

# An Inquiry into the State of HR in the Caribbean

**Paul Juniper, Brendan Sweeney and Alison Hill**  
Queen's University IRC

**September 2014**



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## Introduction



The Queen's University Industrial Relations Centre (IRC) is one of North America's leading providers of professional development for human resource management, labour relations, and organizational development practitioners. In order to ensure that professional development programs are topical and relevant, the IRC is committed to ongoing applied and practitioner-oriented research. One particular research priority aims to better understand the human resource (HR) profession in North America and abroad. The results of two recent surveys of Canadian HR practitioners conducted in 2011 and 2013 have made for very interesting reports, which are available on the IRC website free of charge ([irc.queensu.ca](http://irc.queensu.ca)).

Until only recently the scope of this research program was limited to Canada. However, with the help of our colleagues at the University of the West Indies' Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business in Trinidad and Tobago and the Cave Hill School of Business in Barbados, the IRC launched a survey of Caribbean HR professionals in 2012 as part of our commitment to engaging with international practitioner communities. This report summarizes and examines the results of this survey. In doing so, the report provides an important reference point to help

track trends and advances in the Caribbean HR community. It also serves as a useful comparator when combined with recent reports on the HR profession in Canada.

The survey consisted of a total of 45 closed- and open-ended questions, and was organized in a similar fashion to our survey of Canadian HR practitioners. This facilitates consistent cross-national comparison. However, following consultations with Caribbean colleagues, several questions were revised in order to better reflect the Caribbean context.

A total of 159 respondents from 12 Caribbean countries completed all or the majority of the survey between October and December 2012. For the purposes of this report, these questions were grouped into six specific sections. The first section focuses on respondents' demographic characteristics. The second section focuses on their job characteristics. The third section focuses on the characteristics of the organizations for which respondents worked. The fourth section focuses on education and career development. The fifth section focuses on knowledge and skills. The sixth section focuses on respondents' perspectives on the HR profession in the Caribbean.

### Demographics

Over 81% of respondents identified as female (Figure 1). In this respect, the Caribbean is similar to the rest of North America in that a strong majority of HR practitioners are female.

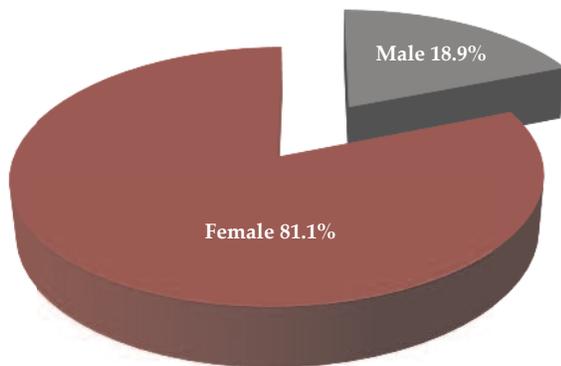


Figure 1. Gender

However, it is slightly higher than the Canadian average, which was 67% in 2013. The age of respondents is reasonably well distributed (Figure 2). Over one third (36%) were between 36 and 45 years old, while just under one third (33%) were between 46 and 55 years old. Only just over 1% were above the age of 65, just under 15% were between 56 and 65 years old, and just under 16% were younger than 36 years old.

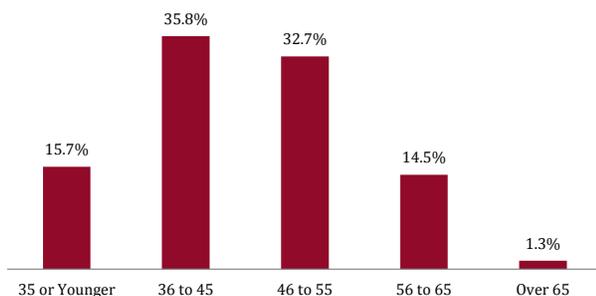


Figure 2. Age

Female respondents were slightly younger on average than male respondents. Despite comprising only 19% of all respondents, over half of those aged 56 or over were males. Conversely, 92% of respondents under the age of 36 were females. This suggests that females comprise an increasing proportion of HR practitioners in the Caribbean, which differs from Canada, where the proportion of male HR practitioners is slowly increasing.

Respondents from 12 Caribbean nations participated in the survey (Figure 3).

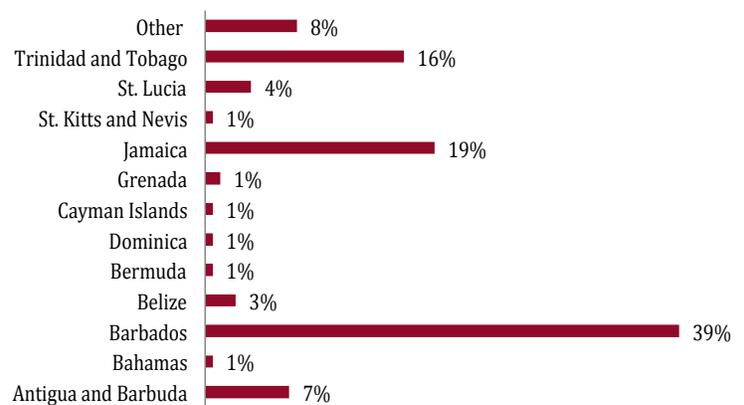


Figure 3. Nationality

Practitioners from Barbados (39%), Jamaica (19%), and Trinidad and Tobago (16%) made up over 80% of all respondents. Most of the remainder came from Antigua and Barbuda (7%), St. Lucia (4%), and Belize (3%). A small number of respondents from the Bahamas, Dominica, the Cayman Islands, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Bermuda also completed the survey. Several respondents also noted that they were based in one particular nation, but were responsible for supporting their organization in multiple Caribbean nations (up to 18 in some cases!). Many professionals based in the Caribbean are

thus engaged with an international HR community on a daily or weekly basis.

Respondents' years of experience working in HR were also reasonably well distributed (Figure 4).

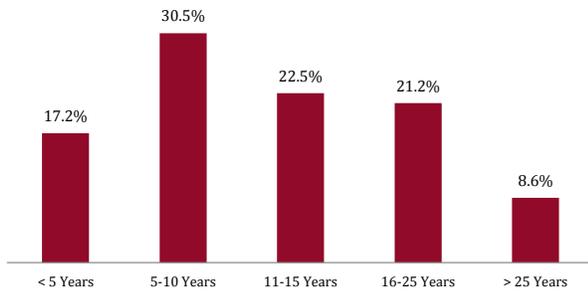


Figure 4. Years of Experience in HR

The majority were very well experienced in HR. Over 22% had between 11 and 15 years of experience, 21% had between 16 and 25 years of experience, and almost 9% had over 25 years of experience. At the same time, a healthy proportion of respondents fit into the early-to-mid career range: over 30% had between 5 and 10 years of experience and over 17% had fewer than 5 years of experience. Males were significantly overrepresented among those with over 25 years of experience (38%), while females were overrepresented among those with 5-10 years of experience (92%). This is consistent with the age distribution of respondents, where males tend to be overrepresented in the more senior categories while females are overrepresented amongst early- and mid-career categories.

Respondents had reasonably high levels of experience in their current roles and positions (Figure 5). Almost 16% had worked in their current role for over 10 years, and just over 30% had worked in their current role for between 6 and 10 years. Nearly half (48%) had worked in their current role for between 1 and 5 years, and

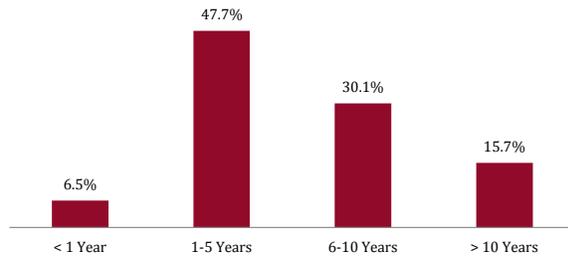


Figure 5. Years in an HR Role

only just under 7% had worked in their current role for less than one year. Interestingly, those with the most years of experience were more likely to have held their current role for over 10 years or to have held their current role for between 1 and 5 years. It appears that some of the Caribbean's most experienced practitioners attained top managerial positions quite some time ago, while others have attained them only recently. This suggests that there are opportunities for career enhancement even among the most experienced practitioners. It also may point to more involvement of experienced HR practitioners in the upper management of organizations.

### Job Characteristics

Caribbean HR practitioners held a number of important roles in the organizations for which they work (Figure 6). A large proportion (36%) identified as Managers/Supervisors, and 19%

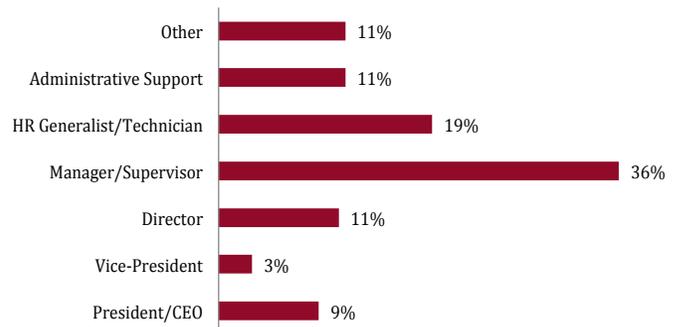


Figure 6. Current Role

identified as HR Generalists. Almost a quarter of respondents held senior leadership roles including Director (11%), Vice-President (3%), and President/CEO (9%). A number of respondents held administrative support roles (11%) and several held a variety of other roles. Many of the 11% who selected “other” were employed as independent consultants. Over 41% of those who held senior leadership roles were male, which is over twice the proportion of all males surveyed. Respondents aged 46 and older were also much more likely to hold these roles. Females and respondents with less experience were overrepresented in the Manager/Supervisor, HR Generalist, and Administrative Support roles.

The HR profession is rapidly evolving and changing, and HR practitioners are often required to take on more responsibilities within their organization. Almost three quarters of Caribbean HR practitioners have seen their workloads increase in the last five years, just over three quarters have taken on more responsibility within their organization, and just under one quarter have witnessed an increase in the number of direct reports. A large number (58%) have also become more involved in developing organizational strategy, a trend that is consistent with Canadian HR practitioners. A number of others received promotions (22%) or new job titles (29%), possibly to better reflect their role or position within the organization. Only a very small number saw their workloads or responsibilities decrease, or saw no change at all (Figure 7).

Caribbean HR practitioners anticipated further change in the next five years (Figure 8). Almost 65% anticipated further increases to their workload while 67% anticipated that they would be required to take on more responsibilities. Those



Figure 7. Changes to Job in the last 5 Years

who had experienced increases to their workload and their responsibilities in the past five years were far more likely to anticipate similar increases in the future than those who had not. Almost two thirds anticipated that they would become more involved in developing organizational strategy, nearly 29% anticipated that they would acquire a new title, just over 26% anticipated a promotion, and almost 30% anticipated that they would be assigned more direct reports. Only 6% did not anticipate change.



Figure 8. Anticipate Changes to Job in Next 5 Years

Respondents were mixed regarding their opinions on work-life balance. Just over one half (52%) felt that they had a healthy work-life balance, while just under one half reported that

they did not (48%) (Figure 9). Males were twice more likely to report having a healthy work-life balance than females. Mid-career practitioners,

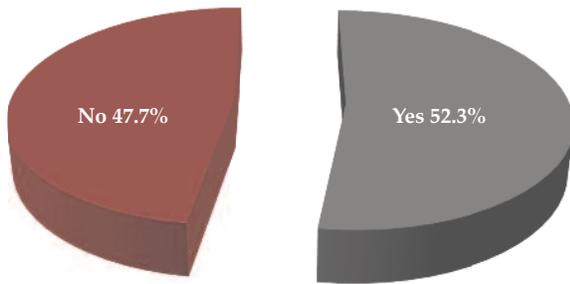


Figure 9. Do you have a Healthy Work-Life Balance?

particularly those in the 36 to 45 age range, were more likely to report that they did not have a healthy work-life balance than those in other age categories. Aside from these characteristics, there were very few differences in work-life balance based on respondents' nationality, the sector in which they worked, the proportion of unionized employees in their organization, or their educational attainment. The proportion of HR practitioners in the Caribbean who report a healthy work-life balance is significantly lower than in Canada, where over three quarters of HR practitioners report a healthy work-life balance. This may be of concern to Caribbean organizations moving forward.

### Organizational Characteristics

Caribbean HR practitioners work for a variety of organizations (Figure 10). Nearly two-thirds

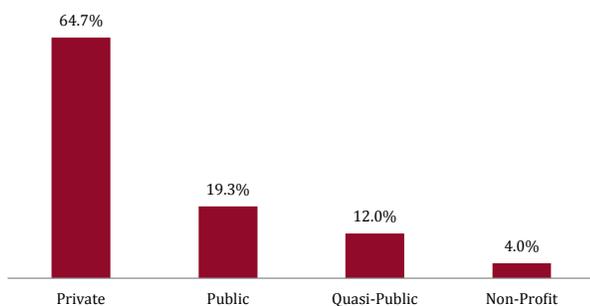


Figure 10. Sector

(65%) work in the private sector. They also work in the public sector (19%), the quasi-public (or para-public) sector (12%), and the non-profit sector (4%). More specifically, many respondents worked in industries as diverse as finance and insurance (19%), professional, scientific, and technical services (13%), government (13%), retail and wholesale trade (7%), manufacturing (4%), education (3%), accommodation and food services (3%), and healthcare and social assistance (2%) (Figure 11).

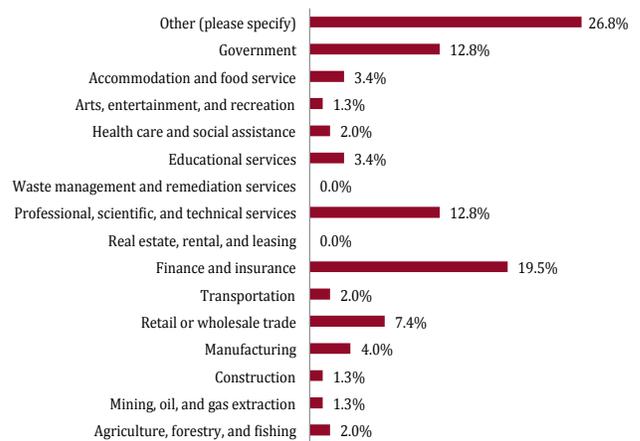


Figure 11. Industry

The size of the organizations for which Caribbean HR practitioners work (by number of employees) varies (Figure 12). A significant number are employed by organizations with

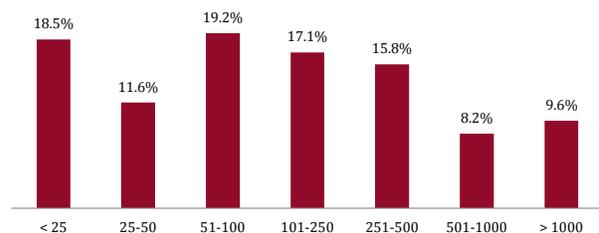


Figure 12. Size of Organizations (by Number of Employees)

over 1,000 employees (10%) or between 501 and 1,000 employees (8%). However, the majority work for small- and medium-sized organizations. Of these organizations, 16% have between 251 and 500 employees, 17% have between 101 and 250 employees, 19% have between 51 and 100 employees, 12% have between 25 and 50 employees, and 19% have fewer than 25 employees. The public sector organizations for which HR practitioners work were most likely to be medium-sized, and were significantly overrepresented among organizations with between 251 and 500 employees. Private sector organizations were most likely to be very large or very small. Non-profit organizations were overrepresented among organizations with between 25 and 50 employees.

Unions are present in almost half of the organizations for which respondents worked. Almost 10% of Caribbean HR practitioners indicated that all of the non-managerial employees in their organization belonged to a union. Nearly 25% indicated the approximately 75% of non-managerial employees in their organization were unionized, 8% indicated that approximately 50% were unionized, and 6% indicated that approximately 25% were unionized (Figure 13).

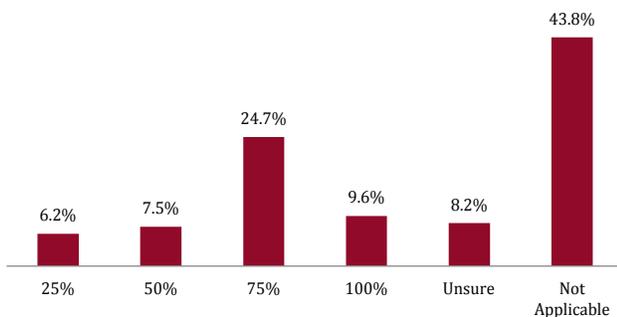


Figure 13. Approximate Proportion of Unionized Employees

However, a large portion (44%) chose the “not applicable” option, indicating that there was no union present in their organization, and 8% did not know approximately what proportion of the non-managerial employees in their organization were unionized. The government and finance and insurance sectors are the most likely to have high levels of unionization (defined as 50% of non-managerial employees or more). Interestingly, respondents who worked in organizations with high levels of unionization were much younger on average when compared with the Caribbean average.

Most HR departments in Caribbean organizations are relatively small. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the organizations for which respondents worked had fewer than 5 employees in their HR department. Almost 21% had between 5 and 10 employees, 3% had between 11 and 15 employees, 3% had between 16 and 20 employees, 1% had between 21 and 25 employees, and 8% had over 25 employees (Figure 14).

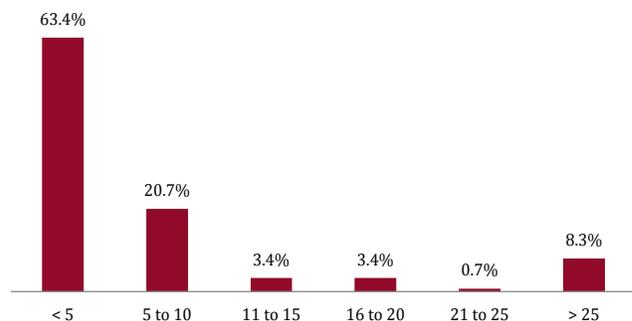


Figure 14 – Size of HR Department (by Number of Employees)

Organizations with HR department with 25 or more employees were most likely to be in the public or quasi-public sector. Interestingly, those working in such organizations were younger and had much less experience on average. They were also less likely to report directly to senior

leaders and more likely to report to someone within their organizations' HR or finance department. This suggests that larger organizations are more likely to provide entry-level and mid-career opportunities, while smaller organizations require HR practitioners with a greater depth and breadth of experience and who are able to take on more responsibility.

The HR function is represented at the executive level in a strong majority (85%) of the organizations in which Caribbean HR practitioners work (Figure 15). This is consistent with general

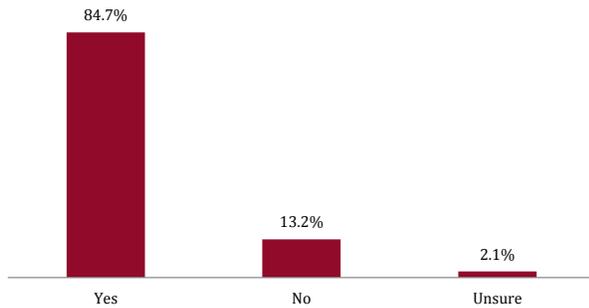


Figure 15. Is HR Represented at the Executive Level of your Organization?

trends towards incorporating HR professionals into the strategic decision-making processes of contemporary organizations. Furthermore, the majority of organizations in which the HR function is not represented at the executive level have fewer than 100 employees. This is likely because the HR departments of such organizations are very small, and also because many of these organizations may lack a traditional executive structure. At the same time, the HR function is represented at the board level in only half of the organizations for which Caribbean HR practitioners work (Figure 16). However, this may be because many organizations – particularly those that are small or those in the public sector – do not have boards of directors.

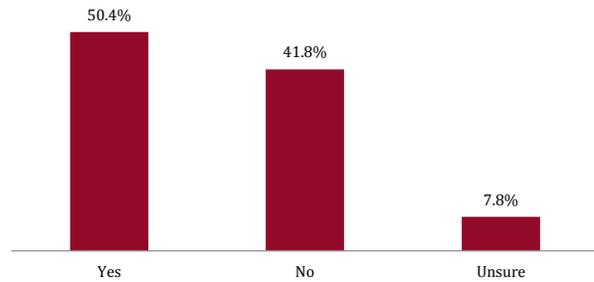


Figure 16. Is the HR Function Represented at the Board Level of your Organization?

### Education and Career Development

Caribbean HR practitioners are extremely well-educated (Figure 17). Over 60% hold a university graduate degree, 15% hold a post-graduate

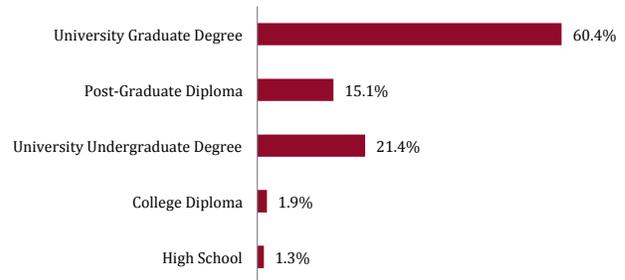


Figure 17. Educational Attainment

diploma, and 21% hold a university undergraduate degree. Males and females have very similar rates of educational attainment. Interestingly, and while workers of all ages are likely to be well-educated, those over 56 years old are most likely to hold a university graduate degree. This suggests that many Caribbean HR practitioners continue to pursue higher education as their career progresses. However, those with university graduate degrees are slightly less likely to report a healthy work-life balance than those without.

Educational attainment among Caribbean HR practitioners far exceeds the minimum educa-

tional requirements of the positions in which they work. Only 25% of positions require a university graduate degree, 7% require a post-graduate diploma, 51% require a university undergraduate degree, 7% require a college diploma, and 5% require a high school diploma (Figure 18). Many Caribbean HR practitioners are thus qualified to progress into more complex

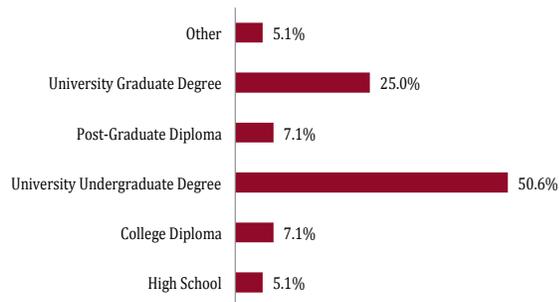


Figure 18. Minimum Educational Requirements of Current Role

positions or positions that require a greater level of skill and responsibility. However, Caribbean employers should also be aware that many of their HR practitioners may be over-qualified for their current position. Employing HR practitioners whose qualifications exceed job requirements may have immediate advantages, but it can also lead to higher turnover and employee dissatisfaction if opportunities for advancement are scarce or not properly communicated.

In order to facilitate career advancement, many Caribbean HR practitioners (45%) have a formal, written career or learning plan (Figure 19). This

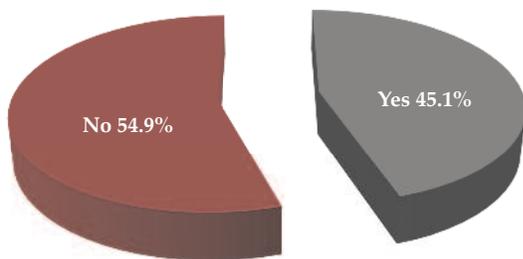


Figure 19. Do You Have a Written Career or Learning Plan?

is higher than the Canadian average (40%). Furthermore, many of those who do not have a formal career or learning plan in place reported having an informal plan that they have merely not taken the time to write down. Others reported that they were close to retirement or more focused on immediate (rather than long-term) career and learning goals. Yet a large number of Caribbean HR practitioners did not believe that a written career or learning plan would be helpful, and for many it was simply not a top priority. Interestingly, those with a written career or learning plan in place were far more likely to work in an organization with high levels of unionization than those who did not.

The direct managers or supervisors of Caribbean HR practitioners were quite likely to be involved at least to some degree in their professional development. Over 11% of respondents reported that their direct managers or supervisors were very involved in their professional development, and 36% reported that their direct managers or supervisors were somewhat involved (Figure 20). Only 4% reported that their direct managers or supervisors were somewhat uninvolved,

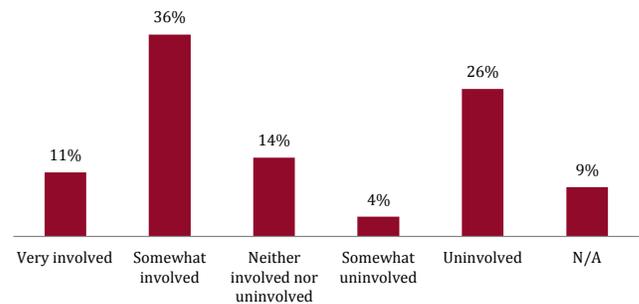


Figure 20. To What Extent is Your Manager/Supervisor Involved in Your Professional Development?

while 26% reported that their direct managers or supervisors were completely uninvolved. Somewhat unsurprisingly, those who reported that

their direct managers or supervisors were very involved or somewhat involved in their professional development were much more likely to have a written career or learning plan in place. Further inquiry would very likely uncover a strong relationship between HR practitioners with well-defined career and learning goals and managers and organizations that support the professional development of their HR practitioners.

Nearly 42% of respondents reported that the organizations for which they work provide financial support for professional and career development (Figure 21). Those with written career and learning plans were more likely to

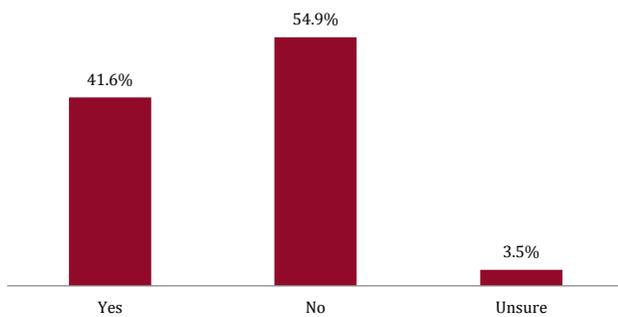


Figure 21. Does Your Organization Provide a Budget for Training, Learning, and Professional Development?

work for organizations that provide such support, further affirming the relationship between organizational support for professional development and HR practitioners' propensity to pursue professional development. Moreover, and similar to the trend noted above, organizations with high levels of unionization were more likely to provide financial support for their HR practitioners' professional development. This reflects the importance of HR to organizations with a high proportion of unionized employees. Respondents also reported that almost 47% of organizations have increased their annual budget

for training, learning, and professional development in the past three years. At the same time, budgets for training, learning, and professional development remained the same in 21% of organizations and decreased in 28% of organizations (Figure 22). Therefore, while financial

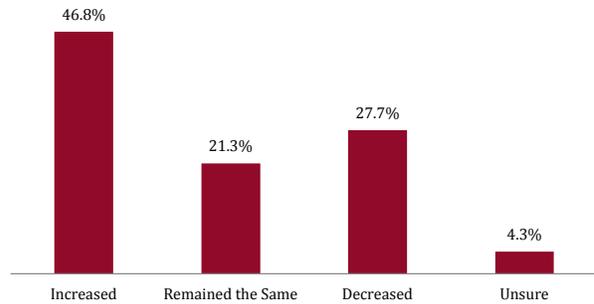


Figure 22. How has Your Organization's Budget for Training, Learning, and Professional Development Changed in the Last Five Years?

support for Caribbean HR practitioners' training, learning, and professional development is not provided by all of the organizations for which respondents worked, there are many that provide strong support for such endeavours.

Nearly two-thirds of Caribbean HR practitioners belonged to their country's HR association (Figure 23). Respondents working in Barbados were more likely than those from any other Caribbean nation to belong to their national HR association. The likelihood that Caribbean HR practi-

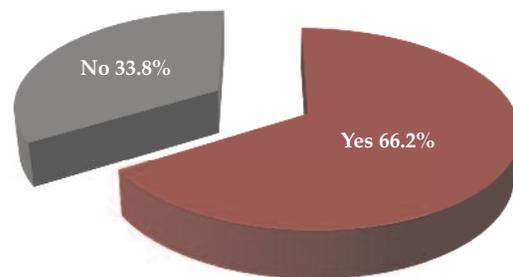


Figure 23. Are you a Member of Your Country's HR Association?

tioners belonged to their country's HR association varied very little based on age or educational attainment. However, females were slightly more likely than males to belong to such associations. Furthermore, respondents with between 5 and 10 years of experience working in HR were far more likely than any other group to belong to their country's HR association. Many Caribbean HR practitioners belonged to other professional associations as well. This includes the US-based Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the British-based Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD). In fact, several were members of both. Those most likely to belong to the SHRM and/or CIPD were those who did not belong to their country's HR associations, and this was only because their country did not have an exclusive HR association. Membership in nationally- or internationally-based HR associations thus appears to be very important for a strong majority of Caribbean HR practitioners.

### Knowledge and Skills

Like others working in the profession around the world, successful Caribbean HR practitioners must possess a variety of skills. This reflects the multi-faceted and complex nature of the HR profession. To determine which were most important for success in HR, the survey asked respondents to rank 14 different skills from most (1) to least (14) important (**Table 1**). The most important skill for Caribbean HR practitioners was communication. Others deemed to be very important included leadership, interpersonal skills, and analytical/critical/strategic thinking. Those deemed less important included consulting, change management, attention to detail, and the ability to organize. Respondents also identified several other skills that were important to

Table 1. Most Important Skills for HR Practitioners

SKILL	AVERAGE	RANK
Communication	3.87	1
Leadership	4.29	2
Interpersonal skills Analytical/critical/ Strategic thinking	4.50	3
Employee engagement	4.85	4
Coaching	7.81	5
Flexibility/adaptability	8.23	6
Negotiation & mediation	8.36	7
Conflict resolution	8.38	8
Time management	8.39	9
Ability to organize	8.79	10
Attention to detail	8.88	11
Change management	9.23	12
Consulting	9.38	13
	9.86	14

their work, including patience, public relations, tenacity, emotional intelligence, and a variety of technological skills.

The survey used a 3-point scale (1 = basic, 2 = intermediate, 3 = advanced) to gauge Caribbean HR practitioners' level of skill (**Table 2**). Those that received the highest average scores were interpersonal skills, communication, flexibility/adaptability, and organizational skills. The skills receiving lower scores included negotiation and mediation, change management, consulting, and conflict resolution. Therefore, while Caribbean HR practitioners are well-versed in many of the skills thought to be important to their success (e.g. communication), there were others with which they had only an intermediate understanding of on average (e.g. leadership). It also suggests that while robust and well-developed skill sets exist among respondents, there remain a number of areas where

Table 2. Skill Level

SKILL	AVERAGE	RANK
Interpersonal skills	2.74	1
Flexibility/adaptability	2.71	2
Communication	2.71	3
Ability to organize	2.71	4
Attention to detail	2.59	5
Analytical/critical/ strategic thinking	2.59	6
Leadership	2.57	7
Time management	2.45	8
Employee engagement	2.42	9
Coaching	2.36	10
Conflict resolution	2.31	11
Consulting	2.25	12
Change management	2.22	13
Negotiation & mediation	2.20	14

further learning, training, and professional development may prove helpful to both Caribbean HR practitioners and the organizations for which they work.

In order to be successful, Caribbean HR practitioners also require a diverse knowledge base. Respondents were asked to rank 17 different areas of knowledge from most important (1) to least important (17). Strategic planning was overwhelmingly ranked as the most important area of knowledge for Caribbean HR practitioners. This is indicative of the increasingly important role that HR practitioners play in the strategic directions of contemporary organizations. Also highly ranked were employment law and legislation, recruitment and selection, employee engagement, and employee relations

(Table 3). Those that were ranked lowest included diversity management, technology, health and safety, and change management. Respondents also indicated that knowledge of basic financial procedures and economic indicators were important to achieve success in the HR profession.

Table 3 – Most Important Knowledge Areas for HR Practitioners

KNOWLEDGE AREA	AVERAGE	RANK
Strategic planning	4.94	1
Employment law/legislation	6.62	2
Recruitment & selection	7.23	3
Employee engagement	7.43	4
Employee relations	8.24	5
Business acumen	8.59	6
Ethics	8.89	7
Organizational culture	8.91	8
Labour relations	9.04	9
Conflict resolution	9.26	10
Compensation & benefits administration	9.31	11
Talent management	9.56	12
Organizational design	9.61	13
Change management	10.01	14
Health & safety	10.41	15
Technology	10.95	16
Diversity management	14.00	17

Respondents were also asked to indicate their level of understanding or familiarity with these 17 knowledge areas. Like the prior question about skills, participants used a 3-point scale to indicate their level of understanding or familiar-

ity. The knowledge area that respondents were most familiar with was recruitment and selection. Knowledge areas such as employee relations, organizational culture, ethics, and employment law and legislation also received high scores (Table 4). The areas with which respondents were least familiar or had low levels of understanding include diversity management, organizational design, technology, and health and safety. In general, those areas of knowledge that were deemed most important were also those with which Caribbean HR practitioners were most familiar.

Table 4 – Level of Knowledge

KNOWLEDGE AREA	AVERAGE	RANK
Recruitment and selection	2.66	1
Employee relations	2.55	2
Organizational culture	2.44	3
Employment law/legislation	2.39	4
Ethics	2.39	5
Employee engagement	2.37	6
Conflict resolution	2.35	7
Strategic planning	2.33	8
Labour relations	2.24	9
Business acumen	2.22	10
Talent management	2.21	11
Change management	2.18	12
Compensation & benefits administration	2.16	13
Health and safety	2.14	14
Organizational design	2.13	15
Technology	2.13	16
Diversity management	1.84	17

### Perspectives on the HR Profession

Respondents were surveyed regarding their perspectives on the state of the HR profession in the Caribbean. Questions focused on the most important HR activities, the extent to which the HR function is involved in shaping organizational strategy, the challenges facing the HR profession, and the immediate and long-range priorities of respondents’ HR departments. In general, the majority of respondents were quite positive in their outlook of the HR profession in the Caribbean. Over 70% were optimistic, fewer than 9% were pessimistic, and about 20% were unsure (Figure 24).

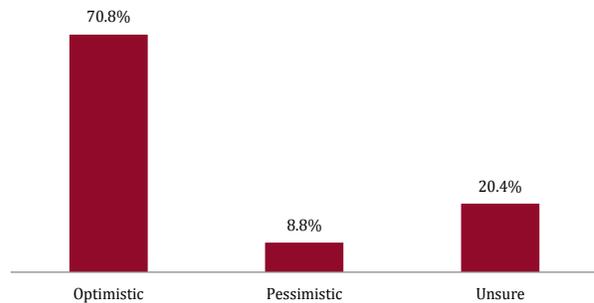


Figure 24. Outlook Regarding the HR Profession in the Caribbean

Respondents were asked to rank 20 activities according to their importance to the role of an HR professional (1 = most important, 20 = least important) (Table 5). Recruitment and selection was identified as the most important, receiving an average score of 5.83 and almost twice as many first place rankings as the second highest activity. Other highly rated activities included employee training, learning, and professional development (7.25), performance management (7.84), employee relations (8.39), and employee

*Table 5 – Most Important Activities for HR Practitioners*

KNOWLEDGE AREA	AVERAGE	RANK
Recruitment & selection	5.83	1
Employee training, learning, & PD	7.25	2
Performance management	7.84	3
Employee relations	8.39	4
Employee engagement	8.43	5
Compensation & benefits	9.58	6
Talent management	9.79	7
Organizational development	10.01	8
Ethics	10.22	9
Labour relations	10.33	10
Organizational effectiveness	10.53	11
Organizational culture	10.59	12
Health & safety	10.69	13
HR governance	10.75	14
Succession planning	10.94	15
Wellness & work-life balance	12.16	16
Change management	12.29	17
HR metrics & measurement	12.84	18
Corporate social responsibility	15.69	19
Diversity management	15.79	20

engagement (8.43). Diversity management was identified as the least important activity, receiving an average score of 15.79 and more than twice as many 20th place rankings as the 19th ranked activity – corporate social responsibility – which received an average score of 15.69. Other activities receiving low average scores were HR metrics and measurement (12.84), change management (12.29), and wellness and work-life balance (12.16).

Respondents were also asked to use a 5-point scale (5 = very involved, 1 = very uninvolved) to determine to what extent they were involved in those same 20 activities (**Table 6**). Many of the activities that identified as the most important to HR practitioners were also those in which they were very involved. Employee learning, training, and professional development received the highest average score (4.43), although respondents were slightly more likely to be “very involved” in recruitment and selection (4.36).

*Table 6 – Involvement in HR Activities*

KNOWLEDGE AREA	AVERAGE	RANK
Employee training, learning, & PD	4.43	1
Employee relations	4.39	2
Recruitment & selection	4.36	3
Performance management	4.27	4
Employee engagement	4.22	5
Organizational development	4.07	6
Labour relations	4.04	7
Organizational effectiveness	4.01	8
Organizational culture	4.01	9
HR governance	4.00	10
Ethics	3.93	11
Health & safety	3.92	12
Change management	3.91	13
Succession planning	3.91	14
Talent management	3.90	15
Wellness & work-life balance	3.86	16
Compensation & benefits	3.84	17
HR metrics & measurement	3.79	18
Corporate social responsibility	3.31	19
Diversity management	3.24	20

Employee relations (4.39), performance management (4.27), and employee engagement (4.22) also received high average scores. Similar to the activities deemed to be unimportant to Caribbean HR practitioners, diversity management (3.24), corporate social responsibility (3.31), and HR metrics and measurement received very low scores (3.79). There was thus a strong relationship between the HR activities that respondents believed were important to their work and those in which they were involved.

The development of the HR profession is not without its challenges. In order to better understand what these were, respondents were asked to list what they believed to be the top five challenges facing the HR profession in the Caribbean. Responses were more qualitative in nature and often quite detailed. Moreover, they provided excellent insight into the obstacles that HR practitioners face in further advancing their profession and their roles in Caribbean organizations. Many were related simply to challenging external economic and political conditions, something that even the most intelligent and forward-thinking HR practitioners have little control over. However, there were several that appeared to be directly related to the day-to-day work of respondents.

Probably the most pressing challenge facing the HR profession in the Caribbean was a lack of integration with the broader organization. Many respondents suggested that the lack of representation at the board and executive level presented a major challenge moving forward. Others believed that the lack of input from HR practitioners regarding organizational strategy was also a major concern. Still others believed that senior

leaders were not willing to fully integrate HR practitioners into strategic decision-making because they lacked respect for what they did or did not fully understand the role of HR departments and practitioners. A common perspective was that senior leaders lacked appreciation for HR, and viewed it primarily as an administrative function akin to personnel management rather than a more holistic and strategic one.

Another challenge noted by many was a lack of support and funding for training, learning, and professional development. This may be related to the points made above; that senior leaders view HR primarily as a rote administrative function and are not willing to provide the funding necessary to assist HR practitioners advance their skills and knowledge as they relate to organizational strategy and development. However, many respondents suggested that the lack of support and funding for training, learning, and professional development had more to do with challenging economic circumstances and small profit margins, a reality for most in the private sector.

Employee engagement also appeared to be a leading challenge. Several practitioners suggested that HR practitioners had difficulty engaging employees due to a lack of respect or understanding of their role in the organization. Others noted particular difficulties engaging unionized employees, who were more apt to look to their union representatives for advice or answers. A small but not insignificant number were of the opinion that it was employee work ethic – particularly among younger generations – that was to blame for the perceived low levels of engagement.

Respondents were similarly surveyed regarding the top three immediate (one year) and long-range (five years) priorities in their HR department. Consistent with other questions in the survey, recruitment and retention appeared to be the most pressing immediate priority, with succession planning and performance management close behind. Departmental reorganization (including job reductions) and improvements or updates to information systems were also im-

portant immediate priorities. Activities such as talent management, performance management, and succession planning were the most important long-range priorities. Becoming more involved in organizational strategy, potentially through an enhanced role in workforce planning and employee training, learning, and professional development were also among the long-range priorities important to the departments in which Caribbean HR practitioners work.

## Conclusion



The results of this survey are fascinating in several respects. Spanning several nations, Caribbean HR practitioners are consistently well-educated, and a large number are in the early or middle stages of their career. Furthermore, many are working in positions for which their educational qualifications exceed the minimum requirements. Caribbean organizations are thus presented with an excellent opportunity to engage with younger and more experienced HR practitioners in order to assist in organizational development and help advance the HR profession in general. Considering the tight-knit communities that exist in many Caribbean nations, and the shared international identity within the region, there are ample opportunities for Caribbean organizations and professional associations to emerge as leaders in this regard.

The results of the survey suggest that a talented and eager community of Caribbean HR practitioners exists, and that Caribbean organizations could benefit from a greater awareness of the competitive advantages that can be achieved by engaging HR professionals. Doing so may best be accomplished with the assistance of training, learning, and professional development for both HR practitioners and the senior leaders of Caribbean organizations. By engaging in conversation and learning regarding the role of HR in organizational design and strategy, senior leaders and HR practitioners can not only be made aware of the value that they can provide to one another, but can familiarize themselves with the most effective contemporary HR and organizational development practices in the Caribbean and on the international stage. This may help

senior leaders better understand the value that HR provides to an organization, and simultaneously helps HR practitioners better understand where their efforts can prove most effective.

Queen's IRC is thrilled to have an opportunity to collaborate further with the Caribbean HR community. The results of this survey have proven enlightening, and also brought to light several questions that we hope to explore in the future. The challenges around work-life balance certainly warrant further discussion, especially considering that many Caribbean HR practitioners

are poised to engage in new and challenging opportunities within their organizations. The penchant for further training, learning, and professional development is also encouraging. Better understanding what types of learning opportunities Caribbean HR practitioners are seeking and what role they themselves seek to have in professional development within their organizations is of great interest to us. We sincerely hope that these conversations will continue at our upcoming programs in the Caribbean in the summer of 2014 and beyond!

## About the Researchers



### **Paul Juniper**

Paul Juniper, MA, CHRP, SPHR, became the Director of Queen's University IRC in 2006. Paul is a leading and respected figure in Canada's HR community, with over 30 years' of experience in human resources and association leadership. Paul was an interim CEO of the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario (now known as HRPA), President of its Board, and was instrumental in the adoption of a degree requirement for certification in human resources. Paul's research focuses on the state of the HR profession both in Canada and around the globe. He speaks regularly at national and international conferences on trends in human resources, and the ways in which individuals and their organizations can continue to raise the bar on HR. He developed and designed the Queen's IRC's Advanced

HR programming to meet the increasingly complex professional development needs of HR practitioners. Paul teaches on the *Advanced HR*, *Strategic Workforce Planning* and *Linking HR Strategy to Business Strategy* programs.



### **Brendan Sweeney**

Dr. Brendan Sweeney brings over ten years of experience teaching and researching labour relations in Canada and the US, with a particular emphasis on the natural resource, manufacturing, and education sectors. He currently works full-time at McMaster University, where he manages the Automotive Policy Research Centre and teaches in the School of Labour Studies. In addition, Brendan has experience working and teaching at Queen's, the University of Washington, and the University of Manitoba. Brendan's research has been widely recognized, and he has received several awards, including a Fulbright Fellowship, a Labor and Employment Relations' Association 2012 Best Paper Award, a nomination for the University of Manitoba Teaching Excellence Award, and the Canadian Association of Geog-

raphers' 2010 New Scholar Award for Excellence in Publication. Brendan's research is featured or forthcoming in almost a dozen high-profile academic journals. Brendan presents at the Queen's IRC *Building Smart Teams* program.



### **Alison Hill**

Alison Hill received her MEd from Queen's University in 2011. While working as a Research Associate with the IRC, she helped to manage the Centre's practitioner-focused research, including interviewing and surveying HR professionals in Canada and abroad. She was also responsible for coordinating and editing the IRC's Research Briefs and E-News, two of the Centre's key communication tools. Her research interests include organizational culture, organizational learning, trends in human resources, program evaluation, and adult education principles and practices.

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