

01

Human resource management

Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) is about how people are employed, managed and developed in organizations. HRM is delivered by means of the HR system, which operates within the framework provided by the HR architecture.

The term ‘human resources’ is controversial. Osterby and Coster (1992: 31) argued that it ‘reduces people to the same category of value as materials, money and technology – all resources, and resources are only valuable to the extent they can be exploited or leveraged into economic value.’ There has therefore been a move to replace ‘human resources’ with ‘people management’ and a proposal on what the latter could mean is made at the end of this chapter. But HRM is still the most commonly used term.

Words of wisdom

Many texts and dictionaries mistakenly define ‘human resources’ as the people employed in an organization, a notion that obscures the meaning of human resources and that critics see as impugning the dignity and denying the independence of human agents. Human resources are more accurately understood as the resources that are intrinsic to human beings, which they can apply to the various tasks of life.

Boxall (2013: 4)

Pause for thought

What do you think of the term human resources?

The chapter starts with a general discussion of the meaning of HRM and the issues involved in its practice, and continues with analyses of the meaning and development of HRM and reviews of HRM philosophy, goals and standards. The various models of HRM and its underpinning theories are then considered. The concept of HRM has sometimes been controversial and different perspectives about what it stands for and what it means are then examined. Next, the chapter contains a description of how an HR system within the framework of the HR architecture delivers HRM. It concludes with a discussion of the present state of HRM and its future in the form of a philosophy of people management.

HRM: meaning and issues

It is possible to produce a definition of HRM as set out below. But it is necessary to look more deeply into the meaning of HRM. This involves considering the issues concerned with the tension that can exist between the fundamental requirement on the one hand to help the organization to achieve its aims as a business or a public or voluntary sector body, and the need on the other hand to respect and promote the interests of the people working in the organization.

HRM defined

HRM was defined by Boxall and Purcell (2003: 1) as ‘all those activities associated with the management of employment relationships in the firm’. Boxall (2007: 13) noted that: ‘Human resources include the knowledge, skills, networks and energies of people and, underpinning them, their physical and emotional health, intellectual capabilities, personalities and motivations.’

Words of wisdom

Human resource management (HRM), the management of work and people towards desired ends, is a fundamental activity in any organization in which human beings are employed. It is not something whose existence needs to be radically justified: HRM is an inevitable consequence of starting and growing an organization. While there are myriad variations in the ideologies, styles and managerial resources engaged, HRM happens in some form or other. It is one thing to question the *relative* performance of particular models of HRM... It is quite another thing to question the necessity of the HRM process itself, as if organizations cannot survive or grow without making a reasonable attempt at organizing work and managing people.

Boxall *et al* (2007: 1)

HRM issues

The following fundamental issue facing HRM was raised by Chamorro-Premuzic.

Words of wisdom

All organizations have problems, and they nearly always concern people. How to manage them; whom to hire, fire or promote; and how to motivate, develop and retain them.

Chamorro-Premuzic (2017: xiii)

However, HRM is not simply there to solve problems. It can be regarded as a philosophy about the ways in which people are managed at work that is underpinned by a number of theories relating to the behaviour of people and organizations. HRM aims to improve organizational effectiveness through people but it should also be concerned with the ethical dimension – how people should be treated in accordance with a set of moral values. An important point was made by Schneider.

Words of wisdom

Positive job attitudes for workers in an organization can be expected when the natural inclinations of the persons there are allowed to be reflected in their behaviours by the kinds of processes and structures that have evolved there.

Schneider (1987: 450)

However, as Keegan and Francis (2010: 873) noted, HR work is now ‘largely framed as a business issue’. The emphasis is on business alignment and strategic fit. These are important requirements but focusing on them can lead HR professionals to place insufficient emphasis on employee wellbeing when developing HR policy and practice.

A simplistic view of the business imperative – the often-expressed belief that the most important

thing HR professionals should know about is ‘how the business makes money’ – permits little room for considering the rights and needs of employees as well as the other stakeholders. HRM should indeed aim to support the achievement of business goals but it should also aim to build relationships with the people employed in the organization based on fair dealing, trust, openness and personal fulfilment. A basis for doing this is provided by the concept of the employee experience as discussed in Chapter 30.

Words of wisdom

A regime which provides human beings with no deep reason to care about one another cannot long preserve its legitimacy.

Sennett (1998: 1)

Pause for thought

Is there an inevitable tension between the need for HRM to further the business success of the organization and the need to be concerned with the wellbeing of the people working in the organization? If there is, how can it be resolved?

The development of the HRM concept

HRM emerged in the 1980s as a philosophy of how people should be managed and an alternative to traditional forms of personnel management. At the time there were questions about whether or not there was a significant difference between them. An answer to this was provided at that time by the writer as follows:

Source review

HRM is regarded by some managers as just a set of initials or new wine in old bottles. It could indeed be no more and no less than another name for personnel management, but as usually perceived, at least it has the virtue of emphasizing the virtue of treating people as a key resource, the management of which is the direct concern of top management as part of the strategic planning processes of the enterprise. Although there is nothing new in the idea, insufficient attention has been paid to it in many organizations. The new bottle or label can help to overcome this deficiency.

Armstrong (1987: 35)

As Hendry and Pettigrew (1990: 18) observed: HRM was ‘heavily normative from the start: it provided a diagnosis and proposed solutions’. They also stated that: ‘What HRM did at this point was to wrap around some of the observable changes, while providing a focus for challenging deficiencies – in attitudes, scope, coherence and direction – of existing personnel management’ (ibid: 20).

Torrington and Hall (1991) suggested that personnel management was *workforce centred* and therefore directed itself to employees, while HRM is *resource centred* and concerns itself with the overall human resource need of the organization.

The ‘founding fathers’ of HRM were the US academics Michael Beer and his colleagues in the ‘Harvard framework’, and Charles Fombrun and his colleagues in the ‘Michigan framework’ or ‘matching model’ as described later in this chapter.

In the UK they were followed by a number of commentators who developed, explained and frequently criticized the concept. Legge (2005: 101) commented that: ‘The term [HRM] was taken up by both UK managers (for example, Armstrong, 1987; Fowler, 1987) and UK academics.’

As first conceived, HRM had a conceptual framework consisting of a philosophy underpinned by a number of theories drawn from the behavioural sciences and from the fields of strategic management, human capital management and industrial relations. As defined by Storey (2001: 7), this philosophy consisted of the assumptions ‘that it is the human resource which gives competitive edge,

that the aim should be to enhance employee commitment, that HRM decisions are of strategic importance and that therefore HRM policies should be integrated into the business strategy.' With its emphasis on strategy, commitment, the rights of stakeholders and the need to regard employees as assets not costs, HRM was a groundbreaking departure from traditional personnel management. Referring to strategic HRM (SHRM), Lengnick-Hall *et al* (2009: 69) observed that: 'This shift signalled a dramatic change in the role and influences of human resource professionals and adjusted the lens used to capture the expectations of human resource activities within organizations. SHRM argues that more than mechanical, administrative contributions are expected from HR professionals.'

Words of wisdom

HR derives its social legitimacy from its ability to serve as an effective steward of a social contract in employment relationships capable of balancing and integrating the interests and needs of employers, employees and the society in which these relationships are embedded.

Kochan (2007: 600)

The development of the HRM concept involved the evolution of notions about HRM philosophy and the goals of HRM. It had a strong base in behavioural science theory and was expressed in a variety of models.

HRM philosophy

Schuler (1992: 21) suggested that an HR philosophy is 'a statement of how the organization regards its human resources, what role the resources play in the overall success of the business and how they are to be treated and managed.' HRM philosophies have also been described as 'the guiding principles that identify and characterize the value and treatment of employees covered within a particular

HRM system' (Kepes and Delery, 2007: 390). This notion of 'guiding principles' echoes Becker and Gerhart (1996: 786), who pointed out that it is at this level within the HR system that effects are 'generalizable or universal'. The impact of HR philosophy was confirmed by Godard and Delaney (2000), who found that the value placed on human capital by those in decision-making positions within organizations affects the types of HR systems that are chosen and how they are used. Boxall and Macky (2009: 7) take the importance of the role of HR philosophy in HR system design a stage further by suggesting that 'we get closer to describing HR systems in meaningful terms when we identify the principal themes that underpin them: in other words, when we describe the major philosophies that management is trying to pursue.' Lepak *et al* (2006: 241), following their research in 402 establishments in the United States, revealed the importance of HR philosophy in determining how high-investment human resource systems were fashioned for both core and support employees.

The following explanation of the common themes in HRM philosophies was made by Karen Legge – a major contributor to thinking about HRM in its earlier days – on the basis of an analysis of a number of HRM models.

Words of wisdom

That human resource policies should be integrated with strategic business planning and used to reinforce an appropriate (or change an inappropriate) organizational culture, that human resources are valuable and a source of competitive advantage, that they may be tapped most effectively by mutually consistent policies that promote commitment and which, as a consequence, foster a willingness in employees to act flexibly in the interests of the 'adaptive organization's' pursuit of excellence.

Legge (1989: 25)

Another major British commentator – John Storey – produced this description of the beliefs of HRM:

Source review

The beliefs of HRM include the assumptions that it is the human resource which gives competitive edge, that the aim should be to enhance employee commitment, that HR decisions are of strategic importance and that therefore HR policies should be integrated into the business strategy.

Storey (2001: 7)

The goals of HRM

Taking into account these beliefs, the goals of HRM can be defined as being to:

- support the organization in achieving its objectives by developing and implementing human resource (HR) strategies which are integrated with the business strategy (strategic HRM);
- contribute to the development of a high-performance culture;
- ensure that the organization has the talented, skilled, and engaged people it needs;
- maintain a positive employment relationship between management and employees, bearing in mind that employees must feel trusted, valued and appreciated if they are to work effectively and efficiently over time;
- provide for a satisfactory employee experience;
- further the wellbeing of employees as major stakeholders;
- achieve social legitimacy (defined by Dowling and Pfeffer (1975: 122) as ‘the congruence between the values associated with the organization and the values of its environment’) by ensuring the rightfulness of

the way in which management treats its stakeholders and by applying an ethical approach to people management.

Note that the goals include both high performance and employee wellbeing.

Pause for thought

Why is it important for organizations to achieve social legitimacy? How can it be done?

Words of wisdom

The potential to pursue the dual goals of high organizational performance and high employee wellbeing reflects the promise of HRM.

Guest *et al* (2013: 197)

Words of wisdom

Meeting employee needs can also improve productivity, innovation and business success.

Brown *et al* (2019: 52)

Pause for thought

Is it feasible to achieve the goals of both high employee wellbeing *and* high performance? And if so, how can it be done?

But Peter Boxall (2007: 62) referred to the ‘strategic tensions’ between social legitimacy and managerial autonomy.

HRM standards

The following are the HRM standards produced by the CIPD on the basis of those issued by the British Standards Institution. They provide guidance on good people management practice.

Source review

- People working on behalf of the organization have intrinsic value, in addition to their protections under the law or in regulation, which needs to be respected.
- Stakeholders and their interests are integral to the best interests of the organization.
- Every organization is part of wider society and has a responsibility to respect its social contract as a corporate citizen and operate in a manner that is sustainable.
- A commitment to valuing people who work on behalf of the organization and to meeting the requirements of the standard is made and supported at the highest level.

CIPD (2018)

Words of wisdom

To make HR practices more than isolated acts, managers and HR professionals must master the theory behind HR work; they need to be able to explain conceptually how and why HR practices lead to their outcomes... Regardless of the preferred theory, managers and HR professionals should abstract from it a higher level of reasoning for their day-to-day work and thus better explain why their work accomplishes its goals.

Ulrich (1997: 238)

The main theories underpinning HRM are summarized below.

AMO theory

The ‘AMO’ formula as set out by Boxall and Purcell (2003) states that performance is a function of Ability + Motivation + Opportunity to Perform. The formula provides the basis for developing HR systems that attend to employees’ interests, namely their skill requirements, motivations and the quality of their job.

Contingency theory

Contingency theory explains that HRM practices are dependent on the organization’s environment and circumstances. This means that, as Paauwe (2004: 36) observed: ‘The relationship between the relevant independent variables (eg HRM policies and practices) and the dependent variable (performance) will vary according to the influences such as company size, age and technology, capital intensity, degree of unionization, industry/sector ownership and location.’

Contingency theory is associated with the notion of fit – the need to achieve congruence between an organization’s HR strategies, policies and practices and its business strategies within the context of its

The theoretical base of HRM

The original notion of HRM had a strong theoretical base. Guest (1987: 505) commented that: ‘Human resource management appears to lean heavily on theories of commitment and motivation and other ideas derived from the field of organizational behaviour.’

Dave Ulrich cites the need for HR practice to be guided by HR theory. He reminded HRM professionals that theory helps explain the manner in which outcomes emerge.

external and internal environment. This is a key concept in strategic HRM.

Human capital theory

Human capital theory is concerned with how people in an organization contribute their knowledge, skills and abilities to enhancing organizational capability and with the *significance of that contribution*. It states that the unique nature of human capital resources within the firm has the potential to generate sustainable competitive advantage (Nyberg *et al*, 2014).

Motivation theory

Motivation theory, especially expectancy theory and goal theory as described in Chapter 24, explains the factors that affect goal-directed behaviour. It therefore influences the approaches used in HRM to enhance engagement, reward people and manage performance.

The resource-based view

Resource-based theory (Barney, 1991) is often expressed as ‘the resource-based view’ (RBV). It states that competitive advantage is achieved if a firm’s resources are valuable, rare and costly to imitate. HRM can play a major part in ensuring that the firm’s human resources meet these criteria. The RBV is associated with human capital theory.

Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory suggests that social beings feel obliged to return favours. Feelings of loyalty and commitment and discretionary effort are in some form a social reciprocation by employees to a good employer. Employees will reciprocate their contribution to the organization if they perceive that the organization has treated them well. It is linked with the concept of ‘mutual gains’ (Kochan and Osterman, 1994) which states that organizations can and should pursue employment policies that produce benefits for both employees and themselves.

Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory as developed by Freeman (1984) states that a number of different groups are stakehold-

ers in organizations, including shareholders, managers, employees, customers, government and the public at large. He quoted (page 31) the Stanford Research Institute’s 1963 definition of stakeholders as ‘those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist’. Organizations must take account of these various interests when formulating and implementing HR strategy and policies (stakeholder analysis is dealt with in Chapter 3).

Pause for thought

Which do you think is the most significant of the theories summarized above and why?

Models of HRM

In addition to having a strong theoretical base, HRM has manifested itself over the years in a number of models that have defined what it is and how it operates. Of these, the first descriptions of HRM – the Michigan and Harvard frameworks – have been the most influential.

The Michigan framework or ‘matching’ model

Fombrun and his colleagues at the University of Michigan proposed in 1984 the ‘matching model’, which indicated that HR systems and the organization structure should be managed in a way that is congruent with organizational strategy. This point was made in the following classic statement:

Words of wisdom

The critical management task is to align the formal structure and human resource systems so that they drive the strategic objectives of the organization.

Fombrun *et al* (1984: 37)

Thus they took the first steps towards the concept of strategic HRM.

The Harvard framework

Beer *et al* (1984) produced what has become known as the ‘Harvard framework’. They started with the proposition that: ‘Human resource management (HRM) involves all management decisions and actions that affect the nature of the relationship between the organization and employees – its human resources’ (ibid: 1). They believed that HRM had two characteristic features: (1) line managers accept more responsibility for ensuring the alignment of competitive strategy and HR policies, and (2) HR has the mission of setting policies that govern how HR activities are developed and implemented in ways that make them more mutually reinforcing.

The Harvard framework is modelled in Figure 1.1. Note the reference to stakeholder interests and the

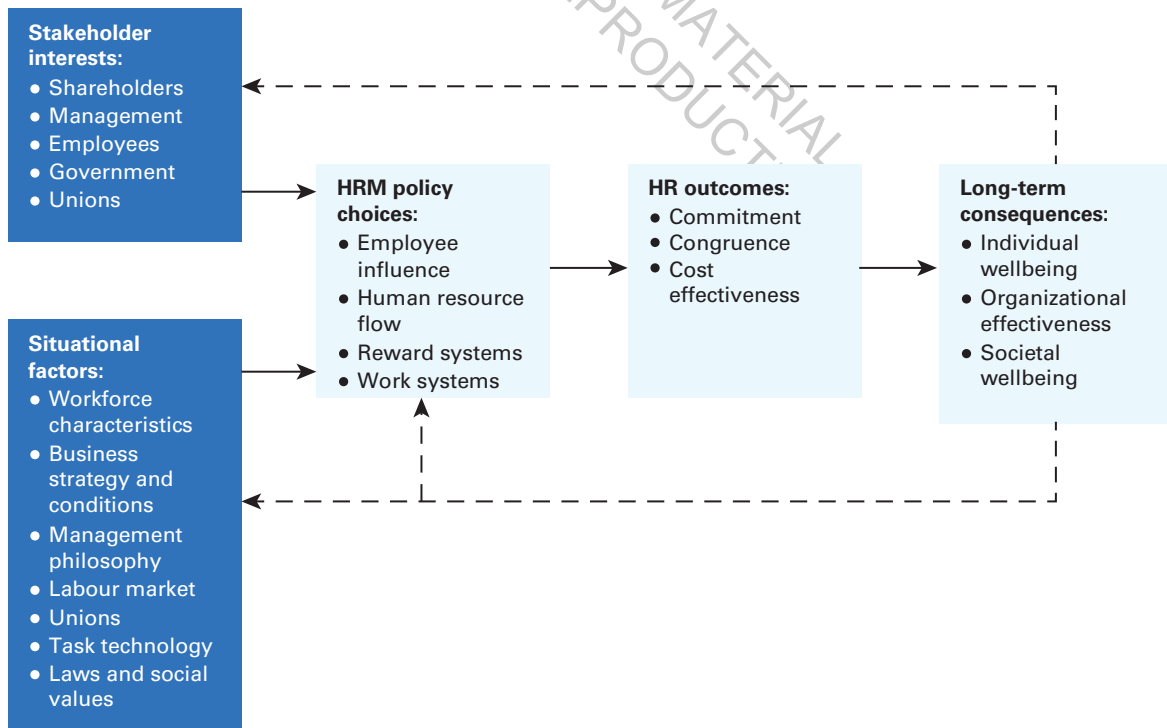
inclusion of employee and societal wellbeing as long-term consequences.

Words of wisdom

Today... many pressures are demanding a broader, more comprehensive and more strategic perspective with regard to the organization's human resources. It is necessary to adopt a longer-term perspective in managing people and consideration of people as a potential asset rather than merely a variable cost.

Beer *et al* (1984: 4)

FIGURE 1.1 The Harvard HRM framework



Source Beer *et al* (1984)

Contextual model

The contextual model of HRM refers to the importance of environmental factors affecting the practice of HRM that have been underestimated in other models. These include the influence of the social, institutional and political forces and the circumstances and features of the organization. The contextual model advocates integrating the human resource management system in the environment in which it is developed. As Martin-Alcázar *et al* (2005: 638) mentioned: ‘Context both conditions and is conditioned by the HRM strategy.’ A broader set of stakeholders is involved in the formulation and implementation of human resource strategies. This is referred to by Schuler and Jackson (2000: 229) as a ‘multiple stakeholder framework’. These stakeholders may be external as well as internal and both influence and are influenced by strategic decisions.

The 5-P model

As formulated by Schuler (1992) the 5-P model of HRM describes the way HRM operates under the five headings of:

- 1 *HR philosophy* – a statement of how the organization regards its human resources, the role they play in the overall success of the business, and how they should be treated and managed.
- 2 *HR policies* – these provide guidelines for action on people-related business issues and for the development of HR programmes and practices based on strategic needs.
- 3 *HR programmes* – these are shaped by HR policies and consist of coordinated HR efforts intended to initiate and manage organizational change efforts prompted by strategic business needs.
- 4 *HR practices* – these are the activities carried out in implementing HR policies and programmes. They include resourcing, learning and development, performance and reward management, employee relations, and administration.
- 5 *HR processes* – these are the formal procedures and methods used to put HR strategic plans and policies into effect.

European model

Brewster (1993) described a European model of HRM as follows:

- Environment – established legal framework.
- Objectives – organizational objectives and social concern – people as a key resource.
- Focus – cost/benefits and environment analysis.
- Relationship with employees – union and non-union.
- Relationship with line managers – specialist/line liaison.
- Role of HR specialist – specialist managers: ambiguity, tolerance, flexibility.

The main distinction between this model and what Brewster referred to as ‘the prescribed model’ was that the latter involves deregulation (no legal framework), no trade unions and a focus on organizational objectives but not on social concern.

The hard and soft models

Storey (1989: 8) distinguished between the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ versions of HRM. He wrote that: ‘The hard one emphasizes the quantitative, calculative and business-strategic aspects of managing human resources in as “rational” a way as for any other economic factor. By contrast, the soft version traces its roots to the human relations school; it emphasizes communication, motivation and leadership.’

However, it was suggested by Keenoy (1997: 838) that ‘hard and soft HRM are complementary rather than mutually exclusive practices’. Research in eight UK organizations by Truss *et al* (1997) indicated that the distinction between hard and soft HRM was not as precise as some commentators have implied.

Pause for thought

Do you agree that HRM is about being both hard and soft as necessary? But if this is the case how can a consistent approach to HRM be adopted?

Perspectives on HRM

On the face of it, the original concept of HRM had much to offer, at least to management. But for some time HRM has been a controversial topic in academic circles. Peccei (2004) identified two main perspectives. The first, 'optimistic' one is the idea that HRM can make a positive impact on the well-being of employees.

When management adopts progressive HR policies that provide a more interesting, supportive and rewarding work environment, in accordance with social exchange theory, workers will respond with enhanced levels of engagement with the organization and their work and thus achieve higher levels of performance. Both the organization and its employees will therefore benefit – the concept of 'mutual gains'.

In contrast, the second, 'pessimistic' perspective is that HRM is potentially harmful to employees and leads to the intensification of work and their systematic exploitation. Macky and Boxall (2008) conducted research which showed that work intensification reduces job satisfaction, increases stress and undermines work-life balance. The pessimistic perspective concludes that it is employers rather than employees who benefit from HRM – profits before people. A very early reservation was made by Alan Fowler.

Words of wisdom

At the heart of the concept is the complete identification of employees with the aims and values of the business – employee involvement but on the company's terms. Power in the HRM system remains very firmly in the hands of the employer. Is it really possible to claim full mutuality when at the end of the day the employer can decide unilaterally to close the company or sell it to someone else?

Fowler (1987: 3)

The following is a selection of other reservations about HRM.

- HRM is simplistic – as Fowler (1987: 3) wrote:

The HRM message to top management tends to be beguilingly simple. Don't bother too much about the content or techniques of personnel management, it says. Just manage the context. Get out from behind your desk, bypass the hierarchy, and go and talk to people. That way you will unlock an enormous potential for improved performance.
- Guest (1991: 149) referred to the 'optimistic but ambiguous label of human resource management'.
- Keenoy (1990: 3) referred to HRM as a 'wolf in sheep's clothing'.
- HRM is manipulative; Willmott (1993: 534) asserted that: 'any (corporate) practice/value is as good as any other so long as it secures the compliance of employees.' Perhaps the initials HRM stand for human resource manipulation.
- Legge (1998: 42) claimed that HRM is 'macho-management dressed up as benevolent paternalism'.
- 'The HRM rhetoric presents it as an all or nothing process which is ideal for any organization, despite the evidence that different business environments require different approaches' (Armstrong, 2000: 577).
- The unitarist approach to industrial relations implicit in HRM (the belief that management and employees share the same concerns and it is therefore in both their interests to work together) is questionable (Ramsay *et al*, 2000: 521).
- HRM is managerialist: 'The analysis of employment management has become increasingly myopic and progressively more irrelevant to the daily experience of being employed. While the reasons for this development are immensely complex... it is primarily a consequence of the adoption of the managerialist conception of the discourse of HRM' (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010: 813).

Pause for thought

To what extent do you think these reservations are valid?

David Guest referred to such comments as the ‘radical critique of HRM’ and summarized them as follows:

Words of wisdom

This view of HRM, in which workers are viewed primarily as resources or objects, is attractive to some managers, if only to remind them of past neglect of a potentially untapped resource. But it is also an easy and familiar target for criticism. It reflects a longstanding capitalist tradition in which the worker is viewed as a commodity. The resultant exploitation may be paternalist and benevolent; but, equally, it may operate against the interests of workers. Essentially, workers are simply resources to be squeezed and disposed of as business requirements dictate. More importantly, the interests of workers and their wellbeing are of no significance in themselves.

Guest (1999: 6)

But in spite of this, Guest concluded from his research that: ‘It appears that workers like their experience of HRM. The more HR practices they are currently experiencing in their employment, the more satisfied they seem to be and the better their psychological contract’ (ibid: 23).

More recently, Dundon *et al* (2017: 19) referred to the ‘inherent bias in managerial writings to treat workers as objects to be subservient to some employer-led strategic mission’. They also commented on ‘the unitarist flavour of mainstream HRM’ (the unitarist belief is that management and

employees share the same concerns). And Hyman made the following memorable observation:

Words of wisdom

Capitalism is a system in which employers require workers to be *both* dependable *and* disposable.

Hyman (1987)

However, in spite of reservations, it is a fact that some form of human resource management or, as it is increasingly being called, people management, is an inevitable feature of any organization. HRM has largely become something that organizations do when they manage people rather than an aspiration or a philosophy. The way in which this is carried out through the HR system is described below.

The HR system

A system is a set of practices or activities that fit together and interact to achieve a purpose. This is how HRM is delivered. In a properly functioning HR system its different parts are interrelated and jointly supportive and, together, they are there to enable HR goals to be achieved. The HR system operates within the framework provided by the HR architecture. It also involves managing the employee experience of working in an organization.

HR architecture

The HR architecture is a comprehensive representation of all that is involved in HR, not simply the structure of the HR function. As explained by Becker *et al* (2001: 12): ‘We use the term HR architecture to broadly describe the continuum from the HR professionals within the HR function, to the system of HR-related policies and practices, through the competencies, motivation and associated behaviours of the firm’s employees.’ It was noted by Hird *et al* (2010: 25) that: ‘This architecture is seen as a unique combination of the HR function’s structure and delivery model, the HR practices and system, and the strategic employee behaviours that these create.’

Purcell (1999: 38) suggested that the focus should be on ‘appropriate HR architecture and the processes that contribute to organizational performance’. Becker and Huselid (2006: 899) stated that: ‘It is the fit between the HR architecture and the strategic capabilities and business processes that implement strategy that is the basis of HR’s contribution to competitive advantage.’

Activities such as organization development, selection interviewing and testing, talent management, learning and development, performance management and total reward play an important part in the delivery of HR. But there is the danger that new and seemingly different techniques become ‘flavours of the month’ only to be quickly forgotten when they fail to deliver.

Words of wisdom

The history of the management of human resources is littered with examples of widely acclaimed techniques enthusiastically introduced by managers who are keen to find solutions to their ‘people’ problems, only to be discarded and discredited by the same disillusioned and increasingly cynical managers some time later.

McLean (1981: 4)

The effective delivery of HR depends on using techniques that are tried, tested and appropriate, not ones that have been promoted vigorously as ‘best practice’ without supporting evidence.

Features of the HR system

Becker and Huselid (1998: 95) observed that: ‘The HR system is first and foremost a vehicle to implement the firm’s strategy.’ Later (2006), they argued that it is the HR system that is the key HR asset. Boselie *et al* (2005: 73) noted that in its traditional form HR can be viewed as ‘a collection of multiple

discrete practices with no explicit or discernible link between them. The more strategically minded system approach views HR as an integrated and coherent bundle of mutually reinforcing practices.’

The components of the HR system

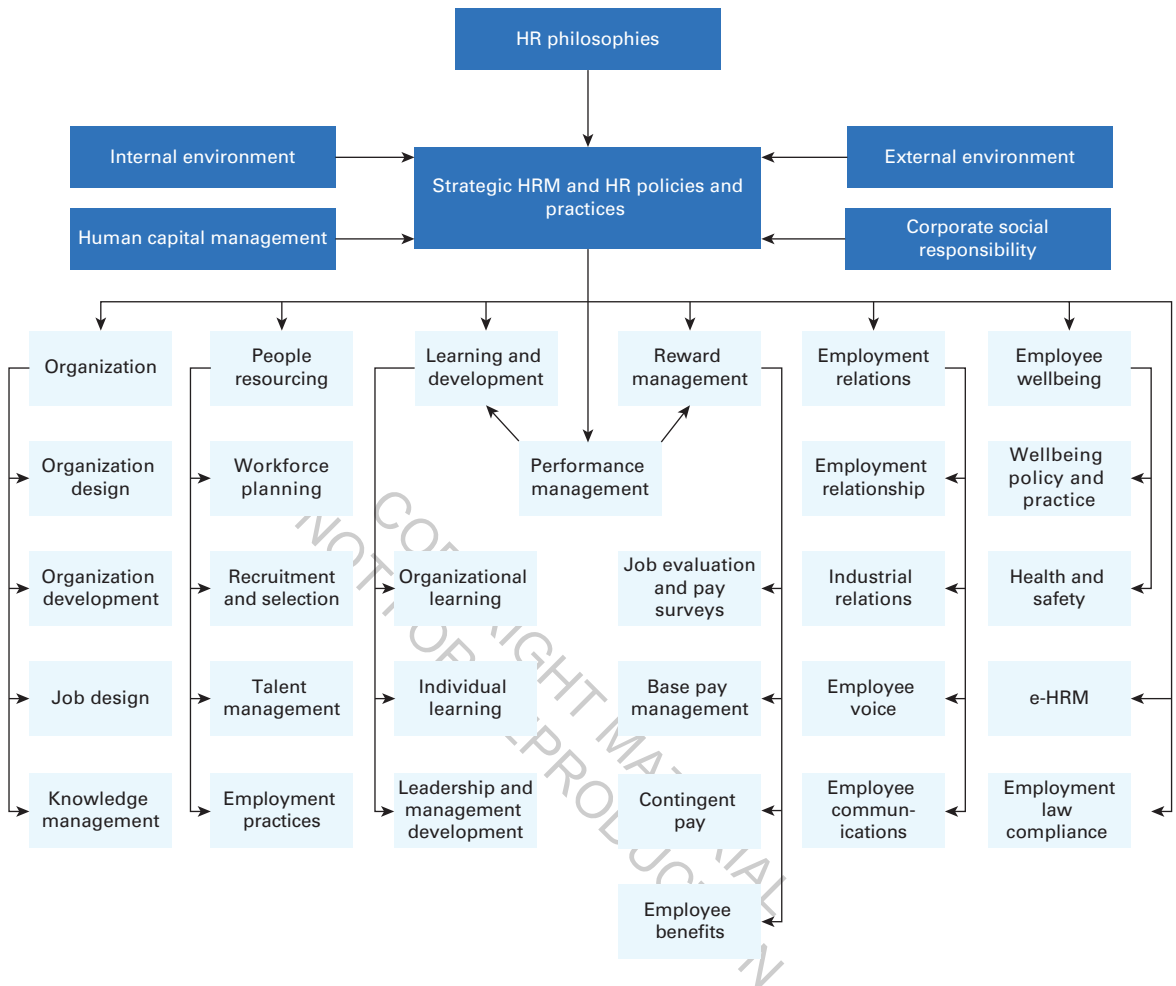
As illustrated in Figure 1.2, an HR system brings together HR philosophies that describe the overarching values and guiding principles adopted in managing people. The HR activities carried out in the system can be divided into two broad categories: (1) transformational (strategic) activities such as organization development and strategic human resource management that are concerned with developing organizational effectiveness and the alignment and implementation of HR and business strategies; and (2) transactional activities that cover the main areas of HR service delivery – resourcing, learning and development, reward and employment relations.

Taking account of the internal and external environments in which the organization operates, the system incorporates:

- *HR strategies*, which define the direction in which HR intends to take each of its main areas of activity.
- *HR policies*, which set out what HR is there to do and provide guidelines defining how specific aspects of HR should be applied and implemented.
- *HR practices*, which consist of the HR activities involved in managing and developing people and in managing the employment relationship.

A strong HR system

Bowen and Ostroff (2004) advocated a ‘strong’ HR system to ensure the more effective implementation of HRM practices. They developed a model of HRM in which HR practices can be viewed as communications from the employer to the employee. They suggested that ‘when the HRM system is perceived as high in distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus, it will create a strong situation’ (ibid: 208). They argued that a strong HRM system can significantly affect firm performance by creating powerful, focused organizational cultures that help

FIGURE 1.2 The HRM system

to structure and direct employee behaviour and effort towards desired organizational goals. They also emphasized the important role of implementation in translating the intended HRM system into action. This point was later reinforced by Nishii and Wright (2008), who observed that there are gaps between intended and implemented HR systems and between implemented and perceived HR systems.

Pause for thought

What do you think a 'strong' HRM system would look like?

The impact of HRM

HRM or people management practices impact on:

- *Performance* – of individuals and the whole organization through resourcing (enabling the recruitment and retention of capable people), enhancing the employee experience, learning and development activities (skills development), performance management, reward management and concern for employee wellbeing.
- *Behaviour* – influencing motivation, commitment and engagement.

- *Culture* – through organizational development interventions.
- *Systems* – by influencing work design.
- *Structures* – by influencing organization design.

HRM – today

As a description of people management activities in organizations, the term HRM is now in common use. Emphasis is placed on the need for HR to be strategic and businesslike and to add value, ie to generate extra value (benefit to the business) by the expenditure of effort, time and money on HRM activities. The problem with this approach is that the needs and rights of employees as key stakeholders in the business can be neglected, even ignored. Emphasis on being businesslike has led commentators like Dundon *et al* (2017: 100) to declare with some reason that many employers ‘simply view workers as a disposable means to a profitable end’.

There have been plenty of new interests and developments including human capital management, engagement, the concept of ‘the employee experience’, talent management, competency-based HRM, e-HRM, people analytics, high-performance work systems, performance management and total reward. But these have not been introduced under the banner of the HRM concept as originally defined.

The practice of HRM can be diverse. Dyer and Holder (1988) pointed out that HRM goals vary according to competitive choices, technologies, characteristics of employees (eg could be different for managers) and the state of the labour market. Boxall (2007: 48) observed that: ‘Human resource management covers a vast array of activities and shows a huge range of variations across occupations, organizational levels, business units, firms, industries and societies.’

But it has become increasingly evident that the term HRM has been adopted as a synonym for what used to be called personnel management without paying much attention to the philosophy of its founding fathers. As noted by Storey (2007: 6): ‘In its generic broad and popular sense it [HRM] simply refers to any system of people management.’ HRM practice today is no longer governed by the

original philosophy if it ever was. It is just what HR people and line managers do.

HRM – the future

HRM has a past and a present. What about its future? The accusation that HRM risks losing its direction and *raison d’être* was made by Marchington (2008). He thought that HRM was becoming unidimensional and one-best-way-driven, elitist, overly focused on the needs (and short-term financial performance priorities and metrics) of investors and leaders, and mis-focused, by ignoring how HRM is (or is not) put into effect by line managers. He argued in favour of a future in which the HR function returns to its distinctive roots in people management and refocuses in three ways:

- increasingly playing the role of strategic problem solver and broker, attempting to balance the demands of different constituents and stakeholders, rather than ‘providing the answers that leaders want to hear’;
- paying greater attention to employee wellbeing as the route to high performance; and
- recognizing that what really matters is how line managers put HRM into effect.

He returned to the fray in 2015.

Words of wisdom

HRM has always been located at the interface of potentially conflicting forces within organizations. However, in its quest for legitimacy, HRM has tended primarily to look up the hierarchy and focus on narrow performance goals, so neglecting other longstanding values and stakeholders.

Unless HRM reasserts its independence, it is likely to wither both in academic and practitioner circles.

Marchington (2015: 176)

David Guest made a related point.

Words of wisdom

The mutual gains model suggests that HRM should benefit both individuals and organizations. However, the dominant models within HRM theory and research continue to focus largely on ways to improve performance, with employee concerns very much a secondary consideration.

Guest (2017: 22)

The concept of people management

The views expressed above are those of two of the most distinguished HRM academics, researchers and commentators in the UK. They should be respected and indicate that consideration should be given to what needs to be done to reshape the HRM philosophy to take account of the problems to which they refer. A different approach could be defined under the heading of 'people management'. This is a term that is increasingly being used as an alternative to 'human resource management' but it should mean more than just a change to a more acceptable name, as may often be the case. A philosophy of people management needs to be developed as described below.

The philosophy of people management

The philosophy of people management is based on two interrelated principles. The first is that a multi-stakeholder approach should be adopted. Employees have a stake in their organization that is just as important as the stake held by owners and senior management. The attention given to the interests of employees has to equal the attention given to the interests of the business. In their seminal book on HRM, Beer *et al* (1984: 15) observed that:

HRM policies are and indeed should be influenced by the interests of various stakeholders: shareholders, management, employees, community and government. Unless these policies are influenced by all stakeholders, the enterprise will fail to meet the needs of these stakeholders in the long run and it will fail as an institution.

In 2015, Michael Beer, Paul Boselie and Chris Brewster reviewed the state of this neglected perspective after 30 years. They stated that 'we need to take a wider, more contextual, more multi-layered approach founded on the long-term needs of all relevant stakeholders' (p 427). They also argued that: 'Fundamental to a multi-stakeholder approach must be the creation, maintenance, and development of a culture of trust among the different stakeholders. Considering HRM as a social system, in contrast to the dominant individual perspective, puts the relationships between stakeholders at the centre of our studies' (p 432).

In a business, its owners and its senior management as principal agents of those owners are two of the key stakeholders. They will aim to achieve financial success as a necessary requirement for the survival of the business. So where does HRM stand? Boxall (2007: 63) suggested that 'The mission of HRM is to support the viability of the firm'. And he correctly observed later that 'HR strategy is part and parcel of a larger business model, and it fails if it does not serve the economic imperatives that are essential to that model' (Boxall, 2013: 59). However, a fundamental feature of people management is that policies and practices should be looked at and developed in accordance with the interests of the people affected by them, not just the economic needs of the business. It is necessary to achieve a balance between these interests. Thompson and Harley (2007:149) remarked that:

In an environment where employee skills and commitment are central to organizational success it is precisely by giving employees more that organizations will gain more... Successful strategies therefore rely on aligning employer and employee interests.

The second principle is that employees should be regarded as people rather than as exploitable resources. John Rawls (1973: 183) wrote that 'We must treat persons solely as ends and not in any way as means'. Schneider (1987: 450) argued that 'Organizations are the people in them; that people make the place'. Managing the employee experience is a 'bottom up'

rather than a ‘top down’ process. To enhance the experience, the starting point is to gain understanding of how employees perceive what it is like to work in the organization and from that analysis obtain the evidence on what needs to be done to deal with any issues. And this cannot be done by an annual engagement survey. Frequent ‘pulse’ surveys are necessary.

A people management system that adopts these principles will cover the same areas as an HRM system. People professionals will be responsible for the same things as HR professionals, but the ways in which they do them will differ.

People management defined

The fundamental aim of people management is to ensure that the organization has the knowledgeable, skilled, engaged and productive people it needs. It adopts a multi-stakeholder approach to managing the employment relationship. This recognizes the need to satisfy the interests of the owners (the shareholders) of a business or the requirements of those responsible for the operation of a public or voluntary sector organization. It also recognizes the interests of the management of the organization and the organization’s responsibilities to its suppliers and

the public at large (the community). Equally, however, it recognizes the interests of the people the organization employs and acts accordingly. People are not simply treated as resources – commodities or disposable factors of production who exist to be exploited at the behest of the owners and management. Essentially, people management aims to achieve a balance between the needs of employees and those of the other stakeholders. It pursues employment policies that are socially legitimate and produce benefits for both employees and employers. It avoids the temptation to look upwards and focus on the strategic (business) aims of the organization at the expense of the wellbeing of the people in the organization.

Comparison between HRM and people management

A comparison of the characteristics of HRM with those of people management is given in Table 1.1.

People management in practice

The following case study illustrates people management in practice at Richer Sounds.

TABLE 1.1 Comparison between HRM and people management

	HRM (Resource-based view version)	People management (Organizations are the people in them... people make the place: Gerald Schneider)
Concept/philosophy	Calvinism (focus on the values of order and regularity) Darwin (survival of the fittest)	Quakerism (emphasis on non-authoritarian fellowship) Rawls (treat people as ends, not means)
Ownership and priority	Shareholder/senior management driven Employees regarded as factors of production	Multi-stakeholder with employees as key Focus on employee wellbeing
Approach	Fads and flavours of the month	Evidence-based
Employment relationship	Unitary perspective Legal employment contracts Compliance De-recognition Focus on managing diversity Formal joint consultation processes	Pluralist perspective Psychological contracts Voluntarism Partnership/mutual gains Focus on both inclusion and diversity Importance attached to all forms of employee voice

(continued)

TABLE 1.1 (Continued)

	HRM (Resource-based view version)	People management (Organizations are the people in them... people make the place: Gerald Schneider)
Work	Work intensification Mechanistic	Emphasis on job quality Flexible working
Analytics	Descriptive Annual engagement survey	Predictive Pulse surveys
Digital	Human resource information systems	Web-based applications: social media, cloud technologies, chatbots, smart phones
Learning and development	Systematic training Learning organization E-learning	Workplace/experiential/self-managed/social learning Organizational learning Blended learning
Talent management	Buy in the best talent and win the talent war Exclusive approach Elitist meritocracy	Grow everyone's talents Inclusive approach Grow your own (talent on demand)
Performance emphasis	Financial Individual	Balanced scorecard Collective
Rewards and incentives	Financial emphasis Highly differentiated Individual performance pay and bonuses	Total reward and recognition More widely shared Profit sharing
Performance management	Results and pay focus Formal annual event	Strengths-based and development focus Continuous dialogue and feedback

Source Adapted from an unpublished paper by Duncan Brown

CASE STUDY

Richer Sounds

Julian Richer founded Richer Sounds, the chain of hi-fi and TV shops, in 1978 when he was 19. In 2018 the firm made profits of around £10 million on a turnover of £189 million. The shops run by Richer Sounds have been declared by *The Guinness Book of Records* as the busiest in the world for 20-plus years running. Shrinkage (theft) at the chain is 0.1 per cent of sales, a fraction of the 1–2 per cent typical on the high street. Labour turnover is 11 per cent a year, compared to 100 per cent in some retailers. Richer Sounds donates 15 per cent of its profits to charity.

Julian Richer claims that ethically run businesses like his – those that treat their staff well – are inevitably more successful than their peers. He has now decided to hand over control of his business to its 500 or so workers.

Julian Richer has written that 'My experience has shown me that treating your staff better will make your business perform better' (Richer, 2017: 16). Some of the key features of how this is done at Richer Sounds are:

- staff are called colleagues;
- competitive pay (at the top level of market rates – no one gets less than the National Living Wage);

- a formal recognition scheme which includes every month providing the colleagues in the most successful branch with the use of the company Bentley;
- profit sharing;
- career counselling rather than performance appraisal;
- a policy of continuous development – regular seminars for managers and training sessions for staff until midday every morning, Monday to Friday, covering technology, customer service and product knowledge;
- an active suggestion scheme;
- an 'introduce a friend' scheme – colleagues who introduce someone to the company who has been employed for six months get a bonus of £100;
- active support for new staff – apart from induction training, everyone is given a 'shadow', a colleague who helps them to settle down;
- a hardship scheme which provides grants or interest-free loans to staff who are struggling financially;
- a private healthcare scheme;
- ten holiday homes for staff including ones in Venice and Paris;
- free holidays for staff with more than five years' service.

Key learning points

HRM defined

Human resource management (HRM) is concerned with all aspects of how people are employed and managed in organizations.

The development of the HRM concept

HRM emerged in the 1980s as a philosophy of how people should be managed. Its 'founding fathers' were the US academics Michael Beer and his colleagues in the 'Harvard framework', and Charles Fombrun and his colleagues in the 'Michigan framework' or 'matching model'.

As first conceived, HRM had a conceptual framework consisting of a philosophy underpinned by a number of theories drawn from the behavioural sciences and from the fields of strategic management, human capital management and industrial relations.

HRM philosophy

Schuler (1992: 21) suggested that an HR philosophy is 'a statement of how the organization regards its human resources, what role the resources play in the

overall success of the business and how they are to be treated and managed.'

'The beliefs of HRM include the assumptions that it is the human resource which gives competitive edge, that the aim should be to enhance employee commitment, that HR decisions are of strategic importance and that therefore HR policies should be integrated into the business strategy' Storey (2001: 7).

Goals of HRM

The goals of HRM are to:

- support the organization in achieving its objectives by developing and implementing human resource (HR) strategies which are integrated with the business strategy (strategic HRM);
- contribute to the development of a high-performance culture;
- ensure that the organization has the talented, skilled, and engaged people it needs;
- create a positive employment relationship between management and employees and a climate of mutual trust;

- further the wellbeing of employees as major stakeholders;
- encourage the application of an ethical approach to people management.

Underpinning theories

'Human resource management appears to lean heavily on theories of commitment and motivation and other ideas derived from the field of organizational behaviour' (Guest, 1987: 505). The main theories are:

- AMO;
- contingency;
- human capital;
- motivation;
- social exchange; and
- stakeholder.

Models of HRM

A number of HRM models exist, the most influential being the Harvard and Michigan frameworks.

The HRM system

HRM is delivered through the HR system within the framework of the HR architecture of an organization.

HR architecture includes the HR systems and processes and employee behaviours as well as the structure of the HR function.

The HR system consists of the interrelated and jointly supportive HR activities and practices which together enable HR goals to be achieved.

People management

There is a case for developing a concept of people management which emphasizes the need to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach.

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