

# HR PRACTITIONERS' CONTRIBUTION TO BUSINESS EXCELLENCE: RESULTS SPANNING A QUARTER OF A CENTURY IN NEW ZEALAND

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## ABSTRACT

*Competent managers and human resource (HR) practitioners play a pivotal role in the success of any business. This includes a variety of business functions that ought to be identified and managed to add value to the bottom-line and harness opportunities. Empirical research was conducted in New Zealand in 2010 to repeat two similar 2000 surveys and an earlier survey conducted in 1994. The longitudinal results up to 2020 identified important areas of the business environment as perceived by HR practitioners. These are awareness of the importance of the effect of change, international competition, and customer satisfaction. It is recommended that HR managers must become dedicated change agents to continue to support management optimally, as this perception was revealed by the survey results over the 25 year period.*

## INTRODUCTION

The global business environment provides a stage for actual business activities to be conducted nationally and internationally by organisations. Within this context, businesses are compelled to manage their affairs diligently if they wish to seize current and future opportunities to achieve their objectives. Concurrently a variety of factors impact on businesses success, such as the type of business being conducted and the quality and leadership the ability of management. Issues confronting managers are the ability to manage the effects of change, dealing with the demands of customers, the quality of the service/product being delivered, the ability to utilise technology and communicate effectively, and being, able to compete nationally and internationally due to global business competition, to name but a few. Some factors have a greater or lesser impact than others on businesses, depending on where and how business is conducted and the type of business, as well as the staff being employed, in particular the management staff. These issues form the focus of this paper, which aims to identify the state of affairs in New Zealand (NZ) with a particular lens on how human resources (HR) practitioners view these issues over the longitudinal period ranging from 1994 to 2020.

In this paper the various factors impacting on HR practitioners to execute their task in the context of the business environment within which businesses operate are multiple and varied, such as understanding governmental legislative requirements, the impact of international competition, the effect of total quality and customer satisfaction on the organisation and the influence of information and communication technology. These aspects are addressed in the literature review prior to the analysis of the findings of the survey. This is carried out to enable HR practitioners to meet the expectation that they will be able to interpret and manage the influence of the business environment on the organisations they work for.

The structure followed for the paper is to first review the applicable literature and then present the methodology being applied and the findings. Lastly an analysis of the results and conclusions is presented.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The world of today is increasingly subject to continuous change which varies from mild to catastrophic and occurs completely unexpectedly at times (Waddell et al., 2011) notwithstanding the fact that minor changes in all spheres of all aspects of life on earth takes place continuously. The business world also experiences these phenomena on a continuous basis. In this regard a change agent should have a variety of capabilities which include the expertise to understand required change interventions in an organisation to achieve existing or new objectives. As examples of issues that require massive adaptation is the Tsunami in 2012 in Japan, the two Christchurch earthquakes in 2010 and 2011 and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), which affects organizations and countries alike (Reserve Bank of NZ, (2012). Global influences continue to impact on the workplaces, organisations, unions and productivity of workforces, which affect the quality of the products and, therefore, the satisfaction of the customers as well (Dessler 2011; Rudman 2010; Nel, du Plessis and San Diego, 2011).

The focus on quality and customer satisfaction in the competitive business environment also warrants particular attention. Innovation in quality and customer satisfaction is an important characteristic in the high performance work that has a significant impact on employee turnover, productivity, market value and profit per employee. The HR function is central within the organisation supply chain, and a range of service can be offered to the relevant users or beneficiaries to improve both the quality of their inputs and outputs in order to assure quality service internally and externally to customers (Losey et al. 2005; Nel et al., 2012).

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. It is similar to Information Technology (IT), but focuses primarily on communication technologies. This includes the Internet, wireless networks, cell phones, and other communication mediums. The (ICT) industry includes areas as diverse as wireless infrastructure, health IT, digital content, payments, geospatial, telecommunications and agricultural technology. (<http://www.nzte.govt.nz/access-international-networks/Explore-opportunities-in-growth-industries/growth-industries/Pages/Information-and-communication-technologies.aspx>). Human resource information systems (HRIS) and the use of technology are inescapable in conducting business effectively. This includes computer literacy in organisations and the ability to execute E-HRM practices.

Learning organizations and transforming HR into a strategic business partner is important. Rudman (2010) also states that it is critical for HR practitioners in New Zealand. By empowering employees with the knowledge to take independent action, the learning organization maintains a highly motivated, innovative workforce, capable of superseding organizational and individual expectations. According to Bratton and Gold (2012), the creation of knowledge and its management are now considered as a source of competitive advantage. It is estimated that, in the future, differences in organizations and nations will depend on the extent to which information can be obtained, turned into knowledge and applied to production. A key reason for this development is seen to be the advances made in information communication technology (ICT), which is used to store, retrieve, analyze and communicate information. Finally another important aspect which plays a role in the execution of effective business is international competition. Various aspects are of importance in organisations, depending once again on the type of business being focused on. It is also clear that line management, as well as HR practitioners should ensure that they are au fait with the impact of national and international competition on organisations if they wish the organisation they work for to be successful.

## METHODOLOGY

The background to the methodology used in this paper is presented first and thereafter the approach used to gather information is then presented. Thereafter the findings are presented.

### Background to the collection of the empirical data

A very comprehensive questionnaire covering 358 items to identify HRM and management trends was jointly compiled in New Zealand (NZ) and Australia in 1994. It was used in a survey to identify the future competencies and roles of HR in N Z in 1994 and forecasted for the year 2000 by the then Institute of Personnel Management, now known as the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand (IPMNZ 1994). That study included the views of 264 respondents formed the basis for subsequent research studies regarding HR practitioners.

The questionnaire was edited and slightly modified and used in 2000 by Burchell (2001) in association with the (HRINZ) to determine a future perspective on human resources issues in 2000 and forecasted for 2010 in NZ. The minor modifications involved updating and reducing the questionnaire and refining the questions for clarity.

Respondents were also asked to rank the five most important elements regarding goals, roles and activities in the various categories which were contained in the questionnaire. The final section of the said questionnaire sought to obtain demographic information from respondents. A total of 1,510 questionnaires were mailed, from which 150 usable responses were received, which represents 10% of the sample. After the responses were verified, the survey results were written up. At the time the research was executed in 2000, advanced statistical analysis was not applied, and the compilation of the questionnaire was limited to the use of a variety of statistical analysis methods. Therefore, in the follow-up survey in 2010 various improvements to the previous questionnaire were introduced to enable the application of different methods, as shown in the section outlining the repeat study.

## **Repeat study covering HR practice in New Zealand in 2010 forecasted for 2020**

The NZ study of 2000 was again used with minor modifications in 2010. It was clear from the previous studies' responses that the questionnaire was too detailed as it covered 358 questions, which in retrospect, discouraged participation. The fact that it was paper-based also reduced the previous response rate. For the 2010 repeat study, the questionnaire was shortened, but some sections were again expanded to include contemporary aspects such as social media in the HRIS section. The reporting format was also changed to an e-survey using Survey Monkey. A 5-point Likert scale was also used which ranged from 1 = "unimportant" to 5 = "critical to success". The Likert scale was not applied in the 2000 survey.

Due to the growing importance of social media and e-HRM, the 2010 survey was expanded to include some new questions on aspects such as the use of Facebook, Twitter and Blogging. This was in response to the importance of HR communication and e-HR, which was identified in 2000 and forecasted for the 2010 survey. However, at the time the 2000 survey was executed, social media phenomena such as Facebook and Twitter were non-existent so comparisons of these aspects with the 2000 results would have been impossible. The target population was again limited to HRINZ members, and those who had registered to participate in HR research requests. The HRINZ provided links to the total number of HRINZ members in this category, being 635. A total of 119 members responded but only 98 questionnaires were fully completed and usable, resulting in a 15.4% response rate. Furthermore, due to the different reporting formats used in the different surveys (from being merely listing and identifying priorities to a Likert Scale and an e-format for respondents), not all results are precisely comparable. However, trends previously identified are indicative of the present importance and context of the 2010 survey and forecasts for 2020, which are reported in this paper. It must be noted that due to the magnitude of the research projects and their longitudinal nature, only the results focusing on HR in the business environment are reported on in this article, which represents a very small section of the overall survey.

The similarity in the 2000 and 2010 surveyed profile of the respondents adds value to the results and is discussed below.

In the current study in NZ (2010), the most frequent title was HR Manager (46.7%), and the next most common title was HR non-management (16.7%). Those two titles accounted for 60.2% of the reported titles compared to 72.5% in 2000.

It needs to be noted that a limitation regarding the two surveys of 2000 and 2010 could also be viewed as an advantage. As pointed out earlier in the methodology, the 2010 survey participants obtained from the HRINZ database only included members who were registered and who requested to participate in HR research from HRINZ. This perhaps explains the larger number of consultants in 2010 (up to 24.7% from 13.8%) and the lower number of CEOs (down from 10.1% to 1.4%). The overall positive implication is perhaps a higher quality and more focused response from participants in 2010, which also resulted in a higher overall response than that for the 2000 survey.

In NZ most organisations (83%) have fewer than 10 employees. In this study, the participants are from different sized organisations and are categorised as follows, namely 10 – 49 secondly, 50 – 99; thirdly, 100 – 499 and lastly 500 or more. For both the 2000 and 2010 surveys, the respondent profiles were comparable. Note that the following groupings were compiled for analysis: small organisations with fewer than 10 and the various categories that are also compatible. It should be noted that NZ is predominantly a country of small businesses, with 93.3% of enterprises employing 19 or fewer people ("SMEs in NZ: Structure and Dynamics" 2006).

It is shown in Table 1 that the results are comparable as far as the profile of respondents by industry sector is concerned and that the 2000 results and 2010 results could be used with confidence for trend identification.

**Table 1: Profile of the respondents by industry sector for 2000 and 2010**

Sector	NZ profile 2000	NZ profile 2010
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	4.2%	4.3%
Mining and quarrying	1.4%	1.5%
Manufacturing	5.5%	6.9%
Electricity, gas and water	9.6%	8.3%
Wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels	5.0%	6.2%
Transport, storage and communication	3.3%	4.1%
Business, insurance and financial services	13.7%	12.5%
Community, social and personal service	11.0%	11.1%
Education	20.7%	20.8%
Other	25.6%	24.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Results of the survey

The results of the e-survey were subject to verification for SPSS analysis purposes. The Likert Scale application (ranging from 1-Unimportant to 5- Critical to success) for the 2010 survey enabled the researchers to apply statistical analyses which were not possible for the 2000 survey. Parametric and non-parametric tests were applied using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test as well. Significance levels at the  $p < 0.01$  were recorded. This level of statistical analysis was not possible in 2000 due to the design of the then questionnaire. The current approach was, however, vital for the 2010 comparisons with the 2020 forecasts in order to identify significant differences. It must be noted that relevant results from the 2000 study and forecasts for the 2010 study are primarily compared with the current results (that is, 2010 and forecasted for 2020). Reference is also made to the 1994 survey results for longitudinal purposes.

## FINDINGS

Only aspects relating to the business environment for HR are focused upon. There is a discussion and comparison of aspects of each survey for the respective time periods after the results have been presented. The results for all the surveys are presented separately prior to discussing the combined results in order to make deductions and then draw conclusions.

### Results of the historical 1994 survey with forecasts for 2000

The 1994 survey was executed by the Institute of Personnel Management (IPM) in 1994 as outlined in the methodology section of this paper. The IPM was the fore-runner to the current HRINZ. The topics which were contained in that questionnaire were as follows:

Increased national/international competition; increased governmental regulation of the employment relationship, growth through joint ventures, acquisitions and alliances; awareness of the increased reliance on

automation technology to produce goods and services; more sophisticated information/communication technology; changing attitude of society towards business; heightened concern about pollution and natural resources; heightened focus on total quality/customer satisfaction; changing employee values, goals and expectations, e.g. less loyalty to current employer; fewer entrants into the workforce; inadequate skills of entrants into the workforce; changing composition of the workforce with respect to gender, age and/or ethnicity; greater concerns about the confidentiality of personal information.

For the subsequent surveys in 2000 and 2010, minor modifications to the questions were introduced to reflect a more modern day business environment. Questions such as reliance on automation and non-traditional business structures and so on were deleted and replaced with questions such as “organisation learning and knowledge management”.

**The top 5 responses from the results of the 1994 survey were:** First, heightened focus on total quality/customer satisfaction; second, increased national/International competition; third, changing employee values, goals and expectations; fourth, increased governmental regulation of the employment relationship, fifth new information technology.

**The top 5 responses from the results of the forecast for 2000 were:** First, increased national/International competition (was 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1994); second, heightened focus on total quality/customer satisfaction (was 1<sup>st</sup> in 1994); third, changing employee values, goals and expectations (same as in 1994); fourth, globalisation of the economy (not in top 5 in 1994); and fifth, globalisation of business structures (not in top 5 in 1994).

## **The 2000 survey results with forecasts for 2010**

Note that the questions contained in the 2000 survey are shown in the 1994 survey, although further refinements of the questions took place, such as globalisation of corporate business structure; breakdown of trade barriers; increased energy costs; and cross border application of employee rights. In the 2000 survey respondents were once again asked to select only the 5 changes which were current for 2000 and forecasted for 2010 that would impact most, and they are presented below.

**The top 5 responses from the results of the actual 2000 survey were:** First, cross border application of employee rights; second, increased national/international competition; third, increased governmental regulation of the employment relationship; fourth, increased energy costs; and fifth, globalisation of the economy.

**The top 5 responses from the results of the forecast for 2010 were:** First, increased national/international competition (was 2<sup>nd</sup> in 2000); second, greater concerns about the confidentiality of personal information (nowhere in 2000); third, cross border application of employee rights (was 1<sup>st</sup> in 2000); fourth, organisational learning and knowledge management (nowhere in 2000); and fifth, globalisation of corporate structures (was 5<sup>th</sup> in 2000).

These results will be compared and discussed with those for the survey in 2010 and forecasts for 2020.

## **The 2010 actual survey results with forecasts for 2020**

This part of the paper presents the results of the 2010 survey together with the respondents' forecasts for 2020. As previously outlined, the findings and discussions are only focused on the HR business environment issues that add value to the bottom line, which represents data from section 5 of the 2010 survey only. Section 5 of the HR survey again comprised 16 questions, but it included more refinement of the previous surveys. One of the questions which, was eliminated was increased energy costs, which attracted a low response in the forecast for 2010.

It must be noted that new questions were introduced in the 2010 survey which were not part of the 2000 survey. This was done because of the changed circumstances of the global business environment and to reflect the modern trends which HR ought to be familiar with. New questions were, for example, growth of electronic

business, organisational learning and knowledge management, and managing the effect of change in the organisation. The full set of questions for the 2010 survey still closely mirror the original set of questionnaires.

In the 2010 survey respondents were required to apply the 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 being “unimportant” to 5 being “critical to success” for both 2010 and 2020 when providing their responses. This approach would enable a measurable refinement of the approach to and analysis of the results which were obtained in previous surveys. The position of the responses would also be indicative of the importance of the results for comparative purposes. For the 2010 survey, the application of statistical methods to reveal the significance of the results and the position thereof would, therefore be possible.

The 2010 results analysis, however, only focused on the last 2 combined responses of respondents, namely “Very Important” and “Critical to Success”. Furthermore, only the results of the questions which attracted a combined response of two-thirds and above are discussed. The generally accepted convention of a majority clearly indicates a direction decision which is more important than a standard majority, which is then two-thirds instead of 50%. This is applied as a sharpened focus for the analysis of the 2010 survey results and the forecasted ones for 2020. Lastly, as a further refinement, parametric and non-parametric tests were applied, in particular the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test to obtain a much more focused picture of the results. The results which attracted a response of more than two-thirds are shown in Table 2 and are listed from the highest response to the lowest. Results below two-thirds are not analysed, but merely taken note of when possibly applicable to the functions of HR. Only one response satisfied the criteria and is listed below.

**The top 5 responses from the results of the actual 2010 survey were:** First, managing the effect of change in the organisation; second, heightened focus on total quality/customer satisfaction; third, organisational learning and knowledge management; fourth, more sophisticated information/communication technology.; and fifth, increased national/international competition.

**The top 5 responses from the results for the 2020 forecast were:** First, managing the effect of change in the organisation (also 1<sup>st</sup> in 2010); second, heightened focus on total quality/customer satisfaction (also 2<sup>nd</sup> in 2010); third, more sophisticated information/communication technology (was 4<sup>th</sup> in 2010); fourth, organisational learning and knowledge management (was 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2010); and fifth, increased national/International competition (was 2<sup>nd</sup> in 2010).

Because more sophisticated statistical methods could be applied in the 2010 survey, which were not possible with the previous survey, a more in depth analysis could be undertaken. See Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Responses by question for 2010 and 2020 at 66.66% and above**

Q No.	Question detail	Position of re-sponse	Response by year
16	Managing the effect of change in the organisation	1 1	2010 – 66.7% 2020 – 83.4%

In Table 3, responses are ranked for 2020 which were not part of the two-thirds and above threshold for both the 2010 and 2020 questions in order to reflect a further refinement of the results. Results are again listed from Highest to Lowest.

**Table 3: Single results by question for 2020 only which attracted a 66.66% and above response**

Q No.	Question detail	Response by year
8	Heightened focus on total quality/customer satisfaction	2020 – 76.6%
5	More sophisticated information/communication technology	2020 – 75.0%
15	Organisational learning and knowledge management	2020 – 68.4%
1	Increased national/International competition	2020 – 66.7 %

From the responses it is clear that the perception of the respondents regarding 2020 has shifted measurably as to what was regarded as “Very Important” and “Critical to Success” in 2010. These results are noteworthy and need to be explored in more detail as well as being compared with the results of previous surveys. It must be noted that all responses which have not attracted a response of 66.7% and above for either 2010 or 2020 are not addressed for the rest of the analysis in this paper. No further discussion is undertaken as they are apparently either unimportant or of no concern. They may be in place but not on the radar screen in organisations as far as the HR respondents are concerned. The questions which were not meaningful re the results are not further discussed.

A further refinement of the results is presented in Table 4 where the questions for either 2010 or/and 2020 which attracted 66.66% and above responses are listed after further statistical analysis was applied. It is indicated in the table under the section “Question and year” in terms of the applicable categories.

In the next section the results are analysed while bearing in mind the significance of each as shown in Table 4 as well as in the literature survey to determine the context of the results. The analysis is initiated for both the 2010 and 2020 results of the same question above the threshold of 66.66% and proceeds from highest to lowest. The discussion of the 2020 only results, which were above the threshold and which were significant as well, as shown in Table 4, are analysed and discussed in the next section.

## ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

It must once again be noted that only responses which attracted 66.66 % and above are focused on in this section.

**Table 4: Paired comparisons and significance of results**

Paired Q number	Question and year	Mean 2010	Mean 2020	Significance
16	Managing the effect of change in the organisation (2010 and 2020 above threshold)	3.95	4.4	.000* /.000**
8	Heightened focus on total quality/customer satisfaction (only 2020 above threshold)	3.62	4.20	.000* /.000**
5	More sophisticated information/communication Technology(only 2020 above threshold)	3.20	4.15	.000* /.000**
15	Organisational learning and knowledge management(only 2020 above threshold)	3.28	3.97	.000* /.000**
1	Increased national/international competition (only 2020 above 60% threshold)	3.02	3.72	.000* /.000**

\*p<0.01 (Note: Scale used was: 1-Unimportant, 5- Critical to success) \*\* Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

### Managing the effect change in organisations

Managing the effect of change ranked first in 2010 and 2020, at 66.7% and 83.4 % respectively, which reflects the increasing awareness of the need for managing the effect of change for the next decade as well. In recent years in New Zealand, there have been numerous cases where sudden cuts in government spending or zealous cost cutting by senior managers have led to major reorganizations and downsizings that have resulted in loss of staff goodwill. This could perhaps explain the importance accorded to manage the effect of change by HR practitioners for the year 2020 (Macky, 2008; Nel et al., 2012).

This result is also significant after the various tests showed p<0.01 being .000, and applying the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test as well of the paired comparisons for 2010 and 2020. It is thus concluded that managing the effect of change in organisations is significantly important for the future as well. This was a new question for 2010 and not contained in the previous survey, yet it is clear that it is a factor which plays an important part in the Business environment in NZ as identified by HR practitioners thinking of the future as well.

## **Heightened focus on total quality/customer satisfaction**

For the HR practitioners surveyed in 2010 the heightened focus on total quality/customer satisfaction was the second most important attribute in the New Zealand business environment with a response of 76.6% for 2020, but it was below the threshold for 2010. Customers bring pressure on a business to match competitors' prices, and these pressures filter down to line managers who in turn seek better and more efficient services from functional managers such as those in HR. This could perhaps provide the motivation for the 2020 result, with a 76.6% ranking. This attribute is the second most important in the business environment after change management. This result is also significant after the various tests were applied showing  $p < 0.01$  being .000 and applying the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test as well of the paired comparisons for 2010 and 2020. It is thus deduced that total quality/ customer satisfaction is significantly important for the future as well. This also confirms the trend identified as far back as 1994 when it was the top priority then and second for the 2000 forecast, albeit low on the 2000 survey results. It is thus an important factor, which plays a critical role in the business environment in NZ, as identified by HR practitioners.

## **More sophisticated information communication technology**

Respondents ranked more sophisticated information communication technologies at 75.7% for the next decade. It did not reach the threshold in 2010 although it was regarded as important. In the literature it was suggested that modern information and communication technologies have created a "global village," in which people can communicate with others across the world as if they were living next door. (<http://www.techterms.com/definition/ict>). According to New Zealand's Trade & Enterprise Department, the ICT industry contributes around \$19.3 billion to the economy each year. ([www.nzte.govt.nz](http://www.nzte.govt.nz)). It is perhaps that more sophisticated information communication technologies are critical in the business environment in future.

This result is also significant after the various tests have been applied showing  $p < 0.01$  being .000 and applying the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test as well for the paired comparisons for 2010 and 2020. It is deduced that information communication and technology is very important for the future as well. This also confirms the trend identified as far back as 1994 when information technology was the fifth priority. It is important in the business environment in NZ as identified by HR practitioners, particularly for the future in NZ.

## **Organisational learning and knowledge management**

Respondents attributed a weight of 68.4% for 2020, but it did not reach the threshold for 2010. The result is in line with various researchers (Rudman, 2010; Bratton and Gold, 2012) who pointed out that it appears that organizations develop opportunities to actively learn new information on an ongoing basis. These developments could perhaps explain why organisational learning and knowledge management is important New Zealand HR practitioners for the year 2010 and 2020. This result is, however, also significant after the various tests have been applied showing  $p < 0.01$  being .000 and applying the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test as well of the paired comparisons for 2010 and 2020. It is deduced that organizational learning and knowledge management is significantly important for the future although it was not highlighted in the previous surveys except in the 2000 survey as the fourth priority forecasted for 2010. It is a more recent high level phenomenon in an organization's quest to be more competitive in future as shown in the 2010 survey with forecasts for 2020.

## **Increased national/international competition**

Increased national and international competition achieved a response of 66.7% for the 2020 forecast. It did not reach the threshold in 2010 although it was regarded as important by respondents.

Like other countries New Zealand faces intense competition in most areas of economic activity. Distance from markets and the cost advantages enjoyed by low-wage countries in Asia and elsewhere, for example make it increasingly difficult for secondary industries (e.g. manufacturers) to operate profitably in New Zealand. The initiatives the government has taken to create a more productive and competitive economy fall into six areas: access for New Zealand businesses to capital markets, innovation and ideas, skilled and safe workplaces, natural resources, infrastructure (including electricity, broadband, transport) and export markets.



(<http://www.national.org.nz/economy.aspx>). This could explain the importance accorded by HR practitioners to increased national and international competition in the business environment in the years 2010 and 2020.

It is also significant after the various tests were applied showing  $p < 0.01$  being .000 and applying the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test as well for the paired comparisons for 2010 and 2020, so is deduced that increased national and international competition is significantly important for the future as well. This also confirms the previous surveys' results in that it is the most consistent result from 1994 through to 2010. It was second in 1994 and first forecasted for 2000. In the 2000 survey it was second and first forecasted for 2010. It is thus a continuing factor which plays a very important part in the business environment in NZ for the future as well as far as HR practitioners are concerned.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2010 results of the survey and the forecast for 2020 revealed that the following indicators are important in the business environment as identified by HR practitioners in New Zealand: manage the effect of change in organisations, focus on quality/customer satisfaction, information communication technology, organizational learning and knowledge management and national/international competition. Some of these results overlap with those of the surveys from 1994 and 2000 which is indicative of the view of HR practitioners regarding the business environment. The significance of the results of the 2010 survey should also provide confidence regarding the future foci in the business environment according to HR practitioners.

It is concluded that the ability to manage the effect of change is currently in sharp focus for HR managers in the organisations they work for. However, HR managers also need to be change agents and leaders as they have to go beyond the traditional roles of HR managers. HR managers must continue to support line management in various areas in the business environment to add to the bottom line and to harness opportunities for the future. There should also be a sharp focus on the identified aspects of quality and customer satisfaction and the impact of domestic and international competition on business, since this has been a focus for HR practitioners over the 25 years of the longitudinal surveys. Priority proactive New Zealand management actions to address the implications of the research findings as perceived by HR respondents over a 25 year period, could perhaps be the following:

- Managers should be more aware of the accelerated impact of change on their organisations and initiate proactive measures to meet this challenge in future. They could perhaps consider utilising expert change agents specialising in the application of information communication technology to keep their businesses competitive because New Zealand is geographically isolated in the global context.
- They could utilise means to enhance New Zealand's competitive business endeavours in the international business environment. For example utilise high level HR practitioners to effectively capture knowledge management expertise to enhance customer satisfaction across the economy.

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