

Unique Factors which shape the Role of the HR practitioner:

An Australian Metals Mining Industry Perspective.

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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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