Unique Factors which shape the Role of the HR practitioner:

An Australian Metals Mining Industry Perspective.

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Bachelor of Commerce

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In (Partial) Fulfilment of the Requirements for Honours in Commerce
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains, as its main content, work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

___________________________________________
Robert Kirkpatrick
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ABSTRACT

The overwhelming voice in the SHRM literature over the past two decades has advocated ‘soft’ human or employee relations over ‘harder’, more prescriptive management science; with much of the literature focusing on the application of high-commitment management (HCM), or high involvement work systems (HIWS), as a way of achieving competitive advantage. Although there has been substantial effort expended to establish a link between such practices and improved firm outcomes, the research has rarely focused on the role of the Human Resource practitioner from the incumbent’s perspective, in implementing and supporting these outcomes. This study uses an approach combining semi-structured interviews, a face to face structured questionnaire based on Ulrich’s (1993) HR role framework, combined with a Delphi study to examine the role of the Human Resource professional within the Australian metals mining industry.

Results from the study indicate that the role of the HR professional within the Australian metals mining industry has not developed as consistent with the dominant discourse on Strategic Human Resource Management in the HRM and SHRM literature. Rather, the evidence suggests that the current HR practitioner is more focussed on operational activities and in performing the ‘employee champion’ role, instead of the ‘strategic’ role.

In the case of the Australian Metals Mining Industry (AMMI) the study has identified that contextual constraints have contributed significantly to the operational focus of the HR role, and that these should not be ignored when examining the implementation of SHRM practices. The results of this study challenge the application of a SHRM ‘best practice’ approach in achieving competitive advantage, and point to a need for re-examining harder, operationally focused but contextually sensitive approach to HRM practices.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The dominant voice in the HRM literature over the past two decades has moved towards encouraging a ‘soft’ human or employee relations versus a ‘harder’ management science. This is represented in various themes, frameworks and models promoting the position that HRM practice should be focused on: long term capacity building through workforce planning and Strategic Human Resource Development (SHSD) (Sheehan, Holland and De Cierri, 2006); developing employee motivation (Davidson, McPhail and Barry 2010) and commitment through work/ life balance programs (Hyman et al. 2003); performance management (Tomer 2001); remuneration; recognition and reward schemes.

These studies have demonstrated that there is a strong correlation between productivity and the activities that drive harmonious employer - employee relationships (Huselid 1995; Lawler 1992; Sheehan et al. 2006; Wright and McMahan 2011). This view of HRM contrasts the ‘hard’ prescriptive, management science approach promoted by Elliot Jacques’ in Requisite Organisation (Cason 1997) adopted by Conzic Riotinto of Australia (CRA) group of mining companies in the mid to late 1990s and currently used by major mining groups or companies such as Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton and Citic Pacific in their Australian based metals mining operations. This less fashionable ‘scientific’ approach has recently regained momentum in academic circles with Kaufman’s economic equilibrium theory for HR maximisation (2010a), revitalising the debate on the legitimacy of ‘hard’ HRM.

The ‘hard’ HRM approach acknowledges contextual considerations which influence the rationalisation of HR activities (Kaufman 2010b). These contextual factors appear to be overlooked by the overwhelming voices advocating a best practice, with seemingly limitless potential, linking motivation and involvement to productivity. It is worth noting that the HRM literature
predominately focuses on North American firms in white collar roles contrasting sharply to the technically orientated, capital intensive Australian metals mining industry.

This study explores specific structural features of the Australian metals mining industry (AMMI) that influence the balance along the continuum from ‘hard’ to ‘soft’ HRM practices.

1.1 Introduction and background to the problem

“The diversity of practice identified in this study suggests that contextual variables determine different roles and practices for HR practitioners. These variables go beyond the factors of structure, business life cycle, product and market place identified by contingency models to an understanding of internal factors such as occupational groups, culture.” (Hope-Hailey et al. 1997, 17).

Figure 1-1 Mining Contribution to the Australian GDP, 2004-2012

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012a, 33)

This study is based on the premise that: Much of the current Human Resource Management (HRM) literature is based on the experience gained in North American, UK and European manufacturing and service industries, which do not share the same structural characteristics as the Australian metals mining industry; And secondly, very few academic studies have explored the unique contextual and operational conditions of the metals mining industry in Australia and how these influence management and HRM practices, despite the major and rapidly growing contribution of mining to the national economy (see above, Figure 1.1 Mining Contribution to the Australian GDP)
Given that the HRM literature has predominately been based upon the dominant manufacturing and service industries and the public sector within North America and the UK, with limited consideration of the unique aspect of the HR practitioner’s role, this Strategic HRM literature is more normative, than descriptive; while the contrasting hard approach to HRM refutes the assumptions implied by SHRM approach, in favour of prescriptive measures that manage explicit scenarios. Thus, in SHRM we find that greater emphasis is placed on what various agents should do to manage people, as opposed to establishing what they actually do (Gratton et al. 1999). This study illustrates the differences between the HR practitioner’s role described within the literature and the HR practitioner’s role within the Australian metals mining industry (AMMI).

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to explore the HR practitioner’s role within the Australian metals mining industry by building a narrative which encompasses the HR practitioners’ activities, internal constraints, the competitive environment in which they operate, and the labour force which their efforts are spent on.

The research objectives are:

- To define the role of the HR Practitioner within the AMMI.
- To explore the historical and emerging future roles of the HR practitioner within the AMMI.
- To identify the factors that influence HRM within the AMMI.

The research is new as it utilises a holistic approach to explore and understand the HR practitioner’s role within a particular industry context. The research examines the co-dependent relationships between HRM, labour profile, and industry characteristics; to understand the true nature of HRM it is essential to also explore the elements which influence HRM, and not exclude contextual influences from the analysis.
Chapter 1: Introduction

The acknowledgement of unique industry based contextual influences substantiates the objectives and methodology of this study. This may be achieved by demonstrating that ‘hard’ HRM is relevant and arguably more effective within certain environment and the advocates of the SHRM perspective within the contemporary literature should be moderate their position to accept the efficacy of alternative approaches. Stated simply, this would validate the theory that the ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ HRM perspective occupy legitimate places on the same HRM continuum given different prevailing, structures, capital and technological considerations, working practices, cultures and other contextual variables which serve as unique industry markers.

1.3 Definition of Key Terms

So as to minimise ambiguity the key terms within the research are here defined (‘in alphabetical order’). A presentation of the frequently used abbreviations is also provided for quick referral (see below, Table 1.1 Abbreviations).

Table 1-1 Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AMMI</td>
<td>Australian Metals Mining Industry</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRM</td>
<td>Human Resource Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>HPWS</td>
<td>High Performance Work Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td>Requisite Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SST</td>
<td>Stratified Systems Theory</td>
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Hard HRM – Also referred to as the scientific approach; ‘hard’ HRM is a pragmatic approach that often dependents on reliable quantitative evidence. Decisions to implement HR activities are seen as relatively impartial, based on the net value to the firm.

HR devolution – To enable HR professionals more opportunity to focus on strategic activities, operational responsibilities are transferred to line managers. The devolution process has been
aided by the introduction of more advanced HR information systems that streamline transactional processes such that they are manageable by non-dedicated HR practitioners.

**HR professional** – Some studies use the term HR professional synonymously with HR practitioner. A HR practitioner is any person who has HR responsibilities, while within this research HR professional is used to explicitly describe a HR practitioner who has tertiary (or equivalent) qualifications.

**Requisite Organisation** – Elliot Jacques’ approach to scientific HRM produced the Requisite Organisation framework – the two principles are that organisational hierarchy is divided into strata with a prescribed span of control; and that every employee has the relevant capabilities and skills necessary to perform their role.

**Strategic human resource management** – Strategic human resource management is a progression of HRM, which explicitly seeks to align HR activities with organisational goals. ‘Best practice’ is covered within SHRM – often referred to as the ‘soft’ approach as SHRM attempts to leverage the human capital.

**Ulrich’s HR framework** – Ulrich demonstrated a framework which accurately classified the various HR responsibilities into four metaphoric roles: *Strategic Partner; Change Agent; Employee Champion* and *Administrative Expert*. Ulrich defined each role with two characteristics: focus (operation - strategic); and activities (people – process). Ulrich argues that the HR function must perform all four roles in order to become a ‘business partner’.

**Ulrich’s administrative expert** – The first operationally focused role is ‘administrative expert’. Typically the incumbent of this role manages the transactional processes – such as reengineering the pay systems, recruitment, or routine book keeping activities.

**Ulrich’s change agent** – The process-focused activities of the ‘change agent’ are often tied to the ‘strategic partner’ role. The ‘change agent’ role falls within category of SHRM with range of
activities and interventions that encourage the human capital to be aligned with the organisational goals. Facilitating new initiatives may be the responsibility of the ‘change agent’, which involves building the capacity to change – such as sharing the vision with all stakeholders; and managing the change – monitoring the process and making the change last (Ulrich 1997).

**Ulrich’s employee champion** – The ‘employee champion’ manages the day-to-day HR activities (or HR operations). Line managers often perform the ‘employee champion’ role, as both share similar goals, such as to “develop credibility with employees by listening, respecting their confidences, and being trustworthy” (Ulrich 1997, 149); However, line managers are not automatically ‘employee champions’, for example when other HR practitioners are the employee’s ‘voice’ or controls the employee-management communication channels.

**Ulrich’s strategic partner** – Ulrich (1997, 79) describes the ‘strategic partner’ as a HR professional who “has the ability to translate business strategy into action” – as a decision-maker for the organisation, or as an expert advisor to the decision-makers. The term is often used a synonym for strategic orientation (this includes people and process activities). However, Ulrich’s orthodox role of the ‘strategic partner’ establishes an organisational architecture conducive for the organisational goals, and devising innovative processes.
1.4 Rationale

Mining HR practitioners are faced with distinct challenges which arise from the unique characteristics of the AMMI. How these contextual influences interact with the role of the HR practitioners remains largely unexplored. Industry specific or contextual influences on the HR practitioners’ role are often identified as being mere limitations of those studies – if at all mentioned. The HRM literature has predominately been based upon the dominant manufacturing and service industries and the public sector within North America and the UK with limited consideration having been given to the uniqueness of the HR practitioner’s role in different operating environments. These studies rarely reflect the unique characteristics of the Australian political, economic, environmental, geographical and industrial relations context (and especially those germane to the mining) making some comparisons of HR strategy and practices almost irrelevant.

Additionally, the SHRM ‘soft approach’ has dominated the contemporary HRM paradigm, advocating for ‘best practices’ to create a competitive advantage which authors from the less popular scientific HRM approach claim to be untenable. The HRM continuum in the literature is divided between supporters of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ HRM. However, Kaufman offers an economic perspective to the scientific HRM approach – suggesting that firms may moderate between both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ HRM approaches to accommodate unique contextual constraints and opportunities.

This study explores the differences in HR processes and practices, with an expectation to find that the practitioner’s role is a pragmatic adjustment to characteristics inherent within the AMMI. That is, certain conditions in the AMMI impact on how business is carried out, and that these conditions are not factored into current models of HRM reported in the literature. These factors are likely to include: high demand for skilled and semi-skilled labour, low value on firm-specific skill, high rate of turnover between competing firms/industries, and remote locations.
1.5 Limitations and scope

This exploratory research has several limitations which are described as follows:

1. The selection of respondents was restricted to HR professionals who were available for interviews within the Perth metropolitan area. This has limited the study’s sample to accurately represent the population; however, the vast majority of the Australian metals mining in Australia are co-ordinated from Perth so any bias would be minimal.

2. The study’s scope was restricted to the perspectives of HR professionals’ at the management level – due to financial constraints and additional complexity it was not feasible to gather information from HR coordinators or supervisors that operated day to day on the front line.

3. The limited availability of the HR professionals, due to the intense activity within the industry during the data collection period in 2012, limited the number of respondents that participated. The methodology allowed for respondents to enter the process at different stages, thus fully utilising the available HR professionals.

4. The time constraints to ensure that the Honours Thesis was completed on schedule also greatly influenced the scope of the research.
1.6 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is structured in three phases, and is reported in five chapters. The chapters are presented in a standard format (see below, Table 1.2 – Chapter Sequence). Chapter One briefly outlines the research – discussing its purpose, rationale, scope and limitations. Chapter Two presents a literature review reflecting the current HR landscape, highlighting the diametric approaches and exploring the HR practitioners’ role. Chapter Three explains the methodology in depth, including a description of paradigms and instruments that are found within the research. Chapter Four reports on the preliminary results of the thematic analysis from the interviews followed by findings from the two Delphi rounds. Finally, Chapter Five presents the conclusion which incorporates the findings from the previous stages of analysis.

Table 1-2 Chapter Sequence

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<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Research methodology</td>
<td>Initial Exploration Phase/</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Results and Discussion</td>
<td>Delphi Phase</td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Final Data Analysis</td>
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The three phases of the research consist of the initial exploration phase, the Delphi phase and the Final analysis phase (see below, Figure 1.1 Research Process and Key). The initial exploration phase collected data from the participants with open ended questions and two surveys – all administered face-to-face. A thematic analysis of the interview data provided the preliminarily themes for the following round. This Delphi round 1 presented the preliminary themes to a panel of experts for comment (the HR professionals). The dominant defining themes for the role of the HR practitioner in the AMMI were identified by participants based on a second round of Delphi responses. The
findings from these phases have been collated in the final data analysis to inform the conclusions of this study.

Figure 1-2 Research Process and Key
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores differing perspectives of HRM, within recent literature, which examine alternative approaches that firms and HR practitioners adopt. Here the value of the HR practitioners’ approach is measured by how well the delivered outcomes are aligned to the firm’s strategy. These perspectives and associated broad approaches to practice reflect different ideas on the role of the HR practitioner. These ideas and approaches are captured and categorised in Ulrich’s (1997) multiple-role HR framework which has made a seminal contribution to understanding the contemporary HR discipline - and specifically the shift towards a greater strategic orientation. The strategic focus has attracted a bulk of literature from proponents of ‘soft’ HRM, suggesting that a competitive advantage derived from human capital can be obtained through long term investment in HR activities based on high performance work systems (HPWS) such as ‘High Commitment’ (Huselid and Becker 1997).

A smaller proportion of authors question the success (or legitimacy) of the strategic HRM, adopting a more scientific approach, or ‘hard’ HRM (see Section 2.5 below – Moderating HR by Scientific Design) where human capital has a diminished value. The scientific (‘hard’) approach maintains that HR cannot create and add extensive value to processes and outcomes from employee commitment and involvement. For examples proponents of Elliott Jaques’ Requisite Organization (RO), with its rigid prescribed structures and processes, reject much of the SHRM literature as “public relations short-cuts that were not soundly based [on reason] and which would not stand the test of time” (Carnegie 2005, 338).

Additionally, Kaufman’s (2010b) economic equilibrium model argues that diminishing returns curb the adoption of HR activities which the Ulrich inspired authors promote. The scientific approach dismisses the claims of ‘soft’ HRM that a sustainable competitive advantage will arise through the enactment of Ulrich’s ‘strategic partner’ and development of HPWS; rather that firms will gain
sustainable value with the engineering of the organisational structure and HR activities which address the specific constraints of the firm’s contextual environment.

In 1977 Sir Roderick Carnegie, the then CEO of CRA group – now called Riotinto, with direct cooperation with Elliot Jaques initiated a radical organisational change to the CRA group mining operations into a Requisite Organisation (Lynch 2011); the change spanned 10 years. The new mining paradigm of CRA highlighted the capabilities required to respond to the tough, cyclic Australian mining industry with a techno-centric culture, whilst accommodating the increasingly mobile, at times mercenary contractors. It is unclear whether CRA’s transformation into a RO influenced the trend of the decreasing long term labour, or if the de-collectivisation of industry was a reaction to other factors. Irrespective, the scientific approach to HRM adopted by CRA demonstrates that different approaches than ‘soft’ HRM perspective can provide value to a firm.

Both the hard and soft perspectives on the role of the HR practitioner have produced convincing credible evidence to advance their position. The ‘soft’ approach lending itself more to knowledge intensive work contexts (Lawler and Mohrman 2003) whilst the scientific (‘hard’) approach favours capital intensive environments where the organisational architecture or “design of institutions must take into account [but not give primacy to] and satisfy the nature of man and not be [entirely] limited to satisfying the non-human criterion of technical efficiency of output” (De Board 1978, 110). Arguably the proponents of the predominant soft perspective on the role of the HR practitioner within the choose selective evidence in the form of case studies, which accept the ‘soft’ HRM practices as best practice while avoiding environments that are unlikely to yield successful results. Examining the contextual influences which have influenced the emergent discourse around the HR practitioners’ role since Ulrich presented his seminal ‘multiple-role model for HRM’ framework in 1997 may explain the “untenable universalistic theory” (Yusoff and Abdullah 2008, 9) that has dominated the HRM literature since that time.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study explores the hard v soft HRM dichotomy within the capital intensive, process and production orientated Australian metals mining industry (AMMI); the study aims to provide original, conceptual and field based insights into how HR is actually practiced in an industry concerned primarily with output and tonnages through appropriate application of technology and technical knowledge. The literature review that follows has been organised to address the major elements of the soft v hard HRM debate; starting with 1) the review of larger concepts the expectations and outcomes of HRM; 2) looking at the literature and concepts on the HRM practitioner role through the lens of Ulrich’s multi-role framework; 3) Presentation of evidence from both sides of the debate to support or refute the features and underlying assumptions of the respective hard and soft models. The underlying purpose of this thesis is to explore the applicability of an alternative discourse to SHRM as it relates to actual HR roles and practices undertaken in the AMMI in 2012. At the very least the thesis offers a perspective which considers the importance of industry and organisational context (in this case the AMMI, mining and mining services organisations) when assessing the universal claims for the efficacy of the SHRM model.

2.1 Expectations of Human Resources

The presence of structured HR departments within major firms demonstrates that there is a common belief that HRM can provide value in the form of skills and knowledge, motivation and commitment which subject appropriate organising principles will lead to increased output or profit. Where and how this value is created is debated within multiple perspectives, though fundamentally HRM aligns human capital with organisational goals, maximises employee commitment, and optimises flexibility and quality of work (Becton and Schraeder 2009; Guest 1987). The intensity of value creation varies, ranging from leveraging human capital as the ultimate source of competitive advantage (Barney 1991; Huselid, Jackson, and Schuler 1997) to ensuring that roles are occupied by employees with the right capacity and skills (Cason 1997). Organisational confidence in HR departments delivering value creation is reflected in the increasing scope of activity and control
Chapter 2: Literature Review

which HR departments possess. HR professionals have gained “elevated corporate status” when
recognised as holding the tools to create a competitive advantage with their human resource
functions (Sheehan, Holland and De Cieri, 2006, 132).

Porter’s competitive advantage model is used extensively throughout the HR literature, with many
authors exploring value adding through organisation of human capital as a basis for competitive
advantage (Colbert 2004; Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall 1988; Snell and Dean 1992; Ulrich 1997;
Wright and McMahan 2011). The logic of the leap from value creation to competitive advantage
may be questionable without careful prior consideration how competitive advantage is determined
and operationally defined. Firms possess a competitive advantage when strengths are leveraged to
implement strategy better than the competition (Porter 1980). Actions that create value greater
than that of similarly engaged actions, by the current or potential competitors within the industry,
may be constitute competitive advantage (Barney 2002). A sustained competitive advantage occurs
when the point of differentiation is valuable, rare, non-imitable, and without a substitute (Porter
1985). When this the concept of competitive advantage is applied to organisational outcomes it
becomes clear that the function of HR is to provide the required human capital to achieve the
targeted competitive capabilities, whilst at the same time maximising the organisation’s generic
strategy. Any additional capability generated from human capital, that isn’t leveraged to extend the
firm’s position, does not provide competitive advantage. Such unrealised organisational capability
may be a symptom of poor integration of the HR function within the organisation.

2.1.1 Best Practice and Best Fit

Two dichotomous terms often used within SHRM literature are ‘best fit’ and ‘best practice’. Best fit
makes the assumption that the HR strategy is reactive to the pre-existing organisation’s business
strategies (Truss and Gratton 1994). As such HR strategy is created as a response to the business
strategy (Buyens and De Vos 2001). Therefore, the HR function realises the business requirements
through vertical integration, thus making the HR strategies match or fit their business strategies.
On the other hand, best practice suggests that bundles of the right HRM components will create synergetic value (Huselid 1995, MacDuffie 1995; Purcell 1999). Referred to as ‘horizontal integration’ of HRM, advocates suggest the right bundle of internal HR activities (such as selection, training, reward and development) will support each other in a synergetic fashion. The best practice is commonly found in high performance work systems. Research has linked best practice with increased employee productivity (Huselid 1995), though this does not necessarily translate to vertical productivity – such that the employee’s efforts are efficiently aligned with the firm’s organisational goals. Whereas best fit perspective is concerned with the explicit alignment between employee effort and long run productivity. The two perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

2.1.2 Value from SHRM

Strategic HRM is the horizontal integration of HRM, which consists of monitoring and aligning the identifiable functions of HRM to the larger business objectives (Buyens and De Vos 2001; Scafidi and Sheehan, 2005). The organisation’s strategy defines the terms in which SHRM operates. The SHRM approach aims to create a competitive advantage within the rules set by activities, such as developing organisational cultures that foster innovation and flexibility (Buyens and De Vos 2001), with less emphasis on challenging the business model. Authors argue that SHRM can create competitive advantage by adopting HPWS: high-performance work systems (Boxall and Macky 2009; Combs et al. 2006; Evans and Davis 2005; Huselid and Becker 1997). HPWS focus on employee involvement, commitment and empowerment, rather than employee control, so as to improve organisational performance (Davidson, McPhail and Barry 2010; Tomer 2001) thereby creating an internal employment system (Kaufman 2010c). In essence, the HPWS proposition is a systemic HR approach that profits from the synergistic combination of practices to create benefits to the organisation, including ones that range from social legitimacy, to corporate social responsibility or increased productivity (Boxall and Macky 2009). The HPWS concept can be divided
into two contrasting approaches: high involvement work systems – HIWS (Lawler 1986), and high-commitment management – HCM (Wood 1999), these respectively cultivate organisational performance by increasing employee capabilities and the maximising of employee effort (Davidson, McPhail and Barry 2010).

The goal of high involvement is to capitalise on human capital through employee empowerment and the decentralising of decision-making (Boxall and Macky 2009). This provides employees with the opportunities for personal development, which in turn increases their ability to problem-solve as well as their flexibility. The higher level of discretionary judgement equips the employee to better resolve ambiguous tasks (Boxall and Macky 2009). There is strong evidence supporting the link between HIWS, and lower employee turnover and higher productivity (Guthrie 2001), this also suggests that high involvement can lead to high commitment.

High commitment management (HCM), also commonly referred to as ‘best practice’, aims to persuade employees to expend higher levels of discretionary effort and therefore create additional value for the firm (Geare, Edgar and McAndrew, 2006). Commitment theory suggests that workers will be more likely to sustain a relationship requiring sacrifice and effort if there is a perceived allegiance and loyalty to the firm (Angelis, Conti, Cooper and Gill 2011). Of the three forms of commitment which HCM fosters - affective, continuance and normative – only affective is strongly linked to employees volunteering additional effort to improve productivity (Meyer, Allen and Smith 1993). Affective commitment is the cumulative result of the employee’s expectations and basic needs being satisfied. The organisation still benefits from the retention psychology of the other two forms of commitment. Continuance commitment is the recognition of the high costs and loss of ‘side bets’ that would result in leaving, while normative commitment is created through socialisation within the organisation that emphasises the obligation to remain.

Purcel (1999) questions the net value generated from a HCM with potentially high running costs. The focus on worker satisfaction may limit a more instrumental Taylorist approach that could
create efficient systems and increase productivity without actively fostering employee satisfaction. Purcell (1999) argues the legitimacy of cost minimisation, or control strategies which reject the SHRM premise of employee empowerment, and that successful contingent models could be contradictory to ‘best practice’. The lack of a universal HCM model would tend to support the suggestion that these HPWS are conditional on contextual influences. Wright, Dunford and Snell are more critical and suggest that “... the integration of the ['resource based view stems from] ...the need to conceptually justify the value of HR and the propensity for the SHRM field” (2001, 702). It is also worth noting that practices that are considered high involvement or commitment in North America, where the bulk of the SHRM literature originates, are viewed as being more conventional practices in other regions such as Europe (Kaufman 2010a).

2.2 Devolution of the HR role

The devolution of the HR practitioner’s role and strategic realignment has dominated the HR literature over the past twenty years. The HR professional has finite resources; therefore more transactional and operational tasks require to be discharged to other actors such as line management and supervisors (assisted by advanced Human Resource Information Systems – HRIS) if the professional is to undertake more resource-intensive strategic activities (Kulik and Bainbridge 2006; Kramer 2012). The proponents of SHRM argue that this must occur in order to permit the HR professionals to develop their strategic role (Yusoff and Abdullah 2008). While the ‘strategic partner’ reality is lagging the rhetoric (Dainty 2011), the demarcation between the function of HR and line managers precedes the increased focus in the academic literature since the mid-1990s (Conner and Ulrich 1996; Sheehan and Scafidi 2005; Sheehan, Holland and De Cieri 2006). When 70% of line managers are being increasingly involved in HR activities (Yusoff and Abdullah 2008) this clearly indicates that more line managers are taking control of transactional day to day HR activities (Kulik and Bainbridge 2006).
Valverde and Ryan (2006) have identified top management, line management, HR department and outsourcing as the four agents which contribute within the HR function. They argued on the basis of findings from their study of 231 Spanish organisations employing 200 or more employees across all sectors that the approach of a firm’s HR function was not homogenous, and fell into seven distinguishing categories (see below, Table 2.1 – Distribution of HRM Responsibilities).

Table 2-1 Distribution of HRM Responsibilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HR as a shared function among internal agents</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>HR as a shared function lead by top management</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>HR function, an agent for each job, a job for each agent</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Partial outsourcing of a wide range of HR activities</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Outsourcing specialised activities and sharing generalist responsibilities</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>HR function as the exclusive domain of the HR department</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>HR function as the domain of the HR department supported by the Line</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Valverde and Ryan (2006, 618)

More than a third of organisations structure ‘Group 7 below – HR function as the domain of the HR department supported by the Line’, where line managers performed as agents of the HR function in executing prescribed policy. Furthermore, the HR function in this group, as well as that in ‘Group 6 – HR function as the exclusive domain of the HR department’, was the domain of the HR department with little strategic partnership. This would suggest HRM as horizontal integration. Two other noteworthy distributions are: ‘Group 2 – HR as a shared function lead by top management’,
where the creation of the HR strategy is generated with the firm’s decision-makers, though there is no guarantee of the inclusion of the ‘strategic partner’; and ‘Group 3 — HR function, an agent for each job, a job for each agent’, where HR specialists are differentiated by a hierarchy of specific tasks within the HR function, or the ‘siloe’d HR function. The approach towards the division of HR activities varies between firms as determined by their organisational contingencies (Valverde and Ryan 2006), these arising partially from contextual considerations as well as from managerial prerogative (Hope-Hailey et al. 1997).

The distribution of HRM responsibilities is significant as it indicates that the structure of the HR function within a firm defines whether the nature of the HR professional roles is specialist, generalists or specialist-generalists. The nature of the HR professional role is likely to influence how far the division of HR labour will span within the firm, that is to say how appropriate it is for line managers to take greater HR responsibilities. More than half of the organisations described the distribution of HR responsibilities as shared by the line – or shared in general. Therefore, the natures of the HR professionals within these firms are likely to be specialists.

While HR professionals are confident that the devolution will continue, with more activities being passed on to the line manager, evidence suggests that the line managers are not enthusiastic about receiving additional HR responsibilities (Cascón-Pereira, Valverde and Ryan 2006; Kulik and Bainbridge 2006). Thus the process of devolution is not without its own snares and difficulties.

A 2006 study surveyed 667 HR practitioners across all the sectors within Australia recorded that 48.7% of HR professionals indicated as the reason for devolving the HR role: ‘to allow HR staff to spend more time on strategic activities’ (Kulik and Bainbridge 2006). Divergent perceptions are held by the line managers, sceptical about the delegation of HR activities. This devolution or delegation of HR responsibilities as political and according to the authors may contribute to line manager turnover. Less than a third of line managers believed that devolution would lead to value by refocusing the HR professional’s role from operational to strategic activities (Kulik and Bainbridge 2006).
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The reality of devolution is questioned when line managers inherit additional responsibilities without any additional resources or autonomy (Cascón-Pereira, Valverde and Ryan 2006). Such work intensification is unlikely to result in the intended outcomes. When devolved HR related responsibilities are unable to be completed the line managers will prioritise what they perceive to be their primary function, and neglect activities which are peripheral – this is likely especially when the line manager receives no additional recognition for the additional responsibilities - and subsequently the HR duties are not delivered with the same quality than when HR was handling them (Renwick 2003). The rhetoric of devolution is focused on the activities, without much consideration for the corresponding autonomy required to effectively perform those tasks. Firms that are proponents for centralised decision-making may require a layer of bureaucratic control as a substitute for line manager autonomy. This form of devolution will create a more prescribed and monitored managerial style for the line manager (Hope-Hailey et al. 1997). Such monitoring can be argued as necessary as line managers may not be consistently objective in their treatment their co-workers (Renwick 2003). Others argue that this ‘closeness’ is precisely why line managers should adopt more HR responsibility, as HR professionals can become disconnected with the realities of the line due to their preference for strategic activities (Yusoff and Abdullah 2008).
2.3 The HR Business Partner

The roles of the HR practitioner has been categorised by several authors (see below, Table 2.2 - HR Role Typologies). The advances within the HR discipline are mirrored by the role descriptions given by these authors, from the simple conformist - deviationist (Legge 1978) to the later strategic – legalistic - operational role (Wiley 1992).

Table 2-2 Role Typologies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/s</th>
<th>Role typologies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legge (1978)</td>
<td>Conformist, Deviationist;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schuler (1990)</td>
<td>Business Person, Shaper of Change, Consultation to Organisation/Partner to Line, Strategy Formulator and Implementer, Talent manager, and Asset Manager and Cost controller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyseon and Fell (1992)</td>
<td>Clerks of Works, Contract Manager, and Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storey (1992)</td>
<td>Advisers, Handmaidens, Regulators, and Change makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiley (1992)</td>
<td>Strategic Role, Legalistic role, and Operational Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulrich (1997)</td>
<td>Administrative Expert, Employee Champion, Change Agent, and Strategic Partner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Yusoff and Abdullah (2008, 12)

The most significant role typology is the seminal contribution of the multiple-role HR framework by Ulrich in which he has redefined the boundaries around of the HR practitioner’s role and attendant capabilities. Ulrich’s conceptual model differentiates the HR practitioners’ role by on two axes of a 2x2 matrix, notably – Orientation of Activities as ‘People or process’, and primary focus of the role...
‘Operational or Strategic’ (Conner and Ulrich 1996). This matrix of orientation provides the framework for Ulrich’s four multiple-role metaphors: Employee Champion; Change Agent; Administrative Expert and Strategist (see below, Figure 2.1 – Ulrich’s Role Metaphor and Deliverable; Table 2.3: Ulrich’s Definition of HR Roles).

Figure 2-1 Ulrich’s Role Metaphor and Deliverables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic</th>
<th>Operational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td><strong>People</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Partner</td>
<td>Change Agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executing strategy</td>
<td>Creating a renewed organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Expert</td>
<td>Employee Champion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building an efficient infrastructure</td>
<td>Increasing employee commitment and capability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Ulrich (1997, 24-25)

Conner and Ulrich (1996) have reviewed the HR practitioner’s role in order to test Ulrich’s multi-role framework and determine the relevance of the HR practitioner as a ‘strategic partner’ compared to the administrative focus of previous research. The data from 256 interviews of high positioned HR managers and executives from medium to large firms in North America demonstrated that HR roles were represented within Ulrich’s four role metaphors. Furthermore they showed that the HR role was resistant to moving from an operational focus. Ulrich (1997) explains that the HR department must be structured to act as a ‘business partner’, whereupon all four role metaphors and their associated activities are successfully delivered.

The deliverables of each role within Ulrich’s ‘business partner’ recommendation can be divided between multiple agents; for example line managers may have the responsibility of ‘administrative expert’ while outside consultants may act as ‘change agents’ (Buyens and Vos 2001; Freyens 2010; Harris 2008). Yet, the sole conversation within HRM literature fixates on the strategic orientation of the ‘strategic partner’ while it neglects Ulrich’s two operational focused roles- administrative expert
and employee champion. The ‘strategic partner’ role is often used synonymously for strategic focus – combining ‘change agent’ and ‘strategic partner’.

Some confusion (or at least conflation of ideas) may be occurring within the current literature when authors begin to refer to HR professionals who conduct the roles of the ‘strategic partner’ and ‘change agent’ simply as ‘strategic partners’. One point of concern arose in Ulrich’s original study which aimed to confirm his four metaphor roles that are required to become ‘business partner’ (Conner and Ulrich 1996); Ulrich revealed that the ‘change agent’ activities were commonly the responsibility of ‘strategic partners’ – a proposition which on face value is remarkably similar to the earlier role typology described earlier by Wiley (1992) as strategic role, legalistic role and operational role. The significant contribution of Ulrich’s role typology is the precise description he provides for each role (see next page, Table 2.3: Ulrich’s Definition of HR Roles); Change management creates value through innovation while SHRM focuses upon aligning HR activities to the organisational strategies. These two activities are frequently linked, and as such they are often synonymous – it is important to clarify that the two roles have very distinct responsibilities.
## Table 2-3 Ulrich’s Definition of HR Roles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic human resource</td>
<td>Strategic partner</td>
<td>Organisational awareness</td>
<td>To implement strategies and build a value created organisation</td>
<td>To align human resource management practices with the organisation’s choice of strategy and with the environment within which the organisation operates: organisational diagnosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management</td>
<td></td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Customer Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stress tolerance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oral communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of human resource</td>
<td>Administrative expert</td>
<td>Attention to detail</td>
<td>To implement an efficient and effective infrastructure (i.e. getting things done better, faster, and cheaper)</td>
<td>To create congruence among the various human resource management practices and techniques; reengineering organisational processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>processes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oral communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Information management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Legal, government, and jurisprudence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Technical competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee advocate and human</td>
<td>Employee champion</td>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>To increase employee commitment and competencies</td>
<td>Employees are increasingly critical of the success of organisations. EA focuses on today’s employee; HR developer focuses on how employees prepare for the future. Listening and responding to employees: providing resources to employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resource developer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oral communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change management</td>
<td>Change agent</td>
<td>Reasoning</td>
<td>To innovate in order to improve the competitive position of the organisation</td>
<td>To catalyse, change and manage the change capacity: managing transformation and change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Influencing/negotiating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Integrity/honesty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Creative thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stress tolerance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oral communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Lemmergaard (2009a, 186) and Ulrich (1997, 25)*
2.4 The Strategic HR practitioner

As the HR function has developed in complexity this demands more from the HR practitioner:

“HRM must be vertically integrated with strategic planning and horizontally integrated with other human resource functions such as training and development, compensation and benefits, recruitment and selection, labour relations, and the evaluation of the Human Resource planning process, to allow for adjustments to be made to confront rapidly changing environmental conditions” (Pynes 2004, 401).

The literature heralding the strategic orientated HR practitioner has two distinct aspects: the integration of HR within the organisational strategic decision process - vertical integration, and the development of HR’s role to foster more strategically aligned activities – horizontal integration.

2.4.1 The Strategic Partner

Lemmergaard (2009a) describes Ulrich’s revised work on the ‘strategic partner’ as advocating the integration of a ‘best fit’ approach instead of following the ‘best practice’. The ‘best fit’ approach seeks outcomes which are valued by the firm, whilst ‘best practice’ capitalises upon efficient combinations which may not be valuable to the firm. However, the pursuit of value from leveraging human capital within SHRM has elevated ‘best practice’ which stimulates horizontal productivity potentially at the cost of vertical productivity.

The increasing competitive pressures on firms highlight the importance of the strategic partner in the continued development of the HR function. Firms are relying on the HR function to develop and implement strategic responses to stresses brought about by intensified international competition, slower growth, and declining markets (Buyens and De Vos 2001). Lawler (2005) suggests that when exposed to these threats the strategic partner product line is best suited to contribute the largest value. Buyens and De Vos (2001) explain that the involvement within the firm’s strategic process allows the HR function to deliver flexibility, creativity and innovation, as well as provide higher quality information leading to effective decisions (Dean and Sharfman 1996).
“Operating truly strategically implies that the HR strategy and business strategy are mutually informative” (Lemmergaard 2009a, 187).

Fairbairn (2005) suggests that the strategic partner has a powerful impact on an organisation through cultural transformation. Without encroaching on the ‘change agent’s role’, the strategic partner is responsible for designing a culture with detailed values and beliefs in accordance to how the firm intends to conduct business. Fairbairn (2005) continues that a successful culture change cannot occur solely through HR, as cultural transformations must be systemic, and this includes having the support of other business leaders within the firm. This is significant as it proposes that where the ‘strategic partner’ is the specialist, defining and shaping of the firm’s culture requires the participation of all major stakeholders.

The zenith of ‘strategic partner’ occurs when the HR is embraced the decision-makers (with possible inclusion on the Executive team). Given a role in shaping the firm’s strategic goals and stream of decisions can expand the role and attendant capabilities of HRM to high level value producer (Buyens and De Vos 2001; Schuler and Jackson 1987). The success relies on other decision-makers to create a partnership that fosters a contributory information relationship (Lemmergaard 2009a). Ulrich and Beatty (2001) challenge HR professionals to become more than partners, by striving to be players that contribute. This does not suggest that ‘strategic partners’ should attempt to dominate with ideals which are nestled within their discipline. The HR professional must evolve into a player that has “... move[d] beyond its polite [people focused] roles and police [regulation focused] roles and add value to executing a firm’s strategy...” (Ulrich and Beatty 2001, 293).

Ulrich and Beatty (2001) have detailed the six essential characteristics for a HR professional to be a player. The player acts as: coach, leader, conscience, architect, builder and facilitator. As with the business partner in Ulrich’s multi-role framework, the player has various roles that must all be represented (Ulrich and Beatty 2001). Lemmergaard (2009a) points out that Ulrich is ambiguous as
to how (and if) this model fits within his original framework. It is possible that the new player model is left intentionally vague as it does not fit neatly into Ulrich’s’ definitive multiple-role framework.

It is more likely that the ‘player’ model is intended as a guiding set of aspirational principles for how each of the role incumbents should approach their activities, rather than be exclusive to ‘strategic partner’ typology.

A different approach is discussed by Lawler (2005), where he suggests that a role separate from operationally focused HRM must exist, reporting directly to the CEO or other equivalent senior decision-maker. This separation would be similar to marketing and finance versus transactionally burdened sales and accounting decision-making processes.

At which stage of the decision process the HR function is to be included was studied by Buyens and De Vos (2001), and they determined that involvement was required at different stages by different HR roles. Various studies have examined the interaction between HRM and the firm’s strategic decision-making process, and these have put forward a variety of distinct configurations linking the two (Bennett, Ketchen and Schultz 1998; Golden and Ramanujam 1985; Miles and Snow 1984; Wright, McMahan, McCormick and Sherman 1998). Cook and Slack (1991) readdressed the problem by creating a model showing four discrete stages of when HRM is involved within the decision process: from very early – Value-driven HRM, to very late – Reactive HRM (see below, Figure 2.2 – Involvement of HRM in Decision-Making Process). Buyens and De Vos (2001) suggest that this involvement model can be included to expand Ulrich’s framework, as all the roles require involvement at different periods and with different actions.

The success of incorporating these above mentioned criteria has been monitored closely over the past two decades. It has been demonstrated that HR practitioners are more strategically orientated, though there is little supporting evidence that HR practitioners are effective ‘strategic partners’. Authors have also questioned the efficacy of HRM practitioners (Michelson and Kramer, 2003), and commented on the poor implementation of SHRM activities (Huselid, 1993; Kaye, 1999;
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Crompton, 2009; Freyen 2010; Dainty 2011). Most authors agree that there is a “growing acceptance of internal resources as sources of competitive advantage [have] brought legitimacy to HR’s assertion that people are strategically important to firm success” (Wright, Dunford and Snell, 2001, 701).

According to Choo, Halim and Keng-Howe (2010), the idea that HRM can provide avenues to gain an competitive advantage is held by the majority of CEOs, who rate HRM as a source of high value. By contrast only a third of executives view HR as a ‘strategic partner’ (LaMarsh 2004). Although the HR professional’s role has focused on more strategic elements, the reality of the ‘strategic partner’ in Australia is still mostly talk which is not supported by action (Dainty 2011).

Ulrich’s framework is limited by the lack of supporting evidence for the realisation of the ‘strategic partner’ role as a source of positive returns against hard performance measures. Three categories of limitations include: Executive resistance, insufficient tools or abilities, and contextual factors. There is substantial pressure placed upon the HR function to perform all the roles satisfactorily, with the addition of an increasing expectation on deliverables whilst the resources available are not expanded (Lemmergaard 2009a). The reallocation of the HR professional’s time has been offset with many administrative tasks being absorbed by advancing technology (LaMarsh 2004). The re-engineering of HR activities have streamlined or automated many HR activities (Lemmergaard

Figure 2-2 Involvement of HRM Decision-Making Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value Driven HRM</th>
<th>Reactive HRM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Anticipative</td>
<td>• Reactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognise and determine</td>
<td>• Glue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Give meaning</td>
<td>• Resolve misfits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Timely involvement of HRM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Executive HRM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Passive adaption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Executing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Here-and-now problem solving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Buyens and De Vos (2001, 76)

According to Choo, Halim and Keng-Howe (2010), the idea that HRM can provide avenues to gain an competitive advantage is held by the majority of CEOs, who rate HRM as a source of high value. By contrast only a third of executives view HR as a ‘strategic partner’ (LaMarsh 2004). Although the HR professional’s role has focused on more strategic elements, the reality of the ‘strategic partner’ in Australia is still mostly talk which is not supported by action (Dainty 2011).

Ulrich’s framework is limited by the lack of supporting evidence for the realisation of the ‘strategic partner’ role as a source of positive returns against hard performance measures. Three categories of limitations include: Executive resistance, insufficient tools or abilities, and contextual factors. There is substantial pressure placed upon the HR function to perform all the roles satisfactorily, with the addition of an increasing expectation on deliverables whilst the resources available are not expanded (Lemmergaard 2009a). The reallocation of the HR professional’s time has been offset with many administrative tasks being absorbed by advancing technology (LaMarsh 2004). The re-engineering of HR activities have streamlined or automated many HR activities (Lemmergaard
2009a), this allows front line managers to competently manage these tasks (Kulik and Bainbridge 2006).

The apparent reluctance for senior managers to bestow the necessary authority on to the HR professionals, to transform into ‘strategic partners’, may arise from the decision-makers and executives being unwilling to grant such authority. The executives’ unwillingness can manifest for several reasons; Buyens and De Vos (2001) explain that reservations to deliver further authority to HR professionals is due to the normative characteristics of the models and theories of the HR function not aligning with company goals and priorities. LaMarsh (2004) describes how ambiguity concerning the deliverables of the ‘strategic partner’ increases the perceived risk in obtaining designated outcomes. Put simply, the decision-makers perceive that implementation as a too costly or problematic alternative for the likely returns from the strategic partnership, when compared to the adoption of more operationally focused traditional methods of obtaining similar outcomes.

This reluctance to support the strategic partner model may also stem from the HR practitioners inability to convey the benefits or perform the role. HR professionals may require specific tools to convey the HR concepts that will create value in a language which senior executives would understand, and they must also have the skill to persuade the decision-makers (Lawler 2005); in other words HR professionals must have the specific language and have an appropriate mind set to contribute to the strategic decision conversation within the firm (Lemmergaard 2009a). Executives are unlikely to make a rational decision to empower the ‘strategic partner’ if they cannot source a HR professional with the appropriate skill set (LaMarsh 2004); skill sets not required of the majority HR practitioners operating in more traditional HR roles (Dainty 2011). Ulrich’s player model places more demands in selecting a higher quality candidate as more roles must be performed simultaneously (Lemmergaard 2009a). Lemmergaard argues that concurrent roles create inherent paradoxes that arise from opposing interests between roles:
“For example, the role of the ‘strategic partner’ conflicts with the role of employee champion. The former requires the HR function to cooperate with top management, with the risk of alienating employees because long-term strategic planning and employee needs might not cohere.” (Lemmergaard 2009a, 187)

Contextual considerations are also likely to influence the development of the ‘strategic partner’.

The contextual factors include internal characteristics - such as organisational culture, and external conditions – ranging from industry stability to country of operation. Occupational cultures’ theory explains that differentiated subgroups are phenomena of organisational culture (Labedz and Lee 2011). These subgroups form when distinct professions are dissimilar to larger contingents of the organisation. The contrast of organisational professions can lead to divergent values and beliefs; this often occurs with executives and it causes disengagement with the organisation. The severity of disengagement is likely to create opposition to sharing authority and responsibility, such as is required with the ‘strategic partner’ role. This effect is tempered by the location of operations due to different levels of collaboration between countries and regions, or even industries (Lemmergaard 2009a).

The constraints of the external environment influences the strategic options and decision process, however “managers retain a substantial degree of control over strategic choice ... even in the context of constraints” (Dean and Sharfman 1996, 369). The importance of these constraints is that they moderate achievable outcomes and strategies, whereby greater constraints and instability reduce the level of decision-making than would be available within a stable environment. That is to say, decision-making has a larger effect in stable environment and therefore the value of ‘strategic partners’ is high; this is as compared to environments of instability where decision-making opportunities are restricted. Thus, HR functions that operate within a stable environment are more likely to have a ‘strategic partner’ representation.
2.5 Operational HRM

Ulrich’s ‘business partner’ represents the strategically orientated ‘strategic partner’/‘change agent’ and of the operational HRM – the ‘administrative expert’ and ‘employee champion’. The strategically orientated roles and operational HRM are often categorised as opposing or exclusive as authors suggest that the two hemispheres of Ulrich’s business partner have competing stakeholders. The “new agenda for HR [to] champion competitiveness” (Wang and Niu 2010, 13) has captivated the energies and publications of academic and professional writers and researchers with the bulk of HRM research examining the strategic progression of the HR practitioner. This tendency to focus on the more fashionable topics, the HR conversation largely dismisses or overlooks the bulk of the operational HRM practices. The extent to which more prescriptive frameworks for task production and outcome focused HRM practice is discounted may lead one to believe that it contains little value, or that it can be performed by line managers.

The recent studies that have explored operational HRM capabilities typically do so by utilising Ulrich’s role metaphors. The purpose of operational HRM can be generalised as to “[maintain] vital contact with employees’ concerns and provide the opportunity to establish trust and the credibility of the function within the organisation” (Harris 2008, 37). Within the HR function, operational HRM facilitates ‘other managerial work to happen’ – such as leveraging their expert knowledge to assist line managers in resolving issues which are preventing the line managers from pursuing their own primary role (Harris 2008). Therefore, the success of strategic HRM to “bring HR initiatives into greater alignment with overall business objectives” (Laabs 2010, 53) is dependent on the enforcement of these initiatives by the operational HRM – ‘administrative expert’ and ‘employee champion’.

The importance of operational HRM enacting strategic policy is overshadowed by the questioning or implicit dismissive tone of the contemporary writers in the field working from both a positivist and critical paradigm. Strategic and operational roles are portrayed with polarised perspectives, so
far that HR practitioners “... need to perform increasingly complex and at times paradoxical roles” (Yusoff 2012, 144). Lemmergaard (2009b) explains that “… the ‘employee champion’ role might conflict with the ‘strategic partner’ role, as strategy might dictate that employee needs suffer at the expense of business development”. Upon close inspection such conflicts seem entirely ‘human’, that is to say that all business decisions need to be rational, whether or not HR initiatives result in a better outcome for employees. The primary stakeholder of operational HRM is the firm, thus situations will occur where the HR professionals fulfilling the ‘employee champion’ will make decisions that appear to have short-term negatives or penalties for employees. The ‘administrative expert’ and ‘employee champion’ have distinct roles which ultimately serve the long term interest of the firm.

2.5.1 The ‘Administrative Expert’

Ulrich (1997) demarcates the ‘administrative expert’ as being responsible for building an efficient infrastructure. Yusoff (2012) explains that as the ‘administrative expert’ is ‘burden’ by the day-to-day operational HR, the role is best described as:

“[The administrative expert’s role] concerns more with process efficiency that involve people and most of the HR function’s time is spent on this role. This role requires that HR professionals design and deliver efficient HR process for staffing, training, appraising, rewarding, promoting, and otherwise managing the flow of employees through the organisation” (Yusoff 2012, 145).

This definition is supported by other authors who state that the ‘administrative expert’ refines the organisational processes to allow the infrastructure to create value, which it does by improving efficiencies and reducing the costs of the firm’s transactional activities (Wang and Niu 2010). The ‘administrative expert’ is the segment of the HR function which specialises in the transactional processes and the associated support for these processes (Voermans and Veldhoven 2006); the ‘administrative expert’ has more traditional ‘personal management’ responsibilities – including the transactional activities of training and hiring (Lemmergaard 2009b).
2.5.2 The ‘Employee Champion’

The primary outcome of the ‘employee champion’ role is to increase employee commitment and capability (Ulrich 1997). These outcomes are achieved by encouraging the employees to be loyal to the firm, as a response to heightened employee well-being (Lemmergaard 2009b). Improving employee well-being is usually linked to a “focus on operational, short term problem solving and support of employees and managers in day-to-day matters” (Voermans and Veldhoven 2006, 890).

In these duties the ‘employee champion’ acts as a leader that generates support from the employees, helping to build a stable work environment with minimal conflict (Laabs 2010). An appropriate skill set is required by the HR practitioner to perform the leadership function of the ‘employee champion’ (Fuller 2006); specifically entailing the ability to communicate within the organisation. The ‘employee champion’ provides a ground floor voice – highlighting what the employees view as important – that allows for strategic alignment between employees and the firm’s goals (Laabs 2010; Yusoff 2012).

Subsequently, the ‘employee champion’ is also the firm’s representative to the employees – such that the employees concerns may be considered by the decision makers. When, due to economic restraints, no favourable action can be taken it is particularly important that the ‘employee champion’ is trusted by the employees otherwise non-favourable outcomes may be viewed by them as the firm behaving opportunistically.

These descriptions assume that employee well-being is only influenced by immediate concerns, with long term concerns remaining the domain of the ‘strategic partner’. Lemmergaard (2009b) describes how employee well-being can improve the firm’s capability, yet Huselid and Becker’s (1997) HPWS’ long term HR activities, which also improve commitment, are seen as activities of the ‘strategic partner’. This illustrates why the ‘employee champion’ needs to be included in the strategic conversation as they implement the strategically aligned activities.
2.5.3 Development of Operational HRM

A significant shift in the way operational HRM is being carried out is motivated by the HR practitioner’s quest to become a ‘strategic partner’ and the advancement of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) – including Electronic Human Resource Management (E-HRM). The current conversation in the HR literature argues that firms will obtain a competitive advantage by shifting resources “liberated from administrative shackles … to developing intellectual capital, social capital and managing knowledge” (De Alwis 2010, 47). Traditional transactional and communication processes, normally the responsibility of operational HRM, are either being devolved to line managers or replaced by new technologies. The proliferation of advanced HRIS into firms allows HR professionals to spend more time on strategic activities – such as developing strategies to create value by leveraging human capital.

Sophisticated forms of HRIS improve the capabilities of the HR function, including recruitment and selection, training and development, and performance appraisals; while less sophisticated HRIS replicates rudimentary HR activities, such as payroll or absence records (De Alwis 2010). The development of HRIS to suit a firm’s needs can substantially reduce costs, empower line managers to discharge more HR activities, provide more information to employees, and can link human capital between departments (De Alwis 2010). HRIS development and introduction of other technologies is facilitating the incorporation of E-HRM technology – which utilises a firm’s intranet to deliver a time-saving centralised transactional system across multiple departments, sites, or subsidiaries (Voermans and Veldhoven 2006).

2.5.4 Consequences of the E-HRM and Strategic Orthodoxy

E-HRM leads to devolution of the HR practitioners’ role, further contrasting the two perspectives of the HR practitioner and line manager (Voermans and Veldhoven 2006). The relational impact of HRIS between HR professionals and line managers has not been thoroughly explored. De Alwis suggests that an adversarial rift may occur between the operationally burdened line managers and
the increasingly strategic HR practitioner (2010). The effectiveness of the ‘employee champion’ is often undermined by antagonistic attitudes created by the frustration that comes from a general lack of training for line managers to operate the sophisticated E-HRM (Fuller 2006).

The tenacious ‘pursuit of the strategic role’ devalues the role of the ‘employee champion’, as the HR responsibilities surrounding ‘employee well-being’ are delegated to the line manager (Harris 2008). The HR practitioners’ shift towards more advisory roles, where traditional HRM interaction with employees is replaced by E-HRM and line managers, limits the effectiveness of the ‘employee champion’ role (Harris 2008). This view is supported by Fuller (2006) who adds that the deterioration of the ‘employee champion’ is further exasperated with the trend of off-site HRM centralisation.

Lemmergaard (2009b) reports that HR devolution leads to additional employee frustration as new roles are poorly defined – resulting in dysfunctional interaction between HR professionals and line management. HR professionals deliver E-HRM solutions to the line managers as tools to expand current HR capabilities, so that the new access of gathering and exploring HR data is central to improving HR outcomes; however, the line manager’s growing mistrust interprets HR devolution as a method for HRM to discard low value activities.

The benefit of further HR devolution is dependent on the actual value of the line managers’ time that is spent on operational considerations (Harris 2008). That is to say, in a scenario where quality line managers are a rare and expensive resource they may create more value for the firm by focusing on task, production and other responsibilities, rather than transactional HR duties. Conversely, the allocation of the line managers’ time is therefore also influenced by the availability of quality HR practitioners to efficiently maintain HR services and support functions for the line.

The strategic shift of HRM tends to occur in periods of economic prosperity, while during economic downturns “… [there are] tremendous pressures on HR professionals to revert to the more reactive
role of fighting fires” (Budford and Mackavey 2003, 600); thus during economic downturns firms are more willing to sacrifice HR capabilities – through lay-offs and outsourcing. It is therefore important for HRM to reinvent administrative activities so as not to risk the loss of core capabilities during less favourable economic conditions (Budford and Mackavey 2003).

The future role of the ‘administrative expert’ is to develop as an ‘organisational diagnostician’ who can support decision-makers with expert opinion on how to improve organisational processes (Wang and Niu 2010). Yusoff et al. (2010) proposes that the HR function can successfully perform the role of the ‘business partner’ by assigning specific roles to each unit within the HR department – with the corporate level HR focusing on the ‘strategic partner’/‘change agent’ roles, while the unit level HR practitioners perform the ‘administrative expert’/‘employee champion’ roles. This highlights the need for the HR function to retain experts on SHRM and operational HRM if the ‘business partner’ is to be realised.
2.6 Moderating HRM by Scientific Design

Variations on scientific management or the neo-Taylorsim approach associated ‘hard’ HRM has been practiced in mining, manufacturing and other task and production focused industries in the post WW2 period. These concentrate resources and human effort on efficient and flexible production methods and cost minimisation (Roan, Bramble and Lafferty 2001). The ‘hard’ approach maintains that the ends justify the means, without any heightened responsibility to provide for the workers beyond the legislative and social minimums. Although both approaches seek the same ends, the ‘soft’ approach emphasises HRM activities to obtain worker cooperation and thereby believes that HRM can generate larger benefits (Roan, Bramble and Lafferty 2001). The ‘hard’ approach is often criticised for impeding the effectiveness of ‘soft’ HRM (Nankervis and Leece 1997), and is seen as a tool to exploit employees (Drucker et al. 1996). The advocates for ‘hard’ HRM on the other hand suggest that the ‘soft’ approach only generates short run benefits, and that this is unsuitable for industries with long term horizons created by the reliance of large scale capital investment in infrastructure and equipment before production can occur (Lynall 2009).

Two concepts drawn from Taylorism to be explored are: the productivity of labour through a socially engineered, stratified organisation - Elliot Jaques’ Requisite Organisation (RO) (Cason 1997); and an economic rationalisation to enhance efficiency (Kaufman 2010a). Unlike the ‘soft’ approach, these two theories do not reject the activities of the alternative perspectives, instead they create prescriptive frameworks in which HRM and allied human activities are structured moderated and controlled so as to maximise long term outcomes.

2.6.1 The Requisite Organisation and Stratified Systems Theory

The purpose of Elliot Jaques’ RO is to provide a hierarchical framework that creates a sustainable competitive advantage that can persist and adapt to the changing environment (Cason 1997). The framework is based on a scientific approach that prescribes a specific number of organisational levels, determined by the systematically defined hierarchy of accountability and authority cascaded
down from the CEO or most senior position (Cason 1997); the benefit of the RO framework is that it scales roles and task with the size of the organisation and levels within it. Jaques redefined leadership as the effective alignment of the collective effort to obtain a desired output (Cason 1997). The practical theory of RO became an Australian reality in 1978 when it was adopted by Conzic Riotinto of Australia Ltd (CRA) (Carnegie 2005); CRA’s approach to Organisational Development was viewed as out of touch by Australian researchers, while the organisation viewed “the structural work as giving the company a competitive advantage in the global mining industry” (Lynch 2011, 68). Arguably the impact of the RO immediately reduced employee lost time and increased labour productivity at CRA’s largest Australian mine (see below, Figure 2.3 – Productivity at Hamersley).

Figure 2-3 Productivity at Hamersley (1970-2002)

Jaques’ framework has been applied with good results in a diverse range of sectors and countries: Australian mining, UK Government, UK military, Canadian power generation, and state police in several states within the United States of America etc... (Kirsner 2005). The industries in which firms
have adopted Jaques’ RO have a similar characteristic: rigid roles that are constrained by operational procedures.

Table 2-4 Universal Pattern of Managerial Layers with Working Relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stratum</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Time-span</th>
<th>Working Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td><strong>Strategic Matrix:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Value systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td><strong>Organisational matrix:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Department Manager</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Added value for the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Unit Manager</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td><strong>Operational matrix:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Section Manager/Supervisor</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Added value for the present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Clerical/Operator</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Jaques, Bygrave and Lee (2001, 262) and Bioss (2005)

Jaques proposes that an organisation’s strata is determined by the planning and control requirements (see above, Table 2.4 – Universal Pattern of Managerial Layers with Working Relationships), with each successive level increasing in task complexity and having a farther outlook (Grobler 2005). The time-spans of control given indicate the duration for which activities are resolved, or climaxed, per a particular level of decision making, and also denote the maximum period a subordinate should work independently (du Gay and Vikkelsø 2012). The stratum is what defines the time-span for decision-making, with the longer time spans correlating to more complex decision-making which is therefore managed by higher strata levels (Grobler 2005). Each layer within the strata contains roles of similar task and complexity that can be found throughout the business in different departments. Each stratum has the responsibility, while remaining true to the
organisation’s objectives, to maximise the working conditions of their subordinates (Carnegie 2005).

The time-span model relies on the CEO – top level of the organisation – to create achievable goals. The proposals of the CEO are formed through a detailed perspective which takes into account the advice provided by his/her immediate subordinates, who in turn are provided with suggestions from their subordinates to inform their own detailed perspective (Jaques, Bygrave and Lee 2001). Subordinate managers with a designated time-span and appropriate managerial prerogative will create their own plans within their particular function that is aligned to the overall company plan (Jaques, Bygrave and Lee 2001). Each stratum will create their own plans and milestones for the levels below, with each level having available successively shorter time horizons. Increasing levels of managerial cognitive capability allows for wider spans of control and responsibility over a greater number of subordinates, so as to ensure the strata are kept to a minimum (Grobler 2005).

Jaques’ Stratified Systems theory (SST) pivots on the ability to fit the right person into the right role within the RO. The organisation’s hierarchy provides the core structure which defines the complexity and time span of the decision making demanded by each role (Grobler 2005), this is as identified by cognitive complexity: the mental ability to assess critical factors in complex scenarios (du Gay and Vikkelsø 2012; Grobler 2005; Yukl 2002). Managers with a higher position in the organisation, and thus supposedly with a capability for higher cognitive complexity, are better suited to making strategic decisions (Grobler 2005). The SST is therefore simply positing that each subsequent stratum requires an employee with higher cognitive capabilities or individual-in-role fit (Grobler 2005). A mismatch of this would lead to under-utilisation or dysfunction with alignment below that stratum.

The Working Relationship given in the above table (see table 2.4 – Universal Pattern of Managerial Layers with Working Relationships) demonstrates the cross strata orientation which certain stratum may be responsible for. Again, these orientations are prescribed by Jaques’ scientific approach, and
expand on the initial principles set forth by the RO. The operational matrix focuses on quality, service and practice; the organisational matrix controls the strategic development and strategic intent; while the strategic matrix is responsible for the sustained viability of the organisation through corporate citizenship and corporate prescience (Grobler 2005). The organisational matrix blends into the other two matrixes, and this conforms to Ulrich’s Business Partner model which operates through multiple strata of the organisation. According to Bioss’ (2005) model, however, the participation of the ‘strategic partner’ decreases above stratum V - Manager. It is worth noting that the level of prescribed roles and organisational structure requires a degree of bureaucracy and control which is not commonly supported within SHRM literature.

Jaques’ prescribed framework relies upon a correctly functioning requisite hierarchy that enables the control and organisation of people with the preservation of autonomy and accountability (du Gay and Vikkelsø 2012). Managerial leaders must cope in today’s turbulent environment of complexity and uncertainty with a great deal of ambiguity which can be mitigated by strategies that simplify complex situations (Roberto, 2002). The SST is used to allocate roles to managers, who ideally have an appropriate ability to solve the problems which they encounter. To better understand how this may be achieved the two principle tasks which any role is exposed to need to be first examined, these being: prescribed demands which are easily measured; and discretionary demands which can appear ambiguous (du Gay and Vikkelsø 2012). To contrast the two, prescribed demands have specified objectives which are explicitly directed by a higher stratum. On the other hand, discretionary tasks are instead often implicit and involve subjective judgement from an actor with a greater cognitive capability, and are thus given a longer time span discretion to be evaluated.

Strategic planning and decision-making occurs at all strata, where there is managerial prerogative and a detailed perspective (Jaques, Bygrave and Lee 2001). If specific prescription prevents managerial prerogative, or the manager does not have suitable perspective, then strategic decisions cannot be made. Therefore, the prescribed boundaries and responsibilities inform the
employee of how he can perform the role without the anxiety associated with role ambiguity.

Within this framework the higher stratum is responsible if a subordinate errs in performing a task which is beyond their cognitive ability and was nonetheless prescribed within their operating boundaries (Brown 1965).

The prescription of every role’s function and responsibilities, together with the delineating of specific strata’s limitations of authority and constraints within the organisation, allows for transparency and autonomy (du Gay and Vikkelsø 2012; Espejo 2007). Managers have the freedom to develop a discourse that determines appropriate norms, creates knowledge, and grants subordinate autonomy – though they may be called to justify their decisions upwards (Espejo 2007). Transparency, leading to organisational alignment, occurs from the top down, starting with the CEO and ending at the frontline (Espejo 2007). However, transparency is bound to fail if decision-making is coerced by politics instead of being rationally based on advice from subordinates and on outcomes by the preceding strata.

2.6.2 Economic limitations on the application of SHRM

“Broadly viewed, [mainstream SHRM theory] is a management-centric and normatively driven theory oriented toward a commitment [internal labour market] type of employment model that gives over-emphasis to psychological factors and intrinsic / humanistic forms of motivation popular in the OB field and under emphasis to external environmental contingencies, extrinsic / coercive forms of motivation, and profit considerations of revenues and costs” (Kaufman 2010c, 308).

HRM literature is flooded with articles dedicated to reporting the link between organisational performance and HRM activities, with however minimal attempts to progress HRM theory (Fleetwood and Hesketh 2006). This under-theorisation of HRM often manifests as measurements recording productivity after a specific event, such as introducing new HRM practices without having undertaken longitudinal analysis. Kaufman (2010a) criticises the self-affirmation of ethnocentric literature examining the HRM-firm/performance relationship in a predominant North American
context. Kaufman argues that the premise of never-ending returns from HRM activities, such as authors linking involvement with performance using the ‘resource based view’ (2010b), does not explain real world conditions and that many studies anticipate additional gains without the support of empirical evidence or robust theorem. Theories benefit from exhaustive explanations that include hermeneutic information, where attention is paid to all interacting causal phenomena or significant influences - such as contextual considerations (Fleetwood and Hesketh 2006). Without critically examining empirical data and exploring all contextual factors then any propositions formed are likely to have little external validity.

A universal theory on HRM activities and performance cannot be isolated to a single organisational environment, and should furthermore be applicable to dynamic conditions. The nature of a firm’s HRM, based on the quantity of HRM practices and expenditure per capita, varies with size, industry, and region (Kaufman 2010a). The distributions of these two criteria resemble a bell-curve, with firms of high HRM practices, or high expenditure per capita, being under-represented (see below, Figure 2.4 – Frequency Distribution of HRM Practices and Expenditure per Capita). Mainstream HRM literature argues that the superior best practice configuration is situated in this underpopulated area of high activity and expenditure (Kaufman 2010a).

**Figure 2-4 Frequency Distribution of HRM Practices and Expenditures per Capita**

![Frequency Distribution of HRM Practices and Expenditures per Capita](image)

**Source 1 (Freeman and Rogers 1999, 124; Bureau of National Affairs 2006) reproduced in Kaufman (2010a)**

The mainstream HRM explains that firms operating with an internalised labour market, or cooperative relationship between managers and employees, are conducting best practice. The
alternative is the ‘hard’ approach where an externalised employment results in high turnover, low skill development, and lack of loyalty and commitment (Kaufman 2010b). The reality is that the majority of firms operate somewhere in between. If firms can increase productivity by expanding HRM until they are no longer operating with an externalised employment system, then why are all firms not doing so? The assumption is that the shift to greater HRM activities is not restricted by very large transition costs, organisational inertia, and managerial ignorance (Kaufman 2010a). The issue is not whether HRM has a positive effect, but rather why most firms operate with a certain level of externalised employment.

Kaufman (2010a) proposes a HRM demand curve that objectively determines the level of HRM activity a firm should implement as derived from a HRM supply curve and a HRM demand function. Kaufman rejects the proposition that operating with an internal labour market is suitable for all scenarios, positing that firms should rationally expand HRM until additional returns are zero. This economic model, or equilibrium theory, provides an objective tool to ensure the HR function is aligned with the firm’s objectives.

The ability to increase individual performance maintains credence, either from immediate application over expansion, or when expansion of resources no longer provide any marginal benefit. That is, the law of diminishing returns suggests that external growth is finite, and that eventual growth will be derived from improved labour performance. Kaufman (2010a) suggests that HRM practices are bound by the same laws, and that firms may adopt more HRM practices to increase profitability until equilibrium is achieved. HRM can lead to above-market wages, less employer flexibility and additional constraints, like labour overheads of performing HRM, which can be a considerable cost to the firm (Kaufman 2010b). Determination of HRM activities requires a cost/benefits analysis that considers the marginal performance from the desired employee cooperation, as well as the costs of alternatives required to obtain that cooperation. The chosen HRM activities will then be those that generate the largest performance gains at the lowest costs.
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The theory of equilibrium incorporates contextual influences and different levels of output that can also include societal benefits. That is, a more holistic view of costs and gains which does not only take into account the monetary side.

The ‘hard’ approach does not resonate well with contemporary HRM authors. The low academic interest in Jaques’ work was in part created by Jaques’ opinion on ‘management science’, which he condemned as being entrenched modern alchemy and often vacuous, as well as the fact that many of Jaques’ propositions directly conflicted with mainstream academia (Kirsner 2005). Jaques and other authors, who advocate the scientific approach, use terms which academics deem to be anachronistic (du Gay and Vikkelsø 2012). The economic (‘hard’) approach also threatens the importance of the HRM actor, arguing that value is revealed in moderation within the contextual environmental. Kaufman (2010b) reflects that the very existence of HRM originated from the introduction of employee welfare schemes to develop a positive employment relation which was then manipulated to increase firm performance. The premise of cooperation and fairness was thus misdirected for a ‘hard’ approach.

2.7 Conclusion to the Literature review

This chapter explores a variety of philosophies on how the HR function creates value for their firm, thus potentially developing a competitive advantage. The terms ‘best fit’ and ‘best practice’, in regards to approaches, are explained as the vertical and horizontal integration of HR activities in line with the firm’s objectives. The discussion of the differentiation of these two approaches demonstrates how the soft approach of SHRM initiatives, such as ‘best practice’ HCM, is limited to reactionary management. A holistic approach supported by Ulrich’s ‘business partner’ framework stipulates that the HR practitioner must also perform as a ‘strategic partner’ – participating in the decision-making process – if HRM is to expand the current capabilities of HRM. The current SHRM conversation advocates increased participation of HR practitioners in strategic decisions, though it
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does so mostly at the cost of operational HRM capabilities from devolution – the operational HRM are argued to be pivotal in implementation of strategic activities and several authors warn that decentralising HRM activities from the HR function will erode the firm’s HR capabilities.

The less popular ‘hard’ scientific approach was also explored, with Jaques’ Requisite Organisation and Kaufman’s Equilibrium theory. The works of these two authors do not undermine the goals of SHRM; Jaques and Kaufman provide frameworks which they argue will yield long term strategic value. Jaques’ RO presents a rigid prescribed organisation, while Kaufman explores the economic realities and the rationality of SHRM implementation.

The following chapter explains the methodology of the research; while explaining the rationale in taking a specific course of action for this study. Paradigms and triangulation are explored due to the resulting complexity of mixing qualitative and quantitative methods. The core conventions are thus presented, and the chapter proceeds to describe the mixed-method process used to collect and analyse the data.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the approach taken to investigate the factors which influence the HR practitioner’s role within the Australian Metals Mining Industry (AMMI). It further outlines the methods used in the three-phased study to gather, collate and analyse data these consisting of: Semi-structured interviews followed by face to face structured surveys with eight selected practitioners, a Delphi study to identify key themes and priorities for HR practices in the AMMI in 2012, from a panel of 8 respondents; Use of thematic analysis to integrate the findings and relate them to relevant models and concepts from the soft and hard HRM literature (see Section 3.3 Methodology). The rationale for choosing these respective methods as well as the limitations of the methodology is examined. Lastly, the ethical considerations of the research, and an overall evaluation of the methodology is discussed.

3.2 Research Design

The following section explains the purpose of paradigms in research, and details the characteristics of two prominent contrasting perspectives. The multi method approach, used for this study, draws on a subjective paradigm (that of social constructionism) to support the objectives. The application of mixed methods in general research is explored and in this study. The section concludes with a review of the various techniques used which substantiates the decision to use a synthesised social constructionist paradigm that incorporates quantitative data.

3.2.1 Paradigms

The substance of paradigms (or theories) stems from the variation that exists in how people think and therefore perceive the world. Silverman (2010a) provides a simple definition of paradigms as
the overall framework as to how reality is perceived; he uses the term ‘model’ synonymously with paradigm. Giola and Pitre (1990, 585) acknowledge Kuhn’s definition that “a paradigm is a general perspective or way of thinking that reflects fundamental beliefs and assumptions about the nature of organisations”. This can be expanded upon as “our ontological assumptions about the nature of reality – what is considered to exist and, just as importantly, what does not exist in the environment we are studying” (Maylor and Blackman 2005, 155). Within research, paradigms reflect the researcher’s imperfect understanding and the assumptions created in an attempt to produce a more complete reality. These definitions of a paradigm serve well for a general description yet do not capture the full concept and implementation.

**Figure 3-1 Paradigm Relationship**

![Diagram showing the relationship between Paradigm, Context, and Purpose]

Within the research context, a paradigm sets the rules for the methodology, and the nature of the research data. Although methods may vary within a paradigm, the methodology will determine the purpose of analysis validation, data representation, and the interaction with the data.

### 3.2.2 Paradigms and Research

Meaningful research is the fit between purpose, context, and paradigm (see Figure 3.1 - Paradigm Relationship). The likely outcome when one or more factors are misaligned will be results which are not conducive to the research purpose. While the context and purpose are often easily revealed, the paradigm is harder to describe. The correct paradigm provides the necessary view to unlock ‘knowability’: the knowledge that resides within the context that is not initially discernible
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(Agamben 2002). Two separate paradigms for the same research will therefore reveal different ‘knowability’, while an unsuitable paradigm set will elicit an unintentional outcome and will not uncover the desired knowledge.

3.2.3 Labelling of Paradigms

The absence of any strict rules governing paradigms has resulted in a diverse paradigm range, which consequently suffers from overlapping labels. The lack of mutual agreement by scholars in labelling paradigms has complicated paradigm description. Two of the popular paradigm archetypes with extreme contrasts are positivism and subjectivism (Maylor and Blackman 2005). Alternatively, a set of three significant business research paradigms include positivism, interpretivism, and critical research; their purposes being respectively hypothesis testing, knowledge inquiry, and iterative modelling (Hallebone and Priest 2009). Further qualitative sets include paradigms such as: introducing naturalism, emotionalism, ethnomethodology, postmodernism, positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism (Lincoln and Guba 2005; Silverman 2010b). All adding up to a vast range of identified paradigms, with many overlapping descriptions.

The idea of the ‘rigid paradigm’ has been superseded by that of fluid paradigms – or a synthesised paradigm which is used in this research, having blurred boundaries these allow formerly rigid genres to cross-pollinate to produce new paradigms as they are needed (Lincoln and Guba 2005). The trend to categorise and label philosophical constructs has invariably distracted audiences from the paradigm’s core function: to provide comparable language in which knowledge can be transferred (Schwandt 2003). Researchers utilise the “rigor in language and the rigor in action” concept to connect with their audience, and to explain the methodology (Suddaby 2006, 640). As a paradigm is dependent on the context and purpose, one paradigm may only provide the perception of a partial truth, the fluid concept allows for a multi-paradigm approach that may result in greater revelations (Giloa and Pitre 1990). If a suitable paradigm is unavailable then researchers can bridge
multiple complementary paradigms to create a different approach (Giloa and Pitre 1990), and in this way avoid being blinded by definitive labelling that may obscure enduring issues (Schwandt 2003).

The selection of a single paradigm was unsuitable for this research due to the multiple relationships within the mixed methods approach employed for the study. The ways in which the different methods relate to each other exclude the choice of a single unifying paradigm. The explorative purpose of this research allows for the quantitative data to be treated liberally - without the constraints of scientific positivism.

3.2.4 Postivism v Subjectivism

Hallebone and Priest (2009) suggest that paradigms can be diametrically opposed; the dangers of this thinking stems from the authors’ use of absolutes, which conflicts with Agamben’s view that paradigms are created by the researcher. Instead of being seen as opposing each other, paradigms should be treated as contrasting, and in fact this contrast illustrates the nature of paradigms. For this reason the two paradigms chosen are the two popular archetypical approaches which dominate the literature in one form or another: positivism and subjectivism (Creswell 1994).

Positivism, also called the scientific approach, aims to deliver definitive statements through the examination of discrete results, such as quantitative data. The belief that knowledge must be testable is favoured by quantitative researchers. The positivist researcher attempts to maintain an objective stance, “separate from what he or she is studying” (Maylor and Blackman 2005, 143) and commits to a highly structured literature review and methodology design before the data collection. The motivation which drives positivist research commonly stems from three agendas-replication, extension or comparison (Maylor and Blackmon 2005). Alteration to the plan only occurs if methodological errors are detected. The research is then driven by the methodology to obtain a logical deduction.
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An expansion of the positivist paradigm is given together with the considerations of the subjective paradigm below - Table 3.1 - Positivism and Subjective Research Considerations. Here it can be seen that the contrasting nature of the two paradigms enriches the conceptual understanding of both. Alternatively, subjectivism represents an ethnographic approach which explores the meaning behind observed social phenomena. Subjectivism covers a series of qualitative approaches, such as interpretivism. The research is fluid, as the data shapes the research, and the actual orientation of the research evolves as the researcher gains greater understanding. Giola and Pitre (1990) describe this research as inductive in nature, as specific observations are used to make wider or more general theories. This inductive nature shifts not only how the data is collected, but also how the research is conducted. Emergent ideas provide revelations which require the researcher to continually update the literature review; with updated literature ensuring that the research is current and still relevant for emergent issues. Finally, interpretivism seeks subjective meaning in human actions whilst still remaining objective (Schwandt 2003).
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## Table 3-1 Positivism and Subjective Research Considerations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positivism Perspective</th>
<th>Subjective Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>The observer is independent of what is being observed.</td>
<td>The observer interacts with subject being observed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value-freedom</td>
<td>The choice of what to study, and how to study it, can be determined by objective criteria rather than by human beliefs and interests.</td>
<td>Inherent biasness in the choice of what to study, and how to study it as researchers are driven by their own interests, beliefs, skills, and values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causality</td>
<td>The aim of social science should be to identify causal explanations and fundamental laws that explain regularities in human social behaviour.</td>
<td>The aim of social science is to try to understand what is happening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothetico-deductive</td>
<td>Science proceeds through a process of hypothesising fundamental laws and then deduces what kinds of observations will demonstrate the truth or falsity of these hypotheses.</td>
<td>Develop ideas through induction from evidence; mutual simultaneous shaping of factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operationalisation</td>
<td>Concepts need to be operationalised in a way which enables facts to be measured quantitatively; static design – categories isolated before study.</td>
<td>Qualitative methods – small samples investigated in depth or over time; emerging design – categories identified during research process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reductionism</td>
<td>Problems as a whole are better understood if they are reduced into the simplest possible elements.</td>
<td>Problems as a whole are better understood if the totality of the situation is looked at.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalisation</td>
<td>In order to be able to generalise about regularities in human and social behaviour it is necessary to select samples of</td>
<td>Everything is contextual; patterns identified – theories then developed for understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Language</th>
<th>Research Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sufficient size; aim of generalisations is to lead to prediction, explanation and understanding.</td>
<td>Informal, evolving decisions; personal voice; use of accepted qualitative words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Language</th>
<th>Research Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal, based on set definitions; impersonal voice; use of accepted quantitative words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.5 Paradigms and Qualitative Research

The significance of paradigms can be summarised by three main themes: generalizability and comparability, methodology, and rigor.

Generalisability and Comparability – This asks the question of how the research can be compared to previous and future work, and how it can be applied to other context. It also provides control as to how the research shall be positioned while within preconception, thus allowing for the exploitation of gaps within the literature.

Methodology – This is how the research is planned and conducted. Paradigms step beyond simple assumptions of how research will be conducted; paradigms deliver a conscious examination of how research outcomes are to be achieved by predetermining a perspective for potential events. Put simply, paradigms craft the rules which the researcher will follow. These rules impact on how the data influences the research such as emergent ideas, to how the discoveries will be presented.

Rigor – The level undertaken of this determines how the research will it stand against the scrutiny of stakeholders. The effect derived from the rigorous use of paradigm language is twofold. First, to convey ideas and knowledge to academia, it is essential to be proficient within the ‘paradigm research medium’. Secondly, the use of this language permeates within the methodology, a fact which as Suddaby (2006) noted earlier, imparts further rigor upon the research.

The broad definition of a paradigm is a collective interpretation of reality, which then stipulates not only how we interpret data, but also how we interact with it. The range of paradigms presented within the essay is but a small selection. Paradigms are fluid, as they are continually shifting and more are being defined. In a sense it is arguable that there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ paradigms for use in research, as each may be appropriate dependent on the context and purpose. As a paradigm can only provide a model as to how reality is perceived, it will therefore only determine the methodology within the research. This will focus the researcher to provide rigorous research which
will be easily compared to other academic work with the benefit of moderated ambiguity. Conveying findings of a study to other research is hindered when the researcher has stepped beyond the boundaries of their paradigm.

### 3.2.6 The Multi Paradigm and Mixed Methods

Where one paradigm can only provide a partial truth, then would not a multi-paradigm approach result in greater revelations and understanding? (Giloa and Pitre 1990). The tension of two diverse ways of knowing or alternative paradigms pressure researchers to take sides, though this is precisely what Greene suggests should be avoided. Greene (2007) explains that these tensions provide conversation and additional knowledge which would not be available within a single paradigm model. Greene’s pragmatic approach to paradigms develops a richer texture than would be obtained through the diminishing trend of the purist’s single paradigm research.

The multi-paradigm approach provides a suitable platform for a mixed methods methodology. As both approaches utilise paradigms that are not inherently linked, the inclusion of quantitative and qualitative data, or a mixed method approach, in a single research project requires a multi-paradigm (Green et al. 1989).

How mixed methods are defined is dependent on the relative author doing the defining; the “...subtle and sometimes significant differences in the ways in which their contributors employed key terms” has not aided the progression of language relevant to mixed methods” (Bryman 2008, 88). Green et al. (1989) describe mixed method design as a methodology that includes at least one data collection component which is quantitative and one that is qualitative. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) suggest that mixed model approaches become a multi-method design with the use of a worldview synthesised paradigm – one that mimics characteristics of positivism and subjectivism – which has been adopted by this research.
The application of mixed methods within research is extremely varied; the approach can be of concurrent or sequential mixed methods, with quantitative and qualitative methods occurring at the same stage or one leading into the other.

The justification for mixed methods is usually to enhance triangulation or to conceptualise the problem in a different manner (Bryman 2008). Authors propose that a mixed method approach can provide three key advantages: First, triangulation or convergence; then bracketing for an ‘improved confidence interval’ - increasing the likelihood that the findings are representative of the larger population; lastly, complementarity of components that leads to a better understanding of the overall phenomenon (Greene, Caracelli, and Graham 1989). Without a precise explanation the research will be vulnerable to accusations of poor planning and relying on a hedged bet - with the expectation that one method will surely reveal the desired knowledge (Bryman 2008).

3.2.7 Triangulation

Triangulation is the convergence of data from different methods which when combined are able to provide better information for a particular phenomenon (Jonsen and Jehn 2009); or, as Turner and Turner state, it is simply “the means by which an alternate perspective is used to validate, challenge or extend existing findings” (2009, 171). An alternative perspective is the product of targeting the phenomenon with a supplementary method, possibly coming from an alternative paradigm or mixed method, or simply being a different set of data from within the same paradigm. Jonsen and Jehn promote mixing paradigms as “… the key to systematic development lies not in the application of any single technique but in the creative and imaginative pursuit of an elusive truth” (2009, 125).

The term triangulation is used synonymously by authors for multi-methods and mixed methods, as it is the primary justification for a researcher to develop a multi-method conceptual framework.

**Classic Triangulation** - Classic triangulation is the “…convergence of methods producing more objective and valid results.” (Jonsen and Jehn 2009, 125). The convergence of two methods with
offsetting biases enhances the validity of the inquiry. The assumption is that the research benefits
from the strength of quantitative and qualitative methods will nullify each other’s weakness or
biases (Bryman 2008). The weakness of this assumption is that contrasting sources of data are
afflicted with dissimilar biases and therefore increase the data’s validity; confidence provided by
triangulation is warranted if the inference of each source is scrutinised (Hammersley 2008).

Within this research, classic triangulation occurs within the initial exploration phase; the semi-
structured interview and quantitative survey produces convergent data on the HR practitioner’s
role. The survey seeks the same information as the interview, ideally without the bias of the
respondents’ perspective.

**Complementarity** - Specific facets of the phenomenon are studied with individual methods which
overlap and yield a richer picture (Greene et al. 1989). The understanding of the overall
phenomenon occurs when all the pieces have been correctly aligned; this differs from traditional
triangulation which seeks validity through convergence. This completeness occurs when the
research exploits the revelations from the quantitative data and a qualitative narrative (Bryman
2008). The diversity of views is here more likely to produce more emergent themes than a
methodology with a single approach.

Bryman (2008) also suggests that mixed methods provide a context and illustration for research
findings; that is to say, qualitative conclusions can be substantiated with quantitative data, and
qualitative data provides a narrative for quantitative data.

Complementarity data occurs in two stages of this research. Occurrences of divergent views during
the initial round of the Delphi phase (see Section 3.6.2 – The Delphi process) utilises the data from
the open ended interview questions (qualitative data) to define clusters, this would otherwise be
unachievable without the additional earlier data to the Delphi results. This same complementarity
occurs in the final data analysis phase, which is where the final Delphi observations are explored.
**Development** - A sequential mixed methods methodology in multi-stage research can be used to develop the data from an earlier stage – advancing the findings that may not be available through a mono-method process. Instrumental development occurs when qualitative responses are pivotal to the development of quantitative instruments (Bryman 2008). Alternatively, a quantitative method may be employed to test or scrutinise any hypothesis formed during a qualitative stage.

In essence, the Delphi phase’s main purpose is to develop and define the emergent themes from the initial exploration phase. The raw thematic analysis is exposed to subjective interpretations; the Delphi quantitative approach tests the earlier propositions from the open ended questions. Thus, in this research, the summary from the initial exploration phase is developed in the Delphi phase.

**Initiation** - Bryman (2008) warns researchers that justification for a mixed methodology must be explicit or the methodology design may be regarded as ‘pot luck’. Greene et al. (1989) does not oppose this caveat, though he does argue that using mixed methods without fully knowing what may emerge is justifiable. Greene et al. suggests that the truth sometimes only presents when the noise of either methodology has been removed. In principle, data mining is a legitimate use, when the author is explicit in his/her reasoning and direction. This however, is not used as a justification for using multi methods in this research.

**Expansion** - The role of quantitative and qualitative methods can be designed to reveal certain aspects of a phenomenon (Bryman 2008; Greene et al. 1989). Greene et al. provide an example which demonstrates that within an evaluation context “qualitative methods [are used] to assess program processes and ... quantitative methods to assess program outcomes” (Greene et al. 1989, 260). An alternatively example, occurring within this study, quantitative data which is used to produce the Role Signature benefits from the descriptive qualitative open ended questions. In other words, a different approach may be more suitable depending on the characteristic which requires investigation. The examination of quantitative characteristics and a qualitative description yields greater scope and breadth than a single method. Expansion is a distinctly different rationale.
to that of complementarity, although both examine different facets of the same phenomenon; expansion seeks a larger picture from opposed disciplines whilst complementarity aims for specific consensus.

Similarities can be drawn from Cook’s (1985) ‘multiplism’ framework where separate methods are employed to address different facets or even similar facets but with a different perspective. The objective of the ‘multiplism’ framework is to increase the likelihood of obtaining meaningful data through the inclusion of additional methods, when revelation is not guaranteed with a single method or when value of potential observations are uncertain (Cook 1985). Mixed-methods implemented within ‘multiplism’ are not necessarily congruent, as being congruent is likely to foil the desired effect.

As with traditional triangulation, expansion is used in this thesis to justify the mixed methods approach in the initial exploration phase. The interviews provide a richer tapestry which adds context to the results from the Ulrich’s HR Role survey and from the role development survey.

Overall, the multi-method approach (including mixed methods) was chosen to strengthen the results of a very subjective process – the semi structured interview. A mixed method approach offers diverse approaches in delivering the similar themes in the initial phase, whilst allowing for the development of those themes in the following phases.

**Research Objectives**

The purpose of this research is to explore the realm of the HR practitioner within the Australian metals mining industry (AMMI). As HR practitioners are not very ‘researched’ focussed, a holistic view will enable the understanding of the contextual characteristics which influence the HR practitioner’s role. The development of the HR practitioners’ role and key responsibilities will provide a narrative on the HR practitioner. Given this, the research’s objectives are:

- To define the role of the HR Practitioner within the AMMI.
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- To explore the historic as well as the future trends for HR practices within the AMMI.
- To identify the industry and other structural factors that influence the role of HRM practitioner within the AMMI.

These three focal points were selected on the assumption that HRM practices, labour profile and industry characteristics are interrelated as shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3-2 Relationships that define HR practices the Australian metals mining

These relationships are explored using the methodology described in Section 3.3 below.

A subjective social constructionism paradigm was selected due to the core approach being qualitative. Social constructionism provides the platform to “play with the possibilities and practices that are made coherent by various forms of relations” (Shwandt 2003, 307); where the language and expressions of respondents can supply further meaning to the inclusion of data from related components. This supports the idea that understanding is obtained through relationships.

As the research is exploratory there is no hypothesis testing. The research approach incorporates a multi-staged sequential/concurrent mixed methods methodology. Though a predominately qualitative approach is adopted, quantitative measures are employed as the structured survey component of initial HR practitioner exploratory interviews and in the follow up Delphi ratings phase. Quantitative measures are used to evaluate the strength of propositions (the Delphi phase)
formed from the results of the initial exploratory phase. The quantitative process of the Delphi phase is dependent on the previous qualitative data gathered from open ended questions, as the first round of Delphi statements are formulated to represent the seemingly more significant themes revealed from the interviews. From this perspective it can be argued that the quantitative data does not define the research outcomes, instead the quantitative methods merely add quantitative descriptors (or increments) to the ‘world view’. Instead of adopting a positivist perspective, a social constructionist paradigm was synthesised to include the quantitative results as a hybrid relationship within the interpretation. The ‘world view’ removes the paradigm from any ideological extreme and allows for the inclusion of potentially conflicting views (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003).
3.3 Methodology

The overall process can be described as a three tiered, mixed method approach; fundamentally it is a qualitative study that uses quantitative data to support and expand the data analysis. The three tiers are:

- **Phase 1: Initial exploration** - Primary data gathering through the means of open questioning using semi-structured interviews and two short structured questionnaires delivered in face to face meetings with 8 respondents. Thematic analysis is used to evaluate all stage 1 data (including the statistical analyses of the survey findings) to reveal reoccurring constraints that influence the HR professional’s role, as well as developing a portrait of the HR role and responsibilities.

- **Phase 2: Delphi phase** - This follow-up data collection uses two series of statements that are presented to a panel of experts to reach consensus on the perceived key constraints upon the HR professional’s role, and orientation of the HR professional – past, present and future.

- **Final Data Analysis** - A discussion where the themes from the initial exploration are rationalised using the consensus from the Delphi phase as well as the initial qualitative results.

The three tiers are presented on the Research Map (see below, Figure 3.3 - Research Map). Each stage of the research is divided into distinct elements. These elements have a title followed by two indicator references. The first indicates the location of the process’ detailed explanation. The second (distinguished by a red font) indicates the location of the elements’ results (see Figure 3.4 – Research Map Key).
Figure 3-3 Research Map

**Interviews**

- Semi-structured interview
  - Chapter 3.5.4
  - Chapter 4.1

- Role Development survey
  - Chapter 3.5.3
  - Chapter 4.3

- Ulrich’s HR Role survey
  - Chapter 3.5.5
  - Chapter 4.3

**Thematic Analysis**
- Chapter 3.6.1
- Chapter 4.2

**Quantitative Results**
- Chapter 4.3

**Delphi phase**
- Delphi round - one of two
  - Chapter 3.6.2
  - Chapter 4.4

- Delphi round - two of two
  - Chapter 3.6.2
  - Chapter 4.5

- Challenge Ratings
  - Chapter 4.3.5
  - Chapter 4.6

**Final Data Analysis**
- (Tier 3)

**Final Discussion**
- Chapter 5

Figure 3-4 Research Map Key

- Location of process description
- Description of the research step.
- Location of results and analysis
3.4 Data Collection

The intent of this research is to obtain the perspective of the HR practitioner on the current constraints and challenges which shape their role. Face to face interviews are the most efficient and effective way to obtain this information while fostering cooperation towards the research.

Tailoring the interview round for the specific interests and expertise of the respondent provides a platform to minimise the potential respondent dropout or what is called the ‘mortality effect’ (de Leeuw, 2005; Zikmund et al. 2010). The follow up data collection depicts a typical Delphi approach conducted via e-mail. The process of data collection is displayed in Table 3.2 - Data Collection and Correlation Process.

3.4.1 Sampling

Target Population

The target population is the relevant population which can provide the information to achieve the research objectives (Zikmund et al. 2010). Determining the criteria for the target population is the first stage in obtaining an appropriate sample. In this study, HR professionals who were currently employed as a senior HR practitioner through to HR director were identified as being the HR practitioners who are capable to enact change on, or influence, the HR function within their firm. The distinction between these HR practitioners and administrative HR practitioners was necessary, as administrative HR practitioners have substantially less influence on the relationships within the AMMI.

The definition of the AMMI for sampling purposes is not restricted to companies that extracted metals from the ground; the AMMI also includes non-extracting operations such as exploration and support organisations. The scope of the AMMI was defined to extend to firms whose primary activity was that of supporting mining operations, and was located anywhere in Australia. The interrelations between contracting labour and principle extractors was too complex for a clear defining division.
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The eligibility criteria for the sampling was

1. Employed as a HR practitioner.
2. Working for an organisation within the AMMI.
3. Be aged 18 years or older (as required by Murdoch University’s Ethics sub-committee).
4. Agree to participate in the study.

Sampling frame

The sampling frame is the sub-set of the total population that the sample is drawn from, and may not necessarily reflect the exact characteristics of the target population (Zikmund et al. 2010). Murdoch University’s Executive Education program held a database of previous participants that came from different industries and disciplines. The Executive Education manager agreed to invite all previous participants who were active HR practitioners in the AMMI to participate in the research via e-mail, to which there were ten respondents. The Executive Education manager passed on the details of these ten potential participants so they could receive further information on the research objectives, approach, risks and potential benefits and to confirm their willingness to participate further in the research.

The method described is an example of non-probability convenience sampling. Non-probability sampling is less likely to have a sample that represents the population as well as probability sampling – where every member of the population has an equal chance of selection (Zikmund et al. 2007). The utilisation of Murdoch Education program’s database immediately applies an undetermined bias, where the sample is restricted to those HR practitioners who have participated in a Murdoch Education program. Therefore, an additional criterion to the sampling exists:

5. Participated in a Murdoch Education program

The ‘convenience sampling’, alternatively referred to as haphazard or accidental sampling, describes the procedure of obtaining the initial respondents (Zikmund et al. 2010). This form of
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sampling was selected as the database provided a gateway directly to a sample frame, which minimised time and a greater potential bias by attempting to gain participants through cold approaches.

The intent was to expand the interview sample with snowball sampling: where the unique nature of the selection criteria increases the rarity such that additional respondents are obtained through the referral of the initial respondents (Zikmund et al. 2007). Unfortunately, the current heightened activity of the Mining industry was not considered. The additional pressure created by this heightened activity has restricted the HR practitioners’ opportunity to network, and has also given them limited time to participate in research. The total amount of additional respondents obtained through the snowball effect was one from the original ten participants.

The intent of this research is to obtain the perspective of the HR practitioner on the current constraints and challenges which shape their role. Face to face interviews are the most efficient and effective way to obtain this information while fostering cooperation towards the research. Tailoring the interview round for the specific interests and expertise of the respondent provides a platform to minimise the potential respondent dropout or what is called the ‘mortality effect’ (de Leeuw, 2005; Zikmund et al. 2010). The follow up data collection depicts a typical Delphi approach conducted via e-mail. The process of data collection is displayed in Table 3.2 - Data Collection and Correlation Process.

Prior to conducting the first interview, a pilot study was carried out on a volunteer who fulfilled the research’s eligibility criteria. The volunteer who participated in the pilot study met the conditions of the target population; the participant selection was one of convenience as the participant was starting their masters at Murdoch University. Pilot studies are preliminary small-scale research projects that parallel the intended research, they can therefore reveal errors in structure and content prior to the commencement of the actual research (Zikmund et al. 2010). The benefit of this pilot study is that it revealed interviewer bias within the semi-structured questions. The
experience of the pilot study test-run resulted in modifications to the open-ended questions which allowed for greater exploration of factors, and less interviewer bias.

Table 3-2 Data Collection and Collation Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Initial Exploration</th>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Delphi Exploration</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short Structured questionnaire on HR practitioner’s role</td>
<td>Semi structured exploratory interview on the mining context</td>
<td>Collation of collected data represented in thematic style</td>
<td>Two iterations conducted via email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Structured survey on organisational efficiency</td>
<td>Themes presented to participants for review and correction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Data Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative and Quantitative consensus data correlated and analysed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Themes linked to literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the initial data collection the subjectivity from the interpretative methodology of the open ended styled interview is balanced by the objective positivistic methodology of the structured surveys. The formally designed questions were respondent-completed since an interrogation style questionnaire would have been counterintuitive for sustaining a cooperative atmosphere. The interviews during initial exploration phase were conducted at several locations – at the convenience of the HR professional. The majority of these interviews occurred at the HR professionals’ place of employment, with one occurring at the Murdoch University campus and another at the participant’s health club.
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The second tier of the research, the policy Delphi phase, consisted of two successive questionnaires that were respondent-completed and conducted by e-mail. The decision to use a third party online questionnaire system, such as Survey Monkey, was rejected. Instead, the surveys were Microsoft Word documents that were attached to the e-mail which had instructions within its body. The questionnaire utilised the advanced feature of drop down lists to allow for easy responses. A simple table was provided within the body of the e-mail as an alternative method for response, as the Microsoft Word features used was not compatible with some older software versions. The overall process was aimed at minimising the cost to the respondent, and encouraging minimal drop-out (de Leeuw, 2005).

The second tier policy Delphi phase had two purposes; firstly, to capture a consensus from a panel of HR experts on identified factors which influence HRM – when a consensus could be obtained; and secondly, to demonstrate that there is an argument for multiple approaches to exist within a similar context. These rationalisations by respondents were the product of analysis from the first tier data collection allowing the individual views to be linked to a broader industry perspective.
3.5 Instruments

The instruments within the mixed methods approach of this research use various tools to record data. During the initial exploration phase the forms of data collection range from the survey’s discrete values to open ended qualitative responses. Therefore the methodology requires an appropriate technique for each of the different forms of data gathering instruments.

3.5.1 Likert Scale

A respondent’s level of agreement, or disagreement, was measured by the universally accepted ordinal scale: the Likert scale, a fixed choice response format. This iteration of the Likert scale allows respondents to choose one of the five weighted options that best corresponds to their opinion on the proposed statement. The scale ranges from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), with the proverbial sitting on the fence of Uncertain (3) in the middle.

The alternative options provided in the Likert scale range from three to nine (Zikmund et al. 2007). The range offered is determined by the purpose of the question. For application within this research the selection of five options was based on three rationales. An odd number was required to provide respondents with the opportunity to be uncertain, or undecided. The provision of an uncertain option has the potential to moderate the overall result as it does not force respondents to choose a side, and thereby accurately measures respondents who don’t select uncertain. Second, the range was kept minimal to reduce the cost to the respondent. The disadvantage of giving less options can be the loss of detail. Finally, the compromise between minimisation and resolution rejected the three response option. Having three options only would provide one magnitude of agreement and disagreement, and this would not capture significant deviation in respondent perception (Zikmund et al. 2010).

The two main limitations to the Likert scale is the potential ambiguity of statements and a social desirability bias. Both these issues are linked to how the statements for testing are phrased. If the statement had multiple ways of being interpreted, such that the intent is ambiguous, then what the
respondent is rating will be basically unknown (Zikmund et al. 2007). On the other hand, if the statement is phrased poignantly in such a way as to be ‘emotionally laden’, then this may lead the respondent to sway their answer to what they believe to be socially desirable (Zikmund et al. 2010).

**Figure 3.4 Interview Instrumental Components**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part One: Structured Questionnaire</th>
<th>Part Three: Structured Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HR practitioner’s role</td>
<td>Organisational effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the characteristics unique to the AAMI which influence HRM</td>
<td>How well does the organisation deliver specific HR responsibilities? (Ulrich’s HR role survey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.5.2 Instrument Components

The instruments used are divided into three distinct components: structured questionnaire, semi-structure interview, and structured survey (see below, Figure 3.4 - Interview Instrumental Components; see also Appendix 2 – HR Practitioner Signature Survey). The order of delivery has been explicitly designed to address the research questions. The overall purpose of all parts is to generate a holistic perspective, utilising mixed methods, resulting in suitable material (results) to
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conduct a thematic analysis. The open exploration within the instruments is intended to generate suitable themes for the following Delphi stage.

The core questions have been built upon two key resources: Moore and Gardner’s research which examines the HR practitioner’s role within the Australian mining industry (2004); and Ulrich’s Role metaphors that categorise HR responsibilities into four discrete quadrants (1997).

The rationale to include a mixed methods approach was based on potential triangulation, complementarity and development of the qualitative component – open ended questions. The additional complexity by including quantitative data to a predominately qualitative study has been justified by the promoted richness revealed during the analysis (see Section 3.2.7 – Triangulation). The levels of detail the quantitative results provide are rudimentary, as it is not intended for this research to be quantitative; the focus of this research is qualitative and explorative.

3.5.3 Part One: HR Practitioner’s Role

The purpose of the first section is for a collation of the specific quantitative portraits of the sampled HR practitioners into a representation of the HR roles and practices in the AMMI industry of 2012. Each specific portrait also serves to enhance the qualitative data from each case’s semi-structured interviews during the thematic analysis.

Part one comprises of three subsections: demographics, employment category, and duties.

Demographics

The questions within the demographic subsection are deliberately easy to answer, with personal details being categorised within a broad non-specific range – age is carefully collected with an especially wide bracket to avoid potentially offending the participant. Interviews initiated with such simple to comprehend questions benefit by providing a platform where the interviewee is more likely to acclimatise to the interview process and thus provide richer information (Zikmund et al. 2007).
Table 3-3 Part One Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Gender, age, tenure in organisation and experience within the Australian metal mining industry.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment category</td>
<td>General level of authority and key responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescribed duties</td>
<td>As per the HR practitioner’s job description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practiced duties</td>
<td>What activities the HR practitioner undertakes to perform his role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred duties</td>
<td>The activities that would generate the most value for the organisation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The order in which the demographic questions are presented encourages the participants to enter the desired mindset. Sequencing the questions in a specific order can prepare the interviewee for upcoming open-ended questions (Zikmund et al. 2007).

Table 3-4 Gender (with coding)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With sequencing and acclimatisation being considered, the first two questions pose no cognitive retrieval, allowing for a quick decisive response which builds interviewee confidence. Although the answer of gender typically appears self-evident, it provides a neutral opportunity for the respondent to commence with no impedance.
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Acknowledging that some participants may be uncomfortable to disclose an explicit age, the brackets are spaced such that exact age is undecipherable yet not so large that meaning of the collected data is lost.

Table 3-5 Age (with coding)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age (with coding)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt; 25 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25 to 30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>31 to 40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>41 to 50 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>51 to 60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>&gt; 60 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The collection of participant’s age and gender is not designed to enhance the qualitative data collected from Part Two: Industry characteristics; the purpose of these two items are only to describe the sample.

**Tenure**

The interviewee is posed two questions concerning tenure which discriminate their relevant experience. The significance of the HR practitioner’s tenure is presented by two aspects: it provides additional insight for the qualitative data and builds upon the sample description. Studies have demonstrated that longer tenures lead towards a more constructive view which benefits from increased organisational knowledge (Gyekye 2006), additionally this alters the personal values and sense of status of the employee (Takeda-Tinker & Mirabella 2009). Tenure describes the opportunity to obtain insight and exposure to the entrenched culture. Therefore the practitioner is led towards the path where their values assimilate with the industry’s own.

The research discriminates tenure into two categories: in the current role, and within the AMMI. The current role refers to the period of time the respondent has spent with their current employer.
retrospective to the last major change of role and responsibility; the period of the current role is continual in regards to minor or subtle role augments which are normative employment activities.

Table 3-6 Tenure in Current Role (with coding)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt; 1 Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 to 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 to 4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>&gt;4 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total period of time a practitioner has spent within the AMMI is recorded in the following tenure question. This time period is the accumulative time, and may include multiple non-consecutive periods.

Table 3-7 Experience within the Industry (with coding)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 to 4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 to 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6 to 8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>&gt;8 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The exploration of both internal tenure (time in the current role) and industry experience allows for a more critical examination of the qualitative data. The ratio between internal tenure and industry experience offers insight in determining the respondents’ potential employment bias; if a respondent has accrued a large portion of his/her industry experience in a single role then it is probable that their perspective is pigeonholed. Furthermore, additional attention is warranted to respondents who have higher than average industry experience.
Employment category

The respondents select one of the six provided brief role descriptions, with a seventh null option (other) available if nothing is appropriate. The six possible role descriptions define the respondent’s level within the organisation: Senior manager/director or HR practitioner/manager and the focus of responsibilities: Human resource, Industrial relations, or combined responsibilities. This question is the first to be derived verbatim from the Moore and Gardner (2004) research survey.

Table 3-8 Job Role Categories (with coding) in Part One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Senior manager/director/practitioner with prime responsibility for HR strategy/policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Senior manager/director/practitioner with prime responsibility for IR strategy/policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Senior manager/director/practitioner with prime responsibility for both HR and IR strategy/policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>HR practitioner with responsibility for human resource operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>IR practitioner with responsibility for industrial relations operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Manager/practitioner with responsibility for HR and IR operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The inclusion of the question on employment category serves three purposes: generalizability, expansion, and funnelling. Generalizability refers to how well the research’s findings can be applied beyond the sample to other research (Zikmund, Babin, Carr and Griffin 2010). It is therefore important to maximise generalizability given earlier research of Moore and Gardner (2004) (which this research is developed from) and current provisional plans of Dr Scott Gardner’s future research.
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Identifying respondents’ level and area of responsibility provides an additional layer of perspective as a variation in responsibility will also alter the respondents’ priorities; different levels within an organisation are likely to have varying goals that may demand an alternative focus. Moore and Gardner (2004) identified an increase in corporate status for HR activities as well as a perceived greater influence. Understanding the respondents’ position aids the analysing of the semi-structured interview which also provides explanation within the later discussion.

Finally, the order of the demographic questions is presented such that the participants’ are subtly directed to turn their unconsciousness towards the desired mindset of self-examining their role as a HR practitioner. This funnelling technique utilises question sequences to obtain unbiased responses (Zikmund et al. 2007). Initial questions bear no significance to the eventual topic within the semi-structure interview. Slowly, the respondents’ are asked questions that invoke non-biased responses relevant to the industry – such as tenure, which leads the respondents to visualise a broad concept of the industry. This visualisation is further developed when the respondents evaluate their own level of responsibility. By the completion of this question the respondents will be in the desired mind set to comfortably address the ‘Practitioner’s Role’ questions.

Practitioner’s Role

The practitioner’s role examines the areas of responsibility and key accountabilities of the respondent. The responsibilities and accountabilities inherited during the initial employment within that role, the status quo (current practices), together with the practitioners’ ideal role form a portrait which represents the progression of their current responsibilities. A synopsis of the practitioners’ portraits will create a composite role profile for the HR practitioner within the Australian Metals Mining industry.

Moore and Gardner’s (2004) study of HR, IR and change management in 62 companies operating in the AMMI required respondents to nominate three key accountabilities or priority role elements
from a selection of ten common HR activities. The current study has expanded this menu of activities to fourteen, with the addition of more contemporary responsibilities and removed or redefined superseded terms or activity categories to reflect changes in HR, and to a larger degree IR practices over the last eight years.

Table 3-9 List of Duties Presented in Part One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE 1 a</th>
<th>Recruitment and Selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 b</td>
<td>Performance appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 c</td>
<td>Performance management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 d</td>
<td>Workforce planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 e</td>
<td>Contract management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 f</td>
<td>HR records and database maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 g</td>
<td>OH&amp;S planning and administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 h</td>
<td>OH&amp;S training delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 i</td>
<td>Training and Development planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 j</td>
<td>Training program design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 k</td>
<td>Training Delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 l</td>
<td>Payroll administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 m</td>
<td>Employee communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLE 1 n</td>
<td>Custodian of ICT/technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where the previous study limited respondents to nominating three key areas, this research allows for the selection of any number of responsibilities. The respondents are directed to indicate where their efforts are significantly channelled. The definition of significant is at the discretion of each respondent, as the question aims to capture their assumptions concerning their role. The decision not to quantify the criteria further, or at all, came from the superficial bias likely to occur from the subjective nature of self-assessment resulting in greater effort for minimal benefits.
The respondents were asked to indicate their significant responsibilities and key accountabilities in three domains: Prescribed, Practiced and Preferred. The prescribed duties explores the original role when the practitioner was initially incumbent, and in doing so acknowledges that roles develop with the occupant, environment and firm’s objectives. The practiced duties reflect how role evolves from the original job description, or prescribed duties, to incorporate new activities while shedding others. The current state of realised responsibilities that are not necessarily explicitly expressed contractually is classified as the practiced duties. The prescribed duties can be viewed as the original inception of the role, and the practiced duties as the matured product.

The third domain of responsibility and key accountabilities is the preferred duties. This reveals where the HR practitioner believes their efforts would be best utilised to benefit the firm. The ideal allocation of effort is subjective to the practitioner – limited by perception of firm and industry. This does not suggest that this insight has no value, instead it provides the perspective which this research seeks; a practical view grounded by pragmatic realities, rather than academic rhetoric, is more likely to present fresh insights.

Figure 3-5 Role Signature Plot (Role Development Survey)
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The prescribed, practiced and preferred duties’ net focuses are evaluated, and this is plotted to create the Role signature (see example above, Figure 3.5 – Role Signature Plot), or HR practitioner’s portrait; in the above example the practiced activities are deflected towards operational and people, while the HR professionals’ preferred activities are more strategic. Each category from the Practitioner’s Role selection has been positioned within Ulrich’s “HR Role in Building a Competitive Organisation” model (Ulrich 1997, 43), with the activity’s focus represented by the quadrant(s) the activity occupies (see below, Figure 3.6 - Role Breakdown). With each activity a specific x and y coordinate modifier, based on the position with the role breakdown, each plot is the summation of indicated responsibilities. The Role signature is the path from the plotted points prescribed – practiced – preferred. An overall portrait of the sample is created by the summation of the net shifts between each plot – the role signature.

The decision to use the net shifts instead of the discrete plots to collate an overall sample portrait is a matter of subjectivity. The purpose of the sample portrait is to characterise the current evolution

Figure 3-6 Role Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic partner</th>
<th>Strategic</th>
<th>Change Agent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;Recruitment and selection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;Workforce planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(x=-1, y=+1)</td>
<td>(y=+1)</td>
<td>(x=+1, y=+1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes</td>
<td>Change Agent</td>
<td>People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;OH&amp;S planning and administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;Custodian of ICT Technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(x=-1)</td>
<td>&gt;Training and development planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;Contract management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;Training Delivery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;Employee communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(x=+1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative Expert</th>
<th>Operational</th>
<th>Employee Champion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;HR records and database management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;Payroll administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(x=-1, y=-1)</td>
<td>&gt;Performance appraisal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(y=-1)</td>
<td>&gt;Performance management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;OH&amp;S training delivery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(x=+1, y=-1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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of the HR focus – whilst allowing emergent clusters to appear through examination of like respondents. Due to the rudimentary method in which each plot is evaluated it would be remiss to treat the Role signatures as anything other than subjective shifts; this method does not provide comparable positions though it does indicate focus shifts. These subjectivity biases prevent the calculated discrete values from being generalizable. Incorporation of relative scales with clearly specified comparison groups (Gyekye 2006) would have increased internal validity to the discrete values, though as discussed earlier this was impractical. Subsequently, the lack of measurement invariance prevents any valid comparison external to the research (Ivanoc 2011). Therefore, the most suitable source of available data to comment on the evolution of the practitioners’ focus is the vector produced from the net shift summations.

3.5.4 Part Two: Industry Characteristics – In Depth Interviews

Due to the exploratory nature of the research no suitable instrument was revealed which matched the desired narrative style that would later undergo thematic analysis. A semi-structure interview process was selected to create a conversational style, with the respondent contributing a narrative. The respondent was offered the opportunity to describe the factors which they believe influence the role of the HR practitioner within the Australian Metals Mining industry. The focus of the interview was retained using a semi-structured questionnaire to support the discussion. A semi-structured interview format employs flexible prompts and questions are dynamic and explorative in nature. Respondents are encouraged to recount their own perspectives while the interviewer’s ‘intrusions’ are performed for the required focussing and subtle redirection.

During this stage ‘response bias’ - a range of biases that distort measurements due to the interviewee misrepresenting the truth (Zikmund et al. 2010), could potentially derail the later Delphi study. Poorly articulated questions could create an acquiescence bias, with the interviewee attaching their view to the questions’ intent. Therefore, a checklist of desired topics was used to softly prompt the interviewee into each arena without telegraphing any desired viewpoints. This
checklist was formulated using feedback from the pilot study, and from the earlier work of Moore and Gardner (2004). The prompts were organic and evolved as more interviews led to emergent themes.

The topics which were targeted for exploration included:

- Organisational structure
- HR protocols and procedures within the hierarchy
- Quality of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS)
- Dissymmetry between similar firms within the industry
- Current threats and opportunities within the labour markets
- Demarcation collapse with the labour market

The success of the in depth interviews, of gaining unbiased, relevant and revealing information was improved with a conversational approach and a fluid Part One: HR practitioner’s role. Recording the interviews, for later transcribing, permitted constant eye contact, which strengthened the conversational style. The mind-set formed through part one allowed for seamless transition into the semi-structured questions, while the conversational approach allowed the respondent opportunity to discuss what they perceive to be integral to their activities; this served to overlay a narrative to the quantitative measures.

3.5.5 Part Three: Organisational Effectiveness

The purpose of Part Three: Organisational effectiveness is to explore activities of the HR practitioner within the AMMI to evaluate if it matches the role of the HR practitioner within contemporary literature. Ulrich’s HR role survey provides a tested tool that measures the effectiveness of delivering the core HR functions (See Appendix 3 – Ulrich’s Human Resource Assessment Survey). A comparison to Ulrich’s discrete role metaphors builds upon the role
signature from Part One, and this delivers a multidimensional approach to the qualitative interview with pre-tested quantitative data.

Ulrich’s framework was developed in a series of pilot studies involving a range of HR practitioners. It was first administered in a Connor and Ulrich (1996) research study where the survey was completed by 256 HR practitioners that had previously participated in workshops for HR strategy. The survey consists of 10 broad questions, tailored for four categorical roles, resulting in a total of 40 items; each item is scored with a five point Likert scale and four sums are calculated which represent the quality of service provided by the HR professional to each role (Conner and Ulrich 1996; Ulrich 1997).

Ulrich proposed his conceptual HR Role framework in 1993; this consists of four metaphoric activities: strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion, and change agent (Conner and Ulrich 1996). Ulrich later expanded this model to provide a modern holistic perspective of the demands from HR practitioners, resulting in six new HR role models: coach, architect, builder, facilitator, leader and conscience (Ulrich and Beatty 2001). This updated model deliberates upon specific HR personalities whilst the original model demonstrates the paradoxical conflict between competing focus. The original model was chosen due its usefulness discussed by Lemmergaard (2009a, 188):

“First, the model has a strong appeal to HR professionals, as they often distinguish between people and processes in their everyday work. Second, the time perspective is relevant as more focus is being put on strategic and long-term HR activities. Third, the model demonstrated four relatively simple roles for the HR manager to perform. These roles demonstrate a logic which is relevant to HR management, and to the developmental progression in the field.”

The four metaphoric roles have been used in studies to define the role of HR practitioners (Lemmergaard 2009a; Connor and Ulrich 1996), though this does not fully embrace the purpose of Ulrich’s model within the framework.
The qualitative enquiry into the HR effectiveness within an organisation – how well the organisation delivers specific HR services – provides information which allows for a deeper understanding of the interviews; suggesting a contextual reality in which the HR activities can further be examined to identify the strength of specific influences. For instance, connecting HR activities to metaphoric roles, and including practitioner narrative can reveal how additional forces influence the outcomes; where Ulrich’s role assessment may reflect a low score yet the practitioner’s narrative may insinuate a dedicated focus to that area which would suggest the mentioned influences has more than a moderate influence. In this sense, the instrument will be used to develop and contextualise the data collected from the semi-structured questions.

3.6 Analysis

The multiple tiered approach of the research dictates that analysis occurs after each introduction of new data – once after the interviews in the initial exploration phase and twice during the Delphi phase. Thematic analysis is used to analyse the data gathered during the interviews. Policy Delphi is used to analyse the results during the Delphi phase.

3.6.1 Thematic Analysis of Data

Thematic analysis is a common technique used in qualitative methods due to an easy to approach and adaptive system (Howitt and Cramer 2008). Thematic analysis identifies reoccurring themes from multiple qualitative samples, and is not the reporting of the frequency which specific terms are mentioned – (Guest, MacQueen and Namey 2011). The strength of thematic analysis is that it can transform simple datum into potent knowledge by bridging its significance over multiple samples and “capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set” (Guest et al. 2011, 11).

The validity of thematic analysis is dependent on researchers adhering to their own set procedure, as there are no specific prescribed methods for thematic analysis due to the varied ways in which
qualitative data can be obtained. Aronson (1994) explains that good thematic analysis follows some general rules (see below, Figure 3.5 - Thematic Analysis Process).

Figure 3-7 Thematic Analysis Process

![Thematic Analysis Process Diagram](image)

Source: Adapted from Aronson (1994)

The first part of the process is to convert the qualitative data into a suitable format, typically transcribed interviews, and for the researcher to become very familiar with the data. Reoccurring patterns will be easily identifiable once the researcher is familiar with the data. The initial insight into the obvious patterns allows the researcher to create codes which will later be used to categorise individual datum.

The next stage of the process begins to draw all the data sets together; all the identified themes are classified by the codes formed in the previous stage. If more themes emerge then additional codes are assigned, and the process is repeated until all the themes are codified. One particular strength of thematic analysis is that it is not restricted to mono-methods, as datum to be identified can come from multiple different methods (Guest et al. 2011).

Themes are likely to be modified as the researcher progresses through the data (Howitt and Cramer 2008). At this point the items not coded on the transcripts are reviewed, and are further discarded if no additional themes are identified. How rigorous the researcher is in assigning to items a thematic code, will determine how well the researcher forms the collected data into a comprehensive picture (Leininger 1985).

If the scopes of the themes are too specific a second round of thematic analysis can be undertaken to seek broader issues. This re-categorisation of apparently superficial themes into stronger
overarching and substantial themes produces additional knowledge which the respondents may be unaware of (Howitt and Cramer 2008). How specific is too specific is determined by the research’s outcomes. Alternatively, if the thematic results are too broad, a more specific thematic analysis can divide larger themes into smaller sub-themes. It is important that the “…theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 82).

The researcher justifies the scope and detail of the themes with related literature (Aronson 1994). The additional information from related literature provides an avenue for the researcher to infer beyond the knowledge of the thematic analysis. This inference can be delivered to the original respondents to provide feedback on the potentially unrealised propositions (Aronson 1994). Providing any inference to the respondents for feedback can reduce the contamination of researcher bias.

The thematic analysis is not without its limitations. It is common for researchers to be too vague in the process, and thus not provide enough procedural evidence to accrue a satisfactory level of validity (Howitt and Cramer 2008). Another problem arises when a numerical representation of the thematic occurrence is included; thematic analysis is a tool to identify reoccurring themes, and not a measurement for those themes. Put simply, it may require diverse processes to reveal anticipated themes from different respondents. When reporting numerical data within thematic analysis it is vital that the methodology used to collect the data supports any inference.

3.6.2 The Delphi process

The principle of the Delphi process involves obtaining a judgment based consensus through an iterative process from an anonymous panel of experts (Chen and Wang 2010; Tapio 2002). Research utilising a Delphi approach can do so in a variety of ways, with this research adopting a policy Delphi process as best suited for discovery of new concepts. Generally, a Delphi approach “…is uniquely suited to studying topics with little historical evidence, related to rapidly changing
events, and of great complexity” (Franklin and Hart 2007, 238). The process is heavily reliant on the quality and appropriateness of the selected participants that form the panel of experts, as well as on the ability of the facilitator – or researcher.

The Delphi process begins with the selection of the panel and a facilitator; the researcher however has the option of performing the role of facilitator within research. Panellists remain anonymous from other panellists, thus restricting any potential biases and promoting more honest views (Tapio 2002). It is the role of the facilitator to interact individually with each panellist. An alternative approach is to focus on organisations, and not individuals, where the panellists seek advice from experts within their organisation before responding (Tapio 2002).

The facilitator formulates the relevant issues, and subsequently determines which issues the panellists do not agree on. A series of propositions are created to explore the rationale of the disagreement/s, or policies which require consensus. The panellists are asked to respond to each statement, indicating if they agree or disagree by typically using a Likert scale. E-mail is an efficient delivery method that expedites the process while minimizing the cost to the respondents, while at the same time maintaining their anonymity (Chou 2002).

The facilitator collates the responses and draws a summary of results that contain expanded and emergent issues. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative responses to the statements better equips the facilitator to develop the issues (Tapio 2002). The developed issues are evaluated and the process is repeated, starting with new propositions for the panel of experts. The facilitator guides the process through a determined number of iterations or until no additional value is expected to be gained from further iterations.

The different Delphi approaches follow the same process of gathering the experts’ opinion, though all focus on different outcomes. The outcomes include exploration of implicit knowledge, assessing
current perceptions, forecasting policy, and stimulating discussion to draw out emerging ideas (Franklin and Hart 2007).

The three styles of the Delphi process are classical, decision-making, and policy Delphi. Each style is best suited for a particular outcome and methodology. The classic Delphi’s objective is to reveal the truth about a specific phenomenon, and usually involves forecasting trends (Chou 2002). The facilitator accepts the experts’ opinion of the development of a specific element.

Whereas decision-making oriented Delphi is a process that encourages collaboration between a group of experts or leaders (Van de Ven 1974). This approach can be used as a substitute for face to face committees, where distance or availability prevents the group from regular meetings. The facilitator accepts arguments from all participants and selects the most appropriate course of action. The decision-making variant takes more iteration to achieve a desired outcome.

Though operating in a similar manner as the previous two, policy Delphi has a substantially different outcome – which is the main contributing reason as to why this approach was selected. The difference is that the policy Delphi formulates and evaluates fresh ideas.

“The policy Delphi is not intended to generate consensus, nor is it intended to be a mechanism for making decisions. It is intended to bring forward options and alternatives and to establish pro and con arguments for differing positions” (Franklin and Hart 2007, 238).

Unlike the first two approaches, policy Delphi does not require consensus to create knowledge. When opposing views are encountered the facilitator attempts to understand the rationality of both perspectives; contrasting responses that do not reach a consensus may warrant supplementary heuristic work.

The Delphi process is not free from criticism, with issues being raised over its reliability and accuracy given a panel with low commitment or not representative of the population (Tapio 2002). The expert panel can be susceptible to poor commitment due to the anonymity of the panellist,
where panellists no longer feel accountable. Tapio (2002) argues that commitment and population representation can be addressed by correctly selecting panellists, as well as ensuring that panellists will be engaged by the topic of discussion and are not selected to ensure a certain point of view. It must be taken into account however, that even engaged panellists may respond without due consideration for the statement, especially when the research is aimed at exploring unrealised pressures.

Ambiguous or oversimplified statements presented to panellists can also draws criticism (Tapio 2002). Ambiguity within abstract statements introduces multiple interpretations that restrict the facilitator from developing the issues in future rounds; furthermore platitude statements restrict new ideas that arise from discussions on disagreement. An argument for an oversimplified statement may be able to reveal or confirm an implicit belief or assumption. The statements within this research were written with this in mind, balancing between platitude and ambiguity. Each statement presented to the expert panel was intended to draw consideration from the HR professional, however in hindsight, some statements failed to fall within the balanced parameters.

3.7 Conclusion for the Methodology

A mixed methods approach was adopted as the research methodology to explore the influences on the HR practitioners’ role—though predominately the methodology is based on the qualitative data from the open-ended interview questions. The research methodology is broken down into three tiers: initial exploration, Delphi phase, and the final Delphi phase. The initial exploration is the preliminary data source that the fundamental themes are revealed via a thematic analysis of two types of data collected: the qualitative open ended questions and the quantitative from the two surveys.

The Delphi phase develops the themes from the initial exploration by presenting a summary to a panel of experts (the participating HR practitioners). The feedback from the experts steers the
presented themes to further development. A specialised method of Delphi study is conducted (policy Delphi) which focuses less on obtaining a consensus between experts, but rather on the exploration of the differences.

The result of these data collection methods is presented in the following chapter. Chapter Four will detail the thematic analysis process, which leads into the brief reporting of the two rounds of the Delphi phase.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the thematic analysis from the initial exploration phase – which identified the contextual factors which influence the role and practices HRM professionals within the AMMI. A portrait of the HR professionals’ role is fashioned from the results of the thematic analysis and the two surveys: The role development survey and Ulrich’s HR role survey. The contextual factors and role portrait concepts are explored further within the policy Delphi results. The themes of cyclic nature (uncertainty and tight labour markets), remoteness and heteronomy are presented at the start of this chapter evolve with the Delphi process – reorientating to operational HRM, uncertainty, remuneration and leaders.

4.1 Participant Profile (n=11)

Participants were identified by a convenience sample source from previous participants in Murdoch Executive Education programs. All the participants are actively employed within the HR function of a firms whose primarily activity is directly linked to the extraction of metal ore. The size of these firms ranged from smaller firms, which provide ancillary support for remote operations, to extremely large firms, such as one of the primary iron ore extractors. The size of the firms’ workforce ranged from 50 to several thousand.

The position that the participants filled varied as much as the firms they worked for, though there was distinct representation of Senior managers who had prime responsibility for both HR and IR strategy/policy. Most of the practitioners have been in their current roles for two to three years, though the industry experience was evenly distributed between two to eight or more years. Nearly half of the respondents had substantial experience outside of the mining sector, and one third was still with their first employer. The organisations which the participants are employed in range from minor ancillary support firms operating from Perth, to large organisations which conduct
exploration and extraction operations that occupy multiple locations. The employers or firms of respondents can be categorised as Requisite Organisations and non-Requisite Organisation.

From the eleven respondents, four are male and seven are female. The oldest respondent was aged between 50 to 60 years of age, and the youngest less than 25 years old. The rest of the respondents are aged between 31 to 40 years of age.

In this study, no respondents are identified. A code using a pre-determined respondent number is used.
4.2 **Thematic Analysis**

The respondent’s interview data from the initial exploration phase was collated into reoccurring subjects – which were then examined for thematic links. The thematic analysis of the interviews captures the HR professionals’ perception of several areas, including Industry characteristics, employment conditions, and HRM norms and expectations. The contextual influences on HRM discussed within the interviews were sorted into preliminary higher level causal factors. The following Delphi phase is based upon the results of the preceding thematic analysis. The themes identified for this are: that the cyclic nature of Australian Metals Mining Industry fosters high uncertainty and a tight labour market, that labour is heteronomous—especially in areas of remote deployment - (see below - Figure 4.1 The Primary Characteristics of the Australian Metals Mining Industry that influence HRM), and that HRM has a predominant operational focus.

**Figure 4-1 The Primary Characteristics of the Australian Metals Mining Industry that influence HRM**

![Diagram showing the primary characteristics of Australian Metals Mining Industry influencing HRM]

The majority of phenomena raised by the interviewees can be argued to be attributed to one or more of the above mentioned factors, as indicated in the Venn diagram. It is worth noting that these three factors were not explicitly stated within the interviews as the most influential factors on HRM. The three factors are inferred by examining the reoccurring themes within the HR
professionals’ testimonies and the relevant literature. The Delphi phase was designed to test the robustness of alternative arguments, and refine the inference of significant factors. Furthermore, none of these factors are unique to the AMMI; rather it is the combination of these factors which may uniquely differentiate the AMMI context.

4.2.1 Cyclic nature

The cyclic nature of the AMMI is represented as a primary influencing factor on the role of the HR professional. Specifically, the cyclic nature refers to the extreme ‘boom or bust’ of the operating economy as a result of influences such as: fluctuations of foreign demand for resources, domestic government policy and industry practices. As one respondent observed:

[The industry] is always ‘boom or bust’. You are always hiring – getting rid of – hiring – getting rid of, so you always have that balance. At the moment we have... not a recruitment freeze, but we are putting a lot of non-production roles on hold. (Respondent 4)

Often the respondents linked the cyclic nature with the immediate changes of labour demands:

It’s cyclical. When its booming everyone wants to be riding the wave, but when things slow down they let teams go quickly. (Respondent 1)

![Figure 4-2 Primary Symptoms of the Cyclic Nature](image)

The influences of cyclic industry are diverse and complex; due to the complexity that creates this cyclic nature, the more manageable symptoms, of uncertainty and tight labour market, are...
examined separately. These two cyclic symptoms are located on opposite hemispheres on the cyclic nature element within the Industry characteristics Venn diagram (see Figure 4.2 – Primary Symptoms of the Cyclic Nature); the challenges of uncertainty were often linked to remoteness, while the challenges of the tight labour market were at times indistinguishable with the challenges of heteronomy (see above - Figure 4.1 The Primary Characteristics of the Australian Metals Mining Industry that influence HRM). Therefore, the primary symptoms of the cyclic nature are designated specific hemispheres which correspond to the associated areas of the Venn diagram which represents the characteristics of the AMMI.

**Uncertainty**

The current boom is leveraged on high commodity prices, which are far from stable. The interviewees stated that the industry was fast-paced and reactive – as opposed to being controllable:

> It’s an incredible fast industry, so, it always seems busy but things really fire up when projects take off or something is given an approval. (Respondent 1)

There are several elements which contribute to the AMMI’s uncertainty. One element is demand, as control lies with foreign interests, specifically China, and this limits the industry’s ability to control output as organisations in several other countries also offer similar production capabilities. As one respondent stated:

> We are now in a situation where the iron ore prices are $150... $130 making it economical to fly in and out people on rosters that seven or eight years ago would have been uneconomical. (Respondent 6)

However, not all respondents are employed in such favourable markets. The shift in demand and supply of nickel together with the strengthening of the Australian dollar has seen the price of nickel fluctuate between US$4 to US$24 per tonne over the past five years:
Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

...if you are in iron ore or the oil business, then it’s a licence to print money. We produce nickel at the moment, our costs are very high. We are producing it at a cost that is currently less than the market value. (Respondent 4)

The next element contributing to the uncertainty environment is government domestic policy which is only escalated by a minority government with a tentative future. The lack of government stability prevents the AMMI from planning for policies ranging from sector based taxes and workforce legislation (Respondent 3).

The high uncertainty of the AMMI with potential high gains has produced a reactive HRM environment. With limited acumen to forecast future needs, effort is directed to immediate needs as they arise. Effort is often reported to be rescinded once the immediate drivers are removed, as one respondent recalled:

Only minimal amounts of the range of initiatives were completed, either due to deliberate lip service or loss of the sense of urgency over an 18 month period. (Respondent 3)

More respondents commented that the industry has only delivered ‘lip service’ to SHRM, relying on the perceived guaranteed returns of the current boom, which in itself is responsible for the mercenary culture exhibited by contractual workers. Though other respondents believed that HRM can deliver value within a tentative market:

Our challenge in this field is to ride the owners, and managers of the company, to positive long term outcomes, and not just the next budget cycle or quarterly report. To take them on the journey on what does the organisation look like in five years’ time – and policy drives that. Policy sets the challenge, if written well then it is the aspiration so long as the policy isn’t lip service. (Respondent 6)

This statement from Respondent 6 indicates how the HR professionals are tested with the task of prevailing over policy-makers’ concerns for long-term uncertainty as well as the difficulties which uncertainty plays upon their own activities.
Tight Labour Market

The long lead time for adequate training and widespread parallel development of mining projects has resulted in a labour shortage, with an especially strong demand for experienced talented workers; as was simply stated by a respondent as:

What people call the ‘war for talent’ – skilled shortages; I am finding it quite hard to find the right candidates. (Respondent 1)

Many of the respondents described it in a similar fashion:

The demand for skilled labour in this sector is higher than the supply available. So straight away it is a supply and demand problem. (Respondent 7)

The misalignment between supply and demand has been exasperated by three main influences; the lengthy period of time taken for the labour force to obtain the required qualifications and experience; the ‘ramping up’ of a growing number of large projects; and the labour forces’ fluidity – or mobility between competing firms and industries. One respondent succinctly summarised the supply problem:

You can’t produce a tradesperson within a year or two. (Respondent 1)

As mentioned earlier, reactive HRM is limited in projecting long-term labour demands as projects can ‘ramp up’ with little time available to prepare. Therefore, firms are restricted to the immediate labour pool when sourcing for new opportunities or projects.

The opportunities to exploit large commodity reserves for significant profit by rapid sourcing of labour has created a bubble within the industry, raising the competitiveness of remuneration packages and diffusing the link to productivity. One senior HR manager reflected:

How do we actually compete without overly baking the costs in what we [claim] to be the cyclical pricing? At some stage the pricing will come off so we can’t sustain cost at certain levels. (Respondent 5)
The problems of remuneration are expanded with one respondent who described similar issues of universally linking performance with remuneration:

It gets distorted and there is no balance [when] there is a lot of manipulation by general managers to keep ‘that guy’ as that person [is perceived] to be critical to the project. (Respondent 3)

This may suggest that the link between performance and remuneration is influenced more by the potential performance determined by the quality of the employee rather than any measurable output. The impact upon the effectiveness of linking performance with remuneration is more critical in the smaller mining firms.

The respondents unanimously agreed that the highly skilled labour market is the most competitive. The heavy competition within the external labour market is restoring a more strategic outlook:

Needing to constantly recruit people is tough; the only way to really address that is to shift a little more attention on retaining people. (Respondent 1)

Typically when firms are unable to attract candidates with a strong set of skills and experience, then they are more willing to apply a fit for purpose criteria which opens a broader range of candidates. One senior HR manager explained that due to the scarcity of experience within the industry their work teams have one very experienced veteran:

What we have been encouraging [the veteran team leaders] to do is to bring in younger people to get the knowledge transfer happening. Bringing people in who are slightly under-developed. Which some bigger companies wouldn’t hire into those roles. (Respondent 6)

Furthermore, respondents reported that training and promotion possibilities are often used as incentives to lure or retain quality candidates that have signalled an intention to leave the firm; as a respondent commented:

It’s getting harder and harder to retain people in a candidate favoured market. (Respondent 1)
This philosophy of actively retaining individuals was rejected by HR professionals that operate within the Requisite Organisation (RO), who stated that employees who indicate a separation from the firm were not selected specifically for retention. One respondent explained:

The reality is that we wouldn’t offer that person a promotion internally as they wouldn’t meet the standards, and that is a decider [for the employee to leave]. (Respondent 5)

An upside to this labour demand has been the increase in minority involvement, with most respondents suggesting we are seeing the highest rates of female participation in the mining industry to date.

The pressure of the tight labour market is further exacerbated as the stronger energy resource sector attracts the higher performing employees to leave the AMMI. The barriers for workers to relocate from the metals mining industry to the oil and gas exploration are minimal due to the similar skill set required by the sectors:

Our biggest issue at the moment is oil and gas draining ... the trades would be sucked into oil and gas; better rosters; better pay. (Respondent 3)

Additionally, employee characteristics are comparable as both industries operate in remote environments, and are heavily procedural. The energy resource sector is described as ‘elitist’, with more favourable conditions and remuneration – placing additional competition on the higher quality candidates.

Not every interviewee listed the tight labour market as being problematic, though it was universally signalled as a major influence for HR policy. Smaller firms, with flatter organisational models, were more likely to contract less suitable candidates where the organisational structure compensates for deficiencies in employee requirements; the lacking of skills is countered with mentoring, and the lack of available experience in work groups can be mitigated by assigning leadership roles to distinguished veterans. Smaller firms reported these techniques as methods for improving the
productivity from employees who would not necessarily be valued in more rigid organisations. Some respondents argued that the skill shortage is localised to a few specific larger players:

The industry talks about the skill shortage... There are other companies that have very low turnover and very positive turnover in the areas that they want turnover in. [This firm] doesn’t have a skills problem; we have the right workforce working for us in the right roles. Other organisations have a skill shortage as they don’t run good businesses and people do not wish to work for them; they fill a role, and three months later they need to fill it again. (Respondent 6)

Skills demand was reported by most respondents to be critical at the leadership level – where highly demand quality candidates were necessary for leadership roles. The apparent cause is the double-edged sword of an elevated level of opportunity for talented employees; the talent pool is being stretched as quality leaders relocate to better opportunities, and the growth of the industry is providing more opportunities than there is available talent:

One of the greatest challenges that we have had in the past few years is as there has been massive growth in the industry we have had to promote leaders much more quickly than we would normally have. (Respondent 5)

The potentially debilitating symptom of this phenomenon is the ‘loss of wisdom’:

You just have less depth and wisdom across the whole industry as it has been stretched. (Respondent 5)

The ‘loss of wisdom’ driven by ‘hot opportunities’ has management struggling to retain high levels of corporate memory as a result of employee departure and the dilution of quality employees. Firms will encounter more challenges as fresh candidates fill positions once occupied by industry veterans. The candidates’ diminishing corporate knowledge and talent marks them as unsuitable to inherit additional HR responsibilities – constraining the devolution of the HR professional role.
4.2.2 Heteronomy

The second characteristic forming the unique factors of the AMMI is role heteronomy. Role heteronomy suggests that roles are standardised and prescribed and is subjected to explicit reporting requirement and limits on autonomous discretion to decide and act. This phenomena isn’t unique to AMMI, with most sectors dependent on productivity resulting from substantial capital costs restrict or prescribe the levels of individual discretionary decision making. Front line workers are typically heteronomous; the mining worker surrenders autonomy due to the structuring effect of organisation procedure, policies and relevant workplace legislation.

The respondents described the front line workers’ role as repetitive work with limitations to accountability, as one HR professional observed:

You have to have fair level of governance to ensure that people do the right thing, but there is a dire lack of accountability at the site. (Respondent 4)

The diminishing accountability of workers has developed during the latest boom:

There is a lack of accountability that has seemed to have crept in over the years. (Respondent 4)

The responsibility of discretionary decision making was remarked on as resting on the work group leaders or mentors. The structure of the front line managers mitigates the responsibility of the individual worker, as more responsibility is laid upon line managers:

...organisations are only successful if the line managers feel they are accountable and held to account for people. They own the people within an organisation. (Respondent 5)

The role of the general labour within the mining industry has limited autonomy; restricted by prescribed processes and a centralised system of accountability placed on line managers.

The heteronomous labour force is problematic as it encourages a transient work force. First, the generic capabilities of front line workers allows for fluidity between firms and similar sectors. An
employee’s ability to move between firms is assisted with the absence of barriers – such as requiring an alternative skill set:

It’s just industry [specific knowledge]. If you’re a dump truck driver then you are a dump truck driver. It really has no bearing on what project you are working on. (Respondent 3)

The approaches which mining firms adopt to ensure projects have a full complement of labour also influence the fluidity of a transient work force:

You are effectively looking for a person to replace a person in a role. (Respondent 6)

Or as one respondent reflected upon, there are demands to recruit for a ‘ramped up’ project:

... took anyone with a heartbeat, ensuring they had the skills and worked somewhere before ... (Respondent 6)

This sentiment extends to how firms approach ‘personnel management’:

... focus on management of those crews, opposed to the skills within the crews themselves. That means that there is a lot of ability to move between employers. (Respondent 3)

Without the internal retaining force of employee involvement, and the non-existent external barriers preventing employees to easily source new employment, the labour force is encouraged to be transient. Additionally, the often strenuous employment conditions can cultivate a culture of employee fluidity – as employees attempt to find more favourable environments. The extent to which labour is treated as transient was summarised by one respondent:

We have to live with the reality that our workforce living this kind of lifestyle should be transient. (Respondent 6)

The second issue with a heteronomous labour force is the clear signalling to external firms of the quality of individual employees; an employee’s capability is easily discerned by the position they hold due to the rapid promotions, and thus the firm is more exposed to the risk of predatory
recruiters. The external demand for quality candidates radically reduces the barriers between firms, as suggested by two respondents:

Quality candidates have got such good choice and such a number of jobs to choose from that they can be very highly mobile. (Respondent 1)

Converse to what is happening in other industries is that we are benefitting from the Gen-Y transfer of better educated employees ... we are probably grooming people for bigger roles. (Respondent 6)

The combination of external and internal demands is described by the respondents as some of the many catalysts for unrealistic remuneration – although it is unclear how much remuneration is factored in an employee’s decision to seek employment elsewhere. The majority of respondents indicated that more emphasis is placed on ensuring remuneration is comparable to the market leaders; rather than directly linking to specific performance. Firms that are not directly competitive with the market leaders focused on retention and attraction by unquantified measures – such as culture fit, and work-life considerations:

We want pay to be fair and competitive, but then the reasons people are attractive with us and stay has to be for many different reasons and we know that the top drivers of retention are not remuneration. (Respondent 5)

All the respondents described the labour force as transient, with a varying degree of impact upon the firm’s HRM; some firms reported that turnover is managed at acceptable levels while other firms have labour shortages that impede production. Interestingly, the HR professionals reported that it is common for an individual’s exodus from the firm to be temporary:

Our workforce tends to be more mobilised and then come back again. (Respondent 1)

The internal movement within the industry was often repeated:

They don’t leave the industry; they often move within the industry and you often get them back. (Respondent 3)
The expected tenure of employees is reported to be ranged between three to five years:

It’s a very fluid industry; people generally stay for five years or five months. In my experience, if we can hold them for the first year then we have a greater success in keeping them. (Respondent 3)

An example of uncertainty on employee tenure is demonstrated by one respondent’s comment:

Why do they stay six months; twelve months; eighteen months; three years; five years? After that you are probably getting lucky, to be honest. (Respondent 3)

One respondent’s tenet resonates through all the respondents’ remarks:

The general rule is if you can retain anyone after three years you are doing well. (Respondent 1)

It is unclear why employees often opt for short-term employment – less than 12 months. It is possibly due to opportunistic behaviour of the younger labour force. Certain major life events seem discordant with remote work life, specifically marriage and children, where the importance of work-life balance becomes imperative.

4.2.3 Remoteness

Remoteness was described by professionals as one of the more difficult factors to overcome. The distance from mining operations to the workers’ residence, with the majority of them not being local, has a damaging influence to their work-life balance. Simply stated, the distance from the mining operations and the employee’s residence causes issues, which are not indicative to metropolitan workers:

None of the iron ore mines are close to any reasonably sized city centres. (Respondent 6)

This respondent’s comment succinctly defines the reality of the remoteness of mining in Western Australia – which is expanded by another respondent:

The biggest problem the industry faces at the moment is the FIFO; unlucky for all of us that we do not have the iron ore mines just outside of metropolitan Perth. (Respondent 2)
Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

Generally speaking, the prevailing solution to overcome the ‘tyranny of distance’ is fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) – where the costs of travel is mitigated over a long working period, which may extend for five to ten days; and upon completion the workers are allowed a contacted proportion of their onsite work hours at their home location for recreational purposes.

The short tenure of workers in the AMMI, influenced greatly by the invasive work component of the work-life balance of FIFO, has strategic ramifications. FIFO increases employee fatigue driven by weariness from extended travel which may contribute to employee turnover. The interviewees also recognise employee work-life balance as being an important factor, and described it as one of their priorities. One solution, recognised as potentially removing many of the ramifications of FIFO, is for the relocation of the employee and their family closer to the mine operations; though the respondents revealed that such solutions are often unachievable:

We would want to do as much residential as we could, but the reality is can you actually get the housing you need there; can you get the required skills there? (Respondent 5)

The respondents also revealed that a further improvement to the work-life balance is restricted by diminishing returns. For example, to attain employee friendly rosters with shorter time on site would encumber the sites with much higher actual daily costs thereby increasing the ineffective transition to productive work ratio; within a given period workers would spend more time in transit and less time in being productive. The decision to improve rosters may be prevented by simple practicalities:

You can’t really change the rosters until you recontract the job or when the client changes the roster. At the end of the day they can’t change the roster if they can’t change the flights. (Respondent 3)

The remote work sites lack the level of support and infrastructure that is expected at traditional metropolitan roles. The missing or degraded support may include limited social support – family and friends or professional counselling; and representation of the firm’s employee support
programs. The remote mine locations generally have limited infrastructure and diminished living conditions. The condition of the employee accommodation while at the remote sites is described as far from ideal:

The problem with these camps are an artificial invention of what a community would look like, but they are not ... As corporations we value [employee communities] really low, as we only want the production that is associated with it. (Respondent 3)

Multiple respondents remarked on how the camps have an oppressive atmosphere, not conducive for employee wellbeing:

As part of the establishment you do not want to be constructing work environments where people feel they work in prisons. We don’t construct a psychic prison for people and say, ‘you are stuck in this remote location and don’t worry about the big fences as they are there to keep you safe’ (Respondent 6)

And again:

You always socialise with a set group of people. You miss out on a lot of social aspects ... if you have family you will miss out on these. And some of the issues presented to them are similar issues to people who are incarcerated, because the routine and the lack of control in your day. (Respondent 1)

Finally, one HR manager described how the conditions of the camp influenced his role on site:

That camp felt like a concentration camp more than a mining camp, and my job there was more of a welfare manager than the HR manager. (Respondent 6)

The described conditions of remote camps illustrate the combined influence of two industry characteristics: remoteness and uncertainty. The remote infrastructure problem, and other challenges detailed by the HR professionals, is compounded by multiple factors; the cost of development is exponentially higher in remote areas; additionally, high risks are associated with any unnecessary outlay due to the uncertainty of the industry. As such, investment in remote infrastructure is likely to be constrained by unfavourable risk assessments.
4.2.4 Summary of Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis of the respondent’s initial exploration interview data revealed three key characteristics of the Australian metals mining industry: cyclic nature, remoteness, and heteronomy. The symptoms of the industry’s cyclic nature was displayed in two distinct forms; firstly, the ‘boom or bust’ reality has resulted in a high level of perceived uncertainty, that is compounded by the additional costs associated with remote operations, has facilitated a reactive HRM policy. Second, the availability of labour has been insufficient to service the fluctuating labour demands of developing projects. This tight labour market is aggravated by the heteronomous labour created from heavily prescriptive roles and reduction of worker autonomy. In effect, the heteronomy and tight labour conditions has expedited a transient labour force – exposed to alternative employment opportunities from competing firms and industries. Firms operating within the AMMI have enacted HR policy to accommodate the skill deficiencies of the available labour market to ensure competitive to other firms. The tension resulting from these demands and policies are likely factors for the elevated remuneration within the industry, creating additional challenges for HR professionals to link employee remuneration with performance.

The next section of the research examines the quantitative data from the initial exploration phase. The quantitative data explores the HR professional’s role, building a portrait of the HR role by examining the HR professionals’ role signatures. The findings of the role signatures are then incorporated with the findings from the thematic analysis in a later section (Section 4.4: Delphi Phase) to derive the statements for the first Delphi round.
4.3 **Quantitative Results: Operational HRM**

Analysing the qualitative and quantitative data gained from the initial exploration phase (interviews) indicates that the role of the HR professional is predominately focused on operational concerns. The quantitative survey data suggests that the HR professional undertakes the activities and responsibilities of Ulrich’s ‘business partner’, with an orientation towards operational activities.

Figure 4.3 HR Role Responses; Reporting Proportion of Total Value and Means.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Partner</th>
<th>23.4%</th>
<th>Change Agent</th>
<th>21.7%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measured: 31.0</td>
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<td>Measured: 29.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Ulrich: 29.8)</td>
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<td>(Ulrich: 29.6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrative Expert</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>Employee Champion</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Measured: 41.5</td>
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<td>Measured: 31.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Ulrich: 36.0)</td>
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Operational

The measured descriptive statistics from Ulrich’s HR role survey showed no marked deviation from the findings of Connor and Ulrich in the original 1996 study, though the ‘administrative expert’ was found to be slightly elevated in this study (see above, Figure 4.3 - HR Role Responses; Reporting Proportion of Total Value and Means). This elevation may be explainable given the low sample size, though the importance placed on the ‘basic transactional processes’ revealed in the open-ended questions of the interviews may also suggest the perception of improved quality in delivering administrative transactions:

It is about practicalities; deliver the basics first – making sure all your transactional processes are seamless so people can’t complain about the delivered service. (Respondent 4)

Several of the HR professionals reject the suggestion that operational HRM is not strategic, as one commented:
Day-to-day activities are all strategic as they all contribute to the organisations goals. (Respondent 1)

The Role Development section measured the aggregate role shifts between the original prescribed roles, current practiced roles and forecasted preferred roles. These shifts are described as the role signature.

Examining each axis of the Role Development plot (see below, Figure 4.4 – Role Development Plot) independently shows that the combined role signature has a preference towards Process (55.0%) and Operational (54.8%) roles. This may indicate an operational approach to engage employees in a more ‘hands on approach’ of high commitment management rather than traditional career planning and human development.

The comparison of the role signature’s prescribed and practiced indicated a shift away from strategic and processes orientation. The respondents also forecasted a shift away from the operational focus to maximise future value from HRM.
The shifts mentioned above are taken from the aggregate, and do not imply that all responses trended in the same manner. The responses presented as two groups with one unique outlier. The aggregate appears as a moderated version of the dominant cluster’s role signature, showing a distinct swing towards Strategic/Process between the points indicating practiced and preferred roles (see below. Figure 4.5 – Role Signature Comparison). The second group, crowded within the larger Requisite Organisations (RO), reported no discrepancies between the prescribed and practiced roles. This RO cluster described the practiced role as being identical to the prescribed role. This may suggest that the smaller firms rely on flexibility with an implicit rule set to address industry challenges, whilst the larger organisations operate under a structure exhibiting more explicit control.

Figure 4-5 Role Signature Comparison

The outlier response originated from the organisation with the least hierarchical HR structure, where the top level HR professional personally monitored front line managers and provided an open channel of communication to all employees. The responses from the open-ended interview with this organisation established that upon obtaining the role, the interviewee redirected the
organisation’s philosophy towards retaining quality candidates by taking immediate action when required. It is of no surprise that this unique response reflected an aggressive strategic shift towards people oriented activities from what was the original *prescribed* role at time of employment (see Figure 4.6 – Role Signature Outlier).

All the responding HR professionals shared the belief that they could contribute more strategically. The constraints imposed upon the HR professionals, including the Dominant clusters and RO cluster, was investigated further during Delphi phase of the research.

**Figure 4-6 Role Signature Outlier**

![Role Signature Outlier Diagram](image)

The role signature has provided an uncomplicated historic representation of the HR professionals’ role; the findings from the analysis of the open ended questions and Ulrich’s HR role survey are supported with the role signature results. Furthermore, the role signature has provided a tool that may easily identify characteristics of specific HR organisational clusters – such as the Requisite Organisation and Dominant clusters.
Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The following phase (Section 4.4: Delphi phase) bridges the results from the previous two sections, thematic analysis and qualitative results of the initial exploration phase, to formulate the seventeen statements presented in the first iteration of the policy Delphi phase.
4.4 Delphi phase – round one of two

The following section presents the results of the Delphi stage. The two rounds will be discussed in order, with each being divided into the HR professionals’ diagnosis and the three emergent themes from the thematic analysis. The questions from the Delphi surveys (see Appendix 4 Delphi Survey Round One) are presented in each theme. A quantitative summary of each round is detailed before embarking into deeper analysis (see Table 4.1 – Summary of Round One Delphi Results).

Table 4-1 Summary of Round One Delphi Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
<th>Highest</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role metaphor –</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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<td>Role metaphor - Employee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role Development – Preferred</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty (1)</td>
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<td>Tight labour market (1)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Remoteness (3)</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scale 1 - 5
4.4.1 Operational HRM – Round one

The purpose of this section was to understand the philosophy of the HR professional and the rationalisation of achieving HR outcomes. The data indicates that the HR professionals are more likely to achieve outcomes by engaging in activities that are focused on day to day operation. The operational focus suggests that the HR professionals’ responsibilities are aligned with Ulrich’s ‘administrative expert’ and ‘employee champion’ roles. The rationalisation derived from the following statements, to which the respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement, aims to link the responses from the interview’s open ended questions with the results from the Role Development survey and Ulrich’s Human Resource Role Assessment Survey (see Appendix 3 Ulrich’s Human Resource Role Assessment Survey).

*Role metaphor (Administrative Expert): Building a robust transactional process in your firm is very important for worker retention.*

The first statement examines the HR professionals’ perception about the importance of transactional processes in obtaining a higher retention rate of workers. Retention of quality labour is vital due to the apparent high mobility of the labour force between firms within the AMMI, and similar industries. The HR professionals detailed the difficulties associated with retaining labour beyond the short-term. The importance of managing the transactional process was described as being the foundation for successful HRM during the open-ended interview questions – this is supported by the agreement to this statement (mean=3.7) which implies that transactional activities influence worker retention.

The responses to this statement are tightly grouped around AGREE (4), with one respondent strongly disagreeing. This disagreement implies that the firm doesn’t believe transactional processes have an effect on retention, or alternatively that the firm does not have a problem with attrition. In this particular case the respondent had previously indicated during the open-ended
questions that their firm’s policy is to outsource the HR transactional processes; therefore, allowing
the HR professional to devote more time to what they consider more important activities.

The results, beyond the suggestion that transactional processes can influence labour attrition, may
also indicate that transactional processes would be best described as a ‘hygiene’ factor within
Herzberg’s Dual-factor theory (Bartol et al. 2008). This theory suggests that factors influencing
behaviour can be separated into two groups: motivators - which provide positive satisfaction; and
hygiene factors – which provide no positive satisfaction when expectations are met, yet cause
dissatisfaction when expectations are not met (Bartol et al. 2008). The presence of well managed
transactional processes would not motivate employees, whereas the absence would cause
dissatisfaction.

Role metaphor (Employee Champion): Retention of people in your firm is heavily dependent on
the quality of relationships between HR and the workforce.

The second role metaphor statement, which also focuses on worker retention, examines the HR
professional’s perception of the ‘employee champion’ role in building relationships within the
workforce. This queries the rationalisation that the focus towards employees’ operational activities
encourages employees to invest their career in the firm. The resultant overall agreement to the
statement (mean=3.7) implies the belief that efforts of an ‘employee champion’ can result in high
levels of commitment. Similarly to the previous statement there was only a single respondent
disagreeing. This disagreement infers that the link between relationships and retention is not
strong or that other methods are used which are more important in managing attrition levels.

The respondent who disagreed to the ‘administrative expert’ statement agreed to this, while one
who agreed to the last statement disagreed to this statement. Thus, all respondents agreed to at
least one statement linking an operational focus (‘administrative expert’ or ‘employee champion’)
to employee retention.
Role metaphor (Operational): In your firm HR practitioners are performing activities many of which could be dealt with by line managers.

The final role metaphor statement examines the HR professionals’ rationale of HR devolution, and specifically the need for further HR devolution. If the line managers acquire more HR responsibility then HR professionals could better align their activities to more complex activities – a sentiment that was often repeated during the open-ended questions. The HR professionals’ strong agreement (mean=4.1) with this statement implies that the HR professional is burdened with responsibilities better suited to line managers and that devolution, for whatever reason, is not fully realised.

A single respondent disagreement suggests that this HR professional perceives devolution as being fully capitalised; this particular respondent performs an administrative role with responsibilities that are not suitable for line managers – this explains the outlier and maintains as valid the supposition that HR professionals perceive the devolution of their role as under-realised.

Role Development (Prescribed): Your prescribed role did not accurately reflect your actual duties.

The Role Development series of questions explores the trend of the prescribed, practiced and preferred activities. The statements are a direct comment on the observations from the Role Development survey and Ulrich’s HR role survey. The first statement examines the HR professionals’ perception of role deviations from the original prescribed activities of their role, to the activities which are the actual activities practiced. The Role Development survey recorded a high incidence of professionals whose practiced role was inaccurately reflected by the prescribed duties. The polarised results (mean=2.7) were evenly distributed over all options, ranging from STRONGLY DISAGREE (1) to STRONGLY AGREE (5). This implies that half of the respondents’ practiced roles are misaligned with the prescribed role descriptions; while for the other half the respondents’ practiced roles reflects the prescribed role description.
These results were somewhat anticipated, though the expectation was of a more concise polarisation and not an even distribution. Respondents from large organisations aligned with Stratified Systems Theory (SST), as predicted, disagreed with the statement. The results suggest that the larger requisite organisations are prescribed, while the smaller firms are more reactive.

One respondent, who was employed to perform the HR role as deemed necessary, was the sole respondent that was uncertain towards the statement; this high level of autonomy and discretionary direction upon employment focus appears to be unique.

**Role Development (Practiced 1): Your role in the firm has evolved towards an ‘Employee Champion’ emphasis.**

The two practice oriented statements in the Role Development series are concerned with developing a broader understanding of the HR professionals’ position within the HR function. The first statement qualifies the HR professionals’ rationalisation that they are performing the role of the ‘employee champion’; a role which has progressively been devolved to line managers in other industries (Kulik and Bainbridge 2006). This statement is supported with an agreement (mean=3.7) which implies that during the time in the role the HR professional has become an ‘employee champion’: with an operational focus on people activities. A few respondents disagreeing implies that those HR professionals are engaged in higher level strategic activities, or that the prescribed activities reflect the ‘employee champion’ role, thus resulting in no evolutional shift.

As suggested by Grober (2005), the respondents who disagreed fall within the cluster of HR professionals that operate within an RO – the working relationship defines the role orientation of each strata within the firm; HR professionals within a RO should not experience any significant role realignment as the roles are predefined to serve a specific purpose. It is interesting that one respondent within the RO cluster strongly agreed to the statement. Clarifying this anomaly is challenging, as no apparent factors seem to offer an explanation.
Role Development (Practiced 2): Your daily activities are often interrupted with unforeseen operational issues.

The second statement on Role Development (Practiced) is concerned with revealing if the HR professional perceives their daily activities to be planned or prescribed. The high occurrence of interruptions to daily tasks was a common factor raised by the open-ended questions. The strong agreement to this statement (mean=3.9) implies that a high rate of contingencies occur which fall outside of operational expectations, and thus the HR professionals are less strategic and more reactive. Two respondents disagreed, with this implying that their contingencies are managed within the organisational structure, or that their planning mitigates the rate of unforeseen contingencies.

Role Development (Preferred): Your role will add more value to the firm if more of your efforts can be diverted away from operational issues to greater strategic concerns.

The final statement on operational HRM examines the HR professionals’ perception of maximising value with HRM. It explores whether HR professionals perceive that focusing more on strategic issues will produce a greater potential value for the firm. The strong agreement to this statement (mean=4.0) implies that the inclusion of more strategic activity will create value. Two respondents disagreed with the statement. This disagreement might infer that the status quo produces the maximum value for the firm, or that the HR professionals have no confidence in their ability to produce additional value. Alternatively, the HR professionals may simply not be engaged with operational issues and therefore there is no additional time to be reallocated.

It is interesting to note that the respondents who disagreed with this statement both strongly agreed to the previous two statements: that their role has developed as an ‘employee champion’; and that they are exposed to unforeseen operational interruptions. This suggests that the high incident of interruptions due to operational concerns has redefined their role as an ‘employee
champion’. Although the respondents have dissimilar roles, and distinctly different employment conditions, it appears that these two outliers share a perception that their time is perhaps already best spent.

4.4.2 Cyclic Nature – Round one

The two symptomatic themes of the industry’s cyclic nature revealed from the thematic analysis are uncertainty and a tight labour market. The statements pertaining to these two themes are intended to draw a deeper understanding about how much of an influence the cyclic nature has on HR policies and how well HR activities mitigate the impact.

**Uncertainty (1): The AMMI will continue to experience long term uncertainty – beyond a horizon of 5 years.**

The first statement qualifies whether the HR professionals perceive an unavoidable uncertainty within the AMMI. The agreeable consensus to the statement (mean=3.7) implies that the AMMI is exposed to an uncertain horizon over the next five years. Two respondents disagreed with a varying level of disagreement, which would imply that they perceive no uncertainty over the next five years. The lack of perceived uncertainty may be the result of a belief that the industry will remain stable as a result of market equilibrium. Alternatively, the HR practitioners may be confident that any uncertainty is controllable through actions of agents under their firms’ control.

The two HR practitioners who disagree represent a cluster of firms whose primary mineral has a forecasted slumping price, which predicts an unprofitable future with a high level of certainty. With the explanation of these two anomalies, the overall results clearly indicate that the HR professionals perceive at least five years of uncertainty in the AMMI.

**Uncertainty (2): Your firm would increase investment in accommodation and amenities if there was less uncertainty**
The second statement about uncertainty examines the HR professionals’ perception on whether their firm would take action to improve remote conditions by providing additional resources—which was a repeated concern for many HR professionals during the interviews. The uncertain response to the statement (mean=3.0) indicates a mixed, though mostly moderated, response as to whether further investment would occur with the reduction of industry uncertainty. Nearly half the respondents agreed—implying that uncertainty is influencing investment in areas that would alleviate HR issues; while the other half disagreed—implying that such action is considered ineffectual or that the problem is not perceived as a priority.

Only two respondents indicated a strong conviction; one in strong agreement and the other in strong disagreement. The strong agreement is from a HR professional in a major exploration and extraction firm, this being on a much larger scale than the others. In this case therefore the costs of any remote amenities would be offset by the benefits shared by a large labour force. The extreme disagreement is from an organisation with minimal remote workers, which therefore would gain very little benefit from this form of investment.

_Tight labour market (1): Your firm mitigates the effects of strong competition for labour by sourcing some candidates which other companies would not consider._

One indication of a tight labour market is the pressure firms have in obtaining appropriately qualified occupancy in roles. The first statement examines the HR professionals’ perspective on the tight labour market; looking particularly at how well their firm can source quality candidates. The strong agreement to the statement (mean=3.6) implies that labour is tight and that in order to maximise occupancy rates firms are not selecting premium candidates. Two respondents disagreeing with the statement implies that either their firm is the ‘choice employer’ or that supply exceeds the demand for talent.
As suggested by Grobler (2005), the two respondents who disagreed are representative of the RO cluster – as a mantra within the System Stratified theory, the unwillingness to compromise on candidate quality (Grobler describes this as ‘cognitive capability’), while instead ensuring that the right candidate is sourced for a prescribed role.

It is worth noting that, during the interview process, other HR practitioners inferred that these RO firms are the price setters for skilled labour, while the larger firms argued that they are simply the employer of choice. There is no evidence to suggest that these two propositions are mutually exclusive.

**Tight labour market (2): Your firm is strongly committed in training or mentoring as a means to reduce internal workforce skill deficits.**

The second statement examines the potential rationale of HR professionals who agreed to the previous statement: about the practice of sourcing candidates that other firms would not classify as high quality candidates. A large portion of the interviewed HR professionals stated that HR practices are in place to compensate for candidates which the industry at large would consider sub-standard. The HR practitioners’ strong agreement to the statement (mean=4.7) implies that the function of HR is crucial in overcoming the pressures of the tight labour market by capitalising on the productivity of less attractive candidates. All the participating HR practitioners agreed or strongly agreed to the statement suggesting that the skilled labour supply is insufficient to fulfil the skill demand, and that firms are attempting to remedy this shortage with HR activities.

It was expected that respondents within the RO cluster would disagree with the statement on the rationalisation that the candidate selection within a SST framework is uncompromised; therefore employees would have no skill deficiencies that require rectification. The discrepancy between this rationale and the resounding agreement which links HR activities with workforce skill deficits may be explained as RO utilises HR activities to expand the capabilities of employees for internal
promotion. While other firms address the immediate limitations of encumbered employees that require additional support in performing their role, RO utilise HR activities to groom candidates, who have demonstrated further potential, for future internal promotion. Given this, the RO firms adamant refusal to compromise on quality candidates may be viewed as a strategic advantage.

**Tight labour market (3): Your firm has difficulty linking remuneration to productivity.**

The final statement on the tight labour market examines the effectiveness of HR professionals to linking remuneration with employee performance – as suggested by some HR practitioners in the open-ended questions. This statement did not generate a convincing consensus, with a very weak agreement (mean=3.4), amongst respondents, this implying that the breakdown of traditional systems where productivity can be improved by additional rewards is limited to a specific cluster within the AMMI.

It is revealing that the HR practitioners who disagreed to the statement represent enterprises that have a comparatively lower remuneration; either lower remuneration due to traditionally lower paid metropolitan roles, or employed in firms that operate in a low profit markets.

Although it is not universally accepted that factors exist which impair the ability to link remuneration with productivity, the results do suggest that links to remuneration become obscure when the base remuneration increases to high levels. The cause of ‘unreasonable’ remuneration within the more profitable segments appears multi-faceted, as one senior HR manager described:

Mercenary and un-loyal instincts of the modern labour force ... given the relentless corporate drive to ‘de-collectivise’ workplaces without a concomitant effort to deliver on the rhetoric of individual reward for effort. (Respondent 8)

The strong agreement of the HR practitioners in a profitable market segment lends credence to the senior HR manager’s comment.
4.4.3 Heteronomy – Round one

This section aims to better understand the pressures HR professionals encounter which are created from heteronomy within the AMMI. Heteronomy describes how employees’ autonomy has become limited through heavily regulated and prescribed activities; such that the structure and activities of the AMMI is creating a heteronomous workforce, and thus is responsible for an increased strain in obtaining suitable leaders and experienced talent. Additionally, the somewhat homogenous skill exacerbates the ‘war for talent’, as it allows for fluidity between similar sectors.

**Heteronomy (1): Your firm has difficulty sourcing suitable line managers.**

The first statement within the heteronomy theme examines the HR practitioners’ perspective that the skill shortage is concentrated more towards talented candidates – such as those who are ideal for leadership roles. The agreement with the statement (mean=3.5) would suggest that HR professionals perceive that the available labour force is under represented with quality talented candidates.

Again, the HR professionals representing firms which offer lower remuneration (those which operate within low profit markets or metropolitan roles) disagreed, thus suggesting that these firms do not experience any significant difficulty in sourcing suitable line managers - where attrition of talent is overestimated or that the responsibilities of line manager role have decreased. It is also possible that these respondents have a greater supply of talent due to declining labour demand in low profit markets, or that talent prefers metropolitan based employment.

**Heteronomy (2): Your firm’s productive capacity is at risk from the mobility of skilled workers within the resource sector.**

The following statement on heteronomy directly examines the HR professionals’ perspective on the productivity pressures originating from a mobile labour force –probing whether the level of employee volatility can influence productivity. The majority of HR professionals agreed to the
statement (mean=3.5) implying that there are pressures on the HR function to maintain labour. During the open-ended questions this pressure was revealed as being resultant from the low barriers on the labour force to switch between competing sectors, such as oil and gas extraction. Two respondents disagreeing with this statement implies the belief that labour does not have the suggested fluidity, or that it is fluid and the attrition is manageable due to a sufficient labour supply.

It is interesting that the two HR professionals who disagreed that a firm’s production is at risk from a fluid labour force also rejected the premise that the industry has long term uncertainty. This anomaly may be linked directly to the profitability of a specific market, and does not necessarily reflect the industry as a whole.

4.4.4 Remoteness – Round one

The remoteness of work sites creates difficulties with employees’ work-life balance that diminishes the expected duration of employment within the industry. The interviews revealed that stress is placed on employees operating in remote areas due to lack of support together with the perception of being ‘incarcerated’ whilst on site. Another important factor is that the population at remote sites is not representative of society, being dominated by young males, and this instils anti-social behaviour. The statements on remoteness therefore attempts to better understand the conditions imposed on the HR professional in how they manage employee’s work-life balance.

**Remoteness (1): The remoteness of work sites is a major issue with HRM practices in the mining industry**

The first statement on remoteness examines the HR professionals’ perspective on remoteness being a major HR issue. The undecided results lean towards general disagreement (mean=2.9), with the results being polarised, implying that perceived issues linked with remoteness vary from each HR professional. This result implies that agreeing HR professionals perceive remoteness as being a
substantial factor in determining HR activities; whereas HR professionals who disagree do not perceive remoteness as a substantive issue, or believe that any issue can be successfully managed.

Unsurprisingly, the HR professional who operates within a metropolitan environment commented that remoteness issues are not applicable; and thus disagreed that their HRM practices are influenced by remoteness. Removing this HR professional’s response for this statement doesn’t however alter the overall polarisation, which remains un-rationalised. Though perhaps the ambiguous nature of the statement may have resulted in an over representation of disagreement – some HR practitioner’s may disagree to the statement as though they may perceive remoteness as a major issue they might also believe that these issues remain manageable.

**Remoteness (2): The employee work-life balance is often compromised due to the requirements of the mining operation.**

During the open-ended questions with the interviews, all HR professionals indicated that the employee’s work-life balance is pivotal to employee commitment. Yet, the recognized issue of employee work-life balance remains problematic. The second statement on remoteness examines the HR professionals’ belief that the issue of an employee’s work-life balance is a consequence of the reality of operational requirements; or alternatively that it is simply a firm’s insincere approach to employee work-life balance. The agreement to the statement (mean=3.4) implies that the pressure upon work-life balance is inherent within the AMMI, and may never be completely solved. The spread between the responses is very minimal, with the lack of stronger agreement to the statement possibly suggesting that the HR professionals perceive additional factors which lead to a degraded employee work-life balance.

**Remoteness (3): The levels of competitive remuneration would be reduced if more provisions were made for workers to live closer to the mining operation.**
The remote conditions were reported to be stressful for the employees, with many HR professionals stating that compensating for remote conditions is an element of the increased remuneration. The premise for the third remoteness statement is to look at the HR professionals’ opinion as to whether the removal of the remoteness condition would result in a decreased remuneration package – indicating that the mining remuneration is encumbered with a remote employment component. The agreement to this statement (mean=3.3) implies that remoteness increases competitive remuneration. A small portion of the respondents disagreed with the statement. This disagreement may infer that remoteness is not seen as a reason for elevated remuneration. Or alternatively, the disagreement might indicate that there are additional factors surrounding remote operations which raise remuneration, such as limited infrastructure at remote sites.

HR managers identified other factors linked to remoteness which create pressures upon employees. Two commonly mentioned issues were the removal of the employee from their current support networks (proximity to extended families and friends etc.); and limited infrastructure at remote locations. Employees living closer to mine operations would still bear the stress caused by those two issues.

4.4.5 Delphi Preliminary Results

Although the first round of the Delphi did not obtain a unified consensus on all the propositions, it did indicate some interesting cluster patterns. The low incidences of unexplainable outliers do not warrant further examination within this research as the emphasis has shifted towards revealing greater understanding from the identifiable clusters. The preliminary results for the first round of the Delphi phase will be discussed within the following sub-sections: role metaphor and development, cyclic nature, remoteness, and heteronomy.

Role Metaphor and Development
Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

There was very minimal variation between individuals’ responses through the role metaphor series of questions. The overall consensus suggests that the roles of ‘administrative expert’ and ‘employee champion’ are pivotal to maintaining the desired retention rate, though the alternating polarity of a few respondents implies that organisations can achieve similar outcomes with different approaches to issues. The opposing responses concerning the HR function’s relationship with the employees needs to be investigated further, as does the precise purpose of delivering high quality transactional processes.

The Role Development series illuminated a prominent division among the respondents: dependant on whether the respondents operated within a RO. From the general consensus it can be inferred that the HR professional has shifted towards an ‘employee champion’ orientation that is subject to frequent operational interruptions. Additionally, the HR professional believes that outcomes would be more obtainable with greater strategic influence.

The respondents from SST dominant firms were the outliers through this series, though surprisingly there were conflicting responses from the SST respondents within the Role Development (Practice) series – which examined the day to day demands. This may suggest that RO firms can have multiple approaches, with some being more adaptive while others are more rigid. The unresolved rationale within this realm merits additional scrutiny as to the circumstances of the interruptions.

Further questions are raised with the statement concerning the balance of operational and strategic activities in the Role Development (Preferred) statement. Beyond the few outliers, the overall consensus is that HR professionals believe that additional strategic activity will lead to value creation. However, this does not fully explain why this value creation has not been realised. The statement has been refined for the second Delphi round to explore the limitation to focusing on more strategic activities.

**Cyclic Nature (Uncertainty and Tight Labour Market)**
Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The consensus of the cyclic nature series supports the thematic analysis’ outcome that the industry operates within a level of uncertainty and a tight labour market. The respondents’ general consensus is an indication that the industry has long term uncertainty which influences investment. The tight labour market compels firms to compromise on recruitment, with skill deficiencies needing to be rectified internally. There are no apparent cluster characteristics to rationalise the lack of consensus on effectively linking productivity to remuneration.

The two clusters that did present within this section were differentiated by the firms’ form of operations, such as extraction, exploration or ancillary support, and the profitability of the market (for that firm’s particular product). The inclination to invest in amenities for employee welfare to solve HR issues is heavily influenced by the size of the labour contingent operating in remote areas. The larger firms have more to benefit from amenities, especially as the smaller firms often utilise external firms to supply remote amenities. Additionally, the type of work may also influence what amenities are available; firms with stationary sites – such as construction and extraction, would be more likely than firms that have mobile groups – such as exploration, to invest in fixed amenities if the industry were less uncertain. Firms suffering from low product price are unlikely to invest further.

The results from this theme suggest that some HR professionals believe that the uncertainty is insurmountable, whilst others disagree. This proposition is included within the second Delphi round so as to assist in explaining this disagreement between HR professionals.

**Remoteness**

The variation of individual responses was largest within the remote theme, with the overall results being scattered across the spectrum with no perceivable patterns. There was weak agreement that the worker’s work-life balance was compromised by mining, and that remuneration was elevated by remoteness. The weak consensus could not be explained until the results were compared with other themes.
The comparison of the respondents’ aggregate uncertainty response (the sum of their responses within the theme) to their aggregate remoteness response indicates an inverse relationship between perceived uncertainty and perceived remoteness (see below – Figure 4.4 Uncertainty and Remoteness Comparison). This suggests that as the perceived influence of uncertainty increases the influence of remoteness decreases. This may simply be due to the phenomenon where HR professionals prioritise influences.

**Figure 4-7 Uncertainty and Remoteness Comparison**

The revelation that the HR function was susceptible to the subjectivity of HR professionals perceiving challenges as a forced ranking system warrants closer examination.

Additionally, some respondents strongly agreed with the proposition that remoteness exasperates remuneration, the lack of agreement between the respondents may suggest that other elements are perceived to be more important to remuneration and this requires inquiry.

**Heteronomy**

The heteronomy responses demonstrated a strong agreement for the previously identified differentiation of market profitability, once responses of HR professionals in such markets were accounted for. The other respondents were in general agreement that the labour is lacking key skills and that the fluidity of labour threatens productivity.

The heteronomous effect is either caused by the industry’s removal of autonomy to the front line, or simply by a similarity in organisational process throughout the industry. One respondent, who
agreed with the statement, nonetheless raised a concern that “…the view is highly debateable” (Respondent 5).

Additional statements were included in the second Delphi round to clarify the heteronomy proposition. The refined statements explore where line managers are sourced from (internally or externally) and the level of competition of skilled candidates.

4.5 Delphi phase – round two of two

The second round of the policy Delphi phase intends to reveal the rationale of the alternative perspectives discussed from the results of the first round. As such, the statements fall within new augmented descriptions of the original categories: operational HRM, uncertainty, remuneration, leaders, and challenges (see Appendix 5 Delphi Survey Round Two). Again, a quantitative summary is presented ahead of the second round analysis (see below, Table 4.2 – Summary of Round Two Delphi Results).

As with the previous quantitative summary, the table indicates the mean and range of the responses.
Table 4-2 Summary of Round Two Delphi Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role metaphor - Devolution</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Development – Reactive</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Development – Strategic</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty (1)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remuneration (1)</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remuneration (2)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders (1)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders (2)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4.5.1 Operational HRM – Round Two

The previous Delphi round found that the HR professionals’ role had shifted towards Ulrich’s ‘administrative expert’ and ‘employee champion’ operational focus. Generally, the roles undertake activities to maximise retention by delivering high standards in transactional processes, and generate employee commitment by cultivating relationships between the HR function and employees.

The results appear more divisive when the data is examined for clusters instead of merely interpreting the means. The role of the HR professional is influenced by the firm’s structure – if it is modelled on Jaques’ RO. The firms which represent RO are more prescribed in the HR professionals’ role. After the first Delphi round it is apparent that the rationalisation behind each cluster is still not definitive.

*Role metaphor - Administrative Expert: A successful transactional system’s primary objective is to reduce employee dissatisfaction, not to motivate employee commitment.*
While the first round clarified that the transactional system was important it did not probe the rationalisation; the statement above addresses this. This statement examines the HR professionals’ perception of the transactional processes’ effect on the function of employee retention. Overall, the HR managers slightly agree with the statement (mean=3.1), however the responses were spread over the full range of options. This broad range of responses implies that in general HR professionals believe that poor transactional processes are a possible cause for employees to leave the firm. That some HR managers disagree implies that the firm’s HR transactional processes performs another function, such as attracting potential candidates to the firm.

The statement reveals an interesting polarisation, with the majority of responses being at the extreme range of responses. All the respondents who disagreed with the first round statement on the ‘administrative expert’ (that a robust transactional process is very important to worker retention) also disagreed with this statement. Therefore, their previous response indicating a low priority to transactional processes explains their disposition to this statement; and hence the polarised views. The modified results, which disregard the previously mentioned group, indicate a strong agreement (mean=4.2) that effective transactional processes behave as hygiene factors as per Herzberg’s Dual-factor theory – that good transactional processes do not attract staff, though poor services would lead to decreased employee retention.

*Role metaphor - Employee Champion: High involvement between HR practitioners and employees is rewarded with high employee commitment.*

The second role metaphor statement examines the rationale of building relationships between the HR function and the employees. Round one revealed that these relationships are important. The HR professionals’ agreement to this statement (mean=3.8) implies that HR professionals create employee commitment by developing a relationship with employees. One respondent strongly disagreed with the statement. This disagreement implies that the HR manager does not believe relationships influence employee commitment.
The single disagreeing outlier seems unremarkable, except that they are also the sole indicator that remoteness has a very strong influence in the later challenge ratings. As the majority of responses to this statement were in agreement, it is likely that the HR professionals view any involvement to have a moderated influence on the level of employee commitment.

**Role metaphor - Devolution: Present conditions are restricting Line Managers from undertaking more HR responsibilities.**

The final role metaphor statement surveys the operational aspect from a different perspective. So far, the statements imply that the decision to adopt an operational focus is rationalised as being the best course of action. The previous round revealed that many of the HR professionals’ roles are suitable for line managers. The uncertain results from this statement (mean=3.1) is caused from moderated responses (no extremes) from nearly all of the HR professionals.

Noticeably, the responding RO representatives strongly disagreed with the statement, implying that rationale agents are preventing line managers from receiving more HR responsibilities – as all these respondents had previously stated that their role could be devolved further to the line manager. Within these cases the rationale agent is Jacques’ prescribed organisational structure which explicitly defines the realm of responsibility and activities for each role within the firm.

**Role Development – Reactive: The incidence of unforeseen operational issues is higher than sectors situated in metropolitan locations.**

The first Role Development statement addresses the contextual situation that may influence the operational interruptions identified in the first Delphi round. The first round revealed that the HR professional was often interrupted with operational issues. The overall response to this statement initially appears uncertain (mean=2.9), suggesting that HR professionals do not strongly believe that operational sites in remote localities experience greater unforeseen circumstances, nor do they strongly believe that remote operations have similar or less unanticipated issues. This may suggest
that the incidence of unforeseen operation issues has become normalised as perceived by the HR professionals within the AMMI.

Deeper investigation reveals that the main contingents which agree to the statement represent ancillary and low profit markets. The remaining high profit markets disagree, indicating that HR professionals working in profitable remote markets perceive the industry to be similar to other industries; whilst firms that perform ancillary roles or are situated in low profit markets perceive the industry to have higher incidences of unforeseen operational issues. This confusing array of opinions may be the result of normalised exposure: with the high incident becoming so regular that HR managers perceive the phenomenon as business as usual.

*Role Development – Strategic: Increased strategic responsibility would allow you to create additional value.*

The first round surmised their roles would potentially be more productive if more time were allotted to strategic concerns. It was not explicit (as intended) as to whether the deferred strategic activities were within the authority of the HR professionals’ role. The strong agreement to this statement (mean=4.1) implies that the HR professional requires greater scope of responsibility to more efficiently achieve outcomes. One HR professional strongly disagreed with the statement, thus implying that this particular HR professional has enough authority, or that additional authority would be superfluous due to other outstanding priorities.

Again the outlier comes from a low profit market, possibly suggesting that larger immediate concerns overshadow any future strategic benefits that could be obtained through HRM. In general the HR professionals believe they could achieve objectives more effectively through extending their strategic responsibilities.
4.5.2 Uncertainty – Round Two

The results from the first round of the Delhi phase indicated that HR professionals have different perceptions of the industry’s uncertainty.

Uncertainty: The ability to control future uncertainty is mostly beyond the control of your organisation.

The most significant differentiator in the previous cyclic series was the price of the firm’s product – where some firms operated in less profitable markets. This statement investigates how the HR professional perceives the likelihood of overcoming any uncertainty. The strong agreement to this statement (mean=4.0) implies that the best a firm can do to counter the perceived industry uncertainty is contingency planning. One respondent disagreed, thereby suggesting that perhaps this HR professional perceives that the industry uncertainty poses no risk to the firm.

Surprisingly, it is not a participant from a large profitable firm that disagreed; HR professionals from the larger firms strongly agreed that the industry’s uncertainty is beyond their control. The one outlier represents an ancillary support organisation which could conceivably reassign its primary purpose to suit changing market conditions.

4.5.3 Remuneration – Round Two

The proposition of the first round stated that remuneration is linked to operational remoteness. Those results are very mixed, which suggested there are other significant influences on remuneration levels. This section attempts to better understand how the different perspectives on remuneration interact with previously identified clusters of responses.

Remuneration (1): The large ‘employers of choice’ are the price setters for labour within the industry.

The first remuneration statement looks at how the base remuneration may be positioned. This statement examines the HR professionals’ perspective on the price setters within the industry; the
previous results may be clarified if respondents who rejected remoteness as a factor for remuneration agree that the ‘employers of choice’ influence general remuneration. The strong agreement to this statement (mean=4.1) implies that the industries comparative remuneration is dependent on the assessment of external firms.

Further examination of these results reveals a richer picture, particularly the comparison of the remuneration results from the first Delphi round. The significance of these results lies with the respondents who disagreed that ‘employers of choice’ are the industry’s price setters. In the first round these respondents also indicated that remoteness is a significant factor in remuneration, and furthermore they are the sole respondents who in the later part of this round positioned remoteness as the challenge with the greatest influence (see Section 4.5 Challenge Ratings, below).

This supports the earlier suggestion that HR professionals’ perceptions of issues are ranked (possibly subconsciously), as the HR professional diminishes the perceived influence of secondary issues in favour of a primary issue.

**Remuneration (2): The de-collectivisation of the workplaces has increased remuneration packages.**

One HR professional commented that the industry has relentlessly pushed for workplace ‘de-collectivism’. This question examines the HR interpretation of the impact that the de-collectivised labour has within the AMMI. With the ever increasing demands for labour combined with dwindling supply the bargaining power swings towards the highly mobile individual. This statement aims to reveal more about the reoccurring clusters – where HR professionals linked by certain characteristics demonstrate similar views. The overall results indicated a slight agreement (mean=3.1) with responses ranging from DISAGREE (2) to STRONGLY AGREE (5); thus implying that de-collectivisation of the AMMI may be partially responsible for the increase in remuneration packages.
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It is interesting to note that respondents who disagreed with this statement, implying that HR professionals can manoeuvre more favourable individual contracts without the collectivist constriction, agreed to the previous remoteness statement – that remoteness influences remuneration. Thus, it appears that HR professionals exclusively select either remoteness or de-collectivisation as primary influences on remuneration levels.

4.5.4 Leaders – Round Two

The first round of the Delphi phase revealed that the workforce was mobile, and that ideal candidates could be costly to source. This follow-up round expands on that idea by examining the leadership portion of the labour force.

*Leaders (1): The supply of leaders for your firm is mostly sourced internally.*

As previously stated, the labour force has mobility between competing firms and industries. This statement is very general; examining if the HR professional perceives that the quality candidates are best sourced internally - suggesting that the external market resembles a homogenous body with less quality candidates. If only the low skilled portion of the labour force is externally mobile then their mobility will be of little consequence as it is easily replaced. However, there are more implications if the mobility extends to the high quality candidates. The agreement to this statement (mean=3.8) implies that the leaders (often synonymous with quality candidates) are sourced from the internal labour market. That two of the respondents disagreed with the statement can be inferred that leaders are also sourced externally, and that therefore leaders are also likely to be mobile.

The only distinguishing data which links the two disagreeing respondents is that they are the only respondents that strongly agreed with the insurmountable uncertainty of the industry.

*Leaders (2): The external competition for leaders or highly skilled candidates is the most aggressive.*
Following the previous statement on leaders, this statement examines the HR professionals’ perception of the external market. These two statements are closely linked and as such the responses are also linked. The agreement to this statement (mean=3.8) implies that leaders are potentially mobile, or that the supply of quality candidates is simply being subjugated to ever increasing demand. These results share near identical responses to the previous statement with the two following exceptions.

One HR professional disagreed with this statement, thus implying the perception that the supply for skilled candidates exceeds the demand, or possibly suggesting a belief that firms have a preference for sourcing internally; though that HR professional agreed with the previous statement leaders are sourced internally implying a belief in the latter reason: that supply exceeds demand.

One other HR professional agreed that the external competition for highly skilled candidates is the most aggressive, yet indicated that leaders are not sourced internally. This conundrum is easily explained given that this HR professional is employed in a recently radically restructured firm, and as such is currently part of a growth strategy.
4.6 Challenge Ratings – Quantitative Results

A series of questions on immediate challenges was nestled within the second round of the Delphi study (see Appendix 5 Delphi Survey Round Two). Unlike the previous statements which measured agreement/disagreement, these questions probed the HR professional to rate the influence of specific challenges within the AMMI. Respondents were asked to designate the most suitable response for the five challenges: tight labour market, long term uncertainty, labour fluidity, attracting potential leaders, and remoteness. The five ordinal options provided a range from NO INFLUENCE (1) to VERY STRONG INFLUENCE (5). A quantitative summary of basic descriptive statistics and adjusted ranking is given before further analysis (see below, Table 4.3 – Summary of Challenge Ratings).

Table 4-3 Summary of Challenge Rating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
<th>Highest</th>
<th>Adjusted ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tight Labour</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Term</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour Fluidity</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attracting</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remoteness</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Departing from the ongoing Delphi process by modifying the Likert scale was deemed more fitting to draw out comparative data. The rating system serves two purposes- to verify the assumed challenges from early statements; to normalise the ratings to reveal an adjusted ranking.

Adjusted Rankings

The challenges could be adjusted by sorting the means from highest to lowest. As the interpretation of the scale is subjective, there are however no guarantees that an individual would use the full range of provided answers. Therefore sorting solely by the ‘means’ can skew the ranking for those questions where respondents have different maximum/minimum responses.
A forced ranking method was also rejected as the results would not yield sufficient data on the perceived level of influence - for example a HR professional could view all five challenges to be very influential, but the forced ranking would demand that one was rated lowest even though it may be perceived to be of similar intensity as the first.

Given these considerations the results were normalised, with each respondent’s results modified to represent the full range scale, and ranked in order of the sum of the responses. The normalised ranking accounts for respondents’ subjective utilisation of the scoring system whilst retaining their order of challenge influence. The normalised sorting created the adjusted ranking listed in Table 4.3 – Summary of Challenge Ratings. Coincidently, the sorting of unadjusted means provided the same sequence as the adjusted ranking system.

**Tight Labour Market**

The tight labour market is the challenge ranked the highest (mean=4.1), indicating a strong perceived influence. The lowest rating which tight labour market received is a MODERATE INFLUENCE (3). The majority of the respondents indicated that the tight labour market is a STRONG (4) to VERY STRONG INFLUENCE (5).

**Long term Uncertainty**

The perceived challenge of long term uncertainty surprisingly appears low (mean=2.8), only ranking as the fourth highest perceived challenge. The respondents who remarked that long term uncertainty is only a SMALL INFLUENCE (2) included the representatives of the RO and organisations situated in metropolitan areas.

**Labour Fluidity**

Labour fluidity received the most MODERATE INFLUENCE (3) rating (mean=3.0), which is reflected within the moderate third place ranking. As with long term uncertainty, the response range was from LOW INFLUENCE (2) to STRONG INFLUENCE (4).
Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

Attracting Potential Leaders

Attracting potential leaders was a close second in the adjusted rankings, demonstrating an overall perceived ‘high influence’ (mean=3.6) with a mean of 3.6. The highest response came from a HR professional who operates in a low profit market. This respondent had previously indicated that leadership was neither internally sourced, nor an aggressive external market. The apparent conflicting combination of these three responses is rationalised with the firm’s growth strategy mentioned earlier.

Remoteness

Remoteness was the least influential challenge to firms (mean=2.8). Remoteness has the largest response variation, from NO INFLUENCE (1) – the occurrence being unique to the sample; to VERY STRONG INFLUENCE (5). The remoteness results were similar to the respondents’ answers on remoteness in the first round of the Delphi phase.

4.6.1 Challenge Ratings Conclusion

The challenge rating provided some interesting insights as to how HR professionals’ perceive their environment. All five challenges appear to be supported, with only variation in intensity requiring explanation. The respondents confirmed that these challenges are subjective to their own circumstances.

An earlier proposition that HR professionals subconsciously prioritise a single issue, elevating a single focus above the rest is supported by this rating scale. The trend was initially revealed in the first Delphi round where the respondents were more sensitive to either remoteness or uncertainty. The challenge rating reveals that all the respondents’ highest score, with the exception of two, was unique within their own survey. In other words, if a respondent selected VERY STRONG INFLUENCE (5) for one challenge then they would not choose this for another – or in some cases the unique high result was one STRONG INFLUENCE (4).
The two respondents who do not follow this trend exhibit the smallest variation in answers. In effect, these two respondents exhibit the characteristics of ‘fence sitters’.

4.7 Conclusion from the results

This chapter described the results of the first two phases of the research which are detailed within the previous chapter (Chapter 3: Methodology). The initial exploration phase, consists of: semi-structured interviews (containing open ended questions), the Role Development survey and Ulrich’s HR role survey. The thematic analysis of the open ended questions revealed three core themes - cyclic nature of the industry, remoteness of work sites, and the heteronomy of labour; whereas the two surveys indicated a role signature that suggests that HR professionals have adopted a more traditional operational HRM approach. This is then followed by the second phase - the two rounds of the policy Delphi phase. This phase utilised the respondents as a panel of experts to scrutinise a series of statements derived from the preliminary analysis of the initial exploration phase. The collection of the experts’ agreement/disagreement to the statements provides the foundation for further analysis. During this phase the themes were refocussed on issues surrounding quality candidates, HR Role Development, and challenge perceptions.

The following chapter (Chapter 5: Conclusion) concludes the research by re-examining the collected data, and drawing from the literature review to rationalise observations. This final analysis will also be summarised in a final conclusion and presented together with its limitations.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

(for Theory and Practice)

5.1 Overview

The purpose of this study was to: 1) Explore the unique characteristics and constraints which influence the role of the HR professional within the Australian metals mining industry (AMMI); 2) Examine whether these are reflected in the current literature on the role and function of the HR professional with specific attention paid to the advocacy for Ulrich’s ‘strategic partner’. The defining characteristics of the HR professional’s role and the identification of the constraints that influence it are explored in Chapter 4. The main constraints are: Long term uncertainty; tight labour market, heteronomy, and remoteness.

The study identified that the respondent HR professionals are orientated towards operational HRM consistent with the characteristics of Ulrich’s ‘employee champion’. This finding supports Ulrich’s original 1996 study which is not widely reflected in the contemporary literature of Strategic HRM. This work highlighted Ulrich’s four role metaphors by examining the role of 256 HR practitioners from firms across North America. Ulrich identified that the HR practitioner role was predominately operational, while contemporary literature suggests that the HR practitioner’s role has become more strategic.

The first section of this chapter considers the theoretical and practical implications of this study with reference to findings from the previous chapter (Chapter 4: Results and Discussion) and their relationship to the current literature on HRM and strategic HRM (Chapter 2: Literature Review). This review of key implications for theory, and practice is reiterated in the conclusions and recommendations for future research in sections (Section 5.2 Conclusion). Study limitations and ethical considerations are examined in sections 5.3 Limitations and 5.4 Ethical considerations. The
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications for Theory and Practice

final part of this chapter discusses the potential contribution of the study to future research (Section 5.5 Recommendations for Future Studies).

5.2 Implications for theory and practice

The responses gained from HR professionals identified priority industry and professional themes which shaped their roles and practices within the AMMI. These are considered below-

5.2.1 Industry Characteristics which define HRM

The initial exploration phase revealed three key characteristics of the AMMI responsible for the core constraints placed upon HR professionals to deliver HR outcomes. As described by many authors (Barney 1991; Huselid, Jackson, and Schuler 1997; Wright and McMahan 2011), it is these that limit the capability of HRM to provide a source of competitive advantage; Notably: *The cyclic nature of the industry; The remoteness of operations, and a Heteronomous workforce*. As explained in previous chapters, the complexity of the cyclic nature can be simplified when looked at as two more manageable challenges - long term uncertainty and tight labour market.

**Long Term Uncertainty** – The HR professionals perceive that there is likely to be a significant degree of industry uncertainty over the next five years. Most of the respondents conceded that control of this uncertainty is beyond the capability of their firms. As such the HR professionals’ role must respond to these drivers often more reactively and strategically. The influence of the challenges stemming from industry uncertainty is hard to gauge – in fact HR professionals operating in low profit markets stated that it poses few challenges. These HR professionals have to pay attention to more immediate concerns which are likely to desensitise their long-term outlook, as the larger more profitable firms acknowledge uncertainty as a real challenge.

One of the main challenges for HRM within environments of high uncertainty appears to be the reactive policies which firms implement to adapt to changing conditions – for example the recent refinancing of Fortescue Metals (Liddington-Cox 2012). The pace which firms shift organisational
goals, reacting to emerging threats and opportunities, restricts alignment of the firm’s human capital to the updated organisational goals and limits the strategic role of HR practitioners in developing Barney’s (1991) source of competitive advantage through leveraging human capital. HR professionals are constrained by rapidly changing conditions that limit effectiveness of how strategic activities can be managed, as instability moderates achievable outcomes (Dean and Sharfman 1996). The risk of long term HRM strategies failing to achieve specific outcomes is therefore increased with the level of the industry’s uncertainty.

HR professionals operating within industries with long term uncertainty should be aware of the associated constraints. The shortened strategic horizon limits the value of long term HR activities, with the short-run benefits of carefully conceived and executed policy, potentially exceeding the long term benefits of more complicated HR activities, such as career planning or advocating for resourced intensive actions, such as improving remote working conditions.

Tight Labour Market – The war for talent within the AMMI has been well documented by the Australian media. The skills shortage sparked by the current mining boom has presented the most challenging issue for HR professionals within the AMMI; with HR professionals stating that high quality candidates, who are suitable for internal promotions to fulfil line manager roles, and so on ..., are especially hard to source. Firms attempt to insulate themselves from potential skill shortages that could affect the firms’ productivity with specific frameworks designed to retain and invest in the firm’s human capital.

The HR professionals representing the RO indicated that quality candidates are groomed for internal promotion – Cason (1997) describes this philosophy as key to Jacques’ Stratified Systems theory (SST); while other firms capitalise on the capabilities of potential high quality candidates who may not hold all the required skills sought by the RO. Unable or unwilling to directly compete for the premium high quality candidates, the smaller firms utilise frameworks which manage skill deficiencies, allowing the HR professional to exercise more latitude when recruiting and selecting.
human capital. The ability of firms to retain quality candidates is vital, as quality candidates are extremely mobile between competing firms and similar industries. Firms are forced to favour internal promotions more so due to the high-competitiveness of the external market, rather than for long term strategic benefits of high commitment management as described by Geare, Edgar and McAndrew (2006). The term ‘quality candidate’ is synonymous for ‘potential leader’ due to the rapid promotion and demand for quality candidates.

The challenge to attract potential leaders, as perceived by the HR professional, is only surpassed by the holistic challenge of the tight labour market. As the rapid growth of the industry has exceeded many firms’ capability to promote internally, sourcing candidates externally (especially potential leaders) gives rise to further demands, with fast internal promotions creating voids that HR professionals struggle to remedy. The potential of labour shortages impacting on firms’ productivity, or progress on any of the current and future projects estimated at 118 billion dollars (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012b), has engendered a mercenary culture within the workforce. Some HR professionals indicated that escalated remuneration packages, which must be competitive with the industries price setters, diffuse the link between remuneration and performance; HR professionals in low profit markets rejected the proposition that linking performance to remuneration is problematic.

Arguably the difficulty HR professionals experience with linking performance to remuneration highlights the industry’s systemic incompatibility with high commitment management (HCM). The mobile labour force and industry’s use of elevated remuneration packages as a universal solution for emerging issues fosters a culture of self-interest that over-emphasises short term gains. The ability for firms to achieve effective HCM, where employees are persuaded to volunteer discretionary effort due to commitment such as their allegiance to the firm (Angelis et al. 2011), is therefore limited whilst remuneration remains a key driver for employee retention/atraction.
The ability for employees to freely switch between employers is beyond simple labour mobility, with employer encouraged by enticing remuneration packages and the predatory behaviour of ‘head hunting’ firms. Such behaviour is likely to limit the cohesion between management and the workforce and the efforts of HR to invoke commitment to the firm.

In an alternative method to HCM, the HR professionals’ availability to the front line labour via expansive communication channels may foster similar commitment to the firm. The relationship between the HR professionals and the front line labour is a substitute for loyalty to the firm. Lemmergard (2009b) argues that monitoring employee well-being will improve the firm’s capability; the HR professionals described that front line labour was encouraged to raise any issues, and more importantly that these issues were immediately addressed. It would thus appear that the trust placed in the HR professionals by the front line labour is a proxy for HCM.

Yet, the HR professionals’ overall low regard for uncertainty as a challenge appears incongruous with the efforts to overcome the constraints of the highly challenging tight labour market. The premise of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) is to align HR activities with the organisational goals; the HR function being that of managing a firm’s human capital, even when operating within the constraints of a tight labour market, such that the organisational goals may be achieved. However, the AMMI’s short term focus has escalated the skilled labour shortage.

The review of the AMMI tight labour market has two distinct implications for HR practitioners and HR theory. First, the Requisite Organisations has exhibited resilience to the effects of skill deficiencies and limited pools of potential leaders, which warrants further research to investigate the benefits of hard HRM. Finally, operational HRM has produced comparative results to that of more complex commitment systems. This suggests that operational HRM has greater relevance than is offered from the overwhelming voice of SHRM.
**Heteronomy** – The mobility of the work force within the AMMI is perceived by the HR professionals as being a threat to their firm’s productivity. This mobility of labour indicates the low barriers of entry that employees face when attempting to enter into competing firms or similar industries; the low barriers of entry can be contributed to the incompatible high commitment, low cost to the worker (the uptake of FIFO limits firms ability to differentiate their conditions of employment, as they operate within similar constraints imposed by commercial airlines), and dominance of industry-specific knowledge over firm-specific knowledge. The emphasis on industry-specific knowledge is compounded with the high mobility of the workforce as the expected employee’s tenure at any specific firm is low – the short length of employment at any firm inhibits employees from gaining deeper insight on how any particular firm runs.

The premise that employees increase their value by developing a better understanding of the firm is based on the principles of high performance work systems (HPWS). The effectiveness of internal promotions is impeded with the diminishing ‘wisdom’ of the labour force; the dwindling experience (which is a characteristic of quality candidates) within the firm limits the extent to which the HR role can be devolved. The case for further devolution of the HR professionals’ role is supported throughout the study through discussion of:

- A high incidence of reactive management to unforseen operational issues,
- Conducting activities which front line managers could undertake,
- Capacity for value generation with the availability of greater strategic orientation.

When there are no contextual environmental conditions able to explain why the HR role devolution is not fully realised, the constraints to this realisation are most likely to be internal. Thus, two possible explanations arise: first, that the quality of the line managers is such that they are unsuitable to receive further HR responsibility; or alternatively (or even additionally), that the perceived gain of greater strategic participation by HR professionals is less valuable than the current productivity from the line managers. The rarity of quality candidates supports the
supposition that the line managers are currently most effectively utilised, with the addition of any HR responsibility deterring from the line managers’ core activities.

It is surprising to note that ROs are not immune to HR professionals’ critique that their own roles are insufficiently strategically orientated; explicitly HR professionals within RO also perceived that additional value is to be gained through devolution. The possible underutilisation of human capital based on the employee’s capability and their role’s time-span of control confronts one of the core principles of Systems Stratified Theory – that roles are occupied by employees within a prescribed level of cognitive capability required of any specific employee (Jaques, Bygrave and Lee 2001; Grobler 2005). Additionally, the HR respondents who perceived that their roles were aligned with the organisation’s goals were not a part of the RO cluster. These respondents perceived that their time was best spent within the role of ‘employee champion’.

The effects of heteronomy have implications for the devolution of the HR professionals’ role. The theoretical implications indicate that a holistic approach should be considered before extending the devolution of the HR role; the quality of available line managers and the pre-existing demands on the line managers, may limit the effectiveness of extended devolution of the HR role. The literature that supports extending the devolution of the HR role should address specific conditions where such devolution could inappropriately misalign the outcomes of the HR function with the organisation’s goals, so far that the contextual environment encourages the HR professionals’ role to have an operational focus.

**Remoteness** – Surprisingly, remoteness was perceived by the HR professionals as the least challenging influence to the role of HRM within the AMMI. It is somewhat contentious that the perceptions of challenges linked to remoteness ranged from NO CHALLENGE (0) to VERY STRONG CHALLENGE (5), and that the perceptions of uncertainty as a challenge, which has inherently strong links with remoteness, was mutually exclusive with remoteness. The exploration of the HR
professionals’ perception on the challenges of remoteness contested several preconceived assumptions.

It was indicated during the pilot study that remoteness has a considerable negative influence on the quality of an employee’s work-life balance, yet the impact of remoteness was not regarded by the HR professionals as being a significant challenge to work-life balance; this suggests that HR professionals perceive other unspecified factors as playing a more serious role in disrupting an employee’s work-life balance. Thus the implicit understanding is that remoteness is an unfortunate reality, with the psychological impacts of FIFO and remote camp conditions left as the sleepers. Finally, it seemed reasonable to expect that remoteness would be such an unalterable employment condition that it would be a large influence on remuneration. Yet, it was revealed that flexibility with remuneration is constrained by the necessity of being competitive with the large ‘price setters’; interestingly the larger ‘price setting’ firms rejected this proposition, suggesting instead that they are the ‘employers of choice’ and that remuneration was dictated by the industry as a whole – not by a few select firms.

The underlying theme of remoteness may be substituted with the implications from generic contextual influences. Remoteness within this study highlights the diversity of perceived challenges within a narrow operational context. The theoretical and practical implications from the variance of perceived challenges support Kaufman’s equilibrium theory – such that the suitability of any HRM activity will vary in accordance with the contextual circumstances of the specific firm. Therefore, literature supporting any HR policy should refrain from purely reporting on reaffirming successes and instead critique situational factors which influence the application of HR activities.

5.2.2 The Role of the HR Professional

The overwhelming voice within HR literature forecasts a rise in strategic involvement by HR professionals; this could well lead to the revolutionary gains promised by SHRM advocates (Barney 1991; Huselid, Jackson, and Schuler 1997). According to Scafidi and Sheehan (2005) Australian firms
are requiring HR managers to perform greater strategic roles. However, this research, which targeted a single but economically significant industry classification (AMMI), reveals that the respondent HR professionals believe that this has not occurred. The HR professionals’ role is comparative to Ulrich’s earlier role metaphor research findings (Connor and Ulrich 1996), this would suggest that the mining industry has not developed beyond the strategic expectations that were held twenty years ago. This theory is further strengthened by the HR professionals’ focus on the operational HRM not being congruent with the contemporary SHRM literature.

The respondents’ role signature, which profiled the HR professionals’ role, revealed that the roles exhibited two distinct sets of characteristics which were then allocated into clusters: a Requisite Organisation (RO) cluster - the \textit{practiced} role of HR professionals within a RO aligned to the \textit{prescribed} role; and a dominant cluster -- the larger group of HR professionals’ \textit{practiced} roles did not represent their \textit{prescribed} role. Irrespective of the cluster, HR professionals described their \textit{preferred} role as being a more strategic role.

The highlighted disparity between \textit{prescribed} and \textit{practiced} roles within the dominant cluster is interesting (see below, Figure 5.1 – Role Signature Comparison). The role signature illustrates a substantial shift towards operational focus and people activities – categorised by Ulrich as the ‘employee champion’ role (Ulrich 1997). The resistance in firms to empower the HR professional has been explored by several authors (Buyens and De Vos 2001; LaMarsh 2004); although organisational resistance may explain the mismatch between the \textit{practiced} and \textit{prescribed} roles, it does not provide any insight on the phenomena of the \textit{prescribed} role development.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications for Theory and Practice

Figure 5-1 Role Signature Comparison

The orientation of HR roles within the AMMI towards an operational focus, in contrast to the strategy bias within the HRM literature, has not been fully explored. The two rationalisations which may explain the operational HR phenomenon is the reaction to demands that are external to the HR function; or alternatively, a changing variable or condition within the operational remit of the HR practitioner. A reaction to an external demand describes an event where the immediate HR requirements have been altered; Kaufman (2011) argues that alternative methods to contextual problems is a rational reality, for example firms may emphasise communication channels to increase employee involvement when the customary HPWS is incompatible with the environmental constraints. The second rationalisation, of changing conditions within the HR function, allude to a change of the firms’ capability to deliver HR objectives. Changes in HR capabilities can occur due to the HR function lagging behind rapidly evolving organisational goals. Then again, an internal adjustment may be implemented to maximise the effectiveness of individual HR roles.

Operational HRM

The characteristics of the HR professionals’ role within the AMMI resemble those of Ulrich’s ‘employee champion’ role. The ‘employee champion’ profile allows the HR professional to develop
an important relationship with the front line employees. Additionally, the ‘employee champion’ role enacts transactional HR activities which are important in meeting the employees expectations, which could otherwise disrupt the employee-HR relationship. A positive relationship between the HR professional and front line employees is important as it engenders normative commitment, whilst affective commitment is obtained by successfully meeting the employees basic expectations linked to HR transactions (Angelis et al. 2011) – such as rosters and pay. Being able to achieve either of these approaches is pivotal for the respondent HR professionals, to maintain the desired employee retention rate.

These findings contain two interesting revelations: that an operational approach appears to have similar outcomes to that of strategic activities; and, that the adoption of the ‘employee champion’ role contributes to the devolution of HR accountabilities within the AMMI. Firstly, the potential HR outcomes of SHRM techniques, such as HPWS (Boxall and Macky 2009) and HCM (Geare, Edgar and McAndrew, 2006), are being reproduced by an operational approach; while more popular SHRM activities advocated by ‘best practice’ remain largely neglected. This suggests that the outcomes argued as pivotal in obtaining competitiveness with other firms by SHRM can also be achieved by operational HRM. The strategic value of an operational approach which accommodates key contextual changes has been undervalued and scarcely researched in the HR literature. Within the AMMI, the HR function has adopted a ‘best fit’ approach, which acknowledges the industry’s contextual constraints.

Secondly, the devolution of the HR role is restricted because of the importance of the ‘employee champion’ role in combating the industry’s greatest challenge: the tight labour market. Authors that support the devolution of the HR role suggest that additional value will be created for the firm when HR professionals are not burdened by operational concerns (Kulik and Bainbridge 2006; Yusoff and Abdullah 2008). The ‘best practice’ mantra, which somewhat over simplifies the moderating influences to devolution, presents an ideology where more is better. However, the
combinations of contextual influences that constrain the HR role within the AMMI limit the extent to which the HR role can effectively be devolved. The more significant constraining influences being: the value of the line managers’ primary role which is increased due to the rarity of their skills; shortage of talented line managers suitable to inherit greater HR responsibilities; and the strategic ambiguity in relinquishing vital HR responsibilities beyond the HR function. These constraints have moderated the degree to which the HR role has been devolved, and thus ‘contribute to the operational focus of the HR professional.

The Business Partner

The HR literature which suggests that the HR professionals’ role should shift towards strategic activities has been over represented, thus illustrating a general deviation from Ulrich’s ‘business partner’; Ulrich explicitly stated that the HR function must successfully perform all four roles in order to maximise HR effectiveness, and that no role is more important than another (Conner and Ulrich 1996). That has not prevented the industry from being criticised for operating inefficiently – stagnating due to promised wealth because of high ore prices (Cleary 2012) - with HR practices that have not evolved much in the past twenty years.

However, the research discussed in this thesis suggests that the argument for the devolution of HR roles within the AMMI may in fact be misplaced, and this presents a contradiction between the SHRM mantra and the non-conforming practices of the AMMI. The devolution of the HR role appears less crucial than is implied within the literature, as the HR function within the AMMI delivers similar outcomes whilst the HR professionals perform more operational duties.

The approach taken by the HR function of firms within the AMMI, with its significant deviation from what the predominant SHRM literature recommends, suggests that there may be multiple legitimate methods for obtaining specific HR deliverables. Indeed, Kaufman (2010c) suggests that
firms can achieve greater efficiency by moderating the SHRM activities with operational activities – where the same outcome is achieved at far lower costs to the firm.

It is clear that all but one of the HR professionals who participated in this research do not fulfil the criteria of Ulrich’s ‘business partner’. In light of this, the belief that all HR professionals should strive to become a ‘business partner’ and perform all four of Ulrich’s role metaphors, is questionable and unlikely. Rather, an alternative suggestion is that the HR function as a whole should perform the ‘business partner’ role; this holistic approach of the ‘business partner’ spanning the entire HR function is exemplified by Jacques’ RO framework, as different working relationships (with specific time-span complexities) are executed at prescribed levels within the organisation (Bioss 2005). Within Jacques’ framework, the levels from ‘Director’ and above are characterised as performing the role of the ‘strategic partner’.

The implication to contemporary literature is simply that soft HRM does not necessarily contain the universal solution to increasingly complex organisational structures. The scientific approach to HRM may present an approach which is more balanced in aligning the outcomes of the HR function with the organisational goals; the scientific approach measures each available policy and adopts the most appropriate, disregarding irrelevant or superfluous outcomes that offer no additional value to the firm. Furthermore, the role of the ‘strategic partner’, required to fulfil Ulrich’s ‘business partner’, is often greater than the HR professional – such that the literature may benefit with a holistic examination of the HR function before returning to the responsibilities of the HR professional.
5.3 Conclusions and Recommendations for further research

The primary purpose of this study was to define the role of the HR practitioner within the AMMI, and look at how the role has recently developed. This was achieved by conducting a mixed methods approach which centred on the thematic analysis of interview data and on Ulrich’s role metaphor framework. Ten HR professionals who work within the industry participated in the interviews and/or the Delphi phase. The research revealed that the HR professionals performed the role of Ulrich’s ‘employee champion’. The HR professionals’ operational HR activities achieved outcomes comparative to SHRM activities – suggesting that operational HRM may be substituted for SHRM. However, the HR professionals perceive that their daily activities are restricting opportunities to develop strategic planning.

The secondary purpose of the research was to identify the factors that influence HRM within the AMMI; specifically as understanding how HR activities are influenced by the contextual constraints can lead to deeper awareness of the limitations and benefits of HR activities. The constraints characterising the AMMI were found to be: Cyclic nature of the AMMI, remoteness, and heteronomy. The Australian labour market is inadequate in aptly reacting to the mining’s boom-bust cycle. The boom-bust cycle causes industry uncertainty that compounds the remoteness issues, with remoteness constraints meaning an increase in investment costs to remote regions, and uncertainty also increasing the risks for investment.

Finally, heteronomy describes the labour phenomena of high demand labour who has limited autonomy, although also has high mobility to enter competing firms. Investment into this heteronomous labour force is rewarded with only marginal gains. Additionally, devolving HR responsibilities on to line managers (high quality employees) results in a net inefficiency as the line manager’s primary activities often have greater value for the firm. The study finding also suggest that the devolution of the HR professionals’ role in the AMMI has been constrained by the tight labour market.
Two clusters emerged during the research: the Requisite Organisation (RO) cluster – HR professionals who were employed within the large RO firms; and the dominant cluster – representing HR professionals from firms other than RO ones.

The RO cluster presented some interesting characteristics which were absent from the dominant cluster. Unlike firms within the dominant cluster, RO firms do not compromise by employing candidates who do not satisfy their immediate role requirements. While other firms invested in developing employees to meet the role requirements of their current position, by not having this constraint RO firms can invest directly in the candidates’ future requirements – thus the RO cluster is better equipped to obtain quality candidates internally. This is significant as the external market for quality candidates has the largest supply deficiency.

The structure of the RO firms produced another of the interesting characteristics: moderated devolution. The Stratified Systems theory prescribes explicit scope and span of responsibilities. The strictly defined strata encourage rational decisions when restructuring roles – such as in devolving the HR professionals’ role. The scientific approach to HRM limits the influence of emotive decisions, determining the appropriate HR activity on the overall net value to the firm. As one HR professional from a RO describes how the firm approaches HRM;

... they're very focused on the engineering element of what we do and try to de-bottleneck that. (Respondent 5)

While this research has reported largely on the characteristics of the scientific approach to HRM, it specifically presents the results with this focus as the ‘soft’ approach is already well covered within recent HR literature. Nonetheless, this research does not attempt to persuade the reader that the ‘hard’ approach is superior to the ‘soft’ approach – but only seeks to point out that there are diverse approaches which may not resonate with the popular voice. From this may be posited the view that Kaufman’s economic philosophy is incorrectly labelled as ‘hard’ HRM, as his scientific approach would be better classified as ‘moderated’ HRM. The ‘scientific’ approach, like Kaufman’s
and Jacques’, does not suggest that ‘soft’ HRM is without value, but rather that the decision to establish HR systems and practices should be demonstrably in line with the long term interests of the firm.

The study respondents indicated varying levels of role disruption from unforeseen operational concerns – with only one respondent indicating no interruptions to daily activities by operational matters. The ramifications to the HR professionals’ activities being disrupted by unforeseen issues warrant further investigation.

Closer examination of why some HR practitioners in the AMMI are less exposed to these problems may inform the design of systems and processes conducive to effective HR practice at an operational, and (by extension) strategic level, within Australian metals mining and a range of allied industry sectors.
5.4 Limitations

The limitations identified in this study fall within the following three categories: participation, research design, and assumptions.

5.4.1 Participation

During the research planning phase, the intention was to interview 12 to 16 HR practitioners. Unfortunately, the actual number of participants in the initial exploration phase consisted of only eight. The low participation does not overly impact the exploratory phase, though it does have a clear impact in the Delphi phase. The Delphi phase is more susceptible given the circumstances where the participants can form clusters with contrary perspectives, thus further reducing the sample size.

A small sample size limits the level of quantitative analysis possible. Though this does not impact this research directly as it was intended to be primarily a qualitative exploratory study, it does, however, impact on any future study which may want to draw quantitative comparisons. The small sample was exacerbated further when two respondents dropped out after the first Delphi iteration. Additionally, two other participants who had initially volunteered for the study could no longer take part in the initial interviews. However, they did participate in the later Delphi phase.

The inclusion of these two participants in the later Delphi phase without their having participated in the initial exploration phase is legitimate as the Delphi’s expert panel should try to reflect the target population and avoid being biased (Tapio 2002). The use of the participants from the initial exploration phase (interviews) as the expert panel in the Delphi phase was not essential, rather the decision to recycle the respondents was one of convenience. Although the inclusion of additional respondents would strengthen the initial exploration phase, participation is not a requirement for subsequent phases. The only stage which has a perquisite for participation is the second iteration of the policy Delphi, which does require participation in the first iteration. The inclusion of additional participants during the second iteration would likely destabilise the findings.
The research does not attempt to prove a categorical truth about every HR practitioner within the AMMI; instead it explores the subjective perspectives of the participating HR practitioners to draw out possibilities that may exist throughout the AMMI. Silverman (2010b) argues that such an exploratory study with a small sample size is justified as it advances the theoretical curiosity towards future analytical possibilities.

5.4.2 Research Design

The instrument (role signature) that defines the practitioner’s role (drawing on updated characteristics from the study of HR and IR practices in the AMMI by Moore and Gardner, 2004), is an original design concept which is being tested by this research. The instrument represents the respondents prescribed, practiced and preferred duties on an axis based on the weighting of each duty listed in the role development survey. The findings from the practitioner’s role instrument are not quantifiable. The instrument does not differentiate between practitioners who spend 2 hours or 40 hours a week on that activity, showing only that both have an associated responsibility to that activity.

However it is of note that the results from the practitioner’s role instrument are consistent with the results from Ulrich’s HR role survey (Conner and Ulrich 1996) and supported by the semi-structured interviews. Therefore practitioner’s role instrument may be developed and refined for use in future quantitative or mixed method studies.

5.4.3 Assumptions

The research asserts that there is a co-dependent relationship between HRM, labour profile, and industry characteristics. The assumption is that the change in one will influence the other two elements within the relationship. Therefore, to understand one element it is necessary to be aware of the other two elements. Secondly that all but the most senior HR practitioners in the AMMI have limited agency to determine firm level outcomes given the interplay between environmental and functional contingencies shaping their role on a day to day basis.
5.5 Ethical Considerations

Any Murdoch University research which involves human beings must obtain approval from the Murdoch’s Research Ethics Committee (Human Research Ethics 2012). To obtain approval the researcher must demonstrate to the Research Ethics sub-Committee that the research poses only a negligible or low risk, indicating that participants will be exposed to no undue discomfort. If the research is likely to exceed a low risk to participants, or if it requires specific research involving children, then approval will only be granted by the full committee.

The Murdoch Research Ethics Committee approved the Honours Research Project 2011/187: “Unique factors that shape the role of the HR practitioner: The Australian Metals Mining Industry (AMMI) perspective” in November 2011; the approval is valid for four years, though this may be extended. This approval was obtained on the basis that due to its low sensitivity this study posed no foreseeable harm to the participants.

Whilst conducting the research, the Murdoch’s Human Research Ethics policies and Honours Research Project proposal 2011/187 were fully acknowledged and implemented. The agreement with the Research Ethics Committee ensured that all potential participants were informed of their rights and of the researcher’s responsibilities. Primarily, the key concerns were that participation would be anonymous, and that participants could elect to discontinue their participation at any time.

These concerns were addressed in the form of a detailed document which described accurately the expectations and requirements of the research project. This participation guide was sent electronically to all participants prior to their initial indication that they were willing to participate. A hard copy was also provided to each participant before the interview, and the researcher verbally ensured that the participants had understood its contents.
Finally, once it was clear that the participants understood the process they were asked to sign an Interview Consent form. Upon completion of the interview respondents were once again informed of their right to leave the research at any time, and that a transcript would be sent electronically to them for their optional editing. All interviewees were assured that all distinguishing comments would be censored as part of the process to de-identify the data.

At no stage during the research were any participants informed of the identity of any other participant.

A copy of the Interview consent form and participation guide is located in Appendix 6 and 7.
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### Appendix 1 Mixed Method Rationale Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Triangulation</th>
<th>Combining quantitative and quantitative research, where mutually corroborative, yields greater validity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offset</td>
<td>The assumption that the strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods can be combined to nullify the weaknesses of each.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Integrity is improved with the combination of both methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complementarity</td>
<td>Where the story benefits from empirical observations and a quantitative narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>The structures of social life can be captured by quantitative research, though the sense of the process is obtained through qualitative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of views</td>
<td>A multidimensional approach that yields additional significant data on the respondents with a complex analysis between the researchers and participants perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Qualitative descriptions can improve the generalizability, or external validity, of context specific quantitative data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration</td>
<td>The reverse relationship of Context, where quantitative data substantiates qualitative data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Specific explanation that qualitative methods can be used to improve quantitative instruments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirm and discover</td>
<td>The qualitative data generates a discovery phase to produce hypothesis which can be tested in the quantitative confirm phase.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiation</th>
<th>Unexpected results</th>
<th>Where completeness suggest mixed methods produce a richer picture, it may also be true that truth can only be revealed by the combination of both methods where only noise exists with a single method.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expansion</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>The addition of one form is used to explain the results, though not conjunctively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhancement</td>
<td>The expansion of either quantitative or qualitative findings by collecting data from the opposed discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>Single common techniques will not always be appropriate for different respondents or cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different research questions</td>
<td>Each research question requires specific approach, which may be dissimilar within the set.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utility</td>
<td>An applied focus within articles which provide actionable discussion for practitioners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other/unclear</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Greene et al. (1989) and Bryman (2008, 103)

---

1 *Unexpected results* falls within the scope of Initiation or Expansion dependent with the original intent; If the expected outcomes is to fall within a predetermined parameter then it would be the later, whilst an unrealised result would indicate Initiation.

2 Sampling, Different research question and Utility address broader research questions, such as purpose of the research and the research framework.
### Explaining the variation of SHRM adoption between industries: HRM moderators that characterise the Australian Metals Mining Industry

The strategic focus of HRM has driven many organisations to operate with complex HRM activities. We can observe industries, such as the Australian metals Mining Industry, which do not operate with such complex HRM practices. This survey attempts to reveal the factors which influence the use of complex practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Time in current role:</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Experience within the Industry:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□ &lt; 1 year</td>
<td>□ &lt; 2 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□ 1—2 years</td>
<td>□ 2—4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td></td>
<td>□ 2—3 years</td>
<td>□ 4—6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 25</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□ 3—4 years</td>
<td>□ 6—8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25—30</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□ &gt; 4 years</td>
<td>□ &gt; 8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31—40</td>
<td>□ 41—50</td>
<td>□</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 40</td>
<td>□ 51—60</td>
<td>□</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Practitioner’s Role

Which one category that best describes your role

- □ Senior manager/director/practitioner with prime responsibility for HR strategy/policy
- □ Senior manager/director/practitioner with prime responsibility for IR strategy/policy
- □ Senior manager/director/practitioner with prime responsibility for both HR and IR strategy/policy
- □ HR practitioner with responsibility for human resource operations
- □ IR practitioner with responsibility for industrial relations operations
- □ Manager/practitioner with responsibility for HR and IR operations
- □ Other

**Prescribed duties:** original job description

- □ Recruitment and Selection
- □ Performance appraisal
- □ Performance management
- □ Workforce planning
- □ Contract management
- □ HR records and database maintenance
- □ OH&S planning and administration
- □ OH&S training delivery
- □ Training and Development planning
- □ Training program design
- □ Training Delivery
- □ Payroll administration
- □ Employee communication
- □ Custodian of ICT/technology

**Practiced duties:** current activities

- □ Recruitment and Selection
- □ Performance appraisal
- □ Performance management
- □ Workforce planning
- □ Contract management
- □ HR records and database maintenance
- □ OH&S planning and administration
- □ OH&S training delivery
- □ Training and Development planning
- □ Training program design
- □ Training Delivery
- □ Payroll administration
- □ Employee communication
- □ Custodian of ICT/technology

**Preferred duties:** ideal activities

- □ Recruitment and Selection
- □ Performance appraisal
- □ Performance management
- □ Workforce planning
- □ Contract management
- □ HR records and database maintenance
- □ OH&S planning and administration
- □ OH&S training delivery
- □ Training and Development planning
- □ Training program design
- □ Training Delivery
- □ Payroll administration
- □ Employee communication
- □ Custodian of ICT/technology
## Human Resource Role Assessment Survey

Consider your immediate HR department where you perform your primary role; rate the quality of each HR activities 1 (low) to 5 (high)

### HR helps the organization ...
1. accomplish business goals ...........................................
2. improve operating efficiency ....................................
3. take care of employees personal needs ......................
4. adapt to change ...................................................

### HR participates in ...
5. the process of defining business strategies ................
6. delivering HR processes ........................................
7. improving employee commitment ............................
8. shaping culture change for renewal and transformation ...

### HR makes sure that ...
9. HR strategies are aligned with business strategies .......
10. HR processes are efficiently administered ...............  
11. HR policies and programs respond to the personal needs of employees ........................................
12. HR processes and programs increase the organization’s ability to change ........................................

### HR effectiveness is measured by its ability to ...
13. help make strategy happen ....................................
14. efficiently deliver HR processes ..............................
15. help employees meet personal needs ......................
16. help an organization anticipate and adapt to future issues ...

### HR is seen as ...
17. a business partner .............................................
18. an administrative expert ......................................
19. a champion for employees ...................................
20. a change agent ................................................

### HR spends time on ...
21. strategic issues ...................................................
22. operational issues .............................................
23. listening and responding to employees ..................
24. supporting new behaviors for keeping the firm competitive ...

### HR is an active participant in ...
25. business planning .............................................
26. designing and delivering HR processes ..................
27. listening and responding to employees ..................
28. organizational renewal, change and transformation ...

### HR works to ...
29. align HR strategies and business strategy ...............
30. monitor administrative processes ..........................
31. offer assistance to help employees meet family and personal needs ........................................
32. reshape behavior for organizational change .............

### HR develops processes and programs to ...
33. link HR strategies to accomplish business strategy ....
34. efficient process documents and transactions ...........
35. take care of employee personal needs ....................
36. help the organization transform itself ....................

### HR’s credibility comes from ...
37. helping to fulfill strategic goals ............................
38. increasing productivity ......................................
39. helping employees meet their personal needs ..........
40. making change happen ......................................
Appendices

Research Stage 2: Delphi (round 1 of 2)

Process

The interview findings from Research Stage 1 were explored via a thematic analysis to establish the defining role characteristics for HR practitioners in the Australian Minerals and Metals Industry (AMMI).

This second stage of the research, the Delphi stage, seeks to establish levels of consensus around the unique or defining role characteristics identified by respondents at Stage 1.

The Delphi stage is conducted over two rounds, with the findings of the first Delphi round being used to produce more specific statements about the role of the HR practitioner in the AMMI for testing in the second Delphi round. This round is intended to test the strength of insider consensus relating to specific statements on the role of the HR function and practitioner in the AMMI.

Instructions

The following five thematic summaries and related propositions or statements are based on the preliminary research from stage 1. Each thematic summary is followed by a number of statements relating to that summary. Please select one of the five Likert options from the drop down list which correspond to your level of agreement – or disagreement with each of the seventeen statements (see figure 1 below). Ensure that all seventeen statements have been addressed.

Figure 1 - Example of selecting agreement to statements

A separate table is provided within the email if you are unable to utilise the Microsoft Word 2010 form feature.
Themes and statements from Research Stage One: HR practitioner interviews incorporating short survey responses.

Theme A- Role Metaphors

Preliminary responses to questions based on Ulrich’s HR role survey (values in red) showed no significant deviation with the findings of the Conner and Ulrich seminal 1996 study (values contained within the parenthesis) on role metaphors, although the ‘Administrative Expert’ quadrant was slightly elevated (see table 1). This finding may be qualified by the low sample size, although it is consistent with the focus on basic transactional processes revealed in the qualitative interview data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic</th>
<th>Operational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Partner:</td>
<td>Operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.0 (29.8)</td>
<td>31.2 (31.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Agent:</td>
<td>Employee Champion:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.0 (29.6)</td>
<td>31.2 (31.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Expert:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.5 (36.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1- HR role metaphors: AMMI Participant responses 2012 v results from Ulrich’s 1996 study

Examining the proportions attributed (the listed percentages) of each axis in table 1 independently suggests a bias towards Process (55.0%) and Operational (54.8%) activity. This indicates an operational approach aimed at engaging employee commitment through solid grass root practices.

Role Metaphor Statements to follow -

S1-Role metaphor - Administrative Expert: Choose an item.
Building a robust transactional process in your firm is very important for worker retention.
S2-Role metaphor - Employee Champion: 
Retention of people in your firm is heavily dependent on the quality of relationships between HR and the workforce.

S3-Role metaphor - Operational: 
In your firm HR practitioners are performing activities many of which could be dealt with by line managers.

Theme B- HR Role Development

The Role Development section measured role shifts between the prescribed – what was required, practiced – what you actually do, and preferred – what you think you should be doing (see figure 2 below). The shift between prescribed and practiced indicates a more people and operational focus, consistent with the ‘Employee Champion’ metaphor. The preferred shift suggests practitioners believe there is value in unrealised strategic activities.

Figure 2 Role development – Gap between prescribed, practiced and preferred perceived by respondents

S4-Role Development – Prescribed: 
Your prescribed role did not accurately reflect your actual duties.

S5-Role Development – Practiced (1): 
Your role in the firm has evolved towards an ‘Employee Champion’ emphasis.
S6-Role Development – Practiced (2):
Your daily activities are often interrupted with unforeseen operational issues.

S7-Role Development – Preferred:
Your role will add more value to the firm if more of your efforts can diverted away from operational issues to greater strategic concerns.

Summary of Stage 1 Qualitative findings:
The three primary industry characteristics which differentiate the mining industry are: cyclic nature, remoteness, and heteronomy.

Theme C- Cyclic Nature of the industry
The fluctuations of foreign demand for resources, domestic government policy and industry practices have created a cyclic phenomenon within the mining industry. The current situation with high commodity prices has fuelled the current boom. This complex environment is responsible for the industry’s high level of strategic uncertainty that limits investment in infrastructure; Uncertainty in the mining industry manifests in reactive policies.

The long lead time for adequate training and widespread parallel development of mining projects has resulted in a labour shortage, with an especially strong demand for experienced talented workers. The opportunities to exploit large commodity reserves for significant profit by rapid sourcing of labour has created a bubble within the industry, raising the competitiveness of remuneration packages and diffusing the link to productivity. When firms are unable to attract candidates with a strong fit of skills and experience they are willing to apply a fit for purpose criteria to a broader range of candidates.

S8-Uncertainty (1):
The AMMI will continue to experience long term uncertainty – beyond a horizon of 5 years.

S9-Uncertainty (2):
Your firm would increase investment in accommodation and amenities if there was less uncertainty.

S10-Tight labour market (1):
Your firm mitigates the effects of strong competition for labour by sourcing some candidates which other companies would not consider.
S11-Tight labour market (2):
Your firm is strongly committed in training or mentoring as a means to reduce internal workforce skill deficits.

S12-Tight labour market (3):
Your firm has difficulty linking remuneration to productivity.

Theme D- Remoteness

Remoteness was described by practitioners as one of the more difficult factors to overcome. The distance from mining operations to the workers’ residence, with the majority not being local, has a damaging influence to their work-life balance. Although the improvements to rosters, generous remuneration and FIFO arrangements have moderated the impact, the expected employment duration for staff is between three to seven years.

S13-Remoteness (1):
The remoteness of work sites is a major issue with HRM practices in the mining industry

S-14-Remoteness (2):
The employee work life balance is often compromised due to the requirements of the mining operation.

S15-Remoteness (3):
The levels of competitive remuneration would be reduced if more provisions were made for workers to live closer to the mining operation.

Theme E- Heteronomy

The mining industry is heavily influenced by Occupational Health and Safety considerations which are dealt with outside the HR department. Repetitive procedural roles, and stratified structural hierarchy supports centralisation of decision making. These factors decrease worker autonomy and reduced individual accountability for decision making. This is reflected in the thinking and practices of workers promoted to management roles.
The heteronomous profile of the industry and prevalence of common roles allows workers to move freely from company to company.

**S16-Heteronomy (1):**
Your firm has difficulty sourcing suitable line managers.

**S17-Heteronomy (2):**
Your firm's productive capacity is at risk from the mobility of skilled workers within the resource sector.

Comments:

Thank you very much for completing this survey
The data from the first round of Delphi questions has been collated, and those results are the foundation for the 15 questions in the final round of questions.

As predicted by several participants, an attempt to reveal a universal description of the HR practitioner in the Australian Metals Mining Industry is problematic; although, distinct clusters have emerged from the data. The polarity of answers can be as telling as a clear consensus.

Instructions

The first ten statements require a response based on your agreement or disagreement to that statement. Please select one of the five Likert options from the drop down list which correspond to your level of agreement – or disagreement with each of the ten statements (see figure 1 below).

Figure 1 – Example of selecting

The final five statements (S11-S15) are challenges faced by HR practitioners. Each challenge has an associated drop down list with a scale from 1 (No influence) to 5 (Very Strong Influence). Please rate each challenge based on the strength of influence these have on HR activities; where the higher number represents a more significant influence. Assess each challenge independently; this is not a ranking between the challenges.

Please ensure that all ten statements and five challenge ratings have been answered.

A separate table is provided within the email if you are unable to utilise the Microsoft Word 2010 form feature.
Unique factors that shape the role of the HR practitioner: An Australian Metals Mining Industry perspective.

**S1-Role metaphor - Administrative Expert:** Choose an item. A successful transactional system’s primary objective is to reduce employee dissatisfaction, not to motivate employee commitment.

**S2-Role metaphor - Employee Champion:** Choose an item. High involvement between HR practitioners and employees is rewarded with high employee commitment.

**S3-Role metaphor - Devolution:** Choose an item. Present conditions are restricting Line Managers from undertaking more HR responsibilities.

**S4-Role Development – Reactive:** Choose an item. The incidence of unforeseen operational issues is higher than sectors situated in metropolitan locations.

**S5-Role Development – Strategic:** Choose an item. Increased strategic responsibility would allow you to create additional value.

**S6-Uncertainty:** Choose an item. The ability to control future uncertainty is mostly beyond the control of your organisation.

**S7-Remuneration (1):** Choose an item. The large ‘employers of choice’ are the price setters for labour within the industry.

**S8-Remuneration (2):** Choose an item. The de-collectivisation of the workplaces has increased remuneration packages?

**S9-Leaders (1):** Choose an item. The supply of leaders for your firm is mostly sourced internally.

**S-10-Leaders (2):** Choose an item. The external competition for leaders or highly skilled candidates is the most aggressive.
Appendices

For the following challenges listed below, please rate the strength of their influence on your firm, where 1 is ‘no influence’ and 5 is ‘very strong influence’.

S11-Tight Labour Market

S12-Long term uncertainty

S13-Labour fluidity

S14-Attracting potential leader

S15-Remoteness

Choose an item.

Comments:

Thank you very much for completing this survey.
Appendix 6 Interview Consent Form Example

Consent Form
Interview

Unique factors that shape the role of the HR practitioner: An Australian Metals Mining Industry perspective.

Participant

I have read the participant information sheet, which explains the nature of the research and the possible risks. The information has been explained to me and all my questions have been satisfactorily answered. I have been given a copy of the information sheet to keep.

I am happy to be interviewed and for the interview to be audio recorded as part of this research. I understand that I do not have to answer particular questions if I do not want to and that I can withdraw at any time without consequences to myself.

I agree that research data gathered from the results of the study may be published provided my name or any identifying data is not used. I have also been informed that I may not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study.

I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.

_________________________  _______________________
Signature of Participant      Date

Investigator

I have fully explained to ____________________________ the nature and purpose of the research, the procedures to be employed, and the possible risks involved. I have provided the participant with a copy of the Information Sheet.

_________________________  _______________________
Signature of Investigator      Date

_________________________  _______________________
Print Name                  Position
Appendix 7 Information Letter (3 pages)

Unique factors that shape the role of the HR practitioner: An Australian Metals Mining Industry perspective.

Overview

We are undertaking a research study aimed to explore the relationships between the Role and practices of the HR professional as they relate to the unique factors which characterise the Australian Metals Mining Industry. This study is part of my Honours Degree in Business, supervised by Dr. Scott Gardner and Dr. Antonia Girardi at Murdoch University.

HRM literature: Rhetoric or Reality

This study is based on the premise that: 1) Much of the current Human Resource Management (HRM) literature is based on experience in North American, UK, and European manufacturing and service industries, which do not share the same structural characteristics as the Australian Metals Mining Industry. 2) Very few academic studies have explored the unique contextual and operational conditions of the Metals Mining Industry in Australia and how these influence management and HRM practices, despite the major and rapidly growing contribution of mining to the national economy.

The dominant trend in the HRM literature over the past two decades has moved towards a softer ‘human or employee relations versus management science focus’. This is represented in various themes, frameworks and prescriptions for practice focused on: Long term capacity building through workforce planning and Strategic Human Resource Development (HRD) and enhancing employee commitment and retention through work/life balance programs, performance management development, remuneration, recognition and reward schemes.

These studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between productivity and activities that drive by a harmonious developmental employer-employee relationship (Huselid 1995; Lawler 1992; Sheehan, Holland, and De Clercq 2006; Wright and McMahan 2011). These authors examine environments conducive with contemporary view of human relations and contingency based approaches to HRM theory and practice; which contrast to the (hard) prescriptive, management science approach promoted in Elliot Jacques’ Requisite Organisation (Cason 1997) and the economic equilibrium approach advocated by Kaufman (2010).

The study will explore specific structural features of the Australian Metals Mining industry that influence the balance between hard and soft HRM practices. Revenue generated from the Australian Iron Ore sector has increased from A$66.6 billion in 2006-07 (Minerals Council of Australia 2007) to a projected A$65 billion for 2011-12 (Cleary 2011). This significant mining contribution of 8% to the Australian GDP warrants more considered approach to what defines the current and emerging role and effective practices of the HR practitioner in mining.

Research Process

The research contains two phases: phase one consists of a short questionnaire and semi-structured interview to be conducted over a one hour period. Interviewees will be offered the transcriptions for editing. The second phase
involves a thematic analysis of phase one findings which provide the template for the Delphi (expert) study component. The Delphi study will explore and pool the perspectives of HR practitioners on unique mining factors and key issues which influence their roles. The email delivered Delphi study will consist of ten statements, and a series of Likert scaled questions (requiring 20-30 minutes to complete). The first round responses will be used to test the level of agreement with the statements. First round findings will then examined by the researcher, refined and e-mailed for a second and third round to build a clear consensus amongst respondents on key elements that define HR practices in the industry.

Figure 1: Overview of Research Approach

Appendices
Benefits for respondents

All respondents will receive a summary document of findings from the study. They will also be invited to participate in a more detailed survey of HR, IR and Change Management practices in the AMMI. This builds on a study of 62 Western Australian based mining and mining service companies by Moore and Gardner (2004).