The validation of a human resource management professional competence model for the South African context

Orientation: The last two decades have seen a great interest in the development of human resource management (HRM) professional competence models to advance the value-add of HR practitioners in organisations. However, empirical research on competency requirements for HR practitioners in the South African context has not been forthcoming.

Research purpose: The main objective of the present research was to validate a HRM competence measure for the assessment of professional HRM competencies in the workplace.

Motivation for the study: Competency models can assist HR professionals in supporting their organisations to achieve success and sustainability.

Research approach, design and method: A cross-sectional research approach was followed. The proposed HRM Professional Competence Model was administered to a diverse population of HR managers and practitioners (N = 483). Data were analysed using SPSS 22.0 for Windows.

Main findings: Exploratory factor analysis resulted in three distinguishable competency dimensions for HR professionals: Professional behaviour and leadership (consisting of the factors Leadership and personal credibility, Solution creation, Interpersonal communication and Innovation), Service orientation and execution (consisting of the factors Talent management, HR risk, HR metrics and HR service delivery) and Business intelligence (consisting of the factors Strategic contribution, HR business knowledge, HR business acumen and HR technology). All factors showed acceptable construct equivalence for the English and indigenous language groups.

Practical/managerial implications: Managers can utilise the validated competence measure to measure the performance of HR practitioners in the organisation.

Contribution/value-add: This research adds to the limited HR professional competence measures that currently exist.

Introduction

The development of human resources (HR) competence models has gained a great deal of attention over the past decade, assisting organisations to adapt to ongoing changes in the business world (Abdullah, Musa & Ali, 2011). HR practitioners in organisations are expected to play a dual role by on the one hand becoming a business partner and protecting employees’ interests and on the other hand managing and implementing strategies and practices that respond to economic circumstances (O’Brien & Linehan, 2014). Competence models that allow for the description of different competences can therefore assist HR professionals to support their organisations in achieving success and sustainability (Sikora & Ferris, 2014; Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz & Younger, 2008).

Empirical research on competency requirements for HR professionals in the South African context is scant. The few detailed empirical studies that were conducted in this field focused primarily on the desired roles and practices of HR practitioners in South African organisations (Coetzee, Mitonga-Monga & Swart, 2014; Magau & Roodt, 2010; Scheepers & Schuping, 2011; Schultz, 2010; Steyn, 2008; Van der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren & Visser, 2003; Van Vuuren & Eiselen, 2006; Van Wyk, 2006). Furthermore, the results of these studies illustrate the confusion regarding the roles and responsibilities of HR practitioners and their lack of competence to fulfil key roles.

Therefore, there is a need to establish and empirically validate a professional HR competence model that can be applied by HR professionals in the South African context. The South African Board for People Practices (SABPP) introduced a new competence model in 2012 to guide the professional conduct of HR professionals in South Africa. This model, however, still needs to
be empirically validated. Schutte (2015) used the SABPP’s model in conjunction with other HR professional competence models to develop a competence measure as a foundation to assess a complete model that HR professionals can use in the further professionalisation of the HR profession in South Africa. The present article discusses the validation of this measure, as well as its equivalence in a culturally diverse South Africa.

This article is structured as follows. Firstly, we present a critical overview of the available measures of HR roles, responsibilities and competencies in the South African context. This is followed by a discussion of the research method employed in the present study. Thereafter, the empirical results of the research are reported. The research concludes with a discussion of the results, together with recommendations for both practice and future research.

**Literature review**

**Human resource management assessments in the South African context**

An extensive review of literature revealed three trends in assessing HR practitioners’ roles, responsibilities and competencies in the South African workplace. Studies to date adopted global or consultancy measures to assess HR practitioners’ roles and the application of HR practices in the workplace. Secondly, authors developed their own measurements to assess the application of global HR frameworks in the South African context. Finally, authors develop their own measures to assess specific areas of the HR field, such as competencies, ethics and professionalism. Only nine quantitative research studies could be found that focused specifically on the assessment of the roles, practices and competencies of HR practitioners in South African organisations. A critical overview of the assessment of HR roles, responsibilities and practices, as well as their applicability in the South African context, is provided hereunder.

Steyn (2008) and Walters (2006) used the Human Resource Role Assessment of Ulrich (1997) to explore the strategic role of HR professionals in the South African context. The survey consisted of 40 statements that measure four roles: strategic partner, change agent, employee champion and administrative expert, using operational phrasing and describes concepts, practices and activities of the HR function. In both studies, the measure yielded important information on the extent to which HR functions are allowed to play a strategic role in South African organisations. Although this measure is globally still the predominant measure of HR roles and competencies in the workplace, future studies should expand the measure to give an accurate reflection of the HR profession in the South African context.

Magau and Roodt (2010) developed a survey to assess the application of the Human Capital BRidge™ framework (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007) in the South African context. The 27-item questionnaire measures operational excellence, growing the company and securing the future and representing the company’s strategic themes. Although this survey yielded promising results, the authors acknowledged that the Human Capital BRidge™ framework was not applied to the fullest extent to guide the measurement solutions to assist both HR and line managers to measure the contribution of human capital towards strategic objectives.

Schultz (2010) developed a measure to assess the effectiveness of HR competencies at a merged higher education institution. This questionnaire was developed based on the HR balanced scorecard of the institution and assesses three HR competencies: business knowledge, HR practices and personal and management skills. Although this study was narrow in its scope in terms of assessing the different types of HR competencies, it provided valuable insights into the need for HR competence assessment in the South African context.

Schepers and Schuping (2011) applied the Human Resources Practices Scale of Geringer, Colette and Milliman (2002) to determine the effect of HR practices on the psychological contract in a mining company. The questionnaire consisted of 50 items and measured five HRM practices, namely communication, hiring practices, training and development, performance appraisal and remuneration practices. This questionnaire was extensively validated in more than 40 countries and showed promising results for use in both developed and developing contexts. Exploratory factors analysis showed several cross-loadings between the items of the five factors (Schepers & Schuping, 2011). Furthermore, the instrument is limited in its assessment of the full scope of HR practices in the workplace. This survey should thus be further validated in the South African context and could be expanded to include a broader scope of HR practices.

Coetzee et al. (2014) used an organisational culture survey of Deloitte and Touche (2009) to assess the extent to which HR practices predict the commitment of engineering staff. This survey measures 13 organisational HR practices: change, communication, diversity and transformation, HR policies and procedures, innovation, job satisfaction, leadership, management style, performance management, recognition, rewards and remuneration, training and development and values and culture. Although this survey was sufficient for the purposes of that study, its scope is rather broad; there should be more focus on the specific roles and requirements of HR professionals in the South African context.

Other researchers developed measures to assess specific areas of the HR role in the South African context. Van Wyk (2006) developed a measure to assess the extent to which HR practitioners display knowledge and apply competencies regarding social responsibility issues such as HIV/AIDS in the workplace. The findings revealed a gap in the knowledge of HR practitioners at all organisational levels on managing HIV/AIDS. Van Vuuren and Eiselen (2006) developed a measure to assess the role of HR professionals in corporate ethics. The results showed that HR practitioners generally believe that they indeed have...
an ethics management competency and that they should be involved in ethics management. Van der Westhuizen et al. (2003) developed a measure to assess the status of HR management (HRM) as a profession in the South African context. The results of their study showed that HR practitioners do consider HRM to be a profession, but that it still needs to achieve true professional status. The above studies provided useful information on specific areas within the HR professional’s function and should encourage other researchers to conduct more detailed research on other functional areas of HRM.

To summarise, it is clear from the above discussion that a holistic and accurate measure of HR competencies within the South African context is lacking. Although most of the studies discussed above developed measures to assess various areas relating the HR function, none focused on the validation of the measures. These studies, however, provided the much-needed preliminary information, which led to the development of the SABPP’s South African HR Competency Model (SABPP, 2012). The SABPP identified 14 competency domains that HR professionals should be able to display in the South African workplace. These are: leadership and personal credibility, organisational capability, solution creation and implementation, interpersonal and communication skills, citizenship for the future, strategy, talent management, HR governance, risk and compliance, analytics and measurement, HR service delivery, HR and business knowledge, ethics, professionalism and duty to society.

Schutte (2015) used this model in conjunction with other models (Ulrich, 1997) as a guideline to develop an HR competency measure for HR professionals in the South African context. The measure consists of three dimensions, namely Professional behaviour and leadership, Service orientation and execution and Business intelligence. This survey, furthermore, measures 12 competencies associated with the three domains. The pilot study of this measure yielded promising results, with clear factor structures and high reliabilities for the three dimensions (Schutte, 2015). The present article focuses on the further validation of this measure in the South African context.

Not only is it important to establish reliable and valid methods of measurement with regard to HRM competencies, it is also important to consider the cultural diversity in a multicultural setting, such as South Africa. As the HRM Professional Competency Model is a new measure, an assessment of this nature should be concerned with construct equivalence. Assurance of measurement equivalency across different cultures is important for determining whether measures of a construct in one culture also exist in other cultures, to determine the degree of variability of the measures across several cultures and to determine whether the measures are universal or culture-specific (He & Van de Vijver, 2012). Furthermore, assessing measurement equivalence across countries and language groups provides information about the factorial invariance of an instrument and therefore allows the researcher a degree of confidence in using the instrument in two or more cultural settings (Van de Vijver & Tanzer, 2004).

Figure 1 presents a model of the HR competency measure for HR professionals.

In light of the preceding section, the following research hypotheses and sub-hypotheses were formulated:

**H1:** The Professional behaviour and leadership competency dimension consists of five factors, namely Leadership and personal credibility, Organisational capability, Solution creation, Interpersonal communication and Citizenship. All factors are reliable and show construct equivalence for English and indigenous language groups.

**H2:** The Service orientation and execution competency dimension consists of four factors, namely Talent management, HR governance, Analytics and measurement and HR service delivery. All factors are reliable and show construct equivalence for English and indigenous language groups.

**H3:** The Business intelligence competency dimension consists of three factors, namely Strategic contribution, HR business knowledge and HR technology. All factors are reliable and show construct equivalence for English and indigenous language groups.

### Research design

#### Research approach

The research approach of the present study was quantitative in nature, as the aim of the research was to validate a HR...
competence measure. A non-experimental cross-sectional survey research strategy of inquiry was utilised in this study, based on the need for exploratory research on HR competencies in the South Africa workplace (Field, 2009).

Research method

A quantitative research approach was followed. A cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data and attain the research goals (Field, 2009). The present research mostly followed the DeVellis (1991) scale development process, as the aim was to develop and validate a diagnostic tool for HR professionals’ competencies in the South African context. The steps of the DeVellis scale development process, as well as the extent to which these were applied in the present study, are indicated in Box 1.

This article reports the results relating to Steps 7 and 8 of the DeVellis (1991) scale development process. The results of the research pertaining to steps 1–6 of the scale development processes are reported elsewhere (Schutte, 2015). This article reports on the final validation of the HR professional competence measure.

Research participants

The respondents were HR officers and managers from various organisations in the public and private sector who had knowledge about HRM processes in the workplace. The study employed purposive convenience sampling, such that the respondents were chosen based on their availability to participate and to provide the desired information. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed, of which 483 were returned. This represents a 60.38% response rate. The demographics of the respondents in this sample were as follows: 55.3% (267) were women, 70.6% (341) spoke indigenous languages, and 78.3% (378) were black Africans. Of the respondents, 29.6% (143) were aged 30–39 years, 35.8% (173) held a bachelor’s degree as their highest level of educational qualification and 31.1% (150) were employed at middle management level. A total of 38.4% (184) of the respondents had 6–15 years’ work experience, 83.9% (405) had a tenure of 0–10 years in their current job and 64.2% (310) had a tenure of 0–10 years with their current organisation.

Measuring instrument

The HRM Professional Competence Model (Schutte, 2015) was used as a measure of HR professional competencies in the present study. This questionnaire consists of three sections that measures three competency domains: Professional behaviour and leadership, Service orientation and excellence and Business intelligence. The Professional behaviour and leadership competency domain measures five sub-competencies, namely Leadership and credibility (13 items), Organisational capability (nine items), Solution creation (12 items), Interpersonal communication (seven items) and Citizenship (six items). The Service orientation and execution competency domain measures four sub-competencies: Talent management (15 items), HR governance (seven items), Analytics and measurement (13 items) and HR service delivery (six items). The Business intelligence competency domain measures three sub-competencies: Strategic contribution (20 items), HR business knowledge (15 items) and HR technology (three items).

Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘Not important’ (1) to ‘Critical’ (5). The competency dimension measurements obtained acceptable reliabilities ranging from 0.90 to 0.973 in a pilot study by Schutte (2015).

Research procedure and ethical considerations

Permission was obtained from the necessary authorities prior to the administration of the questionnaire. Hard copy and electronic surveys were distributed to the relevant participants. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to the administration of the surveys. Confidentiality was maintained at all times.

Statistical analysis

Data were analysed with the aid of SPSS 22.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics (i.e. means, frequencies, skewness

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BOX 1: The DeVellis scale development process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of scale development</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1:</strong> Application in present study</td>
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<td><strong>Step 1a:</strong> Application of a theoretical basis to develop the items</td>
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<td><strong>Identification of the parameters of HRM theory to be included in the measurement scale, which informed the conceptual framework for the study.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Step 2:</strong> Item generation</td>
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<td><strong>Item generation</strong> was based on theoretical relationships between constructs gleaned from an extensive literature review and document analysis. Statements were formulated, rather than questions.</td>
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<td><strong>Step 3:</strong> Determining the scale and measurement format</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing format of items, using statements in a Likert-type response format (DeVellis, 1991). Additionally, checklist-style questions and open-ended questions were included.</td>
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<td><strong>Step 4:</strong> Conducting an item analysis to eliminate inadequate items</td>
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<td>An expert panel of 12 subject matter experts reviewed the scale; they were provided with construct definitions and asked to rate items in terms of adequacy, relevance, conciseness and potentially confusing wording.</td>
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<td><strong>Step 5:</strong> Selecting validation items that can be administered to developmental sample</td>
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<td>This research did not include social desirability scales. The scale does use repetition of items that measure the same construct in different sub-scales to determine if similar or different responses were provided.</td>
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<td><strong>Step 6:</strong> Designing and conducting a developmental study</td>
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<td>Administering HR professional competency diagnostic items and validation items to a sample of 150–300 HR practitioners at different levels within corporate institutions in South Africa.</td>
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<td><strong>Step 7:</strong> Evaluating the items</td>
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<td>As advised by DeVellis (1991, pp. 82–85) item-scale correlations, item variance, item means and coefficient alphas were included when appropriate.</td>
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<td><strong>Step 7a:</strong> Determining construct validity of the measure</td>
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<td>This included conducting exploratory factor analysis. At a later stage, confirmatory factor analysis would be conducted, but that would require a larger sample.</td>
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<td><strong>Step 7b:</strong> Determining the convergent validity of the measure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convergent validity could not be determined in the current study.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 7c:</strong> Determining the divergent validity of the measure</td>
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<td>This entails determining whether method effects are influencing the scale findings, which may also require a criterion-related study and a larger sample than the present sample.</td>
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<td><strong>Step 7d:</strong> Assessing the reliability of the scale</td>
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<td>This entailed determining internal consistency reliabilities. Test-retest reliabilities could not be considered, as the respondents were anonymous. Some items would be expected to change over time, such as intention to quit or satisfaction. The alternative is to administer the scale to another sample, which would enable multiple measures of reliability to be compared.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 8:</strong> Optimising scale length</td>
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<td>Due to the nature of the scale (a diagnostic tool that can be used regularly) the scale needed to be short enough to avoid respondent fatigue; therefore, considerable attention was given to optimising scale length.</td>
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</table>

and kurtosis) were applied. Construct equivalence was determined. The motivation for the application of these techniques was to obtain a structure in each language group that could then be compared across all language groups involved. Factor analysis is the most frequently employed technique for studying construct equivalence (Van De Vijver & Leung, 1997). In the current study, both exploratory and confirmatory models could have been used. Since this is a newly developed instrument, the researcher used exploratory factor analysis.

Factors obtained in each group were compared (after target rotation). The agreement was evaluated by a factor congruence coefficient, Tucker’s phi (Van De Vijver & Leung, 1997). Values above 0.90 were taken to indicate essential agreement between cultural groups, whilst values above 0.95 indicated very good agreement. A high agreement implies that the factor loadings of the lower and higher levels are equal, up to a multiplying constant.

**Results**

Because of the composition of the sample, it was decided to conduct the analysis in this study only on English and indigenous language groups. The KMO analysis showed the following measures of sampling adequacy for the English and indigenous language groups:

- Professional behaviour and leadership measure – English 0.945 and indigenous 0.969
- Service orientation and execution measure – English 0.949 and indigenous 0.969
- HR business intelligence measure – English 0.932 and indigenous 0.968

These results are acceptable according to the guideline of a KMO higher than 0.6 being adequate for factor analysis (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010). The results of the factor analysis are reported next.

**Factor analysis**

**Professional behaviour and leadership competency dimension**

Exploratory factor analysis, using principal component analysis, was done on the 36 items of the Professional behaviour and leadership competency dimension of the questionnaire. The initial analysis revealed that four factors could be extracted, based on the eigenvalues for both language groups. Based on the results of the pilot study, a subsequent principal component factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was done to specify the four underlying factors. Varimax rotation was chosen as it resulted in the most appropriate underlying factor structure for the Professional behaviour and leadership competency dimension. The Organisational capabilities factor was deleted, because of problematic loadings (six items). Three more items were deleted to further refine the questionnaire. A subsequent factor analysis using varimax rotation revealed four underlying factors, which explained 82.974% of the variance for the English language group and 81.037% of the variance for the indigenous languages group. The factors for the English language group were as follows: Innovation (Factor 1), Leadership and personal credibility (Factor 2), Interpersonal communication (Factor 3) and Solution creation (Factor 4). The factors for the indigenous language group were as follows: Leadership and personal credibility (Factor 1), Interpersonal communication (Factor 2), Innovation (Factor 3) and Solution creation (Factor 4). The results revealed equivalence for both language groups in terms of the specified factors and items per factor. The original Citizenship factor was relabelled Innovation. The four factors per language groups are reported in Table 1.

The rotated component matrices of the four-factor solutions for English and indigenous language participants were then used as input for an exploratory factor analysis with target rotations. The following Tucker’s phi coefficients were obtained:

- Leadership and personal credibility: 0.91
- Innovation: 0.93
- Interpersonal communication: 0.94
- Solution creation: 0.95

These coefficients compare favourably with the guideline of 0.90 and can therefore be regarded as acceptable for equivalence for both language groups.

The above results partially confirm Hypothesis 1. The factor analysis revealed four underlying factors for the Professional behaviour and leadership competency dimension, which is in contrast with the five factors initially specified for the measure. All factors showed acceptable Cronbach’s alpha coefficients and construct equivalence for both the English and the indigenous language groups.

**Service orientation and execution competency dimension**

An exploratory factor analysis, using principal components analysis, was performed on the 37 items of the Service orientation and execution competency dimension of the questionnaire. The initial analysis revealed that four factors could be extracted, based on their eigenvalues. A subsequent principal component factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was performed to specify the four underlying factors for the two language groups. Varimax rotation was chosen as it resulted in the most appropriate underlying factor structure for the Service orientation and execution competency dimension. Four items were deleted, due to problematic loadings. The four factors explained 81.660% of the variance for the English language group and 79.693% of the variance for the indigenous languages group. A further 11 items were deleted to further refine the questionnaire. The four factors for the language groups were Talent management (Factor 1), HR service delivery (Factor 2), HR metrics (Factor 3) and HR risk (Factor 4). The original HR analytics and measurement factor was relabelled HR metrics. Furthermore, the original
The rotated component matrices of the four-factor solutions for the English and indigenous language groups were then used as input for an exploratory factor analysis with target rotations. The following Tucker's phi coefficients were obtained:

- Talent management: 0.97
- HR service delivery: 0.94
- HR metrics: 0.91
- HR risk: 0.96

These coefficients compare favourably with the guideline of 0.90 and can therefore be regarded as acceptable for equivalence for both language groups.

The above results confirm Hypothesis 2, namely that the Service orientation and execution competency dimension consists of four factors, Talent management, HR risk, HR metrics and HR service delivery. All factors showed acceptable Cronbach’s alpha coefficients and construct equivalence for both the English and the indigenous language groups.

**Business intelligence competency dimension**

The factor analysis of the Business intelligence competency dimension was performed on the original 38 items, as specified in the discussion of the pilot study and the Organisational capability factor, which originally formed part of the Professional behaviour and leadership dimension. An exploratory factor analysis using principal components analyses was performed on the 44 items of the Business intelligence competency dimension.
The main objective of this research was to validate the HRM Professional Competence Model for HR practitioners in the South African context. The results identified three distinguishable core competency dimensions, namely business acumen, strategic impact, and HR technology.

These coefficients compare favourably with the guideline of 0.90 and can therefore be regarded as acceptable for equivalence for both language groups.

The above results partially confirm Hypothesis 3. The factor analysis revealed four underlying factors for the Business intelligence competency dimension, in contrast to the three factors initially specified. All factors showed acceptable Cronbach’s alpha coefficients and construct equivalence for both the English and the indigenous language groups.

The descriptive statistics of the measures are reported in Table 4. The results show excellent reliabilities for the factors of all the dimensions (Field, 2009). The results further show that the dimensions are negatively skewed. The mean scores indicate that the respondents viewed all the dimensions of the HR Professional Competence Model as important, with the factors Interpersonal communication, Leadership and personal credibility and HR business knowledge indicated as being the most important.

### Discussion

The main objective of this research was to validate the HRM Professional Competence Model for HR practitioners in the South African context. The results identified three distinguishable core competency dimensions, namely business acumen, strategic impact, and HR technology.
### Professional behaviour and leadership, Service orientation and execution and Business intelligence

Exploratory factor analysis, using varimax rotation, resulted in four factors for the Professional behaviour and leadership dimension: (1) Leadership and personal credibility, (2) Solution creation, (3) Interpersonal communication and (4) Innovation. These results contradict the original hypothesised model of Schutte (2015) and the competency model of the SABP, which hold that organisational capabilities should form part of leadership and professional competencies. The results also confirm the findings of the study by Schultz (2010), who found that management skills represent an important competency for HR professionals.

Exploratory factor analysis, using varimax rotation, resulted in four factors for the Service orientation and execution dimension. For both participant language groups, the factors were labelled (1) Talent management, (2) HR risk, (3) HR metrics and (4) HR Service delivery. The results of the target rotations on the rotated component matrices of the four factors showed construct equivalence for both language groups. These results confirm the original hypothesised model of Schutte (2015) in terms of a four-factor solution for the Service orientation and execution dimension. These results also partially confirm the HR capabilities section of the SABP model, except that Strategic impact should not form part of the Service orientation and execution dimension.

Exploratory factor analysis, using varimax rotation, resulted in four factors for the Business intelligence dimension. For both participant language groups, the factors were labelled (1) Strategic impact, (2) HR business knowledge, (3) HR business acumen and (4) HR technology. The results of the target rotations on the rotated component matrices of the four factors showed construct equivalence for both language groups. All factors showed excellent reliabilities. These results partially confirm the original three-factor model of Schutte (2015), but add the factor Business acumen, resulting in a four-factor solution for the Business intelligence dimension. The results are also in line with the findings of Van Wyk (2006) and Schultz (2010), who found that business knowledge is an important HR professional competency in the South African context.

Based on the above results, the framework shown in Figure 2 is proposed for the assessment of competencies of HR professionals.

This research makes important theoretical, methodological and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this research makes an important contribution towards knowledge on the importance of HR competencies in the South African workplace. This research further confirms the validity of the HRM Professional Competency Model, which can be applied in the multicultural South African setting. Finally, this research presents an HRM competence measure that can be used to detect competence levels of HRM practitioners in South African organisations, in order to take corrective measures where necessary.

This research has some limitations. Firstly, limited empirical research exists on the application of HRM competencies in South African workplaces, which made interpretation of
the results difficult. Secondly, this research was conducted in the South African context only and the results cannot be generalised to other countries.

For future research, it is recommended that this research be expanded to other African and international countries for further validation. This sample only tested construct equivalence between English and indigenous language groups. For future research, it is recommended that the sample be expanded to include Afrikaans-speaking individuals, to test for further equivalence. Future research can benefit from testing the interactive relationship between HR practices and key individual and organisational variables.

In conclusion, this research proved the validity of a new HR competence measure that can be used to detect the level of competencies of HR professionals in the workplace. Moreover, the results of this research also showed that HR competencies should be made more visible to younger generations in the workplace, to counteract their turnover intentions. HR practitioners and managers are therefore encouraged to assess the current levels of HR competence and professionalism, to enhance their value-add and strategic contribution to South African organisations.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors’ contributions

This article is based on the doctoral study of N.S. (North-West University), for which N.B. (North-West University; Nyenrode Business University) was the co-supervisor. N.S compiled the article and N.B. and L.S. provided editorial inputs.

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