



UNIVERSITY OF
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‘Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy
the way there for HR?’

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ABSTRACT

There have been suggestions in recent times that the traditional criteria for defining professions is outmoded and inappropriate particularly in relation to the new professions, such as Human Resource Management (HRM). Evans (2008^b) has suggested that a more appropriate evaluation is in terms of a commitment to professional development and has identified that this commitment be referred to as 'developmentalism'. There are a number of ways in which professional development can occur and while traditionally this involved almost exclusively, formal experiences, such as courses, current thinking is now moving towards utilising more accessible, practice based, non-formal mechanisms.

The research presented in this thesis investigates how non-formal learning is used to contribute to a climate of developmentalism by Human Resource (HR) practitioners. For this purpose, 17 in-depth semi-structured-interviews with a purposively selected sample of HR practitioners were conducted. The transcripts were analysed based on the four step process of phenomenographic analysis suggested by Marton (1994) cited by Schroder et al (2005) and Soon and Barnard (2002), to discover the qualitatively different ways in which HR practitioners describe, experience, understand and analyse their professional development and the use of non-formal learning in that development.

What emerged from the analysis were two sets of categories of description; one for each of the phenomena namely professional development and non-

formal learning. In addition, an outcome space for each of the phenomena emerged, illustrating the hierarchical relationship within each set of categories of description as well as the dimensions of variation relating to the phenomena. Also emerging from the analysis was a conceptualised model for professional development comprising non-formal learning using a heutagogical approach in conjunction with the empirically developed HR professionalism continuum as a record of achievement. This model is offered as a means of encouraging HR practitioners to participate in professional development.

Several recommendations arose from this research, and it is anticipated that these recommendations will be of interest to HR practitioners, their employers, HR educators, and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

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'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?'

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	IX
LIST OF PICTURES	X
CHAPTER 1	1
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background to the research	1
1.2 Context	9
1.3 Structure of the Thesis	17
CHAPTER 2	20
2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	20
2.1 Profession, Professional and Professionalism.....	20
2.2 Continuing Professional Development (CPD).....	36
2.3 Learning in the context of CPD.....	45
2.4 Developmentalism.....	47
2.5 Non-Formal Learning.....	50
2.6 The HR Professionalism Continuum.....	74
2.7 Synthesis of the Literature.....	77
CHAPTER 3	82
3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	82
3.1 Setting the Scene	82
3.2 Aim, Objectives and Research Questions	87
3.3 Methodological Approach	89
3.4 Data Collection	98
3.5 Participants.....	101
3.6 Pilot Study	105
3.7 The Data Collection.....	108
3.8 Data Analysis	115
3.9 Ethical Considerations.....	121
3.10 Limitations of this Study.....	123
CHAPTER 4	125
4.0 ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS	125
4.1 Professional Development.....	125
4.2 Pools of Meaning – Professional Development	133
4.3 Categories of Description and Dimensions of Variation.....	137
4.4 The Outcome Space – Professional Development.....	147
4.5 The HR Professionalism Continuum.....	151
CHAPTER 5	162
5.0 ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS	162
5.1 Non-formal Learning.....	162
5.2 Pools of Meaning – Non-formal learning	163
5.3 Categories of Description and Dimensions of Variation.....	166
5.4 Outcome Space – Non-formal learning	176
CHAPTER 6	180
6.0 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS	180
6.1 Introduction.....	180
6.2 Professional Development.....	182
6.3 Non-formal Learning.....	209

CHAPTER 7	229
7.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW.....	229
7.1 Research Questions.....	229
7.2 Recommendations.....	235
7.3 Unique Contribution of this Study	239
7.4 Future Research.....	242
7.5 Reflections on my EdD journey	244
REFERENCES.....	251
APPENDICES	273
APPENDIX 1 - INTERVIEWEE DEMOGRAPHICS AND SCHEDULE	274
APPENDIX 2 - PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM.....	275
APPENDIX 3 - SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROMPTS	276
APPENDIX 4 - PARTICIPANT INFORMATION.....	278
APPENDIX 5 – DRAFT HR PROFESSIONALITY CONTINUUM	279
APPENDIX 6 – RESEARCHER AND HEALTH & SAFETY CONTINUUMS	280
APPENDIX 7 – TEACHER AND GENERAL CONTINUUMS.....	282
APPENDIX 8 – CIPD’S HR PROFESSION MAP.....	283

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	The Sigmoid Curve	5
Figure 2	The Extended Sigmoid Curve	6
Figure 3	Structure of the Thesis	19
Figure 4	How HR specialisms perceive each other	28
Figure 5	Johari's window for development needs analysis	39
Figure 6	Relationship of pedagogy, androgogy and heutagogy	67
Figure 7	The principles of heutagogy	70
Figure 8	Literature Synthesis	80
Figure 9	Influences on the research process	84
Figure 10	The methodological position of the study	100
Figure 11	From utterances to categories of description	128
Figure 12	From pools of meaning to categories of description	138
Figure 13	Outcome Space - Professional Development	150
Figure 14	The Revised HR Continuum	160
Figure 15	From utterances to categories of description	164
Figure 16	From pools of meaning to categories of description	167
Figure 17	Outcome space - Non-formal learning	178
Figure 18	The relationship between the two outcome spaces	212

LIST OF PICTURES

Picture 1 Relevant utterances highlighted in original transcripts	130
Picture 2 Spreadsheet containing utterances	131
Picture 3 Individual utterances	132
Picture 4 Pools of meaning	132

CHAPTER 1

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the research

Identification of the research issue came about through my work developing a new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) process for students who study on the MSc Human Resource Management (HRM) programme offered at Aberdeen Business School (ABS). In the course of my development work I was surprised to learn that CPD participation by professionals, including Human Resource (HR) practitioners, appears to be erratic (Friedman & Phillips, 2001; Farmer & Campbell, 1997). Throughout my career, formerly as an HR practitioner and particularly now in the 'dual profession' of a lecturer in HR (Peel, 2005), I did, and still do, firmly believe in the value of CPD. Professional development has consistently been a fundamental and intrinsically rewarding element of my working life. Indeed, I have always felt strongly that professional development is an obligation I have not only to myself but also to those for whom I work. Now, as an HR lecturer I believe I have an increased obligation to my students as well as to their current and future employers to make them aware of the importance of professional development. Moreover, I took for granted that others would be of a similar mind. I believe that my practice can always be improved and am motivated to achieve this (Evans, 2008^b). CPD, for me therefore, is central to the improvement of my professional practice – something I continually strive to

achieve. Lou Gerstner's 1998 quote (cited in Slater, 1999, loc3670) while CEO of IBM seems to encapsulate my attitude towards CPD "you're never done, and when you think you're done, you're in trouble". CPD, is arguably, of greater significance to me in this dual professional role; as Nixon, et. al. (2001) highlight, this role brings with it a need for me to be credible to my fellow HR practitioners in industry as well as to my academic colleagues and students within the University. Consequently, I was alarmed to learn of this lack of participation in CPD by HR practitioners, and this led me to speculate about how, if at all, they keep their professional knowledge, personal skills and competencies up to date. Is there a lack of awareness of the necessity to keep up to date (Cullen, et. al., 2002; Evans, 2008^b)? This must surely raise questions about the quality of service that HR practitioners deliver, and the resultant effect on the status of the profession as a whole (Reed, 2008). Abbott (1991) highlights that it is the "expert person" (p26) that is the professional of modern society. This is all the more relevant in the light of Evans' (2008^b) proposition that the traditional criteria for defining professions is outmoded and inappropriate, particularly in relation to the new professions (Evans, 2011), of which, it is believed, HR is one (Swales, 2003). Evans suggested that a more appropriate evaluation is in terms of a commitment to professional development. She identified that this commitment be referred to as 'developmentalism' (2008^b). While developmentalism is concerned with a commitment to professional development, professional development is, according to Evans (2009^a), about extending a practitioner's professionalism. The term 'professionalism' was introduced by Hoyle in the 1970s (Evans, 2007) and his work was originally based on the teaching occupation, but Evans

(2008) maintains that the theory is relevant to all professions and she has extended Hoyle's work theoretically both in terms of considering additional occupations, most recently Occupational Health and Safety and defining what is meant by 'professionalism' more fully. Hoyle developed a professionalism continuum, and Evans (2009^a) maintains that every profession has its own continuum, which reflects Hoyle's view of the range of professionalism – a continuum ranging from 'restricted' (at the lower end) to 'extended' professionalism, the characteristics at each end of the continuum providing a framework for professional development. Professional development involves practitioners enhancing their professionalism orientation - the position they occupy at any one time on the professionalism continuum. Enhancing one's professionalism is achieved by a progression along the continuum from the restricted end towards the extended end (Evans, 2009^a).

Through my work developing a CPD process I was fascinated to discover that although traditionally CPD experiences involve, almost exclusively, formal experiences, current thinking is now moving towards more practice based experiences (Gold, et. al., 2007). As the General Medical Council identified 'doctors should also recognise when unexpected opportunities for CPD arise a range of different activities will normally be suitable' (GMC, 2003). This reflects how CPD is broader than conventional courses – it should include formal as well as less formal learning experiences (Eraut, 2001). I found that much work had been undertaken on the role of formal learning and how this is, or could be, used to keep professionals up to date. Research on professional development has mainly focused on the formal mechanisms

(Chivers, 2006) with less attention being given to the role of informal learning (Cheetham & Chivers, 2001). It is interesting, however, that according to Marsick and Watkins (1997) only 20% of what employees need to know comes from formal, structured programmes despite the fact that, according to Terry (2007), as much as 80% of many organisations' training budgets are devoted to formal events.

Similarly, Conlon (2004) argues that some studies have identified that as much as 90% of workplace learning comes from informal learning events. If it is accepted that very little of what a professional needs to know is learned during the traditional, more formal type of learning event, coupled with the ever increasing cost of such events (Conlon, 2004), does it not make sense then to consider recognising and making use of the more informal learning events into the development process of a professional? Not only that but might it be appropriate, given circumstances in the contemporary occupational climate, to consider ways of reflecting a more heutagogical, or learner self-determined, approach, such as the one suggested by Hase and Kenyon (2007), to professional development?

The climate of the 21st Century workplace is fast changing and competitive – at an ever increasing rate (Friedman & Woodhead, 2008). This has come about as a result of many factors often categorised under the headings of social, regulatory, work structure and technological changes (PARN, 2000). Change, and the speed at which it occurs, means that it is increasingly more challenging for a professional to maintain their knowledge, skills and

competences (PARN, 2000; Gold, et. al., 2007). Those professionals who do not actively keep themselves up to date will not simply stand still, they will be left behind (Smith, 2003; Wisniewski & McMahon, 2005). This situation seems to be best illustrated by Handy's (1984) Sigmoid Curve. This curve can be used to illustrate the life cycle of an organisation, products, or, in this case an individual's knowledge, skills and competences. The curve represents how all life cycles start slowly, then grow but ultimately and inevitably decline.

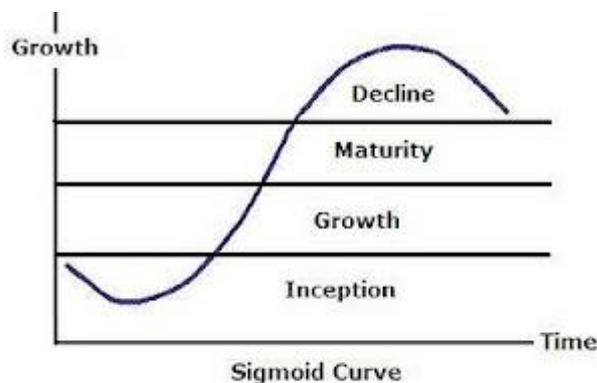


Figure 1 – The Sigmoid Curve (Source: CareerTech Testing Centre (2010) (Adapted from Handy C (1984) *The Empty Raincoat* London: Random House))

While at first this situation can appear hopeless, the real value in this concept is the notion of extending the model to include additional curves as time goes on.

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?'

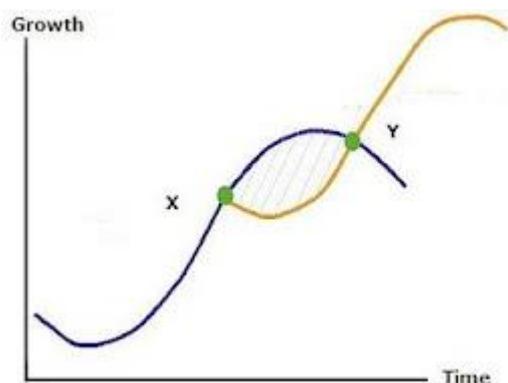


Figure 2 - The Extended Sigmoid Curve (Source: CareerTech Testing Centre (2010) (Adapted from Handy C (1984) *The Empty Raincoat* London: Random House))

In terms of development the ideal would appear to be that an individual should start planning for the extension of their knowledge, skills and competences before they become outdated. Or, in other words, continuation of the development process should begin at position x, and not at position y, illustrated in Figure 2 above. The curve, then, would seem to confirm the need for a planned and structured approach to CPD.

Smith (2003) seemed to sum up the situation succinctly when he stated that the only certainty is change. Although Smith was referring to the library and information profession his comment would seem to be relevant to every profession today, and for the purpose of this study that of Human Resource Management (HRM). Keeping up to date involves learning; indeed occupational learning has a strong link with organisational change (PARN, 2000; Guest, 2002). One illustration of change which impacts directly on the work of the HR practitioner is that organisations have, in recent years,

downsized and/or re-organised – sometimes on numerous occasions. As a result of downsizing and reorganising, many individuals nowadays find themselves with more than one job role.

The situation has prompted Guest (2002) to advise workers today that in terms of professional development they need to be both a team player while at the same time consider themselves to be self employed consultants. This has resulted in Marsick and Volpe (1999) and Reardon (2004) proposing that it is becoming apparent that the more traditional forms of development are no longer suitable or relevant. Another important factor in the background to this research concerns the nature and breadth of the knowledge, skills and competences, which professionals need to possess today. Increasingly professionals cannot be concerned solely with the functional elements of the job, there is a much broader range expected of professionals today including intellectual, vocational and behavioural skills and competences (Shaw, et. al., 1999).

The current fast changing and competitive occupational climate (Friedman & Woodhead, 2008) in which we find ourselves today led me, for a number of reasons, to the conclusion that exploring how practitioners experience professional development and the role of non-formal learning in that development might be a worthwhile area for research (Cross, 2007; Mathews, 2013). It seemed that one reason is that non-formal learning is a cost effective way of using limited resources wisely in this current financially constrained climate – an important factor for organisations and HR

practitioners alike. A second reason is that, like professionals in other professions, HR practitioners are unlikely to work for only one or two employers throughout their career and on whom they could depend to manage their development. HR practitioners are more likely nowadays to have a number of employers throughout their career, which will result in their having to take responsibility for their own professional development. The third reason is that increasingly HR practitioners opt to work under less traditional forms of employment status such as 'contract', 'agency' or 'self-employed' – in this case these practitioners do not have 'employers' in the traditional sense which results in their having to take much more responsibility for their own professional development. Not only have there been changes to employment status but also the ways in which people work have changed, for example, many people work remotely from home or other locations either for some or all of their working week or month. Given all of this, I further concluded that by considering firstly, the experiences of HR practitioners, and secondly, the relevant literature; it might be possible to produce a model to encourage HR practitioners to continually develop themselves professionally and to guide them in the use of non-formal learning as part of that process. I believe, therefore, that the findings of my research could be of benefit to individual HR practitioners as well as to the organisations for which they work, or provide services. Given that developmentalism (Evans, 2008) is a concept to which HR practitioners might aspire, and that in this study I will be investigating how non-formal learning might be used to realize this aspiration, the following research title has evolved:

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?'

1.2 Context

There are a number of policy areas which directly affect the HR practitioner on a daily basis. 'Public policy', stresses the CIPD (2009), directly affects the HR practitioner via employment legislation and regulatory codes of practice. It is generally accepted that there are four areas of HR work – Resourcing, Learning and Development, Relations and Reward – these areas cover all aspects of the management and development of people role of HR (Armstrong, 2009). Employment legislation is constantly changing and being updated – and legislation exists relating to all the above functions. The HR practitioner needs to have specialist knowledge of the legislation and must ensure the constant updating of this knowledge (Gold & Bratton, 2003). Not only that but the often ambiguous (Evans, 1999; Boselie, et. al., 2009) position of HR within organisations today requires them to include business knowledge and other, transferable skills, such as problem solving, negotiation and communication, required of the contemporary professional (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998). This ambiguity stems from the contradiction between employees being perceived as 'people' while at the same time being perceived as 'resources' to be utilised efficiently. This requires the contemporary HR practitioner to develop the skills required to successfully implement "team work and individual accountability, the need for change and the need for continuity, long-term vision and short-term performance management" (Evans, 1999, p326). Not only does the HR practitioner require the skills to implement, for example, a change initiative, but the skills to know

whether, at a given time, it is a change initiative which is required or whether maintaining continuity is most appropriate. Balancing the needs of the employees and the organisation can present a dilemma for the contemporary practitioner which, in itself, requires development of particular skills (Evans 1999), such as those identified above.

Although HR practitioners do not need a license to practice in the UK, many practitioners are members of the professional body for those involved in the management and development of people (CIPD, 2010, 2010^b), the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Equally, however, there are a number of practitioners who are not CIPD members. The CIPD has produced a code of Professional Conduct (CIPD, 2012). The CIPD requires that all members commit to the Code. The Code was developed as a result of a requirement of the Royal Charter (CIPD, 2003) which the Institute gained in July 2000. The CIPD Code covers 'professional standards of behaviour' (2012) and the continual updating and refreshing of members' skills and knowledge is one of these standards of behaviour.

It is evident therefore that the increasing amount, and continually changing, regulatory nature of contemporary policy which is relevant to HR practitioners emphasises the importance of their ongoing professional development. The importance of professional development is such that Evans introduced the term developmentalism to mean a 'commitment to development', maintaining that it is a criterion for professional quality (2008), a guiding principle and a basis for professional practice (2008^b, 2008^a). My research will build on

Evans' work in the area of developmentalism – but in the context of the HR profession. Although Evans has considered the teaching, social research and health and safety professions in developing her ideas, the HR profession has not been considered before. She identifies that some professions display developmentalism more evidently than others (2008^b). My research will investigate whether or not HR is one of those professions.

Non-formal learning is one way of participating in CPD. Non-formal learning mechanisms are generally accessible to everyone with new technology emphasising this. An example is the increasing use of networking sites to exchange professional development hints, tips and methods. Cheetham and Chivers (2001) identified and classified a taxonomy of informal learning events. As this taxonomy has not been used in the context of the HR profession and as it represents a comprehensive compilation of informal events, it seemed to be an appropriate model to use in this research. I intend to use, and if applicable update, the components of Cheetham and Chivers' Taxonomy of Informal Professional Learning mechanisms as a basis for identifying the various experiences used, or those which might be used, by HR practitioners, thereby building on Cheetham and Chivers' work; something which has not been done before in the context of the HR profession.

Given then that developmentalism reflects the importance of ongoing professional development, that it is a different, and arguably more appropriate means of defining professions today (Evans, 2008^c) and that non-formal learning encompasses accessible mechanisms which could be used to

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

contribute to a climate of developmentalism (Evans, 2008^c), the aim, therefore, of my research is:

'To explore the ways in which HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experience professional development and the role of non-formal learning in that development'.

The objectives which need to be met to achieve the aim are:

1. To discover the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland on the subject of professional development.
2. To discover the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland on the subject of non-formal learning.
3. To conceptualise a model to encourage and support the professional development of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland.

I began this EdD journey to develop myself professionally (Edwards, 2006) and personally, and this is what has happened, but in a far more profound way than I could ever have anticipated. I refer to my EdD 'journey' and while this metaphor is over used I honestly believe this has been a journey for me. Not least because researching one's own profession can be an interesting and sometimes painful (as it has been for me) process; there can be both benefits and drawbacks (Mason, 2001). The researcher needs to be aware of these, taking advantage of the benefits and addressing the drawbacks, if the research is to be valuable and worthwhile. The benefits of researching one's own profession include the fact that the researcher has an 'inside' knowledge of the specific issues or problems as well as having a vested interest in the profession (Mason, 2001). The drawbacks may include, for example, the

researcher being 'too close' to the situation thereby not being objective enough or simply not noticing enough; the researcher needing to develop his/her sensitivities and awareness – this may not be something the individual does normally; and perhaps most importantly the researcher may not always be ready to accept fresh possibilities (Mason, 2001). The various stages of the journey have led me to ask many questions relating to my preconceived beliefs around my profession and my original research area, including is HR really a profession? Does it matter if HR does not reflect the traditional characteristics of a profession? Will HR practitioners ever be considered as equals to practitioners such as accountants or lawyers? Is competence something that anyone can ever achieve in an occupational context, and will they know when they get there? Is it not professionalism that is the important issue? Is competence really the issue or is it about improving practice? Is improving practice the most important issue for HR practitioners who want to extend or even maintain their professionalism? The final two questions led me to think about why HR practitioners do not participate in CPD. One reason might be that individuals are not taking ownership of CPD – should the emphasis be changed so that HR practitioners would be able to see that it was all about improving, or extending, their practice and might this encourage them to be more receptive to the whole idea of development? Should I then be considering ways to encourage HR practitioners to 'Improve my Practice' (ImP) instead of CPD? I think it would be interesting to consider the possibility of conceptualising a model, which HR practitioners could use to support them in their professional development. This model may provide a focus for those practitioners who do want to improve throughout their working

lives as well as for those who are content to 'just do their job'. I know from my personal experience that there are individuals who have this attitude and to ignore this fact is naïve and unrealistic. Based on my own experiences in this area, Evans' (2008^c) observation that professionalism is enhanced through the process of professional development just feels 'right' to me. I still question whether or not HR is indeed a 'profession' in the true academic sense of the word. I wonder, though, how many occupations could be truly termed 'professions' in the climate we live and work in today – with so many customers and the increased accountability imposed from all sides including the Government? My particular interest concerns the updating of knowledge and skills of the individuals practising in the profession. I believe therefore that my research might be more valid than I first thought. In fact perhaps finding mechanisms to encourage and improve practitioners' ability to develop their knowledge and skills (extending their professionalism) may, in some small way, contribute to HR practitioners' practice, and as a result, enhance the status of the profession (Evans, 2009^a). The EdD has provided me with the opportunity to do this (Edwards, 2006).

It seems to me that elements of the concepts of Paulo Freire are relevant in my research and have, as a result, been an influence. Although Freire died in 1997, I believe that much of what he wrote has relevance today and in particular in the context of my research (Smith, 1997, 2002; Lytle, 2004). While I do not wholeheartedly embrace all of Freire's views and ideas, I do believe some of his concepts are worth exploring in the context of the study. Although there has been much criticism of Freire's work, specifically his use of

complex language and the accusation that his thinking and theories are more eclectic than original (Smith, 1997, 2002), the Brazilian educationalist's work in participatory adult literacy education is nevertheless considered significant (Smith, 1997, 2002; Sharma, 2001). Freire was a political activist and philosopher as well as an educationalist and believed that people could be "freed from a culture of silence through education" (Sharma, 2006, p43). The elements of Freire's concepts which, I believe, influence my research and which will be explored in more detail in the following chapter, include firstly, the technique of problem posing, problem solving and dialogue, which is at the heart of this study - that of the role of non-formal learning in relation to the professional development of HR practitioners. This is in direct contrast to the more traditional, formal approaches used in professional development which Freire terms 'banking' (Sharma, 2001, 2006; Spencer, 1992). Secondly, Freire's concept of praxis which relates to the amalgamation of theory and practice (Spencer, 1992; Sharma, 2001, 2006). This amalgamation is central to effective professional development in general, and specifically in the context of this study, that of HR practitioners. Thirdly, Freire's emphasis on 'conscientisation' which is described as 'developing consciousness, but consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality' (Taylor,, cited in Smith, 1997, 2002). I believe that it is important that HR practitioners do develop conscientisation if they are to participate effectively in professional development that will in turn enhance their practice.

This research takes the form of an exploratory study and its unique contribution will be to extend the work of Evans on developmentalism and

Cheetham and Chivers' on informal learning, in the context of HR and provide a unique contribution to both the literature and practice relating to the professional development of HR. This has not been done before, neither have these models been used concurrently, and for this reason it is expected that the findings of this research will be of interest to a wide range of stakeholders including HR practitioners, HR educators, employers and the CIPD. I anticipate that the outcomes of this research will be:

1. Identification of the various ways in which HR practitioners experience their 'professional development'.
2. Provision of a guide for the professional development practice of HR practitioners, and as a result, improve the quality of HR provision
3. Identification of a variety of different and accessible ways of participating in that professional development and how they can be embedded in everyday practice thus raising awareness of the ways in which different and accessible non-formal mechanisms could be used in HR practitioners' professional development. As a consequence, the ability of HR practitioners to take ownership for the development of their knowledge and skills and improve their practice would be enhanced (Bailey, 2011), thereby increasing motivation to participate in professional development by identifying and sharing good practice. This increased participation should go some way to contribute to a climate of developmentalism within the HR profession (Bailey, 2011) and, as a result, raise the status of the profession.

4. Development of a conceptual model for the purpose of supporting professional development of HR practitioners. This model should provide a focus of achievement for those practitioners who do want to improve throughout their working lives as well as raise HR practitioners' awareness of the need to keep up to date in terms of knowledge and skills (Bailey, 2011).

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis has seven chapters: an introduction (Chapter 1), a literature review (Chapter 2), the design and methodology of the study (Chapter 3), the findings (Chapters 4 and 5), the discussion (Chapter 6) and finally, the conclusions (Chapter 7).

The first chapter has provided an introduction and background to the study. The significance and context of the study was also highlighted in this chapter. In chapter 2 a comprehensive review of the relevant literature informing this study is presented. Chapter 2 begins with an overview of the terms profession, professional and professionalism in the context of this study – that of the HR profession. The chapter then provides a summary of CPD, the concepts of developmentalism and non-formal learning leading to a section reviewing the notion of the HR professionalism continuum. The literature in this chapter is revisited and reflected upon in chapter 6. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology for the study. The theoretical and methodological assumptions are discussed illustrating how the phenomenographic approach was appropriate for this study. A description of

the method employed to obtain and analyse the data is provided along with the steps taken to ensure ethical issues were upheld and rigour and validity were maintained throughout this study. The participants are introduced in this chapter as well as a discussion of how they were selected. In chapters 4 and 5 the findings of the study are presented. Chapter 4 contains the findings of the first phenomenon - professional development and chapter 5 that of the second phenomenon - non-formal learning. In both chapters a description is provided of how the findings emerged, in the form of an outcome space comprising categories of description, cross category themes as well as a detailed explanation of how these emerged from the participant interviews.

In chapter 6 the findings, comprising outcome spaces, cross category themes and categories of description, of the study are discussed with regard to conceptualising a model to support the professional development of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland. Finally, in chapter 7, the conclusions and recommendations to support professional development of HR practitioners are presented. This chapter goes on to identify potential areas for further research as well as reflections on my EdD journey. The structure of the thesis is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 3.

In the next chapter I will present a critical literature review.

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?'

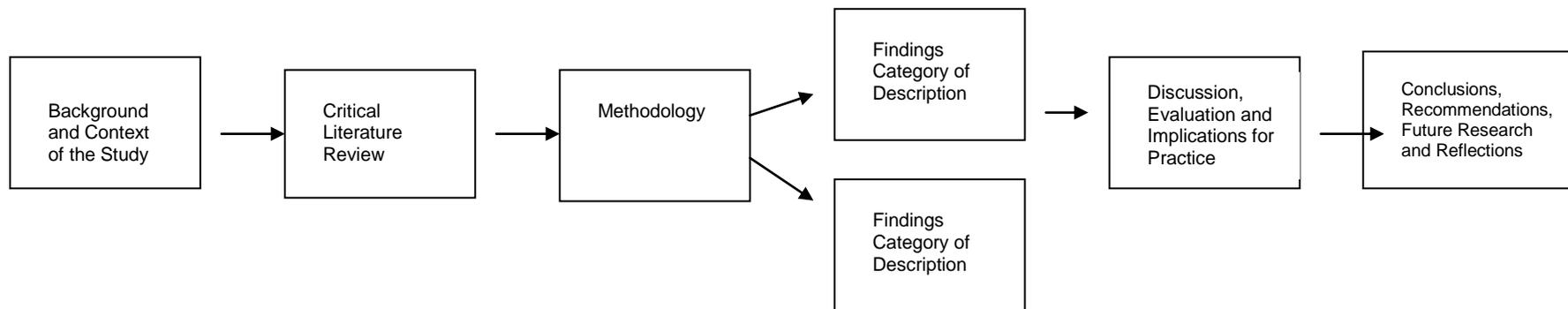


Figure 3 – Structure of the Thesis Source: Author

CHAPTER 2

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter a review of the relevant literature will be presented. The themes I intend to explore in this literature review include profession, professional and professionalism, CPD, learning, developmentalism, non-formal learning and the HR professionalism continuum.

2.1 Profession, Professional and Professionalism

As I outlined in the previous chapter, the focus of this study is the HR profession. Before considering the concept of developmentalism, it is appropriate to explore the terms 'profession', 'professional' and 'professionalism' which are widely used in daily life, on television, in the press and everyday conversation, with particular reference to the HR profession. The use of these terms became more commonplace after the industrial revolution heralded many new 'occupations' the members of which organised themselves into what developed and became known as 'professional' associations claiming the new and specialist knowledge these occupations required was sufficiently important to earn them the term 'new professions' (Swales, 2003) or, as Eraut identified, "strong professions, weak professions or occupations" (1994, p224). Abbott highlights the importance for occupations of being perceived as a 'profession' as there is so much discussion and disagreement on the criteria for distinguishing a profession from an occupation (1991). Friedson (1994, p10), generally accepted as one

of the leading writers on the subject of professions, says “I use the word ‘profession’ to refer to an occupation that controls its own work, organised by a special set of institutions sustained in part by a particular ideology of expertise and service”. While this seems a fairly clear way of considering the term ‘profession’, Wright (2008) highlights that some writers have taken a different, and more sceptical, perspective that a ‘profession’ is more of an “outcome of a strategy aimed at gaining monopoly control over work and exercising power over others” (p1066). The fact that professions, according to Friedson (1994, p13), are concerned with “serving the needs of the public” is an interesting dimension, not least because anecdotal evidence suggests that we are living in a climate of increasing consumer ‘wants’ in which the boundaries between ‘wants’ and ‘needs’ have, to some consumers, become blurred. To distinguish between a ‘need’ and a ‘want’ in the context of a ‘profession’ it is useful to consider a ‘need’ as that which could be considered as basic and crucial in terms of daily life (Ardagh, 2007). The boundary between ‘needs’ and ‘wants’ was more clear-cut at the time when professions comprised medicine, the law and the clergy. In current times society is much more consumerist, hence the blurring for many people between ‘needs’ and ‘wants’. This must lead us to question if the economic and professional relationship is also becoming blurred (Eraut, 1994). Eraut (1994, p223) identifies three key features of a profession – “expert knowledge, service and autonomy”, and points out that the needs of the clients should dictate professional action, not the needs of the profession, society or anyone else. Despite the fact that many writers have written on the subject of what constitutes a ‘profession’, offering many varying opinions and theories, there

seems to be some consensus in as much as a profession has a number of characteristics. Eraut (1994) identified that the traditional 'ideal' professions were law, medicine and the clergy. Hodson and Sullivan cited in Gold and Bratton (2003) suggest specialised knowledge, autonomy, authority and altruism as possible contenders. This view seems to be supported by Wooten (2001) when he highlights that "certification (via professional education) enhances the professionalism of HRM practice" (p160). Locke (2004) attempts to consolidate some of the previous writing saying that what he terms "classical professionalism' consists of three conditions – professional knowledge, autonomy and altruism" (p113). That then, presents some guidance in establishing whether an occupation is a profession or not. It seems to be that it is the specialised knowledge which sets professions apart – bestowing status – from other occupations (Harrison, 2006; Gold & Bratton, 2003; Eraut, 1994; Abbott, 1991). In recent years, though, a degree of public distrust of professionals has been emerging resulting in the 'public' becoming increasingly likely to question and challenge professionals' 'expert knowledge' (Harrison, 2006; Eraut, 1994). The application of this technical or specialist knowledge is, according to Cheetham and Chivers (2001), 'professional practice'. Schön, they highlight, proposes that professional practice relies more heavily on 'artistry' than application of theory. Cheetham and Chivers conducted some primary research – albeit with a limited sample – and broadly speaking their results seemed to suggest that professional practice was a combination of the two theories (Cheetham & Chivers 2001). Does this phrase explain what professionals actually do on a day-to-day basis? Perhaps, however, the term 'space for professional action' does. It can be

used to explain what they do, can do, ought to do and are allowed to do. Space for professional action will involve a number of elements including expert (mainly public) knowledge, tacit and personal knowledge, understanding, judgement. The question then arises – is autonomy and altruism required to enable professional judgement (Eraut, 1994)?

The term 'professional' can be used in the context, according to Gold and Bratton (2003), of judging an individual's behaviour at work as well as describing superior performance. Gold, et. al. (2007) say that the status of a professional is valued in society and is one to which many people aspire and they predict that this is likely to be the case in the short to medium term, though they do question whether this trend will continue in the long term, a view held by Pearson (2003) who goes as far as to say that the demand for professionals, in the future, will in fact decrease as a result of the IT revolution – in fact he predicts that some professions will be wiped out! Runte goes even further when he proposes that in contemporary society there are no 'professionals', only knowledge workers (1995). Nixon (2001), though referring to higher education teachers, suggests that status cannot, nowadays, be taken for granted. When I initially considered my research topic, I did not for a minute question whether or not HR really is a 'profession', or that, as a result, an HR practitioner might not be a 'professional' in the true sense of the term. I had heard the term 'profession' being used on a daily basis – indeed had used it myself – in relation to a wide variety of occupational contexts. As I read more comprehensively and my understanding of the term 'profession' increased, I began to question whether

or not HR, the focus of this study, can be termed a 'profession' and, as a result, whether HR practitioners are, in fact, 'professionals'. That led me to question the implications, if any, this might have on this study. A number of writers have compared a range of the criteria discussed above against the work of HR practitioners and the results have been mixed. Gold and Bratton (2003) applied Hodson and Sullivan's model and while HR practitioners might be considered to possess specialised knowledge, any claims of autonomy, authority and altruism might be more tenuous, although Ardagh (2007) proposes that one way in which HR could prove their authority and autonomy would be their ability to refuse requests from both Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and unions when this is appropriate. This however, is likely to be problematic to achieve. Traditionally professionals have had a duty to their 'clients', indeed the relationship between professional and client has historically been unique. Who are the 'clients' of a contemporary HR practitioner – the employees of the organisation for which they work or the organisation itself? Nowadays many professionals - including HR practitioners - work for an organization, depending on it for their salary (Friedson, 2001), a situation that could lead to contradicting and conflicting accountability issues for professionals – accountability not only to clients, but shareholders and other stakeholders also (Eraut, 1994). This represents a change from the more traditional situation when professionals were generally only accountable to other professionals (Marquand, 2004) and were self-employed or partners in small firms (Eraut, 1994). Nixon (2001) highlights that there seems, in recent times, to have been a concerted effort towards professionalising what have previously been assiduously managed occupations. This has, he says,

in fact, more likely had the effect of de-professionalising these occupations. It would appear that Nixon is suggesting that this is because the criteria for judging whether an occupation is a profession or not has shifted so radically from that which has been traditionally accepted. Might the HR profession be considered, then, as having evolved, as have a number of other new professions, as a result of the de-professionalisation and de-skilling of some of the more traditional professions, as described by Cheetham and Chivers (2005)? Cheetham and Chivers illustrate this suggestion using the example of the optometrist. This profession can be described as having been de-skilled to a certain extent as a result of individuals being able to self prescribe reading spectacles from high street shops and supermarkets – a common event in contemporary life. Both Runte (1995) and Abbott (1991) highlight that de-professionalisation, or de-skilling, is contemporarily commonplace. Abbott proposes that this is a way of professionals safeguarding their future. By commoditising knowledge and devolving to other groups, professionals have the opportunity to create and exploit new knowledge and services (ibid). Runte (1995), on the other hand, though referring to teachers, warns that de-skilling is a dangerous prospect which might ultimately result in erosion of professionals' self-fulfilment as well as place at risk the education of students. The fact that the HR function is, in some organisations, particularly those which are in the small to medium sized category, carried out by general managers or supervisors, is a contextual example of the de-skilling highlighted by Cheetham and Chivers, Runte and Abbott.

The HR profession has evolved in an interesting way. The first 'welfare secretaries' were all female and appointed towards the end of the 19th century, their remit being to protect women and children from the harsh working conditions prevalent at the time. In the beginning it was only the enlightened, mainly Quaker, employers who embraced the role of welfare secretaries (CIPD, 2011). With the advent of the First World War, women were required to take up employment in previously exclusively male job roles and the government of the day insisted that welfare workers be employed to oversee this new development. The progress of the profession, over the next 20 years, was erratic, some employers embracing and seeing the value of having such a welfare role in their organisations, while others refused to have such roles (CIPD, 2011) in their organisation. During the Second World War and continuing afterwards through the 60s and 70s mainly because of changes in management thinking, social attitude and the resultant need for managing the employment relationship particularly in terms of negotiation with workers, the role developed into that of 'personnel management' (CIPD, 2011). The next major change in the profession came about in the 1980s when, through influence from the United States, the profession re-invented itself as Human Resources Management (or HR) to reflect the importance of staff in the achievement of organisational objectives (CIPD, 2011). It was at this time that the specialisms within the profession that we know today, including recruitment, training, reward and organisational development and design, began to evolve. In the last 10 years, the role of HR has evolved into what has been identified by both Storey and Ulrich (cited in Kew & Stredwick, 2010) as a mix of tactical and strategic. Boselie, et. al., (2009) maintain,

however, that writers such as Legge have identified that little or no empirical evidence has been presented to confirm there has, in fact, been a change in the role despite the name change from personnel to HR. What Boselie, et. al. (2009), and Evans (1999) seem to agree on is that in contemporary organisations HR practitioners face a variety of dualities as they carry out their practice. Evans describes these dualities with regard to HR as “opposing forces in an organisation” (p330) and further explains by using Legge’s illustration when she highlights the “market and community” in an organisation. Employees can be viewed as resources, the “market”, or as “community”, where employees are team members and assets to the organisation (1999, p326). Evans suggests that dualities that must be “reconciled or dynamically balanced” (p328). This is relevant in the context of this study as this situation is likely to have an impact on the knowledge, skills and attitudes the contemporary HR practitioner requires.

Despite, or perhaps because of the way in which HR has evolved, Gold and Bratton (2003) identify that HR practitioners have “some way to go to match the professional status of their finance colleagues” (p5). HR then is often seen as ‘subordinate’ in the professional world. Does this result in HR being the subject of horizontal violence from other, stronger professions (Tame, 2009)? Horizontal violence of the type documented in the nursing occupation (Tame, 2009) can involve criticism, ridicule, humiliation, rumour mongering (Curtis, et. al., 2007) and can be verbal or emotional (Longo, 2007) leading to feelings of oppression in relation to colleagues. During my time as an HR practitioner I have more than once been identified as belonging to ‘the Human

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

Remains Department', an experience many of my HR colleagues seem to have had, based on informal anecdotal evidence. Even within the various specialisms of HR, status seems to be questionable as is illustrated in this model developed by Hale (2012).

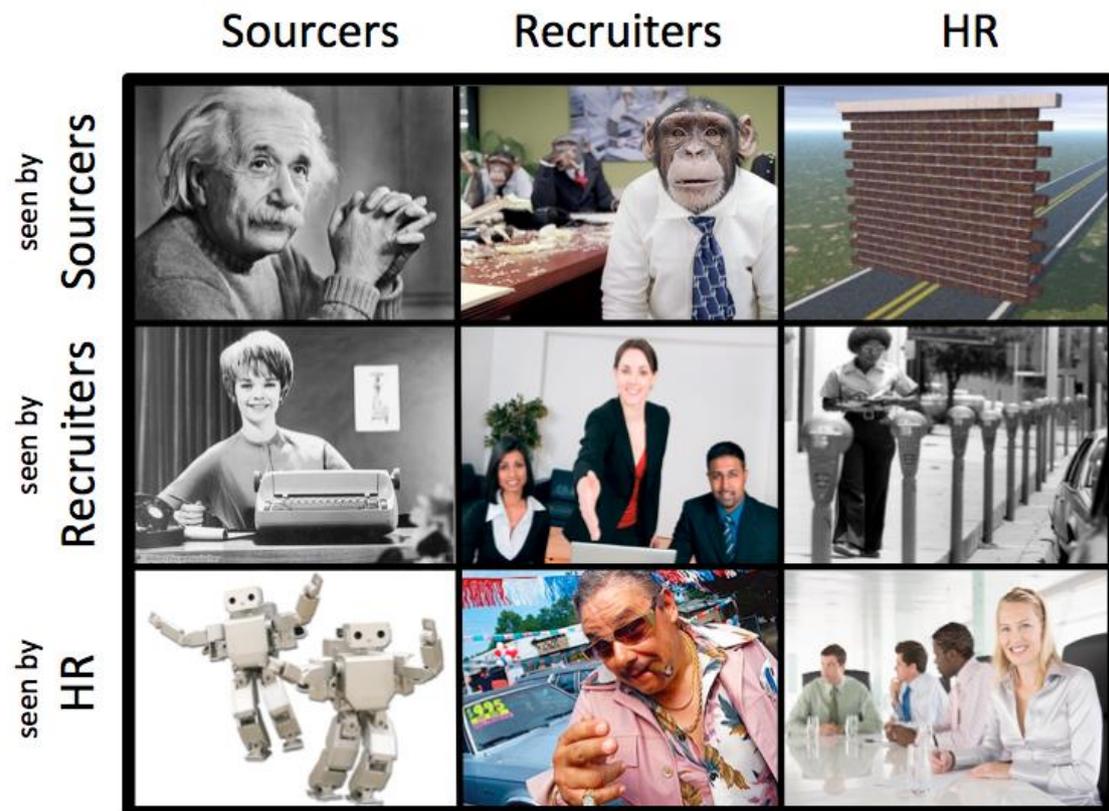


Figure 4 How HR specialisms perceive each other Source: Hale (2012)

This model illustrates how the specialisms of recruitment, sourcers and generalist HR perceive each other. For example sourcers see themselves as Einstein while HR perceives sourcers as robots, recruiters are seen by HR as 'used car salesmen'. HR are seen by HR as business suited decision makers though sourcers see HR as a brick wall and recruiters see them in more of a 'policing' role. Though the model has been developed through very informal and limited primary research, it is revealing in terms of perception of the role

of HR within the profession and must surely make us think about how other colleagues perceive HR.

Horizontal violence can result in victims perceiving themselves as powerless and oppressed (Curtis, et. al., 2007). If this is the case, there may be implications for the professional development of HR because if HR practitioners feel in any way oppressed, as a result of the horizontal violence from 'stronger' professions such as accountants and managers, could this then be transformed into a driver for their participation in professional development (Freire, 1970; Tame, 2009)? Despite HR often being perceived as the 'poor relation' of the professional world, Harrison (2006) observes that although it is a fairly new profession, she does not seem to be in any doubt that it should be recognised as such, and is, presently, an established profession. Ardagh (2007) found some, though not overwhelming, evidence to support this view when he applied a set of 20 criteria to the HR profession. He developed his set of criteria following an extensive analysis of relevant literature and based on the legal and medical professions. Alternatively, might it be the actions of the HR practitioners themselves which have the effect of reducing the professional standing of their profession: by outsourcing (Gold & Bratton, 2003); devolving much of their work to line managers (Gilmore, et. al., 2005); by not clearly illustrating how the function adds value to the organisation (Gilmore, et. al., 2005; Gold & Bratton, 2003; Ulrich, 1998; Wright, 2008) and by not increasing its knowledge and competence base (Gilmore, et. al., 2005)? With regard to the varying perceptions of the HR profession, Ulrich (1998) voices the opinion that because in many cases the

HR function is “ineffective, incompetent and costly” (p124), and it should therefore be ‘abolished’. This is not as radical as it first seems as Ulrich goes on to qualify that HR could, and should, “re-invent itself and act more professionally” by clearly showing how they add value in their organisations. Ardagh (2007) seems to agree when he suggests that proving themselves to be managers is crucial in enhancing HR’s professional status. The idea that the ‘raison d’etre’ of a profession is to meet the needs of the public (in this context employees, prospective employees, organisations and other stakeholders) and its application to HR is interesting. Does HR meet the needs of its public? On the one hand it could be argued that yes it does (Halikowa, et. al., 2003) – it fulfils a people management and development function, but on the other hand it could be argued that the ‘need’, if it exists, can be fulfilled by any manager – as so much HR work is devolved to line managers (Ulrich, 1998; Gilmore, et. al., 2005). Hanlon (2007) argues that HR, far from being a profession, should become redundant because it is irrelevant in the future world of work, a statement with which Pearson (2003) seems to concur when he suggests that what he terms personnel workers will no longer be required – computers will take over their work. There seems, therefore, to be a considerable amount of debate about whether or not HR really is a profession, a debate which is likely to continue for some time, but for the purposes of this research it does seem that, on balance, there is enough evidence for HR to be a contender as one of the ‘new professions’ (Swales, 2003). Given that HR emerged towards the end of the 19th Century and has evolved from its welfarist, paternalistic roots (CIPD, 2012) this seems to further reinforce the notion that it falls into the category of ‘new profession’,

although the way in which HR has evolved as a profession it is perhaps not surprising that HR has to work particularly hard to prove its place as one of the 'new professions'. This, then, must surely result in HR being deemed a 'profession' and an HR practitioner being deemed a 'professional' albeit tenuously (Bailey, 2011). For these reasons, these terms will be used in the context of HR throughout this study.

There seems to be varied opinions on the definition of the term 'professionalism'. Friedson's (1994, p10) definition is as follows: 'I use the word 'professionalism' to refer to that ideology and special set of institutions.' Professionalism therefore, according to Friedson, is concerned with the philosophy, beliefs and principles of the occupation or 'profession'. He also writes about professionalism relating to the "control of work by professionals themselves rather than by consumers of the state" (p32). Gilmore, et. al. (2005) citing work of Friedson (1970) and Weber (1978) seem to indicate that professionalism is tantamount to using knowledge and skills for the purpose of reward – both social and economic. Hoyle (1975) considered the concept of professionalism in the mid 1970s. Evans (2007) discusses how Hoyle came to the conclusion, in the context of the teaching profession, that professionalism was 'status related', suggesting that the term had become distorted as a result of being used unscrupulously by members of occupations as a strategy to improve their status. Nowadays, it's not as simple as that though, as Evans (2008^b) highlights McIntyre's work – though writing about educational researchers – where he makes the point that professional status has to be earned. In the past, importance was placed on remembering

information and knowledge; reflected in the importance afforded to the passing of exams (Walker, 2011), whereas nowadays there is an increasing emphasis on critical and original thought within the professions which is, in the current occupational climate, required to earn the status to which McIntyre refers. This seems to be especially relevant today particularly in relation to HR as one of the 'new' professions. Hoyle (1975) wanted to differentiate between the status related elements of (teachers') professional work which he termed 'professionalism' and the knowledge, skills and procedures used – for which he developed the term 'professionality'. Hoyle's work led him to develop a continuum, which reflected his view of the range of professionalism – a continuum ranging from 'restricted' (at the lower end) to 'extended' professionalism. Lomax (1986) describes Hoyle's continuum by identifying that the skills of those teachers at the restricted end of the continuum are concerned with those required in the classroom. The skills, on the other hand, of those teachers at the extended end are not limited to classroom skills but comprise a wider range. The difference, in essence, might be termed as a 'practitioner' being positioned at the 'restricted' end of the continuum and a 'professional' at the 'extended' end. Davies (1974) identified that this continuum could be used as a framework for development by those teachers who might want, and be able, to extend their skills. Characteristics of the 'restricted' model include the approach to the job based on experience and intuition (Evans 2009^c). Characteristics of the 'extended' model are typically a value on theory, an intellectual and rational approach to the job (Evans 2009^c). More recently, Hoyle (2001) and Sockett (1996) cited in Evans (2007) both referred to 'professionalism' in terms of the improvement or

enhancement of service or practice. This seems to be in line with the expectations of consumers today.

Although Hoyle introduced the term 'professionalism' in relation to his work on the teaching profession in the 1970s (Evans 2007), Evans (2008) maintains that the theory is not only still relevant today, but applicable to all professions. She has extended Hoyle's work theoretically both in terms of considering additional professions, most recently Occupational Health and Safety and defining what is meant by 'professionalism' more fully. Evans (2009^a) maintains that every profession has its own continuum, such as the one developed by Hoyle. Evans (2008^b) maintains that the characteristics, or activities, at each end of the continuum provide a framework for the professional development of practitioners within the profession. Professional development involves practitioners enhancing their professionalism orientation (the position they occupy at any one time on the professionalism continuum) by progressing along the continuum from the restricted end of the continuum to the extended end (Evans 2009^a).

Evans (2008) suggests that professions have changed, and as a result, study in the area of professions and professionalism has evolved to move the attention from what constitutes a profession to include issues such as "trust, values, ethics and control". (Evans, 2007, p10). She proposes that it is "the substance of professionalism" (Evans, 2007, p10) that is important today. She highlights the work of Hoyle (2001) and Quicke (2000) who identified that there is a new professionalism - reflecting the fact that the previously much

valued expert knowledge, which ensured the security and power of professionals, has to a greater extent been eroded, or at least depleted. Nowadays, the question could be asked, does doctor really know best? Pfadenhauer (2006) cited in Evans proposes the term 'postmodern professionalisms' to reflect this change (Evans, 2007). Evans herself has recently further developed these concepts of 'professionalism' and 'professionalism'. Her definition of professionalism is far broader and deeper than Hoyle's but seems to be logical, appropriate and relevant to a wide range of professions including the context of this study – that of the HR profession. Professionalism seems to still be concerned with the knowledge, skills and procedures involved in the practice of the profession but this definition also appears to identify the perspectives involved but also openly links these to professional practice.

Her definition is:

"An ideologically, attitudinally, intellectually and epistemologically based stance on the part of an individual in relation to the practice of the profession to which she/he belongs and which influences her/his performance practice" (Evans, 2008^d, p27).

Following on from her work developing her 'professionalism' definition, Evans (2008^d) began to consider the term 'professionalism' and came to the conclusion that it was an "amalgam of multiple professionalites" (p9), or in other words, the plural of professionalities, concerned with where practitioners

are placed on and how they progress along the professionalism continuum. This implies some sort of 'action' in terms of development on the part of the practitioner – not necessarily the action which is demanded or prescribed by professional bodies, customers or the Government, but that which is actually 'enacted' by the practitioners themselves; according to Evans (2008^d) there is often a mismatch between what is prescribed or demanded and that which actually takes place. She, Evans, maintains that professionalism must be something that is actually carried out by people (Evans, 2011) and more importantly there can be a difference between what they do and what is written that they do, for example in terms of policy. Consequently, she formulated the following definition:

“Professionalism influenced practice that is consistent with commonly held consensual delineations of a specific profession and that both contributes to and reflects perceptions of the profession's purpose and status and the specific nature, range and levels of service provided by and expertise prevalent within the profession as well as the general ethical code underpinning this practice” (Evans, 2008^d, p32).

It seems then, that in current times, the indicators of a profession are concerned with how the individuals who comprise that profession carry out their practice particularly in the light of the contemporary, fast changing occupational climate. As Evans (2009^c) highlights, in every occupation practitioners display differing attitudes towards their practice; whether the attitude causes the practitioner to faithfully follow the rules of the occupation

or, alternatively, to adopt a more liberal application of the rules. This being the case and in the context of this study, the ability of HR practitioners to carry out that practice is likely to be affected by the development of their knowledge and skills on the part of the practitioner.

2.2 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The concept of CPD has been around for some considerable time, but has enjoyed a recent increase in profile due mainly to the fast changing and competitive climate prevalent in the workplace today (Friedman & Woodhead, 2008; Bailey, 2011). This increase in profile has been promoted by the Professional Associations Research Network (PARN) which is a body with members from UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and Kenya, representing a wide range of professions and has a mission to “increase the profile of issues relating to professionals, professionalism and professional bodies through research and networking with the aim of determining and promoting professional good practice” (PARN, 2011). There are a wide variety of definitions of CPD but, according to the CIPD, CPD is “the conscious updating of professional knowledge and the improvement of personal competence throughout an individual’s working life” (CIPD, 2007). This definition seems to raise more questions than answers, and I believe, for the purpose of this research it is important to clarify what CPD actually incorporates. The definition includes ‘professional knowledge’ which is fairly clear but it is also about ‘personal competence’ which is not quite so transparent. Spencer and Spencer (1993) defined competence in the form of an iceberg model. They proposed that competence comprises three layers, the first layer comprising

the knowledge and skills required to carry out a job, the second layer comprising social and communication skills and the third layer comprising values, ethics and morals. Juceviciene and Lepaite (2005) developed the structure of a holistic competence concept, which incorporates knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and personal characteristics. Cheetham and Chivers drafted a model of professional competence in 1998 incorporating the competencies of knowledge, function, behaviour and ethics. In their model Cheetham and Chivers identified that in addition to the above characteristics more generic competencies such as communication, problem solving, creativity, mental agility, analysis and personal development were important and overarching. These they named trans or meta competencies. In their research they identified that the competence of reflection was of special importance because it is not only a competence in its own right but because of its role in relation to other competencies, which Cheetham and Chivers termed 'gate keeper' (1998, p274) and to reflect this importance titled reflection a 'super meta' competence.

It is important to acknowledge the depth and breadth of the components of CPD. In an attempt to achieve this I developed the mnemonic 'mosaic' comprising knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and morals, behaviours and personal characteristics (**m**orals, **k**nowledge, **s**kill, **a**ttitude, **b**ehaviour, **c**haracteristic) when referring to the elements of CPD. CPD then, is really about continuously updating an individual's 'mosaic'. It involves an individual knowing, in terms of their 'mosaic', where they are today, where they want to be in the future, and ensuring they get there (CIPD, 2007). An individual may

choose to learn practical, intellectual, cognitive, personal or interpersonal skills, depending on their particular needs at any one time. To be an effective HR practitioner in today's working environment, an individual will have to develop not only functional knowledge but much wider and diverse skills as those reflected in the term 'mosaic' – they will need to develop their 'whole person' (CIPD, 2007; Conlon, 2004; Shaw, 1999). It seems appropriate, therefore, that in the context of this study the definition of CPD which will be used and is adapted from the CIPD's definition is "the conscious updating of an individual's mosaic throughout their working life". This seems to concur with Evans' view of professional development (2009^b) in which, she maintains, there are three components. The first, functional development, is concerned with professional performance; secondly, attitudinal development is concerned with work related attitudes and finally, intellectual development which is concerned with work related knowledge and understanding (Evans 2009^b). It is likely then, that a contemporary practitioner, and in this context an HR practitioner, would be more likely to enhance his/her professionalism orientation by embracing these new broader and deeper components of professional development. Identifying these broader and deeper components is not a straightforward process as has been identified by Beach (1982) and Gibson (1998) in the context of nursing. Eraut (1999) has suggested one way to address this continuing need for professional development is that school children from 14 years onwards should be given the skills to enable them to participate effectively in learning throughout their career. To ensure continued employability, identification and prioritisation of the elements of an individual's mosaic which needs to be developed, warrants careful consideration.

According to Beach (1982) and Gibson (1998), this should not be an individual process, but one which would be better carried out in collaboration with others such as the HR practitioner's manager(s) or representative(s) of the organisation(s) for which the individual works. A means of achieving this is Gibson's proposal of the use of a Johari window when considering development needs (1998). Gibson uses the window to illustrate how an individual should involve others in the identification of their professional development needs in order to obtain the most relevant range of potential needs. Figure 5 below illustrates that an individual working alone while considering their development needs, will inevitably not be able to see the 'bigger picture', and as a result, potentially important professional development needs are likely to be overlooked.

HR PRACTITIONER			
		AWARE	NOT AWARE
OTHER STAKEHOLDERS	AWARE	Stakeholders and Practitioner Aware of Development Needs	Stakeholder Aware Practitioner Not Aware of Development Needs
	NOT AWARE	Stakeholders Not Aware Practitioner Aware of Development Needs	Undiscovered Development Needs

Figure 5 Johari's window for development needs analysis Source: Gibson (1998) p453 (Adapted)

Might this model be useful for those HR practitioners who work in organisations as well as those who work as consultants to more than one

organisation in the course of their professional development? Beach (1982) and Gibson (1998) identify through the use of this model, HR practitioners could identify appropriate areas for professional development. There are, though, always 'blind' needs of which HR practitioners themselves might not be aware, but could potentially be identified by their managers, or in the case of self employed consultants, by their clients or prospective clients. This model, then, could possibly be a useful tool in assisting the HR practitioner identify the broader and deeper professional development needs required by the contemporary HR practitioner.

I have already highlighted that it would be logical to expect that CPD would be a common feature of professional life today. This, however, seems not to be the case and CPD participation by professionals, including HR professionals appears to be erratic (Friedman & Phillips, 2001; Rothwell & Arnold, 2005; Farmer & Campbell, 1997). There are varying opinions on the benefits of CPD but Megginson and Whitaker (2007) identify benefits including, for individuals, the opportunity to reflect and consider whether or not they are achieving what they want from their professional lives and, for employers, the knowledge that their employees are keeping their 'mosaic' up to date. Professional bodies appear to embrace this opinion that CPD is a means of demonstrating an individual remains up to date (Gold, et. al., 2007). Certainly, employer attitude to CPD can be an important factor in an employee's participation in CPD (Friedman & Phillips, 2001). Murphy, et. al. identified that lack of financial support on the part of the employer can discourage employees from participating in CPD (2006). Lack of

understanding of employee work and domestic obligations as well as the rigidity of (formal) courses can also have an adverse affect on employee participation in CPD (ibid). While Jones and Fear (1994) maintain that there is, in fact, a clear link between CPD, and enhanced performance, they do highlight that employee development areas must be congruent to organisational objectives. A lack of congruence particularly with regard to formal courses can result in CPD being perceived as a waste of time (Murphy, et. al., 2006).

It is sometimes the perception that professional bodies introduce CPD schemes but then fail to support their members in their participation of CPD (Friedman & Phillips, 2001). There are, however, disadvantages to these prescribed schemes as they might have the effect of, at best, encouraging practitioners to adopt a superficial approach towards professional development or, at worst, discouraging practitioners from considering their individual and specific development needs (ibid). Some professional bodies specify very quantitative guidelines, that is to say, specifying a certain minimum number of documented hours, which should be devoted to CPD activities, whereas others adopt a more qualitative stance. The CIPD, via its Code of Professional Conduct, (CIPD, 2012) which details the expected standards of professional behaviour, makes reference to the continual updating and refreshing of members' skills and knowledge. The CIPD does not identify a specific number of hours or events which need to be undertaken for the purpose of professional development; they encourage what appears to be a 'self managed process' for their members (CIPD, 2007). Professions

comprise individual practitioners and as such needs will vary from individual to individual, so while it is this continuous practice of professional development that can keep practitioners up to date, it must be considered on an individual basis (Evans, 2009). That is not to say that professional development needs to be a solitary process; Cheetham and Chivers (2005) identify that both group and individual learning experiences could, and should, be considered by practitioners. While anecdotally, it might be generally accepted that CPD is fundamental in a practitioner's keeping up to date, there is an opinion that formal CPD schemes introduced by professional bodies are not necessary for those individuals who are inherently committed to their ongoing development (Lester, 1999). There are, however, more cynical practitioners who simply do not see the need for CPD, question its necessity to enhance their career, and will, at best, pay lip service to their professional body's CPD scheme, or as is often the case, simply ignore it (Birkenshaw, 1994; Law, 1999; Bamber, 2009). Are these the practitioners who are most likely to remain at the 'restricted' end of the professionalism continuum? This is a relevant question given Evans' (2009) proposition that professionalism influenced practice is an indicator of a 'profession' today. There are a number of 'professionals' which it appears, based on my own experience from researching web sites of professional bodies and talking informally to members of a wide variety of different professions, do participate in ongoing professional development. The teaching, legal and medical professions (Evans, 2008) are the most well known. In their various reports on CPD, PARN identified reasons why CPD should be undertaken. They suggest that as a result of the rapid changes in the working climate today the knowledge, skills and experience with which an

individual begins his/her career may well be out of date within a very short time. This seems to concur with Evans' (2009) view that more and more practitioners from an assortment of professions now accept that development completed prior to their commencing practice is not sufficient to equip them for the duration of their career (Evans, 2009). There has, though, been a tendency in the past for individuals to consider their pre-service education and professional educational achievements to be the 'sum total of their professional development' (Murphy, et. al., 2006, p365), although Cheetham and Chivers (2001) discourage this notion when they highlight that practitioners need to realise that the greatest amount of professional development will take place during their working lives, not during pre-service education. The present economic climate has resulted in decreasing job security coupled with fierce competition to secure and retain employment across many professions. As a result, individuals need, and are likely to continue to need, to focus seriously on managing their career and future employability (Atkinson, 2002). CPD – because of its potentially broader nature than conventional formal courses – could enable practitioners to keep their 'mosaic' up to date, by raising the individual's profile, making them more marketable thereby providing a means of gaining recognition for all knowledge, skills and experience (PARN, 2000). Keeping the 'mosaic' up to date seems to be a key element of all three forms of career identified by Kanter (1989), and the contemporary HR practitioner's career could be bureaucratic, professional or entrepreneurial. Whether an HR practitioner's career is bureaucratic which may include moving from job to job, professional which may include more and more difficult assignments or entrepreneurial

which would incorporate new value or capacity, continuing professional development would appear to be a necessary process to ensure success in all of the three forms. Traditionally CPD experiences have been input driven, that is to say, involving almost exclusively formal experiences such as courses but current thinking is now moving towards more practice based experiences (Gold, et. al., 2007). As the Institute of Management (1992) has identified 'CPD includes everything which has the effect of developing the professional individual in the course of their career'. This reflects how CPD is potentially broader than conventional courses – it can, and indeed should, include formal and informal learning experiences (Eraut, 2001). CPD is all about learning and potentially, learning can occur in a formal or informal way and can be planned or unplanned. Learning events can happen anywhere, such as in the workplace, at home watching television, at a social event, during interaction with colleagues, managers, peers, mentors, in a classroom or at a formal course. What individuals learn from any of these can then be used by them, wherever they find it useful – whether in work or not. Effective CPD simply allows individuals to recognise these potential learning opportunities and capitalise on them, in a way that is meaningful for the individual practitioner at that particular time. CPD is very personal; an individual's interpretation and learning from a particular event is unique to that individual because everyone is a unique individual with unique life experiences. This means that it is up to the individual to choose what and how they learn from an event. Participating in CPD does, however, present challenges for individuals. A feature of life today is that most people have to contend with balancing busy professional and personal lives – CPD is just one more task to complete in an already busy

schedule (Birkenshaw 1994, Doney 1998, Friedman & Phillips 2001). All of this would appear to be important and relevant in terms of this study.

The CIPD, via the Code of Professional Conduct, encourage practitioners to adopt a 'self managed' process to keep themselves up to date. Despite this, the amount of participation in CPD by HR practitioners has been identified as questionable. This leads to the question is there a mismatch such as that described by Evans within the HR profession? Evans' mismatch, in this context, relates to CIPD members actually participating in development to the extent required by the CIPD (Evans, 2008^d)? Is there sufficient action in terms of development by HR practitioners to progress along the (as yet undeveloped) professionalism continuum? This raises two questions pertinent to this study, the first being what are the ways in which contemporary HR practitioners experience professional development discussed in this section (RQ1)? Secondly, what are their experiences of non-formal learning in achieving the various elements of that professional development (RQ2)?

2.3 Learning in the context of CPD

It is important at this stage of the literature review to clarify the terminology being used and which will continue to be used in this study and its context. In the section on Continuing Professional Development, I highlighted the CIPD's definition of CPD as being "the conscious updating of professional knowledge and the improvement of personal competence throughout an individual's working life" (2007). In an attempt to clarify more fully this definition, following a discussion on the breadth and depth of CPD, I proposed that the term CPD,

in the context of this study would be defined as the “conscious updating of an individual’s mosaic throughout their working life”. The term development, highlight the CIPD, “implies a longer-term or broader process of learning and training – acquiring skills or knowledge by a range of different means such as coaching, formal and informal learning interventions, education or planned experience” (Egan, 2013, p2). This being the case, the next area to clarify is how that mosaic might be updated. Schoenfeld seemed to encapsulate how this might be done in his statement “. . . coming to understand things and developing increased capacities to do what one wants or needs to do . . .”. (1999, p6). This is, in fact, Schoenfeld’s definition of learning. The CIPD’s definition of learning is similar and is “a self-directed, work-based process that leads to increased adaptive potential” (Egan, 2013, p1). In the context of this study, then, CPD is concerned with updating the practitioner’s mosaic and the way this is likely to be achieved is through learning on the part of the HR practitioner. Factors, which affect the learning in this context, are firstly, the practitioners are all adults and secondly, are currently practising in HR. The next thing to consider is how this learning might occur. In the previous section, I identified that learning can, potentially, happen anywhere, such as in the workplace, at home watching television, at a social event, during interaction with colleagues, managers, peers, mentors, in a classroom or at a formal course. Learning can be planned or unplanned and can occur in a formal or non-formal way. This is all reflected in both definitions of learning above. The focus of this study is on the use of non-formal learning in the professional development of HR practitioners. Non-formal learning in this context will be expanded upon later in this literature review.

2.4 Developmentalism

As has been identified already, Evans (2011, 2009^c) and other writers have proposed that the traditional and conventional criteria for defining a profession have become outmoded as professions have changed – reasons for this change include increased marketisation and as highlighted by Hoyle (2001) and Quicke (2000) the previously much valued 'expert knowledge' which ensured the security and power of 'professionals' has to a greater extent been eroded, or at least depleted. This is particularly relevant since the Industrial Revolution heralded many new 'occupations', the members of which organised themselves into what developed and became known as 'professional' associations claiming the new and specialist knowledge these occupations required earned them the term new 'professions' (Swailles, 2003). The practical implications of changing professions include changes in practice and, as a consequence, professional development, arguably making the latter more important. As a consequence of the lack of participation of HR practitioners in conventional CPD (Friedman & Phillips, 2001; Farmer & Campbell, 1997), and the potential impact this is likely to have on professional status, finding ways of putting a different emphasis on and heightening the concern of HR practitioners towards developing professionally and using the notion of a 'climate of developmentalism' as a means of achieving this, seems worthy of investigation. For the reasons identified above, Evans has come to the conclusion, based on her conceptual and ontological analyses, that contemporary professions, should be evaluated on the basis of their 'developmentalism' (Evans, 2009). Evans (2008) suggests to enhance or

strengthen the professional status of any occupation whilst at the same time benefiting the individual members by enhancing what I have termed their 'mosaic' might be to encourage developmentalism amongst individual practitioners. Given the questionable status of HR in terms of whether or not it might be considered a 'profession' and that the 'profession' comprises many individuals, it seems a reasonable proposition to encourage HR practitioners to embrace the concept of developmentalism might be one way of producing evidence to support the view that HR can be designated a profession or at least one of the 'new professions'.

It is useful at this stage to unpack the term 'developmentalism'. Developmentalism, according to Evans, represents in a profession a commitment to professional development (Evans, 2009). Practitioners who display developmentalism will, Evans says (2008) be at the 'extended' end (or will be working towards it) of the professionalism continuum, will continually strive for excellence and evaluate their practice in a self critical manner. They will view tasks they complete as part of their day-to-day activities, as opportunities to perform better. The question was raised in the previous chapter that should the emphasis not be that of 'Improving my Practice'? The suggestion to encourage HR practitioners to participate in activities, which contribute to improving practice as part of their normal day-to-day practice, would lead to the improved status of the profession. This is reflected in a report by Schostak et al for the College of Emergency Medicine when they say "CPD ensures that everyday practice is good practice" (2010, p33). The proposition is that by fostering a 'climate of developmentalism' within the HR

profession, the likelihood is that this will go at least go some way to improve HR practice. The word 'climate' has been selected deliberately because it appears the most appropriate in this context. There is much literature on the subject of 'organisational climate', Wallace, Hunt and Richards (1999) suggest that an organisation's climate consists of behaviour and attitude. In this study it is not an organisation that is being considered but a group of practitioners within one profession - HR - and their participation in professional development. It is the attitude and behaviour of the individual practitioners towards their development that is important and relevant, hence fostering a *climate* of developmentalism seems to be appropriate in this context. In addition embracing a climate of developmentalism as part of everyday practice seems to reflect the pedagogical methodology of Freire (Heaney, 1995) in terms of praxis, empowerment and conscientisation.

How might a climate of developmentalism be achieved? While developmentalism is concerned with a commitment to professional development, professional development is, according to Evans (2008^b), a means by which a practitioner extends his/her professionalism, or in other words, progresses along the professionalism continuum (Evans, 2007^a). The knowledge and skills gained through professional development should, in itself, result in a certain power for the HR practitioner that seems to reflect the empowerment Freire aimed to achieve with his adult learners (Freire, 1985; Killian, 1988). Given that the profession comprises individual practitioners their common vision could bring about a change in terms of an increase in participation of professional development (Heaney, 1995). By embracing

developmentalism into their everyday professional practice, HR practitioners would, to some extent, reflect Freire's methodology of conscientisation (1985) which is concerned with reaching new levels of awareness; in this case that of participation in professional development. Not only that but developmentalism would also reflect Freire's concept of praxis – that of translating knowledge into practice (Crotty, 1998; Heaney, 1995). Given all of this then, giving consideration to the concept of a climate of developmentalism would seem to be worthy of further investigation.

2.5 Non-Formal Learning

There is often confusion or misunderstanding in relation to the term 'informal learning' because there are a number of writers who use the term 'non-formal learning'. In 2002, Colley, et. al. qualify that context is important when considering boundaries between formal, informal and non-formal learning and in 2003 they identify that there is no difference in meaning between the terms 'informal' and 'non-formal' learning, they are, in fact, interchangeable. Eraut (2000) seems to disagree with this statement and because there appears to be less colloquial connotations, he prefers the term 'non-formal'. The term 'non-formal learning' will be used in this study, as it seems to be the most appropriate in this context. While this is the case, I do understand that the terms non-formal and informal are often used interchangeably and where other writers use the term 'informal', I will respect this when discussing their work.

As has already been identified, work today, and HR work is no exception, is changing rapidly and the knowledge and skills individuals actually need to do their job are changing – a consequence of this is that formal development is often quickly out of date, so other methods need to be considered (Eraut et. al, 1997). Phillipson (2006) identifies that 70% of organisational learning takes place on the job during experiences such as problem solving and special assignments, 20% from experiences such as coaching, mentoring and support from managers and colleagues and 10% through formal experiences such as classroom or workshop activities. Much has been written about 'formal learning' which is generally considered to refer to be "centred upon teaching or instruction and is located within specialist educational institutions" Colley, et. al., (2003, p5) and as highlighted by Phillipson above only results in a small percentage of organisational learning. Surely then it is worth exploring how more non-formal learning experiences can be used to harness more of the 'mosaic' required of a contemporary HR practitioner? Although a number of writers have identified and described what is meant by 'informal or incidental learning events or experiences' little research has been carried out on their role in professional development, particularly relating to the HR profession. Colley, et. al., (2003) attempt to clarify by highlighting that it (informal learning) generally occurs outwith, what is traditionally identified as, an educational institution. It is, Cunningham and Hillier intimate "almost everything that a person does" (2013, p3). Marsick and Watkins (1997) identify that informal learning is a method of learning that takes place during daily activities, and can occur subconsciously. Not only that, but because, as Chivers identifies (2011), employees can learn in the course of their daily

activities, their normal productivity need not be interrupted by this learning. This is, arguably, extremely important in the current economic climate. Non-formal learning has been around for some time, pre-dating elementary education (Colley, et. al., 2003), although the concept was formally acknowledged by Knowles in 1950. Colley et al (2003), however, attribute recognition to a UNESCO report in 1947. Dewey, (1938) an educational philosopher, wrote extensively and was an enthusiastic advocate, on the subject of experience and education. Mary Parker Follett is also credited with promoting non-formal learning albeit indirectly. In the early 1900s she was involved very heavily in promoting community centres as an educational, as well as a social, medium (Smith, 2001). It was Malcolm Knowles however who really raised the profile of, as well as developing the term, 'informal learning'.

As has already been identified, work today is changing rapidly and the knowledge, skills and attitudes professionals actually need to do their job are changing – as formal development is often quickly out of date, they have to use other methods (Eraut, et. al., 1997). Eraut (2000) makes a point of highlighting that non-formal learning should not be considered inferior to formal learning. This being the case, non-formal learning is an obvious avenue worth exploring in terms of professional development (Bailey, 2011). Jay Cross, however, a consultant and author who has written and spoken much on the subject of informal learning says that informal learning has 'gone mainstream' and believes that his job of promoting it is done and as a result has closed down his blog on the subject (2011). The recent Government

initiative (BIS, 2010) of promoting a “café culture” (p6) to learning in which “organisations are encouraged to embrace and utilise less formal workplace learning initiatives” (p4) thus “creating a learning culture” (p3) seems to go some way to concur with Cross’s statement.

While there are clear advantages to utilising non-formal learning experiences, where these experiences are reactive, short term, unsupported and unmanaged they can have the effect of frustrating the employee (Conlon, 2004; Dale & Bell, 1999). In addition, there is the danger that the learning can become context specific, (Chivers, 2006) wrong, or simply bad practice (Taylor, 2007; Mathews, 2013). Other criticisms of non-formal learning are that it is very often haphazard, left to chance and that individuals may not be completely aware of the learning that has taken place, (Marsick & Volpe, 1999); as a result, the learning not being recognised or accredited (Cofer, 2000) individuals do not gain confidence from the learning (Dale & Bell, 1999). Unsurprisingly, there are differing opinions on the value of non-formal learning, some people like Coffield (2000), and Canning (2011) express in favourable terms the value of non-formal learning in 21st Century workplaces, a view with which Collis, et. al. (2004) seem to concur when they say that ‘anchoring’ of learning in problems and tasks is achieved this way, while others see little value in this form of learning suggesting that it has little or no theoretical underpinning (Cullen, et. al., 2002).

There has been research carried out which attempts to address some of these criticisms. Two studies, one by the Scientoer-Menon Network (2004) and

another by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (2009), carried out across the European Union related to the quality and accreditation of non-formal learning in the workplace and both of which resulted in practical recommendations and tools which employers and professional bodies could utilise to ensure the quality and, as a result, accreditation of non-formal learning experiences. These recommendations seem to reflect Eraut's observations relating to the importance of quality and the accreditation of professional learning (1994). Incorporating some of these practical recommendations is likely to have the effect of dissuading unscrupulous employers from perceiving non-formal learning simply as an excuse for not investing in more formal, and more costly, development events.

The breadth and diversity of knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be achieved using non-formal learning methods is often not appreciated (Canning, 2011). Job specific, behavioural and attitudinal competences, or the 'mosaic', can all be achieved through non-formal learning (Conlon, 2004). In a publication by the Performance and Innovation Unit they defined workplace learning as "activities which increase the capacity of individuals to participate effectively in the workplace, thereby improving their productivity and employability" (PIU, 2001, p6) and it is acknowledged that learning does come about as a result of everyday experiences at work through interaction with colleagues, managers and customers (Fuller, et. al., 2003). This then seems pertinent to this research. Philipson (2006) writes about 'solving problems' 'special assignments' and 'other day to day activities'. Marsick and Volpe (1999) identify that non (or informal) learning takes place in the course

of day to day life and work: Digenti (2000) suggests that 'networking events' and 'team projects' are non-formal face-to-face learning events and learning can flow from normal day-to-day activities and interaction.

One very important advantage of non-formal learning is, as Terry (2007) identified, that it enables individuals to access the knowledge they need when it is needed (Cross, 2007) – unlike during more formal programmes when participants learn what is in the programme – though relevant, perhaps not relevant to them at that particular time, reflecting Freire's 'banked' approach (Smith, 1997). Eraut (2004) identified 'participation in group activities, working alongside others, tackling challenging tasks and working with clients' (p266-267) as types of work activities which give rise to learning. Wisniewski and McMahon (2005) refer to collaboration, coaching, feedback and knowledge access. Marsick and Watkins' (1997) proposed the definition – 'Informal learning is a process of learning that takes place in everyday experience, often at subconscious levels'. Dale and Bell (1999) identified a list of learning devices including Observation, Feedback and Learning Logs. Recently the non-formal mechanisms of coaching and mentoring seem to have gained popularity (Chivers, 2011). Mathews (2013) illustrates how the introduction of 'flash mentoring' (loc2483) has evolved; one time meetings between colleagues for the purpose of learning. Chivers (2011) found evidence in his study with investment bankers that discussions on a wide range of work-related matters amongst colleagues both inside the workplace and in more social environments such as pubs and restaurants, had the effect of building trust resulting in enhanced learning from these discussions. This

list of experiences was useful in as much as it went some way to explicate the term 'non-formal learning events'. I considered, though, that the items seemed very general and broad and open to misinterpretation. Cheetham and Chivers (2001) developed their taxonomy of 12 informal learning events using the acronym 'PROFESSIONAL'. The taxonomy was developed based on qualitative, empirical research consisting of interviews with 80 practitioners from 20 professions and a questionnaire survey of 372 practitioners from 6 professions considered by the authors to be representative (Cheetham & Chivers, 2001). The acronym 'PROFESSIONAL' stands for:

- “Practice and Repetition – including practice, rehearsal, preparation and planning
- Reflection – including self analysis, reflection on own and others’ actions before, during and after an event
- Observation and copying – including structured and casual observations of others, shadowing
- Feedback – including appraisal, evaluation exercises, peer review and appraisal and reading body language
- Extra occupational transfer – learning transferred from previous occupations and taster experiences
- Stretching activities – including working above the grade, demanding tasks and experiences and pioneering activities
- Switching perspectives – including role transfer, secondments and job exchanges
- Interaction with mentor/coach – including mentoring, coaching, tutoring and advising
- Osmosis – including working alongside a role model, networking and working alongside more experience colleagues
- Neurological/psychological devices/mental tricks – including positive thinking, visual thinking, NLP techniques, graphical representation, cognitive models and ‘whole brain techniques’
- Articulation – including speaking at conferences, writing articles, presentation lectures and developing learning materials

- Liaison/Collaboration – including collaborative projects, team building exercises and international collaboration”

(Cheetham & Chivers, 2001, pp282-283)

The rapid increase in technology and the opportunities, which this brings, seems to have made the already accessible non-formal mechanisms even more accessible. Through the use of social networking sites, for example, learning from more experienced colleagues by way of collaboration is much more straightforward. Not only that but the number of experienced colleagues an individual can access is likely to be significantly increased (Mathews, 2013). In addition, an individual has, as a result of technology, access to a vast range of information and resources (Mathews, 2013; Cross, 2010). The question which seems to become apparent is that by raising their awareness of the use of accessible and generally inexpensive non-formal learning mechanisms, and using an HR professionalism continuum as a framework, might HR practitioners be more likely to participate in professional development thereby embracing developmentalism as part of their everyday practice (Bailey, 2011)? Not only that, but non-formal learning might be more liable to provide opportunities for learning, resulting in practitioners achieving their individual 'mosaic' that is required of an HR practitioner in today's occupational climate (Bailey, 2011). Non-formal learning provides the opportunity for the practitioner to choose what elements of their professional development requires to be addressed and when that professional development takes place. This seems to reflect, then, the empowerment that Freire aimed to achieve with his adult learners (Killian, 1988). Similarly,

Mathews (2013) highlights Jay Cross' observation that non-formal is like riding a bike – the rider chooses the destination, speed and route whereas formal learning is like riding a bus – the driver is, in effect, 'in charge' (chapter 3). In the context of this study, then, HR practitioners could, by using the non-formal learning mechanisms available, have the means and power to be in control of their own professional destiny. If this is the case, fostering a climate of developmentalism within the HR profession may go some way towards strengthening the position of HR as one of the 'new professions'.

As has been stated there are a number of limitations to non-formal learning. Marsick and Volpe (1999) suggested initiatives which might improve non-formal learning including heightened awareness of learning, reflective skills, making time and space for learning. It is interesting and worthwhile to consider if, by taking more heed of, and researching into, non-formal learning are we simply formalising it (Conlon, 2004)? This is something Colley, et. al. (2003) identify began to happen to informal learning in the 1980s. Surely though the most important thing is not whether or not we are formalising the learning but that we are capturing and ensuring that learning is useful. Digenti (2000) identifies that the issue of recording and measuring what has been learned in the course of non-formal interventions is problematic. Not only that, but Fulford cautions that failure to record learning derived from an event can have the effect of de-valuing that learning (2012). Not only that, if individuals do not review and follow up what they have learned, it will be quickly forgotten Mathews (2013), which seems to highlight the value of recording of learning. Recording of CPD is an emotive issue as many

practitioners from a variety of professions see the recording of CPD as a chore (Donyai, et. al., 2010). A study within the pharmacy profession identified that the personality type of an individual has a direct impact on that individual's likelihood to record their CPD (Donyai, et. al., 2010). Another study found that although pharmacists embraced and participated in CPD they did not actually record the CPD, though they recognised there were benefits to recording (Donyai, et. al., 2010). This seems to be an example of cognitive dissonance theory. Cognitive dissonance comes about when the way in which an individual acts is inconsistent with how he/she feels which seems to be the case in this situation (McKenna, 2000). Reconciling feelings and behaviour is a complex issue and it is accepted that the best way is to bring about attitude change so that there is compatibility between decision and behaviour (McKenna, 2000). The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB) highlights that what is important in terms of recording of CPD is that it should be "relevant to their field of practice" (Donyai, et. al., 2010, p2), not simply a list of events, and should also "record how their CPD has contributed to the quality or development of their practice" (Donyai, et. al., 2010, p2). The focus of CPD being on how the result of CPD is concerned with the impact on the individual (the professional) and, as a result, the improved service to the professional's customer or client. This emphasis has been embraced by, amongst other professions, pharmacy (Donyai, et. al., 2010) and dentistry (Eaton, et. al., 2011). The pharmacy profession has adopted a mandatory approach to CPD – requiring pharmacists to submit 9 records per annum to the professional body for scrutiny, which seems to have worked (Donyai, et. al., 2010). A study of community pharmacists found that

this mandatory approach was welcomed believing it would act as a “catalyst” (Doyani, et. al., 2010, p10) for their engagement in CPD. This mandatory approach to recording of CPD is an approach the CIPD has, to date, resisted. Quinn (2009) identifies that recording of learning should, through the use of contemporary technology, be much more straightforward, for example by creating and maintaining an online journal, or blog. He suggests that through the use of blogs to record learning, the individual is more likely to reflect on the learning as well as provide the opportunity to receive feedback on those reflections; or what he calls “thinking out loud” (p3) with a view to improving future performance. Mathews (2013) seems to concur with Quinn when he highlights the use of wikis and smartphones as a means of recording learning.

As far as evaluation of CPD is concerned, there are various models which can be used in evaluating training and learning, the most well-known and widely used even today is that of Kirkpatrick which was developed in 1975 (Gold, et. al., 2010). The model consists of 4 levels of evaluation. The first level is that of the reaction of the learner following an activity, the second the skills and knowledge gained as a result of the activity, the third is the effect on the performance of the learner within the workplace and the fourth the effect of changes in performance on measuring results at work (Gold, et, al., 2010). Some practitioners and writers identify that the traditional models of evaluation, such as Kirkpatrick, are simply not appropriate (Pontefract, 2011) nowadays as many different types of learning events other than formal and traditional are used by contemporary practitioners as part of their development. This issue has been highlighted by a number of other writers

and practitioners and while it is agreed that it can be difficult to measure the impact of non-formal events (Mathews, 2013), there are principles of evaluation which can still be applied (Clark, 2011) such as surveys, formal before and after testing, self report and feedback (Smith, 2006; PAVS, 2008; Marsick, 2003), though they are underdeveloped (Skule, 2004). Mathews' (2013) view might, arguably, be too simplistic; he suggests that non-formal learning should be about measuring capability; if an individual is able to complete a task when it is required, as a result of non-formal learning, then the learning has been successful. The difficulty in evaluating CPD is summed up in a study by the General Medical Council when they say 'any meaning we attribute to effectiveness is to be left open because it is complex and *multi-dimensional* and accordingly, incompatible with measurement' (Schostak et. al., 2010, p12).

In terms of recording what has been learned during non-formal learning events PAVS (2008) suggests tools such as portfolios, records of learning, logs, artefacts and other forms of diverse evidence as possible appropriate contenders. Chivers (2011) found, in his research with investment bankers, that report writing and verbal presentations by learners who receive feedback on these from more experienced colleagues could be used as both a record of the learning and as a means of improving that learning. Similarly, Cheetham and Chivers (2005) identify that a reflective practice interview conducted by a specialist in learning and development outside the workplace might be used in the process of professional development. Not only that but the process of collaborative reflection has been offered as being of benefit in maximising

learning and found to be an effective way of reflecting particularly for those who find reflection a lonely and unattractive process (Bevins, et. al., 2011, Eraut, 2004). In fact Knipfer, et. al. (2012) have highlighted that collaborative reflection – though only an “emergent phenomenon” (p8) - can lead to “deeper insights to a problem” (p3). Not only that but Knipfer et. al., (2012) propose that collaborative reflection can act as a “catalyst for individual reflection and enables sharing of knowledge and construction of new knowledge” (p9). The General Pharmaceutical Council suggest reflecting on practice at least once per month and this reflection should include non-formal learning events as well as formal (GPhC, 2011).

In the course of Knowles' research in the 1950s he identified that adults learn differently to children. His beliefs included that adults took responsibility for their learning, were motivated to learn and apply that knowledge when faced with new roles or tasks (Smith, 2002). This led him to surmise that traditional pedagogy was no longer appropriate – he wanted to highlight this fact and offered the term 'andragogy' in relation to adult learning (Smith, 2002). Various criticisms have been made and questions asked of Knowles' work such as, is andragogy really a theoretical concept and has it been underpinned by sufficient research (Brookfield, 1986; Smith, 1999; Hartree, 1984)? Furthermore, Cheetham and Chivers (2005) identify a number of studies in which various writers suggest that learner autonomy and the propensity for self directed learning might not be universal amongst adults but more prevalent in middle class workers and in countries such as the UK, but not so evident in countries such as China where learners are more commonly

directed by tutors in their learning. This observation seems to be reflected by Knowles et. al. (2005) who question whether or not an andragogical approach can meet the needs of the widely diverse society we know today. Society today is diverse in many ways including age, sex and ethnicity. This has not gone unrecognised by writers and thinkers in the androgogy debate (Davenport & Davenport, 1985). Lebel, (1978) for example, believed that older adults warranted their own learning theory – geragogy, while Yeo (1982), suggested that a more specialised approach was required for learning with older adults – eldergogy. Knudson (1979) recognised that identifying such terms could herald ever more complex arguments and suggested that the holistic term humanagogy might be more appropriate. Knowles (1950) hypothesised firstly that adult learners are self directed, something that is relevant as far as professional development is concerned – despite the involvement of professional bodies in CPD. This is significant in this study of HR practitioners who, as has been identified earlier in this review are adults as well as currently practising in HR, are now more likely to have to take responsibility for their own professional development, and that increasingly they opt to work under less traditional forms of employment. Secondly, Knowles (1950) hypothesised that they have accrued life experiences (Canning, 2011) which are invaluable when developing the whole person using the wider and diverse skills which are required of an effective HR practitioner today. Knowles' third hypothesis related to timing being an essential factor, again something that is relevant in terms of the professional development of HR practitioners, particularly because of the ever-changing employment legislation and regulatory codes of practice, which dominate the

day-to-day practice of HR practitioners. Finally Knowles identified that adult learners adopt a problem centred as opposed to a subject centred approach, again a relevant factor in terms of professional development. The changing economic climate and regulatory influence on their day-to-day practice results in the likelihood that HR practitioners' professional development will be driven by problems or situations in which they find themselves in the course of their day to day work. Hase and Kenyon (2000; 2007) have taken andragogy one step further and identified that a 'heutagogical' approach to learning incorporates learning how to learn, empowering learners, double loop and self determined learning, flexible and relevant content as well as providing the opportunity for independent as well as collaborative learning (Eberle & Childress, 2007). Given the occupational climate for contemporary HR practitioners this seems to be an appropriate approach to both their pre-service education and continuing professional development. Double loop learning being a key element because the learner not only considers the problem, actions and outcomes but also involves the learner questioning his/her personal beliefs and values (Bhoyrub et. al., 2010). So then, might one explanation for the lack of participation in CPD be that traditionally the approach to professional development was pedagogical, specifically of being 'trainer or instructor centred' (Marshak, 1983) which is simply not appropriate for today's practitioners? These individuals are simply not motivated by, nor do they have the time or financial resources, to pursue a pedagogical approach to professional development. Not only that, but does this approach equip them to be life-long and proactive learners, problem solvers and critical analysts as well as being at least readers of research? Bhoyrub, et. al. (2010)

raise this question, albeit in relation to nursing education, though their observations seem to be relevant to contemporary HR practitioners. Not only that but the traditional, pedagogical approach to professional development is simply not fit for purpose for contemporary practitioners, including HR practitioners. It has already been identified that the present day workplace demands that the contemporary HR practitioner, as a consequence of the plethora of policy and legislation as well as the way in which the profession has evolved, must, like the contemporary nurse, acquire a complex range of knowledge, skills, performance and attitudes (Byoyrub, et. al., 2010). HR practitioners, like nurses, as identified by Bhoyrub, et. al. (2010), need to continually develop themselves and their practice, or, in other words, be lifelong learners (Ashton & Newman, 2006). So then, might acknowledging and adopting a more heutagogical approach to professional development particularly when non-formal (and arguably more accessible) learning mechanisms are utilised, encourage contemporary practitioners to be more willing, and able, to embrace professional development as a part of their day to day practice? Hase and Kenyon (2007) perceived their notion of heutagogy as an extension of pedagogy and andragogy. This relationship between pedagogy, androgogy and heutagogy is illustrated in the figure 6, cited in Blaschke (2012) and based on Canning (2010, p63).

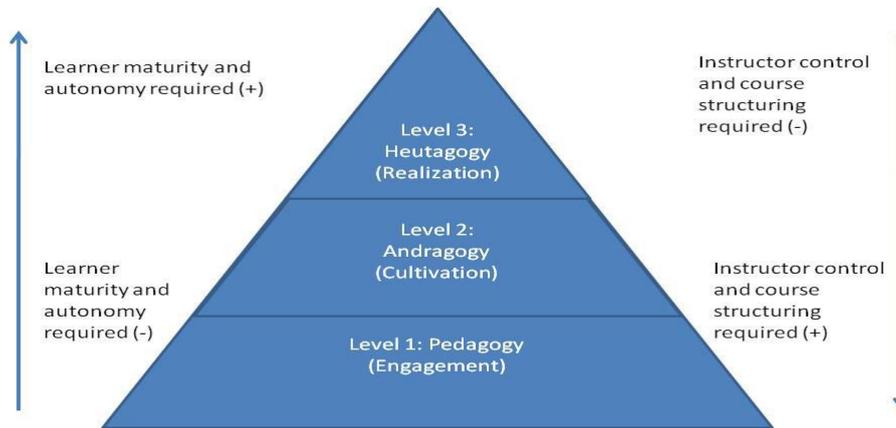


Figure 6 – The relationship between pedagogy, andragogy and heutagogy (cited in Blaschke, 2012, p60)

Hase and Kenyon (2007) identified that pedagogy, and although to a lesser extent, andragogy, are both teacher or instructor centred while heutagogy is learner determined. Once pre-service education is complete, with HR practitioners increasingly having to take more responsibility for their own career management and working in more flexible forms of employment, their ongoing professional development must surely need to be dictated by the practitioner him/herself. This aspect of the heutagological approach seems to concur with Hargreaves' (2005) suggestions in terms of contemporary education in that he proposed that these are the types of skills that will be required in the 21st Century workplace. His comments related to school education and although they were not wholly successfully embraced in that context (Coffield, 2008) they are relevant, I believe, in terms of the HR profession. This will bring with it though, an increased need for the practitioner to develop the skills required to achieve learner autonomy. Not only that, but as Hase and Kenyon identified (2007), learning involves change in an individual's values attitudes and beliefs and as such is a different

process to that of knowledge and skill acquisition. Learners should, according to Bhoyrub, et. al., (2010), seemingly in accord with Freire, be facilitated towards learning, not directly taught. Ownership of learning by the practitioner, the skill of identifying learning opportunities, the development of learner competency, capability and capacity to learn are all elements of the heutagogical approach to learning (Bhoyrub, et. al., 2010). To illustrate this further, Blaschke highlights in her 2012 article, that in self determined learning, competences and capabilities need to be developed by learners, and in this context HR practitioners. This seems to be the case if HR practitioners are to develop their 'mosaic'. As Blaschke says (2012, p59) "Competency can be understood as proven ability in acquiring knowledge and skills, while capability is characterized by learner confidence in his or her competency". She cites the work of Cairns (2000, p1) who says that following development of competency and the capability, which results, enables the practitioner "to take appropriate and effective action to formulate and solve problems in both familiar and unfamiliar and changing settings". Bhoyrub, et al (2010) highlighted an example of when the University of West Sydney in Australia incorporated heutagogical elements in the design, delivery and development of their teacher training programme. The benefits which resulted from this change to a more heutagogical approach involving student-directedness and blended learning included, the trainee teachers becoming better learners who were more prepared for the complexities of their occupational environment. Increased use of technology such as Twitter and other social media sites both involving learner generated content and active engagement by the learner (Bhoyrub, et. al., 2010) makes the heutagogical approach appropriate to the

contemporary HR practitioner as they develop themselves professionally. Initiatives such as Dixons' (Mathews, 2013) creation of an internal e-learning platform named 'Fuse' which is used to create and share videos providing learning and support for their staff. This is similar to the Dare2Share (BIS, 2010) platform created by BT for use by their staff as part of their learning and development process.

The contemporary HR practitioner needs to develop their 'mosaic' and for this to be achieved ongoing professional development is more than knowledge and skills acquisition. The strategies for development, in the case of this research non-formal strategies, must be largely in the hands of the practitioner him/herself. Figure 6 seems to articulate clearly how appropriate an heutagogical approach is in the context of professional development. Surely the practitioner (or perhaps in collaboration with employers or clients) is best placed to know **what** elements of their 'mosaic' needs to be developed as well as **when** they are required, reflecting the need for enhanced learner maturity and autonomy, and this is what is unique about the heutagogical approach. This can only be achieved if the learner has the confidence, and skills required to develop personal strategies for learning (Canning, 2010). Is it then logical to assume that this approach might be appropriate for successful professional development? Hase and Kenyon's (2000) claim that moving beyond knowledge and skill acquiring by building capability is more fitting for the 21st century seems to further reinforce its appropriateness for professional development in general, and in particular to this study. They also refer to using heutagogy to achieve a more comprehensive, or well-rounded

development (2000) – again this is relevant as contemporary professional development involves developing the 'whole person'. The key principles of heutagogy were summarised in a simplistic and diagrammatic form by McAuliffe, et. al. (2009) and are shown in Figure 7. The diagram seems to encapsulate factors, which are important in professional development in the contemporary occupational climate. The learner must be self determined, must be willing and able to identify and capitalise on learning opportunities as they present themselves and must be flexible, proactive and understand the value of the wide range of learning which is or likely to be required by them in the course of their career. To achieve all of this the learning must not be based on process or be teacher centred. It is the world of the learner that is important, resulting in the skill of knowing how to learn being fundamental.

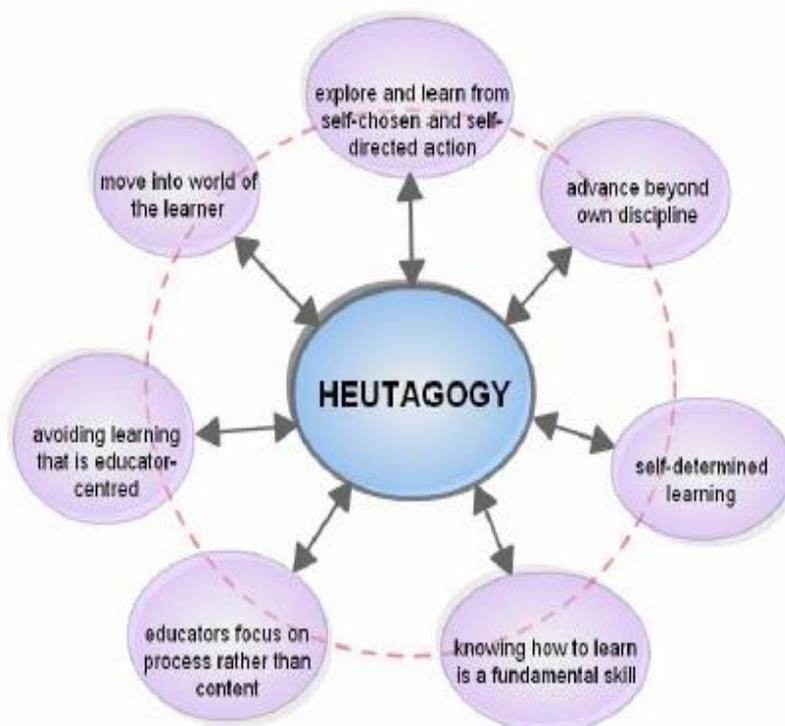


Figure 7 The principles of heutagogy Source: McAuliffe, et. al., 2009, p15

If an HR practitioner embraces this heutagogical approach to their professional development, by honestly determining their own learning, the relevance of what is to be learned, when it is required and by the most appropriate means, by questioning, sharing, reflecting and building on past experiences (Eberle & Childress, 2007), by actually participating in development, then this may reflect at least some of the elements which comprise a climate of developmentalism. Is this additional evidence that the work of Freire is relevant here, as an heutagogical approach appears to be in congruence with Freire's problem posing approach to education described by Sharma (2001) which is in contrast to the oppressive 'banking' approach of the more formal and traditional approach to education, or in this case professional development (Sharma, 2006)? Another theme relevant in this context comes from Rock's work in the area of neuroscience and its relevance to learning (Davachi et. al., 2010), and in particular his identification of the AGES model. Rock (Davachi et. al., 2010) acknowledges that although contemporary employees have much to learn they have less time in which to carry out learning. Not only that, he, Rock (Davachi et. al., 2010) identifies that employers, though they need their employees to learn quickly, have less money than previously to devote to this learning. While Rock (Davachi et. al., 2010) acknowledges that adult learning is complex he suggests that shorter learning programmes might not only be a solution for employers but are actually more conducive to better learning for employees. While he recommends further research his work on the subject of neuroscience does seem to favour short, bite-sized learning delivered over a period of time as

being effective for learning. His AGES model reflects the components for effective learning. The learner needs to be motivated and focused hence their attention is required. The learner also needs to take ownership of the learning by personalising or making sense of the learning based on their individual experiences or as Rock says, generate associations. Rock theorises that there also needs to be a positive and emotional connection with other people during the learning event where feedback and re-enforcement occurs. The spacing of the learning is also a feature, shorter, spaced learning events being more effective than the traditional 'banked' (Smith, 1997) often lengthy, teacher centred presentation of facts and information.

Given the comprehensive nature of the Cheetham and Chivers' taxonomy (2001), it would seem to be a useful and appropriate model to use in conjunction with the concept of developmentalism (Evans, 2009). In addition, there seems to be some synergy between the non-formal learning mechanisms and the heutagological approach to learning. As identified earlier in this section, heutagogy incorporates a number of elements, firstly the empowering of learners and one of the ways this is evident is by the accessibility of these mechanisms on a daily, and very often no cost basis. Secondly, creative, reflexive and, arguably more effective, double loop learning is evident, for example, when using the reflection mechanism (Smith, 2001). Thirdly it should be flexible and relevant as can be seen above from the number, range and nature of these non-formal mechanisms there is potentially a great deal of flexibility available to the practitioners who might use them. In addition because there is a range of mechanisms, practitioners

can select the most relevant, and arguably most importantly, because of their accessibility, at the appropriate and relevant time. Fourthly there should be opportunity for independent and collaborative learning and this is evident, for example, in the observation, copying, practice and repetition, mentoring, coaching, observation and articulation mechanisms. Finally, these mechanisms, because of their continual accessibility and potentially low cost enable learning to be truly self determined. Not only that but it seems that non-formal learning mechanisms would appear to have the potential to comply with the components of Rock's (Davachi, et. al., 2010) AGES model.

All of this leads to a new question. Is the use of non-formal learning mechanisms combined with a more heutagogical approach to professional development likely to inspire the HR practitioner to extend their 'mosaic' thus contributing towards a climate of developmentalism? This would necessitate it being useful to discover if HR practitioners, are aware of, or currently use, any of the above, or any other mechanisms, and how might they be encouraged to use them in their professional development (RQ2)

While the focus of this research is on non-formal learning, it must be acknowledged that there is still a very important place for the more formal and traditional form of learning event. Ideally both formal and informal events should complement each other and should not be considered mutually exclusive (Mathews, 2013; Cross, 2007) Formal and non-formal learning should be integrated according to Wisniewski & McMahon (2005). Formal learning should, it has been suggested form the basis on which professionals

can build and benefit from their non-formal learning experiences (Conlon, 2004). To illustrate this assertion, Cofer (2000) cites Bell's metaphor of bricks and mortar – formal learning being the bricks and non-formal learning being the mortar.

2.6 The HR Professionalism Continuum

As discussed above, Hoyle developed a professionalism continuum for the teaching profession (1975) to illustrate his view of the range of knowledge, skills and procedures required in the teaching profession. Davies (1974) suggested that this continuum might be used as a framework for development by teachers. Evans has extended this work to develop continua for the occupational health and safety (2008^a) (See Appendix 6) and social researcher professions (2007^a) (See Appendix 6) as well as a 'general' continuum (2008^a).

In 2010, the CIPD introduced their new 'Profession Map' (CIPD, 2010). See Appendix 8. This map was developed following consultation with HR practitioners (CIPD, 2010^a) and comprises a complex amalgamation of professional areas, behaviours and bands and transitions (CIPD, 2010^a) and the purpose of the map, according to the CIPD is to 'capture what HR people do and deliver across every aspect and specialism of the profession and it looks at the underpinning skills, behaviour and knowledge that they need'. The CIPD identify that the map can be used by organisations to develop job descriptions and understand the structure and competences of the HR profession, by CIPD members as a basis and framework for professional development as well as providing a basis for the development of the CIPD's

professional qualifications and membership structure (CIPD, 2010^c). The four bands identify what practitioners need to be able to do to progress from one band to the next hence providing a framework for their professional development (CIPD, 2010^f). There are eight behaviours, which are further clustered into three groups. These behaviours, the CIPD intimate, are required by HR practitioners in the modern world to effectively carry out their activities (CIPD, 2010^d). There are ten professional areas which identify what practitioners need to know and be able to do within each area of the HR profession (CIPD, 2010^e). Based on the map, CIPD developed 'My HR Map' an online self assessment tool which CIPD members can use to support their professional development (CIPD, 2010^c). While this tool is useful, might an HR continuum fulfil a niche that the CIPD tool does not? Firstly, the continuum could give the practitioner a clear and straightforward indication of the types of job characteristics they need to develop to fulfil their career objectives – which will vary from practitioner to practitioner. Secondly, as has already been discussed there are a number of HR practitioners who are not CIPD members and are therefore unable to use the HR Profession Map. Thirdly, the CIPD tool seems to be extremely complicated to understand and utilise. A more straightforward tool, such as a continuum might prove to be an accessible and attractive alternative to a wide range of HR practitioners. The HR continuum could be used by practitioners to help them identify the elements of their mosaic which need to be developed. There is likely to be, as in other professions, a wide range of professionalism orientations within HR. The question presents itself that if an HR professionalism continuum existed,

whether or not HR practitioners might see benefits in enhancing their professionalism orientation and if by doing so result in enhancing status?

Based on the discussion in sections 2.1 to 2.5 above, I thought it would be worthwhile to investigate whether or not practitioners might find an HR professionalism continuum useful as an element of a conceptualised model for HR practitioners to use in the course of their professional development, and if so, what its components should be (Bailey, 2011). I had no preconceptions relating to this continuum but believed, based on the literature review, that a worthwhile area for consideration might be that such a continuum could form an element of a conceptualised model. A professionalism continuum for the HR profession has not been developed to date, and for this reason, I decided that prior to the empirical stage of the research process a draft, or provisional, HR continuum should be developed and during the interviews, seek the 'expert opinions', or 'insights', of the participants. Firstly, participant opinion on the usefulness of such a continuum would be sought. If participant experience was favourably disposed to such a continuum, the draft continuum would then, based on their knowledge and experience, be refined. I considered the participants to be 'experts' with regard to the components of the HR professionalism continuum because all participants are currently practising and the sample is sufficiently varied to represent all levels and strata of the profession. The process of developing the draft continuum comprised three stages. Firstly, I studied carefully the existing continua developed by Hoyle (1975) for the teaching and Evans, for the safety practitioner, 'general' (2008^a) and social researcher professions (2007^a).

Secondly, and as discussed earlier in this literature review, the CIPD has recently developed their Profession Map (2010). I thoroughly investigated the map and its various components. Drawing on the data gathered from these two stages, I constructed an initial draft of the continuum. The third stage involved my considering the continuum taking into account my knowledge and experience as an HR practitioner and lecturer. An abbreviated draft continuum which emerged from this process can be found below, and the full draft can be found in Appendix 5.

THE HR PROFESSIONALITY CONTINUUM (Bailey 2010 adapted from Evans and Hoyle)

RESTRICTED HR PROFESSIONALITY

EXTENDED HR PROFESSIONALITY

2.7 Synthesis of the Literature

In this chapter I have conducted a critical review of the literature relevant to achieving the aim and objectives of this research. The context of this research is that of the HR profession. As a result of this review, a number of closely intertwined key concepts have emerged. The first key concept centres around Evans' (2008) proposition that the traditional criteria for defining professions have become obsolete. She suggests that contemporary professions should be considered on the basis of their 'developmentalism', or, in other words, practitioners' propensity for participating in, and commitment to, professional development. This is likely to be evidenced by practitioners continually striving to improve their practice (ImP) by way of extending the 'mosaic' required for their particular profession. Practitioners, Evans (ibid) says, may display what I have termed a 'climate of developmentalism' by, as a part of daily practice, working towards the 'extended' end of the professionalism

continuum relevant to their specific profession. As a result, the requirement for an HR professionalism continuum became apparent. Based on secondary research, a draft HR professionalism continuum was developed and a full description of this process is described in 2.6 above. The draft continuum can be found in Appendix 5. The HR professionalism continuum could be used as a means of identifying HR practitioners' potential development needs, evidencing those needs as well as facilitating a climate of developmentalism, is the second key concept. The third key concept emerging from the literature review relates to the ways in which a practitioner's mosaic might be extended. Based on the literature search, there would appear to be an increased awareness of the role of non-formal learning in professional development (Cunningham & Hillier, 2013), or, as a means of extending professionalism. In the course of practitioners' work, non-formal learning inevitably occurs on a day-to-day basis, and that, coupled with the cost effectiveness of non-formal learning mechanisms, seems to indicate that this is an appropriate means of present day professional development. From the literature review, and considering the context of this study – that of the HR profession, it emerged that the way in which these practitioners learn needs also be taken into account. Hase and Kenyon (2000; 2007) and Kenyon and Hase (2001) suggest that in the contemporary occupational climate, practitioners need to adopt a heutagogical approach to ensure that their professional development is relevant and that they maximise the benefit from all learning events. At the heart of this approach lies the skill of knowing **how** to learn, and is relevant to both formal and non-formal learning events. Combining non-formal learning

mechanisms with a heutagogical approach, then, is the fourth key concept to emerge from the literature review.

Freire's work seems to be of particular relevance with regard to the key concepts of developmentalism and the heutagogical approach to non-formal learning which emerged from the literature review. Progression within the HR profession is likely to come about as a result of a practitioner participating in professional development thereby displaying a climate of developmentalism. One way of professional development is that of incorporating a heutagogical approach to non-formal learning. The HR practitioner must develop consciousness towards the need for professional development, how it is likely to transform their practice, and ultimately their career. Professional development will incorporate the amalgamation of theory and practice, or praxis. One way of participating in development is that of non-formal learning, the mechanisms of which will, unlike the traditional banked approach to learning, involve empowering the HR practitioner with regard to their development as well as requiring their dialogue with others.

The relationship of the key themes and concepts is presented in diagrammatic form in Figure 8 below:

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?'

RELATIONSHIP OF THE KEY THEMES AND CONCEPTS EMERGING FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

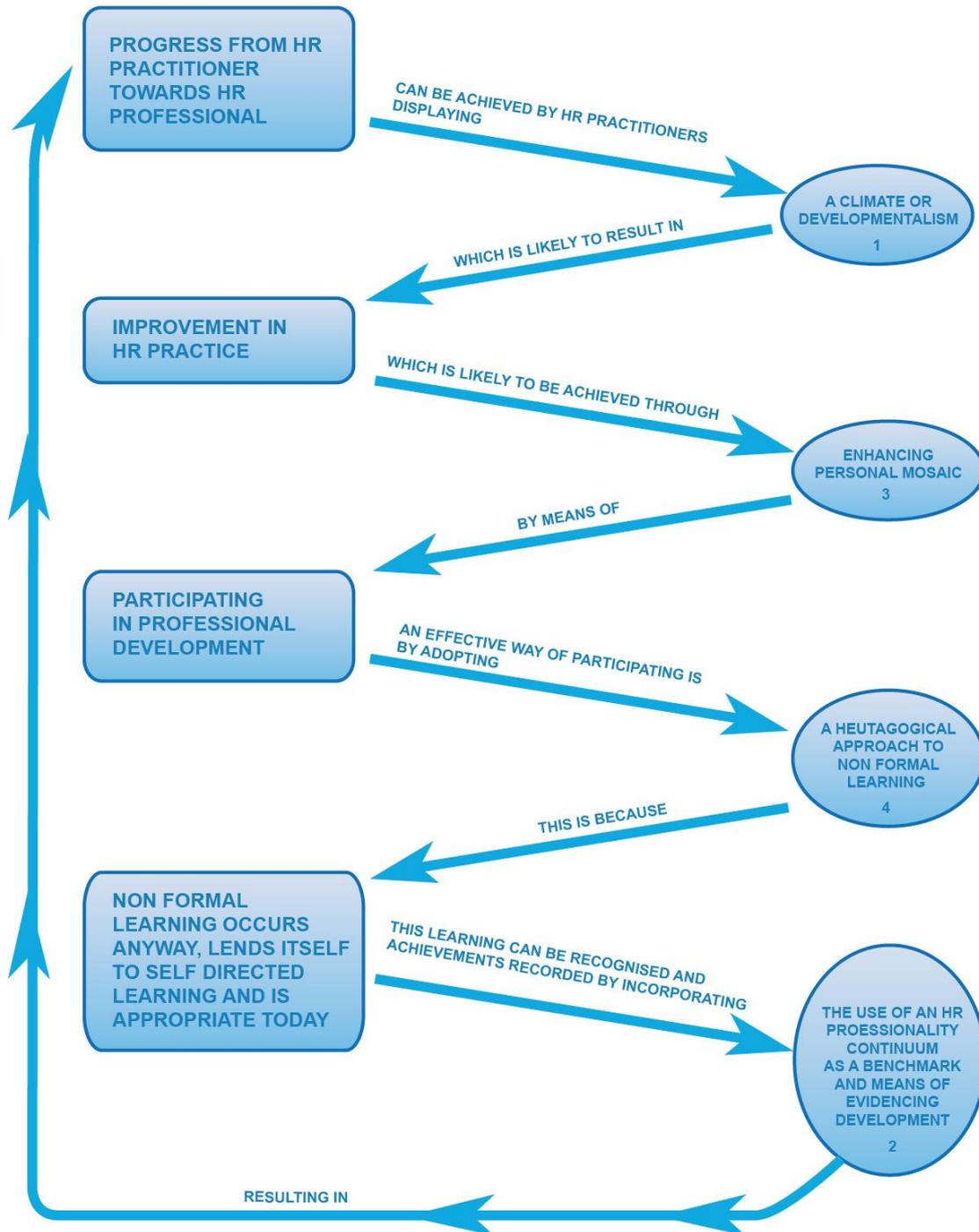


Figure 8 Literature Synthesis Source: Author

The aim and objectives of the research and the preceding literature review have led to the identification of the following research questions:

1. What are the qualitatively different ways HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experience professional development? (Objective 1)
2. What are the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland in the use of non-formal learning mechanisms in that professional development? (Objective 2)
3. What are the perceptions of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland with regard to an HR professionalism continuum? (Objective 3)
4. What are the restricted and extended elements of the HR professionalism continuum? (Objective 3)

In the following chapter I will describe the research design I have adopted to meet the aim and objectives of this study.

CHAPTER 3

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a description, explanation and critical evaluation of the theoretical perspective, methodology and methods selected and used to meet the aim of this study and to answer the research questions.

The intention in this chapter is to provide an 'audit trail' in terms of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a result, the reliability and transparency of the study will be enhanced (Cope, 2002). This 'audit trail' takes the form of a clear and comprehensive description of how the study was carried out including the steps in the research process taken from the start to the emergence and reporting of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.1 Setting the Scene

I stated earlier that I began this EdD journey to develop myself professionally and one of the ways this has manifested itself is that I now have an abiding and passionate interest in methodological issues – that is ontology, epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods, in particular when, why and in what ways the different options might be utilised. When I began, however, to delve into "all things methodological" I was alarmed by the seemingly inconsistent and contradictory use of terminology, so it was some small comfort to me to read that Crotty (1998, p1) identifies that fledgling (as well as the more seasoned!) researchers can be bewildered

at the assortment of methodologies and methods available to them. This notion comforted me to some extent in that perhaps I was not alone in my bafflement and need for understanding, when thinking about my own research project and the most suitable and appropriate methodology to adopt. Spencer et. al.'s comments also struck a chord with me when they intimated that "research paradigms are often presented as a set of opposing camps" (2003, p46). Not only this, as Spencer et. al. go on to highlight, "paradigms are often labelled and described in confusingly different ways" (2003, p46). It quickly became apparent to me that despite being a higher education lecturer and having supervised many students during their MSc and MBA dissertations that I was moving from a state of 'not knowing what I didn't know' to 'an iota of understanding of what I didn't know' in terms of methodological issues. To minimise misunderstanding, Crotty's (1998) definitions of the relevant terms have been used within this study. The methodology used by a researcher is, according to Crotty (1998, p3) "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods." The methods, defined by the plan of action, which a researcher might use, are the "techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data" (Crotty, 1998, p3). While this is all well and good, a researcher needs a 'philosophical stance providing a context for the (research) process and grounding its logic and criteria' or, in other words, a 'theoretical perspective'. That theoretical perspective is important because it is where a researcher starts so that they can then proceed with the right methodology, which will be informed by the epistemology, which according to Crotty (1998, p3) is a way of "understanding and explaining how we know what we know" and feeds the theoretical

perspective. The researcher's ontological and epistemological position therefore underpins and influences the research process and so is the case with this study. Crotty illustrates this in the following diagram:

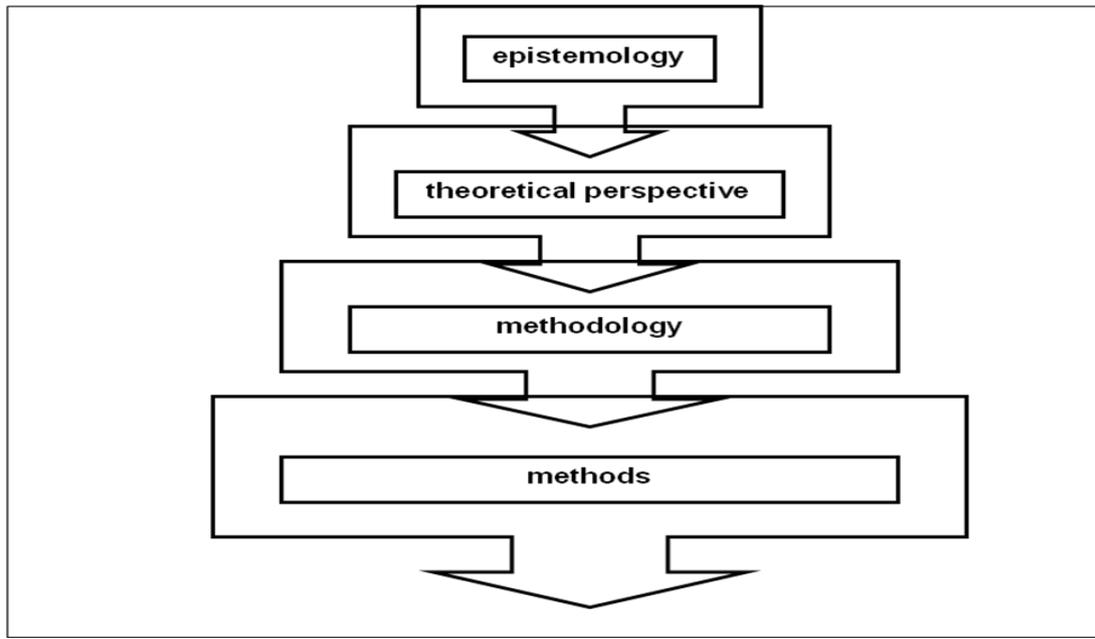


Figure 9 The influences on the research process (Crotty, 1998, p4)

Crotty (1998) maintains that the research process inevitably begins with a problem that needs to be solved, or a question that needs to be answered, thus placing the researcher in the same position as the famous fictional detectives Miss Marple, Poirot and Sherlock Holmes. In this study I am investigating the ways in which HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experience professional development and the role of non-formal learning in that development with a view to gaining a fresh perspective on the professional learning experiences of the participants. I identified in chapter one that Friedman and Phillips (2001) and Farmer and Campbell (1997) propose that CPD participation by professionals including HR professionals is

erratic which raised a question relating to how these professionals keep themselves up to date as well as highlighting the problem(s) for practice that are likely to result through this lack of participation. As Hendrick, et. al. (1993) identify, applied research is concerned with “answering questions and solving problems” (p4), so for this reason, this study falls into the category of applied research. It is my intention, through this study, to improve understanding concerning this supposed lack of participation and to attempt to discover a “solution to the resultant problem(s) and question(s)” (p3). This seems to be in accordance with Cameron and Price when they say that applied research is “research in which the aim is primarily to address issues of concern to practitioners” (2009, pxv). It is important to acknowledge that people’s opinions and experiences change over time and as such this study must be perceived as a ‘snap shot’ (Saunders, et. al., 2003). Willig (2001) seemingly concurs when he intimates that the researcher needs to have a sense of what kinds of things it might be possible to find out, and in this study I believe there are a number of questions which need to be answered, namely what are the different ways in which HR practitioners experience professional development, the experiences of the practitioners in the use of non-formal mechanisms in their development, the perceptions of the practitioners with regard to an HR professionalism continuum, what that continuum might look like and how it may support them in the course of their professional development.

Crotty (1998) identifies that to conduct the research process there are two questions that the researcher needs to consider. The first relating to that of the choice of methodologies and methods, the second relates to the

justification and use of these. When a researcher considers the justification, the researcher, according to Crotty (1998), is really questioning his/her underlying assumptions or theoretical perspective.

As my knowledge of methodological issues increased I found the whole subject exciting and stimulating as well as at times overwhelming. For a long while, I felt like a 'child in a sweet shop' or at least in 'a methodological shop' – when I became more aware of all sorts of interesting and innovative methods and wanted to use many of them in my research. For this reason my quest to identify the most appropriate methodological techniques for my study has been an extremely painful, but at the same time rewarding, process. Despite, during this stage of my Educational Doctorate journey, my becoming increasingly interested in the wide variety of methodological issues, the focus in this chapter is to identify the most appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches to achieve the aim of this study, not to make any significant contribution to further the discussion on the subject of methodology. It seemed to me that by embracing Rowbottom and Aiston's (2006) suggestion of multiple methodologies having benefits, in terms of flexibility to make selections on the basis of appropriateness, or in other words, "liberating myself from the dungeon of dogmatism" (p10). Finally though, I had to be very firm with myself and think carefully about my research questions and what I actually wanted to discover through my primary research and then consider the most appropriate methods and methodology thereby selecting what would inevitably be the hybrid most suitable for my particular study. As Rowbottom and Aiston intimate – the methodological "fitness for

purpose” is what is important and relevant, not “association with ‘positivists’, interpretevists, lions, witches or wardrobes” (2006, p10). As Popper says “... all guesswork, doxa rather than episteme” (Rowbottom & Aiston, 2006, p10). In respect of this study, in an attempt to mitigate Popper’s concerns, I have tried to show, in this chapter, that my methodological choices have not been based on guesswork or popular opinion but rather as a result of an understanding of the relevant body of knowledge.

3.2 Aim, Objectives and Research Questions

It is important at this juncture to restate the aim of this study, which is:

‘To explore the ways in which HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experience professional development and the role of non-formal learning in that development’.

The objectives which need to be met to achieve the aim are:

1. To discover the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland on the subject of professional development.
2. To discover the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland on the subject of non-formal learning.
3. To conceptualise a model to encourage and support the professional development of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland.

The research questions, which flow from the literature review and which need to be answered to achieve this aim are as follows:

1. What are the qualitatively different ways HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experience professional development?

2. What are the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland in the use of non-formal learning mechanisms in that professional development?
3. What are the perceptions of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland with regard to an HR professionalism continuum?
4. What are the restricted and extended elements of the HR professionalism continuum?

Research Question One

The intention in respect of this was to explore the different features of the professional development practices and experiences of various HR practitioners in the North of Scotland.

Research Question Two

This second question attempted to discover whether HR practitioners in the North of Scotland used, and if so, which non-formal learning mechanisms in the process of their professional development thereby addressing objective number two.

Research Question Three

The purpose of this third question was to discover the perceptions of the participants with regard to the need, or not, for an HR professionalism continuum as an element of a model to assist in their professional development process.

Research Question Four

The purpose of this fourth question was to gather the experiences of the participants with regard to the components of the restricted and extended elements of the HR professionalism continuum.

3.3 Methodological Approach

Having decided which questions needed to be answered (Crotty, 1998) by this study, I then had to determine what the best methods and methodology would be for my research. I decided that my deliberations must start with consideration of my ontological and epistemological positions. An ontological position is concerned with what is real, the nature of reality, about what exists (Scott & Usher, 1996; Crotty, 1998), and in the case of this study it is concerned with the professional development of HR practitioners. The nature of reality in this study is concerned with the different experiences of the participant practitioners with regard to the areas under investigation (professional development and non-formal learning) in this study. The HR practitioners and the phenomena being investigated are closely entwined, and for this reason the ontological position must be non-dualist. This is summed up in Ramsden, et. al., (1993) "there are not two worlds (an objective outside world and an internally constructed subjective world). There is only one world to which we have access – the world as experienced" (Ramsden, et. al., 1993 p303). This underlying non-dualist ontological assumption is particularly relevant in this study - the experiences of the individuals and the phenomena are related and inseparable (Barnard, et. al., 1999) something I believe

strongly because the topic of professional development must be personal, individual and fundamental to each practitioner.

An epistemological position might be one of objectivism, subjectivism or constructionism and is concerned with the knowledge itself. In this case, the knowledge relates to the professional development of HR professionals. So, how and what can we know about this subject? This is an emotive question as Johnson and Cassell identify “philosophers have debated epistemological questions since the time of Plato” (2001, p127). They (Johnson and Cassell, 2001) do however concede, and I have found this to be true in this study, that by considering epistemology, a researcher becomes more reflexive. This reflexivity ensures that the researcher thinks about, and questions, the various methodologies, methods and the consequent effect on their research. As Lipp (2007) intimates “reflexivity is used as a meta methodology” (p18). I have indeed found that the broader and deeper reflection that is reflexivity has made me more acutely aware of the influence of my study on my ontological and epistemological stance. Not only that but the impact this stance has on the study. This enhanced awareness has, I believe, enabled me to make the most appropriate methodological choices. I do embrace Finlay’s (2002) comments when she identifies that reflexivity, if not carried out well, can become a self-indulgent activity. I have, I believe, avoided this accusation of self-indulgence because my reasons for engaging in reflexivity have been to enhance the “transparency and trustworthiness” of my research (ibid, p211). An objective epistemological assumption is that “things exist as meaningful entities and careful research can attain that objective truth and meaning” (Crotty, 1998, pp5-6), whereas a subjectivist assumption is that “meaning is

imposed on the object by the subject” (Crotty, 1998, p9), while a constructionist assumption is that “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998, p43). Richardson (1999) highlights that Bourdieu argued that “all data are constructions” (1992, p226). The constructionist assumption is that different people (in this case HR practitioners) understand the same phenomena (in this case professional development, non-formal learning and the HR professionalism continuum) in a variety of ways. The epistemological position, therefore, I decided to be the most appropriate for the purpose of this study, is that of constructionism.

Once I had decided that my epistemological position should be that of constructionism, I needed to consider what theoretical perspective to adopt – or what the “context of this research” (Crotty, 1998, p7) would be. It would, however, have to flow from my constructionist stance. There are a plethora of potential theoretical perspectives which might be taken including positivism, interpretivism, critical inquiry and feminism, and as I have identified earlier, the perspective must flow from the epistemological position. An example of this is that the objectivist view is that “things exist” (Crotty, 1998, p5) “as meaningful entities” and that “careful research can attain meaning” (p6); this is the stance which underpins positivism. Positivism, Crotty (1998) identifies, stems from “something which is posited” (p19) and is concerned with explanation rather than understanding. An interpretive perspective, on the other hand, is concerned with understanding individuals’ perceptions and observations, interpretation of experiences, beliefs and opinions (Sanders, et. al., 2003). I was interested in discovering the experiences, beliefs, opinions and

observations of HR practitioners with regard to their professional development and the use of informal learning mechanisms in that development (Weber, cited in Crotty, 1998), with a view to improve practice, my perspective must then, be one of interpretivism, which, in the case of this study, involves interpreting – or understanding, not explaining (Massey, 2010) - the participants' varying experiences, beliefs and opinions. For this reason I rejected a positivist stance. I speculate that there is no one truth relating to these questions – there are a number of truths based on the experiences of various and individual, practitioners - I needed to choose methods that would help me discover what I believed could be discovered in relation to professional development and non-formal learning. This raises one of the key areas for dispute in qualitative research – that of truth. Will I believe everything that I am told, or if not, how do I know what is true and what is untrue? Has the participant told me everything which is relevant (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000)? These questions will be addressed in relation to this study later in this chapter. The ability of interpretivism to gather very 'rich' data seemed to be the most appropriate (Anderson, 2009). The reason for this is because I am interested in the underlying meaning of the participants' responses, in other words 'how' (Ireland, et. al., 2009) they develop professionally. HR practitioners will have varying experiences and notions of what is true, and for this reason the data I gathered would have to be interpreted. For this reason I discounted a positivist philosophy.

The next area I considered was my strategy, plan of action, or in other words, my methodology (Crotty, 1998), for this interpretive study. The purpose of this

study is not aimed at proving or disproving theory or hypothesis but rather of interpreting the participants' experiences of the phenomena in question in this study. Phenomenography is a research approach, rather than a method, which aims at 'description, analysis and understanding of experiences' (Marton, cited in Richardson, 1999, p64; Ireland, 2009; Marton, 1986), or in other words "the various ways of conceiving a phenomenon" (Micari et. al., 2007, p460) and seems to be the most appropriate because it is an empirical research approach which was designed in the 1970s in Sweden by Ference Marton (Anden, et. al., 2009) to answer pedagogical questions (Orgill, 2002); more specifically, to understand why some students are better learners than others. One of the reasons phenomenography has attracted criticism is that it is empirically based; rather than theoretical or philosophical (Richardson, 1999). For example, Richardson (1999) identifies that in phenomenographic research participant experiences and the accounts of those experiences may be different. Or, as Saljo (1997) highlights, the participant will say what the interviewer wants them to say. The procedure I followed during the data collection and detailed in section 3.7, I believe, mitigates this criticism. Dortins (2002) identifies that the purpose of phenomenographic research has been to illustrate the various ways in which learners capture their learning thus contributing to the body of knowledge relating to teaching and learning and as this study is fundamentally about learning, would seem an appropriate choice. The word has Greek roots and is derived from the words 'phainonmenon' which means appearance and 'graphein' which means description. This approach therefore comprises a description of appearances (Orgill, 2002). In this study I intend to discover the qualitatively different ways

- because I believe from my own experience and anecdotal evidence, there will be differences – in the ways in which people (HR practitioners) understand, experience and think about given phenomena (non-formal learning and professional development). Phenomenography is concerned with 'the relation between the subjects and the phenomenon and not the phenomenon itself' (Bowden & Green, 2005, p12). The reason for this form of qualitative approach is because the research questions which need to be answered relate to the HR practitioners' understanding and experience of, and relationship with, the phenomena. I believe that by concentrating on the differences identified by the participants the truth of the phenomena being studied will emerge (Sjostrom & Dahlgren, 2002). Furthermore, one objective of this study was to gain a fresh perspective on the subject of professional development in the context of the HR profession. It seemed to me that by using the phenomenographical approach, a fresh perspective about how the "learning about the phenomenon is undertaken, experienced and applied in context" (Stein, et. al., 2009, p1) would emerge. This fresh perspective might be more likely in the light of the notion that conceptions (Stein, et. al., 2009) and thoughts (Beddoes-Jones, 1999) influence individuals' behaviours and perspectives. Stein, et. al. (2009) seem to concur when they say "the conceptions an individual holds about a phenomenon can influence and determine associated behaviours and perspectives" (p1). Another reason for using this approach is that there have been important contributions to learning and teaching knowledge which have resulted from previous phenomenographical research (Prosser & Trigwell, 1997; Watkins, 2004). In fact phenomenography has been used to research various experiences of

learning (Mann, 2009) and the foci of this study, professional development and non-formal learning mechanisms, relate to learning. Although there does not appear to be a large number of phenomenographical studies on the subject of professional development, one was carried out by Stein et. al. (2009) to discover the conceptions of e-learning and professional development for e-learning held by tertiary educators in New Zealand which provided some insight for producing professional development programmes. Approaches such as ethnography and phenomenology were discounted because I wanted to adopt a “second order” or “from the inside perspective” (Richardson, 1999, p57). This is because I wanted the phenomena to be described from the participants’ experiences to elicit variation and not on similarities of the phenomena as is the case of phenomenology (Richardson, 1999; Ornek, 2008). Marton and Booth (1997) have described that the terms used in a phenomenographical study need not be limited. For this reason, the terms experience, conceptualise, perceive and understand are used interchangeably in this study. The methodology for this study then needs to be a ‘hybrid’ and will incorporate elements of a phenomenographical study.

Phenomenography has aroused a good deal of debate concerning its philosophical assumptions as well as concerns relating to its validity and reliability (Sandberg, 1997; Cope, 2002). Similar concerns are directed at qualitative research in general (Cope, 2002). Cope (2002) intimates that a researcher should, to address the issues of rigour and validity, in a phenomenographical study, incorporate “verification strategies” (p8) within the method chapter. I have taken cognisance of these issues and the verification

strategies adopted for this study are identified in the appropriate sections throughout this chapter. In terms of philosophical assumptions, one view is that because it is about knowledge, the ontological assumptions become the epistemological assumptions (Svensson, 1997). Another view is that it has a dualist ontology (Richardson, 1999). After much consideration, however, it seems to me that the more commonly held view that phenomenography has a relational non-dualist ontological assumption (Ireland et, al., 2009) with a constructionist epistemology (Richardson, 1999) is appropriate to my study. It seemed to me that the very fact that phenomenography has a non-dualist ontology, or in other words, that the subject(s) and the object(s), or in the case of this study, the HR practitioner (the subject) and professional development and non-formal learning (the objects) are related and inseparable. I anticipated that this might result in the findings of my study bringing the sought after fresh perspective. The main reason, though, for selecting a phenomenographic approach rather than one of phenomenology is because, as Marton identified, phenomenology is concerned with “describing what the world would look like without having learned or taken for granted” (Richardson, 1999, p60) and this has been, I believe, the historical approach to research in relation to professional development and CPD (Farmer & Campbell, 1997; Rothwell & Arnold, 2005). People, in this context HR practitioners, are all individuals, have had varying experiences and will, as a result, experience a phenomena differently. For this reason, I believe that by using a phenomenographic approach I will gather the “lived”, “second order” or “from the inside”, experiences of the practitioners’ world. I am interested in the qualitatively different ways a group of (in this case HR) practitioners make

sense of, experience, and understand (in this case professional development, non-formal learning and the HR professionalism continuum) phenomena (Barnard, et. al., 1999, p224). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that looking for patterns in qualitative data is an indicator of credibility and validity in qualitative research. This is not the case in phenomenographic research nor the case in this study; the interview will be the sole data collection method and patterns will not be sought (Christiansen, 2010; Green, 2005). The constructionist interpretive approach will be evident in this study because it will focus on the understanding of the participants, and how they make sense of the subject area being investigated (Ireland, et. al., 2009). My expectation is that by gathering and analysing data in this way, it will produce a different perspective, and provide a basis for a new discussion on a well known subject. The main reason for this expectation is based on a study carried out by Larsson and Holmstrom (2007) in which 19 Swedish anaesthesiologists were interviewed with regard to their work. The interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim and then the data was analysed firstly using a phenomenographic approach and the same data was analysed for a second time using an phenomenological approach. The results of both analyses produced different perspectives. The phenomenological approach resulted in the essence of the phenomenon being discovered whereas in the phenomenographical approach, the variation in the way the participants understood or conceptualised the phenomenon was discovered. In Larsson and Holmstrom's (2007) study they identified that the results from the two approaches were not mutually exclusive but could be used for different purposes. They identified that the phenomenographical results could be used

to generate learning interventions, not just to describe conceptions. This observation seems to be particularly relevant for this study as it is concerned with finding ways to encourage and facilitate the professional development of HR practitioners with particular reference to non-formal learning mechanisms.

3.4 Data Collection

The method of data collection was the next area to consider. In phenomenographic studies a wide range of data gathering tools can be used. They might include interviews, observation, focus groups and drawings (Richardson, 1999). Generally though, the most commonly used data collection method in phenomenographic studies is that of semi-structured interviews (Stamouli & Huggard, 2007). Moreover, the means by which the data is gathered must reflect the ontological and epistemological position adopted for a study (Crotty, 1998). It is at this stage in the methodological journey that Crotty (1998) advises that consideration needs to be given to whether data collected will be qualitative or quantitative. Both these methods evoke strong feelings from their respective followers, feelings which are reflected by Oakley (2000) when she terms this difference of opinion the 'paradigm wars'. Crotty (1998) identifies that objectivist research usually involves quantitative methods of data collection whereas constructionist usually involves qualitative methods, though he also highlights that there are qualitative research projects that are firmly positivist. I had, then, to consider whether this study would be a qualitative or quantitative one. At the most simplistic level quantitative research is about 'numbers' and qualitative research is about 'words' (Saunders, et. al., 2003). Qualitative research is

concerned with depth and richness of data, is investigative and inductive (Saunders, et. al., 2003), such is the case in this study, whereas quantitative research involves scientific rigour and is confirmatory and deductive (Guba, 1990; Saunders, et. al., 2003). For these reasons, then, and considering that in this study I want to discover participants' experiences, beliefs and opinions (Watkins, 2004) and not to test any theory, I will utilise a qualitative method of data collection. It is imperative that there is sufficient scope for participants to give in-depth qualitative responses, and for this reason I decided to use in-depth semi-structured individual interviews as a data gathering tool (Richardson, 1999) hence the use of questionnaires was discounted (Saunders et, al., 2003). The nature of the topic being investigated is personal to the individual participants and relates to individual experiences and beliefs, so for this reason focus groups as a data collection method were also discounted. As has already been identified, this study is a snapshot, and as Hollway and Jefferson highlight, in qualitative research (2000, p152) "the telling is a product of a unique moment and relationship (another time it would come out differently)", or, as Akerlind says, "the individual's experience of a phenomenon is context sensitive, and so can change with changes in time and situation" (2005^b, p331). In summary therefore the methodological position adopted for this study is as shown in Figure 10 below:

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?



Figure 10 The methodological position of the study
Source: Author

Methods –
data collection techniques and procedures

Qualitative
Semi-structured Interview

Methodology - the research strategy – plan of action that links methods
to outcomes

A Phenomenographic Approach

Theoretical perspective (the research philosophy) – the philosophical
stance informing the methodology (Crotty, 1998 p3)

Interpretivism

Epistemology – a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we
know (Crotty, 1998 p3)
Constructionism

I have highlighted the methodological position I have adopted for this study by using the illustration of a drystone wall because I believe it most aptly represents the importance and relationship of each of the elements and how they have evolved. Like the drystone wall, the first layer of stones is extremely important because this first layer supports the rest of the wall and so it is with the epistemological position adopted by the researcher in any research study. This position is fundamental to the whole study and the base on which the study rests. So it is with the subsequent methodological decisions, such as the theoretical perspective, the methodology and methods. As the researcher makes each methodological decision for his/her study another layer of the 'methodological wall' is constructed with each layer being supported by the previous layer. Figure 10 above illustrates the 'methodological wall' relating to this study.

3.5 Participants

As this is an investigative study, it was important that all relevant people were included. The sampling frame for this research comprised all HR practitioners in the North of Scotland. The reason for this sampling frame was that it covers a wide geographical area comprising a large number and variety of organisations from a diverse range of industries and it is the area in which I live and work. The North of Scotland, for the purpose of this study, comprise Grampian, the Highlands, the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland. Some areas within Grampian and the North of Scotland are amongst the most buoyant in the United Kingdom, with Aberdeenshire (within Grampian) having

an unemployment rate of 1.3% in June 2012 (Aberdeenshire Council, 2012), Aberdeen being considered the 'Oil Capital' of Europe (Wearn, 2012). This buoyancy is reflected in rising house prices (Weldon, 2013). In Aberdeen, prices have risen by 94% and those in Inverness (Highlands) by 80% in the last 10 years (Weldon, 2013). As might be expected, in such a large geographical area, a wide range of industry sectors operate including, local authority, NHS, energy, renewables, construction, hospitality and retail. There is a high CIPD membership (in excess of 1900 members) (CIPD, 2010) in the North of Scotland, plus an unknown number of non-CIPD members and for this reason I came to the conclusion that this area would provide a sampling frame which was comprehensive enough to provide sufficient variation for the purpose of this study. HR practitioners do not need to be CIPD members to practice and anecdotal evidence, based on my contacts within the area both as a former HR practitioner and consultant and in my current role as a lecturer in HR, tells me that there are a substantial number of HR practitioners who are non CIPD members. In an attempt to eliminate bias, ensure validity and reliability (Cope, 2002) and maximise the variation of understanding and experiences of HR practitioners towards professional development, non-formal learning and the characteristics of the HR professionalism continuum, a broad variation of participant categories was sought. In the case of phenomenographic research data was collected in a confined period, unlike other qualitative research studies where for reasons of validity long periods in the field is recommended (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the context is important in the selection of participants and the interview schedule (Green, 2005). These categories were CIPD members, non CIPD members, both sexes, different

levels of job role and varying lengths and types of service as an HR practitioner. Variation in the sample composition is vital in phenomenographic studies (Ashwin, 2006). This is further justification for the selection of the various strata identified above.

The sample group was selected purposively but this was supplemented by quota sampling (Saunders, et. al., 2003). Quota sampling was used to ensure the strata identified above were included. The use of purposive sampling whereby participants within the categories detailed above were 'hand picked', thereby improving the sampling frame deeming it more relevant and complete. Purposive sampling is widely used in phenomenography – the methodological approach to be used in this study (Hornung, 2007) – to ensure as far as possible the variation required by phenomenographic studies. Participants who fulfilled the initial criteria of CIPD member and non CIPD member were identified. Access to both CIPD members and non CIPD members came about through my involvement as the local CIPD branch committee member and CPD advisor, as an active member of the local HR community, as a member of ITOL and through my job as an HR lecturer at Aberdeen Business School. The table in Appendix 1 documents interviewee data including their identifier pseudonyms which were used to ensure confidentiality.

In quantitative studies reliability is often linked to the sample size as well as the data collection tool (Ornek, 2008) and Richardson (1999) identifies that there is, what he terms a "tension" (p72) in terms of reliability between

phenomenography and the more scientific emphasis seen in positivist methodologies. Sample size, for this reason, is extremely important. The total sample comprised 17 participants (n=17). A small sample size such as the one I proposed, particularly in relation to the target group, was, I believe, acceptable given the nature of my study, and was chosen for three reasons. The first was that the data collection method was through in-depth semi-structured individual interviews. I believed that these interviews would generate sufficient and varying data to answer the research questions and achieve the aim of the research, particularly in the light of the fact that there is a limit to the variation of data which can be gathered (Larsson & Holmstrom, 2007; Drew, et. al., 2001). The second reason was that the data collection and analysis methods selected are extremely time consuming. I believed, and was proven to be correct, that the amount of data gathered using this sample size would be manageable. The third reason was that by the time I had completed the 17th interview, there was little new information which led me to believe that saturation had been reached and the study would likely, if data collection continued, become deductive.

As identified earlier one of the main objectives in phenomenographic research is to reveal variation but there is a limit to the amount of variation which is likely to emerge (Kelly, 2002) - this is termed the saturation point. Although Sandberg (2000) highlights Alexandersson's suggestion that 20 cases is the number after which no new 'conceptions' or 'units of description in phenomenography' (Marton & Pong, 2005, p335) arise, there are varying opinions about this number. Swartling, et. al. (2007) identify that generally,

though, between 17 and 20 participants captures all existing variation. This differing of opinion on the subject of sample size is illustrated in previously published phenomenographic studies. For example, Soon and Barnard (2001) interviewed 2 participants in their study concerning HIV patients' conceptions of counselling, Stenstrom et. al. (1993) interviewed 9 participants in their study concerning life with rheumatoid arthritis, while Shreeve (2010) interviewed 16 people on the subject of the relationship between professional practice and teaching that practice to others, Micari et. al. (2007) however utilised 45 participants in their study on educational evaluation. While this is a qualitative and inductive study it has been proposed that such a study becomes confirmatory and deductive as an increasing volume of data are gathered (Morse & Field, 1995). It is unlikely that this will occur in this study as data gathering was halted when the saturation point was reached.

3.6 Pilot Study

A pilot study was held comprising 2 participants (n=2), the participants were not, however, included in the final sample discussed above (Bowden & Green, 2005). The pilot study incorporated conducting full interviews with the two participants, transcription of the interviews, reading the transcripts, listening to the recorded interviews, liaising with my doctoral supervisor with regard to the interview questions and my interview style with the purpose of obtaining feedback on whether or not the questions were likely to gather a variety of views from participants (Bowden & Green, 2005). I had intended to carry out a full analysis of the pilot data but decided against this based on the comments relating to reproducibility by Bowden (Bowden & Green, 2005).

Bowden suggests that categories of description should be based across all the interviews (Svensson & Theman, 1983). I believed that by analysing the two pilot interviews and forming initial categories of description, my neutrality during the interviews in the full study might be adversely affected.

Prior to starting the pilot interviews I spent some time thinking about, and preparing myself, for this stage of my research. I was apprehensive about the process, in particular interviewing my peers about their professional development mainly because, I believe, the subject is of such interest to me. I was also excited at what information I was about to discover. As with every stage of this EdD journey, however, I was about to be surprised once again. As soon as I met with the first pilot participant and commenced the interview, any previously held apprehensiveness disappeared and I thoroughly enjoyed the process finding the discourse interesting and exciting despite finding it challenging. Once the pilot interviews had been completed and the interviews transcribed, I began to read the transcripts and listen to the interview recordings. To my utter amazement I found myself feeling overwhelmed at the prospect of analysing the data resulting in my having a 'crisis of confidence' which, for a couple of weeks, precluded me from doing any work at all on my study. I had decided by this time that I would not be analysing the data at this pilot stage and for this reason decided to take a step back from my study. I pondered for some time about the reasons for this 'crisis' and after much consideration I came to the conclusion that it was mainly because I felt such a huge weight of responsibility relating to the data gathered. As I identified above, I take seriously my ethical obligation of doing

justice to the data entrusted to me by the participants, and seeing the raw data which had been generated from the pilot, crystallised this obligation for me. Also the sheer volume of the transcribed data surprised me. The participants had entrusted me with their experiences, opinions, beliefs and conceptions concerning a topic which was very personal to each of them. The theoretical perspective I have adopted for this study is an interpretive one and as such I must interpret the beliefs and opinions (Sanders, et. al., 2003) of the participants and this brings with it a huge responsibility on my part, one which I had not fully appreciated until faced with the pilot data.

I did, though, after a couple of weeks, manage to return to consider critically and objectively the 'pilot experience'. I read and re-read the transcripts as well as listened and re-listened to the digital recordings of the interviews. As a result of this exercise, interview questions and prompts were evaluated and revised (Akerlind, 2005; Bowden & Green, 2005). In particular I discovered that I had to incorporate more probing questions to each of the main questions so that the research questions could be sufficiently addressed. In addition, during the first pilot interview, I presented the participant with professionalism continua for the teaching (Hoyle, 1975), social researcher (Evans, 2007^a), 'general' (Evans, 2008^a) and health and safety professions (Evans, 2008^a) as examples prior to asking for suggestions for the component elements of the HR continuum. Three continua proved to be too many as it became obvious during the first pilot interview that the participant found it difficult to assimilate the large amount of and diverse nature of the information contained in the three continua. For this reason, during the second pilot interview and the

main interviews, I offered only one continuum as an example. An indication of the length of time required for the interviews was obtained and participants were given this information to assist them to set aside sufficient time in their schedule. One of the main advantages of these activities was that I critiqued and refined my interview style (Bowden & Green, 2005). During the pilot I noticed that participants made comments after the digital recorder had been switched off, in addition to that, there were some observations I made during the interviews which I believed I might want to take into account during subsequent analysis. I decided, for this reason, that I would, where appropriate, take field notes, during the actual data gathering process, in which I could record relevant points which would not otherwise be captured (Polit & Beck, 2004).

3.7 The Data Collection

The interviews were opened by asking a biographical question such as '*Tell me about your career to date.*' The purpose of this question was twofold, firstly to establish the norm that the participant will, during the interview, do most of the talking and secondly to put the participant at ease by talking about a subject they are comfortable and familiar with (See Appendix 3).

The questions used to elicit data for research questions one and two were deliberately phrased to reflect and be consistent with the phenomenographic approach adopted for this study, thus reflecting an element of the verification strategy used in this study to ensure validity and reliability (Cope, 2002). This was achieved by constructing the questions in such a way as to elicit the

differences in understanding and experiences of the participants (Barnard, et. al., 1999). For this reason questions commencing with words and phrases such as 'What?' 'In your experience' and 'What is your understanding?' were developed. I avoided using leading questions (Bowden & Green, 2005). In terms of gathering data to answer research questions one, two and three open questions were asked such as *'Tell me about how you keep yourself up to date occupationally?' and 'What is your personal experience of non-formal learning mechanisms in the course of your professional development?'* *'Based on your experience in what ways might a framework or model help you in your professional development'* With regard to gathering data to answer research question four the participants were shown the 'general' professionalism continuum produced by Evans (2008^a) (See Appendix 7) and asked *'What do you believe are the different elements at the restricted and extended ends of the HR professionalism continuum?'* The reason the participants were shown a sample continuum was so that the participants had some idea of what a continuum and its component parts might look like. I made the decision not to show the draft HR continuum I had developed (see chapter 2) because I wanted to obtain the participants' own unbiased views on what the elements might be, not simply a confirmation of what I had produced.

To summarise then, the questions were carefully and deliberately constructed to ensure consistency with the phenomenographic approach adopted for this study as well as ensuring validity (Cope, 2002). When devising the questions I was mindful to limit the number of pre-prepared questions as highlighted by Ashworth and Lucas (1998) because with a phenomenographic approach it is

important to explore participants' *experiences* of the phenomenon. By asking the questions I did and framing them in the way that I did, I aimed to discover all that is relevant as well as what the participants' have experienced to be as close to the participants' truth as possible. As Hollway and Jefferson (2000, p3) intimate "who are we to know any better than the participants when it is, after all, their lives?"

The interviews in the main study were conducted over a period commencing in January 2011 and ending in June 2011. The interviews were carried out at the convenience of the interviewee, by pre-arranged appointment and on a one-to-one, face-to-face basis, conducted in the participants' work places in an attempt to minimize the inconvenience for busy HR practitioners. Conscious of obtaining sufficient data for my study as well as thinking about the time commitment of participants, I had expected the interviews to last for one-to-one and a half hours – and based on the pilot study (see 3.7) this time estimation proved to be appropriate. I was interested to find out about the different experiences of the participants with regard to their professional development and their use of non-formal learning mechanisms in that development as well as their various suggestions relating to the characteristics of the restricted and extended ends of the HR professionalism continuum (Orgill, 2002) and I wanted to give the participants sufficient scope to give in-depth qualitative responses. In phenomenographic research it is imperative that the interviews are focused – something I as the researcher was continuously conscious of and ensured by being aware that my role was to listen, not talk, be neutral, by using neutral verbal prompts and to make the participants feel at ease and encouraging them to speak freely (Ireland, et. al.,

2009). I believed that this was particularly relevant in this study because I was conscious that I had to ensure that my role as an HR educationalist would not cause the participants conflict in their responses. In addition, in phenomenographic research it is important that the interviewer displays empathy during the interviews (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). This should encourage the participant to convey their honest understanding and experiences (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). It is, however, equally important that the researcher brackets their pre-conceived ideas or beliefs (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). While I found it challenging to be empathetic as well as remain neutral during the interviews, I do believe I achieved this not least because of my passion for the topic being studied but also as a consequence of this passion to discover the true experiences and understandings of the participants. I believe this was achieved by being constantly aware, throughout the research process, of the balance of empathy and neutrality (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). In phenomenographic research the aim is to discover the experiences, assumptions, interpretations and beliefs of the participants, not those of the researcher (Ornek, 2008; Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Richardson, 1999). Consequently, the researcher must 'bracket' or 'put aside' his/her own experiences, assumptions, interpretations and beliefs (Ornek, 2008; Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Richardson, 1999). This bracketing is important also for the purpose of ensuring reliability and validity of the study (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Cope, 2002). During my research, I have read a great deal of academic texts, journals and research studies around the areas of professional development and non-formal learning, as well lecturing on these subjects and as a result needed to bracket the resultant theoretical

interpretations, previously published research findings as well as knowledge and beliefs I have formed as a consequence of these activities (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). Ashworth and Lucas (1998) suggest that analyses should be completed before a literature search is conducted. While I understand the thinking behind this statement, I believe that bracketing can mitigate the reasons for delaying such an important stage in the research project. I found the process of bracketing challenging, which is hardly surprising considering my interest in the subject area, indeed Uljens (1996) acknowledges that bracketing is a difficult, if not impossible, process for researchers who are committed to the subject of their research and is probably only partially achievable (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). To mitigate any difficulty I might have had in bracketing any views and beliefs, I followed Ashworth and Lucas' (2000) suggestion of using empathy throughout the data collection process. Perhaps surprisingly, I found that because of, not despite, my strong interest in the study topic actually made "imaginative engagement" (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, p299) with each participant's account a fairly straightforward process. This came about as a result of a long and hard analysis of what empathy, in this context, honestly means. Following this analysis, I realised that the participants would, in many cases, see the 'world' in a completely different way from myself, consequently I had to bracket my preconceptions and *empathise* or *engage* with each participant as he/she describe their experiences and beliefs.

So that I maintained focus throughout the interviews, I concentrated fully on what participants said and for this reason I discounted note taking as a means

of data recording. To assist with maintaining focus, I had a short list of questions and prompts available to help participants reflect on their understanding of how they develop professionally and what mechanisms they used (See Appendix 3). When developing the prompts to be used during the interviews, I took great care to keep them as open and wide as possible to ensure they were not 'leading' in any way (Richardson, 1999) thereby preserving and reflecting the underlying ethos of phenomenographic data collection by encouraging the participants to speak freely with minimal interruption (Richardson, 1999). The interviews explored fully the various aspects identified by the participants themselves. The interviews were audio recorded using a digital recorder which, because of its miniature size was unobtrusive to participants, and transcribed verbatim. The recorder was checked and tested prior to each interview and spare batteries were also taken to each interview to minimise potential disruption (Saunders, et. al., 2003). The 17 interview recordings were transcribed in full. Transcription is an extremely time consuming task, and for this reason I did not transcribe myself but arranged for a third party to carry out this task. This was a difficult decision for me because I was very conscious of the need to immerse myself in the data gathered and not one taken lightly, but as Akerlind (in Bowden & Green, 2005) highlights "research is always a compromise between ideals and practicalities" (p116). I decided that, on balance though, I could find other means of immersing myself in the data – these are described elsewhere in this chapter - and that the time saved on transcription would be more productively spent on other elements of my study. In addition, I considered that by not transcribing the interviews myself, when the time came to immerse

myself by reading the transcriptions and listening to the recordings it would be with a freshness, the information would not be in any way tainted in my mind - Ashworth and Lucas (2000, p304) purport that “transcription is not a neutral process” - which might occur as a consequence of deciphering words and phrases during the long and laborious task of transcription. Interestingly, Ashworth and Lucas (2000) identify that transcription should “accurately reflect the emotions and emphases of the participant” (p300), a task which I believed could be accomplished satisfactorily by an independent transcription specialist.

Immediately following each interview the recording was checked, the field notes (where appropriate) completed and the digital recording was downloaded on to my computer, then forwarded electronically to the private transcription service I had tasked with the role of transcription. The interview demographics sheet (Appendix 1) was completed recording details of the interviewee and the pseudonym, and this along with the signed participant consent form (Appendix 2) was filed in a locked filing cabinet in my home. The recording was stored on my computer hard drive in a password protected electronic folder labelled with the interview date and time and a separate back up copy taken and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home.

Once the verbatim transcription was returned in the form of a word document it was labelled with the interview date and time and also stored in the electronic folder which had been already created and is described above.

3.8 Data Analysis

There are two outcomes of phenomenographic analysis, the first is to develop categories of description and the second is to explain the relationship of the categories (Trigwell, 2006). I took the decision that although the data relating to the composition of the HR professionalism continuum was gathered using a phenomenographic approach, the analysis would take the form of extracting and considering all the varying suggestions and comments made by the participants. I believed that this would be the most appropriate way in which to analyse the data gathered. During the analysis process as many participant suggestions as possible would be incorporated in the revised HR continuum. Throughout the process, however, I would be constantly mindful not to deviate from the underlying ethos of Hoyle's original model which is that professionalism concerns the "skills, knowledge, understandings, and processes that people apply in their day-to-day work" (Evans, 2009^c, p43). A full explanation and justification of the ways in which the draft continuum was revised, supported by relevant participant quotes, is presented within chapter four.

In phenomenographic analysis there is usually more than one researcher, although there have been instances of researchers conducting analysis alone – particularly in doctoral research. In such cases, the supervisors fulfil the role of devil's advocate, an example of this being Akerlind (cited in Hornung, 2007). This has been the case in this study. In addition though I found, like Akerlind (in Bowden & Green, 2005), that being a part time researcher enabled me to play a 'devil's advocacy role' in my study. Owing to the fact

that I am a full time lecturer I am unable to spend consistently long periods of time on my research and thesis writing thus each time I returned to my study it was with a fresh and more open mind than I would have had by working full time on my study. In this, as in other phenomenographic studies, analysis incorporates 'discovery' and 'construction' (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997). The analysis process did not commence until the interviews were complete. The reason for this is that Bowden and Green (2005) argue that, for reasons of reproducibility, final categories of description should be based on input across all the interviews. They do also highlight however, that Akerlind advises that analysis of a small number of transcripts, prior to the main analysis, could make the volume of data more manageable. This seemed to me to be an important and relevant observation, but after consideration decided that reproducibility was important, thus my analysis would be based across all interviews as a whole. One verification strategy for ensuring validity in a phenomenographic study is to set out in detail the analysis process (Cope, 2002). For this reason there follows in the paragraph below a clear synopsis of how the analysis was carried out in this study.

The analysis followed the four step process suggested by Marton (1994) cited by Schroder et. al. (2005) and Soon and Barnard (2002). The analysis commenced with reading and re-reading the verbatim transcripts and field notes and listening and re-listening to the recorded interviews, immersing myself in the data, while at the same time making a conscious effort to keep an open mind. Relevant utterances were identified and marked in the verbatim transcripts. My decision on which utterances were relevant was

based on my interpretation regarding their significance to, and interest in, the research question in hand as suggested by Marton (1986). This, in addition to my continued interpretive awareness, ensured objectivity and reliability in the selection of the utterances (Ireland, et. al., 2009). The data analysis process involves identifying qualitatively different categories by looking for variations and similarities in the utterances - which seemed interesting and relevant to the study - of the participants (Ireland, et. al., 2009), and achieved this by the long and arduous process of immersing myself in the data both in terms of *what* was said as well as *how* it was said – it is important that the data is analysed not solely by content analysis (Richardson, 1999). This immersion took place in two ways, firstly I read and re-read the verbatim transcripts and secondly I listened and re-listened to the recorded interviews. This was particularly important as I had not transcribed the interviews myself and, as a result of this, had to ensure that everything which might affect the meaning of the participant had been identified (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). I am a licensed user of the psychometric instrument 'Thinking Styles' and know that the way in which I receive information most effectively is by auditory means (Beddoes-Jones, 1999). To capitalise on this, and as the interviews were digitally recorded, I downloaded them on to my iPod and was able to listen to the recordings at convenient times so that I became very familiar with the data. By combining reading and listening to the data the aim was to produce as deep an understanding as possible of what has been meant by each participant (Orgill, 2002). At the end of each interview, I obtained permission from each interviewee to contact them should I find later in the analysis process that I needed clarification on any of their comments. I found the need

to do this with one participant to clarify meaning. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify that one way to ensure rigour and credibility in qualitative research is to take the data back to the participants for verification. This is not what was done in this case. Verification is considered not necessary in phenomenographic research because the findings are in the form of categories of description which are, as in the case of this study, supported by quotes (Green, 2005).

The second step involved identifying, interpreting and extracting those conceptions (pools of meaning), from the utterances described above, which were most relevant about the participants' practice in relation to professional development, the role of non-formal learning in that practice, or in other words, the aim of this study. One of the most important elements of the phenomenographic analysis, and the essence of the interpretivist stance, is the decision on which statements made by each participant are the most important (Sjostrom & Dahlgren, 2002). The importance of this process is emphasised because in phenomenographic studies validity is addressed by the appropriateness of the logic of the categories (Stein, et. al., 2009). Equally, reliability is addressed by ensuring the categories are easily identifiable by others (Stein, et. al., 2009). Reading, re-reading the interview transcripts and listening and re-listening to the interview recordings over a considerable period of time (8 months, June 2011 to January 2012 in the case of this study) was the only way to identify significant statements. Once these statements were identified they were supported by relevant and illustrative interview excerpts (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Cope, 2002).

The third step involved the organisation of the results, based on similarity and difference in meaning, of this analysis into descriptive categories or, categories of description which are really “expressions of understanding” (Barnard, et. al., 1999, p210). During this stage, and for reasons of validity and reliability, I presented my categories to colleagues – fellow lecturers in HR at ABS, and to my fellow doctoral students in two separate presentations. Refinements to the categories were made as a result of feedback and discussion resulting from these presentations. In this way a role for critical peers and a devil’s advocacy process enhanced validity and reliability of the study (Green, 2005). It was important to me to receive feedback and comments on the formation of the categories from those whom I trust and this is the reason I sought feedback from my doctoral supervisor, colleagues and fellow doctoral students. These are all people I know well, trust and whose opinion I value. For the feedback to be worthwhile, it is important that the feedback is both delivered and received constructively (Åkerlind, et. al., 2005^a).

The fourth and final step involved establishing the relationship between the descriptive categories. The term given to the set of descriptive categories and the relationship they have, is the outcome space (Anden, et. al., 2009; Soon & Barnard, 2002).

Findings are presented and categories of description developed in the following chapters in narrative format in addition to selected illustrative quotes

deemed relevant regarding the qualitatively different ways HR practitioners understand how they develop professionally. The use of direct quotes aids transparency and reliability in as much as the reader is in a position to make a judgement on the findings as they are presented (Sandelowski, 1993; Cope, 2002). Presenting the quotes as evidence of the knowledge generated is defended by Hollway and Jefferson (2000). They suggest that situations, such as in this study, are never replicable because the meanings are unique to the participant and to the relational encounter. The analysis provides a “map of the collective mind” (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997, p193), or as Akerlind says, “the aim is not to capture any particular individual’s understanding, but to capture the range of understandings within a particular group” (2005^b, p331), of the participants’ experiences of the phenomena, with which this study is concerned. This seems also to be relevant in terms of validity of the data generated. For me, the value of phenomenography lies firstly, in the structural relationship which emerges from the holistic, or collective, experience of the individual participants, and secondly, in the usefulness of the research outcomes (Akerlind, 2005). In the case of this study it is hoped that the research outcomes will provide insights into the professional development of HR practitioners. The individual and different experiences being expanded to form a ‘collective map’ for me is exciting and refreshing (Åkerlind, et. al., 2005^a).

During the process of analysis the literature review was revisited. The result of this revisit was that a small number of new themes were identified and some of the existing themes were expanded.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

I am passionate about my research topic and for that reason it is extremely important to me that my research generates knowledge and truth with the avoidance of error, whilst at the same time showing respect and consideration for the other stakeholders. Ethical issues, according to Anderson (2009), can arise at all stages of the research process – in the “design and planning stage, during the data gathering process and after the data gathering has been completed (p79)”. Consequently, there are a number of ethical considerations which resulted from this research. I strove to avoid ethical lapses and do justice to the data imparted by the participants. I achieved this, I believe by considering what Steare (2009) recommends are the right questions, these being ‘what are the rules?, are we acting with integrity?, who is this good for?, who could we harm? and what is the truth?’ The ethical guidelines issued by BERA Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004) were followed and permission was granted from the ethics committee at the University for the study to be carried out. Written consent to participate was obtained from the participants (See Appendix 2) who were fully informed of the purpose of the study (see Appendix 4) as well as information of their right to withdraw at any stage. No inducement was used to obtain participation. Participants were provided with a summary of the research aims and objectives and research questions (See Appendix 4). This information was disseminated via the consent form and again at the start of the face-to-face semi-structured interviews when participants were thanked for their participation. Data was treated with confidentiality and anonymity of

participant identities was protected through the use of pseudonyms – although the participants may be able to identify their own quotes, others will not. I decided to use a consistent format for the pseudonyms and for this (Appendix 1) reason a selection of biblical names were used to anonymise the participants. The participant interviews were recorded – consent for recording was sought from the participants in the form of a signed consent form (See Appendix 2). Information about the participants was obtained only from the participants themselves. Confidentiality and security issues were taken into consideration in the storage of all data gathered, for example, recordings and transcribed information. I strove to avoid bias by being aware of my insider perspective of the profession, the topic and my role as an HR lecturer. I was conscious of remaining neutral, though empathetic, during all stages of this phenomenographic study as it is concerned with the notions of the participants and the qualitatively different ways in which the various HR practitioners' view the HR professionalism continuum, their professional development practices and the ways (if at all) in which non-formal learning mechanisms are used. Bowden's advice to the researcher to ensure neutrality is to "limit inputs of the researcher" (in Bowden & Green, 2005, p14). I took heed of this advice during the participant interviews by making a concerted effort to limit my input to the questions on the prompt sheet or to seek clarification or expansion on statements made by the participant.

3.10 Limitations of this Study

In spite of the careful preparation undertaken during the research process, a number of limitations which may have affected the findings of this study, are acknowledged.

- As an 'insider' practitioner study there may be criticism that the researcher had some personal point of view to get across, was unable to 'see' the significance of certain points having been too close to them, or has missed questions and issues a more independent researcher might ask. I believe I have mitigated against this by the 'bracketing process' explained and described earlier in this chapter.
- I decided to use the phenomenographic approach to this study for the reasons clearly explained in this chapter. While I do believe this was the right choice in my quest for a 'fresh approach', this could be perceived as a limitation in that only one research approach was used. In addition the limitations of phenomenographic research discussed earlier in this chapter must, nevertheless, be acknowledged.
- The sample size (n=17) may be considered a limitation. This is, and was always meant to be, an exploratory study. To mitigate the effect of the small sample, and as has already been discussed earlier in this chapter, a broad variation of participant categories was sought and the saturation point was reached.

- The selection of Grampian and the North of Scotland as the geographical area might be considered a limitation given its economical buoyancy largely due to the Oil and Gas sector. While I believe I have justified its selection this potential limitation must be acknowledged.

Throughout this study, which must, as I have stated, be considered exploratory, I have endeavoured to be aware of the potential limitations and attempted to minimise any effect on the findings. This study is, however, methodologically robust and has extended the knowledge in the subjects and context of this research.

In this chapter I have described and justified the methodological issues used in this study as well as identified potential limitations. In the two subsequent chapters, I present the findings of the primary research. This will take the form of a presentation of the categories of description and an outcome space relating to professional development as well as the revised HR professionalism continuum (Chapter 4). The categories of description and outcome space relating to non-formal learning (Chapter 5) as well as a full description of how these findings emerged.

CHAPTER 4

4.0 ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 Professional Development

In this, and the following chapter, I will present my findings on the phenomena being investigated in this study – that of professional development and non-formal learning. In this chapter the findings on the phenomenon of professional development will be presented and in chapter five that of non-formal learning. The purpose of the data gathered in this chapter is to meet the first research objective, which is:

To discover the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland on the subject of professional development.

And the third research objective, in part, which is:

To conceptualise a model to encourage and support the professional development of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland.

The analysis process in this and the subsequent chapter follows the four step process outlined in chapter three of this thesis. Jaidin (2009) intimates that there “is a variety of ways in which researchers conduct phenomenographical analysis” (p105), and she goes on to acknowledge how complex the process

is with many researchers believing, as a result, that it is impossible to follow a “prescribed set of techniques” (p105). This, she postulates, is why researchers “devise and adapt” (p105) analysis to suit the study in hand, and so it is the case with this study. Additionally, as phenomenography is rather a research approach than a method, there is no universally accepted list of instructions for analysis. It has, probably as a result of this, been noted that phenomenographical researchers often do not explain their analysis process sufficiently well (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997; Ashworth & Lucas, 1998). I attempt to mitigate that practice in this and the following chapter by explaining clearly the process I followed in the analysis of both phenomena – professional development and non-formal learning – which involved the sorting and re-sorting the data gathered in my study and how the categories of description and outcome spaces came about. This sorting and re-sorting is at the very heart of phenomenographic research and makes it an iterative process (Dahlgren, 1997). By explaining in detail the data gathering process (in chapter three) and the analysis process in this chapter, illustrating, explaining and reflecting on how the categories of description emerge will diminish the weaknesses of many other phenomenographic studies (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997).

The results of phenomenographic research are categories of description which, together with their outcome space, act as a means of encapsulating and conveying the ways in which phenomena are understood, experienced and applied (Soon & Barnard, 2002). It is commonly believed that these categories which describe the various ways of experiencing a phenomenon

are related in a hierarchical way (Marton, 1988). The categories in this study are formed from practitioners' experiences, and, as a result, give insights into the nature of professional development and non-formal learning that is appropriate for contemporary HR practitioners, which is why this approach was the obvious choice (Kaapu, et. al., 2006).

Soon and Barnard (2001) identify that the outcomes of phenomenographic research are relational, experiential, content-orientated and qualitative. In the context of this study, the categories of description presented later in this and the following chapter are:

- Relational because they relate to HR practitioners and their relationship with professional development and non-formal learning
- Experiential because the experiences in the course of their practice influences the practitioners' experiences of both professional development and non-formal learning
- Content-orientated because the participants' descriptions of professional development and non-formal learning are based on their day-to-day experience and practice
- Qualitative because a number of different ways of understanding professional development and non-formal learning emerged from the analysis.

The process of this data analysis can be best illustrated by using the model presented by Ireland et al (2009). The model adapted for the professional development phenomenon is shown below:

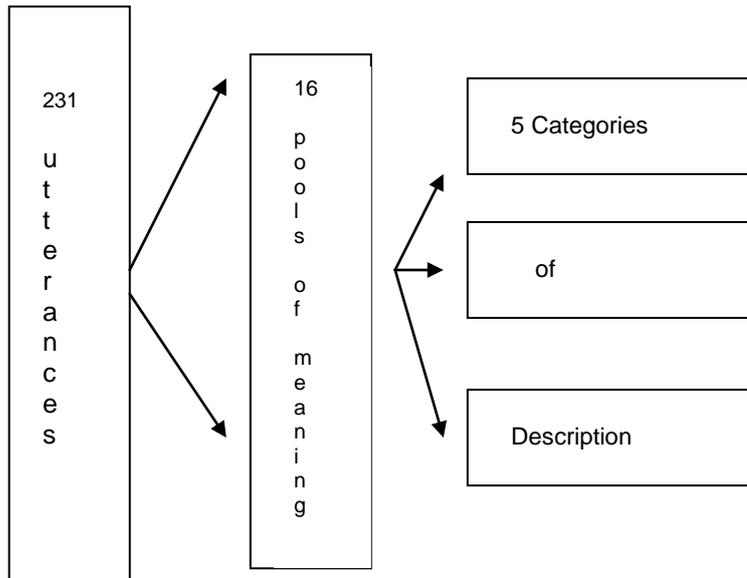


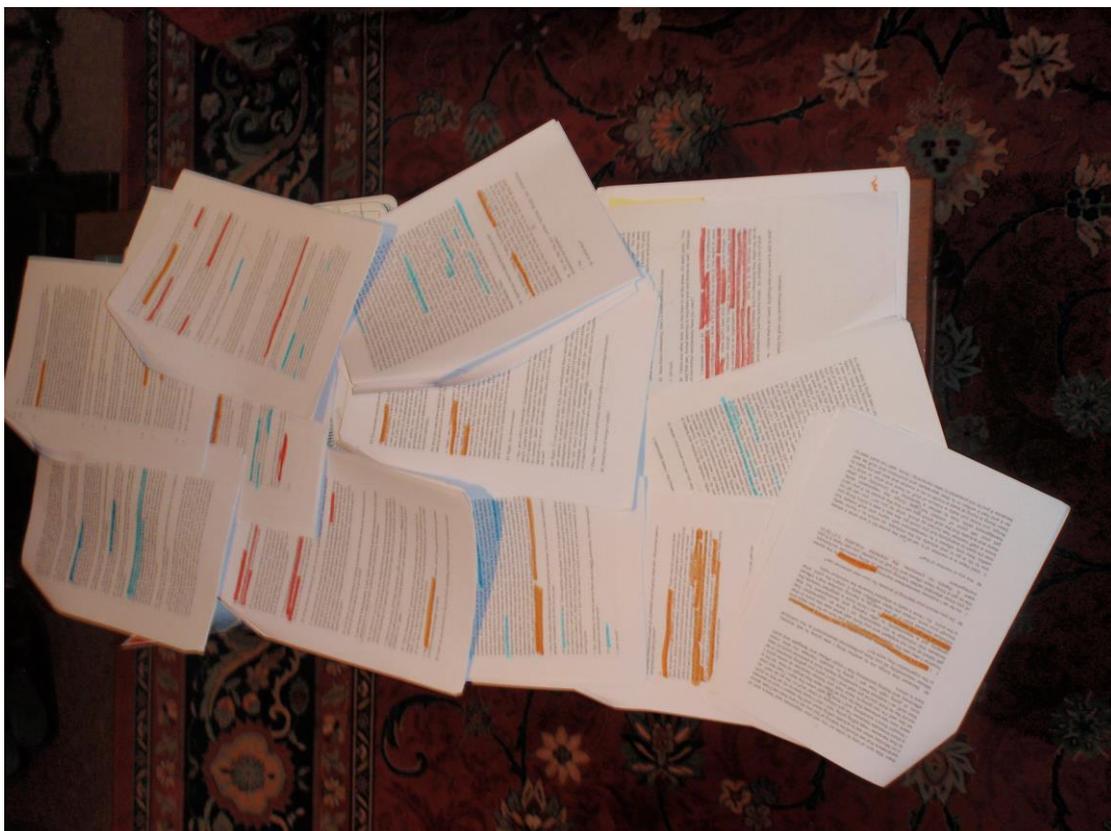
Figure 11 – From utterances to categories of description (Adapted from Ireland, et. al., 2009)

Though very conscious of constantly bracketing throughout the process of data collection, I continued to be aware of the need for bracketing throughout the analysis process. The concept of bracketing has been discussed at length in the previous chapter. Sandberg (1997) highlights that by acknowledging and addressing their subjectivity throughout the whole research process will ensure the researcher maintains an interpretive awareness thus resulting in a more truthful analysis of data, and this is what I believe I have achieved in my analysis.

The first step in the process involved immersing myself in the data gathered and this was achieved by reading and re-reading the transcripts and field notes and listening and re-listening to the recorded interviews as a whole over a period of time – in phenomenograph analysis 'the collective mind' (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997, p193) is what needs to be discovered. A large volume of data is generated in phenomenographic research, in the case of this study, approximately 300 pages of transcript. As a result of this reading and re-reading, the second step in the process was reached in that the participants' utterances which were most relevant or of most interest to answer the question(s) being explored (Marton, 1986) were identified, interpreted and extracted and grouped into 'pools of meaning' (Schroder et al., 2005) representing a 'map' of the different ways in which the participants perceive, or think about, the phenomenon under investigation. In phenomenographic research the focus is to identify the various ways the phenomenon is experienced and, as such, an experience or belief may become an important element of the final outcome space even though it has been identified by only one participant thus being no less important than an experience identified by a number of the participants. In the case of this study, the relevant utterances are those relating to professional development (in this chapter), and non-formal learning (in the following chapter). Selected utterances are presented in the form of direct quotes for reasons of transparency and reliability in relation to development of the categories of description. These utterances have been considered in their original context in the verbatim transcripts because I am aware that utterances can take on different meanings out of context (Svensson & Theman, 1983). Utterances

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?'

deemed to be relevant to each of the phenomena were highlighted in coloured highlighter pens in the original transcripts (See picture 1 below).



Picture 1 – Relevant utterances highlighted in original transcripts

These utterances were then entered into a separate spreadsheet for each phenomenon – linking the utterance to a participant, thus acknowledging and respecting participant experiences (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). See picture 2 below:

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

Picture 2 Spreadsheet containing utterances – professional development

This process also served as a means of managing the data, the purpose not being to create categories of description at this stage. I made a conscious decision to analyse the data manually and not to use computerised software, because I wanted to remain as close to the data as possible. I continued to re-visit the complete verbatim transcripts identifying additional relevant utterances. These actions illustrate the iterative nature of phenomenographic analysis (Dahlgren, 1997; Akerlind, 2005). The new spreadsheet documents formed the 'data pools' relating to the phenomena of professional development. When I was satisfied that I had identified all relevant utterances, I printed off a hard copy of the spreadsheet then separated each utterance so that I had a paper copy of each utterance in order that sorting into pools of meaning could take place (see picture 3 below which illustrates

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?'

this process for the professional development phenomenon. At this stage there were 231 relevant utterances.



Picture 3 Individual utterances – professional development

The pools of meaning relating to professional development which finally emerged, following consideration being given to how the participant explained the phenomenon, are listed below and began to create an image, for me, of how professional development is *experienced* by the HR practitioners participating in this study not what they *think* of professional development. Sixteen pools of meaning were identified. See picture 4 below:



Picture 4 – Pools of meaning – professional development

The pools of meaning listed below emerged following visits and re-visits to the data pools, sorting and re-sorting, comparing and contrasting of the emerging pools of meaning until the meanings settled down. During this process consideration was given to reproducing the participants' intended meaning by taking account of other data from that participant, as well as applying 'empathetic understanding' (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).

4.2 Pools of Meaning – Professional Development

1. Proof of ability and credibility to carry out role
2. Responsibility to carry out professional development
3. Keeping up to date
4. Formal qualifications
5. HR seen as a career or job
6. Professional development as a proactive
7. Other than formal qualifications
8. Means of progression in job role
9. Recording of development
10. Extending knowledge
11. Elements other than knowledge
12. Benefits of development to self
13. Benefits of development to organisation
14. What triggers development
15. Change
16. Choice and self awareness

From these pools of meaning, and based on similarity and difference in meaning, the third step in the analysis process was reached - the categories of description emerged.

These categories finally emerged following deep immersion in, and repeated interaction with, the data. The analysis process for this phenomenon involved an exhaustive process over a 4 month period (July 2011 to November 2011). As has been discussed in chapter 3, I am a part time researcher and this

provided me with the opportunity to play the devil's advocacy role (Akerlind, 2005), each time I re-visited my analysis it was with a fresh and open mind.

The interpretive process which carries with it such a weight of responsibility for the researcher and which I discussed in chapter 3 was used throughout this process (Barnacle, 2005). Categories of description in this study are my way of expressing the different ways the participants experience professional development (in this chapter and non-formal learning in the following chapter) (Akerlind, 2005). Uppermost in my mind throughout the process of analysis was that the categories must represent the data as faithfully as possible because in phenomenographical research, to ensure validity and reliability, strict adherence to the data within the interview transcripts is a means of checking data (Green, 2005). Kelly (2003) questioned the reliability of phenomenographic analysis due to the decontextualising of participant narrative. In this study, I have mitigated this situation occurring by virtue of being aware of this criticism I continually returned to the complete transcripts as well as the pooled data to ensure the utterances remained in their original context. The first set of categories which emerged from the process is listed below:

1. Professional development is concerned with control and ownership of your own destiny
2. Professional development is important for the HR practitioner, must be relevant/timely/and have purpose
3. Professional development is concerned with credibility within the profession
4. Professional development leads to advancement within the profession
5. Professional development proves to others you can do your job
6. Professional development opens up new possibilities to the HR practitioner

7. Professional development must be a collaborative exercise
8. Professional development has many and differing components and can be achieved in many different ways
9. Professional development can bring challenges
10. Professional development is concerned with the individual and not just the practitioner
11. Professional development to the HR practitioner should be about the individual, supporting line management and the business
12. Professional development is concerned with learning not just HR skills but the business too

This was my first attempt at producing categories of description thus provided a starting point. Once the first set of categories finally emerged, I did not re-visit them for some days because I felt that I needed to distance myself from the data for a time. When I returned to the analysis, I re-visited the data which included returning to both the complete transcripts and the pooled data. On further examination of both these and the above categories, and taking into account Marton's suggestion that categories should be parsimonious (1997), I decided that the categories needed some refinement. Taking this into account and following much consideration, I decided that there could be more differentiation between the categories and that they could be more coherent (Akerlind, 2005). I felt strongly that the terminology used in each category needed to reflect the fact that the categories were the experience of the participant(s) and further believed this would be achieved by commencing each category with the phrase 'the phenomenon is experienced by HR practitioners as ...'. After re-visiting the data and following consideration, in particular, to achieve the aims of coherence and differentiation, I came to the conclusion that categories 10 and 12 were more coherent in the new category 6, category 11 was inclusive in category 4 as were categories 3, 4 and 5, into category 2. Category 8 was made more coherent by two emerging categories 5 and 6 and category 7 inclusive of category 5. Marton and Booth's (1997)

suggestion of parsimony led to a number of amendments to categories, namely category 6 seemed to be an element of 3, categories 1 and 2 was subsumed by the new category 8 and categories 2 and 9 was subsumed into category 7. The new category relating to professional development being experienced as a means of keeping up to date emerged.

The second set of categories which emerged from this process was:

1. Professional development is experienced as a means of keeping up to date
2. Professional development is experienced as proving credibility
3. Professional development is experienced as a means to maintain position and progress in the role of HR
4. Professional development is experienced as beneficial
5. Professional development is experienced as taking many forms
6. Professional development is experienced as comprising many different elements
7. Professional development is experienced as requiring motivation
8. Professional development is experienced as empowering

Again I distanced myself from the data for a number of days and following more consideration of the pooled data and a re-visit to the complete transcripts, a new category emerged – that of professional development being a part of practice. I also took into account Hasselgren and Beach's comment that a 'limited' number of categories emerge, usually "five or six" (1997, p196). Category 3 seemed to be an element of category 4, as did category 7 to the category describing the benefits. I identified that there was a requirement for some amendments in terminology used in the description of the categories. Credibility and the empowerment referred to in category 8, which after consideration appeared to be concerned with control, seemed to be relevant, though with different meanings, across all the categories. For this reason these descriptions were deemed not be categories in their own right and I

decided to finalise the categories of description and return to these differences later in the analysis process (Akerlind, 2005). It is, in phenomenographical research, particularly in lone doctoral research projects, a difficult decision when to finish the analysis, but I believe that the third version of the categories which emerged at this stage was an appropriate place to cease analysis (Akerlind, et. al., 2005) of this phenomenon. The version of the categories which then emerged is presented below and represent the qualitatively different ways the participants experience professional development. See figure 12 below.

4.3 Categories of Description and Dimensions of Variation

1. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as including a wide range of components
2. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as a means of keeping up to date
3. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as occurring in many different ways
4. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as being part of HR practice
5. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as enabling them to bring benefits to a range of stakeholders

Pools of Meaning

Proof of ability and credibility to carry out role
Responsibility to carry out professional development
Keeping up to date
Formal qualifications
HR seen as a career and a job
Professional development as a proactive
Other than formal qualifications
Means of progression in job role
Recording of development
Extending knowledge
Elements other than knowledge
Benefits to self
Benefits to organisation
What triggers development
Change
Choice and self awareness

Categories of Description

1. Comprises many elements/components
2. A means of keeping up to date
3. Occurs in many ways
4. Is a part of HR practice
5. Is beneficial to a range of stakeholders

Figure 12 – From pools of meaning to categories of description

Earlier in this chapter I described how the terms 'credibility and control' seemed to be relevant, though with different meanings, across all the categories though not categories in their own right. After the categories were finalised I returned to the original transcripts, utterances and pooled data that related to credibility and control because these utterances seemed to display "dimensions of variation in awareness" on the part of the participants of the,

by now, established categories of description (Akerlind, 2005, p122). During the re-visit it became apparent that the utterances relating to these centred on different aspects of the phenomenon. A “dimension of variation”, or what Akerlind (2005, p139) terms “themes of expanding awareness”, is often considered the second outcome of phenomenography – the first being categories of description. A dimension of variation in awareness is a recognisable theme that exists across all the categories and describes the variation in meaning across the categories of description (Marton, 1988, Akerlind, 2005), or they can be said to describe the difference between the categories (Boon, 2010). Bowden highlights that a theme of expanding awareness is a ‘theme that was common to the ... categories, but ... treated differently’ (Bowden, et. al., 2005, p140). Another way of considering themes of expanding awareness is that ‘they are major issues that have different meaning across the categories’ (Bowden, et. al., 2005, p139). Following my revisit to the original transcripts and utterances, the themes, which conformed to the description of themes of expanding awareness above which emerged were:

Theme 1	Control
Theme 2	Credibility

Illustrative quoted utterances are presented to justify the final categories, and dimensions of variation, for reasons of transparency and reliability.

1. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as including a wide range of components.

In this category professional development is seen as comprising a range of components relating to the individual as well as the HR practitioner. Grace identified a number of components, *management, leadership, business knowledge*, while Tiberius highlighted *communication and business knowledge (is important)*. The components are wide ranging and include what would be traditionally regarded as technical, reflected in Bathsheba's comment *the knowledge bit*, while Rebecca identified *redundancy law*, and Abigail highlighted *knowledge, skills and experience*. Participants, however, did identify softer and transferable components such as those highlighted by Neriah, *it is the attitude as well*, Lucas *solve whatever problem* and Mary *understanding people*. The breadth in range of components is further illustrated by Esther in her comment *behaviours and attitudes*, and Neriah when she identifies *the skills and knowledge to be competent in your role*. In addition, Isaac highlighted *useful things like it's a wise thing to keep your temper*, while Lucas emphasized the importance of *integrative judgement* and John pinpointed *self awareness*.

The control dimension of variation is characterised by the control the HR practitioner has over the components of professional development he/she chooses to concentrate on – as Abigail says *its interest driven*, or as Anna

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

says *it's just kind of driven when I can do it.* Anna's comment illustrates that the practitioner might not always have as much control as might be desirable.

The credibility dimension of variation in this category focussed on a range of areas, one area illustrated by Neriah in HR *I find it is the attitude as well. You have to learn how to react* and Lucas *making sensible decisions based on fact rather than just opinion* both seemed to suggest that how they are seen by other stakeholders impacts on credibility. David's comment highlights that credibility comes from the HR practitioner displaying a wide range of skills *that's where HR gets the credibility, it's not being an HR techy but being a business partner and applying it and understanding the financial side of things and understanding the operational side of things.*

2. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as a means of keeping up to date

The participants' experiences in this category describe that professional development is a way of keeping up to date. Participant experience seems to be that this is of importance. The importance of keeping up to date is highlighted by David *absolutely critical that you keep up to date.* Jemimah captures this experience in a more colourful way *so you're not disappearing down a rabbit hole and forgetting to learn.* Martha adopts a more practical format *keeping up to date with practices, legislation trends,* as does Lucas *keeping their ongoing professional development up to speed.* As Abigail's experience illustrates keeping knowledge up to date is important in relation to status of the profession *it (the HR profession) is absolutely a career, it's about*

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

the breadth and the depth of my knowledge, or as Martha says (HR profession) A career. Because there is progression and development.

In terms of the control dimension of variation there seemed to be little doubt as to who should take responsibility for keeping up to date as is illustrated by *mine* (Martha), *It's my responsibility* (Mary) *I take ownership for it myself* (Rebecca). David has a slightly broader view which he articulates as *for my own personal development I see it as myself, but I also see it in the discussions through my appraisal process, through succession planning to have those discussions with my boss.*

The focus of awareness on the credibility dimension of variation relating to keeping up to date as experienced as a key element of being perceived as credible as an HR practitioner and was articulated by John when he said *I can't see how professional people do their job without (keeping up to date).* Lucas identified a slightly different perspective resulting from the fact that he is a senior HR practitioner – at director level. He maintains that keeping up to date is still of great importance in terms of his own credibility but there is less of a need to keep up to date in terms of day to day advice *in my role there's less of a need to keep up to date in terms of day to day advice. Staff who work for me clearly are being asked to provide advice in all kinds of areas such as employment law.....I'm not in that same position, if I'm asked a question it's a fairly high level..... from that point of view I need to be up to speed on all kinds of areas in order to be credible.* Jemimah's comments highlight the view of credibility *if you don't keep up to date you don't change*

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

then you just end up being irrelevant and not very much use to the people you are trying to do something for. For Anna, her credibility from her colleagues' perspective is important as she says for your work colleagues to say well she's keeping up to date, she's you know professional and I don't know how to say it ... just for the integrity of the service that you are providing really.

3. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as occurring in many different ways

This category reflects the many and wide range of ways professional development occurs in the experience of the participants. As identified by Tiberius, *it can take many forms*, or as John says *I think we have to have a variety of different methods available*. Probably the more traditionally recognised way in which development occurs is through *formal qualification* (Lucas), *structured piece of learning* (Anna), *the attainment of qualifications* (Deborah) to the less formal *lawyer friend* (Martha), or, as David says *It's not just about courses*. For some practitioners the experience was that they had not studied HR prior to becoming a practitioner so ongoing professional development was the only way of developing their knowledge base. As Tiberius says *I don't have an HR degree, I don't have an HR background so everything I've learned about HR has been through my time at XXX org*. It was identified that collaboration with others is a feature, *networks* (Lucas) of professional development, as in *attending professional meetings reading and writing literature etc etc* (Lucas), *It's not just about courses, its about taking on different projects and learning stuff on the job as well* (David). Experience is acknowledged as another way of professional development,

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

doing things and experience (Anna), experience (Ruth), just through doing, experience it is through doing and learning and reflecting (Martha), hands on experience is invaluable more than anything (Neriah). Reflection seems also to be an important way of professional development *reflection* (John), Grace identified that professional development can be achieved by *challenging yourself and putting yourself in situations*. Simple ways were also identified *but I like talking* (Neriah) to the more structured *internal mentoring* (Rebecca).

The control dimension of variation relating to this category is characterised by the range and variety of ways in which professional development can occur as Lucas says *it can take many forms*. Tiberius highlights that the (HR practitioner) *must have ambition and want to learn*. Neriah identifies how she likes to control the way in which she develops *definitely more hands on*.

An aspect of the credibility dimension of variation relating to this category is concerned with professional development being achieved by means of formal qualification – summed up by Deborah when she says *the attainment of qualifications to join a profession*. Or as Mary says, *It's (professional development) tied up with some kind of assessment about your ability*. Given that development can occur in non-formal ways, the credibility of that learning needs to be addressed. One view is that recording this learning might enhance the credibility. As David says *I think it's the right thing to do is to capture the trend*. While this may be the case, it is the experience that it is not carried out *I'm not good at the writing down part* (Neriah). Mary seems to

concur with this view when she says when asked about recording *I think it would improve credibility.*

4. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as being part of HR practice

This category reflects the experience of the participants in that professional development is a part of their everyday practice – a fundamental element of their day to day job. This is reflected in the utterance by Esther *I pick up (learning) across everything.* As Abigail states *I am constantly looking for opportunities to enhance my professional knowledge also self development, needs to be interest driven.* Or as Jemimah says *it's about keeping yourself fresh.*

The control dimension of variation is experienced by the HR practitioner as lacking and is articulated by Ruth when she says that practice results in professional development being *event driven not problem driven, whereas* Tiberius has a different view illustrating how the control is still not with the practitioner but is *driven by problems.* Similarly Ruth identifies one example of how events resulted in her having little control over her learning – she had to meet the needs of the organisation *we've got to train 72 people in 2 weeks.* Martha suggests that there can be control on the part of the practitioner in terms of development but there can also be occasions when control is taken from the practitioner *I come in here on a quiet day and then suddenly I've got a problem that needs to be sorted out. You're never quite sure what could hit*

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

you. Otherwise it's a planned training event. Rebecca recalls how she has chosen a variety of positions in a deliberate move to develop professionally ... and was HR manager there for about four years again lots of change going on... I worked directly for the MD and I got the chance to go out with him when he was negotiating the big deals. Similarly with Abigail It's not a job where I've progressed to A to B to C I've gone from A to D to L to back again and all over the place so for me it's about the breadth and the depth of my knowledge. As David illustrates there is an element of choice with regard to controlling whether or not a practitioner develops through their practice you can stand there and become a victim or you can do something about it. Tiberius says you must take responsibility,

The credibility dimension of variation is evident in the comments by Lucas *If we are making the rest of the organisation more effective then we've done our jobs. Or, as he goes on to illustrate, another way of looking at the credibility dimension I think the worst HR practitioners are the ones who take that view I've seen it all before, I've done it all before.*

5. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as enabling them to bring benefits to a range of stakeholders.

The experience of participants seemed to reflect that professional development brought benefits to a range of stakeholders. Benefits to the practitioner him/herself, the organisation and to colleagues. As Lucas says professional development is about *actually adding value* (Lucas), enhancing the practitioner's (my) *credibility* (Lucas) or an *investment decision* (Isaac). It

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

results in *technically skilled people* (Mary), *bringing HR skills and competences to apply and for the benefit of the organisation* (David), and *meet the business goals* (Tiberius). Benefits to line managers *our job is to support the managers* (Neriah). This category also benefits the practitioner in as much as he/she can maintain or enhance their position within the profession – the choice lies with the practitioner as articulated by Bathsheba *to progress within the position*.

Here, the control dimension of variation reflected the fact that the practitioner is in control of the ways in which he/she benefits from professional development *I've got no desire to become full time, make a huge career, move on. I like where I am* (Bathsheba). For those HR practitioners who choose to progress professional development can help *them become Assistant HR Advisors* (Deborah).

The credibility dimension of variation focussed on the range of stakeholders, the organisation - *credibility and security for the organisation* (Lucas), on the practitioner *fully fledged HR advisors* (Lucas) and on colleagues *help managers make decisions* (Neriah).

4.4 The Outcome Space – Professional Development

The fourth step in the analysis process involved establishing the relationship between the descriptive categories to form the outcome space – an empirical map. The categories are logically related to each other in an outcome space. The outcome space is presented in diagrammatic form and illustrates the

different ways in which I, as the researcher, have interpreted how professional development and non-formal learning is experienced by the participants in this study, or as Stein et. al., (2009) intimates, the logical relationship, in diagrammatic form, of the different conceptions of the phenomenon. This is because in phenomenographical research it is, according to Akerlind et al (2005) 'not enough to simply constitute categories of description'. It is, she says, important to establish and represent the structural relationship between the categories. Following much consideration I decided that Bowden's view of structuring the categories seemed most appropriate to me. Bowden (Akerlind, 2005) also perceives structure as being important but should be established (differing from Akerlind) after the categories of description have been settled, and so it has been in this study. I concur with Bowden in that leaving the quest for structure until categories have stabilised and been finalised will reduce researcher bias (Akerlind, 2005).

An outcome space can be described as a summary of the findings – a 'collective, empirical map' of the various ways the participants experience the phenomenon, in this case professional development (Mann, 2009). An outcome space need not be linear, categories can be inclusive of others and the structure may include branches and forks (Mann, 2009). On close inspection of the categories and the dimensions of variation, it seemed that the outcome space could be represented by a horizontal or linear structure. The outcome space for professional development is based on the experiences of the participants of this study. The structure needed to represent firstly, '**what**' is professional development (categories 1 and 2), secondly '**how**' such

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?'

development occurs (category 3), thirdly **'when'** it is likely to occur (category 4) and fourthly, the outcome (category 5), or the **'why'**, that development brings. I represent this, one possible viewpoint of the professional development outcome space, in the diagram below:

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?'

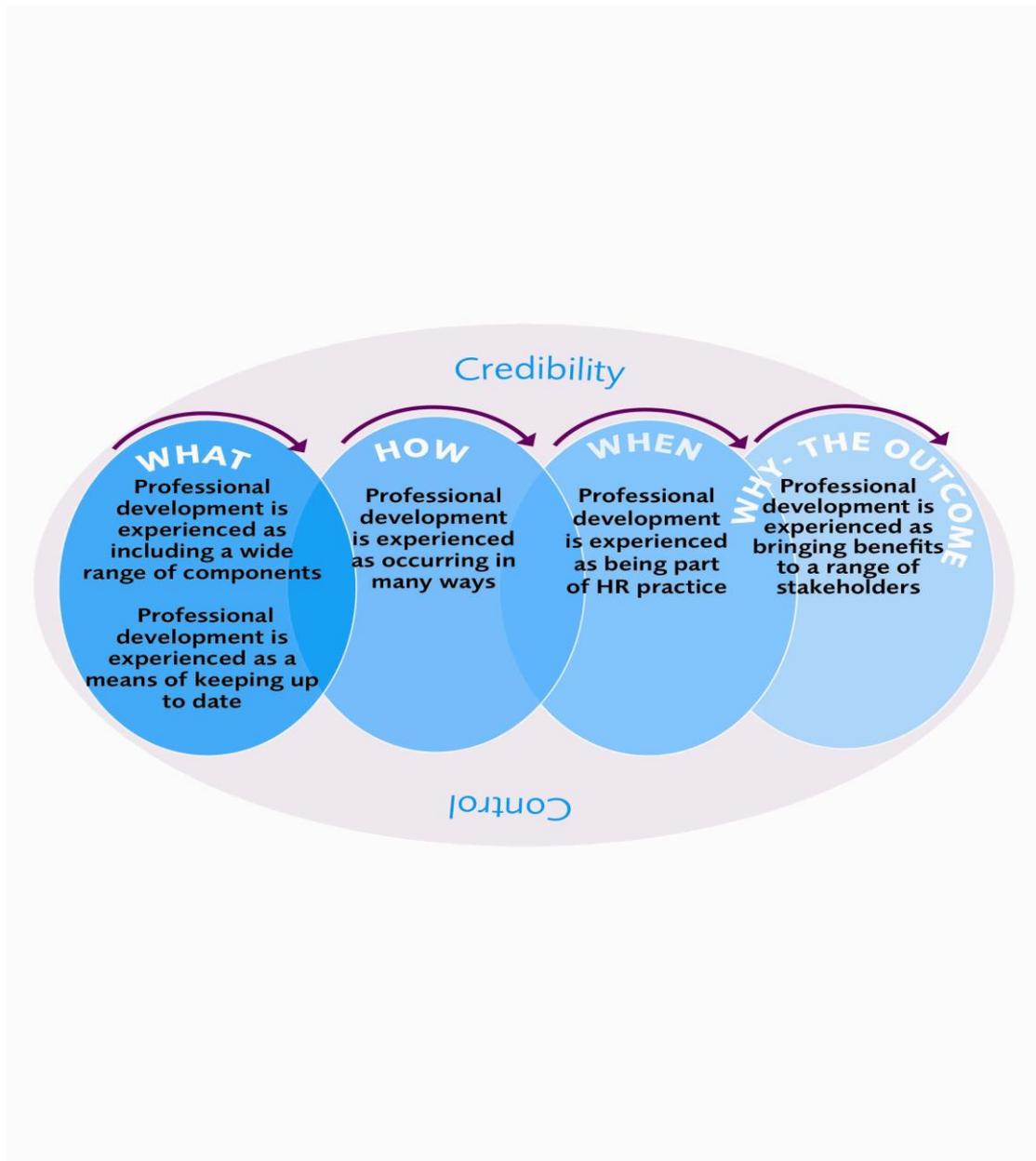


Figure 13 Outcome Space – Professional Development Source: Author

4.5 The HR Professionalism Continuum

As has been discussed in Chapter two of this thesis, an HR professionalism continuum has not, to date, been developed. It was highlighted that a professionalism continuum might be a useful element of a model which could help HR practitioners in their professional development process and for this reason I decided that it was appropriate, as a starting off point, to develop a draft continuum (Appendix 5). This process was discussed at length in Chapter two.

The purpose of the data gathering for the continuum was firstly, to give a 'voice' and, secondly, to gather participants' beliefs and expertise, in HR practice with regard to the proposed development and composition of an HR professionalism continuum which is why a phenomenographical approach was used to gather the data.

The outcome of this data gathering was not to produce categories of description or an outcome space but was to firstly, establish whether or not developing an HR continuum was an appropriate and worthwhile framework which they might use in the course of their professional development activities and secondly, if the view was confirmatory, refine and revise the draft continuum based on the 'expert opinions' of the participants.

I did this by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and field notes and listening and re-listening to the interview recordings on my iPod. In this phase of the analysis I identified and highlighted on the interview transcripts

the participant comments which conveyed their experiences on the subject of an HR professionalism continuum.

At the outset, it was important to establish whether or not the development of an HR professionalism continuum was a worthwhile exercise. The reaction from the participants towards the prospect of an HR professionalism continuum being produced was positive, thus supporting the development of the profession specific continuum. Tiberius' said, *Yes, I see value in this*, while Jemimah's comment was *I think the continuum idea's a really good one, and I like the simplicity of the idea*, Martha said simply *I like this*, while Abigail intimated that *A continuum is an excellent idea*, Lucas' opinion was that *the continuum is absolutely, is right and it's fluid if people want to make it fluid (sic)*. Deborah's experience led her to say that *Yes, definitely using language like continuum*. Anna said *that sounds like it would be good, particularly for people like me who have got to stop and start*. The participant was referring to her career being managed around her having chosen to have career breaks during which she had her children.

Based on these comments, therefore I decided to proceed with the revision of the draft continuum.

A number of the participants identified that a continuum would guide practitioners in their development *I think it's a good guide* (Ruth) as well as enable them to incorporate an element of control and choice in relation to their development, *I think there's probably just the kind of stops along the way*

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

(Jemimah), and not just development related to formal courses – control and choice in relation to what form the development might take, what elements require to be developed, when and how long that development should take
Not necessarily linked to qualification (Deborah).

This being the case, the next area to explore was what such a continuum should look like. When asked what the HR continuum should look like some useful comments were made in relation to the construction. Anna, for example suggested that it be *fairly generic* (Anna), but simple *yes keep it simple because that's exactly what industry wants* (Rebecca). Jemimah identified that a linear model was not appropriate *I'm just not sure if you can get it as linear as that*.

There were some suggestions about how the framework could be used. John highlighted that *you have to ensure that you are constantly developing yourself*, Jemimah's comment was *it's just about putting the options on a piece of paper* (Jemimah), though she did identify also that might be helpful think about the process as *go round the pole in lots of different ways*.

It seems to be confirmed by the comments above, that such a model needed to be straightforward and uncomplicated enough to be of use to a wide variety of HR practitioners and to reflect the fact that professional development is firstly, not a linear process and secondly, that the elements of development could be tackled individually, and that it is an ongoing process. In the first draft, the diagrammatic format seemed to indicate a linear process and did not

take account of the choice highlighted by the participants in terms of what the individual decides to concentrate on, the timing and process of that development. After consideration, and to reflect the comments above, I decided that a cylindrical shape would be most appropriate to form the basis of the model to emphasise the fact that development is not a linear process, or as Jemimah highlighted *much more interesting if it isn't straight across or straight up*. To illustrate the development of an individual from restricted practitioner to extended professional, I selected an overarching arrow. Practitioners need not concentrate on working towards all components in the extended end at one time but are more likely to select those elements which are appropriate at particular times in their career. Not only that, but there are a variety of mechanisms which might be used in that development. In fact development is likely to be one of start, stop, consolidate, start, stop, consolidate and so on. A number of smaller arrows have been incorporated within the model to reflect this.

It was important, based on the findings, to illustrate on the model that even when an individual might be considered to be at the extended end of the continuum, professional development must continue to be an ongoing and important element of practice (Friedman & Woodhead, 2008; Bailey, 2011). As has already been discussed in chapter one, the occupational climate today is fast changing and competitive (Friedman & Woodhead, 2008), and as a result, HR practitioners who do not keep themselves up to date will be left behind (Smith, 2003; Wisniewski & McMahon, 2005), or as Tiberias articulated *you have to stay up to date with what's going on*. This is reflected

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

in the revised model by the arrow circling the extended end of the continuum thus illustrating the ongoing nature of the extended professionalism. A word of caution was given by Neriah in that the continuum should be used to help the practitioner and not simply *involved with labelling and having hierarchical connotations*. Neriah also warned against the continuum causing HR practitioners to become *fixated on having a process for something – it should just be a natural progression*.

Considering Neriah's comments, I decided that the continuum would continue to be displayed in a horizontal, as opposed to a vertical, format.

The next area to consider was the various components of both the restricted and extended ends of the continuum. Hoyle's original continuum incorporated knowledge, skills and procedures (Hoyle, 1975) so it was important to take this into account in the composition of the HR continuum. Hoyle's continuum contained fairly broad components at both the restricted and extended ends (Appendix 7). One participant seemed to concur with Hoyle when he cautioned against the continuum being too prescriptive: *I'm a bit sceptical about the move in the Western world particularly towards standardisation and specifying every bit of knowledge, skills and behaviour that somebody needs to have to be a professional* (John)

The participants, during the interviews, were shown the 'general' professionalism continuum produced by Evans (2008^a) for information purposes and asked *'What do you believe are the different elements at the*

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

restricted and extended ends of the HR professionalism continuum?' This question yielded participants' visions about the various components of both the restricted:

Good with people or just common sense (Martha)

Following the rule book (Lucas)

Following instructions (Lucas)

Applying judgement to a point (Lucas)

Understands theory (Mary)

Applying the rules (David)

The theory, that's the practice (Esther)

Relies heavily on the ideas and practices that other professionals and their professional network recommend (Abigail)

Using your superiors (Ruth)

Don't make decisions, you actually get things confirmed (Ruth)

And the extended end of the continuum:

Make up procedures (Martha)

The law (Martha)

Taking responsibility for the work of other people (Isaac)

Create ideas and come up with ideas (Mary)

Thinking about business solution from an HR perspective (David)

Self starter (David)

Come up with innovative HR solutions as to how the business can progress and move forward (David)

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

Strategic change work (David)

Knowing the business, knowing the people in it and what's going to drive it forward (Ruth)

You're driving rather than someone else driving and making it happen (Ruth)

Sharing the knowledge (Esther)

What you do with the knowledge (Esther)

Apply (theoretical) models (Mary)

Driving the business (Ruth)

After much consideration I decided that I had to strike a balance by incorporating components that were sufficiently specific to be of value as a framework, while at the same time sufficiently broad to be of relevance to a wide range of HR practitioners. Taking into account the comments relating to the language used, I decided to label the restricted end of the continuum as HR practitioner and the extended end HR professional. The components presented in the revised model, I believe, reflects this balance.

Several participants indicated that there should be more than just restricted and extended categories in the continuum:

There should be three or four parts to that (Grace)

Milestones along the way (Abigail)

While I considered the comments carefully, I came to the conclusion that to incorporate more than two categories - restricted and extended - would be

straying too far from the original ethos of the model, which was to produce a framework to aid an individual from practitioner to professional (Hoyle 1975). Not only that but the main driver to my producing an HR continuum was to provide HR practitioners with a user friendly framework and to overcomplicate the continuum would, I believe, detract from the potential benefits. Incorporating more than restricted and extended categories would, I concluded, complicate the continuum. For these reasons, therefore, I decided to incorporate only a restricted and an extended end to the HR continuum.

One participant, however, made the observation:

These words to me are all very negative (Mary)

This comment seemed to me to be a relevant and useful observation. To ensure that the continuum reflected a positive tone, which I believe is important to encourage participation in professional development, careful consideration was given to the choice of wording used within the revised model to reflect this positivity. For this reason I decided to label the 'restricted' end of the continuum 'HR practitioner' and the 'extended' end 'HR professional'.

It was not possible to incorporate all the suggestions made by the participants and in some cases the suggestions were contradictory. Nonetheless, all suggestions were considered and have influenced in some way the continuum presented below. Some of the suggestions and comments identified issues I had not previously considered. I have, however, been continually mindful

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

during the process of revising the model that it was fundamentally important to ensure the original underlying ethos of the continuum was retained and reflected in the updated model which can be seen in Figure 14 below.

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?'

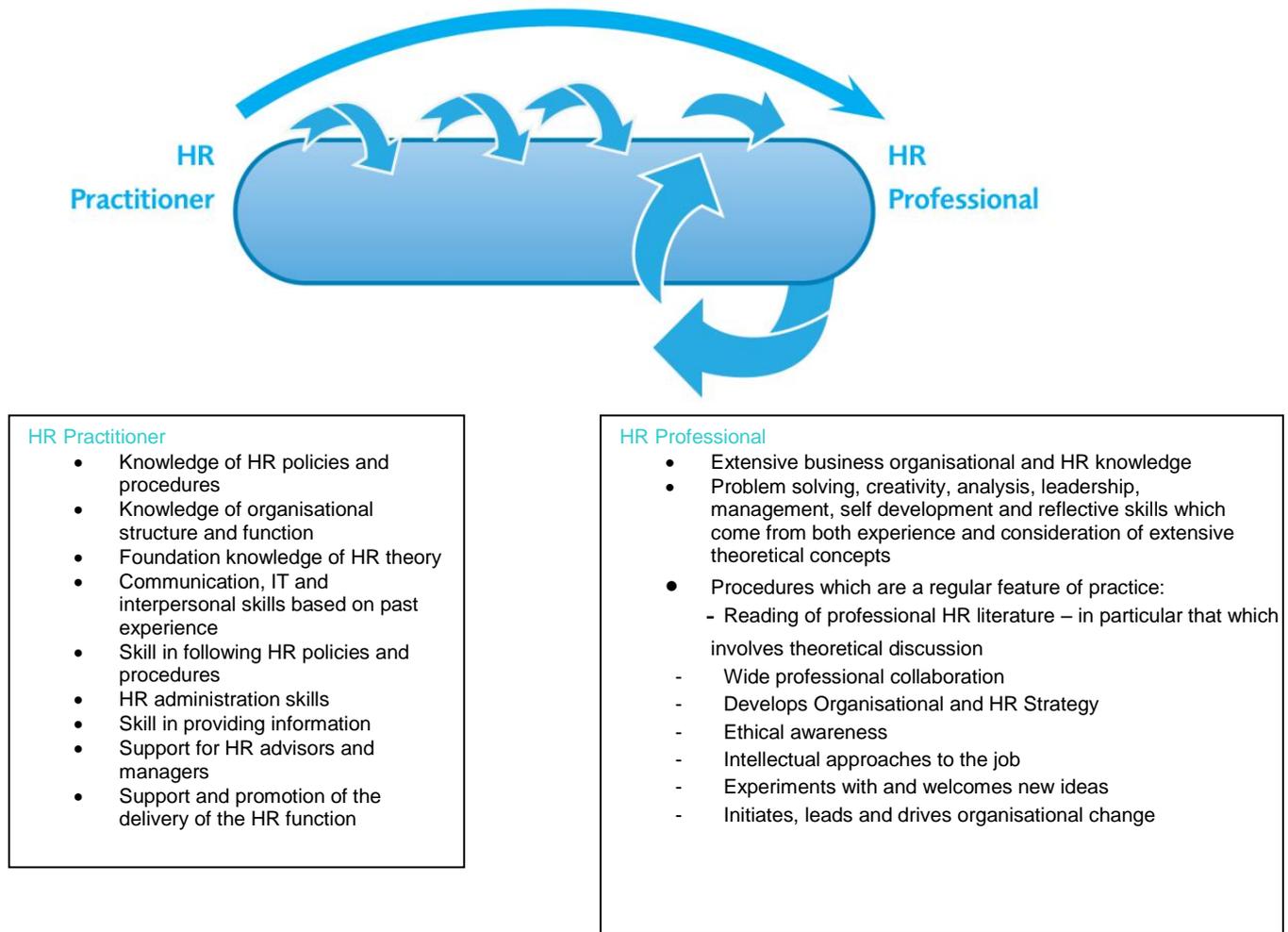


Figure 14 - The Revised HR Continuum Source: Author

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In the following chapter, the findings on non-formal learning will be presented.

CHAPTER 5

5.0 ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 Non-formal Learning

The purpose of the data gathered in this chapter is to meet the second research objective, which is:

To discover the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland on the subject of non-formal learning.

And the third research objective, in part, which is:

To conceptualise a model to encourage and support the professional development of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland.

I will present the categories of description and outcome space for the phenomenon of non-formal learning, which emerged from the second phase of the analysis process. The process of analysis for the phenomenon of non-formal learning was similar to that described in detail in the previous chapter.

As described in the previous chapter, the first step involved immersing myself in the data gathered and this was achieved by reading and re-reading the transcripts and field notes and listening and re-listening to the recorded interviews as a whole over a period of time. This phase of the analysis took slightly less time than the previous phase and covered the period late

November 2011 to January 2012. As a result of this reading and re-reading, the second step in the process was reached in that the participants' utterances which were most relevant were identified and highlighted in coloured highlighter pens in the original transcripts, interpreted, extracted and grouped into 'pools of meaning'.

These utterances were then, as in the case of the professional development phenomenon, entered into a spreadsheet linking each utterance to a participant. I printed off a hard copy of the spreadsheet then separated each utterance so that I had a paper copy of each utterance in order that sorting into pools of meaning could take place. At this stage there were 224 relevant utterances). From these utterances, eighteen pools of meaning were identified.

5.2 Pools of Meaning – Non-formal learning

1. Accessible to many
2. Many different mechanisms
3. Cheap/Cost Effective means of development
4. Relevant in terms of what is learned and when learning takes place
5. Reflection
6. Ad hoc/unplanned
7. Urgent/need to know
8. Heavy reliance placed on it
9. Involves a sharing experiences
10. Willingness/Motivation to learn
11. Lack of credibility
12. Hands on learning/Learning through doing the job
13. Can pace or control learning
14. Popular way of learning
15. Powerful/sense of duty
16. Use colleagues/collaborative/learning from people
17. Used to support formal learning
18. Recording of learning only carried out spasmodically

From these pools of meaning the third step in the analysis process was reached - the categories of description emerged.

The process of this data analysis is illustrated by using the model presented by Ireland et al (2009). The model adapted for the non-formal learning phenomenon is shown below:

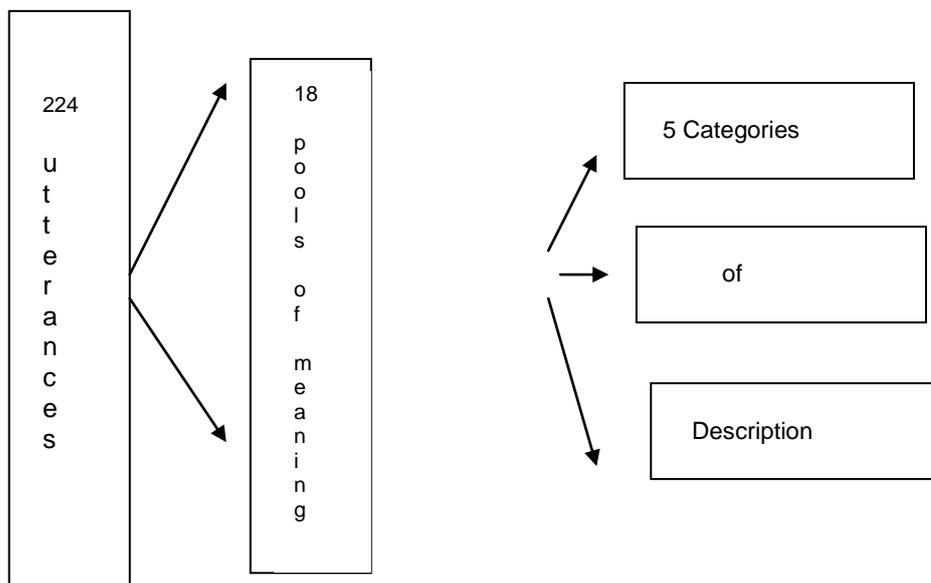


Figure 15 – From utterances to categories of description (Adapted from Ireland, et. al., 2009)

The first set of categories which emerged from the analysis process is listed below:

1. Non-formal learning is experienced as learning many different ways
2. Non-formal learning is experienced as involving other people in learning
3. Non-formal learning is experienced as occurring in an ad hoc and unplanned way
4. Non-formal learning is experienced as being a popular way of learning
5. Non-formal learning is experienced as not being recorded
6. Non-formal learning is experienced as occurring at opportune times
7. Non-formal learning is experienced as supporting formal learning
8. Non-formal learning is experienced as occurring when the learner is motivated to learn

9. Non-formal learning is experienced as lacking in credibility
10. Non-formal learning is accessible
11. Non-formal learning is within the control of the individual
12. Non-formal learning is experienced as incorporating reflection

As in the case of the analysis of the professional development phenomenon described in the previous chapter, the above categories needed some refinement. The process of refinement followed a similar pattern to that described in the previous chapter and involved, following a short period of non-engagement with the data, my re-visiting the data on several occasions, which included returning to both the complete transcripts and the pooled data. Following re-visits to the data, I decided that categories 1 and 7 were more coherent as one category. In the same way categories 3 and 6 were merged, and that categories 10 and 11 were subsumed into one category. The category concerning reflection seemed worthy of consideration relating to relevance across all categories. As in the case of the analysis of the professional development phenomenon, I decided to consider this later in the analysis process.

The second version of the categories which emerged following this process is presented below:

1. Non-formal learning is experienced as a way of learning incorporating many mechanisms and supports formal learning
2. Non-formal learning is experienced as involving other people in learning
3. Non-formal learning is experienced as occurring in an ad hoc and unplanned way but at opportune times
4. Non-formal learning is experienced as being a popular way of learning
5. Non-formal learning is experienced as not being recorded
6. Non-formal learning is experienced as occurring when the learner is motivated to learn

7. Non-formal learning is experienced as lacking in credibility
8. Non-formal learning is experienced as within the control of the practitioner because of its accessibility

Following another short break from the data, then further re-visits to the data, I decided that category 4 seemed to be an element of both category 1 and 2. Category 1 seemed to incorporate two important elements. The first is that the experience seems to be that non-formal learning is a means of professional development and that it comprises many different forms. This being the case, it seemed that categories 7 and 8 were elements of categories 5 and the new category 2 respectively. Category 6 seemed to be worthy of consideration of relevance across all categories of description.

The third and final version of categories which emerged from further analysis of the data and representing the qualitatively different ways the participants experience non-formal learning is listed below (See figure 16 below):

5.3 Categories of Description and Dimensions of Variation

1. Non-formal learning is experienced as a means of professional development
2. Non-formal learning is experienced as comprising many different forms
3. Non-formal learning is experienced as unplanned
4. The recording of non-formal learning is experienced as important
5. Non-formal learning is experienced as involving other people

Pools of Meaning

1. Accessible to many
2. Many different mechanisms
3. Cheap/Cost Effective means of development
4. Relevant in terms of what is learned and when learning takes place
5. Reflection
6. Ad hoc/unplanned
7. Urgent/need to know
8. Heavy reliance placed on it
9. Involves a sharing experiences
10. Willingness/Motivation to learn
11. Lack of credibility
12. Hands on learning/Learning through doing the job
13. Can pace or control learning
14. Popular way of learning
15. Powerful/sense of duty
16. Use colleagues/collaborative/learning from people
17. Used to support formal learning
18. Recording of learning only carried out spasmodically

Categories of Description

1. A means of professional development
2. Comprising many different forms
3. Is unplanned
4. Recording is important
5. Involves other people

Figure 16 – From pools of meaning to categories of description

After the categories were finalised and as in the case of the professional development phenomenon, I returned to the original transcripts, utterances and pooled data to look for the dimensions of variation. The themes which emerged were:

Theme 1 – Motivation

Theme 2 – Reflection

As in the previous chapter, illustrative quotes or utterances, are presented to justify the final categories and dimensions of variation.

1. Non-formal learning is experienced as a means of professional development

This category reflects the experience of the participants in that non-formal learning mechanisms are widely used as a means of professional development. Bathsheba explains *just through sitting learning it with the you know doing it physically doing it and that's how I've learned it all so far*. As Neriah says *so there's the theory, there's learning the skills and there's the learning how to react as a person*. In fact non-formal learning is experienced as supplementary to the more formal types of professional learning. *You're coming in with a degree but now you start learning* (Ruth), in particular to use non-formal mechanisms which might amount to just doing the job, to put the theory into practice as Martha says *I didn't have enough experience* which seems to concur with Neriah *I like always to be able to see the practical side of the theory*. David seems to concur when he says *I'm actually a great believer that HR professionals can't be a true professional if they only stay in one organisation all their lives*. Lucas seems to articulate clearly his experience of the use of non-formal learning in professional development, his response was in relation to a question relating to the value of non-formal

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

learning I'd say the informal because the informal has got its roots in the formal. We'd either write up a new policy or tweak an existing policy and then maybe have lunch club to describe to staff, I think learning is more effective that way.

The motivation dimension of variation is characterised by *you've just got to be up for learning* (Grace), and Tiberius when he said *you've got to have people that want to learn and I guess you value in progressing in their career or developing in their career even if it's without moving*. The motivation for Anna seems to be in terms of her professional development by non-formal means is within her control and can be at her pace *I do not have to achieve anything in the next five yearsgot to stop and start* (because of her personal situation) *I need to take it slowly and progress slower and just stay and hang back a bit.*

The reflection dimension of variation focussed on how non-formal learning experiences are reflected upon *I am a strong reflector so you think about how you do something - I should have done that and I could have done that* (Martha)

2. Non-formal learning is experienced as comprising many different forms

The experience of the participants reflected the different forms of non-formal learning which they used, *just having coffee* (with colleagues) (Anna), *observe* (Deborah), *mentoring* (Rebecca), *meeting with colleagues and speaking to people* (Lucas), *shadowing somebody* (Grace), *a discussion* (Ruth), *go and ask for help* (Bathsheba), *networking* (Tiberius) *listening to people – I'm*

always willing to take feedback (Martha), conferences (Tiberius), just go and find out myself (Ruth), soaking up quite a lot of what's required (Lucas), mentoring and coaching (Martha), I'll watch the economist's updates (Mary). By simply doing the job is another form of non-formal learning as Ruth's experience illustrates *things that you've never done before and getting involved.* Isaac's experience was similar to Ruth's *I moved onto the (organisation name) job learning things through different jobs.* Abigail offers another example when she says *I used to watch how he (a previous senior manager) handled meetings, the language he used and how he dealt with people.* More contemporary examples of non-formal mechanisms were highlighted as being used such as Jemimah's example which she articulated as *brilliant source of stuff through blogging, twitter, all the social networking stuff.* Tiberius highlights *Twitter's great you know and following certain people you'll get links to great articles,* while John explains *the other thing I've used quite a lot is open space technology as a way of just getting folk to make agreements with each other.* When asked about how many non-formal mechanisms she uses Esther said *I suppose quite a lot.* When asked about which non-formal mechanisms they would like to utilise Anna intimated that she would like to *talk to colleagues more,* while Deborah highlighted a *shadow scheme and mentoring* and John said that *coaching is something else that we're going to be developing.* Given all of these different mechanisms, Abigail makes an interesting observation in that *non-formal being things like coaching, mentoring, although I've got a question mark that says they are actually moving more into the formal box now because they are now being*

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

recognised as you know very important ways of knowledge sharing and building capability.

Motivation for the use of non-formal learning was characterised, in relation to why organisations use these mechanisms, related to budgetary constraints, as Lucas identified *really coming down to budgets*, or as David highlighted *We don't have a lot of money*. This though is not always the case, as far as some organisations are concerned, it is a conscious choice to use non-formal mechanisms, as Jemimah says *well non-formal learning is very much what we are about*. In terms of participants themselves non-formal learning seems to be a popular option as Bathsheba says *I think when you're talking about a more informal way of learning that's definitely what I would prefer, definitely. I think you're more relaxed*. Rebecca concurs with this view when asked about whether or not she takes advantage of non-formal learning opportunities she says *I grabbed it with open arms*.

The reflection dimension focussed on it being a non-formal mechanism itself, as Deborah said *I'll just reflect*. Reflection can occur at times other than after the event as Jemimah identifies *reflect during the event as well*.

3. Non-formal learning is experienced as unplanned

The practitioners' experience of non-formal learning seems to be that it is unplanned and ad hoc necessitating in the requirement on the part of the practitioner for recognition of, and then the taking advantage of, opportunities as and when they are presented, Tiberius illustrates this when he says *If I*

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

don't have time to read them I print them out, store them because you spend time in airports and there's always downtime so I think it's a good practice. Esther suggests *the coffee breaks, lunch breaks or the evenings have conversations with a colleague who comes from a different part of the organisation and a different country* again re-enforcing the unplanned nature of non-formal learning. Or as Anna says *I read when I can.* Grace, too, emphasises the unplanned nature of non-formal learning when she says *I'll have my lunch and I'll sit and read.* The idea of unplanned seems to be summed up by Anna when she says *over a cup of tea.* Another aspect of unplanned learning is that the learning might be required immediately and when it is required to carry out the day to day activities of an HR practitioner which is articulated by Martha *I say I've got this problem and she'll say what are you thinking about doing and I would just chat through what the issues were and get her advice.*

The motivation dimension of variation reflected that the unplanned nature of non-formal learning necessitates that the individual practitioner needs to be motivated to recognise and make use of the events as they present themselves, as Tiberius illustrates *it's not always what you get from the meetings, it's what you bring to the meeting as well.* Mary is quite clear about how important motivation is with regard to taking advantage of unplanned non-formal learning events in her quote when she says *they'll only learn if they want to.* Grace's experience also illustrates how motivation is important if practitioners are to take advantage of non-formal learning opportunities *I am open to learning and I think in this environment you constantly have to and you've got to be open to taking feedback.*

Here, the reflection dimension of variation relating to this category concerns how reflection is utilised to enhance learning in the course of a routine and typical task as Grace illustrates with an example from within her organisation *What went well what didn't what would you do differently let's do it right get back on track on the phones, try a different tack, constantly doing that is worth so much more than sitting somebody in a room for a day death by viewfoil.*

4. The recording of non-formal learning is experienced as important

This category reflects the experiences of practitioners in respect of the recognition of non-formal learning experiences. Martha highlights that by using non-formal learning HR practitioners *can build up the same learning (as formal qualifications) but from experience (Martha)* While this may be the case, Anna questions how non-formal learning can be recognised *don't know how if you didn't actually have to write it down*, Martha seems to agree when she talks about recording non-formal learning *I get it out of my head*. Mary also expresses concern in that *it's very difficult to capture it because it's not as tangible*, though Tiberius identifies that *you can store things on facebook*. Often the way in which non-formal learning occurs can affect its recording *So we got trained and then we had to deliver it to others (Rebecca).*

In terms of the motivation dimension of variation there seemed to be an issue in terms of the recording of non-formal learning events. While practitioners do understand the value of recording the motivation to carry out the task is not always present, and is summed up by Esther when she says *I don't do it very*

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

often, but I've kind of been exploring journaling in terms of you know writing things out just capturing thoughts and stuff like that. John seems to concur with Esther when he says a good idea but I couldn't hand on heart say that I do. Participants did share experiences of alternative recording processes. Anna, for example, doodles on her pad. Grace's experience is that she does record though not in the traditional way I'll do things like I suppose write it down not formalised in a sort of, you know, a learning and training folder.

The reflection dimension of variation focussed on the fact that the recording of reflection on non-formal learning is very often neglected as articulated by Martha *I'll just reflect on it in my head.*

5. Non-formal learning is experienced as involving other people

This category reflected the importance and extent of the involvement of other stakeholders in participants' non-formal learning experiences. These stakeholders include known peers from within the profession but outside the organisation such as Lucas describes when he says *you get to know people as well so you can pick up the phone and ask questions*, or managers within the organisation in the form of feedback from other people *we've got feedback formally within our annual review process* (John), peers within the organisation *some of the osmosis would happen if you are work shadowing* (Deborah). Lucas clearly illustrates the role of others in learning *people learning from more experienced HR practitioners*. Esther highlights the value of networking with others and the benefits this brings *I've learnt to value building up a network and then being able to pick up the phone and say that*

kind of thing. Mary's comment demonstrates the involvement of another individual in the role of mentor *if you want a mentor you just ask somebody if they'll be your mentor.* Tiberius highlights the different ways people are involved in his non-formal learning experiences *I see a huge part of informal kind of development, I've learnt a lot from listening to other people, attending these meetings, networking things like that.* This is reinforced by Lucas when he highlights that, for him, others are *supporting and providing advice.* As Abigail says *I will identify somebody that I feel will be a mentor for me.* The extent of the non-formal nature of this is illustrated when she goes on to say *I may not tell that person that I've done that but what I'm doing is watching, observing, listening, seeking out opportunities to interact with that person, that I can learn from them.* There can be a downside with a dependence on this type of learning, as Anna says *I don't like it at the moment as everybody is so busy.*

The motivation dimension of variation of this category was illustrated by Anna when asked about whether or not she would like to have a mentor says *I don't personally have anybody that I do that with but I would like to.* Organisations, too, have a role to play in terms of motivation as Esther says *it depends on the organisation – if the organisation's got a culture where learning is important they can have action steps they can have sharing sessions they can have forums.* Relationships with others, and the value which results, seemed to be a motivating factor as experienced by Isaac, *well the mentoring was informal but that was a relationship.* The motivation for learning from other people can come about because it is experienced as being effective as Ruth

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

explains some of the most useful CPD I've ever had is just calling up a colleague and saying what do you think?

The reflection dimension of variation focused on a practitioner's use of reflection when learning from others' actions and is characterised by Deborah's comment *I try to think well why are we here what are we hoping to get out of it what was your aim did you achieve it and if you did was it the best it could be could it be better.*

5.4 Outcome Space – Non-formal learning

The fourth step in the analysis process involved establishing the relationship between the descriptive categories to form the outcome space – an empirical map. Following consideration of the categories and dimensions of variation, a nested structure seemed to be most appropriate. The set of nested circles represent the fact that non-formal learning is a distinct and standalone phenomenon comprising various conceptions. The conception of non-formal learning is experienced by different people in different ways, in this case HR practitioners. Professional development is at the heart – it is the purpose of non-formal learning and for this reason is represented by the central circle. The second circle from the centre represents the category relating to the unplanned nature of non-formal learning. The third circle from the centre represents the category relating to the different forms of non-formal learning experienced by the participants; the fourth circle from the centre represents the category relating to the importance of recording non-formal learning. The outer circle encompasses all the other circles and as such illustrates the

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?'

importance of other people – arguably the most important feature of non-formal learning, based on this empirical study, so it is for this reason that the category involving other people in the practitioners' experience of non-formal learning is represented by the outer circle. I present therefore one perspective of the hierarchical structure representing the outcome space of the non-formal learning phenomenon in Figure 17 below:

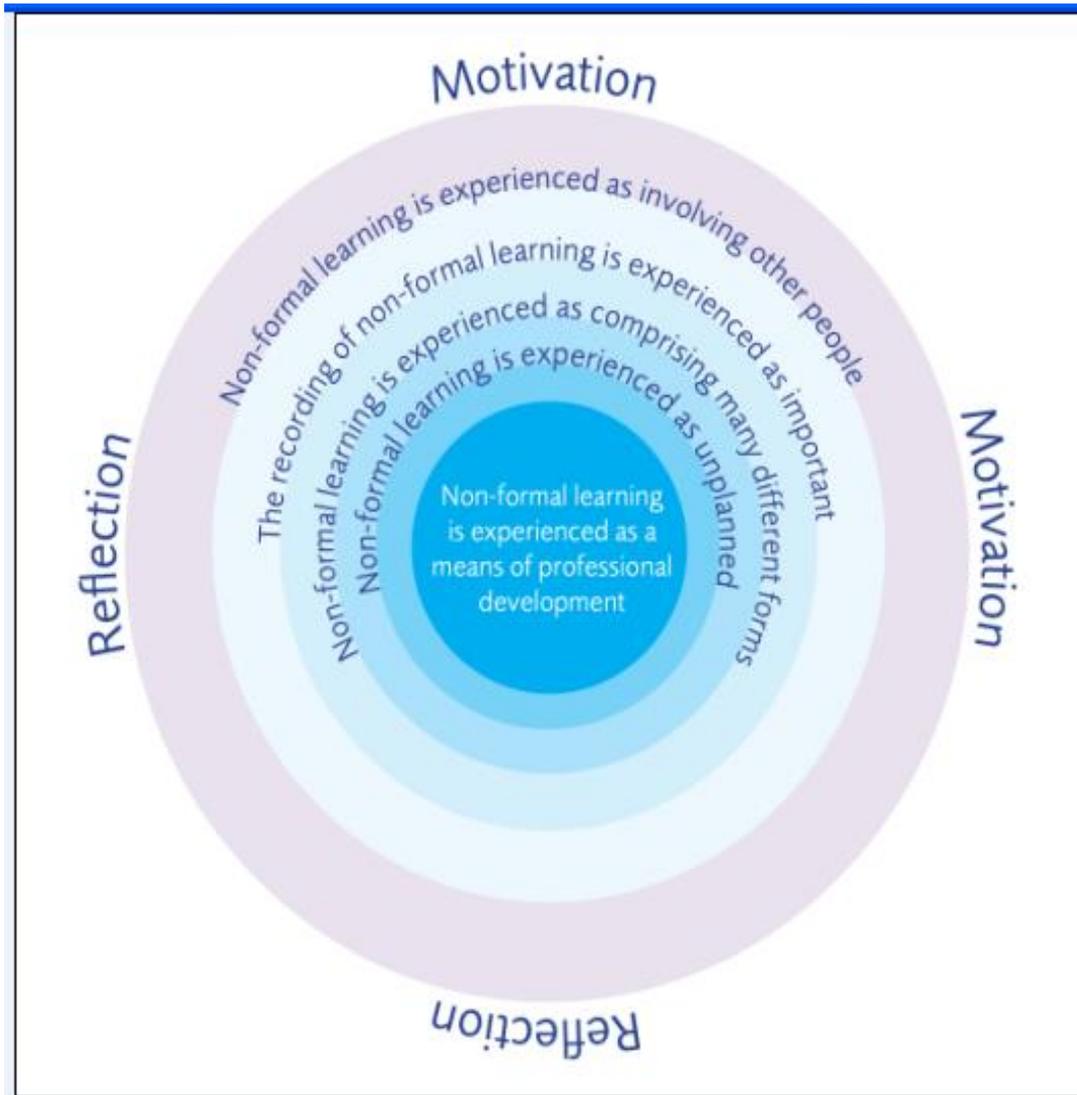


Figure 17 Non-formal learning outcome space

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

In the following chapter, the findings from Chapters 4 and 5 are discussed with respect to how they corroborate, are similar to, or deviate from, the current literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 6

6.0 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss and evaluate the findings of the research by considering what is learnt from both categories of description, and the relationship between each of the phenomena and identify the implications for practice which emerge from this discussion. In this chapter the findings will be discussed with regard to how they corroborate, are similar to, or vary from, the reviewed literature. As outlined in chapter one, the purpose of my research is that of an exploratory study and its unique contribution is to extend Evans' work on developmentalism and the work of Cheetham and Chivers on informal learning in the context of the HR profession thus providing a unique contribution to both the literature and practice relating to the professional development of the HR profession. Consequently, the aim of this research is:

'To explore the ways in which HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experience professional development and the role of non-formal learning in that development'.

The objectives which were identified to meet the aim are as follows:

1. To discover the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland on the subject of professional development.

2. To discover the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland on the subject of non-formal learning.
3. To conceptualise a model to encourage and support the professional development of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland.

Four research questions were developed to fulfil the aim and objectives:

1. What are the qualitatively different ways HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experience professional development? (Objective 1)
2. What are the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland in the use of non-formal learning mechanisms in that professional development? (Objective 2)
3. What are the perceptions of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland with regard to an HR professionalism continuum? (Objective 3)
4. What are the restricted and extended elements of the HR professionalism continuum? (Objective 3)

The research approach used was phenomenographical, which allowed participant experiences to be gathered and used to answer the research questions. The findings resulted firstly, in two sets of categories of description each with a hierarchical relationship represented in two outcome spaces. Secondly, cross category themes or dimensions of variation relevant to each outcome space.

In the remainder of this chapter I will consider what the findings reveal about HR practitioners in the North of Scotland and their experience of professional development and non-formal learning and how this experience relates to the subjects and ideas in the literature which was reviewed in chapter two. The

two phenomena professional development and non-formal learning and their respective categories of description will be discussed individually.

6.2 Professional Development

In chapter one I discussed how previous studies identified erratic participation in CPD on the part of HR practitioners (Friedman & Phillips, 2001; Farmer & Campbell, 1997). The findings of my study have been that amongst the participants of this study participation is not erratic, conversely, the experience is that it is a feature of their day to day practice. As Esther says *I pick up (learning) across everything*. Amongst the participants of this study, which deliberately included a broad variation of categories namely CIPD members, non CIPD members, both sexes, different levels of job role and varying lengths and types of service as an HR practitioner it was obvious there was consistent participation in CPD. Also contrary to the literature, there was no lack of awareness of the necessity to keep up to date (Evans, 2008^b). While this is the experience of the participants of this study, and as has been discussed in chapter two, given that the HR profession comprises all practitioners it is important that if the status of the profession is to be enhanced and confirmed as one of the new professions (Evans, 2008^b), there needs to be widespread participation which is why it is important that the experiences of the participants of this study are shared.

My study found that HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experienced professional development in five different ways, each experience described in

a category of description. The set of categories of description which emerged and addressed the first research question is:

1. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as including a wide range of components
2. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as a means of keeping up to date
3. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as occurring in many different ways
4. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as being part of HR practice
5. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as enabling them to bring benefits to a range of stakeholders

In phenomenographical research an outcome space is produced to illustrate the hierarchical relationship between the categories of description and the cross category themes, or dimensions of variation. The outcome space for professional development was presented in chapter four. The dimensions of variation relevant across the categories were Control and Credibility. This model seems to support the definition of CPD identified in chapter two by CIPD (2007) in which conscious updating and improvement of competence are features. In addition Spencer and Spencer's (1993) and Juceviciene and Lepaite's (2005) more holistic views of CPD seem also to be reflected in the findings. It seemed that the outcome space for this phenomenon would be most appropriately represented as a horizontal structure. This horizontal structure seemed to illustrate most aptly the relationship of the categories. The outcome space has emerged as an amalgam of definitions for CPD

discussed in the literature review since it reflects the 'what it is' in terms of it being a wide range of components, and a means of keeping up to date, the 'how it happens' being experienced as occurring in many ways, the 'when it happens' as a part of daily practice, and the 'why it happens' inasmuch as it brings many benefits to a range of stakeholders (Conlon, 2004; Shaw, 1999, Evans, 2009^b). It also emerged that as far as professional development was concerned the participants' experience was that credibility and control were themes which were relevant across all the different ways of experiencing this phenomenon. In heutagogy, learner maturity, autonomy, knowing how to learn and applying competencies to new and unfamiliar situations are the underlying elements (Hase & Kenyon, 2007). Considering the components and structure of the outcome space, an heutagogical approach seems an appropriate means of fulfilling the what, how, when and why elements of professional development. The concept of 'developmentalism' was discussed in-depth in the literature review. Evans has theorised that practitioners who display a commitment to professional development, do, as a result, embrace developmentalism (2009). Considering the concept of developmentalism in the context of the HR profession, it seems that by embracing developmentalism, the profession might be more favourably perceived as one of the 'new professions' (Evans, 2008; Swailes, 2003). This commitment will be presented as the practitioner striving for excellence and continually evaluating their practice in a self-critical manner and by keeping evidence of relevant development activities to enhance appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes. In addition, Evans states that this excellence and evaluation can occur by means of a practitioner working towards the extended end of a

professionalism continuum (2008). In the context of the HR profession this would necessitate the existence of such a continuum for the HR profession.

As discussed in chapter two, Hoyle developed a professionalism continuum for the teaching profession in 1975 because he wanted to differentiate between the status related elements of teachers' professional work and the knowledge, skills and procedures used which he termed professionalism. Davies (1974) identified that such a continuum could be used as a framework for development whether that development was by formal or non-formal means. The experience of the participants seemed to be that an HR professionalism continuum would be a welcome tool to aid the process of professional development, as Jemimah says *I think the continuum idea's a really good one, and I like the simplicity of the idea*. Secondly the components of such a continuum were identified. This empirically developed continuum reflects, at the practitioner end, the experience and intuition, and at the professional end, the value on theory echoing Evans' (2008; 2009; 2009^c) theoretical propositions. With credibility and control of professional development being of such importance, according to the participants of this study, using the continuum to enhance their professionalism could help to achieve what seems to be the much sought after credibility (Evans, 2009^a). The use of this continuum could clearly show the progress – because of the action implicit in this process (Evans, 2008^d) - of an HR practitioner from the restricted to the extended end of the continuum or how their professionalism is enhanced. In addition, use of the continuum could illustrate what McIntyre suggests is expected today, that professional status has to be earned (cited in Evans,

2008^b), as well as going some way to evidence the “expert person” suggested by Abbott (1991, p26). As I identified in the literature review the CIPD has recently developed a new Profession Map (CIPD, 2010). One of the uses of such a map was to assist members’ professional development. During the participant interviews, when asking for their opinions, based on their experience, of the proposed HR professionalism continuum, it emerged that CIPD members were either unaware of the existence of, or did not intend to use the map for such a purpose. Their reason being that, from their experience, the map was extremely complicated to understand and use. At the start of this research I had considered that non-CIPD members would be interested in such a continuum and that CIPD members might be interested in such a continuum as an addition to the CIPD option. The findings, though, seem to suggest that CIPD members too might be more inclined to use a straightforward framework such as the continuum presented in this study. As Abigail (CIPD member) says *a continuum is an excellent idea*. The implication for practice is that the continuum could be used as a tool for HR practitioners in their professional development, and in the context of this study when using non-formal mechanisms in that development. As a result, this tool could potentially provide HR practitioners with a framework and, as a result of the comprehensive list of components, a record of achievement by which their professionalism orientation could be extended at a time and pace appropriate to each individual practitioner.

The findings in this study indicates that participant experience is that there seems to be a ‘climate of developmentalism’ at least amongst the participants

of this study. If this is the case, then, this experience needs to be communicated as best practice amongst the wider HR community. The implications for practice relate firstly, to educational establishments which provide pre-service education for HR practitioners. They need to ensure that learners know and understand why they need to have the skills to learn effectively (Bhoyrub, et. al., 2010); they also need to possess these skills and this can be achieved by incorporating heutagogical elements to the design, development and delivery of programmes similar to the model used in teacher training in the University of West Sydney in Australia where the benefits involved better learners who were better prepared for the complexities of their occupational environment. This could be achieved by ensuring that all course curricula includes ensuring students are prepared for lifelong learning, take ownership of their learning, know how to learn, their capabilities are developed, can develop new knowledge from existing experiences and are equipped to deal with the complexities of contemporary occupational life (Bhoyrub, et. al., 2010). Secondly for employers and the professional body to be aware of this concept, the benefits it can bring, and to provide opportunities for HR practitioners to learn in this way. Thirdly, there are implications for individual practitioners in terms of their being aware of the components, the position and relationship of these components within the linear structure of the outcome space of the categories of description.

Category 1 - Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as including a wide range of components

The structural relationship between the categories represents the **what, how, when** and **why** of professional development. This category describes, based on the experiences of the participants, **what** is professional development? The participants' experiences showed evidence of a wide range of components reflecting the views of a variety of writers such as Conlon (2004), Shaw (1999), Evans (1999) and Evans (2009^b) whose ideas were discussed in the literature review. My newly developed, in this context, term 'mosaic' and Evans' definition of professionalism, based on her recent theoretical work, (2008^d) seems to be particularly relevant, because it reflects, and supports, the wide and diverse range of components identified by the participants of this study. The fact that the findings support the literature reflecting the wide range of components of professional development including intellectual, vocational and behavioural skills and competences (Shaw, et. al., 1999), and Cheetham and Chivers' (1998) knowledge, function, behaviour, ethics, meta and super meta competences in their model of professional competence, illustrates the awareness of the participants of the breadth of skills and competences required by the contemporary HR practitioner. Grace identifies a broad range of skills and competences when she identifies *management, leadership, business knowledge*. Based on the findings of this study, business knowledge and the more transferable skills such as problem solving seem to be, if not more important than the HR technical knowledge and skills, just as important. It seems to be the case that to be an effective

contemporary HR practitioner technical knowledge and skills are no longer sufficient; a far wider skill and knowledge set is required as reflected in the term 'mosaic' highlighted in the literature review. Esther identifies *behaviours and attitudes*, while Abigail identifies *knowledge, skills and experience* and Mary highlighted *understanding people*. The implication for practice is that it is important, therefore, that HR practitioners, employers, those involved in the development of HR practitioners and the professional body, the CIPD, are fully aware of these findings so that they can actively ensure that the wide range of elements comprising the term mosaic are incorporated into development planning – in the case of the individual HR practitioners, or in the case of the other stakeholders incorporated into both formal and informal development opportunities. Not only that but HR practitioners, the professional body and employers must ensure that the elements within the mosaic are continually reviewed and updated as to their relevance and suitability given the ever changing occupational climate.

Participant experience was that individual practitioners do have, and value, control over which components of professional development they focus on thereby managing their career, and how long this development takes, also something they welcomed (Atkinson, 2002). This seems to indicate that the HR professionalism continuum could be used as a way of giving individual practitioners this sought after control of their professional development. By incorporating the wider skill and knowledge set required, the continuum could, by being a focus for decision making, give practitioners the opportunity to exercise greater control of their development. Participant experience was that

there was a range of career ambitions – from remaining at HR administrator level to HR business partner to HR director level. The continuum could be used as a focus for the practitioner to decide how far along the continuum they wish to progress, because even if the practitioner decided to remain at administrator level there would still be a need for professional development, otherwise practitioners will not simply stand still but will fall behind (Smith, 2003; Wisniewski & McMahon, 2005). This control over their own development may well be a means of the HR practitioner being able to prove that they are on a more equal status to the 'stronger' professions (Freire, 1970; Tame, 2009; Gold & Bratton, 2003). Not only that but use of the continuum could, in effect, put into practice Freire's theory of conscientisation (Taylor, cited in Smith, 1997; 2002) by way of raising awareness of the potential components to be developed. It would appear then, that the HR professionalism continuum could provide the HR practitioner with a framework giving them control and choice over the components to be developed as the continuum developed by Hoyle (1975) did for teachers. Not only that, but all of this seems to indicate that an heutagogical approach with its self determined, double loop learning aspects seems to further emphasise the control and choice sought by contemporary HR practitioners (Bhoyrub, et. al., 2010; Blaschke, 2012; Hase & Kenyon, 2007).

The findings also showed that there are times when practitioners have little or no control over what components are developed and one reason for this is the nature of the HR profession and the impact policy has, for example, in terms of the ever changing employment legislation (Gold & Bratton, 2003). When

new legislation is introduced, for example, the practitioner must update their knowledge relating to that new legislation when it is introduced, thereby the practitioner has no control over what is learned or when it is learned. Practitioners accept this situation as part of the particular practice of HR. Another element of the control dimension relates to the learning that is controlled by the professional body. Given the development of the CIPD's Profession Map (2010) some control over what the practitioner is required to learn is taken by the professional body itself. It could be argued, though, that because the Profession Map was developed in consultation with HR practitioners, there is still a degree of practitioner control.

The credibility dimension of this category is experienced in a number of ways including practitioners showing a wide range of skills, the ability, because of the specialist knowledge, to make decisions and take action which impacts positively on the organisation and other stakeholders. As David says *that's (the wide range of skills) where HR gets the credibility, it's not being an HR techy but being a business partner and applying it and understanding the financial side of things and understanding the operational side of things.* These findings seem to be consistent with the theory that extending professionalism, by way of developmentalism (Evans, 2008^d), is what is important for those contemporary practitioners who wish to be perceived as professional. It is likely then that in today's occupational climate the HR profession could be able to claim its place as one of the new professions, not by the traditional criteria which Gold and Bratton (2003) identify that they (HR) have some way to go to match the professional status of their financial

colleagues (p5), but on a more relevant and appropriate basis – that of commitment to professional development. Though previous literature has made little reference to the concept of horizontal violence with regard to the HR profession, (Tame, 2009; Curtis, et. al., 2007; Longo, 2007), anecdotal evidence – the 'Human Remains Department' - suggests it may be present and by extending their professionalism thereby enhancing credibility, a contemporary HR practitioner may reduce the likelihood of horizontal violence towards the profession.

The implication for practice relates to encouraging the HR practitioner to take control of the elements they are to develop, the pace at which that development takes place given the requirements of their practice and personal life in an attempt to enhance the credibility of the profession. From this enhanced credibility, and over time, other professions are more likely to perceive HR practitioners on a more equitable professional status.

Category 2 - Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as a means of keeping up to date

In terms of the structural relationship, this category describes, based on the experiences of the participants, **what** is professional development?

It was the experience of the participants that keeping up to date was necessary and important *absolutely critical that you keep up to date* (David). In addition they recognised that the way to achieve this was through a process of professional development. This concurs with Evans (2008^b), Smith (2003),

and Wisniewski and McMahon (2005). Swailes (2003) identified that 'new' professions, of which HR is one (Harrison, 2006), claim new and specialist knowledge. With regard to the constantly changing policy – mainly legislation – which directly affects all aspects of the HR profession, the contemporary HR practitioner's specialist knowledge must be kept up to date (Gold & Bratton, 2003). This is reflected in the findings of this study. What did emerge from this study, and is not specifically addressed to any extent in the literature is that within the profession the specialist knowledge required is dependent upon the job role and pre-service education of the particular practitioner. This may be in terms of seniority, for example one HR director (Tiberius) identified that the type of knowledge he requires to keep up to date differs from his subordinate HR business partners as he says *staff who work for me clearly are being asked to provide advice in all kinds of areas such as employment law. I'm not in that same position.* Alternatively, it may be in terms of area of specialism, for example the participants who were HR resourcing specialists or HR generalists highlighted their need to keep up to date in terms of employment legislation while an HR learning and development specialist focused her development on changing government training initiatives. Similarly, those practitioners who find themselves in an HR role with no pre-service HR education will have specific needs with regard to their keeping up to date. Identification of development needs, therefore, is an important task and though the practitioner him/herself has an important role to play in this seeking the opinion of other stakeholders such as managers and clients, as well as using a tool such as the Johari window to identify potential development needs, is likely to make the process more effective (Beach,

1982; Gibson, 1998). This has obvious implications for practice in that individual HR practitioners need to be aware that keeping up to date, or extending their professionalism (Evans, 2007), will involve the practitioner taking into account their particular job role and plan their development accordingly, thereby showing evidence of a climate of developmentalism whilst at the same time embracing the self determination of heutagogy. In addition, employers and the professional body will need to ensure that various and appropriate development opportunities are available to practitioners. This being the case the HR professionalism continuum could be considered as an appropriate tool which practitioners could use as a framework for their development because it clearly shows the potential development areas both at the practitioner and the professional end, and that the components at either end are very different reflecting the different components required by the differing level of job role within the HR profession.

In terms of the control dimension, the focus is on whose responsibility it is for a practitioner to keep up to date. The findings in my study were that it was the practitioner's responsibility, though organisations, through line management, have a role to play. *I take ownership for it myself (Rebecca) David also sees it in the discussions through my appraisal process, through succession planning to have those discussions with my boss.* The fact that keeping up to date to ensure employability involves identifying broader and deeper components, and the Johari window suggested by Gibson (1998) might be a useful tool particularly as part of the shared process between practitioner and organisation or client. This willingness to take responsibility for, and control

of, professional development on the part of HR practitioners, seems to be consistent with Freire's aim to empower his adult learners (Spencer, 1992; Killian, 1988), thus empowering HR practitioners in terms of their development. This finding seems to show that at least among the participants of this study there is evidence of conscientisation. These results have much in common with Hase and Kenyon's (2000; 2007) heutagogical approach reflecting self determined and empowered learners. The findings make apparent that the HR practitioner participants in the study realise that keeping up to date is important in terms of career maintenance or progression which again reflects the literature, this time the key element of all three forms of career identified by Kanter (1989). The knowledge that this is the case empowers individual practitioners to keep up to date in a way and at a pace which suits the individual.

Keeping up to date, according to the findings, seems to be a key feature in establishing credibility in terms of the individual practitioner and the profession as a result. These findings are consistent with Ulrich's (1998) suggestions that HR need to show how they add value to their organisations. Not only that but the findings seem also to align with Evans' (2008^d) notion of professionalism influenced practice having a positive impact on the status and credibility of practitioners, and as a result, the profession. Interestingly the participants in this study seem to understand this but how wide within the profession is this understanding? In addition, this seems to reflect Evans' (2008; 2009) theory that a commitment to professional development, or developmentalism will enhance a practitioner's, and, as a result, a profession's, status and credibility,

something which seems to be required to ensure the place of HR as one of Swailes' (2003) 'new professions'. The implications for practice in this context are firstly ensuring that the practitioner must take control for keeping themselves up to date and secondly that the wider HR community needs to be made aware that keeping up to date is fundamental to the status of the individual HR practitioner, their status within the profession and, as a consequence, the profession itself. Not only that, by making other stakeholders aware that this is what HR practitioners do in terms of professional development thereby enhancing their professionalism, the reputation of the profession is likely to be enhanced.

Category 3 - Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as occurring in many different ways

In terms of the structural relationship, this category describes, based on the experiences of the participants, the **how** element of professional development.

This category is consistent with Eraut (2001) when he identified that CPD is broader than conventional courses, and the Institute of Management (1992) which identified CPD as being 'everything which has the effect of developing the professional'. The participant experience seemed to be that they did use a variety of different methods of professional development. As Neriah says *hands on experience is invaluable more than anything*. This seems to concur with Gold et. al. (2007) in that the CPD experience is moving towards more of a practice base than has been in the past. Courses, meetings, credit bearing

qualifications, reading, informal discussions, doing the job and tackling more difficult than usual tasks were all ways, based on participant experience, in which professional development occurred. As John says *we have to have a variety of different methods available.*

The findings did seem to confirm that the participants' experiences were that they recognised that any pre-service education was likely to be insufficient for the duration of their career, an issue that Evans (2009) has identified, though participants identify that pre-service education does influence the status of a practitioner. This finding seems to be at odds with Murphy et. al. (2006) who maintained that there was a tendency for individuals to believe that pre-service education was all the professional development they required. What also emerged from this study was that there are HR practitioners who had not, in their pre-service education, studied specifically for an HR degree. As Tiberius says *I don't have an HR degree, I don't have an HR background so everything I've learned about HR has been through my time at XXX org.* It emerged from the findings, that some practitioners, prior to their entry to the profession, had studied general degrees or indeed found themselves in an HR position from a previous administrative role, making a structured, credible and systematic approach to their professional development all the more important. Or, in other words, it is important that the wider HR community and stakeholders such as employers need to be made aware of the importance of their embracing the concept of a 'climate of developmentalism' if the status of the HR profession can ever be considered as that of a 'profession' (Evans, 2009) to the wider business community. As Grace says that professional

development is about *challenging yourself and putting yourself in situations*. The implications for practice in this context are that individual practitioners and employers need to be aware that there are many ways in which development can occur. This being the case all stakeholders need to be constantly aware and sufficiently vigilant so that opportunities for development can be identified, created and utilised as they present themselves. To do this effectively though, HR practitioners need to have the skills to identify and make use of these opportunities as they present themselves. A more heutagogical approach to development incorporating learner competency, capability and capacity to learn (Bhoyrub, et. al. 2010), pre-service education and ongoing professional development would appear to be a way of developing these skills and as such has implications for the practitioner, educators of HR practitioners, and the professional body.

In terms of control, participant experience seems to reflect that control comes about because professional development can take many forms and is welcomed by the participants – *it can take many forms* (Lucas). Evans (2009) has made the case that professional development should be considered on an individual basis and the participants of this study seemed to want to select the most appropriate way of development based on their own particular needs and situation. This will, ultimately, have an effect on the profession as a whole as any profession comprises many individuals (Evans, 2009). Given that they did not see the more traditional and formal courses as the only means of professional development, as David says *it's not just about courses*, they seem to embrace the ideas of Freire (Sharma, 2006) in relation to looking

for more appropriate alternatives to the traditional 'banking knowledge' approach to professional development. These findings seem to suggest, and are an implication for practice, that the more heutagogical approach suggested by Hase and Kenyon (2000; 2007) using one or more of the non-formal learning mechanisms might be a means of encouraging the contemporary HR practitioner to participate in professional development.

The findings in this study suggest that there is concern with regard to the credibility of some of the ways of professional development. The perception seems to be that the more formal forms of professional development, particularly those leading to recognised qualifications seem to carry a good deal of credibility. This is summed up by Deborah when she says *attainment of qualifications to join a profession*. This is of particular relevance given the professionalisation of previously assiduously managed occupations discussed by Nixon (2001). While it is a fact then that professional development can occur in many different ways, if the learning from these ways of development is not credible then what is the real value to the individual and, ultimately, the profession? Evans (2008^b) maintains a commitment to development is a more contemporary and appropriate evaluation of whether or not an occupation is a profession and she further maintains (2009^a) that extending professionalism (moving along the professionalism continuum) is a way that a practitioner can prove their commitment to development. This realistically could be achieved by using a variety of different ways of development not just the traditional method of attending recognised courses, so how can this be reconciled? If some of the ways selected by the practitioner, because of their

appropriateness, of moving along the HR continuum are not perceived as credible, then this must surely have the effect of repressing what is likely to be considered the progress in achieving a climate of developmentalism. The implication for practice that emerges from these findings must surely be related to finding ways to ensure that development achieved through non-formal means attains the same credibility as through the more formal means. This needs to be addressed firstly, by educators by ensuring that in pre-service education practitioners understand how to achieve the most effective learning from non-formal events. Secondly, the professional body, by finding ways of acknowledging practitioner knowledge and skills obtained in this way, and thirdly, by employers giving credit in terms of selection and promotion, to the practitioners whose knowledge and skills have been obtained by non-formal means.

Category 4 - Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as being part of HR practice

In terms of the structural relationship, this category describes, based on the experiences of the participants, the **when** element of professional development.

Evans' (2008) theory on developmentalism involves a practitioner continually striving for excellence and viewing tasks which are part of their day to day activities as opportunities to perform better, and this supports Schostak's (2010) suggestion that 'CPD ensures everyday practice is good practice' (p33). This is reflected in the findings of this study as the participants' experience is that professional development is a feature of their day to day

practice. Abigail says that *I am constantly looking for opportunities to enhance my professional knowledge*. This seems to illustrate a climate of developmentalism of the type described in the literature review, characterised by positive practitioner attitudes and behaviours towards professional development (Wallace, Hunt & Richards, 1999), and does currently exist amongst the participants of this study. By constantly looking for ways, in the course of their day to day activities, to develop their 'mosaic' and using the HR professionalism continuum as a framework with which to make decisions relating to which elements of their 'mosaic' to develop, practitioners would either improve the existing, or ensure a forthcoming, climate of developmentalism. Very much a feature of the findings was that the development that was part of practice must reflect the needs of the business to ensure HR added value to the organisation, something which concurs with Ardagh (2007) in his discussion about enhancing the status of HR. As Tiberius identifies professional development is *driven by problems*. Not only that but this climate of developmentalism which does seem to already exist could, and should, be extended, reflecting Freire's praxis (Spencer, 1992; Sharma, 2001; 2006). Through this climate of developmentalism, knowledge is being translated into practice (Crotty, 1998; Heaney, 1995), and as a result of this heightened awareness of professional development the conscientisation (Heaney, 1995) of HR practitioners is raised. All of this results in empowerment of HR practitioners through their extended knowledge and skills and the added value they are able, as a consequence, to bring to their organisations and clients. Tiberius says *you must take responsibility*.

The fact that this is the potential outcome of professional development being a part of HR practice, needs to be relayed to the wider HR community.

The findings of the study relating to the control dimension were that practice results in professional development being event or problem driven – events in the course of practice often necessitating professional development being necessary for the practitioner. In addition, this seems to further emphasize the appropriateness of the heutagogical approach to professional development (Eberle & Childress, 2007) in particular the relevance to the individual practitioner, of that learning. Alternatively problems encountered in the course of practice also resulted in professional development being required. In both these situations the need(s) of the business would be the driving factor for development. All of this seems to highlight the inadequacy and inappropriateness of the more traditional teacher centred approach to ongoing professional development. Interestingly, the findings highlighted that some practitioners use their practice as a deliberate means of professional development. This takes the form of practitioners consciously selecting job roles as a means of developing chosen knowledge and skills. It was highlighted in the literature review that professional development was a requirement in each of the career types identified by Kanter (1989). The experience of the participants of this study seems to be that the different career types were used as professional development for its own sake. Bureaucratic, professional and entrepreneurial career types seem to be used by both self employed consultant HR practitioners as well as those who chose the more traditional permanent staff member, form of employment. These

roles may not be selected for their increasing seniority but for the opportunities of skills development they provide. All of these findings then seem to confirm that these practitioners do display professionalism influenced practice of the sort described by Evans (2008^d). The implication for practice must be to raise awareness on the part of employers, in large, medium and small organisations, that HR practitioners actively search for job roles to provide them with development opportunities, because if they are aware of this, employers can take this into account when staffing their HR function thus giving HR practitioners the development opportunities they seek while at the same time reaping the benefits of securing engaged and committed HR practitioners.

With regard to credibility, the participant experience was that those practitioners who did not participate in development were responsible for HR being perceived as not credible by colleagues and peers from other disciplines, something which has been identified in the literature (Birkenshaw, 1994). As Lucas says *the worst HR practitioners are the ones who take the view I've seen it all before, I've done it all before*. Might this be one of the ways that HR is considered subordinate in the professional world (Gold & Bratton, 2003)? On the other hand those practitioners who, because of the service they deliver, by way of the advice and support, they were able to provide to colleagues thereby adding value to the organisation, enhanced the credibility of themselves and the profession. This finding warrants comparison with Gold and Bratton's 2003 study in which they came to the conclusion that HR practitioners might be considered to possess the specialised knowledge

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

required for contemporary professions. An implication for practice then must be that HR practitioners need to find ways to show how their practice adds value to the business - something which has been identified by Ulrich (1998) as a requirement for the contemporary HR practitioner.

Category 5 - Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as enabling them to bring benefits to a range of stakeholders

In terms of the structural relationship, this category describes, based on the experiences of the participants, the **why** element of professional development.

The experience of the participants in this category concerned the benefits which HR practitioners' professional development brings to a range of stakeholders. The stakeholders comprised, according to the experience of the participants, the practitioner him/herself, *my credibility* (Lucas) the organisation for which the practitioner works, *benefit of the organisation* (David) and colleagues of the practitioner such as line managers, *support the managers* (Neriah)

The benefits to the practitioner were experienced as including enhanced 'mosaic' and, as a result, employability, which has parallels with Atkinson's propositions (2002). The benefits to colleagues and the organisation were experienced as including added value. By keeping up to date not only would the practitioner themselves benefit, but their colleagues and their organisation would benefit as a result of the (better) service delivered as a result of this enhanced 'mosaic'. It would seem that the practitioners in this study do experience that adding value is an important feature of HR practitioners' service, *actually adding value* (Lucas) a phenomenon identified by Ulrich (1998) when he suggested that HR has to prove the service they deliver adds value. The implications for practice of this category are firstly, that it is in the

interests of all stakeholders to support and encourage in all ways the professional development of HR practitioners and secondly, to encourage HR practitioners to ensure they find ways of gathering evidence to prove how they add value in their organisations. Another implication is to ensure that the HR practitioner him/herself understands the benefits they are likely to enjoy as a result of participating in professional development.

As far as the control dimension was concerned, the experience seemed to be that a practitioner could control, by means of professional development, their progress within the profession by means of selecting which elements and at what pace these elements are to be developed to meet their career objectives from *I've got no desire to become full time, make a huge career, move on, I like where I am* (Bathsheba) to *help them become Assistant HR Advisors* (Deborah). By exercising as much control of their development as they are able, a practitioner could help accelerate, slow or suspend their career progression within the profession. Not only that, practitioners could develop the knowledge and skills in any of the HR specialisms, as identified by the CIPD (2007) when they identify that CPD is about practitioners considering where they are today in terms of their mosaic, and where they want to be in the future to satisfy their individual career objectives as well as from the colleague and organisational perspective, fill occupational skills gaps such as the present compensation and benefits specialism (Reed, 2008). This control could, potentially, as illustrated in the previous sentence, bring benefits to all stakeholders. One example of this, according to the findings, was that a female HR practitioner could suspend her career development

while her children were young or pre-school, and restart again at a more convenient time, if that was the choice made by the practitioner. In the findings the ability to have control such as in this situation was particularly important and being perceived as advantageous. In this situation, an implication for practice is that the HR professionalism continuum could be of benefit to practitioners by using it as a framework for controlling development. There is no time factor built into the design for progression along the continuum. Interestingly, Evans (2009; 2007^a) does not discuss in any depth the issue of time in relation to commitment to professional development, so exercising control should not preclude a practitioner from displaying a climate of developmentalism. This type of control, which, according to the findings is welcomed, seems to be at odds with the traditional 'banking' approach to formal professional development (Sharma, 2006). This banking approach describes the more traditional, input driven CPD experiences Gold et. al., (2007) described, based on their study conducted in the context of the legal profession. Increasingly, they suggest, the move is towards more output driven, practice based experiences which the control related findings of this study seems to reflect.

The credibility dimension of the benefits of professional development to a range of stakeholders was experienced, by the participants, as being seen to be credible by carrying out their job in a competent way, as well as continually improving the service they give (Hoyle, 2001; Socket, 1996, cited in Evans, 2007). This is particularly relevant given the position of HR within contemporary organisations and the dualities they face in the course of their

practice (Evans, 1999; Boselie, et. al., 2009) making credibility that much more challenging to achieve. This dimension related to the organisation by means of *credibility and security for the organisation* (Lucas), being perceived as *fully fledged HR advisors* (Lucas), as well as supporting line manager colleagues by *help(ing) managers make decisions* (Neriah). If the practitioner provided sound advice resulting from effective professional development, they would be more likely to meet the needs of their public (Halikowa, et. al., 2003). Providing effective support and advice to line managers could, in addition, have the effect of validating the contemporary strategic role of HR compared to the previously administrative role thereby mitigating the likelihood of deprofessionalising the profession in the way described by Nixon (2001), as they devolve some of their responsibilities to line managers. This could have the effect of changing the role of HR from the traditional administrative to one of a more strategic nature – as explained by Abbott (1991) - which would have a positive impact on the status of the profession as well as having the effect of mitigating the risk of horizontal violence (Tame, 2009). An implication for practice must be that new and better ways need to be found to clearly evidence how HR adds value to stakeholders thus confirming the opinions of Gilmore (2005), Gold & Bratton (2003), Ulrich (1998) and Wright (2008). The professional body must be central in suggesting new and effective ways to measure and evaluate the value of the work of HR practitioners to their colleagues and senior management within their organisations. These findings seem to reflect a need for contemporary HR practitioners to constantly extend their professionalism if they are to achieve this sought after credibility (Evans 2008^d).

6.3 Non-formal Learning

In chapter one I discussed how writers such as Cheetham and Chivers (2001), Marsick and Watkins (1997) and Conlon (2004) all highlighted the role and importance of non-formal learning in professional development in the current occupational climate. My study reflected this view in as much as the use of non-formal learning mechanisms was widespread amongst the participants although they did not immediately recognise their use in that professional development. This finding seems to be at odds with the GMC's statement relating to the importance of, in their context, medical doctors, recognising opportunities for CPD. This being the case, it would seem to be worthwhile for HR practitioners to be able to capitalise, in professional development terms, by recognising and harnessing the learning which is, according to the findings, happening anyway. Non-formal learning as experienced by the participants did seem to reflect to a certain extent, Hase and Kenyon's (2007) heutagogical approach to learning which incorporates learner control, flexibility, double loop learning, collaboration and relevancy in content. The findings supported the wider recognition of the value of non-formal learning for its own sake; though not by formalising it, as well as supporting the notion of giving practitioners the skills to identify the learning which results and make best use of the opportunities as they present themselves. More specifically, I found that HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experienced non-formal learning in five different ways, each experience described in a category of description. Brookfield (1986), Smith (1999) and Hartree (1984) questions whether there has been sufficient

research into non-formal learning in adults; it is hoped that this study and the categories of description and dimensions of variation make some progress in redressing this opinion. The ways in which the participants in this study experienced non-formal learning, and the cross category themes are discussed below. The second set of categories of description, which emerged and addressed the second research question is:

1. Non-formal learning is experienced as a means of professional development
2. Non-formal learning is experienced as comprising many different forms
3. Non-formal learning is experienced as unplanned
4. The recording of non-formal learning is experienced as important
5. Non-formal learning is experienced as involving other people

The outcome space for non-formal learning was presented in chapter 5. The findings echo Marsick and Watkins, 1997, Colley, et. al., 2003 and Chivers', 2011 theories since the characteristics, in the form of the categories they identify, are present. The structure which seemed to best represent the relationship of the categories is a nested structure, at the heart of which is professional development – the reason for this is that non-formal learning is experienced as a means of professional development. Non-formal learning is generally unplanned, hence it occupies the next category in the nest. The next category in the nest is that this non-formal learning is experienced as comprising many different forms. The importance of recording the unplanned, non-formal learning which occurs as a means of professional development is the position in the nest of this next category. The category which

encompasses all the other categories is that non-formal learning is experienced as involving other people. Motivation and reflection emerged as themes relevant across all the different ways of experiencing this phenomenon.

Not only is there a relationship within each category in each of the outcome spaces, there is a relationship between the non-formal learning and professional development outcome spaces. Eraut (2001) identified that professional development should include both formal and informal development, and the findings of this study resulted in this outcome space thus empirically supporting this view. The how category of description of the professional development phenomenon is that professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as occurring in many different ways and one of these ways is through the phenomenon of non-formal learning. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 18 below:

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?'

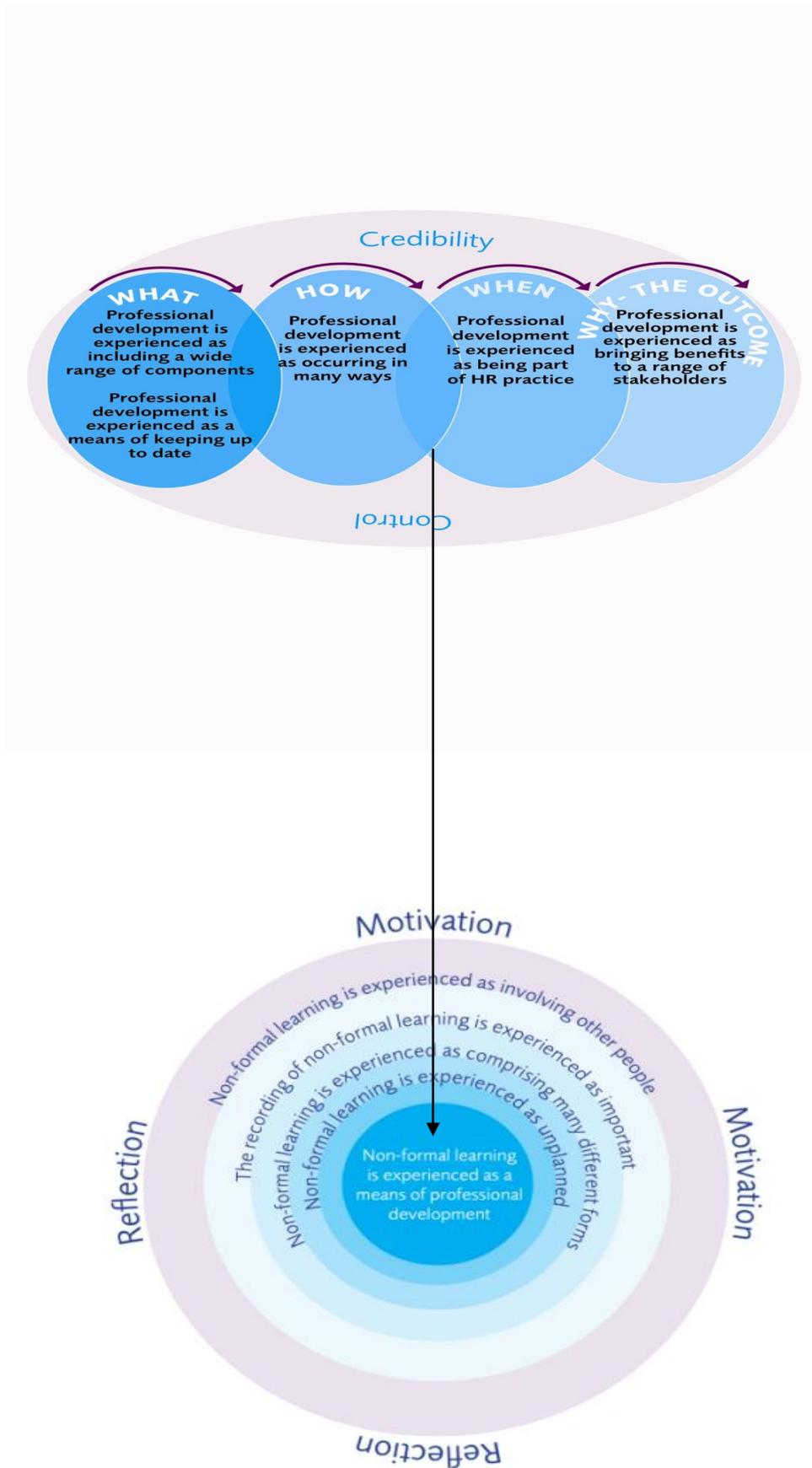


Figure 18 – The relationship between the two outcome spaces Source: Author

Category 1 - Non-formal learning is experienced as a means of professional development

In the same way that the various specialist HR colleagues and non-HR colleagues have an often less than favourable perception of each other (Hale, 2012) so it is with non-formal mechanisms when they are compared with formal mechanisms. There is often a dismissive attitude towards, or at least a lack of recognition of, non-formal learning events. This seemed to be the experience of the participants in this study. While my interpretation was that although the participants did not dismiss non-formal events when asked about professional development, their initial comments related to the more formal types of learning events such as pre-arranged courses and workshops. It was only following probing that the extent to which they used non-formal events became apparent, in some cases surprising the participant him/herself. As Lucas intimates when asked about the value of non-formal learning mechanisms *I'd say informal because the informal has its roots in the formal. We'd either write up a new policy or tweak an existing policy and then maybe have lunch club to describe to staff, I think learning is more effective that way.* This supports Phillipson's (2006) speculations relating to the extent to which non-formal learning is used in the workplace though Phillipson maintains that as much as 90% of learning takes place using a wide range of different non-formal mechanisms. This assertion may not be surprising if the variety of components identified in Cheetham and Chivers' (2001) taxonomy of informal learning mechanisms coupled with the participant experience discussed earlier in the chapter when it was highlighted that the participants of this study

experienced that professional development is a part of their daily practice is taken into account. Cullen, et. al.'s (2002) suggestions that there is little value in less formal mechanisms, then seems in contrast to the findings of this study. These findings do support, for example the Institute of Management's encompassing definition of CPD (1992). In addition, the findings seem to indicate that Jay Cross' action in closing down his blog on informal learning (2011) because, he says, the job of raising the profile of informal learning is complete might be considered somewhat premature. Based on the findings of this study, an implication for practice is that the profile of non-formal learning and its role in the professional development of HR practitioners still needs to be heightened. One way of achieving this is to ensure that the quality of non-formal learning is of an acceptable standard as highlighted in section 2.5. It is apparent that the experience of the participants of this study is that non-formal learning is in no way a substitute for the more traditional formal learning events, rather the role of non-formal learning should be considered to be complementary. As Ruth says *you're coming in with a degree but now you start learning*. This does seem to concur with Phillipson's (2006) comments when he identifies that only a small percentage of organisational learning comes about through the more traditional, formal, or less heutagogical, means of learning. While this study has highlighted that non-formal learning is a part of the participant HR practitioners' professional development, albeit previously often not consciously, there is work to be done, and is therefore an implication for practice, probably most appropriately by the professional body and educators of HR practitioners and potential practitioners, in raising the profile of non-formal learning. Imparting the findings of studies such as this is also

important in raising practitioners' awareness of non-formal events so that they can take advantage of them as they present themselves in the course of the HR practitioner's daily practice. This being the case this must surely go some way towards supporting and enhancing the participation in CPD and resultant enhanced performance (Jones & Fear, 1994; Gold, et. al., 2007; Friedman & Phillips, 2001). Not only that, but by taking advantage of all sorts of development opportunities must also contribute to achieving and maintaining a climate of developmentalism in the HR profession of the sort discussed by Evans (2008^b; 2007^a) and Bailey (2011). The practice of professional development is the essence of developmentalism (Evans 2008^b; 2007^a; Bailey 2011), and given that non-formal learning is a way of professional development and that professional development is a part of HR practice, this category illustrates that a 'climate' of developmentalism does exist in the HR profession, at least as far as the participants of this study are concerned.

Participants identified that motivation had to be present to take advantage of this form of development. *You've just got to be up for learning* (Grace). This motivation can come from the practitioner him/herself if they are aware of the benefits of this type of development in terms of control over when the learning takes place and the time taken for the development. This reflects Knowles' thinking (Smith, 2002) when he identified that adult learning differed from childhood learning in that adults took responsibility for their learning and were motivated to learn and apply the knowledge. Additionally, this category seems to reflect the spacing element of Rock's theoretical propositions relating to adult learning (2010) because by using non-formal learning as a means of professional development the very nature of this type of learning

means that the learning events are likely to be shorter and spaced unlike the traditional banked approach identified by Freire (Smith, 1997; 2002).

Participants' experience was that the process of reflecting on non-formal events was important in maximising the learning from these events, though a number of participants admitted to reflecting only intermittently or, in some occasions, not at all. This cross category theme aligns with Cheetham and Chivers' (2005) proposition relating to reflection being used to support and embed learning as well as being of special importance, both a meta and super meta competence, with regard to professional competence (Cheetham & Chivers, 1998). As Martha says *I am a strong reflector so you think about how you do something – I should have done that and I could have done that.* Given that non-formal learning is a means of professional development for HR practitioners and that reflection has an important part to play in this it seems logical to consider promoting a more heutagogical approach to this form of development (Eberle & Childress, 2007). Reflection has an important role in the double loop element of an heutagogical approach to learning, so another implication for practice is that contemporary HR must develop the skill of reflection as well as ensuring that reflection becomes a key element of the development process, something educators and the professional body need to find ways to achieve.

Category 2 - Non-formal learning is experienced as comprising many different forms

The experience of the participants in this study was that the term non-formal learning means different things to different people. When asked about which

mechanisms they had experienced, mentoring, networking, feedback, observation and coaching were identified by many of the participants as mechanisms they were currently using or which they would like to utilise which reflects the findings of Cheetham and Chivers (2001), Chivers (2011) and Dale and Bell (1999), hence the position of this category in the outcome space nest. In the literature review Digenti (2000) identified specifically that networking events could be used as an effective non-formal mechanism, something the participants representing all the strata in this research seemed to have experienced and with which they concur. As Esther says when asked about the extent of non-formal mechanisms she uses in the course of her professional development, *I suppose quite a lot*. Cheetham and Chivers (2001) identified a taxonomy of 12 different non-formal mechanisms, and this taxonomy appears to subsume the mechanisms identified by Wisniewski and McMahon (2005), Marsick and Watkins' (1997) as well as Dale and Bell (1999). Not all of these were identified and named specifically as mechanisms by participants in this study, although many were either referred to or inferred when asked about how they learn how to carry out their job. For example *soaking up* (Lucas) (osmosis), *willing to take feedback* (Martha) (feedback), *shadowing somebody* (Grace) (work shadowing), *things you've never done before* (Ruth) (stretching), *learning things through different jobs* (Isaac) (switching perspectives), *I used to watch him* (her manager) (Abigail) (observation). An implication for practice is that the mechanisms identified by Cheetham and Chivers (2001) in their study should be highlighted as potential tools for HR practitioners to use in the course of their development. Not only that but it was identified in the findings that interaction with colleagues was a

means of professional development that the participants enjoyed and found worthwhile. As Anna says she would *like to talk to colleagues more*. This is another of the mechanisms identified by Cheetham and Chivers (2001) in their taxonomy and is therefore worthy of note for employers and educators. The fact that the participants did not readily identify and name the non-formal mechanisms, which it became apparent they used, seems to reflect Eraut's (2000) concerns about non-formal mechanisms being considered inferior. Based on participant experience, mechanisms such as coaching and mentoring (In Cheetham & Chivers', 2001 taxonomy this is named interaction with mentor/coach) seem to have a higher profile than other mechanisms such as feedback and shadowing, though it is apparent that these are as commonly used. It appears then that there is a hierarchy of mechanisms some being perceived as 'better', or 'preferable' in some way. The findings in this study identified that new ways of thinking and technology brought the opportunity for new and additional non-formal learning mechanisms such as *open space* (John), *social networking, blogging and twitter* (Jemimah). As a result, the implication for practice must be that there are new possibilities for additional accessible non-formal learning mechanisms. Not only that but because there are many different non-formal mechanisms which present themselves in many different contexts and can be used by the practitioner and can help generate the associations Rock refers to in his AGES model (2010).

Interestingly, reflection according to Eberle and Childress (2007) is an element of a more heutagogical approach to adult learning and has been

identified that in the experience of the participants of this study as being of sufficient importance to be a cross category theme, while Cheetham and Chivers (2001) identify that reflection is itself a non-formal learning mechanism. These findings then support the literature in that learning from non-formal events might be enhanced by using reflection in conjunction with other non-formal mechanisms (Marsick & Volpe, 1999). In the findings Conlon's (2004) question relating to the attention being directed at non-formal learning simply formalises it, was identified in the findings of this study, as Abigail said *actually moving more into the formal box now because they are now being recognised as you know very important ways of knowledge sharing and building capability*. This does seem to reflect Jay Cross' (2011) belief that informal learning has gone mainstream, or at least some progress has been made in making it more mainstream. Considering the non-formal learning mechanisms which have been discussed in this category, they could be considered as a part of everyday practice for the HR practitioner. This being the case, the experiences of the participants of this study seem to reflect that they are already contributing to a climate of developmentalism within the profession. There seems therefore to be different experiences or beliefs as to whether non-formal learning is already, or is moving towards, being more mainstream. What does seem to be evident is that there is no consensus on this point, and as a result there is an implication for employers and the professional body that the variety of available non-formal mechanisms needs to be heightened as well as the potential value of these mechanisms.

The motivation dimension relating to this category focussed on how non-formal learning is a deliberate choice for some organisations and individual practitioners often, though not exclusively because it can be a cost-effective and accessible means of organisational learning, or, as Bell's metaphor highlights, the mortar for the bricks of formal learning (Cofer, 2000). As Lucas says (organisations) *are really coming down on budgets*, and David highlights *we don't have a lot of money*. While money, however, does not seem to be the only motivator for selecting non-formal mechanisms, in some cases they are deliberately preferred for their own value, as Bathsheba says *I think when you're talking about a more informal way of learning that's definitely what I would prefer, definitely. I think you are more relaxed*. This then is an implication for practice in that non-formal mechanisms can be a preferred means of professional development and employers, educators and the professional body need to be aware of this.

Category 3 - Non-formal learning is experienced as unplanned

The experience of the participants in this study seems to be that non-formal learning is unplanned and ad hoc – as Grace says *I'll have my lunch and I'll sit and read* - and is a part of everyday practice which aligns with Marsick and Watkins (1997) when they refer to non-formal learning as taking place in everyday experience and does not interrupt daily productivity (Chivers, 2011). The attitude of the participants did not seem to be that the unplanned nature of non-formal learning was a disadvantage which is at odds with the opinions of Marsick and Volpe (1999) who perceive this lack of planning of learning as haphazard and leaving learning to chance as criticisms of non-formal learning. In fact the attitude of the participants seemed to be that the lack of planning

was actually a positive aspect mainly because it afforded them control over the time they devoted to learning, and could, in fact make best use of any 'downtime', summed up by Tiberius *you spend time in airports, there's always downtime*. These findings highlighted again how important it was for the practitioners to be able to exercise control over their development. The element of control and its importance to the participants of this study was discussed at length in the analysis of the phenomenon of professional development earlier in this chapter. The findings also highlighted the requirement, on occasions, for the immediacy of learning which has been highlighted by Terry (2007) who identified that non-formal learning enables individuals to access the knowledge when it is needed. Martha's experience is that *I say I've got this problem and she'll (colleague) say what are you thinking about doing and I would just chat through what the issues were and get her advice*. All of this seems to suggest that the participants are bringing, because it is appropriate and relevant, the self determined and double-loop learning elements of heutagogy (Blaschke, 2012) to their professional development (Eberle & Childress, 2007). It is useful to consider that while the time planning of learning might not be clearly identified for example with the traditional teacher centred approach by attending classes at a certain time on a certain day, what is actually learned could be controlled through the use of the HR professionalism continuum providing a focus for the development. This could go some way to address the haphazardness about which Marsick and Volpe (1999) espouse. The participants seem to suggest that an advantage of the non-formal format though is in the fact that it **is** unplanned and advantage is taken for opportunities for learning as they present themselves in

day to day activities. The motivation dimension of this category is, according to the findings of this study, concerned with being able, or motivated, to identify opportunities for learning and that the learning from these opportunities is capitalised on, thus incorporating the attention element of Rock's model of adult learning (2010). Grace's experience is that she is *open to learning and I think in this environment you constantly have to and you've got to be open to taking feedback*. Mary's experience is that *they'll only learn if they want to*. The reflection dimension relates to using skills of reflection to enhance learning which seems to echo the recommendations of the General Pharmaceutical Council when they suggest practitioners should reflect on practice and non-formal learning events at least once per month (GPhC, 2011). Grace's experience is that she considers *what went well what didn't what would you do differently*. Cheetham and Chivers' (1998) opinions about the role of reflection as a super meta competence seem, therefore, to be supported by the findings of this study.

The implication for practice which arise from this category is that employers, educators and the professional body need to ensure that practitioners have the skills to be able to identify the opportunities as they present themselves and the skills of effective reflection to enable them to secure the maximum benefit from each opportunity. Not only that but practitioners need to be encouraged to reflect on learning events. Employers in particular have a role to play in this by setting aside time, on a weekly or monthly basis, in which their HR practitioners reflect, either alone or in groups on recent learning events.

Category 4 - The recording of non-formal learning is experienced as important

The experience of the participants of this study was that the recording of non-formal learning was important. As Anna says with regard to the recognition of non-formal learning *don't know how if you didn't actually have to write it down*. Despite this, it seems that recording of non-formal learning events is erratic and spasmodic. The participants recognise the importance of recording but this knowledge does not prompt them to actually participate. As John says *a good idea but I couldn't hand on heart say that I do*. The findings highlighted that motivation to record is not present. This finding seems to reflect the experience of other professions such as pharmacists (Donyai, et. al., 2010) and indicates the cognitive dissonance theory referred to in the literature review where behaviour does not follow what is felt. In the case of this study, participants' experience was that despite understanding the value of recording CPD, knowing that they should participate in recording, they did not consistently record their CPD. The experience seemed to be that development was recorded when required by others parties for example, such as the professional body for the purpose of membership upgrading. There are obvious implications for practice here. The practitioners' desired behaviour can be achieved, in this case recording of CPD, either by the professional body or employer, using either punishment for not complying or reward for complying as well as finding easier and more accessible ways for practitioners to record their CPD. Employers too have a role to play in terms of using the performance management process as an opportunity to record their practitioners' CPD. According to theory if the pressure is either too strong or

too weak it will not have the desired effect (McKenna, 2000). The long term solution must be to change the practitioner's attitude towards recording CPD, and this change of attitude can be influenced through the use of effective reward and/or punishment to encourage recording of CPD. The long term implication for practice is that there is a role for educators in terms of attitude of HR practitioners towards CPD recording, which needs to be included in the formal education programmes for HR practitioners mechanisms to embed the practice of CPD recording in everyday practice. Digenti's (2000) concerns about recording seem, then, to be reflected in the findings of this study.

It has been highlighted earlier in this chapter that non-formal learning is a popular means of professional development for HR practitioners. The findings also suggested that credibility is of great significance to the HR profession. The recording of non-formal learning must be important if the learning from non-formal mechanisms is perceived as a means of showing how HR practitioners might earn status (McIntyre, cited in Evans, 2008^b). Recording may also go some way to address the criticisms of non-formal learning which were discussed in the literature review relating to it being left to chance and haphazard (Marsick & Volpe, 1999).

Participant experience did offer some suggestions with regard to encouraging individuals to record, including using social networking sites and keeping an informal journal rather than a more formal learning log. Smith (2006), PAVS (2008) and Marsick (2003) all suggest a number of mechanisms for recording non-formal learning although Skule (2004) does maintain that methods are, to

date, underdeveloped. The implications for practice is that the use of new technology in the recording of CPD needs to be improved and made more credible.

The findings indicated that reflection is carried out albeit in an ad hoc way, as Martha says *I'll just reflect on it in my head*, which must raise the question about whether or not full value of the learning is being achieved. An implication for practice must be that practitioners need to learn the skill of reflecting – the CIPD and educators of practitioners have a role to play in this skill development. Improved reflection skills coupled with more formalised recording of CPD could go some way to address the criticism that non-formal learning lacks theoretical underpinning (Cullen, et. al., 2002).

Category 5 - Non-formal learning is experienced as involving other people

The findings in this category reflect the importance and extent of the involvement of other people in the participants of this study's experience of non-formal learning. Participants experienced involvement of lone colleagues and peers as well as groups of colleagues and peers. The involvement of others seemed to be something the participants welcomed and embraced. Esther highlights how she has benefited from the involvement of others *I've learnt to value building up a network and then being able to pick up the phone*. It was identified though that there could be a disadvantage involving others in professional development in the light of downsized and flatter organisations of today resulting in colleagues being very busy which can have the impact of their having less time to help in the professional development of

colleagues. As Anna says *I don't like it at the moment as everyone is so busy*. This is an issue employers would need to address if they wanted to foster learning from colleagues as part of their development programme. The findings in this study support Cheetham and Chivers' (2005) propositions that professional development need not be a solitary process, as practitioners seem to currently practice group learning. Not only that but the findings reflect another espoused proposition, that of the importance of emotional attachment in effective learning, which Rock identified in his theory relating to adult learning (2010). This emotional attachment can come about through relatedness with others as illustrated in this category. Eberle and Childress (2007) too, refer to the role of collaborative learning which comes with Hase and Kenyon's (2000; 2007) heutagogical approach to learning. As Tiberius says *I've learnt a lot from listening to other people, attending these meetings, networking things like that*. The findings highlighted that others are important in the professional development of HR practitioners and 'others' covers a wide range of individuals. Participants identified peers both within and outwith their own organisations and superiors within the organisation were involved in their professional development, or if this was not the case presently it was a practice which was desired. Networking with peers from outside their own organisation seemed to be a particularly favoured mechanism of non-formal learning particularly by those participants representing the more senior strata of the sample, while these individuals also highlighted that networking with those for whom the participants were responsible was not preferred unless the relationship was a mentoring one. This category seems, like other categories, to incorporate an element of Rock's AGES model (2010) of adult learning, in

this case the emotional connection to other people element. It seems therefore that the outcome space for non-formal learning incorporates Rock's complete AGES model (2010) of adult learning.

Feedback through annual reviews were identified as an important development mechanism though it was identified that managers needed to be skilled at delivering effective feedback. This then is an implication for practice in that educators and the professional body need to ensure that HR practitioners have the necessary skills for the delivery and receipt of feedback. By incorporating supportive, constructive and non-threatening feedback as a feature of HR practitioners' occupational lives will go some way to ensure the presence of a climate of developmentalism, and as a result add value to the organisation through a more effective HR function.

In addition the findings identified that as far as motivation is concerned, not only HR practitioners need to be motivated to involve others in their professional development but also employers need to be motivated to embrace and encourage this practice if there is to be success. Employers need to ensure that the time and opportunity be made for colleagues to learn from each other. As Esther says *it depends on the organisation – if the organisation's got a culture where learning is important they can have action steps they can have sharing sessions they can have forums*. The findings indicated once again that reflection needed to be incorporated in the process so that the learning resulting from involvement with others could be as effective as possible. For example, Ruth commented that *some of the most*

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

useful CPD I've ever had is just calling up a colleague and saying what do you think? By incorporating reflection into a situation such as that described by Ruth would go some way to ensure that learning is the result of such an incident and not that of simply getting advice or help from a colleague, as well as going some way to mitigate the comments by Marsick and Volpe (1999) relating to the haphazardness of non-formal learning.

An implication for practice is that collaborative reflection is a concept that would appear to be worthy of consideration by employers who would need to ensure that the conditions are available for this to happen and for educators who need to ensure practitioners in their pre-service education have the skills to carry out successful collaborative reflection (Eraut, 2004; Bevins, et. al., 2011; Knipfer, et. al., 2012).

In the next and final chapter I will draw conclusions, make recommendations for the key stakeholders, make suggestions for possible future research, identify the unique contribution of this study and reflect on my EdD journey.

CHAPTER 7

7.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In this chapter I will consider how the findings addressed the research questions, as a result of the discussion in chapter 6, make various recommendations for HR practitioners and those involved in the development of these practitioners, summarise the unique contribution of this study and suggest areas for further research and finally some reflections on my EdD journey will be presented.

7.1 Research Questions

The aim of this study was *'To explore the ways in which HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experience professional development and the role of non-formal learning in that development'*.

To achieve the aim, four research questions were explored.

1. What are the qualitatively different ways HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experience professional development? (Objective 1)
2. What are the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland in the use of non-formal learning mechanisms in that professional development? (Objective 2)
3. What are the perceptions of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland with regard to an HR professionalism continuum? (Objective 3)
4. What are the restricted and extended elements of the HR professionalism continuum? (Objective 3)

By using a phenomenographical approach in the analysis of the data I believed that a fresh, and practitioner-centred, perspective would be brought to the subject of professional development and non-formal learning and the aim would, as a result, be achieved. I now believe that this has been the case. To illustrate this, I will now consider how the findings addressed each of the research questions in turn.

Research Question 1 - What are the qualitatively different ways HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experience professional development?

It was apparent from this study that the collective view of the practitioners interviewed was that they experienced five qualitatively different ways of professional development, namely:

1. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as including a wide range of components
2. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as a means of keeping up to date
3. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as occurring in many different ways
4. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as being part of HR practice
5. Professional development is experienced by HR practitioners as enabling them to bring benefits to a range of stakeholders

The dimensions of variation, or recognisable themes, which exist across all the categories relating to the ways in which they experienced that professional development, were credibility and control from both an occupational and

personal perspective. The structural relationship of the categories of this phenomenon is firstly, 'what' professional development is; two of the categories explained the 'what' element. Secondly, 'how' professional development is carried out. Thirdly, 'when' professional development is carried out and fourthly, 'why' professional development is carried out. While the findings of this study indicated that the HR practitioners interviewed for this study did participate in professional development, it should not be taken for granted that this is the case in the wider profession. The findings of this study confirmed that formal qualifications were important particularly for the credibility of the profession and that non-formal learning was widely used and preferred for ongoing professional development. The findings indicated that all stakeholders need to be aware that there are a wide range of components to professional development, or 'mosaic', required by contemporary HR practitioners including business savvy and transferable skills and which need to be addressed in the professional development of those practitioners. Not only is keeping up to date fundamental to the status of the HR practitioner and the profession, but not keeping up to date is adverse to practitioners and, as a result, the profession. Keeping up to date will involve the practitioner taking into account their particular job role and planning their development accordingly. Practitioners are willing to take responsibility for their development though they do welcome support from employers and the professional body. There are many different ways, including the more traditional such as planned courses, that development opportunities can occur or be created, but consideration must be given to the credibility of these. Recording and recognition of development needs to be considered, and the

professional body has a role to play, as do employers of practitioners. It is in the interests of all stakeholders to support and encourage the professional development of HR practitioners, as professional development is experienced as bringing benefits to all stakeholders.

Professional development should not be commoditised; it is more important than that. One illustration of the importance is as a result of the position of HR within contemporary organisations. The dualities faced by HR and the skills required to cope with the resulting challenges were discussed in the literature review. This discussion highlighted the importance of professional development for HR practitioners. Professional development is, in fact, a part of everyday HR practice and continuous participation in professional development relevant to the job role of the individual practitioner, or demonstrating a climate of developmentalism, is likely to result in extending professionalism, thus enhancing the profession.

Research Question 2 - What are the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland in the use of non-formal learning mechanisms in that professional development

The findings of this study were that the participants experienced five qualitatively different ways of experiencing non-formal learning, namely:

1. Non-formal learning is experienced as a means of professional development
2. Non-formal learning is experienced as comprising many different forms
3. Non-formal learning is experienced as unplanned

4. The recording of non-formal learning is experienced as important
5. Non-formal learning is experienced as involving other people

The cross category themes which emerged were motivation and reflection. The structural relationship emerged as nested, with professional development at the heart; secondly, the many different forms of non-formal learning; thirdly the unplanned nature of non-formal learning; fourthly, the recording of the non-formal learning which occurs as a means of professional development, and finally the category which encompasses all the other categories, is that non-formal learning is experienced as involving other people. Not only that but there was a relationship between the two outcome spaces in that non-formal learning was one of the 'how' elements of the professional development phenomenon. The extent to which non-formal learning is used should perhaps not be surprising but it is definitely widely used – the problem is that it needs to be recorded and recognised and not seen as the 'poor relation' means of development. Practitioners seem to value collaboration with their peers and value networking – mentoring and coaching seems to be experienced as favoured mechanisms. Despite the seeming popularity of non-formal learning it was not an immediately recognised or understood form of professional development.

Research Question 3 – What are the perceptions of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland with regard to an HR professionalism continuum?

The reason for this and the following research question was with a view to conceptualising a model that HR practitioners could use to support and guide

them in their professional development. The findings and subsequent discussion suggested that a continuum could be a useful tool in the professional development process of HR practitioners.

A continuum could raise their awareness of the potential elements to be developed and provide a focus to help them decide on which of those elements they might wish, or need, to develop, and at what pace that development should take. The continuum could give practitioners control over their development and the credibility, which would be likely to come from this development, thus addressing the dimensions of the outcome space of professional development. Some tension may be perceived with regard to the horizontal format of the continuum and the notion that professional learning is hierarchical. Despite this, the continuum has been designed to take account of what was highlighted in this study in that the 'what' an HR practitioner needs to learn must be modified as the position held by the practitioner alters. Participants seem to value having control over their own development though they acknowledged that complete control is not possible given, for example, the constantly evolving employment legislation about which HR must be *au fait*. Using the continuum in their development is likely to give HR practitioners a means of securing a place for the HR profession as one of the 'new professions'. This is likely to come about as a result of proving that a climate of developmentalism does exist and is evidenced by individual practitioners continuously enhancing their professionalism by way of working towards the professional end of the continuum.

Research Question 4 - What are the restricted and extended elements of the HR professionalism continuum?

Based on the expert opinions of the participants of this study, the practitioner and professional elements of the HR professionalism continuum emerged in a straightforward and uncomplicated cylindrically shaped diagram. Not only did the elements of the continuum emerge but the participants' expert opinions influenced the diagrammatic format of the continuum. The fact that an individual's progress along the continuum need not, indeed should not, be simply linear, nor is it ever fully completed is incorporated in the final continuum. Both these aspects are illustrated by the arrows in the final continuum (Figure 14). The conclusion from this and the previous question is that the newly developed continuum, combined with the wide range of potential non-formal learning mechanisms available and incorporating an heutagogical approach to the learning, is a model of professional development which could be utilised by contemporary HR practitioners.

7.2 Recommendations

As a result of this study and based on the discussion and implications for practice which have been identified, a number of recommendations for HR practitioners and those involved in the development of these HR practitioners are presented.

Recommendation 1

The first recommendation of this study concerns the subject of professional development and involves raising awareness with regard to a number of

areas. HR practitioners, employers and the professional body need to be aware that there are benefits to all stakeholders by the participation of HR practitioners in professional development. In addition awareness also needs to be raised with regard to the fact that there are many different ways in which professional development can occur as well as the range of elements which may need to be developed. These elements will vary from individual to individual. The existence of a climate of developmentalism in the HR profession where practitioners are developing the appropriate elements, thereby extending their professionalism, is likely to result in the individual practitioners and the profession becoming more credible. Credibility and control are the cross category themes in the professional development outcome space so are experienced as being important by the participants of this study. By taking control of their development and showing how that development can be a part of daily practice and ultimately add value to the organisation or client, the credibility of individual practitioners and the profession is likely to be enhanced.

Recommendation 2

This recommendation relates to non-formal learning. HR practitioners need to be made far more aware of the range of potential non-formal learning mechanisms available to them. Reflection and motivation are experienced by the participants of this study as being the cross category themes of the categories of description of this phenomenon. The professional body has a role to play in raising awareness not only of non-formal mechanisms as well as finding ways to motivate practitioners to use these mechanisms in their

professional development. One advantage of using non-formal mechanisms is that many of them involve collaborating or networking with others; something the participants of this study were in favour of. In addition there is a need to change the fairly adverse perceptions relating to the value of non-formal learning which is something the professional body and educators of HR practitioners are recommended to address. Finding ways to ensure the quality of the learning arising through non-formal experiences is of an acceptable standard, is one way of addressing this issue, perhaps through the professional body's validation of such experiences. The skill of reflection also needs to be developed by HR practitioners; something the professional body and educators of practitioners are recommended to address.

Recommendation 3

This recommendation is concerned with a climate of developmentalism. A climate of developmentalism seems to be a key factor in enhancing the practice of HR practitioners thereby giving them the skills to add value to their organisations, employers or clients, and as a result, the HR profession. The recommendation is that the professional body, employers and practitioners themselves need to be made aware of the importance of this concept and their role in initiating and continuing a climate of developmentalism as a part of their everyday practice.

Recommendation 4

This recommendation relates to a conceptualised model of professional development. The model being proposed comprises the use of non-formal

learning mechanisms, incorporating a heutagogical approach. The model also includes the use of the HR professionalism continuum as a framework for, and record of, the achievements of that development. It is recommended that the proposed model of professional development is made widely known to HR practitioners who, it is recommended, are encouraged to use it to support and frame their professional development. It must be acknowledged that this recommendation is in addition to, not a replacement for, the use of formal learning mechanisms.

Recommendation 5

This recommendation relates to pre-service education of HR practitioners. It is recommended that pre-service education should include developing the skills required by potential HR practitioners to continue their ongoing professional development. Skills such as being able to identify and make full use of opportunities for learning, to be aware of, and value, available non-formal learning mechanisms. By incorporating heutagogical approaches into pre-service courses thereby ensuring future HR practitioners have the skills to be self-determined learners. By ensuring future HR practitioners have the necessary skills to be able to reflect on learning events enabling them to fully benefit from any learning event they experience.

Recommendation 6

This final recommendation is concerned with the reflecting upon, and recording of, professional development. In the short and long term, the

professional body, employers and educators of HR practitioners need to support and encourage practitioners to reflect on and record their professional development. In the longer term, educators and the professional body need to find ways to encourage practitioners' attitudinal change with regard to reflecting on and recording of development. In addition, ways need to be found to encourage, and that are less challenging, for practitioners to record their professional development. It is recommended that increasingly accessible technology could enable the use of blogs, twitter and internal you tube, all of which are likely to play a key role in encouraging the recording of learning. This may even mean that a mandatory requirement for the recording of development is adopted by professional bodies.

7.3 Unique Contribution of this Study

I believe that this study has made contributions in three distinct areas, practice, theory and method. These contributions are summarised below.

In terms of practice, the contribution relates to the experience of the participants, which has shown that there are variations in the way HR practitioners experience both professional development and the use of non-formal learning in that development. Not only that, but from the study it has emerged that the experience of the participants is that the dimensions of variation across the outcome spaces are credibility and control for professional development and motivation and reflection for non-formal learning.

Another contribution of this study to practice is that HR practitioners in the North of Scotland have been given a voice with regard to their professional development and the role of non-formal learning in that development. Using that information as well as drawing on pertinent literature, and as a result of incorporating developmentalism, non-formal, heutagogical learning and the use of the HR professionalism continuum together produce a conceptualised model to support the development of HR practitioners.

This study has, I believe, made a unique contribution to theory through the development of an HR professionalism continuum. This continuum has been empirically supported and the composition of such a continuum has come about based on empirical participant experience, something that has not been done before. At the start of this study I anticipated that the unique contribution of this study would be firstly to extend the work of Evans on the subject of developmentalism and secondly to extend the work of Cheetham and Chivers both in the context of HR and relating to the professional development of HR practitioners. I believe that this has been achieved. The findings, and subsequent discussion suggest that as far as the participants of this study are concerned there does seem to be a climate of developmentalism. This concept of developmentalism has not, until now, been discussed in the context of HR, particularly in relation to the impact professional development of HR practitioners might have on the status of HR with regard to it being a profession or one of the 'new professions'. Similarly, the findings and subsequent discussion again seem to suggest that as far as the participants of this study are concerned non-formal learning mechanisms are used in

professional development and are, as a result, a key element in creating and maintaining a climate of developmentalism. This has not been researched in the context of the HR profession before. Cheetham and Chivers' model of non-formal learning mechanisms was used in this study as a focus of potential mechanisms which practitioners might use, or wish to use. This study has provoked the potential for subsequent research in the area of non-formal learning – something which is addressed in the following section of this chapter. In addition this study has incorporated the heutagogical approach to learning into this study – again something which has not been done before in the context of HR.

With regard to the contribution of this study in the area of methodology it is my opinion that researching professional development and non-formal learning using a phenomenographic approach has been of value because a more comprehensive view of the experience of professional development and non-formal learning of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland than was previously available has been revealed. The findings and the method by which they were obtained convey new contributions to the field by bringing a better understanding of professional development and non-formal learning. It is hoped that this study will initiate some debate about the use of phenomenography in the area of professional development.

7.4 Future Research

Having considered the conclusions and contribution of this study, some suggestions which might be fruitful areas for future research are presented below.

Based on the findings in this study, two outcome spaces were presented and the way in which the two outcome spaces were related was explored. Undoubtedly, further research in the form of a wider study involving other geographical areas and a wider diversity of participants, is necessary to verify these findings of what is, in essence, a small scale, exploratory study.

To build on the foundations of this study, it would be useful to conduct further, wider empirical testing on the usefulness of the professional development model and the extent to which it could be used. Replicating this study by developing continua for use by other professions and professions would be worthy of consideration. It would be noteworthy to elicit more, perhaps quantitative, data on the components of the continuum. This could be achieved by reaching a wider HR audience.

Further research around the area of cognitive dissonance relating to the recording of CPD might be illuminating, particularly as participants articulate that while they know it is beneficial to record their CPD they do not regularly or consistently do so.

Building on the foundations of this research a more in-depth consideration of the specific ways in which a more heutagogical approach to professional development might be achieved resulting in practical and feasible suggestions for educators, the professional body and employers as well as the practitioners themselves.

Another avenue of potential future research that extends from this study relates to the concept of developmentalism in the HR profession. A wider study replicating this research to discover whether or not there is a climate of developmentalism in the HR profession across the UK.

Another area in which this study provokes future research relates to non-formal learning mechanisms. It is apparent that these are experienced by the participants of this study in the course of their development and more in-depth research into the mechanisms used and those which could be used would be significant.

Finally, I hope there will be further study around the whole area of professional development relating to the HR profession using an holistic phenomenographical approach because despite it being a complex methodological process it truly does give the HR practitioner a voice

7.5 Reflections on my EdD journey

In this section I present some reflections on this, my EdD journey. I did hesitate about using this overused metaphor (as explained in Chapter one), but after a good deal of consideration decided it was, nonetheless, the most appropriate. Previously I have been an HR practitioner, Freelance HR and Training Consultant and Further Education lecturer. I am, and have been for the past 7 years (at time of writing), an HE lecturer in Human Resource Management and although I had successfully completed an MSc, I quickly discovered that there was a gap in my methodological knowledge. I concluded that if I was going to be as effective a lecturer as I wanted to be and supervise post-graduate students effectively, this gap needed to be plugged. In addition, there was a more selfish motive, in that I had a personal and professional interest in how and why HR practitioners develop themselves professionally, which had been whetted when I read a number of articles suggesting that HR professionals do not participate in CPD. It seemed to me that to fulfil both these requirements, studying for an EdD with a view to carrying out research in the area of professional development, would be an appropriated course of action, despite my feelings of inadequacy when I compared myself to other doctoral researchers. I spent a great deal of time considering where to study my doctoral programme, looking into the way in which each was delivered; knowing my own weaknesses and inadequacies, I believed it was important to select the most appropriate programme. Following a conversation with a colleague, Dr Susan Hamilton, from another department within the Business School who was at the time in the final stages

of writing her thesis at Stirling, I decided that the educational doctoral programme at Stirling was the most appropriate for me. So then, my EdD journey commenced. And what a journey! It seems to me that my journey has, in many ways, been similar to that of Jonathan Livingston Seagull. Jonathan is a seagull and his story is told by Richard Bach (1972). Bach tells Jonathan's story using the metaphor of flight to illustrate how our dreams and aspirations, even though these dreams and aspirations may be at odds with many of our peers, can be achieved through persistence and tenacity and this is how it has been with me on this EdD journey.

The journey comprised various stages, the first four stages being the four taught modules and the fifth stage the thesis itself. When I commenced the EdD I was 53 years old and very conscious that I was a very mature student, had a busy and demanding full time job as well as heavy commitments in my personal life, and as a result made a conscious decision that I would have to project manage my research carefully. I believed that I did not have any time to waste. During the discussion with Susan, she advised that if possible I should identify my research topic prior to commencing the course so that I could direct my reading from the outset. This seemed like sound advice to me, I had anyway already identified broadly my topic for research. At the start of each of the five stages, I always felt that I was on the edge of a precipice ready to fall off, the task seemed so huge. Not only that but each stage brought with it a crisis, for example, when I questioned, as a result of my reading during module two, whether HR was indeed a profession in the academic sense – thereby questioning my preconceived beliefs – definitely a

crisis! Surprisingly, I began to look forward, while at the same time being apprehensive, to these crises! In fact I found they inspired me to want to learn more, think differently and question what I had formerly taken for granted. I did though, at some stages in the process have to remember Mark Twain's advice to "eat the frog" (as explained by Tracy, 2007, p1, in relation to doctoral research). I found that while doctoral research (the frog) is stimulating and exciting, it can become overwhelming at times resulting in procrastination; I certainly found this. Tracy (2007) advises that the researcher should take heed of Mark Twain's suggestion to break down the task (of eating the frog) and identify a clear, manageable and realistic plan of action. As far as my own doctoral research is concerned I did this but had to remind myself of my plan from time to time. I have mentioned previously that I am a licensed user of the psychometric tool 'Thinking Styles' and knowledge of this tool has made me aware that I am naturally very task focused, which means that often it is the outcome of a task which drives me to complete it, not the task itself. In the case of my EdD, however, I soon realised that it was the task itself I found so inspiring, in fact so much so, that I did not want the journey to end! Not only that I found that my research, far from being something I had to project manage, quickly became a 'way of life', an integral part of both my professional and personal life. This is a situation I had not experienced before and surprised me enormously.

As my knowledge of methodological issues increased I became apprehensive of the analysis process because I begun to understand the full weight of responsibility on me, the researcher. I have discussed this weight of

interpretive responsibility in earlier chapters. This feeling of responsibility has not left me – I think it would make me a lesser researcher if it did. The weight of responsibility was not only related to interpretation of the data, but I felt a responsibility on the subject of truth with regard to the participant interviews. Another aspect of research, in particular in the case of this study qualitative research was that of truth. Did the participants tell me the truth? How do I know if they told me the truth or not? This prompted me to consider this issue for some time. It also led me to think about this issue in my day to day working and personal life. I have addressed the issue of truth in the study but two quotes finally seemed to sum up this issue for me. Both quotes are from Hollway and Jefferson (2000). The first is that one (p3) “reason for believing what people tell us, as researchers, is a democratic one: who are we to know any better than the participants when it is, after all, their lives?” This seems, to me, to be a very powerful reason. The second quote which, to me, is also powerful with regard to this whole issue of truth is that (p152) “the telling is a product of a unique moment and relationship (another time it would come out differently).” This seems to me to encapsulate the essence of the phenomenographic approach and, in my opinion, substantiates the value of the results of this study.

I experienced challenges solely as a result of my choosing to use a phenomenographic approach in my research. Among the challenges I experienced was that I had to remember how important it was in this type of study to see the world from each participant's experience. The need for bracketing on my part was crucial therefore. Another challenge was that the

number of participants who experienced the phenomenon in a specific way was immaterial; equally no category was more important than any other, or in other words all categories were of equal significance. On balance I do not regret using this approach because I believe the benefits of using this approach outweighs the challenges. Benefits such as discovering the variety of different ways in which the participants in this study (a collective group of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland) understood the phenomena of professional development and non-formal learning. Also, I believe, by giving participants the opportunity to describe and analyse their experiences with regard to professional development and non-formal learning, has given them a voice on an issue which is important for the practitioner and the profession as a whole.

The analysis of the first phenomenon was a very protracted and painful process – only during this period did I fully understand what was involved in phenomenographic analysis. The analysis of the second phenomenon did, though no less painful, take a shorter period of time. I found that I enjoyed this stage of the analysis much more – mainly, I think, because I had gathered a degree of confidence and a greater knowledge of what was required. I think the analysis took less time mainly because I was, by this stage, extremely familiar with the data, indeed had engaged with it closely and frequently, and felt more confident in my ability in interpretive awareness. I believe that making the decision not to use any form of technology to code the data helped achieve this familiarity with the data, and feel vindicated that I selected clothes pegs rather than technology in the coding process! It was at this

stage that I began to actually enjoy the emerging findings, something I had not experienced with the first phenomenographic analysis because during the first analysis I was very pre-occupied with the actual process.

So then what is the effect of this journey on me, as a lecturer, supervisor, HR practitioner and as a person? I believe that I have developed and matured in so many ways, for example, firstly I am a more informed lecturer in that I now have a broader and deeper perspective in terms of my subject area, which has come from the wide reading during my EdD studies. This wider reading has seen me become a 'devotee' (perhaps 'groupie' reflects my true attitude) of writers such as Freire, Evans and Marton. Secondly, I believe that, as a consequence of my wider understanding of methodological issues (and a new abiding interest in this subject), I now supervise my students more effectively, and am able to assist my colleagues. Thirdly the importance of effective bracketing in this phenomenographical study and an awareness of opinions of thinkers such as Freire and Hoyle has made me re-evaluate the HR profession and my position within it. Evidence of this re-evaluation is illustrated in my article (Bailey, 2011) which has recently been published and is based on one of the modules within the EdD. In this article I raise all sorts of questions relating to the practice and status of HR. Fourthly, all of the previous factors have given me a new confidence, which has resulted in my becoming more analytical and questioning than I have ever been before not only in professional terms but also on a personal level.

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

As far as the future is concerned, the ways in which I intend to take forward and capitalise on this learning commenced during my EdD journey are as follows - firstly, I look forward to reading ever more widely and to extend my knowledge of methodological issues, secondly I intend to use this, and the knowledge gained in the course of my research, to work with students in the University to provide them with a better and more fruitful learning experience and thirdly, I look forward to writing and offering more articles for publication. I have, as a result of this study, identified a number of research projects which I personally wish to pursue which will extend the findings of this study. Thank you Jonathan Livingston Seagull!

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 - INTERVIEWEE DEMOGRAPHICS AND SCHEDULE

NUMBER	DATE OF INTERVIEW	INTERVIEW LOCATION	PSEU-DONYM	JOB TITLE	MALE/ FEMALE	NUMBER OF YEARS AS A PRACTITIONER	CIPD MEMBER
1	17 Feb 2011 12 Noon	Martha's Office	MARTHA	HR and Development Consultant – Travel Company	Female	8 years	Yes
2	7 March 2011 10.30 am	Lucas' Office	LUCAS	Head of HR and OD Local Authority	Male	26 years	Yes
3	17 March 2011 2pm	Isaac's Office	ISAAC	Head of HR – Aberdeen Insurance Sector	Male	21 years	Yes
4	23 March 2011 11am	David's Office	DAVID	HR and Strategic Change Director NHS	Male	22 years	No
5	23 March 2011 2pm	Rebecca's Office	REBECCA	HR Consultant Oil and Gas Company	Female	20 years	Yes
6	24 March 2011 9am	John's Office	JOHN	Learning and Development Manager Local Authority	Male	20 years	Yes
7	24 March 2011 2.30pm	RGU Meeting Room	ABIGAIL	Independent HR Consultant	Female	21 years	Yes
8	30 March 2011 10am	Bathsheba's Office	BATHSHEBA	HR Assistant Oil and Gas Company	Female	5 years	No
9	4 April 2011 3pm	Deborah's Office	DEBORAH	Career Development Manager Police	Female	12 years	Yes
10	19 April 2011 11.30am	Neria's Office	NERIAH	HR Advisor Oil and Gas Company	Female	8 years	Yes
11	18 May 9.30am	Anna's Office	ANNA	Reward and Benefits Assistant Oil and Gas company	Female	5 years	Yes
12	19 May 11.15am	Jemimah's Office	JEMIMAH	L&D Specialist Volunteering Project	Female	15 years	No
13	26 May 11.00am	Ruth's Office	RUTH	HR Generalist Hospitality	Female	8 years	Yes
14	2 June 9.00am	RGU Meeting Room	ESTHER	Consultant	Female	20 years	Yes
15	9 June 11am	RGU Meeting Room	TIBERIUS	Talent Acquisition Manager Car Rental Organisation	Male	7 years	No
16	9 June 4pm	MARY'S OFFICE	MARY	Policy and Performance Leader	Female		Yes
17	23 June 2pm	GRACE'S OFFICE	GRACE	Recruitment Advisor	Female	10 years	No

APPENDIX 2 - PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

Participant Name

Participant Designation

Participant's Company

1. I have authorisation from my organisation to participate in this interview study, or I have discretion to make myself available for the purpose
2. I am voluntarily participating in providing any required information in the field of research undertaken by Moira Bailey (email address: m.m.bailey@rgu.ac.uk)
3. I have been informed of the purpose of the research project
4. I agree that all data and information provided will be strictly confidential
5. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded
6. I understand that I can request a copy of the interview transcript to check for factual accuracy should I wish to
7. I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time

Signature

.....

Date.....

APPENDIX 3 - SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROMPTS

I intend to start with a biographical question – the intention being twofold, firstly to establish the norm that the participant will do most of the talking and secondly to put the participant at ease by talking about a topic they are likely to be comfortable and familiar with.

Tell me about your career to date.

This question will be followed by these:

What are the qualitatively different ways HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experience professional development? (*Objective 1*)

What is your understanding of professional development? Why do you keep up to date? How do you perceive the career of HR is it just a job or something else? Why is that?

Can you describe, from your experience, the different elements of professional development (eg what knowledge, what skills, which attitudes etc)

Tell me about how you keep yourself up to date occupationally? In your opinion - Whose responsibility is your professional development?

Describe the different ways in which you carry out professional development? In what ways is this a feature of your regular practice?

Thinking about your recent professional development activities, in what ways have they impacted on your HR practice or if indeed they have impacted on practice? Any other events which have impacted on your practice?

How does your practice improve? Can you think of examples when knowledge or skills you have gained have translated in to practice?

From your experience who decides which events you get involved with?

In what ways do you record any learning?

Tell me about the timing of your professional development? In what ways are the development activities driven eg by problems, by situations or by the learning events which are available?

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

What are the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland in the use of non-formal learning mechanisms in that professional development? (Objective 2)

What is your personal experience of non-formal learning mechanisms in the course of your professional development?

Which mechanisms do you use?

Which mechanisms could you use?

In what ways do you ensure the learning from these non-formal mechanisms is harnessed?

What are the perceptions of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland with regard to an HR professionalism continuum? (Objective 3)

Based on your experience in what ways might a framework or model help you in your professional development?

Based on your experience in what ways might you use a continuum such as the one shown in your professional development?

What are the restricted and extended elements of the HR professionalism continuum? (Objective 3)

Based on your experience what are the restricted knowledge, skills and procedures used by HR practitioners?

Based on your experience what are the extended knowledge, skills and procedures used by HR practitioners?

In addition the following probing questions may be used if and when necessary:

Please tell me more about?

Please give me an example?

APPENDIX 4 - PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

I am a lecturer in Human Resource Management at Robert Gordon University Aberdeen with particular responsibility for CPD participation of the MSc Human Resource Management students at the University. I am conducting research into the professional development practices of local HR practitioners.

The aim and objectives of the study are as follows:

Aim

'To explore the ways in which HR practitioners in the North of Scotland experience professional development and the role of non-formal learning in that development'.

The objectives which need be met to achieve the aim are:

1. To discover the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland on the subject of professional development.
2. To discover the experiences of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland on the subject of non-formal learning.
3. To conceptualise a model to encourage and support the professional development of HR practitioners in the North of Scotland.

APPENDIX 5 – DRAFT HR PROFESSIONALITY CONTINUUM

THE HR PROFESSIONALITY CONTINUUM (Bailey 2010 adapted from Evans and Hoyle)

RESTRICTED HR PROFESSIONALITY

- Uses intuition in their approach to HR practice
- Skills derived from practical HR experience
- Does not reflect on or analyse their HR practice
- Are unintellectual or uncritical in outlook and attitude
- Avoid change and are set in their ways
- Infrequent reading of academic journals or reading of journals of a basic and non-academic nature
- Relies heavily on ideas and practices of more senior HR practitioners

EXTENDED HR PROFESSIONALITY

- Adopt an approach, based on reason, to HR practice
- HR theory and practice used in day to day practice in particular when solving problems and making decisions
- Are reflective and analytical HR practitioners
- Adopt intellectual approaches to the job
- Experiment with and welcome new ideas
- Regular reading of professional HR literature – in particular that which involves theoretical discussion
- Value placed on professional collaboration
- Considers ideas from a range of HR sources

APPENDIX 6 – RESEARCHER AND HEALTH & SAFETY CONTINUUMS

PROFESSIONALITY ORIENTATION – RESEARCHERS (Evans 2007¹)

RESTRICTED PROFESSIONALITY

- Conducts research that lacks rigour
- Understands and utilises only basic research methods
- Fails to develop or extend her/his methodological competence
- Utilises only established research methods
- Fails to develop basic research findings
- Perceive research methods as tools and methodology as a task directed utilitarian process
- Applies low level analysis to research data
- Perceives individual research studies as independent and free-standing
- Perceives individual research studies as finite and complete
- Struggles to criticise literature and others' research effectively
- Publishes mainly in 'lower grade' academic journals and in professional journals/magazines
- Is associated mainly with research findings that fall into the 'tips for practitioners' category of output

EXTENDED PROFESSIONALITY

- Conducts highly rigorous research
- Understands and utilises basic and advanced methods
- Strives constantly to develop and extend her/his methodological competence
- Adapts established methods and develops methodology
- Develops theory from research findings
- Perceives research methodology as a field of study in itself
- Strives constantly to apply increasingly deeper levels of analysis to research data
- Recognises the value of, and utilises, comparative analysis, meta-analysis, synthesis, replication etc
- Constantly reflects upon and frequently revisits and refines, his/her own studies
- Has developed the skill of effective criticism and applies this to the formulation of his/her own argument
- Publishes frequently in 'high ranking' academic journals
- Recognises research's value to policy and practice, engages with practitioner/policy-makers and disseminates findings comprehensibly to them whilst also disseminating groundbreaking theoretical issues and contributing to and taking a lead in developing discourse on theory

PROFESSIONALITY ORIENTATION – OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY
(Evans2008¹)

RESTRICTED PROFESSIONALITY

- Relies heavily on the ideas or practices that other OHS professionals in their professional network recommend or which are prescribed by their managers without wider evaluation
- Uses intuition and experience as the guiding frameworks for OHS practice

EXTENDED PROFESSIONALITY

- Considers ideas from a range of sources including the tried and tested approaches of other OHS professionals and is aware of and draws upon the growing OHS evidence base, all the while evaluating all inputs for their applicability to the organisation and the industry in which the professional operates
- Uses theoretical principles and applies them to practice as a framework for solving problems and making decisions while understanding the limitations of those theories in the reality of practice and compensating for those limitations with ideas gained from experience

APPENDIX 7 – TEACHER AND GENERAL CONTINUUMS

PROFESSIONALITY ORIENTATION – TEACHERS (Hoyle 1975)

RESTRICTED PROFESSIONALITY

- Skills derived from experience
- Perspective limited to the immediate in time and place
- Introspective with regard to methods
- Value placed on autonomy
- Infrequent reading of professional literature
- Teaching seen as an intuitive activity

EXTENDED PROFESSIONALITY

- Skills derived from a mediation between experience and theory
- Perspective embracing the broader social context of education
- Methods compared with those of colleagues and reports of practice
- Value placed on professional collaboration
- Regular reading of professional literature
- Teaching seen as a rational activity

PROFESSIONALITY ORIENTATION – GENERAL (Evans 2008¹)

RESTRICTED PROFESSIONALITY

- Adopt an intuitive approach to practice
- Use skills derived from practical experience
- Do not reflect on or analyse their practice
- Are unintellectual or uncritical in outlook and attitudes
- Avoid change and are set in their ways

EXTENDED PROFESSIONALITY

- Adopt a rational approach to practice
- Use skills developed from both theory and practice
- Are reflective and analytical practitioners
- Adopt intellectual approaches to the job
- Experiment with and welcome new ideas

'Developmentalism – from here to there – is heutagogy the way there for HR?

APPENDIX 8 – CIPD'S HR PROFESSION MAP

