



## HRD Show

Annual survey 2006

A review of current learning and development practice within organisations

19<sup>th</sup> April 2006



**INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL  
OF  
HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT**

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This document represents the interpretation of a qualitative survey construct and does not constitute the provision of professional advice. The International School of Human Capital Management accepts no liability for any outcomes or losses arising from the application of these findings.

# Summary of key findings

The Learning & Development survey provides a 'snapshot' of current practice in organisations around learning & development and its impact within organisations. It was completed by participants at the HRD 2006 show at Olympia, London on 4-6 April 2006, and supplemented by an on-line version, available from April 7-10<sup>th</sup> which was completed by invited respondents sourced from the VaLUENTiS HR professional database. Overall, 278 complete responses were received. Respondents were asked to complete the survey based on their perception of current practice within their own organisation, and had the option of answering from a business-unit or overall perspective. Individual responses remain confidential within this analysis.

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## Current strengths

- Organisations have achieved wide, though not universal, coverage of key HR/people development processes, such as access to training and appraisals
- Learning and development addresses employee effectiveness in current roles as well as being utilised for broader career development
- HR functions are seen as possessing high levels of capability in the areas of employee communications, training & development and resourcing/recruiting.
- Employees appear to have access to the training they need in their organisation, but measurement is patchy and therefore questions both appropriateness and effective spend
- The 'business case' for learning and development is complex and does not appear to be fully established within organisations
- Despite apparent significant HRD efforts, manager 'people-management' skills still appear to contain significant gaps. This perennial problem doesn't seem to be improving. As this is relevant to current expectations, the argument regarding 'the bar being raised' doesn't negate this 'gap'.

## Current areas for enhancement

- Whilst access to training is widespread, many organisations do not maintain up-to-date profiles of development needs, which raises questions around effective targeting
- Evaluation of training and other HRD activity emerges as a clear opportunity, particularly as measurement as an HR functional capability ranked the lowest
- Few HR functions rotate their staff into other functions, or indeed within the HR function itself. This raises the risk of staff remaining in functional 'silos', which impacts on their development and ultimately the effectiveness of the HR function itself.

## Specific insights

- The increasing potential and availability of people-related data provides HR with an opportunity to evaluate outcomes and contribution; but the question remains about HR's capability to take advantage of this

## Broader implications

- The issue regarding management 'base people-competency' still looms large. If the responses are indicative of current practice then this would suggest that there is still an endemic organisational problem
- In light of this, questions are raised regarding HR's drive and accountability of ensuring people management competency in organisations, and whether organisations themselves are serious in this respect
- The lack of HR functional capability in measurement constrains organisations in clarifying the impact of any Learning & Development spend, limiting the ability of the HR function to show the commercial outcome of interventions
- Without clear rationale, training will again be the first to go in any budget tightening exercise, rightly or wrongly.

# Background & Introduction

The Learning & Development survey is intended to provide a 'snapshot' on current practice in organisations around learning & development, its impact within organisations and related aspects of people management.

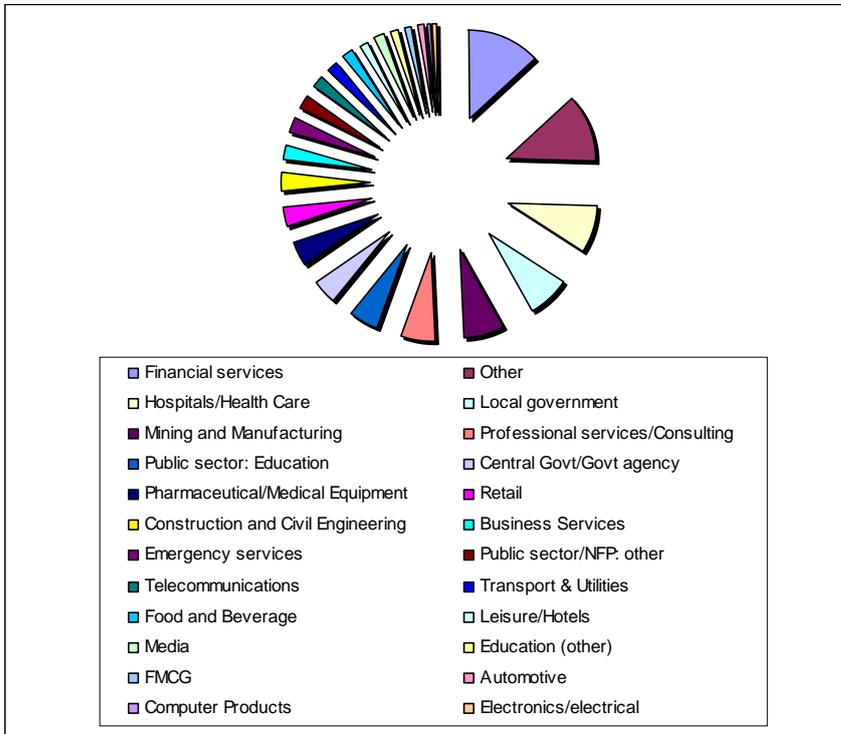
Our aim has been to provide feedback at a general level and raise questions which we believe should be considered by all Learning & Development, and senior HR, professionals.

A set of 62 question-statements, representing aspects of learning and development, was extracted from the more detailed VB-HR™ Rating construct ([www.vbhr.com](http://www.vbhr.com)), which evaluates all aspects of people management practice within organisations.

This survey was completed by participants at the HRD 2006 show at Olympia, London on 4-6 April 2006, on a face-to-face basis. Additionally, HR professionals were given the opportunity to complete an on-line version of the survey from April 7-10<sup>th</sup>. 278 complete responses were received in all.

Respondents were asked to complete the survey based on their perception of current practice within their own organisation, and had the option of answering from a business-unit or overall perspective. Individual responses remain confidential within this analysis.

## Respondent demographics



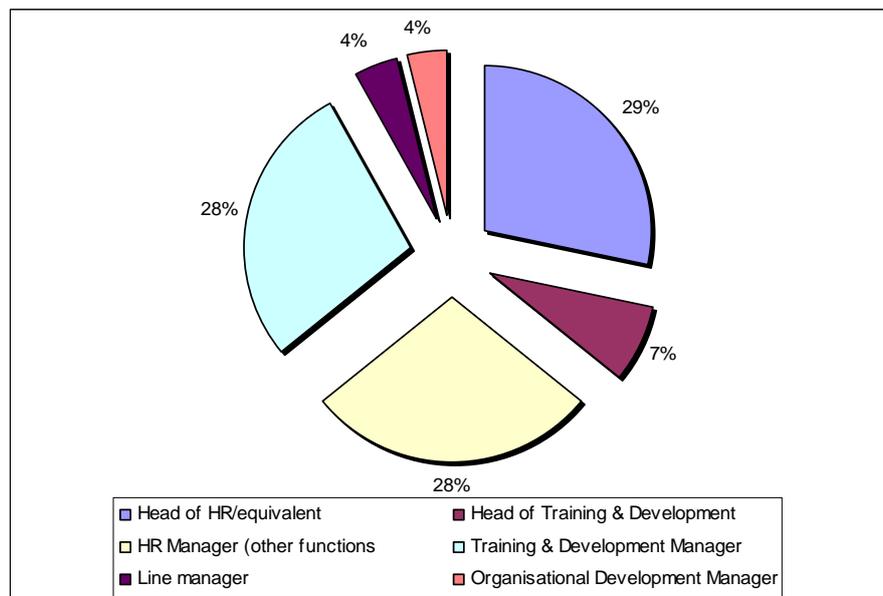
A total of 45 industry sectors were represented.

A breakdown has been provided below, with certain sectoral categories grouped for ease of presentation.

This shows that the largest respondent sectors are:

- Financial services
- Hospitals/Health care
- Local government
- Mining and Manufacturing
- Professional services/Consulting.

- Respondent roles were evenly split between Heads of HR (or equivalent), HR Managers and Training & Development Managers
- Heads of Training & Development, Line Managers and Organisational Development Managers had smaller representation



Organisations represented were primarily UK based with a combination of single and/or multi-divisional organisations operating in one country or multinational organisations with UK operations.

Of the 278 responses, thirteen came from respondents working for organisations based outside the UK.

## Analytical approach

In order to provide an overall assessment of relative strengths and opportunities for enhancement within organisations, the highest and lowest scores have been reviewed.

To add further detail, individual question-statements have been clustered into specific themes, relating to people management and HR functional performance. Due to the nature of the questions and the themes, certain question-statements have been included under multiple themes as relevant.

In general, mean responses have been utilised. A review of the largest respondent sectors has been carried out, and specific insights added where we believe these to be relevant within a separate section of the document, although we would advise caution in the interpretation of these findings in light of the sample sizes.

The analysis themes have been selected on the basis of their relevance to a Learning & Development, and broader HR, audience. These are drawn from the broader evaluative instrument and include:

- Training
- Performance management
- Measurement
- Values/brand
- Development opportunities
- Leadership & management
- Management competencies
- The HR function
- HR function competencies.

## Mean scores: high-level analysis

The highest and lowest mean responses to the survey have been identified, excluding sections relating to management and HR competency (as these have a separate theme).

The review allows us to identify particular strengths and opportunities for enhancement across the respondent populations.

The maximum score to any question-statement was 8, with the minimum being 1. On this scale, any response greater than 4.5 is therefore in 'positive territory'.

# Good practice identified

Table 1 – Top ten highest scoring responses

Rank	Focus of practice	Mean
1	Appraisals and personal development cover all grades and types of staff	6.8
2	Employees have access to the training they need to advance their careers within the organisation	6.2
3	A systematic orientation programme for new hires exists	6.0
4	Does HR incorporate best practice from outside of the organisation?	5.9
5	Employees have a good understanding of how their job contributes to the company achieving its business goals	5.9
6	The degree to which HR understands the organisation and its associated value/cost drivers	5.9
7	The organisation does a good job of valuing diversity of cultural backgrounds, personal styles, and ideas among its employees	5.9
8	Employees have access to the training they need to be productive in their current positions	5.9
9	Does the HR function attract and retain talent?	5.8
10	Management act as positive role models	5.7

## Observations

- Four of the top 10 scores relate to organisational coverage of HR processes relating to appraisals, induction and training provision.
- Despite their top ranking, even the highest scores are lower than we might expect.
- In particular, use of a systematic induction programme is not universal. It may be that this is not seen as a priority by all organisations, or that induction is a matter handled locally. This in turn may raise questions around the quality and consistency of the process.
- Two of the top 10 scores relate to management competence (e.g. in creating employee line of sight and acting as role models). Scores for these, although ranking highly, again rate at levels that would raise questions about consistency within organisations.
- As an illustration, the mean response to 'Management act as positive role models' only rates '...more rather than less of the time', which suggests that there is still a 'knowing-doing' gap in terms of organisation values.
- These observations confirm general effectiveness in organisations at ensuring that key people management processes are at least present (albeit with further work to do).
- Responses, however, raise questions about the effectiveness of these processes from the perspective of their outcomes within the organisation: in particular, scores reflect greater focus on career development rather than immediate productivity. Is this a statistical quirk or more to do with retention management 'plays' at the expense of more immediate concerns?

# Current practice - opportunities for enhancement

Table 2 – Lowest scoring responses

53	Does the organisation benchmark performance of the HR function against other companies?	4.7
54	People have access to appropriate coaching and mentoring support (from colleagues or others) to increase their effectiveness	4.6
55	The organisation suffers from limited opportunities for advancement for all eligible employees	4.6
56	Does HR utilise aspects of marketing in promoting the function/its services?	4.4
57	An up-to-date profile of current employee development needs exists	4.3
58	The organisation monitors and evaluates manager's/employees' productivity	4.2
59	Evaluation of training programmes is based on measurable improvements to business performance	4.1
60	The degree to which HR staff rotate within the HR function	3.4
61	The organisation measures return-on-investment ACCURATELY for all significant HR interventions	2.9
62	The degree to which HR staff rotate outside of HR to other functions/line	2.3

## Observations

- Two of the bottom three and four out of the bottom ten scores relate to the HR function
- Development of HR staff with regard to rotation within and outside the function appears very limited, suggesting a weakness in career development
- It appears that HR functions don't benchmark as much as perhaps we are led to believe, or that they have perhaps realised the limitations of common HR benchmarking
- A particular low score in terms of adapting marketing approaches may be responsible for the continued issue of valued HR contribution; doing a good job is not necessarily enough in corporate terms
- Evaluating the impact of people management practices emerges as a consistent weak area, raising questions around the targeted use of HR spend
- The low score attributed to measurement of employee/manager productivity raises an eyebrow, given the apparent attention measurement has received in the past decade
- The low score attained in assessment of employee development needs implies a 'broken process', particularly in light of the strength of training provision as highlighted earlier.

# Thematic review

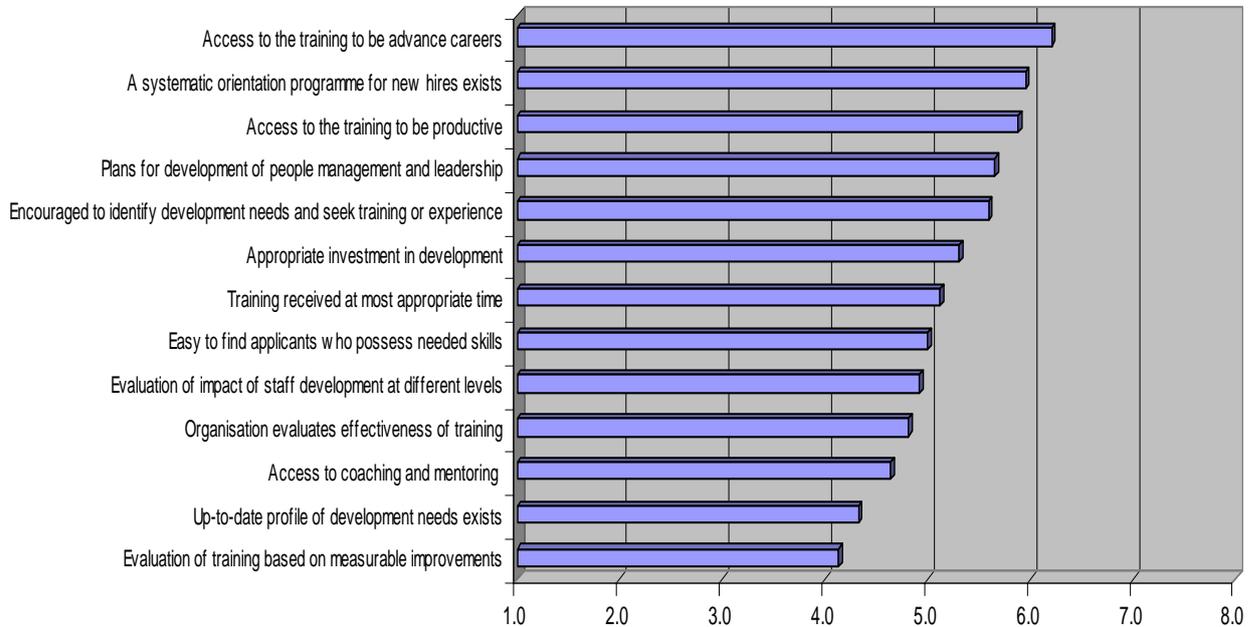
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- Training
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- Measurement
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- The HR function
- HR function competencies.

Please note that certain questions contain a 'duality of perspective' and are therefore repeated in themes where relevant for comparative purposes.

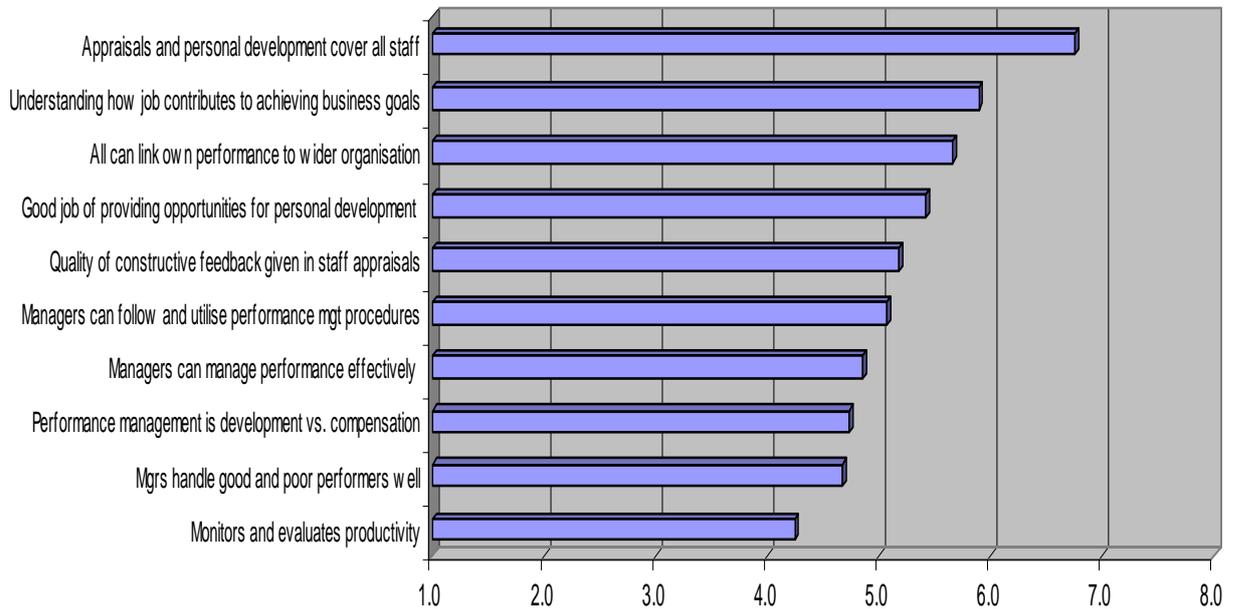
## Thematic review: Training



## Observations

- Responses relating to evaluation of training programmes and the existence of a profile of development needs are around the mid-point, suggesting that these occur in less rather than more cases
- Implications are that “gaps” exist in the training and development process relating both to targeting of development needs and evaluation of training once it has taken place
- HR risks focusing on an input activity (i.e. the delivery of training) rather than ensuring positive outcomes for the organisation
- Responses imply that appropriate investment is made in training ‘to a moderate extent’ only - in view of the responses around evaluation, there is a debatable question around determining an ‘appropriate’ level of investment
- There is scope for HRD functions to improve the effectiveness of their efforts by greater focus on targeting up-front and evaluation
- The response to the question concerning coaching and mentoring support is the lowest-rated training ‘delivery channel’, suggesting that this is not a preferred training option within organisations. It could also imply that the coaching/mentoring panacea has limitations and that it is simply used less.

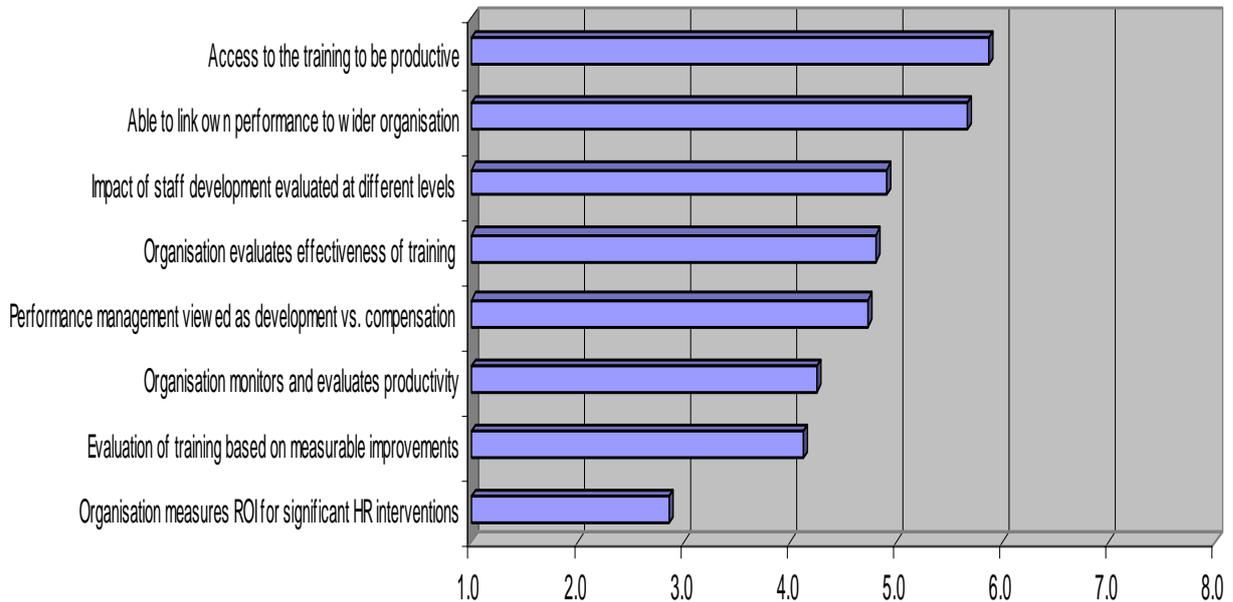
## Thematic review: Performance Management



### Observations

- “Quality of constructive feedback given in staff appraisals” only registers “a moderate extent” in overall score, significantly lower than the score regarding coverage of appraisals. This implies activity of completion (i.e. input) is the focus rather than the outcome (output).
- Evaluation of employee/manager productivity scores the lowest, equating to only a moderate extent: this seriously questions the extent to which organisations are using performance management as a means of ‘managing performance’.
- Three questions relating to manager competence are in the bottom half of the ranking. This implies that the competence of managers is still a relatively “weak area” in the operating environment and thus should be a major focus of HR efforts. The low score could also signify a jaundiced view of management from an HR perspective.
- Overall responses in this area reflect that most organisations have met a “baseline” of established approaches towards performance management
- However, the responses raise some questions around the effectiveness of these systems. If the quality of feedback is mixed, and the organisation is often not evaluating productivity, doubt is cast on the quality of these processes

## Thematic review: Measurement

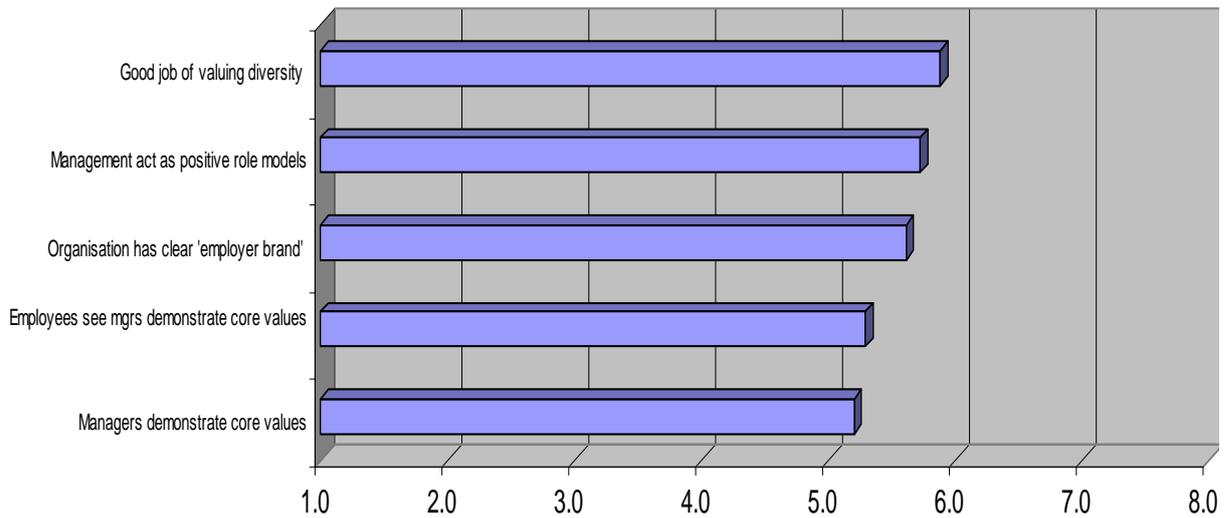


### Observations

- Responses concerning measurement of productivity, improvements as a result of training and ROI score below 4.5, suggesting that they are the exception rather than the norm in organisations.
- The high responses on the issue of being able to link performance to that of the wider organisation is surprising given the low scores in the previous section around measuring productivity.
- The responses indicate that some organisations are evaluating the effectiveness of training in 'more rather than less cases', although scores around links to productivity are lower. This raises the question of what other measures are being used to evaluate training effectiveness<sup>1</sup>.
- There may be some inconsistency in the confidence that employees have access to the training they need to be productive. If organisations are not consistently measuring the effectiveness of training, let alone the direct effect on productivity, is it possible to assess whether employees genuinely have access to the right training, or is there the risk that assumptions are made without appropriate evidence?
- We also note that responses on HR competencies, analysed below, assess 'HR measurement' as the lowest competency.
- The implication could be that measurement is not really done as the organisation, through HR, does not have the expertise.

<sup>1</sup> Despite publications by, amongst others, Kirkpatrick and Easterby-Smith on the evaluation of training, responses suggest that these approaches have not yet been fully internalised within organisations.

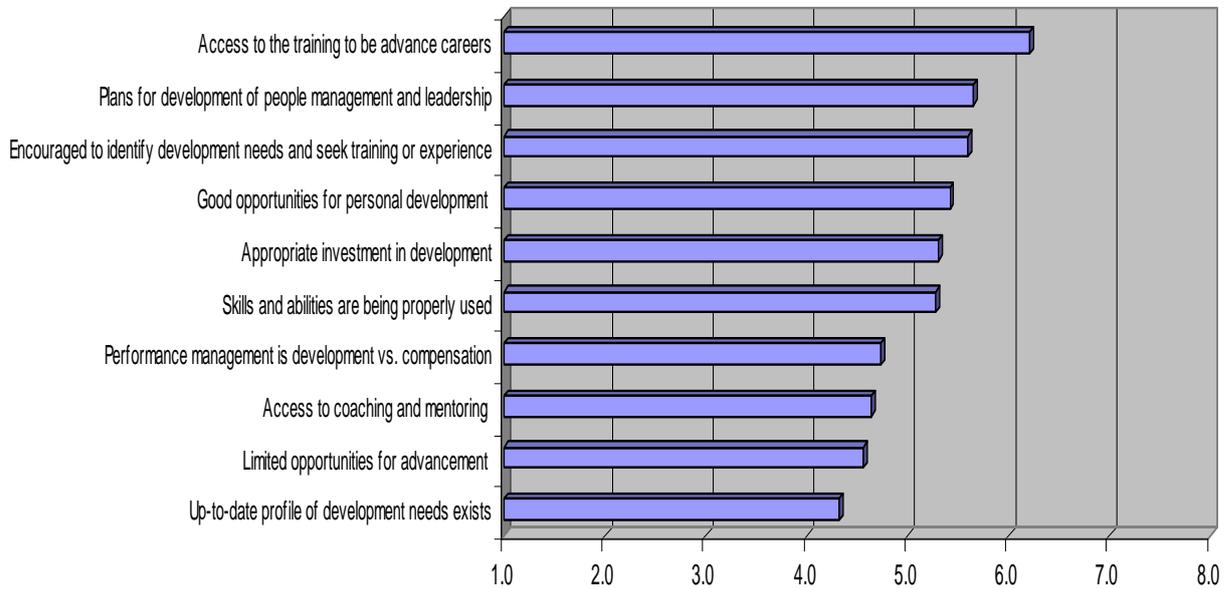
## Thematic review: Values/brand



### Observations

- Questions around diversity, employer brand and managers as role models all score relatively highly, perhaps reflecting areas of recent HR focus. We note, however, that these responses fall some way short of indicating 100% coverage within organisations
- The score for managers as role models is higher than the scores for managers demonstrating core values. This suggests either that core values are not fully internalised within organisations, or that a degree of 'disconnect' exists between actual and intended behaviours
- The implication of this is that displaying core values is not seen as an essential element of manager best practice. Further efforts are required to ensure that any organisational values and the behaviours that these give rise to, are communicated, understood, seen as relevant and applied.

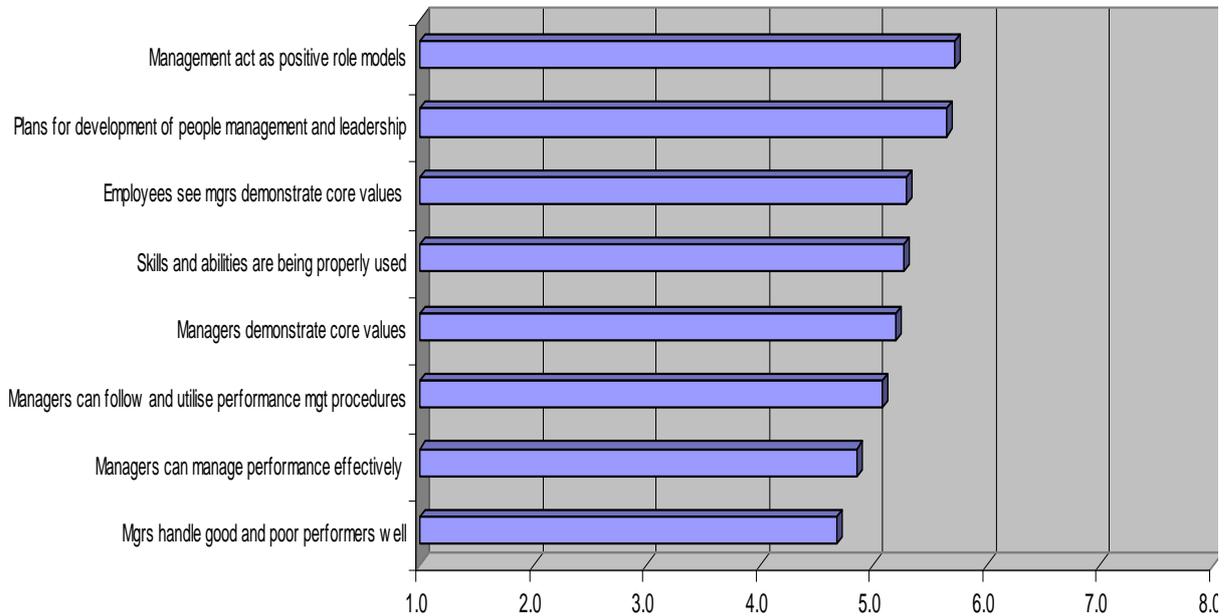
## Thematic review: Development opportunities



### Observations

- Respondents are generally confident that training is available but seem less confident that appropriate investment is being made. It may be that course provision is available, but not being taken up due to budget constraints, or possibly that, although training is available, investment in other forms of development (coaching, mentoring, assignments) is less available
- There is a significant gap between the score for training being available and there being a profile of development needs. Possibly training is available, but not closely targeted to development needs, raising questions around the rationale for training provision within organisations
- The differential between responses relating to relatively low opportunities for advancement, and the relatively high access to training to advance careers is striking. There is a potential risk that organisations are providing levels of developmental training that exceed the opportunities available
- Unless this is integrated within consistent HR policies, this raises the risk either of over-investment in certain areas of training, or the risk of highly-trained employees seeking 'promotion' through joining other organisations within the sector.

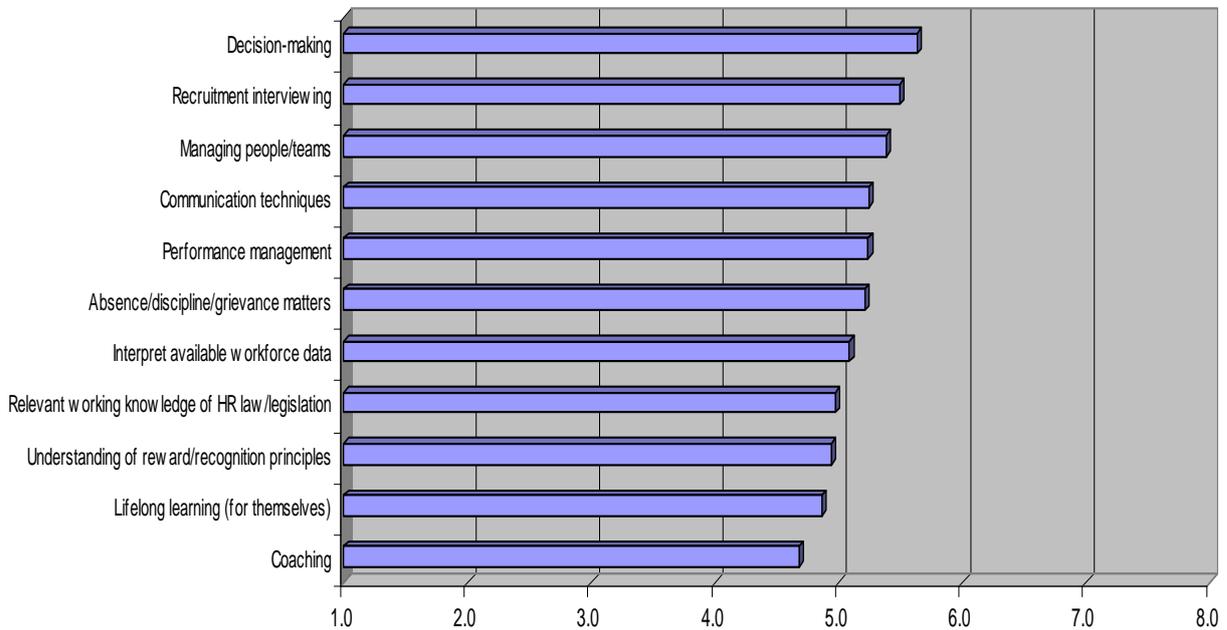
## Thematic review: Leadership & Management



### Observations

- Scores within this theme are relatively consistent, with the lowest responses relating to performance management (see comments noted above in Performance Management)
- The scores here are lower than one might expect. For example, the average response to “managers/employees feel their skills and abilities are being properly used” equate to “more rather than less cases”
- This indicates that performance management is among the weaker managerial skill sets in organisations and should accordingly be a key focus of HR efforts, as noted
- The general scores also imply that, despite the efforts of HR functions, there are still significant general gaps in the manager skill set, at least in the opinion of HR managers
- A significant finding is the low score attributing the managing of good and poor performers well. A common issue of team (& organisational) productivity is the ability to handle this issue. This would suggest that more should be done in this area, given comments already made.

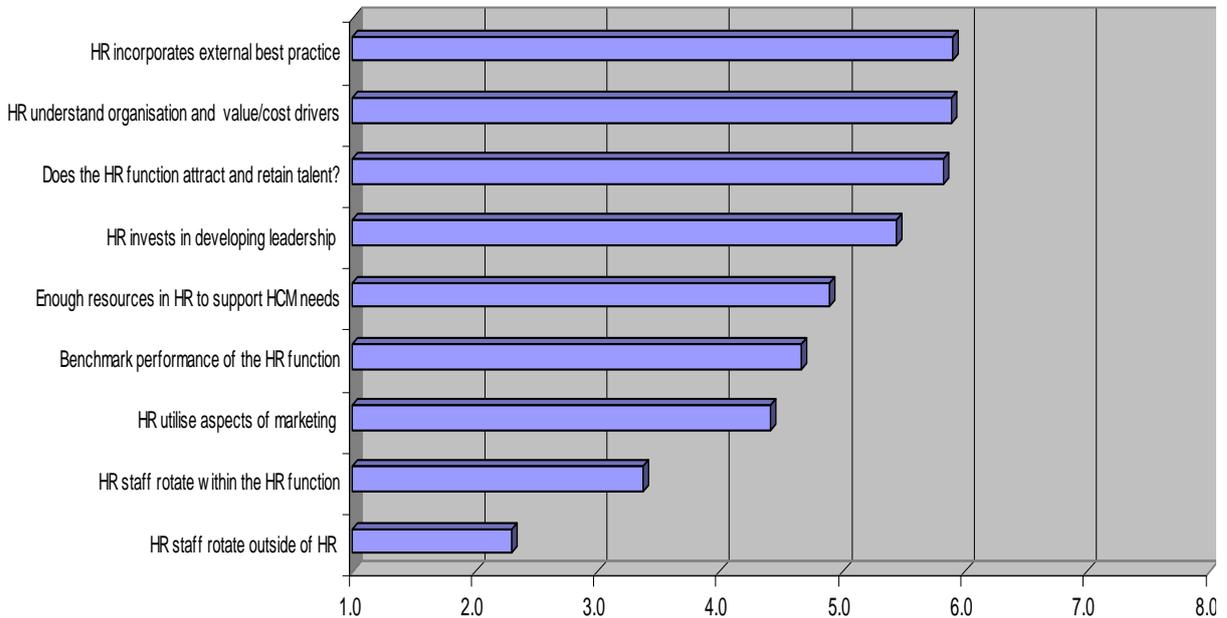
## Thematic review: Management competencies



### Observations

- Overall, these scores are lower than one would like to see, given the focus over the last decade in this area and the annual spend on management development
- These results indicate that HRD professionals in general consider line manager skills to be deficient in some fairly "baseline" areas
- The scores may also reflect HR's harder assessment of managers given their own perspective, and should therefore be taken into account
- A more 'problem comment' is that given the remit and efforts of HR/HRD functions, the question remains as to the overall effectiveness.
- More discerningly, questions have to be raised regarding the seriousness with which organisations are tackling this problem, if these scores are truly reflective of managerial capability in core people management skills.

## Thematic review: HR Function



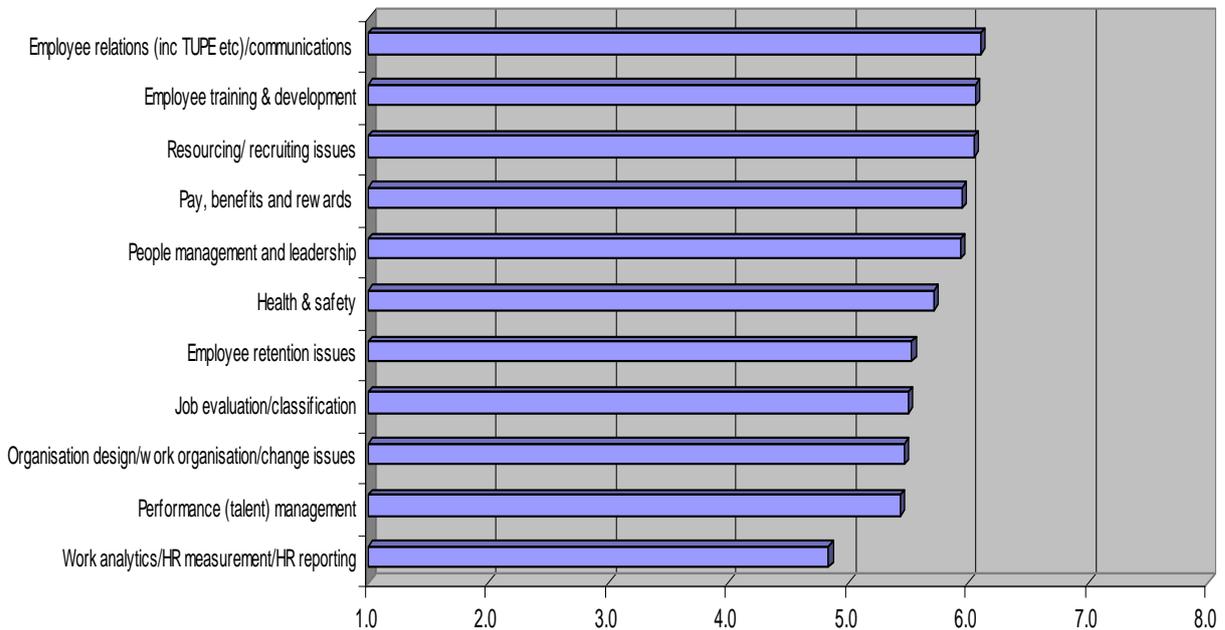
### Observations

- The contrast between the highest and lowest scores above raises some questions. In particular, one could challenge the view that HR staff have a good understanding of their organisations when rotation outside the function is so rare
- The low score for HR staff rotating within the function is even more striking, as this would be regarded as a standard development tool. The implication is that most HR staff remain in 'silos' of one particular expertise or focus
- This raises some questions around whether HR functions genuinely attract and retain talent, and indeed the priority granted to development of their own staff<sup>2</sup> - there is a risk that HR functions may become overly insular and rigid in their structures
- There is also an implication here that, despite believing that they generally adopt best practices from outside the organisation, there is more that could be done to circulate best practice within

respondent organisations and indeed HR functions.

<sup>2</sup> An issue of current relevance – see "Record numbers of junior HR staff leaving over lack of opportunities", Personnel Today, 21 March 2006

## Thematic review: HR Function competencies



### Observations

- These scores are significantly higher than the equivalent scores for manager competencies. The overall average score for manager competency is 5.2, whereas the average for HR competency is 5.7
- This may be a reflection of the fact that the survey was predominantly completed by HR professionals with some in-built 'respondent bias'
- There may be challenge for HR as to why HR functional efforts have not resulted in more competent managers. Indeed, there is a possibility that HR functions are compensating for the shortfalls of managers in people management skills
- As a score of 4.5 equates to "average" performance, these responses also indicate that respondents generally consider their HR functions as 'above average' in these areas
- The ranking of competencies shows continuing dominance of traditional areas of HR activity, with the three highest being employee relations, employee training & development and resourcing/recruiting issues.
- Amongst the lowest scores are competencies relating to HR measurement/reporting, performance (talent) management, organisation design/change issues, which could be viewed as more 'strategic' aspects of HR functional delivery
- Thus, despite extensive publicity around emerging, strategic areas of HR, most HR functions still see their core competencies as belonging in traditional, 'personnel' areas. This challenges the level of organisational impact HR functions currently have, or can hope to have
- In particular, the perception of HR's relatively low competency in use of data raises the risk that other functions, such as Finance, will start to own people-related data as senior managers come to expect greater levels of HR measurement and reporting
- This implies that HR functions run an increased risk of managers within the organisation failing to grasp the full contribution of what the function delivers within the organisation.

# Sectoral review

In order to test the consistency of the survey's findings across sectors, we conducted a specific analysis of responses from the seven sectors most heavily represented in responses. These sectors between them cover 147 responses, which is 53% of the total. These seven sectors are:

- Financial services
- Hospitals/health care
- Local government
- Mining & manufacturing
- Professional services/consulting
- Education (public sector)
- Central government/government agency

In light of the sample sizes and issues in defining each sector, we would advise caution in the over-interpretation and application of these high-level findings.

In general, we did not see significant differences between sectors in comparison with 'all responses' mean scores, and would therefore consider the findings within this document as being generally applicable across sectors.

We have noted below the most significant areas of divergence between the specific sectors reviewed, and survey respondents as a whole.

## Financial services

Question-statement	Sector response	Differential from 'all responses'
The organisation measures ROI <u>accurately</u> for all significant HR interventions	'To a moderate extent'	+1.0
Does HR invest in developing leadership capability within the HR function?	'Moderately effectively'	+0.9
Work analytics/HR measurement/HR reporting (HR competency)	'Moderately high'	+0.9

- Responses within Financial services were generally higher in comparison to 'all responses'
- Companies in this sector rate themselves relatively highly in measuring ROI and HR competence with data manipulation: this could be linked to the nature of the business, which is highly data-driven

## Hospitals/health care

Question-statement	Sector response	Differential from 'all responses'
An up-to-date profile of current employee development needs exists	'To some extent'	-1.3
Appropriate level of investment is made in staff development to meet identified needs	'To a moderate extent (low)'	-1.2
The organisation monitors and evaluates manager's/employees' productivity	'To some extent'	-1.1

- Responses within Hospitals/health care were lower in comparison to 'all responses'
- The responses suggest particular issues around identifying and meeting development needs, which may be attributable to the nature of the work or HR scale constraints/ priorities
- We note that challenges in evaluating productivity in this sector have been well documented recently

## Local government

Question-statement	Sector response	Differential from 'all responses'
There are enough resources in the corporate HR function to support our human capital management needs	'Disagree more than agree'	-0.7
An up-to-date profile of current employee development needs exists	'To a moderate extent (high)'	+0.7
Does the organisation benchmark performance of the HR function against other companies?	'More effective than ineffective'	+0.6
Appropriate level of investment is made in staff development to meet identified needs	'To a large extent'	+0.6

- Responses within Local government were broadly similar to 'all responses' overall
- Respondents believe their HR functions to be less well resourced than others, although this does not seem to have had a significant impact on assessments of manager or HR competencies, suggesting efficient use of available resource
- Other divergences show this sector as more likely to use benchmarking, maintain development profiles and invest in development than others, suggesting a particular focus on workforce and HR development

## Mining & manufacturing

Question-statement	Sector response	Differential from 'all responses'
Appraisals and personal development cover all grades and types of staff	'To a moderate extent'	-1.7
Work analytics/HR measurement/HR reporting (HR competency)	'Lower than average'	-1.0
Health & safety (HR competency)	'Very high'	-0.9

- Responses within Mining & manufacturing were broadly similar to 'all responses' overall
- Coverage of performance management appraisals is significantly lower than other sectors, although the impact this appears to have on other performance management-related questions is limited, suggesting a reliance on 'informal' approaches
- Companies in this sector rate themselves lower in use of workforce data than others and, not surprisingly, have a high HR functional capability in health & safety

## Professional/business services

Question-statement	Sector response	Differential from 'all responses'
Does the organisation benchmark performance of the HR function against other companies?	'Moderately ineffectively'	-1.3
The organisation monitors and evaluates manager's/employees' productivity	'To a moderate extent (high)'	+1.2
It is usually fairly easy to find applicants who possess the skills this organisation most needs to remain competitive/effective	'Disagree more than agree'	-1.1
Absence/discipline/grievance matters? (manager competence)	'More ineffective than effective'	-1.0

- Not surprisingly, the monitoring of productivity is a particular focus, as this is generally linked to revenue generation within the operating model
- The low scores on absence/discipline/grievance management may reflect the sector's traditional focus on revenue generation from managers, rather than people-management aspects of line management
- The limited use of HR functional benchmarking suggests either limited organisational focus on HR performance, or a belief that approaches are highly customised to the individual organisation

## Higher education

Question-statement	Sector response	Differential from 'all responses'
The organisation monitors and evaluates manager's/employees' productivity	'To some extent'	-1.4
Evaluation of training programmes is based on measurable improvements to business performance	'In some cases'	-1.3
The organisation measures return-on-investment ACCURATELY for all significant HR interventions	'To some extent (low)'	-1.2

- Responses within Higher Education were lower in comparison to 'all responses'
- The three biggest "gaps" noted above all relate to measurement and evaluation, suggesting that this sector contains particularly significant opportunities for improving targeting and value gained from HRD spend
- Responses also reflect inherent difficulties in measuring productive output within this sector

## Central government/government agency

Question-statement	Sector response	Differential from 'all responses'
Employees are encouraged to identify their own development needs and seek out the necessary training or on the job experience	'In most cases (high)'	+1.3
Employees have access to the training they need to be productive in their current positions	'In most cases (high)'	+1.1
Appropriate level of investment is made in staff development to meet identified needs	'To a large extent'	+1.1

- Responses within Central Government/ Government Agency were above 'all responses', possibly reflecting recent investment in people management approaches
- Responses suggest a particular focus on employee training and development: this suggests an acknowledgement on the high reliance within this sector on employees to deliver organisational objectives and KPIs

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