

THE **SABPP**™

# FACT SHEET

NOVEMBER 2022 · NUMBER 2022/11

## FUTURE SKILLS FOR HR PROFESSIONALS

[www.sabpp.co.za](http://www.sabpp.co.za)



**SABPP**™  
SA BOARD FOR  
PEOPLE PRACTICES  
*Setting HR standards*

FUTURE WORLD OF WORK SERIES: EVOLVING DEFINITION OF EMPLOYEES | FUTURE WORLD OF WORK SERIES: FUTURE READINESS, EMPLOYABILITY, AND ACTIVISM | FUTURE WORLD OF WORK SERIES: FUTURE HUMAN LIFESPAN AND THE EMPLOYEE LIFECYCLE | FUTURE WORLD OF WORK SERIES: KEY THEMES AND QUESTIONS FOR HR 4.0 | UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING STIGMA DURING THE PANDEMIC | HYBRID TEAMS: GROUP AND RELATED INDIVIDUAL DYNAMICS | RETURN TO THE OFFICE DEBATE: CONTEXTS, DILEMMAS, AND PARADOXES | DEVELOPMENTS IN TALENT MANAGEMENT: THE INTERNAL TALENT MARKETPLACE | NET - ZERO: THE ROLE OF HR | UNDERSTANDING AND MAPPING ORGANISATIONAL NETWORKS | SNAPSHOT OF LABOUR RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

# INTRODUCTION

There is a well-known saying that “the more things change, the more things stay the same”. As we perceive so many aspects of life today changing rapidly, some things do not change. The purpose of the HR work we do could be one of those things. For the SABPP “**Our key focus is on adding value and contributing to the sustainability of organisations.**”<sup>1</sup> In a very similar vein, the CIPD’s slogan is “**Championing better work and working lives. By improving practices in people and organisation development, we’re helping to ensure that work benefits individuals, businesses, economies and society**”<sup>2</sup>.

The People Factor Strategy of the SABPP (illustrated below) shows how the profession centers itself around people in organisations.



Even though so much has changed, and will continue to change, in how organisations find relevance in the economy, how work is organised, and how people contribute to organisations, the central role of the HR profession in contributing to the sustainability of organisations does not change. Indeed, this role has assumed even more importance recently, as discussed by Josh Bersin **3**:

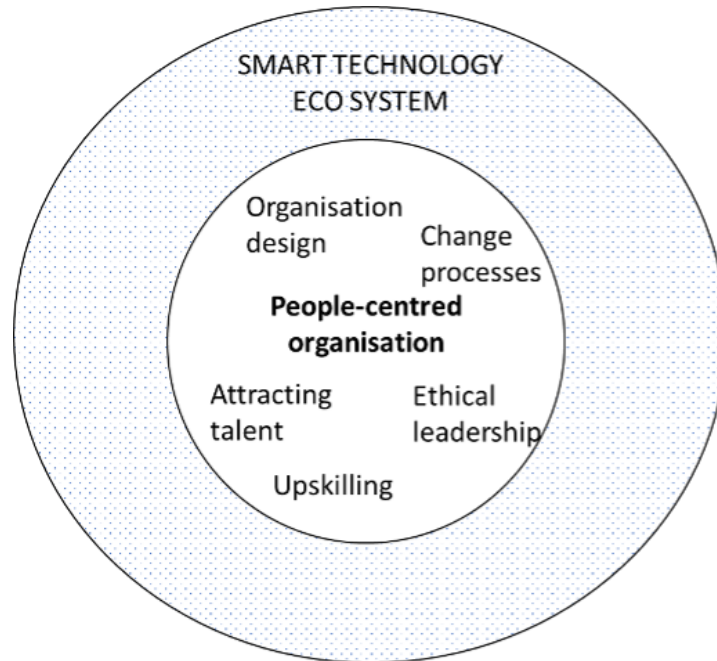
“The human resources profession has risen to a heroic role in business. Not only are HR professionals helping their companies deal with the pandemic, but they are also working to mitigate workforce stress and taking leading roles in workplace transformation, fostering greater diversity and inclusion, and redefining the role and nature of leadership. Throughout the last few years, HR has become more digital, more agile, and ever-more focused on the role of data, analytics, and automation at work.”

1. Vision and Mission (sabpp.co.za)

2. CIPD The Professional Body for Human Resources and People Development

3. Skills of The Future: Introducing The Global HR Capability Project – JOSH BERSIN

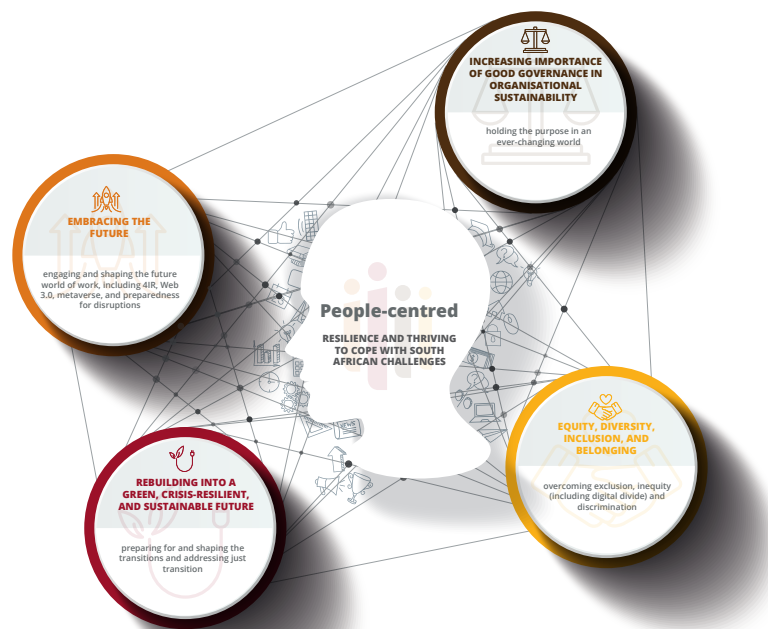
In a recent article,<sup>4</sup> Johan Steyn explained how the 'smart technology eco-system' constructed by an organisation is enabled, or brought to life, by the 'softer' issues, as illustrated below:



Source: P Abbott, derived from the Johan Steyn article

This diagram underlines the importance of the role of the HR profession in delivering the processes which will create this people-centered organisation in the world of smart technology.

As explained in the October 2022 Fact Sheet, contextual changes can be understood in a framework of four themes:



4. JOHAN STEYN: Let robots do the chores and people do the work (businesslive.co.za)



So, if some things change and others do not, have the skills required of HR practitioners changed and how will we equip ourselves for the future? What will these strategic themes mean for skills within the HR profession?

This Fact Sheet will examine several formulations of 'future skills' and will offer a summary of what are the skills that are likely to be important for HR practitioners to develop and continue to develop.

**INTRODUCTION**

**GENERIC SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE**

**MODELS OF HR "FUTURE SKILLS"**

**SABPP MODELS**

**CONCLUSION**

\*\*Navigate the menu by clicking on desired heading.





# GENERIC SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

The World Economic Forum produced the following Top 10 Skills of 2025 in its Future of Jobs Report 2020<sup>5</sup>:



## Top 10 skills of 2025

### Type of skill

- Problem-solving
- Self-management
- Working with people
- Technology use and development

-  Analytical thinking and innovation
-  Active learning and learning strategies
-  Complex problem-solving
-  Critical thinking and analysis
-  Creativity, originality and initiative
-  Leadership and social influence
-  Technology use, monitoring and control
-  Technology design and programming
-  Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility
-  Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation

Source: Future of Jobs Report 2020, World Economic Forum.

A comparison of this list to HR competencies already included in most HR competency models, including the SABPP'S National HR Competency Model 2013, shows that there is nothing new in this list. (See subsequent sections of this Fact Sheet for a comparison of the SABPP model to other depictions of future skills specifically for HR practitioners.)

<sup>5</sup> The Future of Jobs Report 2020 | World Economic Forum (weforum.org)

# MODELS OF HR “FUTURE SKILLS”

## SKILLS, COMPETENCIES AND CAPABILITIES

How does the notion of ‘future skills’ fit with the concept of ‘competencies’?

Comparison of models of competencies is complicated by the various approaches used. Even the use of the term ‘competency’ varies between models, and one finds many debates on the differentiation between ‘competency’ and ‘competence’. Traditionally, a competency is regarded as an output of the right combination of skills, knowledge and abilities. Theories and approaches to the definition of competencies were discussed in a 2013 SABPP Fact Sheet<sup>6</sup> in which Terry Meyer’s definition is quoted: “the integration of knowledge, skill and value orientation, demonstrated to a defined standard in a specific context”.

The concept of ‘capability’, used by Bersin in his Global HR Capability Model cited in the introduction, is explained as a ‘set of skills’, as shown in the text box below

“There are many competency models and frameworks which try to define the skills of HR. But as we talk with hundreds of leaders and study what really makes high-performing companies work, we found that at its core, what HR professionals need are a set of strategic capabilities to do their jobs.

We define a “capability” as a business-oriented set of skills, which can be described in an easy-to-understand phrase. These capabilities, which are broader and deeper than skills, can be tested, observed, and proven in the workplace.

An example of a capability is building an employment brand. This is a complex area of expertise, one which requires an understanding of marketing, data analysis, storytelling, and the role of culture, leadership, and communications to succeed. We know that there are many skills that make someone an expert at employment brand; additionally, extensive experience and business perspective are required. In our Global HR Capability Model, a capability of building an employment brand is made up of many skills and is ultimately measured by experience in driving employment brand in real-world situations.

**Professional success is based on four things:**

**Skills:** What technical, professional, or managerial skills do you have? We define skills as granular areas of expertise on specific tasks, systems, or practices.

**Experiences:** What level of experience do you have designing, implementing, measuring, and improving various HR and talent-related solutions? Have you implemented these solutions in small companies? Large companies? Globally? In what industries? Under what business conditions?

**Relationships:** Over the years of your career, whom have you met who can advise, help, or coach you? How quickly can you identify vendors or technology partners to assist? Do you know solution providers, consultants, or others who can quickly lend expertise when needed?

**Context:** Are you aware of the social, political, economic, or country-specific issues at play? All HR solutions exist in a world of local, ever-changing social context, so context is also key to professional success.”

6. SABPP FACT SHEET NUMBER 4 (mycpd.co.za)

DEPICTIONS OF HR 'FUTURE SKILLS'

The following table lists various concepts that the authors/issuing bodies believe are relevant to the future practice of HRM. As can be seen, sometimes the descriptions are roles, sometimes practices, sometimes skills and sometimes competencies. We have grouped these according to the SABPP contextual strategic themes so that we can later draw out some summaries.

People Strategy Theme				
People-Centred: Resilience and thriving to cope with South African challenges				
	Governance	New Future	Diversity	Sustainability
<b>WEF Future of Jobs: Top skills for 2025</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership and social influence</li> <li>Technology use, monitoring and control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active learning and learning strategies</li> <li>Analytical thinking and innovation</li> <li>Creativity, originality and initiative</li> <li>Technology design and programming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active learning and learning strategies</li> <li>Creativity, originality and initiative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critical thinking and analysis</li> <li>Complex problem-solving</li> <li>Creativity, originality and initiative</li> <li>Leadership and social influence</li> <li>Technology use, monitoring and control</li> </ul>
<b>McKinsey's Future Proof Citizen Skills (Dondi, Klier, Panier, &amp; Schubert)<sup>7</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital citizenship (digital ethics)</li> <li>Mobilising systems (crafting an inspiring vision)</li> <li>Communication (asking the right questions, synthesising messages, storytelling)</li> <li>Critical thinking (seeking relevant information)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mental flexibility (adopting a different perspective, translating knowledge to different contexts, creativity and innovation, adaptability, ability to learn)</li> <li>Critical thinking (seeking relevant information, understanding biases)</li> <li>Communication (asking the right questions)</li> <li>Entrepreneurship (courage and risk-taking)</li> <li>Understanding digital systems</li> <li>Digital fluency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing relationships (empathy, inspiring trust, humility, sociability)</li> <li>Mobilising systems (role modelling, win-win negotiations, organisational awareness)</li> <li>Teamwork effectiveness (fostering inclusiveness, motivating different personalities, resolving conflicts, collaboration, coaching, empowering)</li> <li>Self-awareness and self-management</li> <li>Communication (active listening)</li> <li>Critical thinking (understanding biases)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critical thinking (structured problem solving, logical reasoning, seeking relevant information)</li> <li>Planning and ways of working (Work-plan development, time management and prioritisation, agile thinking)</li> <li>Mental flexibility (adaptability, translating knowledge to different contexts)</li> <li>Communication (asking the right questions, synthesising messages, storytelling)</li> <li>Mobilising systems (organisational awareness)</li> <li>Team effectiveness (collaboration)</li> <li>Understanding digital systems and citizenship</li> </ul>

<sup>7</sup> Dondi, M., Klier, J., Panier, F. & Schubert, J. (2021). Defining the skills citizens will need in the future world of work. McKinsey.com. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/defining-the-skills-citizenswill-need-in-the-future-world-of-work>



People Strategy Theme				
People-Centred: Resilience and thriving to cope with South African challenges				
	Governance	New Future	Diversity	Sustainability
<b>WEF HR 4.0 practices</b> <sup>8</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a human-centric, holistic and purposeful employee experience</li> <li>• Rethink and invest in employee well-being</li> <li>• Foster a culture of lifelong learning and shared responsibility</li> <li>• Use new technologies and data to develop new human capital metrics</li> <li>• Create external reporting on the value of and value added by human capital</li> <li>• Include all forms of human capital within the organization's metrics</li> <li>• Engage with stakeholders and knowledge sources beyond the organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embrace and explain ambiguity</li> <li>• Build a talent ecosystem encompassing alternative work models and employ different methods of finding needed skills</li> <li>• Use technology to engage employees</li> <li>• Unlock the learning mix that is right for the organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactively manage diversity in alignment with business growth</li> <li>• Embed D&amp;I into concrete steps in culture and process</li> <li>• Build a talent ecosystem encompassing alternative work models and employ different methods of finding needed skills</li> <li>• Include all forms of human capital within the organisation's metrics</li> <li>• Use data analytics rigorously to measure diversity and assess inclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combine operational management, technology integration and people management skills</li> <li>• Build strategies for job reinvention, reskilling and redeployment of talent</li> <li>• Track and measure skills in your organisation</li> <li>• Orchestrate a combination of actions to address the impact of automation</li> <li>• Foster a culture of lifelong learning and shared responsibility</li> <li>• Use new technologies and data to develop new human capital metrics</li> </ul>
<b>WEF HR4.0 roles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Relevance and Purpose</li> <li>• Employee Experience Specialist; Bot Monitor</li> <li>• Head of Insights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital HR Lead</li> <li>• Head of Work Reinvention and Reskilling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural Ambassador</li> <li>• HR Data Scientist</li> <li>• Diversity &amp; Inclusion Officer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Insights</li> <li>• HR Data Scientist</li> </ul>
<b>Dave Ulrich (RBL Group) Competency Model</b> <sup>9</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fosters collaboration (builds relationships)</li> <li>• Accelerates business (influences the business, gets the right things done)</li> <li>• Mobilises Information (guides social agenda)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accelerates business (generates competitive insights, drives agility)</li> <li>• Advances Human Capability (elevates talent)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advances Human Capability (champions diversity, equity and inclusion)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accelerates business (generates competitive insights, drives agility)</li> <li>• Advances Human Capability (delivers HR solutions)</li> <li>• Simplifies complexity (thinks critically, harnesses uncertainty)</li> <li>• Mobilises Information (leverages information and technology, guides social agenda)</li> </ul>

8. WEF. (2019). HR 4.0: Shaping people strategies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Retrieved from [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_NES\\_Whitepaper\\_HR4.0.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_NES_Whitepaper_HR4.0.pdf)

9. Ulrich, D. (2022). New HRCS 8 Competency Model Focuses on Simplifying Complexity.

People Strategy Theme				
People-Centred: Resilience and thriving to cope with South African challenges				
Governance	New Future	Diversity	Sustainability	
<b>CIPD Profession Map</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Champion better work and working lives</li> <li>• Ethical practice and behaviour</li> <li>• Professional courage to speak-up and influence</li> <li>• Creating a shared purpose and enabling people development, voice and well-being</li> <li>• Understanding the range of people practices needed to be an effective people professional Employee experience; Creating a holistic approach around engagement and well-being</li> <li>• Ensuring the relationship between an organisation and its people is managed through transparent practices and relevant law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating curiosity and making the most of opportunities to learn, improve and innovate</li> <li>• Understanding the digital environment and how to apply technology in a people context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working and collaborating across boundaries, effectively and inclusively, to achieve positive outcomes</li> <li>• Understanding people's behaviour and creating the right organisation culture</li> <li>• Creating inclusive cultures where individuals can thrive</li> <li>• Understanding how to effectively enable change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding your organisation, the commercial context and the wider world of work</li> <li>• Commercial drive and creating value</li> <li>• Asking questions and evaluating evidence and ideas, to create insight and understand the whole</li> <li>• Making effective and pragmatic decisions or choices based on the specific situation or context</li> <li>• Using analytics to inform organisation decision making; Understanding analytics and its use in creating insight and measuring value</li> <li>• Understanding how to effectively enable change</li> <li>• Creating remuneration and benefits approaches which are aligned to current and future organisation needs and market conditions</li> </ul>



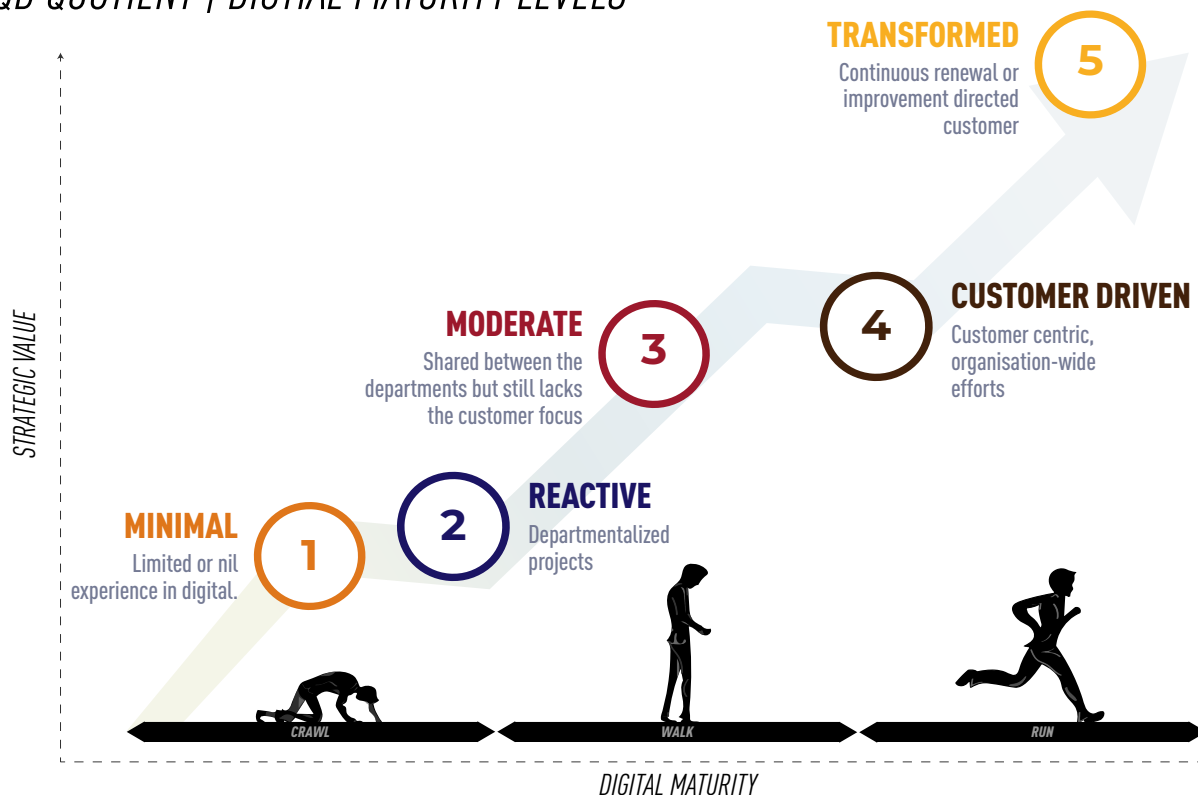
## HR TECHNOLOGY SKILLS – THE DEBATE

There has been a debate amongst HR thinkers as to whether HR professionals should develop technology skills themselves, or whether the HR structure should be designed to bring in experts from other fields such as data scientists, business analysts, and coders/app designers. In a PhD study at the University of Johannesburg, Dr Renjini Joseph assisted in resolving this debate. The study identified three broad groups of technology-related competencies for entry-level HR professionals<sup>10</sup>. She concluded that HR professionals need certain competencies in order to deliver a strategic value add to the organisation, but that these do not include coding, data engineering and such technical skills, which can be obtained through outsourcing of projects, collaboration with the IT department, or inclusion of experts into the HR department. These groups include:

- 'technologising' employee processes,
- processing data expertly and
- translating external trends.

Another factor determining what level and type of HR technology skills are required is the digital maturity of the organisation itself – to what extent it has incorporated advanced technology into its work processes and what demands are placed on non-IT staff in the organisation. One example of stages of digital maturity is shown below<sup>11</sup>. At the more advanced levels, it is likely that HR practitioners would be expected to operate sophisticated, integrated HR processes and innovate continuously. At the first level, basic computer skills, preferably using productivity tools such as a task manager, calendar app and note-taker would be helpful.

### QD QUOTIENT / DIGITAL MATURITY LEVELS



A big advantage of learning coding/programming is the development of analytical skills, which can then be used in a very wide range of contexts. For an interesting discussion of the difference between coding and programming, see [Coding Vs Programming For Beginners: What Is The Difference? \(goodcore.co.uk\)](#). This blog also gives tips on free online courses to learn these skills.

10. Information technology competencies for entry-level human resource strategic partners | Joseph | SA Journal of Human Resource Management (sajhrm.co.za)

11. (46) How to conduct your DIGITAL MATURITY ASSESSMENT - YouTube



## HR 'FUTURE SKILLS' AND STRATEGIC THEMES

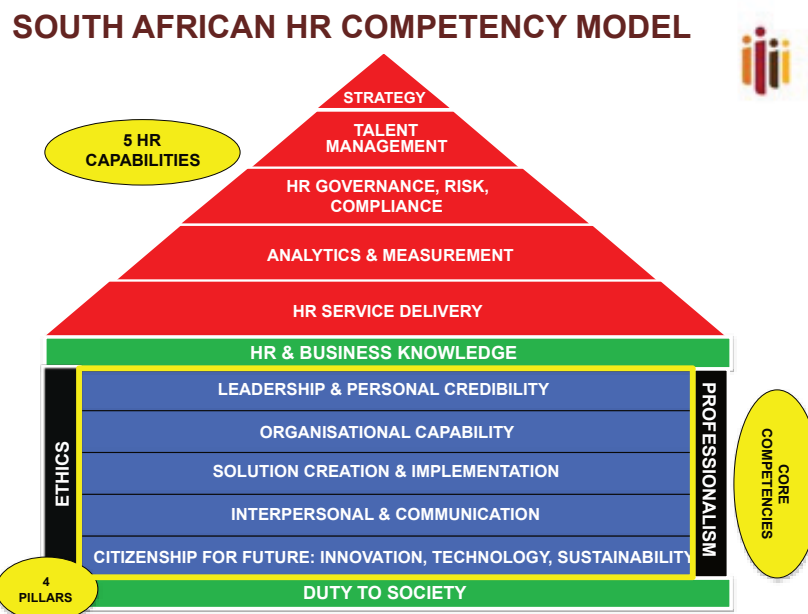
The table below outlines what the strategic themes that were presented in the October 2022 Fact Sheet mean for skills within the HR profession<sup>12</sup>

<p><b>1. Governance</b> Increasing importance of good governance in organisational sustainability (holding the purpose in an ever-changing world)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal and professional credibility – engaging and influencing stakeholders to do the 'right thing'</li> <li>• Ethical practice</li> <li>• Resilience to assert the people-centred agenda and follow through with it</li> <li>• Relationship management – working with diverse stakeholders to find common ground and purpose</li> <li>• Communication – listening and sending the right message to diverse audiences and creating inspiring stories</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. New future</b> Embracing the future (PESTLE forces shaping the future world of work, including 4IR, Web 3.0, metaverse, and pandemic)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curiosity to generate future scenarios and innovations</li> <li>• Critical thinking to ask relevant questions and identify key capabilities for the organisation for the present and future</li> <li>• Analytical thinking – understanding the gap between present and future and breaking it into elements to find solutions</li> <li>• Creativity and agility to craft new solutions</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Diversity</b> Equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging. Overcoming exclusion, inequity (including digital divide) and discrimination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using analytics to identify and overcome barriers</li> <li>• Cultural awareness to identify biases in self and others</li> <li>• Empathy to understand others, particularly those feeling excluded and marginalised</li> <li>• Change leadership to drive equity, inclusion and belonging</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Sustainability</b> Rebuilding into a green, crisis-resilient, and sustainable future</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bigger picture strategic understanding – of the business, the sector and the socio-economic context</li> <li>• Analytical thinking – understanding the gap between present and future and breaking it into elements to find solutions</li> <li>• Crafting an appropriate employee experience which supports individual resilience and well-being</li> <li>• Problem-solving complex system dynamics and various levels of issues</li> </ul>



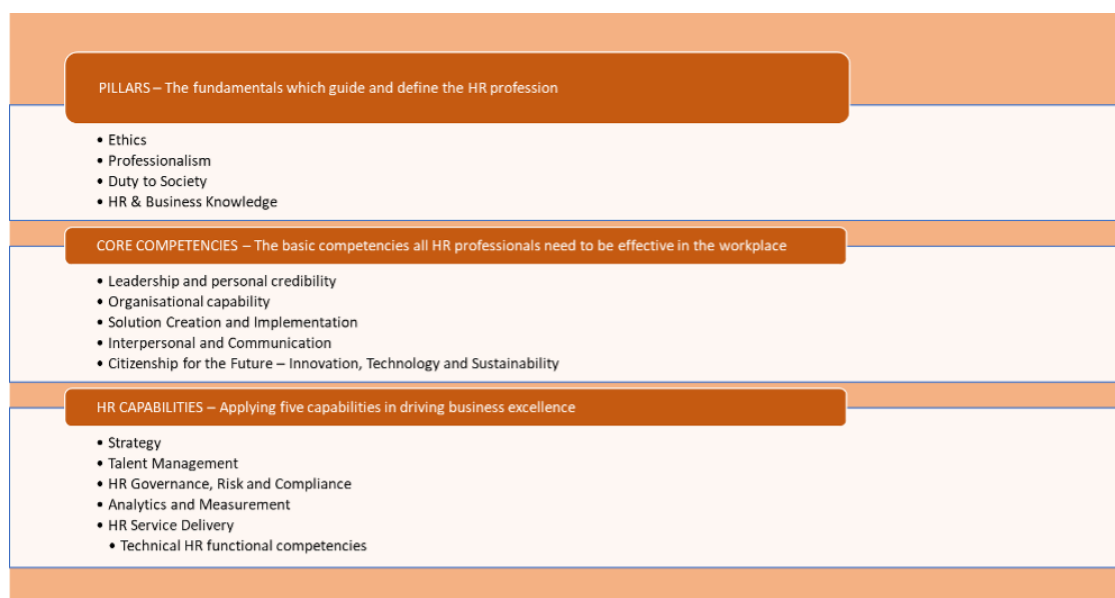
12. October 2022 Fact Sheet”<https://docs.mymembership.co.za/docmanager/8b191c28-797a-4c3d-b249-8b6e5691fe86/00159298.pdf>

# SABPP MODEL



Produced in 2013, the SABPP National HR Competency Model contains both selected 'meta-competencies' and occupational specific competencies.

The meta-competencies selected as critical foundations for HR work form the 4 pillars of the model. The occupational competencies prioritise the strategy setting competencies which produce the business impact, the strategy supporting competencies, and the subjects in which HR must be expert (technical competencies, falling under HR Service Delivery).

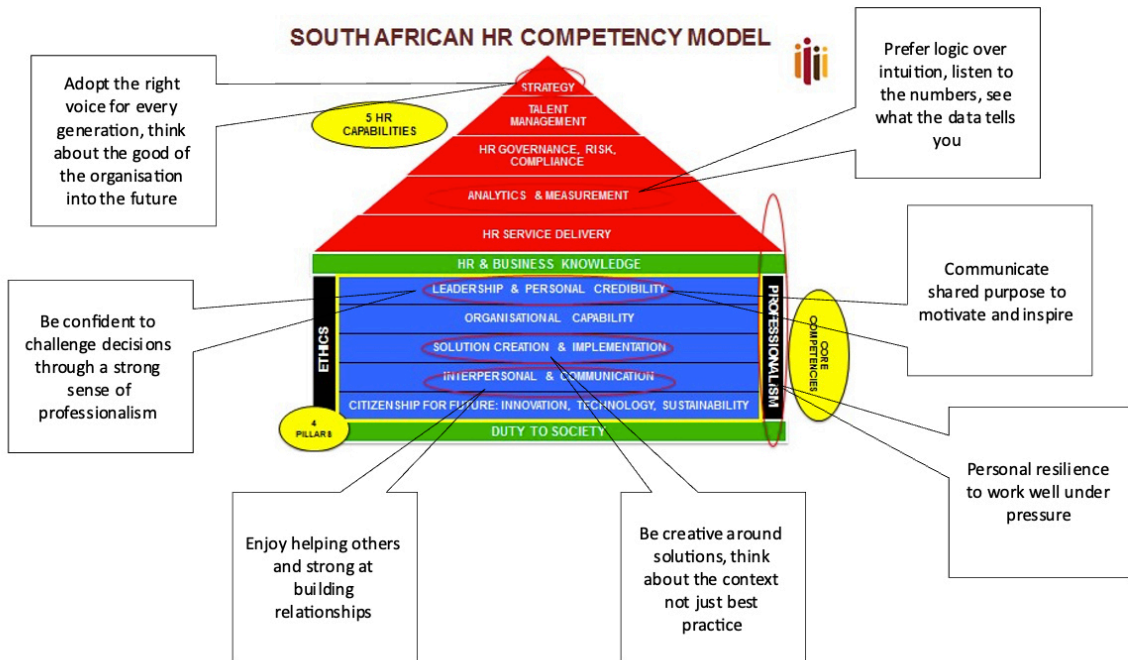


(For further details on the Model, refer to the 2013 Fact Sheet.)

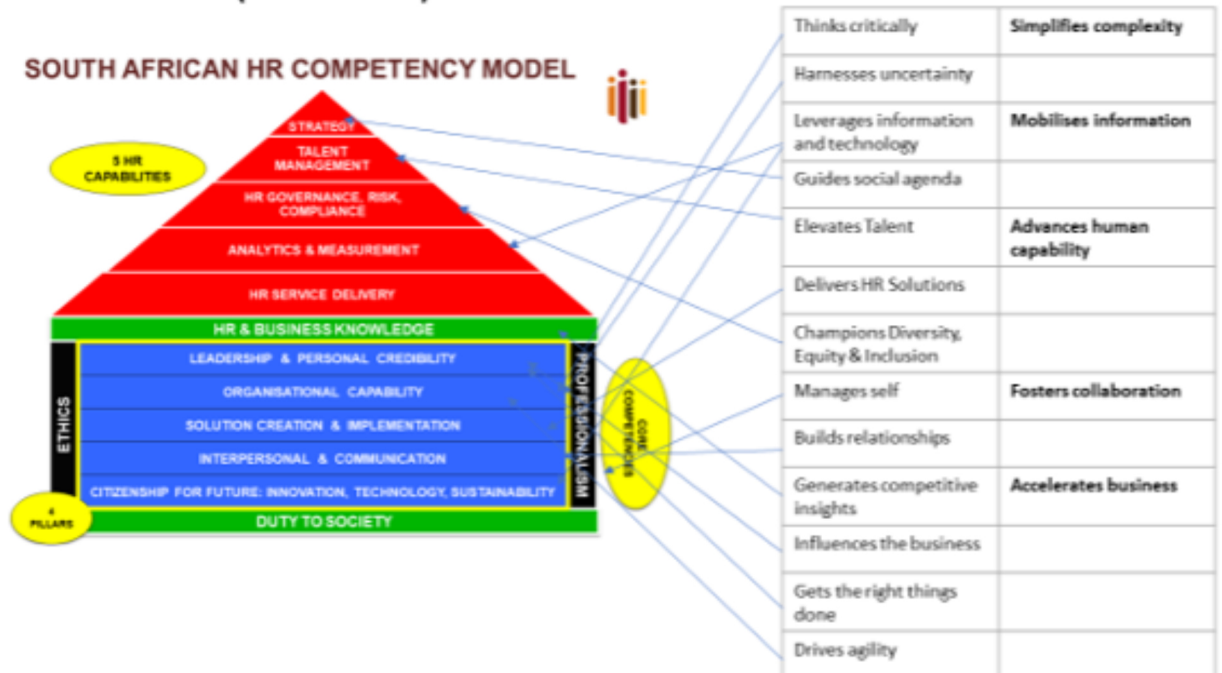
MAPPING THE VARIOUS MODELS AND FRAMEWORKS TO THE SABPP COMPETENCY MODEL

Below are some examples of how one could map the models and frameworks by international consultancies, associations and bodies to the SABPP Competency Model. These examples demonstrate how the SABPP Competency Model incorporates these other models and frameworks.

# CIPD 2018



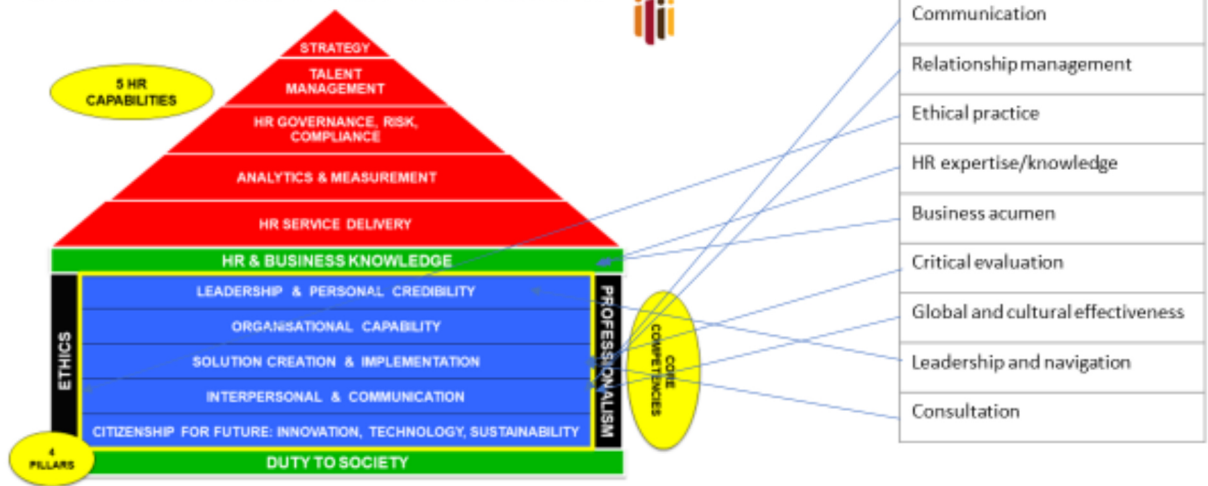
# HCRS 8 2021 (Ulrich)





# SHRM 2012

## SOUTH AFRICAN HR COMPETENCY MODEL



# CONCLUSION

The table of the Pillars, Core Competencies, and HR Capabilities in the SABPP Competency Model shows that it is not really novel skills for the future that HR professionals need, it is the development and deployment of appropriate skills for the various contextual changes as they affect particular organisations. Thus, in summary, it is about situational analysis and finding appropriate solutions, based on a solid value system and a comprehensive knowledge of HR theory and practice.

It is likely that an HR practitioner who is currently working in a digitally mature organisation, with progressive HR strategy and practices which adapt well to rapid context changes, will already be using the skills required for the medium-term future and possibly the long-term future.

An HR practitioner who is not working in such an organisation could look for opportunities to gain exposure to high-tech situations and plan self-development to make sure he/she is keeping up to date with modern trends through Continuing Professional Development and taking advantage of any opportunities offered by his/her current employer. Mentoring and coaching, and use of social media such as Linked-In will also assist in self-development.

This fact sheet was written by:

Dr Penny Abbott and  
Dr Ajay Jivan.







# PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF THE FACT SHEET

## 2021

## 2022

