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1

Beginning the search for the H in HRM

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Introduction

The genesis of this book lies in some perennial questions concerning what is it to be human, what is the relationship between people and work, and what is the fundamental conception of human relationships embedded in the practice of Human Resource Management (HRM). We are not alone in asking such questions. Indeed, a growing literature bears testament to the fact that HRM has failed to deliver on many of its early promises and been unsuccessful in its attempts to achieve status as either a strategic partner or an employee champion. Within the field of HRM, desperate attempts to legitimise its own existence have led to an ever more economic approach, with greater and greater emphasis on providing empirical links between people management techniques and company performance. Turning to workplace contexts, whilst the 'soft' rhetoric of people as an organisation's greatest asset is universally maintained, here too, as the contributions in this book will testify, observation of practice indicates that 'people' figure largely as part of a balance sheet equation. Practitioners, prescriptive writers and critical commentators have, in various ways, noted the hard edge to the notion of human in HRM, and yet within these commentaries we find little illumination on the missing human. In sum, we suggest that in HR theory, practice, and in the workplace experience, though people appear to be of central concern, the rich, warm and unpredictable faces of humanity are all too clearly absent.

We aim to address the issue of the missing human in HRM by taking a fresh look at the Human in relation to society and organisations. Looking through a social lens, our approach situates people at the heart of how society

works and puts forward a 'thick' understanding of human relations (Sayer, 2005). People, in modern society, are not only economically dependent on the contributions made by others but also emotionally and psychologically dependent, just as organisations depend on the very humanity of their human resources, in all sorts of unacknowledged ways – a mutual reciprocity. Yet, despite this mutuality, we suggest that when employment relations are primarily conceived in economic terms, the 'thick' nature of human relations is reduced to a 'thin' veneer. Thinning relations can be observed most acutely in the contemporary practices of 'hard' HRM: the polarisation of skills, and occupational restructuring through work routinisation, lean staffing, contracting, agency work, casualisation and outsourcing; but it can also be found among the recesses of 'soft' HRM: individualisation, flexibility, strong culture management, and the many dimensions of the HR cycle.

The missing H is most clearly represented in the fact that, over the past twenty years, despite economic growth in most developed countries, rather than better jobs and better work, we have seen increases in job dissatisfaction, work intensification, hours worked, job insecurity and economic and social inequality (Ackroyd *et al.*, 2005, p. 12; Ehrenreich, 2001; Taylor, 2002; Toynbee, 2003). Rather than empowering people, the legacy of HRM as it is currently practised is to create a structured dependency for employees and citizens. While the market and economy go from strength to strength, it seems that the employees' lot improves, only (and not always) in economic terms, and that instead the focus of satisfaction has migrated from work (production) to consumption.

In making this argument, we would clearly state that we are not harking after a sentimental humanised past, a return to an earlier era of Human Relations arguments, or a revolutionary turn. We recognise and acknowledge that capitalism exists, and as managers, employees, organisations, consumers, we are all thoroughly involved in the powerful logic of accumulation which traps us in a cycle of produce, consume–produce, consume. This is not going to change. However, in contrast to the economically defined world of the organisation, we must remind ourselves that human relations are socially embedded, multi-dimensional and deeply reciprocal. Human behaviour is complex, various, flawed, but also agential, choosing, knowledgeable, development-oriented, and ethically and morally skilled. Management prescription recognises this, and strives to harness it through a rule-based order, and impose organisational-based feeling, acting and performance standards. What this prescription appears not to understand is that social life has its own moral order, and when it is moved into the economic sphere, and stripped away from its social embeddedness, it becomes

distorted. Spontaneous judgements and moral acts become ‘crowded’ by instrumentalisation and codification; this in itself does not wholly suppress moral order, but it does ignore the strengths and opportunities within it.

Searching for the H in human resource management

From Personnel Management to HRM, Strategic HRM, High Commitment Management, and the latest incarnation, the Management of Human Capital, the management of people has traversed a long and winding road in search of prescription for how to best configure and harvest people skills and abilities in the organisation. How do contemporary debates and practices within HRM reflect on the notion of the human and human relations?

Mainstream functionalist HRM theory and practice optically indicates the centrality of the person: witness Pfeffer’s (1996) boldly titled *Competitive Advantage Through People*. However, despite language to the contrary, contemporary accounts (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2000; DTI, 2004; Leary-Joyce, 2004; Pfeffer, 1996; Schuler and Jackson, 2005) reference a specifically ‘thin’ form of human relations. In the Strategic HRM literature, a prescriptive ‘bundle’ of strategies and policies – strategic recruitment, team organising, flexibility, strategic performance management, performance-related pay, training and development, knowledge management, ‘empowerment’ initiatives – foreground the individual, though they rarely discuss people per se (MacDuffie, 1995; Ulrich and Beatty, 2001; Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005). It would seem that the unitarist frame of reference underpinning mainstream HRM is directed towards the desired outcomes of the organisation, apparently to the exclusion of the individual needs and values of the employee.

HRM practice is theorised as having diverged along two lines – Hard (The Michigan School) and Soft (the ‘Harvard’ Model). However it is true to say that the distinction between the two has weakened in veracity as contemporary HR practice typically deploys elements of both hard and soft models (Storey, 2001). These, in combination, are fundamentally driven by the goal to achieve both the control and consent of employees that are ‘both dependable and disposable (Hyman, 1987, p. 43)’ (quoted in Legge, 2005b, p. 225). Both models clearly involve a very narrow view of the employee as a potential source of sustained competitive advantage.

In simple terms, hard HRM prioritises rational profit maximising and views the employee as a ‘headcount resource’ (Legge, 2005b, p. 223), thereby lending itself to core–periphery models and the management of costs through routinising, delayering and outsourcing (Collins and Porras, 2002; Hammer

and Champy, 2004; Kotter and Cohen, 2002). Simultaneously, occupational restructuring and automation through technology has simplified and eradicated the craft and quality of many occupations, further increasing the tendency to job displacement. In small contrast, soft HRM places a higher value on the human resource as a valued asset, and foregrounds their proactive capacity, motivation and commitment based on a unitarist view of reciprocal obligations and mutuality (Barney, 1991; Pedler *et al.*, 1997; Senge, 2006). Soft HR purports to treat the individual as a whole, with attention to stress, well-being, and family needs, but the underlying instrumental exchange orientation casts these initiatives simply as more effective methods of motivation and control. In a similar vein, a variety of 'people'-oriented cultural management practices under the moniker of HCM (high commitment management) are used both to manage difficult motivational contexts, and to (hopefully) heighten employee commitment to and identification with the organisation so that employees might act flexibly and exercise their initiative towards organisational ends. Such feeling-oriented practices include, for example, structured career development plans, involvement initiatives such as quality forums and self-managing teams, and/or the creation of 'fun' and attractive places to work (Leary-Joyce, 2004; Peters and Schrage, 1999; Reeves, 2001; *The Sunday Times*, 2006). However though all these routes indicate a more plural approach, fieldwork amply demonstrates that the hard and soft aspects of HRM are analytically inseparable as in combination they have a tendency to rupture with tensions due to the fundamental economic goal at their core (Delbridge, 1998; Houlihan, 2002; Strangleman and Roberts, 1999).

Despite its intuitive appeal, the conjoining of people management with business strategy in Strategic HRM suffers from a number of problematic underpinning assumptions. Notably, it assumes a very simplistic, one-dimensional view of human nature. It assumes that human resource strategy can be managed in a planned way, and shaped to fit the business strategy, counter to the insights that strategy is emergent and messy (Mintzberg and Walters, 1985), and neglects the numerous stakeholders to, and societal, historical, cultural, institutional and even financial influences on, strategic direction (Legge, 2005b, p. 227). Moreover, as Legge points out, it particularly downplays the psychological contracts between the organisation and employee, and where these might diverge. By viewing the employee as an individual resource unit to be optimally configured and managed, these practices conceptually divorce employees from their social context – that is, other relations, other shaping forces and other commitments (even within the workplace). In sum, contemporary HRM practice, and the theory that

What sorts of humanity does HRM address?

- Bring us your emotional labour and intelligence though not your emotional needs
- Bring us your ideas though not your objections
- Bring us your creativity though not your misbehaviour
- Bring us your loyalty, so long as we need you
- Work to our codes and procedures, but remain flexible
- Bring us your motivation though make it work related
- Be a team member, though we will manage you as an individual
- Develop, but on our terms, and towards our goals
- Listen and communicate, but don't have human conflicts, and we won't listen to you in the same way

Figure 1.1 'The HRM Contract'

informs it, is based on a thin view of mutuality that we somewhat acerbically characterise as 'the HRM contract' (Figure 1.1).

This review gives pause for thought about the degree to which Strategic HRM is truly directed at 'releasing the untapped reserves of "human resourcefulness"' (Keenoy, 1990). More immediately, we might ask: how effective has functionalist HRM proved at delivering on its promises? Roundly criticised from the business perspective for failing to deliver on '20 years of hopeful rhetoric' and a lack of strategic leadership (Hammonds, 2005), HRM also appears to fail to do what it says it does in terms of the business bottom line; despite many optimistic claims to the contrary (Guest, 1997, 2000; Huselid, 1995). Coming from a resolutely bottom-line focus, Hammonds berates HR for its focus on efficiency over value, administration over strategic leadership, processes over results, and for chasing defensive homogenisation and policy uniformity over flexible support of individual achievement. While coming at it from a rather different perspective than Hammond, we would share his contention that HR promotes short-termist cost efficiency rather than long-term value, and delivers limitation rather than human resourcefulness. As a partner to the business goals, HRM is espoused to deliver strategic strengths in the human resources, yet the evidence from the field is that HR goals become short term, instrumental, and fail to navigate the complex multiple, and necessarily contradictory, demands of its various stakeholders.

The critical response

Human Resource Management's attempts to manage employees in ever more inventive ways and the push towards normative controls involving

the management of values and feelings have, unsurprisingly, elicited various critical responses over a number of years. There are those who, whilst apparently supporting the legitimacy of HRM and its human-centred practices, question some of the claims regarding its 'soft' focus and recognise how the logic of the market permeates and undermines its practices (Boxall and Purcell, 2003; Bratton and Gold, 2004; Guest, 1990; Sparrow and Marchington, 1998; Storey, 2001). However, rather than human agency, a narrow and somewhat functionalist understanding of the H in HRM seems to prevail at the heart of these analyses. Other writers have questioned the legitimacy of HRM and the gap between its rhetorics and realities (Caldwell, 2003; Guest and King, 2004; Keenoy, 1990; Legge, 2005a; Noon and Blyton, 2002; Watson, 2000). Such accounts question HRM prescription whilst accepting the active role of human agency in either supporting or resisting various control attempts and in doing so they provide valuable insight into the potential failings (for employees and organisations) of various HR practices (Callaghan and Thompson, 2002; Delbridge, 1998; Grugulis *et al.*, 2000; Korczynski, 2002).

However, from within the critical schools, another very particular and rather bleak understanding of human agency – the 'disciplined worker thesis' – has evolved into a dominant voice on HRM, its role in society, and its effects. Emerging from a broader base and trend in cultural theory, this view contends that the pressures of modern life induce the routinisation of all that it is to be human (Anderson and Mullen, 1998; Bryman, 1999; Cremin, 2003; Meštrović, 1997; Ritzer, 2004). And so the argument goes, in the unreliable, fragmented conditions of consumer capitalism the world of production offers a stable platform where identities can be confirmed and people can take their rightful place in the world of consumption (Rose, 1999). Thus, for this view, the new source of control is the imperative of the free market and the related culture industry, as both producers and consumers willingly collaborate in their own exploitation and 'personalities' are saturated with the 'culture of enterprise' (Cremin, 2003; du Gay, 1996). For this group of thinkers, it has almost become a taken-for-granted base of analysis that 'if industrial capitalism was all about demoralisation, contemporary society is much more about the production of synthetic or instrumental morality' (Fevre, 2003, p. 8). Such an approach has impacted upon an understanding of HRM as a powerful tool of normative control that represents the much bigger forces of 'demoralisation' at work. HRM is seen to discursively produce a new form of 'manufactured morality' that makes up humanity in different ways (Casey, 1995; Deetz, 1998; du Gay, 1996; Fleming and Spicer, 2003; McKinlay and Starkey, 1997; Scott, 1994; Sewell, 2005; Townley, 1994; Wilmott, 1993).

Unfortunately, in its articulation of the death of the social, the disciplined worker thesis produces an image of emotionally anorexic social actors, leading to a veritable ‘asphyxiation by society’ (Archer, 2000, p. 18) that downplays the varying responses available to employees. In presenting the constitution of the enterprising self as an ‘accomplished fact’ (Fournier and Grey, 1999, p. 107), such interpretations unwisely underestimate the interconnectedness of social ties and, hence, people’s abilities in manoeuvring, manipulating or simply enduring various life situations. In effect, the disciplined worker thesis is blind to the human capacity to continually comply, evade, re-interpret or merely survive management practice. We find these arguments excessive in their bleakness and dubious in their blindness to human agency, and so suggest that if we search a little harder we can find humanity and avenues for restored possibility.

Being human: HRM and the employment relationship

What we want to offer is an analysis that includes humanity – that is, social actors who are capable of moral commitment, who are involved with society *and* whose activities take place within multiple and layered frameworks of action. Humans have an unquestionable sense of being situated within a web of obligations, commitments, and ‘moral sentiments’; factors that make up community (Sayer, 2005). They calibrate and monitor their behaviour in order to maintain social order but to also create and sustain human bonds (Goffman, 1961). Relationships, including the employment relationship, are formed and broken but relationships are a vital and necessary part of a stable social order. Indeed it has long been recognised that organisations rely on the co-operation of people in the organisation, with colleagues, with management, with customers – though the conceptualisation and recognition of that connection and cooperation varies greatly. Ample empirical evidence suggests that it is human connection that oils both the social and the economic wheels of organisational life (Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Bolton and Houlihan, 2005; Callaghan and Thompson, 2002; Korczynski, 2003). This phenomenon is exemplified by people’s behaviour at work as their actions continually cross boundaries between the formal and informal – gaining pleasure (and sometimes pain) from interaction with others. It is thus that we argue work-based relations have economic, but also social consequences.

And yes, of course, organisations are not blind to this. Much of the prescriptive HRM literature assumes a need for connection in their ‘soft’ practices of culture, empowerment, team work, etc. Unlike previous approaches to people management, but building on human relations approaches, HRM recognises the potential in the irrationality of humanity.

Whereas the raw edges of humanity were once firmly excluded from organisational life, HRM *appears to* invite humanity in and celebrate it as a source of creativity, energy and commitment. And one can only think that this is a welcome divergence from management prescription that assumed *homo economicus* in the shape of theories X and Y and pathologised leakages of feelings (Mayo, 1946; McGregor, 1960). HRM's apparent celebration of the human invites a description of their recognition of the employment relationship as 'thick'; involving recognition, respect, trust and, perhaps most importantly, reciprocal obligation. Of course, there will always be dishonesty, disinterest, conflict and contradiction; some may say this is an inherent part of any employment relationship, but a *thick* employment relationship is more likely to encourage accommodation rather than conflict and produce what Andrew Sayer describes as an 'ethical surplus':

As long as the employment contract lasts, the moral expectations and commitments are likely to spill beyond what is contractually defined. (2005, p. 89)

To foster and nurture 'thick' employment relationships appears to make both economic and moral sense; committed workers, increased performance, reservoirs of goodwill and gift relations that can be drawn upon at times of economic necessity. This is certainly the picture portrayed by the advocates of HRM practice. So why do we not see more evidence of the thick employment relationship in action? The most obvious answer might be that, unfortunately, in a market economy it is almost obligatory for companies to exploit the 'ethical surplus' and treat their employees instrumentally (Sayer, 2005; Thompson, 2003). However, this is to assume that an ethical surplus has been produced and that HRM does indeed create the conditions in which thick employment relationships might flourish. We would suggest that this is not the case for two reasons: first, economic considerations override ambitious schemes to humanise HRM; for instance, flexibility translates into insecurity and excessive hours; appraisal focused on development is superseded by concerns with short-term performativity and the suppression of human instincts to help a customer, do a quality job, forgo a sale on ethical grounds or other such measures of humanity that the *Resource* in Human Resource Management overrides and squeezes out. Second, HRM bases its practice on an impoverished model of humanity (Archer, 2000). Despite HRM warmly welcoming humanity into the organisation, it has its very own house rules – feelings, emotions etc are confined to different spheres of economic action and in doing so are rationalised. HRM does this with such ease because it holds onto the functionalist's (Unitarist) conception of humanity. The complexities of humanity are never recognised and employees are conceptualised as a passive, one-dimensional resource entirely disembedded

from the social realm. Human connectivity is squeezed and moulded into certain shapes that can be monitored, controlled and utilised as another factor of production, i.e., coaching sessions, ‘fun at work’ days, ‘team players’, etc. The combination of economic priority and instrumental action directed toward a narrow conception of humanity creates not a ‘thick’ employment relationship but a ‘thin’ one and *homo economicus* is apparent in all of its forms. Nevertheless, though some forms of the human relationship (such as dimensions of the employment relationship) may be overridden by economic demands some moral concerns remain – though, unfortunately, this may exist mainly rhetorically in HR prescription, it does exist in other forms in the shape of calls for corporate social responsibility and trade union activity and the simple forming of social bonds between people at work.

Searching for the human in contemporary HR practice

How then is the human faring in day-to-day practice on the HRM frontline? We have acknowledged that the language of people-centredness pervades HR practice, as it does HR theory. A quick look around flags numerous examples of best practice HR management, from the national standard for human resource development’s evocative moniker ‘Excellence Through People’ to the High Commitment Practices of Google, Microsoft, eBay, Dell and many more firms internationally lauded for HR best practice. The ‘top places to work for’ lists (Great Place to Work Institute, 2006; *The Sunday Times*, 2006) emphasise that people are at the heart of their success, and flag creative initiatives around fun, development and flexibility. This introductory chapter is not the place for a deeper analysis of these practices; however, while acknowledging that humanistic HRM practices are widely to be found, the following questions must be considered:

- WHAT: Is there a choice for diverse needs? Who defines these needs?
- WHO: Who gets to avail of them? Is it all employees, or merely some?
- WHAT IF: When it comes to competing interests: who prevails?
- WHERE and WHEN: Does human-centred practice prevail when it comes to choices between economic and human interests, and at the level of Board and strategic decision making?
- WHY: What precisely are organisations’ views of humanity?

These questions tend to reveal the fact that behind soft HRM initiatives lies an economic instrumentality whereby their deployment is conditional on their contribution to the bottom line. Organisationally, the economic imperative sets in train a cycle of undelivered promises whereby resources

are not harvested either strategically or socially, leaving the organisation and HR in a constant search for new recipes for improvement. It eases the way for waste, errors, and lost checks and balances, at its worst, organisational silence, injustices, and opportunistic corporate misbehaviour. All have societal consequences. By managing the employment relationship solely in economic terms, humanity is 'squeezed', and the resource is never seen in its full light.

Putting the H back in?

By looking beyond models of market society and *homo economicus* we reintroduce humanity to the analysis of the employment relationship, and restore attention to Aristotle's notion of the collective as an arena for human flourishing. We can envisage the embedded nature of economic relationships and their reliance on human connectivity and community. Shifting the gaze from *thin* to *thick* conceptualisations of the employment relationship enables a better understanding of the complex and various motivations that lie behind people's actions. This in turn lends much support for a re-worked HRM model of developed, empowered and involved employees – reflexive, thinking, creative and value-bringing agents. This is more than current models of HRM bring, with their basis in unproblematic, one-dimensional characters. It is also much more than the manufactured morality suggested by contemporary critical writers. It is a model that involves reciprocal obligation – rights and responsibilities – recognition of multiple (and sometimes contradictory) motivations and autonomy and trust – an employment relationship that is recognised for its reliance and embeddedness in the political economy: the employment relationship as a *thick* human relationship. However, to escape the 'soft-headed attitude' often attributed to such calls and avoid being 'lost in the humanistic forest' (McGuire *et al.*, 2005), we have to recognise the irrevocable drive of the market; the logic of capitalism that overrides concerns for human relationships and forces labour into quantifiable units.

The aim of the book is to highlight the missing H and to create a forum where the dynamics that arise when the management of people is structured predominantly or exclusively as an economic relationship can be debated constructively. Our goal is to open up space for reflection and debate about the impacts of HRM on people and society. At a time of growing prosperity in first-world economies, we feel it is pertinent to ask: what about the Human in Human Resource Management?

Searching for the H: theory, practice and workplace contexts

Throughout the book, contributors argue that although the employment relationship has both social and economic elements, evidence from the contemporary workplace indicates the (increasing) economisation and instrumentalising of that relationship and the de-prioritisation of social and non-economic needs. Collectively, we argue that a solely economic orientation to the employment relationship erodes the human resource by individualising and narrowing both organisational and interpersonal relationships. Organised into three parts, the book explores theory, practice and context. Setting the scene, Andrew Sayer's is the first chapter in the theory part. Andrew adopts a 'moral economy' approach in order to emphasise the socially embedded nature of economic activity and the complex and multi-faceted activity of humanity. He asks 'what it is to be human?' and sets out a plea that in analysing organisational life we should not treat people as cultural dopes and neither should we ignore organisations as goal-centred institutions. To do so is to potentially damage both employee and organisational well-being. Steve Fleetwood also adds to our theoretical understanding of the missing human in his review of the nature of theory that informs our understanding of various approaches to HRM and the methodological underpinnings of studies that claim to empirically 'prove' the HR and performance link. Drawing on critical realism, Steve questions how an approach that is methodologically incapable of capturing the essence of human activity in organisations can ever assess how HR practice might impact upon an organisation's economic performance. In Chapter 4, Irena Grugulis explores the nature of skill and how we might better understand contemporary forms of employment that draw on human capacities for emotion and knowledge work. Irena reminds us that humanity and work might be a complex and sensitive topic but that this should not mean it can be evaded or side-lined. Irena goes on to link humanity with the notion of 'decent work' and consider what humanising and humanised workplaces might look like. Concluding the theory part, Paul Thompson contends that the normative and strategic dimensions of HRM are underpinned by notions of human capital that attempt to measure and remodel employees into valuable organisational assets that under the direction of High Commitment Work Practices can and will produce shareholder value. However, Paul highlights the tensions that arise when capital markets create conditions that squeeze the human out of human capital.

Our second part continues the search for the Human, this time in HR Practice. Opening the theme, Marek Korczynski examines the 'enchanted' illusion of menus of choice within the HR cycle, and asks critical questions

about who defines the choices, and what might be missing. Marek's analysis highlights not only the fallacy of choice, but the enactment of individualisation processes through HRM, and the masking of power and its operation in the workplace. For him, this obscuring of power is fundamental in making the workplace less human, and his arguments serve as a sharp reappraisal of HR activities such as training, stress management and coaching. Karen Legge, in Chapter 7, further explores the question of what it means to be human and what is required for a fulfilling life, and turns her analysis to contemporary flexibility practices ranging from empowerment to temporary contracts and outsourcing. Karen offers a rigorous analysis of the evolution of flexibility, concentrating on its tensions and contradictions and she judiciously reflects on the prognosis for flexibility and humanistic practices under contemporary capitalism. In Chapter 8, Martin Parker pens a provocative challenge to the selectivity of truth within HRM practice, and in particular, the question of corporate citizenship. Offering a characteristically wry perspective, he illuminates the potential for employees, in parallel with citizens of the state, to turn the citizen-oriented language of HRM (with its talk of family, shared mission, strong cultures and corporate citizenship behaviour) on its head and, perchance, to 'have it their way'. In doing so, Martin offers a dynamic, and we believe, far from Utopian, agenda for practical radicalism. In the following chapter, Fiona Wilson turns her attention to organisational diversity, and asks just how human, or indeed effective, is the HRM practice of diversity management? Fiona does this by reviewing the evidence and statistics on diversity representation and the wide gap between policy and practice, and by dialoguing with the curious contradiction that diversity practices seem at once to celebrate but also to squash 'difference', by operating both with and without 'regard for persons'. Her recommendation is that the emphasis on the business case for diversity management needs to be foreshadowed by a search for the human benefits of diversity-centeredness. Jane Bryson, in Chapter 10, adds a fresh perspective to current thinking on human resource development, noting how insular and prescriptive much HRD writing tends to be. Jane draws on the Nobel Prize-winning work of Amartya Sen whose fluent and passionate writing on human capability has much to offer current HRD thinking. For Sen, and for Jane, there is a responsibility to create enabling environments, and to put human development and freedom to achieve at the heart of the (organisational) worlds we create. As Jane argues, it is time for HRD managers to 'lift their eyes to purpose and principles' if they are not to remain slaves to short-term cycles of organisational performance, with little or no real impact.

Our third and final part turns from theory and practice, to give voice to workers and the workplace experience. This part seeks to re-examine a variety of specific organisational contexts as indications of the extent to which the H is missing in action on the ground. Here we see most clearly the sharp divide between rhetoric and reality. Opening the part with Chapter 11, Sarah Jenkins and Rick Delbridge offer a valuable review of some key field studies in a range of ‘high performance’ factory settings. Their work maps the experience of HRM initiatives at the coalface, and offers troubling conclusions: not only are ‘high performance work systems’ failing in their promises – underscored by a narrow, self-interested understanding of what people want, look for, and are motivated by – but these same systems, and their fractured enactment, are producing significant disconnections in employee interests, identities and relations. Thus they fail to contribute to, and at times even undermine, the very performance and employee outcomes they set out to achieve. Sarah and Rick are incisive in their examination of the evidence and offer a great deal of food for thought for the HR practitioner, and in pointing to the disconnections within systems of capital, they also remind us that the causes and solutions to these challenges are far from simple and linear. Firmly putting the employee back into a social context, they conclude by reinforcing the necessity to engage with humans in all their knowing, agential and social complexity, rather than rely on a thin and, ultimately, misleading proxy. Chapter 12 draws on a writer that has influenced us both. Polly Toynbee has long been a provocateur and writer of conscience in the British media, and here we are delighted to include a section from her 2003 book *Hard Work: Life in Low-pay Britain*, to observe through Polly’s eyes as she joins the ranks of careworkers who offer their emotion work to elderly and incapacitated residents in nursing homes everywhere. In this account we see for ourselves just how much is exchanged for so little, underscoring the irony of an economic view of employee exchange. Polly’s accounts richly convey the humanity in human resources, and put people, both as clients and carers, firmly in our gaze. Grasping this understanding, it is hard to imagine how work and workers can ever be seen in solely economic terms. This is followed in Chapter 13 by an examination of our own of frontline customer service work in call centres. Here, we articulate the ways in which codification and scripting of interaction seems to squeeze humanity out of the customer–employee interaction, and yet, how, through the voices of customer service representatives, humanity and the deeply social interaction order bubble at the surface nevertheless. We ask why the customer and the employee are constructed so as to divorce human connection, and offer some of the consequences that result. In

Chapter 13, Gerard Hanlon examines the state of the professions, and charts the growing marketisation, quantification of performance, and reliance of immaterial labour within these contexts. Drawing extensively on Marxist critique to examine the labour process and the contradictions produced by the juxtaposition of freedom and control within HRM, Gerry persuasively speculates that HRM may in fact be redundant. He offers a picture of a growing trend mirrored across an ever-greater variety of work contexts, and asks challenging questions about the direction in which we are heading. Far from being idealistically or polemically argued, Gerry situates this perspective in an analysis of capitalism's contradictory reliance on driving down human resource costs on one hand, and depending on the spending power of these same 'resources' as consumers on the other. In our final chapter, Joe O'Mahoney turns his attention to an often-neglected life form in the analysis of work and organisations – the consultant. Looking at the consultant from a rare perspective as human, and through the lens of Joe's own participant observation in the work, we learn just how fraught this role really is. Joe describes the pains of consulting life and the tensions it absorbs with rich humanity, and on this journey offers a deeper understanding of the fragile worlds that create some of the HRM tensions this book evaluates.

All in all, this tour of the theory, practice and context of HRM presents a chorus of voices that would firmly reinsert the human in organisational life, and pause to ponder the causes and consequences of its absence. We hope you will join us in this debate, whether to amplify or offer counterpoint, but ultimately to search for, find, and insist upon the human as the focal point of organisational life.

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