Personal Credibility in Human Resources
What does it take to be strategic?

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Organizational Psychology

at

John F. Kennedy University

August 4, 2008

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INTRODUCTION

I conducted a study of Human Resource professionals’ understanding and application of the competency of Personal Credibility in working within organizations. The competency has been identified as critical to the HR profession and is suggested to relate to Strategic HR. Over the past 20 years, the HR profession appears to be showing a schism in the values, competencies and resulting practices of Human Resource professionals. These values, competencies and resulting practices are crucial as can positively and negatively affect employees, and thus a company’s performance. It is plausible to believe that any difference in competencies and underlying values, beliefs and motivations is recognizable and can be defined by one’s decisions, behaviors and experiences.

The review of the literature in the area of Human Resource practices and, corporate performance, indicated that both HR practices and corporate performance has been researched and quantitatively documented. What had not been well studied, are the values and beliefs within the Human Resources professional, nor how that may or may not relate to competencies such as Personal Credibility, and thusly corporate performance. A source of quantitative measures linking HR practices and corporate performance, such as in Wright, Gardner, Moynihan & Allen (2005), detailed the linkage of HR practices and corporate performance. While the study did not conclusively delineate either the causal direction of the relationship or the numerous concurrent variables that require additional research, it did support the existence of a linkage of HR practices to corporate performance. Thus, it was plausible to consider that the values, beliefs (motivators) and competencies within Human Resource professionals would have impact on corporate performance. Therefore, information...
about motivation, values and competencies within the HR profession and how that relates to success in the field needed further research.

Until recently, little discussion beyond specific technical competence within the profession had taken place. While a significant amount of work and research is beginning to build foundational knowledge about the HR profession and the critical competencies little if any work is being conducted on the understanding of values and beliefs held by HR professionals. In particular, the competency of personal credibility, is showing increasing importance in many of the studies, and thus was an important area to look at in more depth. Moreover, the identification of any link between these values and beliefs and corporate performance is negligible. While much effort has been put into “getting a seat at the executive table”, it appears that moving beyond the limited understanding of technical competence and identification of competencies is crucial to a better understanding of the HR profession, HR professionals and their resulting influence on employees and organizations.

I believed that a better understanding of HR professionals’ competencies, motivations and values, and connecting them to corporate performance was not only important to the profession, but ultimately - to the success (or lack there of) in organizations. Little was known about the most common beliefs, values and approaches within HR, other than the possible inaccurate presumption that HR professionals are “soft and fuzzy,” which translates to the traits of caring and supportive. It is possible that the patterns and trends that emerged through this research would foster both developmental plans for HR professionals that seek to excel in their chosen profession as well as provide evidence and information for the broader understanding of corporate performance and success.

I conducted a grounded theory study with a selected group of HR professionals from the for profit sector within the San Francisco bay area. The study participants were Senior
Human Resource professionals identified by titles of Director or Vice President, with a minimum of 10 years in the profession, minimum experience of two different roles and work experience with more than one company. The research consisted of an approximately one hour of structured personal interview. The interview results, evaluation and conclusions provided additional understanding of the deeper level of the competency of Personal Credibility.
LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive Study of the Federal Human Resources Community (1999) defines how downsizing, reorganization, delegation of HR authority and increasing technology capabilities are driving change in the required capacities within the field of HR. In addition to time spent on the causes of the change, they define the value of using a “competency” approach to the assessment of knowledge, skills and abilities required in the changing role. The value in using a competency approach is that it includes traits, motives and behaviors thus more clearly and completely defining the various measures for success.

Though not exhaustive or thorough, this study also details several other competency models developed or utilized within the field of HR. While many models exist, some are not relative to the field of HR in general, nor are specific to the needs of this literature review. These models are focused on specific industries or specific organizations that cluster the components differently. Many have focused on identifying a definite set of competencies since as early as the 1980’s. However, finding a definite set across the HR field may be an illusive goal given the dynamic and changing nature of the field of HR as well as the changing nature of business in general.

Furthermore, this study suggests that increasing the level of capability in the “newer” HR competencies could lead to HR influence that is more effective in an organization. Two of these “newer” competencies identified are strategic sourcing and credible activism. Strategic sourcing (locating key talent) is an obviously important focus given the current challenge in obtaining key talent in an ever tightening labor market. “Credible activism” (advocating a position with credibility) is the most current categorization of the personal credibility
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competency noted by Dave Ulrich in the HRCS 2007 Survey. This survey of HR professionals in the public sector illustrates the need for the HR profession to continue to develop newer competencies in an effort to continue to move toward being seen as a “strategic” function.

Not only is there a need to continue to develop new or additional competencies, but also there is the need to better define and structure HR. Jane Phillipson and Phillip Wright of the Hay Group (2007) suggest that HR roles are often poorly defined because of the complex nature of HR roles as well as the need to combine unrelated tasks due to limited staffing. This lack of proper definition contributes to the unreasonableness and eventual failure of a person to perform successfully in many HR roles. Based on the widely accepted model by Dave Ulrich (Human Resource Champions, 1997), the authors purpose three core work streams for HR as a function: HR operations (transactional and daily tasks), HR Expertise (in depth technical knowledge), and Business Partner (client facing customer consulting). Each work stream requires or demands different skills, behaviors and outputs. For example: the HR operations work stream requires significant attention to detail; the HR expertise is more about depth of knowledge; the Business Partner work stream requires strong business acumen and the ability to effectively influence others. HR Operations produces detailed analytical reports such as monthly compensation, performance and time logs; HR expertise focuses on singular topics but in depth such as extensive knowledge of employment law; where as the Business Partner role serves as the liaison between the operational ad expertise roles working hand-in-hand with the various functional heads within a firm. So different are these three work streams in many aspects, they are not effectively achievable in a single role as is often the situation in current HR structures. Phillipson and Wright also purport that this “amalgamation” could be
one of the fundamental challenges to whether HR can succeed as an influential or strategic function within a firm.

The Hay Group, through the development of their “Role Profile Matrix”, has compiled behavioral data from more than 65,000 leaders that differentiate between average and successful performance in many fields and professions. The Hay Group has demonstrated the matrix’s applicability in many industries and professions. Success in each “stream” can be defined by different behaviors, abilities and outputs – or presumably competencies.

So, it is plausible to consider that both the structure of the HR profession, as well as the necessary competencies, needs to change in order for HR to continue to move toward a more strategic business function. The HR profession began as HR management or “personnel” and has changed along with the history of business: from managing rapidly expanding industrialization in the Industrial Revolution, to recordkeeping and administrative activities of the 1950’s, to effective coordination of benefits, wages and the human relations perspective (labor) of the 1960’s and 1970’s. (Dunn, 2006)

Old “Personnel” became Human Resources (HR) during the 1980’s because of the refocusing of responsibilities from mere recordkeeping to human relations and the emergence of HRD (Human Resources Development). Though the HR function is now part of many of the essential services in a company (hiring, training, compliance, development, etc…) it is still at the end of the value chain. Rather than a function that leads, sets strategy, and achieves results, it is responsible for implementing pre-determined operational efforts (Dunn, 2006).

Jim Dunn (2006) clearly defines what it means to be strategic in the field of HR and in many ways; this is what the field of Organizational Development (OD) offers. OD, as a field and a profession, developed in response to the need to increase organizational effectiveness
and efficiencies in World War II, focuses on developing organizational capabilities and positively impacting productivity.

The “after the fact” implementation of business decisions, the most common role of HR, is not a strategic function; however, the emerging area of organization capability and intellectual capital management (OD) is a leading or strategic function. HR needs to focus on these forward looking activities or strategic efforts, not only because the state of business now requires this, the HR function has indicated the desire to move to more “impactful” arenas and roles – to be strategic (Ulrich, 2002).

Sullivan (2004) states that being strategic means "having an impact on the things that are the most important to an organization: the corporate goals and objectives. Jim Dunn (2006) illustrates how traditional HR activities and the activities more typical of OD can be effective together, by comparing finance and accounting. While finance is focused on planning and future activities (a more strategic focus), the accounting roles are more detailed and analytical. As a profession, HR could combine these two fields, though not in a singular role, but as pieces of the function. This could allow HR to move toward more strategic efforts that would help a company differentiate itself from the others. By fulfilling the needs and request of executives, HR can become more influential, involved and thus strategic function in the world of business.

**Being Strategic**

Despite Hammond’s (2006) pejorative view of the talents and abilities of HR practitioners from his business experience, he does summarize effectively the dilemma faced by HR professionals. “After 20 years of hopeful rhetoric about becoming "strategic partners" with a "seat at the table," most HR professionals still have no seat. Most HR professionals are
perceived, at best, as a necessary evil -- and at worst, a dark bureaucratic force that blindly enforces nonsensical rules, resists creativity, and impedes constructive change” (pg 20).

In addition to having the knowledge of what needs to be done and the ability to do such, David Crisp (2002) successfully identified the need for HR professionals to meet the double-barreled leadership challenges facing HR. “HR needs to stay focused on the larger vision, on the horizon, and prepare the skills of HR people before the rest of the organization needs them” (pg 23).

Leadership is a challenge on two levels for the HR profession: not only is it the most critical issue for business, it is critical for the profession as well. HR serves the organization as the primary contributor to promoting good leadership practices both through programs as well as through modeling. Moreover, Crisp states, HR is not only dealing with the challenges of leadership on two levels, it is doing this during time of significant change, functional downsizing, technological leaps and an increasingly regulated environment.

To be able to focus on the needs that are more important for the organization, and are of more interest within the profession, Crisp believes that HR needs to move into leveraging technology better so that time can be spent on developing a corporate culture that encourages employee engagement. He suggests that the HR profession utilize two types of roles: consulting and working with the business and detailed analysis and process. This is similar to other authors’ research findings that improving the structure of HR facilitates strategic participation.

Russell Eisenstat (1996) details three functional models that HR has utilized in providing contributions, each with a different focus and thus limitations, hierarchical, professional, and service business. He then proposes a more complete integrated model that demonstrates more effective and strategic contributions to corporations. “Hierarchical” is the
model of HR as support to top management; its limitation is that HR is seen as an agent of top management only. The Professional model developed in order to provide the corporation with assistance with external forces such as legislative and legal concerns; its limitation is being narrowly focused on the external environment. The third model, Service, came about as a response to the limitations of the first two, and was meant to address the client and customer needs of the employees. This model works to mitigate the concerns of narrow focus on the external environment and the exclusive focus of the hierarchical model.

The fourth functional model, Eisenstat’s more integrated model, Partnership, combines the effectiveness of all prior models. Partnering requires HR to focus on the whole of the organization, actively engaging their clients in the development and design of programs while keeping service and effectiveness at the forefront. “Yet none of these models by itself is sufficient to meet the fundamental challenge currently facing the corporate human resource function--how to contribute to competitive success through improving the organization and management of a firm's human resources.” (pg 11).

How this functional view matches with or relates to competency models is not yet completely clear. The concept of competencies is well accepted despite the ambiguous and changing nature of the categorizations within and among numerous models. However, a principle idea that Eisenstat suggests, after significant qualitative research with large firms is, that HR can continue to move toward being a strategic function by active partnering. This will require HR professionals build organizational partnerships throughout an organization by leveraging the centrality of the function (it works with and is associated in some manner with all other business functions).
**HR Impact on Corporations**

The positive relationship of organizational performance and HR practices has been well documented in research; however, the actual causal relationship is yet to be definitely proven (Gardner et al 2005). There is a positive relationship between HR practice and both future and past organizational performance, so additional research is required to attempt to determine if there is a causal relationship or if the factors are simply co-variable or correlated in a non causal manner (Gardner, 2005).

So while the positive association of HR practice and organizational performance exists, Gardner believes that the relationship of HR competencies to HR practice needs to be more specifically reviewed, and thus by extrapolation, HR competencies to organizational performance.

The same issues that challenge other professions challenge HR as well. Ann Dempsey (2006) draws attention to the challenge of “action” among business leaders. The inability or ineffectiveness to implement strategies is a common failure not only among HR professionals, but leadership in other functions as well. Nearly half of the respondents in her survey indicate that their leaders are good at planning, but poor at implementation. The major factor Dempsey discussed, aside from the omni-present need to develop leaders’ ability to communicate and relate, is organizational bureaucracy (excessive process and procedures). While HR can find some comfort in knowing similar issues as themselves challenge corporate leaders, it is HR’s purview to attend to the developmental needs of these leaders as well as to model more flexibility around overly confining process and procedures. HR can lead the effort to put
more “action” into the conversation by real-time thinking in the midst of ongoing change (Dempsey, 2006).

Ann Pomeroy (2006) quotes Stanford Graduate School of Business professor Jeffrey Pfeffer to make the point that HR professionals need to be able to influence leaders by challenging their own assumptions and those of the leaders. This is a component of effective strategic HR. “The ability to identify and help others discover just what their assumptions are and whether they are grounded in fact, coupled with the ability to help leaders change their mind-sets when necessary, are “among the most critical capabilities an HR professional can have or acquire.” (pg 18).

Furthermore, in addition to needing to be action oriented and able to challenge leaders’ assumptions, HR as a profession is delegated culture development and business ethics (Foote and Robinson, 1999). Foote and Robinson sought to look at the fine line of managing organizational values and the ethical management of employees. Though no clear evidence of the existence or level of HR’s influence was obtained, the study did identify that the ability of HR to influence corporate culture is dependent on company culture and structure as well as the status and credibility of the HR practitioner.

**HR Competencies (2002 and 2007 studies):**

Dave Ulrich (2002), one the most respected authorities in the HR profession, has conducted numerous studies over the past 15 years into the nature, change and requirements of the HR profession - the Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS) conducted in 1992, 1995, 1998, 2002 and 2007. The particular study cited here was conducted in 2002 with the results and additional analysis being shared in 2003 and later.
The 2002 iteration includes 7,100 respondents from 241 companies around the globe. The size of the firms varied as did the industries. The survey gathered data from three source populations: HR professionals’ self evaluations, HR professional evaluations of associates and lastly, non HR employees’ evaluation of the participating HR respondents. The majority of the information cited in this article is based on the non HR employees’ evaluation as it more likely represents the perception and plausible impact of HR; self assessment can more likely be skewed (Ulrich, 2002).

Ulrich’s categorization of competencies in this version of the study is: Business Knowledge, HR Technology, HR Delivery, Strategic Contribution, and Personal Credibility. The first three categories are self explanatory; these areas of focus are pervasively written about in the literature as well as actively assessed by and essential to the business of HR.

Ulrich states that business knowledge is a key differentiator for the HR professional. They need to be able to apply HR knowledge to effectively influence the value chain of the company for which they work. Furthermore, it takes a solid understanding of technology and technology applications specific to HR so that the function can move away from being overwhelmed in transactional activity. And lastly, he states, HR needs to deliver results in addition to the tradition transactional and compliance activities. Some of the more progressive HR deliverables include development activities such as career planning, HR measurement and metrics, organizational structure, and corporate wide performance management.

The later two categories, Strategic Contribution and Personal Credibility, are in need of additional research, and not surprising, more attention is required on the ability to achieve results, establish effective relationships and to effectively communicate. While the idea of
credibility was intertwined within the prior survey categorizations, in this 2002 survey (Ulrich, 2002) the data suggested that it could or should be a category unto itself.

Until Ulrich’s iteration in this latest study, the content of credibility was principally integrated into the area of business knowledge. In part, it is now categorized separately because of the significant influence this category has on the ability of the HR profession to be influential and effective. Though "Personal Credibility" is not the most important competency when looking at business results (strategic contribution is), it is key to being successful in the strategic contribution competency.

And the last category, strategic contribution, is HR participating in strategy decisions, facilitating “fast change”, managing culture and creating “market-driven” connectivity. While the causality between credibility and strategic contribution has not been definitively determined, it is most likely a two way equation.

The key findings in Ulrich’s 2002 study focused on the aspects of strategic contribution. He suggested that HR needs to get away from the transactional activities that hinder it in participating in strategy; this would and improve HR’s ability to focus and align with the external environment (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005). Ulrich and Brockbank believe that HR also needs to continue to improve its ability to drive corporate culture in alignment with the external market and to strategically move quickly in response to the market. Furthermore, they say that HR needs to improve the speed in which it can innovate and change both process and content so as to foster quick and effective adaptation within a firm in response to market changes.

Robert Grossman (2007) outlines the competencies identified in the HRCS 2002 and aligns them with the most recent updates of HRCS 2007. In his article, he describes the changing nature of the HR profession by detailing the changes in the most recent update of
the survey. Some of the changes are merely changes in nomenclature or organization, representing the change in business and language, such as the updates to the areas of corporate culture and knowledge of technology. Other changes are key differences for the future of HR as a profession. The newly named competency of “Credible Activist” is aligned with outstanding performance and culminates with the achievement of all of the other five competencies as defined in HRCS 2007.

The effectiveness of this competency is suggesting a dynamic change to how “HR’s” role is defined – moving it to one of advocacy for a position or decision rather than one of consultancy and providing options. Grossman supports the changing role of HR and suggests that the ability to take a firm and non neutral stance aligned with both functional and business expertise is a key success factor for the emerging role of HR. With the latest version of the HRCS (Ulrich, 2007) survey just completed, various analyses are now being conducted and the results will continue to be added to over the next couple of years.

Though the latest version of HRCS categorizes the concept of Personal Credibility into a more active competency of Credible Activist, and disperses HR Technology throughout other categories, many of the findings of the 2002 survey have not substantially different from the earlier Survey findings (Grossman, 2007). The 2002 iteration focused on the competencies that make up strategic contribution, and the need for a basis of personal credibility to be fully capable as a strategic partner. However, neither the HRCS 2002 nor the HRCS 2007 version focuses on how one creates or obtains credibility or what the personal experience of credibility is like as a practitioner. While the latest version is moving beyond defining strategic contribution, Grossman believes it is still suggesting that with personal credibility and a focus on active and risk taking participation, the HR professional can continue to improve its strategic contribution.
Though the particular categorization of the competencies key to the HR profession change with each version of the study, some of the underlying or pervasive characteristics remain. The terminology or particular language used in compiling the competency categorization is often a factor of the state of business at the time of the survey. In some cases, the categorization is also reflective of the changes in the needs and requirements of business (Ulrich, 2002).

Ulrich and Eichinger (1998) suggested that HR professionals needed to become more skilled, credible and professional to continue to offer more value to the companies for which they worked back in 1998. The “attitude” that the authors refer to is “acting with confident conviction to translate how into how-to” (Ulrich and Eichinger, 1998 pg 154), as other professions have already succeeded in doing, i.e. finance, law, etc. This 1998 study by Ulrich and Eichinger provided a foundation for the increasing precision of subsequent studies performed in 2002 and 2007.

In alignment with the findings of the (yet to be conducted) upcoming HR survey of 2007, Ulrich suggested that what HR does is even more important given the knowledge economy (Ulrich and Eichinger, 1998). Many companies are differentiating and standing out by their intellectual capital and the ability to effectively and comprehensively leverage it. In order for HR to be able to do this, the authors state that HR practitioners need to be professional, fully versed in the knowledge of HR and able to translate that knowledge into business aligned practice and actions. “Knowing the business is the ticket of admission for HR professionals to top-level business discussion – it is a threshold skill” (Ulrich and Eichinger, 1998, pg 158).

In the authors’ brief article back in 1998, the idea of personal credibility is brought to light and defined as having both business and functional knowledge, the ability to translate
that into action, and a relationship of trust with key personnel. Though this may not be the first reference to the idea of “personal credibility”, it did initiate the discussion more broadly amongst the profession. And finally, Ulrich and Eichinger suggested that to move the profession forward once having the knowledge to add value, one needs to “act boldly, decisively and independently” (pg 160). While this article was forward looking at the time, prior to official findings in the subsequent surveys, it also suggests that this mindset may have been the focus for the upcoming surveys. Thus, the existence of a causal relationship is hard to determine.

Significant research and writing has been conducted on the need for becoming strategic, the competencies that tie to this perspective, and some of the challenges. However, there continues to be a large gap between the self perception of HR professionals and those that receive their services or results of their efforts (Ramlall, 2006).

Lawler and Mohrman (2003) looked at the following critical questions to the future development and direction of the HR function:

1. Is HR becoming a strategic partner?
2. What does becoming strategic entail?
3. Is HR more effective when it is strategic?

They suggest that HR can make a significant contribution by building an organization via staffing with the right human capital that enables the accomplishment of the business’s strategy.

To provide the right human capital, a focus on recruitment, staffing and development is needed as well an understanding of the business as a strategic entity. “At least in theory, this should mean HR can play an important role in the formulation of strategy by making explicit the human capital resources required to support various strategies and strategic
initiatives, by playing a leadership role in helping the organization develop the necessary capabilities to enact the strategy, and by playing a strong role in implementation and change management” (pg 16).

This article by Lawler and Mohrman along with many others cites the relationship between HR practices and firm performance developed by, first identified by Becker and Huselid (1998). Becker and Huselid found that at least 10% of a firm’s performance can be associated with the HR function. This supports the notion of HR moving beyond simply administrative activities and toward activities more directly related to adding value rather than the “normative” perception of HR as a control and compliance function.

That said, Lawler and Mohrman support the movement of HR to a strategic function, which takes into account changes in how HR is organized, how HR carries out its activities, and the skills of HR players. HR, they say, needs to be able to better understand business and strategy and then be able to provide unique and specific contributions that only HR can provide such as organization design and change management.

Moreover, Lawler and Mohrman state that the structure of the HR function needs to allow for HR to spend time participating in strategic decisions, strategy implementation and other organizational effectiveness functions. That need suggests that the administrative and transactional activities need to be completed competently but without taking away from HR’s ability to have both the time and attention to focus on strategic contributions. However, more research needs to be conducted to determine if HR is capable of identifying and implementing what is required to support the new roles and capabilities that their business needs.

Lawler and Mohrman reference The Center for Effective Organizations and the studies focused on practices, structures and activities in the HR profession. These studies consisted of a survey sent to HR leaders at a director level or above with corporate-wide
visibility to the HR function. The participants were from large firms (average employee count of 21,023) and completed a survey focused on 11 areas. Though the information in this article could be considered a little dated, the specific set of data compared the three different surveys (1995, 1998 and 2001) and provides some of the limited longitudinal data available. Little change in HR’s participation as a strategic partner was found over the three studies, however, 41% of the respondents self reported as being “a full partner” up from 29%. Several HR practices cluster and are highly related to HR being a business partner: planning, organization design, and organizational development. While causality isn’t clear, Lawler and Mohrman found a clear relationship between organizational design and development and HR participating as a full partner.

Lawler and Mohrman further suggest that HR needs to keep an eye to the structure so that HR continues to become more responsive to, as well as continuing to work with line management to develop and implement HR practices and policies. Not only will this involvement of the line encourage active participation by the line, and increase the line’s ability to perform many of the mundane transactional duties once the sole responsibility of HR, it will also help HR to continue to be close to the business and thus provide the opportunity to participate in strategic endeavors.

While improvement in HR’s skill set and structure is required, the authors also suggest that HR needs to improve their ability to facilitate the quality and speed of the business via training and development activities. They believe that the ability to provide knowledge and competency management will continue to be an area of unique and added value to the business.

The traditional viewpoint of HR being a provider of transactional services and/or an employee advocate is not related to being perceived as a business partner according to the
authors. However, Lawler and Mohrman state the factors that are present when HR is playing a strategic role are:

1. knowledge and competency aspects of the business are highlighted
2. increase in HR focus on planning, organizational design and development
3. expanded application of “e” applications for efficiency and effectiveness
4. increased business knowledge of the HR practitioner
5. head of HR has deep HR experience to understand the complexity of human capital management

The article by Lawler and Mohrman does add to the ever growing set of literature regarding why and how HR can/should become a strategic partner and many of the attributes, skills and foci required. However, there is little empirical research to determine if HR is really playing a strategic role and moreover, what it takes to do such.

Sunil Ramlall’s competency models’ study (2006) sought to obtain data to determine if:

1. competencies are predictive of success,
2. competency varied by type of role,
3. competencies with aligned with actual responsibilities, and
4. if there was any relationship among level of education, years of experience, compensation and competencies.

Ramlall’s study was a single point in time, cross sectional study of HR professionals in the upper Midwest region of the US. He sent surveys to 224 full time HR professionals at 66 different companies selected by stratified random sampling. An extensive mix of Fortune 500 industries were represented in the stratified random sample. The survey collected demographic; self report skills, competencies and attributes and a final section of 12 specific activities for ranking of competence required and competence currently held.
Based on the correlations, Ramlall concluded that the ability to deliver HR services had the most significant relationship with the ability to manage change and manage culture, the ability to effectively participate in strategic contribution, and HR technical competence. Thus, solid technical HR knowledge and the ability to deliver results based on that knowledge related to the ability to make strategic contributions.

In addition to HR technical competence relating to strategic contribution, Ramlall found that accounting skills, marketing skills, and HR metrics were also strongly related, therefore suggesting the importance of broad business acumen. The ability to effectively manage change was the most closely related with strategic contribution, and the reading of academic and practitioner journals was related to the ability to effectively manage. Staying current on both HR and business knowledge provided for the ability to manage change and to contribute strategically to a company’s vision.

Moreover, Ramlall’s study found that years of experience were positively related with compensation, knowledge of the business, ability to deliver HR services, ability to manage change, ability to effectively participate in strategic contribution, and HR technical competence. It is probably safe to conclude that a new practitioner in HR is probably not contributing as strategically as a more experience practitioner.

Worldwide, corporations are speaking of the intent to focus more on “people”. Though a causal relationship isn’t established, the HR specialist role is moving toward more business and strategic orientations (Upfront, 2004). The traits of effective HR leadership described by David Hutchin of SHRM, and cited in the article “UPFRONT; New HR - confident, courageous and business savvy “, reiterate that both US and global companies are including as effective traits of HR leaders: confidence, courage, purpose, resilience,
flexibility, competence and character. Many of these traits are variations on, or inclusive of the personal credibility (and now credible activist) competency defined by HRCS.

Despite significant work on developing a competency framework for HR, HR professionals still may or may not be perceived as successful – it depends on the audience. Graham and Tarbell (2006) suggest that the majority of competency work currently reflects senior level management’s perspective and not that of the larger employee group. Furthermore, performance to current competency models, though successful from a senior management line of sight, does not necessarily align with success from an employee perspective. Graham and Tarbell specifically looked to confirm the existence that of a different perspective on the “credibility” competency via focuses groups. As expected by the authors, senior management defined success in the credibility competency as achievement of results while employees looked to the aspects of trust, and managers focused on expertise and relationships. Aside from the situation or contextual nature of competency assessment and definition, determining success or performance in a competency is situational, contextual, and somewhat subjective to the “eyes of the “beholder”.

**Experience of and alignment with success**

Ulrich and Brockbank (2005), taking the findings of the 2002 HRCS survey, have written a book that suggests that HR is positioned to be a powerful strategic advantage for business if successfully fully deployed and leveraged. The authors suggest that the potential exists for HR to improve the function’s connection with the external environment and its effort to more effectively participate a “unique and powerful” contributor to the corporate value chain.

Based on the old axiom, that the results are in the perception of the receiver” Ulrich and Brockbank leverage this to suggest that HR can improve its “voice” by expanding the
traditional view of HR’s responsibilities from simply compliance and employee based
transactional activities to include customer, investor and other key stakeholders’ perspectives
and requirements.

Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) also suggest that while HR has changed (in its use of
outsourcing, movement to eApplications, improvement in staffing and development), it hasn’t
transformed. “Transformation requires integrating the various HR practices and focusing
them jointly on value-added agendas such as intangibles, customer connection, organization
capabilities and individual abilities.” (pg 89).

They believe in the multi-determinant nature of behavior, and that changing behavior
changes outputs. However, this is not necessarily transformation but is essential to stimulate
transformation. While gaining credibility and acceptance by both management and
employees is not transformative, it is a stepping stone that allows the HR profession to
contribute strategically (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005).
METHODOLOGY

The phenomena of the experience of personal credibility as a strategic Human Resources professional were studied from a grounded theory approach, a qualitative method of research (Creswell, 1998). This method was appropriate for this study, which focused on gaining an understanding of the subjective experience of the strategic Human Resource practitioner, an area in which little research has been done. A grounded theory approach allowed the researcher structural flexibility to obtain additional data or clarification as new ideas, concepts, and themes emerged.

Sample

The sample consisted of six senior HR professionals in the San Francisco Bay Area. The sample included four women and two men who were perceived as being strategic practitioners. The criteria for the participants included: either a Vice President or Director in a private or public for-profit organization, a minimum of 10 years experience in the profession, at least two different roles and more than one employer. Participants were sought through colleagues, consultants, or instructors whom the researcher knew through experience in the Human Resources field. The coaches, consultants, and instructors were requested to submit, by email, to the researcher (me), the names and email addresses of potential participants. As an alternative, potential participants were encouraged to contact me directly by phone, or by email. I confirmed that each individual met the criteria for the study and placed those who did on a selection list. Those who did not meet the criteria were advised accordingly and thanked for their consideration.
Data Collection

The qualitative research design consisted of a formal semi-structured interview process, in which the researcher asked the six selected participants (senior Human Resource professionals) to answer certain pre-defined questions, along with possible follow-up and clarifying questions that arose as the information from the participant unfolded. The interview was minimally modified as it progressed, to fit each participant’s unique experience.

Interviews

Participants were interviewed individually. Each interview was recorded in its entirety, with the permission of the participant, and it a third party transcriber transcribed it. The researcher reviewed the data, developed codes, and defined emerging themes and relevant categories. Data was compared and contrasted and conclusions were drawn. may be formed for later evaluation.

Each participant was interviewed once, with the possibility of a follow up question for clarification or expansion of a thought or view expressed by the participant. All questions were open-ended and were asked in a non-leading, neutral manner that allowed the participants to express themselves in their own words. Participant questions are listed below.

Interview Questions

The questions are referenced below. Additional questions were asked, depending on the HR professional’s own story and responses.

1. How many years of experience do you have? Job titles? In what type of organizations?

   What have been your major responsibilities?

2. Why did you chose HR or did you choose HR?
3. What specific skills, abilities, and competencies do you currently bring to your role? Why are they important?

4. Is HR as a field (naturally?, inherently?) strategic? Tell me more? If you think it isn’t, why not?

5. What does Strategic HR mean to you?

6. Is being strategic important? Why?

7. Do you consider yourself a Strategic HR person? (Or) Do you practice Strategic HR? (If they say no, then the rest of your questions will be modified slightly)

8. How do you know when you are accepted as, or are acting, strategic? (E.g., what would one look like if they were acting strategic?)

9. What did you do to become strategic? (If they did) (If they didn’t) What has held you back from becoming more strategic?

10. Do you think personal credibility plays a role? If so, tell me more?

11. What does personal credibility mean to you?

12. What are your core beliefs about work, people and HR? (trying to get to values...)

13. What guidance or suggestion would you give to others in HR in order to become strategic participants? (If they think this is the way to go) (If not?) What is your advice to current HR directors re strategic HR?

In the interviews, the participants were asked to describe their experience, as well as what it was like to be a strategic HR professional. The participants were asked to give examples that demonstrated how they did or did not act strategically, how they defined personal credibility, and the impact of credibility and acting strategically on their ability to affect the organization. The research was open to all possibilities in order to discover the
participant’s perspective of the connection, if any, between strategic HR and personal credibility.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed by a third party transcriber. Field notes were recorded at the end of each interview.

Site

The site for this study was at the office of each participant, or alternatively, by telephone, with the participant and the researcher in their respective offices or homes.

Data Analysis

This was an exploratory study. Data from interview transcriptions and field notes was categorized and coded. Interviews were transcribed and field notes maintained. The researcher paid particular attention to patterns that developed, and applied additional codes and categories accordingly, when applicable.

To commence, three interviews were conducted. They were then analyzed to discover whether or not additional questions were necessary to improve the data and to determine what questions should be added or revised for the remaining three interviewees. The later interviewees were presented the same set of questions as the first three as no change in questions or methodology was determined to be necessary.

Each interview was analyzed separately. Upon completion of all six interviews, the data was cross-analyzed. Similarities and differences were noted. Patterns were coded (using open coding) to identify common themes. When information is in response to probing questions outside the standard questions was obtained, the researcher indicated that in the analysis.
Each of the participants was described, and quotes were taken from their interviews to illustrate common themes and responses.

**Participant Introduction to Project/Invitation to Participate**

Participants were selected from the list of interested individuals who meet the criteria during the confirmation process. Participants were invited to participate in the proposed study via email invitation:

1. After identifying the potential list of participants, an individual email was sent to each potential participant (see Appendix A). Candidates were invited to respond to me directly, via email or telephone, if they chose to participate.

2. Participants who responded affirmatively to the invitation to participate were contacted by the researcher directly to confirm that they met the criteria for participation, and to schedule an interview date, time, and location. If a phone interview was conducted, the researcher confirmed the preferred phone number where the participant could be reached. If an in-person interview was to be conducted, the location for the interview was determined and agreed upon beforehand.

**Informed Consent**

Human participants were protected in accordance with the ethical standards taken from the APA Code of Conduct (1992). A consent form (see Appendix B) emphasizing confidentiality was forwarded to the participant for their review, prior to the scheduled date of the interview and was discussed in detail prior to the interview. The consent form included a clause explaining that participation in the study was voluntary and that participants were free to change their mind at any time, even after signing and submitting the consent form. The
form confirmed that the information provided during participation in the study was confidential and anonymous.

Participants who were interviewed by phone were asked to sign and submit the consent form, via confidential fax or U.S. mail, prior to the scheduled date of the interview. Those who were interviewed in person were given a copy on site, and asked to sign it prior to proceeding to the interview. The researcher verified that each participant understood the documents and the process. Participants were given time to read and sign the consent forms. The researcher assigned pseudonyms (participant numbers) to each participant to insure confidentiality and anonymity. All code notes and participant identifications remain anonymous.

The data is stored in a secured, confidential location, accessible only by the researcher and a third-party subscriber. All data and notes have been kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home office for the duration of the research process. All tapes of interviews will be destroyed upon completion of the final paper.

**Debriefing Procedures**

At the conclusion of the interview, individual participants were given the opportunity to debrief with the researcher. Each participant was given time at the end of their interview session to ask questions or express any concerns they had at the time. The researcher responded to their questions and concerns at that time. If, at any time after the interview, session participants wished to address any outstanding issues or questions regarding the interview or final report, they were invited to call or email the researcher directly to schedule a follow up session. A summary of findings will be made available to them, upon request.
Participants were invited to contact the JFK University Project Advisor if they had questions or requests for additional information regarding this study and the interview process:

Sharon Mulgrew, M.P.H.
Organizational Psychology Research Coordinator/JFK University
Email: SAMulgrew@aol.com Telephone: 510-450-0378

Researcher Bias

The researcher that conducted this study had a bias toward the concept of strategic HR, due to career work in the HR field. In addition, the researcher herself, a female leader working in the public sector, has personally experienced the impact of personal credibility in her work life. The researcher recognized that it is in her best interest to remain neutral in order to learn more from other perspectives and remained open to all data as it was presented. Due to the criteria of the research method, bias awareness is particularly important, and an awareness of that bias was maintained by the researcher.

Limitations

The findings of this study are tentative. The sample size and procedures for participant selection were appropriate for qualitative research. They are not, however, due to the small scope of this study, able to support generalization to a larger population without additional research.
ANALYSIS

The phenomena of the experience of personal credibility as a strategic Human Resources professional were studied from a grounded theory approach, a qualitative method of research (Creswell, 1998). This method was appropriate for this exploratory study, which focuses on gaining an understanding of the subjective experience of the strategic Human Resource practitioner, an area in which little research has been completed. The grounded theory approach allows the researcher structural flexibility to obtain additional data or clarification as new ideas, concepts, and themes emerge.

Participants

The participants consisted of six senior HR professionals in the San Francisco Bay Area. The sample included four women and two men, each perceived as being strategic practitioners by their peers and direct supervisors. The criteria for the participants included: either a Vice President or Director in a private or public for-profit organization, a minimum of 10 years experience in the profession, at least two different roles and more than one employer. While each of the participants met the sample criteria, differences were noted and commented upon throughout the analysis. Three of the participants were clearly more strategic given the quality and depth of their responses to the questions, while the remaining three, while still acting strategically, were not as experienced and more focused on shorter term strategic efforts rather than larger contextual perspectives.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Approximate Years in Field</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>More or less Strategic</th>
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<td>More</td>
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Data Collection

The qualitative research consisted of a formal semi-structured interview process, in which the researcher asked each of the six selected participants to answer certain pre-defined questions, along with possible follow-up and clarifying questions that arose as the information from the participant unfolded.

Participants were interviewed individually. The interviews were recorded in their entirety with the permission of the participants, and were transcribed by a third party transcriber. The researcher reviewed the data, developed codes, and defined emerging themes and relevant categories. The resulting data was compared and contrasted and some preliminary conclusions were drawn. In addition, a hypothesis and additional areas for future research were identified.
HR as a Career Choice

Q1. Tell me about your experience as an HR professional?
Q2. How many years of experience do you have? Job titles? In what type of organizations? What have been your major responsibilities?
Q3. Why did you choose HR or did you choose HR?

The interviews began with questions that identified profile characteristics of the six participants such as job titles, experience, types of organizations worked, and whether the participant had chosen HR as an occupation.

Each participant met the research criteria and had worked in at least 2 different industries at this point in their careers. This study was not interested in the type of industry, but more that the participants experience was not limited to one industry or employer. At the time of the interviews, each participant was working in a role that was not transactional in nature, such as benefits processing or daily operations, and their position was titled Director or Vice President.

Each participant experienced progression in their career, working up a hierarchy of roles beginning in transactional HR roles. “I’ve been a specialist, a manager, a director, a senior director and a vice president, so over the 15 years” (P1). Three of the six participants (P3, P4, and P6) began their formal HR occupation in staffing roles while two others (P1 and P2) started as HR representatives and one (P5) began in HR operations.

Regarding choice of HR as an occupation, each participant utilized choice in focusing on HR as a career. Of interest was the finding that two participants (P1 and P2) had a parent that worked in the field of HR and had influenced their choice of careers. “I think it chose me and I chose it. It chose me because it was my mom’s profession and so . . . and I was growing up and a lot of our dinner conversation was all HR kind of stuff and so I think that was kind of where I first got interested in it.” (P2).
Additionally, two participants (P2 and P6) had specifically participated in Organizational Development Educational Programs early in their careers. While three participants focused on HR as a career at the outset of their careers (P1, P2 and P5), the remaining three participants (P3, P4 and P6) quickly refocused their career choices after a short time in their original occupation: one participant started in sales, one in film and another in airline hospitality. “What happened was I started out as a flight attendant and the guy that did the recruiting said that he thought I'd be great as a recruiter, so I wound up only being a flight attendant for like 9 months and then moved into my very first HR job, so that's how that happened.” (P6).

Q4. What specific skills, abilities, and competencies do you currently bring to your role? Why are they important?

To establish a deeper context for the interviews, an additional question asked for the specific skills, abilities, and competencies the participant employed in their current role.

**Technical Knowledge**

Of the specific skills, abilities and competencies employed in their current roles

Each participant spoke of the need to fully understand HR and its required technical knowledge. “I think I bring just kind of knowledge of HR, so, you know, there's a body of knowledge that I think you need to really be professional HR.” (P2). Three of the participants (P2, P4, and P5) directly mentioned the understanding and application of business knowledge referring to “business partnering”. “So I think the first thing that I bring is really understanding the business and trying to see how HR is going to have the greatest impact on
improvement. And making sure that I’m partnering all these, you know business people within the organization.” (P5).

**Seeing the Whole System**

Two participants (P3 and P6) mentioned the importance of “seeing the whole system” or having a systemic, big picture viewpoint. “And making sure that I’m partnering all these, you know, business people within the organization so that again, I can make sure that we’re hiring the best people that if we have any issues with . . . if they’re not performing that we address those quickly and being able to foresee the different kinds of things that are coming up.” (P6). Three participants (P1, P2, and P3) mentioned the importance of working with the executives, two (P4 and P5) spoke of helping managers or staff members and one spoke of working with others in a broad sense. Two participants (P1 and P5) mentioned directly that they utilized influence, while three different participants (P2, P3, and P4) spoke of the importance of building and having a relationship with others. This was often referred to as rapport. “Build relationships with people and build rapport.” (P4).

**Self Confidence & Esteem**

Two participants (P4 and P6) spoke of the need for self confidence and esteem. Two participants (P3 and P6) made mention of “bring things together” or being able to plan and enact strategies. “...what I mean by that is the ability to understand what’s going on in the business and then build a plan that supports those objectives.” “Again to me it's about being able to bring ideas together, whether it's in a conversation or in a meeting or whatever.” (P6).
Other behaviors mentioned by at least one participant (P5) included keeping commitments, accountability and ability to handle stress. Only one participant (P3) referred to credibility, which will be discussed later in this analysis.

**HR as a Strategic Field**

Q5: Is HR as a field (naturally? inherently?) strategic? Tell me more? If you think it isn’t, why not?

When the participants were asked if HR as a field is naturally or inherently strategic, five of the six participants said NO (P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5). The rationale when probed was that historically, HR has been a transactional service oriented field most often associated with paperwork. “… the other managers that you work with, believe that you’re kind of block and tackling and that you’re just doing the nuts and bolts” (P1). The one participant (P6) that said yes indicated that HR is a strategic field but has not taken advantage of the inherent opportunities in the field.

When asked to talk more about the history of the field, three of six participants (P2, P3, P6) spoke of the lack of knowledge and performance historically among HR practitioners and how that lends to the perception of HR as simply a transactional field. Three of the participants (P3, P4 and P6) remarked that it is important for HR practitioners to position themselves as more strategic “but it's a matter of how you position yourself as a professional with an organization for people to recognize you know, your strategic ability; the importance of Human Resource within an organization” (P4). In addition, the same three participants indicted that to demonstrate strategic behavior was simply understanding the business and aligning an HR plan to act on those needs. “I think it comes down to just understanding
what’s going on in the business and then building that plan, okay, HR plan, that supports that business and those objectives.” (P3).

Though only one participant (P3) clearly indicated that HR needs to be more strategic as a field due to the increasing complexity of business, the remaining participants provided examples of this increasing complexity though they did not directly say so. “I just think the business environment has changed such that it requires different, more practiced thinking around talent and human resources than it might have in a more stable environment say 20 years ago.” (P3).

Furthermore, two participants (P1 and P2) spoke of the need for HR to enact a strategy for itself in a company and that without such, it is easy to stay or remain simply transactional. “And I think that’s so important, in fact, I think it’s one of the key elements in having an effective HR team is strategy.” (P1).

Q6. What does Strategic HR mean to you?

In responding to what the word “Strategic” meant, the participants offered several themes repeatedly.

**Good understanding of the business/business knowledge**

Each participant mentioned that it is important to have a good understanding of the business or business knowledge. “So the first is there is business knowledge. And what that really means is you know and understand the industry that you’re in and the dynamics and kind of what it takes to be successful. And then you also know enough about your specific company.” (P3). Each participant also indicated that technical HR knowledge was important, though one specially mentioned the need to not be “stuck in the nuts and bolts” (P1).
A higher level of contribution

In addition, four of the six participants (P1, P2, P3 and P4) indicated that “strategic” was a higher level of contribution. “Strategic (is) more of a senior level know the business and getting involved with the executive; it’s not the nuts and bolts in doing benefit plans.” (P1).

Seeing the bigger picture/thinking ahead

It was also the ability to see a bigger picture and to think ahead or foresee. “I think being strategic means that you are looking at the bigger picture and that you are thinking ahead. That you're not just living in the moment of being reactionary that your being proactive in your planning so that the company, based on the goals and objectives of the company.” (P1).

Enacting plans aligned with business needs

Also consistent throughout each of the participants was the need for the ability to enact plans aligned with the business needs. Though the word “enact” was not mentioned by each participant, the answers were categorized as implementing and or taking action on plans. “So of all the things that have to happen with the people in that organization for your company to be successful, you know, what are those things and what do you have to do and how do you align the function with the requirements for success of that business.” (P3).

Q7. Is being strategic important? Why?
Each participant felt it was important to be strategic. “In particular, two participants spoke of the centrality of the HR function within an organization (P1 and P6). \textit{Well I think being strategic is important because well, first of all, HR is the one department that deals with every single group within the organization. It touches every other department within an organization. Besides finance, I can’t think of any other department that interacts with every single person within the organization.”} (P1).

However, one of the same two participants (P6) indicated that HR does not leverage that centrality and in fact, stated that HR lacks courage and the ability to take risks. “\textit{Again, you have this window that is so effective and I think unfortunately in our industry for some reason, it’s just not utilized and taken advantage of by the HR people.”} (P6). Another participant (P1) suggested that it could be due in part to outdated ideas. “\textit{I think it's a matter of there are still so many people that have old school ideas that are not about, strategic thinkers, that are not courageous that have not been proactive that you know we got to purge all of that”}.

Q8. Do you consider yourself a Strategic HR person? (Or) Do you practice Strategic HR?

Each participant felt that they practiced strategic HR in their current roles; however, they felt many others do not. “\textit{This is not doing any of us any good because the organization is held back because the HR executives themselves are thinking in the 1970's. I think is part of the problem. We still got a lot of people, which I would say you know half the people in HR management are really not themselves, strategic.”} (P2). When the unplanned but appropriate follow on question was asked, "Why the others do not act strategically?” one theme was offered by all six participants. Each participant indicated that HR is an evolving field that is working to become more and more strategic.
Additionally, one participant (P2) also spoke of the need for more consistent educational and competency requirements to solidify standards for the profession. *But first, you’ve got to establish really good programs. (When) people go to university, they need really good programs. And what do good programs look like? Well they’re a combination of research and understanding why things work the way they do and craft it. So I think in training that’s the kind of the early training. And then, I think the actual strength that people have on the job. …, there are certificate requirements and things like that now but they are still for the basics. How do we build that and how do we teach that, you know, how do we educate people. (P2).*

**Q9. How do you know when you are accepted as, or are acting, strategic?**

In seeking examples of acceptance or reaction by others to the participants acting strategically fairly consistent answers we offered by the participants.

*Verbal & non verbal feedback*

Each participant indicated that both verbal and non verbal feedback such as continuing invitations to participate in strategic discussions were the indicators of being accepted by peers, colleagues and management as acting strategically. “*I think you get invited to a lot more meetings. I think that you are listened to a lot more, your viewpoint is at least considered and I think also things run a bit smoother.*” (P1). Or another participant stated,” *I think probably the best feedback or the clearest feedback is based on the kind of issues that they engage you in.*” (P3).

*Being included and listened to*
While being included or listened to was a widely agreed upon positive response, one participant (P2) indicated that while some inclusion can represent one’s position in the firm, that ongoing participation and inclusion relates to the value of the contribution you make when included. “So sometimes people seek you out just because of, you know, whatever your job title is, but the key is really you just have to deal with those because if they come to you and they ask for your advice and if it goes badly they probably aren’t going to come back.” (P2).

Q10. What did you do to become strategic?

Because each participant indicated that they were acting strategically, each was asked to offer examples of what they specifically did to become strategic. Numerous practical examples of actual strategic action or behaviors were obtained.

*Taken action to learn the business*

Each of the participants indicated that they had taken action to learn the business and to step out of the day to day transactions. “I feel like you have to break out of that and you consciously have to break out of that and be seen as being . . . being more strategic than just doing the day-to-day stuff and I definitely had to step out of that. I had to step out of that day-to-day stuff and act more like I understood what was going on and that I could contribute to that.” (P1).

*See the business as a whole*

Additionally, each participant offered repeated mentions of seeing the business as a whole, having a systemic/whole view, and the ability to foresee and anticipate. “I developed
this whole entire program on cross functional teams to then come up with a very comprehensive program on how we could try and really have an impact on the culture.” (P1).

**Partner with executives**

While each participant made mention of knowing the business and having a bigger picture view, three participants (P1, P2 and P3) specifically mentioned the need to partner with executives. “the Executive Team was supporting it and . . . and I had to even go in and sell it to them, you know, making sure that if they did sign off on this that they really need to be extremely supportive and, you know, think about it in a positive manner and that they were behind it and everything and that was a huge change to what they had been doing before”(P1).

**Making an active choice**

In addition, each participant indicated that they had made an active choice to be strategic. “Definitely. I definitely had to make the shift to become more strategic” (P2). Moreover, three of six participants (P1, P2, and P4) mentioned the value of having a mentor and one referred to collegial support (P5). “I was fortunate to work with somebody who was a mentor to me. (She) was very strategic in thought and had a degree in organizational development and that was her approach to working. And, she really pushed me and challenged me to always be thinking ahead and always planning ahead and how does this impact, you know the things that we are doing today. Are we being proactive, are we being reactionary and what can we do to make things more efficient or to start thinking more ahead and being more proactive?”(P4). The remaining participants (P3 and P6) provided examples of a colleague or mentor assistance in the course of their career.
**Personal Credibility as a part of Strategic HR**

Q11: Do you think personal credibility plays a role in being strategic? How?

Only two participants (P3 and P6) mentioned the term “credibility” directly until this specific question was asked. Each participant responded that credibility plays a significant role in being strategic. “Yes! Credibility plays in any kind of leadership that you have, you know credibility plays a role in any kind of leadership.” (P3).

*Defined as understanding what needs to be done, how to get there, and getting there*

Credibility was defined by the participants as “understanding what needs to be done, how to get there, and getting there” by each of the participants, though some participants were far more direct in their answer. “Yeah, it’s huge. Yeah, I think credibility it’s the element ... of being strategic, when I think of ... the people that I know in my career ... “Wow, this person really gets what needs to be done and can think about the stuff and ... the best way to get there. I think of somebody who really understands about the business.” (P1). In other words, it is about having the needed knowledge and ability and then acting on it. “Yeah, and it really is twofold. So where HR has demonstrated that they can be strategic and where will they deliver it? Will they do what they say they’re going to do and the timeframe they’re going to do it, then I think they have credibility?”(P3).

*Build trust to establish supportive relationships*

When asked what it takes to have credibility, each participant mentioned trust.
Additionally, each participant either mentioned directly or provided an example of establishing effective relationships to get the support to implement and take action that is strategic. “I think it's very important, I think people need to trust you and I think that if you don't build credibility and you don't have the support of your peers and the members of the executive team, then as much as you try to implement things that you know will be helpful or you believe that, you know you're thinking about the best interest of the company regardless of all of that, if you don't build some type of trust with the employees and with the executive team all those efforts just fall to the way side, ..... You need to have credibility and I think that it comes from the trust that you build with the people that you are working with.” (P1).

Q12. What does personal credibility mean to you?

Four of six participants (P1, P2, P3 and P5) delineated between personal credibility and functional or positional credibility. “You know, the ideal is when you have personal credibility and functional credibility and then it’s . . . life is really good. You know, and you still have difficult problems to resolve but you don’t have to spend all your time just trying to get a, you know, get a seat at the table you’re already there, you can just kind of concentrate on where you’re going.”(P2).

Honesty

Honesty was one of the credibility components identified by each the participants. “I think that one of the things in terms of credibility is basic honesty. To acknowledge reality in a way that everybody is going to nod their head.” (P6).

People care about what you think and want your opinion
In addition, having business knowledge and being listened to is to “have credibility”.

And credibility means that you have some influence and that people care about what you think and they seek your opinion” (P2).

Smart; strong interpersonal skills; can deliver

One participant (P3) was able to clearly delineate what it took for them to perceive another as credible and that was intellectually smart or able to deal with complex issues, strong interpersonal skills with a results orientation and those that can deliver. “The first question is - are they smart, the second question is can they get along with people and the third question is will they work hard. Now if you find a candidate who’s smart, can get along with people and will work hard it’s basically a winner every time.” (P3).

Authenticity

One participant (P6) offered additional depth in their answer, suggesting that to be credible it takes authenticity which can mean being vulnerable and able to acknowledge your own limitations.” I would say that is very important and again I think that word Authenticity, being able to come across believable. And I think that often requires you to be somewhat vulnerable and to acknowledge your own difficulties or fear.” (P6).

Consistently delivering results and consistently showing up

An additional question - Is credibility earned or is ascribed by others? - was asked of participants P1, P2 and P3. Each of the three agreed that it is earned and that the “earning” takes time. ”I see this sort of credibility takes some time. I need to work and be exposed to
someone for a little while before I will assign credibility (P3)” and only one participant indicated that management sometimes also ascribes credibility. “…takes a little bit of time, because it’s about consistently delivering results and consistently showing up. It’s about consistently making a contribution, consistently building trust. So the credibility takes a little bit of time before I’ll assign credibility to someone.” (P2).

Q13: What are your core beliefs about work, people and HR?

In an effort to get a more in depth understanding of the participants approach to and values about work and others, the question - “What are your core beliefs about work, people and HR?” was asked at the end of the interview.

Theory Y approach

Each participant expressed a Theory Y approach to and understanding of others. I very much believe that people want to do the right thing and people want to do well at their job and people want to work hard and want to be engaged. “ (P3).

Solve problems rather than lay blame

Each participant indicated the importance of listening to others and to solve problems rather than lay blame. “And so my assumptions about the world are first of all that everybody wants to be successful. Then . . . and the reason that’s important for me is because people don’t come to me because things are going really well, they come to me because…. they want to turn that around and getting (the situation) going well. And so because I really believe that everyone wants to be successful, then when they aren’t it really becomes a question of why aren’t they, which is very different than what’s wrong with them.” (P2).
**HR should model expected behavior/operate with integrity**

Additionally, two of the participants (P4 and P5) directly mentioned the need for HR to model the behavior they expect or to be the role models. “People believing in what you say; you stand behind what you say; and you set an example for; you practice what you preach” (P4). And that HR needed to demonstrate high integrity. “My beliefs are that we do operate at the highest level of integrity because we are HR, we always have to be the role model, if our goals are supposed to be in by a certain time then we need if not exceed, we model what we expect from our employee.”(P5).

**Be self aware and confident**

Only one participant (P6) spoke of the importance to be self aware and the need for confidence to be able to seek that awareness. “I think one of the beliefs that I have is that an organization that is individually and collectively self aware. Who are we? Who are we not? When you can't be everything to everybody then the to the extent that you have to make choices to say this is how I am as an individual, and we are going to contribute.” (P6). In addition, not mentioned by any other participant but a strong point for this same participant (P6) was the need for constructive conversations. “How to be frank and have conversations and disagreements. That is just a clear part of moving forward. It's such an undeveloped area in most companies that people will avoid disagreement like a plague.” (P6). This same participant indicated that it takes listening to be effective and to constructively disagree, and thus persuade others or to solve problems. “... you have to have effective disagreement level so you can actually persuade people. That was part of what they found out, you find out just how ineffective those people are. Most of because they're not willing to listen to other people
and if they're not willing to be persuaded no manner about getting other people to listen to me, if you are listening to them.” (P6).

Summary

The findings of these one-on-one interviews with the six participants offered some consistent and valuable information. The participants each utilized a choice in focusing on HR as a career and have worked to progress from purely transactional to more strategic roles. Of interest, and for discussion in the next section, is the finding that 50% of the participants have obtained Organizational Development specific education.

The competencies demonstrated by the participants include technical knowledge, seeing the whole system, self confidence and esteem, and accountability. Only two participant mentioned credibility without solicitation or use of that word by the researcher. Five of six participants felt that HR is NOT a strategic field due in part to the transactional history of the field, the lack of knowledge and performance within the field and the need for HR participants to actively position themselves as strategic by enacting a strategy within the function to move from transactional to strategic.

Several themes repeated throughout the research as to the meaning of Strategic HR including: having a good understanding of the business/business knowledge, making a higher level of contribution, seeing the bigger picture, thinking ahead, and enacting plans aligned with business needs.

Overwhelmingly, each participant felt it was important to be strategic and that the centrality of the HR function is a key position to leverage. While each participant felt that he/she was acting strategically, they felt that many of their colleagues were not. The lack of courage and risk taking, as well as outdated ideas and the evolution of the field were cited as
reasons for HR not being viewed as a strategic field. Additionally, the need for more consistent educational and competency requirements to solidify standards for the profession as mentioned.

The participants cited feedback, both verbal and non-verbal, and as indicators of other’s acceptance of a practitioner as a strategic HR professional. What the participants did to become strategic included: taking action to learn the business, looking at the business systemically, partnering with executives and making an active choice to participate at that higher level of involvement. Each participant indicated the value of having a mentor during the course of their career.

Though only two participants mentioned credibility prior to the question being raised by the researcher, each indicated that credibility plays a significant role in being strategic. Credibility was defined as understanding what needs to be done and how to get there, and getting there. In other words, it is about having the needed knowledge and ability and then putting it into action. Imperative to being able to implement or act, the participants indicated that building trust to establish supportive relationships was essential. The key attributes of credibility consistently offered by the participants were honesty, authenticity, smart, strong interpersonal skills, ability to deliver, and others seeking your opinion. Each participant indicated the credibility is earned over time by consistently delivering results.

The participants all indicated that they applied a Theory Y belief in others and sought to solve problems rather than to lay blame. To be effective, HR needs to model the behavior and integrity we are working to facilitate within organizations. Additionally, it is imperative that HR practitioners are self aware, confident and willing to constructively confront issues to solve problems.
DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to explore if and how personal credibility influenced the practice of Strategic Human Resources. This research provided information about “what makes HR strategic”, how credibility plays a role in being strategic, what credibility looks like, how to practice it and some ways to develop credibility. The researcher’s intent was to be as accurate as possible and without bias; however, some incorrect assumptions, conclusions or findings are possible. The researcher’s level of HR experience, specific work experience and personal traits could be a source of bias – though the researcher worked to keep that at a minimum through the structured interview methodology. In addition, the majority of the participants currently worked in the field of biotechnology in the San Francisco Bay; this could be a source of industry influenced bias.

Strategic HR

The findings of this research align well with what was found in the literature review. The study indicated that Strategic HR requires a good understanding of business and strong business acumen. This correlates to the published works of many of the authors cited but most importantly Ramlall (2006) and Ulrich (2002). The findings also identified that Strategic HR requires a higher level of contribution, and involves a systemic or whole view of the business as mentioned by Ulrich (HRCS, 2002 and 2007). Furthermore, the findings agreed with the ability to foresee and anticipate (Lawler and Mohrman, 2003) needed actions and then to be able to enact plans aligned with business needs, which provide results (Grossman, 2007 Graham and Tarbell, 2006).
Strategic HR is focused on helping the business via people

Though not stated concisely by each participant, each participant mentioned that HR as a field/occupation was about “doing something to help business via people”. This focus on business via people aligns well with Sullivan’s (2004) suggestion that HR has a “double-barreled” need to both fulfill business vision and effectively work with people. While this finding was not surprising, the amount of discussion and responses surrounding the evolution of HR as an occupation as well as the challenges inherent to the field was unexpected. Responses to the questions regarding what challenges faced the field identified: prior “poor” performance history of the field, the need for more consistent and better educational standards, and the lack of respect and recognition by other professional fields. The participants offered plausible reasons for these challenges suggesting that HR is a relatively new field or occupation among other business fields and that it is primarily a conceptual versus concrete field. Each participant commented on the history of HR as a barrier to overcome. That aligns well with the researcher’s personal experience and was one of the reasons this topic was chosen for research. And, furthermore each participant mentioned it is important for HR to continue to mature as a field and to become more strategic because the business environment is becoming more complex and less stable, requiring more of what “strategic” HR is perceived to be (Phillipson and Wright, 2007 and Dunn, 2006).

Strategic HR requires a Learning Orientation

Each participant expressed the need for a learning orientation, two mentioned it directly and the remaining participants’ responses utilized words and text that indicated the need for growth, the acquisition of additional knowledge, and the illustration of progressive methods.
Both Crisp (2002) and Ulrich (2002) suggested that HR as a profession needs to continue to grow, change and work to focus on becoming more strategic.

Moreover, each participant mentioned the value of having a mentor and/or colleague support. Again, two participants mentioned the need for and value of a mentor in facilitating their current success in HR. The remaining participants provided examples of a colleague or mentor assistance in the course of their career. The literature reviewed for this research did not make mention of the need for or value of a mentor, however the literature review did not necessarily focus on “how to be strategic” or how to develop as a strategic partner”, thus there may be additional literature that sites this finding.

**Strategic HR requires strategic action/behaviors**

Participants gave practical examples of actual strategic action or behaviors for Strategic HR: vision, business skills, relational skills, and personal traits and qualities. This was expected as a plethora of already published research was consistent in referencing the need for strong business skills and traits (Crisp, 2002, Lawler and Mohrman, 2003). Of note, the literature did not reference relational skills with the exception of the series of competency studies conducted by Ulrich in 1997, 1999, 2002, 2005 and 2007.

Also repeatedly mentioned was the importance of seeing the business as a whole, having a systemic/whole view, and the ability to foresee and anticipate (Lawler and Mohrman, 2003). The skills identified by the participants included executive partnering, planning, enacting strategies, facilitation, and integrating all of the above to get results.

In addition to the vision and business skills, the ability to relate effectively with others was repeatedly mentioned by the participants but showed up infrequently in the literature review. Various statements categorized as relational skills included bringing things together,
being able to influence in order to get buy-in, and understanding the audience and choosing the appropriate media, approach, and logistics. Only Ulrich in the HRCS competency studies focused on the interrelation and communication aspect of being strategic. In fact, Ulrich and Eichinger began to write of the importance of this aspect as early as 1998. The lack of research or available documentation of the relational aspects of strategic HR supports the need for this research.

Despite the lack of consistent literature on the specific relational indices or measurements, the research provided numerous examples or references to personal attributes that facilitated a strategic HR person’s ability to relate well to others. This need to relate well was specifically identified in the Federal Human Resources Committee study performed in 1999. The relational attributes identified in this research that facilitate the ability to relate well include a sense of self confidence/esteem, a calm demeanor, and the ability to build rapport. Moreover, each participant consistently identified the need for intelligence, a view of the role as “bigger than self” and believing the best in people as important personal traits to the HR profession.

Is Strategic HR content oriented or process oriented?

The need for HR to be strategic appeared obvious to the participants, and was consistently identified in the literature (Dunn, 2006; Phillipson and Wright, 2007; Ulrich and Eichinger, 1998; Ulrich, 2002). However, how “strategic” HR is in the literature and that difference is important to the future of HR. Strategic is defined in two ways: as an approach of viewing the whole system, or systemic view, and as a level of and assortment of specific activities. The former is a process perspective while the later is a content perspective. Most often, it is the content perspective that is primarily referenced by the participants and the literature such
as the specific tasks one is completing in an effort to be “strategic” when the process perspective – that of viewing the whole system or having the ability to systemically view is more essential (Ulrich, 2002; Lawler and Mohrman, 2003).

Model of Strategic HR

There is a lack of a singular consistent model of Strategic HR throughout the literature. Of the various models suggested in the research, each contains a portion of the model this research produced. The researcher was able to establish a proposed model of Strategic HR based on the findings provided by the participants in this research study.

Each participant stated strategic HR:

- requires a higher level contribution
- takes effort and focus
- is a choice
- not necessarily inherent
- takes a longer range, systemic view
- requires both business and technical knowledge
- identifies opportunities
- effectively influences buy-in
- requires action and results, which reinforces the cycle of credibility

In short, it is about having the knowledge and ability to add value to the business effectively and consistently.
How to know you are strategic

Participants determined if they were acting strategically, or being perceived as strategic from the feedback they received. The feedback ranged from acceptance, to invitation and engagement by peers and colleagues. Of the examples provided, the more one was sought out, included and listened to the more positive the feedback. In addition, the awarding of or the participation in large projects was seen as an indication of credibility and strategic participation. The literature review did not include specific research on the topic of feedback, thus it is plausible that additional research would support these findings.

Credibility

Credibility plays a significant role in strategic HR. Both the literature (Ulrich, 2002, Ramlall, 2002) and this research study suggest that the HR professional needs to be both personally and professionally strategic, that it takes credibility to be strategic and that it takes credibility to get credibility.

Other than the competency studies by Dave Ulrich (HRCS), little specific research about the impact of credibility on strategic HR can be found. While the number of participants in Ulrich’s study is large, which serves to validate the findings, more detailed, specific and applied research on this material would be beneficial to the Human Resource profession. The most recent study found (June 2007) that the prevalent and most critical competency is that of “Credible Activist” - getting the right things done the right way (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2007, pg 73). This concept aligns with the findings of this research and promotes the need for significant additional research into detailed specifics into “how to be” a
credible activist and case examples of the “Credible Activist” competency cited by Ulrich (2007).

This research highlighted the possible existence of a “credibility cycle” – where one element is the foundational for the next and so forth. Though preliminary, and worthy of additional research, the initial cycle appears to be as follows: having specific content knowledge, then the ability to communicate it effectively with others which then builds trust with others and which builds relationships. It is those established relationships that lead to a perception of credibility.

In addition to a cycle of credibility, it is important to note the multiple aspects or ways to view or define the topic of “Credibility”. Many participants spoke of personal credibility versus positional credibility and that personal credibility is best described as “responsible to” others while positional power is “responsible for” others. Other aspects of credibility, all of which could serve as a topic for additional research, and in turn would lead to a more thorough and complete understanding of credibility are: individual vs. functional, context vs. content, inherent vs. learned, earned vs. ascribed/action vs. perception and growth vs. stable.

Credibility Conundrum

The participants consistently stated that credibility was “presumptive” in an HR professionals’ ability to be strategic. The participants did not mention the specific word credibility initially, but many descriptions of credibility were elicited. A “credibility” conundrum became apparent as participants reported that if one does not have credibility it is hard to get credibility. A specific example of the conundrum is that an HR professional’s ability to influence others comes from having credibility, however to be seen as credible you need to be able to get buy-in (influence) and so forth. So which comes first?
Credibility both personal and professional is crucial to Strategic HR

Of interest and surprise, was that the word “credibility” or the idea of credibility was “presumptive” in being strategic. Participants spontaneously mentioned the word before the researcher did in Q10. The participants consistently and enthusiastically affirmed that “credibility” is important to strategic HR. When probed, each participant indicated that “credibility” was an inherent aspect of, and essential to, being strategic. When asked by the researcher, each participant indicated that they had assumed that credibility was a part of Strategic HR.

Duality of credibility – content and personal

Similar to the dual perspectives- content versus process - of strategic HR mentioned earlier in the discussion was the duality of credibility. Credibility – had both a personal aspect and is tied to one’s traits, ethics and abilities, and a content aspect that relates to knowledge. However, each participant did note that without personal credibility, or traits and abilities (process), than it was impossible for one to have professional credibility.

As is often the case in strategic HR, it is the content perspective that is more easily referenced and defined such as the specific knowledge one needs to have to be “credible”. The process perspective – that of being able to interrelate with the system or being perceived as credible is as important, if not more, and not as easily defined. Neither this duality, nor the duality of process/content of strategic HR, was identified in the literature review.
Business and technical skills – getting credibility and keeping it

And finally, as clearly defined in all of the literature reviewed, business and technical knowledge is an essential foundation to being able to practice Strategic HR. To develop credibility, an HR practitioner needs to have a solid understanding of both HR and the business they support; effectively apply that knowledge to meet business goals consistently (action-results); and provide value beyond their area of responsibility. Moreover, this action and result orientation (Dempsey, 2006; Graham and Tarbell, 2006; and Grossman, 2007) builds trust which helps to establish supportive relationships. To continue to develop credibility, one needs to stay current on the state of both HR and their business and effectively integrate and apply both business and HR knowledge (Ulrich, 2002). What was not mentioned in the literature, except by slight reference by Crisp (2002) is the need for the HR professional to take a risk to offer different perspectives or opinions. One participant in the study identified the importance of taking a risk, and the positive nature of constructive conflict. Because this study was not focused on researching this aspect, nor was it commonly mentioned in the literature, it will be included in the recommendation for further research. And lastly, the literature as well as these research findings identified the need for Strategic HR practitioners to consistently show up and deliver results.
Personal Credibility in Human Resources

Recommendations

Further study with more participants

The sample size for this research was sufficient for a qualitative study and offers support of additional research with this set of questions with a broader and more numerous participant pool. The additional research would be helpful to determine if the findings hold for that broader population, and potentially refine and define both the model presented here and additional information on the alignment and interplay of Strategic HR and personal credibility.

Study of perceptions of business partners

Much of the research cited and available did not study the perspectives and perceptions of HR of the business partners that strategic HR participants work with. The idea of credibility while earned is earned from not only within the profession but primarily, and in many ways more importantly, from business partners and clients of the profession. These specific research results are reported from a HR perspective within the field of HR, and it is critical that those that are serviced by the profession, the business partners, are studied as well. Either the same or a similar set of questions needs to be posed to the business leaders and non-HR colleagues that work with the participants as a means of understanding their perspective and to possibly validate these findings.

Constructive conflict

The concept of constructive conflict was only mentioned by one participant, and in that it was not commonly mentioned is worthy of additional investigation. While the participants each indicated it was important to communicate effectively, little mention of
“what effective” communication entailed was offered. The single participant that did offer more detail on the importance of communication also offered detailed description of constructive conflict and its importance to effective communication.

Role of self confidence

Additionally, the role of self confidence and self esteem in being effective and strategic needs additional research. This study seems to suggest that a lack thereof plays a significant role in one’s ability to take risks, provide results, and thus be perceived as credible. Additionally, and of note, is that no participant mentioned or referred to the words “power” or “authority”.

Theory Y practitioners and the impact on the field of HR

Similarly, the consistent identification of HR practitioners’ beliefs in value of people – or Theory Y orientation – is worthy of additional research. One of the questions worth pursuing is how does this orientation impact the function, those in the function and those served by the function? The self selection into this career field is noted, so how does this orientation affect or align with the risk adverse, support, service, compliance orientation of the profession?

Next steps

Strategic HR has a crucial role in effectiveness of organizations and systems because of its centrality, the type of information HR practitioners are privy to, the ready access to people, and the expectation that they influence the emotional side of people. HR, as a professional field, isn’t making the most of its opportunity nor taking advantage of centralized
position. Perhaps, it is that HR is most commonly seen as a service, support, risk avoidance and compliance role, tends to attract people with similar qualities, and thus it is not inherently about risk taking or courage.

When the participants were probed as to why other HR professionals may not be acting strategically, they sited the need for better relational skills as a key to closing that gap.

“You know people fail . . . why do most people fail? It’s generally not their technical skills. So if all the other stuff is in line it is generally the people skills that are lacking.”

Given that being “strategic” is a choice and it takes effort to work to become strategic –HR practitioners need to consistently and continuously work to improve the results of the function such that the perception of HR as an effective and strategic function continues to develop.
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APPENDIX A

Sample e-mail invitation to identified participants:

SUBJ: Invitation to Participate in Study: Strategic Human Resources

I am a graduate student in Organizational Psychology at John F. Kennedy University. As part of the requirements for the completion of my Master’s degree, I am conducting a small qualitative research study on Senior HR professionals and the experience of strategic HR. I am requesting your consideration to participate in this study.

The proposed study will focus on the impact of personal credibility and the experience of working strategically as a Senior HR professional. The study will be conducted through a series of individual interviews with senior HR professionals. A senior professional is defined as having a minimum 10 years experience in the field and at least two different roles with a preference for those having worked with more than one employing organization. Each interview is expected to be of 45-60 minute duration and will be tape recorded. Study participants will be asked to describe their own experience of personal credibility and strategic HR. Data gathered in interviews will be analyzed and interpreted with the goal of enabling a more complete understanding of how personal credibility affects (if at all) the practice of strategic HR.

Participation is completely voluntary and you are free to change your mind at any time and choose not to continue. Should you choose to participate, all information you give during the interview process will be confidential and your individual contribution will be anonymous. All data collected during the process will be stored in a secured, confidential location accessible only by me. I will also make a copy of the summary project report available to you at your request.

Thank you for your consideration. I sincerely hope that you will choose to participate! If you have any questions or would like to talk with me, please feel free to contact me at 415.####.#### or mmeston2000@yahoo.com

Mary Meston
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

My name is Mary Meston. I am currently a graduate student in the Masters of Organizational Psychology program at John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill, California. The research project is a requirement toward the completion of my Master’s degree. This research project is being conducted under the advisement of Sharon Mulgrew, M.P.H. – Organizational Psychology Research Coordinator. She can be reached at SAMulgrew@aol.com, or 510-450-0378.

Project Summary: The proposed study will focus on the impact of personal credibility on strategic HR from the perspective of Senior HR professionals in the for profit sector. The study will be conducted through a series of individual interviews with senior HR professionals; each interview is expected to be of 45-60 minute duration and will be tape-recorded. Study participants will be asked to describe their own experience of personal credibility and how that may or may not affect their ability to work strategically. Data gathered in interviews will be analyzed and interpreted with the goal of enabling a more complete understanding of how personal credibility affects (if at all) the practice of strategic HR. You may also be contacted by phone at a later date for clarification or follow-up necessary to insure accuracy of the data.

Data gathered in interviews will be analyzed and interpreted with the goal of enabling a more complete understanding of how personal credibility affects (if at all) the practice of strategic HR.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is completely voluntary and participants are free to change their mind at any time and choose not to continue even after signing this consent form.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: All information given by study participants is confidential and individual contributions are anonymous. All data will be stored in a secured, confidential location accessible only by me and a third-party subscriber. Each participant will be identified on the tape by first name and participant code only.

Availability of Results: A Summary of the results of this study will be available to participants upon request after completion of the study.
**Consent:** I hereby consent to participate in the above research project. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may change my mind or refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence. I may refuse to answer any questions or I may stop the interview. I understand that some of the things I say may be directly quoted in the text of the final report, and subsequent publications, but that my name will not be associated with this study.

| Participant Signature: ____________________________ | Date: ____________ |
| Name: (Please Print) ______________________________ |

| Witness Signature: ____________________________ | Date: ____________ |
| Name: (Please Print) ____________________________ |
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. How many years of experience do you have? Job titles? In what type of organizations? What have been your major responsibilities?

2. Why did you chose HR or did you choose HR?

3. What specific skills, abilities, and competencies do you currently bring to your role? Why are they important?

4. Is HR as a field (naturally?, inherently?) strategic? Tell me more? If you think it isn’t, why not?

5. What does Strategic HR mean to you?

6. Is being strategic important? Why?

7. Do you consider yourself a Strategic HR person? (Or) Do you practice Strategic HR? (If they say no, then the rest of your questions will be modified slightly)

8. How do you know when you are accepted as, or are acting, strategic? (e.g. what would one look like if they were acting strategic?)

9. What did you do to become strategic? (If they did) (If they didn’t) What has held you back from becoming more strategic?

10. Do you think personal credibility plays a role? If so, tell me more?

11. What does personal credibility mean to you?

12. What are your core beliefs about work, people and HR? (trying to get to values...)

13. What guidance or suggestion would you give to others in HR in order to become strategic participants? (If they think this is the way to go) (If not?) What is your advice to current HR directors re strategic HR?