CIPD
Championing better work and working lives

THE PEOPLE PROFESSION
IN 2018

Asia-Pacific

Report

The people profession in 2018: Asia-Pacific

Contents

① **Acknowledgements**

This report was written by Sara Moulton, writer and consultant.

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The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

The Australian HR Institute (AHRI) is the national association representing human resource and people management professionals, with around 20,000 members from Australia and across the globe. The association sets standards through accreditation of HR qualifications at universities across Australia, conducts research into people management practices, and assists governments in the development of policy and legislation that affects people at work.

The Institute for Human Resource Professionals (IHRP) is the only HR professional body in Singapore authorised to implement the national HR credentials. It was set up by the Ministry of Manpower, the National Trades Union Congress and Singapore National Employers Federation. IHRP has the goal of setting the HR standards of excellence and enabling human capital development in enterprises.

② Foreword

The Asia-Pacific region, covering much of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania, has the most dynamic economy in the world. The World Bank's October 2018 update expects the East Asia-Pacific region's economy to grow by 6.3% this year, underpinned by strong domestic demand. But there are many risks (and opportunities) that governments and firms will have to navigate to maintain growth – protectionist policies, geo-political tensions, environmental degradation, fiscal stress and public debt, ageing populations, cannibalisation of existing businesses by emergent technologies, widening socio-economic divides, and the changing expectations of employers and the millions of workers in the region.

These factors will challenge the (mainly Western) models firms have traditionally relied on to manage their people. In this context, organisations and their HR functions must adapt and evolve to meet the needs of the modern workforce, and to build the skills and competencies to remain relevant in a globalised economy.

The CIPD, in collaboration with the Institute for Human Resource Professionals in Singapore (IHRP) and the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI), has developed a survey to take a bi-annual snapshot of the state of the people profession in the region. The aim is to establish where, when and if the profession is responding to the external and organisational factors shaping the workplace. Given HR's role in people management and development, governments and organisations alike will be keen to ensure that the people profession is competent and confident in its role. The survey data also provides a snapshot of career aspirations and professional practice, which helps us, as professional associations, when looking at how we may best support practitioners' continuing professional development to meet future challenges.

This initial Asia-Pacific report covers Australia, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore. The survey will evolve as we gain more insight into the drivers shaping the region and we hope to include more countries in future.

Dr Wilson Wong, Head of Insight & Futures, CIPD

③ Executive summary

In the evolving world of work, new specialisms, ways of working and priorities have emerged – and with them, the role of the people profession has diversified. Today's people professionals are expected to apply their expertise in people, work and change to drive sustainable value for people, organisations and wider society. They're also called on to step up to ethical issues in organisations and help create cultures of transparency. However, they may face significant challenges in fulfilling this unique role because of competing priorities within the organisations in which they work. Varying cultural norms and expectations across the Asia-Pacific region can also affect practitioners' ability to uphold strong professional standards and call out unethical practices in organisations.

In collaboration with the Institute for Human Resource Professionals in Singapore (IHRP) and the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI), we surveyed 1,332 people professionals in Asia-Pacific (APAC) about their career paths, values, behaviours, and organisational context. The countries included were Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Australia.

The survey provides a snapshot of where people professionals currently are in their careers and professional practice.

Key findings

- Across the APAC countries, people professionals tended to feel that their career progression has met their expectations, and that the work they do is meaningful. Overall, the main barriers to career progression were lack of opportunities with their employer and organisational politics. Practitioners in Malaysia (27%) and Singapore (27%) were more likely to cite lack of opportunities with their current employer as the single biggest barrier to career progression. Meanwhile, respondents in Hong Kong (20%) and Australia (18%) were more likely than those in other countries to say that personal confidence has been the key barrier.

- We explored the extent to which practitioners feel able to exercise professional judgement in their role, and the data revealed that Australian respondents were most likely to report that their job gives them the opportunity to express themselves as a professional (74%). People professionals in Malaysia (44%) and Hong Kong (45%) were the most likely of the APAC countries to feel that there's a conflict between what their organisation expects them to do and what they feel is appropriate according to their professional judgement.

- We asked people professionals which sources of evidence they use in their decision-making, and found that personal experience is the top factor across the APAC countries, followed by organisational data and insights from experts.

In a time when the expectations of people professionals are so high, and their roles are becoming more complex, the results of this study are a useful reference point for any practitioner to understand the current shape of the profession.

④ **Introduction**

The CIPD has worked in collaboration with the Institute for Human Resource Professionals (IHRP) and the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) to develop a new survey of career development and current practice within our profession. We also worked with the European Association for People Management (EAPM) to carry out this study in Europe, and these findings are summarised in a separate report. This new study will provide robust, longitudinal data on the shape of the people profession across countries, alongside information on career and professional development for those working in the profession across the globe. The aim is to include a set of core tracker questions each year the survey is run, with a focus section on a particular topic of interest for each region.

What is the people profession?

We have moved away from referring to 'professionals working in HR and L&D' to talking about 'people professionals', to reflect the wide range of specialisms that now make up our profession – encompassing HR, learning and development, organisational development, and organisational change.

In today's world of work, there is a shift away from basing decisions on financial outcomes and towards making values-based choices that support sustainability. In other words, from profits to purpose. Recent scandals in Asia-Pacific (APAC), such as the 1 Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal where irregular transactions totalling US$4.2 billion

were discovered, and the mistreatment of foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong (Parry 2017), have highlighted the importance of ethics and professionalism. In a world of increasing distrust, an essential characteristic of being a professional is moral integrity (CIPD 2017). In order to rebuild trust with customers and employees, organisations need to start supporting leaders and managers to make ethical decisions. The people profession can lead this change in focus from the front line, but before we can consider our profession's role in helping organisations adopt a more values-driven purpose, first we must understand what the profession looks like today.

The APAC market is complex and diverse, both culturally and financially. It is made up of some emerging markets, such as Vietnam with 6.8% GDP (International Monetary Fund 2018), while other more established economies are seeing slower growth, such as Singapore with 3.6% for 2017 (Table 1).

**Table 1: GDP projections (International Monetary Fund 2018)**

	Classification	2017 GDP (%)	2018 GDP (projected) (%)
Australia	Advanced economy	2.3	3.0
Hong Kong	Advanced economy	3.8	3.6
Malaysia	Emerging market and developing economy	5.9	5.3
Singapore	Advanced economy	3.6	2.9

Alongside the macro-economic trends that will affect performance and quality of work is the cultural diversity within these different markets. Hofstede's cross-cultural communication framework published in 1984 included two key dimensions: individualism versus collectivism and power distance. Individualism versus collectivism refers to how tightly knit a society is, and whether individuals can expect loyalty from others. This fundamentally looks at the self-concept of a society, and whether the group thinks as an 'I' or as a 'we'. The higher the number for individualism, the less expected it is for people within that culture to think of the 'we'. Power distance refers to whether individuals accept that power in institutions and organisations is unequally distributed. This dimension looks at how society handles inequality among people, so a high score for power distance means that the society accepts hierarchy (Hofstede 1984).

Hofstede's (1984) research can help us understand how these cultural dimensions can challenge practitioners' ability to uphold strong standards of professionalism and call out unethical practices in organisations. The index scores are relative: the lowest country is positioned around zero and the highest around 100. For example, Figure 1 shows that Australia has a moderate power distance, which could mean that Australians do not expect to work in a completely flat organisation. Conversely, Malaysia ranks the highest for power distance (out of all 50 countries surveyed), so professionals working in Malaysia can expect an unequal distribution of power and very hierarchical organisations.

In addition, three of the four markets in this survey have a marked preference for collectivist thinking. Collectivist societies prioritise harmony over openness, which translates into expectations of how people behave. Professionals in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore therefore tend to consider what is best for the whole rather than just themselves. Another Asian influence that is important to note is the expectation of 'saving face'. In many Asian cultures, saving face is the avoidance of embarrassment or humiliation, regardless of whether or not someone has acted wrongly.

Figure 1: Hofstede's cultural dimensions (%)

Power distance ▪ Individualism
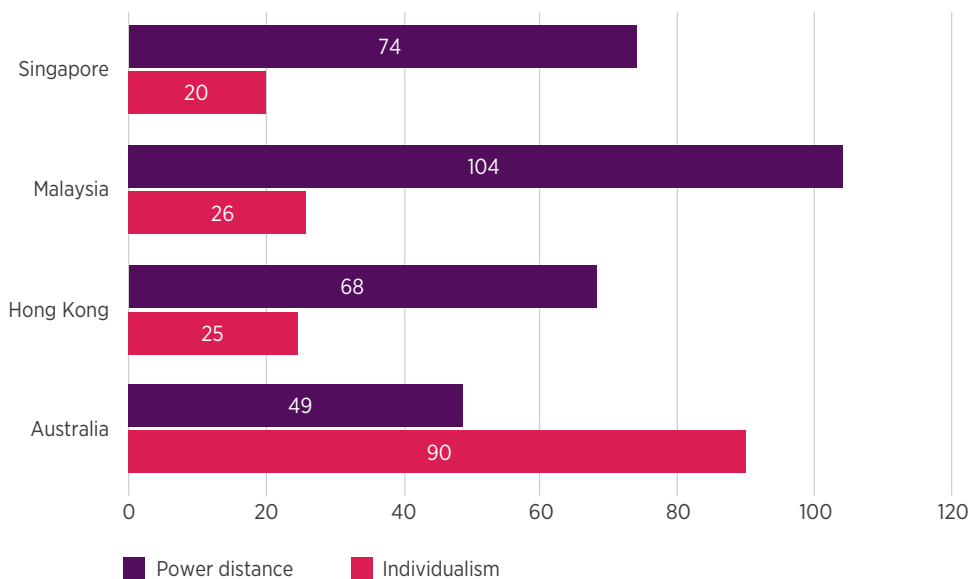
Methodology

We conducted an online survey of people professionals between 28 March and 8 June 2018. Respondents were primarily based in Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Australia. There were also 100 respondents in other countries in the region, but the sample sizes were too small to conduct any meaningful analysis of each region, so these responses have been included as 'other'.

The sample included a mix of seniority levels and professional body members. In total, there were 1,332 respondents in Asia-Pacific. The online survey was distributed by YouGov, and the sample was extended with respondents from across our networks and those of our partners. Table 2 outlines the total number of respondents by region.

Table 2: Respondents per country

Asia-Pacific	
Singapore	313
Hong Kong	152
Malaysia	204
Australia	563
Other	100
TOTAL	**1,332**

The sample characteristics are shown in the appendix. Throughout the report we highlight interesting differences between sectors, organisation sizes and seniority levels, where these are significantly greater than could be expected by chance ($p < 0.05$).

Dimensions of career success

In the literature, career success is divided into extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions (Ballout 2007). Extrinsic factors represent the objective component of career success, that is, observable accomplishments or outcomes including pay and promotions. There is a strong

subjective aspect to career success, since what constitutes success for one individual, or someone at a particular point in their career, may look different for another at a different career stage. The intrinsic – or subjective – component refers to individuals' feelings about their careers and progression, and can be assessed in terms of psychological success such as career satisfaction and happiness in work.

The objective and subjective measures of career success used in the survey are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Measures of career success

Objective (extrinsic) success measures	Subjective (intrinsic) success measures
Annual salary	Career satisfaction
Number of promotions	Perceived likelihood of promotion
	Meaningfulness of work

Dimensions of professional practice

To explore professional practice, we looked at factors outlined in a model which was developed based on our previous research (CIPD 2015b, 2017) and key areas of the new Profession Map (see Figure 2). Body of knowledge is of course a fundamental element of professional practice, but we did not include it in the survey because it can be difficult to measure.

Figure 2: Theoretical model for factors influencing ability to champion professionalism

| Individual factors	Organisational factors	Professional behaviour
Body of knowledge	Organisational values	Professional courage
Professional values	Ethical climate	Evidence-based practice
Perceived responsibility to different stakeholders	Credibility of team/department	

⑤ A snapshot of the profession

The survey provides a snapshot of where people professionals currently are in their careers and professional practice. In this section, we introduce the high-level comparisons between markets, before we explore the key findings within each market.

Career progression

To explore objective career success and what factors are associated with people professionals' ability to achieve it, we first asked respondents how many promotions they have received over their entire career, including promotions within the same or a different organisation (Figure 3). The findings showed that practitioners in Singapore and Australia have most commonly received between three and five promotions (43% and 37% respectively), while practitioners in Hong Kong and Malaysia have more often received one to two promotions (43% and 41% respectively).

Figure 3: Number of promotions (%)
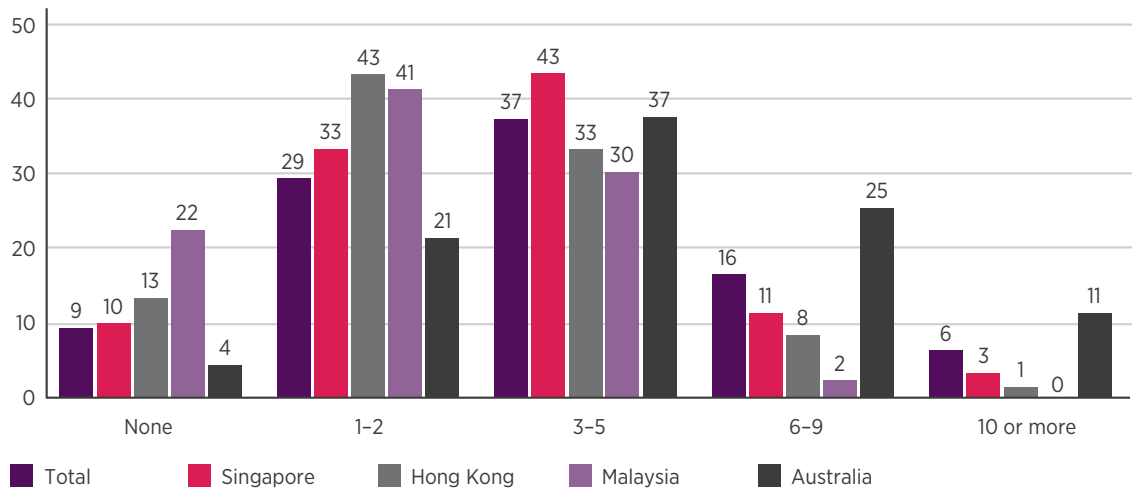
Base: APAC n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

To look at practitioners' subjective view of their career advancement, we asked how likely they think it is that they will receive a promotion within their current organisation in the next three years. The findings showed that across the APAC countries in total, practitioners most commonly said that it was somewhat likely they would be promoted (38%) (Figure 4). While people professionals in Australia were most likely to have had six or more promotions compared with respondents in the other APAC countries, they were more likely to feel that it's not at all likely they will be promoted (27%) compared with those in Singapore (14%), Hong Kong (12%) and Malaysia (11%).

Figure 4: Perceived likelihood of promotion (%)
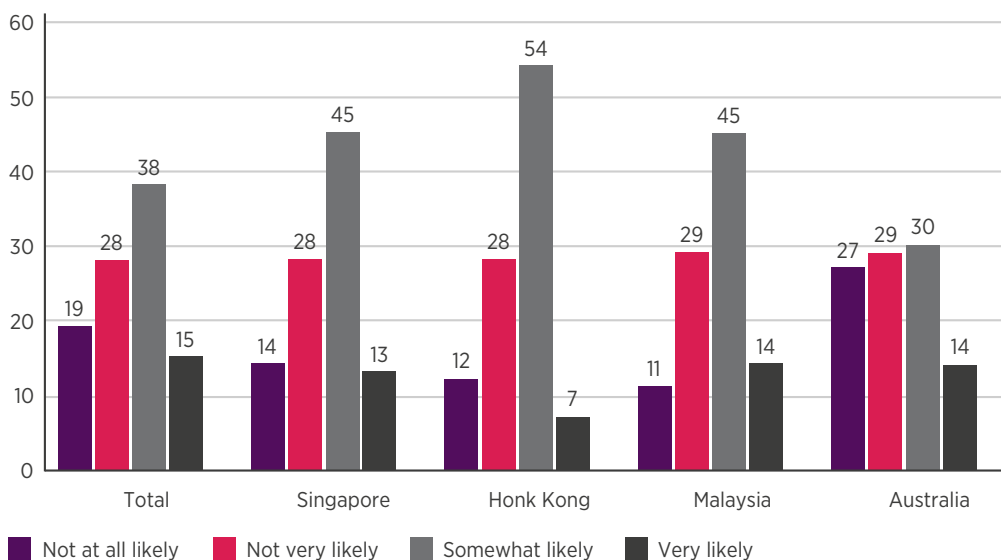
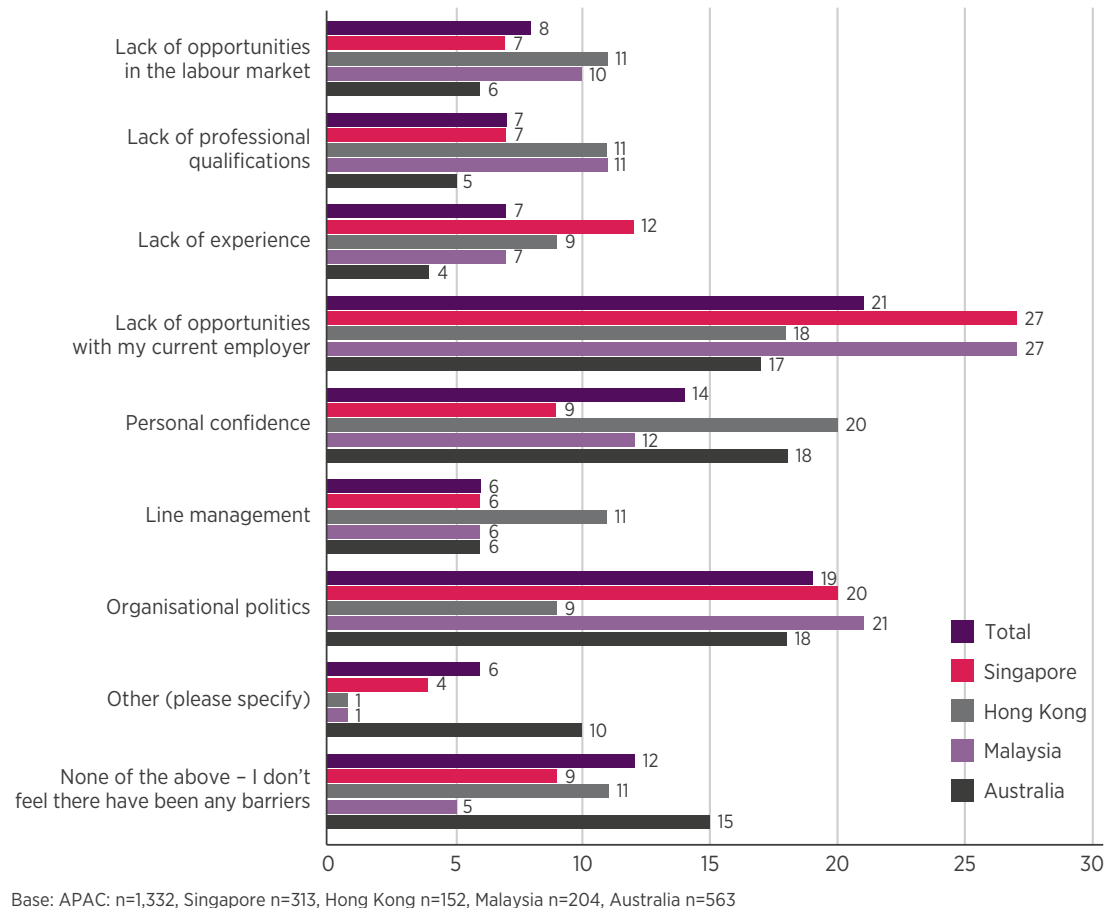Base: APAC n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

Across the APAC countries, people professionals were more likely to say their career progression to date has met their expectations than not. People professionals in Australia were more likely than those in other markets to say their career progression to date has exceeded their expectations (22%), while those in Hong Kong were more likely than others to say it has failed to reach their expectations (31%) (Figure 5).

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Figure 5: Satisfaction with career progression (%)
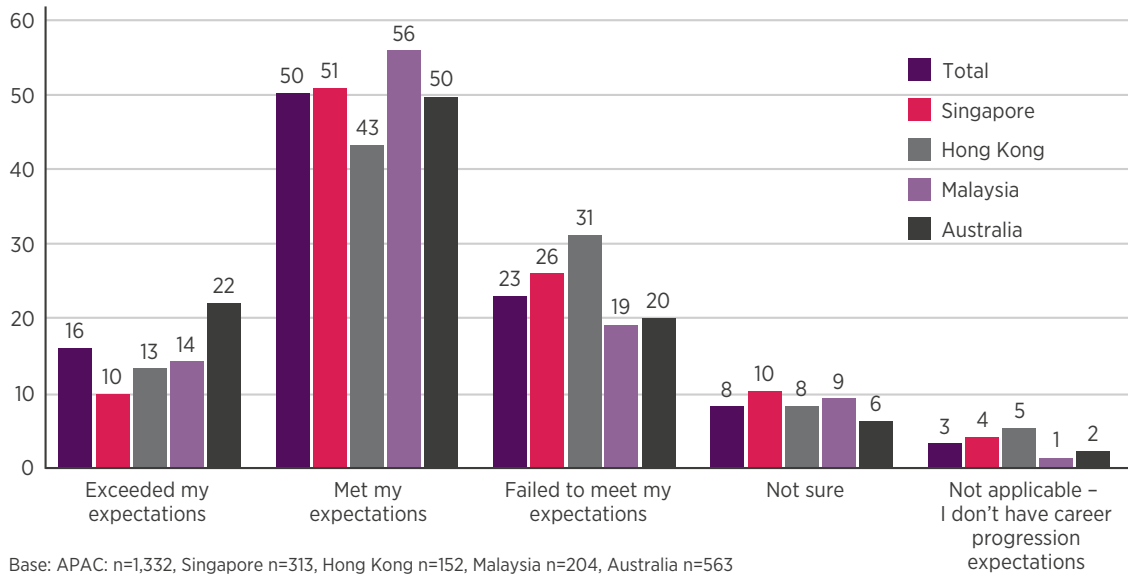
Base: APAC: n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

Overall, the main barriers to career progression were lack of opportunities with their employer (21%) and organisational politics (19%) (Figure 6). People professionals in Malaysia (27%) and Singapore (27%) were more likely to cite lack of opportunities with their current employer as the single biggest barrier to career progression. Meanwhile, respondents in Hong Kong (20%) and Australia (18%) were more likely than those in other countries to say that personal confidence has been the key barrier.

Figure 6: Barriers to career progression (%)

Base: APAC: n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

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Meaningful work

As another subjective aspect of career success, we asked the respondents to what extent they agree or disagree with a set of statements measuring meaningfulness of work (Figure 7). Overall, the majority of people professionals across the APAC countries showed agreement with these statements, with Australian practitioners generally showing stronger agreement compared with respondents in the other countries. Respondents in Singapore were more likely than those in Hong Kong and Malaysia to say that their work makes them happy (70%, compared with 57% in both Hong Kong and Malaysia) and that they feel energised by their work (72%, compared with 57% in both Hong Kong and Malaysia). On the other hand, respondents in Hong Kong (18%) were more likely than those in Singapore (12%) and Australia (7%) to disagree that they see a connection between their work and the larger social good of their community.

Figure 7: Meaningfulness of work (% agree)
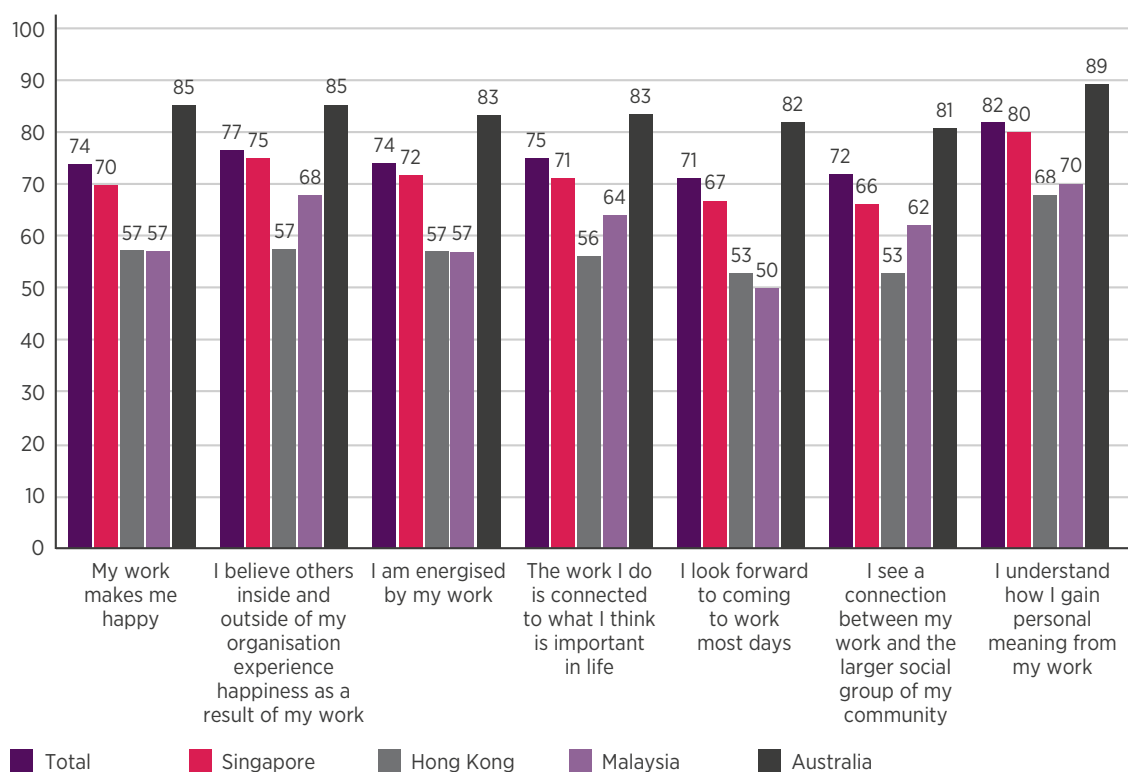
Base: APAC: n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

**Professional development and skills**

This section of the report compares levels of skills and professional development across the Asia-Pacific countries. To find out practitioners' level of engagement in continuing professional development (CPD), we asked them how often they carry out different aspects of CPD (these aspects correspond with the stages of the CIPD's CPD cycle) (Figures 8 and 8a). Practitioners in Australia were more likely than those in the other APAC countries to have very often identified their own L&D needs (16%), acted on their L&D plan (14%), reflected on what they've learned (21%) and applied their learning in the work they do (28%). Malaysian respondents were more likely to have often measured the impact their learning has had (43%), compared with those in Singapore (29%) and Australia (25%).

Figure 8: Percentage of practitioners who have often or very often taken CPD actions (1) (%)
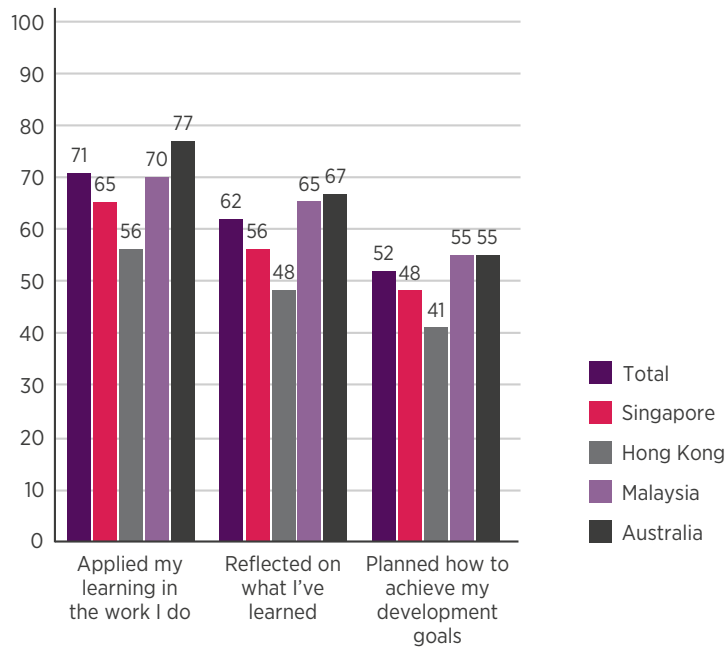
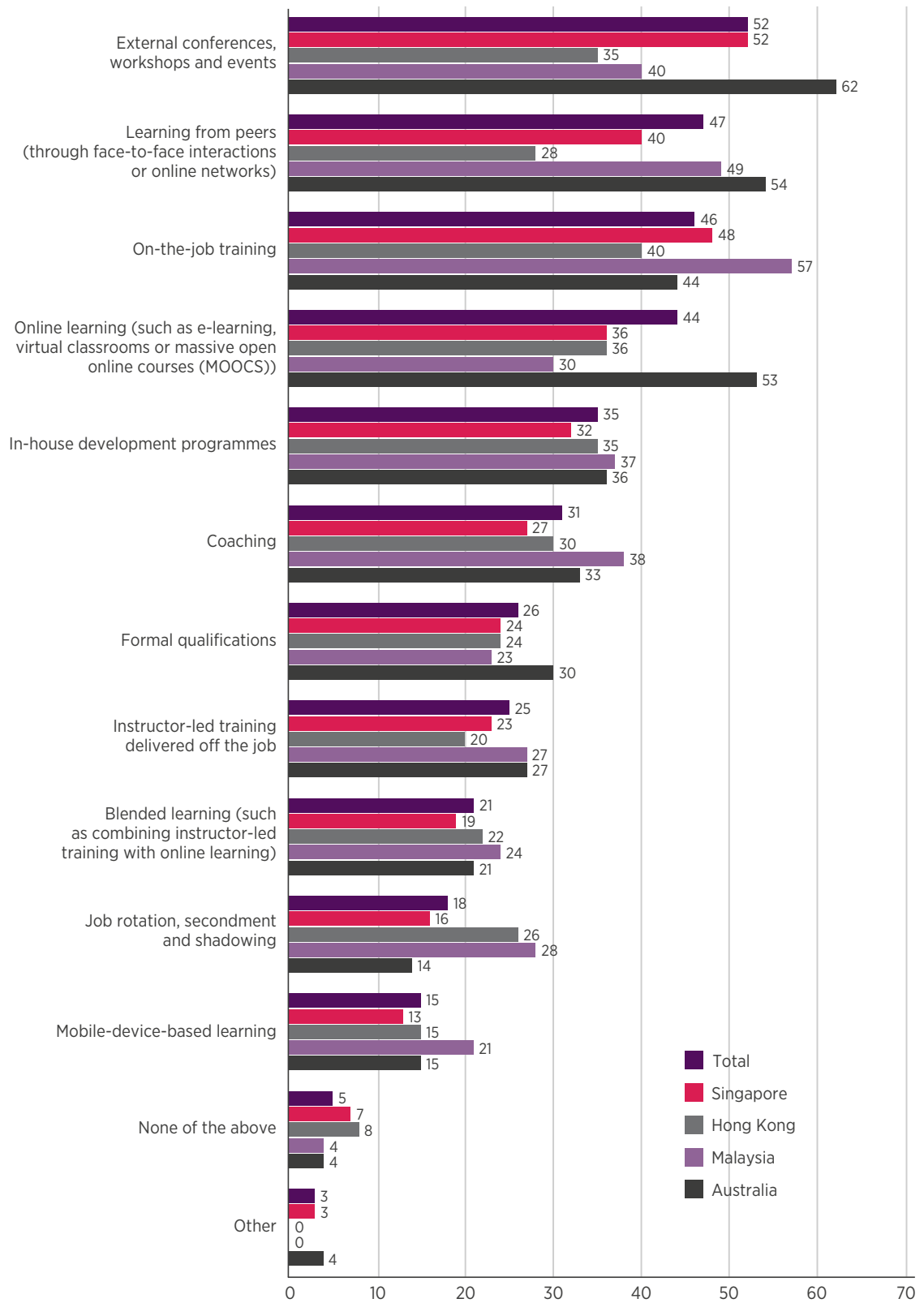Base: APAC: n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

Figure 8a: Percentage of practitioners who have often or very often taken CPD actions (2) (%)
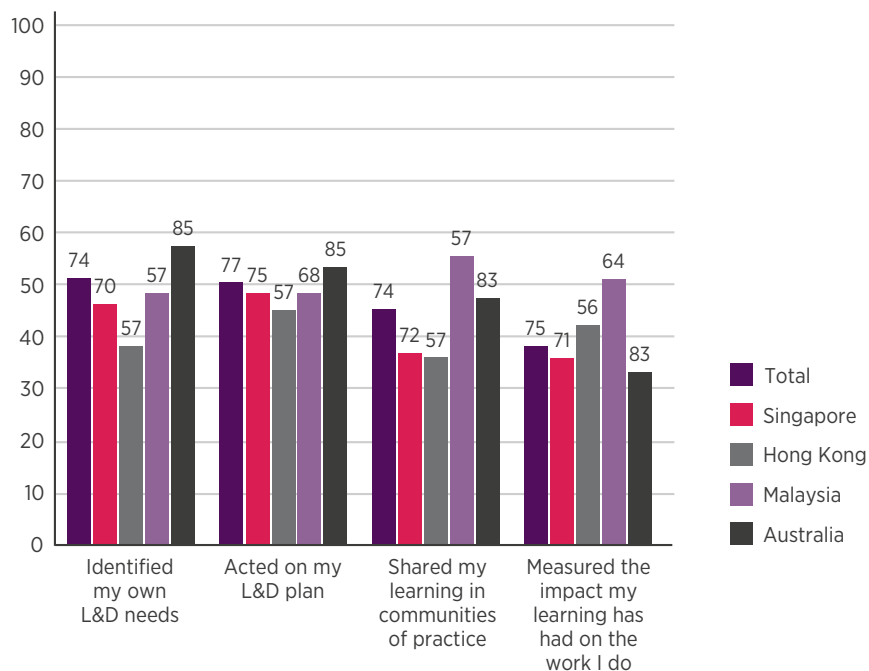
Base: APAC: n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

In terms of learning and development received in the last year, practitioners in Australia were most likely to have attended external conferences, workshops and events (62%) (Figure 9). Another popular response was on-the-job training, with at least 40% of respondents across all markets stating this was a form of L&D they had received. Practitioners in Malaysia were more likely than those in the other countries to have received on-the-job training (57%). Mobile-device-based learning was low across the APAC countries (15%).

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Figure 9: Learning and development received (%)

	Total	Singapore	Hong Kong	Malaysia	Australia
External conferences, workshops and events	52	52	35	40	62
Learning from peers (through face-to-face interactions or online networks)	47	40	28	49	54
On-the-job training	46	48	40	57	44
Online learning (such as e-learning, virtual classrooms or massive open online courses (MOOCS))	44	36	36	30	53
In-house development programmes	35	32	35	37	36
Coaching	31	27	30	38	33
Formal qualifications	26	24	24	23	30
Instructor-led training delivered off the job	25	23	20	27	27
Blended learning (such as combining instructor-led training with online learning)	21	19	22	24	21
Job rotation, secondment and shadowing	18	16	26	28	14
Mobile-device-based learning	15	13	15	21	15
None of the above	5	7	8	4	4
Other	3	3	0	0	4

Base: Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

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To look at how well practitioners feel their level of skills fit their current role, we measured whether they felt they had the right skills, lacked skills for their current role, or if they felt they could handle more demanding work. Overall, respondents across the region most commonly said that they have the right level of skills (43%), while nearly two in five feel over-skilled for their role (37%) and one in five feel under-skilled (19%) (Figure 10). Compared with the other APAC countries, respondents in Singapore were more likely to report that they lack some skills required in their current duties, with over a quarter (27%) saying this.

Figure 10: Skills level (%)
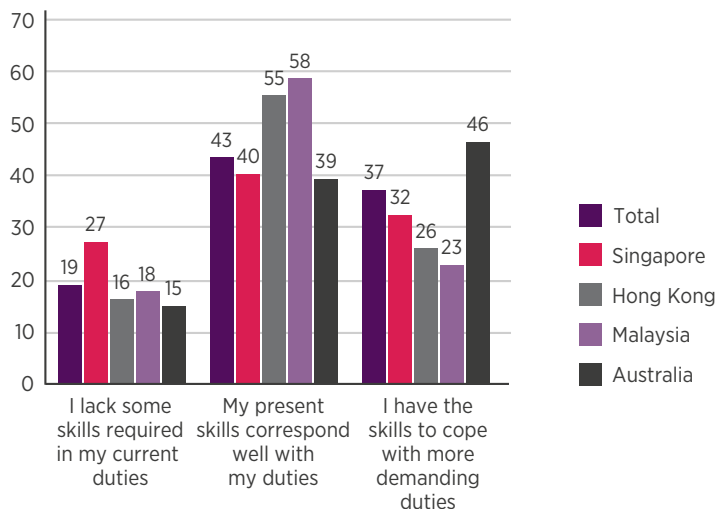
Base: APAC: n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

Professional impact

We explored the extent to which practitioners feel able to exercise professional judgement in their role (Figure 11). In total, seven in ten (70%) respondents in the region agreed that they can fully express themselves professionally at work. Australian respondents were the most likely of the APAC countries to report that their job gives them the opportunity to express themselves as a professional, with three-quarters (74%) saying this.

Figure 11: Ability to fully express oneself as a professional (%)
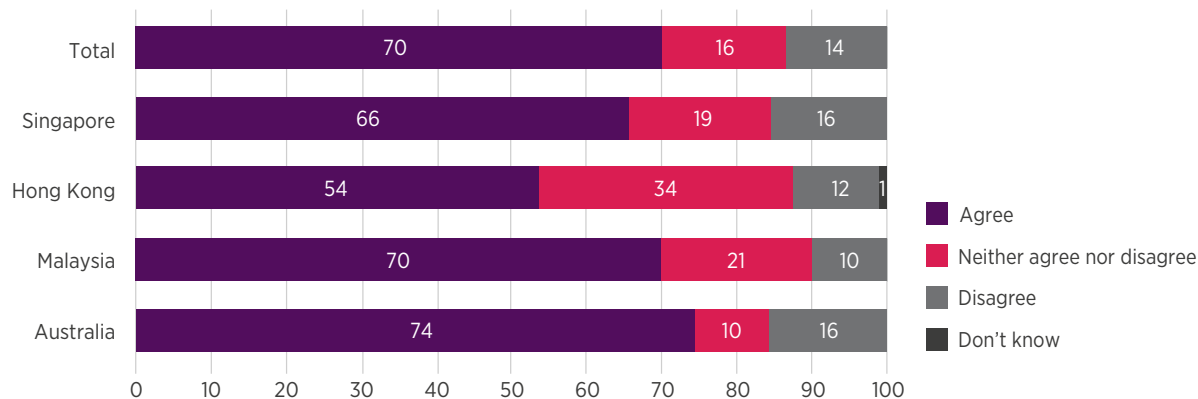
Base: APAC: n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

People professionals in Malaysia (44%) and Hong Kong (45%) were the most likely of the APAC countries to feel that there's a conflict between what their organisation expects them to do and what they feel is appropriate according to their professional judgement (Figure 12).

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Figure 12: Conflict between organisational expectations and professional judgement (%)
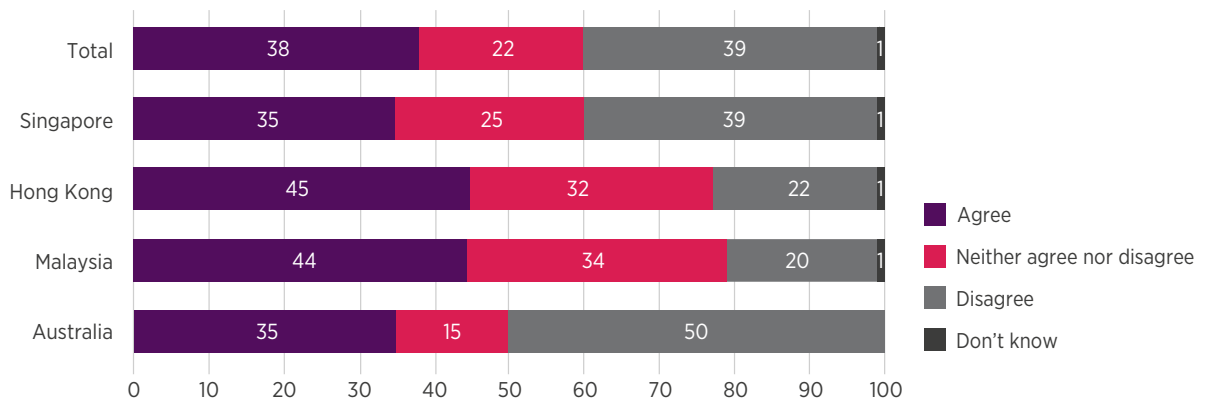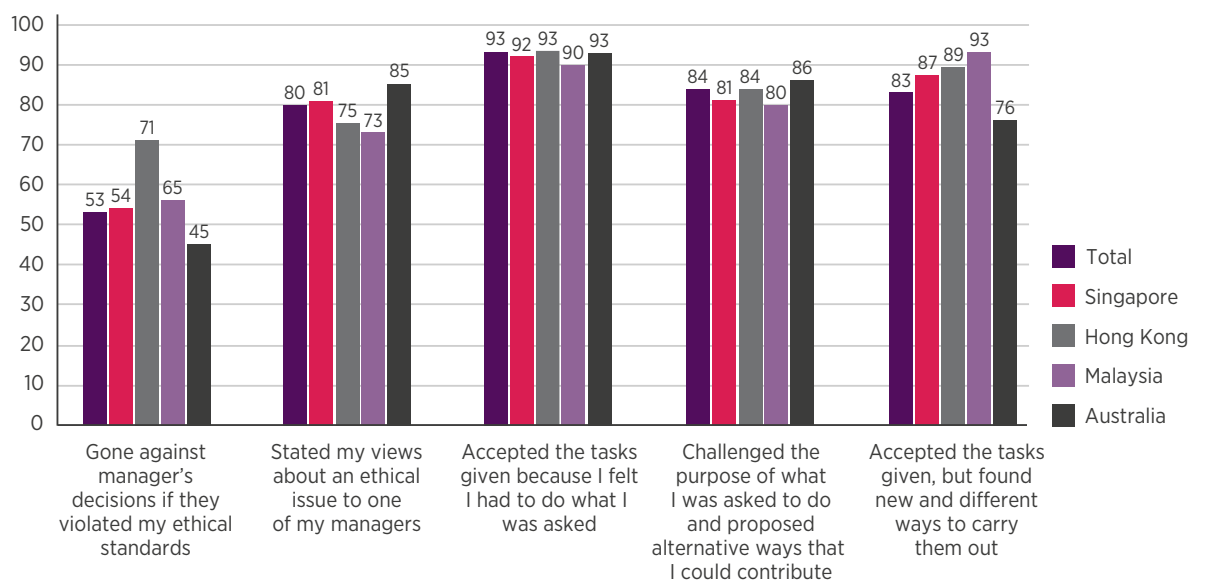

Base: APAC: n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

Challenging organisational practice

We asked the respondents how often they have demonstrated different aspects of professional courage in the past year. Across all markets, when given tasks that violate their ethical standards, practitioners were most likely to accept them, with those in Malaysia slightly more likely to find new ways to carry them out. Practitioners in Hong Kong (71%) were significantly more likely than those in other markets to have at least sometimes gone against managers' decisions if they violated their ethical standards (Figure 13), and four in ten respondents in Hong Kong said that managers in their organisation often behave in ways they consider to be unethical (40%). On the other hand, Malaysian respondents were most likely to feel it's often necessary to compromise one's ethics in order to succeed in their organisation (46%, compared with 40% in Hong Kong, 31% in Singapore and only 27% in Australia).

**Figure 13: Behaviour in the past 12 months (always/often/sometimes) (%)**

Base: APAC: n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

Credibility of the people department in the organisation

We asked the respondents a set of questions about how their team or department is perceived in the organisation, since this may influence their ability to uphold professional standards. People professionals in Australia were significantly more likely than those in other markets to say that their team or department is respected in their organisation (69%), while those in

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Hong Kong were more likely than others to say the HR/people department is not given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their organisation's needs (43%) (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Credibility of department (% agree)
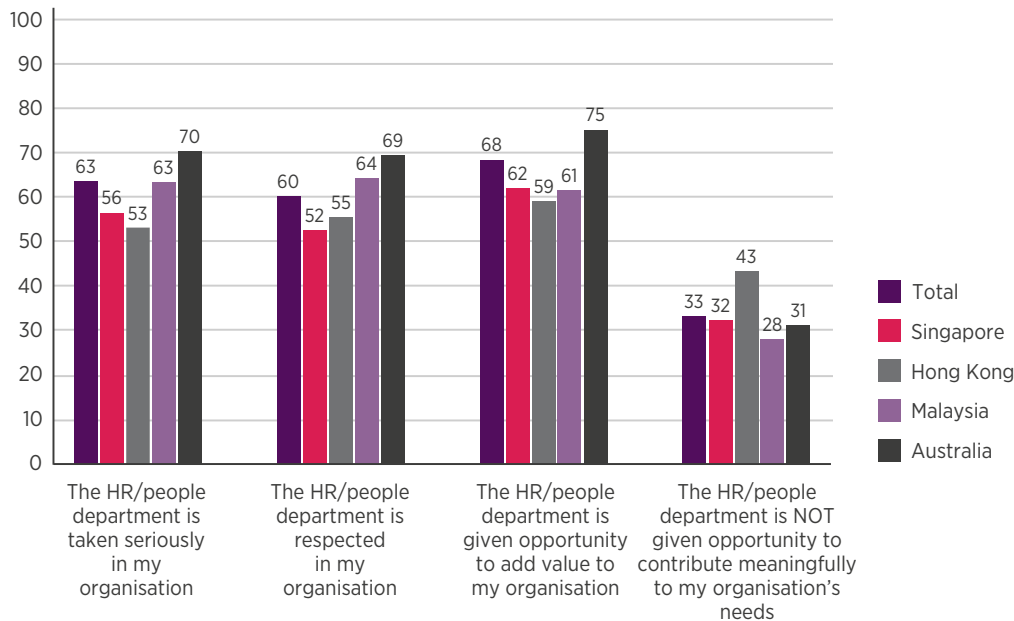
Base: APAC: n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

Evidence-based practice

We asked respondents which sources of evidence they most often use in their decision-making. Personal experience was the main source of evidence for practitioners across the APAC countries (72%), followed by organisational data (60%) and insights from experts (58%) (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Sources of evidence used in decision-making (%)
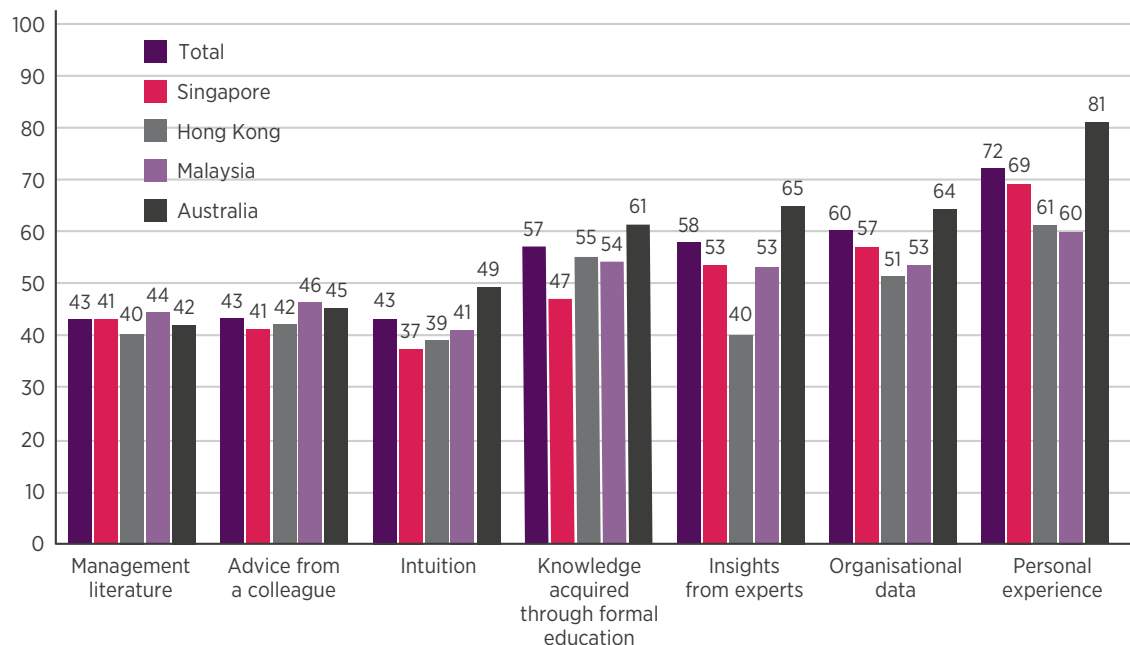
Base: APAC: n=1,332, Singapore n=313, Hong Kong n=152, Malaysia n=204, Australia n=563

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(6) Key findings: Australia

The business environment in Australia is beginning to understand that customer, employee and community trust are essential to sustainability, and to see the dangers of simply working for the satisfaction of short-term shareholder returns. The Hayne Royal Commission into the financial and banking sector is publicly revealing day by day how customers in particular have been cheated by practices in the sector. Together with the #MeToo movement, these revelations have had an impact on the people profession – calling to attention that if practitioners are expected to perform certain critical roles within business and fail to do so, they will inevitably be called to account for their professional incompetence and ethical negligence in an increasingly litigious business environment. The courts are already penalising HR practitioners personally under the 2009 Fair Work Act for failures of HR practice that are in breach of the law and community expectations, and government intervention can no longer be discounted.

Apart from the prevalence of ethical issues affecting businesses, the workforce, workplaces and the nature of work itself are now becoming more complex. Flexibility in terms of where and when work is done is increasingly becoming the norm as employers are becoming more concerned with business outcomes rather than time spent at the desk, and the Fair Work Act has institutionalised a right to request flexible work. These changes create an opportunity for people professionals to lift their game with respect to appropriate training, expertise and behaviour. They need to not only build a productive and engaged workforce, but also have the proven capability to take responsibility for the people culture and, in concert with the other leaders in the organisation, be accountable for it to support business sustainability.

Key findings:

- Many people professionals are satisfied with their career progression to date, but 27% feel it's not at all likely that they'll be promoted in their current organisation in the next three years.
- Practitioners who work in large organisations (32%) are more likely than those in SMEs (17%) to believe that it's often necessary to compromise one's ethics in order to succeed in their organisation, and that managers in their organisation often engage in unethical behaviours (43% compared with 29%).

Many feel that their current skill set doesn't match the demands of their role
When asked about how well their skills fit their current job scope, only 39% of respondents reported that their present skills corresponded well with their duties. Forty-six per cent of respondents stated that they had the skills to cope with more demanding work, while just 15% stated that they lack some skills that they currently need. Australia's moderate score on power distance is useful in understanding this: strong organisational hierarchies may be keeping people in roles for which they are over-skilled.

We also found that respondents who are members of a professional body were more likely than non-members to feel they have the skills to cope with more demanding duties (50% compared with 41%).

Practitioners have good opportunities for progression
Respondents were most likely to have had between three and five promotions (37%) followed by six to nine promotions (25%). Those who are a member of a professional body were more likely than non-members to have had three or more promotions (78% and 66% respectively).

People professionals in Australia were most likely to say their career progression has exceeded their expectations, compared with the other APAC countries surveyed. Over seven in ten (72%) said that their career has met or exceeded their expectations (50% and 22% respectively), while just 20% felt that their career has failed to meet their expectations. Interestingly, professionals who work in a large business were more likely than those who work in an SME to say their career progression has failed to meet their expectations (24% and 13% respectively). In addition, people professionals who work in the public sector were more likely than those in the private or third/voluntary sectors to feel their career progression has failed to meet their expectations (33%, 17% and 13% respectively) (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Satisfaction with career progression to date, by organisation size and sector (%)
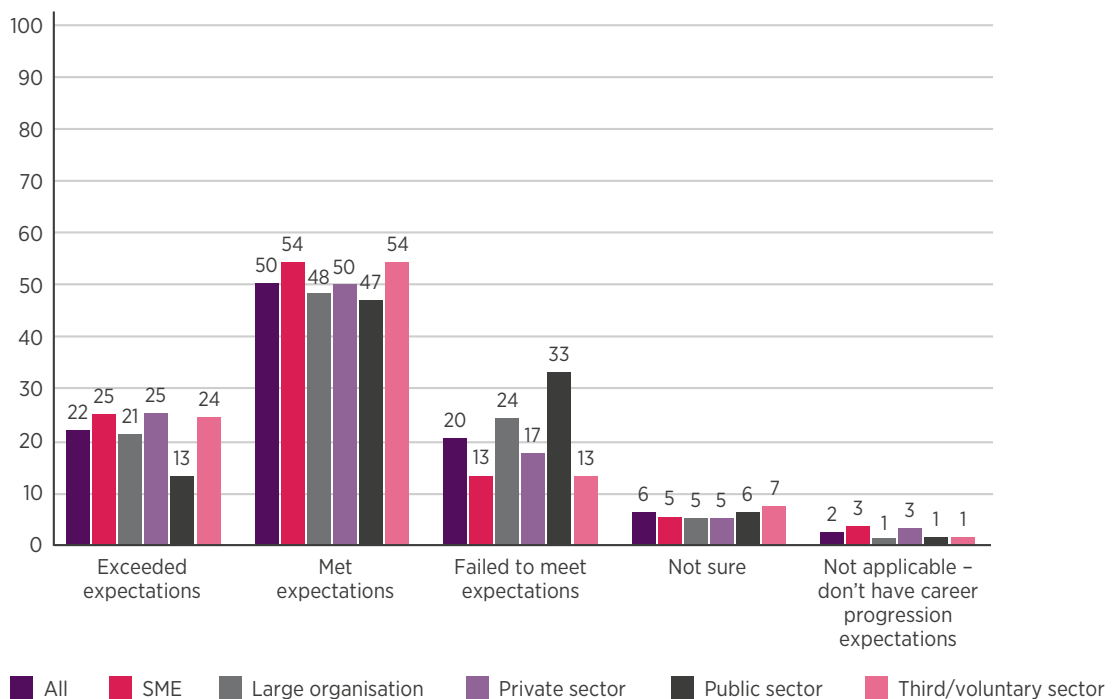
Base: all n=563, SME n=199, large organisation n=358, private sector n=318, public sector n=135, third/voluntary sector n=107

Respondents reported that their top three barriers to career progression are personal confidence (18%), organisational politics (18%) and lack of opportunities with their current employer (17%). Those who work in the public sector were more likely than those in the private and third/voluntary sector to believe organisational politics has been a barrier to their career advancement (28%, 19% and 9% respectively).

Low expectations of promotion in the next three years
While many practitioners have had a relatively large number of promotions and feel that they've achieved their career goals, they did not tend to think they would be promoted in their current organisation in the next three years: over a quarter reported that a promotion was not at all likely (27%) and just 14% said it was very likely. People professionals who work in a large organisation were more likely than those who work in an SME to believe they will be promoted in the next three years (47% compared with 38%). This finding is in contrast with the earlier finding that practitioners in SMEs were less likely to feel that their career had failed to meet their expectations.

Key findings: Australia

In addition, those who work in the third/voluntary sector were less likely than those in the private sector to feel that they will be promoted in the next three years (35% compared with 49%).

Ability to uphold ethical values differs depending on organisational context
When asked whether it's often necessary to compromise one's ethics in order to succeed in their organisation, nearly three in ten (27%) agreed. Practitioners who work in large organisations were more likely than those in SMEs to believe that it's often necessary to compromise one's ethics in order to succeed in their organisation (32% and 17% respectively). In addition, those who work in large organisations were more likely than those in SMEs to feel managers in their organisation often engage in unethical behaviours (43% compared with 29%).

When asked how they've managed their ethical standards, practitioners in Australia were mostly likely to always, often or sometimes state their views about an ethical issue to a manager (85%). This is promising, particularly given the #MeToo movement in 2016, in which HR was publicly criticised in a number of cases for protecting business leaders accused of sexual harassment at the expense of the complainant (Goodear 2018). Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to report that they have always stated their views about an ethical issue to one of their managers (31% compared with 22%).

The survey also revealed that 86% of practitioners have at least sometimes challenged the purpose of what they were asked to do and proposed alternative ways to contribute, but a higher proportion (93%) reported accepting the task that was given because they felt they had to do what was asked.

Practitioners feel they sometimes have to compromise their professional judgement
Over a third (35%) of respondents agreed that there is a conflict between what their organisation expects them to do and what they consider to be appropriate according to their professional judgement. Professionals working in an SME were more likely than those working in a large organisation to strongly disagree that there is a conflict (41% compared with 25%).

Positively, three-quarters (74%) of practitioners said that their job gives them the opportunity to express themselves as a professional. Respondents who work in the public sector were more likely than those working in the private and voluntary sectors to disagree that their job gives them the opportunity to fully express themselves as a professional (24%, 15% and 8% respectively).

The data also suggests that people professionals generally have strong values on how employees should be treated, but there's a mismatch between their professional values and those of their organisation. For example, over seven in ten (72%) respondents said the statement, 'Employees should participate in workplace decisions' reflects the beliefs of the profession, whereas only half (50%) said this describes the values of their organisation. Those who work in an SME were more likely than those who work in a large organisation to feel it's a value of their organisation for employees to share the financial success of the organisation (46% and 37% respectively).

⑦ Key findings: Hong Kong

With a blend of Eastern and Western values, Hong Kong is known as an international financial centre. A British colony until 1997, Hong Kong is now known to be the freest economy globally (Liu 2018), but it's experiencing rising inequality (Wong 2015). Like many countries, it also has an ageing population and organisations are under pressure to improve their practice in order to manage a multi-generational workforce effectively.

The headlines from Hong Kong are not always positive. There are reports of poor treatment of people, such as the abuse of foreign domestic workers and of elderly residents in a nursing home (Lau 2015). In addition, there are questionable ethical practices in some large banking institutions (Chan 2015). These situations are just a few of many that influence work and the people profession. The findings of this study show that the people profession is still discovering how to best make an impact and have the courage to act ethically.

Key findings:

- Four in ten (40%) say it's often necessary to compromise their beliefs in order to succeed in their organisation.
- The top decision-making sources used by practitioners are personal experience and knowledge acquired through formal education. Just over half (51%) of practitioners use organisational data in their decision-making.

A gap in skills development
Over half (55%) of respondents reported their skills correspond well with their role requirements (Figure 17). However, a quarter (26%) felt over-skilled for their current role, while 16% felt under-skilled.

Figure 17: Skills level (%)
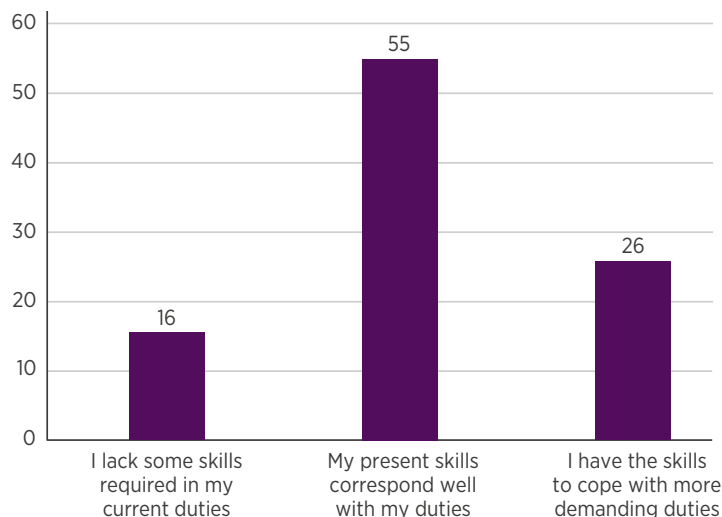
Base: n=152

Perhaps related to the skill level of respondents is the amount of learning and development they receive. People professionals in Hong Kong reported some of the lowest participation in L&D of all four APAC countries surveyed. The most common L&D received in the past year was on-the-job training (40%), followed by online learning (36%). Given the high level of work intensity in Hong Kong (Ng and Leung 2018), it could be that investing in L&D is often overlooked. Prioritising L&D activities could help practitioners to develop the right people skills for their role and progress into roles that better match their skills.

Just over half of practitioners (56%) reported applying learning in the work they do. Less than half (48%) reported reflecting on their learning and 41% have planned how to achieve development goals. This data shows a gap in how people professionals in Hong Kong engage in professional development, which could influence their career prospects.

**Half of practitioners feel a promotion is somewhat likely**
When asked about the likelihood of a promotion within their current organisation in the next three years, more than half of people professionals (54%) felt that it was somewhat likely that they'd receive a promotion. Just 7% stated that it was very likely, which was the lowest for all the APAC countries surveyed. Given Hong Kong's low unemployment rate and vibrant economy (Xinqi 2018), there may be a norm of moving from organisation to organisation for progression opportunities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, almost one in three respondents (31%) reported that their career progression had failed to reach their expectations. However, 43% did report that their career has met their expectations.

Many practitioners ultimately accept the task they've been given, but they do vocalise their opinion beforehand
Respondents from Hong Kong were the least likely of the APAC respondents to feel their job gives them the opportunity to express themselves as a professional (54%), while 45% said there is a conflict between what their organisation expects them to do and what they consider to be appropriate according to professional judgement. We also found that 40% of practitioners often felt it's necessary to compromise their beliefs in order to succeed in their organisation. This could be attributed to cultural influence, specifically power distance and wanting to save face. People professionals will need to consider what this means in the future, especially if they anticipate working cross-culturally where ethical behaviour may be highly prioritised.

Despite the high power distance in the country, reassuringly three-quarters (75%) have stated their views about an ethical issue to one of their managers in the last year. In addition, 71% of practitioners said they have gone against managers' decisions if they violated ethical standards. However, 93% said they have accepted the tasks they were given because they felt they had to do what they were asked, which could again be due to societal pressures to maintain harmony (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Respondents who agreed that they have always/often/sometimes acted in these ways at work over the past year (%)
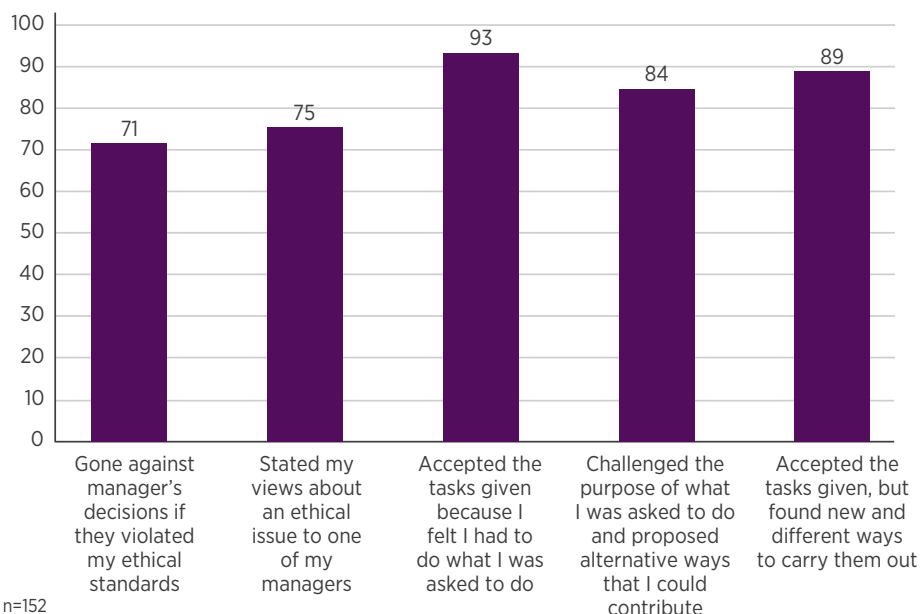
Base: n=152

Decision-making is largely based on experience
Just over half (51%) of practitioners reported using organisational data in their decision-making. They most commonly based their decisions on personal experience (61%), followed by knowledge acquired through formal education (55%). While using relevant knowledge can be helpful, developing skills in data analytics and incorporating it into decision-making would help practitioners make more evidence-based decisions and drive organisational transparency.

⑧ Key findings: Malaysia

The Malaysian government has drawn up a framework for a New Economic Model to propel Malaysia from a middle-income to a high-income economy based on innovation, creativity and high value sources of growth (Tung and Comau 2014). Malaysia is a country with a high power distance; in fact, it was ranked as the highest (Hofstede 1984). This means it is culturally acceptable and expected to know how to operate and influence within a hierarchy. This could make it more difficult for professionals to challenge unethical behaviour, such as in the recent 1MDB scandal which exposed reported massive embezzlement by former Prime Minister Najib Razak. In this context, there's a key opportunity for people management practitioners to build organisational cultures of innovation, underpinned by strong ethical values, in order to drive future success and sustainability.

Key findings:

• Lack of opportunities with employer and organisational politics are the main barriers to career advancement experienced by practitioners.
• The majority (70%) feel that their job gives them the opportunity to fully express themselves as a professional.

People professionals tend to feel confident with their current skills level
More than half of respondents (58%) stated their skills are well matched with their current responsibilities. Almost one in four (23%) reported that they could handle more demanding work, while 18% shared that they lacked some skills for their current responsibilities (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Skills level (%)
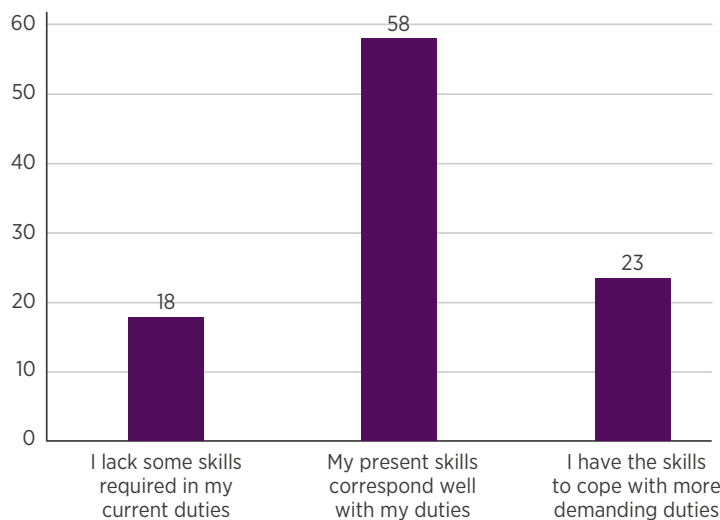
Base: n=204

Even though practitioners in Malaysia have received fewer promotions than the average for the other APAC countries in the survey, they were more likely than some to feel their careers have met their expectations. When asked about career progression, seven in ten (70%) felt it had met or exceeded their expectations (56% and 14% respectively).

Promotions happen less frequently
More than half (63%) of respondents have received zero (22%) or one to two (41%) promotions, and just 30% have received between three and five. This could reflect how relationship-based the work culture in Malaysia is, with priority given to who one works with rather than one's place in an organisation. In addition, 41% believed it's unlikely that they will receive a promotion in the next three years.

Despite the fact that they have generally received few promotions, people professionals in Malaysia have relatively positive feelings about their career advancement: over half (56%) of practitioners said that their career progression to date has met their expectations, and only one in five (19%) said it had failed to meet their expectations. This could suggest that people professionals in Malaysia are less driven by titles as a marker of career advancement.

Much like in its city-state neighbour Singapore, practitioners in Malaysia responded that a lack of opportunities with the current employer (27%) and organisational politics (21%) were barriers to career advancement. The intensity of organisational politics is likely to be consistent with the level of hierarchy in the organisation, since it may be difficult to be heard and therefore progress one's career in an organisational structure that has many layers of hierarchy.

L&D tends to be informal
The data suggests that formal professional training is not currently a priority for practitioners. When asked about professional development, over half (57%) of people professionals reported on-the-job training as the learning and development that they have received in the past year. Learning from peers was the second most common L&D received (49%). This suggests that practitioners in Malaysia most often engage in hands-on learning.

Many people professionals have to compromise their beliefs
People professionals in Malaysia were more likely than those in Australia (27%) and Singapore (31%) in particular to feel it's often necessary to compromise their ethics (46%) in order to succeed in the organisation. At 73%, they were also less likely than practitioners in Australia (85%) and Singapore (81%) to have stated their views about an ethical issue to one of their managers. This could be because of the high power distance and respect for authority that is culturally expected in Malaysia. However, we also found that seven in ten (70%) reported that their job gives them the opportunity to fully express themselves as a professional. Given the deference to authority, it could be that ethical considerations are assumed to be the responsibility of senior executives, while practitioners may see their role as executing on directives.

We explored practitioners' professional values in terms of their perspective on how employees should be treated. The data revealed that Malaysian respondents were more likely than those in the other APAC countries to believe that employees should accept the employment deal that's offered to them (57%). However, more than two in three (67%) said employees should share the financial success of the organisation and participate in workplace decisions (69%).

(9) **Key findings: Singapore**

Known for ease of doing business and a high quality of life, Singapore focuses on attracting top talent and multinationals to make their home in the city-state. With few natural resources of its own, Singapore instead focuses on human capital (Osman-Gani 2004) and investing in innovation to prepare for the future of work (Beh 2017). Many multinational organisations have their regional headquarters in Singapore, which means that companies are heavily influenced by global practice.

For Singaporeans, achievement is important and analytical skills are favoured over creativity. Often, choices are calculated to be safe and validated by measures of success (CIPD 2016). Coupled with this is a stable economy and a low unemployment rate, so professionals don't often encounter the same challenges found in other APAC economies. As we look to the future, how does a young country like Singapore prepare for the future of work? How do people professionals prepare their colleagues and themselves?

Key findings:

- Many practitioners feel that their current skill set doesn't match the demands of their role: over a quarter (27%) said they lack the skills required in their current role, rising to 44% amongst those whose career progression has failed to meet their expectations.
- Practitioners who are a member of an HR professional body are more likely to have had more promotions over their career and to feel confident that they will be promoted in the next three years, compared with non-members.
- The majority of practitioners believe their job gives them the opportunity to express themselves professionally (66%), but 35% feel there's a conflict between their professional judgement and what their organisation expects of them.

A mix of skills over- and under-utilisation
The survey findings showed four in ten (40%) respondents in Singapore felt that they have the current skills to handle their present duties. On the other hand, over a quarter (27%) felt that they lack some skills that are required in their current duties, and almost one in three (32%) reported having the skills to deal with more demanding work (Figure 20).

Respondents who said that their career progression to date has failed to meet their expectations were more likely to feel they lack some skills for their job (44%), compared with those whose progression has met expectations (25%). This points to the importance of skills development for career advancement.

Figure 20: Skills level (%)

Base: n=313

Key findings: Singapore
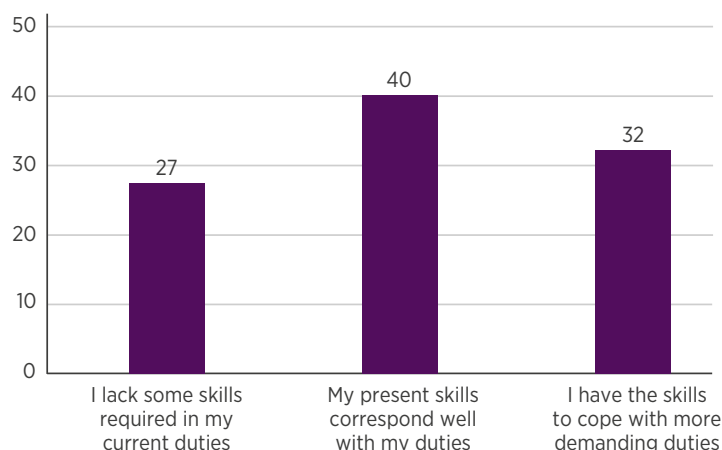
Organisation factors are barriers to career advancement
When asked what has been the single biggest barrier to advancing their career, practitioners were most likely to cite lack of opportunities with their employer as the main barrier to their career progression (27%), followed by organisational politics (20%) and lack of experience (12%). Coupled with the earlier finding that 27% of practitioners believe they lack some skills for their role, the lack of experience barrier could flag an area to be addressed by the HR ecosystem. Those in large organisations were more likely than respondents working in SMEs to consider personal confidence (12% compared with 4%) and line management (9% compared with 2%) to be barriers to their career advancement. This is surprising, as it could be expected that people working in large multinational corporations would have greater confidence.

In addition, we found that practitioners working at a day-to-day operational level (38%) were more likely than those in strategic positions to cite lack of opportunities with their current employer as the main barrier (13% of those in a top-level strategic role and 21% of those with a strategic overview).

Professional body membership boosts chances of promotion
More than two in five (43%) respondents have had between three and five promotions over the course of their career, and one in three (33%) have had one or two promotions. Practitioners who work in an SME were more likely than those who work in large organisations to have had only one to two promotions (44% compared with 25%). This may be because of fewer leadership or advancement opportunities in an SME with a smaller number of employees, or a less structured promotion process.

Practitioners who are a member of a professional body were more likely than non-members to have had three or more promotions (72% and 46% respectively). This could be because members of a professional body actively reflect on their skills and learning and development, or because organisations value professional qualifications.

Professional body members were also more likely than non-members to believe it is likely they will be promoted (66% compared with 52%). Coupled with the earlier finding that professional body members have had more promotions, this suggests that belonging to a professional institute increases one's ability to advance their career.

Learning and development often includes events
The majority of people professionals reported that the learning and development they've received is attending external conferences, workshops or events (52%) and on-the-job training (48%). The city-state has long recognised that talent is an important resource. One of the more recent initiatives introduced by a government tripartite is SkillsFuture (2017), which provides a framework for professional learning and often includes a credit for approved classes or programmes.

The least used L&D channels among respondents were mobile-device-based learning (13%) and job rotation, secondment and shadowing (16%). We also found that practitioners who work at a high strategic level were most likely to have taken part in mobile-device-based learning (17%). It's somewhat surprising that this was the least popular channel overall, given the trend towards bite-sized learning and mobile-based delivery in Singapore.

Our findings show that practitioners who are a member of a professional body were much more likely than non-members to have often or very often identified their own learning and development needs (60% compared with 36%) and acted on their L&D plan (56% compared with 42%). It could be that those who are interested in L&D are more likely to join a professional body.

Key findings: Singapore

People professionals may vocalise their opinion on ethics, but are likely to feel they have to do what's asked

One aspect of professional courage is challenging unethical practice in the organisation. To measure this, we asked respondents how often, in the past year, they have engaged in various ways. We found that 81% of respondents have always, often or sometimes stated their views about an ethical issue to one of their managers in the last year. Just over half of respondents (54%) reported that they at least sometimes went against their managers' decisions if they violated ethical standards. While eight in ten (81%) have challenged the purpose of what they were asked and proposed alternative ways to contribute, 92% have accepted the tasks that they were given because they felt they had to do what was asked (Figure 21). Given these findings, there is still a large opportunity for improvement and to create a workplace culture that invites feedback and debate.

Figure 21: Respondents who agreed that they have always/often/sometimes acted in these ways at work over the past year (%)

Base: n=313
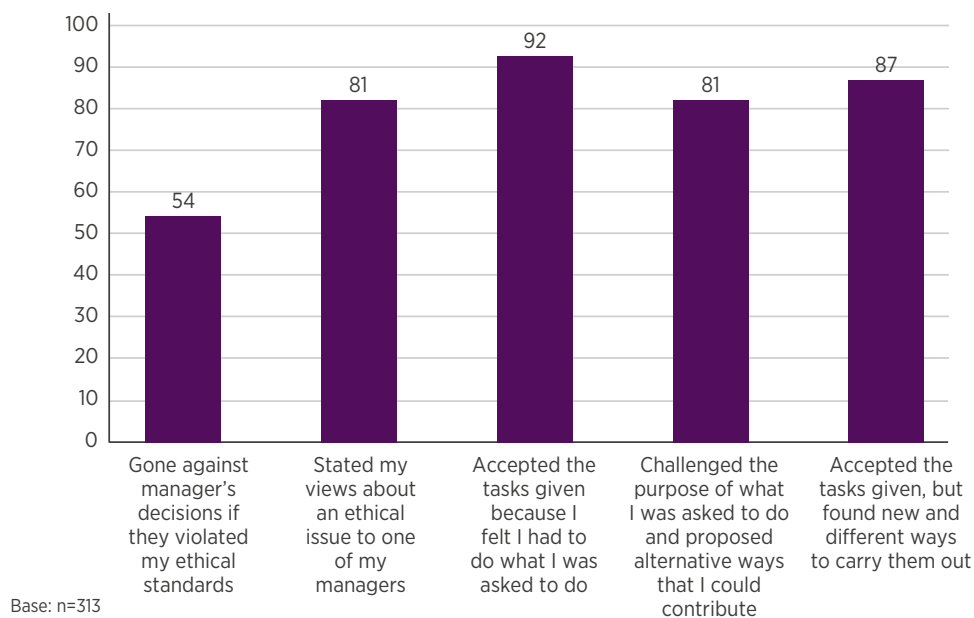
The data also revealed that two in three (66%) respondents felt their job gives them the opportunity to fully express themselves as a professional, while 35% said there is a conflict between what their organisation expects them to do and what they consider to be appropriate according to their professional judgement. Practitioners who are a member of a professional body were more likely than non-members to strongly disagree that there is a conflict between what their organisation expects and what they consider to be appropriate according to their professional judgement (28% compared with 12%).

However, practitioners reported a difference in their professional and organisational values when it comes to how employees should be treated. For example, 89% strongly supported the statement, 'Employees should be given the opportunity to develop in the organisation', whereas only 66% said this statement reflects the values of their organisation. In addition, three-quarters (74%) said employees should participate in workplace decisions, whereas only half (49%) said this aligned with their organisation's values. Practitioners who are a member of a professional body were more likely than non-members to believe it's a value of the profession for employees to participate in workplace decisions (82% compared with 69%) and be given the opportunity to develop in the organisation (96% compared with 85%).

Key findings: Singapore

Most practitioners believe their department is given opportunity to add value to their organisation

Over six in ten (62%) respondents agreed that the HR/people department is given opportunity to add value to their organisation. However, a lower proportion said that their department is respected (52%) and taken seriously (56%) in the organisation. Interestingly, practitioners who work in a large organisation were more likely than those working in an SME to disagree that the HR/people department is respected in their organisation (20% compared with 10%).

Decisions based on data are still evolving

HR analytics can transform business when used correctly to facilitate evidence-based decision-making and inform strategic human capital investments (CIPD 2015a). In our survey, we found that practitioners most commonly base their decisions on personal experience (69%), followed by organisational data (57%) and insights from experts (53%). Belonging to a professional body may encourage practitioners to use data: people professionals who are a member of a professional body (70%) were significantly more likely than non-members (47%) to base the decisions they make at work on organisational data. Already, we see that data is used on a regular basis in some organisations. A recent study by the CIPD (2018) found that 54% of respondents in south-east Asia have access to data, and 23% use data daily.

⑩ Conclusion

The people profession in Asia-Pacific is at a unique point in time where different tensions and trends have the power to influence if and how the profession evolves. Overall, the findings of this survey highlight a positive picture of today's people professionals experiencing meaning in their work and feeling empowered to exercise their professional judgement. While there are different levels of confidence to achieve career advancement and engagement in professional development activities across the markets, the study demonstrates positive links between professional body membership and career success among practitioners.

In a time when the expectations of people professionals are so high, and their roles are becoming more complex, the results of this study are a useful reference point for any practitioner to understand the current shape of the profession.

The new CIPD Profession Map

The world of work is complex and changing, and now more than ever, people professionals need a strong foundation for effective decision-making. The CIPD is supporting people professionals to thrive in this changing world of work – and fulfil the profession's shared purpose of championing better work and working lives – through a programme of work called Profession for the Future. The first milestone is the launch of the new Profession Map, designed to support values-based decision-making that is context-agnostic.

The new Profession Map defines the knowledge, behaviours and inherent values underpinning today's people profession. It is designed to help people professionals globally to make sound decisions and embrace change in the modern world of work. It sets out the defining purpose and values of our profession, together with the knowledge and behaviours required to put those values into practice.

It provides a clear basis for planning CPD and progression, as well as the tools to demonstrate the value and impact of the people profession to the wider business. It supports people professionals – whatever their background – to navigate situations confidently and successfully, drive change in their organisation and progress in their career.

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(12) **Appendix**

Role-level descriptions
- **High strategic level:** Strategic level to deliver long-term value for organisations, working with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders to influence the way that organisations manage their people.
- **Strategic delivery-focused level:** Strategic overview; however, role is delivery-focused. Create medium- to long-term value for organisations and their people.
- **Medium-term operational level:** Work operationally to deliver short- to medium-term value for organisations and their people. Have influence with immediate colleagues and customers, although work is likely to impact a wider audience.
- **Day-to-day operational level:** Work operationally, supporting the day-to-day delivery of people plans, projects and solutions. Work is usually tactical, gathering information and delivering immediate outcomes for my manager, colleagues and immediate customers.

Demographics

Age

	Singapore	Hong Kong	Malaysia	Australia
18–34	33	1	1	93
35–44	64	1	3	119
45+	31	3	4	213
N	128	5	196	425

Gender

	Singapore	Hong Kong	Malaysia	Australia
Male	110	58	74	161
Female	197	92	123	394
N	313	152	204	563

Organisation size (nationally)

	Singapore	Hong Kong	Malaysia	Australia
2–249 employees	124	40	71	199
250+ employees	183	112	131	358
N	307	152	202	557

Sector

	Singapore	Hong Kong	Malaysia	Australia
Private	268	129	174	318
Public	21	8	24	135
Third/voluntary	18	12	5	107
N	307	149	203	560

Years of experience in the people profession

	Singapore	Hong Kong	Malaysia	Australia
Up to 5 years	191	75	93	114
6–15 years	100	46	72	223
16+ years	22	23	30	218
N	313	144	195	555

Role level

	Singapore	Hong Kong	Malaysia	Australia
High strategic level	52	47	58	153
Strategic delivery-focused level	107	48	45	203
Medium-term operational level	75	27	45	117
Day-to-day operational level	79	30	56	90
N	313	152	204	563

Member of a professional body

Singapore	131
Hong Kong	48
Malaysia	40
Australia	344