CIPD

Championing better work and working lives

PEOPLE PROFESSION SURVEY 2020

UK and Ireland

Report

May 2020

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Workday is a leading provider of enterprise cloud applications for finance and human resources. Founded in 2005, Workday delivers financial management, human capital management, planning, and analytics applications designed for the world's largest companies, educational institutions, and government agencies. Organisations ranging from medium-sized businesses to Fortune 50 enterprises have selected Workday.

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① **Foreword**

Foreword from the CIPD

The *People Profession survey* is an annual snapshot of the people profession. It reflects what people professionals are doing, how they're feeling and what they're focused on.

We know that the world of work is changing, and we're committed to supporting people professionals not just to adapt, but to anticipate that change so that they're prepared and equipped to thrive in a changing world of work.

By taking the pulse of the profession annually, in conjunction with our other research, we can make sure that we're providing the right tools and resources for people professionals not just to thrive through change but to shape it.

Already in 2020 we have experienced some profound shifts that we will no doubt feel for years to come. What is already clear, however, is that people professionals are a vital function in supporting businesses to adapt to the rapidly changing circumstances.

Ushering in 2020, many business leaders expected Brexit to dominate boardroom and shop-floor discussions for many more months, but instead it has been the global COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented crisis which has led governments, business leaders and communities to change radically, in some cases overnight. These are truly challenging times.

Throughout both, we know that people professionals are the experts who safeguard organisations and the workforce, particularly through periods of considerable uncertainty. We've all experienced a huge amount of learning in a very short period of time, and I am proud to see the positive response of our profession, who have stepped up to share their expertise, insights and, most importantly, their humanity.

From such an unprecedented time has come lot of positive change. Innovative problem-solving and creative ways of working forced us all to think and act in a more agile way. As we were compelled to rethink business priorities and support workers throughout this time, our mission to champion better work and working lives has never been more pertinent in the world of work.

As well as reflecting the immense value people professionals add and the meaning they rightly attribute to their work, the insights in this report also highlight the challenges and opportunities that they face. For example, with all the changes happening and the demand and opportunity for our profession, we need to focus more on the development of our skills and capabilities so that we can step up, have the courage to innovate, and adapt to the fast-changing world around us.

The CIPD's mission is to support people professionals to address their challenges and capitalise on their opportunities, so that together we can live our purpose of championing better work and working lives.

So read on, and shape your future today.

Peter Cheese
CEO, CIPD

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Foreword from Workday

Workday are delighted to partner with the CIPD as sponsors of the *People Profession survey.* The study aligns with our commitment to helping our customers improve the quality of their people decisions through better data and insights, and supporting those in the people profession so they can derive greater value from their work.

This year, perhaps more than any other in living memory, has highlighted the importance of the people profession. With uncertainty lingering, leaders across businesses have had to make confident decisions about the best way forward for their organisation and their people. In a fast-changing environment, leaders have had to help people stay informed, engaged and supported while adopting what have been entirely new ways of working for many.

Much has been made of the power of technology for bringing people together during this time, both inside and outside of work. But as well as allowing us to continue working and collaborating from our respective home offices, technology has helped many organisations to understand how their workforce is responding to the stresses and strains of this new reality.

For most organisations agility has been key. But change is not unique to 2020; it is a constant that tomorrow's businesses must prepare for, knowing that the skills and jobs that are valuable today may not be the same in a few years' time. Investing in a future-ready workforce enables leading organisations to reap the benefits of increased digital revenue growth that come with being agile.

Workday is an investment in building a culture of agility, data-driven decision-making, and automation that is needed to fuel the recovery from the effects of this year and to drive innovation in the future. With Workday, investing in resilience and innovation is not a trade-off—it's the path forward in a changing world. This means leaders can put their focus and energy toward moving the organisation and its people forward.

We hope you find the research useful and that the insights will help you discover new meaning in the valuable work that you do.

Peter Gamble,
**Regional Vice President,
UK and Ireland, Workday**

② Executive summary

The CIPD's People Profession survey explores perceptions and experiences of people professionals who work in HR, organisational development (OD) and design, and learning and development (L&D). Our sample included 1,368 in-house professionals and 204 independent professionals across the UK and Ireland.[1] The survey was conducted online with YouGov between January and March 2020. Full demographics of the sample can be found in the Appendix.

Key findings

People professionals find meaning from their practice

Whether working in-house or independently, the vast majority of people professionals report their career to be a meaningful one. Given the turbulent and rapidly changing world of work which many practise in today, this is an encouraging finding – it highlights that the profession provides practitioners with a career that gives them meaning and purpose through their practice.

People analytics and data skills are in high demand, but skills are lacking across the profession

Our findings recognise a gap between the demand and current capabilities around people analytics and data skills across the profession. While the majority of organisations plan to incorporate people data to some extent across their business, we found that many practitioners still need to develop basic analytics skills. People professionals have a tremendous opportunity – leaders will need to invest significantly to grow their function's capabilities in this in-demand area.

There is a tension between operational efficiency and strategic delivery

The shape of the profession is changing, and the challenge now is to recognise how the profession can add most value through both operational and strategic activity. Key to this is embedding agility into people functions. People leaders will need to carefully consider whether the structure and job roles within their functions add value and deliver on the wider business outcomes.

Calls from business leaders to uphold the profession's reputation

There is still some way to go to address the disconnect between integrating people strategy with wider business outcomes. Senior leaders outside of the profession realise the importance of people strategy to achieve business goals and call for more business collaboration. Leaders of the profession have an opportunity to act on this and position the profession as a key stakeholder to influencing business strategy.

Influencing trends shift the focus for people professionals

Given the recent COVID-19 crisis, demands on people professionals have never been greater. But this demand has forced the profession to focus and prioritise key areas such as employee wellbeing, retention of staff and employee engagement. However, we also note wider trends and drivers that are influencing change across the profession, particularly calling for more agile ways of working and responding rapidly to industrial and economic change.

We discuss the specific findings in depth, and what this means in practice for people professionals, throughout this report.

③ Introduction

Work in 2020: a shifting context

The first half of 2020 was a hugely challenging time for organisations and people professionals, as global economies suffered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The people profession has been at the centre of organisations' responses to the outbreak, utilising its expertise to support leaders to make difficult decisions regarding their workplaces. The issues presented by COVID-19 illustrate how, now more than ever, people professionals play a central part in navigating the complex and challenging world of work

Even before COVID-19, it was widely acknowledged that the world of work is in a state of flux. Several key trends are considered to be influencing organisations, from improvements in technology and ever-increasing connectedness to increasing workforce diversity. These trends are shaping the environment in which organisations operate to different extents, and therefore where people professionals lead and practice.

Previous research by the CIPD has highlighted eight common drivers of change that have been highlighted across academic and practice literature. These are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Trends impacting the world of work [2]

Trend	Description	Implications for people management and development
Utilisation of technology	• Increased automation of routine and non-routine, cognitive and practical tasks. • Increased use of digital working, changing where and how people work. • Increased need for digital workplace skills, and people management of remote working.	• Innovative job and organisational design to capitalise on emerging opportunities and engage workers who work flexibly/remotely with their employer. • Fast multiskilling and reskilling of employees, whose skills become obsolete. • New ways of working through new technology. • Developing line manager skills and tools in performance management in a way that sustains and supports individual performance.
Workforce diversity	• Rapidly ageing workforce in established markets, younger workforce in emerging markets. • Growing importance of managing multicultural workplaces. • Greater opportunity to tap into business and moral benefits of increased diversity.	• Opportunities to improve business performance through various workforce segments. • Focus on in-work progression to fill leadership gaps and free up entry-level jobs. • More flexible approaches to talent attraction, development and retention – developing individualised relationships with employees. • Responsibility to upskill younger employees to fulfil employers' needs for particular skills.
Globalisation	• Increased offshoring of roles and tasks for purposes of cost and productivity. • Continued expansion of supply chains of products and services. • Mass movement of labour due to geopolitical, health and environmental instability, and increased demand for low-skilled migrant workforce.	• Harmonising labour practices due to national variations in labour legislation. • Managing perceptions of fairness across the workforce segments. • Reviewing the operating model of HR, which is becoming more project-oriented and aimed at improving organisational effectiveness. • Prioritising communication and dialogue to avoid conflicts, maintain a sense of shared purpose and common corporate culture.

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Industrial change	• Steady increase in the proportion of jobs that require a degree or professional qualification. • Digitally based alternative business models that meet real-time consumer demand with supply of specialist skills and products. • Continued organisation change as organisations respond to complex external environment, for example 24/7 operating hours.	• Developing alternative models of creating value through people, managing knowledge capital with a focus on leadership and culture, and organisational development. • Ethical people decision-making: balancing business needs with people needs. • Continuous updating of workforce knowledge and skills. • Developing performance management processes that assess and reward softer aspects of service delivery, as well as redress the impact of emotional labour on workers.
Individualism	• Desire for better work–life balance and flexible work that meets the needs of individual workers. • High-skilled labour expressing their personal desires as opposed to operating as a collective, for example through unions or representatives. • Employees, like customers, expect to move organisations when expectations are not met.	• Providing a positive employee experience. • Balancing personalisation of the working relationship with financial priorities. • Encouraging prominence of individual voice in determining how the employment relationship is set and developed.
Social responsibility	• Increased awareness of the importance of aligned business models and strategies with societal agenda. • Pressure to utilise more resource-efficient technologies to reduce environmental impact. • Increased recognition of the importance of trust in business and its value to organisations and their stakeholders.	• Increased focus on brand management, internal and external communications in people management and development activities. • Developing a greater knowledge base and improved skills to meet demands while influencing the business to act in a responsible way. • Ensuring consistency of ethical codes across the global markets, presenting businesses with ethical considerations, and lead the change towards a more responsible operation.
Quality of education	• Improving global education standards worldwide. • Greater recognition of the importance of continued development and lifelong learning. • Rise in alternative, technology-enabled learning including open universities and peer-to-peer learning platforms.	• Developing mentoring schemes and other workplace support. • Investing more in developing talent in the absence of appropriate government programmes. • Managing the expectations of overqualified individuals, thinking creatively about alternative forms of employee engagement and utilisation of available skills.
Diversity of employment relationships	• Diversity of working patterns, as well as contract types. • Rise of two-tier workforce: traditional contracted 'core' workforce, and freelance or contractor pool.	• Workforce planning alignment with the customer demands. • Transforming organisational culture to embed flexible performance management processes. • Managing inequality of terms and conditions between different categories of workers. • Giving a voice to contingent workforce in when and how they work.

As key trends shaping the world of work, these eight trends represent different concepts that need to be measured, understood and managed over the short, medium and long term. Their impact will, over time, not only shape the wider world of work, but also the role and impact of the people profession, with some implications listed in the third column of Table 1. We will explore people professionals' perceptions to key trends in Section 4.

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Professionalism in 2020

Professionalism can be considered as individual and collective aspects or behaviours. Individually, people professionals have their own professional competence and professional identity. For example, the CIPD's previous work on professionalism details six key elements:

• body of expert knowledge and skills
• social and ethical responsibility
• identity
• commitment
• situational judgement
• continuing professional development.

The framework marks a set of professional standards which aims to build and support the people profession community to make sound judgements, taking into account the needs and interests of all parties involved. While individuals will have different professional identities, this should be underpinned by a standard set of principles and ethical values. In our 2015 research, _From Best to Good Practice HR: Developing principles for the profession,_ there was an ambition between professionals to make balanced, ethical decisions in the workplace. However, we also found a gap existed between ambition and current practice towards applying ethical perspectives in certain situations of the decision-making process.

Farndale (2005) notes that professionalism of an HR department can be defined as _'being perceived to make a valued strategic contribution to organizational life'._ As the fundamental purpose of the people function is to champion better work and working lives, collective impact is at the heart of our new Profession Map – which provides a collective professional identity with shared values and robust standards. Having a collective identity allows the profession to build a common understanding of what we are trying to achieve as a profession to make a positive impact on the changing world of work.

People professionals can positively impact business outcomes in many ways through their professional practice. For example, previous academic research has found that HR practices are strongly related to organisational commitment as well as operational and financial performance outcomes (Wright et al 2003). In smaller businesses there is compelling evidence which demonstrates a positive association between HR practice and performance (Rauch and Hatak 2016), and HR practice has also been shown to be predictive of future business performance (Sheehan 2014).

It isn't only in-house where people professionals are able to add value. Independent people professionals play a crucial role in supporting organisations to achieve their goals and improve their performance. The CIPD's People Skills pilot programme, which supports businesses with HR consultancy and advice, was shown to benefit small organisations looking to improve their people practices. Independent people professionals were central to the effectiveness of the programme, demonstrating that people professionals add substantial value to organisations' efficiency and productivity.

Shifts across the profession: how people professionals influence and add value

For many years, there has been a lively debate around the added value that people professionals offer and the model that best supports the function to achieve this. This debate often involves the dynamic of strategic versus operational HR roles and the importance of the function remaining relevant to stakeholders and influencing wider business outcomes – that is, by contributing to the alignment of human resource management strategy and the overall business strategy (see Ulrich et al 2009).

Clearly there are valid arguments and a need for people professionals to have a more strategic influence, but in doing so this shifts practitioners away from the shorter-term and employee-related issues – resulting in the devolution of this responsibility to line managers. Academic literature suggests that adviser and change agent roles are significant for HR professionals (Caldwell 2001, 2003). Additionally, the CIPD's *Changing HR Operating Models* work suggests that there is not one singular model of HR delivery that is appropriate to all organisations. Instead, HR strategy and operations should be carefully considered in line with organisational strategy and structure and the client, employee and business needs. We explore the changing structure of the people function in Section 5, and the dynamic of strategic and operational roles in Section 6, to understand how these aspects influence the future of the profession.

The development of the profession
Given the above discussion of major trends influencing the world of work, the focus of professionalism and being a value-adding profession, there are currently gaps in our understanding about how people professionals are responding to this complex and ever-changing world of work. The CIPD aims to build a picture of the profession by developing a robust benchmark which indicates how the profession is responding to such workforce trends. As our aim is to build a profession that is future-fit, there is a need for insight and data on the 'here and now' of the profession. By gathering data and insight around what is happening now across the profession, we can build a better picture about how we plan for the future. As well as individual practitioners, this insight will be useful for the CIPD in continuing to develop and support the profession to champion better work and working lives.

Building on the international and UK pilot study we conducted on *The People Profession in 2018*, this annual survey will provide a snapshot of the profession across global markets as well as insights on how we may best support practitioners' continuing professional development to meet future challenges and demands. Insights on the global markets of the people profession will be accessible via a separate report.

Profession snapshot: what does the profession look like in 2020?
The people profession is growing in numbers year after year. Since 2009, the number of people in the profession has increased by 17% (data up until March 2019, ONS) and is forecast to continue rising. The data indicates that this recognised growth is driven by the most senior people professionals – people managers and directors – where there has been a 57% growth across the profession since 2010. On the other hand, we've seen a decline in more junior, entry-level roles – HR administrative occupations have decreased by 31% over the same period. The age profile of the people profession compares with the wider workforce, which has more younger and more older workers. The mean and median age for HR professionals is 42, while the wider workforce mean is 41 and median is 42.

We also know that at least 11% of the profession is self-employed and working independently. In reality, this figure is likely to be even higher as the range of people consultants may not have been fully captured in this data.

We have included the demographics of our in-house[3] and independent people[4] professionals' sample in the appendix. In addition, we have also included relevant ONS data for comparison.[5]

Who was included in this sample?
What do we mean by 'people professionals'?
To fully understand the current state of the profession, we were interested to hear from a range of people professionals. For the purpose of this research, people professionals is an

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inclusive term that encompasses organisational development (OD), organisational design, organisational change, learning and development (L&D), recruitment, compensation and benefits, talent management, human resource information systems/human resource management systems and human resources (HR).

Inclusion of independent people professionals

Independent people professionals have a unique perspective of the profession, given their exposure to multiple organisations across different industries. This presents an opportunity for independent professionals to drive change and make a profound impact in the work that they do. Being a key part of the people profession, we sought to understand the views of independent professionals to explore their views and experience of working in the profession. See Appendix for demographic details of both samples.

Professional identity

The professional identity of those included in the sample are detailed in Table 2. Given the nature of their work, independent professionals were asked to indicate multiple roles that were applicable to them. Interestingly, many independent professionals were found to consult on areas such as organisational change (51%) and organisational development (42%), compared with in-house practitioners (3% and 7% respectively).

Table 2: Professional identities and decision-making responsibilities for in-house and independent professionals (%)

Professional identity	In-house professionals	Professional identity	Independent professionals
Human resource	46	Human resource	53
Learning & development	11	Organisational change	51
Recruitment	9	Organisational development	42
Organisational development	7	Learning & development	37
Human resource information systems/People analytics	5	Organisational design	29
Organisational change	3	Recruitment	26
Talent management	3	Talent management	24
Organisational design	2	Compensation & benefits	15
Compensation & benefits	2	Human resource information systems/People analytics	14
Other	10	Other	15

Base: In-house sample n=1,368; Independent sample n=204

4 Trends and drivers of change

Headline findings

- **Economic change is top of mind for people practitioners operating in-house (40%) and as independents (45%).** The challenges and opportunities presented by economic change are the biggest driver for the profession at present.

- **Digital transformation and industrial change are also important drivers of change**, both for in-house professionals and independent professionals.
- **Drivers such as digital transformation, social responsibility, and changing demographics differ according to organisation size and sector**, highlighting a clear need for people professionals to understand their unique business context, as well as the external environment shaping their practice.
- **COVID-19 shifts employee well-being and retention into the limelight** – these areas were recognised as key priorities by both people professionals and employers.

Businesses today must navigate several interconnected influencing trends that, to different extents, are shaping the world of work. These trends, sometimes additive, sometimes opposing, act to reshape organisations and the environment in which individuals work. Because of this it is important to understand the impact of these trends on professional practice, and crucially the role of the people profession.

As a part of this study we explore the key trends which people professionals believe are shaping their organisations, and therefore their practice. Understanding, interpreting and navigating these trends is key if professionals are to ensure sustainability for organisations over the short, medium and longer term.

In this section we also incorporate data from our analysis of employer responses to the COVID-19 pandemic: a significant challenge to the profession in 2020 and a key driver to be explored through further research.

What's driving change for people practitioners?
We found that both the in-house and independent people professionals we surveyed agreed on the top three drivers of change (Table 3).

Table 3: Drivers of change for people practitioners (%)

In-house professionals		Independent professionals	
Economic change	40	Economic change	45
Digital transformation	37	Industrial change and organisational agility	40
Industrial change and organisational agility	34	Digital transformation	32

Base: In-house sample n= 1,368; Independent sample n= 204

For people professionals operating in-house, we also found some interesting differences according to organisation size and sector:

- Digital transformation is significantly more important to professionals working in larger firms: We found that 43% of respondents in large firms (250+ employees) believe this to be a key driver of change, compared with only 27% of those working in SMEs (1–249 employees).
- Industrial change and organisational agility is significantly more important to professionals working in the private sector: There is a significant difference between those who work in the private sector (40%) compared with those in the public sector (30%) and those in the third/voluntary sector (24%).

Trends and drivers of change

- **Rising demand for social responsibility is significantly more important to people professionals in the third/voluntary sector**, where 34% of people professionals recognise its importance, compared with 19% in the private sector and 17% in the public sector.
- **Changing demographics, such as the ageing and multi-generational workforce, is a more pressing issue for professionals operating in larger organisations:** There is a significant difference between individuals in larger organisations (33%) and those in smaller organisations (23%) for this question.

Economic change is top of the list for people professionals, whether in-house or operating independently. It's clear that economic uncertainty in the UK is a pressing issue for many professionals, likely exacerbated by the uncertainty surrounding the UK's exit from the European Union. Lagging productivity, stagnant wages and limited growth opportunities are known issues facing UK organisations. These present challenging issues for people professionals to navigate and overcome.

These findings further demonstrate why it's important for people professionals to remain aware of the economic environment and look 'upwards and outwards' from their organisation. Business acumen is a particularly important capability highlighted in the CIPD's new Profession Map, and one which, given these findings, must be further supported alongside key strategic decision-making and leadership skills.

People professionals recognise the importance of being adaptive, but business leaders do not believe people teams are agile during challenging situations. Over a third (34%) highlighted industrial change and organisational agility as a driver of change. The CIPD's survey of business leaders[6] (see Appendix) found that there are mixed opinions as to the ability of the function to meet changing business needs:

- Only a third (33%) of business leaders believe their HR/people team helps their organisation to be more agile.
- Just over a third (36%) believe their HR/people team is too compliance-focused and unable to flex to changing situations.
- Less than one in four business leaders believe that the HR/people team displays adaptable behaviours.

Adaptability is essential in response to both negative and positive social, economic and cultural influences. The need for adaptability applies when there is a demand to upscale – that is, responding to a business/consumer opportunity – or when there is a need to scale back to preserve the business and support the workforce in times of hardship. Both require organisational agility in response to change.

Adaptability, reliance, and flexible functional design are all elements of OD practice. These are therefore important insights that highlight the importance of engaging business leaders with OD strategy and outcomes and, in particular, the importance of effective reputation management.

Digital transformation to meet the changing needs of the business: It's clear that digital transformation is a priority for many people functions, as over a third of people professionals (37%) indicated this as a driver of change. This poses important capability and capacity questions for people leaders: Is the people function resourced to support digital transformation? And what are the digital skills that people professionals will need to develop over the short, medium and longer term?

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COVID-19 Focus: Shifting priorities for the people profession

Although our COVID-19 employers' survey[7] (see Appendix for sample details) highlights some shifts in people priorities within organisations, there is clear agreement of these priorities between business stakeholders and people practitioners. We note some interesting findings about organisations' top people priorities before and during the COVID-19 crisis (see Tables 4 and 5):

Learning and development has taken a back seat. Learning was a key people area for both employers (42%) and people professionals (36%) before the COVID-19 outbreak; however, training and development is no longer an area receiving immediate attention within businesses.

Employee health and wellbeing rightly takes centre stage. While employee health and wellbeing was previously a priority, the crisis has accelerated the focus and importance of this area. This is an encouraging finding as businesses recognise their responsibility and duty of care towards supporting the physical and mental health of their workforce during this time. For people professionals, this priority increased significantly – from 38% (noting it as an area of focus before the crisis) to 68% (recognising that employee wellbeing as an immediate pressing issue right now).

Retention becomes a new priority. It's unsurprising that retention has become a key priority – a third of business stakeholders and people professionals agree. The Government actions to support businesses through the Job Retention Scheme is further recognition that retention of staff is high on the agenda and demands economic support to sustain business continuity and minimise redundancies following the crisis.

Table 4: Top three priorities for business stakeholders and people professionals before the COVID-19 outbreak (%)

All business stakeholders		People professionals	
Learning, training and development	42	Employee engagement	40
Employee health and wellbeing	37	Employee health and wellbeing	38
Employee engagement	32	Learning, training and development	36

Base: Business stakeholders n=1,178; People professionals n= 361

Table 5: Top three priorities for business stakeholders and people professionals during the COVID-19 outbreak (%)

All business stakeholders		People professionals	
Employee health and wellbeing	65	Employee health and wellbeing	68
Employee engagement	40	Employee engagement	43
Retention	31	Retention	33

Base: Business stakeholders n=1,178; People professionals n= 361

Trends and drivers of change

Practice reflections

This data illustrates several important reflections for people professionals, both in-house and independent:

Economic change is the major driver for people professionals, both in-house and independent. This trend was the most popular in both surveys, highlighting its importance to people professionals. Economic change is a broad concept that is expected to shape practice in specific and nuanced ways – therefore people practitioners may want to consider the economic context their organisations operate in, the resilience and stability of the business, and the leadership capability in place to support the business through change.

People practitioners are not homogenous, and neither are organisations. Therefore some key trends differ across the profession. There are clear differences in how trends are expected to shape professional practice according to variables such as organisation size or sector. Therefore, it's key that people professionals understand the sector(s) in which they operate, the specific context their organisation operates in, and the nature of employment in occupations and industries in which they work.

COVID-19 is shifting the demands on people professionals. Our findings above indicate that employee wellbeing and retention are key priorities for the profession as we work through the COVID-19 outbreak. The pandemic underlines how people professionals need a holistic approach that protects people from the risks to their mental as well as physical health. In addition to these areas, people professionals are likely to be overwhelmed with the shifting nature of work as businesses adapt and respond to the outbreak. Despite our findings around organisational agility and digital transformation as drivers of change being pre-COVID-19, we can assume that these areas are not only key drivers for change, but the speed at which they influence change is likely to be more rapid and significant than ever. Therefore, people practitioners need to consider how to integrate these priority areas into their practice to equip people functions to deal with future crises.

⑤ Structure of the function – how are leaders building their capability?

Headline findings

- **The nature of the business matters:** Leaders structure their people capability differently across large and small organisations. Standard/traditional business partner models dominate in large organisations (44%), while small businesses have more diverse and innovative models of HR.
- **Outsourcing models differ across business size:** Smaller businesses use outsourcing models more often (39%) than larger firms (23%).
- **A shift for people functions:** We are seeing significant change across people functions, with nearly half of practitioners saying their people function is changing significantly and rapidly.

Businesses come in many shapes and sizes, and so too does the way people professionals operate within such organisations. HR models are not one size fits all – there is not one agreed HR model that is suitable for all organisations and their business demands. The structure of people functions also relies on a number of other functionalities, such as role design and HR capability, and should be developed in a holistic manner and align with the wider organisation.

Form and function

To understand how people functions are currently structured across the profession, we asked people professionals to indicate their HR model. Our findings support the idea that there is not one HR model that is prevalent to the majority, and, interestingly, 13% of participants indicated that they operate in a model that wasn't described by the seven models in our survey. We found some interesting insights focusing on business size and sector.

By business size

Standard/traditional business partner models dominate in large organisations (44%). This consists of a traditional business partner structure with shared services and a corporate people function.

Model type is more diverse in SMEs, where responses varied from single-person HR responsibility to small team or alternative models. This suggests there may be unique and innovative models being used within SMEs that were not covered by the seven model descriptions used within this survey.

Outsourcing models are used mainly by SMEs. Larger firms continue to keep core functions in-house. For organisations that outsource, payroll was more commonly outsourced in SMEs (39%) compared with larger firms (23%). Complex case loads are also more frequently outsourced in SMEs (23%) compared with larger firms (11%). When independent people professionals were asked about the elements of HR that they offer as a service, the top three HR areas were: coaching and training (60%), strategic support (56%) and complex advice, including line manager contact (53%) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Independent people professionals' HR service offerings (%)

Base: Independent sample n=204

Structure of the function – how are leaders building their capability?
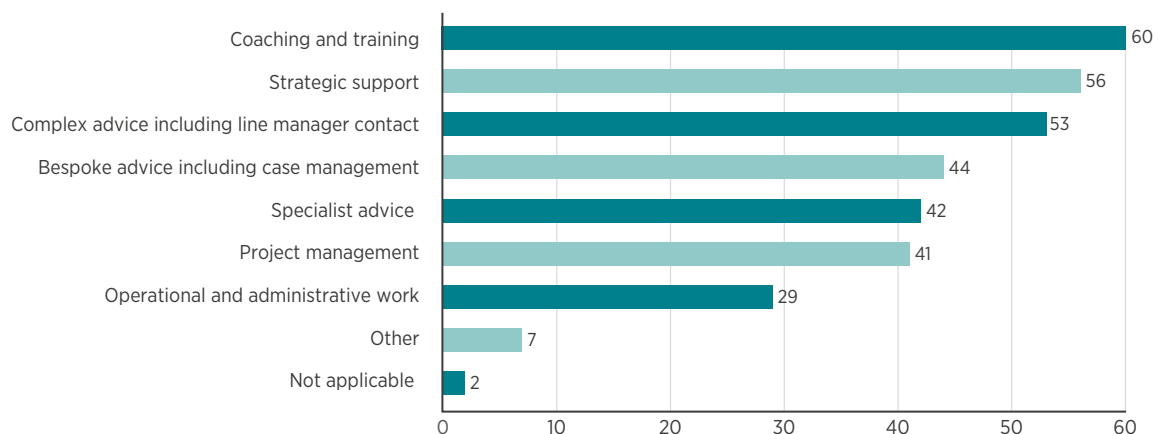
By sector
- **Public sector organisations use traditional models to structure their functions**, with over two-fifths saying they operate using a traditional business partnering model (42%).
- **One-team HR models for private and third-sector organisations:** Private and voluntary sectors most commonly described their model as a singular HR team consisting of generalists, specialists and administration working together.

The above findings suggest that there is a vast range of ways that people functions operate depending on the nature of their business. Additionally, just under half of practitioners believe their people function is changing significantly (45%), which indicates that these models will most likely be influenced by these changes in the near future. This could be an indication of a wider shift within the people profession as practitioners' roles continue to change at a rapid rate. People functions that operate in an agile way will be better equipped to respond to the changing demands on the business. The implications for these points are highlighted in the practice recommendations section.

What about employee experience?
Beyond employee engagement, employee experience considers the engagement of the workforce throughout the employee lifecycle from the perspective of the employee. While social media and other online platforms can give organisations positive exposure, business reputation can also be damaged by employees speaking out on anything from unethical business practices to unjust treatment of employees. In previous research we found that a third of business leaders feel that employees moving to a competitor organisation is one of the top people-related risks for their business (31%). Therefore, it is becoming increasingly important for organisations to provide employees with a positive working experience that they will not only be able to thrive within, but will also be proud to share outside of the organisation.

To understand the approach that organisations are taking towards this employee-centric perspective, and what this means for people professionals, we asked practitioners about their employee experience focuses. We found that over a third said that employee experience is part of the core people strategy for their organisation (35%), suggesting that these organisations view employee experience as an integral part of their strategic objectives. From our previous research we know that employee relations, engagement and wellbeing were said to be important areas for people management in relation to the business strategy – 79% of business leaders agreed.

There were several other aspects of employee experience that are interesting to note (see Table 6):

- **Employee experience is a focus area for the vast majority:** Only a small minority, just over one in ten, said that none of the suggested areas of employee experience are a focus for their organisation (14%). In reality this number could be even lower as organisations may focus on aspects of employee experience that were not mentioned in our survey.
- **Organisations want to be value-driven and culture-focused:** Half of our respondents said their organisation was focusing on the organisation's culture and values as a way of improving employees' experience (49%). Having shared values, behaviours and workplace norms should work hand-in-hand with the organisation's policies and processes. Developing a strong culture and set of values within an organisation reinforces the organisation's purpose and enables employees to recognise how their own personal values align with that of the organisation.
- **A focus on the entire employee lifecycle is needed:** Surprisingly, only a third of organisations (30%) are collecting information on employees' experience of the selection, recruitment and onboarding process. However, two-fifths (43%) indicate

Structure of the function – how are leaders building their capability?

that they collect exit information for employees who are leaving the organisation. By collecting information and data around aspects of the employee lifecycle, businesses are able to create a feedback loop to improve on employee experience of these processes and make improvements guided by evidence. As with any initiatives, intervention or process, it is important to evaluate effectiveness and use evidence-based practice to make a judgement on how best to improve the process to achieve the desired outcomes.

Table 6: Employee experience initiatives (%)

To improve employee experience, my organisation is…	Yes
Focusing on company culture and values	49
Collecting exit information from those leaving the organisation or retiring	43
Investing in management and leadership programmes	38
Creating learning programmes that better meet the development needs of employees	36
Focusing on making employee experience part of our core people strategy	35
Gathering information about experiences around the recruitment, selection and onboarding process	30
Improving/updating the office environment and physical space	29
Implementing or considering the implementation of new HR technologies	24
None of these	14

Base: In-house sample n=1,368

COVID-19: the largest homeworking experiment to date

In line with government advice, homeworking has been the key means for some businesses to continue operating without putting employees' and public health at risk. Our research found that nearly half of employers say that 50% or more of their workforce is continuously working from home as a result of the crisis. While many adapt to the new way of working, homeworking provides some additional challenges and opportunities for people professionals:

- **Psychological stressors of homeworking.** Employers recognise the negative impact of increased homeworking and isolation on mental health wellbeing – 37% felt that this was a key challenge for their business. Given our earlier finding that employee wellbeing is a key people priority for practitioners and other business stakeholders, the psychological stressors of isolation and homeworking need to be carefully managed to minimise any increased risks to employee physical and mental health.
- **Managing and redesigning jobs that are unsuitable for remote working.** Two-fifths of people professionals highlight the difficulty that some jobs are unsuitable for remote/homeworking (39%), which will be a challenge for people professionals to manage.
- **An increased demand of flexible working requests.** Three-quarters of employers expect an increased demand for homeworking once the social distancing measures have been lifted by the Government (75%). This will have implications on various people practices and policies, and will influence how people are managed beyond the crisis – all of which will fall under the remit of people professionals to lead on.

Structure of the function – how are leaders building their capability?

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Practice reflections

The findings above around significant changes to people functions could present potential challenges for the profession:

- **Changing function, changing roles:** With half of practitioners noting that their people function is changing significantly, this raises a question about how this rapid change could impact the job roles of people professionals. People leaders may want to consider the influence on the function's overall strategy and core responsibilities – is there a need to redesign people professionals' job roles in line with these changes? In a bid to be agile and effective, is there a risk of being too reactive and short term? Leaders will need to consider the balance between operational and strategic activity within the context of their organisations.
- **Maintaining relevancy and alignment to business outcomes:** Do changes in structures and HR models consider the wider organisational strategy and how the people function contributes to the wider business outcomes? The structure of the function will likely be very dependent on the context of your organisation and needs to be considered in a holistic manner with the wider business strategy in mind.

Employee experience

- **An integral part of employee experience is the employment relationship:** This is an area in which people professionals can use their people expertise and make a real impact. Providing employees with a positive experience, where they feel engaged and listened to, requires strong manager–employee relationships, built on trust and two-way communication. Employee experience is included in the new Profession Map under specialist knowledge, which includes professional development planning for this topic.
- **Measuring your efforts:** Given that there are numerous ways for people professionals to focus on improving employee experience, it important to assess whether your initiative is having the desired effect. What are you hoping to achieve and how will you measure and evaluate whether the initiative has been a success? Taking an evidence-based approach to your practice is a key value of the Profession Map, but to be able to do this successfully, people professionals will ascertain evidence from a diverse range of sources.
- **Flexible and remote working:** Our findings highlight that the demand for flexible, remote and homeworking is likely to increase as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. What challenges does this present for your people function and how will it be managed? It's likely that this demand for homeworking will require changes in policy, greater investment in technology, adapting performance approaches and providing training for managers to feel confident in managing remote teams.

6 Strategic vs operational: how is the profession adding value?

Headline findings

- **Distinct differences were found between the strategic and operational levels regarding believing your work has meaning and purpose.** Practitioners working at a more strategic level have higher meaningful scores compared with operational practitioners. Additionally, no relationship was found between years of experience outside of the profession and strategic level.

- **Strategic and operational focus was considerably different for independent professionals** – their strategic and operational focus was much more balanced, suggesting they have opportunity to be involved with and influence strategic and operational people practice.
- **The number of respondents within different levels of strategic and operational roles was largely unchanged from the 2018 data** (see Appendix).

As mentioned above, for many years there has been a debate around the dynamic of strategic versus operational HR roles and the importance of the function maintaining relevance as stakeholders who are able to influence wider business outcomes. In this section we explore the dynamic of strategic and operational roles to understand how these aspects influence practitioners' experience of working within the people profession.

Key findings

Strategic level has remained consistent since 2018. Overall, the strategic level across the people profession has remained stable since 2018, with little change (see Appendix). As you would expect, strategic level was related to experience within the profession; those with more years of experience were associated with high-level strategic roles. Additionally, we found some interesting observations around strategic level:

Short-term and immediate outputs: Over a quarter work in day-to-day operational-level roles (26%). Day-to-day operational-level professionals were found most likely to have low meaningful work scores – nearly one in five reported this (19%). This raises a question for leaders of the profession to consider how operational roles are designed across functions – both in terms of adding value to the business but also ensuring good job quality for operational-based roles.

Operational work can sometimes be perceived to be less 'valuing-adding' than more strategic functions. However, operational activities that are delivered by people professionals often underpin and support more strategic practice – the impact is a collective effort. Collective impact is at the heart of the new Profession Map and the Profession for the Future journey. Although individual knowledge and skills are vital, applying this expertise in practice is crucial to create real impact in the work that we do. As a collective, the impact that people professionals can have together is amplified.

Practitioners with a more strategic role find more meaning and purpose from their work: One in five professionals are operating in a high-level strategic role (17%) and a third in a strategic delivery-focused role (30%). Interestingly, those in strategic roles (that is, high strategic and strategic delivery-focused level) were more likely to believe their work is meaningful (net meaningful work scores: 96% and 94% respectively, compared with between 88% and 81% for operational levels). See Appendix for details on the calculation of net meaningful work scores.

Independent professionals engage with a balance of strategic and operational focus in their work: Independent people professionals indicated an equal level of operational and strategic focus within the work that they do – 73% indicated that they are strategically focused and 72% reported being operationally focused to some extent, or to a great extent. This suggests that independent practitioners have a unique opportunity to be involved with and influence strategic and operational people practice. Further details on strategic role levels for independent professionals can be found in the Appendix.

Strategic vs operational: how is the profession adding value?

Outside influence on the profession: No relationship was found between years of experience outside of the profession and strategic level. However, as you would expect, there was a weak correlation between number of years in the people profession and strategic role level – a higher-level strategic role was associated with a higher number of years in the profession.[8]

Adding value and impact: strategy level influences practitioners' views on adding value. We asked practitioners whether they felt they had an opportunity to add value to their organisation. We found a moderate positive correlation between perceptions of adding value to the organisation and strategic level; as strategic level increased, so did the opportunity to add value.[9] Strategic level is also associated with the belief that the profession offers a meaningful career. This highlights that professionals working at the day-to-day/immediate outcomes level[10] are less likely to perceive they have both a meaningful career and add value through the work that they do.

Previous research shows that psychological meaningfulness predicts work engagement and together these predict organisational commitment (Geldenhuys et al 2014). Therefore, practitioners within short-term and immediate outcomes-type roles could experience negative impacts on their work engagement and productivity, as well as health and wellbeing. The challenge for people leaders is to explicitly illustrate the value of operational function roles. For these individuals it becomes vital that there are explicit links from their outputs to the wider organisational strategy and future goals. When there are clear links between personal objectives and the objectives of the team, manager and wider organisation, work-related outcomes are likely to be increased as well as personal outcomes, such as meaningfulness.

Practice reflections

- **Challenge traditional thinking around value-adding roles.** Operational roles include vital aspects of people practice, without which organisations simply could not function. There may be key areas of people management that may be de-prioritised or perceived as less value-adding by the people function, yet can add real value and support to the rest of the business – for example, conflict management and line manager coaching (see Section 9). Key questions for leaders in the profession are therefore:
    - What are the key areas where people/HR capability can support the organisation to achieve their future goals?
    - Is the people strategy aligned to the wider business strategy to support this and influence the wider success of the business?
- **It's all about context.** Roles must be designed with the context of the organisation in mind. When questioning strategic and operational roles within your business, consider whether roles are designed effectively for the organisation's purpose:
    - Are roles split in a hybrid fashion, or are roles designed to be either entirely strategic or operational?
    - What are the benefits of each?
- **Automation and digital transformation – the introduction of digital platforms to support delivery-focused roles.** The trends towards automation of operational roles may offer new opportunities to develop and improve both functional and individual capability. Key questions to consider therefore include:
    - Are there operational aspects that can be automated or digitalised?
    - Where automation of tasks is possible, how might individual job quality (that is, purpose and meaningfulness), employee experience and wellbeing be impacted? This is particularly important for practitioners in operational/delivery-focused roles.

Strategic vs operational: how is the profession adding value?

(7) **New Profession Map**

The CIPD's new Profession Map sets the international benchmark for the people profession. It is designed for people practitioners to enable them to make better decisions, act with confidence, and drive change in their organisation and career. The Map is relevant to all people professionals irrespective of seniority or career path.

The new Profession Map encompasses three core values:

- **being principles-led** – this is about what you stand for as a people professional when making difficult decisions
- **being evidence-based** – using the best available evidence from diverse sources to drive decision-making and professional judgement
- **being outcomes-driven** – balancing business outcomes with people outcomes to champion better work and working lives.

These values will help guide people professionals to make good decisions and create impact in the changing world of work. As a central part of the new Profession Map, we explored aspects of these values in our survey.

a. Being a principles-led profession

Headline findings

- **Early-career people professionals are less confident at sticking to their principles** – these findings apply to all people professionals, whether in-house or independent professionals.
- **Prioritising the needs of the business and pressure from senior leaders are areas where principles are most often compromised.**
- **The five-year picture reflects professionalism and acting with integrity –** personal gain is less of a reason to compromise principles – this dropped from 22% to 15% in the last five years.

As part of our Profession for the Future work, we explored the professional principles for the profession that will support practitioners to champion better work and better working lives. Having professional principles enables the profession to have clear values and beliefs around ethical decision-making using professional judgement. Upholding these principles as a profession is vital, and professionals can do this by demonstrating professional courage to make the right judgement given the context of the situation that they find themselves in. Our ethical decision-making review highlighted a number of lenses that describe the perspectives an individual may consider when having to make ethical decisions.

In reality, there are contextual factors that could influence how principles-led professionals are in their practice. Workplace dilemmas, ethical tensions and workplace pressures will test individuals' willingness to stick to their principles. The profession's ability to remain true to its principles, even in difficult or challenging situations, is an important element of the reputation of the profession.

To find out more, we asked practitioners to indicate whether they would compromise their principles across four principles-based statements. These statements were based on pressures from different aspects of the business that highlight where people professionals find it most difficult to adhere to their principles.

We found that:

- **The vast majority adhere to their professional principles.** In our survey, we found the majority of practitioners are not prepared to compromise their principles, showing professional courage and ethical decision-making – for the various statements, between 73% and 85% of professionals are unlikely to compromise on their principles.
- **Key internal stakeholders are challenging the profession to improve its reputation.** We found that only half of business leaders believe that HR acts with integrity, impartiality and independence (51%) and under a third believe that HR does not challenge inappropriate behaviours and actions (28%), illustrating a clear disconnect between internal and external perceptions of the profession.
- **Early-career practitioners show less professional courage by compromising their principles.** We found that less experienced professionals are less confident sticking to their principles. In particular, those with less than five years' experience are more likely to compromise their principles than those with more experience (see Figure 2). Given that less experienced people professionals are more likely to compromise on their principles, more experienced practitioners should overtly role-model their decision to uphold their principles and situational judgement within the context of their organisation.

Figure 2: Likelihood of compromising principles by experience in the people profession (in-house professionals only) (%)

Base: In-house sample n=1,368
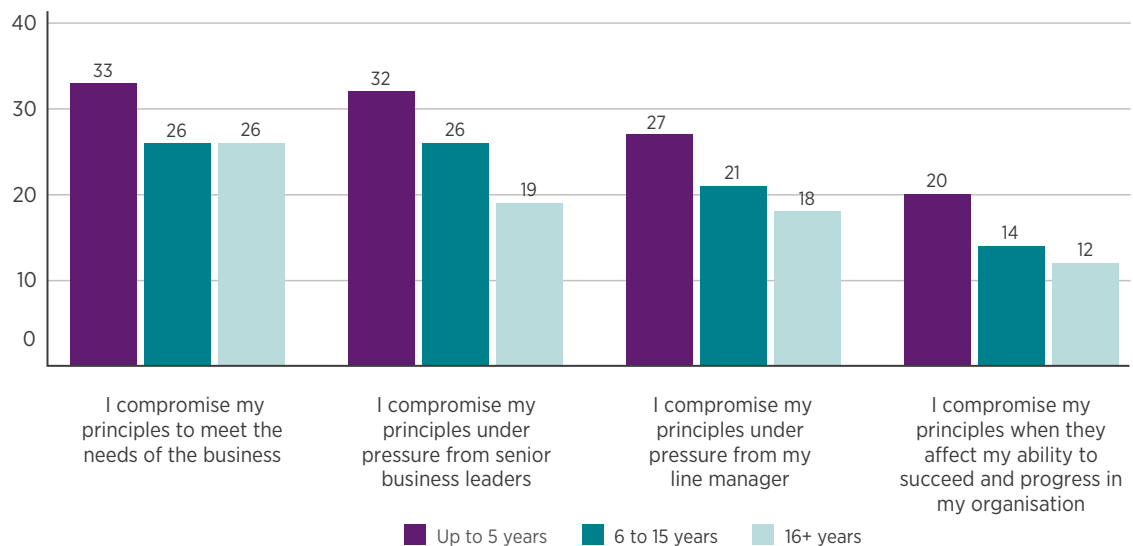
- **Despite the majority upholding their principles, some are feeling the pressure:** A quarter would compromise their principles when it comes to the needs of the business (27%) or under pressure from senior leaders (25%). In our previous work on principles within the profession, the same two principles were most commonly compromised. This suggests that, five years on, business needs and pressure from senior leaders remain areas in which principles are most compromised. Although applying professional principles is the responsibility of the individual to recognise the ethical decision within that situation, these decisions are not made entirely independently.

Professionals working independently show strong professional courage in their practice.
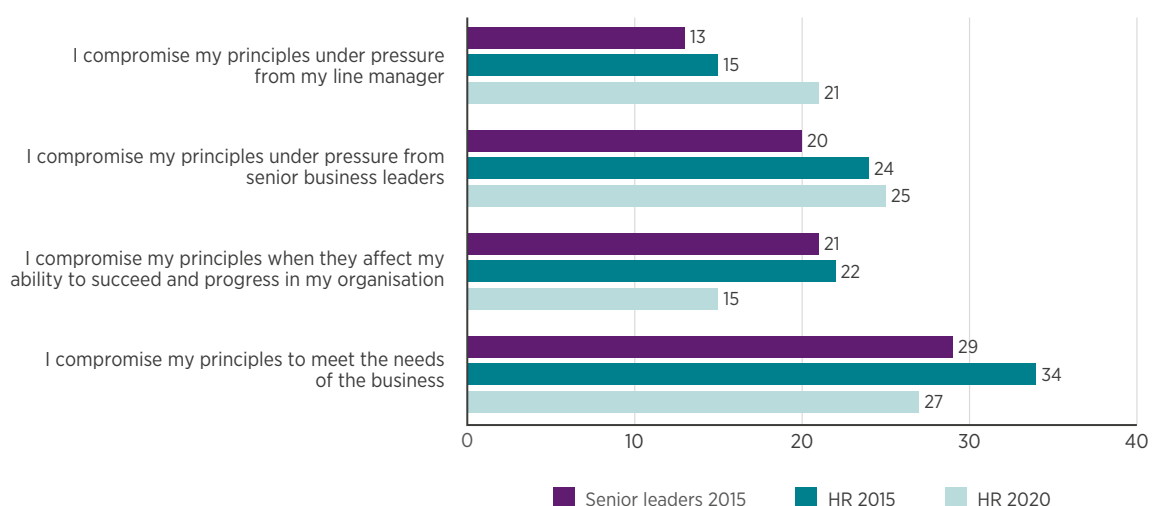Independent professionals were less likely to compromise their principles in any of the situational statements. One explanation for this may be that independent professionals tend to have more experience in the profession before entering the world of independent work. As we know from our earlier findings, those with less experience believe they will compromise their principles more often, so this may be less so for independent workers. Additionally, working independently often means having more choice and autonomy over the type of work that they do and the organisations/clients that they work with. Therefore, from the outset, independent professionals are able to uphold their principles in their practice and disconnect from situations where they would be required to compromise on their professional principles, for example where malpractice or unethical behaviours occur.

As with in-house professionals, we found a negative weak correlation between time spent as an independent professional and likelihood of compromising your principles (on three out of four statements). The more experience an independent professional has, the less likely they are to compromise their principles; however, this relationship is stronger amongst independent professionals.[11] This highlights that both more senior in-house and independent people professionals have a different, but equally important, part to play when it comes to upholding the principles across the profession and role-modelling professionalism.

How does this compare over the last five years and with the views of senior leaders?[12]

- **Personal gain is less of a reason to compromise principles:** This dropped from 22% to 15% in the last five years and shows that people professionals stick to their principles regardless of whether this may be to the detriment of their progression.
- **People professionals are less willing to compromise principles to meet the needs of the business:** The biggest change in compromising principles is directly related to the business – with people professionals now more in line with senior leaders' likelihood to compromise their principles.
- **However, there are some areas of increased pressures:** People professionals are more likely to compromise principles under pressure from line managers and senior leaders compared with the 2015 data. This could potentially reflect the current context in which people professionals are operating, which is both unique and highly challenging.

Figure 3: Reasons why principles may be compromised – comparing senior leaders and people professionals over the last five years (%)

I compromise my principles under pressure from my line manager: 13, 15, 21

I compromise my principles under pressure from senior business leaders: 20, 24, 25

I compromise my principles when they affect my ability to succeed and progress in my organisation: 21, 22, 15

I compromise my principles to meet the needs of the business: 29, 34, 27

Senior leaders 2015　HR 2015　HR 2020

Base: Senior leaders 2015 sample n=3,416; HR 2015 sample n=2,220; In-house 2020 sample n=1,368

New Profession Map

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COVID-19 Focus: Making difficult decisions during crisis

The COVID-19 outbreak has no doubt led to people professionals having to make difficult decisions which test practitioners' principles and ethics. We found some notable findings around the influence of the COVID-19 outbreak on challenging people professionals' principles:

Getting the balance right between business operations and compassion towards the workforce. In challenging times there are often ethical dilemmas and competing demands on the business – but getting the balance right between business needs and people needs is something that people professionals will be faced with. We found that nearly two-fifths of practitioners agreed that operational imperatives are taking precedence over empathy and concern for staff (37%).

Diversity and inclusion considerations are being addressed by the majority. Two-thirds (66%) of practitioners say their organisation has considered the needs and concerns of different employee groups during this crisis.

People professionals supporting line managers – employers call for the profession to do more. The majority of people professionals agree that their people team are stepping up to support line managers through the impact of COVID-19 (57%). However, only 41% of business stakeholders and employers agreed that this was happening. This shows a disconnect between the perceived support that people teams offer to line managers during this crisis. In fact, nearly a quarter of employers felt that their people team failed to support line managers sufficiently (23%). This suggests that leaders in the profession have an important job to do when it comes to building and maintaining the reputation of the profession.

Our findings throughout this section indicate that people professionals need to make objective decisions by considering their principles in line with the other contextual issues that may arise within the business. Making such decisions can be a difficult judgement call for practitioners – an HR practitioner sums this up precisely:

'Many of the decisions are not nice for the individual but are right for the organisation. Recessions make life harder and mean harder decisions and harder consequences. Nevertheless, we have to do what we believe to be right, even if sometimes it is at great personal cost to ourselves.'

Practice reflections

- **Supporting colleagues to be more courageous and to act with integrity.** An increasing number of practitioners compromise their principles under pressure from line managers and senior leaders. Practitioners need to feel confident to exercise professional courage in their day-to-day working lives and to remain true to their professional principles. Professional courage requires key skills such as communication and the ability to build relationships and influence others.
- **Lead by example.** As we found less experienced practitioners can particularly struggle to uphold their principles, it's important that more senior practitioners explicitly role-model ways in which they apply their principles in practice. Leaders also have a responsibility to uphold the profession's reputation, especially when it is challenged by other stakeholders. This is particularly important during crises like COVID-19.

New Profession Map

b. Is the profession evidence-based? To what extent are professionals critical thinkers?

Headline findings

- **On the whole, people professionals are encouraged to question ineffective practices.** CIPD members are more likely to believe they think critically in their practice compared with non-members.
- **Practitioners working at a higher strategic level are more likely to apply a critical approach in their practice by questioning ineffective practices and being problem-focused in their thinking.**
- **Leaders in the profession need to be encouraged to seek evidence and insights during times of change or crisis to inform their decision-making.**

Evidence-based practice makes a case against relying on evidence of low quality (for example, biased, anecdotal and unreliable information) to inform management decisions and practice. Instead, an evidence-based approach encourages critical appraisal of the best available evidence, from multiple sources, to inform better decision-making and achieve desired outcomes. Without evidence-based practice, management decisions may be based upon personal judgement and experience alone – both of which are open to bias and error.

In more recent times, with COVID-19, society has seen just how vital evidence-based decision-making is when considering important decisions that carry devastating consequences when the wrong decision is made. Applying this to people professionals, failing to consider the best available evidence could lead to risks for the business and the workforce. Therefore, it is vital that the best available evidence is consulted before making any important decisions.

To do this, the Centre for Evidence-Based Management (CEBMa) suggests using evidence from four sources, and applying the six steps to ensure quality of evidence is considered (see Figure 4). Our resources on evidence-based practice for effective decision-making provide further details. The CIPD continues to support evidence-based practice by producing evidence summaries on key practice topics.

To successfully synthesise and appraise the available evidence, critical thinking is a key skill for evidence-based practice. Critical thinking means having the ability to think independently, critically reflect on others' ideas, opinions and arguments, and make a strong case for your own. The CEBMa highlights: *'the basic idea of evidence-based practice is that good-quality decisions should be based on a combination of critical thinking and the best available evidence.'*

To understand whether people professionals are critical thinkers in relation to their practice, we asked practitioners to state their agreement with three related statements around thinking critically (see Figure 5).

We found that:

The majority of people professionals are encouraged to question ineffective practice and 'old models' that don't work. We found over two-thirds of in-house (67%) and over four-fifths of independent professionals (84%) feel they can use evidence to improve their practice. It was also found that a small majority of people professionals are problem-

Figure 4: Evidence-based practice

4 SOURCES

1 Scientific literature empirical studies

2 Stakeholders values and concerns

3 Organisation internal data

4 Practitioners professional expertise

6 STEPS

Evidence-based practice is about making decisions through the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of the best available evidence from multiple sources by:

Asking
Step 1
Translating a practical issue or problem into an answerable question

Acquiring
Step 2
Systematically searching for and retrieving the evidence

Appraising
Step 3
Critically judging the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence

Aggregating
Step 4
Weighing and pulling together the evidence

Applying
Step 5
Incorporating the evidence into the decision-making process

Assessing
Step 6
Evaluating the outcome of the decision taken

focused and can define problems before seeking solutions. We found that three-fifths (60%) of people professional functions and 83% of independent professionals define problems before seeking or recommending solutions.

However, when we consider people profession leaders, only 54% of respondents agreed that leaders in the profession are evidence-based through periods of change or challenge. Leaders in the profession need to be encouraged and supported to seek evidence and insights during times of change or crisis to inform solutions that are driven by data and evidence.

Figure 5: Agreement to critical thinking statements for in-house and independent professionals (%)

Base: In-house sample n=1,368; Independent sample n=204
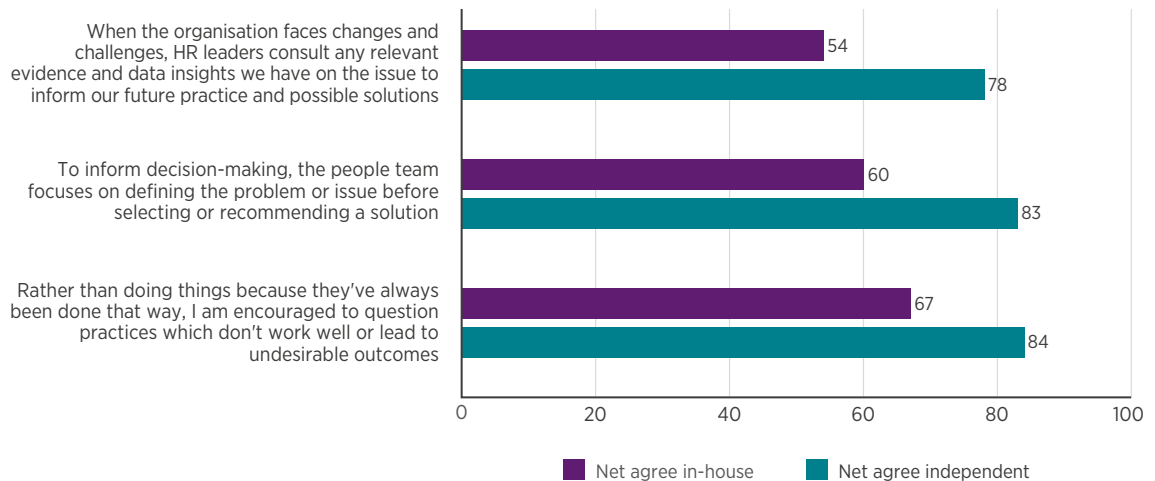
We also found some other factors that are associated with critical thinking capability:

CIPD members are far more likely to be critical thinkers compared with non-members. Members were more likely to perceive that they apply critical thinking within their practice compared with non-members.
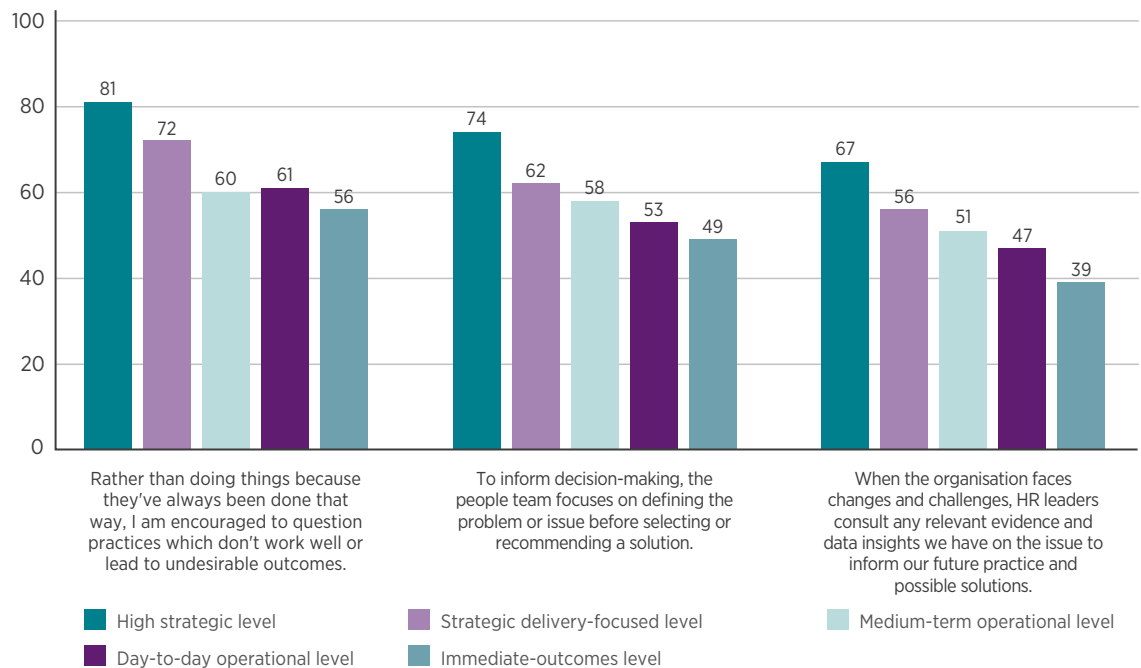
Critical thinkers are more satisfied with their career progression to date. We also found that satisfaction with career progression appears to be associated with critical thinking capability. Of the practitioners whose career progression had exceeded their expectations, 84% demonstrated that they are critical thinkers, compared with 54% of those who said their career progression had not met their expectations.

Strategic-level people professionals believe they have a critical approach. When considering strategic level, practitioners working in a high-level strategy role are significantly more likely to agree with all critical thinking statements compared with those in other mid-level strategic and operational job roles (see Figure 6).

Are leaders in the profession evidence-based during crisis?

An interesting finding here is the difference in belief around HR leaders and their use of evidence and data to inform decision-making during challenging times; for example, economic uncertainty presented by COVID-19. Far fewer practitioners in operational roles believe senior leaders are using data and evidence in their decision-making compared with those in high-level strategic roles.

Figure 6: Agreement with critical thinking statements for in-house and independent professionals (%)

- **High strategic level**
- **Strategic delivery-focused level**
- **Medium-term operational level**
- **Day-to-day operational level**
- **Immediate-outcomes level**

Base: In-house sample n=1,368

There may be a couple of different explanations for this:

- First, high-level strategic practitioners may be more exposed to the strategy and thought process behind decision-making compared with professionals at a lower strategic level.
- Second, it is also likely that the data and evidence behind decision-making is less accessible to most of the business and possibly the people function. This highlights an important consideration around the accessibility of data across the organisation and how leaders make explicit links to data and evidence in their decision-making and communication of such decisions. This will be discussed further in the data skill section of this report (section 9).

Practice reflections

Critical appraisal is a key part of being an effective evidence-based practitioner. How can your people function become better at applying critical thinking and using an evidence-based approach? What data and evidence does the organisation have related to the context of your business and how accessible is it across the business?

Building culture and values can enable critical thinking and evidence-based actions. We found some encouraging findings to show that people professionals apply critical thinking to their practice. However, HR leaders need to build functions where more practitioners feel empowered to apply a critical eye to their work and people practices and apply this to take an evidence-based approach throughout their work. Does your organisational culture support practitioners to voice their opinion? Do managers encourage their teams to question ineffective, outdated models of working?

Leaders should demonstrate when and how they are using data and evidence, especially during crises like COVID-19. It's clear that more can be done by strategic decision-makers to demonstrate how they are incorporating evidence into their decision-making, particularly when navigating complex and significant decisions. Low data visibility, inaccurate or incomplete data, and inconsistencies across evidence sources mean that greater interrogation and exploration is important, and should be role-modelled to the function.

New Profession Map

c. Outcomes: is the profession driving the right results?

Headline findings

- **Clear outcomes and key measures of success are a challenge for the profession,** and these are not well aligned with the wider business. Less than half of respondents state clear links between HR practices and business outcomes.
- **The profession needs to be better at evaluating its efforts and adapting practice accordingly when we fail to achieve desired outcomes.** This has a direct link with evidence-based practice and the need to use the best available evidence to inform better decision-making.

Being outcomes-driven is central to creating value and making an impact. People professionals have the opportunity to deliver value, bringing together strategic imperatives and operational delivery, as well as supporting the business to navigate the changing context of work, the workforce and the workplace, to support sustainable performance and outcomes recognised by the rest of the business.

In this section we explore how people professionals are delivering value, and for whom. We also consider the extent to which the outcomes of the profession are aligned to business needs.

Key findings

There is a lack of understanding when it comes to business outcomes. Worryingly, only half believe that their people function has a clear understanding of successful organisational outcomes (56%). This aligns with our insights from business leaders, which suggest only a third (30%) believe that their people function combines commercial and people expertise, bringing value to the organisation and stakeholders. This disconnect between the people function's practice and business outcomes was highlighted in our previous business leader research – a third of organisations with a people strategy state that it is not integrated to the wider business strategy. It is clear that senior leaders believe that the people strategy and business outcomes are, at least to some extent, interdependent and should be embedded to reflect this.

Outcomes are not strategically aligned across functions. Only half of people professionals (48%) agree that there are key links between people practices and business outcomes that have been agreed across the business. If people practices are not clearly aligned to the wider business, the people function is less likely to add the value and impact that is expected of them by the rest of the business.

The business leaders' perspective: Only 47% of respondents said their HR function has a people strategy, and two-thirds of those (68%) said that the HR/people strategy is integrated into the business strategy (see Figures 7 and 8). Being embedded into business strategy was cited as one of the most important attributes for the success of the HR/people strategy, with 43% saying this. Additionally, two-thirds of leaders believe that the HR/people strategy is important to achieving the organisation's business goals (69%). However, only two-fifths (43%) said that the current HR/people strategy is effective in enabling the organisation to achieve its goals. This highlights a significant perceived gap in the effective delivery of people strategy to meet current business needs.

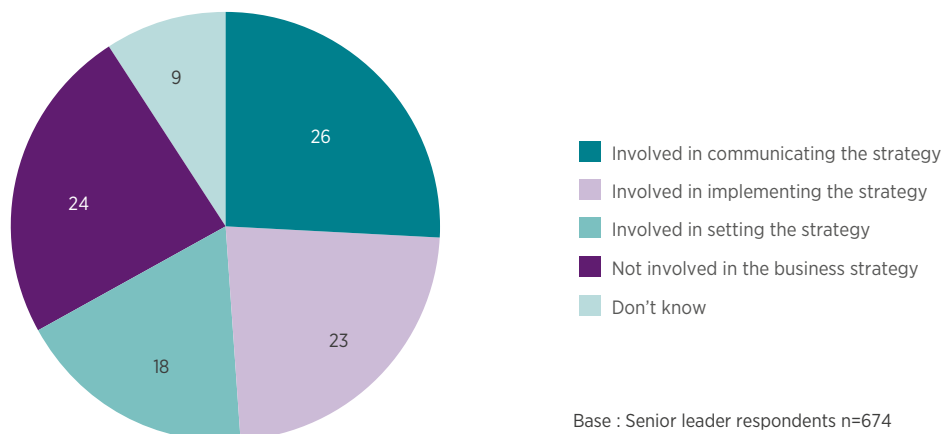**Figure 7: Senior leader respondents whose HR function has an HR/people strategy (%)**

- Yes — 47
- No — 33
- Don't know — 20
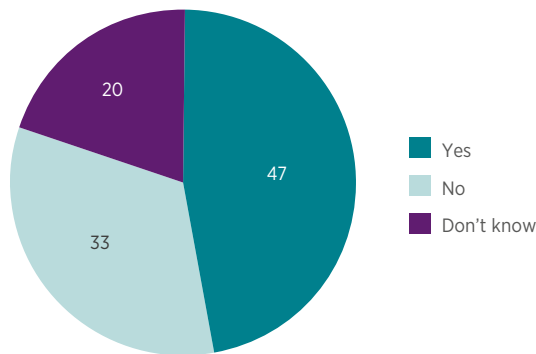
Base :Senior leader respondents n=674

Figure 8: Relationship between HR/people strategy and organisation's business strategy (%)

- Separate — 26
- Integrated — 68
- Don't know — 6
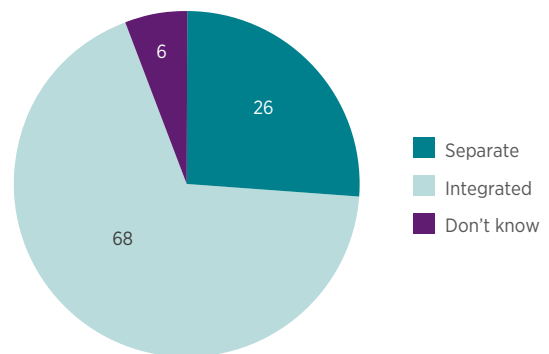
Base: Senior leader respondents with an HR strategy n=311

HR disconnect from business strategy: From our previous research with senior leaders, we know that there is a long way to go before people professionals are key stakeholders towards influencing the direction of the business (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: The HR/people team's involvement in the organisation's business strategy (%)

- Involved in communicating the strategy — 26
- Involved in implementing the strategy — 23
- Involved in setting the strategy — 18
- Not involved in the business strategy — 24
- Don't know — 9

Base : Senior leader respondents n=674

The findings from non-HR senior leaders highlights a significant challenge for leaders in the people profession. The ability of the profession to deliver value over the long term is limited by a lack of integration across functions on strategic issues.

Measures of success are unclear for a sizeable minority. Almost a quarter (24%) think they do not have clear measures of success agreed to measure progress against agreed outcomes. Having clear measures or metrics of success not only highlights where objectives have been met (or not), but also provides the rest of the business and senior leaders with clear indicators of the impact people professionals can have towards achieving wider organisational goals. Effectively utilising people data may be a way of driving performance and tackling business problems. Our work on people analytics found that a people analytics culture was positively associated with overall business performance. Additionally, it was also found that HR strategy was positively associated with an analytics culture – this suggests that a strong HR strategy and strong analytics culture work

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alongside one another. Further findings and discussion around the use of people data and data/analytic skills are discussed in Section 9b.

Evaluation and agility are lacking: Only half (49%) of professionals agree that when desired outcomes are not being met their people function adapts its practice accordingly. Given that our earlier finding showed industry change and organisational agility to be a significant driver of change, being able to think and act in an agile manner is essential for people professionals. Part of being adaptive is having access to the data and evidence that can help better inform practice decisions.

Practice reflections

- **Leaders in the profession must push for integration between people strategy and business outcomes.** There is some way go for people functions to be aligned with the wider context and outcomes of the business. There is no quick win here; this needs to be a wider shift in perspective around delivering on business strategy and the delivery models that support this (this links to our findings from Section 6). This will look very different across different business contexts, but must ultimately be owned by leaders in the profession.
- **Using evidence to add value.** To support the wider business outcomes, people professionals can make use of evidence and people data to understand the context of issues being faced by the organisation and provide solutions driven by evidence. We discuss more on data skills and analytics in Section 9.

⑧ How do people professionals feel about their career and purpose?

Headline findings

- **Overall, practitioners believe that the people profession is a meaningful profession and offers good career prospects.** Those who work at a higher strategic level are more likely to say they have meaningful careers.
- **The majority say they are given the opportunity to add value to their organisation.** This is higher for those working full-time (compared with part-time workers) and for professionals from the private and voluntary sector (compared with public sector workers).
- **Barriers to entry may be preventing early-career individuals from accessing the people profession.**

Meaningfulness is an important psychological concept relevant to modern work. May et al (2004) define psychological meaningfulness as *'the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards'* (p14). Specifically, meaningful work is defined by Hackman and Oldham (1975, p162) as *'the degree to which the employee experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile'.* In this section we explore how people professionals feel about a career in the people profession and about the meaning and purpose they achieve from their work.

The people profession is a meaningful profession, with four out of five (80%) stating that they find meaning from their career within the profession. This figure was even higher

How do people professionals feel about their career and purpose?

amongst the independent professionals (91%). We found a weak positive correlation between perceiving the profession as a meaningful career and career progression expectations: as career progression expectations go up, so do respondents' agreement that the profession offers a meaningful career.[13] Those who operate in more strategic-level roles are also more likely to believe that their career is a meaningful one, compared with those working more operationally and in roles with short-term, immediate value.

The people profession is a profession with good career prospects (73% agreed). Younger people professionals (18–34-year-olds) were more likely to agree that the profession offers good career prospects, compared with the other age groups. As you would expect, there was a weak to moderate positive correlation found between this statement and career progression expectations;[14] as career progression expectations went up, so did respondents' agreement that the profession offers good career prospects.

How have attitudes towards the profession changed since 2018?

Most aspects of attitudes towards a career in the people profession remain stable (see Table 7), illustrating that the profession remains meaningful and offers good career prospects for people professionals. However, there are two notable areas where attitudes are more negative:

• **Access into other areas of the business:** The perception that the profession provides a stepping stone into other areas of the business dropped from 52% to 44%.
• **Difficulty on entry into the profession:** Practitioners' belief in the profession being one that is easy to get into decreased from 42% to 33%.

Table 7: Comparison of attitudes towards a career in the profession between 2020 and 2018 (%)

	Net agree 2020	Net agree 2018
The profession offers a meaningful career	80	78
The profession offers good career prospects	73	74
The profession offers good earning potential	65	68
The profession is a stepping stone into other business areas	44	52
The profession is easy to get into	33	42

Base: In-house 2020 sample n=1,368; 2018 sample n=974

To understand more about practitioners' perceptions of meaningfulness of work, we used a pre-established scale from Ashmos and Duchon (2000) (see Appendix for details on meaningful work scores). Overall, 90% of respondents scored a net high meaningfulness work score, which is similar to the findings from our 2018 survey (91% – for a full comparison per item see Figure 10). Those in the voluntary sector (96%) were more likely to have a net high meaningful score compared with the other sectors. Additionally, respondents with 16+ years of experience in the profession were also more likely to have a net high meaningful score (94%) compared with less experienced professionals (less than five years, 86%; 6–15 years, 88%).

Independent professionals find meaning and purpose in their work. Across all measures, independent professionals scored significantly higher than in-house people professionals (see Figure 10). In particular, there was a large difference in attitudes towards achieving happiness through work – more than nine in ten independent professionals achieve happiness from their work (93%). Sadly, this figure was much lower for in-house professionals, dropping to 59%.
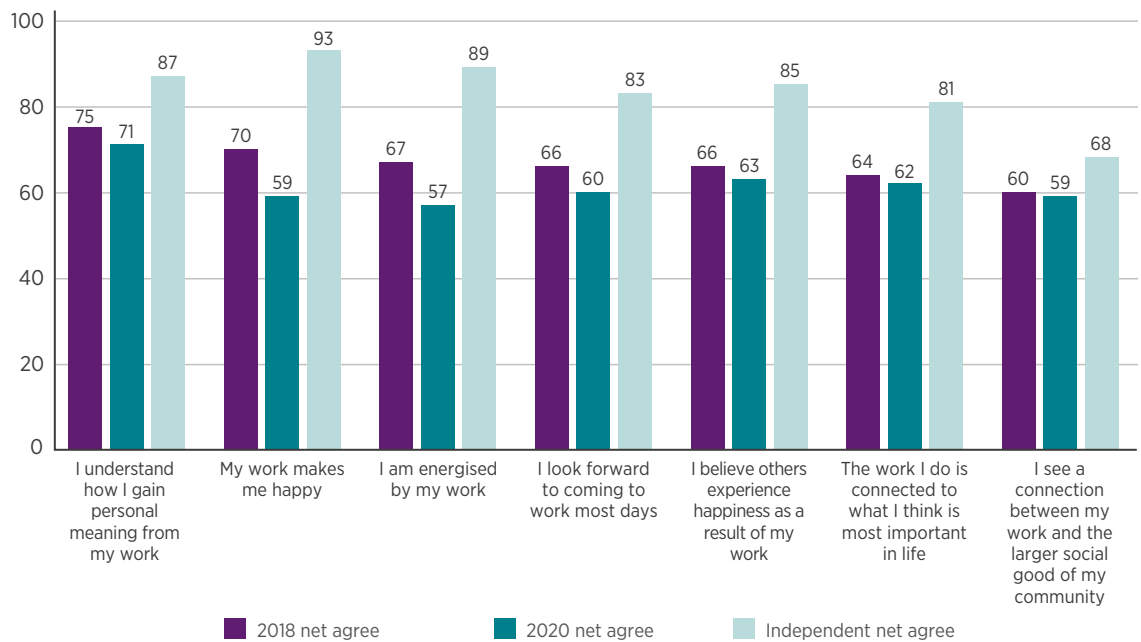
How do people professionals feel about their career and purpose?

Figure 10: Comparison between agreement on meaningfulness of work between 2018 data, 2020 data and the independent professionals sample (%)

Base: 2018 sample n=974; In-house 2020 sample n=1,368; Independent 2020 sample n=204

Three-quarters say their role is value-adding and impactful: 73% believe they have the opportunity to add value to their organisation. The perception around adding value has seen an increase compared with the HR (58%) and business leaders' views (51%) from 2015. We also found some other differences where practitioners believe they add value within their work:

- **Difference across sectors:** Public sector workers were less likely to believe they can add value (67%) compared with private and voluntary sector workers (both 77%). This may reflect the different contextual factors across sectors that influence work-related attitudes; for example, see Snir and Harpaz's (2002) comparative cultural analysis of work values across public and private sector employees.
- **Members feel able to add value in their practice:** CIPD members are more likely to say they are able to add value (77%) compared with non-members (70%).
- **Working hours appear to influence whether professionals believe they add value:** Full-time workers are also more likely to believe they add value (74%) compared with part-time workers (67%). This may be explained by the physical constraints of part-time working (for example, limited time within the office, or with clients and colleagues) or by other confounding factors that may be acting as a barrier to part-time workers feeling able to add value within their role.

Previous CIPD research on flexible working has highlighted several possible barriers to implementing flexible working successfully, including managerial barriers (such as lack of performance management capabilities), colleague barriers (such as lack of team collaboration with the flexible worker) and individual barriers (such as concerns over career progression). It is possible that these potential barriers could also influence perceptions of part-time individuals feeling like they are able to contribute to the organisation in a valuable manner.

How do people professionals feel about their career and purpose?

- **Strategic level and value-added HR:** As mentioned in Section 6, we found a moderate positive correlation between perceptions of adding value to the organisation and strategic level;[15] as strategic level increased, so did the opportunity to add value. Strategic level is also associated with the belief that the profession offers a meaningful career. See Section 6 for more discussion on this.

Lastly, barriers to entry may be preventing individuals from accessing the profession. We found almost a third (32%) disagreed that their profession was easy to get into – this was also highlighted as a decrease since 2018 (see above). This differed according to age: 18–34-year-olds were more likely to agree that the profession is easy to get into (41%) compared with the other age groups (35–44, 32%; 45+, 30%).

Perhaps this highlights that those entering the profession at a younger age find fewer barriers to entry than those who may be entering at a later stage in life. Another possible explanation is the perception that the modern profession is more difficult to get into than it would have been for previous generations first entering the profession – suggesting a potential shift across the industry for early-career professionals.

Practice reflections

- **Recognising your purpose in the bigger picture.** Having meaning and purpose in what we do is important for employees across all professions. As highlighted earlier in this report, research shows that psychological meaningfulness predicts work engagement, both of which predict organisational commitment (Geldenhuys et al 2014). Employees who are highly engaged will perceive their work as meaningful and purposeful, so it's vital that practitioners draw a sense of meaning from their work. Aligning personal and organisational values and understanding how your work fits into the bigger picture of the organisation's goals can help to recognise the value you add as a professional.
- **Independent practice provides high levels of meaning and satisfaction for individuals.** Meaningfulness is clearly significant for independent people professionals and is likely to be a driver towards operating independently. Understanding what it is about independent professional practice that leads to greater meaning, as well as higher levels of job satisfaction, may provide some insights into creating these outcomes amongst in-house professionals.

⑨ Skills and capability: developing the future profession

Headline findings

- **Coaching line managers is an in-demand capability for the profession:** Practitioners need to feel confident in their ability and have the right skills to deliver training to managers.
- **Beyond traditional HR skills:** There is a clear demand for organisational development and change management skillsets amongst the people workforce.
- **Mind the gap:** There is a skills gaps amongst the workforce – upskilling and skills utilisation will help to even the playing field.

Line manager coaching comes in as the top capability: 32% highlighted this as an area of improvement for the profession, recognising the importance of line managers to delivering people practices across the organisation.

Previous research has shown that line managers play a pivotal role when it comes to an organisation's people, significantly influencing personal and work outcomes for individuals, such as health and wellbeing (CIPD 2020), employee voice (CIPD 2019) and enabling HR practices (Kuvaas et al 2014). Line managers also shape the success or failure of people practices, and there is evidence of a strong correlation between high-quality HR training and having a good relationship between managers and people professionals (see Kuvaas et al 2014). The line manager/people practitioner relationship is therefore critical, and training that supports line managers to embed people practices can be hugely valuable.

Having a people-centric approach. Building relationships with colleagues and understanding their priorities is a valuable capability for the profession and one which requires further development. Our data showed that only two-thirds of respondents believe that their function works collaboratively across the business (63%) – suggesting some barriers to collaboration may exist for some professionals. Improvements in technology and task/role automation may mean that demand for 'human' skills increases – and this is where practitioners can add value. This also links to the earlier finding that emphasises the importance of strategically aligning the people practices with business outcomes. Building relationships to better understand business priorities is one way for people professionals to ensure they apply an outcome-driven focus to their work.

What business leaders think: Coaching line managers and building relationships with colleagues and understanding their priorities are two main areas where leaders would like to see change or improvement in HR capability (31% and 29% respectively). Together with the earlier finding that the people strategy is often developed in conjunction with functions outside HR, this suggests that connecting more with the rest of the business could help people professionals to be more effective in delivering the strategy.

Rising demand for OD and change: There is a clear demand for capability in organisational development (OD) and change management amongst HR professionals. This a top in-demand capability that both in-house and independent professionals highlight as a key area for HR improvement. Despite this agreement for OD and change management being key areas for capability, there is a distinct difference in the number of people professionals who highlight these roles as areas of focus. For in-house professionals, just 7% identified that their main decision-making responsibility is OD, while 3% said organisational change. When this was explored across independent professionals, 42% said they consult on OD and 51% for organisational change.

While we cannot compare these figures directly,[16] it does indicate that a large proportion of independent people professionals spend their time consulting in these 'in-demand' areas. It may also indicate that much of the expertise and experience within these areas moves out of in-house roles into independent ways of working. This is supported by the fact that the independent sample is generally older (61% are over 45 compared with 46% for in-house professionals) and over half (54%) said they have more than 16 years of experience within the people profession. This highlights an important point about experts working alongside

Skills and capability: developing the future profession

one another to achieve greater impact through a collective approach. People functions will need to employ a team with greater holistic skillsets across a broader professional network and work alongside independent professionals where their capability in these areas does not meet the organisational demand.

Although this research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it provides a real-life example for why change management and organisational development skills are key for businesses to ensure longevity and relevance during challenging business and societal climates. In the CIPD's new Profession Map, change is noted as a key knowledge area for people professionals, while organisational development can be found under specialist knowledge. In addition, there are a number of OD thought pieces developed with experts to share insight on the current state of play in OD.

Lastly, a focus on skills utilisation and job design is needed. In our survey, nearly two-fifths (37%) have the necessary skills to cope with more demanding work. Worryingly, nearly a fifth (17%) lack the necessary skills required within their current role. On closer investigation, we found that not only does this apply to the least experienced professionals (less than five years, 20%), but also those with 6–15 years of experience (20%). This highlights that a large proportion of the people profession workforce feels that they require some upskilling within their current role, no matter what their level of experience.

Skills utilisation also differs by organisation size: professionals from larger organisations are more likely to believe they have the required skills to cope with more demanding duties (40%) than those within SMEs (31%). In comparison with the 2018 data, skill levels overall have remained stable, suggesting that there has been little change in skill level across the people profession (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: A comparison of skill level between the 2018 and 2020 data (%)
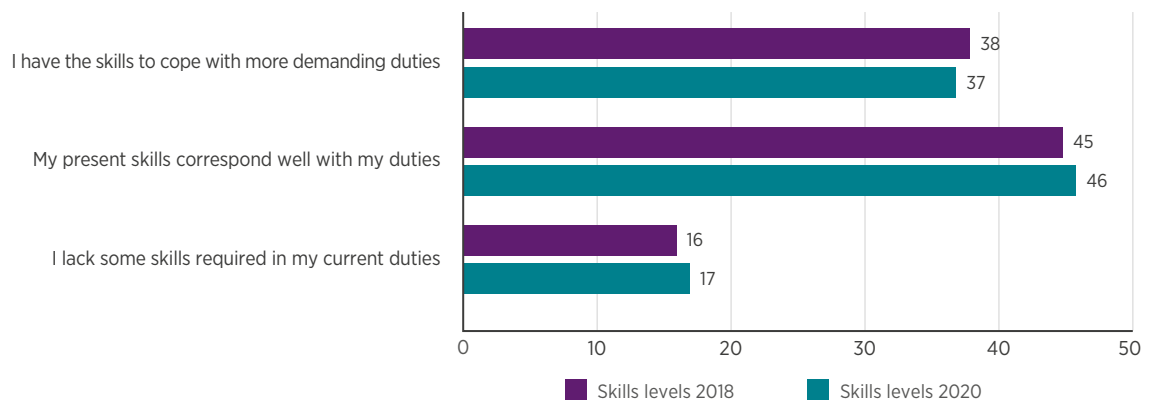
Base: 2018 sample n=974; In-house 2020 sample n=1,368

Practice reflections

- **Securing the necessary tools for the job.** There are clear agreements of the demands for certain skillsets across people professionals (both in-house and independents) and business leader stakeholders. These capabilities highlight key areas for the future of the profession, where practitioners can add value and contribute to the performance of their business in a long-term, sustainable way. Is your organisation building capabilities and skills in these areas? Is there significant investment and buy-in for building on the capabilities gap in your organisation?

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- **Building a broader network across professional communities.** Our findings suggest that a broader, more holistic skillset is in demand across the people profession; for example, capabilities in change management and OD. This presents an opportunity for collaboration and developing a network that encompasses much broader professional communities.

a. The demand for data insights and analytics

Headline findings
- **There is significant demand across organisations,** with 89% of all organisations planning to use HR/people data and analytics.
- **People professionals continue to struggle to make the best use of people data;** we need to get the basics right before moving forward to more complicated analytical techniques.

An emergent capability yet to break through. People analytics is the practice of using organisational workforce data to inform business decisions. The practice has been an emerging capability for several years, and while historically the profession has utilised descriptive workforce data (for example, simple headcount trend reporting), more recent developments mean that advanced predictive capability is available. Advanced people analytics describes the use of different statistical techniques to predict workforce trends. These techniques are commonly associated with large organisations with access to large data sets and more advanced capability.

Previous CIPD research has highlighted how people analytics skills and capabilities are an important emerging capability for the profession as it supports business decision-making. For example, the CIPD's *People Analytics: Driving business performance with people data* report showed that over half (51%) of key business stakeholders are using people data at least once a week in their practice, and just under half (46%) utilise data dashboards in their organisation. People data is becoming an important element of business-wide decision-making.

Key findings
People professionals continue to struggle to make the best use of people data, with basic capabilities dominating. However, demand for skills and capabilities is very high, particularly in large firms.

There is a clear demand for data analytics capabilities. Overall, one in ten (11%) respondents stated that they do not plan to use people data and analytics. Despite this demand, 23% of practitioners didn't spend any of their time on HR analytics tasks – this highlights a clear gap between demand and current practice. Additionally, our sample consisted of only 5% of in-house professionals who identified their professional focus as HRIS/people analytics based, while this was higher within our independent sample at 14%. Demand was considerable in large firms, where 96% of firms are using or plan to use people analytics. Demand was lower in SMEs (77%) but still sizeable, illustrating the significant attention people professionals are paying towards people analytics. This echoes our previous finding that 'using data to inform decisions' is also the fourth most common area for improvement in HR capability.

The profession has yet to reach advanced capability with people analytics practice, with the vast majority of professional practice remaining at the basic level. Our data highlights that capability across the profession is overwhelmingly focused on basic analytics and reporting (37%), which is associated with simple reporting practices or calculating basic averages/means. Less than one in ten (6%) are using advanced analytics techniques. The use of advanced analytics techniques does not vary significantly between small and large firms.

Figure 12: Capability level of people analytics practice (%)

Base: In-house sample n=1,368

Practice reflections

- **Is 2020 the year for people analytics to break through into the mainstream?** Our results show a clear demand for the use of analytics as well as capability that is accessible to the organisation. This presents an opportunity for in-house people professionals to lead the way by utilising data and analytics to gain insight into the issues their businesses face, and drive the use of data and evidence throughout the wider organisation. To do this, the people function needs the necessary skills and capability across the function. Independent consultants can play a critical role in supporting people functions to build their capacity and capability, and also in supporting the integration of new skills into in-house functions. As this is an emerging specialist area, analytics and creating value is a core knowledge area detailed within the new Profession Map.

- **Utilising data analytics and insight is key to being an evidence-based practitioner.** Having evidence and information at your fingertips can influence strategic decision-making and lead to the development of data-driven solutions to address business issues. Without data and other information, it is difficult to make sound judgements and decisions that will ultimately add value to the business. This is an area of real opportunity for both the in-house community and those operating as independent people professionals.

- **Availability and accessibility to data.** Consider the data you have available – where there are gaps in evidence, think about the type of people data that needs to be collected and how you plan to gather this information to address issues relating to business outcomes. Where appropriate, data should be used and shared in a transparent way so that people professionals fully utilise people data in their practice. Where data is less accessible, senior leaders should make explicit links to the use of data and evidence in their decision-making and communicate this across their teams (as mentioned in Section 7b).

Skills and capability: developing the future profession

b. How are people professionals developing themselves and others?
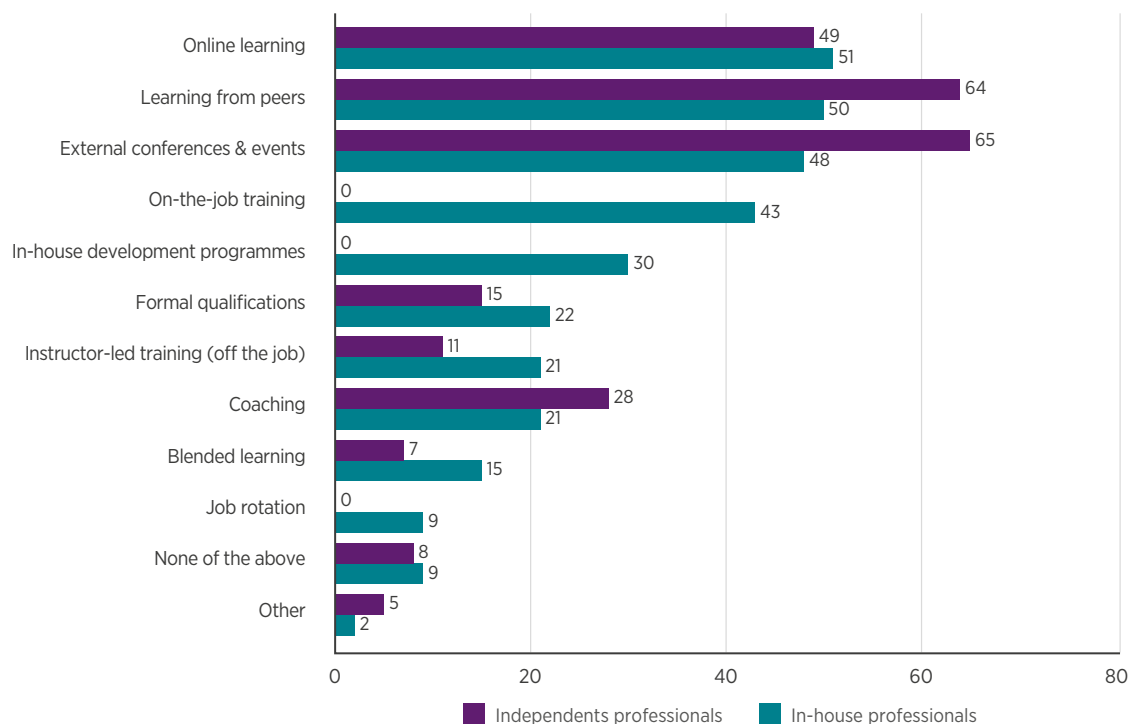
Headline findings

- **The profession engages with learning and development via online learning, learning from peers, and external conferences, workshops and events.**
- **Since 2018 engaging with professional development activities has been less of a priority for practitioners.**

It is imperative that businesses invest in their human capital through professional learning and development. Doing so will ensure that organisations have the necessary capabilities and skillsets required to remain future-fit in the changing world or work. However, the CIPD's *Professionalising Learning and Development* report found that 98% of learning and development (L&D) practitioners wish to develop a positive culture for learning, but only 36% feel like they've developed one.

How have practitioners engaged with their learning and development over the past year?

In-house and independent professionals engage with learning and development through the same mechanisms. For in-house professionals, online learning was the most frequent way to learn (51%), followed by peer learning (50%) and conferences, workshops and events (48%). For independents, external conferences were most common (65%), followed by learning from peers (64%) and online learning (49%) (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Types of learning and development in the last 12 months for in-house and independent professionals (%)

	Independents professionals	In-house professionals
Online learning	49	51
Learning from peers	64	50
External conferences & events	65	48
On-the-job training	0	43
In-house development programmes	0	30
Formal qualifications	15	22
Instructor-led training (off the job)	11	21
Coaching	28	21
Blended learning	7	15
Job rotation	0	9
None of the above	8	9
Other	5	2

Base: Independent sample n=204; In-house sample n=1,368

Skills and capability: developing the future profession

We found some differences amongst the learning and development habits across people professionals.

By sector
More than one in ten private sector professionals have not engaged with any learning and development over the last 12 months. Private sector employees were also more likely to say that they haven't engaged with any of the learning and development means included in this survey (11%) compared with public (7%) and voluntary sector (5%) professionals.

HR professionals in the third sector are more likely to attend external conferences or events (61%) and engage with off-the-job, instructor-based training (30%) compared with other sectors. This suggests that professionals in the voluntary sector more frequently engaged in formal mechanisms of learning in the last 12 months.

By strategic level
One in five operational professionals neglect their learning and development. Worryingly, operational practitioners, working at an immediate-outcomes level, were most likely to say that they failed to engage with any learning and development over the last 12 months (18%). However, this finding should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size of this group.

Professionals working at more strategic levels were more likely to engage with coaching (28%) and external conferences (59%) than their operational colleagues.

By experience
The least experienced people professionals undertake formal learning and broaden their skills by shadowing colleagues and gaining experience in other roles. Practitioners with the least experience within the profession (less than five years) are more likely to undertake formal qualifications (31%) and job rotation and secondments (13%) compared with those who have more years of experience within the profession. This is an encouraging finding, which suggests the least experienced people professionals seek formal learning to advance their development as well as benefitting from the experience of colleagues in other roles within the business.

CIPD members prioritise their learning and development. We found that CIPD members are more likely to engage in learning compared with non-members. Interestingly, over one in ten non-members (12%) indicated that they didn't engage with any of the learning and development types listed, while this figure was only one in twenty for CIPD members (5%).

Continuing professional development: how are people professionals furthering their development?

Continuing professional development (CPD) is an important part of professional practice. We asked people practitioners about their current professional development:

- **Over two-thirds apply their learning in practice.** Positively, 66% of practitioners are applying their new learning in their day-to-day roles. This suggests that practitioners make a conscious effort to apply their learning in practice.

Skills and capability: developing the future profession

- **Just under half identify their own learning and development needs (45%)**. While it is positive that practitioners are taking the initiative to consider their future development and learning progression, one in five said this is not an area of focus (21%).

- **A third lack any development plans.** However, a third of people professionals responded as never or not very often in relation to planning how to achieve their development goals (31%) and acting on their learning and development plan (29%), highlighting a need for professionals to focus more on their own development.

Figure 14: In-house practitioners' professional development activities (%)
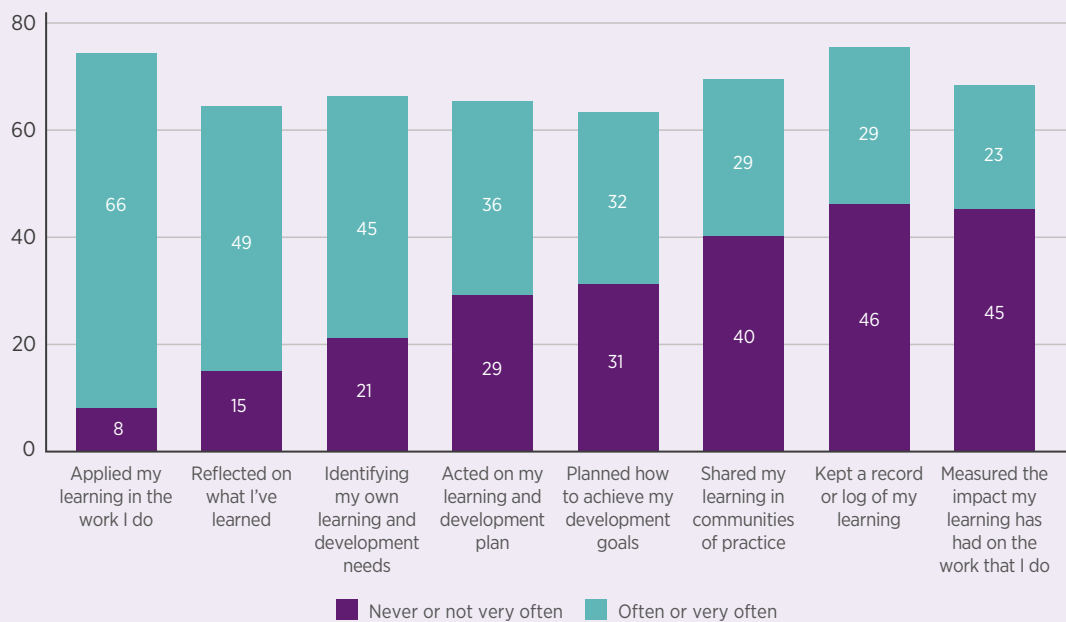
Base: In-house sample n=1,368

Less of a priority – learning and development activities have declined over the last two years. Generally, practitioners' engagement with professional development activities has lowered since 2018 (see Figure 15). Despite this, we note that practitioners continue to implement their learning in practice. This is an important step of the learning process and suggests that professionals are applying their new knowledge in the work that they do. Applying learning in this way suggests professionals continue to grow and develop themselves; however, practitioners should dedicate time to other developmental activities, such as planning how they will achieve their development goals.

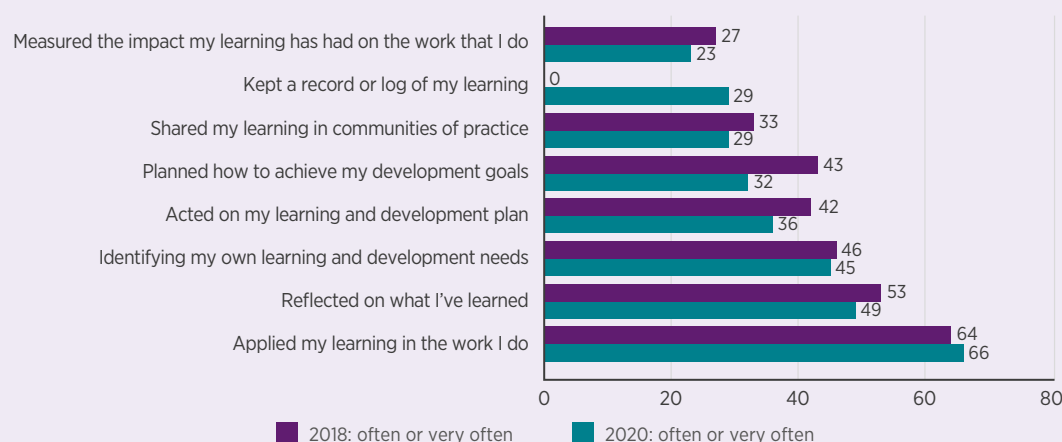Skills and capability: developing the future profession

Figure 15: Comparison between 2018 and 2020 professional development activities (%)

Activity	2018: often or very often	2020: often or very often
Measured the impact my learning has had on the work that I do	27	23
Kept a record or log of my learning	0	29
Shared my learning in communities of practice	33	29
Planned how to achieve my development goals	43	32
Acted on my learning and development plan	42	36
Identifying my own learning and development needs	46	45
Reflected on what I've learned	53	49
Applied my learning in the work I do	64	66

■ 2018: often or very often   ■ 2020: often or very often

Base: 2018 sample n=974; In-house sample n=1,368

Investing in leaders. We found that over a third of practitioners highlighted that their organisation is focusing on creating learning programmes that better meet the development needs of their employees (36%). Additionally, just under two-fifths indicated their organisation is investing in management and leadership programmes (38%). This suggests some organisations are making investments in their people development, specifically for leaders and those who manage the workforce.

Practice reflections

- **Creating the right environment for CPD and learning.** There is a mixed picture when it comes to learning and personal development – we found that for some (that is, operational professionals), there has been little focus on personal learning and development over the last year. While professionals need to take a proactive approach to their learning, to do this there needs to be a culture that prioritises and invests in learning amongst the workforce. Does your organisational culture support the learning of its workforce? How can your organisation encourage practitioners to undertake more of the professional development activities mentioned above? Our report _Creating Learning Cultures: Assessing the evidence_ includes recommendations evaluating the current learning environment and taking action at the individual, team and organisational level. The CIPD also provides resources for professionals looking to continue their CPD journey.

- **Developing skills and knowledge of L&D practitioners.** The CIPD's _Professionalising Learning and Development_ report found that organisations that develop the skills and knowledge of their L&D practitioners through planned continuing professional development see a significant positive impact on growth (21%), productivity (12%) and performance (15%). Additionally, this report identified nine key areas for improvement in L&D teams:

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1 business acumen
2 analytics and creating value
3 culture and behaviour
4 situational decision-making
5 professional courage
6 insights-focused
7 learning impact
8 social collaboration
9 adult learning theories.

How do these key areas match up to the capability needs of your L&D team?

People managers prioritising learning. Are managers confident that they can support the development of their team? Are they empowered and supported by senior leaders to encourage learning that will widen the skillset of their team and support individuals where they feel most challenged and stretched? Are development conversations happening on a regular basis in your organisation?

⑩ Conclusions

Our findings around meaning and purpose suggest that the profession is engaged and passionate about the work that they do.

The people profession offers a unique, challenging, but highly rewarding career. Our findings show that many practitioners today find meaning and purpose through the work that they do, regardless of whether practice is in-house or in an independent capacity. Not only do practitioners believe they find meaning from their work, but three-quarters also believe they add real value and impact through their practice. This finding is an encouraging one, especially given that professionals view the profession in such a positive light, despite the turbulent and very demanding times that the profession has endured over the last year, navigating economic uncertainty around the UK's exit from the European Union, and now the COVID-19 crisis. We hope that practitioners' perceptions of purpose and fulfilment continue beyond the immediate responses to recent events, as organisations respond to and plan for economic uncertainty and eventual recovery.

This research recognises that the profession has an incredible opportunity to tackle the demand for data and analytics skills.

This report highlights the multitude of opportunities that people data and analytics present to the profession and why practitioners should look to build their skills and capability. Our findings on evidence-based practice highlight the value of data to informing effective decision-making to tackle business issues. There is no better time for the profession to grasp these high-demand skills – even at the most basic level we note the overwhelming need for such capabilities amongst people functions.

Economic change, digital transformation and organisational agility are set to be the biggest drivers of change.

Without a doubt, economic change is going to be an even bigger driver of change than stated in this report, with many professionals aware of the economic uncertainty surrounding the UK's departure from the European Union. A key trend likely to accelerate this is the COVID-19 pandemic, having a lasting influence even long after the initial crisis abates. In addition, our findings on digital transformation and organisational agility collectively were

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recognised by 70% of responses as key drivers for change. It can also be argued that these two drivers are closely linked and dependent on one another. For example, the absence of effective digital platforms can be a prominent barrier to organisations efficiently and rapidly responding to business needs in an agile way. Clearly agility is an area which businesses and people professionals must prioritise to survive times of economic difficulty and crisis, which present a potential threat to the success of the business.

Finally, our data shows that the profession has seen a shift in people priorities as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. Employee wellbeing and retention are two pertinent areas of focus as a result of the pandemic that are rising up the business agenda.

Looking ahead: a profession on the rise

Throughout the report we have included practice reflections as a result of the insights collected from people professionals. These reflections highlight key areas to be considered in the context of organisations that people professionals work with, either in-house or independently. We also highlight calls to action for the leaders of the profession to consider, in light of these findings, how we work towards shaping the future of the profession and continue to build its reputation with other key business stakeholders.

The *People Profession Survey 2020* also recognises the apparent tensions around strategic and operational functioning. It is imperative that the profession acknowledges where and how their practice adds value to the wider business in helping to achieve organisational outcomes. This means understanding the strategic and operational value that the profession can offer and not losing sight of this. As previously discussed, leaders of the profession should carefully consider how their people function is best structured and strategic and operational roles designed in alignment with the wider business strategy.

This report explored the values at the core of the CIPD's new Profession Map: being principles-led, evidence-based and outcomes-driven. Our findings highlight some key reflections:

- **Principles-led:** When it comes to principles, key internal stakeholders are challenging the profession to improve its reputation. This is a direct call from senior leaders for the people profession to demonstrate integrity and transparency in their practice, while being collaborative across the business.
- **Evidence-based:** Gathering and utilising accurate and reliable data is a must for the profession. It enables practitioners to incorporate evidence into decision-making and address issues that the business faces – particularly where decisions are complex or significant. Integration and application of evidence should be role-modelled across the function to encourage evidence-based practice.
- **Outcomes-driven:** The profession needs to demand better integration of the people and business strategy. Leaders of the profession need to encourage functions to be structured and supported to deliver outcomes that are aligned with the wider business. There is some way to go before the profession achieves this, but in doing so, the profession will reinforce its reputation as an influential key stakeholder of the business.

Applying these professional values supports practitioners to be future-fit and supports decision-making that has a sustainable and positive impact for the individual, organisation, the people profession community and our wider society. The new Profession Map will help you to do this by supporting your personal career journey and help shape the future people profession.

Recognising the challenges ahead

This report has highlighted how the profession is adding value to businesses through expert practice and where there are signs of positive growth: upholding professional principles, providing a career that is meaningful, and being critical and evidence-based throughout our practice.

We also recognise the rapid and distinct changes and tensions across the profession: the significantly changing structures of people functions, the grapple between operational and strategic value, and the changing demands and skills required by people professionals, influenced by the latest trends and drivers of change.

And finally, the research also highlights areas of focus for the profession, where there is a call for leaders and practitioners to step up to the challenges ahead, fulfilling the demand for data and people analytics skills, challenging thinking around how the profession contributes to sustainable performance and business outcomes, and collaborating cross-business to better integrate people and business strategy. Core concepts such as physical and psychological wellbeing remain important to the profession. To enable positive wellbeing outcomes, practitioners must embed wellbeing holistically, and develop strategies and initiatives that are inclusive and impactful.

People practitioners are experts with the knowledge, skills and networks that are able to make a real difference, but the reputation and influence that the people profession has is down to the collective impact that we make.

COVID-19 is a significant, once-in-a-century challenge to organisations globally that puts people professionals front and centre as businesses respond to the crisis. The nature of professional practice today means that many difficult decisions are having to be made in support of businesses and workers, often with hard compromises at their core. These challenging conditions are likely to persist for some time to come.

As the crisis progresses, effective people practice must remain high on the agenda, as businesses look ahead to prolonged economic instability and uncertainty. The data we highlight in this survey illustrates how, as leaders consider a post-COVID-19 world, many of the core issues arising from this crisis sit squarely in the domain of people practitioners. Wellbeing, engagement and productivity will continue to remain important for many years to come.

As the CIPD, we know that expert people professionals are fundamental to bringing stability, security and growth to businesses, workers and communities globally. The unique knowledge, networks and passion that people professionals possess will be critical in the times ahead. Ultimately, if businesses and economies are to stabilise and grow, expert people practice must be central in the recovery plan. While COVID-19 is likely to shape the global business context for some time, economies will recover, and another threat will emerge. It is for this reason that practice that is principles-led, evidence-based and outcomes-driven is more important now than ever before.

Conclusions

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(12) **Appendix**

Methodology for the People Profession 2020

The CIPD, in collaboration with Workday, developed the *People Profession Survey* 2020 to explore the 'here and now' of the profession. This survey serves as an annual benchmark for the profession and contributes towards building a longitudinal picture of the people profession.

To fully understand people professionals' perceptions and experience of the profession, we ran an online survey between 24 January and 5 March 2020. Our sample included 1,368 in-house professionals and 204 independent professionals across the UK and Ireland.[17] Due to the low number of respondents from Ireland, UK and Ireland data has been grouped together and reported collectively in this report.

In addition to the UK and Ireland sample, the CIPD worked with the World Federation of People Management Associations (WFPMA) and other international partners to build a global picture of the people profession. This enables us to compare data internationally and explore global trends and cultural difference across the profession. This research will be published in a separate report at a later date. We hope to continue building on this global network of people profession organisations, so that future research on the profession can include an even wider range of countries across the globe.

Methodology for non-HR business leaders sample 2019

The survey sample consisted of managers working in an organisation with at least two employees, excluding those working in the people profession. To ensure a representative sample, quotas were set during fieldwork. Results have been weighted and are representative of UK employers (see sample characteristics below).

Table 8: Weighting for non-HR business leaders sample, by sector

Sector	Unweighted	Weighted
Private	452	506
Public	146	121
Third/voluntary	76	47

Base: Senior leader respondents n=674

Table 9: Weighting for non-HR business leaders sample by business size

Size	Unweighted	Weighted
2–9	96	92
10–49	125	103
50–249	102	94
250+	351	386

Base: Senior leader respondents n=674

COVID employers sample

Fieldwork for the COVID-19 online survey was undertaken from 17th–23 April 2020 by YouGov. The CIPD and YouGov collected data from 1,178 employers and senior decision-makers in the UK to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business continuity. Within this sample there were a total of 361 people professionals to draw on insight on the impact of COVID-19 from a people/HR perspective. The figures have been weighted and are representative of UK employers by size, sector, industry and nation.

Demographics of the people profession sample

We include the demographics of our in-house and independent professionals sample below.

Table 10: Gender of in-house and independent samples

	In-house professionals		Independent professionals	
	%	N	%	N
Females	68	926	62	126
Males	32	435	22	44

Appendix

Table 11: Age of in-house and independent samples

	In-house professionals		Independent professionals	
	%	N	%	N
18–34	25	341	2	3
35–44	29	291	16	33
45+	46	625	63	119

Figure 16: ONS data on age of the HR profession and the general workforce (%)
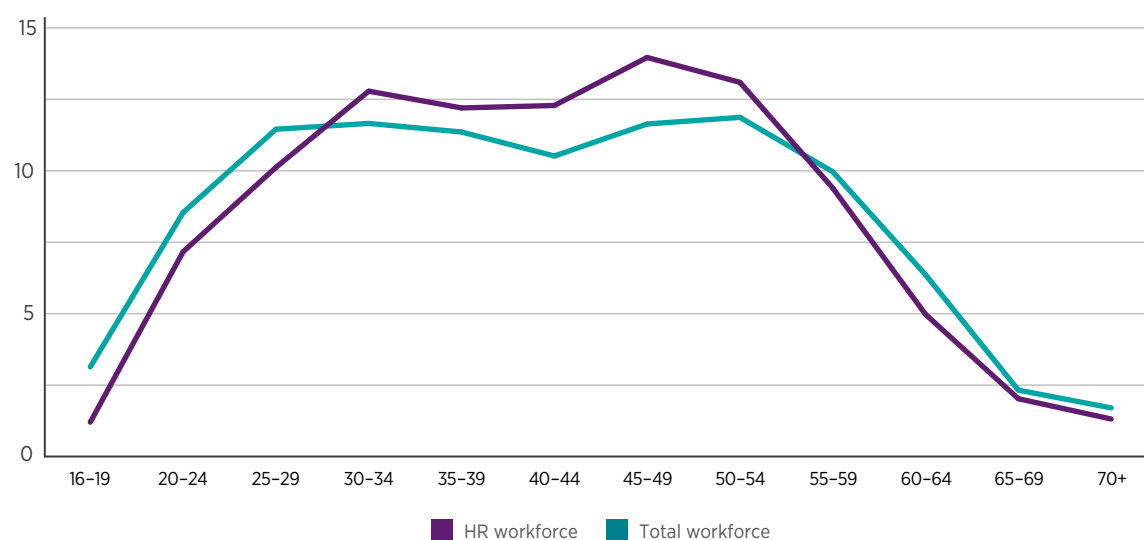
Source: Annual Population Survey accessed through the secure research service[13]

Table 12: Sexual orientation of in-house and independent samples

	In-house professionals		Independent professionals	
	%	N	%	N
Heterosexual	84	1,143	74	151
Gay/lesbian	5	71	2	4
Bisexual	4	52	n/a	n/a
Other	<1	5	<1	1

Table 13: Ethnicity of in-house and independent samples

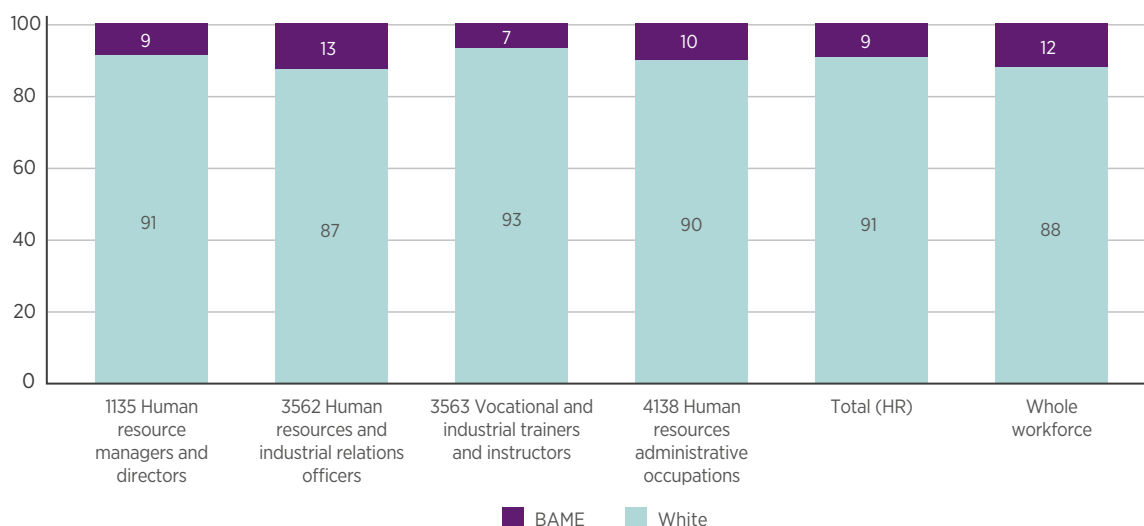|	In-house professionals		Independent professionals	
	%	N	%	N
White	88	1,200	80	165
BAME	5	72	2	4

Appendix

Just over 5% of our sample identified themselves as black, Asian or ethnic minority (BAME). This figure is even lower than the Annual Population Survey (ONS data), which suggests that 10% of the HR workforce identifies as BAME – which is still less diverse than the general workforce, see below.

Figure 17: ONS data on ethnicity: White/BAME proportions, by occupation (%)

Source: Annual Population Survey accessed through the secure research service[12]

Table 14: In-house professionals sample, by sector

	In-house professionals	
	%	N
Private	53	715
Public	32	437
Third/voluntary	15	205

Table 15: In-house professionals sample, by business size

	In-house professionals	
	%	N
1–249 (small to medium business)	35	477
250+ (large)	63	863

Table 16: Working hours of in-house professionals

	In-house professionals	
Full-time/part-time	%	N
Full-time (30+ hours per week)	85	1169
Part-time (8–29 hours per week)	13	178
Part-time (under 8 hours per week)	2	21

Table 17: Working hours of independent professionals

	In-house professionals	
Days per month	**%**	**N**
More than 20 days	23	47
Between 10 and 20 days	39	80
Fewer than 10 days	11	23
Fluctuating hours	18	36

Figure 18: ONS data for working hours split by occupation (%)
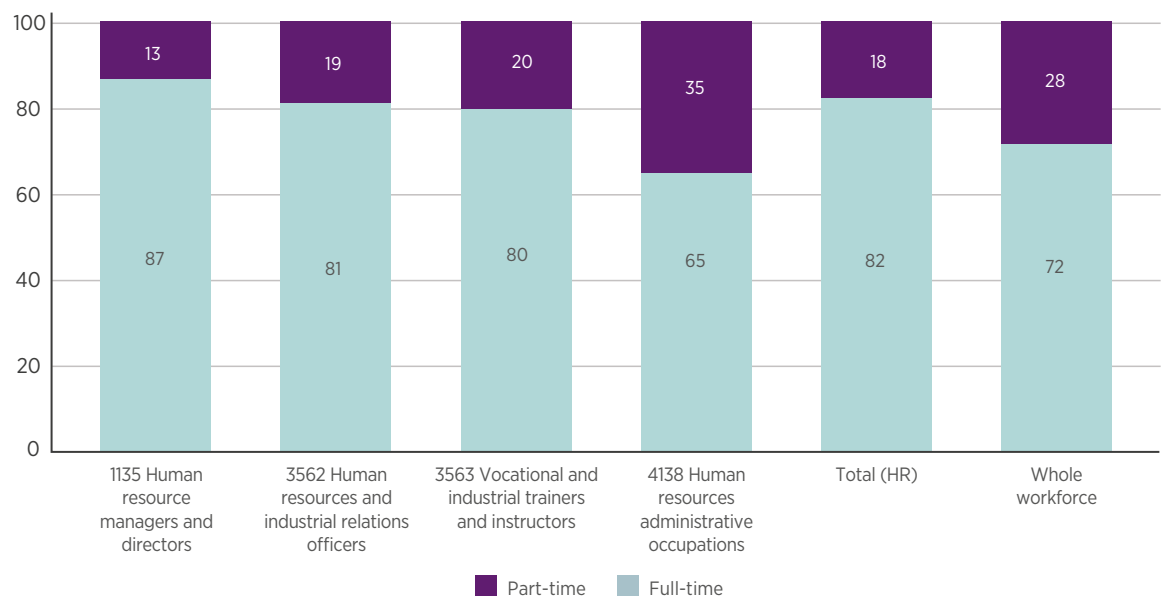
Source: Annual Population Survey accessed through the secure research service

Table 18: Comparison of years of experience in the profession for 2020 and 2018 respondents

Years of experience	In-house professionals 2020 (%)	In-house professionals 2018 (%)	Independent professionals 2020 (%)
Up to 5 years	28	30	46
6–15 years	36	34	34
16+ years	37	35	18

Base: In-house 2020 sample n=1,368; 2018 sample n=945; Independent 2020 sample n=204

Role-level descriptions

High strategic level: Strategic level to deliver long-term value for organisations, working with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders to influence the way that organisations manage their people.

Strategic delivery-focused level: Strategic overview; however, role is delivery-focused. Create medium- to long-term value for organisations and their people.

Medium-term operational level: Work operationally to deliver short- to medium-term value for organisations and their people. Have influence with my immediate colleagues and customers, although work is likely to impact a wider audience.

Day-to-day operational level: Work operationally, supporting the day-to-day delivery of people plans, projects and solutions.

Immediate-outcomes level:[6] Work is usually tactical, gathering information and delivering immediate outcomes for my manager, colleagues and immediate customers.

Table 19 and 20: Comparison of strategic role levels

Strategic vs operational roles (In-house professionals)	2020* (%)	2018 (%)
High strategic level	17	19
Strategic delivery-focused level	30	30
Medium-term operational level	27	24
Day-to-day operational level	20	27
Immediate-outcomes level	6	n/a*

Strategic vs operational roles (independent people professionals)	Agree (%)
Strategic level (execution and delivery)	76
Strategic level (design and development)	70
Operational level (working with in-house team)	59
Operational level (working with owner-managers)	59

Base: In-house 2020 sample n=1,368; 2018 sample n=974   Base: Independent 2020 sample n=204

*Note: For the 2020 survey, day-to-day operational level was split into two categories, forming the additional 'immediate-outcomes level' category.

Measuring meaningfulness of work

We asked practitioners how strongly they agree with a set of statements adapted from Ashmos and Duchon's (2000) meaningful work scale, including 'My work makes me happy' and 'The work I do is connected to what I think is important in life'. We then calculated composite scores to compare practitioners who showed high versus low levels of meaningful work with other factors. The five-point scale was re-coded so that a low score represents an average of 1 to 2.49, and a high score represents an average of 2.5 to 5.

Independent sample questions

Table 21: Reasons for the decision to work as an independent professional (%)

Which of the following statements describes your decision to work as an independent people professional?	
To have more control over my working hours and work schedule	54
To work around family/childcare or other caring responsibilities	32
I was forced to become self-employed due to my situation (for example redundancy)	27
To have a higher earning potential	24
A lack of in-house opportunities for the type of work I wanted to do	17
Other	13
A gap in the market or business opportunity	11
None of these	2

Base: Independent sample n= 204

Table 22: Expectations of being employed as an independent professional in 12 months' time (%)

Do you expect to be self-employed/working independently in 12 months' time?	
Yes	72
Unsure	10
I have not decided yet, but my decision will be based on the income I achieve	6
No	5
I plan to be self-employed on a part-time basis, alongside part-time employment	4

Base: Independent sample n= 204

Appendix

(13) **Endnotes**

[1] In addition to the UK and Ireland sample, the CIPD is working with the World Federation of People Management Associations (WFPMA) and other international partners to build a global picture of the people profession. This research will be published in a separate report.

[2] CIPD. (2015) *From best to good practice HR: developing principles for the profession.* London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Available at: www.cipd. co.uk/Images/best-good-practice-hr-developing-principles-profession_tcm18-8731.pdf [Accessed 6 April 2020].

[3] Figures are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,368 people professionals. Fieldwork was undertaken between 24 January and 5 March 2020.

[4] Figures are from CIPD research. Total sample size was 204 independent people professionals. Fieldwork was undertaken between 6th and 25th March 2020.

[5] This work was produced using statistical data from the ONS. The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data.

This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.

[6] Figures are from CIPD research. Total sample size was 674 non-HR business leaders. Fieldwork was undertaken between 27th June and 4th July 2019.

[7] Figures are from CIPD research. Total sample size was 1,178, of which 361 were people professionals. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17th and 23rd April 2020.

[8] $Rs=-0.221$, $p<0.000$ (positive relationship due to scoring).

[9] $Rs=0.330$, $p<0.000$.

[10] Caution when interpreting findings relating to the immediate-outcomes strategy level as this sample was under 100 practitioners

[11] $Rs=-0.206$, $p=0.006$ (I compromise my principles to meet the needs of my business).

$Rs=-0.208$, $p=0.006$ (I compromise my principles when they affect my ability to succeed and progress with my clients).

$Rs=-0.167$, $p=0.027$ (I compromise my principles under pressure from senior business leaders who I work with in organisations).

[12] Figures are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 9,882, of which 3,416 were senior leaders and 2,220 were people professionals. Fieldwork was undertaken in 2015.

[13] $Rs=0.261$, $p<0.000$.

[14] $Rs=0.258$, $p<0.000$.

[15] $Rs=0.330$, $p<0.000$.

[16] It is important to highlight that these figures are not directly comparable. Given the nature of their work, independent professionals were able to identify multiple areas which they work within, while in-house professionals were only able to select their main responsibility.

[17] In addition to the UK and Ireland sample, the CIPD is working with the World Federation of People Management Associations (WFPMA) and other international partners to build a global picture of the people profession. This research will be published in a separate report.

[18] Office for National Statistics, Social Survey Division, 2019, Annual Population Survey, 2004–2018: Secure Access, [data collection], UK Data Service, 14th Edition, Accessed 13 January 2020. SN: 6721, http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6721-13

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