

# WHAT IS GOOD HR?

Discussion Paper

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## Acknowledgements

This paper is an outcome of AHRI member contributions to a survey distributed during March-April 2014. It also relied on the expertise of a number of AHRI advisory panels. In particular, the contribution of ACT State President Tanya Hammond & and Western Australia State President Kim Schofield needs special mention, as does the oversight of Anne-Marie Dolan, the AHRI Manager of Development & Research.

In addition, special mention should be made of the excellent HR research data of the US-based RBL Group under the leadership of Professor Dave Ulrich. For a number of years it has informed AHRI's professional practice model.

# FOREWORDS



The findings revealed in this discussion paper include some interesting demographics. As with most of our member surveys in recent times, more than 70 per cent of respondents are female, confirming the trend that has seen the gender profile of the HR profession move from around 90 per cent male to less than 30 per cent since the 1970s.

It is pleasing to note that around a quarter of respondents indicate they report to the CEO in their organisation, suggesting a strong contribution from senior practitioners to the survey. And it is equally pleasing to note that more than two thirds of respondents operate as HR practitioners supported by either no reports at all or a maximum of two people reporting to them, confirming that a great many Australian HR departments are running lean. That's a good thing, of course, as long as they have sufficient resources to make an impact.

And impact is what much of the rest of the paper attempts to get at. What are the practices that HR practitioners regard as critical and what do they believe are the expectations on the way they behave professionally in order to make an impact?

It is interesting to note that the expectations on new entrants to the profession list five transactional areas of practice but also list 'workplace ethics and integrity'. It is pleasing to see that quality is so highly rated by their peers at stage one of an HR career. It might well be something that is difficult to tune into later if it is not front of mind early.

It was also gratifying to note that entry-level practitioners are expected to be role models in seven behaviours that include being personally credible, taking responsibility for actions and decisions, and acknowledging errors. These are vital behaviours to internalise early because a failure to do so affects the regard in which the person is held as well as the profession to which she or he belongs. In turn those behaviours will affect the degree of influence which HR is able to exercise in the business.

I was interested to see that respondents have tended to indicate a preference for disciplines such as organisational behaviour, leadership and psychology among the top items that they see as ideal backgrounds for a career in HR. Without in any way denigrating the appropriateness of those fields of study, and being an economist with an accounting background myself, I was somewhat disappointed to see that only 10 per cent indicated a preference for economics or microeconomics as an ideal background for HR. As a profession that is increasingly called upon to be credible, influential and business driven, professional expertise outside the human sciences could well complement those disciplines and be a career plus.

Next year the questions from the AHRI member survey that informed this discussion paper will be put to a CEO member database so that we can compare from an outside view what others think about what we should be doing and how we should be doing it. In the interim, I welcome comment on this paper.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Wilson".

**Peter Wilson AM**

Chairman and National President  
Australian Human Resources Institute



As a report on a survey of nearly 1000 members of the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI), this discussion paper amounts to the first stage in a collective view from the inside by HR professionals of the expectations around HR practice and the behaviour of their fellow HR practitioners. The second stage, scheduled for completion in 2015, will look at the question of expectations of HR from the outside perspective of chief executives within business.

We are very conscious at AHRI that rapid developments in technology and communication have exposed Australian enterprises to competitive pressures on a global scale that are now reflected in how work is done, how workplaces operate, and how the workforce of the immediate future needs to adapt.

I notice that fewer than 30 per cent of survey respondents presently believe that AHRI needs to 'work with global bodies to develop international standards and certifications'. I would have agreed with the majority sample perspective a few years ago but in view of the changing international landscape, there might need to be some robust discussion on this issue in the near future.

As players with the potential to shape the way organisations position themselves with respect to these changing rules of engagement, HR professionals are at a high-water mark. In this shifting environment, HR practitioners will need to ensure that they possess the broader range of capabilities that business increasingly demands, and that they display the agility required to become the trustees of high people performance within organisations that contribute to competitive advantage and sustainability.

As the leader of the Australian HR Institute, I commend this discussion paper to you in the hope and expectation that you see it as the beginning of a conversation about the role that our association can play in looking to a wider horizon involving alliances with our national counterparts in other countries and further discussion around models of certification, accreditation and collaboration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lyn Goodear'.

**Lyn Goodear**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Australian Human Resources Institute

# WHAT IS GOOD HR?

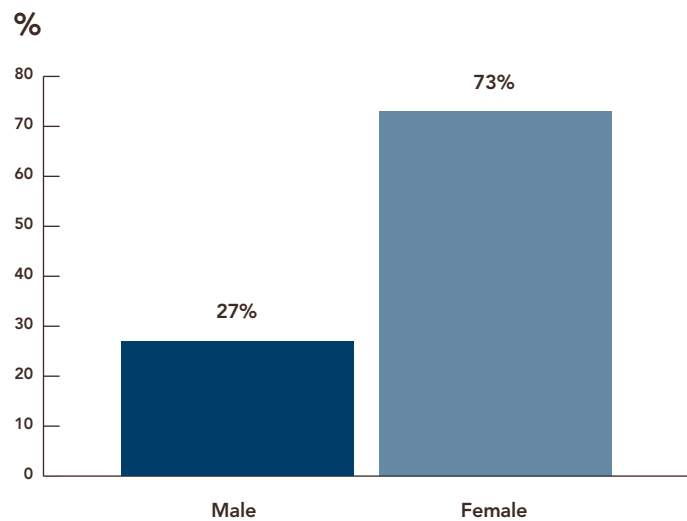
## Overview

This paper is based on the findings of a survey of members of the Australian Human Resources Institute that was conducted online in March and April 2014.

A total of 936 respondents returned answers to the survey, and responses were treated anonymously.

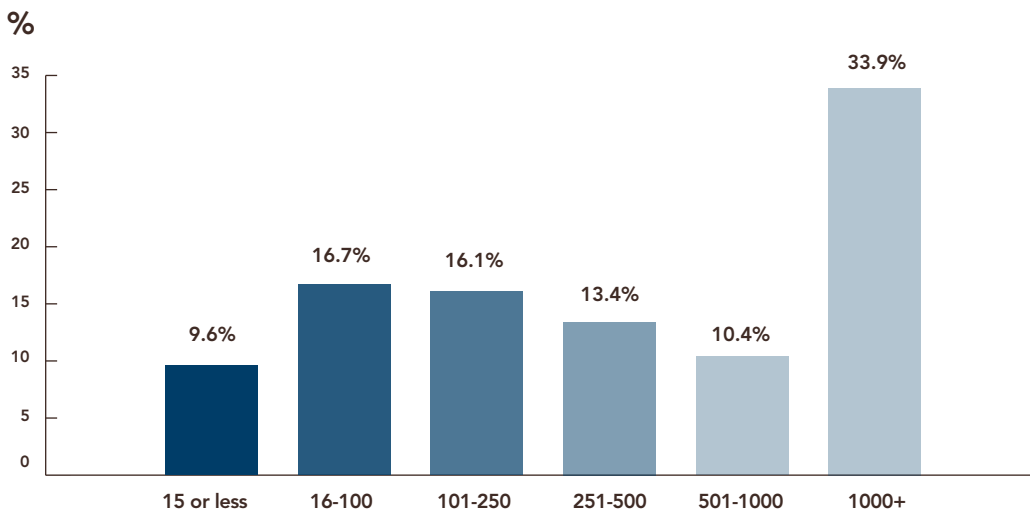
## Respondent Demographics

**FIGURE 1. GENDER**  
934 RESPONSES



Almost three-quarters (73%) of respondents were female, and the remainder (27%) male, as seen in Figure 1. These figures on the gender profile of the profession contrast markedly from the occupational profile of 40 years ago. In the 1970s males represented more than nine out of ten (91%) professionals in HR (then usually referred to as personnel). By the end of the 1980s women occupied around a third of positions and now that has reversed with men roughly making up that proportion of practitioners, and women dominating the ranks.

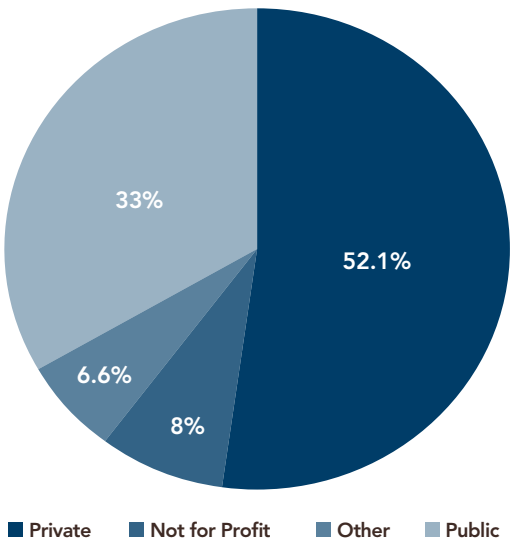
**FIGURE 2. ORGANISATION SIZE**  
918 RESPONSES



According to Figure 2, approximately a third of respondents (34%) work in organisations of 1000 or more employees with another quarter (24%) in organisation of between 250 and 1000 employees. That leaves another third (33%) from organisation that employ between 16 and 250 employees, and fewer than one in ten (9%) from organisations employing fewer than 15 workers.

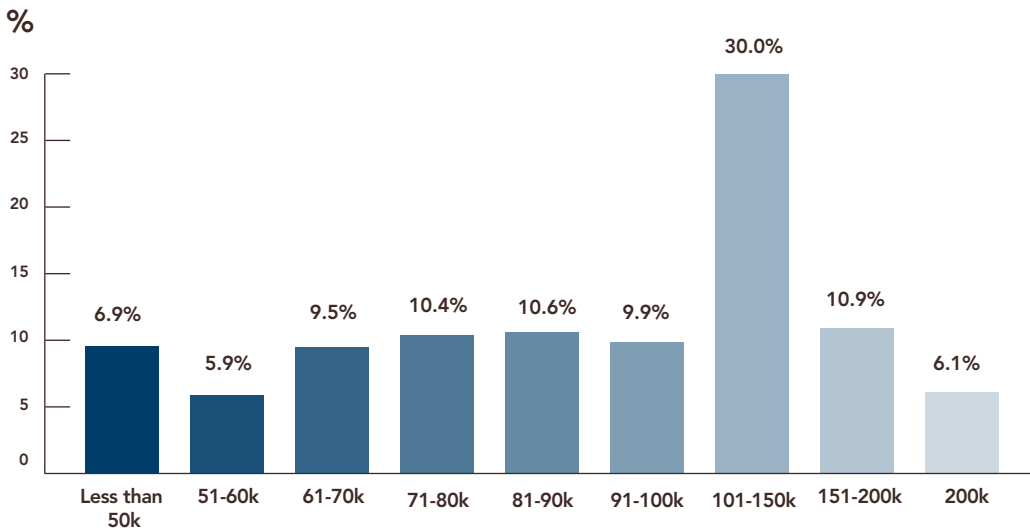
# Respondent Demographics

FIGURE 3. ORGANISATION SECTOR  
910 RESPONSES



More than half (52%) of the respondents come from the private sector and a third (33%) from the public sector, the remaining being not-for-profits (8%) and other, as indicated in Figure 3.

FIGURE 4. SALARY  
918 RESPONSES



On the matter of pay, Figure 4 shows that more than half (53%) of respondents are on salaries of \$100k per annum or less. Just under half (47%) are on salaries over \$101k, of whom 30% are on salaries of \$101-150k.

# Respondent Demographics

TABLE 1. TO WHAT POSITION DOES YOUR POSITION REPORT?

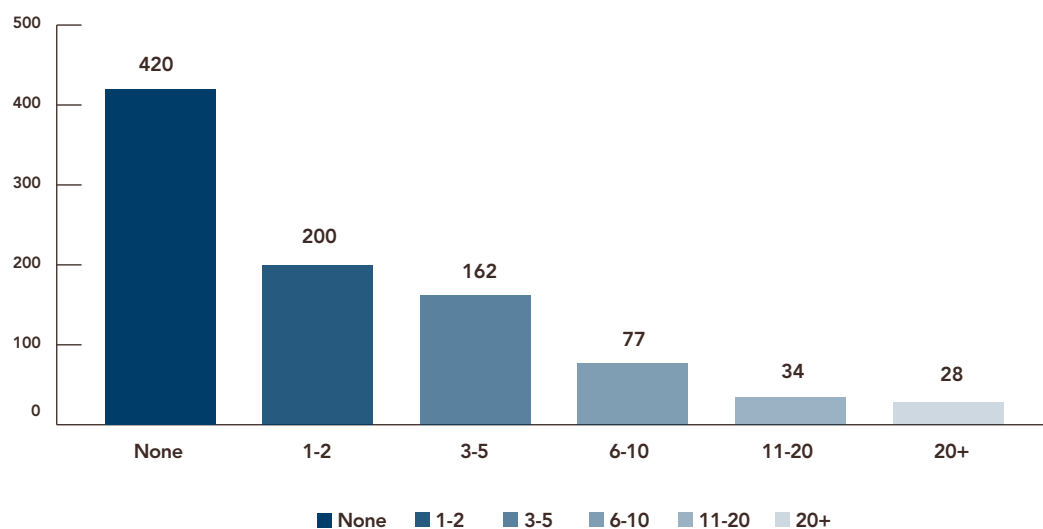
901 RESPONSES

Answer	Count	Percentage
Chief Executive Officer	217	24.08%
HR Manager	174	19.31%
Manager (non-HR or unspecified)	116	12.87%
General Manager (non-HR or unspecified)	72	7.99%
Director (non-HR or unspecified)	71	7.88%
HR Director	34	3.77%
Executives	29	3.22%
Deputy Director	22	2.44%
Chief Finance Officer	20	2.22%
Chief Operating Officer	17	1.89%
Board	12	1.33%
Head of Department	12	1.33%
Senior Advisor	8	0.89%
Partner	7	0.78%
Consultant	4	0.44%
Dean	4	0.44%
Principal	4	0.44%
Advisor	4	0.44%
Chairman	3	0.33%
Managing Partner	3	0.33%
Student	3	0.33%
Business Owner	2	0.22%
Chief HR Officer	2	0.22%
Chief of Staff	2	0.22%
Other	21	2.33%
None	38	4.22%

In terms of the capacity of respondents to exercise influence within the business, Table 1 reveals that nearly a quarter of the sample (24%) report directly to the CEO, 23% report to a HR manager or HR director, and 21% report to either an unspecified general manager (8%) or unspecified manager (13%).

# Respondent Demographics

FIGURE 5. NUMBER OF REPORTS TO RESPONDENTS  
921 RESPONSES



On HR staff reporting to respondents, Figure 5 shows almost half (46%) do not have any employees reporting to them, and just over one-fifth (22%) have only 1-2 positions reporting to them. Approximately one-quarter (26%) have between 3-10 employees reporting to their position. Fewer than 7% of respondents have more than 10 employees reporting to their position.



# HR Areas of Practice

Respondents were asked to rate a number of different areas of HR practice from a list according to what they believe can reasonably be expected of HR practitioners at entry level, mid-career and senior levels of the profession where these levels were defined as follows:

- Entry level (1-3 years) – HR administrator, officer, coordinator, consultant
- Mid-level (3-10 years) – HR consultant, advisor, senior HR consultant, Senior HR advisor, business partner, HR manager
- Senior level (8+ years) – HR manager, senior HR manager, HR executive

Respondents expect entry-level professionals to be able to confidently practise in the following areas:

- Recruitment
- Induction
- OH&S
- Selection and appointment
- HR technology
- Workplace ethics & integrity

Mid-level practitioners on the other hand are expected to be able to confidently practise a greater number of areas:

- HR strategy
- HR planning
- Job analysis & design
- Workforce analytics & planning
- Grievance and discipline
- Exiting the organisation
- Workplace relations
- Learning & development
- Leadership development
- Culture & change management
- Negotiation
- Mediation
- OH&S
- Workplace ethics & integrity
- Governance
- HR technology

Mid-level practitioners are also expected to have achieved a higher level of expertise in the following areas:

- Performance management
- Recruitment
- Induction
- Selection & appointment

For senior-level professionals, there is an expectation that, in addition to high levels of general expertise, they will have specialist knowledge in the following areas:

- Culture & change management
- Leadership development
- Governance

Asked to nominate other areas they believe require particular attention, respondents noted a number of HR practice areas including the following:

- Talent management
- Remuneration and benefits
- Retention and rewards
- Inclusion and diversity
- Organisation development
- Succession planning
- Understanding financials
- HR metrics

# HR Behaviours

Respondents were asked to rate a range of behaviours according to what they believe are required of HR practitioners at different points in their career. The behaviours are rated at behavioural levels in accordance with different stages of practitioners' careers as indicated in Table 2.

On the whole, respondents expect entry-level professionals to be a role model in seven of the behaviours (takes responsibility for actions and decisions, personally credible, professional, approachable and open, follows through on promises, customer focused, acknowledges errors) and demonstrate the remaining thirty-six behaviours.

For mid-level practitioners, respondents expect they will be role models in five of the behaviours, and demonstrate the remaining thirty-eight (courageous, a strong negotiator, politically savvy, a project manager, technologically savvy, authoritative, a decision maker, a business thinker).

Senior level professionals are expected to be role models in all of the behaviours listed.

Respondents were invited to indicate more than one behaviour option when answering this question.

# HR Behaviours

**TABLE 2. BEHAVIOURS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF THE ORGANISATION**  
936 RESPONSES

Behaviour	Entry level		Mid-level		Senior level	
	Behaviour level	Percentage of responses	Behaviour level	Percentage of responses	Behaviour level	Percentage of responses
Curiosity	D	90%	R	51%	R	84%
Resilience	D	85%	R	64%	R	94%
Decisiveness	D	90%	R	51%	R	92%
Skilled in influencing	D	93%	R	51%	R	92%
Personally credible	R	51%	R	79%	R	94%
Takes responsibility for actions and decisions	R	50%	R	81%	R	95%
Collaborative	D	58%	R	74%	R	90%
Driven to deliver	D	65%	R	66%	R	89%
Courageous	D	83%	D	50%	R	83%
Role model	D	69%	R	69%	R	91%
Committed to ongoing professional development	D	53%	R	72%	R	89%
Committed to retaining and growing technical expertise	D	63%	R	65%	R	82%
Committed to continuous improvement	D	54%	R	72%	R	91%
Approachable and open	R	56%	R	78%	R	93%
Customer focused	R	61%	R	80%	R	90%
Skilled in developing and managing relationships	D	81%	R	64%	R	94%
A champion for HR best practice	D	72%	R	64%	R	91%
Proactive	D	55%	R	72%	R	89%
Able to manage conflict	D	88%	R	58%	R	92%
A strong negotiator	D	95%	D	64%	R	85%
A problem solver	D	75%	R	64%	R	89%
Knows the legislative environment	D	89%	R	56%	R	87%
Creative and innovative	D	78%	R	50%	R	78%
Politically savvy	D	94%	D	70%	R	76%
A project manager	D	91%	D	57%	R	80%
Empathy	D	51%	R	73%	R	86%
Connection to the organisation and its purpose	D	62%	R	70%	R	92%
Follows through on promises	R	58%	R	78%	R	92%
Open minded	D	50%	R	73%	R	89%
Diplomatic	D	59%	R	68%	R	87%
An effective communicator	D	57%	R	74%	R	92%
Technologically savvy	D	70%	D	51%	R	58%
Skilled at providing feedback	D	88%	R	63%	R	92%
A rapport builder	D	68%	R	71%	R	90%
Professional	R	60%	R	81%	R	94%
Acknowledges errors	R	53%	R	73%	R	87%
Empowering of others	D	83%	R	59%	R	91%
Authoritative	D	95%	D	68%	R	74%
A decision maker	D	88%	D	53%	R	88%
A critical thinker	D	80%	R	53%	R	86%
Analytical	D	76%	R	56%	R	82%
A business thinker	D	86%	D	52%	R	88%
Skilled at managing priorities	D	62%	R	71%	R	90%

## BEHAVIOUR LEVEL

### D = Demonstrate

practitioners at this level should display this behaviour in their HR practice

### R = Role Model

practitioners at this level should act as an example of this behaviour in their HR practice

## CAREER

### Entry level

HR administrator, officer, coordinator, consultant

### Mid-level

HR consultant, advisor, senior HR consultant, senior HR advisor, business partner, HR manager

### Senior level

HR manager, senior HR manager, HR executive

# Good HR

Respondents were invited to offer descriptors for what they believe to be characteristic behaviours of professionals practising 'good HR'. The following is a sample of respondent comments:

- *'Inclusive, commercially focused, high say/do ratio, connected, delivers'*
- *'Collaborative, adaptable, resilient, credible'*
- *'Proactive, future focused, consultative, developmental, open minded, creative thinking'*
- *'Advocate, influencer, problem-solver, collaborative, consultative'*
- *'Adding value to business, partnering with senior business leaders, anticipate and interpret trends, provide vision for future'*
- *'Consultative, empathetic, organised, knowledgeable, fair, collaborative, inclusive, flexible''*
- *'Positive, proactive, communicative, inclusive, honest, sensitive, innovative, creative, motivational'*
- *'Understanding, consultative, effective, stable, consistent'*
- *'Proactive, collaborative, flexible, innovative contributors to business strategy, performance'*
- *'Strategic thinker; business partner; collaborator; influencer; critical thinker; facilitator; change agent; shaper; resourceful; diplomatic; trustworthy; authentic; customer centric'*
- *'Supportive, helpful, responsive, solutions focused'*
- *'Fair, informed/up-to-date, patient, consultative, broad-minded, approachable, responsive, proactive, forward-thinking, strategic'*
- *'Identify and resolve performance impediments'*
- *'Transparent, engaging, communicative, fair'*
- *'Consultative, business partner, approachable, competent, professional'*
- *'Focused, driven, supportive, diplomatic, friendly, approachable, understands the business'*
- *Business minded, strategic, customer focused'*
- *'Knowledgeable, confidential, supportive, mentor, decisive, action oriented'*
- *'Enabling, expert, self-confident, in background, supportive, courageous, honest broker'*
- *'Fair, responsible, consultative, open-minded, analytical'*
- *'Approachable; communicative; empathetic; decisive; holistic'*
- *'Customer focused, collaborative, consultative, approachable, objective, empathetic, business minded, strategic'*
- *'Advisor, business partner, integrated, connected to the business, lead by example, able to contextualise'*
- *'Supportive; questioning; solution focused; impartial; fundamentally developmental; vision focused'*
- *'Resolution and solution driven'*
- *'Fair, reasonable, open, consultative, guide, courageous, partner, concise'*
- *'Open minded, willing to listen to all parties, always learning'*
- *'Pragmatic, Collaborative, Commercial, Problem Solver'*
- *'Professional, effective, dynamic, flexible, intelligent, savvy, smart, goal focused, communicator, value driven, consultative, visionary'*
- *'Business partnering, supportive, deliver on promises'*
- *'Proactive; solutions focused; business focused; resourceful; helpful'*
- *'Professional, consultative, ethical, fair, strategic'*
- *'Empathy, open-door, approachable, thorough, communicative, consultative, partnership'*
- *'Consultative, advisory, knowledgeable, tolerant, helpful'*
- *'Strategic; collaborative; equitable; acts with integrity; innovative'*
- *'Approachable; professional; honest & trustworthy (transparent) good communication skills (active listener); non-judgemental; knowledgeable'*
- *'Knowledgeable, flexible, innovative, collaborative, persuasive, courageous, practical, credible'*

# Bad HR

Conversely, respondents were invited to offer descriptors for what they believe to be characteristic behaviours of professionals practising 'bad HR'. The following is a sample of respondent comments:

- *'Inflexible, intolerant, non-inclusive, unfair, disorganised, lack of working knowledge'*
- *'Unapproachable, intolerant, poor communicator, doesn't deliver on promises, not available'*
- *'Unprofessional, lacking in strategic capacity, operationally focused, poor contributor to the organisation'*
- *'Reactive, biased, bullying, process-driven, unable to see the human element'*
- *'Administrative, not flexible, passive'*
- *'Unprofessional; breaches confidentiality; unreliable, unapproachable, bullying; lack of knowledge and understanding'*
- *'Arrogant, policy police, short sighted'*
- *'Rude, intolerant, lacks knowledge and expertise, poor communication and people skills'*
- *'Intolerant, narrow minded, task driven, independent in everything'*
- *'Lazy, uninformed, unreliable'*
- *'Biased, discriminatory, inconsiderate, unsupportive and unethical'*
- *'Unapproachable, unprofessional, untrustworthy, indiscrete, lacking knowledge of fundamental employment legislation'*
- *'Compliant, vague, reactive, uncaring, negative, unfair, unchanging'*
- *'Indifferent to the business plan and vision, not able to relate to people, low levels of various intelligence attributes, low levels of HR technical knowledge'*
- *'Arrogance, ignorance, unprofessional behaviour, lack of confidentiality, lack of credibility, poor understanding of organisation, unmotivated'*
- *'Reactive, process heavy, bureaucratic, autocratic, single-minded'*
- *'Dishonest; inaccessible; poor communication; lack of information sharing'*
- *'Impatient, gossip, insecure, apathetic'*
- *'Uneducated, insular, bureaucratic, heavy handed, untroubled by business priorities, only brings standard approaches - no creativity or collaboration'*
- *'Administrative, expensive, bureaucratic, disconnected from the fundamental financial drivers of the business'*
- *'Lack of respect, impatient, untrustworthy, doesn't understand the business, poor relationships'*
- *'Employee development without employee input'*
- *'Process driven, bureaucratic, distant, unaligned, political, ineffective'*
- *'Cute and fluffy HR that does not link to business objectives'*
- *'Lack of business understanding'*
- *'Inflexible, traditional, narrow focused'*
- *'Silo working, punitive, administrative, back office function'*
- *'Dogmatic, ill-informed, partisan, unethical'*
- *'Unable to change, intolerant, poor communicator, argumentative, opinionated, judgemental'*
- *'Disengaged, chaotic'*
- *'Intolerant, lacks empathy, lacks understanding'*
- *'Opinionated; vocal; emotive; negative; unhelpful; indecisive; unlawful'*
- *'Blocker, process over outcome, limited thinking'*
- *'Secretive, intolerant, indecisive, confusing'*
- *'Closed, unavailable, weak, poor communicator, indecisive, gossipy, silo, undermining'*
- *'Process and policy driven, without higher order purpose and alignment to the business goals'*
- *'Unethical, close-minded, inconsistent, unapproachable'*
- *'Controlling, policing, avoider, dismissive, inflexible'*
- *'Unapproachable, non-communicative, gossip, self-serving, lack of empathy, untrustworthy, lack of ability, ineffective'*

# Ideal HR Education Background

**TABLE 3. HR SUBJECT AREAS**

898 RESPONSES

Answers (multiple options allowed)	Total count of responses	Percentage of respondents
Workplace Relations	751	83.63%
Change Management	709	78.95%
Strategic HRM	704	78.39%
Performance and Rewards Management	649	72.27%
Organisation Development	643	71.60%
Contemporary Issues in HRM	608	67.70%
Recruitment & Selection	601	66.92%
Training & Development	518	57.68%
Introduction to HR	471	52.44%
HR Development	464	51.67%
International HRM	235	26.16%
Other	93	10.35%

Table 3 reveals that workplace relations is the subject that most respondents (84%) believe would provide students with the knowledge they require to be effective HR practitioners. This is followed by change management (79%) and strategic HRM (78%). International HRM was selected the least popular course, with only 26% of respondents identifying it.

# Ideal Non-HR Education Background

**TABLE 4. NON-HR SUBJECT AREAS**

892 RESPONSES

Answers	Total count of responses	Percentage of respondents
Organisational Behaviour	684	76.68%
Leadership	624	69.95%
Business Strategy	582	65.24%
Principles of Management	529	59.30%
Business Communication	489	54.82%
Psychology	486	54.48%
Ethics	476	53.36%
Law	435	48.76%
Business analytics	363	40.69%
Accounting/Finance	322	36.09%
Statistics/Research	236	26.45%
IT/Social Media	223	25.00%
Economics/Microeconomics	92	10.31%
Other	22	2.46%

Table 4 reveals that organisational behaviour is the non-HR subject that most respondents (77%) believe would provide students with the knowledge they require to be effective HR practitioners. This is followed by leadership (70%) and business strategy (65%). Economics/microeconomics (10%), IT/social media (25%) and statistics/research (26%) were selected the least frequently.

# Industry Experience

**TABLE 5. WHAT TYPE OF EXPERIENCE IS BENEFICIAL FOR HR PRACTITIONERS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS IN THEIR CAREER?**  
852 RESPONSES

Experience	Unnecessary	Somewhat	Essential
Pre-career experience e.g. retail/hospitality	26.15%	60.22%	13.63%
Early career general experience e.g. administration, temping	11.16%	64.62%	24.22%
Finance based experience eg.. accounting, finance	28.36%	64.13%	7.51%
Other specialised business based experience e.g. marketing, communications	21.26%	69.07%	9.67%
General management experience e.g. line management	9.71%	59.71%	30.58%
Experience within the same industry in an HR or non-HR role	19.5%	56.26%	24.24%

Table 5 shows that approximately a third (31%) of respondents believe that general management experience is essential for HR practitioners, while around a quarter believe that it is essential to have early career general experience (24%), or experience within the same industry in an HR or non-HR role (24%). More than a quarter of respondents believe that pre-career experience (27%) and finance based experience (28%) are unnecessary for careers in the HR profession. More than half of respondents believe that all the experience types listed are somewhat beneficial.

# The Role of AHRI

**TABLE 6. WHAT AREAS DO YOU BELIEVE ARE MOST IMPORTANT FOR AHRI TO FOCUS ON IN DEVELOPING GOOD HR PRACTITIONERS?**  
904 RESPONSES

Answer	Count	Percentage
Provide resources and tools to assist HR practitioners in their roles	696	76.99%
Provide events and activities keeping HR practitioners up to date with latest developments and trends in HR	637	70.46%
Conduct and support research into latest developments and trends in HR	512	56.63%
Develop standards and certifications for HR practitioners in Australia	496	54.86%
Provide mentoring for practitioners to develop the skills and behaviours required	492	54.42%
Delivery of public workshops and training courses in HR	434	48.00%
Development of benchmarks in Australian HR capability in Australia	402	44.46%
Work with government to set standards and legislation for HR practice in Australia	371	41.03%
Work with VET and tertiary providers to guide HR curriculum	370	40.92%
Delivery of formal education courses in HR	345	38.16%
Provide recognition of AHRI and other HR education and training courses for professional members	341	37.72%
Assess and accredit education and training courses in HR in Australia	293	32.41%
Work with global bodies to develop international standards and certifications	257	28.42%
Work with high schools to introduce school leavers to the HR function	192	21.23%
Other	31	3.42%

Table 6 reveals that providing resources and tools to assist HR practitioners is the most commonly selected answer, with more than three-quarters (77%) of respondents identifying this as one of the most important areas for AHRI to focus on. Events and activities (70%) is also a high ranking choice, while more than half believe that research into HR developments and trends (57%) and developing standards and certifications for HR practitioners (55%) are one of the most important areas. The less popular choices work with high schools to introduce school leavers to the HR function (21%) and work with global bodies to develop international standards and certifications (28%).



## Where to from Here?

The results referenced in this discussion paper are based on a survey of members of the Australian Human Resources Institute in 2014 that asked them a number of probing questions about their own profession, including what it expects of practitioners entering the profession and continuing to practise within it. The survey is the first of a two-part exercise, the second part being a survey of chief executives planned for 2015 that will ask similar questions of them with respect to the behaviours they look for from professionals in their business who engage in the practice of HR.

The expectation is that the two papers combined will enable AHRI to place the two sets of findings side by side to arrive at inside and outside perspectives about the standing and practices of the HR profession now and where the profession might need to look in setting its sights for the future.

From the survey referenced in this paper, we know that the Australian HR profession is primarily a female occupation, with only three out of ten practitioners now being male. We also know that almost half the survey respondents are from organisations of 500 or more employees, and less than 10 per cent are from organisations of 15 or fewer employees, confirming that the HR function is still the preserve largely of the big end of town.

With around half the Australian workforce working in small businesses and small businesses making up more than ninety per cent of the total number of businesses operating in the country, if the practice of HR is a necessary part of running an enterprise, that statistic sits out of alignment with respect to achieving productivity and profitability within those businesses. In addition, the omission of good HR within small business could be regarded as a potential handicap that contributes to the high level of small business failures that in turn negatively affect national prosperity. This paper does not directly touch on this question but in looking at the future of HR, it is a question that the data prompts and that may require more focused discussion.

The proportion of not-for-profit respondents is a significant minority at just under 10 per cent, and it is an area that is growing and is looking for innovative HR solutions to boost its capacity to compete for talent where remuneration is not an area in which it is competitive. Similarly, the three tiers of local, state and federal public sector respondents are represented strongly in the data. During a period of widespread public sector downsizing and budget restraint, HR is likewise a vital ingredient in sourcing and marshalling the talent that will enable employees to do more with less and provide the policy advice and services that government expect from the public service.

The Australian data indicates plainly what behaviours are rated highly by respondents, especially at the senior and executive level of the profession, with expectations that they will be not simply display desirable behaviours but be role models in the behaviours they rate highly. More than 90 per cent of respondents nominated testing qualities such as being decisive, following through on promises and being skilled at managing priorities, in addition to less measurable behaviours such as being resilient, being approachable and open, and being personally credible.

In publishing this discussion paper and seeking further feedback to it from HR practitioners in Australia, AHRI will be setting the scene for more direct responses in 2015 from chief executives about what they want from their senior HR people, and in so doing get a reality check for the way HR performs its function now as well as signalling how it might make adjustments for the future in the light of those responses.

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