MASTER PROGRAMME IN STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND LABOUR RELATIONS

ALUMNI STUDY 2019

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Contents

1. Background and objective of the study

For the first time, the University of Gothenburg has conducted an alumni survey aimed at students formerly enrolled in the Master Programme in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations. The purpose of the survey has been to gather information regarding both how former students evaluate their education when they have some distance to it, and also in finding out what kind of jobs they find after graduation.

The programme started in autumn 2010 and the sum total of all students that have been enrolled in the programme between 2010 and 2018 is 351. Obviously, not all of them have completed their studies. Some of them have finished all the courses and their thesis while others have finished no courses at all. However, 135 students have completed their master's thesis, i.e. almost 40 % of all the students that begun their studies on the programme during these years.

The programme is international and the curriculum is entirely in English. The alumni that answered the survey have their origin in 16 different countries, six of them outside the European Union.

The results will primarily be used as a basis for developing the programme, but we will also use the results when we inform prospective students about the programme and when we inform workplaces about e.g. work placement. The survey results can thus provide us with materials for both external marketing and internal development.

2. Who are the alumni and what do they do?

In this section, the students who were enrolled in the programme 2010 – 2018 will be described. We will look at some of their characteristics before they began their master studies, and also what kind of job they ended up in after their studies. In Table 1 we have summarized a number of background characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1: Background	*Per cent*
Gender	
Men	21
Women	79
Age when beginning the programme	
21-24	42
25-29	47
30-35	9
36-	2
Years of work experience	
None	19
1-2 years	48
3-4 years	19
5 years or more	14
Time to first job	
Already had a job	23
Within 3 months	46
Within 6 months	13
Within 12 months	13
More than 12 months	5
N	43

The distribution of men and women among the respondents corresponds well with the distribution of gender of all the alumni. Being a master's programme, we expect the students to be somewhat older than the average bachelor student, which is also corroborated by the data. The absolute majority of the students were in their twenties when they began their programme studies, and the mean age was 25,8 years old. The youngest student was 21 years old and there was only one student who was older than 45. Before beginning their studies about 80 per cent of the students had some kind of work experience and one-fifth of the respondents had no work experience at all. It seems as though it has been relatively easy for the students to find a job after their studies. 23 % of the respondents already had a job when they finished the programme, and within a year all but 5 % had a job.

Since it is an international programme the students come from a number of countries. The respondents have their origin in 16 different countries. 39 % come from Sweden, and then there are alumni from China, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Slovenia, Thailand and Uganda.

Table 2 contains information on some key indicators on where the alumni work and how many hours they work each week.

Table 2:	*Per cent*
Labour market sector	
Private manufacturing	37
Private services	34
State authority	10
County/region authority	8
Non-profit organisation	5
Municipal organisation	3
Other	3
Organisation size, employees	
1-100	20
100-500	13
500-1 000	5
1 000-5 000	10
5 000-10 000	13
10 000-20 000	13
20 000-50 000	15
50 000-	11
Work hours/week	
36-40	63
41-45	32
46-50	3
More than 50	2
N	43

71 % of the alumni work in the private sector with almost equal shares in manufacturing and services. One-third of the respondents work in organisations with up to 500 employees, which means that the majority of the alumni work in rather large organisations. 95 % of the respondents work between 36 and 45 hours a week. That is, the absolute majority of the alumni have what we consider to be normal working time schedules.

For about two-thirds of the respondents, their first job was in the field of HR, and 74 % of states that their current job is within HR. The most common HR job title is HR specialist (28 %), 21 % works as HR business partner, and 10 % as either HR manager or HR consultant.

Among other job titles, we find HR generalist, HR administrator, administrative manager, project manager, research officer, freight forwarder and supply chain engineer.

Not surprisingly, the respondents have wound up in different countries after graduating: Australia, China, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway and the United Kingdom. However, two-thirds of them work in Sweden, which indicates that a number of students that came from abroad are now working in Sweden.

In order to get a picture of the kind of HR work the alumni are involved in we asked them how often they work with ten different broad HR tasks (Table 3). The tasks have been ordered by simply adding the figures of column 1 and 2, which captures what tasks are the most common during a "normal" workweek. There is no "value component" in the ordering, i.e. none of the tasks is more or less "important" than anyone of the others.

Table 3: Frequency of broad HR tasks

How often do you work with the following HR tasks? (per cent)	Several times a week	Once a week	A few times a month	Once a year	Never	Total (n)
1. Internal and external communication	47	18	24	0	11	43
2. Strategic development and change issues	42	11	16	8	23	43
3. Leadership and organisational development	47	5	16	5	27	43
4. Staffing, recruitment, dismissal	45	5	5	14	21	43
5. Skills development, internal education	34	16	16	5	29	43
6. Strategic skills supply, employer branding	37	13	13	5	32	43
7. Salaries, benefits, pension	35	5	19	11	30	43
8. Labour law, negotiations, agreements	34	5	19	16	26	43
9. Work environment, wellness, rehab	32	5	26	8	29	43
10. HR economy, HR analysis, HR controlling	21	8	21	8	42	43

Interestingly, the most common broad task is *internal and external communication*, which seems to imply that many of the respondents have a role in their organisations' that requires them to cooperate with both internal and external stakeholders. The following two broad tasks on the list are *strategic development and change issues* and *leadership and organisational development*. Both of these – together with *strategic skills supply, employer branding* – are arguably those that are most in line with the programme's overall objectives, i.e. to educate for work with strategic HRM. This can thus be regarded as a validation that the programme delivers students to the labour market with relevant knowledge. *Staffing, recruitment,*

dismissal, and *skills development, internal education* can be looked upon as the more "mundane" tasks that are part of general HR work of which most HR professionals are more or less involved in. The four broad tasks at the bottom of the list are to a greater extent more specialised HR tasks (especially in large organisations) which primarily are conducted by staff that are focussed specifically on them. These results are in some respects similar to those in a recent comprehensive survey of HR-professionals in Sweden, in particular regarding *leadership and organisational development* and *staffing, recruitment, dismissal* (Hällstén, Peixoto & Wikhamn, 2017).

3. How do the alumni evaluate the programme?

To begin with, we will look at the alumni's overall assessment of their programme studies. This was measured by asking three questions that measure different aspects of attitudes towards the programme and their studies (Tables 4-6).

Table 4: Overall, how satisfied are you with your programme studies? *(per cent)*

Extremely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied	Total (n)
34	56	5	5	0	43

Overall, the alumni are obviously quite satisfied with the programme (Table 4). 90 % of the respondents assert that they are either *extremely satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* with their programme studies.

Table 5: Has the programme been useful for you in your current professional role? (per cent)

Extremely useful	Very useful	Moderately useful	Slightly useful	Not at all useful	Total (n)
15	32	44	2	7	43

For the second question – regarding whether the programme has been useful for the alumni in their professional roles – the results are more mixed (Table 5). The figures show that almost half of the alumni considered the programme to have been either *extremely useful* or *very useful* for their professional roles, and about 10 % considered the knowledge gained to be either *slightly* or *not at all useful*. These results are most probably an indication of the fact that about 25 % of the alumni do not currently work in the field of HR.

Table 6: Would you recommend the programme to others? (per cent)

Definitively yes	Probably yes	Might or might not	Probably not	Definitively not	Total (n)
34	59	7	0	0	43

In the third question, we simply asked the respondents whether they would recommend the programme to others or not (Table 6). More than 90 % of the alumni testify that they would *definitively* or *probably* recommend the programme to others. None of the respondents stated that they would *probably* or *definitively not* recommend the programme. All in all, the

answers to these three questions indicate that the alumni have an overall positive outlook on the programme and the knowledge they have gained from it.

The next set of questions concerned the objectives of the programme as stated in the programme syllabus. The alumni's evaluation of how they experience that the objectives of the programme have been met were measured by 10 questions (Table 7).

Table 7: Evaluation of the programme's objectives

The programme improved my…	Mean	Std deviation
understanding of how HRM is conditioned by different labour market contexts	4,4	0,72
ability to understand, analyse and explain HRM within the organisation	4,3	0,67
ability to connect research findings to the realities of work-life	4,3	0,77
capacity to carry out in-depth studies in the field of HRM	4,2	1,00
ability to analyse the professional development of HRM	4,1	0,78
understanding of how societal trends (e.g. globalisation, trade conditions, demography) affects the organisation	4.1	0.81
ability to evaluate crucial factors in an organisational change process	4,1	0,87
ability to participate in research and development work within the field of HRM	4,1	1,06
understanding of management trends and how they affect HRM	4,0	0,82
ability to reflect upon different ethical attitudes	4,0	1,00

The maximum score for these questions was 5, i.e. a high score represents a positive attitude.

Overall, this table indicates that there is a great deal of agreement between the alumni that the programme has succeeded in meeting its objectives. The absolute majority of the alumni agrees that the programme to a great extent has improved their understandings, abilities or capacities to work with advanced HR tasks such as they are stated in the programme's objectives. The high scores on all the statements and rather low levels on the standard deviation show that all the different objectives of the programme have been treated in the curriculum.

4. Work requirements

An interesting question is whether the alumni's current work actually requires those kinds of general competencies that they have been trained in during their programme studies. The answer to this question gives us an indication of whether the content of the programme is relevant in the labour market that the students encounter after finishing their education. We measured this by asking 18 questions about what is required of them in their current job (Table 8).

Table 8: Work requirements

Do you agree that your current work role requires that you can...	Mean	Std deviation
work independently	4,8	0,39
independently identify, formulate and solve problems	4,8	0,41
cooperate with others to solve assignments	4,8	0,43
perform tasks within given time frames	4,7	0,50
make oral presentations	4,4	1,11
independently gather new information	4,3	0,78
analyse qualitative information (words and media)	4,3	0,93
critically interpret and evaluate information	4,3	0,94
argue and discuss with stakeholders regarding important issues	4,2	1,17
communicate with individuals and groups outside your workplace	4,1	1,24
analyse quantitative information (figures)	4,0	0,93
participate in research and development work	3,9	1,33
make ethical assessments	3,7	1,34
participate in the planning and implementation of organisational changes	3,7	1,42
take part in strategic planning	3,6	1,35
analyse the impact of macro trends on the organisation (e.g. globalisation, trade conditions, demography, labour markets)	3,4	1,07
write in-depth reports	3,3	1,33
analyse the impact of management trends on the organisation	3,1	1,44

The maximum score for these questions was 5, i.e. a high score represents a positive attitude.

Overall, the results in this table indicate that the alumni's current jobs require them to use a number of the competencies that they have been trained in. Most of the high scoring competencies are indeed characteristic of those that the students continually have to use during their studies. Thus these results indicate that the curriculum of the programme is well suited to the demands of the labour market. The low scoring competencies can be argued to be more specialised and therefore not applicable to all of the alumni's current work situation. The considerable higher values on the standard deviation also testify to a larger differentiation within the low scoring competencies.

5. Job situation, influence and satisfaction

We measured the alumni's job situation by asking 7 questions on different aspects of their current job (Table 9).

Table 9: Job situation

Decide on the following statements…	Mean	Std deviation
I can decide when I need a break	4,3	0,98
My colleagues respect my professional knowledge	4,2	0,57
I can make changes in my work schedule if I have been interrupted in my work	4,1	1,04
I decide my work schedule myself	4,1	1,21
I can influence my professional development	3,8	0,88
I decide my work pace myself	3,7	1,16
I work outside office hours	2,7	1,14

The maximum score for these questions was 5, i.e. a high score represents a positive attitude.

All in all, the majority of the alumni seems to have jobs that give them a considerable amount of autonomy and the possibility to adjust their workload themselves. This is something we also can see in other studies of the job situation among HR-professionals in Sweden (Hällstén, Peixoto & Wikhamn, 2017). During recent years there has been a growing interest regarding whether people work outside office hours, i.e. if they "take their work with them home" (Allvin, 2011). A few of the respondents work a great deal outside office hours, but almost one-fifth of them do not work outside office hours at all. The alumni consider their professional knowledge to be well respected among colleagues, which is an indication that the programme has provided them with relevant knowledge in their field of work. A majority of the respondents also assert that they can influence their professional development.

The respondents' formal influence on their job was measured by asking 6 questions on what kind of influence they can exert on their job (Table 10).

Table 10: Formal influence

What formal influence do you have at your workplace when it comes to…	Mean	Std deviation
decide on employee development	2,6	1,40
decide to change the pace of work	2,3	1,30
make budget decisions	2,2	1,22
decide on major changes regarding the organisation	1,8	1,05
decide on major changes to what is manufactured, sold or what services to offer	1,6	0,85
decide whether to increase or decrease the number of employees	1,6	1,07

The maximum score for these questions was 5, i.e. a high score represents a positive attitude.

The formal influence of the alumni is undoubtedly overall quite limited. On half of the questions more than 50 per cent of the alumni state that they have no influence at all. These results are not especially surprising. A number of the alumni who have answered survey are quite new to the labour market. Thus, they have not yet had the time to climb the hierarchical ladder especially far, i.e. not many of them have the kind of managerial roles that gives them formal influence of the sort that is implied in these questions. Second, HR is primarily a supportive function to managers that make the final decisions on things like product/service offerings, organisational changes, budget, and recruitment and lay-offs.

We measured the alumni's job satisfaction by asking 4 questions on different aspects of their current job (Table 11).

Table 11: Job satisfaction

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your job?	Mean	Std deviation
Your tasks	4,3	1,13
Your career opportunities	3,8	1,03
Your wage	3,7	1,13
Your opportunities for internal education	3,7	1,21

The maximum score for these questions was 5, i.e. a high score represents a positive attitude.

Obviously, the majority of the alumni are quite satisfied with their tasks. Also, most of the alumni are content with their wage. When it comes to *career opportunities* and *opportunities for internal education* there is also an overweight on the positive side which means that we can conclude that the possibility for the alumni to develop in their profession is rather good.

In the final question of the survey, we simply asked the respondents to evaluate their satisfaction with their choice of profession (Table 12).

Table 12: How satisfied are you with your choice of profession? (per cent)

Extremely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied
56	33	3	8	0

Almost 90 per cent was either *extremely satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied*, and none was *extremely dissatisfied*. This outcome testifies that the students are very content with their line of work and, thus, the labour market possibilities that the programme has given them. The

results are also almost identical to those have been found in previous studies regarding work within the field of HR (Hällstén, Peixoto & Wikhamn, 2017).

6. Method

The most important methodological issue we had to solve was to figure out which students should be included in the study. We wanted to reach the students who had completed at least so much of the programme that it would – at least theoretically – have had an impact on their possibility of finding employment in the field of HR. Hence, we decided that the most relevant criterion would be that they must have completed their final master thesis. This left us with 135 students, and for 5 of them we could not find any address, e-mail or LinkedIn profile. Thus, the survey was distributed to 130 alumni, 101 women (77,7 %) and 29 men (22,3 %). The data comes from both the survey and from the university's student systems.

A total of 43 alumni answered the survey which means that we have a response rate of 33 %. Of course, we had hoped that the response rate would have been higher, but after sending out reminders and reaching out to students via LinkedIn we had to settle with what we got. Obviously, the results may be somewhat skewed depending on who the alumni are that answered the survey. For instance, it is – hypothetically – possible that there are more among those that did not answer the survey who do not work in the field of HR. The design of this – admittedly – quite simple survey does not make it possible to make any kind of analysis of those who have not answered it, except for the proportion of men and women. So, the results should be taken with a grain of salt, but they are nonetheless illuminating when it comes to – in particular – the alumni's evaluation of the programme.

Ethical aspects

The material does not contain any information that makes it possible to identify any individuals. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

References

Allvin, M. (2011). *Work without boundaries: Psychological perspectives on the new working life*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hällstén, F., Peixoto, A. & Wikhamn, W. (2017). *HR-undersökningen 2017. En enkätstudie om HR-medarbetare i Sverige*.