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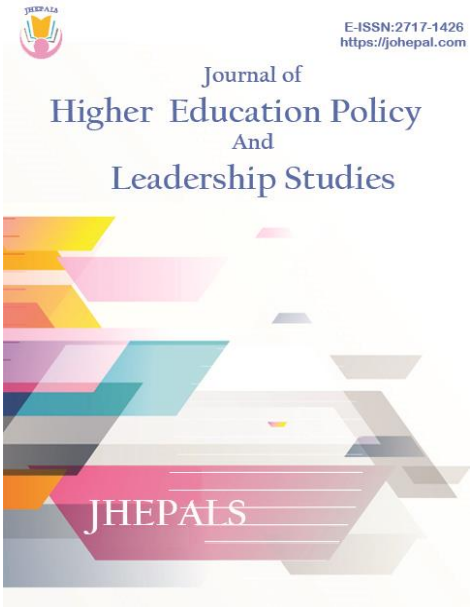
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An Exploratory Study of Educational Pathways in Policy and Leadership Among Successful Chief Human Resources Officers



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An Exploratory Study of Educational Pathways in Policy and Leadership Among Successful Chief Human Resources Officers

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Abstract

The leadership performance and effectiveness of the Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO) are indispensable sources for a higher education organization's success. Despite a wealth of information available regarding the historical roles and functions of CHRO administrators, a notable gap exists in understanding the contemporary challenges they confront within the rapidly evolving landscape of organizational work environments. Employing a qualitative statistical approach, we conducted in-depth interviews with 21 CHROs spanning various countries. Complementing these insights, we drew upon our professional experience as management consultants, engaging with organizations where we closely observed the roles and functions of CHROs. The synthesis of our findings, derived from firsthand accounts of CHROs and our expertise, reveals a comprehensive understanding of the indispensable knowledge, skills, and policy-making abilities required for success. Furthermore, our study sheds light on the most prevalent challenges that CHROs encounter as they navigate the complexities inherent in higher education.

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Keywords: Chief Human Resources Officer; Higher Education; Critical Knowledge Skills; Organizations; Educational Pathways

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Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) encompasses the comprehensive management of all facets of people management to meet an organization's strategic goals effectively. In the dynamic landscape of today's rapidly changing global market, successful organizations recognize the value of leveraging all available resources, with a particular emphasis on human capital, as an integral component of their human resource framework, crucial for organizational success. The CHRO's role has evolved into a pivotal position within organizations that proactively embrace change in the global market. A contemporary understanding underscores the CHRO's responsibility not only to stay abreast of the ever-evolving elements of human resource management but also to function as a liaison with organizational management, advocating for the well-being and interests of employees and also working to effectuate strategic resource management (where part of their role is working to increase organizational performance through their focus) (Milligan, 2018; Joubert, 2024). Consequently, human resources management departments assume heightened significance in diverse sectors, including businesses, organizations, and educational institutions (Joubert, 2024).

The primary objective of our research was to delve into the critical knowledge skills and experiences that are requisite for a highly effective CHRO. Concurrently, the challenges that must be navigated for a successful career will be explored. These practices and experiences will be evaluated within the context of what has been identified in the extant literature as necessary for high-performing CHROs. The insights derived from our study carry substantial implications for human resource management professionals aspiring to attain the role of a successful CHRO. Additionally, our study aims to explore avenues for enhancing human resource management practices in this context. This endeavor involves collecting qualitative data from twenty-one CHROs across various organizations.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework of this research draws from extensive literature in human resource management, which explains the intricate relationship between an organization's internal characteristics and its practices. Tracing the roots of HRM back to the early 1910s, when it was initially coined as personnel administration, underscores the historical evolution that has fundamentally shaped the HRM profession (Price, 2011; Ashdown, 2014). Over the years, the HRM profession has undergone significant transformations, responding to the dynamic needs of organizations (Valentine et al., 2020). As the profession became more ingrained in organizational processes, the evolution necessitated an expanded role for personnel functions, aligning HRM activities with organizational requirements such as talent management, capabilities, experience, professional expertise, and relationship management (Foulkes, 1975; Wright & Ulrich, 2017; Valentine et al., 2020). The advent of computers and software in the 1990s marked a pivotal shift from traditional personnel management to HRM roles, prompting human resource managers to adapt to new technological dimensions (Rafter, 2012; Ashdown, 2014). Concurrently, strategic mandates propelled HRM to anticipate and prepare for organizational shifts (Kovach & Pearce II, 1990). Thus, the traditional role of HRM professionals, focused on reactive tasks without

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comprehensive training, has given way to a more strategic and proactive stance in today's dynamic HRM landscape (Purdue University, 2021; Yu et al., 2022). Besides foundational HRM knowledge, highly successful HRM professionals require a diverse skill set, including interpersonal skills and a willingness to apply these skills (Ansari, 2021.

The CHRO's role within this dynamic context extends beyond keeping pace with HRM trends; CHROs must act as bridges between management and employees, championing the interests of the workforce (Joubert, 2024). This growing prominence of HRM is observed globally, with human resources management departments assuming more significant roles in diverse sectors (Joubert, 2024). Aligning with the 21st-century paradigm, organizations and HR professionals respond to models like the Ulrich Model for Future Strategic Focus, emphasizing the need to reconcile the diverse interests of organizational stakeholders (Ashdown, 2014; Wright & Ulrich, 2017; Nicholson, n.d.). Understanding the requisite functions for success as a CHRO in the 21st century is paramount, considering the historical shift in HRM roles and the evolving nature of the profession (Magsig, 2019). In contrast to traditional HRM roles centered on record-keeping and compliance, the contemporary CHRO is tasked with a proactive and strategic role, necessitating a diverse skill set that includes leadership skills based on values, philosophy, and a sense of mission (Purdue University, 2021). The theoretical propositions posited in this context require empirical validation, both operationally and academically, to ascertain which HRM competencies will drive organizational effectiveness in the foreseeable future.

Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in shaping CHRO professionals, offering degree programs designed to prepare individuals for excellence in HRM roles. These programs encompass a range of areas, including workforce planning, labor management, compensation and benefits, employment law, and employee development. Practical exposure through internships complements theoretical learning, providing a contextual understanding of HRM concepts. The emphasis is on fostering an appreciation for the HRM career field as a core competency crucial for organizational success. Notably, distinctions exist between personnel management and HRM degrees, with the former focusing on administrative functions and the latter emphasizing the value of employees as assets for organizational success (Surbhi, 2022; Chadwick, 2005). However, specific HRM practices integral for practical application in organizational systems, both now and in the future, remain a topic of ongoing exploration.

In conclusion, delineating the functions requisite for success as a CHRO in the 21st-century global market is critical for aspiring professionals. The organization's HRM department must be adequately staffed to navigate the evolving landscape adeptly (Society for Human Resources, 2023). CHROs, serving as strategic advocates for employees and adept navigators of HRM trends, play a pivotal role in the contemporary organizational milieu (Joubert, 2024).

Research Methodology

Purpose of the Study

In addition to examining the theoretical background, there is a compelling need to unravel the intricacies that propel CHROs to achieve notable success within organizations amidst the

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complex backdrop of global economic and political dynamics. CHROs attaining success is not an arbitrary outcome, as emphasized by (Reeves, 2023). Consequently, our study aims to offer valuable insights for practitioners and educators, shedding light on the crucial knowledge skills required for individuals aspiring to assume the pivotal role of a CHRO within a global context, both currently and in the foreseeable future.

Research Questions:

The present study's research questions are as follows:

- RQ_1: From your experience, what Critical Knowledge Skills are indispensable for a CHRO to succeed in the organization? Give examples.
- RQ_2: Were there any barriers/challenges to advancing to your current position, such as work-life balance issues, discrimination, lack of mentoring, education, experience requirements, etc.? If so, briefly explain.

Data Collection

The data collection phase of this study spanned a two-year timeframe, during which participants willingly engaged in the research process. Notably, subjects were explicitly informed about the nature of the study, involving the solicitation of insights into their on-the-job activities prior to their involvement. This proactive disclosure allowed participants to decline participation or discontinue the interview at any juncture, allowing them to opt out of the study entirely and withdraw from our sample set. The study involved interviews with a total of twenty-one successful CHROs representing diverse sectors, including healthcare, finance, information technology (IT), technology services, government, defense, military, transportation, retail, construction, and organizations from both the profit and nonprofit sectors.

Statistical Measures

This qualitative study employed structured interviews to explore how CHROs achieved notable success within organizations amidst the complex backdrop of global economic and political dynamics. Consequently, the qualitative approach facilitated a comprehensive examination of CHROs' opinions and experiences, providing a rich understanding of their views (Rahman, 2016). Moreover, as highlighted by Soegoto and Eliana (2018), a qualitative approach is instrumental in extracting ideas and opinions to gain insights into the study's objectives. The present study conducted a two-year longitudinal qualitative interview investigation, yielding detailed descriptions of participants' sentiments, opinions, and experiences. This approach provided a flexible structure that could be constructed and reconstructed to a greater extent, enabling a nuanced exploration of the subject matter. In this context, qualitative data analysis is inductive, prioritizing the extraction of meaning over generalization. Given the study's objectives and the inherent nature of the research questions, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate.

Research Findings

Insights from our research interviews with CHROs underscored the importance of considering organizational size, industry specifics, non-profit status, geographical locations,

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and unionization status when addressing the initial research question. The predominant responses consistently articulated by participants in the current study are integral to achieving success for a CHRO. Subsequently, the ensuing discussion centers on exploring the research questions posed in our study. The outcomes of our research underscore the critical mandate for CHROs to embody a profound sense of responsibility and cultivate a well-rounded, critical knowledge skill set. This proficiency is indispensable for adeptly guiding the human resources functions within an organization, thereby making a substantial contribution to its overarching success. As well, our findings also underscore the need for CHROs to demonstrate professional proficiency, characterized by a mastery of relevant hard and soft skills and measurable critical knowledge skills. These critical knowledge skills include, but are not limited to, strategic thinking, effective decision-making, and a comprehensive understanding of various HRM function areas. Moreover, our investigative endeavors have highlighted that CHROs must adeptly navigate a spectrum of interpersonal skills, encompassing proficiency in areas such as people skills, interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, leadership, and adaptability.

Research Question 1:

From your experience, what Critical Knowledge Skills are indispensable for a CHRO to succeed in the organization? Give examples. See Table 1 for top responses.

Table 1.
Top Responses and Rankings from Interviews

Ranking	HR Hard Skills
1	Strategic Thinking
2	Decision Making
3	Understanding Function Areas

Strategic Thinking:

In contemporary business circles, a prevailing stereotype persists among professionals that CHROs are not inherently tasked with the strategic responsibilities of an organization (Burjek, 2020). However, recent developments indicate a shifting paradigm, with the HRM department progressively assuming a more integral role in aligning with an organization's overarching business objectives (Society for Human Resources, 2023; Wright & Ulrich, 2017). The imperative to synchronize HRM functions with the broader business strategy has gained recognition. In our research, CHROs who participated in our study underscored their indispensable contribution to the strategic processes within their organizations, ensuring alignment with the mission and goals. When collaborating with other organizational leaders, CHROs play a pivotal role in continuously reassessing organizational plans, thereby enhancing competitiveness and sustaining success. Their focus is refining processes, elevating product and service quality, and optimizing overall performance.

The contemporary CHRO is expected to possess a strategic mindset, leveraging internal and external information, data, and professional networks. The proficiency to analyze and interpret data, discern emerging trends, and anticipate future organizational needs is deemed essential. As highlighted by others (Society for Human Resources, 2023;

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Martin, 2021), these competencies are instrumental in supporting an organization's mission and strategy, establishing the CHRO as a key architect in the pursuit of sustained success. The following are examples of the interview responses:

> CHRO Interviewee: A CHRO needs to be able to understand and then discuss with a strategic mindset, 5-10 10-year plans, budgets, organizational changes, and difficult employment decisions.
> CHRO Interviewee: In essence, I was a strategic member of the company's leadership team in adjusting to the ever-changing business environment.

Decision Making:

Our research interviews underscored the imperative for highly effective CHROs to navigate decision-making processes, prioritizing the collective interests of organizational leadership, employees, and other significant stakeholders. The responsibilities inherent in the CHRO role often involve:

- Confronting wicked problems and situations.
- Navigating periods of organizational adaptive change.
- Managing the potential adverse reactions of employees.

Consequently, CHROs are tasked with the discernment required to make optimal decisions, even when all available options entail varying degrees of sacrifice from one party or another. In the dynamic landscape of organizational leadership, CHROs frequently find themselves having to make critical decisions when others may be unable or unwilling to do so. This underscores the crucial role CHROs play in promoting organizational resilience and ensuring that decisions align with the organization's overarching interests, its leadership, and its workforce. The following are examples of the interview responses:

> CHRO Interviewee: Decision-making needs to be thoughtful and based on facts. HR is often referred to as the people department, which differs from the organization's business side. Sometimes, decisions based on people are not always best for the business side. You must find a balance. A good example is current events in HR. Employees are leaving their current jobs for much higher wages. The HR department wants to increase the salaries of current employees to help with retention. The business side of the organization cannot absorb a significant pay increase. Another vital part of the decision-making skill is that once a decision is made, you must stick to it. Do not let opposers influence your decision once it is made. Make decisions to do the right thing.
> CHRO Interviewee: You must be willing to accept the consequences for the decisions that are being made. There could be financial and/or legal implications to decisions.

Comprehensive Understanding of HRM Functional Areas:

Proficiency in understanding functional areas is deemed essential for CHROs to effectively oversee the formulation and implementation of organizational policies and human resource functions. This emphasis aligns with the imperative for CHROs to showcase a robust

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command of practical business acumen, encompassing a profound comprehension of their organization's operations, functions, and the broader environmental context within which the organization operates (Jones, 2016). The following are examples of the interview responses:

> CHRO Interviewee: Although you may not be the one preparing the spreadsheet or writing the recruiting ad, you need to know how to do this. I have had to step in frequently in a staff member's absence and complete the job.
> CHRO Interviewee: Be prepared to do things that are not in the job description, especially if you are in a small company or organization.

Table 2.
Top Responses and Rankings from Interviews

Ranking	HR Soft Skills
1	People Skills
2	Effective Communication
3	Conflict Management Skills
4	Leadership Skills
5	Adaptability Skills

Our interviewees unanimously underscored the indispensability of soft interpersonal skills for achieving success in the CHRO role (See Table 2). Ascending the hierarchical ladder within a CHRO career trajectory would prove exceedingly challenging without demonstrable proficiency in people skills, which are inherently reliant upon the mastery of soft interpersonal skills (Hilton, 2017). Empirical evidence reveals a prevalent occurrence wherein individuals are elevated to managerial positions based solely on their past achievements in hard HRM skills, yet without substantiated capability in team leadership. This phenomenon, identified as the Peter Principle, elucidates the tendency for individuals to be promoted to roles surpassing their aptitudes (Grant, 2023).

People Skills:

The most frequently mentioned soft skill among CHRO interviewees was people skills. This is corroborated by an extensive five-year investigation conducted by the Stanford Research Institute, Harvard University, and the Carnegie Foundation, which uncovered that a substantial 85% of an individual's success in the professional realm can be directly attributed to their adept people skills. This significance becomes evident when CHROs engage with the organization's workforce, stakeholders, and collaborators, thereby making a significant contribution to the organization's overall success (Bishop, 2024). In our investigation, respondents emphasized the crucial role of CHROs possessing a nuanced understanding of the science underlying interpersonal skills. These non-technical, soft skills are employed by CHROs to enhance communication and foster positive relationships, ensuring effective collaboration and productivity across employees of diverse age groups, ethnic backgrounds, and genders. A comprehensive approach to people skills requires the CHRO's managerial

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expertise and experience, as well as a keen awareness of the organization's workforce needs and preferences.

Moreover, our interviews revealed a consensus among high-performing CHROs regarding the indispensable nature of robust people skills, a sentiment supported by the Australian Institute of Management's 2019 Leadership Survey. This survey emphasized the significance of people skills, ranking them higher than traditionally esteemed leadership hard skills such as financial management and data analysis (Poulsen, n.d.). CHROs, as highlighted in our interviews, prioritize serving the people within the organization, underscoring the critical importance of refining people skills to accomplish their duties. The following are examples of the interview responses:

> CHRO Interviewee: You do not need to like people. You need to be good with people. There is a difference. I disliked many people in my career, but they never knew it. You need to empathize with people and be aware of those who are unkind, dishonest, rude, and cruel. My gut always told me how to respond to people. Different people need different kinds of leadership.
> CHRO Interviewee: Empathetic: Be sensitive to unique perspectives and needs. Surround yourself with people to remind you to be empathetic when making decisions. Be confident. You will not always be popular.

Communication Skills:

To cultivate robust relationships with stakeholders at all organizational levels, including senior executives, managers, and employees, a CHRO must demonstrate exceptional communication skills and be adept at conveying intricate information with clarity and conciseness. Effective communication is a cornerstone of the CHRO's success and is integral to the organization's vitality. To succeed, CHROs must meticulously orchestrate a comprehensive communication plan that addresses interactions with the organization's employees and other key stakeholders. Given the daily interactions with diverse individuals and entities, effective communication is imperative for a CHRO (Pollack, 2024). A formal and comprehensive communication plan enables CHROs to maintain clarity and precision, ensuring that all stakeholders comprehend the contextual nuances of supportive communications, fostering trust, and enhancing productivity. Recognizing that effective communication facilitates the transmission of information from the organizational apex to its foundation, CHROs emphasized the importance of clear messaging to prevent conflicts or misunderstandings.

While listening may not always be explicitly outlined in a CHRO's job description, it remains a critical aspect of effective communication. A study by Emtrain (2020) revealed that one in ten employees expressed skepticism about their leaders taking their concerns seriously. This lack of trust can undermine employees' sense of support and impact their performance. CHROs who prioritizing effective listening gain deeper insights into organizational challenges, enabling prompt problem resolution. Effective listening, encompassing nonverbal cues and empathy, communicates to employees that they are valued. Moreover, though challenging, feedback holds the potential for profound and enduring impacts on an organization. Psychologists assert that a leader's response to an employee is pivotal, signifying understanding and care (Bernstein, 2022). Our professional

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experience as management consultants has revealed instances of employees expressing reservations about ostensibly open-door policies, emphasizing the importance of actual approachability rather than mere policy declarations. The following are examples of the interview responses:

> CHRO Interviewee: You must differentiate the message and delivery system that are conducive to your audience. For example, how you communicate with top executives differs from how you communicate with the employees. You have to balance the details in each message. Some executives want details, and others like the highlights. Communication must be constructed in a way to achieve buy-in.
>
> CHRO Interviewee: How you interact with all levels of employees is essential. And how you communicate with those employees is vital. You must be able to write clearly. You must possess critical listening skills, engage in honest conversations with everyone, and understand others' perspectives. Then focus on a solution.

Conflict Management Skills:

Conflict management mastery is a pivotal skill for a CHRO, given the organizational framework's inherent diversity across generations, cultures, and backgrounds. Successful conflict management necessitates collaborative efforts from organizational leaders, employees, and other stakeholders. Notably, conflicts are inevitable due to factors such as limited resources, divergent work styles, conflicting schedules, disparate priorities, varying personalities, and differing technical opinions (Caesens et al., 2019).

Given this landscape, CHROs assume a central role in fostering collaborative approaches to maintain conflicts at a functional level and prevent their escalation into dysfunctionality. CHROS must orchestrate efforts that not only address conflicts but also transform them into opportunities for growth and understanding. When employees, managers, and stakeholders encounter challenges in resolving dysfunctional conflicts autonomously, they may turn to the HRM department for resolution. Consequently, the adeptness of a CHRO in conflict resolution becomes indispensable for an organization's overall success. By proactively and diplomatically engaging in conflict management, CHROs contribute to a harmonious organizational work environment, thereby fortifying the foundation for organizational prosperity. The following are examples of the interview responses:

> CHRO Interviewee: You must have grace and be honest. These are essential when approaching uncomfortable situations like exit interviews, grievances, and salary negotiations and help keep a balanced work environment. However, three times in my career, I had to push back and have very heated discussions with 1. My manager, and 2. A manager whom I supported in organization 3. A senior manager. Difficult, tears (not in public), but you know what? There was respect after. Never get pushed around. There is a diplomatic way to handle these situations, and you must, or they will continue their unacceptable behavior toward you.

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Chief Human Resource Officers

> CHRO Interviewee: You must be willing to accept the consequences for the decisions that are being made. There could be financial and/or legal implications to decisions.

Leadership Skills:

Attaining success as a CHRO necessitates robust leadership qualities that empower them to influence organizational employees and ensure that their contributions are acknowledged and valued. A fundamental aspect of effective leadership is emotional intelligence (EI), which has been proven to be a valuable asset that leaders want to develop in themselves and their team members. A highly simplified definition of EI is the ability to function effectively under stress or in difficult situations. It is also an understanding or awareness of how our behaviors impact the people around us. Research shows that 90% of top performers have high EI. Additionally, cultivating empathy involves comprehending situations from the employee's standpoint, understanding their emotions, thoughts, and actions, and envisioning their experiences (Conti, 2022). LinkedIn's Global Talent Trends 2020 report underscores the importance of empathy in leadership, identifying it as a pivotal trend in organizational leadership for the coming decade. Consideration must be given to the pivotal question: Does an organizational workforce thrive when led by a CHRO lacking empathy? The Global Talent Trends 2020 report highlights employee dissatisfaction in the absence of empathy in the workplace, leading to demotivation and adverse performance outcomes (Blaschka, 2020). Over time, a dearth of empathy towards organizational employees can precipitate a loss of human resources, as Ansari (2021) emphasized. Therefore, recognizing and integrating empathy into leadership practices is a strategic imperative and a proactive measure to foster a motivated and high-performing team, thereby safeguarding the organization's human capital. The following are examples of the interview responses:

> CHRO Interviewee: You need to be able to pull a thread because you can't push a thread. You need to be seen doing the hard things so that when you ask someone to follow you, they know you have their best interests at heart and will do it with them.
>
> CHRO Interviewee: You must be trustworthy. This is earned. If you fail once, you will not be successful in your duties. You must use discretion. HR handles personal data. You need to keep it as if it's your own.

Adaptability Skills:

The ability to guide an organization through dynamic phases of change and transformation has become paramount in today's competitive and rapidly shifting business environment. Change management is not confined to a single team; it permeates across departments and affects every facet of an organization. A CHRO, equipped with proficiency in change management, becomes a linchpin in orchestrating smooth transitions, fostering a culture of adaptability, and aligning the workforce with the organization's strategic goals. By embracing change management as a core competency, CHROs contribute significantly to the organization's resilience and long-term success. The dynamic nature of the business landscape demands leaders who can respond to change and proactively drive and shape it.

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Therefore, the CHRO's proficiency in change management emerges as a key differentiator in ensuring organizational agility and sustainability in an era of continual adaptability (Congi, 2024). The following are examples of the interview responses:

> CHRO Interviewee: You must be agile, flexible, and open to change management. HR is typically the communicator of change to the employees. If you are not on board, it will show. You also need to be able to take risks and try new things. No one got ahead in any company that I worked with without this.
> CHRO Interviewee: At my company, I am consistently looking for opportunities to enhance the organization's bottom line while not negatively impacting the employees.

Research Question 2:

Have you encountered any obstacles or challenges in progressing to your current position, such as issues related to work-life balance, discrimination, a shortage of mentorship, educational or experiential prerequisites, among others? If affirmative, kindly briefly explain how you navigated or overcame these challenges and the lessons learned from such experiences. Additionally, reflecting on your journey, how do you believe these challenges shaped your professional growth and contributed to your current leadership perspective? The following are examples of the interviewees' responses:

> CHRO Interviewee: Discrimination - I did not have this issue personally. However, I dealt with this on multiple occasions (sexual, racial, age, etc.) with employees at every level and every corporation I was with. Even with all the laws prohibiting discrimination, it still exists in the workplace. You put people together, and there will be those who don't care about the law, are unaware that their behavior is inappropriate, or are just plain ignorant. Education is imperative, and it must be repeated.
> CHRO Interviewee: All personal. Having the confidence to want and accept an advanced position. Being a woman in a predominately man's world. Overcoming insecurities such as "Am I good enough?" and "Do I belong here?". Wanting experience before education. Starting a family was more important than education. Education came later in my career. Lastly, I am probably overworking to prove myself. Putting in exhaustingly long hours unnecessarily every year.

Discussion

Our research underscores the imperative of scrutinizing the critical knowledge skills requisite for a CHRO in the present and immediate future to enhance organizational effectiveness. Also, our findings reveal that a positive workplace culture and a conducive atmosphere for employees are not fortuitous occurrences; instead, they hinge on applying adept leadership skills. These skills are pivotal in instilling confidence in employees, assuring them that the organization is steadfastly supportive when needed. In today's fiercely

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competitive and unpredictable global landscape, characterized by a heightened dependence on effective communication, people skills emerge as the most influential determinant of organizational success (Harter & Adkins, 2015). Consequently, organizations invest substantial resources annually in both financial and temporal dimensions to address human resource management requirements and challenges, emphasizing the pivotal importance of cultivating a positive work environment.

A fundamental tenet for aspiring CHROs is captured in the insight that effectiveness in this role is not about the CHRO per se; instead, it revolves around prioritizing the well-being and concerns of the employees (Blanchard, 2022). A positive and supportive communication-centric workplace atmosphere significantly influences employees' mental and physical well-being, fostering a more engaged and motivated workforce (Whetten & Cameron, 2024). The risk of cultivating a workplace where employees feel undervalued is apparent, as it may progressively evolve into a toxic environment, precipitating employee attrition (Blanchard, 2022). Despite many leaders' claims of an open-door policy, the reality often falls short, with employees perceiving a lack of support for open communication. Notably, a survey by ARRIS Composites revealed that three in ten employees distrust their HRM department, hindering open communication and contributing to organizational mistrust (Douglas, 2023). Moreover, Gallup's findings highlight that over half of departing employees believe their leader or HRM representative could have taken preventative actions to avert their departure (Tatel & Wigert, 2024). Hence, it is incumbent upon CHROs to tangibly demonstrate to organizational employees that they are valued, thereby enhancing the overall morale and well-being of the workplace.

Our interviews underscore the contemporary demands on CHROs, elucidating critical knowledge skills encompassing leadership, interpersonal, decision-making, organizational, and communication skills. Additionally, adeptness in utilizing the latest HRM software and tools is crucial for success in the modern organizational landscape. The alignment of these skills, concepts, and practices with the transformative needs of successful CHROs reflects a clear evolution in this role. This substantiates the argument that effectively managing an organization's workforce requires highly trained CHRO professionals who are adept at employing cutting-edge talent, skills, and practices. Consequently, we posit that CHRO professionals will remain a focal point for organizations in the foreseeable future.

Furthermore, our research underscores the impressive need for CHRO training and educational courses offered by colleges and university degree programs. While research universities and colleges offer advanced degrees in HRM and related subjects, there is a lack of academic institutions in tailoring CHRO programs to meet contemporary organizational needs (Thornburgh, 2016).

Conclusion and Outlook

Recent research reveals that record numbers of employees are leaving their jobs, with a toxic workplace culture being the primary reason they choose to pursue other employment opportunities. Moreover, new research shows that working in a healthy workplace culture is ten times more important to employees than pay (Maurer, 2022). Moreover, Gallup Inc.'s studies have found that great managers are the keystone for organizational success (Beck & Harter, n.d.). To complement the Gallup study, our study supports the notion that CHROs

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utilize critical skills essential for fostering a positive and constructive workplace culture, where they demonstrate trust, openness, respect, support, and a willingness to listen to employees without fear or mistrust. Such trust highly engenders reciprocity, employee feedback, and suggestions. A management survey by PeopleStrong (2020) revealed that 75% of the CHRO group agree that collaboration, constant communication, and mentorship of the workplace culture between managers and organizational employees will become the future mandate of a high-performing organizational workplace. Meeting the needs and expectations of an organization's workforce is no easy task. However, a CHRO with the proper critical skills and tools can strengthen their chances of exceeding employee expectations (HR Managers, n.d.). Likewise, our findings suggest that organizations should equip their CHROs with the skills, talents, and techniques that focus on addressing the concerns, suggestions, and feedback of their organizational employees.

CHROs need to be knowledgeable about the future of work. Some of the fundamental issues to consider are how work is done, who does the work, and where and when work is done. According to a 2020 report written by SHRM and Willis Towers Watson, "85 percent of jobs that will exist in 2030 have not yet been created." So, rather than just focusing on eliminating jobs due to AI, forward-thinking employers will need to think about how the new positions and skills will be used in the workplace due to the advent of technology (Society for Human Resources, 2023). According to a survey report by McKinsey & Company, a management consulting firm, and another from Littler, a law firm, most employers lack policies to manage the use of Artifical Intellence (AI) by employees in the workplace (Smith, 2023). With the onset of AI, CHROs must be able to adapt to the shift in understanding what AI can and cannot achieve, how to implement AI correctly within the organization, and the potential benefits and adverse consequences, which is vital for CHROs (Reeves, 2022; Tarrant, 2023). CHROs and organizations cannot afford to rest on their laurels. Thus, our research findings demonstrate the need to develop effective CHROs. Accordingly, it helps organizations achieve their strategic goals. A CHRO is undoubtedly an essential member of an organization's leadership team.

Implications

Our comprehensive research findings underscore the indispensable skills requisite for a CHRO to excel in the realms of human resources management, thereby contributing to organizational success. Proficiency in these skills is paramount for a human resource management professional aspiring to ascend to the role of an effective CHRO. Soft skills constitute a foundational aspect, encompassing exceptional verbal and written communication abilities, adeptness in nonverbal communication, active listening, and other interpersonal skills characterized by honesty, politeness, empathy, and a positive attitude. A collaborative team player mentality, assertiveness, patience, flexibility, openness, and critical thinking are indispensable attributes in this context. In addition to soft skills, acquiring technical skills is imperative for those aspiring to CHRO roles. Strategic thinking, decision-making prowess, a comprehensive understanding of various human resource management function areas, adept conflict management skills, and knowledge and use of AI will contribute significantly to the critical knowledge skills of a successful CHRO.

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Furthermore, our study holds substantial significance, recognizing the imperative need for organizations across diverse sectors to prioritize the meticulous selection and development of highly adept CHROs. Traditional job descriptions for CHROs often prove inadequate in encapsulating the full spectrum of critical skills essential for their sustained success. Consequently, CHROs may find themselves retained within an organization based solely on their capacity to deliver immediate profitability and commendable short-term results, potentially lacking the requisite interpersonal and leadership skills crucial for long-term success. Our research is pivotal in advancing the existing body of knowledge by delineating the critical knowledge skills that CHROs need to drive enduring organizational success. By identifying these essential competencies, our findings empower organizations to discern CHROs whose focus on short-term gains may inadvertently overshadow potential long-term challenges. This discernment is pivotal for organizations seeking to identify CHROs who, despite initial financial success, may contribute to a dysfunctional organizational climate, triggering emotional contagion and demotivation within the workforce. Recognizing and proactively addressing these issues is integral to preventing unacceptable levels of employee disengagement, averting a decline in quality, diminishing customer satisfaction, and safeguarding overall profitability. Our research equips organizations with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions in CHRO selection, ensuring alignment with the broader objectives of fostering a positive organizational culture and sustained success.

Notably, the scarcity of research interviews with CHROs dedicated to clarifying the essential skills requisite for the current and impending future presents a challenge in deriving comprehensive insights from prior studies. Nonetheless, the outcomes of our study make a substantial contribution to the existing Body of Knowledge, suggesting noteworthy implications for the field of human resource management sciences. Principally, the interviews conducted as part of our study have revealed several critical skills integral to the success of a CHRO. Consequently, the insights gleaned from these interviews provide invaluable assistance to organizational leadership in identifying key indicators that signify the necessity for support and development of CHROs. This recognition is pivotal in augmenting organizational productivity and fostering a culture of service excellence.

Moreover, our research offers significant insights with implications for higher education, particularly in the realms of course components, content, and evaluation. Understanding the nuances of emphasis and perception can contribute to optimizing educational programs tailored to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge essential for success in human resource management careers. Therefore, our study sheds light on the potential influence on students' job search endeavors when pursuing careers in human resources. The insights derived from our research may help educational institutions and aspiring human resource management professionals to align their expectations and prepare for the industry's dynamic challenges. As the role of a CHRO demands a multifaceted skill set, our findings contribute to the broader discourse on effective education strategies that cater to the evolving needs of the human resource management profession.

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Originality Note

It is the authors' original work, and proper citations are included.

Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies Statement

The author claimed that [Grammarly] is used in this research just for the purpose of improving the language of the manuscript. No further use of these technologies are also confirmed by the author(s) to write different parts of the research. One native speaker of English is also invited to proof-read the text prior to its online publication.

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