

## Identifying the Perceived Roles as Human Resources Strategic Business Partner: Study at Public-Service Organization

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### Abstract

The world is changing, including the roles of HR Management in the organization. In responding to the demand of the environment, employees and organization, the roles of Human Resource Management are changing not only in dealing with day-to-day operation but to become more strategic partner to the organization. The objective of the study is to identify the perceived preference roles of HR Management as Human Resource Business Partner (HRBP) based on the concept of Ulrich. The study was conducted at Public Service State-Owned-Organization, with 58 participants, with the position of managerial level. The study is categorized as qualitative approach which was using virtual Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as data collection tools. Content Analysis and Descriptive Analysis were used to analyse the data. The results showed that the priority role chosen by the participants is Human Resource Management as a Strategic Partner (followed by HR Management as an Administrative Expert.)

**Keywords:** Human Resource Business Partner, Change Agent, Strategic Partner.

### 1. Introduction

Globalization and VUCA conditions have created a significant effect on the organization, as customers have a high expectation for quality, speed, and performance (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). As a result, some competitive issues arise in responding to the customer's expectation, adapting to the new technology, managing change, employee development, and cost-efficiency. Meanwhile, over the years, organisations' expectations of their HR managers roles have also changed. The function is not only to ensure that the policies, practices, and procedures of HR Management will assist the employees to develop, but also to assist the organization's to be consistent with its values and to achieve their objectives and vision. There are also some changes in human resource management roles and functions, for example, at present they are not only doing recruiting, selecting, administering pay and benefits, planning employee development, and conducting performance management, but they also

play as a change agent and has more strategic role. Thus, human resource management's nature status and role have progressively become more strategic, as this is the demand of the VUCA world.

## **2. Significance Of The Study**

However, in practice, this demand is not easy to be fulfilled satisfactory in a state-owned organization. HRM at the State-owned organization needs to be professional to fulfill the demand of the stakeholders. This condition includes the demand of the society that needs to serve professionally, meet the employees' demands and management, and adjust to the bureaucratic culture, which is the characterization of most government institutions in Indonesia. This study aims to identify the perceived roles of HR Management as Human Resource Business Partner from the eyes of the employees.

## **3. Review of Related Study**

### **3.1 Challenges of HR Management**

Ulrich (1997), in his book, mentioned that there are 7 (seven) challenges that have been faced by HR Management, namely: 1) Globalization, which needs new markets, new products and services, new competencies, a new way of thinking, and new mindsets. Consequently, HR Management needs to create a model for attaining global agility, effectiveness, and competitiveness; 2) Value Chain for business competitiveness and HR Practices, which means building employees to be more customer responsive, which is responsive to the customer's needs and wants. Responsiveness includes faster decision making, innovation, leading in price and value, and building a value chain for the customers. In this regard, employee attitudes have correlated with customer's attitude; 3) Profitability through cost and growth, increased profitability means increasing revenue and decreasing the costs; 4) Capability focus, in this regard, HR professionals need to focus on what they should do in terms of capabilities that they must create. They should seek what capabilities and competencies for the employees they must possess and what capabilities currently exist within the organization; 5) Managing change, as the world is full of changes, there is no other way that HR practices also ready to face the changes. They need to help how an organization and the employees change and learn to change faster and still comfortable with it; 6) Technology, as technology changes and more advanced, they will change how and where the work is doing, as employees might work in other places, not only at the office; and 7) Attracting, retaining, and measuring competence and intellectual capital, as the world is changing and the requirement is high and competitive, finding and maintaining a promising talent is also challenging.

### **3.2 HR Management roles**

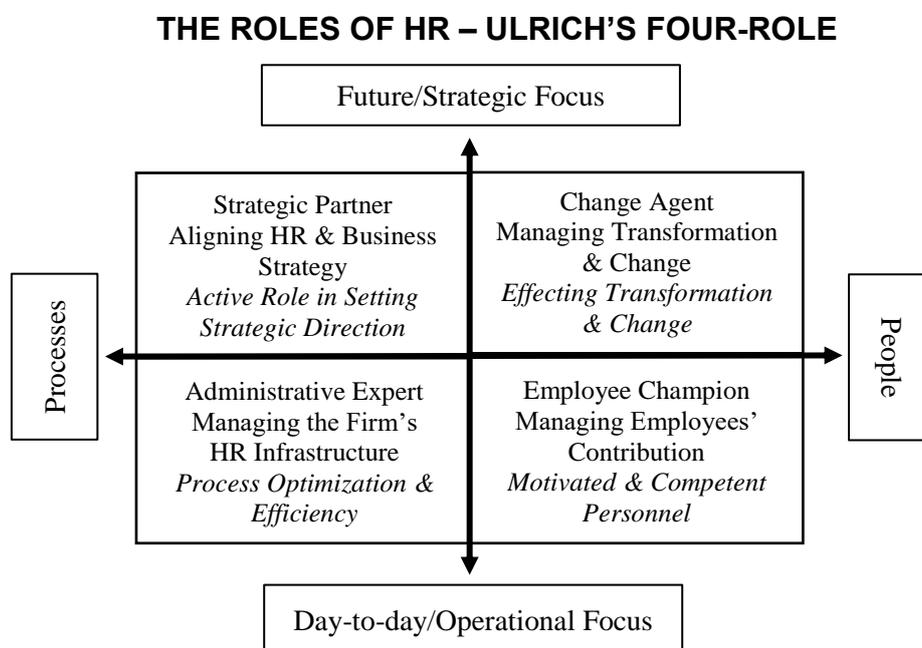
Based on Ulrich (1997) categorization of HR management as HRBP, there are 4 (four) roles that should be possessed by the HR Management, namely:

1. Administrative expert. This role focuses on the providing firm's infrastructure, which is HR managers design and delivers processes for day-to-day HR management operations such as: recruiting, training, conduct performance management, rewarding and managing compensation and benefits, rotating and promoting, and developing employees. The deliverable for this role is administrative efficiency, which is HR management will process this day-to-day efficiently and effectively.

Identifying the Perceived Roles as Human Resources Strategic Business Partner:  
Study at Public-Service Organization

2. Employee champion. This type of role focuses on managing and facilitating employee contributions to the organization. In this regard, HR managers will address day-to-day problems, concerns, and employees' needs and ensure that those needs will meet. The deliverable for this role will increase employee commitment and engagement.
3. Change agent. The focus in this role is on managing the transformation and organizational change. HR managers will help to identify and implement the transformation processes and assist the employees to face the organizational change. The deliverable is the organization's capacity for change.
4. Strategic partner. The focus in this role is the HR managers that play a significant role in aligning HR practices with business strategy. The deliverable of this role is strategy execution.

These 4 (four) roles shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: The Four Roles of Human Resource Management (Ulrich, 1997)**

**Table 1: Definitions of Human Resource Roles**

No	Roles	Deliverable / Outcome	HR Key Roles	Activities
1	Administrative Expert (Management of Firm Infrastructure)	Building an efficient infrastructure	Administrative Expert Focus on day-to-day operation. (Related to process)	Re-engineering Organisation Processes: Shared services

2	Employee Champion (Management of Employee Contribution)	Increasing employee commitment and capability	Employee Champion Focus on day-to-day operation. (Related to people)	Listen and respond to employees. Provide resources to employees.
3	As a change agent (Management of Transformation and Change)	Creating a renewed organisation	Change Agent – Focus on Future and Strategic. (Related to people)	Manage the transformation and change. Ensure capacity for change.
4	Management of Strategic Human Resources	Executing strategy	Strategic Partner Focus on Future and Strategic focus (Related to process)	Align HR and Business strategy: Organisational diagnosis

Source: Ulrich (1997)

The increasing focus on business partnership and the privileged role afforded to strategic imperatives will explain why HRM sometimes fails to deliver specific employee-centred outcomes (Legge 2005; Thompson 2003). Therefore, the roles that prospective HR professionals believe they will fulfill in the workplace is quite impressive.

Further, Francis and Keegan (2006), based on Ulrich's (1997) work, recognize that two possible roles that HR managers could fulfill are the roles of a business partner and employee champion. As a result, becoming a perfect agent of top management will enforce organizational strategy. It is said that HRM had lost sight of its essential role in supporting employees (in this case, acting as an administrative expert) (Kochan, 2004; 2007).

Moreover, Kochan (2004, 2006), Francis and Keegan (2006), and Gilmore and Williams (2007) mentioned that the shift of HR to a business partner role is quite critical. According to them, this is a more advocating role than a much more pluralist view of HRM in ensuring a healthy and sustainable climate in the organization.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1 Participants and Sampling

The participants were chosen using Purposive Random Sampling, with the characteristics as follows: 1) permanent employees; managerial positions, and have been working in the organizations more than 5 (five) years. The number of 58 (fifty-eight) participants consists of The Head of Department, Branch Manager, Regional Deputy Assistant, Deputy Director, a representative from branches, and Head Quarter.

### 4.2 Data collection tools and data analysis

Identifying the Perceived Roles as Human Resources Strategic Business Partner:  
Study at Public-Service Organization

As this study is a qualitative approach, the data collection was using Virtual Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The FGD was conducted 3 (three) times, as follows FGD 1 (one) consists of 26 participants, FGD 2 (two) 19 participants, and FGD 3 (three) 13 participants. Content Analysis and Descriptive Analysis were used to analyze the data.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Issues and challenges of HRM as a Human Resource Strategic Business Partner

Based on the FGD, some issues need to be solved in terms of the 4 (four) HR management roles and functions.

**Table 2:** HR Management as an Administrative Expert

Nr.	Category and Description	N	% of Admin Expert*	% of HRBP**
<b>I. Job Rotation</b>				
1	Develop the indicator and standard operating procedure of the Job Rotation program such as duration, place, career path, and competency test.	11	17.7	4.62
2	The job rotation program should be transparent and fair.	5	8.2	2.10
3	All employees are entitled to have the chance to be rotated in many different places, not only rotated within Head Quarter for some people.	3	4.8	1.26
4	Job Rotation is conducted based on the organization's needs, not on the needs of the employees.	2	3.2	0.84
5	Evaluating the job tender process	2	3.2	0.84
<b>Total Job Rotation</b>		<b>23</b>	<b>37.1</b>	<b>9.66</b>
<b>II. HCIS</b>				
1	Optimization of the HCIS with the objective to develop fairness and transparency in enable employees to get access to it.	10	16,1	4.20
2	Developing profile for each employee, including IDP, passion, a track record of job rotation, performance.	8	13	3.36

Nr.	Category and Description	N	% of Admin Expert*	% of HRBP**
3	Data in HCIS should be based on the Job Rotation program.	2	3.2	0.84
<b>Total HCIS</b>		<b>20</b>	<b>32.3</b>	<b>8.40</b>
<b>III. Career Development</b>				
1	There should be information and communication about career development for the employees.	5	<b>8.2</b>	2.10
2	Every employee should have Individual Development Plan.	2	3.2	0.84
3	Should establish talent pool and talent management program.	2	3.2	0.84
4	There should be integrated information about the accurate career track and development into the HCIS program.	2	3.2	0.84
5	Career development should use the results of the Individual assessment and track record of performance management.	2	3.2	0.84
6	Every employee is entitled to have the same opportunity to develop their career.	2	3.2	0.84
<b>Total Career Development</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>6.30</b>
<b>IV. Delegation of the Authority</b>				
1.	Regional Director should have the delegation conduct the rotation program in their authorities.	2	3.2	0.84
2.	The manager of the work unit has the authority to nominate their subordinates.	2	3.2	0.84
<b>Total Delegation of the authority</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>1.68</b>
<b>Total responses for administrative expert</b>		<b>62</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>26.1</b>

\*Total responses in Administrative Expert are 62

\*\*Total responses as HRBP are 238

Table 3 (three) above shows that the three priority ranks of the preferred roles of HRM as a preferred Administrative Expert lies in a) the activities of job rotation (37.1%), b) managing HCIS (32.3%), and c) Managing career Development (24.2%). Further, the results also reveal that developing the standard operating procedures in job rotation and optimalization of HCIS are the important needs to be done by HR management as an administrative expert.

Identifying the Perceived Roles as Human Resources Strategic Business Partner:  
Study at Public-Service Organization

## 5.2 HR Management as Employee Champion

The results in Table 3 show the perception of the roles and activities HR Management as an Employee Champion.

**Table 3:** HR Management as an Employee Champion

Nr.	Category and Description	N	% of Admin Expert*	% of HRBP**
<b>I. Roles and Function of HR Management</b>				
1	Establishing a complete detail of employee's data	2	3.57	0.84
2	Review and updates all employee's data	2	3.57	0.84
3	Develop Talent Management.	2	3.57	0.84
4	Review and updates HR Planning accordingly.	2	3.57	0.84
5	Make sure about the quality (including background and personalities) of HR personnel.	2	3.57	0.84
6	Response to the employees' issue immediately	2	3.57	0.84
7	Monitor the condition of employees on-site/branches	2	3.57	0.84
8	Make decision objectively (without like and dislike)	2	3.57	0.84
9	Support and motivates employees	2	3.57	0.84
10	Establish open communication and share useful information with all the employees	2	3.57	0.84
11	Work efficiently with sufficient numbers of employees.	2	3.57	0.84
<b>Total Roles and Function of HR Management</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>39.3</b>	<b>9.24</b>
<b>II. Employee Development</b>				
1	Providing training and development for all the HRM officers	3	5.4	1.26
2	Conduct Talent Management	3	5.4	1.26
3	Mapping competency gap for all employees	2	3.57	0.84
4	Develop the employee development planning program to create the performance culture.	2	3.57	0.84
5	Conduct workshop and development program to face the digitalization era.	2	3.57	0.84
6	Develop the employee development planning program to create the performance culture.	2	3.57	0.84
<b>Total Employee Development</b>		<b>14</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>5.88</b>

Nr.	Category and Description	N	% of Admin Expert*	% of HRBP**
<b>III. HCIS</b>				
1	Updating and optimization of HCIS	7	12,5	2.94
2	Implementing HCIS into the digital workplace and HCIS Mobile	3	5.4	1.26
3	HCIS should consist of information about employees and information regarding the offering of training, workshop, and the need for certification in the workplace.	2	3.57	0.84
<b>Total HCIS</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>21.4</b>	<b>5.04</b>
<b>IV. Managing Career Development</b>				
1	Mapping competency and career gap	3	5.4	1.26
2	Establish a clear career path and career planning for all jobs and employees	2	3.57	0.84
3	Total Managing Career Development	<b>5</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>2.10</b>
<b>V. Performance management</b>				
1	Conduct performance reviews of the employees and feedback to the employees	3	5,4	1.26
<b>Total Performance management</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>1.26</b>
<b>Total responses for employee champion</b>		<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>23.5</b>

\*Total responses in Employee Champion 56

\*\*Total responses as HRBP 238

Table 3 (three) above shows that a majority activity that should be done by HR Management as an Employee Champion is in relation with the affirmation of the roles and function of HR management (39.3%); and managing HCIS (21.4%). The results also show that the priority activities that should be done is updating and optimalization of HCIS (12.5%).

### 5.3 HR Management as Change Agent

Table 4: HR Management as Change Agent

Nr.	Category and Description	N	% of Admin Expert*	% of HRBP**
<b>I. Managing the Process of Communication</b>				
1	Establish channel and open communication	9	<b>16.3</b>	3.78
2	Socialization about the new regulation and new officers	4	7.3	1.68

Identifying the Perceived Roles as Human Resources Strategic Business Partner:  
Study at Public-Service Organization

Nr.	Category and Description	N	% of Admin Expert*	% of HRBP**
3	Updating and Information sharing	3	5.5	1.26
<b>Total Managing the Process of Communication</b>		<b>16</b>	<b>29.1</b>	<b>6.72</b>
<b>II. Assurance of the Quality HR Management as a Change Agent</b>				
1	Willing to listen to the inputs and feedback	5	9.2	2.10
2	Objective	2	3.6	0.84
3	Understanding the characteristic of personnel	2	3.6	0.84
4	Friendly and focus on service excellence	2	3,6	0.84
<b>Total Assurance of the Quality HR Management as Change Agent</b>		<b>11</b>	<b>20.0</b>	<b>4.62</b>
<b>III. Managing Compensation and benefits</b>				
1	Review and Evaluate the compensation and benefits for all levels of the employees	3	5.5	1.26
2	Review and evaluate the compensation for employees who posted in different regions	3	5.5	1.26
3	Review and evaluate the compensation every year	2	3.6	0.84
4	Conduct benchmarking about remuneration for officers	2	3.6	0.84
<b>Total Managing Compensation and Benefits</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>18,2</b>	<b>4.20</b>
<b>IV. Facilitating Team Development</b>				
1	Conduct employee gathering	3	5.5	1.26
2	Developing a sense of belonging and engagement	3	5.5	1.26
3	Facilitating tin allocation funds for branches to conduct team development in their work units	1	1.7	0.42
<b>Total Facilitating Team Development</b>		<b>7</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>2.94</b>
<b>V. Conducting Survey</b>				
1	Conduct an internal survey about employees' needs in the workplace	2	3.6	0.84
2	Conduct survey employee engagement and satisfaction	2	3.6	0.84
<b>Total Conducting Survey</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>1.68</b>
<b>VI. Monitoring</b>				
1	Visit site and branches to collect information first hand.	3	5.5	1.26
<b>Total Monitoring</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>1.26</b>
<b>VII. Facilitating Delegation Authority</b>				

Nr.	Category and Description	N	% of Admin Expert*	% of HRBP**
1	To facilitate delegating the authority for Regional Deputy Director to decide HRM issues.	2	3.6	0.84
<b>Total Facilitating Delegation Authority</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>0.84</b>
<b>VIII. Optimalization HRM as a change agent</b>				
1	Develop task force of change agent in many areas and locations.	2	3.6	0.84
<b>Total Optimalization HRM as a Change Agent</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>0.84</b>
<b>Total Responses as a Change Agent</b>		<b>55</b>		<b>23.1%</b>

\*Total responses as a change agent are 55

\*\*Total responses as HRBP 238

Table 4 (four) above shows that the majority preferences of the activities that should be done by HR Management as a Change Agent is in relation with the managing of the process communication (29,1%), followed by the assurance of the quality of HR Management officer (20%), and Managing Compensation and benefits (18.3%).

#### 5.4 HR Management as Strategic Partner

**Table 5:** HR Management as Strategic Partner

Nr.	Category and Description	N	% of Admin Expert*	% of HRBP**
<b>I. Succession Planning</b>				
1	Managing succession planning effectively, so there will not be any lag time between the successors.	21	<b>32.3</b>	8.82
2	HR Management should develop a database for the alternative successor.	13	20.0	.546
3	There are transparent career management and career path, so it is easy to find a successor.	7	10.8	2.94
4	Assurance that HR management is the one that decides about the successor, with no intervention from anybody.	2	3.07	0.84
<b>Total Succession Planning</b>		<b>43</b>	<b>66.2</b>	<b>18.07</b>
<b>II. HCIS and System</b>				
1	HR Management should create Integrated HCIS.	6	9.2	2.52

Identifying the Perceived Roles as Human Resources Strategic Business Partner:  
Study at Public-Service Organization

Nr.	Category and Description	N	% of Admin Expert*	% of HRBP**
2	HR develops a program that enables employees to rotate (job tender), and it is supported with the data from the system.	2	3.07	0.84
3	HCIS will support the HR management to provide employee's information.	2	3.07	0.84
<b>Total HCIS and System</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>15.4</b>	<b>4.20</b>
<b>III. Learning &amp; Development</b>				
1	Develop a particular Fast Track Program for talent that will become the successor.	3	4.6	1.26
2	Adding the quota number for a leadership training program.	2	3.07	0.84
3	Manage and plan the training program effectively	1	1.54	0.42
<b>Total Learning &amp; Development</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>2.52</b>
<b>IV. Talent Management</b>				
1	Develop a talent pool	2	3,07	0.84
2	Conduct competency gap.	2	3,07	0.84
<b>Total Talent Management</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>1.68</b>
<b>V. Regulation &amp; Obedience</b>				
1	To ensure that regulations are clear enough to cater to the responsibilities of each party.	1	1,54	0.42
2	To ensure that all stakeholders should obey and follow the regulations.	1	1,54	0.42
<b>Total Regulation &amp; Obedience</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>0.84</b>
<b>Total responses for Strategic Partner</b>		<b>65</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>27.31</b>
<b>Total all responses HR Management as HRBP</b>		<b>238</b>		

\*Total responses in Strategic partner 65

\*\*Total responses as HRBP 238

The table 5 (five) above shows that the priority actions that should be done is in relation with managing succession planning. Tables 2,3,4, 5 and the figure 2, show that HR Management as a Strategic Partner were chosen about 27,3 % compared to the other 3 (three) roles, further it also shows that the 4 (four) roles were not significantly different as follow: HR management as an Administrative expert (26.1%), HR management as an employee champion (23.5%), and HR management as a Change Agent (23.1%).



**Figure 2:** The results of the research

## 6. Discussion

The studies revealed that, currently employees preferred HR Management roles more as Strategic Partner and as Administrative Expert. Meanwhile, at the same time, HR Management as Employee Champion and Change Agent is also needed. However, they are not in the first priority of the preferred roles. These findings are quite interesting as being a Strategic Partner and as an Administrative Expert, just like in the two opposites roles, as one deals with the strategic issues and the other dealing with day-to-day routine HRM operational. These findings are supporting the initial concept model of Ulrich (1997). In this model, HRM professionals should simultaneously fulfill the role of being an Administrative Expert, as an expert in managing day-to-day operation, and as a Strategic Partner, which supports, implements, and influences the organizational strategy.

These findings are the opposite of Raub and Alvarez's (2006) findings which showed that HR Management's role as an Administrative Expert lies in the highest rank, but the role of the strategic partner is the least. In this regard, HR management should closely integrate their activities with top management to ensure that they serve a long-term strategic purpose. In this regard, the strategic fit should be enhanced if the HR personnel is mastering the concept, tools, and techniques to develop employees.

Thus, developing a relationship and partnership between line managers and HR officers is critical (Bahuguna, Kumari, & Srivastava, 2009). Further, restructuring the HR department and enhancing administrative efficiency are also critical issues in designing strategic human resources, and integrating HR into strategic (Bahuguna., Kumari, Srivastava, (2009).

In contrast, Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) argue that the business environment's ongoing change requires HRM roles to adapt to the new context continuously. HRM professionals as business partners should continually seek new ways to manage people, performance, information, and work (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). In relation to this, several studies also investigate how HRM professionals define their identities between the two poles responsible for satisfying employee needs and fulfilling management requirements (Gerpott, 2015). According to Gerpott (2015), HR management implementation as a business partner concept will change two ways. First, the restructuring of an

## Identifying the Perceived Roles as Human Resources Strategic Business Partner: Study at Public-Service Organization

organization's HRM department into a strategic business. Second, HRM professionals as strategic business partners should seek new ways to manage people, performance, information, and work (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

This study also revealed that the participants' understanding of HR Management's preference roles as Human Resource Business Partner were not too clear. It showed that there are topics such as HCIS falls under the three roles of HR Management, namely HR as an Administrative Expert, HR as an Employee Champion, and HR as a Strategic Partner. From this finding, it may conclude that HCIS is a very significant issue to be taken care of in all different HR management roles, as we are already entering the Digital Era and Industrial Revolution 4.0 and 5.0.

Some limitations embedded in this study are as follows: First, this study was conducted using a qualitative approach, which cannot be interpreted as a cause-and-effect studies. Further study might use the quantitative approach so that the implementation of other quantitative measures can be apply. Second, this study is conducted at a State-Owned organization, which might have specific organizational culture, compares to the culture of different types of organizations. Further study to conduct this type of study in different organizations is needed. Third, this study only involving participants at the managerial level, which is no staff participates in this study. As a result, this condition might have different results if the staffs also participate in this study. The further study recommends extending the participants to include the position of staff in the study.

### **7. Conclusion and Recommendation**

According to the concept of HRBP, there are 4 (four) roles that should be played by HR personnel, namely as an administrative expert, as an employee champion, as a change agent, and as a strategic partner. This study revealed that participants in this study preferred that HR management roles are almost similar in each of the 4 (four) functions, although HR's role as Strategic Partner is the highest, followed by HR's role as an Administrative Expert. To have a clearer picture of the roles of HR Management as Strategic Business Partner, it is recommended that the current study will be followed by the study about the profile of HR management practices in this organization.

The results also revealed that HR Management as a Strategic Partner had been chosen as the highest and significant role that should be played in addressing a fast-changing business scenario and enhancing the HR practices and organizational strategic plan's strategic fit. In addition to that, HR Management also should understand that the strategic approach to human resource management means involving and managing human assets.

Current research on strategic human resource management (HRM) in Asia usually has involved the transference and adaptation of Western management models to the Asian business environmental behavior (Chatterjee & Nankervis 2007; Stanton & Nankervis, 2011). However, Asia as an Eastern country might have different HRM functions within different organizations. Consequently, many studies in terms of HR Management's roles as Human Resource Strategic Business Partner should be studied more frequently in Indonesia and in Asia.

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