

*“Knowledge is that which unfolds your possibilities
and capacities that save you from every
imperfection and helps discover a larger
existence.”*

Swami Chinmayananda

Verse 3, Bhagavad-Geeta Chapter 13
(The Field of the Knower)

A FUTURE FOR HUMAN RESOURCES
A Specialised Role in Knowledge Management

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material, which has been accepted for the award to the candidate of any other degree or diploma, in any university or other institution.

To the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is broadly concerned with the future of the Human Resources function within organisations. The nature of these concerns is two-fold: first, how can Human Resources deal effectively with the challenges of organisational life today; second, how can Human Resources convince senior management that it is both relevant, and necessary, to the economic success of the enterprise, and so assure its future as an internal organisational function. This thesis posits that not only does an involvement in the knowledge management process hold considerable benefits for an organisation through a direct and positive influence on the 'bottom-line', but that such an involvement takes on a specialised set of aims and objectives within the human resource perspective that should not be ignored.

The argument is that Human Resources, with its own knowledge-awareness and overview of the structures, manpower, performance and reward systems, and training and development programs, is uniquely placed to be instrumental in creating the open, unselfish culture required to make a success of Knowledge Management, and secure its own future as a trusted and valued strategic partner, fully contributing to the enhancement of organisational performance, and ultimately, the organisation's place in the world.

The thesis commences with an overview of how Human Resources has defined its role within organisations since the 1980s. The challenges and concerns of human resources professionals are discussed, and the opportunity for them to take the lead in developing the social networks that are vital to the capture and transfer of knowledge is foreshadowed. An examination of knowledge and knowledge management concepts and

principles, and a discussion of the specialised aims and objectives that a knowledge management system can be argued to have within a human resources management perspective in the 21st century is discussed next. As learning from experience with the aim of improving business performance is one of the uses of knowledge management, a discussion of 'learning' and the concepts of the 'learning organisation' follows.

The chapters in the first part of the thesis contain the theoretical material concerning knowledge and knowledge management, learning and the Learning Organisation, and the argument that Human Resources is in a position to play a major role in moving the organisation's culture to one of value creation and valuable strategic decision-making capability, through its awareness of the concept of knowledge and its implementation of knowledge systems, policies, and practices.

The second part of the thesis is more empirically based, and reports the results of recent research by the author into the levels of awareness of the knowledge concept, and the degree to which knowledge management systems, policies, and practices are being implemented. The purpose of the study was to test a number of hypotheses about knowledge and knowledge management and the role of the Human Resources function vis-à-vis these issues. The results and their implications are subsequently discussed.

The thesis concludes with some reflections on the concepts of knowledge and learning, and the specialised role that the Human Resources professional can play in knowledge work.

It should also be noted that although every effort has been made to read widely, and stay recent, the amount of literature that has been published since the researcher first began work, barely three years ago, has been so overwhelmingly large, that this has proved to be a Herculean task. Of course, a thesis has an end, and it is necessary to draw a line, under which the incorporation of the never-ending stream of new articles must be rationalised. The researcher trusts his labours have been equal to his task.