The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.
Executive summary

The people profession in 2018: UK and Ireland

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About the research

In the evolving world of work, new specialisms, ways of working and priorities have emerged – and with them, the role of the people profession has diversified. Today’s people professionals are expected to apply their expertise in people, work and change to drive sustainable value for people, organisations and wider society. They’re also called on to step up to ethical issues in organisations and help create cultures of transparency. However, they may face significant challenges in fulfilling this unique role because of competing priorities within the organisations in which they work.

What is the people profession?
We have moved away from referring to ‘professionals working in HR and L&D’ to talking about ‘people professionals’, to reflect the wide range of specialisms that now make up our profession – encompassing HR, learning and development, organisational development and organisational change.

To understand what drives career development and good practice in the profession, we surveyed 974 people professionals in the UK and Ireland about their career paths, values, behaviours, and organisational context. The survey was conducted online between 28 March and 8 June 2018, and respondents were sourced through a combination of the YouGov panel and the CIPD’s membership.

We used the findings from the survey to understand:
• what factors help people professionals achieve career success
• what factors are associated with practitioners’ ability to demonstrate professional behaviour and good practice
• whether there are any links between professional behaviour and career success.

We also worked with the European Association of People Management (EAPM) to replicate part of this study in other EAPM member countries. The participating European countries this year were Greece and Romania, and these findings are summarised in a separate report. In addition, we worked with the Institute for Human Resource Professionals (IHRP) in Singapore and the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) to replicate the study in Asia Pacific, and there will be a separate Asia Pacific report. We hope to include more countries in the research in future, so that we can draw meaningful comparisons between countries.

Findings

Meaningful work
We found that the vast majority of people professionals have a strong sense of meaning in their work. Three-quarters (75%) say that they understand how they gain personal meaning from their work, and seven in ten (70%) report that their work makes them happy (see Figure 1). CIPD members are more likely than non-members to understand how to gain personal meaning from their work (82% and 71% respectively). These findings point to the positive impact that individual practitioners can have on people’s working lives and wider society.
Skills and experience

Our research highlights the importance of experience to professional development. The majority of people professionals (84%) surveyed have more than a year’s experience of working outside the profession, and this is linked to promotion prospects: we found a small positive correlation between number of years’ experience outside the profession and perceived likelihood of being promoted in the organisation in the next three years.

Looking at skills levels and alignment with job role, we found that 45% of practitioners feel their skills match the requirements of their job, but nearly two in five (38%) feel that they are somewhat over-skilled (Figure 2). Sixteen per cent said they lack the skills required in their current duties, and this figure rises to 22% among practitioners with less than six years of experience. Having the right level of skills for the role is linked to satisfaction with career progression to date: practitioners who say that their progression has exceeded or met their expectations (52% and 46% respectively) are more likely to feel they have the right skills for their role, compared with those who are disappointed with their progression (36%).
Professional courage

Overall, we found that most people professionals (64%) believe that their job gives them the opportunity to fully express themselves as a professional. However, nearly three in ten (28%) feel that there’s a conflict between their professional beliefs and what their organisation expects of them (Figure 3). This demonstrates the challenging role professionals often must play in organisation decision-making.

The data also revealed a link between satisfaction with career progression and perceived ability to express oneself as a professional: we found that practitioners who say their progression to date has exceeded their expectations are more likely to feel able to express themselves professionally in their job (82%) than those whose career progression has just met or failed to meet expectations (71% and 40% respectively). This suggests that achieving career success can build practitioners’ confidence to do the right thing as a professional.

Because ethical behaviour and decision-making are important concepts in people management and HR practice, we asked respondents about their experiences. Two in five (41%) people professionals have always or often stated their views about an ethical issue to a manager in the last year, and 13% have always or often gone against managers’ decisions if they violated ethical standards.

To explore what helps practitioners to demonstrate professional behaviour, we asked about the ethical climate in their organisation and how much influence their team or department has. While over half of practitioners said that the people team or department is respected (54%), taken seriously (57%) and given opportunity to add value in the organisation (58%), just over one in five (23%) feel they are not given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their organisation’s needs. This may have implications for their ability to challenge unethical practice in the organisation.

We found that three in ten people professionals (31%) feel that managers in their organisation often demonstrate unethical behaviour, and nearly the same proportion (28%) feel that it’s often necessary to compromise ethical values to succeed in their company (Figure 4). This highlights the need for people professionals to help develop ethical organisational cultures.
In order to succeed in my organisation, it is often necessary to compromise one’s ethics

Managers in my organisation often engage in behaviours that I consider to be unethical

Evidence-based decision-making

We asked people professionals which sources of evidence they use in decision-making, and found that personal experience is the top factor (76%), followed by organisational data (55%) and intuition (49%) (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who agreed with statements examining ethical climate (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In order to succeed in my organisation, it is often necessary to compromise one's ethics</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers in my organisation often engage in behaviours that I consider to be unethical</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Sources of evidence used in decision-making (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Evidence</th>
<th>To some/a great extent</th>
<th>In the middle</th>
<th>Not at all/to some extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal experience</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational data</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuition</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge acquired through formal education</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insights from experts</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice from colleague</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management literature</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions and recommendations

A key finding from our research is the strong sense of happiness and meaning in work that people professionals share, with many believing that their work contributes to the good of society. However, many practitioners are experiencing a mismatch between their current skill set and the demands of their role, which could limit their opportunities to progress.

Another important finding is that there is still some way to go for practitioners to be fully confident in demonstrating professional courage at work and challenging current organisational practice where it conflicts with ethical values. This is particularly difficult for those in the earlier stages of their career. A surprising proportion of respondents stated that they have faced ethical conflicts with business priorities, which highlights the need for support and guidance in professional decision-making.

Finally, we found that people professionals do use organisational data in decision-making, and this gives them courage to uphold their professional values. This is an area in which the profession could benefit from further investment in skills development, to really drive transparency in organisations and increase confidence amongst practitioners.
The people profession is evidently evolving and developing in its role to create sustainable organisational cultures for the long-term benefit of organisations, individuals and society. To make a greater impact in the world of work, we recommend that people professionals:

• continue to invest in their continuing professional development (CPD), including developing their understanding of the key external trends impacting organisations
• build their confidence to challenge the status quo, through training, coaching and mentoring
• make greater use of evidence in decision-making.

This all points to an important role for the CIPD to play in helping people professionals plan their careers and CPD, providing them with the tools and resources to achieve their career goals, and supporting them to make confident choices grounded in strong standards of professionalism.

Where next for the people profession?
The world of work is complex and changing, and now more than ever, people professionals need a strong foundation for effective decision-making. The CIPD is supporting people professionals to thrive in this changing world of work – and to fulfil the profession’s shared purpose of championing better work and working lives – through a programme of work called Profession for the Future. The first milestone is the launch of the new Profession Map, designed to support values-based decision-making that is context-agnostic.

The new Profession Map defines the knowledge, behaviours and inherent values underpinning today’s people profession. It is designed to help people professionals globally to make sound decisions and embrace change in the modern world of work. It sets out the defining purpose and values of our profession, together with the knowledge and behaviours required to put those values into practice.

It provides a clear basis for planning CPD and progression, as well as the tools to demonstrate the value and impact of the people profession to the wider business. It supports people professionals – whatever their background – to navigate situations confidently and successfully, drive change in their organisation and progress in their career.