

## Human Resources as a Career Option

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The old saying "find a job you love and never work a day in your life" puts a great deal of pressure on people who are trying to choose the right career. Choosing a career path in itself very confusing for most. After all the average person is expected to spend an average of 15 years in the workplace (Eurostat, 2018). A considerably long time to be doing something not suited to you. To add to the confusion, there are so many career choices now than 20 years ago. Examples of careers that didn't exist 20 years include web analyst, app developer and analytics specialist. This white paper will seek to explore what Human resources is and if it is a good career option.

### Background

Many people would assume that the Human resources field is a relatively modern invention. However, a look at its background reveals that the ideas underpinning the discipline stretch as far back as human history itself. The term human resources was first coined in the 1960s when the value of labour relations began to garner attention and when notions such as motivation, organizational behaviour, and selection assessments began to take shape. The Harvard Business Review has it that the Human resources function in organisations, then known as industrial and labour relations, started taking off in the early 1900s.

Charles Babbage and Robert Owens are widely recognized as some of the early proponents of people management. The first, [Robert Owen](#), was a Scottish manufacturer who thought workers ought to be "motivated" rather than threatened. At a time when factory owners placed more importance on the care of their expensive machines than on the well-being of their relatively unskilled employees, Owen's tried a different model. His view was that employees were as important to the success of his enterprise as the machines he owned. By examining working methods and conditions, and seeking to improve these, he is justifiably claimed as one of the founding fathers of the human resources field.

The second, [Charles Babbage](#), was a man who wore many hats. He was a qualified mechanical engineer, mathematician and philosopher. He is credited with bringing the scientific approach to people management through his book, *On The Economy of Manufacturing and Manufacturers* (1832). In this book, Babbage offered an advantage to the division of labour, that the amount of skill needed to undertake a specialised task was only the skill the necessary to complete the task. Babbage analysed and documented the manufacture of a pin and broke the process down into seven elements to illustrate his point. This study became important to employers in that they only had to pay for the amount of skill required to complete a task.

Although there was no talk of "HR" during the industrial revolution, these two men can indeed be said to have contributed to the birth of [HR as a discipline](#) roughly a century later. They both understood that people were responsible for the success of an organisation and that their wellbeing led to better work.

## What is Human resources?

By definition, Human resources can be loosely defined as the business of people management. The goal of Human resource practitioners is to maximize the productivity of an organization by optimizing the effectiveness of its employees while simultaneously improving the work-life of employees and treating employees as valuable resources. Consequently, HRM encompasses efforts to promote personal development, employee satisfaction, and compliance with employment-related laws.

## Traditional Career Paths in Human resources

Figure 1 below shows the traditional career paths that can be expected in the Human resources field. (LucidChart, 2020). The bulk of human resources professionals fall under the titles human resources clerk, human resources officer or human resources manager.

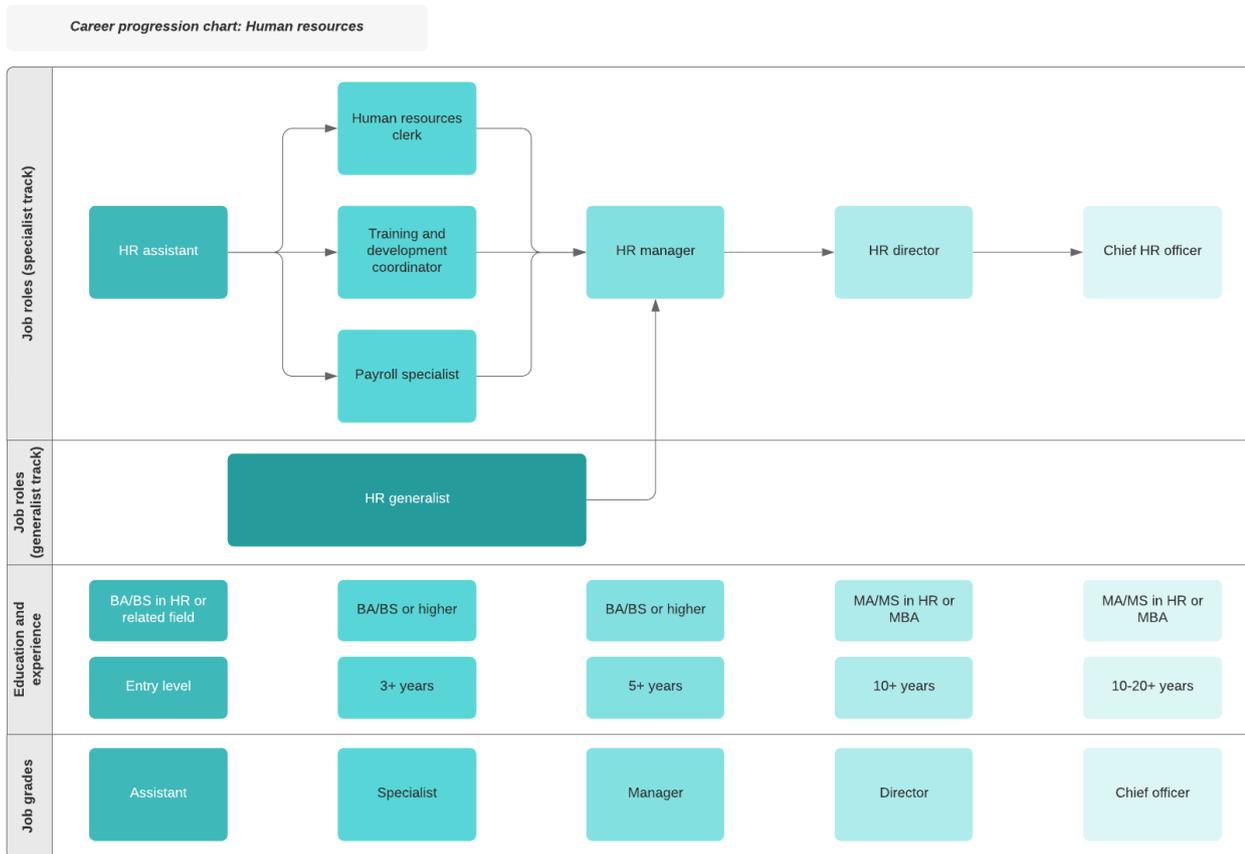


Figure 1.

Traditionally the long-standing duties in human resources have been;

- Addressing concerns expressed by the employees
- Recruitment and management of Onboarding/ Offboarding processes

- Creating career development programmes
- Performance Management
- Implementing reward systems
- Providing guidance and help employees identify their strengths and weaknesses
- Designing and evaluating strategies to increase the retention of personnel
- Creating a positive, safe and enjoyable work environment
- Building and maintaining the company's culture
- Creating and implementing programmes that reflect the core values of the organisation

Human resources personnel in some organisations are also responsible for coordinating the administrative functions of an organization such as payroll duties. Looking into some of the duties individually;

## Recruitment

Recruitment and selection is the process of identifying the need for a job, defining the requirements of the position and the job holder, advertising the position and choosing the most appropriate person for the job.

Forbes Magazine valued the recruitment industry to be worth over US\$400 Billion as of 2017.

Headhunting is one of the traditional career paths in the human resources field. This involves placing candidates for companies and getting a commission in return for finding the right candidate. The success of recruiters and employment specialists generally is measured by the number of positions they fill and the time it takes to fill those positions. Most recruiting agencies require a bachelor's degree for one to join in an entry-level position.

Headhunting is a very rewarding career in that there is no ceiling on the commission one can earn. You also stand to gain a lot of useful skill as recruitment forces you to come out of your shell and engage with a wide range of people across all walks of life. Some of the skills you will develop include problem solving, negotiation and project management. Perhaps the most fulfilling part of the job is assisting people with finding the right job for them – sometimes you can even be a part of fundamentally changing their life for the better. On an emotional level, this is satisfying for both parties, and over time the honing of this art will make you a greater recruiter who can achieve more both for themselves and their employer.

Every coin has two sides and the same can be said of this career path. There are inevitably downsides to being a recruiter. Although there is potential for high reward, it is a very competitive industry with at times multiple agencies trying to fill the same position. This means that the environment is very fast-paced and there is the possibility of not getting the commission if your candidate does not get the position.

Recruitment can also be done by internal human resources personnel. Employees are the lifeblood of an organisation. If the recruitment is not outsourced to head hunters, one of the key responsibilities of an

organisation's is staffing- advertising job postings, sourcing candidates, screening the applicants and coordinating hiring efforts with the relevant managers to make the final selection of candidates.

## **Employer-Employee Relations**

Industrial progress is impossible without labour management cooperation and industrial harmony. Therefore, it is in the interest of all to create and maintain good relations between employers and employees.

Employee relations is the HR discipline concerned with strengthening the employer-employee relationship through measuring job satisfaction, employee engagement and resolving workplace conflict. Labour relations functions may include developing management response to union organizing campaigns, negotiating collective bargaining agreements and rendering interpretations of labour union contract issues.

In a unionized workplace, [human resources professionals](#) must have at least a basic knowledge of labour law so that they can handle the relationship between employers, their supervisors, and the union that represents them. This helps the HR department from overstepping its bounds in key negotiations, which include everything from salaries and raises to employee hiring and termination.

## **Workplace Safety and Health**

Workers spend a major part of their daily life, at least eight to ten hours of it, at their workplace. Reasonably, they need to get a safe and friendly working environment there. It not only helps the worker to be more committed to his job but also contributes to the company's overall productivity. So, the company and its human resources department need to concentrate more on providing a safe environment at the workplace, as it will ultimately reflect in the company's balance sheet positively.

Notably, Occupational safety and health have come a long way since the first industrial movement. There is a more concerted effort to recognise the wellbeing of employees as opposed to seeing them as just another replaceable cog in the wheel. An important function of HR is to support workplace safety training and maintain government-mandated logs for workplace injury and fatality reporting.

An example of the role of human resources in occupational safety and health is workplace safety in the age of the coronavirus. As lockdown is starting to get more relaxed, more and more employees are to return to work. This means that ensuring workplace safety has become an important aspect of human resources.

Practitioners will need to draw up policies and procedures on safety and health in the workplace. Policies and procedures are devised and integrated into the organization's overall management and administrative processes. They usually involve specific job task procedures established for working with or around equipment, hazardous environments or other forms of high-hazard conditions. Safety procedures and policies include accountability requirements to ensure that prescribed practices are followed.

HR safety and risk specialists often work closely with HR benefits specialists to manage the company's worker's compensation issues.

## Payroll Services

Some human resources practitioners have the main duty and responsibility of processing payroll and maintaining the employee database regarding salary and pay. To administer the payroll function, the general requirement is the ability to use [HR Payroll Systems](#). This allows HR activities and processes to occur electronically, making the workload lighter and more efficient for HR professionals. These specialized tools may vary somewhat from organization to organization, but most offer core functionality that helps HR organizations run smoothly.

## Training and Development

The training and development on offer have been listed as one of the top 3 non-financial motivators for modern-day employees as it shows that the employer has their interests over the long haul. An organisation's investment in human capital can be directly linked to the level of employee engagement which in turn affects the performance of the company. A report released by professional networking giant LinkedIn in 2018, the Workforce Learning Report, found that over 90% of employees would be interested in increasing their tenure with an organisation if the said organisation invested in their professional development.

Training and Development is one of the main functions of human resources professionals. Leadership training may be required of newly hired and promoted supervisors and managers on topics such as performance management and how to handle employee relations matters at the department level. Other pieces of training that are traditionally offered by human resources professionals to upskill staff include soft skills training and team building workshops.

## Non Traditional Career Paths in Human resources

Human resources is a very dynamic field. With changes in technology, the scope of work has increased further to create diverse career paths within HR. One of the most interesting career paths to have arisen in the human resources field as a result of is that of analytics.

Human Resource Analytics or People Analytics falls within the realm of digital HR. As human resources technologies and platforms evolve, there is more information captured electronically. Human resources analytics is about the different ways that we capture, measure, and organize that information to create valuable insights for an organization. To [remain successful and competitive](#), all businesses and organizations must be capable of changing, growing, and evolving to meet the new challenges and realities that they face. This is true for every department within an organization, including human resources. HR analytics can be leveraged to create an iterative framework for making these necessary refinements as they become apparent.

More and more companies are recognising the benefits of having bespoke individuals that can translate

people-related data into insights, hence the steady rise of this career path.

## Is Human resources a good career option?

When choosing a career, there are a variety of factors that an individual can take into account. Some indicative questions are if the individual has the general mental abilities to execute the job and the level of interest they have in particular fields.

Looking at the job itself, some of the decisive factors that come up often include;

- Marketability
- The competitiveness of remuneration
- Career progression
- General work hours

Human resources is a very dynamic field that does well in a lot of these categories. Human Resource professionals contribute to business viability and success through the strategic management of human capital, and that in itself gives high levels of satisfaction.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) released two reports in 2013—one surveying 600 U.S. employees in 22 industries on various job satisfaction factors and another polling 347 human resources professionals using the same questions. The 2013 Human resources Professionals' Job Satisfaction and Engagement research report found that 45 per cent of human resources professionals were "very satisfied" with their current jobs—a jump from 36 per cent in the 2011 survey. But while HR professionals' job satisfaction levels went up, U.S. employees' satisfaction overall remained stable. Thirty-six per cent of U.S. employees overall were "very satisfied" with their current job, according to the 2013 Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement survey report, consistent with 38 per cent in 2012. Going by this study, we can conclude that on average Human resources professionals fair better than average when it comes to the job satisfaction aspect.

There are quite a few reasons to pursue a career in human resources. The human resources job outlook is very strong. It's one of the fastest-growing fields in the using readily available figures from the United States. The United States Department of Labour had projected the [employment of human resources managers is to grow 9 per cent between 2014 and 2024](#). This is above the national average job growth rate of seven per cent.

Remuneration within the field of Human resources varies. This can be credited to Human resources professionals being spread over widely across industries with job responsibilities sometimes differing. For example, the highest human resources salaries are usually offered through scientific and technical consulting firms. You also have the potential to earn a higher salary if you specialize in some niches of human resources such as organizational development. The majority of human resources jobs available can be found at companies and enterprises, followed by government, hospitals, employment services and computer systems design firms. This is also indicative of the marketability of the qualification.

The downsides to human resources is at times the workload. The demands of working in HR are considerable. Individuals also have to have high emotional intelligence to deal with disgruntled workers and manoeuvre office politics.

## **How can I make a career in HR?**

As the human resources function is highly varied, you will need to navigate workplace legislation, industry awards, occupational health and safety standards, and stay abreast of trends around salary and non-monetary benefits.

Traditionally, Human resources practitioners have come from educational backgrounds such as Industrial Psychology, Human resources and other social sciences including Law. The trend of late has been to open up the industry to candidates with alternate qualifications. The minimum qualifications, however, seem to be at diploma level and in some cases, a degree.

The field of human resources is inherently people-centric. One would need to be able to communicate clearly and effectively with their colleagues. Other desirable characteristics include problem-solving abilities and a high resolve in being ethical.

## **Conclusion**

The human resources field has come a long way from the old days of being purely an administrative organ. It is now embodied as a profession that has moved with the times and offers a compelling challenge for those who love to problem solve and work with different types of people.

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<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/Human-Resources-As-A-Career-Option>