An exploration of the role of human resource management in the South African motor manufacturing industry

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Commercii in Human Resource Management at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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November 2016
FOR THE READER'S ATTENTION

The following specifications remind the reader of the guidelines followed in this dissertation:

- The study on which this dissertation reports, followed the prescribed format of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) as a framework for the editorial style and references. This practice corresponds with the policy requiring that all scientific documents must employ the APA style as from January 1999, as stipulated by the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus).

- The study is submitted by using the structure of a research article. This dissertation is submitted in the form of two articles. The specified editorial style is used as set out by the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology (which is mainly in agreement with the APA style), but the constructing tables were designed following the APA framework and guidelines.

- Although the title of this dissertation is “An exploration of the role of human resource management in the South African motor manufacturing industry”, only one single motor manufacturing organisation formed part of this study. Therefore, the study population that formed part of this study, did not represent the entire South African motor manufacturing industry.

- The researcher makes reference to the term ‘organisation’ throughout the study. The ‘organisation’ is a single company that is representative and forms part of the motor manufacturing industry.

- Each chapter of this dissertation has its own reference list.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to my very special parents, Mr Pritraj Sundaparsad and Mrs Rajmathy Sundaparsad. Thank you, Pa and Ma, for my wonderful upbringing and the values you both have instilled in me. Thank you for all the sacrifices you have made over the years but more so for believing in me and my abilities to achieve all that I put my mind to. I will be forever grateful.
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last but not least to my darling son Tre, thank you for all your understanding and patience. Thank you for sacrificing your playtime with mummy to allow me to concentrate on my studies. You are truly an amazing and special boy.
DECLARATION BY RESEARCHER

I, Nirvasha Pillay, hereby declare that “An exploration of the role of human resource management in the South African motor manufacturing industry” is my own work and that the views and opinions expressed in this study are those of the author and relevant literature references as shown in the references.

I further declare that the content of this research will not be submitted for any other qualification at any other tertiary institution.

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the dissertation by Nirvasha Pillay was properly language edited but without viewing the final version.

The track changes function was used and the author was responsible for accepting the editor’s changes and for finalising the reference list.

Title of dissertation:
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JACKIE VILJOEN
Strand South
Africa
21 November 2016
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SUMMARY

Title: An exploration of the role of human resource management in the South African motor manufacturing industry

Key words: human resource management, human resources, human resource professionals, business leaders, human resource strategy, organisation strategy, motor manufacturing industry

This study focused on the role of human resource management within the South African motor manufacturing industry. Human resources has emerged as an important component in terms of evaluating and assessing the competitive assets of organisations. Human resource professionals, by virtue of their knowledge of human performance, are well positioned to exercise strategic leadership and contribute significantly to the organisation’s competitive advantage. Although human resources have been part of organisations for generations, the role that human resource professionals play in an organisation varies from organisation to organisation. Much literature have already discussed the evolution of human resources and human resource management yet little research has been undertaken in the South African motor manufacturing industry pertaining to the role of human resource professionals. The goal of the study was to explore the role of human resource management in the organisation (the South African motor manufacturing industry). The overall objective of the study was to explore the role of human resource professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry according to the perspective of both business leaders as well as the human resource professionals in the organisation. This study consists of two articles:

Article 1: Exploring business leaders’ perspective on HRM and the contribution made by HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry

Article 2: Exploring the role and contribution made by HR professionals as perceived by the HR employees within the South African motor manufacturing industry
A qualitative research design from a phenomenological approach was followed to reach the objectives of this study. The interpretivist paradigm was further utilised to assist with the execution of this research study. The research design and approach allowed the participants to express themselves by sharing their own experiences. A purposive, voluntary sample of 15 ($N=15$) participants for both Article 1 and Article 2 was drawn from a motor manufacturing organisation. Eight participants participated in the research for Article 1 and seven participants participated in the research for Article 2. The data collection process was performed through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Thematic analysis was used in order to analyse the data for the two research articles.

For Article 1, two main themes were extracted from the interviews. The results for Article 1 (i.e. theme 1) indicated that human resource professionals – although the business leaders have an expectation of what they believe the role and functions human resource professionals should be performing – these roles and functions are not necessarily fulfilled or executed by the human resource professionals in the organisations. The sub-themes that emerged were: industrial relations, organisational structure, payroll, performance management, recruitment and selection, succession planning and career development, training and development, trusted advisor and reliable source of HR information and advice. The results for theme two indicated that business leaders confirm that there are many limitations and gaps between their expectations and human resource delivery. The sub-themes that emerged were: a lack of credibility and trust in human resource professionals, lack of planning and being reactive, a lack of understanding and awareness between business leaders’ expectations and human resource delivery, not strategic enough, and too much paperwork/administration. The results further show that as a result of these limitations and gaps, human resource professionals do not deliver at the level that they are expected to and they are therefore operating at a functional rather than a strategic level. The two main themes that were extracted from the interviews for Article 2 are set out as follows: Theme 1: Human resource professionals’ perception regarding their role and contribution made to the organisation; and Theme 2: Challenges that limit human resource professionals from performing their roles in the organisation.

The results for Article 2 indicated that human resource professionals perform more administrative roles than strategic tasks. The results further show that although human resource
professionals would like to add value to the organisation by getting involved in more strategic initiatives, they unfortunately are not operating at that level. The sub-themes that emerged were: administration/paper-pushers, fire fighters, industrial relations, and organisational structure. The results for Article 2 indicated that human resource professionals feel that their contribution is not seen as valuable or credible by the business leaders in the organisation. The sub-themes that emerged were: not seen as valuable or credible, not regarded as an area of expertise, not being involved in decision-making, a lack of formal human resource strategy, a lack of planning, a lack of support, operating in silos.

Recommendations with regard to future research and practice were made.
OPSOMMING

Titel: ’n Ondersoek na die rol van menslikehulpbronbestuur in die Suid-Afrikaanse motorvervaardigingsbedryf

Sleutelwoorde: menslikehulpbronbestuur, menslike hulpbronne, beroepslui gemoed met menslike hulpbron, sakeleiers, menslikehulpbronstrategie, organisasiestrategie, motorvervaardigingsbedryf

Hierdie studie het gefokus op die rol van menslikehulpbronbestuur in die Suid-Afrikaanse motorvervaardigingsbedryf. Menslike hulpbronne het ontstaan as ’n belangrike komponent by die evaluering en assessering van die mededingende bates van organisasies. As gevolg van hulle kennis van menslike werksgenhede is beroepslui op die gebied van menslike hulpbron se mededingende voordeel te maak. Alhoewel menslike hulpbronne jare lank reeds deel is van organisasies, wissel die rol van menslikehulpbronbestuurders van een organisasie tot die ander. Verskeie literatuurbronne het reeds die evolusie van menslike hulpbronne en menslikehulpbronbestuur bespreek, maar min navorsing is nog oor die rol van beroepslui op die gebied van menslike hulpbron in die Suid-Afrikaanse motorvervaardigingsbedryf gedoen. Die doel van hierdie studie was om die rol van menslikehulpbronbestuur in die Suid-Afrikaanse motorvervaardigingsbedryf vanuit die perspektief van sakeleiers sowel as beroepslui op die gebied van menslike hulpbronne in die organisasie te ondersoek. Hierdie skriptie behels twee artikels:

Artikel 1: Verkenning van die perspektief van sakeleiers op menslikehulpbronbestuur en die bydrae van menslikehulpbronbestuur tot die Suid-Afrikaanse motorvervaardigingsbedryf.

Artikel 2: Verkenning van die rolle en bydrae van beroepslui op die gebied van menslike hulpbron soos waargeneem deur menslikehulpbronwerknemers in die Suid-Afrikaanse motorvervaardigingsbedryf.
’n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp vanuit ’n fenomenologiese benadering is gevolg om die doelwitte van hierdie studie te bereik. Die interpretivistiese paradigma is voorts aangewend om te help met uitvoer van hierdie navorsingstudie. Die navorsingsontwerp en -benadering het dit vir die deelnemers moontlik gemaak om hulle eie ondervindings te deel en te verwoord. ’n Doelgerigte, vrywillige steekproef van 15 deelnemers vir beide Artikel 1 en Artikel 2 is uit ’n motorvervaardigingsorganisasie getrek. Agt deelnemers het aan die navorsing vir Artikel 1 deelgeneem, en sewe het aan die navorsing vir Artikel 2 deelgeneem. Vir die datainsamplingsproses is semi-gestruktureerde persoonlike onderhoude gebruik. Tematiese analise is gebruik om die data vir die twee artikels te analiseer.

Twee hooftemas het uit die onderhoude na vore gekom vir Artikel 1. Die resultate vir Artikel 1 het daarop gedui dat, alhoewel sakeleiers se verwagting van wat hulle glo die rol en funksie van beroepslui gemoeid met menslike hulpbronne behoort te wees, hierdie rolle en funksies nie noodwendig uitgevoer word nie. Die sub-temas wat na vore gekom het, was: arbeidsverhoudinge, organisasiestruktuur, betaallys, prestasiebestuur, werwing en keuring, opvolgingsbeplanning en loopbaanontwikkeling, opleiding en ontwikkeling, en vertroue advies en betroubare inligting oor menslike hulpbronne en raad. Die resultate vir tema twee het aangedui dat sakeleiers bevestig het dat daar baie beperkinge en tekortkominge bestaan tussen wat hulle verwag en wat menslike hulpbronne lewer. Die sub-temas wat na vore gekom het, was: ’n gebrek aan geloofwaardigheid van en vertroue in beroepslui gemoeid met menslike hulpbronne, ’n gebrek aan beplanning en reaktiewe optrede, ’n gebrek aan begrip en bewustheid tussen die verwagtinge van die sakeleiers en die levering deur beroepslui gemoed met menslike hulpbronne, nie strategies genoeg nie, en te veel papierwerk/administrasie. Die resultate het verder getoon dat, as gevolg van hierdie beperkinge en tekortkominge, beroepslui op die gebied van menslike hulpbronne nie lewer wat van hulle verwag word nie en dat hulle dus funksioneel eerder as strategies werk. Die twee hooftemas wat uit die onderhoude vir Artikel 2 gehaal is, word soos volg uiteengesit: Tema 1: Beroepslui betrokke by menslike hulpbronne se beskouing van hulle rol en die bydrae wat hulle tot die organisasie maak; en Tema 2: Uitdagings wat beroepslui betrokke by menslike hulpbronne beperk en hulle daarvan weerhou om hulle rolle in die organisasie te vervul.
Die resultate vir Artikel 2 het getoon dat beroepslui op die gebied van menslike hulpbronne meer administratiewe rolle as strategiese take uitvoer. Die resultate toon ook verder dat alhoewel beroepslui betrokke by menslike hulpbronne graag meer waarde tot die organisasie sou wou toevoeg deur by strategiese inisiatiewe betrokke te raak, hulle ongelukkig nie op daardie vlak funksioneer nie. Die subtemas wat na vore gekom het, was administrasie en pennelekkery, arbeidsverhoudinge, versoeningswerk, en organisasiestruktuur. Die resultate vir Artikel 2 het getoon dat beroepslui betrokke by menslike hulpbronne voel dat hulle bydrae nie deur sakeleiers in die organisasie as waardevol of geloofwaardig gesien word nie. Die subtemas wat na vore gekom het, was: nie beskou as waardevol of geloofwaardig nie, nie gesien as 'n deskundige gebied nie, nie betrokke by besluitneming nie, 'n tekort aan 'n formele menslikehulpbronstrategie, 'n tekort aan beplanning, 'n tekort aan ondersteuning, werk in silo’s.

Aanbevelings vir toekomstige navorsing en praktyke is gemaak.
CHAPTER 1
Introduction

The study on which this dissertation is based explored the role of human resource management (HRM) in the South African motor manufacturing industry. In this chapter, the motivation for the research is discussed, and the problem statement and the objectives of the research are provided. Thereafter the research design and chapter divisions are discussed.

1.1 Problem statement

It can be argued that the local automotive industry is one of South Africa’s most important sectors. It is estimated that the sector accounts for about 12.0% of South Africa's manufacturing exports, making it a crucial sector to the economy, both in terms of its gross domestic product (GDP) contribution but also in terms of job creation (Automotive Industry Export Council [AIEC], 2015). The broader automotive industry (manufacturing and retail) contributed about 7.0% to the country’s GDP in 2013 and this could increase to between 8.0% and 10% under the Automotive Production Development and Programme (APDP) (AIEC, 2015).

In 2013, South Africa was ranked 24th in respect of global vehicle production with a market share of 0.63%. Significant investment programmes driven by export plans continue to be implemented by the original equipment manufacturers (OEM) as well as the automotive component suppliers. During 2013, capital expenditure by the seven OEMs in South Africa amounted to R4,35 billion and investments by the component sector amounted to R2,9 billion (AIEC, 2015). Average aggregate monthly employment in the vehicle manufacturing industry amounted to approximately 31 000 employees in 2014 compared to 30 120 employees in 2013 and 29 180 employees in 2012 (Business Monitor International [BMI], 2015). Total employment in the trade area, namely in the vehicle sales and vehicle maintenance and servicing field, amount to over 200 000 individuals (Business Monitor International [BMI], 2015).
The South African motor manufacturing industry contributes considerably to the country’s economy and employs a substantial number of people in industry. Although many companies see the value that HRM adds to the organisation from a strategic perspective, the traditional view of HRM as an administrative function still persists in certain organisations. This view is supported by a study by Deloitte (2014), whose research shows that chief executive officers (CEOs) expect the human resource (HR) function to play a more active role in enabling business strategies. However, for many organisations, the transformation process for HR to get to the phase where they produce results has failed. Much research has been conducted on the function, purpose and evolution of HR and HRM. Literature also illustrates views and opinions from various authors on the value of HR professionals in organisations (Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert, & Hatfield, 2010; Sullivan, 2004; Swanepoel, Erasmus & Schenk, 2008; Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2012). However, understanding business leaders’ expectations of HRM and the contribution made by HRM professionals in the motor manufacturing industry have so far not been explored thoroughly in literature.

The purpose of exploring the role that HR professionals play in the organisation is of significance especially since the motor industry is such a dominant player in the South African economy. A study by Bin Wan Ismail (2008) reflects the role and challenges faced by HR professionals in the manufacturing industry, the study found that the main challenge that HR professionals experience in an organisation is they have no time to address both administrative and strategic issues. Although the study is not was not conducted in a South African context. Scholars argue that HR can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage for an organisation (Wright, McMahan, Gerhart, & Snell, 1997). The researcher therefore viewed it important to explore the role played by HR professionals in the in a South African motor manufacturing industry.

In addition, this study should further assist business leaders and HR professionals to get a better understanding of the role that HRM plays in the organisation. The study could possibly further assist HR professionals who are currently employed in this sector as well as future potential HR professionals wanting to enter and establish a career in the motor industry by providing them with insight in terms of the role HR professionals are currently performing in the organisation and whether the roles and tasks are executed at a strategic or functional level.
Human resource management (HRM)

The history of human resource (HR) activities can be traced back to the early 1800s in areas such as agriculture and small family businesses (Brewster, Carey, Grobler, Holland & Warnich, 2008). However, the beginning of the Industrial Revolution saw more formal HR practices being evolved (Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield, 2006). Organisations such as factories required large numbers of employees to operate machinery. In order to recruit and provide the necessary training, companies started employing persons who would be responsible and execute such activities (Brewster et. al., 2008). Within certain organisations, the HR department became responsible for creating, implementing and overseeing policies governing employee behaviour as well as behaviour of the organisation toward its employees (Swanepoel et al., 2008).

Some scholars argued that HRM is said to have started from the term ‘personnel management’ (PM). According to Haslinda (2009), the term ‘personnel management’ emerged after the Second World War in 1945 as an approach by personnel practitioners to separate and distinguish themselves from other managerial functions and making the personnel function into a professional managerial function. Haslinda (2009) further states that traditionally, the function of PM was claimed to be to ‘hire and fire’ personnel in organisations other than salary payments and training. Therefore, the term ‘human resource management’ gradually started to replace the term ‘personnel management’ (Lloyd & Rawlinson, 1992). However, Haslinda (2009), argues that the term ‘human resource management’ has no appreciable difference from PM as they are both concerned with the function of obtaining, organising, and motivating human resources required by organisations.

According to Haslinda (2009, p. 180), HRM is the “process of managing human talents to achieve organisation’s objectives”. Literature also provides various definitions for HRM. Stone (2009) describes HRM as the productive use of human resources in achieving the organisation’s strategic business objectives. HRM focuses on employee management with an emphasis on employees as assets of the business. As with other business assets, the goal is to make effective use of employees, reducing risk and maximising return on investment (Swanepoel et al., 2008). Some of the many areas on which HRM professionals focus, are
employee recruitment and retention, exit interviews, motivation, assignment selection, labour law compliance, performance reviews, training, professional development, mediation, and change management (Swanepoel et al., 2008). HRM, if utilised effectively in organisations, crosses all the functional areas of the business and, if fully integrated with the significant parts of the organisation, i.e. operations, marketing, finance and so on, could add significant value to the success of the organisation (Grobler et al., 2006).

**Role players: Human resource professionals and business leaders**

As organisations started to grow and evolve so too did the role and function of HR professionals (Grobler et. al., 2006). Turner (2003) defines an HR professional as a professionally qualified specialist in the way that HR could be deployed, retained and motivated to achieve the organisation’s strategy. Ulrich et al. (2012) view HR professionals as senior or key HR personnel who are usually embedded in the business unit where they work in partnership with operational managers within that business unit to influence and steer strategy and strategy implementation (Ulrich, et al., 2012). According to Brewster et al. (2008), both management and HR professionals should become partners in decision-making and share accountability for organising the work to be performed as well as where it is to be performed. This view is shared by Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk, and Schenk (2003) in that HRM is viewed as an intrinsic part of an organisation.

Research has suggested that strong leadership in an organisation involves having efficient and effective business leaders whose contribution is vital for the success of the organisation (April, MacDonald, & Vriesendorp, 2000). April et al. (2000) define business leaders as visionaries who inspire employees within the organisation. April et al., (2000) further state that in order for business leaders to be effective and successful, they require the right competencies, skills and behaviours in order to meet the objectives of the organisation. Business leaders are also accountable for strategy formulation and implementation (April et al., 2000).
Roles of HR professionals

According to Brewster et al., (2008), to be successful, HR professionals would need to become involved with line managers in strategy formulation and implementation. Furthermore, HR practitioners of the modern era have to learn how to ensure that HR practices, processes and systems support the organisation in its quest for the competitive edge and the implementation of its strategy (Brewster et al., 2008). This thought is shared by Holbeche (2009), in that HR strategy and practices need to be developed to meet the needs of the organisations. Holbeche (2009) further states that HR strategies and practices that are aligned and relevant to business needs are attractive to business leaders as this could enhance the credibility of the HR team to be seen to be more business-focused.

According to Brewster et al., (2008), HR strategies will therefore need to be designed to meet business strategy and HR professionals would need to become an expert in the way work is organised and executed. In addition, HR needs to be involved in reducing cost through efficiency, while still maintaining the high quality of work produced (Brewster et al., 2008). This can be done by delivering state-of-the-art, innovative HR practices (Brewster et al., 2008). HR will have to become a reliable representative for employees. Furthermore, HR has to become involved in efforts to increase the employee’s contribution to the organisation and become a change agent to continuous transformation and change (Ulrich, 1997).

This viewpoint relates to those shared by Grobler et al., (2006). According to Grobler et al. (2006), a successful HR professional should possess certain essential competencies, namely –

- business mastery, i.e. the HR professional needs to have a good and thorough understanding of the business;
- HR mastery, i.e. the HR professional needs to keep abreast with changes such as staffing, development, appraisals, rewards, team building and communication;
- change mastery, i.e. the HR professional should be competent enough to manage change in the business so that HR activities are merged effectively with the business needs; and
• personal credibility, i.e. the HR professional must establish personal credibility with all individuals in the business.

Therefore, being an effective HR professional does not necessary mean moving from an operational to a strategic role; instead, it means learning to master both operational and strategic processes and people (Brewster et al., 2008). This thought is supported by Ulrich (1997). Literature by Ulrich (1997) also describes that being a successful HR professional involves playing a number of HR roles. These roles are: corporate HR, embedded HR, HR specialists and service centres. Further to this, Ulrich (1997) describes HR professionals as strategic partners, administrative experts, employee champions and change agents.

**Functional and strategic HR**

Traditionally, the HR function has been viewed as primarily administrative, focusing on the level of the individual employee, the individual job, and the individual practice (Becker, Huselid, & Ulrich, 2001). This view is supported by Sullivan (2004), in that according to Sullivan (2004), traditional HR practices include –

- assisting with human capital-related issues, such as recruitment and selection;
- payroll, compensation and benefits;
- training and development;
- reporting diversity data; and
- resolving conflicts.

However, according to Lawler and Mohrman (2003), there is a paradigm shift for the HR function to develop a more strategic role in the organisation. According to Allan (2002), there have been numerous discussions at that stage concerning how HR professionals should adopt a strategic role in the area of HRM. Allan (2002) further states that the paradigm shift involves individual HR functions, such as recruitment, selection, training, compensation, and performance appraisal. These are all closely aligned with each other and also with the overall strategy of the organisation. This thought is supported by Fey, Bjorkman and Pavlovskaya, (2000), who say that the personnel/HRM field has shifted from just focusing on individual
HRM practices to looking at HRM in a more holistic approach, which may contribute to the competitive advantage of the organisation. Many HR professionals have become successful by ensuring that HR governance in terms of policies and procedures exist and by providing managers advice on what can and cannot be done (Fey, et al., 2000). Fey et al. (2000) further illustrate that HR needs to play an active role in guiding and enabling the organisation to attract, develop, retain and support its people well in order to achieve the strategic business objectives of the organisation. In a study by Pietersen and Engelbrecht (2005), it was found that there is a positive relationship between business-related competencies and the strategic contributions made by HR professionals. The two aspects are related and enable HR professionals to contribute to the success of their organisation. This present study comprises two articles:

Article 1: Exploring the business leaders’ perspective on human resource management and the contribution made by HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry.

Article 2: Exploring the roles and contribution made by HR professionals as perceived by these HR employees within the South African motor manufacturing industry.

The study on which the article reports explored the role that HRM professionals play in the organisation from the perspective of both the business leaders as well as the HR professionals within the organisation. The study further explored whether HRM is operating at a functional/administrative level or at a strategic level.

Based on the above mentioned problem statement, the following research questions were formulated for Article 1:

• How are business leaders and human resource management conceptualised according to literature?
• What are the business leader’s expectations regarding the roles of HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry?
• Do business leaders perceive an alignment between their expectation of HR professionals and HR delivery within the South African motor manufacturing industry?
• Do business leaders view HR professionals within South African motor manufacturing industry as operating at functional/administrative or strategic level?
• What recommendations can be made for future research and practice?

The following research questions were formulated for Article 2:

• How are HR professionals and the roles of HR professionals conceptualised according to literature?
• How do HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry view their contribution and roles within the organisation?
• What are the challenges that HR professionals experience when performing their role within the South African motor manufacturing industry?
• Do HR professionals perceive their role within the South African motor manufacturing industry as operating at functional/administrative or strategic level?
• What recommendations can be made for future research and practice?

1.2 Expected contribution of the study

This study can contribute to literature, individual and organisation regarding role of human resource management in the South African (SA) motor manufacturing industry.

1.2.1 Contribution to literature

The findings of the current study could add to literature specifically in the HR field. The traditional view of HR argued that the role of HRM in the organisation, i.e. the paradigm shift from a functional HR to a strategic HRM, has been discussed at length in previous literature. The study looked into the actual role HRM plays in a large multinational organisation. Such research could prove invaluable to both HR professionals in the motor manufacturing
environment as well as to the organisations themselves. Therefore, theoretically, the research should add value and contribute positively to the literature on the subject matter.

1.2.2 Contribution to the individual

The study could assist the individual to understand the business leaders’ expectations of the role of HR professionals better as well as at what level HR professionals are functioning in the organisation, i.e. functional level or strategic level. The findings of the study will further assist by creating awareness of support that is required by both business leaders and HR professionals in order to establish a successful and sustainable working relationship. The findings will further assist by creating a culture of understanding and transparency between both parties, namely that their working relationship is reciprocal in order for the organisation to be successful as a whole.

1.2.3 Contribution to the organisation

As limited literature exists regarding the contribution made by HRM in organisations in the South African motor manufacturing industry, the study could assist both business leaders and well as HR professionals of the organisation to understand the role and contributions made by HR professionals. This could further assist the organisation to understand better at which level HRM is operating and whether it is at a strategic business level. Furthermore, this will also help determine the gap and shortfalls between business leaders’ expectations and actual HRM delivery. The findings can certainly contribute to the organisation.

1.3 Research objectives

The research objectives are divided into general and specific objectives.
1.3.1 General objective

The general objective of this study was to explore the role of HRM within the South African motor manufacturing industry.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of Article 1 were:

- To explain how business leaders and human resource management are conceptualised according to literature;
- To understand what the business leader’s expectations regarding the roles of HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry are;
- To understand whether business leaders perceive an alignment between their expectations of HR professionals and HR delivery within the South African motor manufacturing industry;
- To explore whether business leaders view HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry as operating at functional/administrative or strategic level; and
- To make recommendations for future research and practice

For Article 2, the specific objectives of Article 2 were:

- To explain how HR professionals and the roles of HR professionals are conceptualised according to literature;
- To explore how HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry view their contribution and roles within the organisation;
- To explore the challenges that HR professionals experience when performing their role within the South African motor manufacturing industry;
- To explore whether HR professionals perceive their role within the South African motor manufacturing industry as operating at functional/administrative or strategic level; and
- To make recommendations for future research and practice.
1.4 Research design

The research design of the study consisted of the research approach, the research strategy and the research method.

1.4.1 Research approach

A qualitative research approach was utilised in the study. A qualitative approach was beneficial as it allowed for the participants for both Article 1 and Article 2 to express their views and perceptions freely as well as the experiences they had regarding the role of human resources in the organisation. According to Patton (2002, p. 14), in qualitative research, “the researcher is the instrument”. The researcher acts as an instrument that is utilised to search for patterns and pluralism (Patton, 2002). The phenomenological approach was further utilised in the study. Phenomenology is the reflective analysis of life-world experiences (Moustakas, 1994). According to Wertz (2005), phenomenological research is a way of giving the researcher access to the experiences of participants within a certain environment.

Interpretivism was the underlying paradigm for the study. Interpretivism (the researcher is referred to as an interpretivist) allows the researcher to interpret and understand the various components of the study; thus, integrating human interest into a study. According to Myers (2008, p. 38), “interpretive researchers assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments”. Within this study, the researcher utilised the interpretive research paradigm in order to understand from a subjective point of view the role of human resource management in the South African motor manufacturing industry. The interpretive research paradigm further assisted the researcher to understand the phenomenon of role of HRM within the South African motor manufacturing industry and to seek explanations within the frame of reference from both the business leaders and HR professionals’ perspective about the role HR professionals’ perform in the organisation.
1.4.2 Research strategy

In this study, the researcher adopted a single-case study strategy as it was felt it would enable her to understand and gain greater insight into the phenomenon, namely the role of human resource management in the South African motor manufacturing industry. The case study as a research strategy comprises an all-encompassing method, covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, as well as data analysis approaches (Yin, 2003). According to Sturman (1997, p. 61), a “case study is a general term for the exploration of an individual, group or phenomenon”. Therefore, a case study can be seen as a comprehensive description of a case and events, as well as a description of the discovery process, namely the research itself (Sturman, 1997).

1.4.3 Research method

The research method for the study comprised two phases, namely the literature review and the empirical study. The results are presented in two articles. The research method of this study comprised the following: research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, data collection method, ethical considerations, recoding of data, data analysis, strategies employed to ensure quality data, and reporting style.

1.4.3.1 Literature review

According to Boote and Beile (2005), the literature review represents the most important step of the research process in qualitative, quantitative and mixed research studies. A literature review regarding the function of Human Resources and the South African motor industry was done for both Article 1 and Article 2. Key words used during literature searches included: human resource management, HR professionals, motor industry, HR roles, organisation’s strategy, organisation strategy. Relevant articles published between 1995 and 2016 were consulted. The sources that were utilised included: article databases, such as EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Automotive news in SA, Sabinet Online, Science Direct, Emerald. Journals were
also consulted, e.g. SA Journal of Human Resource Management, Human Resource Management Journal, Human Resource Management Review Journal, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, Journal of Human Resources, and Retail Motor Industry. Furthermore, relevant textbooks and Internet-based search engines, such as Google Scholar and Google, were used.

1.4.3.2 Research setting

The research setting for this qualitative study was the identified organisation. The identified organisation is a multinational motor manufacturing company, which currently employs over 1 800 employees. It is a large, diverse organisation, which is located in Gauteng. The organisation has a manufacturing plant on site and a variety of business units. Permission was granted by the organisation for semi-structured face-to-face interviews to be conducted on their premises. The boardroom, meeting rooms as well as leaders and managers’ offices were utilised for the interviews. No interviews took place in open-plan offices. The researcher conducted the interviews in rooms that were comfortable and as free as possible from background noise and interruptions. All interviews were face-to-face interviews. However, the organisation was equipped with Skype and video-conferencing facilities if the researcher needed to conduct interviews via these channels.

1.4.3.3 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

Access to the relevant participants was made via the HR director of the organisation. The researcher together with HR director facilitated the scheduling of all interviews with both the business leaders as well as the HR professionals. To eliminate the element of surprise, the HR director sent out correspondence to all participants who volunteered to partake in the study for Articles 1 and 2, advising them of the research study and briefly outlining the data collection method. All participants were also advised in advance of the voice recording of the semi-structured face-to-face interviews. All participants for both Article 1 and 2 volunteered to partake in the study.
The researcher occupied a number of roles during the study. The first of which was that of a planner. The researcher planned the study and the details of how the study would be conducted. The researcher worked with the HR director of the organisation to set up the interviews. The researcher also filled the role of interviewer as she conducted the face-to-face semi-structured interviews with all participants who volunteered to partake in the study. During this process, the researcher posed open-ended questions to the participants and was guided by an interview guide. All interviews were recorded by way of an electronic voice recorder. The researcher further played the role of transcriber, as she transcribed the data collected during the interview process by way of thematic analysis as per Braun and Clark (2006). After the interviews had been transcribed, the researcher analysed the data into themes. The researcher further fulfilled the role of reporter where she had to write a report based on the findings of the study. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2005), managing the qualitative researcher’s subjectivity is an important element related to the researcher’s role. It was therefore imperative that the researcher understood her own viewpoints and biases in order to remain objective at all times.

1.4.3.4 Research participants and sampling methods

The researcher utilised purposive sampling in the study. According to Merriam (2009), purposive sampling is the method that a researcher would use to discover, understand and increase his or her insight by selecting a sample from which he or she could learn most. Purposeful sampling is a technique that is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002).

Article 1

For purposes of the study, the researcher interviewed business leaders until data saturation was reached. These business leaders represented the various areas of the organisation including head office and the manufacturing plant. These business leaders occupy senior roles in the organisation and work directly with HR professionals in the organisation. The participants interviewed occupies roles such as Corporate Sales Fleet Manager, Strategic Relations
Manager, Corporate Affairs Director, Senior Manager: Dealer Network Development, Director: Corporate Affairs & Planning, Production Manager, General Manager: Production and Senior Manager: Operational Finance.

Criteria for being part of the research for Article 1 pertained to the following:

- business leaders who were in senior management positions or higher;
- business leaders who had decision-making powers and who were responsible for running a division or department and/or had an area of expertise in the organisation;
- business leaders who worked directly with HR professionals and who had an HR professional assigned to their department, division and/or area of expertise;
- business leaders willing to participate in the study (had given written consent);
- business leaders who worked directly with business leaders and who had been specifically assigned to that business leader’s department, division and/or area of expertise;
- business leaders who were prepared to have their interview voice recorded by the researcher.

**Article 2**

The researcher interviewed HR professionals up until data saturation was reached for the purpose of achieving the goals set out for Article 2. The HR professionals represented the various areas of business including head office as well as the manufacturing plant. The HR professionals interviewed occupy various roles of HR. These roles included HR Business Partners, General Manager: Talent, Senior Manager: Benefits, HR Managers and General Manager: HR manufacturing.

Criteria for being part of the research for Article 2 pertained to HR professionals who:

- were operating at a senior level in the organisation;
- worked directly with business leaders and who had been specifically assigned to that business leader’s department, division and/or area of expertise;
• were willing to participate in the study (had given written consent);
• were willing to have face-to-face interviews with the researcher; and
• were prepared to have their interview recorded by the researcher.

1.4.3.5 Research procedure

Permission for the study was granted in advance by the identified organisation. The researcher together with the organisation’s HR director facilitated the scheduling of all interviews. The HR director sent out correspondence to all participants advising them of the research study. The researcher then contacted the participants who volunteered to partake in the study in order to schedule suitable dates and times for the interviews. The interviews took place at the organisation’s premises so it was convenient for all the participants to attend the interview. During the interview, the researcher created a rapport with the participants and ensured that the participants were comfortable. The researcher explained in detail the objectives of the study and the process itself. The researcher also explained to all participants that the study was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research study at any time. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before commencing with the interviews. The researcher also advised all participants that the interviews would be recorded via voice recorder and obtained their permission for the recording. The researcher further assured all participants that anonymity was adhered to at all times.

1.4.3.6 Data collection methods

Data for the study was collected via semi-structured face-to-face interviews with relevant participants for Article 1 and Article 2. According to Locke, Silverman and Spirduso (2010), the most common sources of data collection in qualitative research are interviews, observations, and the review of documents. Kvale (1996) describes an interview inquiry as a “moral enterprise” this has to do with one aspect of the researcher’s role. The formal interviews comprised of semi-structured questions. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer and interviewee to engage in meaningful conversation regarding the study in more detail.
According to Locke et al. (2010), collecting good data takes time, and quick interviews or short observations are unlikely to help the researcher gain understanding. Semi-structured questions were formulated beforehand and were guided by a well-prepared interview guide. The interviewer also allocated some time to the possibility that some spontaneity could arise during the interview. The duration of the interviews was around 45 minutes to an hour per participant.

The following pre-determined questions (but not limited to) formed part of the interview guide for Article 1: Article 1 was directed towards business leaders of the organisation. The questions posed to the participants were all open-ended questions.

- *In your experience with HRM, what are the role and responsibilities of HR professionals in the organisation?*
- *Through your experience and engagement with HR, to what extent do you view HR as an administrator?*
- *Through your experience and engagement with HR, to what extent do you view HR as a strategic business partner?*
- *How do you perceive the contribution of HR professionals to the organisation?*
- *In your opinion, are there any gaps between the business expectations of HRM and HRM delivery?*

The following pre-determined questions (but not limited to) formed part of the interview guide for Article 2: Article 2 was directed at HR professionals of the organisation. The questions posed to the participants were open-ended questions.

- *According to your views as an HR professional in the organisation, what is the day-to-day activities of the HR?*
- *Explain how much of your time is spent on administrative duties and how much of your time is spent on strategic initiatives?*
- *Are you (HR) aware of the organisation’s strategic objectives? Please elaborate.*
- *Are you involved in any strategic planning of the organisation/department/division? If so, in what way?*
- *Do you feel that HR gets the necessary support from the leaders of the organisation?*
- *What are the challenges you face when dealing with leadership on HR-related matters?*
The researcher also made use of a pilot study for both Article 1 and Article 2. A pilot study was conducted beforehand with two senior participants per article respectively. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine whether the questions posed to the participants would be well understood and correctly interpreted by the participants and whether any changes needed to be made prior to the actual data collection commencing.

1.4.3.7 Data recording

All interviews were recorded by an electronic voice recorder. Afterwards all voice recordings were transcribed into a word-processed document. The interviewer also made personal notes during the interview, which were utilised to assign associated meanings and explanations to the themes and sub-themes. Each interview was assigned a code, for example ‘Participant A’ as well as the date and time of the interview. Each interview was recorded with an electronic voice recorder and labelled as per the assigned code to avoid any mistakes or misunderstanding when transcribing. Every recorded interview was transcribed by key words, phrases and statements. As a precaution to equipment failure, the researcher made sure that the recording equipment functioned well and that spare batteries, tapes, etc. were available (Easton, McComish, & Greenberg, 2000). Field (personal) notes were also utilised. Because the human mind tends to forget quickly, field (personal) notes by the researcher are crucial in qualitative research to retain data gathered and should be written no later than the next day (Lofland & Lofland, 1999, p.5).

The researcher ensured the confidentiality and safekeeping of all data collected during the research study. Data storage of all voice recordings, field (personal) notes and filing of hard copy documentation were secured to prevent others from accessing it. Backup copies of electronic files were made. In addition, the following hard copy documentation was filed for safekeeping:

- the informed consent forms completed by the participants;
- field (personal) notes, any additional information gathered during the interview;
- any notes made during the ‘data analysis’ process; and
- any form of communication between the participant and researcher.
1.4.3.8 Data analysis

Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p. 9) regard analysis as the “systematic procedures to identify essential features and relationships”. It is a way of transforming the data through interpretation. Merriam (1998, p. 48) states, “our analysis and interpretation – our study’s findings will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place”. The data that had been obtained from semi-structured face-to-face interviews was analysed through the process of thematic analysis. Braun and Clark (2006, p. 79) define thematic analysis as “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic.” The researcher was guided by the following steps of thematic analysis as per Braun and Clark (2006):

- Step 1: Familiarise yourself with the data
- Step 2: Generate initial codes
- Step 3: Discover themes/search for themes
- Step 4: Review themes
- Step 5: Define and name themes
- Step 6: Write the analysis

Figure 1: Thematic analysis as per Braun and Clark (2006)

**Step 1: Familiarise yourself with the data**

After the data had been collected, the researcher made every attempt to immerse herself in the data to understand the depth and breadth of the contents of the data fully. This involved
repeated reading of transcripts as well as repeated listening to the audio-taped data. It is the role of the researcher to familiarise him- or herself with the data collected.

*Step 2: Generate initial codes*

This step involves the formulation of initial codes from the data. The researcher worked systematically through the entire data content to identify interesting aspects in the data that could form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set. By doing this, the researcher gained a sense of direction in terms of organising the data relevant to each code.

*Step 3: Discover themes/search for themes*

The researcher started working through the list of identified codes. Following that, the different codes were sorted into potential themes, and all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes were collated. At this stage, the researcher started looking at the relationship between codes, themes and level of themes, i.e. forming sub-themes.

*Step 4: Reviewing themes*

This step began when the researcher devised a set of candidate themes. The researcher reviewed and refined these themes. During this phase, the researcher identified those themes that needed to be excluded or broken down into separate themes or joined or merged into one theme. The researcher was cognisant of the fact that the data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear distinctions between themes.

*Step 5: Defining and naming themes*

During this step, the researcher defined and further refined the themes that were created in the previous step. The researcher further identified the essence of what each theme was about and
determined which aspect of the data each theme captured. The researcher also spent time identifying the sub-themes and the associated meanings and explanations associated with the each of the specific sub-themes. The researcher made sure that the names of themes and sub-themes were a clear representation of the contents thereof.

*Step 6: Writing the analysis*

This step involves the final analysis and writing up of the report. The researcher ensured that the analysis provided a concise, coherent, logical and non-repetitive and interesting account of the story that the data had to tell – within and across the themes. The researcher also ensured that the writing up of the report provided sufficient evidence of the themes within the data. The researcher improved the reliability of the results by making use of a co-coder within the human resource management field.

1.4.3.9 Strategies employed to ensure quality data and integrity

The credibility of the researcher is vital in the research process (Macnee & McCabe, 2008). According to Terre Blanche, Durrheim, and Painter (2009), good qualitative research adheres to the following criteria:

**Credibility:** Credibility is defined as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002; Macnee & McCabe, 2008). Credibility establishes whether or not the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants’ original data and whether it is a correct interpretation of the participants’ original views (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Therefore, the researcher ensured that the findings were reported in a truthful manner.

**Dependability:** The researcher used detailed descriptions, i.e. associated meanings and explanations of sub-themes and quotes to assure the reader that the research and outcomes occurred as the researcher states it did. According to Bitsch (2005, p. 86), dependability refers
to “the stability of findings over time”. The researcher ensured that the study followed the proper processes and that the report indicated the outcome as it occurred. The researcher endeavoured to ensure that the report is clear and detailed enough for the reader to understand the essence of the study and the outcome and findings thereof.

**Transferability**: Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts with other respondents (Bitsch, 2005). Transferability was ensured by providing enough information regarding the context and framework of the study in detail. Meaningful and strong descriptions were developed in order to create understandings that could be transferred to new contexts for future studies.

**Confirmability**: Confirmability is “concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer’s imagination, but are clearly derived from the data” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392). The researcher ensured that the data collected confirmed the general finding and implications. The researcher further ensured that she was not biased and that she remained neutral throughout the study.

1.4.3.10 Reporting style

All findings throughout the study were reported in a qualitative writing style and reflect the participant’s thoughts, emotions and experience. Themes and sub-themes that were extracted from the data and direct quotes were used to confirm results. The researcher was also cognisant of the reflective self during the reporting of data. According to Yin (2003), good researchers express both a declarative self (wants to tell the world what one knows or what one has learned) and reflective self (needs to admit how one has learned what you know) in their study.

1.4.3.11 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations guided this research study. At all times, the researcher was cognisant of the sensitivity and confidentiality of the study and the participation thereof. The researcher
endeavoured to be as transparent as possible with the participants, advising them of reasons for the study as well as layout of proceedings. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent from all participants was a priority. Ethical issues, such as voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality and consent were discussed with all participants in detail ensuring their understanding and acceptance thereof. The researcher endeavoured to ensure every precaution was taken to respect the privacy, confidentiality and dignity of all participants, no harm was caused in any way, and the participants’ best interest was ensured at all times. The researcher also ensured and reassured all participants that their participation in the study would be kept anonymous; hence, no names were mentioned. The interviewer was mindful of the value of time and adhered to the time allocated for the interview. The interviewer also created a rapport with the participants to make them feel as comfortable as possible. All interviews were recorded by voice recorder and participants were informed of the recording. Informed voluntary consent was requested of the participants to provide full permission for the voice recordings. Participants were also advised of their right to terminate their participation from the study at any time should they wish to do so.

1.5 Overview of chapters

The chapters in the dissertation are presented as follows:
Chapter 1: Introduction
Chapter 2: Research article 1
Chapter 3: Research article 2
Chapter 4: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

1.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the problem statement and the research objectives were discussed. Furthermore, the research design and method were discussed, followed by a brief overview of the chapters that follow.
References


CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH ARTICLE 1
EXPLORING BUSINESS LEADERS’ PERSPECTIVE ON HRM AND THE CONTRIBUTION MADE BY HR PROFESSIONALS WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN MOTOR MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Orientation: Business leaders perceive and view the role and contribution made by HR professionals in the organisation as administrative and limited in terms of their role. Business leaders also believe that there is a gap between their expectations and HR delivery.

Research purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore the business leaders’ perspective on human resource management (HRM) and how these business leaders view the role of and contribution made by HR professionals in the organisation. This study was conducted within a motor manufacturing company in Gauteng.

Motivation for the study: Although human resources (HR) has been part of organisations for generations, the role that HR professionals play in an organisation varies from organisation to organisation. This study therefore aimed to explore the role and contribution made by HR professionals in the organisation (motor manufacturing industry) by the business leaders in the organisation.

Research approach, design and method: A qualitative research design with an exploratory approach was utilised throughout this study. Further to this, a phenomenological approach with interpretivism as the underlying paradigm was employed in the study. Purposive sampling was utilised. A voluntary sample of 8 \( N = 8 \) business leaders who were employed in a motor manufacturing company in South Africa at the time formed part of this study, and data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

Main findings: The results of this study indicated the business leaders’ perception of the roles HR professionals in the organisation are performing. However, findings of the study also indicated that a number of limitations and gaps exist between business leaders’ expectations and HR delivery. Furthermore, the study showed that HR professionals operate at an administrative/functional level in the organisation. Two main themes emerged from this study. These themes and their subsequent sub-themes are also described.

Practical implications/managerial implications: If HR professionals are to perform their roles as per the expectations of the business leaders, this could possibly minimise the limitations and gaps between both parties. If HR professionals endeavour to execute their role
more effectively and according to expectations, this could possibly give rise to a shift from HR professionals operating at an administrative level to functioning more strategically within the organisation.

**Contribution/value-add:** The results of this study will provide valuable feedback that could assist both business leaders as well as HR professionals in the organisation to understand the role and contribution made by HR professionals. By taking heed of the findings and recommendations of this study, the organisation would become aware of the level at which HR professionals are performing. The study will furthermore provide information regarding the limitations and gaps between business leaders’ expectations and HRM delivery

**Keywords:** human resources, human resource management, human resource professionals, business leaders, strategic and traditional HRM, limitations and gaps, organisation strategy, HR strategy.

**Introduction**

Human resources (HR) refers to the personnel or people-associated aspects within an organisation (Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk, & Schenk, 2003). HR is an investment in resources to help the organisation to do HR work (Christensen, 2006). Within certain organisations, the HR department forms an instrumental part of the organisation, as it is responsible for creating, implementing and overseeing policies governing employee behaviour as well as behaviour of the organisation toward its employees (Swanepoel, Erasmus, & Schenk, 2008). This thought is also shared by Meyer (2009), in that the HR department could be seen as the heart of the organisation as it influences the culture of the organisation and identifies and implements legislative practices, processes and procedures in the organisation (Meyer, 2009). Meyer (2009) further states that the HR department is responsible for selecting and recruiting the workforce of the organisation as well as of developing people within the organisation.

Research has indicated that traditionally the role of HR operated at a functional level (Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert, & Hatfield, 2010; Swanepoel et al., 2008). This involved clerical and administrative support as well as payroll and personnel management (Grobler et al., 2010; Swanepoel et al., 2008). However, over the years, the role of HR has transformed a great deal
In order to establish how HR has transformed from generations ago, it is important firstly to understand the vast differences between traditional and strategic HR (Brewster, Carey, Grobler, Holland, & Warnich, 2008; Sullivan, 2004). The shift from traditional HR to HRM involved the transition from doing transactional and administrative work to delivering more strategically requires new thinking, practices and competencies (Brewster et. al., 2008: Christensen, 2006).

As organisations evolved and became more strategic so too did the role and function of HR professionals (Grobler et al., 2010). HR professionals themselves have also been undergoing transformation so that effective HR professionals facilitate the creation and deployment of strategy (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2012). Since the 1970s, there has been a gradual move to professionalise the personnel function and increase the value of its contribution (Holbeche, 2009). By the 1990s, organisation survival, rather than growth became the issue in many sectors. The mid-1990s saw HR transforming itself to add value to the organisation beyond just a support function (Holbeche, 2009).

HR started to restructure itself and became more involved in terms of aligning itself with the strategy and goals of the organisation (Holbeche, 2009). The shift for HR to become more involved in contributing to the success of the organisation suggests that there is a link between the role HR plays in the organisation and the achievement of organisational goals (Holbeche, 2009). HR professionals have an important role to play in the sustainability of organisations and the subsequent economic growth of the country through its people (Sikora & Ferris, 2014). This thought was relevant to the study as the study explored the role of and contribution made by HR professionals in the organisation.

Literature to date suggests the strategic role that HR professionals should ideally play in organisations (Holbeche, 2009; Sullivan, 2004; Ulrich et al., 2012). However, the role that HR professionals play in organisations is the subject of an on-going debate (O’Brien & Linehan, 2014). A study by Louw (2012) indicated that HR professionals lack experience and competence in evaluating, executing and reporting on the key aspects of the HR function. As a result, HR practitioners cannot provide organisations with important feedback regarding the effectiveness of the HR function (Field & Louw, 2012). Furthermore, organisations are of the
opinion that the information and advice provided by HR professionals are unreliable and lack integrity, and can therefore not be used (De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009). Further to this, a study by Walters (2006) indicated that, within the South African context, HR professionals are mostly fulfilling the roles of administrative experts and employee champions. A recent study by Abbott, Goosen, and Coetzee (2013) pointed out that many HR practitioners in South Africa are still focusing on the role of employee advocates in the workplace. According to Armstrong (2009, p. 16), an “employee advocate focuses on the needs of today’s employees through listening, understanding, and empathising” with employees. Accordingly, HR professionals take on the role of employee advocates, with the responsibility of ensuring the employer–employee relationship is one of reciprocal value (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). This being said, it is important to explore the role HR professional perform in the organisation.

The HR profession has been in existence for decades and has evolved over time. HR professionals play a vital role in organisations and can turn strategic choices into actions by aligning HR practices and leadership behaviour with the strategy and objectives of the organisation (Ulrich et al., 2012). However, limited research exists on the role that HR professionals perform in the South African motor manufacturing industry. The purpose of the research on which this article is based, was therefore to explore the role of and contribution made by HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry as perceived by the business leaders in the organisation.

Research purpose and objectives

The objective of the study reported here was to explore business leaders’ perspective on HRM, and how these business leaders view the role of and contribution made by HR professionals in the organisation (in this case, the South African motor manufacturing industry). The objectives of the study (Article 1) were:

- To explain how business leaders and human resource management are conceptualised according to literature.
- To understand what are the business leader’s expectations regarding the roles of HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry.
• To understand whether business leaders perceive an alignment between their expectations of HR professionals and HR delivery within the South African motor manufacturing industry.

• To explore whether business leaders view HR professionals within South African motor manufacturing industry as operating at functional/administrative or strategic level; and

• To make recommendations for future research and practice.

**Literature review**

**Human resource management**

The term human resource management or HRM started to be used more frequently (Christensen, 2006) and focuses on employee management with an emphasis on employees as assets of the organisation (Brewster et al., 2008). HRM is rooted in work as a human activity and focuses on all the aspects pertaining to the management of work and the people performing it in organisations (Swanepoel et al., 2008). “Human resource management is that part of the management of the organisations that is concerned with all aspects that relate to, and interplay with, the work and the people who do the work of and in organisations” (Swanepoel et al., 2008, p. 4).

According to Brewster et al. (2008) and Sullivan (2004), HRM professionals should be equipped to develop strategic plans that align with the larger structure of the objectives, of the company whereas traditional HR is almost purely administrative in nature. Sullivan (2004), further states that traditional and strategic approaches to HR offer the organisation different models for providing human capital needs. The HRM function exists to support employees through an array of various human capital needs, i.e. training and development, career development, succession planning, reward and recognition as well as personal benefits such as pension and provident fund, insurance and in certain cases, benefits to support employees’ families (Sullivan, 2004; Swanepoel et al., 2008). Moreover, strategic HR means that an organisation takes a strategic and proactive approach to ensure that all actions that relate to the business objectives are stated in the strategic plan (Ulrich et al., 2012). Strategic HR is part of
a different way of running an entire organisation (Sullivan, 2004; Ulrich et al., 2012). Similarly, Ulrich (1997) states that due to the ever-changing business environment and growth, there has been a growing focus for HR functions to become more strategic and gain the status and credibility to influence the organisation more strategically. Research has also indicated that in recent years, the HR function, like other organisational functions, is required to contribute to organisational demands and requirements (Murphy & Southey, 2002; Ulrich, 1997).

**Business leaders**

Business leaders are visionaries who inspire and lead employees within the organisation (April, MacDonald, & Vriesendorp, 2000). April et al. (2000) state that business leaders require the right set of competencies, skills and behaviours in order to be successful. Further to this, business leaders need to inspire, motivate and empower the people within the organisation (April et al., 2000). Apart from this, business leaders are also accountable for strategy formulation and implementation and ultimately accountable for organisational success (April et al., 2000). This thought is shared by Sarros and Woodman (1993) in that effective leadership can make a difference to organisational performance.

**Alignment of HR and organisation strategy**

To ensure the success and sustainability of the organisation, both the HR strategy and organisational strategy need to be formulated and HR professionals and business leaders need to work together to ensure this (Grobler et al., 2010; Ulrich et al., 2012). According to April et al. (2000), business leaders are visionaries who inspire, mentor, develop and empower the employees of the organisation. Further to this, if business leaders are to be effective and successful, they require the right competencies, skills and behaviours in order to meet the objectives of the organisation (April et al., 2000). Possessing the right competencies, skills and behaviours allows business leaders to become accountable for strategy formulation and implementation (April et al., 2000). This thought is shared by Ulrich et al. (2012). According to Ulrich et al. (2012), business leaders and HR professionals need to work together as partners in order to achieve organisational goals. It is therefore imperative that HR strategy and practices
be integrated and aligned with organisational strategy if it is to have lasting value (Ulrich et al., 2012).

The strategy of the organisation is management’s game plan. Without it, management will have no road map to follow and no action plan to produce results (Grobler et al., 2010). According to Kearns (2010), the strategy of an organisation can be seen as a declaration of long-term intent by the organisation. Kearns (2010) further states that HR strategy cannot be treated as a separate exercise from the strategy of the organisation. The two should be viewed as inseparable and indivisible. Research by Kearns (2010) and Ulrich et al. (2012), has also shown that an effective HR organisation strategy should, by definition, produce an effective modus operandi. The ethos, principles, values and objectives of the organisation should all be encapsulated within the HR strategy for the organisation (Kearns, 2010). This thought is supported by Ulrich et al. (2012) who say HRM should not be viewed in insolation but should be integrated within the organisation as it forms an integral part of the success of the organisation.

Role of HR professionals

HRM, practices must be designed, integrated and aligned to the requirements of the organisation, and HR professionals must be prepared so that they can contribute to the success of the organisation (Ulrich et al., 2012). It is therefore important that HR professionals within the organisation are skilled professionals who can ultimately add value to the organisation (Christensen, 2006). This is further reiterated by Cohen (2005) who refers to HR professionals having a strong educational background in order to be successful, especially with the increasingly high expectations that business leaders have on them. Cohen (2005) explains that HR professionals “need an education and background that will prepare them to be analytical and strategic, thoughtful communicators, skilled negotiators, savvy business professionals, astute change agents, and expert HR generalists and specialists” (Cohen, 2005, p. 69).

HR professionals are senior or key HR personnel (Kearns, 2010). They are usually embedded in the business unit where they work in partnership with operational managers within that
business unit to influence and steer strategy and strategy implementation (Ulrich et al., 2012). HR professionals who want to truly contribute to business performance, must centre on the goals of the business (Ulrich et al., 2012). HR professionals should practice the skill of seeing the business as a whole and not just their own department (Ulrich et al., 2012). Focusing on the business enables HR professionals to add meaningful and sustainable value to the organisation (Ulrich et al., 2012).

Further to this, Ulrich et al. (2012) argue that HR professionals have been through three general waves and the fourth is emerging. These waves are following:

- **Wave 1** involved administrative HR work. HR personnel focused on terms and conditions of work, delivery of HR services and regulatory and compliance. The primary accountability for HR was administrative and transactional.
- **Wave 2** emphasised the design of innovative HR practices. These practices were sourcing, compensation or rewards, learning, communication. HR credibility was derived from delivering best practices.
- **Wave 3** focused on the connection of individual and integrated HR practices with business success through strategic HR. HR professionals turned strategies into HR priorities to deliver on strategic objectives. The effectiveness of HR created a line of sight between business strategy and HR actions. The credibility of HR came from being at the table to engage in strategic conversation.
- **Wave 4** uses HR practices to derive external business conditions and respond to these conditions.

Despite the various positive and negative opinions in literature, many researchers have tested the original four-factor HR role model by Ulrich (1997) in various settings. According to Ulrich (1997), the model consists of four core roles and related activities, namely a strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion and change agent. According to Ulrich (1997), a strategic partner involves aligning HR and organisational strategy, while the administrative expert, is involved with reengineering organisation processes and creating shared services. The employee champion is involved in listening and responding to employees as well as providing
resources to employees. The change agent manages transformation and change ensuring that there is capacity for change within the organisation.

Ulrich (1997) further describes that being a successful HR professional involves being involved in a number of HR roles. These roles are corporate HR, embedded HR, HR specialist and service centre. Corporate HR professionals are HR professionals who define organisation initiatives. They represent the company to external stakeholders and meet the unique demands of senior leaders. Embedded HR professionals are HR generalists within organisation units. These HR professionals collaborate with business leaders to ensure that their organisations deliver value to stakeholders and also deliver competitive strategies. They help shape the business strategy and design and deliver HR practices to achieve organisational strategy and manage the strategy development process. HR specialists are HR professionals working in centres of expertise where they provide technical insight on HR issues, such as staffing, leadership development, rewards, communication, organisation development, benefits, etc. They deliver value by recommending HR practices that are on the forefront of their respective areas of expertise. They create new practices that add value beyond that of their competitors. Service centres refer to HR professionals working in service centres to add value by building or managing technology-based e-HR systems. These systems enable employees to manage their relationship within the organisation.

From the above it is clear that the role of HR in organisations is significant and needs further research, especially given the various views of the role of HR that exist within literature. However, limited research exists in this regard in the South African context, and more so within the motor manufacturing industry specifically. Hence, the importance to understand the business leaders’ perception of the role HR professionals perform in the organisation. The objective of this study was to explore the contribution made by HR professionals in the organisation as perceived by the business leaders in the organisation.

**Research design**

The research design consists of the research approach, research strategy and research method.
Research approach

A qualitative research design with an exploratory approach was utilised to explore the business leaders’ perspective on HRM and how these business leaders view the contribution made by HR professionals in the organisation. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), researchers use qualitative research to observe and describe events as they occur within a specific research setting. The main purpose of such research is to capture the full richness of the participants’ experience of these events (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This approach provided the researcher with an overall and holistic view of the perceptions and opinions of the participants.

A phenomenological approach was furthermore utilised throughout this qualitative research study. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, and Delport (2011), this research design differs from other research designs, as it is done by deriving meaning and essence of experiences, instead of measurements and explanations. Creswell (1998) states that the phenomenological approach aims to describe experiences through first-person accounts in informal conversations and during interviews, for the purpose of understanding human behaviour.

Interpretivism was utilised as the underlying paradigm in the study. Interpretivism refers to an approach in social science that focuses on the significance of the perceptions of insiders to understand truth (Brink, Van der Walt, & Van Rensburg, 2012). Researchers who make use of interpretive paradigms rely on the actual accounts from participants and try to describe what they see in a rich and descriptive manner (Brink et al., 2012). Within this study, the researcher tried to understand the business leaders’ views and perceptions of HRM.

Research strategy

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of the study, a single case study was conducted in the form of semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the participants (business leaders) in order to explore their perception on the role of and the contribution made by HR professionals within the organisation. According to Henning, Van Rensburg, and Smit (2004), a case study
is an intensive study or in-depth investigation where the main assumption concerns a phenomenon being studied in a limited environment. In this study, the phenomenon was the role of human resource management in the South African motor manufacturing industry. As mentioned, the study utilised a single case study strategy as only one single organisation formed part of this research study.

**Research method**

The research method of this study comprised the following: research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, data collection method, ethical issues, recoding of data, data analysis, strategies employed to ensure quality data, reporting, and ethical considerations. All of these are discussed in detail below.

**Research setting**

Prior to the actual research commencing, permission for the study was granted by the identified organisation. The identified organisation is a multinational motor manufacturing company that employed over 1 800 employees at the time of the research. The identified organisation is a large, diverse organisation, which is located in Gauteng. The organisation has a manufacturing plant on site and a variety of business units. All participants occupied senior positions in the organisation at the time of this research.

According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport, (2005), prior to data collection, a setting must be selected that is consistent with the topic being studied and directly linked with the research problem. The interviews were held on the premises of the organisation. The organisation is a diverse multinational motor manufacturing company. All semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted on their premises behind closed doors within allocated meeting rooms. The researcher took great care to ensure that the participants were comfortable at all times during the interviews.
Entrée and establishing research roles

In an attempt to avoid disturbing the participant’s environment and ultimately distorting the quality of the data gathered (De Vos et al., 2005), the HR director as well as an HR manager from the organisation assisted the researcher with identifying the participants and also assisted in arranging the interviews. To eliminate the element of surprise, the researcher compiled a brief presentation containing information such as the purpose and objectives of the study, the expected role of the participants as well as an informed consent form (Berg, 2007; De Vos et al., 2011). The HR director forwarded the presentation to each of the participants. Electronic meeting requests were sent out to all identified participants to partake in the study.

The researcher fulfilled various roles throughout the research study. The first of which was the role of a planner. The researcher planned the study by focusing on important aspects, such as sampling, data collection and analysis of the data. The researcher’s background is that of a head-hunter and recruitment specialist and she has been trained in interviewing skills. The researcher therefore felt comfortable and confident with the interviewing process; thus fulfilling the role of interviewer and facilitator. The researcher also acted as research tool and had a direct influence on the quality of data that was collected. According to Boyce and Neale (2006) and Terre Blanche, Durrheim, and Painter (2006), it is crucial for the researcher to remain aware of his or her personal perceptions and potential bias throughout the data collection process, and how this might influence the objectivity of the research findings. The researcher was therefore aware and cognisant of the fact that interviewing as a method of collecting qualitative data might be prone to bias. However, the researcher remained objective throughout the interview process, ensuring that her personal bias did not influence the findings in any way. In addition, the researcher made some personal notes as a point of reference to assist her when analysing the data. Together with a co-coder from the field of HRM, the data was analysed. The researcher also fulfilled the role of transcriber and analyser throughout the process. Lastly, the researcher acted as a report writer by writing a detailed report regarding the findings of this study.
Research participants and sampling methods

The participants of this case study were sampled out of a specific motor manufacturing organisation within South Africa. The organisation, which is based in Gauteng, has a head office as well as a manufacturing plant. The researcher interviewed the following business leaders: Corporate Sales Fleet Manager, Strategic Relations Manager, Corporate Affairs Director, Senior Manager: Dealer Network Development, Director: Corporate Affairs & Planning, Production Manager, General Manager: Production, Senior Manager: Operational Finance.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, one of the important criteria in the selection process was that participants had to occupy a senior-level role in the organisation but, most importantly, he or she had to work directly with HR professionals. A limited number of business leaders consequently were suitable to form part of the study. Therefore, this research study only made use of purposive sampling to select business leaders from the organisation. However, all participants (business leaders) volunteered to partake in the study. As mentioned previously, permission for the study was granted by the organisation well in advance of the research being conducted. The interviews were planned in advance allowing those participants who volunteered to partake in the study enough time to avail themselves for the interviews. According to Merriam (2009), purposive sampling is the method that a researcher will use to discover, understand and increase his or her insight by selecting a sample from which he or she could learn most. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). Due to the specific nature of the research study, specific inclusion criteria were established for participants to partake in the study, namely:

- business leaders who were in senior management positions or higher;
- business leaders who had decision-making powers and who were responsible for running a division, department and/or had an area of expertise in the organisation;
- business leaders who worked directly with HR professionals and who had an HR professional assigned to their department, division and/or area of expertise;
- business leaders willing to participate in the study (give written consent);
• business leaders who were willing to have face-to-face interviews with the researcher; and
• business leaders who were prepared to have their interview voice recorded by the researcher.

The sample size of the research study was governed by data saturation. For the purpose of measuring the business leaders’ perspective on HRM qualitatively and of measuring how these business leaders view the contribution made by HR professionals in the organisation, eight business leaders ($N = 8$) were interviewed. Data saturation was reached after the first few interviews. Despite this, the researcher interviewed a few more participants to ensure and confirm data saturation. Thereafter, the researcher did not see it necessary to interview more participants.

Table 1 below provides information on the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18-30 years of age</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31-40 years of age</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41-50 years of age</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51-60 years of age</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Gauteng</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 shows that:

- half of the participants were in the age group 31 to 40 years (50%);
- 37.50% of the participants were in the age group 41 to 50 years;
- 12.50% were in the age group 51 to 60 years, and
- there were no (0%) participants between 18 to 30 years.

Furthermore, the majority of participants were male (87.50%) and 12.50% were female; 37.50% of the participants were black, while an equal split of 25% was coloured and white respectively, and 12.50% Indian. All (100%) of the participants resided in Gauteng.

**Research procedure**

Permission and consent for the study was granted by the organisation prior to commencement of the study. The participants were notified in advance of the study and the details thereof. Interviews were scheduled with all participants who volunteered to partake in the study. Interviews took place on the premises of the organisation as this was convenient and familiar to the participants. The researcher ensured that the participants felt comfortable during the interview process. All interviews were conducted in private, allocated meeting rooms. In order to avoid noise and interruptions, the doors remained closed for the duration of the interview. The researcher provided transparent information to the participants as to the objectives and reason for the study. She also gave the participants the opportunity to ask questions or seek clarity if they did not understand anything. All participants were assured that information gathered would remain confidential and anonymous. The researcher also advised the participants of the recording of the interview via voice recorder and obtained permission for the recording from the participants prior to the interview commencing.

**Data collection methods**

The researcher made use of semi-structured face-to-face interviews as a method to collect the data. According to Flick (2009), semi-structured face-to-face interviews are exploratory in
nature. The purpose of this study was to explore and obtain information from the business leaders of the organisation on their perception of HRM. According to De Vos et al. (2011), semi-structured interviews contribute to accumulating insight and understanding. The interviews were exploratory, and the same open-ended questions were asked to all eight participants (Berg, 2007).

During the face-to-face interviews, responses of the participants were used for further exploration and probing for deeper meaning and understanding (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011). The purpose of utilising open-ended questions during the interviews, was to probe and draw as much information as possible and to allow the participant’s story to unfold in his/her own language (Brink et al., 2012). The researcher probed for deeper meaning to get a thick description and an understanding of the business leaders’ experience through the eyes of the participants.

The semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants at the organisation on dates and times that were suitable for the participants. The researcher was cognisant and aware of the very busy schedules of the business leaders; therefore the interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour to avoid too much of disruption from work. Various pre-determined questions (but not limited to) were posed to the participants during the interviews; however, many participants were very engaging and provided such rich and valuable information in answering certain questions that the researcher did not deem it necessary to pose every question to the participants especially if sufficient information had already been gathered. The following pre-determined questions (but not limited to) were asked during the interviews:

- **In your experience with HRM, what are the role and responsibilities of HR professionals in the organisation?**
- **Through your experience and engagement with HR, to what extent do you view HR as an administrator?**
- **Through your experience and engagement with HR, to what extent do you view HR as a strategic business partner?**
- **How do you perceive the contribution of HR professionals to the organisation?**
• *In your opinion, are there any gaps between the business expectations of HRM and HRM delivery?*

The researcher also made use of a pilot study. A pilot study can be referred to as a feasibility study or trial study on a small scale in preparation for the major study (Polit, Beck, & Hungler, 2001). According to Baker (1994), a pilot study can be regarded as the pre-testing of a research instrument. In this research study, the goal of the pilot study was to ensure that all the participants understood the questions correctly. A pilot study was conducted with two participants in the organisation. Both participants occupied senior roles in the organisation. During the pilot study, certain questions were rephrased and refined in preparation for the data collection process. The researcher did not see the need to interview more participants in the pilot study as all participants who were identified to partake in the study were employed at senior levels on the organisation and would be able to articulate and understand the level of questions posed to them.

**Recording of data**

According to Silverman (1993), qualitative research should most preferably be carried out by observations, text analyses, interviews, recordings and transcriptions. Berg (2007) states that the aim of research is for the researcher to avoid causing any harm and to ensure that he or she had taken all reasonable steps in order to protect the data and participants.

Before the interviews commenced, the use of a digital voice recorder was once again explained and an informed consent form was signed by all participants. All interviews were recorded digitally by means of an electronic voice recorder and field (personal) notes were made by the researcher. The field (personal) notes were intended to assist the researcher in describing the associated meanings and explanations of the sub-themes. The recorded interviews were safely stored on the digital recorder to prevent any compromise of the quality of the data. Furthermore, the recordings were also stored in duplicate in locations only accessible to the researcher and her supervisors. The recordings were transcribed verbatim for data analysis by the researcher.
In addition, to the above, the following hard copy documentation was filed for safekeeping.

- The informed consent forms from the participants;
- field (personal) notes to assist the research as a point of reference and added by the researcher in describing the associated meanings and explanations of the sub-themes;
- any notes made during the data analysis process, e.g. grouping of units of meaning into themes; and
- any form of communication between the participant and researcher

**Data analysis**

In this qualitative study, the researchers made use of thematic analysis to interpret the data that had been collected. Braun and Clark (2006, p. 79) define thematic analysis as “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. The researcher was guided by the following steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006):

*Step 1: Familiarise yourself with the data*

After the data had been collected, the researcher made every attempt to immerse herself in the data to understand the depth and breadth of the contents of the data fully. This involved repeated reading of transcripts as well as repeated listening to the audio-recorded data. The researcher also made use of field (personal) notes she had made during the interviews. The field (personal) notes assisted the researcher in describing the associated meanings and explanations of the sub-themes. In order to ensure quality, the researcher randomly checked the transcribed data. Although the process took time, the researcher felt it necessary to do so in order to validate the data.
Step 2: Generating initial codes

This step involved the formulation of initial codes from the data. The researcher worked systematically through the entire data content and identified interesting aspects in the data that could form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set. By doing this, the researcher got a greater sense of direction in terms of organising the data relevant to each code. The researcher ensured that no data was disregarded or seen as insignificant.

Step 3: Searching for themes

The researcher started working through the list of identified codes. The researcher sorted the different codes into potential themes and collated all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. At this stage, the researcher started looking at the relationship between codes, themes and level of themes, i.e. forming sub-themes.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

The researcher began this step by refining the themes identified in the previous steps. During this phase, the researcher identified those themes that needed to be excluded, or broken down into separate themes or joined or merged into one theme. The researcher was cognisant of the fact that the data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear distinctions between themes. Although many pre-determined questions were asked during the semi-structured face-to-face interviews, the answers from the participants flowed from one question to another and reflected similar responses; hence, two main themes and a variety of sub-themes emerged.
*Step 5: Defining and naming themes*

The researcher defined and further refined the themes that were present in the analysis. The researcher then identified the essence of what each theme was about and determined which aspect of the data each theme and sub-theme captured. The researcher ensured that the names of themes and sub-themes were indeed a clear representation of the themes given.

*Step 6: Writing the analysis (report)*

This step involves the final analysis and the writing of the report. The researcher ensured that the analysis provided a concise, coherent, logical and non-repetitive and interesting account of the story that data had to tell – within and across the themes. The researcher also ensured that the report provided sufficient evidence of the themes within the data. The researcher ensured that the findings pertaining to the data were clearly and accurately explained. During the data analysis process, the researcher employed the help of a co-coder within the HRM field.

**Strategies employed to ensure quality data and integrity**

Various criteria were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, which is an important issue to consider during the research process. The researcher applied the following criteria to judge the validity and reliability of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that issues of trustworthiness refer to the quality of data in qualitative research. The following strategies were taken into consideration to ensure the trustworthiness of this research study (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter 2009):

**Credibility**: Credibility relates to the importance of whether the results are credible and believable (Macnee & McCabe, 2008). The researcher endeavoured to ensure that she had truthfully reported the results and that the findings were reported according to what the data collected stated. The truth of the data was not influenced by pre-conceived ideas of the
researcher. The researcher ensured that that the reporting reflects the participants’ views and thoughts. The researcher’s background as a recruiter and interviewer enhanced her interviewing skills and confidence. The pilot interviews were conducted to review the interview guide and to provide additional exposure to interviews.

**Transferability**: Transferability also refers to generalisability. Durrheim and Wassenaar (2002) describe generalisability as the manner in which conclusions of the research can be transferred to other contexts and settings. The researcher ensured that meaningful and strong descriptions were developed in order to create understandings that can be transferred to new contexts for future studies. The goal of qualitative research was not to generalise; however, every step in the research process was explained in detail, and the foundation of everything was explained. This was done to ensure that objectivity was maintained throughout the data collection process.

**Dependability**: Dependability is concerned with describing the changes that occurred in the research setting and how these changes influenced the way in which the researcher approached the study (Bitsch, 2005). This was done by:

- applying consistency in the data that was collected;
- ensuring that she reported things the way they occurred;
- densely and accurately reporting the process and methodology of this research study; and
- taking field (personal) notes during the interview, which were used as point of reference when analysing that data. These field (personal) notes assisted the researcher in describing the associated meanings and explanations of the sub-themes.

**Confirmability**: Confirmability relates to the degree to which the results can be confirmed and substantiated by others (De Vos et al., 2005). The researcher applied the criteria of neutrality and objectivity in order to avoid influencing the research or findings. She further ensured that she remained impartial throughout the study by truly capturing the views of the participants.
The researcher reviewed the themes and sub-themes that were captured a number of times so that it reflected the correct meaning.

**Recording of data**

Each one of the main themes that emerged from the data is described separately in the findings below. Participants’ perceptions, thoughts and views that were captured in the main themes are portrayed and explained with the help of selected quotes (excerpts). In this way, their responses and/or words are described. Some of the interview excerpts were modified by adjusting some of the words, without affecting the meaning of the excerpts. This was done to achieve a more compact statement and/or to help readers understand the excerpts better (De Vos et al., 2005). The themes, subthemes, associated meanings and excerpts of the research study are reported in table format (see Table 2 and 3).

**Ethical considerations**

The researcher was transparent with the participants, advising them of reasons for the study as well as layout of proceedings. Ethical issues, such as voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality and consent were discussed with all participants in detail ensuring their understanding and acceptance thereof. The researcher also assured the participants that they would not be harmed emotionally or physically during the research process and further to this, she would respect their rights and dignity throughout the process. The researcher also explained to the participants that they had the right to withdraw from the process should they not feel comfortable in any way. The researcher was cognisant of the time allocated to each interview and mindful not to run over time especially since it was the organisation’s financial year end. The interviewer created a rapport with each of the participants and made them feel as comfortable as possible. All participants were informed of the recording. Informed voluntary consent was signed by the participants. The researcher also ensured and reassured all participants that their participation in the study would be kept anonymous.
Reporting

Each of the main themes that emerged from the data is described separately in the findings below (see Table 2 and 3). The researcher made use of a table format to describe the themes, sub-themes as well as the direct responses from the participants. For descriptive purposes, the associated meaning and explanations are also presented in each of the tables 2 and 3 below. Quotes by the participants were used to substantiate the results of the study.

Findings

The results of the study were organised into themes and sub-themes. The tables below illustrate the relevant themes and sub-themes, associated meanings together with quotations that support findings. The meanings associated to the sub-theme are a combination of the researcher’s descriptions as well as the combined views and opinions from all the participants. Two main themes were identified through the process of thematic analysis. These themes were captured from the data analysis of the interviews held with the eight participants (business leaders) of the organisation. The first theme reflects the general perception of business leaders on what they believe the role of HR professionals in the organisation should be. The second theme relates to the limitations and gaps between business leaders expectations and HR delivery as perceived by the business leaders in the organisation. These two themes and their subsequent sub-themes are described below. For descriptive purposes the associated meanings and explanations are also presented in the following tables.

Theme 1: General perception of business leaders on what they believe the role of HR professionals in the organisation should be.

The first theme that was extracted from the interviews was the participants’ general perception of business leaders on what they believe the role of HR professionals in the organisation should be performing. Although Table 2 below illustrates the participants’ perception of the role of HR professionals, these roles are not necessarily what the HR professionals were executing in
the organisation at the time of the research, but the participants’ responses reflected various viewpoints on the role of HR professionals. These perceptions and views are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Associated meaning/Explanation (researcher’s description and combination of all the participants views and opinions)</th>
<th>Quotes from participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industrial relations (IR)</strong></td>
<td>Having in-depth knowledge of IR. Competent enough to provide sound and trusted advice regarding IR-related matters to business leaders, senior managers and all managers across the organisation. Dealing with unions</td>
<td>Deal with … IR matters … IR issues … labour law and HR procedures – participant 1E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HR assists with IR issues … general issues – participant 1E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A huge focus for HR is IR issues … – participant 1A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Much of HR work in IR-related … – participant 1B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Setting up standards for discipline and mind-set … union interaction, plant (manufacturing) level agreements – participant 1D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational structure</td>
<td>Having a thorough knowledge of the organisation, divisions and structure. Work together with business leaders to ensure the structure suits the needs of the organisation</td>
<td>… involved with the optimisation of structure of divisions … – participant 1C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HR is responsible for organisation structure and setting up structure … – participant 1D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HR’s role involves … structural design … structural process … – participant 1F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payroll</td>
<td>Ensuring salaries/wages/hourly paid employees get paid on time and more so correctly. Being able to assist employees with payroll related issues.</td>
<td>HR pays my salary – participant 1C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HR is involved with payroll … – participant 1F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A big part of HR’s role is to administer the payroll – participant 1F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>… management of payroll … – participant 1G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HR deals with payroll and remuneration … – participant 1F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance management

Having proper performance management processes in place to deal with performance. Creating a high performance culture by ensuring the right and suitable people are employed in the organisation.

We (business leaders) should be ruthless in demanding accountability from HR … they (HR) are not helping managers to manage performance … – participant 1C

HR should focus on performance management … right people doing the right job … what makes up high performance teams … – participant 1C

… performance matters … – participant 1G

… deal with performance management … – participant 1F

… performance management … – participant 1H

… dealing with key performance index’s and performance … – participant 1A

Recruitment and selection

Recruiting the correct talent for the business by first understanding the role, job profile and responsibilities.

HR assists from recruitment to on-boarding … they help with job descriptions … – participant 1C

HR should focus on getting superstars … getting the right people on board – participant 1C

HR is responsible for … recruitment and selection …, they are responsible for job profiling … – participant 1D

One of the roles of HR is recruitment … – participant 1E

Currently, HR’s role is … recruitment and sourcing … – participant 1G

HR focuses on recruitment matters … – participant 1E

HR is responsible … recruitment … – participant 1H

HR involved with employing people … talent acquisition … match requirement of company talent needed … – participant 1A

Succession planning and career development

Understanding organisational and employee expectations; identifying top talent for future career planning and development.

… talent development … – participant 1A

… succession planning … career development … – participant 1F

… career development … participant 1E
Training and development

To provide adequate and relevant training to employees in the organisation. Understanding the training needs that are required and/or lacking.

HR … training and development … – participant 1D
HR currently has various roles such as training … – participant 1F
… development of individuals of people/talent development … – participant 1A

Trusted advisor and reliable source of HR information and advice

HR professionals should have the necessary skills, experience and qualifications to execute their role. HR should be knowledgeable about the various aspects of HR to order to assist the organisation and the various business units. The information and advice given by HR professionals should not be doubted by the business leaders of the organisation.

… assist with general HR issues and provide advice … – participant 1C
I do however from time to time work closely with the HR director who provides me with assistance and advice … – participant 1C
HR does provide me with advice … – participant 1E
… should have the necessary HR knowledge to assist the business … – participant 1F
… a trusted advisor … share concerns and provide assistance … – participant 1D
… I do try and involve HR in my business and at times they do offer valuable advice … – participant 1D
I do see HR as a trusted advisor … however, I am still very new in my role (business leader) … – participant 1A

Table 2 above provided a description of the theme and sub-themes as extracted from the analysed data. Examples of the responses from the participants were also provided in order to substantiate the findings of that specific sub-theme.

From the interviews, it became very clear that the participants held certain views of the role HR professionals should be performing in the organisation. However, participants also voiced that, despite the above being their perception regarding the role of HR, it is not necessarily executed by HR professionals. The descriptions below of the sub-themes are a combination of the researcher’s descriptions as well as the combined views and opinions from all the participants.
Industrial relations (IR): Participants perceived IR to be “labour-related issues”. They believed HR professionals should be knowledgeable enough to handle and deal with IR-related matters. The organisation has a high number of IR issues that came up during the interviews, especially of the manufacturing side (manufacturing plant) of the organisation. HR professionals should be proficient to address issues, especially within a unionised environment.

Organisational structure: Some participants viewed organisational structure as an important role of HR as it ultimately relates to understanding the organisation as a whole as well as understanding the structures of the various business divisions/departments and how each business division/department plays a role in the successes or failures of the organisation.

Recruitment and selection: Most participants viewed recruitment and selection as a major function of HR. This involves recruiting the right talent for the organisation. Participants expressed the view that HR professionals should have knowledge of what each role/vacancy requires. That means doing the job profiling for the roles and understanding the minimum requirements and skills required to recruit the best suitable candidate for the job.

Payroll: Most participants viewed HR professionals as payroll specialists. They saw payroll and payroll-related matters, i.e. salary queries, pension queries and leave queries as a major role of HR professionals.

Performance management: Participants emphasised the importance of performance management, especially within each of the various business divisions. Some participants viewed performance management as vital in terms of ensuring that employees meet the required standard and level of performance.

They [HR] are not helping managers to manage performance … – participant 1C.

1% of the good talent turning the wheel … they [HR], are not involved in career path … development … performance not managed well historically – participant 1D.
Other participants viewed performance management as a tool to identify good performers and assist them with their career development:

Nothing that you cannot do if you have the right resources [people] – participant 1C.

Succession planning and career development: Many participants viewed succession planning as an extension of performance management as the participants believe that performance management is a good way to identify talent within the organisation and hence establish career paths for top performing employees. However plans need to be put in place to order to achieve this.

True talent is not optimised on … process of promotions are questionable and not fair – participant 1A.

Training and development: Participants viewed this as an important HR function as HR professionals need to ensure that employees are trained and developed within the organisation. Some participants expressed their view that people should be trained and developed internally; hence, increasing their chances of promotions as opposed to recruiting external candidates.

Trusted advisor and reliable source of HR information and advice: Participants believed HR professionals should have a sound knowledge of HR as a field of expertise. They viewed HR professionals to be qualified individuals who are able to provide the participants with proper, unquestionable advice and information with regard to all aspects of HR-related matters.

After reviewing the theme and sub-themes, it is clear that the participants shared the similar views of what the role of HR professionals should be. However, it became evident from the responses that the participants’ expectations of the role of HR professionals might not necessarily be fulfilled or executed by the HR professionals in the organisations. The participants expressed their concerns (listed in Table 3 below) that, at the time of this research, HR was not fulfilling these roles as expected. Although the above-mentioned was ideally what the business leaders believed HR professionals should be involved in and should be executing,
this was not case, in fact, the business leaders voiced their dissatisfaction and disappointment in the delivery by HR professionals in the role they execute. “HR is merely a touchstone and an aid, nothing more” – participant 1H. According to the participants, HR professionals should be responsible for a vast array of roles as mentioned above in the table; however, this is not necessarily the case.

I would like to see HR do more … – participant 1D.

HR functions in silos, not in cross-functional teams – participant 1A.

Theme 2: Limitations and gaps between the expectations of business leaders and HR delivery as perceived by the business leaders in the organisation

The second theme reflects the limitations and gaps between expectations of the participants (business leaders) and HR delivery as perceived by the business leaders in the organisation. These views of the participants reflect what they perceived were lacking by HR professionals at the time of this research. These limitations and gaps and highlighted in Table 3 below:

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Associated meaning/Explanation (researcher description and combination of all the participants views and opinions)</th>
<th>Quotes from participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Lack of credibility and trust in HR professionals | HR does not have a lot of credibility and trust amongst the business leaders of the organisation. Credibility and trust provide the foundation for building strong partnerships. | Level of frustration when dealing with HR … quality of work does not leave a lot to be desired – participant 1F  
There are definitely credibility and trust issues … – participant 1A  
Credibility is a question … – participant 1C  
I would like to give HR a chance … they need to be transparent … and engaging … – participant 1H |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Lack of planning and being reactive</strong></th>
<th>HR professionals are unfortunately not planning activities well enough; hence they are reactive in their approach to their roles and tasks.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lack of understanding and awareness between business leaders expectations and HR delivery</strong></td>
<td>HR professionals do not have a clear understanding of the business leaders’ expectations of them. HR delivery is not at the level of the business leaders’ expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**HR do not take responsibility and accountability** … I have to make my own plan … – participant 1H
They [HR] in general should gain credibility … we want to see them as credible … – participant 1H
… I don’t trust the advice HR gives me, I rather do it myself – participant 1H
… some people don’t see the value in HR … trust is lost … – participant 1B
HR is not transparent … – participant 1C
… no credibility … HR is weak … – participant 1E
HR is too reactive … – participant 1F
HR definitely don’t plan and even if they do, they end up doing something else – participant 1E
HR are far from proactive, they have no time to be proactive especially with all the admin they do – participant 1C
… too slow in doing things … they want to be guided rather than use their initiative … – participant 1G
HR is slow and slacks off a lot … I have to chase them – participant 1H
… turnaround time is too slow … I struggle to get information or a reaction from them … – participant 1B
Managing problems rather than looking at the future … not proactive … – participant 1A
… they [HR] are not active enough – participant 1D
… [HR] should try and be engaging and transparent … – participant 1H
… HR is trying to keep their head above water … – participant 1A

**Lack of understanding and awareness between business leaders expectations and HR delivery**

**HR professionals do not have a clear understanding of the business leaders’ expectations of them. HR delivery is not at the level of the business leaders’ expectations.**

**HR as a whole is not aware of the business strategy and where the business is going** – participant 1B
… they (HR) are aware of our expectations when we require … they just do what is needed to get business to tick … – participant 1A
HR don’t do their bit [according to expectations] … they don’t do enough
Table 3 above provided a description of the theme and sub-themes as extracted from the analysed data. The meaning associated with the sub-theme is a combination of the researcher’s descriptions as well as the combined views and opinions from the participants. Examples of the responses from the participants were also provided in order to substantiate the findings of the specific sub-theme. The descriptions below of the sub-themes comprise a combination of the researcher’s descriptions as well as the combined views and opinions from all the participants:
Lack of credibility and trust in HR professionals: Most participants viewed credibility and trust as the foundation of the partnership between themselves and HR. Participants voiced their concerns of HR professionals not being viewed as credible or trustworthy. This stems from instances where participants doubted and/or questioned the advice given to them by HR professionals. Some participants felt that they would rather do things themselves than get HR involved. All of which spoke about the lack of credibility of HR professionals

I don’t always trust their advice…advice does not match good practice… – participants 1H.

People don’t value HR…HR must add value to make people see why HR is needed…some (business leaders) see HR as a hindrance rather than a business partner – participant1B.

Lack of planning and being reactive: Participants viewed the lack of planning and being reactive in a serious light. Some participants saw this type of behaviour as creating a wrong culture and setting a wrong example. Many participants felt that HR’s approach to tasks was very reactive and that they only dealt with issues on the ground rather than thinking ahead.

Lack of understanding and awareness between the expectations of business leaders and HR delivery: Participants expressed their disappointment that HR is not delivering according to their (participants’) expectations. Most participants viewed HR as being distant from their relevant business department/division

If you [HR] knew my business, you would be more proactive … need to be more interactive … be part of the business … we are going through a lot of changes and we barely see HR – participant 1H.

Some participants expressed that HR was aware of their expectations but still did not deliver according to expectations

HR communicates with me electronically rather than face to face – participant 1A.

Currently, HR is not active enough … they are distant from operational needs … not enough dialogue between business leaders and HR – participant 1D.
**Not strategic enough:** Most participants agreed that HR professionals were not strategic enough. This thought stemmed from their views that HR professionals were too administration-focused:

> From a strategic point of view, I don’t see HR driving the business adding value … HR should do their jobs … HR do not add value … HR does nothing for me – participant 1H.

Although some participants believed that small steps were being made by certain HR professionals to be more strategic, it was a very slow process:

> HR needs to be more assertive in claiming their rightful place… – participant 1B.

**Too much paperwork/administration:** Almost all participants viewed HR professionals as administrators in the organisation. According to the participants, HR professionals spent most of their time and energy on administration-related tasks and paperwork.

The above illustrates the participants’ views regarding the limitations and gaps that exist between the expectations of business leaders and HR delivery. The participants believed that due to these limitations and gaps, HR professional did not deliver at the level that they were expected too. Although the participants expressed that they were transparent in their expectations with HR professionals, the HR professionals lacked the understanding to get to know the particular business division/department of the participants; hence, HR professionals were not able to meet the participants’ expectations. One of the major factors the participants believed to have contributed to these limitations and gaps was the lack of credibility and trust.

> HR has no credibility … background not strong … – participant 1E.

Participants further agreed that HR professionals had a responsibility to the organisation and its stakeholders to perform their duties effectively. After reviewing the theme and sub-themes, it was clear that the participants viewed HR professionals as administrators in the organisation.
The majority of participants did not believe that HR professionals were operating at a strategic level or adding value beyond the administrative tasks:

A lot of work HR does is in an expected way, which is administrative – participant 1B.

More than 50% of HR’s time is spent on admin and admin processes – participant 1H.

Certain participants viewed HR as a hindrance or obstacle in their business unit:

Some people in this organisation believe the acronym for HR stands for horrible relations or human remorse – participant 1C.

Discussion

Outline of the findings

The first objective of this article was to conceptualise business leaders and HRM according to literature. According to Christensen (2006), HR looks at people within the organisation as a critical asset to be leveraged in the creation of value. According to Holbeche (2009), the link between humans as a resource and business success has been the basis of a number of HRM theories over time and these continue to develop. The roles of HR professionals have evolved over time. Although many organisations have embraced the evolution of HRM and value its contribution to the organisation (Grobler et al., 2010), some organisations still have a traditional view of HRM. Stone (2009) describes HRM as the productive use of HR in achieving the organisation’s strategic business objectives of the organisation. In certain organisations, HR professionals have unfortunately not yet aligned their HR policy to the policy of the organisation. This gives rise to a misalignment of goals and objectives (Swanepoel, Erasmus, & Schenk, 2008). However, HR is only effective if there is an alignment between leadership and HR (Kearns, 2010; Ulrich et al., 2012). Research has suggested that strong leadership in an organisation involves competent business leaders whose contribution is vital for the success of the organisation (April et al., 2000). April et al. (2000) define business
leaders as visionaries who inspire employees within the organisation. This finding is supported by literature. Brewster et al. (2008) state that the HR approach looks at the relationship between management and HR professionals and how they could work together and become partners in decision-making and share accountability for organising the work to be performed. If HR professionals are to be seen as strategic partners to the organisation then it is essential that HR professionals understand the organisation, its goal and objectives and that it aligns itself accordingly (Swanepoel et al., 2008).

The second objective of this study was to explore what the expectations of business leaders regarding the roles of HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry. The findings of the study indicated that the participants (business leaders) expected HR professionals to be experts in their field as well as responsible for a vast array of HR skills. The following sub-themes emerged when participants were requested to explain their expectations of the role of HR professionals in the organisation: industrial relations (IR), organisational structure, payroll, performance management, recruitment and selection, succession planning and career development, training and development, trusted advisor and reliable source of HR information and advice. According to Grobler et al. (2010), HR professionals require a set of competencies to understand business thoroughly, stay abreast of changes in the HR field, and manage change processes so that HR activities are effectively integrated with the business needs of the organisation. These competencies are business mastery, HR mastery, change mastery and personal credibility. In addition, the HR manager establishes personal credibility through assertiveness and being fair-minded in dealing with others (Grobler et al., 2010). The findings further suggest that the participants expected HR professionals to provide strong, sound and credible advice and guidance. These findings are also supported by literature. Ulrich et al. (2012) state that credible HR professionals are those who build trust with people through business results and strong, supportive relationships.

The third objective of this study was to understand whether business leaders perceived an alignment between their expectations of HR professionals and HR delivery within the South African motor manufacturing industry. The results indicated that there are unfortunately gaps between the participants’ expectations and HR delivery. The business leaders expressed concerns about the competence and skills level of HR professionals in the organisation. Certain
vital HR practices were overlooked, which did not give the participants any comfort that HR professionals were executing their roles effectively and/or according to their expectations. The following sub-themes emerged: lack of credibility and trust in HR professionals, lack of planning and being reactive, lack of understanding and awareness between the expectations of business leaders and HR delivery, not strategic enough and too much paperwork/administration. In order for expectations to be met, it is critical that HR professionals take responsibility for their roles in the organisation and illustrate that they have the necessary skills, knowledge and competence to execute their roles. Further to this, the participants did not feel that HR professionals knew their department and/or division well enough to align themselves to the business needs. According to a study by De Bruyn and Roodt (2009), organisations are of the opinion that the information and advice provided by HR professionals are unreliable and lack integrity, and can therefore not be used. This is also in agreement with the findings by the current study. Furthermore, The McKinsey and Company (2012) found three areas were highlighted as challenges that prevented HR from realising strategic value:

- HR professionals lack the capability to execute their roles effectively and are not confident and assertive enough in solving business issues with line managers;
- HR professionals have a support function mind-set;
- HR professional do not have the business acumen to relate to the return on investment or business influence of the HR function. HR professionals lack business sense and understanding.

The fourth objective of this article was to explore whether business leaders view HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry as operating at functional/administrative or strategic level. The results of this objective are also supported by the results obtained for objective 3. The results further show that it is because of these limitations and gaps that HR professionals do not deliver at the level they are expected to and are therefore operating at a functional level rather than a strategic level. From the interviews, it became evident that HR professionals spend very little time on strategic initiatives; hence, they are not contributing to the major strategic objectives in the organisation at the time of this research. The results indicate that the participants believed that HR professionals were operating at an administrative/functional level with minimal focus on strategic initiatives. The
majority of HR tasks include mundane administrative duties. Although administration duties are part and parcel of the HR function, it should not make up the majority of the role. This view is supported by a study conducted by Deloitte (2014) whereby research shows that CEOs expect the HR function to play a more active role in enabling business strategies. However, for many organisations, the transformation process for HR to get to the phase where they produce results has failed. Further to this, the participants felt that HR professionals should have an HR strategy guiding the HR objectives and supporting and contributing the strategy of the organisations. According to Holbeche (2009), HR strategy should be directly relevant to business requirements. An integral element of business strategy and delivering value leads structural realignment for HR team and the value add they bring to the organisation (Holbeche, 2009). Kearns (2010) states that the combined HR–organisation strategy should be aligned to maximise the potential value of the organisation. The integration between the strategic objectives of the organisation and integrated HR practices is vital in order for HR to deliver on its strategic promises. Unfortunately, HR does not have a formal HR strategy in place; hence, it is unable to contribute to the strategic objectives of the organisation. As mentioned above, the findings of this study indicated that HR professionals do not contribute to strategic objectives of the strategy of the organisation at the level they are expected to. This is confirmed by research by Walters (2006), which found that HR professionals are mostly fulfilling the roles of administrative experts and employee champions.

Practical implications

By conducting this study, it became very evident that the participating business leaders did not feel that HR professionals add much value to the organisation from a strategic perspective. In fact, some individuals viewed HR as a hindrance in the business rather than as a strategic partner. However, the study created some awareness amongst the participants that the role of HR is to support the business and to work together with the business leaders to ensure the objectives of the organisation are met. Business leaders need to realise that HRM is part of the organisation and, like all the other departments of the organisation, they too play a role in the organisation. The study can further assist business leaders to understand that if they are to get the expected support from HR professionals, then they need to be clear and transparent on their expectations and involve HR professionals as partners in their business/department or division.
Limitations and recommendations

The researcher found that there were a number of limitations became evident during the study. Due to the organisation going through its financial year end at the time of the research interviews, interviewing time was limited to a maximum of 45 minutes. Although all participants were very accommodating about the research study, and were aware of the study in advance, it was somewhat of a challenge to arrange times in their diaries due to their busy schedules. The researcher also found that, despite the HR director sending out correspondence beforehand regarding the study, not all participants were as engaging as others and it took a little more time to create a rapport and to some extend confidence in order to gain the necessary information. Further to this, the study was limited to one automotive organisation. More than one automotive organisation could have formed part of this study or could be researched in future.

The researcher has a great passion for the line of study, especially since it is the professional line of work of the researcher. It is the realisation of the researcher that HR representatives work with people who form the heart of any organisation and it is the very same people who create the culture as well as the values of an organisation.

It is recommended that the participants (business leaders) together with the senior HR professionals of the organisation formulate strategies that will assist all the relevant areas of the organisation to meet its goals and objectives. The participants (business leaders) also need to take responsibility by ensuring that they include HR professionals in all human capital issues from the beginning instead of roping them in at the end. It is imperative for organisational success that the participants (business leaders) and HR professionals work closely together in order to set business unit goals and that there be an alignment between expectations and delivery. The participants (business leaders) need to support HR professionals and HR professionals in turn need to gain the trust and credibility of their relevant business leaders. Ultimately, HR professionals would need a voice in the organisation and a seat at the table if they are to be seen and regarded as strategic business partners in the organisation.
For future research, it is recommended that the study be expanded to various other organisations, sectors and/or industries. It would be interesting to establish how business leaders from other organisations, industries and/or sectors view the role HR professional perform in that specific organisation, industry and/or sector. A comparison can then be made to determine how HRM operates in various other organisations, industries and/or sectors and whether certain performance outcomes are organisation- or industry-specific. It is suggested that more in-depth focus be put on whether HR professionals understand what is actually expected from them by the business leaders. Future studies could also focus on factors such as the number of years the organisation has been in existence, the number of employees employed in the organisation, and whether the HR department is equipped with the correct skills and qualifications to service the needs of the business from a human capital point of view.

**Conclusion**

The findings established that there are definite limitations and gaps between the expectations of the participants (business leaders’) and HR delivery within the organisation. Business leaders have perceptions and views on the role and function HR professionals should be. However, to a large extent, these expectations have not been met. One of the contributing factors to this is that the participants (business leaders) feel that HR professionals have not gained their trust and/or have shown credibility in executing their tasks. Further to this, HR professionals have also not displayed enthusiasm to get in the know and become involved in their relevant business unit/division/department. As a result, the findings indicate that HR professionals are operating at a functional/administrative level as opposed to being a strategic partner to the business leaders and therefore they are unable to contribute strategically to the organisation as a whole.
References


CHAPTER 3

ARTICLE 2
EXPLORING THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION MADE BY HR PROFESSIONALS AS PERCEIVED BY THE HR EMPLOYEES WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN MOTOR MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Orientation: Human resource (HR) professionals fulfil various roles within the organisation. Many times the roles that HR fulfils, are administrative and functional in nature and lack strategic focus.

Research purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore the role and contribution made by HR professionals and how these HR professionals view their role and contribution to the organisation. This study was conducted within a motor manufacturing company in Gauteng.

Motivation for the study: In order to understand and discover whether HR professionals are operating at a functional/administrative or strategic level, it was important firstly to understand the role and contribution made by HR professionals within a motor manufacturing company within South Africa.

Research approach, design and method: A qualitative research design was utilised throughout this study. Further to this, a phenomenological approach with interpretivism as the underlying paradigm was employed in this study. Purposive sampling was utilised. A voluntary sample of 7 HR professionals (N = 7) who were employed by a motor manufacturing company in South Africa took part in this study and data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

Main findings: The results of this study indicated that HR professionals performed various roles within the organisation at the time of the research. The results further indicated that they were functioning at an administrative level as opposed to a strategic level. However, the study also indicated that there were challenges that limited HR professionals from performing their roles in the organisation; hence, they believed that their contribution was not seen as valuable or credible by the business leaders in the organisation. Two themes emerged from this study. These two themes and their subsequent sub-themes are described in this article.

Practical implications/managerial implications: HR professionals and business leaders need to work together as partners in order to add value to the organisation. Business leaders need to support HR in their quest to evolve in their role from an administrative role to a more strategic role. In turn, HR professionals need to immerse themselves in the business and gain trust and credibility to be seen as trusted partners to the business leaders.
Contribution/value-add: This study will add value to both HR professionals and business leaders in the organisation to understand the role and responsibilities carried out by HR professionals better. The study further assists by outlining certain challenges that HR professionals face, which they feel are limiting them in terms of operating at a more strategic level.

Keywords: human resources; HR professionals; human resource management; business leaders; strategic and administrative/functional levels; organisational strategy; HR strategy

Introduction

During the 1980s, human resource management (HRM) assumed importance and recognition in both theory and practice (Grobler, Warnich, Carell, Elbert, & Hatfield, 2010). As organisations developed, so too did the need and demand for more effective people management within the organisation (Torrington, Hall, & Taylor, 2005). Nel et al. (2011, p. 6) define HRM as “the productive use of people in achieving the organisations strategic objectives and the satisfaction of individual employee needs”. This thought is shared Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright (2010), state that in the early days, HRM was not considered an important part of organisation but nowadays, an organisation cannot be administered successfully without the HRM department. Noe et al. (2010) further state the importance of HRM in the organisation as HRM is a set of practices that affect performance, attitude and behaviour of employees at work.

Various views exist about what HRM involves. Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk, and Schenk (2000) refer to HRM as the same processes and functions as personnel management. However, according to the views of Armstrong and Baron (2002), the people employed in the organisation together with their collective skills, abilities and experiences are regarded as making a significant contribution to organisational success and they constitute a major source of competitive advantage. Hence, the overall purpose of HRM is to ensure that the organisation is able to achieve success through the people in the organisation (Armstrong, 2009). Further to this, Walker (1994) states that HRM should be integrated in the strategy of the organisation to
be effective. Therefore, HRM should be aligned according to the strategic requirements of the organisation (Walker, 1994).

Armstrong (2006b) views HRM as the strategic approach to acquiring, developing, managing motivating and gaining commitment of the key resources of an organisation. The role of HRM should include strategic plans, human resource (HR) planning, job profiling and design, job analysis, job descriptions, job specifications, recruitment and selection, orientation and induction, performance appraisal and compliance to policy within an organisation (Brewster, Carey, Grobler, Holland, & Warnich, 2008). Therefore, beyond 2000, strategic HRM was introduced (Brewster et al., 2008). This shift saw HRM transition from a service and support function to a leadership role. Contemporary HRM models include high staff involvement, high commitment, high-performance work systems, and innovative work practices (Brewster et al., 2008). According to Roodt and Meyer (2010), HRM allows the HR profession to move to a role where it is seen as a strategic business partner, thus being involved in decision-making and being drivers of business success by becoming an HR governor in the organisation. This means that HRM is seen as the governor of sustained performance and compliance within the organisation. Therefore, HRM needs to ensure that the organisation performs at an optimum while still complying with legislation and ensuring best practice (Roodt & Meyer, 2010).

Notwithstanding what has been said, not all HRM professionals have evolved over time to perform their role at a strategic level. Many organisations still perceive the role of the HR department as that of a supporting or administration department and not as the role of a strategic business partner or governor of performance and compliance (Kuper, 2006). The purpose of the research on which this article is based, was therefore firstly to understand the role that HR professionals are performing in the organisation. Understanding the role that HR professionals perform is important as it will help to determine the contribution made by HR professionals to the organisation, and further to determine whether HR professionals are performing at a functional or at a strategic level.
Research purpose and objectives

The objective of this study was to explore the role and contribution made by HR professionals as perceived by these HR employees within the South African motor manufacturing industry. The specific objectives of the study on which Article 2 reports were:

- To explain how HR professionals and the roles of HR professionals are conceptualised according to literature;
- To explore how HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry view their contribution and roles within the organisation;
- To explore the challenges that HR professionals experience when performing their role within the South African motor manufacturing industry;
- To explore whether HR professionals perceive their role within the South African motor manufacturing industry as operating at functional/administrative or strategic level; and
- To make recommendations for future research and practice.

Literature review

HR professionals

Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) view HR professionals as individuals who create and deliver value through the roles they play within the organisation. Over the years, research has shown that the role and function of HR professionals, like other organisational functions, have evolved in order to contribute to organisational demands and requirements (Murphy & Southey, 2002). This is due to the transition of the role of HR professionals from administrative to one that is focused on organisational performance (Murphy & Southey, 2002).

In many organisations, the aim of HR professionals should be focused on decreasing the amount of time dedicated to traditional administrative tasks, whilst moving towards performing
roles that are more strategically focused and to be regarded as a strategic partner to the organisation (Redman & Wilkinson, 2009). Redman and Wilkinson (2009) believe that in order for HR professionals to contribute to organisational goals and success, the function of HR professionals must evolve from a simply administrative role to becoming responsible strategic partners. HR professionals therefore need to be supported by the organisation and should not be viewed in isolation (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2012). Ulrich et al. (2012) believes that HR should be integrated within the organisation as it forms an integral part of the success of the organisation. Further to this, in order to ensure the success and sustainability of an organisation, HR professionals and business leaders need to work together (Grobler et al., 2010; Ulrich et al., 2012). According to Ulrich et al. (2012), HR professionals and business leaders need to be aligned in order to achieve organisational goals.

**Roles of HR professionals**

According to Brewster et al. (2008), theory and practice of HRM should embrace the roles that line managers and HRM specialists should play. Management and HR professionals must become partners in decision-making and share accountability (Brewster et al., 2008). Grobler et al. (2010) indicate that, for HR professionals to be successful in their roles, they need to have certain essential competencies such as –

- *business mastery* – HR professionals need to have a good understanding of the organisation;
- *HR mastery* – HR professionals need to keep abreast with changes such as staffing, development, appraisals, rewards, team building and communication;
- *change mastery* – HR professional should be competent enough to manage change in the organisation so that HR activities can be merged effectively with the needs of the organisation; and
- *personal credibility* – HR professionals must establish personal credibility with all individuals in the organisation.
Findings reflected in the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2015) report: “Business savvy: Giving HR the edge” found that the top four expectations that stakeholders have of HR professionals were –

- having a deep understanding of the business model;
- generating insight based on evidence;
- connecting with curiosity purpose and outcome; and
- leading with integrity, consideration and challenge.

In addition, the CIPD’s Profession Map (CIPD, 2015) that identified six common behaviours of the HR professionals, namely:

- *decisive thinker* – uses information, insight and knowledge to make robust and timely decisions;
- *skilled influencer* – influences and gains commitment and support from stakeholders;
- *personably credible* – combines professional, commercial and HR expertise to drive organisational performance and sustainability;
- *collaborative* – works effectively and inclusively with a range of internal and external stakeholders;
- *driven to deliver* – demonstrates determination, resourcefulness and purpose to deliver the best results for the organisation; and
- *courage to challenge* – asking the right questions at the right time and in the right way to achieve the best outcome.

Further to this, the CIPD “HR Outlook” 2014/15 report states that the majority of HR professionals (63%) agreed that HR data and metrics inform business decision-making and its use can demonstrate influence on the business. This view is also shared by Ulrich et al. (2012) in the book *HR: From the outside in*, where the HR professional can be described as ‘credible activist’ by meeting commitments, acting with integrity and building trust. In practice, this is about being committed to developing the performance of line managers and teams, demonstrating a genuine interest and challenge to the business, forming collaborative relationships and providing support and solutions to business problems.
According to Gilbert (2007), another aspect that is crucial to HRM is HR professionals having the capability to deal with complexity of ethics within the organisation. Most business challenges involve conflicting ethical dilemmas between many stakeholders (customers, employees, suppliers and the public) and these dilemmas can often create conflicting expectations between all parties (Gilbert, 2007). The capacity for dealing with complexity and the ability to hold diverse perspectives at the same time enable a manager to resolve ethical dilemmas (Gilbert, 2007).

Meyer et al. (2011) view HRM as responsible for creating an environment where the culture of the organisation is born and sustained, which results in the way things are done within the organisation. This thought is supported by Gilbert (2007), who suggests that in order to establish a culture within organisations, HRM needs to be role models. However in order to be a role model, there needs to be an established set of values agreed upon by top management and the board of directors.

According to Meyer (2009, p. 10), “HR management needs to address people risks which include organisations’ culture, talent shortages and retention, incompetence, employee performance, unethical behaviour, low morale, grievances and disputes, excessive absenteeism, employee wellness, sabotage, workplace violence, and non-compliance to regulations and laws.”

From the above discussion, it is clear that there are different views and thoughts from various authors about the role and function of HRM. Literature also indicates the shift in HR from being administrative to performing more strategic tasks that will contribute to the organisation and the accomplishment of organisational goals and objectives. However, research on the role of HRM in the motor manufacturing industry within the South African context is still limited. This research therefore attempted to explore the role of HRM professional as well as establish whether these professionals are performing at a functional/administrative or strategic level in the motor manufacturing industry within the South African context.
Research design

The research design consisted of the research approach, research strategy and research method.

Research approach

A qualitative research design was utilised in this study as it provided an opportunity to understand the meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences of the participants rather than conducting the study from the researcher’s own perspective (Liamputtong, 2013). Creswell (2007) further states that within qualitative research, the researcher is concerned with exploring and understanding the meaning people attribute to events or human phenomena. According to Struwig and Stead (2001), the qualitative research method reflects certain approaches to knowledge production, and includes any research that makes use of qualitative data. Qualitative research tends to be concerned with the meaning and understanding of the phenomenon in its entirety, rather than to focus on specific concepts (Brink, Van der Walt, & Van Rensburg, 2012). Within qualitative research, the researcher is interested in how people make sense of the world and how they experience events (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2011). The process of qualitative research involves the asking of questions and observing participants (De Vos et al., 2011).

Furthermore, a phenomenological approach was also utilised throughout this qualitative research study. Creswell (1998) states that this research design aims to define the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon, topic or concept for individuals. De Vos et al., (2011) indicate that this research design differs from other research designs by aiming to derive the meaning and essence of experiences, instead of measurements and explanations thereof. Creswell (1998) states that the phenomenological design aims to obtain and describe experiences through first-person accounts in informal conversations and during interviews for the purpose of understanding human behaviour. The aim of this research study was to explore the role and contribution made by the HR professionals as perceived by these HR professionals in the organisation (the motor manufacturing industry).
Interpretivism was also utilised as an underlying paradigm in the study. Interpretivism was seen as best fit for this study as the researcher explored the subjective experiences of HR professionals. With an interpretive paradigm that recognises the value of the qualitative research approach, the researcher was able to gain an overall holistic understanding of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2007). Within this study, the researcher tried to understand the role and contribution made by HR professionals as perceived by the HR professionals within the organisation.

**Research strategy**

The research study followed a single case study strategy. According to Saunders et al. (2009), it is important to have a clear research strategy and the choice of strategy depends on the research questions and objectives of the study. In order to achieve the aims and objectives of the study, a single case study was conducted in the form of semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the participants (HR professionals) in order to explore the role and contribution made by these HR professionals within the organisation. Through this chosen form of strategy, the researcher hoped to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the participants’ experiences. From the perspective of this study, a single case study indicates that a single organisation was utilised in order to collect information for this study.

**Research method**

The research method of this study comprised the following: research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, data collection method, ethical issues, recoding of data, data analysis, strategies employed to ensure quality data, reporting, and ethical considerations. These are discussed in detail below.
Research setting

According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005), prior to data collection, a setting must be selected that is consistent with the topic being studied and directly linked with the research problem. The researcher must therefore recognise the most suitable and information-rich environment within which to conduct the study (Polit & Beck, 2004). Permission was granted by the identified organisation for this study prior to the actual research commencing. The identified organisation was a diversified multinational motor manufacturing company based in Gauteng. At the time of this study, the company employed over 1 800 employees and had a manufacturing plant on site as well as various other business departments and/or divisions. Participation from the participants was voluntary and all participants in the research study occupied senior HR roles within the organisation. All semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted behind closed doors within allocated meeting rooms on the premises of the organisation. The researcher ensured that comfort, quietness and privacy were kept in mind when the interview room was selected and prepared for the interviews (King & Horrocks, 2010). The researcher further ensured that the participants were kept as comfortable as possible during the interviews.

Entrée and establishing research roles

The researcher assumed many roles during the research study. The first role fulfilled by the researcher was that of a planner as the researcher worked together with the HR director as well as an HR manager from the organisation to identify the participants for the study as well as to set up the interviews. To eliminate the element of surprise, the researcher compiled a brief presentation containing information, such as the purpose and objectives of the study and the expected role of the participants who volunteered to partake in the study (Berg, 2007; De Vos et al., 2011). The informed consent form was also forwarded to participants. Electronic meeting (interview) requests were sent out to all participants who volunteered to partake in the study.
The researcher felt comfortable and confident in her ability to fulfil the role of interviewer and facilitator. The researcher has a strong background as a head-hunter and recruitment specialist and has been trained in interviewing skills. The researcher also acted as the research tool and had a direct influence on the quality of data that was collected. The researcher was cognisant of the fact that interviewing as a method of collecting qualitative data can be prone to bias, and it was therefore crucial for the researcher to remain aware of her personal perceptions and potential bias throughout the data collection process, and how this might influence the objectivity of the research findings (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In addition, the researcher made field (personal) notes to assist her by highlighting a few aspects of the interview that she felt would be relevant during the process of analysing data. The purpose of the field (personal) notes was to remind the researcher of certain aspects of the interview. Together with a co-coder, who was from the field of HRM, the data was analysed by following the data analysis steps. In this way, the researcher also fulfilled the role of transcriber and analyser throughout the process. Lastly, the researcher acted as a report writer by writing a detailed report regarding the findings of this study.

**Research participants and sampling methods**

Purposive sampling was utilised in this research study. Due to the specific nature of the research topic of this study, participants were selected from a specific motor manufacturing organisation in South Africa. The organisation is based in Gauteng and has a manufacturing plant as well as various other business departments and/or divisions. All participants who volunteered to partake in the study, were representative of various divisions of the organisation and worked directly with the business leaders in the organisation. The researcher interviewed the following HR professionals: HR Business Partners, General Manager: Talent, Senior Manager: Benefits, HR Managers, General Manager: HR Manufacturing.

Given the objectives of the research study, purposive sampling was utilised to select the participants (HR professionals) from the organisation. As mentioned previously, permission was granted well in advance by the organisation for the study. As interviews were planned in advance, it allowed participants who volunteered to partake in the study enough time to avail themselves for the interviews. The HR director of the organisation advised all participants who
volunteered to partake in the study via e-mail about the study and also communicated to participants to avail themselves and set aside time for the interview process. According to Merriam (2009), purposive sampling is the method that a researcher would use to discover, understand and to increase his or her insight by selecting a sample from which he or she could learn most. Purposive sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002).

Due to the specific nature of the research study, specific inclusion criteria were established for participants to partake in the study. The inclusion criteria were set as follows:

- HR professionals who were operating at a senior level in the organisation;
- HR professionals who worked directly with business leaders and who were specifically assigned to that business leader’s department, division and/or area of expertise;
- HR professionals who were willing to participate in the study (had given written consent);
- HR professionals who were willing to have face-to-face interviews with the researcher; and
- HR professionals who were prepared to have their interview voice recorded by the researcher.

The sample size for the research study was governed by data saturation of the qualitative interviews for the purpose of measuring qualitatively the contribution made by HR professionals as perceived by these HR employees in the organisation. Seven HR professionals ($N = 7$) were interviewed.
Table 1

*Characteristics of participants (N = 7)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18–30 years of age</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31–40 years of age</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41–50 years of age</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51–60 years of age</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Gauteng</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that:

- 28.57% of the participants were between 31 and 40 years of age;
- the majority (57.14%) of participants were in the age group 41 to 50 years;
- 14.29% were in the age group 51 to 60 years; and
- there were no (0%) participants between 18 and 30 years.

The majority of participants were female (57.14%) and 42.86% were males. Furthermore, of the participants –

- 42.86% were black;
- an equal split of 14.29% were coloured and Indian respectively; and
- 28.57% were white.

All (100%) of the participants resided in Gauteng.
Research procedure

Permission and consent for the study were granted by the organisation prior to the commencement of the study. The researcher scheduled interviews with all participants who volunteered to partake in the study. The interviews were conducted on the premises of the organisations because of convenience and familiarity for the participants. Interviews took place in allocated meeting rooms that were free of interruptions and where privacy was ensured. All participants were made as comfortable as possible. The researcher engaged with the participants with regard to the objectives of the study and gave them an opportunity to ask questions or seek clarity if they did not understand anything. All participants were assured that information gathered would remain confidential and anonymous. The researcher also obtained permission for the recording from the participants prior to the interview commencing. All interviews were recorded via voice recorder.

Data collection methods

The researcher interviewed seven participants for the research study. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p. 125), “semi-structured interviews assist in guiding the conversation so that set questions can be posed, while allowing respondents to discuss what is of interest or importance to them”. As a result, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the HR professionals in the organisation to obtain information from these HR professionals regarding how they view their contribution made to the organisation. De Vos et al. (2011) advise that semi-structured interviews would contribute to gaining insight and understanding. The researcher used open-ended questions to probe and gain deeper insight into the views of the participants.

Seven semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants at the organisation according to dates and times that were most suitable for the participants. The researcher was cognisant and aware of the very busy schedules of the HR professionals, and therefore the interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour to avoid too much disruption of their work. Various pre-determined questions (but not limited to) were posed to the participants.
during the interviews; however, the participants were very engaging and provided such rich and valuable information in answering the research questions that the researcher did not deem it necessary to pose every question to all the participants.

The following questions (not limited to) were posed to the participants:

- According to your views as an HR professional in the organisation, what are the day-to-day activities of the HR?
- Explain to me how much time is spent on administrative duties and how much time is spent on strategic initiatives?
- Are you (HR) aware of the organisation’s strategic objectives? Please elaborate.
- Are you involved in any strategic planning of the organisation/department/division? If so, in what way?
- Do you feel that HR gets the necessary support from the leaders of the organisation?
- What are the challenges you face when dealing with leadership on HR-related matters?

The researcher also made use of a pilot study. A pilot study can be referred to as a feasibility study or trial study on a smaller scale in preparation for the major study (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001). According to Baker (1994), a pilot study can be regarded as the pre-testing of a research instrument. In this research study, the goal of the pilot study was to ensure that all participants understood the questions correctly. A pilot study was conducted with two participants in the organisation. Both participants were senior representatives of the organisation and they provided value insights with regard to the research questions. During the pilot study, certain questions were adjusted and refined according to answers provided. As reported in Article one, the researcher did not feel it necessary to interview more participants in the pilot study as all participants that were identified to partake in the study were employed at senior levels in the organisation and were deemed to be able to articulate and understand the level of questions posed to them. The HR representative from the organisation acted as the gatekeeper and provided the researcher with the biographical background of the participants. This included age, race, gender and province. Permission from the participants was obtained and a consent form was signed by each of the participants.
Recording of data

Prior to the commencement of the actual interview, the researcher once again reassured the participants of the reasonable steps taken in order to protect the data as well as the participants. The researcher further offered the participants a chance to ask any questions with regard to any uncertainty they might have regarding the informed consent form. Informed consent was signed prior to the interviews commencing. The researcher ensured that no harm was caused to the participants during the data collection process (Berg, 2007).

All interviews were recorded via a digital voice recorder. The data was then transcribed verbatim and grouped into categories, themes and sub-themes. A password-protected laptop computer was used to store the recordings and transcriptions. The researcher made backups of the research data and stored these on two different external flash drives (USB). The researcher securely stored the USB flash drives in separate locations away from the laptop computer.

In addition, to the above, the following hard copy documentation was filed for safekeeping:

- the informed consent forms signed by participants;
- field (personal) notes to assist the researcher as a point of reference and to add information in describing the associated meanings and explanations of the sub-themes;
- any notes made during the data analysis process, e.g. grouping of units of meaning into themes; and
- any form of communication between the participant and the researcher, e.g. emails to set up interviews, etc.

Data analysis

The researcher made use of thematic analysis to interpret the data that had been collected. According to Braun and Clark (2006), thematic analysis is a tool that is utilised by the researcher to assist him or her in identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within
data that had been collected. The researcher was guided by the following steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006):

**Step 1: Becoming familiar with the data**

After all the interviews had been concluded and the data had been collected, the researcher began the process of going through the data and started to get to know and familiarise herself with the data. The researcher worked systematically and made every attempt to immerse herself in the data to understand the depth and breadth of the contents of the data fully. The researcher read the data a number of times to make sense of it. This involved repeated reading of transcripts as well as repeated listening to the audio-taped data. The researcher also made use of field (personal) notes she took during the interviews. The field (personal) notes assisted the researcher in describing the associated meanings and explanations of the sub-themes. Although the process took time, the researcher felt it necessary to do so in order to validate the data.

**Step 2: Generating initial codes**

This step involved the formulation of initial codes from the data. The researcher worked systematically through the entire data content and identified interesting aspects in the data that could form the basis of repeated patterns across the data set. By doing this, the researcher gained a greater sense of direction in terms of organising the data relevant to each code. The researcher ensured that no data was disregarded.

**Step 3: Searching for themes**

The researcher started working through the list of identified codes and sorted the different codes into potential themes and collated all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. At that stage, the researcher started looking at the relationship between codes, themes and level of themes, i.e. forming sub-themes.
Step 4: Reviewing themes

The researcher began this step by refining the themes identified in the previous steps. During this phase, the researcher identified those themes that needed to be excluded, or broken down into separate themes or joined or merged into one theme. The researcher was cognisant of the fact that the data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear distinctions between themes. Although many pre-determined questions were asked during the semi-structured face-to-face interviews, the answers from the participants flowed from one question to another and reflected similar responses; hence, two main themes and a variety of sub-themes emerged.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

The researcher spent time defining and further refining the themes that were present in the analysis. Following this, the important aspects that lay beneath each theme were further refined. The researcher identified the essence of what each theme is about as well as determined which aspect of the data each theme and sub-theme captured. In addition, the researcher ensured that the names of themes and sub-themes were indeed a clear representation of the themes given.

Step 6: Writing the analysis (report)

The researcher ensured that when writing the report, she provided a concise, coherent, logical and non-repetitive and interesting account of the story that the data told within and across the themes. The researcher also ensured that the writing of the report provided sufficient evidence of the themes and subthemes within the data. During the data analysis process, the researcher was assisted by a co-coder who worked in HRM, further ensuring the validity of the findings of this research study. The researcher ensured that the findings pertaining to the data were clearly and accurately explained.
Strategies employed to ensure quality data and integrity

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that in qualitative research, issues of trustworthiness refer to the quality of data. A variety of different criteria were adopted during this process to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, which was vitally important to consider during the research process. The researcher applied the following criteria to judge the validity and reliability of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The researcher utilised the following strategies as per Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2009) to ensure the trustworthiness of this research study:

Credibility: The researcher ensured that the findings of the study were reported according to what the data says it did by the participants. The researcher was cognisant of the fact that the truth of the data should not be influenced by any pre-conceived opinions, thoughts and ideas of the researcher. Instead, it was important to the researcher that the results be credible and believable; hence, the researcher endeavoured to ensure that she had reported the results truthfully. This is done by ensuring that the reporting only reflected the participants’ views and thoughts. The researcher’s background as a recruiter and interviewer enhanced her interviewing skills and confidence. The pilot interviews were conducted to review the interview guide and provide additional exposure to interviews.

Transferability: The goal of the researcher was not to generalise. Every step in the research process was explained in detail, and the foundation of everything was explained, in order to ensure that objectivity was maintained throughout the data collection process.

Dependability: The researcher believed it to be vitally important to report the findings in the way they occurred. Consistency was therefore applied in the data, which had been collected and reported as such. Furthermore, the researcher reported the process and methodology densely and accurately. Detailed field notes taken during the interviews added detail and depth to improve the quality of the data.
**Confirmability:** The researcher ensured that she remained impartial, neutral and objective throughout the entire research study. This was done to ensure that the researcher did not in any way influence the research or the findings. De Vos et al. (2005) also refer to confirmability as being objective hence, the researcher remained objective at all times.

**Reporting**

The researcher ensured that the findings were reported in a truthful manner. After the data had been analysed and categorised and themes and sub-themes identified, the researcher captured the findings in table format. Each one of the main themes, sub-themes, associated meanings and direct responses from the participants are described separately in the tables below. Participants’ perceptions, thoughts and views were captured and are explained with the help of selected quotes (excerpts). Some of the interview excerpts were modified, by adjusting some of the words, without affecting the meaning of the excerpts. This was done to achieve a more compact statement and also to help readers understand the excerpts better (De Vos et al., 2005).

**Ethical considerations**

The researcher endeavoured not to mislead or deceive any of the participants. Ethical aspects, such as voluntary participation, privacy, autonomy, informed consent and confidentiality of all participants were adhered to at all times throughout the research study. In addition, the researcher was fair, transparent, honest and respectful towards the participants at all times. The entire research study was conducted whilst keeping in mind the welfare of others and respecting their dignity. It was imperative for the researcher not to cause any physical or emotional harm to any of the participants in any way. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, if they felt the need to do so. All participants were ensured of total anonymity; therefore, no names were mentioned.
Findings

Two main themes were identified through the process of thematic analysis. The two themes were captured from the data analysis of the interviews held with the seven participates (HR professionals) of the organisation. The results of the study were organised into themes and sub-themes. The tables below reflect the relevant themes and sub-themes and associated meanings together with quotations that support findings. The first theme reflects the participants’ perception of their role and their contribution made to organisation. Theme two relates to the challenges that limit HR professionals from performing their roles in the organisation.

Theme 1: HR professionals’ perception regarding their role and their contribution made to the organisation

The first theme that was extracted from the interviews was the participants’ perception regarding their role and their contribution made to organisation. These are the actual activities carried out by the HR professionals and which form part of the day-to-day HR function and role in the organisation. For descriptive purposes, the associated meanings and explanations are also presented in Tables 2 and 3. The meanings and associated explanations of the sub-theme are a combination of the researcher descriptions as well as the combined views and opinions of the participants. These perceptions and views are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Associated meaning/Explanation (researcher description and combination of all the participants views and opinions)</th>
<th>Quotes from participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration/paper-pushers</td>
<td>Dealing with the day-to-day HR administration-related issues. Processes administration-orientated and paper-driven. HR professionals dealing with many mundane activities that take up a lot of their time.</td>
<td>80% of my time is spent on administrative/transactional HR tasks – participant 2F. Most of my time is spent on admin duties … – participant 2E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I been in the company for 12 years … I still spend 85% of my time on admin duties … – participant 2A

Currently a lot of work is admin … ideally we don’t want to spend so much time on admin … more than 60% of time is spent of admin … – participant 2G

HR is administrative by nature … 70% at least is spent on admin – participant 2D

80% of time is spent on day-to-day operations … admin – participant 2C

…run around getting paperwork done … we [HR] are paper-pushers … – participant 2A

HR seen as paper-pushers … need to change that perception … education needs to happen to see HR bigger than admin and paper-pusher – participant 2G

Fire fighters

Dealing with day-to-day activities that were not planned for. Sorting out issues on the ground. Tasks derived from challenges rather than planning.

Currently, we [HR] are fire fighters … – participant 2A

… troubleshooting … putting out fires … – participant 2C

Running around putting out fires – participant 2D

We are fire fighters, people working for years in an unstructured way, it’s difficult to change their mind-set – participant 2B

Industrial relations (IR)

Engaging with business leaders on IR issues. Providing advice and guidance in terms of labour-related issues. Having in-depth knowledge on how to deal with IR matters and trade unions.

Dealing with IR … managing unions … part of my day-to-day duties … – participant 2E

Discipline in the manufacturing plant is a huge part of the job – participant 2A

Being an IR partner, what I [HR] deal with – participant 2F

Focus on IR especially in the manufacturing plant – participant 2G

Most of my time is spent on IR – participant 2C

Organisational structure

Supporting organisational structure and structural changes. Monitoring headcount to ensure the organisational structure is sufficient and adequate to meet organisational objectives.

Currently, from a high level, I am involved in organisation structure as well as structural changes … getting the organisation to where it needs to be – participant 2B

Ensure headcount is monitored to support the structure – participant 2B

Currently I support the organisation and its structure by carrying out its goals … – participant 2G
Table 2 above provided a description of the theme and sub-themes as extracted from the analysed data. Examples of the responses from the participants were also provided in order to substantiate the findings of a specific sub-theme. The meaning associated with the sub-theme is a combination of the researcher’s descriptions as well as the combined views and opinions of the participants:

With reference to the above table, the results of the study reflect the views or perceptions of the participants of their role and the contribution they made to the organisation. As mentioned above, these roles refer to the roles that HR professionals were performing at the time of the research within their organisation. The descriptions below are a combination of the researcher’s descriptions as well as the combined views and opinions from the participants:

*Administration/paper-pushers*: Most participants viewed their role as administrative. Participants expressed that, although administration is ideally not what they would like to focus on, it is unfortunately something they cannot get away from and it forms part of their daily activity. Participants expressed their concern that most of their day is spent on administrative and/or functional roles.

*Fire fighters*. Participants expressed that they normally addressed activities and tasks that were not always planned for. Participants also indicated that they were not viewed as important but rather only as fire fighters solving problems that arise. Many participants expressed their disappointment at being viewed in this light but said it was unfortunately part of their daily activities.

*Industrial relations (IR)*: Participants perceived IR to be a big part of their function, especially those participants who were responsible for IR in the manufacturing plant at the time of the research. These participants viewed IR as an everyday activity.

*Organisational structure*: Some participants mentioned that they were called upon in certain instances to assist in organisational structure with regard to headcount and ensuring that the organisation’s mandate in terms of headcount is adhered too. HR professionals viewed this as
an element that is slightly more strategic than the mundane administrative tasks. However, these tasks also come with limits and boundaries as the participants were not necessarily involved from the beginning of the project or task but rather called upon towards the tail end of the project or task. An example would be that a decision is taken by business leaders to reduce the headcount within a department/division and/or business unit and the participant (HR professional) has to follow that instruction whether he or she agrees with it or not.

From the interviews, it was very clear that the participants agreed that their role was more administrative than strategic. A number of participants believed that they had the skill set to carry out more strategic tasks; however, this was not being utilised by the business leaders or relevant organisational units:

The organisation has not embraced HR being a strategic partner” – participant 2F. At the time of the interviews, the organisation – despite expanding and evolving – still viewed HR professionals as administrators and, unfortunately, the tasks carried out by HR professionals were administrative by nature “Business perceives HR as admin – participant 2F.

*Theme 2: Challenges that limit HR professionals from performing their roles in the organisation*

The second theme that was extracted from the interviews referred to the challenges that limit HR professionals from performing their roles in the organisation. Participants felt that their contribution was not valued by business leaders in the organisation. The thoughts and views of the participants are presented in Table 3 below.
### Challenges that limit HR professionals from performing their roles in the organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Associated meaning/ Explanation (researcher description and combination of all the participants views and opinions)</th>
<th>Quotes from participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lack of formal HR strategy</strong></td>
<td>Not having an HR strategy creates challenges for HR professionals as little or no guidance is provided as to how to go about achieving HR and organisational goals and objectives.</td>
<td>We [HR] do not have a HR strategy in place” – participant 2E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“HR strategy is not visible – participant 2G</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No formal HR strategy exists … – participant 2C</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No, we don’t have an HR strategy … no roadmap … – participant 2D</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No HR strategy, just aware of objectives – participant 2B</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>There is an HR plan, not a strategy per se – participant 2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HR, does not have a strategy … don’t know whether you are going to Cape town or going to Cairo – participate 2C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lack of planning</strong></td>
<td>Not a proper plan in place to accomplish goals. Executing tasks only as and when they come up. Stems from not having a proper and formal HR strategy in place.</td>
<td>There is almost no planning that goes into it [HR] – participant 2D</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>There is no overall planning as such – participant 2E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not much planning is in place – participant 2D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lack of support</strong></td>
<td>Little or no support with regard to business leaders viewing HR professionals as partners in the organisation in order to work together.</td>
<td>In some cases we do get support from the business leaders but we are definitely not seen as a partner to the business – participant 2F</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HR seems to be a dumping ground for the business leaders – participant 2A</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>It is a cause-and-effect relationship, we don’t get the necessary support from the business leaders – participant 2C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No definitely not [support]. Business leaders … only call HR when they are in disaster mode – participant 2B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>We [HR] don’t get support … but we are getting there … – participant 2G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not regarded as an area of expertise</strong></td>
<td>Business leaders do not necessarily see HR professionals as having in-depth knowledge of the various aspects of HR. HR professionals are not regarded as experts in the field. Some business leaders believe they know more than certain HR professional do</td>
<td>Certain business leaders think they know more than HR and rather do it themselves – participant 2C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some business do not take us or our expertise seriously – participant 2A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not seen as valuable or credible</td>
<td>HR professionals are not seen as adding value and truly contributing to their business units. HR professionals’ advice and opinions are not always viewed as trustworthy or credible by the business leaders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR is merely a watchdog to monitor policies and nothing more – participant 2C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR don’t get the same respect as other areas of expertise – participant 2A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>We [HR] are not valued. To certain business leaders, we are just fixers – participant 2C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some business leaders don’t believe HR is doing anything that adds value to the organisation – 2G</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certain managers bypass HR – participant 2F</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Business perceives HR as admin – participant 2F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Line needs to see HR as credible to seen as a trusted advisor – participant 2E</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perception of HR is that HR is useless and can’t do anything right – participant 2A</td>
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<tr>
<td>The organisation has not embraced HR as a credible partner – 2F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business leaders will test HR until they see that they [HR] adds value” – participant 2A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>We are not important in the business – participant 2C</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Not being involved in decision-making | HR professionals not being part of or involved in the decision-making. Not having a seat at the table. Being told what to do rather than being involved in the initial planning. |
| HR trying to fight to get their seat at the table – participant 2B |
| HR should not just facilitate and stand on the side-lines; they should be part of and take responsibility – participant 2F |
| HR should communicate in one voice so business can listen – participant 2A |
| HR is not part of the strategic discussion – participant 2D |

| Operating in silos | Business leaders and HR professionals operating in silos. Seen to be on two separate sides when ideally they should be working together |
| Everyone is on their own mission rather than looking at the organisation as a whole – participant 2F |
| People working for years in an unstructured, silo way … difficult to change their mind-set – participant 2B |
| Structure seems to be a silo mentality … HR needs to first understand the business and learn the business first in order for HR to be successful – participant 2F” |
| There should be a golden thread between HR and other areas of the organisations – participant 2A |
Table 3 above provided a description of the theme and sub-themes as extracted from the analysed data. Examples of the responses from the participants were also provided in order to substantiate the findings of the specific sub-theme. The second theme that was extracted from the interviews referred to the challenges that limit HR professionals from performing their roles in the organisation. Below are the views and descriptions (combination of researcher descriptions and views of the participants) of the role of HR:

*Lack of formal HR strategy:* Participants also expressed that a big concern and challenge for them was that no formal HR strategy existed. Most participants viewed this as an obstacle and hindrance as little or no guidance was provided regarding how to go about achieving HR and organisational goals and objectives. Participants agreed that not having a HR strategy was a limitation for them to function strategically. Some participants discussed openly that they were not aware that an HR strategy existed and had never viewed such a document. Most participants felt that having an HR strategy would provide them with a roadmap in terms of achieving objectives.

*Lack of planning:* Furthermore, participants expressed their thoughts that their role lacked planning, especially seeing that most of their time was spent dealing with issues on the ground. Participants acknowledged that not having a proper plan in place made it difficult to accomplish tasks and goals. Participants also agreed that a lack of planning did not do them any favours, more especially if they were to be seen by the business leaders in a more serious light.

*Lack of support:* Most participants felt that they did not get the necessary support from business leaders with regard to them (HR) wanting to be involved and form part of the various and respective business units/departments/division. The participants believed that the business leaders were not always transparent and did not share their expectations with them and felt that they did not see them (HR) as part of the team. A few participants expressed that some business leaders offered some support but not to the level that they would want:
Not valued or seen as credible: Most participants felt that the business leaders did not see value in the contribution they make. The participants also believed that some business leaders did not think that they were credible in terms of having the necessary knowledge, experience and technical know-how to execute their roles. The business leaders often questioned the advice given and the tasks carried out by participants.

Not regarded as an area of expertise: Participants voiced their opinion that the business leaders and to some extent, the organisation did not see HR as area of expertise with regard to all HR and human capital aspects. Some participants believed that the business leaders did not seek their advice or opinion but would rather do it themselves.

Not being involved in decision-making: Participants believed the business leaders did not see them as part of the team/business unit/department and/or division. Participant felt that they did not have a seat at the table and that they were left out of important decision-making. Participants believed that they were only roped in towards the end. Participants were unable to influence and steer strategy and strategy implementation and were not given the opportunity to do so either.

Operating in silos: The participants believed that the organisation as a whole and the various departments operated in silos. They believed that there was little or no alignment and teamwork between the participants and the business leaders. Participants believed that it was them (HR) against the rest of the organisation.

Furthermore, many participants further expressed their disappointment as they felt that they could add more value from a human capital perceptive; however, the dynamics of the organisation was such that the participants found themselves being inundated with administrative related tasks. It is a daily challenge for the participants to be seen as adding value to the organisation or to their relevant business unit:
The way business see HR … HR do not add value … HR is a support function … no revenue generated from HR” – participant 2D.

Some business leaders don’t believe HR is doing anything that adds value to the organisation” – participant 2G.

HR professionals felt it is a constant battle to be part of the organisation and felt that their efforts to change the perception of the business leaders were incredibly difficult:

Change only comes from a mind-set change in leaders” – participant 2C.

Discussion

Outline of the findings

The first objective of this article was to conceptualise HR professionals and the roles of HR professionals according to literature. According to Ulrich and Brockbank (2005), HR professionals are individuals who create and deliver value through the roles they play within the organisation. According to Holbeche (2009), HR professionals are viewed a resource within the organisation to deal with human capital aspects such as skills, competencies and experience of employees. Ulrich et al. (2005) state that traditionally, HR professionals simply delivered the data requested by organisational leaders with little attempt to help analyse it and explain the nuances behind it. This thought is also shared by Guest (1997) as HR professionals were traditionally merely involved in executing administrative and personal tasks. However, Holbeche (2009) further states that the role of HR professionals is undergoing rapid transformation in its journey to deliver value. If HR professionals are to combine operational excellence with a truly strategic approach it has the potential to make a significant contribution to the organisation (Holbeche, 2009). Armstrong (2006b) further states that if HR professionals are to adopt a strategic approach to acquiring, developing, managing, motivating and gaining commitment of the organisation’s key resources, they would be seen as adding greater and more strategic value to the organisation. It is for this reason that the researcher found it fitting
to investigate the roles of and the contribution made by the HR professionals in the organisation specifically in the motor manufacturing industry of South Africa.

The second objective of this study was to explore how HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry viewed their contribution and roles within the organisation. Participants indicated that they performed various roles within the organisation. This theme was supported by the following sub-themes that emerged with regard to the contribution and role of HR professionals: administration/paper-pushers, fire fighters industrial relations (IR), and organisational structure. According to Holbeche (2009), the capabilities of HR professionals are required to demonstrate that they have evolved and could add value to the organisation beyond administration. This was not the case within the current research study as participants of this study indicated that one of their daily activities was to fulfil administrative duties. Participants further indicated that they were sometimes involved with the organisational strategy however not at the level that they would want to be. Holbeche (2009) supports this by stating that no HR professional can expect to be taken seriously if he or she is unable to understand and speak the language of the business and translate the business strategy into relevant people processes and goals, which are appropriate to the dynamics of the organisation. The results of this study indicated that the majority of participating HR professionals, did not believe that they added significant value to the organisation as they were involved in activities such as administration, industrial relations and fire-fighting, prohibiting them from adding strategic value to the organisation.

The third objective was to explore the challenges that HR professionals experience when performing their role within the South African motor manufacturing industry. It was the opinion of most HR professionals that there were a number of challenges that prevented and limited them from performing their role effectively. This is substantiated in the following sub-themes that emerged with regard to this thought:

- lack of formal HR strategy;
- lack of planning;
- lack of support;
- not regarded as an area of expertise;
HR professionals believed that the above-mentioned challenges affected their role and limited their performance significantly. These challenges prevented them from gaining credibility and adding value. As a result, the participating HR professionals believed that the organisation and the business leaders did not regard them as specialists in their field. Literature suggested that, in order for HR professionals to be successful, it is imperative that they have the ability to work collaboratively with line managers in order to achieve business objectives (Holbeche, 2009). In addition, HR the participating professionals believed that they did not necessarily get the support from the business leaders as discussed in the sub-theme lack of support. According to Holbeche (2009), HR and line managers need to work together to push up the standards and practices of people management and development continually. Participants further mentioned that they were not involved in decision-making and that they operated in silos. A study conducted by Richardson et al. (2015) indicated that business leaders require HR professionals to ‘get under the skin’ of the business, rather than focus explicitly on HR practice. In summary, this is about thinking business first and HR second. This is further supported as research has found that HR should seek a structure and set of practices appropriate to the specific context, and the “Changing HR operating models” report of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Developments (CIPD) reinforces this view (CIPD, 2015). It concludes that how an organisation structures its HR function should be based upon its organisational strategy. Holbeche (2009) suggests that for any particular organisational strategy, there has to be a matching HR strategy. Christensen (2006) further supports this theory stating that there has to be a destination and a roadmap from getting from here to there. It is therefore important that HR strategies and organisational strategies be aligned; however, as gathered from the participants of this study, this was not what they were experiencing within their current organisation.

The fourth objective was to explore whether HR professionals perceived their role within the South African motor manufacturing industry as operating at functional/administrative or strategic level. The results indicate that with reference to objectives two and three, HR professionals were indeed operating at a functional/administrative level. Participating HR
professionals were unfortunately not involved in many strategic initiatives in the organisation. Further to this, the HRM department did not have a formal HR strategy in place. The sub-theme lack of HR strategy supports this thought. According to the HR professionals, this formed the biggest challenge and obstacle towards their success, and therefore limited them from performing at a strategic level. HR professionals felt that if they were given more autonomy and authority, they might be able to contribute and add value at a strategic level. The sub-theme not being involved in decision-making supports this thought. However literature from Christensen (2006) contradicts this thought. According to Christensen (2006), a quality of strong HR professionals should be leadership, and this quality gives HR professionals the ability to approach their work in a more strategic manner.

The results further indicate that HR professionals unfortunately also believed that their roles in the organisation involved a large amount of administrative tasks. With reference to the sub-themes administration/paper pushers, fire fighters, and industrial relations (IR), it was evident that participating HR professionals were spending most of their time on administrative duties. Much of the role executed by HR involves paper-driven tasks, and day-to-day functional duties. This means that HR management is seen merely as the administrator and governor of HR policies and procedures within the organisation. HR professionals also felt that, to an extent, the business leaders and the organisation did not allow them to be more involved in strategic initiatives. Participating HR professionals felt that the organisation had not evolved enough over time from an HR perspective and mind-set to allow them to be part of and get involved in the strategic objectives of the organisation. This is supported by the “Global human capital trends” report (Deloitte, 2015) in that significant research over the past 4–5 years suggests that HR needs to shift from a reactive, process-driven resource to one that could respond proactively to ambiguity with fluidity and flexibility in order to improve business results.

Practical implications

The outcome and findings of the study indicate that, unfortunately, participating HR professionals by their own admission believed that they were performing their role at a functional/administrative level. The study however allowed HR professionals to acknowledge
that the roles they were performing at the time of this research, were not strategic enough and therefore they were not operating at the level they should have been. The study has enhanced the awareness within the participants that there are limitations and challenges that also exist that make it difficult for them to perform strategically. In addition, the study made the participants mindful of the importance of having an HR strategy to guide and provide them with a roadmap in terms of executing their function in order to achieve their objectives. The study could further assist HR professionals to work more closely with the business leaders as partners to accomplish not only departmental/divisional and/or business unit goals but ultimately to support the goals of the organisation as a whole.

**Limitations and recommendations**

There has been limited research, which explored the role and contribution of HR professionals in the South African motor manufacturing industry, has so far been done. Understanding the alignment of expectations of business leaders and HRM in the South African motor manufacturing industry has not been reported thoroughly in literature; hence, the purpose of this research study.

The researcher found that there were a few limitations regarding the study. The topic of the research study proved to be sensitive and the researcher found that some of the participants in this article study (HR professionals) felt that they needed to defend their roles and responsibilities in the organisation, and that made them a bit sensitive to the research study. All respondents had first-hand and direct experience in various aspects and levels of the HR field. Due to the organisation going through its financial year end at the time of the research interviews, interviewing time was limited to a maximum of 45 minutes. All respondents wanted to be anonymous and that their names should not be mentioned in the study or in any feedback given to the organisation, should they request it. This was adhered to (as also described in the section on ethical considerations); therefore, complete confidentiality and anonymity were assured to all participants.
The researcher also found that, despite the HR director sending out correspondence beforehand regarding the study, not all participants were as engaging as others and it took a little more time to create a rapport and to some extent confidence in order to gain the necessary information needed. Considering the significant amount of information that was gained from this research, future research is recommended on the contribution and value HR professionals provide in organisations in South Africa. Given that many organisations in South Africa have HR professionals employed in the organisation and HRM forms a big part of the organisation, it would be interesting to establish whether HR professionals in various organisations operate at a strategic level.

Future research could be conducted at the level where HR professionals operate by expanding the research into various other organisations, sectors and/or industries. Organisations who aim to understand the role HR professionals play in the organisation could utilise the information and recommendations provided by this research. A more specific recommendation would be to explore how much authority HR professionals have in the organisation. This is vital as it will determine whether HR professionals have autonomy to make decisions or whether they just have to carry out the instructions that need to be followed. Special consideration should be given to replicate the findings to broader samples across various organisations, sectors and/or industries.

Conducting an in-depth analysis on how whether HR professionals execute their roles according to expectation could provide deeper insight into understanding the diverse nature of HRM within the South African context. Furthermore, the factors that play a role in whether HR professionals operate at strategic and administrative/functional levels need to be explored across organisational boundaries and sectors in order to determine whether some factors are organisation or sector/industry-specific. This will allow both business leaders and HR professionals as well as the organisation as a whole to gain a better understanding of how HRM and its facets manifest within their unique organisation/industry/sector. Consequently, it will help such professionals to create a more accurate, effective and efficient working environment that is conducive to the success of the organisation.
Conclusion

Two themes emerged from the data analysis for this article, namely theme 1: *HR professionals’ perception of their role and contribution made to the organisation* and theme 2: *Challenges that limit HR professionals from performing their roles in the organisation*. The study established that the participants (HR professionals) operated at an administrative/functional level in the organisation. The participants also faced challenges that limited them and to a certain extent prevented them from performing effectively. Participants felt that they had much more to offer the organisation besides just administrative tasks but unfortunately they were not given the opportunity to do so. The participants (HR professionals) expressed their concern that the business leaders did not see them as an area of expertise and therefore did not see value in their performance. It was also established that the participants (HR professionals) felt that they did not get the necessary support from the business leaders in the organisation.
References


CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

This chapter covers the discussions and conclusions regarding the respective objectives that have been dealt with in each research article of the study. Moreover, limitations of the study as well as recommendations for future research, practice and the profession are outlined. The conclusions of this study are discussed according to the objectives and findings of each research article.

Article 1: Exploring business leaders’ perspective on HRM and the contribution made by HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry

The first objective of this article was to conceptualise business leaders and human resource management (HRM) according to literature. Firstly, according to literature, business leaders can be defined as individuals in an organisation who are involved with visioning, inspiring, coaching, energising, and empowering the employees of the organisation (April, Macdonald, & Vriesendorp, 2000). According to Sarros and Woodman (1993), organisational success relies on the traits, skills and attitudes of business leaders. Sarros and Woodman (1993) further state that there are five main attributes or competencies that are required to be an effective business leader, namely:

- vision and creativity;
- setting objectives and achieving targets;
- confident decision-making;
- team building; and
- coaching.

Research suggests that business leaders are also accountable for strategy formulation and implementation (April et al., 2000). Further to this, April et al. (2000) state that strong
leadership in an organisation involves competent business leaders whose contribution is vital for the success of the organisation.

Secondly, according to literature, HRM is defined as “that part of the management of the organisations that is concerned with all aspects that relate to, and interplay with, the work and the people who do the work of and in organisations” (Swanepoel, Erasmus, & Schenk, 2008, p. 4). According to Guest (1997), HRM, as a new approach to personnel management, emphasises a strategic contribution that is closely aligned to business. HRM also requires working with line management and focusing on HRM outcomes such as commitment, flexibility and quality (Guest, 1997). From the above-mentioned, it is clear that HRM should be firmly embedded in organisations (Swanepoel et al., 2008). The link between humans as a resource and business success has been the basis of a number of HRM theories over time and still continues to develop (Holbeche, 2009).

The second objective of this article was to understand what the expectations of business leaders are regarding the roles of HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry. From the study, it was evident that the participants (business leaders) had expectations of the role that HR professionals should be performing. The sub-themes that emerged with regard to this were industrial relations (IR), organisational structure, payroll, performance management, recruitment and selection, training and development, succession planning and career development, trusted advisor and reliable source of HR information and advice. The business leaders indicated that, in order for their expectations to be met, it is critical that HR professionals take responsibility for their roles in the organisation and to illustrate that they have the necessary skills, knowledge and competence to execute their roles. However, the participants believed that, at present, HR professionals lacked the skills, knowledge and competence to meet their expectations. Although the business leaders in the organisation were of this opinion, the roles that HR fulfils within organisations are important. According to Du Plessis, Nel, and San Diego (2013), it is vitally important for organisations to have effective HR structures that selects, develops and produces a level of performance that could justify organisational investments, especially in the current competitive business environment. HR professionals who are knowledgeable and competent in effective workforce management also play critical roles in organisations that support future competitive endeavours (Dessler, 2011).
The third objective of this article was to understand whether business leaders perceive an alignment between their expectations of HR professionals and HR delivery within the South African motor manufacturing industry. The results indicated that gaps definitely exist between the business leaders’ expectations of HR professionals and HR delivery. The following sub-themes emerged: lack of credibility and trust in HR professionals, lack of planning and being reactive, lack of understanding and awareness between business leaders’ expectations and HR delivery, not strategic enough, and too much paperwork/administration. As a result of these gaps, the business leaders expressed concerns that they did not necessarily see value in the services provided by HR professionals. Brewster, Carey, Grobler, Holland, and Warnich (2008) further state that the human resource (HR) approach looks at the relationship between management and HR professionals and ways in which they can work together and become partners in decision-making and share accountability for organising the work to be performed. If HR professionals are to be seen as strategic partners in the organisation, then it is essential that HR professionals understand the organisation, its goal and objectives and that it aligns itself accordingly (Swanepoel et al., 2008).

The fourth objective of this article was to explore whether business leaders view HR professionals within South African motor manufacturing industry as operating at functional/administrative or strategic level. The results of this objective are also supported by the results obtained for objective 3. Most participants believed that HR professionals spend very little time on strategic initiatives; hence, they are not contributing to the major strategic objectives in the organisation currently. Participants viewed the tasks carried out by HR professionals as paper-driven administrative duties. Therefore, participants believed that HR professionals were operating at administrative/functional level with minimal focus on strategic initiatives. Although administration duties are part of the HR function, it should not necessarily make up the majority of the role. With reference to literature, it is clear that, over the years, the roles of HR professionals have evolved (Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert, & Hatfield, 2010). Many organisations have embraced the transformation of HR from being regarded an administrative function to being one that contributes and adds value to the organisation from a human capital point of view (Grobler et al., 2010). Unfortunately, the finding does not reflect this thought but rather indicates that HR professionals are still operating at a functional or administrative level and, hence, they are not contributing strategically to the organisation. The business leaders however saw the need for HR professionals to move away from this school of
thought and to gain credibility and authority at senior or board level. By creating strong credibility and awareness, HR professionals could perhaps slowly move away from the administrative level to becoming involved in strategic initiatives. Literature supports this view in that according to Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright (2010) and Redman and Wilkinson (2009), HR professionals who are strategic in their approach by committing to create new ideas, deliver value and innovate for growth play a key role to maximise organisational performance.

**Article 2: Exploring the role and contribution made by HR professionals as perceived by the HR employees within the South African motor manufacturing industry**

The first objective of this article was to conceptualise HR professionals and the roles of HR professionals according to literature. According to Christensen (2006), HR professionals within the organisation are skilled professionals who can ultimately add value to the organisation. Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, and Ulrich (2012) state that HR professionals are senior or key HR personnel. Turner (2003) defines HR professionals as professionally qualified specialists in the way that human resources could be deployed, retained and motivated to achieve the strategy of the organisation. These HR professionals are usually embedded in the business unit where they work in partnership with operational managers within that business unit to influence and steer strategy and strategy implementation (Ulrich et al., 2012).

Regarding the roles of human resource professionals, Guest (1997) states that traditionally HR professionals were merely involved in executing administrative and personal tasks. However, the transformation shift from this traditional view to HR professionals becoming strategic partners to the business is undergoing rapid changes in its journey to deliver value (Holbeche, 2009). If HR professionals are to transition from merely executing their role as administrators to becoming involved in and understanding the need of organisations from a strategic perspective, they really have the potentially to make a significant contribution to the organisation (Holbeche, 2009).

The second objective of this article was to explore how HR professionals within the South African motor manufacturing industry view their contribution and roles within the
organisation. The following sub-themes emerged with regard to the contribution and role of HR professionals: administration/paper-pushers, industrial relations (IR), organisational structure, fire fighters. The results indicate that HR professionals unfortunately believe that their roles in the organisation involve an immense amount of administrative tasks. The finding further indicates that HR professionals unfortunately also believe that they are not adding value to the organisation to the extent that they would like to. Instead, HR professionals view their role and contribution as still very administration-driven.

The third objective was to explore the challenges that HR professionals experience in performing their role within the South African motor manufacturing company. HR professionals are of the opinion that the challenges they face in executing their role ultimately prevent them from performing their role effectively. This is supported in the sub-themes that emerged with regard to this thought: lack of formal HR strategy, lack of planning, lack of support, not seen as valuable, not regarded as an area of expertise, not being involved in decision-making, and operating in silos. According to the participants, these challenges are part of why they are viewed in the traditional light of being merely administrators and not being able to gain credibility and adding value to the organisation. Literature suggests that HR professionals should make every attempt to gain credibility with line managers and work together as a team in order to achieve the objectives of the business (Holbeche, 2009). This thought is further supported in a study by Richardson et al. (2015), which indicates that it is more important for HR professionals to ‘get under the skin’ of the business, than to focus on HR practices only.

The fourth objective was to explore whether HR professionals perceive their role within the South African motor manufacturing industry as operating at functional/administrative or strategic level. The results indicate that with reference to objectives two and three, HR professionals are indeed operating at functional level. Much of the role executed by HR involves paper-driven tasks, and day-to-day functional duties. This means that HR management is seen merely as the administrator and governor of HR policies and procedures within the organisation. Unfortunately and due to the nature of their roles being so administrative, participating HR professionals felt that they were not given the opportunity by the business leaders to be more involved in strategic initiatives. Although the majority of participating HR
professionals felt that they had the ability to do far more than administration duties, they also felt that the organisation had not evolved enough over time from an HR perspective, which limited their transition from administrative to becoming and adding value at a strategic level. HR professionals, through their knowledge, skills and commitment, should set out a strategy that focuses on supporting organisational effectiveness and achievement of organisational goals (Dessler, 2011; Noe et al., 2010), thereby showing the importance of HR to function at a strategic level. However, Armstrong (2009) indicates the opposite, stating that the general purpose of HRM is to make sure that the organisation is able to achieve success through its people, and HR professionals are instrumental in achieving this (Armstrong, 2009).

4.2 Limitations

In the present study, it was found that there were a few limitations in the study. Interviews were limited to 45 minutes due the organisation going through its financial year end at the time, and given the fact that participants who were interviewed occupied senior roles in the organisation with very busy schedules. Despite the time of the interviews, the researcher collected rich and descriptive data from the research participants. Participants (HR professionals), especially from article 2, wanted to remain anonymous. These participants expressed some concern as to why the study was being conducted and felt that they needed to defend their roles and responsibilities in the organisation. That made them slightly sensitive to the research study. It might therefore have been possible that participants did not feel comfortable to share all their ideas and personal feelings. However, the researcher assured the participants that their identity would remain anonymous and by doing this, the researcher also adhered to the ethical considerations. The researcher also explained in detail the purpose of the present research study, and by doing so, made the participants feel at ease with the entire process.

The researcher also found that, despite the HR director sending out correspondence beforehand regarding the study, not all participants were equally engaging and in some cases, it took a little more time to create a rapport and develop confidence in order to gather the necessary information. However, the researcher tried her best to build a rapport with each and every participant, thereby making participants more comfortable to share their experiences.
Despite the challenges and limitations experienced in this research study, the researcher’s background and professional experience on the field of human resources provided great passion and interest in the study. The researcher acknowledges that HR representatives play a vital role in the organisation as HR professionals work with people who form the heart of any organisation, create the culture of the organisation and a human touch in fast-moving and ever-changing environments.

4.3 Recommendations

Despite the limitations stated above, recommendations can be made for future research and practice.

4.3.1 Recommendations for future research

Considering the significant amount of information that was gained from this research, future research is recommended on the contribution made by and the value HR professionals provide in other organisations within South Africa. Many organisations in South Africa have HR professionals employed in the organisation, and HRM forms an integral part of the organisation. However, it is not known whether other organisations (other than the South African motor manufacturing industry) have evolved from the traditional view and legacy of the role and function of HR and whether HR is indeed operating as a strategic partner in the organisation. Future research could be conducted at the level at which HR professionals are operating by expanding the research into various other organisations, sectors and/or industries.

A more specific recommendation would be to explore how much authority HR professionals have in the organisation. This is vital as it will determine whether HR professionals have autonomy to make decisions or whether they execute just the instructions that need to be followed. Special consideration should be given to replicate the findings of the present study to broader samples across various organisations, sectors and/or industries, where participants
are specifically asked to share their experiences regarding their authority and decision-making within the organisation.

Limited research exists that explored the value and contribution of HR professionals in the motor manufacturing industry. Understanding the alignment of the expectations of business leaders and HRM in the motor manufacturing industry was not reported thoroughly in literature; hence, the purpose of this research study. Conducting an in-depth analysis on how HR professionals execute their roles according to expectations could provide deeper insight into understanding the diverse nature of HRM within the South African motor manufacturing industry.

Furthermore, the factors that play a role in whether HR professionals operate at strategic and administrative/functional levels need to be explored across organisational boundaries and sectors in order to determine whether some factors are organisation- or sector/industry-specific. This will allow the business leaders and HR professionals as well as the organisation as a whole to gain a better understanding of how HRM and its facets manifest within their unique organisation, industry or sector. Consequently, it will help such professionals to create a more accurate, effective and efficient working environment that is conducive to success of the organisation.

In order to address the above-mentioned limitations, qualitative research could be recommended for future research. A qualitative approach is beneficial as it allows participants to express their views and perceptions freely as well as the experiences they have regarding the role of human resources. It is recommended that open-ended and probing questions be posed to participants to obtain more in-depth information and insights from them.

Finally, in conclusion, even though there were a few limitations to the research, very valuable insights and information were captured. The findings add significant new insight that could be used as guidelines for organisations to determine and evaluate the contribution HR professionals make to the organisation.
4.3.2 Recommendations for practice

The current study aimed to understand the role that HRM plays in the organisation from the perspective of both the participating business leaders as well as HR professionals in the organisation. The results and findings indicated that, unfortunately, HR professionals were not performing according to business leaders’ expectations and further to this and by the admission of HR professionals themselves, they are operating at a functional or administrative level. Such finding is unfortunate as the organisation is a large multinational company employing over 1800 employees. HRM is an important function of organisations and the misalignment between the business leaders’ expectations and HR delivery HR professionals could cause great misunderstanding and unpleasantness between certain HR professionals and business leaders. A lack of a formal HR strategy just exacerbates the problems.

It is recommended that the business leaders together with the senior HR professionals of the organisation formulate strategies that would assist all the relevant areas of the organisation to meet its goals and objectives. The business leaders also need to take responsibility by ensuring that they include HR professionals in all human capital issues from the beginning instead of roping them in at the end. It is imperative for organisational success that the business leaders and HR professionals work closely together in order to set business unit goals so that there is an alignment between business leaders’ expectations and HR delivery. Business leaders need to support HR professionals and in turn, HR professionals need to gain the trust and credibility of their relevant business leaders. It is also advised that both business leaders and HR professionals view their working relationship as a relationship of partners rather than as two separate teams working independently. Ultimately, HR professionals would need a ‘voice’ in the organisation and a seat at the table if they were to be seen and regarded as strategic business partners in the organisation. It is vital, however, for HR professionals to understand firstly what the expectations of the business leaders are before formulating, implementing and executing strategy. It is also fundamental that every HRM employee at all levels of the business be aware of the strategy, key objectives and targets.

A further recommendation is that the HR professionals have standard HR processes that they follow. This will assist to eliminate some of the challenges in terms of the business leaders
receiving different advice and guidance from the different HR professionals. It is also recommended that the organisation conduct a skills audit amongst its HR professionals to establish whether HR professionals are competent enough from both an experience as well as a qualification point to view to ascertain whether they are competent enough to operate at a strategic level as well as meet organisational expectations.

This has practical implications for the HR professionals. HR professionals should demonstrate their commitment to their relevant business leaders by getting to know and understand the relevant business unit, provide credible advice, adhere to deadlines, provide comprehensive training, share information, provide for the development and growth of employees within the business unit, and offer more than the current administrative tasks that are being executed. Unless HR embraces change and moves away from the traditional function of HR, it will struggle to solve problems at the pace the business demands.

It is recommended that the implementation of any intervention should focus ultimately on the goals and strategic objectives of the organisation as a whole. The understanding and alignment between business leaders’ expectations and HR delivery should be clear at all times. This could help them to become aware of the symptoms of misalignment and enable them to intervene before the effects become too serious.
References


