

# Strategic Vs Operational Human Resource Role Model: An Empirical Study

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**Abstract** - The role of HR professionals has undergone an immense change from the traditional administrative role to the transformational business partnership roles. Ulrich's four role model is used for this study to analyse the role progression of HR professionals. The Four roles used for this study are Strategic partner, Administrative expert, Employee champion and Change agent. The study is conducted by collecting data from 31 HR professionals in construction companies. The results show that the roles of the HR professionals are evolving with the Employee champion role is the most practicing role among the four. The correlation results reveal that there is a positive significant relationship between all the four roles and but there is a higher level of correlation between Administrative expert and change agent roles. Further, the regression analysis proves that the long-term strategic focus roles i.e., Strategic partner and Change agent are the predictors of the short-term operational focus roles i.e., Administrative expert and Employee champion and the people's roles (Employee champion and Change agent) will have significant impact on the process roles (Strategic partner and Administrative expert).

**Keywords** - Administrative Expert, Change Agent, Employee Champion, Strategic Partner.

## I. INTRODUCTION

From industrial relations to human relations management to personnel management to Human resources management, it indicates the shift of roles of Human resource management from the operational level to the strategic level in an organization. From individual employee, task and practice level, the HR roles took a paradigm shift to the organizational levels. The human resource functions such as training, recruitment, compensation, performance appraisal are closely associated with organizational strategies (Long, Wan Ismail, & Amin [6], 2013). HR professionals to overcome the 'marginality of the personnel function' must adapt to new HR roles (Ulrich [13] 1996). To augment value to the organization HR professionals must face challenges and make transformations to the work (Arachchige & Weerasinghe [2], 2012). Susan M. Heathfield [11]

(2018) said that the HR department should contribute to lead thinking and enhancing the company's profitability. In this scenario, the HR role is transforming to parallelly align with changing organizations. Effective organizations are becoming more robust, quick to adapt new ideas and customer centred.

The construction industry in India is the second-largest economy and employing sector which contributes significantly to our GDP. Though labour-intensive, focussing on completion of the projects is paramount in this industry which considers HR as the staff function supporting other functions of the organization. Hence this study is important to understand the role progression of HR professionals in the construction industry with the help of Ulrich's four role model.

## II. THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

Storey [12] (1992) found out the changing nature of HR practices in the UK and proposed a four-fold model of HR roles on the two bi-polar magnitudes i.e., intervention vs non-intervention and strategy vs tactics. Advisors, Handmaidens on the non-intervention, tactics dimension and Regulators and Changemakers on the intervention, strategic dimension. Later, Ulrich in the year 1996 popularised the four-role model based on people-process relationship and time and level-based focus. On the time and level-based dimension, long-term strategic partner & change agent role and short-term operational focus administrative expert & employee champion role. Similarly, on the people-process orientation, Employee champion and the change agent on the people side and strategic partner & administrative expert on the process side.

### A. Ulrich four-role model of HR Executives

In the highly competitive business environment, today's HR executives are facing following challenges: globalization, the value chain for business competitiveness and HR services, Profitability through cost and growth, capability focus, change, technology, Attracting, retaining and measuring the competence and intellectual capital and ambiguities in turnaround and transformation (Ulrich [13], 1996). Major transformations in the

workplace calls for the rise of HRM and the noteworthy efforts are made by the HR executives to adapt to the changing scenario (Caldwell [4], 2003). Ulrich[13] (1996) introduced a popular model in his book the "Human Resource Champions", which is a four-role model and is based

Figure:1 Ulrich HR roles (Source: Ulrich 1997)



expert. Similarly, on the long-term strategic focus side strategic partner and change agent and short-term operational focus side administrative expert and employee champion role.

### B. Strategic partner

The role of HR has been elevated to a strategic level considering the importance of Human resources in an organization. HR strategies, policies and procedures are becoming the part of corporate strategy and HR executives are representing the board to highlight the opportunities and challenges of Human resources in the organization (Ulrich[13] 1996). The role of HR professionals as a Strategic partner includes partnering in the process of policymaking, aligning the business policy with HR policy, and implementing strategies. To achieve the strategic partner role HR professionals must identify the challenges and build the organizational structure to overcome the challenges (Ulrich [13], 1996). Arachchige & Weerasinghe[2] (2012) argued that HR professionals as a strategic partner must possess the competence to transform the business policies into HR policy. To take part in the strategic decision-making process and the capability of the HR professionals to derive HR policies from business policy makes the HR professionals Strategic partner (Arachchige & Weerasinghe[2], 2012). A study by Bhatnagar [3], (2007) among 640 Indian managers reveals that in the IT industry the role transformation

on people-process relationship and the long-term strategic emphasis vs short term operational purposes. On the peoples' side change agent and employee champion and the process side strategic partner and administrative

of the HR professionals as strategic partner is apparent.

### C. Administrative Expert

In the role of administrative expert, the HR professionals are expected to carry out the functions such as recruitment, selection, training, compensation, performance appraisal and other operational HR functions in the workplace efficiently and effectively (Shakil, Hassan, & Qureshi [9], 2019). HR is predominantly concerned with the managing people within organizations, centring on procedures and on structures, designed to exploit employee productivity. Every organization has to function in an atmosphere and it also gets affected if there is any modification in this environment. (Jain & Bansi [5] , 2018). Administrative expert deals with improving the efficiency of the work performed by the HR executives. This efficiency can be achieved by reengineering the HR processes with the help of technology and rethinking the value creation process inside the organization (Ulrich [13],1996). With the help of automation, Information systems the routine transactional work is taken care of by the machines, and HR executives are spending more time analysing the data to bring about the best decision regarding the employees (Shakil et al.[9], 2019). In the thriving digital age, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is re-modelling the functions of an organization and HR also needs to reshape its plans suitably. Today, HR's attention has shifted toward constructing the

organization of the future. Companies are hiring youthful, digitally native employees who are contented doing things themselves and transparently distributing data thus helping the HR executives in administrative expert roles (Jain & Bansal [5], 2018).

#### D. Employee Champion

It deals with creating a work environment for the employees to keep them motivated, provide a platform for self-learning, committed to working and ensures job satisfaction. Creating employee ownership in the organization through goal setting, assigning responsibilities and delegations plays a major role. To create a win-win situation, organizations must adapt and follow the employee champion role (Yeh [15], 2014). Rynes [8] (2004) argued that organizations that follow employee advocacy values the contribution of the employees towards the organization and such practices increase the job satisfaction of the employees. Employee champions balance the demands of the employees with the available resources to ensure that employees are provided with a platform to learn, adapt, and committed to the organization (Rynes [8] 2004). Employees judging the organization and the HR professionals that they are inclined towards the interest of them, which can be termed as Employee champion (Akgunduz & Sanli [1], 2017). Employee advocacy affects workplace productivity by the supported managers believing the capabilities of the employees and in-turn the employees contributing towards the goals (Yeh [15], 2014).

#### E. Change agent

During changes in the organization, HR professionals as the change agent should help in the smooth transitions in the personnel area. Based on the market practices they should also suggest the best practices. Change management techniques and

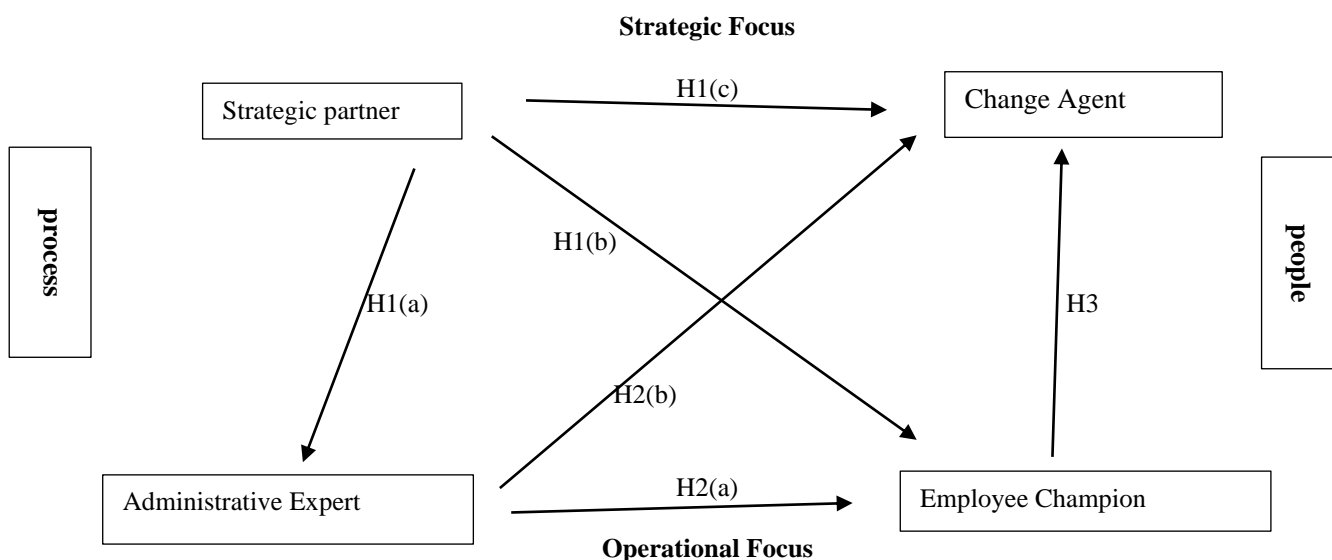
knowledge of the employees and organization must be combinedly used for this purpose (Ulrich[13] 1996). Wright and Snell[14] (1998) suggested that the change process should start from the employees by understanding the needs of them and HR professionals must have a shared understanding of the employees to perform their roles as change agents. It is the responsibility of the change agents to protect the employees from the negative consequences of the unfavourable change (Long et al.[6], 2013).

It is the role of HR to create the right organizational culture which provides an opportunity for everyone to exert their best efforts to achieve the organizational goals. If such a culture is not prevailing, they should act as the change agent to bring about the change in the culture for organizational well-being (Ulrich[13] 1996). Wright and Snell[14] (1998) suggested that to act as a good change agent the HR professionals must have a shared understanding with the employees. The role of HR professionals is not only to implement the changes in the organization also to insulate the employees from the adverse effect of the negative changes (Long et al.[6], 2013).

#### F. Objectives of the study

- To identify the highly practicing HR role among the four roles
- To establish the relationship between all the four roles i.e. Strategic partner, Administrative expert, Employee Champion, and Change agent.
- To study the relationship between the strategic and operational focus roles and people and process roles.

Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the study



### G. Hypothesis

H1: Strategic partner role will positively relate to the Administrative expert role, Employee champion role and Change agent role.

H2: There is a significant relationship between Administrative expert role, Employee champion role, and a change agent role.

H3: There is a positive relationship between Employee champion and Change agent roles.

H4: The long-term strategic focus roles will have a significant effect on short-term operational focus roles.

H5: The people's roles will have a significant effect on process roles.

### III. METHOD AND RESULTS

#### A. Participants and Procedure

The data were collected from 31 respondents, the HR professionals, working in the construction companies from five different organizations in Bangalore. The convenience sampling method is used to collect data from the respondents. The respondent's profile is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Demographic Profile of the respondents**

Gender of the Respondents		Age of the Respondents				Educational Qualification			Level of management currently working		
Frequency		%		Frequency		%		Frequency		%	
Female	8	26	Less than 25 Years	5	16.1	Under Graduate	20	64.5	Executive	6	19.4
			26 to 35 years	15	48.4				Manager	20	64.5
Male	23	74	36 to 45 Years	10	32.3	Post Graduate	11	35.5	Senior Manager	5	16.1
			Above 46 Years	1	3.2						
Total	31	100	Total	31	100.0	Total	31	100	Total	31	100.0

### B. Measures

Ulrich & Conner (1996), the HR role assessment survey questionnaire is used to measure the HR role transformation. A small modification is done in the questionnaire without changing the meaning of the questions to measure the HR executives evolving

roles. The original questionnaire consists of forty questions, ten-question about each HR role are used in this study. The Cronbach's alpha for the scales is strategic partner 0.80, Administrative expert 0.86, Employee champion 0.75 and change agent 0.85.

### C. Results

SPSS 21 is used to test the hypothesis and the results are presented in the sub-sections. Correlation and Step-wise multiple regression is performed in the data to analyse the data and draw the interpretations. The mean and standard deviation of all the four roles are represented in the descriptive statistics Table 2.

	Strategic Partner	Administrative Expert	Employee Champion	Change Agent
Mean	3.21	3.11	3.38	3.14
Median	3.30	3.20	3.30	3.20
Std. Dev.	0.69	0.76	0.70	0.75

The mean values for all the four roles are higher than 3 which shows that all the respondents are agreeing

that these roles are evolving and are practiced in the organizations. The mean value for Employee champion is higher when compared to other values which show that this is the most practicing role and the standard deviation is higher for Administrative expert which indicates that the mean values are dispersed in the higher range for this role.

### Correlation Results

Table 3 shows the significant positive relationship among all the four roles. H1 stated that the strategic partner role will positively relate to the Administrative expert role, Employee champion role and Change agent role. Pearson's coefficient values in correlation analysis revealed that there is a high positive correlation between Strategic partner role and administrative expert, employee champion and change agent ( $r = 0.963, 0.610$  &  $0.956$  respectively), supporting H1. H2 stated that there is a significant relationship between the Administrative expert role, Employee champion

role and Change agent role which is supported by the Pearson's coefficient values ( $r= 0.661, 0.995$  respectively) which shows a highly significant relationship. Thus, H2 accepted. H3 stated that there is a positive relationship between Employee champion and Change agent roles. Pearson's

coefficient values in correlation analysis revealed that there is a high positive correlation between Employee champion and Change agent ( $r = 0.652$ ), supporting H3.

		Strategic Partner	Administrative Expert	Employee Champion	Change Agent
Strategic Partner	Pearson Correlation	1	.963**	.610**	.956**
Administrative Expert		.963**	1	.661**	.995**
Employee Champion		.610**	.661**	1	.652**
Change Agent		.956**	.995**	.652**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### Regression

The Regression analysis is conducted to analyse the impact of long-term strategic roles on the short-term operational roles and the peoples' roles on the process roles and the results of the same are presented in Tables 4 and 5 respectively. H4 stated that the long-term strategic focus roles will have a significant effect on short-term operational focus roles. The regression analysis shows that the long-

term roles such as Strategic partner and Change agent role will impact the short-term role Administrative expert with 99% of variance explained,  $P<.001, \beta = 0.99$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.99$ , and Employee champion role with 65% of variance explained,  $P<.001, \beta = 0.65$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.42$ , supporting H4.

Model	Predictors	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	T	Sig.	Unstandardized Co-efficient
1	Change agent	.995	.990	3020.397	54.958	.000	.995
2	Change agent, Strategic partner	.996	.991	1738.153	15.031 2.308	.000 .000	.868 .133
Dependent Variable: Administrative Expert						**P<0.01	
3	Change agent	.652	.425	21.471	4.634	.000	.652
Excluded variable: Strategic partner						Dependent Variable: Employee Champion **P<0.01	

H5 stated that people's roles will have a significant effect on process roles. The regression analysis shows that the peoples' roles such as Employee and Change agent role will impact the process role Strategic Partner with 95% of variance explained,

$P<.001, \beta = 0.95$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.91$ , and administrative expert role already explained, supporting H5.

Model	Predictors	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	T	Sig.	Unstandardized Co-efficient
1	Change agent	.956	.914	309.756	17.600	.000	.956
Excluded variable: Employee champion.						Dependent Variable: Strategic partner **P<0.01	
2	Change agent	.995	.990	3020.397	54.958	.000	.995
Excluded variable: Employee champion						Dependent Variable: Administrative expert **P<0.01	

### Discussion

Employee champion role is the most practiced role in the industry in contrast to the study conducted by Arachchige & Weerasinghe [2] (2012) where the administrative expert is the most practicing role. This shows that the human resource professionals spends more time in responding the needs of the employees. This improves the commitment of the employees towards the organization. In the

construction industry, where it is labour intensive playing the employee champion role is very crucial to retain the talented employees. By performing the roles, the HR professionals brings various policies and programs to ensure that employees are having career-life balance which in turn helps in achieving the organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and the staying intentions (Somu & Jayavel



[10], 2021). But employee champion role is an operational focus role which also depicts the grave side of the construction industry that the HR professional's roles has not evolved. The HR professionals must spend more time in the strategic roles to align the HR strategy with the business strategy, which leads in achieving the competitive advantage.

There is a significant positive relationship among all the four roles which goes with the study conducted by Yusuf *et.al*[7]., (2017) in which the author describes the interrelationship of all these variables in the manufacturing sector. The employee champion role suffering low correlation between the other variables is due to the reason such as it fails to maintain a balance between the strategic partner role which goes with the paradoxes explained by Ulrich[13] 1996. The HR professionals must meet the demands based on the available resources, and the key for the balance lies in aligning the means with the demands. Whereas in our scenario, the employee champion role is the most practising role which depicts that the HR professionals are inclination towards the employees than the management which causes the imbalance between the demands and the resources.

Short term goals are the consequences of the long-term strategies of the organization; hence they are dependent on the long-term plans of the organization. Similarly, the

short-term operational focus roles such as administrative expert and the Employee champion are dependent on the long-term strategic roles such as strategic partner and the change agent. The processes are for the people working in the organization. Hence the process roles such as strategic partner and the administrative expert are dependent on the people's roles such as Change agent and the employee champion roles. The demographic variables do not yield any significance with the HR roles due to the smaller sample size.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides insight into progressing HR roles in the traditional construction industries. Convenience sampling, smaller sample size, collection of data from a single geographical are some of the limitations for the study. The future study in this area shall be conducted by comparing the Non-HR professionals' perceptions of these roles with the HR professionals' perception. It is evident from the results that the roles of the HR professionals are evolving in the industry and there is an interrelationship among all the four roles. Also, the relationship between the short-term and long-term roles and the peoples and process roles are established.

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