



Understanding the Contemporary HR Function

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Signed: J.Bowen

Date: 31/1/2021



Objectives

- ☐ Understand the role and key objectives of the HR function
- ☐ Understand the different models of delivering HR services
- ☐ Understand the role of ethics in HR management
- ☐ Understand how HR's contribution to the organisation can be measured



LO1 – The Role and Key Objectives of the HR Function



The Purpose?

HR Strategy
and
business
objectives

Decision
Making

Enhance
Performance

The purpose of the HR function is to effectively manage people and their performance, enhance the organisation's performance, and make ethical-based decisions, by aligning HR strategies with business objectives (Taylor and Woodhams, 2016).



{ Objectives }

* Responsibility can vary on level
and role

HR Professionals are involved in the everyday function of People Management, ranging from organisational design, supporting line managers through the employee life cycle, to talent planning and development (Taylor and Woodhams, 2016).

Although, during a survey conducted by CIPD (2007) (as cited in Taylor and Woodhams, 2016) research showed the key objectives for HR is to recruit and retain, develop potential, improve performance management, and increase employee engagement.

Further objectives include reputation-building, promoting being an ethical employer, ensuring legal compliance, and focusing on employee well-being. (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).

However, the responsibility of a HR Professional can vary depending on their level and job role (CIPD, 2013a).



Strategic Approach

- Communicating and Implementing Objectives
- Enhance performance – Resourcing, Developing, Rewards
- Future-Focussed

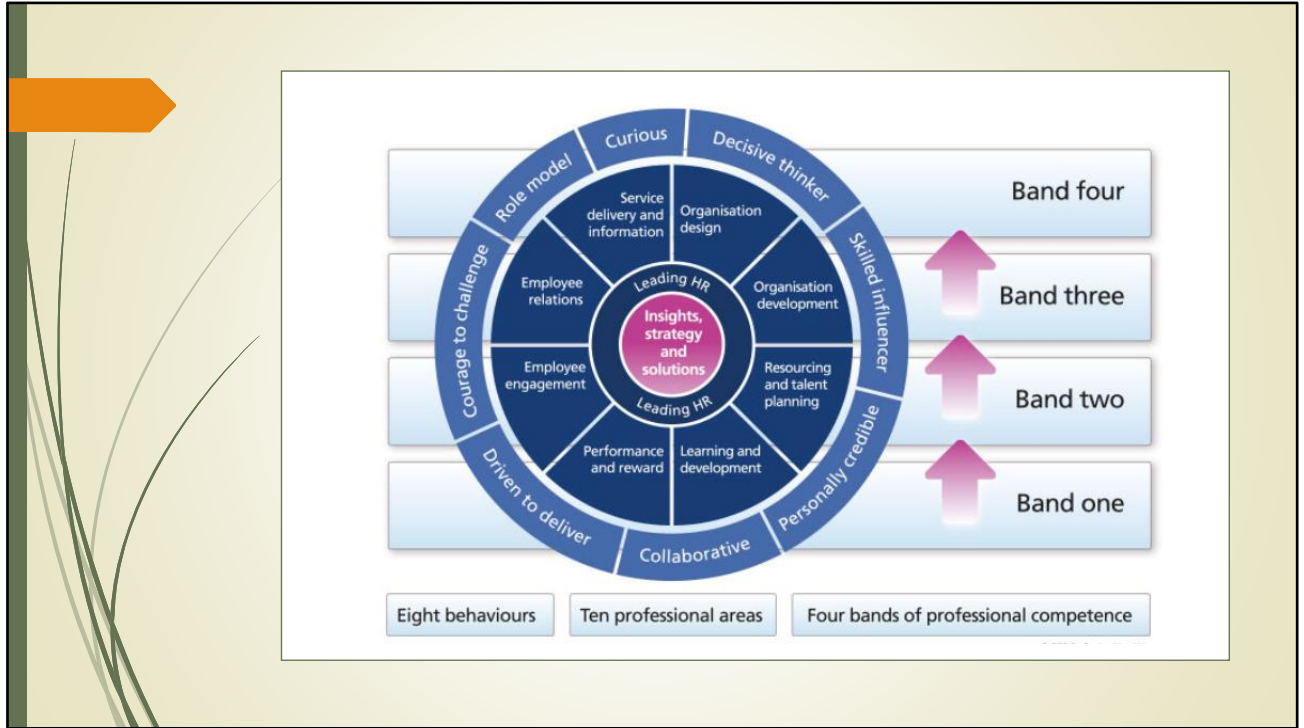
As well as dealing with the day-to-day people activities, HR management is becoming more a strategic profession. They are seen as important assets in the delivery of organisation's strategy through communicating and implementing the objectives, and looking at ways to enhance business performance through resourcing, development, and better reward packages (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).

Effective HR Professionals are continually looking to find new strategic ways of working whilst remaining future-focussed, all within a competitive, ever-

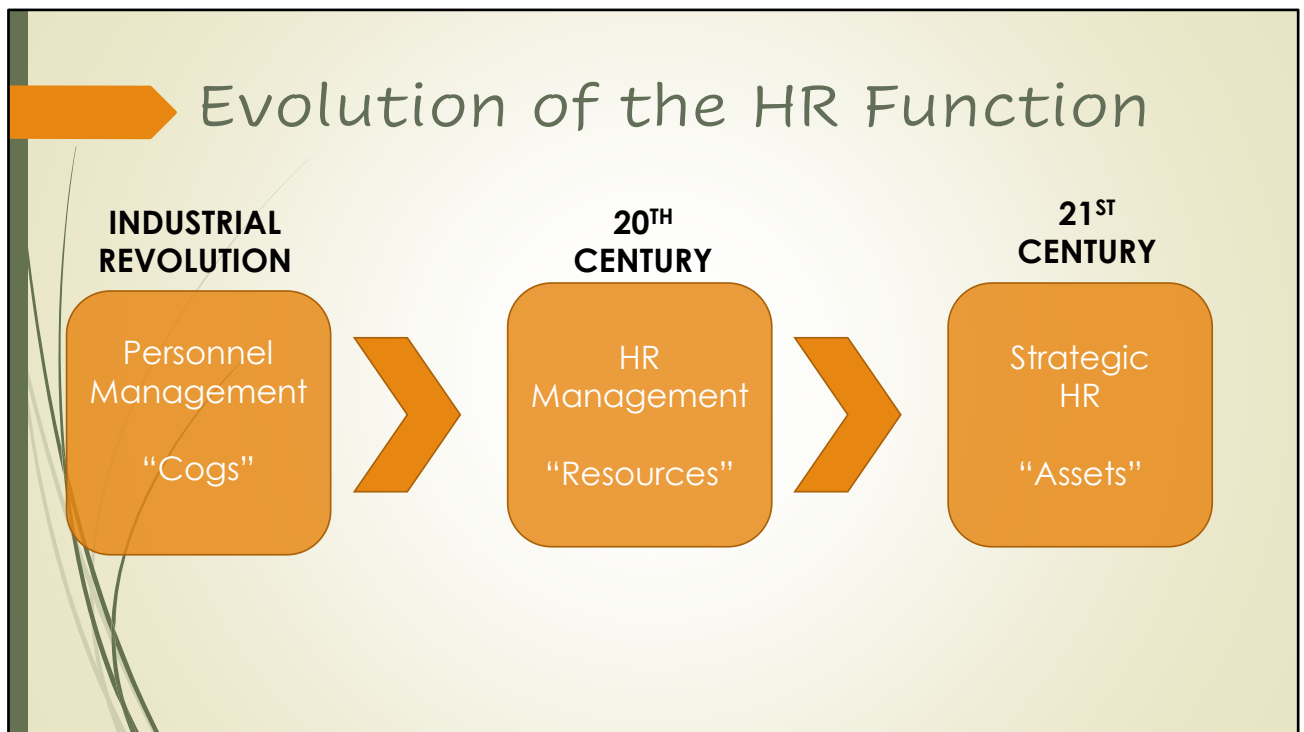
changing, and unpredictable environment (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).



HR continuously need to alter and adapt their priorities to the needs of the world around them (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016) especially during the current COVID pandemic. This was highlighted in the CIPD People Profession Survey (2020b). This research showed the shift in importance prior to the pandemic from employee engagement, health & wellbeing, and L&D activities, to now focussing on health & wellbeing, employee engagement and employee retention; showing just how adaptable to change HR Professionals must be (CIPD, 2018a).



Underpinning the HR Profession is the CIPD Profession Map, highlighting the knowledge, skills and behaviours HR Professionals must model and the core areas of HR they must deliver to add value to the organisation. (CIPD, 2013a)



During the Industrial Revolution Personnel Management was implemented into large organisations, such as factories and the government. The role was designed to look after the wages and wellbeing of employees, as well as the basic fundamentals, including recruitment and training.

Personnel management then developed to HR Management towards the end of the 20th Century, with the focus now on developing effective reward packages that influence and motivate colleagues to

enhance productivity. Employees were now being seen as valuable resources to the business rather than 'cogs'.

Throughout the 21st Century, the profession was seen as more a strategic role, and colleagues were seen as vital assets to business success (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).

Using a strategic framework, Strategic HR Management (SHRM) became responsible for aligning business and individual goals, delivering fair reward packages, improving performance, and shaping the organisation's strategy (CIPD, 2020a).



With HR now becoming more a strategic function and focussing on longer-term activities meant the responsibility for employee-related issues and short-term activities now sat with the line managers to deliver (CIPD, 2020b).

As Strategic HR Management focuses on enhancing business performance and adding value, the importance of effective training, engaging, motivating colleagues, and encouraging development has now become a vital aspect of the

role (Taylor and Woodhams, 2016).

However, in the forever-evolving climate, strategies will continually need to be adapted to the needs and changes of environmental impacts (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016), such as Brexit or COVID pandemic.



Organisational Change

- Design
 - Communicating
 - Implementing
 - Reviewing
- Requires skills and knowledge to land change successfully

HR Profession's also play a vital role in the success of the change management process including designing the change, communicating to colleagues and other stakeholders, implementing the change, and reviewing progress (CIPD, 2020c). Having the right skills and knowledge HR Professionals can effectively apply the right techniques needed to be able to support and manage the change process successfully (CIPD, 2013a).

When contributing to the design and implementation of change, HR professionals will also support the project team during the initial stages by

offering advice to leaders - providing training where needed, understanding employee concerns, and reviewing the impacts change is having on HR activities (such as absence levels or grievances raised) (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).



Why is change needed?

The importance for organisational change is a must-needed factor to ensure businesses grow successfully and remain competitive (CIPD, 2020b). Research highlights organisations are consistently experiencing minor changes regularly but undergo major changes every 3 years (CIPD, 2011, as cited in Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).

The needs for change can also be influenced by the labour market and economic impacts, competitor pressure and new employment law initiatives

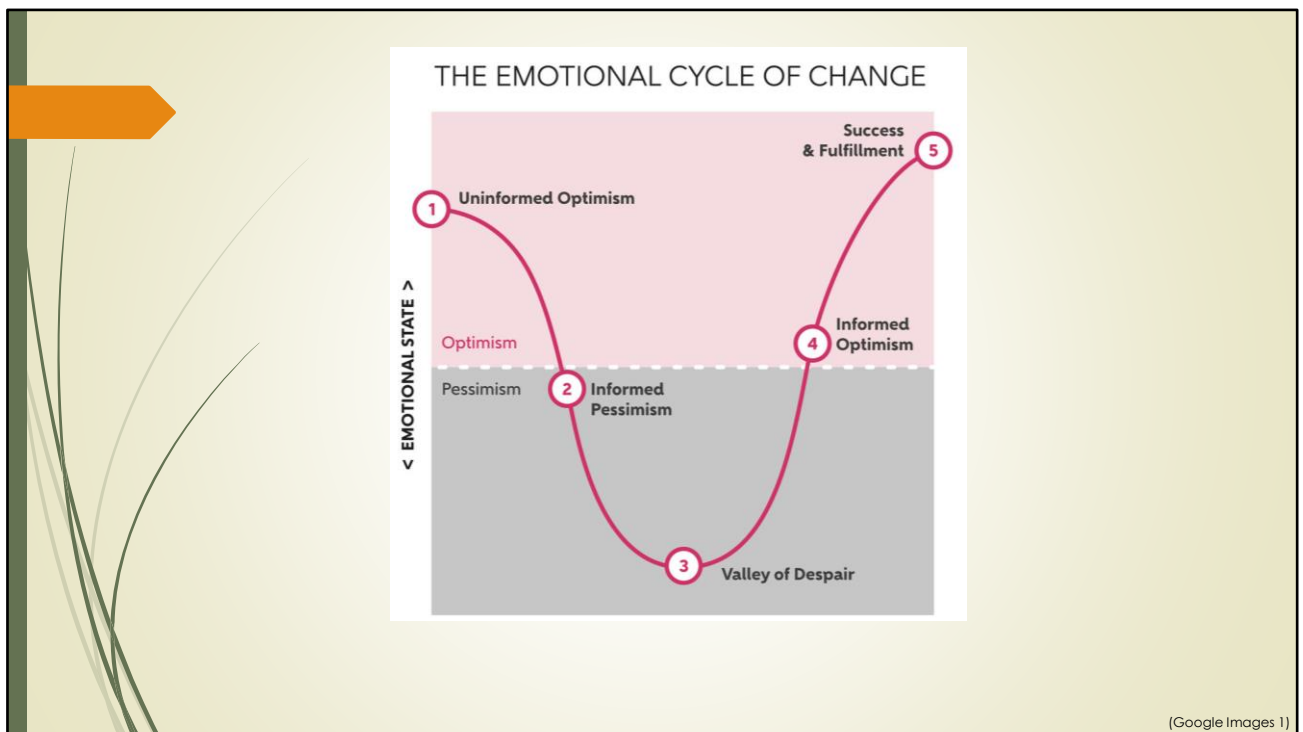
(Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016). Advances in technology, employee diversity and social responsibility are also common factors to change (CIPD, 2020b).

- 
- ✓ Make best decisions
 - ✓ Support business

FAILURE LEADS TO LOSS OF:

- × Jobs
- × Credibility
- × Commitment

By considering these impacts and working with an array of stakeholders they will be able to support the business in making the best decisions. It is HR's responsibility to support the business in effectively delivering the change, failure to do so could lead the business face long term impacts such as job losses, loss of company credibility, and lack of motivation and commitment from colleagues (CIPD, 2020c).



However, as people deal with change in various ways it is important HR Professional's understand how change affects others; by being aware of how colleagues are feeling, monitoring reactions and those going through the 'emotional cycle of change' and be able to support them through the process (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).

To minimise these uncontrollable elements, such as individual or group resistance, HR can support by creating a culture that welcomes change, listening to

and including colleague's concerns and opinions, and managing any conflict or barriers, such as strikes (CIPD, 2020c).

Lewin's Change Management Model



(Google Images 2)

Lewin's Change Management Model was designed in 1950's to support organisational changes describing a 3-step process to successfully landing change:

1. Unfreezing – organisations recognise change is needed, plan for change and manage any concerns.
2. Changing – organisation's implement change, communicate frequently, support colleagues to understand and welcome the change. However, the transition can take time.
3. Refreezing – once embraced the change is

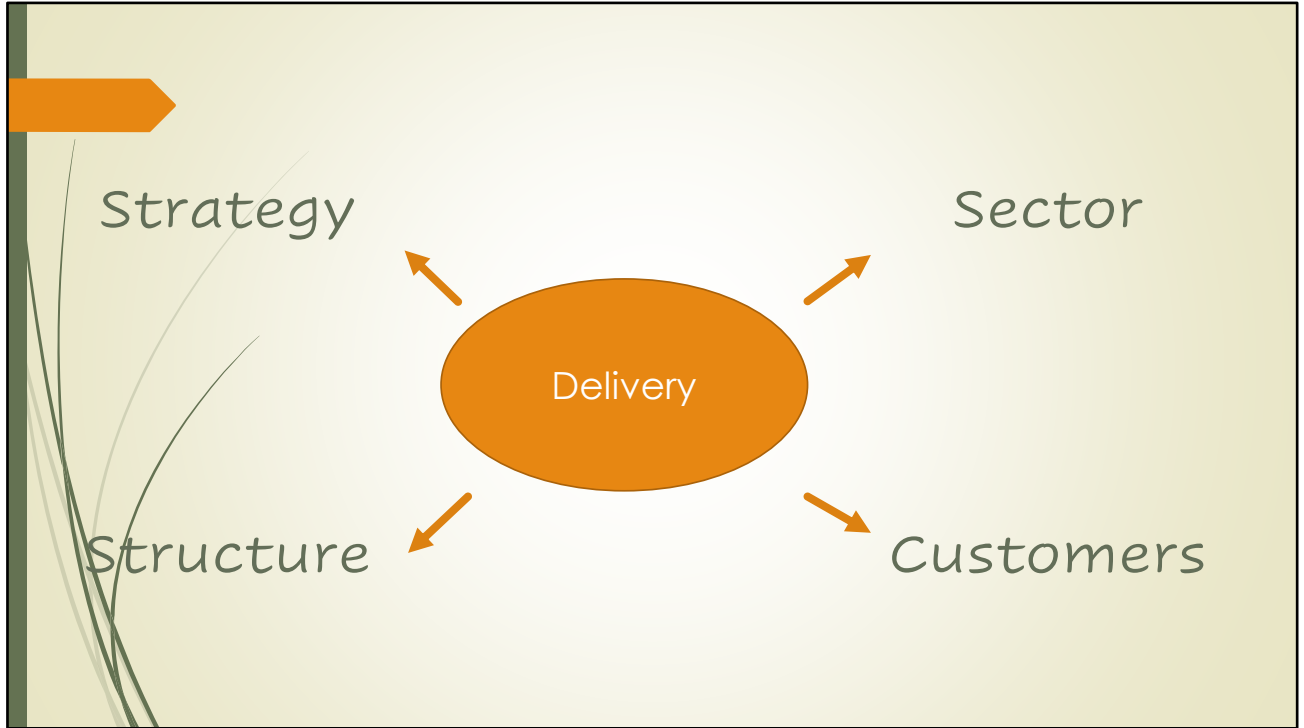
reinforced and stabilised; it is important to celebrate success.

(Mindtools, 2014)

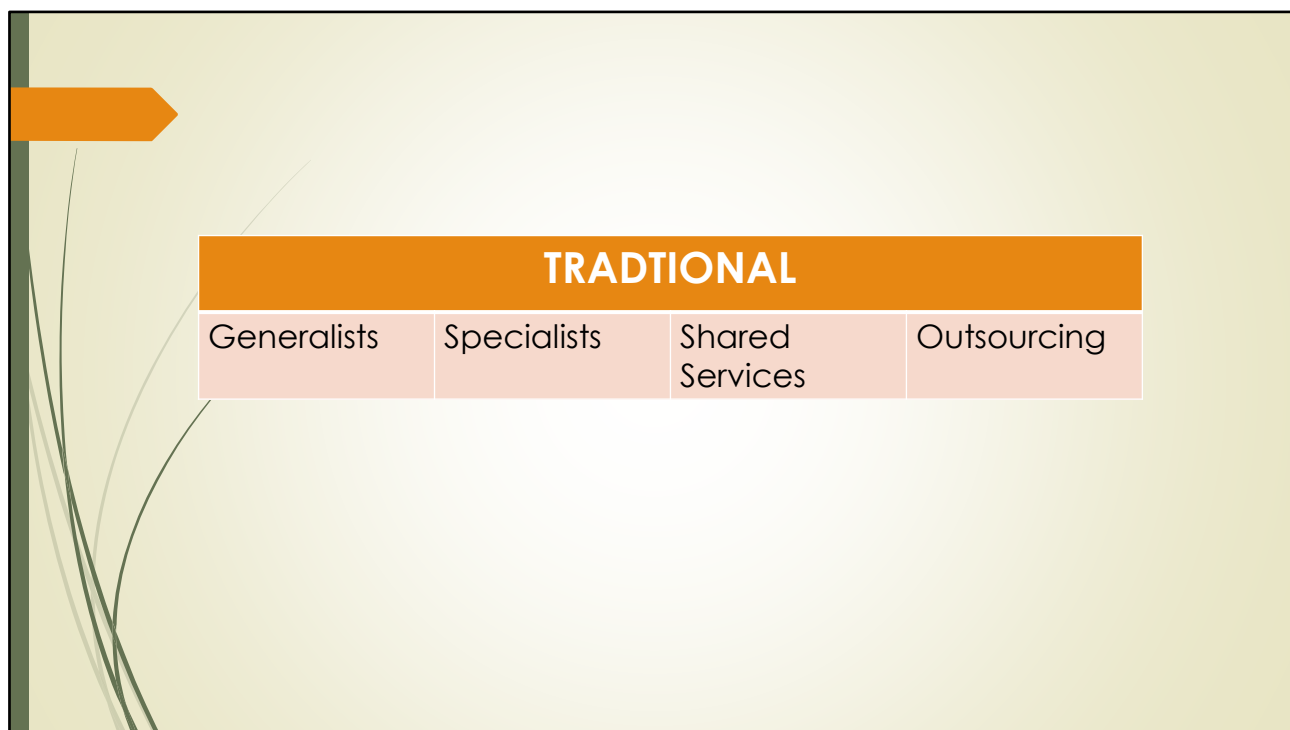
Lewin describes the importance of effectively managing change, and ensuring change is successfully implemented and accepted in the workplace, as without this, people will revert back to their old routine (APM, 2017).



LO2 – The Delivery of HR

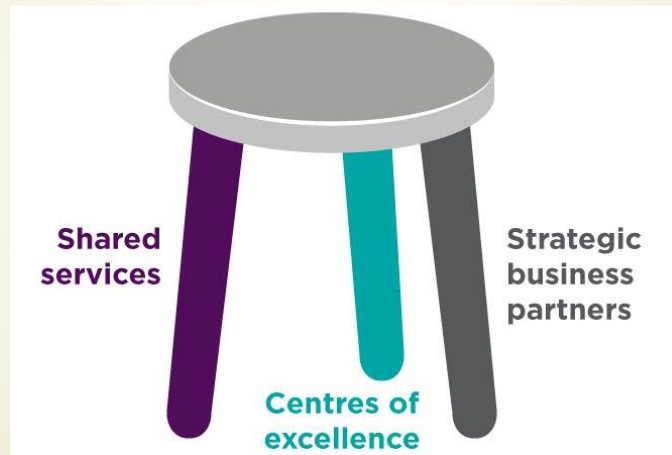


The delivery of HR varies from one organisation to the next, meaning there are many models used in organising the HR function (Swift, 2016). The delivery of the HR function can depend on the organisation's strategy, structure, needs of the customers, as well as the size and sector (CIPD, 2015).



Many delivery models have been designed over the years to support the HR function (Marchington, *et al*, 2016), however CIPD (2016) (as cited by Swift, 2016) suggest the most commonly used models are the traditional structure model and Ulrich's 'three-legged stool'. The traditional structure consists of Generalists and Specialists. Although the structure can also include Outsourcing – which are more popular in SME's and involves both Generalists and Specialists, and Shared Services – which are more cost-effective and provide high quality service, mainly used in a large organisation (Swift, 2016).

Ulrich's 3-legged stool



(CIPD, 2020h)

Ulrich's 'three-legged stool' is based on the structure of HR Business Partners (HRBP), Centres of expertise and Shared Services and has been seen as 'best practice' (CIPD, 2020h). HRBP collaborate with business leaders to achieve business objectives. Centres of Expertise consist of a small HR team with specialist knowledge used to support the developing and delivery of tasks. Shared Services handle 'transactional' activities across the business such as recruiting or monitoring absence (Swift, 2016).



LINE MANAGERS

- Large Organisations
- Day-to-day activities
- Influence overall performance
- HR focus on long term strategies

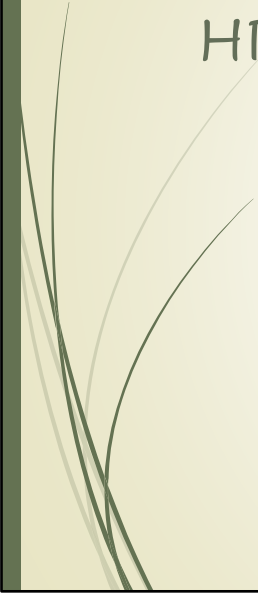
Particularly in larger organisation's Line Managers are also becoming increasingly more responsible in delivering and implementing the day-to-day HR function. However, the importance of how this is done has great influence on employee attitude and performance, which in turn can affect the overall organisational performance (CIPD, 2020d).

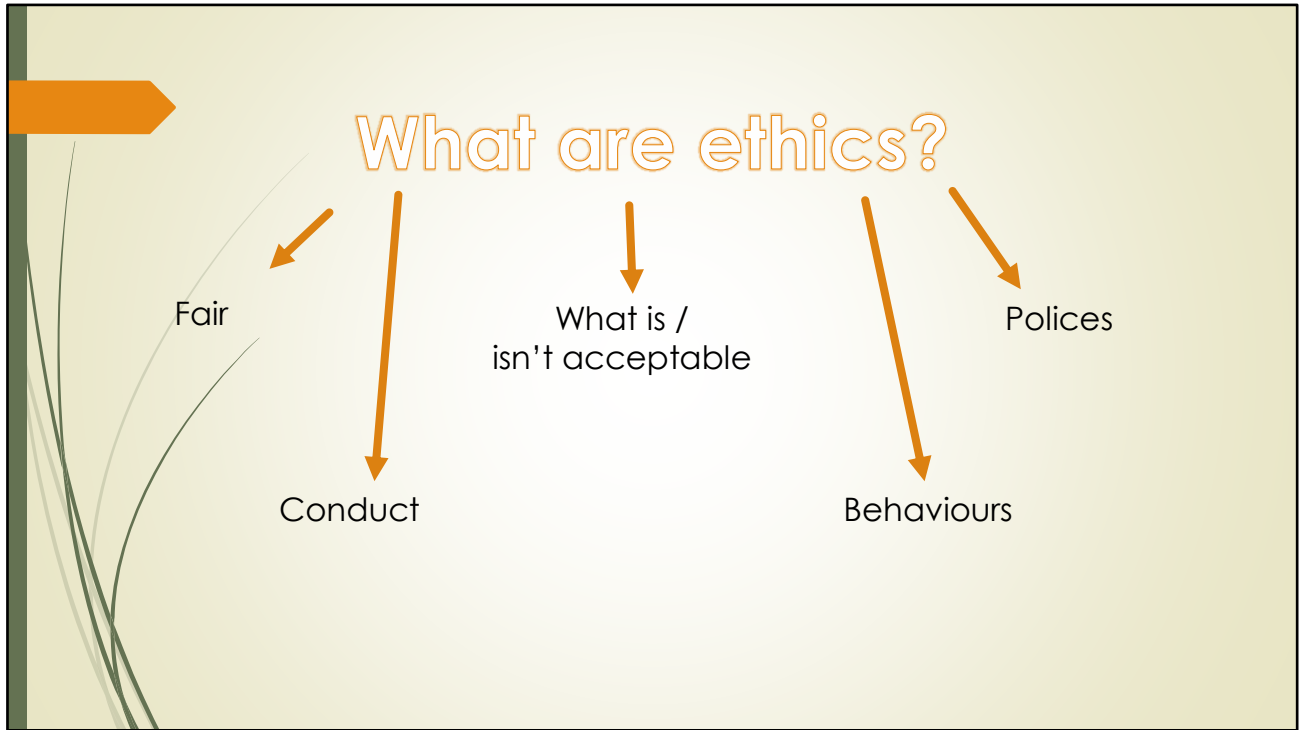
However, providing Line Manager's with the right training and support can alleviate workload of managing day-to-day people activities from the HR

team, allowing HR Professionals to focus on the longer-term strategies (Swift, 2016).



LO3 – The role of ethics in HR



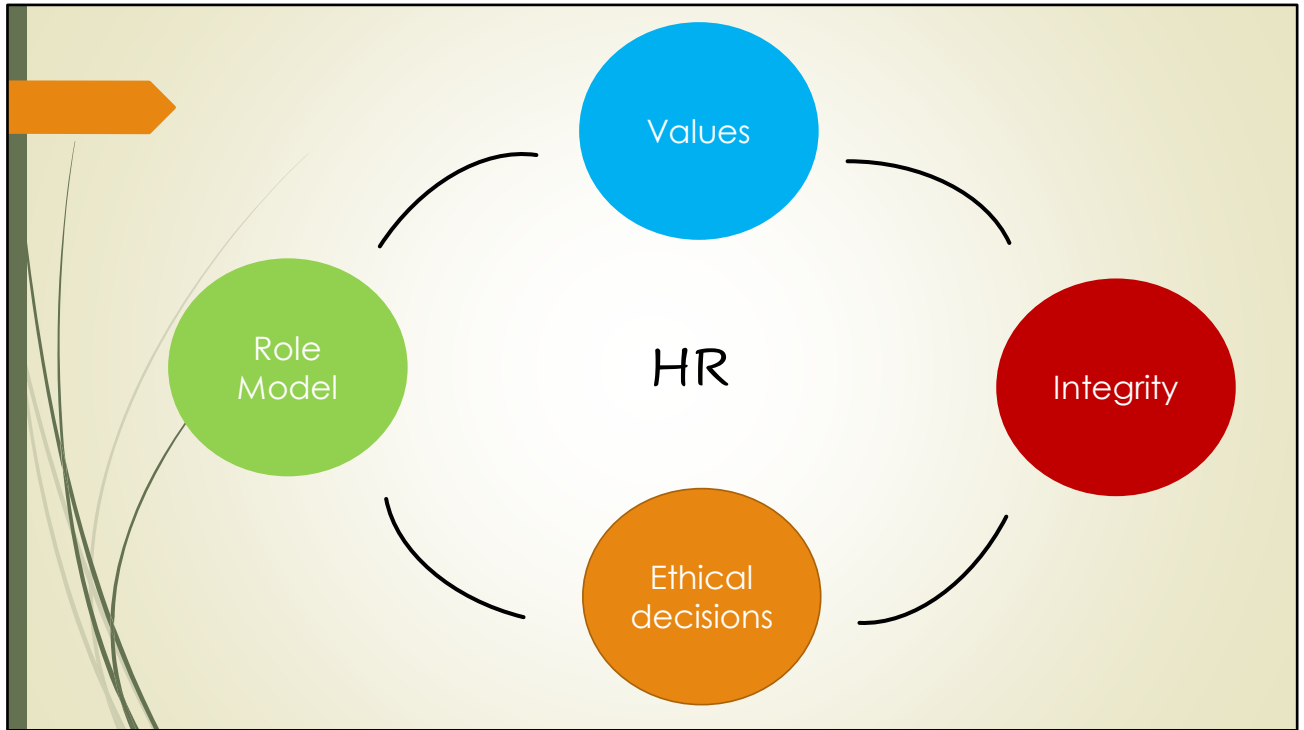


Ethics are described as the moral principles within an organisation detailing what behaviours are and aren't acceptable (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016). Kew and Stredwick (2010) (cited in Taylor and Woodhams, 2016) suggests there are 3 elements to ethics; acting fairly, knowing what is and what isn't acceptable, and the policies and procedures that reinforce acceptable behaviour between individuals and groups.



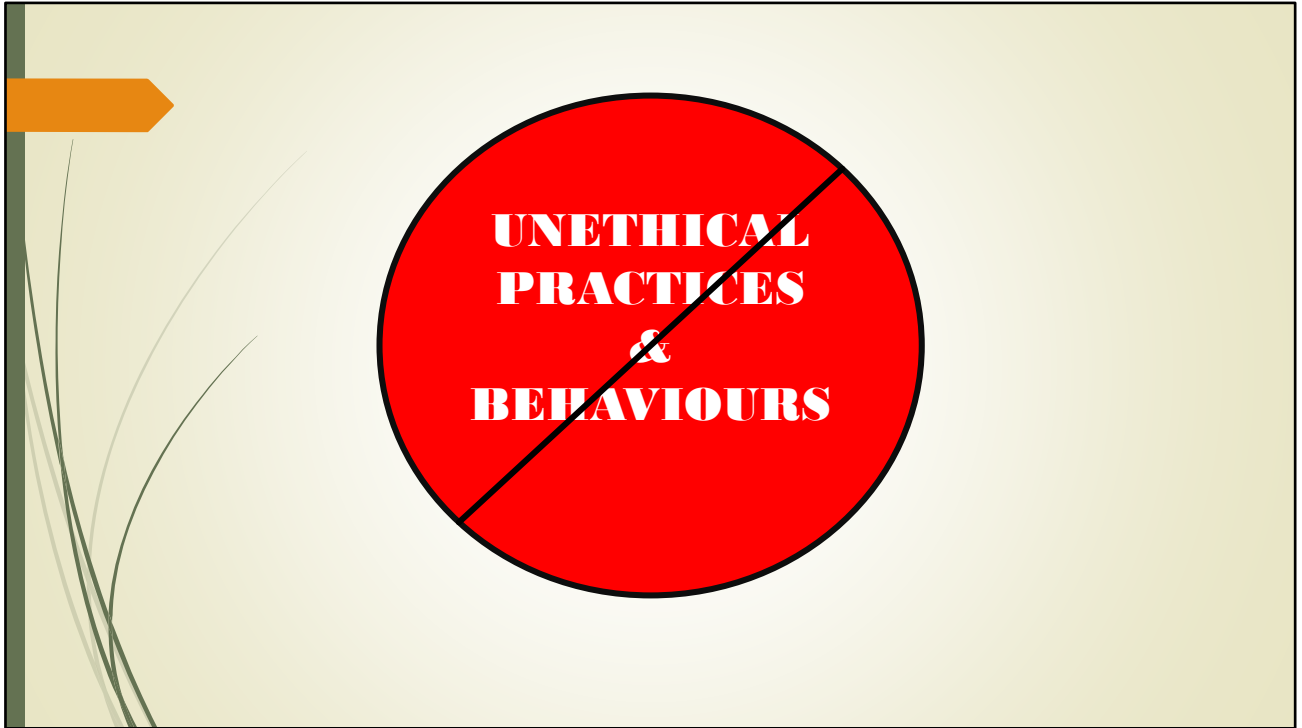
Ethics enhance business performance

HR Professionals (HRPs) are vital in creating a culture of trust and transparency (CIPD, 2020e) with colleagues and customers, as well as developing and maintaining organisational relationships, which together can enhance business performance and reputation (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).



Acting ethically is a key behaviour required by all HRPs as they are trusted upon to act with integrity and to be fair at all times (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016). They are seen as the specialists in people and play an important part in influencing and role modelling organisational values, and always making ethical-based decisions (CIPD, 2019).

Although, 25% of HRPs said they would compromise their values when pressured by the business (CIPD, 2020b).

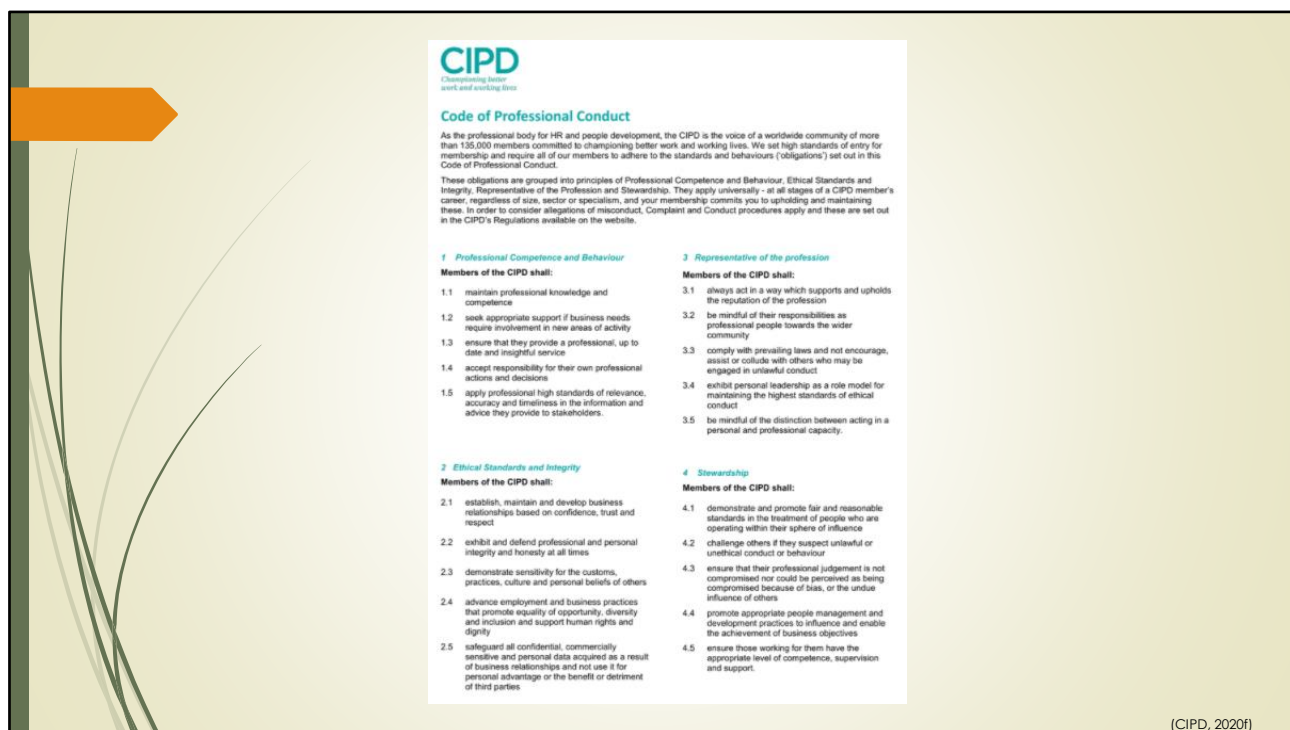


Unethical practices can be detrimental to the culture, the brand, and the reputation (CIPD, 2019), so it is important employers treat their colleagues how they themselves would like to be treated (Taylor, 2017), to always remain open and honest, and seek opinion's from colleagues first before implementing any changes (Perkins, 2017).

The cause of unethical behaviour varies from one organisation to the next, but can be influenced by a number of factors, such as personal and social behaviours, management leadership, the culture, and policies and procedures. Examples of unethical

conduct includes theft, bullying and harassment, not following policies, poor attendance, and high absence levels (CIPD, 2019). All of which can influence where people will want to work or shop (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).

However, HR can support employers to avoid unethical behaviour such as reinforcing policies, improving the culture (CIPD, 2019) and acknowledging the importance of the relationships they have with stakeholders both internally and externally (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016).



Within the CIPD Code of Conduct, it states the importance or role modelling ethical practice and making ethical decisions (CIPD, 2020f) which is essential in protecting the integrity of the HR profession and organisation (CIPD, 2012).



Organisations also have a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in making long-term positive and ethical impacts on society and the environment. CSR projects tend to focus on 4 areas; colleagues, the financial market, community, and the environment (CIPD, n.d).

CSR schemes can also have a positive impact on waste and fuel efficiency, building trust with colleagues, customers, and suppliers, as well as supporting employee engagement and well-being.

All of which can enhance brand reputation and reduce the risk of corporate scandals (CIPD, 2013b).

HR play an important role in implementing CSR by ensuring it is included in the HR strategy through policies and procedures, promoting organisational activities such as volunteering programmes, and by emphasizing the link between the organisations values and culture (CIPD, 2013b).



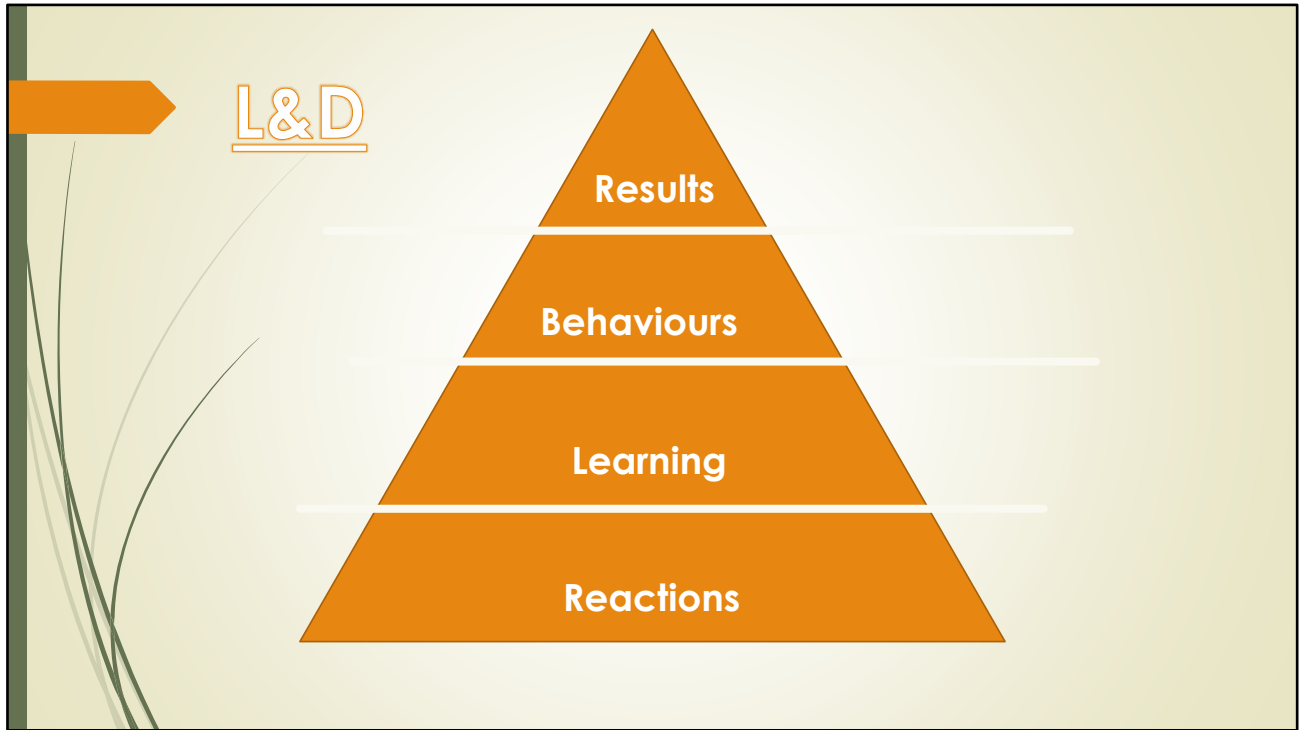
LO4 – Evaluating HR's contribution



Through ethical practice HR Professionals need to be seen as adding value, improving productivity, and reducing costs (Swift, 2016).

HR's contribution can be measured against a range of indicators such as the opinions of stakeholders (Marchington et al, 2016), reviewing customer feedback, and comparing data against previous years' figures as well as competitor performance (Swift, 2016).

The use of a business 'scorecard', KPI performances, recruitment costs, absence levels and training spend can also be factors in the evaluation of their role (Wilkinson and Taylor, 2016). However, although these quantitative measures can provide useful insight to overall organisation performance, it can be argued that these activities are unreliable in measuring HR's contribution as these KPI's tend to be delivered by line managers and not by HR Professional's (Marchington et al, 2016).



The effectiveness of Specialist roles such as Learning and Development (L&D) can also be evaluated as they play a vital part in colleague performance, as they provide them with the knowledge and skills needed to reach their potential and succeed in their role, which in turn can impact the overall organisational performance (CIPD, 2020g).

L&D's contribution can be measured in many ways, such as using the Kirkpatrick model which evaluates the input of L&D through Reactions, Behaviours, Learning, and Results, or by reviewing and monitoring employee participation and satisfaction

levels (CIPD, 2020g)



The effectiveness of the HR function also relies on the link between the HR strategy and organisational objectives, only when planned and implemented successfully can HR Professionals be seen as being effective (Swift, 2016).



Research into HR Practices and Organisational Performance

Research into the link between HR practices and organisational performance has been carried out for many years by many of people (Taylor, 2016).

One research project conducted by West et al (2006) (as cited in Taylor and Woodhams, 2016) highlighted that effective HR practices can have a positive impact on organisational performance.

Carried out in 61 hospitals in England, the Chief

Executive and HR Directors completed a questionnaire regarding the HR strategy, employee involvement and HR Policies and Practices.

The study concluded that appraisals, team-work and robust HR policies all played a vital role in lowering patient mortality.



Research continued..

Another study conducted by Mostafa (2017) (Warwick Business School, University of Warwick) explored the relationship between high-performing HR practices (HPHRP) such as training, communication, and career progression against employee attitudes and behaviours.

The research was gathered from a local welsh government across 8 departments over 6 months using a two-wave method. 1755 employees took part at “Time 1” equating to 27% response rate.

Questionnaires were used to gather data to understand the impact HPHRP can have on positive employee outcomes, such as, job satisfaction and employee retention.

6 months later at “Time 2” only 629 of the 1755 employees agreed to take part again. Research concluded that HPHRP does in fact have a positive link to employee outcomes but also showed that other factors such as job role and manager support also play a key role in employee satisfaction and managers should focus on creating an engaged culture and concentrate on effectively implementing HR practices.

However, due to the study being conducted within the public sector, the low response rate, and the average respondents being 65% of males, it was questioned how reliable the results were, and it could be hard to replicate and generalise in another setting.

On the whole, Combs et al (2006) (as cited in Taylor and Woodhams, 2016) suggests effective HR

practices on average can achieve a 4.6% increase in profit, and a 4.4% reduction in colleague turnover showing the value HR Professionals can add to an organisation.



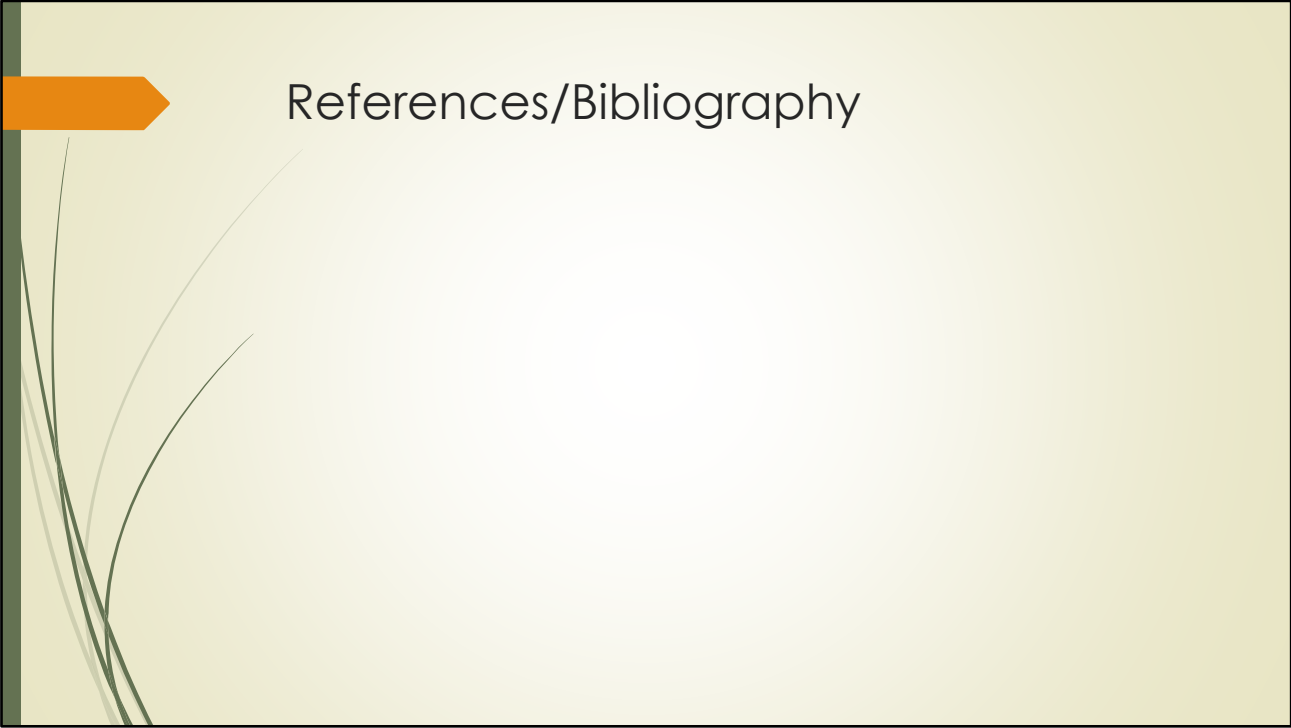
In conclusion..

In conclusion, making ethical decisions, role modelling the values and creating an open and honest culture that is also welcoming of change is vital to being a credible and effective HR Professional.

Regardless of how the HR function is delivered, the overall aim remains the same, and that is to support the organisation in enhancing their performance, achieving its goals, and adhering to their Corporate Social Responsibility all whilst promoting the ethics

of the company.

The success of HR's contribution can only be evaluated once the values and contribution the organisation makes can HR be assessed (CIPD, 2018b).



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