

# Where is the shortage?

**W**e all know that in the HR profession there is a talent shortage in the intermediate HR practitioner levels. The question is – is there really a talent shortage or just a shortage of roles to develop HR talent?

## HR roles and the gap

A recent sample of advertised HR positions in the Australian HR market, up to approx \$80k, revealed an interesting story. The results showed that there is a “gap” in the market for HR practitioners trying to develop their careers. The sample results showed that there is an issue in terms of balance for roles available at the HR Advisor level. The results were:

- 37% – Entry or Officer level (under \$55k)
- 15% – Advisor level (\$55k–\$70k)
- 47% – Consultant level (\$70k–\$85k).

As can be seen, the highest demand sits with experienced HR roles. These roles require candidates with solid mid-level exposure, ready for the next step in their career. Conversely, the least opportunities exist in the mid-level or “bridging” Advisor type roles that transition applicants from “entry level” to “experienced”.

Obviously, if only 15% of roles advertised are for Advisory type positions, there has to be a price to pay moving forward. Some of the quick observations of this imbalance in the market are:

- The number of experienced Consultants in the market is limited. Companies are finding it harder to recruit people with the appropriate skill sets. A recent survey suggests that the completion time for HRC recruitment assignments had blown out by over 22%!
- People are moving from Entry level roles to Consultant roles with big percentage jumps in compensation without the skills set development that is required.
- The candidates that have moved through an Advisor level role before being placed in a Consultant role are very attractive in the market and are generally prepared for the move.

If the sample of HR roles confirmed anecdotal evidence that mid-level HR development opportunities are scarce, why have HR Advisor level roles disappeared?

## Shared Services

The demise of the HR Department and the rise of the pared back HR partner model supported by a centralised HR or shared service, while logical in choice, does little to help career development.

The tasks in these shared services areas tend to be very administrative and operationally oriented. The entry level HR

professional can gain exposure to practical applications such as pay, leave and entry-exit processes. They can also start the journey of developing general HR skills and building their knowledge.

The down side of HR “call centre” style environments is that practitioners may miss out developing many skills that are required in future roles as these areas are often performed at a distance from the “pointy-end” of HR delivery, close to the business.

## Business Partners

The standard line quoted by HR Directors at the start of the recruitment process when recruiting HR consultants is, “the new hire will have to hit the ground running!”

Instead of being able to develop practitioners skill levels gradually, many business partner roles mean that HR Consultants have to be able to deliver for fast moving businesses from day one. This is a big call if no development roles exist in the advisor levels to develop their skill set prior to moving to becoming a fully fledged HRC.

## Committed HR Leaders

There is some good news. Whilst the current structures of HR teams may not reinforce career development, there are some committed HR Leaders who recognise that developing HR talent is essential for the function’s effective business delivery in the short, medium and long terms.

These HR Leaders are proving to be strong mentors and a vital link toward career advancement for junior candidates. They are bridging the gap for their charges, providing them with growth and challenge beyond their normal transactional exposure. The exposure is an invaluable tool for early HR professionals advancement.

## Small can be beautiful

Early HR career practitioners, who work in small to mid size companies or companies with a more decentralised style HR approach, may find themselves exposed to the core HR services earlier in their careers.

Early career HR professionals in these environments are closer to learning by “osmosis”, witnessing the next tier of HR in action within a broader business arena than a shared services area may supply. Some might even find they play a role in some of the core activities around disciplinaries, recruitment and L&D and terminations. These candidates benefit from a broader and more connected exposure to the business.

## What happens if the shortage isn’t filled?

If more Advisor level roles do not exist in the market, the first and most obvious effect is that the shortage of experienced HR Consultants will continue for some time. Clearly the major implication of this is that the function loses credibility with the business as inexperienced people are thrust into front line roles without the right tools and skills.

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