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Skin in the game: Conceptualising Human Resource Development Consultancy as a profession

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John Watkins

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Skin in the game: Conceptualising Human Resource Development Consultancy as a profession

By

John Watkins

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Abstract

The HRD profession has been viewed as a weak profession in both industry and academic literature. This thesis challenges this view by exploring its relevance to HRD consultancy. Drawing on recent developments in the Sociology of the Professions and calls to further examine the factors that influence the way that HRD practitioners are positioned and perceived within organisations, this thesis proposes that HRD consultants use a form of professionalism common to new professions. Findings from a qualitative study of 45 consultancy websites and 29 semi-structured interviews with consultants and clients illustrate that HRD consultants work flexibly with the symbols and discourses of expertise, autonomy and authority and draw significantly on the contextual and relational nature of HRD work to strengthen their ability to diagnose, infer and enrich solutions to client needs. Network reputation, constructed by the client and shared by word-of-mouth referrals, enables consultants to move successfully between clients. Professionalism conceptualised as partnership was found to be a key resource for consultants to successfully manage risks associated with three weaknesses in HRD work – diagnosis, measurement and protecting reputation. This study contributes to a new understanding of the strengths of HRD consultancy as a profession and illustrates how HRD consultants have ‘skin in the game’ to ensure the success of their own professionalisation project through distinctive ways of doing HRD work. This study has implications for academics and professional bodies to view HRD as a heterogeneous profession and to develop a new understanding of different forms of HRD practice in organisations.

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Keywords: HRD, consultant, professions, professionalism, hybrid, reflexive thematic analysis, websites

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Publications from this thesis

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List of Abbreviations

AHRD	Academy of Human Resource Development
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHRD	Critical Human Resource Development
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunities
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
HRD	Human Resource Development
ICF	International Coaching Federation
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IMC	Institute of Management Consultancies
IT	Information Technology
IToL	Institute of Training and Occupational Learning
JPO	Journal of Professions and Organization
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
L&D	Learning & Development
LPI	Learning and Performance Institute
MCA	Management Consultancies Association
OD	Organisational Development
SHRM	Strategic Human Resource Management
UFHRD	University Forum for Human Resource Development
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research background – HRM and HRD

This thesis aims to fill the gap in knowledge about the conceptualisation of Human Resource Development (HRD) consultancy as a profession and what professionalism means for HRD consultants in the UK. HRD consultancy is under-researched despite being a vital part of the UK HRD landscape. In recent years, the academic HRD community have placed their attention on the search for a unified identity for the HRD profession (Hamlin & Stewart, 2011), the need for a common understanding and advancement of the theoretical underpinning of the HRD body of knowledge (Park, 2022; Wang et al, 2017), as well the challenges of access to hard to reach occupations and individuals such as consultants and their clients (Karjalainen, Niemistö & Hearn, 2015). I argue that a focus on HRD consultancy can contribute an important source of insight into the identity of HRD consultancy as a profession and the nature of their professional HRD practice in organisations. However, the focus for this thesis is on the co-constructed, emergent and variable nature of identity rather than a unified identity.

The UK academic and professional body communities have recently refocused attention on the professional status of HRD as an enabler for organisations to enhance responsibility and deliver transformation whilst operating in a dynamic and competitive free market (CIPD, 2015, 2019; Garavan et al, 2019; Hines & Gold, 2013). A dominant theme in the HRD literature, however, is the characterisation of HRD as a 'weakened profession' in need of new ways of conceptualising itself to move from weakness to strength (Gold et al, 2022). This thesis challenges the view of HRD as a weak profession by exploring the contribution of HRD consultancy as a neglected but vital part of the HRD landscape. I argue that claims of weakness assume the HRD profession to be homogeneous and united in a single identity, however, there have been very few attempts to draw on insights from the sociology of the professions (SoP) to explore the theoretical basis of these claims. In this thesis, I draw extensively on recent developments in the field of SoP to argue that we should reframe the HRD profession as a heterogeneous profession, made up of multiple occupations with different organisational identities. This enables me to create a new understanding of a co-constructed identity of HRD consultancy as a profession and how HRD consultants have 'skin in the game' to ensure the success of their own professionalisation project.

In short, this is one of the first studies to examine UK HRD consultancy professional identity through the lens of the professions by using a framework of accepted dimensions of expertise, authority, and autonomy; and to apply the lens of professionalism to HRD consultants as a way of exploring how they work in organisations.

There is growing recognition of the strategic role the Human Resource professions can and do play in organisations (CIPD, 2020). As strategic partners, HR take an active part in running a business, developing, and implementing organisational strategy, work with organisational stakeholders in decision-making processes, and engage in ways to deliver better organisational results (Ulrich et al., 2012, 2013). Research suggests that the strategic nature of HR professional work is highly correlated with the abilities to transform, change and adapt to the external environment (Ulrich et al, 2012). It is commonly accepted that the HR function, the theoretical frameworks, and the organisational processes have changed as a direct result of new organisational dynamics (Bratton & Gold, 2017; Ruona & Gibson, 2004).

HR is commonly understood to be constituted by two independent fields of academic enquiry and organisational practice – Human Resource Management (HRM) and HRD (Alagaraja, 2013; CIPD 2015, 2017, 2019). Table 1 illustrates a comparison of approaches between HRM and HRD in organisations. HRM as one field of HR has become the predominant term to describe the theory and practices relating to the way people are managed at work (Storey, Ulrich & Wright, 2019). HRM is represented in four dominant models of HRM (Bratton & Gold, 2017). The Michigan Model developed by Fombrun et al. (1984) consists of four core HR activities: selection, appraisal, development, and rewards. The model emphasizes the fundamental interrelatedness and coherence of HRM activities, which requires HR strategies to have a clear alignment to the strategies of an organisation (Bratton & Gold, 2017). The Harvard Model offered by Beer et al. (1984) links HR outcomes of high employee commitment and competence to longer term effects on organizational effectiveness and societal well-being. Storey's (2007) Model of HRM has an underlying belief is that the employer's goal should not merely be to seek employees' compliance with rules, but to 'strive' for 'commitment and engagement' that goes 'beyond the contract'. Ulrich's Strategic Partner Model of HRM (1997, 2012, 2013) presented a framework of four key roles that HRM professionals must accomplish to add the greatest value to the organization. HRM professionals must focus on both the strategic and the operational, in both the long and the short term. A core HR competency, according to Ulrich et al. (2012), is that of being both credible (respected, listened to, trusted) and active (taking a position and challenging). A HRM three-legged model was widely promoted and adopted in organisations to represent how a HR department should be organised. These were shared services (doing administrative work), centres of expertise (doing technical specialist work), and business partners (doing generalist business-focused work) (Storey & Ulrich, 2019). Despite the original popularity and impact on the shape of the HRM profession, the HRM three-legged stool model, however, has come under criticism. Reilly (2017) argues that technology, the availability of data and changing customer expectations mean that HRM needs to be more responsive with just-in-time solutions that are more likely to be drawn from external consultant expertise than in-house business partner experience. As managers become increasingly self-reliant and skilled, they may be dissatisfied with low-cost, standardised solutions to increasingly wicked questions (Reilly, 2017).

Common across the four HRM models is a focus on the functions that constitute HRM in organisations, defining specific HRM practice and their alignment with achieving organisational strategies and goals through the performance of employees. The four models also define the nature of the HRM roles needed to operate at both operational and strategic levels in organisations. However, when seen as models of practice, HRM has been criticised for its idealised view of managing performance in complex organisational situations, a lack of attention to the impact of context and specifically organisational size on the practices of HRM, and not acknowledging the conflict between supporting a managerial agenda for ‘resource’ over the more humanist origins of Personnel practice in organisations (Bratton & Gold, 2017).

This study focuses on HRD as the second field of HR as a distinctive academic and practice-based field within the Human Resources (HR) function (Wang et al, 2017). Over the last four decades, the HRD literature has been the site of debate over the nature of its knowledgebase that is in search of both internal clarity for those engaged in the study and practice of HRD, as well as providing a discourse of providing value for practitioners when competing in organisational settings (Jacobs, 1990; Wang et al, 2017). One accepted feature of the HRD knowledgebase is that it is interdisciplinary in nature. According to Jacobs (1990, p.65), the HRD knowledgebase has been influenced by at least five major bodies of knowledge which are education, systems theory, economics, psychology, and organisational behaviour. Since then, some common agreement seems to have been reached about the underpinning theoretical foundations of HRD. Swanson promoted a HRD version of the 'three-legged stool' that spelled out the knowledgebase that HRD drew rather than the Ulrich HRM stool that focused on the organisation of organisational roles. Swanson's (1995) HRD three-legged stool argued that the knowledgebase drew on economic theory, systems theory, and psychological theory. Learning theory (including organizational learning and the learning organization) and the theory of performance improvement have been added as additional perspectives argued to be complementary and illustrative of the overlap and interdependence of the theoretical domains (Weinberger, 1998). Table 1 summarises a comparison of HRM and HRD approaches towards purpose, conceptualisations, location within education institutions, operational and strategic priorities, and desired capabilities.

Although many authors have sought to determine the features of HRM and HRD to establish clear distinctive identities, it is increasingly recognised by authors that the distinction between the HRD and HRM fields is blurring (Alagaraja, 2013; Ruona & Gibson, 2004). Reasons for this blurring include reflecting changes in organisational contexts, the need for more nuanced context specific roles to support more complex and ambiguous organisational challenges, and the changes in non-HR roles to adopt responsibility for people related issues (Lundgren et al, 2023). Whilst the nature of blurred boundaries is out of scope for this thesis, this point reflects the influence of changing organisational contexts and associated nuances needed from different organisational roles. A point which does have relevance for this study and will be explored in the findings from this study in Chapter Five and Six, and the discussion of the findings in Chapter Seven. Despite the evolving features of the HR discipline, there remains agreement in the literature about the broad purpose of HRM and HRD that helps non-HR functions to understand the boundaries of practice in organisations. These are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Comparison of HRM and HRD Approaches in Organisations

	HRM	**HRD**
Overall purpose	Theory and practices relating to the way people are managed at work	Theory and practices to enhance the quality of human contributions and engagement and thereby gain a sustainable competitive advantage
Three-legged stool conceptualisations	Organisational roles	Underpinning knowledgebases
University alignment	Business Schools	Faculty of Education
Operational priorities	• Managing people through staffing, compensation, employee relations • Managing administration systems • Managing regulatory obligations	• Job analysis • Job focused training • Trainer-led delivery • Instructional systems design
Strategic focus	• HR systems as strategic assets • Organisational core competence • Culture change to support radical innovation	• Developing agile workforce and workplaces • Organisational learning and learning organisations • Self-directed learning and development • Knowledge management systems
Desired capabilities of practitioners	• Strategic and future orientation • Results orientation • Agile to respond to changing landscape and contextual factors of the workplace	• Measurement driven to assess organisational effectiveness of interventions • Results driven for performance improvements and efficiencies • Collaborative with managers and employees

Adapted from Alagaraja, (2013); Lundgren et al, (2023); Ruona & Gibson, (2004); Storey & Ulrich, (2019).

Whilst common agreement on the theoretical foundations may be in view, the HRD literature over the last four decades has also been characterized by ‘the search’ – a search to define the purpose and scope of HRD (Jacobs, 1990; Hamlin & Stewart, 2011). As relevant to the HRD research community as the nature of the knowledgebase itself, seeking a holistic definition of HRD is connected with defining HRD as a distinctive occupational domain or profession (Hamlin and Stewart, 2011; Jacobs, 1990; Watkins, 1989), and also as the site for the constant renegotiation on what constitutes HRD both in theory and practice (Lawless et al, 2010). The definition of HRD and the way it is presented shapes the identity of the discipline and constitutes an essential part of HRD knowledge that affects future knowledge production (Wang et al, 2017, p.1166). For the purpose of this study, HRD is defined by adopting Hamlin, Ellinger and Beattie's (2009) definition of HRD as the convergence of Learning & Development, Coaching and Organisation Development. The authors suggest that this way of defining the field provides clear benefits for HRD practitioners to distinguish themselves in the minds of managers (and many HRD professionals) from the work of Human Resource Managers (Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie, 2009, p. 301). As with HRM, the HRD literature more recently has placed attention on understanding who performs HRD in organisational settings (Lundgren et al, 2023) and how the HRD field of study is evolving to reflect the changes in workplace context and culture post COVID-19 pandemic (CIPD, 2023).

The HRD literature draws attention to the complexity of language when discussing the HRD field, acknowledging a divide between academic and practitioner fields. HRD is now widely 'talked into being' as an academic term in both the literature and the UK higher education sector in programme titles and academic communities (e.g. UFHRD) (Stewart & Sambrook, 2012). However, other terms such as Learning & Development (L&D) are used interchangeably by some academics to define human resource development in organisations (Garavan et al, 2019). Coaching and mentoring are used interchangeably in the literature when reflecting the shared purpose of nurturing professional and personal development (Jones & Smith, 2022). Moreover, L&D is the term adopted by the UK government, professional bodies, in organisational structures and job titles (CIPD 2019). Stewart & Sambrook (2012, p.458) argue that 'talking a different language is not a helpful way of bridging the supposed gap' in theory-practice. Whilst the variety in language continues to exist between HRD and L&D (and the features of HRD practice including coaching and mentoring) to refer to theory and practice, for the purpose of this study I will adopt HRD to refer to both academic and practitioner perspectives, but at the same use make use of L&D and other terms where they are reflected in the literature and data collected in the construction of this thesis.

1.2 The HRD/L&D Sector Context

As a sector, L&D is of interest as a high value industry in relation to organisational expenditure. L&D budgets, as discretionary spending by organisations, are considered to be an important indicator of business confidence in economic climates (Bersin, 2014; IBISWorld, 2022). In 2022, the global learning and development market size was worth $363 billion returning to pre-COVID pandemic expenditure and predicted to grow to $380.7 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2023). According to predictions by procurement specialists Beroe Inc (2022), the learning and development industry is expected to reach $402 billion by 2025 with a growth rate of 2-3 percent. North America has a high maturity among other regions, constituting 45 percent of the learning and development market. Other high-maturity regions include Western Europe and certain APAC countries such as Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore.

Globally, external L&D suppliers in 2021 were found to account for 24% of direct learning expenditure by organisations (Statista, 2023). From a UK perspective, the Department of Education reported in 2020 that in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, employers had invested around £42.0bn in training over 12 months, down 0.5% on 2017 (Winterbotham et al, 2020, p.09). Of those organisations sampled who had used external L&D suppliers, 45% of UK organisations used external commercial training providers whilst 26% of organisations used ‘other external consultancies and suppliers’ to provide HRD services (Winterbotham et al, 2020). The size of organisations likely to use external HRD providers was also found to be significant. Winterbotham et al (2020, p.100) found that whilst an average of 22% of UK employers sampled sought or received advice on skills and training related issues, for employers with 100+ employees the percentage rose to 45%.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges to the sustainability of consultancy firms. Research undertaken for the CIPD by Crowley & Overton (2021) 10 months into the COVID-19 pandemic found that 31% of organisations reported that their HRD budget decreased in the last 12 months, 32% reported that their HRD headcount declined, and 31% reported that their use of external suppliers had fallen. Whilst data is not yet available about changes in HRD consultancy firm use post pandemic, equivalent data from the management consultancy sector suggests that budgets and priorities for external support are changing to support organisations in their recovery (MCA, 2023). In 2021, consultancy firms who are members of the Management Consultancies Association (MCA) reported high client demand and their response was to increase the number of staff they employ by 14%. The management consultancy industry is employing more graduates, apprentices, and school leavers than ever before. Since 2021, there has been a 51% increase in graduates and 5% rise in the number of apprentices hired, primarily among larger firms (MCA, 2023). This suggests that external consultancy work is the subject of growth, and needing to prioritise the development of the capabilities and skills of its junior consultants (MCA, 2023).

Limited attention has been given to estimating the size and nature of the UK external L&D consultancy profession and which of those consultants operate globally. Data from the most recent research from the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning (2009, p. 05) suggests that the UK market is characterised by a range of features including:

- Estimated 12,300 private training providers in the UK operating above the VAT threshold.
- Significant growth in number of providers with numbers almost doubled between 2000 and 2008.
- Fragmented market made up of small businesses and freelancers. Only 1 per cent of providers have 250 employees or more.
- Market is oversupplied with providers, many may be operating below viable margins.
- Signs of consolidation between larger providers and only a small number of large global providers.
- Delivery modes and capabilities are changing with technology and blended learning developments.

For organisations with L&D budgets, this means that external HRD consultants are in plentiful supply and organisations have significant buying power to use HRD consultants. For consultancies, this suggests a diverse and competitive market where margins are limited and where the nature of their work is being transformed by innovations in delivery methods and technology (Discetti & Anderson, 2022).

In the literature, HRD consultancy has received limited attention and has been broadly integrated under the term ‘human resource management consultancy’ or implied under broader discussions of management consultancy (Wright, 2008; Muzio et al, 2011; Wylie et al, 2014). Like HRM and Management consultancy, HRD consultancy firms can command high value contracts for their work. They can also work across industries, national borders and work cultures. They can work across different hierarchy levels in an organisation, as well as with individuals, teams or whole organisations (Aldrich et al, 2015; Fairhurst, 2009). A final similarity refers to a reliance on protecting the link between client relationships and securing consulting work which determine the predictability of a firm’s income stream (Czerniawska, 2005). In early HRD texts, HRD consultants are defined as “any outside individual or firm who is paid primarily for the delivery of professional training advice and/or service” and excludes any supplier of ‘off the shelf’ products (Parry & Ribbing, 1976, p.46-2). In the current literature, there is no agreed upon definition of a HRD consultant (Gray et al, 2015). Whilst similarities exist between different specialisms of consultancy described above, for the purpose of this study I define HRD consultancy by adapting Gray et al’s (2015, p.10) perspective that HRD consultants are external providers of expertise to organisations, have portfolio working lives with multiple identities however are united by identifying themselves as working within the field of HRD across one or more activities of Learning & Development, Coaching and Organisation Development.

Previous research into the function of HRD consultancy has mostly focused on individuals who deliver one of the three functions of HRD – coaching (Hamlin et al, 2008). For example, Gray (2011) explored how individuals define their professional identity, how this identity changes over time and the influence of professional bodies on coaching (Gray, 2011). However, Gray, Saunders, Curnow and Farrant (2015) found that 56% of coaches spend less than three days a week employed in coaching assignments with the remaining time spent in other functions such as training and consulting. Gray et al (2015) argue that developing a clear understanding of the identity of external HRD consultants will help identify the possible sources of tension within the discipline and will have implications for how the profession is understood socially and professionally in the future.

1.3 The Sociology of the Professions

This thesis is also situated within the literature of the sociology of the professions (SoP) as a theoretical lens using the theories of the professions and professionalism to understand how professions communicate their purpose, influence clients and protect jurisdiction over specific client work (Abbott, 1988; Larson 1977). A profession is an ambiguous, complex, and changing concept that continues to be the focus of research to understand its definition and the way that definition changes in contemporary work contexts (Evetts, 2013). Chapter 2.2 explores the definitional complexity of the professions in detail however for the purpose of introducing the concept it is useful to set out the commonly accepted features. Freidson (2001) defines a collegiate profession as associated with an abstract body of knowledge, an established autonomously determined set of standards and self-regulated code of ethics, and entry into the profession is through acquiring relevant credentials. Professions have a collective identity and form associations to promote continuous knowledge creation and professional development. Professional status and power are granted by clients, and commonly accepted to be a desirable status to be associated with for both professional and their client. The key to achieving professional status, it is argued, is to exert influence with moral authority and proceed to dominate in increasingly competitive and shifting contexts (Hines & Gold, 2013).

The growth in more specialised roles and emerging professions has made the concept of a profession more complex. Researchers in the sociology of the professions have highlighted a range of issues associated with the growing number and complexity of professions. These include issues in the definition of work boundaries (Kuna et al, 2018), weakened control over barriers to entry (Noordegraaf, 2011; Wright, 2008), ambiguity over how professionalism is defined (Adams et al, 2020) and how quality of professional work is guaranteed (Alvesson & Robinson, 2006). Despite such challenges, researchers have also highlighted the increase in appeal for occupations to engage with professionalisation projects with the expectation that this will bring enhanced status and further rewards (Evetts, 2015). There are three dimensions which have been argued to be common in the conceptualisation of both collegiate and new professions, albeit to varying degrees and in different contexts. These are Expertise, Autonomy and Authority (Noordegraaf, 2020) and are adopted in this thesis as the lens though which to explore the conceptualisation of HRD consultancy as a profession.

Researchers such as Evetts (2006) have argued that changes in research streams reflects a much needed shift in attention towards a clearer understanding of how professional work is enacted by emerging and new professions. Greater attention has also been placed on the importance of understanding professionalism in organisations, giving way to new definitions and conceptualisations of the concept in complex settings by professional associations (CIPD, 2017, 2019) and in academic research (Maestripieri, 2019; Noordegraaf 2020). Researchers have established a growing agenda which explores the professionalisation project of management consultancy (Hodgson et al, 2015; Muzio et al, 2011). This has helped to expand our understanding about professional status to include corporate and hybrid professions in contrast to the more traditionally recognised professions such as doctors or lawyers (Hodgson et al, 2015; Noordegraaf, 2011; Saks, 2016). Corporate and hybrid professions are characterised by those led by organisational priorities, values, and standards alongside (and sometimes in conflict with) those set out by professional associations or government policy (Muzio et al, 2013). The literature of management consultancy has been the subject of much attention in this context to explore how professional dimensions such as expertise defining jurisdiction, autonomy promoting legitimacy, and authority drawn from responsibility are interpreted and used by external and internal consultants (Canato & Giangreco, 2011; Fincham, 2006; Wylie et al, 2014). This makes the sociology of the professions a current and exciting area of study, and a relevant lens through which to conceptualise HRD consultancy as a profession.

Professionalism of consultants is seen as a source of competitive advantage and used as a resource to attract new clients and maintain relationships (Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003). Consultants however operate in an environment of uncertainty because of the intangible nature of their work and ambiguity of results. Uncertainty prevents consultants from building relationships new clients (Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003). Professionalism in management consulting is driven by commercial objectives which is the main source of control in practitioner–client interactions and limits discretion and influences the service ethic (Evetts, 2011). HRD however is characterised by client relationships with shared meanings and work that enhances human potential and personal growth (Hamlin & Stewart, 2011). Research to date has yet to identify the specific dimensions of professionalism for many of the specialised forms of consultancy (Wright, 2008; Wylie et al 2014) including HRD.

1.4 HRD as a Profession

The HRD literature and UK professional bodies have drawn attention to HRD in its demonstration of some of the accepted features of collegiate professions (CIPD, 2017; Gold et al, 2022; Hamlin & Stewart, 2011). Jacobs (1990, p.66) connected professional practice with the abstract body of knowledge drawing attention to the need to continue to evolve the body of knowledge to better reflect practice. Such views on the importance of the evolution of the HRD body of knowledge are echoed by authors such as Lee (2014) to reflect shifting boundaries in society and organisations. The CIPD (2017) revisited the importance of the discourse of professional status of HRM and HRD professionals to reinforcing the moral authority of the profession to influence ethical decision making in changing organisational climates. The CIPD (2019) has recently placed a specific focus on the HRD profession to embrace updated the professional standards, core knowledge and behaviours needed to have impact on their organisations supported by a renewed commitment to ongoing professional development.

Whilst HRD as a profession is part of the familiar discourse of theory and practice, the HRD literature has also problematised HRD as a profession drawing attention to the gaps, dilemmas and issues from its current status. HRD has been characterised as a 'weakened profession' in need of new ways of conceptualising itself to move from weakness to strength (Gold et al, 2022). The definitional crisis with its failure to define HRD across the academic community has been argued to illustrate a profession in search of its identity (Hamlin & Stewart, 2011) and an absence of a common understanding of the theoretical underpinning of the body of knowledge (Wang et al, 2017). Gray et al (2015) for example draws attention to the lack of boundaries over jurisdiction for HRD work amongst other organisational occupations. The lack of recognition by stakeholders of the professional status of HRD has been highlighted by Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie (2008). The limited influence of professional bodies over entry into the profession and focus on best practice rather than self-regulated codes of conduct have also been the focus of attention (Lee, 2001; Stewart & Sambrook, 2012).

However, arguments about the current status of the profession assume that HRD is a homogeneous body of actors with similar motives and needs and who enact HRD in similar ways. Instead, using the theory of the professions, I argue that the HRD profession should be conceptualised as heterogeneous to reflect the diversity of actors involved in ‘talking HRD into being’. The weakened profession arguments focus on the dimensions of collegiate professions and do not reflect an examination of the other conceptualisations of the professions in more recent SoP literature. This approach has been adopted in recent developments in research into the medical profession to reflect the diversification of specialisms and employment status (Anteby et al, 2016; Larson, 2018; Noordegraaf, 2020). I argue that the current focus on a weakened profession also fails to focus as much attention on the conceptualisation of professionalism, which is argued by some SoP authors to be a more relevant way of ‘becoming professional in modern times’ (Noordegraaf, 2007). By seeing the HRD profession as heterogeneous working in ambiguous and fluid organisational contexts, this opens up the need for research to explore the way in which different HRD actors can be conceptualised as a profession and understand how they engage with the dimensions of professional status and professionalism in undertaking HRD work. I argue that the benefit of conceptualising HRD consultancy as a profession in this way helps to challenge the ‘weak profession’ argument by understanding how such actors have ‘skin in the game’ towards their own professionalisation project and how this informs our understanding of how they work in organisations (Evetts, 2006a).

1.5 HRD Consultancy and the UK Context

A further feature of this project is location. The field of HRD research and practice is complex and diverse, and therefore poses challenges to any researcher to draw conclusions without acknowledging the geographic location. In the literature, HRD practice is argued to be influenced by organisation size and structure, the internal and external context of organisations, the sector and industry growth (Garavan et al, 2019). The HRD and HRD consultancy profession is also subject to national variations in relation to education, credentials, the role of the State as well as forms and regulation of occupational closure (Poell, 2015).

For this purpose of this study, I locate this research in the UK as a significant site of academic and professional body research into HRD, sociology of the professions and consultancy. The UK is also the site of the CIPD which, as one of the largest HRD professional bodies, has recently made a specific call to UK HRD practitioners to 'commit to a new agenda to professionalise' and revised their Profession Map to set out the professional skills and capabilities required for its members to responsibly and effectively impact organisations (CIPD, 2019, p.03). HRD professional education is also regarded as distinctive when compared with the rest of the world, where academic membership is comprised of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and HRD programmes are usually provided through Business Schools rather than Faculties of Education (Harrison et al, 2021). Although declining, a recent audit found a significant presence of HRD education in UK HEIs. 259 award titles (e.g. MSc, MA, Postgraduate Diploma) within 187 distinct postgraduate level programmes delivered by 111 providers (Harrison et al, 2021).

1.6 My Role as Researcher/Practitioner

A final feature of this study relates to my role as a researcher/practitioner. My industry HRD journey reflects the transformation of the people profession over the last 30 years following Ulrich et al (1997, 2012) model of HRM Business Partnering. Two stages of my career informed my personal interest in this study – first as a HRD Client and Consultant, and then as an academic/practitioner working with a new generation of HRD talent. My career began in the mid 1990s as a Personnel Manager and I spent 14 years working for a multinational company based in the UK in the field of HRM and HRD. My career moved from HRM generalist to HRD specialist in the same company with knowledge acquired by both qualifications and experience. My experience of promotions and career progression into specialist HRD work, and the selection of HRD Consultants to employ, were not directly dependent on requirements for academic qualifications or professional body memberships. Whilst sector and organisational leadership changes at times sought to professionalise the HR function and used a discourse of professionalisation promote such criteria as barriers to entry, the strong organisational culture and 'how things are done around here' meant that such discourses often reverted to the more widely accepted criteria of relevant experience and values-fit as the criteria for HRD work.

John Watkins

I moved into higher education in 2010 and immediately exposed me to MBA students who were motivated not just to learn the theory of HRD but also wanted to know how to gain access to and perform successfully in the HRD consultancy field. My search for empirical studies to support my own practitioner insight identified a gap in the HRD literature with the relative absence of HRD consultants in HRD studies and a significant absence in associated competency frameworks/consulting models used HRD consultancy. Coaching & Mentoring were the exception. As a qualitative and reflexive researcher, I acknowledge that I bring my own UK experience, dilemmas and bias to the construction of this study. From a research design perspective, I have drawn on my professional network to source participants which is argued to be a benefit when researching hard to reach occupations and individuals (Karjalainen, Niemistö & Hearn, 2015). My approach acknowledges that researcher subjectivity is the primary tool for the research design and the process of knowledge creation as inherently subjective and situated (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Chapter Four Section 4.7 explores my position as a researcher in this study and my reflexive statement in further detail.

1.7 Summary of Gaps in the Literature to be Addressed

Drawing together the issues summarised in this introduction this study specifically addresses four gaps in the literature. First, it responds to recent calls in the SoP literature for more studies of the professions and professionalism in 'emerging' professional fields where status and practice may fall outside of the collegiate or corporate professions such as specialist forms of consultancy (Hodgson et al, 2015; Muzio et al 2011). Whilst more is known about management consultancy, there are calls for research into consultants in specialised forms of work that help to understand the relationship between institutional work and identity work (Muzio, Brock & Suddaby, 2013). HRD consultancy does not yet have any significant attention from academic research. There is also growing interest from the literature of Human Resource Management in the professionalisation project of HRM and HRD roles generally and specifically in how professional status can enhance the quality of the contribution of practitioners in complex organisational decision making, as well as to understand the nature and extent of their professional standing (CIPD, 2019; Hamlin et al 2008; Pohler & Willness, 2014; Wright, 2008). HRD roles have tended to be absorbed under the wider HRM functions. External consultancies as forms of provision of HRM/D work are not specifically identifiable. UK HRM/HRD professional bodies such as the Chartered

Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2017, 2019) have recently refocused their attention to promote HRM as a profession through articulating new statements related to professional identity and defining new professional standards of conduct for current members and future practitioners.

A second gap addressed in this study is for HRD research to better understand what it means to engage in professional activity given the current complexity of HRD professional practice, and how this informs the development of the profession (Dirkx, 2008; Kuchinke, 2017; Lee, 2016; Lundgren et al, 2023). In the literature, there is no common understanding of the meaning of professionalism for professions generally, or specifically for hybrid professions such as consultants (Adams et al, 2020; Collins & Butler, 2019; Noordegraaf, 2020) and yet this is a common term in how the professions represent and control their behaviour (Bellini & Maestripieri, 2023; Evetts, 2006). There is also a growing interest in the purpose of professionalism and how the conceptualisation of professionalism might reflect how professions respond to the challenges to their jurisdiction in organisations (Gross & Kieser, 2006; Noordegraaf, 2015; Pohler & Willness, 2014). Professionalism has been positioned in the literature as subjective and multiple models of professionalism have been proposed in the literature with limited empirical testing (Adams et al, 2020). HRD consultants remain under researched in how we understand their HRD professionalism and their professional activity (Ruona, 2016). I argue that by examining the nature of HRD consultant professionalism, this opens up for academics and practitioners to a way to understand how members of the HRD consultancy profession enact their work through their professionalism.

This study will address a third gap in the literature about how professionalism is used and recognisable in HRD consultant work (CIPD, 2017; Kuchinke, 2017). There has been growing interest not just to define professionalism but to also question ‘for what purpose’ is professionalism relevant and important (Akdere, 2005; Alvesson & Johansson, 2001; Kipping, 2011). This question is particularly relevant for new and emerging professions which don’t have an established status in society. For new and emerging professions, professionalism has more recently been argued to be a resource used by professionals to acquire and protect their jurisdiction, and establish trust (Pohler et al, 2014, Sturdy, 2012). Previous research has focused on the use of professionalism as a resource to control and regulate individual behaviour with clients in line with consultancy values and brand identity (Evetts, 2006; Noordegraaf, 2007; Paton et al 2013). More recently, professionalism has been pursued in the literature as 'how practitioners explain their work' (Cohen et al, 2005; Maestripieri 2019). Research however has typically analysed professionalism in relation to large multinational contexts (Evetts 2011) and has yet to explore more specialised forms of consultancy such as HRD consultancies who are more heterogenous in size and structure (Clegg et al, 2003, 2005; Abdullah et al, 2011).

Evetts (2015) argues that a clearer understanding of professional status and professionalism can help to understand the implications of occupational change in complex organisational settings. Gray et al (2015) argues that further research can help to identify the possible sources of tension within the discipline leading to implications for how the profession is understood socially and professionally in the future. The focus on who enacts HRD consultancy and what HRD consultants do and the extent to which they represent a weak profession have all received significantly less attention in the literature so far and therefore inform the focus of this study.

This study addresses a final gap in the literature in accessing HRD consultants as a source of primary data. One of the challenges acknowledged in the management consulting is the problem of securing access to participants for data for sensitive subjects and hard to reach professions (Karjalainen, Niemistö & Hearn, 2015). The HRD literature also identified difficulties with access to consultants willing to be researched on HRD issues (Garavan et al, 2019). Mosonyi, Empson & Gond (2020) identified that the understanding of professionalism from the perspective of the consultant-client relationship was a significantly under-researched area in literature. This study addresses this gap by collecting rich, thick qualitative data including from semi-structured interviews with HRD consultants and clients of HRD consultants.

1.8 Research aim and questions

This thesis aims to fill the gap in knowledge about the conceptualisation of Human Resource Development (HRD) consultancy as a profession and what professionalism means for HRD consultants. To the achieve this aim, three research questions have been constructed:

Research question 1
Drawing on definitions from the Sociology of the Professions, to what extent can HRD consultancy be considered a profession?

Research question 2
How do the practices of HRD Consultants represent notions of professionalism?

Research question 3
How do HRD Consultants use professionalism as a resource in consultant-client relationships and how does this impact on the nature of their 'professionalism project'?

This thesis takes a multidisciplinary approach to fill the gaps in knowledge related to HRD consultancy as a profession and the meaning of professionalism. This thesis will use the examination of the existing literature, as well as the data collected and analysed. The literature of the Sociology of the Professions provides the theories of the professions and professionalism to understand the nature of status and influence awarded to HRD consultants to act in client organisations. The research into management consultancy provides an understanding of the issues and dilemmas of using corporate professions who are engaged in their own professionalisation project and who also offer intangible services to treat complex client needs in dynamic organisational contexts. The literature of HRD provides the focus of the work undertaken by HRD consultants as well as the underlying philosophical and theoretical knowledgebase of their expert practice.

To achieve the aim and answer the research questions, this study adopts a relativist and social constructionist position to allow the focus to be on discovery and interpretation of possibly heterogeneous perspectives on the nature of new or emerging professions (Hines & Gold, 2013). This study adopts a multi method approach to collecting data. Data was collected from 45 HRD consultancy websites captured between 23 February 2018 and 21 May 2018. A second source of data was collected from 29 semi-structured interviews with HRD consultants and clients of HRD consultants (17 HRD consultants and 12 HRD clients). Interviews took place between 13 March 2019 and 10 February 2020. Discourse and Reflexive Thematic Analysis

(RTA) was eventually chosen as a series of conceptual and practice oriented ‘tools’ to guide the analysis of the data sets and facilitate a rigorous process of data interrogation and engagement to draw out 3 significant themes from the data.

1.9 Contributions from this Study

The thesis makes three connected contributions to the existing literature. These are summarised below and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight in Section 8.3.

The first contribution from this study advances our understanding of the conceptualisation of HRD consultancy as a strong hybrid profession. By using the SoP framework of Expertise, Autonomy and Authority, this study challenges previously held assumptions about the weakness of HRD as a profession (e.g. Gold et al, 2022; Gubbins & Garavan, 2016; Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie, 2008). This is the first UK empirical study to apply the theory of the professions with a framework of Expertise, Autonomy, and Authority to conceptualise HRD consultancy as a profession. These findings confirm that HRD consultancy can be conceptualised as a hybrid profession. These findings provide a new understanding of HRD consultancy which works outside of the current HRD professionalisation project depicted in the literature (CIPD, 2017, 2019; Gold et al, 2022; Salman 2019, 2021).

A second contribution from this study adds to our understanding of connective professionalism as way to understand practices of contemporary hybrid professions in organisational contexts. This study builds on Noordegraaf’s (2020) conceptualisation of connective professionalism to provide new insights into how HRD consultants articulated the notion of ‘partnership.’ From the perspectives of HRD consultants and clients, connective professionalism is understood to embody the importance of shared values, shared goals, with the removal of hierarchy and boundaries traditionally found in new profession relationships (Anteby et al, 2016; Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018; Eyal, 2013; Maestripieri, 2019). This contribution builds on our understanding of connective professionalism by linking it with HRD discipline specific values. This builds on research into management consultants linking with sustainable relationship building and professional fluidity (Cross & Swart, 2021), and into the healthcare sector with service ecologies with stakeholders (Dove et al, 2017). These insights inform the articulation and development of professional behaviours for current and future UK HRD consultants and how these can be supported through revised policies and practices delivered by UK professional bodies and higher education providers.

A final contribution from this study extends our understanding of occupational jurisdiction for hybrid professions where traditional credentials are replaced by alternative ways of evidencing competence and the alignment of values. By exploring the representation of professionalism from the perspective of HRD consultants and clients, this study builds on our current understanding of the use of network reputation for communicating competence by consultants (e.g. Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003; Gray & Saunders, 2014; Gubbins & Garavan, 2009; Salman, 2019, 2021). This highlights the need for HRD consultants not only to evidence competence of managing interdependent relationships, but also to be aware of how clients construct their own view on the professional identity of HRD consultants from these relational credentials.

There are three stakeholders who will benefit from the discoveries in this thesis. For HRD academics and UK HRD professional bodies, this thesis provides an original understanding of HRD consultancy as a vital actor in the UK HRD landscape. Drawing on the lens of the professions and professionalism, the findings from this study can provide a new understanding of the meaning of HRD work from practice and how consultants undertake HRD in organisations. This thesis provides insights into how this community of HRD professionals construct and use their professional status to secure sustainable client work.

For HRD academics with a focus on knowledge creation and dissemination, this thesis provides new understanding of the ways in which HRD knowledge is acquired, adapted and communicated by HRD consultants. This thesis provides insights into the nature of HRD work that draws on abstract and contextual knowledge to be able to diagnose, infer and treat client needs. The role of clients in co-constructing knowledge is also important for academics to consider in how HRD solutions are developed to meet unique client contexts. In contrast to call for HRD research agendas to focus on evaluation and measurement, this thesis provides a different perspective the current capabilities and needs for clients in UK organisations to engage in new ways to evaluate training.

A final audience are the future talent entering the HRD consultancy profession. Insights are provided into what knowledge, skills and social capital future talent need to acquire and demonstrate to enter into the profession and to be commercially successful. Future talent, and those institutions supporting the development of future talent, need to pay attention to how they acquire the symbols and employ the discourse of their professional status in formal and informal ways, and have clear strategies for the continuous development their social capital through a positive network reputation.

1.10 Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two examines the literature of the sociology of the professions as the theoretical lens used in this thesis. The chapter examines the historical origins of the concepts of professions and professionalism. The relevance of such concepts is examined for professions who operate in ambiguous and dynamic organisational environments such as consultancy. The professional dimensions of expertise, autonomy and authority are explored in the literature to understand how status and influence are achieved by the professions, and how these perspectives have evolved as a result of economic and social change over the last 100 years. The evolution and dominance of professionalism in contemporary academic and practitioner research is appraised.

Chapter Three examines the literature of HRD in relation to its professional status. Conceptualised by authors as a weak profession, this chapter assesses the coherence of the field of HRD as an important backdrop to understanding individualistic and collective approaches adopted by HRD practitioners in how they perform HRD work. The HRD literature that draws attention to the professional dimensions of expertise, autonomy and authority is examined to evaluate how professional status is understood so far by researchers in the field.

Chapter Four discusses and evaluates the research strategy for the thesis. The chapter analyses the ontological and epistemological stance used. The rationale for the choice of an inductive approach is provided. The chapter justifies and demonstrates the adoption of Discourse and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as an original way to explore HRD consultancy professional status and professionalism that aligns with my social constructionist position. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethics and the quality criteria for qualitative research which were considered and demonstrated in this thesis.

Chapter Five and **Chapter Six** present the findings from data collected in the study. Chapter Five presents the findings from the data related to the conceptualisation of HRD consultancy as a profession (Research Question One). Chapter Six presents the findings from data collected related to what professionalism means for HRD consultants and how professionalism is used as a resource by HRD consultants in consultant-client relationships (Research Question Two and Three).

Chapter Seven discusses the findings from Chapter Five and Chapter Six to analyse how the dimensions of professions (expertise, autonomy and authority) support an understanding of HRD consultancy as a profession, and how professionalism can be defined and used as a resource in HRD work. Chapter Seven introduces an original conceptual framework of thinking about how the concepts of profession and professionalism are constructed and used by HRD consultants.

Chapter Eight provides a conclusion to the thesis and addresses in detail each of the research questions. The contributions to knowledge are provided and justified in line with the original research questions. This chapter also reflects on the limitations and recommendations for future research.

1.11 Summary

Chapter One has justified the rationale for the study. The significance of the study has been placed within the nexus of the bodies of knowledge from the sociology of the professions and human resource development. This chapter has argued for the gap in knowledge related to emerging professions in understanding how expertise, autonomy and authority inform the professional status of HRD consultancy, and the extent to which this contributes to the conceptualisation of a ‘weakened profession’ by some HRD authors. The commercial context for HRD consultancy has been established to argue for the relevance of the significance to client organisations and specifically to an understanding of how HRD is changing to reflect economic trends in outsourcing. The limitations of industry and national data are acknowledged recognising how monitoring in the UK has moved from public sector oversight to the commercial sector. The research aim and questions are set out and justified, focusing on how each question can be answered in line with the different gaps in knowledge for different audiences.

Chapter 2: Literature Review Part One – Professions and Professionalism

Chapter 2: Literature Review Part One – Professions and Professionalism

2.1 Introduction

Chapter Two provides a detailed analysis of the literature related to the historical and social context of the Sociology of the Professions and its relevance for understanding professional status and practice for 'new' corporate professions such as consultancy. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the relevant debates within the literature and relates these debates to consultants as 'new' professions. Chapter Three connects the debates related to professional status and practice with the field of Human Resource Development (HRD) as a specific basis of professional work undertaken by HRD consultants.

The chapter begins with exploring the background to the sociology of the professions to explore its purpose and relevance in understanding the importance of professional status and practice in society and business. The chapter continues with a discussion of the debates centred on defining a profession in the literature and the competing theoretical perspectives which have shaped this field over the last 100 years. This debate illustrates the underlying changes in the conceptualisation of the role of the professions in contemporary society and organisations, and what it means to be a professional. As such, this chapter explores the chronology of those theoretical positions to understand how history has shaped our assumptions, expectations, and disillusionments over the professions. This discussion informs what has been learned from the subsequent shifts in attention in the literature from collegiate professions to newer conceptualisations of the professions. The next part of the chapter focuses on the dimensions of the professions that construct professional status and how we identify professionals. These are Expertise, Autonomy and Authority. This chapter evaluates their relevance to understanding the construction of professional status and influence for professions over their clients. The final part of this chapter shifts attention to the debates in the literature of the sociology of the professions related to professionalism. This section discusses the purpose of professionalism with the current debates related to consultancy as professional work and evaluates the benefits of using professionalism as a lens to understand the nature of consultant work in client organisations.

2.2 Definitions of Professions

A Profession is an ambiguous, complex, and changing concept that continues to be the focus of research interest to understand both its definition and the way that definition changes in contemporary work contexts (Evetts, 2013). The Professions and Professionalism have been terms used interchangeably in the literature which further complicates efforts by sociologists and other linked disciplines to come to a clear conceptualisation (Evetts, 2003). There has been a consistent focus in the literature to seek consensus and establish a common understanding of the concept and its relevance (Saks, 2016). As the literature has evolved over the last 100 years, definitions of the professions have been attempted theoretically, re-appraised from empirical research, and revisited with the expansion of knowledge work to open up new possibilities of recognising contemporary forms of professions especially in new organisational contexts (Boreham, Pemberton & Wilson, 1976; Saks, 2016). However, with the expansion of approaches to the professions, the concept of the professions continues to be contested and challenged in new and old occupational contexts (Evetts, 2013). Professions instead are no longer recognised to be fixed and closed entities, and their relational and processual nature is emphasised (Noordegraaf, 2020), which makes defining the professions even more complex. The professions have traditionally been seen to be distinct from occupations (Parsons, 1939; Millerson, 1964; Wilensky 1964;) although the distinction between professions and occupations has been viewed in the literature by some to be a process of evolution and organisation from occupation to a more terminal ideal state of ‘profession’ (Freidson 1970; Wolinsky 1988).

The problem of defining professions and achieving collective agreement amongst writers has been well established. Millerson (1964) set out three reasons why definitions in the field are difficult. The first is a semantic confusion, resulting from wide and excessive use of the word in common everyday language, its contextual use in areas such as sport, as well as its use in determining a standard of quality applied to any task. Confusion also arises from the ‘indiscriminate use’ to describe dissimilar occupations or a mistaken image by the general public to what makes a ‘profession’.

As such, the term becomes indistinguishable to the skilled expert work that is the focus of sociologists (Millerson, 1964, p.02-03). The second reason is the structural limitations enforced by attempts to devise fundamental characteristics of a profession. The interests of specific researchers on different occupations provides opportunities for researchers to demonstrate their own bias towards characteristics that best represent individual professions and not achieve generalisation. The limited empirical research attempted in the field of definitions instead leads to an accumulation of confusion in place of clarity (Millerson, 1964).

The third reason according to Millerson (1964, p.06) is the adherence to a static model of a profession rather than an appreciation of the dynamic process that forces traditional professional conceptualisations to reflect the realities in contemporary society. This includes the evolution of access to the professions, the changing diversity in their employed status, the nature of the interest served by a profession, and the expansion of bureaucratisation with increased number of specialisms appearing in specific organisational contexts. These reasons continue to dominate in more recent studies of professions and professionalism, pointing to the continued relevance of the debate and seeking meaning (Abbott, 1988; Butler & Collins, 2016). In moving our understanding forward, authors have argued for a greater focus on understanding the professions from the contexts where their work takes place with clients (Noordegraaf, 2007) and arguing for the value in understanding how members of a profession 'invoke' their professional status and describe its practical use (Dingwall, 2008), and how this helps to understand occupational change (Evetts, 2003).

For the purpose of this study, I adopt the following principles to define professions as a starting point for this thesis. A profession is associated with a higher order occupation which requires substantial abstract theoretical knowledge and expertise to deal with a problem (Hughes, 1963), by providing a solution where high standards are determined autonomously and professionals are self-regulated (Wolinsky, 1988; Freidson, 2001). Entry into a profession is traditionally carefully controlled through credentialling (Evetts, 1995). Those that hold the title of professional enjoy special power and prestige granted by society who acknowledge the link between expertise and their devotion to the public good over self-interest (Larson, 1977). A profession is a special community of discourse endowed with the authority of speaking about and for their field often formed into specific collective associations and, in so doing, constructing its meaning for the lay public (Larson, 2018). Professional status is a desired status that has immense appeal for an occupation and occupational workers to be identified as professional that serves as an appeal to clients and a motivator to those providing professional services (Fournier, 1999). Whilst Millerson (1964, p.09) argued that a definition of the professions can take on different meanings depending on the context and purpose for which it serves, he did acknowledge that to understand the concept of a 'profession' there were certain principles to be accepted. These principles have been widely adopted and integrated into other author's conceptualisations of the professions over time.

Defining the professions can be seen as complex from how the body of knowledge as a social, economic, and political phenomena has evolved over the last 100 years. Saks (2016) argues that there is a value of taking an interlinked approach to seeing the professions in the light of social, political, and economic changes in contemporary contexts. The early writers of the professions in the UK focused their attention on the historical developments of selected ideal-type professions from the social institutions including medicine and law. Tawney's (1920) work, writing after the first World War, is characterised by its political argument for the need for a set of principles to reconsider the nature of social institutions as part of the reconstruction of society. For Tawney (1920), a focus on raising attention on the professions as social institutions was an effort to counter calls in the UK for a new social order to equalise society. Instead, Tawney (1920) argued that social institutions needed to be identifiable in contrast to what he termed as 'industry' for their distinctive status and social responsibility as the visible expression of the scale of moral values which rules the minds of individuals.

Carr-Saunders & Wilson (1933) seminal text was written to address what the authors argued to be an imbalance in the literature and towards what the authors claim to be the more important functions of society – the professions. In the US, Parsons (1939, p.467) seminal text 'The Professions and Social Structure' sets the professions apart from the economic imperatives of capitalism facing Pacific Relations through highlighting the difference between altruistic nature of the professions compared with the egoism of 'the businessman'. Whilst Tawney (1920) provided a broad set of features to determine a profession in general terms, Carr-Saunders & Wilson (1933, p.03) declared that definitions could only be useful once sufficient empirical research had been undertaken. However, the authors did set out a criteria for what would be in-scope for such research:

1. Those with ancient lineage already referred to as professions ‘by common consent’.
2. Those where the State had imposed forms of organisation similar to those imposed upon ‘typical’ professions.
3. Those who had developed forms of organisation similar to ‘established’ professions.

As such, early writers such as Tawney (1920), and Carr-Saunders & Wilson (1933) and Parsons (1939) established a tradition in the literature of suggesting that a profession could be understood not by a definition but in contrast to other roles that focus on profit through industry and achieving business goals. The second tradition established here is the interest in writing that seeks to trace the historical lineage of the social institutions of medicine and law as a mean of establishing social order and the protection of their special status.

A second tradition observable in the literature reflects the rise of managerialism and bureaucratisation in industry and the elevated status of business in US and UK society. The literature in this era places a focus on the professions with the aim of determining the frameworks in place that secure the privilege and the elevated status of the professions in the opinion of society. Writers in the USA such as Parsons (1954), Barber (1963), Hughes (1963) and Wilensky (1964) began to conceptualise the professions in relation to specific characteristics that distinguished the professions from a functional perspective. Such characteristics could be used classify and justify the selection of specific types of professions already ‘accepted’ to be a profession. As part of this approach to establishing frameworks, the French author Emile Durkheim (1957), along with Barber (1963) and Hughes (1963) focus on the importance of professional ethics and following ethical codes to protect professionals. Freidson’s (1970) work on the Profession of Medicine places an emphasis on the professions avowal or promise to their clients. Millerson (1964) in the UK focused his work on the nature of Qualifying Associations for the professions. Authors in this period draw attention to the distinction between the collegial professions who can self-regulate standards of practice and performance in contrast to those salaried professions who are subservient to client needs and approval. The result therefore from the literature by developing characteristics of the professions aims to preserve professional status by demonstrating the distinctiveness of professional conduct through the collective dimensions of expertise, autonomy, and authority.

A third tradition in the literature reflects a significant shift in USA and UK economies with the expansion of industries with the diversification of the working population, the growth in knowledge work and measurement, and the war for talent. Authors in this era place their conceptualisation of the professions in relation to the development of generalist professions towards more specialist forms. For example, Abbott (1988) focused his seminal work on the changes in the medical profession. Authors also began to therefore draw attention to the shifts in power in the professional-client relationship and the ways in which clients employ strategies to exert power over professional autonomy (Haug, 1975, 1976). The extension of this shift in power structure was illustrated by the focus on the integration of collegiate professions into corporate structures and the dilemmas this provokes over accepted characteristics of self-regulation and dis-interest in profit (Freidson, 1986,1989).

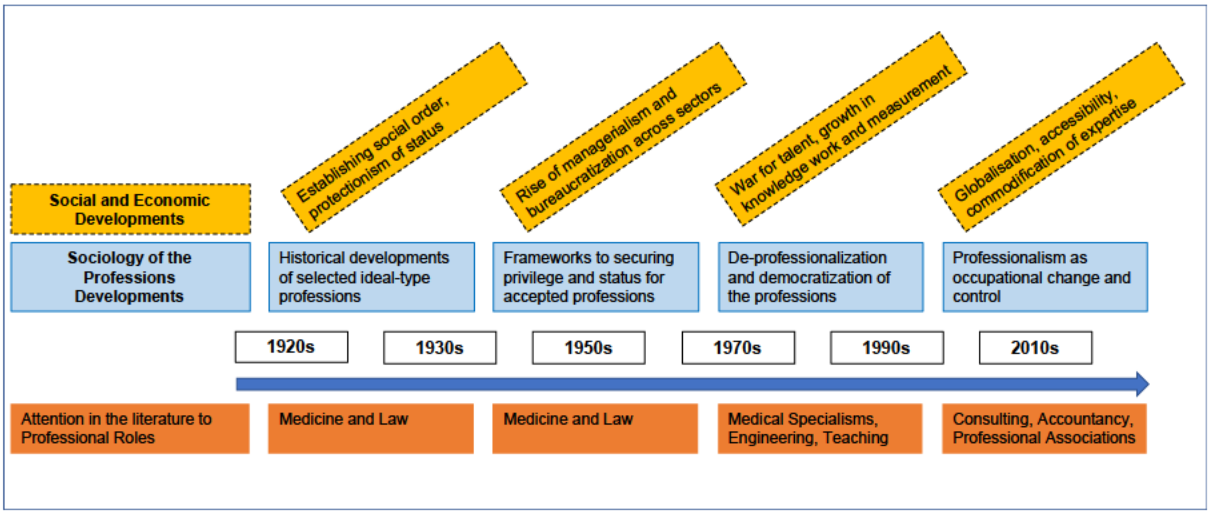
The result of this era is a focus on questioning the validity of professional privilege (Larson, 1977) and debating the democratization of the professions by illustrating the changes in accessibility to professional work leading authors to question the deprofessionalisation of the collegiate professions (Haug, 1988). This opened up a more critical perspective on the power and influence of the professions (Larson, 1977), the values that inform their work and the agendas being served (Clark & Salaman, 1996). Larson (2013) reflected on the historical limitations of research which focused on medicine as 'the queen of professions' which was perceived to be ideal with a limitless market for its services, and contrasted this with engineering which she argued had, in contemporary society, a greater impact on defining modern life more powerfully and irreversibly. Larson (2013) also draws attention to shifts in employment relationships for the professions in corporations, for corporate clients, and for the state that removes the ability to link independent status with professional status and the power to influence others.

A further research focus in this era focused on the appeal of the professions and professionalism, and its increased use as a form of control in organisational contexts.

The appeal included its use in advertising to appeal to customers and the appearance in organisational aims and mission statements to appeal to employees (Fournier, 1999). At an occupational level, Evetts (2003) argued for that there was an appeal to be identified as a professional. This opened up research into new forms of the professions as corporate and hybrid professions, such as specialist forms of consultants and HR roles, to explore how traditional characteristics of the professions have been adopted or approached in order to claim greater legitimacy and influence in organisational settings (Aldrich et al, 2015; Kipping, 2011; Muzio et al, 2011). From my in-depth review of the literature and drawing on the interpretations of the history of the SoP literature from Abbott (1988), Evetts (2015) and Larson (2018), Figure 1 provides an original illustration of the SoP traditions in the literature shaped by the social and economic developments predominantly in the USA and UK.

Figure 1

Traditions in the literature of the Sociology of the Professions



Writers have also sought to define the professions in relation to how they are differentiated from other forms of work and work organisation. Professions are differentiated to the role of bureaucracy in organisations in relation to the conceptualisations of service, values, and control over workers (Haug, 1976; Parsons, 1939; Weber, 1947; Wilensky, 1964;), and in relation to embodying different and opposing institutional forms (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1939) with different moral imperatives (Dingwall, 1999; Durkheim, 1957). Writers also have sought to differentiate 'new' professions with the use of different titles. Evetts (2013) for example differentiates the traditional professions as 'Occupational Professions' with new corporate professions as ‘Organisational Professions.’ Muzio et al (2011) differentiate the ’Collegiate Professions’ from ‘Corporate Professions.’ Corporate professions are conceptualised as professions which operate different membership schemes (individual and organizational), link membership to corporate careers, actively involve clients in their own governance, and focus on transnational jurisdictions (Muzio et al., 2011). For corporate professions, professionalisation projects are linked to employer contexts and closely linked to corporate settings, interests, and practices (Muzio et al., 2011).

This discussion so far about diversity of perspectives raises the question of whether a profession can still be identifiable in contemporary organisations. For some authors, agreement on definitions is not possible. Abbott (1991, p.18) builds on Millerson’s (1964) view on the influence of author bias on defining the professions, arguing that “the term profession is more an honorific than technical one, any apparently technical definition will be rejected by those who reject its implied judgements about their favourite professions and non-professions. To start with definition is thus not to start at all.” There is not an agreed list amongst sociologists which occupations are professions nor is there clarity about which criteria determine features such as privileged status (Sciulli, 2005). Authors such as Evetts (2006a) and Muzio et al (2011) have questioned the value of attempts to produce narrow definitions. It is argued that value in research instead comes from a focus on the nature of occupational change and wider occupational strategies through the lens of specific professional projects “towards a more inclusive understanding of the agency of specific time and space bound actors” (Muzio, Kirkpatrick & Kipping, 2010, p.16).

Whilst we can acknowledge the existing difficulties in conceptualising the professions and its distinctive status, the difficulties in semantics in common and academic use, and a difficulty in determining an agreed set of characteristics (Millerson, 1964; Abbott, 1991; Saks, 2016), there are certain common elements that established professions demonstrate or are present in the efforts of occupations, and their members, to secure professional status. Irrespective of how professions are formed, and the reasons why they evolve into professions, there are three dimensions which have been argued to be common in the conceptualisation of both collegiate and new professions, albeit to varying degrees and in different contexts. These are Expertise, Autonomy and Authority (Noordegraaf, 2020).

2.3 Dimensions of Professions – Expertise

2.3.1 Body of knowledge and skills

One dimension common to efforts in the literature to provide a meaningful definition of the professions is expertise. One of the dominant characteristics of such expertise is the association with an identifiable body of expert knowledge and skills related to a specific field (Noordegraaf, 2020) whilst recognising that such claims of the uniqueness or accessibility to discrete bodies of knowledge may be contested or changing within wider societal changes (Larson, 2018). The professions are argued to be identifiable by their claims to expertise that is drawn from specialised and codified knowledge that is applied to specific needs (Abbott, 1988; Larson, 1977; Parsons, 1939). Early writers such as Parsons (1939) highlighted the importance of the scientific origins in such bodies of knowledge which draw society's attention to the distinct nature of the professions, the level of service expected and the social importance of the professions such as medicine, technology, law and teaching. From their survey of 26 vocations, Carr-Saunders & Wilson (1933, p.492) drew attention to the clear link between such bodies of knowledge and specialised techniques which informed the work of the professions, arguing that 'where a technique is specialized, the rise of a profession is unescapable; where it is generalized, its coming must wait upon the growth of a sense of a common responsibility in order that the loose bond, created by the possession of a common but ill-defined technique, may be drawn more tightly'. Schön (1983, p.21) defined professional activity to consist of 'instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique'.

Expertise however goes beyond defining specific techniques and skill. In their early work on the professions, Carr-Saunders & Wilson (1933, p.491) found the chief distinguishing characteristic of the professions was the application of an intellectual technique to the 'ordinary business of life'. Hughes (1963) argued that it is also the pursuit and systematizing of pertinent knowledge that defines the professions. Expertise requires the application of knowledge to particular settings, and thereby growing the body of knowledge from understanding its application in such unique or pertinent contexts to create a 'certain equilibrium between the universal and the particular' (Hughes, 1963, p.660). Expertise in the professions therefore is perceived to be about applying general, scientific knowledge to specific cases in rigorous and therefore routinized or institutionalized ways (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1994, 2001; Noordegraaf, 2007).

Expertise in the professions, however, is not limited to an explicit knowledgebase drawn from classifications, generalisations and universalism. The optimal base of knowledge for a profession is the balance between the explicit and tacit nature of knowledge. The professions are required to master the combination of intellectual knowing learned from education with understanding acquired from supervised practice and observation (Wilensky, 1964). Whilst certain patterns of knowledge and application are acknowledged by authors to be shared with other occupations such as business, Parsons (1939, p.467) argued the importance of science and its rationality as the distinctive feature of the professions in achieving rationale practice, specificity of function and universalism. Therefore, the presence and development of specialised knowledge which requires a high level of skill and extensive practice to acquire is argued to be at the core of a profession's existence in the traditional view of the professions (Abbott, 1988; Larsons, 1977; Millerson, 1964). However, these views have been challenged by more recent studies who seek to emphasise the importance of understanding new professions through the dynamic nature by which knowledgebase is 'formalised, systematized and polished' (Muzio et al, 2011, p.446).

2.3.2 Knowledge monopolies

Expertise in the professions evolves with time and practice from the establishment and development of a specific knowledgebase into the monopolies of control over the knowledgebase. This in turn informs the tasks and determination of the required competencies to diagnose, infer and treat their client's needs. Knowledge monopolies provide technical autonomy as the means for a profession to have control over how their work is to be accomplished (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1986). Technical autonomy is considered to be able to lead to more situational specific knowledge monopolies through the production and dissemination of case records about specific projects and clients (Abbott, 1988). From his study of the profession of medicine, Abbott (1988, p.08-09) argued that only a profession with an abstract body of knowledge has the capabilities to adapt to its changing environment and acquire new proximate jurisdictions citing as medicine who recently acquired alcoholism, mental illness, hyperactivity in children, and obesity.

For Freidson (1986) knowledge monopolies are clearly linked to higher education where the academic elite play a significant role in producing knowledge for practitioners, and where the production of new knowledge is controlled by such professional elites. Traditionally, therefore, the power and privilege associated with the professions therefore is closely associated with the profession's own control over the current and changing nature of its knowledgebase. However, as the collegiate professions such as law and accountancy became employed within large corporations and subject to performance measurement targets and audits, expertise as control over a knowledgebase and techniques was questioned (Adams, 2015), and the perceptions of a loss of absolute control to the influence of 'the proletariat and the bureaucrats' was a key feature in claims of the de-professionalisation of the professions (Haug, 1976). Rather than diminishing the importance of expertise in this sense, recent research into corporate professions such as management consultancy and HR have focused instead on the evolutionary nature of a knowledgebase and techniques, and how this is shaped by the interactions between professional and their corporate settings, interests and practices (Aldrick et al, 2015; Fincham, 2006; Muzio et al, 2011).

2.3.3 Qualifications, credentialling and ongoing continuous professional development

The acquisition of knowledge is traditionally associated with a credentialling system controlled by the professions or the State. This credentialling system was argued to be distinctive feature of defining the professions in providing an exclusive labour market shelter that controls the entry of individuals into the professional market (Freidson, 1986). In this way, professions are not related to public service, ethics, collegial control but are subject to such forces which build up around professions over time (Brint, 1993). For Freidson (1986), higher education, more so than professional associations or government license, plays an important part as essential dimension of contemporary professions in the provision of credentials which testify to a higher education and exposure to a body of formal knowledge, and as prerequisites for holding jobs. The combination of credentials and training in a body of formal knowledge allow for exclusive access to professional labour markets. In return, Freidson (1986) argued that this was reinforced by the market's perception that competence in performing tasks is directly connected to advanced training exclusive to specific professions. The emphasis on credentialling has the purpose of promoting a commitment to work through creating sheltered conditions for regular practice and focus on a lifelong career. Credentialing also protects the client from incompetence removing the trial-and-error nature of employing professionals within the free market context (Freidson,1986).

Research into new corporate professions, however, including project management, management consultancy and executive search found more diverse, hybrid forms of market shelter which focused less on the formal knowledge nature of credentialling, and more focused on the nature of their work and the economic conditions in which they work. Corporate professions were found to place emphasis on professional service standards (customer focus and reliability), competencies (including problem solving capabilities) and industry experience to evidence the outcomes of the application of their expertise (Muzio et al, 2011, p.446). Whilst for authors such as Freidson (1986) and Brint (1993) they would argue this shift places the professions in a weak position by removing formal means of closure that lead to power and status, new conceptualisations of credentialing recognise the increasing relevance of the employing organisations as sites of professional formation and regulation within a competitive free-market context (Muzio et al, 2011, p.460).

2.3.4 Established standards of ethical professional conduct

Professional expertise is widely accepted in the literature to be associated with an ethical code of practice. The knowledge and application of knowledge by a professional is governed and enforced by an ethical code of conduct, and thereby a central tenet by which professions are identified in society (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2012). In the very early literature on the professions, Tawney (1920) argued for different perspectives on the need for ethical standards and codes of conduct. The first was to protect its members by establishing certain responsibilities for the competence of its members or the quality of its wares. The second is to prohibit conduct that leads to the achievement of personal interest over public good or that bring ‘disrepute’ to the profession as a whole. Finally, to secure that no member of the profession shall have any but a purely professional interest in his work, by excluding the incentive of speculative profit. These themes informed much of the later work in the sociology of the professions reiterating the need to safeguard public interests (Carr-Saunders &

Wilson, 1933; Parsons, 1954), emphasising objective and altruistic motives (Hughes, 1963), and their devotion to public service (Larson, 1977). If we accept that the professions are in service to their client, it follows that their expertise is shaped by a professional's ability to work within the defined standards and behaviours set out by the profession for their client.

Professional conduct therefore has important implications to the mode of behaviour controlling the inter-professional, intra-professional, professional-client or professional-public relationship. These relationships are governed by an implicit or explicit code of conduct determined by some authority within the profession, or an authority established external to it, usually with the profession's sanction (Millerson 1964, p.148-9). Expertise, therefore, is associated with an awareness and adherence to the standards of professional conduct (Millerson, 1964) and the engagement with the socialisation of such ethics (Barber, 1963). For relationship-led professions such as management consultants, understanding how professionals operate and in whose interests they focus their efforts on – their own or their clients – is of central interest (Evetts 2006b) and how this enables a consultant to communicate to their client what they can expect from their conduct and practices (Evetts 2006a). Because institutional and transactional uncertainty are principal features of the consulting domain, Glückler & Armbrüster (2003) argue that management consultancies need to draw attention to this expertise when seeking to establish and maintain trust-based relationships with their clients.

The nature however of ethical standards and codes of conduct, however, is problematic. Traditionally standards and codes of conduct have been attached to professional associations for their development and oversight at a national level. As such they reflect national norms and governmental imperatives that are challenged by professions employed by corporations who work across borders and who have their corporate set of standards and codes of conduct (Evetts, 1995). Whilst a profession may define standards and codes of conduct in the form a set of values, beliefs and ethics, it is the internalisation of such values and ethics by each individual and the collective that is considered to determine a professional practice (Fitzgerald, 2020). To do so, this is dependent on a deep understanding of the specific profession's values and ethics, their socialisation of specific benchmarks amongst the profession, and only becomes a part of professional practice once an individual develops confidence in their skills and know-how (Fitzgerald, 2020). The nature of such standards and codes of conduct have also traditionally been argued to be reflective of the individual conditions where the professions work (Durkheim, 1957) and as such there is no universal measure or absolute content that determines an accepted foundation for professional practice (Millerson, 1964).

A further limitation of the assumption that the presence of standards and codes of conduct means that the behaviour of individual professionals is more ethical, as a norm, than that of individuals in lesser occupations has seldom, if ever, been tested by empirical evidence (Larson 1977). In spite of the existence of codes of conduct, there is no guarantee that individuals, collectives or organisations will abide by such codes or enforce such codes where professional conduct is unprofessional (Khurana, 2008). In more recent studies, certain professions have been criticised for their inability to address issues of alignment to standards and codes of conduct due to the lack of robust and valid means of evaluation of practice, as well as the limited depth with which issues are interrogated by the profession (Tahmassebi & Najmi, 2023).

2.3.5 Competes for monopoly over jurisdiction

The promotion and control over specialist expertise has so far been illustrated to be widely recognised in the literature as means to define the professions and in underpinning professional projects. In doing so, new and existing professions are able to use this expertise to define and defend jurisdiction over specific client needs (Butler and Collins, 2016). A focus on defining jurisdiction has personal benefits to protecting the professional practitioners' own occupational self-interests. This could be seen in protecting their salary, status, and power. Protection was also seen in relation to creating the monopoly of occupational jurisdiction over tasks and responsibilities (Abbott, 1988). In the literature, jurisdiction is characterised by disputes and negotiations in public arenas such as labour markets and education systems (Abbott, 1988). With the proliferation of professions and specialisations within professions, Evetts (2011, p. 418) suggests that these disputes and negotiations now play out inside organisations as occupations seek to control tasks and task divisions to suit their own occupational interests.

The question of the nature of expertise and jurisdiction however has become increasingly problematic because of technology providing access to sources of professional expertise. With the access to the internet-of-things and Google generation, the question of expertise and following a profession's expertise is even more in question (Larson 2018, p10-12) with the lay person having access to informed questions which can be raised to experts or informing experts why they see their advice as misguided or wrong. As an extreme in the political sphere in USA society, Larson (2018, p. 12) argues "politicized mistrust means that non-experts increasingly want to talk back".

2.4 Dimensions of Professions – Autonomy

A second characteristic common to efforts to provide a meaningful definition of the professions is autonomy. For some authors, autonomy is central to the definition of the professions which both distinguishes the professions from other occupations and an essential ingredient on protecting the 'soul of professionalism' from the capacity of other occupations to assert their own right to self-determination (Freidson, 2001). Autonomy is generally accepted to be related to the ability of a profession to define its own standards of professional practice, and in turn direct and evaluate the work of its members without being subject to evaluation of those outside of the profession (Freidson, 1970, 1984; Larson, 1977). A profession's autonomy is embodied in the notion of professional competence that establishes a network of accountability and governs the profession 'at a distance' (Fournier, 1999).

Autonomy is something that is achieved by a profession (Wolinsky, 1988). In Freidson's (1970) view, this is achieved by a two-stage process. The first stage is by demonstrating that, because of its expertise, the profession does reliable and valuable work. Professions demonstrate this through the existence of forms of education, credentialling, codes of ethics and peer control. The second stage involves autonomy being granted by the public when they recognise that the professions "has an extensive collectivity and service orientation" (Wolinsky, 1988, p.36).

2.4.1 Self-regulation

Self-regulation is an integral part of our understanding of autonomy. In this context, self-regulation refers to a profession's ability to provide its own quality control or self-management (Freidson, 1984) and is achieved by the professions who set their own standards which govern training, practice, and conduct (Fournier, 1999). Where professions have no other form of control over the standards and conduct but themselves, the possibility of misuse of autonomy is accepted to exist. Self-regulation therefore means the employments of formal and informal ways of regulating the performance of individuals consistent with its collegiate values (Wolinksy, 1988, p.36). The issue of misuse of autonomy and arrogance by the professions over their clients is argued not to be as a result of the individuals within the profession but because of structural characteristic of autonomy in the professions as insular and immune from external correction (Freidson, 1984).

Whilst the means for self-regulation and expertise are argued to be key in establishing a profession's autonomy, achieving autonomy within the public domain however is argued to be based on perception by the public of the existence of a service orientation. Wolinsky's (1988, p.38) view based on studies of the medical profession is that whether the profession 'has such an orientation, however, is irrelevant. All that really matters is whether the public has imputed that such a service orientation exists. If society has been persuaded to make that imputation, then autonomy is granted and supported'. Therefore, the power of impression management and public belief play important roles for the professions to capitalize on their position with their clients.

2.4.2 Independence

In the literature, the autonomy of the professions is closely associated with the question of employment and independence of the professional (Abbott, 1988). In early conceptualisations of the professions, authors such as Carr-Saunders & Wilson (1933) and Parsons (1939) argued that the professions were defined by their independence within their field and not engaged in the pursuit of personal profit but rather in performing services to his patients or clients, or to impersonal values like the advancement of science. Carr-Saunders & Wilson (1933, p.493) also draw attention to the tensions with the incompatibility between profit-making occupations and professionalism. In contrast to the field of business, collegiate professions focused their attention on a disinterest on profit and was replaced by altruistic motives or ‘disinterestedness’ (Parson, 1939, p.458). As such, professional autonomy and professional status could not be associated with profit-making as their primary function. With the same argument, if the professions enjoyed autonomy over their practice then the professions could not be employed in salaried positions within organisations. Employers, in their view, have ultimate control over their business functions and therefore not be found to be under professional influence from their employee or subordinate (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933). Even in more contemporary conceptualisations of autonomy, it is questioned the extent an occupation embedded in a bureaucratic organization has significant autonomy with respect to determining how it will meet the needs of its client(s) when the client can be the employing organization itself (Pohler, 2014).

Organisational conditions create a challenge for the traditional conceptualisation of professional autonomy. Fournier (1999) argues this challenge comes from commercial imperatives of profit and alternative ways of constructing work through decentralization and market related forms of accountability and evaluations. In this context, organisations are seen as creating new ways of governing individuals by relaxing bureaucratic mechanisms of control and allowing even greater autonomy and empowerment over how they achieve results. In doing so, this creates discretionary gaps requiring ‘new softwares of control’ as new ways of conceptualising autonomy with means to govern and regulate behaviour (Fournier, 1999). This places a greater focus on total behaviour of the professional that includes attitude and self-understanding leading towards the appropriation of control by individuals themselves (Evetts, 2011; Fournier, 1999;). Whilst this may have certain advantages for organisations in achieving financial goals, there are consequences for the nature of control over the professions themselves. On the one hand, professionals are tempted by the ideology of autonomy and empowerment. On the other hand, Evetts (2011, p.412) argues that attempts to measure and demonstrate professionalism increase the managerial ideology of quality control and audit, target setting, and performance review, and are reinterpreted as the promotion of professionalism.

The conceptualisation of autonomy by authors such Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) and Parsons (1939), however, is context bound and can be seen as outdated in modern conceptualisations of employment, service, agency, and capability that no longer reflects the social organisation of the collegiate or corporate professions (Evetts, 2011). For the professions operating in corporate environments, the new phenomenon of accountability by management objectives questioned whether the concept of the professions was in decline or illustrated the professionalisation of all professions (Haug, 1975). Later views, however, rejected such threats to professional autonomy, and thereby professional status being removed, and replaced by an understanding that this signalled internal modifications within the profession and conceptualisation of professional autonomy (Freidson, 1986; Haug, 1988). Autonomy shifted further towards occupational control over work and taking ultimate responsibility for their work (Freidson, 2001), and promoting a discourse of autonomy over the nature expertise and freedom in professional work (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006). In recent HR professions, autonomy is seen to be concerned with whether a profession can autonomously determine the needs of its clients, and the services it will provide to meet those needs (Pohler 2014). Brint (2006, p.108) however argues that this can be viewed ‘more as hypothesis than as a self-evident truth (particularly in the age of litigation and insurance against liability)’.

2.4.3 Earned and Awarded Trust

A central feature of professional autonomy is that it is technical and not absolute. Professions ultimately depend on the trust awarded by its stakeholders to secure their privileged autonomous position (Larson, 1977). In Freidson’s (1970) theory on the emergence and dominance of the professions, the conferral of autonomy in medicine was based on the public’s perception or belief in the profession’s extraordinary trustworthiness. Autonomy based on perception means that a profession’s status is fragile if such perception of trustworthiness is lost (Wolinsky, 1988). Securing trust by the professions therefore becomes key. Trust for the professions is connected with ethical standards and expertise (Freidson, 2001). A professional is considered to become trustworthy when they act in an ethical way with the client’s needs over their own needs and have the appropriate expertise to diagnose, infer and resolve the client’s problems (Abbott,1988).

Autonomy granted by the public is complex and contested especially for new professions seeking to establish their own presence within existing public contests. Studies have found that autonomy is subject to the existing perceptions of professional status already established and enjoyed by collegiate professions (Fournier, 1999). In

Cant & Sharma's (1996) study of the professionalisation of homeopaths, establishing their presence in the eyes of the public, the state and other medical professions had to be achieved using the paradigm already understood to be employed by orthodox medicine. Their autonomy in establishing was therefore subject to comparisons with other already accepted professions to establish the perception of an appropriate professional identity (Fournier, 1999).

2.4.4 Relational autonomy

The concept of 'relational autonomy' has emerged in the literature which positions people's identities, needs, interests are also shaped by their relations to others (Dove, et al, 2017). A profession with a strong social identity may also regulate predictable, responsible behaviours around autonomous work so that a profession can be trusted to do 'what is right' (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006). Research into stories of resistance are about how the practitioners involved held out against the system in a difficult job. These practitioners gave accounts of how they attempted to hold onto a particular vision of a society and of a profession, a set of values and principles judged to be important and a view of themselves as a 'good practitioner' in circumstances that might be at best indifferent and were often hostile to their visions and values (Banks, 2004). This demonstrates a need and a capacity on the part of practitioners to make sense of how they act in a work role in the context of a broader narrative of ideals, values, character, and consistency (Banks, 2004). This also requires reflexive sense-making on the part of professionals as a key dimension of professional integrity and creates alternative strategies to combat 'ethics of distrust' against the professions (Banks, 2004; Larson, 2018)

2.5 Dimensions of Professions – Authority

A third dimension common to efforts to provide a meaningful definition of the professions is authority. When viewed in conjunction with expertise and autonomy, authority is the third 'protective logic' which evidences the way in which a profession complies and revises their standards and codes of conduct to ensure consistency, relevancy and responsiveness to client needs (Noordegraaf, 2020). Whilst closely connected to expertise and autonomy, the approach taken by diverse authors suggests authority is a more complex characteristic to define. Authority is sometimes represented as the outcome of a profession's expertise, established based on ethical practice and service orientations, invoked because of their autonomy to use their best judgement, or a power that is granted by the client (Burns, 2019; Evetts, 1999; Parsons,1939). The authority of the professions has also been conceptualised by some founding authors including Parsons (1939) to be based on functional specificity, the restriction of the power domain, and the application of universalistic and impersonal standards. In the view of Burns (2019), however, the principles of authority are not necessarily exclusive to the professions and can be observed in bureaucratic organisations.

Authority has also been closely linked to legitimacy as the means of understanding the complex phenomena of influence of individuals which can vary from situation to situation depending on the context, the nature of individuals concerned, and the way in which authority is being exercised. Weber's (1947, p.328) work is used to illustrate the variability of authority and his classification of types of authority and the associated claim to legitimacy – legal, traditional, and charismatic. Whilst complex and difficult to find a universally accepted definition for the professions, authority is considered to a crucial characteristic for the professions where the professions need to arm themselves with an array of weapons in a "battle for professional authority" (Wilensky, 1964, p.145). Authority is also generally agreed to be granted by the State and External Bodies as well as granted by the public and the clients. As such, this makes the nature of a profession's authority dependent on forces outside of their own control.

2.5.1 Linked to State or Professional Associations

One of the dominant perspectives related to granting authority to the professions is because of their link to the State and Professional Associations. The authority of collegiate professions in the UK and USA, such as medicine and the law, is founded in the right for licensing and certification granted by the State (Wilensky, 1964) and operationalised by professional associations and higher education (Noordegraaf, 2007). This is linked to Weber's (1947) conceptualisation of legal authority. The importance of professional associations in providing authority has been the focus of attention in the literature. Professional associations are granted authority through the power to control and regulate professional practice by creating means for closure to entry and enforcement of standards. To be professional, therefore, is to be a part of a professional field because of being trained, schooled and supervised by the professional association (Noordegraaf, 2007).

Professional associations have an important role in maintaining authority through ensuring the relevance of the knowledgebase for the profession. This includes knowledge transfer through educational programmes linked to higher education programmes, as well as institutionalised methods through research initiatives, and the dissemination through regular conferences and journals (Noordegraaf, 2007). Professional associations are identifiable also by their right to determine their own code of ethics that prescribe appropriate behaviour, supervise conduct, and administer procedures for dealing with complaints and punishing members (Evetts, 2003). As such, professional associations are considered by some authors to be what separates and stabilises professional communities as distinct to other occupations (Wolinsky, 1988). The distinctiveness of the professions is argued to be associated with special communities, whose members share a relatively permanent affiliation, an identity, personal commitment, specific interests, and general loyalties (Larson, 1977). Professional control is not only functional but also normative and ethical. Professions prescribe moral conduct (Fournier, 1999) and establish and guard normative value systems (Evetts, 2003). Professional associations are an important means to support Durkheim's (1957) view of professions as moral communities who protect society from unprofessional conduct (Durkheim, 1957).

Professional associations as the means to grant and maintain authority are conceptualised as complex and subject to external threats. Authority through professional associations is suggested therefore to exist only once exclusive appropriation of expertise and autonomy is achieved within a specialised field (Fournier, 1999). Professional systems of knowledge need to establish the meaningfulness and legitimacy of their 'truths' in terms that can be apprehended by those whose lives are allegedly governed by these 'truths' (Fournier, 1999). Whilst professional power is subject to a series of checks and balances, this happens from within the profession itself and therefore prone to a lack of transparency in how unprofessional behaviour may be handled (Noordegraaf, 2007). Whilst professional associations demonstrate the use of control by normative and ideological means, the checks and balances vary between different occupational groups and are critically dependent on where a professional code is constructed and operationalized. In Evett's (2003) view, defining professional authority informed by normative value systems and ideologies of control in new and old occupational contexts may be different dependent on the organisational, political, and state influences.

2.5.2 Earned and Awarded for their Contribution

Whilst the collegiate professions may have authority through legal means, the literature also suggests that the professions must establish and retain such authority in the eyes of those they seek to govern (Fournier, 1999, p.285). The power of public perception is a key feature in understanding how professions become accepted by the whole or part of society and be able to draw on authority (Larson, 2018; Millerson, 1964). The importance of public perception in awarding authority is not a new phenomenon in the literature and has a significant place in the conceptualisation of the characteristics of authority and the independence enjoyed to exert control over its work and clients. Durkheim (1957) notes that expertise from a scientific knowledgebase as a traditional characteristic of the professions is not sufficient for the professions to have authority. Science, as Durkheim (1957) noted, cannot combat popular opinion if it does not have sufficient authority and it can obtain this authority only from public opinion itself. The professions are dependent on the need to establish a reputation by conforming with local customs and beliefs rather than solely on professional criteria (Fournier, 1999, p.285-86). The professions must respond to the power of public perception to operate and survive. Freidson (1970, p.21) argues that the survival of the medical profession depends on the choice of its clients to consult it, and that choice cannot be forced instead it must be attracted.

Freidson's (1970) point on attracting public perception builds on Weber's (1947) conceptualisation of charisma as a form of authority within societal and organisational contexts. In this view, public perception of authority is built upon 'proof of their worth'. Proof is subjective and its meaning is the construction of others. As such, the nature of proof for the professions is precarious and dependent on the nature of their relationships with others who hold the power to retain or remove the individual from their position of authority (Weber, 1947, p.389). To be awarded authority, and to retain their authority, the professions must engage with a number of connected strategies.

One strategy is to focus on ‘good results’ which are specific to the profession and attract confidence from their clients by providing adequate solutions to client problems. A second strategy is the demonstration of results. Brint (2006) argues that the free-market professionals need to address the public who consume and evaluate professional services with a combination of technical expertise and value rationality. This puts demands on the intellectual elite to produce research that shows the value of professional practice and professional discretion. As such, the professions demonstrate with consistency their engagement through ideological struggle backed by research (Brint, 2006, p.122). With such results, the professions can engage their autonomous practice with self-criticism and self-correction. In doing so, they can seek to re-address the declining trust in experts in society. Without the capability and will to self-evaluate, this exposes the professions to be evaluated by ‘disinterested parties’ who do not support professionalism and may place greater pressure on building a case to shift work to businessmen, bureaucrats, and technicians (Brint 2006).

2.5.3 Dependent on Building Trust

Because authority for the professions is dependent on public perception, it is represented as fragile. Larson (2018) argues that society now holds a mistrust of experts because of a lack of adherence to their ethical standards. In response to societal changes, she argues that professions need to build trust by improving the understanding of society in what experts do and the nature of the results that have been achieved in their work. The absence of dialogue between experts and their clients increases the ambiguity and distrust, and fuelled by the expansion of expert specialties and unfamiliar fields of work (Larson, 2018). By implication, trust is built by reducing the social distance between expert and client, translating the knowledge and methods to be understandable for the client, and being transparent in the effects and consequences of professional work (Larson, 2018).

Consultants, however, operate in an environment of uncertainty because of the intangible nature of their work and ambiguity of results. Uncertainty prevents consultants from building relationships with new clients (Glückler & Armbrüster 2003). For consultants, the literature supports this strategy to focus on effective client communication making sure that a consultant’s truthfulness and reliability is understood by the client, and with certainty of results that will be achieved (Glückler & Armbrüster

2003, Maurer & Nissen, 2014; Valsecchi, 2013). This reduction of distance between consultant and client becomes a source of competitive advantage which is attractive to new clients as well maintains existing relationships (Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003). Such strategies are in stark contrast to collegiate professions who rely on patronage, state support, and monopoly over work.

For professions like consulting with no unifying identity, it is suggested that resources become a critical feature in the success of a consultant and that they rely on self-representation than external validation (Gross & Kieser 2006). Trust at this stage becomes crucial to establish to address client uncertainty and therefore successfully attract new clients. Kipping (2011, p. 543) argues that management consultants working with clients utilize resources to establish trust with new clients that include their personal appearance of self-confidence and the brand image of the consultancy firm to convey capability and commitment to high performance. Once the relationship between client and consultant is established, experience-based trust enables consultants to address or substitute certain causes of uncertainty from the relational risk, product intangibility and the importance of interdependent cooperation (Glückler & Armbrüster 2003). Glasser (2002, p. 33) argues that trust for consultants is an important element which influences cooperation within consulting relationships but not linked directly to continued business. There is a lack of research however from the client’s perspective on how they perceive the development trust in achieving sustainable relationships that is based on quality work and employing ethical standards to achieve competitive advantage (Canato & Giangreco, 2011; Collins, 2016; Hodgson et al, 2015).

Networked reputation enables a consultant’s professionalism to be conveyed with a higher level of certainty between current and potential clients using more personal methods (Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003). Glückler (2006, p.15) identified that the value of a consulting firm is determined first by the makeup and capabilities of employees followed by the relational capital of its client portfolio. Reputation in the context of the congested and competitive domain of management consulting enables firms to expand into new national markets (Glückler, 2006). For example, the author found that reputation facilitated consultancy firms to follow clients as they expanded across borders. Consultancy firms also crossed borders because of referrals from alumni of existing clients who moved to new employers. Clients therefore had an active role in facilitating consultancy firms entering markets with ‘pronounced cultural dissimilarities and at long geographical distance' by invitation (Glückler, 2006). What we don't know from this research is the extent to which these methods enabled consultancy firms to be establish sustainable business relationships in this way.

2.6 The Polysemous Nature of Professionalism

So far, this chapter has illustrated the complexity of establishing an agreed definition of the professions and what constitutes professional practice. Problematising the defining of the professions has been argued to have become an inherent part of our understanding of the professions (Abbott, 1988). As such, the literature has shifted its attention away from the debates of defining the professions towards an understanding of professionalism as the means to understand how new and old occupations work in context.

Whilst the meaning of professionalism is in itself not fixed, its usually interpreted as an occupational or normative value, as something worth preserving and promoting in work and by and for workers, and as the means to understand the nature of occupational change in contemporary contexts (Evetts, 2013, p.782). For Noordegraaf, (2007, p. 775) the interest in professionalism, therefore, is "not as much about being a professional as it is about becoming professional in modern times, or more precisely, about showing that one is becoming professional without necessarily ever becoming one". The result, however, of polysemous meanings of professionalism is 'mixed-up professionalism' that is without epistemological grounds of definable boundaries. Professionalism at different levels of analysis is nevertheless distinctive in both work-related respects (inferential, experiential) and sociocultural make-up (knowledge workers, organizational professionals) (Noordegraaf, 2007, p.775).

One of the dominant ways in which the polysemous perspectives of professionalism has been approached in the literature is a focus on organisational professionalism. In contrast to occupational professionalism 'from within', organisational professionalism (often referred to as 'professionalism from above') describes control of the professional by organizational managers. Organizational objectives are used to define professional–client relations, set performance targets and KPIs. Occupational control is replaced by organizational objectives to regulate the professional–client interactions, limit professional judgement, and influence the independent nature of professional work (Evetts, 2013; Freidson, 1989). Organisational professionalism is therefore highly influenced by corporate mission statements and managerial goals that in turn influences work identities, career decisions and pathways, and sense of self (Evetts, 2013, p.783). In this way, organisational professionalism is closer to managerialism rather than the self-determined 'from within' occupational professionalism traditionally associated with the professions. However, these forms of professionalism could be seen more as scales with individual professions sitting within each scale based on context (Saks, 2016).

Managerialism and professionalism are increasingly connected making it difficult to distinguish between pure occupational and organisational professionalism. This draws attention to the need to better understand the pressures and implications on professional practice (Noordegraaf, 2020). As Saks (2005) argues, public interest and professional self-interest don't necessarily need to be in conflict, and advancing professional self-interest may be to the benefit of public interest. Professionalism might also work to create and represent distinct professional values or moral obligations which restrain excessive competition and encourage co-operation (Dingwall, 2008). Recognising these linkages between managerialism and professionalism has been the subject of attention for professional service and relationship-led occupations such as management consultants to conceptualise a 'reconfiguration of professionalism' related to their social conditions, demands, and expectations, and shaped by work settings (Maestripieri, 2019; Noordegraaf, 2020).

Table 2

Two Different Forms of Professionalism in Knowledge-based Work

Organizational professionalism	**Occupational professionalism**
• Discourse of control used increasingly by managers in work organizations	• Discourse constructed within professional groups
• Rational-legal forms of authority	• Collegial authority
• Standardized procedures	• Discretion and occupational control of the work

• Hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making	• Practitioner trust by both clients and employers
• Managerialism	• Controls operationalized by practitioners
• Accountability and externalized forms of regulation, target-setting and performance review	• Professional ethics monitored by institutions and associations
• Linked to Weberian models of organization	• Located in Durkheim's model of occupations as moral communities

From Evetts (2013, p.788)

Professionalism is no longer only discussed in relation to the traditional post-Enlightenment professions but also to contemporary ambiguous occupations where expertise is no longer able to be isolated from other experts, decision makers or clients (Noordegraaf, 2007, p.780). Professionalism, therefore, is about content or substance (knowledge, skills, experiences, ethics, and acts) used to meet client needs, and it is about institutional control and discipline (associations, jurisdictions, knowledge transfer, codes of conduct, and supervision) used in professional practices (Noordegraaf, 2007, p.768).

Hybridised forms of professionalism emerge as increasing numbers of knowledge workers go about professionalising to both secure consistency and control over work in changing contexts as well as establishing the symbols of professional status and identity (Noordegraaf, 2007). In these instances, professionalism represents an understanding of different forms of work where client needs, the clients themselves, costs involved and capacities available interact in multifaceted ways (Noordegraaf, 2007). Hybrid professionalism therefore represents new ways of organising around a hybrid of occupational control or organisational control with reflexive control. It provides a way of understanding what it means to be a professional in unique contexts and be able to establish legitimate relationships between clients, professional practice, and organised action (Noordegraaf, 2007, p.780).

The term hybrid profession and professionalism are argued by Butler and Collins (2016, p.49) to have benefits in the exploration of new professions by circumventing the dualism of collegiate and corporate professions in their pursuit of a professional project. Hybrid has been particularly useful in exploring the professional projects by occupations such as management consultants. 'Hybridity' seeks to refer to the existence of professionalization strategies and other organisational priorities that come together to shape the purpose and behaviour of consultants (Evetts 2011; Faulconbridge & Muzio 2008). A focus on hybrid professions enables us to understand how consultants are subject to and adapt to change especially in the context of VUCA business environments where there is an emphasis on establishing efficiency in management practices (Faulconbridge et al, 2008; Hodgson, Paton, & Muzio, 2015).

Whilst the focus may be more on the nature of working relationships and consensual decision-making as an occupational value (Evetts, 2011), hybrid professionalism also recognises that mixed models exist where professionalism and managerialism are intertwined and subject to multiple meanings (Noordegraaf, 2015, p.193). Although intertwined, hybrid professions are subject to the perceptions of their clients and wider public in being to defend a balance of organisational logics and professional independence, resulting in challenges to their autonomy with the need to defend managerial attacks on their ethics-led authority (Brint, 2006). Understanding how hybrid organisational professions go about seeking enhanced status and recognition for their work has been argued to be important to better develop a clearer understanding of their contribution in organisations (Evetts, 2013), and are able to adapt professional work to challenging organisational contexts especially in professional service sectors (Kirkpatrick & Muzio, 2011). Hybrid professionalism has been argued to draw attention to new or alternative features of professional work which hold distinctive cultural or symbolic meanings accessed by professionals to establish institutional legitimacy (Noordegraaf, 2007).

An institutional approach has been argued to be valuable in understanding professionalism in relation to "markets, organizational forms, business practices, and professional groups and professional organizations in processes of institutional change (Muzio, Brock & Suddaby, 2013, p.700). An institutional approach provides an understanding of the varying institutional circumstances which professionals need to adapt to where they are located and employed, and what is needed in those circumstances for professionals to successfully apply bodies of knowledge and skill to client needs (Freidson, 2001, p.180). From an institutional perspective, Evetts (2003, p.407-11) draws attention to the way in which professionalism in this context is increasingly understood as a normative value system and ideology as a mechanism to facilitate and promote occupational change to influence new behaviours that are appropriate, effective, and efficient. In doing so, the discourse of enterprise and managerialism becomes linked with discourses of professionalism, quality, customer service and care (Evetts, 2015, p.44).

Professionalism as discourse is conceptualised as the combination of occupational values and ideological interpretations in relation to trust, discretion, risk, judgement and expertise in professional-client relations (Evetts, 2013, p.782), as well as the reassessment of service quality and professional performance (Freidson, 1994). Professionalism as discourse has wide applications in organisational settings including marketing campaigns for the appeal of work 'done by a professional' as well as in advertising campaigns to attract new entrants into the profession and promote work identities and career decisions (Fournier, 1999). Professional workers themselves prefer and utilize the normative discourse in their relations with clients, their occupational identities, and their work practices (Evetts, 2003). Professionalism as discourse also has managerial appeal in justifying the need for improving performance and the means for achieving improvements through training (Evetts, 2013).

Recent debates in the SoP and Management Consultancy literature have focused on the relationships between consultants and clients, and how this sheds light on furthering our understanding of the discourse of professionalism (Mosonyi, Empson & Gond, 2020). The nature of the work consultant-client relationship and being organisationally independent, it is argued, makes this an important dimension to explore in contrast to other professions (Anteby et al., 2016; Cross & Swart, 2021; Maestripieri, 2019). One perspective taken in the literature has focused on the identity-knowledge dimension and its impact on consultant-client relationships, consistent with the centrality of knowledge as a distinguishing characteristic of the professions (Abbott, 1988). According to Sturdy (1997) knowledge is not always seen as an enabler where a consultants' expertise may pose a threat to clients' managerial identity of being competent and in control. Clark & Salaman (1998b) were more critical of the consultant-client relationship in organisations, arguing that such relationships were unequal in knowledge exchange because of the ambiguity of whose interests were being served in the provision of expert services and suggesting that it was the consultant’s commercial interests that negatively impacted the credibility of professional work.

In contrast to this earlier critical agenda about the consultant-client relationship, Bourgoin & Harvey (2018) present a more complex picture of the consultant-client relationship related to knowledge-identity. Their study reflects the VUCA environments where consultants need to quickly get to grips with new assignments while displaying sufficient knowledge to be regarded as experts. If they do not, they will be unable to exert influence over the situation. This study uncovered a ‘learning-credibility tension where consultants need to learn the specifics of their assignment, complement their existing skillset, and adapt to their clients’ expectations (Bourgoin & Harvey, 2018). In doing so, the authors portray the consultant-client relationship to be unstable with consultants facing three distinct threats - competency threat, acceptance threat and productivity threat. Such threats have an impact on not only how the success of the work undertaken by the consultant but also how the client is perceived by their internal peers and the long-term sustainability of the consultant-client relationship. The authors argue that clients threaten consultants’ identity and hence knowledge flow in the relationship, which subsequently influences how knowledge is used by consultants, while using their power to create competence to safeguard their identity. However, consultants successfully overcome this learning-credibility tension by developing mastery over specific tactics – crafting relevance, resonance and substance – that allow them to maintain face while seeking the information they need (Bourgoin & Harvey, 2018).

In a recent study of professional coaches (Salman, 2019), professionalism was found to be communicated by the coach through examples of their experience of human relationships (both in past careers and in their current identity as coach) as a means of conveying to the client the nature of the service delivery. Professionalism was also communicated through examples of co-production as an integral part of their work where the client themselves was as a tool in their coaching practice. Salman (2019) also found that relationships extended beyond the specific coach client. Professional work for a coach required making allies of clients, through different strategies targeting different kinds of internal actors including collaborating with internal consultants, enrolling HR managers into the benefits of coaching work, and developing affiliations with the top management with the goal of enhancing coaching’s legitimacy. The alliance and collaboration strategies are all the more important for independent professionals, who do not have the same resources (reputation, legitimacy, social ties, etc.) as large firms (Salman, 2019). Whilst Salman's (2019) work is based on independent Executive Coaches whose relationships to clients are not mediated by any employing firm, she explores professionalisation from the perspective of the influence of the client and at an institutional level rather than the practitioner level to understand the more unique relational dynamics of professional practice.

Our understanding of consultant-client relationships has continued to develop in the work of Cross & Swart (2021) who found that consultants employ a relational approach to professional status whereby individual self-employed consultants adapt, change and blend in according to market demand, referred to as professional fluidity. Professionalism in the form of professional fluidity is argued to be necessary as an alternative form of validity and credibility for consultants. The authors argue that it is other independent consultants who validate and legitimise each other as skilled and knowledgeable. This draws attention to the important skill set for collaboration, connecting and mediating across mutually beneficial relationships. Supporting the findings of Maestripieri (2019), Cross & Swart (2021) found that it is the client who is the central work foci for consultants because they provide a form of professional validation by offering work and ratifying their competencies. It is the client who decides who will have work and the identity that they are required to show, and ultimately who survives and thrives – and who does not (Cross & Swart, 2021). In line with previous studies (Anteby et al., 2016; Huising, 2015), Cross & Swart (2021) found that professional work required the ability to work outside of defined work boundaries and specifically undertaking 'scut work' (non-professional but essential work requiring additional interaction with clients). Scut work, rather than negatively impacting the professional identity of the consultant, was found to bolster their relational authority, professional self-image and overall success with sustaining client relationships over time (Cross & Swat, 2021).

Whilst the literature has suggested both the fall of professionalism and the return to professionalism, Noordegraaf (2020, p.02) argues the continued relevance of professionalism and has most recently argued for its return as connective professionalism. This reflects contemporary work contexts and an emphasis on the 'reconfiguration of professionalism'. Connective professionalism, according to

Noordegraaf (2020, p.02), conceptualises professional work as 'professional' which is 'connected' to it's external environment and social conditions. Emphasis is placed on how the connectivity to clients and stakeholders influences the construction of professional identity, how professional decisions are taken, and legitimacy (re)gained (Noordegraaf, 2020, p.02). Connective professionalism draws on the accepted dimensions of professional work in the form of Expertise, Autonomy and Authority and recognises the interrelated nature of such dimensions in professional service delivery. Connective professionalism, however, highlights the importance of a relational sociology of hybrid professionals which draws attention to the connections and dependencies between the professional, client, organisational context, market demands and societal changes (Waring, 2014).

Understanding the different connections in the delivery of professional work requires insights into the different discourses and forms of government used by professions (Noordegraaf, 2020, p.07). Authority in connective professionalism goes further than 'a right' or granted by public perception. Authority in this context is conceptualised as active and ongoing processes of creation, reproduction, co-production, and being deserved (Lidskog & Löfmarck, 2015). Professionalism in the form of expertise, autonomy and authority are seen to interactive, taking shape in real-life processes situated in complex service ecologies and reflect the diverse levels of relationships which exist between the professional, client and wider stakeholders (Dove et al, 2017). By extension, because of the relational nature of the interactions, processes, and experience which inform expert knowledge, expert decision making and the conditions where these take place, connective professionalism is better understood in the 'real landscapes' which surround professional workers and the work of their stakeholders. As such, professionalism, it is suggested by Noordegraaf (2020, p.17), "is not only produced by professionals".

Whilst recognised for its attempt to move theory forward within the sociology of the professions, connective professionalism has had mixed reception from observers. One criticism is that connective professionalism presents another 'idealised' view of the professions with a lack of focus on the nature of power relations and in particular minimalizing the challenges experienced by the professions in maintaining their authority (Adams et al, 2020). A second criticism is that connective professionalism does not bring a wholly original perspective on professional dynamics where the relational nature of professionalism has always been part of any professional project however the rejection of inequalities within the professional-client relationship may not be goal for all professions whose motivations and interests remain with their protection of privilege or status (Adams et al, 2020). A final criticism relates to the very dualistic nature of the professionalism debates that Noordegraaf (2020) seeks to avoid. Rather than seeing connective professionalism as an absolute, Adams et al (2020) argue that the professionalism may be more clearly viewed as 'degrees of connectedness' with different levels of expectations or discourses adopted by different professions. Whilst connective professionalism has its outstanding questions and limitations in its conceptualisation, it is suggested to continue to support the relevance to the understanding the ways in which new or emerging professions operate through their expertise, autonomy and authority, and what this suggests for understanding how such professions may work in relational client contexts in hybrid ways (Adams et al, 2020). As such, I argue for the relevance of connective professionalism to be adopted as a lens for exploring HRD consultant professionalism in this study.

2.7 New Forms of Professions

Recent attention from the sociology of the professions has focused on the proliferation of new 'expert occupations' (Fincham, 2006; Muzio, Kirkpatrick & Kipping, 2010; Reed, 1996), and the examination of different strategies and tactics adopted that depart from those of established professions such as law and medicine (Alvesson, 1993; Reed, 1996; Fincham, 2006). Diverse authors have commented on the importance of recognising the emergence of these different forms of occupations making claims to professional status in the labour market, and in doing so making substantial steps in their 'professional project' (Abbott, 1988; Evetts 2006; Noordegraaf 2020). Whilst some authors have questioned the ability for new occupations to be able to meet the traditionally recognised characteristics of the professions, recent research has challenged this assertion, pointing to an emergent narrative of professionalisation within certain occupational fields, such as supply chain management, human resource management and consultancy (Paton, Hodgson & Muzio, 2013).

The notion of corporate professionalisation has been used to explore such practices (Kipping 2011; Muzio, Kirkpatrick & Kipping, 2010). New professions, such as the HR Business Partner profession, are focusing on professional status and identity so that they can command their share of autonomy, recognition of equal status, control over resources and freedom to work within their own boundaries (Aldrich et al 2015; CIPD, 2015). Achieving recognition for the HR profession is considered to be directly linked to achieving greater power in addressing un-ethical behaviour by other occupations in organisational settings (CIPD, 2017). For professions such as HR, consultancy and management, steps are being taken to reflect the accepted characteristics of collegiate professions in establishing professional associations, constructing bodies of knowledge, credentialing and professional development initiatives and means to control entry into the professions. However, these steps have been seen to reflect their own conceptualisation of the purpose and meaning, as well as the varied successes (and failures) of such attempts leading to reconceptualising such steps to their own needs (Collins, 2004; Collins & Butler, 2020; Handley et al, 2007; Lowman, 2012). Such struggles and dilemmas for understanding the variety of occupational coherence makes the study of professions and the identity of the professional of current interest, and certainly an ever evolving one.

For new professions such as management consultants and managerial occupations, writers have drawn attention to the distinction between the collegiate and the new professions and what this means for understanding of professional projects in contemporary organisational corporate settings. These distinctions are used to draw attention to the issues related to the difficulties in adopting conventional forms of professionalisation by managerial occupations. Because of corporate, organisational settings, some of these conventional forms associated with special privileges are either unattainable such as self-regulation and explicit exclusive knowledge, or unattractive such as restricted practices (Paton, Hodgson & Muzio, 2013). Instead, authors have focused on exploring the conceptualisation of corporate professionalisation particularly in large corporations where ‘expert occupations’ have emerged as areas of special interest for academic investigation in the fields of management consultancy, project management, executive search (Muzio et al, 2011) and human resource management (Bailey, 2011).

Authors focusing their attention on expert occupations have drawn attention to alternative ways of understanding professionalisation that draws attention to different tactics that relate to their particular knowledge base, work identity and industry structure whilst at the same time recognising the growing importance on occupational over organisational affiliations. In doing so, expert occupations are able to define and establish their jurisdiction whilst at the same time secure financial rewards. (Anteby, Chan, & DiBenigno, 2016). Paton, Hodgson & Muzio (2013) provide one perspective on such tactics arguing that expert occupations such as project management seek to achieve both their own interests and those of their employing organisation by developing associations – between a professional body, their members, and the employing organisations. Maestripieri (2019) provides an alternative view where management consultants in their association with employing organisations employ different tactics to demonstrate their professionalism and status. Where consultants have been found not able to leverage professional associations or credentials, management consultants were found to draw on a discourse of professionalism through claims of their contribution to innovation and efficiency as a ‘corporate profession’ to achieve such desired recognition of their ‘being professional’ (Maestripieri, 2019). In the case of HR, the use of new role titles was employed to communicate jurisdiction and claims to contribution to their employer needs (Wright, 2008).

Burns (2019) argues that a paradigm shift for the sociology of the professions is needed to recognise that new occupations are faced with accepting a new reality for the career of their practitioners within large corporations. This contrasts with the independent, lifelong career of the collegiate professions which dominate much of the literature discussed in this chapter. Instead, large corporations are now seen as the location for professionals as sites for professional development (Adams, 2015) and where competition for jurisdiction takes place (Wylie et al, 2014). Organisations as sites for ‘colonisation’ by the professions are equally relevant in both private and public sectors (Saks, 2016). A further paradigm shift for corporate professions is reflected in the global nature of organisation, and rethinks the ways in which such traditional norms as governmental protection, occupational closure through credentialling and professional self-regulation could be conceptualised where national governments had traditionally defined such boundaries (Evetts, 1995). Instead, global organisations with global operations undertaken by corporate professions reshape the nature and needs from professional work, as well as their role in maintaining and furthering the globalisation strategies of organisations (Carter, Spence & Muzio, 2015).

In the HRM literature, the opening up of markets which loosens professional and managerial boundaries has been argued to place a greater emphasis how professional standards are set and monitored, as well as how service guarantees are given and honoured (Short & Anderson, 2021). Professions and professional status therefore become a more complex concept, and understanding professionalism as a framework for expert occupations needs to be achieved by exploring alternative and context specific organisational examples (Noordegraaf, 2020). This more contemporary view of the professions provides an imperative for a greater diversity of expert occupations in different employment situations to be studied (Evetts, 2003) and an understanding that professional projects such as management consultants may not necessarily have the same positive outcomes (Butler & Collins, 2016; Short & Anderson, 2021). As such, the dualism between collegial and corporate professions has been challenged with the rise of alternative forms of hybrid professions and professionalism that reflect different forms of occupational change (Evetts, 2003) and different ways in which we can construct and understand professional practice in complex contemporary work contexts (Noordegraaf, 2020).

2.8 Implications for this Study

This chapter has highlighted the rich and growing body of work in the Sociology of the Professions from its original origins in medicine to wider interest in other occupations including the Law and Professional Associations (Brock, 2021). Greater attention has also been placed on the importance of understanding professionalism in organisations, giving way to new definitions and conceptualisations of the concept in complex settings by professional associations (CIPD, 2017, 2019) and in academic research (Brock, 2021; Maestripieri, 2019; Noordegraaf 2020). More specifically to this study, researchers have established a growing agenda which explores the professionalisation project of management consultancy (Hodgson et al, 2015; Kirkpatrick et al, 2023; Muzio et al, 2011; Muzio et al, 2013).

Brock (2021) undertook a review of the methodological approaches adopted since 2014 in the Journal of Professions and Organization (JPO), a relatively young journal but with a high level of scholarly quality based on ranking. Qualitative empirical research was identified as the most popular mode to explore the subtle indicators of institutional work and hybrid management are best captured using qualitative methods

(Brock, 2021). In the same review, Brock (2021) identified the occupations that make up the majority of JPO research, however, reflect the traditional focus of attention from SoP research including Health, Law and Accounting. In comparison, consultants have received limited attention in part because they are categorised as hard to reach participants (Karjalainen, Niemistö & Hearn, 2015).

Studies such as Kirkpatrick et al, 2023; Muzio et al, 2011; Muzio et al, 2013 on Management Consultancy, and Salman (2019, 2021) on Executive Coaching have responded to these limitations by adopting multi-method approaches supporting insights from interviews with an analysis of organisational documentation linked to the rise and fall of professional associations. Whilst professional associations provided a relevant form of data on the ways in which a profession conceptualises and communicates its identity and practice, this assumes that links between the professional association and its members are closely aligned. This also assumes that they keep up with the changes to the professions in their context. In this study, it is argued that HRD consultancy does not have this alignment and will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three. Moreover, this study seeks to explore the conceptualisation of the profession, the professional identity and the meaning of professionalism from the perspective of the HRD consultant themselves and from the perspective of their clients. And, to explore this through the different voices used that seek to communicate the meaning of profession. To achieve this aim, the use of HRD consultancy websites as a complementary source of data to qualitative interviews is adopted.

One study that influenced my decision was Sillince & Brown (2009) who used websites in their study of English and Welsh constabularies to analyse how multiple organizational identities are constructed through rhetoric to affect the legitimacy claims by organizations. Sillince & Brown (2009, p.1832) argued that ‘web-based accounts constitute one genre of collective identity that are particularly interesting because they are sanctioned by senior managers (i.e. are ‘official’) and designed for both internal and external consumption. The work of Sillince and Brown (2009) however was limited to the investigation of legitimacy. In this study, the scope is expanded to Expertise, Autonomy and Authority as a more contemporary framework in order to better explore hybrid professions such as HRD consultancy who operate in more complex organisational contexts.

Gray et al (2014) argued websites could provide insights into the priorities, strategies and credibility of organisations (Huang & Benyoucef, 2014; Youngblood & Mackiewicz, 2012) and the focus on communicating legitimacy and trust (Sillince & Brown, 2009), and the use of impression management to truthfully communicate, conceal, or exaggerate engagement with socially desirable characteristics (Windscheid et al, 2018). From a HRM perspective, websites have also been used to draw insights from job adverts into issues of strategic employer branding, employer reputation, as well as the ways organisations build relationships with existing and future recruits (Mashiah, 2021). Discetti & Anderson (2022, p.10) argue that the increasingly digitized nature of learning, training, people management and development processes mean that HRD and technology are increasingly connected and that both “established and emerging social networking tools and the ‘blogosphere’ represent important means by which HRD stories are told.”

Using the key word search ‘websites’ and ‘web sites’, no research to date has been found that explores HRD consultancy in this manner from specialised HRD journals - Human Resource Development Review, Human Resource Development International and Human Resource Development Quarterly. Therefore, I argue that there is a gap in the literature for the use of websites to explore the conceptualisation and construction of professional identity, and the means by which professionalism is communicated for the purpose of commercial gains. From a HRD perspective, Garavan & MacKenzie (2015, p.372) have argued that ‘HRD scholars have a responsibility to utilise any empirical data source that can potentially illuminate failures of HRD policies, practices and procedures’. I argue that websites are both a rich site for an understanding of the professions and professionalism relevant to this study, and which respond to Crocco & Grenier’s (2021, p.62) call for new and different ‘paradigms, explanations, and wandering into the breadth and depth of voices, perspectives, and experiences’ in HRD research and scholarship. This study responds to this gap in the literature and adopts websites as one of the methods used in this study. Chapter Four explores this approach in more detail.

2.9 Summary

This chapter has explored the establishment of the professions and the nature of their professionalism as an important and highly desirable occupational value, with practitioner-client relations characterized as collegial, cooperative and mutually supportive underpinned by trust from education, training and sometimes by licensing. The concept of professionalism has been viewed as distinctive form of decentralized occupational control, a process of market closure and monopoly control of work, and more recently as a more managerial form of control to establish ‘appropriate’ work identities, conducts and practices. This chapter has highlighted the gaps in the literature in defining the professions and professionalism because of the influence of the changes in the external environment, along with the changes in the expectations and demands of the client and other stakeholders in the delivery of professional services to meet complex and often ambiguous needs.

This chapter however has demonstrated that it is possible to identify core characteristics of the professions – expertise, autonomy, and authority – and the different strategies adopted by the professions to acquire, promote and utilise in client contexts. Gaps in the literature have been discussed where research has yet to explore these characteristics in new and emerging professions including specialised forms of consultancy who work in complex organisational settings. The relevance of seeing professionalism in its hybrid and relational ‘connected’ nature has also been highlighted as a relevant lens to explore the way in which individuals and collectives seek to address the ambiguities of their professional status in a meaningful way and influence public/client perceptions. This study responds to calls for research to better understand the connected nature of professionalism in diverse organisational settings.

Chapter Three will now examine and analyse the nature of HRD consultancy as a profession. Whilst there are apparent professional projects from within the wider HRM and management consultancy sectors, and within the HRD discipline specifically, Chapter Three explores the nature of such projects and the extent to which HRD consultancy is identifiable in the literature to understand their conceptualisation as a profession.

Chapter 3: Literature Review Part Two –
HRD as Professional Practice

Chapter 3: Literature Review Part Two – HRD as Professional Practice

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore the current conceptualisations and features of the HRD profession, with specific focus on HRD consultancy as actors within the HRD discipline. As discussed in Chapter One, a dominant theme in the HRD literature is the characterisation of HRD as a 'weakened profession' in need of new ways of conceptualising itself to move from weakness to strength (Gold et al, 2022). Such claims assume the HRD profession to be homogeneous and united in a single identity, however, there have been very few attempts to draw on insights from the sociology of the professions to explore the theoretical basis of these claims. In this chapter, I connect the theoretical lens and the debates from Chapter Two to argue that we should reframe the HRD profession as a heterogeneous profession, made up of multiple occupations with different organisational identities each with different strengths and weaknesses. This creates a much clearer way to begin to develop an understanding of the conceptualisation of HRD consultancy as a profession and professionalism in relation to the current academic and professional body's conceptualisation of HRD.

Recognising that definitional complexity exists in both the sociology of the professions and HRD, for the purpose of this study HRD is defined by adopting Hamlin, Ellinger and Beattie's (2009) view as the convergence of Learning & Development, Coaching and Organisation Development. The authors suggest that this way of defining the field provides clear benefits for HRD practitioners to distinguish themselves in the minds of managers (and many HRD professionals) from the work of Human Resource Managers (Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie, 2009, p. 301). Within this definition, it is recognised that there is complexity in how the terms of Learning & Development, Coaching and Organisation Development are themselves defined.

Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie (2009) draw attention to Plunkett and Egan's (2004) definition of coaching which emphasises its practice as being a fast-growing specialist HRD role who uses 'knowledge, skills and techniques from psychology and HRD-related fields in the design, development, and implementation of individually focused change efforts aimed at improving executives.' In their meta-analysis, Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie (2009, p.18) synthesised the then current status of coaching into four categories or variants of coaching – coaching, executive coaching, business coaching and life coaching. Common across each variant was the focus on helping, facilitation, relationship-led, and being goal orientated. More recent definitions no longer position coaching only as a developmental relationship at the interpersonal level or linked to interventions that address performance at organisational levels, but also as a social process which contribute to societal concerns (Gannon, 2021, p.06). The developments in conceptualising coaching reflect the impact of the organisational contexts where coaching has been used to address the issues linked to corporate behaviours, inequalities and the drive for empowerment (Shoukry & Cox, 2018).

The second feature of Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie (2009) definition of HRD is the integration of OD. The authors define OD as "any systematic process or activity which increases organizational functioning, effectiveness and performance through the development of an organization's capability to solve problems and bring about beneficial change and renewal in its structures, systems, and culture, and which helps and assists people in organizations to improve their day to day organizational lives and well-being, and enhances both individual, group, and organizational learning and development" (Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie, 2009, p.19). Drawn from the analysis of 29 definitions of OD, this definition highlights the focus on performance improvements, positive change efforts, and working at individual, group and organisational levels.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the current conceptualisation of HRD consultancy in the HRM and HRD literature. The chapter continues with an understanding of the identity of other actors with whom HRD consultants interact in their work and compete against in the jurisdiction over HRD work in organisations. The chapter moves to critically evaluate how expertise is currently conceptualised in HRD work in organisations by defining the bodies of knowledge drawn on in the performance of HRD work as a means of defining consultant professional practice and determine the jurisdiction of HRD consultant professional work in organisations. This is followed by a critical evaluation of the role of professional bodies in shaping the landscape of HRD professional practice. Autonomy is analysed in relation to how the HRD profession seeks to take responsibility for work outcomes and achieve the regulation of professionals through the discourse of quality and impact. The chapter moves to explore how HRD consultant authority is understood through the means to determine ethical professional practice and influence the opinions of clients to engage and development close working relationships.

3.2 HRD Professional Context

There is growing attention being placed on the professional status and professionalism of HRM and HRD functions in highlighting the need for better business cultures in the light of corporate scandals and economic crisis (CIPD, 2015, 2017, 2019; Garavan et al, 2019). As a result, the HRM and HRD professions are thought to be under increased scrutiny and pressure to demonstrate how they add value to organisational and financial performance (CIPD, 2019; Kim & Polyhart, 2014). Whilst the HRD profession status was viewed as weak in the 1980s and 1990s because of the criticisms placed on its attention towards training and administrative roles in organisations, in the 21st century the profession was urged to play a more strategic role in contributing to organisational performance (CIPD, 2015; Stewart & Sambrook, 2012). In spite of these calls for change, the work of HRD professionals continues to be perceived as operational, tactical and administrative and therefore struggling to transform its identity to respond to new client needs (Garavan et al, 2019, p.02).

The response to the challenge to relinquish some of the process oriented and administrative contributions emerged in different ways (Garavan & Carbery, 2012). Academics argued for a greater focus by the HRD community to be recognised for its leadership role in the development of people (Gold et al, 2011). Academics shifted their focus towards Strategic HRD (SHRD) which calls for a proactive rather than reactive approach to organisational needs implemented in an ethical and sustainable way (Garavan & Carbery, 2012). Practitioners were encouraged rethink their identifies and act as change agents to help clients in need of building adaptability, alignment and execution capabilities towards the achievement of strategic goals (Garavan, 2007).

New identities for HRD professionals had to focus on new ways of conceptualising work including time (long term development of human resources), relationships with stakeholders (shaper of business strategy), goals (learning aligned with strategic imperatives), and methodology (multiple means to facilitate performance, learning and change in individuals and organizations) working in continuous alignment with organisational goals (Garavan & Carbery, 2012). Whilst a direction of travel for the profession has been set out in the literature, HRD professionals have to contend with organisational challenges to their status to work at this strategic level. This includes gaining access to senior decision making, working with stakeholders who value other organisational functions over HRD's contribution to organisational issues, as well as challenge of working across organisational and national cultures (CIPD, 2014; Galperin & Lituchy, 2014; Garavan & Carbery, 2012).

3.3 HRD Consultancy as a Profession in the HRD literature

External HRD consultancy contributes significantly to the narrative of professional and personal development inside organisations and in the public domain generally (CIPD, 2015). HRD consultants can command high value contracts for their work. They can also work across industries, national borders, and work cultures. They can work across different hierarchy levels in an organisation, as well as with individuals, teams, or whole organisations (Aldrich et al, 2015; Ardichvili, 2001). In spite of this vital role in the HRD landscape, HRD consultancy remains under researched. Reasons include the difficulties with access to consultants willing to be researched (Garavan et al, 2019), the lack of imagination to critically challenge professional practice (Gold & Bratton, 2014), the current narrow focus on coaching as one component of HRD professional practice (Gray et al, 2015), or the ability to conceptualise an holistic HRD consultant role (Clegg et al 2003, 2005). HRD consultancy is competing with other occupations in a congested domain for jurisdiction for work that leads to increasing individual, group and organizational effectiveness and performance (Wylie, Sturdy & Wright 2014). Developing a clear understanding of the status of HRD consultancy and their work needs to be explored to identify the possible sources of tension within the discipline and will have implications for how the profession is understood socially and professionally in the future (Gray et al, 2015).

There has been limited research which explores consultants who work across in the fields of HRD to include Training, Learning & Development, Organizational Development and Coaching (Gray et al, 2015). Early HRD texts, published in the USA, place their attention on clients and their need to effectively manage external consultants. An example of this approach is by consultant and client authors Parry &

Ribbing (1976) who provide a chapter on 'Using Outside Training Consultants' in Craig (1976) Training and Development Handbook. This text provides a practical guide for the benefit of clients and sets out their definition of a consultant as “any outside individual or firm who is paid *primarily* for the delivery of professional training advice and/or service” and excludes any supplier of ‘off the shelf’ products (Parry & Ribbing, 1976, p.46-2). As such, their emphasis is on performance and not products. The authors also set out a list of capabilities that a client could draw on detailed list is presented in Figure 2. In their view, HRD consultants are able to:

- Measure human performance
- Carry out needs analysis
- Prepare and conduct courses
- Training the client’s trainers
- And provide the other services necessary to assure delivery of the trainee’s performance as specified

Figure 2

Major Types of Activities of Training Consultants

Major Activities	**Description**
Analysis	Analysis of human performance and assessment of organisational and individual needs. Includes task analysis, systems analysis, behavioural analysis, establishing behavioural objectives and performance criteria, and use of tests and survey research.
Design	Design of training programs. Includes research to determine course content and a design rationale for selecting methods and media, instructional strategies, criterion test, and decisions on administering the instructional – when, where, how often, for whom, by whom, etc.
Production	Preparation of instructional materials. Writing of training manuals, programmed instructions, cases, role plays, instructor guidelines, games and simulations, script for tape, creation of slides, film, videotape, flip charts, wall charts, etc.
Presenting	Teaching. Giving in-company courses (either public, tailored, or homegrown) in such areas as sales training, management by objectives, problem solving, management development, transactional analysis, 'train the trainer' workshops, and EEO implementation.
Implementing	Installing instructional systems. Tailoring of the consultant's existing courses to meet the needs of client, and training of client's instructors in how to administer the course(s) on a continuing basis.
Evaluating	Evaluation and/or design of performance development systems. Performance appraisal, job analysis, preparation of job descriptions, assessment labs, skills inventories, placement, career planning, succession programs, and OD work.

From Parry & Ribbing (1976, pp.46-3)

In the view of Parry & Ribbing (1976), clients draw on three motivations to use external consultants. The first is a resource-based decision to supplement internal resources for specific projects. The second is to fulfil the need for specialised expertise that require ‘professional skills’ which is more cost efficient to buy in that to employ. The third is to fulfil a political motive or ‘intangible’ reason for objectivity to see a problem from a fresh perspective and ‘getting top management to listen…Outsiders may command attention and be catalysts in getting things done’ (Parry & Ribbing, 1976, p.46-3).

A second early text also from the USA by Gilley & Egglund (1989) expands on the nature of HRD consultancy in organisations and focuses on their likely backgrounds and the challenges this brings to performing in organisations. HRD consultants are characterised as previous learning specialists and instructional designers who experience difficulties from the transition from structured environments in the classroom delivering off the shelf products towards ‘unfamiliar turf’ where their focus is problem identification and diagnosis, synthesizing solutions, managing ambiguity, and servicing organisational needs over individual needs (Gilley & Egglund, 1989, p. 172). Like Parry & Ribbing (1976), Gilley & Egglund (1989, p.174-5) set out a list of HRD capabilities that a client would draw on that includes specialised knowledge and ability to analyse and provide additional resource to pursue organisational priority projects. Gilley & Egglund (1989) expand on the characteristics of the ideal HRD consultant that is identifiable by their objectivity, ability to overcome resistance to change through intellectual integrity and minimising resistance, and acting as a spokesperson to protect clients from their stakeholders.

In contrast to Parry & Ribbing (1976) structured and definitive way of looking at HRD consultants, Gilley and Egglund (1989, p.173) build on Lippitt and Lippitt’s (1988) view that HRD consultant roles in client organisations reflect trends of change in organisational needs and priorities. One trend relates to increasing need for expertise in the design and use of learning technologies. A second trend refers to the need for a breadth of expertise in supporting wider human resource plans not limited to HRD. A third trend is for supporting the underdeveloped consulting skills of line managers and supervisors. This shift in perspective may signal an understanding of the rapid developments in organisational practices and awareness of the War for Talent in this era. However, much of the idealised conceptualisation of the HRD consultant and their response to organisational trends in this text are drawn from the wider management consultancy literature for models rather than an empirical study which explores HRD consultancy in context.

The literature in this era looks at HRD consultants from the client perspective and focuses on the practical decision making behind why they may seek out a client (Parry & Ribbing, 1976) and an idealised way of understanding how they may work generally in organisational contexts (Gilley & Egglund, 1989; Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986). Whilst they may provide timely insights to a student wanting to develop their knowledge of external contributors to HRD work, the texts are written from author opinion rather than informed by empirical research. Such idealised texts also portray an ease with which an external contributor can navigate organisational politics and ignore the complexities of partisan affiliations and power dynamics amongst stakeholders and competing occupations. Whilst there is some limited acknowledgement of the role the client plays in providing organisational insider knowledge to the consulting process (Parry & Ribbing, 1976), the nature of such trends on the consultant-client relationship is left under developed nor how the management of HRD consultants may shape the process and outcomes of HRD work.

Later papers provide insights through the use case studies involving the use of HRD consultants. Fairhurst (2009, p.33) cites a case study of Rolls Royce where delivery is outsourced to 4 partner organisations to create flexibility to turn delivery rapidly on and off in response to business needs. The capabilities of L&D practitioners identified in this case study include understanding of business needs and reporting ROI, business partnering, diagnostic and design, and a global perspective balancing local ethical and cultural issues with core organisational values. It is unclear, however, from this author’s analysis whether these abilities are distinguishable from any internal client roles.

Gray (2011) explored how coaches define their professional identity, how this identity changes over time and the influence of professional bodies on coaching (Gray, 2011). Whilst the body of research into forms of coaching are rich and the focus on attention from the academic communities, in providing an understanding of HRD consultancy as a profession they are limited. Gray et al, (2015) found that 56% of coaches spend less than three days a week employed in coaching assignments with the remaining time spent in other functions such as training and consulting. As discussed in Chapter One, the aim of this thesis is to explore the conceptualisation of HRD consultancy who identify with more than one function of HRD. Gray et al (2015) acknowledge in their research the complexity of identifying with a profession and argue that developing a clearer understanding of the identity of external HRD consultants will help identify the possible sources of tension within the discipline and will have implications for how the profession is understood socially and professionally in the future.

The HRD professional bodies in the UK have to date provided limited specific representation of HRD consultants or their models of consultancy work in organisations. The Institute of Training and Occupational Learning (IToL) stand out for developing a competency framework for 'performance consultants'. Whilst they don't define performance consultancy or the occupational identity of performance consultants, IToL do define performance consultants in relation to their 'on-the-job outcomes' and the competencies needed to be successful. IToL (2021, p.03) define four on-the-job outcomes are defined as:

- Build deeper strategic partnerships with management
- Analyse business and performance needs
- Determine what solutions are required to address those needs
- Partner with Stakeholders on projects that address performance goals and the needs of the organisation

IToL (2021, p.04) refer to four areas of competence for performance consultants as:

- Content competencies
- Analytical competencies
- Process competencies
- Attributes

The nature, role and influence of HRD professional bodies are discussed later in this chapter in Section 3.6.1.

3.4 Dimensions of HRD Consultancy as a Profession – Expertise

Chapter Two explored the characteristics of the professions in relation to Expertise, Autonomy and Authority drawing on the lens from the literature of the sociology of the professions. The following section focuses attention on how the HRM/HRD literature conceptualises expertise for those who enact HRD professional work, and specifically what we can learn from the perspective of external HRD consultants. An understanding of expertise therefore is achieved through how HRD is performed by different actors and in doing so we understand the different perspectives of HRD as a body of knowledge (Sambrook 2017; Stewart and Sambrook, 2012).

3.4.1 Body of knowledge and skills

Chapter Two illustrated the link between the dimension of expertise and the body of knowledge and skills used by each profession to diagnose, infer and treat client needs. Over the last four decades, the HRD literature has been the site of debate over the nature of its knowledgebase that is in search of both internal clarity for those engaged in the study and practice of HRD, as well as providing a discourse of providing value for practitioners when competing in organisational settings (Jacobs, 1990; Wang et al, 2017). One accepted feature of the HRD knowledgebase is that it is interdisciplinary in nature. According to Jacobs (1990, p.65), the HRD knowledgebase has been influenced by at least five major bodies of knowledge which are education, systems theory, economics, psychology, and organisational behaviour. Since then, some common agreement seems to have been reached about the underpinning theoretical foundations of HRD – from the starting point of Swanson's infamous 'three-legged stool' that spelled out how HRD drew on economic theory, systems theory, and psychological theory (Swanson, 1995). Learning theory (including organizational learning and the learning organization) and the theory of performance improvement have been added as additional perspectives argued to be complementary and illustrative of the overlap and interdependence of the theoretical domains (Weinberger, 1998).

Whilst common agreement on the theoretical foundations may be in view, the HRD literature over the last 4 decades has also been characterized by 'the search' – a search to define the purpose and scope of HRD (Jacobs, 1990; Hamlin & Stewart, 2011). As relevant to the HRD research community as the nature of the knowledgebase itself, seeking a definition of HRD holistically is argued to be connected with defining HRD as an occupational domain or profession that is distinctive (Hamlin and Stewart, 2011; Jacobs, 1990; Watkins, 1989), and where the HRD literature is used as the site for the constant renegotiation on what constitutes HRD both in theory and practice (Lawless et al, 2010). The definition of HRD and the way it is presented is thought to shape the identity of the discipline and constitutes an essential part of HRD knowledge that affects future knowledge production (Wang et al, 2017, p.1166).

The terrain of HRD definitions can be characterised as evolutionary and diverse. There have been several attempts to map the terrain of HRD definitions. One study from Nadler & Nadler (1989) illustrated the development of a HRD definition as a result of their own previous definitions of HRD from their publications (1968 and 1970). Chalofsky & Lincoln (1983, p.15) developed their definition as a result of reviewing 5 major perspectives of HRD: conceptual/philosophical, operational, functional, field of practice and field of study. Both papers are limited by the lack of transparency in the authors approach to their theorising, marked by limited reference to the sources, the method of analysis undertaken or how conclusions were drawn to result in new definitions. A more recent meta-analysis by Hamlin & Stewart (2011) draws on a diverse range of academic and practitioner sources from over 30 years. Their work is situated in the belief that definitions provide important means to differentiate the field from competing occupations and support the professionalisation project of HRD. As such, the work of Hamlin & Stewart (2011) represents a shift from 'how to do HRD' which targeted a practitioner audience, towards the question of 'what is HRD' which is aimed both at scholars of HRD and their students. Hamlin & Stewart (2011, p.210) identified the four core purposes of HRD to be:

- Improving individual or group effectiveness and performance
- Improving organisational effectiveness and performance
- Developing knowledge, skills, and competencies
- Enhancing human potential and personal growth

The most recent review of the state of HRD definitions has been completed by Wang et al (2017). As with Hamlin & Stewart (2011), the authors place the context for this paper in the 'definitional disorder' of HRD and the importance of HRD's definition in shaping the identity of the discipline (Wang et al, 2017, p.1166). A second similarity is placing the paper in relation to HRD as a profession and practice – a social and organisational phenomenon that can be viewed as a process, practice, or a mechanism (Wang et al, 2017). The authors argue, however, that the process adopted by authors so far in defining HRD has been atheoretical resulting in a lack of robustness and overly influenced by a western-centric focus (Wang et al, 2017, p.1166). Their goal therefore is to adopt a theory development approach to theorizing a new HRD definition that is more inclusive. In their conceptualisation of HRD, Wang et al (2017, p. 22) define HRD as:

> *Human resource development is a mechanism in shaping individual and group values and beliefs and skilling through learning-related activities to support the desired performance of the host system.*

Wang et al (2017) argue that this definition reveals the uniqueness of HRD in providing the mechanism of HRD and not the function per se which is (2017, pp. 22-24):

- Value neutral and multidimensional
- Conceptualizes the mechanisms, functions and process of HRD which could be formal/informal and self-directed/externally imposed
- Accounts for an open systems view balancing activities with business goals
- Suggests consequences of any imbalance implying the removal of functions that are inconsistent with the host system's business goals
- Extends an understanding of HRD across non-western contexts under globalization

Wang et al (2017) support the importance of definitions in shaping the nature and understanding of HRD expertise and argue further that the benefit for practitioners will be to enhance the perceived value of HRD within their organizations and improve their internal stakeholders' understanding and appreciation of the value of HRD. In the context of this study, the absence of other HRD practitioners such as HRD consultancy is apparent in the intended audience for such definitional work or the beneficiary of such academic efforts.

The constant renegotiation of HRD is argued to have consequences for the evolving nature of debates about HRD professional knowledgebase and the future of theory building in HRD (Chalofsky 1992; Lawless et al, 2011), the philosophical positioning of HRD (Ruona & Lynham 1999), the compilation of distinctive competency frameworks

(Gilley & Egglund, 1989) and a governing code of ethics of HRD practice (Kuchinke 2017). Despite these motivations for a definition and an agreed set of outcomes, the search remains contested and problematic (Evans, 2014).

There is however debate as to whether HRD can or should be defined. Chalofsky and Lincoln (1983, p.15) suggest that that HRD means different things to different people suggesting a level of complexity in the achievement of any agreement to the identity of HRD in practice. In her seminal work, Lee (2001) argues that there are philosophical, theoretical and practical reasons why HRD should not be defined and argues the extent of variety of practice across the globe makes the notion of producing a generally acceptable (generic/universalistic) definition of HRD an unrealistic idea and an unrealisable goal. Lee (2001) suggests that HRD professionals use the term 'development' to refer to 4 different forms of development - 'maturation, shaping, voyage and emergent.' The form of development often refers to the subject involved – the individual being developed, the organisation using development tools, or academics researching organisations as social systems (Lee, 2001). This points to the agility and adaptability of the profession however it doesn't provide a clear direction of travel for defining distinctiveness.

Whilst the interdisciplinary and performative nature of the HRD knowledgebase is acknowledged to provide flexibility and adaptability in the approach to complex organisational issues, there are limitations. For clients and stakeholders, an interdisciplinary knowledgebase is argued to lack distinctiveness and thereby limits recognition by outsiders of the value of the HRD profession's contribution (Jacobs, 1990). A lack of distinctiveness is also a criticism of HRD research themes that seem to focus more on fads and pressing organisational issues and thereby are more representative of fluctuating trends, challenges and opportunities facing HRD than focusing on a unified theory development (Ghosh et al, 2014), reflective of the limits of scholarship to keep ahead of organisational practice (Garavan & Carbery, 2014), or for scholars to be better able to empirically align HRD practices with the constructs of an organisation's strategic priorities (Gibb & Wallace, 2014). One response proposed is the expansion of our understanding of discourses which construct and constitute HRD (Lawless et al, 2011) recognising that language influences how ideas are implemented in practice and regulates the conduct of others (Hall, 2001).

3.4.2 Control over diagnosing and treating client needs

One body of HRD research has focused its attention on neoclassical models of HRD to demonstrate and measure the human capital investment outcomes based on learning theories and economic theories (Dobbs, Sun & Roberts, 2008). Researchers in this field therefore are seeking to understand the impact of specific HRD practices in organisations and to understand the 'why investment decisions are made' for employees to develop organisation-specific skills and knowledge to improve performance. As such, the elements of human capital theory can be used to explore the possible relationships between training, skills/knowledge, productivity, and the labour market from an organisation's perspective (Dobbs, Sun & Roberts, 2008, p.791). Recent research has argued that there is limited research on the extent to which the effects of such practices vary depending on national context and highlight the relevance of institutional factors which affect the outcome of organisationally sponsored development activities (Bagdadli et al, 2021).

Over the last 15 years, the HRD literature has focused significant attention on expertise in relation to how the profession approaches HRD work with the ADDIE model (Cherrstrom & Bixby, 2018). The "ADDIE model" is an idiomatic term describing a systematic approach to training including the analysis, design, develop, implement, and evaluate phases (Allen, 2006). Illustrated in Figure 3, Robert Gagne is credited as being the "father of ADDIE." Developed by the USA Military with the original goal to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of education and training by ensuring learners acquired the required knowledge and skills for specific jobs whilst eliminating peripheral content (Cowell et al, 2006). When originally developed, the ADDIE model was 'state of the art' expertise for HRD professionals for the design and development of systematic training in a military context for learning specific job tasks by a continuous cadre of homogenous leaners (Allen, 2006, p. 432). Whilst the neoclassical training models of HRD focus on why people invest in themselves for their own self-interest and for the sake of future gains in life-time earnings (Dobbs, Sun & Roberts, 2008), models such as ADDIE seek to explain how HRD professionals such as HRD consultants go about the process of the design and delivery of solutions to client needs.

Figure 3

Original Air Force ADDIE Model

From University of Maintenance (1990, p.iii) cited in Allen (2006, p.433)

The ADDIE model has evolved over time which reflect four 'generations' or shifts in understanding of instructional design which respond to theoretical developments in adult learning, contextual changes of increasing complexity in organisational environments, and technological developments in support of the delivery of training (Allen, 2006, p.431). These generations can be categorised as:

1. Implementing behaviour patterns of learning
2. Adopting systems theory for control and management of complex processes
3. Recognising relevance of interactive processes where entry happens at any stage of the model and drawing increasingly on cognitive theory
4. Introducing continuous evaluation and troubleshooting to reflect technological advancements in learning as well as managerial agendas of cost-effectiveness and measurement

Figure 4

ADDIE Model: Phases, System Functions, and Quality Improvement

From Department of the Air Force (2001, p.18) cited in Allen (2006, p.438)

As illustrated in Figure 4, ADDIE focuses on a cyclical and ongoing process of continuous improvement where each phase is constantly evaluated against the client needs and instructional requirements supported by principles of adult learning (Allen, 2006).

Whilst the ADDIE model has endured the changes of context and approach over time with over 100 variations of the model (Allen, 2006), the model has equally received attention in the HRD literature for its limitations. Swanson & Dobbs (2006) argue that its impact on HRD practice is limited because of the lack of expertise in HRD practitioners in its use because training design focuses on expertise in content instead of being experts in providing systemic and systematic training in support of organisational goals. Cowell et al (2006) argued that the ADDIE model, whilst highly effective in structured military environments, did not lend itself to organisational settings which are characterised by more diversity in learners, unique organisational cultures, and the freedom of learners to want to know 'the why' for the need for training. In response, multiple models of systematic training have emerged over time that focus either on instructional development, performance, or practical variations as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Competing Systematic Training Models

From Cowell et al (2006, p.461)

Whilst the development of such models illustrates the dynamic nature of the HRD discipline to respond to changing conditions and needs of organisations, the expansion of such models is subject to criticism. Cowell et al (2006) argue that models are developed for the non-expert and as such this could question the professional nature of such models which are assumed to hold certain levels of complexity that only a professional can understand. Models are also represented as 'mix and match' for the practitioner to create local variations based on practical need and not within the given framework (Cowell et al, 2006). The authors also argue that the challenge remains for the professional to select the appropriate model that can best reflect both the trainer, the training environment, the audience, and the content. Hirudayaraj & Baker (2018) found that there is a disconnect with how professional associations (in this case the ASTD in the USA) and employing organisations approach systematic models such as ADDIE as an area of expertise. Whilst employers actively cited ADDIE as a requirement in job adverts, Hirudayaraj & Baker (2018) found that this was absent from the ASTD's framework of knowledge and skills. However, the literature highlights the role of organisational size in the extent to which such models and practices will be consistently employed by the HRD profession in organisations. Recent research highlight that SMEs are likely to have more junior staff with responsibility for training design, if at all, whilst larger firms may have full time HRD staff who may have to cope with greater amounts of complexity and diversity of training activities (Garavan et al, 2019).

More recently, the academic communities and professional associations have urged the HRD profession to move away from its identity as provider of training and administration towards assuming a more strategic role in organisations (CIPD, 2015; Garavan, 2019). The CIPD (2015, p. 03) argued that the HRD profession needed to recognise that the pace of change in organisations necessitated more multi-faceted roles that reflected a shift from learning delivery to performance consultancy, underpinned by the need for HRD to be aligned to the business and deliver tangible organisational and individual impact. These strategic roles include “business partner”, “internal consultant” and “strategic business partners” (Gao et al., 2016; Nguyen et al., 2019) which therefore reconceptualises the nature of diagnosis, inference and treatment of a new set of client needs.

HRD professionals have made efforts to reframe their expertise around these roles and to relinquish tasks associated with direct training, training administration and compliance activities (Garavan et al, 2019) and research is beginning to recognise developments in engagement with new forms of expert work such as working with Artificial Intelligence (Ardichvili, 2022). The CIPD (2019) has reframed its competencies within the Profession Map to put a greater focus on strategic and agile professional practices with a call for HRD practitioners to commit to a new professional agenda. This is illustrated in Appendix 1. In spite of these calls, the work of HRD professionals continues to be perceived as operational, tactical and administrative, suggesting that L&D professionals have struggled to get out from under their history as a profession (CIPD, 2019; Garavan et al, 2019). Research undertaken by the CIPD into the HRD profession revealed significant gaps in understanding and practice needed to facilitate necessary change (CIPD, 2017, 2019). The specific skill gaps highlighted include the lack of strategic skills, poor business acumen and gaps in skills to leverage data and technology to contribute to strategic formulation and implementation (CIPD, 2019).

3.4.3 Qualifications, credentialling and ongoing continuous professional development

In Chapter Two, credentialing was discussed as a traditional means of creating exclusive market shelters for the professions by creating controls over entry into the profession. Such controls were often overseen by the profession or the State. In this way, universities have been seen to play an increasing important role in the provision of education towards the achievement of qualifications, credentialing, and ongoing professional development. The nature of HRD education provision is acknowledged to be an area that has been under-explored in the literature both in the USA (Zachmeier & Cho, 2014) and in the UK (Harrison et al, 2021; Stewart & Sambrook, 2012) and therefore there is limited insight in relation to expertise is currently conceptualised through this lens. The picture of HRD qualifications and education in the UK is currently understood through a limited number of papers. We do know that in the UK occupational closure is not dependent on specific credentials including professional association membership or specific qualifications (Stewart & Sambrook, 2012) and thereby perceived status of the HRD profession was previously considered to be low (Reid, Barrington, & Brown, 2004). To address this perceived lack of status, a variety of different forms of scholarship and representation began to appear in the UK. HRD professional higher education was introduced, starting with the first Masters level HRD programme at South Bank University, London in 1990 and followed by other both accredited and non-accredited institutions across the UK (Harrison et al, 2021). Scholarly groups also emerged including the appointment of full professors as well as networks to promote engagement between academia and practitioners including the University Forum for HRD (UFHRD) and a range of HRD specific scholarly journals (Stewart & Sambrook, 2012). The CIPD established special interest groups (SIG) as a networking forum for in selected locations in the UK for those interested in L&D and OD.

Professional associations in the UK evolved acquiring recognition by the State and resulting in the creation of Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), full membership of which was, and continues to be, contingent on acquiring a CIPD-accredited postgraduate qualification (Harrison et al, 2021, p.203). Whilst rapid developments in the UK illustrate many of the traditional characteristics of a professional project on the rise, the representation of HRD does not receive such a glowing report in the literature. In spite of the initial reports of growth of HRD awards in the UK (Stewart & Sambrook, 2012), more recent research has found an 'erosion of HRD professional status' as a result of a significant decline in the use of the term HRD in programme titles and instead HRD provision is being merged within a ‘symbiotic’ HRM curriculum (Harrison et al, 2021, p.215). The role of the CIPD itself has been criticised for retaining the language of Learning & Development over HRD as a further threat to the visibility of HRD’s professional status. “Such a decline in both practitioner and HE professional education spheres may appear at odds with continued advocacy for `HRD’ as the title of a distinct profession” (Harrison et al, 2021, p.214). Whilst under explored, it is recognised that the nature of professional education has a central bearing on the extent to which HRD can be regarded as a distinct profession (Harrison et al, 2021).

In a recent study by Salman (2019, 2021) into the establishment of a professional body for coaching in France, she draws attention to the decision to select criteria other than qualifications as a means of defining entry into membership, and of communicating what defined a professional coach. Whilst qualifications were increasingly being developed by emerging providers and made publicly available to current and prospective coaches, this specific professional body’s criteria valued a relational form of expertise, based on experience and personal growth that sought to stand for a recognition of expertise in coaching (Salman, 2019). The criteria included previous professional experience outside of coaching itself, training in coaching or psychological techniques, demonstration of the values of ethics and quality, a mastery of coaching skills, and on-going professional supervision (Salman, 2019, p.12).

However, in this context, although qualifications were not adopted to validate certification for professional status, the application of an alternative criteria effectively was shown to have achieved a form of social closure. Salman’s (2019) study illustrates the relevance of national context in the professions. In this case, specifically the role and importance placed on working with governmental regulation of the occupations and the aim for coaching to be recognised as a profession in France. In the UK, however, HRD professional bodies are not required to establish or oversee a criterion to assure expertise. HRD consultants are not regulated by a professional body to evidence any criteria to gain entry into either any of the HRD functions of training, coaching, or organisation development.

3.4.4 Established standards of ethical professional conduct

Chapter Two considered how expertise is traditionally associated with an awareness and adherence to the standards of professional conduct and the engagement with the socialisation of such ethics. For collegial professions, ethical frameworks and codes of practice are normally acquired through education and their day-to-day practice by professionals are controlled through professional associations. For the HRD profession, the nature of ethical standards and codes of practice is represented in the literature to be complex and debated and linked to conceptualising HRD as a discipline. Swanson & Holton (2001, p.10) argue that there are 3 distinctive core beliefs that shape how we might understand HRD both as a process and function in organisations, and are closely linked to the profession's code of ethics:

1. Organisations are human-made entities that rely on human expertise to establish and achieve their goals
2. Human expertise is developed and maximised through HRD processes and should be done for the mutual long-and/or short-term benefits of the sponsoring organization and the individuals involved
3. HRD professionals are advocates of individual/group, work process, and organisational integrity

Stewart (2004, p.85) argues that ethics for the HRD profession is understood through the lived experience of HRD work, or in his words 'immanent in HRD'. In his view, HRD is, in and of itself, an ethical endeavour, arguing that ethics describes phenomena in which moral values are implicated and in which, therefore, moral choices must be made (Stewart, 2004, p.85). And as such, the ethical nature of HRD is one cause of its complexity. For Stewart (2004) one thing is clear that the (ethical) practice of HRD is linked to the categorical imperative of supporting individuals to cope successfully in a complex world and to embrace change in the world.

Whilst sharing the view on the complexity of ethics for the profession, Hatcher (2004) places the question of standards in relation to the theoretical foundations of HRD that give rise to an understanding of the profession's wider social responsibilities. He argued that what the HRD profession has yet fully to acknowledge and resolve is its inability to enhance global sustainability and its fundamental responsibility to society (Hatcher, 2004). In his view, Hatcher (2004, p.42) argues that HRD as a profession needs to focus more attention on acting consciously on issues of social responsibility within complex work environments. In his opinion, the solution to raising the consciousness of the profession is to adopt unbounded world views that inform a shift away from reductionism and predictability towards a profession that engages with systems theory, deep ecology, and complexity theory.

Adopting an unbounded world view through new theoretical lenses, it is argued, conceptualise responsibility that extends past economic responsibilities as employers and creates a profession that is morally responsible beyond short- sighted economic gain and behaviourally-oriented psychological fulfilment (Hatcher, 2004, p.53). Whilst both authors provide connected but different theorising over the idealistic and human-centred visions of ethical HRD practice, HRD as a profession is bound by the tensions of its existence within management theory and the support of managerial agendas (Armitage, 2018) to support organisations in leveraging their workforce's knowledge, capabilities, adaptability and efficiency (Mitsakis & Aravopoulou, 2016, p.68–69). This has brought the value proposition of HRD into sharp focus. As Lee (2014, p.09) points out "those acting in HRD roles are regularly (and increasingly) faced with ethical dilemmas. HRD is permeated by emancipatory values. These might differ from group to group and can be in conflict with organisational values of performance and profit, but professional bodies can play a leading role in establishing and voicing the ethical side of HRD".

In the light of corporate scandals and their impact on global financial downturns, the CIPD (2017) in the UK called for a re-examination of the role the wider HR profession plays in organisational outcomes. From their findings from HR members, the CIPD (2017) argued for rethinking the critical role of the wider HR profession to develop its expertise to help businesses create lasting, sustainable solutions built on ethical decision making for the benefit of all stakeholders. In increasingly complex organisational environments, the CIPD (2017, p.03) argued that the "ability to apply situational judgement and demonstrate moral integrity are what sets [the professions] apart as professionals and are important characteristics in helping organisations create long-term sustainability". Conceptualising the HR profession to be values-led focuses attention on how professionals create greater trust between organisational actors which leads to enhanced and more ethical work behaviours (CIPD, 2017).

At present, no regulatory body exists that standardises the knowledge and practices of HRD outside of its national boundaries using qualifications. In the UK, for example, standards of HRD professional practice set out by the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) are blurred amongst generalist Human Resource Management competencies and domains of knowledge. In the UK, the most recent version of the CIPD's HR Professional Map places a clearer focus on the core behaviours for HRM/HRD professionals to include ethical practice and situational decision making (CIPD, 2019), championing better work and working lives for all (see Appendix 1). This, to some degree, seems to respond to their research into HR professionalism that identified a gap 'between the ambition to uphold ethical values and actual practice' and a greater allegiance with the organization than the profession (CIPD, 2017, p.05). As such, this highlights a dilemma for the HRD profession and its ability to reach all types of actors in the use of HRD in organisations.

As L&D specific professional associations in the UK, neither LPI or IToL highlight ethics and responsible practice to be a competency required in their revised LPI Capability Map or the IToL Competence Framework for Performance Consultancy (see Appendix 1). IToL (2021) defines success to be the result of both skills (or the capability to perform the role) and support (or the working environment and systems that allow you to work in this way). However, unlike the CIPD's (2017) claims that HRD have agency to create change through ethical and responsible professional practice, and through the ability to challenge organisational decision making, IToL (2021, p.02) state that "the conditions for success as a performance consultant need to be provided by the organisation that they work for and so individually they have no control over it." This suggests that HRD professional conduct, in the view of IToL, is role specific and seen in isolation from the context where professional practice takes place. There is no explanation within the IToL literature about limits of HRD agency or how this is linked to possible ethical and responsible practice in organisational settings. Instead, we may see this in the context of website content that is consistent with the discourse of positivity and transformational outcomes of HRD.

Whilst there is a common view in the academic literature that it is becoming increasingly clear that HRD professionals significantly contribute to the process of institutionalizing ethics (Foote & Ruona, 2008), and helping organizations achieve societal, environmental, and economic goals (Garavan & McGuire, 2010), the increasing complexity of the scope of HRD from local to global conditions creates tensions in the way the profession can translate a common set of standards to fit the varieties of HRD practice across nations, sectors, organizations, and within organizations (Lee, 2014, p.08). As such, there is a potential a dilemma for the strength of the profession to control the behaviour and responsible practice of its diverse practitioners.

Research that focused on a framework specifically for the HRD profession has been limited (notably McLagan 1996) and has not been revisited to represent the changing nature of the contribution of external HRD consultants, or in national or global contexts. In the USA, the AHRD provides practitioners with their Standards on Ethics and Integrity. This statement sets out general principles for standards of conduct and set forth a common set of values for HRD professionals, including those engaged in consulting work (AHRD, n.d.). The General Principles represent principles that provide the foundation for all of the Standards. These principles include (a) competence, (b) integrity, (c) professional responsibility, (d) respect for people's rights and dignity, (e) concern for others' welfare, and (f) social responsibility. Rather than being a standard which individual professionals are held accountable for in their behaviour, the AHRD state that such standards are "prepared primarily as an educational vehicle. It serves to articulate the values to which HRD professionals aspire in their work… HRD professionals aspire to weighing their options and making the best (ethical) decision they feel they can, based upon an attempt to be socially responsible" (AHRD, n.d.).

3.5 Dimensions of HRD Consultancy as a Profession – Autonomy

Chapter Two explored autonomy as generally accepted to be related to the ability of a profession to define its own standards of professional practice, and in turn direct and evaluate the work of its members without being subject to evaluation of those outside of the profession. A profession's autonomy is embodied in the notion of professional competence that establishes a network of accountability and governs the profession 'at a distance'. Achieving autonomy is dependent on the expertise developed by the professional as well as their ability to self-regulate. The professions, however, are dependent on earning and being awarded trust from their clients in order to become autonomous in their professional work.

3.5.1 Independence and Standards as Objective Measures

For the professions, Chapter Two drew on Freidson's (1984) view that self-regulation refers to a profession's ability to provide its own quality control or self-management and is achieved by the professions who set their own standards which govern training, practice, and conduct (Fournier, 1999). Whilst standards are regarded as a vital part of organisational, professional, and social life by providing a 'quality assured' professional practice, the HR field has lacked any agreed standards of practice (Anderson, 2017b). However, in response to the prevalence of standards in organisational and management practices, and efforts to further the wider HR professionalisation project, there has been a growing interest in the development of HR standards (Murphy & Garavan, 2009). Whilst the ability to standardise HR is contested, Anderson (2017b, p.327-8) argues that such efforts to standardise would have profound implications for HRD professional identity, practice, pedagogy, and education.

Since 1991, the Investors in People (IiP) standard has been the most recognisable national-level HRD standard in the UK (Murphy & Garavan, 2009). This national standard was launched by the UK Government and subsequently adopted by over 20 countries (Anderson, 2017b). Whilst adopted by diverse national governments and business cultures from France and Germany in Europe, to Australia, to Japan and South Africa, Anderson (2017b) draws attention to five dilemmas that emerge from the evaluation of the impact of the standards that questions the ability of IiP to lead to successful outcomes. The first dilemma relates to the difficulty in validating of claims made about the measurable causal relationship between IiP and the quality of the provision of training and development, organisational performance, job satisfaction and awareness of professional development in adopting organisations (Smith, Stokes, & Wilson, 2014).

The second dilemma relates to the basis of IiP on a functional managerial paradigm that uses the process of audit in the form of 'check-do-review' to assess minimum threshold standards (Anderson, 2017b). Rather than promoting professional excellence, a managerialist paradigm is thought to promote compliance and local deviations of practice to fit in (Anderson, 2017b). The third dilemma refers to the lack of consensus over how HRD activities can be prescribed and trained to be relevant for organisations of different sizes, across different sectors, and geographical locations (Zachmeier & Cho, 2014). A fourth dilemma for the HRD field relates to the time horizon assessed in the IiP standards. The focus on short-term managerial practices were found to be in opposition to the long-term orientation of the HRD field that seeks to focus on individual growth, achieving potential and organisation development (Garavan et al, 2019). A connected and final dilemma refers to the very nature of standards in being able to reconcile the tension between measuring standards as stability with the reality of organisations who are in constant need of employees to respond to states of change (Anderson, Garavan, & Sadler-Smith, 2014).

A more recent attempt to develop a more coherent and responsive set of HRD standards have been developed by the British Standards Institute (BSI) for HR standards (Anderson, 2017b; Short & Anderson, 2020). These are articulated in three standards: BS76000, Human Resource. Valuing People. Management System. Requirements and Guidance (published in 2015); BS76005 Valuing People Through Diversity and Inclusion: Code of Practice for Organizations, and PD76006 Guide to learning and development.

The IiP reflects the state sponsorship which mirrors collegiate professions – funded by the British Government and licensed by the UK Department for Education and Employment (Anderson, 2017b). The BSI however is a national standardisation body and focuses on the development of standards for use in organisations rather than by a profession. Anderson (2017b, p.335) highlights the strengths of the development of the new standards to reflect a more inclusive and diverse approach to its development with representation from organizations and employer bodies representing large and small organizations and across the public, private, and non-profit sectors, consultancies, research organizations, 'think tanks', professional and scholarly associations such as CIPD and UFHRD, and worker representation organizations. As such, the adoption of a more inclusive approach with diverse voices to form standards is considered to have better reflected the pluralist and inclusive approach for the HR field, and which allowed for the HRD definition of value to be adopted to reflect valuing individuals 'for who they are' as well as their contribution to organisational performance (Anderson, 2017b, p.338).

In spite of the purported differences in sponsorship and development, the BSI standards have had limited impact in UK organisations (Short & Anderson, 2020). There is a disconnect between the BSI standards and perceptions of 'best practice' by HR practitioners because of seeking endorsement from thought leaders such as the CIPD. A connected but wider issue was that different standards and awards results in the fragmentation of the meaning of 'excellence in HR' rather than achieving a coalescence. In line with the criticisms of the IiP, HRD as a field has alternative views on the achieving standards. According to Short & Anderson (2020), HRD values discontinuous, strategic change, flexibility, and managerial discretion which are prioritised over process harmonisation and standardisation. The implication therefore is that the "priority of flexibility and responsiveness over the values of consistency and uniformity serve to diminish the professional interest in, and imperatives for, standardisation" (Short & Anderson, 2020, p.89). The implication from this analysis of BSI standards is that HRD standard setting is limited by the co-construction that underpins HRD work in practice where HRD professionals seek to adapt their work to contextually located HRD priorities and resource-based view of hard to imitate organisational capabilities.

3.5.2 Independence and Standards as Individual and Relational

Whilst objective and measurable standards have been considered by authors, the HRD literature has placed more attention on the question of self-regulation and standards of HRD practice through individual and relational accountability. The nature of this body of research suggests attention being placed on individual responsibility in their professional HRD practice as a means of 'becoming' professional (Lee, 2001, 2003) and thereby attending to an internal locus of control as a means of controlling their behaviour. In the work of Elliott & Turnbull (2003), they explored the question of autonomy in HRD practice in relation to the rise of the enterprise culture and the growing complexity of HRD practice. Conceptualising HRD as a predominantly performative function, Elliott & Turnbull (2003) draw attention to the question of personal choice as a means of explaining whether HRD practitioners and researchers shape their behaviour and accept diverse organisational demands as the basis for autonomy in their role. Drawing on the lens of Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (OCB), the authors explore the nature of individual choice over behaviour as means of explaining how practitioners may enact behaviours that benefits themselves as well as others. Whilst this may fit with an OCB perspective on individual behaviour that is shaped by the search for 'community' by striving for a renewed sense of collective purpose, shared values and the common good, the authors draw attention to the variables that may exist that regulate individual behaviour including the nature of contractual work and national cultures (Elliott & Turnbull, 2003).

The HRD literature has explored the concept of identity as a means of understanding self-regulation and establishing standards of professional HRD practice from several different perspectives. Gray et al (2015) found that external coaches construct over time their self-identity in line with the values and outcomes of coaching as professional work. This identification with coaching was found to lend some support to the notion that coaches are experimenting with provisional selves *as coaches* (Gray et al, 2015; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Salman, 2019). Their professional identity was found to be linked to their self-identity as biographical continuity in that there is a clear sense of the individual coach's agency, linking the past, the present and the future into a continuous sense of self (Gray et al, 2015). In this sense, the authors found that coaches were being guided by a complementary and self-supporting set of values and beliefs drawing on the discourses of doing good in the world and helping others. For Salman (2019) she found many participants who referred to a sensitivity or empathy for a coach identity regardless of having attended any formal training and claimed to have 'always been a coach.' For Gray et al (2015), they found that coaches were more likely to identify strongly with coaching as a profession when they held a coaching qualification. However, coaching is often one task amongst a portfolio of HRD activities including training and HRD consulting, suggesting that identity is both multiple and mutable (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

HRD professional identity as a means of becoming a HRD professional is also found to be socially constructed through network processes with clients, peers and stakeholders. In his investigation, Evans (2019) found that HRD practitioners constructed their professional identity through enacting 'what it meant to them to be professional' with new social networks. The study draws on the construct of 'the enterprising self' by du Gay (1996) where individuals use the discourse of 'new capitalism' (knowledge-led, adaptive to change, meritocracies and individual responsibility) to continuously demonstrate their value in professional networks as a means to access new markets and continuously construct their professional identity. Autonomy for HRD professionals was found to be legitimated by visibly engaging with knowledge sharing with others, and the adaption of existing knowledge and products to customise for their construction of individual needs. By doing so, HRD professionals reinforced their professional identity by a demonstration of competence towards others (Evans, 2019). Whilst constructing and reinforcing their individual professional identity towards others for individual gain, the study found that HRD professionals also used such methods to seek affiliation, relational support and a validation of competence as an iterative means to shape and strengthen their professional identity within a community of learning (Evans, 2019). This finding builds on Gray et al's (2015) conceptualisation of coaches as improvised identities that are constructed through a process of experience in HRD work. In other words, by engaging in HRD work and enacting 'what it means to do HRD', practitioners create a self-supporting feedback loop that regulates behaviour through how it is received by clients as well as peers within a community of other HRD professionals.

The HRD literature views the self-regulation of the profession to also draw on diverse processes of feedback and critical reflection to establish and negotiate boundaries of what it means to do professional work. Koukpaki & Adams (2020) found that introspection and critical reflective practice were crucial skills for HRD professionals to employ to make sense of their own practice, promote professional growth and promote the value of HRD in organisations. In this study, it was found that it was important for professionals to create 'space' in professional work for gradual reflective practice to take place, that reflective practice draws on individual and collective goals, the success and learning from power struggles with stakeholders, to develop an active understanding of the role of the organisational context where professional practice takes place, and to develop learning from experience to shape future practice (Koukpaki & Adams, 2020). Gold & Bratton (2014) reflect Chalofsky's (2007) view in arguing that 'being professional' requires HRD practitioners to engage in critical practice towards the traditional theoretical models and methods of performing HRD work. In their view, the act of critical practice is crucial for the profession to gain improved autonomy within organisations by demonstrating their lead in resolving 'wicked problems' created from gaps in HRD expertise. Critical practice, in their view, involves the questioning of accepted knowledge and engaging in collaborative action research between HRD academics and HRD practitioners to lead to new possibilities for theorising and practice (Gold & Bratton, 2014).

Kuna & Nadiv (2018) draw attention to the importance of boundary work as a means of regulating professional behaviour when working with competing occupations in delivering change programmes. Boundary work was found to be a requirement for external HRD professionals as a process of constructing and regularly (re)negotiating roles with other competing occupations, and in this study other HR roles. In this study, boundary work (in the form of avoidance techniques, customer-supplier relations, and occupational alliance tactics) was used by HRD professionals to establish control over claims of jurisdiction and protecting which clients needs were to be addressed. Boundary work was also found to be an important source of self-regulation in how professional work was being performed (Kuna & Nadiv, 2018). Boundary work required competing occupations to create feedback forums with competing occupations, and to establish ongoing efforts to manage constructive interactions. Overcoming tensions in competing work environments by establishing positive working relationships was found to be an important professional skill for HRD professionals to develop in order to be effective in working in complex change processes and be effective in delivering client needs (Kuna & Nadiv, 2018). The authors highlight the need for higher education to include this professional skill in order to prepare future professionals to engage in boundary work knowingly and adapt their approach to better fit into client organisational contexts.

3.5.3 Earned and Awarded Trust

As discussed in Chapter Two, the nature of a profession's autonomy is something to be earned by a professional and awarded by their client. As such, a profession's autonomy is considered to be dependent on the level of trust that exists in the consultant-client relationship. Whilst trust has been the focus for much of the management consultancy literature, there is more limited focus on HRD consultancy. This is surprising given the attention given by recent CIPD (2015) reports that emphasises the importance for the professions in maintaining strong ethical values so that their members are trusted when applying their expertise in both organisational and societal settings.

In a conceptual paper, Akdere (2005) explored the relevance of trusted relationships between HRD practitioners and their clients from a social capital perspective. In this paper, the author argues that trust is linked with the active investments in relationships between individuals (Akdere, 2005). Social relations are argued to create value and facilitate actions by allowing practitioners access to resources and thereby make cooperation between individuals, teams and organisations possible (Akdere, 2005). Gubbins et al (2018) expand on this view with arguing that HRD professionals are dependent on trusted relationships with clients as well as organisational senior managers. In organisations, the authors argue that it is the senior managers (and not the HRD client) who are the gatekeepers of financial resources, strategic information, and access to policy decision making. In this context, the influence of the HRD profession is often therefore directly dependent on the quality of its trusted relationship with the top management to secure support for resources, be awarded final approval for interventions and measurement of change efforts (Gubbins et al, 2018). According to Garavan et al (2019, p.02), however, the climate in UK organisations is challenging for HRD professionals to achieve this type of support. In their research, the authors found that "key organisational stakeholders including Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), senior and line managers do not view HRD as a strategic priority… and consider training and development to be a waste of time. L&D professionals are not viewed as strategic partners with organisational leaders when it comes to strategic change. Structurally, only a very small proportion of L&D professionals sit at the top table."

Building and sustaining a trusted relationship with a client not only provides access for the consultant to support for their work, but a valuable resource that needs careful regular attention to be able to act autonomously and act within expected ethics. Egan & Hamlin (2014) argue that some of the distinctive features of the HRD practitioner relationship with their client focuses on strategies that build working relations and facilitate working together as equals. The authors argue that this includes the reduction of social distance and creation of shared meanings through different communication strategies. Building relationships was found to lead to more accurate reception of information and comprehension of communications which in turn lead to shared norms, expectations, attributions and perceptions (Egan & Hamlin, 2014). In Salman's (2019. 2021) study, coaches placed an emphasis on communicating to their client their practice and experience of human relationships in coaching (and previous career roles) to highlight the value of the coach-client relationship in any service delivery.

Beaverstock et al (2009) discovered that HR consultants employed a range of strategies which include educating clients about the ‘cultural’ alignment of consultancy practices with their client needs through ‘drip fed’ communications via social media and public events to promote the status of consultancy work. Alvesson & Robertson (2006) found that achieving longer term success with clients required individual consultants to draw on social values of community, entrepreneurialism and social rewards to enhance their own sense of professional identity. The development of a ‘robust, distinctive identity … will facilitate impression management and the development of social relations” (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006, p.220). The CIPD (2015, p.28) draw attention to the importance of HR professionals communicating contribution and value to win trust. In their study, individuals were found to acquire trust by virtue of the recognition from the organisation that they have contributed positively to solving organisational problems. This was found to be more likely where the individual had a greater orientation towards their identity with the profession over an orientation to their employer.

However, building autonomy through trust is considered to be more challenging and increasingly fragile with the growing complexity of organisations. As the experts on people and organisations, the literature acknowledges the difficulties of acting with conflicting roles where HR professionals are caught between acting for the good of the organisation and ‘for good’ (Caldwell, 2003; Gao et al., 2016). For the CIPD, they argue the HR profession must play a fundamental role in creating work that benefits all stakeholders, building ethical and sustainable cultures. However, since the remit and identity of HR has been closely tied to organisational goals, the ability of HR practitioners to operate as independent professionals, with the power to challenge organisational decisions when they violate ethical values, has been questioned (CIPD, 2015, p.34)”. More than ever, the profession needs to place an emphasis on understanding the roles of HRD professionals in interpreting local conditions and strategies, as well as global strategies (Garavan & Carbery, 2012). At present, the literature does not fully explain the impact of different employment conditions of HRD professionals and the extent to which this influences the competencies needed.

3.6 Dimensions of HRD Consultancy as a Profession – Authority

Chapter Two discussed the nature of the collegiate profession's authority to be connected not just with the existence of professional associations as means of control over the expert knowledgebase but also in its role in establishing a means of communicating the authority of the profession over its specific jurisdiction.

3.6.1 Linked to State or Professional Associations in the UK

In the UK, professional bodies represent the interests of HRD practitioners and HRD academics through the provision of government representation, industry research, career advice to off-the-shelf solutions. The field of HRD is supported by professional bodies both within a broader combined HRM and HRD framework, and by a smaller number that focus on Learning & Development. Executive Coaching is also represented by its own specialist professional bodies.

The CIPD is a professional body that reflects the evolution of HRM from workers welfare, to labour management to personnel management, and to a combined identity between HRM and HRD. Established in the UK in 1913 as the Welfare Workers' Association (WWA), becoming the Institute of Industrial Welfare Workers (IIWW) in 1924, renamed as Institute of Labour Management in 1931, and then to the Institute of Personnel Management in 1946. In 1994, the Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD) was formed through the merger of the Institute of Personnel Management with the Institute of Training and Development (CIPD, 2024). The most recent development came with being granted a Royal Charter in 2000 to create the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. The CIPD represents itself as the professional body leading and supporting the people profession in the UK and globally (CIPD, 2024).

CIPD (2024) position their purpose to be the voice, the benchmark and the partner for experts in people, work and change. According to their website, they position themselves to address all people professions and "set the standards, build capabilities, and connect our global community of HR, L&D, OD and all people professionals. We are your learning and career partner. And, together, we are a leading voice and an active force for good work that creates value for everyone" (CIPD, 2024). A set of standards were first launched in 2009 created by the profession for the profession.

These set the benchmark for successful and effective human resource (HR) and learning and development (L&D) professionals. In 2018, the CIPD redeveloped the standards in the form of the Profession Map which aimed to establish a more ambitions framework as a set of international standards for all people professionals – including HR, L&D and organisation design and development professionals (CIPD, 2024). This can be found in Appendix 1.

The CIPD's specific focus on HRD practice is reported in annual surveys about organisational practice, establishing a series of Special Interest Groups (SIG) for HRD professionals, and more recently drawing attention to the professionalisation agenda for HRD practitioners (CIPD, 2019). The presence of HRD consultants in CIPD published work has mostly been limited to reporting on levels of outsourcing and the rise of coaching work in organisations. The first HRD consultant specific report was published in March 2021 reporting on the work of independent learning practitioners, exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the profession. The value of the report for HRD consultants focuses on the speculations about the possible changes to the delivery of future HRD work and how "taking a consultative coaching approach with sound diagnosis from an early stage, we will understand contexts more deeply. This will help diagnose needs and make sound recommendations, demonstrating the value that L&D can add to supporting long-term organisational goals" (CIPD, 2021, p.20).

The UK has two HRD specific bodies. The Learning and Performance Institute (LPI) was founded in the UK in 1995 (known then as the Institute of IT Training or IITT) and is the one of two UK based HRD specific professional association that provides training, qualifications and accreditations. Their aim is to "champion workplace learning that leads to a demonstrable impact on individual and organisational performance. We do this by working with learning and development (L&D) departments, by supporting individual professionals' development, and by helping learning service providers constantly improve their practice" (LPI, 2022, p.4). The Institute of Training and Occupational Learning (IToL) was founded in 2000 and stands out for its focus on both organisational HRD roles as well as 'training consultants'. IToL (2021, p.03) make specific reference to 'performance consultants' within their categories of HRD role.

Unlike the CIPD, LPI and IToL offer their members the ability to accredit their work through benchmarking and validation services. The benefits of accreditation by a professional body, according the IToL, are twofold – raising the consultancy's profile within their own organisation and the L&D profession, and demonstrating a consultancy's commitment to quality (ITOL, 2021). Neither LPI nor IToL, however, provide any research that support any claims about the value of membership gained by its members nor the impact that accreditation has on the quality of its members work.

All three UK professional bodies claim to support their HRD communities with membership via qualifications and continuous professional development as means to offer value to their client organisations. Membership to a professional body, according the LPI (2023) announces a 'commitment to professionalism' and enhances the reputation of an HRD organisation as a trusted employer. Membership is also couched in the context of the appeal to both UK and international practitioners. None of the websites however address any specific benefits to a 'global' professional body or how this helps to navigate any country specific governmental constraints attached to practicing HRD.

In a recent analysis of the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) globalization activities, McLean and Lee set out six reasons for barriers and challenges in creating a global presence outside of the United States (2016). These were the lack of financial resources, cultural differences in the expected standards of practice and lack of trust, inconsistent HRD communities of practice and affiliation, limited personal interest from AHRD leadership team, limited accessibility for participants outside the USA, and no shared language of research (McLean & Lee, 2016). Developing a clear identity for HRD practitioners, it is suggested, will support the recognition of 'professionalism' of current practitioners and provide a clear route map for the 'voyage' to be undertaken by future HRD practitioners and academics. Hamlin & Stewart (2010, p. 203) argue "for HRD to have meaning as a discrete field of study and practice, and possibly as an emergent and unique discipline and genuine profession, it requires an identity that is globally recognised and accepted." At present, no regulatory body exists that unifies the knowledge and practices of HRD outside of its national boundaries. Standards of HRD professional practice from the CIPD are blurred amongst generalist Human Resource Management competencies and domains of knowledge. Developing a clear identity for HRD practitioners, it is suggested, will support the recognition of 'professionalism' of current practitioners and provide a clear route map for the 'voyage' to be undertaken by future HRD practitioners and academics.

3.6.2 Authority Earned and Awarded for their Contribution

Chapter Two discussed the nature of a profession's authority as something that is earned as an outcome of their track record of effective performance. Seen in this way, a profession needs to be able to demonstrate proof of worth in a way that can be easily understood by a client so that authority will be awarded. To support these claims and demonstrate worth, the HRD literature places considerable attention on the importance of evaluating the impact and value of HRD work in organisations. The definition of training evaluation is debated and evolving with increased attention from the HRD academic community to find innovation in its efforts to evidence proof of worth (Saks & Burke-Smalley, 2014). For the purpose of this study, training evaluation is defined a systematic process of collecting data with the aim to determine the effectiveness and/or efficiency of training programs and to inform decisions about future training (Brown & Sitzmann, 2011).

This chapter has already discussed the ADDIE model (Allen, 2006), and its multiple variations, views Training Evaluation as one of the core stages to be addressed in effective training design that seeks to evaluate the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and provide insight into continuous improvement for future applications (Blanchard, Thacker, & Pichai, 2013). Kirkpatrick's four-level approach to training evaluations is broadly accepted as a standard model in use throughout the field of HRD, and HRD professionals frequently use Kirkpatrick's terminology as both a professional vocabulary and a rough taxonomy for an evaluation criterion (Alliger & Janak, 1989). Kirkpatrick's Hierarchical Model of Training Outcomes (1996) is a goal-oriented model that seeks to evaluate reactions, learning, behaviour, and results. The four levels explain the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of a training programme (Giangreco, Carugati, & Sebastiano, 2010). The model is conceptualised as interconnected where a trainee's satisfaction (reaction) has an impact on the inclination to learn, which in turn can drive a change in behaviour which generates organisational results.

Whilst other (less well known) training evaluation models have been developed, they follow a similar approach to levels or categories of evaluation, that when seen together seek to provide a means to evaluate training effectiveness. The Kraiger, Ford, and Salas (1993) model is based on three categories of learning outcomes and measures (cognitive, skill-based, affective). Kaufman & Keller (1994) developed five levels - Enabling and Reaction, Acquisition, Application, Organizational Outputs, and Societal Outcomes. Holton's (1996) model based on Kirkpatrick removed reaction as a first level, and focused on outcomes such as motivation to learn, perceptions of training, and transfer climate that links learning with individual and organisational performance.

A secondary category of evaluation models are finance based. Phillips (1996) introduced a finance-based variation to the Kirkpatrick 4 Level taxonomy by adding another level (the 'ultimate' level). This refers to the calculation of a return on investment (ROI). The purpose of the 'ultimate' level is to compare the Level 4 Results of Kirkpatrick's taxonomy with the costs of training, and thereby calculating a ROI. The model asks participants or their line managers to assign values to those results and to provide a confidence level ranging from 0 to 100% for the financial values. The model has been praised for raising awareness of the link between evaluation and ROI, and its application in empirical studies across diverse industry sectors and countries (van Rooij & Merkebu, 2015). Whilst there is a simplicity to the notion of perceived value and an attempt to validate the perception with the confidence rating, the 'four-plus-one' model has not been widely applied (Cheng & Hampson, 2008).

Evaluation models have been to source of debate within the HRD literature. Practitioner focused models, in particular Kirkpatrick's 4-Levels model, have been criticized for making assumptions about the relationship between training and job performance (Alliger & Janak, 1989) and for omitting the existence of personal and environmental factors that may affect HRD outcomes (Giangreco, Carugati, & Sebastiano, 2010), and the linear nature outcomes emerging over time in homogeneous ways (Joseph-Richard, Edwards & Hazlett (2021, p.188). There continues to be growing attention on measuring HRD work in organizations. Joseph-Richard, Edwards & Hazlett (2021) argue that it is important to know what the outcomes of HRD work are and when those outcomes emerge and become realised for organisations. In their study of leadership development programmes in the UK healthcare sector, development outcomes emerged at various points in time in a heterogeneous manner across cohorts of learners, and that time does not have uniform effects on the participants' experience of programme impact (Joseph-Richard, Edwards & Hazlett, 2021, p.188). In relation to understanding the complex nature of time on measuring individual and collective development, the authors highlight the theoretical gaps in the HRD evaluation models to be clear about "when and how often we should measure key variables and outcomes, and how to measure the 'correct' lag across the various types of programme outcomes" (Joseph-Richard, Edwards & Hazlett (2021, p.189).

ROI has been criticized for being retrospective and therefore unhelpful for forecasting purposes, failing to recognise the possible impact on customer behaviour and retention over time, and for excluding indicators that do not lend themselves to monetization (Joseph-Richard, Edwards & Hazlett, 2021). ROI models are also seen as subjective where the variables are often measured by self-report from a single source. Whilst a common practice in training research, this can be affected by method bias and measurement error (Saks & Burke, 2012). ROI models are also criticised for not taking into account factors such as customer satisfaction and employee job satisfaction that other authors argue do have an economic impact on business results (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2005; Wang & Wang, 2005). ROI models tend to focus on the training dimension of learning, with limited attention given to other forms of formal or informal learning that are also important forms of HRD work that have impact on an organisation's performance (Park & Jacobs, 2011). Joseph-Richard, Edwards & Hazlett (2021) draw attention to a lack of coherence in defining "impact," with definitions from accounting-based indicators to perceptual measures of value. A final critique in the literature highlights the limited empirical evidence validating the ROI models or the extent to which they have been adopted by HRD professionals in the field (van Rooij & Merkebu, 2015).

A further area of complexity in the HRD literature relates to what to measure. Training evaluation is closely associated with the concept of transfer of training which refers to the generalization of learning, trained skills and behaviours from the training environment to the work environment; the maintenance of skills and behaviours; and the length of time behaviour change is used on the job following any training (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Whilst it is acknowledged that training evaluation is necessary to determine if training has transferred, research on evaluation and transfer have been found to be conducted separately and seldom been linked (Saks & Burke, 2012). In their study that sought to link Kirkpatrick's model of training evaluation with measures of transfer of learning, Saks & Burke (2012) found that there is a link between the two measures discovering that organizations that report evaluating their training programs more often have a higher rate of transfer of training. Whilst this field of research seeks to promote awareness of transfer of training as 'proof of worth' the measurements of transfer of training remain a subjective estimate of any transfer rate (Saks & Burke, 2012, 2014). Like ROI models, measurement can be affected by perceptual bias, can be general and do not demonstrate how new skills are used on the job (Saks & Burke, 2014).

A further focus of research questions the capabilities and attitudes of HRD practitioners to be able to undertake the evaluation of training. Research from the CIPD (2016, 2018) investigated the status of measurement in UK organisations in relation to training evaluation. HRD practitioners acknowledged that where they have embraced business insights into their work, HRD functions are more likely to deliver greater value for money and improve leadership capabilities in organisations (CIPD, 2019). However, the CIPD (2016, p.15) found that the majority of HRD professionals are not collecting insights into the impact of learning within the organisation, with only 36% of respondents measuring specific business metrics when evaluating the effectiveness of learning.

A further key finding relates to the influence of technological change in organisations where the explosion of data within organisations that can support decision-making has triggered the emergence of a skills gap in data analysis amongst HRD professionals. In the survey, 96% of HRD professionals identified data analytics as a priority area for their professional development, and only 24% believing to have these skills in house (CIPD, 2019, p.11). Therefore, whilst data is increasingly available, and there is an acceptance that evaluation as a strategic feature of HRD practice is important in line with business metrics, the capability of the majority of HRD professionals has not kept up with the ability to engage with empirical work in demonstrating 'proof of worth'. The CIPD research identified the challenge for the profession is being able to adapt to such complexities. According to their research, the CIPD (2019, p.05) found that 48% of L&D practitioners are 'extremely concerned' with the lack of time they can spend on their own learning. A common concern is their capacity to undertake continuing professional development activities and the reality is that they invest limited amounts of time in their own development (CIPD, 2019, p.19). This focus on developing expertise and thereby enhance authority brings into focus the interrelated nature of HRD work. As the CIPD (2019, p.16) argues, “measuring learning transfer involves systemic thinking and vital analysis around whether learning needs are being accurately defined, who learning is aimed at and how well the learners are prepared and supported by manager once back in their workplace”.

Research has also found that HRD professionals report that they have limited control over the transfer of training. Wisshak & Barth (2021) explored the question of capabilities and responsibilities drawing on a sample of external HRD consultants and internal trainers. Whilst trainers felt responsible and capable of using techniques in the delivery of classroom training in training environment that were focused on promoting transfer of training, the study found that ultimately trainers acknowledged their limited control over the transfer of training once the participants re-entered the work environment. Trainers acknowledged that they had transfer barriers over both the trainees and the workplace, such as “involuntary training participation, lack of motivation to transfer, and insufficient time and opportunities to transfer” (Wisshak & Barth, 2021, p.222).

3.6.3 Dependent on Building Trust

So far, this section has explored the nature of HRD profession’s ability to earn and be awarded authority based on proof of worth. A final perspective in the HRD literature relates to the position of HRD in organisations that enables the profession to acquire authority by being recognised as partners for their standards of behaviour and the extent to which they delivered on their promises for ‘good work’. The HRD literature shows that achieving a strategic role in organisations through sustaining partner relationships with their stakeholders is yet to be realised. In his analysis of HRD partner relationships with line managers, Hamlin (2016, p.9) argues whilst most HRD professionals are, or wish to act as strategic partners in leading organizational change programmes, the contribution that HRD can make remains contested. In his view, HRD professionals will only gain more recognition and thereby authority if they are better able to transform the attitudes and capabilities of line managers towards engaging with HRD outcomes. A second challenge for HRD professionals is enhancing their trusted professional status with managers who will grant HRD a strategic business partner status by selling their potential (Hamlin, 2016).

According to Hamlin (2016), the HRD profession needs to focus on two developments within the profession. The first is a focus on evidence-based practice and use the findings of high-quality management-related and HRD-related research to inform, shape, and evaluate the effectiveness of their consultancy and change agency practice (Hamlin, 2016). The second is for the HRD academic community to incorporate evidence-based practice in the teaching of HRD related qualification programmes and in academic research projects (Hamlin, 2016). This focus on developing areas of core knowledge, behaviours and specialised HRD knowledge is reflected in the CIPD’s revised HR Profession Map. Hamlin’s argument however assumes that HRD practitioners are developed through formal higher education programmes and engaged in CPD through engagement with HRD scholars and scholarship.

3.7 Implications for this Study

This chapter has highlighted the rich and growing body of HRD knowledge drawn from both academic and professional body authors. Whilst the HRD literature has used qualitative methodologies and methods to advance understanding and develop theory, recently HRD authors have brought to light the underuse of qualitative perspectives published in HRD journals. Werner, Anderson & Nimon (2019) for example highlight that it was only in 2017 that the first qualitative study was published in the Human Resource Development Quarterly, with qualitative studies only making up 38% of a total of 47 articles published between 2016-2018. Cho, Grenier & Williams (2022, p.687) draw attention to the patterns across HRD journals still show a limited number of qualitative research published between 2015-2020 and with narrow methodological scope and reliant on the traditional approaches of generic qualitative inquiry, qualitative case study and phenomenology.

The use of qualitative methodologies and methods has been of interest to many disciplines in the social sciences, including the field of HRD (Lester, 2022). For disciplines such as HRD, the strength of qualitative research is seen in its usefulness for gaining a deeper understanding of social phenomena and the particularities of individuals, organizations, cultures and society through a thick description (Cho, Grenier & Williams, 2022, p.686). Qualitative research has also been highlighted in the HRD literature for its ability to explore the experiences of understudied groups in specific social contexts and allows the researcher to surface new insights (Richardson, O'Neil & Thorn, 2022).

This study contributes to the movement within the HRD literature that argues that qualitative methodologies and methods are vital for understanding how people across a range of contexts make sense of their everyday lives and social worlds (Cho, Grenier & Williams, 2022; Lester, 2022), and can be seen from the rise of special editions in the HRD journals that seek to promote this qualitative agenda. This agenda reflects the growing maturity of the HRD discipline which includes the need to consider innovative approaches that could complement or replace traditional approaches to offer "new ways of seeing" (Bansal et al., 2018, p.1189), creating closer associations within the field for identifiable qualitative methodologies, and leveraging old and new methodologies to advance theoretical understanding in the new contexts in which we all now live and work (Discetti & Anderson, 2022; Lester, 2022). Grenier, Williams & Cho (2022, p.755) argue, championing qualitative enquiry has the 'unique ability to aid researchers and practitioners in capturing and honouring participants' voices and experiences, and the meaning-making of individuals, teams, organizations and communities'.

This chapter has also highlighted the relative absence of HRD consultants in the existing academic and professional literature. Whilst there is growing interest from the literature of Human Resource Management in the professionalisation project of HRM and HRD roles (CIPD, 2019; Hamlin et al 2008; Pohler & Willness, 2014; Wright, 2008), HRD roles have tended to be absorbed under the wider HRM functions. Previous research into the function of HRD consultancy has mostly focused on individuals who deliver one of the three functions of HRD – coaching (Hamlin et al, 2008). For example, Gray (2011) explored how individuals define their professional identity, how this identity changes over time and the influence of professional bodies on coaching (Gray, 2011). However, Gray, Saunders, Curnow and Farrant (2015) found that 56% of coaches spend less than three days a week employed in coaching assignments with the remaining time spent in other functions such as training and consulting. Gray et al (2015) argue that developing a clear understanding of the identity of external HRD consultants will help identify the possible sources of tension within the discipline and will have implications for how the profession is understood socially and professionally in the future. There is gap in the literature for research designs that capture and honour their voices through the different means by which their stories are told in contemporary UK business settings. This study contributes to closing this gap by adopting a multi-method approach which will be explored in detail in Chapter Four.

3.8 Summary

Chapter Three has explored HRD through the lens of the professions from the perspectives of those who shape the knowledgebase and those who enact HRD in organisational contexts. The chapter has explored the professional status of HRD work from the perspective of expertise, autonomy, and authority. Whilst more is known about management consultancy, this study addresses calls for research into specialised forms of work such as consultancy that can help to better understand the relationship between institutional work and identity work (Muzio, Brock & Suddaby, 2013). Whilst there is growing interest from the literature of Human Resource Management in the professionalisation project of HRM and HRD roles generally, gaps in the literature focus on how professional status can enhance the quality of the contribution of practitioners in complex organisational decision making. This also helps to understand the nature and extent of their professional standing (CIPD, 2019; Hamlin et al 2008; Pohler & Willness, 2014; Wright, 2008). This builds on the recent refocused attention from the CIPD (2017, 2019) to promote HRM as a profession through a renewed articulation of professional identity and defining new professional standards of conduct for current members and future practitioners. This chapter has explored this discussion in relation to HRD consultancy. The interdisciplinary basis of HRD expertise has been highlighted as illustrative of the evolving and adaptive nature of HRD as a discipline whilst at the same time contested by some authors as a symbol of a weak profession.

This study builds on the limited attention in the literature of how HRD consultants engage with the symbols and discourses of expertise to engage clients and how they undertake HRD work in organisations. The extent to which these evolving perspectives in the academic circles as well as from professional bodies has an impact on how HRD consultancy acquires autonomy and authority is yet to be fully understood in the literature. This chapter did not seek to repeat the textual analysis of HRD definitions over the last 4 decades. Instead, this chapter used this discussion about the context and origins of these definitions to better able to understand the historical development of the HRD concept with the goal of exploring the nature of professional practice at the heart of HRD. This responds to the call for a focus on understanding HRD where knowledge is contextual and situated and where HRD research should focus on the narrative of practice (Dirkx, 2008, p.266) and to further how we understand their HRD professionalism and their professional activity (Ruona, 2016). In short, the presence of HRD consultants and an understanding how their work in HRD is difficult to determine in the literature. By exploring the HRD consultancy profession, this study helps to address this gap in knowledge by locating their interpretation of HRD practice and explore the possible sources of tension within the discipline leading to implications for how the profession is understood socially, professionally, and in relational to their complex organisational setting in the future (Gray et al, 2015; Lundgren et al, 2023).

Chapter Four will discuss the research design used in the thesis focusing on the benefits of the relativist, social constructionist approach adopted, and the relevance of Discourse and Reflexive Thematic Analysis to create meaning from the primary data collected to answer each of the research questions.

Chapter 4: Methodology

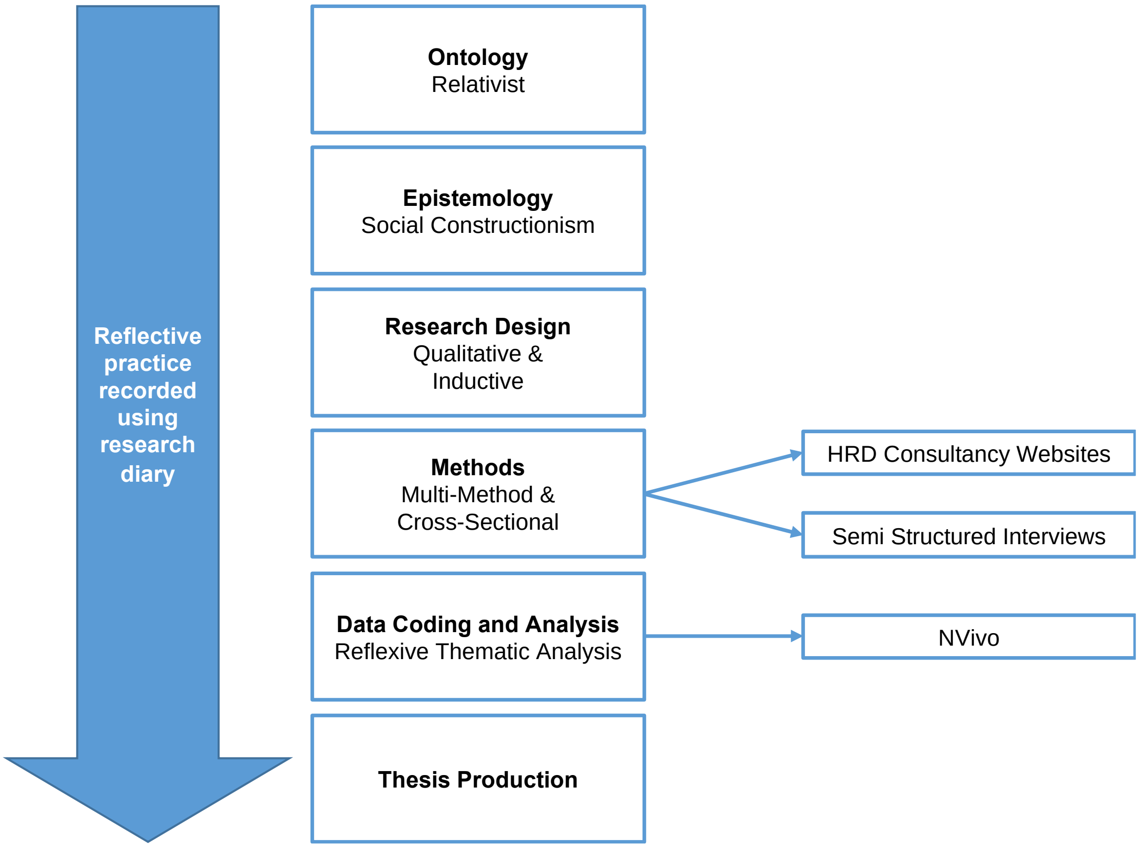
Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In Chapters Two and Three, I discussed the context for this study in relation to the body of knowledge in the literature of the Sociology of the Professions and Human Resource Development. In this chapter, I now turn my attention to the methodology and methods used to answer the research aim and questions for this study. The chapter will begin with the discussion and justification of the ontological and epistemological decisions in relation to the traditions within the literature as well as my own position and preferences as researcher/practitioner in the HRD consultancy field. The chapter then moves on to discuss the rationale behind the choice of multi method data sources and their relevance as a means of securing access to and generating thick data from hard to reach participants. This section is followed by an analysis and justification for the adoption of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) as the method by used to analyse the data collected and present my interpretation of data in relation to the three research questions. My intention in this chapter is to relate not just what I did but also how I engaged with the process of research in line with the deliberate, thoughtful and reflective research practice crucial to quality in RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The chapter concludes with a discussion on the research ethics considerations in undertaking this study, and a critical examination of the quality criteria applied to qualitative research in relation to this thesis. The decisions of each part of the research strategy and sequence are illustrated in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5

Methodology Selection and Sequence



4.2 Ontological and epistemological position

The ontological and epistemological assumptions in a research design influence the methodologies chosen by the researcher. Crotty (1998, p.10) asserts that ontology and epistemology sit together to inform a theoretical perspective that will embody a way of understanding ‘what is’ (ontology) with ‘what it means to know’ (epistemology). In the construction of research, ontological issues and epistemological issues tend to merge together (Crotty, 1998). Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson (2015) assert that the choices made by a researcher can be unconscious and naturally follow the traditions of research field. Developing an awareness of the philosophical assumptions, it is suggested, can increase the quality of research, and contribute to the creativity of the researcher (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

4.2.1 Ontological choice

An ontological perspective sets out a way of understanding the nature of being, the nature of reality, and how this may be perceived by individuals (Crotty, 1998, p10). In my approach to this study, therefore, there was an assumption to be made about the nature of the social reality that was to be investigated (Blaikie, 2007, p.12). Realists assume that there is one truth that does not change and which can be objectively measured. Once a truth has been discovered through research, it can be generalised and applied to other situations (Crotty, 1998). For Guba & Lincoln (1994, p108), realism is identified with objectivism where the researcher is positioned with objective detachment and value-free. In doing so, the researcher can discover 'how things really are' and that reality is out there (Gray, 2018). Relativists, however, assume that there are multiple realities and meanings which are shaped by individual contexts. Relativists also believe that there are multiple ways of accessing meanings (Gray, 2018). Realities therefore are moveable, evolving and changing. Realities can be local and specific in nature (although elements may be shared among individuals and cultures) and their construction will be dependent on the individuals or groups for their form and content (Bryman & Bell 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Once this assumption has been made, it will influence each choice to be made in the design of the study.

In my approach to this study, I adopted a relativist position as I assumed that the dimensions of professional status and professionalism are a social construct produced through social interaction, in a constant state of revision and where roles are constantly being negotiated amongst different actors. This position does not deny the existence HRD consultancy firms as identifiable entities (with names, company registrations, websites, client lists and products, and job descriptions) or the existence of professional frameworks and codes of practice set out by professional bodies. However, I assumed that there are multiple meanings which have been created through the active role that individual actors play in constructing their realities in different evolving social settings of HRD consultancy work (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In adopting a relativist approach, I am assuming that realities are constructed subjectively, may sometimes be conflicting, and will vary according to time and place and often displayed through the language used (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.34).

Relativism fits with one of the dominant perspectives in the HRD literature discussed in Chapter Three which views HRD as a fluid, ambiguous discipline that is characterized by ongoing debates about its identity and the identity of its practitioners. For example, the literature of HRD is characterized by the debate about the identity of HRD as ambiguous and evolving (Swanson, 1995; McLean 1998; Hamlin & Stewart, 2011; Wang et al, 2017) or whether HRD can or should be defined (Lee, 2001), or whether HRD is better understood by how problems are approached (Swanson & Holton, 2001). When researchers have sought to define the identity of HRD practitioners, they have found individuals with multiple identities (Clegg, Rhodes & Kornberger, 2003, 2005), developed over time (Gray 2011; Gray, Saunders, Curnow & Farrant, 2015), and led by inconsistent communities of practice and affiliation with no shared language of research (McLean & Lee, 2016) or oversight on standards outside of national boundaries (Poell, 2015).

Relativism also fits with the literature discussed in Chapter Two related to professions like management consultancy with no unifying identity who become reliant on the subjective opinions of others to determine the success of a consultant. Subjectivity therefore places a focus on understanding the nature of contextual techniques such as self-representation rather than external validation (Gross & Kieser, 2006).

Acknowledging the subjectivity of this relativist lens, therefore, requires an openness about the researcher's context, positionality, or standpoint, and the possible effect of this on the research process and outcomes (Anderson, 2017a, p.129). This, it is suggested by Anderson (2017a), is one of the ten criteria for evaluating qualitative research within HRD. The nature of my context as a researcher and its influence on the research design will be explored in more detail in this chapter.

4.2.2 Epistemological choice

According to Crotty (1998, p.03) epistemology is defined as the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology. An epistemology provides a philosophical grounding for establishing what kinds of knowledge are possible - what can be known - and criteria for deciding how knowledge can be judged to be adequate and legitimate (Blaikie, 2007, p.18). In the social sciences, epistemologies help researchers to answer the question: 'How can social reality be known?' and inform decisions about which scientific procedures produce reliable social scientific knowledge when enquiring into the nature of the world (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). There is some criticism in the literature about the accuracy of distinctions made by researchers between epistemology and ontology because the nature of related issues tends to emerge together making it difficult for writers to conceptually keep the two apart (Crotty, 1998, p.10).

One dominant epistemological paradigm in the social sciences has been positivism with its main argument that the social world is external to the researcher, and its properties can be measured objectively and directly through observation (Easterby-Smith et al, 2021; Gray, 2018). Originating in the views of the nineteenth-century French philosopher Comte in 1853, researchers working in a positivist paradigm adopt the position that knowledge is of significance if it is based on observations of an external reality and the result of empirical verification (Easterby-Smith et al, 2021). The main philosophical assumptions in this paradigm are that the observer is independent of what it being observed, the choice of what and how to study can be determined by objective criteria, the aim of any research is to identify causal explanations, research is led by hypothesising. Once data are acquired, observations will support or falsify hypotheses, and concepts need to be defined to be measured quantitatively, inferences can be generalised about a wider population and regularities in social behaviour identified by making comparisons of variations across different samples (Easterby-Smith et al, 2021, p.119).

Positivistic paradigms and the use of quantitative approaches have a dominant presence in HRD research (Li, 2023). However, as Lynham (2000) argued, whilst positivist paradigms have been instrumental in the early theory building imperative amongst the HRD research community, the associated assumptions become problematic when seeking to understand the subjective views of social and organisational phenomena. Twenty years on, Sambrook (2021) continues the criticism of the dominance of the use of a positivistic paradigm and argues that HRD research needs to be more clearly situated in its political and economic context and therefore requires a more inclusive, interdisciplinary approach. For Sambrook (2021, p.479), the limitation of a positivist paradigm in HRD research is that it largely ignores contextual complexity, where the plurality of stakeholder interests generates tensions and contradictions associated with conflict, power, and employee voice.

Another of the dominant epistemologies in the social sciences is constructionism (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2018). In contrast to positivism and its objective lens, social constructionism is associated with the creation of knowledge as the outcome of people making sense of their encounters with the physical world and with other people (Gray, 2018). While constructionism and rationalism share the view that social reality is a structure of ideas, they differ in the source of these ideas. For rationalism, the source lies in the universal innate structures of mind. For constructionists, the source is the product of the intersubjective, meaning-giving activity of human beings in their everyday lives. These ideas cannot be innate, because different cultures or communities are likely to have different constructions of social reality (Gray, 2018). A constructionist epistemology therefore produces relative knowledge. Consistent with this epistemological approach, my expectation was that I would not find one single truth but rather a plurality of truths drawn from different constructions of reality (Blaikie, 2007). A second feature of this epistemology that I align with is that meaning is not discovered but constructed, and the construction is carried out by different human beings involved in this study as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998).

Adopting a social constructionist approach accepts that there is no theory-free observation or knowledge. The activities involved in constructing knowledge occur against the background of shared interpretations practices and language; they occur within our historical and cultural ways of being (Blaikie, 2007). In this study, my selection of epistemology was informed by the relationship between myself as the researcher and the knowledge about the conceptualisation of the professions and professionalism. In contrast to other epistemological choices, rather than seeing the profession as a ‘thing’ with intrinsic meaning (objectivism) or imposing meaning (subjectivism), my belief was that knowledge was to be constructed and that I would play an active role in its creation through the choice of research questions and the choice of data to be collected to answer each question (Blaikie, 2007, p.19).

As this study is about social enquiry, I adopted social constructionism as a process of meaning-giving as a social activity that creates shared knowledge through a process that is social (Blaikie, 2007). Social constructionism is defined by Crotty (1998, p.42) as ‘the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context". The 'social' in social constructionism is not about the kind of object that has meaning but refers to the mode of meaning generation, therefore collective generation and transmission of meaning becomes the focus (Crotty, 1998). This approach contrasts with constructivism which refers to the process of meaning-giving activity of the individual mind and drawing on cognitive processes (Blaikie, 2007). Social constructionism can be applied to both social actors and social scientists. My assumption was that HRD consultants and their clients are social actors who socially construct their reality within each unique client organisation context. My intention behind this study was to explore how HRD consultants and clients together conceptualize and interpret their own actions and experiences, the actions of others, and the social situations where HRD work is carried out (Blaikie, 2007). From this perspective, my role as researcher is to socially construct my interpretation of the different social actors' realities, their conceptions and interpretations of the actions of social actors and of social situations (Blaikie, 2007).

A social constructionist approach recognises my assumptions about the role of the researcher being actively engaged in the construction meaning from the social actors who take part in the study as well as construct a relationship between this knowledge with existing understandings (Crotty, 1998). A social constructionist position places place an emphasis on understanding the roles of HRD professionals in interpreting local conditions and strategies as well as global strategies (Garavan & Carbery, 2012). In contrast to positivist epistemologies, social constructionism allows for the researcher to achieve the goal from contemporary HRD research in creating a better understanding of contextual complexity of HRD practice, exploring the plurality of stakeholder perspectives and interests, and can be used to generate an understanding of tensions and contradictions associated with conflict, power, and employee voice (Sambrook, 2021). To do this, I acknowledge my influence on the research by drawing on my familiarity with HRD contexts from my previous HRD career, explored later in this chapter in section 4.11. From a social constructionist position, research has sought to uncover the evolving nature of HRD consultant practitioner business models and identities by exploring their individual stories and their future plans (Clegg et al, 2003, 2005). From the management and HRM consulting literature, the understanding of social action is reflected in exploring the consulting relationship as dynamic and interactive with a series of phases from dependence, counter dependence to interdependence (Glasser, 2002). Avakian, Clark & Roberts (2010) argue that the inter-organizational and interpersonal relationships between consultant and client involve a host of complex, social dynamics. A social constructionist position therefore focuses attention on the nature of relationships is a complex feature of the consulting practice and relevant to gaining an in-depth understanding of the relational frameworks used to structure the dynamic nature of consultant-client expectations.

4.3 Qualitative Strategies of Enquiry

This study adopts a qualitative research strategy to focus on how individuals and groups observe their realities and enable the accumulation of different perspectives from the varieties of different perspectives shared about the nature of their professional work context (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Qualitative research allows for the researcher to study human behaviour in its context and the associated experiences that cannot be measured through quantitative strategies (Saunders et al, 2011). In the social sciences, qualitative research is more traditionally associated with the ways of describing and interpreting data, and thereby support the development of theory building (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Consistent with the aims of the social constructionist approach adopted, qualitative research is able to place emphasis on the specific, the local, and the particular to more closely represent the lived experience of those being studied and in this study the lived experience of HRD consultants (Torraco, 2002, p.362). Qualitative research has evolved over time and has been acknowledged for its flexible, emergent characteristics whilst retaining its credibility as a systematic research strategy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). These features of qualitative research were beneficial to achieve my research questions set out in Chapter 1.8 to explore the meaning and constructions of professional status and professionalism.

In contrast to quantitative research strategies, qualitative research designs, including textual analysis of organisational documentation and the use of semi structured interviews, allows for the ability to research a subject in depth resulting in rich, thick, and meaningful data that involves rich descriptions and is sensitive to the subtleties and situated nuances (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Saunders & Townsend, 2016). Qualitative research has some considerable variability in the approaches to data collection which allows the researcher to adapt their approach in different environments and contexts where the particular subject naturally takes places (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Different qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews provide the flexibility to allow for participants to depart from any schedule or pre-determined guide to allow for the participant to engage with the subject in unforeseen and possibly more significant ways (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Consistent with the social constructionist approach adopted, social meaning from participants can then be generated as the product of the intersubjective, meaning-giving activity of human beings in their everyday lives (Gray, 2018). Organisational documentation and semi structured interviews, for example, provide the means to identify how meaning is communicated and interpreted by human beings. The use of a humanistic and literary focus often starts and ends with words which allows the researcher to illustrate their understanding and describing of meanings from the real-life interactions between researcher and participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Through the representation of the data in this form, such as websites and quotes from semi structured interviews, the social constructionist researcher remains visible and self-declared during the process of research so that it is clear when the researcher's own voice is represented and when the voices of others are put forward (Torraco, 2002). Qualitative research strategies therefore value personal involvement and partiality through an understanding of the importance of reflexivity that comes from an active role of the researcher in the analysis of types of data such as organisational documentation and semi structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2016).

4.4 Inductive Approach

Because this study is concerned with the exploration of the perceptions, experiences and constructions of different HRD consultancies, consultants and clients, I chose to adopt an inductive approach. This was more relevant to open up space to explore, reflect and construct meaning from the meanings in the data. Induction is also deemed to be more appropriate where the phenomenon in question is of a subjective nature in contrast to a deductive approach seeking to impose an a priori frame of reference on the phenomena in search of explanations (Johnston, 2014). Induction was a more relevant choice for inquiry than a deductive approach because I did not believe a conceptual or theoretical model could be constructed prior to observation and tested through facts in a cognitively accessible world (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Given my assumptions and beliefs about HRD and the consultancy sector to be fluid and ambiguous, my aim from the study was not to establish explanatory, causal relationships between phenomena but rather to adopt an exploratory approach which permits an understanding of the data for theory development from which further investigations can be made (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012; Torraco, 2002).

Adopting an inductive approach does not necessarily mean ‘pure induction’ without pre-existing knowledge because the knowledge of the field cannot be forgotten and ignored (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). Both induction and deduction are also reliant on data as the central element in social research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). While this study is inductive in its approach, I cannot deny that my stance could be influenced by existing concepts and ideas derived from the literature during my studies, my own professional experience in HRD, and my personal beliefs built up over time (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The relationship between theory and data therefore is a complex one (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). Research in HRD is argued by Hamlin (2015) to be a circular process where existing knowledge established a baseline for empirical research to begin, the results feedback to practitioners and academics to inform, shape and critically evaluate the way they practice, and thus becomes part of the existing body of knowledge.

4.5 Methods for collecting qualitative data

The selection of data collection methods needed to reflect the inductive, exploratory, and qualitative nature of inquiry of this study. In spite of the dominance of certain approaches, Anderson (2017a, p.126) argues that 'the term qualitative research in HRD does not represent a monolithic, agreed upon approach; rather, it is populated by a multitude of perspectives and voices'. Grenier, Williams & Cho (2022, p.760) draw attention to three considerations to acknowledge in my approach to data collection methods. The first is how to design methods to bring into the foreground the different participant voices; the second is how to reflect the cultural context of participants; and the third is how such choices promote meaningful understanding of what happens in organizations. For this study, an additional consideration was the nature of access to consultants who are categorised as hard to reach participants (Karjalainen, Niemistö & Hearn, 2015).

One option considered was ethnography as a qualitative method which uses a variety of techniques to collect data (Brewer, 2004). This method of research is defined as "the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally" (Brewer, 2000, p.10). Adopting ethnography would be consistent with the inductive approach adopted in this study and the social constructionist position where the researcher uses socially acquired and shared knowledge to understand the observed patterns of human activity. Adopting this approach seeks to draw meaning from the way people behave and that it depends on the social context where work takes place. As such, researchers observe their participants as it occurs in natural settings to meet research aims (Brewer, 2004). The researcher's focus is the exploration of the social meanings of people in the setting by their close involvement in the field (Brewer, 2004, p.313) and uncovering insider knowledge and actual goings-on (Hammersley & Atkinson 2019). Whilst these benefits align with my philosophical position and research aims, the adoption of ethnography as a method assumes access for the researcher to observe participants in their natural setting. One of the challenges that is acknowledged in the management consulting and HRD literature is the problem of securing access to data for sensitive subjects and hard to reach professions (Karjalainen, Niemistö & Hearn, 2015). Ethnography therefore assumes access to being granted to the secretive and sensitive worlds of consultants and their work with clients (Clark & Salaman, 1996).

To address these considerations, I chose to adopt a multi method approach which used a cross sectional time horizon. The methods adopted are the use of HRD consultancy websites and semi-structured interviews as complementary data collection methods. These will be discussed in Chapter 4.5.1 and 4.5.2 below.

4.5.1 Websites

In the literature, there is growing tradition of the use of organisational websites as a site for researchers to access data about organisational identity, culture and values, and its relationships to its current and future customers base (Mashiah, 2021; Simões, Singh, Perin, 2015; Windscheid et al, 2018). Whilst this is considered to be a tradition, very few papers seek to define the term website. Feeney & Brown's (2017, p.62) definition from their research into the use of websites for USA government suggests websites are 'a form of two-way information communication technology (ICT) that supports [organisational] operations, engage [customers], and provide [consulting] services.' Data collected from websites is considered to be rich for researchers by analysing different features of websites.

Sillince & Brown (2009, pp.1835-36) determined five benefits for researchers when investigating professional identity which I believe have relevance for my study of 'hard to reach' consultants:

1. Allows insight into the distinctiveness of organizations with insights into genre rules, situational requirements, substantive and stylistic characteristics and organizing principles
2. Illustrate how organizations seek to project their identity or identities to different audiences
3. Provide access to appropriate amounts of text-based data that can be analysed
4. Give potential examples of the dilemmas that organizations face in being able to match their strategic (commercial) purpose with the fulfilling the needs of their audience (clients)
5. For organizations with legitimacy at the core of their identity and authority to act, websites would be a relevant place to find data.

The work of Sillince and Brown (2009) was limited to the investigation of legitimacy. Whilst this provides insight to a relevant dimension of the professions, this study aims to extend the use of websites to explore the representation of a wider set of professional dimensions that may be represented by HRD consultancies, as well as explore how ‘professionalism’ is constructed in its attempt to attract new client relationships (Wylie et al 2014).

In a later study into SMEs by Gray et al (2014) websites are defined as a form of social media considered to be important for SMEs to generate social capital. Findings from this study found that having a website was also considered to be of at least some importance to the business’s success by 86% of SMEs, over 40% of SMEs considering this extremely important. In this context websites were found to be seen as an important feature of SME networks, and actively used to establish and maintain a ‘‘community of people’ of customers, associates, and former employees. The importance of such a network was found to be useful to connect with those who may join in with a new business proposal or be used to buy in external expertise (Gray & Saunders, 2014).

Drawing on arguments for the greater use of online data sources, for the purpose of this study I conceptualise HRD consultancy websites to be developed and used as social, interactive, and a personal form of communication that provides constructed meaning about the nature of HRD and the professional status of consultants between consulting firm and their clients (Kozinets, 2019). Websites also inform an important understanding of HRD consultancy as one of only a few publicly available sources which contain an articulation of what HRD consultancy work involves and developed by HRD consultancies to communicate this meaning to clients. Thus, I argue that HRD consultancy websites have a number of benefits for their use, and are a relevant source of data to answer the research questions of this study. Drawing on my synthesis of the literature from previous studies who use websites as a data source, and from the literature that seeks to understand the qualities of HRD profession practice, I developed six criteria to be applied to support the relevance of websites in this study. These criteria are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

Benefits of HRD Consultancy Websites as Sources of Data

Websites as Rich Sources of Data	**Relevance to this study**
Functional	Definition of HRD as a set of functions and services that are provided by external consultants to treat client needs (Gray et al, 2015; Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie, 2009).
Illustrative	A means by which information asymmetry between buyer (client) and seller (consultant) can be closed to build trust due to the ambiguous nature of consultancy work (Bennett & Robson, 1999).
Reflective	Provides individual consultant voices that demonstrate introspection and critical reflective practice used to make sense of their own practice, demonstrate professional growth and promote the value of HRD in organisations (Koukpaki & Adams, 2020).
Personal	HRD professional identity as a means of becoming a HRD professional as socially constructed through network processes with clients, peers and stakeholders (Evans, 2019).
Dynamic	Requires regular updating and careful use of specific language to promote visitor satisfaction and the likelihood of being found through search engines (Gray et al, 2014).
Strategic	Considered and planned method of generating social capital but cannot work as stand-alone strategy and needs to be connected with face-to-face contact as a complementary approach (Gray & Saunders, 2014).

There are limitations to the use of websites. Websites as a form of organizational documents, it is suggested, are likely to be written by author(s) who have a particular message or point of view to communicate (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The different authors and their texts may not provide consistent information and present one organization as having multiple identities (Sillince & Brown, 2009). Those documents that are in the public domain therefore may have different meanings or reflect different realities depending on the context of the individual reader for example if they internal or external to the organization (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.554).

Whilst being aware of limitations, I argue that from a social constructionist position, I acknowledge that any interpretations from websites as a form of organizational document are likely to be product of the bias of the researcher at that point in time. Atkinson & Coffrey (2004) for example argue that organizational documents need to be viewed from 2 perspectives – the context where they were produced and their intended or implied reader. The authors argue that documents are written with a distinctive purpose which is to communicate impressions not necessarily realities. The authors also argue that documents cannot be understood to represent a single reality of how an organization operates or 'transparent representations' of a social reality. From this position, this provides rich sources of data that provide opportunities to explore how different actors perceive their organisations, bring out the role of subcultures in organizations, and explore the nature of representativeness of data (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

4.5.2 Semi structured interviews

A second complementary data collection method adopted in this study is the use of semi-structured interviews. An interview as a research method is defined as a verbal exchange in which one person, the interviewer, seeks to acquire information and gain an understanding of another person, the interviewee (Gray, 2018, p.378). The choice of interviews is consistent with the ontological and epistemological position taken in this study that places the emphasis on meaning-making from the lived experiences of individuals within their context. To some extent, the choice of interviews is also found to be influenced by the personal preference of the researcher and their level of comfort within qualitative paradigms (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). In Seidman's (2013, p.07) text on qualitative interviews, I connected with his opening statement that 'I interview because I am interested in other people's stories… stories are a way of knowing'. Choosing interviews was connected to my humanist interest in the lived experience of HRD consultants and clients, and the meaning that they make from that experience (Gray, 2018). Seidman (2013, p.08) sees that at the very heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their experience through language. Seeing interviews as the means for participants to share their experience through the stories of their experience was an important determinant in my selection of the method and the design of the interview. As Seidman (2013, p.07) points out, an interview has relevance in empirical research because it is an active ‘process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience’.

Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to take a personalized approach to each participant by asking specific questions that may not have been anticipated at the start of the interview, and probe unique experiences to better understand a particular feature of their story in their context (Gray, 2018; Rabionet, 2011). This was particularly important in reflecting the different possible profiles of participants and the possible similarities/differences between consultant and client roles. A second benefit to the decision to use semi-structured interviews was the ability to probe views and opinions held by participants, and to encourage participants to expand on their answers to help explore subjective meanings that the participants create from different ideas or events in their professional practice (Gray, 2018). A third benefit from the use of semi-structured was the ability to collect ‘thick’ data (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Cho, Grenier & Williams, 2022; Saunders & Townsend, 2016) by encouraging participants to reflect on the nature of the question to themselves as professionals, and explore their experiences and beliefs about such questions in different contexts.

There are limitations associated with semi-structured interviews which I needed to be conscious of to strengthen validity by ensuring openness and the ability to collect thick data. As discussed above, rapport and trust were needed to be built for the participants to feel able to express themselves (Gray, 2018), and be comfortable with sharing confidential stories or client sensitive information (Karjalainen, Niemistö & Hearn, 2015). This would require sufficient time to be allocated to the interview and specific interviewing skills to prompt the participant to illustrate and expand on their responses to ensure stories could be understood. A second limitation with semi-structured interviews is that given its storytelling and participant-led nature, participants may lead the interview into confidential or distressing areas during the interview or lead the participant to share important reflections once the recording had stopped (Pascoe Leahy, 2022). Whilst eliciting stories is a benefit for adopting this approach, this requires careful listening, observing body language, and a focus on research ethics to ensure that no harm is experienced by the participant. Pasco Leahy (2022) also argues that participants continue to be engaged in these situations when they feel that their interviews serve a larger purpose. The use of a reflective diary was adopted to record interview experiences and capture the in-between moments which inform my own reflections on each interview experience (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019; Pascoe Leahy, 2022). My reflections have been used as part of my reflexive statement discussed later in Chapter 4.7.

A final limitation acknowledged in the literature is time-consuming nature of the process including the efforts to secure relevant participants, the scheduling of interview around other commitments and the completion of interviews. Whilst time commitments were carefully planned in this study, I was able to adopt several strategies to secure participants including the use of senior sponsors, personal contact by phone, email and in networking events to engage participants in the purpose of the study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). I also found that participants could be secured by clarifying that the focus would be on understanding successful practices in organisations. This seemed to appeal to the participants' preference for storytelling about career achievements. On reflection, promoting the opportunity for individuals to talk about themselves, their practice and their successes seemed to be the 'hook' that engaged their enthusiasm to take part. Given my own significant experience in interviewing (recruitment and professional development) in organisations, I was also able to manage the process and no ethical issues were identified or evident in the process.

4.5.3 Designing the interview schedule

Given the discussion above about the importance of setting the context and establishing a feeling of safety in the interview, a first consideration was to ensure that the interview had a clear introduction. Using the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 10 & 11), I introduced the purpose of the research, my role as researcher in the study, the different areas that the interview would cover, and securing their permission to record the interview (recordings could be stopped on their request). Each participant and I signed the Informed Consent forms before the interview began (Appendix 12 & 13). Each interview was scheduled to work around the diary commitments of the participants so that they were in a location which was quiet and confidential and without distractions from work deadlines or demands from colleagues (Karjalainen, Niemistö & Hearn, 2015). This meant that interviews took place at my work location in the City of London, in the offices of HRD consultants, and online using Skype, Zoom and Microsoft Teams, and on one occasion over the phone. Reflecting on each interview in the research diary, I considered the possible impact of different locations and mediums in relation to the level of openness or detail included in the responses. No significant difference was noted in the level of openness or detailed nature of responses suggesting an ease with which participants could engage with the study across multiple locations and media (Nadin & Cassell, 2006).

To maintain a balance between storytelling and answering the research questions, I developed an interview guide that created a structure to the interview but which also provided the flexibility that a conversational style interview would need (Appendix 8). My intention was to give space for participants to reflect on the questions in relation to their experience and unique contexts, as well as provide space for me as researcher to pursue participants' ideas as they developed. The interview guide therefore facilitated 'knowledge as conversational' in the exchange with participants, where discourse and negotiation could be achieved about the meaning of their lived experiences in their contexts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.54). Allowing each interview to be guided by participant reflections and priorities in relation their identity, practice and relations with others was particularly relevant to explore how participants intersubjectively and relationally constructed themselves, their relationships, and the different organisational contexts through discourse (Cunliffe, 2008). However, this did not mean that interviews were non-directive such that interviews meandered and flowed with a life of their own. I was as much a co-constructor of knowledge as well as guide and timekeeper to ensure that participants time was respected, and each of the interview areas were explored. As such, the flexibility and structure allowed each interview to achieve the features of qualitative interviews where knowledge is produced by human interaction that is relational, contextual, linguistic, narrative, and pragmatic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.54).

The interview guide was developed with questions that explored perceptions, experiences and beliefs, and developed with close alignment to each research question (Appendix 8). Whilst the study is positioned as inductive, the questions were developed with awareness of pre-existing knowledge following an initial review of the literature as well as drawing on my own experience in HRD consulting (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Questions were adapted for relevance to the constructions of HRD consultant professional status from the perspective of the consultant or from the perspective of clients of HRD consultants depending on who was being interviewed. The questions were clustered around the following conversational topics:

- Background to you and your role in HRD
- Selecting a HRD Consultancy and Consultant
- Working with a HRD Consultancy and Consultant
- Results from working with a HRD Consultancy and Consultant
- The future outlook for HRD Consultancy and Consultant

Each interview began with Question 1 which asked the participant to provide a short biography of their career and their involvement in HRD work in organisations. The answers to this question provided routes into further questions from the interview guide but not necessarily in a sequential order. The interview guide was structured around the accepted stages of a consulting cycle which starts from entry into a new client organisation, the selection of consultant and towards consultants becoming embedded within a client organisation. A final set of questions were added which focused on their perspectives on the future of the profession.

Conducting the interview, I was mindful of Kvale & Brinkman's (2009, p.164) six quality criteria for a semi structured interview. Whilst the authors acknowledge that the perfect interview and interviewee are unattainable, the criteria provided a guideline for me as an experienced interviewer to ensure that interaction was developed in the interview and that the data collected could be analysed appropriately by the method to be adopted in this study (to be explained later in this chapter). My approach to planning the interviews is set out in Table 5.

Table 5

Application of 6 Quality Criteria for Semi-Structured Interviews

Quality Criteria **Kvale & Brinkman (2009)**	**My Approach to Planning Interviews**
Spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant answers from the interviewee	I used rapport building before the start of the interview to establish a level of comfort and trust in the confidentiality of the interview, and establish the conversational approach to be used.
Short interviewer questions and longer interviewee answers	I made a conscious decision to set the context of my interest in the question before asking the question.
Using follow up questions and clarifying meanings of the relevant aspects of the answers	I actively used the nature of the semi-structured interview to use follow up questions such as ‘why is that’, ‘what is that like’ and ‘can you give me another example.’
The interview being interpreted throughout the interview	The use summarizing and questions ‘is that what it is like for you.’
The interviewer attempting to verify his interpretations of the answers during the interview	I used summarizing and checking if this ‘is that what it is like for you.’
The interview being “self reported,” as stories without the need for further explanation	I was consciously using verbal and non-verbal prompts such as eye contact, nodding, ‘ok’ to encourage storytelling.

Each interview was recorded digitally to allow me to concentrate on the process of listening, interpreting and re-focusing the interview (Gray, 2018). As part of the research ethics, I made sure that the use of the recording devices was explained, why the recording was being made and how I was going to be use the recording in the study (Willig, 2008). Given the importance of the recording, and being mindful of the possible issues with recording quality, I adopted to use two devices. On more than one occasion, the use of a back-up was useful where devices encountered issues with recordings and the quality of the sound reproduction could not be assured (Gray, 2018). I decided not to use note making during the interview to prevent any distraction in the interview by myself or the interviewee. I wanted to avoid the risk that note making would interfere with eye contact and non-verbal communication, and would negatively impact the development of rapport (Gray, 2018). Each recording was turned into a verbatim transcript. Whilst I recognise that an interview transcript can never be the mirror image of the interview, the use of verbatim transcripts was consistent with my epistemological position that sees the text as ‘a manifestation of available discursive resources that the interviewee is drawing upon to construct a particular version of events’ (Willig, 2008, p.10) that are subsequently constructed by the researcher into meaning.

4.6 Sampling and sample size

The careful sampling of data sources and participants is a key component in the design of this study. In qualitative research, the sample selection has a profound impact on the quality of the research (Gray, 2018). Sampling design also needs to be aligned to the social constructionist epistemological position in this study. Purposive sampling was adopted in this study defined as ‘a form of non-probability sampling design where the criteria for inclusion in a sample are defined, and entities are first screened to see whether they meet the criteria for inclusion; those entities that meet the criteria are included in the sample’ (Easterby-Smith et al, 2021, p.169). In adopting this approach, I recognise that I had a degree of influence over who will provide the best perspectives toward answering the research questions before selecting sources and inviting participants (Gray, 2018). Whilst purposive sampling has influence over the sample, I was aware that this could also create a limitation to the quality of the study such that I might overlook a key characteristic in the selection criteria or that there may be a subconscious bias in the selection of the sample (Gray, 2018). To address this possible limitation, a set of criteria for both sources of data was developed to guide the selection. The criteria were informed by a combination of previous review of the literature as well as my own experience of working with HRD consultants in different contexts.

The literature pointed to the difficulties of accessing consultants in talking about their practice and the secretive nature of their tactics with clients (Garavan & MacKenzie, 2015). I therefore chose to adopt multiple purposive techniques in line with other studies using hard to reach participants and to reflect the complexities of the issues being examined (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p.83). Although a probability sampling approach has benefits for studies to be precise about the relationship between a sample and the population from which the sample is drawn, a non-probability sampling approach was considered more suitable both in terms of the exploratory nature of the study and enabling access to hard to reach participants (Easterby-Smith et al, 2021). Snowball sampling was one technique that addressed the problem of ensuring an adequate sample of hard-to-reach people to achieve a large enough sample size (Easterby-Smith et al, 2021, p.170). Snowball sampling was used with participants who met the criteria for inclusion in the study and subsequently took part in the interviews. At the end of the interview, each participant was asked if they had contacts who also fit the eligibility criteria. This method was identified as suitable where individuals are rare and it is hard to identify who belongs to the population (Easterby-Smith et al, 2021).

Qualitative research often involves producing large amounts of raw data from small sample sizes because the aim is to provide an in-depth analysis that is focused on explanation, rather than generalization (Gray, 2018). According to Saunders (2012) the number of participants in a qualitative study is a function of the relationship between the research aim and the sampling technique used. Although clear rules are available for probability samples, this is not the case for non-probability samples. Whilst authors have sought to establish guidance on likely numbers (Cresswell, 2007; Guest et al, 2006; Saunders, 2012), sample size is a complex and debated topic with no common agreement about what makes an ideal number. The issue of a suitable sample size for non-probability samples is characterised in the literature to appear ambiguous (Saunders, 2012) and 'tricky' (Braun & Clarke, 2021) with no hard and fast rules. As a researcher, I was also aware of the balance required between ideal sample size (consistent with the purpose, analytic orientation and theoretical underpinning) with the practical (time, norms, and expectation of the research field) whilst establishing my sampling strategy (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Robinson, 2014). Further considerations included the data type, the volume of data and the richness of each data item, as well as the homogeneous and heterogeneous nature of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

4.6.1 Sample selection and size – websites

Chapter One discussed the ambiguous and fluid field of HRD consultancy field. This was evident in the difficulty of finding a definitive list of HRD consulting firms. The search was completed using three different methods. A first method was the use of an internet search. Internet searches have been used by Clegg et al (2003) to create a definitive list of 93 Business Coaches in Australia. The authors, however, fail to include how they established their search criteria or what search engines were used to complete the search – and therefore does not provide a repeatable design (Gray, 2018). Scanning individual results from across the different searches, I began to draw some conclusions about the utility of this

- firms that appear on searches use multiple terms and descriptions of functions including Learning & Development, Organisation Development and Coaching, and not necessarily HRD
- firms listed include those who mix HRD with HRM work
- firm size and activity are not always obvious or provided
- firms listed include large consulting firms who have HRD consulting as one of many consulting specialisms
- individuals appear on lists as well as firms demonstrating the extremes in scale and complexity within the industry
- firms and individual appearance on list are not always location specific i.e. UK firms and individuals appear on US hosted lists
- there are a variety of ways in which firms can appear on a list. For example, firms can self-nominate, firms can pay to be listed, firms appear as award winners, and there are closed lists only available to paying users or existing members of associations (including paid for memberships)

The results are detailed in Table 5 below. The conclusion from this method was that it was not possible to identify a manageable, transparent, and practical list to be used for the purpose of this study.

Table 6

Search Engine Results for a List of HRD Consulting Firms

Method One - Using Google.com search engine
Search words: list of learning and development consulting firms Search Engine: Google.com Date: 21 October 2017 Results: About 13,300,000 results (0.97 seconds) Search words: list of HRD consulting firms Search Engine: Google.com Date: 21 October 2017 Results: About 911,000 results (0.88 seconds) Search words: list of Human Resource Development consulting firms Search Engine: Google.com Date: 21 October 2017 Results: About 15,600,000 results (1.07 seconds) Search words: list of Human Resource Development consultants Search Engine: Google.com Date: 21 October 2017 About 14,300,000 results (0.78 seconds)

A second method considered was to use an internal list held by a CEO of a multinational SME HRD consultancy from my professional network. The list was produced by one multinational corporation as part of the due diligence for the purchase of the multinational SME HRD consultancy. This method held a list of 29 HRD consultancies who were identified as competitors based on a 4-point criteria. The use of this kind of list is suggested in the study by Porac et al (1995) and cited by Clegg et al (2003) as a credible source of defining a sample. The authors argued that an industry is defined by identifying the socially constructed knowledge structures shared amongst key stakeholders (Clegg et al, 2003). In other words, the industry is defined for one organisation by their knowledge of their competitors as comparable firms who are rivals in the same industry. Whilst this would provide a manageable and practical list of identifiable HRD consultancy firms, there were limitations that made this method unsuitable. I was not able to secure ethical permission for the use of the list for the purpose of this study given its commercially sensitive background. The 4-point criteria were not made available to me and therefore there was no transparency about the representative nature of the list of consulting firms. On this basis, this method was not adopted.

A third method was to use a publicly available printed List of Exhibitors distributed at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) Learning & Development Show on 10-11 May 2017 in London, UK. This list provided details of over 150 HRD consultancy firms who were present at the exhibition which was open to the public. The benefit of this approach was that it was a publicly available list of firms who purposefully provided company name, contact details and organization purpose information (Clegg et al 2003, 2005). This information was made available via a recognized UK HRD professional body to both members and non-members (Gray, 2011). Company information on product style and methods was openly shared with consumers and competitors for the purpose of representing their presence in a competitive domain (Porac et al, 1995). Whilst I recognised that this list is self-selected by those firm choosing to participate in the exhibition, and organisations used a range of terms associated with HRD (such as Training, Learning, Coaching) to describe their purpose, the list does provide a public record of those organisations identifying with HRD in the UK as well as practical starting point from which to identify the websites to select. For the purpose of this study, this method was adopted.

In order to establish a relevant sample from the CIPD List of Exhibitors, and in the absence of a similar criteria in the literature, I developed a selection criteria drawing on relevant literature discussed in Chapter One and Three in the context of HRD consultancy, and in line with the research questions. The criteria are shown below in Table 7.

Table 7

Criteria for the Selection of HRD Consultancy Firm Websites

	Criteria for Websites	**Link to Literature**	**Essential (Yes/No)**
1.	Homepage represents HRD as its core business to include Training & Development + Coaching + Organisation Development. This criteria for HRD work align with the definition of HRD adopted in this study by Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie (2009).	Undertake complex operations where human capital is a dominant factor and Offer specialized business-to-business services related to business and production processes rather than for private consumption Karjalainen et al (2015, p.276)	Yes
2.	Firm established in the HRD industry over 5 years	Strong positive corporate culture and branding Karjalainen et al (2015, p.276)	Yes
3.	Firm has a link with Professional Association or Professional Body (on the website)	Regulated social identities Karjalainen et al (2015, p.276)	Yes
4.	Website includes profiles of the consultants or vacancies (with job description or person specification)	Rely on professional knowledge and qualifications	Yes

		Karjalainen et al (2015, p.276)	
5.	Website includes testimonials from clients	Use of clear contractual conditions Karjalainen et al (2015, p.276)	Yes
6.	Firm listed at Companies House https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk	Location of firm Clegg et al (2003)	Yes

Using this criteria, 45 HRD consultancy firms were identified. The detailed matching is provided in Appendix 3, and those rejected list in Appendix 4. Website data was captured between 23 February 2018 and 21 May 2018 and entered into NVivo for analysis. Website data captured was limited to pages accessible by one click from the Homepage tabs or Menu List which I believed would reflect the key messages HRD consultancies would use which the intention to attract attention from clients. The selection of the sample size of 45 consultancies was considered large enough to provide identification of patterns across the data collected given the rich data accessible on websites (Terry et al, 2017). In representing the data collected, I chose not to anonymize company names because I viewed both company name as well as the choice of website content to be an integral part of the richness of the data and illustrative of the language used by HRD consultancies to communicate their professional status and purpose. This included company names like Getfeedback.net and 3c Performance Management as the functions of HRD. The Mind Gym and The School of Life suggesting the transformational nature of HRD consultancy. And Two Bald Blokes and Blue Beetle Productions suggesting the ambiguity in HRD consultancy.

The inclusion of company names follows the approach adopted by qualitative studies in the Business and Management literature where websites and organisational blogs are directly named. Barros (2014, p.1227) explored how one petroleum organisation used diverse social media tools as a platform from which they could create their own discourse to challenge the print media's perception of malpractice and in response build its own credibility. Using named organisations was choice by the author to draw attention to specific strategies used by a single organisation to achieve discursive legitimacy. Handley (2017) examined employers' graduate careers websites and explored the discursive construction of the 'employable graduate.' Named websites were analysed as texts that, as social artefacts in a public arena, can represent different discourses and illustrate how artefacts are represented, constructed and consumed by the reader. Mashiah (2021) investigated how 14 tech companies used the recruitment sections of company websites to convince and attract candidates. The adoption of named websites enabled the study to draw attention to employer branding with the use of company names, logos and taglines to illustrate the importance of corporate image and increase recruitment effectiveness. Each of these studies uses the company name and verbatim quotes as textual data, and not as visual data. This supports the intention to analyse text and not the visual dimensions of websites. These studies connect with the use of HRD consultancy websites in this study where consultancies are seeking to establish legitimacy, construct relevant discourses for potential customers, and use corporate image to attract customers within a dynamic and competitive sector. The use of named websites was included in the research ethics application reflecting publicly available data. Example screenshots of HRD Consultancy websites are included in Appendix 15.

4.6.2 Sample selection and size – semi-structured interviews

Whilst I had a defined list of HRD consultancy websites to access, I also needed to establish a means to identify and select appropriate individual consultants and clients to participate in semi-structured interviews. Following the purposive sampling adopted, my starting point was drawing on my own professional network for those who worked as HRD consultants and who were clients of HRD consultants. This was a pragmatic decision given the hard to reach nature of consultants and the difficulties in accessing data on sensitive subjects (such as work with clients) (Karjalainen, Niemistö & Hearn, 2015). Consistent with the selection of HRD consultancy firm websites, and in the absence of a criteria in the literature, I created a selection criteria based on a review of the literature discussed in Chapter Three and the research questions of this thesis. The criteria are shown below in Table 8:

Table 8

Criteria for the Selection of HRD Consultants and Clients

	Criteria for Consultants and Clients	**Link to Literature**	**Essential (Yes/No)**
1.	Identification with the HRD profession and HRD consultancy work	Evident association with HRD - majority of their time in HRD or using (self) adopted job title related to HRD work Gray (2011); Gray et al (2015) Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie (2009)	Yes
2.	Scale of work	Contracts with organisations not with specific individuals Evetts (2006); Saks (2015)	Yes
3.	Setting of HRD work	Experience of working on HRD work that includes UK setting Evetts (1995); Poell (2015); Clegg et al (2003)	Yes
4.	Experience and time related to working on HRD work	Worked on HRD projects within the last 24 months either as an independent consultant or as part	Yes

		of a larger consulting firm Gray et al (2015)	

Using these criteria, a total of 29 interviews were completed made up of 17 HRD consultants and 12 HRD clients. 20 participants were secured through my professional network. 4 participants were secured through a CIPD networking event. 5 participants were secured via snowballing sampling. Interviews took place between 13 March 2019 and 10 February 2020. Consultant interviews lasted between 42 minutes and 1 hour 10 minutes. Client interviews lasted between 39 minutes and 1 hour 06 minutes. A summary of the interview participants can be found in Table 9 and Table 10.

Table 9

HRD Consultant Interview Participant Overview

Participant Code	Participant Anonymized Name	Job Title	Organisation Size	Number of Years of HRD Experience	HRD Related Professional Association Membership (Yes/No)	HRD Related Qualification (Yes/No)	Interview Duration (Hour: Minutes: Seconds)
CO01	Natalie	Head of People Strategy and Development	SME; Multinational	Over 20 years	Yes	Yes	59:53
CO02	Ulla	Consultant and Executive Coach	SME; Multinational	Over 15 years	No	No	57:48
CO03	George	Principal Consultant	SME; Multinational	Over 5 years	No	No	48:17
CO04	Francesca	Principal Consultant	SME; Multinational	Over 25 years	No	No	1:10:43
CO05	Bea	Consultant and Executive Coach	SME; Multinational	Over 15 years	Yes	Yes	1:02:47
CO06	Hari	Storyhacker, author and narrative coach	SME; National	Over 10 years	No	No	42:10
CO07	Bassam	CEO	SME; Multinational	Over 20 years	No	No	46:43
CO08	Cliff	Consultant	SME; National	Over 20 years	No	No	59:34
CO09	Dean	Sales Manager	SME; Multinational	Over 25 years	No	No	40:36
CO10	Hugh	Head of Consultancy Practice	SME; Multinational	Over 20 years	No	No	50:55
CO11	Connor	Leadership Expert, Speaker, Coach, Author	SME; National	Over 25 years	No	No	51:26
CO12	Myra	Owner	SME; National	Over 20 years	Yes	Yes	53:59
CO13	Evan	L&D Consultant	SME; Multinational	Over 20 years	Yes	Yes	58:39
CO14	Colt	CEO	SME; National	Over 20 years	No	Yes	45:16
CO15	Kayleigh	CEO	SME; National	Over 20 years	Yes	Yes	1:03:49
CO16	Philip	CEO and Principal Consultant	SME; Multinational	Over 10 years	No	No	1:04.50
CO17	Bryson	Head of Learning	SME; Multinational	Over 25 years	Yes	Yes	54:41
					6 out of 17 Hold Membership	7 out of 17 Hold HRD Qualifications	

Table 10

Client Interview Participant Overview

Participant Code	Participant Anonymized Name	Job Title	Organisation Size	Number of Years of HRD Experience	HRD Related Professional Association Membership (Yes/No)	HRD Related Qualification (Yes/No)	Interview Duration (Hour: Minutes: Seconds)
CL01	Carly	Academy Design Lead	Large; National	Over 25 years	Yes	Yes	1:03:04
CL02	Tabatha	Director of Learning Solutions	Large: Multinational	Over 20 years	Yes	No	1:06:14
CL03	Lara	L&D Consultant	Large: Multinational	Over 25 years	Yes	Yes	57:05
CL04	Deirdre	Group Talent Manager	Large; National	Over 15 years	Yes	Yes	59:30
CL05	Mary	Head of Talent and Learning	Large; National	Over 25 years	Yes	Yes	52:26
CL06	Tessa	Former HR Director	Large; Multinational	Over 25 years	Yes	Yes	55:07
CL07	Abby	Former Senior Performance Development Consultant; Now Organisation Development Adviser	Large; National	Over 10 years	No	No	50:31
CL08	Kal	Head of Learning	Large; Multinational	Over 5 years	No	No	1:00:14
CL09	Tara	Former UK Leadership and Capability Specialist; Now Organisation Development Manager	Large; National	Over 15 years	Yes	Yes	39:15
CL10	Deborah	Former Director of Talent Management	Large; Multinational	Over 15 years	No	Yes	50:33
CL11	Harriet	Learning and Development Consultant	Large; National	Over 25 years	Yes	No	1:02:43
CL12	Karen	Learning and Development Manager	Large; Multinational	Over 25 years	No	No	56:32
					8 out 12 Hold Memberships	7 out of 12 Hold HRD Qualifications	

The sample size was considered large enough to provide identification of patterns across the data collected given the rich data collected in interviews (Terry et al, 2017). All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were then added into NVivo for analysis. In anonymizing the interview data collected, I created a set of guiding principles with the aim to retain the richness of the data collected whilst protecting the identity of the participants (Terry et al, 2017). This is illustrated in Appendix 14. An example transcript is included as Appendix 16.

4.7 Reflexive statement

In RTA, reflexivity is an important feature to because it allows me, as the researcher, to consider the (inevitable) impact I will have on data collection and analysis (Terry et al, 2017, p.64). A core assumption in RTA is that researcher subjectivity is the primary "tool" where subjectivity is a resource for research and not a problem to be managed or controlled (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Researcher bias is incompatible with RTA because knowledge generation is viewed as inherently subjective and situated (Braun & Clarke, 2021). A further core assumption for RTA is that reflexivity, the researchers' insight into, and articulation of, their generative role in research, is key to good quality analysis. In achieving good quality analysis, it is important to strive to own my perspectives (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). To structure my reflections, I draw on Corlett & Mavin's (2018) framework of the choices made in business and management research related to the researcher's motivations, role, positionality, identity, power, and voice. At the same time, I recognise that these choices can be interconnected and mutually related. As part of these reflections, I also reflect on what I didn't expect to find and how this changed the way I approached the analysis and conclusions.

My interest in the professionalisation project of HRD consultancy was motivated from my industry career in L&D as a client. Working for a UK based global retailer, I spent four years of working in HRM where L&D was a part of my remit (often delivered by consultants chosen centrally by head office) and then nine years in head office as a L&D specialist (client) commissioning work with HRD consultancies. In this role, I had responsibility for a £1 million annual budget for management training. My HRM and L&D career was formed in a relationship-based culture where culture-fit, 'gentleman's agreements' and being a part of the family applied to both employees and outside suppliers. This shaped who we worked with, how we worked together, and how performance was measured (and in direct contrast to the discourse of strategic HRM that was emerging from the senior HR team who talked of innovation from new ways of identifying talent and performance management).

Whilst we shared the values and passion for L&D, L&D specialists (clients) were not selected to work in L&D because we had completed formal training or credentials. In hindsight, this is surprising given our remit was large scale solutions to over 300 stores, high profile strategic projects with board level sponsorship, and hefty budgets. Instead, I was selected for my ability to work with consultants who had the L&D experience, and it was understood that my professional development in L&D would be derived from working with such consultants. By the mid 2000s, my colleagues and I were encouraged by the organisation to undertake CIPD qualifications in learning & development to 'professionalise' ourselves, and eventually becoming a member of the CIPD. Whilst we were enthused by the idea of developing ourselves, there was rarely a requirement to demonstrate the link between theory and practice. The act of delivering L&D work, and recording how much was delivered, was deemed sufficient as the measure of success. It wasn't until I enrolled into a part-time MSc in Organisational Behaviour that I began to appreciate the theory-practice divide, the role of critical reflexive practice in questioning the dilemmas involved in fitting organisational needs into theoretical frameworks. As an enthused student, I quickly learned to temper my 'academic' identity from the glazed look over my colleagues' eyes when I began to draw on my newly acquired abstract knowledge in 'solution focused' meetings. It was at this point in my client career that I realised we valued having a consultant in the room because of their status as an outsider with an industry view and listened carefully to their storytelling about how solutions had worked in other similar retailers.

One specific phenomenon from my industry career remained with me. Over the nine years I worked as a client, the organisational climate towards the use of external suppliers changed dramatically with the adoption of procurement practices, budget cuts, and the need for innovation. Whilst these changed the administrative processes and invited in new external suppliers, the sustainable relationships continued to be with the original small number of consultants who were familiar, trusted, and part of the family – irrespective of the strategic direction from the different HR and Finance leaders setting the organisation's priorities.

I draw attention to these three stories because they shaped my initial interest in undertaking a PhD to explore the identity of the consultants and what gave them the status awarded by us as clients. My identity therefore as a researcher in designing this study was intentionally associated with my relativist and social constructionist beliefs.

Reading the literature that categorised consultants as hard to reach, I knew that my industry network could give me access to consultants who could share their different histories and therefore contributing to the originality of the study. I also believed that to understand consultants in organisational contexts in the UK, this couldn't be completed without seeing it from the client perspective as these roles together shaped the outcomes of L&D consultancy work. My position was more romantic than neo-positivist in approaching the design of semi-structured interviews assuming that each interview would focus on 'genuine' interaction that came from establishing rapport and trust between myself and each interviewee (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). I was mindful that from the interviewee there may be assumed shared understanding of the stories being told or an uncertainty about what was expected to be said in an academic context. To address this, I made conscious choices in designing the interview to include informal conversation before the recordings began, but also drawing attention to a change in my position before the recording began by drawing attention to the formal introduction to the interview to cover the administration requirements of the university. These included clarifying the nature of the academic project and my current identity as a PhD researcher, clarifying research ethics commitments, and the anonymizing methods I would employ (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

While reflecting on the experience in the interviews and analysing the data, I was enthused by how familiar the emphasis on partnership working was and the importance of the quality of the relationship between consultant and client. Specifically, the emphasis on flexibility, support and the professional development provided to the client resonated with my own experience. I remembered how I had learned and practice the value of impression management. For example, over time, I changed how I dressed, the managerial language I used, and how I talked with practiced passion and enthusiasm about the opportunities and benefits of L&D work.

However, whilst gathering and coding the data, I also experienced disappointment in the recurring emphasis of what reminded me of the children's story 'The Emperor's New Clothes'. Across the data, I found claims about what consultants hope to achieve and the claims they make about the results they do, in contrast to the stories about the actual measurement undertaken in organisations. At the same time, I was immersed in the academic and professional body literature promoting an evidence-based perspective in all things HRD. I have struggled during this PhD project to define my point of view on the topic. Initially, I had rejected the critical position taken in the management consultancy literature who focused on the guru nature of management consultants. I had found their own style of writing less evidence-based and instead used the very ‘soap box’ style of writing they criticized management consultants of using. But at the same time I didn’t know how to find a balance with the positivity and stories of success from my data or from the HRD literature seeking to define the transformative power of HRD.

In the end, my position was shaped by the movement in and out of the data. Adopting RTA, I could see patterns in the data and to raise awareness to myself about whether it was my identity as L&D professional or HRD researcher who was working with the candidate themes. And to be able to switch between these roles during the creative process of finalising themes. Throughout, I wanted to respect those who took part in the study, and to respect the community of HRD practitioners as whole. Therefore, I adopted the use of thick data in the form of long quotes, and multiple voices from websites, consultants and clients to help the reader to understand my construction of meaning.

Resolving my positional difficulties, I realised that the HRD literature was approaching the HRD profession as homogeneous, and I interpreted this to be with an assumed bias to organisational (client) roles. My experience, my participants, and the data collected demonstrated that the profession was far more heterogeneous in how HRD practice was constructed and enacted in organisations with different but interrelated professions working together on client needs. HRD consultancy was just one of these different professions who had their different strengths and weaknesses, and these could be understood by seeing them in the context of a client’s needs, their perceived value and the associated response by the consultant. My role in this study and the aim of this study, however, was not to determine whether the needs and associated responses were good or bad. This is for future research.

COVID-19 has shown that professional practice can be shaped dramatically by external events, and therefore I hope my findings will reflect my interpretation of a pre-pandemic era as well as provide a set of new questions to explore for future research about an evolving and exciting profession.

4.8 Data analysis

With having made choices related to the data to be collected and the sample sizes to be adopted, I recognised the need to adopt a data analysis method that would help to avoid being overly captivated by the richness of the data at the expense of being able to construct meaning from the data's broader significance (Bell, Bryman & Harvey, 2018). Recent writers in the sociology of the professions field have returned to the micro and meso perspectives on the professions that draws attention to discourse analysis and connects the interactionist interest in the symbolic nature of professional status and identity (Saks, 2016). Discourse analysis as a theoretical perspective has been used to explore professions to draw attention who use the language of the professions in how they make sense of their identity, inform their relationships and the positions of power with stakeholders in their internal and external environments (Sachs, 2001). In doing so, discourse analysis has opened up a greater understanding of work cultures in organisational settings (Saks, 2016), and has benefited the body of knowledge by opening a wider range of occupations to understand the nature of the professions (Evetts, 2003). For example, discourse analysis has been used to explore a diverse list of professions than previous theoretical perspectives, drawing on empirical research into occupation groups such as advertising and recruitment (Fournier, 1999), teachers (Sachs, 2001), and social workers (Gray & McDonald, 2006).

Discourse analysis is argued to advance the field through closing the gap between theory and practice by drawing out the meaning of professional work and identity from practitioners in their own sense making practices in context giving the rise to active, spirited debate about policy and practice at the micro and meso level (Sachs, 2001). As such, this approach acknowledges the diverse, changing and unstable social spaces where professional work takes places often in politicised environments where scientific knowledge and moral reasoning dilemmas exist (Gray & McDonald, 2006). Discourse analysis acknowledges the diversity and richness of approaches to understanding of the professions and it used as a means to unearth, categorise and represent such complexity in context (Hodges et al, 2011).

Whilst the intention of studies using discourse analysis is not to seek to establish a unified consensus on an understanding of the professions, criticisms of discourse analysis focus on particularities of the workplace settings where studies take place (Saks, 2016). Studies in this approach are also not able to present ‘statements of truth’ about what a profession is or how professions should be assessed (Hodges et al, 2011) and thereby unable make a significant contribution to the long-established practice of examining the ideologies of professions and professionalizing groups in the policy context at the macro societal level and to generate public debate (Sachs, 2001; Saks, 2016). My adoption, however, of this perspective is consistent with the beliefs in discourse analysis that social reality is socially constructed where the individual’s experience of the world is understood from a subjective standpoint, and meaning from language goes beyond the literal meaning of words and languages.

Template analysis was initially identified as the method for data analysis and defined as a group of techniques for thematically organizing and analysing data (King, 2004, p.256). Adopting template analysis allowed for the use of different levels of codes developed a priori drawn from the literature to organise the data along with the flexibility to add or amend codes as a result of the text analysis. For the purpose of this study, the level one codes would be drawn from the 3 research questions set out in Chapter One. One of the benefits of this flexibility is that it allows the researcher to organize the codes with larger sample sizes. King (2004) suggests that 20-30 texts is a common number found in template analysis which aligned with the sample sizes discussed earlier in this chapter. Template analysis aligned with my social constructionist position because it suggests multiple interpretations from the data depending on the context, and acknowledges the richness of description from the text (King, 2004, p.257).

However, whilst template analysis had benefits, once I began to apply the template analysis to the data, I found there were a number of limitations which were not aligned to my researcher position or the lens with which I intended to view the findings. Because this study draws from a multi-disciplinary body of knowledge, I found that the template adopted did not allow sufficient flexibility in coding such large amounts of rich data from both websites and interviews. A further limitation in applying template analysis was for the tendency for the analysis to be overly descriptive, and with a small Q lens that draws attention to frequency of examples in the data, and as such I felt that the individual voices in the data were diminished (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A final limitation was the difficulty in accessing participants for a second meeting as part of the feedback process to fulfil the quality criteria (Anderson, 2017a). My conclusion from this stage of the analysis was to look for another approach that remained aligned with my social constructionist position but that allowed for greater flexibility in the use of coding, greater creativity in the construction and reconstruction of themes, and that acknowledged my active role and bias in how meaning was created from the data collected.

4.9 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

To resolve this dilemma, I explored thematic analysis (TA) which is defined as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke 2006). In his work, Boyatzis (1998, p.01) defines thematic analysis as a way of seeing which moves the researcher through 3 phases of enquiry from "recognising an important moment (seeing) precedes encoding it (seeing it as something), which in turn precedes interpretation." According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information with the use of a theme generated from patterns found in the information which either describes or organizes observations or provides an interpretation of different aspects of a phenomenon. The use of themes aims to capture something important about the data in relation to a research topic, and represents a level of patterned response or meaning within the data (Gray, 2018). Whilst widely adopted in different fields of research including business and management, thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged qualitative analytic method (Boyatzis, 1998). Over time, the typology of TA has expanded to include contrasting approaches dependent on the goals of the researcher for qualitative or quantitative outcomes (Terry et al, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2013, Kidder & Fine, 1987).

The Braun & Clarke (2006) approach to TA is based in a qualitative research philosophy with an emphasis on deep thinking about the meaning and interpreting of data. In its early conceptualisation, Braun & Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis was characterised by its theoretical flexibility. As a method, therefore, it can be used with inductive and deductive coding and analysis; experiential (what it is like) to critical orientations (how we want to look at the data), and from critical realist (access to a truth) to social constructionism (how the topic is understood from the data collected) (Braun & Clarke, 2018). In later publications, the authors repositioned and clarified their meaning behind the nature of flexibility. For Braun & Clarke (2019, p.593) the meaning of flexibility is now ‘constrained by paradigmatic and epistemological assumptions around meaningful knowledge production; reflexive TA procedures reflect the values of a qualitative paradigm, centring researcher subjectivity, organic and recursive coding processes, and the importance of deep reflection on, and engagement with, data’.

Now referred to as Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), Braun & Clarke (2021) set out several fundamental principles that shape the approach adopted by the researcher. Themes are actively created by the researcher in contrast to themes ‘emerging’ from the data; themes are influenced by the researcher’s philosophical and contextual background; and themes are informed by choices made, understood, and explained to inform an argument (Braun & Clarke, 2016). RTA sees themes to be organic, exploratory, and subjective, and related from a philosophical basis of enquiry informing assumptions made and implemented knowingly. Adopting RTA is argued to help researchers look deeper into the data to identify a central idea and develop storybook themes which illustrate actionable outcomes, underlying patterns, concepts, and ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Storybook themes are the goal for RTA in that they provide a detailed analysis of data and sense making (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). This contrasts with a ‘bucket theme’ which is a domain summary of the data collected and illustrated as a descriptive summary of what was said in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

I was drawn to this approach because this more clearly aligned with the philosophical approach adopted in this study and helped me to better position my dual identity as researcher and practitioner with a career in HRD consultancy. According to Braun & Clarke (2019, p.594), RTA places an importance on the researcher in the research process and that ‘the researcher’s role in knowledge production is at the heart of the approach’. RTA helps the researcher to consider the (inevitable) impact researchers have on data collection and analysis (Terry et al, 2017, p.64). The active role of the researcher is seen in several ways – active, creative and reflexive. Themes are actively created by the researcher in contrast to themes ‘emerging’ from the data as seen in other methods of qualitative data analysis. The themes created, and the act of creating themes, is influenced by the researcher’s philosophical and contextual background. Themes are conceptualised as patterns of shared meaning underpinned or united by a core concept referred to as a 'central organizing concept' to emphasise a uniting idea (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Therefore, RTA needs the researcher to make a series of choices, understand why these choices were needed, explain why this is needed for the research project (in relation to the research questions and what theories were used to locate the research), and finally to communicate to the reader why the data is interesting to inform an argument (Braun & Clarke, 2016). Through this method, themes are organic, exploratory, and subjective (Braun & Clarke, 2016). To achieve an understanding of how themes were created, it is important to share with the reader the philosophical basis of enquiry - what assumptions underpin the use of specific procedures or ideas, and how these were implemented knowingly.

Adopting RTA provides a way to address the ambiguity and 'tricky' question of sample size. Whilst guidelines are useful, RTA does not define specific sample sizes. The decision on sample size, according to Braun & Clarke (2021) is iterative, context-dependent, and a process of ongoing interpretation by the researcher. In other forms of thematic analysis, the concept of data saturation has been the gold standard to determine sample size. However, saturation is seen to be problematic for RTA because it is not philosophically and methodologically consistent with reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Instead, appropriate sample sizes were determined using 'information richness' in line with the aim and research questions which is considered in RTA to be appropriate for when the sample is relatively homogenous (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The sample size, therefore, is determined by the researcher's ability to look at patterns across cases. Braun & Clarke (2021) suggest that 'data adequacy' supports this part of the process where the researcher reflects on having achieved an adequate depth of understanding from the data to create meaning. Information richness and data adequacy, however, were also influenced by the pragmatic limits to access to relevant data sources within the timescales available, and the number of reachable participants while undertaking the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Building on Boyatzis (1998, p.11) 4 stages of thematic analysis, Braun & Clarke (2006, pp.86-87) set out a 6 phase analytic process The authors emphasise that analysis is not a linear process. Instead, it is seen as a recursive process with movement forwards and backwards as required over time (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp.86-7). The computer programme NVivo was used during the qualitative analysis which assisted greatly in recording, dividing, segmenting, and auditing the data as part of the iterative coding process and promoting transparency in the coding process (Gray, 2018) and ensuring that context of quotes was preserved as much as possible to communicate data richness (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

In the section below, I set out the given definition of each phase and the experience of applying this method to the analysis of website data. My aim from this section is to reflect Braun and Clarke's (2019, p.594) view on quality in RTA which 'is not about following procedures 'correctly' (or about 'accurate' and 'reliable' coding, or achieving consensus between coders), but about the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process'. This process follows the work of authors such as Byrne (2021) (on attitudes in educational contexts) to evidence the transferability of RTA into diverse contexts and research topics, and a means to evidence quality in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Phase 1 Familiarise yourself with the data: *what is going on, how does this data make sense, what are the complexities, draw out assumptions and recording initial ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006).*

My approach: Reading and re-reading website pages; deciding what level/section of website pages to include and what to exclude for example excluding the content of 'further reading' sections; making printed copies of the website pages to be able to annotate while reading. Reading each transcript first as a full document. Followed by replaying the recordings and using active listening to check for accuracy of transcription (especially to capture HRD jargon), to relive the experience of the interview dynamic between myself and participant, and check against other observations recorded in the interview notes in my reflective diary, making printed copies of the transcripts to be able to annotate while reading (Braun, Clarke & Ranc, 2014). Continued use of the research diary to record confusions and personal reflections from the website text and transcriptions, and decisions made for consistency (Byrne, 2021).

Phase 2 Generating initial codes: *First systematic part of the process where coding is a process of interpretation where researcher subjectivity fuels this process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Codes cluster together to build and generate themes. Codes can be* *semantic (surface meaning with intention) to latent (underlying assumptions that surface meaning relies on and we reflect on the social context we live in thereby reflecting on the cultural landscape, norms and assumptions that allow what people say to make sense). Code labels have to work independently from the data and thereby evoke the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).*

My approach: Codes were first created during the reading of the website and transcripts, writing in the margins as well as highlighting parts of the text linked to the initial codes. Initial coding included overlaps of meaning and variations of meaning that could be later refined in later iterations of the coding process and once all data was analysed (Byrne, 2021). Research questions were kept visually available during the coding process to ensure that coding reflected the aim of the study. Initial coding was transferred into NVivo as part of the recording and iterative process that helped to reflect on semantic and latent codes, visualize overlaps within the data, and further familiarize myself with the volume of data collected. Table 11 illustrates the initial coding with the creation of 45 codes across the website and interview data collected.

The evolution of codes was recorded using an Excel spreadsheet as a way of documenting the iterations of coding as well as documenting the overall analytical process (Byrne, 2021). I regularly reverted back to Phase 1 to consult the transcripts to assess the coding in the context of the text, examine for new codes to be created and continue to further my familiarity with the data. By doing so, I recognised the non-linear and recursive process of analysis to be adopted (Braun, Clarke & Ranc, 2014). At this stage, clustering was more straightforward related to the definition of HRD and Products and Services. However, coding the data related to the concept of Professionalism created a large number of codes and reflected the definitional diversity already identified in the SoP literature.

Table 11

Illustration of NVivo Nodes and Initial Coding of Website and Interview Data

Node	Child Node	Child Node [2nd Level]	Child Node [3rd Level]
Definition of HRD	•Definition as Functional •Definition as Values-based •Definition as Functional/Values •Definition as 'what should be' •Constantly Evolving •Not Easily Defined in Words		
Products and Services	•Coaching •Organisation Development •Training and Development •Other •People Buy People		
Professionalism of HRD	Credibility	Adding Vaue	Altruism for society
			Efficiency
			Impact
			Tailored for Client
		Expertise	Cognitive
			Design and Delivery
			Experience
			Interpersonal
			Methodological
			Political
			Technological
		Relationships	Associate Relationships
			Longevity of Relationships
			Mutual Obligations
			Networked Reputation
			Perceptions of Others
			Position within the Industry
			Status of Clients
			Who You Know
	Legitimacy		Award Winning
			Mobility across Borders
			Power to Act Autonomously
			Professional Body Links
			Proprietary Methodologies
			Qualifications
			Working with other Partners
	Trust		Communicating Expectations
			Contractual Structures
			Managing Knowledge Asymmetry
			Meeting Client Motives
			Meeting Consultant Motives
			Self Representation - Capability and Commitment
			Self Representation - Self Confidence
			Time - Years of Experience

Phase 3 Generating themes: *Bigger more important codes become themes and can be clustered. Use thematic maps to help look at the relationships. Identify and use a central organising concept to assess the linkages and capture the patterns. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).*

My approach: Using the spreadsheet as a visual tool, I began to assemble codes into initial candidate themes where the meaning was distinctive, reflective of the data collected and produced a coherent picture of the dataset (Byrne, 2021). Excel spreadsheets also helped to visually create clusters of similar meaning (Braun, Clarke & Ranc, 2014) to create candidate themes and sub-themes. Initially this meant working with a large number of codes and candidate themes. This was in part due to the volume of data collected as well as the inductive approach adopted to the coding process, as well as my inexperience of coding data. Relistening to recordings and revisiting the coding of text in NVivo helped to ensure that candidate themes were linked with the data collected, and the meaning I intended to create was centred around a central organising concept that underpins the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I was at this stage very aware of the positive language being adopted in the codes and candidate themes drawn out from the positive claims and experiences from the data collected.

Table 12 illustrates at this stage of the analysis the assembling of codes into initial candidate themes centred around an organising concept of jurisdiction (which in later reiterations became expertise). For example, the candidate theme ‘We are in service to our client's needs’ was clearly definable, with constituent coded data presenting the narratives from HRD consultants and client data related to the nature of boundaries in their work towards measurable benefits and managerial agendas with a clear focus on diagnosing and treating client needs. The name felt appropriate as it came from a quote from one of the interviews with a HRD consultant. The theme ‘We work in a constantly evolving and fluid domain’ was first created to reflect the ambiguous nature of the HRD consultant practice that was constantly adapting to unique client contexts. However, at this early stage, I was aware of the overlap with the theme ‘We work with whatever we need to get the job done’ which also reflected the evolving nature of the HRD knowledgebase that informed the lens to diagnose and interpret each client context. While it was useful (and exciting) to bring all this information together into themes from the coded data, even at this early stage it was evident that two themes were dense and had areas of overlap and would likely require further revision.

Table 12

Initial Themes Created Linked to HRD Consultant Expertise

Jurisdiction; Knowledgebase; Skills		
Theme: We are in service to our client's needs	**Theme: We work with whatever we need to get the job done**	**Theme: We work in a constantly evolving and fluid domain**
HRDC work is broadly defined as performance and engagement	HRDC draws on a multi-disciplinary knowledgebase	Deals with the intang ble side of people and organisations
HRDC work is defined by products and techniques	Knowledgebase constructed from HRDC experience	Reflects the pace of change and transformation in client organisations
HRDC work is about what is developed and how it is developed	Knowledgebase includes client organisation and culture	Reflects the tensions in organisation purpose from individual well-being to managerial agendas
HRDC work is defined by the client need	Knowledgebase is 'all about me'	Reflects changes in clients and their expectations of standards
HRDC work delivers measurable benefits to organisational, team and individual performance	HRDCs develop their own knowledgebase, standards and measures	Reflect the changing context for clients in the war for talent
HRDC work supports a managerial agenda	HRDC knowledgebase is boundaryless and borderless	Reflects the changing population of learners and learning habits
	HRDCs knowledgebase is limited in knowledge of impact measurement	Reflects the propensity for fads as innovation
	Old and New Wisdom	Reflects the changing client view on the purpose of HRD
		Reflects the gap in capability in decision makers
		HRD can't do it all alone
		Client needs are comparable across sectors, industries and national borders
		Clients look for knowledgebase from other similar client work

Phase 4 Reviewing potential themes: *Asking yourself questions about the central organising concept, quality of the theme, boundaries of the theme, check if there is enough meaningful data, or is the data too diverse? Adopting Patton's (1990) dual*

criteria for judging categories – observing internal homogeneity within themes while observing external heterogeneity among themes.

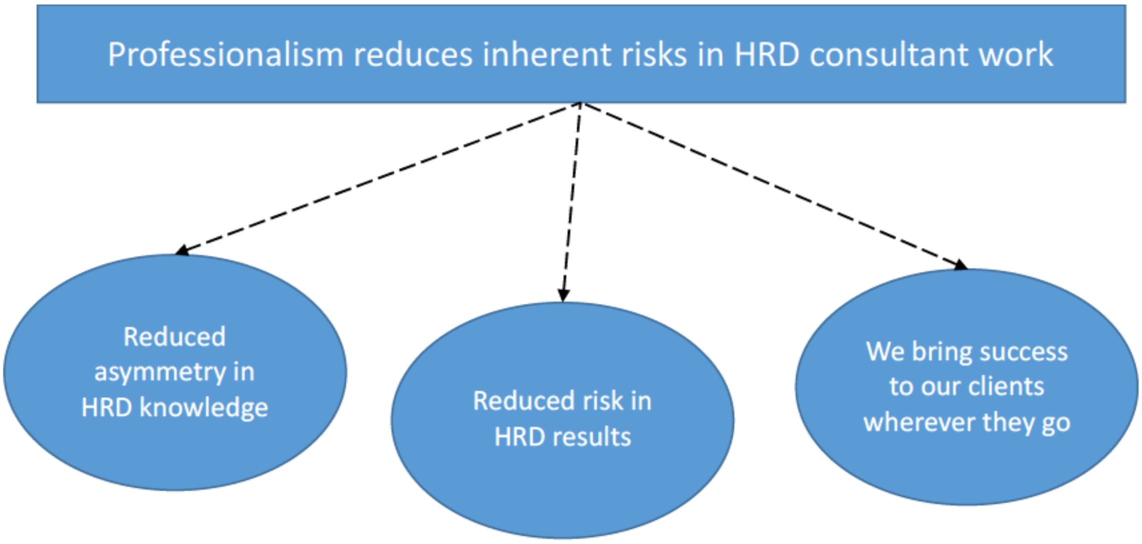
My approach: Two levels of review were completed at this stage. The first was to review the relationships between the data items and codes that created themes and sub-themes. I was looking for coherence that informed a logical argument and overall narrative in line with the research questions. This meant that some themes were folded into each other or removed. The second level of review sought to ensure that duplication was removed and the breadth of findings from the data were clearly articulated across both concepts of professional status and professionalism. Moving from the spreadsheet onto a Mind Map helped to visualise the linkages between candidate themes and sub-themes, using this to combine sub-themes and expand others, assessing whether they represent single participants or consultancy websites as thin themes, or represented large amounts of data collected as thick themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Byrne, 2021). Figure 6 illustrates one of the significant decisions in the review of potential themes related to the thematic map linked to research question 3 which explores how professionalism is used as a resource by HRD consultants in consultant-client relationships.

Whilst the reducing risk as a theme was clear from earlier development phases, the sub themes of reducing risk of HRD results and client success were not yet clearly demonstrating internal homogeneity. For example, the naming of ‘reduced risk in HRD results’ was not clearly linked to the risk from a lack of measurement with results. Lack of measurement was a significant from the interview data and contrasted with the claims made from HRD consultancy websites.

The sub theme ‘we bring success to our clients wherever they go’ was not yet distinctive in relation to a particular concept. To achieve external heterogeneity, I went back to the interview data and my research diary where ‘client success’ was recorded. By doing so, I identified that I had interpreted success in relation to the concept of reputation. From this review, it was clear to me that further development was needed on these two sub themes to illustrate my interpretation of the dataset more clearly.

Figure 6

Draft Thematic Map for Research Question 3



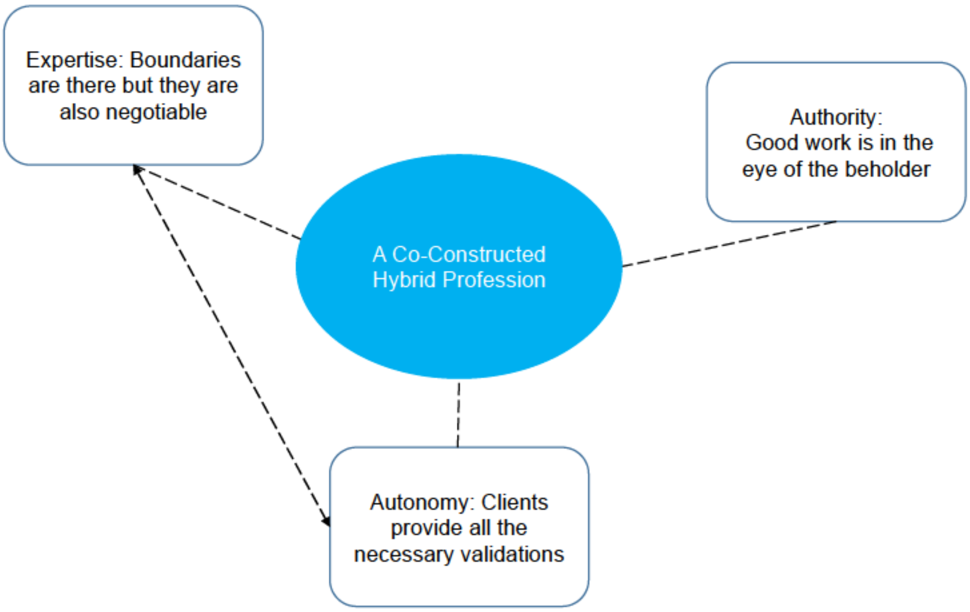
Phase 5 Defining and naming your themes: *Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme. By defining and refining, the researcher is identifying the 'essence' of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures (Braun & Clarke, 2006).*

My approach: At this stage of the process, the naming of themes and associated definitions were revised with the intention to draw a link between the literature and the data collected in this study. Naming was an iterative process that continued to be revisited as the Discussion and Conclusion chapters were drafted with the aim to create concise, informative and memorable names that capture the attention of the reader (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2020), and that don't end with a description but instead convey what is important about the theme (Byrne, 2021). Figure 7 illustrates the finalised thematic map for research question 1 that examines how HRD consultancy is conceptualised as a profession. The iterative process was influenced by my ongoing engagement with the literature being published at the time of data analysis. This led to adopting Noordegraaf's (2020) categorisation of Expertise, Autonomy and Authority, discussed in Chapter 2.3 - 2.5. Integrating this lens with my candidate themes helped to more clearly shape the distinctive and connected nature of the conceptualisation of HRD consultants as a hybrid profession.

A second stage in this iterative process was the greater clarity in the use of specific language to draw out the importance of boundaries, validation, and good work. In this process of refinement, I wanted to retain the HRD voice in how the themes were named to convey the essence of the lived experience of HRD professional practice by the consultants in this study. My intention behind the final wording was to reflect the words used by HRD consultants and my interpretation of their meaning.

Figure 7

Finalised Thematic Map for Research Question 1



Phase 6 Producing the report: *The process of writing, finalising the order of themes, selecting the rich examples, writing analytically, relating to research questions and the Literature Review (Braun & Clarke, 2006).*

My approach: One of the considerations at this phase is establishing a logical and meaningful order in which the themes are reported (Braun & Clarke, 2012). On the one hand, this was predefined by the sequential nature of the research questions of this study. However, the sequence was also defined by my interpretation of the data and the story I wanted to tell as a researcher. Data extracts are used illustratively as examples of data identified within each theme and discussed analytically to identify specific features of the data in relation to the literature (Terry & Braun, 2016).

A second feature specific to RTA is synthesizing the reporting of results with the contextualization of the results with the literature within a single chapter. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I chose to adopt the traditional convention of separate Findings and Discussion chapters. This was to reflect the context of the PhD thesis being produced (an examined PhD) and my context as 'student researcher' to work within expected structures. Whilst this is counter to the approach advocated by Braun & Clarke (2013), this decision does reflect my context of as a PhD researcher and continues to adopt each of the six phases of RTA – and therefore I argue is consistent with the aim and spirit of the RTA approach.

4.10 Ethical considerations

My commitment to ethical research practice in undertaking this study has been carefully aligned to the Faculty Research Ethics guidelines, and secured with the relevant approvals before data collection was undertaken for websites and semi-structured interviews. Appendix 2 demonstrates the ethics approval for the collection of website data. The use of websites as a type of organizational document for analysis has less ethical consideration. For example, in a similar study by Harper (2012) using job adverts, ethics are viewed in relation to the question of 'what is a job advert'. It is suggested that the analysis of job adverts is a form of unobtrusive observation which does not harm or affect the participant (Harper, 2012). Confidentiality and consent are less important in the ethical considerations of the analysis of publicly available online documentation. Bryman & Bell (2011) draw attention however to a key issue for the researcher where content may change, and links become out-dated and therefore the researcher is dealing with data in a state of metamorphosis. To address this, I used specific recording of dates and times of access to each website, as well as the use of web capture of web pages within NVivo to retain a record of the data collected.

For semi-structured interviews, there were more significant considerations of preventing lack of informed consent, preventing harm to participants, and avoiding deception and invasion of privacy (Jones, 2021). This included giving clear consideration for the interview participants with the use of Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms in line with the Faculty guidelines. Both documents were discussed and signed by participants and myself before starting the interviews. In each interview, I drew attention to the provision to withdraw from the study and therefore not be included in the thesis. I was mindful that very few of the participants had been engaged with academic research in this way and therefore research ethics would be unfamiliar. A signed copy was kept by participants. Appendix 6 demonstrates the ethics approval for the use of semi-structured interviews.

Anonymity has been discussed previously in this chapter and has been actively used to provide safety from harm for participants from being recognised in this study (Jones, 2021). This was an important strategy to create a safe and open climate for participants to represent their opinions, beliefs, and experiences (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). I chose not to present full biographical details of the participants and only selected information necessary for the purpose of the study.

4.11 Demonstrating Quality in Qualitative Research

Consensus amongst qualitative researchers is that qualitative research is developing its reputation for meaningful and useful results (Nowell et al, 2017). However, as the qualitative community becomes more complex with increasingly diverse and rich research methods, achieving consensus for a criteria of quality in qualitative research is increasingly difficult (Anderson, 2017a). It is generally agreed that applying traditional criteria used in quantitative inquiry like generalizability, objectivity, and reliability to qualitative research is illegitimate (Tracy, 2010, p.838). Within a social constructionist paradigm, Lincoln & Guba (2005, p.178) argue that a quality criteria should focus on trustworthiness and authenticity such that a reader can answer the question “Are these findings sufficiently authentic (isomorphic to some reality, trustworthy, related to the way others construct their social worlds) that I may trust myself in acting on their implications. More to the point, would I feel sufficiently secure about these findings to construct social policy or legislation based on them?”

For Lincoln & Guba (2005), quality qualitative inquiry is ‘valid’ where authentic, trustworthy and rigorous research can be demonstrated. The authors propose a criteria of fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity. and tactical authenticity. Tracy (2010, p.839) extended this approach and proposed a 8-point criteria made up of (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence. Both approaches acknowledge the centrality of subjectivity within the research design (and argue that objectivity is not a goal to be attempted) and the importance of reflexivity as a researcher to achieving authenticity which is reliant on critical subjectivity and self-awareness.

Whilst recognising that many authors have proposed their criteria for quality in qualitative research, Braun & Clarke (2021, p.04) emphasise the importance of aligning quality strategies with the theoretical assumptions and values of the Big Q qualitative paradigm adopted in RTA, where Big Q research involves both qualitative data, and values and practices embedded in a qualitative paradigm. The focus is on the means to promote reflection, rigor, a systematic and thorough approach, and greater depth of engagement with the data. Tracy (2010, p.837) suggests that whilst criterion can be used to guide qualitative researchers, 'each criterion of quality can be approached via a variety of paths and crafts, the combination of which depends on the specific researcher, context, theoretical affiliation, and project'.

To reflect the HRD context of this research, I chose to draw on a framework proposed by Anderson (2017a) for quality in HRD qualitative research that continues to build on the criteria discussed already in this chapter and places a focus on the specific HRD qualitative research context. Anderson's (2017a) framework is consistent within a Big Q paradigm, and has the additional benefit of being constructed to support the researcher in constructing HRD qualitative inquiry. This has a further benefit that HRD editors may use this framework in the selection of research that reflect credibility, resonance, and rich rigor as a basis for an ethical and meaningful contribution to HRD knowledge, scholarship, and practice.

The first criteria proposed by Anderson (2017a) for demonstrating quality in qualitative research is methodological awareness. In the discussion in this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate and justify the steps taken and decisions made in the research process, from establishing the research question at the beginning, to the research design issues, through to the approach adopted with data analysis. (Anderson, 2017a). In this study, I have used of the six stages set out by Braun & Clarke (2006; 2021) in RTA to evidence the 'audit trail' of the stages. In ascribing to a recognised systematic approach, I found that it had both pragmatic value in building my confidence in the approach to undertaking a complex study as well as supporting my aim to quality to demonstrate credibility in my analytic approach (Cassell & Bishop, 2019, p.197; Pritchard, 2012). The 'audit trail' was also supported the adoption of NVivo as the data analysis tool and a research diary to promote dependability (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In RTA, good quality coding as part of methodological awareness is important to demonstrate (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p07). In this study, I have adopted and illustrated the dual processes of immersion or depth of engagement, and distancing, allowing time and space for reflection and for insight and inspiration to develop. Whilst Anderson (2017a) argues that member-checking procedures is an important feature of qualitative research, I have chosen to be consistent with the RTA approach where coding quality is believed to be not dependent on multiple coders but rather a single coder/analyst is typical in RTA where reflexivity and interpretative depth is achieved (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

A second criteria proposed by Anderson (2017a) for demonstrating quality in qualitative research refers to the adoption of strategic sampling supported by clear justification and critical reflection about the use of purposive sampling over accidental or opportunistic approaches (Anderson, 2017a). In this chapter, I have outlined the approach adopted to purposive sampling as well as balanced with the snowballing sampling as the recruitment and selection methods needed to reach HRD consultants as hard to reach participants. As such I have argued that the data set "represents meaningfully authentic and 'rich' meanings, experiences, and perceptions" and that the sample size was sufficient (Anderson, 2017). Like Braun & Clarke (2021), Anderson (2017a) does not necessarily advocate saturation but rather the research should find ways to demonstrate complexity, diverse means of evidencing concepts, and resonance with literature or applied social contexts. This has been introduced in Chapter Four and will be demonstrated in the Chapter Five - Six (Findings) and Chapter Seven (Discussion).

Reflexivity is a further criterion proposed by Anderson (2017a) for demonstrating quality in qualitative research. In each of the stages in the study, reflexivity has been adopted to provide appropriate discussion of my context, positionality, standpoint, and the possible effect of this on the research process and outcomes (Anderson, 2017a). Reflexivity was one of the features that attracted me to the adopted of RTA which by adopting six stages helped me to recognize, structure and think (deeply) about the many layers of conceptual thinking behind all (good) research practice (Braun &

Clarke, 2021). In doing so, this meant that I did not adopt Anderson's (2017a) criteria of member checking of data analysis as this is not consistent with RTA where single researcher analysis is common (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021). I found that the use a research diary provided an opportunity for me as a single researcher to construct an understanding of my initial position and researcher bias, explore my reflections at each stage, as well as record the development of my thinking during the complex stages of the study.

A final criteria proposed by Anderson (2017a) for demonstrating quality in qualitative research refers to transferability. In Chapters Five and Six, I have provided findings which are defined and presented with sufficient, rich data in the form of direct quotations and descriptive phrases that convey a sense of the participants, their environment, and their claims to professional practice as the basis for careful interpretation to illustrate in-depth concepts and constructs that are important to the study. Careful attention is made to distinguish between interview and website data provide differential insights into the context of HRD consultancy and differential means by which the social behaviours of actors based on shared values or belief systems are communicated (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

4.12 Summary

This chapter has justified the coherence between the exploration of professional identity as a constructed concept, the exploration of perceptions and beliefs by practitioners and an alignment with my own social constructionist philosophical belief system. The chapter has justified my research design choices in relation to the research questions of this study, and the research method traditions across HRD and SoP. The data collection processes were discussed considering the issues related to sampling and ethical considerations. Reflexive practice is discussed and demonstrated in this chapter in line with the 6 RTA phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021). This chapter concluded with an assessment of how the quality in qualitative research debate was considered and demonstrated through careful consideration of my choices and the approaches used to demonstrate transparency in the presentation of this thesis.

Chapter Five and Six will now present the results from the analysis of the data collected from website content and semi structure interviews.

Chapter 5: HRD Consultancy as a Profession Findings

Chapter 5: HRD Consultancy as a Profession Findings

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the data collected from semi-structured interviews with Human Resource Development (HRD) consultant and clients, and organisational documentation from websites of UK based HRD consultancies. As discussed in the Introduction chapter, the aim of this study is to fill the gap in understanding about the contemporary role of Human Resource Development (HRD) consultancy as a profession and what professionalism means from the perspective of the HRD consultant and the client. The chapter will offer a synthesis from the data sets related to the first of three research questions. Chapter Six explores the remaining two research questions:

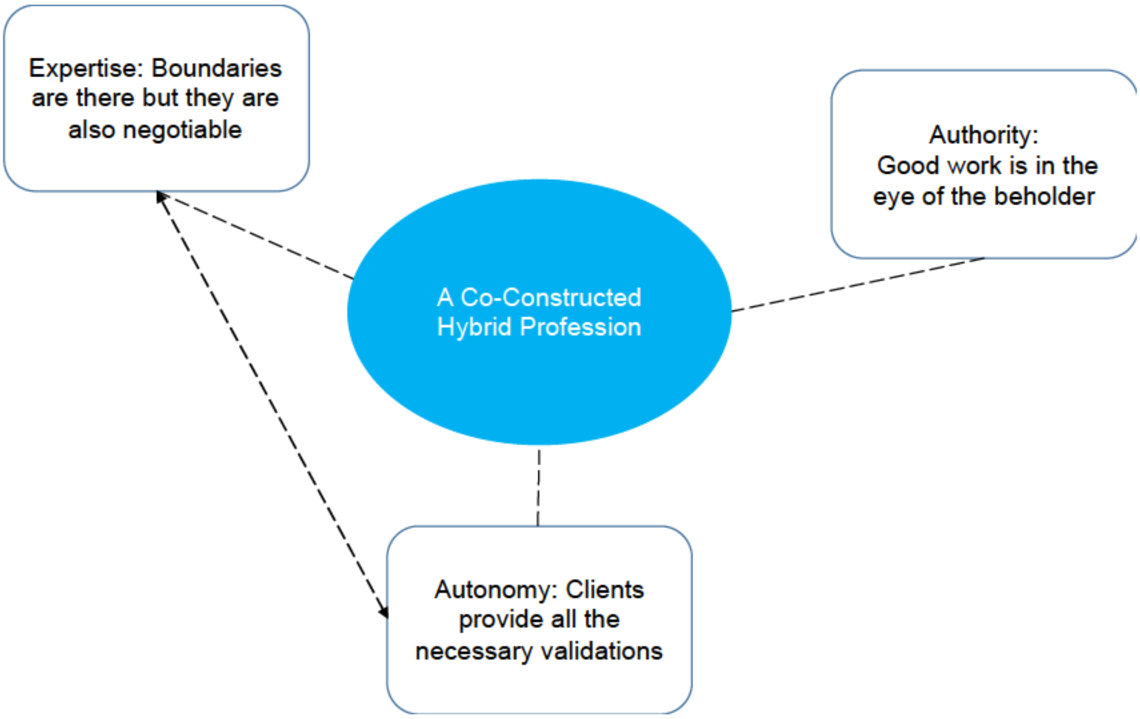
Research question 1
Drawing on definitions from the Sociology of the Professions, to what extent can HRD consultancy be considered a profession?

The chapter will begin with an illustration of the thematic maps created from the analysis of the data collected. As discussed in the Chapter Four, this study uses Reflexive Thematic Analysis to analyse and communicate the outputs from the analysis in the form of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020). The chapter will move on to a discussion of three sub-themes in a sequence that I have determined that creates a coherent story from the data but does not suggest a hierarchy or dominance of one theme over another. Each sub-theme aims to work independently and collectively towards an understanding of the theme of 'a co-constructed hybrid profession'. The thematic map is presented in Figure 8. Key discussion points identified within the data are presented and discussed. Specific attention is placed on the synthesis of the data sources from websites, HRD consultants and clients. In creating a synthesis, I am drawing out both consensus and divergence in the data and interpreting possible meanings in line with the aim of this study. Findings are presented and supported using verbatim quotations to support the arguments.

The theme of a co-constructed hybrid profession can be understood by exploring three sub-themes that draw out different perspectives from the theoretical lens of the professions and using the accepted dimensions of expertise, authority, and autonomy. The co-constructed nature of HRD consultancy as a hybrid profession draws attention to the importance of professional status being recognised and awarded by the client as well as the contextual and relational nature of HRD consultant work in organisations.

Figure 8

Research Question One Thematic Map



5.2 Expertise: Boundaries are there but they are also negotiable

This sub theme explores the hybrid knowledge base of HRD consultants which informs the expertise in their professional work. This study found that HRD consultants draw on a hybrid knowledge base which reflects the combination of abstract knowledge from an interdisciplinary base, knowledge of the client context, and the co-production of knowledge with clients and stakeholders. Learning from experience is the dominant means of new knowledge acquisition.

5.2.1 Expertise from Abstract Body of Knowledge

HRD consultant knowledge is drawn from an abstract body of knowledge. Consultancy The Mind Gym is illustrative of the references to the use of scientific knowledge in their HRD work and the results this enables them to achieve. They emphasis 'latest' knowledge to demonstrate currency and 'being on top of' latest thinking. Consultancy The Emergenetics International extract illustrates of how the language of scientific research is used to project legitimacy such as 'statistical reliability and validity'. On websites, a very small number of HRD consultants go further and include the detail of the testing carried out that backs up these studies however this tends to be hidden away in a downloadable file. Consultancy Getfeedback claim to have an openminded approach to scientific knowledge in being 'committed to original research' and being 'psychologically minded.' Consultant websites, however, rarely state which body of knowledge informs their products, their know-how, or values:

> "The strength of the Emergenetics Profile lies not only in its statistical reliability and validity, but also on how it provides powerful insights into individuals and teams without judging or labeling." (Website Emergenetics International)
>
> "Mind Gym uses the latest psychology and behavioural science to transform how people think, feel and behave and so improve the performance of companies and the lives of people who work in them." (Website The Mind Gym)
>
> "Getfeedback is committed to original research and adopts a psychologically minded approach to things, supported by science and reinforced by business understanding." (Website Getfeedback)

In interviews, only a small number however of HRD consultants acknowledged that their scientific knowledgebase is important in how they communicate their expertise to clients. However, as Philip highlights, HRD consultant work has different knowledge bases for different work. Coaching, in this example, requires 'scientific knowledge' to communicate the value of consultant work with employees 'who don't believe' in HRD.

"… scientific knowledge will come out in the client testimonials, it will come out in the experience, it will result in word of mouth referrals. It is important in our thought leadership, it's important when we interact particularly with participants more so maybe than coachees in the room or even via e-learning to show that there is academic underpinning, there is a scientific reason, there is a physiological link with behaviour, that increasingly through neuroscience we can see and we can prove, and that's a great way into participants and coachees who are maybe engineers, maybe technical experts in their field, don't quite believe in all this people mumbo-jumbo and neuroscience, scientific knowledge..." (CO16 Philip)

Consultants and clients did not define a single 'body of work' that informed their definition of HRD or the work being delivered in client organisations. Participants suggested that there was a breadth of bodies of knowledge made up HRD and this list was consistently evolving. Hugh, for example, shared his view that as a consultant:

"I think the key is to integrate as much as possible from different disciplines to create better and more creative solutions and I think that's a fundamental skill that good HR(D) consultants have, being able to draw away from a whole range of different disciplines to make the best more pragmatic and rigorous solutions that the clients want, yeah… The main driver to draw in those disciplines is because you get the best solution at the end of it when you're drawing in best practice in eclectic ways. I don't believe that any one facet of HR(D) consulting has all the answers so I think it's about having a versatility." (CO10 Hugh)

One example of the skill of drawing together multiple disciplines was shared by consultant Kayleigh. She illustrated her expertise was seen in how knowledge from her different professional identities informed her HRD consultant work:

"… in my other line of work I'm a psychotherapist and so I work with trauma particularly, which came out of being in the Police and seeing the traumatised Police Officers, and so in the one-to-one work I have adapted the trauma process that I learnt about in my trauma training and used that as a coaching model in development work. So, what that works with is the neuroscience of how the brain creates patterns and is looking for patterns but it helps the brain

> to unlearn patterns and to unlearn those traumatic brain patterns." (CO15 Kayleigh)

Selection of the right abstract knowledgebase to be used in HRD consultant work is also part of a HRD consultant's expertise. In interviews, HRD consultants like Bea emphasised that collaboration and negotiation in selecting abstract knowledgebases were important to determine what was most appropriate for the client context:

> "I'm very careful not to be dogmatic and just have one because for me that's a danger. For me the one thing that is the most important, it is the client that is at the centre of everything that I do. And I never ever want a body of work, the client to fit into that. It's the client first and then I have different bodies of work and tools and whatever it is that I can draw on to help my client. That for me is absolutely key." (CO05 Bea)

Consultant Connor agrees that abstract knowledge is not how his clients construct their opinion of his expertise. Whilst his own personal engagement and 'reasonable grasp' of abstract knowledge exists, clients value other forms of expertise. In the case of Connor, he refers to his ability to deliver practical solutions that is prioritised over the knowledge employed in diagnosing or designing the HRD work:

> "…the way that I utilise scientific knowledge is I absolutely reference it and I have a reasonable grasp of what's out there but, to be honest, with my clients, nobody, nobody employs me because of my scientific knowledge. Because of who I am and what I do, they don't perceive me in that light. That's not what they want from me. They want a pragmatist, somebody who is going to help them deliver the plan." (CO11 Connor)

This view is extended by clients where expertise in the form of abstract knowledge is not considered to a barrier to entry for a HRD consultant to be brought into their organisation. From the majority of clients interviewed, the use of abstract knowledge base is a lower priority when selecting consultants:

"Scientific knowledge, it depends what the solution is because if I was looking for somebody to support me with culture, that wouldn't be important to me. It depends what it is that I'm looking for." (CL12 Karen)

Consultant Cliff suggests the absence of this barrier to entry is linked to the way in which some clients see the nature HRD work. For Cliff:

"Astonishing, isn't it, you'd think [evidencing expert knowledge] would be but it's not my experience. I would say in some organisations the L&D people just aren't that experienced or knowledgeable and aren't thinking about it, they're doing a job and it's back to that, 'I'm just putting training on'. I wonder whether at some point there's an element of trust, there's definitely some clients we've got some history with, they'll just trust us to do a good job and bring whatever models we want into that. Just, it's really rare, really rare when a client says, 'Okay, take me through the models that you're going to be delivering'. So, that might be ignorance, it might be lack of interest, it might be distraction, they're too busy doing other things but it's really rare." (CO08 Cliff)

5.2.2 Expertise from Situational Knowledge

Rather than a focus on abstract knowledge, this study found that a HRD consultant's expertise was linked to situational knowledge drawn over time from their experience of working with client organisations. This finding is well represented by clients, consultants and the website data. In HRD consultant websites, expertise in the profession is represented by the situated knowledge that is acquired from their experience of HRD work with clients. This also includes how much experience represented in number of years. One of the most common occurring references relates to the use of tried and tested approaches. The extract from Impact International illustrates a commonly occurring feature of HRD consultant websites that links knowledge or 'know-how' to the years of experience working with clients and the nature of that work. :

"Our expertise is rooted in 38 years of designing custom solutions for organisations confronting a need to adapt, change and grow. We work at the

> boundary between the people strategy and the organisations development strategy, connecting and developing both." (Website Impact International)

For consultants, expertise from situational knowledge created from client experiences is an important part of their professional status. This comes in different stages as illustrated by consultant Hugh. First, the creation of new knowledge from HRD consultant work in client organisations. The second is the exchange and dissemination of this experience by the HRD consultant with clients:

> "The first thing is sheer expertise and it's my job, and I'm thinking about when people are bringing me, singular, in. Having that breadth of understanding and seeing what works in other places, what works in other organisations, being able to bring in best practice, it's my job to make organisations stronger, more capable, more adaptable." (CO10 Hugh)

Expertise from situational knowledge is also an important feature that distinguishes the external consultant role from any internal capabilities. This external perspective is one of the 'added value' dimensions of a HRD consultant work. As mentioned by consultant Connor, HRD consultants use their situational knowledge to inform an understanding of the external environment for their clients. Expertise therefore is understood by how the consultant determines 'what good looks like' without the alignment with abstract knowledge:

> "Again, I think what's helpful, because I have such breadth in the organisations I work with, I think it's a real advantage that one day I'm in aviation, the next I'm in law, the next I'm in retail, the next I'm in banking, the next I'm… whatever. Again, there's a perspective there that's, you know, if you're internal in an organisation, you get very, very blinded by the company." (CO11 Connor)

Clients are represented as being partners in creating a HRD consultant's situational knowledge base. Knowledge is created by the situational data shared by clients with HRD consultants. Whether clients are aware of this form of knowledge creation, however, is unclear. Consultant Bassam, for example illustrated their approach:

> "…we have this experience which actually, again, we don't utilise as well as we should do, but it means that we've got this, because we've got relationships, our customers share information with us. So, they share information with us. Not, we don't use it in a visible way, but we take principles and lessons and kind of apply it, so it just gives us a wealth of knowledge, which is actually really quite powerful." (CO07 Bassam)

Expertise for a HRD consultant also includes the knowledge of unique client organisations and power dynamics in organisation cultures. From the consultant's perspective, knowledge of the client organisation from both commercial goals and internal power perspectives are represented as requirements for a successful HRD consultant. Expertise is therefore defined in a manner that integrates the focus on HRD and business systems, strategy and stakeholder dynamics:

> "…about knowing how complex organisations work. Knowing how things need to get done in… well, things get done in different kinds of cultures. Being able to, even if you haven't worked there directly, knowing how you might get ideas supported and bought into in different contexts. How the decision-making process works, and helping my clients to navigate their own organisation, I think, is really important as well, to understand their stakeholders." (CO10 Hugh)

One consultant stands out for his awareness of the limitations of his expertise which is dominated by situated knowledge rather than abstract knowledge. In his reflections, Bassam demonstrates the conflict between his current professional practice and a future ideal professional practice drawing on different types of knowledge. The cost involved in changing his approach is linked to his own commercial drivers as well as his professional identity:

> "So, my job is to simulate brilliance. Do I need a scientific basis to do that? Yes, in some measure. But does it… would it… would I change who we are? No. So, therefore I think we need to, in terms of our maturing and growing up as an organisation, it would be beneficial… But we are not trying to mould ourselves to be what others are." (CO07 Bassam)

The development of new knowledge and engaging in professional development activities is undertaken at the expense of the survival of the HRD consultancy business. When faced with investing in time on creating new knowledge or acquiring new knowledge, HRD consultants have to weigh up the opportunity cost. Consultant Myra described it as:

> “Well I, it’s quite interesting that, you know, being completely honest, that actually there’s only enough time that, that the delivery of what you do and all of that. But a big part of what you’ve got, what you do has got to be about marketing and chasing. Every, you know, and that is, as I, as I keep saying, that’s the, I mean, that’s the business angle. You don’t do it, you die.” (CO12 Myra)

5.2.3 Expertise from Control over Tasks and Competencies

Expertise is also claimed by HRD consultants through the means to define their control over HRD professional practice. On websites, expertise HRD consultants is portrayed in relation to the control over the provision of products, techniques and tools to current clients or offered to prospective clients. These involve specific and tangible products such as workshops and masterclasses, or products delivered over longer timeframes such as courses or programmes. HRD products are represented as tangible and can be specified within a curriculum. Coaching, for example, is positioned as a tool to be made available for organisations to use. Products are tangible also to the extent to which they can be customised to meet a client need and tailored to a specific audience:

> “We offer a full curriculum of courses, workshops, masterclasses and one-to-one coaching at all levels of the Leadership Pipeline, through both standard and tailor-made learning solutions.” (Website The Oxford Group)

> “The School of Life is devoted to developing emotional intelligence. We offer a variety of programmes and services concerned with how to live wisely and well.” (Website The School of Life)

> “Executive Coaching is one of the most versatile and powerful change management tools available to organisations today.” (Website AoEC)

In interviews, both consultants and clients viewed defining HRD consultant work in functional terms as products and tools was considered to represent a lack of expertise in HRD and a lack of understanding of the professional work of a consultant. The example from consultant Cliff illustrates the influence of time in how HRD is defined in organisations and a desire to move to a new ‘ideal’ HRD work that growing but not yet the focus of HRD work:

> “So, I if go back twenty years, people would say, ‘We want …’, you know, I mentioned the Time Management thing, the website that I created, people say, ‘We want a Time Management day’, where you go and deliver a Time Management day or, ‘We want a Presentation Skills day’… today, many more clients that we deal with who are looking for us to contribute at a strategic level. It’s fewer than I’d like, to be really honest, but some clients will literally be saying, ‘We are doing a major refresh on values, we really want to reposition our organisation, our staff etc and we want Learning Development support to help us bring about that change within the organisation’.” (CO08 Cliff)

HRD consultant expertise also has control over what is developed. In websites, this is represented as the development of specific skills such as time management, team working and communication skills. Specific skills can be defined, how they are developed can be identified and their audiences can be specified. On websites, the emphasis is on transferable skills and easily understood structures. In the examples from Belbin and Getfeedback, development can happen in teams and in any organisation:

> “Belbin Team Roles is the language of teams, enabling individuals to be able to project and talk about their behavioural strengths in a productive, safe and nonconfrontational way.” (Website Belbin)

> “Getfeedback have developed Think-IN; a scalable methodology that delivers superior solutions and embeds the discipline of effective thinking in organisations.” (Website Getfeedback)

HRD consultants also use the narrative of boundaryless impact when defining their expertise. Consultants work is not limited to developing specific skills for specific audiences. HRD consultants represent their control to include how development changes organisations. HRD consultant work, as discussed by client Kal, develops employee behaviours that changes their cognitive abilities and their sense of self. For example, Emergenetics International illustrate how their work links raising of self-awareness with enhanced ways of facilitating more open forms of communication in teams. The development of open forms of communication leads to 'celebrating the individual and bonds the collective'. The varied jurisdiction requires consultants to adopt diverse styles of work to work across different types of development:

> "…my feeling has evolved more to helping people identify, you know, giving them the tools and the frameworks and references to really understand their own skill gaps and then giving them opportunities to learn in different ways." (CL08 Kal)

> "Today, organisations the world over are driving results simply by having a deeper understanding of each individual that makes up the team, putting in place a common language that cuts through the differences, and creating a climate that celebrates the individual and bonds the collective. The result? Happier employees. Motivated teams. Better performance. Desired results." (Website Emergenetics International)

5.2.4 Expertise from Credentials

A significant finding in this study from both consultants and clients is that entry into a client organisation is not informed by HRD professional body membership or HRD qualifications. For consultant Evan, engaging in qualifications is led by his own values as a means to develop his professional practice through acquiring new knowledge. Evan stands out as one of the few HRD consultants in the study who has actively engaged with qualifications as part of his career. This might be connected to the environment where he works in the commercial consulting function of a HRD professional body, although this connection was not specifically made by Evan:

"… has been really important to me to validate that I'm actually in the right space, because the whole reason for doing the Master's, even though I've got an MSc and a Postgrad diploma, I was reaching the boundaries of some of my digital knowledge and it was like, okay, so I need to step up a bit here and I found this course and it's really kind of helped me, so keeping on top of some of the advances and changes has been really important to me. Can I do that without qualification? Yes, I can, but for me the qualification framework is an extra step of kudos". (CO Evan)

Consultant Bryson works in the commercial consulting function of a HRD professional body. Whilst in his view, HRD qualifications are important for the acquisition of abstract knowledge and skill development, he acknowledges that qualifications are limited in the extent to which they represent current competence:

"That's a really nice question. Especially for someone who works for an awarding body. I think qualifications often provide a snapshot at a moment of competence and knowledge. So I did my MPhil twenty years ago or so. It's a great qualification. It shows rigour around research and those kind of approaches. What was the leading edge of instructional design when I did my MPhil is very different from the leading edge of instructional design now." (CO17 Bryson)

Consultant Myra is one of the small number of consultants who holds a HRD qualification from a HRD professional body. In her opinion, it is not linked to entry into clients because the client's assessment of her expertise goes past what qualifications represent. Performance and experience represent her expertise:

"Nobody cares, in my opinion, people don't care. If you are ticking all the rest of the boxes, experience, you know, I could be, I could come out of university with a, with everything from top drawer and all the qualifications in the world and do a load of, it's not the same as standing in front of people and having done it yourself." (CO12 Myra)

Consultant Colt, for example, represents a large number of consultants who hold no HRD professional body memberships or associated HRD qualifications. Consultant

Connor illustrates that for many consultants the lack of engagement with professional bodies and qualifications is a conscious choice:

> "Because the, in 15 years of coaching, nobody's ever asked me for my qualifications. They base my engagement on what I achieve with people and I think there is a huge industry that grows up around qualifications and I think its people use it as a badge of honour that's unnecessary." (CO14 Colt)

> "I have no qualifications. I've got no affiliations with any professional bodies and that has not been an issue for me, ever, actually, in my career… I made a very conscious choice in my career, ten or fifteen years ago." (CO11 Connor)

From a client's view, Client Tessa suggests that qualifications and professional body memberships hold limited value to HRD consultants because of the lack of barriers to entry into the profession, and lack of barriers into client organisations who themselves value experience over qualifications:

> "Because often people that have delivered some of the best training, whether it's leadership whether it's product, customer training, are people that might have had a previous career in marketing or a previous career in you know, finance or whatever it is. So, and I also think that's probably partly the reason why the whole nature of the industry has continued to be very fragmented and why professional bodies like the International Federation of Coaches or CIPD or any of these other bodies struggle with their membership. And are not, it's a bit of a catch 22 because they're not able to offer enough value to their members. And arguably that's because their members don't need them to offer that value." (CL06 Tessa)

Client Tabatha reflected on her view of the lack of importance on qualifications or professional body memberships because it reflected her own journey into the profession and how she developed her knowledge of HRD work:

> "It's not important to me because of the way I've come in in an informal route. So I don't place that same weight that maybe other people would…. And there may be more generally, there are just so many different routes in that I don't

think... But you can acquire it in so many different ways that I don't think I need to be prescriptive when selecting a consultant." (CL02 Tabatha)

Coaching, however, stands out as HRD consultant work that is more closely linked to professional bodies and qualifications. Client Mary shared her reflections on how her own professional development in coaching influenced a change in how she viewed a consultant's expertise. Having completed a qualification and become an accredited coach, she changed how she interacted with her current consultants. Her new informed position, however, did not change her opinion on what evidences expertise. What is important for HRD consultants, however, is that expertise is believed by the client only where evidence of the professional standards is demonstrated in their practice and assessed by the client:

> "I ask them 'who are you accredited with' and that has actually interestingly flushed out some people who are not accredited and that doesn't mean I wouldn't necessarily use them but I have a level of discernment now on 'this is someone who coaches but isn't, and they might be working towards their accreditation because as we know there's lots of hours of coaching you need to do, so you have to coach to end up being accredited, so you know, I understand that." (CL05 Mary)

As an alternative, HRD consultants chose to be qualified in specific HRD tools. Certification was typically provided by external HRD consultancies to other consultants. Certification in specific HRD tools were selected because of image of professional practice and as a means of securing additional HRD work with clients. Consultant Ulla reflects a significant number of consultants who had sought this type of credentialling:

> "What I then did is search out for external certifications, in other words became a certified MBTI, DISC, INSIGHTS, things like that where I could be sure that the information or let's say the material that I was delivering had some professional background." (CO02 Ulla)

Consultancies instead were found in this study to use their own normative mechanisms to award credentials. Consultant Natalie is in charge of recruiting new consultants. She talked about they developed their own criteria for credentials that reflected organisational requirements for values and culture fit rather than those of a collective profession:

> "… we're using our standards, which are I guess built from years of experience actually and knowing part of it is about our, as an organisation, our values, our culture, the skills that we've got are part of that process." (CO01 Natalie)

Consultant Connor is an independent consultant and he sees his own credentials to be drawn from the production of his own HRD knowledge base through publishing books. Publishing his own views on HRD practice and being recognised externally as published replaced the role of a professional body or qualifications as credentials:

> "Now, I counteract that because I'm a published author. I absolutely recognise that if I was not an author, that would be a different proposition and I know that a lot of my credibility comes on the back of my books." (CO11 Connor)

A more dominant way of understanding credentials for HRD consultants is through a discourse of experience. Experience was more commonly found in this study to qualify a HRD consultant to be able to diagnose, infer and solve client needs. Experience as a credential however was determined by clients and not through impression management strategies employed by consultants. For client Tara, experience qualifies a HRD consultant to be able to engage with client conversations. For Client Abby, experience is the means by which a HRD consultant can best communicate their expertise and provide guarantees:

> "They've lived it, they've breathed it and they can advise from their own personal experiences… sometimes experience incredibly outweighs a qualification." (CL09 Tara)

> "So a qualification for me as an individual, isn't an essential if you can demonstrate that you can actually do what you need to do, that you have the knowledge." (CL07 Abby)

Experience is a credential to that provides the ability to diagnose. For consultant Felix, he describes how experience is built by getting under the skin of different client organisations and translating that knowledge into other client relationships:

> “I’m always trying to do and perhaps this is because it’s the model of the organisation that I work in, but really try and get under the skin of the organisation. Understand their culture both what they say their culture is, the values on the wall, and actually the real values, what’s going on? I think that’s where the consultant can add most value, actually, because of the experience from other organisations, being able to read between the lines and assess the culture a little bit…” (CO03 Felix)

Client Tabatha provided an example where one consultant drew on their previous experience in other organisations in order to diagnose a HRD solution for her organisation. The HRD consultant’s experience therefore was a desirable characteristic in the selection of the consultant:

> “And she could give us a range of options. She could say well this happened or I’ve had experience of X, Y or Z in various organisations. But this is what I think will work for you. And that’s really important as well.” (CL02 Tabatha)

For Consultant Cliff, the experience of trust based relationships helps with the entry into new clients through network reputation. The uniqueness of client contexts becomes a more dominant theme as the client-consultant relationship develops over time. This will be expanded upon later in Chapter Six:

> “…well it’s two ideas. So, one is we’re experienced in what we do but actually I think it’s more about they’re experienced in us, that idea that because of the word of mouth thing, because of the recommendations, I think that you’ve got actually a sense of, ‘We had a great experience, these people know what they’re doing, they’re experienced’, both that experience and the great experience idea comes through.” (CO08 Cliff)

Experience is purposefully used by HRD consultants as organisational credentials. Experience is used by HRD consultants to evidence how they have acquired (interdisciplinary) expertise including their non-HRD consultant work. For Consultant Bea, experience represents a HRD consultant's expertise when linked to experience working in the corporate world and evidencing empathy with her future clients. For Consultant Bea this reflects the positive achievements in a HRD consultant's previous career:

> "So for me qualifications are important but for me what's really important is experience, especially when it's working in the corporate world, having been in the corporate world. That's one that also, and this is going to be, I'm going to be very harsh as I say this. Having had successes in the corporate world also." (CO05 Bea)

5.3 Autonomy: Clients provide all the necessary validations

This sub theme explores the autonomy HRD consultants as the ability of a profession to define its own standards of professional practice, and in turn direct and evaluate the work of its members without being subject to evaluation of those outside of the profession. As discussed in Chapter Two, autonomy is dependent on a profession's expertise and its ability to self-regulate. This study found that HRD consultant autonomy can be understood as hybrid in balancing values-led relational practice with delivering a managerial agenda.

5.3.1 HRD Consultancy Standards are grounded in Transformation

This study found that delivering transformation was a dominant narrative in how HRD consultants defined the standards of professional practice. A narrative of transformation appears across a significant number of website data. The example from Consultancy Courageous Success illustrates the emphasis that life changing transformation of people and organisation performance is their defining purpose. For Consultancy Impact International, their claims are even grander with changing the 'world of work':

> "We deliver life changing learning that transforms people and business performance across the globe." (Courageous Success)

> "We're a people development company that's here to change the world of work forever." (Impact International)

Transformation in the hands HRD consultants is also conceptualised at multiple levels from individual, team and organisational levels. Consultancy The Mind Gym illustrates the ease by which HRD consultants can transform individual attitude change in their sense of self efficacy and agency in their own lives as well as the part they play in an organisation:

> "By changing belief and capability, attitude follows. People say: 'I feel positive, in control and excited about my future. I understand the importance and value of this change for my personal as well as company's success, and I am committed to helping make it happen." (The Mind Gym)

Consultancy Belbin describes the ease of engaging individuals, team and organisations connected to an ease of learning from and through HRD work which lead to positive transformational outcomes for organisations:

> "By using Belbin, individuals have a greater self understanding of their strengths, which leads to more effective communication between colleagues and managers. Great teams can be put together, existing teams can be understood and improved, and everyone can feel that they are making a difference in the workplace." (Belbin)

The absence of a narrative of struggle, conflict or discomfort is important to recognise. By implication, any struggle or discomfort experienced by an individual, team or organisation is as a result of non-HRD consultant actions. This is to be expected given the marketing nature of websites. However, such absence masks the reality of personal and professional change in organisations and the difficulties faced implementing HRD work by HRD practitioners. A second feature absent from the narrative of transformation is the model or framework by which transformation specifically happens. Whilst some websites provided a consulting model, it is unclear how HRD consultants as a collective achieve consistency in such results. At an individual consultant or consultancy level, this is understandable a lack of disclosure related to protecting their competitive advantage and instead requires prospective clients to be drawn in to 'contact us' or 'set up an appointment to find out more.'

A significant number of HRD Consultants represent HRD as the enabler of 'what should be' as life in organisations. In shaping this ideal workplace, HRD consultants communicate the power of their autonomy to be universal and able to work outside of boundaries such as company size, sector, or nationality. For consultancy Marshall E-Learning, this universalism is used to deliver what it sees as an ideal state of soft capitalism where softer embodied emotional and aesthetic skills transform organisations into post-Fordist workplaces through work with senior leaders to transform cultures:

> "Through close working with our team of highly motivated and experienced associates, your senior staff will learn to maximise their management and leadership qualities, understand the need to act as role models, and fully embrace the responsibility that comes with their position. The effect of these sessions will be to trigger top-down gains for your entire organisation." (Marshall E-Learning)

For Consultancy Interaction, HRD consultants work with the autonomy to work to transform all types of individuals in the workplace as their specialism for their clients:

> "We specialise in bringing about positive behavioural change for leaders, managers, graduates, apprentices and individuals at all levels of a business." (Interaction)

For Consultancy The OCM, they are able to perform their work to any audience 'globally' suggesting that HRD work's universalism has a single unifying power for organisations and individuals without impact from national cultures or norms:

> "We are coaching and mentoring experts who work globally with organisations and individuals to harness the transformative power of coaching and mentoring in pursuit of your strategic goals and purpose." (The OCM)

Consultancy Emergenetics International represents a less common approach but still important where their values of equality have the power break down hierarchies and unify all individuals ‘on a common plane’:

> “Using the Emergenetics Profile as a common denominator cuts through any organisation hierarchy, placing every individual on a common plane.” (Emergenetics International)

Transformation also aims to help clients create the ideal workforce as the ultimate form of managerial agenda. Consultancy The Tess Group connects the power of their HRD work to create a dream workforce that clients ‘had always dreamed they become.’ Employees are transformed through the unique work of consultants into ‘ambassadors.’ Consultancy Marshall E-Learning emphasise how this dream workforce is transformed using the discourse of efficiency and a discourse of responsibility. The work of consultants in creating this type of transformation is achieved in two ways – by the functional HRD work of ‘sessions’ and by the autonomy to set standards as desired outcomes:

> “We transform your people into the ambassadors you always dreamed they’d become with fresh, unique and forward thinking sales training.” (The Tess Group)

> “The sessions will help your workforce forge a tighter bond, set common goals, and ensure that you are all in it together. For any organisation to work best it must be working to the peak of its collective abilities.” (Marshall E-Learning)

5.3.2 HRD Consultancy Standards are regulated by Client Relationships

A profession’s autonomy is usually granted by the client. This study found that relational autonomy was an important feature of the HRD consultant relationship with their client. From both consultant and client interviews, the narrative of professional friendships was a dominant discourse in how autonomy was granted. For client Tara, a consultant who is ‘human’ and ‘genuine’ was an important feature of the partnership mindset that enabled a new consultant to become quickly embedded in her organisation. For consultant Bassam, professional friendships are ‘what drives us’ as consultants in their professional work and they have important commercial consequences for consultants in securing long-term client work. This suggests that developing and protecting a professional friendship is an important means of self-regulation for HRD consultants:

> "She was persistent without being overbearing, which I think is really important from a consultant's perspective. She wasn't a salesperson. She was human. She was able to connect with you on a human level and talk about her own experiences which seemed really genuine." (CL09 Tara)

> "That's what drives us. We're, I mean, literally when we get it right as an organisation, our clients become friends, literally, and like, friends, kinda professional friends, yeah? And when that happens, we just see relationships blossom. When it happens, our relationships will be 10, 15 years plus, yeah? We call each other, they ask for advice." (CO07 Bassam)

Consultancy Courageous Success stands out as an exception in how the discourse of friendship is characterised in more formal and public ways in their websites. This absence suggests that consultancies use formal means to emphasis the managerial agenda as the means to be granted autonomy. In doing so, however, they hide the appeal of the values-led consultant-client relationship and send ambiguous messages about the importance of the personal relationship to secure future work:

> "We create personal connections. We are naughty, real and authentic, controversial whilst kind. Creating and maintaining lifetime relationships that feel like personal connections." ("Website Courageous Success)

Self-regulation with the goal to develop a successful client relationship needs to be crafted and achieved over a period of time. Consultant Francesca describes the importance of self-regulation in how the process of exchange happens in building rapport over time. This skill set, she describes, is also used as a criterion used by her consultancy to recruit future HRD consultants:

> "…the first one or two experiences with a client that has to be carefully balanced with just a degree of letting them get to know us a little bit because I

think most people really don't want to be greeted by, 'Right, let's deeply probe into your innermost …', people just need a bit of social space just to get an idea of who they're working with. So, I would say all of our consultants, we're looking for those qualities and up front we're also looking for just nice social skills." (CO04 Francesca)

A further means of self-regulation within the consultant-client relationship is evidencing flexibility. For Client Karen, the terms of the relationship are not determined by specific contractual terms. Instead, flexibility is an expectation from embedded relationships. This flexibility can be drawn on to meet a client's needs outside of formal traditional contractual terms:

> "I really value a good partnership with a provider. So, in such that I can just pick the phone up and quite often, it might be where I'm just picking the phone up to ask advice about something and they're not going to charge me anything for that because they know that they've got a long term relationship with me." (CL12 Karen)

But professional friendship and human connection does not hold the same meaning for all consultants. Whilst for Client Deborah, the consultant-client relationship is characterised not by a blurring of boundaries into friendship, the emphasis on securing and protecting the relationship as a means of controlling behaviour is still apparent:

> "…relationship and not necessarily friendship because I think there can be a blurring of boundaries there that I actually find quite challenging but certainly that kind of positive regard and respect and shared goal. That's really important and having each other's backs. So, there would be times where I might defend the partnership that I had with the external provider and at times they might help me to influence in some way, so there was a sort of supportive relationship." (CL10 Deborah)

5.4 Authority: Good work is in the eye of the beholder

The final sub theme explores how HRD consultants achieve authority to perform professional practice in client organisations. In both collegiate and corporate professions, professional bodies and associations have been argued to play an important role in articulating the authority granted with professional status.

5.4.1 Professional Bodies have a weak role in Authority

In this study, the authority of HRD consultants is not achieved through the direct influence of professional bodies and associations. Authority instead is found to be awarded by clients through constructing alternative ways of conceptualising professional practice. From the HRD consultant websites sampled in this study, The Tess Group is unique in its direct reference to a HRD professional body. As a consultancy, they 'stand out from the industry' because their Managing Director holds a CIPD professional qualification. This reference is used to reinforce the authority of their HRD work which is 'definitely on learning':

> "We standout from the industry as being a Learning & Development Provider with an MD that is CIPD qualified so the focus is definitely on learning!" (The Tess Group)

For Consultant Evan, the access to relevant HRD knowledge base through the professional body serves as a commercial advantage as a means of distinguishing his consultancy from others. Evan works for the consulting arm of a UK professional body which could therefore explain why his view of the link between his employer and authority is important. For Evan, the link between HRD knowledge through research and the authority to engage with clients as a HRD consultant is clear:

> "I'm a Chartered Fellow [of the CIPD], as well, so I'm incredibly proud of that status and prior to being an employee it was extremely valuable to me to be able to access that breadth of research that we do. So, that is important and that is… one of our unique selling points is that we've got a brilliant team of researchers and we've got access to that and we can share that in real time, so rather than relying on a piece of research that came out ten years' ago, actually we've got a February 2019, this has come out, let's talk about this." (CO13 Evan)

Consultant Natalie talked about professional body membership sometimes being a relevant criterion for selection by client organisations. The purpose of professional body membership here is represented by Natalie as contextual and led by a client's internal dynamics led by a non-HRD professional functions (in this case Procurement) in the organisation:

> "If it's being driven by Procurement in their organisation and usually you find in large organisations that these are driven by Procurement and they will sometimes ask for qualifications and membership of different bodies etc as part of that process. Therefore, in order to win some business, it's important that we have people that are attached to certain bodies and certain organisations, depending on the context." (CO01 Natalie)

For client Tara, whilst she was uncertain of the advantages of professional body memberships and qualifications when working with HRD consultants, she did reflect on one example where this did influence her opinion to draw interest in a new consultant and award authority to work in her organisation:

> "She was doing an Ashridge qualification in coaching which is out of this world expensive, and just that, in itself, flagged to me her true investment in not only her own coaching practice but also the expertise that she can bring to her consultancy and so we got her in for a trial run with the team to just show us what she had to offer." (CL09 Tara)

For a small number of consultants, they see professional bodies as a ticket to entry into new clients. For consultant Bassam, for example, he uses his presence at events run by professional bodies for brand awareness and marketing:

> "So, even this afternoon, I'm going to, after this, yeah, I'm going to see one of those who met us at CIPD, and it's about brand awareness, it's about securing a number of customers, and also, we say that, you know, in an exhibition of that nature, there is one what we call big customer, which will potentially bring us in a significant amount of revenue. So, that's, we tend to do two of those a year. But that's kind of probably the major marketing strand that we have." (CO07 Bassam)

From the data collected, there are very limited references in relation to the CIPD within the professional world conveyed via UK consultancy websites or illustrated in interviews with UK based HRD consultants and their clients. There is also a very limited references to other HRD professional bodies either those based in the UK and those with a European or global presence. This is surprising in two ways. First, the sampling technique for selecting websites was based on a CIPD listing of consultancies attending a CIPD Learning & Development exhibition. Second, a significant number of consultants hold professional association members and qualifications (see Table 9) and a similar picture with clients (see Table 10). In spite of these connections to professional bodies, this study found that the nature of authority linked to professional associations had very limited recognition.

A more dominant theme from consultants and clients was the perceived absence of a relevant HRD professional body or association that had influence over HRD professional practice. Client Abby suggested that there is a conflict in the focus of one of the UK professional bodies between HRM and HRD qualifications:

> "…there's not really a great professional body for the industry, so we didn't really look into 'are you CIPD qualified' and all of that jazz because the CIPD qualifications are, they're not totally useless but they're not amazing either and as a body I know they're trying to get better but they are not set up for HRD. They are set up for HRM." (CL07 Abby)

For consultant, Hugh, he shared this view of conflicting with other discipline professional bodies provided a focus more on impression management than actual indicators of current standards of professional practice:

> "… I'm not aware of professional bodies that specifically enable/police/safeguard the broader L&D profession. I think in that case what I would draw on was the chartered occupational psychology thing which sounds impressive, it probably isn't really, but the fact that I have that and other people draw on, "I'm a fellow of the CIPD." I don't have that, but perhaps a CIPD-type of qualification, or being accredited in certain L&D tools, but there isn't so much

of an obvious badge that you can get that says, "I can do this stuff."" (CO10 Hugh)

For Client Tara, the absence of HRD professional associations relates to their lack of relevance for HRD professionals by not keeping up to date with consultant needs. The relevance for upholding and keeping up to date with professional practice standards is questioned by client Tara:

> "I do think their offerings are starting to dwindle and I do wonder if they are keeping up with trends in the market and offering things that are unique and in the moment, for HR professionals. I've got a real mixed view really of their relevance and their contribution." (CL09 Tara)

For consultant Philip who works globally, the relevance of a professional body for HRD consultants has to reflect the reality of cross border and global HRD practice:

> "Even organisations like the CIPD are virtually unknown outside the UK or at least the English speaking world, so there is nothing equivalent elsewhere, so it's not that important and I guess that's why the client testimonials and why word of mouth and why case studies and everything we've been discussing is so important because there is no one benchmark." (CO16 Philip)

Philip also questions whether it is even possible to assure HRD practice as such a complex domain. As a CEO of his consultancy, he also doesn't see a commercial advantage to his organisation in a HRD professional body being created to fill the gap:

> "… HRD can be anything from organisational development through to individual coaching, with all the training and all the development on and off the job in between, it's enormous… there is no organisation that can assure that….Would I go out and start it today? I don't know. We do well without it." (CO16 Philip)

For consultant Ulla, her authority to perform HRD work in the absence of professional bodies and codes of practice is replaced by the reputation of her employing HRD consultancy:

> "…that was one of the reasons why I chose to start working for a company who had that kind of, for me, that was the professional platform." (CO02 Ulla)

5.4.2 Similar experience is key to awarding Authority

This study found that experience was a more dominant discourse which represented a HRD consultant's authority over HRD work in client organisations. For Consultant Hari, she has experienced a shift from impression management techniques of storytelling to clients wanting evidence of experience from positive impact:

> "So in that sense I would say case studies as well should actually go to the top, you know, I think people are really, people have become very sceptical of the storytelling element of consultancy and what they're really looking for is what I call the storymaking. So evidence that we have that heritage really of being able to make positive change." (CO06 Hari)

For consultant Francesca, this has importance for how her authority is constructed by her clients. Similarity refers to the previous client organisation, the organisation culture and profile of the workforce. The similarity of client contexts, and in this example in how consultants enter a new client relationship, provide important signals of authority to work in future contexts:

> "I think it represents professional validation, it kind of says, 'These people have made it through the sift with other organisations, who are making it in the sector we're in'. So, if I could use a football analogy, it would be like say if we bought a player and we said, 'Well, they played for Real Madrid, they played for Paris Saint Germain, they played for Barcelona', well, we probably have a good player there." (CO04 Francesca)

A key feature, however, is that HRD consultant authority is granted by clients based on their construction of the evidence available to them. For Client Tabatha, understanding the similarity in a consultant's experience informs the questioning and sense making she undertakes when meeting new consultants, which in turn determines the likelihood to enter into a client-consultant relationship:

"I mean that tells me, the case studies of previous work tells me, what I was saying about the level that somebody's worked at. You can really get to grips with that and through a procurement process I'll always, that'll always be one of the questions. And if they get to interview stage that'll always be something that we talk to them about is their work with other organisations. And so it's a very quick way actually of finding out if that experience is real and how deep is that experience." (CL02 Tabatha)

5.5 Summary

Chapter Five has presented the results from data collected from interviews and websites in relation to Research Question One in this study. This study found that their expertise interpreted as interdisciplinary nature of HRD knowledgebase provides practitioners flexibility in how client needs are diagnosed, inferred, and treated. This study has shown that HRD consultants expertise draw on the diverse discourses of the professional and the managerial nature of HRD work in how HRD consultants communicate their jurisdiction. The discourse of experience in HRD work that reflects similar client contexts and needs provides a dominant form of credential to evidence the expertise of HRD consultants. The power to assess such evidence as assurances to quality however is held by the client who in turn uses this construction to grants access to new client organisations and access long-term relationships.

HRD consultants draw on claims of the transformative power of HRD to achieve autonomy in client organisations. In the absence however of influential professional body codes of practice or standards, HRD consultants draw on the values which inform the consultant-client relationship as how they self-regulate behaviour. In doing so, this study draws attention to the importance of relational autonomy to understand the nature of influence in this relationship dynamic. Data collected highlighted only stories of successful consultant-client relationships. Missing in the data are the stories of absence of relational autonomy or loss because of poor self-regulation. What we can say from this focus on relational autonomy is that by extension, relational autonomy is fragile and its loss would be significant for a HRD consultant. HRD consultant professional practice therefore needs to focus on sustaining client relationships as a means to be able to work successfully within a client organisation. Establishing and sustaining a values-led consultant-client relationship becomes the framework by which HRD consultants can inform their means of self-regulation as a profession.

A third sub theme in this chapter found that experience represents several features of HRD consultant's professional authority. Experience provides guarantees of quality from the professional work of a HRD consultant. The evidence of experience is found to be reflective of the extent to which evidence contains familiarity or similarity to a new client's context and needs. Evidence of experience is also dependent on how this is communicated to clients in the form of case studies of previous professional practice so that clients may construct their own meaning of a HRD consultants' professional status and grant authority to work within their organisation.

Chapter Six will now present the findings related to Research Question Two and Three to explore the meaning of professionalism for HRD consultants and how this is used as a resource.

Chapter 6: HRD Consultant Professionalism Findings

Chapter 6: HRD Consultant Professionalism Findings

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Five presented the analysis of the data collected that sought to understand the contemporary role of Human Resource Development (HRD) consultants as a profession. Chapter Six draws on the data collected to explore what HRD consultant professionalism means and how it is used by consultants in shaping their professional practice. The chapter will offer a synthesis from the data sets related to the following research questions:

Research question 2

How do the practices of HRD Consultants represent notions of professionalism?

Research question 3

How do HRD Consultants use professionalism as a resource in consultant-client relationships and how does this impact on the nature of their 'professionalism project'?

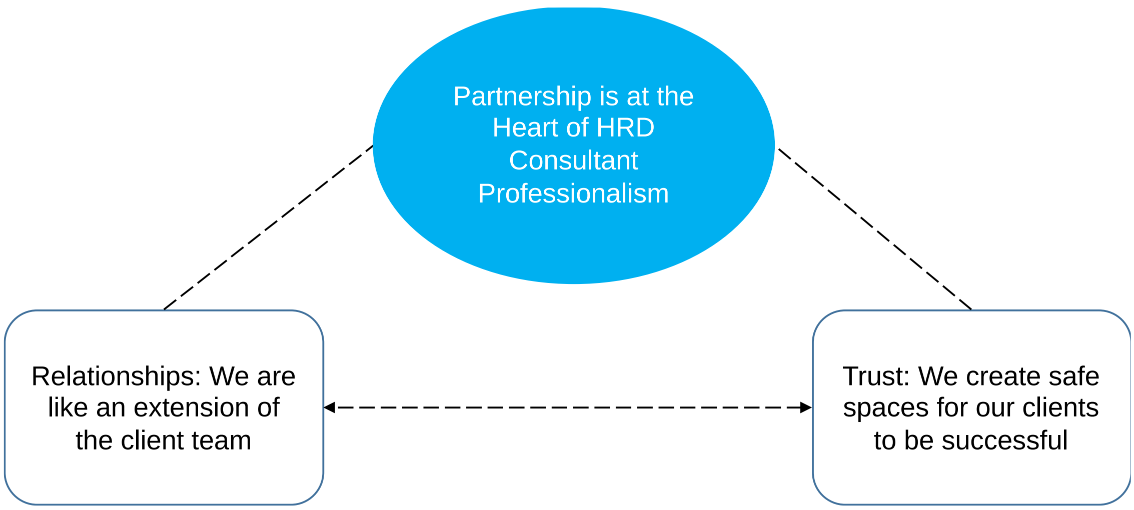
The chapter will provide an illustration of the thematic maps created from the analysis of the data collected in relation to Research Question Two and Three. In relation to Research Question Two, the theme of 'partnership is at the heart of HRD consultant professionalism' will be discussed. In relation to Research Question Three, the theme of 'professionalism reduces risks in HRD consultant work' will then be discussed. The chapter will present a discussion of the sub-themes for each theme in a sequence that I have determined that creates a coherent story from the data but does not suggest a hierarchy or dominance of one theme over another. Each sub-theme aims to work independently and collectively towards an understanding of the theme. The thematic maps in this chapter are presented in Figure 9 and Figure 10. Key discussion points identified within the data are presented and discussed. Specific attention is placed on the synthesis of the data sources from websites, HRD consultants and clients. In creating a synthesis, I am drawing out both consensus and divergence in the data and interpreting possible meanings in line with the aim of this study. Findings are presented and supported using verbatim quotations to support the arguments.

6.2 Professionalism: Partnership is at the Heart of HRD Consultant Professionalism

This theme has two sub themes which work independently and collectively around the central organising concept of partnership as the meaning of HRD consultant professionalism. The sub themes are based in the dimensions of relationships and trust.

Figure 9

Research Question Two Thematic Map



6.2.1 Relationships: We are like an extension of the client team

This sub theme from the findings addresses one of the meanings of professionalism for HRD consultants. Findings from the data illustrate the ways in which the consultant-client relationship and trust inform a discourse of partnership to be at the heart of a consultant's professionalism. Consultants and clients specifically use the discourse of partnership to describe the different expectations of a successful HRD consultant professional practice and emphasises a shared values-led dynamic in the consultant-client relationship. These findings provide important insights into the importance of crafting the 'right fit' in a partnership as a strategy for HRD consultant professional work

In this study, the professionalism in defining the nature of the consultant-client relationship was emphasised by all participants from both consultant and client perspectives. One significant perspective shared by many consultants was the importance of relationships as one of the first discourses which appeal to clients. For Consultant Natalie, the relationship is an important commercial strategy for a consultant. On the one hand, the client-consultant relationship is conceptualised as a commodity that has commercial value. Consultant Evan however illustrates that relationships are also conceptualised as a strategy that enables consultants to become embedded with the client:

> “We arrive and when I'm selling I'm selling a mixture of the solution, the service and the people. So, it really is all three and quite early on in that meeting I try to figure out which one is most important because obviously I want to sell it, ... I'm better off selling a consultant and have them with me because part of the selling it will be that relationship that’s built in that room on that day and that’s ultimately, and I believe this, our clients buy relationships, they buy people and that’s what’s important to them.” (CO01 Natalie)

> “How we help you get there, for me, that’s all about relationships. So, relationship building. It’s about empathy with where they are. It’s around providing challenge but in a supportive way, so yeah, in terms of how you relate as a consultant to people ... You buy more when you’ve got a good working relationship with people.” (C013 Evan)

In this study, the client-consultant relationship is conceptualised as ‘one team’ and re-thinks the traditional view of boundaries between client and consultant. The ‘one team’ partnership is seen in how consultants perceive the nature of the boundaries that define their services and their identity toward their clients. A large number of consultants contribute to this sub-theme in their portrayal of the consultant-client relationship without boundaries as being like ‘one team.’ Consultants use the discourse of boundaryless and integration as ‘one team’ to demonstrate their embedded relationship with their clients. Pearlcatchers use a client testimonial to illustrate how their use of time to ‘understand our business’ removes the client perception of boundaries between consultant and the client’s own Learning & Development department. Flexibility in the partnership is associated with a ‘bespoke’ way of working combined with knowledge of the client business. This combination creates social capital for the consultant in informing 'one team' from the integration of the outsider (consultant) with the insiders (client). Blue Sky use a client testimonial to illustrate how their flexibility combined with demonstrating professional values of 'passion and pride' enables them to become integrated into their client context 'as if they were part of our own organisation.' Social capital here is achieved not just by flexible approaches but also by the demonstration of a consultant's values. This illustrates how a consultant demonstrates how positive working relationships are developed through building trust and shared norms:

> "Their bespoke approach and delivery style ensures any potential cultural and language barriers are effectively overcome. The time Sharon and her team have taken to truly understand our business enables me to view them as an extension of my global L&D department." (Website Pearlcatchers - client testimonial)

> "I have worked with Blue Sky on a number of successful programmes. They are dynamic and creative in their approach, plus they delivered with passion and pride, as if they were part of our own organisation." (Website Blue Sky - client testimonial)

> "When talking to clients, the most common thing that crops up is the importance of our partnership approach whereby no request is deemed too hard or too small." (Website The TCM Group)

For clients, partnership in the form of 'one team' is equally actively sought for in the client-consultant relationship. For Client Tabatha, one team partnership blurs the boundaries between consultant and client in the diagnosis and solution development stage of professional work. This boundaryless way of working is influenced by the identity of the consultant as 'like part of the team' or outsider-and-insider. For Client Deirdre, the blurring of boundaries also comes from the outsider's knowledge of the client organisation:

> "So the best consultancies that I work with become like part of the team. And so that's what it feels like when you're working through developing a solution.

So a lot of what we do is just about problem solving. What's the problem and how are we going to resolve the problem? So discussion and exchange and ideas and, no that's a rubbish idea, let's look at something else… So ones that really try to understand and clarify, that's what partnership means I think." (CL02 Tabatha)

"I think the whole partnership piece for me works well because I think understanding the organisation from within is very important." (CL04 Deirdre)

Professionalism in the form of partnership is demonstrated by consultants has a number of characteristics valued by client and consultants. One characteristic is the equalisation of power in the partnership. For Client Carly, partnership removes traditional hierarchies within supplier-customer relationships and replaced by equality. The qualities valued in the client-consultant relationship of 'rapport' and 'connection' help to remove any hierarchies. For Consultant Natalie, partnership is characterised by the equality from viewing both consultant and client through the lens of professional work:

"it's having that really sort of well grounded real relationship, real rapport and connection with the relationship that means we are equal here you know, there's not a superiority. We're working together, in partnership". (CL01 Carly)

"So, I think consultancy firms need to recognise that actually and continue to work in partnership and sort of know our place really and know why we exist and we are experts working with other experts, professionals working with other professionals and supporting them in delivering what they need to deliver for their organisations." (CO01 Natalie)

Partnership is represented as the product of time invested by the HRD consultant in getting to know the client. As consultant Felix describes, building the relationship has to come first before the process of diagnosis, inference and treatment can begin, and importantly before the client can share insights into the real needs to be addressed:

"…the relationship is absolutely vital and that was one of the things that I learnt, actually, quite early on that with the best intentions you can't go in and start asking all of these open but probing questions to get under the skin. You need to build the relationship first.” (CO03 Felix)

The removal of hierarchies, however, does not shift how consultants position themselves to be in service to their client’s needs:

> “We are in service to the client, so they do need to feel like we are in service to them and they’re not in service to us and that’s about listening, it’s about noticing, it’s about being flexible.” (CO01 Natalie)

> “It means that if the person in the room with the client, for example, like the first meeting or second or third meetings or in the project development stages, if that person is not deeply skilled on inter-personal level things will not proceed. So, I think there’s something strategic, which is this first set of things here, and then there’s something very immediate. We have to bring somebody to the client early on with whom they can really connect and obviously in the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy connection and engagement is very, very important to us, that we deeply listen to the client, we deeply respect and understand them. So, it’s a criteria for us that everybody we recruit has that to be able to bring that to the client.” (CO04 Francesca)

6.2.2 Trust: We create safe spaces for our clients to be successful

Professionalism in the form of partnership also is found in the way HRD consultants create opportunities to focus on the professional development needs of the client. This finding is consistent across both consultants and clients as the process and outcome from working with HRD consultants. Professional development of the client happens through the expected style of communication and exchange in the partnership. Becoming ‘thinking partners’ was an aim for HRD consultants in this study. As illustrated by Consultant Philip, consultants are working in embedded relationships to help clients to identify their currents needs from HRD consultant work. For Consultant Francesca, this thinking partner role is a current feature of their professional work. This is less focused on clients’ needs being met through specific HRD products. Instead, HRD consultant professional work is about flexible ways of working with a client to think:

> "…to get to that point where you're going out and requesting three proposals or three tenders from three different suppliers a lot of thinking has already gone on and as an organisation we're often in those conversations before it even comes to the request for a proposal, because we're actually helping our client contact to think it through. So, yeah, to me trust, the relationship, are key values which you can explode into lots of other things." (CO16 Philip)

> "I think it's going to become, it already has become and its' going to be more and more a really, really high quality thinking partner and I think that will require, again, a combination of sharp thinking, clear thinking, creative thinking… I think it will become less and less about set specific content and more and more about how do we help them think in ways that work, behave in ways that work, extremely flexibly and I tend to describe that now as what we do when we don't know what to do. I think that, for me, is where I'm very motivated to add value at the moment and I feel that as a profession that is going to be very, very central." (CO04 Francesca)

For Client Tessa, thinking with their partner is a form of professional development which focuses not just on the diagnostic phase with formulating new HRD requests. Instead, the thinking partner provides the client with professional development on the strategic role of HRD in the organisation:

> "But the sort of training that we see with leaders and the greater levels of investment I think it's all about well who's really buying this? And how well are they thinking about it as a client? And that's where the partnership with the consultant comes in because they should be challenging that buyer from the outset. Not just looking for well I need to close this deal because I want to do that bit of coaching. But challenging the HR Director or whoever it is just to think more strategically about it." (CL06 Tessa)

For client Carly, she highlights the challenges faced when working in HRD roles with limited opportunities to develop herself in her HRD professional practice:

> "I actually want someone who is going to you know get me thinking of the options. Really stretch. So I think there is a degree of personal development you also get within an organisation from an external consultant because if you're in that function, you may be the most senior person so actually if you are bringing in consultants sometimes… you're also getting some development yourself. Which is HRD related as opposed to business related." (CL01 Carly)

As Consultant Philip describes, trust is a key component within the partnership because of the sensitive nature of what is shared. Clients in this example can be found to share knowledge about company and personal objectives to be worked on with their consultant:

> "when we start sitting down with our client contacts and they start talking about some very real challenges, often at senior level, they can see what's going to be happening in the future or something might be coming up and is actually strictly confidential but they need to prepare and think about what they're going to do about it. We find ourselves in situations where we hold some potentially very sensitive information and we can't have that conversation in a meaningful way if there's no trust." (CO16 Philip)

For consultant Francesca, the safe spaces aims to facilitate creative thinking with the client. As such, the collaborative nature of the thinking partnership between client and consultant helps to 'create order.' For consultant Francesca, the safe space also allows the client to challenge their own practice away from internal stakeholders without risk to their own status in the organisation:

> "I think when we work with the internal HRD specialists we can be a very stimulating and a very safe partner for them and by stimulating I mean we can ask them stuff and encourage them to answer things with little or no risk, in a way that they can't do with their own stakeholders. It's very hard, even very senior professionals in HRD, it's not easy to work that stuff out with your stakeholders in live time, so we can be a good place to do that. By a safe place all I really mean is when a good consultant builds high trust with internal HRD specialists that can create a very safe place for the HRD specialist to deeply challenge their own practice." (CO04 Francesca)

Consultant Hari highlights two features of their flexible behaviour when creating safe spaces. The first requires the consultant to role model the challenging of professional practice by sharing ‘very personal things’ to open up the safe space for the client. The second is the recognition of time in establishing the safe space. By becoming embedded within the partnership, the safe space is created and used for client development.

> “I call it self-sacrificing, is this idea of to create a really human bond, I almost have to reach the olive branch out first. So I will often share very personal things as I’m building relationships, so that people know that it’s safe for them to do the same and I will signpost always confidentiality, you know, trust that development of the container and it does, you know, it takes anywhere between four to eight weeks to kind of start to embed, especially when you don’t know that person from before, this trusting environment where people can, you know, really relax and really sink into the deep space we need them to create change.” (CO06 Hari)

Once created, the HRD consultants inhabit the safe space with the client as their ‘trusted advisor.’ In this study, the HRD consultants as trusted advisor is conceptualised as the truth teller. The truth teller is used to illustrate how trust in the consultant-client partnership enables the consultant to behave on behalf of the client. For Consultant Hari, she positions the truth teller as ‘court jester.’ In this role, the HRD consultant has power ‘to shift the whole system forward.’ This power uses truth telling to cut through organisational hierarchy and politics to create positive outcomes for the client. For Hari, the ability to use this power comes from permissions granted by the client to take on this role:

> “So we can play the role in a way, you know, if we go to an ancient archetype of the fool, the court jester who actually in a very amusing and light hearted way, speaks truth to power but speaks it in a way that shifts the whole system forward, you know and we have that permission as an external consultant, although I’m always very careful to gain that permission at the start of any client relationship.” (CO06 Hari)

For Consultant Francesca, the trusted advisor is a positive dimension of HRD consultant work that benefits the client 'in sensitive moments'. The HRD consultant therefore is required to be fluid and adaptable to a range of organisational issues and 'say the unsayable'. The HRD consultant as trusted advisor is valuable to the client not just for their ability to adapt to sensitive moments:

> "I think HRD specialists can bring in good consultants when there are either sensitive moments, politically or in terms of hierarchy or structure, where an outsider is needed to say the unsayable and I think that can be really helpful for everybody." (CO04 Francesca)

For Consultant Connor, the power to move things forward also comes from the fluid and intangible nature of HRD consultant work. Consultants use the discourse of the 'lens' or the 'mirror' to reflect back organisational power dynamics and behaviours. By doing so, this affects 'focus' and 'mind-set' to affect change:

> "So, basically, in a very constructive way, I was just able to hold up that lens and really challenge them on their mind-set, on the conversation, on the topics and as a consequence of that, they are now re-scheduling their calendar. They've shifted their focus. They've made some tangible decisions about advocacy and communication back in the firm. None of that, to me, they would not have been able to do that on their own." (CO11 Connor)

For Consultant Hugh, the speaking truth to power is more than just permission. For Hugh, he highlights that this is a capability an external HRD consultant brings to the client-consultant partnership that the client may not have, or be permitted to use. This is the capability to diagnose and act through 'objectivity' and 'courage'. For Hugh, this is highly valued as a skill set in the partnership:

> "It's also that you can say things and have opinions and point things out that internal consultants probably either wouldn't see or wouldn't feel capable of pointing about. So, there's something about that objectivity, that distance, the courage. You're actually being paid sometimes to say things that no-one is willing to say, to point out that the emperor's got no clothes on [laughter], and that's okay. They're paying you to do that." (CO10 Hugh)

The ‘truth teller’ as a means of creating safe spaces for the client is not a feature of how HRD consultants formally represent their work on websites. Whilst acknowledged widely across most of the HRD consultant interviews, there is very limited reference made on consultancy websites in their external representation of professional work. AKD is the only website from this study that references their role in responding to ‘misalignments’ between aims and client organisational culture. This suggests the ‘truth teller’ is a tacit dimension of the trust in the client-consultant partnership:

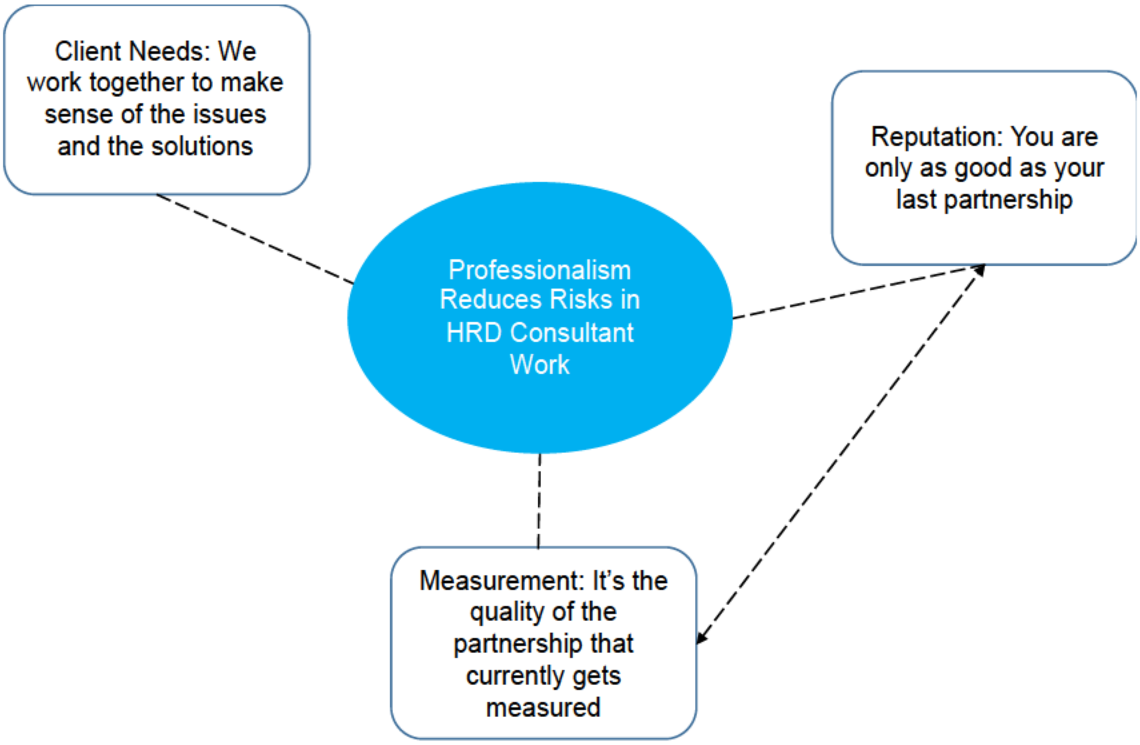
> “Collaboration lies at the heart of this programme. We’ll meet with you to ask a few vital questions that will help us understand who you are, who you are becoming, and the values and behaviours you believe will help drive the change you need. These insights will not only enable us to adapt our programmes to suit your exact needs, but are often a good way of working out if there are misalignments between your aims and your current working culture." (Website AKD)

6.3 Professionalism as a Resource: Reduces Risks in HRD Consultant Work

This theme has three sub themes which work independently and collectively around the central organising concept of professionalism as a resource that reduces risk for HRD consultants in undertaking work in client organisations. The sub themes are based in the dimensions of diagnosing client needs, measurement, and reputation.

Figure 10

Research Question Three Thematic Map



The work of a professional is defined by a body of knowledge which determines the boundary of a professional's work. This is expressed as the expertise to make decisions and solve problems with autonomy and with authority. In hybrid professions, there is a great emphasis on the relations between expert and client and the process of shared decision making. In this study, HRD consultants were found to draw on their professionalism as a resource to address a range of risks involved in carrying out HRD work with clients.

6.3.1 Client Needs: We work together to make sense of the issues and the solutions

Whilst HRD knowledgebase is conceptualised as boundaryless and seen as a benefit for working with HRD consultants to adapt to different ambiguous client contexts, the risk of ambiguity influences the extent to which a consultant can diagnose and problem solve successfully. To mitigate the risk, consultants use a range of strategies linked to their partnership developed over time with their client. Consultant Natalie reflects on the challenge of ambiguity over the purpose of the HRD work needed by the client and delivering the boundaryless promises from HRD consultants:

> "A lot of the time it is, even though it's not always clear, the purpose is not always clear, ultimately it's about performance and it's about helping individuals reach their potential but that's not just idealistically reaching their potential, it's for a purpose and the purpose is for helping the organisations deliver what it is that they need to deliver, whatever that might be." (CO01 Natalie)

In some circumstances, consultants do not have the autonomy or authority to determine the intended outcomes of their client work. HRD consultants can be excluded from the decision-making process that prevents the diagnosis and inference stages of professional work. The risk however is that they remain subject to an assessment of meeting client needs. Consultant Kayleigh shared an example of a comment made by a delegate on a training course she had been asked to deliver without being part of the needs analysis, and without the client using an informed diagnosis process, and instead led by convenience:

> " 'How did our company buy this work? I mean it's great, I mean it's brilliant but we've never seen anything like this done before, how on earth did they buy this?'
>
> ...if I'm honest he didn't know what he was selling and he didn't know what he was buying, that part was trust really. I'm not saying they didn't know anything about it, it was like, 'Oh yeah, well that seems to work', and they knew about my work and my own consultancy work, so they were like, 'Oh she seems to know what she's doing', sort of thing but it was a word of mouth, it wasn't, it definitely wasn't a real knowing buy." (CO15 Kayleigh)

In some instances, however, consultants give up the authority to determine the standards of their work. In the example from consultant Bassam, being client-led is used to hand over the power to clients to determine the professional standards of HRD consultant work. This strategy ensures that clients' needs are met when measured by their own assessment and not only reliant on the opinion of the HRD consultant:

> "I feel we're true to our ethos. I think clients will get something that they truly want, so it's about bespoke, so if you don't like it, we won't give it to you. We work with you till you get what you want. So, I think it sounds quite obvious, but it's not necessarily always the case." (CO07 Bassam)

To mitigate this risk, outcomes for HRD work are crafted by collaboration and negotiation between consultant and client. In this example, client Deirdre describes how consultants work with her to shape the desired outcomes of their work, and thereby gain autonomy over expectations from HRD consultant work:

> "So, I think the senior, the people, the leadership team would set around actually what we were trying to achieve, that end vision, and then it would be down to myself and whoever the project team was in conjunction with the consultant to then deliver what we needed to deliver but also to help shape potentially what those outcomes might be, so actually feeling comfortable around actually we think which should be more like this rather than like that in terms of doing that bit." (CL04 Deirdre)

Consultant Bea emphasizes that when it comes to creating solutions, she actively uses the partnership with her client to determine the nature of the solution rather than her reliance on abstract bodies of knowledge to inform her work:

> "They don't want somebody who's just going to be a yes woman or a yes man. They don't want somebody who's just going to execute what they see as being the solution. They don't want somebody who's going to go off and just come with a cookie cutter approach. We don't do that. I, it's co-intelligence. Again, this is this part here... It's interpersonal but we, I always create an intervention with the client because it has to be in the context and only they can talk about the context. So they don't want an off the shelf. They don't want an arrogant academic person coming in and talking to them." (CO05 Bea)

For consultant Francesca, she describes that in some client contexts the concept of partnership also includes a wider stakeholder group that demonstrates both the equalisation of hierarchies between outsider consultant and internal occupations to co-

construct both the diagnosis and the solution. By implication, this approach shares the risk at each stage of the consulting cycle:

> "…everybody on that spectrum has skin in the game. So, part of my job, as I understand it in my career, is simply to be a part of generating that awareness and then asking, me and everybody else, 'Okay, if we want to bring value what should we do?". (CO04 Francesca)

6.3.2 Measurement: It's the quality of the partnership that currently gets measured

A second risk facing HRD consultants is their ability to deliver the claims made about the value and impact of HRD work in client organisations. This study found that websites consistently used the narrative of positive 'for good' results from their work. The claims can be categorised into three messages. Consultancy Insights illustrates the claim that HRD consultants makes a tangible impact in specific functions in an organisation:

> "We deliver measurable impact in the areas of teamwork, leadership, change, sales and service, and culture and engagement." (Website Insights)

Consultancy DTC illustrates the second claim is that impact of HRD consultant work is measurable:

> "You will be able to measure the impact of the leadership development programme with bottom line results." (Website DTC)

The final claim, illustrated by Consultancy The Forton Group, is that HRD consultants not only make an impact, and have ways to measure impact, but that HRD consultants do measure their impact.

> "We demonstrate the difference effective leadership makes - whatever framework and measures your organisation currently uses." (The Forton Group)

Many of the websites seen in this study reflect claims by The Oxford Group that delivering measurable impact is directly linked to their professionalism in partnering with successful client relationships. By not delivering for the client, HRD consultants risk losing the client-consultant relationship:

> "Central to the success of our client relationships is that our approach to Learning and Development (L&D) is geared towards delivering real, measurable business impact and improving team effectiveness." (Website The Oxford Group)

However, the interviews in this study with consultants and clients provided a different perspective on the nature of measurement of HRD consultants work and the risks associated with trying to measure. This study found a gap between the discourse of measurement and the actual use of measures and measurement in client organisations. As illustrated by client Lara, there is a conflict between knowing the need to measure and the organisational resources available to measure. Clients acknowledge that the lack of measurement is linked to the pace of client organisations and changes in priorities. For Lara, the pace of change in client organisations may mean that HRD work delivered is no longer relevant and therefore worth measuring and linked to the culture of the organisation and the priorities set by its senior leaders:

> "It's so hard, because it's such a hard thing to measure. My personal view is, and nobody does it really well in my view, is that, yes we have the happy sheets, that's fine, lovely. But nobody then goes back and measures it periodically… People can't be bothered; it takes too long… People don't have time. And the other thing, things change, especially nowadays, the priorities change, and things change so you might have to do something completely different and it isn't actually relevant any more. So there's lots of different factors, but a lot of it is I don't think people are truly believing and measuring it." (CL03 Lara)

Consultant Colt acknowledges that whilst the boundaryless nature of HRD appeals to some organisational stakeholders who are happy with the intangible nature of HRD work, the same stakeholders interact with other functions in the organisation who focus on value from tangible deliverables that can be measured. Whilst the comparisons are not equal, they reflect the need to understand calls for measurement:

“There is a leap of faith people have to take and there is a sense of people going who are happy with the intangible nature of the value that you create. So you know, you’ve got somebody at the UK Based Food Retailer with a spreadsheet going ‘this money that were investing, we want some metrics, so should we spend the one on UK Based L&D Company doing this stuff, which is creating a really different environment, or should we spend it putting better WIFI in our shops’ and that’s a really difficult thing to get round because its binary.” (CO14 Colt)

Consultant Dean reflects the dominant responses from consultants that whilst consultancies accept the need to measure, this is not part of their actual practice and instead led by commercial imperatives to move to the next paying client need:

“You know, we've actually been quite poor at that as a business, you know, as soon as the job is finished, the consultant walks away and that's it, it's over, on to the next one.” (CO09 Dean)

One of causes of this risk is linked to the limitations of the HRD knowledgebase to guide consultants in how to measure HRD work. As illustrated by client Kal, comparisons are made between the measurement of technical training with objective standards with leadership development which is more subjective with individual outcomes. This suggests that the boundaryless nature of HRD work can add risk to claims of impact. As illustrated by consultant Evan, the HRD knowledgebase has to reconcile the fluidity of its own identity before measures can be better understood:

“If you’re working in leadership training and that sort of thing, there are certainly very good things to measure but they’re not necessarily the same direct, hard business matrix that you have in technical training.” (CL08 Kal)

“Part of that is because their organisation has said, “You’re training” so therefore you need targets of how long you’re in a room like this, but that’s not the same as learning and that’s not the same as impact on performance. So, we need to change that before we can change the next step, so how do we kind of build that?” (C013 Evan)

Like many consultants in this study, consultant Cliff refers to a dominant model of measurement (Kirkpatrick's Levels of Evaluation) which is criticised by consultants for its perceived lack of development in line with the changing forms of HRD or the changing aspirations by the profession for measurement of impact.

> "I don't find the market place very demanding on it, I don't know how familiar you are with Kirkpatrick's five forms of measuring, I mean it's been around donkey's years but to be really honest, and I've put a lot of effort into this, there isn't much else. There aren't many ways really of ascertaining whether or not you've been effective with your L&D budget and so Kirkpatrick seems to have stood the test of time but it doesn't feel very creative or innovative." (CO08 Cliff)

As illustrated by client Kal, hard measures such as return on investment are seldom evidenced and instead replaced by intangible discourses of nurturing talent:

> "I think in the leadership space we should really challenge ourselves to measure, certainly the effectiveness of training…. I really believe in all of that, but I've seen it time and time again and it's difficult to say what the return on investment is, other than the fact that maybe you have a pipeline of talent that you're nurturing." (CL08 Kal)

In the light of the limitations of HRD evaluation and measurement models, clients are adopting measures from outside of the HRD jurisdiction. Engagement scores were consistently talked about by consultants and clients as a quantifiable form of measurement of impact. As illustrated by consultant Connor, however, there was an agreement in the limited belief in the extent to which this was a helpful measure without clear linkages to the value of HRD consultant work:

> "In my experience, most organisations and clients recognise that the ability to make a very, very hard linkage, to draw a line between that intervention and that outcome, is really hard. Even if you try and evidence it through engagement and engagement scores which is probably the most measurable way that clients do… we know that leader would absolutely claim a linkage between the activity that we'd been doing and the improved engagement score but to really quantify that, is still quite difficult." (CO11 Connor)

To address the risk of not being able to measure impact, and therefore proof of the successful treatment of client needs, HRD consultants use their professionalism as a resource to provide alternative ways of constructing a discourse of value. The consultant-client partnership is positioned as a measure in the same way a 'financial number' may be used. The client-consultant relationship is represented therefore as a measure of impact that satisfices both HRD consultant and client. As illustrated by client Carly, the client-consultant is assessed from both sides of the partnership based on flexibility, openness of communication, and collaboration:

> "I think the real measure is qualitative feedback from clients and that really drives me and that's my key measure. I kind of know if I'm doing a good job or not. I kind of know if I'm on my game or not." (CO11 Connor)

> "I'll say well how will you know. Okay let's say the work has been great. What does it look like? And they'll say we are putting everything on the table and we are working together. We're not afraid of talking about things. So they're not going to put a financial number." (CO05 Bea)

> "…delivering what was agreed in the right time to the right budget provided you know, whatever has been agreed really and I've been flexible in line with any scope, creep. So delivering, but also having a continued relationship. Having a continuing relationship, an ongoing relationship." (CL01 Carly)

The partnership however is also measured through impact on the client's stakeholders. As discussed earlier in this section, HRD consultant work is subject to the assessment by non-HRD specialists. Risk however continues to be minimised through the use of impression management with a client's stakeholders. As illustrated by consultants Hugh, HRD consultants need to ensure that measurements are made by 'the right people', communicated by the 'right people' to tell a story of positive impact and 'doing a great job':

> "The key thing is, as long as the right people feel the change has been made in the right way and the partnership was good and they feel they got value for money, then they will come back." (CO10 Hugh)

The consultant-client partnership is used as a resource to co-construct the nature of any measures and forms of measurement. Co-constructing measures and measurements further surrenders their professional autonomy of the HRD consultant in determining the standards from professional work. The act of co-construction of standards and measures however is not portrayed in isolation of the client stakeholders and the commercial goals. The act of co-construction is presented as being within a framework of client goals. Professionalism in this context is used to inform a more fluid dialogue between client and consultant about measurement in each unique client context. This act of co-construction minimises the risk of not delivering positive impact by ensuring that HRD consultants are actors in defining both the explicit standards and measures, as well as implicit ones:

> "…one of the questions we actually ask them is this, what does success look like? So, one of the things we do do is actually say to clients, at the beginning, what does success look like for you? And once they tell us that, we then do design some metrics around that to say, actually, this is what they're looking for. And there's some very, there's some explicit ones, which is fine, but there's also implicit ones." (CO07 Bassam)

Whilst this study found that standards and measures of HRD consultant work has conflicting messages and ambiguous practices, the level of risk for a HRD consultant is relatively low. This study found that there is a gap between the narrative of needing to do more measurements and an anti-measurement reality in client organisations. As illustrated by clients Tabatha and Kal, the landscape for measures and measurement of HRD consultant work, as conceptualised by clients and their stakeholders, is relatively fluid and flexible. From the perspective of the client, measures of value and impact can be contextual and organic. Measurement is subjective and meaning is constructed from the heuristics of a client's stakeholders:

> "But for [the senior stakeholder] value is, his business development team being able to talk confidently with a client about what it is we sell and why we're different from the competition. And in terms of ROI, we're never going to go to that length and say well did that happen and what ROI did that conversation with a client give to us? We're not going to do that…. Why are we, why are we

trying to set up a process and becoming slaves to evaluation and ROI studies and that kind of thing when actually it's just about being clear at the beginning with the client. What is it you want to achieve? What's going to look different in the organisation? And then having a follow up discussion with them about that. That's possibly for the most part all you really need." (CL02 Tabatha)

"...that kind of comes back to the whole, "I'm pushing you, training. I'm defining the KPI" and so forth, so there's a whole other part of training which is just creating the environment for learning and collaborative learning and there, your KPIs, you have to allow them to develop organically and you don't really know what they are." (CL08 Kal)

A small number of consultants like Evan discussed the need for change and which starts with 'thinking some different things':

"So, traditionally, learning and development, we have brilliant, brilliant customer satisfaction survey sheets that in a lot of organisations just get put in the bottom drawers and nobody does anything with. I say, "Look, if you really want to measure the impact of what you do, then you need to start thinking some different things." (CO13 Evan)

6.3.3 Reputation: You are only as good as your last partnership

In this study, successful HRD consultants were found to focus significant attention to promoting their professionalism with the goal of securing and sustaining long term relationships with clients. As illustrated by Consultancy Pearlcatcher, HRD consulting is recognised for its relationship-led features. Relationship building and long-term partnerships are represented as connected and a goal for the HRD consultant profession. The long-term relationship therefore is positioned as a conscious strategy by HRD consultants to achieve their commercial goals. As illustrated by The Oxford Group, there is a direct link between long term relationships and referrals. Referrals in this context relates to HRD consultants being recommended by current clients for future work:

> "We work on the basis of building effective relationships and long term partnerships with our customers." (Website Pearlcatchers)
>
> "Our clients come from a range of industries and locations. We are proud of our long-term relationships, with 80% of our business being based on referrals." (Website The Oxford Group)
>
> "…our business grows by referral so delivering things that work matters to us." (Website Get Feedback)

The importance of long-term relationships is also reflected in the lived experience of consultants. For consultant Myra, professionalism means building and sustaining relationships. Consultant Philip explains that these values can be at the core of the consultancy's own corporate values for relationships with the organisation and at the same time demonstrated as values with individual clients:

> "I think it's still about the people. I think, I do genuinely feel people buy people... we're small enough, we care, we build relationships with people, we keep there with people." (CO12 Myra)
>
> "…first of all we're a very relationship driven business on the whole, developing and nurturing relationships is one of our four values. So, people are important to us, relationships are important to us, number one. That relationship, in this context, can be characterised as the relationship with the organisation and, as I said, as organisations we tend to work together with businesses for eight plus years, so once we're in we continue working, even when the individuals change, so there's an organisational relationship, and then there's the individual relationship." (CO16 Philip)

Using long-term relationships as a commercial strategy is a high risk for HRD consultants. As consultant Kayleigh illustrates, the sustaining of relationships has to become a core purpose for consultants. Sustaining relationships is an accepted source of vulnerability in the profession however a reality that cannot be avoided.

> "…you can't really afford for [losing relationships with clients] to happen. So, I think it makes it, you feel quite vulnerable around it being so much word of mouth but it categorically always has been and it doesn't really matter what else I've done, it hasn't really made an awful lot of difference." (CO15 Kayleigh)

For client Tessa, she illustrates that long-term relationships provides the authority for consultants to move into 'very different environments' and use their expertise to provide 'thoughts' for how the client can use consultant work in a new context. For client Karen, she uses her own subjective assessment of previous HRD consultant performance connected to 'trust' that they will be able to deliver again in new contexts:

> "Or conversely I'll move employer... But I will pick up the phone to those consultants that I've worked with over the years and say so I'm now working, you know, as a HRD in a very different environment. I'd like some thoughts from you." (CL06 Tessa)

> "…people that I've worked with, I've then tended to take them from one company to another where I've trusted them, I feel that they've delivered a great job." (CL12 Karen)

Long-term relationships not only provide access for HRD consultants to move across organisations. As consultant Bassam also illustrates, crossing boundaries is also seen as crossing national borders where the culture and scale of work can transcend national cultures to global working cultures. For example, from German based companies to Multinational companies:

> "So, for example, I have one client, Evelyn, she was at an International Car Manufacturing Company, then she went to a Multinational Retailing Company, now she's at a German Based Multinational Logistics Company, and everywhere we go, she goes with us, we go with her, and she will say, if you want something like this, [go to] Bassam". (CO07 Bassam)

This study found that a further risk with a relationship-led professions is that HRD consultants have limited control over the narrative of value and impact that enables them to move into new client organisations. This study found that it is the clients that construct their assessment of a HRD consultant's professionalism, then communicate this as their reputation through the use of 'word of mouth' referrals. For HRD consultants, their ability to cross boundaries therefore becomes associated with the existence of positive 'word of mouth' referrals. Quotes from clients on HRD consultancy websites are used to communicate the nature and impact of Word of Mouth referrals valued by consultancies:

> "Charlotte came recommended from my HR network within small investment companies and we have not been disappointed. " (Website How to Associates)

> "My experience of Impact has been so positive that I have introduced them to other organisations. They have a tremendous ability to adapt to different cultures and to quickly win the trust and respect of people at all levels." (Website Impact International)

This study found that word of mouth referrals replaces the gap left from the absence of an understood and accepted set of professional standards or professionalism for HRD consultants. As client Kal describes, both consultants and clients are aware of the power of the word-of-mouth referral as the means to establish shared accountability for the results from HRD work:

> "It means that it's not simply a transactional relationship and that they have some skin in the game and that if they feel like there is a positive outcome, it's positive for them, as well, and very often with service providers they will ask you to be a reference". (CL08 Kal)

Client word of mouth referral therefore becomes an important form by which HRD consultant professionalism is defined, appraised, and communicated. As such, the nature of the referral is a subjective assessment which follows a storytelling tradition of exchange of personal experience over professional credentials. As illustrated by consultants Philip and Bea, there is an acknowledgement and acceptance of this 'valuable way' for consultants to benefit from an alternative form of impression management. Clients appraise the client-consultant experience and construct an appraisal to formulate their own statement of a consultant's professionalism. HRD consultants benefit from this client-led construction:

> "…it's going to be a client who's had a great experience will actually refer. And that's the way I get most of the business. I have not in ten years picked up my phone a single time. So it's either been a client who's gone somewhere else or a client who said we've had a great experience." (CO05 Bea)

> "I put word of mouth referral at the top because it's the most powerful. If one of my clients says to another potential client, 'By the way, if that's what you're trying to do, ring these people because they're fab', that's absolutely the most valuable way to promote our work." (CO16 Philip)

Word of mouth referrals assume the ability for HRD consultants to cross boundaries is based more on trust-based claims than empirical evidence. As Ulla describes, word of mouth referrals, based on long-term client-consultant relationships, become an acceptable form of guarantee of standards, and the communication of that guarantee, that otherwise cannot be given for HRD consultant work:

> "I couldn't come up with a way that didn't seem fake or undersold or oversold, I just couldn't find a way that I felt comfortable with portraying what I do. Therefore you'll see that what I put here, word of mouth referral as being the important thing because if someone has worked with me and they tell someone else that it was a positive experience, then for me that's my website." (CO02 Ulla)

Technology was cited as a means by which the client-to-client relationship networks are formed and sustained. Keeping a network alive through the use of technology provides rapid response and access to word-of-mouth referrals. As client Tabatha illustrates, the use of mediums such as LinkedIn provide greater instant access to their own network:

> "If I didn't know, if I didn't know of a supplier or I wanted to get some fresh suppliers I would go to my L & D network or I would go to SME's within the organisation and say what kind of businesses or consultancies do you work with…. Because if I've got a problem and I'm like hang on, Kelly might know the answer to this one cos you know. So it's a little LinkedIn message. You

couldn't have done that ten years ago when you pick up the phone to somebody you hadn't spoken to for a year or two." (CL02 Tabatha)

This study found that HRD consultants use their partnership with the goal to make the client look good. This both strengthens the nature of the trusted relationship between consultant and client, and reduces the risk of a poor word of mouth referral. This was an important strategy talked about by a significant number of HRD consultants in their professional work. For Consultant Hugh, making the client look good and delivering 'great quality' have equal status for his clients to construct his reputation. In this example, success refers to the outcomes of the contractual nature of the HRD consultant role in delivering what the client 'paid for':

> "A consultant's job is to make the client's life easy and to make them look good, right? That's really the job, so to make the client's life easy, "Are they going to be a good partner and do what I want them to do? Make me look good. Are they going to deliver to a great quality and impress my stakeholders?" As long as they're comfortable that you're going to do those two things and, of course, have the impact that you've been paid to have, that's also important, then I think it's alright." (CO10 Hugh)

HRD consultants also emphasised making the client look good would result in strengthening the client's position within the organisation. In doing so, the focus is on raising the strategic nature of the client role, strengthening their power to influence and be recognised by stakeholders, as illustrated by consultant Francesca:

> "…organisations where the HRD specialist is struggling to get traction in terms of real Senior Board level sponsorship. A part of our job might be helping them position their messaging to get more sponsorship or visibility at that level." (CO04 Francesca)

For consultant Bassam, it provides a unique way in which his professionalism is lived through the business and altruistic drivers which means combining delivering on the business, professional or personal objectives of the client is part of the 'value proposition' for his consultancy and thereby the means for sustaining the partnership with clients:

> "I can see you struggling, I can see what the agenda is, I can see you're scared, and I need to help you out. So, it's not just about delivering the services, it's about actually helping that person, as well... And so, it's not only the kind of business objective, but I also look at the client's objectives as well. And sometimes they do differentiate, because it's important for me that my clients are okay. So, if they trusted me to deliver, firstly deliver, but also, how do I help them in the process of, for example, take away the pain... Because I know it's important to that client." (CO07 Bassam)

Making the client look good is an important objective for consultants to manage the likelihood for embedding the client-consultant relationship. As consultant Hugh explains, successfully balancing business, professional and personal objectives also leads to commercial benefits for the HRD consultant. This suggests that the embedding phase of the relationship has a symbiotic nature. As such, the partnership achieves benefits for both client and consultant.

> "But just being able to make sure that she shone in that session and I could tell that she made a good impression on him and it set her up for success with this guy and, of course, it set me up for success as well because the credibility of what she's doing is enhanced in the eye of somebody who signs a lot of the cheques, so it worked on a number of different levels." (CO10 Hugh)

6.4 Summary

This study found that HRD consultants and clients use the discourse of professionalism as partnership to describe the different expectations of an effective working relationship and re-imagines the traditional view of boundaries between consultant and client. Partnership as 'one team' is used to characterise the quality of the partnership between individuals. Partnership is seen through a sense of shared responsibility felt by consultants for the client organisation to achieve its vision and goals. Partnership was also illustrated by the development of the client. In this study, it was found that the purpose of developing the client is not an explicit requirement set out in the formal contracting of a HRD consultant. Instead, this is an implicit expectation from both client and consultant from the partnership created. As such, this needs to inform how a HRD consultant represents their professionalism to new clients. HRD consultant professional work therefore needs to be able to deliver the client's organisational needs, as well as the professional development needs of the individual client. Their success at both determines the extent to which a HRD consultant is able to create a sustainable working relationship with the client. This continues to blur boundaries in the way in which HRD consultant professional work is defined and the boundaries between individual and organisational client needs. As such, this provides important insights into the nature of 'added value' from working with professionals.

Partnership is acknowledged to be crafted by both client and consultant, with the goal to determine if there is a 'the right fit'. The likelihood of finding the 'right fit' with a partner is difficult to predict because of the absence of traditional guarantees to quality. This study found that both consultants and clients pay careful attention to social cues to demonstrate their partnership mindset. Crafting of a 'right fit' in a partnership is therefore an important focus for HRD consultant professional work.

This study found that professionalism is a resource for HRD consultants to address specific risks in delivering HRD work, and provide protection for both consultant and client. This study found that HRD consultant work has risks from being able to diagnose needs from projects built around ambiguous and changing organisational priorities (such as increase engagement, release potential, transform cultures). In an open system context, HRD consultants co-construct the outcomes of diagnosis and inference with influential internal stakeholders, often requiring consultants to challenge the internal dynamics amongst stakeholders to provide clear direction and leadership to support their client's work. HRD work has been found to be at risk from the limits of the theoretical HRD knowledgebase in how to evaluate its impact and from the lack of investment in IT systems as well as a lack of interest from stakeholders in anything other than superficial results. The risk of failure of delivery and the risk to reputation were found to be high for both consultant and client. Professionalism in the form of protecting the client was therefore identified as an important feature of the consultant-client relationship. Risks were mitigated through co-construction of project briefs, renegotiations of project outcomes during the project development and delivery, and co-constructing the nature of the metrics to be used to evaluate the quality of the work delivered. Partnership in this manner provided a shared ideology that protected both the client and consultant from failures in quality of HRD work, and justified a narrative of delivering added value without any depth of supporting empirical evidence.

Chapter Seven will now provide a detailed discussion of the findings in Chapters Five and Six in relation to the literature reviews and presents an original conceptual framework.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research findings and explore their significance in relation to the existing literature from the Sociology of the Professions, and HRD. Together with the data collected, these perspectives inform the nexus upon which this thesis is built and the contributions will be argued. The chapter revisits the research questions set out in Chapter One in relation to the findings from of this study. The research questions are stated below.

Research question 1
Drawing on definitions from the Sociology of the Professions, to what extent can HRD consultancy be considered a profession?

Research question 2
How do the practices of HRD Consultants represent notions of professionalism?

Research question 3
How do HRD Consultants use professionalism as a resource in consultant-client relationships and how does this impact on the nature of their 'professionalism project'?

This chapter synthesises the Literature Reviews in Chapter Two and Three, the Methodological approach in Chapter Four and the outcomes of the data analysis in Chapter Five and Six. The purpose of this synthesis is to discuss the themes and issues from the data collected and place them in the context of existing literature and methodological philosophy. The chapter concludes with the presentation and justification of an original conceptual framework created as a result of this analysis

Three themes have been developed from the data collected in the study and inform contributions in the area of Sociology of the Professions and HRD. These were discussed in the Findings Chapters (Chapter Five and Six) and are summarised in Table 13. HRD consultancy was found to be conceptualised as a hybrid profession working flexibly with the symbols and discourses of expertise, autonomy and authority associated with both collegial and corporate professions. HRD consultancy was found to draw significantly on the contextual and relational nature of HRD work to strengthen their ability to diagnose, infer and enrich solutions to client needs. Occupational closure was achieved using experience as the dominant credential whereas network reputation, constructed by the client and shared by word-of-mouth referrals, enabled a consultant to move successfully between clients. Professionalism conceptualised as partnership provided control over individual HRD consultants performance by establishing a values-fit with the norms, organisational goals and culture of each client. Partnership was also found to be the key resource for consultants to successfully manage risks associated with three weaknesses in HRD work – diagnosis, measurement and protecting reputation.

Table 13

Summary of Themes and Sub Themes

Research Question	**Drawing on definitions from the Sociology of the Professions, to what extent can HRD consultancy be considered a profession?**	**How do the practices of HRD Consultants represent notions of professionalism?**	**How do HRD Consultants use professionalism as a resource in consultant-client relationships and how does this impact on the nature of their 'professionalism project'?**
Theme	A Co-Constructed Hybrid Profession	Partnership is at the Heart of HRD Consultant Professionalism	Professionalism Reduces Risks in HRD Consultant Work
Sub Theme	Expertise: Boundaries are there but they are also negotiable	Relationships: We are like an extension of the client team	Client Needs: We work together to make sense of the issues and the solutions
Sub Theme	Autonomy: Clients provide all the necessary validations	Trust: We create safe spaces for our clients to be successful	Measurement: It's the quality of the partnership that currently gets measured
Sub Theme	Authority: Good work is in the eye of the beholder		Reputation: You are only as good as your last partnership

7.2 Research Question 1: A Co-Constructed Professional Identity

This section explores the conceptualisation of HRD consultancy as a hybrid profession which works flexibly with the symbols and discourses of expertise, autonomy and authority associated with both collegial and corporate professions. This section discusses the dimension of expertise as how HRD consultants lay claim to specific tasks and services. HRD consultant expertise was found to be claimed over the functional and normative aspects of HRD work. As such this includes both bounded and boundaryless work that is dependent on the co-construction of needs with the client to diagnose, infer and treat these needs as well as 'add value.'

This section moves on to discuss expertise as relational and adaptive reflecting the boundary spanning relationships in client organisations that enriched the HRD solutions to often complex and intangible client needs. In contrast to the professionalisation agenda of professional bodies and associations, HRD consultants were found to engage in alternative client-facing practices that established their autonomy through embedding standards of practice. These alternative and homogeneous practices enabled HRD consultants as professionals to cross boundaries of client work and promote mobility across sectors and borders.

This section concludes with a discussion of authority as a third dimension of the professions. Authority enables professionals to act on behalf of clients and influence others as a result of their social standing and status. This study found that HRD consultants articulate their authority in line with traditional conceptualisations of the professions for working 'for good' and for the benefit of all. HRD consultants were found to be values-led consistent with the 'becoming' emergent conceptualisation of the HRD discipline, understood and shared across HRD consultants and clients. This can be seen through a set of intuitive codes of conduct which demonstrate the convergence of claims to delivering transformations 'for good' notwithstanding serving possibly competing agendas.

The conceptualisation of HRD consultancy as a hybrid profession was found most clearly when seen through the system of relations in which HRD consultants are embedded in client organisations. Through this perspective, the findings challenge the arguments of a weakened profession which focus attention on the dimensions of collegiate professions rather than seeing different HRD practitioners working flexibly with the symbols and discourses of expertise, autonomy and authority associated with both collegial and corporate professions. Drawing on the conceptualisation of hybrid professions to explore the strengths in a profession reflects recent developments in research into the medical profession to reflect the diversification of specialisms and employment status (Anteby et al, 2016; Larson, 2018; Noordegraaf, 2020). This chapter will explore the benefits of conceptualising HRD consultancy as a profession in this way helps to understand the strengths in the profession and how such actors have 'skin in the game' towards their own professionalisation project.

7.2.1 Expertise

This study found that HRD consultancy can be conceptualised as a hybrid profession that works flexibly with the symbols and discourses of expertise, autonomy and authority associated with both collegial and corporate professions. As a hybrid profession, HRD consultancy reflects the collegiate profession's expertise drawn from a codified body of knowledge to inform a structured sequence of diagnosis, inference, and treatment (Abbott, 1988). Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) found that professional expertise sets professions apart from the work of ordinary people. Abbott (1988, p.54) argued that for collegiate professions academic knowledge legitimizes professional work by clarifying its foundations of expertise and tracing them to major cultural values which in turn demonstrates the rigor, the clarity, and the scientifically logical character of professional work. However, in more recent research into forms of corporate professions, Fincham (2006) found that, for these groups, the source of expertise was much more heterogeneous in character and lacked a clear link to a body of theory. For example, management consultants in his study were found to draw on a type of formalised knowledge for the profession through recognisable techniques such as SWOT and Boston Box. Fincham (2006) argued that it was the lack of linkage to a codified body of knowledge that meant management consultants lacked any claim to legitimacy.

In this study, HRD consultants were found to draw on abstract bodies of knowledge in line with traditional conceptualisations of professions. For example, HRD consultant websites analysed in this study were found to signpost the larger theoretical concepts in the representation of HRD work. These included accelerating learning through applying knowledge of adult learning, improving the skill of new managers through applying management and organisational theory, enhancing leaders' performance through the use of coaching models and theories of personality, or enhancing organisational productivity through applying knowledge of motivation. In the interviews, HRD consultants such as Hugh (CO10) drew attention to how he used a discourse of scientific knowledge, emphasising the need to integrate different knowledgebases in eclectic ways to ‘create better and more creative solutions’. As such, this reflects the conceptualisation of HRD as a discipline informed by diverse and complementary interdisciplinary fields of knowledge (Chalofsky, 2007; Lee, 2003). While some authors have associated the status of the HRD knowledgebase to be part of the weakness of the profession in search of its identity (Hamlin & Stewart, 2011), for HRD consultancy websites this was represented as a strength in their professional identity.

However, in interviews, HRD consultants and clients also provided an alternative perspective on abstract bodies of knowledge. HRD consultants were not found to need to draw on a discourse of abstract knowledge in their work with clients communicate their professional identity. For Consultant Bea (CO05) this was an important feature of relationship building with her client to ensure that the discourse of the client and client needs took precedent in how she talked about her work. Consultant Cliff (CO08) illustrated how in his experience clients did not use the command of abstract knowledge as a selection criterion when engaging HRD consultants. The scientific underpinning was not required by the client to be explained or emphasised when developing solutions. Instead HRD consultants placed greater emphasis on describing their ability to deliver practical solutions to client problems. In line with the findings from the literature of management consultancy (Fincham, 2008; Muzio et al, 2011) and revisiting changes in collegiate professions (Edwards, 2011; Sandefur, 2015), expertise in the form of abstract knowledge, whilst not absent, was therefore not found to be a *sine qua non* in how HRD consultant’s expertise is represented. This implies that there is no commercial incentive for the HRD consultancy profession to draw on a coherent abstract body of knowledge. Therefore, what might be perceived as a weakness for collegiate professions, is a strength for HRD consultancy. In this study, HRD consultants and clients placed a greater emphasis on other forms of expertise involved in professional HRD work.

HRD consultants were found to make claims to expertise over a defined or bounded set of client needs which require ‘diagnosing, inferring and treating’. This finding relates to the early SoP literature which argued that professions were traditionally established by focusing on a specific type of work and client need (Wilensky, 1964). Boundaries were then defined by professions to claim autonomy over specific tasks and to be recognised by other professions, occupations, and wider society (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1994; Wilensky, 1964). In this study, the HRD consultancy websites were found to use a narrative of expertise defining specific tasks and boundaries. For example, websites emphasised HRD practice as a set of specific functions. This included the provision of HRD as a set of pre-designed and tangible products which could be delivered with a pre-prepared ‘off the shelf’ curriculum such as one-time workshops and masterclasses, or products delivered over longer timeframes such as skill development courses or leadership programmes. Such products were tangible enough to be tailored to meet a specific client need using expertise.

Abbott (1988) argues expertise can also be understood to be claimed over services or ‘acts’. The websites in this study were found to set out their expertise consistent with Abbott (1988) articulation of the three acts of professional practice - ‘treating’ a client’s needs achieved through services that demonstrate the use of ‘diagnosing and inferring’. In websites, the discourse of expertise was illustrated using the stages of the training cycle reflecting the ADDIE process from the identification of training needs, the design and the delivery of HRD products through to evaluation of impact (Swanson, Holton & Holton, 2001). The articulation of functional boundaries is consistent with how the early writers in field of HRD literature sought to define HRD in relation to ‘how to do HRD’ to support organisational goals nationally and globally (Chalofsky & Lincoln, 1983; Gilley, Egglund & Gilley, 1989; Harbison & Myers, 1964; McLagan, 1983; Megginson, Jo-Matthews & Banfield,1993; Nadler, 1970; Nadler & Wiggs 1986). The expertise of HRD consultancy work was found to be represented using the discourse of collegiate professions to work within the boundaries of specific products and services with the goal of treating a client needs. In this way, the discourse of expertise and clear boundaries are associated with the functional view of HRD.

Whilst expertise in this study was constructed using the features of abstract knowledge and services, this research found that HRD consultant expertise is more multi-dimensional and complex. Expertise was also found to be relational and adaptive to unique organisational needs and contexts. This reflects the more organisational forms of corporate professions. The HRD literature suggests that expertise is more fluid for people-centred careers or where individuals are working within an occupation that is still evolving in the construction of its professional identity (Valkevaara, 2002). In this study, HRD consultant expertise was more significantly represented in evidencing their experience in bringing together local stakeholders into a functioning network of expertise to diagnose, infer and treat client needs with HRD work. Website Impact International made claims of working across the boundaries of people strategy and organisation development strategy ‘connecting and developing both’ for their clients. Consultant Hugh (CO10) highlighted his expertise, drawn from experience across different complex client organisations, in helping clients to ‘navigate their own organisation’ to get ‘ideas supported’ and ‘understand [their client’s] stakeholders’. This is similar to the findings by Edwards (2011) who found that welfare professionals working in complex environments drew on two complementary forms of expertise - core expertise (from the codified body of knowledge) and relational expertise where professionals translated knowledge into forms that other stakeholders could meaningfully interpret for their own work. Relational expertise was also demonstrated in the ability of the professional to recognise and respond to the contribution of other stakeholders ‘in local systems of distributed expertise’ (Edwards, 2011, p. 33).

Seeing the expertise of HRD consultants as relational is also similar to Eyal (2013) who builds on this view that expertise is not confined to a knowledgebase alone. Like Eyal (2013), HRD consultants and clients shared the view that relational expertise was highly valued in the process consultants used to engage with clients in the shared co-production of solutions. In interviews, examples of co-constructing new consulting briefs, the co-development of solutions, and co-constructing the measures of impact with the client were given to illustrate how consultants could better respond to the complexity and unpredictability of professional work in organisations. Client Tabatha (CL02) highlighted the roles HRD consultants played with her own internal team in the collaboration when defining problems, diagnosing problems, and the shared discussion and exchange of ideas to generate solutions. This supports Eyal (2013) finding of the importance of the quality of cross boundary relationships and the existence of co-constructed beliefs about success of results. This finding also supports Huising (2014) that engagement with abstract knowledge alone is insufficient to elicit deference from clients and enable the professional to influence client and wider stakeholders. In this way, expertise was more understandable as a corporate profession and described as a strength for the profession.

For the collegiate professions, credentials represent more than just the exposure of professionals to a higher education and to a body of formal knowledge, and as prerequisites for access to professional labour markets. In Freidson's (1986) view, the process of credentialing promote confidence in the competence of professionals for society as well as protecting the client from incompetence by removing the trial-and-error nature of employing professionals within a free market context. As discussed in Chapter Three, the provision of higher education qualifications and CPD in the UK has been a focus for universities and professional bodies for over 30 years. Occupational closure however is not dependent on specific credentials including professional association membership or specific qualifications (Stewart & Sambrook, 2012) and the nature of professional education in the UK has a central bearing on the extent to which HRD can be regarded as a distinct profession (Harrison et al, 2021).
Similar to the findings by Muzio et al (2011) in their study of corporate professions specifically specialist forms of consultancies (project management, management consultancy and executive search), HRD consultancy had more diverse, hybrid forms of market shelter which focused less on the formal knowledge nature of credentialling and instead reflected the relational and managerial nature of their work.

In their study Muzio et al (2011), discovered that credentials emphasised the professional service standards (customer focus and reliability), competencies (including problem solving capabilities) and industry experience to evidence the outcomes of the application of their expertise. In this study, HRD consultancy credentials were highly valued by clients which evidenced their previous experience in similar client contexts reflecting the relational nature of client work including with the client's stakeholders. Examples of co-construction of contextual knowledge and its successful transfer to new client organisations were sought out by clients and scrutinised as part of the selection process. In the interviews, consultants and clients both drew attention to how case studies of previous HRD consultancy work were used as forms of credentials. Consultant Hari (CO06) referred to the importance of case studies that reflected a movement in her client's perspective, their growing scepticism of impression management techniques of 'storytelling' and replaced by wanting evidence of 'storymaking'. Client Tabatha (CL02) used a HRD consultancy's industry experience as evidence of 'the level that somebody's worked at.' As such, this provided assurance of a HRD consultant's expertise as something 'you can really get to grips with' to understand what can evidence expertise.

Whilst present in the background and career histories of specific HRD consultants, there was no commercial incentive for HRD consultancy to invest in acquiring qualifications and CPD. One exception found in the study was the access to coaching work which was more widely acknowledged to use professional body or associations and qualifications. Client Tara (CL09) was influenced by a HRD consultant doing an expensive coaching qualification which she interpreted as evidence of that consultant's 'true investment' in their own professional development and the 'expertise she could bring' to HRD work. However professional body membership did not provide a barrier to entry for most consultants even into coaching work. Instead, collating a portfolio of successful client work, the duration of client relationships, and word of mouth referrals provided the credentials to support how HRD work was undertaken and the reassurances necessary for clients to construct their view of a consultant's expertise in the abstract, contextual, and relational nature of HRD.

Whilst the SoP literature (Brint, 1993; Freidson, 1986) and some HRD authors (Reid, Barrington, & Brown 2004) would argue this places the collegiate professions in a weak position by removing formal means of closure that lead to power and status, new conceptualisations of credentialing for corporate professions provide strengths for professional to reflect the increasing relevance of work undertaken in organisations as sites of professional formation and regulation within a competitive free-market context (Muzio et al, 2011, p.460). However, this finding poses a challenge for new talent to enter the profession and their need to acquire social capital in the form of diverse experience. This finding also has implications for the role of higher education and professional bodies in the development of competence in the profession that further closes the gap for practitioners between theory and practice.

In summary, HRD consultants were found to represent their expertise over both the functional and normative nature of HRD work to be 'boundaryless'. The strength of the profession is their expertise to work outside of the boundaries of abstract bodies of knowledge to reflect the contextual and relational demands from their clients and to better situate their role to diagnose, infer and treat a client's needs in their context. In interviews, a strength of the profession's expertise was to be able to work outside of functional boundaries of contractual arrangements and focus attention on practical solutions and working flexibly for the benefit of the client. A consultant's expertise in creating flexible working relationships was a dominant claim found from clients to explain why they selected specific HRD consultants.   This research therefore argues for the conceptualisation pf HRD consultancy as a hybrid profession that draws strengths from the 'boundaryless' nature of its body of knowledge and relational expertise based on the perception of professional status from their clients.

7.2.2 Autonomy

A profession's autonomy is embodied in the notion of professional competence that establishes a network of accountability and governs the profession 'at a distance'. Achieving autonomy is dependent on the expertise developed by the professional as well as their ability to self-regulate. The professions, however, are dependent on earning and being awarded trust from their clients to become autonomous in their professional work. Bourgoin & Harvey (2018) highlight the continuing tensions for consultants seeking to enter new client relationships from the absence of tangible evidence of competence in work completed to provide a guarantee of quality, and the ability to demonstrate sufficient experience with dealing with often shifting and new context specific client problems. They argue that core expertise of consultants is often at its limit because it is socially embedded and context-dependent and therefore more difficult to transfer into new client organisations (Bourgoin & Harvey, 2018).

HRD consultants used the evidence of their competence in how they created successful client relationships, their ability to work across different stakeholder groups, and how such relationships helped to create contextual knowledge to enable consultants to 'tailor' solutions to individual client contexts. Websites were used to illustrate client referrals and case studies that emphasised the quality of the working relationship as a measure of the success from selecting the HRD consultancy. In interviews, consultants referred to the importance of word-of-mouth referrals based on the ease of working with consultants in the level of flexibility in co-constructing and reconstructing client briefs, as well as working outside of contractual obligations when clients needed an external perspective on other priorities. The TCM Group Website draws specific attention to their approach with clients where 'no request is deemed too hard or too small'. Client Karen (CL12) discussed the value of 'just picking up the phone to ask for advice' that was outside any contractual arrangements or expectation of being charged for providing services because of a shared understanding based on a valued long term relationship.

As such, the representation of competence in similar client contexts enabled a HRD consultant's professional status to be easily understood in client organisations. This provided consultants with the autonomy to act on behalf of their client with stakeholders. This supports recent findings into changes in medical, welfare and legal professions where professional models of competence dependent on an individual's expertise have become reconfigured to focus on relational expertise (Anteby et al, 2016; Eyal, 2013). This finding supports our understanding of in the strengths used by the corporate professions to respond to the unpredictability and coordinative complexity of work to influence non-professionals and other influential stakeholders (Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018; Noordegraaf, 2020).

However, insights from this study show that it is the client who has power to create meaning about the nature and relevance of such expertise for their context. This study supports insights into the role of the client in making meaning from consultant professional status (Canato & Giangreco, 2011; Collins, 2016; Hodgson et al, 2015). The power of word-of-mouth referrals was illustrated in the interviews as the dominant way in which they acquire work and expand their social capital. Clients referred to the importance placed on word-of-mouth referrals, and their own previous relationship with consultants in previous organisations, as a trusted form of guarantee of quality. Client Tessa (CL06) and Client Karen (CL12) both gave examples of 'picking up the phone' to consultants as they moved to new employers in 'very different environments' to 'take them with me' to share thoughts and collaborate on new HRD projects because of the trust established and built up over time working in a consultant-client relationship. As a hybrid profession, this illustrates Abbott's (1988, p.54) view on the cultural legitimacy of collegiate professions where legitimacy is dependent on the perception and acceptance by others.

HRD consultants therefore must work hard to establish sustainable positive relationships with previous/current clients who they can trust to convey authentic reassurances to quality for future clients. The weakness for the profession, however, is that consultants therefore have limited agency over what reassurances of quality will be shared and what future clients interpret from the referrals. This risk or weakness for the profession is explored in later in Chapter 7.4.3.

In the literature of collegiate and corporate professions, autonomy is characterised by boundary work and dispute. The literature suggests that boundary work for the professions is characterised by perpetual dispute at different levels – at an organisational level and at a national level (Abbott, 1988). For new professions, Evetts (2013) argues that boundary work is observable in the form of disputes and negotiations within an organisational setting and is in need of protection from other competing occupational groups (Evetts, 2013). Collins & Butler (2019) in their study of management consultants found that the ambiguity of briefs is problematic to defend with increasing encroachment between professions over cognate boundaries of organisational tasks.

However, findings from this study provide a different perspective on the disputed nature of autonomy which is similar to the findings from contemporary views on relational nature of professional work in the medical professions. In their analysis of 4 UK case studies, Dove et al (2017) found that autonomy was better understood to be achieved through interpersonal relations. Using the term 'relational autonomy', the authors argue that 'identities, needs, interests – and indeed autonomy – are always also shaped by their relations to others' (Dove et al, 2017, p.150). Individualistic concepts of jurisdiction and agency were instead found to be the causes of dispute in the healthcare sector (Dove et al, 2017).

In his research into nursing, MacDonald (2002) argues for a focus on professional work to be socially situated and that the capacity for professionals to act autonomously is dependent on social relationships and an awareness of the power structures where professionals are embedded. This view on relational autonomy connects with the findings in this study where a HRD consultant's jurisdiction was characterised as agile and shaped by their relationships in client organisations. Consultant Francesca (CO04) described how her work included helping the client 'to position their messaging to get more sponsorship or visibility' and thereby strengthening the organisational perception of the value HRD work. Consultant Hugh (CO10) put it more directly, emphasising that a consultant's role was to make sure that their client 'shone' in front of organisational stakeholders building the credibility of the client and facilitating future work with the consultant.

Anteby, Chan & DiBenigno (2016) found that professional work could be understood by when and how collaboration across different actor groups. Collaboration was found to expand social influence for professions across an ecosystem of stakeholders in a complex web but unified to achieve a shared or complementary goal. In this study, HRD consultants were found to actively collaborate with clients through each stage of the consulting cycle (from diagnosing, inferring, and treating) regularly seeking feedback and readjustment to achieve approval. Client needs would also be re-negotiated, and very often re-constructed, during each project as client needs evolved or as HRD consultants learned about client political dynamics. The process of negotiation, re-negotiation and re-construction was welcomed by HRD consultants and represented a significant way in which 'HRD professional practice' was articulated. Working outside of the boundaries of pre-defined tasks and relationships was described by HRD consultants and clients as a further form of 'adding value to clients' needs'. This was found to in response to changes in client needs, budget constraints, or internal power dynamics amongst stakeholders. The ability to inform, negotiate, and re-construct client briefs was an essential quality looked for by clients when selecting HRD consultants from previous client work. This agility and responsiveness to social experience, navigating relations and being 'wired in' to the dynamics of client organisations is similar to Noordegraaf's (2020) theorising of the connective nature of professional work. Autonomy is therefore not fixed and stable, but instead (re)constructed and (re)negotiated in each client's context but at the same time dependent on positive social relations and agile to respond to change within the client organisation.

7.2.3 Authority

So far in this chapter, the hybrid professional status of HRD consultancy has been explored in relation to expertise and autonomy. This section explores authority a further dimension of professional status. One finding from this research related to authority is that HRD consultancy are engaged in alternative practices that diverge from the professionalisation projects in the HRM and HRD communities, and other corporate professions. In the literature, corporate professions have been found to be engaging with different professionalisation projects to achieve status, recognition, and standards (Muzio et al, 2011). Recent research into HR professionals who have been characterised as an 'aspirant profession' suggests that greater attention needs to be placed on recognisable professional characteristics such as a strong professional body to enable groups of practitioners to increase their authority by adopting professionalization activities (Pohler & Willness, 2014). The HR profession, for example, has focused attention on developing and communicating common competency models as the basis for the assessment and improvement in the quality of HR professionals (CIPD, 2018; Ulrich et al, 2013). In the last five years, the CIPD in the UK has revised its focus on the professional identity and status of its members. For HRD specifically, they have argued it is time for practitioners to commit to a new agenda to 'professionalise' which includes an alignment with a body of knowledge and continuous professional development to achieve specific professional standards (CIPD, 2019). Their focus however is dominated by the needs and professional status of internal HRD practitioners.

This study found that HRD consultancy standards are expressed through a homogeneous code of conduct which is values-led and altruistic. The focus on positive transformations of individuals and organisations reflects Harrison & Kessels (2004) view of the universal benefits HRD achieves for both individuals and organisations. HRD consultants also break down existing boundaries to enable such positive transformations which connects to the early conceptualisation of HRD as focusing on the political agency of HRD to promote good citizenship in a democracy (Harbison & Myers, 1964). The claims that the universality of HRD work leads to positive experiences which lead to positive results reflects the views of Hamlin & Stewart (2011) that HRD enhances the wider lived experience which is beneficial to all with relevance across borders, and with McLean & McLean's (2001) extension to the whole of humanity. This rejects the perspective by Marquardt & Engel (1993) which argued that HRD was culturally bound and HRD was much more complicated outside of home cultures and practitioners shouldn't be practicing in unfamiliar cultural environments. This code of conduct further links with the belief in HRD as the enabler of normative view 'what should be' not just in learning but in the wider lived experience of work in organisations, reflects Garavan (1991) view that HRD enables the utilisation of social capital, and well as the most recent conceptualisation of HRD by Wang et al (2017) that HRD shapes values and belief systems to create a normative view of performance governed by a ‘host’.

In support of Lee (2001, 2014), interpreting HRD consultant professional status as values-led illustrates the emergent ‘becoming’ nature of HRD work. For HRD consultants, their authority from professional values provides what Lee (2010) referred to as ‘the permeable outline of HRD’ from which HRD consultants collectively can establish their professional practice. Interpreting HRD consultant service mission in this way provides early evidence of the first steps towards Hamlin & Stewart (2011, p.203) view that ‘for HRD to have meaning as a discrete field of study and practice, and possibly as an emergent and unique discipline and genuine profession, it requires an identity that is globally recognised and accepted.’

In contrast to the literature and professional bodies such as the CIPD (2015), who draw attention to the importance of a unified and controlled code of conduct for its HRM and HRD members, a key feature for HRD consultants is that it is intuitively accepted and communicated by HRD consultants in the study without reference to originating sources or professional association oversight. This connects with research in the welfare sector where professionals were also not found to reference the professional ethics or integrity that governed their daily practice (Banks, 2004, 2010). This study found that there was an absence of reference to the role of universities, qualifications or CPD that would have created a shared understanding of the academic foundations of values or code of conduct. There was also an absence of reference to the role of professional bodies and their professional standards.

Whilst Chapter Three highlighted the presence of some reference to consultancy (a Performance Consultancy Competency Framework from ITOL, and the CIPD’s Special Interest Group on consultancy), the websites and interview participants made no references to these as forms of unified or controlled codes of conduct. The Tess Group website itself illustrates the absence of professional body influence over HRD consultancies stating that they ‘stand out from the industry with an MD that is CIPD qualified’. Consultant Philip (CO16), who works for a HRD consultancy with clients outside of the UK, suggested that the lack of importance placed on HRD professional bodies was because professional bodies needed to reflect the global scope of HRD consultancy work. The one constant force that provided a central homogeneous approach to ‘good work’ was the quality of the client relationship.

HRD consultancy work ‘for good’ was found to be dominated by claims of working to a managerial agenda. Specifically, an agenda that emphasises efficiency, improved business results, and creating the ideal workforce. The emphasis of working to a managerial agenda is positioned by HRD consultants to be without competing against or in conflict with their values-led code of conduct. The sociology of the professions literature argues that clients expect professionals to act in ways that have their best interests in mind, demonstrating the appropriate commitment to those interests, since behaving otherwise would not be considered consistent with codes of conduct or in the publicly made claims to professional jurisdiction (Abbott 1988; Beaton, 2010). In the literature, however, professions are characterised as ‘self- serving monopolists’ whose agendas seek to capitalize on their position in society to their own benefit at the expense of meeting the needs of their client (Butler & Collins 2016; Larson 1977). The management consultancy literature has been dominated by critical perspectives that have highlighted the lack of clarity about consultant agendas in client organisations questioning if consultants are acting to benefit the commercial objectives of the consulting firm or the business goals of the client (Clark & Salaman, 1998b).

The appeal of the HRD consultancy agenda can be understood in two ways. The first relates to the appeal to clients that consultants can support their role in delivering the often ambiguous nature of transformational HRD work. Not only are the jurisdictions aligned but the motives behind HRD consultants are consistent with their publicly perceived code of conduct ‘for good’. Such claims reflect not only the values-led code of conduct discussed earlier in this chapter, but also the wider conceptualisation of HRD as a discipline in the HRD literature. For example, Wang et al, (2017) position HRD work to assume benefits to all within the immediate host system. The second is the appeal to business leaders. For this audience, the HRD consultant agenda appeals to more than just the sensibilities of the cause and effect nature of business, but also to management desires for efficiency and control. The Courageous Success website draws attention to their purpose of transforming ‘people and business across the globe’. Impact International website uses their bold claim that they can ‘change the world of work forever’.

In this study, HRD consultant agendas represented an assumed positive correlation between the work of HRD consultants and improvements in employee retention, engagement and productivity. As a result of employing HRD consultants, therefore, results will be achieved. Websites were found to be the vehicle to consistently disseminate the public image of this managerial agenda through the narrative of their goals and evidenced by references to previous client work. In the interviews, HRD consultants reflected these agendas in their own narratives of experience and professional goals. Clients reflected these agendas in their construction of their expectations from professional HRD work. This provides a contemporary illustration of Abbott's (1988) findings in how public methods are used by professions within a wider public arena to reinforce the coherence in understanding between a profession's purpose and the goals of the professional employed.

In carrying out these roles, this study found HRD consultants to be represented as upholding the values of both individual and organisational growth without encountering conflicting priorities. The agendas behind HRD consultant work are represented as tailored, positive, effective and experienced through a diverse range of enjoyable practices. As a result of such practices, the HRD consultant agenda not only provides benefits to individuals but also to organisations and wider society. The representation of these shared and non-conflicting outcomes was found to be consistent across websites and in interviews with consultants and clients.

However, the Critical HRD literature has problematised the representation of such shared positive outcomes. Elliott & Turnbull (2003) argued that the emphasis on performativity fails to acknowledge the tension between autonomy and community for HRD professionals. Bierema & Callahan (2014) argued that the humanistic roots of HRD have been co-opted by managerial agendas who portray a discourse of positivity, balance, helping and transformation to represent masculine characteristics of control and privilege. As such, the authors argue that this fails to acknowledge the potential for a darker side such as dysfunctional workplaces and worker exploitation. The homogeneous nature of these positive claims to service is also in contrast with traditional views on professions. The literature suggests that claims of service are institutionalized in heterogeneous ways, and aren't necessarily coherent within a profession (Abbott, 1988).

Whilst the data collected in this study does not provide specific answers to such problematised agendas, we can understand the absence of such contested notions from the context of this research. The authority of professions in public arenas is more likely to represent the intended positive side of HRD. Such claims to positive outcomes have been shown to be consistent with how the HRD literature has conceptualised HRD which is dominated by clams of positive transformation. In this study, a third way of understanding this phenomenon is also to consider the specific claims by HRD consultants in how such positive transformational outcomes are achieved. In this study, transformation was achieved in two ways – by the functional HRD work of designing and implementing solutions, and by the proximity of the consultant-client relationship. It is through this combination of functional and relationship work that perception of transformation was constructed by the client. It is this co-constructed belief shared between HRD consultant and their client that gives the HRD consultancy authority its influence and a homogeneous dimension.

In this study there was no perceived conflict found between the managerial agendas of performativity and the authority of HRD consultancy articulated in their code of practice. The Belbin website highlights how transformation happens with individuals acquiring 'greater self-understanding of their strengths' leading to teams where 'everyone can feel that they are making a difference in the workplace'. This finding is similar to the view that HR practitioners are emulating collegiate traits of the professions with establishing transcendent values through a moral and ethical code to provide influence in organisational settings (Pohler & Willness, 2014). This also emulates how collegiate professions represent themselves in the public arena to secure jurisdiction by the nature of their performance claims linked to a set of intended outcomes.

These findings however provide a subtle but important distinction to the conceptualisation of the HRM professional which views practitioners as the ethical "agents" or "stewards" in organisations (CIPD, 2017). This finding highlights the disconnect between the conceptualisation of the HR professional purpose and values as set out by the CIPD (2017) in their revised Profession Map (see Appendix 1). In this study, HRD consultancy code of conduct was characterised to be 'principles-led.' The shared values and standards were not found to reflect the CIPD professional values as 'evidence-based' and 'outcomes-driven.' The implications of this will be discussed later in this chapter.

This chapter so far has discussed the conceptualisation of HRD consultancy as a hybrid profession working flexibly with the symbols and discourses of expertise, autonomy and authority associated with both collegial and corporate professions which successfully convey their professional status in client organisations. Table 14 summarises the ways in which HRD consultancy was found to portray their hybrid professional status as strengths to navigate the to successfully undertake HRD work in organisations that combine sites of professional formation and regulation within a competitive free-market context. The strengths for the HRD consultancy profession are found in their pursuit of a managerial agenda of transformation in line with organisational goals and in support of relational structures. In contrast to the aspirations of some CHRD authors for the HRD profession generally, for HRD consultancy their professional work reflects rather than challenges the structures of capitalism and the status quo of organisational practice.

Table 14

Comparison of Professions with HRD Consultancy as a Hybrid Profession

	Collegial Profession	**Corporate Profession**	**HRD Consultancy as Hybrid Profession**
Expertise through knowledgebase	- Reliance on an abstract body of knowledge	- Co-production of knowledge with industry - Situated knowledge - Focus on competences	- Informed by abstract body of knowledge - Co-production of knowledge with clients in context - Situated knowledge from client contexts transferable to other clients - Focus on competences and practical application - Learned from experience
Autonomy to operate for clients	- Legitimised by public benefit - Statutory closure via Royal Charter	- Legitimised by market value - Market closure via corporate practices (tendering and procurement processes)	- Legitimised by client appraisal of partnership - Market closure via relationships and corporate practices - Not limited to tendering and procurement processes
Authority through professional bodies & associations	- Individual membership - Single-tier membership structure	- Individual and organisational membership - Multi-level membership structure	- Membership not required - Memberships have questionable relevance - Associations provide routes to collegial networks and commercial opportunities

Adapted from Muzio et al (2011, p.457) and Noordegraaf (2020, p.08)

7.3 Research Question 2: Partnership is at the heart of HRD Consultant Professionalism

Having explored the conceptualisation of HRD consultancy as a hybrid profession, this section explores the meaning of professionalism for HRD consultants in the context of working with clients. This section highlights partnership as the way HRD consultants construct professionalism in their work in organisational contexts. Professionalism in the form of partnership reflects the need for agile and fluid roles within the nature of often complex and ambiguous HRD work. This section first explores how successful client relationships are achieved by breaking down the expert-client hierarchies seen in collegiate professions and focuses on negotiated co-constructed ways of working with clients reflective of corporate professions.

This section will move on to explore trust which informs how individual HRD consultants strengthen the consultant-client relationship. This section explores professionalism as partnership with trust-based relationships which reflects the socially situated nature of HRD consultancy work. In shifting client situations, decision making is found to be shared between the HRD consultant and diverse stakeholders. Professional work therefore is found to focus on establishing supportive social conditions for both the HRD consultant and for the client to operate together. Whilst trust-based relationships illustrate the interdependent nature of the consultant-client work. Consultants were found to be dependent on the client's feedback and subjective assessment of their social experience as a means of assessing the professionalism of individual HRD consultants. This section highlights how professionalism shapes our understanding of how HRD consultants undertake their professional work in client organisations.

7.3.1 Relationships: We are like an extension of the client team

The first finding in this section is that professionalism for HRD consultants is enacted as 'partnership' and found in the ways in which effective client relationships are defined by consultants. HRD consultants re-conceptualise the consultant-client relationship as a partnership where the relationship is co-created as equal partners with their client and driven by a shared belief in professional ways of working and shared motives in achieving the client's goals. To achieve this, HRD consultants break down the barriers in the consultant-client relationship from traditional expert-client hierarchies to become partners. Seeing professionalism as constructing relationships builds on Abbott (1988) who argued the development of professions, and the interplay with jurisdiction, came from the understanding of the formal and informal social structures at play between professionals and clients. This finding illustrates also Evetts (2011) view that corporate professions focus on the nature of working relationships and consensual decision-making as an occupational value.

However, this finding goes further than 'just' a value. The nature of partnership between HRD consultants and clients links with Aldrich et al's (2015) study that the development of informal relationships is a purposeful strategy for HRD professionals. The authors highlighted the relevance of professionals going beyond formal relationships and paying attention to the interpersonal and informal dimensions of client relationships to establish their credibility with clients. Partnership in this study was acknowledged to be crafted by both consultant and client, with the goal to determine if there is a 'the right fit'. For Consultant Natalie (CO01) this was informed by her understanding that her clients 'buy relationships.' Therefore, when pitching for new projects, she will make sure that 'the solution, the service and the people' are present and draws attention to the importance of relationship building 'that built in the room on that day'. Consultant Evan (CO13) highlights the importance of skills of empathy, challenge and supporting others that are used to craft relationships with individual clients. The Pearlcatchers website uses a client testimonial to illustrate their skills of understanding and adapting to organisational cultural norms and barriers that allow the client 'to view them as an extension of my global L&D department'. The likelihood of finding the 'right fit' with a partner was difficult to predict because of the absence of traditional guarantees to quality. In this study, it was discovered that both consultants and clients needed to pay careful attention to cues to demonstrate their partnership mindset. Crafting of a 'right fit' in a partnership is therefore an important focus for HRD consultant professional work.

Similar to Clegg, Rhodes & Kornberger (2007) who explored how business coaches developed relationships with clients, this study found that HRD consultants focused on the importance of emotion work in the consultant-client relationship as much as the rational processes of managerial agendas set out in their contractual obligations. In this study, HRD consultants, however, actively drew on a discourse of past client relationship building experience to evidence emotion work capabilities. Participants referred to working outside of their formal contractual obligations to support clients in raising their profile with senior stakeholders, identifying pressure points for their clients in influencing stakeholders, and establishing friendships through the process of working together. Consultant Philip (CO16) spoke of the confidentiality involved in client partnerships where clients share 'some very real challenges, often at senior level' where the client uses the partnership to help them 'prepare and think about what they're going to do about it'. As such, HRD consultants 'hold some potentially very sensitive information' outside of any contractual terms or billable time. This is similar to Maltbia, Marsick & Ghosh (2014, p.991) who emphasise the importance of stories of coaches in a coach-client partnership to illustrate how they 'stand with the client to transform challenges into victories.'

Similar also to Maltbia, Marsick & Ghosh (2014), HRD consultants described their partnership to be 'co-created' as the result of the combination of expertise and loyalty to achieve client outcomes. From the perspective of Client Carly (CL01), the experience is a 'well grounded real relationship, real rapport' where the client and consultant 'are equal here, there's not a superiority'. As such, HRD consultants were found to remove hierarchies and barriers and focus instead on the customised and flexible interpersonal identities in their relationships with clients (Clegg, Rhodes, & Kornberger, 2007). HRD consultants also reflected the findings from Styhre (2016) who found that scientists established relationships through the exchange of past experiences that evidenced their know-how of organisational politics, communication devices and decision-making practices.

Professionalism as partnership is found to be co-constructed through a convergence of social expectations between HRD consultants and clients in the ways in which a set of shared motives are established and worked towards. This finding builds on the work of Nikolova, Reihlen & Schlapfner (2009) who investigated the nature of the client-consultant interaction in complex and movable project work. Their work identified how the sharing of practice and experience between consultants and clients leads to a shared understanding of the social reality around the client needs. Consultants and clients developed a highly involved and rich communicative social exchange through a shared understanding of norms, values and practice that shaped successful ways of working. The link with this study is particularly relevant because of the association with HRD consulting work with movable project goals and fluid process expectations requiring more explorative consulting practices (Nikolova, Reihlen & Schlapfner, 2009, p.296). This finding is in contrast with one of the dominant traditions in the management consultancy literature which attempted to demystify the consultant-client relationship and question the extent to which the provision of help by consultants is appropriate to the actual needs of the client. Instead, consultants, it is argued, prioritise their own commercial agendas at the expense of the needs of the client (Clark & Salaman, 1996; Clark & Salaman, 1998a; Clark & Salaman, 1998b). In this study, both HRD consultants and clients emphasised their focus on shared understanding and shared motives with the client.

The co-creation and importance of the informal and emotional nature of relation building in HRD consultant work suggests partnership is a more complex dimension of professionalism than is currently conceptualised by professional bodies. The CIPD Profession Map and the LPI Capability Map do not currently emphasise this complex link (see Appendix 1). The International Coaching Federation (2019) competency framework does refer to partnership established from the combination of process, values and skills (see Appendix 1). Transactional clarity (documenting and upholding the contractual obligations) combined with demonstrating professional values of trust and respect for the client, and the application of skills to employ an open, grounded approach (ICF, 2019). Partnership in this framework however is limited to the narrow focus of work of an executive coach and is not fully representative of what has been conceptualised as a HRD consultant in this study.

Seen in the light of the findings from this study, understanding professionalism as partnership extends our understanding of the transactional coach/consultant-client work relationship with distinct boundaries, and provides an additional focus on the relational identities and skills needed to establish effective power structures in HRD consultant work. This also draws attention to Evett's (2013) conceptualisation of professionalism as discourse as the combination of occupational values and ideological interpretations in relation to trust, discretion, risk, judgement, and expertise in professional-client relations. This draws attention to the ways in which professionals talk about the appeal of professional work and why it can be understood to be normative in defining and controlling work identities. This will be elaborated on further in this chapter.

7.3.2 Trust: We create safe spaces for our clients to be successful

A further complimentary dimension of professionalism as partnership was found in the use of a discourse of the 'trusted advisor.' In the work of Maister, Green & Galford, (2000) a trusted advisor is defined as someone who creates safe spaces where diverse client needs can be met. Unlike Maister, Green & Galford's (2000) conceptualisation which suggests a trusted advisor to be an evolutionary state that is dependent on the breadth of issues and depth of personal relationships, this study found that the trusted advisor was a conscious discourse employed by HRD consultants to build client relationships. Consultant Hari (CO06) referred to this as 'self-sacrificing to create a really human bond'. This involved sharing 'very personal things as I'm building relationships, so that people know that it's safe for them to do the same'. For Hari, this was an investment in time within the consultant-client relationship where 'it takes anywhere between four to eight weeks to start to embed'. Only by doing this, according to Hari, that the client can 'sink into the deep space we them to create change'.

As normative form of control, HRD consultants behaved in a conscious manner to earn trust, and, when experienced in the relationship, trust was awarded by clients. As such, this reflects the conceptualisation of the collegiate professions where trustworthiness is earned by the perception of society and achieved by evidencing how the professions acted to meet the needs of the client over their own needs (Abbott, 1988). The importance of this status is similar to the view of the collegial professions (Freidson, 1970; Wolinsky, 1988) who considered trust to be of high value because it is fragile and dependent on the perception of society, and therefore professions need to pay close attention to strategies that sustain their trusted status.

Whilst a significant focus in the literature on trust in collegial professions related to ethics and expertise, and some corporate professions related to impression management, this study found that the trusted advisor strategies were more closely aligned to the conceptualisation of the emerging professions which emphasise the relational nature of trust to do what is right (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006; Dove et al, 2017). For HRD consultants, the trusted advisor focused on creating psychological safe spaces where their client can be successful through meeting their functional and professional career development needs. Consultant Francesca (CO04) gave an example of how safe spaces were created between HRD consultants and clients to 'encourage them to answer things with little or no risk, in a way that they can't do with their own stakeholders'. HRD consultants were aware of the importance the trusted advisor represented in being able to access client relationships and as such devoted time and resources to building this dimension of the partnership.

This study found that HRD consultants established trust in safe spaces through a relational strategy of developing the client and protecting the client. HRD consultants used their experience in other organisations as one means of developing the knowledgebase of the client and providing narratives of future impact for the client to share with their own stakeholders because of engaging with HRD consultancies. This finding supports an accepted feature in the management consultancy literature where closing the gap or information asymmetry between the consultant and client relationship is seen to be important to build trust and establish open communication (Bennett & Robson, 1999). This also supports the growing awareness in the literature of the sociology of the professions which argues that the professions need to focus on translating knowledge and methods into understandable ways for the client to be aware of the effects and consequences of professional work (Larson, 2018). HRD consultants could translate the complexity of how HRD work was undertaken by highlighting their interpretation of similar examples from previous clients in challenging situations, and drew attention to the importance an understanding of the complex nature of work contexts and emotional spaces in which work occurs and where performance is constituted by social and emotional relations (Watson & Ward, 2013).

Developing the client, however, was not detailed in a formal contract or specified in project briefs. Instead, the identification of development needs was characterised to be emergent and co-constructed between consultant and client based on the immediate context, such as day-to-day challenges facing the client to gain recognition or support from stakeholders. Or needs which were co-constructed between consultant and client based on the medium-term career goals of the client in achieving their desired career progression within the organisation or progression into other organisations. For Client Tessa (CL06), she saw the consultant-client relationship to be developmental in challenging the thinking and decision making capabilities to determine what HRD solutions were needed for the organisation. For Client Carly (CL01) working with HRD consultants not only provided 'the stretch' to their capabilities but also were often identified as the only suitable person who could provide that stretch because of the seniority of the position held by the client. Developing the client was individualised and tailored to the context based on the client's level of expertise in HRD and the client's professional development needs based on their career goals. Rather than conceptualising the client as 'the audience' without agency and 'done to' by self-seeking 'gurus' (Clark & Salaman, 1996; Clark & Salaman, 1998a), this finding is more in line with the conceptualisation of the management consultant-client relationship which is dynamic and interactive evolving over time towards interdependence (Glasser, 2002; Noordegraaf, 2020). The 'natural state' with which both consultants and clients described developing the client provides insights into the methods used by HRD consultants for affiliation, relational support, and a validation of competence as an iterative means to shape and strengthen their professional identity within a community of learning (Evans, 2019; Gray et al, 2015).

Looking at the data collected from the interviews, I reflected on the absence of conflict in the data between the alignment of a client's professional development goals and organisational priorities. What was good for the client was associated to be good for the organisation, and in turn good for how consultants were perceived to be performing. This view may have been different if other stakeholders had been included in the study however it again draws attention to the co-construction of client needs and the treatment of those needs by the consultant and client. Unlike findings in some sectors where the absence of contractual arrangements setting out relational responsibilities were found to be emotionally challenging and had a negative impact affective commitment in work relations (Ward & Greene, 2018), the expectation of developing the client was shared between consultant and client, talked about with enthusiasm and pride in being able to support and in some cases transform a client's immediate work relationship or next career move.

Development and protection come in different forms in relation to partnership. Protection is illustrated through the discourse of 'the Truth Teller.' The Truth Teller is a metaphor that comes consistently from how HRD consultants that illustrates the need for trust to be embed the client-consultant relationship. The Truth Teller holds the power to cut through organisational hierarchy and politics to create positive outcomes for the client. Consultant Hari (CO06) establishes her role with the permission of the client, and once acquired the truth teller works in a manner that shifts 'the whole system forward'. For Consultant Francesca, the power of the HRD consultant comes with the capability and position within a client organisation 'to say the unsayable' at 'sensitive, political or hierarchy' moments, a capability and power that internal clients are not able to use for fear of consequences to their own careers. The Truth Teller was found to be directly linked to the intangible nature of defining HRD work, what it means to enact HRD work, and how to represent the impact of HRD work. For Consultant Connor (CO11), in the Truth Teller role with his clients who needed to 'shift their focus' operating as a dysfunctional management team and 'make tangible decisions', he claims that the internal stakeholders alone 'would not have been able to do that on their own'. Therefore, trust in the form of the Truth Teller is a positive dimension of HRD consultant work and valued by clients.

The ability to use this power comes from permissions granted by the client to the HRD consultant to take on this role. HRD consultants also viewed this as a skill which an external HRD consultant brings to the partnership. This finding extends current constructs of professional HRD behaviours (CIPD, 2021; Egan & Hamlin, 2014) as the capability to diagnose and act on through 'objectivity' and 'courage' (CIPD, 2019) and by doing so extends our understanding of the heterogeneous nature of the HRD profession by considering the capabilities that a different employed status can have on the trust building relationships between outsider and insider. By taking on the role of the truth teller, the consultant is trusted by the client to remove their risk of 'being fired'. An understanding of the Truth Teller in this study rejects the identity of the 'guru' or 'witchdoctor' from the management consultancy literature (Clark & Salaman, 1996; Clark & Salaman, 1998a). The Truth Teller instead is as a means of protecting the client. However, this study found that it is not a feature of how HRD consultants represent their work on websites. Whilst acknowledged widely across the HRD consultant interviews, there is very limited reference made on consultancy websites in their external representation of professional HRD consultancy work.

This finding for the focus on developing and protecting the client supports the view of Wylie, Sturdy & Wright (2014) who found that trust, when connected to the dimensions of professionalism of expertise and adding value, plays an important role in understanding the creation of the relationship between consultant and client. Whilst their study focused on internal HR consulting roles, this study extends such insights which is not just about accessing relationships but providing access to the sensitive, hidden side of the client organisation. In doing so, trust provided access for HRD consultants to resources as well as institutional support. Participants gave examples of gaining access to 'strictly confidential' insider knowledge about organisational challenges and commercially sensitive information that would position them to compete for future work. Examples in this study illustrated how clients would share personally sensitive information and develop with new ideas without the risk of loss of reputation or criticism from stakeholders. Seen in this way, this provides empirical evidence to the theorising by Akdere (2005) that social relations create value and facilitate actions by allowing HRD practitioners access to resources and thereby make cooperation between individuals, teams and organisations possible. This study provides empirical evidence which extends this understanding by discovering link between developing the client and protecting the client to be important features of how these social relations are represented in our understanding of HRD consultant professionalism.

This finding challenges the critical perspectives in the management consultancy literature which argues that management consultants (as professions with no unifying identity) rely on self-representation rather than external validation to establish trust with new clients paying more attention to their personal appearance of self-confidence and the brand identity of the consultancy firm to convey capability and commitment to high performance (Gross & Kieser, 2006; Kipping, 2011). Instead, trust here for HRD consultants is unspoken, not formalised in the form of contracts, or explicitly stated in project briefs, and awarded by the client. The tacit nature of how trust is conceptualised and realised in practice by HRD consultants extends the current conceptualisation of evidence-based practice in HRD which is argued to build trustworthiness for practitioners (Gubbins et al, 2018). The understanding of professionalism in the form of developing and protecting the client highlights the importance for HRD consultants to be aware of the construction of their professionalism through an intentional strategy, how this is communicated to their clients, and their dependency on the client in awarding trust.

This study found that the safe spaces were regularly assessed by HRD consultant and client through a shared assessment of the relationship. This finding supports Gray et al (2015) conceptualisation of coaches as improvised identities that are constructed through a process of experience in HRD work, and that validation of competence is constructed by HRD consultants through different relational methods to shape and strengthen professional identity (Evans, 2019). In other words, by engaging in HRD work and enacting 'what it means to do HRD', practitioners were found to create a self-supporting feedback loop that regulates the consultant-client behaviour through how it is received by clients as well as peers within a community of other HRD professionals. Engaging and investing in feedback loops supports the findings by Aldrich et al (2015) where HR Business Partners demonstrated their professionalism through engaging in relationship building across multiple stakeholders at different levels in the organisation. In this study, feedback loops were found to exist from the entry into the client organisation through to the process of becoming embedded.

The use of feedback as form of normative control over behaviour helped the HRD consultant and client to co-construct the acceptable levels of performance expected and delivered by the consultant. This assessment happened in multiple directions by both the client and consultant in the form of regular informal conversations in safe spaces, end of project reviews and the feedback collected from stakeholders in the client organisation. Once received, the feedback allowed both client and consultant to take corrective action where necessary and became an important part of the sense making process for clients and consultants enabling actors adapt their work to changing client dynamics (Gray et al, 2015). Feedback was found to be an important part of the professional development of the consultant to learn from experience and adapt to future situations (Evans, 2019). In this study, HRD consultants were found to be engaging in a continuous learning process, acquiring knowledge of their environment throughout the consultant-client relationship. HRD consultants used this knowledge throughout the relationship to shape how they engaged with their client and other stakeholders. Working in heterogeneous client organisations required HRD consultants to be agile and adaptable in how they enter and become embedded into a new client relationship. The shared assessment of the level of trust in the relationship supported the understanding of professionalism by providing feedback within the system.

7.4 Research Question 3: Professionalism Reduces Risks in HRD Consultant Work

So far in this chapter, professionalism as partnership provides a set of strengths for the HRD consultancy profession in response to the complex and ambiguous field of HRD work in organisations. Professionalism as partnership was found to be a resource for HRD consultants in the form of specific capabilities to manage three dominant risks linked to the current (weakened) state of HRD as an academic discipline. This includes tensions in seeking to serve multiple stakeholder agendas and the negotiable jurisdiction of client work, and the absence of traditional guarantees of quality or traditional forms of measurement, and the influences over career development in the wider HRD profession. Such risks have reputational consequences for the client as well as the HRD consultant. In response to such risks, partnership, once created and embedded, is used to reduce risks. Consultants and clients co-construct the means to make claims to value from HRD consultant work. This includes the co-construction of client needs, the co-construction of the methods to measure value, and the ongoing renegotiation of proof of worth which aims to protect network reputation.

7.4.1 Client Needs: We work together to make sense of the issues and the solutions

This study found that HRD consultants and their clients recognised the realities of the risk to accurately diagnose needs and to work with constraints to apply appropriate solutions. HRD consultants were found to draw on the HRD knowledge monopoly in the form of the ADDIE framework (previously discussed in Chapter Three) that provided a systematic model for diagnosis of client needs (Allen, 2006). HRD consultants were found to draw regular attention to the language of aligning with organisational goals, identifying client needs, stakeholder need analysis, training design validation and evaluation. However, HRD consultants and their clients drew attention to the limits of this approach as a linear or cyclical model of HRD practice (Allen, 2006). Needs analysis instead is represented in this study as complex and dynamic with a range of factors which challenge the ability of consultants or clients to define a set of training needs. The use of ‘off the shelf’ HRD solutions requested without proper needs analysis and tailoring to client contexts was characterised by HRD consultants as ‘unprofessional’ and ‘undesirable for the client’s needs’ that did not place HRD work in its full strategic capabilities (Campbell and Lambright, 2016; CIPD, 2015; Gao et al., 2016; Nguyen et al., 2019). Needs analysis in organisations in this study instead were characterised by ambiguity for the client to be able to define a set of specific outcomes.

Risks in needs analysis were identified because of the need to serve multiple organisational stakeholder agendas. Whilst HRD consultants were able to become 'like a member of the team' in a client organisation and used their relational expertise to gain access to insider information, the needs analysis diagnosis was represented as often subject to navigating non-specialist HRD stakeholders to approve diagnosis. Examples from participants illustrated the role non-HRD specialists such HR Managers and Procurement Specialists, and in some instances, procurement panels were established to sign off a HRD consultant's needs analysis or their proposed solution. For example, Consultant Natalie (CO01) highlighted where the Procurement Function of client organisations might lead the search and the selection of HRD consultancies to work in the organisation. In doing so, this provided challenges for HRD consultancies to their normal approach to winning work with new or existing clients. In Natalie's example, this included having consultants with specific qualifications or professional body memberships that did not represent the capabilities valued or needed by the HRD client in the organisation.

This study found that HRD consultants addressed the possible risks of ineffective needs identification and solution building by employing a relational approach with the client. HRD consultants and their clients were found to collaborate and co-construct HRD work across the cycle from needs identification to solution. Consultant Philip (CO16) illustrated how he used his embedded status in the client organisation as partners in defining HRD project outlines for external tender as part of a 'thinking partner' role. HRD consultants also shared examples of helping to define a client's needs by providing illustrations of work in other competing organisations as a means of diagnosis. Client Deirdre (CL04) talked about how tenders were characterised as fluid, allowing for new insights from HRD consultants, the client, and organisational stakeholders to redefine the brief to be 'more relevant' and 'more achievable' to be delivered as the project stages developed possibly reimagining the original client need. Consultant Bassam (CO07) shared examples where HRD work was also characterised as subject to feedback at different stages of delivery allowing the HRD consultant to adjust to different audiences and needs 'for added value', and allowing the client to reject the solution if they were not satisfied.

By remaining fluid in outcomes, content, and delivery HRD consultants could argue their professionalism to be evidenced through openness to co-construction and (re)negotiation of client briefs (Sturdy, Wylie & Wright, 2013). HRD consultants and clients described this to be inherent in their professional practice illustrating a response to Swanson & Dobbs (2006) criticism of HRD practitioners in being limited to a focus on training content rather than finding methods that focus on systemic and systematic HRD work in support of organisational goals. In this context, this represents the connective nature of professionalism that emphasises collaboration across and within occupations (Anteby, Chan & DiBenigno, 2016) and the emphasis on brokering of professional and organisational knowledge that focuses on solution building rather than winning jurisdictional battles and achieving monopoly (Bres et al, 2019). This finding provides insights into hybrid professions, outside of Noordegraaf's (2007) attention on the medical professions, to support the conceptualisation of how hybrid professionalism draws attention to the importance of partnership as relational features of professional work which hold distinctive cultural or symbolic meanings accessed by professionals to establish institutional legitimacy.

7.4.2 Measurement: It's the quality of the partnership that currently gets measured

A second risk found in this study facing HRD consultants is the absence of evidence-based measurement to support their claims of impact from their work in client organisations. To overcome this risk, HRD consultants focused on relational measures with their clients to construct claims of successful outcomes (which in turn support their sustainable commercial goals). Chapter Three drew attention to the debated nature of HRD measurements and the limits of the knowledgebase related to measurement (Hamlin, 2016), expansion of national standards of HRD practice in academic circles (Anderson, 2017b). Chapter Three also considered the recent calls for action from the CIPD (2015, 2019) as professional bodies seeking for its HRM/HRD practitioner base to achieve further consistency in their practice and create greater influence over their stakeholders. The emphasis for the HRD profession, it is suggested in the literature, is to achieve enhanced recognition for its professional status (expertise, autonomy and authority) by connecting the expansion of the knowledgebase of measurement with greater evidence-based practice which leads to better structuring of expectations and signals greater trustworthiness for results (Garavan et al, 2019; Gubbins et al, 2018; Schoorman, Mayer & Davis, 2007).

This study found a more complex situation facing HRD consultants in balancing claims of impact with the challenges of determining what to measure and how to measure. As seen in Chapter Six, on the websites of HRD consultancies, and in the interviews with consultants and their clients, measurable change and delivering positive outcomes were found to be a consistent discourse in how HRD consultants communicate the purpose and value of HRD work. Websites, as the formal means of communicating about HRD consultancy work, consistently drew on the discourse of the positive impact of their HRD work on individual, group, organisational and society outcomes. DTC website claimed that their clients will be able to 'measure the impact of the leadership development programme with bottom line results'. The Forton Group website extended these claims suggesting that impact of their HRD work could be measured 'whatever the framework and measures your organisation currently uses'. Delivering measurable change therefore is represented to be a core part of the professional identity of HRD consultants. This representation remains consistent with the definitional debates discussed in Chapter Three that share a common view on the scale of HRD impact on organisations and the positive results from engaging with HRD practice (Hamlin and Stewart 2011; Wang et al, 2017).

However, this study found that such claims are limited by how much measurement is achieved or even possible in client organisations. Where HRD consultants did engage with measurement, this study found that most activities focused on Kirkpatrick's (1996) Levels 1 (Reaction) and Level 2 (Learning) which elicited the emotional and knowledge comprehension responses of participants to their immediate experiences of learning. Consultant Cliff (CO08) explained that whilst he had invested a lot of effort in his work into the Kirkpatrick framework he had done so because 'there isn't much else' to ascertain 'whether or not you have been effective with your L&D budget'. This is in line with the CIPD's (2016) own findings about the limited activities reported by its members on collecting data generally, and the absence of data specifically that draws on business metrics.

The HRD literature discussed in Chapter Three suggests that there are a range of interconnected reasons why measurement does not take place in organisations. Rather than an issue of competencies and capabilities, this study did find a common understanding of models of training evaluation dominated by references to the Kirkpatrick 4-Levels model as a functional approach to evaluation, and to ROI models conceptualised as more ‘strategic’ drawing on a more commercial KPIs and achieving more managerial goals from evaluation. However, the perception of such models provides some insight into why they were not used in client organisations. Consultants were found to highlight the lack of real insight that could be acquired through the usual measurements at Kirkpatrick’s Level 1 and 2. Consultants were found to consider the lack of creativity or innovation found in Kirkpatrick’s model and the lack of awareness by consultants and clients of any new perspectives that may meet these criteria. In the view of Consultant Connor (CO11), this was in part led to a shared belief between consultants and clients that it is a ‘very, very hard linkage to draw a line between that intervention and that outcome’. Client Kal (CL08) suggested that the HRD profession needed to ‘really challenge ourselves to measure the effectiveness of training’ whilst recognising that for organisations ‘it’s difficult to say what the return on investment is other than the fact that maybe you have a pipeline of talent’. This supports the reasons in the literature related to the absence of the necessary competencies and capabilities of HRD practitioners to undertake evaluation at different levels of analysis (CIPD, 2016; Garavan et al, 2019; Wisshak & Barth, 2021).

A second interconnected reason is the lack of available technology to collect and analyse evaluation data (CIPD, 2019). In this study, consultants and clients referred to the lack of technology to support evaluation being linked the organisational climate in organisations towards evaluation and measurement. In some instances, the evaluation stage of the ADDIE framework was not commissioned by the client because of the lack resources available to fund the time to undertake detailed measurements, focusing instead on the resources to design and deliver HRD work. In many instances, client organisations lacked the technology to gather any data in a systematic way that would link HRD work and measurable impact on organisational KPIs. In interviews it was found that the only technology and data available for HRD measurement was linked to employee engagement which, in the view of HRD consultants, was not easily linked to meaningful measurement.

This finding provides an important insight into assumptions made by Garavan et al (2019, p.70) who argue that HRD professionals must adopt more evidence-based practices with the use of real-time data analytics and require a 'mind-set change' towards the value of such data. However, before big data management can become a professional practice, organisations need to have such systems in place to collect data. This study found that all organisations involved did not yet have any systems in place to undertake this level of measurement. Whilst HRD consultants have been seen in this study to blur the outsider-insider boundaries through their partnership mindset, they have been found to remain constrained by their client's position in the organisational hierarchy to influence the need for investment in IT infrastructures to collect or analyse HRD impact data. In contrast to the arguments of UK professional bodies (CIPD (2019), and academic voices (Garavan et al, 2019; Gubbins et al, 2018) advocating the need for evidence-based HRD practice, HRD consultants and clients also did not see this to be a strategic imperative to sustain their level of HRD work.

A third interconnected reason for the lack of measurement relates to the ambiguity about what to measure and when. In the literature, studies discussed in Chapter Three have drawn attention to the limits of the HRD knowledgebase in relation to omitting the personal and environmental factors that may affect HRD outcomes, the ability to measure when organisations are in continual process of change, and that transformation from HRD work may not be linear in nature (Giangreco, Carugati, & Sebastiano, 2010; Joseph-Richard, Edwards & Hazlett, 2021; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2005; van Rooij & Merkebu, 2015). This study found support for the impact of ambiguity influenced the shared views of consultants and clients about what to measure. In interviews, clients drew attention to the importance of 'pipelines of talent' which may also be linked to other organisational factors such as opportunity and internal support as much as not just HRD work such as leadership development programmes. Consultant Colt (CO14) drew attention to the conflict facing HRD work when attempting to find managerial means to measure value in the same way as tangible organisational infrastructure like better wifi, suggesting that this conflict was unnecessary. Instead, Colt referred to the essence of the 'leap of faith' held by organisational stakeholders in the values behind HRD work, or measuring the climate where HRD clients were enabled to operate. Client Lara (CL13) drew attention to the pace of change in organisations and the ambiguity this created in when to measure in a systematic large-scale way. As such, this study places further support for the understanding of organisational factors that may prevent measurement to take place (Joseph-Richard, Edwards & Hazlett, 2021). This finding also provides insight into the attempts by HRD consultants to place control over ambiguous and fluid contexts by focusing primarily on immediate emotional and comprehension responses as the symbol of measurement.

7.4.3 Reputation: You are only as good as your last partnership

A third risk found in this study facing HRD consultants is the risk associated with losing reputation from not demonstrating proof of worth in a client partnership. The consequence for HRD consultants of losing their reputation is the termination of existing client relationships as well as the risk in securing future client relationships, and thereby negatively affecting their commercial goals. Whilst we do not know from the data collected in this study if relational measures used by HRD consultants are more important that ROI, we do know from the data collected that attention is placed on the measurement of the quality of the partnership and the impact that has on a consultant's reputation.

This study's findings support the link between the relational nature of the HRD consultant's professionalism and the strategies to manage the risk of conveying 'proof of their worth' to future clients. HRD consultants were found to draw on their partnership mindset and built trust that focused on 'making the client look good'. HRD consultants differentiated between two types of relationships which required investment in to secure long term relationships. Organisational relationships related to delivering on the functional outcomes of their work. In relation however to managing risk of reputation, it was the individual relationships which were related to the success of their individual clients and drew on a significant investment in partnership to establish close working relationships with specific clients (Muzio et al, 2011). HRD consultants were found to focus on 'making the client look good' by first investing in developing effective social relationships, emotional relationships and helping competencies through informality, self-disclosure, conversation and empathy (Egan & Hamlin, 2014).

In contrast to the representation of management consultants and their use of impression management to further their own agendas, HRD consultants were found to position their client in situations where their own performance could be recognised by senior internal stakeholders. Consultant Francesca (CO04) shared an example of her investment in the client relationship was to support a client 'struggling to get traction in terms of real Senior Board level sponsorship'. Consultant Bassam (CO07) shared an example where he was able to assess the current and future position of his client struggling in their organisation. In doing so, he shaped his role with the client 'I can see what the agenda is, I can you're scared, and I need to help you out'. Working outside of the service being provided to the organisation, Bassam shaped his brief 'it's not only the kind of business objective, but I also look at the client's objectives as well'. In doing so, this helped further the client's internal status for adding value.

HRD consultants also worked outside of their contracted terms to fix problems for the client that protected their internal credibility or emotional wellbeing. Unlike internal change consultants who were found to focus on securing recommendations from senior management for success and survival (Sturdy, Wylie & Wright, 2013, p.65), external HRD consultants focused their efforts on the individual client and the construction of 'worth' as the extent to which consultants supported the career goals of the client. This finding provides further evidence of the contextual variables that exist in different HR/HRD relationships which lead to positive career advancement within a dyadic organisational relationship. HRD consultants benefit as their client's career develops across multiple boundaries that would normally limit HRD consultant reach (Gubbins & Garavan, 2016).

This study found that the investments in the individual relationships with each client fuelled their network reputation and reduced the risk from any uncertainty over the nature of any 'word-of-mouth' recommendations. In this study, Consultant Bassam (CO07) illustrated this by an example of one client who crossed sectors (Automobile, to Retailing to Logistics) and crossing of national boundaries (from the UK to Germany). This was represented by Bassam and other consultants a natural part of HRD work for one consultancy to follow the career of their client without constraints from the restrictions to the profession applied by non-UK external bodies or governmental regulations. This study supports Glückler (2006) view of network reputation where consultants benefitted from crossing organisational boundaries by being brought into new organisations as their client moved employers. This study provides empirical evidence of Evetts (1995) view that network reputation facilitated a consultancy to follow a client career to cross sector and national boundaries.

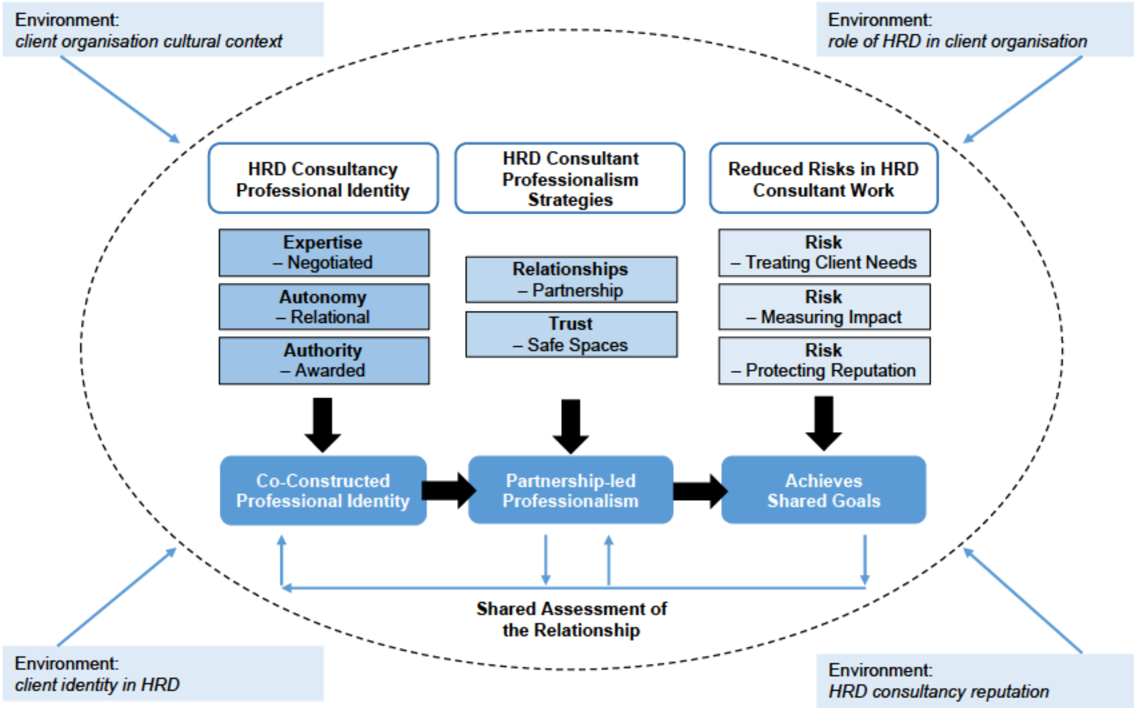
Managing the risk to loss of reputation, therefore, provides empirical evidence toward an understanding of the nature of agency within Noordegraaf's (2020, p.16) conceptualisation of connective professionalism. Agency in this study is driven by the behaviour of HRD consultants to navigate relations, being wired-in to the power dynamics between the client and organisational stakeholders, understanding of the lived social experiences of the client, navigating the dilemmas facing the client and gain respect. Seen in the light of HRD consultants, however, agency is on the one hand values-led in line with the HRD discipline and professional standards (CIPD, 2017). And on the other hand, agency is a commercial imperative for HRD consultants who are overly dependent on word-of-mouth reputation constructed by their client (Sturdy, Wylie & Wright, 2013). This finding provides alternative insights into the nature of social capital within HR and HRD professions that does not therefore draw on the espoused influence of evidence-based HRD (Gubbins & Garavan, 2016).

7.5 Conceptual Framework: The HRD Consultant Professional System

To illustrates the link between professional status and professionalism for HRD consultants, this thesis introduces an original conceptual framework The HRD Consultant Professional System created from the data collected and analysed from this study. This is illustrated in Figure 11. The framework illustrates how this link informs a unique system which enables HRD consultants to enter and embed themselves into a client organisation. The goal of the HRD Consultant Professional System is to create a symbiotic relationship for the benefit of the consultant and client. The HRD consultant draws on illustrations of their hybrid profession status and their professionalism to demonstrate proof of worth and enhance their social capital within the client organisation as their strategy to achieve commercial goals by building a sustainable consultant-client relationship. In doing so, this system illustrates how professional status and professionalism influence the consultant-client relationship through a consulting cycle. The conceptual framework illustrates how this system is outcome focused for HRD consultants with shared outcomes and management of risk to support both managerial agendas for the client organisation and personal agendas for client.

Figure 11

The HRD Consultant Professional System



This relationship between professional identity and professionalism as illustrated in the HRD Consultant Professional System however needs to be understood in relation to the context where such professional work is undertaken. The importance for HRD consultants to understand and respond to the changing dynamics of each individual client contexts is a key feature found in this study. As such, this can be explored through the lens of open systems theory (OST) illustrated in Figure 11 which first placed a focus on the importance of feedback loops and factors in the external environment are highlighted in understanding the role of context for successful HRD consultants. This thesis is the first to depict HRD consultant professional status and professionalism in this way to connect professional work with the client environment.

HRD consultants operate within an eco-system which is not a static linear system but one that is regularly shaped by feedback in a shared assessment of the relationship. The use of feedback in this system helps to determine level of performance expected and delivered by the consultant. Feedback provides a shared assessment of the relationship. This assessment happens in multiple directions by both the client and consultant. The client feedback can also be informed by other stakeholders in the client organisation during each phase of the system. Feedback allows both consultant and client to take corrective action where necessary. Feedback is an important part of the sense making process for consultants and clients enabling actors to adapt their work to changing client dynamics. Feedback is also an important part of the professional development of clients and consultant to learn from experience and adapt to future situations.

In this study, four factors in the environment were identified which have an impact on the client-consultant relationship. The first factor is the client's own professional identity in HRD. In this study, clients do not have a unified professional identity. This includes those from specialist HRD roles, generalist HR roles, to clients from commercial roles in organisations. The different identities means that clients have diverse experience or formal knowledge of HRD and its practices, diverse needs from HRD consultants, and work with diverse constraints to budgets and decision making.

The second factor is the cultural context of the client organisation. This reflects the diversity of organisational cultures which influence how relationships are created and embedded between internal and external partners. This includes highly formal bureaucratic cultures which seek to use criteria led approaches for entry and evaluation. Alternatively, more task based and person-centred cultures where individual autonomy and peer matrix structures are used for collective decision making and collaboration. The influence of leadership styles in the client organisation is also reflected in how entry and embedding is achieved by HRD consultants.

A further factor in the environment is the perceived role of HRD in the client organisation. This reflects the positioning of the function of HRD as well as the position of the client. In this study, HRD is not a homogeneous function across organisation. HRD sits as an autonomous function, integrated as part of the HRM function, or outside of any people related function and within the scope of the line manager who holds their own budget for people development work. There is also an inconsistency in how HRD is perceived to contribute to a client organisation performance by client organisation stakeholders. This ranges from seeing 'development' as a strategic function with a commercial managerial agenda to more traditional views of 'training' as a symbol engaging or rewarding individual performance.

A final factor in the environment is the track record of HRD consultancy in client organisations and the reputation for delivering 'value'. This is reflected in a number of different sources of reputation. One source of reputation is the specific HRD consultant reputation for delivering 'value' from their past performance. A second source is the past performance of other HRD consultants and consultancies in similar work. This can include discrete projects as well as the continuation of HRD projects handed over from one consultant to another. A further source is the past performance of management consultants as actors in an organisation wide project whose jurisdiction also extended into areas of HRD including change management, process re-engineering and wider HR change initiatives.

In this study, HRD consultants were found to be engaging in a continuous learning process, acquiring knowledge of their environment throughout the consultant-client relationship. HRD consultants used this knowledge throughout the relationship to shape how they engaged with their client and other stakeholders. Working in heterogeneous client organisations requires HRD consultants to be agile and adaptable in how they enter a new client relationship as well as how they become embedded in the client relationship. The shared assessment of the relationship supports the flexibility and adaptability needed from HRD consultancy by providing feedback within the system.

7.6 Summary

This chapter has discussed the main findings of the research, based on the experiences, perceptions and reflections of HRD consultants and clients, in relation to the existing literature. Structured in line with the three research questions, this chapter has highlighted the important contributions to gaps in the literature related to the conceptualisation of HRD consultants as a hybrid profession, and the relevance of professionalism in understanding how HRD consultants enact their work with clients, and use their professionalism as a resource to achieve shared outcomes. The contributions from the research relate to the bodies of knowledge which have been represented as the 'nexus' from sociology of the professions and HRD.

This chapter has explored the first research question to provide new insights into HRD consultancy as a professional field through creating an original study that draws on the

SoP framework of Expertise, Autonomy and Authority. This chapter has illustrated how HRD consultants communicate expertise, autonomy and authority to co-construct their professional identity to their clients. Whilst expertise, autonomy and authority provide a common lens through which to conceptualise a profession, the contribution from this section is that HRD consultants have been found to communicate their professional identity in alternative ways when compared to corporate professions. The fluidity of the definition and theoretical foundations of HRD have an important role for HRD consultants. This fluidity influences how expertise, autonomy and authority are conceptualised and communicated by consultants to enter client organisations and establish sustainable relationships. Rather than being weakened by a lack of traditionally recognised characteristics shared by collegiate professions, HRD consultants demonstrate strength from a fluid and co-constructed professional identity to succeed in their goal to secure long-term client relationships.

Exploring the second research question, this chapter has provided an understanding of how professionalism for HRD consultants in the UK is conceptualised as connective. Considering the difficulties associated with the definition of professions, and the ambiguities related to defining professionalism already discussed in this thesis, the study of the HRD consultant profession and professionalism offers an important way forward in understanding the connective nature of HRD consultant work, and their progress with professionalisation in the context of competitive client work. Drawing on the concept of connective professionalism, this study builds on the growing interest in this way of conceptualising professionalism in the SoP literature. Drawing on the discourse of partnership used by HRD consultants and clients, professionalism in this study is understood in the ways that interdependent relationships influence the construction and communication of professional identity, how professional decisions are taken collaboratively, and how the consultant works with client relationships to adapt and flex to changes in organisational contexts.

The third research question has been explored to understand how HRD consultants in the UK use professionalism as a resource in consultant-client relationships. Risks faced by HRD consultants were found to exist as a result of the tensions in seeking to serve multiple stakeholder agendas, the negotiable and fluid jurisdiction of HRD work, and the absence of traditional guarantees of quality or traditional forms of measurement from HRD consultancy work completed. This study found that the connective professionalism of HRD consultants is a resource in the form of specific strategies that support their agency to manage three dominant risks. Agency, in this respect, is seen in the behaviour of HRD consultants to navigate relations, be wired-in to the power dynamics between the client and organisational stakeholders, and understand the lived social experiences of the client, navigate the dilemmas facing the client and gain respect. For HRD consultants, professionalism is seen in their agency which is on the one hand values-led in line with the HRD discipline and professional standards. On the other hand, a HRD consultant’s professionalism facilitates their agency in supporting their commercial imperatives when being dependent on their word-of-mouth reputation constructed by their client. To manage such risks, HRD consultants used professionalism to create strategies that led to ways of support the discourse of positive transformation from HRD consultancy in complex organisational settings. In doing so, turning weakness in an academic discipline and into strengths for those who practice HRD for profit.

Chapter Eights provides the conclusion to the thesis by revisiting and answering the three research questions and discusses the contributions to knowledge. Finally, the chapter examines several limitations to the study and providing recommendations for future research.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Chapter 8: Conclusion, Recommendation and Limitations

8.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion to the thesis and outlines how the research questions have been addressed. This chapter highlights the original contributions which have been developed from this study. The limitations to the study are examined and reflected upon. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the implications for future research. First, each of the three research questions are answered drawing upon the data collected and analysed, the findings and discussion presented in the previous chapters in this thesis.

8.2 Research Questions Answered

8.2.1 Research Question 1: Drawing on definitions from the Sociology of the Professions, to what extent can HRD consultancy be considered a profession?

The first question was to examine how HRD consultancy is conceptualised as profession. By adopting the theory of the professions and using the accepted dimensions of expertise, autonomy and authority, the findings provide a greater understanding of the professional status of HRD consultancy from the synthesis of two perspectives. First, from those who enact HRD consultancy work (HRD consultants), and those who contract and pay for the repeat services of HRD consultancy to treat their needs (organisational clients). This study responds gaps in the literature in relation to better understanding of new and emerging professions such as specialised forms of consultancy (Evetts, 2013; Hodgson et al, 2015; Muzio et al, 2011), the professional status of HR and HRD practitioners in organisational settings (CIPD, 2015; Garavan et al, 2019; Gold et al, 2022; Gray et al, 2015), and how the HRD profession can better enhance their position and promote their values in increasingly complex and ambiguous organisational settings (CIPD, 2019). This study also addresses gaps in the literature related to how HRD as a profession is understood by those who enact

HRD in contemporary settings (Lawless et al, 2011; Stewart & Sambrook, 2012). The findings from this research provide important insights into how HRD consultants 'talk into being' their professional practice.

The findings from this research show that HRD consultancy is characterised as a hybrid profession when seen through the dimensions of expertise, autonomy and authority (Noordegraaf, 2020). In line with the findings from the literature of management consultancy (Fincham et al, 2008, Muzio et al, 2011) and revisiting changes in collegiate professions (Edwards 2011, Sandefur 2015), expertise in the form of codified abstract bodies of knowledge, whilst not absent, was not found to be a sine qua non in how HRD consultant's expertise to be represented. Expertise involved the co-production of new knowledge with clients to treat new or emerging context specific issues. The expertise of HRD consultants therefore is more competency based with a focus on practical application from heterogeneous sources of knowledge including new knowledge learned from experience. Expertise is therefore less about acquiring formal qualifications and credentials and instead supports the view in the literature that crossing the boundaries of formal and situational knowledgebases, and crossing the outsider-insider boundaries to be able to co-construct relevant knowledge with clients to create solutions help to define how consultants 'add value' to their client's unique needs (Anteby, Chan & DiBenigno, 2016; Valkevaara, 2002).

Core expertise complemented by relational expertise together helped to understand the process HRD consultants used to engage with in the shared co-production of solutions to better reflect the complexity and unpredictability of professional work in their client organisations. As such, this provides further support for Eyal (2013) who highlights the importance of the quality of cross boundary relationships and the existence of co-constructed beliefs about success of results, and supports Huising (2015) who found that core and relational expertise together elicited deference from clients and enabled the professional to influence client and wider stakeholders.

In the management consultancy literature, Nikolova & Devinney (2012) have argued that understanding of autonomy, and the drawing of boundaries, provides an insight into the nature of the consulting model being used by consultants and illuminates the nature of the consultant-client interaction. Seeing autonomy as relating and connective provides important insights into how HRD consultants work successfully in client organisations by navigating possible disputes and competition with other groups. This research supports MacDonald's (2002) view that seeing autonomy as relating illustrates how professions better understand and integrate the differences in capacities between their own and their clients, as well as the ability to identify situations where autonomy is ambiguous or ill-defined. As such, this research supports the view that professions can no longer be understood by looking at independence and enacting separate action. Successful HRD consultants can be understood to work 'in-between' stakeholders and facilitate decision making especially in complex and ambiguous contexts where autonomy may well be ill-defined (Noordegraaf, 2020). Collaboration was found to support the current understanding of how to expand social influence for professions across an ecosystem of stakeholders in a complex web but unified to achieve a shared or complementary goal (Anteby, Chan & DiBenigno, 2016). HRD consultants were found to use their dependency on social relationships and an agility to work within existing power structures in client organisations to remove possible disputes. Understanding boundary work in this way highlights the relational nature of autonomy in the professional identity of HRD consultants, and the co-construction of work between the HRD consultant and their client.

HRD consultants therefore need to draw attention to the process of negotiation and renegotiation in constant collaboration with the client when defining their model of consulting. The ability to inform, negotiate, and re-construct client briefs was an essential characteristic looked for by clients when selecting HRD consultants to enter their organisation or to become embedded. This agility and responsiveness to social experience, navigating relations and being 'wired in' to the dynamics of client organisations provides further empirical support to Noordegraaf's (2020) theorising of the connective nature of expertise in professional work. Autonomy is therefore not fixed and stable, but instead (re)constructed and (re)negotiated in each client's context but at the same time dependent on positive social relations and agile to respond to change within the client organisation.

Authority was found to be granted by the client where evidence of core and relational expertise could be demonstrated, and desired quality in their practice, could be assessed by the client. For HRD consultants, this means that barriers to entry are in existence to access clients and therefore the ability to enter professional practice. However, in contrast to the preoccupations by some management consultancy literature (Muzio et al, 2011) and the HRD literature (Harrison et al, 2021) HRD consultants work within a regime that is not orchestrated by professional bodies or controlled by university qualifications that work within tight cognitive boundaries to provide symbols of professional status and thereby represent authority. Instead, HRD consultant authority was found to be governed by through relational structures and priorities. This study therefore emphasises the need for HRD consultants to engage with specific strategies to gain a 'ticket to entry' into a client organisation. External symbols of expertise from experience are important to develop and communicate to clients as means of evidencing past professional practice and predict future performance. However, HRD consultants also need to be aware of the professionalisation project underway in the areas of coaching specifically, and HRD generally, to ensure that they can maximise access to a competitive market and future developments in standardising professional practice. Unlike calls for a unified HRD body of knowledge from the CIPD (2019) and expansion of the HRD theoretical knowledgebase (Garavan et al, 2019; Lawless et al, 2011; McGuire, 2011; Russ-Eft et al 2014; Stewart & Sambrook, 2012), HRD consultant professional status is not dependent solely on the rigour of science in the form of knowledge expertise or professionalisation tactics. Instead, this study found that HRD consultant professional status is built and communicated through evidencing the transferability of core and relational expertise from experience of HRD work in similar contexts to new client situations. This enables HRD consultants to cross boundaries of client work and promote mobility across sectors and borders.

The outcomes of this research are that HRD consultants can be conceptualised as hybrid professions whose purpose and behaviour can be in part attributed to professionalization strategies and their client's organisational priorities (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008). This research is in line with the view that hybrid professions focus more on the nature of working relationships and consensual decision-making as an occupational value than collegiate or corporate professions (Evetts, 2011). HRD consultants in this study were found to demonstrate a set of unifying features in each of the dimensions of their professional identity when working in client organisations whilst rejecting the accepted means of becoming unified through a professionalisation project. This study extends our understanding of the ways that hybrid professions create and use new forms of networks to organise and regulate themselves (Dingwall, 1999; Evetts, 2000) through an understanding the collaborative climate between HRD consultant and the client in establishing reviewable standards of professional practice. This provides support for Noordegraaf's (2020) view in the interdependency of the professions which involve extensive webs of relations for individuals to perform. This study supports the importance of relational autonomy and relational authority as a key concept for HRD consultants in understanding how the client has significant agency in awarding of professional status for HRD consultants through their appraisal of the consultant-client relationship and to be trusted to do what is right (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006; Dove, et al, 2017; Noordegraaf, 2020). Whilst benefiting from recognisable features of a collegiate profession, this study argues that conceptualising HRD consultancy as a hybrid profession helps researchers and practitioners to recognise how a heterogenous professional group succeed in their competitive field whilst working outside of the current professionalisation project of HRM and HRD in the UK.

8.2.2 Research Question 2: How do the practices of HRD Consultants represent notions of professionalism?

The second question was to explore the meaning of professionalism for HRD consultants through the interpretation of their lived experiences and reflections associated with being successful, and drawing on similar sense making by their clients. This question responds to the gaps in the literature of the Sociology of the Professions where the is no consistent understanding of the concept of professionalism. Instead, professionalism has been conceptualised as subjective with calls for research into more specialised forms of new or emerging professions (Adams, 2020). This study addresses a gap in the literature to understand such new professions in an evolving context where from our original associations of professionalism with collegial professions towards organisational professions and their professionalism who work in ambiguous domains where expertise is no longer able to be isolated from other experts, decision makers or clients (Noordegraaf, 2007, p.780).

Recent studies have recognised linkages between managerialism and professionalism for professional service and relationship-led occupations such as management consultants to conceptualise a 'reconfiguration of professionalism' related to their social conditions, demands, and expectations, and shaped by work settings (Maestripieri, 2019; Noordegraaf, 2020) but specialised forms of consultancy have yet to be included in this area of research. This study has drawn on three specific conceptualisations of professionalism in the context of hybrid professions. First, organisational professionalism is thought to be highly influenced by corporate mission statements and managerial goals that in turn influences work identities, career decisions and pathways, and sense of self (Evetts, 2013, p.783). Second, connective professionalism is argued to place an emphasis on how the connectivity to clients and stakeholders influences the construction of professional identity, how professional decisions are taken, and legitimacy (re)gained (Noordegraaf, 2020, p.02). Thirdly from a practice perspective, professionalism as status is argued to be a resource for achieving competitive advantage which helps consultants to claim jurisdiction over other competing occupations to secure relationships and thereby future consulting work (Wright, 2008; Wylie, Sturdy, Wright, 2014).

From the analysis of the data, two themes were created which highlight the nature of professionalism for HRD consultants as well as the strategies needed to successfully communicate professionalism to their clients. The nature of HRD consultant professionalism is highly client focused with a relational basis that connects relationship goals with trust to establish partnerships that transcend traditional professional-client boundaries. This finding extends our understanding of how specialised forms of consultants establish links between expectations and ambiguous work settings with clients (Maestripieri, 2019). Seeing professionalism as partnership provides supports for how the professional influence of HRD consultants is achieved through the informal and emotional work with clients by removing hierarchies and barriers, and focus instead on the customised and flexible interpersonal identities in relationships with clients (Clegg, Rhodes & Kornberger, 2007).

This study found that partnership was a conscious strategy employed by HRD consultants. Drawing on the concept of connective professionalism, this study provides further empirical evidence to show how interdependent relationships influences the construction of professional identity, how professional decisions are taken, and how the professional-client relationships adapt and flex to changes in organisational contexts (Noordegraaf, 2020, p.02). Whilst the literature focuses on the nature of protection for the professions from market risks, the risks of inter-professional conflict and competition (Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018), professionalism in this context provides an alternative way of looking at protection. HRD consultants use a range of informal values-led behaviours to achieve their primary goal of protecting the individual client, and by doing so, protects the interests of consultant. When done successfully, representing professionalism in the form of a track record of partnership extends our understanding of how relationships provide competitive advantage to the individual consultant to defend their jurisdiction and achieve their goal of sustainable long term client relationships (Wright, 2008; Wylie, Sturdy & Wright, 2014).

The literature has also viewed professionalism as a managerial form of control to establish ‘appropriate’ work identities, conducts and practices over professional practice (Evetts, 2013) and the enforcement of ethical HR practices at a distance (CIPD, 2015). In this study, deviating from professionalism as partnership was controlled through informal feedback mechanisms between consultant and client, and the shared awareness of the negative consequences to losing valuable consultant-client relationship. The control over conduct however was represented by participants in this study to be well managed. HRD consultants were found to view professionalism as partnership to be co-constructed between HRD consultants and clients through a convergence of social expectations in the ways in which a set of shared motives are established and worked towards (Nikolova, Reihlen & Schlapfner, 2009). In contrast to Aldrich et al (2015) where HR Business Partners demonstrated their professionalism through engaging in relationship building across multiple stakeholders at different levels in the organisation, HRD consultants were found in this study to focus their attention first on their individual client feedback on the success of the partnership. Once received, the feedback allowed the consultant to take corrective action where necessary which became an important part of the sense making process for consultants to adapt their work to changing client dynamics (Gray et al, 2015).

Seeing professionalism as a form of equal exchange with their clients, this builds on existing ways of seeing how HRD consultants focus on affiliation, relational support and a validation of competence as an iterative means to shape and strengthen their professional identity within a community of learning (Evans, 2019; Gray et al, 2015). This finding supports Gray et al (2015) conceptualisation of coaches as improvised identities that are constructed through a process of experience in HRD work, and that validation of competence is constructed by HRD consultants through different relational methods to shape and strengthen professional identity (Evans, 2019). In other words, by engaging in HRD work and enacting ‘what it means to do HRD’, practitioners were found to create a self-supporting feedback loop that regulates the consultant-client behaviour through how it is received by clients as well as peers within a community of other HRD professionals. Feedback provides important part of the professional development of the consultant to learn from experience and adapt to future situations (Evans, 2019).

The co-creation of the informal and emotional nature of relation building in HRD consultant work and its importance for creating sustainable consulting work suggests partnership is a more complex dimension of professionalism than is currently conceptualised by professional bodies. The International Coaching Federation (2019) competency framework refers to partnership as established from the combination of process, values and skills. Transactional clarity (documenting and upholding the contractual obligations) combined with demonstrating professional values of trust and respect for the client, and the application of skills to employ an open, grounded approach (ICF, 2019). There are some similarities, but also some important contrasts, with the CIPD's model of the HR(D) professional. The capability to diagnose and act on through 'professional courage and influence (CIPD, 2019, p.07) is perhaps the closest 'core behaviour' linked to professionalism. However, the CIPD's approach to defining professionalism is transactional between the professional and the learner, and fails to reflect the inter-relationship behaviours that exist in organisations such as between the external consultant and the HRD client.

This finding extends current constructs of professional HRD behaviours (CIPD, 2019; Egan & Hamlin, 2014) to reflect the importance of the link between relationships and trust articulated as partnership between external HRD consultants and their client. Learning how to create and demonstrate partnership is interpreted in this study to be experiential and 'on the job.' Consultants are guided in this learning by the shared sense making and feedback processes between consultant and client as the relationship develops. The ability to use this power, however, comes from permissions granted by the client to the HRD consultant. HRD consultants viewed this as a capability which an external HRD consultant brings to the client-consultant relationship. Seen in the light of the findings from this study, understanding partnership as an articulation extends our understanding of the importance of micro-practices that happen in HRD consultant-client relationships, and provides an additional focus on the relational identities and skills needed to establish effective power structures in HRD consultant work (Noordegraaf, 2020).

8.2.3 Research Question 3: How do HRD Consultants use professionalism as a resource in consultant-client relationships and how does this impact on the nature of their ‘professionalism project’?

The third question was to explore how professionalism is used by HRD consultants in performing successfully in client organisations. There has been growing interest not just to define professionalism but to also question ‘for what purpose’ is professionalism relevant and important (Akdere, 2005; Alvesson & Johansson, 2001; Kipping, 2011). Previous research has focused on the use of professionalism as a resource to control and regulate individual behaviour with clients in line with consultancy values and brand identity (Evetts, 2006; Noordegraaf, 2007; Paton et al 2013). More recently, professionalism has been pursued in the literature as ‘how practitioners explain their work’ (Cohen et al, 2005; Maestripieri 2019). Research however has typically analysed professionalism in relation to large multinational contexts (Evetts 2011) and has yet to explore more specialised forms of consultancy such as HRD consultancies who are more heterogenous in size and structure (Clegg et al, 2003, 2005; Abdullah et al, 2011).

By addressing this gap in the literature, this is in line with Gray et al (2015) who called for research to help identify the possible sources of tension within the HRD profession and their implications for how the profession is understood socially and professionally in the future. In exploring this question, I wanted to understand the benefits of professionalism linked to a consultant’s ability to work in diverse client organisations. In answering this question, this study found that professionalism in the form of partnership provides a set of strengths for the HRD consultancy profession in response to the complex and ambiguous field of HRD. Professionalism seen as partnership is a resource in the form of specific capabilities to manage three dominant risks linked to the current (weakened) state of HRD as an academic discipline.

The profession faces the risks of inaccurate diagnosis and inference of client needs, and then using their influence to apply appropriate solutions. Whilst the discourse of systematic models of HRD were used, this study found support for the criticism of the dominant models such as ADDIE (Allen, 2006) where HRD consultants drew attention to the limits of this approach as a linear or cyclical model of HRD practice. In this study, needs analysis is found to be a much more complex and dynamic feature of HRD consultancy work to navigate a structural and relational complexities in organisations which challenge the autonomy of consultants to define a set of training needs. This study extends our understanding of the complexity of needs analysis by highlighting the challenges to professional autonomy of consultants as experts, and decision-making being subject to the views of non-HRD specialists such HR Managers and Procurement Specialists to 'sign off' needs analysis. In some instances, needs analysis was also characterised as solutions driven and not bound by any specific form of HRD knowledgebase that would constrain an understanding of the client context, needs or prescribed solution. This study found that HRD consultants addressed the possible risks of ineffective needs identification and solution building by employing a relational approach with the client. By remaining fluid in outcomes, content, and delivery this study extends our understanding of how specialist consultants evidence their professionalism by their openness to co-construction and (re)negotiation of client briefs (Sturdy, Wylie & Wright, 2013).

This supports the growing understanding in the SoP literature of the connective nature of professionalism that emphasises collaboration across and within occupations (Anteby, Chan & DiBenigno, 2016) and the emphasis on brokering of professional and organisational knowledge that focuses on solution building rather than winning jurisdictional battles and achieving monopoly (Bres et al, 2019). Rather than seeing HRD to be weakened by the limits of systematic models of HRD, this finding provides further empirical support to Noordegraaf's (2007) conceptualisation of professionalism which draws attention to the importance of partnership as relational features of professional work. The behaviour of collaboration across and within diverse occupations to achieve consensus supports the view that professionalism in this form holds distinctive cultural or symbolic meanings to establish legitimacy for the profession, even when the professional work may be limited by its abstract foundations. In enacting the behaviour of partnership with the client (and with client stakeholders), this study found new insights into the strengths employed by the consultant to navigate the cognitive and practical risks of needs analysis, and instead drew on the discourse of shared and co-constructed meaning to demonstrate their professional standing.

A second risk to be navigated is the HRD consultant's ability to be evidence-based in the measurement of impact and demonstrate proof of worth. The emphasis for the HRD profession, it is suggested in the literature, is to achieve enhanced recognition for its professional status by connecting the expansion of the knowledgebase of measurement with greater evidence-based practice (Hamlin, 2016) which leads to better structuring of expectations and signals greater trustworthiness for results (Garavan et al, 2019; Gubbins et al, 2018; Schoorman, Mayer & Davis, 2007), and supports the possibilities from the expansion of national standards of HRD practice (Anderson, 2017b). Whilst the practice of measurement and discourse of positive transformation was found in this study to dominate HRD consultancy websites, the participants in the interviews presented alternative views the reality of the nature of measurement in organisations, and what leads to a shared discourse of successful HRD work in client organisations. In this study, evidence-based practice through measurement of HRD work was limited to Kirkpatrick's (1996) Level 1 and Level 2, although the actual practice of data collection and analysis was itself found to be limited. The reasons cited support our current understanding of organisational constraints including available technology and stakeholder interest. This finding, however, extends Wisshak & Barth (2021) to see the influence to measure by understanding that HRD consultants as experts are limited by the constraints imposed by non-HRD stakeholders in withholding organisational support in the form of budget and the need for evidence as well as creating 'time' to measure instead of just 'moving onto the next thing.'

New insights from this study found that it is the quality of the ongoing consultant-client relationship that is measured and informs the discourse of positive outcomes from HRD work. Consultants were evaluated by clients through their attention given to co-constructing project briefs, their flexibility with renegotiations of project outcomes during the project development and delivery, and their openness when co-constructing the nature of the metrics to be used to evaluate the quality of the work delivered with the client. Seen in this light, relational as well as processual measures are introduced and co-constructed between the consultant and client. In contrast to the traditional conceptualisations of the professions in their autonomy to assess the quality and standards of its practitioners (Abbott, 1988), HRD consultants in this study adopt a connective approach to their work in being assessed by the client (Noordegraaf, 2020). In line with Noordegraaf's (2020) conceptualisation of connective professionalism, the

HRD consultant is evaluated by both relational and processual dimensions. This study builds on this work by seeing the client to be an active agent in determining the relational and processual criteria to measure the performance of the consultant linked to the client's own individual and organisational goals.

This finding provides new insights to Noordegraaf's (2020) conceptualisation by appreciating the informal nature of this measurement that is not reflected in formal contracting or project brief measurements. Whilst the HRD profession may be perceived to be weakened by an absence of a coherent evidence-based practice, this study found that HRD consultants were able to successfully sustain client relationships. Instead, this informal and evolving measurement provides new insights into the socialisation of the consultant as outsider to become an insider that has important consequences to determining service delivery (Noordegraaf, 2020, p.15). The response and outcomes of such informal and evolving measurement is identified in this study as an important feature of the consultant-client relationship to be understood by consultants in how their professionalism is used to establish sustainable client relationships to fulfil their commercial goals. Whilst this does not answer Garavan et al's (2019) call for advances in the knowledgebase of HRD measurement, this finding provides original insight into alternative priorities for HRD consultancy and their organisational clients in relation to the need to measure.

A third risk found in this study facing HRD consultants is the risk associated with losing reputation from not demonstrating proof of worth in a client partnership. The consequence for HRD consultants of losing their reputation is the termination of existing client relationships as well as the risk in securing future client relationships, and thereby negatively affecting their commercial goals. This study found that the investments in the individual relationships with each client fuelled their network reputation and reduced the risk from any uncertainty over the nature of any 'word-of-mouth' recommendations. This study supports Glückler (2006) view of network reputation where consultants benefitted from crossing organisational boundaries by being brought into new organisations as their client moved employers. This facilitated the creation of new organisational relationships without having to compete against rivals or embedded consultants through the power of the client's word of mouth referral. Network reputation through following client careers helps to understand how HRD consultants were able to cross sector and national boundaries successfully without constraints from external bodies or governmental regulations (Evetts, 1995). This study extends Glückler (2006) view of network reputation to understand the nature of the relational strategies used by consultants to achieve network reputation within existing relationships. Seen through this relational lens, this challenges the view of Glasser (2002, p. 33) who argues that whilst trust for consultants is an important element which influences cooperation within consulting relationships, it has not been linked directly to continued business. Seen with equal importance by clients, this study adds new insights to understand how clients construct their assessment of the strategies which build trusted sustainable relationships based on quality work and employing ethical standards to achieve competitive advantage (Canato & Giangreco, 2011; Collins, 2016; Hodgson et al, 2015).

Managing the risk to loss of reputation, therefore, provides new empirical evidence toward an understanding of the nature of agency within Noordegraaf's (2020, p.16) conceptualisation of connective professionalism. Agency in this study is driven by the behaviour of HRD consultants to navigate relations, being wired-in to the power dynamics between the client and organisational stakeholders, understanding the lived social experiences of the client, navigate the dilemmas facing the client and gain respect. Seen in the light of HRD consultants, however, agency is on the one hand values-led in line with the HRD discipline and professional standards (CIPD, 2017). And on the other hand, agency is a commercial imperative for HRD consultants who are overly dependent on word-of-mouth reputation constructed by their client (Sturdy, Wylie & Wright, 2013). In contrast to the claims of a weakened profession that does not draw on the espoused influence of evidence-based HRD (Gubbins & Garavan, 2016), this study provides alternative insights into the strengths that exist in HRD when viewed as a heterogeneous profession and how the HRD consultancy profession build influence through professionalism as a resource to secure social capital.

Risks faced by HRD consultants are as a result of the tensions in seeking to serve multiple stakeholder agendas, the negotiable and fluid jurisdiction of HRD work, and the absence of traditional guarantees of quality or traditional forms of measurement from HRD consultancy work completed. Such risks have reputational consequences for the HRD consultant as well as for the client. Therefore, professionalism as partnership was found to be a resource successfully adopted by participants in this study to prevent such risks from occurring.

8.3 Contributions from this study

The thesis makes three connected contributions to the existing literature.

The first contribution from this study advances our understanding of the conceptualisation of HRD consultancy as a strong hybrid profession. By using the SoP framework of Expertise, Autonomy and Authority, this study challenges previously held assumptions about the weakness of HRD as a profession (e.g. Gold et al, 2022; Gubbins & Garavan, 2016; Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie, 2008) and suggests that HRD consultancy has the power to successfully appeal to clients, influence stakeholders, attract new talent into the profession, and practice HRD for profit in complex organisational settings. This study found that gaps in the HRD knowledgebase were resolved through the acquisition of contextual knowledge, experience-based knowledge and knowledge that is co-constructed between HRD consultant and client. This boundary spanning nature of expertise was found to enrich solutions, promote autonomy by being more easily accepted by clients and stakeholders, and establish authority from a track record of ‘adding value’ to a managerial agenda of efficiency and transformation.

This is the first UK empirical study to apply the theory of the professions with a framework of Expertise, Autonomy, and Authority to conceptualise HRD consultancy as a profession. These findings confirm that HRD consultancy can be conceptualised as a hybrid profession. These findings provide a new understanding of HRD consultancy which works outside of the current HRD professionalisation project depicted in the literature (CIPD, 2017, 2019; Gold et al, 2022; Salman 2019, 2021). This study challenges our current understanding of the professionalisation project of HRD to be unified (e.g. CIPD 2017, 2019), and reframes the HRD profession as heterogeneous and made up of multiple occupations with different organisational identities. These insights can inform the development of new professional frameworks by UK professional bodies and higher education providers for HRD consultancy to reflect the contextual dimensions of their professional status. This contribution also has implications for HRD academics interested in closing the gap between theory and practice by helping to understand the dynamics of the different actors involved in the application of theory, and how theory may be shaped by how HRD is enacted in organisational settings.

A second contribution from this study adds to our understanding of connective professionalism as way to understand practices of contemporary hybrid professions in organisational contexts. This study builds on Noordegraaf's (2020) conceptualisation of connective professionalism to provide new insights into how HRD consultants articulated the notion of 'partnership.' From the perspectives of HRD consultants and clients, connective professionalism is understood to embody the importance of shared values, shared goals, with the removal of hierarchy and boundaries traditionally found in new profession relationships (Anteby et al, 2016; Bellini & Maestripieri, 2018; Eyal, 2013; Maestripieri, 2019). This contribution builds on our understanding of connective professionalism by linking it with HRD discipline specific values. This builds on research into management consultants linking with sustainable relationship building and professional fluidity (Cross & Swart, 2021), and into the healthcare sector with service ecologies with stakeholders (Dove et al, 2017). These insights inform the articulation and development of professional behaviours for current and future UK HRD consultants and how these can be supported through revised policies and practices delivered by UK professional bodies and higher education providers.

A final contribution from this study extends our understanding of occupational jurisdiction for hybrid professions where traditional credentials are replaced by alternative ways of evidencing competence and the alignment of values. By exploring the representation of professionalism from the perspective of HRD consultants and clients, this study builds on our current understanding of the use of network reputation for communicating competence by consultants (e.g. Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003; Gray & Saunders, 2014; Gubbins & Garavan, 2009; Salman, 2019, 2021). This highlights the need for HRD consultants not only to evidence competence of managing interdependent relationships, but also to be aware of how clients construct their own view on the professional identity of HRD consultants from these relational credentials.

As one of the first studies to explore how external HRD consultants build their network reputation (e.g. Salman 2019, 2021), this study showed that this is achieved by supporting a client's personal career goals as well as the stated organisational goals.

This highlights the need for HRD consultants not only to evidence competence of managing interdependent relationships, but also to be aware of how clients construct their own view on the professional identity of HRD consultants from these relational credentials. HRD consultants therefore were found to craft to their network reputation by working outside of the traditional boundaries of the consulting brief, and by the regular nurturing of current and past relationships with clients to ensure positive word of mouth references. Feedback loops were found to be important between the consultant and client to regularly assess both the capability to add value to organisational goals and the support the client's personal and professional goals.

This highlights the importance for HRD consultants to establish and maintain within their business model the ability to work within and outside of contractual work to enhance their network reputation. HRD consultants will also need to establish a methodology and mindset to regularly assess how their network reputation is being constructed by their clients. For future talent wanting to enter the profession, this study can raise awareness of the importance for Professional Bodies, Higher Education, and HRD Consultancies to develop alternative practices to support future consultants to acquire appropriate relational credentials to prepare them to gain access to a prospective client.

8.4 Limitations of the Study and Future Studies

The research undertaken in this thesis created original findings and contributions. Reflecting on the research process and outcomes, four limitations have been identified which are important to be acknowledged when viewing the whole research project.

The first limitation relates to the absence of failure in the data collected. The nature of the sample selected focused on clients, consultants and consultancies who were established in the profession for more than 5 years. As such, this was interpreted to mean that the sample had attributes of being successful in their careers. This was a conscious decision in the selection of the sample to assume that data could be collected from diverse experiences in HRD work and the associated results from the work completed. As discussed in previous chapters (Chapter One and Four), the literature suggests that gaining access to consultants and getting them to talk about their work in clients was a barrier for researchers. When approaching participants, therefore, I emphasised the opportunity to reflect on their experience in HRD work and their practice as a professional. The opportunity to talk about their career highlights and successful HRD work seemed to encourage participation in the interviews as well as the openness in response to the interview questions. The possible impact on the research is that the emphasis of the conceptualisations of professionalism and client relationships is based on perceptions of successful professional practice only. The data collected and analysed therefore did not reflect how professional practice is shaped by learning from the experience of failure. It was assumed however that consultants and clients would be less willing to engage with the research project and have their experiences published if their failure was focused on. Nevertheless, it is argued that the research remains important because of the ability to access 29 consultants and clients who were able to provide relevant and a representative perspective on how professional practice is conceptualised in HRD consultant work.

The second limitation relates the lack of comparability in the data collected. In the selection of the sample, it could have provided different and possibly more insightful perspectives into perceptions of professional practice by interviewing the specific HRD consultant and client in each dyadic relationship. Whilst this was considered in the initial design of the study, the ability to attract consultants and clients to share specific feedback about their professional relationships was considered not to be achievable within the time constraints of the project, and the likely access to such dyadic relationships. This could have provided different ways to analyse perceptions of professional practice through the ability to compare perspectives in relation to specific HRD consultant work. Instead, the study used a semi-structured interview design to ensure that examples of practice and results were explored in client contexts. Nevertheless, it is asserted that the research remains important because new insights related to HRD consultant professionalism were able to be drawn through the reflexive thematic analysis of rich data from the sample.

Furthermore, the data gathered was self report with limited ways to compare with observable practice. Ethnography could have been adopted to observe and/or interact with participants in their real-life environment. This would have required access to participants willing to be researched through observation of their professional practice in possibly commercially or personally sensitive situations. This would have limited the number of possible participants in the study. The findings could have been more context specific rather than conceptualising professionalism for HRD consultants more widely. The use of websites as visual data, including the illustration of different website screenshots, could have been used to explore the representation of HRD consultancy as a professional service. The inclusion of screenshots may also have added a richness to data collected to explore websites as a site where impression management techniques are employed. However, qualitative research traditionally draws on self report and therefore the study remains important. The sample size allowed insights to be compared and contrasted across consultants and clients drawing out important themes to better conceptualise HRD consultants and professionalism.

A final limitation relates to the lack of specific location specified where HRD consultant work was carried out. Whilst a criterion for sample selection included to consultants and clients who worked in the UK, the nature of consultant work and client organisations is less easy to define with HRD consultants working with clients in both local and global contexts. Without specifying specific organisational contexts of work, the study was not able to explore the possible influence of specific political, social, or cultural norms related to the conceptualisation of HRD professional practice. This would have required a change in the methodology towards a case study approach requiring access to specific organisations and dyadic relationships. As such, issues of access and openness would limit the progress of the study within the timeframes. Nevertheless, it is argued that the research remains important because it asserts the relevance of an open systems approach to HRD consultant professionalism as a resource to enter and become embedded within client organisations.

Having reflected on these limitations, it is important to note that this study is valid. I do acknowledge that research is an evolving process and future studies could therefore be designed and conducted in different ways and produce different findings, or realities, depending on the researcher, the participants, the organisations and the location of the research. I do not, therefore, make claims of one ultimate truth and call for future research to expand our understanding of HRD consultancy as a profession and professionalism with further research.

8.5 Implications for Future Research

This section discusses the implications for future research following the completion of this thesis. This study found that HRD consultancy is not weakened by the limited influence of higher education and professional bodies over their acceptance by clients. This study has explored the recognised functions provided by UK higher education and professional bodies in collegiate professions related to occupational closure, self-regulation, development of bodies of knowledge and promotion of acceptance by society of the profession's jurisdiction over specified client needs. Whilst in this study there were some indications about the role of professional bodies for HRD consultancy in enhancing social capital, future research could develop a greater understanding about what current and future HRD consultants need from their academic and professional body communities. This could have important consequences for understanding the future shifts within the HRD profession especially where UK higher education and professional bodies are themselves moving into for-profit consultancy work and therefore further changing the nature of the HRD consultancy terrain. Future research can adopt similar research designs in drawing on website and interview data from consultants, professional bodies and academics. Future research could expand the use of qualitative methods to include focus groups that can both shape an understanding of the current status and adopt an action research approach to look at practical solutions.

Chapter Four discussed the difficulties in researching consultancy as hard to access participants. I was able to achieve the large number of interviews, and collect rich, thick data, because the focus of this research was on the perceptions of successful HRD consultancy, and the appeal to participants in interviews to draw on storytelling about successful HRD practice. Their claims emphasise the transformational nature of HRD and the positive outcomes in support of managerial agendas. Rathan than adopting a focus on success, future research could explore the potential for a darker side of HRD consultancy work to explores where failures in professional practice happened. By adopting a lens of Critical HRD, future research can seek out the nature of ethical dilemmas experienced in the partnership between consultant and client, and the impact of partnership as an ideology had on HRD consultant behaviour towards how such dilemmas were diagnosed, inferred and treated within different organisational contexts. This would expand our understanding of the nature of HRD consultant professionalism, and the boundaries of ethical professional practice in HRD consultant-client partnerships, across a range of organisational climates and HRD priorities which achieved different levels of successful (or not) outcomes.

This thesis has followed an accepted research tradition in the use of a qualitative research design to explore meaning constructed by different actors in the profession. Future research could now adopt a different philosophical approach by assessing the relative importance of expertise, autonomy, and authority for HRD consultants. Reflecting the relevance of entry and becoming embedded in client organisations asserted in this thesis, future research could assess whether different dimensions of HRD consultant professional identity have greater or lesser influence over entry into client organisations, and whether this is similar or different in influencing the sustainability of the HRD consultant-client relationship in the embedded phase. Adopting a positivist approach would therefore provide a new insight into the construction of professional identity generally, and specifically for HRD consultants. For practitioners, this could further support their understanding of how to adapt their formal and informal communications with clients and better compete with other consultancies for HRD work.

A final area for future research is to adopt different research designs to include ethnographic and longitudinal designs. This thesis adopted a sampling strategy that included participants with at least five years of experience in HRD work. This allowed participants to reflect on examples of historical practice and past experience in HRD work over multiple projects. This criterion also allowed for participants to reflect on their mobility across organisations and borders over time. However, if we accept that professional status and professionalism are subjective, dynamic, client context specific and time-sensitive, this will require a greater understanding of how consulting firms understand and evaluate how their professional status is built in the long term. Future research can adopt more ethnographic and longitudinal research designs to get a better understanding of the influence of organisational culture on HRD work (Jones, 2021). This will allow for an understanding of how context specific and time-sensitive factors influence the construction on professional identity. This will also allow for greater insights into how a HRD consultant's professionalism controls behaviour over time in response to changing client needs and in response to internal power struggles with other competing occupations.

8.6 Summary

This chapter has provided an account of the research process and critically evaluated the achievement of the research aims and questions. The chapter has drawn together the threads of the central argument of this thesis and has asserted and outlined the distinctive theoretical contributions offered to research in the disciplines of the Sociology of the Professions and Human Resource Development. This chapter has acknowledged that these insights are situated and partial and subject to limitations discussed above. Finally, this chapter outlined the implications for future research. The aim of the insights from this study and subsequent contributions to theory and practice is to improve the understanding of HRD consultancy as a hybrid profession and how professionalism provides insights into how HRD is enacted in organisations. As argued at the start of this thesis, by seeing the HRD profession to be heterogeneous helps researchers to reflect the diversity of actors involved in ‘talking HRD into being’. I argue that the current focus by some authors in the HRD literature on a weakened profession does bring to the fore the need for an understanding of hybrid professions and fails to focus as much attention on a conceptualisation of professionalism which is argued by some SoP authors to be a more relevant way of becoming professional in modern times (Noordegraaf, 2007). I argue that the benefit of conceptualising HRD consultancy as a profession in this way helps to understand the strengths in the HRD consultancy profession in how they demonstrate having ‘skin in the game’ towards their own professionalisation project and how this informs our understanding of the complexities and risks involved in their occupational change (Evetts, 2006a). I hope this conceptualisation provides inspiration for new ways of researching HRD consultancy as a vital part of the UK HRD landscape and new understandings about how they do HRD work.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Professional Body Frameworks

CIPD New Profession Map (2018)

The standards themselves are divided into three areas:

- **Core knowledge:** what you have to know to be an expert in people, work and change – regardless of your role, sector or specialism. This includes:
  - People practice
  - Culture and behaviour
  - Business acumen
  - Analytics and creating value
  - Digital working
  - Change
- **Core behaviours:** ways of thinking and acting that should be consistent across the people profession, and enable you to live the values of being principles-led, evidence-based and outcomes-driven. These are:
  - Ethical practice
  - Professional courage and influence
  - Valuing people
  - Working inclusively
  - Passion for learning
  - Insights focused
  - Situational decision-making
  - Commercial drive
- **Specialist knowledge**, including one for L&D which focuses on:
  - Continuing professional development
  - Developing capability
  - Adult learning theory and motivation
  - Design and delivery of face-to-face learning
  - Design and delivery of digital learning
  - Content management, creation and curation
  - Learning facilitation
  - Social collaboration in learning
  - Using coaching and mentoring
  - Learner engagement, learning transfer and impact

It is against these new Profession Map core knowledge and behaviours and specialist L&D knowledge that the CIPD-Towards Maturity Skills Pulse Survey was undertaken to explore and highlight key development themes for L&D practitioners.

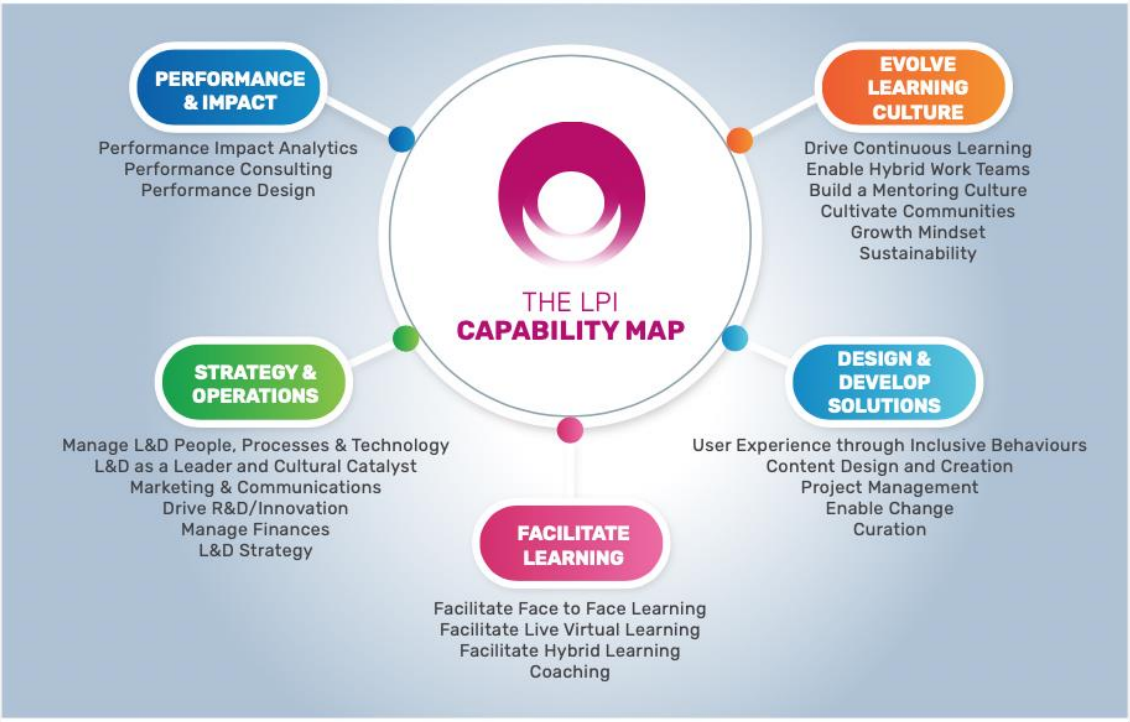
LPI CAPABILITY MAP (2022)

ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR MODERN L&D PROFESSIONALS

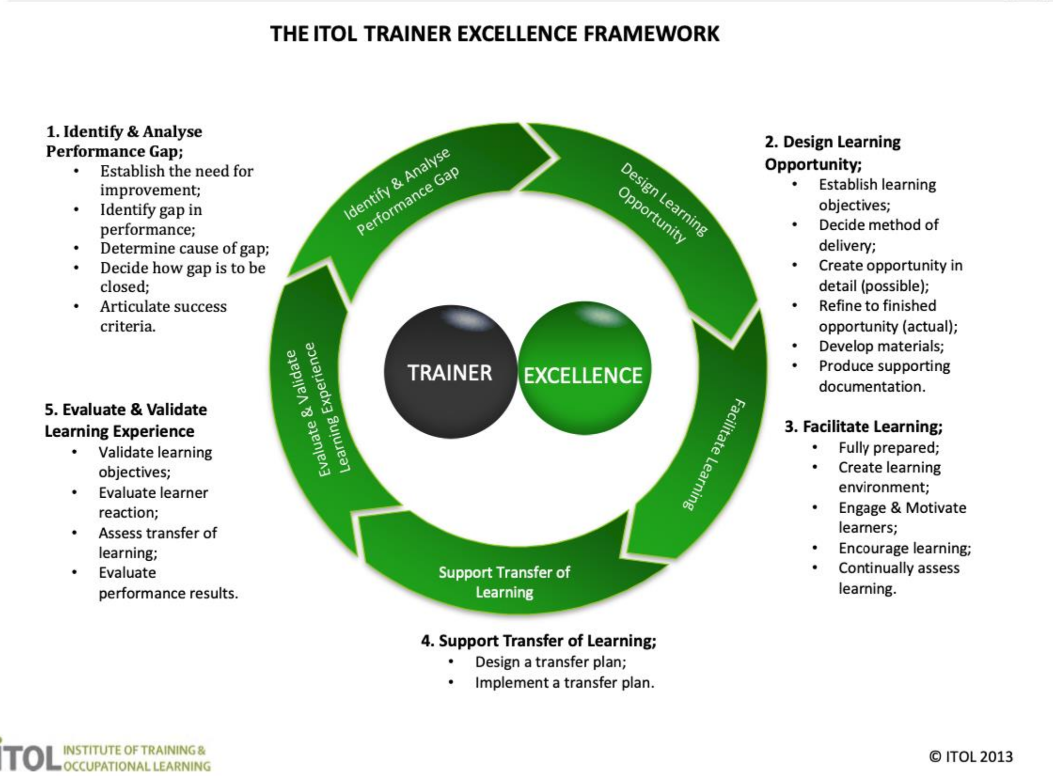
The LPI Capability Map consists of 24 skills, defined across 5 levels. The skills are divided into 5 categories, reflecting the range of responsibilities of the modern Learning and Development function.

The five levels describe an individual's level of expertise with a particular skill, rather than reflecting a person's position in an organisational hierarchy:

No Experience	You have no experience in this skill.
Foundational	You achieve it with guidance.
Proficient	You achieve it by yourself.
Advanced	You are an expert. You support and develop others.
Strategic	You determine strategy and define practice.



The ITOL Trainer Excellence Framework (2013)

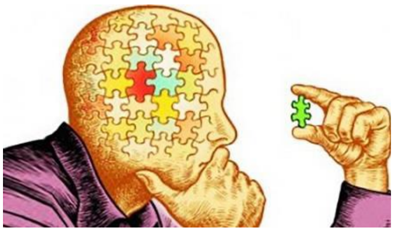


Content Competencies

- *Business Knowledge:* Knowledge of how businesses function and achieve success, both in general and for the specific organisation(s) that they support.
- *Talent and Learning Systems Knowledge:* Knowledge of multiple talent and learning solutions that can be utilised as solutions when addressing human performance needs relative to business goals.
- *Systematic Problem Solving:* The systematic and systemic identification and removal of barriers to individual and organizational performance.
- *Technology Knowledge:* Knowledge of optional technology solutions that can be considered when addressing talent, learning, and business issues.

Analytical Competencies

- *Analysis Skill:* Obtain, synthesise and report data (both narrative and quantitative
- *Project Management Skill:* Plan, organise and monitor work done by others in support of a specific project or assignment.
- *Strategic Thinking Skill:* Identify key issues and requirements to create competitive advantage for an organisation in achievement of its long-range goals.
- *Systemic Thinking Skill:* View organisations as a system, recognising that the success of the whole is dependent upon the integration and alignment of all segments.



Process Competencies

- *Change Management Skill:* Guide others to prepare for, support, and adopt actions required to achieve successful outcomes from a performance change initiative.
- *Facilitation Skill:* Manage meetings and group processes to ensure that the objectives of the group are achieved.
- *Influencing Skill:* Gain acceptance of ideas and proposals though interpersonal skills and persuasion.
- *Questioning Skill:* Gather information through the process of interviews and other probing methods.
- *Relationship Building Skill:* Establish and maintain collaborative partnerships with individuals across a broad range of people, organisational levels, and groups.

Attributes

- *Behavioural Flexibility:* Readiness to modify approach or performance when the situation requires it.
- *Objectivity:* Maintain a bias-free approach to situations and people.
- *Self-Confidence:* Manage own performance in an effective manner when placed in new or challenging situations.
- *Tolerance for Ambiguity:* Demonstrate comfort in situations where the goal or process to achieve those goals is unclear and difficult to determine.

This framework is by nature dynamic and should be reviewed and updated regularly.

ICF Core Competencies (2021)

ICF Core Competencies

A. Foundation

1. **Demonstrates Ethical Practice**
   DEFINITION: *Understands and consistently applies coaching ethics and standards of coaching.*

2. **Embodies a Coaching Mindset**
   DEFINITION: *Develops and maintains a mindset that is open, curious, flexible and client-centered.*

B. Co-Creating the Relationship

3. **Establishes and Maintains Agreements**
   DEFINITION: *Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to create clear agreements about the coaching relationship, process, plans and goals. Establishes agreements for the overall coaching engagement as well as those for each coaching session.*

4. **Cultivates Trust and Safety**
   DEFINITION: *Partners with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely. Maintains a relationship of mutual respect and trust.*

5. **Maintains Presence**
   DEFINITION: *Is fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident.*

C. Communicating Effectively

6. **Listens Actively**
   DEFINITION: *Focuses on what the client is and is not saying to fully understand what is being communicated in the context of the client systems and to support client self-expression.*

7. **Evokes Awareness**
   DEFINITION: *Facilitates client insight and learning by using tools and techniques such as powerful questioning, silence, metaphor or analogy.*

D. Cultivating Learning and Growth

8. **Facilitates Client Growth**
   DEFINITION: *Partners with the client to transform learning and insight into action. Promotes client autonomy in the coaching process.*

International Coaching Federation

coachingfederation.org

Appendix 2: Ethical Approval (HRD consultancy website content)

Certificate of Ethical Approval

Applicant:

John Watkins

Project Title:

Desk based research of HRD consultancies and the role of HRD consultants

This is to certify that the above named applicant has completed the Coventry University Ethical Approval process and their project has been confirmed and approved as Low Risk

Date of approval:

07 November 2017

Project Reference Number:

P61884

Appendix 3: Ethics Application (HRD consultancy website content)

Coventry University ETHICS

Low Risk Research Ethics Approval

Project Title

Desk based research of HRD consultancies and the role of HRD consultants

Record of Approval

Principal Investigator

I **request an ethics peer review** and confirm that I have answered all relevant questions in this checklist honestly.	X
I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described in this checklist. I will immediately suspend research and request new ethical approval if the project subsequently changes the information I have given in this checklist.	X
I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agreed to abide by the Code of Research Ethics issued by the relevant national learned society.	X
I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agreed to abide by the University's Research Ethics, Governance and Integrity Framework.	X

Name: John Watkins ....

Date: 09/10/2017 ....

Student's Supervisor (if applicable)

I have read this checklist and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the student and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.

Name: Crystal Zhang ....

Date: 07/11/2017 ....

Reviewer (if applicable)

Date of approval by anonymous reviewer: 07/11/2017

Low Risk Research Ethics Approval Checklist

Project Information

Project Ref	P61884
Full name	John Watkins
Faculty	Faculty of Business and Law
Department	School of Marketing and Management
Supervisor	Crystal Zhang
Module Code	FBL-PHD
EFAAF Number	
Project title	Desk based research of HRD consultancies and the role of HRD consultants
Date(s)	12/11/2017 - 01/06/2018
Created	09/10/2017 14:46

Project Summary

This project is the first phase of data collection of a wider project in the support of a PhD study. This study focuses on the concept of Human Resource Development (HRD) Consultants and consultancies. This first phase will explore how HRD consulting firms construct the notion of HRD and how this defines the distinctive nature of HRD consultants' work with clients. Data will be collected from publically available information on the websites of selected HRD consulting firms including job adverts, job descriptions and job specifications of HRD consultants. In the absence of a recognised industry or professional body database of HRD consulting firms, a list of 40 firms has been created from a convenience sample that fulfil specified criteria drawn from the literature. This first phase is expected to take a maximum of 6 months from ethics approval to communication of findings. The findings from this first phase of data collection are intended to shape the focus and methods to be employed in later phases to answer the wider research questions of the PhD study.

Names of Co-Investigators and their organisational affiliation (place of study/employer)	
Is the project self-funded?	NO
Who is funding the project?	
Has the funding been confirmed?	NO
Are you required to use a Professional Code of Ethical Practice appropriate to your discipline?	NO

Desk based research of HRD consultancies and he role of HRD consultants

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Have you read the Code?	NO

Project Details

What is the purpose of the project?	This study investigates the concept of professionalism in relation to Human Resource Development (HRD) Consultants. Defining the field of HRD has been the subject of discussion in the literature over the last 27 years with no accepted definition (Wang et al 2017). The focus on who enacts HRD consultancy and what they do as a HRD consultant has received significantly less attention. Roles like HRD consultants are competing with other occupations in a congested domain for jurisdiction over increasing individual, group and organizational effectiveness and performance (Wylie et al 2014). The professionalism of consultants is seen as the source of their competitive advantage which establishes the perceived quality of work and the level of trust in a consultant's autonomy to act on behalf of the client (e.g. Maurer and Nissen 2014). Understanding how non-traditional organisational professions seek enhanced status and recognition is important to better develop a clearer understanding of the contribution of roles in organisations (Evetts 2013). The literature so far has yet to define professionalism in relation to external HRD consultants and their relationship with clients.
What are the planned or desired outcomes?	This project therefore will explore the distinctive nature of HRD by first understanding how HRD consulting firms describe their role and the process and relationship to work with their clients. The desired outcomes of this project are to explore how HRD consulting firms construct the notion of HRD and how this defines the distinctive nature of their work with clients. The research questions to be answered in this phase of data collection will be: RQ1: How do HRD consultancies define HRD in relation to the services provided as presented in their online organisational documentation? RQ2: How do HRD consultancies define the distinctive job description and personal specifications of their HRD consultants in how they deliver HRD

	services to their clients in their online organisational documentation? RQ3: How is the concept of professionalism defined and used in HRD consultancy company online documentation?
Explain your research design	For the purpose of this study, a constructivism position will be taken which assumes that social phenomena is in a constant state of revision and negotiated by different actors (Bryman and Bell 2015). An interpretivist position will be taken which places an emphasis on the subjective meaning of social action and thereby understand human behaviour (Bryman and Bell 2015). The research design will be the use of organisational document analysis. Data will be collected from HRD consulting firm websites. In the absence of a recognised industry or professional body database of HRD consulting firms, a list of 40 firms has been created from a convenience sample that fulfil specified criteria drawn from the literature.
Outline the principal methods you will use	The principle method will be online desk based research. Data will be collected from publically available information on the websites of selected HRD consulting firms including job adverts, job descriptions and job specifications of HRD consultants. Data will be gathered and stored using a set of a priori codes drawn from the conceptual framework established from an extensive review of the literature. Data will be subsequently analysed using template analysis which enables the coding to be modified and added to as a result of working with the data and interpreting the text (King 2004). NVivo will be used for the analysis of the data. In this study, there will be the use of reflexive practice of the researcher to enhance the quality in the qualitative methods used (Bryman and Bell 2015). Reflexive practice will be supported using a research diary that will document the thoughts, feelings and observations of the researcher during the project.

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Are you proposing to use an external research instrument, validated scale or follow a published research method?	NO
If yes, please give details of what you are using	
Will your research involve consulting individuals who support, or literature, websites or similar material which advocates, any of the following: terrorism, armed struggles, or political, religious or other forms of activism considered illegal under UK law?	NO
Are you dealing with Secondary Data? (e.g. sourcing info from websites, historical documents)	YES
Are you dealing with Primary Data involving people? (e.g. interviews, questionnaires, observations)	NO
Are you dealing with personal or sensitive data?	NO
Is the project solely desk based? (e.g. involving no laboratory, workshop or off-campus work or other activities which pose significant risks to researchers or participants)	YES
Are there any other ethical issues or risks of harm raised by the study that have not been covered by previous questions?	NO
If yes, please give further details	

External Ethical Review

Question			Yes	No
1	Will this study be submitted for ethical review to an external organisation? (e.g. Another University, Social Care, National Health Service, Ministry of Defence, Police Service and Probation Office)			X
	If YES, name of external organisation			
2	Will this study be reviewed using the IRAS system?			X
3	Has this study previously been reviewed by an external organisation?			X

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Risk of harm, potential harm and disclosure of harm

Question			Yes	No
1	Is there any significant risk that the study may lead to physical harm to participants or researchers?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
2	Is there any significant risk that the study may lead to psychological or emotional distress to participants?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
3	Is there any risk that the study may lead to psychological or emotional distress to researchers?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
4	Is there any risk that your study may lead or result in harm to the reputation of participants, researchers, or their employees, or any associated persons or organisations?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
5	Is there a risk that the study will lead to participants to disclose evidence of previous criminal offences, or their intention to commit criminal offences?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
6	Is there a risk that the study will lead participants to disclose evidence that children or vulnerable adults are being harmed, or at risk or harm?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
7	Is there a risk that the study will lead participants to disclose evidence of serious risk of other types of harm?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
8	Are you aware of the CU Disclosure protocol?		X	

Online and Internet Research

Question			Yes	No
1	Will any part of your study involve collecting data by means of electronic media (e.g. the Internet, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, online forums, etc)?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will obtain permission to collect data by this means			
2	Is there a possibility that the study will encourage children under 18 to access inappropriate websites, or correspond with people who pose risk of harm?			X
	If YES, please explain further			
3	Will the study incur any other risks that arise specifically from the use of electronic media?			X
	If YES, please explain further			
4	Will you be using survey collection software (e.g. BoS, Filemaker)?			X
	If YES, please explain which software			
5	Have you taken necessary precautions for secure data management, in accordance with data protection and CU Policy?		X	
	If NO	please explain why not		
	If YES	Specify location where data will be stored	Coventry University H drive (staff folder)	
		Planned disposal date	01/02/2021	
		If the research is funded by an external organisation, are there any requirements for storage and disposal?		X
		If YES, please specify details		

John Watkins
Appendix 4: UK Based HRD Consultancy Websites Selected

Completed on Nvivo in Sequence	Company Name	Represented at CIPD Learning & Development Show 10/11 May 2017	Homepage	HRD as core business	Firm established over 5 years	Link with Professional Association (on the website)	Website includes profiles of the consultants or roles	Website includes client testimonials	Firm listed at Companies House	Turnover or creditors under or over £1M *from last 3 years*	Date site accessed
1	Acteon	Yes	https://www.acteoncommunication.com/index.html	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Over	15/01/2018
2	Belbin	Yes	http://www.belbin.com	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Over	13/01/2018
3	Blue Sky	Yes	https://blue-sky.co.uk	Yes	Yes	PSA, ICS	Yes	Yes but not cited	Yes	Over	03/02/2018
11	Emergenetics International	Yes	https://www.emergenetics.com/uk/	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Over	13/01/2018
4	Getfeedback.net	Yes	http://www.getfeedback.net	Yes	Yes	CIPD	Yes	Yes	Yes	Over	03/02/2018
5	Impact International	Yes	https://www.impactinternational.com	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Over	13/01/2018
6	Insights	Yes	https://www.insights.com	Yes	Yes	BPS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Over	03/02/2018
7	Marshall e-Learning Consultancy	Yes	https://marshallelearning.com	Yes	Yes	CIPD	Yes	Yes	Yes	Over	03/02/2018
8	Mind Gym	Yes	https://uk.themindgym.com	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Case studies	Yes	Over	13/01/2018
9	My Family Care	Yes	https://www.myfamilycare.co.uk	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Over	03/02/2018
10	Propel International	Yes	http://www.propel-international.com	Yes	Yes	BPS, CIPD, ABP, AFC, ICF	Names only	Yes	Yes	Over	09/02/2018
12	Saville Consulting (Assessment)	Yes	https://www.savilleassessment.com	Yes	Yes	BPS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Over	09/02/2018
13	The Oxford Group	Yes	https://www.oxford-group.com	Yes	Yes	Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Over	13/01/2018
14	The School of Life	Yes	https://www.theschooloflife.com/london/	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Over	09/02/2018
15	The Tess Group	Yes	http://thetessgroup.com	Yes	Yes	CIPD	Yes	Yes	Yes	Over	09/02/2018
16	3c Performance Management	Yes	https://3c-performance-management.co.uk	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	15/01/2018
17	A & C Associates	Yes	http://www.ancassociates.com/index.aspx	Yes	Yes	IoSCM	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	03/02/2018
18	Academy of Executive Coaching	Yes	http://www.aoec.com	Yes	Yes	ICF	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	03/02/2018
19	AKD Solutions	Yes	http://akdsolutions.com	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	03/02/2018
20	Blue Beetle Productions	Yes	http://bluebeetle.co.uk	Yes	Yes	CIPD	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	13/01/2018
21	Centre for Strategy & Communication	Yes	https://www.the-centre.co.uk	Yes	Yes	IIP, ILM	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	03/02/2018
22	Centre for Team Excellence	Yes	http://teamdevelopment-training.co.uk	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Names only	Yes	Under	13/01/2018
23	Courageous Success	Yes	http://www.courageoussuccess.com	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes but not cited	Yes	Under	13/01/2018
24	Creativedge Training	Yes	http://www.creativedgetraining.co.uk	Yes	Yes	ILM	Vacancies only	Yes	Yes	Under	13/01/2018
25	DPA	Yes	https://dpa.consulting	Yes	Yes	CIPD, ABP, BPS, ICF, IIP	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	13/01/2018
26	DTC	Yes	http://www.development-training.com	Yes	Yes	ILM, CIPD	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	03/02/2018
27	How To Associates	Yes	http://howtoassociates.com	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	03/02/2018
28	iManage	Yes	http://imanageperformance.com	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Under	03/02/2018
29	Interaction Learning and Development	Yes	http://www.interaction-ld.com	Yes	Yes	No	Names only	Yes but not cited	Yes	Under	13/01/2018
30	Leading Edge Leadership	Yes	http://leadingedgeleadership.com	Yes	4 years	No	Yes	Names only	Yes	Under	13/01/2018
31	MTa Learning	Yes	https://www.mtalearning.com	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	15/01/2018
32	Music and Management	Yes	http://www.musicandmanagement.com	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	15/01/2018
33	Optimus OD	Yes	http://optimusod.com	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	15/01/2018
34	Passe-Partout	Yes	http://www.passe-partout.com	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	03/02/2018
35	Pearlcatchers	Yes	http://www.pearlcatchers.co.uk	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	13/01/2018
36	Practical Training for Professionals	Yes	http://www.ptp.co.uk	Yes	Yes	CIPD	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	03/02/2018
37	Professional Academy	Yes	https://www.professionalacademy.com	Yes	Yes	ISMM, CAM, CMI, DMI	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	15/01/2018
38	oyal Central School of Speech and Dram	Yes	http://www.cssd.ac.uk/bespoke-and-business-training	Yes	N/A	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	15/01/2018
39	TetraMap UK	Yes	http://tetramap.co.uk/home	Yes	Yes	CIPD	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	09/02/2018
40	The Forton Group	Yes	https://thefortongroup.com	Yes	Yes	ICF, CMI	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	13/01/2018
41	The Method	Yes	www.the-method.com	Yes	Yes	No	Names only	Names only	Yes	Under	15/01/2018
42	The OCM Group	Yes	http://www.theocm.co.uk	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	13/01/2018
44	The TCM Group	Yes	https://thetcmgroup.com	Yes	Yes	PMA, Customer First, CMC, ILM, NOCN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	09/02/2018
45	The Whole Story	Yes	http://www.thewholestory.org.uk	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Under	09/02/2018
47	Two Bald Blokes	Yes	http://www.twobaldblokes.com	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Under	13/01/2018
						20 out of 47 Have Link with Professional Association					

John Watkins
Appendix 5: HRD Consultancies Rejected

CIPD Learning and Development 2017 Exhibitor List
Company profiles rejected
Updated 09/02/2018

Section Editorial	Company Name	Rationale
	Bolt from the You	Closed
	forMetris	Learning Evaluation
	Gamelearn SL	Learning Technology
	Head Light	Talent software
	Kogan Page	Publishers
	Learning Heroes	Learning Technology
	Management Pocketbooks	Publishers
	Mimeo	Learning Technology
	Scott Bradbury	Video training
	Skill Pill M-Learning	Learning Technology
	The Open University	Education
	Video Arts	Video training and Learning Technology
Section Exhibitor Updates	Alliance Manchester Business School	Not listed in Companies House
	Avado	Learning Technology
	C PD	Professional Body
	Clear Lessons	Video training
	CrossKnowledge	Learning Technology
	Eras	Personality Profiling
	forMetris	Learning Evaluation
	Good Practice	Learning Technology
	ICS Learn	Learning Technology
	Kineo	Learning Technology
	Learning Heroes	Learning Technology
	Lumina Learning	Personality Profiling
	Management Pocketbooks	Publishers
	Me Learning	Learning Technology
	Mimeo	Learning Technology
	People Alchemy	Learning Technology
	Questionmark Computing	Learning Technology
	RW3 CultureWizard	Learning Technology
	Scott Bradbury	Video training
	Skill Pill M-Learning	Learning Technology
	The Open University	Education
	Video Arts	Video training and Learning Technology
	Zoho	Learning Technology
Section Product Index - Learning Strategies and Consultancy	Acceler8	less than 5 years
	Appitierre	Learning Technology
	At my best	Personality Profiling
	Bite Size	Learning Technology
	Bright Matter Resourcing	Recruitment consultancy
	Enovation	Learning Technology
	Findcourses	Online services
	getAbstract	Online services
	Hart Learning & Development	Apprenticeship provider
	Ignition	Learning Technology
	Interserve	Apprenticeship provider
	Intqual-Pro	PREVENT only; 2014; No Coaching or OD
	Ixxus	Learning Technology
	KnowledgePoint	Learning Technology
	Management Dynamics Global	2016
	Myndflex	Personality Profiling
	NLP School	Personality Profiling
	Pappaya	Recruitment software
	Paradigm Learning	Simulation delivery only; No OD; No Coaching
	People Safe	No OD; No Coaching
	Watson Martin (Reed Business School)	No OD; No Coaching
	Renault-Nissan Consulting	No OD; No Coaching
	Resilient People	No coaching, not on Companies House
	The Sales Activator	No OD; No Coaching
	Silver Lining Training	No Training; No OD; Not on Companies House
	Strengths Partnership (Strengthscope)	No Coaching; No OD; No profiles
	Strengths Profile	Personality Profiling
	Suzy Lamplugh Trust	No Coaching; No OD
	Synergy Learning	Learning Technology
	Trainers Kit Bag	Training products only
	The Training Foundation	No Coaching; No OD

Appendix 6: Ethical Approval (Semi-structured interviews with HRD consultants and clients)

Certificate of Ethical Approval

Applicant:

John Watkins

Project Title:

Exploring how Human Resource Development (HRD) consultancies construct and communicate the potential of HRD

This is to certify that the above named applicant has completed the Coventry University Ethical Approval process and their project has been confirmed and approved as Medium Risk

Date of approval:

06 March 2019

Project Reference Number:

P88232

Medium to High Risk Research Ethics Approval

Project Title

Exploring how Human Resource Development (HRD) consultancies construct and communicate the potential of HRD

Record of Approval

Principal Investigator

I **request an ethics peer review** and confirm that I have answered all relevant questions in this checklist honestly.	X
I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described in this checklist. I will immediately suspend research and request new ethical approval if the project subsequently changes the information I have given in this checklist.	X
I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agreed to abide by the Code of Research Ethics issued by the relevant national learned society.	X
I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agreed to abide by the University's Research Ethics, Governance and Integrity Framework.	X

Name: John Watkins ....

Date: 22/02/2019 ....

Student's Supervisor (if applicable)

I have read this checklist and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the student and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.

Name: Crystal Zhang ....

Date: 28/02/2019 ....

Reviewer (if applicable)

Date of approval by anonymous reviewer: 06/03/2019

Medium to High Risk Research Ethics Approval Checklist

Project Information

Project Ref	P88232
Full name	John Watkins
Faculty	Faculty of Business and Law
Department	School of Marketing and Management
Supervisor	Crystal Zhang
Module Code	FBL-PHD
EFAAF Number	
Project title	Exploring how Human Resource Development (HRD) consultancies construct and communicate the potential of HRD
Date(s)	01/03/2019 - 31/01/2021
Created	22/02/2019 14:39

Project Summary

The purpose of the study is to explore the nature of Human Resource Development (HRD) consulting work as a specialist profession. This research seeks to explore the nature of HRD consulting from the different stages of the consulting cycle from consultant pitch, selection, project delivery and ongoing working relationships. This will include the projects undertaken, consultant selection, the consultant-client working relationship, and how HRD consultant work is evaluated.

Names of Co-Investigators and their organisational affiliation (place of study/employer)	
Is the project self-funded?	YES
Who is funding the project?	Coventry University London
Has the funding been confirmed?	YES
Are you required to use a Professional Code of Ethical Practice appropriate to your discipline?	NO
Have you read the Code?	NO

Project Details

What is the purpose of the project?	The purpose of the study is to explore the nature of Human Resource Development (HRD) consulting work as a specialist profession. This research seeks to explore the nature of HRD consulting from the different stages of the consulting cycle from consultant pitch, selection, project delivery and ongoing working relationships. This will include the projects undertaken, consultant selection, the consultant-client working relationship, and how HRD consultant work is evaluated.
What are the planned or desired outcomes?	The outcomes from the research project support being able to better understand the nature of HRD consulting as a specialist profession, and how the value of their work can be better understood in an increasingly competitive environment. Findings from this data collection aim to enhance our understanding of the values that inform the work of HRD consultants, the nature of the work undertaken, how consultants work with their clients and the intended results. This research, alongside secondary data already gathered in this PhD project (ethics approval dated 07 November 2017 ; Project Reference Number: P61884), responds to the calls for further research into hybrid professions (e.g Evetts 2013), further research into the impact, relevance and effectiveness of HRD interventions (Wang 2018) and what it means for HRD practitioners to engage in professional activity (Kuchinke 2017).
Explain your research design	The research aims to collect qualitative data generated through semi structured interviews. The sample will be made up of 15 HRD consultants who spend the majority of their time as a consultant working in the areas of Training; Learning & Development; Coaching or Organisation Development. Their job title is related to this type of consulting work. They are associated with HRD consulting work in the United Kingdom. They have worked on such projects within the last 24 months either as an independent consultant or as

	part of a larger consulting firm. The sample will also be made up of 15 clients of HRD consultants who have been commissioned to work on projects in the areas of Training; Learning & Development; Coaching or Organisation Development. Clients have worked in a consultant-client relationship on such projects within the last 24 months. The location of the consulting work has included the United Kingdom. For both consultants and clients, no one organisation or individual identity will be revealed or profiled. Data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name.
Outline the principal methods you will use	Data collection will be through the use of 1-2-1 semi-structured interviews. The interview questions have been developed a priori from the review of the literature and from findings from secondary data collection and analysis. Interviews will be recorded (audio only) and transcribed. Interviews will be carried out both face-to-face and online (using Skype video) in order to maximise the access to participants. Transcripts will be produced, anonymised and imported into NVivo for data analysis. Initially, the participants will be recruited from volunteers who are already known to the researcher through professional networks. It is expected that snowballing will be used to get to the target number of interviews from participant referrals of both consultants and clients. Participants will be selected for their suitability using their LinkedIn profile where initial information will be used to establish a match with the criteria indicated in the Participant Information Sheet. Clients will be sufficiently senior to consent on behalf of their organisation. Participants will be approached via an introductory email to request their involvement in the study. Suitability criteria will be included in the introductory approach email. One chase email will be used in the event of a non-reply within 4 weeks. A non-

	reply to the chase email will be taken as no interest in participating. The use of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form will be used to communicate the purpose, possible risks and the nature of confidentiality for all participants.
Are you proposing to use an external research instrument, validated scale or follow a published research method?	NO
If yes, please give details of what you are using	
Will your research involve consulting individuals who support, or literature, websites or similar material which advocates, any of the following: terrorism, armed struggles, or political, religious or other forms of activism considered illegal under UK law?	NO
Are you dealing with Secondary Data? (e.g. sourcing info from websites, historical documents)	NO
Are you dealing with Primary Data involving people? (e.g. interviews, questionnaires, observations)	YES
Are you dealing with personal or sensitive data?	YES
Will the Personal or Sensitive data be shared with a third party?	NO
Will the Personal or Sensitive data be shared outside of the European Economic Area ("EEA")?	NO
Is the project solely desk based? (e.g. involving no laboratory, workshop or off-campus work or other activities which pose significant risks to researchers or participants)	NO
Are there any other ethical issues or risks of harm raised by the study that have not been covered by previous questions?	NO
If yes, please give further details	

DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) formerly CRB (Criminal Records Bureau)

Question		Yes	No
1	Does the study require DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) checks?		X
	If YES, please give details of the serial number, date obtained and expiry date		
2	If NO, does the study involve direct contact by any member of the research team:		
	a) with children or young people under 18 years of age?		X
	b) with adults who have learning difficulties, brain injury, dementia, degenerative neurological disorders?		X
	c) with adults who are frail or physically disabled?		X
	d) with adults who are living in residential care, social care, nursing homes, re-ablement centres, hospitals or hospices?		X
	e) with adults who are in prison, remanded on bail or in custody?		X
	If you have answered YES to any of the questions above please explain the nature of that contact and what you will be doing		

External Ethical Review

Question		Yes	No
1	Will this study be submitted for ethical review to an external organisation? (e.g. Another University, Social Care, National Health Service, Ministry of Defence, Police Service and Probation Office)		X
	If YES, name of external organisation		
2	Will this study be reviewed using the IRAS system?		X
3	Has this study previously been reviewed by an external organisation?		X

Confidentiality, security and retention of research data

Question			Yes	No
1	Are there any reasons why you cannot guarantee the full security and confidentiality of any personal or confidential data collected for the study?			X
	If YES, please give an explanation			
2	Is there a significant possibility that any of your participants, and associated persons, could be directly or indirectly identified in the outputs or findings from this study?			X
	If YES, please explain further why this is the case			
3	Is there a significant possibility that a specific organisation or agency or participants could have confidential information identified, as a result of the way you write up the results of the study?			X
	If YES, please explain further why this is the case			
4	Will any members of the research team retain any personal of confidential data at the end of the project, other than in fully anonymised form?			X
	If YES, please explain further why this is the case			
5	Will you or any member of the team intend to make use of any confidential information, knowledge, trade secrets obtained for any other purpose than the research project?			X
	If YES, please explain further why this is the case			
6	Will you be responsible for destroying the data after study completion?		X	
	If NO, please explain how data will be destroyed, when it will be destroyed and by whom			

Participant Information and Informed Consent

	Question	Yes	No
1	Will all the participants be fully informed BEFORE the project begins why the study is being conducted and what their participation will involve?	X	
	If NO, please explain why		
2	Will every participant be asked to give written consent to participating in the study, before it begins?	X	
	If NO, please explain how you will get consent from your participants. If not written consent, explain how you will record consent		
3	Will all participants be fully informed about what data will be collected, and what will be done with this data during and after the study?	X	
	If NO, please specify		
4	Will there be audio, video or photographic recording of participants?	X	
	Will explicit consent be sought for recording of participants?	X	
	If NO to explicit consent, please explain how you will gain consent for recording participants		
5	Will every participant understand that they have the right not to take part at any time, and/or withdraw themselves and their data from the study if they wish?	X	
	If NO, please explain why		
6	Will every participant understand that there will be no reasons required or repercussions if they withdraw or remove their data from the study?	X	
	If NO, please explain why		
7	Does the study involve deceiving, or covert observation of, participants?		X
	Will you debrief them at the earliest possible opportunity?		
	If NO to debrief them, please explain why this is necessary		

Risk of harm, potential harm and disclosure of harm

Question		Yes	No
1	Is there any significant risk that the study may lead to physical harm to participants or researchers?		X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks		
2	Is there any significant risk that the study may lead to psychological or emotional distress to participants?		X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks		
3	Is there any risk that the study may lead to psychological or emotional distress to researchers?		X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks		
4	Is there any risk that your study may lead or result in harm to the reputation of participants, researchers, or their employees, or any associated persons or organisations?		X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks		
5	Is there a risk that the study will lead to participants to disclose evidence of previous criminal offences, or their intention to commit criminal offences?		X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks		
6	Is there a risk that the study will lead participants to disclose evidence that children or vulnerable adults are being harmed, or at risk or harm?		X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks		
7	Is there a risk that the study will lead participants to disclose evidence of serious risk of other types of harm?		X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks		
8	Are you aware of the CU Disclosure protocol?	X	

Payments to participants

Question		Yes	No
1	Do you intend to offer participants cash payments or any kind of inducements, or reward for taking part in your study?		X
	If YES, please explain what kind of payment you will be offering (e.g. prize draw or store vouchers)		
2	Is there any possibility that such payments or inducements will cause participants to consent to risks that they might not otherwise find acceptable?		
3	Is there any possibility that the prospect of payment or inducements will influence the data provided by participants in any way?		
4	Will you inform participants that accepting payments or inducements does not affect their right to withdraw from the study at any time?		

Capacity to give valid consent

Question		Yes	No
1	Do you propose to recruit any participants who are:		
	a) children or young people under 18 years of age?		X
	b) adults who have learning difficulties, mental health condition, brain injury, advanced dementia, degenerative neurological disorders?		X
	c) adults who are physically disabled?		X
	d) adults who are living in residential care, social care, nursing homes, re-ablement centres, hospitals or hospices?		X
	e) adults who are in prison, remanded on bail or in custody?		X
	If you answer YES to any of the questions please explain how you will overcome any challenges to gaining valid consent		
2	Do you propose to recruit any participants with possible communication difficulties, including difficulties arising from limited use of knowledge of the English language?		X
	If YES, please explain how you will overcome any challenges to gaining valid consent		
3	Do you propose to recruit any participants who may not be able to understand fully the nature of the study, research and the implications for them of participating in it or cannot provide consent themselves?		X
	If YES, please explain how you will overcome any challenges to gaining valid consent		

Recruiting Participants

Question				**Yes**	**No**
1	Do you propose to recruit any participants who are:				
	a)	students or employees of Coventry University or partnering organisation(s)?			X
		If YES, please explain if there is any conflict of interest and how this will be addressed			
	b)	employees/staff recruited through other businesses, voluntary or public sector organisations?			X
		If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			
	c)	pupils or students recruited through educational institutions (e.g. primary schools, secondary schools, colleges)?			X
		If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			
	d)	clients/volunteers/service users recruited through voluntary public services?			X
		If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			
	e)	participants living in residential care, social care, nursing homes, re-ablement centres hospitals or hospices?			X
		If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			
	f)	recruited by virtue of their employment in the police or armed forces?			X
		If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			
	g)	adults who are in prison, remanded on bail or in custody?			X
		If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			
	h)	who may not be able to refuse to participate in the research?			X
		If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			

Online and Internet Research

Question				Yes	No
1	Will any part of your study involve collecting data by means of electronic media (e.g. the Internet, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, online forums, etc)?				X
	If YES, please explain how you will obtain permission to collect data by this means				
2	Is there a possibility that the study will encourage children under 18 to access inappropriate websites, or correspond with people who pose risk of harm?				X
	If YES, please explain further				
3	Will the study incur any other risks that arise specifically from the use of electronic media?				X
	If YES, please explain further				
4	Will you be using survey collection software (e.g. BoS, Filemaker)?				X
	If YES, please explain which software				
5	Have you taken necessary precautions for secure data management, in accordance with data protection and CU Policy?			X	
	If NO	please explain why not			
	If YES	Specify location where data will be stored	All electronic data will be stored in a password-protected computer folder on the lead researcher's Coventry University personal drive. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the lead researcher's home office.		
		Planned disposal date	31/01/2022		
		If the research is funded by an external organisation, are there any requirements for storage and disposal?			X
		If YES, please specify details			

Languages

Question			Yes	No
1	Are all or some of the consent forms, information leaflets and research instruments associated with this project likely to be used in languages other than English?			X
	If YES, please specify the language[s] to be used			
2	Have some or all of the translations been undertaken by you or a member of the research team?			
	Are these translations in lay language and likely to be clearly understood by the research participants?			
	Please describe the procedures used when undertaking research instrument translation (e.g. forward and back translation), clarifying strategies for ensuring the validity and reliability or trustworthiness of the translation			
3	Have some or all of the translations been undertaken by a third party?			
	If YES, please specify the name[s] of the persons or agencies performing the translations			
	Please describe the procedures used when undertaking research instrument translation (e.g. forward and back translation), clarifying strategies for ensuring the validity and reliability of the translation			

Laboratory/Workshops

Question		Yes	No
1	Does any part of the project involve work in a laboratory or workshop which could pose risks to you, researchers or others?		X
	If YES: If you have risk assessments for laboratory or workshop activities you can refer to them here & upload them at the end, or explain in the text box how you will manage those risks		

Research with non-human vertebrates

Question		Yes	No
1	Will any part of the project involve animal habitats or tissues or non-human vertebrates?		X
	If YES, please give details		
2	Does the project involve any procedure to the protected animal whilst it is still alive?		
3	Will any part of your project involve the study of animals in their natural habitat?		
	If YES, please give details		
4	Will the project involve the recording of behaviour of animals in a non-natural setting that is outside the control of the researcher?		
	If YES, please give details		
5	Will your field work involve any direct intervention other than recording the behaviour of the animals available for observation?		
	If YES, please give details		
6	Is the species you plan to research endangered, locally rare or part of a sensitive ecosystem protected by legislation?		
	If YES, please give details		
7	Is there any significant possibility that the welfare of the target species of those sharing the local environment/habitat will be detrimentally affected?		
	If YES, please give details		
8	Is there any significant possibility that the habitat of the animals will be damaged by the project, such that their health and survival will be endangered?		
	If YES, please give details		
9	Will project work involve intervention work in a non-natural setting in relation to invertebrate species other than Octopus vulgaris?		
	If YES, please give details		

Blood Sampling / Human Tissue Analysis

Question			Yes	No
1	Does your study involve collecting or use of human tissues or fluids? (e.g. collecting urine, saliva, blood or use of cell lines, 'dead' blood)			X
	If YES, please give details			
2	If your study involves blood samples or body fluids (e.g. urine, saliva) have you clearly stated in your application that appropriate guidelines are to be followed (e.g. The British Association of Sport and Exercise Science Physiological Testing Guidelines (2007) or equivalent) and that they are in line with the level of risk?			
	If NO, please explain why not			
3	If your study involves human tissue other than blood and saliva, have you clearly stated in your application that appropriate guidelines are to be followed (e.g. The Human Tissues Act, or equivalent) and that they are in line with level of risk?			
	If NO, please explain why not			

Travel

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Question</th><th>Yes</th><th>No</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">1</td><td colspan="2">Does any part of the project require data collection off campus?

(e.g. work in the field or community)</td><td>X</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>If YES:

You must consider the potential hazards from off campus activities (e.g. working alone, time of data collection, unfamiliar or hazardous locations, using equipment, the terrain, violence or aggression from others). Outline the precautions that will be taken to manage these risks, AS A MIN MUM this must detail how researchers would summon assistance in an emergency when working off campus.

For complex or high risk projects you may wish to complete and upload a separate risk assessment</td><td colspan="3">The interviews will take place in a safe and public environment. Interviews are planned to take place at Coventry University London buildings or held at participant offices whichever is most convenient for the participant. Interviews will take place in safe office environments during normal business hours. All travel will involve the use of public transport following the normal travel routes regularly undertaken by the principal investigator. No risks are considered to be associated with the data collection. The principal investigator has travel insurance in place and has the phone numbers for emergency services.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">2</td><td colspan="2">Does any part of the project involve the researcher travelling outside the UK (or to very remote UK locations)?</td><td>X</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>If YES:

Please give details of where, when and how you will be travelling. For travel to high risk places you may wish to complete and upload a separate risk assessment</td><td colspan="3">Paris, France – this is the home/office of the principal investigator. Vienna, Austria – this is the home/office of the principal investigator's family. Travel will be completed between March 2019 and October 2019 depending on the availability of participants. All travel will involve the use of public transport following the normal travel routes regularly undertaken by the principal investigator.</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td colspan="2">Are all travellers aware of contact numbers for emergency assitance when away (e.g. local emergency assistance, ambulance/local hospital/police, insurance helpline [+44 (0) 2071 737797] and CU's 24/7 emergency line [+44 (0) 2476 888555])?</td><td>X</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td colspan="2">Are there any travel warnings in place advising against all, or essential only travel to the destination?

NOTE: Before travel to countries with 'against all travel', or 'essential only' travel warnings, staff must check with Finance to ensure insurance coverage is not affected. Undergraduate projects in high risk destinations will not be approved</td><td></td><td>X</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">5</td><td colspan="2">Are there increased risks to health and safety related to the destination? e.g. cultural differences, civil unrest, climate, crime, health outbreaks/concerns, and travel arrangements?</td><td>X</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>If YES, please specify</td><td colspan="3">There is current civil unrest in Paris, France. This is largely at weekend protests in central Paris. Interviews will be</td></tr>
</table>

		planned to take place in safe office environments during normal business hours. Large crowded public spaces will be avoided. Weekly checking of news reports to identify any areas of protests will be carried out to avoid any identified locations. Monthly supervision meetings will be used to outline forthcoming interview dates, times and locations. Monitoring of locations will be done with the use of shared Outlook calendar accessible to supervision team with work location/activity recorded at all times. Supervision team hold Principal Investigator contact details including mobile phone and WhatsApp.

6	Do all travelling members of the research team have adequate travel insurance?	X	
7	Please confirm all travelling researchers have been advised to seek medical advice regarding vaccinations, medical conditions etc, from their GP	X	

Appendix 8: Semi Structured Questions with HRD Consultants and Clients

Question Number	Link to RQs	Questions for clients	Questions for HRD consultant (HRDC)
		Background to you and your role in HRD	
1	RQ2	What is your experience of working in HRD? How long have you been involved in HRD work? In what ways?	What is your experience of working in HRD? How long have you been involved in HRD work? In what ways?
2	RQ2	In your opinion, what is HRD all about?	In your opinion, what is HRD all about?
3	RQ2	What is your experience of working with HRDCs?	What do you do as a HRDC?
		Selecting a HRDC	
4	RQ2/	Why do you choose to use a HRDC for your organisation?	In your opinion, why do clients hire a HRDC?
5	RQ1/2/3	Who do you hire for HRD work - the individual consultant, their team, or the consultancy?	Who do you sell for HRD work - the individual consultant, their team, or the consultancy?
6	RQ1/2/3	What do you value most when selecting a HRDC? (Probing: Scientific knowledge, Experience, Client testimonials, Attractive Websites, Case Studies with results from previous work, Word of Mouth, Price, Innovation and others) [*card sort exercise*]	What is most important for your promoting your work to clients? (Probing: Scientific knowledge, Experience, Client testimonials, Attractive Websites, Case Studies with results from previous work, Word of Mouth, Price, Innovation and others) [*card sort exercise*]
7	RQ1	When selecting a HRDC, what qualifies a HRDC to work with you on projects?	When hiring a new HRD consultant to join your consultancy, what qualities or qualifications do you look for? What else do you look for?
8	RQ2	What type of knowledge is important for a HRDC to have? How does this knowledge inform their work? What else is important?	What type of knowledge is important for a HRDC to have? How does this knowledge inform your work? What else is important?
9	RQ1	Do you work with or are you aware of any HRD professional body? What is your experience/view on HRD	Do you work with or are you aware of any HRD professional body? What is your experience/view on HRD

		professional bodies? How important is the link between a HRDC and a HRD professional body?	professional bodies? How important is the link between a HRDC and a HRD professional body?
10	RQ1/2/3/4	What do you take notice of from the website of a HRDC? Can you give a recent example of what you looked for or learned about from a HRDC website?	What do your clients take notice of from your website? What role does your website play in how your represent your work in client organisations? What are your key messages?
11	RQ1/2/3	Who else is involved in the selection of HRDCs in your organisation? What do they look for? How are decisions made?	Who else is involved in the selection of HRDCs for your client? What do they look for? How are decisions made?
		Working with a HRDC	
12	RQ1	Thinking of a recent example of working with a new HRDC, what was important for you to build an effective working relationship?	Thinking of a recent example of working with a new client, what was important for you to build an effective working relationship?
13	RQ1	What is important for you about the HRDC when you decide to continue the working with a HRDC?	What is important for your client in their decision to continue working with you?
14	RQ1	What values are important for a HRDC to have when working with you?	What values are important for a HRDC to have when working a client?
15	RQ1/2/3	What don't you want from a HRDC?	What don't your clients want from you?
		Results from working with a HRDC	
16	RQ3	What results/impact have HRDCs delivered for your organisation? What types of evidence/data (quantitative and qualitative) do you use to demonstrate those impacts? What do the HRDCs expect?	What results or impact do you expect from your work with clients? What does your client expect?
17	RQ3	Who sets the targets or goals from HRDC work in your organisation? Whose agenda is this type of work helping?	Who sets the targets or goals from HRDC work in your clients? Whose agenda is this type of work helping?
		The future outlook for HRDCs	
18	RQ1/2/3	How do you see the demands on the HRDC role changing in the future? What will be critical in how this role develops?	How do you see the demands on the HRDC role changing in the future? What will be critical in how this role develops?

		Final Question	
		Do you have any consultants/colleagues who would be interested in taking part in this study?	Do you have any clients/colleagues who would be interested in taking part in this study?

Notes for carrying out the interviews:

- Ask for specific examples with question "Can you give me a recent example of this…"

Appendix 9: Risk Assessment (Semi-structured interviews with HRD consultants and clients)

RESEARCH PROJECT RISK ASSESSMENT

Person(s) undertaking project:	John Watkins
Project Lead/Principal Investigator:	John Watkins

Brief outline of project: *Outline the types of activities that will take place or items fabricated i.e. face to face interviews, public surveys, water sampling, machining vehicle parts, brazing etc.*	One-to-one interviews will be carried out with Human Resource Development consultants and clients. Semi-structured interviews will be carried out both face-to-face and online (using Skype video) in order to maximise the access to participants.

Dates of study (from – to)	06 March 2019 to August 2019
Location(s) of activity: *Country and specific area.*	United Kingdom – London (Work location of Principal Investigator and Work location of participants) France – Paris & Boulogne Billancourt (Home office of Principal Investigator and Work location of participants) Austria – Vienna (Home office of Principal Investigator and Work location of participants) Interviews will take place in safe office environments during normal business hours. Large crowded public spaces will be avoided. Weekly checking of news reports to identify any areas of protests will be carried out to avoid such locations.

Will the project involve laboratory work? *If yes, you will be required to complete separate risk assessment(s) prior to carrying out any laboratory work.*	No
Will the project involve workshop work? *If yes, you will be required to complete an induction and may carry out a separate risk assessment(s) prior to carrying out any workshop work.*	No

Will the project involve travel? (If yes, complete this section as fully as possible. The form may require review prior to travel to add missing details)	Yes

Contact details at destination(s): Contact details of next of kin in case of emergency:	
Approximate dates of travel and itinerary: Your supervisor/line manager must have details of travel plans once confirmed.	(see itinerary table below)
Arrangements to maintain contact with the University:	Monthly supervision meetings outlining forthcoming interview dates, times and locations. Use of shared Outlook calendar accessible to supervision team at all times with work location/activity recorded at all times.
Emergency contact information:	School/Faculty contact (Daytime): 0207 247 3666 24hr University contact (Protection Service): 02477 65 5555 Local healthcare/emergency services at research location: France & Austria: 112

From	To	Dates
London	Vienna	March or July 2019
London	Paris & Boulogne Billancourt	April - August 2019

Has suitable travel insurance has been obtained? (Please attach a copy of certificate)	Yes
If EU travel, has EH1C card been obtained?	Yes
Has advice/vaccinations from GP been sought (where appropriate)?	N/A
Are medical kits required (i.e. in countries with poor healthcare facilities)?	N/A
Are there any warnings issued by the FCO* against travel to the area?	No
Have you registered with the FCO* service LOCATE? (British nationals only)	Yes

*FCO = http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/

PLEASE USE THE HAZARD CHECKLIST AS A GUIDE WHEN COMPLETING THIS SECTION.

Hazard	Precautions to be used
Work factors: *E.g.: dealing with the public, interviewing on sensitive issues, lone working, driving, working on boats, laboratory work; biological, chemical hazards etc*	Describe potential risks/hazards and the intended strategies to manage them. Potential risk: Safe storage of interview recordings Strategy: All interview recordings will be made on password protected devices. Passwords known only to the Principal Investigator. Potential risk: Safe storage of participant personal data (e.g. contact information) and interview transcriptions. Strategy: All electronic data will be stored in a password-protected computer folder on the lead researcher's Coventry University personal drive. Potential risk: Researcher safety during data collection using safe environments and accommodation arrangements. Strategy: Interviews will take place in safe office environments during normal business hours. Large crowded public spaces will be avoided. Weekly checking of news reports to identify any areas of protests will be carried out to avoid such locations. Monthly supervision meetings outlining forthcoming interview dates, times and locations. Use of shared Outlook calendar accessible to supervision team with work location/activity recorded at all times. Supervision team hold Principal Investigator contact details including mobile phone and WhatsApp.

Site specific factors (in the field): *E.g.: remote area, construction site, local endemic diseases, political unrest, terrorism risk etc* *If travel abroad see FCO* website – list any risks greater than there would be for the UK*	Describe potential risks/hazards and the intended strategies to manage them – e.g. avoidance of crowded public spaces re: international terrorism; reference to FCO travel advice. Potential risk: FCO travel advice for France and Austria for avoiding international terrorism. Strategy: Interviews will take place in safe office environments during normal business hours. Large crowded public spaces will be avoided. Weekly checking of news reports to identify any areas of protests will be carried out to avoid such locations. Subscribed to FCO email alerts for changes to status of countries.

Environmental factors (in the field): *E.g.: extremes of temperature, altitude, weather conditions, tidal conditions, cliffs, bogs, caves, mountains etc*	Describe potential risks/hazards and the intended strategies to manage them. Potential risk: Weather disruption of travel Strategy: Regular checking of news and transport provider websites to check for possible delays or disruption to planned travel.

Equipment: *E.g.: operation of machinery, use of specialist equipment, manual handling/transportation, compressed gases, etc*	Describe potential risks/hazards (e.g. risk of loss/theft of ICT equipment) and the intended strategies to manage them. Potential risk: Safety or loss of equipment Strategy: All interview recordings will be made on password protected devices. Passwords known only to the Principal Investigator. All electronic data will be stored in a password-protected computer folder on the lead researcher's Coventry University personal drive. Secure and regular backups of data therefore provided by the University of all data.

Other: *Detail any special arrangements required, i.e. permissions required, accommodation, travel/visas, catering etc*	No special requirements required for the following reasons: Accommodation and catering provided using home locations. Normal travel arrangements within EU. Regular checking of visa requirements will be made following UK government decisions post 29 March 2019. All travel to be arranged by the Principal Investigator using regular train and airlines companies already known and regularly used by the Principal Investigator which are Eurostar, British Airways and Austrian Airlines.

This assessment must be reviewed before any significant project changes are made.	
<u>Assessment carried out by:</u> Signature: Position: Date:	<u>Authorisation to proceed:</u> Signature: Position: Date:

Appendix 10: Participant Information Sheet (Semi-structured interviews with HRD consultants)

Project Title: Human Resource Development Consulting

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (Consultant)

You are being invited to take part in research on Human Resource Development (HRD) consulting. John Watkins, PhD student at Coventry University, is leading this research. Before you decide to take part it is important you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of the study is to explore the nature of HRD consulting work as a specialist profession. HRD is a term used to refer to work within the areas of:

- Training
- Learning & Development
- Coaching
- Organisation Development

This research seeks to explore the nature of HRD consulting from the different stages of the consulting cycle. This will include the nature of the projects undertaken, consultant selection, the nature of the consultant-client working relationship, and how HRD consultant work is evaluated.

Why have I been chosen to take part?
You are invited to participate in this study because the majority of your time as a consultant is spent working in the areas of Training; Learning & Development; Coaching or Organisation Development. Your job title is related to this type of consulting work. You are associated with HRD consulting work in the United Kingdom. You have worked on such projects within the last 24 months either as an independent consultant or as part of a larger consulting firm.

What are the benefits of taking part?
By sharing your experiences with us, you will be helping build a wider understanding of the nature of HRD consulting in client organisations as a specialist profession. This will benefit the HRD consulting profession in building an understanding of how they represent themselves to their clients in relation to the products and services provided and the benefits delivered to the client. Consultants will also benefit from an understanding of what clients value from the consultant-client relationship. This will enable consultants to tailor their approach to new and existing clients to better communicate the value of their work in an increasingly competitive environment. An executive summary of the research findings will be available to all participants at the end of the study.

Are there any risks associated with taking part?
This study has been reviewed and approved through Coventry University's formal research ethics procedure. There are no significant risks associated with participation.

Do I have to take part?

No – it is entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part, please keep this Information Sheet and complete the Informed Consent Form to show that you understand your rights in relation to the research, and that you are happy to participate. Please note down your participant number (which is on the Consent Form) and provide this to the lead researcher if you seek to withdraw from the study at a later date. You are free to withdraw your information from the project data set at any time until the data are fully anonymised in our records on 01 December 2019. You should note that your data may be used in the production of formal research outputs (e.g. journal articles, conference papers, theses and reports) prior to this date and so you are advised to contact the university at the earliest opportunity should you wish to withdraw from the study. To withdraw, please contact the lead researcher (contact details are provided below). Please also contact the Research Support Office via email researchproservices.fbl@coventry.ac.uk or by telephone +44(0)2477658461] so that your request can be dealt with promptly in the event of the lead researcher's absence. You do not need to give a reason. A decision to withdraw, or not to take part, will not affect you in any way.

What will happen if I decide to take part?
You will be asked a number of questions regarding your experience as a consultant working with different clients. The interview will take place in a safe and public environment at a time that is convenient to you. Ideally, we would like to audio record your responses (and will require your consent for this), so the location should be in a fairly quiet area. The interview should take around 45-60 minutes to complete.

Data Protection and Confidentiality
Your data will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Unless they are fully anonymised in our records, your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. No individual organisation and identity will be revealed in any forms at any stage of the project. If you consent to being audio recorded, all recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. Your data will only be viewed by the researcher/research team. All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer file on the lead researcher's Coventry University personal drive. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the lead researcher's home office. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses in order to minimise risk in the event of a data breach. The lead researcher will take responsibility for data destruction and all non-anonymised collected data will be destroyed on or before 01 January 2022.

Data Protection Rights
Coventry University is a Data Controller for the information you provide. You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. For more details, including the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the University Data Protection Officer - enquiry.ipu@coventry.ac.uk

What will happen with the results of this study?
The results of this study may be summarised in published articles, reports and presentations. Quotes or key findings will always be made anonymous in any formal

outputs unless we have your prior and explicit written permission to attribute them to you by name.

Making a Complaint

If you are unhappy with any aspect of this research, please first contact the lead researcher:

Name: John Watkins

If you still have concerns and wish to make a formal complaint, please write to:

Dr Crystal Zhang
Director of Studies and Associate Head of School: School of Marketing and Management
Coventry University
Coventry CV1 5FB

In your letter please provide information about the research project, specify the name of the researcher and detail the nature of your complaint.

Appendix 11: Participant Information Sheet (Semi-structured interviews with clients)

Project Title: Human Resource Development Consulting

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (Client)

You are being invited to take part in research on Human Resource Development (HRD) consulting. John Watkins, PhD student at Coventry University, is leading this research. Before you decide to take part it is important you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of the study is to explore the nature of HRD consulting work as a specialist profession. HRD is a term used to refer to work within the areas of:

- Training
- Learning & Development
- Coaching
- Organisation Development

This research seeks to explore the nature of HRD consulting from the different stages of the consulting cycle. This will include the nature of the projects undertaken, consultant selection, the nature of the consultant-client working relationship, and how HRD consultant work is evaluated.

Why have I been chosen to take part?
You are invited to participate in this study because you have been a client of HRD consultants who have been commissioned to work on projects in the areas of Training; Learning & Development; Coaching or Organisation Development. You have worked in a consultant-client relationship on such projects within the last 24 months. The location of the consulting work has included the United Kingdom.

What are the benefits of taking part?
By sharing your experiences with us, you will be helping build a wider understanding of the nature of HRD consulting in client organisations as a specialist profession. This will benefit the HRD consulting profession in building an understanding of how they represent themselves to their clients in relation to the products and services provided and the benefits delivered to the client. Clients will benefit from a greater understanding of the nature of consultant-client relationships. This will provide insights into the decision making processes used in organisations when selecting and retaining HRD consultants, as well as wider understanding of what makes a successful consultant-client relationship. An executive summary of the research findings will be available to all participants at the end of the study.

Are there any risks associated with taking part?
This study has been reviewed and approved through Coventry University's formal research ethics procedure. There are no significant risks associated with participation.

Do I have to take part?

No – it is entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part, please keep this Information Sheet and complete the Informed Consent Form to show that you understand your rights in relation to the research, and that you are happy to participate. Please note down your participant number (which is on the Consent Form) and provide this to the lead researcher if you seek to withdraw from the study at a later date. You are free to withdraw your information from the project data set at any time until the data are fully anonymised in our records on 01 December 2019. You should note that your data may be used in the production of formal research outputs (e.g. journal articles, conference papers, theses and reports) prior to this date and so you are advised to contact the university at the earliest opportunity should you wish to withdraw from the study. To withdraw, please contact the lead researcher (contact details are provided below). Please also contact the Research Support Office via email researchproservices.fbl@coventry.ac.uk or by telephone +44(0)2477658461 so that your request can be dealt with promptly in the event of the lead researcher's absence. You do not need to give a reason. A decision to withdraw, or not to take part, will not affect you in any way.

What will happen if I decide to take part?

You will be asked a number of questions regarding your experience as a consultant working with different clients. The interview will take place in a safe and public environment at a time that is convenient to you. Ideally, we would like to audio record your responses (and will require your consent for this), so the location should be in a fairly quiet area. The interview should take around 45-60 minutes to complete.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

Your data will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Unless they are fully anonymised in our records, your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. No individual organisation and identity will be revealed in any forms at any stage of the project. If you consent to being audio recorded, all recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. Your data will only be viewed by the researcher/research team. All electronic data will be stored in a password-protected computer folder on the lead researcher's Coventry University personal drive. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the lead researcher's home office. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses in order to minimise risk in the event of a data breach. The lead researcher will take responsibility for data destruction and all non-anonymised collected data will be destroyed on or before 01 January 2022.

Data Protection Rights

Coventry University is a Data Controller for the information you provide. You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. For more details, including the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the University Data Protection Officer - enquiry.ipu@coventry.ac.uk

What will happen with the results of this study?

The results of this study may be summarised in published articles, reports and presentations. Quotes or key findings will always be made anonymous in any formal outputs unless we have your prior and explicit written permission to attribute them to you by name.

Making a Complaint

If you are unhappy with any aspect of this research, please first contact the lead researcher:

Name: John Watkins

If you still have concerns and wish to make a formal complaint, please write to:

Dr Crystal Zhang
Director of Studies and Associate Head of School: School of Marketing and Management
Coventry University
Coventry CV1 5FB

In your letter please provide information about the research project, specify the name of the researcher and detail the nature of your complaint.

Appendix 12: Informed Consent (Semi-structured interviews with HRD consultants)

Participant No.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: Human Resource Development Consulting

You are invited to take part in this research study for the purpose of collecting data on Human Resource Development consulting.

Before you decide to take part, you must **read the accompanying Participant Information Sheet.**

Please do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is unclear or if you would like more information about any aspect of this research. It is important that you feel able to take the necessary time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

If you are happy to participate, please confirm your consent by circling YES against each of the below statements and then signing and dating the form as participant.

1	**I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions**	**YES**	**NO**
2	**I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my data, without giving a reason, by contacting the lead researcher and the Research Support Office at any time until the date specified in the Participant Information Sheet**	**YES**	**NO**
3	**I have noted down my participant number (top left of this Consent Form) which may be required by the lead researcher if I wish to withdraw from the study**	**YES**	**NO**
4	**I understand that all the information I provide will be held securely and treated confidentially**	**YES**	**NO**
5	**I am happy for the information I provide to be used (anonymously) in academic papers and other formal research outputs**	**YES**	**NO**
6	**I am happy for the interview to be audio recorded**	**YES**	**NO**
7	**I agree to take part in the above study**	**YES**	**NO**

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your help is very much appreciated.

Participant's Name	Date	Signature
Researcher	**Date**	**Signature**

Appendix 13: Informed Consent (Semi-structured interviews with clients)

Participant No.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM:
Human Resource Development Consulting

You are invited to take part in this research study for the purpose of collecting data on Human Resource Development consulting.

Before you decide to take part, you must **read the accompanying Participant Information Sheet.**

Please do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is unclear or if you would like more information about any aspect of this research. It is important that you feel able to take the necessary time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

If you are happy to participate, please confirm your consent by circling YES against each of the below statements and then signing and dating the form as participant.

1	**I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions**	**YES**	**NO**
2	**I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my data, without giving a reason, by contacting the lead researcher and the Research Support Office at any time until the date specified in the Participant Information Sheet**	**YES**	**NO**
3	**I have noted down my participant number (top left of this Consent Form) which may be required by the lead researcher if I wish to withdraw from the study**	**YES**	**NO**
4	**I understand that all the information I provide will be held securely and treated confidentially**	**YES**	**NO**
5	**I am happy for the information I provide to be used (anonymously) in academic papers and other formal research outputs**	**YES**	**NO**
6	**I am happy for the interview to be audio recorded**	**YES**	**NO**
7	**I agree to take part in the above study**	**YES**	**NO**

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your help is very much appreciated.

Participant's Name	Date	Signature
Researcher	**Date**	**Signature**

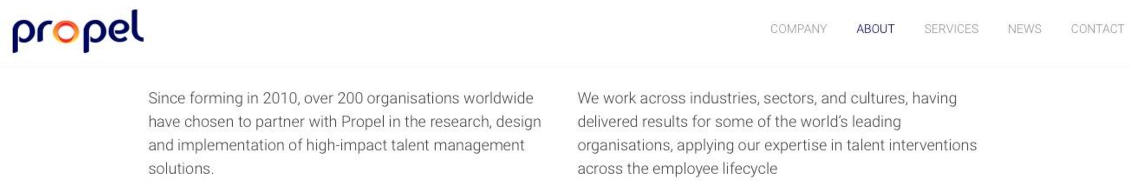
Appendix 14: Guiding Principles for Interview Transcript Anonymisation

Guiding Principles for Interview Transcript Anonymisation
Human Names • First name are anonymized by using an alternative name • The name always begins with the next letter of the alphabet • The name attempts to reflect the nationality of the person • No surname is included
Company Names • Names are replaced by description of the organisation • Names include the sector • Names include the size of the organisation • Names include the geography of scale of the organisation
External Professional Bodies/Associations • Names are retained where they exist in the public domain and not directly identifiable to specific participants

Appendix 15: Example HRD Consultancy Website

Impact International. (2018). *Our Work.* https://www.impactinternational.com/ourwork

Bluesky. (2018). *What we do*. https://blue-sky.co.uk/whatwedo



Propel International. (2018). *About*. http://www.propel-international.com

Title:	PhD CO04 110419
Length of Audio:	1:10:43

So, Francesca, thank you so much for coming to join me this morning.

You're welcome.

And just to confirm that we've looked at the consent form and you've signed the consent form to say you're happy to take part?

I have.

Great, thank you. So, as I explained, these interviews are forming part of a PhD study and I'm exploring the nature of the relationship between clients and consultants who work within the area of learning and development, coaching and organisational development, and as such I'm going to use the term HRD or Human Resource Development that refers to activities within those three areas. Is that okay with you?

That's fine.

Great, so just kick off with a few questions about yourself and then as we proceed I'll explain what my questions refer to as we go, but just thinking about some introductions to yourself, can you tell me a bit about your experience in working in this field of Human Resource Development?

Sure, okay. So, I guess if I start now and track back a little bit that'll be good, so I'm currently the Head of Leading Transformation and Engagement for a UK Based Global L&D Consultancy. Most of my work currently is with leadership communities and looking at how they can add maximum socio-economic value to the environments in which they are operate and I've been in that role for just coming up to three years. Prior to that I worked as a consultant specialising in development and leadership development for knowledge and expert organisations, so that typically means organisations with a high complexity environment, typically highly regulated, lots of autonomy and relatively complex operating environments, for example, financial services, gas and oil, legal, research and development, and that's been my specialism for most of the time that I ran the business I was a partner in before I joined the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy. Prior to that I specialised in looking at talent development with a UK Based Building Society and that was an employed role, prior to that I was Head of People Development for UK Law Firm, who are a leading commercial law practice and I started my career in the NHS as a National Management Trainee and my specialism during that time was industrial relations. So, I guess to some extent the thread running through that has really been the development of people and in particular what represents value, how people bring value in the work they do to their organisations and to the communities that they're part of.

So, how long have you been working in this field of HRD?

I started working in 1982, so I did a degree, which was English, and then I joined the NHS in 1982 and I've been working in this field since then.

So, you made reference to the fact that you started out in industrial relations and you've moved into talent, so what motivated you or what inspired you to make that move out of industrial relations into that people development space?

Yes, well the first part of my career, as I say, was in the NHS and in that public sector environment we had the opportunity to specialise in different areas and I chose industrial relations which I enjoyed and I decided at a certain point I needed to get some private sector experience and I looked around and organisations that appealed to me again were something to do with expertise, technical environments and financial services was interesting to me. The opportunity came up at a UK Based Building Society and it was really described initially as a development partner for certain areas of the business and I took it on that basis and the focus on talent developed really when I'd been there for about a year and there was a need to focus on that particular population and I was asked if I would do that and I did.

Great, so in all those different roles, and you've focused in on talent, you've focused in on people development and leadership development, what would you say that this field of HRD is all about, what does it mean to you?

I think that's a brilliant question. I guess for me the key words that come up when you ask that, I think one is enabling, another one is value again and I think the third one is conditions and I think it's really about enabling organisations to create the conditions internally and in the way they operate in their market, for everybody who works in the organisation to be able to deliver maximum value. It's a good question. That's what I think it's about.

Anything else that you think that it's about?

We could probably spend the whole hour just on that one question I imagine (laughter). I think it's about influencing and about providing insight for the business into what needs to happen for the people in the organisation deeply to understand the organisation's purpose and vision and to feel a sense of personal buy-in to that, to feel like whoever I am, I'm part of this and I'm not just a subject of this, I'm an architect of this at whatever level I work and I think HRD is an advocate for that and can and should be an influencer to help that be understood in the business.

You made reference to earlier the part of the role that you're now playing is related to looking at socio-economic value, how does that fit in with what HRD is all about for you?

I think it's intimately connected because I think that part of HRD's role, as I see it, in the wider sense, is to encourage and support the organisation to ask the question, 'In what ways do we bring socio-economic value, as a community, in what way do we bring that value into our market place and what's the benefit of that for our customers, for our employees and for our reputation in the market?'. So, for me it's a very exciting question and I think it's a question that we actively encourage our clients to ask and I'm very interested, as a professional, in how many ways we can use that question, especially to build engagement, which I think is key.

How easy do your clients find answering that question then?

Well, I think the first thing I'd say is, without exception, they really relate to the question, I think that's the first thing I would say, and some of them it's very clear. We work with an organisation at the moment which has a very clear socio-economic purpose, it's there to do something which delivers value and they find it quite easy to do that. I think the other kind of organisation that finds it easy is those that have very clear metrics on economic value, so we are here to generate shareholding value, we measure that, that's quite easy. I think I like the provocation of linking socio-economic value together because I do believe that these things are not opposed to each other, I don't believe that it's either commercial value or social value, I think they can be connected. So, I think most organisations, they enjoy at some level the provocation of that question.

Okay, I'm going to come back to that question of results and value a bit later on, if that's aright but keeping with that idea of posing the question and working with your clients, what do you see then as the role, as a consultant, that you play in HRD? What's the contribution that you make that I guess isn't already within the organisation?

Yes, well I guess you could see that probably in two parallel ways. One is I think good consultants can deeply assist the internal HRD specialist and teams in a number of ways, which I'll speak about, and I think secondly, there can be moments when it's actually really helpful to have an outside colleague to work with some of the stakeholders in the business who may either need a safe outside space or, frankly, who may listen more to an outsider and I think those are the two ways that we can really bring value. I think when we work with the internal HRD specialists we can be a very stimulating and a very safe partner for them and by stimulating I mean we can ask them stuff and encourage them to answer things with little or no risk, in a way that they can't do with their own stakeholders. It's very hard, even very senior professionals in HRD, it's not easy to work that stuff out with your stakeholders in live time, so we can be a good place to do that. By a safe place all I really mean is when a good consultant builds high trust with internal HRD specialists that can create a very safe place for the HRD specialist to deeply challenge their own practice. I think that's helpful. On the other side, I think HRD specialists can bring in good consultants when there are either sensitive moments, politically or in terms of hierarchy or structure, where an outsider is needed to say the unsayable and I think that can be really helpful for everybody.

Why do you think they need an external voice to say the unsayable?

Again, these are really good questions. I think sometimes something can happen in an organisation where the stakeholders and the HRD specialists know something, everybody knows something, it's there, it's the elephant in the room or it's clear, but there's a tacit understanding that if one of us says this the fallout is something we're then going to have manage together and when that occurs I think having an outsider say it doesn't change what's said but it somehow means that the two participant constituents can hear it and they're hearing it together and when the outsider has then gone away that thing that's been said is in some ways more common property. Not sure if I'm being clear what I mean by that?

Can you think of a specific example of where that's happened with you?

Yes, it's an organisation which has been going through a merger and there's been a huge amount of sensitivity around this, and there still is, around this merger. These two organisations have come together for very good commercial reasons, as a complete entity they now serve a much bigger pipeline and this will bring value. However, on a cultural level, they couldn't be more different and they're not yet at the stage of appreciating these differences and it's a little bit like an arranged environment where each party looks at the other and says, 'If I was choosing somebody, it probably wouldn't be you'. So, intellectually I get it, why we did this, but it doesn't feel good and some of our role in that situation has been simply to say that, to say, 'Look, you two have come together for reasons you understand, but on an emotional, psychological level, feels really awkward, doesn't it?', and because neither of them has therefore had to say it to the other, 'I feel awkward about being with you', somehow it's become a little easier for them to say, 'Yeah, you know what? That is not actually that easy', and that I think has been a good example. Clearly, we haven't fixed that but by surfacing it in a non-blaming way, I'd like to think we've contributed to them being able to talk about it.

Great, thank you for that example.

You're welcome.

So, I'm now going to move into the next section of questions, so I'm thinking, in these questions, about the process that happens where a client chooses a consultant to work with. You've talked about why a client would bring in a consultant within this work around HRD already, but when you're thinking about making that pitch to a new client, who, in your opinion, are you selling? So, are you selling the individual consultant, are you selling the team that may be working on such a project, or are you selling the consultancy itself, or are you selling something else?

So, I could answer that in a number of ways, so maybe if I just check-in with you. I could answer it in terms of my role now, what I do right now, or I could answer it in terms of my career journey if you like and what's happened during that journey. So, I don't which would be more helpful for you actually?

An example from both perspectives?

Okay, so in my work now I'm helping clients understand whether the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy is the right partner for them and then within that I'm helping to ascertain, with them, which is the right team and within that team, which are the right specialists to partner with them. So, it's like there concentric circles, are we the right partner, within that who are the people who would well serve them and within that who are the actual names in the frame who would best really fit with what will be useful for them.

And you're doing that with existing clients?

Yes, and also with new clients. When I see new clients or people who are interested in working with us, from the very beginning part of my job is to help them to get a sense of, 'are we the right partners for them at this time?', and then within that, okay, which team, which individuals?

To me that sounds like it's a different way of selling, it's not necessarily saying, 'Work with us because we're the best', it's saying, 'Actually, what you're describing sounds to me like we maybe the right fit for you, on the following basis', is that …?

I think again, yeah. This is very interesting. I guess I would say, 'Do I believe we're always the right people for every client, automatically?', no, I think that would be a very foolish assumption. If I didn't believe we could bring value, I wouldn't even be in the room in the first place, talking to them, if I felt there was just no point. So, somewhere within those two extremes, I think part of our professional responsibility is to explore that with the client actually. I think in the fields that we're in we are always, in my opinion, a top contender to be a good partner for them.

And when you're talking to the client, so you talk about, 'Are we the right consultancy or the right team or the right individuals?', is there one particular part of that dynamic that is a focus in those conversations?

I would normally describe that conversation in terms of, 'Let's explore how we might work together, whether that would be a good thing for us to work together', and usually I'm taking into account their needs at this time. So, an example would be if an organisation said, 'What we need at this time is, we have a desired outcome, we have a number of constraints and parameters within which we need to achieve that outcome and we have a whole number of important things that are off limits. For example, we can't speak about this to the Board, we don't have a senior sponsor and we daren't ask for one, we don't really have very much time to do this and most of it is a secret, so there's a lot that we can't actually disclose'. We're probably not the right people to work those people at this time.

Why would that be?

Because they could spend a lot of time and money and have little or no chance of achieving their desired goal. I think part of our expertise is knowing there are certain basic conditions that need to be in place for them to do the work. Now, if those conditions aren't in place, we might well do some work to create the conditions, so in that case I think I would normally be saying the client, 'The scope you've currently outlined is probably not where we'd recommend you start, but let's work with you to create the conditions that then mean that is likely to happen', and that is what we would seek to partner with them on.

And you mentioned that's what your current role and that's where your current focus is. Maybe in your previous roles that might have been different?

Yes, my role prior to joining the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy, I ran a small consulting business with my partner, which we did for twenty years, and in that situation we were very, very small. Again, a consulting business, a very small consulting business with a number of associates, so the same model as within the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy but a different scale and perhaps the main difference there was that I was more personally involved in delivering a great deal of the work than I am now. So, in that sense perhaps it was more about whether or not I personally am the right person. In the majority of projects now it's not likely to be me personally delivering most of it.

Great, thank you. So, I've got a little activity now, just to build …

Excellent, I love an activity (laughter).

… just to build on this question of selection of consultants and it's a word sort activity and in this word sort there's lots of different words. What I'd like you to do is have a look at these words first of all and think about the following question. So, what's most important, for you, when promoting your work to new clients? And if you can think about what would be the most important …

Okay, so I'll just manoeuvre these?

Manoeuvre them around and pick up what would be the ranking of importance when promoting yourself to new clients. You'll find that there's an 'other' in there in case you think there's something which is missing.

Yes. I think I would probably cluster them together a little bit like this. This is what I'm experiencing at the moment with clients, is that probably the four that are weighing particularly heavily at the moment are case studies with previous work, client testimonials, our experience in the sector and innovation. And then from there, inter-personal skills and price but I would probably say value more than price, people often start with a question about price and quite often what they're really asking is, 'What is it we're getting for this?', and that depends a lot on who we're talking to as well. Coming after that I would put website and word of mouth referral and then scientific knowledge and other.

Okay, so if we can start with, so on the far right hand side here you've got case studies, client testimonials, experience and innovation. Tell me a bit about why that's important.

Yes, I think I'd probably put case studies and testimonials together because most organisations find it informative and reassuring to know who else, so people want to know what ball park are you in and one of the ways we ascertain that quickly is who else …

And when you say ball park what do you mean by that?

I mean probably two things. One is sector, so what have you done in our sector, and secondly, magnitude of clients, so who are you working for. So, if you're working for FTSE Top 100 Companies or you're working for market leaders in our industry then you're more valuable to us probably than if you're not.

Why is that more valuable?

Well, again this is a good question. Is it more valuable? Well, I think it's a different question as to whether it is more valuable or whether people feel it's more valuable. I think it's reassuring because people feel some of the buy-in decision is already made because X and Y bought you, I'm probably safer bringing you in than if nobody I ever heard of bought you and I think often our buyers are aware of their stakeholders. They are aware that they're telling their Board, 'I brought these people in', and so it's a reassurance for them to know, 'And so did X and Y'.

So, the other clients represents what, do you think, in giving that reassurance?

I think it represents professional validation, it kind of says, 'These people have made it through the sift with other organisations, who are making it in the sector we're in'. So, if I could use a football analogy, it would be like say if we bought a player and we said, 'Well, they played for Real Madrid, they played for Paris Saint Germain, they played for Barcelona', well, we probably have a good player there.

And you've experience and innovation in the same column.

Yes.

Can you tell me a bit about that?

Experience, what that means to me is, okay, these are the people they've worked with, however, what have they actually done? So, what have they delivered in the field that we're buying in? So, if we're buying a leadership development intervention or we're buying a development centre intervention or a talent intervention, have they done that and what was that? So, they like to see an example of that.

So, that refers to the experience of the consultancy and the work that the consultancy has done.

Absolutely. If the first part is, 'With whom have you done this?', then is, 'What did you do?', and that I think is where the link is between testimonies and case studies. 'What have you done?'.

Innovation is also in that column.

At the moment people are just crying out for (laugh), 'Give us, help us with innovation, give us something', and that is expressing itself in a couple of ways. At the moment we're doing some prototyping, we're inviting a couple of clients to work with us to prototype something and at the moment literally we're exploring something with the client and we're saying, 'We would like to explore creating this, I'm looking for some clients who would like to explore something with us, would you like to be one of those people?', and a lot of them are, 'Yes, we would'. They haven't asked, 'What is it?' (laugh). Some of them have but some of them literally have said, 'That sounds interesting to us'.

And what does the innovation represent? Is it about new ideas? Is it about creative and new thinking? Or is it about just having something we don't have at the moment?

Right, I think there are three things. I think one is competitive advantage, can we do something that gives an advantage, either with our customers or, for example, in terms of retaining talent, something like that. I think the second thing is staying, well, actually, needing to be innovative just to stay current, in a sense, not becoming stagnant or out-moded very quickly. And I think the third thing people are quite interested in is how an innovative mindset is a core skill now and for the future. So, people want to really begin to work in ways that create innovation because I think they're beginning to understand, 'We're always going to need to do this, so if we start now, doing it like this, we can probably develop that capacity'.

Thank you. So, moving onto your second column, you've got inter-personal skills here. Can you tell me what does that mean for you?

It means that if the person in the room with the client, for example, like the first meeting or second or third meetings or in the project development stages, if that person is not deeply skilled on inter-personal level things will not proceed. So, I think there's something strategic, which is this first set of things here, and then there's something very immediate. We have to bring somebody to the client early on with whom they can really connect and obviously in the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy connection and engagement is very, very important to us, that we deeply listen to the client, we deeply respect and understand them. So, it's a criteria for us that everybody we recruit has that to be able to bring that to the client.

And obviously inter-personal skills can mean lots of different things, what does it mean for you? What type of skills or qualities does that mean?

Listening very deeply to the person in front of you and listening very deeply to what they are and are not saying about the world that they're in, their organisation. Asking questions with as few filters as possible and trying to ask questions without imposing a frame on the person's world, really to understand what is their position? What is their organisation's goal? Patience because people have different levels of ability to bring out what is really needed. I think a very, very deep, a very deep personal commitment to being trustworthy and ethical and a sense of perspective, so that you can quickly ascertain what is this, is it something huge, something tiny? Because we see a client, at the beginning we don't see the perspective of their world, so we need to kind of get a sense of where they are. I think they would be the main things and care actually, caring about them, being interested, a desire to build something.

You mentioned ethics and linked that to trust, could you perhaps give an example of where that's influenced your relationship?

Yes, I've got several examples. This is a very common example in the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy actually, so it's not at all unique to me, but it's not at all unusual for a client to be in a position where there'll be something happening in the organisation and our main stakeholder or contact is in a very complex position politically. We've had many examples where they will share that with us without reservation, they will really trust us with what's happening for them, not only in the organisation but in their own career, their decision making, all the way to Board Member level, knowing that we will never misuse that information, that we will hold it as a relevant piece of data without disclosure and I think that's a very typical example of that. I guess another example would just be clients will often share with us quite early on quite a lot of sensitive information, even though they may not be entirely sure where the project will be going, because I think they know quickly that we are a highly trustworthy organisation, so they can put us in the picture quickly and they won't regret it.

And what would some of that sensitive information be?

It might be, we have an example at the moment of a client, a city client in fact, who is just forming their new strategy, their leadership strategy and what that means for their current leadership team and they have two discussions papers on their Board table about that now. They've sent me that last week saying, 'This is not even signed off yet', but it's good to see it because it gives you an idea of where we might be and if we're not there we can shred it.

Great, thank you. So, I guess that connects with a question I have about what you then look for from new consultants joining your organisation. Is there anything different or is there anything else that you're looking for from the person profile or spec?

Yeah, I would say there are several things and, again, you might get similar or different answers depending on who you're talking to. I think another quality is emotional courage and intellectual ability, intellectual clarity, a sense of rigour, not being unduly swayed by, on the one hand not being unduly swayed by the emotionality of a situation and on the other hand not being unfeeling. For me I'm looking for that quality, that combination.

Could you give me an example of emotional courage?

Yes, an example of one of our colleagues who was recently in a situation with a client with a very senior group, in the second module of a Senior Leadership Development Programme, and in the room my colleague decided there's a certain amount of what's happening here that is game playing and it's being propagated by the politics of what's happening in the room. Now, there was no need for them to raise that or surface it. Obviously they could have gone through the entire module, they could have covered the content, they could have invited people to think, there was no need to front up with that but they made a decision in the moment to say, 'Let's just pause this for a second here, let's just take a risk and have a look at what might not be being said', and that I thought was an extremely UK Based Global L&D Consultancy moment because it would have been so much easier not to and it was a real risk to do that. I think they had 100% of support from me and from everybody else in the business for doing that and the client actually came back and said, 'Look, that wasn't an easy call for them to have made but we respected them for making it'.

Thank you, that's a very nice example and you said that intellectual rigour was the other thing you would look for, can you give me an example of what that might look like?

Yes, it means asking a lot of probing questions, such as, 'What does that mean? What does that really mean? What else does that mean? We say that, on the other hand, what about this?'. So, being very interested and able to pin down what's underneath the clichés and the generalisations because if we go too far into a piece of work and we're satisfied with the generalisations, very rarely, I mean the work may be okay, it may go well, but that's not really what we're trying to do. We're trying to make a really big systemic difference.

And is that emotional courage and intellectual rigour, how is that different from that first client meeting to the ongoing relationship with a client?

That's a very interesting question. Can you say a bit more about what you mean by that question?

So, is that important as a first impression or is that something that you would look for to be a consistent part of the relationship?

Okay, it's a consistent part of the relationship and in fact in the first one or two experiences with a client that has to be carefully balanced with just a degree of letting them get to know us a little bit because I think most people really don't want to be greeted by, 'Right, let's deeply probe into your innermost …', people just need a bit of social space just to get an idea of who they're working with. So, I would say all of our consultants, we're looking for those qualities and up front we're also looking for just nice social skills. Nice is a difficult word but personable and able to build a social relationship enough for those things to open up beyond that actually.

Great, thank you. Your next column here is about, you've got website and word of mouth together.

Yes.

Tell me a bit about the website and word of mouth, why have you put them together and is one more important than the other?

Right, I put them together because typically they're two ways that work might come to us, so that's the reason they're grouped together. Again, a very big part of our work in the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy, and in fact a very big part of our work in my previous business, was word of mouth and in both cases more than 80% of our work was referral, which is a lot of work. So, that, I think, is of paramount importance in one way because it's a powerful thing to be referred by a client.

And how does that referral work?

I guess an example would be somebody contacting us and saying, 'You don't know me but X told me that I should speak to you because they've worked with you and recommended you in this area'. That's the most common thing that would happen.

Okay and is that from a different company to a different company or is it often, is it also word of mouth within the same company?

Right, it could be from a different company. Something that happens quite a lot is stakeholders move around in this profession, as we both know, and so people will often take us with them and that's ideally what we would really like to have happen because that helps their career and it also helps us and that would happen a lot. People move company, they come back and say, 'Actually, come and talk to us here', or they might move to a new company and say to another stakeholder in that business, 'You should talk to these people'.

You've also got website in this same column, what would you say that your clients take notice of from your website?

Case studies, stories, insights, a kind of scan of, 'Who are these people?', maybe profiles of the colleagues and partners and the kind of language that's used. So, a really nice example that happened on Monday this week, somebody had approached us, didn't know us at all, had a conversation with them and they said, 'We read your website and on your website, in Transformational Leadership, you talk about being a partner that we can trust and you talk about your commitment to inspiring positive change and I need those things', and he actually said to me, 'There's probably other businesses who do that, but I think you said it really clearly and I sort of believed it so I phoned you' (laughter), which it's not often it happens like that but that was kind of interesting. So, the language I think is important.

And did he say what it was that led him to believe that that was going to be the case?

He said it was straight forward, the way it was described, he said it just put it out there, it said this is what we do and he said it sounded like you meant it.

Is there anything else that your clients look for from your website?

I guess there's a kind of, I should say this is not an area of specialism for me, website design or the use of website or search engine, but I'm guessing they look for a sense of face validity. So, does it look professional? Does it look fresh? Does it look current? Is it easy to navigate? Does it have real people, real stories? And does it sound like it's future-facing perhaps?

Thank you and your final column, you've got scientific knowledge and other, so could you tell me a bit about scientific knowledge, what does that mean for you?

I guess really if I were organising, the scientific knowledge is really a subset of experience and what that means to me is whatever specialism the person purports to be in, that they know about that. There's nothing particularly about scientific knowledge that might be different, except perhaps if we want to think about using particular models or frameworks. So, if what you mean by this is scientific knowledge in the sense of we work with adaptive leadership or we work with appreciative enquiry. So, we could call that technical or L&D knowledge maybe and that I would group with experience.

Group with experience, yeah. When you're working with clients, is there a particular type of knowledge that they're asking for or looking for?

Yes, there might be, and again if I think of one of my colleagues and the focus of their work, which is talent focused really, then the client there might be saying, 'Okay, what do you know about what initiatives are happening in the world of talent particularly?', and that could be an example of something concrete or specific. In my area people would be asking, 'What's happening in leadership? What are people thinking about there?', so in that sense yes.

One of the other ways in which professions refer to knowledge or evidence knowledge is through qualifications. Are there any particular qualifications that you think are important?

Yeah, a good example there would be, for example, again my colleague who leads our Coaching Practice, all of the coaches in that practice are qualified coaches, whether it's ICF or any other equivalent international qualification and that will be a benchmark for us. We wouldn't take anybody into that practice who did not have that.

And how is that different to the other parts of the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy?

Well, I guess it's different in the sense that there may be other areas where there isn't an equivalent qualification, I mean as far as I know there isn't an equivalent, for example, in talent or in leadership that says, 'This is a recognised qualification, international benchmark in that area'. If there is such a thing, we would give priority to people who have it, we have a number of people who might be studying a particular specialism, so they're qualified in that or they use particular tools.

And one of the other ways in which knowledge is referred to or evidenced is around professional bodies. You made reference to some of those in relation to coaching, what's your experience of working with professional bodies in the area of HRD?

Again, we have a number of involvements, whether it's with the CIPD or other bodies or Corporate Search Forum and so on and I think that can be interesting. I think it can be an interesting and stimulating cross-fertilisation between the consultancy, the professional body and the client. Obviously in terms of professional networking with colleagues, the development of ideas, that can be helpful and again it can be quite an interesting space just to explore and think with like-minded colleagues about what's happening. That can be helpful, I think.

When was the last time you, for example, took part in something like that?

Yeah, well I guess an example would be I'm quite involved with Change Board and that links to some of the work I do, again on socio-economic value and the last time I was involved in that was two weeks ago and I'll be doing a podcast with them again next week. So, I'm quite involved with that.

And how important is it for your clients that there is a relationship between consultants in the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy and a professional body?

It's not a question that's often asked in an overt sense, so for example when we're completing a conversation with a client, I don't think clients would very often say, 'What professional bodies do your teams belong to?'. Having said that, for example in the coaching practice it's a clear part of our offer that everybody is accredited and I think we refer to it where we believe it is a value-adding part of the conversation. For example, we have one consultant who is a visiting academic and we would refer to that in his bio and would readily share that with a client.

Thank you. So, the last question around this selection is you made reference that your clients have a number of stakeholders that they are involved with and connected to and responsible to. Who are some of those, typically who are those stakeholders who are also involved in the selection of the consultant or consultancy?

Typically, they would be typically be at Director level in some shape or form, they may or may not be ExCo members and it wouldn't be unusual to have one or more ExCo member sponsoring the field of work that then our immediate stakeholder is leading. Again, an example would be in a particular energy company we work with in gas and oil. All of their global leadership development work which we do has an ExCo sponsor, so if you like, the buyer who is bringing us into the organisation has a key accountability to that ExCo member and at some point we will be involved with meeting them. At the other end of the spectrum, there may be organisations who have sponsorship at a Senior Manager level which might be very light touch and not very present and in a less favourable situation there maybe organisations where the HRD specialist is struggling to get traction in terms of real Senior Board level sponsorship. A part of our job might be helping them position their messaging to get more sponsorship or visibility at that level.

What does that sponsorship mean for you?

Again, I'll give you an example. I can't name the client, but it's a really interesting example and again it's a city client. What it means in this case is that the Managing Director of one of the business units within this organisation, who's a Board member, not only participates in a number of leadership development events, he will come and do things at the event, but each year when we create the programme for the events we have a meeting together with him and with a Senior Head of L&D, so the Head of L&D, this particular MD and myself will be sitting down together in two weeks to ask, 'What's this year's big business question on your mind and how can this population in the Leadership Programme be a resource for you in working on that question?', and he is a fantastic sponsor. This is the third year now that we will have specifically worked with, 'How can this group be a resource for the business at the same time as they are learning?'.

So, he's shaping the work, as it were?

Yeah. What we have said at the beginning of that, it was an interesting programme that we created a few years ago, and what we said at the beginning was, 'This programme can be business valuable as well as learning valuable', that I think is a hall mark of what we do, I hope. So, being able to say to him, 'Look, let's work smart here, let's look at how they learn. Let's also look at what you need doing. How can these work together?', and that has been very, very interesting actually and fruitful.

Great. So, before we get onto the value and the results part of the relationship, my last question is about what don't your clients want from you, as this external …?

That's a good question (laugh). Wow, what don't they want? Goodness, well, they don't want hassle, they don't want, 'It's difficult to do business with you', they don't want quality failures, they don't want broken promises, they don't want consultants who lack credibility or lack impact. I think those are probably the main things they don't want. Hassle, lack of value and non-delivery.

And what would hassle be for a client?

That’s a really good question. Hassle would be anything from we can’t get hold of the right person to talk to. We asked for something to be different and it’s proving really difficult to get it to be different. Our job is to make it easy for us to do business with these people, so hassle would be they’re having to work harder than we are to get it to happen (laughter). Our job is to make it easy for them to succeed, not they don’t have to work as hard as we do to get that to happen.

So, in that hassle is there an element of being able to be independent within the client organisation?

How do you mean?

So, being able to do things for yourself as opposed to needing the client to do something?

Yes, and it could also be being proactive with a client, so it could be saying, ‘Look, we’ve thought ahead, we can see that this is coming up, this potentially is something we should think about, so we’ve thought about it. Here are some ideas, here are three options. Have a think about it, let me know what you think’. Rather than then having to think, ‘This is coming up, gosh, this poses some questions, I wonder what we should do. Let’s talk to the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy’. Our job is to be a step ahead of their situation, if we can. If possible.

Okay, great, thank you. So, my last section of questions I suppose is then looking at this question of results and you’ve referred to value versus price previously, so if we think about what your clients are expecting from the work that you’re doing, what are those results that they’re typically looking for?

If I give you one bit of context about that and then I directly answer the question. The context is that the work that we do, along with every other consultancy, and this is true throughout my entire career, is that what we do is one of a number of variables. So, one of the interesting and difficult things in measuring results is how do we ascertain which variables are affecting the situation? You’ll know this as well and better than I do (laughter). I guess this is in some way an interesting part of your work. So, we try to establish with a client early on what are you looking to change as a result of this work and what are the variables that are affecting that and which of those variables are we aiming to effect? What can we measure that will help us to measure that? So, an example would be one client, who at the moment we’re doing a long-term evaluation with, who is looking at the population who participated in a particular academy programme that we ran and the population who didn’t and they’ve been looking at things like retention, promotion, transfers across the business and looking to see, ‘Is there a pattern in those things?’. One of the projects that we completed recently after about four or five years, we did see a pattern there, where people had participated there were more promotions, there were more transversal moves and there was greater retention. Now, can we say we caused that to happen? Honestly, I'm not sure we can with any degree of rigour, but I think we can say it’s certainly a contributing factor. The biggest variable that we would like to be able to measure more is the role of the line manager in imbedding behavioural change and that is a current question, is how could we help to measure that variable?

And how much of that evaluation work is part of what you do as a consultancy and how much of that is done by the clients?

It’s an integral part of our offer to clients, we are very clear from the beginning that we’re in business to create more trusted and engaging leaders and managers, who have a measurable impact on their businesses and who deliver the maximum value. So, we measure immediate evaluation, what happened after the intervention and we then are increasingly developing more subtle measures of mid and longer-term impact. So, we believe we should be evidencing that as we go along and building a body of evidence that we can help to share.

So, in the example that you gave, you’ve focused on people related measures like transfers, retention, promotion etc. What other type of results do your clients look for?

The other type of results that we also measure would be looking at clients’ key performance indicators and how they’ve been impacted. So, again, if I give you an example, one of the things that we measure in our Executive Coaching practice is agreed key performance indicators with that particular individual person, so they will know from the beginning, 'Look, I'm trying to do this', and we'll help them measure how they're doing against that. So, it could be that we measure specific indicators.

In that coaching relationship, could you give me an example of a type of target or goal that might be measured?

No (laughter), but I know somebody who could give you an example of that, but I don't have it in my head so I wouldn't improvise on it.

That's fine. So, they are the results that your client's looking for. As a consultancy are there other results or other measures that you might use to say how well you're doing as a consultancy?

In addition to financial performance, which of course is an important measure because the numbers tell us the story, don't they, they tell us what we're doing and how that might be working. We look at the client feedback on consultants very carefully, both in terms of the learning experience that clients have had and their sense of how well the consultant works with them as a partner and we measure that very seriously. We have quite a rigorous internal process of looking at consultant feedback, with the consultant and with the client. We also look at optimisation of use of consultants, so we look at, 'Okay, which consultants are we working with the most often? How is that working? What projects are they in?'. We try to be as engaging as we can for our consultants, so we also try and look at their satisfaction and we have a lot of engagements, so they measure internally about how the rest of us are, 'Are we okay? How are we doing?', quality-wise but also engagement-wise.

So, going back to the first part of that answer, which is about measuring the client feedback on the particular consultant, how is that measured? How is that feedback gathered?

We will have a conversation with clients regularly to talk about that and that's very open, it's not hidden from the consultant at all, and so the relationship manager, in their normal conversation with a client, will be asking, 'How are things going from your point of view?'. The way that I personally normally do that is before I have a relationship meeting with the client, I'll speak to each consultant on their team, on their delivery team, to understand what intelligence they want to share with a client, how is their satisfaction working on the project, how they feel, and then I will ask the client the same question and then I share with each party so that everybody knows because I think it's important that the consultant team are really working in client work where they are invested in it. They want the client to succeed, so for that to happen the consultant has to be in a good set of conditions too, so part of my role I think is the broking of that mutual investment. Each needs to want the other to succeed, I think.

And do you think those factors of the client relationship and the consultant wanting the client to succeed is what enables the consultant to deliver those results?

I do, yeah, I do, and we have some outstanding consultants and we have a number of consultants who, honestly, if they were on the payroll of that client, in my opinion, they couldn't be working harder for them. They couldn't be more invested in them, which is, hopefully, what we would like people to feel. Not close enough to lose their impartiality but close enough to be invested in success.

Thank you. So, my last question really is about looking towards the future.

That's one of my favourite places (laughter).

How do you see the work of (phone ringing), how do you see the work of consultants working in this field of HRD, how do you see that changing in the future?

Right, I see it becoming absolutely more and more about being a really, really good thinking partner, about being a really good creator of conditions in which internally HRD specialists and other stakeholders have spaces in which they can get creative, take some risks.

Perhaps if I can start that question again, I think it might have frozen. So, how do you see the role of consultancies changing in the future? You said it was about being a thinking …

I think it's going to become, it already has become and its' going to be more and more a really, really high quality thinking partner and I think that will require, again, a combination of sharp thinking, clear thinking, creative thinking and I have an as yet unproven but quite deeply held professional belief that it will be increasingly about the ability to create the right conditions. I think it will become less and less about set specific content and more and more about how do we help them think in ways that work, behave in ways that work, extremely flexibly and I tend to describe that now as what we do when we don't know what to do. I think that, for me, is where I'm very motivated to add value at the moment and I feel that as a profession that is going to be very, very central.

So, how does that influence, do you think, the products that you as the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy sell or the services that you sell?

I think it means that there will probably be more differentiation between certain clear products which you can define as something discrete that you can have, you can see, you can repeat. We have a number of those and I think they work very well and we're developing more of those and I think alongside that will come much more of a pure consulting function, which I think we and I think clients will probably become freer about understanding that just buying time to think and decide stuff will, I think, become in itself an offer. I think that HRD specialists will become more robust about saying to their stakeholders, 'I'm buying this because this valuable to us'. I think they'll feel less apologetic about, 'I have to explain what I'm filling it with and I have to have a certain amount of stuff to put in it'. That's what I think, so I think there'll be those two directions. In the product direction I think products will become already shorter, clearer, more just in time, more specific and very much more how to rather than learn about. I think that already is quite interesting to us, it's not really learn about, it's really learn how to.

And in that pure consultancy, as you were describing, what would that look like for a client do you think?

Again, there's perhaps one example of that, a client in France where they've spent several days of their time and budget for looking at the future and what happened is myself and one other colleague went to spend this time with them and we started with a couple of provocative questions for them and one was, 'If you, as an HRD function, were actually being brought in by your stakeholders, if from this time next year they could buy you in on or not, what needs to happen between now and then for them to be buying you? Let's just set aside everything you're doing right now and just address that single question. If you knew that you could potentially be out of business in a year, what would you do?'. And that was very interesting for them because it gave them a very safe but a very provocative place to look very hard at what they were delivering and what they weren't and they made some quite big changes from that in the way they brought their offer to their internal market.

And where did that conversation take place?

It took place in their office in Paris.

In their offices?

Yeah. So, I think, to answer your question in a more concrete way, what it could look like could be, we consciously want thinking space to address two or three core business questions. What represents value from us as a function? What does that mean in terms of what we deliver and what needs to be different and how do we do it? So, it could produce some quite concrete outputs, it may seem like empty space, but I think it's empty space with framing questions that them produce actions in the business.

So, in that respect whose agenda are you, as consultants, helping to achieve?

The business' agenda because if we as partners to the HRD specialist within the business, if we don't focus on the business' goals and agenda then the work is pointless. I think a big risk that we can help

HRD specialists to avoid is the risk of being well intentioned and yet ultimately entirely internally referencing. It really isn't about, 'What does L&D do? What does L&D need to do? What should L&D do?', it really isn't about any of that (laughter), it really is about, 'What's this business about? What's it trying to do? What customer experiences are you trying to deliver? What do we need to do to serve that?', so we can really help them to stay on that.

Thank you. My very last question, thinking about that future, so how are you personally developing yourself to move into that future work?

Let's think. Well, there are probably two things I'd say, there's an in-work thing and out of work thing, so is it okay if I share both?

Yeah, yeah.

The in-work thing is I'm working with my coach, specifically on future readiness. So, we set as our goal for this set of coaching sessions I'm in at the moment, we've just set that one goal which is for me, personally, as a professional, what does future ready mean? I'm also doing a lot of reading about stuff that will help me to read and think differently and I've chosen a project at work this year where every book that anybody recommends to me I will read. And that has included books that I would have never have remotely been interested in reading and books that I'm very interested in reading. So, that's been interesting. Outside of work I try and do something every year that unsettles me and I think that that is a very important professional development activity at the moment. So, I've done improv classes and I've done music lessons and I've done…, so I'm trying to do something every year that deeply unsettles me as I think the ability to have equilibrium when deeply unsettled is going to be one of the most important skills that we bring in this profession and if we aren't there or we're not trying to get there, we're not much use helping others get there.

And how are you, as a consultancy, developing internally to be ready for that future?

We are completely, if you imagine a series of people on surf boards, this is my analogy, we are a mixture of on our surf boards, falling off our surf boards, we are monitoring the waves, we are over our heads in the water. What we're really doing is looking at how we remain true to our core mission, which is the creation of deeply engaging and trusted leaders and managers. We're part of a Major UK Based Training & Qualifications Provider, the purpose of that group is the generation of socio-economic value, helping people into jobs, to succeed on the job and into the next job. So, we're looking very hard at what products we bring to the market, we're looking at getting the right people in the right roles to deliver that vision, we're looking at how we maintain the commitment and the equilibrium of our professional team to surf that environment and we're doing a lot of listening to clients about what they want, what they need, how they do it. So, a lot actually, a lot.

And is that listening to clients a different activity to the one that you've described previously about getting the regular feedback?

Yes, and I think there are probably a couple of things. I mentioned this prototyping thing earlier on, this is an experiment for us, so we have never done this before. So, you could be talking to me in a year and I could have a lot of egg (laugh) which I could be, wiping a lot of egg off my face but if you don't try, you don't find out, so that's an example where we're taking something to the client in a very, very, very embryonic moment and I don't know what that will be like but we'll find out and we will listen a lot to what comes back from that and that's quite different to something we've done before.

Fantastic. We've come to the end of my questions and I realise there's one question I didn't ask you a little bit earlier, it's the one that you referenced about the role that HRD plays in socio-economic values. Could you say a bit more about that?

Yes, the best way I would describe that would be, and this again is how I see it myself and how I see it in our business, I think that each organisation, you can think of three concentric circles of value, what's happening in the organisation? What's happening in their market place, their customers, their clients? And what's happening in the economies and communities and associate societies they're part of? So, my work and the work I want to contribute in the UK Based Global L&D Consultancy, is to help leadership communities, including HRD specialists, to ask the question, 'How many kinds of value do we generate and how many kinds of value can we generate?'. So, what are our results like as a business? What value do we contribute to the community in the organisation? How do we make that more valuable? How do we bring more value to our clients and customers? Customer experience, how do we make that richer? If we have a sense of corporate social responsibility, what are we doing? Are we doing something about that or is it just we've got a nice mission statement? And the other connection I would like to help leaders to make more deeply is the connection between purpose and engagement. Humans like to be part of something that matters and when they are part of something that matters the engine is switched on, so to me socio-economic value in those three communities means everybody we lead and everybody we work with as a stakeholder has at least one or two things that they feel personally, 'I want this to happen'. What that means is, across the organisation, whether you've got people who are motivated by profit or by commercial success or by making the world a better place, doesn't matter because if you think socio-economic value, everybody on that spectrum has skin in the game. So, part of my job, as I understand it in my career, is simply to be a part of generating that awareness and then asking, me and everybody else, 'Okay, if we want to bring value what should we do?'.

And is that something that your clients are asking you for or is it something that you're bringing into the client?

Again, this is kind of a personal comment, so people may have different views on this, it's something that I personally feel a very, very deep sense of professional intuition about and a very deep personal commitment towards. So, this is my work, this time of my career, and I'm going to be doing it. Some clients are asking to have that conversation and as the Major UK Based Training & Qualifications Provider we have that conversation a lot and I believe that that is going to become a much more important request that we're getting and I think that I want us to be ahead of that.

And is that different, do you think, to other consultancies who are working in the same field?

It's a good question, I don't know. Something I don't do very well, and I don't know whether I need to do it more or not really, I don't necessarily benchmark a lot by what others are doing. I tend to be either led by what I'm hearing and seeing from clients or I tend to be led a lot by my intuition about where I think things are going. I just want to make one Myers Briggs comment. My Myers Briggs preference is ENTP and I think, like a lot of people with that preference, I think a lot about the future and I am quite quick to see a sense of where things are going before they go there and I do believe, in my work, this is somewhere we will be going more.

Thank you very much.

You're welcome, my pleasure.

Francesca, thank you so much for answering all of my questions.

Thank you for inviting me to participate.

Is there anything that we, well we've talked about a lot around the nature of the work and the nature of the client relationship and the results and the future, is there anything that we didn't talk about that you thought we might talk about today?

No, I think you were very clear in what the scope of the work was. I would be really interested and delighted to see any further stages of your work or to see the result or if I can help further.

Fantastic.

You or colleagues, just ask.

Thank you very much.

John Watkins

End of audio