

## **Research Note: The state of human resource (HR) competency research: Charting the research development of HR competencies and examining the signals from industry in New Zealand**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Human resource (HR) competencies for HR professionals have been implicated as an indicator of organisations' pursuit of strategic human resource management (SHRM). Utilising signalling theory, this research note charts the development of HR competency research and examines the signals given by organisations in the recruitment of HR professionals in New Zealand. This research note reports on the signals that organisations recruiting HR professionals give in their job advertisements. Findings indicate that the development of HR competency research has progressed to more strategic concerns and focused on the management of competencies by organisations. In contrast, signals by organisations appear to emphasise functional rather than strategic competencies. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

### **Introduction**

In the last few decades there has been an increasing strategic orientation for human resource management (HRM) function (Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, & Drake, 2009; Lepak, Liao, Chung, Harden, & Joseph, 2006; Marler, 2012). Despite this, there has been criticism that the literature on strategic human resource management (SHRM) has failed to make an impact on the everyday practice of organisations (Kaufman, 2012; Yeung, 2011). Such evaluation is surprising considering the enormous impact that SHRM initiatives have for the organisation (Jiang, Lepak, Jia, & Baer, 2012). Scholars suggest that this lack of proliferation rests squarely in the human resource (HR) competencies of the HR professional (Han, Chou, Chao, & Wright, 2006; Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2013). Empirical research on the HR competencies of the HR professional demonstrate the importance of their credibility and the HR function to employees (Graham & Tarbell, 2006); as well as the importance of leadership competencies in mobilising HR strategy (McDermott, Conway, Rousseau, & Flood, 2013). Such is the importance of competencies for the HR professional that professional associations such as the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand (HRINZ, 2013) and the Australian Human Resource Institute (AHRI, 2013) have advocated competency standards for their members.

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However, there has been little systematic review of the overall HR competencies literature to assess the development of HR competencies for HR roles. Aside from Ulrich and colleagues (Ulrich et al., 2013) which utilised professional associations, practitioners and thought leaders as the basis for their study (Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz, & Younger, 2008b; Ulrich, Brockbank, Yeung, & Lake, 1995; Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2012), we have very little knowledge about how much of the research literature on HR competencies have impacted on the development of HR competencies required by industry. Such critical assessment of the development of HR competencies research and the way in which HR competencies are signalled by organisations has the potential to bridge the micro and macro aspects of the HR function including highlighting the gaps through which organisations are able to develop their HR readiness and competence (Huselid & Becker, 2011). Utilising signalling theory, we aim to investigate how HR competencies for HR roles have developed and assess the HR competency requirements on job advertisements. This research note is the first step in a wider research stream on HR competencies and their development for the professionalisation of HR professionals. Our research question therefore asks, “What do New Zealand organisations signal in their HR competency requirements of HR professionals?”

This research note is structured as follow, we begin with a theoretical background of how HR competencies for HR roles in research has developed with an emphasis on recruitment information as signals to HR professionals. In the methodology section, we then chart the development of HR competencies for HR roles research highlighting the prominence of different HR competencies throughout the years. Secondly, we analyse the HR competencies that industry signals through their recruitment of HR professionals. Results are presented in the next section including findings from the content analysis based on published articles and a quantitative analysis based on job advertisements. In the final section of this research note, we discuss some important findings and its implications for theory and practice.

## **Background**

The importance of human resource (HR) competencies has been researched in the literature for over 20 years. Beginning with the seminal work by Ulrich and associates at the Michigan school of business, the general consensus was that the development of HR competencies had the ability to promote the HR function by adding value to the business through proficiencies and through strategic partnership (Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich, 1998). Thus, as the HR function became more strategic, the impetus for the professionalisation of HR roles and specialised knowledge too became critical (Baill, 1999; Kochan & Dyer, 1993; Lawson & Limbrick, 1996). In a recent review, Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank and Ulrich (2013) identified six domains of competencies that are as critical for the HR profession including strategic positioner, credible activist, capability builder, change champion, human resource innovator and integrator, and technology proponent. Their categorisation of HR competencies was identified from surveys of HR professionals (Ulrich et al., 2013). Proclaiming that the HR profession has arrived, the authors go on to suggest that HR standards should impact “hiring, orienting, promoting, training and assessing HR professionals” (p.468). However, such assertions are rarely straightforward. The authors themselves have noted the changes in the HR function and competencies associated with the HR roles since their initial data gathering wave beginning in 1988/1989 (Ulrich, Brockbank, & Yeung, 1989; Ulrich et al., 1995). However, the context for these changes have not been systematically assessed.

Several authors have argued convincingly that HR's strategic contribution should encompass more functional competencies such as negotiating trust and fairness as these competencies are far more critical in managing multiple stakeholder perspectives important for sustainable performance (Graham & Tarbell, 2006; Han, Chou, Chao & Wright, 2006). Moreover, others have argued that HR's contribution was not a function of its strategic contribution per se, but as a function of its effectiveness in operational activities (Teo and Rodwell, 2007). These studies highlight the need to evaluate how HR competencies have evolved over time along with the changing strategic role of the HR function. Despite the literature distinguishing between strategic and functional HR competencies in the alignment of HR value with the organisation (e.g., Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997), evidence suggests that HR practitioners are still spending more time on operational HR activities (e.g. providing support to line managers and HR transactions), than making a strategic contribution (Kulik, Cregan, Metz, & Brown, 2009; Ramlall, 2006). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that HR competencies in organisations may continue to evolve in organisations (Guest & Conway, 2011; Soderquist, Papalexandris, Ioannou, & Prastacos, 2010). Legge (1995) suggests that the rhetorics of HRM and the realities of practice in HR have further muddied the waters. Taken together, these studies suggest that the adoption of HR competencies for HR professionals has significant complexity.

One area that has not received much attention despite its importance for organisations is the recruitment of HR professionals. This is surprising considering the importance of organisational attraction in ensuring human capital advantage (Den Hartog, Caley, & Dewe, 2007; Marques, 2006). As such the focus on how organisations recruit HR professionals should provide insights into the importance organisations place on HR competencies for their HR professionals. In addition, the messages used in recruiting such as job advertisements provide information about the role and the organisation (Rynes & Barber, 1990). Recently, signalling theory has been described as gaining momentum in the management literature (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzell, 2011). Signalling theory is based on information economics research on the outcomes of information asymmetries in markets (Spence, 1973). Spence's (1974) theory presented the hiring of employees by organisations as a central problem. In this case, organisations wanting to employ productive individuals and potential employees wanting a monetary exchange for their abilities employ signalling mechanisms (such as education as a proxy for their abilities) to surmount information asymmetries between the potential hiring organisation and the potential employees. Within this framework, concepts such as immutable attributes (such as gender and sex) are known as indices while alterable attributes are named signals. In addition, the framework recognises the reduction of uncertainty, costs of equilibrium, and perception as important processes in the interpretation of the signals (Karasek & Bryant, 2012). Based on this premise, signalling theory has been used to explain acquisition premiums (Reuer, Tong, & Wu, 2012), promotions (DeVaro & Waldman, 2012), recruitment (Celani & Singh, 2011), and selection (Bangerter, Roulin, & König, 2012). Signalling theory provides an important insight into the exchange between actors in the employment relationships and the role of HRM (Cadsby, Frank, & Maksimovic, 1990; Kirmani & Rao, 2000).

In terms of recruitment, the way in which the organisation signals to potential applicants of a job role represents the beginning of the relationship between two agents such that as potential psychological contract begins with the signals transmitted via websites or job advertisements (Rynes, 1991; Suazo, Martínez, & Sandoval, 2009). Recruitment begins with the sole purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees (Barber, 1998). Therefore, job

advertisements provide a fruitful avenue to examine the signals that organisations make about the required competencies and roles (De Cooman & Pepermans, 2012; Dineen & Williamson, 2012). Thus in order to assess the dissemination of HR competencies utilised by organisations, assessment of the job advertisements used to recruit HR professionals is an important step.

In summary, while studies exist of what HR competencies required (e.g., Ulrich et al., 2013), there is little examination of the context of these changes. Therefore, it is timely to assess the evolution of HR competency research since the 1990s in order to understand how competencies for HR roles has evolved. Thus, we report on the development of the HR competency literature through automated content analysis. In addition, we report on an analysis of job advertisements of HR professionals in order to assess the competency signals that organisations in New Zealand have for HR professionals.

## Methods

The research design of this research note utilised a quantitative approach in both analysing the development of HR competency research as well as the analysis of the job advertisements. We charted the changing concepts in the HR competency literature using content analysis aided text-mining software ([www.leximancer.com](http://www.leximancer.com)) as a research tool. In this research note, we utilised articles about competencies for the HR function from a business database (Business Source Premier). Moreover, we analysed job advertisements of HR roles collected from an online database ([www.seek.com](http://www.seek.com)). These methods are briefly described in the following section. For the purposes of this research note, we distinguish the concept of HR competency from the concept of HR practices. HR competency refers to the personal characteristics and behaviours required of an individual HR practitioner to achieve effective performance in his/her job (McEvoy et al., 2005; Ulrich et al., 2008b). Whereas HR practices refer to a set of interrelated activities aimed to ensure the management of employees contributes to effective organisational performance (e.g. recruitment & selection) (Delery & Doty, 1996; Schuler & Jackson, 1987).

### ***HR competency research development: Journal articles 1990-2012***

In order to chart the movement of concepts in HR competency research, we collected scholarly, peer-reviewed articles published on HR competencies in *Business Sources Premier* database from 1990-2012. Business Source Premier is one of the top business research databases, featuring the full text for more than 2,200 journals in all business disciplines, including HRM. Pdfs of the articles were downloaded as a unit of analysis. Utilising the entire article as data for analysis allowed a much deeper analysis of the content and scope of the HR literature on competencies for the HR function. We utilised “human resource competencies” as a general search term in the Business Source Complete database. In addition, we limited the search to scholarly (peer reviewed) journals. A total of 141 articles were obtained from this initial search term. However, from this initial set of articles, 26 were excluded because they were non-specific HR roles (such as line managers), 37 were about competencies for non-HR organisational level functions (such as logistics), 12 were excluded as miscellaneous articles (such as non-management, book reviews, research reports, research reviews or news articles), seven were about generic competencies for organisational strategy, and finally, eight were excluded because they were non-English articles. The final dataset

yielded 51 articles. The results of the database search were rated by the co-authors to ensure inter-rater reliability resulting in 97% agreement for the final dataset for analyses (agreement on 137 out of the 141 articles).

Leximancer (ver. 4) was utilised to analyse the content themes and concept relationships in the articles. The automated content analysis utilises word frequency and co-occurrence of data that is then aggregated to identify families of words and terms that are used together in the data. Two phases of co-occurrence information extraction is performed that uses both a statistical algorithm (examining semantic and relational features of the data) and nonlinear dynamics and machine learning (Cretchley, Rooney, & Gallois, 2010). By utilising automated content analysis in this research note, researcher bias is eliminated as a priori identification of words and terms are identified automatically. The automatic generation and co-occurrence data that occur frequently from the data are then treated as concepts. Concepts are then clustered together (denoted as themes) and this can be displayed in a concept map for an overview of the structure and content of the data. Each theme is named after the most prominent concept in that group which is also indicated by the size of the dot in the concept map. Further analyses are available including rank-ordered concept list, concept frequency, total concept connectedness (in a hierarchical order of appearance), direct inter-concept relative co-occurrence frequency and total (direct and indirect) inter-concept co-occurrence (shown as proximity of one concept to another in the map).

The reliability and validity of Leximancer has been demonstrated by its stability, reproducibility, correlative validity and functional validity (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). Minor data cleaning was performed at each analytical step of the analyses. These steps included automatic merging of plural and singular words (such as organisation and organisations), and removing common function words and general terms (such as “et al”, “results”, etc) from the concept seeds. A growing number of publications have also established Leximancer as a rigorous research tool (Campbell, Pitt, Parent, & Berthon, 2011; Cretchley et al., 2010; Cummings & Daellenbach, 2009; Gapp, Fisher, & Kobayashi, 2008; Middleton, Liesch, & Steen, 2011).

We conducted a second analysis utilising Leximancer with a semantic comparison of each decade in the dataset. Concept maps were also created for each decade for comparative purposes for this research note. These separate analyses allowed a much greater detail to be examined about the conceptual nature and concept relationships in each individual period without relational forcing in the overall analysis (Cretchley et al., 2010). We assessed two time periods (1990-1999 and 2000-2012) by creating data subsets of 10-year periods. The two separate time periods consisted of 20 articles for the 1990-1999 time period and 31 articles for the 2000-2012 time period. These two decades were selected because the competencies approach were analogous to changes in the HRM movement from HRM to SHRM (Boxall & Purcell, 2003; Lundy, 1994). In addition, HR competencies were widely disseminated in HRM culminating in several seminal books by Ulrich distinguishing a model of competencies and HRM in the late 1990s (Teo, 1998; Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich, 1998). This provides a natural point (1990-1999 and 2000-2012) to assess the direction and dissemination of competencies in HRM over the two decades. Leximancer provided an identification of where each decade was situated in relation to the overall landscape of the dataset. This allows an examination of the semantic focus of each period and highlight changes over time.

***Analysing industry demands of HR competencies: Job advertisements for HR professionals***

Job advertisements were collected between December 2012 and February 2013 from NZ's most widely used online job site (www.seek.com). The search term of "human resources" and "New Zealand only" search limiter was used to gather job advertisements for HR roles. The initial search results gleaned 1,000 results. However, job advertisements which were not for HR roles (e.g., general administrator, sales representative) or limited term (e.g., part time, casual) were eliminated from this initial search resulting in 111 Job advertisements. Each job advertisement was scanned, marked with a reference number and filed into an excel database based on the type of role (HR Manager, HR Director). Job advertisements were then broken down into semantic categories and identified competencies categorised into knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). For example, from the job advertisement (semantic category) - "delivery of exceptional operational performance through engagement of people and leadership", we categorized as "leadership" under knowledge (KSA category).

Along with the competencies, we also recorded some relevant demographic and job data such as name of the advertising company and work conditions. Manual input of each job advertisement into KSAs were performed by one of the researchers and verified by another. Descriptive analysis and frequency analysis of the competencies from the job advertisements were then performed. A total of 793 competencies were identified from the job advertisements. Frequencies (%) were calculated on the number of KSAs competencies identified from the overall dataset. Frequencies for specific HR roles were calculated on each HR role total competencies. In addition, we further categorised the KSAs identified into Ulrich et al's HR (2008a) competencies domain to allow for further comparisons. Utilising these categories is important as professional bodies such as the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand (HRINZ) have used Ulrich et al.'s (2012) seven HR competencies domains as the basis for their standards (HRINZ, 2013). Thus, the focus on signals that organisations give can be understood in the context of these idealised competency requirements.

**Results**

The Leximancer analysis of the 51 articles shows the most frequently occurring concepts. Figure 1 presents the overall map of concepts and themes, with decades indicated (see Appendix). As can be seen from the concept map, HR is one of the most central themes (HR, business, professionals, role, and managers; theme connectivity=100%) indicating that the role and utilisation of HR is a central theme in the HR competencies literature. Associated with the concept of HR is the link towards competencies with the strategic aspect of business and research. In addition, competencies (competencies, model; theme connectivity=67%) reflected the importance of competencies and competency models. The third most important theme is that of Organisation (organisation, resource, people; theme connectivity=50%) which specifies organisational features and resources in HR competencies. Overall, the concept map displays that competencies were associated with aspects of training and development, the job itself and performance. These concepts were associated with the

increased need to contribute to the performance of the organisation including its role in SHRM.

Table 1. Top ten concepts from HR competency journal articles 1990-2012

<b>Word-like</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Relevance (%)</b>
Competencies	1564	100
Business	502	32
Organisation	476	30
Management	460	29
Professionals	457	29
Resource	387	25
Performance	385	25
Model	351	22
Role	334	21
Knowledge	323	21

In addition, the top ten concepts based on their frequency from the literature can be identified (refer to Table 1). The top concepts include business, organisation and management while the lowest ranked concepts (not shown) were customer, activities and capabilities. Of the top ten concepts, Competencies (100%) of the literature specifying the competencies required for HR roles while model (22%) specifies competency models for HR roles, five (business, organisation, management, resource and performance) were about the relationship of competencies with the organisation, and three (professionals, role and knowledge) were about the individual aspects of HR competencies. We further specified comparative analysis of the decade changes in concepts in the HR competencies literature (refer to Figure 2, see Appendix).

Table 2. Ranked concepts by decade (1990-1999 and 2000-2012)





















Category: FOLDER1_1990-1999				Category: FOLDER1_2000-2012			
Concept	Rel Freq (%)	Strength (%)	Prominence	Concept	Rel Freq (%)	Strength (%)	Prominence
change	12	63	 1.5	management	15	64	 1.1
resource	16	59	 1.4	role	11	61	 1.1
human	13	57	 1.3	strategic	9	60	 1.0
organization	16	49	 1.2	business	16	59	 1.0
model	12	47	 1.1	performance	12	57	 1.0
competencies	50	46	 1.1	professionals	13	56	 1.0
professionals	14	43	 1.0	competencies	44	53	 0.9
performance	11	42	 1.0	model	10	52	 0.9
business	14	40	 0.9	skills	9	51	 0.9
management	11	35	 0.8	organization	12	50	 0.9

Figure 2 displays a table of the top ten concepts by decade (1990-1999 and 2000-2012). The quadrant map allows a visual comparison of the changes in concept centrality of the literature. In addition, Table 2 displays the list of top ten concepts according to decade. One of the main findings is the significant increase in the concept of management from 10<sup>th</sup> place to 1<sup>st</sup> place over the two decades (prominence from 0.8 to 1.1). In summary, the main findings from the analysis of the research literature revealed the move towards strategic contribution of HR competencies for HR professionals. Moreover, the change over the decades saw a move towards more strategic competencies for the organisation including the need to find new ways to manage HR competencies for SHRM.

The analysis on job advertisements revealed the specific competencies that are signalled to HR professionals. With regards to the KSAs identified for all HR roles, there were some similarities and differences between the HR roles. Overall, there were more knowledge and skills described while little information about abilities (except for creativity) was mentioned for HR professionals. Generally, all HR roles demanded knowledge of HRM operational activities such as recruitment (5.42%), performance management (3.66%), learning and development (4.79%), remuneration (1.89%), and employment relations (3.28%). In terms of skills, communication (7.57%) and leadership (3.92%), as well as IT skills or computer literacy (3.40%) were important competencies requested. Table 3 summarises the competencies associated with the HR roles identified by Ulrich and HRINZ (HRINZ, 2013; Ulrich et al., 2008a).

Table 3. Sample of competencies identified from job advertisements



Prominent competencies of HR professionals across job advertisements		
Competence elements	Percentage	
Knowledge	Recruitment	5.42%
	Performance	3.66%
	Learning and Development	4.79%
	Remuneration	1.89%
	Employment relations	3.28%
Skills	Communication	7.57%
	Leadership	3.92%
	IT skills or Computer literacy	3.40%

In terms of specific HR roles, HR director competencies were the least represented in job advertisements (4.79%). The most common HR roles advertised were HR advisor (25.85%) followed by HR manager (20.68%) and other HR (20.30%; other HR included administrative/focus roles in HR including HR training and development and employment relations focus). This was followed by HR Admin and Entry level HR (13.37%) and Specialist HR (15%; Specialist HR included categories such as HR consultants or recruitment consultants). As Table 3 demonstrates, the job advertisements reveal that competencies for HR roles varied across the different HR positions in organisations: the higher position, the fewer operational priorities and the more strategic capabilities required.

Categorising the KSAs identified from the job advertisements around the six dimensions developed by Ulrich and his associates (Ulrich et al., 2008a), reveal that HR director' competencies were prioritised around leadership, organisation culture and strategy (Table 4). Specifically, the categorisation of KSAs from the job advertisements showed that operational executors (55.24%) was highest, followed by culture and change steward (39.46%); talent manager/organisational designer (42.09%) and strategy architect (39.46%). For the HR manager roles, a significant proportion of competencies requested were as an operational executor (73.20%). Similarly, competencies of HR Advisor, Other HR, Other Advisor and HR Admin were associated with the role as operational executors (HR Advisor=84.94%; Other HR=95.61%; and Other Advisor=84%; HR Admin=96.23%). To summarise, competencies signalled by organisations in their recruitment of HR professionals were far more functional than strategic. All HR roles required knowledge or functional competencies. In addition, senior roles signalled far more strategic and change management competencies and stakeholder and relationships building competencies.

## Discussion

Our first discussion deals with the development of HR competency research. Overall, it can be observed that as the strategic imperative for HRM has also extended to understanding how HR competencies contribute to this change (Chadwick & Dabu, 2009; Teo, 1998). In particular, the search for the role of HR competencies in organisational performance dominates the development of HR competency research. This is in line with current thinking that the black box of performance in the HRM-performance link remains little understood (Guest, 2011). Additionally, there is increasing attention that these performance links lies in understanding the role of HR competencies (Guest & Woodrow, 2012; Morris et al., 2009).

Analysis of the changes from 1990-1999 to 2000-2010 demonstrate that concerns regarding management perception, skills and people around competencies are an imperative for potentiating HRM for performance (Campion et al., 2011; Heneman & Milanowski, 2011).

Additionally, our initial analysis of the signals from industry show that HR competencies for HR roles in NZ are focused on functional rather than strategic competencies. The HR competencies in NZ appear to be fixated on the operational aspects of the function with greater emphasis on competencies as operational executors. Looking further into these competencies the results show that senior HR roles (HR director and other advisor) were more strategic than the other roles and were far more focused on stakeholder management (credible activist and business ally). In terms of the competencies of Ulrich et al.'s (2008a) dimensions, the signals that job advertisements give tend to emphasise systems and processes rather than relationships or strategy (Kulik et al., 2009). HRM in NZ therefore appear to be at focused on operational efficiencies and not on the strategic dimensions. One potential explanation is that HR professionals in NZ are more focused on operational and functional aspects of HRM, which some authors have argued is the way HR departments can be more effective (Teo & Rodwell, 2007). This is counterintuitive to the development of HR competency research that demonstrates increasing need for strategic orientation for HR roles. This suggests that intuitively the role of HR competencies and professionals play in SHRM is far more complex. An additional implication for the lack of strategic competencies in signal from job advertisements, especially for senior positions have real implications for the recruitment of a potentially strong pool of HR professionals (Gruber, MacMillan, & Thompson, 2012; Wright & McMahan, 2011). Increasingly organisations utilise the job advertisement as a powerful tool for attracting employees with high potential (Edwards, 2010; Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen, & Schoonderbeek, 2013; Lievens, 2007; Martin, Gollan, & Grigg, 2011). These signals may form the basis of the organisation's competitive advantage (Johnson, Winter, Reio, Thompson, & Petrosko, 2008).

This research note has a number of implications for the organisation and HR professionals. Firstly, the results indicate that all HR roles require operational competence and be efficient in HR systems and processes. Senior level HR roles are associated with a stakeholder focus and may contribute to the roles' credibility and professionalisation. Such stakeholder focus can be explained by the NZ employment relationships framework requiring more interaction with unions as well as the importance of relationships building with internal stakeholders (Haworth, 2011; Macky, 2004). However, as many professional bodies (e.g., HRINZ, AHRI, Society of Human Resource Management, etc) continue to develop accreditation for the HR professional based on the Ulrich model, the changing nature of the HR function will continue to be advanced by further research and the changing nature of professional practice. As more research evidence becomes available, HR competencies and their outcomes will be at the forefront of accreditation from these professional bodies.

This research note demonstrates that the evolving role of HR competencies require a focus on the evolving nature of HRM contributions to organisational performance and the ability of organisations to signal the minimal competency standards for the HR professionals. Our research note suggests further improvements could be made with regards to how HR competencies are utilised and signalled to the HR community (Barber, 1998; Heneman & Berkley, 1999; Rynes, 1991). This brings up two possibilities that could be part of the wider discussion on the value of HR competencies. Firstly, in assessing the contribution that associations such as HRINZ make about providing the competency level quality for junior-level roles and secondly to focus on the contribution that such associations can make for the

strategic competencies of its members. The findings on the junior and administrative level HR roles suggests that organisations seek HR professionals at this level as an entry level position or that organisations are tasked at providing training for these competencies. Regardless, this has implications for the role of professional associations in managing the professionalization of the function with future efforts focused on providing the development of operational and functional efficiencies to gain credibility.

## Conclusions

This research note has charted the development of HR competency research and assess the state of HR competencies that organisations signal to potential HR professionals. As the strategic nature of HRM demand more strategic competencies, this research note demonstrates that the relationships between HR competencies and SHRM is far more complex than just the need to accumulate and exploit the potential of strategic competencies in people. Based on signals that organisations signalled in this research note, HR professionals in New Zealand are expected to focus on operational efficiencies rather than on strategic dimensions. Such findings reiterates the need to examine the ways in which HR competencies, particularly strategic ones are utilised and perceived in organisations. This suggests that NZ organisations can use job advertisements as a powerful tool to attract potentially qualified HR professionals.

We acknowledge that this research note has some important limitations which limit the generalisability of findings. Firstly, while we have attempted to be inclusive by using a prominent research database for article search, this has limitations in that our search only produced articles that are indexed by this database. In addition, our use of job advertisements was limited to the past 3 months in the Australasian summer which may limit the representativeness of job advertisements as this period may have less activity. Future research could examine a larger scope of articles (by including more journal databases e.g., ABI/INFORMS and broad search terms such as “competencies”) and job advertisements over a longer time frame (for example, a year). Therefore, a future research direction is to determine the adoption and dissemination of HR competencies as they are driven by the contextual and organisational processes (Yeung, 2011). All things being equal, substantial gains can be made for the role of HR competency development for both the individual and the organisation (Shaw, Park, & Kim, 2013).

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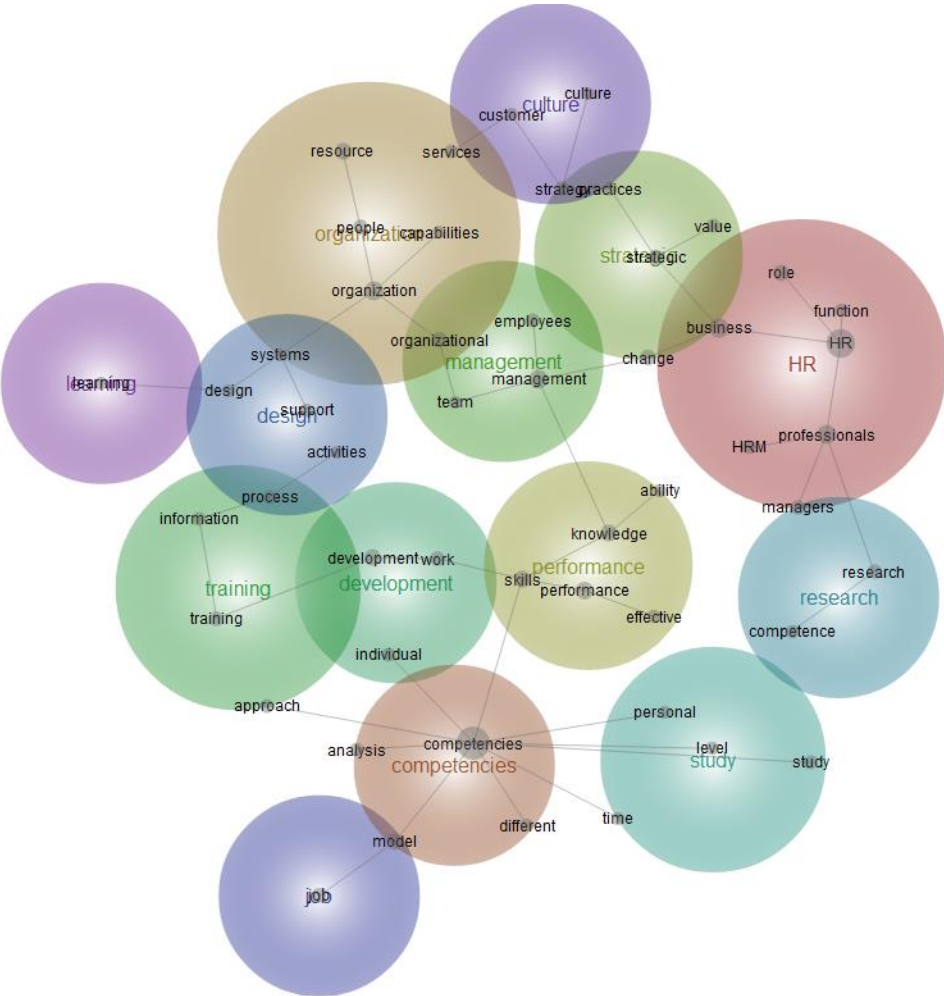


Figure 1. Theme and concept map of HR competency journal articles 1990-2012

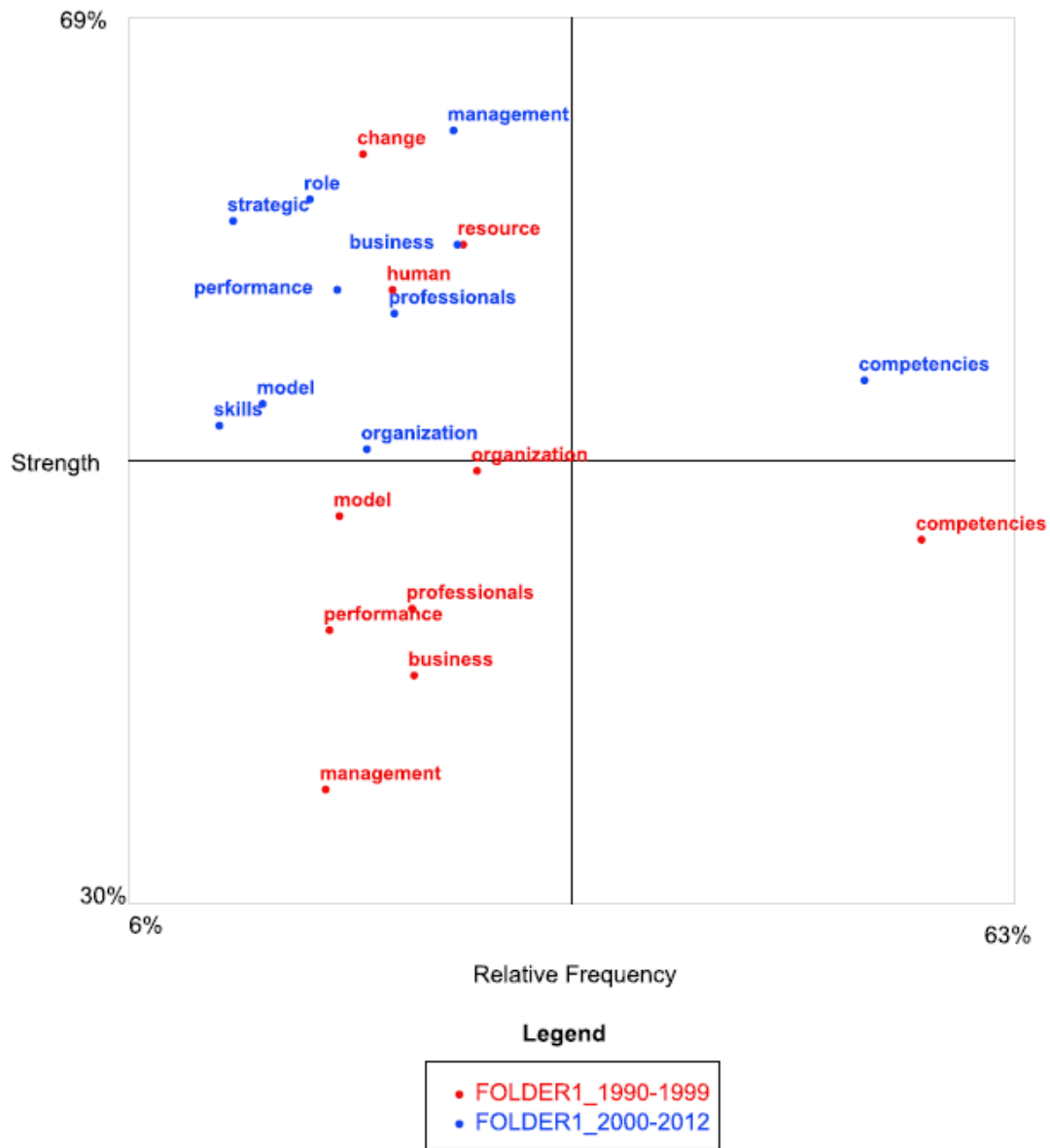


Figure 2. Concept centrality and frequency by decade (1990-2012 and 2000-2012)



Table 4. Summary of HR competencies for HR roles							
<b>Percentage of HR Professional's competencies (Knowledge, Skills, Abilities and Other characteristics)</b>							
Positions		<b>HR Director</b>	<b>HR Manager</b>	<b>HR Advisor</b>	<b>HR Admin</b>	<b>Other HR</b>	<b>Other Advisor</b>
Frequency (overall)		4.79%	20.68%	25.85%	13.37%	20.30%	15%
<b>Relationships</b>	<i>Credible Activist</i>	31.57%	21.35%	8.80%	14.15%	5.59%	12.60%
<b>Systems and Processes</b>	<i>Operational Executors</i>	55.24%	73.20%	84.94%	96.23%	95.61%	84.00%
	<i>Business Ally</i>	36.83%	24.40%	18.57%	0%	0%	33.60%
<b>Organisational capabilities</b>	<i>Talent Manager/ Organisational Designer</i>	42.09%	26.84%	16.12%	0%	0%	35.28%
	<i>Culture and Change Steward</i>	39.46%	23.79%	14.18%	0%	14.28%	34.44%
	<i>Strategy Architect</i>	39.46%	23.18%	18.07%	0%	12.41%	34.44%