteerism (Nedbank, 2014). Organisations can now manage their resources differently, that is, current and potential future human resource management resources, including social relations external to their organisation. Ehnert, Harry and Zink (2014) refer to this as a human resource base that falls within the strategic management of an organisation. However, Ehnert, Harry and Zink (2014) suggest that many organisations declare that they are dedicated to sustainable development either on their website or sustainability reports, though they are not always clear what is actually authentically taking place from within the organisation, and thus only refer to sustainability as it would apply to any organisation.

Consequently, the importance of human resource management sustainability is underscored by Ehnert, Harry and Zink (2014, p. 6) in achieving the following objectives:

- a. Attracting and retaining talent and being recognised as an employer of choice;
- b. Maintaining employee mental health and safety;
- c. Workforce training for the long-term development of critical competencies;
- d. Championing employee's work-life-balance and work-family-balance;
- e. Managing ageing workforces;
- f. Creating employee trust and continued employment relationships;
- g. Displaying and developing (corporate) social responsibility towards employees and the communities in which they are operating.

Obrad and Gherheş (2018) and Slater (2019) cite extensive literature on the connection between corporate social responsibility and human resource management. Carroll (1979) explains corporate social responsibility as the accountability of business to include the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of business at a given point in time. Similarly, Obrad and Gherheş (2018) state that business must influence decisions and activities

on society and the environment, thus maintaining transparency and ethical behaviour that contribute to sustainable development and meeting the expectation of stakeholders.

Furthermore, businesses must also perform social responsibility by undoing unsustainable business choices resulting from the previous financial crisis and initiated by unsustainable and unethical financial decisions. Therefore, sustainability in the interest of society is frequently used synonymously with corporate social responsibility. However, except for business ethics, sustainability to support positive choices for the greater good of society is not merely based on moral or ethical problems in the business context, and corporate social responsibility is not only founded on regulating business activities. Therefore, corporate social responsibility is not just for scholars who have focused on green human resource management and environmental sustainability but should also be included in business decisions (Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2014; Obrad & Gherheş, 2018).

Therefore, the purpose here is to raise awareness that human resource management strategic decisions should consider the consequences of affecting society. This refers to environmental impacts, sustainability and decisions made for operational reasons, such as retrenchments that could affect an entire community and thus society. An example of this in the South African context would be if human resource management at, for example, the Sasol Plant in Secunda<sup>13</sup>, or any other organisation, would issue a Section 189(1) of the Labour Relations Action, No. 66 of 1995 (LRA), due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. This notice is for an invitation to have meaningful engagement on various issues concerning contemplated retrenchments (Hofmeyr, 2021). These interactions initiated by human resource management should be conducted with integrity and keeping in mind the effect on society, thus the sustainability of such a business decision, whatever the outcome.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

As society progresses through this new world of work, human resource management professionals will apply their own set of principles in South Africa. Notably, there will be challenges that will differ between organisational and cultural environments. Employees now work remotely or have a hybrid work option, and organisations have less control, thus

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<sup>13</sup> The Sasol Plant in the town of Secunda (Mpumalanga Province) is one of the main sources of income for households. The town's name refers to the Latin word for Second, referring to the second extraction refinery producing oil from coal, after Sasolburg which is the main plant (ShowMe, 2021).

maintaining their strategic and operational support during these VUCA times has become crucial. The CIPD (2015) advises that to gain credibility and trust, the human resource management profession must define the principles that it stands for and develop capability in interpreting those principles for specific business models without losing sight of the core values. Weckert and Lucas (2013) state that according to the traditional core body of knowledge that reinforces professional accreditation, professionalisation must be motivated by the industry. In the case of this research, it would be the human resource management professionals and the human resource management professional bodies that already exist in South Africa who would need to motivate for such accreditation. Since all human resource management practitioners do not need to become members of any professional body in South Africa, there are no human resource standards, nor an ethical code of conduct, nor even a standard stipulated level of professionalism. Therefore, human resource practitioners are split between either subscribing to professional membership or removing it. It must also be noted that the downside to the professionalisation of human resource management will also have consequences for the profession.

## Chapter 4: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

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*“Allow your passion to become your purpose and one day it will become your profession”* by

Gabriel Bernstein

### 4.1 Introduction

There are typically several nuances to consider in new research when developing a theoretical and conceptual framework. Various authors cited in Crawford (2020), such as Pfeffer (2017), Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), Maxwell (2013), Marshall and Rossman (2016), Robson and McCartan (2016), and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) can describe and explain either type of framework differently. The theoretical framework is a collection of thoughts that deliver research direction. The researcher has assembled the necessary structure and is left with the free will to construe what is in the room. However, it may be a matter of interpretation, as there may be misperception between a theoretical and conceptual framework (Green, 2014; Lederman & Lederman, 2015; Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009; Tamene, 2016).

In contrast, a conceptual framework is a diagnostic tool with numerous alternatives and frameworks. All researchers must decide on a suitable framework to clearly describe the pertinence of the intended study. This structure facilitates the analysis and interpretation of data in order to deliver scientific results. Remarkably, authors such as Green (2014), Lederman and Lederman (2015) and Tamene (2016) have established that both types of framework are often unclear in terms of how they could guide a study or be entrenched in the literature. Therefore, all researchers undertaking qualitative and quantitative empirical studies should connect the literature and theories that reinforce the need for their studies (Green, 2014; Lederman & Lederman, 2015; Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009; Tamene, 2016).

The theoretical underpinning of the multilateral framework used in this study relied on three knowledge systems:

- a. **The field of ethics:** Precisely considers how business ethics support human resource management ethics. Professional ethical functioning is separated from the moral consequences and actions of custodians responsible for safeguarding organisational standards. Reliance on business ethics, teleological and deontological theories augment the analysis of professional practice.

- b. **Sociology of professions:** Particularly focusing on Evetts' (1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018) three concepts on the development of professions, professionalism and professionalisation, with a focus on the discourse of professionalism and the use of McClelland's (1990) categorisation theory to differentiate between professionalisation from 'within' (that is, the successful manipulation of the market by the occupational group) and from 'above' (domination of forces external to the occupational group). Lastly, professionalism from 'within', creating an identity and regulating responsibilities, which can be associated with a professional body, and professionalism from 'above' for the better part refers to the employers and managers of the specific profession (Evetts, 1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018).
- c. **SABPP Human Resource Competency Model:** Effectively unites four pillars, ethics, professionalism, a duty to society, and human resource and business knowledge, in the pursuit of creating a systematic and rational framework. While both the IPM and the SABPP have contributed to human resource management statutory professionalisation, the SABPP has offered substantial knowledge of the human resource management profession in South Africa (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021).

Collectively, selected business ethics theories, professions' contributions, and the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021) have shaped the conceptual model that is employed in this study.

#### **4.2 Business ethics theory and human resource management ethics**

To understand the ethical attributes of human resource management, it is crucial to comprehend the nature and principles, and the resultant definition of ethics. De Silva and Opatha (2015) offer a comprehensive overview of ethics based on a consideration of relevant literature and dictionaries that all define ethics in diverse ways and from various perspectives, as presented in Table 9 on the following page.

Table 9: Definition of ethics (Source: De Silva & Opatha, 2015, p. 8)

NO:	SOURCE	DEFINITION OF ETHICS
1	The Compact Oxford Dictionary, as stated in Armstrong (2012)	Ethics is defined as being 'related to morals, treating moral questions' and ethical is defined as 'relating to morality'.
2	The Oxford Dictionary (1989)	Ethics is a branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles (singular). Moral principles govern a person's or group's behaviour or the conducting of an activity (plural).
3	Collins English Dictionary (1979)	Ethics is the philosophical study of the moral values of human conduct and of the rules and principles that ought to govern it (singular). Ethics are social, religious, or civil codes of behaviour considered correct, especially that of a particular group, profession or individual (plural).
4	Beauchamp and Bowie (1983, as cited in Armstrong, 2012)	Ethics is concerned with matters of right and wrong, and hence, involves moral judgments.
5	Byars (1992, as cited in Opatha, 2010)	Ethics are principles of conduct that govern the decision making and behaviour of an individual or group.
6	Petrick and Quinn (1997)	Ethics is the study of individual and collective moral awareness, judgment, character, and conduct.
7	Hamlin et al. (2001, as cited in Armstrong, 2012)	Ethics is concerned with rules and regulations or principles that help us distinguish right and wrong.
8	Clegg et al. (2007, as cited in Armstrong, 2012)	Ethics is the social organizing of morality. Hence, simply, ethics could be described as being about behaviour, while morality is about beliefs.
9	Opatha (2009)	Ethics are moral beliefs and rules or obligations regarding right and wrong
10	Armstrong (2012)	Ethics is concerned with making decisions and judgments about what is the right course of action to take.

De Silva and Opatha's (2015) definitions encapsulate the various forms of ethics encompassing moral principles, values, judgment, beliefs, and morality. These definitions describe morals as the understanding of the difference between right and wrong and individuals or groups' good and bad conduct, therefore referring to human behaviour, values, ethics, and morals, which denotes conduct. Ethics is understood to be signalling the study of moral conduct or code of conduct, which infers that ethics and morals are used interchangeably, together with good and right, the same as unethical and immoral can be used instead of each other. In terms of scholarly definitions, ethics is similarly linked to right and wrong and the good and bad conduct of individuals or groups. Ethics is also connected to morality or the principles relating to the difference between right and wrong, or individuals' or groups' good and bad conduct. Literature by Armstrong (2012) and Beauchamp and Bowie (1983), advises that both these words are different, therefore suggesting that morality is a social establishment with a history in rules, whereas ethical theory states that there should be philosophical review of ethical principles and judgments. However, Armstrong (2012) claimed that ethics is related to right and wrong issues and therefore involves moral judgment. Ethics is concerned with making decisions and judgments about the right action to take.

The study of ethics in business, primarily within the context of organisational and management theory, has proposed that ethical issues have minimal consequences to the unfolding academic debates around management practice, specifically within human resource management. However, contemporary research in business ethics has shown that human resource management associated problems have increased; hence the connection between ethics and human resource management is emerging as a significant area of academic inquiry. Being aware of human resource management's severe criticism, Ekuma and Akobo (2015) explain that an understanding of the environment in which businesses and organisations sustain and protect their financial and human interests is necessary (Ekuma & Akobo, 2015). Hence, the study's natural resources, workforce and stakeholders required for successful organisational delivery is society.

De George (1999, as cited in Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017) explains how people believe myths in society, and even though a tale could convey a partial truth, it might obscure some reality. Rossouw and Van Vuuren (2017) state that the myth is that 'homo economicus' occupy businesses, which is at a basic level when a person acts with self-interest, and business decisions are directed at the self-interest dermis of human, social and environmental principles.

Therefore, if statutory professional bodies establish legal authorities, they institute hierarchies of power and privilege (Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003). Professional bodies and councils regulate prescribed ethical standards and professional conduct aligned to normative societal standards (Zakaria, Haron, & Ismail, 2010).

Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren and Visser (2003) discovered that South African human resource management practitioners subscribe to ethical practice to augment legitimacy in the absence of a statutory professional body (Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003). However, their study did recommend that further investigation of this topic was significant and necessary. Over time they suggested that the development of human resource management, and more specifically, the competencies required for human resource management as the work experience changes should be examined. From a theoretical perspective, another study by Schutte, Barkhuizen and van der Sluis (2015b) confirmed the validity that a human resource management professional competency model might offer remedial action where necessary. This forms an integral component of the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021) which is discussed in some depth in this research and contributes to the conceptual model underpinning the study. Accordingly, human resource management professionalism in the absence of statutory professionalisation in South Africa remains a priority.

With regard to categories of fraud and pecuniary corruption over 24 months from 2018 to 2020, South Africa's human resource management sector recorded 21% in 2020, decreasing from 23% in 2018 (PwC, 2020). The PwC's Global Economic Crime and Fraud Survey (PwC, 2020) reported 245 responses from South Africans; 71% of respondents were members of the 'C-suite' which is a substantial contribution, increasing its relevance to this research. Interestingly, this report indicated that one in three South African respondents confirmed that distrust in particular has an emotional impact from reported incidents (PwC, 2020). Therefore, suspicion and absence of trust in organisational human resource management must be considered. In addition, bribery and corruption are pervasive within organisations as pecuniary crimes, with senior management at the epicentre. The lead partner suggests that to endure the effect of increased financial crimes, it is imperative to be more proactive, agile, and resilient.

In 2020 a new question was added to the survey; respondents were asked if their organisations had been accused of perpetrating fraud. One in five South African respondents reported that

their organisations had been accused of fraud, corruption, and financial crimes. This PwC Report (2020) also acknowledged that South Africa has strict board structures, such as the King Reports, among other regulations; however, over-regulation concerns businesses across the board. It is essential to understand how this is relevant to this research. Every time human resource management leadership or business leadership justifies their unethical practices by saying “we are doing the wrong thing for the right reasons”, human resource management is then expected to mindlessly justify whatever wrong and unethical behaviour may take place, for the greater good of the organisation and for its financial gain.

To establish the ethical practice of the human resource management profession in South Africa, one needs to understand what ethics in an organisation represents and what business ethics is relative to human resource management ethics. Leadership in organisations are not always trusted by society to do the right thing due to their questionable business ethics, as evidenced by numerous legal cases investigating their engagement in activities such as bribery and corruption (Mihelič, Lipičnik, & Tekavčič, 2010; PwC, 2020). In South Africa, several cases have featured prominently in social media and the news, including the Steinhoff scandal and the Competition Commission investigation into price-fixing (Tiger Brands fixing of bread prices). The economic crime statistics sourced from the recent PwC (2020) report on South African organisations are displayed in Illustration 5 on the next page. The findings of previous research which shows that human resource management is a profession, even if human resource management is not statutorily professionalised, points to the fact that human resource management has the competency and proficiency to take remedial action. It makes sense that human resource management fraud is now down by 2% in two years in South Africa, which indicates that human resource management is perhaps no longer covering up unethical practices in the workplace (PwC, 2020).

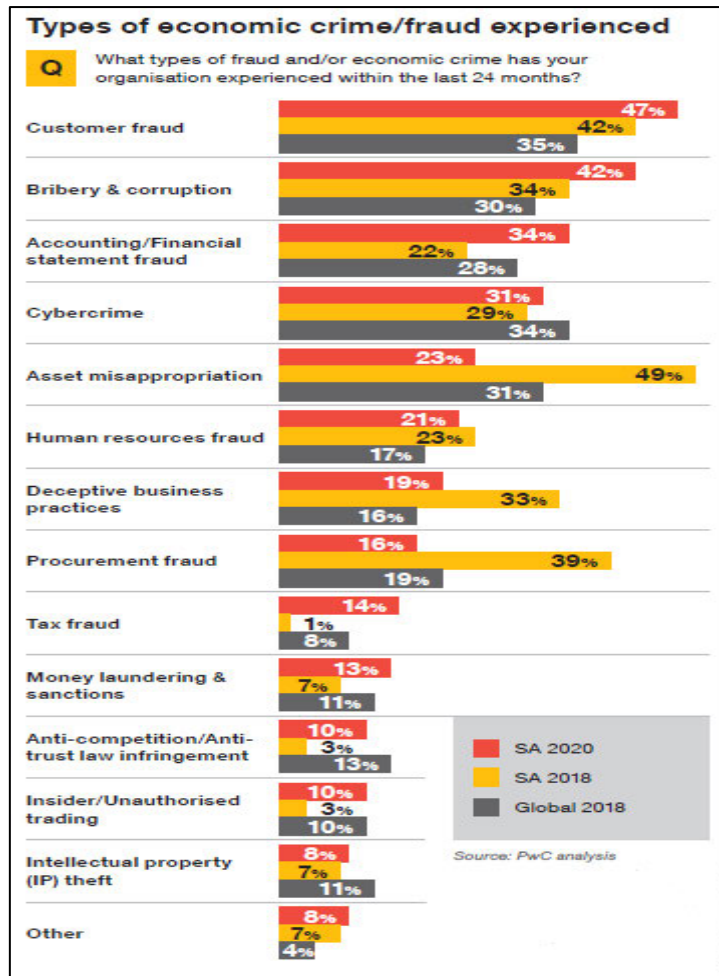


Illustration 5: Types of economic crime and fraud experienced in South African and global organisations (PwC, 2020, p. 10)

From the PwC (2020) report and other research (Bowker, 2018; Transparency International, 2020; Van der Westhuizen, Keightley-Smith, & Kathrada, 2021; Van Rensburg, 2021), it is apparent that there is no scarcity of ethical dilemmas facing business in South Africa. However, Schumann (2001, p. 94) poses an interesting question about management, that is, “do managers consider ethics when making business decisions, or do they focus on maximising profits?”. Schumann (2001) refers to Drucker (1954), a prominent management guru who has debated for over four decades, and who argues that the most significant factor is that management understands that basic business strategy and achievement reflects upon society. Schumann’s (2001) article offered a framework based on five ethical principles for making moral judgments, not just in management, but within the human resource management context. The five ethical principles assess morality from diverse viewpoints. First, ‘utilitarian principles’ concentrate on the consequences of action and scrutinise whether that action yields the greatest

good and the minimum damage possible from the view of those affected by that action. The next is the ‘rights principle’ which is centred on the approach, and therefore observes if the person acting on the action has the moral right to act (Schumann, 2001). Third, the ‘distributive justice principle’ emphasises whether the action creates a reasonable distribution of harm. Fourth, the ‘care principle’ focuses on shielding and cultivating the individuals with whom the person acting on the action has a special relationship. Finally, the ‘virtue principle’ pays attention to the character traits of the person working on the action (Schumann, 2001).

Schumann’s (2001) framework on moral judgment is insufficient for this research; hence a more in-depth approach and framework to underpin the study is required. General theories on ethical practice and professional behaviour provide a position regarding the purposes and processes of ethical decision-making. This serves to clarify the consequences of, and the link between, ideologies, theories, and other ideas. Nonetheless, there is no universally agreed-upon ethical system to analyse ethics and ethical practice. However, there are two primarily accepted theories that most scholars consider in terms of ethics: teleological and deontological theories (Hatcher & Aragon, 2000). To present meaningful analyses, it would make sense to lead with understanding the concept of business, since *the business of business is business* is not a sufficient reason. Business can refer to a specific type of organisation, corporate or professional activity, which provides goods or services for payment. These activities involve individuals, and at a basic level, involve an economic exchange and considering any ethical practices within the context of the business activity (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017), thereby steering to ethical practice and moral behaviour in business. Rossouw and Van Vuuren (2017) explain ethics as normative and appropriate human interactions, which entails three concepts: self, good, and other (Illustration 6).

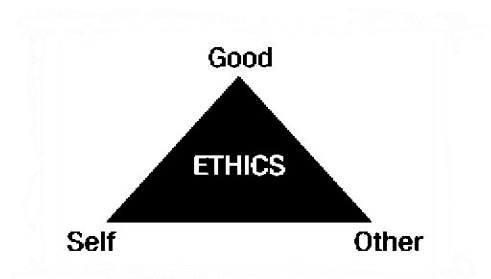


Illustration 6: The three central concepts of ethics  
(Source: Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017, p. 13)

In theory, ethical practice and moral behaviour occur not simply by a reflection on that which is good for oneself; it includes a review on what is good for others. This definition is inclusive and interdependent on the self, the other and the greater good (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017). If *good* is overlooked, then the make-up of ethics dissolves. Ethics is not purely the interface linking *self* and *other* but rather the quality of the relationship between the two. One without the other does not work; focusing on *self*, either good or bad affects the link to *other*. However, suppose *self* is absent, this would mean the focus is on the *other*. It is a theoretical form of altruism, which is not possible as it is impossible not to consider one's self-interest (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017). Similarly, the *other* cannot be omitted from the definition of ethics, as this will result in self-interest; hence the interest of oneself and others are connected. Ethical practice and behaviour can therefore be self-centred. However, once a person recognises that their behaviour could harm another, yet they still only consider themselves, such behaviour is egotistical and unethical. Conversely, when one seeks one's interests, the interests of *others* will be impacted (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017).

The three central concepts of self, good and other are essential to understanding ethics and business ethics. Consequently, if one were to take these three central concepts into a business context, one would have to consider all that would be affected. Hence, business ethics signifies the morals and ethics that govern the link between a business and its stakeholders. Thus, business ethics are about morals and ethics (good) that direct the business (self) in its relationship with stakeholders (others) (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017). Within the context of this study, business ethics provides subject matter to the *good* (morals and ethics). It establishes the link between *self* (human resource management) and *other* (human resource management clients and human resource management itself, internal and external stakeholders to human resource management).

Greek philosopher, Aristotle (350 B.C.E.), is associated with ethics; the foundation of his ideas is based on the writings of fourth century BC scholar Nichomachus, commonly referred to as the Nicomachean Ethics. There are various classical theories, such as deontology, utilitarianism, rights, and virtues, to consider in business ethics. Aristotle's (1925, as cited in Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017) focus was specifically on virtue theory, understanding that morality is fundamental and essential for human beings. He proclaimed that it is, therefore, irresolvable to exist with human dignity devoid of a mature moral compass. He asserted that morality was not a choice but mandatory in human beings and that individuals who abandon

their moral compass do not satisfy their human potential. Aristotle (1925, as cited in Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017) used the Greek word *telos* to refer to a goal, and the goal of human resource management is to be human and support the people in an organisation. Aristotle (1925, as cited in Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017) also acknowledged that *all humans share telos*, thus all human beings ought to endeavour to attain *telos*. Therefore, the Greek word to label the *telos* of all humans is *eudaimonia*, loosely translated to ‘happiness’ or ‘life well-lived’ (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017).

Rossouw and Van Vuuren (2017, pp. 58-59) further explained that to accomplish *eudaimonia*, four conditions will be required:

- a. First, a society protected by justice is needed, which is the responsibility of politicians.
- b. Secondly, one should have good friends in one’s inner circle to ultimately attain *eudaimonia*. These two conditions are the sentiment of Aristotle's belief that people are all social beings who require social interactions to prosper.
- c. The third condition is to have substantial supplies.
- d. Since the first three conditions are external, namely society, friends, and material possessions outside of oneself, the fourth is purely internal. Thus, one would have to mature and foster one’s human potential.

These conditions could apply to human resource management; that is, a human resource management code of conduct provided to professionals by a professional body would be the first condition. The second condition would be human resource management colleagues and the human resource management community supporting each other (friends). Human resource management qualifications and tools of the trade such as legislation, training and courses provided by tertiary institutions and professional bodies (material possessions) would be the third condition. However, the researcher agrees with Aristotle (1925, as cited in Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017) mainly on the fourth condition, regarding the purely internal need and one’s own need to attain *eudaimonia*. Since the last condition is unpredictable, a pertinent classical theory is applied in further analysis (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017).

The classical theory by Mill (1869, as cited in Crisp, 1997) refers to one’s morality of an action that their consequences should judge. Mill (1869, as cited in Crisp, 1997) believed that these steps are reasonable when they contribute to the final purpose of human beings, which he

described as happiness. The assumption that actions are considered to be good when the outcome is happiness was developed in Mill's *Greatest Happiness Principle*. The absence of moral doubt results in happiness for the greater good; hence it is an ethical action. Mill (1869, as cited in Crisp, 1997) deduced that every person's need is happiness and will lead to happiness for all people, thus society's happiness. Keeping this in mind, people do experience external pressure to consider the interests of others, as people all need the support of others throughout their lives.

There was however substantial criticism of Mill's (1869, as cited in Crisp, 1997) theory, for instance one critique which referred to utilitarian standards as unrealistic, as it is unfeasible to always act for the greater happiness of society. Mill's (1869, as cited in Crisp, 1997) response was simply that people would rarely find themselves in situations to consider society as a whole, and only a tiny and rare group of people would find themselves in such a situation (Crisp, 1997; Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017). Considering that Mill's theory was developed in the 1800s, human resource management professionals may currently be that group of people. In recruitment, human resource management mediates on a panel to decide on a vacancy, which could impact a person and their family. If there is nepotism by the panel towards an applicant, and human resource management professionals allows this unethical practice, this will have implications on all applicants that have applied. The successful applicant for the vacancy should be evaluated based on the applicant's merits, and therefore should be given an opportunity for the right reasons and not due to nepotism. This individual will then have a chance to move to a higher level, increasing their salary band and increasing household income, thereby leading to many other opportunities for those who live in their household (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017).

Keeping in mind the *Greatest Happiness Principle*, applicants would benefit from an ethical process being applied, resulting in happiness for whoever was successful and therefore would result in opportunities for the greater good. However, the unethical practice of nepotism which would also result in happiness does not make it ethical. Mill's (1869, as cited in Crisp, 1997) argues that it is unfeasible to always act for the greater happiness of society, especially in a society such as South Africa, where prejudices are centred on past discrimination of race and gender. The stipulations contained in the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 aim to promote equal opportunity and should eliminate and prohibit unfair discrimination. Human resource management most certainly finds itself in situations where unfair discrimination has

occurred. However, with low barriers of entry into human resource management, such as human resource management tertiary education and training, and without proper guidance, such as a human resource management code of conduct, professional standards, or strict rules by a professional body, human resource management professionals are left to their own interpretation of what is ethical or not (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017).

The last classical theory to be considered is that of Immanuel Kant (1785, as cited in Warburton, 1999), a German philosopher from the 1700's who believed that moral action necessitates conformity to reasonably founded ethical principles. Therefore, he was of the belief that one's moral actions are not directed by one's practical experience (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017). Weiss (1998, as cited in Naidoo, 2003) refers to this universalism ethics, also known as deontological ethics, as essentially meaning that the means justify the ends of the action, not the consequence. Kant (1785, as cited in Warburton, 1999) believed that humans are natural beings and can reason, which separates them from animals. As rational thinkers, people have free choice, which is essential to his understanding of moral theory. The notion of goodwill is also fundamental to his theory, as he explains that people's ability to choose what they want to do and what they wish to become includes both standard and rational dimensions; hence he believed not just in human will but in a 'good will' (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017).

The autonomy to make impartial and rational decisions advances human dignity. A hallmark of moral behaviour is doing the right thing out of a sense of duty to the universal moral law. To better appreciate Kant's (1785, as cited in Warburton, 1999) universal moral law, reference will be made to categorical imperative instead of hypothetical imperative. To better understand, an imperative is something that a person must do to conform and achieve a purpose. An example would be, as a human resource management generalist, if one seeks a reputation of having integrity, one will provide a reliable and honest service to the business. This only applies if the purpose is to have integrity; if the purpose changes, this is irrelevant (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017).

Kant (2008) uses three practical imperatives for moral action and decision-making. The first explains that one's moral action is not directed by one's feelings, but rather a sense of duty to the universal moral law. Second, he argued that one should not act for a subjective purpose, but for the sake of an objective purpose that will pertain to everyone. Similarly, a hypothetical imperative hinges on the subjective purpose, which relates to everyone irrespective of their

subjective intent. Lastly, Kant (2008) explains that categorical imperative is familiar to people but is something that people can identify with as their own. His moral theory asserts that an objective moral rule can direct all ethical decisions. One needs to respect this moral rule, which can be created for a pure reason, acting on it out of a sense of duty (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017).

Winstanley and Woodall (2000) were also influenced by Kant on the following two key concepts:

- a. The principle of what is suitable for one person is right for everyone. Thus, it is essential to do unto others as you would be done by – the criteria of universality and reversibility.
- b. The principle of respect for people should be treated as ends in themselves and never as a means to an end.

Considering that three classical theories have been presented above and were considered for this research, the latter theory is most valid. Ekuma and Akobo (2015) claimed that the Kantian framework is relevant to human resource management and credible to sustain its obligations to both employer and employee, thus protecting the interest of employees and enabling a more ethical human resource management. However, this model has received considerable criticism by scholars who argue that the framework is impractical and undermines business. Consequently, human resource management self-seekers support the notion that the ethical practice of human resource management professionals would involve being partial in order to reinforce the self-interest of the employer rather than the rights of employees (Ekuma & Akobo, 2015). Regardless, Ekuma and Akobo (2015) acknowledge the Kantian framework as the basis of the deontological viewpoint that supports business ethics' focus on duty. Within the human resource management context, Winstanley and Woodall (2000, as cited in Ekuma & Akobo, 2015, p. 51) argue that a rights-based framework is essential in the following areas:

- a. Selection interviewing (the right to privacy and confidentiality of personal information, mainly where it is not relevant to the job and the obligation on the part of the employer to ensure that).
- b. Occupational testing (such as the right to feedback from the organisation).
- c. Equal opportunities and diversity management (the right to be treated the same or given special treatment).

- d. Flexible employment contracts and working time (the right to ‘family-friendly’ practices).
- e. Whistleblowing (the right to speak out about wrongdoing).
- f. Staff charters (which may outline employee rights and responsibilities and the employer’s obligation to the employee).
- g. Employee development (the right to psychological and physical safety, such as with relation to outdoor training, for instance)

Based on the seven points mentioned above, within the South African context, this rights-based framework, whilst relevant, may apply differently with certain caveats:

- a. Selection interviewing: Candidates do not always understand their right to privacy, and this level of confidentiality is not explained to candidates before or during an interview process. An example of this includes reference information in a candidate's CV. Employers do not always ask for permission to do a reference check even though it is regulated that they do so. Secondly, candidates have the right to decline to share salary information at the offer stage of an interview process, as this information is confidential. However, human resource management insists that they have this information to make an offer, which is not valid. If a position or role is graded (various grading options can be used), there will be salary bands available. An offer can be made based on the interview process, the candidate's experience, their education and what they will bring to the position. Once a request is made, there can be negotiations by both candidate and employer. In the South African context, it is essential that human resource management understand the right to privacy when biases are still an issue in corporate South Africa, such as gender prejudice, the inequality between races, discrimination against those with a disability, and pregnancy, to name a few.
- b. Occupation testing: This could have various meanings; for example, assessments conducted as part of the interview process are typical for this research. However, participants do not always receive feedback once the assessments are done. It is important to note that only a qualified psychometrist, industrial or clinical psychologist may give the candidate and the panel feedback. Candidates may not receive constructive feedback from human resource management after the interview process is concluded. Instead, they may receive a generic email or no feedback at all.
- c. Equal opportunity and diversity management: Employment Equity does not make this possible in the South African context. However, within the regulations of the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998, there are still prejudices based on age, race, gender, disability,

- and pregnancy. This is when human resource management struggles with their dual responsibility to business and their profession to do the right thing for the right reasons. This may not be easy and should not be underestimated, especially when there is little guidance from a professional body due to the lack of statutory professionalisation.
- d. Flexible employment contracts and working time: Work-life balance has become an important topic, especially during the COVID-19 global pandemic when most people globally have been working remotely due to lockdown and employees have struggled with balancing work and family commitments in response to the ‘great resignation’<sup>14</sup>.
  - e. Whistleblowing: Unfortunately, whistle-blowers are not always protected. In a corporate environment, a Compliance and Ethics Department conducts ethics training and has an ethics line to report unethical behaviour anonymously. However, the confidentiality of the information cannot always be guaranteed since the information is generally shared with management and human resource management. On a larger scale, whistle-blowers involved in ethical scandals in South Africa are also not protected, as highlighted by the case related to the Personal Protective Equipment scandal where Babita Deokaran was murdered after coming forward as a whistle-blower regarding a deal worth three hundred and thirty-two million rands which proved to be corrupt (Bhengu, 2021).
  - f. Staff charters: At human resource management's induction process, employees sign a Terms and Conditions document and are inducted to the Company Code of Conduct. Some companies also invest in an Employee Value Proposition Project, which can be signed as a charter by both employee and management, focusing on an organisation's employee experience. This project is chaired by human resource management as part of the human resource management strategy plan.
  - g. Employee development: Lastly, in South Africa employee development is also referred to as organisational development or may take the form of a learning and development department that is part of the greater human resource management department which conducts psychology assessments and supports employees and management with their growth and personal needs. Over and above employee wellbeing, support is offered by the Independent Counselling and Advisory Services, known as ICAS, to employees and management. There are also other respective medical aids that support all employees in an organisation with psychological and financial assistance.

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<sup>14</sup> Also referred to as the Big Quit, a trend where employees voluntarily leave their jobs in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic and are therefore reconsidering their careers, work conditions, career goals, remote working, and work life balance (Cook, 2021).

Conversely, Ekuma and Akobo (2015) admit that utilitarianism or consequentialism theory have fragile principles for ethical practice and could not significantly impact or validate human resource management practices. If one does not harm and establishes the greatest good and exploits business interests, it does not make it ethical practice. Therefore, teleological ethics claims that the right thing to do is create the best result, thus extreme consequentialism. A moral opposite to deontological ethics would validate all methods needed, for one must amplify the good and therefore diminish the bad. In contrast, under deontological ethics, the ends of any alleged action can never validate the use of any or all means, for one must act out of regard for the greater moral good.

Subsequently, the deontological approach is the way to balance the teleological methodology of consequence and actions by adding the dimension of moral duty. This establishes itself within limitations, irrespective of possible unnecessary consequences (Ekuma & Akobo, 2015; Hatcher & Aragon, 2000; Macdonald & Beck-Dudley, 1994; Micewski & Troy, 2007; Xing Xu & Keung Ma, 2016). Hence, deontological ethics is more relevant to the complexities in which human resource management generalists find themselves in their everyday work practice.

Having discussed the role of teleological and deontological ethics above, the chapter now proceeds to the second body of knowledge analysed from the sociology of professions field of expertise, which will be presented in the following part of the theoretical overview on professions, professionalism and professionalisation.

### **4.3 Overview of the sociology of professions in South Africa**

Even though human resource management is not statutorily professionalised in South Africa, assessing human resource management as a profession requires a theoretical perspective. Therefore, the study of professions as viewed by the sociology of professions is essential in understanding the development over time, from the industrial to post-industrial societies. The contribution of several sociological theorists has proven to be crucial to the analyses of the profession. Syrigou (2018) recognises that Weber did not write anything particular on professions. Notably, Syrigou (2018) states that Marx preferred to withhold any contribution as he believed that professions were not recognised in capitalist society. Similarly, Weber (1968) did not see professions as significant. Durkheim (1957), on the other hand, discussed the theme of professional ethics expansively, with no historical analysis of professions

(Syrigou, 2018). However, within the broader sociological context in understanding professional work, the analyses of professions in the South African context should be essential.

Bonnin and Ruggunan (2013) posit that the sociology of professions does not have much footing in sociology in South Africa. Critical sociology relates to the focus of the labour movement and the previously disadvantaged working class within the sociology of work. This is not to say that there has been no other research on the middle class and white-collar workers. For example, research examining nursing as a profession has been conducted by Marks (1994), which is one of the oldest professions in South Africa. There were also other pieces of research on black managers by Nzimande (1991) and on race, skill and occupation during apartheid as described by Crankshaw (1997). However, some prominent sociologists, such as Crompton (1990) and Evetts (2003b), both referred to in Bonnin and Ruggunan (2013), felt that the framework and investigations did not resonate with conventional sociology of professions debates. Bonnin and Ruggunan (2013) stated that this may have been due to the unequal society during Apartheid where many were denied admission to a profession. They also propose that the functionalist paradigm was discarded within the South African context instead of the greater sociology of professions field. It is also important to note that the male-female ratio is slanted towards men. There is thus a notable lack of research on the professionalisation of occupations in South Africa and professional associations (Bonnin & Ruggunan, 2013).

The need for further research within the realm of professions and expert occupations that dominate sections of the labour market, and associated factors such as age, race, and gender exclusivity, will be considered during the data analysis portion in Chapter Seven of this research. Even though these are not entirely South African predicaments, age, race, and gender are distinct demographics considering South Africa's history. Past legislation allowed for discrimination in the form of Apartheid, which was a system that endorsed prejudices based mainly on the colour of a person's skin; these are most certainly factors that currently affect the human resource management profession, as a consequence of the inequities of the past.

The use of the understandings provided by the sociology of professions in this theoretical framework would contribute to addressing the gap in the current South African sociology of work context. The limitations of the existing body of research are that it may not focus specifically on the gaps in South African occupations, such as age, race gender or even expert occupations, such as medicine. However, it does open the gate for other disciplines such as

human resource management, which could be considered an emerging profession in South Africa (even though research does confirm it is a profession). Since human resource management is not statutorily professionalised in South Africa, sociology of professions research could contribute to human resource management's professional journey, the importance of quantifying its professionalism and thus leading to its statutory professionalisation.

#### **4.4 Theoretical analysis of professions, professionalism, and professionalisation**

Evetts (2012a) explains that the analysis on the concepts of a profession can be classified as occupational work relative to professionalisation which is to pursue, develop and maintain the status of the occupational group, thus leading to the concept of professionalism which could be considered varied in categories of descriptive theory, which will become evident in this literature. Therefore, the discourse of professionalism can be examined as an effective tool of occupational change and social regulation at a macro, meso and micro level and in a wide variety of occupations in extremely diverse work, organisational and employment relations, backgrounds, and circumstances (Evetts, 2012a).

In contemporary times, the principal emphasis of the professions literature has progressed from examining the characteristics of professionals to studying the dynamics in and around existing professions. Therefore, the landscape of professions has transformed drastically. The pace of occupational change has increased, and new occupational fields such as human resource management have emerged or are emerging, depending on the professional status in various countries. Models established in the sociology of professions were essentially grounded on traditional professions, such as medicine and law, and studied in isolation. Notably, Abbott (1993) and Abbott and Meerabeau (1998) highlighted the collaborative nature of professions, hence the request for multilevel analyses of the system of associations. Lastly, the expansion of corporations and nation-states indicates that occupations do not function in isolation as private entities. Professionals are progressively engaged by prominent bureaucratic organisations and more often controlled by market rationality. Professions have evolved, and a more contemporary analysis is therefore required (Brès, Mosonyi, Gond, Muzio, Mitra, Werr, & Wickert, 2019). In the case of human resource management, the current sociology of professions theoretical analysis is considered and interpreted in the conceptual framework used in this study.

It is evident from the research presented in the second part of this theoretical review that the meaning of professionalism is not set in stone and has had a long history in the disciplinary sub-field of professions. However, the sociological analysis of the concept has established that there have been changes over time in terms of its interpretation and purpose. Hence, within the human resource management context, all of these different interpretations are now required to grasp the appeal of professionalism in new and old occupations and how the concept is being used to encourage and enable occupational change (Evetts, 2003b; 2012a) in emerging professions such as human resource management and even in established professions such as accounting.

While professionalism was previously understood as an occupational or normative value, it was later interpreted as a discourse and thus joined occupational value and ideology. Subsequently, the current work status and professional work have increased the discourse of professionalism across occupations. It has also appeared in managerial literature and features in training manuals. Essentially, literature has suggested that occupational regulation and control now validates cultivating professionalism in the workplace, or the new world of work<sup>15</sup>, as practitioners, employees and managers apply themselves in their growth and sustainability of work identities, career development and self-care (Evetts, 2003b; 2012a). In this way, current human resource management projects are focused on mental health in the workplace, as well as women and management development programs that are being established and championed by human resource management for the benefit of business, succession planning, and addressing the current war on talent.

A consequence of occupation or normative value is contrasting occupational groups. Evetts (2012a) uses McClelland's (1990) categorisation theory to assist in compositing each category in her conceptual model. Evetts (2012a) further contextualises using McClelland's (1990) categorisation theory of professionalisation from 'within' (that is, successful manipulation of the market by the occupational group; in this research that would be human resource management in an organisation) and from 'above' (domination of forces external to the occupational group; in this research that would be human resource management clients and for society (Evetts, 2003b; 2012a; 2012b; 2014a; 2014b).

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<sup>15</sup> In response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, traditional office environments have fallen away as many employees work remotely.

At this juncture, research intersects with ethics and professionalism, as Evetts (2012a) further explains professionalism as doing work well, as a skilled person, whatever the task may be. Human resource management is expected to be guided by a code of ethics and is internally motivated to provide the best service to customers measured only by internalised standards as skilled professionals within a principled community of fellow practitioners (Evetts, 1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2012a; 2014a). The code of ethics, internal competency, morality, and skill to provide the best service that she refers to, is a sense of duty in professionalism. Thus, this ties into a deontological (duty) ethical approach to professionalism, together with the psychological attributes required of human resource management practitioners, which include emotional quotient and intelligence, also referred to as EQ. This quotient exhibits as self-awareness, empathy, and compassion, which are attributes that are necessary when providing a service to employees in an organisation. These are discovered in psychological assessments, such as the Meyers Briggs Personality Test and the Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ) assessments, which should be a compulsory component of the enrolment of a human resource management professional, as shown in Illustration 7 below.



Illustration 7: Human resource management attributes

The concept of competency is perhaps as old as humankind, as humans have always wanted to master skills, such as the primordial making of fire. Therefore, humans have found ways to unravel practical, professional, and scientific challenges over time. Individuals' desire to acquire professional specialisations remains unchanged. The motivation to intensify proficiencies and dexterities, promote independence and gain professional human resource management accolades are instrumental in achieving success (Mulder, 2014).

#### **4.5 Historical development of human resource management as a professional body**

The SABPP and the IPM are the only two registered professional bodies in South Africa for human resource management practitioners. Van Rensburg (2009) and Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011b) trace the formation of the SABPP from meetings held between 1973 to 1976 at the IPM that evolved into the foundation of the SABPP later in 1989. These meetings also marked the initiation of the conversations on human resource management professionalisation in South Africa, emphasising governance and ethical standards, the sustained professional development of human resource management, and the signalling of the move of human resource management from the payroll department to strategic business partner and respected ethical professional. The then CEO of IPM, Wilhelm Crous (1973, as cited in Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b), stated that the sugar industry strikes at that time displayed human resource management's lack of professional ability to cope with the crisis. The interview with Crous (1973, as cited in Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b) established that the original idea was to regulate and therefore establish a professional registering body for personnel practice<sup>16</sup>, the term previously used to label the human resource management department. The notion was that IPM, and the government would introduce the body together. Significantly, the government was not opposed to the professionalisation of human resource management; however, they believed that this profession should establish itself first. Therefore, the IPM launched the SABPP without government support. Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011b) provide a comprehensive history of the progress and professional development of the human resource management professional bodies in South Africa. The focus was specifically on the period from the inception of the SABPP from IPM till the death of the founding father of SABPP, Garry Whyte, thus covering in detail the period from 1977 to 1991 when Wilhelm Crous was elected as the second chairman. Subsequently, they proposed recommendations for further research spanning from 1991 to 2011 when published, with a request for the period extension to 2021 for the following reasons.

Firstly, they suggested that it was necessary to document 30 years of focused professional development of the human resource management profession which should answer the government's previous reservations on human resource management not being established as a profession in South Africa. Secondly, in 2006 The Human Resource Professions Act caused

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<sup>16</sup> Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011b) detailed board minutes on personnel management vs human resource management, however it was decided at the time that human resource management was not a specific description, with a few other limited views.

friction between IPM and the SABPP, as the IPM did not support the act (SkillsPortal, 2005). It was disappointing as a researcher in human resource management to read of the divergence between two professional bodies whose original purpose was to regulate the professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa. In 2017 the late Dr. Marius Meyer, the previous CEO of the SABPP, and Dr. Gule (2017), the then interim CEO (and current CEO), collaborated on evolving the human resource management profession. This project, which was supported by the Gauteng Department of Health, aimed to upgrade, and develop their human resource management competencies and standards, and to audit and provide leadership development to improve human resource management practice and professionalism through the various department sites in Gauteng (Hammond, 2017).

Third, in 2018 the SABPP advertised a call for the SABPP bursary for study in statutory recognition of the human resource management profession, which implied that the SABPP had an interest in reapplying to the government for the statutory professionalisation of human resource management. Fourth, as a human resource management generalist who has worked in the profession for 18 years at JSE listed companies, the researcher only became aware of being registered as a human resource management professional with either professional body at the onset of this research in 2017. On that note, not having the option to register with a professional body, is the fifth and final point. This makes reference to the membership fees that usually are only offered to accountants, lawyers, and engineers, and not to human resource management professionals, even though there are two existing professional bodies in South Africa. Dawood (2015), in her dissertation on mechatronic engineering, discusses the application for registration to the Engineering Council of South Africa. Specifically, Dawood (2015) mentions that engineers do not want to register with the council due to exorbitant membership fees that they will personally be responsible for.

#### **4.6 SABPP Human Resource Competency Model**

The SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021) positions the standard for human resource management professionalism. The SABPP's Human Resource Management System Model and Standard<sup>17</sup> defines what organisations ought to have in place

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<sup>17</sup> The Human Resource Management System Model and Standard was a project by the SABPP that put the human resource management profession in South Africa on the international map. It was launched in August 2013 and was a collaboration between the late Dr Marius Meyer and Dr Michael Robbins, a leading United Kingdom expert in business standards (SABPP, 2013).

to enhance their human resource management practice and deliver substantial work and quality of work-life for their employees. In addition, the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021) is strongly connected to the Standard and illustrates what human resource management practitioners have to offer in terms of knowledge, skills, and behaviour to implement the Standard.

The SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Illustration 8) consists of three broad competency areas (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021) that are relevant to this research:

1. The four pillars of professionalism form the foundation for professional human resource management practice.
2. Five core competencies needed by human resource management professionals to engage in high-quality human resource management work constitute the building blocks.
3. Five human resource management capabilities required to ensure strategic human resource management impact form the fragments of the roof.



Illustration 8: SABPP human resource management competency model  
(SABPP, 2021, pp. 1-2)

#### 4.7 The four pillars of the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model

1. **Duty to Society:** Human resource management professionals have a responsibility to society in delivering high-quality human resource management work that impacts the community.

2. **Ethics:** Human resource management professionalism should contribute to ethics in organisations and drive ethics under the SABPP Human Resource Management Guide on Ethics.
3. **Professionalism:** Human resource management professionals should manage themselves professionally in acting and behaving like true professionals in the standard of human resource management work they deliver.
4. **Human Resource Management and Business Knowledge:** Human resource management professionals must have good human resource management knowledge as well as sound business knowledge to succeed professionally with strategic partners.

One can refer to human resource management's duty to society that creates the foundation of the human resource management competency house. Ethics and professionalism are the pillars. If the foundation and pillars are not sturdy and stable, the house will collapse. In addition, human resource management and business knowledge is the glass ceiling, securing comprehensive human resource management and business knowledge that unlocks prospects for human resource management professionals to realign to a strategic level of the human resource management house, that is, the roof (SABPP, 2021).

#### **4.8 The five core competencies of the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model**

1. **Leadership and Personal Credibility:** All human resource management professionals should possess leadership skills to drive the human resource management profession. Likewise, human resource management professionals should have personal credibility in their daily practice, irrespective of their level in an organisation, but this can only be achieved if they display a high level of competence in executing professional human resource management work.
2. **Organisational Capability:** Understanding the organisational context as a business strategy is critical in planning and delivering human resource management practices.
3. **Solution Creation and Implementation:** Human resource management professionals must create, plan, and implement human resource management solutions, including interventions and practices according to the organisation's needs.
4. **Interpersonal and Communication Skills:** All human resource management work depends on successful relationships, and excellent interpersonal and communication skills are significant.

5. **Citizenship for the Future:** Together, the human resource management strategic partner role and the new business environment requires human resource management professionals to drive innovation, optimise technology and contribute to sustainability. Thus, human resource management professionals become citizens for the future in ensuring the sustainability of organisations and the environment.

To be effective in the workplace, these competencies are the fundamental stipulated proficiencies provided by the SABPP to all human resource management professionals (SABPP, 2021).

#### **4.9 Five strategic capabilities of the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model**

1. **Strategy:** Human resource management professionals contribute to business strategy by drafting human resource management strategies aligned to the organisation's overall strategy. However, this refers to more than just aligning human resource management and business strategy; it requires the ability and influence to create a people-driven business strategy in partnership with leadership.
2. **Talent Management:** When business and human resource management strategies are clear, human resource management professionals should work with line management in implementing a talent management plan for the organisation.
3. **Human Resource Management Governance:** Governing the human resource management function is crucial in order to make effective people decisions for the business. This includes managing human resource management risks and ensuring compliance to employment laws, rules, codes, and human resource management standards to elevate human resource management from business partners to human resource management governors.
4. **Analytics and Measurement:** Another core capability is to generate a systematic and integrated approach to human resource management analytics and measures in demonstrating human resource management impact on the business.
5. **Human Resource Management Service Delivery:** Ultimately, human resource management professionals should be able to deliver high-quality human resource management services in business and should therefore meet or exceed the expectations of management, employees, and key stakeholders.

#### **4.10 Developing a human resource management conceptual model**

A collection of scientific scholarship research incorporated with a theoretical framework has identified the apparent absence of business ethics which has had disrupting effects on society, especially since human resource management is involved in challenging ethical business practices daily. This research and the human resource management profession demonstrate that human resource management is now an established profession that can be regulated and one which can attain statutory professionalisation, as an emerging profession. Regardless of statutory professionalisation, organisations should safeguard business interests within the bounds of the law (Schumann, 2001). Thus, a framework to better understand ethics, ethical practice, and professionalism for the greater good is essential. In the South African context, anyone that works in human resource management should know that in the absence of company policy and procedures, the following legislation is in effect: Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No. 75 of 1997; Unemployment Insurance Act No. 63 of 2001; Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995; Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998; Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998; Occupational Health and Safety Act No. 85 of 1993; Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Disease Act No. 130. Of 1993; and all the amendments thereof.

However, since human resource management is not regulated and has no compulsory statutory professionalisation in South Africa, no human resource management professional is obligated to follow legislation or internal policy and procedures. It is entirely up to the human resource management professional's discretion as to how they apply themselves in business and by the very least adhere to the basic standards and competencies that bind professionalised human resource management. Traditional ethical theory, frameworks (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2017), together with the sociology of professions of the emerging profession, advanced by Evetts' (1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018) notions of professions, professionalism and professionalisation relative to human resource management ethics, particularly on the discourse of professionalism, as well as McClelland's (1990) categorisation theory from 'within and from above', contributes to the conceptual model represented on the following page in Illustration 9. These understandings all contribute to identifying ethical, unethical, and professional human resource management conduct. The conceptual model is based on the literature considered in the preceding chapters and in this theoretical framework chapter, emanating from the four themed framework that supports this research, that is, general human resource management, human resource management ethics,

human resource management professionalism and finally, human resource management professionalisation.

Therefore, the four themed framework responds to the exploratory research questions and objectives that are underpinned by this conceptual model, which focuses on examining how the human resource management profession has developed in South Africa. Thus, establishing the relationship between the professional development of the human resource management profession and the codes of ethical practice over time is the second focus of this research, which is reflective in this model. The third research objective that this conceptual model will aid in determining is how statutory professionalisation of the human resource management profession and ethical practice affect human resource management professional development. As a result, recommendations will be presented in the final chapter of the study, endorsing statutory professionalisation as a strategy for ethical practice in human resource management in South Africa.

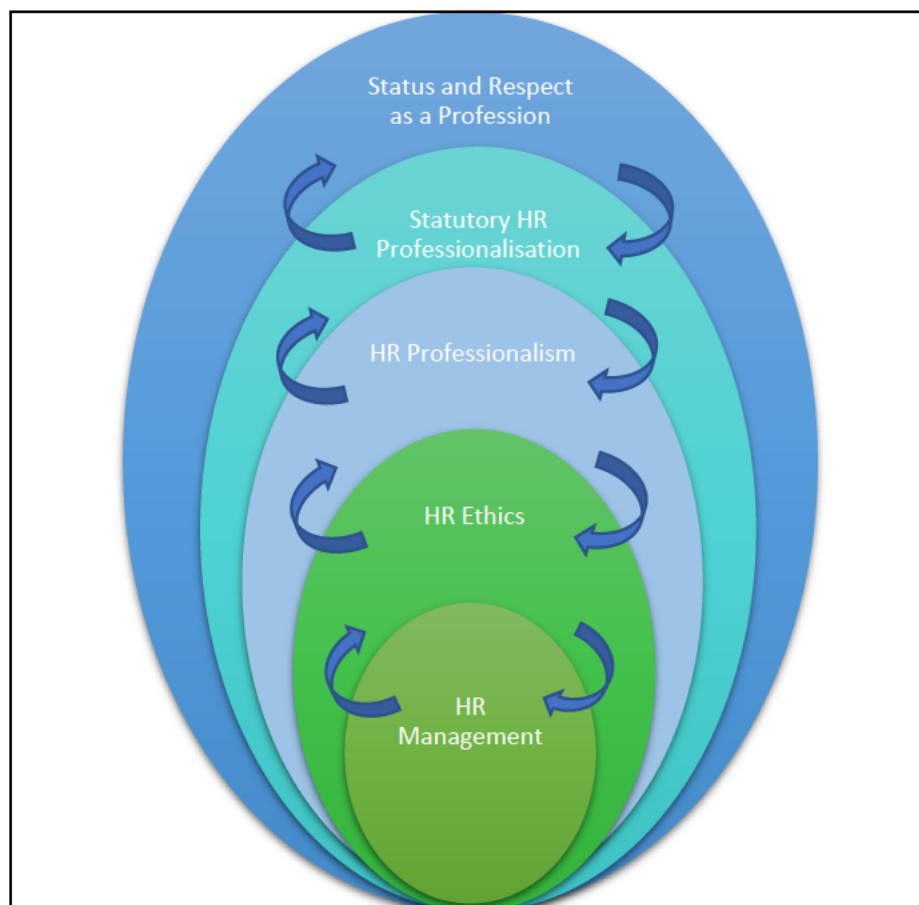


Illustration 9: Conceptual model

**Upward Spiral:** If human resource management professionals were more ethical, based on their ethical practice, this would increase human resource management's professionalism in the workplace. Together with other contributing factors, this would provide a case for statutory professionalisation, which will render human resource management a respected and trusted profession.

**Downward Spiral:** When human resource management professionals is a respected and trusted profession, due to statutory professionalisation (in a similar manner to engineers and accountants), it would essentially mean the establishment of human resource management ethical practice and professionalism, which will translate into a robust human resource management function. South African statutory regulatory bodies would intensify human resource management professionals' credibility and integrity. Subsequently, the descending credibility of human resource management mandates its professionalisation to augment prescribed ethical guidelines. The human resource management conceptual model is an upward trajectory, recognising the importance of ethical standards and professional conduct and integrating it to deliver an evolved statutory human resource management professional body. Human resource management professionals will have a platform for robust strategic business partnerships.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

Collectively, the discussion presented in this theoretical framework chapter has shaped the foundation which led to the creation of the conceptual model that was used to guide this research. It is important to note that the arrows explain the direction of this research within the context of society and McClelland's (1990) categorisation theory from 'within and from above'. Similarly, the King IV (2016) Report on Corporate Governance endorses the approach of the Companies Act No. 71 of 2008 that highlights the role of business in society and its responsibility to perform as a responsible citizen. The Board of any organisation accepts final responsibility and must entrench this ethical practice and philosophy in all strategies, plans, processes, and performance (Deloitte, 2016). Therefore, within the context of this research, the responsibility that the King IV (2016) Report on Corporate Governance is not just the board's responsibility but human resource management's responsibility as well, because human resource management has a significant influence on an organisation's ethical culture and strategy. A collection of theories from the field of ethics, specifically business ethics, including teleological and deontological theories, is further highlighted in literature by Evetts (2012a),

particularly on the discourse of professionalism and McClelland's (1990) categorisation theory. Lastly, the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021) is made up of the foundation, which is a duty to society, and the pillars, including ethics, professionalism, and human resource management and business knowledge, thus intersecting in the conceptual model, establishing the requirement for statutory professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa.

## Chapter 5: Research Methodology

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*“Nothing is better than reading and gaining more and more knowledge”*

by Stephen Hawking

### 5.1 Introduction

This empirical investigation is the first study in South Africa that evaluates the maturity of and correlation between human resource management ethics, professionalism and professionalisation of human resource management. This dissertation shall contribute on empirical, theoretical, and methodological grounds in exploring the research scope. Therefore, the initial literature review was split between a consideration of general human resource management, human resource management ethics, and the relationship between human resource management ethics and the King Reports on Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016). This was followed by a discussion of the influence of the sociology of professions on the development of professions, specifically focusing on the work of the theorist Evetts (1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018). This discussion was narrowed to a specific examination of professions, professionalism and professionalisation. The theoretical underpinning of this research is grounded on a multilateral framework that encompasses business ethics theory, with specific reference to the discourse of professionalism and McClelland’s (1990) categorisation theory, to differentiate between professionalisation from ‘within and from above’. The third and last body of knowledge considered previously in the dissertation was the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021), which effectively brings together ethics, professionalism, and duty to society, as presented in the previous chapter.

The significance of the theoretical analysis of data acquired during this research will detail how this research was undertaken and is therefore explained in this chapter. In terms of the methodological approach, this study took the form of a qualitative analysis, keeping in mind the critical research objectives which are:

1. To examine the development of human resource management as a profession in South Africa.
2. To establish the relationship between the professional development of human resource management and codes of ethical practice.

3. To determine how statutory professionalisation and ethical practice affect human resource management's professional development.
4. To establish recommendations for statutory professionalisation to be a strategy for ethical practice in human resource management in South Africa.

The three participant groups that participated in this study are: human resource management professionals who do not belong to a professional body; human resource management professionals who do belong to a professional body; and human resource management clients in middle and senior management positions who use human resource management. Each participant group comprised of twelve individuals, constituting thirty-six individuals who ultimately participated in this study. The appropriate research techniques and analysis in light of the aim and objectives of the study were considered, and the most pertinent were applied to generate robust data. Therefore, the primary portion of this chapter outlines the selection of the research topic and reasons for choosing a national research site. The secondary portion of this chapter focuses on the methodological considerations or reasoning behind the chosen research method, hence justifying this qualitative study. The third part of this chapter will focus on the sample selection and data collection process, which took the form of in-depth interviews. Finally, trustworthiness, limitations of the study, and ethical considerations will be presented and discussed in this chapter.

## **5.2 Selecting the research topic positionality**

Kinnear (2014) emphasised the importance of examining the researcher's position concerning their research, a sentiment further reinforced by Cohen and Mallon (2001), as a researcher may apply their own judgment and perspective, hence the importance of this section which considers the position of the researcher in this study. There is a personal interest by the researcher in the area of investigation explored in this study, as a human resource management non-professional who has worked for the last 18 years in organisations listed on the JSE. The researcher has experienced significant anomalies in how human resource management professionals have conducted themselves daily and has witnessed unethical practices and a lack of professionalism by human resource management professionals towards their fellow human resource management colleagues and employees. During the 18 years of working in the field, the one statement that has always arisen from human resource management clients was the following sentiment, “You are human resource management; we do not trust you!”. This

stereotype has made it exceedingly difficult for human resource professionals to carry out their job when they are faced with situations where they need to prove themselves and earn the trust of their clients first, whilst trying to be a strategic business partner and confidant. Therefore, the researcher's positionality within this study is subjective considering the challenges faced in working in the human resource management field, and as an academic, there is an opportunity in this study to answer the question of, “Why is human resource management not trusted and therefore considered unethical?”.

### **5.3 Finalising research topic**

When researching the variations of human resource management ethics, it was apparent that human resource management professionalisation is not statutory nor compulsory in South Africa. Hence, when selecting this research topic from a theoretical point of view, it was essential to integrate ethics, professionalism and the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021) to build a case for human resource management statutory professionalisation in South Africa. This study will also be significant to human resource management professionals who have worked in human resource management long enough to appreciate the findings, analysis, and discussion thereof that this study offers. These professionals would appreciate that a fellow human resource management generalist conducted this type of research, as the researcher is very familiar with the challenges faced within the field.

Human resource management is an integral function and department in established South African organisations. Human resource management professionals have played a supporting and business partnering role and recently have provided extensive support to companies transitioning to the ‘new normal’ as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, in highlighting this profession's credibility, it was vital to trace human resource management history in South Africa from its inception to date. Specific reference was made in previous chapters to the establishment and early history of the SABPP, as the proponent and proactive professional regulatory body of human resource management and the statutory quality assurance body under the South African Qualifications Authority Act No. 58 of 1995 in South Africa. There was also a need to understand and illustrate the development of professionalism when the SABPP was established. The discussions in the preceding reviews of existing literature and the theory chapter unveiled the path that professionalisation has undergone

through the history of human resource management in South Africa (Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b).

Legg (2004) and Janse van Rensburg (2009) have provided a detailed overview of human resource management history in South Africa. Notably, they documented the interrelationship of the different professional bodies, providing some insight into the thinking, motivation and subsequent processes and events that are all relevant to this research (Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Legg, 2004). The inauguration of the IPM in South Africa and the establishment of an ad-hoc committee to set up the SABPP coincidentally aligned with the development of human resource management bodies in other major economies. This includes the example of the United Kingdom professional body, known as the CIPD, which was established in 1946. The human resource management certification institute in the United States of America was established in 1976; similarly, the IPM (mid-forties) and the SABPP (in the late seventies) were established in South Africa (Janse van Rensburg, 2009).

Furthermore, Janse van Rensburg's (2009) research on defining a profession in South Africa was initiated by Langenhoven and Daniels (1980). Their study concluded that during the developmental phase of the human resource management profession, the significance of professionalising human resource management had proved to be essential to the process at that time during the late seventies and is also noteworthy now. More importantly, their study explored human resource management professionalisation in South Africa (Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b). Therefore, this current research aimed to connect human resource management ethics and professionalism with statutory human resource management professionalisation by asking purposeful questions. Conducting this research and its ultimate contribution to existing knowledge is strategically important in motivating toward the application for mandatory professionalisation of the profession of human resource management, thus providing a case for either professional body (IPM or SABPP) to be involved in the application. This research will also direct organisations to put in place criteria when appointing and working with human resource management that would contribute to enhancing this profession's current professional status and development, ethical practice, and professional standing in the business. Eventually, when human resource management does gain statutory recognition, as it has in other countries, this will be recorded as a milestone in human resource management history in South Africa.

#### **5.4 Methodological considerations**

Dawood (2015, p. 66) states that the primary purpose of a research methodology is to “generate data which gives insight into people’s experiences”. According to Creswell (2009, as cited in Dawood, 2015, p. 66), “the interpretive disposition of qualitative research allows for a holistic account of participants’ understandings and experiences by considering multiple factors which contribute to the research problem”. Therefore, this research has drawn on the expertise of human resource management professionals (non-professionals and professionals, i.e., from human resource management consultant, business partner, up to Executive and Director), and as a result will provide various perspectives that will be generated into data for this study (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Kothari, 2004; Kumar, 2011; Pandey & Pandey, 2015). Hence, the different participant groups’ subjective experiences will be analysed, making it a blueprint against the existing literature backdrop. This makes this a real-world study, delivering components that establish an articulate and consequential set of findings and discussion.

Therefore, understanding the professional development of human resource management in South Africa and how this development converges with ethical practice and professionalism requires an in-depth analysis appropriate to achieving the aim of this research. Notably, there has always been a debate between qualitative and quantitative analysis, each of which has developed as an independent sphere of empirical research (Flick, von Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004; Krefling, 1991). Quantitative analysis is considered to provide an analytical evaluation since “quantitative research makes sense in situations where we know what the variables are and can devise reasonable ways of controlling or measuring them” (Kinnear, 2014, p. 134). Quantitative research has a numerical aspect that implies measurement, while qualitative research requires collecting information to explain, interpret and recognise (Syrigou, 2018). Therefore, qualitative research does not profess to solve quantitative analysis problems but does not see them as constraints (Holliday, 2007; Tuli, 2010).

Qualitative analyses, and data such as text from interview transcripts, are unlike quantitative analysis, which is statistics-driven and largely independent of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research depends heavily on the researcher’s analytic and integrative skills and personal knowledge of the social context where the data is collected. The qualitative forms of analysis emphasise sense-making or understanding a phenomenon rather than predicting or explaining (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Dey, 2005). Therefore, a creative and investigative mindset is needed for qualitative research, based on an ethically enlightened and participant-in-context

attitude, as well as a set of analytic strategies (Burton & Steane, 2004; Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005).

Qualitative analysis is more widely used in the social sciences, but, of late, it has gained popularity in business and management studies (Kinnear, 2014). This form of analysis may often be underestimated in a management context, as it is essential to note that a qualitative approach allows the participants to speak of their personal experiences. Silverman (2010, as cited in Kinnear, 2014, p. 134) advises that “the quantitative and qualitative debate should not focus on which methodology is better or even more appropriate, but rather on which methodology is most suited to the question being researched”. Hence, this study has endeavoured to gain data and to seek an understanding by eliciting thick descriptions from human resource management professionals and human resource management clients, in order to establish and to pursue patterns from their respective work experiences. Thus, the researcher has used inductive reasoning and has applied subjectivity based on their experience in the human resource management profession. Braun and Clarke (2013) offered a comparison between quantitative and qualitative paradigms which is summarised in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Some broad differences between qualitative and quantitative paradigms  
(Source: Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 15)

QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE
Numbers used as data	Words – written and spoken language – (and images) used as data.
Seeks to identify relationships between variables, to explain or predict to generalise the findings to a broader population.	Seeks to understand and interpret more local meanings; recognises data as gathered in a context; sometimes produces knowledge that contributes to more general understandings.
Generates ‘shallow’ but broad data – not a lot of intricate detail obtained from each participant, but lots of participants take part (to develop the necessary statistical power).	Generates ‘narrow’ but rich data, ‘thick descriptions’ – detailed and complex accounts from each participant; not many take part.

Seeks consensus, norms, or general patterns; often aims to reduce the diversity of responses to an average response.	Tends to seek patterns but accommodates and explores differences and divergence within data.
It tends to be theory-testing and deductive.	It tends to be theory generating and inductive (working up from the data).
Values detachment and impartiality (objectivity).	Values personal involvement and partiality (subjectivity, reflexivity).
Has a static method (harder to change focus once data collection has begun).	The method is less fixed (can accommodate a shift in focus in the same study).
Can be completed quickly.	It tends to take longer to complete because it is interpretative, and there is no formula.

## 5.5 The selected research sites

Since human resource management is a function that can be found in diverse types of business structures, the following categories were considered for this research, as defined by the Companies Act No. 71 of 2008 (with an amendment in 2011): profit and non-profit companies; personal liability companies; state-owned companies; and public and private companies (Department of Trade and Industry, 2010). The interviews with the participants sampled from the companies were conducted in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal<sup>18</sup>. Notably, most interviews were conducted in Gauteng due to the type of sampling applied in this research. It is important to note that most JSE listed companies have their head offices in Gauteng which was also a contributing factor to most of the interviews being conducted in Gauteng. In addition, both the SABPP and the IPM are also based in Gauteng, in Weltevredenpark, Roodepoort and Rosebank, Johannesburg, respectively. Consequently, four interviews were conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, and thirty-two were conducted in Gauteng, primarily in Sandton and surrounding suburbs.

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<sup>18</sup> At the time of fieldwork, the researcher was based in KwaZulu-Natal and could only afford to travel to Gauteng; hence Cape Town was not considered.

## **5.6 Locating the sample**

Sampling is an essential element of qualitative research and is dependent on the nature of the qualitative study and analysis undertaken, such as interpretative phenomenological analysis, grounded theory, content, or thematic analysis (Robinson, 2014). Since there are several different ways to choose a sample, the method used in this research was contingent upon the area of research, research methodology and preference of the researcher (Dawson, 2002; Kumar, 2011; Rugg & Petre, 2007). It is not necessary to collect data from everyone in a community or even to include an entire population in order to acquire valid findings. However, in qualitative research, only a sample, that is a subset, of the population being researched needs to be selected for any given study, which was the case in this research, as indicated in the discussion of the research population presented below (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005; Maree, 2012).

For this research, theoretical sampling was applied, which occurs when gathering data guided by emerging concepts. The researcher pursues the path of the concepts by examining places, people or experiences that have supported additional evaluations of data, thereby developing knowledge about the aspects, perceptions, and associations between concepts (Merriam, 2009; Somekh & Lewin, 2005).

### **a. Population**

Robinson (2014) suggested that choosing the sum of persons from a paradigm who may reasonably be sampled in a study is known as a sample universe, more commonly referred to as the study population or target population. A set of inclusion or exclusion criteria, or both combined, needs to be quantified to better describe this sample universe. Specifically, inclusion criteria mainly focus on attributes that would qualify the intended participants as suitable for the study. On the other hand, exclusion criteria must stipulate criteria that would, based on certain characteristics, disqualify participants from taking part in the study. Significantly, a sample universe offers a practical boundary that promotes the process of sampling and provides an essential theoretical position in the analysis and interpretation process by identifying what is a sample, therefore delineating who or what a study is about. Thus, the sample dictates the level of generalisation to which a study's findings are pertinent and rationally reasonable in the sample universe. Consequently, the more clearly and explicitly a sample universe is illustrated, the more acceptable and transparent any generalisation can be. When a study does not define a

sample universe or makes claims beyond its sample universe, this will destabilise the study's credibility and consistency (Robinson, 2014).

The targeted population that was interviewed in this study comprised, firstly, human resource management non-professionals, specifically human resource management consultants and business partners, up to Executive and Director level. Secondly, human resource management professionals were also included, that is, those who are members of professional bodies and are considered strategic experts in the field of human resource management and business operations. Lastly, the targeted population also encompassed human resource management clients, from manager level up to Executive and Director level. The researcher used purposive and snowball sampling until data saturation was achieved in this study. Saturation signifies the point in the research process when no new concepts or further aspects and perceptions of existing concepts emerge from the data. However, some additional elements of possibilities and perceptions may continue to be realised, as the general instruction, when the research achieves a point when the data appears to be recurring. Therefore, a researcher would persist in data collection until they encounter a negative case. When considering the concepts and aspects within the data, the negative sample characterises an extreme point of the range of concepts. It certainly does not refute the theory; instead, it may add to its range by increasing its possibilities (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). For this study, data saturation was reached during the interview process when the researcher established that no new or additional data was discovered when reviewing the transcripts from all three participant groups against the four themed framework that was applied to this study. Thus, the researcher was empirically confident that saturation had been reached at this point. This is evident in the analysis of the data, which will be presented in Chapter Six.

#### **b. Selecting a sample strategy**

Once the sample universe and target population is outlined, and the exact number of participants to be included is decided, a researcher must assess the attributes for inclusion (Robinson, 2014). In determining the sample selection in this study, the researcher had to consider that since human resource management has no statutory status in South Africa, it is not compulsory for human resource management professionals to belong to a professional body. Therefore, no records of human resource management professionals were available for selecting the sample in this research. The SABPP did offer a list of registered human resource

management professionals; however, for this study, the intended participants needed to include both registered and non-registered human resource management professionals from a diverse industry in South Africa. Consequently, the King Reports on Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016) apply to all entities, not only to companies that impose additional and more stringent corporate governance standards as dictated by the Companies Act No. 71 of 2008. However, in a few instances, the Companies Act No. 71 of 2008 requires a more rigorous regime than the King Reports on Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016); hence a list of the diverse types of industries was sourced from the Act, as a guide to determine research sites (Hofmeyr, 2017).

Non-probability sampling, in the absence of any idea of probability, was applied in this study; that is, purposive or judgment, and snowball sampling (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Kothari, 2004; Pandey & Pandey, 2015), both of which were used in this study. The non-probability sampling approach was applied for this study to select participants that fit the characteristics required for this research to address the research questions and objectives of the study (Syrigou, 2018). Thus, purposive sampling was selected because it represents the total population of human resource management professionals; it is known that this will produce well-matched groups, which in this research comprised a diverse group of the human resource management population and their human resource management clients. The idea was to decide on a sample that would provide guiding principles considered to be necessary for this study (Merriam, 2009; Pandey & Pandey, 2015).

Since purposive or judgment sampling was selected, human resource management professionals were capitalised to choose participants who could offer accurate information in the endeavour to ensure the collection of reliable data (Bryman & Bell, 2014; Kothari, 2004; Maree, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Pandey & Pandey, 2015). The other sampling method that was used was snowball sampling, which is often used in cases where the population is difficult to find, or where the participant group is in an interconnected group of people. The latter was relevant to this sample selection, which was categorised into three participant groups, namely human resource management non-professionals, human resource management professionals, and human resource management clients (Bryman & Bell, 2014; Maree, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The snowball technique proved beneficial in this study, as it provided access to the high calibre and tenured human resource management practitioners and human resource management clients, as a minimum of five years of work experience was set as a standard (Syrigou, 2018).

### **c. Sampling technique**

Sampling is the statistical process of selecting the group and subgroup of the entire population (Bhattacharjee, 2012), which in this study applied to the categorisation of the sample into the three participant groups. Based on the sampling strategy, the following inclusion criteria were applied. Human resource management professionals are equivalent to professionals classified by the SABPP; this includes Chartered human resource management professionals and Master human resource management professionals (by qualification, experience, and tenure). In addition, the human resource management clients included in this study were from manager and team leader professional level up to Executive and Director level. This was attributed to leadership role profiles at this professional level that require more significant interaction with human resource management, industrial and employee relations, performance management issues of employees, and remuneration issues, to name a few, that would usually necessitate a human resource management intervention. A detailed breakdown of the participants included in the sample from the three subgroups is presented in Table 11 on the next page, in terms of their demographic profiles, as well as their location, qualifications and years of experience.

Table 11: Biographical data of participants by age, race, gender, location, qualification, and tenure

NO.	NAMES <sup>19</sup>	AGE	RACE	GENDE R	LOCATION	QUALIFICATION	TOTAL YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
<b>HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CLIENTS (MIDDLE / MANAGER LEVEL UP TO EXECUTIVE / DIRECTOR / CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS) (X12)</b>							
1	Ashen Madden	41	Indian	Male	Sandton	Mechanical Engineering MBA Professional Engineer	18
2	Evelyn Mac	44	Coloured	Female	Sandton	BCom Articles Post Graduate Diploma Corporate Governance Certificate Ethics Officer Change Management Certification	21
3	Lily James	56	Indian	Female	Rand Parkridge	Bachelor degree in Law LLB	30
4	Matthew Brazzoli	54	Indian	Male	Woodmead, Sandton	BSc Computer Science	32
5	Mandy Moore	42	African	Female	Sandton	BTech in Management Services National Diploma	20

<sup>19</sup> All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity

<b>6</b>	Naomi Lange	40	White	Female	Sandton	BCom Marketing Management Honours in Business Management: Marketing Adhoc Technical Training	21
<b>7</b>	Sam Richards	28	Indian	Male	Rosebank, Sandton	Bachelor of Business Science	5
<b>8</b>	Sophie Rainey	41	Indian	Female	Sandton	Honours in information technology Higher Dip in Computer Auditing Project management qualifications (x3) Certified Information Systems auditor Certified Personal Information Systems control Certified Risk management practitioner Certified Risk Management ITEL Foundations Exam Colbert Foundations Exam Management Advancement program	20
<b>9</b>	Stella Morgan	45	Indian	Female	Midrand, Johannesburg	Higher Diploma Architecture	23
<b>10</b>	Scott Dunn	40	Indian	Male	Woodmead, Sandton	BScEngineering MBA	18
<b>11</b>	Victoria Rhodes	41	Indian	Female	Sandton	BCom MBL	18

12	Zain Hall	53	Indian	Male	Sandton	BSc MBA	30
<b>HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT NON-PROFESSIONALS (CONSULTANT / BUSINESS PARTNER UP TO EXECUTIVE / DIRECTOR)</b> <b>(X12)</b>							
1	Alvin Sandler	32	White	Male	Sandton	BCom Industrial Psychology	11
2	Anne Yates	40	Indian	Female	Sandton	MMBEC (Masters in Management in Business and Executive Coaching) Honours Business Coaching BBA (Bachelor in Business Administration)	23
3	Delilah Short	35	Coloured	Female	Woodmead, Sandton	BA Industrial Psychology	14
4	Heidi Jackson	45	White	Female	Sandton	BCom Law SHE	22
5	Kali Campbell	59	Indian	Female	Sherwood, Durban	Matric Certificate in Marketing and Personal Management Accounting	48
6	Taylor Sandler	37	Indian	Female	Sandton	Certified Associate in Project Management Scrum Master	11
7	Mary Havana	57	Coloured	Female	Sandton	Matric Diploma human resource management	37

8	Rose Regan	47	Indian	Female	Sandton	Bachelor of Social Sciences Higher Diploma Bachelor of Education MBA	22
9	Duke Moore	36	White	Male	Sandton	Business Sound Engineering	14
10	Tanya Sable	42	Indian	Female	Sandton	BA Psychology Advanced Certificate in human resource management	19
11	Tasha Arnolds	40	African	Female	Midrand, Johannesburg	Bachelor in Ind Psychology Advanced Labour Law	20
12	Irene Lake	42	Coloured	Female	Sandton	BA Honours in human resource management	20
<b>HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS (REGISTERED WITH PROFESSIONAL BODIES (X12))</b>							
1	Alison Moody	56	White	Female	Constantia Office Park (Johannesburg)	Bachelors in human resource management Honours in Human resource management Honour is Marketing Masters in Commerce	35
2	Diana Mason	45	Indian	Female	Fourways, Sandton	Social Sciences Honours Industrial Psychology Masters in Industrial Psychology	20
3	Hope Kelly	38	Indian	Female	Musgrave, Durban	Bachelor in Social Sciences Honour: Psychology Bachelor in Social Science (Industrial Psychology)	15

<b>4</b>	Jason Gaede	63	African	Male	Rosebank (Johannesburg)	BA in Humanities CDE (Concurrent Diploma in Education) Master of Education (United States of America) Masters in Education. Education in Masters (Harvard) EDD Education Doctorate Diploma in Corporate Directors (IOD)	37
<b>5</b>	Katie Mabee	43	African	Female	Constantia Office Park (Johannesburg)	Diploma in human resource management Degree in human resource management Masters in human resource management Certificate in Financial Planning	20
<b>6</b>	Katie Sawyer	54	African	Female	Sandton	Rhodes University: Bachelor of Journalism Medical University of South Africa: BSc Hons Psychology Medical University of South Africa: MSc (Clinical Psychology) HEC Paris and University of Oxford: Executive Masters (CCC)	32
<b>7</b>	Lexi Mace	38	African	Female	Centurion, Pretoria	BCom / BA Honours / Master in Arts	15

<b>8</b>	Mbali Msibi	28	African	Female	Constantia Office Park (Johannesburg)	Programme in human resource management Advanced Programme in human resource management BTech BCom Honours: human resource management	5
<b>9</b>	Margret Matsheka	56	African	Female	Centurion	Bachelor of Public Administration in Industrial Psychology Management Development Programme Development Programme in Labour Relations Master's Certificate in Labour Relations Advanced Labour Law	34
<b>10</b>	Neelan Vaughn	59	Indian	Male	Constantia Office Park (Johannesburg)	Diploma in Marketing Diploma in Credit Associate Diploma in Banking Fellowship in Accounting Practice ODETDP Certificate Insurance	36
<b>11</b>	Ronald Phillips	40	Coloured	Male	Musgrave, Durban	Bachelor of Science: General Post Grad Certificate human resource management MTech human resource management PhD Labour and human resource management	21

<b>12</b>	Steven Nxele	52	African	Male	Durban: CBDD	BA in Industrial Psychology and Communications Honour in Psychology Psychometry Independent Psychometry Diploma in Public Relations	24
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## **5.7 Data collection**

Rugg and Petre (2007) explained that a researcher is unlikely to agonise in data collection methods since a researcher requires many data-gathering tools or techniques. Data collection tools may vary in complexity, interpretation, design, and administration. Furthermore, each tool is suitable for collecting certain types of information (Pandey & Pandey, 2015). The data collection tool of choice for this research was in-depth interviews.

### **a. In-depth interviews**

Different types of interviews can be applied in a study during the interview process. Most qualitative studies use semi-structured interviews. This type of data collection is perhaps the most common type of interview used in qualitative research. It is a combination of both structured and unstructured interviewing, as the researcher may have some pre-determined themes and questions, but there is space for following up on leading questions, as they come up during the interview process (Bryman, 2012; Dawson, 2002; Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005; Maree, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Rugg & Petre, 2007). In this study the researcher used structured questions within the semi-structured interview schedule for gathering the participants' demographic information, such as age, gender, location, and qualifications. Similarly, within a semi-structured interview there are unstructured and informal questions (Merriam, 2009). Important to note in this study is that the researcher is trained to conduct interviews as a human resource management professional at different professional levels, from learnerships, administration positions, middle management to Executive appointments. Thus, the researcher has a good understanding of the challenges of the interview process as the interviewer. The key skills that interviewers need in order to conduct effective in-depth interviews are presented in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Key skills for in-depth interviewing (Source: Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005, pp. 38-39)

SKILL	INCLUDES	RATIONALE	TIPS
<b>Rapport-Building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ ⇒ The ability to quickly create interviewer and participant dynamics that are positive, relaxed, and mutually respectful.</li> </ul>	<p>Participants will talk freely, openly, and honestly about the research topic only if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ feel comfortable in the interviewer's presence</li> <li>⇒ trust the interviewer</li> <li>⇒ feel secure about confidentiality</li> <li>⇒ believe the interviewer is interested in their story</li> <li>⇒ do not feel judged.</li> </ul>	<p>Learn culturally specific styles and techniques for building rapport. Suggestions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ be friendly</li> <li>⇒ smile</li> <li>⇒ use a pleasant tone of voice</li> <li>⇒ use relaxed body language</li> <li>⇒ incorporate humour</li> <li>⇒ be humble</li> <li>⇒ do not patronise</li> <li>⇒ do not scold, coerce, or cajole participants</li> <li>⇒ be patient.</li> </ul>
<b>Emphasising The Participant's Perspective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ ⇒ Treating the participant as the expert.</li> <li>⇒ Keeping the participant from interviewing you.</li> <li>⇒ Balancing deference to the participant with control over the interview.</li> <li>⇒ Being an engaged listener.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ The interviewer's perspective on the research issue should be invisible.</li> <li>⇒ This avoids the risk that participants will modify their responses to please the interviewer instead of describing their perspectives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Remember that the purpose of the interview is to elicit the participant's perspective; consider yourself a student. If a participant asks for factual information during the interview, write down the questions and respond after the interview.</li> <li>⇒ If a participant asks what you think, deflect the question.</li> <li>⇒ Let the participant know that you consider their point of view more important.</li> </ul>

	⇒ Demonstrating a neutral attitude.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Don't overcompensate for perceived status differences by giving the participant too much control over the interview.</li> <li>⇒ Pay attention to what participants say and follow up with relevant questions and probes.</li> <li>⇒ Be aware that what you say, how you say it, and your body language convey your biases and emotional reactions.</li> <li>⇒ Use them instead to communicate neutrality and acceptance.</li> </ul>
<b>Adapting To Different Personalities And Emotional States</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Being able to adjust your style to suit each participant quickly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Every participant has a unique character and demeanour.</li> <li>⇒ By adopting appropriate behaviour for each individual, the interviewer can help the participant be comfortable enough to speak freely about the research topic.</li> </ul>	<p>Different interviewing styles may be needed for different participants, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ be able to retain control of a conversation with a dominant personality and animate a shy participant.</li> <li>⇒ Know how to tone down heightened emotions, such as when a participant starts crying or becomes belligerent.</li> <li>⇒ Adapting to each individual may require softening the way you broach sensitive issues, adjusting your tone of voice to be more sober or upbeat, or exhibiting increased warmth or social distance.</li> </ul>

Most of the fieldwork in this study was done over a six month period in 2019. However, due to unforeseen circumstances and work constraints, the last two interviews were completed in the first semester of 2020. All fieldwork was concluded before the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the lockdown that was imposed in South Africa in March of 2020. Based on the skills required to elicit in-depth information in an interview, the researcher was able to gauge non-verbal responses, clarifying questions that were not adequately understood, such as the difference between professionalism and professionalisation. This also allowed for further information to be collected by prompting for leading questions when participants were vague, especially considering the sensitivity of human resource management ethics. If a quantitative method of data collection had been applied using questionnaires or surveys as a tool, further interrogation of the pertinent topics under consideration would not have been possible. Therefore, the choice to use in-depth, semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection for the purposes of this research was most suitable.

Bonnin (2007, as cited in Dawood, 2015, p. 79) notes that:

*“...the material gathered in interviews and the meanings generated are moulded by the context of the interview, the place where the interview takes place; the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee; and, in a focus group discussion the way the person wishes to present themselves to the groups”.*

The interviews in this study were conducted at convenient venues for the participants and were recorded, with the participants' permission, on the researcher's mobile phone and laptop. Informed consent forms were signed by all participants who agreed to partake in the study, and the entire research process was explained to the participants at the onset of each scheduled interview. The duration of interviews varied depending on the participant groups. For the human resource management non-professional group, the interviews were between thirty to over sixty minutes. The human resource management professionalised interviews lasted between thirty minutes to over an hour and a half. Finally, human resource management clients' interviews were between thirty to about a hundred and four minutes. One interview was not recorded due to technical difficulties; the researcher's notes were not sufficient to use as data and this interview was therefore not used in this study. Another participant withdrew, and two

others did not provide adequate information during the interview process, regardless of probing questions. In total, four interviews were conducted but were not used in this study.

## **5.8 Data analysis**

“Analysis of data is one of the most important steps in the research” (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008, p. 587). Pandey and Pandey (2015) define data analysis as studying the organised material to discover inherent facts. The data is studied from as many angles as possible to explore the new attributes. Hence, good analysis requires efficient management of data gathered. Qualitative data analysis is somewhat less cryptic than complex, even tedious and a strain (Dey, 2005). Jones (1985) proposes that qualitative data analysis includes developments of interpretation and innovation that are challenging to make it unambiguous.

The specific form of data analysis used in this study was thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013) offer a guide with six phases that can be used in thematic analysis, summarised in Table 13 on the following page. It is essential to note that these guidelines are not a rule of thumb but rather serve as basic principles that may be applied in this form of analysis. In addition, thematic analysis is not a straightforward progression where the researcher moves from one phase to the next; instead, it is a more tedious process, where a researcher may move back and forth as required throughout the phases. It is also a process that develops over time and should not be rushed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013). Therefore, the chosen application for this research was an interactive approach in line with the stipulations of the thematic method of qualitative data analysis.

This approach allowed for ongoing modifications and adjustments during the research process, permitting connection between the different components. Maxwell (2005) explained this interactive process that includes the research objectives and questions, the theoretical and conceptual framework, methods, validity, resources, research skills, problems, ethical issues, data collection and factors influencing the results. The passive approach can be adapted to possibilities, such as conducting a pilot study. Most importantly this approach allows for a spiral process of data collection, where various considerations and logistics are navigated in order to complete the study. Furthermore, this process allows a researcher opportunities to consider unanticipated themes, as was the case in this research, as well as challenges and stereotypes associated with the human resource management profession (Syrigou, 2018).

Table 13: Six phases of analysis (Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013)

<b>PHASES</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS</b>
<b>1. Familiarising yourself with your data</b>	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
<b>2. Generating initial codes</b>	Coding interesting data features systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
<b>3. Searching for themes</b>	Collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each.
<b>4. Reviewing themes</b>	Checking in the themes, work concerning the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic map of the analysis.
<b>5. Defining and naming themes</b>	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the study tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
<b>6. Producing the report</b>	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, definitive accounting of selected extracts, relating the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

### 5.9 Coding the data

A code is a term used in qualitative analysis which refers to a word or short phrase that will explain and represent an attribute for a portion of the relevant data and is just one way of analysing qualitative data. Principally, a few research methodologists recognise a code as simple shorthand or an abbreviation for the more significant grouping yet to be discovered, though some do use the terms code and set interchangeably (Saldana, 2013). The coding process undertaken during thematic analysis presents the researcher with insights and perspectives. No information should be neglected, especially when coding responses to open-ended questions in order to be methodical (Syrigou, 2018). Researchers rarely get coding right the first time.

The data collected in this study during the semi-structured interviews was analysed using a software program, NVivo, which is used for qualitative analysis at a basic level. The interview transcripts were coded according to the four themed framework, including general human resource management, human resource management ethics, human resource management professionalism, and human resource management professionalisation. Basic structured coding originated from the posed question, which was based on the four themed framework. The codes generated in order to further analyse the data obtained in this study are presented in Table 14 on page 149. Syrigou (2018) and Saldana (2013) advise that there are numerous ways of organising data. However, for this study, the coding involved: firstly, analytically screening each interview transcript by omitting the unnecessary talk; secondly, identifying emerging themes and perceptions; and lastly reviewing each interview transcript again for additional information and clarity, which would inform the analysis process (Saldana, 2013; Syrigou, 2018).

Similar to the difficulties that Syrigou (2018) encountered in her study, there were challenges experienced when transcribing and coding the data in this study. These included:

- a. Thirty-six participants were interviewed at venues convenient to the participant, with open-ended interview questions that created high volumes of data that was then painstakingly manually transcribed. This meant omitting unnecessary information to attain meaningful transcriptions.
- b. A structured coding technique was used that was able to work through the volume of data and keep the codes linked to the four themed framework, which was used to address the research questions and objectives.
- c. To avoid the over-reliance on the NVivo software program for coding and analysis, this meant applying a structured coding first, and simultaneously using a manual process on Microsoft Excel, thus using a dual process to code and analyse the data until saturation was achieved.
- d. Lastly, selecting the appropriate findings was crucial as this would reveal the results to address the research questions and objectives, thus understanding that there is no singular way to achieve the objectives of this research.

Table 14: Example of coding of the human resource management professional findings

GENERAL HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT		HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT / ETHICS / KING REPORTS		HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALISM		HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALISATION	
QUESTIONS	CODE	QUESTIONS	CODE	QUESTIONS	CODE	QUESTIONS	CODE
What is your background?	*Background Qualifications	In your opinion, how ethical do you feel organisations have behaved in the past year?	*Unethical behaviour	What is your understanding of professionalism and professionalisation?	Defining Professionalism / Professionalisation	In your opinion, why do you think that statutory recognition of the human resource management professionals have not fully materialised, even though there are professional bodies such as the SABPP and IPM, in South Africa?	Why human resource management is not professionalised in South Africa
What is your understanding of human resources management? What do you think it entails?	Understanding of human resource management	What particular unethical behaviour did you personally experience or have heard of from others?	*Human resource management's role in ethical practice	How do professionalism and ethics interconnect?	The link between ethics and professionalism	What is your understanding of the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model?	SABPP Human Resource Competency Model
What skills would you say are imperative for a student to become a successful human resource management professional?	*Skills and Behaviours	How would you describe human resource management's role in ethics or ethical practice in organisations in South Africa? (Custodian of Ethics)	*Human resource management's role in ethical practice	Have you heard of a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment known as a VUCA environment? If so, how would one maintain a level of professionalism in such an environment?	VUCA and Professionalism	In your view, how can an understanding of statutory professionalisation of human resource management contribute to a broader theory of professionalisation that is in the interest of society?	*Society and Corporate Social Responsibility

### **5.10 Thematic analysis**

Saldana (2013) states that several qualitative research texts conflate the use of the term ‘codes’ with ‘themes’. However, Saldana (2013) disagrees with this conflation and advises that doing this would dilute the terminology, instead explaining that a theme *results* from coding, categorisation, or analytic reflection. Syrigou (2018) suggests that research has the option of employing various techniques of data analysis, such as conversation analysis and grounded theory; however, thematic analysis is ideal for creating a clear picture of content in text and gaining an extensive understanding of the data. The use of themes in order to scrutinise data is called thematic analysis. This analysis is highly inductive, and the themes emerge from the data, which are not imposed by the researcher, as is the case in grounded theory. In this type of analysis, the data collection and analysis occur simultaneously. Even background reading can significantly form part of the analysis process to help explain an emerging theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Dawson, 2002). The flexibility of this analysis has its advantages in allowing for creativity in assigning the data categories or themes. However, a restriction of thematic analysis relates to the various coding options that can be implemented, as there is no particular method that should be strictly adhered to. To avoid the broadness and flexibility of the coding, in this study the researcher created a four-theme framework for the interview process that was interconnected with the literature that provided connections which will be presented in the findings in subsequent chapters (Syrigou, 2018). This approach augmented a rich analysis and will further amplify the discussion of the findings.

### **5.11 Trustworthiness of the study**

There is undoubtedly a need to build in strategies to ensure trustworthiness in a study, that is, to ensure that the findings are valid and reliable. To this end, triangulation is a common strategy, as it provides an audit trail (Merriam, 2009). Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) offer a step-by-step approach for conducting a trustworthy thematic analysis. From the onset of conducting qualitative analysis, it is crucial to plan a practical and effective process for conducting thematic analysis that endeavours to meet the trustworthiness criteria that Lincoln and Guba (1985) have outlined. Creswell (2006) advises that in qualitative research, the manner of data collection, data analysis and writing are not always clear-cut steps. They are often interconnected and happen concurrently during the research process since data collection and analysis may occur simultaneously and are essential towards classifying that the data analysis process may not be completely distinct from the actual data (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) apply Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis in a linear, six-phased method, which is outlined in Table 15 below. The process of conducting rigorous and trustworthy thematic analysis has been demonstrated to assist with interpreting and representing data. This iterative and reflective process matures over time and requires constant moving back and forward between phases to ensure that a process of conducting a trustworthy thematic analysis that may have a constructive impact on qualitative research as a methodology is followed (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

Table 15: Establishing trustworthiness during each phase of thematic analysis (Source: Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017)

PHASES OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS	MEANS OF ESTABLISHING TRUSTWORTHINESS
<b>Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prolong engagement with data.</li> <li>2. Triangulate different data collection modes</li> <li>3. Document theoretical and reflective codes and themes</li> <li>4. Store raw data in well-organised archives</li> <li>5. Keep records of all data field notes, transcripts, and reflexive journals</li> </ol>
<b>Phase 2: Generating initial codes</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Peer debriefing</li> <li>2. Researcher triangulation</li> <li>3. Reflexive journaling</li> <li>4. Use of a coding framework</li> <li>5. Audit trail of code generation</li> <li>6. Documentation of all team meetings and peer debriefing</li> </ol>
<b>Phase 3: Searching for themes</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research triangulation</li> <li>2. Diagramming to make sense of theme connections</li> <li>3. Keep detailed notes about the development and hierarchies of concepts and themes</li> </ol>
<b>Phase 4: Reviewing themes</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Researcher triangulation</li> <li>2. Themes and subthemes vetted by team members</li> <li>3. Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data</li> </ol>
<b>Phase 5: Defining and naming themes</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research triangulation</li> <li>2. Peer debriefing</li> <li>3. Team consensus on themes</li> <li>4. Documentation of team meeting regarding themes</li> </ol>
<b>Phase 6: Producing the report</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Documentation of theme naming</li> <li>2. Member checking</li> <li>3. Peer debriefing</li> <li>4. Describing the process of coding and analysis insufficient details</li> <li>5. Thick descriptions of context</li> <li>6. Description of the audit trail</li> <li>7. Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study</li> </ol>

This six-phased approach was applied by the researcher in this research as well as Guba's (1981) strategies for qualitative research. It is important to note that Guba (1981) argued that these criteria must be defined differently for qualitative and quantitative analysis based on the philosophical and conceptual divergence of the two approaches. Thus, the following strategy applies to qualitative analysis, which includes:

- a. **Credibility:** This included checking the actual value of the findings obtained by matching field notes, triangulation, peer examination, and independent coding.
- b. **Transferability:** Ensuring applicability of the findings was achieved by comparing adequate data and the data description.
- c. **Dependability:** Consistency of the data was acquired through an audit, keeping unprocessed material, and giving a clear and complete description of the research method that was used. The same process was followed during triangulation, peer examination, and code-recode procedure; and
- d. **Confirmability:** The researcher applied the principle of neutrality and kept a distance so as not to influence the research, as well as using the triangulation and code-decode procedure.

## 5.12 Ethical considerations

Ethics in research is an established practice that results in weighing up many factors. In some disciplines, the research proposal must be submitted to an ethics committee that will evaluate the sensitivity to participants in the research and will also assess if the methodology is sound and suitable, considering ethical principles and guidelines, thus encouraging the ethical research practice of *do no harm* (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). The research proposal for this study was submitted to the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Research Ethics Committee, along with the ethical clearance application. This was approved, and the Protocol Reference Number is HSS/1935/018D (Appendix One).

At the onset of the fieldwork, the participants needed to provide permission to participate in the study and to acknowledge that they were fully aware of the purpose of the research and the consequences of their participation in the study. Informed consent letters were signed by each of the participants in agreement for their voluntary participation in this study. Somekh and Lewin (2005) advise that:

- a. The researcher should declare the purpose of the research, informing and gaining access, thus defining all the potential consequences. For this research, the meaning and sensitivity of the theme of ethics were clarified with the participants when the interviews were being scheduled. This was first explained telephonically by the researcher, following which the researcher emailed the informed consent form to the participants for them to peruse and sign at their convenience before the interview. The forms were either returned via email or at the in-person interview.
- b. However, predicting the consequences in advance may not always be possible. A more suitable concept is rolling informed consent, that is, the renegotiation of informed consent once the research is ongoing and a more credible assessment of the risks to participants can be made. This did not occur during the fieldwork undertaken in this study; therefore, the informed consent forms were valid and were not adjusted during the period of data collection.
- c. The informed consent form is required from each participant interviewed as a mandatory part of the research ethics process. In addition to the informed consent letters signed by the participants, gatekeeper's letters were also obtained from the SABPP and IPM (Appendix Two and Appendix Three).
- d. There may be difficulty in gaining informed consent from participants. This was not the case in this research.

Furthermore, Somekh and Lewin (2015) explain the magnitude of maintaining confidentiality and anonymity when conducting research. Confidentiality is a notion that allows participants to participate in confidence in the fieldwork, meaning that their personal information will not be divulged by the researcher which may cause distress or harm. If confidentiality is not guaranteed, participants may refuse consent of publication of any data or findings in any publication. Equally, anonymity is a process to protect privacy, thus also preserving confidentiality. Although beneficial in the endeavour not to identify people, anonymity cannot promise that harm may not occur. Nonetheless, a sound ethical principle is to pursue permission from the participants involved in order to ethically use the data collected in a study (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). Within the context of this research, the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants is guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms so that no participant can be identified.

Hence, all ethical considerations were adhered to, thus ensuring the protection and privacy of all participants in this research. The informed consent forms guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, and most importantly, all names have been changed to ensure the protection of all the participants' details. It was also clearly explained to all participants that they could remove themselves from participation in this study, and one participant did indeed do so during the course of the research. They were also informed that all information gathered from this study would be discarded after five years and that only the supervisor and the researcher would have access to the data.

### **5.13 Conclusion**

The first part of the literature review presented in Chapter Two established that human resource management is a profession in South Africa through a review of previous research and theory on human resource management ethics and the King Reports on Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016). The second part of the literature review in Chapter Three explained the contribution of the sociology of professions to the understandings around the development of professions, specifically by the theorist Evetts (1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018) focusing on professions, professionalism and professionalisation. The theoretical underpinning of this research is grounded on a multilateral framework that encompasses business ethics theory, with specific reference to the discourse of professionalism and McClelland's (1990) categorisation theory, to differentiate between professionalisation from 'within and from above'. The third and last body of knowledge contributing to the theoretical grounding of the study is the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021), which has effectively brought together ethics, professionalism, and duty to society. Based on the research questions and objectives, the researcher developed an appropriate methodological strategy and design that was applied in conducting the study. The methodology applied to this qualitative research was a thematic approach. The option to use in-depth interviews contributed to an interactive and reflective process. The non-probability sampling approach was used, specifically purposive and snowballing techniques, which resulted in the collection of rich data from knowledgeable participants. This data was coded using a thematic technique and was aligned to the four themed framework, that is, general human resource management, human resource management ethics and King Reports, human resource management professionalism, and lastly human resource management professionalisation.

## Chapter 6: Findings

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*“Experience without theory is blind, but theory without experience is mere intellectual play”*

by Immanuel Kant

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the research findings gained through the thematic analysis of the data collected during the semi-structured in-depth interviews with the research participants. These interviews were conducted in order to obtain relevant data that would address the research objectives, and the findings will therefore contribute to achieving the aim of this multi-disciplinary qualitative study. Braun and Clarke (2006, as cited in Judger, 2016) explained that it is essential to identify themes from the data collected in a study. The themes encapsulate the central ideas in the data concerning the research questions and objectives that will illustrate some level of modelled responses or meaning within the given data sets. Therefore, it is vital to be consistent in the development of established themes for the presentation of the data in this chapter. In an inductive *bottom-up* way or an academic, deductive *top-down* way, Bazeley (2009) has asserted that themes offer great substance when they are associated with an explanatory model that will ‘describe, compare and relate’ in a three-step formula when presenting and reviewing the data. Judger (2016) also referred to Thomas’s (2003) reasoning regarding the main aim of the inductive approach, minus the limitations required by structured methodologies, which has allowed the frequency, dominant or significant themes found in the raw data to be identified, which in turn has materialised into the research findings.

The three focal principles for an inductive approach are:

1. To condense extensive and varied raw data into a brief, summary format: In this data set, the transcripts were captured in Microsoft Word, were then catalogued into themes in Microsoft Excel, and in turn populated into another Word document, which was processed as a query in NVivo.
2. To establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the data: The summary findings are therefore presented, analysed, and discussed in this chapter in the form of NVivo Text Search.

3. To develop a model or theory that contributes to understanding the underlying structure of experiences by the participants, which are evident in the raw data. Furthermore, Thomas (2003) has acknowledged that *top-down* and *bottom-up* processes are interactive in some way because the researcher keeps a specific interest in identifying themes influenced by the theoretical framework: In this research, both approaches have been applied to the theoretical framework detailed in the previous chapter.

To recap, the research objectives to establish connections to the summary findings presented in this chapter are:

1. To examine the development of human resource management as a profession in South Africa.
2. To establish the relationship between the professional development of human resource management and codes of ethical practice.
3. To determine how statutory professionalisation and ethical practice affect human resource management's professional development.
4. To establish recommendations for statutory professionalisation to be a strategy for ethical practice in human resource management in South Africa.

## **6.2 Thematic analysis: Critical Themes**

Keeping in mind the abovementioned objectives, the four themed framework that has emerged has delivered the following critical themes: general human resource management; human resource management ethics and the King Reports on Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016); human resource management professionalism; and human resource management professionalisation. The themes have provided the basic structure of this chapter, and their contribution to this study will be clarified in the following sections. Three participant groups<sup>20</sup> were interviewed: human resource management professionals that do not belong to a professional body; human resource management professionals that do belong to a professional body (i.e. SABPP, IPM, the Health Professions Council of South Africa [HPCSA] and the Society for Industrial Organisational Psychology South Africa [SIOPSA]); and finally, human resource management clients in middle and senior management positions who are stakeholders in businesses that use human resource management as a service. Each participant group

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<sup>20</sup> All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity

comprised of twelve individuals, constituting thirty-six data sets that were imported into NVivo for the qualitative analysis to be presented in this chapter. A code book was created in NVivo, providing the five significant sub-themes that emerged during the NVivo analysis from each participant group. Each main theme and the five corresponding sub-themes will be categorised and presented, thus showing the parent-child relationship from NVivo in Table 16 below.

Table 16: Four themed framework with five sub-themes from each participant group

	<b>X3 PARTICIPANT GROUP</b>		
<b>FOUR THEMED FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT NON-PROFESSIONALS</b>	<b>HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS</b>	<b>HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CLIENTS</b>
<b>GENERAL HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT</b>	1.Career 2.Qualifications 3.Stereotypes 4.Challenges 5.Development	1.Skills 2.Qualifications 3.Psychology 4.Stereotypes 5.Challenge	1.Credibility 2.Competency 3.Courage 4.Relationship 5.Support
<b>HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ETHICS AND THE KING REPORTS</b>	1.Confidentiality 2.Unethical 3.Conflict 4.Bias 5.King	1.Confidentiality 2.Unethical 3.Conflict 4.Bias 5.King	1.Ethics 2.Unethical 3.Confidentiality 4.Challenge 5.King
<b>HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALISM</b>	1.Professionalism 2.Profession 3.Ethics 4.VUCA 5.Respect	1.Professionalism 2.Profession 3.Behaviour 4.VUCA 5.Volatile	1.Professionalisation 2.Characteristics 3.Profession 4.Ethics 5.VUCA and Volatile
<b>HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALISATION</b>	1.Professionalisation 2.Professional Body and Practice 3.Attributes 4.Ethical 5.Standards	1.Professionalisation 2.SABPP 3.Professional Body 4.Competency Model 5.Strategy	1.Professionalisation 2.Respected 3.Development 4.Attributes 5.Challenges

### 6.3 General human resource management

This was the first critical theme of the four themed framework examined during the interview process across all participant groups. The rationale for including this theme was that there are low barriers of entry into human resource management. Since human resource management is not compulsorily professionalised in South Africa, anyone who has in the past worked in human resource management has not had to abide by any strict human resource management criteria other than possessing a basic matric pass, which is also the requirement for low-level and administrative positions in an organisation. In more recent times, a degree has become a requirement to work in human resource management. However, the degree requirement is not specific to a human resource management degree, thus allowing anyone from any academic background to work in a human resource management department. Hence, it is vital to understand human resource management non-professionals and their professionalised interpretation and understanding of general human resource management. Understanding general human resource management from the perspective of the three participant groups would also be interesting. Their views on human resource management greatly varied on topics such as those participants who have chosen human resource management as a career, stereotypes, challenges, and highlights of working in this profession.

The word tree in Illustration 10 below shows the observed words across all three participant groups related to the theme of general human resource management: human, people, business, managers, and professional.



Illustration 10: General human resource management (human resource management non-professionals, professionals, and clients)

#### 6.4 Human resource ethics and the King Reports on Corporate Governance

The second theme of the four themed framework is a dichotomy of human resource management ethics and the King Reports on Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016). The contrast between human resource management ethics and professionalisation is the focus area of this research. It was valuable to interrogate each participant group regarding their daily ethical practice in human resource management. The intent was to determine whether human resource management non-professionals, those who are professionalised, and human resource management clients understand the relevance of the King Reports (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016) in their daily ethical practice, as well as to better understand the participants' awareness of human resource management's responsibility in good corporate governance and citizenship. Findings on maintaining confidentiality, requests for inappropriate and unethical tasks, avoiding conflict, personal bias, and codes of conduct have all illuminated the insights and perceptions of the participants.



Illustration 11: Human resource management ethics and King Reports (human resource management non-professionals, professionals, and clients)

It makes sense that in the word tree for all participant groups' views of human resource management ethics and the King Reports (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016), as shown in Illustration 11 above, that words like ethics, people, confidentiality and unethical are the most common and appropriate sub-themes.

## 6.5 Human resource professionalism

The third and fourth themes of the four themed framework focus are essentially the secondary focus of this research, which is the participants' views of statutory professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa. To understand what professionalism means to each participant group was significant, hence determining whether participants acknowledged the link between professionalism and ethics which is characterised by professionalism. It was also noteworthy to establish whether participants felt that it was possible to maintain a level of professionalism while operating in the VUCA environment. Thus, recognising professionalism within this context is significant to the profession and human resource management's reputation in organisations.



Illustration 12: Human resource management professionalism (human resource management non-professionals, professionals, and clients)

In supporting the human resource management professionalism theme, professionals, profession, ethics, and competency are some of the sub-themes that emerged as significant to the participant groups, as shown in Illustration 12 above.

## 6.6 Human resource professionalisation

The last theme of the four themed framework emphasised each participant group's awareness of statutory professionalisation of human resource management and what this meant for the profession in South Africa. Considering that there are already two prevailing professional bodies, statutory professionalisation could influence human resource management's reputation

and human resource management ethics in an organisation. Perceptions on the different sub-themes varied between human resource management professionals who belong to a professional body and those who do not. Lastly, human resource management clients comprehended the significance of professionalisation for the human resource management profession and human resource management's service delivery in an organisation. For this last theme of the four themed framework, the main sub-themes that were frequently identified are professionals, people, qualifications, and governs, as shown in Illustration 13 below.



Illustration 13: Human resource management professionalisation (human resource management non-professionals, professionals, and clients)

### 6.7 Human resource non-professionals

The first set of findings focused on the responses obtained from human resource management non-professionals, that is, those human resource practitioners who are not registered with any professional body locally yet still work in human resource management. Since human resource management is not compulsorily professionalised in South Africa, it would be pertinent to gain insights into these participants' views and experiences in relation to the themes identified in the four themed framework of human resource management professionals. Five key sub-themes emerged per main theme within the four themed framework from the responses from this participant group. These findings will be presented in the subsections to follow.

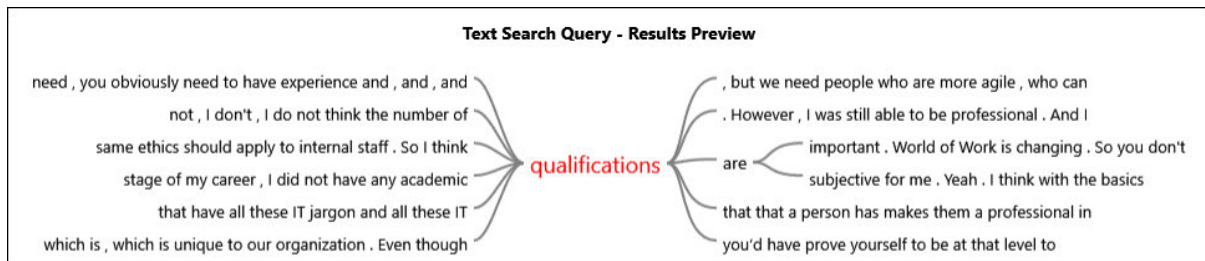
### 6.7.1 General human resource management

Human resource management non-professionalised participants revealed why they chose human resource management as a career or why human resource management chose them. It was interesting how the latter was the case for a few participants. Some participants started off in related fields and then gravitated towards human resource management or wanted to work to support people and therefore initially started in psychology, as a field connected with the human resource management profession. The following NVivo text searches, shown in Illustrations 14 and 15 below, provided these supporting statements for those who believed that human resource management chose them.

Illustration 14: Career



Illustration 15: Qualifications



It is common for those employed in human resource management to initially start working in recruitment either at a recruitment agency or in-house recruitment within an organisation and over time to move into human resource management at an administrative or consultant level, such as in Heidi Jackson's (HJ) experience:

*'It kind of chose me. I landed in it. From becoming a recruitment consultant at a previous company that I mentioned...between recruitment consultant and human resource management consultant, there was a human resource management administrator stint. It's important because that's how I was able to move over. I*

*firmly believe you can't just jump from recruitment to human resource management generalist' (HJ)*

This was also the case with Rose Regan (RR), as indicated in the excerpt on the following page, whose career started in information technology. Interestingly, in some organisations, training facilitators are employed in the information technology department, however over time they progress to Learning and Development which is part of the human resource management profession.

*'I don't think I chose human resource management; human resource management chose me. With learning and development moving into the human resource management value chain this has been identified as a human resource management function. I've always been in information technology, but in the last five years, I've been part of the human resource management practice' (RR)*

There are those whose tertiary education started in other fields or a similar area; however, they later ended up in the human resource management profession for their own reasons. For instance, Taylor Sandler (TS) stated:

*'I think human resource management chose me. I wasn't sure, initially, when I finished secondary school. I wasn't sure which field I wanted to go into. And I kind of fell into the bucket of legal so I studied law for a couple of years and then realised that it wasn't for me and decided to get some exposure into the working world and sort of stumbled upon human resource management in every job that I had had. And I think yeah, it was a path that I had followed and landed in' (TS)*

Tasha Arnolds (TA), who also started in the legal profession and found a calling in human resource management to make a difference, said:

*'You know because I started my career at the CCMA where I was actually introduced to Labour law and, I realised that there is... All the cases that we dealt with human resource management was at the centre. And I wanted to go into this field and make a difference. Cos, I think having started at the CCMA I realised that there are many tiny little mistakes that I know human resource management*

*is doing... So initially that was my calling, that I want to go into this field and make a difference. And teach them and... you know. So that's why I went there, to make a difference in terms of understanding the labour laws, the laws that governs your role as a human resource management' (TA)*

There are also those participants who had an interest in psychology, who made the association between human resource management and psychology, and therefore chose human resource management as a career choice, such as Delilah Short (DS):

*'So, I chose human resource management. And the reason being is that I've always been interested in psychology. So, what happened was with psychology I always wanted to understand the human mind and what was happening. But I also wanted to know why humans do and behave in a specific way within the workplace. At the time I didn't know the correlation between the two. I just knew I wanted to study psychology, I wanted to go into psychology. When I sat down with my dad, he said, "That is human resources. So, you want to know what happens in the workplace and you want to know what's the best output for human being based on the behaviour." And that's how I put the two together and realised that I'd like to do psychology in the workplace. Which is why I went the industrial psychology route and then into human resource management' (DS)*

Interestingly, 25% of the 12 participants in this group wanted to work with people and make a difference with people and therefore make a contribution, as mentioned by Duke Moore (DM):

*'For me, it's like enjoying working with the human interaction. And there's also a growth opportunity within human resource management departments. And, yeah, but I think it's more to do with the fact that you can work with the people in there. And that just makes the career interesting' (DM)*

Tanya Sable (TS) wanted to develop and grow individuals, thus contributing to the employee's career growth and development:

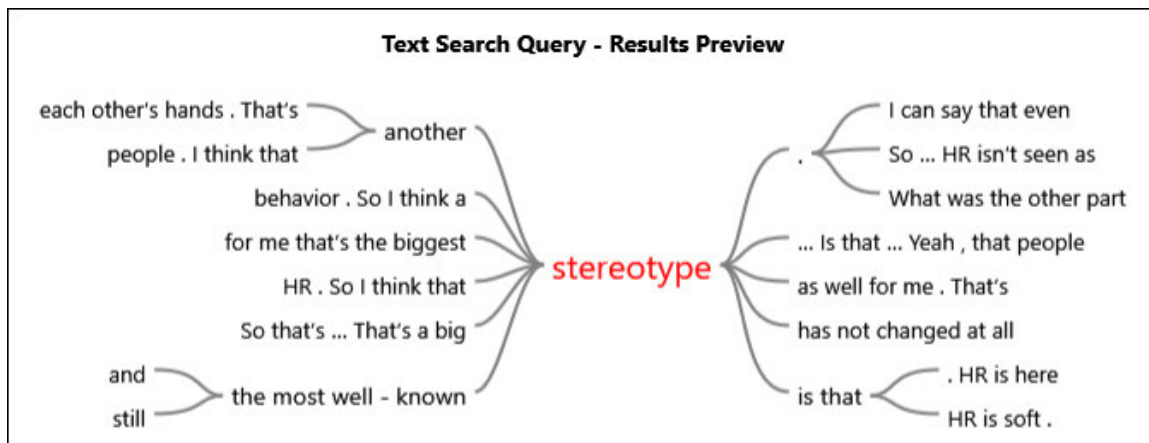
*'I think I have an interest in people. My interest is around growing and developing individuals' (TS)*

Kali Campbell (KC) loves working with people and therefore made a choice to work in the human resource management profession:

*'I love working with people' (KC)*

A common theme throughout these responses is that participants did not go to university with human resource management in mind or to study a human resource management degree to work in the human resource management profession. Over time they transitioned into human resource management, with no specific human resource management qualifications. All human resource management non-professionals had different journeys which led them to the human resource management profession. Furthermore, other professions such as information technology and the legal field had always been considered by these participants before human resource management.

Illustration 16: Stereotypes



Stereotypes associated with the human resource management profession are varied. However, the participants in this group believed that human resource management stereotypes affect the profession's reputation, and also influence whether people think that human resource management should be trusted and if this profession should be considered ethical in terms of their work practice. As Tasha Arnolds (TA) simply put it:

*'Nobody likes human resource management. There's a book or something. Someone has said that there's a book called, nobody likes human resource management or something' (TA)*

A prevalent human resource management stereotype is that this profession supports management and not the employees, which is further reinforced by Tanya Sable's (TS) statement:

*'In my opinion, I think a lot of people believe that human resource management is there for managers and not for employees necessarily. And they just do what the business asked them to do or what the organisation's asked them to do. I don't see a lot of opinion around where a human resource management person is supporting the employee, as such. Unless it's around policies and procedures and administrative kind of activities that are going to aid the employee while they're employed by the organisation' (TS)*

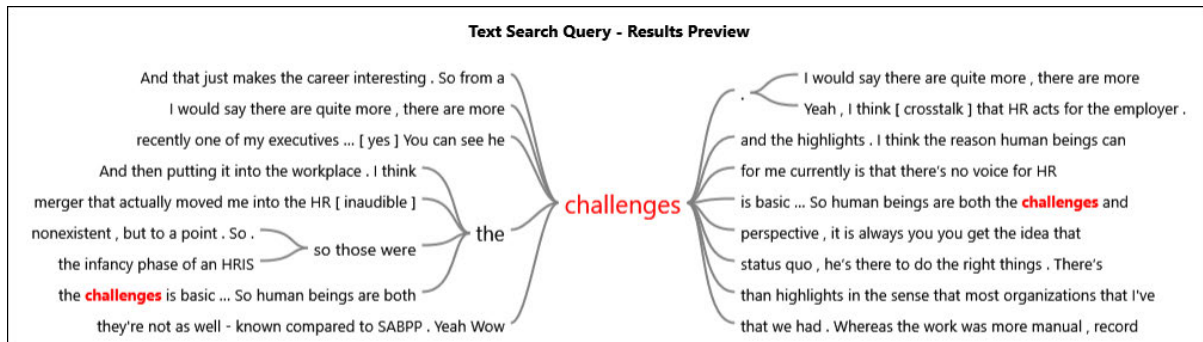
The stereotype that the human resource management profession is prejudiced against employees is further supported by Delilah Short (DS), as a human resource management consultant for two years in the financial sector and qualified in industrial psychology:

*'So, the stereotype for me is that human resource management is there for the managers. I feel that is such a hard thing...that needs to, you know it's ok, let me explain it this way. So, with the human resource management, walking into a human resource management role as a new employee in a company. The first and the most well-known stereotype is that human resource management is here for the leaders. They're never here for the people. They're going to do what they do for the for the managers and they're never going to take care of the people. And it's the most detrimental thing for the human mind because people learn to not trust human resource management. So, I think that stereotype has not changed at all over the years. It's still the most well-known stereotype. I can say that even from a human resource management point of view, we have the same outlook on our human resource management. Ja so, for me that's the biggest stereotype' (DS)*

The stereotypes associated with the human resource management profession have been around since the human resource management department transitioned from the payroll department to being a human resource management strategic partner and business leader. The most notable stereotype is that human resource management is biased against employees, instead of doing

the right thing for the right reasons and being neutral in business and employee decisions. This stereotype therefore presents challenges for the human resource management profession to perform as a business partner.

Illustration 17: Challenges

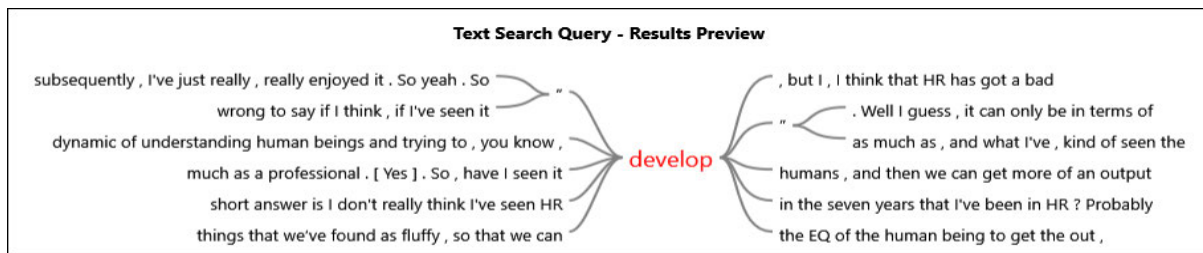


Due to stereotypes and the associated challenges, the human resource management profession does not always show the confidence required to make business decisions and therefore is not always respected by leadership. Mary Havana (MH) has been working for 37 years and has been a human resources manager for 16 years in the same financial sector. Consequently, her insights bear truth to the experience of a human resource management non-professional that has been in the human resource management profession for decades:

*'The challenges for me currently is that there's no voice for human resource in the organisation because they need to be dictators to what the business requires them to do. And they don't take ownership of their profession and that is the challenge...'* (MH)

From the various sub-themes that have been analysed thus far in this chapter, it was necessary to examine the development of human resource management as a profession to set the precedent, as it is significant and is also pertinent to the first research objective of this study. As a result, a discussion of how the human resource management profession has evolved and developed was presented as part of the literature review in Chapter Two of the dissertation.

## Illustration 18: Develop



Anne Yates (AY) and Duke Moore (DM) talked of the development of the human resource management profession from being a traditionally transactional department to supporting contemporary business strategy, and so moving from the personnel management to the human resource management department:

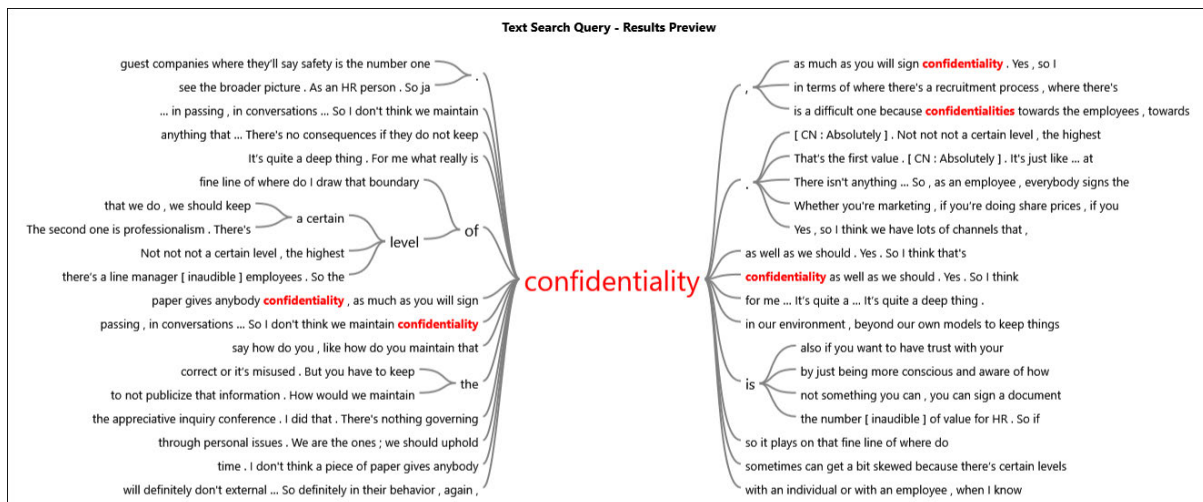
*'I think human resource management as a whole, is still very transactional, but I'm seeing in the company I am, there's shifts being made to move to more transformational work. And the more transformational work is coming when human resource management managers, for example, are willing to hold the conversations that normally typically OD would be brought to have with a team'* (AY),

*'So, I think it would depend how you look at it. So, from...in our previous world, the personnel manager, who has now evolved into a human resource management manager'* (DM)

### 6.7.2 Human resource ethics and King Reports

The second main theme of the four themed framework focused on human resource management ethics and the King Reports on Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016) as well as the terms associated with these themes, namely confidentiality, unethical behaviour, conflict, the King Reports, and the sub-theme challenges that emerged once again from the data collected in the interviews with this non-professional human resource management subgroup.

## Illustration 19: Confidentiality



Confidentiality is a crucial component of a human resource management profile at any level. This first participant group is not professionalised and therefore is not governed by standards or a code of conduct that would advise on ensuring confidentiality in the human resource management profession. This profession has low barriers of entry yet deals with confidential information and work situations that require confidentiality and privacy. This notion is supported by Rose Regan (RR), who has been working for 22 years and has been employed in human resource management for ten years:

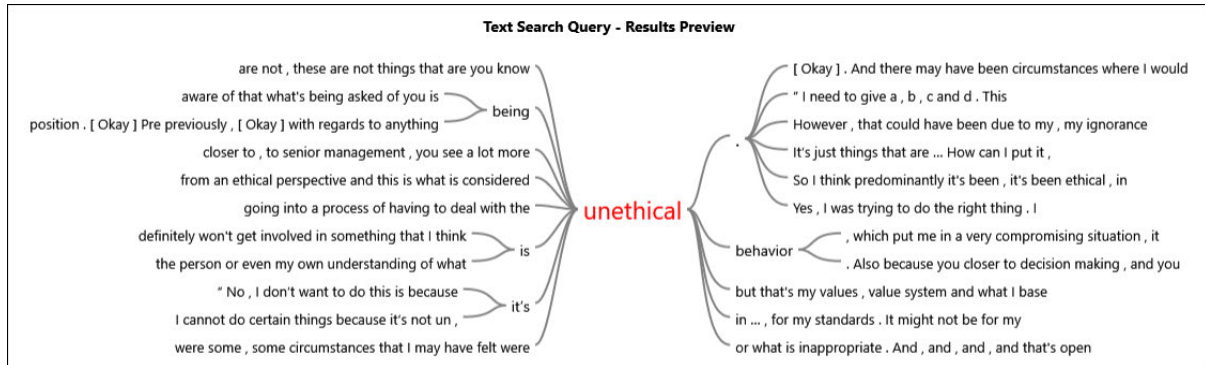
*'So definitely in their behaviour, confidentiality is not something you can sign a document and say, this is confidential, because it all is in whether you as an individual respects that and that, again, comes with credibility and comes with your behaviour and it's very much an individual thing, because in an organisation, you will know who to share and not share with and you'll learn this over time. I don't think a piece of paper gives anybody confidentiality, as much as you will sign for confidentiality' (RR)*

Consequently, one of the participants, Tanya Sable (TS), also mentioned that there are no repercussions for human resource management professionals when they break confidentiality:

*'So currently, one of the issues is that there are no consequences if they do not keep confidentiality. There isn't anything. So, as an employee, everybody signs the same non-disclosure agreement. But as a human resource management*

*professional, you don't sign a separate one that holds you accountable if you had to leak confidential information. So that's what's missing in my world' (TS)*

Illustration 20: Unethical



Some participants believed that behaviour could depend on an individual's choices, as suggested by Rose Regan (RR) in her comment on unethical behaviour. She advises that she personally chooses not to participate in unethical behaviour:

*'I think it's a value thing, so yes, I definitely won't get involved in something that I think is unethical but that's my values, value system, and what I base my value system on' (RR)*

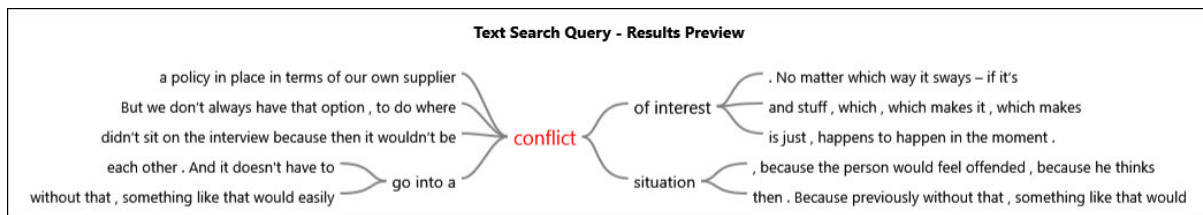
Another participant, Alvin Sandler (AS), also agreed that a human resource management professional does have a choice and can question instructions that seem unethical, instead of just following instructions blindly:

*'So, the short answer is no, I don't just follow orders. I ask a lot of questions, that is in my nature. I don't think that necessarily makes me a critical thinker, but I always will check something, and it might not be directly with that person who gives the order. It might be with someone else, you know, to double check' (AS)*

However, those participants in this group who have challenged unethical behaviour said that the decision to speak out has not been easy, and has come at a price to their careers, as was the case with Tasha Arnolds (TA):

*'I have and it has gotten me into so much trouble' (TA)*

## Illustration 21: Conflict



When a human resource management professional is conflicted in a work situation, their response to the problem is also dependent on management's influence on the outcome. Specifically, human resource management professionals should do the right thing for the right reasons. This is why there are consequences for some human resource management professionals, as policies and procedures do not always provide the necessary guidance, or they are merely overlooked with no consequence, as was the case with Anne Yates (AY):

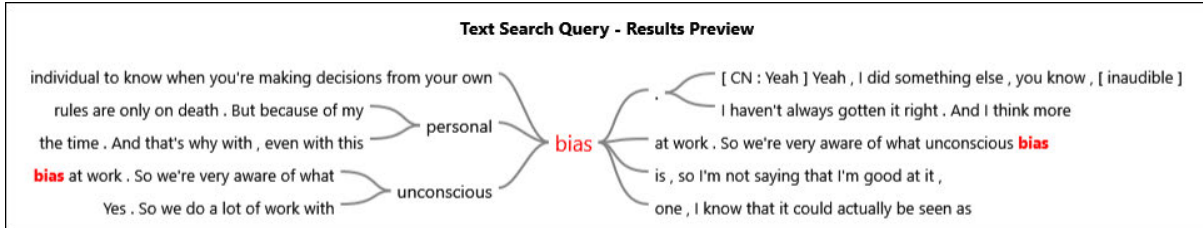
*'So even in my team I've seen when it hasn't been practiced and I've seen where our own recruitment process was side-lined with the blessing of our human resource management person because we needed to get a person in. So, I've seen how the human resource management policy wasn't followed, and how human resource management condoned it, like allowed it to happen. And I've also seen when it's been adhered to. Yeah. So, I think authority plays a big piece. If you're higher up and you have the authority to sign things off, it'll get signed off' (AY)*

Similarly, conflict of interest situations for the human resource management profession may also occur in recruitment situations. Therefore, human resource management does have the responsibility to apply themselves to do the right thing, as was the case with Delilah Short (DS) from her excerpt on the following page:

*'So, I've had an instant recently like that...we were interviewing learners. And we had the ability to pass the information through to family members and anybody that's interested and then get them to come for interviews. So, by default I had one of my family members that was chosen... and prior to the interview taking place and knowing that I had a family member that was going to be on the panel, that was going to be interviewed, I then asked to not be part of the interview. So, I didn't sit on the interview because then it would be conflict of interest. But we*

*don't always have that option...but if I have the ability to avoid it prior, I rather do it that way' (DS)*

Illustration 22: Bias



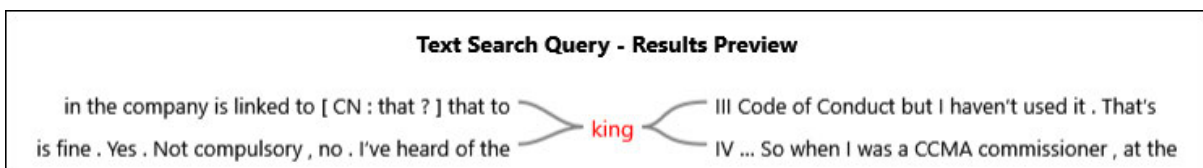
The same would apply to personal biases in professional situations, with limited guidance to human resource management professionals, who would have relied on their self-judgment in such problems in the workplace, as was the case with Heidi Jackson (HJ):

*'Yes...that came with experience. But yes, I have learned to put all biases aside and listen through everything, and then...come to a decision. Yes, experience helps, and then getting other people's input as well' (HJ)*

It was apparent that not only did qualifications appear as a sub-theme, but experience also emerged as a sub-theme, therefore knowledge gained over time (tenure) most certainly aids in making difficult decisions, as further supported by Taylor Sandler (TS):

*'So that's an interesting question because I've noticed that I've grown in that space personally, especially over the recent number of years. And I have been engaging with a lot of people that I would have thought I had a biased against, but I had to sort of invoke my professional way of working so that I do not, so that no one is prejudiced in the situation' (TS)*

Illustration 23: King Report on Corporate Governance



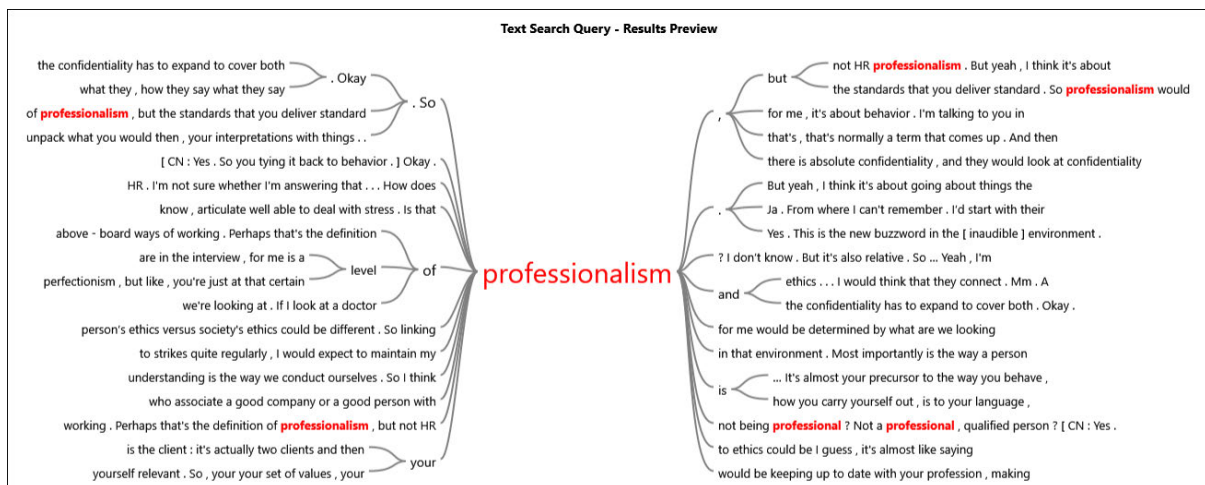
When referring to the King Reports on Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016) as a theme to human resource management non-professionals, most of the participants either had not heard of or have not needed to apply the reports' precepts in business, even though the King compliance reports apply to all JSE listed companies. In this regard, the responses by Duke Moore (DM), Rose Regan (RR), Tanya Sable (TS), Delilah Short (DS), Mary Havana (MH), Anne Yates (AY), Heidi Jackson (HJ), and Taylor Sandler (TS) were:

- ⇒ 'No, I haven't' (DM),
- ⇒ 'No' (RR),
- ⇒ 'I've heard of the King III Code of Conduct, but I haven't used it' (TS),
- ⇒ 'I remember this from shew, 3, 4, 5 years back. But I haven't used it' (DS),
- ⇒ 'I did. I don't have the details' (MH),
- ⇒ 'Yes, never read it' (AY),
- ⇒ 'I have but I don't know what it says' (HJ), and
- ⇒ 'Yes, I have heard of it' (TS)

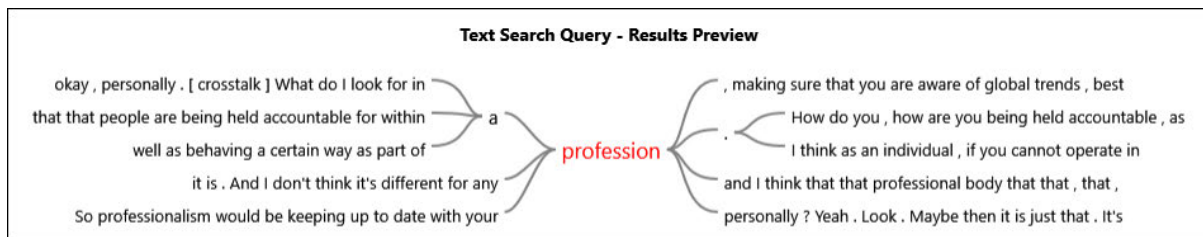
### 6.7.3 Human resource professionalism

The third theme of the four themed framework centred on human resource management professionalism and related sub-themes, thus understanding professions, ethics, VUCA, and respect as a behaviour associated with professionalism in the workplace.

Illustration 24: Professionalism



## Illustration 25: Profession



From the comments on professionalism, the collective consensus from human resource management non-professionals connects this theme to levels and standards that are global, such as belonging to a profession or a professional body, and behaviours related to professionalism, such as professional manner and being accountable. This is supported by the following comment from Duke Moore (DM):

*'That means is to keep a certain level of standards, whether it's world standards, or what's good for your company itself. But it's yeah, it's nice to keep that certain level of standards or quality standards' (TM)*

Rose Regan (RR) suggested that keeping up to date with global trends, best practices and behaviours that are related to professionalism are important themes that relate to the human resource management profession:

*'So, professionalism would be keeping up to date with your profession, making sure that you are aware of global trends, best practice, and yeah and as well as behaviour, as well as behaving a certain way as part of a profession. How you are being held accountable, as a professional' (RR)*

Tanya Sable (TS) commented on professional behaviour as being common to all professions, not just the human resource management profession:

*'But there's also the behaviour of professionals which is how as a doctor do you conduct yourself with a patient or with a client' (TS)*

Delilah Short (DS) suggested a connection with professionalism to a professional body, which maintains a code of conduct, and is supported by policies and guidelines for the human resource management profession:

*'So, for me professionalism is, it's governed by a body. There's a governing body around it. There's a certain code of conduct. There's certain policies and guidelines in terms of that. So that would... and then obviously in terms of these legalities' (DS)*

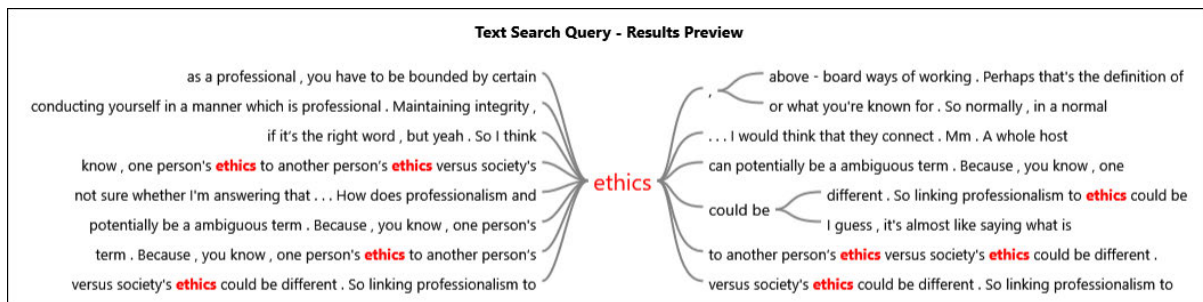
Mary Havana (MH) also connected professionalism to belonging to a professional body and therefore guiding human resource management professional conduct and principles:

*'What I understand about professionalism... you will belong to a body, and you will have to conduct yourself according to their principles' (MH)*

Lastly, Kali Campbell (KC) also associated professionalism with behaviour and having a professional manner, which is given and received in a work environment. There is a connection between professionalism and being taken seriously as a professional and therefore earning the respect of human resource management professionals:

*'So, professionalism, for me, it's about behaviour...and I wouldn't be lounging when I know that I have somebody there that I am talking to, you need to behave in a professional manner. And with everything it's about your whole personality needs to be, I don't know how to say this. You need to portray that image of yours in a professional manner, in order for the person to take you seriously, to give and receive the respect that one needs, in whatever it is that you're doing. You know, especially in human resource management' (KC)*

## Illustration 26: Ethics



Duke Moore (DM) explained that a human resource management professional is bound to display ethics; however, the connection to professionalism, ethics and values is based on the individual's ethics:

*'For me, it's very close in the fact that if you want to be reckoned as a professional, you have to be bounded by certain ethics, or what you're known for. So normally, in a normal working environment, people who associate a good company or a good person with professionalism, that's a term that comes up. And then when you delve deeper, you will find out that person is driven by certain values and by good ethical system' (DM)*

Rose Regan (RR) offered diverse sub-themes on what is professional, values and standards, accountability, as well as what an association with a professional body would mean to a human resource management professional:

*'Yes. Definitely, I think there needs to be a set of ethical standards ethical behaviour, that people are being held accountable for within a profession and I think that professional body...the specific professional body would have to uphold this, and make this and share this across the communities' (RR)*

One participant, Alvin Sandler (AS), explained that professionalism and ethics could be related to what could be considered professional or unprofessional, and therefore could be relative to a work environment and company culture:

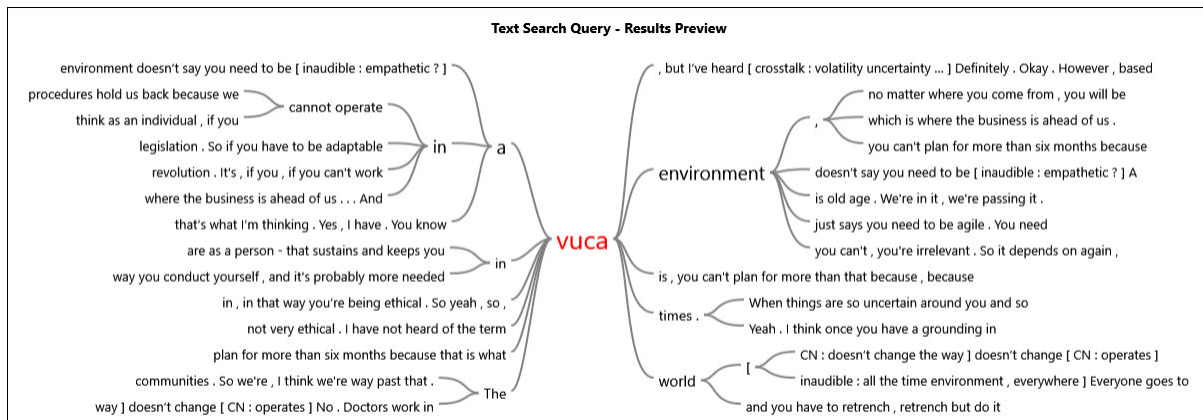
*'So, I think ethics can potentially be an ambiguous term. Because, you know, one person's ethics to another person's ethics versus society's ethics could be*

*different. So, linking professionalism to ethics could be I guess, it's almost like saying what is professional versus what isn't a professional. Giving someone a high five when you interview them, might be seen as unprofessional, but it also might be how a cool funky tech company wants people to remember them. So, I think it's potentially relative...'* (AS)

Conversely, another participant, Heidi Jackson (HJ), affirmed that she disagreed that there is a connection between professionalism and ethics. She explained her point by arguing that human resource management professionals can be professional, however, they can also be unethical:

*'No. Completely separate...I think it's completely separate. Ja, no, separate. The one is more to do with what is right and what is wrong. And the other one is more on how you do it. You can be very professional but completely unethical. So, ja, I don't believe it is. I actually find very unethical professional people in this company'* (HJ)

Illustration 27: VUCA



Human resource management non-professionals' perceptions of a VUCA environment is comprehensive. Rose Regan (RR) believes that VUCA is 'old age' and now with the fourth industrial revolution is the current trend. However, it is essential to note that the interviews were conducted pre-COVID-19. The COVID-19 global pandemic has created a VUCA environment on a different scale for the human resource management profession. Interestingly, this participant also referred to behaviours required to survive a VUCA environment, which include being agile and flexible with short-term planning, but most importantly, being flexible, regardless of one's profession:

*'The VUCA environment is old age. We're in it, we're passing it. It's the fourth revolution. It's if you can't work in a VUCA environment you can't, you're irrelevant. So, it depends on again, how agile are you? How flexible are you? And that's why, and that's why I say sometimes, our processes and our systems and our procedures hold us back because we cannot operate in a VUCA environment, which is where the business is ahead of us...and in a VUCA environment, you can't plan for more than six months because that is what VUCA is, you can't plan for more than that because the environment will change in three months, or six months. In fact, in the next week. So, we have to be agile enough and flexible enough to be able to adapt to our environment, whatever it is. And I don't think it's different for any profession. I think as an individual if you cannot operate in a VUCA environment, no matter where you come from, you will be irrelevant. And it's up to you to make yourself relevant' (RR)*

Tasha Arnolds (TA) supported Rose Regan's (RR) sentiments on being agile in a VUCA environment as a human resource management non-professional and also referred to being adaptable while maintaining ethical practices, bearing in mind South African legislation:

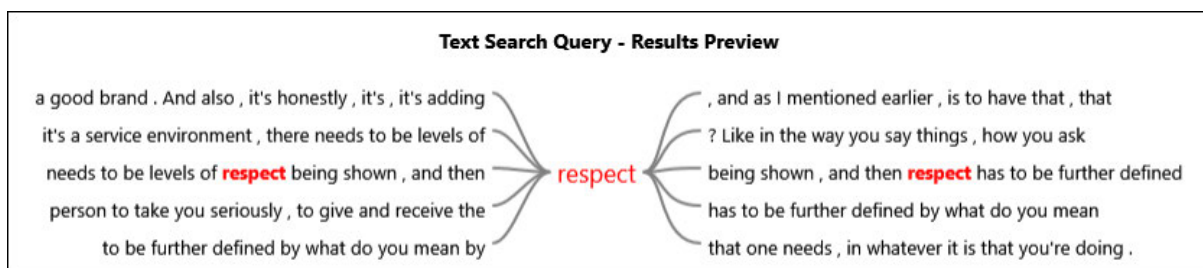
*'You know a VUCA environment doesn't say you need to be empathetic. A VUCA environment just says you need to be agile. You need to understand that there's a lot of things that are coming into the market. Like there's Airbnb there's Uber. It's more about research and development and making yourself relevant. It does not say that you have to be unethical. So, if you're in South Africa, make sure that you stick to the legislation. So, if you have to be adaptable in a VUCA world and you have to retrench, retrench but do it according to the Act. And that in that way you're being ethical. So yeah, so it's a VUCA world' (TA)*

Anne Yates (AY) similarly referred to being adaptable and mentioned preserving one's values during VUCA times, which would provide the solid base required for these times. This statement also supports an individual behaviour and choice, which is a sub-theme that emerged from the data, even though it was not questioned explicitly during the interview process. Anne Yates (AY) elaborated:

*'So, I think professionalism is it's almost your precursor to the way you behave, the way you conduct yourself, and it's probably more needed in VUCA times. Yeah, I think once you have a grounding in terms of your values and how you, who you are as a person, that sustains and keeps you in VUCA times. When things are so uncertain around you and so complex and so ever-changing, you need to have a solid base of who you are, still be adaptable in that. Yeah, so I think that would be because if you don't have a solid base of who you are as a person, then whatever is changing around you can very easily influence what you do and how you do it' (AY)*

Lastly, the other participants had heard of VUCA, however, they could not provide more detail but rather just acknowledged its relevance to these changing times in business.

Illustration 28: Respect



Respect is the last sub-theme in this third main theme of the four themed framework on human resource management professionalism. The participants mentioned respect when asked to define what they believe to be characteristics of professionalism. Therefore, the issues of trust, honesty and being respected are also connected to levels of professionalism. Duke Moore (DM) stated:

*'Okay, so for me, it's about trust, it's about a good brand. And also, it's honestly, it's adding respect, and as I mentioned earlier, is to have that, that certain level of I won't say perfectionism, but like, you're just at that certain level of professionalism, but the standards that you deliver' (DM)*

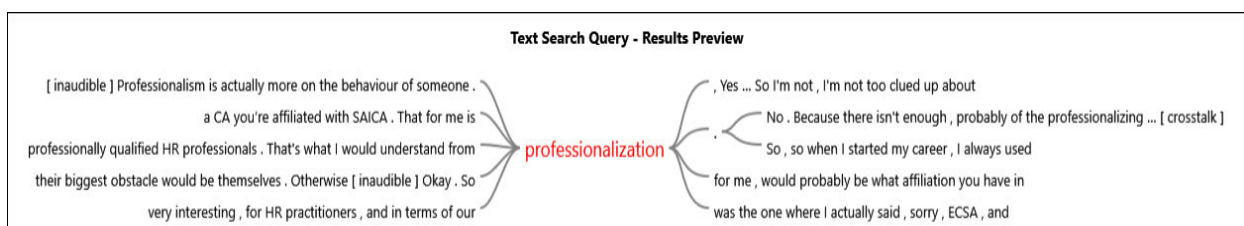
Anne Yates (AY) explained the characteristics quite simply, to maintain the trust and confidentiality that are also reciprocal sub-themes, together with honesty and standards:

*'So, I would come back down to the role...and then I would say in that environment, for example, if it's a service environment, there needs to be levels of respect being shown, and then respect has to be further defined by what do you mean by respect? Like in the way you say things, how you ask for things, allowing someone to finish their sentence...those would be things...you'd have to unpack what you would then, your interpretations with things. So, professionalism for me would be determined by what are we looking at, the role that we're looking at, in the industry we're looking at. If I look at a doctor's professionalism, there is absolute confidentiality, and they would look at confidentiality being alone with the patient. You look at business, it's different, because your client is not just the person in front of you. Like from an OD or coaching perspective, it's also the company. So, then you say who is the client, it's actually two clients and then your professionalism and the confidentiality has to expand to cover both' (AY)*

#### 6.7.4 Human resource professionalisation

This sub-section explores human resource management professionalisation from the point of view of those human resource management non-professionals who chose not to register with a professional body, such as the SABPP and IPM. The sub-themes that support this fourth and last main theme of the four themed framework are professionalisation, professional body and practice, together with attributes, ethics, and standards.

Illustration 29: Professionalisation



Understanding what professionalisation means to human resource management non-professionals includes sub-themes associated with local and international professions, as shared by Delilah Short (DS):

*'So professionalisation for me, would probably be what affiliation you have in terms of your current profession. So, for instance, are you affiliated, if you're a CA you're affiliated with SAICA. That for me is professionalisation' (DS)*

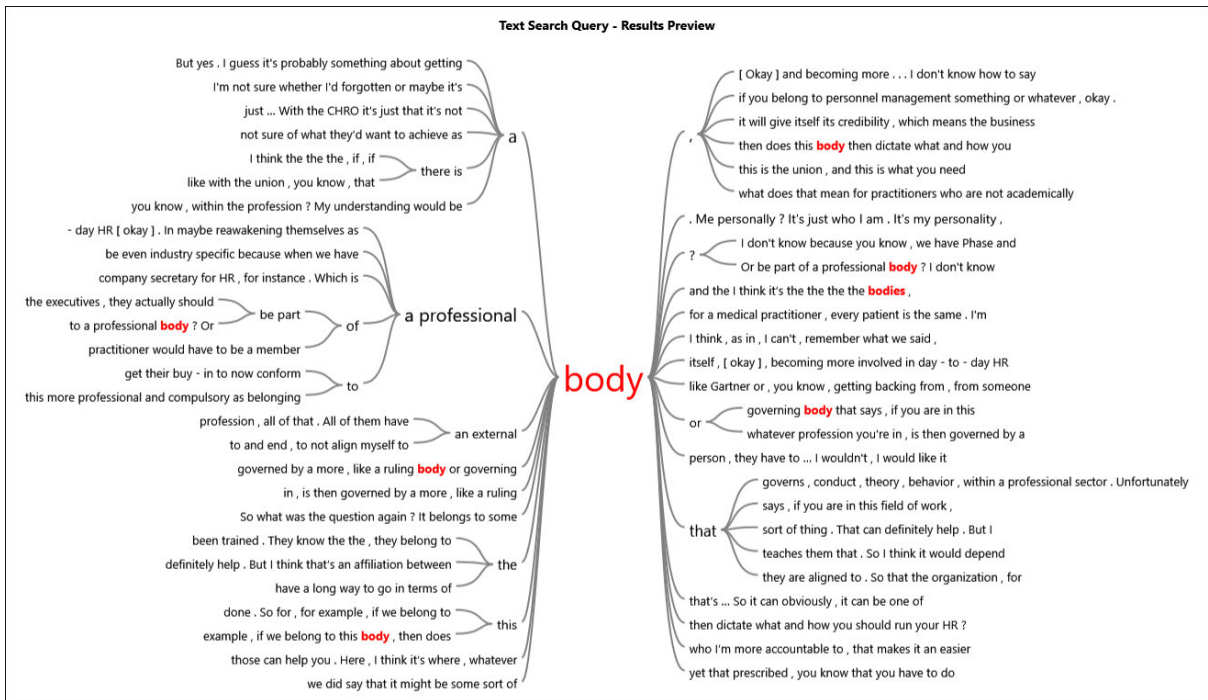
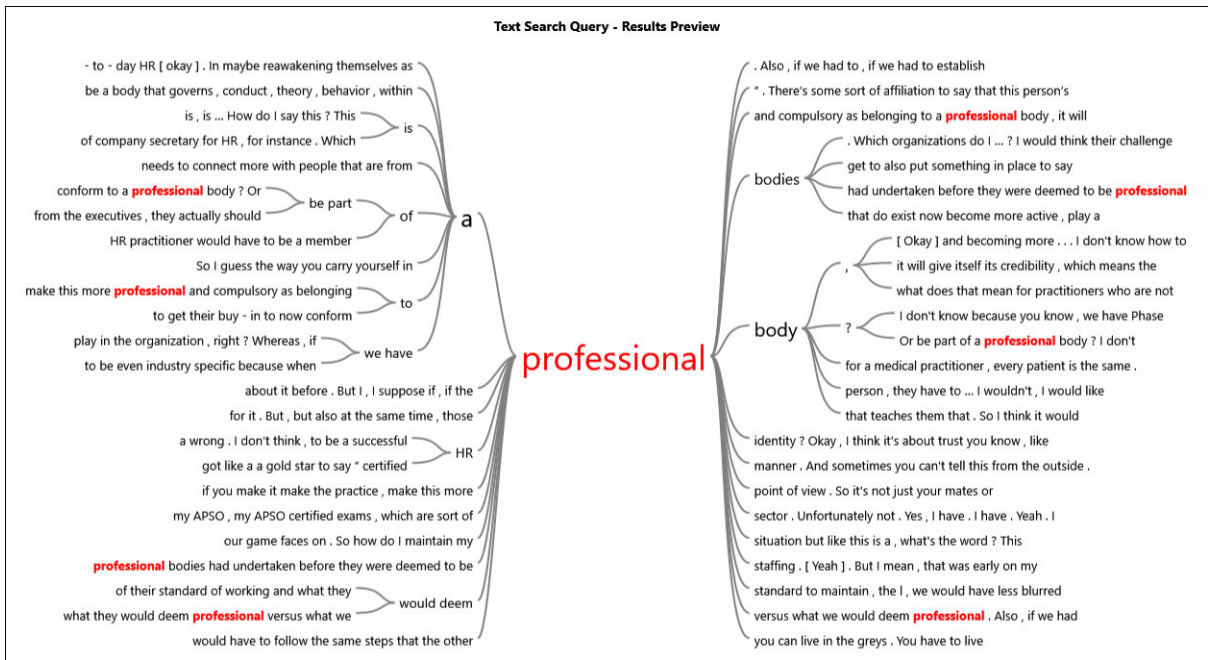
Tanya Sable (TS) explained that behaviours are linked to professionalism, therefore globally when individuals belong to a professional body, they have a better chance at career growth and development, which therefore provides career opportunities:

*'Professionalism is actually more on the behaviour of someone. Professionalisation was the Health Professions Council of South Africa, globally a lot of human resource management professionals, like even in Nigeria. If you are not linked to CIPD or you know something, they don't hire you' (TA)*

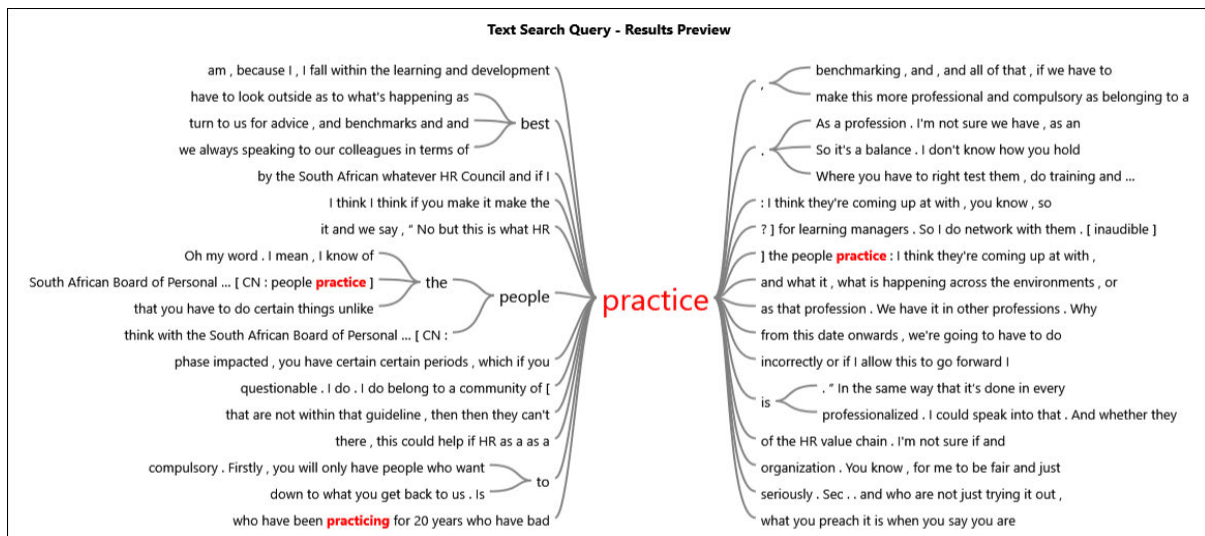
Heidi Jackson (HJ) clearly explained the association of qualifications and training required when going through the process of belonging to a professional body. Based on the process that needs to be followed to be professionalised, human resource management professionals would display levels of professionalism:

*'Well, what I quickly think of is that you would have a standard of qualifications for each, and courses that they would have to go through. And, she went through that, six months of this, in six months of that, and they are now professionally qualified human resource management professionals. That's what I would understand from professionalisation' (HJ)*

# Illustration 30: Professional body



### Illustration 31: Practice



Most of the participants are aware of the IPM and SABPP; however, they have limited knowledge of what is offered to human resource management professionals, as suggested by Heidi Jackson (HJ) and Mary Havana (MH):

⇒ ‘Yes. I don't know what they do. But I've heard it all’ (HJ)

⇒ ‘I've heard about them. I don't have a lot of knowledge about...’ (MH)

On the other hand, the participants who did understand what professional bodies offer explained it from a different perspective in that not all human resource management professionals would want to belong to a professional body. However, Rose Regan (RR) did clarify that there would need to be a balance, as there are pros and cons:

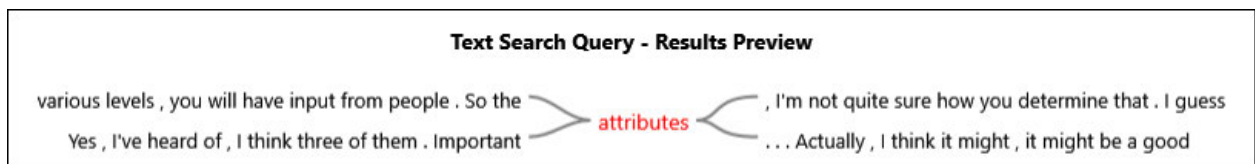
*‘There are people in the profession for over 20 years. How are you going to get their buy-in to now conform to a professional body? Or be part of a professional body...we can't put everybody through it. It's condescending to some people. It is offensive to some people, but you also have people who have been practicing for 20 years who have bad practice. So, it's a balance. I don't know how you hold people accountable, who are executives and have been doing this for 30 years and think they're doing a good job and when they are actually not. Or you have somebody who's coming in and he's at first or second year and actually needs the guidelines because they shouldn't be picking up those bad habits from the*

*executives, they actually should be part of a professional body that teaches them that' (RR)*

Nevertheless, other participants, such as Delilah Short (DS), admit that professional bodies have done a fair amount of work and acknowledge that they would have something to offer as a good start if human resource management is professionalised in South Africa:

*'I think they've done the groundwork. We don't need to redo work, that they've done. We can just obviously leverage from there and build from there. So, I definitely think we could use, we can use the ones that are in its systems already' (DS)*

Illustration 32: Attributes



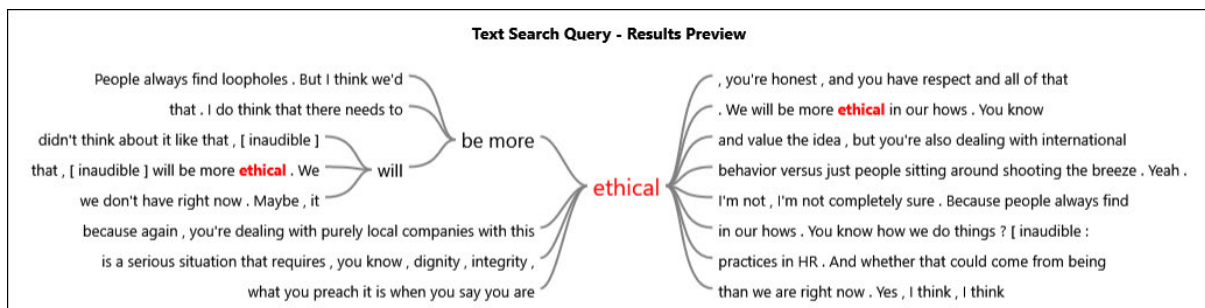
The attributes in job specifications when recruiting professionals is relevant. Hence, in this research the qualities required by human resource management professionals as identified by members of this group are professional manners, as indicated by Rose Regan (RR):

*'So, I guess the way you carry yourself in a professional manner. And sometimes you can't tell this from the outside. I mean, we all have psychometric assessments, and all these assessments, personality assessments, and all of that, that we, that we use as guidelines again, they're not, they're not the only criteria for hiring somebody. And as I said, earlier on, we work very much on a culture fit. So, we kind of have a culture fit interview, together, and in there's maybe three or four levels of interviewing. So, at various levels, you will have input from people. So, the attributes...you carry yourself out well in an interview, but you could be quite a misfit. Because you just know, well, you just know how to interview well' (RR)*

Consequently, individual behaviours such as respect, communication, attention to detail, and the ability to maintain confidentiality are considered to be important attributes, as cited by Kali Campbell (KC):

*'It's respect. It's being able to communicate at all levels. Very important is attention to detail, especially when you're dealing with documentation regarding individuals, your salary and personal information. Yeah, stuff like that's important. There must be a word for something like that, but I don't know. I think attention to detail, yeah. because it's, it's a lot of confidential information'* (KC)

Illustration 33: Ethical



Ethical practice is a sub-theme that connects all the main themes within the four themed framework, specifically if human resource management is professionalised in South Africa. Human resource management non-professionals do stand up against unethical behaviour and the consequences, as stated by Tanya Sable (TS):

*'If I'm now, today, faced with an issue where a manager within my employment, asked me to do something that I believe is unethical right, I am only accountable to my organisation who pays my salary. So, I will do what I have to do to keep my job. However, if I have an understanding of my career to come to an end, to not align myself to an external bodies which I'm more accountable to, that makes it an easier discussion for me to tell I'm sorry Mr Manager, I am governed by the South African whatever human resource management Council and if I practice incorrectly or if I allow this to go forward, I will lose my license as a practitioner. It's a different mindset. It changes the way you think about what you do'* (TG)



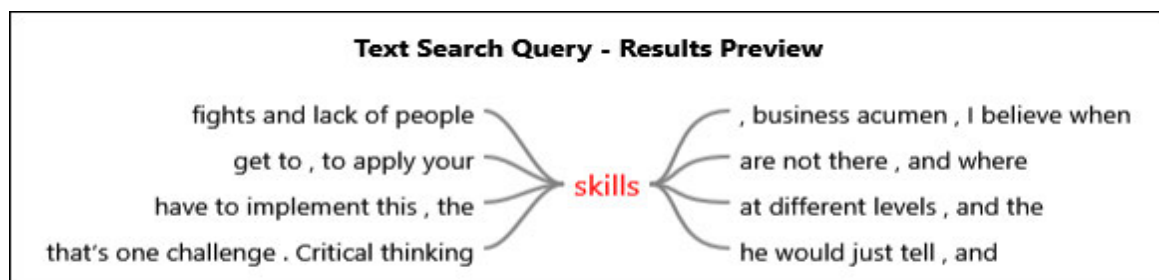
## 6.8 Human resource professionals

The second set of findings to be presented in this section focuses on the views of human resource management professionals registered with local human resource management related professional bodies, including the HPCSA, SIOPSA, SABPP or IPM. Since human resource management is not compulsorily professionalised in South Africa, the four themed framework created for the purpose of this study proved to be significant when responding to the research objectives. Text search in NVivo was used to focus on the five core sub-themes identified per main theme in the four themed framework. The following subsections explore the human resource management professionals' views of the five core sub-themes associated with each main theme that were identified in the data.

### 6.8.1 General human resource management

During the semi-structured interviews, human resource management professional participants communicated their backgrounds, why they chose human resource management as a career, what they understood by being a human resource generalist, and the skills required to be a generalist. For this part of the presentation of the findings, the following sub-themes were identified for human resource management professionals that responded to questions on what general human resource management is. The emerging sub-themes include skills, qualifications, psychology, stereotypes, and challenges.

Illustration 35: Skills



Attributes are qualities that an employee brings to a job, and skills refer to the employee's ability to apply themselves in that job. The participants were questioned about their views of the skills they believed would be required to be a successful generalist. Common answers included business understanding, critical thinking, communication, empathy, emotional intelligence, resilience and, most importantly, detachment from negativity in the workplace. Cultural intelligence and a global mind-set were also mentioned as crucial in terms of inter-

relations across cultures, especially when working in international organisations. When people enter the human resource management profession, they underestimate the job strain; thus, a lack of skills will impact those in this profession and the clients they support. From the comments elicited from this group of participants, it is evident that human resource management is not always prepared for the complexity faced in certain circumstances. In addition, tertiary education does not necessarily endorse the fostering and development of skills required for the human resource management profession. Margret Matsheka (MM) shared her sentiments on the key skills required:

*'Having business understanding and being able to advise the business in a way that business opportunity grows and if it means that an education that needs to be done with your business partners...being an human resource management person of saying I understand and when I come up with a suggestion to say this is how you can achieve it and if you go that way I believe even having conversations that show our business partners we understand what you are talking about if it means that then our partners need to realise that they don't know the business, that's one challenge. Critical thinking skills and business acumen, I believe when you get those two. Communication is important. Inter-relations is important, cause if you don't understand this, you communicate in French, in Spanish whatever but when you communicate, you will then earn the respect of your colleagues or your peers to the point where if they meet a broken imagine of you they won't even believe it because they are hearing that substance of what you are saying' (MM)*

Ronald Phillips (RP) contributed with a detailed and pertinent response to the question on skills:

*'I think today's time, a couple of things, I think, number one, and the biggest one for me is empathy. People need to not be able to not just fit the cliché or put yourself in somebody else's shoes, I think it's become a cliché, people just say that, but they don't understand what they're saying. And what empathy really means. So, for me, and what's shocking, I don't think I can stand corrected as far as I know. I don't think in human resource management degrees at the university, that the university and colleges all focusing on these top necessary skills that*

*people need when they come out of university. Now, the first one I said to you is empathy. 'The second one, I think, is emotional intelligence. Human resource management professionals need to have emotional intelligence. But they also, especially because of globalization, and because the world is so interconnected, need to be culturally intelligent. Now, culturally intelligent, diversity and inclusive. And all of that is wonderful. But it's a subcomponent of culture, intelligent patterns are much broader than that you can bring in the millennials and generational cultures, and all of that is cultural intelligence. So, a human resource management professional needs to think with a global mindset, almost tunnel vision in situations. I think, really, really important, which I find that people who have gone into human resource management, didn't realize how taxing the profession is specifically on their emotional and mental wellbeing... So, I said, empathy, emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, global mindset, resilience, and the ability to detach from negativity, I would think those would be fundamentally important. And I think this is an overall key one, but you just got to have a problem-solving mindset...So don't be too soppy. And so, on the people side, don't be too technical and focus on the numbers. It's a balancing act. It's a huge balancing act that you have to do in human resources...and then some were number crunchers. And they detached in the workplace...you can't show compassion, empathy detached emotions...these the funny parts of human resource management, the things that we have to do that's part of the job, it begins to eat you up...' (RP)*

Illustration 36: Qualification



Qualifications appeared as a sub-theme in the first set of findings with human resource management non-professionals, as well as in the data obtained in the semi-structured interviews

with human resource management professionals. Qualifications, as well as on-the-job learning are essential, as mentioned by Katie Mabee (KM) and Habiba Karim (HK):

*'First of all, for you to have a qualification in human resource management because without qualifications you don't have the knowledge of human resource management. It starts there and now that there is a SABPP as a professional body being there, who has developed the national human resource management standards and most of the universities are credited by SABPP with each curriculum, and why because they incorporated their standards into their curriculum and a student tells the University, whereby human resource management is accredited by the SABPP. We know the standards we have been introduced to, so when they go to work now and start their employment journey now, they are already for the workplace because they have that knowledge in human resource management. You speak about 13 standards, but they don't know the transactional human resource management that has happened in the past when you speak about the strategic human resource management. Over and above studying human resource management, I fell in love with human resource management, and my main interest in human resource management is training and development. Yes, so that's what I did previously before I got involved in research, I mainly dealt with training' (KM)*

*'It will be qualification but also skills that you learn on the job, and theory can only go that far' (MM)*

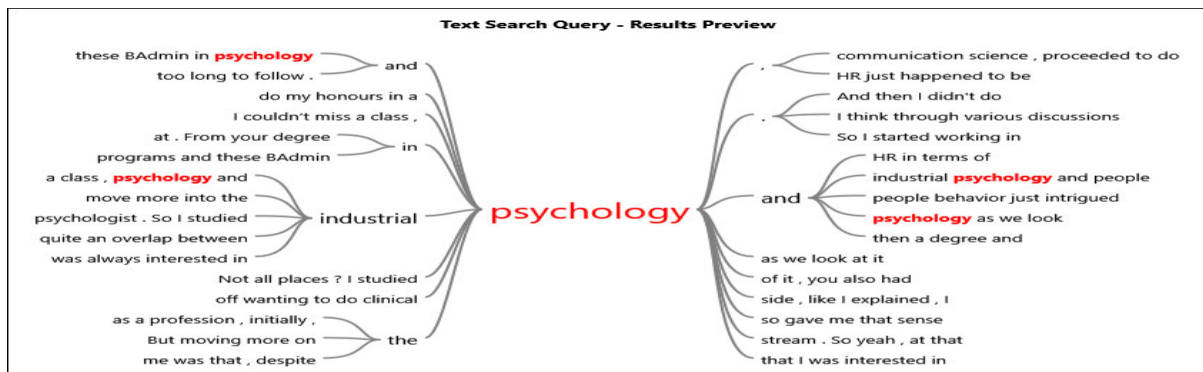
Since this participant group comprised of human resource professionals who belong to professional bodies, their reference to professional standards and continuing professional development points that are required for continuous learning is not surprising and is important for the professional development of the human resource management profession.

In this regard Mbali Msibi (MM) stated:

*'So, it's becoming for me...it is a profession because I feel that more and more people with human resource management qualifications to be able to do the work that needs to be done. And to do it effectively. And I think also with SABPP and*

*IPM, they also kind of professionalised the human resource management profession, and, you know, create a set of standards that people are working towards, also to keep up to date, like how, with the health professions, you've got continuing professional development points, for example, to get people to also keep up to date with what's happening in the human resource management world. So, to govern that. And when you start doing that, then, you know, you start to merge from just the admin role, now more of a profession' (HK)*

Illustration 37: Psychology



As with human resource management non-professionals, human resource management professionals that belong to a professional body also found themselves initially studying other subjects, such as psychology, which is human resource management adjacent, as there are no specific human resource management qualifications required to work in a human resource management department, as mentioned by Steven Nxele (SN) and Lexi Mace (LM):

*'From your degree in psychology, communication science I proceeded to do my honours in psychology. So, I started working in a government department...in the field of human resources, as well as public relations with my communications module. And then I moved straight to human resource management afterward...as the Head of Talent Management at the time as Public Affairs as they called it. Both for internal as well as external public clients...and then after I moved to... human resource management consultant, as it's been about three years with the telco region then human resource management generalist, but also career management, and...then at head office as the Group Talent Specialist...now Head of human resource management taking care of talent, we call it Human Capital' (SN)*

*'I wanted to be an industrial psychologist. So, I studied industrial psychology, human resource management just happened to be where I got my first job. That's how I stayed in human resource management. So, it wasn't like studying' (LM)*

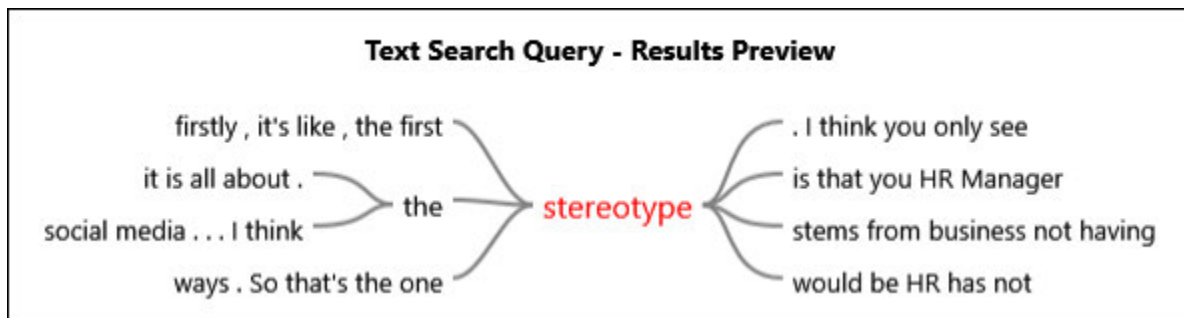
Since there are no specific human resource management qualifications required to work in the human resource management profession, eventually these participants gravitated towards human resource management, as was the case with Margret Matsheka (MM):

*'In the queue when we were going to register, I looked at these other programmes and these BAdmin in psychology and psychology as we look at it has to do with people. I didn't understand much then, but I knew. So, I changed my mind in the queue then and I was admitted. And I loved it from the word go, I loved it. I couldn't miss a class, psychology, and industrial psychology and people's behaviour just intrigued me, all the theories we studied. I think that this will keep me in the arena of working with people and in the process and I also did so well, I got a bursary. In 2nd year I got picked up for a bursary...and so during holidays I had the opportunity to go work there on an internship in Personnel Management' (MM)*

Diana Mason (DM) also agreed that human resource management was not her first choice as a profession; however, her need to help people and her choice to study psychology led her to human resource management as a career choice and profession:

*'Well, I had, I think I first got into wanting to study sciences to get into medicine. So, I started with wanting to do something to help people. And when I was on campus and stuck in chemistry and biology, I realized quickly that it was too long to follow. And psychology so gave me that sense instead, I was adding value to someone's life. Yes, I started off wanting to do clinical psychology. I think through various discussions with relatives, friends, steered me away from clinical more into the industrial and organisational, just because for the pure relevance of the topic, I think, what excited me was that, despite the psychology of it, you also had to step into business and the numbers and profitability and things that people always need. So, organisational relevance, you know, that that was something for me, that would always be in demand. So that's why I got into it' (DP)*

Illustration 38: Stereotypes



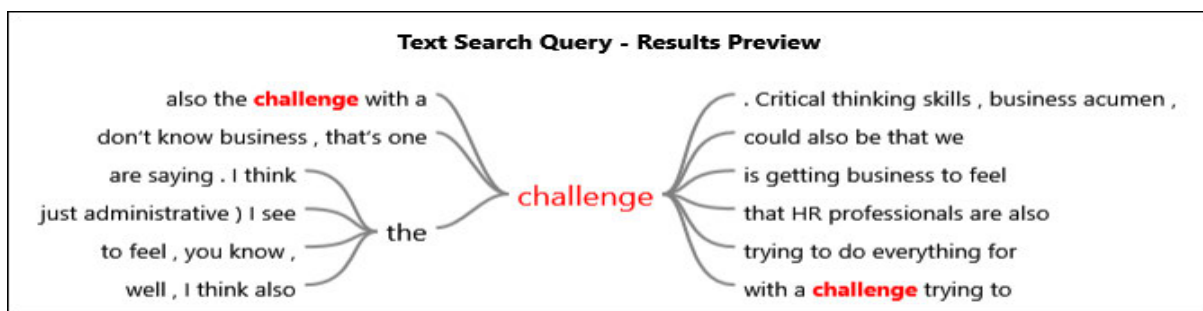
Stereotypes are also a sub-theme that is prevalent with human resource management professionals, though, in this participant group, the stereotypes refer to how business and clients classify human resource management, as well as associating the human resource management department with what it once was, that is, the payroll and administration department, as commented by Katherine Sawyer (KS):

*'I think the stereotype stems from business not having an understanding of what the profession is all about. And I don't know if it's because human resource management has failed in teaching business, what it is all about. The stereotype would be that human resource management has not been considered a profession as much as other professions, like, if you think about the engineers in the business or the finance persons in the business. And that is why you see a lot of finance people being finance and human resource management, simply because they run their payroll. But they're not human capital. They're not human resource management, as is to make sure that payment is made. But then they get lumped with the human resource management role, and they have absolutely no idea what it is all about, but they call themselves human resources or finance, I find that finance and human resource management get lumped together by virtue of the transactional requirement that finance has to do in payments'* (KS)

Business does not always understand the human resource management value chain. Human resource management is labelled and therefore stereotyped based on their interactions with business, with no understanding of the strategic support that human resource management has to offer, as stated by Habiba Karim (HK):

*'I think they firstly, it's like, the first stereotype is that your human resource management manager is there just to do your admin work, okay. So that your business or client will only come to if and when they need you. Then it depends on the area that you're working in, like, if your areas are very intense in terms of recruitment, they then start seeing you as a recruitment consultant. If you're areas varied, you know, these a lot of IR stuff, they start seeing you as an IR consultant, not really as a generalist who can do multiple things and add value in multiple ways. So that's the one stereotype' (HK)*

Illustration 39: Challenges



When questioned about the challenges that human resource management experiences, the participants recognised that the SABPP has previously applied for professionalisation, which was not approved and has therefore been a challenge for the profession, as mentioned by Alison Moody (AM):

*'You know, I think some of the challenges is there was a SABPP submitted quite a few years ago, a whole white paper, and it wasn't approved' (AM)*

The responses on challenges and stereotypes overlap, which are 'just administrative' and 'don't know the businesses'. This makes sense as the stereotypes that are associated with human resource management make working in human resource management challenging sometimes. Businesses influence how human resource management operates on a day-to-day basis, which also proves to be challenging since business respect is fundamental to getting the job done, as expressed by Lexi Mace (LM):

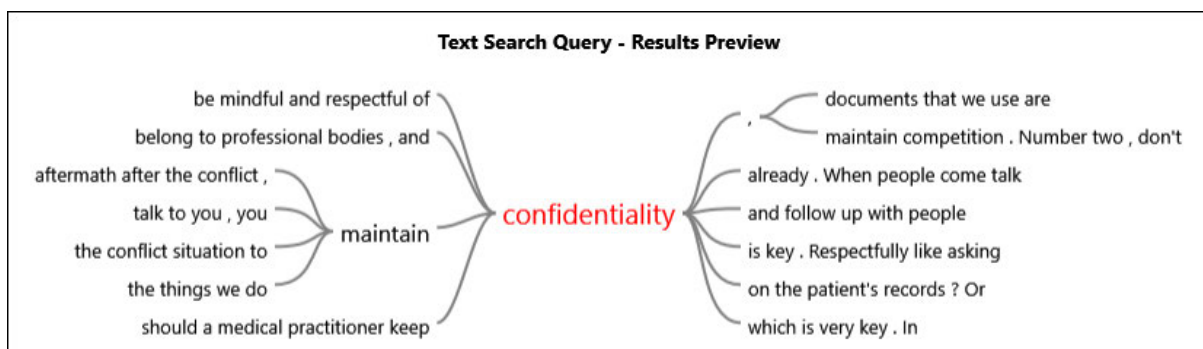
*'I think when you go with a business partner model, you are as good as the business deems you to be good, which comes with its own challenges. If a business*

*doesn't like you, then you're not a business partner, then you're not effective. So, it almost makes people want to be what the business wants them to be because that's how we judge your effectiveness. Okay, so we now more influenced by the business, than we more influence, but it's because we now want to be seen as business partners' (LM)*

## 6.8.2 Human resource ethics and King Reports

The second main theme of the four themed framework concentrated on what these professionals comprehend about human resource management ethics and the King Reports for Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016). In this section, the NVivo text search revealed five sub-themes: confidentiality, unethical, conflict, bias, and King Reports.

Illustration 40: Confidentiality



Maintaining confidentiality is not always about the information shared in the boardroom, personal information, or salaries, but the expectation of all human resource management professionals to always be conscious of what they say, and how and when they say it, even in general conversation, as mentioned by Lexi Mace (LM):

*'I think some of the things we do maintain confidentiality already. When people come to talk to you, you maintain confidentiality, documents that we use are confidential, salaries are confidential, most of what we do is still keeping confidentiality' (LM)*

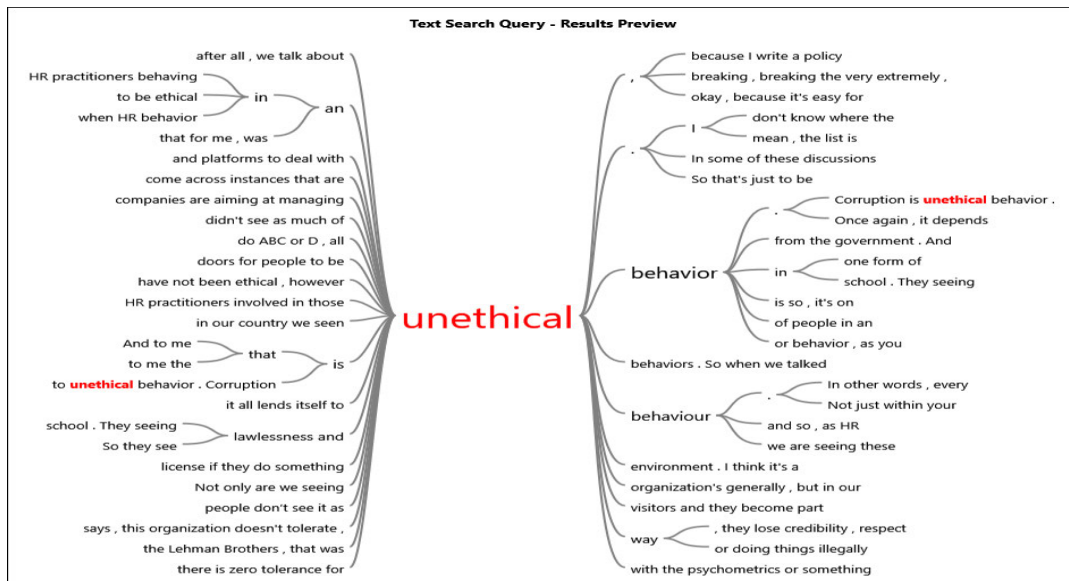
Human resource management non-professionals and human resource management professionals share the value of confidentiality in the human resource management profession, regardless of whether or not they are professionalised, as stated by Diana Mason (DP):

*'I mean with human resource management, everything is confidential. So especially around certain topics. Know whom you're speaking to know what you're speaking about. Don't you know, it's the simplest of things sharing opinions on the simplest of things can be very damaging. So, you have to do everything you do' (DP)*

Katerina Sawyer (KS) shared similar sentiments:

*'Human resource management, like other professions, belong to professional bodies, and confidentiality is key. Respectfully like asking me, how should a medical practitioner keep confidentiality on the patient's records or a clinical psychologist. So, it's a given. For me, it's almost like it's a given. Why would they not, so why would they not' (KS)*

Illustration 41: Unethical



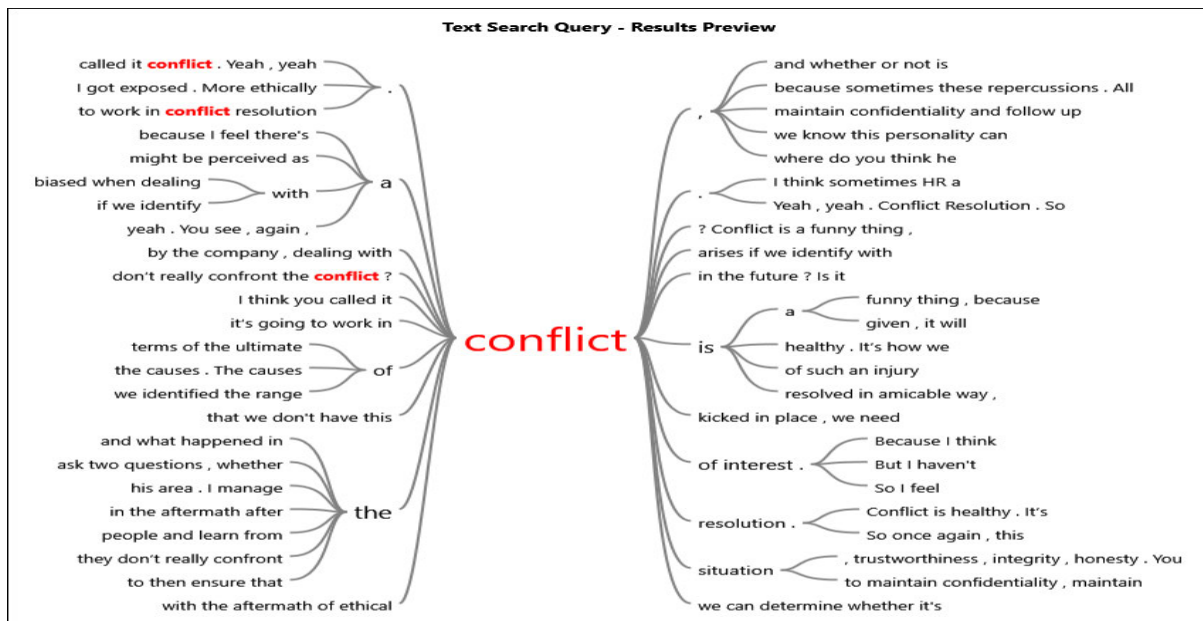
Unethical behaviour is often associated with the human resource management practice. Notably, with the pace of technology and social media this unethical behaviour has become more evident and incidences of this type of behaviour become available for public consumption, as mentioned by Katie Mabee (KM):

*'It is a huge challenge, organisations have not been ethical, however unethical behaviour is so, it's on the high. There is still a lot to be done. Ok let me talk about the SABC issue, do you remember it? Three journalists were dismissed, I mean it's human resource management. Human resource management should have said we can't do this, they are procedures, and the process is to be followed, therefore no I won't do that. The question of unethical is doing what we know is wrong, giving wrong advice to the employer instead of saying no this is what you need to do, it cannot happen that way, so we need to follow the processes. So, human resource management in most of the cases is involved' (KM)*

Consequently, based on the participants' experiences, it is believed that human resource management's reputation is at risk, as indicated by Alison Moody (AM):

*'I think sometimes if an Executive decides they don't like a person anymore, human resource management must make a plan to get rid of the person, and if a human resource management person is not skilled in managing that in terms of the ethics, but also the legal requirements and processes in our country, it becomes very challenging for human resource management to get credibility because they don't have the legs to stand on. And can highlight the business risks, and that's why the business acumen is so important that people for the human resource management person can analyse the actual impact of such decisions. And also, when we look back to reputation because nowadays, everything goes to social media' (AM)*

Illustration 42: Conflict



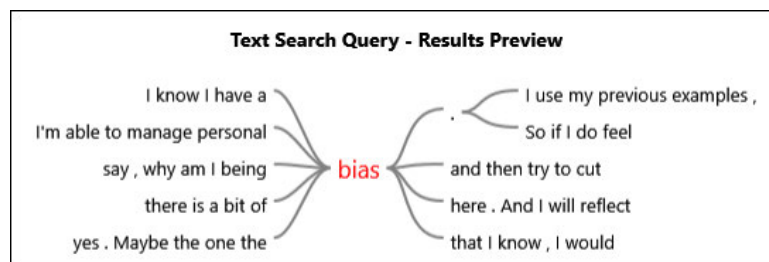
Thus, unethical behaviour, together with conflict as a sub-theme, affects human resource management's reputation and has more significant repercussions on how human resource management can operate with business, causing distrust and lack of professionalism, which was expressed by Katie Mabee (KM):

*'Human resource management should always be upfront, should always be ethical. Do not be biased when dealing with a conflict situation, trustworthiness, integrity, and honesty. You need to instil that at all times. Sometimes, all of the cases are difficult, but sit down and think back. Do I feel ok about it or not, with this decision, will I sleep at night or not, do what is right. They need to be honest with themselves, they need to be honest with the profession because I am saying many things are going wrong because human resource management is quiet. Human resource management voice is not heard outside there. In fact, someone told me that one union guy went to address them and was addressing human resource management professionals, and he said to them, 'you human resource management people are useless, I disregard you because things are going wrong, and you are just quiet'. So, it is a shame that the union is telling human resource management professionals, I would be ashamed of myself really' (KM)*

Neelan Vaughn (NV) explained in detail that ethics and solving conflict is essential, including the support required after a situation has occurred and the actions that should follow:

*'You see, we need to ask two questions, whether the conflict arises if we identify with the conflict, we need to then say because of ethics and the role of human resource management we need to ensure then that the conflict is resolved in an amicable way, Yes, okay. Fairness should be applied in the process. And also, the company's policies and procedures will be kept in mind to say, we are following the governance that being said by the company, dealing with conflict, we know this personality can we identified the range of conflict we can determine whether it's serious or can be a minor thing, but it needs to be resolved. In dealing with the aftermath of ethical conflict, because sometimes these repercussions...does it have an impact on the business and the conflicts of such a nature that is detrimental to the organisation, we need to say then, okay, that's what the parties are on the table for the discussion together. And so, you know what, this is no good for the institution. How can we put a remediation process in place? I think remediation is very critical. And the second part is to say, how do we prevent this going further and that ties back to your previous statement of being proactive'*  
(NV)

Illustration 43: Bias



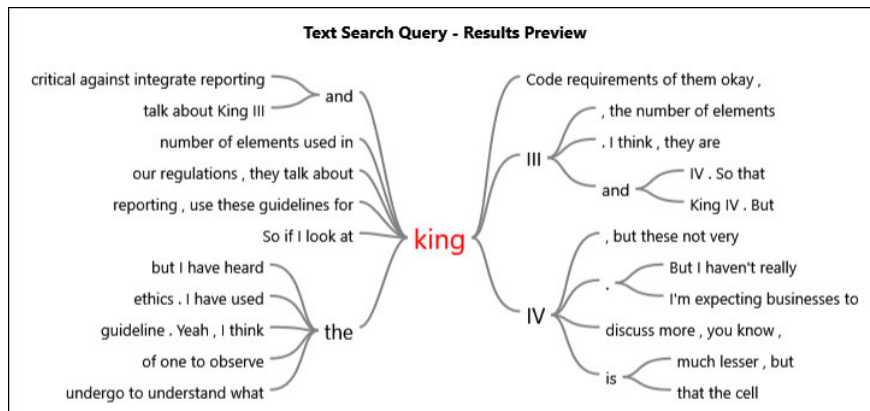
Most human resource management professionals that responded to the questioning on personal bias believed that they could manage their preference; however, Lexi Mace (LM), an industrial psychologist who worked as a human resource management generalist, admitted that people would want to say that they can manage their bias if they are aware of it:

*'All of us would love to say yes, maybe of a bias that I know, I would manage. I don't know, sometimes I will manage if I know I have a bias's* (LM)

Another industrial psychologist, Habiba Karim (HK), stated that she is conscious of her biases. Due to her high levels of emotional intelligence, she can remove herself from a situation if she feels that she cannot be objective:

*'I am the sort of person that is very, very conscious. So, if I feel a certain way about something, I'm very conscious about why I am feeling that way, am I biased? Do I know, am I going towards one direction because of my viewpoint of you know, perceptions, or whatever. So, I'm able to introspect very well and am very conscious about how I come across to other people, this comes to my EQ, which is very high in that sense. So, I'm able to manage personal bias. So, if I do feel that I'm being biased, I'm able to pick up on it very quickly, and then nip it in the bud. So, if I feel that, listen, there is a bit of bias here, and I will reflect and say, why am I being biased and then try to cut that out and be objective. If I feel I can't do that, I remove myself from the situation and say I can't make a decision on this, because I'm not completely objective' (HK)*

Illustration 44: King Report on Corporate Governance



The last of the five sub-themes for human resource management ethics and the King Reports (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016) relates to whether human resource management professionals who belong to a professional body are aware of the King Reports. Unlike the human resource management non-professionals who mainly were unaware of the King Reports, this professional participant group included individuals who had used the King Reports due to their work portfolios. For instance, Katie Mabee (KM) said the following:

*'I have used the King IV, mainly on governance issues, it gives a clear direction, guidance on how to go about it. These an article I wrote three weeks ago, which is on governance, and I did quote King IV there, and I related it to what I was talking about because it gives us a clear guidance' (KM)*

Margret Matsheka (MM) is in a senior portfolio and uses the reports in her line of work:

*'I am a member of the Institute of Directors...I have served on different Boards. I was very active with the Remuneration Committee...It is another forum where I keep myself up to date with the King III and King IV Reports where it matters, we can address issues' (MM)*

Neelan Vaughn (NV) understands the difference between the King III and King IV Reports and understands both reports' application:

*'At the board, we use it all. Yes, it's not negotiable. So, if I look at King III, the number of elements used in King IV is much lesser, but the range is becoming bigger in terms of the minor responsibilities. So, the answer is yes, I understand both well' (NV)*

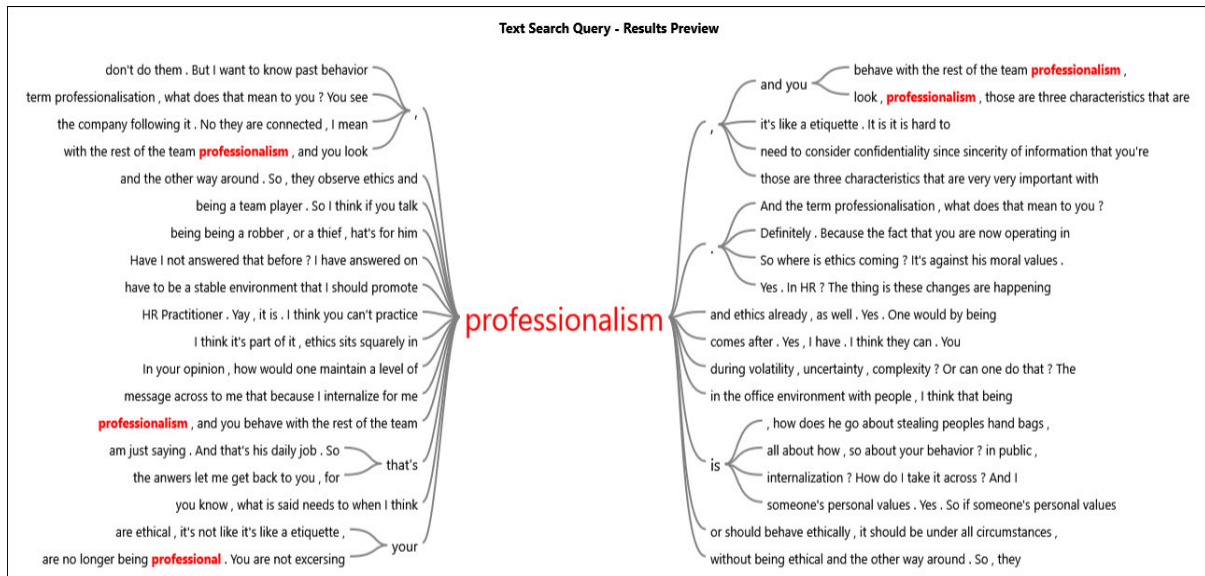
Lastly, Katherine Sawyer (KS) also uses the reports and understands the implications of the code of conduct on JSE listed companies:

*'In what way, and the reason I'm saying in what way, it is simply because of the fact that the work that I do requires one to observe the King III and IV. So that includes the Code of Conduct...you don't have to be listed on the JSE to follow the King. You don't know it's a decision that you take as a business to observe it. Because it's not a legislated piece. It is more of a governance recommendation and all self-respecting companies should observe it, for the same reason in like, once again, that code of conduct that we're referring to' (KS)*

### 6.8.3 Human resource professionalism

With regard to the third main theme of the four themed framework, human resource management professionalism, human resource management professionals directed their responses towards the following sub-themes: professionalism, professions, behaviour, VUCA and volatile.

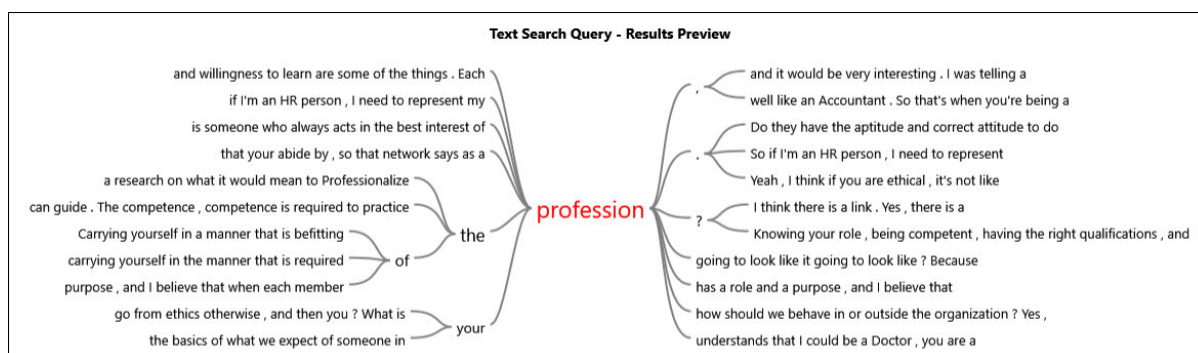
Illustration 45: Professionalism



The data collected from the questions on professionalism that were posed to human resource management professionals presented associated sub-themes such as behaviour and understanding the human resource management profession, and what it means to work in this profession. Katie Mabee (KM) stated:

*'Professionalism is professionalising your career. I can be in human resource management, I can be in finance but not be professional so we need to professionalise that role or that career and why should we professionalise, so that we instil good governance because if you don't professionalise, one will do as they want. You won't have that liberty, control that space of a profession' (KM)*

## Illustration 46: Profession



One could argue that this group of participants, being professionals, would be biased towards statutory regulation. Thus, all responses will be consolidated from all participants in the analysis and discussion, which will follow in Chapter Seven. However, Jason Gaede (JG) contributed richly to this discussion in his following remarks:

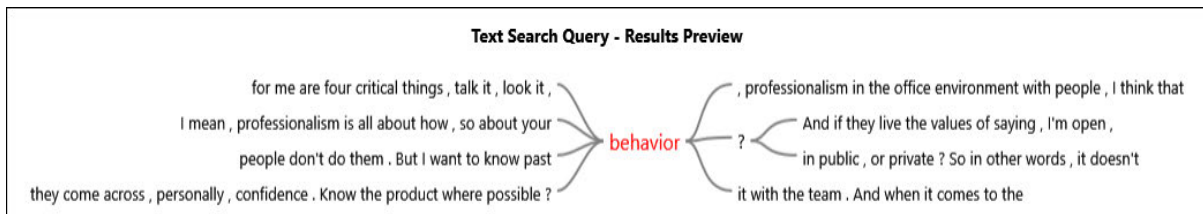
*'So, professionalism in my understanding is related to a profession that you as an employee, and as an individual, you're qualified to do this particular profession. You are trained in and are developed in it. Possibly designated and you have a stamp of authority to say you can as an expert in performing that function, basically the best you can do. There is definitely a link because if you behaviour unprofessionally...In fact, when you conduct or when you perform an unethical act you are no longer being professional. You are not exercising your professionalism' (JG)*

Steven Nxele (SN) observed that the connection between professionalism and belonging to a profession does provide credibility, which is also associated with professional status and trust, thus affirming that if human resource management professionals do belong to a professional body, they would be respected by their organisations:

*'Professionalism is the way to go in any profession because we need to make sure that we can have credibility...with our line managers doesn't matter what area of human resource management or human capital, needs to be respected by your clients, because of your knowledge, in most instances, from your experience. The reason why most don't respect us was that human resource management at the time, we were not credible...so professionalism then gives us that, if you want to*

*call it that, that advantage of saying just like I always say to them in the field of finance, in the field of law, and you would respect someone who belongs to a professional organisation, that person is up to date in terms of best practices and in terms of policies and legislation, and all of that, if they belong to a professional body' (SN)*

Illustration 47: Behaviour



The correlation between good governance, personal values, credibility, lack of respect towards the profession, and lastly, the advantages of belonging to a professional body, was noted by Neelan Vaughn (NV):

*'You see, professionalism is someone's personal values. Yes. So, if someone's personal values are already corrupted. Yes. What does ethics mean to them, for them? They think that's right. Okay, so being a robber or a thief, for him that's professionalism, how does he go about stealing people's handbags, I am just saying. And that's his daily job. So that's professionalism. So where is ethics coming from? It's against his moral values. So, let's put it out. Is there a correlation? I believe there should be a correlation. It's about taking your personal values into consideration to predict the two together then I think, then you live in the culture of both' (NV)*

Alison Moody (AM) also observed similar behaviours associated with professionalism and that professionals should also deliver on what is expected of them based on their knowledge:

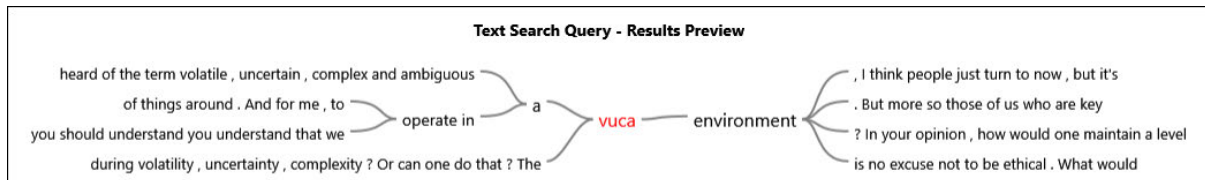
*'So, professionalism, they say it's for me once again, how a person behaves. That's a behavioural aspect. So, what in the behaviour displays professionalism? For me, it's people's sound character. People who walk the talk. And people's actions, what they're saying they are doing and they consistent in doing what they say they're doing. And that they've got the understanding...advising people on*

*specific topics that they have, actually the knowledge. And not to advise people on things that they are not competent in realizing' (AM)*

Consequently, behaviours associated with professionalism and the human resource management profession were pointed out by Lexi Mace (LM):

*'I think it's hard to respect human resource management because we expect too many things, we have too many ideas of what human resource management is. Everyone has had an opinion about what human resource management should be. So firstly, we don't know what they should be doing so you always have the perception that they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing which is what is in people's minds and not necessarily see what human resource management should be doing. I think our behaviour when we are business partnering, or how we have behaved in the past also contributes to it and it depends on the organisation and what they want human resource management to be, so dependent on what the organisation wants you to be doing, they respect you or they don't' (LM)*

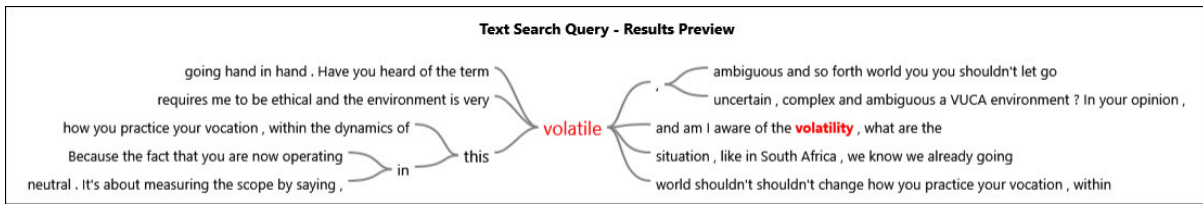
Illustration 48: VUCA



Human resource management professionals' perceptions on VUCA and volatility emerged as sub-themes within the third theme related to professionalism. In this regard, these participants acknowledged the need for human resource management professionals to be able to navigate and survive during VUCA times, as mentioned by Alison Moody (AM):

*'The VUCA environment, I think people just turn to now, but it's just going to get worse, you know. There's always been those kinds of things around, and for me to operate in a VUCA environment is no excuse not to be ethical' (AM)*

## Illustration 1: Volatile



Human resource management professionals provided insights on ways to deal with the VUCA times such as maintaining one’s ethics and balanced emotional intelligence in the human resource management profession. Participant Margret Matsheka (MM) expressed the importance of this sub-theme:

*‘Yes, I have...you know it is only now that the term has been coined. It’s always been there, and I don’t see it going away and I think it is what would make an environment very exciting or being aware. Like ok, I am dealing with this matter, and it requires me to be ethical and the environment is very volatile, and am I aware of the volatility, what are the dynamics that I need to consider. It’s that, being able to say if we take this decision today, we are really not certain. For me, it is really a situation, and being very responsive to that. We need to say; how do we treat it’ (MM)*

Jason Gaede (JG) understands that adapting to volatile times requires professionals to maintain their ethical practices:

*‘Definitely. because the fact that you are now operating in this volatile world shouldn't change how you practice your vocation, within the dynamics of this volatile, ambiguous, and so forth world you shouldn't let go from ethics otherwise...what is your profession going to look like. Because it's supposed to adapt and deal with the changing environment. It’s clear there are grey areas, that’s when you consult. That's why I have to create an environment where people are free to ask questions’ (JG)*

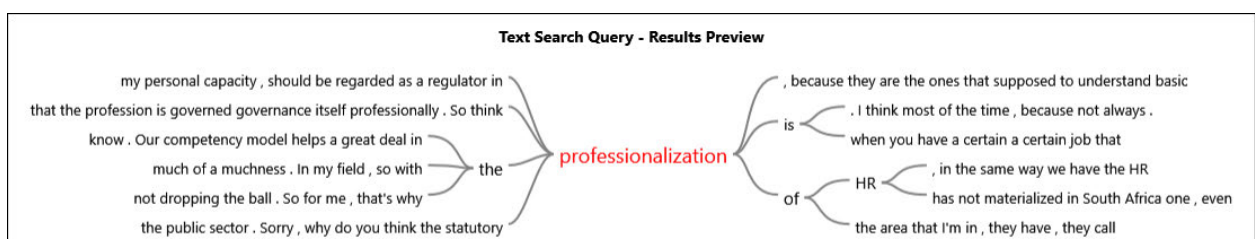
Comparatively, Ronald Phillips (RP) commented on the resilience of human resource management professionals during these VUCA times:

*'So, see with something volatile, and complex, one of the key skills for volatility and complexity is resilience. resilience and I already mentioned it early on, as a skill. I also think that when you are working in a volatile, complex, ever changing environment, you're dealing with people, and sometimes people can't cope. And then people show up, not the best versions of themselves. So, I think that emotional intelligence, having a place to manage, recognise, understand, manage, and control your reactions, and those of other people is also very important... human resource management, people need to be opened to doing things differently, all the time' (RP)*

#### 6.8.4 Human resource professionalisation

The professionalisation of human resource management from the point of view of those in this profession who choose to belong to a professional body is noteworthy for this study. It is important to highlight that human resource management professionals who belong to the HPCSA, SIOPSA, SABPP and IPM were interviewed. Those who are registered with the two human resource management professional bodies in South Africa have done so by choice; however, the psychologists and industrial psychologists that opted for human resource management as a vocation were required to complete their Master's degree, complete certain other related requirements, and to register with the HPCSA and SIOPSA in order to practice as psychologists or industrial psychologists. The sub-themes that emerged in relation to this fourth and last of the main themes of the four themed framework are professionalisation, SABPP, professional body, competency model and strategy.

Illustration 50: Professionalisation



The responses from the professionals who are registered with either human resource management professional body (SABPP or IPM) show that they understand the process of professionalisation and the significance to the human resource management profession, as mentioned by Alison Moody (AM) who works at the SABPP:

*'So professionalisation for me is to make sure these minimum standards that people are adhering to and that these consistencies in what we are doing, but most is the integration between the different areas of human resource management because only then you can get better...'* (AM)

Essentially, being professionalised means maintaining standards, attaining levels of one's career and tracking progress through the professional levels, as observed by Jason Gaede (JG) who works at IPM:

*'So professionalisation, my understanding is the path that the people in the profession have set up to say, if you want to open it is a professional at a particular level, these are the things that you need to do to reach a milestone one, milestone two, and milestone three. So that's the professionalisation and what it is that we value as a profession, so it's a thing, a path to get yourself at different levels of your profession'* (JG)

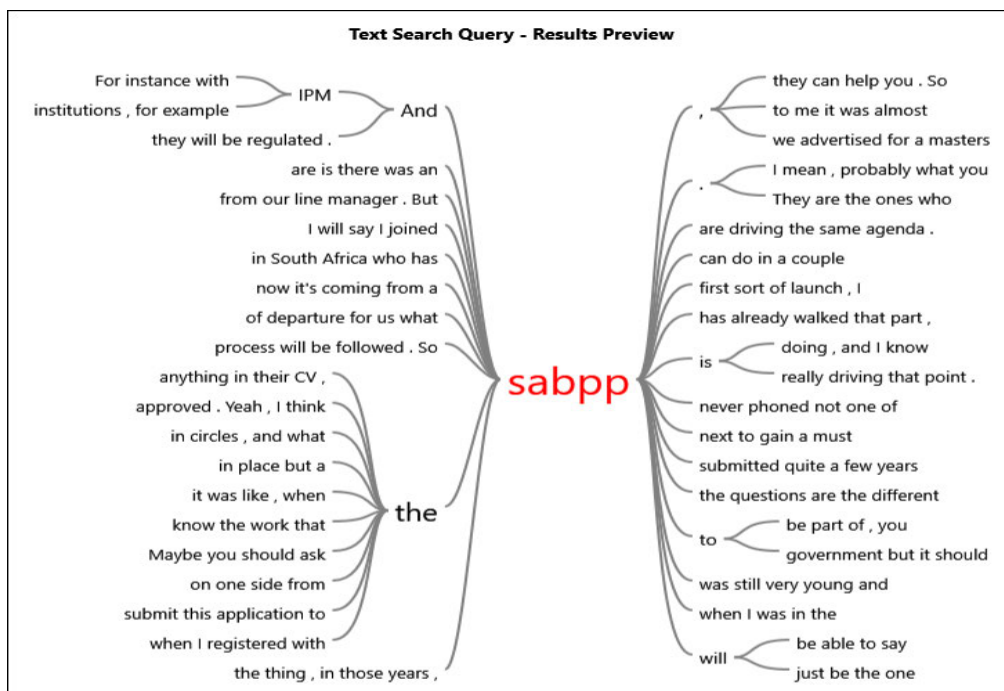
The issue of entry into the human resource management profession, keeping up with what is happening in the profession, and maintaining continuous professional development points are considered similar to the requirements for those belonging to the HPCSA and SIOPSA in order to maintain their membership. These sub-themes were expressed by registered professionals such as clinical psychologist Katherine Sawyer (KS):

*'That it is to continue improving the profession, and that response that I gave on what is professionalism, because if you do not professionalise the business, irrespective of what it is, what industry or issues of ethics, and all the things that we have discussed, are going to fall by the wayside...maybe there has to be a barrier to entry and that barrier should not necessarily be specific to qualifications per se. But certain criteria that are required for somebody to function in their human resources space'* (KS)

Habiba Karim (HK), an industrial psychologist, explained the importance of standards and criteria in order for human resource management to keep up to date with professional developments, thus allowing certain professionals to belong to a specific profession:

*'So, I think professionalisation is when you have a certain job that you need to be governed. So, there's a set of standards, there's a set of criteria for you actually to be part of that particular profession. And it's also governed in terms of ensuring you to keep up to date. You know, like for the continuing professional development points, you keep relevant in your field, you're not dropping the ball. So, for me, that's why the professionalisation is...'* (HK)

Illustration 51: SABPP

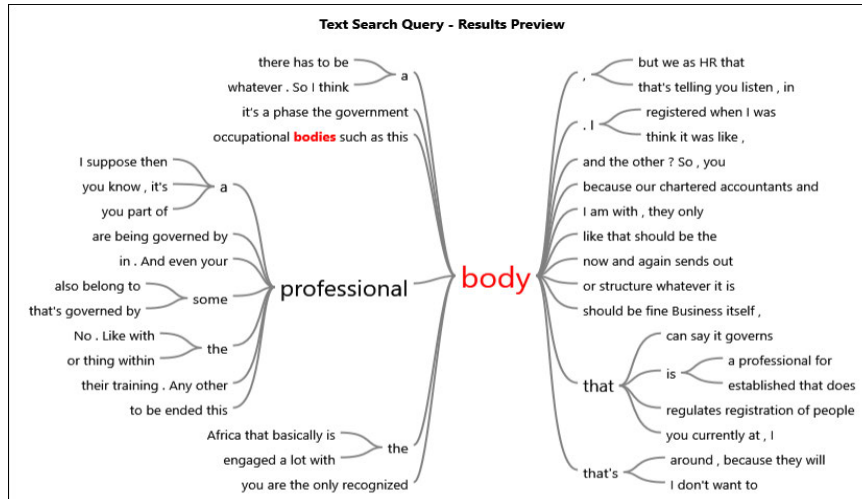


The responses from human resource management professionals regarding the professionalisation of human resource management have provided depth and breadth of knowledge to this research. Firstly, those professionals who are registered with the SABPP were aware of and mentioned a similar study being conducted by the SABPP on the professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa. This study is also referred to in the literature review in this dissertation, and was mentioned by Margret Matsheka (MM) and Katie Mabee (KM) in the following quote:

*'I think the approach now will be much better because there is a study now, it is a risk. It will be researched so pending the results then a decision will be taken and obviously the necessary process will be followed. So SABPP will be able to say here is the research, this is a thing from the community, from society so there*

is a need. If there is a need, the results will be that there is a need' [for professionalisation] (KM)

Illustration 52: Professional body



The sub-themes entail growth opportunities for human resource management professionals based on the requirements for continuing professional development points, which is something all professions maintain, as stated previously by Habiba Karim (HK), and supported here by Margret Matsheka (MM):

*'Why don't start now by educating yourself, start by registering with the SABPP because you are going to gain a lot, you going to know what is available. To see conferences that are coming, and you would be able to choose which conference or not and a course...and if you are in human resource management and you are aware, why not put them in your development plan, why not get a budget for stuff like that because then professionalism will go across. Finance is not fully professionalised, it's only the Chartered Accountants and Auditors, it is only to a certain level as a profession. Even them, they will have to be, in fact, I think every professional should be professionalised. And I mean if we could do things without being regulated, that would be just fine. I mean Doctors do stuff, Lawyers do stuff, and yet they are professionals. Rather professionalism means regulatory, or it means coming from the heart and more coming from the heart. Each profession has a role and a purpose, and I believe that when each member of the profession understands...the question about human resource management, that the SABPP*

*has sponsored, I don't know if someone has taken it up, there was a call for someone who is wanting to research what it would mean to professionalise the profession, and it would be very interesting. I was telling a group that I was working with last year that, imagine as a human resource management person for you to be appointed, you have to show a license, that I am licensed as a human resource management practitioner' (MM)*

Alison Moody (AM) also referred to continuing professional development points that are important in keeping up with competencies and knowledge within a profession. Notably she also mentioned human resource management professionals who are not qualified with the necessary qualifications and will therefore not be able to apply for continuing professional development points:

*'So, if we look at any other professional bodies that actually are regulated, the need to belong, they need to do their continuing professional development, and that will actually give people opportunity to grow. But it will also exclude people that's not suitably competent and qualified' (AM)*

Interestingly, Steven Nxele (SN), in the excerpt on the next page, referred to the rift between the two professional bodies, the SABPP and IPM, which has comprehensively been explained in the literature review in this study. Resolving this rift is a valid objective in relation to the statutory professionalisation and professional development of human resource management for the following reasons. Firstly, it must be determined which professional body would take the lead in the application to government for statutory professionalisation, or there must be an agreement towards a dual application by both the SABPP and IPM. Secondly, since it has already been documented in the literature review in this study that the SABPP was conducting a similar study on the professionalisation of human resource management, it must also be established which professional body human resource management professionals should register with and thus become a member of if human resource management is statutorily professionalised.

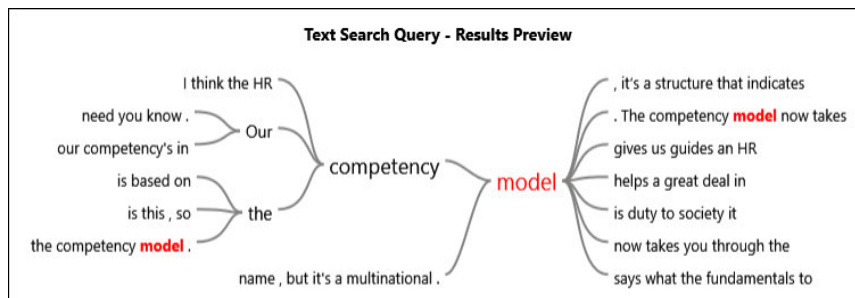
*'We debated that at our AGM, it's got to do with those institutions, for example, IPM and SABPP are driving the same agenda. But at the same time, as splitting the vote, in a sense, saying belong to me, or belong to me instead of just saying*

*coming together and make a very big, powerful people's organisation. But I think the reason why we are steps behind is because of our good intentions, to make sure that we professionalise...for instance with IPM and SABPP the questions are the different measures, every Chief Executive Officer should be about that. You should do what you can, according to the people's organisation in the country. It doesn't mean that we should not professionalise, but we should be hard and earn the respect like the other professions' (SN)*

Lastly, another valid consideration for this research is determining what statutory professionalisation would mean for psychologists and industrial psychologists who are already registered with the HPCSA and could also register with SIOPSA. Habiba Karim (HK) raised the issue that most organisations pay for employees' professional association fees, however not all organisations will pay for human resource management professional fees:

*'But to look at the profile of a human resource management business partner, it says its certification with the SABPP or IPM is an essential certification. Essential, not preferred. But they don't want to pay for it. Although our policy states that we can pay for registration with at least two professional bodies...paying for our Accountants, our Chartered Accountant's with SAICA, and we pay for Lawyers. Why is it such a big thing, so for a few years I was paying my own registration, and then when I joined the HPCSA, and I knew that this is now the platform to go, it doesn't make sense to me to now belong to two professional bodies...plus I have also to join SIOPSA because SIOPSA is the Society for Industrial Organisational Psychology Association. And they offer a lot of courses for your continuing professional development points and things like that, which is going to be important to me and my continued registration with the HPCSA. So, then it's back on to them like how many professional bodies am I going to be a part of how many am I going to pay for' (HK)*

Illustration 53: Competency model



The SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021) also features in the literature review and contributed to the competency model which underpins this study and was presented in the theoretical framework chapter. The response below by Ronald Phillips (RP) explains the contribution this model has to this research:

*'I think the human resource management competency model says what the fundamentals to any human resource management practitioner should be competent in your ability to do something. So, the human resource management framework is basically very clearly spelling out what a human resource management practitioner in South Africa who has SABPP can gain and must be able to demonstrate, but that's why I said earlier on, that it was a little bit, it was not best practice' (RP)*

Alison Moody (AM) also acknowledged that the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model contribution is important to the human resource management profession:

*'And if we look at this SABPP competency model, derived from the investigation of the top competency models, you know, forward thinking kinds of things. The thing that we've built into the competency model is to assess human resource management risk, which is the first one in the world. And there's also a very good governance structure built into it, and measurement' (AM)*

Illustration 54: Strategy



The last sub-theme falling under the fourth main theme of professionalisation of human resource management is the theme of strategy. Human resource management strategy is important for human resource management to align themselves to business, thus those employed in human resource management must be agile and must apply competencies identified within the SABPP Human Resource Management Competency Model. These sub-themes were identified by Alison Moody (AM):

*'Human resources, first of all, need to have people at different levels of work, if you look at the department, but more so that human resource management strategy must clearly be aligned with the business strategy. In your opinion, what skills would you say are important...technically and behavioural. From a behaviour point of view, I think the new skills required...they need to be agile; they need to be able to learn and need to understand business acumen. And that needs to be supported with a very solid base of human resource management knowledge, of generalist human resource management knowledge to support the business. So, apart from agility and I think human resource management people need to have compassion, they need to be able to be unbiased, and objective'*  
(AM)

Competencies highlighted in the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model establish the importance of strategy and its impact on governance, thus underscoring the relevance of the pillars to this research is essential. These sub-themes were mentioned by Neelan Vaughn (NV):

*'So, if I look at both competencies that should be the underpinning the purpose of character and behaviour of this person demonstrating the required skills from*

*taking the strategy all the way down and say how does the strategy have an impact on me keeping the governance and the pillars of ethics professionalism into the living standard. So, for me you must live the values, and it depends at whatever levels of the low level and higher level, we should live by an effort to meet a professional competence in its underpinning behaviour' (NV)*

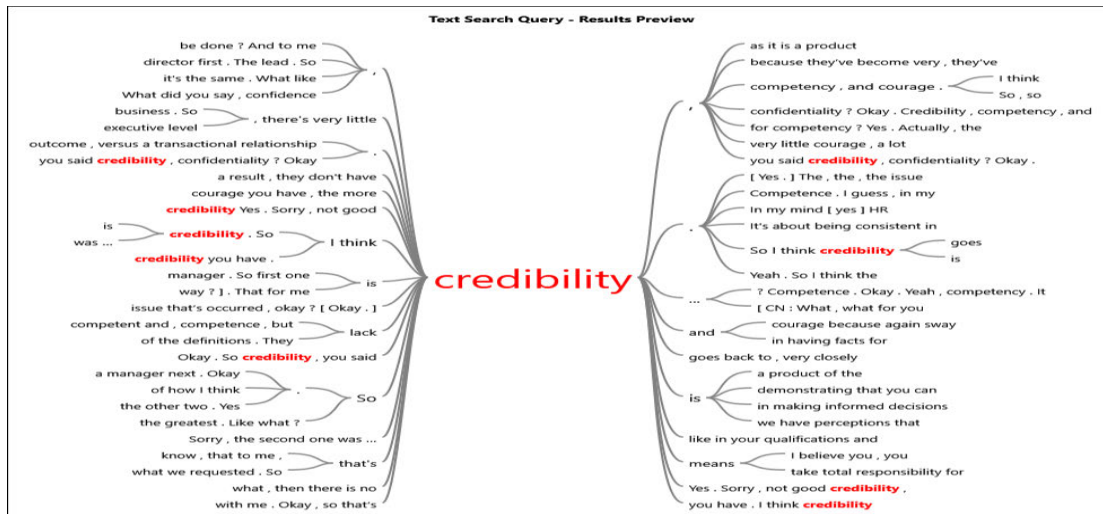
## **6.9 Human resource management clients**

The third and last set of findings focuses on the responses emanating from the interviews with human resource management clients who use the services of the human resource management department with regard to aspects of the human resource management value chain, such as performance management, talent management and industrial relations, to name a few labour-intensive activities. Therefore, the essences of human resource management clients' opinions on the themes identified in the four themed framework were rendered into NVivo. As with the previous participant groups, text search in NVivo was used to focus on five core sub-themes that emerged within the four main themes of the four themed framework.

### **6.9.1 General human resource management**

Human resource management client participants were asked about their relationship with their human resource management department. They were also asked about issues such as whether challenges were experienced, and their views on trusting their human resource management, expectations, areas of development, and the competency of their human resource management department. For the first theme of the four themed framework, namely general human resource management, the sub-themes which emanated from the data collected from human resource management clients who responded to questions addressing this theme are credibility, competence, courage, relationship, and support. These sub-themes are multifaceted. Some human resource management clients believed that their human resource management either incorporates one, a few of, or none of these sub-themes.

## Illustration 55: Credibility

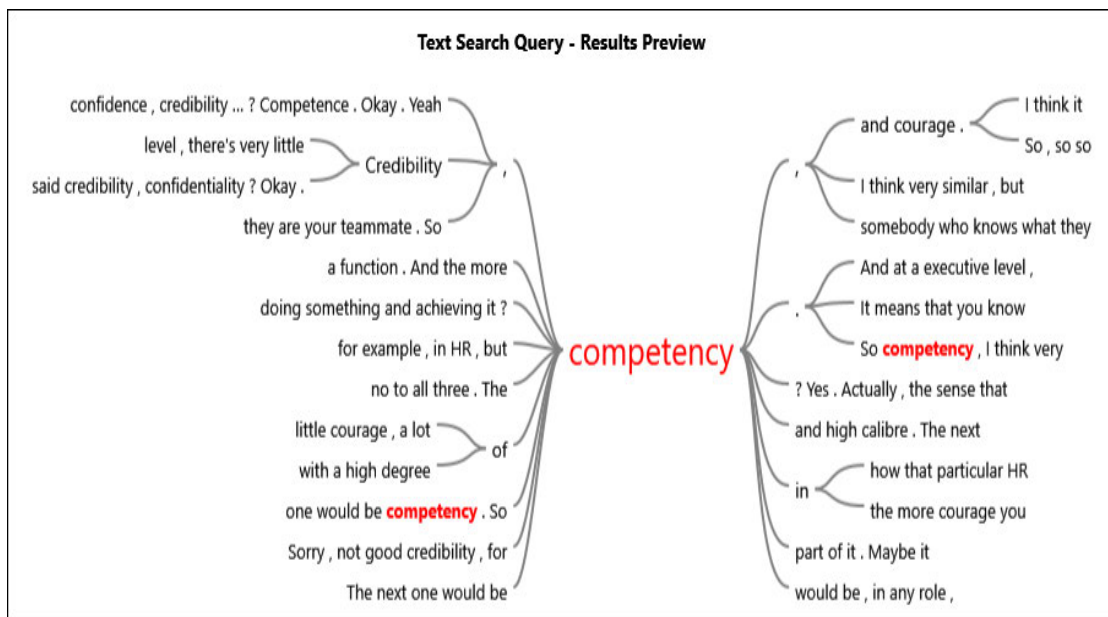


These thoughts were shared by Sophie Rainey (SR) on credibility when dealing with confidential information; however, even though the participant believed that professionals have courage, they still supported management:

*'So, credibility is in making informed decisions and sticking to their decision so that people can rely on them with many, multiple aspects of what we requested. So that's credibility and in having facts for when we are requesting certain types of information like REM channel. Gosh, okay, having facts on the table before you make a decision, so that we can rely on that' (SR),*

*'Yes, I think they have the competence, but it's based on my experience. So, for what we expected as an admin function... human resource management to do, then they competent in that, if there were an expectation for them to go further, we wouldn't know that. Unless someone comes in enlightens us on that...Yeah, they do have the courage actually, but they do, they stand up a lot for management' (SR)*

Illustration 56: Competency



Victoria Rhodes (VR) also aligns credibility and courage to competency, which she believes contributes to a team’s success:

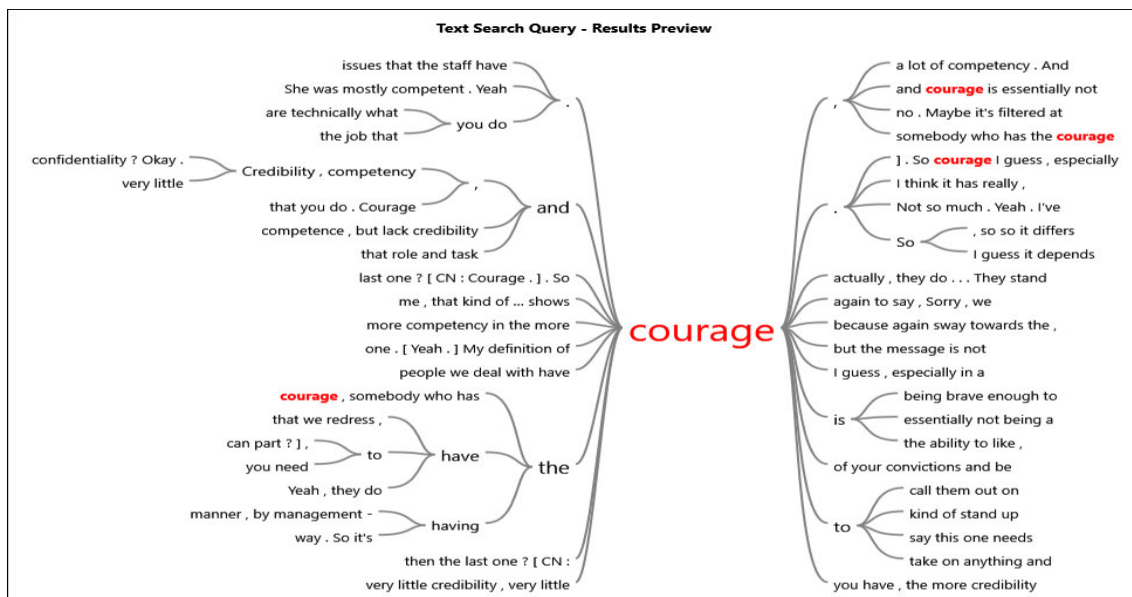
*‘For me to describe credibility, someone who’s noted for doing something and achieving it. Competency, somebody who knows what they are doing and is competent in fore-filling that role and task, and courage. Somebody who has the courage to take on anything and make a team successful’ (VR)*

A detailed response from Matthew Brazzoli (MB) explained what human resource management competency means to human resource management clients based on his interaction with different levels of human resource management. He also clarified credibility, competency and courage, or the lack thereof, at the different levels of the human resource management profession, and why a balance across the levels is important to the human resource management professional’s development and to back line managers to support their teams:

*‘So, I think the human resource management lead, human resource management director probably shows high levels of competency in all three areas. So strategic in nature takes risks, gives me good insight into the business, gives me best practices, knows the laws, and all of that. So, I think that person ticks the box in all of them. Where that person can do more is reach out to the bigger team. So,*

*the human resource management Lead is often seen only in the boardroom. Doesn't walk the corridors, doesn't form a relationship with the, with the greater team. Whereas the business partners will walk the corridors, have a good relationship with the team, go drinking with them, whatever. However, they lack all three of the definitions. They lack credibility because they've become very, they've become an admin junkie. If you go to them with a quick query, even if not me, my team goes to them with a question, human resource management related, they often say, "well let's go talk to the director." So, then this escalates. I don't know, there are simple things, like if somebody comes to you and says, "I want to take a year's sabbatical? Is it possible?" They would not know. The BP would not know. The BP will say, "Let me find out." And then they'll forget... This is a real case that happened to me recently where one of my members wants to take a year sabbatical and it's an absolute nightmare getting an answer, from human resource management. So, credibility means take total responsibility for the moulding...of my people in my team. I've got a very functional role and I need the right team to do it, make it happen. So, they, they should be, they should ensure that I have the right team. Yes, I also have responsibilities in that, but as a business partner, they should share some of that with me. Okay, so that's credibility' (MB)*

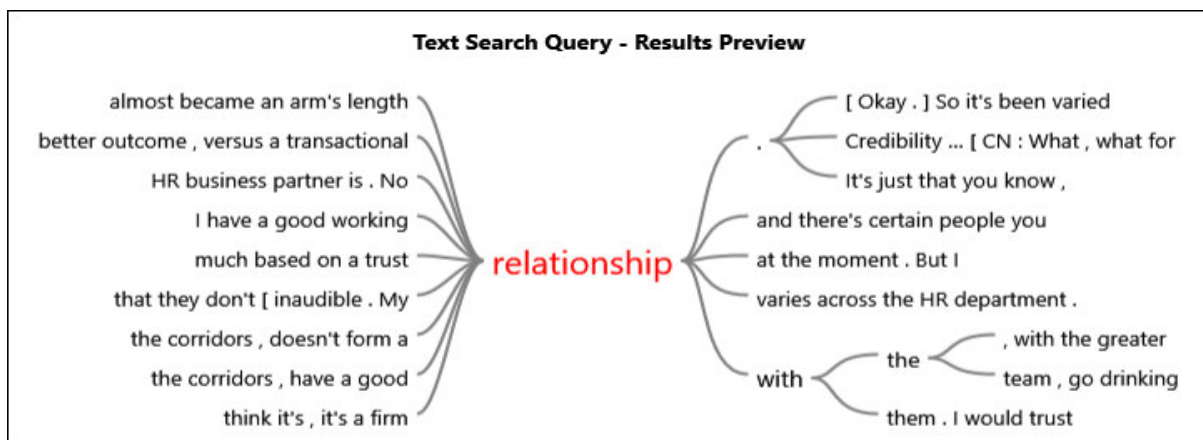
Illustration 57: Courage



Stella Morgan (SM) described credibility, competency and courage when displayed by human resource management professionals; however, she indicated that these may vary depending on the situation and may also depend on whether these professionals are championing employees or business. She was also certain that executive level human resource management are lacking all of the above:

*'Credibility, competency, and courage. So, it differs across the levels of management in human resource management. Where I find the human resource management business partners, some are, some are courageous, competent, and credible. Others are competent but lack credibility and courage because again sway towards the employees. But, from a senior perspective, they very much swayed towards business. So, there's very little credibility, very little courage, a lot of competencies. And at an executive level, there's very little credibility, competency, and courage' (SM)*

Illustration 58: Relationship



The ability of human resource management to create and to maintain relationships is connected to credibility, from the previous sub-theme, and with building relationships with their clients. Significantly, all the responses by human resource management clients are based on their relationships with their human resource management department. If they had a good, decent, or neutral relationship, their responses were positive or neutral. However, if they did not, they acknowledged the relationship and their expectation as clients of their human resource management department. The following participants, Sophie Rainy (SR), Matthew Brazzoli (MB), Lily James (LJ), Mandy Moore (MM), Stella Morgan (SM), and Zain Hall (ZH), had this to say:

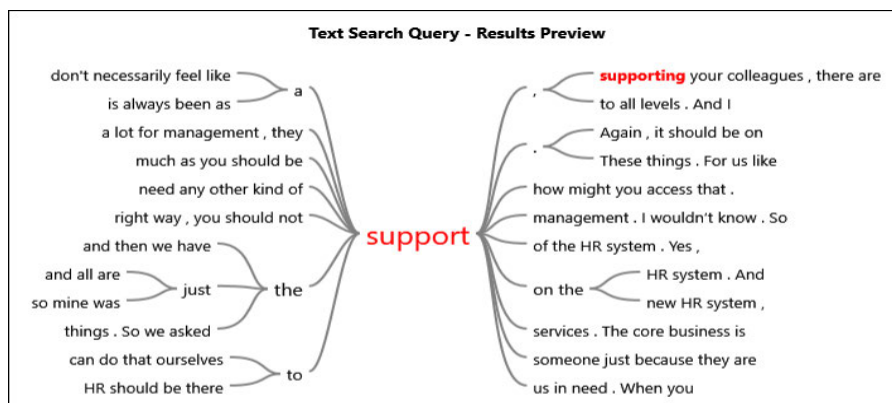
- ⇒ *'I think they are quite helpful, friendly, approachable, willing to help when they have the time' (SR)*
- ⇒ *'It's extremely professional, but more as the need requires. I don't have regular one on ones, as and when I need their services, it's an operational relationship' (MB)*
- ⇒ *'I have a good working relationship with them, the previous person and I started off together. So, we had a very good thing, he understood, we went on training together' (LJ)*
- ⇒ *'I think it's a firm relationship. It's just that you know, certain things from a human point of view, you won't always go to human resource management because of the fact that some of the things sometimes, they tend to be used as instruments...[by management]' (MM),*
- ⇒ *'My relationship varies across the human resource management department. That is, when you work in an organisation like I do, you have to network with different individuals to attain different results. So, I have good and bad relationships within human resource management, and I have friendships within human resource management' (SM)*
- ⇒ *'I think it has really, over time, I've seen him as a service provider. I've had engagements where I've seen them as a partner. And of course, but I think over the duration of my career, over a couple of decades, I've also seen the evolution of human resource management with self service offerings, and at times it almost became an arm's length relationship. So, it's been varied in terms of I guess, as my own journey has transitioned. My most recent engagement with human resource management has been as a partner. And where we, you know, had jointly agreed outcomes for what we wanted to achieve in the business, and it was a much more a productive engagement' (ZH)*

The following responses by Ashen Madden (AM) and Evelyn Mac (EM) were negatively inclined:

*'We very seldom interact, we probably interact twice a year, maybe three times a year. Yes, that is correct. Unless there's some major issue or grievance or complaint, we don't actually see human resource management. Then, as I said, well, communication is very limited. So, it would be unfair to judge them. But for us as well, it seems the interactions with us generally seem to be tick box exercises, and they seem to be very little outcomes' (AM)*

*'Currently, I don't know who they are. So, I've been in this team for six months, I'm not sure who our human resource management business partner is, no relationship at the moment. So, I think it was reasonable, they dealt more with my line managers, but I had two direct reports. So, we dealt with them during the performance reviews, you know...does consistency checks. So, you don't just come up with a rating from one and one's. So, she was involved in all of that, and I think she's pretty fair. I don't think their communication was the greatest' (EM)*

Illustration 59: Support



This last sub-theme of the general human resource management main theme in the four themed framework is also connected to the previous sub-themes in this section, more so with relationships, as mentioned by Sophie Rainey (SR):

*'No, not to help with staffing and headcount. No, that's a decision taken with management, and then only the output of the decision goes to the human resource management person to decide to hire a new person, then the human resource management person would come in if we are revising salary. Human resource management then goes to the manager for the motivation... human resource management just actions' (SR)*

Relationships between human resource management and their clients include the assistance clients expect and generally do receive from the human resource management department. Therefore, the client relationship is the key aspect of this sub-theme, together with being accountable for the support provided by the human resource management professionals, as revealed by Matthew Brazzoli (MB):

*'So, the time I use human resource management is mainly in a hiring process, in a dismissal process, and a performance discussion process. Other than that, we don't, we hardly meet. This is very operational. I have a one on one with my team every week. And in those discussions, I normally split the discussions, 50% of the time is spent on KPI's and active work, and so on. And the second half is all around the person, the people. But when I have a meeting with human resource management it's never about people, it's always about KPI's. So very, very operational' (MB)*

Naomi Lange (NL) explained her relationship with her human resource management department and provided an example where she experienced a lack of maturity and trust in a work scenario, resulting in her disappointment and therefore a breakdown in the client relationship. This is also another example of low levels of competency of a human resource management professional:

*'Sadly not, and I think what was disappointing for me is...things are very, it's either black or white with me. So having asked the question I'd asked, I didn't feel it was coming from a bad place and the way she behaved in that particular scenario, having been in, in the space she's been in, was very immature. And it did break down an immediate kind of trust that we possibly had before. And given that she couldn't deal with that situation on her own, she had to go and raise it with her manager, who then engaged with my manager's manager and insisted on an apology, which I don't feel was a one sided scenario' (NL)*

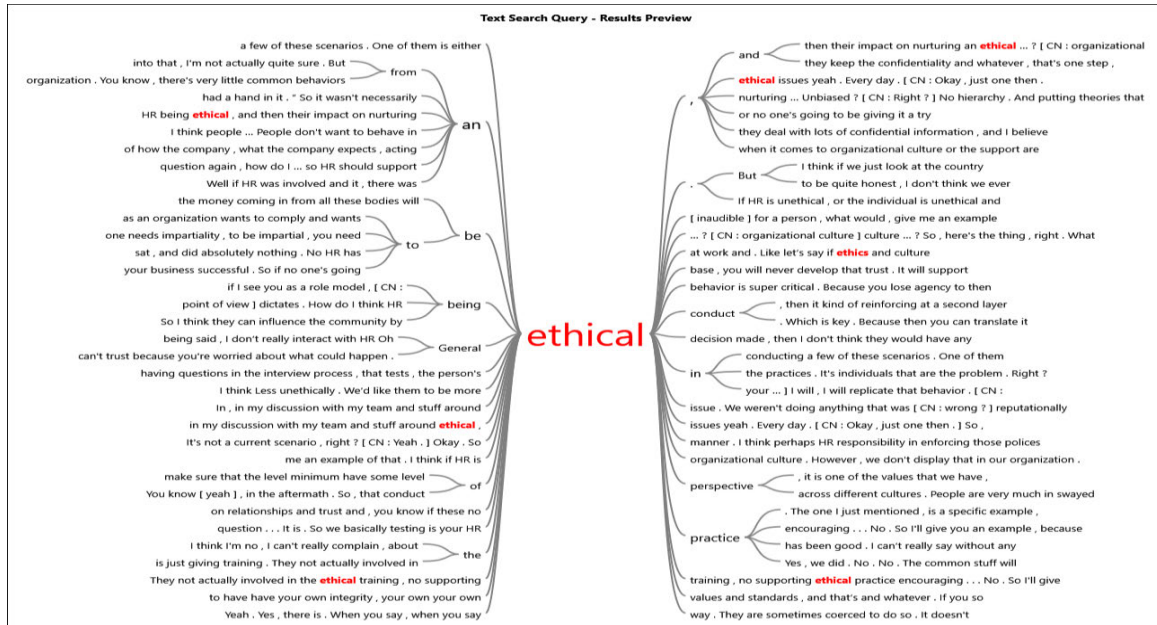
## **6.9.2 Human resource management ethics and King Reports**

The second main theme of the four themed framework focused on human resource management ethics and the King Reports on Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016), specifically from the human resource management client perspective. The associated sub-themes are confidentiality, unethical behaviour, conflict, the King Reports, and challenges that have repeatedly been highlighted in this research.

The link between human resource management's ethical practice and unethical behaviour was expected by the researcher and was apparent in these responses. The participants referenced

accountability and responsibility, business strategy, bias towards management, expected support by human resource management, that is the previous sub-theme, and culture.

Illustration 60: Ethics



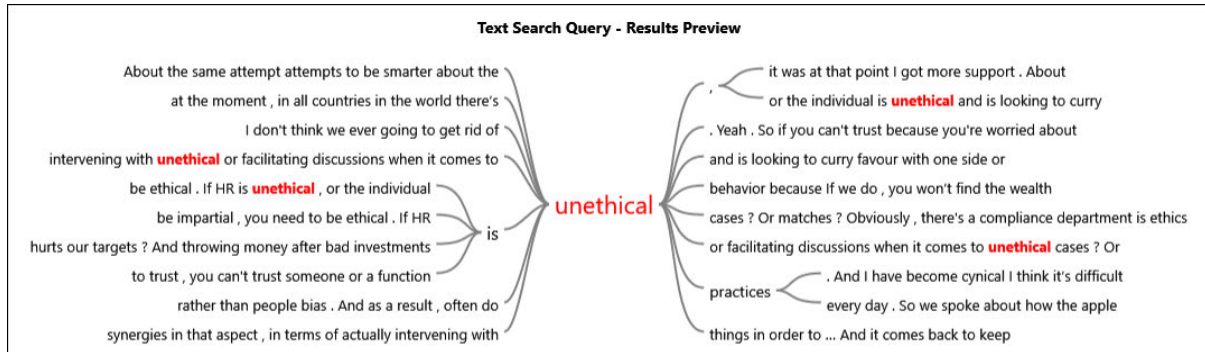
The connection between ethical and unethical behaviour by human resource management professionals was elaborated by Matthew Brazzoli (MB) and Sophie Rainey (SR), with the latter also reiterating that human resource management supports management more than they do the employees:

*'I think ethics is part of the ethos and if you don't have, you don't operate ethically, then you can't work professionally. You are being professional, again, is the way you operate, or you work, take accountability, take responsibility, can defend your strategy, and ethics is the thread across all of that' (MB)*

*'I think it's the same across all companies if I am not mistaken, the experience has been the same. The role maybe may vary across the human resource management functions in terms of some doing more than others. But in terms of ethics, it's still saying, they are not trustworthy. They are very sided with management, I would just say it's the same as my experience, but that's where we need human resource management support, and help guide us to change that mindset, right, and shift it. But I think from where they are coming, it's a very,*

*you either do this, or you do that. There's no in-between that you can try and should I say mould for different people' (SR)*

Illustration 61: Unethical



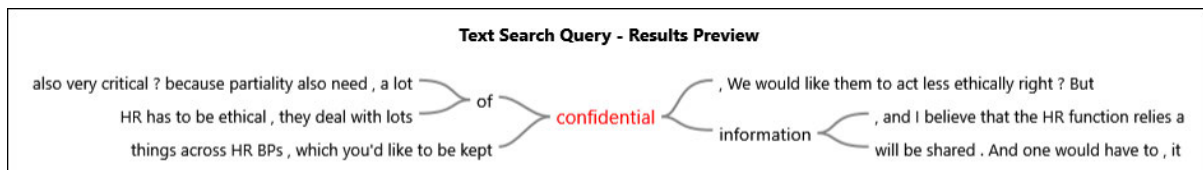
Scott Dunn (SD) further echoed their sentiments by citing an instance when management influenced human resource management’s unethical behaviour:

*‘Where the manager or the MD didn't like somebody, and they created a scenario that wants to dismiss the guy. And the human resource management person was pressurized to toe the line, also the human resource management manager, obviously, one of them folded himself’ (SD)*

Victoria Rhodes (VR) also commented on how human resource management professionals were influenced by business, specifically head office, in their daily practices and the expectation for this profession to be ethical:

*‘So, we are testing is your human resource management is ethical in conducting a few of these scenarios. One of them is ethical, when it comes to organisational culture, or the support is representative of it in how they practice human resource management. Well, that's also driven from head office, from the greater human resource management team. So, I would think that they should be following it, maybe I don't see it’ (VR)*

## Illustration 62: Confidentiality



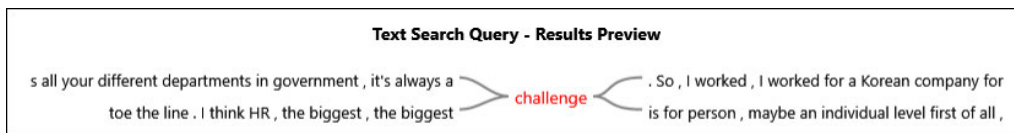
Regardless, of their experiences with the human resource management department, clients do believe that human resource management professionals should maintain confidentiality as they do not have anyone else to keep their confidence at work, as stated by Lily James (LJ):

*'I think if human resource management is ethical, and they keep their confidentiality and whatever, that's one step, one step for them, and in working in their favour. But if human resource management cannot be trusted, then the whole thing about ethics will fall away. And I know we asked like, we have people coming at least twice a year to do training on ethics...I think by being neutral, is, for starters...to also keep that confidentiality. People come to [human resource management] because they don't want to talk to their manager, they don't want to talk to someone else. So, I think that confidentiality thing is a big thing as well.'*  
 (LJ)

Naomi Lange (NL) connected credibility and competency to hold confidentiality by human resource management professionals for their clients:

*'So, I think credibility goes back to, very closely linked to competence in that do you display and deliver on particular scenarios in a credible manner. Are you giving people the right advice, guiding them in the right way, and again, it goes back to confidentiality. Because if you cannot keep a particular discussion between the two of you, how credible are you in a particular role where you are human resources. It's not management resources, it's you know, being honest in that conversation you've had, and if you need guidance from somebody more senior, somebody more knowledgeable, keep names out of it. There's no need to go and address it in a team forum'* (NL)

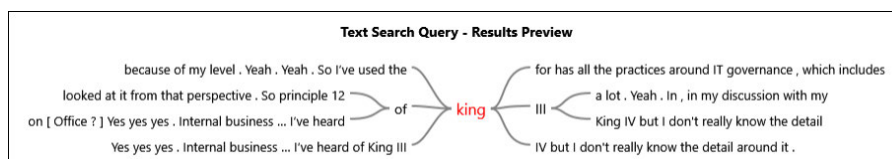
### Illustration 63: Challenge



Comments presented by the participants in this section have described many situations in the work environments when human resource management clients did face challenges with their human resource management department. In the comment below, Zain Hall (ZH) explained how human resource management supported business and employees during difficult times. However, he also indicated that there were recent times when human resource management could not support him, and he then had to seek external support. Consequently, this portrays human resource management as being inconsistent in their support to business:

*‘So, you know, whilst I had some challenges, I’ve also had in the last while, examples where their competence has saved me. When I think about some of the so called bad behaviours of people that resulted in CCMA, having a highly competent human resource management function, I think was great for the business, protected the business, but also protected the individuals... [conversely] And then what’s been interesting is, in the recent past, given the challenges we’ve faced, I found myself turning to external sources for, for their insights, their counsel’ (ZH)*

### Illustration 64: King Report on Corporate Governance



The participants who used stipulations outlined in the King reports within their roles in the organisation understood the relevance of the reports to their working environment, as described by Sophie Rainey (SR):

*‘So, principle 12 of the King has all the practices around information technology governance, including information technology management, resourcing, how we report to the board, and the responsibilities that come with information*

*technology roles. That's my responsibility to ensure that I put it into a charter, we comply with it from a perspective of rolling it out making everyone aware. Yeah, so have documented the change. So, we get it reviewed by all companies, and then we set out certain processes and practices that they need to follow, such as mandates, four different forums, etc., that allows us to comply and reporting to the JSE that back to the compliance test reporting' (SR)*

Matthew Brazzoli (MB) understands specifically the King III Report in relation to ethical issues. He also references the IoDSA, which is the Institute of Directors South Africa, and the benefits of belonging to this institute:

*'So, I've used the King III a lot. In my discussion with my team and stuff around ethical issues. And people join...the IOD is a great body. People tend to join that for networking. That's what I see, the education part is there, and they run amazing courses. They're costly at times...their networking that provides probably one of their biggest assets, and I think people join because of networking' (MB)*

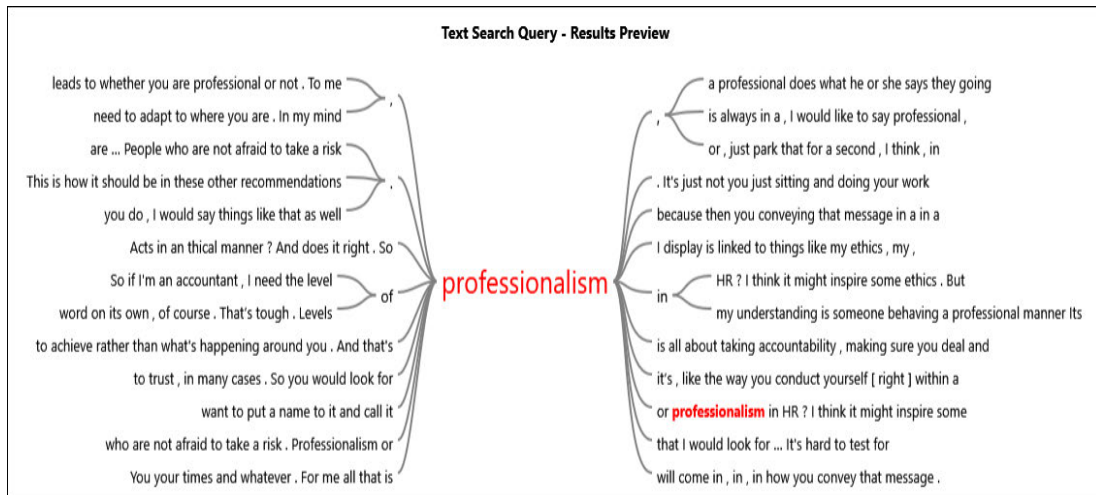
Notably, there were also participants, such as Stella Morgan (SM), who had heard of the King Reports but did not know the specific details of the guidelines stipulated in the reports:

*'I've heard of King III, King IV, but I don't know the detail around it' (SM)*

### **6.9.3 Human resource professionalism**

The third main theme of the four themed framework centred on human resource management professionalism and related sub-themes from human resource management clients' understanding of the themes that have emerged. These include professions, ethics, VUCA, and respect as a behaviour associated with professionalism in the workplace.

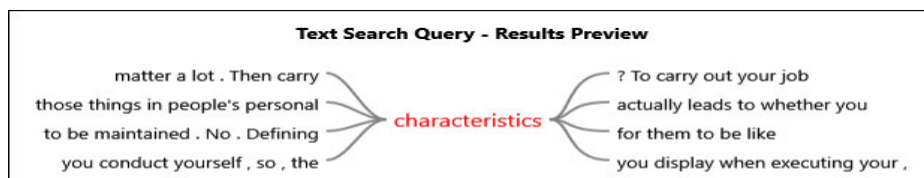
### Illustration 65: Professionalism



Zain Hall (ZH) is a senior member of leadership in his organisation and expressed what levels of professionalism mean in relation to his expectation as a human resource management client:

*‘That’s tough, levels of professionalism that I would look for... it’s hard to test for these things in an interview because I think it’s observed behaviours, you know. So, in an interview, if there were something like that, you know, I’d be looking for examples of where someone’s sharing their experiences with me and the kinds of things, I guess I would be looking for is commitments one makes and keeps. In other words, whether I’m in Project Management, and you know, I deliver on time, etc. How they behave in teams, the ability to respect someone’s point of view and to allow someone to finish. So, listening and then you know, providing constructive feedback’ (ZH)*

### Illustration 66: Characteristics



When questioned about their understanding of the characteristics of professionalism, the responses varied in terms of behaviours expected and being accountable. The following characteristics were identified by Mandy Moore (MM) and Naomi Lange (NL):

- ⇒ 'Accountability...understanding expectations of management, emotional intelligence, and performance' (MM)
- ⇒ 'I would say somebody that can maintain their cool in all scenarios, good, bad, and ugly' (NL)

Illustration 67: Profession



Human resource management clients' thoughts about and experiences with their human resource management professionals varied between behaviours and attributes expected of this profession to apply themselves at work, as stated by Sophie Rainey (SR):

*'Attributes, so personality and skills wise technically. So, it's their behaviours where they try and inspire people, liberate the best in growing their people, and support them. So that's the one element of it. The other is to have the technical know-how on gathering information, analysing information, reporting it accurately without bias (SR)*

Scott Dunn (SD) associated the human resource management profession to qualities that are expected, such as integrity, being honest and transparent in the work environment:

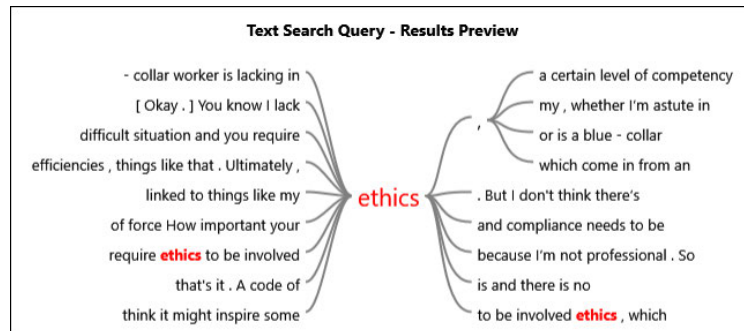
*'I think once again integrity, broad minded, honesty...what they say they must do. Transparency is also critical, don't want things to be happening behind closed doors, and you don't know how to be open' (SD)*

Having empathy and managing expectations of their human resource management clients were two aspects highlighted by Victoria Rhodes (VR) and Matthew Brazzoli (MB):

- ⇒ *Have an open door policy right...empathy...I think ethical' (VR)*

⇒ *‘So obviously, I’m very strong on ethics and I’m very strong on the empathy side. The people side, driving successful people in an organisation, through people management and proper people...people management and people development’ (MB)*

Illustration 68: Ethics



Subsequently ethics is a sub-theme, and is one of the cornerstones of this research, hence it appears within the context of professionalism in relation to human resource management clients’ views of the ‘what and how’ to practice professionalism in the workplace. Sophie Rainey (SR) declared the following:

*‘So, if you have a difficult situation and you require ethics...which come in from an angle of the facts, this is how it should be in these other recommendations. Professionalism will come in on how you convey that message. So, it's the what, and the other is the how you do it’ (SR)*

Scott Dunn (SD) explained that professionalism and unethical behaviour are not the same but can be linked:

*‘Yes, I don't think you can be professional and be unethical at the same time. So, I think yes, there has to be a link between the two, and it has to be maintained’ (SD)*

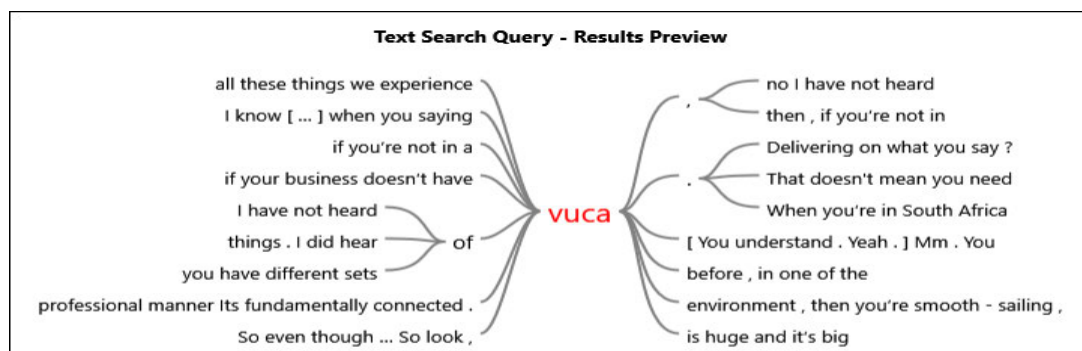
A fundamental relationship may exist between professionalism and ethical behaviour, as Stella Morgan (SM) explained her view of ethical behaviour and how essential it is when representing and making business decisions:

*'To make good business decisions, you need to display ethical behaviour. Otherwise, you do things that are not in favour of the organisation. And we see what we see happening in government and many corporate organisations, we see a lot of golden handshakes. And then how is it that you're being professional because you're not representing the organisation for what you were employed to do' (SM)*

Sam Richards (SR) related the sub-theme of ethics to an employee's professional manner and what a good professional entails. Furthermore, he highlighted the importance of aligning ethics to a code of conduct:

*'So, in terms of what a good professional is, a good professional does everything in the best interest of their company, tries to make value for the company, then does it correctly. The correct manner is where it comes in, obviously, a company will always do things according to what is most ethically so to do your job correctly in a professional manner. You need to follow, basically follow the code of conduct and even if there is a cheaper way of making money, if that's not ethical, that's not an option and the company will fully support you as well' (SR)*

Illustration 69: VUCA

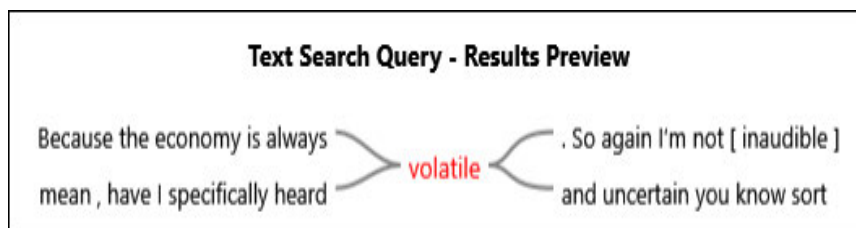


Human resource management clients' views of a VUCA environment vary across the board, where some have heard of VUCA, and others have not. Matthew Brazzoli (MB) believes that a VUCA environment is constant, and empathy is required:

*'So, in a corporate environment...I think it's fairly normal because the economy is always volatile...So in any business, if your business doesn't have VUCA, if*

*you're not in a VUCA environment, then you're smooth sailing, that's like nirvana, which would never happen. So, every business has elements of that and some higher than the other parts. So, from a human resource management perspective, you need to have an understanding and empathy towards that and then show that in the decisions you're making and how you're assisting the team'* (MB)

Illustration 70: Volatile



Stella Morgan (SM) referenced innovation, disruption, change and transformation as some of the influences that contribute to a VUCA environment. Regardless of these factors, she stated that maintaining one's ethics is necessary:

*'So even though...VUCA is huge and it's big now...we are talking about innovation, we talk about disruption, we are talking about change, we talk about transformation, we are talking about evolution. So, to keep up with all these things we experience VUCA. That doesn't mean you need to be unethical. So, you can still do everything with your moral compass pointing'* (SM)

Zain Hall (ZH) explained professionals in a VUCA environment, and the attributes such as empathy that are required to maintain professionalism:

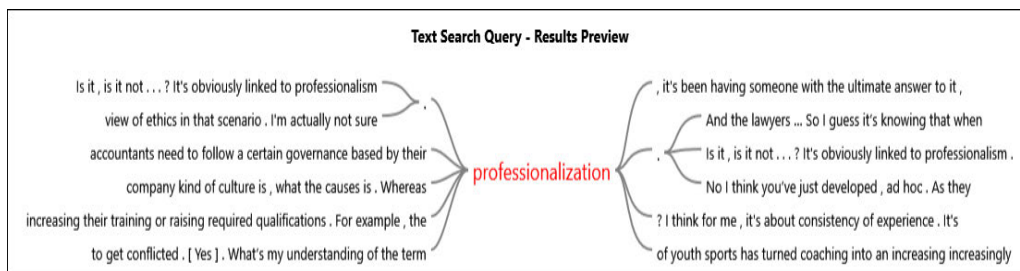
*'It's quite interesting. I guess you've thought about your questions in a particular order. Again, I think professionals will be able to execute in different circumstances. In different environments. First and foremost, they will show up with the attributes that we talked about and be able to navigate difficult situations, I think that would be the way I'll think about it. And so, whether we want to put a name to it and call it professionalism, or just park that for a second, I think, in times of uncertainty, in times of volatility, or in that context, you know, cool heads*

*prevail. Having empathy prevails. So, I think one would draw on quite a few aspects of a professional during that environment context whatever it might be'*  
(ZH)

#### 6.9.4 Human resource management professionalisation

Human resource management clients' opinions on the professionalisation of human resource management were diverse. The sub-themes that support this fourth and last of the main themes of the four themed framework are professionalisation, respect, development, attributes, and challenges. Human resource management clients did not know about the human resource management professional bodies, therefore the SABPP or IPM were not mentioned in their responses in the respective sections of their interviews.

Illustration 71: Professionalisation



Human resource management clients were interrogated about their understanding of professionalisation, and Scott Dunn (SD) stated:

*'I would say it is governed by a framework of codes and requirements, which are benchmarks, internationally to make sure that there is a minimum standard of people in this environment' (SD)*

The following human resource management clients made reference to standards and competency, as with other professional bodies. Matthew Brazzoli (MB) noted:

*'So, you have in South Africa the boards like the SAICA board, which is the South African CA chartered accountant board. And all accountants need to follow a certain governance based by their professionalisation' (MB)*

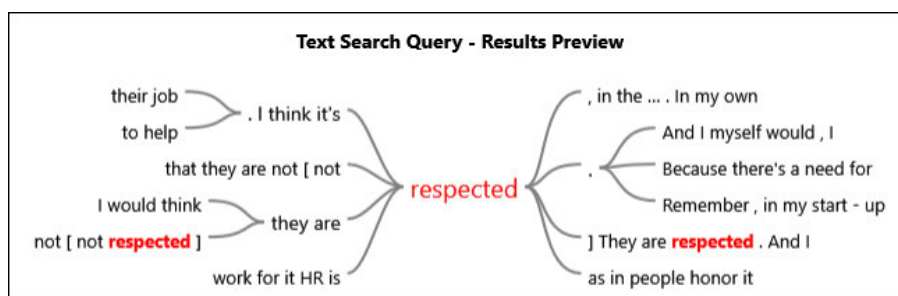
Ashen Madden (AM) described professionalisation within the South African context and the current unstructured nature of human resource management:

*'Human resource management in South Africa, as by my perception is that it's been a bit of a shotgun approach. It seems to be everyone has their views. Everyone seems to be doing things differently. I think part of the challenge is that human resource management is a profession where many practices are subjective, certainly not easy to quantify, which is the best way of doing something, which is possibly more challenging. So, at the moment, I just think that the human resource management profession in South Africa is pretty much scattergun, its flavour of the month type stuff. Doesn't seem it doesn't seem to have been a structured approach to what the human resource management profession should look like in my opinion' (AM)*

Evelyn Mac (EM) referred to standards and assessed the professionalisation of human resource management professionals compared to other professions, such as accounting:

*'For me, it's like bringing you up to standard. So whatever industry you're in, if you say, when they organize themselves and say, "You are now an accounting professional." They'll give you a title and a level. To meet that there's a certain knowledge level that needs to be considered that you need to achieve. There's normally like a certain level of experience you need to display, prove, and certain behaviours you need to adhere to. And then they're like, "Now you are competent in that." And you can call yourself an accounting professional, a chartered accountant, whatever' (EM)*

Illustration 72: Respected



The responses from human resource management clients were a bit vague when they were asked about their views on whether human resource management as a department in an organisation is respected as a profession. This makes sense when considering some of the other sub-themes, such as challenges experienced by human resource management clients with human resource management professionals. Sophie Rainy (SR), Scott Dunn (SD) and Matthew Brazzoli (MB) alluded to this:

*'I think it's respected because there's a need for them, but in terms of what they do, it's tough to judge if you don't know what the full extent of their coverage should be' (SR)*

*'Of course, well I respect them. And I think...you can't disrespect or have a general disrespect to the group of people in a certain department. Because in any organisation, every piece has a role to play, and no matter how insignificant it might seem to one, I think it can't function one without the other' (SD)*

*'Yes, I think it is. So, it is because the human resource management Director is in the front. They play a very key role, especially if you have unions and you have IR type challenges. So yes, I think it is, and they sit on the board' (MB),*

However, 60% of the participants in the human resource management client group do not believe that human resource management professionals are respected and suggested that they are instead under-appreciated, as shared by Ashen Madden (AM), Mandy Moore (MM), Evelyn Mac (EM), Stella Morgan (SM) and Zain Hall (ZH):

*'Probably not, I can't think of a single organisation we have work for where human resource management is respected. When my start-up company was launched, I consider getting a human resource management professional to be part of the team and I was meet with rolls of laughter, really' (AM)*

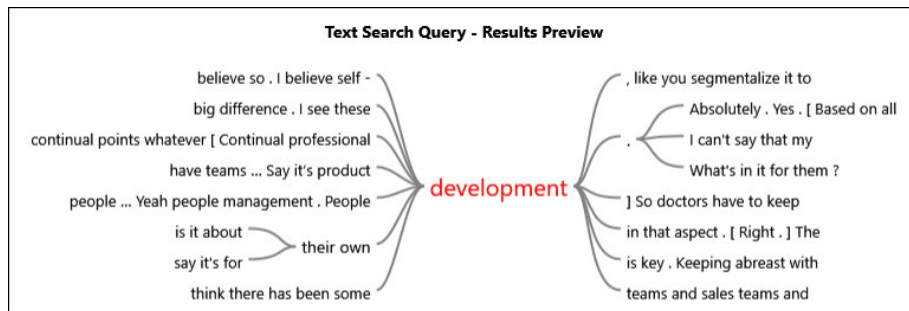
*'The fact that there are trust issues. I don't believe so' (MM)*

*'I think it's respected as in people honour it as a profession. But whether people personally know and respect their human resource management business partner, not always' (EM)*

*'No, certainly not in my organisation, certainly not in the previous organisation I represented. Also, because of the biases that existed between human resource management and the employer' (SM)*

*'I think about this for a while because it's like a double edged sword. On the one hand, when talent decisions go wrong, it has such a significant impact, that one blames human resource management by default. There's an unappreciation of the importance of the work being done...' (ZH)*

Illustration 73: Development



The development of human resource management in South Africa is a significant sub-theme from the standpoint of human resource management clients based on their everyday experience with their human resource management professionals at the different levels, as revealed by Ashen Madden (AM):

*'Development areas, I think it would need a strong Exec who's willing to give difficult feedback to the board, and the Chief Executive Officer. Our human resource management function in this organisation is over staffed, there is potentially a human resource management person for every individual in Ops' (AM)*

The development areas of human resource management professionals are a combination of behavioural and technical areas, such as having difficult conversations, keeping up to date and

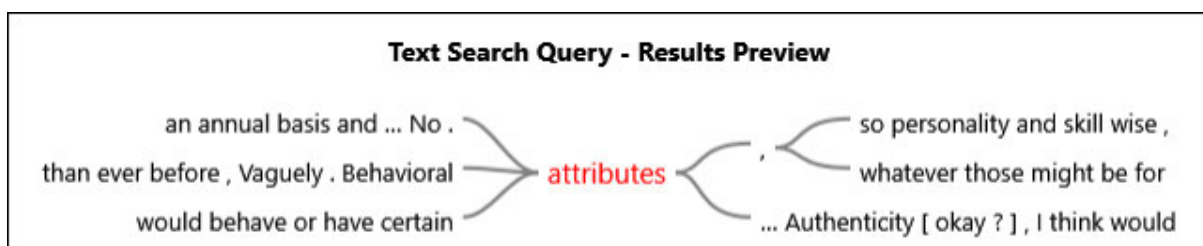
maintaining continuous professional development points, as currently happens in the medical and accounting professions, as observed by Matthew Brazzoli (MB):

*'There are no continuing education requirements. In the medical fraternity, they have CDP points, continual professional development. So, doctors have to keep going on courses to make sure they're updated because if you see a 60 year old doctor he's not going to give you 60 year old medication...I don't think it exists, in the human resource management field. It exists in the chartered accounting field. It doesn't exist in marketing; it doesn't exist in the human resource management field' (MB)*

Significantly, some development areas cannot be taught but are essential for a human resource management professional, however it is also up to the individuals to ensure their own self development and growth, as noted by Mandy Moore (MM):

*'I'm not sure how to answer this one but I will answer it in two parts. So, for the previous organisations that I worked for, I would say that, based on how the human resource management partner dealt with us, I don't think there has been some development in that aspect. I also believe self-development is key. Keeping abreast with what's going on' (MM)*

Illustration 74: Attributes



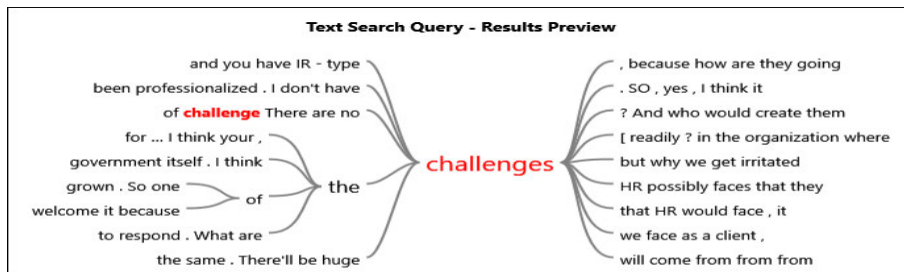
According to these human resource management clients, the particular attributes include ethics, accountability, and behavioural characteristics. Matthew Brazzoli (MB) explained some of the attributes of human resource management professionals associated with their development as a profession, which is the previous sub-theme, as:

*'Ethical, accountability, ability to challenge, ability to defend, and being productive in. So, an element of meeting deadlines, achieving, achieving goals meeting certain requirements throughout their job, those kinds of attributes' (MB)*

Zain Hall (ZH) supported the idea that human resource professionals should possess genuine behavioural attributes and engage in ethical conduct in the form of trust and being a human resource management subject matter expert and therefore supporting their clients accordingly. In this regard he stated:

*'Behavioural attributes...authenticity. I think would be at the top of my list. I think ethical conduct...so, I look for trust. And I think, what's the right word? I'm going to call it subject matter expertise. But I've seen where human resource management brought those talents of understanding people and organisations and so forth, and being a partner to me, by connecting me to some of the theory in that space, worked well. So, you know, proper practitioners, expertise, expert advice' (ZH)*

Illustration 75: Challenges



The last sub-theme related to the main theme of professionalisation is the challenges that human resource management professionals would or could experience in pursuing their professionalisation in South Africa, as explained by Sophie Rainey (SR), Mandy Moore (MM) and Stella Morgan (SM):

- ⇒ *'I don't think so. I think they'd welcome it because of the challenges we face as a client, they would welcome some more formal sort of guidelines and practices' (SR)*
- ⇒ *'I think the challenges that human resource management would face, it will be resistance from them, for people who have been in the industry for long' (MM)*
- ⇒ *'There'll be huge challenges, because how are they going to prove their worth' (SM)*

## **6.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with members of the three groups comprising the sample in this study, which was determined as a result of purposive and snowball sampling from the following population groups. These three groups were human resource management non-professionals, human resource management professionals, and human resource management clients. The larger data set was split into three parts. Each data set was based on the findings related to the main themes of the four themed framework namely: general human resource management; human resource management ethics and the King Reports (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016); human resource management professionalism; and human resource management professionalisation. The interview transcripts were analysed by NVivo software using word tree and text search. Based on the results, five sub-themes have emerged in each of the main themes of the four themed framework. These sub-themes and the findings derived under each sub-theme have been detailed in this chapter. An analysis and in-depth discussion of the findings of the study will be provided the chapter to follow. This analysis will also be framed against the four themed framework that was applied in this chapter.

## Chapter 7: Analysis and Discussion

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*“The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance; it is the illusion of knowledge”*

by Stephen Hawking

### 7.1 Introduction

The findings of the study that have been introduced in Chapter Six have conveyed a variety of trends, views and considerations of the sampled human resource management non-professionals, human resource management professionals, and human resource management clients about the human resource management profession in South Africa. The participants of this research amiably shared their perceptions which were coded to establish the emerging assortment of themes and sub-themes, not just with an unbiased intent but considering a deliberate point of view. Their contributions and the resultant findings will allow for a rich analysis, by contextualising the data in relation to the previous research considered in the literature review and theory chapters and will deliver a comprehensive discussion in this chapter of the dissertation.

This chapter is structured around the four themed framework that was established during the research and proposal stage when the interview questions were constructed. This framework emanated from the literature review which consisted of two parts. The first part of the literature review in Chapter Two discussed human resource management and human resource management ethics and the King Reports (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016), and the second part in Chapter Three examined human resource management professions, professionalism and professionalisation in organisations. The theoretical framework also provided direction and context on human resource management ethics and the professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa. The literature reviewed and the conceptual model underpinning the study contributed to the methodological approach and data collection method that has been applied in this research.

For the remainder of this analysis and discussion chapter, the four themed framework will provide the structure to examine and interpret the data collected from all three population groups that was presented in the previous chapter. This will, therefore, contribute to the exploratory discussion in this chapter based on the research findings (from Chapter Six), theoretical and conceptual framework (Chapter Four), and lastly from the literature review

presented in Chapters Two and Three. The first research objective was addressed by examining the development of human resource management as a profession, and by providing various definitions and conceptualisation of the human resource management profession in South Africa. A comprehensive historical overview and the evolution of human resource management to date was also presented in the literature review chapters. The analysis and discussion in this chapter will provide insights into the findings related to the relationship between human resource management ethics and the professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa, which is the second research objective of this study. The findings concerning the third research objective will determine how statutory professionalisation of the human resource management profession and ethical practice affect human resource management professional development. This will result in recommendations that will be presented in the final chapter of the study, validating statutory professionalisation as a strategy for ethical practice in human resource management in South Africa.

## **7.2 Four themed framework**

Bearing in mind the research objectives, and the rationale for conducting this human resource management study, the following has been applied. The analysis and discussion to follow in this chapter was drawn by contextualising data that was presented in Chapter Six in relation to the literature review presented in Chapters Two, Three and Four, consequently building a response considering the literature that was synthesised. In this study, the collective strategies and competencies required by human resource management professionals were first elaborated upon in Chapter Two. Human resource management ethics and the significance of considering the King Reports on Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016) concerning this study were explored.

The second part of the literature review drew on the sociology of professions theory, specifically on Evetts' (1999; 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018) insights and learnings on professions, professionalism and professionalisation. Other research has also contributed to this analysis, such as research on other professions in South Africa by Dawood (2015), studies on the human resource management profession in South Africa by van der Westhuizen, van Vuuren and Visser (2003), Legg (2004), Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011a; 2011b), and Syrigou's (2018) international contribution on the role of professionalisation of human resource management practitioners. Reference to international and local professional bodies also provided perspective on the human resource management

profession, professionalism, and professionalisation journey in the South African context. Hence, the four themed framework responds to the investigative research questions and objectives that support the conceptual model underpinning the study, as outlined in Chapter Four, which focused on scrutinising how the human resource management profession has developed in South Africa and thus, formulating the relationship between the professional development of the human resource management profession and the codes of ethical practice.

A thematic analysis of the data collected during the interviews was undertaken, which established the sub-themes that emerged related to the main themes of the four themed framework. The main themes entailed: general human resource management; human resource management ethics and the King Reports (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016); human resource management professionalism; and professionalisation. The three targeted groups that were interviewed included human resource management professionals that do not belong to a professional body, human resource management professionals that do belong to a professional body, such as the SABPP, IPM, HPCSA or SIOPSA, and lastly, human resource management clients in middle and senior management portfolios that are stakeholders in business and use human resource management as a service in an organisation. The interview questions for each of these groups concentrated on areas that give weight and are applicable to the analysis and discussion to be undertaken in this chapter.

### **7.3 General human resource management**

A crucial finding in this research speaks to the low barriers of entry into the human resource management profession as a career in South Africa. Responses from two of the three participant groups talks to each group's experience concerning their choice of occupation as human resource management non-professionals and human resource management professionals. Both groups indicated that the human resource management profession was not their first choice, but instead, the human resource management profession 'chose them'. In the human resource management non-professional responses, their journey started at university; the selection of subjects would affect their career options, so psychology and understanding human behaviour guided them to a career in industrial psychology, which is a human resource management adjacent career. Once participants started their careers, they eventually gravitated toward the human resource management generalist profession and found themselves remaining in the department.

Furthermore, some participants in this first participant group either started in other operational departments, such as information technology or legal departments, or in human resource management related areas such as recruitment. It was clear from most of the participants that they wanted to work with people and make a difference. Therefore, it made sense to choose human resource management as a career, as Ulrich (1997, as cited in Parkes & Davis, 2013) clarifies that human resource management was born out of concern for human wellbeing and practices, emphasised by ethical and social values. A common theme throughout these responses in this participant group is that they did not go to university with human resource management as a career choice in mind. Therefore, they did not study or opt for a human resource management degree that would have steered them to a human resource management internship, learnership or role; they did however find their vocation along the way (Parkes & Davis, 2013).

Similarly, in the human resource management professional group, participants did not plan for a career in human resource management; however, they indirectly landed in the human resource management profession. Psychology as a sub-theme makes sense as there are participants in this group that studied psychology and industrial psychology and are registered with the HPCSA and SIOPSA, and they now have careers in the human resource management profession. Another sub-theme in this participant group is the skills required to be a successful generalist. Responses entailed business understanding, critical thinking, communication, and inter-relations across cultures, especially in international organisations. Additional behaviours included empathy, emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, global mind-set, resilience, and the ability to detach from negativity in the workplace. A valuable assessment by participants in this group was that when human resource management professionals enter the human resource management profession, they underestimate the strain of the job, thus lacking specific coping skills did impact those in the profession and the clients they supported. These comments demonstrated that these human resource management professionals were not always equipped for the job's complexity, and therefore may not always have the competencies required. Consequently, it can be inferred that tertiary education does not necessarily support the development and practical skills necessary for the human resource management profession.

This participant group acknowledged that having the right qualifications, and on the job, learning was crucial, which aligns with maintaining continuing professional development points that are a requirement for this participant group of human resource management

professionals who belong to their respective professional bodies. Evetts (2003b) and the CIPD (2015) emphasise the significant attributes required to work in the human resource management profession, and the knowledge required that is both technical and tacit. Consequently, this literature does support the need for tertiary education, professional training, work experience, and expert knowledge in the field of human resource management (CIPD, 2015; Evetts, 2003b), even though this was not the case with this group of participants.

Extensive literature has documented the history and the evolution of human resource management, and how the transition from payroll and administration to a strategic business partner has affected human resource management's reputation (e.g. Budd, 2015; Cohen, 2015; De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009; Deadrich & Stone, 2014; Harzing & Van Ruysseveldt, 2004; Itika, 2011; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Ulrich & Beatty, 2001). Consequently, the label of being traditionally administrative continues to cast a shadow over the human resource management profession. This is evident in the responses from human resource management clients when describing their relationship with their human resource management department. The human resource management profession is either viewed as having credibility, competence, and the courage to perform their function, or is viewed as not at all capable for human resource management clients.

Together with establishing and maintaining relationships and providing support, the responses from this group were either positive, negative, or neutral, subject to human resource management clients' relationship and experiences with their human resource management department. These sub-themes are about human resource management's ability to apply themselves to be more than just an administrative function, being confident when making decisions, delivering on work to their clients, and standing up to management. One participant referred to these three sub-themes as being different at different levels of human resource management, confirming that human resource management at a Director level are strategic and are therefore considered to have the necessary calibre and thus considered competent. However, at a level below, such as manager and human resource management business partner level who walk the floor and build relationships with their clients, human resource management are not considered in this manner as they are perceived as focusing on being administrative and lacking the confidence to make decisions without escalating to the next level. Therefore, they are considered to lack credibility, competence, and courage, as experienced by their human

resource management clients, thus not living up to their expectations of the human resource management profession.

Knicey (1997, as cited in Van der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003) contributes to the body of knowledge on credibility, competence, and courage. The literature presented in Chapters Two and Three supports the responses of the human resource management clients, as credibility means doing what you said you will and therefore honouring one's integrity beyond criticism and keeping one's convictions, which is evidently an expectation of these human resource management clients. Competencies refers to embracing constant learning and developing human resource management skills as a profession and in business, as well as being an evolving organisational need, as human resource management currently finds itself in these VUCA times. Ultimately, human resource management requires the courage to process how things are done, to drive for continuous improvement, and to establish the eagerness to take risks and stand up to management (Van der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003).

The last two sub-themes that human resource management non-professionals and human resource management professionals highlighted are stereotypes and challenges, which intersect in this analysis. Human resource management non-professionals have had experiences where stereotypes affect their reputation while calling into question whether they can be trusted or whether their daily practices are ethical. This is supported by the CIPD (2015), which advises that to improve credibility and trust, it will be necessary for the human resource management profession to define its principles and to develop the capability to deliver on those principles and stick to its values whilst doing so. Unfortunately, this is not always the case in South Africa, as concerns around the human resource management profession supporting management and not employees have influenced their lack of credibility in business, as expressed by the participants in this group.

In brief, the sub-themes presented in the first part of the four themed framework on general human resource management, which is also supported by the literature presented, moderately demonstrates the evolution of the human resource management profession as it has advanced over time. Hence, this relatively demonstrates the development of human resource management as profession in South Africa, which has not been without certain limitations. Therefore, the stereotype of being highly administrative and supporting management still presents as a challenge to the human resource management's professional reputation, and the lack of

confidence and courage to support leadership. Human resource management professionals shared similar stereotypes regarding the development of human resource management over time and the lack of awareness of what human resource management has to offer business. Interestingly, being viewed as highly administrative and not having business acumen affects whether the human resource management profession is trusted and respected, and most certainly has affected how they operate in the business.

#### **7.4 Human resource ethics and the King Reports**

Legge (2000) describes the ethical challenges of human resource management and proposes that there is a chance for human resource management to embrace a more ethical approach. This will ultimately lead to an increase in productivity and employee wellbeing, all of which are vital to business (Caldwell, Truong, Link, & Tuan, 2011; Guest & Woodrow, 2012; Pinnington, Macklin, & Campbell, 2007). A moral dilemma that the human resource management profession struggles with is maintaining confidentiality, a significant sub-theme that emerged from the data, which also appears in a human resource management job profile/description. Human resource management non-professionals and human resource management professionals shared their concerns around the lack of confidentiality in the profession. There is no promise of confidentiality, and there is undoubtedly no consequence if confidentiality is broken by human resource management professionals, according to the three participant groups. There is a correlation between maintaining confidentiality and trust for human resource management clients, which speaks to human resource management's ethics, or lack thereof, if human resource management cannot sustain their confidentiality. Some participants have also extended the lack of trust by human resource management professionals, as implying that they are also not being credible and competent in their profession.

Literature on the human resource management profession suggests that ethical conduct is demonstrated through individual professional conduct, thus the focus on the responsibility of human resource management in encouraging and sustaining ethical and accountable business practice as a dual approach (Adeniji & Osibanjo, 2012; de Gama, McKenna, & Peticca-Harris, 2012; Guest & Woodrow, 2012; Parkes & Davis, 2013; Pinnington, Macklin, & Campbell, 2007). Human resource management professionals with a background in psychology or industrial psychology are more self-aware and believe they can manage their personal biases. Moreover, human resource managements' ability to manage their personal biases comes with experience gained over time in the human resource management profession. This is evident in

the responses by human resource management non-professionals, human resource management professionals and human resource management clients, who suggest that unethical behaviour is an individual choice and is prevalent in everyday human resource management practice, leaving human resource management professionals conflicted and not trusted, and thereby perceived as lacking professionalism.

The significance of the King Reports on Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016) in daily ethical practice and the identification of awareness of the reports between the participant groups is dependent on the individual's position and whether they were exposed to these reports. Therefore, their consideration of its applicability to good corporate governance and citizenship is understood as being valuable for the greater good of everyone. The outcomes of the studies by De Beer (2013) and De Beer and Du Toit (2015) revealed that senior human resource management managers did not have in-depth knowledge and understanding of the then King III (2009) code, stating that corporate governance was the responsibility of all the senior employees in the organisation (De Beer, 2013; De Beer & Du Toit, 2015). Their findings therefore validate the responses from participants in this study who have been exposed to the King Reports (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016) as they comprehended the significance of these reports in business, whilst other participants were not aware of the implications of the King Reports (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016) in everyday activities in an organisation.

## **7.5 Human resource professionalism**

The aim of this third theme of the four themed framework was to identify if there is a link between professionalism and ethics, and to establish what each participant group recognises as characteristics of professionalism. Notably, one participant stated that professionalism could be relative to what people understand as being professional or unprofessional. Research by Freidson (1994, as cited in Evans, 2008) supports this statement, as he argues that professionalism has diverse implications with regards to diverse groups of people, hence the term professionalism is not used singularly. This correlates within the human resource management context as advised by the human resource management non-professionals (Evans, 2008).

The constant sub-theme and discussion which came across from all groups was the interconnection with professionalism and related behaviours, such as being accountable, displaying a professional manner, good values and being credible. Evetts (2003, as cited in

Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009) validates the connection between professions and professionalism and the association with trust, discretion, competency, and behaviours that are being challenged (Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009). Nevertheless, human resource management professionals believe that belonging to a professional body would assist the profession in displaying levels of professionalism. Some participants from this group connect professionalism to knowledge and work experience which allows them to conduct themselves competently. Another participant, from the human resource management professional group, did explain that most clients do not always appreciate what human resource management does as a function. It was also mentioned that human resource management does not always partner with business, based on the client's previous experience with human resource management professionals.

Thus, based on the client perceptions of human resource management, it can be predicted that these views would make it difficult for human resource management to conduct themselves professionally. Hence, the essence of professionalism is variable in this sociological analysis and has developed over a long period. In terms of the understanding and meaning of professionalism, its attraction and relevance to the new and old occupations, it encourages and enables occupational change, and is recognised for the human resource management profession (Evetts, 1999; 2003b; 2011; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2018; Watson, 2002).

Lastly, an examination of whether a level of professionalism during the VUCA environment is possible was undertaken, and if professionalism within the context of this research is imperative to the profession and human resource management's reputation in an organisation. A research report by the CIPD (2015) supports the notion that professionalism and ethics go hand in hand; however, human resource management does not always want to broach the topic of ethics as they believe it will clash with their reputation, of getting the work done and supporting leadership.

Human resource management non-professionals' perceptions of a VUCA environment are based on their experience prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has created precarity for the human resource management profession. Participants specifically referred to behaviours such as being agile and flexible during these times, regardless of one's profession. Human resource management professionals' perceptions of VUCA and volatility have come through as sub-themes in the research findings. This recognises the need for human resource

management professionals to navigate and survive while maintaining ethics and a balanced emotional intelligence. Human resource management clients believed that a VUCA environment is a constant, as businesses are constantly under pressure of a changing environment; therefore, preserving one's ethics and moral compass would hold human resource management in good stead during changing times. Rose (2007) supports the belief that it has become essential to appreciate the ethical practice of business and human resource management in this VUCA environment under the current dimensions of change.

## **7.6 Human resource professionalisation**

The fourth and final theme of the four themed framework delivers research findings on the insights of each participant group regarding their perspective of professionalisation that would promote further professional development, and what it would mean to the human resource management profession in South Africa. As a group that is not professionalised, the human resource management non-professional group referred to other professions that are professionalised in South Africa as a comparison, namely chartered accountants, and lawyers, and mentioned international human resource management professional bodies, such as the CIPD in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Middle East, and Asia. In addition, they highlighted associated behaviours and attributes connected to professionalism that experts could gain from being qualified and skilled in the human resource management profession which would include attending training, as with other professions, such as accountants. Other sub-themes from this group that emerged in this last section were around general attributes, ethical practice if human resource management were to be professionalised, and standards connected with being professionalised, including the 'gold standard', which were also sentiments shared by the human resource management clients.

Weckert and Lucas (2013) encourage Higgins and Lo's (2018) analysis on power over those who do not have the knowledge and expertise and are consequently vulnerable to those who do. Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) advise that human resource management professional associations established with statutory recognition have emphasised that human resource management professionals require specialist proficiencies and skills guided by statutory professional standards. As mentioned, this is also the sentiment of the participants in this study. Hence, the participants believed that the professional development of the human resource management profession in South Africa would improve if statutory professionalisation were regulated. Therefore, statutory professional bodies would institute legal authorities, and

establish positive hierarchies of power and privilege that would apply to this profession (Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003). Professional bodies and councils would thus regulate recommended ethical standards and professional conduct aligned to statutory societal standards (Zakaria, Haron, & Ismail, 2010), supporting professional development and ethical practice in the workplace.

The research findings from the second group, namely human resource management professionals, regarding their professionalisation have provided substance to this discussion. It is important to note that this group has participants registered with the SABPP, IPM, HPCSA and SIOPSA. Their registration to a professional body allows them access to information, training and further research in this and related human resource management professions such as psychology, industrial psychology, and clinical psychology, all of which are professions that either work in a human resource management department or are referred to for specific cases, such as mental health issues or trauma. It is also important to note that the SABPP registered professionals were aware of a similar study conducted by the SABPP on the professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa.

The other sub-themes include growth opportunities for human resource management professionals based on the requirements for continuing professional development points, which is common to all professions. One participant was transparent about the rift between the two professional bodies, the SABPP and the IPM. The SABPP Human Resource Competency Model also featured as a sub-theme and connects this discussion to the theoretical framework that explains the relevance of the model to this research, which are also the sentiments shared by the human resource management clients. From these responses, the participants agree that the model offers human resource management professionals a framework for explaining the role of a human resource management practitioner and what good governance means to the human resource management profession in South Africa. The SABPP Human Resource Management Competency Model establishes the standard for human resource management professionalism (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021). The model and standard describe what organisations ought to have in place to enhance their human resource management practice, and to deliver substantial work and quality of work life for their employees. The model is strongly connected to the standard and illustrates what human resource management practitioners have to offer in terms of knowledge, skills, and behaviour to implement the standard (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021). Another valid consideration for this research is what it

would mean for psychologists, industrial psychologists and clinical psychologists that have already registered with the HPCSA and could also register with SIOPSA if human resource management is statutorily regulated. The last sub-theme emanating from the human resource management professionals group related to the professionalisation of human resource management is the theme of human resource management strategy, which aligns human resource management to business practice and culture. Ekuma and Akobo (2015) have evaluated several businesses and human resource management ethics studies. They identified that much of the literature maintains explicitly or implicitly that human resource management is an approach to management, with its instructions on business strategy integration, which would necessitate ethical evaluation and critical analysis (Ekuma & Akobo, 2015).

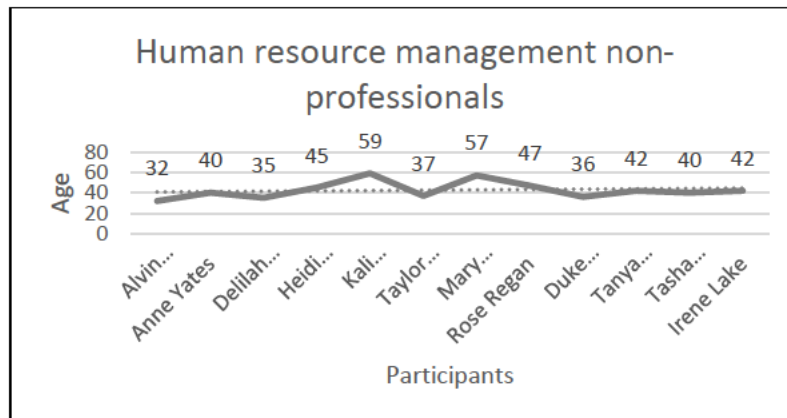
Probing human resource management clients on whether human resource management professionals are respected as a profession delivered ambiguous responses, since 60% do not believe that the human resource management profession is respected. Therefore, the professional development of human resource management is a significant sub-theme to this research from the position and perspective of human resource management clients. The developmental areas are a blend of behavioural and technical attributes. Syrigou (2018) explains that human resource management tries to prove its worth to clients by delivering a vast list of work activities, from leave queries to board reports and union intervention. This may not always translate into satisfying client needs, regardless of human resource management's best efforts. This could lead to a lack of trust and therefore undermine human resource management's status in the workplace, partly due to the decentralisation of human resource management activities in an evolving business environment (Syrigou, 2018).

### **7.7 Demographics on age and gender**

This section considers age, race and gender as unique demographics within the South African context that influence and will continually influence the human resource management profession. Current legislation on employment equity and affirmative action, and further disparities experienced by the human resource management profession and their clients, which are explicitly based on race and gender, which are not necessarily unique to South Africa, will be considered within the context of this study. It is particularly interesting that the average age of each participant group speaks to the tenure of the participants, and thus the years of experience and knowledge that each group has contributed to the input into the findings of this study. This is significant when considering their intellectual property that contributed to the

discussion on the history and evolution of human resource management over time in South Africa. The ages of the participants, per group within the sample, is shown in Illustrations 76, 77 and 78 below.

Illustration 76: Age of human resource management non-professionals



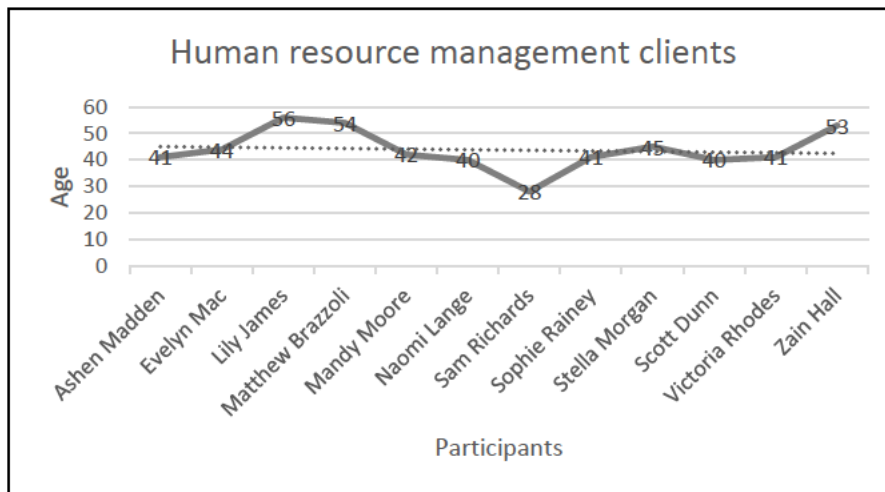
Evidently, 50% of the participants fall into the age category 40 to 49, 33% into the category 30 to 39 and two seasoned human resource management non-professionals are in their 50's. None of these participants belong to a professional body.

Illustration 77: Age of human resource management professionals



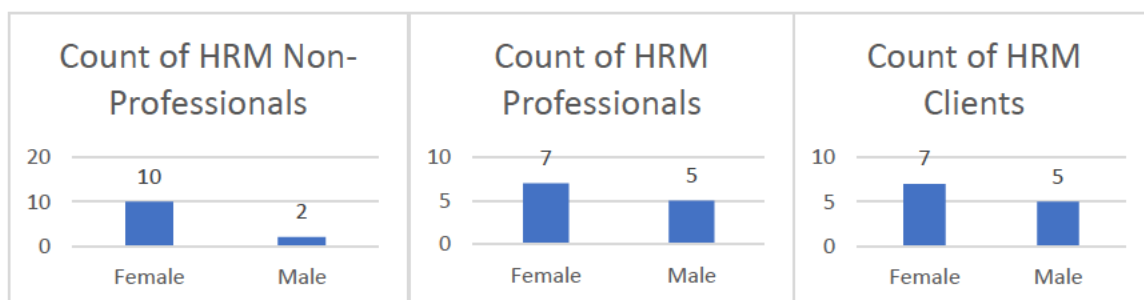
The average age of participants in this group is over 50 years of age, with 25% in the age category 40 to 49, two between 30 to 39 and one in their 20's. These are human resource management professionals that belong to a professional body.

Illustration 78: Age of human resource management clients



Essentially, 66% of this group are in the age category 40 to 49 and have worked for an average of 20 years, which contributed to their human resource management expertise and intellectual property, 25% are in the age category 50 to 59, and one participant is in the age category 20 to 29.

Illustration 79: Gender of participants



Significantly, in two of the participant groups that work in the human resource management profession more females, per group, have participated in this study. Even though this was not examined or even planned during the interview process, there may be validity in considering

gender and race for future research. The human resource management profession was not traditionally considered a profession dominated by women. However, in the current South African business context, women and individuals of colour are not always treated equally in terms of salary or career opportunities compared to their male, and more specifically white male, counterparts who are still top earners across industries and are sometimes privileged to better career opportunities, regardless of Employment Equity and Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment policies introduced by government. Since this was not interrogated in the interviews with participants, it should be considered for future research.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

The importance of preserving the human resource management profession's ethics and professionalism will advance to a credible human resource management status. Hence, a boost in human resource management's professional status, trust and professionalism will contribute to the application for statutory professionalisation which will enable practitioners a level of power and privilege. The association between knowledge gained through tertiary qualification and on the job training, maintaining an ethical practice and earning the trust of their clients will also contribute to the professional development of the human resource management profession. This will ultimately contribute to the human resource management profession's credibility, competence, and courage, given the uncertainties during these VUCA times, whilst tackling a variety of ethical issues.

This chapter has discussed the key findings of this research which are based on the participants' knowledge, insights, and thoughts. The four themed framework that provided the structure to this chapter included participants' awareness of general human resource management, human resource management ethics and the King Reports for Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016), human resource management professionalism, and lastly human resource management professionalisation. These are all themes that have highlighted the familiar experience of each participant group concerning human resource management ethics and the need for human resource management professionalisation and professional development in South Africa. The findings have indicated each group's perception of human resource management's ethical practice, the connection between professionalism and ethics, and the possibility of professionalisation for human resource management in South Africa, together with possible highlights and challenges. These are all aspects that contribute to addressing the research objectives that will be answered in detail in the following chapter. In addition, the

findings of this study respond to calls from previous researchers, and recommendations will also be provided based on the discussion presented in this chapter. The original contribution to knowledge of this research will be highlighted in the final chapter of the study.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

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*“Through life I have learned that the most important critic whose judgment of my actions matters is my conscience”* by Thuli Madonsela

### 8.1 Introduction and research inquiry

A multitude of previous studies have considered similar areas of research interest as those explored in this study (e.g. Abbott, Goosen, & Coetzee, 2013; Dawood, 2015; De Beer, 2013; De Beer & Du Toit, 2015; de Bruyn & Roodt, 2009; Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Legg, 2004; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2015a; Schutte, Barkhuizen & van der Sluis, 2015b; Syrigou, 2018; Van der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b; Van Vuuren & Eiselen, 2006). The findings and related analysis and discussion presented in this study will contribute to existing literature, both locally and internationally. Firstly, the findings will add to knowledge on the professional development of human resource management. It is important to note that previous discussions on this topic in South Africa (e.g. Abbott, Goosen, & Coetzee, 2013; De Beer, 2013; De Beer & Du Toit, 2015; Van Der Westhuizen, van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b) were published about two decades ago and focused on investigating the experiences and opinions of human resource management professionals that the researchers worked with, as well as professionals that belonged to human resource management forums, or to a professional body such as the SABPP.

This study took the prior research and discussions one step further and considered the experiences and opinions of human resource management non-professionals, that is, those who do not belong to a professional body, in addition to human resource management professionals who do belong, as well as human resource management clients. As mentioned previously, the views of human resource academics and their students within universities were also going to be considered in this study; however due to the low response rate the researcher decided not to add this group to the sample. The participants in this study have contributed to existing knowledge on the professional development of human resource management that will become relevant when one or both of the professional bodies, that is the SABPP or IPM, makes an

application to government for the statutory professionalisation of the human resource management profession in South Africa.

Secondly, the findings of this study will complement existing research on the ethical practices required by human resource management non-professionals and professionals. In addition, this study will contribute to the sociology of professions discussion on occupations, which relates to professions, professionalism and professionalisation theory that has also been presented and analysed in the relevant chapters of the study. Lastly, aspects of this study should be considered for inclusion in the next King Report, which should have a more robust approach to human resource management's ethical practice and corporate governance in South Africa. Based on the overall findings that emanated from this study, the overall conclusions to the study will be drawn, and recommendations regarding statutory professionalisation as a strategy for ethical practice in the human resource management profession in South Africa will be presented in this chapter. The findings of this study will also be of interest to human resource management professionals who work in this profession and would appreciate a practitioner's perspective within the South African context.

The human resource management participants in this study have extensive experience in human resource management yet also have diverse backgrounds in several fields in which they were involved before entry into the field of human resource management. They all worked in different sectors and have moved through the ranks in human resource management. Their tenure and experience have allowed human resource management non-professionals, human resource management professionals and their human resource management clients to dig deep and share their knowledge and insights into, and experiences with the human resource management profession. Furthermore, due to the lengthy tenure of most of the participants, they have been present for and have witnessed the professional development of the human resource management profession from its initial role in the payroll/administration department through its evolution to now having a seat at the boardroom table.

As a result, the discussion in this chapter of the study will also respond to calls and contributions from similar research in the human resource management profession and related fields that have previously been conducted in South Africa in the last decade (e.g. Abbott, Goosen, & Coetzee, 2013; De Beer, 2013; De Beer & Du Toit, 2015; Van Der Westhuizen, van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a; Van Rensburg, Basson,

& Carrim, 2011b). These contributions were achieved through the use of a four themed framework that is the backbone of this study, which recognised insights into general human resource management, human resource management ethics and the King Reports on Corporate Governance (1994; 2002; 2009; 2016), as well as human resource management professionalism, and human resource management professionalisation. This formed the core structure of Chapter Six, where the findings were presented, and Chapter Seven, which concentrated on an analysis and discussion of the findings.

This was preceded by a two part literature review; the first part in Chapter Two comprised of a detailed overview of aspects related to human resource management within the business context of South Africa, and the second part in Chapter Three focused on literature on professions, professionalism and professionalisation in relation to the human resource management field. The theoretical framework presented in Chapter Four comprised of a multilateral paradigm that relies on a three specific knowledge system. It started with the field of ethics, specifically business ethics, that is, teleological and deontological theories. It further highlighted literature by Evetts (2012a), particularly on the discourse of professionalism and McClelland's (1990) categorisation theory from 'within and from above', which contributed to the conceptual model that was presented. The SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021) comprises of a structure that represents a house: the foundation refers to human resource management professionals' duty to society; the walls, referred to as pillars, represent human resource management ethics and professionalism that is considered a core competency by the SABPP; and the roof refers to the general human resource management and business knowledge that all human resource management professionals should have, regardless of their level in an organisation. Chapter Five outlined the methodological approach used in the study, which was vetted and approved by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the proposal stage of this study.

The latest King IV Report on Corporate Governance (2016) and the Companies Act No.71 of 2008 highlight the influence of business in society and the responsibility to perform as a responsible citizen and preserve a sense of community. The SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021) portrays the responsibility for human resource management professionals in business to commit to their duty to society and ultimately use their knowledge and experience as professionals. To this end, this exploratory study, together with the analyses and interpretation of the experiences of the human resource

management non-professionals, human resource management professionals and their human resource management clients, aimed to provide an original contribution to the body of knowledge on the human resource management profession in South Africa.

## **8.2 Addressing the research objectives of this study**

From the data that was generated, analysed, and interpreted, as well as the landscape that has been presented in this research inquiry, the research objectives will be addressed in a way that will offer recommendations and illustrate the original contribution to the existing knowledge about the human resource management profession in South Africa.

1. To examine the development of human resource management as a profession in South Africa.

Van Der Westhuizen, van Vuuren and Visser (2003) confirmed that human resource management is a developed profession in South Africa. However, the authors also made reference to attributes that are associated with being a developed profession, such as full professional status and being trusted and respected and contrasted these attributes to accountants and lawyers who share the same space at the boardroom table (Van Der Westhuizen, van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003). Their research resulted in proving that human resource management is indeed a profession in South Africa. Nevertheless, they were unable to negate the negative perceptions of human resource management as a profession in the early 2000's and put forth recommendations to improve human resource management recognition and contributions of a regulatory board on ethical standards, with the aim of making the human resource management profession more critical in the field. They also recommended that further studies should be carried out which could determine the perception of the human resource management profession by other professions, the public, and other divisions and line managers. Thus, they advocated for the need for recommendations to improve the positioning of human resource management in modern organisations (Van Der Westhuizen, van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003).

The significance of this first objective was not only to present existing literature, but to also examine whether the participants who currently work in the human resource management profession believe that this profession has actually developed over time, based on their experience. The participants agreed that the profession has developed, however there are those

who maintain that human resource management professionals are still stuck carrying out what is considered traditional or administrative work. This was also consistent with responses from human resource management clients, who believed the expertise required for this profession was more evident at the higher levels, that is, at the executive level, and not so much at the middle and lower levels of human resource management, as the lower levels were still stuck on transactional work or did not have the power to make vital decisions. This lack of credibility, competency, and courage to deliver to clients' expectations damages the reputation of and respect for the human resource management professionals. The clients also commented on their general relationship, or their lack of relationship, with their human resource management department. In addition, they identified human resource management problem areas that could be improved through development. These included: lack of confidence to have difficult conversations; being accountable for their actions; being more visible; lack of training; and again, lack of expertise in conducting themselves with a level of professionalism as human resource management professionals.

As mentioned earlier, there is substantial evidence based on the sub-theme of development, specifically referring to the professional development of the human resource management profession and a movement away from its main role being related to the payroll and administration departments, to fuller involvement in contemporary business practice. Previously, the South African government believed that human resource management needed to establish itself first in business as a mature and strategic business partner (Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b). From this research, it is evident that human resource management has established itself as a profession, and even though there are still prominent stereotypes and challenges faced, statutory professionalisation would provide the guidance, standards and a code of conduct that would contribute to an increased professional status for human resource management in South Africa. The SABPP has also done sufficient work to support human resource management in the form of the establishment of the SABPP Human Resource Competency Model (Meyer, 2021; SABPP, 2021). The findings of this current study support Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim's (2011a) request for the SABPP to establish statutory regulation of human resource management, if not in legislation, then by pursuing a similar route to the CIPD, by formalising their application through a gazetted chartered council.

Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011b) published an article on the historical development of human resource management as a profession and evaluated the platform for human resource

management's professional standing in South Africa. The authors admit that their work was by no means a complete record of the history of the SABPP; however, it did record the contribution of Garry Whyte, the founding father of the SABPP, from the first discussion on regulation to his death in 1991. Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011b) recommended that further research be undertaken. However, their initial research put the history of human resource management within the larger context, emphasising the establishment and development of the human resource management profession. Their research contextualised socio-political changes within the SABPP and the National Qualifications Framework, also referred to as the NQF. Together with the South African Qualifications Authority the NQF certifies that the South African education and training system is world class. Certification of human resource management qualifications would contribute to the development of these qualifications, which would be influential in realising the request for statutory SABPP regulation; thereby acknowledging the profession's efforts to establish good governance, ethics, categories, job levels, criteria, and the South African professional human resource management standards (Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b).

2. To establish the relationship between the professional development of human resource management and codes of ethical practice.

Irrespective of the minimal requirements to work in the human resource management profession, that is referred to as low barriers of entry in this study, the findings in this research have confirmed that both human resource management non-professionals and professionals, and their clients, have reinforced what has been stated in the literature review, that is, that having suitable qualifications and on the job learning is crucial, especially within the South African context. In addition, as presented in Chapter Six, were findings related to the participants' views that human resource management professionals are not always equipped for the different levels of complexities involved in their work, and the unethical behaviour and situations faced in the working environment.

Firstly, there is literature supporting the need for tertiary education, professional training, work experience and expert knowledge in the field of human resource management (CIPD, 2015; Evetts, 2003b). Evetts (2003b) reinforced the knowledge-base that can be attained through higher education, training, and work experience from on the job learning. Hence, the sociology of professions agrees on the need for a knowledge-based profession, which is gained from

higher education and on the job learning. This study has made a solid case that due to perceived lack of credibility, competency, and courage of human resource management professionals, attaining professional status is necessary in order for them to be trusted and respected by their peers and by their clients to meet expectations and service delivery. Although the human resource management professionals continue to face challenges due to the stereotypes that are prevalent on a daily basis, they have achieved professional standards at the senior level, they are also now qualified compared to the past, and are receiving training and on the job learning, which will contribute to the further development of human resource management professionals at the middle and junior level. Fortunately, in the long term this will contribute to the human resource management profession's improved professional status and will aid in building trust with their peers and clients, which will result in them being respected for their increased levels of professionalism.

Secondly, South African businesses are embarking on focused and structured attempts to manage ethics. Over the years, the King Reports have stipulated the institutionalisation and management of ethics as a primary focus of good governance (Van Vuuren & Eiselen, 2006). Janse van Rensburg (2009) conducted interviews with the then President of the Human resource management Council of South Africa (HRCOSA), Shaun Schwanzer, and the Chair of the King Committee on Corporate Governance in South Africa, Judge Mervyn King. Judge King emphasised his support for the statutory regulation of the human resource management function to ensure compliance with an applicable code of conduct. He explained that enforcing a code of conduct is essential for good practice (Janse van Rensburg, 2009). In South Africa, increased awareness of the negative consequences of corruption and sub-standard services has contributed to the demand for codes of conduct and negotiated charters to be endorsed by the government in all business spheres. Janse van Rensburg (2009) stated that a large majority of human resource management professionals have admitted to the need for some form of regulation of the human resource management profession.

Thirdly, the discussion on professional ethics, expert knowledge, trust, and professional identity indicated that these are all relevant in establishing a relationship between the professional development of human resource management and addressing unethical behaviour, which has directed professional bodies to construct ethical codes of conduct (Syrigou, 2018). To attain the professional status required by all human resource management professionals in South Africa would mean that ethical dilemmas, regardless of a code of conduct being in place,

are influenced by individual behaviour (Syrigou, 2018). Stewart and Rigg (2011), also state that since ethics cannot be learnt, instead, individuals need to determine their ethical practice. These sentiments also appeared in responses by human resource management non-professionals, human resource management professionals and their clients in this study who suggested that unethical behaviour is an individual choice and is prevalent in everyday human resource management practice, leaving human resource management professionals conflicted and not trusted, thereby lacking in their professionalism.

However, the research outcomes show that the literature advocates for the accountability of human resource management in managing ethics and embracing a more ethical approach in promoting ethical practice in an organisation, regardless of individual behaviour. Research on ethics and human resource management has applied ethics theory to the practice of human resource management (Djurkovic & Maric, 2010; Felty, 2014; Greenwood, 2014; Jack, Greenwood, & Schapper, 2012; Lloyd & Mey, 2010; Parkes & Davis, 2013; Rhodes & Harvey, 2012; Van Vuuren & Eiselen, 2006; Wilton, 2016). The connections drawn between professionalism and ethics from all participant groups in this research shows that they associate professionalism to a profession and related behaviours, such as being ethical, accountable, displaying a professional manner, having good values and being credible. These behaviours of human resource management professionals have proven to have a relationship with the professionalism and the professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa.

3. To determine how statutory professionalisation and ethical practice affect human resource managements' professional development.

Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011a) had in 2011 made a request for the SABPP to establish the statutory regulation of the human resource management profession. These academics suggested that if statutory regulation was not entrenched in legislation, then it should be pursued by following a similar route to the CIPD (United Kingdom's professional body), that formalised professionalisation through a gazetted chartered council. Significantly, there was also a recommendation by Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011a) that human resource management should find a place in the next King Report, which would have been the King IV Report on Corporate Governance that was published in 2016. They went on to specify that all JSE listed companies should appoint registered human resource management professionals, at least at chartered human resource management practitioner or master level. This would

promote an alliance between the IPM and the SABPP, to motivate the need for higher education qualifications for all registered human resource management professionals, thereby supporting professional development, as well as to prioritise ethics training for human resource management professionals in South Africa.

Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011a) believed that statutory professionalisation would contribute to a uniform standard of competency and professionalism to improve human resource management credibility, competency, and courage. Human resource management clients in this study have clarified that these standards are expected of their human resource management department, as well as of each other as professionals in the workplace. Therefore, if all organisations insisted on registration to a professional body as compulsory in a human resource management job profile, this would automatically influence the professional development of human resource management in South Africa. The prior research by Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011a) demonstrates that the purpose of this objective is not new to the appeal for statutory professionalisation and ethical practice. However, an application of some part or all of the suggestions by these authors will provide an opportunity for the profession to display whether statutory professionalisation and ethical practice will impact the professional development of human resource management. In turn, this will support the case that the human resource management profession has matured in South Africa and that another application by either the SABPP or IPM to government for statutory professionalisation would be justified.

Finally, it is the responsibility of human resource management professionals to educate their clients about their role in an organisation, as well as for them to understand the various registration categories, to support registration with a professional body (Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a). The participants in this study, specifically the human resource management non-professionals and professionals, firstly shared a similar point of view in terms of advocating for the regulation of the professional development of human resource management professionals. Secondly, it was evident that some human resource management clients do not fully understand the entire scope of work of a human resource management generalist. This lack of understanding affects their expectations as well as their relationship and interaction with their human resource management clients, as presented in the findings of this research.

Likewise, Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) advise that human resource management professional associations established with statutory recognition emphasise that human resource management professionals have gained specialist proficiencies and skills, guided by statutory professional standards, together with attributes and ethical practice, which all contribute to the professional development of this profession, thus setting a gold standard. Participants in this study shared similar sentiments. Firstly, participants agreed that qualifications are important. However, the views of human resource management non-professionals versus professionals were slightly different. The former were not necessarily qualified in human resource management but in other fields such as law or psychology, and they felt that they were led into this profession, as it was not their first choice. However, the latter believe that a specific human resource management qualification is essential and highlighted the impact of statutory professionalisation which would promote continuous professional development points that would also contribute to a gold standard, something that non-professionals believe to represent a higher calibre of professionalism.

In addition, research presented in the literature review revealed that human resource management has a responsibility within an organisation to take care of the ‘people’ part of the organisation and should therefore create an ethical culture, nurture good values, ensure proper corporate governance and compliance, and also manage any risk. De Beer (2013) argued for the need to establish the particular role that human resource management professionals could have in relation to the then King III Report on Corporate Governance (2009), and therefore investigated what human resource management professionals understood about the King III Report (2009). However, at the time of his study, De Beer (2013) faced several limitations and challenges. His questions on ethics in a human resource management department created concerns, therefore resulting in a small sample size, and he experienced challenges in scheduling interviews. For this reason, he recommended that future studies should include a larger population, as well as more human resource management participants from JSE listed companies, as his study only had two participants, resulting in limited data on the key themes of human resource management in relation to the King III Report on Corporate Governance (2009).

De Beer and Du Toit (2015) suggested that professional bodies should intensify ethics and corporate governance. Moreover, the authors maintained that human resource management must prioritise their responsibility, in this way strengthening the connection between statutory

professionalisation and ethical practice. The authors also recommended that human resource management should ensure that qualifications and training are more focused on professional development and preparing human resource management professionals to become strategic business partners in an organisation. De Beer and Du Toit (2015) confirmed that human resource management professionals acknowledged knowing little about the King III Report's (2009) principles and were unsure of the human resource management function. At the time of publication of their article, De Beer and Du Toit (2015) suggested that the next King Report, that would be the King IV Report on Corporate Governance (2016), would have been the ideal opportunity for human resource management professionals to take more responsibility as professionals and that they should contribute to the application of the next King Report.

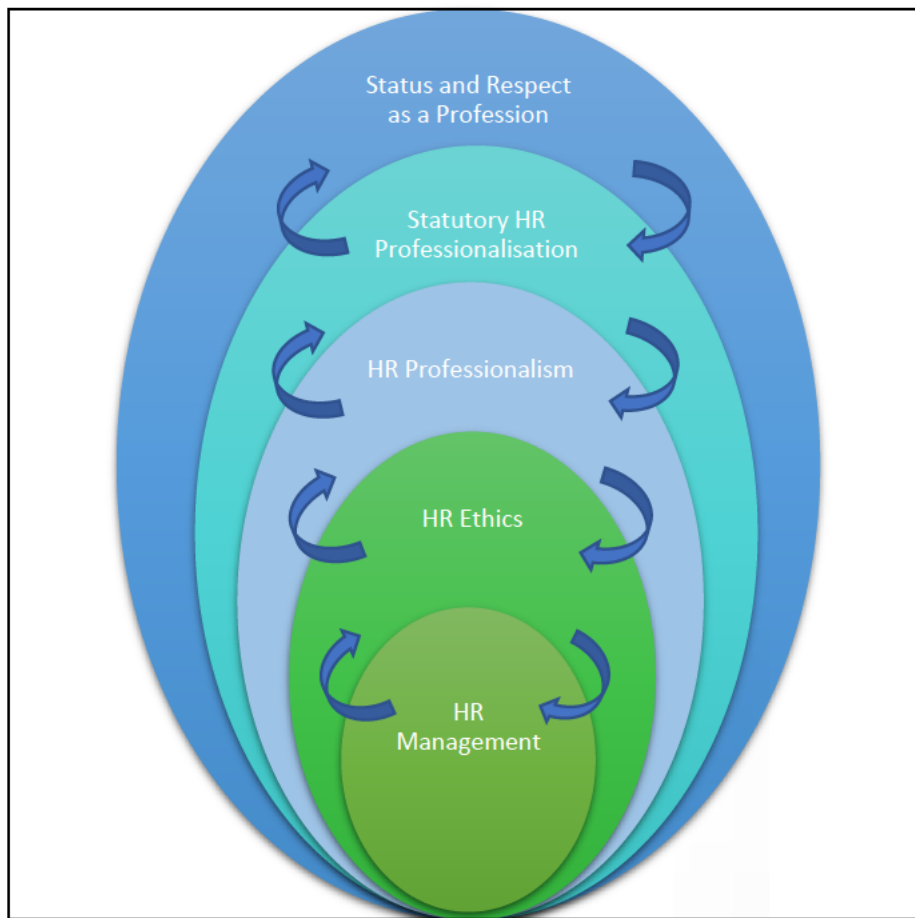
In comparison to De Beer's (2013) study that had only two participants from JSE listed companies, this study had twenty three participants at the time of the fieldwork who were working at JSE listed companies, whilst twelve participants had previously worked at JSE listed companies, making the total thirty five out of thirty six participants that have worked or were working at JSE listed companies. However, according to their responses, not all participants were aware or had detailed knowledge of the King Reports even though this report applies to all JSE listed companies. Human resource management non-professionals had either not heard of or had not needed to apply the King Reports in their business activities, which is similar to De Beer and Du Toit's (2015) participants who acknowledged knowing only a little about the King Reports. In comparison, human resource management professionals and human resource management clients from this study were aware of the reports, more specifically those who explained how they used the King Reports in their current positions.

The second part of the literature offered the history and the contribution of the sociology of work within the sociology of professions, regarding what constitutes a profession. A profession should dictate to society what is good and right (Evetts, 1999; 2003a; 2003b). However, Evetts (1999; 2003b) suggested that there is disagreement between the functionalist and neo-Weberian theoretical positions with regard to the connection to a value system and ideology. In this study, one of the participants specifically referred to an individual's value system and indicated that when put in a position of addressing or behaving unethically, it is an individual's choice to challenge the unethical behaviour. Furthermore, she detailed the understanding of what a profession is, the association to professionalism (the most difficult of the three concepts), professionalisation, and the attributes associated with a profession and knowledge, both

technical and tacit qualities, together with trust, discretion, and accountability. The process of professionalisation was documented by Evetts (1999), and the need for a code of ethics, training, and continuing professional development was recommended. Evetts (2003a) explained that professionalism in the military is constructed and imposed from above under the discourse of professionalism. This literature supports the discussion on the importance of professionalism to a profession (Evetts, 2003a). In her contribution, Evetts (2003b) used McClelland's (1990) categorisation theory to differentiate between professionalisation from 'within' (in a business context that would be the successful manipulation of the market by the occupational group), which in this research would be human resource management in an organisation, and from 'above' (referring to the domination of forces external to the occupational group), which in this research would be human resource management clients, stakeholders and society.

Evetts (2003b; 2012a; 2012b; 2014a; 2014b) also indicated that there is a plea from the profession itself for professionalism from 'within', creating an identity and regulating responsibilities, which can be associated to a professional body, and professionalism from 'above', which for the better part refers to the employers and managers of the specific profession. Therefore, her contribution to this research provides a framework that can be drawn upon for any profession to want to be regulated, the need for continued professional development, to be trusted and accountable, and to be guided by their own ethical principles.

Illustration 80: Conceptual model



### **Upward Spiral**

If human resource management professionals were more ethical, based on their ethical practice, this would increase human resource management's professionalism in the workplace. Together with other contributing factors, this would provide a case for statutory professionalisation, which will render human resource management a respected and trusted profession.

### **Downward Spiral**

When human resource management is a respected and trusted profession, statutory professionalisation (in a similar vein to engineers and accountants) would essentially result in human resource management ethical practice and professionalism, which will mean a robust human resource management function.

Finally, this conceptual model together with the theoretical framework that was presented in Chapter Four supports the first two research objectives addressing the development of human resource management as a profession, and the relationship between the professional

development of human resource management and codes of ethical practice, as well as the last objective supporting the effect of statutory professionalisation and ethical practices on the professional development of human resource management. The human resource management conceptual model upward spiral recognises the importance of ethical practice and professional conduct, which would result in displaying levels of professionalism. This increased level of professionalism could promote an application for statutory professionalisation of the human resource management profession, thus increasing human resource management's professional status and earning respect as a profession. Conversely, the downward spiral refers to maintaining the professional status and having the respect of a profession that is regulated by government, thus displaying professionalism, professional conduct, and ethical practice. The South African statutory regulatory bodies, that is the SABPP and IPM, could intensify the profession's credibility, competency, and integrity in a time of descending credibility when the profession should be focused on creating a platform for robust strategic business partnership.

### **8.3 Limitations of the study**

This research began in 2017, thus one of the limitations was the long-time period of this study due to unforeseen circumstances and work constraints as the researcher relocated and embarked on a new portfolio. In addition, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, there were further time constraints as human resource management was seriously affected. This meant that the fieldwork was only completed by the end of 2019. Furthermore, the researcher de-registered in the second semester of 2020, after completing all fieldwork, hence the prolonged length taken to complete this study.

Another limitation was that the fieldwork was only conducted in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. Due to a lack of funding for the research, the Western Cape and other provinces were not included in the study. When the four themed framework was constructed for the interview process, the order of the framework made sense at the onset of the research and correlated with the structure used in the two-part literature review. However, during the interview process, it was apparent that the framework should have started with human resource management professionalism and human resource management professionalisation as the first two themes because during the interviews, the participants spent more time processing these questions than the first two themes of the framework, namely general human resource management and human resource management ethics. Lastly, at the onset of this research, academic institutions were

considered to be part of the participant group; however, when applying for gatekeepers' letters, only one institution indicated an interest to participate in this study and therefore academic institutions proved not to be viable to be included in this research.

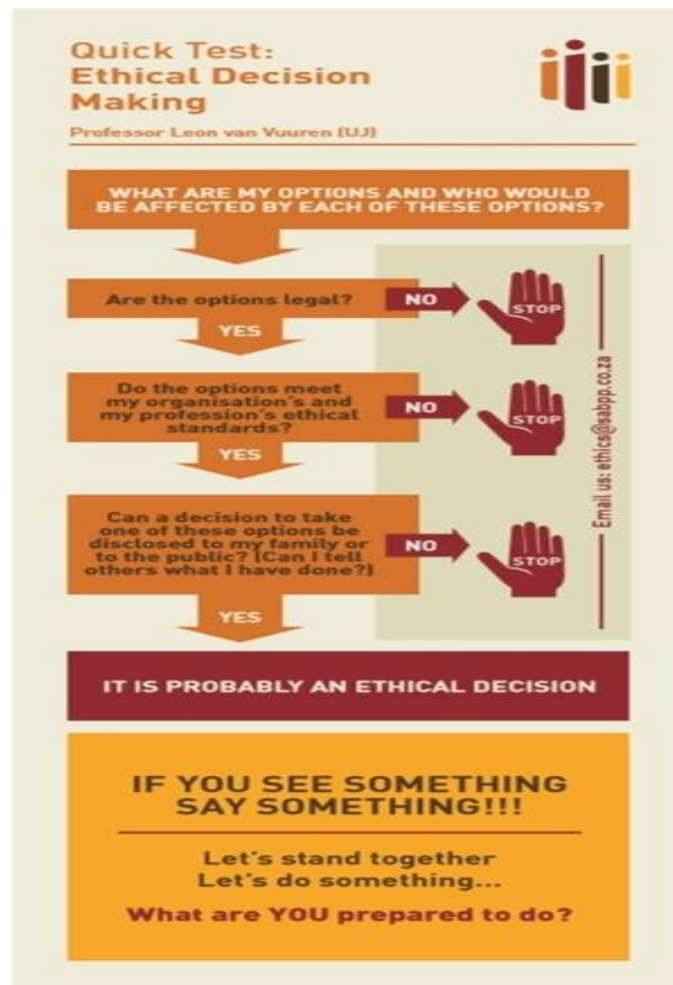
#### **8.4 Recommendations**

The last objective of this study is to establish recommendations for statutory professionalisation to be a strategy for ethical practice in human resource management in South Africa.

A common theme that features throughout this exploratory study is the development, over time, of the human resource management profession in South Africa and, more importantly, the continued professional development of the human resource management profession, whilst establishing a code of ethical practice, coupled with attaining statutory professionalisation for human resource management in South Africa.

The first recommendation is that there should be a strategy to support the continued professional development of human resource management professionals in the absence of statutory professionalisation in South Africa. This recommendation is grounded from the human resource management non-professionals' and professionals' responses, which highlighted the significance of qualifications, training, and continuous professional development points to achieve a gold standard in this profession. Hence, the first part of this recommendation is that human resource management ethics training should be compulsory in all human resource management related degrees and courses. Notably, most JSE listed companies do offer ethics training, as confirmed by the participants in this study, however the ethics training covers general ethics. The type of training required for human resource management professionals should be specific to the profession. The SABPP already offers Ethics in Human Resources workshops, together with their Ethics Toolkit that is made up of the SABPP Code of Conduct (that appears as Appendix Five), which acknowledges the core values of the professional body as Ethics Values. These include responsibility, integrity, respect and competency, and a code of ethics for human resource consultants that all registered professionals must sign. The SABPP also offers a free quick test for ethical decision-making, displayed in Illustration 81 below.

Illustration 81: Quick test - ethical decision making (SABPP; 2022, p. 1)



If there are alliances between the professional bodies and tertiary institutions and business schools, this ethics training can be tailored towards the particular requirements for human resource management degrees and courses to prepare students for the real-world scenarios that they will face in their careers. If this type of human resource management ethics training is taught at the foundation level of human resource management qualifications, that is at university, technikon and business schools, it would provide future human resource management professionals the grounding required to address unethical behaviour, whilst maintaining ethical practice as well as confidentiality. According to the participants in this study, ethical practice and confidentiality are essential to this profession but are sometimes lacking and there are also no consequences if these are broken by human resource management professionals.

On the point of professional development, it would also be essential for human resource management degrees, diplomas, and modules to prepare human resource management students for the working world by equipping them with standards, principles, and an understanding of what human resource management professionalism in the absence of statutory professionalisation is. It is also recommended that tertiary institutions and business schools must be included in any further research done on human resource management ethics and human resource management professionalisation in South Africa. At the onset of this study, the researcher did intend on including academics and students from tertiary institutions and business schools across South Africa. However only one tertiary institution in Johannesburg agreed to provide a gatekeeper's letter to interview their lecturers and students. Due to the lack of data to compare to from other institutions it was decided not to include tertiary institutions and business schools in this study.

The second recommendation supports the suggestion made in Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim's (2011a) research that the human resource management profession should find a more critical place in the next King Report, as a prominent principle focusing on human resource management's accountability and ethics. The King IV Report's (2016) only reference to human resource management was in relation to remuneration, and included themes such as good performance, effective control, and legitimacy. However, Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011a) noted that all listed companies should appoint registered human resource management professionals, not just at the management level, but at all levels in order to achieve a constant professional status across the human resource management function, thus achieving a uniform standard of competency and professionalism that would improve human resource management governance. The King IV Report on Corporate Governance (2016) now has an 'apply *and* explain' rule, compared to the King III Report (2009) that had an 'apply *or* explain' rule, which previously allowed for companies not to comply with the King Report on Corporate Governance (2009), and to just provide an explanation. The King IV Report (2016) compels organisations to progress further than just complying, but rather to build a business strategy that is suitable to the organisation's culture, one which will realign the current strategy to the seventeen principles offered by the latest report, presented below in Illustration 82.

Illustration 82: King IV on a page



(Source: Bullivant, 2018, p. 14)

The main purpose of the King Report was to assist all JSE listed organisations to realise the benefits of corporate governance in the workplace. Therefore, this endorsement of Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim's (2011a) research can be related to the fact that some participants in this study had limited or no knowledge of the reports, while only the participants who used the reports had knowledge and understanding of the relevance of corporate governance within their portfolio's. Considering that all but one participant has worked or was working at a JSE listed company at the time of this fieldwork, all participants should have had a fair knowledge of the King Reports and corporate governance. In the absence of statutory professionalisation and with an intention to put a spotlight on human resource management governance and ethical practice, this will only happen if human resource management governance is included, as is the case with information technology in the King IV Report (2016), in greater detail in any subsequent King Reports.

The seventeen principles from the King IV Report (2016) on corporate governance, as outlined in Illustration Eighty Two, provide a benchmark for good governance in business which can be applied to the public and private sectors. These principles can provide professional bodies

with guiding principles that steers and sets strategic direction, approves policy and planning, oversees and monitors, and lastly ensures accountability. These primary governance roles and responsibilities will set the stage for these seventeen principles, and once applied in practice will lead to results that will contribute to an organisation's ethical culture, good performance, effective control, and legitimacy (Bullivant, 2018).

The third recommendation follows De Beer's (2013) suggestion for a larger sample size and to have more participants from JSE listed companies included in any future studies. However, this recommendation does not just pertain to the sample size but also to the methodological considerations of future research. This study constituted a sample of twelve participants in each of the three population groups, with thirty six participants in total contributing their views during the in-depth interviews conducted. This study's data collection strategy focused on thirty five participants who work or have worked at a JSE listed company, and just one participant who did not, which can be considered a development that follows the prior recommendation emerging from De Beer's (2013) study. The third recommendation of this study, therefore, is that future research could also consider including the public sector. Unethical behaviour is not exclusive to the private sector, and since all JSE listed companies are now obligated to 'apply *and* explain' in their reporting, there is an increased level of accountability that organisations must comply with. However, the public sector does not have such regulations in place, other than being obliged to adhere to the mandates of the Public Protector, yet the responsibility of ethical behaviour should not just rest with the Public Protector's Office. Hence, conducting research in the public sector could provide a different point of view to the question of statutory professionalisation and whether it could be a strategy for ensuring ethical practice in human resource management in all sectors in South Africa.

A fourth recommendation would be that human resource management departments can take it upon themselves to improve and be more specific in stipulating the requirements and attributes pertaining to their current job profiles when hiring human resource management professionals, at all levels. Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011a) proposed that all JSE listed companies should appoint registered human resource management professionals, at least at chartered human resource management practitioner or master level. In this study, it was evident from the responses from human resource management non-professionals and professionals that human resource management was not their first choice as a profession, as most participants had pursued other qualifications and had eventually ended up in human resource management as a

career. Due to the low barriers of entry into the human resource management profession, which has been discussed in the Literature Review, the next recommendation is twofold.

Firstly, human resource management leadership have a choice to create an ethical culture and to nurture an environment that promotes the professional development of the human resource management profession in the absence of statutory professionalisation in South Africa. They should start at the beginning of a recruitment process, which would be with human resource management job profiles. As a human resource management practitioner, the researcher is aware that most organisations have their job profiles updated every couple of years and add on new job profiles to be graded by an external vendor or an industrial psychologist that is trained to grade job profiles. During this project, it is recommended that human resource management job profiles from the junior and entry level up to executive level should include requirements such as human resource management or related qualifications, as well as registration with either the SABPP or IPM. These profiles should also include the attributes required for daily ethical practice and continuous professional development, which makes the employees responsible for their own professional development that can be reviewed and tracked on their scorecards during the performance review cycle.

Finally, Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011b) recommend future research that covers the period beyond 1991 to 2011. However, to prove to the South African government that over and above the establishment of human resource management as a profession, which has been documented and tested with human resource management professionals in this research, a comprehensive timeline of human resource management's development from 1991 to 2022 could be detailed in the application for statutory professionalisation of the human resource management profession in South Africa. Keeping in mind that the last objective of this study is to establish recommendations for statutory professionalisation to be a strategy for ethical practice in human resource management in South Africa, the researcher opted to first provide recommendations that could be put into place at this point, hence the statement 'in the absence of statutory professionalisation in South Africa'. These recommendations will provide human resource management leadership the choice to create opportunities to increase their professional status, professionalism, professional conduct, and ethical practice, with the goal of developing even further as a profession. These developments and maturity by the leadership in this profession should be tracked by the professional bodies and will provide a substantial

case study in the future application to government for the statutory professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa.

### **8.5 Original contribution of knowledge**

Keeping in mind Abraham Wald and his talent for abstraction, the researcher tried to examine the problem from an abstract point of view since there has been a reasonable amount of local research that has already been conducted on human resource management, ethics and considering statutory professionalisation for this profession in South Africa. The question the researcher had to keep in mind during the course of this study was: ‘where are the bullet holes and where are there no bullet holes in this research problem?’

Like the American Navy that have experts in aviation, the researcher is a human resource management professional who has conducted an exploratory study on establishing recommendations for statutory professionalisation to be a strategy for ethical practice in human resource management in South Africa. In this analysis the ‘human resource Swiss cheese’ was the unethical behaviour of human resource management professionals, as experienced by the researcher. At the onset of this study, the researcher realised that statutory professionalisation as a strategy for ethical practice should be considered, and therefore settled on the particular research questions and objectives guiding the study. When preparing the research proposal, the researcher referenced international and local research in the field of human resource management, business ethics and the sociology of professions, and analysed the efforts of the two regulated professional bodies in South Africa, the SABPP and IPM. The researcher also considered research conducted in South Africa on the themes of human resource management; the development of human resource management from the SABPP’s previous application to the South African government for statutory professionalisation; human resource management ethics; and the importance of the professional development of the human resource management profession in the absence of statutory professionalisation.

Upon closer analysis of this prior South African research, the researcher realised that the research focused only on human resource management professionals’ experiences and views, and most of the research was done via a questionnaire that was emailed to the participants. What was not considered was the understanding and experience of business, more specifically human resource management clients that used the services of this profession on a daily basis.

The main drive of a human resource management department is to provide a service that, over time, has evolved from the payroll and administration department to a human resource management value chain of services, and this profession continues to innovate and develop, as presented in the literature review and the findings of this study.

Therefore, the original contribution of this study is the knowledge and insight gained into the views of human resource management clients in relation to their experiences with human resource management non-professionals and human resource management professionals. These insights were gained through the findings obtained from the in-depth interviews that were conducted and using thematic analysis to elicit the sub-themes from the data that was gathered, based on the four themed framework that was used in this study. Other studies within the South African context have only focused on the experiences of human resource management professionals over the last twenty years (e.g. Abbott, Goosen, & Coetzee, 2013; De Beer, 2013; De Beer & Du Toit, 2015; de Bruyn & Roodt, 2009; Janse van Rensburg, 2009; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2015a; Schutte, Barkhuizen & van der Sluis, 2015b; Van der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011b; Van Vuuren & Eiselen, 2006).

Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim (2011b) stated that the South African government has recommended that human resource management needed to establish themselves with business. Therefore, investigating business opinions, that is, human resource management clients' experiences, together with the views of human resource management non-professionals and professionals' could be where the bullet holes are not, if one were to apply Abraham Wald's abstraction to this study. Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015, p. 191) asked the question "How does human resources move forward to approach human resources from the outside/inside with the objective of adding value to the organisation?" They advise that human resource management needs to focus on three areas. The first area is human resource management's relationship to business, which is twofold: 1) the business framework that influences decision making; and 2) aligning with stakeholders that obtain the benefit from the work of human resource management, which could therefore influence the work that human resource management does. The second area refers to the three recipients or results that human resource management requires to perform their duties, that is, 'individual, organisational and leadership'. The third and last area is the sphere for 'investments' which specifically needs to be leveraged to achieve

the previous two areas (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). Even though theirs is not a South African article, the three areas identified by Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) were considered in this research and all lead to human resource management's relationship with their clients who utilise human resource management and make business decisions that impact human resource management.

Now that this study is concluded, the objectives have been answered based on the literature and the data collected, and the original contribution of this study has been presented. There still may be many more 'bullet holes' that have not been abstracted to address the 'human resource management Swiss cheese'. Overall, this study will contribute to the gap in research from the early 2000's to the present day, thus providing recommendations for statutory professionalisation to be a strategy for ethical practice in human resource management in South Africa and encouraging possibilities for further research.

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## Appendix 1: IPM Gatekeeper's Letter



**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AS PART OF THE DOCTOR IN PHILOSOPHY:  
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT QUALIFICATION**

**Date:** 18/09/2018

**Attention to:** The Registrar

The PhD Candidate, **Charuna Naidoo (961093311)** consulted our organisation regarding her academic research project *"The Professionalisation of Human Resources Management in South African as a strategy to facilitate ethical practice for the public good"*

We have agreed that the above-mentioned student may interview employees and members of the Institute of People Management (IPM) for the purposes for her research. This letter is only valid for the period of her study, not beyond.

Regards,



**Keith Pieterse**  
Business Development & Systems Manager  
Tel: +27 (0)11 544 4400 or 0861 476 476  
[www.ipm.co.za](http://www.ipm.co.za)

## Appendix 2: South African Board of People Practice Gatekeeper's Letter



**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AS PART OF THE DOCTOR IN PHILOSOPHY:  
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT QUALIFICATION**

Date: 24/09/2018

Attention to: The Registrar, UKZN

The PhD Candidate, Charuna Naidoo (961093311) consulted our organisation regarding her academic research project *"The Professionalisation of Human Resources Management in South African as a strategy to facilitate ethical practice for the public good"*

We have agreed that the above-mentioned student may interview employees and members of the South African Board for People Practices (SABPP) for the purposes for her research. This letter is only valid for the period of her study, not beyond.

Regards,



Kgomotso Mopalami  
Head of Knowledge and Innovation: SABPP  
Office: 010 007 5906  
Mobile: 076 093 3987  
[www.sabpp.co.za](http://www.sabpp.co.za)

## Appendix 3: SABPP Code of Conduct



### SABPP CODE OF CONDUCT

#### Individual Practitioner Commitments

As a professional HR practitioner, I commit myself to uphold and be loyal to the SABPP's ethical values and standards. The core values of:

- Responsibility
- Integrity
- Respect
- Competence

I further commit myself to enhance and support the reputation of our HR profession through my personal conduct and my professional behaviour.

I serve society through applying my knowledge and skills in partnering with and serving managers and employees to:

- Make a difference to the communities I touch;
- Develop performance, skills and quality of work life of all employees;
- Support sustainability of the organisation;
- Contribute to the economic and social development of South African society inside and in the external context of my organisation.
- Promote ethical behaviour within organisations

My part in living the four values is further elaborated on below.

#### ETHICAL VALUES

##### 1. Responsibility

- i. I accept responsibility for the outcomes of my decisions and actions.
- ii. I accept responsibility to think proactively and anticipate positive and negative consequences of my decisions and actions.
- iii. I accept responsibility to ensure compliance with the Constitution, laws, regulations, Codes of Good Practice, and my organisation's policies and codes.
- iv. I accept responsibility to work towards achieving SABPP's HR Management Standards thereby living good practice.
- v. I accept my responsibility to assist in building an organisation fully representative of the broader population at all levels and which eliminates institutional racism and other barriers to equality, employment equity.
- vi. I accept responsibility to bring serious breaches of the SABPP's ethical values by other SABPP members to the attention of the SABPP in terms of the complaints procedure.
- vii. I accept responsibility to work towards universal professional registration of people working in HR roles through encouraging colleagues to register with the SABPP.

##### 2. Integrity

- i. I understand that my effectiveness as a credible activist HR practitioner rests on my personal integrity.

- ii. I commit to build trust in me through acting with:
  - o Honesty
  - o Objectivity
  - o Fairness of judgement
  - o Consistency of action.
- iii. I commit to declare and address actual and potential conflicts of interest as they arise in my professional and personal capacity.
- iv. I commit to ensuring that I meet agreed expectations of the people I serve.

**3. Respect**

- i. I commit to upholding human rights as enshrined in the Constitution of my country and to make human rights values part of my everyday life and language by listening, learning, communicating and educating, and by being open minded and impartial.
- ii. I commit to treat everyone with dignity, fairness and respect.
- iii. I commit to work towards eliminating discrimination of whatever type and to uphold the principles of anti-discrimination and anti-racism in the workplace and in society.
- iv. I commit to work towards achieving equality and diversity and to ensure that prejudice and discrimination do not go unchallenged. I will follow all SABPP professional guidelines and standards promoting diversity in the workplace.
- v. I respect the confidentiality of information that is entrusted to me.
- vi. I respect members of the various work teams of which I am part and ensure that I behave effectively as a team member.

**4. Competence**

- i. I understand and accept that it is our professional duty to integrate and apply sound human resource management principles, policies and practices in accordance with the SABPP's HRM Standards in all aspects of people management and to assess the value that we add.
- ii. I commit to ensure that I am competent to perform my professional HR role and that I have a good understanding of the business of my organisation.
- iii. I regularly assess myself against the expectations of the profession and the changing requirements of my roles and undertake personal and professional development where I have identified gaps.
- iv. I make sure I keep myself up to date with knowledge in the HR field through continuing professional development.
- v. I ensure that I am aware of the limits of my professional competence and I refer to other professionals where appropriate.
- vi. I commit to supporting my fellow HR practitioners in developing their competence including through role modelling and mentoring.

I AGREE TO ABIDE BY THESE COMMITMENTS AND ACCEPT THE PROFESSIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF ANY BREACH OF THESE.

Signed:
Name:
Registration Number:
Date:

Witnessed by:	
Name:	Date:
Signature:	

# Appendix 4: Turnitin Report

## Turnitin Originality Report

Processed on: 21-Nov-2022 5:01 PM CAT  
ID: 1960345625  
Word Count: 97425  
Submitted: 1

The Professionalisation of Human Resource Man... By Charuna Naidoo

Similarity Index	Similarity by Source
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6% match (student papers from 04-Apr-2018)  
Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal on 2018-04-04

The professionalisation of human resource management in South Africa as a strategy to facilitate ethical practice By Charuna Naidoo 961093311 A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy School of Management, IT and Governance College of Law and Management Studies Supervisor: Professor Mariam Seedat CCS 2022 Declaration I, Charuna Naidoo, declare that: i. ii. iii. iv. v. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. The dissertation does not contain other person's data, pictures, graphs, or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons. This dissertation does not contain other person's writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then: a. their words have been re-written, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced; b. where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks, and referenced. vi. Where I have produced a publication of which I am author, co-author, or editor, I have indicated in detail which part of the publication was actually written by myself alone and have fully referenced such publications. vii. This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the dissertation and in the References sections Signed by Student:..... i Dedication I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my first human resource manager, Anesa Naidoo. You have provided me with the solid foundation and learning, on which I have built my human resource management career. You have instilled in me the strength I need on difficult days, the courage to question, and the determination to always do the right thing for the right reasons, even if it would be career limiting. I thank you! ii Acknowledgments I would like to thank God and the Universe for the guidance and strength to persevere. To my family, thank you for your loving support during the ups and downs of my PhD journey. I would like to thank Professor Mariam Seedat-Khan for accepting me as a student in my last semester and allowing me the opportunity to complete my PhD, under her tutelage. I am eternally grateful. Thank you Valerie Chinniah, my partner in crime during this journey. To Dr. Quraisha Dawood, thank you for your time and support during this journey. Lastly, to all of those who have supported me, I thank you all. My PhD journey in a nutshell . . . "Life is Amazing And then it's awful. And then it's amazing again. And in between the amazing and awful it's ordinary and mundane and routine. Breathe in the amazing, hold on through the awful, and relax and exhale during the ordinary. That's just living heartbreaking, soul-healing, amazing, awful, ordinary life. And it's breathtakingly beautiful" By L. R. Knost iii Abstract "The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything" by Albert Einstein Human resource management has made great strides as a profession in South Africa, from its initial function as the payroll department to now being a strategic business partner and confidant to the C-suite. This profession, however, faces its fair share of challenges. In particular, the issue of ethics and lack of professionalism has become a dilemma for the profession, which, together with the absence of statutory professionalisation, has made it increasingly difficult for human resource management professionals to survive this volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment within a South African ecosystem. While there is literature confirming that human resource management is in fact a profession, in the absence of statutory professionalisation it is essential to explore the experiences and opinions of human resource management professionals who do not belong to a professional body, and to compare these with the views of those who do belong to a professional body, as well as the perceptions of clients of both professionals and non-professionals. In this research the first participant group is called non-professionals, the second is professionals, and the last are the human resource management clients, without whom this profession would not exist. The framework and analysis that was applied in this study is a four themed framework used to investigate the participants' understanding of general human resource management, human resource management ethics and the King Reports (with specific reference to the last King IV Report), human resource management professionalism and lastly human resource management professionalisation. The theoretical and conceptual model is based on a multilayer framework from the field of ethics, the sociology of

## Appendix 5: 1st Approved Ethical Clearance



14 November 2018

Ms Charuna Naidoo (961093311)  
School of Management, IT & Governance  
Westville Campus

Dear Ms Naidoo,

Protocol reference number: HSS/1935/018D

Project title: The Professionalisation of Human Resource Management in South Africa as a strategy to facilitate ethical practice for the public good

**Approval Notification – Expedited Application**  
In response to your application received on 18 October 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

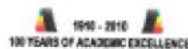
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Dr Shaun Ruggunan  
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor Isabel Martins  
cc School Administrator: Ms Angela Pearce

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair) / Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)  
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag 254001, Durban 4000  
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 2667/6330/4957 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4820 Email: [shenuka@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:shenuka@ukzn.ac.za) / [shamila@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:shamila@ukzn.ac.za) / [oskhure@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:oskhure@ukzn.ac.za)  
Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

## Appendix 6: 2nd Approved Ethical Clearance



26 August 2022

Charuna Naidoo (961093311)  
School of Management, IT & Governance  
Westville Campus

Dear C Naidoo,

Protocol reference number: HSS/1935/018D

Project title: The Professionalisation of Human Resource Management in South Africa as a strategy to facilitate ethical practice for the public good

Amended title: The Professionalisation of Human Resource Management in South Africa as a strategy to facilitate Ethical Practice

### Approval Notification – Amendment Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application and request for an amendment received on 17 August 2022 has now been approved as follows:

- Change in title
- Research Questions & Objectives
- Research Methodology

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form; Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/ms

---

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
UCZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000  
Tel: +27 31 260 8380 / 4887 / 3587  
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/research-ethics/>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

## Appendix 7: Interview Guide

### *Interview Guide:*

---

#### **Biography:**

Name & Surname:

Age:

Gender:

Race:

Location:

Qualification/s:

Years of Experience:

Email Address:

Mobile Number:

Do you have qualifications in HRM?

Are you currently studying / attending training?

If so, what?

If so, what?

Previous Job Titles:

Industries / Sectors worked in:

Current Industry:

Current Job Title:

Portfolios responsible for:

Number of years employed in current position:

#### **Read Instructions to the Respondent:**

Even though ethical behaviour, professionalism and professionalisation can be defined in many ways, I am interested in YOUR personal perceptions of the above-mentioned themes. However, please take note that merely not liking a behaviour or action should not be considered unethical or unprofessional.

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**Section: A**

**In-depth Interview Questions: Human resource manager generalists (Consultant / Business Partner up to Executive / Director)**

	General HRM	HRM / HR Ethics / King Reports	HR Professionalism	HR Professionalisation
1	What made you choose HR as a career?	How would HRM maintain appropriate confidentiality in a work environment?	What is your understanding of professionalism?	What is your understanding of professionalisation?
2	How has HR developed as a profession in South Africa?	Are you able to say 'no' to inappropriate or unethical requests in a work environment?	How does professionalism and ethics interconnect?	Do you feel you are respected as a HR professional?
3	What are some of the challenges / highlights of working in HR?	Are you able to avoid conflict of interest situations in a work environment? , i.e., Interviewing a friend for a position that you are on the panel?	Have you heard of a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment, also known as a VUCA environment ? If so, how would one maintain a level of professionalism in such an environment?	How do you maintain your professional identity in HR?
4	How do you keep up with what is trending in HR?	Are you able to manage your personal biases when making HR decisions?	What would you say are defining characteristics of professionalism?	Do you belong to a professional body / council?
5	What type of stereotypes are associated with HR and HR Generalists in South Africa?	Do you follow orders, regardless if they appear unethical to you?		If not, have you heard of the South African Board of People Practice (SABPP) / The Institute of People Management (IPM), or the Human Resource Development Council of South Africa (HRDC)?
6	Have you seen any changes over time in these stereotypes?	Do you challenge yourself to 'do the right thing' when conducting yourself as a HR Generalist?		What would you say are important attributes of a HR professional?

7	Do you participate in HR conferences / workshops?	How important is ethical practice in the HR function?		Should HR in South Africa be established as a profession, i.e., it is not compulsory for HR practitioners to belong to a professional body to work in HR, as it is in many other countries, such as, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA)?
8	How do you keep up with changes in HR legislation?	How would you describe the ethical practices over the period of your career?		If HR is established as a statutory profession in South Africa, do you believe that HR will be more ethical?
9	What are your strengths and weaknesses, academically and personally as a HR professional?	Have you taken a course or had any training in business ethics?		Do you believe that HR should be governed by professional standards, and a HR code of ethics, over and above the company code of conduct?
10	There is academic literature stating that HR should be the custodians of ethics for an organisation, what are your thoughts on this statement?	Have you worked for a company that has/d a code of conduct, and did this make a difference to the work environment?		Would you say that the professionalisation of HR is an important issue for the profession?
11	Other than qualifications, what personality traits should HR Generalists have to possess?	Have you ever heard about or used the King III / IV code?		Do you work with / network with those in your field? How?

12	Do you feel HRM is respected in a work environment?	Tell me about a time that you were challenged ethically in your career?		How do you think HRM could become recognised as an established and statutory profession in South Africa?
13		You would have worked with people from different cultures. What ethics and values did you find you had in common, and where did you differ?		Which organisations / people do you think are key in establishing HRM as a profession?
14		If there is an ethical issue arise at work, whom did you consult with and what is the process?		What challenges does HRM face in establishing themselves as a profession? Who creates these challenges?
15		Can HR facilitate ethical practice for the public good? CSI		

**Section B**

**In-depth Interview Questions: Human resource manager Clients (Manager level up to Executive / Director)**

	<b>General HRM</b>	<b>HRM / HR Ethics / King Reports</b>	<b>HR Professionalism</b>	<b>HR Professionalisation</b>
1	How would you describe your relationship with your HR Generalist or the HR Department?	How does the HR generalist role in ethical conduct feed in at various points:	What is your understanding of professionalism?	What is your understanding of professionalisation?
2	What are the challenges in communications between you and HR?	a. In the nurturing of an ethical organisational culture;	How does professionalism and ethics interconnect?	In your estimation, how do you think HRM has developed as a profession in South Africa?
3	Do you trust your HR Generalist to support you when making important business decisions?	b. In the resolution of ethical conflict when it occurs;	Have you heard of a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment, also known as a VUCA environment ? If so, how would one maintain a level of professionalism in such an environment?	Do you think that HRM is respected as a profession?
4	What are your expectations of your HR Generalist or HR Department?	c. In dealing with the aftermath of an ethical conflict;	What would you say are defining characteristics of professionalism?	How do you think HRM should maintain their professional identity?
5	What are the areas of development for your HR Generalist or HR department?	How important is ethical practice in the HR function?		Do you think HR should belong to a professional body / council?
6	Does your HR show credibility, competence, and courage in their HR function?	South African businesses are embarking on focused and structured attempts to manage ethics, what would you suggest?		As a HR Client, have you heard of the South African Board of People Practice (SABPP) / The Institute of People Management (IPM), or

	How do you define credibility, competence, and courage?			the Human Resource Development Council of South Africa (HRDC)?
7		How would you describe the ethical practices over the period of your career?		What would you say are important attributes of an HR professional?
8		Have you taken a course or had any training in business ethics?		In your judgement, should HR in South Africa be established as a profession, i.e., it is not compulsory for HR practitioners to belong to a professional body to work in HR, as it is in many other countries, such as, the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA)?
9		Have you worked for a company that had a code of conduct, and did this make a difference to the work environment?		If HR is established as a statutory profession in South Africa, do you believe that HR will be more ethical?
10		Have you ever heard of or used the King III / IV code?		Do you believe that HR should be governed by professional standards, and a HR code of ethics over and above the company code of conduct?
11		Tell me about a time that you were challenged ethically in your career?		In your opinion, would you say that the professionalisation of HR is an important issue for the HR profession?

12		You would have worked with people from different cultures. What ethics and values did you find you had in common, and where did you differ?		Do you network with those in the HR field? How?
13		If there is an ethical issue arise at work, whom did you consult with and what is the process?		In your view, how do you think HRM could become recognised as an established and statutory profession in South Africa?
14		Do you expect businesses in the future to behave more unethically, about the same, or more ethically?		In your estimation, which organisations / people do you think are key in establishing HRM as a profession?
15		Can HR facilitate ethical practice for the public good? CSI		In your opinion, what challenges does HRM face in establishing themselves as a profession? Who creates these challenges?

## Section C

### In-depth Interview Questions: Human resource manager members of professional bodies

	General HRM	HRM / HR Ethics / King Reports	HR Professionalism	HR Professionalisation
1	What is your background?	In your opinion, of how ethically do you feel organisations have behaved in the past year?	What is your understanding of professionalism?	In your opinion, why do you think that statutory recognition of the HR profession has not fully materialised, even though there are professional bodies such as the SABPP in South Africa?
2	What do the following themes mean to you: Human Resources, Professionalism and Professionalisation?	What particular unethical behaviour did you personally experience, or have heard of from others?	How does professionalism and ethics interconnect?	What is your understanding of the SABPP HRC Model?
3	What skills would you say are imperative for a student to become a successful HR Generalist?	How would you describe HR's role in ethics or ethical practice in organisations in SA?	Have you heard of a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment, also known as a VUCA environment ? If so, how would one maintain a level of professionalism in such an environment?	In your view, how can an understanding of statutory professionalisation of HRM contribute to a broader theory of professionalisation that is in the interest of public good?
4		Have you ever heard of, or used the King III / IV code?	What would you say are defining characteristics of professionalism?	In your estimation, what are some of the obstacles or challenges to the regulation for HR?
5		Do you expect businesses in the future to behave more unethically, about the same, or more ethically?		In your opinion, who are the key players in regulating HRM as a profession?
6		How does the HR generalist role in ethical conduct feed in at various points:		In your view, are there strategies in place to ensure the establishment of HRM as a profession?

7		a. In the nurturing of an ethical organisational culture;		
8		b. In the resolution of ethical conflict when it occurs;		
9		c. In dealing with the aftermath of an ethical conflict;		
10		South African businesses are embarking on focused and structured attempts to manage ethics, what would you suggest?		
11		Can HR facilitate ethical practice for the public good? CSI		