

Developing professional practice analysis



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The Oxford English Dictionary states the following meanings of the word ‘professional’: 1. ‘a person engaged or qualified in a profession’ 2. ‘a person competent or skilled in a particular activity’ In other words, an HR professional needs to have the necessary ability, knowledge and skills in the field of people management. However, that is not enough. One also has to be able to apply them in a consistent manner, i. e. one has to be professional at all times, at the same, high, level. This means that it is important for a professional to continue to develop his/her competence, taking into consideration the continuously changing environment and demands.

The CIPD has developed a core set of knowledge, skills and behaviours that an HR practitioner needs to possess and develop in order to be competent. This core set is incorporated in the CIPD Professional Map and covers the following professional areas:

These areas are the key aspects where HR can contribute to the organisations’ performance and support the overall organisational strategy. Because ultimately HR is only a small, yet important, part of a much bigger body that makes up the organisation. Therefore HR needs to be aligned with the organisational goals and the HR professional needs to be fully engaged with them. This is the ‘Performance’ part of the ‘People/Performance Partnership’.

In addition, the CIPD believes that the HR professional needs to display the following behaviours:

As reflected especially in the behaviour part of the HR professional map, professionalism is about more than just performing well. It is also about the

ethical dimension, in other words the ' People' part of the ' People/Performance Partnership', which focuses on compliance. The HR professional needs to continuously demonstrate the highest level of personal integrity, in the form of equity, transparency and fairness. This is represented by the third ' atom' (' stewardship') in the diagram.

The HR Professional Map also reflects a certain hierarchy of the HR profession, in the form of four bands of increasing professional competence. These bands are to a large extent derived from the three types of professional action: Administrative – support, service and information provision
Advisory – provision of specialist expertise

Executive – addressing human resources challenges at organisational level
If we take the professional area of ' service delivery and information' as an example, this means that an HR professional working in the first band will be hands-on involved in the provision of information, for example sick leave. An HR professional working in the same professional area, but in the second band may be more involved in an advisory role, i. e. the analysis of information and providing advice on how to decrease for example sick leave. In both cases the professional should show similar behaviour, such as ' driven to deliver' and ' collaborative'. Another example is the professional area of ' learning and talent development', where a professional working the first band may be actively involved in the provision of trainings, whereas a professional in the second band may take a more advisory role towards line managers on how they can develop their staff.

2. Thinking Performer The concept of the 'Thinking Performer' was launched by the CIPD in 2002, but has now been replaced by the HR Professional Map. It underlines their belief that every HR professional should always be on top of their game. In other words, (s)he should be both efficient (perform) and effective (think), contrary to, for example, the 'Automated Bureaucrat' (non-thinking performer) or the 'Wish-List Dreamer' (thinking non-performer).

The 'Thinking Performer' is always aligned with the organisational strategies, so (s)he produces the expected results and adds value to the organisation, while at the same time looking for ways to improve processes and activities. However, that in itself is not enough. The 'Thinking Performer' also challenges what (s)he sees/does and thinks for him/her-self instead of blindly following orders. The situation may have changed which affects the usual way things are being done or why they are needed. (S)he looks beyond the results to why they are required and tries to make a positive difference to the organisation. Every organisation is a living organism and the HR professional should be a (pro)-active member rather than a follower. In the HR Professional Map this is represented by required behaviour such as 'curious', 'courage to challenge' and 'personally credible'.

At the same time, and maybe even more importantly, the 'Thinking Performer' is also committed to self-development and has an intrinsic desire to grow. Not just for him/her-self, but also because (s)he recognises that the environment around the organisation and the organisation itself changes continuously, which poses different demands on the HR professional. In order to remain relevant as a professional and to continue to add true value to the

organisation (s)he will have to identify what new skills and knowledge are needed and how to acquire those.

With the ever increasing pace of change in the world, today's market leader can be out of business tomorrow if the organisation fails to adapt to the changes around it. One of the key assets of each organisation is its human capital, i. e. the knowledge, skills and abilities of its staff. If the organisation is to adapt, then it is essential that its staff adapt too. In fact, ' thinking performers' would lead the way and initiate the changes they see necessary for the sustained performance and survival of the organisation. Every organisation should therefore aim to have a high number of, if not only, ' thinking performers' across all departments.

3. Typical Scenarios for an HR Advisor In order to remain effective and to play a valuable role in the organisation, any HR professional will need to focus his/her energy on managing the direct working environment, including him/her-self. This can be visualised by four concentric circles:

Obviously, one's effectiveness starts with one self. The HR professional will take a pro-active role and will take responsibility for his/her own development and performance, instead of waiting for others to take the lead.

Most HR professionals will at one point in their career work as part of a team. Therefore it is also important to develop a thorough understanding of teams and their functioning, including one's own role and behaviour.

A key role of the HR professional is advising and supporting other key-players, such as front-line managers. It is therefore essential that the HR

professional is also able to manage across the organisation. (S)he should be able to look beyond his/her own domain, relate to a wide variety of stakeholders and be able to assess and meet their needs.

Finally, the HR professional should be able to manage upwards, i. e. senior managers. This should be aimed at building up effective relationships, based on mutual trust and respect.

Below two typical HR scenarios will describe how the four concentric circles and the concept of the 'thinking performer' play an important role in any HR professional's working life.

The first example concerns the implementation of a revised salary grid across the organisation. It should obviously be the HR advisor who signals the need for a revised grid in the first place, recognising the changing circumstances. In order to obtain approval for such a revision, buy-in needs to be sought from senior management, which depends partly on presenting a solid business-case, but also on personal relationships with the key decision-makers. The revision is a large project and a project team is required for the implementation. (S)he may be part of the group or even lead it. In any case, for the implementation to be successful the team needs to function effectively, therefore it should be picked carefully and each member has an important role to play. Last but not least, for the implementation to go well, it is also important to adjust to the circumstances of each individual department and understand their particular situation and needs. Once the implementation is finished it is important to have a moment of reflection and

do a lessons-learnt. Not only about the process itself, but also about the role (s)he played and the development (s)he has gone through.

The second example is related to a grievance from an employee about the intimidating behaviour of a (senior) front-line manager. It's the HR Advisor's responsibility to ensure compliance with the proper policies and procedures. (S)he may have to confront the front-line manager, which may not be easy, especially if this is a senior person. It will require courage to challenge and the willingness to step out of his/her comfort zone. The HR Advisor will also need to have built up the trust and support of his/her direct line manager to be entrusted with such a delicate matter. The issue may be related to the working environment of the particular employee, so it is important for the HR Advisor to explore this further, find out more about the department concerned and not to arrive to conclusions too easily. It is important to take an objective position and not be judgmental. At all times reflection on this will be necessary. Finally, other staff may be involved too, for example legal staff if legal actions are required. The HR Advisor is expected to manage the (ad-hoc) team.

4. Continuous Development As indicated at the start of this paper, every HR professional needs to continue to develop his/her competence. This is called Continuous Personal Development (CPD). Although CPD in itself is not new, it has become much more relevant over the past 20 years, due to the increasing pace at which changes are taking place. The (working) environment changes rapidly and with it, the demands placed on any professional. Today's relevant requirements may already be outdated tomorrow and the HR professional will need to keep up with developments to

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remain relevant and effective and able to meet the demands and expectations.

Next to that, the average education level of the working population is increasing, leading to more competition for relevant jobs. The HR professional has to be aware of the competitive working environment, as younger professionals may come onto the market and other professionals are continuing their development and may take his/her place in the job market. Continuous Professional Development is no longer a choice, but a necessity!

There are many ways to assess and identify development needs, including 360-degree appraisals, 'internal client' surveys and various self-assessment methods. The HR Professional Map that the CIPD has developed (see above, under point 1.) is an important self-assessment tool. One can look at the professional areas and the behaviours and identify strengths and weaknesses accordingly. In addition to that the CIPD has developed 'My HR map' which allows HR professionals to take on-line self-assessments against the HR Professional Map.

Having done a self-assessment against the HR Professional Map I have identified my three key development needs for the moment: 1. UK employment law 2. Employee relations 3. Managing & coordinating the HR function They are mainly related to the fact that I have not worked in a UK context before and my aspiration to work in a more coordinating/managing role.

There are a number of ways to assess one's preferred learning style, including Honey & Mumford and VARK. After filling in the VARK questionnaire I have come to the conclusion that I have a preference for learning by Reading and Writing. This means that I prefer an emphasis on words, rather than listening or looking at pictures. Following on from my preferred learning styles I have identified and selected a number of methods to satisfy my development needs:

1. Formal CIPD course – Although this can be time consuming and difficult to fit in next to a full-time job, it gives me a lot of theory, exchange of ideas and I need to write assignments for it.
2. E-learning – Especially in combination with the course mentioned above, I can explore the internet for relevant background material, which can be very recent (e. g. law updates). It also offers me the flexibility to do it at times and locations that are convenient for me.
3. On-the-job training – It still works very well for me to learn on the job. It enables me to apply theory immediately in practice and reflect on the process and the results. However, it would require a potential employer to recognise my potential and offer me the opportunity.

Taking everything of the above into account I have written my personal development plan and record (see annex 1). In line with the concept of continuous development I plan to review and update this regularly, preferably each month. This is necessary, because as explained earlier circumstances change rapidly, which means that my learning objectives may need to change. Simultaneously, I am currently learning at a fast pace and thus need to move the goalposts regularly to really push my learning and try to achieve as much as possible. Objectives should be ambitious! This will

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require regular self-reflection, aided by feedback from others such as teachers, fellow students and direct colleagues.