HR as a Strategic Business Partner: Challenges and Opportunities

الموارد البشريه كشريك إستراتيجى فى إدارة الأعمال: تحديات وفرص

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Abstract

Several studies in the field of HRM concentrate on the importance of HRBP to the business performance. This research focuses on the relationship between achieving HRBP and its challenges in a UAE medical organisation.

The quantitative based approach was used to research the problem through collecting data from HR professionals, senior managers, line managers and medical professionals working in a medical UAE based organisation. The study has used a self-administered questionnaire to examine the relationship between variables. The questionnaire was adapted from previous research findings, Human resource-role assessment survey by Ulrich & Conner (1996) and Ulrich HRBP model (1997). The survey was sent by emails to 342 employees and out of them 259 completed the survey. Cronbach's alpha correlation and 2-tailed significance tests were employed to examine the hypothesised relationships. The results show that there is an empirical evidence of statistical relationship between the HRM practices synergy and HRBP performance. In addition, a positive relationship between HR business partners' role understanding and HRBP performance is detected. HRPs' business knowledge shows a significant relation to HRBP performance as well. The last finding indicates a significant relationship between the management support and HRBP performance. The new findings of this research stand as a new gadget for a competitive advantage to apply HRBP in any organisation and an annexure to the HRBP literature.

Keywords: HRBP, HRBP Performance, Business Knowledge, HRM, Role Understanding, Synergy between HR Practices

ملخص

لقد ركزت العديد من الدراسات فى مجال إدارة الموارد البشريه على مدى أهمية شراكتها فى إدارة الأعمال. و يركز هذا البحث على العلاقه بين تحقيق شراكة الموارد البشريه فى إدارة الأعمال ومعوقات هذه الشراكه فى منشأه طبيه فى الإمارات العربيه المتحده.

تم استخدام منهج البحث الكمى كأداة بحث علمى لبحث المشكلة من خلال جمع البيانات من خبراء الموارد البشرية، وكبار المديرين، والمديرين التنفيذيين والمهنيين الطبيين الذين يعملون في إحدى المؤسسات الطبية في الإمارات. وقد استخدمت الدراسة استبياناً ذاتياً لدراسة العلاقة بين المتغيرات. تم تعديل الاستبيان من نتائج بحوث سابقة، واستبيان دور الموارد البشريه لأولريك وكونر (1996) ونموذج أولريك لشراكة الموارد البشريه فى إدارة الأعمال (1996). تم إرسال الإستبيان عبر البريد الالكتروني لعدد 342 موظف 259 منهم شاركوا فى الإستبان. تم توظيف علاقة ألفا كرونباخ التبادليه ودلالة التذييل الثنائى لدراسة الفرضيات. وأظهرت النتائج التجريبيه أن هناك أدلة إحصائيه تثبت وجود علاقه ايجابيه بين ترابط ممارسات الموارد البشريه و نجاح تطبيق شراكة الموارد البشريه فى إدارة الاعمال. بالإضافه إلى ذلك تم إيجاد علاقه إيجابيه بين مدى فهم الشركاء التجاريين للموارد البشريه لدورهم فى إدارة الأعمال من جهه ونجاح تطبيق شراكة الموارد البشريه من جهه اخرى. وأثبت البحث أيضا وجود علاقه ايجابيه بين مدى المعرفه التجاريه لدى خبراء الموارد البشريه و نجاح تطبيق شراكة الموارد البشريه فى إدارة الأعمال. نتائج البحث أثبتت ايضاً وجود علاقه إيجابيه بين الدعم الإدارى لفكرة شراكة الموارد البشريه فى إدارة الأعمال وتطبيق الفكره. هذه النتائج الجديده تقف بمثابة أداة جديده وميزه تنافسيه لتطبيق شراكة الموارد البشريه فى أى منشأه و تمثل ايضاً اضافه إلى مرجعيات شراكة الموارد البشريه فى إدارة الأعمال.

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List of Abbreviations

- CEO/s (Chief Executive Officer/s)
- ER (Emergency)
- HOD (Head of Department)
- HR (Human Resources)
- HRBP (Human Resources Business Partnering)
- HRBP/s (Human Resources Business Partner/s)
- HRM (Human Resource Management)
- HRP/s (HR Professional/s)
- ICU (Intensive Care Unit)
- IT (Information Technology)
- OD (Organisational Development)
- RBV (Resource Based View)
- SHRM (Strategic Human Resource Management)
- UAE (United Arab Emirates)
- USA (United States of America)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to find out the main barriers and challenges towards Human resources (HR) to become a strategic business partner. The lack of synergy between the HRM functions and the ambiguity of human resources business partnering (HRBP) role understanding are significantly blocking the way of HR professionals (HRPs) to be business partners. Moreover, the lack of business knowledge between HRPs and the lack of support from the management hinder the efficiency of the HRBP performance. Namely, the main purpose of this study is to figure out if there is a relationship between the before mentioned challenges and HRBP performance. The second purpose is to figure out a new gadget of a competitive advantage to increase HRBP performance and to identify the best way to do so.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is HR currently seen as a business partner and why?

- What are the key aspects for business to consider HR as a business partner?

- What are the barriers that currently block the way of HR professional in becoming strategic business partners?

- What are the opportunities that HR professionals can build on to become strategic business partners?

The first question focuses on finding out if the HR is currently considered as a business partner or not, and the reasons behind the predicted result. The second question defines the key aspects for HRM to be considered as a business partner from the business point of view. The third question defines the barriers for HRM to be a

business partner. The fourth and last question highlights the opportunities that HR professionals can use to build on to become business partners.

1.3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This part of the study intends to provide a general overview about the scope of the research and the case study.

1.3.1 BACKGROUND

Keeping organisations on the business track becomes a tough mission for several organisations due to the severe challenges in today's market. That is why; shifting business operations from following the traditional business models to more professional business centred models become inevitable demand for organisations to increase their productivity and profitability (Boxall, Purcell & Wright, 2007). Traditional organisations always consist of line operating departments handling the core business operations and staff services departments handling the support functions. According to Ulrich & Brockbank (2005) all the functions in an organisation starting from line managers and passing through all support functioning departments should work shoulder to shoulder to increase the organisational outcomes.

HRM is seen for long time as one of the support service departments. It has been developed through several stages over the past few decades starting from being merely a personnel and support services department reaching to be an effective business partner. This change has emerged due to the need of partnering the service support departments such as HRM with the business objectives for better business outcomes through a professional and business centred approach in employees' management (Hope-Hailey et al., 1997). However; Ulrich (1997) stated that aligning HRM with the business should not lead it to lose its function as internal support services provider. To accomplish this mission smoothly and effectively, HRM needs to restructure the flow of its functions in a way that ensures the implementation of

both business strategies and other support services in the same time and the same efficiency.

HRBP is a business centred model developed to ensure the support of the HRM functions to the business (Dalziel, Strange & Walters, 2006). Namely; it is a new HRM role that aims to involve the HRPs in the execution of business goals and objectives by adding value through a professional application of strategic and people management tasks. To achieve this, HRPs should be assigned to the business units and get familiar with the business needs so as to be able to add a real value through providing the line managers with relevant business centred advices and managing people in a strategic way to achieve the business objectives (Dalziel, Strange & Walters, 2006). Adding value to the business strategy rather than merely focusing on the regulations implementation is the main concern of HRBP notion through knowing the business and applying this knowledge to change the culture and improve the manpower (Ulrich & Beatty, 2001).

HRM has always been considered as merely a service and cost centre doing recruitment formalities in addition to a punch of clerical tasks and paper filing (Fallon & McConnell, 2007). That was one of the reasons which motivated the concerned researchers and firms to find new strategies to shift HRM from being merely administrative department to be more strategic and business centred. HRBP is one of several competency models aimed to increase the growth of HRM through stratifying its functions with the business objectives (Ulrich, Brockbank, Yeung, & Lake, 1995). HR business partnering could be implemented through transforming the HRPs into human resources business partners (HRBPs) by connecting between the HRM strategies and the business objectives. Ulrich (1997) HRBP model involves four directions to shift from being merely a service provider to be a strategic business partner. According to Ulrich (1997) HRM should produce four outcomes to achieve the purpose of business partnering: associate with the business managers for better business strategy execution, excellent delivery of the administrative tasks and HRM

system, emphasis employees' engagement and contribution and finally serves as a change agent.

Brockway (2007) assumed that the role of HRBP differs from one organisation to another according to the context and the strategies of the business in which it will be implemented. Therefore; the definition of the role of HRBP could be slightly differed from one industry to another according to the business needs, requirements and strategies. This also reflects the importance of studying the HRBP implementation in each industry separately so as to figure out the opportunities and build on them on the one hand and find out the challenges and solve them on the other hand. However; there are still some basic central functions and general roles in the HRBP models to be used in all businesses as the role of advising and supporting line managers, maintaining strategies and identifying the needs for achieving the business objectives through applying the proper HRM functions and practices (Lambert, 2009; Ulrich et al., 2009). According to Wright (2008) the validation of the HRBP role in an organisation will require a mutual cooperation and communication between HRBPs and line managers which requires in return HRPs to increase their business knowledge. This knowledge will ensure their ability for better implementation of the business strategies and profound for their legitimacy to be business partners. Hence, the success of the HR business partnering depends on its ability to convince the top management and line managers of their ability to make change in the business through the implementation of professional business centred strategies in addition to the other operative HRM functions. According to Ulrich (1998) the implementation of a successful HRBP demands a mutual understanding from both line managers and HRBs through increasing the line managers' involvement in the HRM practices and increasing the HRBPs involvement in the business strategies. However organisations are seeking to make their HR professionals think like a business developers, they are missing to provide them with the needed tools to achieve their new mission. Hence, the efficiency of the HRBP model has been criticized due to the implementation

challenges, limitations and indigent predictions of the efficiency of the HRM role as a business partner (Hope-Hailey, Farndale, & Truss, 2005; Francis & Keegan, 2006).

Despite the essential importance of the relationship between line managers and HRBPs in forming the successfulness of the partnering process, literature has rarely paid attention to the social, behavioural and relational challenges that could encounter the process. Therefore; this research will emphasis on the aforementioned challenges through an empirical study to find out the reasons behind these barriers and the proper solutions for them to achieve better HRBP performance especially in the medical sector. The study will concentrate on the evaluation of Ulrich's (1997) multiple-role model in human resources management within the medical industry through studying the strengths and deficiencies in the application process with a keen focus on HR business partnering and its relationship with the business managers and key stakeholders. Another concern of this research is to find out the needed mechanisms and steps for HRM to become a successful business partner. This research will also focus on the main barriers and challenges for HRM to become a strategic business partner as well as the efficiency of applying this model in the health care sector.

1.3.2 RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

Hospital Z is one of the top hospitals in Dubai and The United Arab Emirates (UAE). For the sake of confidentiality, the case study hospital of this study will be referred to as hospital Z. Planned to cover most of the medical specialties in Dubai and The United Arab Emirates, hospital Z has been founded with two hundred beds capacity. Regardless the big size and capacity of the hospital, it started with a very limited number of employees to start the operations of the major departments which are; obstetrics & gynecology, general surgery, general dentistry, intensive care unit (ICU), cardiology and emergency (ER). The number of employees increased along with the new openings of several medical and support services departments in the

hospital. By the mid of 2013 the number of employees increased to reach five hundred and sixty operating in both medical and support services departments.

The progress of the HR department in hospital Z was very slow and limited. Senior Management and accounts department used to operate the basic HRM functions since the opening of the hospital. The first real plan for the HR department started in 2010 after three years from its opening date by hiring an experienced HR director who started a manpower plan justified by business forecasting and line managers' requirements. However; instead of focusing on the business strategies and improving HRM to be strategic, the HR director focused on operational, administrative, and other related transactional tasks. The negligence of a real strategic plan resulted in several issues such as high turnover ratios (Figure 1.1). The high turnover was one significant reason resulted in business loses because of the cost of hiring, training and on boarding (Figure 1.2). HRM in hospital Z failed to align its practices with the business needs, the thing that caused instability, high turnover and business loses.
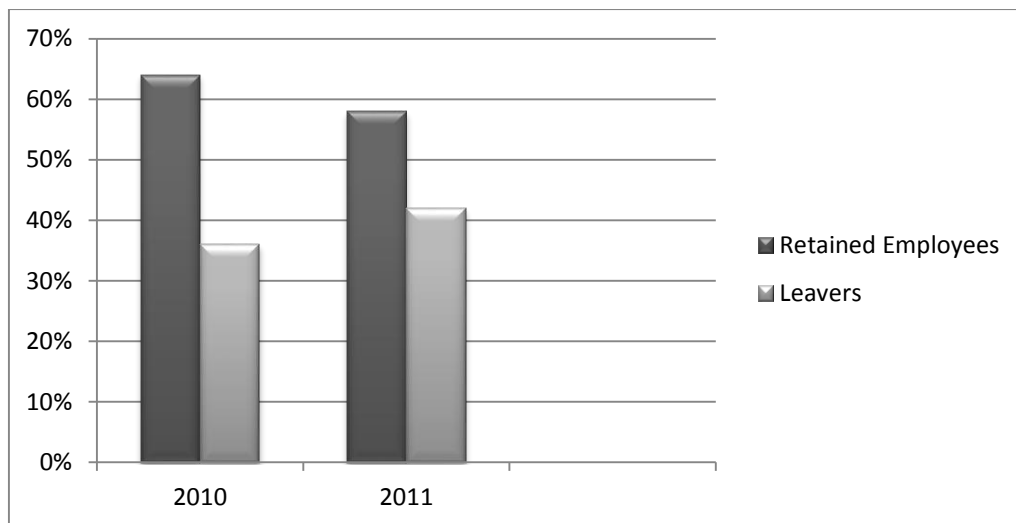
Figure 1.1 Turnover Rate in Hospital Z in 2010 & 2011

Profit Margin Ratio

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
2010	2.5	3.7	3.5	4.5	3.2	4.3	2.9	3.8	4.6	3.9	4.5	3.9
2011	2.4	2.8	3.3	2.9	3	3.1	2.7	2.6	3.2	3.8	2.8	3.3
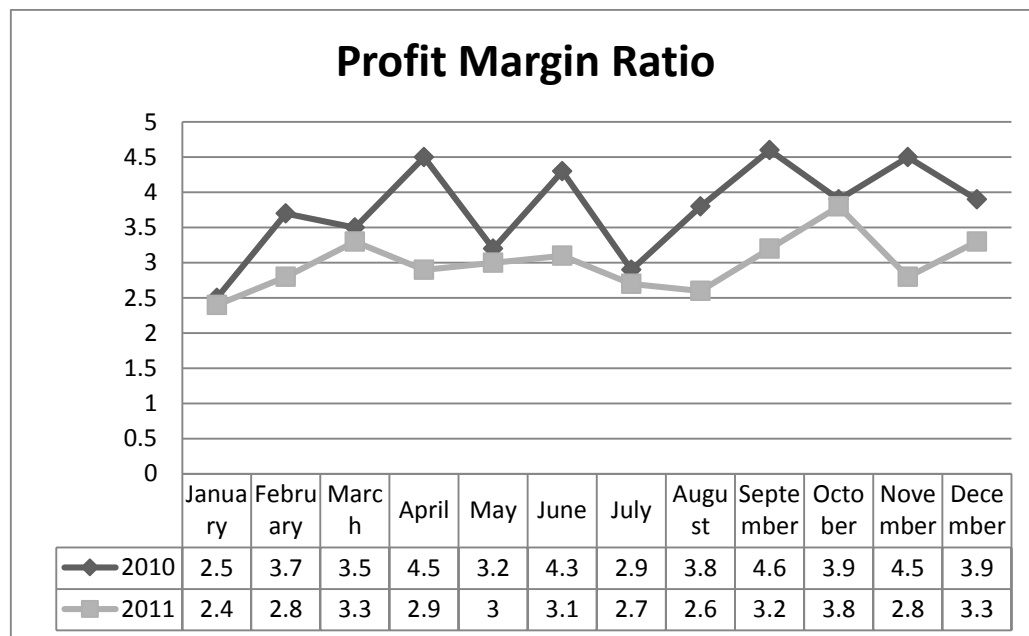
Figure 1.2 Profit Ratios in Hospital Z in 2010 & 2011

As a result of the growing challenges, the chairman decided to enroll new HR professional in an intensive training and development program aiming to prepare him to lead the mission of transforming HRM from being a transactional department to be an effective business partner to increase the business outcomes. Hence, hospital Z is a suitable case study to examine the role of human resources business partnering and rich environment for discovering the barriers and advantages of the partnering process. After the completion of the core part of the training and development program by the mid of 2013, the chairman assigned the HR professional as the new HR manager and HRBP in hospital Z.

Aiming to transform the HRM from being merely a transactional and support services provider to be a strategic business partner, the new appointed manager adapted the new HRM functions according to Ulrich's (1997) human resources business partnership model. The implementation of the new HRM functions takes four directions according to Ulrich's four-role model. The first role, HR strategic role, concentrates on aligning the HR strategies with the business strategies to ensure the achievement of the business success. The second role is the administrative expert,

focuses on the efficiency of recruitment & selection, compensation management, training & development, appraisals and performance evaluation to add value to the business flow. The third role is the employee champion, focuses on facilitating employees' needs and solving their problems with an attempt to satisfy those needs and solve those problems to ensure the commitment and engagement of employees to the organisation. It also focuses on motivating employees to look to the organisation by the eyes of a business owner to ensure the link between employees' contribution and the organisational success. The fourth and last role is the change agent, focuses on managing the change instead of following it to increase the ability of the organisation to achieve its vision in the minimum time through circulating the culture of change, ensuring the readiness for change and the continuity of change. Hence, the HRBP model is a four ways bridge connecting mainly between HRM functions and the business strategies.

1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEMS

This part of the study discusses and analyses the main barriers towards HR to be a business partner in hospital Z.

1.4.1 Main problem

The hospital Z main goal is to be the leader of medical industry in the Middle East region. To achieve this mission, the hospital owner decided to enhance the business partnering notion by changing the HR department from being merely cost service centre to be a core business partner. The implementation of this process started by developing one of the talented HR professionals to start applying the new role of HR as a business partner in the hospital Z. Based on his knowledge and experience, the new manager started applying Ulrich's (1997) HRBP model aiming to give HR the right to sit on the table of line managers and to add value to the business.

Despite the said plan, the process faced many obstacles that slowed down the progress of partnering HRM with the business. The main problem hinders HR way towards being a business partner is the lack of support and trust from the top management and line managers as well as the lack of trust in HRM to be a business partner. In response, this study aims to investigate the reasons behind the emersion of these problems. It also focuses on finding the proper solutions and suggestions to overcome those problems in order to ensure a smooth transition of HRM to be a core and effective business partner.

1.4.2 Sub-problems

This study will also investigate other sub-problems emerged during the implementation process of the HRBP model in hospital Z. The first sub-problem is effect of the lack of business knowledge towards HR professionals to be business partners especially in a complicated industry like the medical industry. The second sub-problem is the difficulty to understand the real role of HRPBs. The last sub-problem is the effects of the lack of synergy between HRM practices and on HRBP performance.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study fills a gap in the knowledge library since it is one of very few studies (may be the only study) that deals with the HRBP role and barriers in the medical sector in UAE. The study has also a practical aspect as it will provide guidance to the HR professionals on how they can capitalise on the value of HRBP work performed in the hospital Z.

1.6 ASSUMPTIONS

The assumptions that can influence the outcome of the research are as follows:

- HR professionals lack the needed knowledge to be business partners especially in the medical industry.

- The lack of synergy between HRM practices creates fragmentation which in return hinders the integration with the business strategy.

- The difficulty of understanding and identifying a specific role for HR business partners is hindering the implementation of HRPB.

- HRM ability to transform itself to be a business partner is linked to the extent of their business knowledge.

- Role ambiguity and lack of business knowledge stands as major reasons for the management rejection to HRBP.

- Lack of business knowledge is the main driver for other challenges facing HRBP performance.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION

- **Chapter 1 – Introduction**: This chapter presents the purpose of the study, research questions, context of the study; back ground, research introduction, research problems; main problems, sub-problems, significance of the study, assumptions, and the structure of dissertation.

- **Chapter 2 – Literature Review:** This chapter presents the relevant literature review centred on the origins and history of old and modern HRM practices in addition to HRM measurement tools. Strategic human resources background, theory, approaches critiques and barriers are included. It also includes the history of strategic human resources and human resources business partnership models.

The last part in the literature review chapter includes an intensive overview of the human resources business partnering barriers and challenges, the part which creates the hypothesis of the research.

> **Chapter 3 – Research Design and Methodology**: This chapter starts with an introduction about the used research design. Then it presents research population and sampling, conceptual framework used to improve the research hypotheses, study instrument and methods of analysis. The last part of this chapter discussed the ethical considerations of the study.

> **Chapter 4 – Descriptive Statistics & Measures:** This chapter explains the descriptive statistics and the formation of the study measures.

> **Chapter 5 - Data Analysis & Findings:** This chapter discusses the scale reliability, the main variables descriptive statistics, correlation between the study variables and the significant 2 tailed correlation between the independent and dependent variables. It will also include an interpretation for the study hypotheses and findings.

> **Chapter 5 - Discussion:** This chapter discusses the research findings, interprets the results. It also includes the researcher's views and point at issues from the literature review. The limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are also included.

> **Chapter 6 - Conclusions & Recommendations:** This chapter concludes the study and present its implications. In addition, it offers recommendations to academics, HR and business professionals.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

This chapter explores closely related literature and the placement of this research among other work cited by different researchers.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The modern world business is severely driven by competition, market rapid changes, talents retention, globalisation, new technologies and workforce new management models. While the whole cycles of organisations are functioning by people, then managing people is the most effective solution to cope up with the market challenges. To achieve this, organisations need to build on improving the workforce capabilities as the main driver of improving their abilities for competitiveness, business continuity and success (Ulrich & Lake, 1990; Hamel & Prahalad, 1994). That is why; the focus on the HRM role in the modern age becomes inevitable for any organisation to ensure its ability to overcome the continuous several challenges to the business worldwide. This role has been improved significantly in the past decades through several stages and will be discussed in the following sub-sections.

2.2 HRM ORIGINS & HISTORY

Scholars diverged in determining the origins of human resources management into several different perspectives. One of the most dominant perspectives suggested that the first emerge of HRM occurred in United States of America (USA) during the Industrial Revolution in 1800s (Haslinda, 2009). However; another significant perspective claimed that human resources management (HRM) started in the time of World War II in 1940s when the need for training workers for military equipments and machinery production intervened (Desimone, Werner & Harris, 2002). Dissimilar to others, Blake (1995) suggested that HRM has been built on the organisational

development concept (OD). Another suggestion by Stead & Lee (1996) highlighted that HRM originated during 1950s and 1960s after some theorists like Argyris (1957), McGregor (1960) and Likert (1961) wrote about the need for employees' development.

2.3 OLD HRM PRACTICES

Several researches claimed that the earliest job for which personnel department has emerged was the employees' welfare. It started by assigning secretaries to facilitate employees' requirements then improved to include more functions and duties such as maintenance of employees' files and payroll (Anthony, Perrrewe & Kacmar, 1996). Since then, innovation in HRM practices and functions has been improved dramatically. One of the earliest thoughts to increase HRM effectiveness was the cost reduction through restructuring the HRM functions (Beer, 1997). The implementation of this role is increasing the organisational success only on the short term as the cost of keeping talents and improving them will be an obstacle for the cost cut in many cases.

According to Pfeffer (1994) the organisations depending on the traditional HRM practices as a main source of success still benefiting but lower than in the past. Similarly, Becker & Huselid (1998) assumed that transactional HRM practices such as staffing, compensation, policies, attendance etc… are fundamental to any organisation and if implemented properly it will add value to the organisation. Yet, these practices are no more enough to handle the complexity of market challenges and talent management complexity. This fact highlights that the essential challenge for HRM to be aligned with business strategies will be centred on talent management decision issues. Therefore; organisations are likely to lose any benefit from the use of the traditional HRM practices in the near future if they will not change. This fact makes the owners and leaders of business around the world disappointed with the role and participation of the traditional HRM practices to the business outcomes.

2.4 NEW HRM PRACTICES

The significant boom happening in organisations worldwide is the outcome of the mounting perception of the human resources management as a main gate of a competitive advantage. Human resources has changed since it has emerged through several stages starting from being merely a record keeper and files archive to be a strategic business partner (Ferris et al. 1999). According to Baird and Meshoulam (1988) the growing organisational change stimulated the need for changing human resources management. This change sparked the perception that employees are the most important asset for an organisation and the main source of competitive advantage. This fact is the basic source that inspired HRM to focus on creating policies to increase employees' productivity, keep talents and help in executing the business strategies (Ruona & Gibson, 2004). Moreover, attention has been given to the importance of HRM due to the emergence of the technological evolution, globalisation and fight for talents (Brockbank, 1999). Hence, this urged HRPs to find solutions for how to get and keep the right people who will make them able to compete and keep their business on the track.

2.5 HRM APPROACHES

There are two basic approaches for HRM; the soft and the hard approach (Boxall, 1996). Legge (1995) stated that the soft approach focuses on the development of employees as well as their attitudinal behaviors like commitment, satisfaction, involvement and motivation. In other words, it concentrates on creating the proper culture and work environment that makes employees able to give their utmost contribution to the business objectives achievement. The creation of such environment should be driven by several HRM practices such as open communication, trainings, empowering, recognition and flexibility (Beer et al, 1984; Walton, 1985; Boxall, 1996). On the other hand, the hard HR always called strategic human resources management (SHRM) is related to the business strategy

implementation. The effectiveness of HRM in this approach is based on cost reduction rather than investing in employees (Storey, 1992).

2.6 HRM MEASUREMENT TOOLS

According to Corporate Leadership Council (2001) measuring human resources goals falls under two important paradigms; the quality of workforce and the connection between human resources functions and business strategies. However; previous research proved that those tools cannot measure or improve HRM effectiveness as it has been basically designed for other sources and typically applied to HR without considering the other specific implications of HRM (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2004). On the other hand, Jamrog & Overholt (2004) suggested that other measurement tools like HR quality, HR branding, HR accounting and HR balanced scorecards can be effective measurement systems for HR if applied in a proper way. Meanwhile, Boudreau & Ramstad (2003) claimed that these measurement systems are not useful for improving talent management decisions. In the same context, Boudreau & Ramstad (2004) stated that HR is an operating department just like finance and marketing helping organisations in the critical talent market through providing them with the proper and effective talent management decisions. This concludes that talent management is one of the main measurements of HRM effectiveness.

2.7 STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (SHRM)

This part of the research overviews the most popular definitions of SHRM and its origins. Furthermore, it discusses the SHRM theory, approaches, critiques and barriers.

2.7.1 DEFINITIONS & BACKGROUND

According to Schuler & Walker (1990) SHRM is the process of linking between the HR professionals and the business managers activities so as to find out solutions for the people and business issues. Namely; it is a replacement to the traditional HRM practices and based on linking HRM practices to other several organisational functions such as performance, productivity, employee turnover, financial outcomes and organisational value (Arthur, 1994; MacDuffie, 1995; Huselid, 1995). In other words; SHRM is an approach which has been created to shift HR from being only a service centre to be a strategic partner so as to be able to meet the business strategies and achieve the business objectives. Sparrow & Pettigrew (1987) stated that the formation of HR strategy depends on the interaction between the internal organisational factors such as culture, politics, structure and business direction on the one hand and other several external factors such as politics, economy and technology on the other hand. However; SHRM has been criticized for being founded on weak concepts (Delery, 1998).

On the other hand, Guest (1989) proposed that SHRM is focusing on the integration between the HRM functions and business strategies on a daily based routine. However; Wright & McMahan (1992) introduced more inclusive definition stating that SHRM is all the functions and activities implemented by HR to enable organisations to achieve their business objectives. Furthermore, they highlighted that SHRM is not merely a process of integration between HRM and the business strategies but requires coordination between HRM functions as well. In their definition they involved the variables that could affect HRM practices such as workforce skills, abilities and required organisational behaviours. Therefore; the more these decisions are effective the more strategic contribution the HR will add to the organisation.

2.7.2 SHRM THEORY

The origins of the SHRM approach returns back to an adoption of what is called the resource-based view (RBV) which has been initially suggested by Barney (1991) then followed him Lado & Wilson (1994) then Wright, McMahan & McWilliams (1994). The resource-based view circles around the ability of an organisation to get a competitive advantage of its resources through moving out its focus from the external environment to the internal environment (Figure 2.1) (Delery, 1998; Armstrong, 2006).
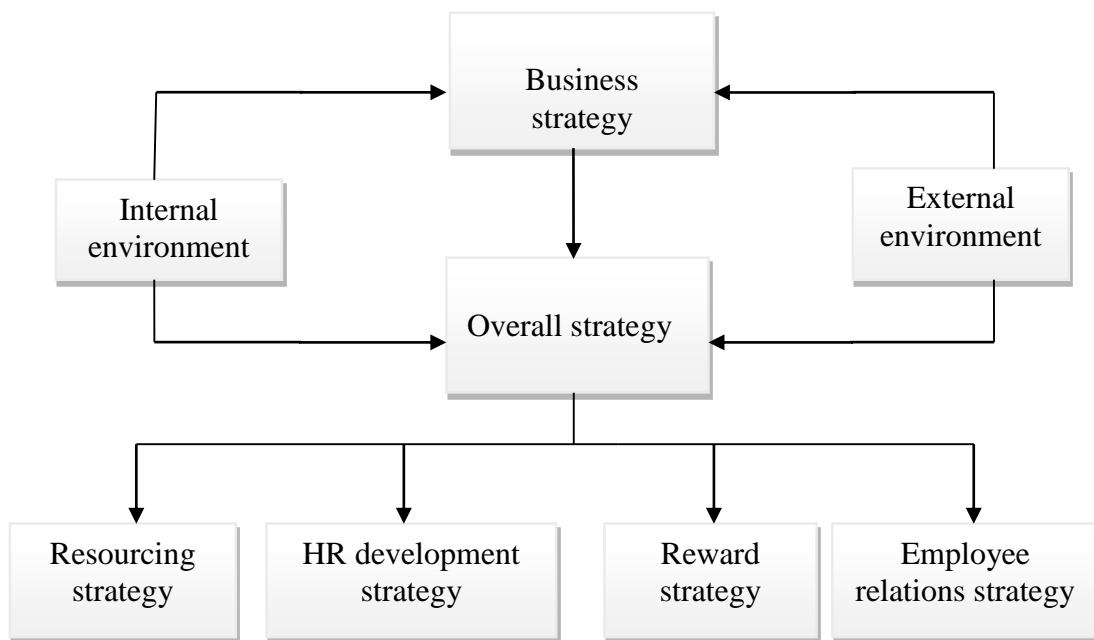
Figure 2.1 A linear strategic HRM model. Armstrong (2006).Strategic human resource management: A guide to action.

In other words, organisations should give more focus on how to make use of the resources they have to gain a competitive advantage by increasing their abilities to compete in the market rather than focusing on how to position themselves in the market without proper utility of their resources. Hence, organisations need to focus on the resources they have and improve those resources to be their weapons and

soldiers defending them against the external jeopardies. While people are the most important asset for any business and its real investment, then the competitive advantage of an organisation should start from its employees through creating a unique pool of talented, skilled and engaged employees (Barney & Wright, 1998). Various evidences from previous research highlighted that strategic use of human resources can lead to a competitive advantage to any organisation as if used strategically it will add value and increase outcomes (Wright, McMahan & McWilliams, 1994; Barney & Wright, 1998). Delery (1998) stated that the organisations can get a valuable competitive advantage of its talented workforce attraction and retention in addition to the traditional HRM practices. He added that SHRM is based on the alignment of HRM practices to the business objectives of an organisation to gain a competitive advantage of these practices and increase the organisations' financial outcomes rather than being merely a cost department.

2.7.3 SHRM APPROACHES

Literature has defined four main SHRM perspectives; the universalistic perspective, the contingency perspective, the configurational point of view and the contextual approach (Jackson, Schuler, & Rivero, 1989; Delery & Doty, 1996; Brewster, 1999). The universalistic perspective is a simple approach plainly analysing the human resources strategies. It concentrates on the HRM functions and how to shift them from isolation and link them to the organisational performance (Terpstra & Rozell, 1993). The universalistic authors argued that the approach is basically transforming the performance of some HR policies individually such as selection and appraisals to reduce the management cost, increase individuals' abilities and increase the organisational performance (Rumberger, 1987; Delery & Doty, 1996). This perspective creates what is called HR best practices such as strategic selection, strategic HR plan and strategic appraisal systems. This is; however focusing on HR strategies, lacks the focus on the integration between the HR practices which lowers

the contribution of these practices to the organisational performance (Pfeffer, 1994; Osterman, 1994).

The contingency perspective is an opposing model to the universalistic perspective as it denies the notion of HR best practices and builds on the integration between HR practices as the new contingent variable that builds the relationship between human resource management and organisational performance (Galbraith & Nathanson, 1978; Delery & Doty, 1996). On the other hand, the configurational perspective suggests that for HR to be strategic, the integration should start internally before being linked to the external environment and the organisational strategies so as to ensure the achievement of the business goals (Delery & Doty, 1996).

Unlike the previous approaches, the contextual perspective is more broader and global as it is not only focused on the achievement of business goals and financial profits but also the extent of its effect on the organisational context such as the nature of human resources, its implications, the factors affecting it and the environment it evolves in (Brewster & Bournois, 1991; Brewster, 1999).

2.7.4 SHRM CRITIQUES

The SHRM theory has been criticized for being more descriptive and using ambiguous symbols rather than following the why, how and when to explain the relationship between the HRM functions implementation and the business strategy execution (Bacharach, 1989). The insufficiency in explaining the relationship between SHRM and business strategy resulted in an obscure justification for the existence of this relationship which in return creates an ambiguity in defining its real role. Wright & McMahan (1992) claimed that the HRM functions differ and that falls under the fact that the HRM field functions has been created in isolation with minimal integration. Hence, if the HRM practices fail to be fully integrated together, it will be able to integrate with the business strategy. Therefore; the challenge in defining SHRM theory starts from the failure to achieve a real strategic integration

between the HRM practices. The research shows a very little interest in identifying the relationship between HRM practices, for example, the relationship between selection and employee relations or appraisals and succession planning. According to (Galbraith & Nathanson, 1979; Fombrum, Tichy, & Devanna, 1984) functions like strategic development, strategic selection and strategic appraisals came into view due to the separation of HRM practices. Wright & Snell (1991) confirmed the same when they stated that most of the attempts for aligning employees with the organisational goals neglect the interaction between HRM functions which results in a weak alignment between them and the organisational strategies.

2.7.5 SHRM BARRIERS

One of the most significant barriers towards the implementation of effective SHRM is the rejection of the senior management especially the Chief Operating Officers (CEOs) to accept the HRPs as decision makers in the business strategies (Fowler, 1987; Kane, 1996). The conflict of interest that might occur between HR professionals and line mangers is another predicted reason for the top management rejection. This predicted conflict could be the result of line managers' closed comfort zones which could be disturbed by HR if it will go strategic and will have hand in the business as it will add tasks to line managers, put more supervision on their people management behaviours and business strategy execution. Moreover, it could be a result of the increasing feeling that HRM is administrative department and cannot participate in the business strategy formation or execution. In this regards, Dyer & Holder (1988) stated that the top management is the sturdiest and most opposing force that directly work against the implementation of the HR strategic role. That is why; Becker & Huselid (1999) highlighted that CEOs should perceive that the implications of the new role of HRPs involve more tasks than the administrative work so as to ensure more business awareness. Therefore; they need to be supported instead of being rejected and equipped with business knowledge instead of being neglected. They also noted that the lack of business knowledge is a significant barrier

towards HRPs. Meanwhile, Ulrich, Brockbank, Yeung, & Lake (1995) added that the ability to lead a change and the proficiency in delivering HRM practices are the most dominant barriers towards the implementation of HR strategy.

The second most common barrier towards the implementation of HR strategic role is the possession of business knowledge that lacks most of the HR professionals (Dyer & Holder, 1988; Miller, 1991). As a result, they will not be able to add value to the business or help the line managers in the execution of the business strategies except by implementing the traditional HRM practices. The third barrier is the absence of certain long term outcomes of the new applied HR programs which negatively affect the commitment of the program executers to the whole process (Storey, 1995; Legge, 1995). Therefore; an expected shortcoming might occur in the effectiveness of the program during the implementation process. A profound review of the reasons behind the emergence of the aforementioned barriers to the effectiveness of the implementation and the expected outcomes of the strategic HRM shows that most of these barriers are liable to the extent of trust, acceptance and cooperation between the top management and HR.

A strong and close cooperation based relationship between HRPs and line managers is required to construct an effective SHRM (Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Ulrich, 1998; Mello, 2001). To let this happen, line managers are required to participate in talent management practices such as policymaking to be able to respond to employees' issues (Martell & Caroll, 1995; Budhwar & Sparrow, 2002). However; this might cause line managers to fail in focusing on employees' performance and therefore a failure in executing the business strategies and objectives (McGovern et al., 1997).

Mello (2001) summarised the barriers towards SHRM implementation in eight significant reasons. The first is that organisations do focus on the short-term benefits more than the long-term one. While most of the HRM practices are based on long-term implications, HRPs will fail to achieve the required change in the time frame

desired by the organisation. The second Barrier is the incompetence of the HRPs to think strategically or even execute strategies. This barrier explains the need for equipping HRPs with business skills. The third barrier is the underestimation of the HRM functions and considering it as a service centre. The fourth hinder is the inability of line managers to perform HRM functions as well as the lack of cooperation between them and the HRPs. The fifth is that organisations are focusing on the quantified short-term results. The sixth reason is that organisations are afraid of the risk of investing on human resources because they are not sure of the outcomes. The inability of HRM practices to adjust itself according to the business needs is the seventh barrier that blocks the way towards the link between HRM and business strategies. The last reason is the lack of encouragement, support and rewards from organisations to the process of change.

2.8 HUMAN RESOURCE BUSINESS PARTNERING (HRBP)

This part of the research explores the most popular definitions of HRBP and its origins. Furthermore, it discusses Ulrich's HRBP model (1997) and its barriers.

2.8.1 DEFINITIONS & BACKGROUND

The HRM practices have witnessed several changes through its history, yet the recent changes are characterized by a great support to the business strategies and objectives. One of the most recent changes aimed to link HRM practices to the business is the human resources business partnering. In this regards, Becker, Huselid & Ulrich (2001) stated that The world's growing need for creativity, innovation and commitment gives no option for HRPs but to work hardly and find effective ways to link people, performance, strategy, mission and values to ensure their leverage contribution in adding value to their organisations. The secret behind the importance of linking human resources practices to the firms' strategies lies behind the fact that it is directly and positively reinforcing the organisational performance and helping in achieving the organisational objectives (Huselid, 1995; Delery & Doyt, 1996).

However; Dalziel, Strange & Walters (2006) assumed that cost reduction and adding value to the business through cooperating with the line managers is the main driver to HRBP.

HRBP competency models aimed to push HR professionals to review the traditional way of handling people management strategies and upgrade it to match the business strategy execution needs (Ulrich, 1997; Losey, 1999 Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). Namely; to shift HR from doing to delivering and that will not occur unless the HR professionals master the strategic functions of HRM such as recruitment and selection, training and development, employee relations etc... However; the implementation of these functions will require HR professionals to shift their focus from just doing the task to the focus on the results expected from the implementation of these tasks. For example, more than only fulfilling the manpower of an organisation, HR professionals need to focus on the outcomes related to this i.e. the abilities of the new hires to execute the business strategy. Likewise, instead of focusing on the number of trainings delivered, to focus on the new strategies applied and the change happened as a result of those trainings. Becker, Huselid & Beatty (2009) stated that talents are the core competitive advantage of an organisation; however, organisations are not building on the opportunities that strategic talent management can come up with.

According to Boroughs (2009) HR business partnering is a new style of thinking to be followed not just an action to be taken. Hence, if the management mind-set of an organisation is not open to change then the mission of HR to be a business partner is in risk. Ulrich, et al. (2009) concluded that HRBP is a real add to the business if implement successfully. However; research offers few numbers of empirical surveys about the effectiveness, challenges and opportunities of implementing those models (Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

2.8.2 HRBP ORIGINS

The HRBP notion has originated from several works such as (Storey, 1992; Beer, 1997). However, Ulrich's book Human Resources Champions (1997) is the most significant contributor to its popularity. In this book, Ulrich focused on the capabilities instead of the abilities of HR. In other words; focusing on the value that HRM could add to the outcomes instead of focusing on what HR is doing (Dalziel, Strange & Walters, 2006).

Conner & Ulrich (1996) planted the seed of the Four-Role based HR business partnering model developed by Ulrich (1997). According to Yeung, Woolcock & Sullivan (1996) the competency model developed by Ulrich, Brockbank, Yeung & Lake (1995) is the most influential HR competency model ever. This competency model itself was the spark for the emergence of Ulrich's HRBP model proposed in his famous book Human Resources champions (1997). The model suggested that HR can add value to the business and increase organisational performance if it will implement four roles. The first role is to be a strategic business partner adding to the business value instead of being a cost centre, the second role is to be an administrative expert, the third is to be a change leader instead of being a change follower and the fourth to be an employee champion and advocate (Ulrich, 1997).

Several research findings raised the fact that HR competency models are vital to the business performance; however, the effectiveness of those models are limited to the way it will reinvent itself and improve its roles to help in the execution of business strategies (Hope Hailey, Farndale & Truss, 2005; Wright, 2008). This is no doubt requires more concentration on the barriers and challenges of implementing the HRBP models.

2.8.3 ULRICH'S HRBP MODEL

Ulrich's HRBP four roles model aimed to transform HRM from being a traditional service provider to be a strategic business partner through focusing on what HR is delivering not what HR is doing (Legge, 2005). Similarly, Ulrich & Brockbank (2005) assumed that to increase organisational performance and business outcomes, the HR role as a business partner should concentrate on how to add value to all stakeholders. The CIPD report (2007) confirmed the importance of the HRBP role to the business outcomes and organisational success. The report shows that 38% of organisations are implementing the HR business partner role.

Ulrich's HRBP model (1997) suggested four roles for HR to be strategic business partner; the strategic partner role, the change agent role, the employee champion role and the administrative expert role (Figure 2.2). The four roles should work in synergy to achieve the mission of transforming HR from being traditional to be a business partner. The role of strategic partner is to align between HRM practices and business strategy to facilitate the execution of the business strategies and in return increase the business success.

FUTURE/ STRATEGIC FOCUS

PROCESSES

Strategic Partner	Change Agent
Administrative Expert	Employee Champion

PEOPLE

DAY TO DAY/ OPERATIONAL FOCUS

Figure 2.2 Ulrich, D, (1997) Human Resource Champions. Boston: Harvard University Press.

The role of administrative expert requires HR professionals to handle and improve the HR processes efficiently so as to add value to the business (Ulrich, 1997). In addition, it is aimed to increase the financial effectiveness through providing quality low cost services. HR administrative role is significant for organisational efficiency, however; this role could occupy the HR professionals and reduce their chances to have enough time to facilitate the execution of the business strategies. To avoid this, organisations should work on automating the HR administrative processes to reduce time and effort and give space for HR professionals to devote themselves for adding value to the business.

Solving and investigating employees' problems, defending them internally and externally and responding to their needs is increasing their loyalty and commitment to their organisations and therefore the organisational success (Conner & Ulrich, 1996). That is why; Ulrich (1997) confirmed that the employee champion role, if performed efficiently, will help in increasing employees' contribution and performance. Being employee champion requires more supervision on the managerial level especially with what concerns their relationship and attitude with their subordinates. Namely; employee champion role is focused on finding new ways to increase employee engagement, commitment and capabilities.

The change agent role exceeded more than merely being a follower to the change to be a builder to the change capacity, leader in the change process and a guardian to its culture (Conner & Ulrich, 1996; Ulrich, 1997). The change agent role includes HR ability to lead and maintain the change of the organisational culture and confirming that this culture is serving the business goals. The change agent is a crucial role as it is responsible for creating the environment that fits and facilitates the execution of business strategies. It is also responsible for changing the mindset of the top management and line managers and increasing their trust in HR professionals' ability to be business partners.

Wright, Dyer & Takla (1999) supported Ulrich's HRBP model; however, they stated that HR professionals do not have the capability to implement it appropriately. This suggestion might be driven from the fact that HR professionals lack the business knowledge or even do not like to leave their comfort zones and take the risk of business partnering challenges. Moreover; the responsibility of being a business partner will shift HR professionals from the ease of executing administrative tasks to the stiffness of executing business strategies to add value to the business outcome. In addition, Ulrich himself notified that if the four HR roles will be looked at hierarchically considering change agents and strategic partners are to add value to the business more than the administrative expert and employee champions do, this might diminish the overall effectiveness of the model due to tasks fragmentation (Pickard, 2004).

According to Ulrich (1998) shifting HR from being traditional to be more business centred and more strategic requires HR professionals to acquire business knowledge and develop skills such as change agents, employee advocates and business partners. However; if such competencies will not be linked to an empowerment for decision making especially for talent management related decisions, it will be of no great importance and might fail HR professionals to achieve any strategic role. Also being up to the neck with other transactional tasks makes HR professionals in short of time to implement their new complex strategic role. This could be solved by making HRM paperless department through automating all the administrative and paperwork or by assigning clerks to do the administrative work to free HR professionals to implement their strategic role just as finance parted filing from accounting work (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2004).

2.8.4 HRBP BARRIERS

Organisations are struggling to make their HR professionals add direct value to the business through linking them to the business execution. However; they are missing to equip them with the needed tools to achieve their new mission. HRBP

implementation challenges are chasing HR professionals since it has been launched. To avoid most of these challenges HR partnering should be treated as a mission to be achieved more than a task to be added. Therefore; all hands should be in the process of transforming HR to be a business partner (Ulrich, 1997). Partnering HR with the business should start by creating an environment which accepts HR to be a business partner. This includes preparing HR professionals for their new role by introducing them to the business context and helping them to master the business strategies so as to be able to add value in the execution of the same.

The transformation of HR from being merely a service centre to be an effective partner in the business in an organisation is not an easy task as it requires several criteria and standards to be fulfilled to ensure its successfulness. Brockway (2007) stated that the first driver for HR to be a business partner is to be business oriented and focused on long term benefits. Secondly, HRPs need to maintain a strong relationship with the line managers through providing them an easy accessibility for HR functions and maintaining a trust based open communication with them. The third and last driver is the business knowledge skills that HRBPs need to be equipped with to be able to add value to the business and the sufficient time they need to perform their new tasks. Based on literature review findings, the following sub-sections will discuss some of the major challenges obstacle HRBP performance.

2.8.4.1 LACK OF SYNERGY BETWEEN HRM PRACTICES

Several researches concluded that there is a significant relationship between HRM practices and business performance (Arthur, 1994; Pfeffer, 1994; Huselid, 1995; Ulrich, 1997). They suggested that HRM can make difference if it is used in building the commitment of employees. However; they also suggested that HRM practices should perform in a complete synergy so as to be able to perform the business partner role. Furthermore, Wright & McMahan (1992) highlighted that SHRM is not merely a process of integration between HRM and the business strategies but requires coordination between HRM functions as well.

The clerical or administrative work is always seen as one of the lowest strategic roles in an organisation. However; Ulrich (1997) in his HRBP model saw that HR administrative tasks can add value to the business if implemented efficiently and in synergy. The design of the HR shared systems and how it delivers services will reduce the cost and save money for the organisation and create synergy between HRM practices. On the other hand, Lambert (2009) assumed that the overload of the administrative tasks may cause a duplication in the HRM functions and hinder the HRPs' way to focus on the execution of business strategies and in return lower their contribution to the business performance. The automation of HRM functions could help in reducing the efforts required from HRPs and free them up for the implementation of other strategic tasks related to the execution of the business strategies.

Lawler & Mohrman (2003) highlighted that the administrative work of HR is a core part of the business partnering. However; the traditional way of handling HR administrative work will not free up HR professional to help in the execution of business strategies or to align between the HRM practices and the business strategy. Nevertheless; the increasing use of information technology (IT) lessened the load of HR administrative functions in many organisations as much of these functions can be handled through IT self-services (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003).

Several empirical testimonies suggested that the outcomes shall be increased when systems work together rather than if they work individually (Pfeffer, 1998; Sun et al., 2007). In the same context, Becker & Huselid (1999) suggested that reshaping the organisation's culture to increase the business outcomes will not occur if human resources functions are implemented individually. Hence, integrating the human resources practices is a step that must be taken before integrating the HR itself with the business strategies so as to ensure a smooth transformation for HR to be a strategic business partner. In other words, integrated HRM systems and practices can bring about higher business outcomes and financial profits if integrated with the

goals, mission and values of an organisation. Meanwhile, researchers claimed that the integration of HR with business strategies is based on the interrelationship between all the process participants such as top management, HRBPs, line managers and employees in order to achieve the business strategies (Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich & Brockbank 2005; Francis & Keegan, 2006; Wright, 2008). This is leading to the following hypothesis:

H1: The synergy between HR practices will positively influence HRBP performance.

2.8.4.2 UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCES BUSINESS PARTNERS

According to Caldwell (2008) several research findings suggest that HR competency models are providing unsatisfactory definitions for the real role of the HRBPs. Moreover; Caldwell (2010) suggested that business partnering models does not define a clear role for the business partners and even not predicting their performance outcomes. The ambiguity of the role of HR as a business partner is the outcome of the several directions that HR is taking by either focusing on strategies, support services, operations or people management (Francis & Keegan, 2006). In addition, Caldwell (2003) argued that the ambiguity of the HR role as a business partner is the outcome of the overlap between the administrative and the strategic roles which might create a role conflict during the implementation of the model. Even delegating or outsourcing HR services could create fragmentation and increase the ambiguity of the HR role as a business partner. However; several researches concluded that the use of IT self-services could somehow reduce the complexity of HRBPs' role by reducing the load of administrative services (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Lambert, 2009). Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H2: Understanding the HRBPs' role will positively influence HRBP performance.

2.8.4.3 LACK OF BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE AMONG HR PROFESSIONALS

Strategy execution is the main driver to the successfulness of changing HR to be a business partner (Pfeffer, 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Hence, any shortfall in the know-how to execute these strategies shall result in a failure to transform HR to the business partnering stage. That is why; Becker & Huselid (2006) highlighted that the ability of HRPs to create the systems that enhance employees' performance and behaviours is the main gadget to a competitive advantage that leads to increased financial outcomes. To achieve this strategic shift, HRPs need to play different roles more than the ones they were accustomed to play before, such as the role of advisor, coach and architect (Ulrich & Beatty, 2001). Implementing these roles require HRPs to increase their abilities to create new policies so as to guarantee effective talent management for better business objectives achievement (Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997).

Business knowledge and strategic goals understanding are the essential requirements for HRPs to be able to manage the workforce and to play a leading role in the change process (Clardy, 2008). Caldwell et al. (2011) noted that the lack of knowledge from the side of HRPs on how to create strategies and how to implement them will lead them to fail in achieving their roles in the strategy execution. Pfeffer (1998) argued that HRPs are short of the needed skills to implement the new policies and systems required to shift HR to be strategic and even not aware of the advantages of implementing these systems. Lawler III (2008) saw that however there is an increasing need for their contribution, HRPs are not equipped with the knowledge and skills that make them able to manage talents and help in organisational effectiveness. That is why; Beer (1997) argued that HRBPs need to improve their analytical and communication skills in order to enable themselves to lead the change towards HRBP.

According to Lambert (2009) the role of HRBP requires a deep understanding of the business and its implications so as to be able to provide the business managers

with relevant advices that add value to the business and increase the organisational performance. This will occur by increasing business managers abilities on how to manage people to get their best performance (Ulrich et al., 2009)   However; this is liable to several factors one of them is the relationship between HRBPs and business managers and the extent of trust in HR professionals to be business partners. In this context, Lambert (2009) saw that a strong relationship based on trust should be established between HRBPs and business managers to ensure a successful partnership.

Lawler & Mohrman (2003) stated that HR can make difference and add value to the business through equipping the organisation with the right capital and continuously developing them to achieve the business strategy. While most strategies fail due to the lack of implementation guidelines, this development should be focused on increasing the workforce capabilities on how to implement business strategies and how to lead a change. In the same context, Lawler & Mohrman (2003) saw that the lack of talented workforce is the main driver of business strategy failure. This is proposing the following hypothesis:

H3: HRPs' business knowledge will positively influence HRBP performance.

2.8.4.4   LACK OF SUPPORT FROM TOP MANAGEMENT & LINE MANAGERS

One more significant obstacle towards the transformation of HR to be strategic business partner is the lack of acceptance, trust and admittance of the new role of the HR as a business partner from the side of the line managers and top management (Wright, 2008). The difficulty in admitting the new role of HRBPs from the side of the line managers might be because they feel that it will give HRPs more authority on them and more interference on what they are doing. That is why; Wright (2008) claims that developing a strong and close relationship with the line managers will

make achieving the HRBP more of an easy task. According to Wright (2008) the validation of the HRBP role in an organisation will require a mutual cooperation and communication between HRBPs and line managers which requires HRPs to increase their business knowledge.

Being a business partner is not the most important consideration of HR professionals due to the lack of confidence and support from the senior management and line managers. Huselid & Becker (2011) assumed that the lack of interest from the side of management in HRBP is the outcome of the unstable HR quality. According to Krishna & Prasad (2012) two key challenges block the way of HR professionals towards being business partners; the first is the lack of support from the top management and line managers in the HR transformation process. This lack of support may be the result of several reasons such as the traditional way of perceiving HR as an administrative services provider or due to an expected conflict of authority lines between management and HR professionals. The second challenge is the extent of IT participation in helping HRM to improve its practices. Namely; providing HR with IT solutions for the implementation of HR daily practices will increase effectiveness and free up HR professionals to help in the execution of business strategies.

To ensure their ability to add value to the business and meet HR business partnering current and future challenges, HR professionals need to develop sustainable relationships with employees from all levels and focus on service delivery and business understanding (Brockway, 2007). Hence, a strong relationship between HRPs and CEOs will increase their chances to gain support and empowerment which in turn will help them to implement the HRBP role.

The new role of HR as a business partner gives a feeling of discomfort to several HRPs and line managers as it is dragging them out of their comfort zones to encounter new responsibilities. According to Ulrich (1998) the implementation of a successful HRBP demands a mutual understanding from both line managers and

HRBs through increasing the line managers' involvement in the HRM practices and increasing the HRBPs involvement in the business strategies. Hence, achieving HRBP requires HR professionals to let go of the comfort zones of traditional HRM practices (Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). However; line managers will always try to keep HR professionals away from getting inside their comfort zone due to the increasing feeling that they are intervening in their responsibilities, threatening their authorities and adding new tasks to them. According to (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003; McConville; 2006) a significant challenge obstacles the implementation of the HRBP is the discomfort that overwhelm the line managers when they know that they are going to perform HRM tasks in addition to their business targets. Therefore; a conflict may occur between HR professionals and line managers due to the rejection of the new tasks HRBP will incorporate to both parties. That is why; Holden (2007) highlighted that the organisational change should be focused on changing the mentality of leaders and taking them out of their comfort zones to increase their understanding, support and acceptance to the new HR responsibilities. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H4: Top management and line managers' support will positively influence HRBP performance.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the used methodology to examine the research hypotheses instituted in the first chapter. The first part of this chapter explains the research design. Research population and sampling comes in the second part of this chapter. The third part states the study conceptual framework. In the fourth part of this chapter study instruments are presented. The fifth part presents methods of analysis. The ethical considerations of this study are discussed in the last part of this chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Robson (1993) the survey is a widely applied research methodology used to gather data from a particular population or a selected sample of the same through distributing an interview or questionnaire as the survey tool. Surveys are the most significant tools to get data from small or large population. That is why; they are to a large degree accepted as a fundamental instrument for executing social science research (Rossi, Wright & Anderson, 1983).

Leary (1995) states that questionnaires are more effective tools for conducting researches than interviews as they are cheaper, easier, can be conducted in groups and allow more confidentiality to respondents. In addition, Robson (1993) added that mailed surveys are serving the researcher more than other tools as they are more effortless, time consuming and lower in cost. The afore mentioned facts urged the researcher to go for the quantitative research methodology and use a questionnaire as the survey tool to assess the relation between the expected challenges of applying HRBP and HRBP performance in a UAE based medical organisation.

The relational type of research is used in several studies as it is advantageous for investigating the connection between two or more variables that already exists in the population (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002). Therefore; to test the developed

hypotheses, the researcher used a relational design based on a cross-sectional survey to correlate between the scores of the listed variables and measure the relationship between them.

The questionnaire items were based on literature findings and an adaption of Ulrich and Conner Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey (1996). To reduce the time and effort, an online version of the questionnaire has been set and sent as internet link by email to the HRD, other administrative and medical staff of the case study organisation. Responses to the questionnaire will get back automatically as soon as the participant clicks finish.

The challenges facing HRBP represent the four independent variables in the study were the synergy between HR systems, HRBPs' role understanding, HRPs' business knowledge and top management and line managers' support to HRBP. The study includes HRBP performance as the only dependent variable.

3.3 RESEARCH POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The target population of this study are employees in the health care industry in UAE. The sample of the study involves HR staff, administrative non-HR staff (administrative staff, line managers and senior managers) and clinical staff. The basic responsibilities of the participants include administrative tasks, medical tasks, operational tasks, people management tasks and strategic planning tasks. Including HR, administrative non-HR and clinical staff of the case study organisation was based on their familiarity of the HRM tasks due to the high number of transactions they used to have with HR since the date they applied for a job in the same organisation. Hence, they are all able to reply any question related to HRM performance and its relationship with other departments.

There was no accessibility issue in the process of the questionnaire distribution. Permission has been granted from the general manager of the case study organisation

to send the questionnaire link by emails through the HR department to the targeted employees. Selection error has been avoided by specifying the existing employees and cross-checking duplications. All email addresses of employees were confirmed to be valid, different and no one of them is repeated. The internet survey link was sent to 342 employees and a total number of 259 submitted the questionnaire. The usable response rate of the complete questionnaires was 75.73% which is a relatively high rate of Internet based survey responses.

According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black (1998) the power of the statistical analysis is the outcome of the sample size and it has a direct influence on the results generalizability. The small sample increases the chances of Type II error or beta (β) occurrence which in turn lowers the power and significance of the statistics (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998). In addition, the high response rate for the questionnaire indicates that the results can be inferred, however; it cannot be generalized due to the limited application on one hospital only. The limitation of distributing the survey in several organisations happened due to the confidentiality policies in UAE hospitals which do not allow surveys related to the medical organisations' performance or practices due to competition purposes.

Email surveys are liable to nonresponse bias which occurs when respondents have a dissimilar point of view about the measurement items (Smith, Olah, Hansen & Cumbo, 2003). Armstrong & Overton (1977) stated that more than 70% rate response is sufficient to avoid the occurrence of the nonresponse bias. By ensuring confidentiality, keeping the survey life for long time and sending reminders, the response rate exceeded 70% and the research managed to avoid the nonresponse bias.

3.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is focused on finding the relationship between the challenges towards applying HRBP and HRBP performance in a medical context. Several empirical researches have already focused on some of HRBP challenges as mentioned in the

literature review chapter but in different contexts. This study is focused on more challenges towards the application and performance of HRBP based on literature review assumptions (Figure 3.1).

The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the obstacles hindering HRBP on the one hand and HRBP performance on the other hand in one of Dubai most leading hospitals. Some independent variables were adapted from Ulrich & Conner (1996) Human resource-role assessment survey and the rest of them were created based on literature review and relevant research findings. The independent variables which represent the challenges facing HRBP consist of the synergy between HRM systems, HRBPs' role understanding, HRPs' business knowledge and the top management and line managers' support to HRBP. The dependent variable was based on Ulrich HRBP model (1997) and consists of four roles administrative expert, strategic partner, employee champion and change agent. To examine the performance of HRBP in the case study organisation, the four HRBP practices adapted from Ulrich HRBP (1997) has been integrated into a single dependent variable. Therefore; this research intends to examine the relationship between four challenges facing HRBP and HRBP performance.
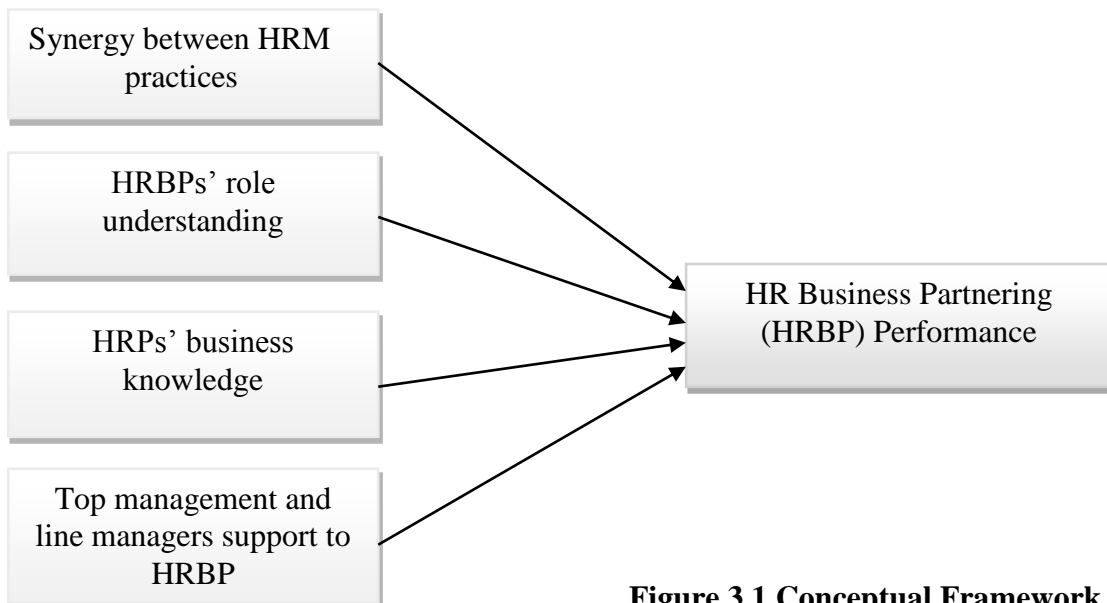
Figure 3.1 Conceptual Framework

3.5 STUDY INSTRUMENT

The study has used a self-administered questionnaire to examine the relationship between HRBP challenges and HRBP performance in the case study organisation. The first part of the questionnaire identifies the demographic data of employees such as gender, educational level, age, organisational tenure, job level, job nature and nationality (Appendix A). The second part of the questionnaire was adapted from previous research findings and Ulrich & Conner (1996) Human resource-role assessment survey and Ulrich HRBP model (1997) to examine the relationship between the proposed HRBP challenges and its performance. Questions from 1-5 were addressed to examine the synergy between HRM practices. Questions from 10-13 were intended to examine the HR professionals business knowledge and ability to perform the business partner role. The extent of ambiguity in the HR business partners' role was examined by the items 14-17. Questions 18-23 aimed to examine the extent of support from top management and line managers to HRBP. Items 6-9 were set to examine the administrative expert role, 11-13 to examine the strategic partner role, 24 to examine employee champion role, 25 to examine the change agent role and all combined as a scale aimed to examine the HRBP performance.

Respondents were asked to respond to a five Likert questionnaire to state the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the statements (1= totally disagree till 5= totally agree). In addition a not applicable due to insufficient information option has been added to avoid random responds. All fields of the questionnaire were mandatory and one answer only was allowed.

3.6 METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the collected data. While the survey was internet based, data has been imported directly to SPSS software and descriptive statistics were processed to display results.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To avoid any ethical issues, hindrances or problems in the research process, the most primary consideration of this study was the confidentiality, wellbeing and rights of the participants. Participants have been informed by emails that their response is not mandatory. They have also been informed that the purpose of the survey is only statistical and that their identities will not be known. Moreover; a neutral language has been used to make it easy for all participants from all nationalities. Therefore; consent has been sent by email to all participants explaining the nature and content of the survey ensuring that the data will be used for statistical purposes only (Appendix B). In addition, it involves a confirmation that the response to the questionnaire will not by any means harm the respondents. Also the right to ask questions about the survey before participating was highlighted.

CHAPTER 4: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS & MEASURES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of two sections aimed to discuss the descriptive statistics and the measures of the study. The descriptive statistics includes everything in the respondents' demographics by numbers, percentages and comparisons. The measures formation will be discussed in details as well.

4.2 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The first part of the survey was tailored to describe the structure of the case study hospital respondents by gender, education, age, number of years in the current organisation, job nature, region, and job level (Table 4.1). The survey was sent by emails to 342 employees and out of them 259 completed the survey at a response rate of 75.73%. According to Green, Wu, Whitten, & Medlin (2006) the expected rate of response to HR related surveys falls between 5% and 20%. Hence, the response rate in this study is considerably high in the field of HR research. However; the results of this survey cannot be generalized because it has been applied only to one organization.

The results of the demographics section of the distributed survey shows that out of 259 respondents who completed the survey, the majority were females (n = 131; 50.6%) with a slight difference from the males (n = 128; 49.4%) as shown in Table 1. With respect to the highest educational level (n = 157; 60.6%) respondents were graduated from college, (n = 44; 17.0%) were post graduated, (n = 51; 19.7%) were master's degree holders and (n = 7; 2.7%) were PhD holders. Out of 259 respondents (n = 11; 4.2%) were less than 25, (n = 167; 64.5%) were 25-35, (n = 66; 25.5%) were 36-46 and (n = 15; 5.8%) were 47-60. With regard to the number of years at the case study hospital most respondents indicated that they had worked for three-seven years (n = 102; 39.4%), respondents who worked one-three years came after (n = 89;

34.4%), followed by less than one year (n = 53; 20.5%). Respondents who worked in the same organisation eight-thirteen years (n = 13; 0.5%) and the lowest participation was for respondents who worked fourteen years and above (n = 2; 0.8%).

Descriptive Statistics			
Total sample size **100%**		**259**	
Gender	Male	128	49.4%
	Female	131	50.6%
Highest Level of Education	Graduated from College	157	60.6%
	Post Graduate Diploma	44	17%
	Masters Education	51	19.7%
	PhD	7	2.7%
Age	Less than 25	11	4.2%
	25-35	167	64.5%
	36-46	66	25.5%
	47-60	15	5.8%
Number of Years at Hospital Z	Less than one year	53	20.5%
	1-3 years	89	34.4%
	3-7 years	102	39.4%
	8-13	13	0.5%
	14 years and above	2	0.8%
Job Nature	HR	11	4.2%
	Medical	125	48.3%
	Other administration	123	47.5%

Nationality	UAE National	4	1.5%
	Arab/ Non UAE	55	21.2%
	North/ South America	2	0.8%
	Europe/ Australia	2	0.8%
	Asia	193	74.5%
	Africa/ Non-Arab	3	1.2%
Job Level	Staff	202	78%
	First line manager	38	14.7%
	Senior Manager	19	7.3%

Table (4.1) Descriptive Statistics

The largest number of population were medical staff as they were representing the majority of the hospital employees (n = 125; 48.3%), comes next administrative non-HR staff such as finance, IT, customer service and senior management (n = 123; 47.5%) and the lowest number of respondents was HR due to the fact that they were only representing one department in the whole organisation (n = 11; 4.2%). With respect to nationalities, Asian nationals represented the majority of respondents (n = 193; 74,5%) due to the fact that they are the majority of UAE expatriates, followed by Arabs/ Non-UAE nationals (n = 55; 21.2%), UAE nationals represented (n = 4; 1.5), Africa/ Non-Arab represented (n = 3; 1.2%), followed by North/ South America (n = 2; 0.8%) and Europe/ Australia (n = 2; 0.8%). Most of the respondents were staff (n = 202; 78%), first line managers came after (n = 38; 14.7%) and senior managers were the lowest number of respondents (n = 19; 7.3%).

4.3 MEASURES

The measures of this study were basically adapted from Ulrich and Conner Human resource role-assessment (1996). However; few modifications were done by adapting other measures from related research findings to match the research

circumstances. The existing and adapted measures were combined into a 25 questions survey to measure the hypotheses of the study.

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.972	.972	25

Table (4.2) Reliability Statistics

The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the 25 items was .97 which indicates significant consistency between all the study items (Table 4.2). Cronbach's Alpha if Item deleted shows that there will be no significant increase in the total scale alpha in case of any item deletion (Table 4.3). In addition; no negative item correlation has occurred.

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
In my organization compensation is based on performance evaluation	72.4172	694.431	.467	.763	.973
In my organization succession planning is based on performance evaluation	72.2517	690.163	.573	.764	.972
The training I receive in my organization helps me perform my job description.	71.8742	683.471	.649	.625	.972
HR practices are administered cohesively	72.1258	673.151	.809	.868	.971
I believe there is synergy between HR practices	72.2252	671.162	.790	.855	.971

HR is more administrative than strategic	72.2649	684.903	.562	.593	.973
HR develops systems that efficiently process employee transactions (Vacations / Visa ...etc)	71.9007	673.770	.757	.831	.971
HR is delivering administrative work efficiently in my organisation	71.9139	674.213	.818	.860	.971
HR administrative work is adding value to the business in my organisation	72.2053	668.924	.837	.809	.971
HR professionals in my organisation are equipped with the business knowledge	72.3576	669.085	.835	.852	.971
HR professionals in my organization participate in the process of defining business strategies	72.5166	669.158	.791	.832	.971
HR professionals help the organization accomplish business goals	72.2715	670.306	.819	.820	.971
HR professionals spend time on strategic issues and know how to solve them	72.4437	670.168	.774	.712	.971
HR business partner is required job in my organisation	72.2914	670.208	.740	.829	.971
I clearly understand the role of HR business partner in my organisation	72.1854	673.419	.747	.795	.971
The HR business partner in my organisation work to align HR strategies with business strategy	72.3377	670.212	.765	.782	.971
HR has a significant role in the business strategies execution in my organisation	72.3642	670.086	.768	.760	.971

Line managers are supporting the HR business partner role	72.1060	676.375	.750	.798	.971
Line managers see that HR business partnering role is an added value to the organisation	72.2119	668.475	.806	.874	.971
HR is receiving support from the top management in the application of the HR business partnering role	72.1987	673.080	.714	.701	.972
Top management is confident in the HR ability to be a business partner in my organisation	72.2583	670.820	.774	.776	.971
HR professionals are open to the HR business partnering roles and responsibilities	72.3113	668.656	.799	.842	.971
The line managers feel comfortable in the implementation of the HR practices	72.2715	668.212	.847	.877	.971
HR supports and advocates employees in my organisation	72.3046	671.587	.815	.809	.971
HR is seen as a change leader in my organisation	72.4305	664.313	.855	.853	.970

Table (4.3) Item-Total Statistics

4.3.1 THE SYNERGY BETWEEN HRM PRACTICES

Several research findings concluded that HRM should perform in a complete synergy to add value to the business (Arthur, 1994; Pfeffer, 1994; Huselid, 1995; Ulrich, 1997). A scale combined of five items was created to measure the extent of synergy between the HRM practices to correlate it with the HRBP performance. The five items of the scale had a strong Cronbach's alpha value and the total consistency

of the scale indicates a significant consistency which will be shown in a later assessment (section 5.1).

4.3.2 BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE

The business knowledge scale has been adopted from Ulrich and Conner Human resource role-assessment (1996) and measured by four items. However; every item was slightly changed to match the research requirements and context. The inter-item correlation indicates that the four items are significantly consistent and the total consistency of the scale indicates a significant consistency which will be shown in a later assessment (section 5.1).

4.3.3 ROLE UNDERSTANDING

The role ambiguity notion has been deeply exposed in several researches. According to Caldwell (2010) business partnering models does not define a clear role for the business partners and even not predicting their performance outcomes. The measurement of this scale has been partially adopted from Ulrich & Conner Human resource role-assessment (1996) and partially created. Four items were used to measure the role ambiguity scale, two of them were adopted and modified to match the study context and the other two items were created. The inter-item correlation indicates that the four items are significantly consistent and the total consistency of the scale indicates a significant consistency which will be shown in a later assessment (section 5.1).

4.3.4 MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

The management support to the HRBP concept has been extensively discussed in several researches. According to Wright (2008) developing a strong and close relationship with the line managers will make achieving the HRBP more of an easy task. In addition; Krishna & Prasad (2012) stated that one of the key challenges

blocking the way of HR professionals towards being business partners is the lack of support from the top management and line managers in the HRM transformation process. The measurement of this scale has been created from the scratch based on previous research findings. Subsequent to some refinements, six items were used to measure the management support. The inter-item correlation shows that the six items are significantly consistent and the total consistency of the scale indicates a significant consistency which will be shown in a later assessment (section 5.1).

4.3.5 HRBP PERFORMANCE

The variables discussed in the previous sub-sections were the independent variables and aimed to measure the challenges facing the HRBP performance. However; this section describes the measures used to examine the dependent variable. The dependent variable as previously discussed in the literature review is HRBP performance. To measure the HRBP performance, Ulrich's HR champions, four-role model (1997) was used. Therefore; 9 items were created and used to measure the four roles as a scale. The administrative expert role was measured by 4 items, 3 items measured the strategic partner role, the employee champion 1 item and 1 item for the change agent role. The inter-item correlation shows that the nine items are significantly consistent and the total consistency of the scale indicates a significant consistency which will be shown in a later assessment (section 5.1).

4.3.6 CONTROL VARIABLES

The demographic characteristics of the study were used as control variables. These are gender, highest level of education, age, tenure, job nature, region and job level. Highest level of education was measured by college graduation, post-graduation, master education and PhD. Age was measured by years and clustered (less than 25 years, 25-35 years, 36-46 years and 47-60 years). While the tenure was (less than one year, 1-3 years, 3-7 years, 8-13 years and 14 years and above). Job level was measured by (HR, medical and other administration). The influence of

these factors has been used severally in previous researches to ensure that the results are none biased. Using some of these factors in a regression analysis could also add more findings to the study results or further researches.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the scale reliability, the main variables descriptive statistics, correlation between the study variables and the significant 2 tailed correlation between the independent and dependent variables. It will also include an interpretation for the study hypotheses and findings.

5.2 SCALE RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

It is fundamental to test the reliability of the multi-item scales of the study before the interpretation of the hypotheses. One of the most common ways to examine the reliability of the variables of a study is the Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient. Cronbach (1951) developed the alpha coefficient to measure the scale internal consistency. The measures of the alpha coefficient vary between 0 and 1. The common accepted α is .7 and the higher the alpha the higher the reliability among the test items.

In this study the total α of all variables scored between .8 and .9 which indicates excellent correlation between all the items of the study. Moreover; Cronbach's alpha if item deleted shows that the deletion of any item will not have any effect on the total scale reliability. The Cronbach's alpha for the five scales was tested separately and each of them had an alpha above .9 which means that the internal consistency of the five scales items is highly correlated (Table 5.1).

Variable	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
All variables	.972
Synergy between HRM practices	.858
Business Knowledge	.896
Role Ambiguity	.919
Management Support	.920
HRBP performance	.935

Table (5.1): Scale Reliabilities

5.3 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

This section analyzes the frequency distribution of the study five variables and interprets the correlation between those variables.

5.3.1 FREQUENCIES AND DISTRIBUTIONS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Synergy	175	4.00	25.00	15.2171	5.33571
Business Knowledge	177	.00	20.00	11.4407	4.86851
Role Understanding	173	.00	20.00	11.8208	5.21706
Support	166	.00	30.00	18.2410	7.08150
HRBP	167	1.00	45.00	27.0419	10.20297
Valid N (listwise)	151				

Table (5.2): Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables
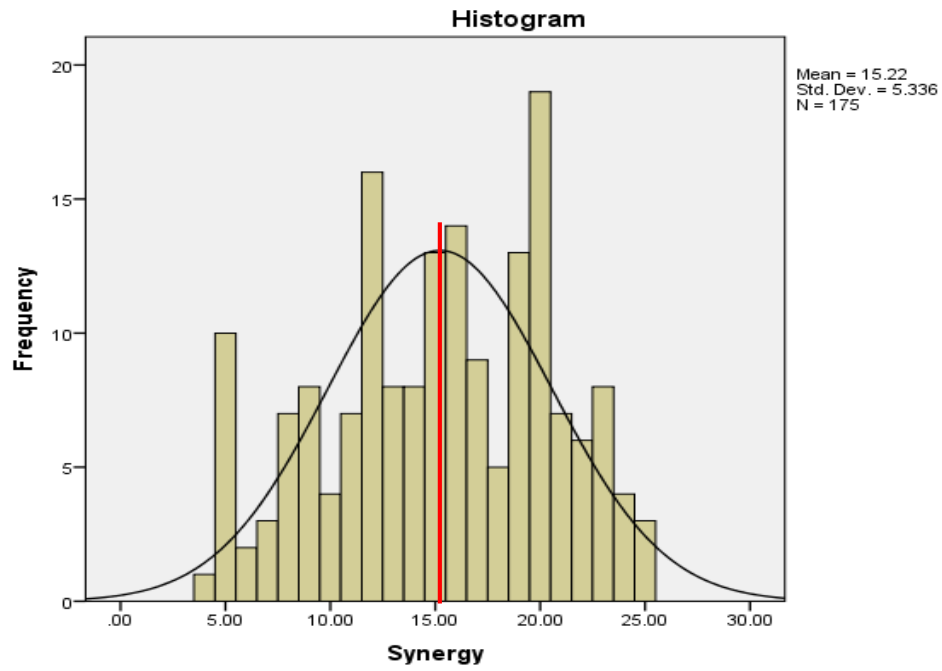
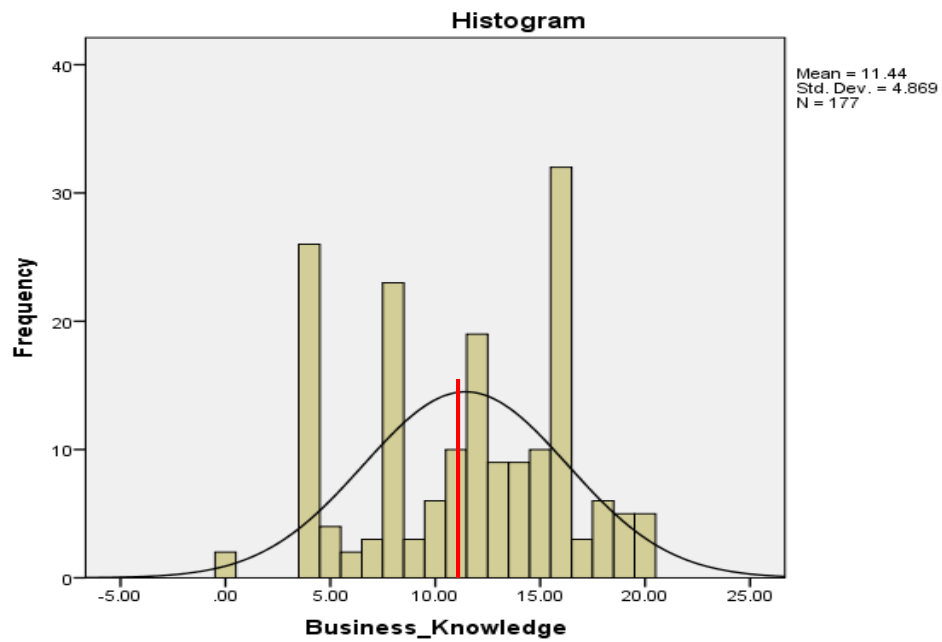**Fig (5.1): Histogram Synergy between HRM Practices**

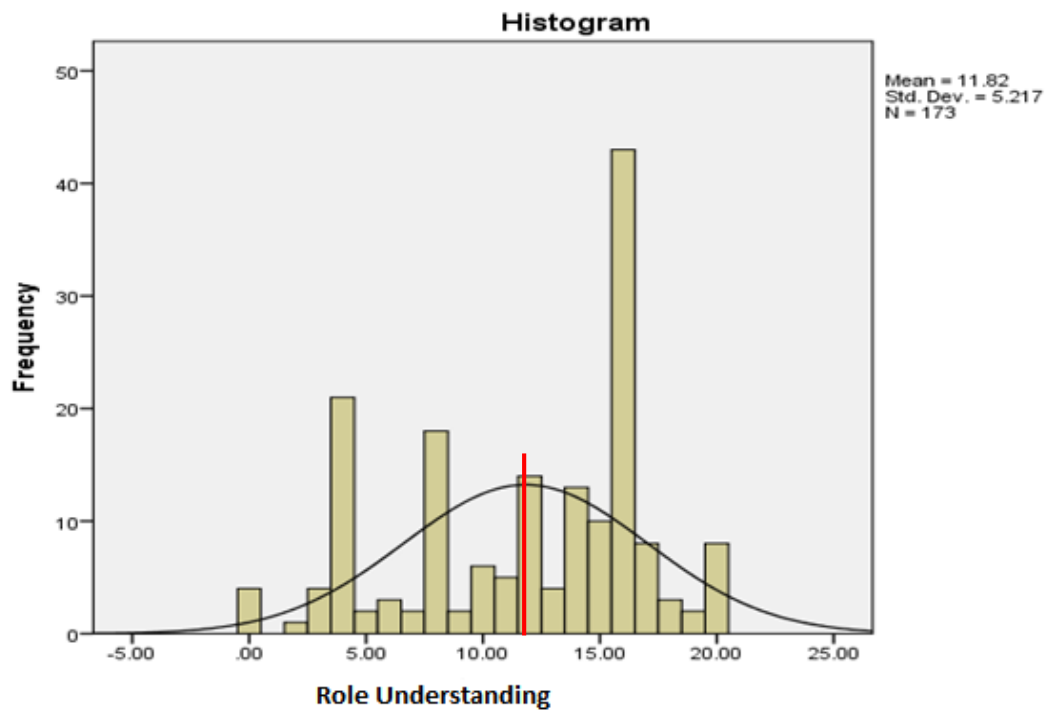**Fig (5.2): Histogram Business Knowledge**
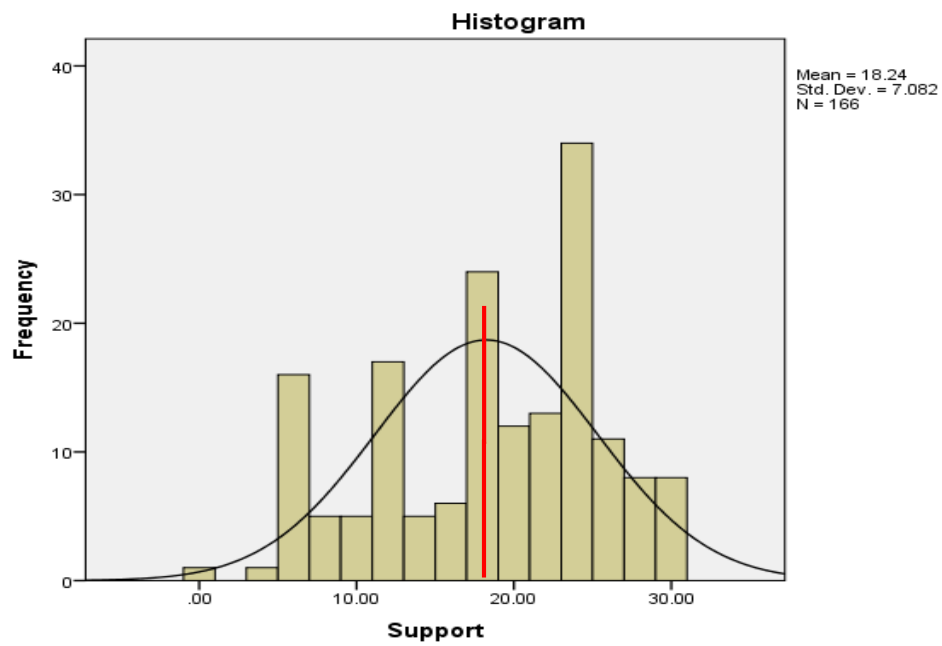
Fig (5.3): Histogram Role Understanding

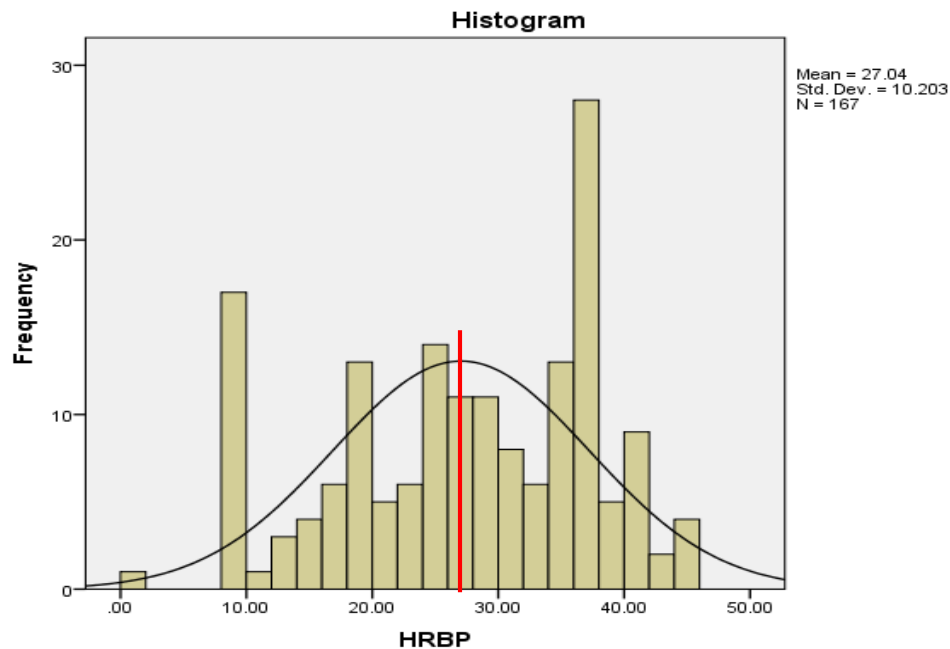**Fig (5.4): Histogram Management Support**

Fig (5.5): Histogram HRBP Performance

The standard deviation level of the study five variables falls between 4.8 and 10.2 which indicates medium variability of responses and considered acceptable (Table 5.2). The frequency histograms also indicate that they are all moderately peaked (Figs. 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5) which proves the medium variability of the responses. The homogeneity of the sample is the reason behind its medium variability as the majority of the sample respondents were medical and administrative staff working for the same organisation and all are aware of the current HRM systems.

According to Bowermann, O'Connell & Hand (2001) statistical analysis infers that the distribution of the real population of a study should be shaped in a normal bell-shaped curve. Hence, any deviation from this inference shall require some explanations. George & Mallery (2007) stated that the deviation in the distribution normality can be measured by kurtosis and skewness test and a -/+1 value is considered excellent. In this study the means of all the study variables are more or less centred, normally peaked and their skewness range between -.234 and -.511 which proves a normal distribution (Table 5.3).

Variable	Skewness
Synergy	-.234
Business Knowledge	-.258
Ambiguity	-.511
Support	-.430
HRBP	-.377

Table (5.3): Normality Measures

5.3.2 CORRELATIONS

Correlation is the way to assess the relationship between the variables of a study. Pearson correlation always referred to by the letter r is one of the most commonly used correlation tests and ranges between -/+1. According to George & Mallery (2007) Pearson's correlation is best used where the distribution of study variables proved to be normal. In this study all the variables of interest are normally distributed. Therefore; Pearson's correlation is suitable to be used. The positive correlation indicates that when one variable increases the other variable will increase as well. On the contrary, the negative correlation indicates that if one variable increases the other will tend to decrease. When Pearson's value is close to -/+1 it means that the variables are highly related to each other and when it is close to 0 it means that the variables are weakly related. In addition the Sig (2- tailed) p value indicates to the extent of significance in the statistical correlation between variables. When the value of the Sig (2- tailed) is greater than .05 it concludes that there is no statistical significant correlation between variables and if the Sig (2- tailed) is equal or less than .5 it concludes that there is a statistical significant correlation between variables.

		Synergy	Business Knowledge	Role Understanding	Support
Synergy	Pearson Correlation	1	.726**	.600**	.749**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	175	171	166	161
Business Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	.726**	1	.797**	.859**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	171	177	171	164
Ambiguity	Pearson Correlation	.600**	.797**	1	.835**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	166	171	173	163
Support	Pearson Correlation	.749**	.859**	.835**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	161	164	163	166
HRBP	Pearson Correlation	.822**	.933**	.794**	.882**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	162	167	162	157

Table (5.4): Correlations between all Variables

The correlation coefficients (r) in this study indicate that there is a significant relationship between all the five variables of the study. Additionally, the Sig (2-tailed) p value is <.0001 which concludes that there is a statistical significant correlation between the independent and dependent variables of this study (Tables 5.4 and 5.5).

		HRBP
Synergy	Pearson Correlation	.822
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.0001
	N	162
Business Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	.933**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.0001
	N	167
Role Understanding	Pearson Correlation	.794**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.0001
	N	162
Support	Pearson Correlation	.882**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.0001
	N	157
HRBP	Pearson Correlation	1**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	167

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table (5.5): Correlation between the Dependent and Independent Variables

As previously assumed, the correlation between the four independent variables representing the HRBP challenges and the dependent variable representing HRBP performance indicates that there is a significant statistical relationship (Table 5.5). In addition, the Sig. 2 tailed p-value is < 0.0001 in all cases which indicates a significant magnitude of association between the study independent and the dependent variables. This concludes that the increase of the synergy between HRM practices will increase HRBP performance. In addition if the HRPs increase their business knowledge, this will increase HRBP performance. In the same context, if HRPs, line managers and top management understand the implications of the HRBPs role, it will increase the HRBP performance. Finally, the increase of the management support represented in line managers and top management will increase the HRBP performance. Furthermore, the correlation between all the study variables illustrated that all independent variables are significantly correlated to each other (Table 5.4).

5.4 HYPOTHESES INTERPRETATIONS

This part interprets the proposed hypotheses of the research based on the findings of the statistical results of the research.

5.4.1 HYPOTHESIS 1

The first hypothesis in this research foretold that the synergy between HRM practices will influence HRBP performance. The coefficient correlation (r) between the synergy between HRM practices representing the independent variable and HRBP performance representing the dependent variable is .82 and the p value < 0.0001 (Table 5.5). Therefore, there is a strong evidence of statistical analysis that there is a significant relationship between HRM practices synergy and HRBP performance. This means that if the HRPs work to integrate all the HRM practices together without separating any of them; it will increase their chances to align those practices with the business strategies. Therefore, the more the HRM practices are related to each other and building on each other, the stronger the HRBP performance will be. Subsequently, hypothesis 1 is accepted.

5.4.2 HYPOTHESES 2

The second hypothesis in this research predicted that understanding the HRBPs' role will influence HRBP performance. The coefficient correlation (r) between the HRBPs' role understanding representing the independent variable and HRBP performance representing the dependent variable is .79 and p value < 0.0001 (Table 5.5). Therefore, there is a strong evidence of statistical analysis that there is a significant relationship between HRBPs' role understanding and HRBP performance. This means that if the HRPs, business managers and top management focus on defining and understanding the real role of HRBPs', it will increase the HRPs' chances to focus on strategic issues and relate the HRM practices to the business performance. Consequently, this will affect the HRBPs' abilities to play a real and

clear strategic partner role. Therefore, the more the HRBP role is clear and understood, the stronger the HRBP performance will be. Subsequently, hypothesis 2 is accepted.

5.4.3 HYPOTHESES 3

The third hypothesis of the research foresaw that the HRPs' business knowledge will influence HRBP performance. The coefficient correlation (r) between the HRPs' business knowledge representing the independent variable and HRBP performance representing the dependent variable is .93 and p value < 0.0001 (Table 5.5). Therefore, there is a strong evidence of statistical analysis that there is a significant relationship between HRPs' business knowledge and HRBP performance. This means that if the HRPs became more knowledgeable with the business implications and its requirements, it will increase their capabilities and help them to align the HRM practices to participate in the business strategy execution. Consequently, the know-how to execute the business strategies from the side of the HRPs will increase their chances to participate in the business strategy execution and formation. Therefore, the more the HRPs' are equipped with the business knowledge, the stronger the HRBP performance will be. Subsequently, hypothesis 3 is accepted.

5.4.4 HYPOTHESES 4

The fourth hypothesis of the research expected that the top management and line managers' support to the HRBPs will influence HRBP performance. The coefficient correlation (r) between the independent variable representing the top management and line managers' support and the dependent variable representing HRBP performance is .88 and p value < 0.0001 (Table 5.5). Therefore, there is a strong evidence of statistical analysis that there is a significant relationship between the extent of support from the top management and line managers to the HRBPs new roles and HRBP performance. This means that if the top management and line managers became more open and supportive to the HRBP, it will increase the HRPs'

chances and give them more space to implement the strategic business partners' roles. Admitting the new roles of the HRBPs, unblocking their way and supporting them will make it easier for them to participate in the business strategy execution. Therefore, the more the support from the top management and line managers to the HRBP notion, the stronger the HRBP performance will be. Subsequently, hypothesis 4 is accepted.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 DISCUSSION

This study aims to examine the relationship between four predicted challenges blocking the way towards HRPs to be strategic business partners. Namely; the study investigates the relationship between HRM practices synergy, understanding HRBP role, HRPs' business knowledge and top management and line managers' support on the one hand and HRBP performance on the other hand. Descriptive statistics and coefficient correlation results prove that the study variables are significantly correlated by statistical evidence.

Pearson's coefficient correlation (r) is used to investigate the main hypotheses of this study. The results indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between the HRM practices synergy and the HRBP performance. This result proves the idea that HRM practices can help performing the HRBP role if it works in complete synergy (Arthur, 1994; Pfeffer, 1994; Huselid, 1995; Ulrich, 1997). In addition, it proves that the HRBP will not only occur by the integration between the HRM practices and business strategies but also requires internal coordination and synergy between the HRM practices (Wright & McMahan, 1992). Hence, HRPs are required not to separate between the HRM practices and not to downgrade the strategic role of the HR administrative tasks. However, they need to create effective HR shared systems and automate the HRM functions to reduce the efforts and duplications and free up themselves to play a strategic role in their organisations. According to (Pfeffer, 1998; Sun et al., 2007) several empirical testimonies suggested that the outcomes shall be increased when systems work together rather than if they work individually. In the same context, Becker & Huselid (1999) suggested that reshaping the organisation's culture to increase the business outcomes will not occur if human resources functions are implemented individually. After all, this finding proves the study first hypothesis at a significant level. The same is also confirmed by several previous researches and testimonies. In addition, it holds the study assumption that

the lack of synergy between HRM practices creates fragmentation which in return hinders the integration with the business strategy. Moreover, it indicates that the administrative expert role in Ulrich's HRBP four-role model (1997) should be characterized by strong internal correlation and strong synergy otherwise it will stand as a key barrier in implementing and performing the HRBP role in any organisation. It also implies that the synergy between HRM practices requires a strong interrelationship between all the process participants such as IT, line managers and top management.

In addition to that, the statistical results of the research indicate that there is a significant relationship between understanding the HRBPs' role and HRBP performance. This implies that there is diversity in point of views about the HRBP real role which creates ambiguity, role fragmentation and unstable performance outcome. Several research findings suggest that HR competency models are providing unsatisfactory definitions for the real role of the HRBPs and even not predicting their performance outcomes (Caldwell, 2008; Caldwell, 2010). This study investigates the HRBP role understanding in general. According to Francis & Keegan (2006) the ambiguity of the role of HR as a business partner is the outcome of the several directions that HR is taking by either focusing on strategies, support services, operations or people management. In addition, Caldwell (2003) argued that the ambiguity of the HR role as a business partner is the outcome of the overlap between the administrative and the strategic roles which might create a role conflict during the implementation of the model.

Subsequently, this finding proves the study second hypothesis at a significant level. The same is confirmed by several previous researches and testimonies. Additionally, it holds the study assumption that the difficulty of identifying a specific role for HR business partners is hindering the implementation of HRPB. In fact, identifying and understanding the real role of the HRBP should start by accepting the role itself from the side of all the process participants. Namely; HRPs should be more

open to the new role, top management should accept the role and support it, and line managers should accept the new implications of the role. In this study, medical and administrative non-managerial staff who might be non-aware of the implications of defining or understanding the real role of HRBP were involved. This could be counted as a limitation to the significance of this finding.

Likewise, the statistical results of the research indicate that there is a significant relationship between HRPs' business knowledge and HRBP performance. This finding confirms the idea that business knowledge and strategic goals understanding are essential requirements for HRPs to be able to manage the workforce and play a leading role in the change process which in turn increase HRBP performance (Clardy, 2008). In the same context, several research findings and theories highlighted that the implementation of the role of HRBP requires a deep understanding of the business and its implications (Lambert, 2009; Clardy, 2008). This means that without the proper business knowledge, HRPs will not be able to contribute in creating or executing the business strategies. Caldwell et al. (2011) noted that the lack of business knowledge from the side of HRPs on how to create strategies and how to implement them will lead them to fail in achieving their roles in the strategy execution. Pfeffer (1998) argued that HRPs are short of the needed skills to implement the new policies and systems required to shift HR to be strategic business partner and even not aware of the advantages of implementing these systems.

Accordingly, this result proves the study third hypothesis at a significant level which is also confirmed by several previous researches, theories and testimonies. Moreover, it holds the study assumption that HR professionals lack the needed knowledge to be business partners especially in the medical industry. It also assumes that the lack of business knowledge is a main driver to HRBP challenges. Lawler & Mohrman (2003) saw that the lack of talented workforce is the main driver of business strategy failure. It can be further implied that if HRPs fail to gain the required business knowledge to equip the organisation with the right capital, they are

not only failing to participate in the business strategy execution but the failure of the whole strategy.

The fourth finding of this research indicates that there is a strong evidence of statistical analysis that there is a relationship between the management support to the HRBP notion and the HRBP performance. It confirms the idea that the validation of the HRBP role in an organisation requires a mutual cooperation and communication between HRBPs and line managers which requires HRPs to increase their business knowledge. This further implies that the issue of management support to HRBP is related somehow to the HRPs business knowledge. A great deal of previous research findings, testimonies and theories confirmed the same finding. According to Wright (2008) the lack of acceptance, trust and admittance of the new role of the HR as a business partner from the side of the line managers and top management stand as an obstacle towards HRBP performance. In addition, Huselid & Becker (2011) assumed that the lack of interest from the side of management in HRBP is the outcome of the unstable HR quality. The relationship between HRPs' business knowledge and Management support to HRBP could be a further research of interest. After all, this finding proves the study fourth hypothesis at a significant level and holds the study assumption that the lack of business knowledge stands as a major reason for the management rejection to HRBP.

6.2 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The research's main limitation is that the study is held in one hospital only due to the confidentiality policies followed in UAE hospitals regarding sharing confidential internal information. However; it is assumed that the outcome could be relevant to other hospitals in the same country. But to be fully generalized and validated, more extensive surveys should be executed in other hospitals. Another limitation is that some of the survey respondents lack the insight into HR business partnering or even does not hear about it before the survey. Notwithstanding, the study fills a gap in the knowledge library since it is one of very few studies (may be the only study) that

deals with the HRBP role and barriers in the medical sector in UAE. The study has also a practical aspect as it will provide guidance to the HR professionals on how they can capitalise on the value of HRBP work performed in the hospital Z.

Future research on HRBP role understanding limited to the process participants may imply further results of interest. In addition, the effects of employees' age, tenure, education and job level on accepting HRBP could add new findings to the literature.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

HRBP is a new followed style of thinking which carries lots of implications and challenges in its folds. This study concentrates on the main challenges of HRBP performance. It attempts to uncover new valuable areas in the field of HRBP and its implications to help HRPs and business professionals to have a new gadget to improve HRBP performance. The HRBP as a theory has been studied in several prior researches. Most of those researches are focused on the model implementation and few of them concentrate on the challenges of its application. This study is devoted to investigate the relationship between HRBP performance and its challenges represented in the synergy between HRM practices, HRPs' business knowledge, HRBP role understanding and management support. To investigate this, a survey was distributed in a UAE based hospital. 259 participants responded and data were collected, statistically analyzed and interpreted.

Based on statistical evidence, the study found that there is a significant relationship between the HRM practices synergy and HRBP performance. This means that HRPs should pave the way to the HRBP by creating internal synergy between HRM practices. Accordingly, this will create harmony in the process of aligning those practices to the business strategy and in return increase the HRBP performance. In addition, the study confirmed that there is a significant relationship between HRBP role understanding and HRBP performance. In this regards, organisations should consider that the role understanding should involve all the process participants to reduce any internal rejection for the role implications.

Likewise, management support and business knowledge were found to be significantly related to the HRBP performance. According to those findings, organisations are truly required to equip their HRBPs with the business knowledge-the thing which if happened- will reduce most of the other challenges facing HRBP performance. To transform HR from being traditional to be a business partner, HR professionals are required to shift from the concentration on what they are doing to

the concentration on what they are delivering. In other words, it is to direct their efforts to add value not to accomplish activities. This will not happen without gaining business knowledge. Generally, the lack of business knowledge is one of main challenges facing HRBP and a reason behind other sub-challenges facing it.

Eventually, the findings of this study conclude that organisations should prioritize the essentiality of business knowledge between HRPs when they are to implement HRBP. In addition, top management and line managers should support the process and work on understanding its new roles and implications. It can also be suggested that aligning the HRM practices to the business strategy will only happen if there will be a synergy between the HRM practices. Considering these steps can make HRBP a gadget for a competitive advantage in any organisation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: The questionnaire

Part One: Demographics

1- What is your gender?

- o Male
- o Female

2- What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- o Graduated from college
- o Post graduate diploma
- o Masters education
- o PhD

3- What is your age group?

- o Less than 25
- o 25-35
- o 36-46
- o 47-60

4- Number of years at the Hospital

- o Less than one year
- o 1-3 years
- o 3-7 years
- o 8-13 years
- o 14 years and above

5- What describes your job nature best?

    o HR

    o Medical

    o Other administration

6- Which region do you come from?

    o UAE National

    o Arab/ Non-UAE

    o North/ South America

    o Europe/ Australia

    o Asian

    o Africa/ Non-Arab

7- What is your job level?

    o Staff

    o First line manager

    o Senior manager

Part Two: HRBP Challenges and Performance

S/Disagree				S/Agree	N/A
1	2	3	4	5	6

1. In my organization compensation is based on performance evaluation

2. In my organization succession planning is based on performance evaluation

3. The training I receive in my organization helps me perform my job description

4. HR practices are administered cohesively

5. I believe there is synergy between HR practices

6. HR is more administrative than strategic

7. HR develops systems that efficiently process employee transactions (Vacations / Visa ...etc)

8. HR is delivering administrative work efficiently in my organisation

9. HR administrative work is adding value to the business in my organisation

10. HR professionals in my organisation are equipped with the business knowledge

11. HR professionals in my organization participate in the process of defining business strategies

12. HR professionals help the organization accomplish business goals

13. HR professionals spend time on strategic issues and know how to solve them

14. HR business partner is required job in my organisation

15. I clearly understand the role of HR business partner in my organisation

16. The HR business partner in my organisation work to align HR strategies with business strategy

17. HR has a significant role in the business strategies execution in my organisation

18. Line managers are supporting the HR business partner role

19. Line managers see that HR business partnering role is an added value to the organisation

20. HR is receiving support from the top management in the application of the HR business partnering role

21. Top management is confident in the HR ability to be a business partner in my organisation

22. HR professionals are open to the HR business partnering roles and

   responsibilities

23. The line managers feel comfortable in the implementation of the HR practices

24. HR supports and advocates employees in my organisation

25. HR is seen as a change leader in my organisation

Appendix B: Email to the survey participants

Dear All,

This is a link to a very brief survey consists of 25 multi-choice questionnaire. The survey is assessing the relationship between HR practices and its contribution to the business in the Hospital. The purpose of this survey is only statistical and aims to help in the refinement of HR practices to match the business and employees' needs. Your identity will not be known and your response will not by any means whatsoever reflect any harm on you. Your contribution will be of a great help. Feel free to email us for further information.

https://www.research.net/s/HRBP-research

Thanks & Regards