"THE TIMES THEY ARE-A-CHANGIN": RECONSTRUCTING THE NEW ROLE OF THE STRATEGIC HR MANAGER

Vincent Cassar

University of Malta, Valletta, Malta & Centre for Evidence-Based Management
ORCID: 0000-0002-7795-5601; e-mail: Vincent.cassar@um.edu.mt (corresponding author)

Katarzyna Tracz-Krupa

Wrocław University of Economics, Wrocław, Poland
ORCID: 0000-0002-2845-8086; e-mail: katarzyna.tracz@ue.wroc.pl

Frank Bezzina

University of Malta, Valletta, Malta
ORCID: 0000-0001-5578-2722; e-mail: Frank.bezzina@um.edu.mt

Sylwia Przytuła

Wrocław University of Economics, Wrocław, Poland
ORCID: 0000-0002-9602-241X; e-mail: s_przytula@wp.pl

Abstract: Much has been said about elevating the HRMgt function to strategic levels. Adopting a more evidence-based approach through the use of data analytics is considered an important driver in this direction. This provides a more potent decision-making resource that enables less biased and harder evidence which ultimately is more convincing. But will Strategic HRMgt adopting data-driven strategies require people in the profession to adopt new skills? This exploratory project is work-in-progress and presents initial interview results. Interviewees report that the use of HRMgt data analytics can certainly improve the strategic value of HR and that while the use of data can drive HR decisions more convincingly, HRMgt itself cannot be reduced or substituted by data. The participants also reported that HR professionals would require learning new skills, amongst them IT, analysis and interpretation of data. The project aims to eventually draw a number of attributes or skill-sets to this effect.

Keywords: strategic HRMgt, data driven decision-making, new competency model.

1. Introduction

This paper represents a project that is 'work-in-progress' at the time of writing. It is a project that attempts to evaluate a possible scenario of what may seem to be two parallel sides of the story: on the one hand, we have 'Human Resource Management' (HRMgt) as a management function. On the other hand, the advent of automation coupled with its large data-generation and analytical capabilities for improved decision-making. The latter is likely to impact the former in terms of the required competency sets required by Human Resources Managers (HR). But how is this likely to take shape? Our argument is based on the premise that decisions lie at the core of 'management' and data is a resource for decision-making [Briner, Denyer, Rousseau 2009]. We argue that the introduction of more hard evidence and improved data that supports the decision-making process will render the function of HR more strategic

and relevant, but this will require a re-focus on the use of 'HRM analytics' (e.g. [Bassi, Carpenter, McMurrer 2012; Edwards, Edwards 2016]).

2. Strategic HR Management (SHRMgt) and the measurement of HR

It is generally claimed that HRMgt has evolved from a mere administrative role to a more strategic one (c.f. [Brewster1999; Brewster Gooderham, Mayrhofer 2016; Dik, Byrne, Steger 2013; Schuler 1992]). According to Lado and Wilson [1994] HRMgt can play a key role in the articulation of the strategic vision, in the formation of organizational capital, and in the enactment of beneficial firm-environment alignment. Armstrong [2006] goes as far as to define HRMgt as "a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization's most valued assets – the people working there who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives" (p. 3). While this narrative has been supported and upheld by many of those in HRMgt, some scholars have pitched a number of serious accusations at its real value and contribution to the firm. For instance, Noonan [1992] argues strongly that HRMgt is theoretically deficient because it can neither describe nor predict given its broad outreach. Likewise, Mabey, Skinner and Clark [1998] lambast the role of HRMgt as creating high expectations without being able to deliver. Gratton, Hailey, Stiles and Truss [1999] describe HRMgt as hyperbolic in its stated mission of what it can achieve. Defendants of HRMgt argue that one way in which the field can overcome these criticisms levelled at it is by adopting a more strategic role. Armstrong [2006], for instance, argues that the most significant feature of HRMgt is the importance attached to its strategic integration, and utilising data and embracing data analytics to measure HR may be one practical way forward in this direction [Briner, Barends 2016; Pfeffer, Sutton 2006; Rousseau, Barends 2011]. Indeed, this would avoid its fate of becoming a neglected and wretched Cinderella [Cassar, Bezzina 2017]. According to Lawler, Levinson and Boudreau [2004]: "If HRMgt can make a strong case for being an important part of strategy development and implementation because of the importance of human capital, why does HRMgt often fall short of being a strategic partner? At least one possibility is because HRMgt lacks the type of analytic and data-based decision-making capability needed to influence business strategy" (p. 28). For Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade and Drake [2009], the role of SHRM is to measure how HR strategies impact performance and they specifically highlight the

measurement of outcomes as a central theme within the literature of SHRM. This may entail a reconsideration of what constitutes SHRMgt in terms of the competences, skill-sets and the necessary mind-sets of those who occupy that position [Schuler, Jackson 2008]. Frey and Osborne [2017] recount the onset of automation and the substitution of contemporary skills, not as a unique state of disruption but as a continuous evolving process, likely to change the competency sets of many professions and roles. The importance of automation and the faster availability of data is likely to evolve the competency sets of many professions, not least that of the 'HR Manager' (c.f. [Lawler et al. 2004]). In this scenario, the HR function becomes one which essentially informs about the HR systems and business outcomes attributed to HR. After all the use of information technology systems to record HRMgt practices, trends and data may not only revolutionize the management of people but also evaluate more precisely and more comparably their outcomes and the beneficial impact on organizations [Bondarouk, Brewster 2016], making such practices better comparable and, at the same time, versatile. We postulate that in the changing world of work, the advent of more data-driven decision-making through data analytics into the reconstitution of SHRM will depend on the extent that this management function will embrace this inevitable change.

3. HRMgt Analytics

HRMgt Analytics represents a new innovation even though it has been discussed for many years [Lawler, Levenson, Boudreau 2004]. Turning data from HRMgt practices into information and knowledge that is applicable is often not direct or straightforward and therefore does not come easily. While these are interlinked processes, they exist in a perpetual cyclical fashion. Indeed transforming data into information and knowledge is developmental and sequential. Managers adopt a degree of selective attention to the most appropriate and valid data that can elicit applicable results because not all the information gathered can be justified with a favourable level of good evidence. Even more, translating information through evidence into practice requires closing the gap between what is known and what is practised. Moreover, turning data into evidence, and in turn into practice is a process of critical thought, insightful reflection and active questioning. It also involves an intensive assessment of a host of factors, not least cultural [Farndale, Sanders 2017], contextual [Baba, HakemZadeh 2012] and natural judgemental biases in the process of decision-making [Bazerman, Moore

2013]. As suggested earlier, studies indicate that the situation is more fluid and more relaxed when it comes to fields like HRMgt [Briner et al. 2009; Rousseau 2007; Latham 2007]. One way to overcome this may be the introduction of more hard evidence and improved data that supports the decision-making process. Indeed, over the last few years a number of initiatives have taken place and a number of practitioner-oriented tools have been published to support HRMgt become more data-driven and focused on internal assessments of specific HRMgt analytics (e.g. [Bassi et al. 2012; Burkholder, Golas, Shapiro 2007; Edwards, Edwards 2016; Fitz-Enz 2010; Smith 2013]).

Before we proceed to an evaluation of an 'HRMgt data' culture, it is right to remind the reader that this is only one, albeit significant, perspective of enacting a SHRMgt approach. This is only fair to point out in view of the criticisms directed at evidence based management in the field of HRMgt [Learmonth 2006; Learmonth, Harding 2006]. Indeed, it is warranted to argue that an HRMgt system goes beyond the hard and fast evidence and therefore cannot be easily translated into mere 'assessments' and 'analytics'. To begin with, HRMgt systems come alive through the social interactions among the many organizational members who act as the 'consumers' of this system ranging from professionals, employees and managers in other departments [Jackson, Schuler 2003]. In addition, one cannot not contextualise HRMgt analytics. Organizations are dynamic entities and given that they are constantly in flux, an organization's external and internal environments create a dynamic context for the development, evolution, and demise of HRMgt policies and practices [Jackson, Schuler, Jiang 2014]. Lastly, HRMgt systems are subject to the influence of multiple stakeholders that can mould and shape its 'state' from a variety of perspectives such as the standing of the profession, the social criteria embodied in laws and regulations and individual employee reactions [Jackson et al. 2014]. Hence, 'data' relevant to, and generated by, HRMgt practices should be considered as one (important) piece in a jigsaw puzzle; the challenge remains to raise the bar further and further signify their relevance.

4. Evaluation of HRMgt Analytics

'HRMgt Analytics' represents a new innovation even though it has been discussed for many years. Lawler, Levenson and Boudreau [2004] distinguish 'HRMgt Analytics' as separate from 'HRMgt metrics'. Lawler et al. [2004] state that analytics are not measures but rather represent statistical techniques and experimental approaches that can be used to show the impact of HRMgt activities. Indeed, Bassi [2011] argues that HRMgt analytics consists of an array of tools and technologies, ranging from the simple reporting of HRMgt metrics all the way up to predictive modelling and can be considered both as 'systematically reporting on an array of HR metrics' or more sophisticated solutions, based on 'predictive models' and 'what-if scenarios'. In addition, Bassi's definition includes the notion of taking an 'evidence-based approach' to making decisions on the 'people side of the business'. Finally, focusing on the link with SHRMgt, Mondare, Douthitt, and Carson [2011] define HRMgt analytics as demonstrating the direct impact of people on important business outcomes [Lengnick-Hall et al. 2009]. Despite this distinction between HRMgt metrics and HRMgt analytics, there is still definitional ambiguity in the literature. However, because we discuss here the processes of deriving and treating the data from organizations, we prefer to use the term 'HRMgt analytics'.

There are several points one ought to make about HRMgt analytics. The first is that HRMgt analytics is not HRMgt Metrics; better still, the latter represent a subset of the former. Metrics, in this sense, are measures of key HRMgt outcomes, classified as efficiency, effectiveness or impact. Thus analytics represent more an approach, a methodology and a way of approaching data, thinking about it and treating important information as part of a broader system of activities rather than a static yardstick or a signpost that merely projects an estimate or a numerical fact [Lado, Wilson 1994]. The second highlight is that HRMgt analytics do not focus exclusively on HR functional data but involves integrating data from different internal functions and data external to the firm. As Schuler and MacMillan [1984] asserted, a value chain provides an organization with several potential 'strategic targets' for using an HR competitive advantage. Thirdly, HRMgt analytics involves using information technology to collect, manage, and report data. Fourthly, HRMgt analytics is about supporting people- related decisions while linking HRMgt decisions to business outcomes and organizational performance. This last highlight about HRMgt analytics captures the most compelling aspect of this concept and links it to the strategic HRMgt literature. As pointed out by Marler and Boudreau [2016], HRMgt analytics has the potential to connect HRMgt processes and decisions with organizational performance; this is indeed an avenue to elevate HRMgt to a more strategic role and joining other business functions at the strategy table thus assisting better the connectivity between human capital and firm performance (e.g. [Crook et al. 2011]). Finally,

as highlighted by Lado and Wilson [1994], we must warn against the possibility that HR managers and professionals may be trapped and enmeshed in a 'numbers game' designing HR measurement systems (e.g. performance appraisals) that overemphasize individual performance without regard for systems factors. This is certainly not our intent regarding HRMgt analytics.

5. The Research Questions for this study

Introducing HRMgt analytics requires HR practitioners to develop three important, although not mutually exclusive, skill sets: an understanding of data treatment and analysis, the use of IT and a deep understanding of other business areas such as finance. We do not see these three skill sets as separate but rather complementing each other and perhaps should represent the modern HR practitioner's competency luggage. The first, data analysis, is often quoted as the most frequently cited reason as to why HRMgt Analytics is not more widely adopted (c.f. [Cascio, Boudreau 2011]). The shortage of analytically skilled HR professionals makes it difficult for such analytics to be introduced with a degree of conviction within the role of HRMgt. Unlike other areas of business, HR professionals seem to be less conversant with number crunching and the analysis of data patterns [Marler, Boudreau 2017]. Smith [2013] specifically argues that "Human resources is one of the last department to fully leverage its data" (p. 4). In his book 'The New HR Analytics' [2010], Jac Fitz-Enz does not mince his words and states clearly that "the problem was that HR didn't know, and never talked about, the value they were generating because they couldn't – they had no language for it. All their terms were qualitative, subjective and equivocal" (p. xii). Rousseau and Barends [2011] state clearly that becoming an evidence-based HR professional requires an ability to see through the data using appropriate analysis and developing correct metrics.

The second, use of IT, requires that HR practitioners are IT savvy. Bassi [2011] predicts that in the absence of the necessary IT acumen (i.e. how to use analytic software tools) it is highly unlikely that HRM analytics becomes a resident within the field of data-driven management. Levenson [2011] identifies the specific analytical competencies needed for HRM professionals to perform effective analytics. These are basic data analyses, intermediate data analyses, basic multivariate models, advanced multivariate models, data preparation, root cause analysis, research design, survey design, and quantitative data collection and analysis. According to a survey of HRMgt analytics

[Levenson, Lawler, Boudreau 2005] the higher level statistical skills needed to establish business impact are not in high demand but the bad news is that even at this low level of demand there is an inadequate supply. In fact in that survey less than one third of HRMgt analytics professionals reported having competency in advanced multivariate statistics and that proportion drops to only 3% when only considering HR professionals not specifically hired for HRM analytics.

The third area that requires emphasis is the ability of HR professionals to 'connect' through their work with other important departments of the business. Rasmussen and Ulrich [2015] argue that in addition to the shortage of technical skills, evidence suggests that HR leaders with a clear business focus are also in short supply. The line of argument here is that appropriate collaboration between HR practitioners and others in disciplines such as finance, operations, marketing, and engineering may be key to developing the logical frameworks for HRMgt analytics that can engage key decision-makers and connect more clearly with organizational outcomes (c.f. [Crook et al. 2011]).

Hence we postulate the following research questions:

RQ1: How do practitioners in SHRMgt construe the increasing importance of HR-related data for organizational effectiveness?

RQ2: How will the role of SHRMgt practitioners change or evolve in the era of data?

RQ3: Do SHRMgt practitioners possess the necessary skill sets and competencies to benefit from HRMgt data analytics?

6. Method

6.1. Adopted research strategy

At the time of writing, this study is still work in progress. It adopts a qualitative strategy using in-depth interviewing through a semi-structured interview guide. The qualitative research interview is the most widely used technique in qualitative research [King 1994] as it provides the basis for the application of other qualitative approaches and analytical procedures. However, this should not be the prime concern for using the interview as a method for data collection. Rather, the researcher should 'thematise' the interview in the sense that there is a close interrelationship between the purpose of the study, the choice for this method, the research question and the subsequent analytic method [Lee 1999]. A look at the literature on the qualitative research interview (e.g.

[Arksey, Knight 1999] will point out that the purposes of this method are multi-fold but the most distinct are: first, to find out what is in people's minds and to gain access to the individual's perspective before creating *a priori* and impersonally based thematic categories; second, to uncover, explore, understand and validate the meanings interviewees give to certain phenomena and concepts of interest before further analysis; third, to help people articulate and to gain an explicit understanding about issues that are often tacit or implicit; and fourth, to conduct exploratory work before a quantitative study (or other studies) can be done. These purposes all fall neatly within the wider scope of this investigation.

6.2. Participants and selection criteria

The sample for this study is based on a primary selection of the participants who have the knowledge and experience the researchers require, are articulate about the topic and have both the time and the willingness to be interviewed [Denzin, Lincoln 1998a]. The participants were selected using a nonprobability sampling strategy, employing a mix of convenience and purposive sampling [Tashakkori, Teddlie 1998]. At the time of writing, only six full interviews were available and while this is in itself restrictive, it still serves the purpose to get an initial glimpse into the sense-making process related to the topic in hand. All six participants occupy positions of HRMgt in their respective companies, provide direction and have decision-making responsibilities. They therefore occupy a very senior position which fits well in the domain of a strategic function. Participants come from different sectors including hospitality, finance, consultancy and manufacturing. The minimum number of employees in each of the companies is 400 employees.

6.3. Research Guide and Procedure of analysis

A research interview guide was specially developed for the purpose of this research, and based on the research questions to ensure a high degree of validity [Alvesson, Sandberg 2013; Flick 2009]. Twelve questions in total were prepared following a number of discussions amongst the research team. It was also agreed to allow for probing to enable elaboration. According to several authors, semi-structured interviews are used "where there is a desire to hear what informants have to say on the topics and areas identified by the researcher. However… there is also room for the interviewer to improvise questions to clarify or extend answers" [Arksey, Knight 1999, p. 7].

A lot of attention was given to the construction of the questions to avoid lack of clarity, built-in biases or directed responses. Even more attention was given to the interviewing process [Arksey, Knight 1999; King 1994; Lee 1999]. As King [1994] states: "The way in which questions are asked during the interview has a major bearing on how useful the responses are likely to be" (p. 21). This was ensured in the design and the processing of the interviews by: avoiding leading questions of various forms; asking proper probing questions; probing properly 'don't know' answers; presenting the interview guide in an effective manner; ascertaining appropriate personal behaviour during the interviewing process; and being aware of conditions inherent in the interaction with the participant.

After finalising the interview guide, the schedule was thoroughly piloted [Denzin, Lincoln 1998a] using recommendations suggested by Fowler and Mangione [1990]. Each pilot respondent (three in total) was taken through the interview guide and one of the researchers instructed each to think aloud about the clarity and difficulties in understanding the instructions and the questions. They were also asked to describe the purpose and the intention of each question in the guide in their own words to ensure that the researchers were asking questions that were clearly understood in the same way by the participants. This trial run led to further modifications of the interview guide.

All six participants were checked for their suitability in this study and were then briefed about its research aims, its purposes and its theoretical background. They were also informed that the study would involve tape-recording during the sessions even though they were given the option to ask for it to be switched off during certain parts of the process. Confidentiality was fully guaranteed to all the participants. They were then given the time to make and ask questions. Denzin and Lincoln [1998b] argue that rapport, trust and the quality of interaction is imperative in interview settings. Before the interview itself, participants were also instructed what to do in case of not understanding certain questions. They were also asked to emphasise their personal experiences and perceptions rather than their observations about others at the place of work. Each interview was transcribed by the researchers which helped the researchers increase familiarity with the text.

7. Results

7.1. RQ1: How do practitioners in SHRMgt construe the increasing importance of HRM-related data for organizational effectiveness?

As expected, all six HR professionals consider data as being critical and very important in rendering and developing the role of HR as more valuable from a strategic perspective and hence with a direct impact on organizational effectiveness. However, they construe data, quantitative data in particular, as *facilitating* the decisions within business processes both at the input level and at the output level for various HRMgt functions including recruitment, selection and training. One of the participants emphasised the need to rely more on data rather than mere intuition for improving the validity and the precision of one's decisions.

The participants highlighted the need to make sense of 'data', in spite of its importance, as part of the wider domain of HRMgt. HRMgt is not only about reading into data but covers practices that involve engaging to other people at work; the humanisation of the HR profession is equally important. Moreover, the participants noted that the relevance of data in HR-related decisions are even more important when placed within the wider domain of the business. Hence, if data from recruitment and selection is used to support the achievement of targets in specific departments or to enhance the company's manpower planning, then such data really renders the voice of the HR professional at a strategic level. Indeed, the participants agreed on the need for HR-driven data to be integrated to other business activities and that this will serve to ensure that data has a communicative value rather than value in itself.

However, the majority of the participants also consented to the fact that, compared to other management functions (e.g. Marketing, Finance, etc.), HR is the least data-driven and that HR professionals are the least versed in data management even though they recognise that this needs to change. One of the participants, for example, remarked that the inclusion and recruitment of HRMgt data analysts is a move in the right direction, which signifies the increasing importance of data in the function of HRMgt. The interviewees also interestingly remarked that data becomes more critical as the size of the firm increases.

Overall, all the participants remarked that there is a huge need for more quantitative-based based decisions but this would entail that HR professionals, in the majority, acquire more data analytical skills.

7.2. RQ2: How will the role of SHRMgt practitioners change or evolve in the era of data?

Responses from the interviewees were not conclusive on the current strategic function of HRMgt. While some argued that HRMgt is still often considered as a supporting function and sometimes reporting to other management functions like finance, while adopting a strong administrative role, some others stated that they feel that HRMgt is strategic or at least should progress further towards acquiring such a status. Hence one of the participants emphasised that HRMgt is implicitly strategic because it deals with people strategy which is ever more increasing its importance in organizations. Another participant remarked that given that markets are changing, HRMgt needs to become sensitive to such changes and hence needs to develop better insights and foresights which it can relay to the organization at large.

All interviewees agreed that data and data analytics with direct applications to HRMgt will support HRMgt to become a more strategic arm in the organization. Data, they argued, will enhance decisions while it will also challenge people to avoid succumbing to their own biases. They also insisted that relying on data and skilfully interpreting them implies taking the right decisions and allows one to see the future trends. However, a few of the interviewees also insisted that data usage and the role of HRMgt data analytics will always be subject to interpretation and hence does not imply that the function of HR can become completely automated. One interviewee remarked that the first 'teasers' of the new revised role of HRMgt could emulate the form of Industry 4.0 solutions. However, all interviewees explicitly stated that while data analytics and the ability to analyse and critically evaluate data can support HRMgt to rise to a more formal strategic function, data alone is not sufficient. HRMgt is also dealing with people and hence the traditional function of HRMgt should be maintained and improved through the use of data analytics rather than using data analytics to substitute what HRMgt stands for. As one interviewee put it: "Data will certainly keep increasing the importance of HRMgt if HRMgt can use it to its advantage. So the strategic function will actually increase. But data analytics should remain just that: analytics and therefore tools for improved decision making".

7.3. RQ3: Do SHRMgt practitioners possess the necessary skill sets and competencies to benefit from HRMgt data analytics?

A wide array of skill sets was highlighted as being relevant to qualify HRMgt at a more strategic level. These included: a high degree of self-confidence and accountability; the ability to influence and negotiate; the ability to convince; problem solving skills; and also a very good understanding of the legal aspects surrounding employment law. However in view of what skill sets may be necessary to benefit from HRMgt data analytics, the following additional attributes were mentioned: numeracy and analytical skills; the ability to interpret and communicate data trends to members at Board level; critical thinking skills; better anticipation of future business trends including good observation of social and cultural phenomena; and the ability to make firm conclusions from data, knowledge of appropriate measures, indicators and metrics. Many of the interviewees suggested that the acquisition of these skills varies as a function of the size of the organization highlighting the possibility that larger firms are more likely to equip HR professionals with these skills given HRMgt's more strategic value. On the other hand, the interviewees anticipated that while HR managers may well be prepared to add these new skills into their range, they suggested that they are less common amongst HR professionals than they should be.

8. Discussion

To reiterate, the purpose of this investigation was to appreciate the role that data in HRMgt and its use in the form of HRMgt data analytics may have on the evolving role of HR practitioners and more specifically on the value of data analytics in making HRMgt increasingly strategic in scope. As already stated, this is a study in progress and certainly six interviewees are not exhaustive enough to draw any firm conclusions. However, some initial insights are possible.

8.1. Interpretations of findings

Nearly all the interviewees admitted that currently the function of HRMgt is by and large still perceived to occupy a supporting function with the exception of larger firms. As all the interviewees indicated, data are relevant to HR and support HR practitioners in enhancing their decision-making. This is in line with earlier suggestions made by Briner and Barends [2016] and Pfeffer and Sutton [2006], amongst others. Indeed, the ability to measure HRMgt processes is deemed as a way forward to enhance the decision-

quality status of the HRMgt field as proposed by Andrade and Drake [2009] and pushes up further the strategic function of HRMgt [Armstrong 2006; Cassar, Bezzina 2017]. In addition, the use of data for HRMgt purposes is valuable in reducing judgemental biases and hence being a means to improve the purpose of HRMgt at Board level. However, the utility of HRMgt data discussed in the interviews were more at a descriptive level rather than at a more predictive one which is where perhaps data analytics in HRMgt should ideally be [Cascio, Boudreau 2011]. This is mostly because it appeared that data usage and data management for decision-making is not as common as in other management functions. However all the interviewees agreed with the notion that the usage of improved data analytics would better bridge the gap between HRMgt processes and firm performance as highlighted by Crook et al., [2011] amongst others. Nevertheless, all the interviewees agreed that data analytics alone is necessary but not sufficient to constitute a strategic label for HRMgt. Unlike some arguments that automation will radically change the landscape of many professions (c.f. [Frey, Osborne 2017]), the role of HRMgt will, and should still, retain its traditional methods of being close to people within the organization. This is for a variety of reasons, but one of the most important is that not everything can get measured and it would be a grave mistake to substitute specific practices at automation level, which echoes previous warnings by scholars such as Lado and Wilson [1994].

In terms of skills required, these initial interviews indicate an array of important attributes that future HR practitioners are required to possess in order to utilise to the best advantage more sophisticated data analytics. These range from IT skills and the ability to analyse data and statistics (e.g. [Levenson 2011; Marler, Boudreau 2016]) to being able to interpret and place the analytical findings within a larger business framework (e.g. [Rasmussen, Ulrich 2015]). These skills would truly render the HR practitioner more strategically positioned in the firm, but combined with these, the interviewees also mentioned critical thinking. This is in line with calls from other scholars like Rousseau and Barends [2011] who suggest that evidence-based HRM professionals would require an ability to see *through* the data.

Overall, these initial findings seem to indicate that, while there is much scope for HRMgt to elevate itself to a strategic role, the use of HRMgt data analytics could serve as an effective tool in this direction. This is because such an approach would provide better decision-ammunition for HR professionals to influence higher echelons of the firm. In addition, this

entails that HR professionals would need to brush up and improve their ability and skills to deal effectively with such data which will hopefully take them from understanding data value from just a descriptive level to appreciating further its predictive value.

8.2. Limitations and way forward

This study is work-in-progress and hence the findings should be considered no more than interesting highlights. In fact, it is planned to continue qualitative data collection from a wider and larger number of HR practitioners to evaluate these initial findings. In addition, the explanation will be examined using a more empirical approach which will help to understand the prevalence and the relationship between the number of issues that will be raised in the course of these interviews.

9. Conclusion

Data analysis and the ability to discern more unbiased, better quality judgements in decision-making is of critical importance in an organization. In the field of HRMgt this could provide leverage to this important management function to elevate itself to more strategic relevance. This will of course entail an acquisition and acceptance of new skills that traditionally are not part of 'HR'. However, it looks that the future is bright as HR professionals appreciate that this is the way forward to ensure that their function is beyond a supportive one while, at the same time endorsing the traditional role which is related to being close to the people in the firm. Further studies should reveal this reality by understanding more the type of variable relationships that are likely to ensue in an age of increasing data usage importance and perhaps charting out a skill-set that may help to shape future SHRMgt practitioners.

Bibliography

Alvesson M., Sandberg J., 2013, *Constructing Research Questions,* Los Angeles, Sage.

Arksey H., Knight P., 1999, *Interviewing for Social Scientists,* London, Sage.

Armstrong, M., 2006, *Strategic Human Resource Management* (3rd ed.), London & Philadelphia, Kogan Page.

Baba V.V., HakemZadeh F., 2012, *Toward a theory of evidence based decision making*, Management Decision, vol. 50, pp. 832-867.

Bassi L., 2011, *Raging debates in HR analytics*, People + Strategy, vol. 34, pp. 14-18.

Bassi L., Carpenter R., McMurrer D., 2012, *HR Analytics Handbook,* Reed Business, Amsterdam.

Bazerman M.H., Moore D.A., 2013, *Judgement in Managerial Decision Making* (8th ed.)., John Wiley, Hoboken, NJ.

Bondarouk T., Brewster C., 2016, *Conceptualising the future of HRM and technology research*, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, vol. 27, pp. 2652-2671.

Brewster C., 1999, *Strategic Human Resource Management: The value of different paradigms*, Management International Review, vol. 39, pp. 45-64.

Brewster C., Gooderham P.N., Mayrhofer W., 2016, *Human resource management: The promise, the performance, the consequ*ences, Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance, vol. 3, pp. 81-190.

Briner R.B., Barends E., 2016, *The role of scientific findings in evidence-based HR*, People + Strategy, vol. 39, pp. 16-20.

Briner R.B., Denyer D., Rousseau D., 2009, *Evidence-Based Management: concept clean up time*?, Academy of Management Perspectives, vol. 23, pp. 19-32.

Burkholder N.C., Golas S., Shapiro J., 2007, *Ultimate Performance: Measuring Human Resources at Work,* John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ.

Cassar V., Bezzina F., 2017, *Evidence-based HRM through analytics: Reducing the propensity of HRM to become a Cinderella*, Management Sciences, vol. 4, pp. 4-11.

Cascio W., Boudreau J., 2011, *Investing in People*, 2nd ed., Pearson, New Jersey.

Crook T.R., Todd S.Y., Combs J.G., Woehr D.J., Ketchen D.J., 2011, *Does human capital matter? A meta-analysis of the relationship between human capital and firm performance*, Journal of Applied Psychology, vol. 96, pp. 443-456.

Denzin N.K., Lincoln Y.S., 1998a, Entering the field of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin N.K., Lincoln Y.S., 1998b, *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, London, Sage.

Denzin Y.S., Lincoln Y.S. (eds.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry,* Sage, London.

Dik B.J., Byrne Z., Steger M.F. (eds.), 2013, *Purpose and Meaning in the Workplace,* American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

Edwards M.R., Edwards K., 2016, *Predictive HR Analytics: Mastering the HR Metric,* Kogan Page, London.

Farndale E., Sanders K., 2017, *Conceptualizing HRM system strength through a cross-cultural lens*, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, vol. 28, pp. 132-148.

Fitz-Enz, J., 2010, *The New HR Analytics,* APA, New York.

Flick U., 2009, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 4th ed., Thousand Oaks, Sage, California.

Fowler F.J., Mangione T.W., 1990, *Standardized Survey Interviewing: Minimizing Interviewer-Related Error,* Sage, London.

Frey C.B., Osborne M.A., 2017, *The future of employment: How susceptible are jobs to computerisation?*, Technological Forecasting & Social Change, vol. 114, pp. 254-280.

Grant A., Parker S., 2009, Redesigning work design theories: the rise of relational and proactive perspectives. *Academy of Management Annals,* vol. 3, pp. 317-375.

Gratton L., Hailey V., Stiles P., Truss C., 1999, *Strategic Human Resource Management*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Herriot P., Pemberton C., 1995, *New Deals,* John Wiley & Sons, Chichester.

Jackson S.E., Schuler R.S., 2003, *Managing Human Resources through Strategic Partnerships*, 8th ed., Southwestern, Mason, OH.

Jackson S.E., Schuler R.S., Jiang, K., 2014, *An aspirational framework for strategic Human Resource Management*, The Academy of Management Annals, vol. 8, pp. 1-56.

King N., 1994, The qualitative research interview, [in:] C. Cassell, G. Symon (eds.), *Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*, Sage, London.

Lado A., Wilson M.C., 1994, *Human Resource systems and sustained competitive advantage: A competency-based perspective*, Academy of Management Review, vol. 19, pp. 699-727.

Latham G.P., 2007, *A speculative perspective on the transfer of behavioral science findings to the workplace: "The times they are a-changin"*, Academy of Management Journal, vol. 50, pp. 1027-1032.

Lawler III, E.E., Levenson A., Boudreau J.W., 2004, *HR metrics and analytics: Use and Impact,* Human Resource Planning, vol. 27, pp. 27-35.

Learmonth M., 2006, *Is there such a thing as 'Evidence-Based Management'?: A commentary on Rousseau's 2005 Presidential Address*, Academy of Management Review, vol. 31, pp. 1089-1093.

Learmonth M., Harding N., 2016, *Evidence-Based Management: The very idea*, Public Administration, vol. 84, pp. 245-266.

Lee T.W., 1999, *Using Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research,* Sage, Thousand Oaks.

Lengnick-Hall M.L., Lengnick-Hall C.A., Andrade L.S. Drake B., 2009, *Strategic human resource management: The evolution of the field,* Human Resource Management Review, vol. 19, pp. 64-85.

Levenson A., 2011, *Using targeted analytics to improve talent decisions*, People & Strategy, vol. 34, pp. 34-43.

Levenson A., Lawler III, E.E., Boudreau J.W., 2005, *Survey on HR Analytics and HR Transformation: Feedback Report,* Center for Effective Organizations, University of Southern California Los Angeles, CA.

Mabey C., Skinner, D., Clark T., 1998, *Experiencing Human Resource Management,* Sage, London.

Marler J.H., Boudreau J.W., 2017, *An evidence-based review of HR Analytics*, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, vol. 28, pp. 3-26.

Mondare S., Douthitt S., Carson M., 2011, *Maximizing the impact and effectiveness of HR Analytics to drive business outcomes*, People & Strategy, vol. 34, pp. 20-27.

Noon M., 1992, *HRM: A Map, Model or Theory?*, [in:] P. Blyton, P. Turnbull (eds.), *Reassessing Human Resource Management*, Sage, London.

Pfeffer J., Sutton R.I., 2006, *Evidence-based management*, Harvard Business Review (January issue), pp. 63-74.

Rasmussen T., Ulrich, D., 2015, *Learning from practice: how HR analytics avoids being a management fad*, Organizational Dynamics, vol. 44, pp. 236-242.

Rousseau D.M., 2007, *A sticky, leveraging, and scalable strategy for high-quality connections between organizational practice and science*, Academy of Management Journal, vol. 50, pp. 1037-1042.

Rousseau D.M., Barends E., 2011, *Becoming an evidence-based HR practitioner*, Human Resources Management Journal, vol. 21, pp. 221-235.

Schuler R., 1992, *Strategic Human Resource Management: Linking the people with the strategic needs of the business*, Organizational Dynamics, vol. 21, pp. 18-32.

Schuler R., Jackson S.E. (eds.), 2008, *Strategic Human Resource Management,* UK: Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

Schuler R.S., MacMillan I.C., 1984, *Gaining competitive advantage through human resource management practices*, Human Resource Management, vol. 23, pp. 241-256.

Smith T., 2013, *HR Analytics: The What, Why and How*, Tracey Smith Copyright.

Tashakkori A., Teddlie C., 1998, *Mixed Methodology: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Sage, Thousand Oaks.

„CZASY NADCHODZĄ NOWE": REKONSTRUKCJA NOWEJ ROLI STRATEGICZNEGO HR MANAGERA

Streszczenie: Wiele powiedziano na temat podniesienia funkcji zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi (ZZL) do poziomu strategicznego. Przyjęcie bardziej udokumentowanego podejścia bazującego na analizie danych jest istotne i wysoce niezbędne. Stanowi ono wsparcie przy podejmowaniu decyzji, sprawiając, iż są mniej tendencyjne, lepiej udokumentowane, a zarazem bardziej przekonujące. Czy jednak strategiczne zarządzanie zasobami ludzkim bazujące w podejmowaniu decyzji na danych „twardych" będzie wymagało od specjalistów z obszaru HR zdobycia nowych umiejętności? Niniejszy projekt badawczy jest obecnie w fazie realizacji i prezentuje tylko wyniki badań wstępnych. Osoby udzielające odpowiedzi na zadane pytania stwierdziły, iż zastosowanie analizy danych w zarządzaniu zasobami ludzkimi może zdecydowanie podnieść strategiczną wartość HR oraz w lepszym stopniu uzasadniać decyzje podejmowane w zakresie HR, przy czym samo zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi nie może być zredukowane lub zastąpione samymi danymi. Uczestnicy badania stwierdzili również, że specjaliści z zakresu HR będą zobligowani w przyszłości zdobyć nowe umiejętności, w tym te dotyczące nowoczesnych technologii oraz analizy i interpretacji danych. Projekt ma na celu wskazanie zestawu niezbędnych kompetencji do zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi na podstawie analizy danych.

Słowa kluczowe: strategiczne zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi, podejmowanie decyzji na podstawie danych, nowy model kompetencji.