

The Human Resources Certification and its Effect on Learning Motivation and Proactive Behaviors

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Abstract

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Human Resources (HR) professionals can practice in their profession without being certified. However, every year, the number of HR professionals becoming certified is increasing. While the main purpose of the HR certification is to encourage HR professionals to remain up to date on the newest trends and regulations in the industry, there is a lack of research investigating whether the certification indeed has this effect. The purpose of this paper was therefore to examine the impact of the HR certification on HR professionals' level of motivation to learn and be proactive, while including individual (goal orientation (GO) and age) and contextual (leader-member exchange (LMX)) moderating factors for further insights into this important relationship. Guided by the proactive motivation theory (Parker et al., 2010), this correlational study consists of 192 HR professionals in various industries across Canada who completed an online survey. The hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression. Results revealed that the HR certification marginally impacts an HR professional's motivation to learn and proactive behavior. Further, this relationship is stronger among more junior HR professionals and as the supportive environment from their leader decreases. Companies should consider encouraging HR certification for all of their professionals and leaders should understand the impact that the certification can have on their employee's career development and desire to make changes.

Keywords: Human Resources, Motivation to Learn, Proactive Behavior, Leader-Member Exchange, Goal Orientation, Professional Certification

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Introduction

Human Resources (HR) professionals who seek out challenging projects, take charge, thrive on problem-solving, demonstrate a desire to learn, and are informed about the latest trends and technology are an HR employer's dream. What if there was a certification that could lead to an employee with the above-mentioned traits and motivations?

Unlike other professions, such as nurses, occupational therapists, pharmacists, and engineers (Lengnick-Hall & Aguinis, 2012; Lester & Dwyer, 2012), where certification is a legal obligation to practice, HR professionals are not required to follow a particular educational path or receive specific certifications to be hired or perform on the job. Still, an HR certification can act as an indicator of credentials and educational expertise during the selection process (Lengnick-Hall & Aguinis, 2012; Lester et al., 2011). The fact that certification is a choice for the HR professional suggests that it can also act as an indicator of other essential traits or characteristics, such as discipline and competence (Cohen, 2012; Dimaggio & Powell, 1983; Hsu & Yancey, 2015; Spence, 1973). However, to date, we know little about whether the HR certification gives organizations any insight into the employee's abilities or motivations once hired.

HR can be interpreted as a new industry in comparison to others, which has quickly developed into a quintessential aspect of every organization (Boxall & Purcell, 2000; Wright et al., 2005). Aslam et al. (2013, p.127) state that "in order to attain targeted profitability and survival results, and to keep up with the competitive advantage, firms are responsible to manage the resources accordingly." This claim can be translated as HR being the foundation and the face of the organization. The resources that hire, manage, and develop other resources must be of utmost quality to properly carry out these tasks. Therefore, HR professionals are expected to remain current and keep abreast of new research, trends, and future predictions. As stated by Lester et al. (2011), the main purpose of an HR certification is to assure that the HR professional remains up to date on the newest trends and regulations in the industry (Fertig et al., 2009). This ongoing need for learning and proactivity has become increasingly important, not only for HR professionals, but for all types of employees across different work environments in today's complex and ever-changing economy (Crant, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001; Parker et al., 2010).

Some studies have demonstrated potential links between certified HR professionals and opportunities such as receiving higher salaries or position level (Rynes et al., 2002), experiencing higher career satisfaction (Putka et al., 2015) and increasing chances of being selected for positions, but there is no established link between HR certifications and employee performance (Aguinis et al., 2005; Fertig et al., 2009; Gee et al., 2019, Wiley, 1992). Additionally, very little empirical work has been done to support or explain these aforementioned relationships (Cohen, 2012; DeNisi, 2012; Garza & Morgeson, 2012; Hsu and Yancey, 2015; Hyland & Muchinsky, 1990; Latham, 2012; Lengnick-Hall & Aguinis, 2012; Lester et al., 2011; Paxton, 2012). In Latham's (2012, p. 270) critique of the current literature on the HR certification, he clearly defines the need for more research on the value of the HR certification in terms of its impact on the following important outcomes: "promotions, C-suite positions, higher HR unit performance, enhanced reputation of the HR department in the eyes of stakeholders, and value-added contribution of the HR department in the organization". While increased salary, higher positions, and hiring rate may be indicators of a stellar employee, there is limited knowledge about why an HR employee would be eligible for such opportunities. More specifically, there is little to no research that has established whether the HR certification encourages HR professionals to learn and be more proactive as per its purpose described above. This lack of research significantly reduces the value and credibility of the HR certification and does not demonstrate how HR professionals can capitalize on it.

This paper aims to address this gap in the literature by investigating the relationship between the HR certification and HR professionals' motivation to learn and be proactive. To add further insights into this relationship, this study will also incorporate individual and contextual moderators that can shed light on when the HR certification will have more or less of an impact. More specifically, this study will contribute to the literature by investigating the following critical research questions: Are HR certified professionals more likely to seek out learning opportunities? Are HR certified professionals more likely to exhibit proactive work behaviors? Can age, goal orientation (GO), and the relationship with a leader affect the motivation to learn and be proactive for a certified HR professional?

In addition to the theoretical contribution mentioned above, this study also offers the following practical implications: 1) To provide further insight to HR professionals and

employers about the benefits and value of the HR certification, and 2) To equip managers with guidelines to encourage learning and development, and change-oriented behaviors in their employees, whether or not they are holders of HR certification.

Theoretical and Research Background

HR Professional Certification

According to the Chartered Human Resources Professional (CHRP) Designation site, the purpose of the CHRP is to "validate your knowledge of HR, your workplace readiness and your commitment to career-long learning and ethical practice" (www.hrpa.ca, 2018). This definition is mostly concerned with the development of the individual to ensure that their motivation as an HR professional to learn is "career-long." Due to the novelty of the HR industry, credibility and legitimacy of HR certifications are, only recently, very gradually gaining recognition (Hammonds, 2005; Lengnick-Hall & Aguinis, 2012; Stewart & Martin, 1996; Stewart & Woods, 1996).

In order to become certified, HR professionals must pass an exam that assesses their knowledge of the HR practice, or they can complete specific HR courses as part of their university degree or certificate. There is currently a strong participation rate and high potential for HR certifications with more than 22,000 individuals becoming HR certified members in Canada in 2015 (www.hrpa.ca, 2018). Once certified, HR professionals in Canada must respect the continuing education requirement, which is 66.67 hours of training and professional development over a period of three years (www.hrpa.ca, 2018).

Do individuals and employers value the HR certification?

Many studies have been conducted on the perception of the value of the HR certification and the motivation of an HR professional to become certified (Lester et al., 2011; Lengnick-Hall & Aguinis, 2012; Wiley, 1992; Hsu & Yancey, 2015). According to this research, the main reasons why employees obtain the HR certification are the following: "career advancement, professional credibility, distinctive knowledge and competency, ongoing educational

opportunities, and increased earning power" (Lester et al., 2011, p.408), as well as acknowledgment from colleagues (Wiley, 1992).

According to Garza & Morgeson (2012), the employee's decision to obtain an HR certification is influenced by an organization's values. For example, organizations that value innovation will want to use the HR certification as a tool to filter their candidates because it assures them that their new hire comes with pre-existing knowledge about HR and will remain up to date with the different requirements necessary to maintain certification. If the employee recognizes that the organization supports and encourages HR certifications, it can influence them to put effort into obtaining it (Kavosa & Lapina, 2016). Additionally, Lester et al. (2011) found that within their pool of managers, 90% believed that hiring HR professionals with an HR certification would be advantageous to their organization (Cohen, 2012).

In another light, other researchers (Lester et al., 2010; Paxton, 2012) oppose the value of the HR certification, stating that the years of experience that an employee holds can override the possession of the HR certification. A study conducted by Aguinis et al. (2005) demonstrated that the HR professional certifications were not requested by employers because approximately 96% of the HR job advertisements did not mention the HR certification. However, Lyons et al. (2012) conducted a similar study to Aguinis et al. (2005) that demonstrated that, less than a decade later, the number of job postings that request the HR professional certification increased by 14.2 %. The mix of conflicting perceptions and results from these studies only adds to the confusion about the value and recognition of HR certifications.

In the following sections, I will review the literature and make predictions about the relationships between HR certifications and an individual's motivation to learn and be proactive through the lens of Parker et al. 's (2010) Proactive Motivation Model. Furthermore, I will examine the role of individual and contextual factors that can influence the aforementioned relationships. Individual factors consist of goal orientation (GO) and age, and the contextual factor is the Leader-Member Exchange theory. The terms "member of HR certification," "presence of HR certification," "HR designation," and "HR professional order" will be used interchangeably throughout this paper, as seen in the literature.

Theory: Proactive Motivation Model

As stated earlier, the main purpose of HR certifications is to ensure that the certified individual remains up to date with changes in the field by being proactive – i.e., “being proactive is about making things happen, anticipating and preventing problems, and seizing opportunities” (Parker et al., 2010, p. 827) – and motivated to learn -- i.e., “motivation to learn encompasses the desire to engage in training and development activities, to learn training content, and to embrace the training experience” (Major et al., 2006, p.927) (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Carlson et al., 2000; Fertig et al, 2009; Lester et al. 2011; Noe, 1986; Rosenfeld et al., 1995). How is that achieved? Understanding how individuals become motivated to identify change, envision a different future, and develop new skills can be explained by the Proactive Motivation Theory (Parker et al., 2010). Parker et al. (2010) argue that there are two processes in proactive motivation: 1) Proactive Goal Generation; imagining and preparing for a different future, and 2) Proactive Goal Striving; influencing the change and evaluating it. These same authors also developed three motivational states that can explain the reasons why an individual would engage in proactive and learning oriented behaviors, which are as follows: 1) “can do”, the capability of the individual to achieve it, 2) “reason to”, the reasons why the individual would want to achieve it, and 3) “energized to”, the level of enthusiasm to achieve it (Parker et al., 2010). With the help of these motivational states, I offer an explanation for the impact of the HR certification on an HR professional’s motivation to learn and engage in proactive behaviors. It is important to note that motivation to learn and proactive behaviors, although similar, are two distinct constructs. For example, Major et al. (2006) found support for proactivity and learning motivation being different constructs (e.g., they discovered that proactive personality had a significant relationship to motivation to learn). In this study, these two constructs will be examined separately as dependent variables in the proposed model.

HR Certification & Motivation to Learn

“Can do” Motivation – Self-Initiated Learning. As mentioned above, in order to obtain the HR certification, an exam or a particular educational background must be achieved. These activities require discipline, determination, and motivation to learn (Fertig et al., 2009). HR professionals must be equipped with the tools and knowledge to forecast, predict, and plan for the consequences of changes in the industry. Certifications oblige professionals to learn on a continual basis, and this acquired knowledge can, in turn, enable the employees, as well as their

organizations, to remain or become competitive (Appelbaum & Gallagher, 2000; Major, 2000; Major et al., 2006). As organizations and managers seem to be less participative in the career development of their employees, the need for certification is increasing since the employees are left accountable for their development and acquisition of their self-interests (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Erlich, 1994; Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Major et al., 2006). According to Fertig et al. (2009), the feelings of confidence and achievement that result from passing a certification exam typically contribute to the employee moving on to achieve other certifications or educational accomplishments. Similarly, Burke and Hutchins (2007) developed the concept of *training transfer* which details that when individuals can use and apply the knowledge that they learn, it encourages more learning to take place within the work environment to continue the transfer of knowledge (Fertig et al., 2009; Roussel, 2011). Thus, HR certification can give HR professionals “can do” motivation to continue learning and provide them with the taste of wanting to pursue more such learning activities.

“Reason to” Motivation – Skill Updating & Development. Those who are certified are aware of the conditional hours of continuing education that are needed, which suggests that these professionals are willing and open to updating and upgrading their knowledge on a continuous basis. While there is no research available to support this claim, we can look at the role of certifications in other contexts for further insights.

In the medical context, nurses are obliged to be part of a professional order to practice. Dolphin (1983) surveyed 377 nurses to identify their perceptions and attitudes towards their continuing education programs; it covered several factors that included employee benefits, learning motivation, and employer requirements. The results indicated that the majority of the nurses were not willing to take part in learning and development activities that were not accredited towards their continuing education hours. Put differently; the certification might have a negative effect on the employee’s motivation to learn as it can diminish the personal, voluntary or organic interest to learn and defeat the initial reason why this requirement was first implemented (Yoder-Wise, 2007). However, in a more recent study by Shahhosseini and Hamzehgardeshi (2014), in the same context, 361 nurses responded to a similar survey used in Dolphin’s (1983) study evaluating the nurses’ perceptions of participating in continuing education programs. The results of this study demonstrated that the main reason for participation is for skill and knowledge advancement and maintenance. In other studies investigating the

purpose for obtaining certification, skill and professional development is a constant factor that appears as a motivator (Hsu & Yancey, 2015; Lengnick-Hall & Aguinis, 2012; Lester et al., 2011; Wiley, 1992). In short, more recent evidence suggests that professional certifications can influence employees' motivation toward learning by increasing their "reason to" motivation for such learning activities.

"Energized to" – Personal Satisfaction. Wiley (1992) discovered that certified HR professionals mainly went through with the certification to feel personally accomplished and proud of their achievement. This contagious sentiment would lead to higher motivation to pursue additional learning opportunities (Fertig et al., 2009), different projects, and responsibilities (Koestner & Losier, 2002; Pierson et al., 2001; Ryan & Connell, 1989). Fertig et al. (2009) found that individuals who successfully performed the entire exam process, including the preparation, studying, and investing time to obtain the certification, were more likely to have high satisfaction to achieve other levels of accomplishment such as completing another certificate. In addition, they argued that HR certifications can lead to feelings of power and status that can increase an HR professional's self-esteem. Similarly, research by Carlson et al. (2000) reveals a significant and positive relationship between self-esteem and training self-efficacy. This relationship can be translated into employees who have a greater feeling of positive affect towards themselves also have higher motivation and willingness to go through training activities and learn. Hence, the HR certification should increase HR professionals' "energized to" motivations for learning due to higher feelings of personal satisfaction and self-esteem.

Based on the above theoretical arguments, I expect HR certifications to increase HR professionals' desire to learn because it increases their capabilities to do so ("can do"), it requires them to update skills and knowledge ("reason to"), and it can lead to feelings of satisfaction ("energized to"). Based on these arguments, I hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: HR professionals with an HR certification have a higher motivation to learn than HR professionals without one.

HR Certifications and Proactive Behaviors

Schroeder (2012) reviews how critical HR is to an organization's strategic sustainability and identifies proactivity as a solution to goal realization. On an individual level, the proactivity

of HR professionals can accordingly be argued to promote their success, especially given that the goal of the HR certification is to promote career-long learning to guarantee that HR professionals can cope with ongoing environmental and demographic changes (Burke & Ng, 2006; Hervas-Oliver, 2013). In addition to promoting learning motivation as described in my first hypothesis above, I expect the HR certification to also influence how proactive HR professionals are more generally. I draw from Parker's work on proactivity to describe this relationship below.

“Can Do” – Credibility & Power. Some researchers have evidence to support that HR certifications provide a level of power and authority to HR professionals since they are obligated to respect a code of conduct to which they are held accountable (Fertig, 2011; Hsu & Yancey, 2015). Investing time and energy to complete an exam to attain the certification can be associated with feelings of competence (Fertig et al., 2009). The certified HR professionals may use their competence to demonstrate higher levels of leadership, influence, and problem solving due to the sense of authority that comes from being certified (Paxton, 2012). Therefore, HR certifications can lead to a status of credibility, power, and confidence (“can do” motivation) that have been shown to activate proactive behaviors (Parker et al., 2011).

“Reason to” – Greater Career Outcomes. One of the main selling factors of the HR certification is to achieve greater career success, such as salary increases (Wiley, 1992) and career advancement. In research by Wiley (1992), the participants reported that after completion of the HR certification exam they received higher salaries in comparison to non-certified HR professionals and that one-third of the participants also received promotions post certification. Studies have shown that individuals' participation in more learning and development activities can potentially lead to positive effects such as “increased chances for promotion, salary increases, and recognition by managers or peers” (Noe & Wilk, 1993, p. 292) (Dubin, 1990; Farr & Middlebrooks, 1990). When career advancement opportunities arise for certified HR professionals, proactive behaviors are consequently required to accomplish these new challenges, such as taking charge, problem-solving and change-oriented behaviors. Hence, I argue that the HR certification will increase proactive behaviors due to the potential career advancement opportunities that can result (i.e., the “reason to” motivation).

“Energized to” – Increased self-image. As seen in the preceding points, the HR certification has shown to be positively related to employees' satisfaction (Fertig et al., 2009),

personal accomplishment and pride (Wiley, 1992). These outcomes are types of positive affective states, which in turn have been linked to proactive behaviors in employees. A study was conducted on 428 certified HR professionals that were all part of a LinkedIn Group. The results of this study demonstrated that these HR professionals identified with the members in their group and created an image for these group members (Chiang et al., 2013). These members were able to learn from each other's experiences, share stories and increase self-esteem just by feeling like they contributed to their group. By gaining this support system and identity, certified HR professionals can be more confident and have the power to make more moves in their work and seek out new challenges. Hence, I expect that the HR certification will increase proactive behaviors due to the heightened feelings of higher self-image and positivity that it promotes ("energized to").

In sum, the achievement of an HR certification can lead HR professionals to feel powerful ("can do"), which can lead to higher status and positions ("reason to") and this can stimulate positivity ("energized to"). Due to the reasons above, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2: HR professionals with an HR certification have a higher motivation to be proactive than HR professionals without one.

The following sections will detail individual and contextual factors that may moderate the relationship between an HR certification and HR professionals' motivation to learn and proactive work behaviors.

Individual Factors as Moderators

Goal Orientation (GO). Setting goals for oneself is a human instinct in order to move further and progress. The GO theory provides an explanation of how individuals set goals and the reasons for them. There are two types of GOs: 1) Mastery GO, and 2) Performance GO (Dweck, 1986; Murphy & Alexander, 2000; Nicholls, 1984; Schunk et al., 2014; VandeWalle, 2001). Individuals with a high mastery GO engage in learning opportunities or tasks for skill development and truly commit to the entire learning process (Schunk et al., 2014). Individuals with high performance GO instead embark on learning opportunities for extrinsic rewards to portray their abilities to others and learn for quick results (Chadwick & Raver, 2015). The different GOs can detail individual differences in beliefs regarding the purpose of developing

skills: high mastery GO individuals believe that goals can be reached overtime and through persistence (i.e., skills are malleable) whereas high performance GO individuals select goals that do not present a challenge and mainly to demonstrate their abilities to others (skills are not malleable) (Chadwick & Raver, 2015; Dweck, 1986, 1975; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Gerhardt & Brown, 2006). Several studies have shown that individuals' GO can influence their learning and proactivity. Tuckey et al. (2002) showed that employees with high mastery GO have the tendency to ask for constructive criticism where they can learn and grow, thus increasing their motivation for learning and proactivity. Employees with high performance GO tend to have the opposite feeling toward feedback and constructive criticism. Studies have shown that this avoidance will stunt their motivation for proactive behaviors and learning opportunities to prevent perceptions of low performance or poor feedback (Dierdorff, 2010; Parker et al., 2010; Porath & Bateman, 2006; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997).

As mentioned earlier, one of the purposes for the HR certification's obligated hours of continuing education is to ensure that individuals maintain and enhance their skills and knowledge. An employee with a mastery GO will regard continuing education hours as an opportunity for professional development, whereas, an employee with a performance GO will complete the obligated hours to maintain membership. Additionally, an employee with a high mastery GO will use the acquired feedback and apply it to the work environment to improve or change the quality or process (Parker & Collins, 2010). HR certifications also have sporadic inspections, where consultants of the professional order review the work of the HR professional, which results in work improvement recommendations (Fertig et al., 2009). Individuals with a high mastery GO can potentially be motivated and "energized" by this requirement, whereas individuals with a high level of performance GO can be discouraged from such critique which can lead to a decrease in motivation.

As seen in the above literature, for individuals with a high mastery GO, it can be argued that the interest in learning and feedback seeking represents the "can do" motivational state while understanding the significance and consequences of taking advantage of these learning and feedback opportunities represents the "reason to" motivation state of why they would be interested to obtain the certification in the first place. In addition, professional assessments can energize HR professionals with a high mastery GO due to the positive and constructive feedback

that is received. For these reasons, I expect HR professionals' mastery GO to increase their motivation to learn and be proactive in response to their HR certification. I accordingly hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3a: GO will moderate the positive relationship between the HR certification and motivation to learn, such that the positive effect will be stronger for individuals with a higher mastery GO.

Hypothesis 3b: GO will moderate the positive relationship between the HR certification and proactive behaviors, such that the positive effect will be stronger for individuals with a higher mastery GO.

Age. Have you ever heard your colleague or friend say phrases like "I've paid my dues" or "I'm too old for this"? Over the years, employees change their behaviors and their mindset. Perhaps their desire to learn and engage in proactive behaviors can also change. Bertolino et al. (2011) surveyed 252 employees who worked for the municipal government on the relationship between proactive personality and training initiatives and interests. Their results show that age played a strong moderating effect on both of these relationships, demonstrating that training motivation was more prominent in younger professionals than older professionals. Lester and Dwyer (2012) identified that younger professionals are considered more "credential-oriented" (Lester & Dwyer, 2012, p. 587) since the levels of work experience could not be compensated for. A study by DeJoy (1997) discovered that early-career professionals (aged 25-34 years old) were interested in pursuing more education to increase their chances of obtaining a higher position and the level of interest decreased for professionals in later age groups.

In a similar vein, Price and Reichert (2017) conducted a study on 185 nurses on their perceptions of ongoing training and education in their field, grouping these individuals by career level: student/novice, early career, and mid-late career. In the novice/student grouping, the nurses depended on the training offered which was quintessential to their level of confidence, stage of growth and their future career. Early career nurses strongly appreciated training in the form of mentorship and guidance and recognized the importance of continuous training. Lastly, mid-to-late career nurses viewed training and development as a way to develop their skills but did not actively pursue such activities due to lack of managerial and organizational support for training

and development as a priority. They did not have the opportunity to attend as many training activities as an early career nurse because management felt that more training needs to be given to the novice group to develop faster. The author included that retention levels were low within the mid-late career group of nurses, which translates to mid to late career nurses losing the motivation to work in the field. Whereas, early career nurses are interested in pursuing continuous training opportunities to move forward and make changes.

I expect this trend to hold within an HR context as well. That is, younger HR professionals will have a higher thirst to learn and take on new challenges because they have an entire career ahead of them and growth is significant at this stage (“reason to”). For younger HR certified professionals who have already completed additional educational credentials, they will be potentially motivated by skill development and change-oriented projects (“can do” motivation), as mentioned above. By benefitting from these opportunities and guidance, younger professionals will exhibit higher levels of appreciation towards them (“energized to”). Given the arguments above, I expect younger HR professionals to be even more motivated to learn and be proactive in response to their HR certification.

Hypothesis 4a: Age moderates the positive relationship between the HR certification and a motivation to learn such that it will be stronger for younger HR professionals than for older HR professionals.

Hypothesis 4b Age moderates the positive relationship between the HR certification and proactive behaviors such that it will be stronger for younger HR professionals than for older HR professionals.

Contextual Factors as Moderators

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). Although HR certifications are an individual’s choice, the quality of employees’ relationship with their leader may influence their choices and decisions. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory is a model that defines how leaders will have higher quality relationships with certain members of the team, which can lead to particular advantages (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen, 1976). According to the LMX theory, the higher the quality of the relationship between the leader and the member, the greater the benefits and opportunities will be presented to the favoured members (Gooty et al., 2012). Some ways that

leaders present their favourite members with opportunities can be through feedback, first choice on projects, participation in difficult projects, exclusive information, and more decision making authority (Gooty et al., 2012; Liden & Graen, 1980).

Burris et al. (2008) discovered that high LMX relationships could increase the psychological safety of the members, which allows employees to speak up, voice concerns, and share ideas for learning and improvement (Parker et al. 2010). Additionally, a study conducted by Gerstner and Day (1997) determined a significant link between LMX and member competence as well as satisfaction. Leaders and members in high quality LMX relationships can result in increased member competence due to the frequent exchanges, such “as increased delegation (Leana, 1986), empowerment (Keller & Dansereau, 1995), mentoring (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994), and career progression (Wakabayashi et al., 1988)” (Gerstner and Day, 1997, p. 839) and “decision influence (e.g., Scandura et al., 1986)” (Gerstner and Day, 1997, p. 839).

Atwater and Carmeli (2009) revealed in a study of 193 employees who worked in a creative environment that higher levels of LMX stimulated their employees to be more engaged in their work and to generate higher performance outcomes. This study demonstrates that leaders can be the reason why employees are energized and motivated to do their work. Another study (Ansari et al., 2014) similarly showed that the type relationship between a leader and member will determine the level of performance of the member such that a positive dyadic relationship that encourages and cultivates positive emotions will lead to higher employee performance.

A strong LMX relationship can thus result in HR certified professionals voicing concerns and taking advantage of the presented learning opportunities because their leader makes them believe in their ability to do so (“can do” motivation), encourages them to do so (“reason to” motivation) and this in turn energizes the professionals to be proactive and bring about creative ideas without feelings of fear that they will be restricted. The quality of the relationship between the leader and the HR certified individual can also result in positive emotions and satisfaction, which can “energize” the professionals to engage in more learning and exhibit more proactive behaviors. I hypothesize that,

Hypothesis 5a: Leader-member exchange moderates the positive relationship between the HR certification and motivation to learn, such that the positive effect will be stronger with high levels of leader-member exchange.

Hypothesis 5b: Leader-member exchange moderates the positive relationship between the HR certification and proactive behaviors, such that the positive effect will be stronger with high levels of leader-member exchange.

Framework

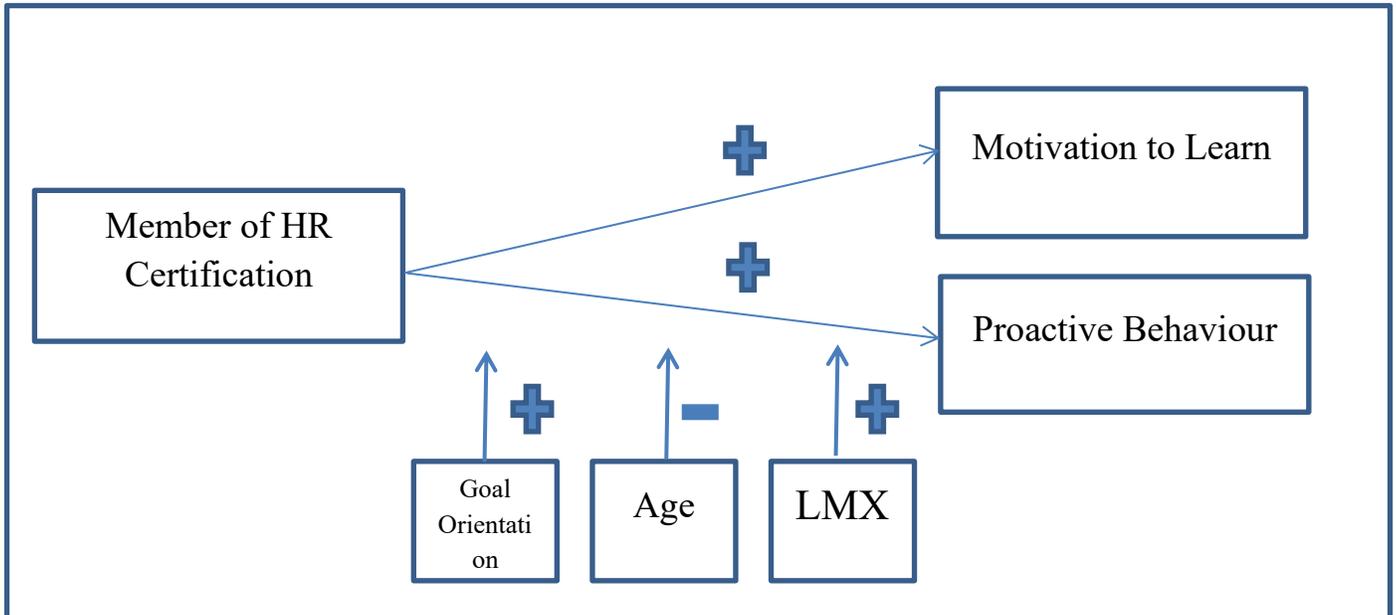


Figure 4: The framework of the impact on HR certifications on the motivation to learn and proactive behaviour, moderated by goal orientation, age and LMX.

Through the lens of the Proactive Motivation Model (Parker et al., 2010), this research aims to (a) identify a relationship between the HR certification and HR professionals' level of motivation to learn and be proactive, and (b) test specific individual (GO and age) and contextual (LMX) moderating factors that influence the strength of this relationship.

Methods

Design & Procedure

The design of this research was correlational. Participants were invited to complete an anonymous and voluntary online questionnaire that took around 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The online questionnaire was available in French and English to facilitate participation of HR professionals with different language preferences and abilities. Since the survey was sent out in both languages, a back translation was done to ensure the reliability of the terms and phrases used in either language (Cha et al, 2007; Douglas & Craig, 2007). There were a few ways that I used to recruit candidates to participate in this research: 1) I posted the survey on the Order of HR's (CRHA) LinkedIn page for members to complete; 2) I posted the survey on an HR private group on Facebook called "*Mes Collaborateurs RH*" which is a group of HR professionals only (i.e., members must qualify as HR professionals in order to be accepted; the owner of the group does a short screening of the members that want to be added by ensuring that they are HR professionals through a series of questions), and lastly; 3) the snowball effect was the main method that attracted the most participants. To elaborate on this last step, the survey was sent to approximately 50 HR professionals who I asked to send out to another 10-15 other HR professionals within or outside of their company. Participants had the choice to complete the questionnaire on their personal or work computer, or on their mobile device. Upon completion, the participants were rewarded with a 5-dollar gift certificate from Starbucks coffee shop.

Participants

The total number of participants in this study was 192 and all participants worked in the field of HR within Canada. 24 participants were removed due to incomplete or missing data. Almost half of the participants, 46% (n = 92), were members of the Human Resources Order. Most of the participants overall came from the following three different industries: Healthcare (20%), Transportation (16%) and Financial Services (15%). The average age of the participants was 35.23 years ($SD=8.18$). Females represented 61% (n = 117) of the sample. Independent t-tests were run on gender and the dependent variables of motivation to learn and proactive behavior, which demonstrated that there were no significant gender differences ($p>0.05$). Interestingly, 62% of the participants were of management status. The participants' education

levels varied from a high school graduate to a Master's degree or higher. Precisely, 67% of the participants had a bachelor's degree as their highest form of education and 22% had a master's degree or higher. Additionally, the HR professionals mostly worked in the function of recruitment (22.4%), training & development (17.7%) and strategic HR management (15.1%).

Adding further insights to the HR certified sample, I found that the most common reason certified HR professionals decided to become a member of the Order of HR was for increased credibility and title (23%), while the second most common reason was due to the desire for skill updating (9%). Of this same group, 68% of the time, the employers paid for their certification fees. Building on this, I found that the average hours of training per year for the group of participants who were members of the Human Resources Certification was 4.24, while it was only 1.98 for the group of participants who were not certified. This finding offers preliminary support for my predictions about the certification having a positive effect on HR professionals' learning motivation and proactivity.

It is important to point out that a small group of 52 participants, in addition to the 192 pool of participants, were excluded from the sample set as they did not clearly fit within the yes versus no groups for being certified. These 52 participants responded "No, but I am thinking of becoming certified in the near future (e.g. 1-3 years)" when asked whether they are a member of the HR Order. Individuals who are looking to become certified within 1-3 years may already be working toward pursuing the educational requirements of the certificate or are likely preparing for the exam considering the time it takes to do so. Due to this ambiguity, I decided to exclude this group of respondents in order to receive clearer results, meaning that the respondents who selected no had no intent on receiving a certification. The mean age of this excluded group of participants was 32 years old, where 24 years old was the youngest and 48 years old was the oldest to respond "working on it." Post-hoc analyses were conducted on this group to evaluate the effects of their possibly unique motivation to learn and proactive behavior. Please refer to Table 4 for more information on the mean differences across the three groups of respondents (HR Certification, Not HR Certified and Working Towards HR Certification).

Measures

HR Certification. The HR Certification construct was measured with one item, "Are you a member of the Human Resources Certification?" There were three possible responses: 1) "Yes," 2) "No, and I do not have any plans to obtain one," 3) "No, but I am thinking of becoming certified in the near future (e.g. 1-3 years)." For the purposes of my hypothesis testing, I split this variable into participants that did have a certification (Yes Group) and those that did not (No Group). The Yes Group was a dummy variable coded as "1" and the No Group was coded as "0". For additional analyses, I also included the third group that responded that they were thinking about obtaining a certification (maybe group) in which case the groups were coded as "1" for the Yes Group, "2" for the No Group and "3" for the Maybe Group.

Mastery Goal Orientation. To measure mastery GO, I used Vandewalle et al.'s (2001) GO questionnaire, which has been adapted from past research (Vandewalle & Cummings, 1997). Also known as the "Learning GO" (Vandewalle et al., 2001), there are four items that measure the mastery goal orientation which were used and assessed on a 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) Likert scale (e.g. "I enjoy challenging and difficult tasks at work where I'll learn new skills."). Cronbach's alpha was 0.69.

Motivation to Learn. Three items from Noe and Schmitt's (1986) Motivation to Learn scale was used (e.g. "I try to learn as much as I can from training programs"), using a 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha for this Motivation to Learn scale was 0.57.

Leader-Member Exchange. Leader-Member Exchange was measured using the LMX 7 scale, which has seven items, (e.g. "How well does your leader (follower) understand your job problems and needs?") on a 5 point Likert scale from 1 (not a bit) to 5 (a great deal) (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995). Cronbach's alpha was 0.86.

Age. To measure age, I used one item "What is your age?"

Proactive Behaviors. To measure proactive behaviors, I used ten items that were extracted from Morrison and Phelps' (1999) Taking Charge scale (e.g. "You often try to change organizational rules or policies that are non-productive or counterproductive."). The items were

measured on a 1 (very infrequently) to 5 (very frequently) Likert Scale. The Cronbach's alpha for Taking Charge scale was 0.85.

Covariates. I controlled for self-efficacy and positive and negative affect because research shows that these individual difference variables may influence a professional's motivation to learn and their proactive behaviors, as well as possibly their interest in pursuing the HR certification. In terms of self-efficacy, Crant (2000), Morrison and Phelps (1999) and Parker (2000) describe and demonstrate the important role of self-efficacy for proactive behavior (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Building on this, Schoenfeld et al. (2017) conducted a study on 228 undergraduate accounting students that revealed that higher levels of self-efficacy were positively and significantly related to the desire of becoming a certified public accountant. Similar to the human resources field, accountants can choose to become certified, making this relevant evidence for the current study. Additionally, for motivation to learn, various authors have conducted studies using self-efficacy as a required element for trainee motivation and knowledge transfer (Carlson et al., 2000; Tracey et al., 2001; Tai, 2006). In terms of affect, several studies show that positive and negative affect can strongly influence individuals' motivation to learn and proactive behaviors. For example, negative affect decreases proactive behaviors (Ashforth et al., 2007; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2009; Grant et al., 2009; Wu & Parker, 2011) and the motivation to learn (Sonnentag, 2003). Hence, I included these variables as covariates to take out any possible confounding or spurious relationships effects. To control for self-efficacy, I included the 10-item Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The items were measured on a 1 (Not at all true) to 4 (Exactly true) point scale ("I can usually handle whatever comes my way"). The Cronbach's alpha for the Generalized Self-Efficacy scale was 0.74. To control for negative and positive affect, I used the 20-item Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (Watson et al., 1988). The items are measured on a 1 (Very slightly or not at all) to 5 (Extremely) Likert Scale. The Cronbach's alpha for the positive affect was 0.73 and for the negative affect was .81.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

All descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables are specified in Table 1. Looking at the variables in my model, the only significant positive correlations were between the moderator mastery GO and the dependent variables of proactive behavior ($r = .31, p < 0.01$) and motivation to learn ($r = .23, p < 0.01$). Thus, as mastery GO increases proactive behavior and motivation to learn increase as well. Importantly, the covariates were significantly related to several of my model variables and were thus retained for all analyses.

Primary Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Before conducting hypothesis testing, I centered my variables to decrease nonessential multicollinearity for the moderation analyses in particular (Iacobucci et al., 2015). Hierarchical linear regression was used to test Hypothesis 1 through 5 (see Table 2 and 3). In model 1, the control variables (self-efficacy, positive affect, and negative affect) were added. In model 2, the independent variable (HR certification) was added. In models 3, 4 and 5, the moderators (mastery GO, age and LMX, respectively) were added. The following sections will be organized by dependent variable; beginning with motivation to learn and ending with proactive behavior.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.

| Variables | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---------------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1. Positive Affect | 3.774 | 0.564 | (0.73) | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Negative Affect | 1.968 | 0.557 | 0.085 | (0.81) | | | | | | | |
| 3. Self-Efficacy | 4.008 | 0.362 | .314** | -.267** | (0.74) | | | | | | |
| 4. HR Certification | 0.479 | 0.501 | -0.017 | -0.024 | 0.125 | - | | | | | |
| 5. Goal Orientation (Mastery) | 4.202 | 0.519 | .161* | -0.101 | .209** | 0.125 | (0.69) | | | | |
| 6. Age | 35.245 | 8.180 | 0.032 | -.229** | 0.113 | -0.039 | -0.034 | - | | | |
| 7. LMX | 3.774 | 0.684 | .515** | 0.004 | .212** | -0.042 | -0.124 | -0.025 | (0.86) | | |
| 8. MTL (Motivation to Learn) | 3.811 | 0.533 | 0.141 | -0.036 | 0.101 | 0.132 | .232** | -0.043 | 0.028 | (0.57) | |
| 9. Taking Charge (Proactive Behavior) | 3.847 | 0.566 | .300** | 0.121 | .299** | 0.111 | .310** | 0.103 | 0.117 | 0.129 | (0.85) |

Notes. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

HR Certification (0 = No Certification, 1 = Yes Certification)

Self-Efficacy, Positive Affect, Negative Affect, Goal Orientation, Age and LMX variables were centered at their means.

Control variables: Self-Efficacy, Positive Affect and Negative Affect variables.

Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are the values on the diagonal in parentheses.

Motivation to Learn

All results reported in the following section can be found in Table 2 and Figures 2 and 3. In model 1, the control variables (self-efficacy, positive affect and negative affect) did not explain a significant amount of variance ($B = .07, ns, B = .13, p < .10, B = -.03, ns$). Model 2 included the HR certification variable, which improved the overall model fit by 2% ($\Delta R^2 = .02, p < .10$.) The HR certification was positively and marginally significantly related to motivation to learn, meaning that HR professionals with the certification have a marginally higher motivation to learn than those without the certification. This result therefore partially supports Hypothesis 1 ($B = .14, p = .07$). In model 3, the first moderator of mastery GO was added as well as the interaction variable between HR certification and mastery GO. The addition of these variables did not explain a significant amount of variance ($\Delta R^2 = .00, ns$) and the interaction term between HR certification and mastery GO was not significant ($B = -.14, ns$). Thus, Hypothesis 3a is not supported. However, it is interesting to note that the direct effect of mastery goal orientation on motivation to learn was positive and significant ($B = .14, p < .01$). In model 4, the second moderator, age, and its interaction variable were added, which led to a marginally significant 2% increase in overall variance explained ($\Delta R^2 = .02, p = .06$). The interaction term between the HR certification and age was negative and marginally significantly related to motivation to learn ($B = -.02, p = .06$). A visual representation can be found in Figure 2, illustrating how the certification has a positive effect on the motivation to learn for younger HR professionals. However, certification does not have an effect on older employees as hypothesized. Thus, Hypothesis 4a is partially supported. Finally, in model 5, the third moderator of LMX and its interaction variable with the HR certification were added, which increased the overall variance explained by 3% ($\Delta R^2 = .03, p < .05$). The interaction between LMX and HR certification was negative and significant ($B = -.28, p < .05$), however, this relationship was not in the predicted direction, thereby not supporting Hypothesis 5a. That is, in a workplace with low LMX, certification plays an important role on an HR professional's level of motivation to learn. However, as the LMX increases, certification becomes less important. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 3.

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Motivation to Learn

| Model Parameters | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | | Model 5 | |
|----------------------------|--------------|------|--------------|------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| | B (SE) | p | B (SE) | p | B (SE) | p | B (SE) | p | B (SE) | p |
| Self-Efficacy | .070 (.119) | .554 | .075 (.118) | .525 | 0.035 (.117) | 0.765 | 0.072 (.120) | 0.546 | 0.065 (.117) | 0.575 |
| Positive Affect | .127 (.074) | .088 | .127 (.074) | .088 | 0.105 (.073) | 0.153 | 0.172 (.074) | 0.02 | 0.154 (.083) | 0.066 |
| Negative Affect | -.033 (.073) | .648 | -.029 (.073) | .686 | -0.019 (.072) | 0.795 | -0.029 (.073) | 0.689 | -0.035 (.072) | 0.625 |
| HR Certification | | | .141 (.077) | .068 | 0.117 (0.076) | 0.127 | 0.164 (.075) | 0.032 | 0.139 (.076) | 0.068 |
| Goal Orientation (Mastery) | | | | | 0.256 (0.096) | 0.009 | | | | |
| HRCertXGoMa | | | | | -0.14 (.149) | 0.35 | | | | |
| Age | | | | | | | 0.006 (.007) | 0.378 | | |
| HRCertXAge | | | | | | | -0.018 (.009) | 0.055 | | |
| LMX | | | | | | | | | 0.127 (.096) | 0.185 |
| HRCertXLMX | | | | | | | | | -0.283 (.114) | 0.013 |
| Constant | 3.812 (.039) | .000 | 3.744 (.053) | .000 | 3.761 (.053) | .000 | 3.736 (.052) | .000 | 3.742 (.053) | .000 |
| ΔF | 1.627 | | 3.379 | | 0.877 | | 3.721 | | 6.224* | |
| R ² | .025 | | .043 | | .082 | | .079 | | .077 | |
| ΔR ² | .025 | | .017 | | .004 | | .019 | | .031 | |

Notes. * Significant at the 0.05 level, HR Certification (0 = No Certification, 1 = Yes Certification).

Self-Efficacy, Positive Affect, Negative Affect, Goal Orientation, Age and LMX variables were centered at their means.

Control variables: Self-Efficacy, Positive Affect and Negative Affect variables.

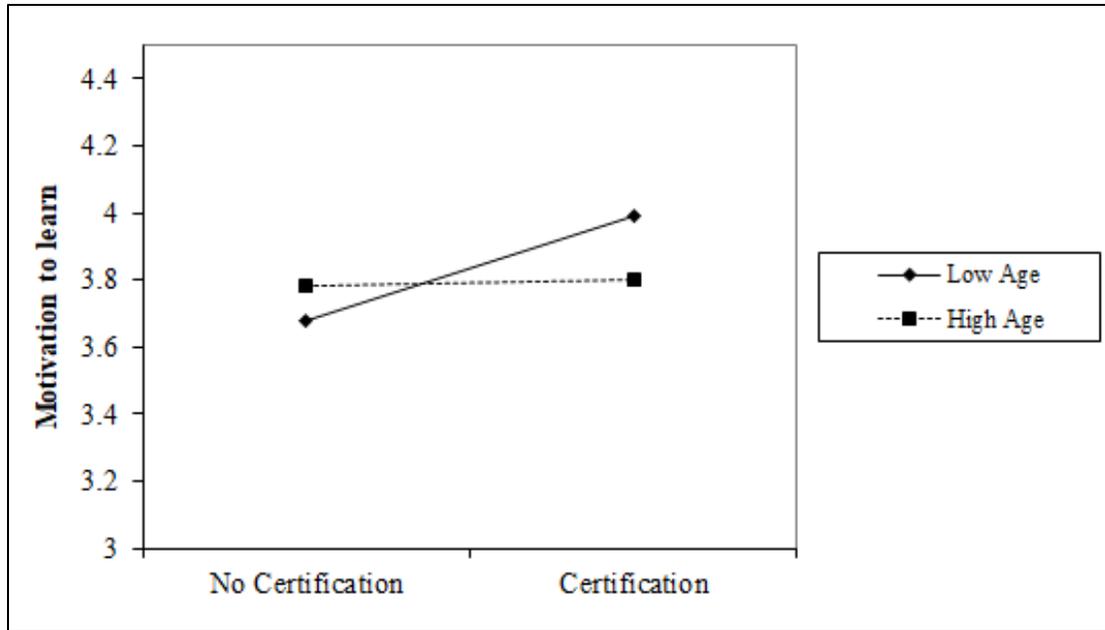


Figure 5: Hypothesis 4a testing: Age moderating the relationship between certification and motivation to learn.

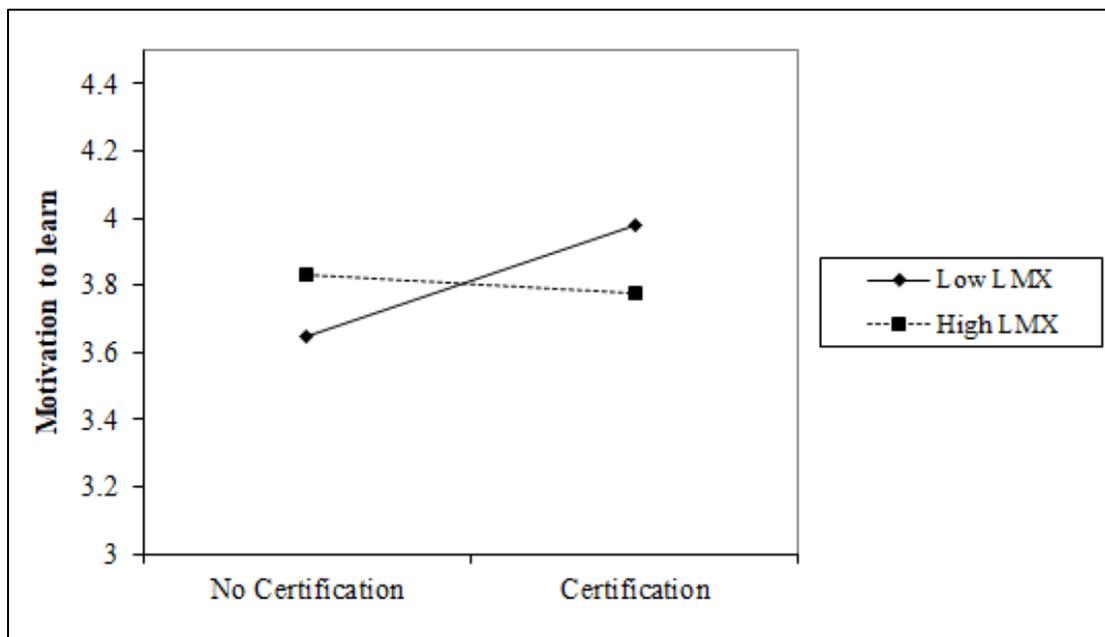


Figure 6: Hypothesis 5a testing: LMX moderating the relationship between certification and motivation to learn.

Proactive Behavior

All results for proactive behaviors discussed in the following section can be found in Table 3. In model 1, all control variables (self-efficacy, positive and negative affect) were significant ($B = .45, p < .01$, $B = .20, p < .01$, $B = .18, p < .05$), but did not explain a significant change in the overall variance ($\Delta R^2 = .17, p = ns$). In model 2, the addition of the independent variable of HR certification revealed a marginally significant effect on proactive behavior ($B = .14, p = .07$), thus partially supporting Hypothesis 2 in that being certified leads to more proactivity. This variable addition improved the overall model fit by 18% ($\Delta R^2 = .18, p < .10$.) In model 3 and 4, the moderators of mastery GO and age, along with their interaction terms were added. Precisely, the interaction term between HR certification and mastery GO was not significant ($B = -.08, ns$) and neither was the interaction term between HR certification and age ($B = .00, ns$). Furthermore, the addition of these variables did not explain a significant change in the overall variance: mastery GO ($\Delta R^2 = .00, ns$) and age ($\Delta R^2 = .00, ns$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3b and 4b were not supported. In model 5, the moderator LMX and its interaction term were added, which increased the overall variance explained by 2% ($\Delta R^2 = .02, p < .05$). The moderation of LMX was significant ($B = -.22, p = .05$) but negative (refer to Figure 4), thus not supporting Hypothesis 5b. Similar to motivation to learn, as LMX decreases, certification has a positive impact on the level of proactive behavior of the HR professional.

Overall, the results demonstrate that certification can impact a professional's motivation to learn or proactive behaviors, but interestingly it depends on the level of support from one's leader and the HR professional's age.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Proactive Behavior

| Model Parameters | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | | Model 5 | |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|---------------|-------|--------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| | B (SE) | p | B (SE) | p | B (SE) | p | B (SE) | p | B (SE) | p |
| Self-Efficacy | 0.447 (.116) | 0.000 | 0.452 (.116) | 0.000 | 0.393 (.113) | 0.001 | 0.418 (.121) | 0.001 | 0.445 (.115) | 0.000 |
| Positive Affect | 0.195 (.073) | 0.008 | 0.195 (.073) | 0.008 | 0.166 (.071) | 0.02 | 0.192 (.075) | 0.011 | 0.221 (.082) | 0.008 |
| Negative Affect | 0.184 (.072) | 0.011 | 0.188 (.071) | 0.009 | 0.204 (.069) | 0.004 | 0.212 (.074) | 0.004 | 0.184 (.071) | 0.011 |
| HR Certification | | | 0.139 (.075) | 0.066 | 0.105 (.074) | 0.156 | 0.148 (.077) | 0.054 | 0.137 (.075) | 0.068 |
| Goal Orientation (Mastery) | | | | | 0.261 (.073) | 0.000 | | | | |
| HRCertXGoMa | | | | | -0.080 (.144) | .582 | | | | |
| Age | | | | | | | 0.008 (.007) | 0.254 | | |
| HRCertXAge | | | | | | | 0.001 (.009) | 0.935 | | |
| LMX | | | | | | | | | 0.091 (.094) | 0.335 |
| HRCertXLMX | | | | | | | | | -0.221 (.112) | 0.05 |
| Constant | 3.847 (.038) | .000 | 3.78 (.052) | .000 | 3.796 (0.51) | .000 | 3.773 (.053) | .000 | 3.778 (.052) | .000 |
| ΔF | 12.361 | | 3.423 | | .304 | | .007 | | 3.892* | |
| R2 | .165 | | .015 | | .235 | | .182 | | .200 | |
| $\Delta R2$ | .165 | | .181 | | .001 | | .000 | | .017 | |

Notes. * Significant at the 0.05 level, HR Certification (0 = No Certification, 1 = Yes Certification).
 Self-Efficacy, Positive Affect, Negative Affect, Goal Orientation, Age and LMX variables were centered at their means.
 Control variables: Self-Efficacy, Positive Affect and Negative Affect variables.

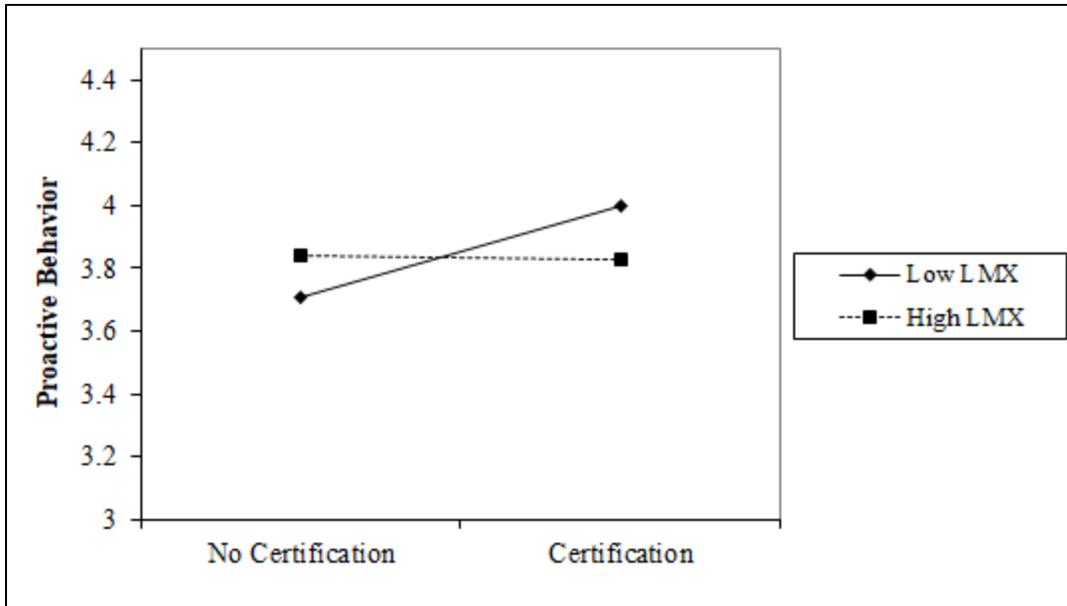


Figure 4: Hypothesis 5b testing: LMX moderating the relationship between certification and proactive behavior.

Post-Hoc Analysis

I next examined whether there were any meaningful differences across not just the two groups of HR certified members versus not, but also across the group of employees considering the HR certification in the future. I used the one-way ANOVA including and excluding the covariates and found that there were statistically significant differences between group means for motivation to learn ($F(2,241)= 4.92, p < .01$) but not for proactive behavior ($F(2,241)= 1.32, p > .05$). For motivation to learn, the group with the highest mean was the small group of 52 participants ($M= 4.02, SD=.51$) that responded “No, but I am thinking of becoming certified in the near future (e.g.1-3 years)”, thus demonstrating that they were the most motivated to learn. The mean for the certified group was 3.88 ($SD=.48$) and for the not certified group it was 3.74 ($SD=.57$). Interestingly, this group also had a younger mean age and were mainly women, which could help to explain these results as I elaborate upon in the discussion section. The mean differences across the different groups of respondents are revealed in Table 4.

Table 4: Mean Differences across Different Groups of Respondents

| <i>Variables</i> | HR Certification | No HR Certification | Working Towards HR Certification |
|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Age | 34.91 | 35.55 | 32.10 |
| Gender | Male | 37 | 4 |
| | Female | 55 | 48 |
| Training Hours | 4.24 | 1.98 | 4.96 |
| Motivation to Learn | 3.88 | 3.74 | 4.02 |
| Proactive Behaviors | 3.91 | 3.79 | 3.79 |

Discussion

Despite the numerous studies that focus on the reasons for why HR professionals get certified, there is little to no research on the impact of HR professional’s motivations and behaviors once they are certified. This is a critical omission in light of the pressure put on many employees and their organizations to encourage certification to take place, not to mention the time and financial costs involved with employees pursuing this option. To address this omission, this study investigates the value of the HR certification for employers as well as for the HR

professionals themselves. According to the results from this study of 192 HR professionals across industries in Canada, the HR certification has a marginal impact on an employee's motivation to learn and proactive behaviors, as was hypothesized. Looking at possible moderators that may help shed further light on these relationships, I first looked at the role of HR professionals' mastery GO. I did not find a significant interaction, but rather a significant main effect such that mastery oriented HR professionals, certified or not, were more likely to be motivated to learn and be proactive. This is perhaps because a mastery GO is having the desire to learn more because you intrinsically want to do so, regardless of any external certification requirements. Looking at the role of age, I found that younger HR professionals that are certified are more motivated to learn than older HR professionals. Based on the research discussed in previous sections, younger HR professionals can potentially benefit more from learning opportunities and have a higher desire to exploit these challenges to advance in their career (and possibly also because they have less experience to provide them with credibility in their careers). Lastly, I found a significant moderated effect of LMX, but not in the expected direction. More specifically, the results indicated that the HR certification is more important in a non-supportive leadership environment. The reason for this is most likely due to the fact that in a non-supportive environment, professionals are not provided with learning opportunities or new challenges and this is where their certification will provide them with that extra confidence and independence to scout out their own learning opportunities and seek out their own new challenges. Whereas in a supportive environment, if your leader is helpful and wants to develop you, then you are in less of a position to require HR certification as you are being developed and challenged organically in your work with the help of your leader.

Offering some more nuance to these findings, I also looked at a third group of respondents who answered that they would consider pursuing the HR certification in the future. This group was more motivated to learn than the other two groups who either were or were not certified, but it is important to note that they also had a younger mean age by around three years and were mainly women. A lower age group that is intrigued and motivated to learn is aligned with previous research that states that younger employees are thirstier for knowledge so that they can advance in their careers (DeJoy, 1997; Price & Reichert, 2017). In this sample, I also found that the women participants were more motivated to learn than the men, further explaining this

result. Following this interesting result, I would recommend future researchers to further investigate the impact of gender on learning motivation at different ages.

This study is important for organizations and employers to know that when an HR certification is placed on a job posting, there are possible positive implications that follow. In particular, these certified HR professionals are more likely to be motivated to learn and to be proactive, especially if they are in an earlier career stage and even if they work in a non-supportive environment. Hence, recruiting certified HR professionals or supporting current HR professionals to get certified can benefit an organization in terms of their proactivity and learning motivation. In other words, when hiring HR certified professionals, employers can expect employees who are more likely to remain up to date with the newest trends, research and technology in the field as well as seek out challenging opportunities and feedback. Employers should be prepared with resources, either monetary or learning opportunities, to fulfill the expectations of these certified professionals.

This study also provides a conceptual contribution by being one of the first studies to further look into the behavioral consequences of the HR certification using the proactive motivation model (Parker et al., 2010). The guiding principles of the three motivational states in this model, “can do, reason to and energized to”, offers justified reasons for why HR certified professionals would be more motivated to learn and exhibit proactive behaviors. This proactive motivation model is therefore helpful to understand why the HR certification influences HR professionals’ desire to develop their skills, learn more, seek challenges, and take charge. I encourage future scholars to consider using this model to assess other important types of behaviors and motivations that may be the result of HR professionals’ certification, such as organizational commitment or employee engagement

Limitations and Future Research

While this study is one of the first to investigate whether the HR certification produces its intended effects on employees’ motivation for learning and proactivity, it does come with some limitations that I discuss below to encourage future research on this important topic. To begin, I used a cross sectional, self-reported survey to collect my data. While this method was strategically chosen to be able to reach out to as many HR professionals across industries in

Canada, it is widely critiqued for its inability to show causation and to rule out reverse causation. That is, perhaps being more motivated to learn and be proactive can lead to an HR professional becoming HR certified. Similarly, this research design may be influenced by individuals' lack of attention or biases and moods. I took steps to reduce some of these threats in line with recent recommendations urging scholars to recognize the possible benefits of cross sectional research (Spector, 2019). In particular, the certification is an objective measure (you do or you do not have it), which reduces the concern about self-reporting such information, especially in an anonymous survey. I also controlled for possible confounding variables and spurious relationships whereby research suggests that individuals with higher self-confidence and positive affect as well as lower negative affect may be more likely to be motivated and to engage in learning and proactive behaviors and to thus possibly have the HR certification. Above and beyond these covariates, my results still produced some important marginally significant results.

Further reducing concerns about the threat of reverse causality, I ran post-hoc analyses that indicate that the main reason the HR professionals in my sample became certified was to gain more credibility in their careers and not because they were proactive or motivated to learn. Precisely 23% of the 192 participants chose "Credibility and Title" as the main motivator to obtain the HR certification. Regardless of the direction of the relationship, it is evident that the HR certification would benefit organizations and employers. In both directions, employees that are HR certified are also more motivated to learn and exhibit proactive behaviors. Having said that, I recommend further research on this important topic that includes objective data as a measurement, such as performance evaluations results, to prevent the biases mentioned above. To add, in order to reduce common method bias, the study should also be conducted at different time points to increase the validity of the responses. Future research should thus look into conducting this study in a longitudinal setting, separating the independent and dependent variables by time. However, it is worth noting that while a longitudinal study is ideal for establishing internal validity, it would be difficult to manipulate whether people have the certification or not through experimental designs.

This research was only conducted in the Human Resources field, thereby limiting the criteria of potential respondents to HR professionals only. However, another field in the same situation, such as accountants or project managers, who have the choice to become certified or not, should be tested in future research to examine the generalizability of this study and its

theoretical framing. To build on this, research has revealed that HR certifications are demanded more often in particular industries, such as manufacturing and health care (Aguinis et al, 2005; Gee et al, 2019; Lyons et al. 2012). Future research should accordingly investigate the role of industry for the impact of certification on employees' motivation to learn and proactivity.

To continue, there were two variables, motivation to learn and mastery goal orientation, that were under the acceptable point to be considered reliable measures of 0.70. They were 0.57 and 0.69, respectively. Both of the scales used to measure these variables were validated from reputable sources (Noe & Wilk, 1993; VandeWalle et al., 2001), which produced reliable Cronbach's alpha when used in different studies. While this is a limitation of this study, Lance et al. (2006) have argued that the value of 0.7 is an arbitrary number that is invalid to be used as a measurement to guarantee reliability. Still, I encourage future researchers to consider using different scales to measure motivation to learn and mastery goal orientation variables in this and other contexts. For example, I would recommend that future researchers use scales with more items such as Tsai et al.'s (2007) Willingness to Learn Questionnaire, which has five items as opposed to Noe and Wilk's Motivation to Learn scale that has only three items. For mastery GO, I recommend scholars to use Midgley et al. (1998) Goal Orientation Scales that use six items per construct rather than four items from the VandeWalle et al. (2001) version. It may also be important to alter the context of the questions to become more work environment based rather than academic.

It is worth noting that although age was used as a proxy for career stage it may not have been the right measurement to use for that variable despite the numerous amount of studies that have used age for this purpose. Over the course of an employee's professional career, an employee can change positions and companies frequently at any point in their life. Determining what career stage an employee can be a complex matter. However, according to several studies (Bertolino et al., 2011; Cohen, 1991; Duarte & Lopes, 2018; Lam et al., 2012; Super, 1980) age was used as a measurement of career stage because it most demonstrates "indicators of career development models" (Cohen, 1991, p. 259). Since this paper was geared towards the identification of an employee's motivation to learn and proactive behavior it seemed relevant to use age to indicate the proper career stage of the professional. However, it would be interesting to add the question of career stage in the survey to see if career stage would capture a different impact on an employee's learning motivation and proactive behaviors. Perhaps adding

supplemental questions such as “How many years have you been in this position?” and “How many years of experience do you have in the field of HR?” would have produced other, more nuanced insights.

In future research, the person-job fit should also be considered when looking further into the impact of HR certification on HR professionals’ motivation to learn or exhibit proactive behavior. According to the authors, Saeed and Asghar (2012), person-job fit strengthened the relationship between training and motivation and employee performance. In a similar vein person-job fit can strengthen the relationship between certification and motivation to learn and be proactive. The higher the person-job fit the more the employee will want to develop and make changes in their environment. It would be important to look into this variable to ensure that the employee is not unmotivated due to lack of poor fit.

Another important variable that should be considered in future research is organizational commitment. Organizational commitment has an impact on an employee’s motivation to learn (Joo & Park, 2010) and level of proactivity (Joo & Lim, 2009). As an employee feels committed to his or her organization, the motivation and behaviors will therefore come as a consequence, regardless of certification or not. I encourage researchers to look into the effect of employee’s level of organizational commitment to identify the impact on their motivations related to learning and levels of proactivity.

The function or expertise of HR that the professional specializes in might be another potential moderator between the relationship of certifications and motivations/behaviors. HR professionals should possess general competencies (e.g., employee relations management), but will also possess more specific competencies (e.g., employment law) depending on their function (Ulrich et al., 1995; Yeung et al., 1996). Ngo et al. (1998) identified that the HR management practice of training and development and compensation increased the performance of the organization. These results contest that different HR functions can potentially have a different influence on the performance or outcome of an individual organization. In the future research section of the Putka et al. (2015) study, it was mentioned that the types of HR expertise evaluated in the study can potentially have more impact than the results revealed. It would be interesting to further look into these special competencies per function of HR and assess their

impact on an HR professional's motivation to learn and proactive behavior due to being certified or not.

Conclusion

Certifications that are not obligatory are required to more frequently justify their existence than certifications that are obligatory in order to practice in the profession. This was one of the first studies to bring light to the value of certification for HR professionals in regards to their motivation to learn and their proactive behaviors. The results of this study reveal that certified HR professionals are more motivated to learn and exhibit more proactive behaviors in the workplace compared to non-certified HR professionals. If these professionals are younger or have poor relationships with their leader, the certification plays a particularly important role for their motivation to learn and be proactive. Overall, this study suggests that when HR employees choose to become certified, they are more in control of their career development and next move.

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Appendix

Read each question below carefully and select the number that best corresponds with your behaviors in your current job.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Very infrequently | Fairly infrequently | Occasionally | Fairly frequently | Very frequently |

PROACTIVE BEHAVIORS - TAKING CHARGE SCALE (Morrison & Phelps, 1999)

- You often try to adopt improved procedures for doing your job.
- You often try to change how his or her job is executed in order to be more effective.
- You often try to bring about improved procedures for the work unit or department.
- You often try to institute new work methods that are more effective for the company.
- You often try to change organizational rules or policies that are non-productive . or counterproductive.
- You often make constructive suggestions for improving how things operate within the organization.
- You often try to correct a faulty procedure or practice.
- You often try to eliminate redundant or unnecessary procedures.
- You often try to implement solutions to pressing organizational problems.
- You often try to introduce new structures, technologies, or approaches to improve efficiency.

Read each question below carefully and select the number that best corresponds with your attitudes and experiences in your current job.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither | Agree | Strongly Agree |

MOTIVATION TO LEARN SCALE (Noe & Schmitt, 1996)

- I try to learn as much as I can from training programs
- I believe I tend to learn more from training programs than others
- I am usually motivated to learn skills emphasized in training programs.

Read each question below carefully and select the number that best corresponds with your attitudes and experiences in your current job.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither | Agree | Strongly Agree |

GOAL ORIENTATION - MASTERY APPROACH SCALE (VandeWalle et al., 2001 adapted from VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997)

- I am willing to select a challenging work assignment that I can learn a lot from.
- I often look for opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge.
- I enjoy challenging and difficult tasks at work where I'll learn new skills.
- For me, further development of my work ability is important enough to take risks.

This next set of questions refers to your manager's leadership. Please refer to your immediate manager when answering these questions. Select the number that corresponds best with your opinion.

LMX – LMX 7 SCALE (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)

- Do you know where you stand with your leader ...[and] do you usually know how satisfied your leader is with what you do?
- How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs?
- How well does your leader recognize your potential?
- Regardless of how much formal authority your leader has built into his or her position, what are the chances that your leader would use his or her power to help you solve problems in your work?
- Again, regardless of the amount of formal authority your leader has, what are the chances that he or she would "bail you out" at his or her expense?
- I have enough confidence in my leader that I would defend and justify his or her decision if he or she were not present to do so.
- How would you characterize your working relationship with your leader ?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----------------------|--------------------|---------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Extremely ineffective | Worse than Average | Average | Better than average | Extremely effective |

Read each question below carefully and select the number that best corresponds with your attitudes and experiences in your current job.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Not at all true | Hardly true | Moderately true | Exactly true |

SELF-EFFICACY SCALE (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995)

- I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough
- If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.

THE HR CERTIFICATION AND ITS EFFECTS

- It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.
- I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.
- Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.
- I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.
- I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.
- When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.
- If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.
- I can usually handle whatever comes my way.

When responding to the questions below, think about feelings you have. Please indicate how you have felt at work over the past few weeks.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Very Slightly or Not at All | A Little | Moderately | Quite a Bit | Extremely |

PANAS SCALE (Watson et al., 1988)

- Interested
- Distressed
- Excited
- Upset
- Strong
- Guilty
- Scared
- Hostile
- Enthusiastic
- Proud
- Irritable
- Alert
- Ashamed
- Inspired
- Nervous
- Determined
- Attentive
- Jittery
- Active
- Afraid

DEMOGRAPHICS

- Are you :
 - Male
 - Female
 - Prefer not to respond

- What is your age? _____
- What industry do you work in?
 - a. Construction
 - b. Financial Services
 - c. Manufacturing
 - d. Transportation
 - e. Government
 - f. Healthcare
 - g. Retail
 - h. Media
 - i. Other

- **Are you in a management position?**
 - Yes
 - No

- **What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?**
 - Less than high school
 - High school graduate
 - College degree
 - University Certificate
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Master's degree or higher
 - Other, please specify _____

- In which function of HR do you mostly work in?
 - a. Recruitment
 - b. Training & Development
 - c. Compensation & Benefits
 - d. Occupational Health and Safety
 - e. Organizational Development

- f. Strategic HR Management
- g. Labour Relations
- h. HR Information Systems

HR CERTIFICATION

- Do you have your HR Certification (e.g. CHRA, CHRP)?

- Yes
- No, and do not have any plans to obtain one
- No, but I am thinking of becoming certified in the near future (e.g.1-3 years)

- If yes, why did you get your HR Certification?

- Career Advancement
- Skill Updating
- Request from employer
- Credibility and Title
- Increased salary
- Other, please specify: _____

- Does your employer pay for your HR Certification annual fees?

- Yes
- No
- I have not asked

- Does your employer pay for your learning opportunities affiliated with the HR Certification?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------|--------------|-----------|--------------|------------|
| Rarely | Occasionally | Sometimes | Fairly often | Very often |

- How many hours of training have you completed, on average, this year? _____