

2016

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**Human Resource Planning Practices in the
Omani Public Sector:
An Exploratory Study in the
Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman**

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Business and Law, Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia

2016

Abstract

Human resource planning (HRP) is the management process that helps organisations prepare for the number of employees and the types of skills needed to achieve organisational goals and objectives. In short, the aim of HRP is to have the right people in the right place at the right time. However, unlike the private sector, HRP practices are not widespread in the public sector. Literature on the ways in which HRP is conducted in public sector organisations has been limited to date. While the process of moving from traditional models of public management to New Public Management (NPM), and the Resource-Based View (RBV) approach implies the need for emphasising the central role of the Human Resource Management (HRM) function, the question of how public-sector organisations implement HRP remains largely unanswered in the existing management literature.

The focus of this study was to explore the current practices of HRP in the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Oman, an unexplored context, in order to gain an understanding of good practice, and recommend further improvements. An interpretive case study methodology was adopted for this study which enabled the researcher to gain access to the tacit knowledge held by experienced practitioners who are involved in HRP processes in the MoE.

The analysis of data collected through interviews with key informants revealed that despite the implementation of some strategies, the MoE did not formulate or implement a comprehensive HRP approach. The focus for the MoE remains on operational and annual requirements with only few attempts made to incorporate HRP into strategic planning efforts or to involve HRP professionals in strategic planning processes. Strategic and operational HRP practices in the MoE have lagged the good practices highlighted in the literature. The results from this study also indicate that HRP professionals lack the ability, knowledge, and skills necessary to develop and implement effective HRP practices. The study found that HRP in the MoE is influenced by both external and

internal factors. The external factors were government policies, the legal context, the labour market and the economy, while the internal factors included organisational structure and culture.

Through cross-comparison and alignment of MoE practices with those best practices identified in the literature, the key characteristics of good HRP practices in Oman's MoE were identified. This study begins to address this issue by attempting to use RBV and NPM theories to explain how HRP practices are currently recognised and used in public-sector organisations. The implications of the study suggest that having HRP in place is conducive to improving the competitiveness of the organisation. Moreover, under the principles of NPM, the study has been able to show how people at both strategic and operational levels of public organisations adopt, develop and manage the new concept of strategic HRP to continually improve organisational performance. This calls for researchers and those interested in the theory to give particular attention to the development of the skills and competencies of HRP professionals, including the skills needed to explore the ways that HRP is used to achieve competitive advantage. Further, in order to facilitate the effective adoption and application of NPM reforms, efforts should be made to prepare public-sector organisations well in terms of their culture, policies, rules and regulations.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Almighty Allah (God) for His grace and for giving me strength, insight, enablement and determination to complete this thesis.

Second, my PhD journey would not have been possible without the sincere efforts of several wonderful people who deserve to be both acknowledged and thanked here.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents (Um Adnan and Abu Adnan). Words cannot express how grateful I am to them for their endless love and support. Their prayers for me was what sustained me thus far.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to my main supervisor, Associate Professor Maryam Omari for her academic guidance and enthusiastic encouragement throughout the research. Without her unlimited support and continuous follow-up I could not have done what I was able to do. She was very generous in sharing her experiences of academic life and beyond. Her effort and patience will never be forgotten. I know I cannot thank my mentor and supervisor Associate Professor Maryam Omari enough but at least I can promise that I will try to use her professional and personal qualities as my model throughout my future life and career.

I do not have words to express my real appreciation for Associate Supervisor Professor Rowena Barrett. I was always full of motivation whenever I left her office. I sought to see her often as talking with her brought new ideas and gave me all the enthusiasm to move another step forward. When I mention her to my colleagues, they always inform me how lucky I am. Professor Barrett is not only my supervisor, but also sometimes acts as an older sister when circumstances call for it. She was always there to listen and to give me a lot of consideration about anything I hoped for. Although she moved to another university, she never gave up on me and always maintained her confidence in my ability to complete this PhD. Professor Barrett set a great example for me, and I really consider myself lucky to be her student.

My special words of thanks should also go to Adjunct Supervisor, Senior lecturer Dr Megan Paull. Her support and contribution was there both at the beginning and the end of my PhD journey. She spent endless hours proofreading my thesis and giving me excellent suggestions which always resulted in improved versions of the thesis

As always it is impossible to mention everybody who has had an impact on my thesis. However, there are some of my friends whose spiritual support is even more important. A special mention of thanks to my friends in Australia, Dr Ahmed Bello and his wonderful sons, Abo Biker and Mahmood. The unlimited assistance that they have provided me over the years was the greatest gift anyone has ever given me. I am deeply thankful to Dr Abdul Latif Al Balushi and Dr Salem Al Kindi for their helpful suggestions when I was writing my thesis. I would especially like to thank my cousin Nasir Abu Mohammed Al Wahshi for his support and help, and Mr Mohammed Al Hosni, Khaled Daabaj, and Ms Layla Al Hameed for their logistical support.

I wish to express gratitude to HE Saud Al Balushi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education in Oman, for generously funding my study and giving me the opportunity to conduct this research project and obtain my PhD in the HRM field. Without his generosity and support I would not have been able to achieve my goal. I particularly wish to thank Mr Hamid Al Hajri for his encouragement while I was doing my PhD. I would like to also thank Mr Fahad Al Khawaldi and Mr Talal Al Asmi who have been kind enough to advise me and help me to study in Australia.

In Perth, Western Australia, my thanks also go to professional editor Ms Ilsa Sharp, who took on the task of expertly proofreading and copy-editing my thesis draft even despite her need to nurse her husband after his recent stroke; I am grateful to her for her many insightful comments and queries.

A special thanks to all my brothers and sisters for their love and affection. In particular, I would like to thank my brother Khalid (Abu Siafi) for all his support and the help he has provided me when I was out of the country.

Last, but not least, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my beloved wife (Um Saif) to whom I am really unable to express the full extent of my gratitude. I am so grateful to her for standing beside me throughout all these years and she has made them the best years of my life. She inspired me, provided constant encouragement and made great sacrifices so I

could accomplish my goals and realise my dream. Also, thank you my wonderful children: Aalia, Maryam, Saif, Mohammed, and Abdul Al Malik, who were my best assistants in this journey. I aspire to see them making their own great contribution to knowledge and the elevation of the nation, one day in the future.

Table of Contents	Pages
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abbreviations.....	xiv
1 Chapter One: Overview of the Study.....	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Purpose of the Study	6
1.3 Research Questions	7
1.4 Case Study Methodology	7
1.5 Significance of the Study	7
1.6 Terminology Used in this Study.....	8
1.7 Organisation of the Thesis.....	10
1.8 Summary	13
2 Chapter Two: The Context of the Study	14
2.1 Location.....	14
2.2 Population.....	15
2.3 A Brief History of Oman.....	16
2.4 Political system	16
2.5 Economy.....	17
2.6 Labour market	18
2.7 The Public Sector and the Civil Service in Oman.....	19
2.7.1 Civil Service Sector.....	21
2.8 The Ministry of Civil Service.....	22
2.8.1 Civil Service Law	23
2.9 The Case Study Organisation: The Ministry of Education	24
2.10 Key Factors Determining HRM Practices in Oman	27
2.10.1 Human Resource Strategies in Oman.....	30
2.11 Summary of Chapter Two	34
3 Chapter Three: Review of the Literature.....	35
3.1 HRP as an HRM fundamental.....	35

3.2	Definition of HRP	41
3.3	The Importance of HRP	42
3.4	Evolution of Thinking on HRP	43
3.5	New Public Management and HRP.....	45
3.5.1	New Public Management	45
3.6	Factors Influencing HRP	56
3.6.1	External factors	57
3.6.2	Internal Factors.....	59
3.7	Good HRP Practices.....	65
3.7.1	HRP and Strategic Planning.....	66
3.7.2	Forecasting Demand and Supply.....	77
3.7.3	Recruitment Strategies	87
3.7.4	Employee Surplus	97
3.7.5	Evaluation.....	100
3.8	Models of HRP.....	103
3.9	HRP in the Omani Context.....	108
3.10	Conceptual Framework of the Study	110
3.11	Summary.....	112
4	Chapter Four: Methodology.....	114
4.1	Introduction:	114
4.2	Design of Research Methodology	115
4.2.1	Research Paradigm	116
4.2.2	Research Approach	119
4.2.3	Research Strategy	121
4.2.4	Data Collection Method	122
4.2.5	Participant Recruitment.....	123
4.2.6	Ethical Considerations.....	128
4.3	Pilot Interview	129
4.4	Interview Guide.....	130
4.5	Interview Techniques	131
4.5.1	Senior Managers.....	132
4.5.2	Female Participants	133

4.5.3	Participants well known to the researcher	133
4.6	Data Collection.....	133
4.6.1	Setting.....	134
4.6.2	Audio Recording	135
4.7	Data Transcription.....	135
4.8	Data Analysis	136
4.8.1	Coding Procedures	139
4.8.2	Saturation	143
4.9	Research Trustworthiness	144
4.9.1	Credibility.....	144
4.9.2	Transferability	147
4.9.3	Dependability and Confirmability.....	147
4.10	Limitations.....	148
4.11	Summary.....	149
5	Chapter Five: The HRP Process in Oman’ s MoE	150
5.1	Introduction:	150
5.2	Demographic Information	151
5.2.1	HRP in the Strategic Planning	153
5.2.2	Forecasting HR Demand and Supply	168
5.2.3	Implementing Gap-Closing Strategies	176
5.2.4	Evaluation	193
5.3	Summary	196
6	Chapter Six: Factors Influencing HRP in the MoE	199
6.1	Factors Affecting HRP in the MoE.....	199
6.1.1	External factors Affecting HRP Practices in the MoE.....	200
6.1.2	The Economy	200
6.1.3	Government Policy (Omanisation)	201
6.1.4	The Legal Context:.....	203
6.1.5	The Labour Market	207
6.2	Internal Factors Affecting HRP in the MoE.....	208
6.2.1	Organisational Structure.....	208

6.2.2	Organisational Culture	213
6.3	Summary	216
7	Chapter Seven: Discussion.....	218
7.1	Introduction	218
7.2	HRP and Strategic Planning	219
7.2.1	Environmental Scanning	219
7.2.2	A Formalised and Written HR Strategy	223
7.2.3	Strategic HR Objectives in MoE.....	226
7.2.4	HRP Professionals' Involvement.....	229
7.2.5	Linking HRP Processes with Strategic Planning	231
7.3	HR Forecasting.....	235
7.3.1	Identifying the Gap.....	241
7.4	Employee Shortages	241
7.4.1	Internal Recruitment Strategies	243
7.4.2	External Strategies.....	257
7.5	Employee Surpluses	260
7.6	Evaluation.....	262
7.7	Concluding Statements on the Research Objectives	264
7.8	What can be Done to Improve HRP Practices in the MoE?.....	270
7.8.1	Development the Structure of HRM in the Civil Service System.....	270
7.8.2	Integration of HRP into Strategic Planning.....	271
7.8.3	Involvement of HRP Professionals in the Strategic Planning.....	273
7.8.4	Combination of Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in the Process of HR Forecasting	275
7.8.5	Development of an Effective HRIS	275
7.8.6	Formulating a Clear and Transparent Policy for Employee Selection, Promotion, Performance Appraisal and Transfer	277
7.8.7	Development of an Effective Training and Development Program 278	
7.8.8	Creation of a Clear and defined policy for Managing Surplus Employees	279

7.8.9 Establishment of a well-defined policy for the evaluation of HRP practices	279
7.9 Summary	285
8 Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Implications	286
8.1 Key Findings	286
8.2 Contribution of the Study: Implications for Theory and Practice	289
8.2.1 Implications for Theory	289
8.2.2 Implications for Practice	293
8.3 Limitations and Directions for Further Research	294
8.4 The Thesis in Brief: Closing Comments	297
References	300
Appendix 1: Consent Form.....	326
Appendix 2 Information Sheet to Participate in a Case Study	327
Appendix 3 Supporting letters from the Supervisors	330
Appendix 4 Supporting letters from Consulate general of the Sultanate of Oman	331
Melbourne- Australia	331
Appendix 5: Rationale for Participant Selection	332
Appendix 6: Interview Guide for Strategic Planning Staff	334
Appendix 7: Interview Guide for Operational Staff	335

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Organisation of the Thesis	12
Figure 2.1: Geographic Location of Oman.....	15
Figure 2.2: The Government of Oman's Administrative System	21
Figure 2.3: The Civil Service System in the Sultanate of Oman	22
Figure 3.1 Stage of HRP Sophistication.....	70
Figure 3.2: Criteria for Deciding Appropriate Approach to HR Forecasting.....	86
Figure 3.3:Sinclair's Model	105
Figure 3.4: Pennsylvania HRP Model	106
Figure 3.5: The Basic HRP Model	107
Figure 3.6: Conceptual Framework for the Study	112
Figure 4.1: Design of Research Methodology.....	115
Figure 4.2: Sample of Governorates in the Study	128
Figure 4.3: Stage of Data Coding	142
Figure 5.1: Participants' Experience at the MoE	151
Figure 5.2: Recruitment Alternatives to Address Employee Shortage in Oman' s MoE.....	177
Figure 6.1: External and Intern al factors affecting HRP in the MoE.....	200
Figure 7.1 : Model of HRP processes in public-sector organisation in developing countries	284

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 Key terms used in this study.....	9
Table 2.1: Number of Schools, Students, Teachers in Oman, 1970 - 2010.	25
Table 4.1: Differences between the Two Approaches: Quantitative and Qualitative	121
Table 4.2: Interview Categories and Participants.....	125
Table 4.3: Phases of Thematic Analysis.....	138
Table 4.4: Example of Coding Template	141
Table 5.1: Demographic Profile of the Participants	152
Table 7.1: Gaps between Oman MoE's current HRP practices and good practices identified in the literature	269

Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Explanation
ADB	Asian Development Bank
CAQDAS	Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personal Development
CSC	Civil Service Council (Oman)
CSL	Civil Service Law (Oman)
ECU	Edith Cowan University (Perth, Western Australia)
EU	European Union
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HREC	Human Research and Ethics Committee (ECU, Western Australia)
HRIS	Human Resource Information System
HRP	Human Resource Planning
HRM	Human Resource Management
HR	Human Resources
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPMA	International Personnel Management Association
IPMA-HR	International Public Management Association for Human Resources
MoE	Ministry of Education (Oman)
MCS	Ministry of Civil Service (Oman)
MoF	Ministry of Finance (Oman)
NCSI	National Centre for Statistics and Information (Oman)
NGT	Nominal Group Technique
NHS	National Health Service (UK)
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OR	Omani Rial (The currency of Oman)
RBV	Resource-based View
SCFP	Supreme Council for Planning (Oman)
SHRM	Strategic Human Resource Management
SHRM	Society of Human Resource Management
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
TOOSAD	Technical Office of Studies and Development (Oman)
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
WHO	World Health Organisation
WRT	Workforce Review Team

1 Chapter One: Overview of the Study

1.1 Background

Global competition, rapid technological advancement, and dramatically shifting demographics are challenges encouraging public and private organisations to consider people as their most valuable resource (Miracle, 2004). Human Resource Planning (HRP) is a core process that ensures an organisation prepares for its current and future needs by having the right people in the right place at the right time (Jacobson, 2010). HRP allows the building of long-term capacity to meet workforce needs and overcome challenges (Choudhury, 2007). If an organisation is effective in the development and implementation of its Human Resource Management (HRM) plan, it will be able to better utilise human capital in order to achieve its strategic objectives. The question of how organisations conduct HRP in the public sector is at the heart of this research.

HRP is an outcome of a long period of evolution in management practice; it was historically known as manpower planning. The focus in manpower planning was on forecasting the needs for employees into the future, assessments of internal labour supply for meeting these needs, and identifying the gaps between what will be needed and what will be available (Santos, Zhang, Gonzalez, & Jain, 2009). The 1980s saw a period of transition where manpower planning began to be replaced by the notion of HRP (Bramham, 1994). The process now encompasses not only supply-demand balancing or quantitative forecasting, but also analysing an organisation's human resource (HR) needs as an integrated part of organisational strategy. This change is consistent with the overall shift taking place in the field of HRM, where employees have been recast as valuable resources and are considered a vital internal source of organisational competitive advantage (Kelly, 2003). This shift was largely due to the Resource-Based View (RBV) turning attention away from external resources toward internal resource as a source of competitive advantage (Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001). In the public sector, the

increased influence of private sector thinking has led to efforts to give the public-sector greater managerial latitude over personnel decisions through the New Public Management (NPM) principles (Dougherty & Van Gelder, 2013), which aim at increased levels of governmental performance and the delivery of excellence to citizens. It has become incumbent on the public-sector to compete with others organisations, both private and public. This has prompted the two sectors to seek to continually improve their performance (Harel & Tzafrir, 2001).

Since the 1980s, there has been a continually growing body of literature on HRP in relation to the private sector; however, the same attention has not been paid to the public sector (Freyens, 2010). This has reflected a broad behavioural perspective of leadership in the public sector, based on an expectation that there was competence to lead these organisations, where many leaders had long tenures (Wilkerson, 2007). Other reasons proposed in the literature for not conducting formal HRP in public-sector organisations have been identified as, budget restrictions; the time commitment needed for a workforce plan; focus on short-term activities; and low or non-prioritisation (Goodman, French & Battaglio, 2013).

Several studies indicate that further exploration of the progress of current HRP practices is needed to address many issues within public-sector organisations (e.g. Jacobson, 2010; Ulfertsm, Wirtz, & Peterson, 2009). These issues include the retirement and ageing of employees, lack of resources, the isolation of the HRM function, and the absence of formal HRP in the public sector. Many organisations in developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and most European Union countries have found that the ageing of the baby boomers (people born between 1946 and 1964) is one of the major demographic challenges facing HRP in the public sector (Jacobson, 2010). If all boomers were to move into retirement concurrently, fewer younger workers will be available to fill the gaps. This realisation has led to the identification of a crisis with regard to replacing older workers in the workplace (Bosworth, Wilson & Baldauf, 2007). Another challenge associated with this

phenomenon is that a high proportion of leadership and key customer interface or front line positions are occupied by baby boomers (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison, 2004). This situation is not confined to the public sector. Arnold and Pulich (2007) provided the example of a non-profit organisation experiencing a crisis where a high proportion of older employees were skilled and in high positions thus making it harder to replace them. HR planners will need to adjust their policies and practices in order to address the increasing number of baby boomers in the workplace.

Isolation from other organisational strategies is another challenge for HRP in the public sector (Freyens, 2010). Pynes (2004) pointed out that organisational leaders have poor skills when it comes to aligning HR functions with business strategy, and that HR departments are usually deprived of the flexibility to suggest new organisational functions and structures, or to develop projects to maximise their goals. The blending of business strategy with HRM enables an organisation to maximise its competitive advantage by drawing attention to ways in which people could be developed and deployed more effectively to enhance the achievement of business goals (Anyim, Mba, & Ekwoaba, 2012). If HRP is to be effective, the evidence is that there is a need to shift the focus from operations to strategy.

HRP remains an underutilised and little appreciated process in the public sector. Colley and Price (2010) indicate that in Australia, for example, only a small percentage of public sector organisations apply HRP processes effectively. This finding is consistent with a study conducted by the International Personnel Management Association (IPMA) that found HRP practices are not common in the public sector generally (Johnson & Brown, 2004). This is due to factors such as the absence of an appreciation for the value of comprehensive centralised workforce data, inadequate competencies and roles to support HRP, and failure to identify HRP as an area needing investment (Anderson, 2004). Another significant factor is that HR professionals lack sufficient strategic skills and this leads to ineffective HRP practices. According to Freyens (2010), this is particularly so in relation to the skills and abilities of HR planners to conduct forecasting exercises in

practice, or to link these projections into existing strategic plans. The lack of resources such as technology and time could also lead to difficulties in improving accessibility to information regarding HRP programs and activities (Freyens, 2010; Pynes, 2004).

HRP implementation in Oman's public-sector faces many challenges. One of these challenges is the underutilisation of Omani nationals. For instance, Oman depends heavily on expatriates to meet workforce requirements in both the skilled and unskilled domains. Omani participation in the labour force (both male and female Omani nationals) compared to non-Omani participation is 15 to 40 percentage points lower for male and female nationals (Gonzalez, Karoly, Constant, Salem, & Goldman, 2008). Furthermore, the high unemployment rate is a significant problem in Oman. Recent statistics indicate that the number of job seekers reached 60,000 (Ministry of Manpower, 2012), translating into a 15 % unemployment rate (NCSI, 2015). Several studies also point out that the education system is not producing workers skilled enough to meet current labour market requirements (Al Kindi, 2007; Gonzalez et al., 2008; Madgali & Taylor, 2015). In recent times, the Omani public-sector has experienced a high turnover rate. Swailes and Al Fahdi (2011) noted that losing skilled and educated employees has a negative impact on public organisations. These researchers identified this high turnover as being due to administration style, reward practices and promotion opportunities.

In the light of the challenges facing public-sector organisations and the corresponding absence of HRP in those organisations, further research is needed to explore why public-sector agencies are not utilising the advantages of HRP to improve their ability to compete for quality employees (Goodman et al., 2013). Jacobson (2010) proposes that in-depth studies need to be conducted to explore current HRP practices in the public-sector. In addition, there is a lack of published research about the need for or the applicability of HRP practices in public-sector organisations (Goodman et al., 2013). This conclusion was also reached by the Workforce Review Team (WRT), which was commissioned by the Institute for Employment Research and the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom (UK) to conduct a rapid review of global literature to identify good HRP

practices in the public sector and to use this evidence to inform National Health Service (NHS) workforce planning (Curson, Dell, Wilson, Bosworth, & Baldauf, 2010).

It is apparent from the literature that there needs to be further investigation of the public sector globally to gain a better understanding of how the sector conducts HRP; Oman is no exception. Most studies that have investigated HRP practices in Oman are limited in scope. For example, Al Bahri's study (2010), which aimed to examine the degree of differences in HRP practices between the central office and other departments within the Ministry of Education (MoE), did not focus on specific planning techniques for different levels of employees. Furthermore, the study did not identify the HRP practices at the MoE district levels. No previous studies in Oman have conducted an in-depth analysis of issues related to HRP such as the evolving linkage between HRP and strategic planning; techniques of HR demand and supply forecasting; HRP solution action plans, and aligning the needs of HR with the organisation's objectives. Therefore, this research attempts to fill this void by providing an understanding of the state of HRP practices in Oman's public-sector organisations.

This study focuses on the MoE as most civil service employees in Oman are concentrated in the MoE, representing 51% of the total public-sector workforce. This means that a significant proportion of the challenges that have been documented for the public sector in Oman are located in the MoE. Interestingly, the highest departure rate among Omani employees, who have left the civil service has also been recorded for MoE employees (Ministry of Civil Service, 2015). In addition, the MoE has attracted the highest number of job applicants compared to other governmental units: this number was estimated at 10,668 in 2012 while there were only 221 MoE vacancies available at that time (MCS, 2015). Therefore, a study focusing on the MoE will create a unique opportunity for developing a better understanding of how HRP is being conducted in the Oman's public-sector.

The aim of the study is to more specifically explore the way HRP is undertaken in the MoE. The investigation of HRP practices is conducted with a view to developing a good HRP practice model that can serve as a guide for Oman's MoE in developing HRP processes to meet its needs. Using both RVB and NPM principles, the study also provides significant insight into the ways that public-sector organisations perform HRP practices to enhance their effectiveness and gain a competitive advantage. The MoE's department of HRP is responsible for the planning of both the educational and administrative needs of the Ministry; however, this study concentrates on how the MoE conducts HRP for the administrative posts group. An investigation of HRP practices in the educational/teaching context requires a thorough consideration of the relationship between school HRP and many factors such as the principal, teachers, curriculum, budget, student enrolment, and educational stages in each school as well as locality and geographic dispersion. Moreover, it requires gaining broad perspectives from different categories of participants from different backgrounds and at different levels in the work place that are reflected in the schools' HR plans. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a review of good HRP practices applied in the private sector has been undertaken to identify key areas for improvement. However, HRP techniques or procedures used in the private sector would be difficult to transfer to educational institutions because they are different from other organisational systems in terms of size, instructional directions, standards, program variety, sources of support, and objectives.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore current HRP practices in the Ministry of Education in Oman and to recommend how these practices can be further developed. Firstly, the study sought to investigate what practices were employed in the MoE in Oman. Second, the factors influencing HRP in the MoE were examined. Following this, in order to improve HRP practices and strategies, the existing HRP practices were analysed in terms of the current situation in Oman, and these were compared to what is being identified as

good practices in the literature. Finally, a model for good practices in the MoE in Oman was proposed.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How does the MoE in Oman currently undertake HRP?
2. What are the factors that may affect HRP practices in the MoE in Oman?
3. Are the current HRP practices in the MoE in Oman good practices? If not, why not?
4. What can be done to improve HRP practices to ensure they meet the needs of the MoE?

1.4 Case Study Methodology

A qualitative explorative approach was undertaken due to a lack of existing research on HRP practices in public-sector organisations, particularly in developing countries. To gain deeper insights into participants' actual experiences of HRP practices, 32 in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Contributions of this study are made in two ways: first, the study adds to the growing body of knowledge on HRP practices in the public-sector; and secondly it provides evidence to add to the aggregated knowledge of HRM practices in Oman, particularly HRP in the public-sector, as there is a need for in-depth analysis of how HRP is practised in the public sector in different contexts. The HRP literature includes limited empirical studies conducted in the public sector (Curson et al., 2010; Freyens, 2010; Goodman et al., 2013; Johnson & Brown, 2004). Based on evidence in the literature that HRP is not commonly practised in the public-sector, this study will contribute to awareness of the importance of HRP and will assist public organisations to work towards achieving their

objectives. Empirical studies on HRP can add to the creation of scholarly knowledge by probing deeper into the nature of HRP in the public-sector. Further research is also needed to suggest ways in which public-sector organisations can align their HRP practices to their strategic planning. This study contributes to identification of important HRP variables and characteristics which enable the public sector to be more effective.

The location of this study in Oman will contribute to a small but growing body of knowledge of HR practices in that country, and will provide a significant study of HRP in the Oman's public-sector. As most HRM theories and practices originated in Western cultural contexts, research and studies need to take place in other nations and cultural contexts to form a full picture of the issues of significance, especially in developing countries (Zhiwei, 2012). Conducting such studies in developing countries is necessary both to provide perspective on the possibility of applying Western theory or practices in non-Western settings and to identify alternative policies or practices suited to the different contexts. The study is underpinned by the Resource-Based View (RBV) and New Public Management (NPM) theories. There is a lack of information regarding the application of these theories in the field of human resources management in developing countries. These two theories are used together to provide a framework to understand HRP practices in Oman's public-sector. This will contribute to both theory and best practices development.

1.6 Terminology Used in this Study

The terminology of HRP and other relevant terminologies have been taken from management discipline and directly transferred to the context of this research. These terminologies are presented in Table 1.1

Table1.1 Key terms used in this study

HRP	Strategic alignment of an organisation's human capital with its business direction: 'a methodical process of analysing the current workforce, determining future workforce needs, identifying the gap between the present and future, and implementing solutions so the organisation can accomplish its mission, goals, and objectives'. (Helton & Soubik, 2004, p. 460)
The Ministry of Education	MoE is a ministry of the Oman Government responsible for many aspects of education in Oman. (See Chapter Two for more details)
HRP professionals	Employees working for the MoE in the HRP department at the time of the study.
Omanisation	One of the strategic projects created by the Government of Oman to pave the way for Omani national labour to engage in both public and private-sector jobs (see Chapter Two for more details).
Internal factors	The internal organisational environment that influence the way in which HRP is accomplished in the MoE such as organisational culture, organisational strategy, and organisational structure.
External factors	Outside influences that can affect HRP practices in MoE such as demographic, economic, political and technological changes, as well as laws and regulations.
Directorate	An organisation representing the MoE in the regional governorates. Its role is to manage various activities that relate to the Ministry.
Administrative job group	A job that is purely administrative and distributed according to the functional structure of the Ministry or Directorate.
Professional job group	A job associated with the educational staff in the schools, but which takes place within the functional structures of the Ministry and Directorate, rather than in the schools.

1.7 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into eight chapters as indicated in Figure 1.1. This figure provides a map of the flow of this thesis within these eight chapters. Chapter One, the current chapter, provides a brief introduction to the issues under investigation, and to HRP practices in the MoE in the Sultanate of Oman. It also provides an overview of the research questions, significance of the research, and thesis organisation.

Chapter Two describes the context in which the study took place. This chapter introduces basic information regarding the Sultanate of Oman such as its location, population, and the political system. Chapter Two also provides detailed information relating to Omanisation, Oman Vision 2020, and their influence on HR practices in Oman.

Chapter Three details the review of the literature relating to the phenomenon under investigation. The chapter starts with an overview of the theory of HRP and its importance in relation to human resource management. In particular, special attention is paid to the intersection of both NPM and RBV theories with HRP practices. This chapter concludes with the conceptual framework used in this study.

Chapter Four covers the research design and methodology used in this study including the selection of a qualitative methodology, the single case study approach and the rationale for the sampling process. This chapter also discusses the development of the semi-structured interview questions, interviewing techniques, and recording and translation systems. This chapter concludes with a discussion of data analysis techniques utilised, and their contribution to the outcomes of this research.

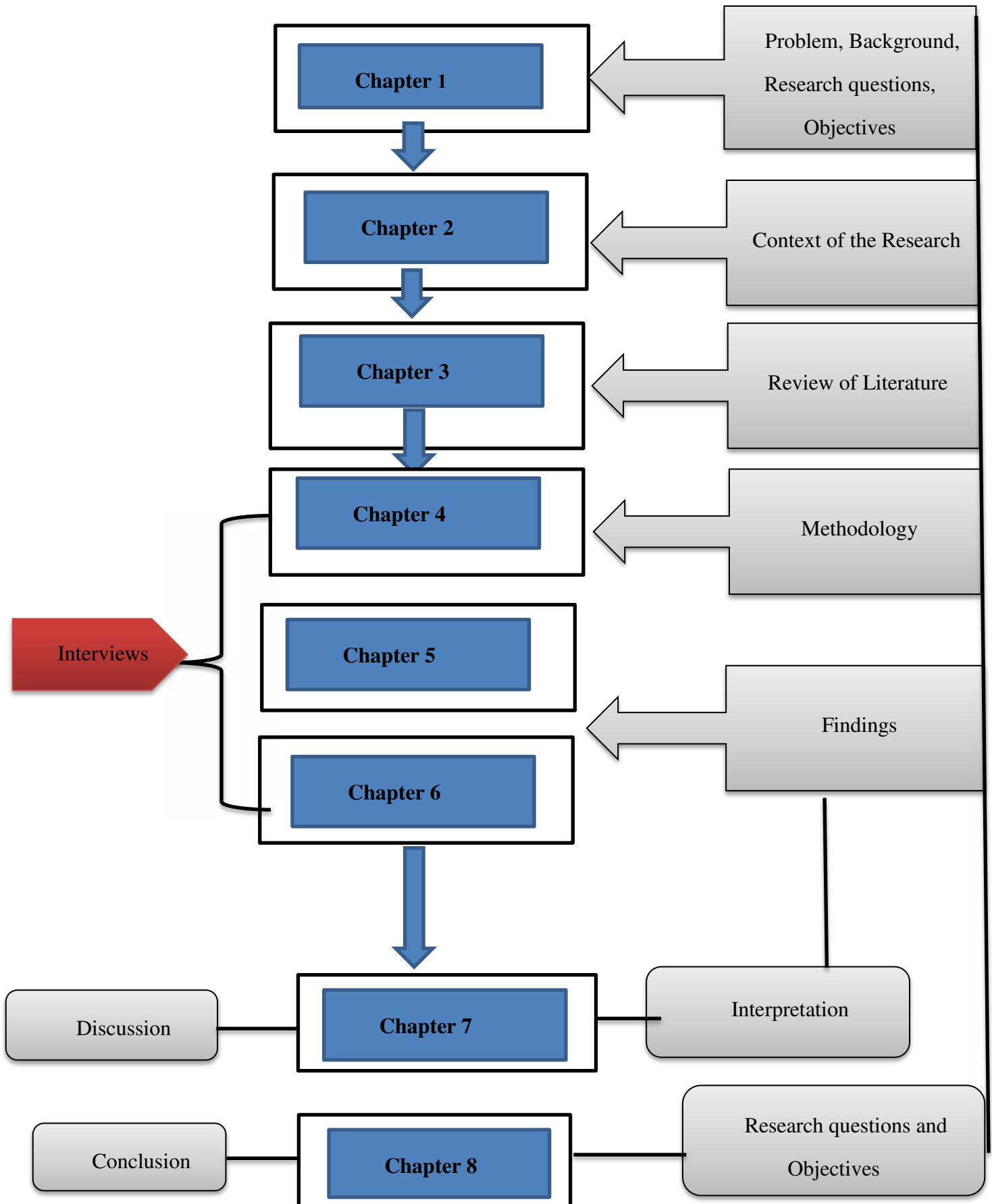
The findings of this research are presented in Chapters Five and Six. Chapter Five presents the interpretation of findings related to the current practices of HRP in the MoE. The objective of this chapter is to provide an explanation as to how the MoE conducts

HRP and the outcomes of this process. Chapter Six presents the findings on the external and internal factors influencing HRP in the MoE.

Chapter Seven, is a critical chapter that interprets the study's results and draws conclusion from this qualitative study. This chapter includes the discussion around the key findings presented in Chapters Five and Six, with consideration given to their comparison with the perspectives in the literature in order to answer questions three.

Chapter Eight, the final chapter, presents the summary of the main findings, and it is the concluding chapter. Major findings are highlighted in this chapter; it summarises the research outcomes according to the research objectives. The chapter also contains major recommendations for HRP at MoE, and contains suggestions for research and practices. Figure 1.1 on the next page summarises the organisation of the chapters.

Figure 1.1: Organisation of the Thesis



1.8 Summary

This chapter has introduced the reader to a study which has examined HRP in the MoE in Oman. Key elements of the literature review, the methodological approach and the importance of the research have been outlined. The key research questions have been identified, and the organisation of the thesis introduced. The next chapter provides a contextual overview for the case study.

2 Chapter Two: The Context of the Study

One of the unique features of this study is its location in the Middle Eastern Sultanate of Oman (Oman). This chapter provides key contextual information about Oman, its location, population, traditional history, political system, economy and labour market. It then provides detail on the public sector in Oman, the civil service and its employees as well as the case study organisation the Ministry of Education. The final section of the chapter includes contextual information about the adoption of HRM practices in Oman, including what is known as ‘Omanisation’, a policy of increasing the employment and skills of Omani nationals which is in keeping with similar policies in other developing countries.

2.1 Location

The Sultanate of Oman is a developing country which occupies the south-eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula. Its beaches extend from the Strait of Hormuz in the north to the Republic of Yemen in the south. Oman occupies an area of approximately 309,500 km², and is the third largest country in the Arabian Peninsula. Three seas surround Oman: the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. Oman shares borders with four countries: the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia in the west, the Republic of Yemen in the south, and Iran in the north (see Figure 2.1) (Kamel, 2006). This location has given Oman a pivotal role throughout history, in political campaigns and, regional conflicts, and for the access it offers to Asian, Arabic, and African markets (Ministry of Tourism, 2015).

Figure 2.1: Geographic Location of Oman



Source: <http://www.omaninfo.om/>

2.2 Population

According to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the total population of Oman is estimated at 4,168,329, comprising 2,342,831 Omanis and 1,825, 498 expatriates (NCSI, 2015). The gender split is 50.5% males and 49.5 % females. The largest age-specific segment is the 25–29-year age group, which constitutes 17% of the total Oman’s population. This means that Oman is a relatively young society. The total number of government employees in the civil service is 126,134, with Omanis accounting for 111,845 and expatriates 14,289. The majority of Omanis are Arab and live mostly in the desert and coastal areas of the country. By contrast, in the national capital Muscat and the surrounding areas, there is a mix of Indians, Pakistanis, Africans, and Iranians who migrated to Oman in the early 20th century when oil was discovered in the region (Cavendish, 2007). Arabic is the official language of Oman, and English is usually used as a second language for international business and tourism.

2.3 A Brief History of Oman

Oman's history stretches back thousands of years. The conversion to Islam occurred in the 7th century. From the 9th century BC onwards the Arabs started migrating to Oman. During the 11th and 12th centuries Oman was controlled by the Seljuk Empire. They were expelled in 1154 when the Nabhani dynasty came to power and ruled Oman until 1470. Due to the strategic location of Oman on trade routes to the east, Portugal dominated the region around Muscat between 1507 and 1650. By the mid-17th century, under the Imam's leadership, Omani tribes drove the Portuguese out of Muscat (Ahmed, 2001). In the late 17th century, the leader of Oman, Saif bin Sultan, began a process of expansion down the east coast of Africa. During that period, Oman became an important trading station for maritime trade and its ports dotted along the coast of the peninsula. Thereafter it fell to Ottoman Turks, but in 1741, the leader Ahmad ibn Sa'id forced them out, and today the descendants of Sultan Ahmad rule Oman. On 23 July 1970, Sultan Qaboos ascended to the throne. Since this time, Oman has improved the people's quality of living and transformed Oman from an impoverished Bedouin land into a prosperous nation (Owtram, 2004).

2.4 Political system

The system of government in Oman is a hereditary Sultanate in which succession passes to a male heir. Sultan Qaboos bin Said is a current the Head of State and Prime Minister. The central Government is located in the capital Muscat. Oman is divided into 11 administrative areas which are called governorates: they are Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Buraimi, Al Wusta, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Dhofar, Musandam, and Muscat. Each governorate has a governor who is a Representative of the Sultan. Each Governorate in turn is divided into districts called willaya. There are 61 willaya in Oman (Stöckli, 2011). As stated in the Royal Decree number 114/2011, the purpose of this division is to stimulate economic development in

the country and facilitate the deployment of services across the country (Oxford Business Group, 2012).

2.5 Economy

Oman's economy is heavily dependent on oil revenue as the main sources of income. The country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2013 was OR 11,2 billion approximately USD \$29 billion and GDP per capita was USD \$26,519. Oil and gas provide 84% of the General State Budget revenue (NCSI, 2015). The currency of Oman is the Omani Rial (OR), which is pegged to the US dollar at 1 Rial = 2.895 dollar. This means that the currency fluctuates in line with the US dollar. Economic and financial policies in the country are largely linked to oil revenues, due to dependence on oil as a major source of funding for development programs. Thus, changes in the price and availability of oil can have a significant impact on the growth of the Oman's economy and other activities (Al Hamadi, Budhwar, & Shipton, 2007). Due to a decline in oil production and rapid increase in population, the Government of Oman has drawn up a development plan focusing on diversification, industrialisation and privatisation (Hvidt, 2015). This Five-Year Plan is the initial stage of a longer term plan set to further develop and grow the economy of the country; it is named the Future Vision Plan (Hvidt, 2015). This plan aims to reduce the oil sector's contribution to GDP to 9% by 2020. The development of Oman's human resources is a key component of the plan to achieve the diversification strategy (Budhwar & Mellahi, 2006). The plan includes policies established by the Government to create more jobs in order to provide job opportunities for the increasing number of Omani job seekers; another objective is upgrading of the skills of the Omani workforce through improvements in technical education, vocational training and higher education, which are discussed later under Omanisation (Sultanate of Oman, & the International Labour Organisation, 2010).

2.6 Labour market

Oman's labour market, as with many of the countries in the Gulf region, has been shaped by factors such as an increasingly younger working age population, a growing dependence on non-national workforce, both skilled and unskilled, and the demand for technological skills (Zerovec & Bontenbal, 2011). Oman is considered a labour importing country; the Government tends to import Asian workers from several countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (DE BEL-AIR, 2015). The reasons for this are: the lower cost of such important labour; the ease of dismissing migrant workers; the perception that migrant workers are more efficient obedient and manageable, as well as culturally less threatening to the status-quo. Most Omani nationals rely primarily on the public sector for employment, while foreign workers are mostly employed in the private sector (Randeree, 2012). Most Omanis prefer government jobs as these are seen as more secure and stable than private jobs, and considered to bring better compensation and prestige (Al Ali, 2008). In Oman, around 41.2% of the population is under the age of 15 and 53.9% are in the 15-60 year bracket. Statistics reveal that every year almost 30,000 students successfully finish high school and are ready to become involved in the job market (Das & Gokhale, 2009). Nevertheless, Omani youth demonstrates a comparatively high unemployment rate, which represents a major challenge to the government. According to the Gulf Research Centre report, the unemployment rate in Oman has reached 15% (De Bel-Air, 2015). In order to reduce dependence on foreign labour and to tackle unemployment, the Government introduced the Omanisation policy, which aims to replace expatriates with qualified nationals in the labour force. The Government of Oman started implementing the Omanisation policy in the public sector in the late 1980s, whereas, the Omanisation policy was introduced to the private sector in 1995 within a comprehensive national strategy (Zerovec & Bontenbal, 2011). Despite these efforts the Government is still heavily dependent on expatriate labour due to the lack of a highly skilled and educated national labour force. Even though the Government of Oman has devised a series of initiatives to contain the unemployment crisis, many organisations struggle to implement effective strategies to achieve the objectives of these

initiatives. For instance, there is an imbalance in the labour force in the public sector owing to supply exceeding demand. A survey by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (2015) reveals that this is because the majority of Omani nationals prefer working in the government sector due to the better working conditions. This in turn has led to problems in trying to achieve the goal of ‘Omanisation’ (providing job opportunities for nationals) in the private-sector. For example, at the end of 2014, the Omanisation ratio in the private sector was 10.6% which was well below the target of 25% as targeted in the country’s Five-Year Plan (2011-2015). On the other hand, many studies and reports indicate that foreign workers are favoured by the private sector (Al Lamki, 2000; Budhwar & Mellahi, 2006), and the latest employment statistics published by the NCSI indicate that expatriates make up 89.2% of the private-sector workforce (NCSI, 2015). One possible explanation could be that hiring expatriates is relatively inexpensive for private sector organisations. This constitutes a challenge for the government to increase the number of Omanis in the private sector (Moideenkutty, Al Lamki, Murthy, 2011). A discussion of this Omanisation policy and its impact on HRM can be found later in this chapter.

2.7 The Public Sector and the Civil Service in Oman

The public sector is that part of government concerned with providing various services to the public. In recent times, public and government agencies across the world have been under intense pressure to provide more responsive and proactive public services; the Oman’s public-sector is no exception (Rajasekar & Khan, 2013). Given the expansion of services and creation of employment opportunities for Omanis in various government departments, Oman’s leadership has realised that development of the public sector is necessary to drive better outcomes (Swales & Al Fahdi, 2011). The expanding role of the public sector has been driven mainly by infrastructure projects such as those involving communication, power, water, and education (International Business Publications, 2009). These projects are undertaken by working in partnership with the private-sector. The motivation for this approach is the Government of Oman’s desire to diversify the country’s

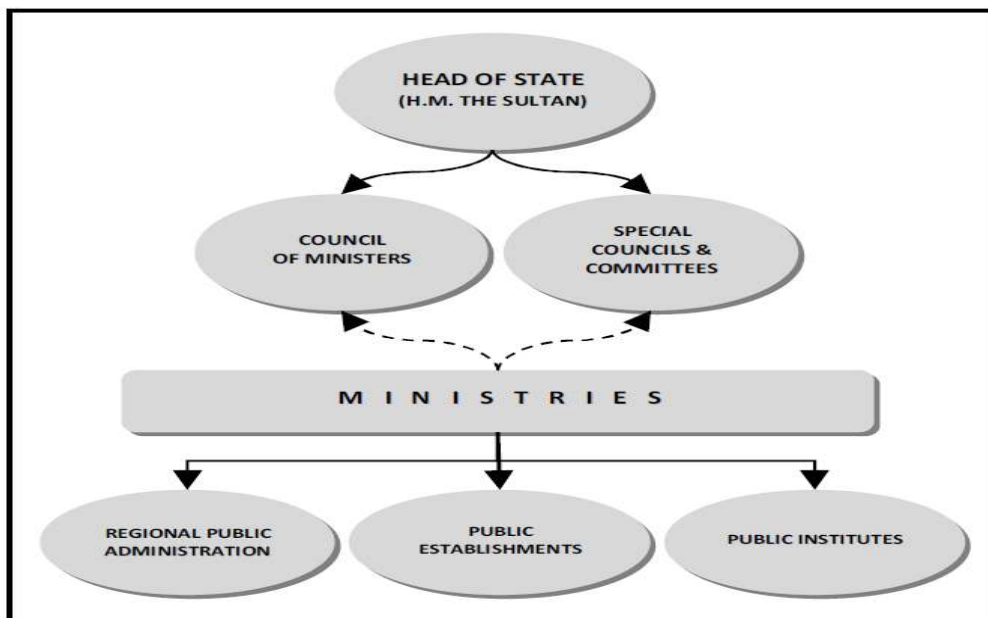
economy and to overcome administrative and technical problems facing the public sector (Al Lamki, 2000). To achieve this goal, a policy of privatisation has been adopted under Royal Decree number 77/2004 (International Business Publications, 2009). Privatisation projects have taken place in many spheres of the public sector such as banking, insurance, tourism and electricity (International Business Publications, 2009). This strategy reflects the Government's attempts to shift from a centralised government controlled operation to one of competition and freedom (Ambinder, De Silva, & Dewar, 2000). However, recent studies (e.g. Al Balushi, 2008; Baporikar & Shah, 2012) indicate that job candidates are unable to acquire skills and knowledge to the level required for implementation of the management techniques utilised by private organisations. This means that the Government of Oman needs to upgrade the skills and education of its workforce and increase its pool of skilled and educated workers to position itself better in the global market.

There is a diversity of experience among Arab countries in relation to the formulation of regulations, policies, and management. Civil Service structure varies among these countries in terms of the distribution of authority within that structure (Al Obthani, Omar, & Bakri., 2013). Middle Eastern organisational structures are mainly centralised, and extremely bureaucratic. Authority within organisations is confined to the top management, which means that decision-making power is also confined to this group (Al Sawafi, 2012). The organisational structure of human resource functions in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member countries is also subject to a centralised system managed by government. This centralisation of decision making in-turn affects all human resource activities and work progress, including planning, recruitment, selection, and training (Al Sawafi, 2012).

Al Obthani et al. (2013) provide a model of the Omani government administrative system. This model consists of six organisational clusters: Council of Ministers, Special Councils and Committees, the Ministries, Public Establishments, Regional Public Administration, and Public Institutes. Figure 2.2 below indicates that His Majesty (HM), the Sultan, is the

Head of State and he manages the Government through two types of councils: the Council of Ministers and various special purpose councils and committees. These councils are formed by various ministers, who are members representing their seats according to their specialties and expertise. These are followed by Ministries, which are organised into three main entities – Regional Public Administration, Public Establishments and Public Institutes. The ministries, in turn, perform their role based on the authority granted to them in the decision-making of the public organisation in each of the three entities.

Figure 2.2: The Government of Oman’s Administrative System



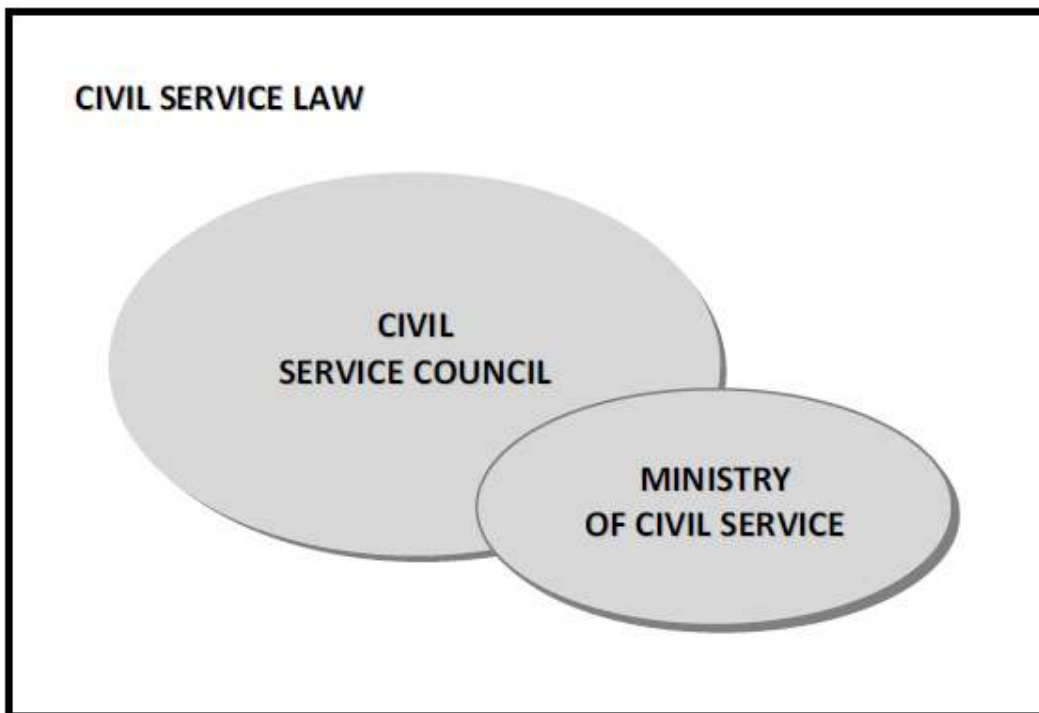
Source: (Al Obthani et al., 2013, p.57)

2.7.1 Civil Service Sector

Staff employed in the public sector are referred to as civil service employees, civil servants or the civil service (Al Obthani et al., 2013). The current practices of the civil service are driven from by changes necessitated within the GCC by factors relating to the political, economic, and cultural aspects of the existing environment (Al Obthani et al., 2013). The GCC comprises the following countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman. The administrative system

of Oman's civil service operates through the interdependence of the three main entities, (i.e. MCS, the Civil Service Council (CSC), and the body of Civil Service Law (CSL)). These entities share and carry out civil service activities, and establish the general policies of the civil service and the set of rules and regulations that guide the conduct of such the civil service sector, as illustrated in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: The Civil Service System in the Sultanate of Oman



2.8 The Ministry of Civil Service

The Ministry of Civil Service in Oman is a government body established in 1988 to supervise the implementation of civil service law and regulations by all government units (MCS, 2015). Civil service rules include the important general rules and standards that, constitute a guide for practices and job descriptions for all members of the civil service working to achieve set national development goals (Nyameh & James, 2013). The number of government agencies that fall under the umbrella of the civil service is 34. By the end of 2015, the total number of civil servants was 186,386, representing 86.3% of the workforce (MCS, 2015). The majority of civil service employees are employed in the

Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, representing 69.9% of the total. As a public organisation, the MCS exercises the following roles (MCS, 2015):

- Examining and reviewing the policies and general plans of the civil service and presenting them to the CSC.
- Formulating and implementing the policies and general plans of the civil service, especially within regard to employment within the public sector.
- Updating and proposing civil service laws and regulations.
- Participating in the design of organisational structures of units for the state administration.

2.8.1 Civil Service Law

Oman's Civil Service Law has passed through several stages of development. The modernisation of civil service law was essential to address the new needs of the dynamic nature of the society (Al Obthani et al., 2013). The new body of civil service law was established in 1997 by a specialist group, based on the formulation of the civil service laws in Egypt and other Arab countries (Al Hamadi et al., 2007). In 1980 a Royal Decree, number 8/80, was issued to make the required amendments to the CSL. In 1984 another Royal Decree, 52/84, was issued, creating the separate regulation that still governs civil service entities today. The Civil Service Law Act of 2004 was also recently amended under Royal Decree number 120 of 2004. The main features of the amendment include:

- Basic civil service terminology
- Objectives of the civil service entities
- Job distribution and description
- Recruitment policies
- Employee code of conduct
- Assessment policies
- Work benefits

- Work conditions
- After-service conditions

The main objective of the Civil Service Law reforms has been to operationalise good HRM practice in the public sector. These reforms have highlighted the role and behaviour of public sector employees and how employees will be treated and rewarded by their organisations (Common, 2011). The Civil Service Law reforms have focused on developing competencies and upgrading the skills of public-sector employees (Al Hamadi et al., 2007), this has been implemented by planning, executing, and assessing their annual training activities (Rajasekar & Khan, 2013). According to a study by the Ministry of Education and the World Bank (2012), the public sector has become attractive for both Omanis and expatriates. For instance, more than 60% of expatriates working in Oman's civil service have at least a university degree (MoE & the World Bank, 2012).

National legislation and regulation are frequently cited by Omani employees as a factor that has a direct influence on HR practices (Mamman & Al Kulaiby, 2014). It is likely that this outcome is related to the fact that HR departments and HR practice in the public sector are required to conform strictly to CSL dictates. Al Hamadi et al., (2007) believe that the CSL will continue to influence HRM policies and practices. This view has been confirmed in recent studies on HR practice in Oman, which have showed that the current CSL hinders the development and changes recommended by HRM professionals (Al Sawafi, 2012; Mamman et al., 2014; Swailes & Al Fahdi, 2011).

2.9 The Case Study Organisation: The Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education is the ministry responsible for many aspects of education in Oman. Its central office is located in the capital, Muscat. When HM Sultan Qaboos became Sultan (the ruler) in 1970, the MoE was established to spread education across all geographical regions of Oman. To achieve this goal, the MoE made every effort to provide all requirements and mechanisms (MoE, 2015) to do so. The provision of modern

education became a top priority for the Government. This is reflected in the following excerpt from the royal speech of HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said's speech on the occasion of Oman's second National Day, 18 November 1972:

Education was my great concern, and I saw that it was necessary to direct efforts to spread education. We have given the Ministry of Education the opportunity and supplied it with our capabilities to break the chains of ignorance. Schools have been opened regardless; the important thing is that there should be education, even under the shadow of trees. (Pakistan American Foundation, 2000)

Since that time significant efforts have been made to ensure the provision of education across all geographic areas of Oman. Education in Oman has therefore witnessed major development, in terms of scope and spread. Table 1 illustrates the achievements during 40 years of rapid expansion of education services with a dramatic increase in the number of available schools, students and teachers from 1970 to 2010. In terms of student numbers, dramatic is no exaggeration, with 909 students enrolled in 1970 to 531,393 students enrolled in 2010. The growth in the number of schools is similar: in 1970, there were three schools but by 2010 that number had increased to 1,040. Linked to this, the number of teachers also increased dramatically, rising from 30 in 1970, to 44,506 by 2010 (MoE, 2011).

Table 2.1: Number of Schools, Students, Teachers in Oman, 1970 - 2010.

Year	School	Students	Teacher
1970	3	909	30
1980	373	106032	5150
1990	779	355986	15121
2000	993	554845	26416
2010	1,040	531,393	44,506

Source: (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.37)

In terms of the legal framework, the royal decrees, goals and policies set by government are the underpinnings by means of which the MoE exercises its functions. These include specification of the MoE's roles and responsibilities in establishing education norms and standards. The Ministry has been charged with the following functions (MoE, 2015):

- Studying and proposing educational policy for school education
- Developing plans and projects for the implementation of educational policy adopted in the light of economic, social, scientific and technical development requirements
- Disseminating basic school education and post-basic education according to the principle of equal educational opportunities for all citizens in all governorates and regions of the Sultanate.
- Encouraging private-sector investment in school education and pre-school education under the supervision of the MoE.
- Identifying mechanisms and means to strengthen the relationship between home and school.
- Undertaking studies and research aimed at identifying the educational needs of learners and proposing mechanisms for development.
- Setting standards for teaching and learning, taking into account the continuous evolution in teaching and learning.

The Five-Year Plan provides the basics for the MoE's annual budget, which is submitted to the Supreme Council for Planning (SCFP) for approval prior to being forwarded to the Ministry of Finance (MoF), which is responsible for the financial resources of the MoE. Each year, the SCFP examines the extent to which the MoE meets its objectives, using key performance indicators for the five-year plan (MoE, 2011). At the time of the research and writing of this thesis, the MoE Five-Year Plan, the eighth in the series, covered the period 2011-2015. The goals of this plan included (MoE, 2011):

- Developing education systems according to quality standards
- Development of educational plans and curricula
- Expansion of technology in education
- Raising the efficiency of human resources
- Providing building needs and essential equipment

MoE employees account for more than 50% of the total number of employees of the civil services in Oman with 92% of them Omani and 8% non-Omani (MoE, 2011).

Some relevant statistics include:

- Just over half (52.9%) of the country's total number of Omanis civil service employees work in the MoE.
- More than a third (35.8%) of the country's total non-Omani civil service employees work in the MoE.
- Of the total number of male employees in Oman's civil service, 40.5% work in the MoE.
- Of the total number of female employees in Oman's civil service, a high percentage (64.6%) work in the MoE.

The overall percentage of Omanisation in the MoE is 92%, compared to 85.1% in other civil services units. This means that the MoE plays an essential and lead role in the process of Omanisation with regard to civil service establishments. The range of factors that influences HR management within the MoE common to many other organisations in Oman.

2.10 Key Factors Determining HRM Practices in Oman

Three fragmented elements that have a significant influence on society and culture, and therefore also on business practices in Oman, are contained within the triangle of Islam, tribal clans, and family. Oman follows the Islamic system of law called Sharia, which is

based on the Koran (The Holy Book). Islam plays a vital role in shaping a moral framework and in underpinning fundamental principles in all aspects of the culture of Oman. Therefore, religious scholarship and knowledge of the Koran command respect and recognition, particularly in employment and in the public sector (Cavendish, 2007). According to Monir (1997), decision making and the management-employee relationship in many organisations in the Arabic countries of the Middle East are based on Islamic traditions and the Koran. This means that HRM practices are required to conform to Islamic principles and guidelines. In Oman, when the Government wants to enact new legislation and policy, it must ensure that they are consistent with Islamic principles. Al Hamadi et al, (2007) found that among other factors, Omani employees accorded great importance to religion in national institutions.

Tribal culture and family also play an important role in a shaping a person's value and behaviour among countries falling within the GCC framework. Tribal culture often glorifies the family, personal leadership, status, and authority (Budhwar & Mellahi, 2006). One of the most common tools deployed is the Wasta (personal connection), a strategy that is used by the elite to give family members more opportunity to obtain a promotion (Moblely, Wang, & Li, 2011). In Oman, tribal connections and family are a significant part of the national culture (Al Hamadi et al., 2007).

Oman is an example of a country that tends to have a highly collective culture within the group (tribe or extended family), and yet is highly individualist when relating with the out-group (non-kin and guest/migrant workers) (Al Hamadi et al., 2007). For instance, out-group interactions are limited to and focus on an individual's achievements. Leadership follows the same out-group standards when dealing with employees (Reiser, 2010). On the other hand, Oman's collective culture aims to maintain the reputation of the members of the family clan in comparison to other groups. By contrast, the policies of organisations in Western countries are often based on a combination of factors including the national culture, government policy, economic conditions, trade unions, and the legal system (Moblely et al., 2011).

Moideenkutty, Al Lamki and Murthy (2011) agree with this view of the significance of cultural orientation in Oman. He investigated the cultural orientation of the Omani workforce and its relationship with the performance of HRM policy, and practices and found that Omanis manifest have a stronger orientation towards a collective view and also towards hierarchy than towards individualism. The prevalent employment trends in Oman are distinctly different from the fundamental employment dynamics in Western countries. In Oman, family loyalties have been found to prevail over individualism (Aycan, Al Hamadi, Davis, & Budhwar, 2007).

Khan (2011) attempted to comprehend the dynamics of HRM and assessed the various different HRM models in the context of Oman. He argued that studying HRM models without analysing regional and socio-contextual dimensions fails to take into consideration some important factors in what constitutes a complicated process in countries like Oman. He tried to explain the model of HRM that best fits the context of Oman, using the following two models: convergence and divergence (Sparrow, Schuler, & Jackson, 1994). The convergence approach is based on normative statements drawn from the HRM model and what it should look like and is strongly influenced by American researchers, while supporters of the divergence approach believe that the HRM model should be embedded in the national and economic context. Khan (2011) concluded that the Oman model cannot be classified into either the convergence or divergence model as there is a lack of knowledge and competency available to understand the social context factor. These findings are consistent with Katou, Budhwar, and Al Hamadi (2010), who examined the influence of national culture and national institutions on HRM practices in Oman by means of a survey-based investigation using a sample of 712 respondents employed by six Omani organisations. The research findings indicated that the majority of Omani employees believed that the expatriate workforce had the most significant impact on their organisation's HRM policies and practices followed by their religion.

It is evident from the earlier discussion that in order to understand and develop HRM practice in Oman, it is imperative to have knowledge and awareness of the terms and conditions that lead to such practice. Generally, HRM practices in Oman are more likely to be influenced by social factors such as cultural values, the political environment and economic issues, as well as environmental factors.

2.10.1 Human Resource Strategies in Oman

Recent years have seen evidence of significant development in Oman overseen by HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The development process depends on strategies related to sound rationale and methodology which formulate policy and set the foundations for achieving set goals through specific programs such as Vision 2020 and Omanisation. The next section of this chapter outlines each of these strategies.

2.10.1.1 Vision 2020

The first long-term development strategy was implemented from 1970 to 1995. The initial program utilised the profits of the oil resources industry to complete infrastructure ventures (in the health, education, and communications sectors), increase the capacity of the national economy, and improve the private sector (NCSI, 2015). During this period, Oman faced two main challenges to future growth. Firstly, oil output in Oman decreased. This had a negative impact on the capability of the government to employ Omani nationals. Secondly, the skills required by the labour market were not evident in the growing population of employable youth (Gonzalez et al., 2008). To overcome these challenges, in 1995 the Government of Oman organised a consultative conference called Vision 2020, which was the first comprehensive plan of a country's economy and social development in the Arab world (Cordesman & Al Rodhan, 2007). Through Vision 2020, the Government aimed to upgrade the nation's human resources, establish an efficient and competitive private-sector, and diversify the economy away from its dependence on oil resources (Gonzalez et al., 2008). In fact, the Government attempted to diversify the

economy through investing more in education and developing its human resources. According to Al Hamadi and Budhwar (2006), the Oman government's commitment to developing its human resources through education and training stems from several factors. Firstly, the government seeks to reduce its dependency on oil to 9% by 2020. Secondly, the Government is trying to address the demographic imbalance in its workforce, which is dominated by foreigners. Thirdly, the Government believes that a skilled Omani work force is required to participate in the industrial sector to increase the level of its contribution to GDP by 2020.

To achieve these long term goals, the leadership in Oman established a number of formal five-year plans to create a diversified economy, promote sustainable growth, encourage private sector development, and train high quality human resources (Gonzalez et al., 2008). The five-year plans reiterate the importance of human resource development as one of their core objectives (1995-2020). Currently, Oman is in the fifth phase of its Vision 2020 long term strategic plan (1995-2020). Diversification of revenue streams, creation of employment opportunities for Omani youth, balanced growth, and development of higher education and healthcare facilities remain priorities for the current five-year plan. The Government of Oman continues its important investments in HR through training and education programs with a great focus on building skills that are necessary to perform in the workplace.

2.10.1.2 Omanisation

Nationalisation is one of the policies also also has a major influence on HRM in the public sector of many developing countries. Nationalisation is a policy used in developing countries with the aim of replacing non-national with national labour (Kapiszewski, 2000). One of the pressing reasons that prompted the GCC to adopt this policy is the disparate composition of the workforce, and the many young nationals seeking employment (Al Lamki, 2000). The GCC adopted different localisation strategies for notational labour, including wage subsidies and employment targets as well as fees,

charges and quotas on foreign labour to curb non-national employment (Al Ali, 2008). Oman is viewed as a country that has experience with localisation policies (Omanisation), and is known for achieving a constitutional GCC agreement, which was primarily designed to increase its citizen workforce (Al Lamki, 2000). Omanisation is one of the strategic projects created by the Government of Oman to pave the way for Omani national labour to engage in both public and private-sector jobs. The policy of Omanisation is similar to that promoted by the GCC, in terms of the following strategies: minimisation of unemployment, creation of employment opportunities for Omanis, and the provision of the training and qualifications needed by the labour market (Swales & Al Fahdi, 2011). Omanisation was adopted as an integrated national policy within Vision 2020. Its objectives were to be achieved through the following strategies:

1. Providing Omani employees with the training and qualifications to adapt to labour market demands.
2. Supporting women's participation in the labour force.
3. Increasing the efficiency of Omani labour (NCSI, 2015).

Omanisation related achievements can be identified in both the public and private sectors. The first phase of this project was introduced in 1988 and one of the goals was to replace the unskilled non-national labour force with Omani labour. Through its Five-Year development plans, the Government of Oman has made a concerted effort to support Omanisation schemes and incentives in order to promote its initiative in both the public and private sectors. For example, in 2007, country's public-sector achieved the highest employment rate of nationals (85.5%), compared with the GCC average (Swales & Al Fahdi, 2011).

Although the Omanisation project achieved great success, assessments of the Omanisation policy by a number of researchers have revealed significant issues that have hindered the implementation of the strategy as planned. Al Lamki (1998) investigated the barriers to Omanisation as perceived by 95 senior graduating students at the Sultan Qaboos University. She identified that barriers to Omanisation prevailed in a number of

areas: training and development, salaries, retirement plans, security, worker's compensation, educational assistance, holidays, sick leave, and working hours. This means that much more needs to be done for government to achieve Omanisation objectives through its plans and programmes. A study conducted by the World Bank and the MoE reveals inadequate educational preparation of Omani graduates from Omani higher education institutions (MoE & the World Bank, 2012). For example, Oman's graduates showed poor skills in a number of areas including: teamwork, public speaking, problem solving, and critical thinking, while they also lacked a strong work ethic and willingness to take responsibility. Some authors (Al Lamki, 1998 & 2000; Al Maskery, 1992) highlight the importance of establishing effective communication between higher educational institutions and employing organisations with a view to integrating labour market requirement into coursework at an appropriate level. Al Kkindi's study (2007) of educational planning in Oman highlighted the gap between strategic planning and implementation in the Omanisation project. He identified the major problems in higher education as a lack of capacity in institutions to accommodate the outcomes of public education and the lack of compatibility between output and labour market needs. These findings are consistent with Al Maskery's (1992) findings, which showed that the government sector was unable to employ Omani nationals.

Even though the Government of Oman has devised a series of initiatives to contain the unemployment crisis, many organisations struggle to implement effective strategies to achieve the objectives of these initiatives. For instance, there is an imbalance in the labour force in the public sector owing to supply exceeding demand. A survey by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (2015) reveals that this is because the majority of Omani nationals prefer working in the government sector due to better working conditions. This in turn has led to problems in trying to achieve the goal of 'Omanisation' (providing job opportunities for nationals) in the private-sector. For example, at the end of 2014, the Omanisation ratio in the private sector was 10.6% which was well below the target of 25% as outlined in the country's Five-Year Plan (2011-2015).

It seems that the Omanisation policy is merely a means of increasing the quantity of Omani employees, without taking into account the quality of these employees.

2.11 Summary of Chapter Two

This chapter has provided the context in which this study takes place. The main characteristics of Oman discussed include its geography, economy, people, labour market, political system, public-sector, civil service system, and the MoE. This chapter has also presented the key factors determining HRM practices in Oman. The following chapter will explore the literature in relation to HRP practices.

3 Chapter Three: Review of the Literature

The aim of this study was to investigate existing HRP practices in Oman's public-sector. The literature review comprises nine sections. The first section explains how HRP is a part of the HRM functions within an organisation. It will then be shown how HRP can contribute to achieving competitive advantage for an organisation, particularly from the RBV perspective. The second section presents a definition and the importance of HRP. This is followed by an overview of the development of HRP and then an examination of the interface between the NPM approach and HRP. The fifth section highlights the factors that influence HRP practices, and how those factors contribute to effective HRP. A review of the existing literature relating to good HRP practices and models of HRP is presented in sections six and seven, respectively. Then studies investigating HRP in Oman are highlighted to identify the gaps in the literature. The final part of this chapter focuses on the conceptual framework and contributions of this study.

3.1 HRP as an HRM fundamental

One of the most pervasive and essential management processes that helps an organisation to achieve success is identification of a management strategy (Mittenthal, 2002). Competitive advantage can be obtained by any organisation that uses both physical resources, including technology and equipment, and intellectual sources including individual knowledge, skills and abilities (Ismail, Rose, Uli, & Abdullah, 2012). Many organisations seek to create a truly competitive advantage by focusing on their people (Munteanu, 2015). HRM is undertaken as part of the management process that is responsible for ensuring that the organisation's human resources gain a competitive advantage (Duke & Udono, 2012). According to Inyang (2011), HRM can be defined as policies, practices, and procedures that relate to the management and development of an organisation's people. The functions of HRM consists of HRP, job design and analysis, recruitment and selection, performance management, staff development, rewards management, remuneration management, employment relations, employee health, safety

and welfare (Nankervis , Compton, Baird, Coffey, & Shields, 2013; Randhawa, 2013). It is clear that HRP is a core activity of HRM (Anyim et al., 2012). This is because the main function of HRP is to ensure the right quality and quantity of human resources within an organisation are available when and where they are needed. Thus, all actions involving the continuous environmental scanning and the reviewing of an organisation's strategies, objectives and policies will be captured by HRP (Deb, 2006; Härtel, Fujimoto, Strybosch, & Fitzpatrick, 2007; Randhawa, 2007).

In recent years, growing attention has been paid to the formulation of HR strategies and plans within the context of overall organisational strategies and objectives referred to as strategic human resource management (SHRM) (Guo, Brown, Ashcraft, Yoshioka, & Dong, 2011). SHRM has been defined as "The pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable an organisation to achieve its goal" (Boxall & Macky, 2009, p. 4). Within this context, HRP can be considered as a function of HRM. It seeks to achieve a linkage between HRM programs and an organisation's current and emerging mission and goals (Härtel et al., 2007; Jacobson, 2010; Mullins, 1996).

By adopting a strategic approach to HRM, HRP can be used to translate organisational strategic objectives into HR strategy and to match people to the strategic requirements of an organisation in both the short and long term (Colley & Price, 2010). In adopting HRP, an organisation analyses its current workforce to determine its future workforce needs and identifies the gaps between the future and the present based on its organisational strategic objectives (Ulfertsm et al., 2009). Ulrich (1992) reported three benefits from a link between organisational level strategic planning objectives and HRP. The first benefit is derived from the integration of strategic planning and HRP which leads to optimising the creation of competitive advantage for the organisation. The second benefit is the change created in the organisation's business system allowing it to become a more flexible business. The third benefit is associated with strategic unity. Creating competitive advantages and HR programs that are fully compatible with the strategic goals and

initiatives of an organisation will result in increasing the likelihood that all the organisation's strategic initiatives will be achieved.

Besides specific contextual factors, a set of structural and procedural conditions as a tool for effective adoption of HRP was specified in the literature. Within this context, HRP can be considered as a function, which seeks to achieve a linkage between HRM programs and an organisation's current and emerging mission and programmatic goals (Härtel et al., 2006; Jacobson, 2010; Mullins, 1996). Ozutku and Ozturkler (2009) stated that strategies are more effective when they are systematically coordinated by making efficient choices about HR practices that consistently support an organisation's strategy. Thus it is not surprising that the focus on linking HRP to strategy has become an overriding concern for HR professionals (Lam & Schaubroeck 1998).

The paradigmatic shift of HRM from the traditional to the strategic in the move to SHRM stimulated the application of concepts and theories from the broader strategy literature (Allen & Wright, 2006). Among these is the notion of the Resource Based View of the organisation (RBV). Growing acceptance that an organisation can obtain its competitive advantage from its internal resources spurred the integration of SHRM with RBV (Wright et al., 2001). RBV, a dominant theory of competitiveness states that internal resources that are valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable, can provide a sustained competitive advantages to the firm (Barney, Wright, & Ketchen, 2001; Wright et al., 2001). RBV posits that organisational resources must converge on four main criteria; they enable a firm to add value; they must be unique or rare among potential and current competitors; they must be imperfectly imitable; and competing organisations' resources should not be substitutable with other resources (Barney, 1991; Priem & Butler, 2001). According to this view, an organisation is able to achieve competitive advantage by building and developing its internal capabilities such as control systems, and human resource skills, knowledge, and behaviour.

The Strategic role of the Human Resource and its effects on an organisation's performance has been under the spotlight in recent years. A resource-based model of HRM developed by Boxall and Macky (1996) stated that HR owns responsibility for improving the effectiveness of organisations and is an important aspect for boosting business success. Besides, the role of HR functions has been categorised by Armstrong (2006) into two main dimensions: transactional and strategic. Transactional activities consist of the day to day service delivery aspects of HR such as recruitment, training, legal compliance, and dealing with people issues. However, strategic HR emphasises activities that contribute to the organisation's strategic goals

HRM literature has witnessed interest in the concept RBV in private firms being applied to public-sector organisations (Crilly et al., 2013). An important question here is, whether RBV concepts can be applied in public-sector organisations. Some researchers argue that this is problematic. Hansen (2007) claims that it is difficult for public-sector organisations to recognise the line of businesses they are in and the forces that are influential in that business. Furthermore, RBV focuses on competition while public organisations focus more on collaboration (Hansen, 2007). RBV stresses that in order for an organisation to gain a competitive advantage over other organisations, it is important that it is able to possess certain unique resources. Carmeli and Tishler (2004), indicate the existence of strong links between elements of the resources and a public organisations performance. Ferlie (2002) argues that RBV can be used in the public sector because elements of strategic resources used in private companies are also found in public-sector organisations. For instance, Carmeli and Tishler (2004) indicated that there is a positive relationship between elements of the resources and the performance of public organisations. Burton and Rycroft-Malone (2014) employed RBV concepts to analyse the impact of (often complex) quality improvement efforts in healthcare. They concluded that the concepts were helpful to understand the impact of complex quality improvement programs. According to RBV, the most efficient way for an organisation to gain a competitive advantage is for it to utilise its internal resources in the best possible manner (Hansen, 2007). Matthews and Shulman (2005) state that the efficient and effective

delivery and development of services for the benefit of the populace can be achieved by public-sector organisations. Popa, Dobrin, Popescu, and Draghici (2011) demonstrated that an advantage tends to be identified by public-sector organisations through differentiation between the types of competitive advantage. They strive to gain a competitive advantage by differentiating the unique characteristics and developing their basic skills that distinguish them from other public institutions. Therefore, using RBV theory in public-sector organisations is useful to provide a better understanding of how the inter sectoral transfer of HRM theories into public-sector organisations takes place.

In the field of HRM, RBV has significantly influenced the rapidly growing strategic aspects of the HRM function (Barney et al., 2001). It has contributed a theoretical connection between strategy and HRM by providing a greater understanding of the link between HRM and organisational performance (Mueller, 1996; Wright et al., 2001). The RBV theory suggests that human capital and specifically, employees' behaviour lead to a competitive advantage in an organisation (Pološki & Vidović, 2007). Sabiu, Tang, and Joarder (2016) argued that HRM practices can be considered a significant internal factor influencing organisational performance because they give employees the opportunity to perform through the effective utilisation of an internal resource base. Many HR researchers have provided evidence that supports the strong impact of HRM on organisational performance. A study by Quresh, Akbar, Khan, Sheikh, and Hijazi, (2010), for example, revealed a relationship between HRM practices and the financial performance of 46 banks in Pakistan. In another study, Lazim and Azizan (2010) found that HRM practices play a significant role in delivering business performance in the organisation. A more recent Middle Eastern study by Karami, Sahebalzamani, and Sarabi (2015) examined the influence of HR practices in private banks in an Iranian city concluded that a positive effect on organisational performance is enabled by applying suitable HR practices that correspond to an organisation's strategy. The study concluded that all tested HR practices have a positive relation to and impact on financial performance.

Considering the evidence underpinning the notion that HRP is a function of HRM, it is clear that HRP has the potential to be an influential factor for organisational performance and creates a competitive advantage. Budhathoki (2004) stated that “Organisational effectiveness depends on the performance of people working in the organisations, better people achieve better results” (p. 99). In other words, competitive advantage can be achieved through better utilisation of HRP practices. The concept of the HRP role in the creation of competitive advantage is predicated on the belief that the right number and the right kind of employees performing actions, at the right place at the right time, results in long-term benefits to the organisation (Ulfertsm et al., 2009). By creating greater competitiveness and critically helping an organisation to identify the areas that require extra efforts and in which it needs to excel, it has been argued that HRP is the most important aspect of HRM, in terms of its contribution to the overall success of an organisation (Lam & Schaubroeck 1998; Pieter & Grobler, 2005; Sinclair, 2004). The results of a study by Ogunrinde (2001) showed that firms engaged in HRP performed better than those that were not thus engaged. Leng (2005) reported a similar observation in an analytical study which examined the extent and effects of the implementation and development of HRP in a construction project. The study confirmed that HRP played a significant role in improving the project's performance and in facing the management of challenges such as a shortage of skilled employees, a transient workforce, and a lack of effective training and performance appraisals. Similarly, Abdullah (2009) attempted to investigate the relationship between five HRM practices (training and development, HRP, performance appraisal, employee security, and compensation) and performance in Malaysian private firms. They found that there is a significant positive relation between the five HRM practices and performance. Ali, Ahmad, and Iqbal (2012) purport that the best approach to applying the RBV concepts in HRP is the adoption of a proactive (instead of a reactive) approach. This requires translating the organisation's strategic objectives into HR plans. All HRP initiatives, therefore, need to be flexible to enable the organisation to meet the requirements of its objectives and create opportunities to be more responsive to external changes in the environment. According to Wright et al. (2001), since the RBV concept was outlined by Barney (1991) as a basic theoretical model for

sources of competitive advantage, it has emerged to become the most utilised theory within the HRM field as a rationale for empirical research and the development of theory. However, there is comparatively less attention given to this in the literature on RBV in public organisations than in the literature relating to private organisations.

3.2 Definition of HRP

HRP has multiple definitions, but the definition which has been identified as the most widely used and commonly known is that it is a process of having “The right number of people with the right competencies in the right jobs at the right time” (Stokker & Hallam, 2009, p. 562). IPMA describes HRP thus: “Strategic alignment of an organisation’s human capital with its business direction. It is a methodical process of analysing the current workforce, determining future workforce needs, identifying the gap between the present and future, and implementing solutions so the organisation can accomplish its mission, goals, and objectives” (Helton & Soubik, 2004, p. 460).

There are some similarities between these two definitions. Firstly, both are concerned with looking ahead and using systematic techniques to assess the extent to which an organisation will be able to meet its requirements for labour in the future. Freyens (2010) affirms that the focus of HRP involves taking steps to not only assess future human workforce needs but also to develop programs to meet those needs. Organisational forecasting requirements involve generating the numbers and quality of personnel that will be available or who are needed by the organisation in the future. In addition, HRP can still be viewed as a systematic technique for assessing the organisation's ability to meet its future needs for employees and the type of skills required by comparing these with the available workforce. According to Choudhury, (2007), HRP helps an organisation to have a clear strategy in the areas of workforce, resource, and management support, thereby helping the organisation to stay motivated and overcome frustrations and failure. Furthermore, both definitions highlight the need for HRP to link the organisation's human capital with its business plan to achieve its mission. The link between human

capital practices and programs, and strategies focuses on the need for strategic thinking, allowing for proactive initiatives to ensure a capable workforce to meet organisational objectives (Office of Management and Budget, 2001).

The study uses the definition adopted by IPMA. It provides a more comprehensive framework of HRP at an organisational level. It identifies that HRP needs to establish clear objectives in conjunction with the development and implementation of several programs, such as staffing and training to ensure that current employee strength and skills are available when needed (Ulfertsm et al., 2009). The IPMA definition also offers more details about the procedures and goals of HRP. It identifies largely similar elements for all HRP processes, including identifying the organisation's strategic direction, scanning the internal and external environments, understanding the current workforce, assessing future workforce needs, determining the gap, developing and implementing strategies to address the gap, and evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of those strategies (Anderson, 2004; Colley & Price, 2010; Jackson & Schuler, 1990; Sinclair, 2004).

3.3 The Importance of HRP

HRP plays an enormously important role in realising the organisation's goals as it involves having the right talent with the right skills, at the right time and for the right cost. The importance of HRP lies in its potential to identify organisational needs for skills and competencies for both present and future programs (Randhawa, 2007). HRP can use various methods to address current and expected workforce needs such as demographic analysis and retirement projections (Meisinger, 2007). Organisations need HRP to have the right systems in place to ensure that the organisation has the right job in place and obtains the right people for them (Freedman, 2009). HRP also aims to facilitate organisational effectiveness. For instance, HRP can involve the collection of data, which can be used to assess the effectiveness of a program and provide notice when revision is needed, such as in the area of employees' skills, interests and experience (Ulfertsm et al., 2009). HRP is also important to assist HR professionals to plan for change and mitigate

against sudden events. This can be achieved through HRP by developing a clear vision of their workforce requirements. It is apparent that HRP is more accurate as it depends on the prediction of several elements that are related to the HRM function, such as recruitment, retention, redeployment, leadership and employee development (Sullivan, 2002).

HRP activities provide the opportunity to frame decisions explicitly in terms of long-term strategies that then turn into effective outcome statements for the organisation. This is important for acquiring, developing, and retaining staff to achieve programmatic goals (Choudhury, 2007). HRP enables an organisation to adjust and quickly respond to current and emerging business requirements. For instance, by engaging in HRP, an organisation can formulate strategies for success through providing a set of useful inputs such as the type and number of current employees (Aswathappa, 2005). Achieving a balance between labour demand and supply is the most common cited benefit of HRP (Imison, Buchan, & Xavier, 2009). The demand side is concerned with expected trends in the labour market, while the supply side involves determining the method of job candidate placement and the position that will be occupied by candidates with the required qualifications (Snell & Bohlander, 2012).

To gain a better understanding of what HRP is, and how it has emerged, the next section will describe the evolution and development of HRP.

3.4 Evolution of Thinking on HRP

Since Adam Smith set out the notion of the division of labour in the 18th century, the need to determine the number of people who should perform a particular function has emerged (Lacerda, Spiegel, & Neto, Secundino, 2013). The literature review indicated that HRP theory has undergone substantial changes over the past three decades. Sinclair (2004) points out that during the 1960s and 1970s, HRP was the subject of growing interest. In this period, the world was experiencing stable economies and low

unemployment rates. HRP was primarily concerned with determining both the quantities and types of employees required (Bechet & Walker, 1993). HRP was officially called manpower planning until the late 1970s. In the early 1980s, the term manpower planning became human resource planning, which is in line with the HRM concept and thus HRP gained acceptance as a way of representing the positive view of human resources (Omoankhanlen, 2013). HRP remained one of the important aspects of HRM until the period of economic recession in the 1980s, a period during which companies ignored the importance of HRP (Sullivan, 2002). The reason for this was that HRP techniques used to conduct HR forecasting needs were based on complicated mathematical calculations, which hindered the flexibility of HRP to meet changing conditions (Parker & Caine, 1996). The availability of a wide range of quantitative techniques is ineffective if those techniques cannot be utilised by less numerate employees. Staff with the required qualifications were not always available and this was a challenge that potentially reduced the success of the existing form of HRP that used quantitative techniques (Pynes, 2004). Thus, much effort was directed towards developing tools with the flexible analytical power of the more traditional mathematical techniques (Parker & Caine, 1996).

In the 1990s, awareness of the importance of skills development due to continuous environmental change increased, and this led to HRP occupying the forefront of the HRM agenda (Cowling & Walters, 1990; Reilly, 1996). In addition to continuous improvement in HRP, a focused effort was put in to integrating HRP with an organisation's strategy to gain competitive advantage in the face of increasing global competition, product innovation, and technological development (Bechet & Walker, 1993; Cowling & Walters, 1990; Lam & Schaubroeck 1998); there was an increased emphasis on the important role of HRP in helping organisations face international competition and a more complex business environment. How an organisation can contribute towards achieving competitive advantage and organisational strategic objectives by developing more effective HRP practices is the current concern of experts and academics in this field (Ali, et al., 2012; Colley & Price, 2010; Curson, et al., 2010; Jacobson, 2010).

To ensure public organisations meet their current human resource needs including their readiness to address future trends and demands, major emphasis needs to be placed on HRP. The following section will shed light on HRP and new approaches to public-sector management.

3.5 New Public Management and HRP

This section is divided into two main parts. The first part explains what NPM is and the basic principles underlying this paradigm. The second part shows how NPM elements are used in HRM in general, and HRP in particular.

3.5.1 New Public Management

During the last two decades, the drivers of change, particularly financial pressures, prompted Western countries to shift the public sector from its traditional administration mode to become more competitive, and demanded that public administrators become more responsive to their customers' needs by reducing costs, increasing value for money, and increasing choice flexibility. This movement was broadly known as NPM (Groot & Budding, 2008). NPM is a perspective on organisational design within government, and is an administrative philosophy that aims to clarify the governmental agenda and authoritative decisions in a particular place and time (Kalimullah, Ashraf, & Ashaduzzaman, 2012). NPM is defined on the basis two paradigms, known as public choice and managerialism. Public choice is a modern field of discourse, which is more concerned with all levels of government rather than just management, whereas managerialism is a field of discourse that primarily relates to the private sector (Kalimullah et al., 2012). Borins (1995, p.12) defines NPM as "a normative conceptualisation of public administration consisting of several inter-related components: providing high quality services that citizens value; increasing the autonomy of public managers; rewarding organisation and individuals on the basis of whether they meet demanding performance targets; making available the human and technological resources

that managers need to perform well; appreciating the virtues of competition and maintaining an open-minded attitude about which public services should be performed by the private sector, rather than the public sector.

3.5.1.1 Principles of NPM from the viewpoint of Hood

Much of the literature is devoted to the search for principles that enable public sector organisations to improve the quality of their delivered goods and services. However, based on the evidence, the characteristics mentioned by Hood (1991) are the most frequently cited by authors and publications in the HRM field. These characteristics include:

Hands-on Professional Management: Managers need to be more proactive as opposed to reactive. In their day-to-day operations, modern public managers should have discretion to participate in decision-making. In contrast, in traditional public administration, managers had little or no discretion, and they implemented government policies in accordance with established rules and regulations. NPM considers professional managers as an important key to the development of the public sector.

Explicit Standards of Performance: Emphasis on performance evaluation allows focus on specific responsibilities which in turn enables public-sector bodies to implement those tasks efficiently and effectively. In the light of the performance measurement system, public-sector institutions can fulfil their responsibilities by committing to the spirit of continuous performance improvement in accordance with benchmarked levels and standards of service delivery.

Greater Emphasis on Output Controls: Under NPM, the focus of attention is shifted from processes to results. Public-sector institutions for too long were unsuccessful in providing quality service. Therefore, what the organisation actually achieves with the resources available is an important consideration for the proactive public manager.

Disaggregation of Public-sector Units: NPM champions a shift to disaggregation of units in the public sector. Based on NPM principles, using a decentralised structure facilitates improved quality of service from public-sector units. Organisations seeking to increase their efficiency are required to adopt the notion of disaggregation of bureaucratic units and decentralisation of bureaucracy. This is considered to be more efficient as the smaller units have more ability to set goals and work to achieve them more quickly and directly than they would in traditional structures. Under this concept of NPM, public organisations will become more accountable because responsible managers are directly accountable to the public compared to a 'faceless bureaucrat'.

Greater Competition in Public Service Provision: The principle of competition, which provides enhanced efficiency in the delivery of services and choice for customer, has led public organisations to move from public service provision to an increased involvement in the market. This orientation tends to be viewed as equally important by both public service providers and users. On the provider side, in the context of a competitive environment, public service provision agencies, subjected to the pressure of other market forces, will be stimulated to develop new instruments and services. On the customer side, there is a possibility passive public service consumers can be transformed into active customers, further prosecuting the enforcement of market rules.

Private-sector Styles of Management: In order to be a more business-like, the public sector should execute a style of management derived from managerial practices in the private sector. According to NPM, in order to support the more efficient delivery of public services, public-sector organisations should produce and provide their services in accordance with business principles. Therefore, the management style in the public sector should be based on the style adopted by the private sector, including features such as more flexible working practices, and mechanisms that allow for performance-related pay.

Greater Discipline and Economy in Resource Use: The principles of NPM also suggest that public service agencies should have effective mechanisms that enable agencies to explore and exploit the available human and financial resources. This means that certain procedures must be followed by public service units, including increasing quality of public service provision, cutting direct costs, raising labour discipline, and resisting union demands.

3.5.1.2 Core Principles of the NPM Approach as Distinguished by Hays and Kearney

In an extensive review of NPM literature, Hays and Kearney (1997) found that most of the studies on NPM stated five core doctrines: downsizing - reducing the size and scope of government; managerialism - using business protocols in government; decentralisation - moving decision making closer to the service recipients; debureaucratisation - restructuring government to emphasise results rather than processes; and privatisation - directing the allocation of governmental goods and services to outside firms (Vigoda, 2002).

Although the two paradigms of NPM discussed above have several principles and use different labels for adopting NPM, the basic premises are the same. For example, under the principle of Hood's paradigm (1991), one could discern in the paradigm of Hays and Kearney (1997) a managerial principle in the shape of a sectoral style management implying that managers should be able to manage an organisation's economic and human resources more independently. Furthermore, the disaggregation of public-sector units described by Hood (1991) could be classified under the doctrine of decentralisation. Both doctrines focus on decentralisation which can give organisations the capacity to form a more efficient and accountable public service. The differences may stem from why and under what circumstances these principles have been adopted and implemented. The principles of NPM may take different forms due to rules that are related to the specific sector to which NPM is being applied, as well as political and administrative local history,

and the complex interplay of global and local forces (Verger & Curran, 2014). In addition to the principles of the entire NPM theory, a good basis for the investigation and determination of this multiform public management phenomenon is provided by Hood's doctrines (Hakulinen, Rissanen, & Lammintakanen, 2011). Therefore, in this study, Hood's doctrine is used to examine HRP in the context of NPM.

3.5.1.3 Criticism of NPM

Although many benefits have been cited for the use of NPM theory, including improved service quality in the public sector, reduced public expenditure, improved efficiency of government operations, and more efficient implementation of policies (Monteiro, 2002), a number of criticisms have been raised against NPM as a tool for the public sector. Given the more turbulent political environment, and more complex objectives, and more intricate accountability, it may be inappropriate to apply an NPM approach in the public sector (Islam, 2015). Furthermore, management practices in the public sector differ from those seen in the private sector. For example, in the public sector, the leadership is concentrated on distributing power among different levels of governance, while in the private sector the leadership is more focused on results and profit, and on the efficiency of conducting the job (Demeter & Tapardel, 2013). Thus, there may be risks associated with adopting NPM practices in the public sector. The most serious criticism of NPM theory is that it was designed to suit conditions in Western countries rather than in developing countries. The applicability of NPM practice has been a major concern among scholars dealing with developing countries. Polidano (1999) has argued that since governments in developing countries are highly decentralised, NPM does not suit such developing countries. Additional, specific criticisms of the application of NPM in developing countries include the fact that these countries lack the necessary expertise and have unreliable information systems (Caiden & Sundaram, 2004; Polidano, 2001).

Several management scholars such as Robertson et al. (2002) have argued that the theories developed in the USA and Western Europe are applicable to some developing

countries. Even though there are several challenges facing non-Western countries in the application of NPM, countries such as Singapore have experienced relative success in implementing some NPM reforms (Sarker, 2006). Privatisation was effected in some selected cases, corporatisation was introduced in certain sectors, and quality service initiatives and performance measurement were placed on the agenda. All these can be achieved only if the basic parameters of governance are present. The potential for successful implementation of certain aspects of the NPM model has been supported in the case of some non-Western countries that are striving to transform their economy and society. These examples also emphasise that NPM is as starting point for managerial reforms initiated in the public sector with the aim of achieving greater effectiveness and efficiency.

On the other hand, some scholars who have conducted studies on the Middle East countries have concluded that western theory is applicable to these countries only where the organisation's core is concerned or where technical issues are addressed, but showed a poor fit with the theory where the environment is involved. For instance, many researchers have concluded that such conditions in the Arabic environment must be taken into account when attempting to build and develop organisations and management (Khan, 2011). In the Arab world the evolution of management theory has been influenced by forces such as language, history, religion, traditions and values, and the external environment (Ali, 1995). Anwar and Chaker (2003) investigated different challenges that face American organisations seeking projects in the UAE. They found that the biggest challenge lies in the process of adapting to the Arabic culture and its management methods. Anwar and Chaker (2003) suggested that for Western business executives to be successful in the UAE, they must adapt appropriate management styles to the Arabic cultural context. These earlier studies have been further supported more recently. Although unique national cultures and other special features distinguish GCC countries, a recent study conducted by Moideenkutty et al., (2011) suggests that organisations in these areas can enhance their performance by implementing high-involvement HRM

practices. This reinforces the view that high-involvement HRM practices are closely associated with organisational performance.

3.5.1.4 HRM as part of broader NPM reforms

The move towards a performance-oriented approach to the provision of public services is a concrete step undertaken by many public organisations. HRM is expected to keep pace with this change by providing valuable input into decisions regarding employee management and the core objectives of government entities (Goodman et al., 2013). In line with these efforts, both scholars and practitioners have sought to synthesise the traditional and modern approaches required to develop the management of human resources in public-sector organisations. This approach has been adopted through several recommendations related to deregulating regulation-constrained public-sector employment in the USA. Such deregulation measures include the following strategies: adopting written tests for hiring and promotion; reducing the number of classified positions; moving to pay banding, implementing pay performance based remuneration; promoting diversity; implementing binding arbitration, and instituting cooperative labour–management relationships, to name a few (Goodman et al., 2013). In Australia, in response to accountability pressures, the adoption of new public-sector guidelines has required organisations to alter their management structures, systems and processes so that they are more responsive to and flexible on issues arising from a competitive market environment (Kearney & Hays, 1998).

With respect to HRM improvements, NPM changes include the rearrangement of the people management function and the realignment of the corporate HR department and organisational strategy (Teo, 2002). Developing a performance system has been part of the reform agenda embodied in most of the new civil service laws in many countries (Bowman, 2009). An increased interest in performance and results-oriented service has led to greater recognition in public-sector organisations of the need to adopt effective HR strategies that increase organisations' performance (French & Goodman, 2012). This has

enabled the public sector to improve organisational performance by making programs and services more efficient with a view to achieving better quality. One of the challenges in adopting such a strategy is the inherent limitations of their administrative capacity, especially those aspects dealing with reward and performance management (Ayanda & Sani, 2011). Public-sector organisations cannot usually compete with private sector incentive and salary levels (Nelen & Hondeghem, 2000). There are, however, example of a wide-range of incentives beyond salary, available to enhance the public sector's ability to compete in attracting skilled people. For example, in Germany public-sector development has seen a combination of psycho-social and material incentives ranging from flexible working hours to flat hierarchies and high-end technical equipment (Äijälä, 2002). As the main role of HRM in an organisation is to create value to the organisation by recognising that people are an institution's competitive advantage, the extent to which the public sector can translate this concept into policies and practices that enhance organisational competitiveness remains unclear and needs further research.

There is a broad argument that HRM in the public sector has changed to become more like HRM practice in the private sector (Boyne, Poole, & Jenkins, 1999). A 1990s study of HRM practices in central government departments in 24 western nations concluded that economic strain on the public sector was the reason behind changes to the way people are managed in the public sector (OECD, 1996). Several more recent studies have revealed differences in HRM procedures for HRM between public and private organisations, and have identified a gap in prevailing HR services between the two sectors. For example, Iqbal, Arif, and Abbas (2011) conducted a comparative study of HRM practices at public and private universities in Pakistan which showed that there was a significant difference in HRM practices between these institutions. The findings are consistent with those of Budhwar and Boyne (2004) who compared HRM practices in private and public manufacturing firms in India. A possible explanation for the differences between the two sectors might be that each sector has its own distinct organisational roles, structures and processes (Harel & Tzafrir, 2001). These differences are also attributable to the purpose of the organisation itself public-sector organisations

are geared towards serving the public and wider community, while private-sector organisations seek to make enough profit from the production of particular goods and services for their customers (Al Obthani et al., 2013).

3.5.1.5 Human Resource Planning: Public Sector Specific Considerations

The 2008 World Economic Crisis and the ensuing pressure on the public service to adopt strategies similar to those of the private sector have caused many public organisations to pay attention to the importance of HRP (O’Riordan, 2012). HRP has long been applied in the private sector, while it was not commonly utilised in the public sector (Colley & Price, 2010). One of the earlier descriptive studies was conducted by the International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA–HR) (Johnson & Brown, 2004). IPMA-HR examined the extent to which public organisations utilise a human resource plan and have a formalised HRP process in place. The study found that only 37% of organisations had an HR plan and used HRP. More than 50% of the respondents indicated that they were developing an HR plan. Only 6% reported that their organisation has a plan, which has been in place for more than five years. Similar results were reported by Selden and Jacobson (2007), who found that many cities and countries have not conducted formal HRP, while only about 19% of countries operated an integrated HRM information system. An OECD (2011) report found that only a minority of public services demonstrated that they utilised HRP, and they had very little experience of integrated HR planning and business planning. Goodman et al., (2013) conducted a survey of HRP practices at the local government level in the United States. Their study which targeted HR managers from many cities, indicated that only 11% of the cities surveyed engage in comprehensive HRP. Another 43% implement some HRP, while 31% and 16% reported that they did little to no HRP, respectively. These studies emphasise that public-sector organisations have very little experience of HRP. Thus, there is a need to gain more insight into how HRP practices are being used in the public sector.

There are numerous unique challenges associated with implementing HRP in a public-sector context. Choudhury (2007) conducted a survey to investigate whether there was any progress within integrating HRP in small local governments. He found that respondents were reluctant to integrate HRP due to a wide range of factors: among these, their lack of political authority, budgetary slack, and inadequate technical skills. Jacobson (2010) conducted a study on the state of HRP in medium and large municipalities in North Carolina. He found that approximately 25% of his survey participants did not intend to develop an HR plan. The most common barriers identified as preventing HR plans and producing poor time management included preoccupation with short-term activities, insufficient staffing, lack of finance and lack of executive support. In addition, the report of the State Government Workforce conducted by Barrett, Green, and Sheldon (2014) noted that the lack of public-sector workforce planning was due to insufficient resources including time, staff, expertise, and other immediate pressures on HR that had relegated planning to a low priority objective. This report's findings were very similar to the findings of Jacobson's (2010) study. Considering the studies discussed above, it seems that HRP in the public sector has not yet been formalised, and the public sector has only recently begun to look at this issue systematically.

While there has been some progress in recent years with consolidating effort, further important efforts are still required to overcome the challenges that have made implementation of HRP difficult. This proposition is supported by a recent study conducted by Absar and Mahmood (2011) which clearly indicated that there is a statistically significant difference in HRP practices between the private and public-sectors, particularly when it comes to maintaining manpower requirement data. In addition, a study by Sheehan and Scafidi (2005) has cited more evidence, revealing that HRP practices are viewed differently in the public and private sectors. Their study showed that private-sector organisations were most effective in predicting the roles of HR managers in strategic planning. HR managers in private-sector organisations performed triple the number of duties compared to those within public-sector organisations. This study further indicated that there was reduced exposure to strategic

skill acquisition for aspiring HR professionals in the public sectors. The results showed that the inability of HR professionals to develop broad strategic business experience is caused by the focus on more functional HR tasks for mid-level managers working in the public sector. Overall, the results of Sheehan and Scafidi's study (2005) and the studies cited above illustrate that a wide gap still exists between the two sectors despite more than two decades of applying NPM principles. This means that HR functions are still facing challenges that limit HRM and HRP's capacity to help public organisations improve performance, such challenges include the instability of political administration policy in the public sector and the effects of dysfunctional factors (Vveinhardt & Papsiene, 2013). Further investigation is required to overcome these challenges.

Regardless of the type of organisation, dramatically shifting workforce demographics supply and demand factors do stimulate both private and public organisations to pay HR functions special attention. For its effective and efficient performance, every organisation needs to respond to current and future demand for and supply of human resources (Jacobson, 2010; Pynes, 2009). Although the public sector has recently increased its focus on HRP, nonetheless HRP trends conditioned by both RVB and NPM principles constitute an area of research that has received only limited attention. This calls for more focused research on the use of HRP in public organisations.

RBV and NPM principles together underpin the theories explored in this current study. Based on the RBV perspective, HRP has been incorporated into the study, as a tool that can add value and efficiency to the organisation in terms of playing a vital role in anticipating an organisation's needs in order to maintain its competitiveness (Al Bahri, 2010; Talukder & Khan, 2013). Also, HRP emphasises SHRM to help achieve better results for the organisation (Anyim, Ekwoaba, & Anthony, 2012). Few studies have been carried out in developing countries in order to identify how effective HRP practices can gain a competitive advantage in public-sector organisations. Hence, this study intends to use RBV to explain how HRP practices in the Oman's public-sector lead to competitive advantage in public-sector organisations. On the other hand, until recently, investigations

of the contribution of HRP to the improvement of public-sector effectiveness have been relatively limited since the emphasis commonly is placed on human resource and people management for the implementation of public management reforms (Järvalt, 2012). Therefore, the underpinning concepts of NPM are essential to this study in determining the ways in which public service organisations use effective HRP practices.

An increasingly turbulent and more rapidly changing business environment is affecting the ways in which today's organisations conduct HRP. Therefore, the next section of this literature review investigates more specifically how external and internal factors influence HRP practices.

3.6 Factors Influencing HRP

To understand HRP practices in context, one must consider how these practices are affected by the internal and external environments of organisations. In today's intensely competitive and global marketplace, there are many factors that affect HRP practices in an organisation. These factors can be divided into two categories; internal and external factors.

- External factors: An external factor is a macro factor which influences HRP from outside the boundaries of the organisations and cannot be controlled by the organisations (Mddom, Kasim, & Shamsuddin, 2012). The major external factors include, but are not limited to demographic shifts, the economic, and political context, laws and regulations, and changes in technology (Miracle, 2004).
- Internal factors: the internal factors are controlled by the organisation and consist of those factors within the organisation itself that affect HRP, including organisation culture, organisation strategy, and organisation structure (Mddom et al., 2012).

3.6.1 External factors

Demography

The changing demographics of the workforce have a significant impact on all aspects of HRM (Mddom et al., 2012). Demography is a factor that influences trends in the HR activities, policies and overall strategies of an organisation (Norman & Gooden, 2012). A study undertaken in New Zealand by Edgar and Geare (2004) aimed to determine the demographic differences in attitudes toward the importance and implementation of some functional areas of HRM. The researchers found HRM activities are mainly influenced by factors such as demography, especially gender, ethnicity and the employment sector (Edgar & Geare, 2004). The impact of demographic change on HRM practices is evident in the fact that the public sector in many Western countries has to rely on a much older workforce, who will have to work longer in future. According to Winkelmann (2009), those countries where a high proportion of the population is aged over 60 years will be affected by workforce ageing by 2025. This will cause a reduction in overall employment rates in those countries. Lars (2011) argues that in some instances the change in demographics will yield fewer entry-level employees, which will lead to increased competition among employers. Responding to this challenge, many organisations in European countries have already modified their HRP policies. For example, many organisations in the UK have adopted strategies that provide advice on current employment opportunities within the company or that improve their employees' skills to enable them to find work in other companies (Česynienė, 2008). Accordingly, elements of current HR policies and organisational management need to be adjusted to take these issues into account.

Economy

Economic fluctuations have important implications for HRP (Sinclair, 2004). Mddom et al., (2012) investigated the factors influencing HRP for the local workforce supply in the

Malaysian construction industry. The researchers found that economic changes were key factors influencing HRP. This is because economic change impacts organisations according to their type and size; what they do; for whom they do it; and how they recruit, retain and develop the workforce (Colley & Price, 2010). For instance, labour shortages that resulted from US economic prosperity during the 1990s encouraged organisations to create innovative labour recruitment and retention practices, and to employ workers from non-traditional sources, leading to a more diverse workforce (Česynienė, 2008). Economic factors have been identified as one of the most important factor in devising effective training and development programs (Genc, 2014; Goodman et al., 2013; Kane & Palmer, 1995). With an analysis of economic change, HRP practices can be formulated and implemented accordingly.

Technological Development

There has been a major change in the use of technology within the field of HRM. Technology has improved HRP operations in terms of effectiveness and efficiency (Xie & Huang, 2012). One of the many advantages resulting from the use of technology is the reduced cost of processing in HRP (Shyni, 2005). In addition, communications technologies have enhanced the incorporation of HRP into other managerial departments covering areas such as finance, goods, work flow, and customer relations. As an example of the application of technology to HRP, Canada and the World Health Organisation (WHO) (European Region) provide health data, by International Labour Organisation (ILO) websites, these data can be utilised by HR planners to forecast human resources needs in health sector (O'Brien, et al, 2001). Developments in information technology have transformed the nature of the workforce, with result that HR planners now need to create a system that allows an organisation faster access to and analysis of employees' data in order to attain positive outcomes linked to organisational goals and objectives.

3.6.2 Internal Factors

Organisational Structure

Organisational structure can be viewed as ‘The network of relationships and roles existing throughout the organisation’ (Goldhaber, 1984, p. 86). Similarly, Rees & Smith (2014) view organisational structure as an integrated system through which the work is allocated to distinct shares of responsibility and then coordinated among them. Buchanan and Huczynski (2010, p. 453) defined the structure of an organisation as ‘The formal system of task and reporting relationships that control, coordinate and motivate employees to work together to achieve organisational goals’. These definitions highlight that each organisation must design a structure that is appropriate for its strategy so that its employees can carry out their work-tasks in a systematic way. It is also clear that every organisation structure has an internal configuration, which varies from one organisation to another according to the internal factors of strategic goals, functional requirements and environmental contingencies (Ravichandran, 2011).

The presence of structure in the organisation tends to provide stability, order, and organisation in a complex reality. Carmeli and Binyamin (2010) state that an organisational structure is essential to help managers deal with reactive patterns of behaviour. They added that organisations with a structure often adopt other performance improvement strategies to address core organisational issues and implement the organisation’s strategy by allocating substantial time, resources, and effort. Structured core processes constitute a vital tool to help the organisation integrate and connect the strategic level with the practical level of managing daily activity. They provide mechanisms that enable flexibility, which can contribute to the improvement of the employees’ performance and of the organisation’s overall functioning (Carmeli & Binyamin, 2010). An organisational structure creates the various levels of communication within an organisation and assists in drawing together the various hierarchies and responsibility areas (Teixeira, Koufteros, & Peng, 2012).

The influence of organisational structure on HRM has been addressed in detail in the literature. Early examples include research by Dastmalchian and Blyton (1992) who investigated the association between organisational structure and HR practices. The results revealed that centralised decision-making has a negative influence on industrial relations. Pandey and Garnett (2006) also showed that centralisation in public-sector organisations led to a reduction in the volume of communications, in the time spent on informational interactions, on feedback. Pandey and Wright (2006) found that the centralisation of decision-making authority contributed to role ambiguity for the public manager. Similarly, Dedahanov, Kim, and Rhee (2015) revealed that centralisation has a significant impact on the communications among staff within the organisation. The evidence from these studies shows that more centralised structures are less capable of implementing HRM functions effectively.

Within the organisational structure, individual organisations have HR structure, which encompasses different areas involving various activities and processes associated with managing the human resources of the organisation (Mondy, Noe, & Premeaux, 1996). Carmeli and Binyamin (2010) define the structure of HRM as a 'framework of explicated and clear HRM policies that are then translated into institutionalised and systematic modes and recurrent patterns of activity in an organisation'. The structure of the HR function varies in different organisations and countries; some organisations adopt a centralised approach, while others prefer to decentralise. This difference depends on factors such as cost considerations, government policy, organisational resources, and organisational structure (Erik & Odd, 2010).

NPM initiatives have encouraged developed countries to devalue HRM functions (Teo, 2002). Governments in most of these countries tend to decentralise the HRM responsibility away from central management agencies to the heads of individual departments and agencies. In contrast, the structure of public-sector organisations in developing countries differs in terms of the degree of authority assigned to units of the civil service (Al Obthani et al., 2013). For example, Middle Eastern organisational

structures are mainly centralised, and extremely bureaucratic. Authority and decision-making in these organisations is confined to the top management (Al Sawafi, 2012). The organisational structure of HR in GCC countries is subject to a centralised system managed by government. This centralisation of decision making affects all HR activities and work progress, including planning, recruitment, selection, and training (Al Sawafi, 2012). Tessema, Soeters, and Ngoma (2009) noted that in most of the developing countries the decentralisation of HR functions has not been effective. A lack of will and commitment among policy makers, coupled with insufficient expertise, institutional capacity or effective controlling mechanisms has contributed to this failure. This is clear evidence that there is a distinct difference in the experiences of developing and developed countries in the formulation of regulations and policies, and in management. It depends on the actual or perceived benefits of more elaborate approaches to HRM. This means that each country must establish its own organisational structure for human resources functions, one that is directly related to its own unique conditions (Tessema et al., 2009).

Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is viewed as “one of the most popular concepts in the field of management and organisational theory” (Ogbonna and Harris, 2000, p. 768). Increasing attention was paid to the subject of organisational culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as organisational behaviour researchers were seeking to explore the real reasons for the American corporations’ failure to compete with their Japanese counterparts (Ojo, 2010). Organisational culture is an important issue and has been the subject of a large amount of critical discussion in both academic research and management fora. This can be seen in the wide range of existing theories and perspectives as well as the current use of the culture concept in the organisational disciplines (Mohammad et al., 2013). The reason for the latter is that many experts view the cultural dimension as a fundamental aspect of organisational life (Mats, 2002; Uddin, Luva, & Hossian, 2013; Schein, 2010). Therefore, culture is an important factor contributing to either success or failure in organisations.

The term organisational culture is defined as the pattern of shared values, behaviours, assumptions, and beliefs that clarifies the way in which members of an organisation act and perform their jobs within the organisation (McShane & Von Glinow, 2011). However, according to Al Adaileh and Al Atawi (2011), the definition provided by Schein (2010, p.17) is the one most commonly used to describe organisational culture. He defined organisational culture as “A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid”. This definition highlights the importance of organisational culture in driving the success of the practices and activities of an organisation. The definition also reflects the significance of prevailing values, attitudes, and beliefs among members of the organisation. This is essential to comprehend the behaviour patterns of employees and explore how decisions are made in an organisation (Singh & Kant, 2008).

The culture of an organisation is created or changed by many different factors. It may be shaped by values of the top management or the attitude of the founders of an organisation (Sun, 2008). Martin (2006) identifies four major elements that constitute organisational culture: the structure of an organisation, the process by which an organisation utilises its resources and work procedures within the organisation, and the people within the organisation. These four elements underpin and inform an organisation’s direction, mission, and goals.

Different types of functions and activities within an organisation may require different kinds of culture. For instance, some units that are highly dependent on innovation, may need to be focused on norms that encourage creativity and implementation, whereas creating a performance culture in other units, such as manufacturing, may requires cultural norms that emphasise speed and efficiency of service (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1996).

Organisational culture is one of the most powerful and most stable elements within the organisational context (Schein, 2010). Some authors argue that a strong organisational culture is intensely held and shared among the members of an organisation. According to this view, most of the organisation's members tend to accept a cognitive and behavioural uniformity, and reject any deviation from norms (Chatman, Caldwell, O'Reilly, & Doerr, 2014; Kaplan, Brooks, King, & Zaccaro, 2009). This perspective led scholars such as Kotter and Heskett (1992) to suggest that an organisation will have a strong culture if that culture considers the alignment between the individual's and the organisation's goals, increases the level of employee motivation, and provides the necessary controls without the stifling effects of bureaucracy on individual freedom. In such a climate, people will be able to generate more creative solutions because they can express their beliefs and ideas without restrictions emanating from other members of their group (Forster, Friedman, Butterbach, & Sassenberg, 2005). Therefore, an organisation needs to encourage behavioural variation in order to achieve creative innovation (Chatman et al., 2014). As a group, HR practitioners have experienced a slow response to changes in the business environment and in their jobs (Becton & Schraeder, 2009).

The core values embedded in organisational culture can influence many aspects of the organisation and tasks such as of the selection of choices, priorities, commitment, and attitudes (Alnaqbi, 2011). This influence exerted by the core values of an organisational culture also extends to the HR practices that an organisation adopts. Early studies have indicated that organisational culture influences HR practices. For example, research findings conducted by Goodman et al., (2001) have indicated that job satisfaction and organisational commitment are negatively associated with hierarchical cultures. In addition to this, Park and Kim (2009) conducted a study on job satisfaction and turnover intention among hospital nurses in Korea and whether these were affected by different types of organisational culture. The results revealed a positive correlation between job satisfaction and market (clan) cultures, with cultures based on adhocracy and hierarchy displaying no statistically significant influence. Another study by Diponegoro (2009) found that organisational culture in Indonesian companies has an important impact

on HRM in two areas: staffing and participative management (Diponegoro, 2009). These results are in accord with Milikić (2009) who found that that organisational culture in some selected Nigerian private universities has an influence on several HRM functions, including the recruitment process, training programmes, job performance management, employees performance, pay structure, and compensation administration. It can be concluded that cultural differences require organisations to set up different HRM practices accordingly.

Due to cultural differences, it is difficult to apply a unified model for HRM practices in all countries. Nyambegera, Sparrow, and Daniels (2000) point out that culture is a key factor when comparing HRM practices of different countries or organisations, because of the belief that cultures are at the base of an organisation's and people's behaviour. The authors analysed a sample of 274 Kenyan employees from eight multinational companies and investigated the influence of an individual's nationality on preferences for the design of HR practices. They found that the application of US models was not appropriate for developing countries. More recently, Friedman (2007) suggested that the best way for HR practices to counteract the challenges hindering the achievement of the company's culture is to ensure that the performances of HR functions conform to the rules and customs of the local culture. In addition, alignment between different cultures and the culture of the organisation is the best way to implement effective HRM practices. Rioux, Bernthal, & Wellins (2000) noted that the best approach adopted by international companies was to spread the culture of the company through communication with all sectors. Furthermore, giving local workers the freedom to practise their culture within the context of the company while also incorporating the local culture into the company's vision proved to be effective measures. Thus, the results of these studies show that HR practices that are effective in one organisation or country may be ineffective in other contexts due to differences in environment and culture (Erik & Odd, 2010). Similarly, this conclusion is applicable to HRP practices.

To conclude, the review of the literature on the factors which affect HRP practices have shown that two types of factors affect the implementation of HRP practices: external and internal. The effect of these can differ from country to country according to cultural context and environmental conditions. To implement HRP practices effectively, organisations should take into account the potential effects of environmental factors on those practices.

As mentioned earlier, a review conducted by the Workforce Review Team (WRT) indicated that there is a gap in the current academic knowledge with regard to identifying effective HRP practices in the public-sector context (Curson et al., 2010). Consequently, this study seeks to address this limitation by exploring HRP practices currently used in the public sector in order to identify whether effective HRP practices can be applied or developed in the public sector. The next section undertakes a review of global literature regarding good HRP practices.

3.7 Good HRP Practices

Conducting HRP accurately and effectively is one of the most prevalent topics in current discussions of HRP research (Freyens, 2010). Wilkerson (2007) has shown that the amount of HRP literature has increased dramatically since 1994 but ultimately has failed to identify successful and proven strategic solutions. It was only the beginning of 1994 that saw an influx of higher quality literature from research studies addressing strategic HRP solutions across a wide range of organisations. As this picture of HRP in public-sector organisations is still not available, the researcher will address this issue by highlighting the good practice discussed in the literature on HRP practices in the private sector. Some aspects of these practices will be also covered under the topic of HRM practices since HRP is a function of HRM.

The most important step in HRP practices is integration with the organisation's strategic planning objectives (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). The next section discusses alignment of an organisation's HRP with its strategic planning.

3.7.1 HRP and Strategic Planning

Many organisations face challenges that may hinder their success and development. These challenges include increased competition for staff, volunteers, participants, and clients; an aging population the up-skilling of the workforce in new technologies and other specialised areas, and diversity within the workforce. Such challenges have undoubtedly caused HRP to take a more strategic role in the strategic planning process of an organisation (Doherty, Taylor, & McGraw, 2009). HRP is considered the primary means of ensuring that an organisation's human resources contribute to the achievement of its business strategy; it is a vital function in terms of assisting the organisation to achieve its goals. (Anyim et al., 2012). HRP is increasingly seen as one of the key functions in setting up and implementing strategic responses to global competition and the rapidly changing business environment. Kydd and Oppenheim (1990, p. 30) concluded that "human resource management can be a powerful tool to enhance competitiveness when policies and practices are logically driven by a firm's strategy and by the key environmental factors it faces". Thus, it is not surprising that the focus on linking HRP to strategy has become an overriding concern for HR professionals (Lam & Schaubroeck, 1998).

3.7.1.1 Integration of HRP into Organisational Strategic Planning

The past 25 years have witnessed a rapid change in the field of HRM. The first shift was a profound transformation, moving from personnel management to human resource management. The second shift was the transformation from HRM to Strategic HRM (Caliskan, 2010). Growing attention has been paid to the view that HRM functions should be integrated into the context of overall organisational strategies and objectives Chao

Guoet al., 2011). The link between HRM and the strategic objectives of an organisation and the involvement of HRM in both the formulation and implementation of organisational strategies referred to as integration of HRM (Schuler & Jackson, 2007). According to a survey conducted by the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), the three core areas of the HR function that are critical to achieving organisations' business strategies are (1) Planning, employment and recruitment, (2) training and development, and (3) employee benefits (Benedict, Lockwood, & Williams, 2008). In adopting a strategic approach to HRM, HRP can be used to translate organisational strategic objectives into HR strategy by matching people to the strategic requirements of an organisation and gaining a better understanding of the required skills and employees to ensure effectively targeted strategic planning (Colley & Price, 2010). Based on this perspective, HRP is an integral part of how an organisation plans to achieve its strategic goals, it ensures that the right people, with the right skills and knowledge are in the right positions to deliver on the organisation's goals.

The demands of market competition during the past decade have placed unprecedented pressure on organisations to look for innovative ways to respond quickly and nimbly to the changing environment (Lam & Schaubroeck 1998). RBV theory assumes that the organisation needs to utilise its resources for the purposes of competitive advantage. According to the theory, to remain competitive in the future, organisations will need to use different competition strategies and organisational practices. One of those strategies to achieve competitive advantage involves the linking of HR planning to strategic planning (Sluijs & Kluytmans, 1994). Thus, when HRP is at the core of an organisation's strategy, it can create value as a competitive advantage. This is because integrated HRP will offer the most effective and realistic way of determining the number, mix and distribution of skills, competencies and capabilities (O'Brien-Pallas et al., 2001).

There are a number of features that encourage organisations to adopt a strategic approach to their HRP. Linking HRP to organisation strategy enables an organisation to adjust and quickly respond to current and emerging business requirements. For instance, by

engaging in HRP an organisation can formulate strategies for success through providing a set of useful inputs such as the type and number of current employees (Aswathappa, 2005). Integrated HRP will offer the most effective and realistic way for determining the number, mix and distribution of skills, competencies and capabilities (O'Brien-Pallas et al., 2001). For instance, reviewing the role of business strategy in HRP practices will draw attention to how the achievement of business goals can be enhanced by developing and deploying employees. This in turn will enable the HR planners to focus on programs that might have to be resolved to anticipate how many and what type of people will be available, and capable of making necessary and unique contributions (Anyim et al., 2012).

The integration between organisation strategy and HRP is necessary to cope with environmental change and workplace challenge. In conjunction with this, an operational strategy assists an organisation to meet its strategic goals and objectives through appropriate deployment of its employees and to reduce costs by forecasting and addressing the labour surplus or shortage in a timely manner (Doherty et al., 2009). For example, any sudden change in consumer preference or legal requirements, can impact on business plans. Instead of changing its overall business plan, an organisation will resort to making changes through special projects, which in turn requires consideration of the HRP implications (Heneman & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011). With its scope for long-term forecasting, the integration of a business plan with HRP is also likely to be a more appropriate approach for organisations coping with demographic change, which is a factor that influences HRP trends and overall organisational strategies (Anyim et al., 2012; Norman & Gooden 2012). Consequently, HRP practices need to be developed as an integral part of an organisation's overall strategy.

It has been noted that integration of HRP will make an organisation more resilient and more effective at reducing costs while at the same time adding skilled staff to enable the organisation to surpass its competitors (Dainty, 2000). Hunger and Wheelen (2014) argue that HR alignment means integrating decisions relating to staff with decisions relating to

the organisational outcome. This can be seen in the case of employee shortages, which result in a loss of economies of scale, and of specialisation, as well as orders, customers and profits. On the other hand, an employee surplus is wasteful and expensive (Anyim et al., 2012). In this case, HR planners can implement activities to control staffing costs and enhance employers' ability to make more informed judgements about desired staffing levels, numbers employed, and staffing quality (Anyim et al., 2012).

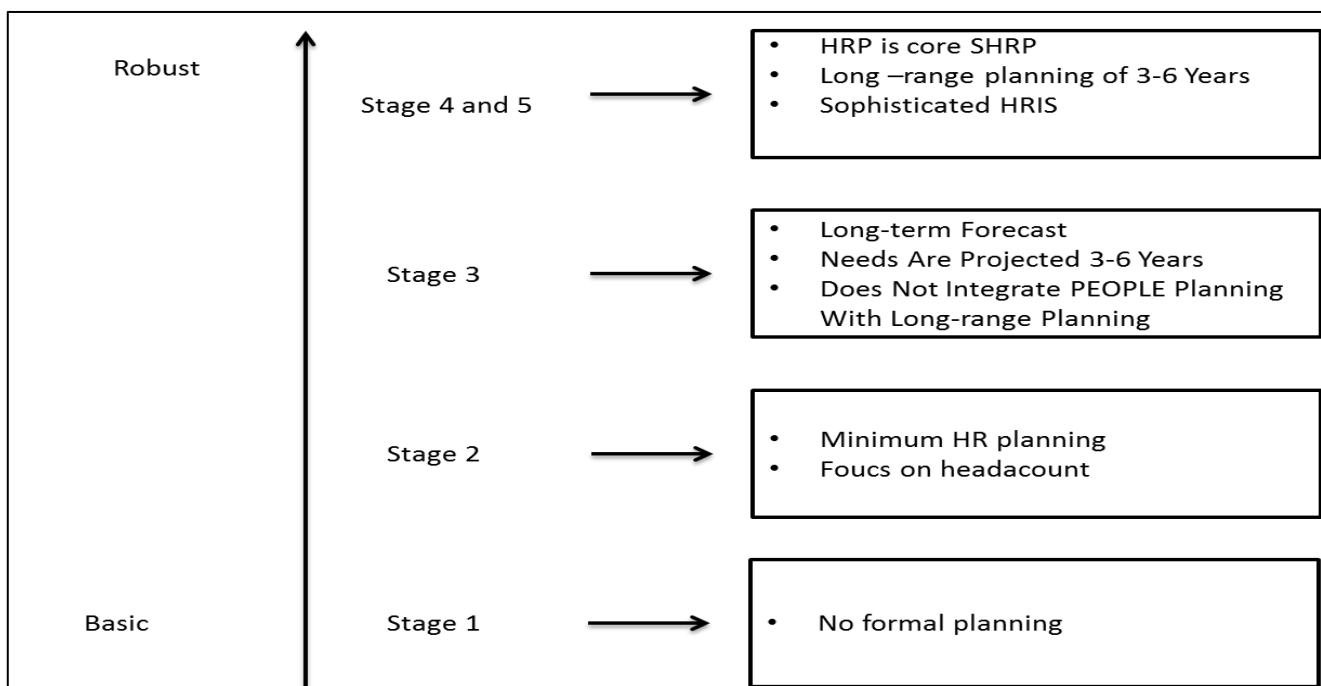
3.7.1.2 Models Linking HRP and Strategic Planning

Various models have been developed in the literature for describing how HRP is integrated with strategy. Golden and Ramanujam (1985) proposed four linkages between HRM and the business plan: administrative linkage, one-way linkage two-way linkage, and integrative linkage. An administrative linkage describes a situation where there is little or no linkage between HR and business strategy. In one-way linkage, HR specialists develop practices and processes in order to support the organisational strategy provided by top managers. Two-way linkage has a strategic characteristic as it involves a reciprocal relationship between HR and business strategies. Integrative linkage is the most advanced linkage as in this kind of linkage the interaction between HRM and business strategy is sequential, and HR managers play a key role in the senior management team. Mills (2001) observed that organisations evolve planning through several phases, and the level of sophistication and formality of planning will differ among organisations according to their planning sophistication.

Mills (2001) investigated the number of people planning elements used in companies. He identified five stages of sophisticated planning, as shown in Figure 3.1. In stage 1, an organisation does not participate in any planning whether business or HRP, while recruitment and training are considered an afterthought. Organisations in stage 2 focus on some long-term business planning, and HRP processes are confined to numerical predictions. The strategic integration of HRP practices with organisation strategy does not receive much attention in Stage 1 and Stage 2 organisations. In Stage 3, the HRP

entails a moderate, long-term forecast usually done for human resource needs. The HRP projections are computed for five years at a time. Stages 4 and 5 HRP can be described as the core process in an organisation. To be effective it is imperative that HRP anticipates resource requirements for the future and is supported by managers. In stages 4 and 5, an organisation conducts long-term HRP on a three-or-more-year basis. In these two stages, the HRP is considered as the thread that ties together all other human resource activities and integrates these into the organisation's business strategy. It can be concluded that in Stages 4 and 5 an organisation engages in a high level of sophisticated planning because its HR processes and activities are aligned with the strategic goals of the organisation. These models are useful, as they can categorise organisations according to the extent to which strategic HRM is adopted; however, the effective linkage of HRP with strategic business planning depends on participation within and across the organisational levels, and on ability of these model to achieve competitive advantage.

Figure 3.1 Stage of HRP Sophistication



Source: (Mills, 2001, p.123).

A growing number of studies have investigated the integration of HRP with organisational strategy. Despite the fact that most organisations recognise the importance of planning and plan continuously, many of them struggle to achieve the desired partnership between human resources and business strategy. For example, Lam and Schaubroeck (1998) examined planning in manufacturing firms and the sophistication associated with the strategy-performance relationship. They found that only four out of the 85 firms surveyed were adopting strategic HRP objectives and formal planning methods. Similarly, when Wright, Snell, and Jacobsen (2003) conducted their study to determine the best practices with regard to HR strategies in 20 companies found that not all companies did any scanning of the external environment, and most focused only on business issues. Sheehan and Scafidi's (2005) comparative study found that in the public-sector, the same strategic roles were played by HR managers at the most senior level and their counterparts in the private sector. However, HR managers in the private sector were given more significant strategic roles in comparison to their counterparts in the public sector. Every organisation is unique and organisations are very different in terms of how they integrate and align HRM policy and practices with the organisation's strategy. (Florah, Nyagol, & Rabah, 2013). In an analysis of the effectiveness of the HR function as operating in public organisations, Raofi and Taheri (2014) found that HR was not functioning effectively as a strategic partner.

3.7.1.3 Environmental Scanning

The analysis of an organisation's internal and external environments is the critical starting point of strategic thinking (Thompson, Strickland, Gamble, & Gao, 2008). This requires understanding the competitive environment, and its internal assessment. Strategic planning literature suggests the implementation of environmental scans such as SWOT analysis of the organisation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Yang, Rounsevell, Haggett, Piorr, & Wilson, 2015). According to Williams (2008), SWOT is the most effective tool for evaluation of an organisation's environment. SWOT analysis has received much attention from authors and strategists with many studies being carried

out in different countries to investigate methods of strategic analysis in organisations. These include work by Paliwal, (2006); Ren et al., (2015); and Young, (2003) who all emphasise that SWOT analysis is a tool used together with strategic planning to explore both internal and external factors that may affect the strategy of a public organisation within a competitive environment. Gretzky (2010) also provides a framework for applying SWOT analysis as an essential tool for environmental scanning. In addition, a study conducted by Williams (2008), which explored the strategic planning process of 15 small businesses in north and northwest Omaha in the US found that conducting a SWOT analysis was reported by 80% of participants as the best practice employed in the strategic planning process. These studies emphasise that scanning of the internal and external environment is an important step in understanding the internal and external forces affecting organisations. In addition, SWOT analysis has been recognised as an activity that is essential to the strategic planning process as it provides useful information for matching internal resources with the competitive environment (Thompson et al., 2008). To be a strong competitor in any field, weaknesses must be transformed into strengths. Likewise, threats should be examined with a view to converting them into opportunities. Finally, strengths and opportunities should be combined to optimise the performance of an organisation. (Kalpande, Gupta, & Dandekar, 2015; Shabanova, Ismagilova, Salimov, & Akhmadeev, 2015).

3.7.1.4 A Formalised and Written HR Strategy

A written HR strategy is an important tool in achieving strategic integration and alignment of HRM with business strategies. Once the strategies for HR have been determined, the organisation strategy must be articulated in an HR plan (Sharma, 2009). According to Andersen, Cooper, and Zhu (2005), the documentation of planning and development reinforce the role and authority of HR managers when they contribute to an organisation's strategic decisions. A brief document should contain a particular set of assumptions, and outline the resulting associations with a proposed strategy. Establishing formal objectives, searching for innovative HR applications and identifying appropriate

organisational strategies should all be part of this brief document (Lam & Schaubroeck, 1998). The document will also include the roles and responsibilities of the individuals involved in implementation strategies and the timelines for implementation (Sharma, 2009). Documentation of HR strategy materials is an important input for an organisation developing an HRM vision, and objectives and when performance is being evaluated and maintained (Thite & Kavanagh, 2009). Another advantage of documentation is that it can increase the ability of managers to deal with external factors that affect HRP practices such as a tight labour market (Andersen et al., 2005).

3.7.1.5 Formation of HRP Objectives

HR plans should be based on an organisation's strategic planning objectives, which imply that the HR objectives must be derived from organisational objectives (Aswathappa, 2005; Van Knippenberg, 2012). Defining the organisation's mission, vision, goals, and objectives has become imperative for an effective HRP process (Cotten, 2007). The most important step is analysing the organisational strategic planning objectives (Mathis & Jackson, 2011; O'Riordan 2012). This step will draw the attention of an organisation to the direction in which human resources could be channelled and deployed more efficiently. Identification of the strategic direction of an organisation will help ensure that the people required will be available as well as be able to focus on problems that might have to be resolved, leading to the achievement of business goals (Armstrong, 2006). HRP objectives state that specific requirements regarding the quantity and quality of employees should be based on what is to be achieved with regard to organisational objectives (Chan & Burgess, 2010). For example, a major change in organisation's business directions may require another shift in the nature of work performed and in employment arrangements. Similarly, the strategic choices of an organisation will be examined to explore ways to fill an open position either from its current human resources or from those available in the external labour market (Miner & Crane, 1995).

Clarifying objectives is an important step in HR planning, but the difficulty lies in setting out the right targets and deciding how to go about determining the appropriate variables (Lam & Schaubroeck, 1998). Explicit strategic planning objectives are critical step towards creating and maintaining organisational competitiveness. It is also essential to assess the potential risks and benefits facing organisations when carrying out the organisational plan. Chatterjee (2005) argues that identifying the core objectives that drive a top organisation's competitive advantage is not easy, but it places the organisation in a much better position to deal with the risks of failure than the average organisation. Nkomo (1988) mentioned that HR plans at the strategic level need to answer two broad questions: (1) what kinds of human resources will be needed to manage and run the organisation in terms of future business demand, in order to meet strategic business objectives? and (2) How will the organisation effectively acquire and utilise the organisation's human resource? Lam and Schaubroeck (1998) have suggested a number of frameworks for the further development of such objectives, including Schuler (1988)'s model. This model suggested three main factors that influence how organisational strategies should be translated into HR objectives, including the environment, labour market trends, and the nature of the business. Schuler identified differences in the main objectives of HRP such as planning to simplify jobs as against planning to enrich them, dependent on which competitive strategy objectives have been adopted. Ulrich (1992)'s model shows that HR professionals must integrate contextual factors with HRP. Before embarking on one of these models, an organisation needs to be very clear about what its capabilities are. Without this clarity, the organisation risks failure. It is clear that consideration of the organisation's strategic objectives is an important step for HRP, which must translate these objectives into action plans by ensuring the availability and utilisation of HR (Doherty et al., 2009).

3.7.1.6 Involvement of HR Professionals

Before HRP can make a significant contribution to organisational strategy, an organisation needs to take one further step (Nkomo, 1988): it needs personnel who can

implement HRP activities correctly and achieve effective linking of HRP practices with the organisation's strategy (Stratton, 1992). Gaining competitive advantage depends on people who can understand and implement the strategy (Ulrich, 1987). The role of HR has changed from the traditional way of managing people to improving the line manager's ability to align their employees' contributions to the strategic decision-making process (Anonymous, 1996). Jonathan and Sheehan (2005) noted that the process of integrating HRP into strategic planning, encouraged not only the HRM department but everyone to increase their activities in a second role as a business partner in the organisation.

Within the framework of strategic HRP, HR planners get an opportunity to represent their concerns and be involved in the development of a business strategy from the outset (Oladipo & Abdulkadir, 2011). Lawler and Boudreau (2009) pointed out that this provides an opportunity for the HR planner to play an important role when participating in the organisation's executive management team. HR planners are expected to perform three main roles in the major business decisions of the organisation: strategy formation, organisational design and business model implementation.

The involvement of a senior HR manager in the organisation's senior management also provides an important channel for strategic plan development together with the stakeholders of an organisation. It is an opportunity for both parties to share information on strategic planning, offering assurance that meetings will confront priority issues and that commitments are made on the basis strategic objectives (Lam & Schaubroeck 1998; Oladipo & Abdulkadir, 2011). Thus, HR strategic partnerships lead to improvement of the targeted processes, resulting in an improvement in organisational excellence. The results from a study conducted by Chui (2015) recently revealed that effective HR strategic partnering has positive impacts on organisational performance.

In order to achieve a maximum level of integration between HRP and business strategy, an organisation needs to have HR competence combined with the right skills. However, a number of studies have found that a lack of experience and skills among HR

practitioners constitute the major obstacle to the effective integration of HRP and strategic planning. For instance, a study by Lawler and Boudreau (2009) investigated which skills were most appropriate to ensure that the HR unit becomes a more strategic business partner. They found that such skills included business understanding, strategic planning, organisational design and cross functional experience. In addition, in order to understand the future skills and abilities that are needed to execute an organisation's strategy, HR planners required higher operational knowledge levels about the workforce itself. For example, the shortfall or surplus of a certain type of skill can be determined and addressed by knowing how these skills affect costs and whether a substitution of such skills can be achieved with other technologies (Lam & Schaubroeck, 1998). Similarly, if an organisation's strategy involves working to protect the environment in order to protect the organisation's jobs, various skills and information can be gained through programs designed to protect and preserve the natural environment. The organisation might, for example, need to concentrate on issues such as air pollution, water pollution, toxic chemicals, acid precipitation, global warming, deforestation, and ozone depletion (Stratton, 1992). The examples presented support the idea that knowledge and abilities gained from pursuing strategic planning objectives are useful to the HR planner's aspiration to become an effective strategic partner in the relevant organisation. However, inadequate HR skills and experience can act as a barrier to effective HRP-strategic planning integration. In the 1990s, Sparrow and Marchington (1998) reported that many of those involved in HR functions demonstrated a lack of confidence in their ability to act as strategic partners and to fulfil the demands of their new role. More recently, a study conducted by Becton and Schraeder (2009) has shown that HR practitioners have been slow to respond to changes in their jobs and in the business environment. Wright et al. (2003) gathered data through interviews with 20 HR executives with extensive knowledge about their HR strategies. They found that HR generalists assigned to business units had very little formal or deep knowledge of the competitive issues facing their businesses (Wright et al., 2003). Abdullah (2009) found that the performance of various HR responsibilities among manufacturing firms in Malaysia has suffered from a lack of HR expertise. These results agree with the findings of Debrah, McGovern, and Budhwar

(2000), whose study of the manufacturing sector in South-East Asia found that the sector requires knowledgeable and competent HR personnel. These studies provide further evidence that in some cases HR managers lack the necessary skills and experience, rendering them incapable of contributing strategically to the organisation.

Forecasting labour demand and supply is key to an organisation's ability to achieve its strategic goals. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

3.7.2 Forecasting Demand and Supply

One essential element needed to achieve the objectives of an organisation is the prediction of future needs for different skills using effective HRP practices (Jacobson, 2010; Mullins, 1996). HRP needs to be able to anticipate the organisation's future HR requirements and to identify practices that will help it meet those needs. A requirement forecast involves predicting in advance the numbers and kinds of employees the organisation will need in order to meet its objectives (Omoankhanlen, 2013). Forecasting human resources involves estimating future human resources needs based on the strategic goals of the organisation (Ulfertsm et al., 2009). The main task of HRP is to support an organisation in its quest for the best people. Insight into the right quantity and quality of human resources needed to achieve the desired competitive advantage is provided by the forecasts of human resources demand and supply (Ruse & Jansen, 2008). For this to occur, the forecasts of human resources demand and supply should be considered as integral to the organisation's business and functional planning processes.

HRP professionals have to estimate the availability of and need for future employees when assessing the supply of employees both within and outside the organisation. In addition, assessing future demand for specific numbers and types of employees is another important task for HRP professionals (Sutanto, 2004). The number and characteristics (e.g. skills, abilities, pay levels, or experience) of employees required for particular jobs at a given point in time and in a particular place is referred to as labour demand. The term

labour supply refers to both the number and characteristics of people available for those particular jobs (Jackson & Schuler, 1990). Forecasting the right number of staff and the appropriate skills requires reliable and valid information about the organisation's current and potential workforce (O'Brien et al., 2001). Tripathi (2010) noted in a study that it is necessary to collect comprehensive information and conduct extensive information analysis about a particular organisation to achieve workforce forecasting and planning that can create an intelligent decision-support system. The starting point of forecasting demand and supply is job analysis, a process that entails HR professionals accessing each job within the organisation (Omoankhanlen, 2013). Job analysis is a systematic process of identifying information regarding the tasks, duties, and responsibilities of a job. Job analysis is an important means of providing services and valuable information toward forecasting future staffing needs and HRP activities (Lunenburg, 2012). For example, the information obtained from job analysis can be utilised to determine the number of employees, to identify appropriate recruitment and selection methods, and to develop training programs for employees (Lunenburg, 2012). The importance of job analysis is not limited to providing information for HRP purposes; it also plays a significant role in organisation performance. A recent study conducted by Suthar, Chakravarthi, and Pradhan (2014), which surveyed 417 respondents across India's public-sector organisations, demonstrates that organisational performance and job analysis are positively related.

3.7.2.1 HR Demand Forecasting

HR demand forecasting is a key element of HRP. It involves predicting the number and characteristics (e.g. skills, abilities, pay levels, or experience) of employees needed for particular jobs at some future point in time and in a particular position (Jackson & Schuler, 1990). In HRP, HR demand is conducted separately from supply estimates because it depends primarily on variables that are specific to an organisation, such as turnover and retirement rates, transfers, and promotions. Supply forecasts on the other hand, rely heavily on difference and change in external factors (Sutanto, 2004). The two

main approaches used to perform demand forecasts are the qualitative and the quantitative approaches. Each approach offers several methods to assist HR professionals forecast supply.

Quantitative Approaches to Forecasting HR Demand

Quantitative approaches involve statistical or mathematical techniques. They are used primarily by professional HR planners in the organisation. They include several approaches: trend analysis, economic analysis, and Markov Chain Theory. A wide variety of quantitative methods for HR demand forecasting have been developed and some of them have been used very successfully (Parker & Caine, 1996). However, significant time and structured information are required to apply quantitative techniques and conduct analyses of the results. Also, key to the accuracy of quantitative techniques is the reliability of the input information (Lacerda et al., 2013). Application of this approach requires or depends on conditions affecting the structuring of data and information.

Trend Analysis

In this technique, prediction is made by past and present trends into the future. It is often used by small organisations and is based on the assumption that the past level of employment can also be used to indicate HR future needs (Bulmash, Chhinzer & Speers, 2010). The successful use of HR prediction is achieved by assessing past relationship patterns over the last few years. Normally, five years will yield adequate data to facilitate this kind of analysis. Trend analysis can be achieved using many factors, such as the number of employees leaving an organisation, retirements, resignations, and job categories. However, this approach often fails to take account of changing requirements for levels of employee efficiency (Bulmash et al., 2010).

Economic Modelling

This kind of technique applies a complex computer model to provide predictions of future demand based on probabilities and multiple assumptions. Identifying statistical relationships between variables included in a model is a method used in predicting HR demand. In this model, HR projections can be more accurately determined by adding more variables. However, such a technique is considered costly due to the high number of organisation-specific variables (Jackson & Schuler, 1990).

Qualitative Approaches to Forecasting HR demand:

Many small and medium-sized organisations prefer to rely on qualitative approaches, which attempt to involve employees and their supervisors and managers in HR forecasting. Qualitative forecasts are estimates by experts who have some knowledge of previous HR availability or utilisation (Lacerda et al., 2013).

Delphi Technique

Delphi technique is a sophisticated method of qualitative forecasting. It is a decision-making method that uses problem-solving and expert consulting (Nankervis et al., 2013). In order to maximise the benefits and reduce the deficiencies in the process of group decision-making, this technique is conducted in a structured manner. The process of Delphi involves a panel of experts who make independent forecasts and assumptions. Experts make their estimates in the light of a variety of factors, including economic, demographic, technological, legal, and social conditions outside of the organisation, as well as production, sales, turnover, experiences, and education levels of the workforce within the organisation. Then the information is collected and analysed by the HR department, and fed back to the experts for discussion. This process continues until a consensus is obtained about the forecast (Jackson & Schuler, 2001). There are two major disadvantages to the Delphi technique: it is time-consuming and costly. Another

disadvantage of the Delphi method is that it is subjective in nature. Thus it may not suit those who are more familiar with quantitative methods. This is because less attention is usually paid to issues related to qualities (e.g., skills and abilities) that employees will need in the future.

Nominal Group Technique

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is another group-based forecasting method. NGT techniques can be utilised to predict human resources demand or to facilitate group decision-making. The process starts with identifying issues and projections that need to be addressed. Then several experts (usually line and department managers) are invited to a face-to-face meeting to generate as many solutions as possible (Bulmash et al., 2010). The proposed solutions are reviewed, followed by ranking of each solution. The solution receiving the highest average ranking becomes the group choice (Stone, 2014).

3.7.2.2 HR Supply Forecasting

Once the HR Manager has forecast the HR needs of the organisation, the next step in HRP is HR supply forecasting. The purpose of forecasting supply is to ensure an adequate supply of human resources both in terms of the number and the characteristics of people available to fill the projected vacancies (Jackson & Schuler, 1990). Supply forecasts can be derived from either internal or external sources of information. The first step in HR supply forecasting is usually generating an inventory of the current supply of employees in the organisation (the number of people and their skills and abilities). The second step involves analysing external sources of HR (Lunenburg, 2012). Both steps are dependent on an accurate assessment of the current workforce situation, but most organisations start with internal candidates.

3.7.2.2.1 Forecasting External HR Supply

It is much easier to forecast the supply of human resources available inside the organisation than outside (Jackson & Schuler, 1990). Two reasons for this have been documented by Gourida (2013). First, the existing information on how organisations estimate external labour supply is limited, which means that the prediction of such HR supply is not an easy task. A more sophisticated approach is concerned with applying scenarios of several economic and technological conditions. This approach aims to secure labour for a particular type of organisation that provides equal opportunity and identifies the number of its people falling into various gender and race categories. Second, organisations vary in their unique procedures for determining requirements. For example, some public organisations have attempted to develop traditional work culture by employing from external sources (Nankervis et al., 2013). External HR supply can be estimated at multiple levels, including global, national, provincial, regional, and local. Information that may prove useful to an understanding of future HR supply includes:

- Supply and demand of jobs or skills
- Educational attainment levels within a region
- Compensation patterns based on experience, education, or occupation
- Immigration and emigration patterns within an area
- Forecasts of economic growth or decline
- Competition for talent
- Expected growth levels within industry or occupation groups
- Public policy, government, and legal changes
- Trends in labour force participation (including entry and exit)
- Technological development patterns (Bulmash et al., 2010, p. 70)

3.7.2.2.2 Forecasting Internal HR Supply:

Forecasting internal HR supply involves determining the number and type of employees who will be in the organisation at some future date. The main objective is to identify which current employees might be qualified for the expected positions available (Gourida, 2013). Organisations deploy various techniques to forecast the internal supply of HR. They include turnover analysis, replacement charts, Markov Chain Theory, and succession planning.

Turnover Analysis:

The standard definition of turnover is the “total number of employees leaving an organisation divided by the total number of employees in an organisation, regardless of whether the turnover was voluntary or involuntary” (Bulmash et al., 2010, p. 36). Turnover can be categorised into two subgroups voluntary and involuntary. Turnover that takes place within an organisation due to employees making decisions to terminate their employment is referred to as voluntary turnover (Zimmerman, 2008). In this case, the decision is made by the employee without management enticement. Involuntary turnover refers to employees who initiate departure from the organisation. Turnover is an important variable which organisations rely on to make internal supply forecasts (Sutanto, 2004). Obtaining information about why people leave the organisation is essential as it leads directly to developmental activities (Omoankhanlen, 2013).

Markov Chain Theory:

Markov analysis is another statistical technique used for demand forecasting. It is highly mathematical in nature as it is derived from probability theory. It is one of the most widely used techniques for determining system availability. Markov analysis constitutes a way of analysing the current status; the probability of each event derived from random events is determined according to the nature of the previous event (Parker & Caine, 1996). For

example, in a human resources system, the most basic information that can be used is the rate of transition. Employees can move from one position to another over time, with a transition probability. Transition of a system is known to be uncertain and thus, Markov analysis helps management to evaluate the effectiveness of various decisions, since the probabilities of transition from one state to another state are known (Škulj, Vehovar, & Štamfelj, 2008).

Replacement Charts:

A replacement chart is one evaluation technique used to forecast supply in higher level jobs (Jackson & Schuler, 1990). Its major concern is how projected openings will be filled by potential candidates from among internal employees (Lunenburg, 2012). Information regarding current job incumbents for vertical or horizontal movement can be used to form a comprehensive replacement chart. A brief assessment of performance and potential, age, length of time in current position, and overall length of service is information that typically is included (Sutanto, 2004). Its propensity for focusing attention on the skills and positions currently needed by the organisation and not those required for the future has been a major criticism of the replacement chart.

3.7.2.3 Choice of a Forecasting Technique

Regardless of the technique used, there is no doubt that the use of quantitative techniques can assist managers to operate effectively in the problem-solving and decision-making processes, but they are not always the most appropriate methods to use (Bhattacharyya, 2002). Conversion of such techniques into practical tools usable by the non-mathematician is not possible as they entail a wide range of mathematics skills and competence (Parker & Caine, 1996). In addition, the employment of this type of approach may entail the unnecessary cost of collecting and systemising information that may not contribute objectively to decision-making (Lacerda et al., 2013). Agrawal, Nanda, Rao, and Rao (2013) state that the complexities associated with quantitative information are

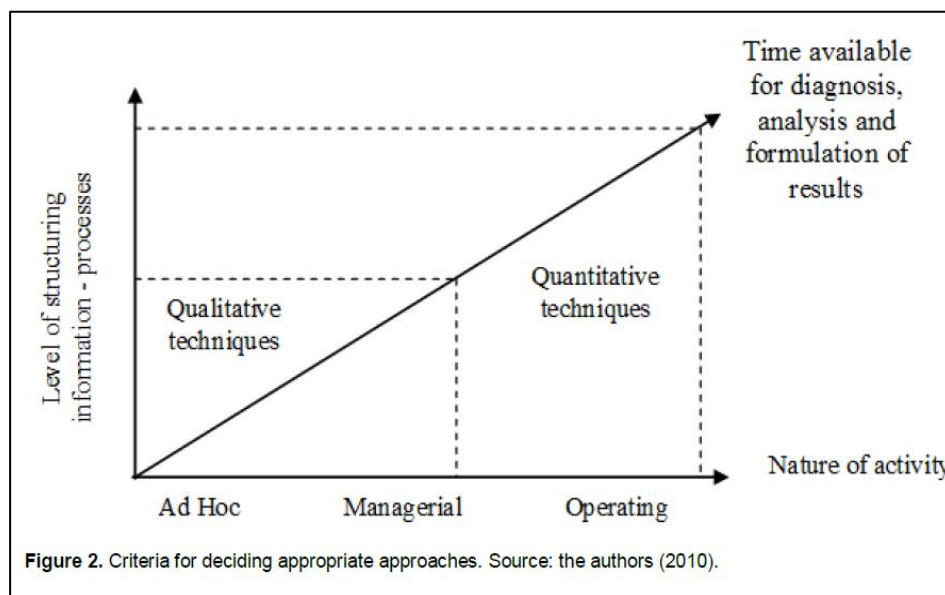
typical of forecasting in many developed countries (Agrawal et al., 2013). HRP, however, should use both approaches: qualitative and quantitative. The two approaches are intended to complement each other and provide more comprehensive planning (Nankervis et al., 2013). For example, using a quantitative approach in the beginning, in an unstructured environment, may take longer, thus resulting in higher costs to cover the need for specialised professionals. It is recommended that HR forecasting should start with a qualitative approach to structuring, standardising, creating metrics, and collecting data; this can later be operationalised based on a quantitative approach (Lacerda et al., 2013).

The choice of forecasting method is influenced by many factors. Lacerda et al. (2013) suggests some criteria can impact the choice of an appropriate HRP approach. Figure 3.2 illustrates how the choice of approach depends on the three axes of the decision: i) the nature of the activity, ii) to what level data / information / processes are structured, and iii) the time available for the project (diagnosis, analysis and formulation of the results). Nankervis et al. (2013) point out that the choice of a forecasting technique is influenced by the expertise of the HR specialist, the complexity of organisation structures, and market factors. Sutanto (2004) determined four major factors affecting the choice of an appropriate HRP approach:

1. Organisation's environment: An organisation that operates under fairly stable environmental conditions can use statistical forecasting models. Conversely, for firms operating in unstable environments, quantitatively based predictions are likely to be highly tentative.
2. Organisation size: Comparison of larger organisations with smaller ones shows that the larger ones are likely to use a more sophisticated quantitative technique. This can be observed in governmental sectors where there is a tradition of high internal stability due to low employee turnover.

3. Perceived uncertainty in labour markets and the economy: The discontinuation of sophisticated techniques will emerge if there is an increase in perceived uncertainty to a point where techniques are not used, or where uncertainty decreases to a point where techniques are no longer needed.
4. Competition: Industrial organisations tend to use similar forecasting techniques due their regulations, their operation within predictable product markets, and their acquisition resources slack.

Figure 3.2: Criteria for Deciding Appropriate Approach to HR Forecasting



(Lacerda et al., 2013, p. 795)

In sum, due to the high number of factors that can influence HR predictions, different types of organisations must perform this function in different ways.

3.7.2.4 Determining Gaps and surpluses

The phase of HRP that comes after demand and supply forecasting entails identification of the gaps between demand and supply. The process of identifying the differences and

the gaps between current and future workforce needs is conducted based on information collected about jobs supply analysis and demand analysis. (O'Brien-Pallas, Birch, Baumann, & Murphy, 2001). More commonly, this process focuses on identifying areas where the organisation expects that its future needs will exceed the current resource, or where its current workforce exceeds the projected needs of the future (Cotten, 2007). Jacobson (2010) develops a set of important determinants that should be discussed and agreed at this stage:

- The skills that the organisation anticipates needing.
- Areas in which future needs exceed current resources and projections.
- Skill gaps that are critical for future goal achievement.
- Areas in which the current workforce exceeds the projected needs of the future.
- Areas in which the current supply will meet future needs.
- Existing employee skills, qualifications, and competencies required for the proposed organisational objectives.

When gaps are identified, management and leadership in the organisation should prioritise the development of action plans aimed at closing the demand–supply gap. This will involve staffing strategies which employ a cohesive strategic workforce that can plan for effective service delivery.

3.7.3 Recruitment Strategies

Heneman and Judge (2008) defined a staffing strategy as an interplay between organisations and HR strategy that deals with key decisions regarding the acquisition and development of an organisation's workforce, such as decisions on recruitment, selection, and employment programs. Staffing strategies are categorised under two broad headings: internal and external strategies (Heneman & Judge, 2008; Kumari, 2012; Shipps, 2007; Yusoff, Shah, Ali, & Abu Bakar, 2013). Internal staffing is described as the set of activities and processes used by an organisation to fill the vacancy by offering enhanced

job opportunities to those staff already within its existing workforce (Yusoff et al., 2013). Rosman, Shah, and Hussain (2013) observed that internal sources for recruitment and selection are preferred by both private and public organisations. According to a survey published by the Chartered Institute of Personal Development (CIPD), 84% of UK organisations had a policy of advertising all vacancies internally (CIPD, 2005). One reason why an organisation may prefer insiders to outsiders is that current employees have been made aware that their organisation plans to provide career development and promotion opportunities for current employees (Rosman et al., 2013). Thus, internal recruitment enhances motivation and engenders a culture of loyalty and stability among existing employees. Another advantage of this strategy is that current employees are more likely to have connections and knowledge relevant to the organisation's policies and procedures. The time needed to train internal recruits is therefore shorter (Kumari, 2012).

On the other hand, internal recruitment is not without its disadvantages. These disadvantages occur because existing employees all tend to work with the same set of ideas and tend to implement according to processes and procedures that have become traditional within their organisation (Rosman et al., 2013). Thus, fresh talent is needed to spur growth and development in an organisation. This can be achieved through external recruitment.

External recruitment is another method that the organisation uses to fill vacancies or open positions. External recruiting involves actions intended to attract candidates from outside the organisation when it has no qualified candidates among its existing employees to fill vacancies through promotions or transfers (Mondy et al., 1996). The primary advantage of external recruitment is that it gathers fresh talent from the outside that can provide innovative ideas and fresh perspectives for the organisation. An additional advantage of external recruitment is that it achieves fairness, because it provides equality of opportunity to all. It also brings the best people into the organisation (VO & Bartram, 2012). Louw (2013) found that external sources of recruitment are widely used in the South African context in order to avoid nepotism in the recruitment and selection process.

The disadvantages of these methods include lower morale and less commitment to the organisation. This occurs when current employees are rejected, leaving open the supposition that they may not be considered true members of the organisation (Rosman et al., 2013). Osoian and Zaharie (2014) reported that identifying recruitment sources is a crucial step for any enterprise; however, there is no specific source which is the best and appropriate approaches for an organisation depend on organisational needs, the features of the vacancies, the size, image, and budget of the company, and the labour force supply.

Internal and external staffing strategies both involve a number of alternative staffing activities. The following section provides a more detailed discussion about the various staffing methods adopted by organisations to fill vacancies internally.

3.7.3.1 Internal Promotion

Promotion is an internal staffing strategy that organisations choose to address the gap between labour demand and labour supply. Internal promotion is defined as the process of movement to a higher position in which responsibilities and presumably prestige are increased (Gusdorf, 2008). To attract suitable and competent employees, organisations should have clearly defined policies that set the criteria, standards, and measures for evaluation (Geet, Deshpande, & Deshpande, 2009). The purpose of promotion policy is also to ensure that the process is fair and equitable. An important requirement of promotion policy is the career path that the HR planners will be able to project for the existing employees available for vacancies (Ganesan & Weitz, 1996; Seibert, Kraimer, Holtom, & Pierotti, 2013). In addition, a career path determines who is eligible for a new job in the organisation when it outlines the core responsibilities, skills, and requirements for each position (Cao & Thomas, 2013). Another important component of effective promotion policy is the assessment method which the organisation uses to decide who is eligible to be considered for an open position. Usually, specific methods of assessment are applied, using measures such as seniority, level of experience, and other standards

such as knowledge, skills, ability, and other characteristics. For instance, according to the Federal Personnel Guide provided by the federal government of the USA, to be considered for internal assignment, evaluation of an applicant can include reference to factors such as job-related experience, education, supervisors' appraisal of performance, special achievements, training tests, and interview (Anonymous, 1999). According to a survey for the 44th meeting of the Directors General responsible for the Public Administration of the European Union (EU) member states, the EU promotion system then included several requirements and criteria, such as passing exams, mandatory training days, and proven seniority (Bossaert, 2005). Based on this empirical evidence it is recommended that the evaluation of candidates be carried out through a variety of methods using diverse criteria, rather than a single method. In addition, the evidence suggests that performance appraisal should be the primary method used in promotion procedures. Recent studies have shown that the use of performance appraisal positively relates to organisational persistence and growth (Joarder & Ashraf, 2012; Sabiu et al., 2016).

Promotion systems constitute a very important factor that affects almost all aspects of organisational life. Most studies of HRM have noted that the existence of a promotion system is seen as positively affecting organisational performance. In their study, (Bonavia & Marin-Garcia, 2011) examined the impact of HRM practices on organisations in Spain. They found that there was a significant positive relationship between promotion opportunity and organisational performance. Similarly, another study by Katou and Budhwar (2010) shows that promotion practice is positively related to organisational performance. As is evident from these studies, internal promotion makes a positive contribution to employees' satisfaction and is likely to lead to an increase in the effectiveness of the organisation. Therefore, an emphasis on internal promotion is important because this is one of the key factors leading to competitive advantage in an organisation (Sabiu et al., 2016).

3.7.3.2 Internal Employee Transfer

According to Aswathappa (2005), an internal employee transfer occurs when an employee shifts from his or her current job position to another at the same level, and with the same conditions. Causes of employee transfers differ from one organisation to the next depending on the organisation's size, policy, and structure. For example, employees may be required to move from one department where there is a surplus of employees to another department where there exists a shortage of employees (Sharma & Goyal, 2010). Transfer may be part of an organisation's approach to career development: the transfer may take place in response to an employee's expression of a lack of interest in his or her current work, or lack of job satisfaction. Prince (2005) argues that the transfer of employees between different organisational units is an area where the organisation can accrue social capital advantages. New transfers put organisations in a unique position to provide a better match between the specific knowledge and capabilities of employees and the needs of the organisation.

Transfers from other units in the organisation facilitate knowledge exchange and aid coordination between those units, which in turn can help create a unique human resource that provides a trigger for competitive advantage. Jacobson (2010) states that the cost and benefits associated with investments in HR practices are lost when staff turnover is controlled poorly. A study conducted by Mabindisa (2013) showed that employee turnover reflects negatively on the image of the organisation and results in a reduction in effective service delivery to customers. A fair and impartial transfer policy is needed in order to ensure that employee transfers are implemented in an objective manner. Adequate selection and placement procedures must be clarified to ensure that transfer procedures are reasonable and consistent with the interests of the organisation (Krishna & Aquinas, 2004). It is advisable that the format for the organisation's transfer policy should be acceptable to both employees and the organisation (Coetzee & Mbanze, 2014). Thus, an organisation needs to plan the internal transfer carefully to reduce the impact on organisational effectiveness and employee performance.

3.7.3.3 Training and Development

Training and development is an important strategy whereby organisations can make a significant investment in developing a talented, motivated and engaged workforce (Rajasekar & Khan, 2013). Truitt (2011) defines training and development as those activities used to improve employees' performance on current jobs and future assignments in order to meet the future organisation's needs. The primary objective of training and development programs is to help achieve overall organisational objectives as well as the employee's personal goals (Bala, Aklahyel, & Ibrahim, 2014). In other words, training and development are important programs which can be utilised by organisations to close the performance gaps among the organisation's employees.

Since the skills needed in the workforce are always changing due to organisational change initiatives, training and development must be an important component of organisational strategy. A strong relationship between training and development and competitive advantage was demonstrated in the literature (Cooke, 2001; Divya & Gomathi, 2015; Falola, Osibanjo, & Ojo, 2014; Sabiu et al., 2016). This is because training and development is a vital area of HRM that may help employees to perform tasks efficiently and enables them to derive satisfaction from their work, so that they feel passionately about it (Wahab, Hussain, Zadeh, Shah, & Hussain, 2014). This in turn may boost morale, reduce staff turnover, and save money (Mabindisa, 2013).

According to Kiyonaga (2004), institutions that intend to gain a sustainable competitive advantage should make training and development an integral part of their business strategy. This requires, according to Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) that HR functions act as a business partner. This business partner role encompasses many dimensions such as becoming a business expert, change agent, knowledge manager, and consultant. A clear understanding of the organisation's mission and values will help ensure effort is focused in the right direction for goal attainment (Ogedegbe, 2014). It is essential to define very clear objectives for an organisation to be successful in providing an effective training

strategy. Au, Altman, and Roussel (2008) revealed that observable and measurable training objectives lead to more effective training.

Training needs assessment is ‘an ongoing process of gathering data to determine what training needs exist so that training can be developed to help the organisation accomplish its objectives’ (Brown, 2002). Conducting a needs assessment is a useful tool to identify and analyse the gap between the current employee’s skills and the skills required for effective job performance (Mirza, & Riaz, 2012; Cekada, 2010). In addition, through conducting a needs assessment, an organisation will be able to specify the conditions under which the training and development activities are expected to occur (Cekada, 2010). Needs assessment involves three levels of analysis: organisational analysis, task analysis, and individual analysis (Brown, 2002; Goldstein, 1993). Organisational analysis refers to analysis from an organisational perspective, which determines the knowledge and abilities that employees will need for the future. Task analysis includes identifying the important tasks as well as the knowledge, and skills needed to perform the job (Mirza & Riaz, 2012). Individual analysis aims to identify who needs training from the individual perspective. The data for analysis include those arising from surveys, interviews, focus groups, tests, and performance appraisals (Brown, 2002). Conducting a training needs assessment correctly is a wise investment for the organisation. It helps the organisation save time, money and effort by working on the right problems (Cekada, 2010). Therefore, it is critical to make assessments based on the use of accurate and reliable data input. To this end, it is essential that the supervisor has a clear role in supporting the employees to identify their training needs. The communication between the supervisor and subordinate is to ensure the latter is clear about the specific training needs and to consider how these will be met (Prince, 2005). In addition, a Human Resource Information System (HRIS) is a useful tool to support organisations in the training process. Goodman et al. (2013), argue that HRIS is a must for adequate HR systems and allows for easier analysis of future needs, helping HR managers plan accordingly. HRIS is a useful tool to help organisations with the training process. It has been found that better training needs

analysis can be obtained with the increased use of HRIS in training and development functions (Nagendra & Deshpande, 2014).

Leadership development has been considered a key strategy in maintaining competitiveness in today's globally competitive environment. According to Uzundu (2013), a leadership development program is useful for building organisational knowledge while ensuring that a steady supply of key leadership talent will be available to replace retirees. Hence, leadership development refers to all developmental activity that focuses on leadership continuity and on critical positions within an organisation (Kim, 2006). Such programs are seated in a belief that having successors ready to fill key vacancies allows an organisation to improve its operational conditions and thus outperform its competitors (Basiri & Sabegh, 2014). Kim (2012) indicated that the presence of a leadership development program will increase the motivation, productivity, and loyalty of employees, which are fundamental to organisational performance. For this reason, many organisations have accorded leadership development high priority. Bossaert (2005) reported that training programs relating to leadership development are a growing focus of attention in the EU. For instance, in the UK, a number of different leadership programs have been set up at senior level, employing methods such as performance appraisal feedback, leadership training, and feedback from colleagues. According to Halligan (2007), government regulations and standards, institutional structures, and the extent of reform are factors that are affected by leadership development. Although leadership development has been used extensively in the private sector, the public sector has faced difficulties in implementing this type of program, including problems engendered by the nature of tenure and political leadership in the public sector, personnel system rules, lack of resources, and lack of focus (Wilkerson, 2002).

3.7.3.4 External Staffing

In contrast to internal recruitment activity, external recruitment activity occurs when the organisation looks outside itself for a pool of candidates (Dahlberg, Nyström, &

Dahlberg, 2001). As discussed above, an organisation uses the external recruitment strategy when internal recruitment does not produce the number or quality of employees needed. Osoian and Zaharie (2014) point out that organisations usually undertake external recruitment strategies to remain competitive in the labour market. It is widely accepted that attracting highly skilled employees is essential to gain a competitive advantage. This is because such employees will become a part of an organisation's core workforce and thus they improve the organisation's competitive position by increasing productivity (Anyim et al., 2012). The reality of the marketplace is that the public sector struggles to attract talent in the face of strong competition from the private sector (Wilkerson, 2002). It is for that reason that many public sector organisations adopt strategies similar to those in the private sector for attracting and retaining talent. For instance, some government organisations have already made adjustments to their compensation system. In addition, public sector organisations can attract talented employees by providing them with a wealth and range of experiences that are not available elsewhere (Richardson, 2009).

The recruitment of applicants from outside the organisation can be implemented through different channels. For most jobs the traditional methods include print media, external agencies, education liaison, other media and professional contacts (Yusoff et al., 2013). More common now is the use of internet recruitment (Richardson, 2009). However, according to a study conducted by Louw (2013), newspaper advertising is still the most popular method used to source qualified applicants from outside the organisation. This is because it is a relatively inexpensive method of reaching a large number of candidates.

The recruitment process can be implemented by an organisation under a centralised or decentralised system (Heneman et al., 2011). The centralised recruitment system is a system of recruiting employees coordinated by a central office, while in a decentralised system, recruitment procedures are coordinated by individual units. Each system has its advantages and disadvantages, particularly in terms of flexibility, ability to fill vacancies, quality of staff employed, responsiveness, distribution of staff, and equal opportunity (Njovu, 2013). According to the literature, a decentralised system may have both negative

and positive effects (Hou, Ingraham, Bretschneider, & Selden, 2000; Wang, Collins, Tang, & Martineau, 2002). For example, unequal distribution of staff, poor quality of staff, nepotism, favouritism and corruption are all potential disadvantages of a decentralised recruitment process. On the other hand, a decentralised recruitment process can be more flexible, effective, responsive to the HR needs of the organisation, and quicker in making decisions. The disadvantage of a centralised system, on the other hand, is that it suffers from rigidity, inflexibility and unresponsiveness (Lavigna & Hays, 2004). However, this system is more likely to provide equal distribution of staff and employment of qualified staff (Munga, Songstad, Blystad, & Mæstad, 2009; Wang et al., 2002).

Recruitment and selection systems vary across different countries and regions. For instance, most EU countries have moved towards some degree of decentralisation of HR responsibilities (Bossaert, 2005). In contrast, some countries such as Bangladesh, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, and Pakistan, have opted for a centralised system (Asian Development Bank, 2007). The difference between those two types of countries could be due to factors related to recruitment decisions such as labour legislation, the source of recruitment, and the size of the organisation (Louw, 2013). However, the literature suggests that there is a strong trend toward decentralised recruitment processes. There is some evidence that an organisation which is usually characterised as decentralised is more able to attract qualified people. For example, a study conducted by Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson (2005) in Belgium, found that applicants were more attracted to decentralised organisations than to centralised organisations. This may be explained by the fact that decentralised institutions tend to grant more decision-making power to employees, which in turn positively influences job satisfaction. Similarly, Njovu (2013) found that the decentralised recruitment policy adopted by the Tanzania government led to the development of employees' performance and motivation, and to a reduction in bureaucracy. The results of Turban, Campion, and Eyring's study (1995) also suggested that decentralised organisations have more ability to attract higher-level applicants. There is no perfect system and no one system that is appropriate for all organisations; however, prior to the adoption of any system, organisations need to have well-functioning

structures to facilitate effective functioning of the system and to be prepared in terms of resources, rules and regulation (Njovu, 2013).

Organisations use various methods to select applicants, depending on the organisation's culture and size, the state of the labour market, and the type and level of the position (Stone, 2007). The aim of any selection method is to narrow the number of candidates and make the final recruitment decision in favour of the right candidate (Gummadi, 2015). Anderson and Witvliet (2008) found that interviews, work sample tests, and résumés were popular selection tools used in six countries: the US, France, Spain, Portugal, and Singapore. In a study conducted by Sackett and Lievens (2008), it was found that the most popular techniques used in the selection process were application blank, interviews, and reference checking. These results are consistent with those of Louw (2013) who revealed that the application blank and the interview are the most popular selection methods in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Another study conducted by El-Kot and Leat (2008) seems to be analogous with this research in that the interview, application forms and references, are rated as the dominant method used by Egyptian organisations. In general, it seems that the research evidence favours the use of a diversity of methods to ensure the selection of the best applicants, since a combination of selection methods can provide abundant information on who is the best suited applicant, which in turn may enhance organisational competitiveness (Louw, 2013).

3.7.4 Employee Surplus

An employee surplus indicates that the existing employee supply or the number of employees within the organisation exceeds the demand. The organisation can accommodate this imbalance for a short time; however, this situation is seen as one of the factors most negatively influencing employee loafing, employee motivation, and efficiency and productivity in public-sector organisations (Armstrong 1997; İdrisoğlu, 2014). İdrisoğlu (2014) has indicated that an employee surplus is usually caused by social and political pressures. Anyim et al. (2012) argue that if a surplus employee situation

persists, it potentially will become a problem, and costly due to legislation, including requirements such as a minimum period of notice and redundancy payments. Gimpelson, Kapeliushnikov, and Lukiyanova (2010) state that the institutions that suffer from shortage or surplus of employees are the least effective and competitive institutions. Thus, in responding to employee surplus, an organisation needs to take action by aligning the quantity and quality of their workforce supply.

Downsizing methods have been widely used by organisations to facilitate workforce adjustment. For example, in a survey of 1,194 large Canadian companies, more than 50% of the organisations surveyed reported efforts to permanently reduce and remove unnecessary work (Wagar, 1997). An organisation can adopt many downsizing strategies for addressing an employee surplus, including temporary layoffs, permanent layoffs, incentives for voluntary separation and leave without pay, and early retirement packages.

Layoffs

The layoffs strategy fundamentally forces employees into unemployment. The layoff solution tends to be a quick fix strategy, allowing an organisation to adjust its internal labour force based on its skills and competencies (Sobieralski & Nordstrom, 2012). Layoffs present considerable challenges, including lack of involvement in the workplace and high stress levels, and tend to reduce productivity. A key consideration for a layoff strategy is that a variety of decision criteria are available to select who goes and who stays (Cascio, 2009).

Incentive for Voluntary Separations

Incentives for voluntary separation represent an alternative way for organisations to address employee surplus. This strategy allows organisations to entice employees to self-select employment termination. It is viewed as a more humane, efficient, and timely method for managing employee surplus than layoff (Bulmash et al., 2010). One of the

challenges facing organisations when implementing this strategy is the risk that the number of employees wishing to engage in the voluntary separation is higher than that desired or required. These challenges can be addressed by providing clarity on several issues, including the number of, eligibility for, and strategic reasons for the proposed separations (Bulmash et al., 2010).

Early Retirement

Early retirement incentives represent one of the popular methods of addressing an employee surplus. This strategy is offered for a limited time to a select group of employees who have spent a long time in service; they are encouraged to retire before they reach the normal retirement age (Patton, 2000). Although early retirement packages offer a quick and simple way to deal with employee surplus (Appelbaum, Patton, & Shapiro, 2003), Paul and Townsend (1992) point out that early retirement incentives have received harsh criticism due to the impact on employees, including financial problems, and psychological problems relating to self-image, values, power and security.

Leave without Pay

In this strategy, an organisation encourages the employee to take temporary leave without an incentive (Niehaus & Price, 2013). An organisation can use this strategy to manage employee surplus in the short term. The terms and length of the leave must be explicitly defined (Bulmash et al., 2010).

The main conclusion seems to be that a downsizing strategy could be viewed as either effective or ineffective, and that how and why downsizing is undertaken will determine the outcomes (Appelbaum et al., 2003). The existence of a strategic plan for downsizing from the beginning is what distinguishes the downsizing winners from the losers. Cascio (2009) highlights that decision-makers must always take into consideration the short and long-term costs of layoffs. Before a course of action is selected, senior managers must

ensure that the several potential solutions are consistent with the legislation and regulations in the organisation. It is imperative that the employee surplus be identified based on job analysis (İdrisoğlu, 2014). This is because the number of employees/positions needed for each department will be determined through this method.

3.7.5 Evaluation

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, HRP has the potential to be a unique source of competitive advantage. Evaluating HRP practices is an important step for organisations which seek to gain competitive advantage (Franklin, Mackie, & Rigby, 2005). The final step of HRP includes monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of ongoing HRP programs. HRP professionals need to adopt a system of HRP measurements that will enable effective decisions to be made regarding HRP processes and programs (Helton & Soubik, 2004; Pynes, 2004). Peiseniece and Volkova (2009) reported the three main reasons why an evaluation is essential for HR programs. Firstly, it contributes to the growth of the organisation's value by linking HR activities to measures; for instance, impact measures seeking to prove the existence of a link between the training programs and tangible effects on the competitive advantage of the organisation (Holland, Sheehan, & De Cieri, 2005). Secondly, assessing HRP effectiveness is important to identify which area should be revised and improved. Thirdly, the evaluation of HR programs involves HR managers obtaining feedback from top management on the various practices and programs, in order to make necessary adjustments.

Although there is apparent acceptance among practitioners and academics that evaluation is a crucial step in the process of HRM, the reality is often that difficulties have been identified in assessing the impact and degree of success of HR practices. In a study by Franklin et al. (2005) which aimed to determine obstacles to the effective measurement of human resources in New Zealand, it was found that HR professionals lack the knowledge to undertake the measurement task, and lack the skills to conceptualise and design measures. In the same context, Tootell, Blackler, Toulson, and Dewe (2009)

conducted a case study of six organisations to investigate issues about the development of HR measures. Similar barriers were identified that hinder the organisation from measuring HR. These barriers include limited understanding of different theoretical measuring models, a limited skill in designing and analysing measures, and limited support for measurement from senior management. These studies suggest that the extent to which an organisation can overcome the above obstacles will determine its capability to progress HR measurement initiatives.

The existing research revealed that various methods and models facilitate the evaluation of HR processes. However, these models were not exclusively developed for the HRP function; they may be used in other functional areas of HRM as well. The following examples are some models used for human resource evaluation:

Return on Investment Model (ROI)

The ROI model tries to use input and output ratios that are converted into financial terms, and then calculates the cost of HR functions and programs that have contributed to the organisation. The output is the percentage that determines a return on investment in human resources (McLean, 2005).

This model can improve the information flow about profit attributable to HR programs. This because ROI operations require the active participation of management working with HR toward the computation of the ROI numbers. Despite the efforts of many organisations to use ROI in evaluating HR, it can prove difficult to measure because of intervening variables (mediating variable used to explain causal links between other variables), and some intangible benefits are not financial (e.g. employee satisfaction and ethical business decisions).

Balanced Scorecard Model

This model is not new and evaluates HR effectiveness by taking into consideration four perspectives: the financial, customer, internal business innovation, and learning perspectives (Ulrich, 1997). The Model's focuses on the bottom line and on the organisation's strategy implementation constitutes the important advantage this approach offers. The Balanced Scorecard approach is, however, fraught with many difficulties, including determining quantitative measurable results for the most important outcomes, and high start-up costs for training users and for developing systems to operate it (McLean, 2005).

Group-level Metrics Model

Organisations using the Group-level Metrics model tend to rely on work teams to increase their efficiency and effectiveness. Elements that can be evaluated at the group level include: performance, cohesion, conflict, communication integration, morale, turnover, and group satisfaction. (Härtel, Fujimoto, Strybosch, & Fitzpatrick, 2006). There are, however, serious difficulties in applying the model's control and experimental group approach. For example, it is difficult to attain statistically significant results because of the small numbers or samples involved. Also, there may be some difficulty in selecting employees randomly due to schedules, work teams, union agreements or other factors (McLean, 2005).

Evaluation System Model Integrated into HRM

This model presents a comprehensive human resource evaluation through a consideration of organisational performance. The model is integrated into the overall management control of the organisation, and demonstrates that the stages of HR assessment are related to one another. The stages of the model comprise: position evaluation of personnel hire;

periodic personnel evaluation, and evaluation of the held position (Vveinhardt & Papšiene, 2013a).

In the context of HRP according to Donahue, Selden, and Ingraham (2000a) there are three important points an organisation needs to consider when evaluating its HRP processes. First, data should be collected in a way that support the assessment of the organisation's current status and estimates of its future requirements. Second, the organisation should become actively involved in a comprehensive needs analysis. Third, detailed guidance and contingency planning to meet future workforce needs should be set by the organisation. The mechanisms by which HR evaluation are conducted depend on the level of technological sophistication the systems that are available and the robust nature of the tools chosen. Anderson (2004) pointed out that there is no one perfect evaluation model for HR; however, in order to access the most important data and information, the decision-makers in the evaluation process are required to be flexible, allowing the necessary experimentation steps. He added that decision-makers must also be willing to synthesise HRP with other strategic documents, directions and information for it to be useful. Proper evaluation is dependent on the criteria by which the organisation can assess whether its HRP function is effective or not (Donahue et al., 2000a).

Gilbert (1993) defined the model as a theory or set of assumptions that seek to explain or to communicate mutual relations between social phenomena. From this perspective, a model specifies the main concepts that will have to be explored in the investigation. The next section reviews models to show the common processes of HRP and to provide a conceptual framework for the study.

3.8 Models of HRP

Literature on HRP in public organisations, since Helton and Soubik's (2004) case study on Pennsylvania's HRP model was published, has been limited. In addition to the Pennsylvania model, this section discusses two more recent models of HRP in public

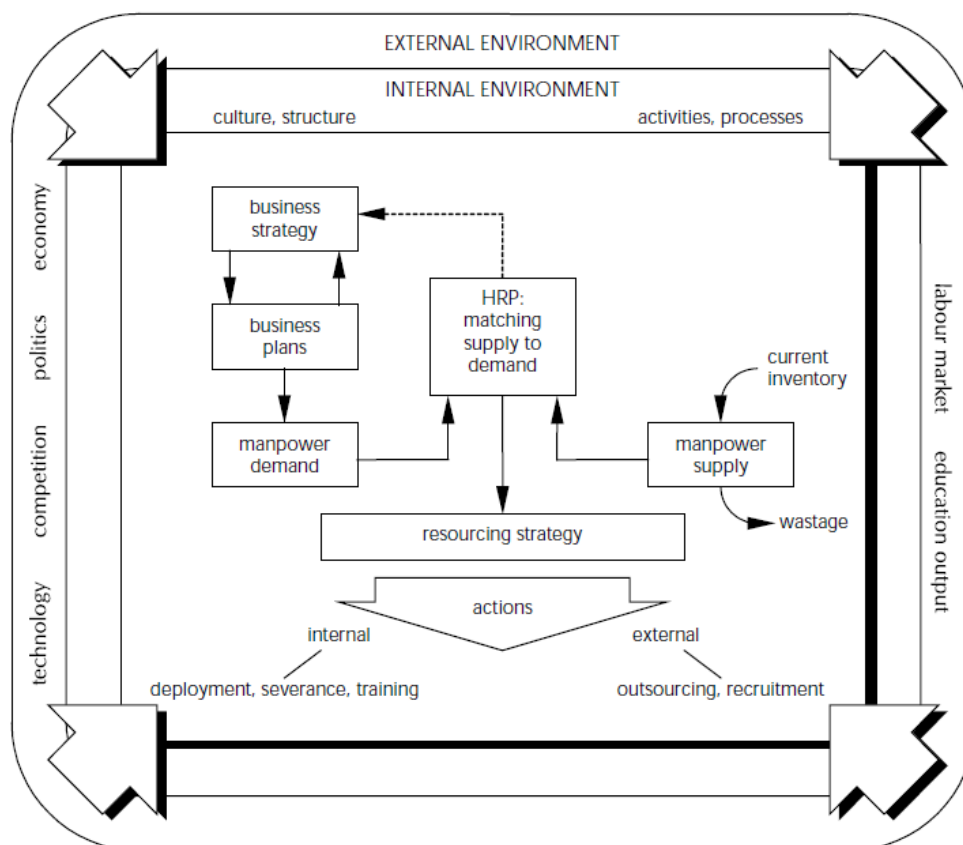
organisations described in the literature. These models provide sound illustration of the HRP practices and steps necessary to develop a basis for identifying a conceptual framework for the study.

Sinclair's Model

The first model, Sinclair's model (Figure 3.3), illustrates how HRP is congruent with the broader plan of the organisation. This model provides assumptions and solutions based on current trends for use when conducting HRP. These trends include changes in the external and internal environment such as economic systems, demographics, and advances in technology, laws, and regulations. Consideration of these and other trends provides valuable information for analysis by the HRP professional, since these trends illustrate change in the nature of the workforce and workforce needs in the future

One of the advantages of this model is that it integrates HR strategy and a strategic planning system, to constitute a single underlying constructed framework that identifies sets of competencies aligned with the organisation's mission, vision, and strategic goals. Competencies include the knowledge, skills, and other attributes that an individual needs to process in order to execute a role effectively, and so contribute to the achievement of organisational objectives. In addition to the ease and simplicity of using of this model, it allows an underlying analysis of knowledge and skills through development of HRP activity, which means that superior organisational performance can be achieved.

Figure 3.3: Sinclair's Model



Source: (Sinclair, 2004, p. 5)

Pennsylvania HRP Model

A second model is applied by the Pennsylvania State Government in the USA (Helton & Soubik, 2004). It focuses more on the significance of knowing where the organisation is going. The Pennsylvania State Government has developed a nine-step HRP process. As shown in Figure 3.4, the model begins with an analysis of the agency mission, goals and initiatives, which includes strategic objectives and a review of the organisational structure, with HR an active partner. The second process is determining future work requirements, followed by analysing current resources and projections. Performing a high-level workforce gap analysis is the fourth process. The fifth and sixth processes include designing a workforce plan and addressing skills gaps. The seventh process involves creating workforce-solution action plans that include recruiting,

training/retraining, organisation restructuring, contracting out, succession planning, technological enhancements, and so on. The eighth process is implementing an action plan, which involves ensuring the role of HR is understood, and that necessary contact work, marketing, and coordination happen in order to implement the plan and to achieve the strategic goals. This model concludes with an evaluation of the process.

Figure 3.4: **Pennsylvania HRP Model**



Source: (Helton & Soubik, 2004, p. 459)

Basic HRP Model

This model also shows how HRP practice is related to the formation of the business plan and takes into account both the supply and demand of staff needed; it is sensitive to the external environment. The model focuses on how HRP can meet the unique needs of public-sector organisations and clarifies that the process of implementing HRP is driven by strategy. In addition, this model provides an opportunity to review the workforce plan

to ensure that the plan and related strategies are in line with the agency's mission, goals, and initiatives.

Figure 3.5: The Basic HRP Model



Source: (Jacobson, 2010, p. 362)

A comparison of the HRP models shows that they are all quite similar and provide good illustrations of the HRP process except for differences in the terms used and the order of processes involved. According to Jackson and Schuler (2001), nearly all models of the HRP process encompass the same elements or activities. The most common standards found in the majority of models include establishing human resource objectives, gathering and analysing data to forecast expected human resource demand, forecasting future human resource supply, analysing gaps and identifying future HR and competencies needed, designing and implementing programs, and monitoring and evaluating HRP programs and activities.

It appears that the most of these models focus on issues relating to a linkage of HRP with all other activities. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this approach is significant in ensuring effective integration of HR planning with the direction that the organisation will take. In addition, environmental factors are considered and taken into account when making these models and this will reduce the gap between the current and future expectations of the organisation. Environmental scanning in terms of manpower is a must

as today's turbulent economics will generate changes in skills, job content, and whether there is a staffing surplus or shortage. With respect to gap analysis, this step is worth mentioning in that these models emphasise how the organisation will deal with an employee surplus or overcome shortages to fulfil the substance of the HR plan in place. Finally, the evaluation and monitoring of the methods used by the chosen model allows feedback on how well the model is working, which is a common standard practice endorsed by the models themselves. All models emphasise the ongoing evaluation and monitoring of various HRP processes.

In order to achieve the objectives of this research, there is a need to gain more insight into how HRP practices are being used in the public sector. The next section discusses the situation in Oman, which is the chosen context of the proposed study, with specific reference to HRP practices.

3.9 HRP in the Omani Context

Few HRP studies have been undertaken in the context of Oman, contributing to the general gap in studies of public-sector HRP practices. Most local studies to date have focused on the current skills and abilities of HR planners. For example, Al Lazmi (2003) investigated the strengths and weaknesses of HR planners in the MoE. His study used a 60 item questionnaire for evaluating planning specialists in terms of their tasks, responsibilities, administrative work, technologies, and education information. The key staff weaknesses identified were: lack of planning education, and lack of analysis of staff education status in order to identify problems, as well as capabilities; a lack of support from authorities; centralised decision-making for planning issues; and a lack of background knowledge. In order to assess the effectiveness of HRP employees in the MoE, Abdalkalq (2005) attempted to identify statistical differences among respondents in terms of gender, job title, qualification, experience and in-service training. She collected data from 63 individuals including directors, deputy directors, section technical heads, and members working in the Ministry of Education. The results of the study

showed that the levels of HRP skill among HR planners at the MoE ranged between low and medium. Together, the above studies emphasise that staff engaged in HRP often suffered from a lack of skills and knowledge in many important areas related to HRP.

Although several descriptive studies have been conducted in the area of strategic planning, little effort has been made to explore what the MoE is doing in terms of linking strategic planning with HRP. For instance, a quantitative study by Al Sahmsi (2010) using a sample of 356 individuals working in the MoE explored the degree of strategic planning undertaken by the managers there. The results indicated the need to increase the implementation of strategic planning concepts and practices at the MoE. The study also found that over half the respondents do not have the correct understanding of strategic planning concepts. In addition, Rajasekar and Khan's (2013) study aimed to examine the effectiveness of the training function in 11 Government of Oman organisations. Their findings revealed the lack of a long-term training strategy in public-sector organisations, and a lack of strategic goals, hindering the development of employees. On the other hand, studies conducted recently in Oman illustrate that SWOT assessment was the tool most commonly used by organisations in Oman (Al Hijji, 2012; Rajasekar & Al Raee, 2014).

Nevertheless, only one study has addressed HRP practices in Oman's MoE Ministry. This study was conducted by Al Bahri (2010), and examined the degree of difference among the various HRP practices in the MoE. The variables considered in the study included the education district, years of planning experience in a specific position, and attendance at the HRP program. The investigation found that the extent or quality of HRP practices within the MoE ranged from medium to low. The study highlighted the consensus amongst participants regarding the weakness of monitoring and evaluation practices in the MoE. This may mean that the MoE has experienced minimal success in implementing HRP. Al Bahri's study produced results which corroborate the findings of previous work in this field (Freyens, 2010; IPMA-HR, 2002; Joan, 2006).

Based on previous studies, it is clear that the status of HRP in the public sector in general, and in the public sector in developing countries in particular, needs further investigation. Although several discursive studies can be found, there is a strong lack of focus on HRP in public-sector organisations (French & Goodman, 2012; Goodman et al., 2013; Pynes, 2004). Little effort has been made to explore actual practices in the use of internal and external data; the integration of strategic planning objectives with HRP; techniques used by organisations to forecast HR supply and demand; alternative staffing strategies used to address staffing gaps, and the monitoring and evaluation of HR programs. It is evident that few studies have attempted to elaborate on whether the MoE implements HRP good practices or not. The main purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore and reveal current HRP practices in the MoE in Oman, and to recommend strategies for developing and improving these practices where needed.

3.10 Conceptual Framework of the Study

After reviewing existing views in the literature concerning good HRP practices, in both the theoretical and the empirical context, the emerging models were described in Figures 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5, presented in section 3.8 of the literature review. These models together constitute a conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 3.6. Although there are different models of HRP, nearly all these models encompass similar elements or activities (Colley & Price, 2010; Jacobson, 2010; Keel, 2006; O’Riordan, 2012). O’Riordan (2012) states that HRP models provide a sound framework for understanding and engaging with HRP. Thus, the convergence of these models produces a framework for examining HRP practices in the public sector of Oman, taking into account the cultural and contextual differences. A research framework has been developed and adapted to better suit the public sector in Oman, taking into account the cultural and contextual differences outlined above. The HRP processes include details of some aspects of HRP, which have been developed in the three HRP models presented in section 3.8. The key motivation behind the model is the integration of a practical (empirical) and a theoretical model.

The research framework initially focuses on HRP as an integrated part of the strategic planning process of an organisation (Arnold & Pulich, 2007; Ulrich, 1992). This perception is important in this study because it will guide the way HRP is conducted at the strategic level by MoE. Also, knowledge of the directions charted for the MoE is essential in order to recognise the impact of strategic planning on HR plans and to clarify the alignment that can potentially exist between HRP and the organisation's strategy (Christie, 2005).

The first step was addressed by understanding how HRP is conducted in the strategic planning stage. The study investigated how HRP is used within the framework of MoE's strategic goals, from the perspectives of key members at the strategic planning level. This phase reveals how MoE identifies projected requirements for the number and type of people needed to achieve its strategic objectives (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). During this phase, attention is drawn to the strategies that the organisation uses to provide the skills employees need for future organisational requirements (Armstrong, 2006). This phase also involves determining how HRP is deployed and integrated across the strategic planning process and its functions.

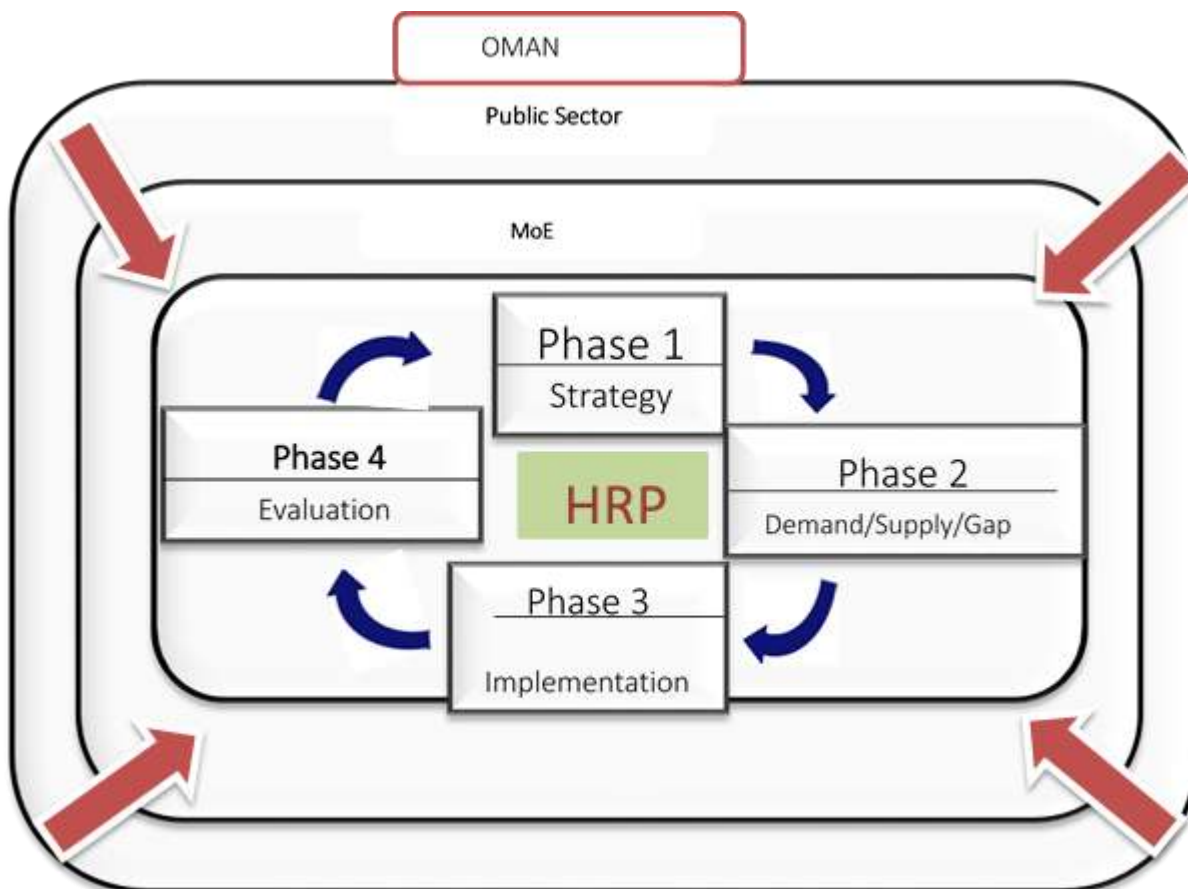
Based on the organisation's strategic plan, the second step identifies the various methods used by the MoE to analyse present and future workforce needs. Forecasting HR demand and supply is the second step undertaken by this research. It answers the questions of how many human resources are needed, when they are needed, and where they are needed. This step focuses on how the MoE determines the gap between what is needed and what is available. Gates, Eibner, and Keating (2006) describe the gap as the difference between the supply and demand projections.

In order to understand how the MoE develops and implements its human resource strategies to ensure that the right talent is attained and retained to achieve established goals, in the third step the study focuses on the strategies needed to close the gap between current and future needs (Ulfertsm et al., 2009).

For the purpose of knowing what measures are used to assess the effectiveness of HRP in the MoE, in the fourth step the processes of evaluation and how the MoE makes adjustments to its plan as required is examined, and new workforce and organisational issues are addressed (Jacobson, 2010).

In order to identify whether the existing practices in each phase are good practices for the MoE, the study examines the extent to which the practices considered in the literature are applied or can be applied in the MoE. The results from this phased analysis are used to formulate recommendations that can be used to develop and improve HRP practices in the MoE in particular and in public-sector organisations in Oman in general.

Figure 3.6: Conceptual Framework for the Study



This chapter has provided background information, together with a discussion of relevant theories and previous research associated with HRP. In section 1 the chapter presented an overview of HRP as an HRM fundamental. The definition and importance of HRP were presented in section 2. Section 3 introduced the various stages that HRP has undergone through different time periods. In section 4, theories that served as a foundation for the study were discussed, followed by a discussion of the factors affecting HRP practices. Section 6 focused on good HRP practices currently described in the literature. Major HRP models were described in section 7, and then the research related to HRP in the Omani public-sector was reviewed. The last section of this chapter explained the conceptual framework for this study.

It is evident from the literature that HRP in Oman's public-sector has not received sufficient attention. Therefore, this study will fill this gap in the literature by undertaking a case study examination of HRP practices in the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman.

The following chapter will discuss the research methodology, including research paradigms, study participants and their selection, data collection methods and analysis.

4 Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction:

This exploratory study was designed to gather data to add to the existing body of knowledge related to HRP practices in public-sector organisations, in particular the MoE in the Sultanate of Oman. The research on HRP in public-sector organisations in developing countries has been discussed in the literature review, which shows that little research has been done on this topic to date.

The purpose of this study was to explore current HRP practices in Oman's MoE to recommend strategies for developing and improving those practices. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1. What are the current HRP practices employed by the MoE in the Sultanate of Oman?

Subsequent questions which were explored as a result of this investigation are:

RQ2. What are the factors that may affect HRP practices in the MoE in Oman?

RQ3. Are the current HRP practices in the MoE in Oman good practices? If not, why not?

RQ4. What can be done to improve HRP practices to ensure that they meet the needs of the MoE?

In order to address these questions, qualitative data collection was undertaken through interviews with HRP practitioners at both the strategic and operational levels in the case study organisation (MoE), providing rich data resources for the exploration of the research questions. The data were analysed by employing an interpretive approach firstly by identifying recurring themes and generating a conceptual understanding of the current

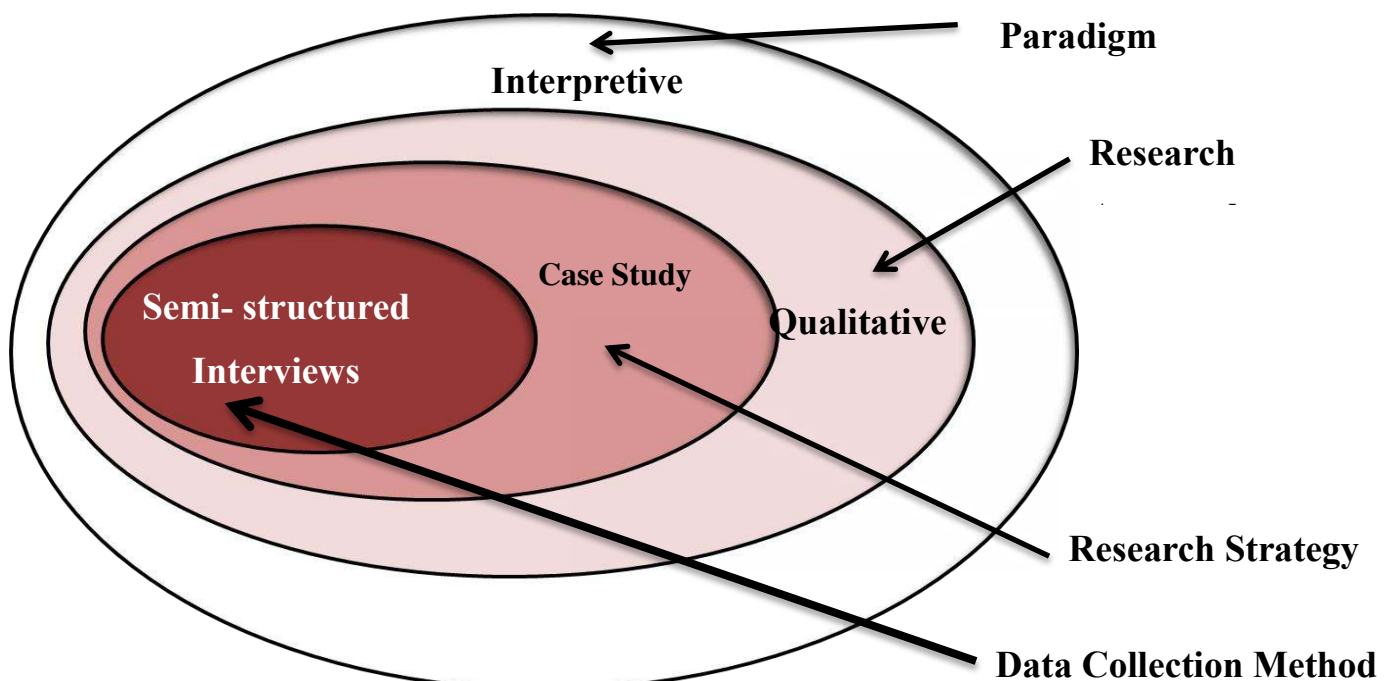
practices, and then by an iterative process of theory building. The study employed NVivo qualitative data analysis software as a tool in this process.

This chapter details the research approach of the study. Specifically, it addresses the research design and methodology, the population and sample, the instrumentation, data collection, and the processes employed in the data analysis and development of theory.

4.2 Design of Research Methodology

Scholars such as Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2012) argue that determining the underlying philosophical framework for research methods enables the researcher to successfully manage the quality and clarity of their research. Collis and Hussey (2013) define methodology as the overall approach undertaken in the research process. The design of the research methodology adopted in this study will be addressed, from right to left, as it appears in Figure 4.1. An exploration of the research approach used for this study will be discussed, and this will be followed by a discussion of the research strategy and the method of data collection.

Figure 4.1: Design of Research Methodology



4.2.1 Research Paradigm

It is useful to begin the discussion of the research methods used by considering the meaning of the term paradigm. According to Weaver and Olson (2006, p. 460) “Research paradigms are patterns of beliefs and practices that regulate inquiry within a discipline by providing lenses, frames and processes through which investigation is accomplished”. This definition reveals how the structure of inquiry and methodological choices inevitably will influence the researcher’s choice of epistemology, ontology, and methodology during the research. The term ontology refers to “A branch of philosophy concerned with articulating the nature and structure of the world” (Wand & Weber, 1993, p. 220). It is concerned mainly with questions of ‘What is there that can be known?’ or ‘What is the nature of reality?’ Epistemology refers to “The nature of human knowledge and understanding that can possibly be acquired through different types of inquiry and alternative methods of investigation” (Hirschheim, Klein, & Lyytinen, 1995, p. 20). It specifies the form and nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable) (Elshafie, 2013). Methodology is defined as how the researcher in practice goes about finding out whatever they believe can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This study used the interpretivist paradigm.

The interpretive paradigm rests on the assumption that knowledge is gained through social constructions such as language, consciousness, and shared meaning. It operates on the basis that there exists an intimate interaction between the researcher and what is being explored (Rowlands, 2005). Patton (2005) explains that the interpretive paradigm accepts that reality comes only through a person's perceptions that emerge from the lens of their prior experience, knowledge, and expectations, and that this lens will influence the interpretation of new information. In this research paradigm, social reality is not constructed as objective, but as something filtered through the minds of individuals, and as such it is always considered to be subjective. Thus, the methods used in the interpretive approach emphasise the interaction between the researcher and the participants. This

approach provides an opportunity for participant voices to be heard, and engages such practices as interviews, field notes, diaries, and observation. In addition, interpretivist research is focused more on noting and accepting what has occurred within situational constraints rather than on trying to predict what will happen next. Interpretive researchers bring a more complete understanding of the nature and meaning of everyday experience to the phenomena being studied. Johnson and Christensen (2012) indicate that the main objective of this type of research is to explore a phenomenon in depth, from which basis the researchers attempt to derive the constructs of the participants. Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm avoids rigid sets of procedures and structural frameworks. Research structures are more likely to be personal and flexible (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001). Merriam (1998) identifies five main characteristics of the interpretivist paradigm:

1. It is interested in the meaning people have constructed around their world.
2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
3. It usually involves fieldwork.
4. It primarily employs an inductive research strategy.
5. The final report is richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998, pp. 6-8).

In contrast, the positivist ontology, assumes that the natural and the social worlds are similar, and that both can use the same methods (Elshafie, 2013). This paradigm touts the belief that reality is objectively given, quantifiable, and knowable, and it claims that there is only one truth or one external reality. In positivism, the rational search for any phenomenon is restricted to the methodologies of the natural sciences (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Positivists also claim that it is important to create distance between the researchers and the research (Carson et al., 2001). This implies that reality exists independently of the researcher and also before the researcher approaches it. The goal of positivism is to uncover a pre-existent truth and facts and to present these via specified correlations and associations (Henning, Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). Hence, the researcher should strive to be objective by following a controlled and structural approach in

conducting research (Elshafie, 2013). Mathematical and statistical models are favoured by researchers working within the positivist paradigm (Bisman, 2010). In addition, positivism is often applied in an investigative search via experiments, correlational survey research designs, and quantitative statistical analysis (Carson et al., 2001; Elshafie, 2013).

As explained in the first chapter, the researcher is interested in exploring how the MoE conducts HRP in order to develop a more in-depth understanding and clarify potentially conflicting information about the Ministry's HRP practices. This goal fits with the philosophy, strategies, and intentions of the interpretive research paradigm, as the study seeks empirical information to explain the why, how, and what regarding the HRP practices in the MoE. The study aims to collect and analyse data that aims to explore how HRP is applied in the MoE as it operates in the real world. For this purpose, the interpretive paradigm was selected to explore and find interpretations of realities affecting HRP practices in the researched context as perceived by the participants. This paradigm is the most appropriate for this situation because the researcher seeks to gain insight into a phenomenon based on personal experiences. The nature of the interpretive paradigm allowed for the use of inductive processes, by which exploration and understanding of HRP practices in the MoE could be clearly and carefully identified (Merriam, 1998).

This study is the first conducted in the public sector of Oman to focus on HRP practices. It is hoped that the findings will allow for better understanding of the HRP practices within public-sector organisations in Oman and will set a baseline for any future research aimed at improving HRP practices in Oman. Similarly, the study will contribute to an exploration of the factors that influence HRP practices in the public sector of Oman.

During a review of possible paradigms to underpin the research for this thesis, a positivist approach was identified as a possibility. However, many of HRP practices in the public-sector are cognitive, or felt and sensed more than known. Therefore, using a positivist perspective would not provide sufficient depth of information from HR planners or from those who have a responsibility for HRP in the MoE. The interpretive paradigm has

greater potential to generate new understandings of complex multidimensional human phenomena. As emphasised by Dahlberg et al. (2001, p. 51), “Understanding other humans and their existence can never be completed without the perspective of the subjective experience”. HRP practices in an organisation involve multiple strategies, purposes, and interpretations, the essential and embedded features of which are difficult to reduce or measure quantitatively. The purpose of this research is to offer a framework for good HRP practices in the public sector of Oman. To accomplish this, the research was by nature exploratory; thus, an interpretive paradigm was viewed as best suited to this study.

4.2.2 Research Approach

According to Patton (2002) and Creswell (2014), qualitative research of this nature focuses on the people’s core experience of the phenomenon under investigation. In using a qualitative method, this study aims to make a significant contribution to knowledge and understanding in the relevant field of HRP by addressing some of the key shortfalls in prior research and literature particularly in relation to HRP practices in a public sector setting. Carson, Gilmore, Gronhaug, and Perry (2001) note that qualitative methodology is appropriate when research questions are ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions whereby the researcher seeks to gain in-depth understanding of certain phenomena associated with the research questions. Studies to date have not explored the current status of HRP practices in the public sectors in great detail, so techniques employed have not been elaborated upon in depth. Furthermore, investigations have not provided an analytical evaluation which includes the various stages of HRP. Most available research has tended to use a quantitative approach (Busiony, 1988; Curson et al., 2010; Freyens, 2010; Nkomo, 1983; Ogunrinde, 2001; Rizzo, 1984), with only very few studies employing a qualitative approach (Andersson, Avasalu, & Gabrielson, 2003).

At the time of this study there had been no previous work in the context of Oman, which is the location for the field research, and no study in that had used a qualitative approach

(Abdalkalq, 2005; Al Kindi, 2007; Al Lazmi, 2003; Al Bahri, 2010). For instance, Al Bahri's study used a quantitative method to suggest a model for developing HRP practices. Due to cultural considerations, the use of a questionnaire alone is not considered sufficient to provide the type of information needed to design an HRP model. Quantitative methods seek only to study the relationship among the variables or values. Thus, compared with the results from qualitative research questions, the depth of the answers tends to be limited. There was little evidence in the prior research that the data had been collected from various levels of an organisation. For example, data from studies done in Oman were collected only at operational levels. Since both strategic and operational positions share responsibility for the formulation and implementation of HRP (Emmerichs, Marcum & Robbert, 2004), data should be collected from both levels to provide greater insight into the key elements of central research question.

Consequently, after considering the strengths and limitations of each approach, the researcher found the qualitative approach most suitable for this study. Table 4.1 summarises the key differences between the two research approaches.

Table 4.1: Differences between the Two Approaches: Quantitative and Qualitative

Orientation	Quantitative	Qualitative
Assumptions about the world	A single reality (i.e. can be measured by an instrument)	Multiple realities
Research purpose	Establish relationships between measured variables	Understanding a social situation from participants' perspectives
Researcher methods and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Procedures are established before study begins; - A hypothesis is formulated before research can begin; - Deductive in nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexible, changing strategies; - Design emerges as data are collected; - A hypothesis is not needed to begin research; - Inductive in nature
Researcher's role	The researcher is ideally an objective observer who neither participates in nor influences what is being studied	The researcher participates and becomes immersed in the research/ social setting
Generalisability	Universal context-free generalisations	Detailed context –based generalisations

(Wiid & Diggines, 2010, p. 86)

4.2.3 Research Strategy

A qualitative case study approach was used in this research to explore a contemporary situation. The case study approach, which traditionally functions within the qualitative research realm, has been defined as “A form of qualitative research that is focused on providing a detailed account of one or more cases” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 49). Creswell (2014) defines a case study as an approach in which an investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. The MoE in this study of Oman was selected as a case study over other public organisations since most Oman civil service employees are concentrated in the MoE representing 51% of the total public

sector workforce. This assumes that most of the challenges that have been documented for the public sector in Oman are located in the MoE. For instance, the MoE has recorded the highest rate of Omani employees leaving the civil service (MCS, 2012). In addition, the MoE has recorded the highest number of job applicants compared to other governmental units, with the number estimated to be 10,668 applicants, while it had only 221 vacancies in 2011 (MCS, 2012). A single case is often used where the case is of an extreme nature or provides an opportunity to analyse a phenomenon which still need further investigation (Rowley, 2002). Therefore, the intention of this research was to explore current HRP practices in the MoE by carrying out a case study strategy that would provide a significant opportunity for developing a better understanding of how HRP has been operating in the Oman's public-sector.

It is evident that qualitative case study methodology can effectively achieve what the present study seeks to accomplish. This kind of approach can lead the researcher to gather data that looks for 'rich' detail from different occupational categories. In addition, by referring to the literature on current HRP practices, the study will explore which of these practices the MoE in Oman uses, or does not use, why or why not, and seek to explore how good practices can be developed. Such questions point to the need for in-depth data, and hence a qualitative approach in this study.

4.2.4 Data Collection Method

This study used interviews to explore how HRP is being conducted in Oman's MoE. Interviews were employed for collecting information as effective in allowing respondents to answer in questions in depth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Patton (2002) noted that the objective of research interview is to elicit rich, detailed material that can be used in describing and understanding the meaning of the interviewees' view. According to Mason (2002), another reason for using interviews is that qualitative interviews ensure greater flexibility and allow extra topics and issues to emerge through the interview process. Furthermore, Bryman and Bell, (2007) state that in qualitative interviewing, the

interviewer can ask clarifying questions to follow up on interview response, and can seek further clarification or alter the order or wording of the questions if needed. Therefore, using the interview method for this study offered the opportunity to seek in-depth knowledge of how HRP is conducted in the Oman's MoE. The interviews served to capture the participants' experiences with HRP.

A semi-structured interview guide was selected to guide data collection and include instructions for obtaining information from the interview. This method was appropriate for exploring the perceptions and opinions of participants regarding HRP practices and enabled probing for more information and clarification of information. An interview guide was used in this study as a framework for conducting the interviews to help answer the research questions and to ensure a consistent flow in the interview. An interview guide provides a list of the main themes or topics to be covered and a list of possible aspects for follow up after the participant's responses (Walter, 2010). Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) advocate the use of this type of interview as such interviews can generate systematic and comprehensive material. Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999) emphasise that an interview is suitable for exploratory research as it concentrates on offering greater clarification about the central domain and associated factors in the study. Thus, this data collection method allowed the researcher to obtain the requisite information around the main area in this study and enabled the identification of current HRP practices in Oman's MoE, as well as factors affecting that practices.

4.2.5 Participant Recruitment

The strategy chosen for selecting representatives for the study population was purposive sampling, which is one of the most common sampling strategies used in qualitative research (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010). Using this method the researcher seeks to obtain rich and deep information about issues that are relevant to the purpose of the research. Maximum variation sampling, a technique of purposeful sampling, was used in this study to capture a wide range of perspectives relating to the phenomenon under

scrutiny, by intensively investigating a small sample (Maykut & Morehouse, 2002). This technique is considered an effective means of documenting the scope of the selected phenomena and identifying important shared patterns that cut across variations (Loiselle, Profetto-McGrath, Polit, & Beck, 2010). This research involved purposively selecting participants with diverse backgrounds, using such criteria as personal characteristics, experience, job level, location, and their personal role in HRP, a process that distinguished this research from other studies, especially given the little research that exists on public sector HRP practices in Oman. Most studies that have investigated the practice of HRP there have been limited not only in scope, but also in their provision of adequate explanation for distinctions among the various levels of HRP. These studies did not focus on specific planning techniques for different levels of employees. Furthermore, the studies failed to identify HRP practices at the district levels of the MoE.

To identify a purposive sample that would meet the criteria for this study, the researcher first reviewed the organisational structure of the MoE to obtain an idea of which authorities had been assigned or delegated to conduct HRP. A scan of the structure of the MoE showed that HRP was performed at both central office (the Ministry) and the directorates (governorates). From a total population of 38 personnel within the MoE who perform this function, it was proposed that a sample of at least 24 would be selected for this research. However, the researcher continued to collect data until the number of the interviews reached 32, at which point the researcher realised that no new ideas were arising and additional interviews were not resulting in identification of new themes in HRP practices. Silverman (2013) states that a sample should be built to enable the researcher to address the research problem, which was accomplished. According to findings by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2011), the sample number also equaled the number of interviews suggested for a qualitative study.

4.2.5.1 Categories of Participants

Table 4.2 displays the distribution by category and the number of participants in this study. The categories represent people who were either directly involved in or responsible for at least some components of HRP. This study has approached interview participants from senior management to operational-level employees to develop a broader understanding of HRP practices in the MoE.

Table 4.2: Interview Categories and Participants

Category No	Category Type	Number interviewed
1	Employees from senior management (MoE)	3
2	Employees from senior management (MCS)	2
3	Employees from senior management (governorates)	7
4	Employees from middle management (MoE)	2
5	Employees from middle management (governorates)	6
6	Employees from middle management (MCS)	2
7	Employees at the operational/junior level (MoE)	4
8	Employees at the operational/junior level (governorates)	6
Total		32

As Table 4.2 shows, eight categories of participants were chosen for this study, to provide a rich, detailed picture of HRP practices in the MoE. The 32 participants were selected according to their areas of expertise and interest in various aspects of HRP practices. In selecting the category prior to an interview, the researcher took into account a number of criteria and aimed to include at least two participants from each category. For instance, the categories included participants who had worked directly with HRP at both strategic and operational levels within the MoE, as well as those who were involved in related activities such as HR development, job description, recruitment, and selection. The purpose of using extensive and varied data was to select participants who could offer their personal opinions of, and attitudes to HRP practices based on their direct experience. This

research took into consideration the participants' points of view. As discussed in the literature review, all previous studies conducted in Oman that have addressed HRP have targeted only the participants who were operating in low-level executive HRP functions. However, these studies did include insights from the perceptions of participants who had both strategic and executive responsibilities for a variety of HRP activities. In order to gain broader insights into the prevailing perceptions about the phenomena under study, participants were senior-level, mid-level and operational/junior-level employees, as well as employees who worked in human resources training and administrative affairs.

4.2.5.2 Selection of Participants

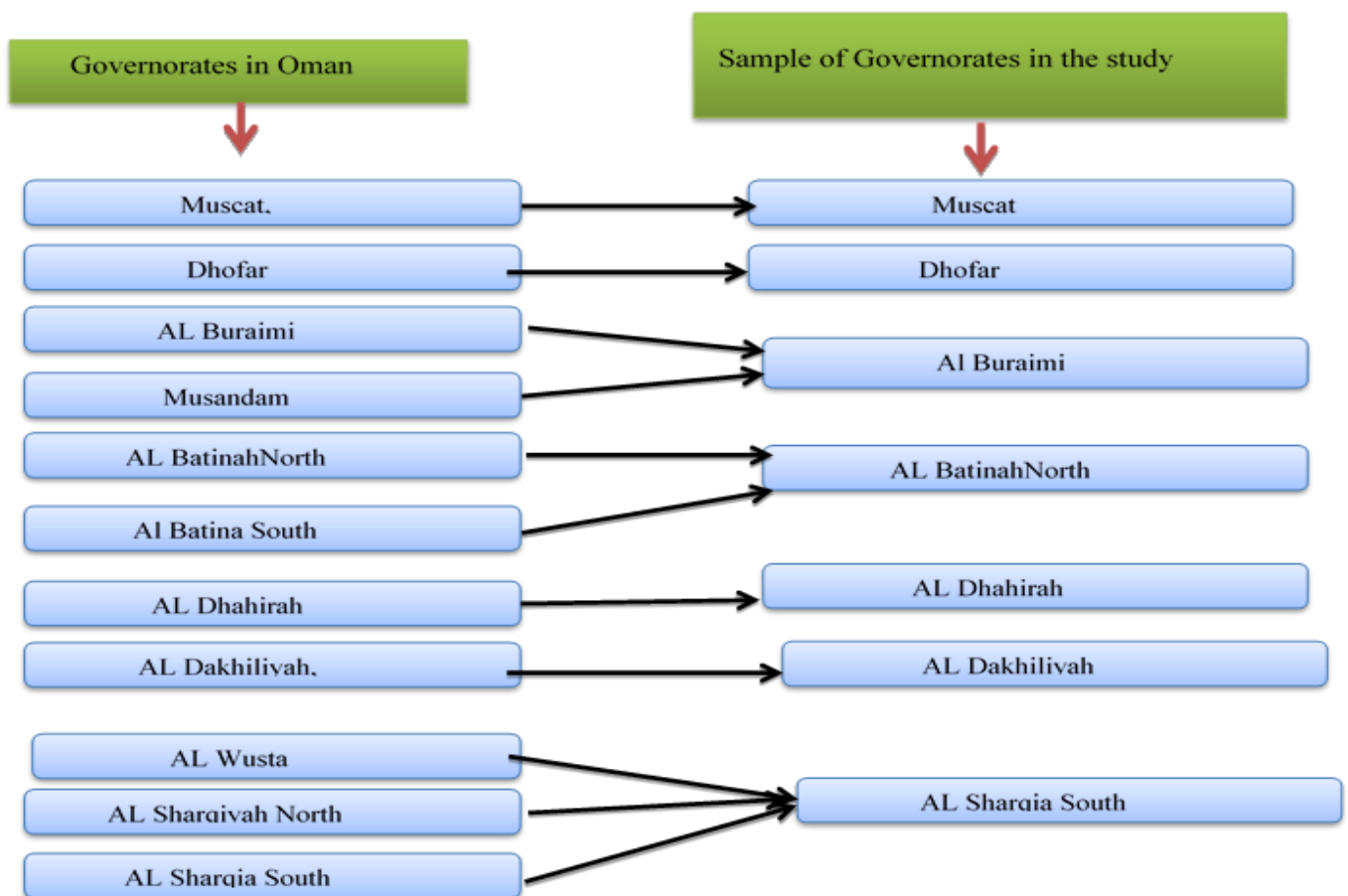
The researcher established the following criteria for selecting participants:

- Participants were engaged primarily in conducting human resources planning in the MoE;
- Participants carried out activities related to human resources planning;
- Professionals who took part expressed a desire to participate and had varying areas of expertise and interest; and
- Participants who were middle managers were in the majority, (as, this category constitutes an important channel for interactive information flow and communication between the strategic and operational level in the MoE).

A summary of the rationale for the selection of the study participants is provided in appanndex 5. In general, participant selection was based on selecting those who could best and most broadly inform the research questions.

Participants for each category were recruited according to their role, job title and nomination. For instance, participants who were selected from the MCS were those familiar with topics related to HRP practices such as job requirements, job descriptions and employee selection. Participants in other groups were selected based on their tasks and roles. The number of participants recruited for each category was targeted to include enough individuals to fully clarify all important elements of HRP practices under review. Participants were typically chosen to reflect the diversity and breadth of the population in the sample. With categories that shared the same properties, the researcher opted to conduct more interviews within the larger and more diverse category. For example, Oman has eleven governorates in Muscat, Dhofar, Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Batinah North, Al Batina South, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South and the Al Wusta. Some of these governorates have similar geographic characteristics, and more than one have local area departments, as in the governorates of Al Buraimi and Musandam. These governorates have the same properties and they are both located on the border with the UAE. The former was selected for including in the study sample because the number of employees by nationality and qualification (2011/2012) was 363 and 269 respectively (and so forth for similar circumstances) (MoE, 2012), as shown in Figure 4.2 on next page.

Figure 4.2: Sample of Governorates in the Study



4.2.6 Ethical Considerations

This study received the approval of the Edith Cowan University (ECU) Human Research and Ethics Committee (HREC) on 5 March 2013 under the record number: 9303. The researcher followed the stipulated MoE, for conducting such studies that, and the research in-turn fell under the responsibility of the Technical Office of Studies and Development (TOOSAD). Meetings with TOOSAD staff were used to introduce the research and obtain the names of potential participants who could represent the study's target population. Following this, letters of explanation and invitation were sent to all potential participants, whether in the Ministry or in the directorates and in the governorates. Everyone approached agreed to take part in the interviews. This may be due to the perceived benefits they expected to gain from participating in the study, such as gaining knowledge

regarding good practices that are being applied globally and their potential application at the local level as well as the opportunity to learn more about new HRP methods and strategies. The participants were given informed consent and confidentiality forms. The consent form contained information about the research purpose, research questions, instrumentation and means of participation (Appendix 1). The confidentiality form provided instructions for the participants as to whom to contact regarding their rights as a research participant to ensure that confidential data would be protected. Each respondent in the study was also asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 2) to record an informed agreement to take part in the research.

Due to the nature of this study, the researcher believed that there were only minimal ethical considerations to be addressed, most importantly ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of study participants. As this study involved human subjects, numerous protections were implemented to maintain participants' safety and anonymity. The letter provided to all participants assured the interviewees of the following conditions: (a) the identity of the institution and participants would not be revealed; (b) the interviews would be transcribed, with the transcribe signing a letter of confidentiality; and (c) all collected documentation would be kept in a secured file and digital data stored on a secured external hard drive. The sound recordings, interview notes, and any documents were kept in a locked filing cabinets and could only be accessed by the researcher and the agreed supervisor. In addition, files including computer files that contained personal or identifiable data, (such as participants' names), were encrypted with a password that only the researcher and agreed research assistants would have the authority to use.

4.3 Pilot Interview

Before the research was undertaken, the interview framework was pilot tested to ensure that the questions were suitable. The purpose of the pilot interview was also to check the data collection method, the sample recruitment strategy, and to check for accuracy and recalibrate the questions where necessary. Saunders et al. (2011) recommend the use of a

pilot test to discover any shortcomings in the design and administration of interview questions, and to assess the clarity and precision of the instructions.

One of the senior managers in MoE's HRP department was selected for this test. The interview was conducted at the participant's office, his choice of locations, and it was recorded on a voice recorder. At the end of the interview, the researcher summarised the respondent's observations, and this feedback was used in the pilot process. The interview questions and data collection procedures were tested. Conducting a pilot test was useful to the researcher in assessing and utilising the interview techniques. It provided opportunities to explore the willingness of the participants to take part in this kind of research. Pilot tests assisted the researcher with the revision of interview questions and with dealing effectively with time issues.

4.4 Interview Guide

Once the pilot interviews were completed, the interview questions were recalibrated and the final interview guide constructed. The main themes in the interviews were designed around the conceptual framework developed for the study (Figure 4). This framework contains the four main phases of HRP. However, the activities and responsibilities of each process were determined based on guidelines in literature review, wherein activities were categorised by organisational level. The interview questions were constructed from the findings in literature review and with the assistance of subject matter experts. Figures 5 and 6 provide a flow chart depicting how the semi-structured interview guide was formatted and aligned with the research questions and the framework of the research. The researcher's plan was to develop two versions of the interview guide. Version 1 of the interview guide was designed to seek information from participants at the strategic planning level on their HRP in the MoE, the role of HRP within the organisation's planning, the internal and external factors that influence HRP, the strategies that organisations focus on, human resource objectives, the linkage between HRP and strategic planning, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the program Appendix 6.

Version 2 of the interview guide was designed to obtain information from participants at the operational level about the steps followed in HRP processes, techniques to forecast HR demand and HR supply, and how HR programs were implemented to achieve objectives Appendix 7.

Initially, the interview questions were developed in English. Then, they were translated into Arabic as this is the first language of the target population. A reverse back translation method was used to check that the questions were appropriately translated without changing their meaning or intent. To translate the scale items into Arabic the methods cited in Naglirei and Graham, (2003) were followed. The translation of instrument was completed in four phases. First, the interview guide was translated from English to the Arabic. The interview guide was then translated back to English by a professional translator who did not refer to the original scale. The third phase included a comparison between the re-translated version and the original English version. The Arabic translation adjusted several items which differed slightly in their meaning. Finally, the pilot interview was used to pre-test the instrument on the target population to ensure it was easy to understand and respond.

4.5 Interview Techniques

A qualitative research methodology was adopted in order to explore and probe individuals' experiences and the organisational context in which HRP practices were implemented. This methodology contributed to the choice of an in-depth interview as a method, which in turn involved clear and direct cooperation and interaction between the researcher and interviewees. Nevertheless, using in-depth interviewing was a significant challenge, especially as social science research is not a common practice in Oman. Most social research in Oman is carried out using quantitative research techniques. The majority of social researchers devote their attention to measurements that can be obtained from statistical aggregation. People in Oman are unfamiliar with qualitative methods;

therefore, a primary concern for the researcher was to establish a positive relationship with interviewees in order to ensure that interviews would be conducted in a successful way. This step was necessary for participants, who were likely to feel that it was inappropriate to provide sensitive information to a person they had never met. Gaining trust from the interviewees was an important element that the researcher sought to achieve before conducting the interviews.

After the researcher received permission from the Ministry to conduct the study, a compulsory step, he was able to obtain the contact details of potential candidates from the Department of Statistics. When suitable participants were identified, the researcher contacted them. The researcher used a variety of communication methods with participants, including letters, telephone, e-mail, or face-to-face contact. Telephone contact was a method used with the majority of the participants as it was a quick and easy way to contact them. However, the researcher utilised other strategies with some participants in order to enhance their interest and willingness to be involved. The researcher used two basic procedures for contacting and booking appointments with participants namely, face-to-face and telephone contact. As the latter is an efficient way to connect with subjects, it was the typical method used by the researcher. The participants included the following:

4.5.1 Senior Managers

Face-to-face contact was desirable for participants in senior managerial positions. This demographic, by necessity, received more attention and consideration, and the initial face-to-face meeting provided an opportunity for the researcher to draw a clear picture of the research and to explain the benefits that would be gained from the research. In addition, informal contact with the participants was continued after the interviews in the expectation that it would be necessary to obtain further information during the research journey.

4.5.2 Female Participants

Interviewing women individually is not culturally appropriate in Oman even though an interview by nature requires the researcher to deal with both men and women. The limitations were due to Islam not permit meetings between men and women in private. Face-to-face meetings provided greater detail about the research and established close and very positive relations with respondents. Two female participants were recruited. They were given the option to choose the right time and an appropriate place to conduct interviews. Fortunately, both agreed to be interviewed for this study. One of the female participants preferred to have the interview conducted in the presence of other employees which is in keeping with norms related to interviewing female participants in Arabic cultures. The second female participant agreed to conduct the interview without any conditions set.

4.5.3 Participants well known to the researcher

The researcher was keen to minimise bias that may occur during the interviews and made sure that participants fully understood the research they were about to become involved in. The interviews were conducted according to the guidelines formulated and all questions were asked in the same way in an attempt to prevent interviewer bias. In addition, a pilot interview was conducted with one of the participants in this category to prepare the researcher and avoid interviewer bias.

4.6 Data Collection

This section presents and details the procedures followed to gather the data in this study.

4.6.1 Setting

The interviews were conducted during April and December 2013 in the Sultanate of Oman. The participants were located in the MoE and the MCS. The majority of the interviewees came from the directorates of education that were affiliated with the MoE in seven governorates, which were located between 105 km and 1,500 km from the researcher's home. The interviews took place in a location convenient for participants, which was at their respective workplaces. The individual interviews were approximately 60 minutes in duration.

To address the participant's willingness to take part in the research, the researcher also performed the following:

1. He thanked the participants for coming, acknowledged their time and effort.
2. He presented the research in such a way that participants saw it as an opportunity to learn something new, or as a solution for current issues.
3. He explained the purpose of the interview and the role that participants could play to contribute to the research goals.
4. He clarified how long the interview would likely take.
5. He asked the participant if he/she had any questions before the interview started.

The interviewer asked the participants if they had any questions or if they required clarification before the interviewer left. All the interviewees preferred to conduct the interviews in Arabic. In general, the attitude towards the interviews seemed to be a positive and cooperative. This in turn enabled the researcher to obtain factual and rich information about the phenomenon being investigated.

4.6.2 Audio Recording

The interviews were audio recorded using a digital recorder. King and Horrocks (2010) argue that an interview needs to be in a quiet location, free from distractions to ensure a quality recording of the conversation. Walter (2010) identifies that a sound recorder is essential equipment to enable the researcher to give the interviewee full attention and to make it easy to concentrate on the interview. Notes taken during an interview may be incomplete due to the difficulty of writing answers and asking questions at the same time, while recording interviews reduces the loss of information and allows the interviewee to receive the full attention of the researcher. All participants agreed that the researcher could record the interview; only one participant did not give his permission to record the interview; however, taking notes was an option that the researcher used during that interview.

4.7 Data Transcription

It was necessary to arrange interviews with enough time between them to allow the researcher sufficient time to write up or type a transcript and a set of notes, and to analyse these before proceeding to the next period of data collection. In addition to transcribing the recording and beginning to code, categories and note patterns, the researcher found it helpful to note additional information during this period as well. The researcher recorded all the interviews and then transcribed the recording of each interview. In the case where the participant did not want the interview recorded, the researcher wrote up details and notes while the interview was being conducted.

Interviews were transcribed by the researcher whose first language is Arabic. Then, the transcriptions were sent to a translator to translate from Arabic into English. As a third step, the transcriptions that were translated into English were sent to a research assistant, who was also a native speaker of Arabic, to reverse the translation. The colleague's experience of both organisational research and education planning was very helpful in

achieving this. The original transcription in Arabic and reverse translated transcription were compared. All the interviews including the data were sorted into the NVivo program, which analyses explanatory models grounded in such data (Carcayry, 2011). Although translating the quotes to another language created additional challenges that might obscure the meaning and result in inaccurate expression and loss of validity, the researcher engaged the support of two professional translators. In order to maintain trustworthiness in qualitative research, special attention was paid to rich descriptions through the use of participants' quotes. Although the services of a professional translator added to the cost of the study, it contributed to the validity of the research and the quality of the data.

4.8 Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative research aims to transform the data into something that is meaningful in order to understand the big picture of the research undertaken (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). According to Easterby, Thorpe, and Jackson (2008), this requires clear explanations of how the analysis was undertaken and how the conclusion was reached. Therefore, understanding these processes is an important part of conducting qualitative research, as well as interpreting it. Reviewing the literature was useful to provide an extensive theoretical understanding that assisted with conducting the data analysis.

The approach for the data analysis in this study was a hybrid, combining qualitative thematic and template analysis approaches. This combination generated a more convincing answer to the research questions by providing an initial analytical framework from a detective template analysis, while allowing themes to surface from the data inductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir, 2006; King & Horrocks, 2010). This started with a wide, deductively created template, as described below, and ended with an inductively modified template. The collection, examination and continual re-examination of data were undertaken until the research finding data were determined. According to

Morse and Richards (2002), qualitative interview data must be continuously, systematically and recursively analysed throughout the data generation process.

Template analysis refers to the group of analytical techniques used for thematically organising and analysing qualitative data (Cassell & Symon, 2004). This approach was intended as a means of organising text for subsequent interpretation. Sections of text were coded to identify underlying themes in the data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The code list was based on a preliminary scan of the text, but the initial template was created based on the research question and the conceptual framework representing potential themes and sub-themes. The codes list was then developed based on the main question constructs and sub-questions covered in the interview guide. Crabtree and Miller (1999, p. 265) state that “When using a template, the researcher defines a template or codes and applies them to the data before proceeding to the connecting and corroborating/legitimizing phases of the analysis process ... where the template or codes can be constructed, based on prior research or theoretical perspective”. In this study a priority list of codes was drawn up based on a key selection of HR research. Additional issues or codes were identified while listening to and transcribing the interviews. The analysis was carried out as an iterative process, by schematically reading and comparing sections of coded data. This required that the researcher to go through the material several times to identify or adjust the coding, and to review, synthesise and reduce the entire data set to identify and confirm core themes and sub-themes (Jones & Alony, 2011).

The thematic analysis approach used in the data was designed to produce data that could undergo analysis similar that suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). This type of data analysis allows a theme to emerge which has relevance to the phenomenon being studied. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. It minimally organises and describes the data set in rich detail. However, it also often goes further than to interpret various aspects of the research topic. This method of analysis is used for developing concepts and insights from qualitative data. This approach suited the analysis of public sector HRP practices, since few prior studies

existed and the issues at hand were not clearly defined and delineated in the literature.

Table 4.4 below describes the procedures used in the analysis of the interviews.

Table 4.3: Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of Processes
Familiarizing with data	Transcribing data, reading and rereading the data to get an initial idea
Generating initial codes	Coding interesting feature of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating and relevant to each code
Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level1) and the entire data set, generating a thematic map of the analysis
Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme
Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis

Source: (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 18)

Content analysis was used to explore whether the existing HRP practices are good practices for the MoE. This method of analysis enables the researcher to analyse textual information and to systematically identify the presence of words, concepts, characters, or themes. This approach was appropriate in order to analyse whether the MoE employs good HRP practices. The main purpose of the questions was to assess whether the MoE implemented this construct in a way consistent with its theoretical conceptualisation in the literature. Also, good practices gleaned from large scale reviews of existing literature and research in the HRP domain were used to develop a detailed coding scheme to guide the analysis. Accordingly, content analysis allows statements about standards contained in the literature to be applied and developed in the MoE. This allowed the researcher to assess which of these practices the MoE should adopt, and which could be developed.

4.8.1 Coding Procedures

The data was analysed in this study using both NVivo and Microsoft Word. A combination of both manual and software assisted methods is likely to achieve the best results (Welsh, 2002). NVivo was used when working with qualitative data. This work involved progressively coding, browsing, searching, sorting and linking sections of the qualitative data to develop themes. NVivo was also used for the initial stages of coding. This was a useful organisational tool that allowed the researcher to: enter raw data directly into the program, index segments of the text to particular themes; carry out complex search and retrieval operations quickly, and to link research notes to coding (Lacey & Luff, 2001). However, software is only an aid to the organisation of the material as it cannot produce accurate analysis and interpretation due to its lack of capacity (Cassell & Symon, 2004). It was important that researcher used both manual and electronic forms in analysing the interview throughout a series of technical and intellectual operations. Conducting software analysis was the first stage, while undertaking manual table analysis was the second stage.

Prior to beginning the interviews, the researcher created a temporary template as a framework for coding the qualitative data. The template has a list of codes that describe the conceptual framework, research questions, problem areas, and key variables. All individual audio recordings were transcribed and loaded into NVivo. Then, through progressively reading and re-reading the documents, the researcher developed categories for the research variables, codes, and a possible list of themes. King and Newton (2002) mention that creating a first version of the template is an effective technique to analyse certain issues relevant to the topic being investigated, which in turn, will provide a base from which the researcher can safely anticipate issues that arise in the data. This approach involves modeling a hierarchically structured list of codes from the interview guide, where the main question and probes are higher order codes and additional questions and probes are lower order codes. Hierarchical coding is ideal for analysing text at different levels of specificity. Broad higher codes add quality to the scheme, while lower order

codes contain the minimum information required for better clarification among the layers of coding (King & Horrocks, 2010). Hierarchical templates guided the creation of codes in NVivo.

The researcher identified the highest order codes in terms of the core elements of the conceptual framework. Four broad code categories formed the code manually strategy, forecasting HR needs, implementing HR programs, and evaluation. The level 2 codes were identified in terms of the core concepts for each main topic of HRP process. For example, the strategy included organisational strategy, strategic HR objectives and integration of HRP processes into an organisational strategy. This involved reading, listening, and summarising the raw data. Categories were derived from multiple readings of the raw data. The researcher summarised the transcripts separately by outlining the key points made by participants in their responses to the questions asked by the researcher. These key questions included:

1. Do you have a formalised, written strategic plan?
2. To what extent does the organisational strategy guide HRP?
3. What is the role of HRP within the organisation's planning strategy?
What are the expected outcomes?
4. Describe the processes and key activities you use to conduct HRP in MoE?
5. What internal factors influence HRP in the organisation?
6. In what ways do they affect the HRP?
7. What external factors influence HRP in the organisation?
 - a. In what ways do they affect the HRP?
8. Is there a linkage between the HRP strategy and the strategic planning?

A template of codes was applied and extra coding was added. This was accomplished by following procedures used for inductive thematic analysis. During the analysis of interview transcripts, coding was driven by an approach aimed at identifying a new theme

in the data. The additional codes either expanded the template or separated it from the predetermined codes. Level 4 involved connecting the different codes into potential themes by identifying the relationship and patterns in the data. For instance, participants reported a wide range of factors that affect HRP in the MoE. Some of these factors were closely allied to external factors (e.g. economy, government policy, labour market, and legislation). Other factors were related to internal indicators (e.g. organisational culture and organisation structure). One of these themes was further separated into, three codes representing selection, training, and recruitment, and major themes or concepts which were developed from these categories. An example of the development of the coding template is presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.4: Example of Coding Template

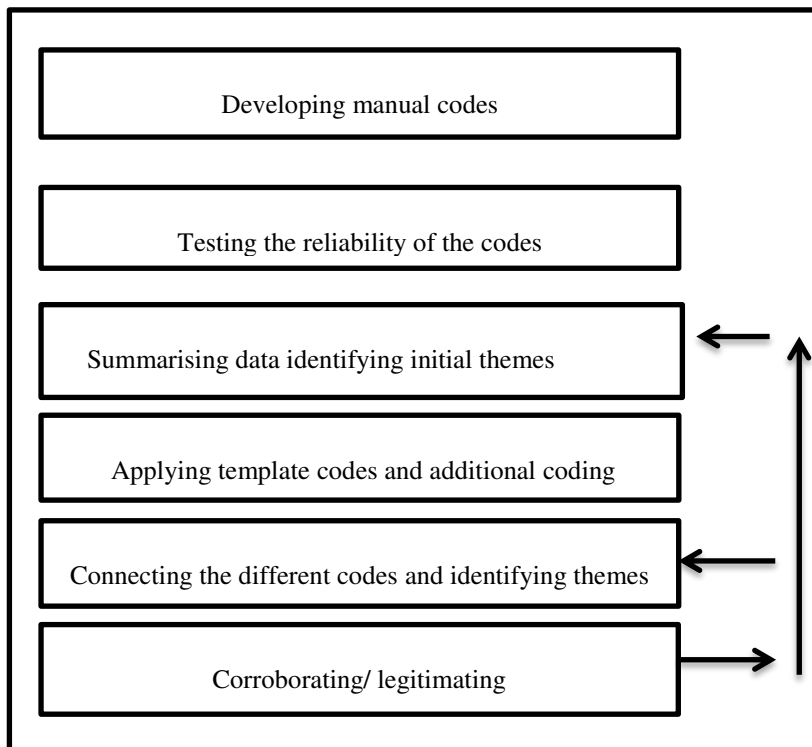
Level 1 Code	Forecasting Demand	
Level 2 Code	Professional job	
Level 3 Codes	Quantitative methods	Qualitative method
Level 3 Code	Student Numbers	
Level 4 Code	Calculation	

Corroborating/legitimizing was the final analytical activity in the process of the coding procedure of this study. This is a process of confirming themes and patterns to obtain a comprehensive overview of the information, which is then incorporated into the data interpretation stage (Fereday & Muir, 2006). Before proceeding to the next stage of the analysis, the interaction of the text and template in the research underwent several iterations. This process involved moving between the code list, the literature, and the themes, to consider the coded themes.

As mentioned above, transcriptions of the interview data were first carefully subjected to research tools in order to highlight frequent primary and secondary issues. The second stage was initiated by a code list, and a qualitative data analysis using NVivo to employ and create codes and manage the data. The thematic and content analysis was applied to

extract additional patterns and themes from the data. Figure 4.6 below shows the stages undergone by data coding.

Figure 4.3: Stage of Data Coding



Source :(Fereday & Muir, 2006, p. 5)

Themes were added and modified comprehensively, via the NVivo computerised data management program, version 10. Inserting the interview transcripts into NVivo allowed the researcher to build a new template, working from existing themes. A number of superordinate themes were created and reapplied to new segments of data electronically, which led to the formation of lower level categories through inductive analysis. This hierarchical coding involved the use of categories embedded in both the conceptual framework and primary data. Continuous use of this process allowed a growing number of codes, textual segments, and relationships between codes to evolve into tightly defined categories (Bishop & Cassell, 2005). The data was analysed and organised sections. Each section covers a broad theme and its associated categories.

4.8.2 Saturation

The term ‘saturation’ in qualitative research is the point at which the researcher feels that sufficient data has been amassed and that no new information can emerge to contribute to the inquiry (Mason, 2010). This is because qualitative research seeks richer and more in-depth information, which is obtained through fewer participants with diversified experiences, rather than a large number of participants with the same type of experience (Hoepfl, 1997). Following the guide suggested by Townsend (2013), the data in this research was found to reach the point of saturation after four levels of data analysis. The first level of data analysis began by developing a codebook, which contained a brief definition of the code, as a reminder for the analyst and an explanation of how codes should be used. This was to facilitate the creation of categories that helped identify the predicted themes. The researcher completed the coding for the first 12 interviews, which included four of the directorates under MoE. A second level analysis involved refining the coding to be more nuanced. The researcher worked from the data through summaries, self-memos, and a research diary. The creation of memos enabled the researcher to clarify emerging concepts and to categorise interview material, articulating all second level codes, allowing the researcher to determine the additional information that required focus. For instance, the researcher noted that the data introduced rich information on two main themes: forecasting HR requirements and closing the gap between the current HR requirements. However, data collected did not present a clear picture of issues related to strategic aspects of HRP. The researcher conducted nine interviews; all were obtained from the MoE to prepare for the third level of data analysis. New codes were added to the codebook, and broad topics became more precise and related to the sub-themes. For example, the code ‘Forecasting HR Demand’ evolved to include sub-themes of ‘forecasting demand of professional jobs’ and ‘forecasting demand for administrative posts’. The new codes that were developed did not reach second level analysis, nor did they reach the point of information saturation. The fourth level of data analysis covered the additional information needed from the MCS. As a result of this process, five primary and 26 subsidiary codes were produced and labelled. The last seven pieces of data that

the researcher analysed did not add any additional codes to the existing coding list, therefore; the researcher realised that he had reached the point of saturation. The repetition of issues was also used as an indicator that the data had reached saturation point (Hennink, 2013). Additional interviews were utilised to assist the researcher in selecting the quotes that best illuminated the issue under observation to increase the quality of the data collected (Townsend, 2013).

4.9 Research Trustworthiness

To establish the trustworthiness of findings in this study, the researcher relied on four criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These authors identify one alternative set of criteria that parallels the criteria of validity and reliability in quantitative research. The criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

4.9.1 Credibility

The concept of credibility in qualitative research is defined as the extent to which the findings of a study are believable and trustworthy (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This refers to whether the research methods used by the researcher are likely to yield a deep and accurate picture of the experience of participants. Evidence of credibility in this research was obtained using several strategies, including triangulation, member check, peer debriefing, an analysis software package (NVivo), and audio recording.

First, triangulation was employed to enhance credibility in this study. Triangulation involves collection and analysis of data from more than one source to get a broader perspective on the situation being investigated (Lacey & Luff, 2001). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, P315), this ‘... is a process carried out with respect to data—a datum or item of information derived from one source (or by one method or by one investigator), and should be checked against other sources (or by other methods or investigators)’. One important distinctive feature of triangulation is that it has the ability

to detect complexity and to find various points of view (Patel, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 315) suggest that triangulation can improve the ways in which the researcher can explore, validate, and analyse the findings.

As mentioned above, triangulation is an important step in establishing credibility in qualitative research. To accomplish this goal, the current research employed three methods of triangulation. The first was triangulation among the sources which involved verifying similar data from multiple sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data was collected from HR planners at various levels of responsibility and various occupations. Second, triangulation was employed through multiple locations in addition to the main location of the MoE; data was collected from seven directorates affiliated within MoE. These directorates are different in terms of demography and location. Data interview transcripts and documents were also utilised to triangulate the same information raised by one or more of the data sources. The last method of triangulation was achieved by using multiple methods of data analysis. The researcher used an analytic strategy to achieve this goal, discussed further in Section 3.8 of this chapter. Triangulation was significant in widening the researcher's knowledge and gaining additional insight from the various forms of data. In addition, it provided the researcher with the opportunity to conduct in-depth examinations and articulate respondents' views and opinions regarding the different aspects of issues associated with HRP practices.

Second, the researcher used a technique known as a 'member check' to enhance the trustworthiness of findings. Member checks refer to verifying the findings with the research participants, from whom the data was originally collected. Participants were given a chance to review transcriptions and these were returned to the researcher. They were asked to check if the content expressed what they wanted to say and were given the opportunity to modify or further explain any part of the contents. The majority of participants gave their feedback, the only exception being one participant from the MCS. Two interviewees from the central office added explanations about their experience with the HRP, but none of the interviewees disagreed with the transcriptions.

Third, peer debriefing was used to establish the credibility of this research. In the early stages of the study, the researcher conferred with different colleagues and interested parties on this research, including HR professionals, postgraduate students, and university lecturers. The researcher was also involved in broad discussions with fellow students at ECU who have similar paradigmatic orientations. This technique was very useful in assisting the researcher with (a) maintaining consistency as to the role of the researcher in the research, (b) developing steps in the emerging design of the study, and (c) organising research ideas and themes as they were occurring (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The perspectives of the above groups were utilised by the researcher in all stages of the research process, especially in the analysis and coding of data.

Fourth, to increase the validity of this research, a software package (NVivo) was used in the data analysis process. This tool was very useful for carrying out quick and accurate searches of a particular type of information. Buchanan and Jones (2010), argue that NVivo data analysis software can enhance the validity of qualitative research through its capacity to provide systematic processes and procedures that offer higher accuracy and greater transparency. For example, data integration was one of the features achieved using the search facility in NVivo; more reliable results can be yielded by carrying out a search electronically via NVivo, and the program is less susceptible to error compared to searches by humans (Welsh, 2002). The software analysis is discussed in greater detail in the data analysis section.

Fifth, in order to ensure the accuracy of ideas, the interviews were recorded. According to Klenke (2008), an audio recording is a technique which may enhance the validity of qualitative research by providing an accurate and relatively complete record. Besides, it enables the researcher to focus on the interview and concentrate on listening and responding to the interviewee, so that the whole interview can be captured for data analysis.

4.9.2 Transferability

Another criteria of trustworthiness is transferability, which is concerned with the extent to which the research results can be applied to similar settings and samples (Shenton, 2004). Seale (1999, p.45) advocates that “Transferability is achieved by providing a detailed, rich description of the settings studied to provide the reader with sufficient information to be able to judge the applicability of the findings to other settings that they know”. This contains a rich description of the phenomena being investigated and its context in relation to the occurring phenomenon. The participants’ quotes were another method employed which allowed for extraction of the data framework to be used in other studies. In addition, purposive sampling was employed in this research to fully explore a broader range of participants’ experiences. Parr (2010) argues that purposive sampling supports the transferability of a study by maximising the range of information obtained.

4.9.3 Dependability and Confirmability

From a qualitative perspective, dependability is related to the quality of the integrated processes and procedures of data collection and data interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Seale (1999) states that dependability can be achieved through auditing which consists of the researcher's documentation of data, methods, and decisions made during both the data analysis stage and the outcomes stage. To fulfill these criteria in this study, the researcher implemented the following techniques:

- Clarify the theories underlying the study.
- Provide more details and description on how data were collected to allow for an audit trail.
- Use several different research techniques in the study (triangulation)

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of the research can be confirmed or validated by others. In this research, confirmability was achieved by involving participants in reviewing the transcripts to improve the quality and accuracy of data

analysis (Sarantakos, 2005). Data was collected in a retrievable form, then analysed in a systematic way. Raw data, including audio recording, documents, records, and field notes were documented in great detail.

4.10 Limitations

As expected, there were some limitations associated with conducting with this study.

First, the researcher faced some difficulties collecting data through the interviews. For instance, participants in some departments of the MCS asked formally for a letter to their employers requesting permission to undertake the interviews. In order to comply with this requirement and speed up the process, two more documents were presented to participants. These were supporting letters from the Omani Government Cultural Attaché and another from the supervisor (see Appendixes 3 and 4). Due to bureaucratic requirements, it is strongly recommended that all potential researchers working with Oman's public sector prepare in this same way.

Second, the researcher faced some challenges in obtaining information on the research topic, as much of the information related to Oman was not publicly available on the internet and other sources. Therefore, the researcher had to rely on primary data.

Third, the researcher was influenced by time factors. Interviews in seven governorates were conducted over three periods, with many visits to each governorate. Two directorates were visited twice because some participants were not available on the first visit. The interviews were conducted before northern summer because most employees prefer to take their holidays during the summer, so to it would be difficult to schedule an appointment with them at that time.

Fourth, the research was limited to two public-sector organisations the MoE and the MCS. This may limit the generalisability of the results to other public organisations if

researchers use different research methods. The use of a broader representation of organisations is recommended.

4.11 Summary

This research aimed to explore how HRP practices are conducted in Oman. The research design for this study was situated within the interpretive paradigm and a case study methodology was the main tool used to gain an in-depth perspective on the investigated phenomena. This chapter has discussed the context of the research, and discussed two instruments that were used in this research, including interviews with both upper and lower management. Furthermore, it has briefly highlighted the ethical issues encountered in the research. Several stages involving analysis and interpretation of data have also been discussed. Finally, the chapter explained the criteria employed to enhance research trustworthiness.

The next two chapters, Chapter Five and Chapter Six, elaborate the findings obtained from the interviews. The interpretation of the findings will then be presented in detail in Chapter Seven.

5 Chapter Five: The HRP Process in Oman's MoE

5.1 Introduction:

The purpose of this study was to explore HRP practices in Oman's MoE given limited previous research. Qualitative research utilising an interpretive approach was adopted for this study. The data was gathered using face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Using a process of thematic coding that contains deductive and inductive coding, 32 interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analysed. The data was intended to provide more in-depth information about current HRP practices in the MoE by addressing the research questions.

1. How does the MoE in Oman currently undertake HRP?
2. What are the factors affecting HRP practices in the MoE in Oman?

The evidence associated with the first two research questions is presented in this chapter and the next. The chapter which follows (Chapter Six) then discusses the evidence in the context of the literature to answer research questions 3 and 4.

4. Are the current HRP practices in the Ministry of Education in Oman good practices?
5. What can be done to improve HRP practices to ensure they meet the needs of the MoE?

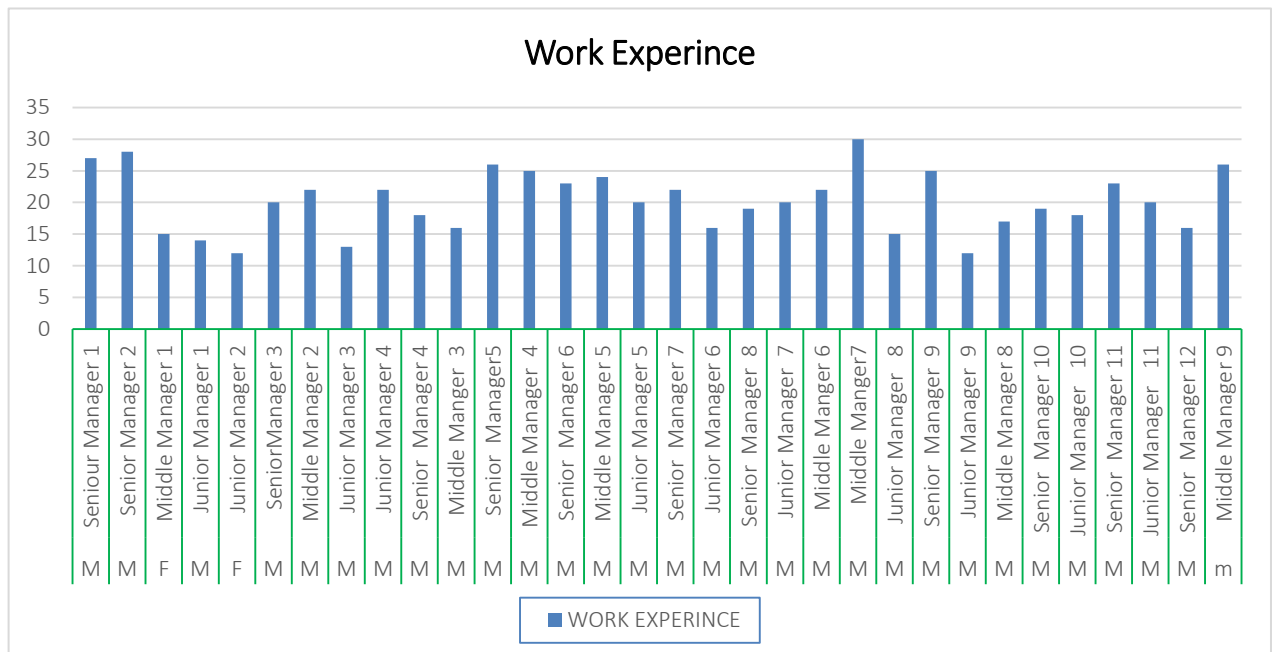
This chapter presents the findings of the first research question. This question considers HRP practices in the MoE. It is appropriate to first offer a profile of the participants in this study.

5.2 Demographic Information

The general characteristics of participants in this study are presented in Table 5.1. The 32 participants in this study were diverse in terms of level of education, position, and number of years employed. All 32 interviewees were Omani (100%). Of the 32 participants, two were female and the rest were male. This is reflective of the level female participation in Oman’s labour force which is low due to cultural and political reasons discussed in Chapter Two (Ingvaldsen, 2010).

The number of years that participants had been employed at the MoE ranged from 11 (the least experienced) to 28 years (the most experienced). Specifically, 13 (40%) had been employed for a period between 25 to 30 years, 14 (43%) for 10 to 15 years, and five (20%) between 25 and 30 years. The last group was employed in strategic planning positions. All participants had worked at the MoE for more over 10 years.

Figure 5.1: Participants' Experience at the MoE



The majority of participants had a Bachelor's degree (53%), while a substantial number (34%) had a Master's degree, two (6%) had a PhD degree and one had a Diploma. Only a few had degrees related to HRM or HRP, implying that these professionals were experienced administrators.

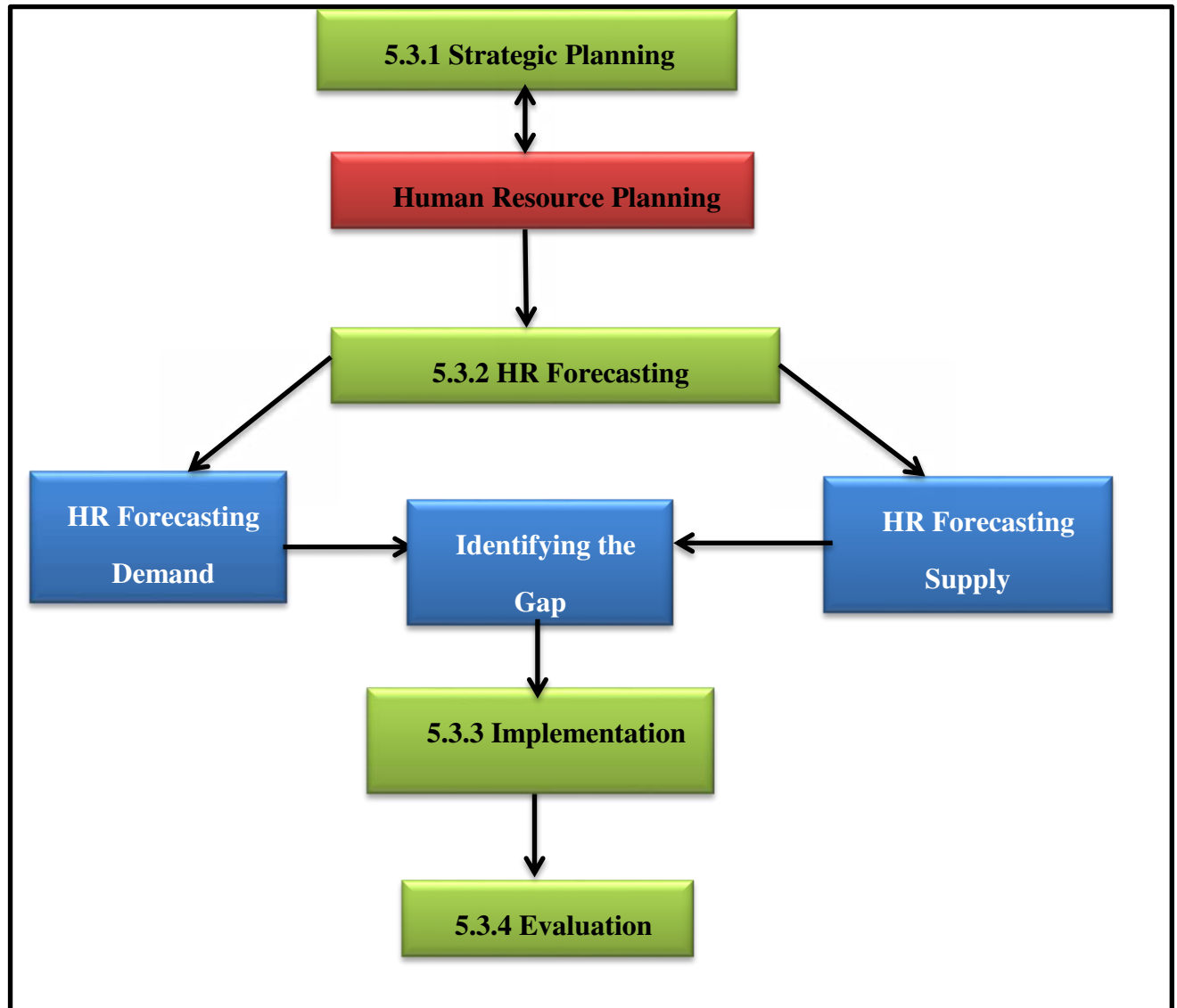
Table 5.1: Demographic Profile of the Participants

<i>P.No</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Working Experience</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Degree Earned</i>
1	M	27	Senior Manager 1	Master
2	M	28	Senior Manager 2	Bachelor
3	F	15	Middle Manager 1	Bachelor
4	M	14	Junior Manager 1	Bachelor
5	F	12	Junior Manager 2	Diploma
6	M	20	Senior Manager 3	Master
7	M	22	Middle Manager 2	Master
8	M	13	Junior Manager 3	Bachelor
9	M	22	Junior Manager 4	Bachelor
10	M	18	Senior Manager 4	Master
11	M	16	Middle Manager 3	Master
12	M	26	Senior Manager 5	Bachelor
13	M	25	Middle Manager 4	Bachelor
14	M	23	Senior Manager 6	PhD
15	M	24	Middle Manager 5	Bachelor
16	M	20	Junior Manager 5	Bachelor
23	M	22	Senior Manager 7	Master
18	M	16	Junior Manager 6	Bachelor
19	M	19	Senior Manager 8	Master
20	M	20	Junior Manager 7	Bachelor
21	M	22	Middle Manager 6	PG
22	M	30	Middle Manager 7	Master
23	M	15	Junior Manager 8	Bachelor
24	M	25	Senior Manager 9	PhD
25	M	12	Junior Manager 9	Bachelor
26	M	17	Middle Manager 8	Master
27	M	19	Senior Manager 10	Master
28	M	18	Junior Manager 10	Bachelor
29	M	23	Senior Manager 11	Bachelor
30	M	20	Junior Manager 11	Master
31	M	16	Senior Manager 12	Bachelor
32	M	26	Middle Manager 9	Bachelor

The aim of the research question 1: *How does the MoE in Oman currently undertake HRP* was to gain an understanding of the HRP practices undertaken by the MoE, and to provide an insight into these practices through a focus on the activities of those holding administrative posts within the directorates. Four dominant patterns or strategy of activity relevant to HRP emerged from the data: the strategic planning, demand and supply forecasting, implementation, and evaluation stages. It is important to note that the

participants often referred to ‘the Ministry’ when they discussed the central office of the MoE and this has been retained in the data.

Figure 5.2: HRP phases in Oman’s the MoE



5.2.1 HRP in the Strategic Planning

It was repeatedly stressed by participants that the integration of HRP into organisational strategic planning is extremely important. Accordingly, this section aims to discuss and understand how HRP is conducted at the strategic planning level in the MoE. To gain further insights into this, the participants were asked to describe the procedures created by the MoE to facilitate the achievement of the organisation’s strategic planning, the

major objectives of the HR plans within the MoE's strategic planning process, and how these link HRP with strategic planning, as well as their personal involvement in the process of strategic planning. Here, several sub-themes emerged as a result of data analysis.

5.2.1.1 Environmental Scanning

Participants were asked to describe the process and key activities they used to determine MoE's HR requirements in order to meet the Ministry's strategic goals. The majority indicated SWOT was used as one of the key planning tools for identifying the strategic HR goals of the current Five-Year Plan (2011-2015). One manager reported that:

The current five-year plan started with an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses through meetings with different directorates followed by training workshops on how to conduct the SWOT analysis. This step helped us in setting the determinants, which have been converted to goals and ultimately programs of different aspects. (Middle Manager 1)

Another interviewee stated:

We built a previous five-year plan based on the analytical tool called SWOT, which provided us with an opportunity to know the goals that we need to accomplish in this plan. (Senior Manager 2)

Junior and middle managers pointed out that they undertook a training course to learn skills needed to implement a SWOT analysis. These two quotes demonstrate their views:

We have executed a (SWOT) analysis for the current plan. This was accompanied by training programs on how to do SWOT analysis. The course was implemented by a specialised person from the Ministry. (Middle Manager 5)

In order for the directorates to successfully apply a SWOT analysis, many of the department heads on those directorates attended courses on how to conduct SWOT analysis. (Junior Manager 7)

Not all participants indicated that they performed external environmental scanning as a part of the SWOT analysis. The majority of participants reported that this process is usually identified and considered centrally by the HR planner in the Ministry. They indicated that they conducted the SWOT analysis without taking into consideration the external opportunities and threats. This point is illustrated in the following:

The external factors, such as economy, technology, laws, etc were not studied by the directorates, but we are much concerned with the internal factors. I think, however, the study of the environmental external factors could be achieved by the Ministry. (Junior Manager 12)

The same view was shared by another participant:

This process was done centrally by the Ministry and not by the directorate. Ever since I have worked in the field of planning, we haven't studied the impact of the economic and social aspects on the governorate and its HRM objectives. (Middle Manager 9)

It was also pointed out that the process of examining the organisation's external environment takes place exclusively at the Ministry level as they have the resources, which advantage allows them quick and easy access to the information they needed. One interviewee commented:

... yes, external factors are identified as opportunities and threats might possibly exist and this step is performed in a central way by the MoE as they have the ability to communicate with the other ministries and institutions and have access to important information sources. (Middle Manager 5)

Although the Ministry had adopted the SWOT approach to scan the external environment as a part of the strategic planning process for HRP, the expected effects of the external environment had not been given sufficient attention in terms of what should be monitored within the organisation. A participant from the central MoE stated:

... before implementing the current strategic planning (sic), both internal and external environments were important factors taken into consideration by the Ministry ... but regarding the external factors, there was a shortcoming in this aspect. Although factors such as economic trends, technology, labour market, and legal-political have a significant influence on human resources, they have not been considered in the current plan. (Senior Manager 9)

The data indicates that there are two main reasons for not conducting an analysis of the external environments in the required manner at the Ministry. The first reason was that the HRP professionals do not have direct access to relevant information regarding the external environment. The data from outside the Ministry has not been integrated into MoE's data, as observed by this interviewee:

.... the information about the external factors and linking them to the situation of the human resources does not exist as we do not have access to government related information. We really need to open more channels with other government institutions. For example, if we can get information about job seekers from the Ministry of Civil Service, such data and resources will be useful to make sound HR planning decisions in the MoE. (Senior Manager 7)

In addition, there was a lack of advance information about economic trends. A clear vision of economic conditions is required to enable assessments in terms of what HR activities need to be completed and how this should be achieved. A senior manager had the following to say:

... when we talk about the strategic goals, we have to get a clear vision of what the MoE wants to achieve during the coming period. Since we talk about governmental sectors, the question will be “what is an orientation that the country will take economically?” Such answers must be provided by the Government, so that information is accessible by all in order to help shape the MoE’s HR plans in response to various changes. (Senior Manager 1)

The second reason given by the participants for the lack of environmental scanning was that there was a perception that HRP professionals in the MoE lacked the knowledge and skills to use the external information sources and to determine the HR requirements of the MoE, as reported by one senior manager:

Although courses and training were provided to workers in strategic planning, the main challenge is that the Ministry has HRP professionals who lack knowledge and skills to perform scanning activities. These kinds of tasks require analytical skills for information processing and analysis. (Senior Manager 2)

Most of the participants agreed that conducting a SWOT analysis was an essential and useful tool for setting out the MoE’s objectives, including HR objectives, in the MoE’s current Five-Year plan, as illustrated in the following extracts.

... yes, why not! This process gives an accurate description of the situation and significant data which helps us to do a good job in the planning process for the human resources. (Junior Manager 7)

I emphasise that the recent plan was good in that some of the staff from the governorates were engaged in knowing the mechanisms of setting the HR plan, of which SWOT is one of its tools. (Middle Manager 6)

It appears that SWOT analysis was the most discussed analytical tool for conducting internal and external environmental scanning. There was consensus among study participants that environmental scanning is an efficient, organised means for the MoE to collect relevant information regarding HRP. However, several participants indicated that they did not perform external environmental scanning, due to the inadequate knowledge and skills of HRP professionals, and the lack of adequate information and data or resources necessary to conduct environmental scanning. This may mean that the relevant decision makers were only presented with part of the picture and data set with which to draw up their plans.

5.2.1.2 A Formalised and Written HR Strategic Plan

The first sub-theme to emerge concerned the strategic planning phase that the MoE operates to generate it has a Five-Year strategic plan. There was general consensus among participants' responses that this was a formalised strategic plan for HRP in the MoE, similar to those of other governmental organisation in Oman. One participant reported:

Providing the required human resources of the Ministry comes within the most dominant planning frame in the governmental sector in the Sultanate, which is the Five-Year Plan. (Senior Manager 6)

Another added:

Setting the objectives and providing staff are generally done according to the Five-Year Plan. (Senior Manager 2)

Similarly, another participant commented:

Normally, the Ministry always sets the Five-Year Plan. This plan includes programs and operating plans that are related to all aspects of the Ministry, such as the education, the curriculum, human resource development, evaluation, etc. (Senior Manager 5)

With respect to the presence of written strategic human resource plans, participants from the Ministry indicated that they had a written plan. Two participants reported that:

The current Five-Year Plan could be the only written plan that includes programs and indicators, which work in accordance with particular visions. (Senior Manager 9)

... yes, there is the Five- Year Plan document, and it clarifies all the goals and the programs that the Ministry aims to achieve. (Middle Manager 1)

However, a majority of the participants in the governorates admitted that strategic planning is not documented, as indicated in the following extracts:

No, we do not have a written plan. All we have is related to staff who work in schools [for teachers], but with regard to the administrative posts, it is not documented in terms of the employment. (Middle Manager 5)

The visions and the goals could exist, but they are not declared to everyone. (Middle Manager 9)

Another participant commented:

We are supposed to have a written plan that clarifies our requirements of human resources in every department, section and school. (Middle Manager 8)

When asked about the extent to which the MoE has a formalised strategic plan for administrative posts or jobs, the responses indicated that HRP activities related to these posts did not receive as much consideration within the MoE' strategic plan as in the case of the professional jobs, as demonstrated by the following comments:

The administrative posts did not get the same attention as the educational [teaching] jobs. What is available now is filling the vacancies caused by resignation, compulsory retirement or death. (Senior Manager 5)

The Ministry gives great attention to education jobs. However, we don't see such attention paid to other [administrative] side. (Senior Manager 12)

It became clear that the focus at the strategic HRP within the MoE is relatively long-term (five years), which is part of the Five-Year Plan for the country. Also, the data indicate that a majority of directorates, unlike the Ministry, did not have a written strategic plan.

5.2.1.3 Strategic HR Objectives in the Five-Year Plan

This section seeks to further understanding of how HRM objectives are set in order to achieve the MoE's objectives. The strategic goals identified for HR in the previous Five-Year Plan were development of human resources and the provision of required employees with relevant skill sets and knowledge. Participants stated that:

Strategic planning consists of the two following objectives: (1) Provide the MoE's future HR needs (2) train and develop human resources. (Senior Manager 11)

Another participant commented:

There were two basic goals, which are to provide the required staff and develop them. (Middle Manager 2)

Senior staff emphasised that improvement of employees' skills and knowledge in various areas was given priority in the current Five-Year plan.

We have a strategic goal related to the various aspects of the work, which is upgrading the skills and knowledge of the human resource in the different specialisations. (Senior Manager 9)

The objectives were defined based on evaluation of the previous strategic plan. As stated by several senior management participants:

We built the Five-Year Plan based on the evaluation of the previous Five-Year Plan, which was by knowing the goals achieved and not achieved in that plan. (Senior Manager 3)

We gathered (sic) all the directorates to know the achievements in the light of the previous plan (2006-2010) and to determine what has not been achieved, and that has become our strategic goal that needs to be achieved in the coming plans. (Senior Manager 8)

Participants from various levels of the HR development department pointed out that the strategic objectives of the Five-Year Plan provide a clear picture of the intended outcome for professional jobs. For the administrative posts, however, participants observed that the strategic objectives are not clear enough to constitute a base from which the HR manager can set annual plans that would support the organisation's strategic objectives:

A middle manager illustrates this point

Regarding the administrative posts, we don't have clear strategic objectives that provide us details, which include the expected results from conducting training programs during the coming five years. For example, training and development programs for employees in the planning sector were not executed based on clear objectives in order to meet the MoE's strategic planning. (Middle Manager 3)

Similar comments were made by another participant:

Do we know the strategic goals of the Ministry for those who are working on the administrative side? Are these goals achievable? As I am the one who is responsible for the training department, I have no idea about these goals. We must have clear objectives to establish specific training and development objectives, so with these goals we can determine not only the training and development needs, but also a comprehensive picture of the MoE's goals that it wants to accomplish. (Middle Manager 9)

Another interviewee added:

The annual development plan consists of two aspects. The first and bigger aspect of the plan is the professional side, and the other aspect is the administrative side. However, we are satisfied with the first aspect because the requirements are determined according to clear directions and guidelines. For the other side, the Ministry struggles to set the training action plan within a clear strategic frame that contains clear goals ... There are difficulties in setting (sic) the strategic plan of the Ministry in terms of the training aspect. (Senior Manager 3)

These observations strongly suggest that the MoE recognises the importance of training and development for its employees, an area which has been a primary target in its recent plan. In terms of strategic objectives, HRP professionals were able to develop HR plans that helped them accomplish those objectives for the professional jobs, while the objectives in the administrative posts were thought to lack clarity and were difficult to translate into action. This showed a differential two-tier planning process for the two job classifications in the MoE, possibly indicating a greater level of importance allocated on one more than the other.

5.2.1.4 HRP Professionals' Involvement in Strategic Planning

Of the study participants, was of the opinion that senior management in the Ministry had a growing awareness of the need for HR professionals to become actively involved at the strategic planning level. The majority of participants indicated that the Ministry's current Five-Year Plan has seen significant development in terms of the participation of other parties in the preparation of the plan. This view is reflected in the following comments:

In fact, a strategic five-year plan has been set based on direct participation of the HR staff whether in the Ministry or directorates.
(Senior Manager 11)

.... Moreover, we were engaged in preparing the five-year plan through participating in specialised training courses about preparing the five-year plan. The main feature that distinguishes the current plan from the previous ones is that the current one relies on broad participation from various sectors of the Ministry. (Middle Manager 6)

This was reinforced when HRP professionals from the middle and lower management were granted the opportunity to participate at the beginning of the plan, especially in the process of environmental assessment, as a participant reported:

As governorates, we discussed setting the bases and the standards by which the plan will be built. I emphasise that the current plan is good in that some of the staff from the governorates were engaged in setting the strategic plan to identify vital information about strengths and weaknesses of their directorates. (Junior Manager 10)

A similar comment was made by another participant:

As I have mentioned, there were efforts at the beginning of the current five-year plan; for instance, meetings were held and courses were organised in the field of strategic planning, for each person on his/her departments. (Middle Manager 5)

However, when asked to identify the role of the participant in formulating their organisation's current five-year plan or the MoE's strategic plan, the majority of participants from both the middle and operational level reported that they were not fulfilling their roles, in that they did not know what projects that needed to be implemented on the basis of human resources needs and the time framework. The participants pointed out that they did not have a preconceived idea of the projects that the Ministry intended to implement during the plan. This point of view is supported by the following two extracts:

Not everyone knows the programs and projects that will be established during the next five years. We need to know and get more information about the plan, to make sure projects will finish on time, and meet the requirements of the human resources. (Middle Manager 8)

We define the strengths and weaknesses points of the Directorate, but we did not receive the final results of this process, nor did we get involved in setting the last draft of the final plan that was enacted. (Junior Manager 9)

This view was reinforced by another middle manager:

There was an important project announced by the Ministry recently... Although this project had a direct relationship with my job, I have no idea about its goals, requirements, when it will be implemented, or who is the responsible party for this project. (Middle Manager 6)

What is apparent from these comments is that while progress has been made, there is evidence that the integration of HRP with strategic planning is still in development.

5.2.1.5 Linking HRP with Strategic Planning

In relation to the linking of HRP and strategic planning, participants were asked whether HRP in the MoE was aligned to the requirements of strategic planning goals. Participants indicated that training activities were relatively short term and strategic considerations did not enter into HRP decisions related to those activities. A few respondents had the following to say:

There is an annual training program in the Ministry, but it was not an action that translated the MoE's strategic plan objectives (Five-year plan). This means departments, such as finance, planning and statistics, do not receive training programs with clearly articulated outcomes and in accordance with the strategic objectives. (Junior Manager 4)

... bodies concerned with training have been engaged in setting the training and implementing workshops in the governorates. Thus, they are aware of what will be executed under the training programs during the years. (Senior Manager 3)

Participants mentioned that there was no opportunity for HRP professionals to take a strategic outlook towards determining the quantity and quality of employees required for the administrative posts in order to meet organisational objectives. On the other hand, HRP action, undertaken by the MoE for professional jobs, was guided by the MoE's strategic planning. This predominant characteristic of HRP practices in the MoE was mentioned by a significant proportion of participants, for example:

We don't have a clear vision in the current Five-Year Plan by which we address our requirements of human resources quantitatively and qualitatively in the coming three or four years We can't determine a starting point through which we can move to what must be done to ensure that the activities of human resources required by the Ministry are tied to its strategic objectives. It could be clear when it comes to the how many

and what kind of employees we need in professional jobs. (Middle Manager 1)

Two participants from the central office (MoE) added similar perspectives:

Honestly speaking, the quantity and quality of staff needed is not included in the strategic plan for the administrative posts. “How many we need and what we want and when will we need them”, such questions, I cannot give you precise and clear answers for the administrative posts as is the case for the professional jobs. (Senior Manager 7)

If you ask me about other administrative posts, the current Five-Year Plan doesn't include the requirements of the administrative posts. For example, the types and numbers of employees that the Directorate of Financial Affairs will need during the next five years are not clear. (Middle Manager 7)

HRP was also perceived not to be aligned with strategic planning in recruitment operations. Extraordinary measures were observed to have been taken by the government, prompting the Ministry to employ a large number of employees, which did not correspond with the strategic plan. As one participant reported:

The Ministry has received an additional number of graduates who exceed the real need of the Ministry. (Junior Manager 2)

Another participant clarified this further:

The requirements in the last year in the Ministry were done according to the commands of the supreme leadership to accommodate the largest possible number of graduates. This happened without prior planning, and it was not included in a strategic plan. (Middle Manager 10)

A participant from senior management in the MCS emphasised that most of the recruitment operations are not linked and aligned with the Five-Year Plan. He added that the MCS conducts a recruitment process on a yearly basis:

The selection and the recruitment processes are supposed to be done in accordance with the vision and the requirements of the Five-Year plan of the government. However, the Five-Year plans are most of the time economic plans and they don't include determining (sic) the requirements of human resources. I wish the requirements of the human resources and the economic requirements were linked together. (Senior Manager 7)

It is evident from these responses that integration of HRP within the MoE's strategic planning for administrative posts is not considered a high priority. The participants indicated a lack of strategic alignment of HR functions relating to forecasting, recruitment and training programs.

5.2.1.6 Summary

This section discussed various themes relevant to the current HRP practices at the strategic planning level. In general, the findings suggest that the MoE does not perceive HRP as critical to its strategic planning. The results in this section also demonstrated that there was a lack of skilled and experienced staff to conduct environmental scanning, and that the information needed to support environmental scanning was not available. This means that the analysis process is ineffective. In terms of the strategic objectives, those in the Five-Year Plan were not sufficiently well defined to enable their achievement of goals through the HRP process. The responses of middle and junior managers interviewed indicated that HR professionals did not involve senior manager in planning formulation and setting the direction for HRP. The participants strongly emphasised that the integration of HRP practices into the MoE's strategic planning process was not given enough consideration by the Ministry.

5.2.2 Forecasting HR Demand and Supply

Interviewees were asked several questions to unpack the various methods used for forecasting HR demand and supply. Under this category, three main themes emerged from the data: forecasting HR demand, forecasting HR supply, and key challenges in forecasting. Each them will be discussed in turn.

5.2.2.1 Forecasting HR Demand

The majority of the participants stated that there were more clear procedures in place for forecasting professional jobs as compared to administrative posts. This is in keeping with a perception that determining the numbers of employees needed, their skills, and positions easier for professional jobs (i.e. teaching positions) than it is for administrative posts as is illustrated in the following extracts:

The professional jobs are known and clear in terms of estimating the requirements which are linked to clear and consistent standards. (Junior Manager 2)

In contrast, the standards for administrative posts are not clear to forecast the future HR requirements either quantitative or qualitative. (Junior Manager 6)

Another interviewee expressed a similar point of view, stating:

Forecasting techniques used for identifying the requirements of professional posts associated with teaching are clear, but when you talk about the other administrative posts, here in lies the difficulty. (Junior Manager 5)

5.2.2.1.1 Forecasting Demand for Professional Posts

Quantitative HR forecasting was found to be a primary technique used by the HR planner for professional jobs in the MoE. The participants indicated that mathematical techniques were used to forecast professional requirements, as explained by two junior level managers:

We use a mathematical method to forecast employment requirement.

(Junior Manager 8)

... the statistical data about the current situations of the teachers and the students of the schools is primarily used for predicting our needs for these types of jobs. (Junior Manager 10)

Another participant provided the following comment about the mathematical basis used for professional job forecasting:

... our main task as a planner is just to consider the quantitative requirement. For example, the Ministry adopts a benchmark standard of one supervisor for every group of 20 teachers per 500 classrooms.

(Middle Manager 1)

Quantitative techniques for predicting the number of professional jobs were mainly based on the numbers of students at the school. HRP professionals can anticipate professional job requirements for a particular period based on the number of students. The following excerpts reflect participants' views on the use of quantitative techniques for predicting professional jobs.

What is clear to us is the numbers of the teachers or the students, by which we determine staffing requirements. (Middle Manager 8)

We can anticipate the number of professional jobs in relation to the school based on the number of students or teachers, and the number of classrooms. (Junior Manager 11)

5.2.2.1.2 Forecasting Demand for Administrative Posts

The participants reported that the administrative posts in the MoE are subject to the authority of the MCS, which determines the skills, duties and characteristics of the people needed to perform the job requirements. The types of jobs needed are identified in the MoE based on the requirements of the positions available with the MCS. A participant from the Civil service stated that:

The basic role of our department is to create the jobs for various organisations applying the Civil Service Law. This process determines the people and acceptable qualifications needed to perform the jobs. It also provides information regarding the essential tasks and responsibilities of the job. (Middle Manager 3)

However, it was found that in the case of some administrative posts, no articulation of the job's duties and qualifications was attached.

Administrative posts such as administrative researcher, data entry operator, administrative clerk, and observation member, do not have clear tasks and responsibilities, so how can we have a plan for the number and type of employees needed for them. (Senior Manager 3)

A participant from the MCS agreed that this situation is a common in most government units. When he was asked about the rationale for such practice, he replied:

The Ministry of Civil Service attempts to reduce or organises this phenomenon. The organisational structure in the governmental units is the main source we rely on to create the jobs. This situation happens when

the manager creates jobs not according to an organisational structure (sic). (Middle Manager 4)

When the participants were asked to provide more detail about the procedures used to identify the required number of employees for the MoE, most of them indicated that each department has its own method of identifying and assessing its HR needs. These are considered as individualised strategies conducted by various sections and departments of the Ministry. The conditions and the stages differ from one department to another and every unit has its own set of procedures, as highlighted in the following interview extracts:

The existing techniques cannot be described as quantitative or qualitative we can say that they are attempts to estimate the human resources requirements for these jobs. They are considered as personal efforts done by the directorates or the Ministry. (Senior Manager 11)

We don't follow a clear guideline or standards that help us to determine the need for jobs and employees for all the departments and sections in the Ministry. Each department or section seeks to provide its needs, according to their personal vision. (Junior Manager 2)

The participants reported that no set of standards could possibly anticipate the number of employees necessary to fulfill the administrative post requirements.

Basically, there are no clear standards for these jobs, so it is impossible to forecast the requirements of these jobs. (Junior Manager 1)

It can be difficult to predict future demand for these jobs in the absence of a guide that helps to determine the number of employees you will need in the future to ensure efficient operations. (Junior Manager 7)

These statements were also supported by another participant who pointed out that the lack of clarity in the job descriptions has led to an imbalance between the duties of the positions available and the required number of employees. Some departments had undertaken a large number of tasks and responsibilities, which were not commensurate with the number of employees who were actually working in those departments.

Some of the departments have many tasks and duties, and the number of employees is not adequate to fulfil the responsibilities entrusted to them. I think we need to solve the problem by upgrading the job descriptions in each department, and of the jobs. (Junior Manager 11)

This case was consistent with other cases in public-sector organisations, as was confirmed by participants from senior management at the MCS, who reported that:

The quantitative requirement of HR was not part of the job description. It is a general state among government ministries, which requires us to reconsider most of the jobs that come within the framework of the civil service (sic). (Senior Manager 5)

All the participants indicated that the process of determining the HR requirements for professional jobs was based on clear standards and that HRP professionals used both quantitative and qualitative methods in this process. Quantitative methods are based on the number of students; qualitative methods are based on clear guidelines. On the other hand, the administrative posts in MoE are such that clear forecasting of HR needs cannot be ascertained with any certainty. Job classification is provided by the MCS and is used as a guide to determine the vacancies which need to be filled to meet the MoE's needs; however, the participants indicated that not all administrative posts have a job classification.

5.2.2.2 Forecasting Professional and Administrative Posts Supply

It is evident that there is a significant lack of capability to forecast HR supply requirements for both professional and administrative posts in Oman's MoE. The MoE does not take into account assessments of the internal and external sources of supply for its jobs. Current practice does not include any internal analysis of factors such as retirements, turnover rates, the potential training needs of current employees, or future staffing requirements. The case of HR forecasting practice relating to external analysis is similar, so that the absence of such external analysis constrains the potential human resource supply from outside the Ministry. The following illustrates this finding:

There wasn't any anticipation in this regard. It was just financial projections required to provide human resources, but forecasting the current employees who will be promoted, transferred, developed. etc., such processes are not applied in the MoE. (Senior Manager 10)

Determining the requirements of the professional jobs in the Five-Year Plan is based on current needs, and it is done without taking into consideration the future status of those employees: we did not take into account that some of them might be qualified to occupy the expected vacant positions. (Junior Manager 9)

Therefore, it can be surmised that the forecasting processes associated with HRP in the MoE face practical barriers and constraints.

5.2.2.3 Key challenges in Forecasting HR Demand and Supply

According to participants, there are several challenges when forecasting HR demand and supply in the MoE. The presence of ambiguous organisational goals was one of the major challenges facing HRP professionals when conducting HR forecasting of demand and supply. One of the participants commented on this issue, stating:

There are many reasons. I think that the existing plan is the only temporary, solution to the problems facing the Ministry at the moment. We have not seen long-term strategic planning yet. It will be interesting to see how the MoE's strategic thinking evolves towards the development of HR. There would not be a gap if various aspects of human resources were planned with clear objectives. The Ministry needs a clear vision to be set as a foundation for all decisions that are related to human resources.
(Senior Manager 1)

The following extract highlights the impact of objectives not being clearly articulated to facilitate HR forecasting for administrative posts:

In my opinion, the biggest obstacle we face is the absence of the strategic goals and visions in most of the institutions. Clear goals and objectives are essential in to order to facilitate the determination process regarding human resources. (Senior Manager 12)

HRP departments have undertaken a large number of tasks and responsibilities, which is another barrier that prevents HR professionals from undertaking their role of forecasting the HR needs of administrative posts. They have no time to address both administrative and professional jobs, as one participant stated:

The undertaken tasks are many (sic), and they are not commensurate with the number of employees who are performing the work. We have only three employees in the department, HR professionals are spending too much time on tasks that are related to professional jobs. So, we do not have enough time to deal with both administrative jobs. (Middle Manager 8)

5.2.2.4 Identifying the Gap: Surplus or Shortage

The process of identifying the HR needs gaps focuses on identifying where the organisation expects to have a surplus or shortage of employees. In this section,

participants were asked to clarify their views regarding the techniques used in determining the gaps between demand and supply. Most of them emphasised that it is easy to perform this process for professional jobs as the requirements for those jobs are mainly identified by calculating the numbers of students at the schools. The gap determination process is calculated by comparing availability with requirements. Positive values indicate a surplus of employees, while negative values indicate a shortage of employees, as clarified by the participants below:

Identifying the gap contains a detailed specification of the existing numbers of staff in all the departments and sections and the required number or the supposed number for these departments. (Junior Manager 8)

This process is usually conducted by matching employees' exits and jobs currently available with the number and type of employees that would be required in the MoE. (Middle Manager 1)

The processes that we carry out to determine the vacancies include identifying the number of staff required in the future in comparison to existing staff, and then we get the vacancies as a result. It is clearer than other jobs. A negative number indicates worker shortage and a positive number indicate surplus. (Middle Manager 5)

If we assume that the number of future workforce employees needed is 250, and the number of available staff in that job is 200, the result of bringing together requirements and availability produces a shortage of 50. (Junior Manager 9)

Nonetheless, participants pointed out the difficulty of conducting a gap analysis for administrative posts. They attributed the lack of forecasting methods for administrative posts to the civil service system, which does not adopt standards or guidelines that can help HRP professionals in the MoE forecast the number of employees for those jobs. One respondent stated:

I think that the obstacles encountered in applying qualitative and quantitative techniques is that those jobs are subject to the law of the civil service, which does not provide clear information standards by which we can access our future needs of these jobs. (Junior Manager 10)

5.2.2.5 Summary

The findings in this section indicate that the MoE's HRP professionals employed traditional forecasting methods to predict the expected number of employees. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used for forecasting professional job demand, while, determining and forecasting demand for administrative posts was confined to the use of qualitative methods. The HRP processes in place at the MoE failed to undertake identification of the future HR supply for either type of jobs. Numerous factors affected the ability of HRP professionals to apply an appropriate HR forecast method, including goal ambiguity, the large number of duties and responsibilities of HRP professionals, unplanned projects, and lack of awareness of the impact of external factors on HRP. A comparison of the findings related to the administrative and professional jobs revealed that gap analysis was not undertaken for the administrative posts, hence HRP professionals could not predict the departments within the MoE where there was likely to be would be a shortage or surplus of employees. The next stage in the HRP process is the development and implementation of strategies to address gaps identified in the forecasting stage.

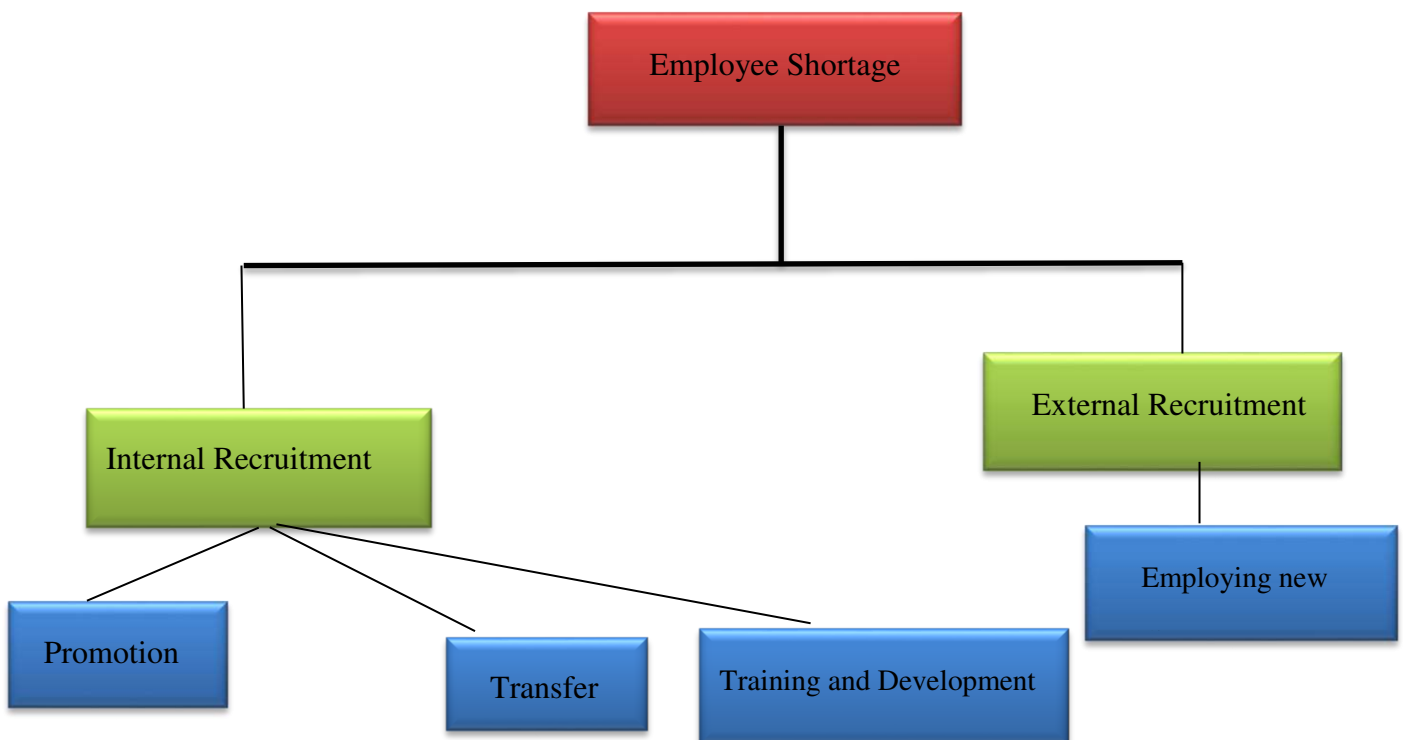
5.2.3 Implementing Gap-Closing Strategies

Participants in this study were asked to describe how they implement workforce solution needed to close the gap between current and future HR needs. They were asked to provide more detail relating to the alternative strategies they use to redress employee shortage and surplus. The following sections will elaborate the findings related to each of the main themes and sub-themes.

5.2.3.1 Shortage

Participants were asked to describe the gap-closing strategies they most commonly implemented to mitigate potential occupational and skill shortages. Discussion with participants revealed that there are two options available for initial consideration in dealing with employee shortages: internal and external recruitment. The main strategies that became apparent under internal recruitment were promotion, transfer, and training and development, while, hiring new applicants was the primary external recruitment strategy used by the MoE, as is shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Recruitment Alternatives to Address Employee Shortage in Oman's MoE.



5.2.3.1.1 Internal Recruitment

Promotion

Internal promotion, whereby the employee moves to a higher position, was a favoured strategy used by the MoE to deal with employee shortages. Most of the participants commented that the MoE tends to use this strategy as they have better information about their employees' ability and performance, as demonstrated by the following quotes from two participants:

Promoting-from-within to fill the vacancies is a favoured strategy for the Ministry because the current employees are already familiar with the work in the Ministry. (Middle Manager 10)

The Ministry gives preference to its employees when filling a job vacancy as they may actually perform better than external candidates and they may have more experience than those from outside of the Ministry. (Senior Manager 6)

Another participant added that the Ministry gives priority to internal promotion in order to fill vacancies because it is seen as one of the ways in which the Ministry can reward and motivate its employees:

The MoE prefers to fill the open positions via internal promotion before looking for employees outside the Ministry. The Ministry uses this strategy as a motivational tool for its employees. (Senior Manager 1)

Participants indicated that promotion was often dependent on the perspective of the unit manager or the immediate manager. For example, three study participants reported that:

Employees get promoted not based on clear criteria, but they are often directly nominated by the Director-General of the Directorate in the governorates. (Middle Manager 8)

Filling the position is a centralised process; even when a candidate passes all of the required steps, the final decision on his as most employees are male promotion depends on the opinions of the senior management in the Ministry or Director-General in the governorate. (Junior Manager 9)

Unfortunately, no, there are no tests or even interviews to select the appropriate person to fill the vacancy. The decisions around promotion are made by the direct manager. (Junior Manager 7)

When asked about the standards used for filling vacancies by internal promotion, participants reiterated that that promotion was not subject to clear standards. The MoE does not have a general guide in which the necessary competencies are identified so that employees are more aware of their opportunities. For example, four participants commented that:

The conditions and requirements for the administrative posts are not clear for employees to compete with others or prepare themselves to take this opportunity. (Middle Manager 11)

In the context of selection and promotion, there were no clear characteristics used to select the employee who appears to have the desired characteristics. (Middle Manager 4)

The basis of promotion is not based on clear competencies in which we can select the right person. (Junior Manager 8)

In cases where there is a vacancy, the Ministry nominates the employees for it without any standards set or competition. I couldn't find a document or a guide that contains the basis and the standards by which the right person can be selected. (Middle Manager 6)

When participants were asked whether there are any guidelines or requirements that regulate the promotion process, they replied:

There is law which states that the employee promotion is subject to 70% on merit and 30% tenure. (Senior Manager 2)

... legal framework for employee's promotion dictates that promotions will be given based 70% on employee merit and 30% on tenure. (Senior Manager 4)

Although there is an MCS list of competencies for civil service promotions adopted by the MoE, the Ministry did not apply these criteria as required, as one of the participants stated:

There are many law suits that the employees have won against the Ministry because the law of civil service was not applied. This gives us an indication that we are not going in the right direction. (Senior Manager 11)

Most participants indicated that the current promotion procedures were ineffective in terms of selecting the best-qualified candidates for vacant positions and validating the information that captures the applicant's capability to do the required work.

Currently, we have ineffective practices regarding nomination for a vacant position; the opportunity is supposed to be given for all employees and the chance of competition should be provided for everybody. (Middle Manager 9)

This view was supported by another participant:

We wish to see a new system which uses a variety of methods that provide enough information for evaluating applicants and leads to employing the appropriate person. (Senior Manager 6)

Participants noted that the current promotion policy negatively influences employees' work motivation. Another impact observed was a high turnover rate, as mentioned by participants below:

From my perspective, the current system does not take into account the employee's contribution, which affects negatively the quality of the work; due to this, some talented employees shifted from the Ministry to another organisation. (Middle Manager 5)

The same point was made by another two participants:

The system is based on seniority, not based on performance. This is why you notice that some employees move to other institutions where they pay attention to employees' performance. (Middle Manager 5)

The current situation of promotion is quite weak regarding evaluating and motivating the employee. It has no logical standards that motivate and reward employees based on their performance. (Senior Manager 6)

Participants pointed out that the current promotion practice was not effective as not adequately recognise the importance of career paths for employees:

In fact, some promotions are inconsistent with the career path of the employee selected and they are irrelevant to his/her experience and qualifications. (Middle Manager 3)

It is clear that employee promotion is one of the preferred strategies used by the MoE to fill vacancies. Although the civil service has established a law regulating employee promotion, current procedures are inconsistently complaint with this law. In addition, the current promotion practices are perceived by participants as limiting motivation and increasing employee turnover.

Employee Transfer

This section explores the sub-theme of employee transfer and the contribution of this strategy in managing employee shortages. The participants were asked to state whether they had adopted transfer procedures to fill vacancies within the MoE. Generally, all participants explained that a transfer strategy is used by the MoE to shift employees from educational positions to fill administrative positions:

A large extent of administrative posts are occupied by employees from the academic staff. (Senior Manager 7)

Generally, we cover some of the administrative posts by moving some employees from the educational staff who are likely to be rendered surplus. (Middle Manager 7)

Most of the administrative job positions are given to applicants from the educational field who want to transfer. (Junior Manager 1)

Two participants indicated that the Ministry prefers to fill positions via internal transfers to enhance employees' career development, providing educational staff with the opportunity to apply for transfer.

The Ministry and directorates initiate transfers from the educational side to administrative in order to transfer employees to positions that enable them to be more effective. (Senior Manager 1)

There were a large number of employees who moved to the administrative field in governorates. This step was done because most of those staff were not able to be productive in the educational field. (Senior Manager 6)

Participants believed that the employee transfer process is not based on procedures that select employees who meet the standards and qualifications for a position. Participants

indicated that no clear basis is used to determine which employees should be transferred to what position:

If you have a look at the existing process of employee transfer in the Ministry, you will find that it is not based on clear requirements and standards. (Senior Manager 5)

When managers need to determine which employees will be transferred, they most likely use their personal viewpoint. (Junior Manager 11)

The challenge remains in the staff transfer process when they don't meet the job's standards or when they exceed the actual needs. (Middle Manager 8)

Some of the relocations are not based on qualifications. For instance, a large group of educational staff (sic) were moved to the administrative field due to being surplus. (Junior Manager 8)

It was observed that the MoE uses employee transfer as an employee development strategy, but the procedures of identifying an employee to transfer to a suitable vacancy are not conducted in a systematic manner.

Training and Development

Training and development is an important strategy that organisations use to provide the employee with skills that are intended to be used in the future. Participants were asked how the MoE employs the strategy of training and development to meet changes in job requirements and to prepare for future. Four of the participants involved in training expressed their views from a planning, development, training, and execution perspective.

Participants reported that the training plan is prepared by the HR Training Department through regular communication with the different directorates and training departments in the MoE:

We have an annual plan set for the employees. The programs are divided according to the type of job and determined through knowing the aspects that have a skills gap. The plan is prepared in accordance with the different requirements of the directorates in the year. (Senior Manager 3)

All the participants reported that the training plan in the MoE is prepared on a yearly basis. Participants noted that plans were typically short-term training programs:

From my perspective, the Ministry or even the Directorate don't have any strategic plan. They only have short-terms plans. (Middle Manager 4)

We implement an annual plan and it clarifies all the goals and the programs that the Ministry aims to achieve. (Junior Manager 4)

Participants reported that career development programs were not implemented to meet the objectives of the MoE's strategic plan. The MoE did not produce a development plan that prepares employees to meet future Ministry needs. As illustrated in the quotation below, only limited consideration was typically given to the strategic needs of the organisation during the career development discussions:

Regarding the qualification program, we don't have a clear vision of this aspect. This is one of the weak points that we hope the Ministry solves. Logically, sending employees overseas to study requires the Ministry to take into account the long-term needs of the organisation. For example, if an employee starts his career in the Ministry as a HR planner and he participates in further education, this means that he should receive a promotion to supervisor in the HR planning department. (Middle Manager 2)

Some of the employees who were sent abroad to study did not find a desk to sit at or work to do at their institution. It is expected that employees need to be able to identify potential opportunities to grow within the Ministry based on the type of education and training they have received. I am not talking about the Ministry of Education only, this is a common administrative phenomenon in most government units. (Senior Manager 3)

Three participants pointed out that the HR department creates a training plan by conducting a survey that collects information on training needs. This survey covers various training programs based on the courses that the HR development department intends to implement during the year.

There is a form called “Identification of Training Needs form”. We send this form to all employees in the MoE to determine the programs and the courses that they need. (Junior Manager 4)

We are following one form which is distributed to all sections and departments to assess training needs and design training programs. (Junior Manager 3)

These programs were designed through analysing the survey, which is distributed to all sections and departments. This survey focuses on identifying programs which employees need. (Middle Manager 9)

Most participants agree that the MoE did not have leadership development programs in place, however, there did not seem to be a formal program conducted to prepare and develop highly qualified candidates to close developmental gaps.

Such a program doesn't exist; it needs to be adopted and applied within a clear framework at the Ministry. I wish that this program existed in the Ministry. (Junior Manager 7)

We don't have any system driven by the Ministry about preparing the 'second-echelon leaders' who will undertake the leadership in the future.
(Senior Manager 3)

There is no formal process in this way and the Ministry misses such programs which deal with the level of management (sic) and above.
(Middle Manager 7)

There are no training programs that are presented especially for candidates who may obtain a higher position in the Ministry. (Senior Manager 1)

There was no preparation for leadership roles within the Ministry in terms of career development. The employees who occupied a higher position in the Ministry were not ready to take the next step and were not aware of what types of developmental programs were necessary or available. Participants emphasised that:

I am a manager of a department, but I am doing my work with the same knowledge and skills that I used in the last position. This is because I did not receive appropriate training before I got the promotion. This requires preparing employees with knowledge and skills that are intended to be used in the new position. (Senior Manager 3)

There were a number of promotions that have been made for the many employees (sic), but they didn't take any specific course or knowledge training courses that are needed to meet the minimum requirements for new jobs. (Junior Manager 4)

There is a lack of leadership development programs ... employees can't get promoted unless they have completed ... training courses in a specialisation or on the job. (Middle Manager 2)

Participants identified some potential barriers impeding successful applications for career and development planning. All the participants believed that in the absence of a long-

term training strategy in the MoE, it is difficult to design meaningful training and development programs:

The department of HR development implements hundreds of training programs each year, but here the question presents itself, where does the MoE want to be in five years time? What have we achieved in the last year? What do we want to achieve in the next year? We have to admit that these questions have no answers. (Middle Manager 10)

With clear objectives, we can determine the training programs for all departments and employees in the Ministry. For example, with the program designed and objectives set, we can implement the training programs for various departments at the Ministry. Also this will help us to identify the training programme for employees on an annual basis (Senior Manager 3)

Participants stated that most of administrative employees had no clear career path or training program. They indicated that this constitutes an obstacle to the identification of training objectives and employee development programs in the MoE

The first reason is that there is no clear career path for all the jobs; this is necessary in order to design training programs. (Senior Manager 9)

The biggest obstacle that we face in determining the training requirements is that there is no clear career path for the jobs so we can convert these tasks into information needed for training program planning. (Middle Manager 2)

Some technical jobs do not have a career ladder that helps us to recognise the development needs of employees who are working in these jobs. (Senior Manager 3)

Here the biggest challenge is in the absence of a clear career ladder for some technical jobs, in which each employee can start at the lowest level

and work their way up. The question is how long will the employee stay in the technical stream? The Ministry must establish a career path for those jobs, so we can provide them the training and development needed.

(Junior Manager 3)

Participants mentioned that the training database was insufficient to meet the needs of training and career development planning. Currently, MoE's information systems do not have the necessary data that can be used to determine whether employees' skills need updating or whether they have completed training courses:

Our information system is outdated and the data contains basic information such as name, education level, position title, salary, years, but not include information that helps us to determine which employees need training and or to select the right person to be trained at the right time.

(Junior Manager 3)

The Ministry of Education has a lack of information in the database which provides an employee's profile, including courses completed the training workshops that he/she attended and certified skills and educational experience. Such information would help to make the right decision on training activities. (Middle Manager 2)

5.2.3.1.2 External Recruitment

Participants were asked to describe activities and processes used to obtain a sufficient number of potential candidates from outside the MoE. Participants indicated that the MoE used external recruitment to fill administrative position vacancies. This was as result of those positions requiring a particular set of skills that could not be found internally in the Ministry.

External recruitment is conducted to attract candidates for jobs requiring specialised skills such as electronic engineering and information technology. (Senior Manager 11)

If no appropriate internal candidates are found, the MoE coordinates with the Ministry of Civil Service to fill the vacancies by targeting candidates.
(Middle Manager 6)

Two participants added that external recruitment was used by the MoE to meet the growing demand for jobs from the increasing number of Omani job seekers:

Hiring employees from outside the Ministry was also aimed at absorbing the Omani graduates, which is a top priority for the Government.
(Middle Manager 11)

The Ministry of Civil Service plays a central role to cover the requirements for these jobs by government's Omanisation program. (Junior Manager 9)

When asked who is responsible for conducting the recruitment and selection process, participants stated that the HR professionals' role in the MoE is confined to identifying the vacancies. The MCS is responsible for recruitment and selection in this situation:

The cooperation between the Ministry of Civil Service and other government units is confined to determining the vacancies. Thus, the Ministry centrally undertakes the recruitment function. (Junior Manager 6)

If some jobs remain vacant, we coordinate with the Ministry of Civil Service to fill these jobs. (Junior Manager 3)

Other participants expressed similar views:

The employees in the administrative posts are recruited by the Ministry of Civil Service based on the procedures of Civil Service Law. (Middle Manager 6)

Jobs unrelated to the educational field are covered by the Ministry of Civil Service when a rare vacancy occurs in a position at the lower level.
(Junior Manager 8)

Another participant detailed his engagement in recruitment and selection processes:

The appointment is done centrally by the Ministry of Civil Service, and the concerned units have authority to determine their needs for human resources. Once the vacancies are identified by the concerned body, authority for recruitment decisions is delegated to the Ministry of Civil Service. (Junior Manager 12)

This process was confirmed by a participant from the MCS, when asked about the nature of his role.

Our role is to receive the HR requirements from the ministries and the different governmental units in order to undertake recruitment action.
(Senior Manager 5)

Two participants noted that recruitment and selection processes was operated by a centralised system to provide fairness and transparency in the recruitment process:

An absence of transparency is one of the reasons why it is done centrally by the Ministry of Civil Service. The central hiring provides an equal chance for all the citizens to compete for the advertised jobs. (Middle Manager 3)

When asked about different methods used by the MCS to recruit applicants from outside the organisation, participants reported that the recruitment process consisted of three assessment stages: committee checks, written test, and interview. This is illustrated in the following extract from two participants from the MCS participants:

Regardless of the selection process, there are three stages through which we assess people applying for a job. These stages are committee check, written

test, and personal interview. For the first stage, applicants should wait until a thorough committee check has been completed. The second step in the selection process is performing the exam. Next, interviews are scheduled for the top five applicants. Then, the marks for the exam and the interview are added to give the final result. The selection decision will be made by identifying the applicant who got the highest marks in the exam and interview (sic). Finally, SMS text message notifications will be sent to all applicants selected. (Middle Manager 3)

Candidates must first successfully complete a profile test, and then a written test will be conducted. After the written test stage, a selection will be made of the top five candidates to attend an interview. After completing the interview, successful candidates will be notified by SMS, and an offer of employment will be sent. (Middle Manager 4)

Participants were also asked to explain how the current selection criteria assisted them to obtain the best possible applicants for specific positions. They commented that the criteria for selection include a variety of requirements relevant to the applicant's background, experience, general information, basic skills, and specialist skills:

The committee check examines the background, experience, and suitability of candidates. A candidate does not take the test unless he satisfies all the conditions. All documents and qualification in particular must be checked and reviewed by a specialised committee. If the applicant's documents are acceptable, the test can be given. (Middle Manager 4)

The test is designed to measure three basic aspects of an applicant's personality. The first part assesses skills and knowledge related to a specific position, the second part assesses the general skills which include basic computer knowledge, typing and communication skills, and the third part assesses the applicant's mental abilities and intelligence. (Middle Manager 3)

An interview is conducted in order to obtain the information about the job and the organisation that the applicant will be eligible to join. It also reveals the applicant's interests and specific skills that they have acquired during the training period. (Senior Manager 4)

With respect to why potentially some candidates did not possess skills required to the level desired for that position, participants were very specific stating that the educational institutions were not properly preparing Oman's young people for work.

The Ministry deals with what is available from educational institutions. Serious consideration should be given to these institutions providing graduates with practical skills necessary to excel in the workplace. (Senior Manager 5)

Participant also attributed the weaknesses of graduates to the absence of a strategic vision of human resources in government organisations:

This may be attributed to the absence of strategic planning in HR with the governmental units. With regard to the required skills of graduates, governmental institutions must have an idea as to where they are going in the future so that they can disseminate information which can be used by universities to develop the study programmes that will be needed in the future to meet the demands of these units. (Senior Manager 3)

5.2.3.2 Surplus

Participants were asked about the strategies used to deal with employee surpluses. The emerging theme here was that there was no clear HRP pathway established to reduce the any employee surplus. The common reasons provided by participants referred to the MoE having no policy to correct workforce imbalances, or to address the excess supply of employees compared to demand.

We leave employee surpluses as they are, there is no further action taken by the Ministry to address this situation. (Senior Manager 1)

We do not have an authority whether in the Ministry or governorates to make an internal movement due to surplus in some sections or departments. (Senior Manager 12)

A transfer policy should be set in order to make settlement between these departments and sections. Some departments need employees, while some do not. (Middle Manager 7)

A similar but more specific comment was:

We don't have a formalised surplus employees policy. The Ministry needs to set rules and guidelines for transfers, otherwise there will be randomness (sic) and confusion. (Junior Manager 1)

It is apparent from the data that current HRP processes do not cater for surplus employees due to the lack of any definitive policy to resolve any employee surplus situation.

5.2.4 Evaluation

This section focuses on the fourth and last phase of HRP: evaluation. The evaluation phase in this research refers to the approach and the common measures that HR planners use in evaluating HRP effectiveness. To identify evaluation practices, the participants were asked to describe how they evaluated the success of HRP in the MoE. Most

participants reported that very little attention was paid to evaluating HRP effectiveness. The MoE does not appear to set any formal evaluation criteria or procedures that can constantly evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of both the strategic planning and implementation processes, as can be seen from participant's comments:

I haven't noticed that there are bodies in the Ministry who undertake process evaluation and measure whether the strategic objectives have been achieved. (Senior Manager 4)

Since I have worked here, I haven't received any information regarding the evaluation and monitoring of various HRP activities and programs. (Middle Manager 9)

I wish we had a process of evaluation which enabled us to develop our work based on criteria and procedures that clarify the weak points in order to address them. (Junior Manager 11)

If there was an evaluation of the performance of the department, the vision wouldn't be ambiguous all that time; the evaluation process needs to be given much attention in the MoE. (Senior Manager 6)

In general, HR planners seemed to conduct an evaluation and make changes only when major problems emerged through the implementation of some HRP programs. One participant had the following to say:

There is no clear plan to evaluate and review the programs and projects in general or the HRP itself. If there were comments on the projects - an evaluation - it could result in the issue being addressed. For example, we have received some concerns from the directorates about the basis for the professional jobs forecasting. The basis for the supervisor provision under the guidelines states that one supervisor is adopted for 38 teachers; however, after we received complaints on this issue, the basis has been changed to be one supervisor for 25 teachers. (Junior Manager 8)

Several key reasons were raised by participants to explain what the MoE did to evaluate HRP programs. One of the reasons mentioned by the majority of the participants was that evaluation does not take place within the political and system the Ministry context.

We do not have in the Ministry a system that sets clear tasks for job performance and includes a continuous audit process to determine whether they are effective. (Senior Manager 1)

I don't have a clear idea about the methods and means used to evaluate HR plans. It is assumed that each directory has a department which is responsible for following up and implementing the annual plans of each section and department. (Senior Manager 6)

There is no agreed policy for evaluating HRP there must be a system by which the evaluation of various HRP activities can be evaluated. (Senior Manager 10)

Another reason given for the lack of a review is that the MoE does not provide measurement standards that help the HRP department to systematically evaluate and follow up on the performance of its activities and programs.

There is a big shortage in this aspect. You could find that some projects were cancelled because the Ministry did not have adequate guidance and criteria to evaluate and adjust the implementation of projects. (Middle Manager 7)

There are no clear bases or standards for evaluation which come within a comprehensive and coherent guide. I mean there are no bases upon which any evaluation procedure can be performed. (Middle Manager 4)

Some participants attributed the weakness of the evaluation system to a lack of technical knowledge and experience related to the measurement and evaluation of HRP. The

participants indicated that HR planners lack competencies needed to perform HRP evaluation.

I think that the experience and the abilities of HR staff in the Ministry in this aspect are poor; HR staff must have adequate capabilities to operate such programs. (Middle Manager 10)

If we want to evaluate how well HRP is performing I expect that there will be an obstacle in terms of HR professionals' capabilities. (Middle Manager 4)

The existence of an evaluation system should be useful to anyone working in the Ministry, however, it may be difficult to measure the HR programs because HR lacks the skills to carry out the right program of measurement and evaluation. (Middle Manager 6)

A major reason is the lack of specialised and prepared staff. Without the required skills, HR professionals cannot effectively participate in evaluating different programs and activities. (Senior Manager 11)

The above comments suggest that a systematic evaluation of HRP activities was not conducted by the MoE. The MoE's progress towards the annual or strategic goals was not measured. Participants attributed the lack of an evaluation system to a lack of experience of HR planners and lack of clear policy in relation to evaluation of HRM activities. The absence of evaluation means that it is not possible to establish mechanisms of HRM practices for further improvements.

5.3 Summary

This chapter aimed to explore the various strategies used by the MoE in dealing with employee shortages and surpluses. In terms of employee shortages, the findings revealed that the HRP professionals use options such as internal promotion and transfer, training and development, and external recruitment. However, for employee surpluses, the HRP

professionals do not develop and execute an action plan to correct the employment imbalance.

Most participants indicated that preference is given to internal candidates to fill vacancies by promotion from within the MoE in order to increase employee's job satisfaction. It was evident that there were no clear standards applied to select the best candidates for the position. The findings reveal that there is a gap between the ideals and the practical application of the law to actual promotion procedures within the MoE. Furthermore, grade promotion was not linked to performance; instead, it was mainly based on seniority. Most participants viewed the current promotion policy as having a negative impact on employees' productivity and contributing to the increase in employee turnover.

Generally, the transfer procedure in the MoE is confined to the movement of employees from professional positions to administrative positions in the Ministry or directorates. This occurs when the supply of employees in professional jobs exceeds the demand for such employees. The data suggest that currently the MoE lacks the policies and guidelines to regulate the decision-making process related to employee transfer within the Ministry.

The findings in this chapter indicate that although the MoE produces a short-term training plan, this plan does not have measurable development objectives, nor are they is it linked to organisation's strategic objectives. A survey is the only method used to identify training needs. Here, systematic leadership and career development programs are not applied within the Ministry in a planned way. There are several challenges entailed in the current implementation of training and development programs within the Ministry, including the absence of strategic planning, lack of clarity in career paths, and a lack of comprehensive data sets needed for the training and development of employees.

External recruitment sources are also utilised by the MoE to fill positions requiring specialist skills, and to accommodate Omani graduates seeking jobs - two disparate concerns. Furthermore, it is clear that the HR employees in the MoE do not get involved

in external recruitment, as it is the MCS that implements the centralised external recruitment system. Various recruitment and selection methods are used to choose the best applicant for a vacant position, with candidates being subjected to some assessment of their qualifications, experience, competencies, abilities, and language skills, using written tests and an interview. Participant perspectives in this study reflected that a weak education system was possibly the reason for some graduates' lack of key skills required by the MoE for their full and productive participation in the workforce.

It is also evident that the MoE lacks a transfer policy, which creates an obstacle to managing and resolving the problem of surplus employees. For example, the strategy of transferring an employee from one department to another is not included in the Ministry's HRP procedures.

The results of this study also indicate that the Ministry does not pay enough attention to the evaluation and measurement of HRP programs. Two common reasons for the lack of an evaluation program were mentioned: the MoE does not have a system to evaluate HRP programs, and the HR department lacks the ability to conduct HRP programs.

These results have not only provided in-depth information about HRP practices in the MoE, they also provide evidence that that some factors act as barriers to the development of HRP practices in the Ministry. Accordingly, in the next chapter, the study will examine some of the key factors that may affect MoE's HRP practices.

6 Chapter Six: Factors Influencing HRP in the MoE

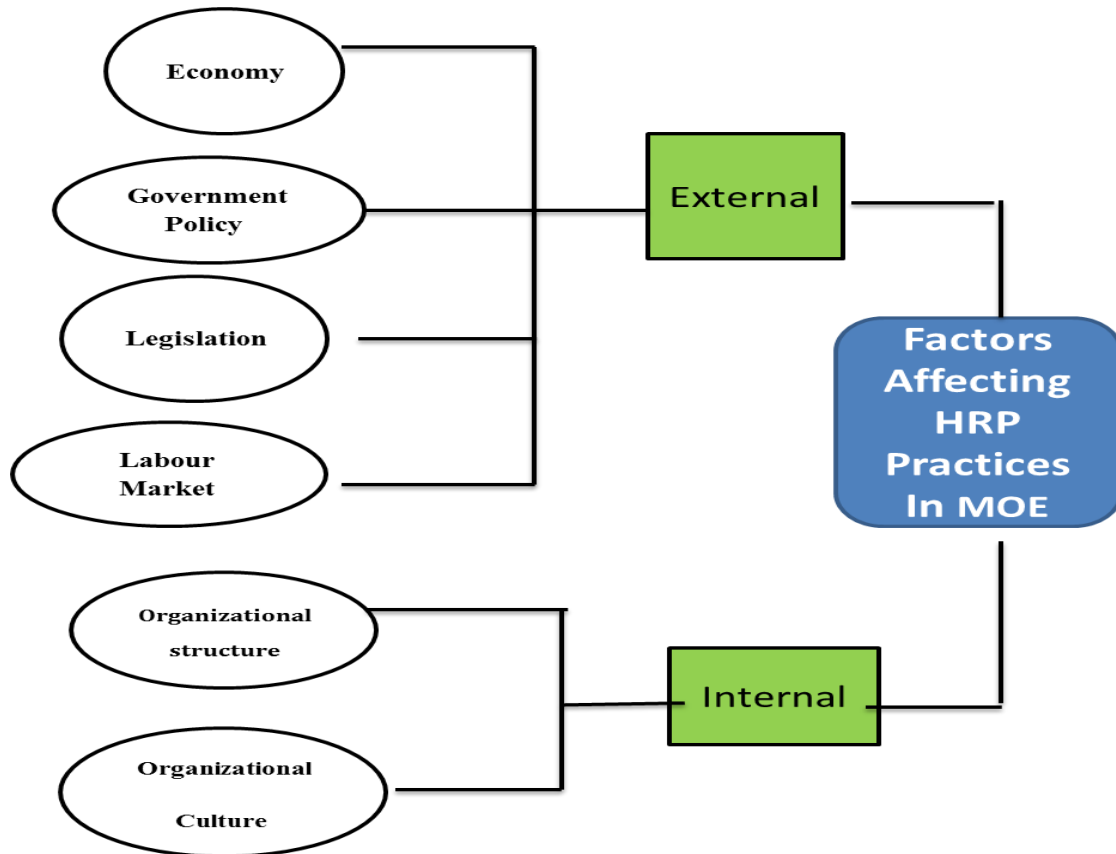
This section presents evidence to answer the second research question: What are the factors affecting HRP practices in the MoE in Oman?

6.1 Factors Affecting HRP in the MoE

As this was an exploratory study, the researcher attempted to remain open and flexible so that themes could emerge, rather than impose his expectations onto the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). During the process of data collection, findings emerged relating to factors that impact HRP practices within and outside of the MoE. This was in keeping with research question two. Armstrong (2006) stated that HRP in any organisation cannot take place in isolation from the surrounding environment; hence, in order to obtain a more thorough understanding, it was necessary to consider how HRP practices are affected by external and internal factors. Toh, Morgeson, and Campion (2008) reported that the study of HR practices in isolation from the surrounding influences will not provide a full understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Multiple studies suggest that organisational characteristics and context can have significant influence on the adoption and application of HRP within an organisation (Cummings, Estabrooks, Midodzi, Wallin, & Hayduk, 2007; Toh et al., 2008). Although there are many situational factors that can be considered, the focus in this study is on factors that have particular relevance to HRP practices.

The findings show that the most important external factors affecting HRP practices in the MoE are legislation, the economy, government policy, and the labor market, whilst internal factors of significance appear to be organisational structure and culture. These factors are summarised in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: External and Internal factors affecting HRP in the MoE



6.1.1 External factors Affecting HRP Practices in the MoE

6.1.2 The Economy

The data analysis indicated that the economy has a significant impact on HRP. Seven of the participants explicitly reported that economic factors related to HR have the potential to affect HRP in the MoE. One main idea that arose from interviews is that the country's economic development level directly impacts human resources. For example, an increase in financial allocations to the Ministry during the Five-Year Plan has improved its ability to plan for its human resources. In particular, the availability of financial allocations has played a significant role in increasing employment opportunities and training. The findings of the study indicate that recruiting and training systems have been influenced by financial issues as reflected in the following extracts from participant responses:

The economic situation directly affects the human resources activities in the Ministry or other units in the public-sector institutions. The existence of a strong economy has increased the financial allocations for the Ministry. In fact, the Eighth Five-Year Plan witnessed a significant expansion in employment of national manpower and training programs. This in turn supports the programs that aim to promote activities related to human resources planning such as training and recruitment. (Junior Manager 1)

The financial support we received in the current five-year plan from His Majesty has helped us a lot in terms of quantity and quality of training programs. For example, the existence of the recent financial support enabled us to start focusing on external programs like the conference and sending employees to external training courses. (Middle Manager 3)

In light of the great financial support of the Ministry, I hope we will be able to achieve the general aims of the country which are related to human resources especially. The Ministry of Education spends 7 million OR 23,500,000 on human resources. This has been used for developing and upgrading the human resources to provide them with the skills necessary to perform their work efficiently. (Senior Manager 4)

It is evident that participants see that the economy has a direct bearing on HRP practices in the MoE. The intensity of HRP activities increases or decreases according to the state of the economy or financial trends. In times of economic and financial upturn, HRP activities are directly affected, especially recruitment and HR development programs.

6.1.3 Government Policy (Omanisation)

The policy of Omanisation enacted by the Government has directly influenced HRP practices in the MoE. The Ministry has been required to offer jobs to a larger number of formerly unemployed citizens, a gesture that sometimes does not reflect the actual needs of the MoE's Human Resources Department. One senior manager stated that:

The government ministries and institutions were ordered to accommodate large numbers of Omani job seekers. However, most of the jobs did not meet the Ministry's requirements that we actually needed, so the job expansion was carried out when there was no need for it. (Senior Manager 1)

This situation has led to an employee surplus at the MoE. Some departments in the Ministry have a larger number of employees than is necessary for their operations. This issue was identified by a senior manager who stated:

Expanding job opportunities recently have caused an existence of surplus employees in some jobs and employee supply exceeds demand for employees in some departments in the Ministry. This result was due to policies that the government implemented to address the employment of nationals. (Senior Manager 10)

Another participant from the senior management level indicated that due to the Omanisation's policy, the MoE has faced the problem that some graduates do not have the appropriate skills or qualifications relevant to job vacancies in the MoE:

The orientation of the country in employment policy is considered sometimes as a problem because the policy forces us to Omanise all the jobs by accommodating all the Omani graduates. For example, two years ago, the Ministry was obliged to accommodate graduates and some of them had not acquired relevant skills and knowledge to work in the different departments in the Ministry. (Middle Manager 9)

Overall, the findings indicate that the employment policy (Omanisation) adopted and implemented by the government has a substantial impact on HRP practices. Due to this policy, the Ministry experiences difficulties in finding employees with the required skills and educational profiles necessary for some jobs. Also, an increase in the employment of Omani nationals in the Ministry has led to an employee-employee in some departments.

6.1.4 The Legal Context:

Participants were asked to comment on the impact of laws enacted by government on HRP practices. This factor was mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews. The data indicate that the current CSL may not provide the flexibility necessary for the development of HRP practices within the Ministry. Decisions on HR practices are subject to the rules and standards of CSL, which prevent HR planners from improving those practices in the MoE. A senior manager illustrated this point:

The biggest challenge that we face in applying any international model or developing the HR system in the Ministry is that we are not the only body that makes decisions related to the human resources activities. The Ministry is considered as a part of civil service system. Thus, the systems and practices that govern the human resources in the Ministry are not determined by us, but they are determined by the law of the civil service and its executive regulations (Senior Manager 4).

This point was also supported by one of the junior level managers, who stated:

We need to change the systems and the laws, I think in order to act effectively; Civil Service Law should be flexible to alter policies over time and adapt to changes in relevant technologies. (Junior Manager 2)

One example of the inflexibility of the CSL when it comes to developing HRP practices is that the rules and regulations prevailing in the civil service do not encourage opportunities for the MoE to establish a talent program in order to attract, develop, and retain skilled employees:

You certainly know that the ministry is subject to the law of the civil service. Does the ministry get talents? Can an official directly reward a talented employee? The answer: no, it's not possible. Can these talented people occupy positions without procedures? No, they can't. The reason is that we are all under one roof and subject to the same civil services compensation system. All employees are equal in everything and are

getting the same salary. And this is not effective because the working conditions differ from one position to another. (Middle Manager 6)

Another example indicating a lack of flexibility of the CSL was mentioned by a member of senior management in the MoE. He expressed the view that the CSL constitutes a challenge to the development of HRP practices which the MoE can use to prepare managers and other key employees. As he described:

Unfortunately, as long as we are subject to the current law of the civil service, we don't have any authority to apply a succession planning program which prepares the second echelon leaders who will undertake the leadership in the future in the Ministry. (Senior Manager 8)

The CSL regulations were again highlighted by participants when discussing issues such as evaluation and development. Some participants indicated that the civil services system does not provide for the public sector or the MoE with an integrated framework for employees' development and growth. The absence of clear career paths in most administrative posts has given rise to the MoE having a vague and ambiguous view of their employees. The following excerpt represents two participants' responses on this issue:

There is no application within the Civil Service Law that requires the governmental units to implement career path plans for each job. For example, I have not seen, since I started working in the Ministry, that employees who have been promoted to positions of greater responsibility had received proper training or joined a practical program. (Middle Manager 1)

The problem of administrative posts at the Ministry is that there is no binding legislation that stipulates the pathway involving the related task and skills that employees move through over time. If this method was available, we would be able to say that employee A or B of the employees

would get promoted after they accomplished a number of hours of training courses in a specialisation or a particular skill. (Senior Manager 4)

This point supports the following comment by a senior manager in the MCS:

Career path and development programs do not exist as you explain, we attempt now to coordinate with the other ministries to determine the type of training and critical skills needed for all the jobs. (Middle Manager 4)

With regard to the evaluation of staff performance, the participants made several comments about the structure and nature of the existing system for appraisal of employee performance, including: (i) the system is very old, and (ii) it does not have a substantial impact on employee promotion, training and career development. Employees sourced from the current system of evaluation do not have self-knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses, and this then makes it difficult for HR professionals to propose appropriate solutions that could improve their performance in the MoE. Under the existing CSL, the association between performance measurement and financial rewards as well as promotion is absent:

There is no clear basis or standard for evaluation that can provide regular feedback to the employee in the current performance appraisal. And we can't change it because we are subjected to the Civil Service Law and this comes under their responsibilities. (Senior Manager 3)

He added:

In order to recognise and reward an employee's special achievements, the Ministry of Civil Services should prepare a new method of performance appraisal. (Senior Manager 3)

The form of performance appraisal needs to be updated in order to use it effectively in different issues relevant to the employee's performance, such as promotions, training programs, and rewards. (Middle Manager 2)

A member of the top management in the MSC provided more insights into the process of performance appraisal in the public sector and highlighted the disconnect between the performance appraisal and promotion:

Current practices associated with performance appraisal in the civil service sector really need to be changed and improved. Unfortunately, currently the assessment and rewarding processes are not linked to the employee's performance. Based on the existing performance appraisal system, everyone can get a promotion, regardless of whether he is working or not. (Senior Manager 4)

Participants pointed to the growing phenomenon of turnover that the Ministry has been experiencing recently. They believed that the absence of an effective system of incentives in the current civil services has negative side effects on employee turnover. This claim is illustrated in the following extract:

Unfortunately, there is no law that is applied that forces the Ministry to take care of its talent. We need to develop the current system that really keeps the competencies rather than losing them. It is normal to see employees move to undertake the positions in other organisations. (Senior Manager 9)

There are no strong conditions implemented or conditions imposed on the Ministry to take care of its employees who currently do not receive much attention. That explains why some employees leave the ministry and move to other institutions. (Senior Manager 10)

The majority of participants who responded in relation to this factor pointed out that the CSL represented a major obstacle affecting the development of HRP practices. This means that the legal factor has a profound influence on HRP practices. This influence is apparent in most of the HRP operations in the MoE.

6.1.5 The Labour Market

The labour market was considered to be one of the main external factors impacting on the nature of, and on attitudes to, HRP practices in the MoE. One participant argued that some employees who had graduated from educational institutions were considered unprepared to enter the labour market without further training. He speculated that this was due to the low quality of education and the lack of alignment between labour market requirements and education outcomes. This is illustrated in the following extract:

One of the challenges encountered by the Ministry is that some of the jobs don't attract or receive a better quality outcome from higher educational institutions. I think it is important that relevant government organisations such as the Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Civil Services, should make sure that learning programs are producing outcomes in line with labour market requirements. (Middle Manager 7)

Demand for and supply of employees in the labour market have a significant influence on HRP decisions relating to recruitment. Some participants indicated that the MoE experienced difficulties in finding appropriate applicants for some jobs and specialisations within the Ministry because graduates who possess the skills implicit in certain degrees are highly prized by private-sector firms. The following two extracts illustrate this:

We also have shortages in Omani engineers and I expect that the reason is these certain jobs are in high demand in the private sector and that these jobs offer more privileges than the Ministry of Civil Service. The number of applicants for these jobs is very limited and sometimes positions remain vacant for a long time. (Senior Manager 2)

In fact, even though the graduates exist, they do not want to work at the Ministry of Education as they prefer opportunities in other organisations. Unfortunately, some technical staff in the Ministry do not enjoy any privileges compared to the privileges given to employees in other

institutions. Therefore, the number of Omani engineers in the Ministry of Education is less, especially in the directorate, except for females. (Middle Manager 8)

It is clear from the interviews that HRP practices in the MoE are shaped by labour market trend. Participants indicated that the supply of graduates in the labour market did not match the knowledge and skills needed for some vacancies in the MoE. This was due to lack of alignment between demand and supply in term of specific needs the Omani job market. Also, the MoE is increasingly facing competition with the private sector to attract skilled employees.

6.2 Internal Factors Affecting HRP in the MoE

This section presents evidence related to the internal factors affecting HRP in the MoE. These factors include the following:

6.2.1 Organisational Structure

Three themes emerged in relation to the influence of organisational structure on HRP: centralisation, clarity, and complexity.

6.2.1.1 Centralisation

A key theme that emerged was that HRP practices are also affected by the way in which the authority systems in the MoE are run. This theme was mostly derived from the interview with middle and junior management. The centralisation of the MoE is perceived to have a negative influence on communication among the Ministry bodies. The HR planners in the governorates are not actively involved in the planning of the Ministry activities, thus they do not have sufficient information to make plans for their organisations. When asked to identify their role in formulating their organisation's current Five-Year plan, the majority of the participants reported that they were not

fulfilling their role of strategic planning. The MoE's strategic planning was formulated by the senior level management or the board of directors in the Ministry. This category of interviewees was absent during the time of plan formulation.

The strategic plan is centralised and drawn by the staff in the ministry, not in the governorates. The role of the planning in the governorate is limited in this matter. In other words, we are an executive body. (Junior Manager 10)

Unfortunately, as I am a manager of the department, I don't know what has been formalised in the five-Year plan. The formulation was mostly carried out by the Ministry. We did not participate actively in the whole process of strategic plan formulation. (Middle Manager 8)

Three participants commented that anticipation of HR requirements for administrative posts was also done centrally in the Ministry. HR planners in the governorates were not given access to certain information material to their HR needs, and decision-makers in the Ministry did not involve governorates employees in anticipating HR requirements that were directly related their work needs.

Checking on how many and what sorts of employees in the administrative side the governorate needs: such functions are normally identified through the Ministry actually we don't have a role in the governorates. (Middle Manager 8)

Unfortunately, details about the future human resources needed for the governorate in the medium and the long term are not available to us, but it may be available centrally in the Ministry. (Junior Manager 10).

The number of employees who will be appointed with a specific specialisation in a particular year, such information is often held by the Ministry. (Junior Manager 6)

In terms of recruitment, the participants stated that applicant's data are held and collected centrally by members of the civil service. The central department of HR in the MoE does not have permission to access the data that could be utilised as input for HRP decisions. This is illustrated in the following extracts:

The data of college and university graduates are not available in the Ministry. Job-seekers' database is controlled by central through the Ministry of Civil Service. (Middle Manager 8)

The Ministry of Civil Service doesn't provide data of unemployed people to be used by other public institutions. I think the availability of this kind of data is useful and it will provide a clear picture for the Ministry to make decisions related to HRP when necessary. (Senior Manager 8)

The responses with regard to this factor revealed that decisions made about HRP procedures were confined to the top hierarchy of MoE; therefore, centralisation of decision making can be seen in most HRP practices. These include formalisation of strategic planning, anticipation of HR requirements, and participation in recruitment, promotions, and training activities.

6.2.1.2 Clarity

HR professionals face several difficulties relating to HRP due to the lack of clarity in the job description for most administrative posts within the MoE. Participants emphasised that the lack of job description information constitutes an obstacle to identifying training objectives and employee development programs. The following excerpts from two participants' responses represent their views on job description clarity:

The biggest obstacle that we face in determining the training requirements is that the responsibilities and roles for the jobs are not clearly defined to be able to convert these tasks into training programs given to the targeted members of staff. (Senior Manager 3)

The first reason preventing us from designing the training programs in conformity with job requirements is that there is no clear job description for all the jobs, which is necessary to design the training programs (Middle Manager 11).

This lack of job description information is in part due to the generic approach to administrative roles across all civil service departments. This problem may also be experienced in other departments.

6.2.1.3 Complexity

The structure of the MoE's HR departments in the MoE does not appear to be designed in such a way that HRP practices can be controlled through simple strategies. Participants emphasised that HR departments are not well integrated and major restructuring is necessary to make HRP processes and workflows run smoothly - as demonstrated by the following quotes from three participants when asked about the structural complexity of HR departments:

To apply a sophisticated HRP model, we need to change and restructure the Ministry. The existing structure of HR functions does not come under one frame, which is essential for raising service standards provided by the Ministry. (Senior Manager 1)

The HR departments should be integrated together; departments such as planning, training, recruitment are not organised by a coherent structure so the employees can easily do their work. HR sections or departments are scattered across an organisation. (Senior Manager 2)

There are other departments that participate in the planning of human resources. The HRP Department determines the requirements, the training department sets training programs, the Human Resource Department undertakes the task of appointing, and the Department of Finance provides the financial requirements. However, they are not

working as a team; integration of all activities requires senior level coordination. (Junior Manager 7)

The complexity of the task performed is another factor that has an influence on HRP practices in the MoE. Participants indicated that the number of committees and functional departments is considered to be the principal indicators of the complexity of the task and scale of the operations that are being undertaken by HR planners in the MoE.

There is a difficulty in performing tasks that are related to training because of the large number of committees and new projects. These increase the workload on the departments, which, in turn, impacts the effectiveness of implementation of training and development. (Middle Manager 2).

Sometimes the decision-making takes time between units and committees. In the Ministry, in addition to the existing HR departments, there is an enormous number of committees involved in different HRP activities. For example, there are committees formed to coordinate between the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, a committee for the Development of Human Resources, a committee of Appointments, and a committee of Transfers, etc. (Senior Manager 1)

A participant from senior management pointed out that the result of the complexity in the current structure of the HR departments is evident in the delays HRP transaction:

One of the obstacles that we encounter is the duplication of the tasks between the units and also the time spent and the number of steps taken in one process. Therefore, the Ministry lags behind in some issues like employing and recruiting and other issues (e.g. loaning, paying allowances). (Senior Manager 1)

The complexity of tasks related to HRP practices that are related to the MoE's organisational structure most likely arises from the Ministry's large number of

departments and their employees, especially in terms of training activities and conducting job analysis. The following excerpts from participant responses clarify this:

The challenges that we face are that the number of departments and employees is increasing in the Ministry. The number of employees has reached 60,000, which means we have various units that have various needs for employees with specialised skills. This makes the processes of training more complex. (Senior Manager 3)

The Ministry tends to identify the process, which clarifies the job requirements, but the large number of employees and multiple levels in the structure of the Ministry represent a significant obstacle in setting different scopes of responsibility and competencies for these jobs. (Middle Manager 2)

These comments reveal that the current structure of the MoE may not be designed to provide flexibility in HRP practices, nor to enable its integration into organisational structure. The majority of the participants reported that the MoE faces significant coordination challenges and that the organisational structure needs to be reviewed in order to apply HRP more effectively.

6.2.2 Organisational Culture

The prevailing organisational culture was cited by most interviewees as one of the important internal factors that impacted on HRP practices in the MoE. Participants' perspectives yielded two main themes underlying organisational culture: openness to change and management style.

6.2.2.1 Openness to Change

The development of HRP practices in the MoE was affected by an apparent non-acceptance of cultural change. This was the most striking point to emerge from employees

who were working at the operational/junior level. They emphasised that developing an awareness of people's beliefs and values regarding change is fundamental to making change happen. They also highlighted that the Ministry's current HR staff did not appear to have change management skills, which are essential for establishing the culture of change and minimising employee resistance. The following excerpts from participant responses illustrate this point:

Sometimes we found it difficult to persuade some superiors to accept new ideas or systems which differ from the usual routine of their duties. Also the question may present itself here: do we have the appropriate capabilities to carry out these new ideas? (Middle Manager 2)

There is a need to change some of the work styles in the Ministry, which believe in change and development. I remember that when the Ministry wanted to apply a new system of employee transfers, the first challenges were from the employees themselves: they were not willing to apply the new system. (Junior Manager 6)

When we intended to analyse the weaknesses and the strengths, which is an important step to develop the plan, some of the employees didn't accept this step as they were not aware of it. (Junior Manager 11)

In relation to the idea of resistance to change, one participant commented that in some cases rejection of the change is cumulative. A participant attributed this to the fact that employees are committed to the idea that the work can be done based on what worked before:

We could make such a change to the Ministry if we didn't have an inherited culture, which forces us one way or the other into following the previous approach. For example, if you become a head of the department, and you wish to make some changes, unfortunately you will come to a standstill because other individuals in the department are not familiar with it or do not have the ability to change. (Junior Manager 12)

Another participant also noted that managers show resistance to any change to a new system:

Different levels of management don't adopt these ideas. Making changes in the institutions is always complicated by the lack of enthusiasm for the proposed change. (Junior Manager 11)

The results showed that one of the main obstacles to the development of HRP practices is resistance to new methods. Participants acknowledged some employees within the MoE are not well informed about cultural change and are not ready to take responsibility for undertaking the change process because they fear their knowledge and skills may become obsolete.

6.2.2.2 Management style

HRP practices are impacted by management style, which is closely related to organisational culture (Kubr & Office, 2002). The study found that employee turnover was influenced by the existing management styles among senior managers at the MoE.

Most of the senior management interviewees considered the transfer of employees to be a healthy practice, and they actively encouraged employees who desired to move to another institution. The following extract from the responses illustrates how senior management behaved with regard to this phenomenon.

The Ministry helps an employee in case the event that he/she finds a new opportunity in another institution. The evidence which confirms this is that no actions are taken to deal with the employees who are seeking to move to another institution. (Senior Manager 5)

Another senior manager supported this opinion:

It is normal that employees move to the other sectors, taking into consideration that the number of employees in the Ministry is very large. (Senior Manager 10)

Two senior managers held the opinion that turnover from the MoE represents a healthy trend, and it is not an issue that the MoE addresses in any systematic way. Part of the rationale was that it was easy to find alternative employees because the Ministry has a large number of employees.

6.3 Summary

The findings indicate that both external and internal factors have significant influence on HRP practices in the Oman's MoE. The results show that the economy, government policy, legal context, and the labour market are key external factors, while organisational structure and organisational culture are internal factors that affect HRP practices in the MoE.

In relation to the effects of external factors, the results reveal that government policy and the economy have a direct impact on HRP such as creating jobs for the unemployed and implementing HR development programs. It is also apparent from the empirical evidence that the CSL creates difficulties for the MoE in terms of developing its HRP system to attract and retain the desired workforce. The labour market factor creates difficulties for the MoE in terms of attracting a skilled workforce especially engineers, since most in this skilled category prefer to work in the private-sector, which better meets their expectations of higher salaries and better conditions.

There are three major aspects of organisational structure that influence HRP practices in Oman: centralisation, clarity and complexity. The data has shown that decision making processes related to HRP practices are centralised. With respect to clarity, it is apparent that job descriptions are not well articulated for the purposes of gathering and reporting

information about job training. Further, the structures of HR departments appear to be poorly integrated with the overall organisational structure, a challenge to accomplishment of HRP the roles and objective. The data suggest that organisational culture factors, including openness to change and management style influence HRP practices. There is evidence of both individual and collective resistance to change, including the application of new systems of HRP. Management style is frequently cited as having a direct impact on employee turnover.

The next chapter, Chapter Seven, discusses in further detail the findings presented in Chapter Five and Six and analyses them in the light of previous research reported earlier in the literature review. This will address the third question: *Are current HRP practices in the Ministry of Education in Oman good practices?*

7 Chapter Seven: Discussion

HRP Practices in the Ministry of Education in Oman

7.1 Introduction

In recent years significant attention has been paid to HRP practices in the private-sector; however, studies in this field have been very limited in scope, providing little information related to HRP in public-sector organisations, particularly in developing countries. Consequently, the major objective of this study was to address this gap by exploring HRP as it is currently practised in the MoE in the Sultanate of Oman. The study was exploratory and followed a qualitative approach to elicit in-depth perspectives on key influencing factors, and provide a better understanding of the current standing and effectiveness of existing HRP practices in the MoE.

This chapter addresses research questions three and four. It draws on the previous two chapters (five and six) to discuss HRP practices as they are currently enacted in the MoE and, in keeping with an interpretivist approach, considers these practices in the light of the current literature on the topic. The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section analyses and explores organisational objectives and the link between HRP and other strategic objectives. The second section considers processes and techniques used for HR demand and supply forecasting. The third section analyses alternative staffing activities undertaken by the MoE to deal with employee shortages and surplus. The fourth section, analyses different strategies used to evaluate the effectiveness of HRP practices. The final section addresses the fourth research aim to explore the question: *What can be done to improve HRP practice to ensure they meet the needs of the MoE ?*

7.2 HRP and Strategic Planning

This section discusses and analyses in further detail how HRP is conducted in the strategic planning stage in the MoE.

7.2.1 Environmental Scanning

The review of literature on the use of the environmental scanning tools in strategic planning and HR practices, particularly in Oman, as presented in Chapter Three, indicate that SWOT analysis was the most common strategic process used by the country's organisations (Al Hijji, 2012; Rajasekar & Al Raee, 2014). Turning to the results of the current study, the main findings from the interviews show that the SWOT analysis technique has been practised to assist in identifying the strategic direction for HRP in the MoE to some extent. The participants in this study were of the opinion that conducting a SWOT analysis was very effective in helping them to assess the organisation's internal and external environment and plan HR requirements. This is consistent with studies such as that conducted by (Gretzky 2010; Williams, 2008), which also reported that the use of SWOT analysis had increased consistently in most parts of the world. These results are also in line with those of previous studies conducted in Omani organisations (Al Hijji, 2012; Rajasekar & Al Raee, 2014). Similarly, many HRP models establish the importance of careful analysis using environmental scanning and specific activities to achieve analysis goals (Hafeez & Aburawi, 2013; Helton & Soubik, 2004; Jacobson, 2010; Sinclair, 2004).

The data from this study indicates that most of the participants received training in SWOT analysis before starting to prepare the strategic plan. Jehanzeb and Bashir (2013) argued that organisations should provide the training for employees to acquire and develop the knowledge and skills required to accomplish strategic objectives. Here, it is evident that MoE recognises the importance of staff skilling programs to the success of an organisation's strategy. In the literature review, it was reported that training and

development programs played a vital role in putting organisations in the best position to face competition (Cooke, 2001; Divya & Gomathi, 2015; Falola et al., 2014). In the case of the MoE, it is clear from the evidence that senior management recognises the importance of staff skilling programs to the success of their organisational strategy.

Although most of the participants indicated that they had conducted some SWOT analysis when developing their long-term HR plans, the current study revealed that analysis of external environmental factors was not systematically or comprehensively included in the inputs for HRP processes in the MoE. Little emphasis was placed on analysing changes in external factors, which is an essential component of the SWOT analysis process (Paliwal, 2006; Ren et al., 2015; Young, 2003). What follows is a description of the major causes identified by participants as contributing to the limited external environment scanning included in the HRP process in the MoE.

The apparent failure to carry out external environmental scanning as part of the HRP process in the MoE could be attributed to three important barriers. Firstly, the results of the current study reveal that information that could be used to analyse the external environment is not available to HRP professionals in the MoE. For instance, there was a lack of advanced information about economic trends. A clear vision of economic conditions is required by the Ministry for its assessments in order to determine what HR programs need to be completed, and how these should be conducted. A senior manager had the following to say about the MoE:

... when we talk about the strategic goals, we have to get a clear vision of what the MoE wants to achieve during the coming period. Since we talk about governmental sectors, the question will be “What is the orientation that the country will take economically?” Such answers must be provided by the government, so that information is accessible by all in order to help shape the MoE’s HR plans in response to various changes. (Senior Manager 10)

Doherty et al. (2009) stressed the importance of available data and information on the basis of which assessments of the organisation's internal and external environments can be made. By making sense of the information gathered, HRP professionals can extract the main implications for the decision-making and HR requirements that the organisation needs to meet its goals (Doherty et al., 2009). Early literature on environmental scanning demonstrated that some organisations outsource their external scanning activities (Tan, Teo, Tan, & Wei, 1998). For example, General Foods outsourced all its environmental scanning efforts to an external consultant who placed the information gathered in a database accessible to the organisation's employees (Auster & Choo, 1994). Other organisations have been found to extract information from multiple sources such as business surveys, conversations with retailers, newspapers, business magazines, external reports, and market analysis (Auster & Choo, 1994). In the case of this study, there was no central data bank in the MoE or within the Government of Oman; thus, information gathered from different sections of the MoE or from other government organisations was not available to staff in the MoE. O'Riordan (2012) argued that, particularly for public sector organisations, there is a need to review external information that is likely to impact on services.

The second barrier, as mentioned in Chapter Two, may be associated with the organisational structure of the HR function the public sector organisations of Oman, which are subject to a centralised system managed by the Government. This means that sensitive information is held only by the senior managers in the MoE. This may create certain problems in terms of collection and analysis of the data, as managers at the professional HRP level do not have access to, or permission to use, such information. HRP professionals should ideally be involved in the collection of data that can be used to evaluate program effectiveness and to provide advance notice when program revision is needed (Ulfertsm et al., 2009). The perception of political risk often reinforces limitations to investment in a technique that has yet to deliver on its promise. The concern surrounding the lack of an external scanning process was evident from the interviews for

this study. Some participants pointed out that the process of examining the organisation's external environment takes place exclusively within the Ministry, as they use the resources that offer them quick and easy access to the information they need:

... Yes, external factors are identified as opportunities and threats might possibly exist while this step is performed in a central way by the MoE as they have the ability to communicate with the other ministries and institutions and have access to important information sources. (Middle Manager 5)

The third barrier to conducting external environmental scanning in the MoE is related to the Omani HRP professionals' skills and experience. The data in this study reveals that despite having received training, as discussed above, these professionals' limited expertise, lack of knowledge and appropriate skills have prevented them from using external environmental scanning when they prepare to undertake HRP processes. These findings are in accordance with those in previous studies (Anyim et al., 2012; Lawler & Boudreau, 2009; Wright et al., 2001; Wright et al., 2003) which have reported that HR teams often lack the skills and competencies needed to undertake environmental scanning, and that this may make them unable to contribute strategically to their organisation. Wright et al. (2003) stated that staff members who conduct scanning must have the appropriate skills and knowledge, as a thorough strategic cannot be achieved without considering the ways in which organisations are affected by their external environment.

This opinion has been formed in the context of SWOT analysis being performed in the MoE without the benefit of such environmental information, thus denying the MoE a strong basis on which the organisation would be able to determine its opportunities and threats. An understanding of the four aspects of a situational analysis is required in order for an organisation to better leverage its strengths, correct its weaknesses, capitalise on opportunities, and deter potential threats (Yang et al., 2015). The literature identifies such

factors as good practice when performing HRP processes, due to their potential for major impact on job analysis and skill requirements. Besides this, labour supply and demand data are prerequisites for HRP operations such as planning, forecasting, and programming. According to Coulter (2008, p. 66) “Conducting SWOT analysis requires scanning and evaluating an organisation's various external and internal sectors to discover positive and negative trends that could impact on organisational performance”. This is an important consideration for HRP professionals in terms of promoting and organising their thinking about the external issues that might affect their services. According to the literature, SWOT analysis is also a necessary tool to strengthen the competitive advantage of an organisation (Kalpande et al., 2015; Shabanova et al., 2015).

7.2.2 A Formalised and Written HR Strategy

7.2.2.1 Time Horizon

The results indicate that MoE’s HRP practice covers a five-year time horizon, this being relatively long term and reflecting a growing awareness of the need for a strategic approach.

This supports the findings of recent studies undertaken in Oman which indicate that there is a trend for many Omani organisations to become involved in more strategic planning processes (Al Sahmsiy, 2010; Rajasekar & Al Raei, 2014). This is also consistent with research findings in the GCC indicating that the use of long-term planning has increased consistently in the region (Yusuf & Saffu, 2009). Similarly, research in developed countries on strategic planning concepts and techniques indicates that an increasing number of organisations are including a human resource component in their long-range business strategic planning processes (Luoma, 2000; Nankervis, Compton, & Savery, 2002). This approach is adopted in order to stay competitive and to translate organisational strategic objectives into HR strategy. Within the scope of a long-term plan, the integration of a business plan and HRP is also likely to be more appropriate for

handling environmental change, as such change may influence HRP activities and the overall strategies of an organisation (Anyim et al., 2012; Norman & Gooden, 2012).

7.2.2.2 Written Strategy

The study findings revealed that the central office of the MoE has a formalised strategic plan, which provides guidelines when making long-term decisions about the direction of the Ministry. Mittenthal (2002) argued that good written strategic plans offer a vision for the future and detail tasks towards achieving goals. Papulova and Papulova (2006) recommended that the development of guiding documents is an essential precursor phase for the organisation's development of strategic objectives and action plans.

Interestingly, the study showed that the majority of the MoE's directorates, the representatives of the Ministry at the governorates level, did not have a written strategic plan for their HR strategy. This result reinforces previous studies in different contexts (Choudhury, 2007; Goodman et al., 2013), which indicate that most government units do not have tailored and formalised HRP plans. According to Bracker and Pearson (1986), the strategic plan must be written, and focused on the long term. A possible explanation for this finding suggested by the participants was that it was due to the centralised nature of the MoE having a negative influence on communication among the various Ministry bodies. The HR planners in the governorates are not actively involved in the planning of these activities, thus they do not have sufficient information to make plans for their organisations. Therefore, the organisation's structure may be an impediment to the MoE's HRP process. This conclusion is supported by Al Sawafi's study (2012), which found that the centralisation of decision-making affected all HR activity and work progress, including planning, recruitment, selection, and training. It also found that authority was confined to top management, which maintains its decision-making power under centralisation. In many western contexts, it has been shown that in flatter and more flexible management structures, managers and organisational units are given greater freedom and a high degree of management autonomy in terms of making strategic and

operational decisions (Demmke, Hammerschmid, & Meyer, 2006). In the view of Falconer (1999), greater flexibility in delegating authority is more efficient, as the smaller units are better able to set goals, and they work more quickly and directly than traditional management. This may not be possible in the more hierarchical Middle Eastern cultural context due to pervading values, and norms of behaviour. A country which privileges a hierarchical structure is likely to find it difficult to adopt a decentralised system as its underpinning values will be in conflict with the values of decentralisation, which endorse popular participation and bottom-up decision-making (Chan & Chheang, 2008).

7.2.2.3 Strategic Focus

The findings indicated that the MoE focused its strategic HRP work on its professional employee group. It was noted that the administrative jobs group was neglected as a possible focus for strategic HRP planning work. There was a prevailing opinion among most participants that the MoE optimises strategic HRP by concentrating on the professional employee group, and there is no provision for this to be extended to cover all employee categories. This unexpected result may be explained by the fact that long-range or strategic HRP efforts tend to be focused on the professional job group since this group includes staff positions that are relatively more senior, more difficult to fill, and require long timeframes to develop. Another possible explanation for this is that strategic HRP is focused on the development of HR plans for the professional employee group because it is implicitly assumed that the MoE enjoys relative autonomy to develop an HR strategy for this group, while development of the strategy for the administrative employee group is an MCS prerogative. Ogunrinde (2001) suggested that all categories of employees within an organisation should be included in strategic HRP. Organisations are likely to be more effective if their HR practices are employee-centred and utilise RBV theory principles, which hold that people are the most important assets of any organisation, and also its source of sustained competitive advantage. A strategic perspective would suggest that an organisation is forward-thinking and considers human resources to be a valuable asset (in the MoE case, to the government) (Norman, 2014).

Thus, an organisation needs to provide employee planning across the board, whether employees are grouped according to job categories or not: everyone should be covered when long-term strategic HRP practices are formalised.

7.2.3 Strategic HR Objectives in MoE

7.2.3.1 Formation of HRP Objectives

Previous studies (Aswathappa, 2005; O’Riordan, 2012; Van Knippenberg, 2012) have found that the process of reviewing the organisational mission, direction, goal and vision provides an opportunity for an organisation to assess HRP contributions to the achievement of its goals and objectives. Cotten (2007) suggested that the definition of an organisation’s strategic direction is an indispensable task for HRP professionals. Thus, as mentioned in Chapter Three, HRP is considered a key requirement when it comes to moving organisations towards better performance. The concept of the HRP role in the creation of competitive advantage is predicated on the belief that it is necessary to have the right number and kind of employees, at the right place at the right time, and that long-term benefits to the organisation are achieved by ensuring this is so (Ulfertsm et al., 2009). In general, the prevailing view is that when developing a strategic HR plan, the organisation first and foremost should specify its overall purpose and objectives.

Conducting the current study among HRP professionals at the MoE using qualitative data provided a clearer picture of the actual use of HR objectives, an area that no previous studies have investigated in detail. The outcomes of the interviews indicated that the strategic goals and objectives for HRP established in the last strategic planning process were: the development of human resources and the provision of the required employees. This reflects, as mentioned in Chapter Three, the Government of Oman’s major investment in the country’s public sector, with a strong focus on developing human resources (Al Hamadi et al., 2007; Al Sawafi, 2012; Rajasekar & Khan, 2013; Swailes & Al Fahdi, 2011). In terms of the formalisation of goals and objectives for HRP in the

MoE, findings from the current study, however, illustrate that the MoE is not undertaking HRP in a manner consistent with what the literature indicates should be done. Participants made little use of the practices discussed in the literature as useful for strategic purposes. The strategic objectives and goals for HRP in the MoE seemed essentially to be based on a single source: an evaluation of the previous strategic plan. There are two explanations for this. Firstly, the MoE does not appear to have drawn up any overall vision. This reason seemed to be consistent with Rajasekar and Khan's study (2013) which showed that the absence of a vision, mission and strategic goals in public-sector organisations in Oman hinders the creation of a formal long-term training and development plan. As O'Riordan (2012) has suggested, strategy in public-sector organisations should be derived from government objectives. HRP professionals in the MoE did not report setting their strategic goals to meet the objectives outlined within the Government's Vision 2020 (now in its fourth phase since its inception in 1995, see Chapter 2 for details). This suggests a weak link may exist between government and the governmental entities responsible for implementation of the strategic Vision 2020 program, since the latter have not followed up on the implementation of this vision within government institutions, and apparently have failed to ensure the alignment of Vision 2020 with actual organisational practice. According to Choudhury (2007), the generic vision should be applied at all levels of government; however, specification as to where the adoption of HRP should take place depends on the particular context. Feedback from MoE participants indicated that governmental institutions were not connected to a comprehensive vision. A senior manager reported:

In my opinion, the biggest obstacle we face is the absence of strategic goals and visions in most of the institutions. (Senior Manager 2)

7.2.3.2 Clarity of HRP Objectives

As argued in Chapter Three, defining objectives, a key step in the HRP process, can determine the areas an organisation needs to prioritise in order to become successful, and

can create a clearer focus on the function of the organisation's business (Ulrich, 1987). Choudhury (2007) found that the role of HRP becomes clearer if an organisation has a clear strategy in place, as well as the resources and management support that enable it to implement the strategy. Jacobson (2010) reported that if HRP professionals have a clear idea of the goals they are expected to achieve, they will also have a clear perception of actions the organisation needs to take to respond to current and future demands, in order to achieve organisational goals and objectives. This corroborates the views of Lam and Schaubroeck (1998) who suggested that having a clear objective is essential if an organisation aims to take advantage of HRP and make the process explicit and important within the organisation. Various frameworks have been used in the literature show how these objectives should be developed. For instance, Schuler's (1990) model developed over 25 years ago suggested that environmental elements, such as labour market trends, and organisational elements such as the nature of the business, influence how an organisation establishes strategic objectives; these are then broken down into clear objectives for the HRP function. Focusing on the link between a broad spectrum of contextual factors and HRP was the foundation suggested by Ulrich (1992) for setting clear HRP objectives.

In contrast to recommendations in the literature, the study participants reported that objectives were not clearly defined for HRP professionals in the administrative jobs group. Chan and Burgess (2010) concurred with earlier views when they stated that HRP objectives are set based on what needs to be done with regard to organisational strategic objectives. This situation was not found in the MoE. Consequently, the lack of clarity around HRP objectives and priorities has led to complex HRP initiatives for HR at the operational level. For instance, the MoE's HRP professionals were not able to focus on meeting the HR development and training needs of administrative job-holders while maintaining the overarching vision of the Ministry's strategic plan. Evidence of the impact of ambiguous goals on HRP processes can be clearly seen in the following extract from a participant interview:

Clear goals and objectives are essential in to order to facilitate the determination process regarding human resources. (Senior Manager 7)

These findings are in agreement with Lam and Schaubroeck's (1998) contention that without clear objectives, HRP programs cannot be effective. The authors attributed this to two reasons, namely, the difficulty in setting the right objectives, and the ability and skills to set HRP objectives. This conclusion may explain what the current study found as to why the MoE has unclear HRP objectives. These results are consistent with previous research conducted in the MoE, which found that the HR professionals in the Ministry need to develop their skills and knowledge to make them more capable of both HRP and strategic planning (Abdalkalq, 2005; Al Sahmsiy, 2010; Schuler, 1990).

7.2.4 HRP Professionals' Involvement

The main purpose of this study was to explore HRP practices at both the strategic planning and operational levels in the MoE. Seeking to find out about the participation and involvement of HRP professionals in strategy formulation and setting HRP directions was a critical step in the current study towards producing a clear picture of HRP practices at the strategic planning level. This is because HRP occurs within the broad context of organisational and strategic business planning (Omoankhanlen, 2013). As mentioned in Chapter Three, an important aspect of the integration of HRP and strategic planning needs is that HRP professionals need to be fully in tune with their senior managers to ensure the HRP activity is linked to, and supports, strategic planning. Despite this, studies have shown that many public organisations do not yet consider HRP professionals or directors to be full partners in the strategic planning process. For instance, Sheehan and Scafidi (2005) found that HR managers in Australian public-sector organisations were not as strategically involved as those in the private sector. These results are consistent with a study conducted by Jacobson (2010) in North Carolina, USA, which found that HR professionals were not involved in the strategic decision-making process. Jacobson (2010) also found that the role of human resource directors is changing.

This study's results are consistent with the existing literature relevant to Oman, which has found that although the MoE has attempted to increase the opportunities for HRP professionals to be involved in the strategic planning process, that desired partnership of HRP professionals with senior managers in matters of strategy formulation and strategic decision-making has not yet been achieved in the MoE. Two main reasons were provided by the participants for the lack of HRP professionals' engagement in all the stages of the strategic planning process. First, the MoE's strategic planning usually takes place at the top management level or on the Ministry's board of directors. HRP professionals in middle and lower level management do not have the opportunity to be involved in all the strategic planning components. This could be attributed to structural issues in hierarchical organisations, where many instances of poor communication occur due to the centralisation of power and the prevailing authoritarian pattern (Dedahanov et al., 2015; Pandey & Garnett, 2006). It has been suggested that an organisation must make a concerted effort to involve line management in formulating and implementing strategies that align with organisational objectives (El Kot & Leat, 2008; Lawler & Boudreau, 2009). Moreover, it is necessary to build trust between central controllers and line managers, in order to improve the performance of public-sector organisations (Sarker, 2006). In other words, the extent to which line managers are given flexibility, or at least consulted about the approach to be taken, with their performance in HRM roles, plays a vital role in improving the organisation's delivery of services.

The second main reason cited by participants for the lack of engagement of HRP professionals is their lack of skills and knowledge with respect to strategic planning. HRP professionals from middle and lower level management are not involved in the process of strategic planning and thus are not exposed to it before being promoted to senior levels. This explanation is also in accordance with that of Sparrow and Marchington (1998), who reported that many of those involved in strategic HR functions demonstrated both a failure to understand the demands of their new roles and a lack of confidence in their ability to be strategic partners. Abdullah (2009) reached a similar conclusion seven years

later. Therefore, it is importance that HRP professionals are considered during the strategy formulation process. According to Oladipo and Abdulkadir (2011), the strategic partnership between HRM and business strategy provides a greater opportunity to align HR goals, strategies, philosophies and practices with organisational objectives and the implementation of business strategy (Butler, 1988; Lawler & Boudreau, 2009). Researchers such as Ulrich (1992) argue that HR professionals need to create strategic partnerships with senior managers in organisations. The evidence is that competitive advantage may be derived from integration of the organisation's business strategy and HRP by recognising that people are a source of competitive advantage, thus increasing the ability to implement strategic initiatives, and the organisation's capacity for change. It is also necessary to note that HR professionals must have the right skills in order to deliver satisfactory results and build an effective partnership (Chui, 2015). Therefore, it might be concluded from the evidence that decentralised decision-making in HRP operations would be insufficient to establish a strategic partnership role for HR in the MoE. However, the development of appropriate skills and competencies among HRP professionals, as well as their inclusion in strategic decision-making, is likely to facilitate this outcome. Linking HRP to strategic development processes is recognised as a pathway to improving outcomes.

7.2.5 Linking HRP Processes with Strategic Planning

When HRP practices are linked and aligned with strategic planning, they contribute to the creation of a competitive advantage for an organisation by reducing cost, increasing performance, and improving the organisational response to environmental changes. Effective HRP is an aspect of HRM that can be conducted at the organisational level; however, the overall success of any organisation is achieved through integrating HRP and organisational strategic planning (Omoankhanlen, 2013). In order to link HRP activities with strategic planning, HR professionals need to implement better methods of aligning their objectives and practices with the development, design and implementation of organisational strategic objectives and initiatives (Lam & Schaubroeck, 1998). A number

of models have been proposed in the literature to explain how HRM and strategic planning can be strategically linked. For example, Golden and Ramanujam, (1985) developed four levels of integration of HRP activities and organisation strategy: administrative linkage, one-way linkage, two-way linkage, and integrative linkage. The most advanced form of linkage is integrative linkage, where the senior HR manager is represented on the senior management team, and is involved in various stages of the decision making process (Wright et al., 2003). The most recent model from Bulmash et al. (2010) is also in line with this approach and involves the HR function and those responsible for strategic planning working together as a team to plan and integrate the strategic and HR plans.

With respect to this study, existing models and practices from the literature may not be directly transferable. Although the majority of participants reported that the MoE has a strategic plan, findings suggested that HRP was carried out in isolation from the strategic plan. The HRP program for administrative jobs was not a part of the Ministry's strategic planning process. The results supported the view that there was a lack of strategic focus in the Ministry's HRP activities (e.g. forecasting, training and recruitment activities). In relation to administrative jobs, the role of HRP professionals was often taken into account only to the extent necessary to ensure that the MoE had sufficient people to meet operational demands. Based on Miles' model described in the literature, HRP sophistication in the MoE tends to be in stage two. In this stage the organisation concentrates on some long-term strategic planning and does not pay sufficient attention to the integration of HRP activities with its strategy. These results are in accordance with recent studies indicating that only a small number of organisations have fully integrated plans. For example, the results of the IPMA-HR study clearly found that only 39% of public and private organisations demonstrated that their HRP process was aligned with their organisation's strategic plan (Johnson & Brown, 2004). Jacobson (2010), who found that only 41.4% of public organisations incorporated a human resources section into their strategic plans, also reported a lack of engagement of HRP with strategic planning. These results also match those found in (Lam & Schaubroeck 1998; Ogunrinde, 2001), and more

recently Norman (2014) whose case study doctoral research indicated that organisations are not yet linking their HRP to strategic planning, and are still focused on operational processes. Despite most public sector organisations recognising the importance of planning, many of them struggle to achieve their goals, largely because of a failure to link HR strategy with business plans (Kalyani & Sahoo, 2011; Raofi & Taheri, 2014). This has often led to an emphasis on short-term operational activities at the expense of a long-term strategic program.

An important question arises from this: why has Oman's MoE not developed an integrated HRP system? Many possible explanations exist. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the perspective of the integration of HRP and strategic planning assumes the importance and priority of human resources as a source of long-term competitive advantage (Aswathappa, 2005). The findings of the current study have indicated that while the MoE is directing more of its strategic focus towards professional jobs, the Ministry has not yet applied this concept to the management of its administrative jobs category. Taking this perspective into account (i.e. people are an organisation's most important asset), the HRP professionals in the MoE may pay lip service when referring to professional-level employees, and do not pay enough attention to employees in administrative roles. This means that the employees in the MoE are not viewed as a single organisational resource capable of building competitive advantage. According to Sabiu et al. (2016), investment in people is considered the key driver for competitive advantage and organisational effectiveness. Thus, HRP must become a gatekeeper and cultivate an appropriate culture by including all employees within the strategic HRP focus.

The lack of such a policy, encompassing the integration of HRP and strategic planning, is an important factor in the failure to adopt the necessary systems. Sudin (2004) argued that to be effective, an organisation should have consistent HR policies and practices, aligned with the organisation's other existing directives. If, therefore, a range of well-conceived HR policies and practices are introduced, an organisation can guide employees' behaviour towards achieving strategic objectives (Rose & Kumar, 2006). In

order to achieve a successful integration human resource planning and strategic planning, the organisation needs to adopt specific HR policies and practices for different strategies. If linking HRP practices with strategic planning was part of MoE policy, then it would be viewed as critical to the success of the organisation. The adoption of a strategic integration policy incorporating HRP plays a positive role in increasing the effectiveness of public-sector organisations (Al Qudah, Osman, Ab Halim, & Al Shatanawi, 2014). The organisations would benefit from adopting such an approach because it would enable them to deal with environmental change and workplace challenge (Doherty et al., 2009). This is especially so in this case study, since recent studies indicate that it is possible for institutions in Oman to apply such practices, which in turn can enhance the performance of these institutions (Moideenkutty et al., 2011).

This study found that a further factor contributing to the existing separation of HRP activities from strategic planning in Oman's MoE may be that the integration of HRP with strategic planning is a relatively new concept to many of the study participants; many of them mentioned that they had no idea of the nature of such integration. As one participant said:

This new model is not available in the Ministry. (Senior Manager 9)

Two participants offered similar information:

The scientific method and the model you have mentioned are still ideas which are not applied in the MoE. (Middle Manger 8)

There is no system framed in this way and the Ministry misses such programs. (Junior Manager 11).

Based on the literature discussed in this section, a major challenge to effective integration of HRP and strategic planning is the lack of experience and skill of those involved in the

HR function. For example, a study conducted by Becton and Schraeder (2009) showed that HR practitioners were slow to respond to changes in their jobs and in the business environment. Wright et al. (2003) gathered data through interviews with 20 HR executives and found that HR generalists assigned to business units have very little deep and formal knowledge of the competitive issues facing their businesses. These findings suggest the need not only for professional development programs to disseminate the knowledge and understanding of the integration of HRP and strategic planning, but also a lifting of the skill set of the relevant HR professionals, in order to effectively drive organisational excellence (Chui, 2015).

7.3 HR Forecasting

HR forecasting is a critical component of an effective HRP process as it is related to employment and development decisions, which are strategic in nature and can produce long-lasting effects (Omoankhanlen, 2013). As discussed in Chapter Three, determining the required numbers and kinds of employees that an organisation will need at some point in the future is the essence of forecasting HR demand. Forecasting HR supply involves estimating future labour availability both within and outside the organisation. In HRP, HR demand analysis is conducted separately from supply estimates as it depends primarily on organisation-specific variables, such as turnover and retirement rates, transfers, and promotions (Sutanto, 2004). Supply forecasts on the other hand rely heavily on the variances in external factors. A number of distinct approaches to demand forecasting are identified in the literature: quantitative techniques (e.g. trend analysis, ratio analysis, regression analysis) or qualitative techniques (e.g. Delphi method, nominal group technique, scenario analysis) (all discussed fully in Chapter Three). Several studies have revealed that using a mix of forecasting approaches, rather than relying on a single method, provides more complete planning coverage. For instance, Bhattacharyya (2002) suggests that adopting a mixed strategy of qualitative and quantitative methods is the preferred approach for HRP. Agrawal et al. (2013) recommended a mixed method approach to HR forecasting in various fields of agriculture in India. They found that this

approach helped in arriving at better outcomes, particularly in the context of limited data sources. Tripathi (2010) noted in a study of an intelligent decision support system that the gathering of comprehensive information about a particular organisation, including the collection of extensive data analysis, is a necessity for workforce forecasting and planning.

The findings of the current study in relation to HR forecasting techniques in Oman's MoE suggest that the professional jobs group within the Ministry displays some distinctive features. It was found that HRP activities were more systematic for professional jobs as compared to those for administrative jobs. Participants were able to provide a clear description of the procedures adopted when implementing HR forecasting for professional jobs, but this was not the case for the administrative jobs. It seems possible that this might be due to a degree of flexibility and freedom granted to the MoE to deal with the professional jobs. Consequently, the MoE was better able to estimate the number and type of employees needed for the professional jobs. With respect to techniques used to perform demand forecasts, the study data revealed that quantitative techniques are more commonly used for the professional jobs. This has been amply demonstrated through the Ministry's deployment of mathematical functions which are mainly dependent on the number of students, when forecasting professional jobs. This finding seems to be consistent with other research that indicates an increase in the adoption of quantitative techniques in large organisations (Lacerda et al., 2013; Parker & Caine, 1996; Valero, 1997). It appears that the size of the organisation may have an impact on the forecasting method used. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the MoE in Oman is currently considered one of the largest government organisations there. This relationship can be seen particularly in the governmental units, which usually have high internal stability due to the low labour turnover rates (Sutanto, 2004).

Parker and Caine (1996) argue that quantitative techniques may enhance decision-making and problem-solving capabilities. However, as reflected in the review of the literature, the adoption of a balanced-mix of quantitative and qualitative methods has increasingly

been seen to be a better approach for HR forecasting (Bhattacharyya, 2002). The results of this study suggest that qualitative HR demand forecasting is clearly missing from the HRP process at Oman's MoE. This is of concern, given that a strategic perspective requires both a quantitative and qualitative forecast of human resource demand (Nkomo, 1988). The literature review provides the emerging view that HRP professionals in the MoE need to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches in the process of HR forecasting, in order to obtain a clear view of future human resource requirements. The outcome of such an approach would be an understanding of the qualitative mix needed to accomplish strategic objectives, with being limited to a projection of staffing needs (the number of employees for each job category).

Clear forecasts for the number of resources needed to fill the MoE's administrative jobs could not be ascertained. Compared with the list of specific forecasting techniques described in the literature, the data showed that the MoE did not use sophisticated forecasting techniques for administrative jobs. No attempt was made by the MoE's HRP professionals to forecast human resource demand and supply in order to provide an accurate number of human resources required in the administrative jobs group in terms of quantity, nor in terms of quality. The data showed that job descriptions alone do not provide a basis from which information about the number of employees needed can be derived for forecasting purposes, as reported by a participant:

There is no clear job description for the administrative posts group, so in the same way we are more likely to find it difficult to forecast the requirements of those jobs. (Junior Manager 1)

The absence of HR forecasting processes for the administrative jobs may be explained by the fact that administrative jobs are driven by the principles of the civil service, which is operated from within a highly centralised fiscal system. The civil service often lacks the standards, technical, and professional capacity needed to adopt an HR forecasting system. According to Tessema et al. (2009), one of the major obstacles to effective performance

of the public sector in developing countries is the excessive concentration of decision-making and authority within central government. For example, the research participants indicated that they employed the job classification technique provided by the MCS to determine the vacancies that needed to be filled to meet the MoE's needs. Similar findings have been reported by other researchers. For example, Budhwar and Mellahi (2006) and Al Sawafi (2012) found that current job descriptions lack many of the components that can be used for HR forecasting. According to Lunenburg (2012), valuable information for forecasting future staffing needs and other personnel management functions should be provided through job analysis. In addition, this study found that some jobs do not have a job description, which has led to an imbalance between the duties of the position and the required number of employees. Tang and Chang (2010) argued that an unclear or non-existent job description leads to role ambiguity. Thus, Oman's MCS needs to provide specific guidelines to HRP professionals at the appropriate time and place by conducting job description definition in a more scientific way. This is because according to Suthar et al. (2014), job analysis can play a vital role in enhancing public-sector organisational performance and productivity.

The adoption of forecasting techniques is particularly challenging in the case of the MoE's administrative posts because the limitations and constraints mentioned above hinder the capacity of the HRP professionals in the MoE to anticipate and plan for their future, or to balance demand and supply and identify the gaps between them. This situation is consistent with that found in the other levels of government in Oman as they share the same conditions, and operate under one system. In order to achieve high-performance HRP practices, Fleming (2000) stresses that it is necessary to critically assess the structure of, and responsibilities for HRM at a central level. From the findings of the current study, it can be interpreted that the civil service needs to give HRP professionals in the MoE more flexibility regarding HR forecasting. Ravichandran (2011) states that an organisation needs to be structured according to how it can best deliver the desired services based on its strategic goals, functional requirements and environmental contingencies. This is also necessary if the organisation intends to achieve a competitive

advantage. By forecasting the number of employees to be recruited and also by estimating and knowing their required skills, experience, and competencies, the MoE will be better able to attract the best people for the right jobs at the right time (Sutanto, 2004). Therefore, forecasts of administrative human resource demand and supply should be considered part of the MoE's strategic planning and functional HRP processes, taking into consideration the specific organisational context.

Another surprising finding was that the HR forecasting effort has been largely confined to estimating demand rather than supply. Despite the MoE having five-year plans, none of these has given any attention to the HR function of forecasting supply. The findings showed that forecasting supply is not regarded as a core priority and is not formally addressed by HRP professionals in the MoE. For instance, determining the number and type of employees that will be available internally or externally in the future is not included within the process of the MoE's HR forecasting. This is clearly a limitation.

A number of factors were given by the participants for not conducting forecasts of HR supply in their HRP process. The first is that inadequate attention has been given to what the main objective of HRP should be and for what purpose. According to Omoankhanlen (2013), strategic objectives help HR professionals to identify the desired activity to achieve these goals in the future. The existence of a clear set of objectives will provide information which could be a guide for HR forecasting. Unless the goals of HRP are clear, understood, and accepted, it is unlikely that HR forecasting can be effective (Richards & Amjad, 1994).

The large number of duties and responsibilities undertaken by the HRP department may also be a factor in this. These results are in congruence with previous research by Norman (2014). The amount of time taken up with implementing HRP activities might not allow HRP professionals to develop HR forecasting, as the study indicates that HRP professionals shoulder other HRP responsibilities such as planning, transfer, training, and recruitment. As one of the junior managers articulated:

The HRP departments undertake many functions. We are not only responsible for determining the need for employees in educational and administrative sectors, but also we do other tasks: we participate in recruitment, training development, transfer, and selection processes.
(Junior Manager 11)

A third reason for HR supply forecasting apparently being neglected is that the MoE lacks the comprehensive and accurate data that are necessary to facilitate the implementation of HR forecasting. Regardless of the technique used, reliable and valid information is imperative for HR forecasting techniques (Lacerda et al., 2013). The data problems encountered in this study of HR forecasting are common to most government sectors in developing countries (Agrawal et al., 2013; Goodman et al., 2013; Jacobson, 2010).

There are two likely causes for the lack of information. Firstly, the lack of availability of information sources hinders the process of forecasting HR supply. Non-centralised, national information about the labour supply is available through a number of departments in Oman. There is a need for multiple sources of information that can be used in various HRP programs. For instance, a job futures databank with supply and demand information for 265 occupational groups and 155 fields of study was established by the Canadian Occupational Projection System (Bulmash et al., 2010). Secondly, the influence that HR forecasting can have in the MoE seems to have been significantly limited by a lack of skills and capabilities among the Ministry's HRP professionals. The poor background, both in terms of their education and their past work experience, of these HRP professionals, as well as their lack of experience in the HRP position and role may add to this limitation. Omoankhanlen (2013) demonstrates that the problems and difficulties of applying HR forecasting can also be attributed to the fact that many HR professionals lack the complex mathematical skills needed in HR forecasting, to handle elements such as labour turnover and employee stability figures. This is in line with the findings of earlier research in literature mentioned previously (Colley & Price, 2010;

Goodman et al., 2013; O’Riordan, 2012; Robinson, 2010), which opined that a lack of expert and experienced employees created an obstacle to developing and applying many HRP techniques. Therefore, the qualifications and skill set of HRP professionals should be considered one of the greatest challenges in the task of implementing and designing effective HR forecasting.

7.3.1 Identifying the Gap

For the reasons discussed above, the HRP professionals in the MoE do not produce any comparison of workforce supply and demand in order to identify human resource needs related to skills, positions, or the number of employees. The study found that it was easy to conduct a gap analysis and determine the vacancies for professional jobs; however, difficulties were encountered in conducting this process for the administrative positions. Vacancies only occur when an employee retires or resigns, or takes a job elsewhere. Participants attributed the lack of forecasting methods and job descriptions for administrative jobs to the civil service system, which does not adopt standards or guidelines that could help HRP professionals in the MoE to balance demand and supply, and forecast the number of employees for those jobs.

7.4 Employee Shortages

As noted in Chapter Three, two main strategies were identified to deal with employee shortages: internal and external recruitment strategies. Through an internal recruitment strategy, an organisation can capitalise on the money that it has invested in its existing employees. Due to the fact that information about the existing employee’s ability is typically well known by managers, many organisations prefer to use internal recruitment processes (Kumari, 2012; Rosman et al., 2013). In addition, an internal recruitment strategy can be utilised as a motivation tool and a reward for good work or for longevity in the organisation (Rosman, Shah, & Hussain, 2013). However, the organisations may find that the practice of internal recruitment restricts the influx of new employees. This

can be avoided by filling the vacancies through external recruitment, which provides an opportunity for qualified people outside the organisation with new ideas and fresh perspectives to enter the organisation (Mondy, 1996). This strategy may have disadvantages, however, as it may lead to lower morale and decrease organisational commitment among existing employees.

The current study clearly indicates that the MoE relies on both external and internal recruitment strategies to deal with employee shortage. This combination allows the MoE to exploit the advantages of both strategies. The MoE fills vacant positions through internal promotion because managers in the MoE have a better idea of their existing pool of internal candidates as compared to external resources. The study also indicates that filling internal posts by promotion can increase employee job satisfaction. These results appear to reflect similar trends in developed countries regarding promotion opportunity (Gusdorf, 2008; Phelan & Lin, 2001; Rosman et al., 2013). Thus, it can be concluded that practice at the MoE is consistent with that of organisations in developed countries, where it is considered that remaining competitive is largely dependent on the contribution that promotion practices can make to organisational performance (Bonavia & Marin-Garcia, 2011; Katou & Budhwar, 2010; Kessuwan & Muenjohn, 2010). This convergence of practices may be the result of globalisation and western management theories and practices that have affected management practices in Oman. Internal promotion as part of the MoE's HRP practices can be deemed good practice as it will empower the organisation to achieve competitive advantage (Sabiou et al., 2016).

The results of the current study have also indicated that the MoE uses external recruitment to fill vacancies. Two main reasons encourage the MoE to recruit employees from outside the Ministry. First, external recruiting is needed in the MoE to absorb Omani graduates, which is of high priority for the Government. This shows clearly how governmental policies impact HR practice in Omani organisations. It is consistent with the findings of Al Hamadi et al., (2007) and of Mamman and Al Kulaiby (2014), which

underline the obvious fact that Oman is yet another developing country where such factors can play a significant role in shaping HRM practices.

Second, recruiting from external sources is a strategy used when the MoE has demand for technical and skilled employees. This situation is common in the MoE, especially for positions that require specialised competencies and skills. Research has demonstrated that there are several advantages an organisation can gain by relying on external sources, including raising the demand for a specific skill, and exposing the organisation to new ideas (Louw, 2013; Rosman et al., 2013).

7.4.1 Internal Recruitment Strategies

The following section discusses in more detail the four recruitment strategies that are used as vacancy-filling alternatives to deal with employee shortages in the MoE.

7.4.1.1 Internal Promotion

Internal promotion is one the significant recruitment strategies that an organisation uses to fill open positions. In order to maximise motivation and attract qualified employee, the policy of promotion from within an organisation should be clear and visible to ensure the selection of the best qualified candidates for the open position. Organisations that adopt an internal staffing policy generally have career paths built into their structure (Ganesan & Weitz, 1996; Seibert et al., 2013). The literature suggests that various assessment methods can be used for granting a promotion including an individual interview, mandatory training days, seniority, and tests of technical skills ability.

Regarding the procedures used to make promotion decisions in the MoE, the majority of participants placed significant weight on the opinion of senior managers in the promotion decision-making process. Such decisions which were found not to be made based on performance, contribution, or qualification standards; rather, they are based on top

management's selection. The results from this study have also indicate that the major selection criteria and system of promotion are not well defined to confirm that candidates have met the criteria. This was an unexpected finding as there is a special section in Oman's CSL devoted to promotion, which states that employee promotion is determined 70% on merit and 30% on tenure. However, there may be differences in the interpretation and application of the relevant law. These findings are consistent with previous research on public management in Oman and the Middle East (Al Ali, 2008; Al Balushi, 2008; Al Sawafi, 2012; Budhwar & Mellahi, 2006; Swailes & Al Fahdi, 2011) which has contended that despite the CSL encompassing human resource practices, the legislative framework lacked practical application and some organisations overlooked breaches of the law.

In contrast to the situation in Oman, western contemporary promotion systems tend to include several requirements and criteria. For example, Bossaert (2005) found that in the UK, selection is made from the best qualified candidates, and promotion is usually effected based on a combination of methods such as interviews, assessment centers, and recommendations by managers. Evans, Glover, Guerrier, and Wilson (2007) argue that rather than relying on a single source of information, an organisation should use many sophisticated selection processes on which to base decision-making on the most suitable candidates for a specific job role. Hence, there is a divergence between the Omani and western contexts with regard to the promotion process. Western human resource systems appear at face value to have consistently applied rules, and strict compliance to laws and regulations. As mentioned earlier, this divergence may be due to cultural attitudes and behaviour. Budhwar and Mellahi (2006) state that nepotism and personal connections are often the basis for promotion in Arab countries: in the case of a potential promotion, influential family or tribal connections are frequently used to intercede on the candidate's behalf (Al Ali, 2008). However, it is argued that the public sector should attempt to implement the written rules in the ways that will maximise their performance (Dwivedi, Shareef, Pandey, & Kumar, 2013). Recent research into public organisations has suggested that adequate legal frameworks must be in place, together with sound HRM

practices, in order to improve the efficiency and performance of the public sector (Vveinhardt & Papšiene, 2013).

This study also indicated that performance appraisal was not utilised effectively as a means of identifying eligible candidates for promotion. The participants reported that the current form of performance appraisal needs to be updated in order to use it effectively in making personnel decisions, including promotions, training programs, and rewards. With respect to the western context, there is much emphasis on the importance of appraisal systems and performance assessment in boosting promotion policy. According to Bossaert (2005), a majority of public administration agencies in the west stress the importance of performance as a means of evaluating eligible candidates in order to ensure that transparent promotion criteria are developed. Al Sawafi (2012) observes that performance appraisal in the context of Oman does not comply with the contemporary theories of performance that are being addressed in the literature. This is likely due to issues related to personal humility interfering with the process, as Al Hamadi and Budhwar (2006) claim. The norms of behaviour and conduct are also different in community and relationship-based cultures such as the ones in the Middle East, where 'who' one knows is more important than 'what' one knows. Therefore, it is essential that promotion procedures in Oman's MoE be carried out with particular attention to performance appraisal. When promotion measures are aligned with performance appraisal, the organisation will be more likely to focus on improving its services and enhancing its persistence and growth, and providing incentives to talented employees (Joarder & Ashraf, 2012; Sabiu et al., 2016).

7.4.1.2 Employee Transfer

Scant literature is available on the processes of employee transfer from position-to-position within organisations. The majority of the literature on this subject relates to turnover and geographic relocation; however, there are a few studies focused on transfer as an internal staffing strategy. Additional information from the current study supplies

the missing links in the studies of employee transfer within the organisation and provides a baseline for future research in a more local context. According to Aswathappa (2005), an internal employee transfer occurs when an employee shifts from their current job position to another at the same level, and with the same conditions. The reasons for employee transfers differ from one organisation to the next depending on the company's size, policy, and structure. For example, employees may be required to move from a department with surplus staff to another department where there is a shortage of employees (Sharma & Goyal, 2010).

Transfer may be a part of an organisation's approach to career development, which means that a transfer may take place based on an employee's expression of a lack of interest in his/her current work or lack of job satisfaction. A fair and impartial transfer policy is needed in order to ensure that the employee's transfer is implemented in an objective manner. Adequate selection and placement procedures must be clarified to ensure that transfer procedures are reasonable, and consistent with the interests of the organisation (Krishna & Aquinas, 2004).

The evidence from Oman's MoE was that employee transfer was one recruitment option used by the MoE to address employee shortages. Generally, the MoE adopted employee transfer for some education sector employees in order to provide them with an opportunity to develop and grow their career capabilities. The organisation reportedly pursues internal transfers to accommodate employees from the education sector whose productivity has declined because of the lack of job variety. Findings indicated that this lack of variety and therefore monotony may be due the absence of a career ladder in the schools, which might generate frustration and disillusionment. One participant indicated that:

The reason that leads us to give an opportunity for the educational staff to move to an administrative job is the limitations of the current career-ladder in school. The question is, how long the employee will remain as a

teacher, deputy principal or principle of a school. This situation makes most educational staff feel that they cannot achieve self-actualisation.

(Middle Manager 7)

The evidence in this case was that educational staff were given a chance to move to the administrative field, doing any administrative job, in order to retain them and provide them with more job variety and satisfaction. This process is endorsed by many researchers who believe that an organisation increases employee commitment by providing organisational processes that assist employees to reach developmental goals (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Gopinath & Shibu, 2014; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Prince (2005) argues that an organisation that is characterised by skill development strategies, such as movement of employees from different units, can develop key competencies that provide a basis for competitive advantage. Mullins (2016) also agrees that the organisation that occupies a leading position in a competitive environment that demands quality and cost efficiency is the organisation that creates an attractive and motivating work environment.

Although internal employee transfers take place within the MoE's strategies to deal with employee shortage, the data indicated that the transfer criteria were not clear, and were perceived to be unfair; the data also suggested that qualifications and experience were not always the criteria for transferring education staff. Employee transfers in this situation were considered to be unplanned actions as it seemed that there was a lack of clarity on when, and how, an employee would be transferred. Jacobson (2010) states that if employee transfer is poorly planned, an organisation will be affected negatively by increased costs and lowered morale among employees. The existing transfer process was at odds with the principles of employee transfer outlined by Krishna and Aquinas (2004), who stated that employees must meet all requirements and criteria for the new positions, and must be ranked among the best qualified candidates in order to qualify for moving onto another career path. Failure to do this may lead to poor service delivery which will lead to ineffectiveness of the organisation (Mabindisa, 2013). Thus, the MoE may benefit

from improving its employee transfer procedures by establishing clear selection criteria and standardising the terms and conditions of employee transfer. An ambiguous and misleading policy may result in the organisation experiencing difficulty in the management of transfer, in turn negating the benefits, and acting as a negative motivator for employees (Coetzee & Mbanze, 2014).

7.4.1.3 Training and Development

The literature supports the view that training and development programs are one of the alternative strategies used to address the gap between current HR supply and future demand. Since the skills needed in the workforce are always changing, an employee development strategy must be considered within the broader context of how an organisation utilises its current employees to ensure that sufficient experienced people with the appropriate characteristics and skills are available when and where needed (Omoankhanlen, 2013). A number of characteristics have been identified as contributing to a successful training and development plan. First, a training plan needs to be designed according to the organisation's business strategy. Rajasekar and Khan (2013) argue that establishing a training and development strategy is essential, and it must be considered a process that is a strategic priority rather than simply a tactical one. Secondly, it is important for any training strategy to have clear goals and objectives. Au et al. (2008) found that a training strategy which has observable and measurable training objectives is more effective than one which focuses on training methods and procedures. The third characteristic of a successful training and development plan is that the career path and development within the organisation needs to be very clear for all employees. Finally, the fourth characteristic that needs to be considered is positioning leadership development. This strategy aims to ensure that employees with the potential to fill key positions are prepared and will have the required competencies for success in the new job. The review of the literature suggested various methods for identifying training and development needs, such as observation, interviews, information search, and focus groups.

In reviewing training and development practice in Oman's public-sector organisations, recent research indicates that a significant amount of human resources training and development is being provided by the Government of Oman. For instance, Al Hamadi and Budhwar (2006) mentioned that the Government has increased investment in the development of its human resources. The investments that have been embraced by the Government have an impressive track record in training and education. This can be seen in Swailes and Al Fahdi's study (2011) which outlines four initiatives identified by the Government to develop its human resources. One of their major strategic initiatives has been developing human resources through the promotion of educational and vocational training. However, studies have found that there are some weaknesses and gaps in the relevant aspects of training and development in the public sector, including the absence of long-term strategies and plans for training, little work on the links between training and organisational strategies, and a lack of clarity regarding the process of needs assessment (Rajasekar & Khan, 2013; Swailes & Al Fahdi, 2011). Other weaknesses have been mentioned in Al Sawafi's study (2012) which found that the concept of a career path plan is not used in Oman's public sector. These results corroborate the findings of another study conducted by Al Hamadi and Budhwar (2006).

7.4.1.3.1 Policies Followed by the MoE In Relation to Training and Development of Human Resources

The current study found that the qualifications and the training of employees received the MoE's special attention, and tangible steps have been taken in the recent strategic plan to expand training and development programs. As with most government institutions, this is evidence that the MoE has recognised that training and development are important tools that the Ministry must take seriously if it expects to capitalise on the talents of its human resources. The 2012–2013 Talent Management and Rewards Survey by World at Work and Watson (2013) highlights that developing and retaining employees is the most effective way to address the growing talent shortages that many organisations are facing

at present. It is therefore not surprising to see that the MoE has greatly emphasised the training and development of employees by implementing a variety of programs using either internal resources or external agencies. The establishment of an administrative apparatus for formal training has consolidated the MoE's interest in human resources development. This has been accomplished by creating training departments within the Ministry's structure or in its directorates in the governorates. This increased investment in human resources comes from within the framework of the MoE's commitment to governmental programmes and policies, which include the provision of training and other skills development opportunities to enhance employees' performance and ability to carry out their work effectively. The reason that possibly led to the MoE paying increased attention training and development is that an organisation's performance will be enhanced by good training and development practices. This is particularly important in an environment where service organisations engage to provide excellent service (Mabindisa, 2013). Recent studies have revealed the clear link between an organisation's effectiveness and training and development initiatives (Cooke, 2001; Divya & Gomathi, 2015; Falola et al., 2014). These studies show that the training and development of employees can play an important role in increasing organisational effectiveness and efficiency. Training and development practices are therefore an effective method to gain competitive advantage.

On the other hand, the study participants also reported that qualitative and quantitative expansion of training and development has occurred as a result of government's increased allocation of funds for training programs. As one participant reported:

The financial support we received in the current Five-Year Plan from the government has helped us a lot in terms of quantity and quality of training programs. For example, the existence of the recent financial support enabled us to start focusing on external programs like the conference and sending employees to external training courses. (Middle Manager 3)

The findings of this study concur with the results being observed in many countries; for example, Goodman et al. (2013) in a study of local government in the USA, concluded that any political change or economic crisis affects the organisation's ability to carry out HRP activities. Similarly, Kane and Palmer (1995) described how an economic downturn contributed to a reduction in Australia's labour force. In Turkey, the economic crisis in 2001 led to decreased demand for manpower, and to many companies having to resort to wage and salary cutting (Genc, 2014). Therefore, in order to avoid the challenges associated with a lack of training and development programmes, HRP managers should consider the potential effect of such factors on HRP programs, and should respond to them in a timely and effective manner.

The current study found that the MoE's training plan involves several proposed training programs and courses that the HRD department prepares on an annual basis. Participants stated that the department only conducts training on a short-term basis and never plans for more than one year ahead. It appears also that characteristically, the MoE's HRD department operates a short-range formalised training system designed primarily to meet specific short-term needs. The department has developed an annual training plan because the Ministry is required to follow the guidelines issued by the MCS (Rajasekar & Khan, 2013). However, the data showed that the MCS does not have long-term planning processes for training programs that involve the MoE and other government organisations in relating training to strategic issues (i.e. no activities such as identifying measures to assess training processes, or identifying long-term employee development programs). In good HRP practices, a clear picture of the organisation's vision, philosophy, goals, and strategies that can provide a variety of training and development opportunities is necessary to cultivate talented employees. Jacobson (2010) points out that having a strategic training and development plan in place can increase staff retention, tailor training goals and needs, provide leadership opportunities, clarify employment priorities, increase employees' satisfaction, enhance employees' commitment to work and the workplace, and improve the organisation's standards.

Although data showed convincingly that more attention has been given to the human resources development aspect in the strategic planning process, the HRD department fails to completely engage in the integration of strategic planning and the annual training and development plan.

A big part of the training and developments program is not conducted according to the long-term strategic plan of the Ministry especially the scholarship program. (Middle Manager 10)

This is in accordance with recent studies indicating that ambiguous HR development objectives may hinder employee development in Oman's public organisations (Rajasekar & Khan, 2013; Swailes & Al Fahdi, 2011). Study participants stated that the primary reason for this problem was that many HR development activities are not designed or tailored according to how they contribute to the achievement of the organisation's long-term goals. This means that the HR department in the MoE has not yet become a strategic player within government; a strategic approach to HR development is crucial to enhancing the long-term focus of both the HRD department and the organisation (Kiyonaga, 2004). A well-developed HR development plan integrates a training plan with the organisation's strategic objectives. When this happens, HR development becomes a true strategic partner in boosting the organisation's competitive advantage by providing a continuing supply of well-trained, broadly experienced, and well-motivated employees who are able to meet future agency needs and to perform a job effectively (Sabiu et al., 2016; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

7.4.1.4 Methods used to conduct the training needs analysis

The study revealed that the MoE's HRD department used a form to identify training needs. The department collected and analysed the training needs for various levels of employees based on the employees' perspective of the proposed training and development programs included in this form. When compared with a variety of analytical

methods described in the literature (e.g. job interview, focus group, tests, and performance appraisal) (Brown, 2002) or those available in developed countries, it became apparent from the evidence that the MoE did not apply an advanced method for assessing and analysing the training needs of its employees. Despite the current training needs analysis tool providing an opportunity for the employees to participate in choosing programs that would improve their work, the evidence suggests that this tool has some limitations. First, it is worth noting the current tool is restricted to training programs that the HR department intends to implement; however, it has not been designed to determine gaps between the existing pool of skills and knowledge and the skills needed in the future. Accurate training needs analysis is essential for identifying the gap between the actual performance and the desired performance in the organisation (Mirza & Riaz, 2012). The second limitation is that senior managers are not involved in the training and development analysis. Prince (2005) argues that supervisors should direct employees to relevant training opportunities and develop objectives for the training and development program. Another problem is that permitting individual employees or other users to identify training needs may create a problem due to the individuals' eagerness to follow up on an expensive training program, whereas their department or organisation does not consider this a priority (Rajasekar & Khan, 2013). During direct communication between the employees and supervisors, the needs assessment process can determine what experience and training might still be needed to improve employee performance (Pynes, 2004). Nevertheless, because of limitations in the gap analysis tool, the MoE has limited ability to ensure training and development programs are linked to the long-term skills and knowledge needed. Cooke (2001) states that the relationship between HR development and organisational performance is dependent upon where the organisation needs to support its strategy. By identifying training needs accurately organisations can achieve their performance targets. Therefore, the MoE's HR development requires careful identification and analysis of training needs in order to determine the priorities for each department and its employees.

7.4.1.4.1 Leadership training and Development Programs

With regard to leadership training and development programs, the data indicated that there has been a lack of focus on leadership development. Although the MoE has developed many leadership training programs, some of them have not been aligned with the MoE's strategic goals and objectives, as one participant reported:

The Ministry implemented many leadership training programs for many employees without concentrating on particular objectives. (Senior Manager 7)

The data has suggested that the MoE does not deliberately prepare future leaders as part of its training and development plan; opportunities to receive the appropriate career development training that could help them to meet the requirements of their new positions are not made available to employees who occupy a higher position. The apparent difficulty of implementing such HR development programs in the MoE have been attributed to a range of factors. The study results showed that one of the main obstacles to the development of such practices was resistance to new methods. Participants acknowledged that some employees within the MoE are not well informed about cultural change and they are not ready to take the responsibility of undertaking that change process because they fear their knowledge and skills may become obsolete in the process. An OECD (2001) report has stated that leadership development usually takes place in a diversified society with a decentralised government where public administration structures and processes are more sophisticated, and where comprehensive reform has brought about a gradual cultural change (Common, 2011). Yet the reality is that the HR development function in Oman's public sector has been identified as operating within a highly centralised bureaucracy and thus it remains constrained, a factor which is likely to make implementation of such sophisticated HR development programs difficult (Rajasekar & Khan, 2013).

The second reason that may hinder the process of preparing candidates to take up key roles in the future, from the participants' point of view, is legislative support (in the context of Oman). Lack of legislation to enact formal succession planning constitutes an obstacle to implementation of the HR development process and decision-making in the MoE. This finding is in congruence with the findings of a study by Wilkerson (2002). Consequently, the successful implementation of HR development processes requires the kind of administrative reform that reorganises the public sector, exposes it to the market, and emphasises the delivery of outcomes that are commensurate with the administrative culture and context of Oman. A systematic process of leadership development must be put in place to ensure that suitable talent is ready for current and future senior or key jobs. Planned HR development activities to support key positions are also critical to maintain superior organisational competencies in a complex and competitive environment (Basiri & Sabegh, 2014; Kim, 2012).

7.4.1.4.2 Barriers to Successful Implementation of Training Programs

The study showed that there are many barriers preventing the HRD department in the MoE from setting up an effective training and development plan. These include the lack of a training database and career paths. Most of the participants stated that career paths were not a major characteristic of the training and development programs, and that this aspect required advancement by adopting a system which aligns the interests and skills of employees with the needs of the MoE's strategic planning. Logically, without clear job descriptions, the HR department will not be able to design and implement training and development programs effectively. Bauer (2002) argues that unclear job requirements and responsibilities can lead to role ambiguity. The results from Al Sawafi's (2012) and Al Hamadi and Budhwar's (2006) study also support the findings that most of the employees in many departments in Oman do not have a career path. They recommended that public-sector organisations need to have a realistic, written, comprehensive career development plan for each employee.

A lack of information systems that provide intelligent insights into employees' training and development needs presented another barrier. Results suggested that the current information system operated by the MoE was inadequate to meet the process of training and career development in the Ministry. As mentioned by interviewees:

With respect to training, we do not have comprehensive and accurate data that helps us to provide the necessary information for designing courses and development programs. (Senior Manager 9)

The information about training in the current database is limited. We need to establish a database that enable us to extract information and produce reports for training purposes. (Junior Manager 12)

These results support previous research stating that, although HR information technology is now extensively used in the public sector, it appears that there is a lack of interest in public sector organisations in storing and analysing human resources data using the HRIS tool (Beadles, Lowery, & Johns, 2005; Jordan & Battaglio, 2014; Kabir, Bhuiyan, & Mohammad, 2013). Those earlier studies proffer the following reasons for the gap between expectations and the actual application of HRIS: high cost, time consumption, lack of proper infrastructure, lack of expertise in HRIS, and lack of HRIS training for HR employees. In the current study, the participants reported the gap could be due to the lack of HRIS skills in the MoE:

The challenges that we face about the database are caused by the lack of staff and staff quality. (Junior Manager 4)

By utilising an HRIS system, an organisation can provide all of the relevant data relating to employees' training needs (Goodman et al., 2013). The benefits of implementing HRIS are more accurate and faster access to information, and improved training and development programs (Kabir et al., 2013; Nagendra & Deshpande, 2014). Therefore, for

more effective HR development practices, the MoE should put effective HRIS into practice to capture data related to training and development.

7.4.2 External Strategies

When HRP activities point to the existence of vacancies, an organisation has the choice of recruiting either internally or externally (Gusdorf, 2008). The goal of HRP here is to facilitate recruitment and selection processes in order to ensure that the organisation has the right numbers and the right kinds of human resources at the right places, at the right time (Dahlberg et al., 2001). It was evident from the literature review that the organisation can use various approaches to attract and locate potential employees from outside. For most jobs the most popular sources of staffing are government employment agencies, educational institutions, print media, external agencies, other media and professional contacts (Rosman et al., 2013). The literature explored various systems that have been applied to the recruitment process. For example, Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand have a centralised recruitment system. Other countries have adopted a decentralised system (e.g. USA, UK, Canada, and Australia) (ADB, 2007). Stone (2007) argues that decisions to use recruitment and selection procedures vary from organisation to organisation, and region to region. Such decisions are dictated by organisational objectives, culture, size, labour legislation, the type and level of position, and the source of recruitment. In Oman's MoE, the selection process for hiring new civil servants consists of several stages. The next section discusses the strategies that the MoE uses to attract qualified applicants if the position is to be made available via an external recruitment source.

In terms of the system of recruitment and selection applied in the MoE, the study has shown that the HRP process in the MoE resembles a centralised system with respect to particular recruitment processes. The MCS, apart from being responsible for all matters relating to HR, is also responsible for the provision of HR services to the MoE. Therefore, the MoE has no autonomy to recruit and select staff since the MCS is responsible for recruitment, including creating a list of all graduates for the purpose of simplifying the

recruitment process, advertising vacant posts, and conducting the process of recruitment in collaboration with the concerned parties (MCS, 2015). The study participants reported that the Government decided to adopt a centralised recruitment system only after a decentralised system had failed to achieve the intended results. A study participant explained:

The recruitment function was not centralised; however, due to social factors this policy did not achieve its goal in terms of hiring talented employees and providing equality of opportunity. Accordingly, the Government has decided that the recruitment and selection process be carried out centrally by the Ministry of Civil Service. (Middle Manager 4)

The study also showed that a centralised recruitment system was adopted due to government's desire to solve the problems of inequality and nepotism. Budhwar and Mellahi (2006), and Al Balushi (2008) pinpointed the spread of nepotism in recruitment in the Middle East. Al Balushi (2008) attributed this to a culture that encourages people to be both dependent and clannish. Comparing those practices with practices in other countries, it is apparent there is a convergence in terms of their recruitment systems between organisations in Oman and in less developed countries; the principal characteristic of this convergence is that the organisations under scrutiny are based on a rigid bureaucratic notion of legal authority which suggests the existence of authoritarian, hierarchical and centralised rules and procedures (Tessema et al., 2009). An important question to ask here is, which of the two approaches is the best fit for organisational management HR functions in the civil service in Oman? The study suggests that past decentralisation of recruitment and selection processes in Oman's public sector has tended to lead to favouritism and nepotism. Selecting its choice of action from the wide NPM agenda, the Government of Oman basically needs to focus on decentralising the role of HRM practice by delegating HRM responsibility from the central agency to line organisations. In this respect, the Government may need to implement this principle using

a strong controlling mechanism, combined with policy-makers' will and commitment, as suggested by Tessema et al. (2009).

Participants from the Oman MCS reported the use of three methods to select the most suitable applicant for a job: committee checks, written tests, and interviews. Each method evaluates different competencies and knowledge. Committee checks evaluate the validity of an applicant's documents, the extent to which the applicant meets the job standards, and whether there is a match between the individual and the requirements of a particular job. The written test evaluates the basic traits and competencies necessary for civil servants, and the selection interview estimates competencies, attitudes and values. The findings on the diversity of selection methods and strategies used by the MCS were similar to those cited in the literature. This may be evidence of a desire to use more empirically predictive techniques in a national context, to avoid a situation of serious skill shortages. The approach of using a diversity of selection methods for different types of jobs, deploying different techniques, has been confirmed in a number of studies (Anderson & Witvliet, 2008; El Kot & Leat, 2008; Leat & Hsu, 2000; Louw, 2013; Sackett & Lievens, 2008). The evidence suggests that the organisation adopting such diverse approaches may be taking on board new ideas and methods and choosing combinations of selection methods due to new economic, competitive and technical environments. Louw (2013) asserts that an increasing number of organisations is using various forms of assessment methods in order to attract the right skills.

Despite the diversity of methods used by the MCS to recruit the best qualified candidates, the results show that Omani graduates lack the skills required to operate effectively in their field of specialisation. At the same time, due to the Omanisation program, the MCS is required by the Government to give priority to opportunities for the employment of Oman nationals. One of the challenges highlighted by the participants is the lack of qualified applicants in the Omani labour force; this issue poses a significant challenge for those responsible for recruitment and selection. The participants attributed the lack of suitably qualified graduates to the lack of academic preparation. These results are

consistent with previous studies (e.g. Al Balushi, 2008; Al Lamki, 1998; Al Kindi, 2007; Zerovec & Bontenbal, 2011) which confirmed a lack of synchronisation between the Omanisation program and the education system with regard to the skills development needed to fill vacancies effectively. Compatibility between the output of the educational system and labour market recruitment needs requires a continuous mechanism between all levels of government and higher education institutions, as well as clarification of the roles and functions of employees in the organisation concerned (Kottmann & Weert, 2013). Recruiting unskilled employees can have a long-term effect on the workplace and financial performance of the organisation. For example, unskilled employees will be unable to perform their job requirements effectively, which can lead to customer dissatisfaction (Sweis, Bisharat, Bisharat, & Sweis, 2014). Also, unqualified employees place pressure on training needs, use of office equipment, and salary and benefits, and these issues adversely affect the organisation's financial performance.

Moreover, the data showed that the MoE, like other government units in Oman, has always suffered from employee shortages in technical and engineering jobs which the Ministry needs to supervise and follow up school building and information technology projects. The main reason for this may be linked to the transfer of employees to the private sector, where the management style, pay and promotion policy, and career development, are more attractive to engineers among others. These results are in agreement with those obtained by Al Sawafi (2012), Swailes and Al Fahdi, (2011), and Wilkerson (2007), which found that the public sector finds it difficult to attract employees because it is unable to compete with the private sector in terms of compensation. Therefore, the Government of Oman needs to make the public sector more attractive in terms of career management, compensation, and promotion systems.

7.5 Employee Surpluses

An employee surplus exists when the supply of employees exceeds the demand. Effective HRP includes responding to any employee surplus by taking action to ensure that an

employee equilibrium is maintained. This balance is seen as an important need to be addressed by the organisation because, according to Erasmus, Swanepoel, and Schenk (2008), an employee surplus leads to low productivity, financial losses, and employee motivation problems. The methods for managing an employee surplus include reduction strategies (such as layoffs, incentives for voluntary separation, early retirement, and leave without pay). Organisations are not limited to selecting only one strategy to deal with employee surpluses; they can adopt multiple strategies to achieve the best desired outcome for the staff and the organisation. However, any strategy must comply with the relevant legislation and regulation (Cascio, 2009).

When the current study examined whether similar methods have been used in managing employee surplus in Oman's MoE, the results were surprising in that there was no action taken to deal with employees identified as surplus (either voluntarily or in a compulsory manner). The participants reported that it is not clear whether the Ministry or the governorates allows them to use alternative techniques to manage an employee surplus in some sections or departments. In addition, the HRP professionals in the MoE faced the problem of a policy void, with no policy in place that exclusively regulates transfers as a means to eliminate surplus employees:

We do not have a mechanism through which we can identify whether or not this section has employee surpluses and shortages. (Junior Manager 12)

It is difficult to transfer surplus employees from one department to another unless there is a legal framework that regulates this process. (Senior Manager 11)

Imbalances in employee allocations will contribute to reduced effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation (Anyim et al., 2012; Gimpelson et al., 2010). Gimpelson et al. (2010) argue that the least efficient and competitive organisations are those most exposed to a shortage or surplus of employees. This study found that there was an employee surplus in some departments, while other areas suffered from employee

shortages. Also, the lack of job descriptions may be the reason why the MoE and other public-sector organisations suffer from employee surpluses. According to İdrisoğlu (2014), the first step to solve employee surplus is determination of the need for employees through job analysis. Thus, the Oman MCS needs to adopt a clear policy and prepare clear job descriptions for each job in order to maintain a proper balance in the number of employees required by public-sector organisations.

On the other hand, when considering the factors affecting the incidence of labour surplus, participants claimed that a surplus employee situation may arise due to an increase in the employment of Omani nationals in the MoE, as the Government requires them to absorb Omani workers without taking into account their real needs or chosen career paths. This, in turn, has led some departments in the Ministry to have a larger number of employees than is necessary for their operations. According to İdrisoğlu (2014), the situation of surplus employees in the public sector arises from political or social causes. The results of this study provide evidence that political and legal factors are strongly associated with the actual difficulties the MoE experiences in developing its HRP practices.

7.6 Evaluation

This section focuses on exploring how HRP professionals evaluate the effectiveness of various HRP activities. It has been emphasised in the literature that it is necessary for HRP professionals to monitor progress and make mid-course corrections in order to achieve the desired outcomes (Helton & Soubik, 2004; Pynes, 2004). Therefore, a true HRP professional is responsible for evaluating the processes, and continuously improving the technical and strategic aspects of those processes. A variety of mechanisms or tools is available for use in evaluation, such as: return on investment, balanced scorecard, statistical approach, and metrics integrated with HRM. The literature considers that the ability of an organisation to deploy these tools largely depends on its level of technological sophistication, the systems that are available, the presence of qualified staff,

the criteria by which the organisation can assess the results, and the robust nature of the tools chosen (Anderson 2004; Donahue, Selden, & Ingraham, 2000b).

With respect to this, the results of the current study indicate that the MoE makes no attempt to assess the effectiveness of its HRP programs and activities. The majority of participants reported that they did not use systematic evaluation techniques comparable to those mentioned in the literature. For instance, the MoE does not evaluate its HRP through examining or studying the cost-benefits of HRP projects for top management's consideration, nor does it conduct annual reviews of its action plan. It was evident that the MoE undertook evaluation only at the 'reaction' level, mainly to deal with crises and urgent problems. This result is entirely consistent with research previously conducted on both the local and global levels (Curristine, Lonti, & Joumard, 2007; Jacobson, 2010; Rajasekar & Khan, 2013; Swailes & Al Fahdi, 2011; Vveinhardt & Papšiene, 2013). Although the NPM requires that organisations in the public sector be subjected to a rigorous process of review and evaluation (Vigoda, 2002), the adoption of HRM monitoring and evaluation systems in the public sector is still affected by a complicated scientific and practical problem of the past. This is due to the increasing complexity of organisational cultures, the changing political-administrative policy in the public sector, as well as the influence of dysfunctional factors such as nepotism and favouritism making it difficult for the HR function to carry out the necessary activities effectively (Vveinhardt & Papšiene, 2013).

Participants identified two main barriers faced when attempting to effectively evaluate the HRP function. It was reported that there were no laws or regulations that monitored the standards and achievements of HRP programs in the MoE. De Cieri and Boudreau (2003) contend that HR professionals need to adopt a systematic metrics or measurements for human resources, to achieve the human performance that will enable effective decisions to be made on the human resources function and value creation in the organisation (Peiseniece & Volkova, 2009). Therefore, a key factor for the success of any evaluation system would be the MoE's deep political commitment to that system;

otherwise, efforts will be to no avail, which in turn could result in activities with no clear benefits or outcomes for individuals or organisations. Franklin et al. (2005) argue that HR measurement is complex, difficult, and at times confusing; however, it can and must be done. Organisations must constantly undertake change, including the implementation of new initiatives in order to survive. It is essential that Oman's Ministry of Civil Law should permit a more flexible system in order to allow the MoE and other government agencies to create appropriate and effective evaluation systems.

Another barrier presented by the participants is that the MoE lacks knowledgeable HRP practitioners to perform the assessment of various HRP activities and projects. It was apparent that the HRP professionals in the MoE did not have the ability and experience needed to evaluate the effectiveness of their HRP practices. These findings corroborate the issues discussed in the literature. For instance, the findings of a study by Tootell et al. (2009) revealed that there were three obstacles to the measurement of HR effectiveness: the lack of HR experience, the lack of precision, and difficulties in measurement. Franklin et al. (2005) note that the lack of knowledge and experience related to the empirical assessment of HR work is one of the most common weaknesses of HR professionals. This implies that the MoE may have to focus on improving the quality and skill base of its HRP professionals through developing their knowledge, skills, and capabilities in order to perform effective program evaluations. Re'em (2011) argues that increasing the capacity of public-sector employees to learn and apply new knowledge regarding the measurement of HR effectiveness lies at the heart of an organisation's performance, for it is through people that services are planned and delivered. In addition, measuring HRP practices is an essential tool for organisations if they are to survive in a competitive environment (Franklin et al., 2005).

7.7 Concluding Statements on the Research Objectives

For this study, a qualitative case study approach was used to explore and enable an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under research. The use of this approach was

intended to unearth existing HRP practices in the MoE. Semi-structured interviews took place with participants who has insights into HRP from the perspective of different occupational levels within the MoE. The major findings of the study have been presented and discussed in this Chapter Seven. The section below provides an overview of the results based on the research objectives of this study as presented in Chapter One.

1) An exploration of current HRP practices in the MoE

In the interviews, participants were asked about HRP practices at both the strategic and operational levels in the MoE. In order to investigate the strategic context within which HRP was used, the first form of interview included questions exploring the HRP practices employed in strategic planning. The discussion was also expanded to include a question about strategic HR objectives in the MoE's strategic planning, and the extent to which the Ministry has a formalised and written HR strategy. Moreover, questions were asked to identify environmental scanning activities used and to clarify the role of HRP professionals in strategic planning. The second form of interview sought participants' perspectives at the operational level regarding the steps followed in HRP processes. This included techniques employed to forecast HR demand and supply, HR strategies implemented to close the gap between the current workforce and future requirements, and methods used to evaluate HRP programs and activities.

Overall findings indicated that despite the fact that the MoE has taken a number of steps to develop its HRP practices, it has not established a comprehensive HRP approach in terms of both its formulation and implementation. This conclusion is consistent with other findings of a lack of comprehensive HRP practices in the public sector context (Choudhury, 2007; Goodman et al., 2013; Jacobson, 2010; Norman, 2014; OECD, 2011). Although there was an awareness of the necessity for integrated strategic HRP, it was found that the MoE's focus was still on operational and annual requirements, with only limited attempts made to incorporate these into strategic planning efforts. The study

revealed that there is either no integration of HRP into strategic planning, or else HRP activities were carried out without consideration of strategic planning issues. Although the majority of the participants indicated that they may have some involvement in some stages of strategic planning, the study found that senior managers did not build effective partnerships with middle and junior managers in planning formulation and setting the direction for HRP activities and the achievement of strategic goals.

The study also found that HRP professionals relied heavily on traditional quantitative forecasting techniques for the professional-sector jobs. Identification of future HR supply requirements and gap analysis were not considered in the HRP processes dealing with administrative posts.

The findings from this study suggest that the MoE's rules and guidelines for employee transfer need to be regulated. In addition, it became clear that administrative jobs group lacks clear career paths and criteria for promotion, and current promotion procedures may have a negative impact on employees' productivity, thus contributing to the increase in employee turnover. The study also found that the MoE's training and development programs are ineffective because the training and development set-up suffers from the absence of strategic planning, lack of clarity in career paths, and an absence of the comprehensive data sets needed for the training and development of employees.

The results of this study also indicate that the evaluation and measurement of HRP activities and programs are processes that do not receive enough attention from the Ministry; it is strongly recommended that the Ministry monitor HRP processes regularly. Moreover, the Ministry's HRP professionals lack some of the skills and knowledge required to conduct HRP properly, including linking HRP with strategic planning, setting the right objectives, conducting environmental scanning, forecasting HR demand and supply, and evaluating the effectiveness of HRP programs and activities.

2) An exploration of the factors that may affect HRP practices in the MoE in Oman

As mentioned earlier, unexpected data emerged related to factors that impact HRP practices within and outside of the MoE. Consequently, this objective was formulated to explore factors that shape HRP in the MoE. In other words, there are internal and external organisational and contextual factors influencing the Ministry's HRP practices. In order to gain an insight into these factors, several questions were asked in the interviews, directed at two main categories of factor: in the first category, participants were asked several questions about the factors that affect HRP from inside the organisation. Questions around the second category sought information relating to factors that influence HRP from outside the organisation.

In summary, the findings of this study revealed that both internal and external factors have a significant influence on HRP practices in the MoE, and that HRP professionals should carefully consider these factors when designing the HRP practices. The study indicated that the major external factors affecting HRP practices were the economy, government policy, the legal context, and the labour market. Important internal factors, on the other hand, were the organisational structure and culture.

3) Whether current practices of HRP in the Ministry of Education in Oman considered to be good practices?

This objective was addressed by analysing the MoE's HRP practices and standards guidelines as presented in the HRP literature. The research examined in particular the evidence from the participant interviews relating to existing HRP practices in each phase, and compared them to findings in the existing literature on HRP. This research identified four major gaps between the current HRP practices in the MoE and the effective practices showcased in the literature: (1) linkage between the MoE's strategic planning and its HRP, (2) the forecasting of HR demand and supply, (3) the development and

implementation of HRP strategies, and (4) the evaluation of HRP. Within each major gap area, a number of other deficiencies were found. A more detailed analysis of these gaps is provided in Table 5 below:

Table 7.1: Gaps between Oman MoE's current HRP practices and good practices identified in the literature

Gap1:Strategic Focus	Gap2: Forecasting	Gap3: Closing the Gaps	Gap 4: Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of systematic analysis of external environmental factors. ▪ Some units in the MoE did not have a written strategic HR plan. ▪ HRP effort in the MoE concentrates only on the professional employees group. ▪ Lack of measurable and clear goals to meet the objectives set within the strategic plan. ▪ The involvement of HRP professionals as strategic partners in strategy formulation and strategic decision-making has not been achieved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tends to rely on quantitative HR forecasting for professional jobs in the MoE. ▪ Lack of utilisation of HR forecasting processes for the administrative posts. ▪ The HR forecasting effort has been largely confined to assessing the demand for employees rather than supply of HR ▪ MoE lacks information systems that can be used in various HRP activities. ▪ Some administrative posts do not have a clear job description. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance appraisal system not utilised effectively. ▪ Major criteria and system of promotion not well defined. ▪ Employee transfers and promotion procedures considered ineffective. ▪ Absence of long- term training strategies and plans. ▪ Limited link between training and organisational strategies. ▪ Lack of clarity regarding the process of training and development needs assessment. ▪ Lack of focus on leadership development ▪ Omani graduates lack the skills required to operate effectively in their field of specialisation. ▪ No action taken to deal with employees identified as surplus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Systematic evaluation techniques not comparable to those mentioned in the literature.

It was essential to explore MoE's HRP practices, not only to examine what actually occurs in HRP practices within the organisation, but also to examine what the literature states should happen, and in turn, to take appropriate action to improve that practice. The next section provides suggestions for remedying the gaps that exist between findings and suggestions in the literature and the Ministry's current HRP practice, thus addressing research question four.

7.8 What can be Done to Improve HRP Practices in the MoE?

Findings from this study suggest that the MoE has not established a comprehensive HRP approach in terms of both its formulation and implementation, especially given the respective political, cultural, and legal climates in Oman. The literature suggests that the development of an integrated set of strategies requires an accurate assessment of the HRM structure and responsibilities at the central agency (Buchanan & Jones, 2010; Rees & Smith, 2014).

7.8.1 Development the Structure of HRM in the Civil Service System

It was clear from this study that the MoE is generally effective in relation to the decentralisation of HRP practices related to professional jobs, while the hierarchical structure of HRM in the civil service system was the primary factor found to exert more restrictive control on HRP practices for the administrative job group. Public organisations are required to pay closer attention to their HRM policies, which constitute a key element in shifting the public sector towards better performance, as emphasised in the NPM process (French & Goodman, 2012; Goodman et al., 2013). It has been recommended that this reorientation should take place in public-sector organisations by establishing various reforms and initiatives for HRM systems, and that much greater priority should be given to improving the work environment. Flexible HRM policies and strategies are needed to ensure the improved efficiency and effectiveness of public-sector organisations in a rapidly changing environment (Chapter Three, section 3.6, p.138). Thus, Oman's

MCS needs to allow the MoE and other public-sector organisation some degree of flexibility in order to reduce the impact of centralisation on HRM practice, including HRP, selection and job requirement processes, employee development, and performance management systems, and the centralised civil service HRIS. Since the study was concerned with HRP practices, in this context, the MCS needs to articulate more clearly the agreed principles that can be used for HRP; the organisations' practices should be homogeneous, and a general, overall vision for the improvement of HRP in the public service is required. The MCS can decide what policies and practices should remain centralised and what should be decentralised to the MoE. This also requires the MCS to define the core elements that need to be standardised across the public service and which elements need to be more flexible. Under such a system, the MCS would be responsible for setting targets, policy and strategic frameworks, and for giving direction to the MoE. This strategy could be helpful in identifying each individual organisation's priorities, taking into account each one's specific requirements and future challenges by introducing more systematic and long-term national strategic planning.

7.8.2 Integration of HRP into Strategic Planning

Another significant area for HRP reform in the MCS is the strategic integration of HRP into strategic planning. Based on various models discussed in the in chapter three (Sinclair, Pennsylvania, and basic HRP), effective practice suggests that the integration of HRP with strategic planning is the key to successful HRP (Anyim et al., 2012; Doherty et al., 2009; Lam & Schaubroeck 1998). It enables the organisation to determine the level and the quality of human resources needed to achieve its business objectives. The MCS must allow the MoE to participate in formulating HRM policies and integrated HRP as tools for use within its individual operating and agenda-setting structure. Once HRP strategies that support business strategies have been adopted by government and driven by the MCS, the MoE and other institutions will be encouraged and persuaded to work with the new system. A commitment to HRP as a critical element in the strategic planning

process requires a review of this trend in terms of the current organisational structure, culture, rule and regulation.

According to Mills' (2001) model, discussed in Chapter Two, truly sophisticated HRP requires that business strategy and HRP be integrated. To this end, senior management in should acknowledge and embed HRP into the strategic framework of the organisation. Therefore, senior management in the MoE needs to reflect the value of HRP in all processes of strategic planning, starting with defining the Ministry's philosophy, systematically scanning the environmental conditions, identifying the organisation's strengths and weaknesses, and developing clear strategic objectives. As several authors emphasise, a close partnership between the senior management and line management in the HRP process is a powerful force in shaping the survival and growth of organisations in a competitive environment (Lawler & Boudreau, 2009; Oladipo & Abdulkadir, 2011). Recognition of this view means that senior management should be in a stronger position to convince line managers and other employees of the strategic and value-added role of HRP. However, HRP professionals can help senior management achieve strategic goals by serving as the experts in HRP activities. For instance, HRP professionals can help senior management establish an HR strategy by identifying HR requirements based on the organisation strategy.

To forge the linkage between HRP and core strategic planning, HRP managers in Oman's MoE should consider adopting strategies to improve their relationships with line management. It is important to ensure that the HRP managers have adequate tools to add momentum to, or to legitimise, the HRP junior manager's role in the strategic planning process (Lam & Schaubroeck 1998; Oladipo & Abdulkadir, 2011). In addition, the HRP middle manager's expectations of HRP junior managers need to be clarified at different levels and in various areas. HRP managers need to provide line managers with increased flexibility to conduct and develop HRP activities, with support and guidance. HRP junior managers should be given more flexibility to undertake HRP activities, which means they must be prepared to take on a greater role in enhancing strategic partnerships between

senior managers and HRP employees and in making decisions at the policy formulation level.

Effective practice suggests that HR objectives, policies, and plans must be in accordance with the Government's overall goals (Chan & Burgess, 2010; Cotten, 2007). It would be beneficial if the MCS were to link HRP to specific, well-defined strategic objectives, including the imposition of deadlines that are clear and measurable. All strategic HR objectives must be specific enough to enable the HRP department to perform different HR activities to accomplish identified strategic objectives. With clear goals, HRP professionals in the MoE will be engaged in strategic rather than administrative roles. A written strategic plan is also needed to provide a road map for keeping MoE leaders and those who implement the strategic plan focused, and committed to the vision of the Government. Furthermore, such a written plan will act as a guideline for making strategic decisions related to several HRP activities, facilitate decision-making, and help ensure that work continues along the correct path (Sharma, 2009; Thite & Kavanagh, 2009).

7.8.3 Involvement of HRP Professionals in the Strategic Planning

In order to improve the status and influence of HRP in the MoE's strategic planning process, HRP middle managers should be involved in the process of strategic planning. If the top management and senior managers have an opportunity to establish relationships with each other, the chances of effective integration and value creation can be further increased. In this role, HRP middle managers need to invest more energy and resources into developing their knowledge about the business of the MoE, competitors, costs, profit indicators and stakeholders. On the other hand, HRP middle managers should seize the opportunity to explain the strategic benefits flowing from the HRP department's involvement in strategic planning issues. HRP middle managers can also play a significant role in convincing those in the top management team of the need to align the Ministry's changing values and standards with the NPM environment. With this new emphasis on a two-way flow of communication, the participation of middle HRP

managers in the MoE's top management team could provide an important channel to create shared expectations, promote transparency, and report progress.

This study found that the roles and background of HRP professionals in different job categories within the MoE reinforce the lack of strategic focus in HRP. In a phase of transition to strategic HRM, HRP professionals need to evaluate their skills and competencies in relation to their roles, and determine what they lack. The literature recommends that training employees or providing practical experience is the best way to build a variety of competencies, skills, and abilities required for effective HR professionals (Lawler & Boudreau, 2009; Oladipo & Abdulkadir, 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to consider incorporating HRP skills in all planning packages for HRP professionals. They can attend training programs or courses sponsored by professional associations. Based on the study results, HRP professionals need to develop their skills and competencies in five main areas:

1. Linking HRP with strategic planning
2. Setting the right objectives
3. Conducting environmental scanning
4. Forecasting HR demand and supply
5. Evaluation of the effectiveness of HR programs and activities.

An important finding was that the administrative jobs group in the MoE is a neglected area in terms of strategic HRP. It is therefore recommended that equal consideration must be given to all levels and categories of employees. Adequate and proper HRP should be in place to promote the productivity and performance of the MoE. HRP must be directed towards developing an integrated set of policies and programs to achieve effectiveness both among the employees and within the organisation.

7.8.4 Combination of Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in the Process of HR Forecasting

With respect to HR forecasting, the study indicated that quantitative forecasting methods are commonly employed for MoE's professional jobs sector. The literature recommends both a quantitative and qualitative forecast of human resources when employing HR forecasting techniques (Agrawal et al., 2013; Bhattacharyya, 2002). Thus, HRP professionals should combine the two HR forecasting approaches to complement each other and provide more comprehensive planning. Qualitative forecasting is essential to recognise what new skills may be required due to changes in key influencing factors such as businesses, markets, technology, organisation size, and competitive conditions.

7.8.5 Development of an Effective HRIS

The study confirmed that the MoE did not maintain adequate workforce datasets to support HRP activities. The literature emphasises that in addition to the use of conceptual and analytical techniques, HR forecasts require access to accurate and comprehensive information (Tripathi, 2010). The MoE needs to develop sufficient data to facilitate HRP activities both qualitative and quantitative information must be available to HRP professionals and it must be timely and accurate. Currently, it is difficult to undertake quantitative HR forecasting for the administrative posts, due to a centralised civil service human resources information system and the lack of a job description. For the former, there is a strong need to build a strong human resource information system that can be utilised in different HRP requirement. There is a need to establish a comprehensive central workforce database to identify gaps between the trends relating to the future of the organisation and capability requirements, and to elevate the HR function to a more strategic level. This must be supported by using planning software that can create sophisticated data systems and create cost efficiencies and effective deployment of human resources. For the latter, clarity of job description is the basis for effective HR forecasting. Job description provides valuable information for forecasting the number and types of

employees needed and other HRM functions. The job description needs to be a written and documented for all job categories by clarifying the requirements that a person needs in order to achieve the duties and responsibilities set forth in the job description (Lunenborg, 2012; Omoankhanlen, 2013).

Besides establishing the need for a sufficient HR database for quantitative HR forecasting, the findings of the study also revealed that the MoE uses unsophisticated forecasting methods which suggests that the MoE needs to develop and maintain qualified employees who are able to use advanced forecasting methods throughout the HRP process. Successful application and implementation of HR forecasting techniques will result from training sessions for HRP professionals. By attending specialised training courses and programs, HRP professionals will be able to enhance their knowledge of these forecasting techniques.

On the other hand, building a solid database is a crucial step to deal with the shortage of skills or competencies of applicants in the Omani labour force. To that end, the MoE must first collect data about its workforce to assist assessment of its current status and estimation of future requirements. Secondly, public-sector organisations and higher education institutions have to work together to produce graduates with the competencies demanded by those organisations. Thirdly, all universities and colleges have to consider some degree of curricular reform to meet the real workforce needs in public sector organisations. Many studies emphasise that effective communication and coordination between higher education institutions and public sector organisations are required at all times, to ensure that educational or training qualifications are relevant to the current needs of public sector organisations (Al Lamki 1998 & 2000; Al Maskery 1992). Monitoring and evaluation should take place at different stages, to assist in mapping directions for the future in terms of continuation, expansion or modification of various vocational education and training programs.

7.8.6 Formulating a Clear and Transparent Policy for Employee Selection, Promotion, Performance Appraisal and Transfer

In relation to internal promotions, the MCS should have clearly defined policies and procedures for promotion in public sector organisations, to ensure that the selection of candidates for vacancies is conducted within clear and agreed guidelines. The MCS also needs to expand its efforts in the promotion process to ensure that the process is fair and equitable, and that it results in the best outcome. In addition, the MoE should strive to pave the way for more effective selection processes which are fair to all applicants and take into consideration the legal requirements. The various assessment criteria such as qualifications, performance, and experience must be considered as important means of identifying eligible applicants for internal promotion (Bossaert, 2005). The MoE requires a performance appraisal system that differentiates between high and low performers. HRP professionals can play a significant role in drawing attention to ways in which people may be promoted more effectively in order to enhance the achievement of strategic goals (Ganesan & Weitz, 1996; Seibert et al., 2013). HRP professionals should estimate the vacancies that may be available and make plans to ensure that the MoE has the right number and kind of people, at the right place and time.

With respect to external recruitment and selection strategies, the study indicates that the MCS uses a variety of selection methods for different types of jobs, but the civil service needs to overcome certain barriers that hinder the process. For example, to deal with the transfer of technical and engineering employees, the civil service needs to improve the attractiveness of employment in public sector organisations by developing working terms and conditions. Wages are a crucial factor that has a significant and positive impact on the recruitment and retention of staff. It is therefore vital that the MCS develop remuneration systems that include elements based on performance or results.

The study of transfer procedures in the MoE brought to light the importance of this option as a significant strategy to address employee shortages as well as being a motivator for

employees. The study showed there is a need to create further policies and procedures to regulate the internal transfer process. These should pay attention to the interest of the organisation first. Second, the transfer policy should be flexible enough to allow for some individual treatment of employees. Another procedural requirement is that there must be clarity about who will be transferred and where (Coetzee & Mbanze, 2014; Krishna & Aquinas, 2004). The MoE must set guidelines that cover in detail the procedures regarding the internal transfer process, so that greater transparency, fairness, and re-training are provided to employees that are transferred.

7.8.7 Development of an Effective Training and Development Program

It was noted that senior management in the MoE is well aware of the importance and necessity of training and programs, but the strategies the Ministry has adopted still fail to deliver a strategic and systematic approach towards these programs. Thus, in order to follow a strategic training approach, the MoE needs to develop a comprehensive long-range training plan. The plan should have measurable development objectives and an action plan, which communicates the organisation's strategy and goals (Au et al., 2008; Ogedegbe, 2014). A long-term human resources training strategy is needed to increase the MoE's attractiveness as an employer in order to compete in a competitive talent market. The study also recommends incorporating career planning in training and development planning. A career development policy is in place requiring clearly defined career paths. It is therefore essential that the MCS participates in the development of career paths. This requires clearly defining the job in terms of its purposes, key functions and required tasks and competencies: this clarity will help to specify the kinds of training programs that need to be implemented.

In order to provide an effective training and development plan, a systematic needs analysis at the individual, job, and organisational level is recommended (Brown, 2002; Goldstein, 1993). Careful needs assessment is important to ensure that a selected trainer will have the required skills and competencies; this in turn facilitates a comprehensive

HR development program in terms of understanding the skills and training needed for particular jobs, thereby creating an opportunity for the HRD department to review roles and policies in training and development programs.

According to the NPM approach (Hood, 1991), HR practiced should focus on professionalising and strengthening the role of the leadership in the public sector. In this respect, the training and development strategy in the MoE should include leadership training programs that cultivate employees for more key positions. Good leadership is a key element of an effective strategy to develop government organisations. In addition, ensuring policy provisions that cover the leadership development programs can be an effective way of ensuring that a more structured approach is adopted (Uzondu, 2013).

7.8.8 Creation of a Clear and defined policy for Managing Surplus Employees

An important key finding is that policies and guidelines for dealing with an oversupply of employees should be developed through the MCS as a matter of priority in general, and in the MoE in particular. These should be designed to determine appropriate employee size and establish processes for dealing with surplus employee situations in the departments. The identification of an employee surplus requires a selection process to be conducted among employees; thus clear criteria and conditions must be established (Cascio, 2009). The MCS needs to address the paucity of laws regulating employee surpluses in public-sector organisations, and to develop a legal framework that exclusively regulates employee surplus within the organisation itself.

7.8.9 Establishment of a well-defined policy for the evaluation of HRP practices

The results of this study suggest that the process of monitoring and evaluating HRP activities and programs is an area that requires attention and development from the MCS. All HRP models mentioned in the literature emphasise that HRP practices should be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis to give a clear picture of their progress over

time (Helton & Soubik, 2004; Pynes, 2004). Thus, a well-defined policy for the evaluation of HRP practices is needed, as this can play a significant role in achieving the desired outcomes. The MCS should set up a system to review and evaluate the accomplishment of all HRP activities and programs in public sector organisations. This system should compel public sector organisations to evaluate their HRP programs. To this end, it would be very useful if public sector organisations had evaluation data to provide indicators and constructive feedback that would show the extent of HRP's contribution to the achievement of the organisation's strategic goals. The training of HRP professionals to understand the steps necessary to create an evaluation system is also strongly recommended (Franklin et al., 2005; Tootell et al., 2009).

7.6.1 Towards a Model for HRP in the MoE

Based on previous HRP models presented in chapter three (Sinclair, Pennsylvania, and basic HRP), the results presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, a new model is suggested as a result of this study. This model attempts to conceptualise a formal HRP process. The model consists of four different phases, first goal setting and strategic planning (stage 1); second, forecasting (stage 2); third, development and implementation of HR programs (stage 3); and finally, evaluation, monitoring, and adjustment of the plan (stage 4). The model presented in Figure 7.1 takes into account both the findings of previous research and the results of this study.

Stage One: Goal Setting and Strategic Planning

The first stage of the proposed model of HRP involves the strategic direction of the organisation. The employees who are involved in HRP processes must demonstrate an understanding of the organisation and its HR strategic plan, its vision, mission, objectives, the timeframe of the plan, and the way environmental factors influence the processes. Specific emphasis needs to be placed on the organisation's ability to scan the external environment. The information on internal and external environmental trends and their

likely impacts will then be used to review the strategy and set the strategic objectives. It is important that senior managers or top management in the organisation ensure that HRP is a part of the organisation's strategic planning (see 3.7.1.). This can be achieved through the development of a close relationship with the HRP department. Communication between HRP professionals and senior managers is crucial in all stages of the process, including data acquisition and analysis, selection of strategies for change, implementation of strategies, and evaluation of the plan's impacts.

Stage Two: Forecasting HR Demand and Supply

The primary goal of this phase is to predict areas in the organisation where there are or will be labour shortages or surpluses. Effective forecasting requires the use of data and information that is easily utilised and understood. This can be further achieved by focusing on information such as the knowledge, skills and abilities of the current employees, and some basic demographics. The acquisition of reliable and relevant sources of information is essential to maximise the success of the forecasting stage. Also necessary is the availability of a functional HRIS that supports HR forecasting. Forecasting on both the demand and supply side must be implemented by qualitative and quantitative methods (see section 8.2.1) to achieve appropriate and acceptable results.

Stage Three: Development and Implementation of HR Programs

Once gaps between demand and supply are identified, the senior management team and the HRP manager in the MoE should review possible alternative recruitment strategies for redressing labour shortages and surpluses. In choosing and executing strategies, it is essential to consider issues such as time, resources (staff, money, technology, etc.), and alignment with strategic goals. There is no specific source that can be deemed 'the best', and appropriate approaches for an organisation depend on organisational needs, features of the vacancies, the size, image, and budget of the company, and the labour force supply. In the case of employee surpluses, HRP professionals can decide to recruit new

employees, offer incentives to postpone retirement, re-hire retirees, attempt to reduce staff turnover, allow overtime work for the current staff, subcontract work out, hire temporary staff, and/or redesign job processes. When surpluses occur, HRP professionals can freeze the hiring of new employees, offer incentives for early retirement, reduce working hours, provide leave of absence for voluntary service, lay workers off, reduce outsourced work, or increase employee training (education, outside training, and mentoring). It is very important in this case that the organisation regularly monitors progress on implementation to ensure the organisation has avoided any potential employee shortages or surpluses.

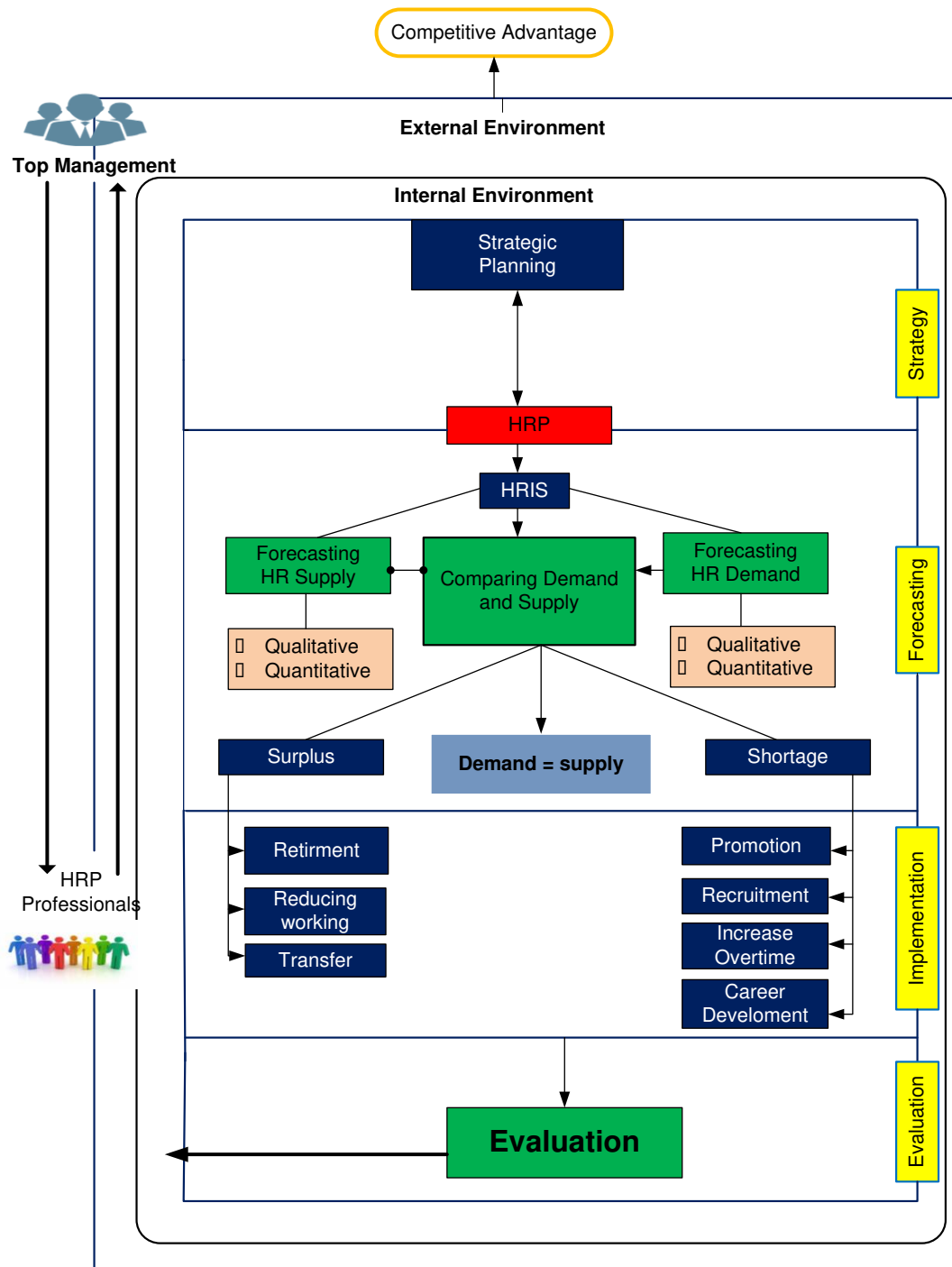
Stage Four: Evaluate, Monitor and Adjust Plan

The final phase in the HRP model covers evaluation and revision. This step is intended to create confidence in the HR planners' commitment to the efficiency of the organisation's strategy. It is also important to provide an early warning system that informs HRP professionals when revisions to their HR programs are needed. Public-sector organisations should establish a formal evaluation and review of the results of HRP processes, to make adjustments according to the evolving strategic planning direction. In addition, assessing the effectiveness of ongoing programs requires performance data that use computerised and statistical analysis. In this phase, working through the results of the evaluation and developing an action plan to address the highlighted issues should be processes conducted through close collaboration between HRP professionals and senior managers. Some important criteria and standards to consider in the evaluation of HRP activities and programs include:

- Actual HR plans against recruitment requirements
- Productivity levels against established goals
- Actual personnel flows (e.g., turnover, absenteeism, promotions, etc.) against desired rates
- Functional personnel programs implemented against planned programs

- Employee and program costs against budgeted amounts (Erasmus, Swanepoel, & Schenk, 2005, p. 180).

Figure 7.1 : Model of HRP processes in public-sector organisation in developing countries



The proposed model in this study highlights the importance of adopting HRP practices within a sociocultural context. The model suggests that any effort to develop HRP practices in developing countries would do well to consider better integration of the main

characteristics of these countries. In this model, HRP practices are likely to be influenced by internal and external factors as well as the culture and context of the country in question. These factors must be taken into account in order to increase HRP effectiveness. This model emphasises the provision of opportunities for establishing effective strategic partnerships between senior/top management and HRP professionals. In addition, this model assumes that organisational effectiveness in public sector organisations can be achieved through better utilisation of HRP, which can constitute a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

7.9 Summary

This chapter has addressed the third research question relating to whether current HRP practices in the MoE are good practices or not. Major findings have been highlighted and have been analysed from the perspective of previous and related studies. The chapter has discussed the way HRP is practised as a strategic function to achieve the strategic objectives of the MoE and has covered different HR forecasting techniques used for the HRP process in the organisation. Furthermore, strategies for dealing with employee surplus and shortages have been highlighted and discussed. This chapter has also presented additional insights and discussion on different methodologies used by the MoE for evaluation of the HRP process. In terms of contributions to practice, the findings of this chapter show there are some gaps currently between how the MoE conducts HRP and how it should be conducted. Therefore, strategies and recommendations have been suggested for addressing these gaps. Finally, a theoretical model has been developed for conducting customised HRP processes in public sector organisations, such as Oman's MoE.

The next chapter provides conclusions, the implications of the study, and its limitations, as well as suggestions for further research.

8 Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Implications

In the current business climate, managers in organisations, regardless of their nature and type, aim to plan and fully utilise their human resources in order to seek a competitive advantage. To ensure that an organisation is able to perform well in a competitive environment, the recognition of HRP as an influential tool is essential. The study reported in this thesis was conducted at a time when many organisations in the public sector in the Middle East and beyond had begun to realise that the importance and need for HRP is greater than ever. As discussed in the preceding chapters, it is evident that most of the existing research related to HRP has been undertaken in the private sector, with only limited research focused on the public sector. Consequently, there is no clear picture of the adoption and utilisation of HRP tools and related practices in various organisation types in the public sector. This is particularly so in the Sultanate of Oman.

The purpose of this research was to explore HRP practices in the MoE in the Sultanate of Oman. The study sought to identify the practices in use, and the factors that affect those practices. Using effective HRP practices described in the literature as a basis, the study explored current HRP practices in the MoE and the development of these practices in the context of Oman. This chapter draws on the major findings, which were based on the study's research questions and objectives, to identify the contribution of this thesis to theory and practice, and discusses what potential changes to its HRP practices could be considered by the MoE. The chapter presents the limitations of the study, and identifies opportunities for further research.

8.1 Key Findings

The main objective of this research was to investigate how the MoE in Oman implements HRP practices in order to identify key areas requiring improvement. A qualitative case study involving 32 participants working at the strategic and operational levels of the MoE was undertaken to gain a greater insight into the Ministry's HRP practices. Analysis of

the data from interviews answered the first research question in Section 1.3, Chapter One: How does the MoE in Oman currently undertake HRP?

The first step taken to address this research question was to investigate the MoE's current HRP practices within the strategic planning process. It was found that the MoE employs a SWOT analysis method to examine the internal and external environments. All interview participants in the MoE confirmed that SWOT analysis was an effective practice used in the HRP process. The study indicated, however, that this process was not conducted in the desired manner due to the lack of available information sources of skilled and experienced personnel. The study revealed that, although the MoE has a written strategic plan, this plan is not available to all Ministry units. There were indications that the strategic plan does not provide measurable and specified objectives which can then be translated into action to be implemented by the HRD department. Despite the efforts made by the MoE to encourage HRP professionals to take a position on some aspects of the strategic planning process, the study revealed that the MoE still had some way to go in achieving a satisfactory level of HRP involvement. There was also evidence of a lack of alignment between HRP and the Ministry's strategic plan.

In the second stage, the Ministry's current HRP practices within the operational process were investigated. With regard to forecasting, the findings suggested that the MoE used traditional forecasting methods to predict the expected number of employees in the future. Quantitative techniques are the most common forecasting methods used by the MoE's HRP professionals. However, the Ministry did not undertake forecasting of the number of employees specifically required to meet future demand. As a result, the failure to utilise effective methods of forecasting supply makes it difficult to identify the gap between supply and demand. The findings revealed two disparate actions with respect to employee surplus and shortage. It was apparent that some strategies, such as promotion, internal transfer and external recruitment, were used to address employee shortages. However, employee surplus in various sections of the MoE was not addressed by the Ministry's HRP professionals. This study also revealed that inadequate skills among the MoE's HRP

professionals, as well as a lack of policies, have led to a lack of systematic evaluation of HRP programs and activities.

The second research question dealt with the factors that may affect the HRP practices within the MoE. The study found that HRP in the MoE is influenced by external and internal factors. The external factors affecting HRP practices were government policies, legal context, labour market and the economy. The internal factors included organisational structure and culture.

The third research question was aimed at addressing whether current HRP practices in the MoE are effective. Comparative analysis of the MoE's current practice and practices with found in the literature review identified several gaps between the two. These gap areas included strategic focus, forecasting of HR supply and demand, implementation of HRP strategies, and evaluation of HRP.

Finally, the gaps that were identified within the MoE context provided an incentive for achieving the aim specified in the fourth research question of the study, which was to develop comprehensive and integrated reform proposals for developing HRP practices in Oman's MoE in particular, and in public sector organisations in general. The first reform identified was the creation of a flexible organisational structure that would support the effective integration of HRP into strategic planning, and the establishment of strong communication between top management and HRP professionals. Moreover, the study highlighted the role that top management should play in supporting and improving HRP, as well as the need to develop the skills and competencies of HRP professionals in order to implement effective HRP. The reforms also included functions and activities related to staffing practices such as recruitment and selection, promotion, performance appraisal, and training and development. The proposal for reforms concluded by emphasising that HRP practices should be reviewed and evaluated to ensure that they contribute to the achievement of strategic objectives.

8.2 Contribution of the Study: Implications for Theory and Practice

8.2.1 Implications for Theory

This study can be considered as a starting point for developing new directions regarding HRP practice in Oman. One contribution of this study is its focus on HRP in the public sector. While significant literature already exists on HRP practices in the private sector, there is a dearth of information in the literature regarding HRP practice in the public sector. The study attempts to redress this gap by providing a special and unique understanding of HRP practices in developing countries in general and in the Sultanate of Oman in particular. Its contribution can be seen as specific to Oman's MoE. This contribution may also be appropriate and useful to the public sector in Oman generally, and beyond. As mentioned previously, this may in part be due to all HRM activities in Oman being governed by the same civil service rules and regulations, and the fact that they share many similar cultural and contextual characteristics. Most significantly, perhaps, the study provides insight into HRP practices from the multiple perspectives of HRP professionals working at different levels of an organisation. It makes a significant contribution to knowledge regarding the use of HRP, through multiple lenses, and by identifying the way in which HRP operates and is managed effectively. Most significantly, the study adds to the understanding of how to implement HRP as part of the strategic planning process, and it provides valuable information relevant to forecasting HR supply and demand, recruitment strategies, and the evaluation of the HRP process within public sector organisations.

In addition, this study enhances understanding of the factors affecting HRP practices in public sector organisations. It outlines the key environmental factors that shape HRP in Oman, including external factors specific to the Omani context, as well as the internal factors and the needs that arise from these. The study also recognises the need to incorporate these factors into the development of HRP practices in Oman.

A significant contribution resulting from the study is the development of an HRP model that suits the MoE and other public sector organisations. The model consists of four stages, including goal setting and strategic planning, forecasting HR supply and demand, development and implementation of HR programs, and evaluation and mentoring of HR programs. An important first step in this HRP model is to provide a process where the strategic planning, vision, mission and objectives of an organisation can be understood by HRP professionals. This step also includes strong communication between HRP professionals and senior managers so that HRP can be incorporated into the strategic plan. Both internal and external factors must be considered in this stage, in order to establish appropriate strategic HR plans. The next phase of HRP involves improved forecasting of supply and demand to meet the organisation's objectives. This process should be supported via effective HRIS and implemented by using two different methods: quantitative and qualitative. Stage three is the process of identifying the gaps between HR supply and HR demand, and developing a variety of recruitment strategies for closing the gaps. These strategies must take into account some important issues such as time, resources, budget, and vacancies, and alignment with the strategic goals of an organisation. Stage four involves a systematic review and evaluation of HRP activities and programs in order to identify whether adjustments need to be made to develop the new directional focus of the organisation.

Although competitive advantage has received increasing attention in the literature on the public sector, and the use of HRM has been identified as an important and potentially successful tool, little consideration has been given to how HRP is employed in the public sector and how the public sector can effectively utilise HRP for the achievement of competitive advantage. Thus, this study begins to address this issue by using RBV and NPM theory to explain how HRP practices are currently recognised and used in public sector organisations.

Although discussion about competitive advantage in the extant literature is restricted to private organisations, it seems also to be appropriate to public organisations, in terms of

its potential to improve organisational performance. The study sought to use RBV by reporting on how HRP has been put into practice to improve organisational performance. By gathering and analysing data from people responsible for performing HRP in public organisations, the study revealed HRP to be an important organisational resource that could improve organisational performance. The results of the research showed that having HRP in place is conducive to improving the competitiveness of the organisation. This could be achieved through the integration of HRP with an organisation's strategy, participation of HRP professionals in the organisation's executive management team, a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in the process of HR forecasting, the undertaking of several recruitment strategies, and enhancing the quality of employees through training and development. The study found, however, that HRP professionals in public organisations face difficulties when trying to use HRP in ways that would achieve competitive advantage through human resources, and also maximise the performance of the organisation. The study found that HRP professionals lack the knowledge and skills required for identifying, enabling and managing the use of HRP for competitive purposes. For example, the study found that HRP professionals need strong strategic and operational skills to accomplish organisational goals. This calls for researchers and those interested in the theory to put their efforts into investigating the different skills that HR professionals in public organisations need to help their organisations gain a competitive advantage.

This study also drew on the utility of NPM to investigate HRP in the public sector. Deploying the principles of NPM, the study has been able to show how people working at both the strategic and operational levels of public organisations adopt, develop and manage new HRP strategies to continually improve organisational performance. The theory was helpful to develop the effective HRP practices that are required for raising public sector performance levels. Although the Government of Oman has attempted to implement some reforms in the public sector, consistent with the literature, the evidence indicates that political and social contexts remain the main challenge for the effective implementation of HRP leading to the successful implementation of NPM. For example,

the study showed that due to the government's desire to solve the problems of inequality and nepotism, the recruitment system was changed from a decentralised to a centralised system, which is counterproductive to the implementation of NPM. Thus, the study highlights the need for a deep understanding of developing countries' contexts and cultural dimensions, and how these relate to HRP. This is necessary to develop alternative HRP practices based on developing countries' values. It is essential to review regulations, the economy, government policy, legal context, and the labour market when it comes to examining the application of Western-style management in Middle East. This is because regulations and policies have significant impact on HRP practices. The Middle East is characterised by a high degree of centralisation and political power, and it is hard to change their mindset about rules they used to work with or introduce new rules or methods of doing the work. This constitutes a significant challenge when it comes to implementing Western theory in such an environment. There is an opportunity for management scholars to assist countries seeking to achieve the intended results of NPM by investigating and developing strategies to reduce the impact of sociocultural factors on public organisations and attempting to make these strategies consistent with developing countries' cultural values. This, in turn, is likely to lead to public sector organisations implementing innovative HRP practices in order to produce successful performance.

On the other hand, the study revealed that there had been a failure to apply certain laws relating to some HRP activities, which will hinder the public sector organisations' ability to implement tasks efficiently and effectively. This means that in both legal and political terms, public sector organisations in Oman are not well prepared to embrace and implement NPM. Thus, before NPM reforms can be introduced in developing countries, collaboration between researchers and practitioners is needed to build a supportive context to enable a smoother transition through the process of change. Furthermore, amendments to both legislation and policies within the public sector in developing countries are required in order to bring about change and enhance the application of NPM. In doing this, it is also essential to take into account the local conditions, experience,

knowledge of a country and its context, and to provide opportunity and encouragement for new reforms.

8.2.2 Implications for Practice

This study has highlighted the practical implications of HRP in the MoE in Oman and has enabled identification of key recommendations for the public sector within Oman and developing countries.

Initially, coherent initiatives and reforms need to be established, to bring about an HRM system that will provide an improved workforce as well as flexible HR policies and strategies. This will support the development of HRP practices within public sector organisations. The study's recommendations in Chapter Seven included reforms that would deregulate and decentralise HRM structures and processes. Major changes proposed in this area have included an increased focus on cultural change, and the regulation of HRM in public sector organisations. The distribution of power and politics prevailing in these organisations should also be properly studied.

In addition, establishing a clear government vision together with strategic objectives is a major strategy that needs greater emphasis for HRP to be effective within the MoE. Thus, a framework that includes a clear roadmap to achieve certain goals across the public sector should be implemented. As suggested in the discussion in section 7.8, Chapter Seven, this requires the fullest possible support by top management and decisionmakers, in order to align HR policies and practices with overall strategies.

The need for the development of the skills and competencies of HR professionals is a key outcome of the study. This includes their ability to link HRP with the strategic goals of the organisation, conduct environmental scanning in order to provide accurate and dependable forecasting of HR supply and demand, and to evaluate the effectiveness of HRP programs. Managers in public organisations should give high priority to developing

strategies and action for improving the skills of HRP professionals. As discussed in Chapter Seven, providing practical experience and training programs is the best way to achieve this. Managers can ensure that HRP professionals have these skills by emphasising that the training outcomes will be used on the job, and by giving HRP professionals the opportunity to use their new skills and to make decisions regarding HRP based on their training.

Another important recommendation derived from the study is the need for the greater engagement of HRP professionals in the strategic process, as well as for a coherent HRIS. This can be achieved by enacting legislation and policies that support aligning the organisation's HRP activities and programs with the organisation's mission, and strategic goals, and allowing HRP professionals to be strategic partners with key organisational leaders. The study also suggests that succession planning, a fair equitable promotion process, and job analysis should be performed. Finally, HR strategies and practices need to be changed to suit the organisation's strategy.

The results of this study strongly point to the need for the public sector in the Sultanate of Oman, and more importantly the MoE, to conduct a systematic evaluation of HRP activities and programs. As was discussed in Chapter Seven, HR managers working in the public sector may need to create a central evaluation system which will enable public organisations to obtain a clear picture of how HRP practices contribute to more efficient and effective achievement of desired outputs.

8.3 Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This exploratory study has contributed to providing a picture of how HRP is being applied by significant and large public organisations in Oman, however, as with all studies, there are limitations.

The scope of this study is limited to HRP departments in the MoE; thus, generalisability to other public-sector organisations may be problematic, as the findings may not be representative of all types of public-sector agencies. It is clear that the use of qualitative data analysis alone is insufficient for a thorough exploration of the topic of HRP practices. Future research would benefit from adopting alternate research approaches such as: longitudinal studies, mixed method approaches, and triangulation to name a few, to provide a more comprehensive picture of public sector organisations.

Due to certain limitations associated with the use of purely qualitative research, it may be desirable in future to use a broader public sector organisation sample to offer additional insights. Efforts should be made to collect data not only from a single organisation, but also from other organisations, to provide a broader insight into what public sector organisations need in order to develop their HRP practices. Future research should continue to investigate other questions not addressed in this study, such as:

- a. Are public sector organisations in the same environment using the same HRP practices?
- b. Do public sector organisations from different environments utilise common HRP practices?
- c. Is there consistency among the elements of the HRP process?

The links between organisation strategy and HRP practices in public sector organisations have not been fully explored in this study as this topic was not within its scope, however, this is deemed to be the most important area for further investigation. Questions such as how public sector organisations can better link HRP and strategic planning, how they can better align HRP with other HRM functions, and how organisational strategy can be translated into HR programs and practices, are in need of further investigation.

Many studies have suggested that the design and application of HRP is dependent on external and internal organisational factors. As this (case) study is unique, being conducted in Oman explicitly to examine the impact of internal and external factors on HRP

practices in the public service, a consideration of all potential factors that could affect HRP was not possible given the time constraints and scope of the research. Therefore, more empirical research should be conducted investigating a broader range of environmental factors, using a larger sampling process to validate the factors identified in this study, and to identify the relationships between these factors and HRP practices.

By combining the review of the literature with the findings of this study it was possible to design a model for an HRP process to be implemented in the MoE. However, in order to establish that this model is fit for purpose or whether it needs additional conditions or elements, it is recommended that it be tested and its feasibility evaluated with a larger sample that includes other organisations in the public sector in Oman, the GCC, and beyond.

The design of this study was such that it did not capture scale items relevant to other types of organisations in the public sector in Oman. A comparative study can be extended to organisations that are providers of public service (e.g. health and education), and those that have already been privatised (e.g. banking, insurance, tourism and electricity) to identify any difference in of HRP practices. This would contribute to a better understanding of the HRP practices in the Middle East in general, the GCC and in Oman in particular.

The relationship between HRP and organisational performance in public sector organisations was not in scope and was therefore not addressed in this study. As little research has been conducted to explore the link between HRP and organisational performance in Oman, further research is needed to include a wider cross-section of public sector organisations so that generalisations with regard to the influence of HRP practices on organisational performance can be made. For example, further research might investigate the impact of HRP practices on organisational outcomes such as absenteeism, turnover, productivity, and organisational commitment.

Although the current study provided valuable information relevant to recruitment strategies within the MoE, it is important to continue the analysis, by highlighting the challenges facing HR professionals and their role in designing appropriate strategies to fill vacancies as and when required in an organisation.

Further empirical research is necessary to test the employers' attitudes toward employee's retention in general and women in particular.

A more detailed investigation is needed to unearth the types of challenges faced by higher educational institutions and universities when attempting to match the provision of education and training and public sector organisations' requirements.

8.4 The Thesis in Brief: Closing Comments

This study represents an exploratory and qualitative investigation of how the MoE conducts HRP to assess the effectiveness of its HRP practices and provide recommendations for improvement. The study presents key findings from in-depth interviews conducted with a range of HRP professionals at the central and line department levels of the MoE, and is one of the first detailed studies to explore the ambiguity of HRP in public-sector organisations in Oman. The study has provided a preliminary understanding of the context for the MoE's use of HRP in Oman.

The study both raises and answers questions pertaining to HRP practices at both the strategic and operational levels of the MoE. The findings help to identify some of the factors influencing HRP practices in the MoE and provide recommendations for the further development and implementation of HRP practices in the MoE. The outcome of this research together with past research on HRP has led to the design of a model for HRP in public sector that provides practical steps for the successful development and implementation of HRP. This model covers the most representative stages of HRP practicea suggested by the literature.

It was apparent from the case study research that Oman's MoE has taken important steps to develop its HRP, including setting a strategic plan, conducting some activities related to environmental scanning using SWOT analysis, and involving HRP professionals in some stages of strategic planning. However, the implementation of HRP in the MoE shows that HRP is not comprehensive, nor strategically applied in the MoE at this stage. Rather, the practices are currently based on annual requirements; therefore, the opportunities for enhancing the organisation's ability to achieve its long-term objectives are still untapped in the MoE. In terms of factors affecting HRP practices, the study found that CSL, government policy and organisational structure and culture represented major factors affecting the development of HRP.

This study is significant as it has identified key characteristics of HRP practices in Oman's MoE. It represents a possible guide for other studies related to the potential for HRP in public sector organisations in developing countries, especially in Oman.

It is also possible that the NPM and RBV theories would be useful for conducting more research into the implementation of HRP, in the first instance to obtain more basic knowledge about the phenomenon. The study has taken advantage of its investigation of HRP in public sector organisations to provide a better understanding of the conditions under which NPM and RBV theory can be applied in developing countries. Findings from the study suggest that having HRP in place is conducive to improving the competitiveness of public organisations, however, attention should also be paid to the development of the skills and competencies of HRP professionals, including the skills needed to explore the ways in which HRP is used to achieve competitive advantage. In addition, in order to facilitate the effective adoption and application of NPM reforms, public sector organisations need to be well prepared in terms of culture, policy, rules and regulation.

This study has laid the groundwork and unearthed some preliminary findings relating to HRP practices in an underresearched context. Clearly, there is more work to be done to

ensure organisations realise their strategic intent through effective HR practices, including HRP.

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Appendix 1: Consent Form



Title of the Study: Human Resource Planning Practices: An Exploratory Study in the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman

I have been informed of and understand the purposes of the interview. I understand the nature and intent of this research. I also understand that my participation in this interview is completely voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving any reason. A decision to withdraw from the interview will not affect my academic status. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study or the interview. All personal information provided by myself in this interview will remain confidential and will not be identified in any publication or presentation arising from the interview.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this interview and I have received a copy of interview Information sheet. I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me in this study.

Name of Participant _____

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator: Adnan. Al wahshi

Email: aalwahsh@our.ecu.edu.au or adnan.w@moe.om

Tel: +61 451199986 (Australia)

Tel: +968 99414277 (Oman)

Signature: _____

Appendix 2 Information Sheet to Participate in a Case Study



Information Sheet to Participate in a Case Study

My name is Adnan Al Wahshi, I am a PhD student at Edith Cowan University in Perth WA, and I am undertaking a project investigating Human Resource Planning (HRP) practices in Ministry of Education in Oman in order to improve those practices. The researcher is working in the Ministry of Education as a Head of Quality Insurance. Prior to this role, he worked as the Head of Human Resource Planning within the Ministry. The Ministry provides an opportunity for the researcher to get a PhD in order to contribute in improving and developing the practices in Human Resource planning within the department.

This project has been approved by ECU's Human Research Ethics Committee. I'm writing to request your participation in a research study as you one of the HRP members in Ministry of Education. Your selection for participation in this case study will be solely due to your extended experience and work within the HRP sector in the Ministry of Education in Oman. Your contribution in this study will be through experience, roles, and tasks in the domain of HRP. This will allow the researcher to explore the salient practices of HRP in the Ministry of Education. Also, it is a good opportunity for researcher to draw a clear picture of how can the Ministry of education conducts the HRP practices in effective ways. Your contribution towards this research will be most valuable for this research and thus will be highly appreciated.

Please read the information below before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary and will remain entirely anonymous and confidential. If you decide to participate, you will be invited to a face-to-face interview by the researcher. This interview can be conducted at your convenience, and should take approximately 30-50 minutes.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me by email.

Title of the Study:

Human Resource Planning Practices: An Exploratory Study in the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman

Principal Investigator:

The research study is being conducted by Al wahshi, a PhD student in the Management School, Edith Cowan University, under the primary supervision of Associate Professor Maryam Omari and Professor Rowena Barrett.

For more details or queries please contact us on the following address:

Researcher: Adnan. Al wahshi

Email: aalwahsh@our.ecu.edu.au or adnan.w@moe.om

Tel: +61 451199986 (Australia)

Tel: +968 99414277 (Oman)

Supervisor:

Associate Professor Maryam Omari
 Telephone: (61 8) 9370 6014
 Email: m.omari @ ecu.edu.au

Professor Rowena Barrett
 Facsimile: (61 8) 6304 5988
 Email: r.barrett @ ecu.edu.au

Purpose of the Study:

The study aims To investigate the current human resource planning (HRP) practices in the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the Sultanate of Oman in order to recommend how those practices can be further developed.

Description of the Study:

The main purpose of this study is to explore the current HRP practices in the Ministry of Education in Oman and to recommend how those practices can be further developed.

The primary goals of this case study are to:

- investigate what practices are being used in the Ministry of Education in Oman
- seek to analyse these practices both in terms of the current situation in Oman and also in comparison to what is being used globally
- Provide a model so that the effective practices of HRP can be deployed in the Ministry of Education in Oman.

Also the interview will include questions about what is the state of current HRP practices and how can the MoE apply effective HRP practices.

Risks or Discomforts:

There are no known harm including physical, emotional, or psychological associated with your participation in this research. You have the right if you decide not to take part or to stop taking part in this study anytime. Refusal to participate in this study will in no way affect in your work status.

Benefits of the Study:

This research is expected to conclude with benefit to you, your department and organisation, and society. The result of this study will help you to, recognise common practices that are being applied globally and their potential application at the local level and to provide you with the opportunity to learn more about new methods and strategies in HRP. For example, gaining knowledge regarding communicating plans that are needed for HRP implementation, supply/demand analysis and gap analysis, HRP data, integrating HRP into organisation's strategic plan, and evaluating HRP. The expected results from this study will provide a model of effective HRP practices that can be deployed in developing and improving the current HRP practices in your department. It will create awareness regarding the importance of HRP and will help public organisations achieve their objectives. Further empirical studies on HRP can add to the creation of scholarly knowledge in this arena by probing deeper into the nature of HRP in the public sector in Oman, thereby contributing to the few studies in this area. In addition, this study is significant in that it will provide a framework effective practice of HRP in the public sector of Oman.

Confidentiality:

The identity of participants will be completely confidential while the researcher and supervisors will only have access to the collected data. Under no circumstances will your name or personal identifying characteristics be included in the dissertation or any other report or presentation resulting from this case study. Information from this case study will be kept strictly confidential. Data obtained from the case will be assigned a code number

to conceal the participants' identity and this information will be stored securely at Edith Cowan University, Faculty of Business and Law for five years after the study is completed. Your data will be used for the study purposes only, and you will not be individually identifiable in any reports or publications. The data may be preserved for future use in other research project.

Human Research Ethics Committee

This survey has received the approval of Human Research and Ethics Committee Edith Cowan University (Approval number is 9303). For further information about the ethics of this research, please contact the Human Research and Ethics Committee (secretary) in the following address:

Office of Research & Innovation, Edith Cowan University, 270 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup, WA 6027 research.ethics@ecu.edu.au Tel: +61 08 6304 5122 | Fax: +61 08 6304 5044 | CRICOS IPC 00279.

Thank you for your contribution in sharing your experiences and opinions

Appendix 3 Supporting letters from the Supervisors

JOONDALUP CAMPUS

270 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup
Western Australia 6107
Telephone 134 328
Facsimile (08) 9300 1111

ABN 54 361 485 361

CRICOS IPC 00279B

6 March 2013

To Whom It May Concern,

**RE : Adnan Al-Wahshi
Student Number 10273253**

Mr Adnan Al-Wahshi is a PhD student in the School of Management.

He is at the data collecting stage and is supervised by Associate Professor Maryam Omari and Professor Rowena Barrett.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rowena Barrett".

**Rowena Barrett
Head, School of Management
Faculty of Business & Law
Edith Cowan University**

Appendix 4 Supporting letters from Consulate general of the Sultanate of Oman
Melbourne- Australia

Consulate General of
The Sultanate of Oman
Melbourne - Australia



القنصلية العامة
لسلطنة عمان
مليبورن - استراليا

الرقم (ق.ع.ق/ ٥٩٢/ ٢٠١٣)
التاريخ ٢٦/١١/٢٠١٣م

شهادة الى من يهمة الامر

الموضوع : الفاضل/ عدنان بن سيف الوحشي

بالإشارة الى رسالة جامعة ايدس كوان في أستراليا بشأن المذكور أعلاه والمبتعث
للحصول على درجة الدكتوراة من الجامعة المشار إليها والتي تفيد بحاجة الفاضل الى إجراء عدد
من المقابلات المرتبطة ببحث الدكتوراة الخاص به مع بعض المسؤولين في عدد من الوزارات
والجهات الحكومية بالسلطنة.

وعليه فان القنصلية ترجو التكرم بالايعاز لمن يلزم نحو تسهيل مهمة المذكور البحثية

لانجاز برنامجه الدراسي.

شاكرين لكم حسن تعاونكم.

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام،

د.حمد بن علي العلوي
القنصل العام







Appendix 5: Rationale for Participant Selection




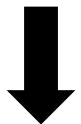
Category No	Location	Participants	Rationale
1	Ministry of Education (Central)	Employees from senior management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To clarify the alignment that can potentially exist between HRP and organisation strategy. To recognise the strategic goals of human resources. To understand how HRP undertakes and attains the MoE's strategic goals. To identify the factors that impact HRP in the MoE.
2		Employees from middle management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To describe their role in HRP process. To establish this category's view on the steps involved in the HRP process. To explain the importance of their level and role in facilitating the HRP process in the MoE.
3		Employees at the operational level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reveal their views on forecasting HR requirements and availability. To collect views on how databases can assist HRP processes. To establish this category's perceptions of what MoE can do when either a surplus or shortage of workers exists.
4	Ministry of Education (governorates)	Employees from senior management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To describe their role in HRP process. To identify the method of alignment between the MoE's plan and plans of the directorates in the HR plan.
5		Employees from middle management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To describe their role in the HRP process. To discover this category's experience of differences between the Ministry and other directorates in the HRP processes.
6		Employees at the operational level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reveal their views on forecasting HR requirements and availability. To determine their views on how databases can assist HRP processes. To establish this category's perceptions of what MoE can do when either a surplus or shortage of workers exists.
7	Ministry of Civil Service	Employees from senior management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify the role played by the MCS for the planning of human resources in the MoE. To explore their view regarding the process that MCS undertakes to attract employees at the right time, in sufficient numbers and with appropriate qualifications for jobs. To explore the category's role in improving HRP practices.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To seek their views on the application of the principles of NPM relating to human resources planning.
8		Employees from middle management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To describe the various job analysis methods used for jobs in the MoE • To identify who participates in job analysis and the nature of the promotion policy • To describe the recruitment process as part of the HRP strategy. • To explain the various methods of selecting employees for new position.

Appendix 6: Interview Guide for Strategic Planning Staff

<p>Introductory explanation</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>Interviewee characteristics & background</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>How does Ministry of Education in Oman undertake HRP?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>Are current HRP good practices? If not, why not?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>How can it be improved?</p>	<p>Participant understanding of study and how the interviews were structured.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- What is your position? 2- What has been the extent of your involvement with HRP in the MoE, other public sector? 3- What extent does the organisational strategy guide HRP? 4- What is the role of HRP within the organisation's planning strategy? What are the expected outcomes? 5- Describe the process and key activities are used to conduct HRP in MoE? 6- What internal factors influence HRP in the organisation? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a-In what ways do they affect the HRP? 7- What external factors influence HRP in the organisation? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. In what ways do they affect the HRP? 8- What strategies and techniques are used in HRP? 9- How does senior management support the HRP? 10- Is there a linkage between the HRP strategy and the Strategic planning (SP)? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How closely do HRP people work with SP people? 11- Does the MoE try to measure the outcomes of HRP? If so how? 12- How frequently, if at all, do you review and make changes to HRP? 13- What are some of the changes you have made to your strategic plan and why? 14- Do you think it is possible to measure the outcomes of HRP? If yes how? <p>Give a list of global HRP best practices to the interviewee and ask:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15- Which of these practices does the MoE use or not use and Why or why not? 16- Which of these practices would like MoE to develop? 17- What benefits would you expect from each? 18- Are there any other HRP practices you would like to see MoE develop? And what benefits would you expect from these? 19- What advice would you give to MoE on conducting and improving HRP in the organisation?
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Appendix 7: Interview Guide for Operational Staff

<p>Introductory explanation</p>  <p>Interviewee characteristics & background</p>  <p>How does Ministry of Education in Oman undertake HRP?</p>  <p>Are current HRP good practices? If not, why not?</p>  <p>How can it be improved?</p>	<p>Participant understanding of study and how the interview was structured.</p> <p>1-What is your position?</p> <p>2- What has been the extent of your involvement with HRP in the MoE or other public sector agencies?</p> <p>3-What extent does the organisational strategy guide HRP?</p> <p>4- What information is used for HRP scanning workforce needs? How they are used?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">a. How does your organisation identify the skills that will be needed?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">b. How does your organisation identify the number of employees that will be needed?</p> <p>5.How your organisation estimate the available supply of employees?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">a. What data is used for analysing internal HR supply?</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">b. What data is used for analysing external HR supply?</p> <p>6. What the methods or techniques are used to determine gaps and surpluses?</p> <p>7.Describe the strategies used in closing the gap between the present and future needs?</p> <p>8- Do you think is it possible to measure the outcome of HRP?</p> <p>9 -How frequently, if at all, do you review and make changes to HRP?</p> <p>10-Do you think it is it possible to measure the outcome of HRP? If so how?</p> <p>11-How frequently, if at all, do you review and make changes to HRP?</p> <p>12-What are some of the changes you have made to your strategic plan and why?</p> <p>13-How does MoE currently measure the outcomes of HRP?</p> <p>Give a list of global HRP best practices and ask:</p> <p>14- Which of these practices does the MoE use or not use and Why or why not?</p> <p>15-Which of these practices would you like the MoE to develop?</p> <p>What benefits would you expect from each?</p> <p>16-Are there any other HRP practices you would like to see MoE develop? And what benefits would you expect from these?</p> <p>17-What advice would you give to the MoE on conducting and improving HRP in the organisation?</p>
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