

ANDRZEJ RÓŻAŃSKI

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9354-037X>

## COMPETENCIES EXPECTED OF TODAY'S HR PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN POLAND – EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION?\*

**Introduction:** As demand for a professional approach to human resources in organizations has risen, requirements for specialists in this area have grown systematically. Due to multidimensional needs of people at work, as well as the rapid pace of changes in the environment, each “Era” (starting from the industrial revolution to the present day) affects the competency needs of individuals responsible for co-creating the working environment.

**Research Aim:** The aim of the study was to identify key competencies of HR specialists working in Poland in the context of selected classic models outlined over the last several decades by HR practitioners and theoreticians, in terms of employers’ expectations.

**Method:** A mixed study design (qualitative and quantitative) has been applied to the analysis of job offers addressed to HR specialists via the LinkedIn platform.

**Results:** Conducted analyses showed that competencies prevailing in job offers for HR specialists in Poland were personal, such as communication skills, teamwork, diligence/conscientiousness, open-mindedness and adaptability, initiative, action-oriented mindset/self-reliance, as well as willingness to learn and develop. On the other hand, the following were listed among managerial competencies: work organization, data analysis and good judgement skills, as well as project management skills. The most frequently mentioned skills are digital competencies specific to the HR field: ERP systems, MS Office, project management, database systems, as well as tools for creating e-learning courses and supporting social media.

**Conclusions:** Conducted analyses and comparison of study results obtained by representatives of other disciplines point to relative stability of the “set” of key competencies of HR professionals. The only modification consists in their position in the hierarchy of the current needs of the organisation. Therefore, in the case of HR specialists, we can speak about the process of consistent evolution of competency needs rather than about a series of revolutionary changes in overall characteristics of the profession.

**Keywords:** human resources development, competencies, HR professional, job offers

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\* Suggested citation: Różański, A. (2025). Competencies Expected of Today's HR Professionals Working in Poland – Evolution or Revolution? *Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny*, 44(4), 251–269. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/lrp.2025.44.4.251-269>

## INTRODUCTION

Modern HR practices have attracted interest of social scientists representing such disciplines as IO psychology, human resources management, labour pedagogy, adult learning theory (andragogy), sociology of work, as well as human resources development, which explore a person in the context of their critical agency at work – in the process of shaping our environment. A person is primarily approached as a subject; however, taking into account the systemic nature of today's working environment, they are treated as one of the key resources that determine directions for development of individuals, social groups, organisations or, more globally, civilisation. Research initiated at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the improvement of workplace organisation/streamlining production processes, devoted to the Taylor's estimation of work productivity has in the decades that followed expanded the space for scientific investigation. Current research has taken into account individual needs and dispositions of employees to a larger extent than it did in the pioneering days. This has been confirmed by the search for new solutions, among others, by Mayo's (1933) experiment forming a milestone for understanding teamwork, or Maslow's (1954) theory going beyond the-then perception of the needs of people at work, or McGregor's (1960) Theory X and Theory Y, the underpinnings of which have been used in organisational practice until this day. Over the decades, the developing HR area was expanded with subsequent concepts explaining possibilities and determinants of people's potential at work. Attention could be drawn here to the founders of industrial and organizational psychology, namely Munsterberg (1913) or Biegeleisen (1949), to *business pedagogy*, sociology of work and industry by Wóycicki (1929) and in the area of management to Gilson (1916), who pioneered human resource management, or Knowles' (1970) pragmatic approach to development of adult people's growth potential.

Thus, the systematic unfolding of knowledge and practices related to the place of a man person in working environment naturally enforced professionalisation of this area, especially in the context of rapidly developing organisations. Professionalisation of HR (human resource) activities, identity, and professional identification of practitioners has been the focus of interest of, among others, Syrigou & Williams (2023). Earlier references to professionalisation had been made by Brewster & Farndale (2005), Gilmore & Williams (2007), Bolton & Muzio (2008), Wrigh (2008), Pohler & Willness (2014), Fear & Pritchard (2015), Gamwell, Higgins, Roper (2016), Higgins & Lo (2018), Slater (2019) and many others.

Initially, the described HR practices were primarily based on technical skills of professionals that pertained in the first place to traditional personnel functions. A proposal by Megginson and Pedler (1992) is a kind of systemic approach to HR evolution from the point of view of an organisation. The authors pointed to professionalisation of personnel-related tasks involving the growing areas of interaction with an organisation's human resources. According to the authors, the 1950s

were the time of focus on identification of *training gaps* – educational shortages. The 1960s and the 1970s saw rapid development of the concept of systematic approach to training, together with measurement of the efficacy of development programmes, including concepts by: Mager (1997), Gilbert (1998), Rummeler (1995), training for higher productivity, human effectiveness systems – by Likert (1967), Argyris (1991), McGregor, but primarily the Kirkpatrick Model (1994), which was extended into a model measuring return on investment in employee development programmes designed by Philips (2010) in the first decade of the new millennium.

Chronologically, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a highly rapid growth of investment in human resources in enterprises, especially by large corporations, resulting in growing bureaucratisation of development processes. This was also a time of clashing concepts from the borderline of HR theory and practice of *learning or performance*, that is discussion on the essence of the human-organisation relationship. At that time, the dispute was dominated by questions of whether it is more important to focus on the effectiveness of performed tasks (performance) or on people and their growth (learning), or maybe on adopting an integrated/sustainable approach equally considering the needs of employees and the organisation in the context of attainment of strategic goals (Róžański, 2014).

A stronger interest in the issues related to competencies in the area of today's HR (construed as individual dispositions) emerged in the 1970s. As part of the works of the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD), Bedrick and McLagan (1983) attempted to systematise and characterise work/tasks and roles performed by human resource professionals. Their concept straightforwardly referred to three basic areas of professional activity: coordination and integration of training, organisational development, and career development of individual employees. As a result of this endeavour, specific competencies were attributed to individual "roles" (Bedrick & McLagan, 1983). The-then tendency to bureaucratisation of the personnel management function became the driving force for detailed analyses that resulted in the emergence of subsequent highly specialised professional roles. Among others, the already mentioned proposal by McLagan considered as many as ten categories (HRD outputs by role): administrator, manager, evaluator, HRD materials developer, individual career-development advisor, instructor/facilitator, marketer, needs analyst, programme designer, organisation change agent and researcher (McLagan, 1989).

Development (by ASTD) of a universal model of HR competencies in mid-1980s was a natural outcome of "HR roles" defined in practical terms. Initially, model competencies were solely related to human resource training and development (HRD) professionals; however, at the next stage, the works were extended to include the entire HR area. As a result of conducted analyses, four key competency domains were identified: business, technical, interpersonal, and intellectual competencies (McLagan, 1989). Also at that time, Lawson (1989) put forward a pro-

posal focused on competencies of HR executives. Then, the list of existing model competencies was extended by competencies related to business knowledge, impact management, functional and organisational area, leadership, goal and activity management, as well as technical HR competencies (Lawson, 1989).

In the 1990s, Ulrich (1997) paid attention to the need to establish closer links between HR and business strategy units of an organisation. The author proposed a model that integrated human resources activities with company goals – the *HR Business Partner* model. This made it possible to establish four basic roles delivered by HR departments that would allow to implement personnel policies, namely: strategic partner, change agent, administration specialist, employee advocate. According to the author, this approach facilitated diagnosis of the status quo and agreement on the direction of HR policy – that is determination of objectives aligned with company goals and, consequently, more effective creation of added value and achievement of better business outcomes by the company (Chudzińska, 2018). Currently, Ulrich (2012) construes the concept as a general philosophy of organising HR functions (a model of value delivered by HR department; the concept of a personnel unit as a profit centre; an effective HR department model – HRBP 2.0 model) and the model of roles and competencies of an HR employee (usually, HR Generalist dedicated to a business unit).

Over time, Ulrich's analyses spanning many years (1997, 2008, 2012) have become the most often cited research on key significance of roles and competencies of HR professionals. This pioneering project, implemented regularly since the end of the 1980s in collaboration with HR departments, turned into an excellent source of information about the evolution of HR needs. With each subsequent study, lists of competencies were updated along with relevant market changes.

The first wave of studies conducted by Ulrich's team (1995) found that technical skills, change agent's skills, and knowledge of the business were becoming of key importance for HR professionals (see also Glenn & McEvoy, 2005). In this context, an HR specialist would have to use their knowledge about employees and apply essential change management techniques in order to minimize the costs of implemented transformations, and help introduce the changes as smoothly as possible. What is more, HR professionals should identify potential sources of resistance to change and catalyse change over the entire process of organisational transformation. This role was more strongly embedded in HR practice by Khairuzzaman et al. (2012), who proposed a set of "critical competencies of HR professionals" basing on the analysis of earlier literature. They took into account the specificities of increasingly rapid changes in the environment, including the need to continually adapt to newly emerging conditions of the business environment. The set included: managing organisational culture, ability to build relationships and communication skills, HR development (including regular training of employees, career development, coaching, mentoring schemes, succession planning

and organisational growth), productivity management, supply chain expertise, HR technology, conflict management (Khairuzzaman et al., 2012).

The next stage of research conducted by the Ulrich's team focused on competencies necessary to act at a strategic level, considering a broader context, that is the entire organisation and its external environment. According to the authors, knowledge in this respect has become of key importance for shaping long-term personnel policy of an organisation. Listed components of strategic competencies included knowledge of financial management as well as knowledge of customer needs and the ability to identify and evaluate the external competitive threats. Next, two new competency domains were added pertaining to ethical references, including: culture management and personal credibility (Glenn & McEvoy, 2005; Ulrich, 1997). Ultimately, six competency domains for HR professionals were specified: business ally, strategy architect, talent manager/organisational designer, operational executor, culture and change steward, and credible activist (Brockbank et al., 2007). Over time, the research gained an international dimension, which complied with the tendency of making HR services global (Giang Thi Huong Vu, 2017). This constituted a departure from the fixed frameworks of cascading projects, focusing activities on a flexible approach to employee needs, matching skills and jobs, searching for/mining the potential – talents. This also included new concepts of well-being, job crafting, and coaching, including psychological counselling, designing experiences of employees and job candidates, providing equal opportunities at a workplace, diversity, as well as building identity and organisational culture.

Studies described above made it possible for Ulrich (2012) to build an evolutionary model for developing HR functional domain in the form of an extending area of impact of HR professionals. The model was expanded with subsequent areas of activity, starting from physical working conditions and operational excellence, to functional effectiveness and specific HR practices – using psychological tools. At the same time, HR practices were being incorporated into business strategies of organisations, with the focus on competence development and identification of talented employees, in order to create market value together through responsible leadership.

This evolution in approach to hiring people and their development in the working environment determined the place and position of human resources within organisational structures, leading to extension of the scope of tasks implemented by HR professionals. Large enterprises would usually have (or continue to have had) complex HR units/divisions; smaller ones on the other hand have focused on basic HR activities as part of dedicated job positions (e.g., HR Generalist). It has also been observed – in particular following the COVID-19 pandemic – that people are increasingly interested in remote work and that HR services have largely been outsourced. External services (provided on-line) have been playing an increasingly important role, supported by professional apps designed to optimise HR processes

(e.g., recruitment, employee assessments, planning of training courses, employee records, finances, etc.). Comprehensive HR services have also been offered by external HR Service Centres (HR Shared Services Centers – HRSSCs). In this case, the global trend to reduce the costs by optimizing employment in various types of enterprises has had an impact on the situation of HR professionals as well as on the quality and individualisation of their work. Thus, we have been dealing here with the process of *moving* the HR function out of an organisation, which results in taking HR services over by specialized consulting companies. In this case, the character of HR services has shifted from a *traditional employment contract* towards services rendered by external consultants under civil law contracts.

Today, HR must face subsequent challenges, namely further digitisation, systemic nature of digital solutions (digital HR platforms), or lately the use of AI in automation of selected HR processes. Regardless of the level of HR advancement in an organisation (Róžański, 2021), experiences of HR practitioners and theoreticians have confirmed that just like with other professions, identification of professional competencies is focused on indication of model universal sets (matrices) that may pertain to a specific HR profession (Capaldo et al., 2006; Lewartowicz & Róžański, 2024; Lo et al., 2015; Ulrich et al., 2017; Vu, 2017). Adoption of a universal approach allows for developing professional/company profiles and designing specific job positions. The matrix approach, for this is what we may call it, allows for a more effective use of the profiles in organisational practice (Capaldo et al., 2006; Getha et al., 2016).

Increased interest in systematisation and modelling of competencies of HR professionals and managers for unification purposes resulted in gradual putting of this area into order. Numerous industry associations (AHRD: Academy of Human Resource Development, ASTD: American Society of Training and Development, WFPMA: World Federation of Personnel Management, AAHRI: Associations, Australian Human Resource Institute), consulting companies (e.g., Boston Consulting Group, Deloitte), independent organisations, higher education institutions, researchers, and consultants have been working on putting solutions that would help regulate qualifications and competencies in order for purposes of professionalisation of this emerging profession.

In 2015, Ulrich's team analysed and verified already existing competency models used to assess the quality of education offered to HR professionals. Their objective was to develop guidelines for organisations training HR specialists, and to draw up criteria for assessment and verification of the quality of their work. Based on longitudinal studies conducted for more than thirty years in collaboration with HR practitioners, as well as the analysis of the existing competency models (15 institutions, industry associations, consulting companies, higher education institutions, consultants, and researchers), six competence domains were determined together with their full descriptions. In this set, the following components were

revealed: business competencies, HR expertise, digital competencies (HR information systems, business intelligence), change management, knowledge of organisational culture and personal competencies (Ulrich et al., 2015).

This approach had its opponents as well. The concepts mentioned above failed to consider the specificities of enterprises/industry, size of organisation, organisational culture, type of offered/manufactured products or services, or place of providing services, etc. (Capaldo et al., 2006). What should be mentioned here as well is a highly important aspect of the planning perspective adopted in an organisation. It is the planning timespan that delineates (if not determines) the prospect of employment or expected pace of employee development. What they have been missing as well is the socio-economic context that would account for rapid changes in the environment. Thus, considering the previously mentioned determinants, critics of this approach were primarily pointing to the absence of the situational aspect (Capaldo et al., 2006). Competencies of HR specialists (just like in case of other professions) should, therefore, match a specific role delivered in connection with specific organisational tasks. By adopting the situational approach, HR specialists working in traditional HR roles will need another set of competencies than, HR analysts, for instance, who are focused on more specialised tasks (Lo et al., 2015; Vu, 2017).

Studies on the essence of professional competencies usually investigate individual behaviours of a subject in social situations. At a workplace, this is usually related to outcomes, meaning work productivity in the context of practical presumptions. In case of HR (HRM/HRD), we are dealing with a relatively extensive area. For this reason, the conducted research, especially addressing issues related to professional competencies, rarely takes the form of purely theoretical deliberations, as those studies usually make references to practical aspects. A kind of feedback emerges here (practitioners/research institutions/practitioners/research institutions), working in the process of verifying adopted theoretical assumptions, creating new classifications, or building practical models. In research on competencies of HR specialists, records collected by *human resource* departments, created in accordance with employment and development policy pursued by the company, have been the most often used source of data.

Disclosed data may, however, at times be filtered in line with the company's personnel policy (disclosure). Data obtained from publicly available market information, statistical data and reports published by public institutions, industry associations, research and scientific contributions, are other sources used. Among these, results of job offer analyses are a highly important source of information. They also indicate current market needs and at the same time provide the most updated list of competencies lacked by enterprises. Thus, this data acquisition method allows to analyse information that is strictly linked to the market situation – the needs in this respect, in the macroeconomic context, but also in terms

of individual competence needs for selected workplaces. At the same time, it is assumed that recruitment for a given position is a process designed for a specific timespan (tactical level at a minimum) and that it is linked to the strategy of the organisation or more broadly to its personnel policy. It may, therefore, be assumed that recruitment for specific job positions is the manifestation of personnel needs of an organisation with regard to specific competencies.

This type of research has been conducted, for example, in New Zealand (Ho et al., 2015). Data were obtained from job offers for candidates applying for the position of an HR specialist. Job offers were uploaded on the job search website (www.seek.com), which was most popular at that time. From among nearly one thousand search results taken into account, 111 offers that met the *HR specialist* criteria were ultimately considered. To be exact, in this case the title “HR specialist” is the criterion in itself as this particular prompt has been used to find information related to it via search engine available at LinkedIn social media platform. Next, the job offers were divided into semantic categories, whereas the identified competencies were divided into three consistent domains: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Based on the frequency rate analysis, the total of 793 items in the *competencies* category were obtained (this number results from multiple repetitions of *competencies* across different offers). Prevalence rates for single competencies reflected their significance in the context of the entire created set.

The prepared list was entered into the framework of the Ulrich’s Model (Ulrich et al., 2012). This enabled the author to identify the most frequently repeated ones. They primarily included: communication skills, leadership skills, and IT technical skills. On the other hand, in the field of HR expertise, these were: knowledge of recruitment processes, work performance/productivity, learning and growth, building of employee relationships. Thus, we may assume that the afore-mentioned list reflected the-then competency needs that had critical impact on increasing the added value of an enterprise in accordance with Ulrich’s Model (2012).

Similar research was conducted in the Republic of South Africa (RSA), among other countries. As part of the project, an attempt was made to validate fitness for purpose of the “local” SABPP competence model (South African HR Competency Model, 2012) used to assess professional competencies of HR specialists. The study was conducted on HR employees and HR managers across different organisations. Factor analysis allowed to identify three distinctive aspects of competencies that included professional conduct and leadership that encompassed such factors as leadership and personal credibility, solution delivery, interpersonal communication, and innovation. Focus on services and their pursuit involving such factors as talent management, HR risk management, knowledge of HR indicators, and provision of HR services and Business Intelligence – involved such components as strategic participation, HR business knowledge, HR business acumen and knowledge of HR technology. Average results obtained show that respondents found all



dimensions of HR professional competency model to be important, and factors such as interpersonal communication, leadership, and personal credibility, as well as HR business knowledge, were regarded as being of key significance (Barkhuizen et., 2015).

Similar results were obtained in the research on key competencies of HR specialists conducted in Poland during the COVID-19 pandemic (Krasnowa, 2021), in circumstances that appeared to significantly depart from typical study conditions, due to imposed advancement of remote work. Selected job offers published on specific job search sites (Pracuj.pl, Praca.pl, OLX.pl “jobs” tab, Indeed.pl) were used in the study. Purposive sampling method was applied. Searched job offers were related to human resources management (Payroll and Personnel, Recruitment or HR specialist/junior specialist, HR Manager, trainee in HR Department, HR Business Partner, etc. with “remote position” option). Analyses showed that according to published job offers, candidates should present highly advanced skills of managing their own work, self-organisation, and self-reliance, in addition to having teamwork skills, communication skills, focus on attainment of goals, and engagement in performed tasks. As little as 10% of all offers expected the candidates to be *focused on self-growth*; a similar result was obtained for expectations related to the knowledge of remote work tools (Krasnowa, 2021).

## RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM

Considering the pace of change and rapidly changing circumstances in which individuals and organisations have come to function on today's labour market, responding to the question about the type of competencies expected of HR specialists by employers appears to be of considerable importance. The research problem, therefore, pertains to the type and place of HR specialist competencies in the organisational perspective, more broadly in the *evolutionary/revolutionary* approach to shaping personnel policy. In the study, it has been assumed that changes may occur in an evolutionary manner when they are minor and take place over short periods of time, whereas revolution takes place when the changes are big and occur over a single and short period of time. Evolution has a steady course, whereas revolution is rapid. Therefore, it is primarily the question of pace of the occurring or conducted changes (Wolniewicz, 1989, p. 151). On the other hand, an HR professional in an organisation is an employee pursuing tasks related to the growth of human potential in the enterprise. Depending on the organisation's needs/possibilities, the specialist may implement HR-related tasks to a very large (e.g., organisational generalist), or a narrower more specialist extent (e.g., training provider).

The purpose of the conducted study was, therefore, to identify key competencies of HR professionals working in Poland, in the context of selected classic

models outlined by practitioners and theoreticians identifying with the area of human resources. To that end, the “Ulrich’s HR Competency Model” (2012) resulting from analyses spanning many years (longitudinal studies conducted by Ulrich since 1997) was used, reflecting evolution of the role of HR specialists in business and strategic aspects.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

The quantitative and qualitative study was carried out by analysing contents of job offers (for HR specialists) addressed to candidates via the LinkedIn social networking platform accessed by registered users in Poland (8.1 million in 2025). The purposive sampling method was applied. Terms used to identify the specific job offers in LinkedIn search engine were *specjalista HR* and its English equivalent of *HR specialist*. The job offers were geographically filtered to include the territory of Poland and time constraints were applied (the offers were downloaded between 27-28 February 2025). Of 155 job offers published at that time (all HR specialist offers uploaded on specified dates on the job search site), 96 that met the a/m criteria were ultimately taken into account. Rejected offers included repetitions (one and the same job offer added multiple times in different languages). Of all offers selected for the analysis, 82 were addressed to candidates representing HR specialist level and 14 to candidates from consultant/expert level (civil law contracts, B2B, such as Outsourced IT services) with a similar job description. The offers were published by 91 companies, 8 of which were acting as recruitment intermediaries (therefore, the number of listed job offer providers was lower than the number of actual job offers).

## DATA ANALYSIS

During the first stage of the research, the offers were verified for quality, which allowed to put expressions used in the offers and describing competencies expected by employers in order and to assign them to specific categories, which then allowed the author to develop a code frame. On this basis, after analysing the material, seventy-one competencies included in downloaded job offers were singled out. Next, thirteen logically and substantially consistent groups/categories were created. Each category included competencies with identical names and those whose description pointed to the affinity to a specific group/category. Proposed category names correspond to terms commonly used in international HR nomenclature and their universality allows for comparisons across selected practical models. Next, groups of competencies thus obtained were included in the categories of the

proposed Ulrich's model (2012). This allowed for determining their prevalence rates, position, and importance/priority in this *universal list*.

## RESULTS

Below is a summary of groups of competencies singled out on the basis of job offers for HR Specialists in Poland downloaded from LinkedIn (on 27 and 28 February 2025).

1. Knowledge of HR applications and IT systems
2. Command of foreign languages
3. Communication skills
4. HR specialist competencies (including HR related education)
5. Teamwork skills
6. Initiative and proactive attitude/self-reliance
7. Strong organizational skills
8. Conscientiousness/accuracy/attention to detail/responsibility
9. Managerial competencies/data analysis and good judgement skills
10. Project management skills
11. Open-mindedness and adaptability
12. Understanding and awareness of HR strategy/policy
13. Willingness to learn and grow at the workplace

Table 1 below presents a summary of key competencies expected of HR Specialists in Poland, together with their prevalence rates in the job offers downloaded for analysis. All of them were compared against the comprehensive Ulrich's Model (2012). Characteristics of this model to the broadest extent consider the organisational context and the role of an HR Specialist in the shaping of an organisation's policy. In the case of analysed job offers from across Poland, the most extensive range of competencies appeared in the group of personal competencies, including command of foreign languages (including English – 68%), communication skills, teamwork, accuracy/conscientiousness, open-mindedness and adaptability, initiative proactive attitude/self-reliance, as well as willingness to learn and grow. Command of foreign languages, considering the international character of HR services, appears to be something natural in Poland, especially in view of globalisation, leading to blurring cultural differences in the area of professional activity. Another group of competencies involving aspects of leadership brings to the fore strong organizational skills (nearly 44% reports), followed by data analysis and good judgement skills (more than 37%), as well as project management skills (above 31%).

While analysing prevalence rates and distribution of individual competencies in the distinguished groups, it was found that digital competencies appear to be included in job offers the most frequently. For instance, in the group of competen-

cies referred to as *Knowledge of HR applications and IT systems*, there appeared: Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, components of the MS Office suite (nearly half of the reports), project management applications, database systems dedicated to HR departments, applications for designing e-learning courses, apps for social networking sites, as well as AI tools, that is technologies linking actual reality and virtual reality (AR/VR)” – although in the last case, only one job offer was taken into account.

HR knowledge, besides role-specific (human resources) and related education, the following were reported competencies: coaching skills, knowledge of the assessment centre method, knowledge of employee evaluation systems, knowledge of HR techniques and tools, knowledge of employee branding tools, knowledge of career paths systems, ability to use LX DESIGN for designing effective educational solutions, ability to conduct classes/provision of training/ability to assess training effectiveness, knowledge of recruitment methods, knowledge of onboarding/offboarding processes, ability to analyse training needs, ability to develop training materials, etc.

Table 1.

*Polish employers' competency expectations of HR Professionals according to D. Ulrich's classification (2012)*

No.	Competencies – expectations by Polish employers (2025)	per cent of reports	KP	KO	KB	WHR	KC	WKO	Competency HR Model D. Ulrich (2012)
1	Knowledge of HR applications and IT systems (including MS Office 50%)	82.29					82.29		Digital competencies
2	Command of foreign languages (including English 68%)	79.17		79.17					Personal competencies
3	Social competencies/ communication skills	75.00		75.00					Personal competencies
4	HR specialist competencies (including HR related education)	65.00				65.00			HR knowledge
5	Social competencies/ teamwork skills	64.58		64.58					Personal competencies
6	Initiative and action-oriented mindset/self-reliance	48.96		48.96					Leadership competencies
7	Strong organizational skills	43.75	43.75						Leadership competencies

8	Conscientiousness/accuracy/ attention to detail/ responsibility	41.67	41.67						Personal competencies
9	Data analysis and good judgement skills	37.50	37.50						Leadership competencies
10	Project management skills	31.25	31.25						Leadership competencies
11	Open-mindedness and adaptability	31.25	31.25						Personal competencies
12	Understanding and awareness of HR strategy/ policy	29.17		29.17					Business competencies
13	Willingness to learn and grow at the workplace	20.80	20.80						Personal competencies
	Prevalence rate			3	7	1	1	1	0

Author's own materials. Abbreviations with explanations: KP Leadership competencies; KO, Personal competencies; KB, Business competencies; WHR, HR knowledge, tools, practices and processes; KC HR information systems, business intelligence and architecture, digital competencies; WKO Knowledge of the organisational culture.

## DISCUSSION

Analyses conducted by the author, as well as results obtained in previous research, manifested in practical competency models, point to a relative stability of the *universal* set of knowledge, skills and attitudes essential to perform the role of an HR Professional. In line with Ulrich's Model (Ulrich et al., 2012) adopted for this study, the results identify the position and prospective competencies of HR professionals, especially in the context of an organisation's perspective and personnel policy, and they do not depart from results obtained in similar research conducted in New Zealand by Ho, Lo, Mclean, Nguyen, Teo (2015), in RSA by Schutte and colleagues (2015), in Poland by Krasnowa (2021), or and in longitudinal studies obtained by Ulrich and colleagues (1997, 2008, 2012). Therefore, we are dealing here with a relatively fixed set of competencies that got systematically complemented over the years. Together with ongoing developments in the practice and theory of organisation and management (targeted at performance and productivity – *added value*), HR became a significant component of enterprise competitiveness. Therefore, HR Professionals (at times, these were external entities/consultants/consulting companies) who collaborated on developing policies of an enterprise (strategic planning and tactics) over time were given the role of an *HR business partner*. Thus, the *traditional role of an HR Professional* got extended with new competencies of *strategic thinking and acting*. Currently, Ulrich (2012) construes the concept as a general philosophy of organising HR functions (a model of value delivered by HR

department; the concept of the personnel unit as a profit centre; the model of an effective HR department – HRBP 2.0 model) and the *model of roles and competencies of an HR employee* (usually, HR Generalist dedicated to a business unit). Therefore, by extending the scope of tasks up to the strategic level, it was also complemented by *new sets of competencies*.

In the case of analysed job offers across Poland, the most extensive range of competencies appeared in the group of personal competencies, including communication skills, teamwork, accuracy/conscientiousness, open-mindedness and adaptability, initiative and activity-oriented mindset/self-reliance, as well as willingness to learn and grow. Command of foreign languages and considering the international character of HR services appear to be natural especially in view of globalisation leading to the blurring of cultural differences in the area of professional activity. Another group of competencies taking into account aspects of leadership brings to the fore strong organizational skills, followed by data analysis and good judgement skills, as well as project management skills. By analysing prevalence rates and distribution of individual competencies in distinguished groups, it was found that digital competencies appear to be included in job offers most frequently. For instance, in the group of competencies referred to as “Knowledge of HR applications and IT systems,” there appeared: Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, components of the MS Office suite (nearly half of reports), project management applications, database systems dedicated to HR departments, applications for designing e-learning courses, apps for social networking sites, as well as AI tools, that is technologies linking actual reality and virtual reality (AR/VR)” - although in the last case, only one job offer was taken into account.

## CONCLUSIONS

Obtained results reveal competency expectations of job candidates willing to work as HR professionals, showing that employers focus on competencies allowing for fulfilling tasks at a tactical level (team management, project management) and ongoing interventions. As shown by job offer analysis, many enterprises have continued to perceive the role of HR specialists merely as employees determining competency needs, which dates back to as far as the 1980s/1990s. Candidates are not expected to present knowledge and skills at the strategic level (understanding and awareness of HR strategy/policy). In the longer term, this attitude constrains active participation (consultation) in developing a broader HR policy in an organisation. This may reflect a relatively low level of HR organisational maturity in enterprises, little awareness and understanding of more extensive HR determinants, which in the long run may contribute to decreased competitiveness of the entire enterprise. Based on the analysis of job offers, no interest in AI competencies was

presented by the employers of recruited HR professionals, which may be indicative of a very careful approach of companies to this area. The question is not strictly about problems related to AI, as this is what we are dealing with, but about a specifically real need to employ HR professionals displaying AI-related competencies (most probably, right now there are still few of them on the labour market but the demand will grow). This is confirmed by a rather conservative approach of organisations to HR professionals' competency needs (only 9% of Polish enterprises have declared to undertake limited actions related to AI algorithms in their activity (RESEARCH REPORT, June 2025, Generative AI and Polish labour market). Therefore, in case of HR professionals, we can speak about an ongoing evolution of competency needs in the context of professional expectations rather than about revolutionary changes in the characteristics of the profession. Daily practices of HR professionals to a much greater extent involve providing support to organisation's activity than to joint creation of the vision of an organisation in accordance with D. Ulrich's concept. Therefore, the transformations take place steadily and involve a continued extension of the scope of tasks and competencies of HR professionals in response to the needs shaped by current market expectations.

## LIMITATIONS

Review of the job offers revealed a variety of tasks assigned to *HR specialists*, which may somewhat impede the process of conceptual categorisation used to analyse the collected material. Among others, this stems from a highly *flexible* approach to this profession in the practice of an organisation, both in organisational terms, that is placement in the structure of an enterprise (job position level), as well as substance-based scope of the performed works (specialisations). What is more, the presented research results reflect current competency needs that were limited to place and time of downloading the job offers, which considering today's rapid rate of change occurring in the organisation's environment, requires systematic observation enabling practical verification of functioning competency models. Joint analyses performed by practitioners and theoreticians may be of help in this respect, in particular during the process of verifying the adopted theoretical assumptions and creating new classifications or practical models.

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## WSPÓŁCZESNE OCZEKIWANIA KOMPETENCYJNE WOBEC SPECJALISTÓW HR W POLSCE – EWOLUCJA CZY REWOLUCJA?

**Wprowadzenie:** Wraz ze wzrostem zapotrzebowania na profesjonalne podejście do zasobów ludzkich w organizacjach rosną systematycznie wymagania wobec specjalistów w tym obszarze. Każda z kolejnych „epok” od rewolucji przemysłowej do współczesności, ze względu na wielowymiarowość potrzeb ludzi w sytuacji pracy, a także dynamikę zmian w otoczeniu wpływa na potrzeby kompetencyjne osób odpowiedzialnych za współtworzenie środowiska pracy.

**Cel badań:** Celem badania była identyfikacja kompetencji kluczowych specjalistów HR w Polsce w kontekście wybranych modeli klasycznych nakreślonych przez wybranych praktyków i teoretyków identyfikujących się z obszarem HR w kontekście oczekiwań pracodawców.

**Metoda badań:** Badania o charakterze ilościowo-jakościowym zrealizowano w oparciu o analizę treści ofert zatrudniania skierowanych do specjalistów HR za pośrednictwem platformy LinkedIn.

**Wyniki:** Wśród ofert pracy dla specjalistów HR w Polsce dominowały kompetencje osobiste: komunikatywność, współpraca w zespole, staranność/sumienność, otwartość i adoptowalność, inicjatywa, nastawienie na działania/samodzielność a także gotowość do uczenia się i rozwoju. Kierownicze: organizacji pracy, umiejętności analizy danych i oceny sytuacji oraz umiejętność zarządzania projektami. Najczęściej pojawiającymi się w ofertach pracy są kompetencje cyfrowe, dedykowane obszarowi HR: systemy ERP, znajomość pakietu Office, aplikacje do zarządzania projektami, systemy bazodanowe, oraz aplikacje do tworzenia kursów e-learningowych, aplikacje obsługujące sieci społecznościowe.

**Wnioski:** Przeprowadzone analizy własne a także porównania wyników uzyskanych w badaniach zrealizowanych przez przedstawicieli innych dyscyplin, wskazują na względną stałość „zestawu” kompetencji kluczowych specjalistów HR. Modyfikacji ulega jedynie umiejscowienie ich w hierarchii uwzględniającej aktualne potrzeby organizacji. Zatem w przypadku specjalistów HR możemy raczej mówić o stałej ewolucji potrzeb kompetencyjnych w kontekście oczekiwań zawodowych pracodawców niż o rewolucyjnych zmianach w charakterystyce profesji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rozwój zasobów ludzkich, kompetencje, specjalista ds. HR, oferty pracy