HR Executives' Perception of Academic Research

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One of the goals of academic research is to contribute to managerial practice. Within the context of Human Resource Management, HR executives belong to the reading audience of scholar publications. This research builds on the study, undertaken fifteen years ago by Terpstra and Rozell (1998), who investigated perceptions of HR executives about scientific research, and found that perceived accessibility and relevance of scientific information, as well as overall skepticism scored low, where accessibility was perceived most negative. Since then, an enormous amount of new topics and discussions emerged within the HR academic literature and technological developments enhanced information and knowledge exchange. Given latest HRM developments, modernization of the workforce management and improved information exchange, this research is inspired by the assumption that nowadays perceptions of HR executives about academic research differ from the ones fifteen years ago. By means of 10 in-depth interviews with HR executives, we found that accessibility is perceived high as scientific HR information can be obtained easily, especially through the internet support. HR executives perceive scientific information useful if it is practically relevant, timely, understandable and presented in an appropriate amount. It was found that scientific publications are perceived not only useful but actually useable if they add value through practical examples or guidelines for implementation, and if authors of publications or institutions are highly reputable. Skepticism is found to be mainly low, indicating willingness of HR practitioners to undertake effort to apply academic findings. Consequently, if HR scholars want their academic research to be read, valued and applied by HR practitioners, we advise them to focus on providing practically relevant, timely information that is understandable, appropriately presented, includes practical examples and guidelines, and addresses reputation issues, so that expectations of a broader audience are met.

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE NEED TO CLARIFY PRACTITIONERS' VIEW ON ACADEMIC RESEARCH

The strategic focus of Human Resource Management (HRM) has gained more and more importance within the last decades and was highly addressed within academic research (Gong, Law, Chang, & Xin, 2009; Liu, Combs, Jr, & Ireland, 2007). However, an issues is represented by the ongoing debate of HRM's real contribution to enhanced organizational performance (Fleetwood & Hesketh, 2006). Academic results have shown differences in the outcomes so that the real impact of HRM on overall performance remains unclear which raises the question if academic research on HRM's impact on firm performance and is still relevant and trustworthy as it was found by Terpstra and Rozell (1998). The researchers investigated HR executives' perception of academic research regarding the three factors (1) relevance, (2) accessibility and (3) skepticism. The overall findings indicated that HR executives assess the accessibility of academic research and its findings as the most negative factor as academic journals primary address academics rather than practitioners. Furthermore academic research literature is considered as too theoretical and contains too few recommendations for executives. Thus the practical relevance was found to be low as well. Skepticism regarding academic literature was identified as surprisingly low, so HR executives did not show a lack of trust concerning academic literature. As the research has been conducted about fifteen years ago, it seems to be relevant to investigate the current situation of HR executives' perception of academic research. Although academic research and its results are considered to represent a contribution to managerial practice experience in general (Ellson, 2009; Hilgert, 1972),academic research on the perceived relevance for Human Resource practitioners (or also referred to as HR executives) did not receive remarkable attention. Concerning the increased importance of HRM, the continuous (internal and external) environmental changes due to the globalization process and the rapid technology development (Shinzato, Shibata, Kawahara, & Kurohashi, 2012), which further facilitates and enhances improved information availability, access and exchange, it can be assumed that the HR executives perception of academic research accessibility changed. Furthermore, the ongoing debate on HRM's performance impact might have caused a reduction in the perceived relevance and an increase in skepticism. It is argued that misconduct of academics within research can also have a negative impact on the confidence level of practitioners and the general public concerning academic research (Boaz & Ashby, 2003). Additionally Deadrick and Gibson (2007) found that expectations and importance concerning relevant HR topics are diverging between HR academics and practitioners indicating a gap of research attention. Thus, the expectations and understandings regarding different dimensions of research results, and thus scientific information quality, are considered to play a crucial role in the assessment of academic research. The current situation concerning several factors which are related to the perception of research (and information) quality, and thus being assumed to play a role in the HR executives' perception of research usefulness and usability (Kahn, Strong, & Wang, 2002) will be enfold. Therefore the study of Terpstra and Rozell(1998) is replicated, as the research goal of identifying the current perception of HR executives is replicated, although a different research method (qualitative instead of quantitative research) and model is used based on the following research question:

> *What are the perceptions of HR executives in terms of information usefulness, usability, accessibility, and skepticism?*

In order to determine the overall perception of academic research several aspects of HR executives' personal attitudes about information usefulness, usability, accessibility and skepticism towards academic research, identified within the information quality as well as within the research quality literature, are considered and discussed within the current study, also with regard to their ability to provide appropriate results to give an indication if Terpstra and Rozell's (1998) identified perception still remain or if changes occurred. The goal of this research is to identify the current state of HR executives' perception of academic research. The current state will then be presented also with regard to the findings of Terpstra and Rozell (1998) in order to enfold a potential change which might provide an indication for further research needs in this field of research. The paper has three lines of contribution. (1) Theoretically the framework proposed by Terpstra and Rozell (1998) is improved as it focuses on the four dimensions perceived usefulness, usability, accessibility and skepticism. (2) Empirically it presents the results of the overall perception of HR executives. (3) Practically, it gives recommendations to scholars about the issues in academic research considered important by practitioners (HR executives).

2. PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH: TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The conceptual model is based on the two research fields of information quality and research quality which are assumed to impact the perceived usefulness and usability of information in general (Kahn et al., 2002), and of academic research studies in particular as the author assumes academic research studies to represent a form of information, namely scientific information. Consequently, the terms academic research and scientific information will be used interchangeable. The perception of information usefulness and usability are further considered as determinants of information usage, so that they present appropriate concepts to explore the actual perception of HR executives on (scientific) information quality which might be related to their usage of academic literature. A literature analysis of information quality concept as well as research quality concept revealed that both concepts involve impacting factors appropriate to measure the perceived usefulness of academic research. Within the information quality literature several dimensions contributing to overall information quality are discussed and can be categorized according to several dimensions (Bovee, Srivastava, & Mak, 2003; Chen & Tseng, 2011; Eppler & Wittig, 2000; Jeong & Lambert, 2001; Kahn et al., 2002; Lee, Strong, Kahn, & Wang, 2002; Madnick, Wang, Lee, & Zhu, 2009; O'Reilly, 1982; Salaün & Flores, 2001; Stvilia, Gasser, Twidale, & Smith, 2007). The information quality dimensions relevant for the present study are represented by those considered to cover the information quality characteristic of "fitness of use" and "meeting or exceeding consumer expectations", thus representing dimensions focusing on the information consumer and its personal attitudes and expectations (Bovee et al., 2003; Eppler

& Wittig, 2000; Jeong &Lambert, 2001; Kahn et al., 2002; O'Reilly, 1982), such as useful information and usable information (Kahn et al., 2002). The information quality framework proposed by Kahn et al. (2002) assumes that useful information include appropriate amount (of information), relevancy, understandability, interpretability and objectivity, while usable information involve believability, accessibility, ease of manipulation, reputation and value-added. However, as criticized by Bovee, Srivastava & Mak (2003), the accessibility dimension should be placed as a predominant factor to ensure that information quality is given. Otherwise information can be considered useful although it is not accessible. In the present concept this thought is considered and accessibility is regarded as independent dimension from the information quality concept. Furthermore, information can only be regarded usable if it is useful. To be useful it needs to be sound and dependent, meaning that it is error-free, complete, concise and consistent as well as timely and secure, respectively (Kahn et al., 2002). Here, the security aspect can be left out as this does not seem relevant for practitioners' perception of academic research. The framework proposed by Kahn et al. (2002) represents the base for the research model of the present study but is adjusted and extended by the notion of Bovee, Srivastava & Mak (2003) concerning the accessibility dimension, which was also found by other researchers to be one of the most important aspects of information quality and requires specific attention (Jeong & Lambert, 2001; O'Reilly, 1982). O'Reilly (1982) found that accessibility was even more important than relevance on the overall perceived quality of information. Additionally Jeong and Lambert (2001) mentioned the dimension of attitudes to have one of the highest impacts on the intention to use information. Such an assumption is supported by the findings of O'Reilly (1982), indicating that variations in the perception of information quality can occur based on information consumer experiences, goals or preferences. Next to information quality dimension, further dimensions identified within the research quality literature are added(Boaz & Ashby, 2003). Compared to the information quality literature, the research quality literature contains few discussions about the research quality with regard to practitioners' perception. Research quality is mainly discussed in terms of bibliometric measurement criteria, such as citation rations and peer reviews (Boaz & Ashby, 2003; Brinn, Jones, & Pendlebury, 2000; Butler, 2008; Cheek, Garnham, & Quan, 2006; Frey & Rost, 2010; Jones, 1999; Seglen, 1997). Although mainly used as measurement concepts, bibliometrics are highly criticized and discussed (Cheek et al., 2006) due to (1) their quantitative nature (Boaz & Ashby, 2003) and (2) the difficulty to apply bibliometric measures correctly (Seglen, 1997) and (3) their focus on addressing mainly the academic community (Korhonen, Tainio, & Wallenius, 2001). Few studies deal with measures assessing the perceived usefulness for practitioners, such as Boaz & Ashby (2003). The authors propose four dimensions of research quality, namely methodological quality, quality in reporting, appropriateness of methods to the aims of the study and relevance to policy and practice. In the present study, the relevance to policy and practice dimension is adopted due to its focus on the end-consumer of research, so that it is added under the term of relevance (as sub-concept of useful information). The dimension of quality in reporting refers to the way of communicating research findings which the author of the present study assumes to fit the concept of useful information in terms of the possibility to understand information. The concept of skepticism was not covered within the information- and research quality literature, so that it is adopted from Terpstra and Rozell's (1998) research concept and added to the present research model. In the context of investigating the HR executives' perception of academic research, these concepts provide the base for measuring the perceived usefulness and usability of scientific information (and the actual usage of academic research by HR executives). The perceived usefulness and usability of information are measured through the concepts of appropriate amount (of information), relevancy (including relevance to practice), understandability (including quality in reporting), interpretability and objectivity; and believability, ease of manipulation, reputation and value-added, respectively. Additional dimensions of the model are accessibility of scientific information and skepticism towards scientific information which are assumed to contribute to the overall perception of academic research.

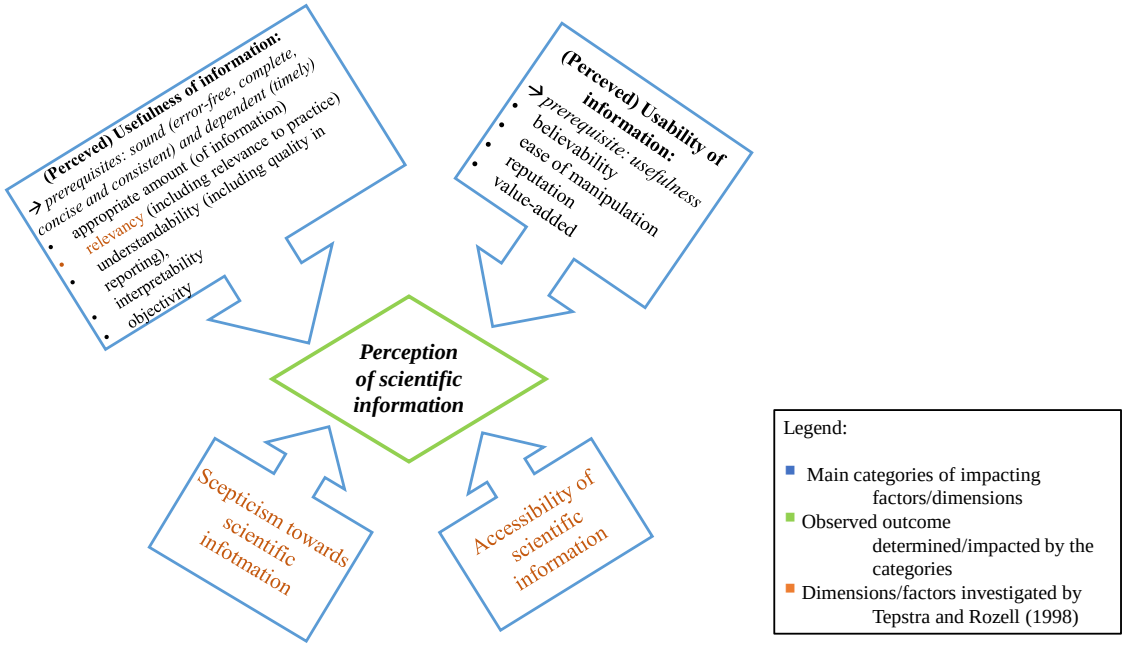

Figure 1: Factors impacting HR executives' perception of academic research

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

An explorative research was performed in order to describe potential changes of Terpstra and Rozell's (1998) findings and to discover potential needs for further empirical investigation of the validity of his assumptions stated in the conceptual model. To enfolde the informants' (HR executives') viewpoint regarding the presented issues, a qualitative research design was chosen (Pratt, 2009) which consists of, empirical interviews about practitioners perception regarding academic research in general. Moreover, the collection of individual opinions, being subjective in nature, could be ensured by using interviews which contained discussion topics regarding the determinants of the perception of academic research in the business context of HRM. Additionally, the degree to which academic research is actually used by HR executives was investigated by the interview questions. Finally, the interview findings are presented with regard to differences to the findings of Terpstra and Rozell (1998). The findings are presented in a figure indicating which factors are perceived most important by the respondents, so that an overview for academics who want to target HR executives directly can base their research and the presentation of their findings in a way that suits the needs and expectations of targeted practitioners. So that it allows academics to target their research and research findings specifically to the needs and expectations of HR executives. Further, the areas and topics stated by HR executives, where scientific information was used successfully are presented so that academics have a clear overview in which areas of the HRM field informaton exist that was valued by practitioners.

3.2 Selection of cases

The interviewees sample consists of eleven HR executives of nine companies (in one company two HR executives from different independent business divisions were interviewed) which all have at least one HR department or even several different business-division related HR departments. Consequently, HR executives represent the units of analysis, that were sampled based on the specific societal category (HR executives) being studied (Mays & Pope, 1995). HR executives were sampled as they represent the conneting point between theory and practice of HRM. HR executives ideally use and interpret academic research to find solutions for practical situtations or problems and consequently are responsible for implementing theory-based solutions. Their individual perception of acadmic research might impact the degree of usage. To provide a sufficient degree of diversity among interviewees, which serves to enable a potential variety of answers and thus the consideration of different viewpoints, HR executives of different firms within different industry sectors were choosen[1]. However, most HR executives are located in Germany (eight) while one is located in the Netherlands and one in the UK. Three companies operate in the chemical industry, while the others cover the automotive, plastic films, engineering services, electronics, building envelopes (windows,facades,doors), or waste disposal industries. The participating HR executives included seven women and four men.The author(s) expected to gain sufficient data richness through in depth interviews and diversity. The cases (interviewees) were collected based on relationships with family members or friends. However, the interviewer did not know every interviewee in advance as some were contacted based on third party relations. The table below (Table 1) provide an overview about the participating interviewees, which were anonymised (as well as companies) due to the demand of certain interviewees.

[1] An overview of the participating companies can be found in the appendix.

3.3 Data collection method

Interviews were designed based on a literature research concerning interview design and wereconducted individually, besides one interview where two HR executives decided to participate at the same time (within a discussion), either face-to-face (three interviews with three interviewees) or by telephone (seven interviews with eight interviewees). Interviews leasted 30 to 60 minutes, seven hours in total. Answers were collected by recording them, as well as by taking notes. The interviews were constructed in a semi-structured way and were based on a guideline for the interviewer that indicated the the topics to be discussed with the interviwees. In this regard, all interviewees were asked questions concerning the same issues, however, leaving freedom to the interviewer to rephrase the questions and to adjust them according to specific answers. Therefore, interview questions include a specific topic but were only phrased in short sentences to provide examples to the interviewer how questions could be asked. A question to concerning the perceived accessiblity are represented by the following example: *If you (would) need academic research findings, where do you get them from?Is it easy or difficult for you to get them?* An example question of perceived usefuness was: *What do you expect from academic research so that you find it useful?* For perceptions about useability: *To be actually applied or to consider for an application, what aspects needs to be included within academic research/scientific information?* A possible question for skepticism was: *If there were new concepts, theories or findings in the HR academic literature, how likely would you be to use or test them?* They serve to start a discussion on the presented question topic where the interviewer guided the discussion but left a certain degree of freedom to the respondent. Thus missing, rejecting or ignoring new ideas and contributions was avoided and issues could be discovered in more detail. However, the interviewer guided the discussion and ensured that most relevant concepts were not left out and that the time frame of 60 minutes was not exceeded. Guidance through the interview was crucial within the present research as the current state of practitioners' perception had to be enfold, and the concepts of Terpstra had to be covered by the respondents in order to be able to explore if perceptions of HR executives about academic reseach differ from those identified by Terpstra and Rozell (1998). A semi-structured interview approach was choosen because it allowed for exploration of potential other factors playing a role for HR executives' perception of academic research although they might not be covered by the research model. The interviews held face-to-face were recoreded, which was not possible for phone-based interviews. During all interviews notes were taken in form of bullet points including short sentences and key words covering the main thoughts of the respondents. Afterwards the interview protocols were sent to the respondents to ensure that the notes match their intended meanings. After having reached an agreement, the interviews were analysed by coding the notes into categories belonging to the dimensions of the research model (Burnard, 1991).

Table 1: Overview of participating HR executives (selected cases)

Interviewee	Interviewee function	scope of tasks and responsibilities	Gender of interviewee
Interviewee 1 (Company 1)	HR Business Partner Regional Business Unit (Europe)	Classical HR tasks (compensation, recruitment, employee development, succession planning, recruiting and operative business tasks)	male
Interviewee 2 (Company 2, business division 1)	Head of Human Resource department of business division 1	Responsible for employees at two production sites, less strategic and more hands-on work, first contact person for process from the recruitment to leavage/retirement, responsible for the administrative process	female
Interviewee 3 (Company 2, business division 2)	Head of HR of business division 2 (firm's core business) Europe	Tasks are e.g. restructuring, within HR team working on employee or graduate development, internal communication; with board working on strategy, and simoulatously on specific issues on different sites. (HR) department acts little in a way of central function, more having a disperged focus	female
Interviewee 4 (Company 3)	Human Resource Management of one production site	Responsible for the HRM of indirect areas, first contact person for managers working in laboratory, or Engineering functions, including tasks like employee development, placed between the purely strategic and purely administrative functions; beyond the day-to-day business strategic tasks, topics or projects with focus on our specific plant are realised	male
Interviewee 5 (Company 4)	Project management on culture and change belonging to HRM, before: pure HR role	Responsible for transformation of organisational culture, workshops with employees, changing behaviours	female
Interviewee 6 (Company 5)	head of the group's HQ HRM department (central function)	Supporting the subsidiaries and sites worldwide including tasks as concept development on how to integrate subsidiaries and their employees or transferring education practice ,central function, which is however quite narrow: recruiting is done locally	male
Interviewee 7 (Company 6)	Head of the company's HR department	Leading HR department (operative and comprehensive tasks).Whole process from recruitment to retirement, such as onboarding or payment accounts.Besides employee development all HR tasks are performed by the HR department	female
Interviewee 8 (Company 7, interview together with interviewee 9)	Head of HR department	Responsible for overall HR tasks (together with colleages) such as talent management, selection processes or employer branding	male
Interviewee 9 (Company 7 interview together with interviewee 8)	HR representative talentmanagement	Responsible for talent management (close cooperation, networking with universities, education institutions)	female
Interviewee 10 (Company 8)	Head of subsidiary's Human Resource department	Tasks such as the payment account or recruitment activities (the whole process from job interviews to providing the contract)	female
Interviewee 11 (Company 9)	Group leader HR Business Partner	Recruiting and employee support until the employee leaves the company, or legal aspects (labour law), Not in the scope: employee development or payment account	female

3.4 Data Analysis Method

The interviews were analysed according to the analysis method proposed by LeCompte (2000). Notes were taken while reading through the interview protocols. Each protocol took two to three readings. Statements were looked through in order to identify different items (indicating a certain category or subcategory/ dimension of the research model or newly emerged categories). These items were marked and then assigned to the different categories or subcategories of the conceptual model where they belong to or fit best (LeCompte, 2000). The decision of fitting the items into a certain category was mainly based on the proposed definition of the dimensions (see Table 2 below). It was also noted if the respondents did not mention a certain category or subcategory of the conceptual model. Those where coded as absent/not mentioned. In a case where the aspects stated by the interviewees did not fit the existing categories, they represented a new category or a subcategory of an existing one if a fit into the category was reasonable. Further, if other interviewees' responses were consistent with, and supported, the new category it was reasonable to keep it. In order to facilitate the process of assigning items to the categories or subcategories, a table was constructed[2]. After having assigned the responses/statements to the categories (such as usefulness or accessibility of information) and their subcategories (such as

[2] This comprehensive table including the full raw data is available upon request. Contact the author.

Table 2: Definitions of the dimensions proposed in the conceptual model

Dimension *(perceived degrees)*	**Definition** (the extent to which …)
Appropriate Amount of Information	the volume of information is appropriate for the task at hand (Kahn, Strong, & Wang, 2002) matching the needs and expectations of the consumer (self-administrated extension of the definition)
Believeability	informtion is regared as true and credible (Kahn et al., 2002)
Completeness	information is not missing and is of sufficient breadth and depth for the task at hand (Kahn et al., 2002)
Concise Representation	information is compactly represented (Kahn et al., 2002)
Consistent Representation	information is presented in the same format (Kahn et al., 2002)
Ease of manipulation	information is easy to manipulate and apply to different tasks (Kahn et al., 2002)
Free-of-Error	information is correct and reliable (Kahn et al., 2002)
Interpretability	information is in appropriate languages, symbols, and units, and the definitions are clear (Kahn et al., 2002) so that the information consumer is able to transfer the information (message) to different settings/contexts (self-administrated extension of the definition)
Objectivity	information is unbiased, unprejudiced, and impartial (Kahn et al., 2002)
Relevancy	information is applicable and helpful for the task at hand (practical orientation) (Kahn et al., 2002)
Reputation	information is highly regarded in terms of its source or context (Kahn et al., 2002)
Timeliness	the information is sufficiently up-to-date for the task at hand (Kahn et al., 2002)
Understandability	information is easily comprehended (Kahn et al., 2002) and to which the consumer is able to receive the information (message) as intended/meant by the producer (self-administrated extension of the definition)
Value-added	information is beneficial and provides advantages from its use (Kahn et al., 2002)
Usability (*low, moderate,high*)	information is (considered) useful and applicable within practice and contributes to fundamental theory or knowledge (self-administrated)
Usefulness (*low, moderate,high*)	information is sound, dependent, of appropriate amount , relevant, understandable, interpretable, objective (self-administrated)
Skepticism (*low, moderate,high*)	one is not willing to put complete, unconditional confidence into information (self-administrated)
Overall perception/ attitudes *(positive, neutral, negative)*	the personal beliefs and understandings about the information at hand (self-administrated)
Accessibility (*low, moderate,high*)	information is obtainable, receivable or possible to entre (self-administrated)
Soundness *(existent/given, non-existent/absent)*	information is error-free and provides conciseness (concise representation), consistency (consistent representation) and completeness (self-administrated)
Dependency *(existent/given, non-existent/absent)*	information is timely, meaning that it is given at a time close to the actual need/present when needed/required) (self-administrated)

understandability as subcategory of usefulness), the next step was identifying patterns in the perceptions of the respondents regarding the categories (representing characteristics/attributes of scientific information/academic research perceptions). If similarities occurred in the perception within a certain category, determinded by similarities within subcategories, it was checked if those respondents also had similar overall perceptions of scientific information in HRM. The patterns taken together provided a structure, allowing the researcher to determine the (overall) perception of HR practitoners concerning academic research, so that she could give a description of the (current) overall perception. The results are described and most important aspects of HR executives perception are presented in a figure.

4. RESULTS

The interview findings reveal that the perceptions as well as the degree of usage vary among the respondents. The overall perception can however be regarded as quite positive. No respondent stated a negative perception while a minority described their perception as neutral, which they stated to be grounded in their degree of scientific/academic information usage which was either very low/rare or even non-existent. The perceptions are presented according to the four main categories of perception determinants, namely the accessibility, usefulness, usability and skepticism.[3]

4.1 Perceived Accessibility

Gaining access to scientific information was reported as quite easy, indicating a high degree of overall perceived accessibility. Respondents stated that, even if they did not use scientific information, they would be able to gain access. They knew where to search or ask for such information. Some named the internet as facilitator in terms of making scientific information sources, such as articles, easily available. The main sources seem to be professional journals which involve practitioner reviews, empirical research articles or purely conceptual/ theoretical scientific articles. The index is perceived as important to scan contents and to decide on relevant information sources. Employing students who write their theses with(in) the company is a often stated sources of gaining access to relevant scientific information. Further sources are consultants, summaries (for instance Harvard Review) or expert/colleague consultation (e.g. internal knowledge sharing platforms), which three respondents categorized as a sort of indirect access, as these sources are based on scientific information consumption by others communicated to the respondents. The findings differ from Terpstra and Rozell's (1998) results as they found that accessibility was perceived negative. The actual results reveal that the perception is quite positive and has little influence on the actual usage.

4.2 Perceptions of usefulness

The interviewees stated different perceived degrees of usefulness and referred to a variety of factors contributing to the usefulness. Relevance, timeliness, the amount and understandability appear to be the most stated and most important aspects. Furthermore some referred to the soundness in terms of perceiving correctness (error-freeness) and conciseness as crucial. The (practical) relevance was highly discussed. Most interviewees had the perception that the relevance varies a lot because of individual, diverse organizational environments and (economic and financial) situations. Some respondents did not see the practical relevance because in their eyes the information was not tailored to their needs (such as small size, low budget, high operational focus) as one Head of a chemical company divisional HR department stated: "*We do not tend to use it, its so much away from our industry, the board would laugh at me."* The same interviewee reported:

> *I did go to an European HR directors meeting: When I saw the agenda I realized that the topics were very much away from my issues, very much country specific. They had a lack of focus on the overall European level and specific issues relevant to my work.*

Others stated that information is relevant, especially in order to get an overview about trends or new perspectives. As one respondent of another chemical company illustrated:

> *I once had a supervisor who said: "It does not matter how much you can remember, you always learn something new (when talking to others, consultants)" This can be transferred to scientific information: when you keep your eyes open chances are high that you are cleverer than before also if you have to deal with other things at the moment.*

Here the dimension of timeliness is perceived as being moderately important because information could be used later, when appropriate. However, the majority of respondents had a contrasting view and stated the timeliness as highly important, especially with regard to studies on compensation structures and trends. Consequently the perception of timeliness and its contribution to usefulness is assumed to depend on the topic at hand but is mainly perceived essential. The amount is perceived as highly important and a too extensive volume may contribute to a negative perception. HR executives report a restricted a restricted amount of time they could invest in literature research (searching, reading and understanding). Therefore they expect scientific information to be presented in a compressed format, making the key message(s) visible at the first sight. They would not be "*willing to explore the key/core message anymore"* if the too scientific language is used or the key message becomes not clear. The understandability is also addressed here. A minority of respondents reported a low degree of understandability contributing to low perceived usefulness. The understandability is perceived moderately given but highly important and dependent on the content and its presentation, which is also important for a high perceived interpretability. The interpretability is reported to occur if information is relevant to the practical context and firm specific needs, such as industry specific compensation structures or recruiting mechanism. Objectivity was not mentioned by the interviewees as part of perceived usefulness. The overall perception of usefulness is moderate, based on a high importance of the practical relevance dimension, which is not always given due to a reported lack of practical examples and support contact information or inappropriateness regarding the organizational situation and its context. These results support the findings of Terpstra and Rozell (1998), indicating that practical relevance can serve as a negative factor on the HR executives perception concerning scientific information.

4.3 Perceived usability

The degree of perceived usability is reported to be based on the perceived usefulness, perceived added-value, and to a certain

[3] A table including sample of interview quotes per conceptual dimension can be found in the appendix (Table A2)

extent believability and reputation. A new category, not proposed within the conceptual model emerged throughout the interview process. Most respondents mentioned the organizational capacities, such as time and resources (financial, workforce, etc.), and context as important aspect for the perceived usability of academic findings. Further, the aspects considered as important concerning usefulness also determine the perceived usability, such as timeliness, which was stated by most respondents with regard to usability. Consequently perceived usefulness is perceived as a prerequisite of usability of scientific information. Moreover, the added value is considered crucial. Most interviewees stated that including practical examples or guidelines on how to apply the ideas presented in academic findings within the practice would contribute to a positive perception of usability. Furthermore, information coming from well-know sources, for example universities or journals with a positive reputation, are considered as believable and usable. The overall findings involve high, but also low degrees of perceived usability, because some academic findings are considered to be not useable illustrated by a Head of HR of a manufacturing services subsidiary:

> *If we have two applicants, both have the same background (same university, same age, etc) but only one aspect differs: one has followed a practical oriented apprenticeship. Then we would choose the one with practical experience because he is aware of the real-life situations. This can be transferred to academic work as well. Information produced by academics is nicely meant but if it lacks the knowledge about reality it is not usable. The basic knowledge foundation is missing.*

This perception is, however, not supported by the majority of interviewees. The perceived added value is relatively high because of a perceived contribution to the respondents' existing knowledge in the field of HRM in terms of new perspectives on general understandings or methods, providing detailed, well-defined, deeply researched/analyzed (expert) information about a specific topic currently dealt with by the HR executive or illustrating new trends, developments and areas of, and suggestions for, improvement. As the majority reports a high usability, the overall perceived usability is moderate to high.

4.4 Skepticism

The reported degree of skepticism is moderate. Most participating HR executives stated that they are open to new scientific information in the field of HRM but only about one third would directly be willing to implement or test new ideas. Most of them stated that it needs to be well evaluated or empirically proven before implementation, and some state that one has to keep a critical (positive), interested and open perspective. The overall degree of skepticism is best illustrated by the Head of HR of a building envelop company:

> *We would not say that we "try" because we do not try to implement something. We are a medium size company, so we would not be the first ones to test if it would work. We consider an application if it was empirically tested/proven .An exception is if we have requested a certain study (project), then we have a higher impact.*

The presented perception matches the picture presented by Terpstra and Rozell (1998) which indicated a low degree of skepticism.

5. DISCUSSION: OVERALL PERCEPTION AND ACTUAL USAGE

The overall perception was found to be quite positive, and even those who do not use scientific HR information at all reported a neutral perception. The positive attitude towards scientific information is mentioned to be grounded in the perception that academic research serves as a good source to explore new perspectives, ideas and developments in order to extend the HR executives' scope of knowledge although there are certain negative aspects reported: the amount is often perceived too extensive or the academic findings lack practical examples or support contact information. Even though the perception is mainly positive the degree of usage is described as "sporadically, superficial or rare". This was reported to be caused by a limited amount of time available to information consumption.

Operative/administrative activities require most of the HR executives' time, such as recruitment and selection processes or employee support function for instance concerning labor law. Moreover, HR executives tend to rely not only on scientific information, but also consult colleagues and experts within the firm. Some tend to take "*a parallel look: what does the theory suggest, what does the praxis suggest?"*.

The main fields where scientific HRM information is used are:

- Health care management
- Demographical change
- (Recruitment and) selection process development
- Compensation structures and systems
- Key positions and succession planning

Considering the findings of the present study with regard to those identified fifteen years ago by Terpstra and Rozell (1998), it can be assumed that the perceived accessibility changed and does not represent a negative factor anymore as, especially the internet enables an easy access to every kind of information. The degree of skepticism seems to remain low and the practical relevance aspect remains crucial so that it can be to contribute to a negative perception if HR executives perceive a lack of practical focus within scientific HR information. Here, it needs to be stated that HR executives on the one hand wish to get practical examples and guidelines, but on the other hand do not have time and are not willing to read long articles. One might argue here that HR executives need to be able to consume scientific information and transfer the messages into the practical context, but if scholars only consider this one perspective they might risk missing a potential audience of their publications. Therefore, the HR executrices' expectations represent a challenge for scholars if the want their publications to be read by HR practitioners. Consequently, if HR scholars wish to address an audience that includes not only academics but also HR practitioners, the author(s) advice them to present their research findings in a way that meets HR practitioners expectations. Therefore, the dimensions that are found to be perceived crucial by HR executives are presented in figure 2. Scholars aiming to reach more HR executives could present their findings in an appropriate amount, for example providing summaries that present the key aspects and findings underlined by practical examples. Further, they could include information about relevant support contacts, such as institutions specialized in providing support for the specific HR topic dealt with by the given research. Moreover, the above presented HR fields, where scientific information was mainly used according to the respondents, can be considered by scholars when they think

about potential publishing channels. They could include their publications within journals of these fields in order to catch HR executives' attention and thus reach a broader audience. The findings indicate: Although a certain science-practice gap seems to remain, practitioners consider scientific information positive; a good source of new perspectives and ideas. Consequently, the question could be put on the table: do we need to reduce the gap completely; and whose responsibility is it? Can we as academics expect the HR practitioners to improve their abilities to understand our academic findings if we provide it in a way we commonly do? Or may we ask ourselves it is worth to make an effort to take a step towards HR executives' expectations, so that we possibly broaden the field of potential readers.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the ten semi-structured interviews of this research, it was found that the perception of scientific information in the field of HRM is quite positive. Accessing scientific HR information is perceived easy and skepticism was found to be low. The most important aspects for academic research in order to be perceived useful by HR executives are practical relevance timeliness, an appropriate amount and understandability of scientific information in the HRM context. The limited time capacity requires the information to be presented shortly, compact and appropriately formulated (not too scientifically). To be perceived actually usable, usefulness needs to be perceived as a prerequisite. Additionally, an added-value, a well-known author or institution and a belief in the research needs to be perceived by an HR practitioner. Consequently scholars that wish to meet HR executives' expectations are advised to consider the proposed aspects of perceptions while creating their publications. The stated degree of usage is relatively low, which can be assumed to be mainly caused by restricted time capacities available for information consumption by HR executives. Those working in a more strategy oriented area seem to be more likely to have a positive perception and are able to spend more time on scientific information while those having a more administrative or operative focus seem to be less likely to use scientific information. This needs to be further investigated as it exceeds the scope of the present research. Further, the educational background may represent an impacting factor and should be further investigated. Limitations of the present research include a limited capacity of time and scope so that the sample size is relatively small. Consequently it is suggested to conduct further research including a bigger sample size and a consideration of additional potential impacting factors such as the educational and demographical background, the organizational culture or industry specific business conditions, such as company size, customer or supplier base.

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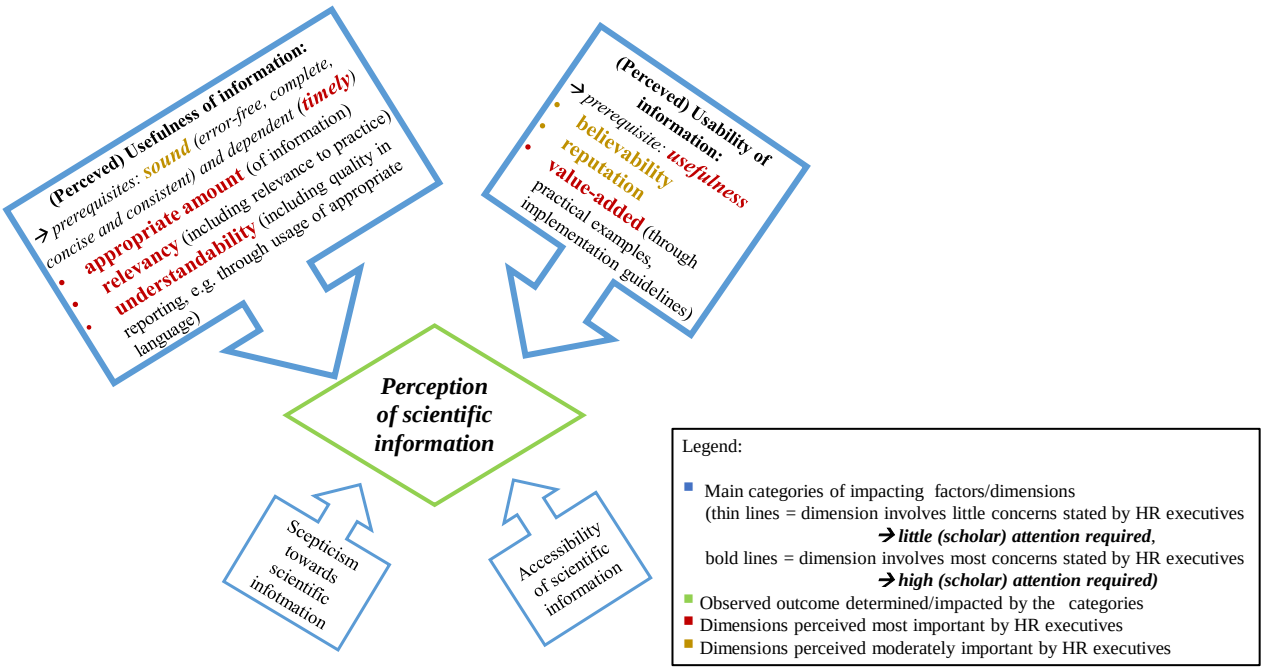

Figure 2: Factors found to perceived most important by HR executives' regarding academic research

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APPENDIX

A. ADDITIONAL TABLES

A.1 Overview of participating companies

Table A1: Overview of participating firms

Company	size (number of employees)	Industry	short description/company profile	Location	Interviews conducted	Interviewee function
Company 1	~111 000	chemicals	The company represents one of the world's leading chemical company, including about 15 business divisions serving several markets such as the food, chemical, construction or automotive industry. They are operating in more than 80 countries worldwide.	Germany	1	HR Business Partner Regional Business Unit (Europe)
Company 2	~15000	chemicals	The company belongs to the top chemical companies worldwide, includes 15 businesses and is operating on 51 manufcturing sites in eleven countries. Its chemical products, such as chemical intermediates, serve a diverging range of end-user markets.	Germany	1 (business division 1)	Head of Human Resource department of business unit
				UK	1 (business division 2)	Head of HR of business division 2 (firm's core business) Europe
Company 3	~105 000	automotive	The company is one of the main car manufacturers worldwide, serving markets in more than 150 countries.	Germany	1	Human Resource Management of one production site
Company 4	~118 000	electronics	The company provides healthcare, lightening and lifestyle electronic products. It is operating and serving markets worldwide in more than 100 countries.	Netherlands	1	Project management on culture and change belonging to HRM, before: pure HR role
Company 5	~4500	plastic films	one of the leading plastic film companies, their portfolio includes plastic films for a variety of industries such as building, automotive, electronics, swimming pools, etc.	Germany	1	head of the group's HQ HRM department (central function)
Company 6	~900	chemicals	The entire production of its products, being mainy fine chemicals and functional polymers is performed on three production sites in one region of Germany. The traditionally grown medium-size company serves different markets in Europe, such as pharmaceutical, agrochemical or cosmetical industries.	Germany	1	Head of the company's HR department
Company 7	~ 5000	building envelopes	The market leader for building envelopes covers a product range of windows and doors systems and facade systems as well as solar solutions. The company is present in 78 countries and its ~5000 employees are working worldwide.	Germany	1 (with two participants)	(1) Head of HR department & (2) HR representative talentmanagement
Company 8	~500	technological/ engineering services	The company represents a subsidiary of a large German industrial service provider. The subsidiary provides technical solution and engineering services, in form of consulting, planning, developing, assembling and installing solutions. With these services they are serving a niche markets mainly in Germany, but also within Italy and Romania.	Germany	1	Head of subsidiary's Human Resource department
Company 9	~3000	disposals/ waste management	The company is offering waste disposal solutions and recycling options for private, industrial or local authority customers across Europe, especially in Germany and Poland	Germany	1	· Group leader HR Business Partner

A.2 Sample of interview quotes per conceptual dimension

Table A2: Sample of interview quotes per conceptual dimension[4]

Sample quotes of HR executives' perceptions per conceptual dimension	Accessibility	Usefulness				
		soundness of information (prerequisite)	*dependent (timely)*	*(appropriate) amount*	*understandability*	*relevance (to practice)*
1.	I know where I get the information I need. If I do not have access but think that there is scientific information available for the topic at hand, I organize it[…]I perceive the accessibility as quite easy. Especially the development of the internet facilitated and highly improved the access to information. Indirect access is provided by consultation of colleagues.	Should not be taken out of the air: scientific/academic foundation/base. […] Statistical analyses (e.g. societal, demographical changes and trends) can be very interesting, here the empirical relation is important.	Should be timely! Especially if costs to acquire information are involved: not older than 12 month, relevance decreased quickly, as well as correctness.	We do not spend endless time on searching and reading long articles, (no the time to do so), articles need to be short, compressed, summed in a good way, the main aspect/key aspect has to be visible on the first sight, when I search for specific information I have a higher tolerance for longer articles	The information needs to be adjusted to the needs of a diversity of people involved so that they are able to understand the information articles need to be understandable (I do not want to read five times to be able to understand the content)	Sometimes "reality and praxis are two pair of shoes". Scientific articles are often very enthusiastic and loose the realistic aspect. Especially in Personnel management it is difficult because employees need to take part and accept e.g. changes and the implementation process (of concepts). This is often more difficult than presented within scientific studies.
2.	I could have access if I would have needed it but I do not use scientific information/academic research.	To be qualitative it needs to follow a certain structure and should consider a sufficient amount of units of analysis.	The point in time is important, it has to be available when needed.	There are always too many information, I do not read everything (not possible from a time perspective, one needs to decide what is relevant to oneself)	Should not be formulated on a too high academic language level, for example if one does not understand many terms because definitions/ explanations are missing, otherwise it won't be used and understood by practitioners.	I do not put effort in it if there is no need (otherwise I waste time). One can compare that with a blind person who wants to get his driving license. The blind can learn the rules, but it will not help him.
3.	The information quality level in the HR function is even higher compaired to other functions within the company, we have a huge variety of information sources/different media (e.g. a lot online: specific HRM tool)	Needs to be underpinned with evidence in order to have worth.	Articles can be used later as well if they become relevant.	Acceptable amount of effort to get an overview? If not, for example if it includes 17 pages, almost no practitioner will read it --> a short, precise presentation of the key message/aspects, amount available is usually too much/high	The information (especially articles) need to be clearly understandable.	Industry type specific benchmarks should be involved/given as survey information on different industries is less relevant

[4] The complete raw data is available upon request. Contact the author.

Usability				**Scepticism**	Overall perception
believability	*reputation*	*value added*	*additional subcategory identified throughout the interviews: organizational capacities and context*		
References where results come from needed: “don’t trust any statistic that you did not manipulate yourself” Believe in honesty? Yes! But some studies cannot taken souriously, but those I take seriously are e.g. about labour impact on helth (health care management)	If authors from highly known universities or well known researchers/professors/scientists: confidence that topic has been researched well	Get some learnings form someone who did studies , to change behaviours one needs to understand the process behind	The main isses and problems related to the use of academic research are the limited time and financial capacities as well as the specific context of the chemical industry and our specific business.	Not skeptical, always open-minded and interested. I scan information if they come on my table and if they are not relevant at the moment I keep them if I thing that they may become relevant to me somewhen.	Positive, interested, open-minded. But also rational/unemotionally: might be that you cannot use a certain study within the practice but it is worth giving it a try: “It costs nothing to ask”
I trust it, there is some hard work behind it	Furthermore one needs to consider who is doing the research	Tipps how to apply information within the praxis: this means involving good practice-related examples and contact information for further information	Often it is difficult to apply concepts and theories proposed within literature in small companies as they do not have financial and human resource capacities	Kind of skeptical, I would probably not be the first one to try out	Scientific information lack the context specific relevance and are very theoretical. However my attitude is not negative, it is neutral as I just do not see the relevance for my function and our business.
If I am convinced that the study/theory is useful, relevant and appropriate then you should try to apply it/put it into practice	People who are producing those information might never have worked. I am more likely to value it if it comes from people working in practice.	Scientific information are good to get new perspectives and ideas	Here, another way of doing exists (more hands on). The content [of scientific information] needs to fit the organization.	I would NOT wait: If I am convinced that the study/theory is useful, relevant and appropriate then you should try to apply it/put it into practice, don’t wait! ,I look from a critical, but interested perspective, I am also open to put it into practice	Positive, we have also other needs as those of scientific/academic institutions and we take over what is relevant and usable for us. Articles indicate/point at new ideas/thoughts very early, so that you need to look at those professional journals to be up-to-date and able to follow the current trends/developments from an early stage