

Special Issue CALL FOR PAPERS

Situating Human Resource Management Practices in their Political and Economic Context

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This special issue seeks papers that theorise and empirically examine the relationships between complex and sometimes shifting socio-economic and political conditions, the activities of HR practitioners, and the outcomes and implications of HR practices. The papers published will question how contextual conditions combine to effect and enable the ideas, practices and impact of HR managers. For example, external changes driven by financialisation (Appelbaum, et al. 2013) and shifting institutional supports to employment (see Eichhorst, 2015) will influence the perspectives of HR practitioners and, consequently, the possibilities of HRM. The contextual conditions in the global political economy vary considerably, as labour market and regulatory contexts provide differing levels of protection from, and responsiveness to, product markets (Kochan and Bamber, 2009). Researchers therefore face the challenge of understanding this diversity and the multiple realities with which HR managers are engaged.

Mainstream approaches to social science, which have dominated analyses of HRM for more than 20 years, engage rather narrowly with positivism, atomistic units of analyses (individuals and employers), instrumental understandings of rationality and behaviour, prediction and prescription. In these accounts, academic rigour is directed towards trying to measure HR practices rather than the context of action, with numerical datasets used in attempts to measure and quantify the "impact" of specific HR practices. The objective of this "performance paradigm" has been to discover the most profitable and productive bundle of practices and to try to "prove" that these are effective at a general level, often removing contextual diversity from the analyses.

Whilst the apparent failure of this approach (see Godard, 2004; Kochan, 2007; Fleetwood and Hesketh 2010; Guest, 2011) has tarnished the reputation of this area of social science (see also Brewer, 2013; Marchington, 2015), many of those interested in HRM have not moved far from managerial and prescriptive agendas. Much of the writing in the field continues to downplay the independent role of context in both enabling and constraining the agency of HR managers (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010). Whilst many accounts recognise that contextual constraints matter, HR managers' agency is still prioritised, however little "room for manoeuvre" they have available. Furthermore, any prescriptions and objectives generated from research are often assumed to be generally beneficial whatever the contextual situation, when this is questionably the case (see Kaufman, 2015).

An alternative and in our view better and more theoretically rigorous way of framing the problem is to see the activities of HR managers as existing in emergent and often fraught relations with other elements of a political economy, broadly defined. This context is complex and multifaceted. For example, it is possible to identify a discursive context of management ideas to which senior executives and HR managers are variously attentive; a labour market context; a regulatory context of employment laws; the lobbying of employers' associations and the activities of trade unions; a governance context in which different forms of ownership of, and investment in, organisations impact outcomes; a cultural context, and so on. Managerial hermeneutics and practices are thus one part of a context in which a multitude of ideational, market, organisational and institutional arrangements interact to shape fields in which HR practitioners are active (cf. Bamber et al., 2016).

To develop analyses of HRM, this special issue especially welcomes contributions that do not separate the actions and goals of HR practitioners from their context, but instead explore how HR managers and other managers perceive, respond to and use this context as they seek to make a difference. Such contributions are timely as analyses that theorise and empirically examine the activities of HR practitioners in this way respond to calls to account for the behaviour of managers across different jobs, workplaces, companies, industries, and societies (see Boxall et al., 2007; Boxall and Purcell 2016). Suitable contributions, which may draw on international research, are thus likely to "examine the competitive forces of globalisation both within and without firms [and other employing organisations] ... to better understand how comparative institutional factors and firm-level strategies influence the management of human resources" (Sheehan and Sparrow, 2012: 2393).

Progressing this agenda may require a radical rethink of research methods. Arguably, we need novel approaches that reveal managerial hermeneutics and practices within specific contextual arrangements. Contributions may be qualitative explorations of specific situations and the practical projects that inhere within these, and/or quantitative examinations of the moderating effect of political and economic context on the relationship between HRM practices and outcomes. Whichever method is chosen, papers will offer empirically grounded and theoretically rigorous perspectives of the situated actions of HR practitioners, which will take account of the specificity of contextual arrangements and how they combine and interact to effect specific HR discourses, practices and influences.

Contributions to this special issue will continue to focus on the practices of HR managers, and they may or may not eschew prescriptive objectives, but they will account for the emergence and impact of HRM in terms of relations between management discourse, practice and a complex, multifaceted political economy of work. By adopting such a broader appreciation of the situated character of HR practice, contributions will demonstrate that engagement with wider range of actors and influences, within and beyond the employer, is essential to progressing the relevance and influence of the field. The following list offers a few examples of the theoretical and empirical areas that are relevant to this special issue. Submitted papers may, for example:

- Theorise and explore the diverse ways in which combinations of institutional influences and institutional uncertainties, such as those associated with financing arrangements, state and national agencies, skills regulators, unions, employers' interests, governance structures, industry contingences and the like, combine to effect and enable the everyday ideas, practices and influence of HR managers.
- Debate whether and how the meaning and implications of HRM differ in different socio-political and economic contexts, such as by comparison of developing economies, the USA and Canada, the global south, Asian economies and Northern Europe.
- Analyse how particular approaches to HR planning influence workers' and managers' experiences and interests, for better or worse, in various political and economic contexts.
- Assess how external product and labour market conditions combine with other institutional arrangements to impel patterns in global value chains, and to consider

how these market-creating institutions impact on what HR managers choose to do, the ideas they draw on and to what extent they achieve their goals.

- Compare and contrast the rhetoric and reality of different forms of HRM in different situational contexts.
- Explore how HR practitioners engage with other management functions, and how the outcomes of these interactions influence the practice, ideas, experiences and impact of HR managers and the people they manage.

Full papers should be submitted between March 26, 2018 and April 30, 2018 at <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/hrmj>, indicating “**Situating Human Resource Management Practices in their Political and Economic Context**” as the Special Issue. Please note that papers may not be submitted until March 26, 2018 and HRMJ will not be able to consider late submissions. The Special Issue will be published in 2019.

Enquiries related to the focus of papers or other queries related to the call for papers should be directed to Steve Vincent (steve.vincent@newcastle.ac.uk), Greg Bamber (greg.bamber@monash.edu), or Virginia Doellgast (vld7@cornell.edu).

Enquiries related to the online submission process should be directed to: HRMJ.journal@wiley.com

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