Doctorate in Professional Studies

Exploring Human Resource Management Practise through the Qatar HR Forum; framing the influence of 'Tharaba' culture and the development of Qatar-Centric competencies for HR Professionals practising in Qatar.

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"Tell me, and I forget, teach me, and I may remember, involve me, and I learn".
Benjamin Franklin

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Disclaimer: The views (separate from quotes and facts) expressed in this document are mine and are not necessarily the views of my supervisory team, examiners, or Middlesex University.

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Abstract

Qatarisation policy has emerged from the Qatar National Vision 2030 and has become embedded into organisations' core strategic visions. Qatarisation aims to place knowledgeable local Qataris into senior professional roles to lead their country. Human Development is a core pillar of the National Vision and is an expected responsibility of each organisation and its employees. This responsibility directly impacts the Human Resource Management (HRM) function and HRM professionals developing talent in Qatar. This is a challenge due to a lack of Qatar-centric frameworks available to HR Professionals practising in Qatar and a lack of understanding of influences on HRM Practises. The research focused on overcoming this challenge and contributing to a sustainable framework solution for HR professionals in Qatar.

There were three main aims; to review HR literature while exploring the fundamental principles and context of the HR professional practise in Qatar; to explore ways HR practitioners in the Qatar HR Forum could drive and support a change in HRM practise, and to contribute to professionalising HRM Practise in Qatar. A qualitative interpretivistic approach explored the experiences and perceptions of HR professionals practising in Qatar, who are members of the Qatar HR Forum, through surveys, interviews, and focus groups, to understand the complexities of HRM in Qatar.

The findings show that distinctive expatriate and Qatari influences need to be considered with a new framing of how Qatari culture might influence and impact current and future HRM practises. This has been conceptualised as 'Tharaba Culture' – ذرابه, which encompasses behaviours, customs, and unwritten expectations that locals acknowledge as their culture. It is based on influences such as family ties, leadership status, expected norms and non-negotiable behaviours, engulfed in the wisdom of the respected elders formulated from tribal descent. The research further impacts practise, with a significant outcome being the development of a Qatar-centric HR competency framework, which will provide a foundation for HR professionals to meet the unique challenges and complexities of HRM practise in Qatar.

Glossary

Expatriate: A person who lives outside their native country.

Qatari national: A citizen of the State of Qatar.

Human Resource Management: This is the practise of recruiting, hiring, deploying, and managing an organisation's employees. HRM can also be referred to as human resources (HR).

Qatar Human Resources Forum: A voluntary community of HR Practitioners that collaborate and share knowledge in Qatar.

Qatar National Vision 2030: A Policy that was directed by the Emir of Qatar to develop and build Qatar towards a knowledge-based economy.

Chapter 1:   Introduction

1.1.   Outline of Chapter 1

This chapter provides an introduction and context to the research project. Section 1.2 in this chapter provides an overview of the myself, as the researcher, explaining my reality and lived experience, both personal and professional, and what led me to embark upon this research project. The research terms of reference are presented, providing an overview and facts regarding Qatar and governmental policies that HR professionals must follow. The chapter provides insight into the current complexities found in Qatar with Human Resource Management Practise (HRM) within various organisational types. This chapter explores the overview of HRM practise in Qatar and what challenges are currently understood as day-to-day challenges and complexities. The chapter provides an overview of the community in section 1.5. It introduces the strategic role of the Qatar HR Forum (QHRF) in this research and the criticality of the partnership and collaboration of the forum and myself as a researcher and the Chair of the Qatar HR Forum. The research aims, objectives, and questions are presented in section 1.6 of this chapter to explain the project and the approach taken.

1.2.   My Personal and Professional Journey

I am an expatriate HR professional who has been working and living in Qatar for over 15 years. I am recognised as a leading HR professional and lead high-level transformation projects in the Financial Regulatory sector. My roots are multicultural, and I am bilingual (English/Arabic). While the differences in Qatar's culture were surprising, and I had not learned or understood the impact of the cultural differences upon my own HR practise until I started to work in Qatar. I am of mixed Arabic origin; my father is Palestinian, and my mother is English. I was born and raised in the United Kingdom (UK) as a Muslim, where the Arabic language and culture were an integral part of my upbringing. I embraced my culture and religion and married an Egyptian national. My culture and religion are significant to me, and my principles, ethics and values are based on these two elements.

I have noted in my upbringing assimilating into the British culture and the Egyptian culture, that my culture influences me more than perhaps my religion does. However, Islam is a way of life for me. I view myself as a British Muslim. The idea of moving to the Middle East stemmed from the challenges I faced as I was raised differently from other children. I was born in a small town in Shropshire in the UK. I was different from others; for example, many people were unaware that I fasted for Ramadan. I did not want my children to face the same challenges as I had growing up. Therefore, my husband and I agreed that we would seek employment in the Middle East to provide a more Islamic upbringing, where they could hear the call to prayer, feel Ramadan and see religion as the norm instead of being the exception. We moved to Qatar in 2007 after my first son was born.

Upon settling in, I resumed my career in Human Resources Management. Initially, I was surprised to find out that cultural differences would impact my work. However, my initial experiences in this region highlighted significant contrasts in work culture. Diving deep into my field, I rapidly gained insights and adapted to the local professional environment. My fluency in Arabic and being bilingual facilitated effective communication and connection with my colleagues and employees. I was surprised by how HRM was managed in the country and the organisations I had the opportunity to work in. I felt there were many gaps in my understanding of international best practises compared to what I was living and working with each day. These differences opened my eyes to understanding why HRM is like it is in Qatar. This guided me to set up a small forum and network with like-minded HRM professionals in Qatar, perhaps facing the same shocks and challenges. I also had a passion for the people profession. Building on my passion, I co-founded and am currently the chair of the Qatar HR Forum. The Qatar HR Forum is designed to aid HR professionals in Qatar, including local nationals and expatriates, offering a secure platform for collaboration and knowledge sharing. This initiative emerged due to the lack of a formal professional body or association for regional HR practitioners. Managed by volunteers, the forum features a committee that orchestrates events for its members. Its primary objective is to foster professional development in HRM within Qatar, focusing on addressing challenges collectively. The forum collaborates with

local and international entities to introduce and integrate best practises in HRM into the Qatari context.

Through my engagement in numerous projects, I have gained recognition as a specialist in my field. This led to my secondment across different financial regulatory bodies, where I was responsible for planning, leading, and executing HR transformations. Presently, I serve as the Director of Strategy, Organisational Development, and HR in a semi-governmental organisation within the financial regulatory sector.

Qatar has hosted me and provided many occasions to develop my HR Professional skills. I have created an understanding and appreciation of HRM through my tenure in various organisations. I believe my professional vision and passion for the people profession contribute to Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030).

I have been immersed in my career in HRM for the last eighteen years and have been awarded fellowships with the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the Chartered Management Institute (CMI). Additionally, I have completed my International Coaching Accreditation. My passion drove my career to help people. Having started in a generalist HR role. Through the years, I continued to enhance my skills and expertise in the various functions of HRM. My experience builds on local, regional, and international exposure, and I continue to thrive in my profession to lead and manage change through talent. I am a passionate professional who enables and delivers change through people. Mentoring and coaching others to develop to their full potential is the most rewarding part of my career. This was particularly imminent in Qatar through their Qatarisation vision and programs. I have created and implemented nationalisation programs encompassing different areas of learning and development, and as a result, I have built my knowledge and expertise regionally. The Qatarisation programme I developed and implemented in my current organisation won an award across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in 2017.

A relevant initiative I was involved in was a research project for a leading bank, 'Leading in Qatar', under the guidance of Professor Scott-Jackson. Professor William Scott-

Jackson has led several research initiatives into the region's nationalisation and exploring management styles. The concept of this study was to understand and identify challenges with managing diverse cultures. Through this collaboration, my work led me to lead Qatar's Arabian Society of Human Resource Management (ASHRM) branch. The objective of this branch, which was developed in Aramco, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), was to partner with key organisations to support the HR profession in Qatar. I have also been recognised through my work and presented with an award for developing and facilitating an HR training program designed and customised for the region and accredited by the CMI. I frequently share my expertise at regional HR conferences as a recognised leader and contributor in HRM. Due to this recognition, I was invited to be an advisory panel member for the Career Development Forum, whose goal was to contribute to the Qatar National Vision 2030 to support human capability development as a pillar of the vision.

My professional capability has been recognised over the years, and I am now described as an HR 'voice' in Qatar. I am often invited to seminars, universities, and conferences to provide a practitioner's view of the reality of HRM in Qatar and the region. My lived experiences as a practising HR practitioner and the credible reputation I have built over almost two decades have made me recognised as a competent professional who delivers excellence and is a trusted advisor by many. This took time and delivery of valuable advice and worthwhile outcomes of any project I have led, working with integrity and delivering excellence. I have also exhibited the courage to challenge. When I do not think something is right, I challenge others when I have a strong recommendation. These behaviours are rare in the workforce in this part of the world, coupled with the fact that I am a female expatriate, and challenging senior leaders, particularly males, is rare.

When I reflect upon my position as a researcher, I view myself as an influencer and a change agent, always working with integrity and excellence, with no exception.
My personal and professional journey has enhanced my curiosity. As a result, I decided to explore HRM in more detail and understand other HR professional colleagues' lived experiences whilst working within the HR field in Qatar. For my professional doctorate I

embarked on my research journey to conduct research titled "Exploring Human Resource Management Practise through the Qatar HR Forum; framing the influence of 'Tharaba' Culture and the development of Qatar-centric competencies for HR Professionals Practising in Qatar". The research intended to explore, collate data, and analyse the results, which may be implemented for Qatar HRM practise through the Qatar HR Forum (explained in section 1.5). The research explored the current context of HRM in Qatar whilst simultaneously exploring culture and influences on HRM practise in Qatar. The overarching rationale for this research was to transfer my knowledge to the local population of Qatari national HR leaders who will assume the HR leadership roles from myself and expatriates' colleagues in the near future. This permits me to make an impact whilst leaving a legacy as an expatriate. I want to contribute to the HRM in Qatar and lead the implementation of a sustainable change in Human Resources. Through the research, I intend to embed a legacy into the HRM Practise in Qatar. This will support a contribution to the bigger 2030 Qatar National Vision – which is yet to be delivered. I consider HR at the core of this vision of developing human capability. The overarching aim of this research is to contribute to both theoretical knowledge and apply any research findings to practise. The data that the research collated and the findings and recommendations are discussed at length in chapters 5 and 6.

My doctoral journey has left me excited and satisfied to contribute even further to the HRM practise in Qatar and provide me with an opportunity to understand the reality and complexities that we live and face every day working in our field. I have engaged with stakeholders interested in knowing more and understanding the outcome of my research, including governmental bodies in Qatar who oversee the HRM of ministries, my fellow HR practitioners in the Qatar HR Forum, and people leaders responsible for employees in their organisations. It was not my intention when I embarked on this journey to become an academic, but it was to increase knowledge in my field as a practitioner; the outcome has raised my awareness of the rigorous requirements in academia whilst contributing to the research gap in my field as well as developing skills I thought were perhaps beyond my capability, simultaneously I have enriched my understanding in my field.

1.3.   Qatari context and Terms of Reference of the Research

Over time, the function of Human Resource Management (HRM) has established that it can be a business partner with stakeholders and be a strategic partner to organisations. Ulrich (1997) has emphasised the strategic role of HR and the need to align HR practises with organisational objectives, through his Business Partner Model. This business partnering can be utilised to support and enable organisational talent to reach their full potential. This, in turn, will benefit both the individual employee and the organisation. To explain the context of Qatar, it is essential to note that the government sets an overarching vision for Qatar. This is known as the Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV2030). The Qatar National Vision 2030 (Ministry of Planning and Development, 2010) was developed by the highest level in the state to drive the country into a diversified and knowledge-based economy. This vision provides the strategic direction and purpose for the country. The National Vision 2030 is replicated throughout the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) and is not unique. The goal of the National Vision is to provide a framework that can support the development of human capital capabilities, focusing on the local population and diversification of the economy. Organisations are encouraged to build up these capabilities and invest in assisting the country to continue its journey toward a knowledge-based economy, which leads to the diversification of Qatar's economy (Ministry of Planning and Development, 2010). This is not unique to Qatar and is evident across all the (GCC). There are national visions for each GCC country; however, this project has focused on Qatar. This project focuses on Qatar as I, the researcher, have worked and lived in Qatar for almost the last two decades; this is where I believe I can make the most impact as I understand and contribute to the 2030 vision daily within my various roles as Director, HR transformation within a semi-government organisation in Qatar. Qatar has a unique and mixed labour force; expatriates or foreign workers relocate and work in Qatar from across the globe.

Figure 1. **The figure shows the Labour force distribution in Qatar in Q1 2021.**

Planning and Statistics Authority Labour force sample survey. The first quarter (Q1 2021).

السكان (15 سنة فأكثر) حسب العلاقة بقوة العمل والجنسية والجنس
Population (15 years and above) by Relation to Labor Force, Nationality & Sex

مسح القوى العاملة بالعينة - الربع الأول 2021
Labor Force Sample Survey - The first quarter of 2021

Table No. (2)

جدول رقم (2)

Nationality	Sex	المجموع العام Grand Total	غير النشيطين اقتصاديا Economically Inactive						النشيطون اقتصاديا Economically Active				الجنس	الجنسية
			المجموع Total	أخرى Other	متقاعد Retired	عاجز Disabled	متفرغ للدراسة Student	التفرغ لأعمال المنزل Homemaker	المجموع Total	متعطل سبق له العمل Unemployed with previous employment	متعطل لم يسبق له العمل Seeking Work for first time	مشتغل Employed		
Qatari	Males	106,407	35,784	1,701	11,277	1,575	21,231	0	70,623	63	126	70,434	ذكور	قطريون
	Females	110,036	69,215	2,646	6,719	2,079	27,783	29,988	40,821	0	378	40,443	إناث	
	Total	216,443	104,999	4,347	17,996	3,654	49,014	29,988	111,444	63	504	110,877	مجموع	
Non-Qatari	Males	1,750,531	45,225	4,255	0	564	40,406	0	1,705,306	230	983	1,704,093	ذكور	غير قطريين
	Females	377,423	139,491	3,321	0	1,859	30,065	104,246	237,932	167	1,191	236,574	إناث	
	Total	2,127,954	184,716	7,576	0	2,423	70,471	104,246	1,943,238	397	2,174	1,940,667	مجموع	
Total	Males	1,856,938	81,009	5,956	11,277	2,139	61,637	0	1,775,929	293	1,109	1,774,527	ذكور	المجموع
	Females	487,459	208,706	5,967	6,719	3,938	57,848	134,234	278,753	167	1,569	277,017	إناث	
	Total	2,344,397	289,715	11,923	17,996	6,077	119,485	134,234	2,054,682	460	2,678	2,051,544	مجموع	

The figure presents an overview of the labour force in Qatar. The total number of Qatari nationals employed in the workforce is 110,877. Compared to expatriates, where 1,940,667 are employed in Qatar. The total number of people in employment is 2,051,544 in Qatar's labour market. These figures are essential to understand the heavy reliance on expatriate talent. It also shows the low number of nationals in employment and how this poses a challenge to fill all roles in Qatar 100%. This also explains a challenge when attempting to Qatarise positions across different roles in different sectors. The number of active Qatari nationals in employment would never fulfil the labour market needs. Hence the drive for Qatarisation to fast-track Qatari nationals into leadership roles. However, there will still be a Qatari national talent shortage, but the focus is on specialised skills and leadership roles for the locals, based on the data presented in Figure 1. This shortage is the reason for the concept of Nationalisation (in the GCC) and Qatarisation (in Qatar). These are discussed as part of the literature review in chapter 2, sections 2.6 and 2.7, respectively.

HRM practise is not supported by a professional body in Qatar. This is discussed and explained in chapter 2, section 2.9, in more detail. The absence of a professional body infers no expectation of behaviours, skills or competencies for HR Professionals practising in Qatar. Although this does not imply that there are no professional HRM practises in Qatar, what this means is that there is not one clear understanding of what a good HR Practitioner looks like in the country. In some organisations, HRM practises may only be present due to competent expatriate professionals being in Qatar and having implemented sustainable HRM practises or developed local talent into successors. Professional practises are likely to be observed in specific organisations, generally Multinational conglomerates. They would have global HRM practises implemented in Qatar's offices – with some customisation to fit the labour laws.

There is not one set of governance in HRM in Qatar that is agreed upon and utilised in organisations. Globally and regionally, countries have standards set out by professional bodies. In the United Kingdom (UK), HR professionals are expected to adhere to the professional body known as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Conversely, in the United States of America (USA), an HR professional would be expected to follow the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM). In the GCC, this is also the case with both geographical neighbours of Qatar, namely the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), having HRM professional bodies. These are the Federal Authority of Human Resources (FAHR) and the Ministry of HR, respectively. Even though Qatar has the QNV 2030, as do the GCC countries, the absence of a professional body means HR does not have the deserved recognition as a profession. A profession that can be a strategic partner, a champion of change, and a leader in driving the implementation of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

In considering the importance of HR in this context, it becomes particularly pertinent to examine the structure and makeup of the workforce. Saheem (2016) focused on expatriation in emerging Arab Gulf States, specifically in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and noted that it is unlike expatriation elsewhere. In most of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the workforce mainly consists of expatriates, with the local population

generally forming a small minority. Philip *et al.,* (2021) described blue-collar migrant workers as generally being from countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Egypt. They work predominantly in sectors like construction, maintenance, cleaning, and other technical and non-technical areas. His depiction of the expatriate workforce leads to certain assumptions, some of which Saheem *et al.,* (2017) challenge in their later work.

Saheem *et al.,* (2017) discussed in more depth the assumption that expatriates are often assumed to have enhanced terms and conditions in their employment contracts and, because of this that makes them expensive, to be in key managerial or technical specialist roles. He defines those in more manual and menial roles as 'migrants'. However, they stated that millions of people around the world are not migrants and do not fall under this definition. On the contrary, their intended stay in a foreign country is seen by them and their employers as temporary, but their employment contracts are far from advantageous compared with those of locals. These 'hidden' expatriates are brought into focus in the emerging Arab Gulf States. In some of these countries, the population consists mainly of expatriates, with the local population a small minority. This is also true of Qatar expatriates and there is an added layer of complexity in treating and defining expatriates. This complexity is further compounded when considering certain demographic nuances unique to the region.

There are other demographics that fall within the expatriate group but are treated differently such as children born to Qatari mothers and employees who are born in Qatar but are only assigned travel documents. Women who have children are not permitted by law to pass down the Qatari citizenship as it is only passed through the male. These two groups, for example, are not treated exactly as Qatari nationals or as expatriates but have slightly different benefits to account for their unique status. In the context of this research, the definition of expatriate HR Professionals includes non-Qataris and does not include blue-collar migrant workers. It also encompasses the unique group of those who have Qatari mothers or travel documents, but do not have Qatari citizenship. Understanding

this varied landscape of expatriates in Qatar is fundamental to fully grasp the intricacies of HR policy and practise in the region.

1.4. Rationale for the research project

A significant challenge in Qatar is that an imported international-centric HRM model only works with customising areas of a model or framework. The model can originate from anywhere, but it will only fit with some customisation. HR professionals (whether Qatari nationals or not) are not necessarily skilled in how one may be skilled or competent as per the model's expectations adopted into an organisation. Furthermore, the exposure to different practises or conditions and issues, as HR professionals are used to dealing with in our own countries, are only sometimes relevant to Qatar. This relevance is vice versa, where Qatar's specific issues, conditions or practises are unique. Therefore, taking this concept and training Qatari nationals and fast-tracking them into HRM Leadership roles mandated by Qatarisation is only sometimes successful.

Consequently, these HR professionals will only sometimes have the expected competencies or experience required. As described earlier, there is no consistent HRM practise, and therefore, no expectation of what a 'good HR professional' should be in Qatar. This presents an opportunity to research this uniqueness embedded in complexities and challenges and explore ways to support professionalising the HRM practise in collaboration with the Qatar HR Forum to contribute to the National Vision 2030 through HR Professionals.

The research problem has different aspects to it:

1- The HR function is deemed administrative and needs to be more strategic in many organisations in Qatar.

2- The fast track of Qatari nationals into HRM leadership roles with a lack of experience but minimum or no qualifications presents challenges. In addition, some leading sectors in Qatar have previously led initiatives in which Qatari nationals are shadowing expatriates in lead roles for two years to develop themselves.

3-   There needs to be recognition for HR as a profession in Qatar and, as a result, clarity on the expectations of an HR professional working and practising in Qatar.

4-   The dictation of the QNV2030 to build human capability is an immense challenge, especially when the HR professionals in Qatar are not necessarily experienced in supporting such a vision or ready to deliver on it due to the challenges that are faced. Therefore, the research will explore the cultural impact on the HRM practise and the role of HR Professionals in this.

Diving deeper into the challenges identified above, the value of HR as a strategic partner has been researched, acknowledged, and realised in the last few decades. The perception of HRM varies, with different perspectives illuminating different facets of it. Certain definitions centre include the activities and functions of HRM (Lado and Wilson, 1994; Buchanan and Huczynski, 2014). For instance, Lado and Wilson (1994) define HRM as "a collection of unique yet interconnected activities, functions, and processes geared toward attracting, developing, maintaining, or discarding a firm's human resources." This definition highlights the core functions of HRM.

However, diverging from this perspective, contemporary approaches emphasise the strategic role of HRM. According to Armstrong (2015, p. 14), HRM is "a strategic and coherent approach to managing an organisation's most valued assets - the people who contribute individually and collectively to achieving its objectives." This entails all management decisions and practises that directly impact the organisation's human resources.

This succinct definition underscores key HRM themes. It posits HRM as a strategic rather than an operational function, indicating that organisations can leverage HRM to align their strategies with HRM practises.

Other attempts to define HRM strike a balance between HRM's functional and strategic roles. For Delaney and Huselid (1996), HRM is a holistic approach to managing people, with dual objectives: employee motivation and development, and organisational

performance and productivity. This suggests that HRM underscores human-centric management and employee-organisation relationships Osibanjo *et al.*, (2012). It implies that HRM strives to balance the interests of both parties: the organisation and the individuals. Consequently, all HRM policies should aim to enhance both individual and organisational performance.

However, HRM can only generate a competitive advantage when effectively managed. Human resources must demonstrate high levels of skill, motivation, and commitment to foster productive behaviours driven by human resource practises Wright *et al.*, (2014). According to Beardwell and Claydon (2004), HRM encompasses both soft and hard variants. While the soft variant revolves around HRM functions like training, development, commitment, and participation, the hard variant primarily focuses on strategy, and utilising human resources to attain organisational goals.

The absence of this strategic partnership in many organisations in Qatar is disadvantageous to the HRM practise. In addition, the vision of Qatarisation means that experimental ways are being taken to upskill and build capability fast-tracked. Over the last few years, one way that has been implemented in a leading sector is to recruit senior expatriates in their field and identify a young, talented Qatari national to shadow them. The notion is that the identified successor will obtain the knowledge required for such a period without time to gain experience. This way has some things that could be improved, such as decision-making. Whilst shadowing, there is always a fine line between accountability and responsibility. Therefore, who is responsible for the role's decision-making? Is the expatriate assuming the position or the young successor who is learning? Even if it is considered that the expatriate fulfils the level of responsibility and makes the required decisions, how does that impact the successor when the expatriate leaves the position and the successor takes over the role? The successor is expected to assume the leadership position and be fully competent. Furthermore, the mix of expatriates from across the globe means that knowledge transfer typically occurs over a period; contracts can last two to five years.

Due to the nature of life and my lived experience practising as an HR professional in Qatar, the expatriates' circumstances may change. They may leave in the middle of the transfer of knowledge process. Thus, you then have the successor yet to be fully ready. The organisation may either place the successor into the role without experience and knowledge or recruit a replacement. The knowledge transfer is unfinished and deemed unsuccessful.

Another point to note regarding this model of upskilling is that even if a replacement is sought, the country of origin of the replacement may differ from the original expatriate. This can present a different professional knowledge they may bring to the successor. For example, a British expatriate may start the knowledge transfer and assume they work towards the CIPD HR competency framework. This individual may need to exit Qatar and be replaced by a Canadian HR professional who may bring SHRM HR competency framework standards. This can lead to inconsistency in the training of the HR professional, the identified successor, in the organisation, causing confusion. The other issue with this model is the absence of Qatar-centric HR standards and knowledge. This inconsistency may also lead to a perspective of unprofessional behaviour and even performance.

The literature review presented research studies that have found an absence of one Qatar-centric HR Model in HRM in Qatar. This project asserts similar findings and is discussed in chapter 6. Harbi, Thursfield and Bright (2017) found that the absence of clear standards and professional career paths for HR resulted in an over-reliance on expatriates to fulfil HR roles. Several researchers have found that in Arab and Middle Eastern countries, factors influencing human resource management include religious and cultural factors (HRM) practises (Branine and Pollard, 2010; Budhwar and Mellahi, 2007; Metcalfe, 2007). Furthermore, Assad (2002) and Idris (2007) stated that factors including cultural issues have led to unprofessional HR Practises. Cultural issues pose a challenge to improving organisational performance in Saudi Arabia.

There is a lack of specific literature regarding HRM practises in Qatar, and Afiouni, Ruël and Schuler (2014) stated that although there was research conducted since 2007, it was not enough and has advocated for further research in this area.

Over the last few years in Qatar and the GCC, there have been unpredicted political and economic challenges that Qatar has demonstrated its resilience in overcoming. The Qatari nationals have shown an unprecedented determination to deliver on their National Vision 2030. Therefore, it is the right time to explore Qatar's HRM practise.

The development of a professional body is a concept that has been introduced previously in Qatar. A new professional body was formed in 2004, and the 'Qatar Society of Engineers' was inaugurated and activated in engineering. Qatar has always delivered on the QNV 2030, and even over a decade ago, in 2007, the country formed a society known as 'Qatar Society of Engineers (QSE)', formerly called "The Forum of Qatari Engineers" was created on January 27th, 2007, by the Ministry of Social Affairs as part of the Qatari Law No.12 for the year 2004 concerning the initiation of Societies and Private Corporations ruled. The association's purpose was to govern the construction and engineering functions across the country. The association can determine if an engineer is competent to practise. The engineer must undergo a graded assessment and a license is issued if they pass. The association has also linked this to sponsored expatriates, so if they cannot obtain a permit, their immigration is not approved.

Furthermore, the association has the right not to renew the commercial license as an entity and prevent the company from tendering or obtaining any further projects in Qatar. This professional body and strict implementation in engineering is still relevant and active today, 2024. Therefore, there is an opportunity to take a similar, perhaps less regulated approach, for Human Resources as a profession.

These governmental procedures are becoming common across the region. Oman and KSA also have a government target for nationalisation. If these are not met, this impacts the organisation's immigration status, meaning they are not provided with any working visas to sponsor expatriates. Qatar also faces a challenge for HRM positions in

government and semi-government organisations. Obtaining authorisation for expatriates in HRM in these organisation types is difficult and time-consuming, and justification must be presented to the concerned authority to issue an immigration approval. These examples illustrate the drive for nationalisation across the region with specifics in different countries within the GCC, as aligned to their National Visions 2030.

Khaloud (2018) found that the influences that impact HRM in Qatar can be identified as standards, culture, both organisational and local, religion and the expatriate demographic in organisations. HR professionals practising in Qatar manage culturally diverse organisations, Qatari nationals, and global demographics. Similar to the region of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Qatar attracts thousands of expatriates annually. According to the results of 2017 surveys, Qatar had the highest level of dependence on foreigners in different economic sectors Al Sulaiti (2018). Furthermore, Al-Ammari and Romanowski (2016) state that the economic progress of Qatar has created an influx of high and low-skilled expatriate workers, creating a significant imbalance in the population and labour force; between nationals and expatriates Masri and Suliman (2019). The country's workforce has changed significantly, generating specific challenges for HR professionals who need to manage highly diverse employees (Al-Ammari and Romanowski, 2016; Masri and Suliman, 2019). This, coupled with the three different labour laws currently governing the profession, poses challenges. The three laws are as follows:

Table 1. Different types of Labour laws regulating employment in Qatar

Law	Organisation type governance
Qatar Labour Law[1]	Private companies
Civil HRM Law[2]	Government and semi-government
QFC Regulations[3]	QFC entities

Although Table 1 shows the clarity of which organisations are governed by which laws-there are governmental entities that have exceptions from the Civil HRM Law. Thus, their HR policies then present different governance based on those approvals. Approvals for this only happen from the Emir of the state.

Figure 2 presents the complexities and issues that are impacting day-to-day HRM practises. It is important to note that this is not one big area but several layers of mini complexities that need to be deconstructed. This research explored these and discovered the actual narrative and context of HRM practise and policy in Qatar. The conclusions and realisations from this will then be shared with the Qatar HR Forum, which supports opportunities to contribute to professionalising the Human Resource Management Practise in Qatar and to enhance the HR profession. These challenges present themselves in most organisations in the country. The connection between the research and the potential impact of any findings with the support and drive of HR professionals within the Qatar HR Forum is critical to the success of any change. The HRM function cannot work in isolation from business units in organisations. Thus, as a result, the impact of professionalising HRM practise is critical to the success of companies and, in turn, the success of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

There are multi-layers of impact on HR practise, as Figure 2 illustrates. This figure shows the different elements that impact the practise of HR in Qatar. The law is woven and

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[1] Qatar Labour Law
[2] Civil HRM Law
[3] QFC Employment Regulations

embedded with Shariah or Islamic principles. These laws translate into the HR policies, which in turn are translated into the organisation through practise.

As research has demonstrated over time, the HR function, if conducted to a professional standard, can strategically impact people's capability, something the Qatar National Vision 2030 mandates to build this human capability. Therefore, the importance of this research is ultimately critical to the success of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

Figure 2. Layers of Influence on HRM Practise in Qatar
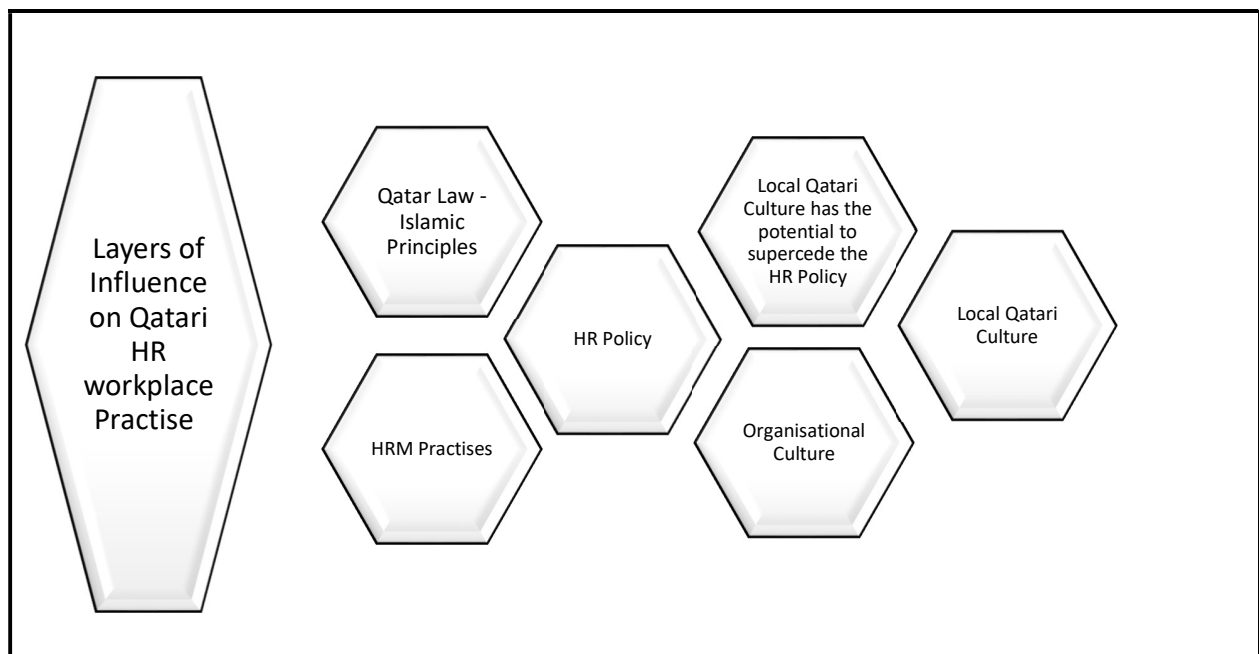
1.5.   The Strategic Role of the Qatar HR Forum

The initial idea of my research took a different approach, and I originally wanted to conduct a case study of an organisation I was working on when I embarked on this journey. However, upon review of the idea and the research proposal, I realised that to impact HR at a Qatar level, I needed to involve the Qatar HR Forum as they eventually would be part of the operationalising as well as lead change in the various organisations, as the members are representative of HR practitioners in Qatar, especially as we have a

mixed demographic including expatriates and Qatari nationals. The importance of the Qatar HR Forum and its value cannot be underestimated, and this has been built on many years of work and networking. Therefore, I wanted the research to further support the Qatar HR Forum and provide information, data, and research to enhance their experience as HR professionals in Qatar. A critical factor for me is the sustainability of building HRM Practises that are relevant and customised to Qatar, and therefore engaging the Qatar HR Forum would provide a sustainable model. A sustainable model to support and contribute to many years of further practise even in the absence of expatriates who may have contributed to this vision. This is important, especially when my colleagues or I eventually return to our home countries. To have contributed to the legacy of HR professionals is an overarching objective. I have spent time during this research project identifying gaps in knowledge that provided an opportunity for further contributions in this area or practise. I discovered that research had been conducted mainly focused on Qatarisation, not HRM practise. There was an opportunity to contribute to the HRM practise and academia.

Once I started the exploration of literature and thinking deeper into the framework of research, I identified that HR is not a standalone area to be researched, but to the contrary, it enveloped many aspects of different disciplines, including but not limited to the local culture and Islam. Therefore, these became part of the literature review framework. However, even more than this, I needed to understand the concept of culture professionally, including organisational culture and the impact of Islam in HR practises. However, one thing I understood and noted at the beginning of the proposal was that collating data would be a challenge due to the 'factor of fear' for expatriates. This led me to think much more extensively about my research, and upon researching the literature and reviewing the gaps, I decided to embark on this. I then prepared the proposal to present to the panel, and part of this process was to seek ethics approval and complete the MORE form to ensure the proposed research was in alignment with the ethical requirements. I received the approval to proceed with my research after completing and uploading the form and presenting the proposal to a panel of experts from Middlesex University.

1.6.   The research aims, objectives and research questions.

In the context of the research, this project aimed to research the area of '*Exploring Human Resource Management Practise through the Qatar HR Forum; framing the influence of 'Tharaba' culture and the development of Qatar-Centric competencies for HR Professionals practising in Qatar'.* It is naïve to assume that this can be addressed without understanding the complexities of the impact on HR; therefore, the cultural aspect is as important as the function itself. Thus, to address the specific problem of this research and provide potential solutions in the context of this research, it is necessary to formulate effective research, aims, objectives and research questions to guide the project. The research focuses on the below aims and objectives and, through answering the research questions, will be able to provide some meaningful research data to support this research intention.

The research has three main aims that were explored, below are the aims, objectives, and research questions.

Aim 1: To review Human Resources literature and professional sources while exploring the fundamental principles and context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar

Objective: To conduct a comprehensive literature review to understand the HRM context for policy and practise.

Aim 1 Research Questions

1. What is the Human Resource Management context for policy and practise in Qatar?
2. How are cultural challenges if any influencing the Human Resource Management practise in Qatar?

Aim 2: To explore ways Human Resource practitioners in the Qatar HR Forum can operationalise knowledge gained through the research to drive and support a change in Human Resource Management practise.

Objective: To conduct an online qualitative survey, semi-structured interviews and focus groups to research the lived experiences and collate data on the views of current HR practitioners in Qatar.

Aim 2: Research Questions

1- How can a shared vision of a Human Resource Management standard be explored in Qatar in the context of the Qatar Vision 2030?

2- What competencies are required for an HR professional practising in Qatar?

Aim 3: To contribute to professionalising Human Resource Practise in Qatar.

Objective: To operationalise the research findings data through the Qatar HR Forum by creating a Qatar-centric competency framework.

Aim 3: Research Question

1- How can the research findings and shared vision of standardising the competencies of HR professionals be achieved through joint advocacy of the Qatar Human Resource Forum?

These objectives, aims, and research questions will set the foundation for exploring the HRM context of policy and practise in Qatar, including the Qatar National Vision 2030, collating data on the lived experiences of HR professionals in Qatar to understand through their eyes what the required competencies are to be a successful HR professional in Qatar. This provides an opportunity to contribute to professionalising HRM Practise in Qatar in collaboration with the Qatar HR Forum.

1.7.   Summary of Chapter 1

This chapter provided an overview of the context of HRM practise in Qatar and explained why this research is important. The chapter provided insight into Qatar's labour force, the Qatar National Vision 2030, and its importance in driving Qatarisation. This was important to set the scene to provide the aims of the research, objectives, and the research questions to answer. The context overview provides a foundation to commence the literature review and the contextual framework for exploring the literature. Furthermore, it

is noted that HRM is not a speciality in isolation but is impacted in a transdisciplinary manner. As a result, in chapter 2 the literature review encompassed areas that may not seem relevant to HR but were found to have an impact on HR Practises, such as Islam, culture, Wasta and a lack of standardisation. Chapters 5 and 6 also hone in on the competency framework developed from this research. The contribution to the HR profession from these findings is discussed in more detail in chapter 6, where I will discuss the findings of new insights into HRM practise in Qatar.

Chapter 2:   Literature Review

2.1.   Outline of Chapter 2

This chapter explores and reviews the literature that informed the project and provides a foundation for the research. This chapter provides an overview of Qatar, including the Qatar National Vision 2030. This is at the core of the well-established Qatarisation theme that has provided a directive to the country to build next-generation knowledgeable Qatari national leaders. This chapter explores this in the context of HRM Practises in Qatar and the broader GCC context, encapsulating HRM's role in the policies surrounding Nationalisation. The impact of this concept in the region is fundamentally at the core of the organisational objectives. Through the literature, this chapter then explores how Qatarisation impacts HRM practises and the understanding of professional HR Practises. The literature revealed conceptual elements on other areas of influence on HRM practises in the region, such as culture, Islam and Wasta. The literature regarding Qatar and these areas was scarce. It was essential to take a structured approach to capture the available research and critically review how different research has addressed the issues of challenges in HRM practise in Qatar.

2.2.   Introduction

To set the terms of reference for this project and align with the literature review, it is vital to have some awareness and understanding of the country context, Qatar, in which the research was being conducted. Therefore, I commenced the study with a literature review incorporating the facts about Qatar and literature that discusses potential factors impacting HR. Furthermore, it is essential to provide information on the research that has been conducted in Qatar regarding this topic and for the wider region. What also has come to light is that reviewing the literature is not just about HR but also the complexities surrounding this function. The conceptual framework is discussed by Bloomberg and Volpe (2018a), which I used to plan the literature review and explore what literature exists on HR as a profession as well as the complexities of the environment within organisations, given the uniqueness of the demographics and cultures that are present in HR

departments and across organisations in Qatar. Through understanding the area of practise and understanding the history and demographics of the country, it provides the journey that HR has taken through the last few decades and presents an understanding of the current HRM context of the Human Resources professional practise. To set up and maintain an HR function in any company organisation and its reliance on an expatriate workforce, the political and environmental impacts must be recognised. This chapter will provide an understanding of the literature that provides insight into the areas above.

2.3. My Approach to the Literature Review

The long-traditional academic guidance on the approach for conducting research is to perform a search followed by an evaluation of the literature available for the area of interest being researched. This approach establishes a foundation of knowledge from which to move forward (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2018). Academic researchers, particularly new ones, are often advised to spend time in their academic institution's library as a starting point. Educational institutions usually have access to many databases and subscribe to peer-reviewed journals and other materials relevant to the topic being researched and thus are a valuable resource for literature searches. This was my starting point to conduct my literature review. I compiled a conceptual framework, as I was not only focussed on HRM research but also different influences, and impacts and I initially had two decisions to make.

In this research the conceptual framework (Bloomberg and Volpe 2008) is critical. It serves as a guide that dictates the parameters of the study. The conceptual framework was created and plays a pivotal role in the literature review in several ways. Firstly, the conceptual framework was an aid to guide the search for relevant literature. The key elements of the conceptual framework for this research include the practises of Human Resource Management (HRM) specific to Qatar, the influence of culture on HRM, and the development of competencies required for HR professionals operating in Qatar's unique cultural environment. The key variables, concepts, and theories outlined in the conceptual framework served as keywords for the literature search. The conceptual framework

supported the organisation of the literature review, as illustrated in Figure 3, literature was grouped and discussed according to the key concepts and variables in the framework. The literature search will be guided by these specific areas, using keywords derived from the framework, such as HRM practises in Qatar, Culture, Nationalisation, Qatarisation, "HR competencies", and Qatar-centric HRM.

This makes the literature review more coherent. The framework aided in analysing the literature available and to compare and contrast these. The conceptual framework aids the researcher and provides the parameters of the research and showcases where the current study fits into the existing body of knowledge in terms of my problem and research questions. Furthermore, it supports showing the unique contribution of the study. In short, the conceptual framework is not just a part of the final written research output, but it's also a tool that guides the entire research process, including the literature review. Moreover, it identifies where this current research fits into the existing body of knowledge, in relation to the specific problem and research questions. It demonstrates the research's unique contribution, specifically its exploration of the intersection of HRM practises, the cultural impact on these practises, and the development of relevant competencies in the Qatari context.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) argue that the conceptual or theoretical framework of a research study is what drives the investigation. They define a conceptual framework as "the researcher's understanding of how the particular variables in his or her study connect with each other" (p. 56). They suggest that the conceptual framework serves as a lens through which the researcher views the problem under investigation. This lens is influenced by the researcher's theoretical perspective (which may include specific theories, models, or philosophies). It should link to the purpose of the study and guide the formulation of research questions and methodologies.

In essence, Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) contend that a strong conceptual framework provides the researcher with a clear map to guide their study, ensuring that they maintain focus and direction throughout the research process. It also helps to align the research

question, design, and analysis, supporting the researcher in generating meaningful, valid conclusions. Thus, the conceptual framework is a crucial tool, guiding not just the final written output, but the entire research process, including the literature review. Figure 3 depicts the conceptual framework for this research.

Figure 3. The Conceptual Framework

Nationalisation & Qatarisation & impact on HR	Islam & The HR Function	Politeness Culture
• *Randeree (2009)* • *Forstenlecher et al (2012)* • *Scott-Jackson et al (2014)* • *Al Horr (2011)* • Reliance on Migrant workers • Nationalisation of HR and the challenges • Local employers having reservation on employing locals. • Impact of nationalisation on HR activities, e.g. PM • Impact of Qatarisation on HRM Functions	*Tayeb (1997)* *Metcalfe (2006)* *Branine & Pollard (2010)* • Islamic principles are often seen in the HR laws • Islam is the basis of the life in GCC and Middle east • Analysis of the Islamic Management, e.g kindness, Allah's will.	*Samarah (2015)* *Hofstede (1980)* • Politeness to Arabs is influenced by religion and social convention. • The religious context of politeness is found more powerful, and this was analysed due to the language that was used which embeds reference to god or 'Allah'. • Collectivist culture: focused on groups rather than individuals, in organisations where employers and employees improve their relationships to strengthen organisational solidarity.
Cultural Impact on HRM Practise • *Katou et al (2012)* • *Metcalfe (2006)* • Oman: Omani beliefs, values and norms do have an influence on the way HR Practitioners perform their roles • UAE: Many practises are based on culture.	**Wasta in HRM Practises** • *Budwhar et al (2019)* • *Iles et al (2010)* • Wasta: significant challenge in the GCC • Explored outcomes of the wasta cultural practise	**Fear Factor** • *Hudson (2013)* • *Devadason (2017)* • Tiptoeing • Golden Handcuffs

In the first instance, I had to decide which topics and areas would be of interest I would pursue. Secondly, how would I access the literature to seek out the research pertaining to my topics and areas of interest? My access was through the online digital library available at Middlesex University, and I was also fortunate enough to have a colleague who provided me access to Qatar University Library, if I was required to use it. As (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2018) suggested, a library is an essential resource. To ensure that I had the required skills to conduct a thorough and logical literature review, I was

supported by the Middlesex University library team, who were open to having one-to-one sessions when I needed them. In addition to that, I was also guided by my advisor, and I continued to read books and access literature reviews to support this process.

I commenced my literature review with the broad topic of HRM in Qatar. This initially did not yield as much literature as anticipated, so I expanded the search to include 'HR in the GCC' and 'HR in the Middle East'. I also searched 'HRM practises in the Middle East', 'Islam and Qatar', 'Culture and impact on HRM', 'Qatarisation', 'Nationalisation', 'Professionalism', 'Politeness', 'Cultural in the Arab World' to yield the literature I reviewed. I noted the gap in the literature, particularly in the context of Qatar, and therefore continued to expand the search. Still, I soon realised that my project was exploring new territory. The process was iterative, in which one resource would lead to another, and whilst assessing the literature, I would also be directed to the references cited in the document. I would then source this as a primary source and read the documents. I ensured I kept records of the papers and literature I had reviewed through the RefWorks program. As recommended by several literature search authorities (Randolph, 2009) (Costley and Nottingham, 2017), (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008), the literature search continued to locate and review sources throughout the process of completing this project.

As a researching practitioner (Costley and Nottingham, 2017), I embarked on my project as a practitioner and thus became more comfortable and familiar with professional sources of information. Nevertheless, over the years of conducting the research, I found myself becoming more comfortable in academia and literature reviews. This can be seen throughout this document. The progression of my knowledge from a practitioner to expanding into academia has broadened, including my understanding and awareness of academic rigour. My knowledge of conducting a literature review has not only developed the breadth of this project, but also my knowledge in my HRM practise as a practitioner.

### 2.4.	The State of Qatar

Extending from Saudi Arabia into the southern Persian Gulf sits the State of Qatar ruled by the Emir Shaikh Tamim. In 1971, it gained independence as it discovered petroleum resources and has one of the world's highest gross domestic products (GDPs) (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2021). Qatar has developed at a phenomenal rate both in terms of infrastructure and culture. They have opened their borders to become a leading tourist destination. Officials soon recognised that the dependence on petroleum left the economy vulnerable (International Monetary Fund, 2003), and as a result, Qatar started its journey of diversifying the economy. Diversification is seen across sectors, such as:

Education: The infamous Qatar Foundation was set up. This foundation has a multitude of internationally recognised Western universities set up branches here to service the country. The universities range from Weill Cornell University, Carnie Mellon, University College London and HEC Paris.

Finance: Qatar Financial Centre Authority was set up in 2005 to establish international financial services to invest in the country. The global financial community is invited to operate from the free zone. The goal is to make Qatar the financial centre of choice in the Middle East.

Aviation: The establishment in 1993 of Qatar Airways the national airline for the country has seen it grow into a global player in the aviation industry.

Medical: Sidra Hospital was set up as a leading women's and children's hospital in the region.

Energy City: Qatar is developing an 'Energy City' to become one of the business centres for energy commodities in the Gulf in the world's most advanced business centre of its kind

The nation's hydrocarbon wealth is distributed to the public in the form of a generous welfare system with education and health care and is made available to all Qatari citizens. This can be seen to lead to an 'entitled' attitude, and therefore there is no motivation to work to succeed to earn more – as this is provided by default. Thus, from the perspective of HR supporting nationals to exceed and to perform is challenging, once again, not just within the function but within organisations.

2.5. Qatar National Vision 2030

The Qatar National Vision 2030 has 4 pillars to develop the country, including the human development element, illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. The four pillars of the QNV2030

| 1- Economic Development | 2- Social Development | 3- Environmental Development | 4- Human Development |
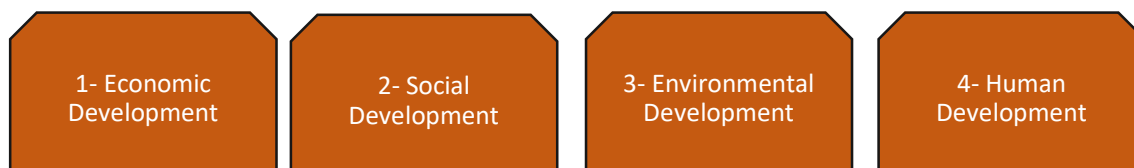
One of the key pillars of the QNV 2030 is human development in the form of capacity building and the creation of a knowledge-based economy. Furthermore, this objective is detailed in the Qatar National Development Strategy (QNDS) 2017-2021 Ministry of Planning and Development (2010). This strategy looks at the initiatives required to develop the workforce and modernise the infrastructure and the public sector. Eight levers of change have been identified. Three are specific and focused on HRM, pertaining to performance management, organisational alignment and human or talent development. The QNV (2030) stated that "elevating the importance of human resources management…leads to increased employee capabilities".

2.6. Nationalisation in the GCC

Randeree (2009) explained how in recent decades, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have become reliant on migrant workers. This has led to the workforce demographic of the GCC constituting approximately one-third of the total GCC population.

Moreover, both Qatar and the UAE are at the extremity of the situation, as the nationals of these countries constitute only one-quarter and one-fifth of their national populations, respectively. He further explains that because of these numbers and the distribution of migrant workers, the concept of nationalisation has become the HRM strategy of all GCC countries. In the case of Qatar, this is Qatarisation. The idea of nationalisation is to reduce expatriate employment by attracting more nationals into the workplace.

Randeree (2009) had previously stated:

'Nationalisation of human resources is a desired and articulated policy of all rulers of countries that form the GCC. In reality, however, the policy has been dogged with difficulties in implementation from its inception as it faces seemingly insurmountable hurdles, such as demographic imbalance caused by a high proportion of expatriates working in the region, the challenges of public and private sector employment, the role of the national women in society, the reliance on expatriate employment, high rates of unemployment among poorly trained nationals, and cumulatively the need for sustainable development as well as the effective governance of human capital.'

Towers Watson reported in their white paper perspectives by Zaki Zahran (2013) that employers in the region have their biases, too. He explained that many perceive nationals as less productive and more expensive than expatriates, as well as possessing lower skill levels and motivation. Even some local employers have reservations about employing nationals Forstenlechner *et al.,* (2012). In addition, the research shows that salaries for nationals must meet minimum wage requirements that do not apply to expatriates. Moreover, mandatory pension contributions and payroll taxes make nationals more expensive to employ in the private sector Mashood, Verhoeven and Chansarkar (2009). Furthermore, there are clear labour legislations that have been created to support the implementation of the nationalisation programs. It is not uncommon to see organisations, particularly large ones that operate in the GCC, are required to develop localisation of HR agendas. There is an impact on HR activities, including recruitment and selection, training and development, career management, performance management, compensation, and talent management, e.g. Scott-Jackson *et al.,* (2014).

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have witnessed a unique form of workforce nationalisation that aims to develop and employ local employees due to heavy reliance on expatriates in their labour markets Elbanna *et al.*, (2023). As a result, the GCC governments have recognised the need to prioritise workforce nationalisation and have implemented strategies to reduce dependence on skilled expatriates (Al Jawali *et al.*, 2022). These strategies align with the future national visions and long-term strategies adopted by the GCC countries, emphasising human development and the cultivation of a highly skilled and productive local workforce Budhwar *et al.*, (2019).

Despite research on workforce nationalisation since the early 1990s, a comprehensive literature review specifically focused on workforce nationalisation in the GCC region is yet to emerge, with the exception of Budhwar *et al.*, (2019). Existing studies generally highlight developments in the Human Resource Management (HRM) field in the Middle East, including localisation initiatives, without specifically addressing the unique aspects of workforce nationalisation in the GCC countries (Budhwar *et al.*, 2019). These unique aspects may include cultural factors, per capita income, and political systems that differentiate the GCC region from other Middle Eastern countries.

2.7.   Qatarisation and HR

The nationalisation concept in Qatar is known as Qatarisation. Al-Horr (2011) conducted research into the impact of Qatarisation policies on the HRM function. The effect of Qatarisation is two-fold in organisations. Firstly, it will impact the organisational policies in terms of recruitment and training to ensure positions are identified to be Qatarised. Secondly, the Qatarisation of the HRM function itself. Al-Horr (2011) found that the public management of organisations in Qatar claims that they are committed to Qatarisation and are willing to implement it whenever possible. However, they also argue that it is difficult to achieve the policy targets due to several 'external' challenges that are out of the companies' control. The research identified that some of the external factors in Qatar that impact Qatarisation policies are influences such as the labour market conditions such as skill shortages. The research also found that two significant macro external factors affect

Qatarisation, including the structure of the local population and the education system. Qatar has a population of people, and this has resulted in extreme dependence on non-nationals. The demographic also has a high male/female ratio and little to no participation of locals in the private sector. Therefore, the external factor of the population distribution in Qatar has a significant impact on the implementation of the Qatarisation policies mandated by government policy. Furthermore, the educational system is being blamed for not being able to provide different sectors of the economy with a qualified national workforce with the right level of general or even technical skills.

Al-Horr (2011) found that, as a result, the overall formulation of the Qatari human capital might need to be better utilised in the country. Through this research study, it was also found how workforce localisation policies are implemented in different contexts and how this affects the HR function. As to the implications of the current research for the HRM field, the findings highlighted the importance of understanding how 'external' factors shape HRM decisions. The recent study contributes to linking the notion of political contingency to HRM policies and choices by arguing that HRM in Qatar is configured differently compared to elsewhere because of state interference in the labour market. When it comes to the implementation of the Qatarisation policy on the micro-level, it was found that companies differ in their approaches to the policy. Three approaches were identified in this study.

Strategic adaptation: where companies have strategically adapted the process of Qatarisation to achieve a fifty per cent target of their organisation. These organisations use the concept of 'Quality' Qatarisation, and both managers and employees are aware of this strategic objective being implemented as a target. These companies were found to provide proper communication to the employees and transparency when it came to Qatarisation and made the required financial resources available. Furthermore, the research found that organisations such as these that would adopt a strategic approach embedded Qatarisation into their HR practises, namely in recruitment and training. They even go one step further and have clear and robust succession plans to identify Qatari successors who are invested in and supported to take on future roles. The pathway in

which these companies engaged in Qatarisation permitted them to achieve the highest Qatarisation percentages in Qatars' companies and ultimately demonstrates that taking this strategic approach and linking it to HRM practises can lead to successful implementation.

Pragmatic acceptance: These organisations were found to 'officially' commit to the Qatarisation Policy but differed from the above approach as minimal financial resources were allocated to attracting nationals to their workforce. Moreover, the lack of communication resulted in a lack of awareness among the employees in these organisations and what the Qatarisation Strategy was. It was found in the research that organisations taking a pragmatic acceptance approach meant conflicting definitions of what Qatarisation was, and confusion as to whether the focus was on numbers or training locals.

Implicit avoidance: This is the third approach to Qatarisation found to be embedded in organisations in Qatar's labour market. These organisations are more concerned with increasing the number of nationals in the company as opposed to training and investing in them. Therefore, there would be no investment in the locals meaning training programs available to the nationals. In terms of recruitment, the organisations that took the implicit avoidance approach to Qatarisation did not employ new national graduates as this would mean financial investment in terms of training and development of the graduates.

The research concluded the importance of considering the external environment when examining HRM policies and practises, since these can be determined by the consequences of external influences. The study emphasised that once the approach to Qatarisation was defined in an organisation in Qatar, then they should embed the Qatarisation policy into their HRM practises (Al-Horr, 2011).

2.8.   Political Influences on Qatar and the impact on HRM

Over the years, the political decisions have impacted HRM practises. Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2011) and Randeree (2012) identified that the availability of large pools of cheap labour has slowed the adoption of modern and productive technologies in the region, thereby holding back efforts to rebalance these economies away from oil and gas. This is identified as a critical challenge, as the GCC has their nationalisation agendas. This has led to some governments in the GCC remedying the imbalances and ironically entrenching further inequalities such as:

- Raised salaries of government employees, regardless of merit or competence. This translated to a 60% salary raise instantly for local employees in Qatar.
- The creation of public sector jobs, in many cases unneeded
- Lavished more benefits for public-sector employees.

According to Allam (2013), Saudi Arabia faces the same challenges as countries that have undergone the Arab Spring: which included challenges such as high food and housing inflation, youth unemployment of roughly 25%, and social and political unrest instigated by terrorist groups. In response to this, Saudi Arabia has increased its spending on education by 21%, and on health care and social benefits by 16%, and set quotas to increase the employment of nationals of Saudi Arabia, a government initiative across the GCC workforce. Allam (2013) also identified the impact of the increased hiring of nationals achieved by quotas comes at the cost of market and hiring inefficiencies. These solutions are not new solutions but reignited initiatives and notably appeared in response to social and political unrest in the region. This coincided with the Arab Spring. One perspective is that these governments may be trying to appease their citizens, especially the young, who shoulder the brunt of unemployment. Furthermore, the drive to nationalise the workforce displays a desire to reduce reliance on foreign expatriates and preserve national identity. It also acknowledges that long-term development cannot rest with foreign expatriates indefinitely Randeree (2012). This is interesting, particularly since research by Richardson and McKenna (2006) found that expatriates have a fundamentally different relationship with their foreign employers than workers in their

home countries, who are much more committed, which in turn has long-term effects on the stock of human capital. The implementation of the quotas system is a foundation of nationalisation programmes in the GCC nations. In these programmes, the state requires employers to hire some minimum percentage of nationals, and the strategy generally includes carrots and sticks (incentives and threats) to ensure that the policy is followed. There are many reasons for organisations to follow this directive, some of which can be traced to employer and employee perceptions, while others reflect labour market policies and conditions, both locally and abroad. Over the period of this research, there have been significant political and environmental changes that have potentially affected the context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar.

The GCC blockade.

One example of a political and environmental impact that occurred at the time of this research was the GCC blockade. This was discussed at length by Al Hamadi (2021) explaining the deep underlying political reasons for such actions taken against Qatar. He explained the facts and potential causes of the diplomatic breakdown of the GCC states that was intensified with the blockade of Qatar in 2017. The GCC alliance has always been a strong relationship due to factors such as geographical proximity, cultural and historical uniqueness and as a model for a progressive society. It was noted by Al Hamadi (2021) that the movement or the threat that emerged against Qatar has exposed the vulnerability of the GCC alliance. Qatar quickly took steps to strengthen its position and address its vulnerability through the formation of other alliances with other powers to strengthen its economy and military. The purpose of these new relationships was to mitigate the consequences of the embargo. The researcher throws light on the political uncertainty and the economic volatility that affected the instability of the GCC. The researcher also analysed how the diplomatic rift impacted the GCC's political and economic atmosphere, and examined how Qatar adopted resilient measures that strengthened the country to achieve self-reliance in various areas and at various levels.

Ulrichsen (2018), discussed the diplomatic and economic blockade of Qatar launched on June 5, 2017, and its impact on the Gulf Cooperation Council stating that the blockade has

weakened alliances. Furthermore, it has raised questions in the United States about the reliability of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as reliable political and security partners. Ulrichsen (2018) has found that the blockade has identified important implications for socio-political stability and regional security in the Gulf against a backdrop of a generational transition of leadership and a far more assertive and unpredictable thrust of policymaking coming out of regional capitals. Albasoos *et al.,* (2021) detailed a study which reviewed the challenges and opportunities encountered by Qatar due to the blockade. In summary, this is when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt closed their borders to Qatar. This caused borders to be closed, meaning that direct flights to different jurisdictions became indirect flights and costly. It also meant that while recruiting, it was difficult to obtain approvals for anyone from these countries, hence impacting a massive pool of Arabic-speaking pool of Egyptians. Internally government was not permitting the issuance of Egyptian nationals in Qatar to transfer work visas. Consequently, the recruitment pool was also decreased. Qatar adopted this as an opportunity to demonstrate self-sufficiency as a country. Furthermore, the country strengthened its ties with Turkey, and as a result, there was an influx in talent pools available from Turkey – however, they are not Arabic speaking and thus, the talent pool was limited. The findings of the research of Albasoos *et al.,* (2021) revealed that crisis management was an effective strategy implemented by the Qatari Government. It helped Qatari officials to change and transfer the negative impacts to a positive force. Although 2017 was a challenging year for Qatar due to the crisis, yet the national economy showed an accelerated growth of 5% in the second half of the same year. The impact of the GCC blockade on HR practises was challenging as experienced from my own HR professional experience and as a result not only caused challenges with recruitment but also the retention of employees from the embargo countries in particular Egyptians. It also did not directly impact their objective of hosting the FIFA World Cup 2022.

COVID-19 Global pandemic.

This has led to approximately 30% Bloomberg News (2020) of the expatriate workforce being made redundant. This demonstrated an even more urgent need for Qataris to take

on leadership roles. The reduction of the workforce by 30% also led to a mass exodus from the country and impacted HRM practises.

<u>The Ministry of Administrative Development and Social Affairs Directive:</u>
This was a directive that Qatarisation within HRM should be 80%. This means practically that the quota is monitored by the ministry and impacts any immigration issuance relating to an HR position for an expatriate. This impacts HRM practises as the recruitment pool is limited, and the fast-tracking of nationals in HRM positions without the relevant knowledge has implications.

Overall, the impact of political situations, whether directly impacting Qatar or the GCC countries or the wider region, can directly impact or even indirectly have an impact on HRM practises in Qatar.

2.9.   HR Professional Bodies

The literature review has already touched on there being HR standards which are typically stemming from a professional body.
Table 2 provides an overview of some of the global HR professional Bodies. Many professional bodies exist in HRM globally, however, directly related to Qatar, there is not one.

Table 2. Comparison of Global HR Professional Bodies

Country	Professional Body	Competency Framework
Australia	AHRI	Yes
UK	CIPD	Yes
Singapore	SHRI	Yes
UAE	FAHR	Yes
Oman	OSHRM	Yes
KSA	ASHRM	Yes
Qatar	N/A	No

What is seen in HRM functions is the adaptation of international standards, which do not relate to different practises in Qatar. The research will focus on exploring the context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar and professionalising HR, as can be seen in

Table 2, there is no recognition of the HRM practise in Qatar. The research explores the current context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar through research. There is no recognition of the HRM practise in Qatar, although to achieve the aims of the Human Development Pillar within the 2030 National Vision HRM professionals have a leading and critical role to play. Professional HR expertise would drive the strategic direction, design and delivery of all programmes that enable people performance across all sectors of the Qatar workforce. If Qatar's' HRM practises are to adopt international standards, they should "glocalise" Robertson (1994). This implies consideration of global standards but at the same time building HRM organisational structure, policies and processes whilst addressing any local market influence that is specific to a country. A phased approach to development and design tends to be lacking, and programs or policies are designed with the end state in mind rather than creating one for the current state with the flexibility to expand for the future state. The other area that was identified was competent HRM professionals. HRM has developed beyond an administrative

function to a strategic partner in organisations; developing skilled and knowledgeable HR professionals who can advise and take accountability for the decisions relating to talent management and development must be a key focus. The absence of a professional HRM body offering standards to the profession in Qatar leads to inconsistency, and an influx of irrelevant practises that do not ensure HRM practises are professional.

Thus, it is vital to have a specific model for Qatar and its HR function, a framework developed as an outcome of this project is presented and discussed in chapter 5, section 5.5.10. There is an immense opportunity to introduce professional standards in this area to support the delivery of the Qatar National Vision 2030, which could enable the Qatar HR Forum to embed glocalised practises into their organisations and, in turn, allow the HRM professional to support their organisation to build the capability within their organisations. The Qatar HR Forum provides access to insights, networks, and like-minded professionals who, as a forum and a group of like-minded HR professionals, collectively work toward the advancement of human resource professionals and human resource practises in Qatar's organisations.

As a practise, the field of Human Resources (HR) has evolved substantially over the past 40 years, shifting from a largely administrative role to a strategic partnership within organisations (Cohen, 2015; Ulrich and Dulebohn, 2015). As a result, the competencies and Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAOs) required of HR professionals have been a point of debate, as they must now match new strategic demands (Ulrich *et al*., 1995, 2017a, b; Liu and Lee, 2015; Mcdonnell and Sikander, 2017; Vu, 2017). Globally, professional bodies, such as industry associations or regulatory bodies, often play a role in establishing and defining competencies and skills required for specific professions. The professional bodies develop standards and frameworks that outline the knowledge, skills, and behaviours expected of professionals in their fields. These bodies may also offer certifications or licenses to individuals who meet the established criteria, providing evidence of their competence.

Traditionally, a universalist approach has been taken in outlining HR competencies, applying a broad set of skills relevant across the HR profession for efficiency and cost-effectiveness (Capaldo *et al*., 2006; Lo *et al*., 2015; Ulrich *et al*., 2017a, b; Vu, 2017; Getha-Taylor *et al*., 2016). However, critics argue this approach neglects organisational attributes such as size, culture, role, and function (Capaldo *et al*., 2006). The situational perspective emerged in response, suggesting competencies should be context-specific, tailored to a specific role given the variation among roles and the different sets of HR competencies required to perform job tasks (Schoonover 2003; Lo *et al*., 2015; Vu, 2017). The concept of competency in HR is highly variable, and for this discussion, competencies are referred to as a collection of technical and cultural capabilities (Brockbank, 1997). Still, different authors propose different approaches to competency definition (Ulrich *et al*., 1995; Yeung, 1996).

At the national level, governments and regulatory bodies often have their own set of competencies and skills that they deem necessary for certain professions. These requirements vary from country to country due to different regulations, legal frameworks, and cultural contexts. National bodies may establish accreditation processes, educational requirements, or licensing examinations to ensure that individuals possess the necessary competencies and skills to practise in their respective countries.

It's important for HR professionals to be aware of the competencies and skills outlined by different professional, national, and international bodies relevant to their industry or organisation. This knowledge can help inform recruitment strategies, job descriptions, performance evaluations, and professional development initiatives. By aligning with recognised standards, HR can ensure that the workforce possesses the necessary competencies and skills to meet organisational objectives and industry demands.

There are various professional bodies that have specific definitions of competencies (alongside specific competencies). The following illustrates these definitions by some of the prominent global HR professional bodies utilised extensively in Qatar.

1. Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM 2023):

SHRM defines competencies as "a cluster of related knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that together describe successful performance in a particular work setting, reflecting the combined contribution of individuals, teams, and the organisation." SHRM identifies two types of competencies: behavioural competencies (describing how individuals should behave) and technical competencies (related to specific tasks or functions).

2. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD 2023):

According to CIPD, competencies are "the behaviours and actions that individuals must demonstrate to be effective in a job, role, or specific task." They emphasise that competencies go beyond knowledge and skills, including behaviours, attitudes, and personal qualities that contribute to performance.

Relevance and Implications for HR Practises:

Professional bodies, national entities, and international organisations establish competency frameworks and standards to ensure individuals possess the necessary competencies and skills. HR professionals must remain aware of these different definitions and frameworks to inform recruitment strategies, job descriptions, performance evaluations, and professional development initiatives. By aligning with recognised standards, HR can ensure the workforce meets organisational objectives and industry demands.

Competencies and skills are integral for efficient job performance. Professional organisations at various levels provide definitions and frameworks for these traits. Acknowledging the differences between competencies (a combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviours) and skills (specific proficiencies acquired via education or experience) is pivotal for HR professionals when making decisions related to talent management. Adherence to the standards set by these professional bodies allows HR to establish common language and assessment criteria, fostering a competent and skilled

workforce. Although definitions may slightly vary, the core concept remains constant, enabling improved talent management and overall organisational success.

HR professional bodies provide governance on expected behaviours and standards that an HR professional should adhere to standards that are developed and prescribed for HR professionals in various countries. This supports HRM professionals in understanding the expectations of their role wherever they work. The bodies also provide a framework on what professional standards look like – this is typically seen through a competency framework. The concept of a competency framework is not just in the HR profession but is seen across different specialities. There is a fundamental irony that characterises HR professionalism: alignment with business strategy lies at the heart of most HR roles. One of the key attributes of a profession is the ownership of standards that not only go beyond but take precedence over, those of the organisation Farndale and Brewster (2005).

2.9.1   Professionalisation

'Professionalisation' can be viewed as a gradual process, since professional techniques usually develop gradually before professions attain the highest levels of professional status Banning (1999). It has therefore been suggested that professionalism should be perceived as a scale or continuum rather than as a cluster of characteristics.

Professions, according to Lester (2014) can be grouped into different types. The general professionals are areas such as - the priesthood, university teaching, law and physicianship; the medieval trade occupations include surgery, dentistry and architecture; the industrial-era professions (generally typified by engineering); and various groups that emerged or professionalised in the twentieth century (from teachers and social workers to accountants and personnel managers). A recent trend is for some old-established learned professions (such as curators and some scientific occupations) to re-professionalise according to more contemporary models.

Professions are identified through specific traits or characteristics. Lester (2014) discussed the need for an assessment process for entry into the profession, a common body of knowledge, a code of ethics and a professional association. The issue with this

approach is that it can be debated endlessly, it tends to be based on a few ideal types and therefore represents a particular view of the profession, and it also tends to be a product of its time. Nevertheless, a few characteristics do appear to be general and stand the test of time. These characteristics have the advantage of being independent of any specific model of organisation, and they can be applied to both individual practitioners in their field or to professions.

The CIPD report 'HR Professionalism What do we stand for?' published in 2017, explored an understanding of how to create a sense of professional identity in an organisational context, what was more important to HR practitioners in how they define their work: 'being' an HR professional or 'being' a member of a particular organisation? Given the importance of professionals in organisations and given 'the centrality of identity in how individuals make sense of and "enact" their environments' Pratt *et al*., (2006) p235. The report found that HR practitioners wanted to create a stronger sense of professional identity within their Qatar HR Forum, which the HRM professionals believe is likely to build HR's credibility and better enable practitioners to champion better work and working lives, according to the CIPD. Umphress *et al*., (2010) found that as identification strengthens, people are more likely to internalise the values of the profession and behave in ways that are consistent with its norms. Suggesting that the more someone identifies with their profession and its values, the more likely they are to demonstrate behaviours that are aligned with those professional values.

Summary of 2015 research, From Best to Good Practise HR: Developing Principles for the Profession (CIPD 2015a) combined findings from various pieces of research and provided insight into the priorities of people management decision-makers and how those priorities may be challenged in the future. Key findings include both HR professionals and business leaders are primarily aligned on what the best thing to do is, but there is a gap between ambition and practise. Furthermore, HR practitioners face tensions in managing the interests of management and staff, which are often conflicting Caldwell (2003). The CIPD report stated that HR is viewed as a function rather than as a profession by organisations, which presents a significant challenge for practitioners when it comes to

challenging unethical organisational decisions. The global trends impacting the world of work are constantly challenging people management practise. HR practitioners will need to apply their expertise in the context of explicit core values guiding their professional judgements.

In this rapidly changing global world of work environment, it will be increasingly important for HR to be clear on what they stand for as professionals if they are to be trusted advisers to business leaders. However, as a relatively young profession that has experienced many role changes, the credibility of HR practitioners has been under constant scrutiny. The role of HR has shifted from traditional personnel management to custodians of 'Since HR is responsible for making decisions that affect workers' lives, HR practitioners must understand the sensitivities that come with managing human beings, rather than focusing solely on business profits. (CIPD 2015a)' Although this is a UK-centric report, these findings are not unfamiliar to the context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar.

The concept that having a professional body with standards creates a belonging of practitioners to a profession also ensures adherence to professional and ethical behaviours as proposed by professional bodies. Qatar lacks a professional body, and therefore, in turn, it does not have HR standards and no competency framework for the HRM profession. It could be argued that this lack of standard in the HRM in Qatar could mean that HR professionals are not professional and may not even follow ethical standards. This is an area that will be explored within this research.

2.10.   HR in the Middle East

The Middle East is highly diverse in terms of languages, ethnicities, religions, as well as political and economic systems Mellahi, Demirbag and Riddle (2011). These findings taken in the context of organisations reflect the complexities circling Human resources. The Arab Middle East is described as a group of emerging economies including Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine (Gaza Strip and West Bank),

Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen (The World Bank 2009). However, none have focussed, specifically on Qatar, although the literature does provide an opportunity to study synergies with HR of neighbouring Middle Eastern countries. This research focuses on Qatar, it has both a common and unique identity within the Arab Middle East.

Several scholars, such as Becker and Huselid (1999) Truss (2008), in the literature, have noted that the human resource (HR) function must move from its traditional operational role towards a more strategic role. The thinking is that if HRM is not strategic, it will be unable to demonstrate strategic value within the organisation and contribute to the overall organisational performance.

Gooderham *et al*., (1999) have also argued that the formal institutional framework backed up by legislation affects HRM practises and the role of HR practitioners. Mamman and Al Kulaiby (2014) conducted a research study on the usefulness of Ulrich's HR model in understanding HR Practitioners' role in non-western countries, focusing mainly on Oman in the GCC. The study revealed that there were unique characteristics that were determined by the influence of institutional forces. They found that public sector organisations have vague, hard-to-measure, multiple and conflicting goals, concluding that without clear goals, HR practitioners will be reduced to a mere administrative or functional expert role. This aligns with the scholars Becker and Huselid (1999) Truss (2008), who discussed the necessity of strategic HRM for it to be viewed as contributing to the organisation's overall performance. Furthermore, Mamman and Al Kulaiby (2014) explained that the nature of institutional forces determines the degree of managerial autonomy, which in turn determines HR practitioners' degree of influence in an organisation. They also stated that Socio-cultural factors contributed to how managers respond to rules, but the rules themselves were impacted by socio-cultural factors. This conveyed the conclusion that culture may also influence the role of HR practitioners within the institutional context of Oman. This leads to the dimensions of culture that may impact HR practises, and HR practitioners may be carrying out their roles within the notion of 'power distance'. Bakhtari (1995) confirmed this cultural impact and pointed out that coercive or authoritative style characterises management practise in most Arab countries.

Branine and Pollard (2010) argued that in Arab societies often, friendship and kinship took more priority over qualifications as line managers feel responsible for supporting their network, namely relatives, family and friends. This can also be construed as Wasta. Other authors have made the point that cultural influences in the Middle East are impactful on HRM practises, providing further rationale for this research study and contributing to the knowledge on HRM practises in Qatar. Afiouni, Ruël and Schuler (2013) suggested that the professionalism of HR functions (HRf) in the GCC is not of world-class standard and might have relied too much on unsuitable imported HR methods. This research aims to explore the professionalisation of HRM in Qatar and make recommendations to professionalise HRM in Qatar. It was suggested by Afiouni, Karam and El-Hajj (2013) that further research "is also needed to suggest ways in which companies can align their HR practises to their business strategies while accounting for external institutional realities. In the case of multinational corporations (MNCs), for example, to what extent can HR practises be standardised or localised and what are the trade-offs that need to be made to ensure survival without compromising business competitiveness? There may also be practical benefits, as suggested by Afiouni, Karam and El-Hajj (2013), to conducting further research into how much MNCs have made to their HRM practises when applied to the Arab region.

2.11.   Cultural and Islamic influence in the Middle East

The literature review restates the complexities within the cross-cultural set-up of organisations in Qatar as the HRM function is not independent of factors such as culture and religion in the workplace. It is crucial because individuals don't only bring their expertise to the workplace but also their own cultures, values, and religious beliefs. Although these may not be apparent, they become visible in the workplace as practises these practises can influence and impact HRM. This section will explore organisational culture, a theoretical review of cultural models and their application in Qatar, followed by the Islamic influence on HRM practises in the GCC.

2.11.1 Organisational Culture and a critical review of Hofstede's Model

Organisational culture has been defined by various researchers as 'people's attitudes, values, and ways of making decisions within an organisation Dutch (2013) and symbols, rituals, social patterns, and shared understanding of the behaviour within the organisation Chow and Liu (2009) It is important to understand that organisational culture, business strategy and HR strategy all have a significant impact on the organisation's performance and efficiency. Chow and Liu (2009) state that HR systems help shape the behaviour of individuals, and thus become the pathway by which cultures are created and sustained within organisations. The behaviour of employees is seen in organisational culture. Dutch (2013) states a 'symbiotic' relationship between organisational culture and HRM in that the latter communicates the corporate values, which are a primary driver of the organisational culture. Building and maintaining connections with people is just one form of cultural diversity. To maintain a network, people need to understand the culture with which they are associating.

There have been many authors who have interpreted the meaning of the word culture differently. American anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) have given more than 160 different definitions for culture. They identify the concept of culture as an idea that consists of patterns, but two main points to note are that culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action; on the other, as conditioning elements of future action, Kroeber and Kluckhohn's (1952) concept of culture can be construed as the following Holden (2002) that a set of ideas, concepts, or notions, especially values are shared by the members of a culture. This set of beliefs is transferred from one generation to another through symbols, and finally, that culture exists from the past actions of members of a group.

Much interest has been placed on culture in business in the last two decades, and it has never been as important in business terms as it is today. The study of the field began in earnest with the work of Hofstede with his landmark study of IBM Hofstede (1980). Preceding these studies, however, was the work of Bartels (1967), who was one of the

first to relate the importance of culture, illustrating the concept in decision-making and business ethics. He identifies several criteria for the identification of cultural differences.

Hofstede's gargantuan research effort commencing in 1980 is the most celebrated of its kind (Bond, 2002). Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, as outlined in his 2010 research, represents an evolution from his original model in the 1980s. Originally, Hofstede (1980) identified four dimensions: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, and Masculinity vs. Femininity. This model was primarily based on his analysis of IBM employees across various countries. In 1991, in collaboration with Michael Bond, Hofstede expanded his theory to include the fifth dimension, Long Term Orientation vs. Short Term Normative Orientation. This addition was influenced by Bond's (1988) research in East Asian cultures and emphasised values like persistence and thrift. Finally, in 2010, Hofstede introduced the sixth dimension, Indulgence vs. Restraint, which explores the degree to which societies permit the gratification of basic human desires. Hofstede's (2010) update significantly broadened the application and relevance of his model, making it a more comprehensive tool for understanding cultural differences in global and organisational contexts.

The six dimensions of the Hofstede Cultural model are as follows:

1- Power Distance (PD) PD has to do with the degree to which unequal distribution of power and wealth is tolerated. This can be determined by the level of hierarchy in workplaces and the distance between social strata.
2- Individualism (IC) This is a measure of whether people prefer to work alone or in groups. It indicates the degree of social/community integration. Indigenous nations tend to be collective where the original culture has not become fractured.
3- Masculinity (MF) This scale does not refer absolutely, to the dominance of gender. It depicts the degree to which masculine traits like authority, assertiveness, performance and success are preferred to female characteristics like personal relationships, quality of life, service and welfare.

4- Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) UA is the extent to which people are threatened by a lack of structure or by uncertain events. It refers to how people will deal with the future, whether they have inherent control, or whether events are beyond their control (fatalism).

5- Short term Vs Long term orientation

6- Indulgence vs. Restraint. This dimension reflects the degree to which societies allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun, as opposed to restraining these desires due to social norms.

Qatar, in the context of Hofstede's theory, can be summarised as a collectivist, feminine society that stresses high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance. If we look at Qatar from the Hofstede dimensions, we can get a better insight into the culture and thus a better understanding of how the culture impacts the workplace. Criticised and complimented on the breadth, depth and importance of his study of Hofstede's work has been nothing short of highly controversial. Many arguments run against Hofstede's work, and the discussion which follows endeavours to capture some of the more pertinent issues.

Relevancy

It is believed by many researchers that a survey is not an appropriate instrument for accurately determining and measuring cultural differences. Mainly when the variable being measured is a value that is culturally sensitive and subjective Schwartz (1999). Hofstede (1998) responds to this critique by responding that surveys are one method but not the only method that was used.

Cultural Homogeneity

This criticism is taking the perspective that the study assumes the domestic population is a homogenous whole. However, it is known that most nations are made up of different ethnic groups Jones (2007). The analysis is therefore restricted by the individual character of the person undergoing the assessment, thus possibly leading to outcomes

of randomness. On the other hand, Hofstede (1998) believed to ignore the importance of community and the variations of the community influences Williams *et al.,* (1988), Lindell and Arvonen (1996).

National Divisions

This argument against Hofstede's cultural model is that nations do not form proper units of analysis as cultures are not automatically bounded by borders McSweeney (2002) More recent research has found that culture is fragmented across the group and national lines DiMaggio (1997). Hofstede points out that national identity is the only means we have of identifying and measuring cultural differences Hofstede (1998).

Political Influences

The outcomes, particularly those pertaining to Masculinity Søndergaard (1994) and Uncertainty Avoidance Newman and Nollen (1996) may have been sensitive to the timing of the survey. As a result of the political instabilities of the time, the sample lacks data from socialist countries, as well as from the less affluent Third World Countries.

One Company Approach

A study fixated on only one company cannot possibly provide information on the entire cultural system of a country Søndergaard (1994). Hofstede said he was not making an absolute measure, he was merely gauging differences between cultures, and this style of cross-sectional analysis was appropriate Hofstede (1998). In addition, Hofstede points out that the use of a single multinational employer eliminates the effect of the corporate policy and management practises from different companies influencing behaviour differently, leaving only national culture to explain cultural differences Hofstede (1980).

Out-dated

Some researchers have claimed that the study is too old to be of any modern value, particularly with today's rapidly changing global environments, internationalisation and convergence. Hofstede countered by saying that the cross-cultural outcomes were based

on centuries of indoctrination, recent replications have supported the fact that culture will not change overnight Hofstede (1998).

Too Few Dimensions

Four or five dimensions do not give sufficient information about cultural differences. Hofstede agrees, he believes additional dimensions should continue to be added to his original work Hofstede (1998).

Statistical integrity

Dorfman and Howell (1988) have found that Hofstede's' analysis, has, on occasion, used the same questionnaire item on more than one scale, and several have significant cross-loadings.

The above critique of the cultural model that Hofstede created demonstrates that if it is used to assess culture, it needs to be used with precaution and address the limitations presented by other researchers. As the global workforce becomes the norm, it becomes imperative for HR managers to manage an increasingly diverse range of cultures. Global managers have realised that HRM strategies differ significantly across different countries with varying cross-cultural settings and that the strategy used to manage human resources in one country cannot be applied in another country Budhwar and Debrah (2001). Globalisation has increased the pressure on HR managers to identify and adjust to cultural differences when doing business Mendonca and Kanungo (2006). Authors Budhwar and associates (Budhwar and Debrah, 2001; Budhwar and Sparrow, 1998, 2002) have developed a framework for studying and investigating cross-national HRM. They have recognised three levels of determinants that they believe to affect cross-national HRM policies and practises. These are Budhwar and Debrah (2001):

• National Factors – These involve national culture, national organisations, businesses, and business environments.

• Contingent variables – Explained above, including factors such as age, size, ownership type, life-cycle stage of the business, the existence of trade unions, types of HR strategies and policies, and benefits to stakeholders.

• Organisational Strategies –These strategies also include policies and practises related to HRM functions and administrative units existing in a firm dealing with labour markets. For studying HRM in developing countries, more significant stress is laid on the analysis of the influence of national factors

2.11.2   Islam and the HRM function

To explore the context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar it is essential to review if there is any impact of Islam on the HRM practises found in organisations. It was found that there has been some research conducted in this area, not specifically in Qatar but in the UAE and KSA, which are in close geographical proximity of the country with a similar national identity.

Tayeb (1997) researched examples that demonstrated these values and attitudes in Islamic countries and found that seniority job status and tolerance of ambiguity were all impacted. Mellahi (2007) noted that Saudi Arabian culture is highly collectivist, which means it is focused on the group rather than individuals, which translates into organisations where employers and employees improve their relationships to strengthen organisational solidarity. This is mirrored in the Qatari culture, being an Islamic culture and a collectivist society. These Islamic principles are often seen in the HR laws of the country, such as Hajj leave, and Umrah leave, the rights of females are protected, ensuring that they are entitled to nursing hours for at least two years – which is an Islamic criterion.

The has been some previous research conducted that examines whether there are common HR practises and policies in countries that are expressly modelled after Islamic religious ideals to whether there is a distinctive Islamic HRM model (Katou *et al.*, 2010) (e.g., Tayeb 1997; Al-Hamadi, Budhwar and Shipton 2007; Ali, 2010; Branine and Pollard 2010; Mellahi and Budhwar 2010). It is important to note that Islam is the basis of life in

the Arab world, and in Qatar, it governs all aspects of life and therefore by, default becomes central to business. Some of this research proposes that Islamic characteristics embedded within HRM include, for example, when business is conducted face-to-face is the preferred method Tayeb (1997) as well as complementary interests between employers and employees Ali (2010). Mellahi and Budhwar (2010) suggest that there is more research on HRM in Islamic countries than on HRM from an Islamic perspective. Branine and Pollard (2010) provided a more profound analysis of Islamic management principles (e.g., intention, mindful of Almighty God and kindness) and the actual practise of management in Islamic Arab countries and concluded that there is a considerable gap between the two.

Culture is present globally in organisations however, what sets an organisational culture? As the research is conducted in Qatar, culture cannot be ignored and is an important element of the way organisations function. There are many factors that influence organisational culture and can define that if a culture is more substantial than a strategic vision, the culture could be more impactful than the strategic vision. This section will explore some of the effects of culture and what they are.

In 2006 the literature focused on the idea that linked HRM practises to national culture Dirani and Hamie (2017). The question that was being answered was whether HRM practises are culture-free or culture-bound. Most authors, regardless of the country covered, conclude that HRM practises are likely to be influenced by both cultural and institutional factors and that it is difficult to deconstruct the various cultural, Islamic and institutional influences. Democracy is absent from Arab culture, and the prominent management style is Authoritarian is what has been found by Branine and Pollard (2010). This is an important point as the culture and Islam cannot be analysed separately, Islam feeds into the local culture, and local culture feeds into the workplace. The way in which HR then proceeds to partner strategically can be impacted when the culture is Authoritarian, as it can translate into the workplace where senior HR professionals may not feel they can speak up. Through the complexity of the expatriate mix and the 'job insecurity' that may be felt, HR professionalism may be absent, and in turn, the HRM

function is administrative. Metcalfe (2006) found that the UAE, which has transformed into a developed country, has many cultural practises, which are driven by Arabic values as seen in the Middle East. The research also found that in most of the GCC countries, including the UAE the interpretation of the Labour laws is steered by 'Urf' (custom) and 'Sharia (Islamic Law) which reflects the need to protect women and create a moral work.

2.11.3 Wasta in HRM practises

Wasta (going in between) is described as a powerful and pervasive social mechanism that has strong roots in cultural traditions and is known to underpin the employment relationship in Arabic societies. Mohammad and Hamdy (2008) described it as an intervention to obtain benefits and/or benefits from a third party.

In the context of HR Wasta, a form of social networking prevalent in the Arab Middle East, enables individuals to utilise connections for their benefit, such as gaining jobs, good performance appraisal results, and quick promotions, regardless of their actual merit Alsarhan and Valax (2020). Despite its wide usage, research on Wasta has been fragmented and lacking in theoretical rigour (Berger *et al*., 2019; Alsarhan *et al.,* 2020; Al-Twal, 2021).

Wasta is prevalent across the Middle East including Lebanon, rooted in tribal, familial, and friendship networks and used informally to distribute resources and achieve objectives (Makhoul and Harrison, 2004; Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993; Stefanidis *et al*., 2023). The practise, deeply embedded in Arabic societies' culture and collectivism, presents challenges due to unemployment, legislative gaps, institutional voids, lack of public trust, inefficiencies in bureaucratic systems, political systems, and the education system (Afiouni, Karam, and Makarem, 2020; Aldossari and Robertson, 2015; Kropf and Newbury-Smith, 2016; Alsarhan, 2021; Berger *et al*., 2015; Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993; Kilani and Sakijha, 2002; Ta'Amnha *et al*., 2016).

This cultural influence is also evident in Saudi Arabian organisations, such as SACO, where Hofstede's cultural dimensions, specifically collectivism and power distance, are

useful heuristics for understanding the cultural context for performance appraisal (Peretz and Fried, 2012; Branine and Pollard, 2010; Budhwar and Mellahi, 2007; Metcalfe, 2007; Idris, 2007; Hofstede, 1980, 2001). A more comprehensive understanding of culture's role in HRM. It is important to identify this as an embedded cultural impact on HRM practises in the GCC Qatar.

Wasta has been identified as a significant challenge in the workplace by Budhwar *et al.,* (2019), particularly when it came to delivering on the nationalisation agenda, which is seen across the GCC. Wasta as a concept is contrary to Islamic Principles of practise of equity and fairness. Wasta involves a person (intercessor) who does the Wasta (as a verb) and a waste (supplicant) who receives benefits (known as objects). Sometimes it is through a third party. Wasta is defined as a "process whereby one may achieve goals through links with key persons in positions of higher status. These links are personalistic, and most often derive from family relationships or close friendships" Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993). Wasta is then a form of social capital, associated with loyalty and solidarity, resulting in an unwritten social contract and a hidden force or an invisible hand, which is not confined to support, and favouritism provided to family members, such as nepotism, but involves several other relationships such as cronyism, kinship, colleagueship, friendships, and business relationships Ta'Amnha *et al*., (2016). Wasta can also be viewed as a mechanism to bypass the law and obtain benefits and favours, sometimes at the expense of other people. Therefore, the concept, although it exists, is not a practise that many Arab people like. It is not just seen in the GCC, but an example where is being attempted to be eliminated is in Jordan, which, if proven, can be a punishable crime. However, even though some countries do take this view, the prevalence in organisations across the Arab world seems to be on the increase as it is proving to be impossible to overcome bureaucratic obstacles in any other way. Their reason for this could be due to a lack of transparency and accountability at all levels (organisational and national), lack of trust between people and government/authorities who try to maintain a grip on authority to govern, its informal institutionalisation (i.e., the belief that it is one's right to access a resource via such means), lack of protection of employees' rights via labour legislation resulting in people to rely on it to protect

themselves, and to a great extent the race to access scarce jobs and related benefits. Iles *et al.,* (2012) explored outcomes of the Wasta cultural practise, which included but were not limited to:

- lack of competence among employees
- unprofessional behaviour,
- perceptions of ill justice,
- resentment and risk of retaliation,
- destruction of equality and fairness at the workplace,
- results in unfair practises.

Most importantly, all these also have an impact on HRM in the region. Despite the impact and the presence of Wasta in the Arab region, there is a lack of research and evidence available on various aspects of Wasta Aldossari and Robertson (2015). The definition and understanding of the practise of Wasta and how it impacts the HRM practises is essential to understand whilst exploring the context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar, as it is prevalent and has a potential impact and concluded by the research. To date, the research concludes that although there is religious influence, the Arab culture likely has more influence, and Branine and Pollard (2010) suggested that, they are two areas that cannot be separated as they intertwine with complexity. This research project provides an opportunity to explore the Islamic influence, if any, on HRM practises in Qatar.

2.11.4 Impact of local culture on HRM practises

Katou *et al*., (2010) conducted a study on the influence of ethical beliefs, national or local culture and institutions on preferences for Human Resources Management in Oman. It was observed that Omani beliefs, values and norms do influence the way HR practitioners perform their roles. This can also be comparable to HR practitioners performing their roles in Qatar. The research found that HR practitioners in the public sector appear to perform less strategic roles than their counterparts in the private sector. The roles performed by HR practitioners can be influenced by the industry they operate in and the sociocultural context. This leads to the suggestion that Ulrich's model might be more applicable in the

private sector in an HRM function as an HR professional rather than in a bureaucratic setting of a public sector.

Namazie and Frame (2007) found similar issues in Iran whilst researching the perception, understanding and role of HRM in Iran, which found that the strategic element was lacking, and the personnel management side was more apparent. The research found varying HR challenges, including the three areas of workforce, cultural and environmental. These challenges were felt in multinational companies (MNCs) primarily due to the relationship-oriented culture that is found in Iran. This cultural factor, in turn, posed many problems for the MNCs to standardise their global HR Processes, which do not take into consideration cultural preferences.

Several academic authors have critically reviewed Hofstedes' work in the field of culture. McSweeney (2002) critiques Hofstede's model, challenges the notion of national culture as a systematically causal factor of behaviour and finds it implausible. This critique provides caution to those who rely on Hofstede's research and examines its logical consistency.

From a paradigmatic perspective, McSweeney (2002) argues against Hofstede's logic and rejects his paradigm and premises. This highlights the need to consider multiple paradigms, including functionalist and alternative perspectives, for future research on national culture and understanding social behaviour in different national cultures. Williamson (2002), describes McSweeney (2002) critique to be used as a warning, but disagrees that the model should be rejected, due to the fact there are no satisfactory models developed to assess culture and would be throwing away valuable insight.

In summary, McSweeney (2002) critique challenges the plausibility and systematic causality of national culture in explaining behaviour. It serves as a warning to those who rely solely on Hofstede's research and emphasises the importance of considering multiple paradigms for future research on national culture and social behaviour in diverse cultural contexts. In addition to these cultural adjustments based on Hofstede's dimensions,

expatriates may also need to adapt to local language, customs, and social norms. Building cross-cultural competence, seeking cultural training and support, and maintaining an open-minded and flexible attitude can aid in successful cultural adjustment for expatriates.

The investigation into the role of culture in international Human Resource Management (HRM) and its interaction with Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory represents a critical area of research in organisational studies. This body of work, encompassing contributions from several key scholars, delves into the multifaceted nature of culture and its impact on HR practises, while also critically assessing the limitations of Hofstede's (1980) framework.

Baah (2013) underscores the profound impact of societal values, attitudes, and behaviours on organisational operations, particularly in multinational corporations. His work emphasises the deep-rooted influence of culture in shaping organisational dynamics, highlighting how cultural orientations can significantly affect the success or failure of international corporations. Baah (2013) conducted a literature review but the analysis, while providing crucial insights, stops short of fully exploring the dynamic and evolving nature of culture within organisations, a gap that subsequent research attempts to address.

Aguilera and Dencker (2004) further contributes to this discourse by differentiating between organisational and national cultures. Their work highlights the nuances each brings to global HR management and underscores the importance of understanding both forms of culture and their impacts on workforce management. However, this dichotomy, while useful, may oversimplify the complex interplay between these two types of culture, particularly in a globalised business environment where boundaries between organisational and national cultures are often fluid and permeable.

Harzing *et al*., (2001) conducted a comprehensive study to understand the deployment of expatriates in multinational companies (MNCs) and the impact of cultural differences

in cross-border mergers and acquisitions. Utilising data from an international survey of 212 subsidiaries of MNCs in 22 countries, the study identified three key functions of international transfers: position filling, management development, and coordination and control. It found significant variations in these functions based on the MNC's home country, subsidiary location, and cultural differences. The research emphasised the critical role of cultural integration in global business practises, highlighting the need for cultural awareness in HR practises like recruitment, training, and retention. Their work, however, could be critiqued for being overly focused on the challenges, rather than exploring potential synergies that different cultural frameworks can bring to organisations.

Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory, a seminal contribution to cross-cultural studies, has been subject to significant critiques, most notably from McSweeney (2002). McSweeney's (2002) critique is centred around Hofstede's (1980) methodological approach, which relied on survey data collected from IBM employees in various countries. He argues that this approach risks oversimplifying and generalising national cultures, potentially leading to inaccurate representations based on a dataset that might not fully capture the diversity within nations. Furthermore, McSweeney (2002) challenges the foundational assumptions of Hofstede's (1980) work, particularly the notion of portraying national culture as a simplistic and static causal factor of behaviour. This critique points to the need for a more dynamic and detailed understanding of culture, recognising its complexities and the potential for change over time. In response to McSweeney's (2002) critique, Williamson (2002) acknowledges the limitations pointed out but cautions against completely discarding Hofstede's (1980) model. Williamson (2002) suggests that despite its shortcomings, Hofstede's (1980) work still offers valuable insights, and there is a lack of a satisfactory alternative model that comprehensively addresses the complexities of culture. This perspective highlights the ongoing debate in the field about the best approaches to studying and understanding culture in a global context, balancing the need for comprehensive frameworks while acknowledging the inherent intricacies and dynamism of cultural phenomena. McSweeney (2002) advocates for a more detailed and nuanced understanding of culture, possibly through ethnographic studies or mixed-

methods research, which could provide a deeper and more comprehensive view of cultural nuances.

There is no dispute that culture stands as an unquestionable pillar, shaping organisational behaviour and driving the distinctions of HR practises across various geopolitical landscapes. Baah (2013) and Hofstede (2010) notably anchor the implications of culture on organisational mechanisms, exposing the complex interplay between societal values, attitudes, and behavioural patterns. The methodologies rooted in this domain are often expansive, employing surveys to discern patterns in work attitudes and organisational values on a national scale. Delving into more detail, Aguilera and Dencker (2004) provide a distinction between organisational culture, a mosaic of specific company norms and values, and the broader, all-encompassing national culture. Understanding these different layers of culture requires methodologies of diverse scale and scope. While organisational culture often invites detailed case studies, interviews, and internal surveys, national culture is typically explored through broader, more extensive survey methodologies, encompassing a wider population to discern general patterns and trends.

Further contributing to the landscape Harzing *et al*., (2001) explore the complexities encountered in cross-border mergers and acquisitions. Their research highlights the crucial role that cultural differences play in such contexts. The success of these international ventures often hinges on the effective navigation and management of cultural differences, whether organisational or national. This emphasis on cultural integration in global business practises underscores the intricacy of merging different cultural frameworks and the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity in global HR practises like recruitment, training, and retention. Here, the ability of an organisation to harmonise its internal culture with the external national culture, especially in leadership and management practises deeply entrenched in cultural norms, becomes a critical determinant of success in the international landscape.

The discussion continues through the research of Namazie and Frame (2007) which adds another layer. Their qualitative study of HRM in Iran, conducting 20 semi-structured

interviews from 14 organisations reveals a landscape predominantly oriented towards personnel management, with strategic HR elements conspicuously absent. This orientation poses significant challenges for multinational companies (MNCs) operating in Iran, given the country's deeply relational and nuanced cultural context. The research underscores the difficulties faced by MNCs in aligning their standardised HR processes with local cultural preferences and practises, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of local cultures in global HR management.

More recent studies, such as that by Alqudah *et al.*, (2022), provide contemporary insights that both support and challenge Hofstede's (1980, 2010) cultural dimensions model. Focusing on the context of Jordanian banks, their research underscores the role of hierarchy culture, aligning with Hofstede's (1980, 2010) Power Distance dimension, and demonstrating how cultural acceptance of hierarchical structures influences organisational practises like high-performance HRM. This alignment validates the relevance of Hofstede's (1980, 2010) model in understanding the impact of cultural dimensions on organisational behaviour. However, their study also presents a nuanced challenge to Hofstede's (1980, 2010) framework. By concentrating on the specific context of Jordanian banks, the research highlights the complexity of cultural influences within a particular society or sector, suggesting that organisational culture can have unique characteristics not fully captured by broad national cultural traits. This nuanced perspective suggests that while Hofstede's (1980) model provides a valuable overarching framework for understanding cultural trends, it may benefit from integrating more context-specific analyses, particularly in organisational settings. The study supports the importance of Hofstede's (1980, 2010) cultural dimensions in understanding organisational practises but also underscores the need for more dynamic and multifaceted approaches that consider specific contexts and industries within national cultures.

The spectrum of research spanning from Hofstede's (1980) foundational work to the critiques and extensions offered by scholars like McSweeney (2002), and more recent studies like that of Alqudah *et al.*, (2022) collectively emphasise the need for a more

nuanced, dynamic, and multifaceted approach to studying the relationship between culture and HRM. The research was conducted between March 2020 and September 2020, this research targeted bank employees in Jordan, using a structured questionnaire delivered through email, phone, and personal contacts. This body of work underscores the criticality of culture in shaping HR practises and strategies, highlighting the necessity for HR professionals to navigate this complex landscape with sensitivity, insight, and an openness to evolving cultural dynamics. The intersection of organisational and national cultures, the intricacies of mergers and acquisitions, and the overarching influence of culture on HR are pivotal areas of study in this field. Employing robust methodologies, fortified by comprehensive data, is essential for a thorough understanding of these dynamics. While Hofstede's (1980) framework has provided valuable insights into cultural influences on organisational behaviour, the evolution of the field indicates that blending diverse methods and considering critiques like McSweeney's (2002) has paved the way for a more holistic comprehension of the relationship between culture and HR, and continues to do so.

In conclusion, the exploration of culture's influence on HRM across different regions and contexts reveals complex interplays between national culture, organisational practises, and societal norms. The critiques and expansions of Hofstede's (1980) work, alongside specific studies into regional cultural nuances like those in Jordan (Alqudah *et al*., 2022), and Iran (Namazie and Frame, 2007)   underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of culture in HRM practises. This includes considering multiple paradigms and acknowledging the intricacies of cultural dynamics within specific social contexts. As organisations navigate the global landscape, a deep appreciation of these cultural dimensions becomes essential for effective HR management. This exploration highlights the ongoing need for nuanced and context-specific research in understanding the dynamic interplay between culture and organisational practises in an increasingly globalised world.

Furthermore, while there doesn't appear to be specific literature directly critiquing Hofstede's work using Ulrich's contributions, I can offer a critical evaluation of Hofstede's

(1980) cultural dimensions in the context of HRM and consider potential insights from Ulrich's work. One critique is that Hofstede's dimensions may oversimplify the complexity of cultural variations within and between countries. Culture is a multifaceted and dynamic concept influenced by various factors, including history, religion, socioeconomic conditions, and political systems. Hofstede's dimensions, while providing a broad framework, may not capture the nuances and intricacies of specific cultural contexts.

Ulrich (1997) has emphasised the strategic role of HR and the need to align HR practises with organisational objectives. While Ulrich (1997) work may not directly critique Hofstede's dimensions, his emphasis on context and strategic alignment aligns with the need for a nuanced understanding of cultural factors in HRM.

Ulrich's frameworks, such as the HR business partner model and HR competency framework, emphasise the importance of considering local factors and cultural variations in HR practises. This aligns with the critique that Hofstede's dimensions may not fully capture the diversity and complexity of cultures. Furthermore, Ulrich (1997) focuses' on the strategic contribution of HR suggesting the need to go beyond cultural dimensions alone in shaping HR practises. It highlights the importance of understanding the specific organisational context, aligning HR strategies with business objectives, and considering a range of factors, including culture, to effectively manage human resources.

While direct critique of Hofstede's work using Ulrich (1997) contributions may not be readily available, the alignment of their perspectives suggests that a more comprehensive and contextually sensitive approach to HRM is needed. This would involve considering cultural dimensions alongside other factors, such as organisational context and strategic alignment, to develop effective HR strategies.

In summary, a critical evaluation of Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions in light of Ulrich's work suggests the need for a nuanced and comprehensive approach to HRM. While there may not be explicit discussions linking Ulrich's work to Hofstede's dimensions, Ulrich's emphasis on context, strategic alignment, and the consideration of local factors

aligns with the critique that cultural dimensions alone may oversimplify the complexity of cultures. Integrating insights from both Hofstede and Ulrich can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of culture's role in HRM.

2.11.5 Politeness within Culture

The politeness within culture that has arisen from the research to support the data and build on the work Hofstede (1980) has contributed to in this area. For many decades this has been discussed by Hofstede (1980), a collectivist culture. The support provided to one another can also be identified as Wasta, as discussed in chapter 2, section 2.11.3. The results of the research also identified this as an area that impacted HRM Practises, and this is discussed in more detail in chapter 5 in section 5.5.2.

This was also found in Samarahs' (2015) work where he concluded the following.

I. Politeness to Arabs is influenced by religion and social convention.
II. The religious context of politeness is found more powerful, and this was analysed due to the language that was used which embeds reference to god or 'Allah'.
III. Addressing peers using titles, such as sir etc, is universal in all cultures and languages however cultures differ in the degree of using such expressions.
IV. Politeness in Arabic can be analysed in at least ten semantic categories: sociability, gratitude, benevolence and felicitation, guilt, permission, appreciation, hospitality and generosity, respect, the introduction of conversation, and the recognition of social status.
V. Humility in Arabic is not equal to loss of dignity or loss of face, but to show a high degree of respect based on religious and social recommendations. His research also notes that this may be a cause of misunderstanding, misinterpreting, and misjudging from other cultures if they have interacted with Arabs.
VI. In Arabic society the social hierarchy was and is still noticeable.
VII. However, when Islam spread in the Peninsula (Saudi Arabia nowadays), religion recommended Arabs use many polite expressions, this recommendation has enriched the Arabic language. Moreover, the high-class people of the Arab society are between two central pressures, religion which orders them to show as much

humility as possible, and the social convention, sometimes in opposition to religion. When in doubt, people usually follow religious recommendations.

Politeness theory is an interesting phenomenon and one that explores different aspects of politeness, either as a linguistic approach or in the context of a culture. For this research and literature review, exploration of the literature is being viewed in the context of the Arabic Culture and Qatari culture.

2.11.6 Expatriates and Local Culture

Chen, *et al*., (2010) developed a multilevel model of expatriate "cross-cultural motivation and effectiveness" (motivation and effectiveness about cross-cultural contexts) that incorporates the influences of foreign subsidiary-level attributes. Their study indicated that expatriate cross-cultural motivation was more positively related to work adjustment and that work adjustment was more likely to mediate the positive relationship between cross-cultural motivation and job performance when expatriates were assigned to foreign subsidiaries characterised by lower levels of subsidiary support and cultural distance. This may lead to awkwardness in adaption to the new culture. In this race of adjusting as early as possible many times, the expat faces a cultural shock or a transition. While overcoming these problems. The process of adaptation depends on individual characteristics, intents and needs, as well as the cultural and social context of adaption Taft (1977). The proposed modification, adjustment and development of intercultural skills should be taken care of with due diligence, using abilities to resolve the crisis, and gradually leading to acceptance of some personal changes. Dowling (1994) opined that an expatriate, who is positioned as a manager for an international assignment, should have certain traits and characteristics for expatriate success. It does not mean that an expatriate with these characteristics is guaranteed to be successful on the job, but for those without these traits, the probability of failure is higher. These characteristics include technical ability, managerial skills, adaptability and adaptability of family, cultural empathy, diplomacy, language ability, positive attitude, emotional stability, and maturity. For example, as compared to men, women's participation in the UAE national labour force

has remained consistently low (Gallant and Pounder, 2008; Kemp and Zhao, 2016). Similarly, expatriates are typically employed in the private sector, which exhibits rent-seeking behaviours, with salaries and benefits at much lower levels, particularly for those working in semi-skilled or unskilled levels of employment (Raheem, 2016). Accordingly, expatriate managers in the UAE report many cultural differences that impact their work and performance Cerimagic (2010). In these environments, expatriates are likely to encounter more difficulties in managing international assignments Hemmasi and Downes (2013).

2.11.7 'Fear Factor' for Expatriates

In the GCC there is a job insecurity factor that faces expatriates. Given that most of the manpower is expatriates in Qatar – there is a fear factor to their job security. This is potentially where expatriates fear their jobs being dissolved by the organisation. This can simply be because a local has decided they dislike an individual. Therefore, there is potentially a shift in how expatriates may behave professionally – perhaps differently than in their home country. Hudson (2013) identified this as 'tiptoeing' which is a term that reflects the complexity, uncertainty, and potential for 'explosive' and potentially job-threatening conflict the environment is perceived as presenting to the participants and the study investigates how they attempt to negotiate the complexities and potential areas of conflict they encounter working in the Arabian Gulf region. Devadason (2017) coined the term Golden handcuffs this research found that the expatriates got used to a comfortable lifestyle with a tax-free salary and thus lived the job insecurity for as long as possible to work longer in the region.

This literature review has presented several complexities found in Qatar that are prevalent in the workplace. All of them have an impact on individuals, people and, therefore, employees in an organisation. This literature review has presented evidence of HR not necessarily being the most professional function in an organisation. Therefore, is there an opportunity to professionalise the HR profession in Qatar, and if so, how can this be

achieved in collaboration with the Community of Practise? This research intends to explore this in more detail.

2.12.   Summary of Chapter 2

In summary, the literature related to HRM practises globally and in the region, however, there was little available for Qatar. This chapter examined the definitions of HR, professionalism, and what impacts HR practises in the region, more specifically Islamic principles and cultural impact. More research is needed on HRM practise in Qatar both to understand the context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar and to ascertain the need for professionalisation of the HRM in Qatar. This connects with the chapter 6 conclusions that will be presented and discussed.

Chapter 3:   Methodology

3.1.   Overview of Chapter 3

This chapter provides an overview of the qualitative methodology used and the rationale for why this particular methodology was preferred. I will state my position within the research and describe any ethical considerations taken into account during this research. The discussion will include the research design intended and used in this study. As an individual researcher, I planned to take a pragmatic approach and seek answers to a real-world problem that HR professionals are practising in Qatar encounter. This chapter will also explain how the data was collected and analysed. During the research phase, the COVID-19 Pandemic emerged and impacted how I maintained and upheld rigorous standards while conducting the research.

3.2.   Introduction

The HRM function in Qatar has its realities, challenges, and complexities, and the approach to understanding HR professionals' experiences was essential to gain insight into the lived experiences conducted by HR Professionals from the Qatar HR Forum. This sample was identified to explore how they perceive and understand their HR role, especially its professional nature. The research gathered qualitative data to understand the issues faced within the HRM practise. My HR community was an essential source of this information and data. The cruciality of using the Qatar HR Forum itself was the opportunity to obtain research data that is relevant and specific to Qatar and the HR professionals working in Qatar. I also note that it was and continues to be a community of practitioners. This was also the case during the research phase, and the impact on the HR professionals of COVID-19 was strenuous and mentally draining, both professionally and personally. Throughout my professional career in Human Resources, I have interacted with a diverse array of individuals in an organisational setting, from senior leadership and line managers to employees. This variety of interactions has cemented an

understanding of how uniquely each person perceives and experiences their work environment.

The core purpose of this research was to provide a detailed description of the experiences and perceptions of the participants, namely HR professionals in Qatar. The Qatar HR Forum was invaluable in accessing these professionals and gaining insights into their experiences. It was the task of the social scientist, as Bryman (2008) underscores, to interpret the actions and social world of these individuals from their perspective. As such, qualitative research was chosen as the most appropriate approach for this study. This human-centric approach, grounded in the interpretive tradition of the social sciences and humanities, aims to interpret and make sense of phenomena through the meanings people attribute to them. Qualitative research allowed for an in-depth exploration of attitudes, behaviours, cultural values, and lifestyles within the HRM landscape in Qatar.

As an HR professional who began my career in the scientific field, I was initially taught objective quantitative methodologies. However, my recent research ventures highlighted the necessity for a deeper individual understanding of the participants' lived experiences. This insight prompted a shift towards qualitative methodologies, fuelled by my belief that individual lived experiences are a rich data source for theoretical development, offering a more comprehensive understanding than potentially quantitative methods. Furthermore, my foray into human resources management (HRM), especially within Qatar's vibrant and diverse cultural context, has prompted a significant shift in my approach towards research methodologies. This journey has increasingly led me to embrace qualitative research methods. This orientation is driven by the need to understand the complex interplay of cultural nuances, professional practises, and individual experiences that define HRM in Qatar's unique setting.

Transitioning from a scientific background to Human Resources Management (HRM), my research journey has been significantly shaped by the qualitative methodologies influenced by the interpretivist and social constructivist paradigms. This evolution in approach, particularly pertinent in Qatar's diverse cultural environment, draws upon the insights of Creswell (2018), Crotty (1998), and Charmaz (2005). The detailed paradigms

by Creswell (2018), the emphasis on the social construction of knowledge by Crotty (1998), and the constuctivist grounded theory methodology advocated by Charmaz (2005) have collectively guided the formulation of my research methodology.

In Qatar, my research delves into the cultural influences on HR practises, employing qualitative tools such as surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. These methods are pivotal in capturing the nuanced insights from HR professionals. Adopting an interpretivist ontological stance allows for an appreciation of the varied realities experienced by individuals in the workplace, a crucial aspect in a culturally complex setting like Qatar. My methodology, integrating constructivist ontology (Bryman, 2008) with interpretivist epistemology, is designed to be responsive to the diverse experiences of participants, offering a holistic understanding of the HRM landscape.

The constuctivist grounded theory approach by Charmaz (2005) significantly influences my research. It underscores the importance of incorporating the researcher's perspectives, values, and beliefs into the research process. This approach complements the perspectives of Creswell (2018) and Crotty (1998), guiding how I design, conduct, and interpret my research in the context of HRM. As Crotty (1998) described, the social constructivist perspective emphasises the collective nature of knowledge construction within cultural and societal contexts. This perspective is vividly observed in the focus groups conducted through the Qatar HR Forum, where shared experiences and insights of HR professionals are brought to light.

Interpretivism, acknowledging the existence of multiple realities, as highlighted by scholars like Guba and Lincoln (2005) and Schwandt (2001), shifts the focus from traditional metrics of generalisability and reliability to authenticity and trustworthiness. This paradigm is particularly suited to qualitative research methods, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the diverse realities within the HRM sector in Qatar.

The HRM landscape in Qatar, intertwined with cultural norms, modern business practises, and socioeconomic factors, requires a nuanced research approach. The interpretivist and qualitative methodologies advocated by scholars such as Brewster (1999), Dowling (2008), Harzing (2001), and Budhwar (2004) provide valuable insights for effective management and policy development in dynamic cultural settings.

My research endeavours to probe deeply into the HRM practises prevalent in Qatar, with a specific emphasis on understanding the impact of cultural dynamics and the cultivation of competencies tailored for HR professionals within the Qatari context. Employing qualitative research methods, I aim to capture the lived experiences of HRM professionals authentically. This approach is underpinned by a social constructivist worldview and the principles of grounded theory, enabling a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the experiences of these professionals. By doing so, I aspire to gain a profound understanding of the HRM landscape in Qatar, seeking to unearth and highlight avenues for the advancement and professionalisation of HR practises in this unique cultural setting.

The research approach taken is not unique, to the contrary, the adoption of an interpretivist and qualitative approach in international HRM research, underscored by the works of key scholars, has been integral in understanding the complexities of HR phenomena across diverse cultural contexts. Illustrating this as an example, Brewster (1999) leverages case studies and ethnographic research in international and comparative HRM to offer a comprehensive understanding of HR practises in various national contexts, emphasising the need for contextually sensitive HR strategies in multinational corporations. Similarly, Dowling (2008) utilises in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to investigate the challenges multinational enterprises encounter in managing globally diverse workforces, thereby highlighting the importance of cultural nuances and subjective experiences. Moreover, the research methodologies utilised by Harzing (2001) use content analysis and comparative studies to explore cross-cultural management and the impacts of multinational corporations on local employment practises, offering insights into the complexities of cultural interactions in global business settings. Budhwar (2004), with a focus on emerging economies, adopts longitudinal studies and participant observation to analyse the variance in HR practises across cultures, revealing diverse management strategies required in different regions.

This methodological strategy not only bridges gaps in existing literature but also addresses the important underpinning issues in my research questions. It underscores the effectiveness of interpretivist and social constructivist approaches in my study,

providing in-depth, contextual insights into the subjective realities of HR practitioners, which are crucial for understanding effective management and policy development in the dynamic and culturally diverse HRM landscape of Qatar. In summary, this research aims to comprehensively explore Human Resource Management Practise through the Qatar HR Forum; framing the influence of 'Tharaba' culture and the development of Qatar-centric competencies for HR professionals practising in Qatar.

As an insider researcher (Costley, Elliot and Gibbs, 2010), I am influenced by disciplinary knowledge expertise within the field of HRM to address the complexities of the context in which I am working. I wanted to research rich data on HR professionals' lived experiences in Qatar's context of their HRM work experience. I conducted this through a qualitative approach, as I wanted to obtain insightful, personal lived experiences from the participants. The information was sourced from the HR professionals who experience HRM in Qatar daily through the Qatar HR Forum.

Therefore, to conduct this exploratory piece of research bridging the context of HR with the reality of developing better practise in Qatar – I used a qualitative approach with the Qatar HR Forum volunteers. I took a staged approach. Firstly, with the qualitative survey and based on the findings developed the semi-structured surveys, once this data was collated and coded, I took the findings and ran the two focus groups with expatriates and Qatari national HR professionals. This is described in more detail in chapter 4, section 4.4.3. I decided to take this approach to understand what was happening (and theorising how cultural context played a part in HRM practise) and what could be done to provide a foundation for HR professionals that fit into the context – moving toward Qatar National Vision 2030 policy.

During the research phase, I had to consider the dynamics of Qatar's situation, including the expatriate fear factor, where expatriates work in the country not knowing when they will lose their jobs. This is explained in chapter 2, section 2.10.7. The COVID-19 circumstances exacerbated this fear, notably as the government had announced a 30% redundancy within the expatriate workforce (Bloomberg News, 2020).

The environment in which the research was conducted was dynamic and agile, coupled with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic; the process was more complicated than anticipated. Nevertheless, the research was confident in the value of the data gathered and its contribution to the HRM landscape in Qatar. The methodology effectively provided varying views of Qatari nationals, expatriates, and different demographic groups among the expatriates. The varying experiences and points of view added depth to the research, highlighting the importance of lived experiences.

In conclusion, the qualitative methodology was instrumental in exploring the HRM landscape in Qatar. The focus on processes, understandings, and interactions among people enabled a comprehensive understanding of the complex layers of the HRM function in organisations in Qatar. This methodological approach was crucial to incorporating the human element of the HR professionals in Qatar. The study offers an opportunity for further large-scale studies to delve deeper into the intricacies of the HRM landscape in Qatar.

Therefore, surveying and interviewing individuals who had these situations hovering over them was challenging. This potentially also impacted the strategic implementation of the Qatar National Vision 2030, as organisations were abiding by a decree from the government, and these employees were being made redundant, which meant the goal could be affected heavily. The progress made to date is immense, and the country relies on an expatriate workforce, and eliminating 30% suddenly is detrimental to the goal. This would potentially directly impact Qatar's HRM practise at that time, i.e., reducing HR departments by 30% of the expatriate workforce. The HR professionals were working within a global dynamic and COVID-19 pandemic; they were suddenly put into a position of looking after the employees in unprecedented times. In Qatar, the HR professionals had to encompass even more challenges by terminating employees and worrying about their jobs, coupled with the expatriate distance from their families as the world shuts down. In the research context, this proved a challenge as a minority of participants were happy to contribute given the circumstances they found themselves in, as described above, thus

potentially impacting the data-gathering participation rate. Although this was the situation at the time and the HR professionals' lived experiences, this led to rich data as the rapport already in place helped ensure the participants were comfortable and trusted my position as an insider researcher. They opened up regarding their frustrations with the circumstances and were comfortable answering questions and discussing their lived experiences as HR professionals.

Furthermore, in the context of gathering data and the unknown changes occurring during COVID-19, I realised how the participants responded to this crisis through the interviews and interactions. This meant I had to incorporate this into my interview planning to let the participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences. I ensured the research data gathered was accurate and maintained confidentiality and anonymity.

3.1.   Research design and approach

This research study is concerned with investigating and unravelling HR practitioners' experiences, perceptions, and understandings. It was essential for me to research individuals' lived experiences to examine and explore the problems surrounding professionalising HR in Qatar. (Creswell, 2009) offers social constructivism as a philosophical worldview where I am influenced as a researcher. Constructionism, as described by Bryman (2008), is an ontological position that also goes by the name of constructivism. It posits that social phenomena and their meanings are continuously constructed by social actors. To investigate and gain a deeper understanding of social phenomena such as events and individuals' insights, the research study employed a qualitative methodology. This approach aligned with the social reality approach proposed by Mason (2002). The focus was on exploring "messy" data, as highlighted by Mason (2002), to collect and analyse information that highlights the human aspects of social inquiry. This approach was particularly relevant given the research's objective of comprehending the distinct landscape of Human Resource Management (HRM) in Qatar.

Social constructivists believe that individuals seek to understand the world they live and work within. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing definitions into a few categories or ideas (Creswell, 2009) research project as I have seen through the literature discussed in the knowledge landscape above, there are theories on HRM in the GCC, not particularly in Qatar. However, as a qualitative researcher, I will focus on the personal experience of HR professionals in Qatar. Therefore, my focus was to gather data from participants who are HR professionals and live and work in Qatar that shows their lived experiences to understand the context of their HR experience and investigate possible ways of professionalising HR. This research contains a narrative thread, and I was seeking to go beyond the parameters or narrative of the research project, so the thesis is an opportunity to provide a platform to tell the story of HR professionals in Qatar, which encompasses many different areas.

A pivotal aspect of the research was the context in which HR professionals operate within Qatar. The flexible qualitative methodology with the triangulation facilitated the execution of qualitative surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The research approach used different methods to triangulate the data and provided a way to interpret the results with enhanced confidence (Bryman, 2004). A decision was made to conduct separate focus groups for Qatari nationals and expatriate HR participants, enriching the research by providing diverse perspectives. The staged approach illustrated in Figure 5 was critical to the success of the research.

3.2.   Interpretivism

The interpretive epistemology assumes a subjective view is used within the research Mason (2002). However, to establish an honest account of what is happening, the researcher must acknowledge themselves as a potential foundation influence on the study. Trustworthiness is the ability of the research researcher to provide and present a truthful account of what they heard Merriam (1995). Tied to trustworthiness is the subjectivity of the research. From a positivistic perspective, these notions are impossible

and difficult to grasp; yet, from an interpretivist perspective, they are embraced. The research intends to inform new concepts/theories and apply new products or services to the HR profession in Qatar.

Outlining the differences between the approaches introduced intense rigour in interpretivist qualitative research, emphasising the importance of developing a well-documented data structure built on first-order codes, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions Gioia *et al*., (2013). Examples of employing this approach to HRM, highlighting the particularities of a specific firm, industry, or national context, can be found in Harsch and Festing (2020) and Muratbekova-Touron *et al*., (2018).

In the context of these studies, individuals construct their knowledge within the social-cultural context influenced by their prior knowledge and understanding. As a result, I, the researcher, positioned myself within the parameters and emphasised the socially constructed nature of the reality of the participants' environment. Creswell (2009). As I researched the context of HRM in Qatar, I wanted to talk to individuals in the HR community. This would allow me to focus on what knowledge existed and what new knowledge or data I could gain through the research. One of the outcomes was to develop competencies specific to Qatar and, as a result, a competency framework. The interpretation of the data was conducted through interpretive categories of themes (Mason, 2002), which is how I analysed the data. The data cannot exist in an uninterpreted or literal form but must be engaged with for a reflexive and interpretive explanation.

The richness of qualitative data can provide deep insights into specific cultural, regional, or industry-specific contexts. This approach offers rich and detailed descriptions. Qualitative research, by its nature, delves deep into participants' experiences, perspectives, and feelings. In the context of this research, this approach offers invaluable insights into the HRM in Qatar by focusing on the lived experiences of HR professionals and stakeholders in Qatar, the research provides a unique window into the specific

challenges, opportunities, practises, and norms of HRM in this particular setting. Such insights could not be easily gained from a broad, generic study.

Furthermore, the development of a Qatar-specific Competency Framework utilised the data derived from the research, which does not just provide insights, it has actionable outcomes that were important to me as a practitioner. A competency framework specific to Qatar's HR profession can guide training, recruitment, performance assessment, and professional development in the country. This region-specific framework is more likely to be effective than a one-size-fits-all approach. Both Mason (2002) and Creswell (2018) emphasise the importance of understanding and interpreting the social reality of participants in qualitative research. Rather than imposing external or pre-existing frameworks, qualitative research seeks to understand the world as the participants see it, valuing their unique perspectives and experiences. In conclusion, qualitative research provides a pathway to gain insights that might not be evident or possible through purely quantitative means. It is evident that this methodology has been beneficial in understanding the HRM landscape in Qatar and tailoring a competency framework specific to its unique requirements.

3.3.   Methods

Qualitative research attempts to study the everyday life of different groups and communities in their natural settings; studying educational settings and processes is beneficial. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) described qualitative research as involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Simultaneously attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena regarding the meaning people bring.

Qualitative research is designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live. Qualitative data sources include observation and participant observation (fieldwork), interviews and questionnaires, documents and texts, and the researcher's impressions and reactions. Different knowledge claims, enquiry strategies, and data collection methods and analysis are employed by Creswell (2018).

While quantitative research presents statistical results represented by numerical or statistical data, qualitative research shows data as descriptive narration with words and attempts to understand phenomena in "natural settings". This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Denzin and Lincoln (2003).

The research allowed the participants to explain their understanding of their lived experiences working as HR professionals in Qatar. This research is intended to explore the cultural impact on HR practises as lived and experienced through HR professionals' realities. The overview of the aims, objectives and research questions is indicated in chapter 1, section 1.6. There is a gap in the literature on this subject when focussing on Qatar. Thus, this has encouraged my confidence that an inquiry is needed for such a complex issue. As a result, to meet the research purpose and answer critical questions, a qualitative approach was utilised through qualitative surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

3.4. Research Approaches in International Human Resources Management

This research intended to explore and understand the lived experiences of the participants. I considered this and took a qualitative approach to the research. My approach was aligned with past examples of HRM research conducted, particularly in the context of culture. Therefore, I was comfortable with the idea that my participants and audience (the Qatar HR Forum) would accept the research methodology as the norm in HRM. Research in International Human Resource Management (IHRM) has grown substantively over the past two decades and commonly uses an interpretivist approach. The examples outlined by Schuler and Tarique (2007) below relate to my work in the context of the methodological approach. IHRM can be split into different streams as outlined and broken down into three separate streams:

- **HRM in the international context**; This research focused on the multinational context of HRM and its conduct in global enterprises (MNEs), Bonache and Festing (2020).

- **Comparative HRM.** This research stream in IHRM focuses on investigating similarities and differences between HRM practises in different countries and regions. Brewster *et al*., (2004)

- **Cross-cultural HRM** This stream combines research from cross-cultural psychology and intercultural management studies with HRM Dowling *et al*., (2014). The inspiration for this stream was from the work mainly of national cultural values by prominent researchers such as Hofstede (1980). It incorporates cultural distance and investigates the impact of HRM policies and practises.

Furthermore, Primecz (2020) outlined the future direction for international Human Resources, including more paradigm reflexivity, non-mainstream (constructivist and critical), and new paradigmatic directions. The importance of interpretivism is emphasised in cross-cultural IHRM research. This notion of using an interpretivist approach being expected in the literature, particularly in cultural studies and the impact on HRM, informed my rationale for the chosen methodology. Hence, qualitative research seeks to investigate human phenomena in-depth to understand the values and meanings of individual participants. Consequently, this concept helped me gain in-depth views and experiences from the participants of the HR professionals in the Qatar HR Forum who agreed to participate in the research. The qualitative methodology fostered rich and detailed descriptions, yielding invaluable insights into the HRM landscape in Qatar. This approach also paved the way for the development of a competency framework specific to Qatar's HR profession, derived from the analysis of the collected data. Mason (2002) and Creswell (2009) provided a way to see the world based on the social reality experience of the participants.

3.5.   Qatar HR Forum

In this research, the target sample population criteria to complete the collation of research data is to obtain experiences and the realities of HR professionals working within a

function in Qatar. The Qatar HR Forum has 288 members. The forum only accepts members through personal recommendations to prevent non-HR professionals joining. The Qatar HR Forum is open to HR professionals who work in Qatar. The experience of the members varies from entry-level to Chief HR Officers and HR Directors. Therefore, the concept of purposeful sampling was utilised. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting in-depth information-rich cases for study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. The participants were part of the Qatar HR Forum. I chose the forum to be the purposive sample for the research. The members were invited to volunteer to participate in the research. It started with a qualitative survey, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, as illustrated in Figure 4. It took a staged approach, each stage reliant on the other to move forward with the data analysis. One study that used this approach is observed in the comparative study by Horwitz *et al.,* (2006), who studied different HR practises in managing knowledgeable workers in two culturally distant countries, namely, Singapore and South Africa.

Figure 5. The staged approach is illustrated below
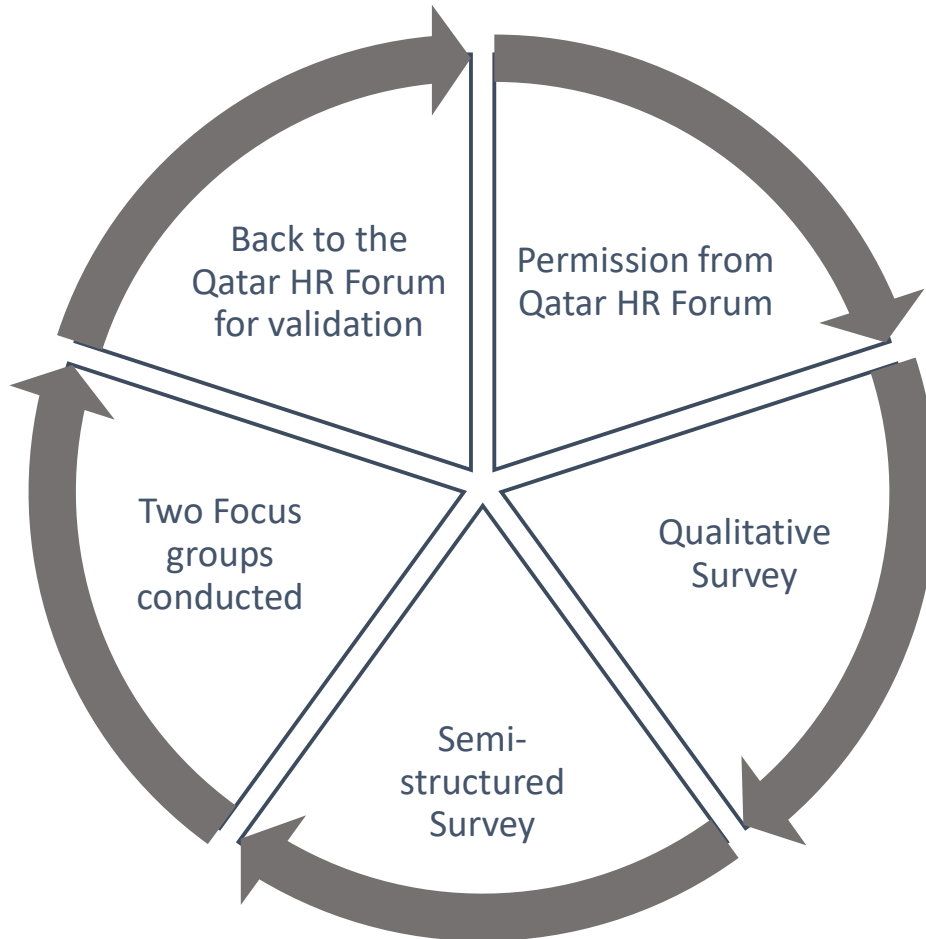
My research focused on using the sample from the Qatar HR Forum, and the participants were invited. The only criteria I had put in place was that they had to have been working in Qatar in HR. The research incorporated the expatriates' and nationals' perspectives, and I identified this early on as the experience must be authentic to Qatar's HR profession. As such, both nationals and expatriates work within this profession. Often, expertise is believed to come from credentialed or accredited expatriate professionals. However, some nationals are credentialed or accredited, although in the minority. I also ensured I offered the opportunity to professionals who may not have the formal credentials or accreditation. Still, their profile was built on experience in the workplace because, again, this is the reality of the multi-layered workforce within HRM functions in Qatar. Inviting

Qatari nationals to listen to their views and experiences was critical, mainly because it is their National Vision and country. Therefore, the research could only represent the HR profession in Qatar if they were to be included.

3.6. Qualitative Survey

The research was initiated with a questionnaire distributed to the forum, followed by semi-structured interviews with willing participants. The discussion revolved around the themes identified in the original questionnaire, further exploring these from each participant's perspective. Despite the challenges posed by the 'fear factor' and the timing of the research during the COVID-19 pandemic, the study persevered to gather invaluable insights.

The 24 participants that responded to the qualitative questionnaire were from across various organisation types, a combination of male and female, Qatari nationals and expatriates and were as follows:

Table 3: Overview of the participants of the qualitative survey.

Participant Code	Gender	Nationality	Sector
R1	Male	Expatriate	Government
R2	Female	Qatari	Semi-Government
R3	Male	Expatriate	Private
R4	Female	Expatriate	Semi-Government
R5	Female	Expatriate	Semi-Government
R6	Male	Expatriate	Private
R7	Female	Expatriate	Private
R8	Male	Expatriate	Semi-Government
R9	Female	Qatari	Private
R10	Male	Expatriate	Private
R11	Female	Expatriate	Private
R12	Male	Expatriate	Private
R13	Male	Expatriate	Semi-Government
R14	Male	Qatari	Semi-Government
R15	Female	Qatari	Semi-Government
R16	Female	Qatari	Semi-Government
R17	Male	Qatari	Semi-Government
R18	Male	Qatari	Semi-Government
R19	Female	Qatari	Semi-Government
R20	Male	Expatriate	Private
R21	Female	Expatriate	Semi-Government
R22	Male	Expatriate	Semi-Government
R23	Male	Expatriate	Government
R24	Female	Qatari	Semi-Government

3.7. Participants

A purposive sampling approach was used to identify the participants in this study. To fulfil the research objectives, it was essential to conduct the study among HR practitioners currently working in an organisation's HR function and Qatar. This would ensure that the participants would have been exposed to the dynamics and complexities of working in Qatar and could share their lived experiences. The source of the sampling was active members of the Qatar HR Forum. The active members of the HR forum are individuals, both locals and expatriates, who are currently working within HR in Qatar. This way, it was simpler to identify the potential participants. Furthermore, the forum members had built a rapport with me, the researcher, as I was the chair of the forum. They would be confident in their anonymity and confidentiality.

Given the chosen data collection method, the sample size could be a manageable size since the aim was to collect in-depth, qualitative data from experienced HR practitioners. This was justified because 'in any given qualitative study, interviews are usually done with only a few respondents...Statistical power is not a goal, and large samples cannot easily be analysed with qualitative methods' Oishi (2003:174). The intention was to include 10 HR professionals; the final sample size for the semi-structured interviews was 13. It was essential to have a mix of Qatari nationals and expatriates to ensure perspectives from both.

The qualitative survey responses were also critical. The focus group was split into two groups to ensure a representative view. They were employed in senior or very senior positions as HR advisers, business partners, managers/directors, training managers, or consultants. Many had the experience of working in both the public and the private sectors. Their experience had been gained in diverse backgrounds, at different levels and in various roles, which meant they could "dip" into their past and present experiences working in the HR field in Qatar. Therefore, the data collection was conducted in such a way as to invite participants within the criteria of working in the field of HRM in Qatar and offer them the opportunity to provide input about their experiences and their reality.

The data for the study was derived from a qualitative survey, a semi-structured interview and a focus group.

Furthermore, the research on the data collection took a mixed research approach, in which the surveys, interviews and focus groups provided the opportunity for the participant to provide their view. One question which supported the final competency framework was the opportunity for the participants to choose and provide their opinions about the most critical competency for the HR profession in Qatar. I wanted to keep some of the questions open-ended due to the concept of wanting the views and experiences of the participants. Particularly for the competency framework presented in chapter 5, section 5.5.10 that was developed, I could take on board the research data and create a framework specifically for Qatar HR professionals. The question about the competency framework was presented so that the participant could provide an answer by choosing more than one competency from the list provided. This meant that no mathematical tool was used to analyse the responses; on the contrary, I used the research answer for this question and analysed the competency based on the number of times it appeared. This provided a list dependent on the importance of the competency. This was determined by how many times participants had chosen the same competency. This is presented in chapter 6.

3.7.1   Ethical Considerations

My research identified three areas considered when thinking about ethics whilst embarking upon this research. COVID-19-related research, and the participants' environment, particularly considering the 'fear factor' of participants.

3.7.2 My role as Co-Founder and Chair of the Qatar HR Forum

As the chair of the forum, I understood that there might be a view that I would influence members to feel that they should or must complete the survey. However, I also wanted to ensure I was not exploiting my role. As a result, all participants were provided with an informed consent form, which was sent back after they sent the email with their answers.

Furthermore, I requested a signed permission letter from the committee of the Qatar HR Forum for permission to conduct the research with the members (Appendix 2). The Vice-Chair signed this, and the committee agreed to ensure no conflict in my role as the Chair of the Qatar HR Forum.

3.7.3 'Fear factor' or 'apprehension' of participants

The working environment in Qatar can be unique in many aspects, but when addressing the job security of expatriates. The job roles that expatriates fill can be dissolved in days, and they find there is no longer a position for us to fill – this is a risk we anticipate and manage as expatriates daily. This factor is important to highlight in this research and in conjunction with my methodology. I gathered qualitative data to understand HR professionals' experiences, but I also had to have this awareness. Ethically, I did not want anyone to be impacted by this research. I did not want participants to feel unsafe sharing their honest opinions and experiences. The consideration here was that expatriates might fear opening up when responding to the open-ended questions in the qualitative surveys and the semi-structured surveys. The consideration was eliminated as much as possible in two ways. Firstly, as I was Chair of the forum and had been leading it for the last eight years, I had built a rapport with many members, and they trusted me. This trust had been built on my demonstrating and role-modelling confidentiality when dealing with our members over the years. Secondly, I understood I was also in the same situation, i.e., an expatriate in an HR role in Qatar. The empathy, connection, and understanding of the participants' circumstances helped build on the trust already established, but furthermore, it meant that confidentiality was protected. Trustworthiness is one-way researchers can persuade themselves and readers that their research findings are worthy of attention Lincoln and Guba (1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refined the concept of trustworthiness by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to parallel the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability.

3.7.4 Professional Conduct

I have several accreditations from various global professional bodies; all have a code of conduct. I adhere to these in my line of work, and whilst in the HR space, I follow the CIPDs' code of conduct CIPD (2020). Particularly relevant in the context of this research are the ethical standards and integrity stated in their code of conduct. These are:

- Establish, maintain, and develop business relationships based on confidence, trust and respect
- Exhibit and role model professional and personal integrity and honesty at all times
- Demonstrate and promote sensitivity to the customs, practises, culture and personal beliefs of others
- Champion employment and business practises that promote equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion and support human rights and dignity
- Safeguard all confidential, commercially sensitive, and personal data acquired because of business relationships and not use it for personal advantage or the benefit or detriment of third parties.

The areas above were critical to have an awareness of and acknowledge. Even within qualitative data collection, the experience and information must be confidentially maintained. Hence, I needed to ensure integrity and confidentiality throughout the research process, treat each participant fairly, and maintain justice. This also includes reporting the data professionally, confidentially, and objectively. The participants were repeatedly reassured that they could withdraw at any time. Acknowledging our challenges, particularly during this data collection, engaged the interviewee and built trust to provide a safe space. The ethical considerations were vital for me to be aware of throughout the research.

In addition to ethics and a researcher's principles, researchers must be aware of the laws and regulations governing their realm of research Resnik (2015). As of May 25, 2018, I learned that a new law encompasses all transactions with any person or company within the European Union (EU), regardless of the country from which a transaction originates.

This law, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), refines a set of rules that had already been in place concerning personal information. I work and reside in Qatar. I am a student at Middlesex University (located within the EU). I did not survey or interview individuals living in countries within the EU. Thus, my research was not subject to this law. I confirmed this with my supervisor and consulted the Middlesex DPS 4561 Handbook, and re-read the form submitted with my proposal for this project to determine if additional steps were required to be taken by me to fulfil any GDPR requirements. I concluded that the university's requirements for protecting research participants and their personal data exceed the new law's boundaries. Middlesex University requires its researchers to ensure the inclusion of data protection from the onset. Therefore, I ensured I adhered to compliance with the Middlesex Online Research Form (MORE), which was the permission of the ethics from the Middlesex Ethics Committee, which was submitted as part of the approval of the project,

I also ensure that I adhere to safeguarding the information, data, and people participating in this research and ensuring that I am aware of any legal conformity. I ensured I took all safeguarding measures to protect the information throughout the project. I worked from my home office, using a laptop backed up to a hard drive monthly and stored securely in my locked filing cabinet. Additionally, written project work is held in 'the cloud' on OneDrive. Upon completing this project, all data in my possession will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for the five years stipulated by (Middlesex University, 2015). This will include all handwritten notes, printed communications, and electronic information, which will be copied to a dedicated USB drive and then deleted from my computer, USB and OneDrive.

3.8. Focus Groups

Focus Groups were the final qualitative method approach this research took. I invited members to participate in the focus groups, and the rationale was to provide an opportunity for the Qatar HR Forum members to validate or contribute further to the data. This allowed me to evaluate my research and receive input from the HR professionals

practising in Qatar. This provided an opportunity to inform the research further, as it would either confirm the findings or be disputed. The focus groups provided an opportunity for the participants to provide their input into the findings. I also took the approach of conducting two separate ones. One was for Qatari nationals, and the second was for expatriates. This was to ensure the expatriates could speak freely without feeling there may be any potential repercussions. It allowed the locals to incorporate their views and perspectives into the research findings through focus groups. A collective dialogue was conducted through the focus groups, and the input was captured to inform the research. Mason (2002) discussed the value of the focus group interviews as the group discussion allows the researcher to observe situational interactions taking place and perceive how these issues are conceptualised. It is a tool that can provide insight into the participants' lived experiences.

The two focus groups that I facilitated followed a protocol expected in academic research to ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of data. It has been explained in the literature that the value of a focus group is in the facilitation and the skills and background of the facilitator Allen, Grudens-Schuck, and Larson (2004).

Krueger (2007) identified focus group facilitation best practises. These best practises, include respect for participants, empathy, and background knowledge of the discussed topic. They also found that clear written and oral communication, good listening skills, the ability to control personal views, a sense of humour, and the ability to handle unexpected situations were essential factors when facilitating focus groups. Krueger (1988; 2007) elaborates by suggesting that the facilitator needs to use various strategies to get participants fully involved in the conversation to connect with emotions, attitudes, and unconscious behaviours. Krueger (2007) suggested this occurs by asking good questions, using skilful probing, pauses, comments, body language, eye contact, and knowing when and how to move on to a new topic.

In summary, the best facilitators find ways to quickly adapt to each group's environment and culture (Krueger, 2007). This advice and the notion of my role as an insider

researcher and a facilitator were facilitator. As the facilitator, behaving in such a way was not unexpected or unusual; through my professional roles over the years, I have been able to mitigate bias through a neutral stance due to my professional training in my career. Furthermore, when this research was conducted, trustworthiness and rapport were even more critical than having empathy and supporting my colleagues.

I commenced the session by putting the participants at ease and engaging them in small talk. The focus group was online via video conference, so I started with introductions. Each participant introduced themselves, some revealed their workplace, and some did not.

The members of the Qatar HR Forum were invited to the session. Once online, I welcomed them and started the formal group session by thanking the participants for coming and stating the group's purpose. They were informed that they were there voluntarily, and if anyone was uncomfortable at any time, they were free to leave. I emphasised the rules of confidentiality and invited them to ask questions.

Through the focus group, I shared the findings and provided an opportunity for each of the six participants to provide their views, perspectives, and ideas. At the end of each question, I asked if anyone had further comments before moving to the next point.
To facilitate the interaction between the group members, I probed and paused to involve all the participants in the discussion without expressing any value to the answers received. The focus groups may be held in the subjects' mother tongue. The second focus group was held with six Qatari nationals, held in the majority in Arabic. The translation of the information was through me, as I am bilingual, so the interpretation of the information did not have to be translated literally, but I can work proficiently in both languages, which I do daily. As a general guideline, the average duration of a focus group is two hours. The focus groups conducted took between 90 and 120 minutes.

Upon completion, I thanked the participants again for their time and valuable contributions to the research. I also reassured the participants of the confidentiality and anonymity and the expectation that was upheld for one another.

Providing a summary of the discussion to the participants is not desirable because achieving consensus is not the objective of a focus group; instead, it is about exploring the various perspectives held by participants. However, as I took notes, I ensured that I reiterated the points before moving on. I needed to capture the information accurately. I did not signal the participants whether their opinion was worthy or not. Overall, the protocol I followed aligns with the focus group's best practise. However, I had to adapt slightly to engage in the restrictions we were working in, i.e. the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

The focus groups, comprising Qatar HR forum members, were instrumental in allowing me to interpret (Mason, 2002) the results obtained from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The focus groups served to present the findings, seek opinions, and ascertain if the results accurately reflected the current HRM landscape in Qatar. These focus groups were crucial for two reasons. Firstly, this ensured that the local community contributed to their Vision 2030. Secondly, this provided a safe environment for expatriates to voice their opinions without fear of retribution. The feedback from these focus groups led to slight adjustments in the research findings, allowing for a greater interpretation of the research from the interview data.

3.9. Limitations of qualitative methods used in the research

The selected qualitative methodologies used in this study have certain limitations to be addressed. It was vital for me as an insider researcher to ensure that these were considered throughout the study, from planning to analysis to concluding. When selecting methodologies and research designs, limitations are viewed as boundaries unintentionally set by researchers. These methodological choices are typically associated

with certain limits set for exploring the subject or phenomenon and discussing or analysing the problem Gravetter and Forzano (2018).

Gravetter and Forzano (2018) explained that in qualitative studies based on interpretivism, there are key limitations: the small sample sizes, problems in finding and recruiting participants, and the collation of information appropriate to address the set research questions in this study.

The first limitation was associated with the 'fear factor' that expatriates face in Qatar and the fear of speaking out and saying the wrong thing. 'Fear Factor' is explained in depth in chapter 2, section 2.11.7.

The second limitation was that conclusions in qualitative studies were based on participants' subjective visions and the researchers' interpretations (Gravetter and Forzano, 2018). As an insider researcher, I was aware, and I find it necessary to use my interpretation through my professional knowledge to limit the bias. I gathered the data in a fair way and allowed the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants to shine through. This ensured the data reflected what the participants said, and I utilised the findings for the HR Profession. I applied rigour in my doctoral research process by reviewing and checking with my supervisors and using the Qatar HR Forum to discuss the findings. This ensured my HR Colleagues and Supervisors objectively reviewed my bias, if any.

The third limitation is that the results of this study cannot be generalised concerning the larger population, and narratives available for thematic analysis are subjective (Miles *et al.*, 2018). Participants can only focus on their perceptions of experiences, and these visions cannot be viewed as objective. It is the participant's understanding of their realities and their perceptions of this. However, the development of the Qatar-centric Competency framework and the feedback from the focus groups means I can apply this in a broader context for the HR Profession in Qatar.

The fourth limitation in conducting this research is ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. This limitation touches on the 'fear factor', and the assurance to the participants that there would be no revelation of their identity was critical to them responding to the research. Furthermore, to protect the participants, it was impossible to present their nationality, position, industry type or where they worked. Therefore, I ensured the participant's anonymity by contextualising information regarding all the available, non-sensitive data presented by the participants. These limitations typical of qualitative studies were considered when planning and conducting this research.

3.10.   Summary of Chapter 3

This chapter provided an overview of the qualitative methodology used in this research. I presented justification as to why I chose the methods that I did. The limitations were addressed and acknowledged. I also showed how I overcame these limitations. The approach explained and adopted in this research aligned with my beliefs as an HR professional and how I wanted to extract the data given the COVID-19 pandemic uncertainties that my colleagues were facing at the time.

Chapter 4:   Project Activity

4.1.   Outline of Chapter 4

This chapter will present an account of the methods used to collate the research data. I will detail the process of how the participants were identified and sourced. I will provide a rationale for using the three different methods employed in this research, i.e., qualitative survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. I will discuss the steps to analyse the data leading to the themes identified in chapter 5. The data collection was split into three parts: the qualitative survey, the semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. The chapter will end with potential limitations of the methods the participants and data collection. The approach of this research was to collate qualitative data, deep dive into the experiences of HR practitioners practising within the State of Qatar HR functions, and understand what this meant for the profession.

4.2.   Research Sample Strategy

The sample for this research study was HR professionals working and practising in Qatar when the data collection occurred. These participants were members of the Qatar HR Forum. I invited the members to participate in the qualitative survey. The participants needed to be HR professionals, and there was a mix of expatriates and Qatari nationals. This ensured that the data represented the mix of the HR Labour force in Qatar. The participants were required to have been in the HR role for at least one year in Qatar. This was important as the data to be extracted would need to be representative and relevant to the research. A carefully selected sample can provide data representative of the population from which the sample is drawn. Bernard (2013), noted that 20-60 knowledgeable people are enough to uncover core categories of the lived experience of a defined group, in this case, the HR profession in Qatar.

4.3.   Pilot Survey

I finalised the survey to reflect the questions I was exploring as part of my research – and I thought it was essential to run a pilot with trusted members. Therefore, I asked two HR professional colleagues to review the survey. I asked them to provide general feedback as well as specific areas as follows:

1- Read it to ensure there was no ambiguity
2- Read it to ensure that it was simple to follow
3- Read it to ensure there were no grammatical errors
4- Review whether they would like it as a word document attached to an email or on a tool such as Survey Monkey, especially from the perspective of feeling safe. They both independently agreed on the word document they could email back they felt would feel more comfortable for participants. However, a tool would be advisable for ease of the participants.

A few minor edits were suggested, which I took on board and the verbal feedback from the pilot stated that the length of the survey was a decent length and the set-up with the open and closed-ended questions was appropriate. It did not feel intrusive. The survey was piloted with two trusted HR professionals, who provided feedback regarding the format and flow.

4.3.1   COVID–19 pandemic considerations

While conducting this research, the world was amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Around the same time, participants in HR had many hats to wear in their roles in Qatar. The government-mandated Qatar-based organisations to reduce our budgets by 30%. This put us all at risk and within an insecure environment, not knowing whether we would have a role or not. This, coupled with the fact that we had to manage the pandemic impact on our organisations and employees, meant participants came to the interviews quite frustrated. In the interviews, I provided space and time for them to explain their frustrations, supporting them whilst ensuring that they felt it was a safe place to share their experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic also meant that I had to conduct the

interviews by video call. This would have been a challenge, more so had I not known of the participants, but again having that report described above was critical to building the interviewee's psychological safety. During the research activity, it became apparent that I did have to question the methodology and the ethics and had to have several conversations about how to proceed to make sure that I fundamentally carried out the same research as had planned within the initial proposal. However, I also had to consider my potential participants at this point. It meant I had to be empathetic and understand the severity of the situation they were in, coupled with the understanding that they may be facing redundancy and a potential exacerbation of the 'fear factor' of the expatriate.

4.4.   Research Tools

4.4.1   Qualitative Survey

Post pilot, it was time to reach out to the Qatar HR Forum; therefore, in the first instance, a qualitative survey was conducted as part of the research methodology. The sample was a cross-section of the Qatar HR Forum.

The qualitative survey intended to collate qualitative data, and the survey comprised a combination of closed and open-ended questions. The qualitative survey was sent as a word document through email. However, the feedback received from the pilot as it would be easier for participants to use an online tool. I decided that given the sensitivity of the feedback and the apprehension around people sharing information generally in Qatar, I wanted to ensure my HR professional colleagues felt safe and comfortable sharing information with me. I could not guarantee the security of online tools, but I could if I received a word or PDF document straight to my inbox with participants' responses. I was the only one with access to my email inbox – my email and university email. However, also my devices have passwords, so I knew that accessibility by others was not an option. In addition to this, given the COVID-19 pandemic, the online security measures were increased, and there was an introduction of a two-factor authentication from the email account I was using. The security measures were also increased when the blockade first happened in the GCC. Therefore, I decided to keep it in a word format and share it as an

email. I believed that the security and confidentiality of the information were more important in this case than the format. Moreover, participants' comfort in answering the qualitative survey as a word document was more important than an online survey tool.

The qualitative survey was initially distributed with a two-week deadline. It was posted over the new year, and I wanted to ensure people were back to work and were able to set some time aside to answer the qualitative survey. Unfortunately, the launch coincided with the COVID-19 Global Crisis. The two-week deadline was slightly ambitious in the first instance. I then extended the deadline by another three weeks, considering how busy the HR professionals were at this time. The COVID-19 impact was not just locally, i.e., in Qatar, or regionally, i.e., in the Gulf, but it soon became a global pandemic. The participant sample was over 150 members of the forum, all working in Qatar. This was my target sample. As described above, it was easy to understand that the HR professionals' focus was elsewhere. In my experience at this time, the HR professional in Qatar (and possibly globally) was focused on several areas-these included:

1- Their role responsibility and how those responsibilities are shaped quickly in requiring quick actions in entirely new and unfamiliar territory. HR professionals, in my experience, are not necessarily equipped with crisis management skills, and thus the agility and adaptation that was to be shown were extensive.

2- Their employment security as the economy was falling and the future impact of the pandemic was yet to be realised.

3- Family concerns were two-fold. Some HR professionals were far away from their loved ones, stranded in a foreign country, with the potential prospect of no or even reduced income and unable to travel to their home countries with the global lockdown in aviation.

The above all contributed to potentially enhanced feelings of apprehension during this research collection. This meant that additional care was taken to support my HR

professional colleagues. Furthermore, Bloomberg News reported on the situation in Qatar and the budget cuts meaning participants faced potential redundancy.

"Qatar told government-funded entities to cut spending on non-Qatari staffers' wages as it tries to shore up its finances to cope with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The Ministry of Finance instructed government ministries, institutions and entities funded by the state to reduce monthly costs for non-Qatari employees by 30% from June 1, either by cutting salaries or laying off workers with a two-month notice, according to a letter seen by Bloomberg." (Bloomberg News, 2020)

COVID-19 was in the background early on in 2020 when the economic effects were beginning to be realised by the government. It was also an approach the rest of the GCC had taken. Given the above and the focus of HR professionals, the deadline was extended by another three weeks, resulting in 24 responses to the distributed qualitative survey. In my research proposal, I highlighted the potential challenge of receiving responses due to the element of 'Fear Factor'. Thus, as a researcher and HR Leader in my profession, I saw this 'fear factor' becoming exacerbated because of COVID-19 and was escalating the lack of job security. The other factor which was lingering was the blockade. As an HR professional, I had to ensure this was taken into consideration and that both national and expatriate HR professionals were impacted in some way or another by the blockade. This further indicated the daily challenges and considerations regarding the geographic and demographic influences we face as HR professionals. It is fair to note that individuals were not interested in a 'bigger picture' through the pandemic. After approximately six weeks, I decided after I had followed up with members through email to answer the qualitative survey. I commenced the interpretation of the data.

The 24 responses were received from 9 Qatari HR professionals, and 15 expatriate participants in 3 different Organisational types in Qatar, the distribution of their employment status is illustrated in Table 4. I would have liked to have seen more responses but given the circumstances and the expatriate 'fear factor' present. This data was analysed and provided some rich findings, as discussed further in chapter 5.

4.4.2   Semi- Structured Interviews

This second stage of the research identified several participants who would answer more in-depth questions and participate in a semi-structured interview based on their survey answers. I was able to speak to eight expatriates and five Qataris. Therefore, I talked to thirteen HR professionals, from various sectors and at senior levels. One Qatari identified as an expatriate as she is a westerner but married a Qatari and has since been naturalised. This provided for an interesting discussion.

Table 4 Participant Profiles for the Semi-Structured Interviews

No	Participant Code	Gender	Nationality	Sector
Semi-Structured interviews participants				
1	R1	Male	Expat	Government
2	R3	Male	Expat	Private
3	R4	Female	Expat	Semi-Government
4	R5	Female	Expat	Semi-Government
5	R8	Male	Expat	Semi-Government
6	R11	Female	Expat	Private
7	R13	Male	Expat	Semi-Government
8	R21	Female	Expat	Semi-Government
9	R2	Female	Qatari	Semi-Government
10	R14	Male	Qatari	Semi-Government
11	R18	Male	Qatari	Semi-Government
12	R19	Female	Qatari	Semi-Government
13	R24	Female	Qatari	Private

I used semi-structured interviews as one of my tools, as it was essential to obtain the lived experiences of HR professionals – and their views on HRM practise in Qatar. Qu and Dumay (2011) suggested in their research - that those interviews offer a valuable way for researchers to obtain information about the world of others. However, real understanding may sometimes be elusive. Even when the interviewer and the interviewee speak the same language, their words may have different cultural meanings. Thus, communicating may become problematic when people have different worldviews. 'Semi-structured

interviews are cross-cutting and explore the 'social construction of situated accounts' Qu and Dumay (2011, p. 239). However, done with care, a well-planned interview approach can provide a rich amount of data. It has been said that qualitative research can be subjective in nature as different researchers could interpret data from their perspectives. The text is always open to multiple interpretations because researchers are reflective individuals involved in their own relationships with the world and others. This is also reflected in the ICF's coaching competencies that I adhere to, as listening and probing to ensure that you have understood the coachee is critical to the success of the coaching conversation.

The qualitative survey allowed for a space for participants to respond and indicate whether they would be interested in being involved in a more detailed discussion on this topic. Some consented; therefore, I started to reach out to those who agreed to set up a time to conduct a semi-structured interview.

In March 2020, I was unable to interview anyone face to face as the pandemic meant we were all in lockdown and in front of our video calls. I proposed a schedule to each participant and set quiet time aside for three hours for each interview. Although the interviews did not take that long, the participants did not want to be recorded, with all the apprehension, fear of losing their role, and not being comfortable under the circumstances. Therefore, I needed to ensure I had noted all that was being said and ensure that this was fresh in my mind as I re-read straight after the call and made sure I had the notes clear whilst I captured the themes. I initially highlighted the themes. I repeated this.

As with the survey response, it was difficult, even more, difficult than I had anticipated obtaining interviews. I believe this was due to a mix of expatriates being worried about their current role security and what would happen if the information 'got out'. I assured them that their confidentiality was being protected, and it was agreed that they did not want their answers recorded. I checked in with my supervisor prior to proceeding with this

part of the research, and it was agreed to go ahead and collate the data. This aligned with the considerations that I had already thought about this fear.

4.4.3   Focus Groups

Once I collated the data and thematically analysed it, as will be discussed in chapter 5, section 5.7, I facilitated focus groups. Initially, I ran one focus group with a group of members from the Qatar HR Forum, and six volunteers provided their feedback on a video call. Four of this group had already participated in the qualitative survey. This group comprises five senior HR professionals on average, working in Qatar for the last five years in different sectors. Some of these participants did not know each other. I also explained at the beginning of the video call that it was confidential. The purpose of the focus group was to explore the themes of the research data and present the proposed competency framework developed for HR professionals in Qatar. This group consisted only of expatriates. Upon receiving the feedback and discussing it with my Supervisor, it was agreed that I would run a second focus group for Qatari nationals. Table 5 illustrates the two focus groups participants.

This way, the expatriates provided their feedback, and the second group would be able to offer their feedback from their perspective. As it was for their country, it was essential to give a chance for the Qatari nationals to have their views heard. I reached out to six Qatari HR Directors across different sectors, all of whom were members of the Qatar HR Forum, and two of whom had already participated in the qualitative survey and had indicated they would participate in further research. I arranged the video call and introduced it in the same way. The feedback was very different in that they agreed and did not have much additional input; I took them through the themes of the research data and what that meant for them. I was also able to provide the information verbally in Arabic, eliminating any language barriers or miscommunication. It was essential to address this as, initially, I had not proposed in my research proposal to have two separate focus groups based on expatriates and Qatari nationals, but rather than lose the opportunity to gather data directly from the Qatari nationals, I decided to pursue a second focus group. I believed this would be a better approach and more representative of the Qatari national's

feedback on the purpose of this study. This was particularly important as we, all expatriates, are likely to repatriate to our home countries in the foreseeable future.

Table 5 – Focus Group 1 and 2 Participants

No	Participant Code	Gender	Nationality	Sector
		Focus Group Participants		
	Focus Group 1			
1	FG1	Female	Expatriate	Semi-Government
2	FG2	Female	Expatriate	Semi-Government
3	FG3	Male	Expatriate	Semi-Government
4	FG4	Male	Expatriate	Semi-Government
5	FG5	Female	Expatriate	Private
6	FG6	Male	Expatriate	Private
	Focus Group 2			
7	FG7	Male	Qatari	Semi-Government
8	FG8	Female	Qatari	Semi-Government
9	FG9	Male	Qatari	Semi-Government
10	FG10	Female	Qatari	Semi-Government
11	FG11	Female	Qatari	Private
12	FG12	Female	Qatari	Semi-Government

It was presented as a possible enhancement of the current practise that we are all involved in. Furthermore, the idea of having a competency framework developed for HR professionals in Qatar that they would be part of was exhilarating for them. A view that they were contributing to the Qatar National Vision 2030 through their profession and for their country. I was also contacted post focus group by one of the Qatari national members, who explained to me that this research is vital for the country and for the right people to see the HRM Practise in its reality with all its complexities exactly in the way the research data had produced. The participants then went on to introduce me to several different people to discuss this research and see how we can use it to contribute to professionalising the HR Profession. The participants contacted me post focus groups once they were aware of the work. This reflects their keenness in reaching the vision of the Qatar HR Forum.

4.5.   Analysis of Research Data

4.5.1   Qualitative Survey Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) primarily used thematic analysis informed by Mason (2002) and Bryman (2008). I tabulated the information into an Excel sheet and extracted the data into the Excel sheet by participation and by question. This is where the coding began. The coding commenced once all the Semi-Structured Surveys were received, and initial coding was illustrated in Figure 6.

I began the process by getting familiar with my data. This involved transcribing the data, thoroughly reading it multiple times, and jotting down initial ideas that surfaced. Following this, I created my initial codes. I systematically pinpointed intriguing features in the data across the complete set, then began categorising the data associated with each of these codes.

Figure 6. An extract of coding the Qualitative surveys.

Q No	Question	Participant					
		1 EG	2 QSG	3 EP	4 EP	5 EP	6 EP
1	Position						
	HR Assistant						
	HR Specialist	Male	Female	Male	Female		
	HR Manager						
	HRBP						
	HR Advisor						
	HR Generalist					Female	
	HR Expert						
	Head of HR						Male
	HR Director						
	Head of Function						
	Other						
3	Formal Qualifications	AHRI	CIPD– L3	N/A	Diploma Chartered CIPD	Diploma	SPHR – Diploma
4	Direct reports	1-5	1-5	0-5	N/A	1-5	11-20
5	% Nationality split of direct reports – Q/E	50	50	N/A	N/A	100 E	16-35
6	Does your role sit within the HR function?	Yes	Yes	yes	N/A	Yes	Yes
7	How many years of experience in HR do you have	11-20		10-20			
	In Qatar		6-10		5	11-20	8
	Outside Qatar				30	20	10
8	How would you describe your organisation	Govt	Semi-Govt	Private	Semi-govt	Private	Private
9	What sector do you work in?	Financial	Telecom	FMCG	Oil&Gas	Engineering Consultants	Retail
10	Number of employees	>250	>250	>250	> 250	>250	>250
11	How many HR employees	10-49	10-49	10-49	10-49	10-49	<10
12	Number of Qataris in HR	10-49	10-49	0	>10	<10	0
13	What is the organisations Qatarisation Number	85	36-49	5%	16-35	N/A	6-15
14	Does your HR Have a strategy aligned to the business?	No	Yes	no	Yes	Yes	No
15	Is the current organisational strategy aligned to the QNV2030	No	Yes	no	Yes	yes	No
16	Please describe your HR function	Recruitment of finance, support and governance related positions across a financial reg body.	Planning–need to know future needs or org.	HRBP model with CoE	Bring specialist support to strategic planning for change. Introduce plans to develop ability of QNs in their HR roles. Bring specialist knowledge to the HR function through policy application in the workplace	Generalist HR support to major projects	OD, C&B, TA, ER, Training & PM

This became my master sheet. This allowed me to get an overview of the data received. Some of the questions were open-ended. Therefore, from these answers, I read them several times to identify themes. I then took these themes and entered a new sheet in the Excel book. I added more worksheets to allocate words as I read through the answers. It was important for me to code the participants, and this was broken down by giving everyone a participant code, gender, nationality, sector, organisation type and job title. This allowed me to ensure that confidentiality was maintained. I worked off the codes of the participants, not the names. This was also important to remove any bias I may have had, especially as I knew the participants and had conversations regarding HR in the past – pre-research.

The master sheet consisted of the coding (Mason 2002). This is the process of categorising the data. I then did the same exercise for the competencies that the participants had mentioned and the challenges they had discussed. There was space for more, and I ensured that all open-ended answers were captured.

This then led me to the phase of discovering possible themes, where I compiled these codes into potential themes, amassing all the data relevant to each theme. I then subjected our transcripts and documents to a thorough thematic analysis. I adhered to the following five-stage process, suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006)

1. I read and re-read the data until we had become familiar with the breadth and depth of the content being dealt with.

2. I then set about creating initial codes. Working through the data, I pinpointed what I thought were any key points/aspects/issues – these were then recorded.

3. Once all data had been coded, I then progressed towards the identification of themes. This was sorted into categories, with consideration towards how various codes could be combined to form overarching themes.

4. I then reviewed it to ensure that each theme consisted of coherent data that came together meaningfully; I also ensured that each theme was significant

and unique in its own right (relative to the other themes). Once all the codes and themes had been through this review process, I then had the final themes.

5. Once I was satisfied with our thematic map, I then went about defining and further refining the themes. By the end of this stage, I was able to provide a concise account of the content and significance of each overarching and sub-theme. Upon completion of this step, I then felt in a position to start writing up the findings.

I then proceeded to evaluate these themes. I was conscious that some of the early codes might need to be re-defined or prove to be irrelevant as the data analysis progressed. Byrne (2022) notes that it is not uncommon for a researcher to discard initial codes when different interpretations of the data emerge. This step helped me in generating a thematic 'map' of my analysis. To further solidify my findings, I engaged in refining and naming the themes. During this continuous analysis, I polished the specifics of each theme and the overarching narrative that emerged as a result of the analysis, simultaneously formulating clear definitions and appropriate names for each theme. The data were coded inductively using a process of open coding, to best represent the meaning communicated by the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Codes are generally descriptive or interpretive labels that are assigned to the data that might be relevant to the interview questions. The extract shared above is anonymised and certain questions and answers have been removed to protect the confidentiality of the respondent. I have chosen not to share an extract of the respondents coding to prevent any possible identification of the individual. The research undertook an exploratory approach to theorising model creation, specifically the conceptualisation of the 'Tharaba' Culture. A robust conversation during COVID-19 times in Qatar led to data collection from participants of the Qatar HR Forum. The interpretivist approach taken allows for a deeper understanding of how people interpret and understand their social world, a fundamental aspect of this study.

I then did the same for the competencies. The competencies tallied for the number of the same competencies mentioned. This provided me with a coding scoring system for me to be able to get an importance rating tally. Although the numbers were not mathematically

sound, as participants had an opportunity to list what they believed were the top three competencies, it was an open-ended question. However, upon analysis, there were repetitive competencies, and therefore it was scored based on the number of repeat competencies mentioned. The competencies were interesting as I was able even to score them when I had captured responses and started to notice that there was repetition. This was the basis of the competency framework. The scoring allowed me to build the framework, I then developed it further by capturing the information and creating the various proficiency levels. I developed the competency framework based on the feedback received from the interviews and understanding where the challenges were. This enabled me to develop proficiency levels and descriptors to attempt to capture the reality and experiences of the participants who had provided research data.

This was important as I wanted to go back to the Qatar HR Forum to conduct a focus group. Here I ran the first ones – which was the plan; however, when I only had expatriates joining the call, I decided to conduct one with only nationals to obtain their feedback. Especially as this was their country. Furthermore, as I had offered the focus group participants to the Qatar HR Forum, I had participants who had not completed a survey. They had some input to support the notion of having a specific competency framework for HR professionals in Qatar.

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4.5.2   Interview Analysis

The semi-structured surveys were conducted over a video call. As mentioned earlier, there was no face-to-face contact due to lockdown. Once the initial data was reviewed and thematically analysed into themes from the qualitative surveys, the participants that had indicated they would be open to a semi-structured interview, I noted them and started to correspond with them. I invited them to participate and set up a convenient time for a video call. By this time, I was aware of the challenges facing the HR professionals in Qatar and was sensitive to their needs. The 13 interviews were conducted with members of the Qatar HR Forum. Even though the study is qualitative, the reliability of having the sample from the Qatar HR Forum meant the shared lived experiences and HR professionals' realities are repetitive. As the interview was being conducted, I took notes and then transcribed the information straight from interviewing the participant. I also had to ensure that I captured this. As mentioned previously, I made sure I had ample time before and after the interviews to avoid overlooking any information shared in the interview. I also understood that I had to be reporting objectively, given that I had my own experiences. Through the information that I transcribed, I was able to identify themes using thematic analysis that came out of the interviews and review them with those already identified from the structured survey. Themes were aligned to those that had already been identified and captured from the analysis of the structured surveys. Once all of the relevant data

items were coded, they were reviewed for interrelationships, patterns, and connections. Those codes with shared meanings were combined into initial candidate themes and later, these were collapsed into sub-themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) themes data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set by capturing something important. However, it provided a deep insight into what those themes meant for the individual participants and how it impacted their work. This analysis provided an opportunity to understand more through people's experiences working in HR in Qatar. An extract of the coding is not presented here due to the issues surrounding confidentiality and anonymity.

4.5.3   Focus Groups Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the focus groups were a valuable tool to enable me to involve the Qatar HR Forum. I invited members of the forum to participate in the focus groups over the phone. I called them and asked if each member would be interested in participating in the focus group. The purpose of the focus groups was to validate the findings and themes with the HR professionals themselves, based on the research findings. This validation was both for the themes found and research findings and to share the competency framework developed because of the research. It was important to hear what my colleagues in the Qatar HR Forum thought and how they saw the information to be operationalised or not, and whether they felt the competency framework was of value in their day-to-day work.

I ran two focus groups through video calls due to the COVID-19 global restrictions, and face-to-face was still not allowed due to Qatars' government regulations. For the first session with the expatriate, group permission was sought for recording. Once I finished, I took the time to transcribe the session. The themes identified through the thematic analysis shared similarities to the interview themes. The focus group provided a good discussion and allowed me to understand the participants' experiences even more. Feedback on the competency framework was valuable and provided input to address some of the proficiencies and the definitions presented. The Qatari nationals needed to be provided with an opportunity to explain and provide their views and experiences on

the data collected. Their input was vital as it is their country. I requested that we do a session online, which they agreed to; however, there was no video this time. It was only audio due to cultural implications for the females, and they disagreed on a recording. I presented the results, and the themes identified, including the competency framework. The discussion took a different approach compared to the expatriates. The Qatari nationals had different perceptions of the themes from the expatriates, again based on their experiences. The significant outcome was that the focus group were enthusiastic about the possibility of having a Qatar-centric competency framework developed for HR professionals in Qatar that they would be a part of. I took notes as they spoke and provided space for them to think and share their experiences. Any additional sub-themes were identified, and this was a good reliable source to enhance the data that had already been collected. It also validated what the results were.

4.6.   Summary of Chapter 4

In summary, chapter 4 discussed the actual work and procedure followed whilst gathering the data. The chapter discussed the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic and the impact on how the data gathering from the qualitative survey, the interviews and the focus groups had to be adapted to align with government regulations in Qatar. Consideration of my colleague's situation as redundancies became at the forefront of the organisations' cost-cutting governmental directives. The chapter also explained the reason for adopting a second focus group to incorporate feedback from the Qatari national HR professionals, thus having perspectives from a purposeful, representative sample of HR professionals working in Qatar.

Chapter 5: Project Findings

5.1. Outline of Chapter 5

This chapter provides the findings of the research conducted and carried out for this project. The chapter reviews the aims, objectives, and research questions to provide an alignment of the findings with the intent of the research. The chapter then presents the actual findings of the research data and the outcomes of the research.

5.2. Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory research project was to explore and investigate the context of the HRM professional practise in Qatar through the Qatar HR Forum. In this chapter, the project findings will be presented. There were three methods used to conduct the research, and it commenced with a qualitative survey and then a semi-structured interview followed by two focus groups to share the findings. The presentation of data and the results of analysing and interpreting the participants' narratives are provided in this chapter according to the principles of thematic analysis.

In chapter 5 of this thesis, the focus is on presenting the findings of this research project, where it depicts the various themes that emerged from the analysis of all three data sets. While this chapter does introduce some relevant literature, a more detailed exploration of these literary sources is presented in chapter 6, where the discussion takes a deeper dive. Following this, the identified themes will be analysed and connected back to the overarching aims, objectives, and research questions of the study, ensuring a cohesive examination.

The feedback from the participants has been valuable and shared in unforeseen circumstances, i.e., COVID-19, and thus, the need to revisit and realign methodology was a challenging element of the project. There is an opportunity for further research as the findings are complex, and each area could benefit from further analysis and research in

the context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar and the Qatar National Vision 2030.

It was challenging, even more difficult than I had anticipated obtaining interviews, and this, I believe, was due to a mix of expatriates being worried about their current role security and what would happen if the information 'got out'. I assured them that their confidentiality was being protected, and it was agreed that they did not want their answers recorded. I checked in with my supervisor prior to conducting the semi-structured interviews, and we both agreed that there was enough ethical support not to record. The point of the interview was not to make them fearful or apprehensive but, on the contrary, to feel relaxed and feel comfortable talking in a secure environment and with someone they could trust. That was me, the researcher. As an insider researcher, I was aware of this and understood the tensions that my colleagues may have been feeling. This helped me to make them feel at ease to talk openly and comfortably and share their experiences to contribute to the research data gathering. The second stage of the research was to identify several participants that would answer more in-depth questions and participate in a semi-structured interview based on their survey answers. I was able to speak to 8 expatriates, and 5 Qataris invited from the Qatar HR Forum. Therefore, in total, I interviewed 13 HR professionals, from a mix of sectors and at senior levels. One Qatari identified as an expatriate as she is a Westerner but married a Qatari and has since been naturalised. This provided for an interesting discussion.

The way I will present the findings will be a themed approach and what emerged from the interviews by themes identified earlier on in the qualitative survey analysis.

The conversations with the interviewees were remarkable in the sense that some were going through a termination process. Therefore, there was some anger and resentment that was being sensed. I am a trained executive coach and credentialed by the International Coaching Federation (Appendix 3). Therefore, it was important for me to find the right amount of empathy, ask the right questions and still listen to their concerns. I had to remember I was not there to solve their problems; I was there to lead the discussion but with the right balance of providing enough space for the interviewee to share their

experiences and views. These will be explored further in this chapter. The final stage of the research gathering process was the focus groups, and I had an opportunity to run 2 focus groups, one with expatriates and one with Qatari nationals, to ensure an opportunity to hear both sides of the participants' experience to validate and contribute to the data. The findings from the data and analysis will be discussed in depth and at length in this chapter.

5.3. Aims, Objectives and Research questions

There were three types of methods used to gather the data. These were qualitative surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and the methodology took a staged approach, as shown in Figure 5. I started with permission from the Vice-Chair of the Qatar HR Forum to tap into the members as a sample. I received signed permission, followed by the qualitative survey, which formed the basis for the next stage – the semi-structured interviews and then the two focus groups conducted with the Qatar HR Forum. This produced some rich data and valuable findings that will be able to aid the HR profession in Qatar. The three research aims aligned to its research objectives and questions as presented in chapter 1, section 1.7

5.4. Overview of the Participants

There were 24 responses to the qualitative survey, and Table 6 shows the breakdown of the participants by entity type and whether they were expatriates and Qatari nationals. The breakdown of the participants was 9 Qatari nationals who responded compared to 15 expatriates who responded.

Table 6. Illustration of the breakdown of total number of participants and by organisation type and nationality

Entity Type	Number of Participants (24)	Nationality	
		Qatari (9)	Expatriate (15)
Government Entities	1	0	1
Semi-Government	14	8	6
Private	9	1	8

The sector breakdown in which the participants worked varied and included industries such as financial, construction, engineering, retail, health, and sports. This is reflective of the forum ratio – 55% female and 45% male, at the time the qualitative survey was distributed. This was important as the data can be described as representative of the HR demographic distribution found in organisations. It is also interesting to note that there was no response from Qatari nationals who work in government entities.

Table 7. Illustration of the breakdown of gender of participants and by Qatari or Expatriates

	Qatari	Expatriate
Female (11)	6	5
Male (13)	3	10

Figure 7. Illustration of the breakdown of the gender and nationality of the participants
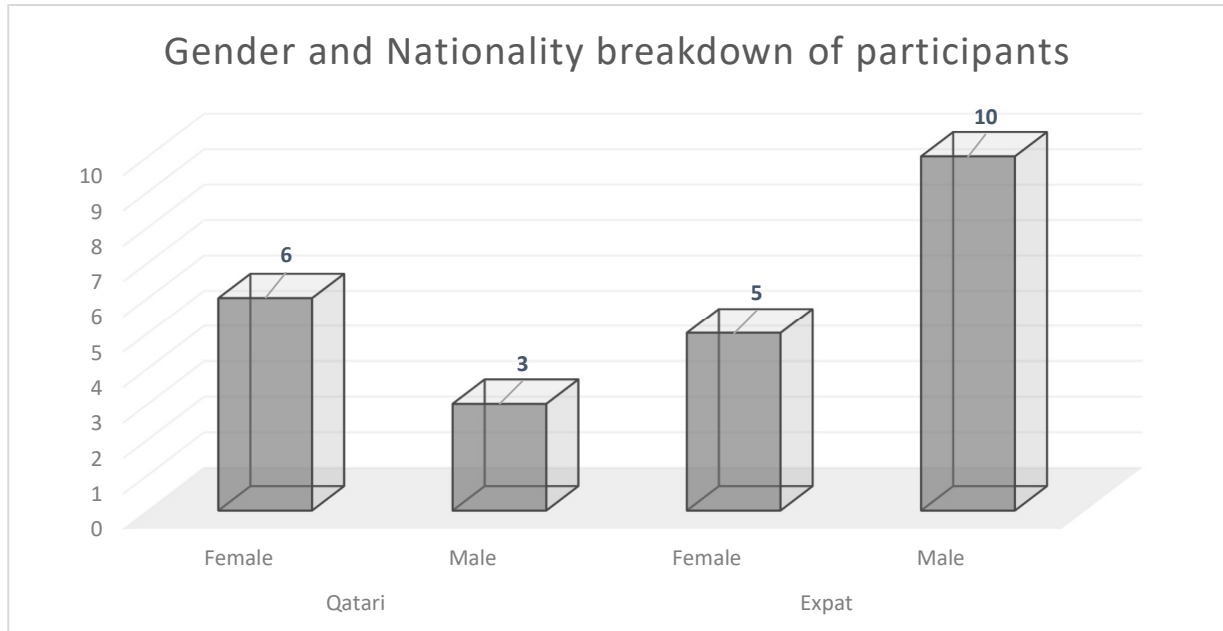
The participants who responded to the question asking them to identify any formal qualifications where the qualification is defined as anybody that has graduated with a diploma or above from a recognised institute of education. The number of 'qualified' HR professionals, i.e., an HR professional who had some qualification or degree in HR was 8 out of the 24 participants. The results also show that 4 of these 8 were Qatari nationals. Interestingly when the participants were asked whether their HR strategy was aligned to the Qatar National Vision 2030, 16 responded yes, 6 responded no and 2 participants did not know.

5.5.   Themes

There were seven main themes that were identified through thematic analysis of the data from the qualitative survey. This was preliminary data, and there was an opportunity to deep dive into these themes in the semi-structured surveys and focus groups. The qualitative survey had a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions, and thus, the data generated from the qualitative survey supported comprehensive data to conduct the thematic analysis to identify themes. This is illustrated in Figure 6. There were 7 themes

identified from the data there are: Cultural Impact, Professional Standards, HRM Practise Challenges, HR Standards, Training and Development, Planning and Budgeting Factors.

Figure 8. Illustration of the themes extracted from the data

1 - **Cultural Impact -** Including areas such as Wasta, tribalism and family relationships.

2 - **Professional Standards -** There was not one professional standard that HR professionals adhered to.

3 - **HR Challenges -** Current day to day HR challenges in the Qatar HRM Practise.

4 - **HR Standards -** There is no HR Standards in Qatar.

5 - **Training and Development** - Consistent and relevant training for HR professionals practising in Qatar was lacking.

6 - **Planning -** Plans change in Organisations and means that HR can not always complete the initial plan.

7- **Budgeting Factors -** Budgets changing and being restricted in the middle of a project by government.

5.5.1 Theme 1: Cultural Impact

The culture of an organisation is defined as an amalgamation of the behaviours within an organisation. Behaviours can be those of organisational expected behaviours or that of a dominant culture. Therefore, one of the exploratory questions in the qualitative survey was to understand the level of Qatarisation of an organisation and whether this had an impact on the organisational culture and, in turn, the HRM Practise. In 2012 Peretz and Fried found that organisations are embedded in and influenced by national culture. The initial findings concur with this.

The question from the survey which gathered data on this area was, "<u>Do you feel local Qatari culture has an effect on your HR practises such as Wasta?</u>"
Through the qualitative survey, interviews, and the focus groups, cultural impact in the context of the role of an HR professional in Qatar starred across all data-gathering methods and was also identified in the competency framework as a standalone competency. This portrays the role that culture is a big part of the HR professionals' practise in Qatar.

Table 8 shows extracts from the qualitative survey, which depicts the cultural impact on HR practises. The responses received were direct anonymised responses and provided valuable data. Furthermore, the participants from the interviews, which represented a mix of expatriates and Qataris from the Qatar HR Forum, responded to the above question as follows, which provided insight into the idea that the cultural impact of the people of the organisation was stronger than the organisational culture on the HRM Practises

Table 8. Theme 1: Cultural Impact – extract from the qualitative surveys

Theme 1: Cultural Impact; *this is where people's influence takes over the bigger picture of following processes or procedures, ultimately causing unjust and inconsistency in the implementation of processes.*
Critical decisions made in haste: Senior Management often, act without buy in or consultation from key stakeholders. Committees with representatives from key stakeholders need to deliberate and agree on major decisions ensuring all voices are heard.
Cultural practises superseding best practises: whilst diversity presents tremendous opportunities for learning, organisations must be cautious to ensure best practise is embedded in company procedures and daily practise. These evolve into cultural practise. HR must support diversity across the team instead of homogenous pockets of staff across the departments, which leads to sub-culture practises superseding organisation best practise.
Openness: Remove the fear of termination
Ability to change approach and current practises: Remove Wasta
Confidentiality is almost non-existent information is more readily shared in local customs.
Capability and potential combined succession planning
Conflicts Managing Performance: Organisational culture and values policies
Wasta culture: greater enforcement of process - many firms have excellent Policies and procedures, but the major issue is the implementation
Influenced recruitment: assessment and merit-based recruitment should be the standard
Policies and procedures flaunted: checks and balances should be implemented, and a whistleblower culture supported and practised to ensure 'the right thing' is encouraged.

Culture can be seen to influence HR practises and was described by one male expatriate respondent in the context of recruitment; *pressure to interview certain candidates from particular tribes/families (R1).* This respondent worked in a highly Qatarised organisation over 85%. The participant is from a government entity which has Qatarisation rates of

over 85%. This shows that the impact in organisations that have a higher Qatarisation rate could have a local culture impacting the HRM Practise.

Two participants who were Qatari nationals (R14 and R17) answered no. They did not think that there was any effect. They stated that their organisations followed policy, and their policy had a clear recruitment process. However, the type of organisations they were responding on behalf of, have a Qatarisation percentage would be less than 30% as they are representing semi-government organisations. Therefore, there could be an argument that the lower the level of Qatarisation, the lower the visibility of local culture on HR policies and procedures and there is no cultural ambiguity. Indeed there is an organisational culture that is more predominant.

> *Strongly Yes and Very common (R2)*
>
> *Yes - HR Policies and Procedures are often disregarded to accommodate cultural norms (R5)*
>
> *Yes, just like any other culture globally there is always an acceptable percentage of local influence but explain what these 'measuring terms' every jurisdiction. (R8)*

Adhering to performance management processes in organisations, some participants/interviewees explained how performance management processes were not necessarily always followed fairly or transparently due to the family ties or certain families they were from. Therefore, the culture was uncomfortable when providing feedback and especially constructive feedback. As one expatriate from a semi-government entity wrote in their qualitative survey answer.

> *Difficulty in confronting poor performance is exacerbated by long-entrenched social networks both amongst established staff and within the org and those new Qatari national staff joining. Am not sure how much national culture is org culture. Differences and hierarchical structures inhibit efficient working and processes, alternatively, allowing a*

"workaround" when Wasta is utilised to support a project when necessary.
(R15)

In terms of the qualitative responses from the surveys, it can be reported from the data that HR professionals felt that there was some cultural impact on their HR processes. The depth and actual effect were explored in the interviews, as is recounted from some of the above extracts in the qualitative survey. When I review the Qatarisation levels of these organisations, the results validate those cultural influences on HR processes are more prominent in organisations that have a Qatarisation level of over 50% within the organisation. The percentage was reported by the participants.

Another thought-provoking point that came to light was that 'Wasta' although present in Qatar is also prevalent in other parts of the world and is a Global Phenomenon, perhaps known in a more common way 'it's not what you know, but whom you know. I have often heard individuals take up expensive MBAs with reputable world-class education institutes, and the reason they give is that it's not about the course. It is about the network and the calibre and profile of fellow executive students on the course and about the reputation. Possibly this is the same concept of having building 'Wasta'. Therefore, this concept was explored more in the interviews to understand the individuals' experiences and to, think around the cultural influence and to connect on a deeper level with the participants' experiences and reality. This is explored in section 5.4.2.

5.5.2 Wasta and its' impact on HR Practises

In Arab and Middle Eastern countries, religious and cultural factors are stated to be influential in shaping human resource management (HRM) practises (Branine, and Pollard, 2010, Budhwar and Mellahi 2007, Metcalfe 2007). Cultural issues pose a challenge to the improvement of organisational performance in Saudi Arabia (Assad, 2002 Idris, 2007, Harbi, Thursfield and Bright, 2017a).

The concept of this 'Wasta' was first identified in the qualitative survey,

They recruited us to support them and transfer knowledge, yet at the first sign of an issue, expatriates are being fired and salaries being reduced. This is not fair; we have families and responsibilities too. (R7)

Yes- Wasta to force-fit essential standards. (R3)

Also, the way in which immigration works if you are in government or private differs. As an HR professional, this is no standard way to ensure that things get done in HR. furthermore, the immigration rules can suddenly change by the mood of someone at immigration and Wasta. (R11)

On Qatari male interviewee said:

The redundancies were a decision from the top. Although we feel for them (the redundant employees), we wish them all success and Allah be with them. (R14)

The concept of HR practises being influenced or impacted by culture was explored more in the interviews here, in-depth answers were provided with examples of their reality and how they felt Wasta was prevalent in organisations. It is important to note that the time the interviews were being conducted was the time of the COVID-19 redundancies across Qatar, where there was a governmental decree to decrease the workforce by 30% (Bloomberg News, 2020).

Participant one, an expatriate who was made redundant and was in the middle of their exit plan, shared how he felt the Qataris have a *sense of entitlement. I*t is important for me, as an interviewer, to note that the bitterness was identifiable in the interview. This interviewee was angry, which I felt was emerging in the interview. I asked him to expand on this, and he mentioned

That this sense of entitlement was present in workplaces in Qatar, especially if they thought you were taking their job. A job that they would

be unlikely to have the capability to do anyway. This is what they need us expatriates here for. (R1)

There is an idea that arises from the fact that Qatari nationals have a sense of entitlement, which is embedded into their culture. This impacts the way they can be treated in organisations to not feel like they are being singled out. This quote relates to the notion that through Wasta and their connections, the Qatari nationals will get jobs, but there is a mindset that expatriates are taking over those jobs.

Respondent one continued to explain why he felt like that.

It is disappointing that I have been treated like this, especially as I have spent the last 3 years training and upskilling my Qatari national colleagues. (R1)

Respondent 22 also noted that '*he felt that they (Qatari nationals) did not care about their colleagues that were terminated.*' He mentioned that he took it upon himself to be caring and to ensure that the employees exiting felt someone would listen. Although the HR Department was not all nationals, why did he feel that the Qataris did not care? The interviewee did explain that there were expatriates in the HR department, and he felt there should be more professionalism from them. But it was unlikely as their Line Manager was local, and therefore, they did not have control or authority, and there was always an element of 'expatriate fear'.

On the contrary, one of the Qatari male respondents (R18) was asked about this concept of Wasta and 'sense of entitlement' and whether he felt there was more that he could do, but he said it was an instruction. When asked if there was more support that the Qataris could do for the expatriates during this time (COVID-19), he answered, '*we supported them already'.* When probed, this meant that there was an End of Service financial entitlement, 3 months' notice, and support with repatriating.

This is indicative of the way the culture intertwines with Islam, and the behaviour shown in organisations is influenced by these ideas.

Another expatriate who was going through a job interview for a prestigious global event that was soon to be held in Qatar was surprised at their experience.

> *I went through several rounds of interviews, as expected. I sent an email early on to the recruiter with my salary expectations…The process was delayed for a couple of months due to the COVID-19 pandemic so a couple of weeks ago I received an offer in writing well below my expectations…..I would have expected the recruiter to be very transparent given that she was British too, but when confronted-diplomatically she blamed the organisation and the salary structure. (R13)*

Another expatriate I interviewed gave an account of their experience in being recruited for a major organisation and how unprofessionalism was demonstrated.

> *A few years ago, I was approached by a British recruitment agency, and I was looking for a role in the Healthcare industry given my background and experience. I said I could not believe that a British recruitment agency would be willing to work so blindingly with either the candidate or the organisation and not have minimum information to share with the candidate. I also mentioned that this would never be acceptable in the UK, so why were they as an agency allowing this unprofessionalism? She did not really have an answer and we parted ways. It is just one example of many of how not just how unprofessional HR departments are, but how they are able to bring in international partners who go along. I understand that there is a commercial gain involved, but also there is a professional reputation to uphold. (R4)*

The above extract informs an example of how professional standards are not upheld, even though there is an expectation when dealing with colleagues from across the globe that similar professional standards are expected. Furthermore, it appears that our colleagues assimilate to the 'way business is conducted' in Qatar and thus provide HR services, such as this recruitment experience in an unprofessional manner, surprisingly by a British counterpart.

This assimilation to unprofessionalism and the absence of HR standards due to culture in an organisation was confirmed by a respondent (R8), a male expatriate. The data here suggests that expatriates become comfortable in their work and lifestyle. It is easier to do the bare minimum, not challenge and have a quiet life. This in turn means that a family does not have to relocate back to their country, with no job or role and sometimes no money.

As this male expatriate participant, who had been in the region for over 10 years explained.

> *Sometimes I assimilate to what is totally against my professional beliefs or values, I have 2 children in a great school here and do not want to disrupt their education and take them home. But the more I work in this region, I realise that people want an easy job. Do not rock the boat. So, I end up doing things that are not aligned with my values, not unethical, just not what I would call professional. (R8)*

Interestingly Wasta is not only something that is visible with local Qatari nationals but can be seen amongst other nationalities too in the workplace.

> *I have been burnt before, not by the locals but by other expatriates trying to keep themselves in roles they do not have the skills for but instead have the relationships for or otherwise known as 'Wasta'….The other expatriates that want to stay, and they could be those that are displaced,*

who do not have countries to go to or who have been born and raised in Qatar, so they are nicely nice. Pleasing their bosses, doing what their bosses want even if it does not support or help the organisation. (R11)

Overall, the concept of Wasta is prevalent in organisations and the country, from the data it impacts HR practises across immigration requirements, recruitment, and performance management. in addition, the experiences of HR professionals working in Qatar have placed Wasta even in organisations as expatriates, who perhaps are not necessarily skilled for the role, but to the contrary, know the right person to have gotten a role.

Another point to make regarding Wasta is the notion of helping people by providing a Wasta is a kind and an Islamic notion, hence the commonality of it in Qatar. Furthermore, Wasta does not need to be viewed or utilised in a negative light, as the local and Arab culture is very much about networking, supporting, and helping people, and even demonstrating charitable actions, and thus Wasta can be potentially a positive action if used in the context of HRM practises then the correct HR due diligence is maintained and conducted to ensure there is none or limited bias.

5.5.3 Islam and HR Practises

Islam is a way of life in a Muslim's life; therefore, it is not surprising to hear and see it every day in organisations. The interesting thing is that whilst conducting the research, there has been an opportunity to experience new insights from the respondents, interestingly non-Muslims as well as Muslims. This was heard from respondents, even in the language they use concerning Islam as Allah's wish, the use of Inshallah in everyday conversation and in how support is extended to employees. As Muslims, we all follow the same book and directions, but the interpretation of this through culture can differ as seen in the next two quotes extracted from semi-structured interviews.

Qatari male respondent

Our culture is one of help and supporting others it is dictated by our religion too, sometimes there are Allahs' wishes. (R18)

One respondent male Muslim expatriate, explained that although culture impacts, he believes that it was done with their religious beliefs, however, he also said that.

So, when they must terminate employees, they do not, as they believe they are interfering with Allah's' wishes. I am a Muslim and believe in Allah too. However, if someone is not performing their role, this is Haram. Also, their culture intervenes through a sense of belonging to families and relationships. The locals do not always make decisions objectively and this can interfere in the work culture. (R13)

The notion above through the quotes, illustrates that the way Islam impacts the decision-making of individuals is different, and Qatari nationals find it challenging to make business decisions when it impacts individuals. An example that is seen commonly is the termination of an employee, and this is because there is a belief in Islam, that Allah is responsible for our livelihood and نصيب 'Naseeb'. Naseeb is believed to be one's fate in Islam, what Allah has written for you will be what one gets in life. This is strongly believed in by Muslims. How can this impact HRM practise? When Managers don't performance manage their team due to this concept, then this leads to underperforming employees or employees not meeting performance expectations and they can end up being propped up and working in positions they do not have the skillset for? This either leads to an underperforming employee or recruitment of a new employee, or overloading an existing employee. This is just one example, but in terms of HRM practise this impact can be on the overall performance of an organisation.

5.5.4 Theme 2: HR Professional Standards

Upon analysis of the results of the 24 HR professionals that participated in the qualitative survey shows that almost a third of those surveyed do not have any formal recognition either locally or from global associations. The rest of the sample had formal qualifications, which ranged from CIPD recognition to SHRM, and others did not identify in the qualitative survey which body their formal recognition was obtained from. This range of skills and professional accreditation could influence the different ways of working and demonstrating professionalism and best practise in the workplace. The impact of HR professionals that were sampled in the qualitative survey not having any formal certifications may mean that they did not know what best practise was. Given the current state of HR in Qatar, this was an unsurprising fact the data showed. The results of the qualitative survey from the 24 participants showed that only a third of the sample did not have any qualifications or have any sort of HR accreditation. The lack of credentials in certain areas of HR has been highlighted previously where there is not one standard HR qualification that local nationals can obtain for their role in Qatar. The data was obtained from 24 participants, however, it may be representative of Qatar, given that the Qatari nationals were the higher number of participants that did not have any formal recognition. It is also important to note that the impact of the varying formal qualifications of the expatriate participants who were holding a formal recognition was from around the globe. Therefore, presenting a mixed picture of the formal recognition of HR professionals in practising in Qatar.

This information continues to provide an opportunity to professionalise the HR profession, which is one aim of the research project. It also provides insight into the concept that there is no one standard approach to upskilling HR professionals in Qatar, and different individuals in the profession come with different competencies.

The literature review, as discussed above, has similarities to neighbouring countries, what was not present in the literature was HR research in the context of Qatar or the National Vision 2030.

The qualitative survey provided preliminary findings of the HRM Practises, which explored in detail the challenges HR professionals face in Qatar whilst practising this profession. These include the themes that will be discussed below in more detail. Some of the key analyses showed that there is no standardisation of HR practise, there is no professional society – which the participants felt was needed, and culture had an impact on the HR practise.

Regarding the research to explore the need to professionalise HR in Qatar, it was important for me to understand what HR professionals themselves felt a professional HR was. One of the questions asked in the survey.

<u>One of the questions that was asked in the survey was 'How would you describe a professional HR Practitioner?'</u>
There was a range of answers to this question in the qualitative survey as it was one of the open-ended questions. This was then built upon as part of the explorative questions in the interviews.

> *A robust professional practitioner who demonstrates empathy yet conviction to ensure the welfare of both ee an emp. Professional aware of global trends, a proactive yet calculated risk-taker who is not hesitant to consider/embed innovative methodology to improve HR activities within organisations. (R1)*

> *Objective-based deliverables with mandatory competency development that has a business outcome. (R3)*

> *A generalist in HR knowledge and practise in all areas of function. Later can specialise in one area developing a career, or take on management and leadership roles in HR. (R4)*

The answers received were open-ended and varied; different participants answered it was about behaviour and others about skills that HR professionals needed.

> *Hands-on, expert, empathetic yet hard-line individual, sensitive to both the employees and the business. (R5)*

> *Organised, ethical, good communicator, trouble-shooter, Accessible Understand the business, good listener, provide a solution, and support business decisions. (R8)*

> *Client focussed, non-judgemental and able to actively challenge and support organisations and individuals to improve. (R13)*

> *Reliable, accessible, trustworthy. Strategic people thinker, well versed in HR techniques and processes. (R14)*

> *Curious, good person, ethical. (R16)*

The qualitative survey went on to explore the description of Qatar-based HR professionals.

<u>Would your description be the same as above if the HR professional were in Qatar? Please explain your answer.</u>

> *No, there would be 1 hour voice that is heard and a go-to ref point for HR-related matters. (R2)*

> *Yes - function should be of a similar standard - with flexibility for cultural nuances-wherever it operates in the organisation. (R4)*

Yes, HR people should face the challenges with the best standard to keep the quality of service maintained. (R7)

More so, but with a greater focus on the need for a business plan and strategic KPIs to drive all initiatives. (R13)

The mix of responses shows that it is a varied definition of what an HR professional should be. It encompassed responses regarding expected visible behaviours, the function in terms of what should be delivered, and provided by an HR professional according to the responses of the Qatar HR Forum. Interestingly, when asked what issues were in the workplace with HR professionalism, the responses generally provided an answer stating that professionalism was lacking and was not being demonstrated in the participants' opinions and their experiences. The variety of professionalism was and the varied responses were explored in the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Some of the answers determined the lived experiences, and the HR professionals shared examples of what they had been through and the following quote is longer than what I have normally presented. However, it captures their particular views and lived experience regarding this issue. The below extract from an interview with an expatriate of Arab origin with a Western passport explained the reasons why they believe in their experience that some individuals don't demonstrate the expected professionalism. This can be due to the sponsorship system. When working in the GCC, employees are sponsored by their companies for work-related immigration purposes. This means that if they are unemployed, then they cannot stay in Qatar.

There is a common thread of 'Arabs' to make sure they are needed, and their definition of professionalism, is different than ours. I am an Australian Arab expat; I have worked in Australia. I have the same beliefs – Islam and similar values….I understand that there is a need and there are many nationalities that are displaced such as Palestinians, Syrians even Lebanese. I understand that the quality of life, education and security is better in Qatar and that these and other countries may not be in a place

that they can go home. However, the professionalism is lacking. What this means is that there are certain things that are non-negotiable, such as not blaming others, being held accountable, delivering projects not making up excuses for why we cannot deliver. As a Senior Human Resources Business Partner (SHRBP), this really frustrates me. What happens to the dynamic in the workplace when you find yourself in a non-professional working environment? Other than being frustrated there becomes a divide, although I try hard to understand the culture, but I do not understand why one would not want to leave a legacy. If you raise it, your job is on the line, however as a female sponsored by my husband this is the least of my worries, but for others, particularly those males who sponsor their family and then have children in schools they don't want to speak up, so it seems that sometimes these professionals adhere to what is already there, as opposed to influence. Even though they have an opportunity as men to infiltrate through the majlis etc. The other element to this is the culture of the workplace, this is highly influenced by the type of nationality you have working in the organisation. In a previous role I worked with Americans and things got done, there was accountability and deliverables that were delivered on time. (R21)

The point being made is that when you have sponsorship tied up to an organisation and show courage or speak up about a practise, it may not be well received and as a result, an employee sponsorship their family with perhaps children is schools may find themselves suddenly having to relocate back to their home country and disrupt their family life including children's education. Furthermore, the concept of certain nationalities being displaced, as mentioned above, such as Palestinians or Syrians, do not always have a 'home' country to go back to, so it may be that they are more likely not to speak up or show courage due to this fear and comfort of living in Qatar. The data shows that this is visible as unprofessionalism. This point is confirmed by another respondent, an expatriate HR professional

Professionalism should not be different in different countries. How professionalism is presented differs. It generally depends on where an individual comes from. This may sound prejudiced, but it is the reality I have found in the 5 years I have worked across 2 different organisations. I spent some time in recruitment as part of my HR Managerial role and found that one organisation I worked in, would recruit, and pay the person based on their origin. The recruits were split into 4 groups Arabs such as Palestinian, Jordanian, Egyptian etc. Qataris, Asians, and Western expatriates such as Europe (excluding Eastern Europe), Australia, and New Zealand. (R4)

This point leads to inequality, which is unacceptable and unprofessional. A demonstrable example of a direct impact of unprofessionalism on HRM Practises starting at the onboarding and recruitment stage, paying based on nationality and desperation for a role and a potential life in Qatar. This practise stemming from the unprofessionalism then contributes to the cultural impact of an organisation in the way that the personal culture of an employee emerging, skewing the lines between organisational culture and the employees' personal culture.

This practise was researched and highlighted in research conducted by Abdalla, Al Waqfi, Harb, Hijazi, and Zoubeidi, (2010), where they found that people were paid based on their nationalities in the region, even though they are doing the same job showing that there may be a lack in best practises adopted across the region and in turn it appears Qatar has elements of this in their HR functions. One expatriate HR professional stated.

Also, I find that based on the origin one starts to notice certain behaviours stemming from culture rather than organisational behaviours or organisation. What this means is that we expect people to start demonstrating behaviours based on their origin. So as an example, Qataris generally do not show up on time or have a habit of not putting their phones down in meetings. Filipinos we see to be

super-efficient in getting things done, but never speak up. Arabs generally are good at keeping their jobs even if they are not performing their roles as they are good at building up the relationships with the Qataris. (R3)

The bridge that builds these relationships is deemed to the language being able to communicate in Arabic natively eases the communication and builds trust.

It helps that they can speak the language. This is where it gets complicated because if the person the Qatari trusts, who perhaps is quite high up in the hierarchy of the organisation, the 'trustworthy' person may not be providing the right advice and the advice or information provided is more for self-interest to keep their roles. It provides a horrible organisational culture and makes those in charge look weak and vulnerable. (R11)

These relationships built through connecting with the right language and the trust built can then be powerful and abused in an unethical way. The trust built between locals and Arab nationalities was stated to be impactful on HRM practises by way of recruiting friends, being protected from being terminated and the loyalty is described as having 'blind' followers.

Bringing in friends to work in the same organisation without necessarily declaring it. This creates loyalty and followers. Blind followers. (R24)

This means that the professionalism does not exist.

And the professionalism becomes almost non-existent. I do not just see this in HR I see this across the organisation. I spoke up in my last company and soon found myself repatriated with my daughter and wife through termination for no reason. (R1)

This experience reiterates the point that when this expatriate HR professional working in Qatar had the courage to speak up about a professional matter, they found themselves terminated and repatriated to their home country. The experience of the Qatar HR Forum who have found themselves in these types of situations may come back and find themselves working, doing their job without making a fuss. This is how unprofessionalism, as defined by the Qatar HR Forum, leads to a lack of professionalism due to experiences had by individuals.

> *But I now choose to keep my head down and 'do my job'. Things are not going to change, so what should I put my family at risk again? I really was not prepared for the repatriation financially, so it was a depressing and difficult time. I have decided that the money is worth not speaking up for now. I know other HR professionals look at me and think why, but they do not know my personal situation or that I want the best education for my daughter, which she is totally getting in Qatar. More importantly, is the networks and friendships she is getting; this is her future, and she is safe and secure here. (R8)*

Another example of the impact of a lack of HR professionalism on HR practises is when an employee is leaving a role and is offboarding. A particular example was shared by an expatriate who was made redundant during COVID-19 and felt there was no aftercare on the offboarding.

> *I have recently been terminated, my organisation is predominantly expat, so there has been a 30% reduction. I noted there was no aftercare for us so in my role I took it upon myself to coach and mentor those that are losing their job. I focussed my efforts to ensure those who are being left without an income and may even have to take their families back home to the unknown had support. It is hard for me too as I do not have that support for myself. Luckily, my family was already at home as we were thinking of*

leaving Qatar in 18 months. This aftercare feeds into a lack of professionalism. The professionalism or unprofessionalism I have encountered in the last couple of weeks has made me realise even more that there needs to be a standard for HR Practises, and now there is not. This creates this inconsistency, few HR professionals know what to do in circumstances that are 'different' such as this one. (R3)

This expatriate respondent shared their experience when they were terminated due to the recent COVID-19 economic impact. They describe the lack of professionalism. This corroborates the findings from the qualitative survey where similar findings were found. The important reality that has been a lived experience by several respondents that were interviewed is that the behaviour of current HR professionals practising in Qatar is unprofessional, and through these lived experiences being described and shared, it becomes apparent that the unprofessionalism is not unique to the sector, type of industry or even nationality.

5.5.5 Theme 3: HR Challenges in the Context of Qatar's HR Forum

The focus of the research is a broad understanding of HR but homing in on Qatar as a country and exploring the specific HR challenges in its unique business landscape. Predictably there were many, but upon analysis and coding of the data, I was able to break these into groups.

The data produced some information that has enabled the research to identify HRM challenges and cultural impact on those practises in Qatar. The HRM Governance in Qatar consists of three different laws, and the organisation is governed by a specific law dependent on the type of organisation it is registered as. The HRM practise has a clear mandate to ensure that Qatarisation is at the forefront of the HRM strategy of every organisation, this is aligned to the Qatar National Vision 2030 but beyond this is the belief that HRM is an easy profession and therefore, HR roles are a target for Qatarisation. Qatarisation is a practise in Qatar, as it is in the GCC, and the concept is that the priority for roles is for Qatari nationals. HRM in Qatar is one speciality that has a special focus on

the Ministerial entities and is governed through various parameters, such as immigration approval and budget approvals – where applicable to ensure that the government is supporting the concept of Qatarisation. I did not ask directly regarding Qatarisation in the qualitative survey, but expectedly it was a matter that was captured in the qualitative survey data as well as the semi-structured interviews. The research findings showed that although the Qatar National Vision 2030 is eight years away, only 16 out of the 24 participants in the survey could confirm that their HR strategy was aligned to the vision, which is contrary to the government mandate and directive of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

The Qatarisation theme also emerged in the interviews. One male expatriate:

> *Yes - jobs that are of a specialist nature are held for Qatari nationals who do not have the required skills or expertise when appointed. this has a large negative impact on the people function of the organisation. (R8)*

Qatarisation is a huge part of the HRM practise that impacts HR professionals daily in Qatar. It stems from the Qatar National Vision 2030, and if the HR professionals' role is not planned to be Qatarised, then the HR professional will be supporting the organisation to find roles that can be Qatarised.

The HR professionals explained and touched on the issue of employment sponsorship and the reality of how HR professionals themselves can be deemed less professional to save their jobs and continue to live a comfortable life or educate their children and not disrupt their education or even the extreme of certain nationalities being displaced and maintaining roles in Qatar as they did not or could not repatriate.

An extract from one expatriate account of their interview explaining the sponsorship and their experience of the HR challenges they face.

Of course, being the main sponsor of my family and putting them first I can justify it. I currently work in a 90% Qatari organisation which is semi-government. I could never imagine the type of politics or even the bureaucracy that I would be facing. If I am completely honest, I feel like my confidence has been shaken. I am not a young guy, but I am mature and professional. I find the behaviour around me very unprofessional. The culture is burdensome, I believe it is influenced by the local culture, which is weaved with relationships, family connections and doing favours. This is brought into the workplace and sometimes, it seems our job is impossible. What I feel is happening to me, I am putting my family first and my children's education, and I am letting a lot of battles go that I would not normally. I am keeping my head down. Which I also think is what my other expatriate colleagues are doing in this organisation. (R13)

This quote is a direct experience a male expatriate is facing in his role, what complicates his life is the fact that he is the main sponsor of the family and therefore, he no longer speaks up if there are issues, he does not agree with. This is not uncommon behaviour, and it can be concluded that there is a direct link between how the sponsored employee feels about their workplace environment, their safety to speak up and the criticality of one's family situation. These three areas could be impacting the behaviour of the HR professional, which indirectly impacts how professional one is.

5.5.6 Theme 4: Absence of HR Standards in Qatar

The idea of Qatar not having HR Standards in HRM was addressed both in the qualitative survey as well as the semi-structured interviews. The responses relevant to the lack of standards in HR in Qatar are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Responses from the Qualitative Survey relevant to the lack of HR Standards

HR Standards: *The challenges within this area are to do with governance, laws, and the market itself in Qatar, there is not one standard or labour law*
Avail of bilingual - Improve immigration and approval process
Standard HR Law: Same HR Law should be for all sectors
Change in regulations/rules: to be alert and up to date
Standard employment jurisdiction: Standard framework
Compensation and Benefits: Market Survey
Time to Hire: Process

The above data indicate that the lack of bilingual support in certain governmental agencies is challenging, especially as the rules change consistently; therefore, not standardising the approval process to obtain the most accurate information to onboard candidates directly impacts the HR practise of recruitment and something out of control. In addition, the governance of the workforce in terms of laws is different in terms of which type of organisation one works for. As explained in one interview with a Qatari national.

> *There are 3 laws in Qatar, covering different jurisdictions in terms of governance. There is the Qatar Labour law, which governs private companies, HRM law, government, and semi-government, but it has been known for some entities to exempt themselves from parts when it does not fulfil their needs. By Emiri Decree. The Qatar Financial law, based on international law, regulates all Qatar Financial Centre registered entities. It is known to be one of the fairer laws, as this is mainly since it provides a platform to attract international companies and employees. These discrepancies in the labour market cause a lack of standardisation. The biggest one is compensation differences, as under the HRM law, the organisations' Compensation structure is dictated by the law. (R24)*

The direct impact of this lack of standards is the compensation or reward structure as explained by one Qatari national respondent, within the HRM law the salary structure is directed as is the bonus scheme, so this direct impact on the reward structure within HR practises is evident through the law. Although it can be argued that this is a standard,

nevertheless this does not provide these types of organisations the scope to be able to benchmark or develop their own reward and compensation structure. However, it can also be argued that this provides for a fair and transparent standard.

An expatriate interviewee directly stated;

> *I believe Qatar does not have HR standards and that is why these things happen, and they get away with it in HR and time and time again. HR builds a bad reputation, and it is just unprofessional individuals. (R11)*

One expatriate interviewee went on to speak about their experience in feeling isolated without a Qatar HR Forum, but found it in the Qatar HR Forum, this had enabled the sharing of practises and standards and best practises

> *In my experience, it is essential that there are standards that companies are governed by and then a profession precedence or similar to know what the right thing to do is in this country. If it wasn't for the Qatar HR Forum, I don't think I would have lasted in my current role for the last 4 years, as I would have felt very isolated especially that I am in the minority in terms of the demographic of HR. (R5)*

A Qatari respondent who graduated from the USA with a master's in HR spoke about their experience, interestingly, they captured the reputation of HR, especially when it came to his parents and their thoughts on the profession. This is valuable insight as this interviewee shared the idea that HR is transactional as opposed to strategic.

> *When I decided to go and study HR, it was a fight with my parents, as the profession had a reputation of being the department that files your papers and manages your annual leave. However, it is so much more than this. As a Qatari who has also completed internships abroad and interacted with HR departments abroad, I understand completely how far away HR*

is from having a standard. Since working in HR for the last six years, I have seen subtle changes in the way HR is being viewed. I have seen my own organisation build up strategic HR and have been given a voice. But is also since our leader is an HR supporter and believes in HR. He understands and has worked in multinationals previously and has interacted with their Global HR teams with a Glocalisation of processes to suit the market here. (R18)

Another area of HRM practise which is impacted by the lack of HR standards is redundancy, this was prevalent during the lockdown and COVID-19 redundancies, as several respondents shared (expatriates) in their offboarding experience that the aftercare and support were non-existent and in their opinion was due to the lack of HR professionalism and HR standards. Although in the context of the COVID-19 redundancies, it could be argued that they were unprecedented times and there was not a standard offboarding at that time, although it could be argued to the point that the standard care is lacking from their experience in their offboarding experiences in general.

This was one of the themes to emerge from the qualitative survey, and there was an overwhelming consensus that there was a lack of HR standards in the HR profession in Qatar. The HR functions across the organisations and sectors did seem to have an affiliation with an external international HR body or even a local one.

5.5.7 Theme 5: Training and Development

The concept of training and development is lacking in the HR profession that was customised or specific to Qatar. This means that there is no standard that an HR professional in Qatar can be assessed against or even trained to. The qualitative survey captured several answers from the participants regarding this area. This was an open-ended question. "*What challenges do you feel you face as an HR professional in Qatar? What solutions do you suggest if any?*"

Table 10. Theme 5: Responses from the Qualitative Survey relevant to Training and Development

Training and Development: The challenges in the are of training HR Professionals
Professional training of locals: Recognition by ministry of HR Standard.
Clear development for employees -Follow up/conduct professional training.
Training with a cheque book: Needs-based linked strategy
Real-time knowledge updates: centralised knowledge centres
Face different people at work: Ensure that the team is developed as much as required to be agile
Demotivation Employees: Career Development
Recognition is very qualifications focussed: There needs to be more understanding of generic transferable skills - the world economic forum has excellent work on 21st century skills that would benefit recruitment professionals
Staff Development: It tends to be expensive, unfocused, and not relevant to a career path or comp. A far greater focus on professional vocational qualifications and international accreditation via examination is necessary.

Overall, these comments gathered in the qualitative survey state that although there is training, it is not aligned with a strategy or a standard. There is an idea that the training received from external bodies and training providers should be recognised by the local HR ministry in Qatar, currently, this is not the case.

5.5.8 Theme 6: HR Planning

Planning in the context of HR was a theme that was gathered from the data in the qualitative survey. Although it was not a major theme, it was mentioned in the responses. What challenges do you feel you face as an HR professional in Qatar? What solutions do you suggest if any?

Table 11. Theme 6: Responses from the Qualitative Survey relevant to HR Planning

Planning: The challenges associated with a lack of planning for HR Activities and projects
Lack of planning: It is critical COVID-19 many critical businesses were exposed to a lack of Business Continuity Programs. Organisations need to be more robust and plan for the unforeseen. The blockade was an example of this.
Organisational structure changes - many times a year: Provide an awareness session to employees
Load of key projects: delegation to the team.

This data is important in understanding the HRM context in terms of planning, as one of the answers mentioned the blockade and the COVID-19 pandemic, it identifies the idea that organisations are not necessarily ready for any unplanned issues, and this is something important for a successful HRM. It is also not unusual to find several organisational restructures or major changes several times a year. Therefore, that lack of planning or HR understanding is visible and active in the HRM in Qatar, as the Qatar HR Forum respondents have indicated in their answers.

5.5.9 Theme 7: Budgeting Factors

This is an interesting theme from an open-ended question from the qualitative survey that was identified as there is a budget challenge, particularly if the state is funded. It is not unusual to have funding or budget cuts mid-year or mid-projects, and it is expected for HRM to change directions, particularly with manpower budgets and thus, recruitment gets directly impacted, as bonus payments and project continuation.
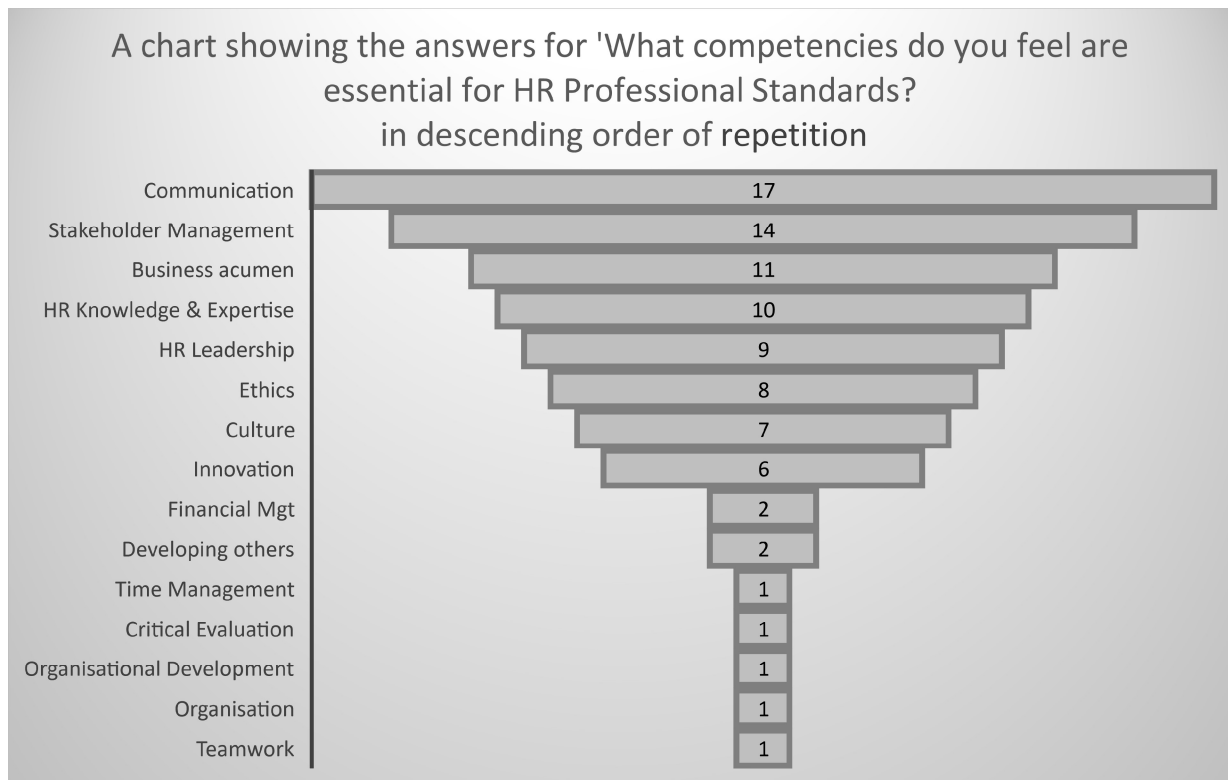
Table 12. Theme 7: Responses from the Qualitative Survey relevant to Budgeting Factors

Budgeting Factors: *This impacts HR initiatives are cut due to a lack of funding.*
Cost-cutting myopia: Cost optimise through wastage reduction instead of Human Capital
Government budgets vs. private sector: Value for money needs to be reassessed

5.5.10 Development of Qatar-Centric HR Competency Framework

Whilst collating data through the methods implemented in this study, it provided an opportunity to explore ways in which the Qatar HR Forum can utilise the knowledge gained in this study. One of the major potential contributions to the profession in Qatar is the competency framework that has been developed. This competency framework was developed through the research data; by analysing the results provided by the Qatar HR Forum respondents, I was able to develop and create this customised and unique competency framework. This provides a good start to having a framework for the Qatar HR Forum, which can then use within their organisations. This will help to identify skills needed to work within HR in Qatar as well as provide direction to standardise what a professional HR practitioner could be. The lack of a standard in the HRM profession in Qatar now has led to issues in the profession, and therefore, the contribution of such a framework, built by the Qatar HR Forum for the Qatar HR Forum, is of value to their work. Through the qualitative survey, one question asked the participants to write three competencies they felt were important to the HR profession in Qatar. As a result of this question, I was able to present the below analysis. The results showed that communication was identified as a top choice for HR professionals in Qatar. Figure 9 below shows the competencies that HR professionals identified as required specifically for Qatar. This was a major outcome of the project, and from this, the creation of a specific competencies framework was created in collaboration with the focus groups. This is illustrated below in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Competencies identified by the Qatar HR Forum deemed important for HR Professionals in Qatar.

A chart showing the answers for 'What competencies do you feel are essential for HR Professional Standards? in descending order of repetition

Competency	Count
Communication	17
Stakeholder Management	14
Business acumen	11
HR Knowledge & Expertise	10
HR Leadership	9
Ethics	8
Culture	7
Innovation	6
Financial Mgt	2
Developing others	2
Time Management	1
Critical Evaluation	1
Organisational Development	1
Organisation	1
Teamwork	1

The above Figure shows competencies identified by the Qatar HR Forum from their experience whilst answering the open-ended questions 'what competencies of you feel are essential for HR professional Standards?'. These are illustrated above in descending order of importance. Practising HR professionals (sample group) in Qatar decided that communication was the most important competency. The respondent was able to pick more than one option for their chosen competencies, and these were open questions. These were then used for the basis of a competency framework for HR professionals. Through the discussions in the interviews and the focus groups (discussed below), proficiencies were developed. These were designed into three levels and presented to the Qatar HR Forum through the focus groups for their feedback. There were two focus groups that took place, one with expatriates and one with Qatari nationals. I did not have any pre-disposed thoughts regarding what I thought the competencies would be, and

therefore it was reassuring to find those different participants from different countries practising HR in Qatar had similar expectations of what HR competencies were required for Qatar.

As a practising senior HR professional, I have developed, reviewed and implemented competency frameworks within organisations and sectors. Therefore I have extensive experience in competency frameworks. These frameworks range across behavioural, leadership and technical competencies. The Qatar-centric competency framework, as seen in figure 8, developed for the HR profession in Qatar, is a preliminary framework. The framework developed and validated by the Qatar HR Forum is not elaborate or complex. However, it is easy and user friendly and can be understood by all HR professionals at all levels. The current context of HRM in Qatar, where there is no HR Standards or any framework, provides a good start. This framework enables the HR Profession to have a foundation for standards, one that is consistent, communicated to our colleagues and created collaboratively. Once I had developed the competency framework, and it was shared with the Qatar HR Forum, it was validated by experienced members within the profession, and there was no feedback with regards to the quality or potential limitations of the framework. The fact that there is no other alternative at this point provides an opportunity to have something. The potential to operationalise and roll out a standard is a possibility in the near future. Therefore the framework captures the needs of the HR Profession and is a framework that can be used as a foundation and built on in the future as the profession evolves in Qatar.

Competency	Competency Description	Level 1 (Entry)	Level 2 (Intermediate)	Level 3 (Advanced)
			Figure 10. HR Competency Framework for HR Professionals in Qatar	
1- Communication Skills	The ability to receive and convey information clearly, using a broad range of communication styles and tools to effectively communicate and relay the information to different audiences in diverse situations.	To actively listen and asks questions to ensure ideas are understood and facilitate understanding for both parties.	Ensures open communication practises for knowledge sharing and transparency across the organisation and to HR Colleagues.	Advocates open and clear communication by providing direction and required information to strengthen the organisation and HR practises.
		Uses verbal and nonverbal communication effectively to convey HR information to non-HR professionals.	Anticipates the reaction of the target audience and adapts content, style, tone and type of communication accordingly.	Influences stakeholders through effective communication leading to credible and courageous relationships.
		To be able to read and understand HR laws to make recommendations based on governance.	Communicates the organisations' HR initiatives to enable and support stakeholders to be effective.	Acts as a trusted advisor to senior leadership to advise on HR issues and understand the stakeholders challenges and provide resolutions.

2- Stakeholder Management	The ability to manage and build relationships effectively and professionally to provide HR services, support and guidance to enable the organisational objectives through its people.	Understands both HR and organisational strategic objectives with stakeholder needs and manages expectations	Aligns both HR and organisational strategic objectives with stakeholder needs and manages expectations	Implements both HR and organisational strategic objectives with stakeholders needs and manages expectations
		Positively builds relationships with stakeholders by providing updates on the progress of the HR service they are receiving through clear Service level agreements (SLAs).	Maintains credibility with stakeholders through delivering excellent HR advice and support to the stakeholders.	Manages the stakeholders relationships through their credibility and knowledge as a senior HR professional.
		Follows-up with stakeholders during and after the delivery of services to ensure that their HR needs have been met and are aligned to stakeholders needs.	Provides recommendations to stakeholders through data analytics to support their people decision making.	Ensures the HR function is aligned to stakeholders' needs and strategic alignment.

3- Business Acumen	The ability to understand and apply services and expertise with which to contribute to the organisation's strategic plan.	Understands the position of the organisation in the larger world context through an awareness of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.	Be knowledgeable of the organisation's governance, rules, structures and people and the impact on HR strategy and services	Contributes to shaping business practises and policies by sharing new ideas and perspectives to adjust business strategies
		To be able to consider the bigger picture while setting priorities.	To understand the organisation's bigger purpose and make recommendations in the context of HR to ensure the stakeholders are receiving the best service.	Ensures any internal and external factors impacting strategy, performance and success from a business and commercial perspective are in line with the HR strategy
		To have an awareness of competitive differentiators	To understand the competitive differentiators and use the knowledge to inform HR practises.	Promotes a shared understanding of the organisation's needs and strategic direction to embed into HR strategy and ensure HR practises align with organisational needs.

4- HR Knowledge and Expertise	The ownership of HR knowledge of governance, principles, practises, and functions for effective human resource management.	Possess basic HR knowledge to respond to basic queries about HR matters and processes and can identify resources to support response across all HR functions.	Identify solutions leading to effective change management and business process improvement through HR knowledge and expertise	Assessing and evaluating strategic options and identifying imaginative opportunities to improve performance and position.
		Maintains confidentiality of employee data at all times and ensures compliance with any global or local governance and regulations.	Application of HR expertise to organisational policies and procedures to ensure a robust HR service.	Expertise in providing direction on impactful decisions and ensuring resources, structures, communication and continual learning is in place for the HR team
		Ensures continuous professional development and building capability of HR knowledge and expertise.		Implementation of innovative and cost-effective solutions leading to effective change management and business process improvement through HR Expertise
5- HR Leadership	The ability to demonstrate leadership capability as an HR professional	Demonstrate the ability to lead an HR initiative to execution.	Differentiates appropriately between accountability, responsibility and	To lead with courage and be able to influence senior leadership with supporting data, research and HR best practises.

	in Qatar through understanding and evaluating ideas, research, and HR best practises to support the organisation in the present and in the future.		delegation when empowering others with authority.	
		Understand and appreciate how leadership formulates strategy and implements strategic change.	Delegates are responsible to individuals to make them accountable for successful execution.	Acts proactively and courageously and thinks strategically, anticipating organisational needs and recognising the wider business environment and dynamics.
		To lead self to demonstrate ethical and professional values.	Inspires, motivates and supports individuals and teams to ensure their potential is maximised and that they work effectively and efficiently.	Acts as a trusted adviser, providing independent recommendations on complex HR problems and novel initiatives, and supports with handling priority issues.
6- Ethics	The ability to develop ethical values and integrate them with personal and professional accountability and integrity to promote both	An understanding and compliance with all Qatar labour laws and governance of HR Practises	Advises on HR cases where there may be negligence or lack of adherence to a law by the organisation	Able to provide basic legal advice on HR-related cases where there has been a breach or negligence identified due to unethical behaviour
		Lives ethically and influences others in the team to behave in an ethical manner	Positively influences managerial integrity and accountability	Displays exemplary ethical behaviour and is an ethical role model

		and roles model ethical behaviour	
	Influences decisions at department level to ensure impartiality	Challenges status quo to ensure the organisation's and HR's high ethical standards	Champions high ethical standards and values
7- Culture	To have an awareness of personal cultural intelligence and how to apply this to HR working practises.	To be able to identify the difference between organisational culture and local culture in the workplace and how this impacts HR Practises.	To demonstrate empathy in a situation and ensure that the stakeholder's needs are understood and met through HR practises.	To manage stakeholders expectations by demonstrating cultural intelligence and courageous leadership
		To be able to work within a multicultural environment and communicate effectively with stakeholders	To be able to address differences in the organisational and local culture and the impact this has on HR Practises.	To lead diversity and inclusion practises within the HR Strategy to embed the differences in organisational and local cultural practises.
		To understand personal cultural intelligence and be aware of unconscious bias to manage a fair and	To build relationships based on encompassing trust and credibility with stakeholders	Accurately hears and understands the unspoken thoughts or feelings of others and acts purposefully with empathy having an awareness

		just workplace as an HR Professional		of cultural variances in the workplace.
8- Innovation	The ability to recognise opportunities for implementation and acceptance of innovation to enhance organisational outcomes through HR Enablers	Proposes new ideas to achieve greater HR efficiency in line with the organisation's vision.	Analyses recommendations for enhancements and allocates resources based on decisions made.	Partners with internal and external stakeholders to create a strategy for change in the organisation and identify how this can impact HR activity.
		Identifies and assesses innovational ideas that have been implemented.	Identifies and reviews all organisational risks concerning change and implements risk mitigation strategies.	Manages complex change management situations and stakeholder responses including resistance to change.
		Identifies any measures to address challenges associated with change management efforts	Promotes and communicates change initiatives to stakeholders across the organisation	Drives a culture that embraces and adapts to change in the organisation and HR.

5.6. Professionalising HR in Qatar

One of the questions asked of the participants was <u>Do you recommend that HR would benefit from a professional body in Qatar?</u> The response was a unanimous yes.

When asked the respondents what they thought this could look like, there was a requirement to see a professional body, that had clear HR competencies, and that was recognised by the Qatari government. The professional HR body should set a standard for the HR profession that either trained or partnered with training institutions to ensure that there is a clear standard for the practise. It was also noted that the body could recognise international bodies to cross-accredit certificates and qualifications. The body would also need to have a role to ensure that expatriates entering the HRM profession understand the local customs, culture, and challenges. E.g., immigration, Qatari expectations, compensation, and benefits being varying between cultures. The ultimate goal would be to raise awareness of the HR profession and gain the recognition it deserves as a profession. It was also questioned as to why there was not one already in place, although there is a law society and an engineering society. The engineering society is very strict and will not issue engineering companies permits if their employees do not undergo their assessment. There should be at least an outline of a framework with HR standards and clear HR competencies that HR professionals can assess themselves and their teams against and upskill the capability gaps.

One expatriate respondent answered;

> HR is a very loose sector without a formal voice and an industry body. There is not a go-to portal and I tend to find HR members exploring solutions across their respective countries without due consideration for local implementation and considerations. We require a Qatari/GCC regional HR body with best practise, research, and case studies to consider given the unique cultural complexities of the region. (R1)

To standardise anything, it is important to have a base line of what is expected; therefore, the survey addressed the competencies that HR professionals feel are required to practise in Qatar.

The result of the question
<u>What would you change about the HR profession if you could in Qatar?</u>

Answers varied from

Have a standard, have shared HR procedures, and have case studies that could be shared with one another openly. The UAE have the Federal Authority for Government Human Resources (FAHR)[4] and they have HR Standards for the profession there, particularly in the government sector. (R22)

The call for a professional body for HR in Qatar is strong; whether indicated through the qualitative survey, the semi-structured interviews or the focus group, the Qatar HR Forums' voice on this in strong and loud. It is important to note that there was an Emiri Decree in November 2021 announcing the formation of the Civil Service and Government Developmental Bureau (CSGDB) ديوان الخدمة المدنية. This is discussed in chapter 6, section 6.1.3. This is set up to support ministerial HRM practises, streamline them and then set an expected standard. This is only impactful on those organisations that are governed by the HRM Civil Law, this could be a start to the idea in Qatar, but it is not serving the bigger idea that the Qatar HR Forum has a vision.

5.7.   Focus Group findings

Two focus groups were run, one for the expatriate HR professionals and one for the Qatari nationals.

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[4] FAHR

Feedback from Focus group 1: This group consisted of 6 expatriate participants, as shown in Table 5. The data was presented to the focus group after following the protocol of confidentiality and anonymity, as described in chapter 3, section 3.8. The themes were agreed upon. The themes including the 7 extracted from the data from the qualitative survey. For each theme, I had prepared an overview of the findings and shared this on the screen for the participants. Each theme was discussed regarding their own experiences when it came to each one was shared to the group. An interesting discussion point that was raised was the idea that expatriates do not share their knowledge for fear of them not having a job. It was found that in order for expatriates not to lose their job by handing it over to a Qatari national, they may not share their knowledge, therefore securing themselves and their families a continued life as an expatriate. It was discussed how to eliminate this challenge. One participant discussed their view on providing a retention bonus which would only be paid upon the expatriate demonstrating their transfer of knowledge. This was then discussed at length. It should be part of their job. There is no need to pay more money.

Focus group 1 continued to provide feedback on Qatarisation and the challenge of Qatari nationals stepping up to the role and taking accountability. It was determined that they could sometimes get comfortable having someone doing the work for them. This is particularly the case when/if the accountability and responsibility boundaries are not clearly identified. It was acknowledged that organisations invest in their specific Qatarisation model, but ultimately the job needs to be performed and whether that is at the detriment of not having a trained Qatari national successor is not the fault of the expatriate. The competency framework presented had a discussion around it, particularly in defining terminology and what was meant in certain areas. For example, communication competency was questioned as to whether there should be facilitation skills within it.

However, the opinion of other participants was that it works the way it was, as not every HR professional will have to facilitate a session. The discussion was important to validate the reality of the competency framework and whether the HR professionals of the Qatar

HR Forum could confirm that there is an opportunity to operationalise such a framework to support the profession. They all unanimously agreed. Focus Group 1 concluded that the value of having a Qatar-centric competency framework was important to identify what skills people had and what capability gaps they needed to train for. Ultimately supports identifying individual skills gaps, more importantly, a consistent approach to the skills gap in the HR profession, in Qatar.

The focus groups were being used as part of understanding the distinctive contribution of theory as well as the distinctive contribution to the practical application and operationalising of the HR Competency framework. There were several findings that came out of the focus groups, namely, the concept of culture being part of the competency framework was unanimous in it being part of a framework. Individuals spoke of their lived experience when it came to HRM practises being impacted by culture, and they shared examples specifically in recruitment due to Wasta and not managing performance, due to not wanting to hurt individuals and the Qatari nationals being polite to one another due to the connections/Wasta/family and tribal relations.

In the communication, direct communication was discussed and the importance of listening. This skill is hindered due to the culture, and direct communication is lacking in some instances. Furthermore, it was validated that it was important to have this in the competency framework because even if it not being visible now as a competency, it is definitely a critical one.

Feedback from Focus group 2: This group consisted of 6 Qatari national participants, as shown in Table 5. The data was presented to the focus group after following the protocol of confidentiality and anonymity, as described in chapter 3, section 3.8. The themes were agreed upon, and discussion regarding their own experiences when it came to each one was shared with the group.

The Qatari focus group was interested in the way that when they discussed the competency culture, they identified that it was organisational culture but then discussed how expatriates did not understand how to deal with them sometimes and would tiptoe

around them. There was a discussion regarding their understanding of how some expatriates did not have high expectations of them as Qatari nationals and therefore did not give them the responsibility to perform their role. This focus group discussed that there was a fear of the expatriates from them, and as a result, they would be promoted with little or no merit, just to keep the peace. They discussed the 'fear factor' and how some expatriates were scared they would lose their job, although the expatriates were there to support us and ensure we have the knowledge. There was also a thought that other expatriates did not teach us, as they wanted to stay in Qatar, so it was difficult to extract all the information, which meant the knowledge transfer became impossible. This was found to be contrary to what the government wants, especially as the knowledge transfer is part of the Qatar National Vision 2030 and Qatarisation was a big mandate. The focus group explained that one of the reasons for this is expatriates are paid well and have good benefits and a lifestyle, so they do not want to leave and go back to their country. Although one participant of the focus group did portray a different experience of expatriates and explained, her experience was contrary to this discussion. It was shared that they were provided with the right training and shadowing opportunities to get exposed to cases and learn quicker. It was acknowledged that this was not the norm.

The group discussed HR standards and the lack of them. They explained their experience with imported HR standards and frameworks that did not comply with country governance and were not fit for purpose. They agreed that having a Qatar-centric Competency framework was a great start to start professionalising by building skills. It was noted that it is so important that we have something for Qatar as other GCC countries have their own. The focus group concluded the fact that there is a competency framework, it is a great start. It is ideal that it has been developed through research and data that was obtained from our colleagues and us in the Qatar HR Forum.

Overall, the focus groups provided an opportunity for others to confirm the findings and contribute further to the findings that were presented. The discussion of the groups separately provided real lived experiences about how they thought of one another and how they were supporting one another. The outcome of the focus groups was the

confirmation and validation of the findings and support for the HR Competency framework for Qatar.

5.8. Summary of Chapter 5

Through the research phase, it became apparent that there was an opportunity to seek recognition for the HRM profession in Qatar, especially as it is a heavily Qatarised function. This is a potential government impact as developing recognition for the State of Qatar for the HR practise, will need Governmental support and agreement. However, given that the Qatar National Vision 2030 is creeping upon organisations and HR can be a strategic partner to support the development of talent within organisations. This finding of the project has been valuable to raise awareness and support the Qatar HR Forum to operationalise the findings. The generation of the data has provided the key opportunities for the Qatar HR Forum to explore ways in which the findings could help to support a change in the HR practise.

The research responses showed that there was cultural Influence within HRM practises and impacted areas such as recruitment, performance management, reward management and offboarding in Qatar. The findings showed that Wasta was prominent as part of the culture, and it is something that is built into Qatari nationals as part of their DNA. The lack of support that would be viewed by the network if Wasta was not conducted could impact relationships. Therefore, to embrace the culture, HR Wasta should and can be utilised, but it is the responsibility of the HR professional to ensure due diligence. Wasta as behaviour and part of the culture is too embedded in the Tribalism, Islamic influences, as well as family connections and relationships to disregard and ignore.

HR standards in Qatar were found to be lacking, and a need for HR standards it was identified and is required to support the profession. This requirement is being called for by HR professionals. They want to see HR standards customised to Qatar. To create HR Standards, they must include and embrace the governmental governance, immigration and Qatarisation measures that are required of organisations, which are in place to

ensure Qatarisation and the delivery of the Qatar National Vision 2030. These potential HR standards need to move away from being dependent on people working within the profession but dependent on expected standards for all HR professionals. This research has commenced the professionalising of this by developing the Qatar-centric competency framework, which can set a minimum standard of skills required for HR professionals practising in Qatar.

Chapter 6:   Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1.   Outline of Chapter 6

The research focussed on three aims: to review Human Resources literature and professional sources while exploring the fundamental principles and context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar, to explore ways Human Resource practitioners in the Qatar HR Forum can operationalise knowledge gained through the research to drive and support a change in Human Resource Management practise, to contribute to professionalising Human Resource Practise in Qatar. The research focussed on the Qatar HR Forum to contribute new knowledge to the field as a practitioner within the country. In conclusion, the aim of the research was to gather data that would support my drive to conduct the research with the Qatar HR forum. This, in turn, would guide the quest to support professionalising HR – which aligns with the forum's goals to gain professional status and recognition for HR professionals in Qatar.

This chapter aims to present the conclusions from the research and provide recommendations on operationalising this dissertation's findings. The chapter will also discuss the impact and contributions of this research on both theory and practise.

This chapter will provide an overview and recommendations of the research on the drive to lead and contribute to professionalising HR in Qatar in the context of the QNV 2030. This will be presented regarding this doctoral research and its scope. This will be followed by a discussion of the impact of the research in the field of Human Resource Management and other areas such as culture that was determined by the findings, as it has been found that the HR Practise touches on other social, economic, and cultural complexities. The findings themselves provide an opportunity to operationalise the findings through the Qatar HR Forum to support HR professionals in Qatar. The chapter will include a discussion of the unique contributions found, including the impact of COVID-19 on the HRM research and the exaggeration of the already existing fear factor. The project research has identified potential opportunities for future research in Human Resources

Management for Qatar and beyond, which will be discussed and highlighted in this chapter.

6.1.1   Partnership and Collaboration with the Qatar HR Forum

The importance of the Qatar HR Forum is to ensure that the findings are operationalised with the full support of the HR professionals. Therefore, it is essential to use the research data and share it with the forum, which can be utilised to impact the onboarding of new joiners. This will support addressing the sustainable practise of HRM in Qatar. The Qatar HR Forum is critical to the success of driving recognition for the HR Profession in Qatar.

6.2.   To review Human Resources literature and professional sources while exploring the fundamental principles and context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar

The research commenced with a literature review to establish what the HRM context looked like in relation to Qatar. The literature had limited information on Qatar HR practises. However, through the transdisciplinary nature of this research, potential areas of impact or influence on HR were explored. These included the conceptual framework of areas that were addressed in chapter 2. This provided an opportunity to explore the research literature available in this area. The areas that were explored were areas that were set in the outline of searching the literature.

The literature review provided insight into other geographies within the Middle East Region. The focus was honed on the United Arab Emirates Metcalfe (2006), Oman Mamman and Al Kulaiby (2014), and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Allam (2013), which discussed similar HRM challenges. Literature surrounding HR, Islam, Qatarisation and Nationalisation, Wasta and the Culture were explored, as well as their varying impact on HRM practises. I reviewed the literature and understand what had been researched previously in the region, not only in Qatar.

It is important to note that although the United Arab Emirates, Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are geographically close and do show similar challenges within HRM practises, these countries as well as Qatar have their unique challenges. Therefore, the literature was lacking in addressing the HRM in Qatar directly. Through an analysis of the data and review of the literature, it is fair to state that there is a uniqueness in HR practises in Qatar, which are different from those of neighbouring countries. However, some shared influences exist, such as Wasta, cultural influences and lack of HR standards. These have yet to be directly researched in the context of Qatar.

The research has shown that the context of the human resources professional practise in Qatar can be split into two main areas, namely administrative (or transactional) and Strategic HR. What was apparent in the literature review was that HR cannot be reviewed in isolation due to its impact on other areas within the organisations and its people. Its transdisciplinary nature provided an opportunity to explore various impacts on HRM practises.

6.2.1   The Impact of Local Culture on HRM Practises

The research findings assert that local culture was drawn out as an effect on HRM practises, and this was three-fold, local culture, organisational, and the nature of some organisations being multicultural. Organisations in Qatar can be classified into four types, Government, Semi-Government, Local companies, and Multinationals.

1. Government organisations are those defined as fully funded by the Ministry of finance and are governed by the HRM Law. These organisation items will have a high categorisation percentage, generally over 80%.

2. Semi-government organisations are defined as fully funded by the Ministry of Finance and are governed by the HRM law and with some exceptions to the laws. These organisations can also be defined as organisations that are funded by the Ministry of Finance but may also have a commercial element and may be governed

by the Qatar Labour Law. These organisations will have a high Qatarisation percentage but likely between 30% to 50%.

3. Local Companies are defined as organisations that are governed by the Qatar Labour Law and will have a local or regional presence. These organisations generally have the lowest number of Qatari nationals working as part of their workforce; however they may have Qataris in very senior leadership roles, or the organisation may even be owner owned by Qataris.

4. Multinationals are defined as organisations that are governed by the Qatar Labour Law but will have a global presence. These organisations generally don't have any Qataris working in them due to the high salary expectations, and therefore, the compensation and benefits cannot be afforded and are made up of expatriate employees.

These definitions are important to understand to comprehend how the culture can impact the HR practises within these various types of organisations and setups in Qatar. This information is also critical as the spread of participants was across all sectors and, thus, different governance. In chapter 1, section 1.3, in the context of the research, these different laws are displayed and noted in terms of their governance.

The intersection of organisational and local cultures in Qatar, notably the 'Tharaba' Culture, has visible effects on HR practises. These effects are notably evident through the influence of Qatarisation on different types of organisations, as observed by HR professionals participating in this research. As an HR Practitioner in Qatar for nearly a decade and an insider researcher, I can personally attest to this impact.

In my experience, working in diverse organisations governed by different HR laws there is a connection between the degree of Qatarisation (the process of increasing the proportion of Qatari nationals in the workforce) and the influence of local Qatari culture within diverse organisations governed by different HR laws. Survey data supports this

observation, indicating that a higher percentage of Qatarisation corresponds to a more significant presence of local Qatari culture.

In a study by Mamman and Al Kulaiby (2014), it was noted that socio-cultural factors play a role in how managers respond to rules, and these rules themselves are influenced by socio-cultural factors. This suggests that culture can impact the role of HR practitioners within the institutional context of Oman. The study also suggests that cultural dimensions, such as "power distance," may influence HR practises. Bakhtari (1995) further supports this idea, highlighting that a coercive or authoritative management style characterises management practises in many Arab countries.

Branine and Pollard (2010) argue that in Arab societies, personal relationships and kinship often take precedence over qualifications, as line managers feel obligated to support their network, which includes relatives, family, and friends. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as "Wasta." These cultural influences in the Middle East have been recognised by various authors as impactful on HRM practises, providing further justification for research on HRM practises in Qatar.

Overall, the presence of local Qatari culture and the degree of Qatarisation appear to be intertwined, and cultural influences have been identified as impacting HRM practises in Qatar.

The HR law, with its structured articles, provides explicit guidance on various HR processes but somewhat constrains HR's capacity to be strategic. However, it's essential to understand that the HR law and its constraints are also a reflection of the 'Tharaba' Culture, deeply rooted in Qatari societal norms and values. This embeddedness of culture in law and organisational practises further underscores the importance of a culturally informed HR framework for Qatar.

Cultures are visible in terms of organisational culture and local culture. The organisational culture was found to be impacted by the level of Qatarisation in each different type of

organisation through the HR professionals that participated in the different stages of the research. As an insider researcher and an HR Practitioner in Qatar for almost decades, I can relate to this. I have previously worked in different organisations governed by different HR laws, and this has been my experience too. The survey data provided information that can be justified to draw a conclusion that the higher the Qatarisation percentage, the more the influence of the local Qatari culture is seen. These organisations are generally the government organisations and somewhat the semi-government organisations, where both are governed by the HR law. The HR law itself restricts HR to become strategic due to the structured nature of the articles presented in the HR Law. This HR Law provides detailed directions on various HR processes.

The Civil HRM Law dictates exactly how much employees can be paid, dependent on their years of experience. Therefore, employees are not paid based on the role they are filling but on how many years of experience they have. Furthermore, the recruitment of the potential employee must go through an approval process, particularly difficult if the candidate is not Qatari. In the event the candidate is an expatriate, the Ministry will provide profiles of locals that are unemployed, and the organisation is requested to review the profile in case the local is a better fit. Once the organisation makes an unfavourable decision regarding the candidate, then the recruitment case of the expatriate proceeds to further approvals within the Ministry. This is time-consuming and forces HR professionals in those organisational types to prioritise locals. Furthermore, it does not support an effective or efficient HR practise in recruitment. The research can conclude that although the data states there is a lack of standards, the HR Law does try to standardise somewhat, but this is only in the context of the ministerial entities. Therefore, as some of the participants were not in ministries, standardisation was deemed an issue.

The Civil HRM Law provides detailed instructions on how much bonus is allowed to be paid to an employee. This payment will be based on a rating that is determined by the Line Manager, not against objectives, only against pre-defined competencies set within the HRM Law. These competencies include basic things such as attendance. When this idea is coupled with the idea that the higher the Qatari employee distribution within the

organisation, the more influence is seen from the local culture, it can be concluded that this influence of the culture can show that the Qatarisation level has a higher impact on local culture. This is important to note as the impact on the HR practises can be immense. A further conclusion drawn from the qualitative survey and semi-structured interviews is that the influences or impact on the HRM practises can be straightforward, such as relationships, connection networks as well as activities that are seen within the local culture and generally the Arab culture which is known Wasta. Therefore, as an individual that is assigned to transform organisations, it is important to be able to understand the impact of the different types of employees within a company as this will impact the culture and potentially bring around change into that company culture. This is also important as the culture can directly impact the HR practise when we look below in more detail at the familial ties and other factors that can impact organisations when it comes to HR practise.

6.2.2 Tharaba Culture ذرابه

Politeness in cultural settings is a concept that has been discussed in the literature review in chapter 2, section 2.11.5 and the understanding of what this is and how it impacts the Arabic culture. One of the conclusions from the research has been the identification of the politeness culture impacting HRM Practises in Qatar. I have specifically named this Qatari-centric culture as it is specific to the Qatari nationals, and it has a direct impact on the way they perform in their HRM roles. This has been named specifically for Qatar, which is Tharaba ذرابه. This is defined as the local culture, which encompasses behaviours, customs, and unwritten expectations that locals acknowledge as their culture. It is based on influences such as family ties, leadership status, expected norms and non-negotiable behaviours, engulfed in the wisdom of the respected elders formulated from tribal descent. The 'Tharaba Culture' ذرابه is influential and impactful on HRM practises in some organisations in Qatar, as found by the data collated from the Qatar HR Forum.

Samarah (2015) has documented politeness within culture, specifically in the Arab culture. Nevertheless, there is no research that has specifically looked at Qatar. Consequently, this is a unique finding to support understanding of the context of the human resources professional practise in Qatar. The Tharaba Culture ذرابه as a

contribution to theory adds to the findings of Tayeb, (1997), who found that in Islamic countries, seniority and job status were all impacted and a tolerance of ambiguity. This is reflected in the semi-structured interviews data where it was shared by participants that the Islamic principles the locals lived by impacted their performance as HR professionals. This was even addressed by Muslims too. This is believed it is due to the magnitude of the impact of the culture on individuals in the Qatari society.

The contribution to the theory is that it builds on the theory that already acknowledges Qatar as a collectivist society (Hofstede 1980). Mellahi (2007) noted that Saudi Arabian culture is highly collectivist, which means it is focused on groups rather than individuals, which translates in organisations where employers and employees improve their relationships to strengthen organisational solidarity. Thus, as a culture, the relationship is more important than the work. This relationship strength is embedded in the local Qatari Culture. This is mirrored in the Qatari culture, being an Islamic culture and a collectivist society.

The Tharaba Culture in Qatar significantly contributes to understanding Qatar as a collectivist society, as described in Hofstede's theory (1980). This culture encompasses a strong emphasis on familial ties, community bonds, leadership status, and the wisdom of elders, which are defining characteristics of collectivist societies.

According to Mellahi (2007), Saudi Arabian culture is highly collectivist, prioritising group relationships over individual interests. This collectivism is evident in the organisational context, where strengthening employer-employee relationships is crucial for fostering organisational solidarity. Similarly, in Qatar, the Tharaba Culture highlights the significance of relationships over tasks, reflecting its collectivist nature.

The Tharaba Culture offers a unique perspective to explore how these collective ties impact workplace dynamics in Qatar. Being an integral part of Qatari society, which is both Islamic and collectivist, the Tharaba Culture provides deeper insights into how interpersonal dynamics, rooted in cultural norms and expectations, shape HR practises.

Weerakkody *et al*., (2015) emphasised this aspect in their research on the development of appraisal systems, performance management, and development (AS-PMD) strategies in organisations, considering socio-cultural influences within the organisation and the broader national context. Cultural considerations become particularly important when implementing such systems in different countries or organisational contexts, as approaches that work well in Western Europe or North America may not align with the cultural and social differences in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including Qatar. These cultural considerations extend to variations in operational procedures, management practises, and values between private and public sector organisations within the same country.

In summary, the Tharaba Culture expands upon existing theories by demonstrating how the cultural nuances of Qatar, as embodied in the Tharaba Culture, influence the HR landscape in a distinctly Qatari context.

The concept of Wasta is one that cannot be avoided, it is prevalent across organisations in Qatar, as the data from the research revealed from the Qatar HR Forum. Iles *et al.,* (2012), explored outcomes of the Wasta cultural practise, which included but were not limited to:
- lack of competence in employees
- unprofessional behaviour
- perceptions of ill-justice
- resentment and risk of retaliation
- destruction of equality and fairness at the workplace
- results in unfair practises

Most importantly, all these also have an impact on HRM in the region. Despite the impact and the presence of Wasta in the Arab region, there is a lack of research and evidence available on various aspects of Wasta (Aldossari and Robertson, 2015). The Tharaba Culture embraces Wasta as an expectation of behaviour.

Katou *et al*., (2010) conducted a study on the influence of ethical beliefs, national or local culture and institutions on preferences for Human Resources Management in Oman. It was observed that Omani beliefs, values, and norms do have an influence on the way HR practitioners perform their roles. The determination of the Tharaba Culture ذرابه is an important contribution to the theory, building on other researchers' work and findings over time. The Tharaba Culture ذرابه embeds the elements described in the literature and determined by the Qatar HR Forum participants, thus making it unique for Qatar and the cultural impact on HRM practise.

The Tharaba Culture provides critical insights into understanding cultural phenomena such as Wasta, which is deeply rooted in Qatari society and significantly influences organisational behaviour and HRM practises. The concept of Wasta, as the research data from the Qatar HR Forum reveals, has diverse implications, including employee competence, professional behaviour, perceived justice, workplace equality, and fair practises.

By acknowledging and incorporating Wasta as an expected behaviour, Tharaba Culture offers a culturally nuanced framework to approach and manage these associated challenges. It allows HRM to address these issues in a manner that aligns with local cultural norms, potentially leading to more effective and acceptable solutions.

Furthermore, the conceptualisation of the Tharaba Culture enhances the understanding of how local cultural norms, similar to what Katou *et al*., (2010) found in Oman, influence HRM practises. By capturing specific cultural elements relevant to the Qatari context, as identified by the Qatar HR Forum participants, the Tharaba Culture contributes to a more context-specific understanding of HRM in Qatar.

In essence, Tharaba Culture builds on previous research, integrating cultural expectations and behaviours unique to Qatar. By doing so, it provides a robust, culturally relevant framework for understanding and addressing HRM practises in Qatar. This

makes the Tharaba Culture a valuable tool for HR professionals seeking to navigate the complex cultural landscape of Qatari workplaces.

The data asserts that distinctive expatriate and Qatari influences need to be considered with a new framing of culture influencing and impacting HR practises. HRM cannot be detached from the shared values, beliefs, norms, customs, laws, and habits of people as members of the society (Hofstede, 1980). A similar approach was taken in Ghana where the African concept of Ubuntu, which reflects the values of interpersonal harmony, solidarity, reconciliation, sympathy, and consideration, is noted to guide Ghanaians' attitudes and actions at family and firm levels (Ayentimi, Burgess and Brown, 2018). It was recommended that HR practitioners acknowledge this and note that they are inseparable.

This was visible in areas such as the HRM Civil Law, which provides Islamic holidays and leave for Islamic pilgrimage, encompassing Islam's practise into the day-to-day workforce rights. Furthermore, it is expected not to schedule meetings in specific organisations between 11:30 and 12:30 to allow for group prayer. This is an unwritten practise. These practises based on Islam are apparent within the workplace and contribute to the context of the human resources professional practise in Qatar and experience in Qatar's organisations. The expectation of the one, especially the men, to join the prayer at the correct times is part of the local culture – Tharaba Culture ذرابه. This can be described as an element of the expected behaviour. The values of Islam are also seen in how people are treated sometimes, and managers do not want to score employees low in performance management ratings as it can have a monetary impact – they believe that it is not acceptable as a Muslim to stop any rights a person may have when it comes to money. Therefore, it presents itself in an HRM practise where rarely are underperformers managed out of an organisation due to this concept. This, in turn, demonstrates how Islamic values spill into the workplace, hence impacting HRM Practise.

Qatar's families evolved from tribes, and there is a strong family network, primarily identified to us expatriates by their surname. This is exhibited in a hierarchy of family –

the hierarchy impacts family and individual influences, networks, connections, and personal relationships. This family hierarchy is maintained through marriage and ensures a 'strong' bloodline. This can lead to favouritism shown to similar or close tribes and families. This family hierarchy comes from the different tribes and the proximity of the tribes to one another. This literature has been reviewed and explained in chapter 2, section 2.10.4. Historically a high affiliation can be linked to the geographical proximity of one another. The closer the tribes are geographically, the stronger the connection is than more geographically dispersed tribes. This is then linked to a collectivist relationship within those ties, which presents as favouritism. This favouritism can be seen in organisations through HR activities such as 'Wasta' in recruitment and performance management. In recruitment for example, locals may obtain employment due to their family name, tribal connection, familial relationship or whom they know. In performance management, it may be seen that the employee with the right connections will always be evaluated as performing. These unwritten impacts of the family ties make it challenging to maintain best practises for an HR function without acknowledging the local culture and working within these complexities. Once again, the Tharaba Culture ذرابه surfaces as families serve and support one another and do not refuse to support. This finding is essential in the context of working in HRM in Qatar, as it is seen and identified as an influence and impact on our practises. Thus, this needs to be considered, and there is an opportunity to provide this onboarding to a new joiner, particularly one new to Qatar.

The Tharaba Culture ذرابه., focused on Qatari-specific behaviours, customs, and expectations, offers fresh perspectives for understanding and implementing HRM practises in Qatar. It highlights social norms unique to Qatari society, thereby enabling HR professionals to make more culturally informed decisions. It aids in developing a Qatar-centric HR competency framework, promoting more effective HRM practises. It enhances cross-cultural communication, fostering better integration of expatriate workers in Qatari workplaces. This offers insights into local leadership and decision-making styles, aiding in the creation of culturally respectful leadership programs. Lastly, it guides the formulation of HR policies and strategies aligned with Qatari customs, ensuring their

acceptance and effectiveness. Overall, Tharaba Culture enriches the HRM knowledge base, providing an in-depth, culturally tailored approach to HRM in the Qatari context.

6.3. HR Standards in collaboration with the Qatar HR Forum

Qatar does not have any HR standards, either standalone or as part of a professional body when compared to neighbouring countries that have it. This was a major finding in both surveys conducted and within the focus group. Qatar lacks specific competencies identified for the HR practise here. Qatar also does not have a set certification requirement to enter or maintain your career in HRM. As a result, the importing of expatriate talent from around the globe appears to have had an impact on the lack of standardisation. This is mainly due to the different understanding of HR practise across the globe and the variety of standards then imported through the international talent into Qatar. This impacts HR functions as it can bring inconsistencies both within the organisation and across the country. Therefore, it is important to be able to standardise HR practise and be fit for purpose both for the country and the type of business as well as the size of the organisation.

The initial data findings from the qualitative survey and subsequent research showed that organisations have opted for the most part, to implement the Ulrich HR Business Partner Model HRBP model. However, that itself has not led to organisations being able to function 100% in their HR functions. This concludes that the import of standards is challenging and are not always fit for purpose, and as a result, inconsistency is observed.

The findings suggest that the adoption of international standards in Qatar's HRM practises can be challenging and may not always be suitable, resulting in observed inconsistencies. To address this, it is recommended that Qatar's HRM practises "glocalize," (Robertson 1994).This approach involves considering global standards while building HRM organisational structures, policies, and processes that account for specific local market influences in each country.

Developing an HR standard tailored to Qatar would promote strategic HR practises that are aligned with the country's specific needs. This issue presents a significant challenge for HR professionals in Qatar, as highlighted by the Qatar HR Forum and supported by the data. Hence, this research project can make a valuable contribution by supporting the advancement of HR standards, starting with the implementation of the Qatar-centric HR Competency framework.

Therefore, the establishment of an HR standard specific to Qatar would contribute to the development of more strategic and purpose-driven HR practises. This issue represents a significant challenge faced by HR professionals in Qatar, as highlighted by the Qatar HR Forum's data. Hence, this research project can make a valuable contribution by supporting the promotion and implementation of HR standards, beginning with the operationalisation of the Qatar-centric HR Competency framework.

Traditionally, a universalist approach has been taken to define HR competencies, aiming to apply a broad set of skills that are deemed relevant across the HR profession for efficiency and cost-effectiveness (Capaldo *et al*., 2006; Lo *et al*., 2015; Ulrich *et al*., 2017a, b; Vu, 2017; Getha-Taylor *et al*., 2016). However, critics argue that this approach overlooks important organisational attributes such as size, culture, role, and function Capaldo *et al*., (2006). In line with this literature, building a competency framework requires customisation and consideration of local socio-cultural influences. As I have demonstrated in the development of the competency framework in this piece of research in figure 10.

In conclusion, the data presented findings that there is not one HR standard for HRM practise in Qatar. This in turn leads to a different understanding of what HRM is and how it is supposed to function from one HR professional to the next and one organisation to the next. This was not news to the Qatar HR Forum, and they have acknowledged that this is what they live every day in their profession. The research has provided a practise-based contribution to start the journey of building HR Standards in collaboration with the Qatar HR Forum.

6.4. 'Fear Factor' and its impact on HR Professionals practising in Qatar

As identified in the literature review in the GCC, there is a job insecurity factor that faces expatriates. Given that most of the workforce is expatriates working in Qatar – there is a fear of losing their job, so they feel fearful about their job security. This is potentially where expatriates fear daily their jobs being dissolved by the organisation. This can simply be because a local has decided they dislike an individual. Therefore, there is potentially a shift in how expatriates may behave professionally – perhaps differently to their home country. Hudson (2013) identified this as 'tiptoeing' which is a term that reflects the complexity, uncertainty, and potential for 'explosive' and potentially job-threatening conflict the environment is perceived as presenting to the participants, and the study investigates how they attempt to negotiate the complexities and potential areas of conflict they encounter working in the Arabian Gulf region. Devadason (2017) coined the term Golden handcuffs this research found that the expatriates got used to a comfortable lifestyle with a tax-free salary and thus lived the job insecurity for as long as possible to work longer in the region.

The research data gathered concludes similar findings, and in addition, it was found that the expatriates choose not to speak out. This ensures they do not rock the boat, and thus, they are at risk of losing their job. I also found this in gathering the data, and the participants did not want to be recorded just in case the wrong person heard the information. The time the research was conducted was the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus, the risk of losing jobs was even higher.

My research concludes that expatriates need to be comfortable showing courage and speaking up within HR when HR practises are not professional. This is exactly one of the behaviours the CIPD expect from their HR professionals. Courage is an important behaviour for any HR professional, and Qatar needs its HR professionals to speak up to ensure professional practise. Managing expectations and ensuring that communication is open and transparent is a big part of this by being courageous and speaking out will provide the right expectations and provide transparency.

As an HR professional, one must be trusted by the employees to deliver expectations and support them. Data from my research has provided insight into how critical trust is in building relationships, especially in this part of the world. Even in my experience, trust is critical. However, the research data has shown from the semi-structured interviews that trust can also be damaging if the wrong people are trusted. If trusted advisors to senior leadership are trusted and do not understand good HR – then whilst implementing or making recommendations to the same senior leadership – the opinion of the trusted advisor can have an impact. Therefore, in turn impacting the HRM practise directly.

Overall, the influences on HRM practise in Qatar, as described above, have many layers that impact it as illustrated in Figure 2. The HR professionals have hindrances here, as came to light in the research – including their own personal challenges as expatriates. The multi-cultural nature of the organisation present in Qatar provides its own challenges, alongside the different types of organisations. When this is all pulled together, it is no surprise that frustrations are seen, and HRM practises as a result are seen. In conclusion, the concept of the fear expatriates may have in their roles, and how this impacts their behaviour and drives a lack of courage to speak up about things within the workplace across the board if viewed through the HR lens, will impact day to day HR practises if an HR professional is behaving in this manner.

6.5.   Impact and Contribution

I believe this research project can impact and contribute to professionalising Human Resource Practise in Qatar. This contribution is through the theory of HR and culture in the literature and HR practise in Qatar. The potential contribution to impacting the HR practise in Qatar is twofold. Firstly, the development of the competency framework is a tool that has encompassed the input from HR professionals from the Qatar HR Forum and has been endorsed by them. This can be rolled out, as discussed in chapter 6, section 6.5.2, the awareness of the findings of this research to educate the HR professionals about the findings and utilising it in their day-to-day work.

6.5.1 Contribution to theory

The research data gathered and feedback from the Qatar HR Forum have made it possible to theorise several concepts to support the existing literature and contribute to academic research and offer distinctive contributions.

'Tharaba' Culture – ذرابه was determined from the research data as a specific set of cultural values and behaviours that impact HR Practises in Qatar. The Impact of Culture is present and alive in organisations. This has led me to coin the term 'Tharaba' Culture – ذرابه. This is an Arabic word that is specific to the local Qatari dialect. The definition is the local culture, which encompasses behaviours, customs, and unwritten expectations that locals acknowledge as their culture. It is based on influences such as family ties, leadership status, expected norms and non-negotiable behaviours, engulfed in the wisdom of the respected elders formulated from tribal descent. The 'Tharaba Culture' is influential and impactful on HR practises in some organisations in Qatar. This culture is not just seen in organisations or the workplace but is a day-to-day expectation of 'good' behaviour and expectations. This contribution is unique to the theory of HR practise for Qatar and is based on the idea that it is a cultural term specific to them.

Furthermore, the results suggest that unique aspects related to both expatriate and Qatari cultural norms should be factored into the rethinking of how Qatari traditions could shape and affect present and future Human Resources Management (HRM) strategies. This concept has been termed 'Tharaba Culture' – ذرابه, which embodies behaviours, customs, and unspoken societal expectations recognised by local people as intrinsic to their culture. It draws from elements such as familial bonds, leadership stature, established norms, and inflexible behaviours, all of which are deeply rooted in the wisdom handed down by revered elders from tribal lineage. The research carries further implications for practise, a noteworthy result being the creation of a Qatar-centric HR competency framework. This framework will serve as a foundation for HR practitioners to address the unique challenges and intricacies of HRM practises in Qatar.

The 'Tharaba Culture' concept, with its focus on Qatari-specific behaviours, customs, and expectations, provides a new lens through which to examine and understand HRM practises in Qatar. The Tharaba Culture can contribute to the existing body of knowledge as follows:

1. Improved Understanding of Cultural Norms: Tharaba Culture sheds light on the social norms, behaviours, and customs intrinsic to Qatari society. This nuanced understanding help HR professionals better appreciate the cultural context within which they operate and make more informed decisions.

2. Development of Qatar-Centric HR Competency Framework: A competency framework grounded in Tharaba Culture allows for a more context-specific understanding of HRM practises. It can provide HR professionals with a blueprint to navigate the unique cultural landscape of Qatar and tackle HRM complexities effectively.

3. Enhancement of Cross-Cultural Communication: Understanding Tharaba Culture can facilitate better communication and relationships in the workplace. It can help expatriate employees and managers better integrate into Qatari workplaces, and vice versa.

4. Insights into Local Leadership and Decision-Making Styles: Tharaba Culture, with its focus on family ties, leadership status, and the wisdom of elders, provides insights into the leadership and decision-making styles in Qatari workplaces. This can contribute to the development of leadership programs that respect and leverage these local practises.

5. Informed Policy Making and Strategy Development: A deeper understanding of Tharaba Culture can assist in formulating HR policies and strategies that are aligned with local customs and expectations, thereby enhancing their effectiveness and acceptance.

In summary, the concept of Tharaba Culture brings a new dimension to the understanding of HRM practises in Qatar. It enhances the body of knowledge by providing a more in-depth, culturally rooted perspective on how HRM can be adapted and optimised for the Qatari context.

The Tharaba Culture ذرابه is unique in that it specifically addresses Qatari culture's influence on HRM practises. The literature does not provide information on anything similar applied in other countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) or Qatar.

However, there are models and initiatives that deal with the interaction of local culture and HRM practises in the region, including examples such as the following:

- Nitaqat system in Saudi Arabia: This is a Saudisation initiative which, although not a theoretical model, significantly impacts HR practises. The initiative categorises companies based on their level of compliance with Saudisation targets and provides incentives for hiring Saudi nationals.
- UAE's Emiratisation program: Similar to the Nitaqat system in Saudi Arabia, the Emiratisation program seeks to integrate UAE nationals into the workforce and impacts HR practises such as recruitment and retention.
- Abu Dhabi's ADNOC competency framework: The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) has implemented a competency framework to ensure that its employees have the necessary skills for their roles. This reflects a local adaptation of international HRM best practises.
- Dubai Government's HR Law: This law has been developed specifically for Dubai government entities and reflects local cultural, social, and economic considerations. It covers areas such as recruitment, training and development, performance management, and employee relations.

These examples are not identical to the Tharaba Culture concept but reflect ways in which local culture and conditions have influenced HRM practises in the GCC region. Each of these examples has its own cultural underpinnings and understanding them in depth can provide insights into HRM practises in different GCC countries.

Professionalising HR: It was clear from the data that there is no set of HR standards in Qatar HRM practise. This stems from the western-centric practises that are imported through the imported expatriate talent. This lack of professionalism has not been addressed in the literature for Qatar previously. This embeds a Qatar-centric competency framework developed by the HRM professionals working in Qatar for Qatar and is specific to the practises we work in each day. The theoretical element is the data showing and asserting the key competencies that have been identified to be a successful HR professional in Qatar. there is also evidence of the behaviours that have been identified

as key behaviours that are critical for practising HR in Qatar. These have been identified as courage and trust. Demonstrating these politely and aligned to the 'Tharaba' culture, will enhance the relationships built with stakeholders, particularly with the locals. The acknowledgement and recognition by the expatriate community that a western-centric model will not work and have not worked previously, it is now time to work towards a model that is specific to Qatar. The first step is a competency framework specific to the requirements of our profession in Qatar.

6.5.2 Contribution to the drive towards recognition for the HRM practise in Qatar

Development of a Competency Framework© for HR professionals in Qatar

The results provided an opportunity to explore ways to support HRM practitioners in my Qatar HR Forum. The Qatar HR Forum were the experts that I engaged with to gather data for the project – this, in turn, means their personal experiences and realities that they have lived in their careers are captured in the data and the research. The Tharaba Culture, as discussed in section 6.5.1 is the contribution to theory and a new way to understand and view HRM influences in Qatar. This phase of the operationalisation of the competency framework is an operational phase to contribute to the practise and the profession. These results can be operationalised firstly by sharing this with the Qatar HR Forum– what the findings are and how it can be used. The sharing of information and acknowledging what we as a Qatar HR Forum have shared will be important. This information can be used operationally for HR professionals to acknowledge the challenges, have an awareness, and be more culturally intelligent or perceptive.

Operationalising the Competency Framework

One conclusion from the research is the consensus by HR professionals in the Qatar HR Forum that the import of the international standards is not providing support to a standard approach for the function in Qatar. The imminent delivery of the Qatar national 2030 vision is challenging the profession. Their responsibility in delivering on the Human Capability Pillar is critical. The Qatar HR Forum provided a voice, and as a result, a competency

framework© specific to HR practise in Qatar has been an outcome of this research. This can be operationalised with the Qatar HR Forum. The input by the Qatar HR Forum concludes that there is a need for a standard and the competency framework is an excellent starting point. The steps for operationalising this are:

Figure 11. The steps to operationalising the HR Competency Framework Specific to Qatar.

Figure 11. Illustration of the steps to operationalising the HR Competency Framework Specific to Qatar
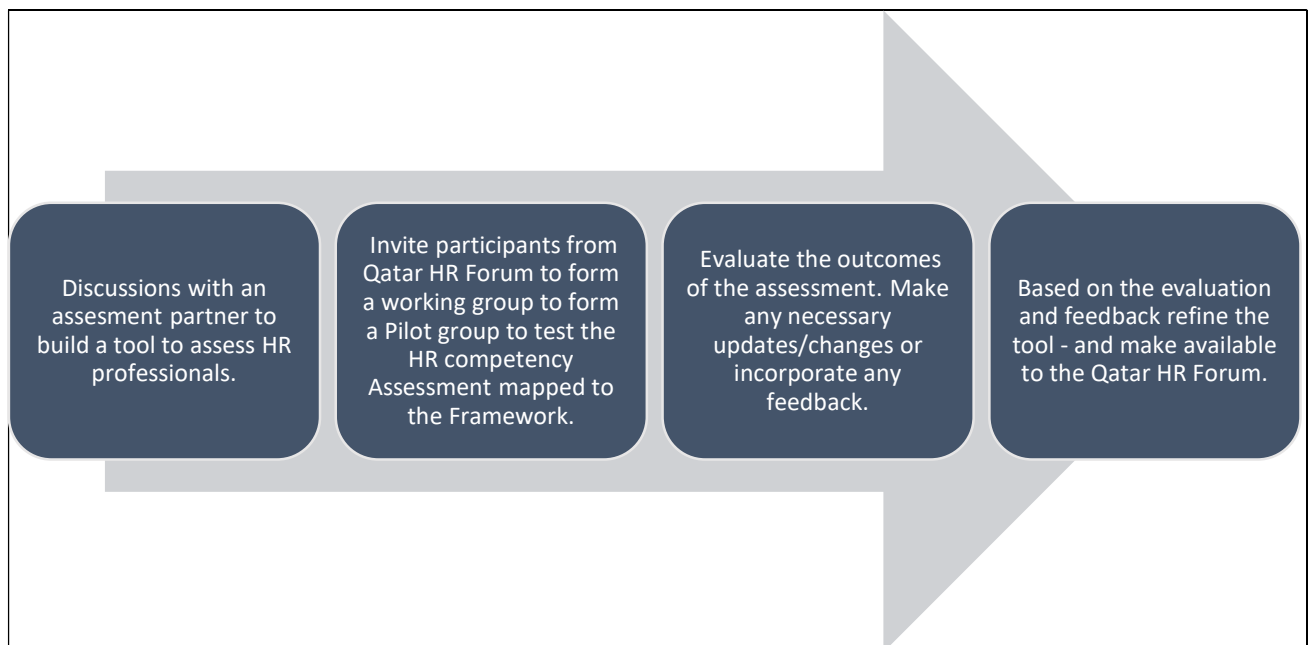
I will prepare an assessment with an assessment partner in order to provide organisations with a tool to 'assess' the competencies of their HR professionals. A partner has already been identified, and this collaboration is being discussed. Upon a product being finalised, I will invite Qatar HR Forum participants to join a pilot group, where the product will be tested in a 'real' environment once we have five organisations willing to pilot the tool. The feedback will be collated and evaluated, and the product refined where necessary. The experience will be shared with the Qatar HR Forum and will be offered to HR Leaders

and professionals who would like to use it to support them in understanding their talent and gaps they may have. This will be a start in having an HR standard for Qatar.

Designing HR Training for Qatar

Once the tool is in the market and supported fully by the Qatar HR Forum, the information collated from the assessments will provide insight into where the most capability gaps are. I will invite participants who are interested in supporting the implementation of training specific to HR for Qatar. The Qatar HR Forum working group will work with one another to design and deliver training built based on capability gaps identified from the assessment tool. The training will need to be available in English and Arabic to address the needs of the country. The capturing, not just the competencies but also the understanding of the context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar with the unique challenges that Qatar sees in their HR practise will be an essential part of the learning and building of HR capability to support Qatar's 2030 vision. I have already been approached to discuss the training needs for the HR professionals across the Ministerial sector in Qatar and build relevant content. The basis of this content can be the competency framework designed for Qatar's HR professions in collaboration with the Qatar HR Forum. I envision that the above opportunities to operationalise will provide a platform for developing HR standards.

Partnering with the Qatar HR Forum to share the findings and insights of the research to support the profession

The research has provided some valuable insight into the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar, and I as an experienced expatriate HR professional believe it is important to share this insight. As a result, I have started to share these research findings at international universities based in Qatar, namely HEC Paris, and I have engaged with Carnegie Mellon University in their organisational Behaviour department, who are inviting me to give a series of lectures based on experience and the research findings. The research will only be impactful if used to inform and support the HR profession in Qatar. I will also be seeking speaking opportunities at local and regional conferences to share

these important insights. I intend to build on this valuable research data to support Qatar's HR profession to support the Qatar National Vision 2030.

The project research data concludes that there is a need to professionalise the HR profession. The concept professional and what that means was earlier described in the literature – but the research identified simple areas that need to commence with an HR standard in Qatar. Normally Qatar's HR relies on international standards – which this research illustrates – is not fit for purpose. This is highlighted by the research conducted by Al-Jahwari and Budhwar's study (2016) emphasises that while Business HRM (BHRM) is a burgeoning phenomenon in Oman, its practises still lean heavily towards traditional and reactive methods. The design of various HR processes often takes Western practises into account, but the implementation often falls short of aligning well with business strategies. Instead, they are enacted for narrow administrative objectives and remain only loosely interconnected. The HRM in Oman appears to be influenced by a blend of Islamic principles and Western management approaches. This observation is further supported by Aycan, Al-Hamadi, Davis, and Budhwar's (2007:30) analysis, which notes an increasing emphasis on Omanisation and adherence to Islamic principles. Concurrently, the forces of globalisation are exerting pressure to adopt globally standardised HRM practises and policies. This is not dissimilar to Qatar which needs to have its own HR Standard, which encompasses' local and international best practise. As seen from the research data – an absence of an HR Standard in Qatar is proving to be difficult and almost unfavourable to our profession.

6.5.3   Qatar National Vision 2030 Policy contribution through the HRM Profession

The Qatar National Vision 2030 is imminent. HR is a key strategic partner in any organisation, and we, as professionals here, in Qatar, have an opportunity to contribute to the delivery of the Human Capability Pillar in the Qatar National Vision 2030. How will this potentially be achieved? In October 2021, the Emir of Qatar announced Ministerial changes. One of those major changes was the creation of a Civil Service and Government

Developmental Bureau. Over the past twenty years, the governments of the GCC have acknowledged the pressing conditions of their labour markets. They have implemented numerous initiatives to reform their civil service and enhance the curriculums of their public schools and higher education institutions. These steps were undertaken with the aim of equipping their citizens more effectively, thereby cultivating a broader talent pool of locally developed professionals capable of competing effectively in the labour market (Berrebi *et al*., 2009). Nonetheless, the GCC region has witnessed several crises since the 1990s, including the Gulf Wars, the 2008 financial crash, plunging oil prices, ramifications of the Arab Spring, and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. These events underscore the urgent necessity for innovative and more efficient nationalisation strategies. Furthermore, these strategies are crucial for dispelling the unfavourable stereotypes associated with citizens, a perception held by both expatriates and the citizens themselves. These stereotypes often revolve around perceived deficiencies in competencies, skills, and desirable work ethics, such as diligence, passion, and dedication (Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2010, 2014; Forstenlechner *et al*., 2012a). This Bureau has the same status as other Ministries and will be responsible for the HR Laws and the Civil Servants. This, in my opinion, is a big step in Qatar attempting to overcome challenges in relation to Human Development and the Qatar National Vision 2030. This also shows that there is commitment at the highest level in Qatar. This research data can offer guidance and support to the policy deemed critical to the overall success of diversifying the workforce.

By raising the awareness of these findings alongside acknowledging the challenges, we, as the Qatar HR Forum, will be able to form a professional body that will lead and contribute to the function of HR practise. The contribution of this research is strategically placed through the Qatar HR Forum to support the drive for professionalising our practise and, therefore, will feed into the delivery of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

I intend to engage with this Ministry to share the knowledge and data from this research. I have had already two senior Qatari colleagues tell me they would like to introduce me to the Minister – as they believe I would be able to provide the right support and advice

to him and his office. This would be an opportunity to strategically contribute to the delivery of Qatar National Vision 2030 at a state level. This also demonstrates the focus on the issues that have come to light in the research, as well as the commitment of local senior leaders to recognise the need to support such a change from the Qatar HR Forum. This exciting collaboration could potentially influence the development of HR standards across Qatar as well as a potential influence on HR laws. Over the last few years, we have seen Qatar engage in updating and changing HR laws in areas such as removing the need for a No Objection Certificate (NOC) to change sponsorship and even the elimination of the employer having control over the exit permit previously required by employees to exit the country. These are positive changes to support the employees and indicates the understanding at a high level to have a more engaging and empowered workforce. There is potential to build on these opportunities to support any further changes in the HR Laws to support this vision. Although the policy contribution will take time and is out of the scope of the doctorate, this valuable research has identified support to provide to potentially impact policy change in the future.

6.5.4   HR Standards-The Development of a Qatar specific HR Competency Framework

A major contribution of this project is the development of a competency framework specific to Qatar and HR professionals in HR. This was built by the Qatar HR Forum for the Qatar HR Forum and built-in Qatar for Qatar – thus proposing a potential start the idea of developing HR Standards. A need identified by the Qatar HR Forum as lacking in our profession here. The operationalising of this framework has been discussed above, however, the impact this will have will potentially be a countrywide impact. The concept of having a framework for HR professionals has been toyed with previously, but nothing has emerged. This competency framework if operationalised, can be the gold standard to assess and train current and future HR professionals.

6.6.   Contribution to the Transformation of the HRM Practise in Qatar

 In conclusion, as highlighted in this chapter, the challenges facing HRM in Qatar are complex and unique. The evidence that emerged from this research has asserted that there may be a transformation in HR. It is unclear what the HR Model would look like for Qatar at this point, but I am strongly recommending a hybrid system-based on a mixture of both traditional Qatari characteristics and a Western rationalised system could emerge. It is important to focus on the key contextual and institutional (e.g., economic, social, political) influences as the key determinants of developments of HRM and the resultant challenges facing the HR function in Qatar and perhaps the Middle East. This research has been helpful not only highlight the current context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar but also to provide an opportunity for an agenda for future research. There are definitive directive and institutional pressures to pursue Qatarisation programs and developing the HRM to lead this. This research also notes that critical roles played by cultural norms and expectations such as Wasta and their direct impact on HRM practises. These are not influences we can shy away from, to the contrary, we must understand them, acknowledge them, and embrace them in a professional manner.

Similar findings were found in Ghana where they argued HRM frameworks or HRM models were too Western-centric, but they are required to build a synergistic fit with Ghanaian cultural, institutional, and social values to be implemented successfully (Amankwah-Amoah, 2015). This can be mirrored to a similar requirement in Qatar. 'This means acknowledging the important role of kinship and extended family ties, collective sharing, communism and solidarity, issues that are largely absent from Western-centric HRM practises' Akuoko (2008).

The HRM training and professionalisation is not well structured and developed in Qatar compared to other professions, and it may even be noted that it is absent. The establishment of a professional and regulatory HRM organisation plays a significant role in supporting the advancement of the HR profession through the dissemination of best

practises, training of HR professionals and influencing government policy formulation on human capital development.

In October 2021, there was the formation of the Civil Service governmental development Bureau[5] responsible for overseeing the HR functions in the ministries. This is the first step in standardising the function in the ministries. The establishment of a professional HRM regulatory board that sets and accredits HRM standards for the training of HRM professionals and managers in Qatar could help improve HRM practitioners' capabilities and professional HRM knowledge to adopt professional HRM systems and practises. A request and conclusion the Qatar HR Forum has not only requested and recognised but also endorsed.

In summary, the identification of factors originating from the economic and socio-cultural system as the main driving force underpinning the advancement of HRM practises in Qatar. These include:

- The Qatari cultural beliefs and assumptions.
- Respect for social status, power, and authority.
- Education, skills development, and training mismatch.
- Lack of HR standards and a professional body.

These factors can result in the recruitment of unqualified and inexperienced people professionals. The implication is that such practises may create problems for managers to maintain fairness, procedural justice, and the principles of meritocracy in their capacity as HR professionals.

This research highlights factors that impact the HRM practises in Qatar based on lived experiences of current practitioners who are members of the Qatar HR Forum. Nonetheless, the opportunity to conduct this research has allowed for an investigation of

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[5] HH the Amir Issues Amiri Decision Appointing President of Civil Service and Government Development Bureau (hukoomi.gov.qa)

a topic providing research findings and data that did not exist prior to this research. The factors that emerged from my analysis will help provide a broader perspective to both HRM practitioners and academic scholars to understand how the context of the Human Resources professional practise in Qatar is undermined by socio-cultural and economic factors. This examination provides a basis for others to conduct future research on HRM practises in Qatar, as I recommend, we move towards a Qatar-centric HRM model in Qatar. Further research areas suggested may be reviewing the success of current HR operating models, case studies on successful organisations, Qatarisation impact on HRM practises and the local culture and its impact on the organisational culture, where applicable. These areas, as a suggested direction for further research, would potentially provide rich, valuable data to support Qatar's HRM practise.

Chapter 7:   A reflexive account of my personal learning and professional journey

This chapter will provide an overview of my experience whilst conducting this research. It will cover more about my journey, the challenges I encountered and the considerable amount of learning I have embedded into my professional experience.

7.1.   A reflexive account of my personal learning and professional journey

I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience of completing the Doctorate of Professional Studies over the last few years. However, I have encountered many challenges I can only reflect on, and I have grown within my profession, as a researcher, and personally. This chapter will explore my personal and professional development as it expanded and developed during this period. As I walked the journey of undertaking this professional doctorate, it enhanced my workplace curiosity. It has made me question more about what and why things happen in the way they do. The data I collated also provided insight and ignited inquisitiveness whilst observing the behaviours of individuals around me. With over two decades of work experience in my field, the project allowed me to view my practise as a transdisciplinary profession.

As an HR professional in Qatar, I wear many hats as an expatriate. My professional purpose is to help people be the best version of themselves, whether in a work environment or personal, through coaching them. Reflecting on my journey as an in-house HR professional, I understand now that although I can bring about change management and transformation, this research project has widened my understanding of Qatar's complexities surrounding the profession. This awareness and learning have led me to acknowledge these issues without forming an opinion on the reality, meaning that HR is the way it currently is in my working environment. It does not aid well to have an opinion on why, but to the contrary, I have realised that by acknowledging the real issues and being honest in my approach, I gain more trust and support to make a change within an organisation. The research period has seen me grow professionally by building my

courage in senior leadership meetings. This, in turn, has led me to not only sometimes agree with what is being said but also present an opinion supported by evidence with the acknowledgement of the actual day-to-day issues.

This simple change in my approach by building more confidence in my professional understanding has seen me being seconded into three different organisations to assess capability and to transform them through their people. This has been a challenging journey and not a straight road. With many of the challenges we face in this profession in Qatar, it has proven more and more that it is about gaining trust with the individuals within the organisation. I have also been reporting to the Board of these organisations as a trusted advisor. I credit the knowledge I have gained as an insider researcher, as this has provided me with robust data to understand the working culture of these various organisations. The research results have catapulted my understanding of these cultural insights, and I have used them effectively. The most valuable is understanding the local Qatari culture and how it impacts an organisation's culture.

I am of Arabic and English heritage and a practising Muslim; having been brought up in the UK for the first 25 years of my life provided me with a non-judgmental acceptance of people from different cultures. I realised this is a crucial factor in my success in Qatar, as working within this unique multicultural environment has allowed me to connect with many different individuals from across the globe. While completing the research project, I am also being recognised within the financial sector as an HR professional with the courage to provide an opinion with respect and credibility. The opportunity and drive to complete the research and the information gathered from colleagues in the workplace give me even more credibility as I can now provide evidence-based research in my profession.

This, in turn, has led me to take a step back and try to understand why I gained this reputation. I am a female working in a male-dominated environment; although this is not unusual, it is unique in the context of a covered Muslim British female. I have been described as an enigma because it is usually male advisors that we see a lot in this part of the world and because I have a mixed background. I have a mixed British and Arabic

ethnicity, and I can speak the Arabic language. My mixed background and ability to speak the language means I integrate into the western expatriate community, the Arab expatriate community, and the local Qatari community. Engaging in Arabic means I can communicate and build relationships at the highest levels, keeping within the remit of professionalism. The language also allows for communication to be preserved in translation. I also reflect as a practitioner and find that my relationships are built on trust; I have often been described as trustworthy; in the context of work, this means I deliver what I say I am going to deliver at a high standard, something which can be lacking here in Qatar. Since I am so passionate about my profession, I also realise that I can problem-solve issues and always have time for a conversation if an employee or manager has a problem. Commonly, I am often invited onto projects that may have stagnated, or there appears to be no way forward. I then take it upon myself to find that solution. Doing this with the insider researcher insight I have gained through my research has been precious.

My doctorate journey has led me to a professional discovery. I started with a different project title in the planning phase. However, personal circumstances changed. As a result, I had to go back to the drawing board to review and refocus my research proposal. The original concept was to focus on one organisation. However, this project has provided a fantastic opportunity to engage with the broader HR community and provide an opportunity for a wider impact. Upon reflection, I realised I had to be resilient even initially, and it would have been much easier to give up. However, I persevered and found the right way for myself and the research. This journey has been worrying on occasion but exhilarating, and returning to places of knowledge I was confident in was humbling.

My role has often seen me provide feedback to people, so it has been a rewarding experience receiving hours and hours of constructive feedback from my advisor to help shape my research thinking – an area in which I had little experience. The feedback has improved my perception of my knowledge as an HR practitioner and my confidence in my research capabilities.

The research element of the project has given me an insight into HR that has opened my eyes. Although I had found challenges in this area, understanding the complexities has empowered me to be more insightful in my field and become recognised as an expert. As explained earlier, I have been asked to support several organisations (board members are recommending me) regarding HR and OD in the sector.

I have also realised upon reflection that my knowledge of HR and its challenges in Qatar has enabled me to be more patient in my field – understanding even more so that the locals who are encouraged to be in senior roles lacking experience need the knowledge to support them to make decisions in their roles. Therefore, coaching them on a one-to-one basis has supported them with the knowledge to enhance their capabilities. This would not have been something I would have taken this approach to had I not gained confidence from the survey findings providing me with further insight.

This insight has given me sensitive opportunities to mediate between local senior leaders in an organisation to understand and recognise the cultural challenges within their relationship. It helped me immensely to provide feedback and support at a senior leadership level I never thought I could do. I also formalised my coaching skills during this period and gained the international coaching federation (ICF) accreditation. This process was an intense experience, engaging in many hours of workshops, practising this skill set, and then providing proof of my coaching skills to the ICF to gain this recognition, including having an examination. This was a proud moment for me, and once again, it was an objective recognition of the skills I offer to the organisations.

As a practising HR professional, coaching others came naturally to me. The certification was an objective acknowledgement of this competency.

When I embarked on the research phase, I started to doubt my capability as a researcher, particularly the level at which I aimed to conduct the research and attempt to make such a significant change potentially at a policy level in Qatar – that tied to the Qatar national Vision 2030. I also noted that although I came from a scientific background, my project took a qualitative, social science approach, which I had never done before. This was a massive learning curve because it was almost as if everything I learned in science

differed. I had a challenge trying to understand the rigour and validation of data around social science. Also, how can you replicate such a project as a social scientist? However, I read a lot and made sense of the methodology and value of the research data.

Furthermore, when I looked through studies in my area and understood what type of research was being undertaken, I understood that those researchers had leapt from being a knowledgeable practitioner to a researcher individual within their chosen topic by sharing their findings. This demonstrated that I have excellent and rigorous data to share with the Qatar HR Forum to share the knowledge gained through this project. More than just the data was needed. Pulling on my Scientific background, I assumed that a magic formula exists to turn raw data into a credible, original, helpful theory that resonates with a broad audience would be imprudent. Arguments and interpretations are created by analysing the data and being mindful of critical points. I viewed the data I had collated as a deep tunnel that needed to be searched to provide a thematic approach to the analysis and deliver valuable knowledge.

When I set out to start my research halfway through, I had to consider a new proposal as I would be leaving Qatar. Therefore, I had to rethink the idea and how to obtain the research data without necessarily being present in the country. This meant that my original proposal was no longer valid due to the legalities of obtaining information. Although we did not end up relocating – I did have to rewrite the research concept. This time, I looked at organisations nationwide, not just one.

This has motivated me to continue the doctorate, primarily through the write-up phase, to offer an opportunity for other practitioners to learn from this by sharing my knowledge – helping people aligned with my purpose. The conversations in the focus groups were rich and comforting as the participants were excited to see the development of a potential competency framework based on research for their profession addressing their day-to-day challenges. This was fantastic for me and my research as it reinforced the issues and challenges we, HR professionals, must address and overcome daily. The discussions were rich and contributed to the validation of the research outcomes.

I also had three boys under 10 when I embarked on this journey. During the project, which was research at the Doctoral level, I was blessed with another boy. The balance between all the activities I had on my plate, which included

- My role as a mother and a wife
- Engaged in full-time employment
- Chairing the Qatar HR forum
- Setting up and running projects for my company, 'The OD Company'
- Undertaking the ICF coaching certification
- Completed executive course on International Financial Systems – at Harvard Law School
- Board member and head of the HR committee for an educational entity

I would feel guilty and overwhelmed about what I had on my plate. However, being a mother motivated me and set an example to my boys of life-long learning and finding a career you are passionate about so it does not feel like a burden. My boys were incredibly supportive and accepting of my journey. Often, I hear friends, colleagues and family say to me, 'I do not know how you do it', but I accept my challenges with determination and love for the change and contribution my research will offer. I also believe in the work I do. As a result, volunteering on a Board or Chairing the Qatar HR Forum contributes to my legacy of improving the HR profession, which is a significant factor in why I manage my time and persevere in my passion.

Another major event during this time was the global pandemic, where we all suddenly found the world in an unbelievable state, which I had never anticipated. Other than this impacting how we worked and lived, such as suddenly having three children at home that needed home-schooling whilst I was delivering projects with a team I collaborated with remotely, it was a massive change in that moment of my life in all aspects. In terms of the research, I conducted the semi-structured interviews and the focus groups online. This differed from what I had initially anticipated, whether in my proposal or while conducting the research. However, it demonstrated how agile I was and finding a way in the face of adversity, like the rest of the world, particularly in how I conducted the research. It was interesting as I had trust built with the Qatar HR Forum. It is always different from being in person. However, I feel it was a successful way of conducting the research and do not

feel the results were impacted differently – through video conferencing, watching body language and listening intensely, I could interview effectively.

The pandemic also meant that we, as HR professionals, were swamped. Suddenly, we had to start thinking about our employees differently, not just providing tools to enable them to work. However, we also had to consider their well-being and our own. After setting up coaching sessions within the organisations and having regular informal check-ins with my team and other employees, this spilt into the Qatar HR Forum. I realised that we needed to support one another, so I brought the committee together and offered the following to our Qatar HR Forum to support them.

- **Complimentary coaching sessions** for our Qatar HR Forum and the community of non-HR professionals; we were happy to support any individual who needed the support.
- Webinars with guest speakers from across the globe, and we even had one session with Dave Ulrich
- **Policy sharing** – certain areas had to be addressed; for example, most companies in Qatar were not set up for hybrid working, and of the 20% to go into the office, how do we decide, high-risk people? Sharing of practises general advice and of what our organisations are doing currently. Moreover, once people start to return, provide updated information on entry back to the country.
- **LinkedIn:** We focussed on our LinkedIn following of 20,000 people as we started to connect with HR colleagues across the globe.
- **Complementary Sourcing Service**: Redundancies started to happen, and we decided to offer community support not only for HR professionals but also for loved ones who may have to leave suddenly
- We even partnered with two local Qataris who had built a website to share CVs and for organisations to share any roles they are working on recruiting. This concept did not obtain approval from the relevant ministries and was closed after three months.
- **Ongoing support:** We are not through the other side of the pandemic. Therefore, we still offer the above and have a plan for the year.

The above activities that we quickly put into place demonstrated the Qatar HR Forums' purpose and the support it provided our colleagues at a challenging time, mainly because this was not something we had previously experienced. As a result, through us supporting one another, we were all in a better position in our organisations to support them in our roles as HR professionals. I am forever grateful to the committee and my colleagues for ensuring that we are all helping each other.

I often wonder what my success can be attributed to, and it is a combination of many things, particularly the trust I build, the courage I show, and the culture I understand. Furthermore, with the complexities I face daily in my practise, perseverance, persistence, and problem-solving skills help me keep going and working through the challenges. In summary, my philosophy in my field is to always 'do the right thing' I made peace with myself many years ago that if I am to challenge an idea that may result in me being terminated in a role in Qatar – as long as I have challenged it in a way that for me is 'doing the right thing', then I am at peace with this. My role occasionally sees me fighting for employees, which can be intense discussions. However, I believe that as HR professionals, we must be courageous and advocate for our employees when issues arise – it is not appropriate to be 'yes' people all the time.

The project has been significant. I have identified complex ideas that still can be unpacked even further at the leading edge of HR practises in Qatar and the underlying complexities. It has drawn correlations between practitioners' experiences and challenges in a systematic and ethical approach with results that can now contribute to various HR practises in Qatar and feed into further research. Many years of experience had already had me reflexive, acutely aware of the challenges in my practise, and convinced that by embarking on a critique of my practise, it would be possible to make an informative and practical contribution to my profession, mainly as I contribute to the legacy of HRM in Qatar. The legacy I would like to leave is all done through passion, perseverance and patience.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Qualitative Survey Questions

Position

1- What is your current title?

2- What is your nationality?

3- Do you have formal qualifications in HR?

4- Do you have direct reports?

5- What is the split of the nationality of your direct reports – Expats and Qataris – in percentage terms?

6- Does your role sit within the Human Resource Department? If not, where does your role sit?

7- How many years of Experience in HR do you have inside and outside of Qatar?

8- How would you describe your organisation?

9- What sector do you work in?

10- How many employees are in your organisation?

11- How many HR employees are in your department?

12- What is the number of Qataris in your HR department?

13- What is the organisations' Qatarisation number?

14- Does your HR department have a Strategy aligned to the business?

15- Is the current organisational HR strategy aligned to the Qatar National Vision 2030?

HR Professional Competencies

16- Please describe your HR function.

17- What is the organisation structure like (please feel free to add HR organisational structure if you prefer)?

18- Does your HRs' organisational design follow a specific model?

19- What competencies do you feel are essential for HR professional standards?

20- What international HR standard, if any does your HR department follow

21- Does your organisation have a global Headquarters?

22- If you have a Global headquarter, are HR policies dictated to your HR department or are they customisable?

23- Do you recommend that HR would benefit from a professional body in Qatar?

24- Do you feel local Qatari culture influences your HR Practises such as Wasta?

25- If applicable, do you feel this affects your HR function?

26- If yes, how – please explain?

27- What Challenges do you feel you face as an HR professional in Qatar? What solutions do you suggest if any.

28- If there were one thing you would change in the HR profession in Qatar – what would that be?

29- How would you describe a Professional HR Practitioner?

30- Would your description be the same as above, if the HR Professional were in Qatar? Please explain your answer.

31- Would you be interested in meeting with the researcher and having a one to one confidential interview? If yes, please add your email below.

Appendix 2: Signed permission from Qatar HR Forum Vice Chair

To: Najat Mohammed El Mahdy
Student Number: M0051940

Date: 13th January 2019

This letter is confirmation of permission for the above named (Middlesex University Student) to access this organisation in order to undertake a research study.

As part of her Doctorate of Professional Studies program and collect data as agreed, through focus groups, interviews and questionnaires. The study may proceed subject to approval from the Middlesex University Ethics Sub-committee.

I acknowledge that Najat El Mahdy will be required to provide Consent Forms and Participation Information Sheet to those taking part in the study.

If you wish to verify any information please contact me on +974 33190587.

Yours sincerely
Name and position

Caroline Parsons
Vice Chair of the Qatar HR Forum

Appendix 3: Associate Coaching Certificate, ICF

The International Coach Federation

is honored to confer upon

Najat El Mahdy

the designation of

Associate Certified Coach (ACC)™

The designation is earned by demonstrating knowledge and proficient use of core coaching skills through a comprehensive application and evaluation process designed to ensure high standards for the coaching profession and the clients it serves.

Awarded on this day

7/11/2019

ICF GLOBAL BOARD CHAIR

ICF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Valid through: 7/31/2022