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After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Define HRM and its relation to organizational management
2. Explain the central features of the contract in the employment relationship
3. Summarise the scope of HRM and the key HRM functions
4. Explain the theoretical issues surrounding the HRM debate
5. Appreciate the different approaches to studying HRM
The contemporary workplace is constantly changing against a backdrop of post-2008 economic austerity that has now reached the proportions of the Great Depression of the 1920s. The changes relate, although not exclusively, to the rise in zero-hour contracts (Brinkley, 2013), the increase of precarious work and insecurity (Standing, 2011), organizational downsizing (Datta et al., 2010), low wages (Flssbeck and Lapavitsas, 2015), the emasculation of trade union power (Hutton, 2015a) and extreme inequality in income (Stiglitz, 2015). Analyses of these labour market changes driven by neo-liberal economics vary significantly between developed capitalist countries. These changes have been introduced at different times and in different political and economic contexts, and have been accepted or opposed by workers and even managers in different ways and to different degrees (Atzeni, 2014). This diversity makes it even more important to understand the numerous different theories underpinning human resource management (HRM) and to explore the outcome of human resources (HR) practices on organizations, managers and workers and wider society.

As a management function, HRM has been widely documented as playing a fundamental role in designing and bringing about the changes that have given rise to 'labour market flexibility'. Despite the importance and deleterious effects of these transformative changes, mainstream coverage of HRM exhibits a ‘dominance of consensus-oriented discourse’ that is predominantly managerial in outlook, strategic and prescriptive (Keegan and Boselie, 2006). To put it another way, mainstream accounts tend to focus largely on assumed positive outcomes and the ‘how to’ of HRM (Watson, 2010). This book tries to take a different perspective: although it is concerned with the way in which organizations manage human capability, both individually and collectively, its coverage of contemporary HRM draws from the conflict and dysfunction-oriented discourse, a discourse being a number of ideas that together form a powerful body of thought that influences how people think and act. Thus, its central aim is to examine HRM theories and practices critically and to expose the tensions inherent in the employment relationship. A further aim is to provide a better understanding of how social relations, leadership, culture and HR policies and practices seek to enlist employee capabilities and engagement – or fail to do so – so that the wider role of HRM within the theory of organizational effectiveness (Boxall et al., 2008) can be examined in ways that will help managers manage workers more equitably and with dignity.

Many managers complain that the HR department prevents them from doing what they want, such as hiring someone they ‘just know’ is a good fit for the job. And HR professionals make them perform tasks they dislike, such as ‘playing God’, when appraising their employees’ performance. These complaints from line managers have a cyclical quality – they are driven largely by the business context. When organizations are experiencing labour problems, whether those are skill shortages, high turnover or low productivity, HR is usually seen as a valued leadership partner. When things are running efficiently, managers tend to think, ‘What’s HR doing for us, anyway?’ (Cappelli, 2015, p. 54)
management’ (Guest, 1987; Storey, 1989) to describe formally organized activities that specifically dealt with managing workers. For some, the rise of the HRM new orthodoxy is associated with a set of distinctive ‘best’ practices that aim to recruit, develop, reward and engage employees in ways that create what are called ‘high-performing work systems’. For others, HRM is simply a relabelling of ‘good’ personnel management practices – the ‘old wine in new bottles’ critique. More profoundly, some detractors argue that HRM grew out of, and is located within, a wider neo-liberal context, and HRM continues to grapple with enduring conflicts and paradoxes associated with managing the employment relationship (Gennard and Kelly, 1997; Legge, 1995). If we understand paradox as two or more positions that sound plausible and well argued yet are contradictory and incompatible with each other, it is argued that successful managers are those who are able to accept the tensions arising from the paradox and are able to handle all its competing positions simultaneously instead of choosing only one of them (Guerci and Carollo, 2016). Further background material on the development of HRM is available on the book’s online resource centre.

Visit the online resource centre at www.palgravehighered.com/bg-hrm-6e for a short history of the development of HRM over the last 30 years.

We start this introductory chapter by examining the complex debate surrounding the nature and significance of contemporary HRM. After defining HRM, we examine the nature of the employment relationship and HRM functions before exploring some influential theoretical models that attempt to define HRM analytically. At the end of the chapter, we introduce the importance of critical HRM education (CHRME) and the application of the ‘sociological imagination’.

Management and HRM

HRM, in theory and in practice, encompasses a multidisciplinary field, bringing together a diverse body of scholarship from various social science disciplines that are concerned with managing work and people. An early definition of HRM by Michael Beer and his colleagues focuses on all managerial activity affecting the employment relationship: ‘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’ (1984, p. 1). Acknowledging HRM as only one ‘recipe’ from a range of alternatives, Storey (1995a, 2001) contends that HRM plays a pivotal role in sophisticated organizations, emphasizing the importance of the strategic dimension and employee ‘commitment’ in generating HR activities. In his view (Storey, 2007, p. 7):

“Human resource management is a distinctive approach to employment management, which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce using an array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques.

Conceptualizing HRM as a high-commitment management strategy limits the discipline to the study of a relatively small number of distinct organizations, as most firms continue to provide low wages and a minimal number of training opportunities (Bacon and Blyton, 2003). In contrast, Boxall et al. (2008, p. 1) define HRM as ‘the management of
work and people towards desired ends’. These authors advance the notion of ‘analytical HRM’ to emphasize that the primary task of HRM scholars is to build theory and gather empirical data in order to identify and explain ‘the way management actually behaves in organizing work and managing people’ (Boxall et al., 2008, p. 4, emphasis added).

This approach to HRM has three interrelated analytical themes. The first is a concern with the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of HRM – with understanding management and employee behaviour in different contexts and with explaining motives. The second theme is a concern with the ‘how’ of HRM, that is, the processes by which it is carried out. In this context, Blau’s (1964) influential concept of social exchange theory is often referred to. Social exchange theory draws attention to the psychology of instrumental human behaviour. Its relevance to HRM is defined by an assumption that a resource (human capability and commitment) will continue to flow only if there is a valued return contingent upon it. Social psychologists call this reciprocally contingent flow reinforcement, and economists call it exchange (Emerson, 1976, p. 359). Therefore employees will feel a sense of obligation to reciprocate when they perceive that they are being treated well by a manager or by their organization (Gilbert et al., 2011a). The third theme is concerned with questions of ‘for whom and how well’, that is, with assessing the outcomes of HRM. This third characteristic in particular implies a critical purpose and helps us to rediscover one of the prime objectives of the social sciences – that of asking tough questions about power and inequality. It also reminds all of those who are interested in studying the field that HRM is ‘embedded in a global economical, political and sociocultural context’ (Janssens and Steyaert, 2009, p. 146).

Over 50 years ago, sociologist Peter Berger wrote that the first wisdom of sociological enquiry is that ‘things are not what they seem’ (1963, p. 23). A deceptively simple statement, Berger’s idea suggests that most people live in a social world they do not understand. The goal of sociology is to shed light on social reality using what the late C. Wright Mills called the ‘sociological imagination’ – the ability to see the relationships between individual life experiences and the larger society, because the two are related (1959/2000). Sociologists argue that the sociological imagination helps people to place seemingly personal troubles, such as losing a job to outsourcing or local environmental degradation, into a larger national or global context. For Watson (2010), a critical approach to studying HRM provides inspiration and an invitation to apply Mills’ ‘sociological imagination’ to matters of HRM ‘outcomes’ that have ‘wider social consequences’. In the context of the post-2008 global recession and the search for the ‘new economic philosophy’, Delbridge and Keenoy (2010) provide a persuasive argument for critical HRM (CHRM), an intellectual activity, grounded in social science enquiry, that sets HR practices within the context of the prevailing capitalist society, challenges the maxims of what Alfred Schutz has called the ‘world-taken-for-granted’ and is more inclusive of marginal voices (Bratton and Gold, 2015).

We need a definition of the subject matter that conceptualizes HRM in terms of employment or people management, one that distinguishes it from a set of ‘neutral’ functional practices, and one that conceives it as being embedded in a capitalist society and its associated ideologies and global structures. The following attempts to capture the essence of what contemporary HRM is about:

"Human resource management (HRM) is a strategic approach to managing employment relations which emphasizes that leveraging people’s capabilities and commitment is critical to achieving sustainable competitive advantage or superior public services. This is accomplished through a distinctive set of integrated employment policies, programmes and practices, embedded in an organizational and societal context."
There is no legal definition of ‘zero-hours contracts,’ although a British government consultation document (BIS, 2013) states that:

A zero-hours contract is an employment contract in which the employer does not guarantee the individual any work, and the individual is not obliged to accept any work offered.

Zero-hours contracts contain no obligation to offer work or accept it. A person on a zero-hours contract is legally not an employee but a ‘worker.’ They are covered by some employment laws, but others, which are costly to employers, do not apply, such as the provision of redundancy pay, minimum notice periods, maternity and paternity leave and pay and protection from unfair dismissal (Wakeling, 2014).

Labour Force Survey figures published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2015) show that the use of zero-hours contracts for April–June 2015 increased by 19 per cent compared with the previous year, giving a figure of 744,000 contracts. These contracts account for 2.4 per cent of people in employment. Women, students in full-time education and young or older workers are the groups most likely to be on zero-hours contracts. An ONS survey of businesses covering 2 weeks in January 2015, however, found that there were around 1.5 million contracts that did not guarantee a minimum number of hours. The disparity between the two surveys may be due to people having zero-hours contracts with different employers or having one in addition to their main job. Zero-hours contracts are usually with large employers, especially in the hotel and leisure industries, the National Health Service, the care industry and universities (Inman, 2015). For example, the retailer Sports Direct employs 80 per cent of its staff on zero-hours contracts (The Guardian, 2015).

Wakeling’s analysis of zero-hours contracts based upon enquiries to the UK Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) reveals a contradiction between low-commitment contracts and the performance of jobs over a long time that require a high sense of commitment and involvement, such as work as a personal carer with disabled or elderly individuals:

Two broad themes emerged. The first was to do with a lack of clarity over employment status, and a lack of awareness of employment rights, as described by both workers and employers. The second was to do with a disparity that often seems to arise between the emotional attachment many people form with their job or workplace and their contractual status. This disparity often expressed itself in a fear about future earnings and a sense of unfairness about the way they were being treated. (Wakeling, 2014, p. 6)

It emerged in the ACAS research that:

Workers are often frightened to turn down work or look for other work in case their employer starts zeroing down their hours. These anxieties appear (continued)
Following on from this definition, CHRM underscores the importance of people – only the ‘human factor’ or labour can provide talent to generate value. With this in mind, it goes without saying that any adequate analytical conception of HRM should draw attention to the notion of indeterminacy, or uncertainty, which derives from the employment relationship: employees have a potential capacity to provide the added value desired by the employer. It also follows from this that human knowledge and skills are a strategic resource that needs investment and skilful management. Moreover, the emergent environmental management literature provides a role for HRM in improving an organization’s performance in terms of overall sustainability. Also implicit within our definition is the need for radical organizational and social change. Another distinguishing feature of HRM relates to the notion of integration. A cluster of employment policies, programmes and practices needs to be coherent and integrated with the organization’s corporate strategy. Finally, the 2008 collapse of financial services firm Lehman Brothers – the spark that detonated the global financial implosion and recession – the 2011 nuclear crisis in Fukushima, Japan, and the 2015 sovereign-debt financial crisis remind us that the economy and society are part of the same set of processes, and that work and management practices are deeply embedded in the wider sociocultural context in which they operate. The conception of CHRM put forward here resonates with analytical frameworks holding that HR practices can only be understood in the context of economic-societal factors that shape or direct those practices. The approach adopted can be summed up in the succinct phrase ‘context matters.’

It is plausible to argue that if the workforce is so critical for sustainability performance, human dignity in and at work is, or ought to be, at the heart of contemporary HRM (Bolton, 2007). The existing literature on dignity in and at work has revealed conditions that contribute to indignity, the ways in which employees’ inherent dignity is undermined and employees’ responses to indignity. Framed in positive terms, dignity is affirmed in three ways: ‘inherent’ dignity as recognized by respectful interaction; ‘earned’ dignity as recognized by messages of competence; and ‘remediated’ dignity as recognized by social interactions and organizational practices. Achieving workplace dignity is anything but easy, but research underscores the importance of tackling the phenomenon: ‘when dignity is violated, individuals can engage in practices of resistance to reclaim not only a sense of worth but the material resources to affirm their worth’ (Lucas, 2015, p. 642). The dignity dimension provides support for a reconceptualized HRM model of empowered, engaged and developed employees – the ‘missing “human” in HRM’ critique (Bolton and Houlihan, 2007). The demands for dignity in the workplace are a key dimension of CHRM that provides strong support for extending the analysis of HRM outcomes beyond employee performance and commitment to include the ‘dignity’ aspects of the employment relationship and equality.
To grasp the nature and significance of HRM, it is necessary to understand the management process and the role of HRM within it. But before we do this, we should explain why managing people or the ‘human’ input is so different from managing other resources.

**The meaning of ‘human resource’**

First and foremost, people are not a commodity so, arguably, referring to employees as a ‘human resource’ – in which people are seen as another input in the business process – ‘dehumanizes workers’ (Spencer and Kelly, 2015, p. 78). It is people in organizations who set overall strategies and goals, design work systems and create wealth by producing goods and services. People therefore become human capital by virtue of the roles they assume in the work organization. Schultz (1981, p. 21; quoted in Fitz-enz, 2000, p. xii) defined human capital in this way:

> Consider all human abilities to be either innate or acquired. Every person is born with a particular set of genes, which determines his [or her] innate ability. Attributes of acquired population quality, which are valuable and can be augmented by appropriate investment, will be treated as human capital.

In management terms, ‘human capital’ refers to the traits that people bring to the workplace – intelligence, aptitude, commitment, tacit knowledge and skills, and an ability to learn. But the contribution of this human resource to the organization is typically variable and unpredictable. This indeterminacy of an employee’s contribution to her or his work organization makes the human resource the ‘most vexatious of assets to manage’ (Fitz-enz, 2000, p. xii) and is helpful in understanding Hyman’s (1987) assertion that the *leitmotiv* of HRM is the need to gain both control over and commitment from workers.

Managing people in a democratic market society extends beyond the issue of control. If the employer’s operational goals and the employee’s personal goals are to be achieved, there must necessarily be cooperation between the two parties. However, different forms of resistance and conflict often accompany this reciprocal cooperation. The nature of employment relations reminds us that people differ from other resources because their commitment and cooperation always has to be won: they have the capacity to resist management’s actions and join trade unions to defend or further their interests and rights. At the same time, employment entails an economic relationship and one of control and cooperation. This duality means that the employment relationship is highly *dynamic* in the sense...
that it is forged by the coexistence of varying degrees of control, cooperation and conflict (Brown, 1988; Edwards, 1986; Watson, 2004). Thus, HRM is inevitably characterized by structured cooperation and conflict.

The meaning of ‘management’

The word manage came into English usage directly from the Italian maneggiare, meaning ‘to handle and train horses’ (Williams, 1976). In contemporary workplaces, a manager is an organizational member who is ‘institutionally empowered to determine and/or regulate certain aspects of the actions of others’ (Willmott, 1984, p. 350). Collectively, managers are traditionally differentiated horizontally by the activities of their function (for example, production manager or HR manager) and vertically by the level at which they are located in their organizational hierarchy (for example, branch manager or line manager). The creation of a formal organizational structure and work configuration is the raison d’être for management. Classical management texts present an idealized image of management as a rationally designed system for realizing goals, but there are competing theoretical perspectives, as we will explain below. HRM is often considered to be synonymous with the ‘HR department’ (Purcell and Kinnie, 2008). Yet, as recent studies suggest, general managers are expected to deliver more effective and cost-efficient solutions (McGuire and Kissack, 2015), and as such occupy a key role in delivering HR interventions, a development we examine in Chapter 3.

The nature of the employment relationship

The nature of the social relationship between employees and their employer is an issue of central analytical importance to HRM. The employment relationship describes an asymmetry of reciprocal relations between employees (non-managers and managers) and their employer. Through the asymmetry of the employment contract, inequalities of power structure both the economic exchange (wage or salary) and the nature and quality of the work performed (whether it is routine or creative). In contemporary capitalism, employment relationships vary: at one end of the scale, they can be short-term, primarily but not exclusively economic exchange for a relatively well-defined set of duties and low commitment; at the other, they can be complex long-term relationships defined by a broad range of economic inducements and relative security of employment, given in return for a broad set of duties and a high commitment from the employee.

The employment relationship can be created in three ways: unilaterally by the employer; bilaterally, by the employer and the trade unions, through a process of collective bargaining; and trilaterally, by employers, trade unions and statutes, through the intervention of the government or state (Kelly, 2005). The (unilateral) individual employment relationship between an employer and an individual employee details the terms (wage or salary) and conditions (duties, obligations and other benefits) of the relationship. The (bilateral) collective employment relationship is between an employer and a group of employees, the terms and conditions being determined jointly by collective bargaining between the managers, acting on behalf of the employer, and the trade union(s) representing the employees. The terms of the collective agreement between the employer and the trade union are incorporated into the individual employment contracts of all employees (union and non-union members) in the bargaining group (Farnham, 2015). What, then, is the essence of the employment
relationship? Research into the employment relationship has drawn attention to economic, legal, social and psychological aspects of relations in the workplace.

At its most basic, the employment relationship embraces an economic relationship: the ‘exchange of pay for work’ (Brown, 1988). When people enter the workplace, they enter into a pay–effort bargain, which places an obligation on both the employer and the employee: in exchange for a wage or salary, paid by the employer, the employee is obligated to perform an amount of physical or intellectual labour. The pay–effort bargain is relevant for understanding how far the employment relationship is structurally conflictual or consensual. In the capitalist labour market, people sell their labour and seek to maximize their pay. To the employer, pay is a cost that, all things being equal, reduces profit and therefore needs to be minimized. Thus, as Brown (1988, p. 57) states, ‘Conflict is structured into employment relations’ as the benefit to one group is a cost to the other.

The ‘effort’ or ‘work’ side of the contract also generates tensions and conflict because it is inherently imprecise and indeterminate. The contract permits the employer to buy a potential level of physical or intellectual labour. The function of management is therefore to transform this potential into actual value-added labour. HR practices are designed to narrow the divide between employees’ potential and actual performance or, in Townley’s (1994, p. 14) words:

Personnel practices measure both the physical and subjective dimensions of labour, and offer a technology which aims to render individuals and their behaviour predictable and calculable … to bridge the gap between promise and performance, between labour power and labour, and organizes labour into a productive force or power.

The second component of the employment relationship is that it involves a legal relationship: a network of contractual and statutory rights and obligations affecting both parties to the contract. Contractual rights are based on case law (judicial precedent), and the basic rules of contract, in so far as they relate to the contract of employment, are fundamental to the legal relationship between the employer and the employee. It is outside the scope of this chapter to provide a discussion of the rules of contract. But, to use Kahn-Freund’s famous phrase, the contract of employment, freely negotiated between an individual and her or his employer, can be considered to be the cornerstone of English employment law (Honeyball, 2010).

A complex network of UK and European Union (EU) statutory rights regulates the obligations of employers and employees even though these are not (for the most part) formally inserted into the employment contract itself. Table 1.1 provides an overview of how UK employment legislation has helped to shape the legal regulation of employment relations. In broad terms, the employment laws of the 1979–97 Conservative government sought to regulate the activities of trade unions. Cumulatively, the changes marked ‘a radical shift from the consensus underlying “public policy” on industrial relations during most of the past century’ (Hyman, 1987, p. 93), which had the effect of tilting the balance of power in industrial disputes towards the employers (Brown et al., 1997). In the late 1990s, under Britain’s ‘New Labour’ government, a plethora of legislative reform in employment extended protection to individual employees. For example, the 2006 Work and Families Act gave additional protections in relation to pregnancy – the right to maternity leave, time off for antenatal care and the right to maternity pay (Lockton, 2010).
EU employment legislation draws on the Western European tradition, in which the rights of employees are laid down in constitutional texts and legal codes. For example, in 2002, the UK implemented the EU directive mandating that fixed-term employees cannot be treated less favourably than comparable permanent employees in the same firm in terms of wages, benefits and training. New data indicate that the previous wage gap of 4 per cent between male fixed-term and permanent workers closed after 2002, although it is questionable whether this can be ascribed to the new EU law (Salvatori, 2015).

On 24th June 2016, Britain voted to sever the UK’s 43-year membership of the EU, triggering turmoil in the global financial markets (Parker et al., 2016). The vote to leave the EU has also prompted questions over what EU employment legislation and directives will be retained, amended or abolished. It remains to be seen what effect this extraordinary political event will have on UK employment laws, but it seems likely that the influence of EU law, which has steadily increased over the four decades of EU membership, will diminish.

Visit the online resource centre at www.palgravehighered.com/bg-hrm-6e for information on how the UK’s decision to withdraw from the European Union might impact on current EU-derived employment rights and the HRM function.
The third distinguishing component of the employment relationship is that it involves a social relationship. Employees are not isolated individuals but members of social groups, who observe social norms and mores that influence their actions in the workplace. This observation of human behaviour in the workplace – which has been documented since the 1930s – is highly relevant given the increased prevalence of work teams. Furthermore, unless the employee happens to be an international football celebrity, the employment relationship embodies an uneven balance of power between the parties. The notion in English law of a ‘freely’ negotiated individual agreement is misleading. In reality, without collective (trade union) or statutory intervention, the most powerful party, the employer, imposes the agreement by ‘the brute facts of power’ (Wedderburn, 1986, p. 106).

Inequalities of power in turn structure the nature of work. Most employees experience an extreme division of labour with minimal discretion over how they perform their tasks and minimal opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. Thus, the social dimension is concerned with social relations, social structure and power – people with power over other people – rather than with the legal technicalities between the parties. As such, employment relations are deeply textured and profoundly sociological (Bratton and Denham, 2014). Looking at the development of the mainstream HRM canon over the last 25 years, it can be seen how little these inherent inequalities figure, despite the fact that they can be readily observed in the contemporary workplace.

In recent years, mainstream HRM scholarship has focused on another component of the employment relationship: the psychological contract. This is conceptualized as a dynamic, two-way exchange of perceived promises and obligations between employees and their employer. The concept has become a ‘fashionable’ framework within which to study aspects of the employment relationship (Guest and Conway, 2002; Rousseau and Ho, 2000). The ‘psychological contract’ is a metaphor that captures a wide variety of largely unwritten expectations and understandings of the two parties about their mutual obligations. Rousseau (1995, p. 9) defines this as ‘individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization’. Guest and Conway (2002, p. 22) define it as ‘the perceptions of both parties to the employment relationship – organization and individual – of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in that relationship’. At the heart of the concept of the psychological contract are levers for individual commitment, motivation and task performance beyond the ‘expected outcomes’ (Figure 1.1).

![Figure 1.1 The employment and psychological contract between employees and employers](image-url)
Arguably, the growth of employment in the airline industry is emblematic of globalization. The nature of the work undertaken by flight attendants, in particular the relationship between the work of flight attendants and employee emotion, has been studied by critical employment scholars. Claire Williams’s (2003) study of nearly 3000 Australian flight attendants examined occupational health and safety variables, as well as sexual harassment and passenger abuse, and found a close link between emotional labour and sexual harassment. Research on the link between work and employee emotion goes back to the 1930s. Emotion at work, mainly captured as the ‘happy productive worker’ hypothesis, has been at the heart of HR since the HR movement of the 1930s. Positive emotion at work offers an apparent win–win situation for organizations and individuals as it suggests that, if a job or work is correctly designed, individuals will feel better and perform better.

However, this framework for interpreting how employees feel at work has tended to eclipse the more critical debates on emotion at work. These highlight that, beyond the more visible efforts aimed at reshaping jobs and job characteristics to achieve the desired emotions in employees, there are more subtle, indirect but still pervasive attempts to manage employees’ feelings. As described in the now classic *The Managed Heart* (Hochschild, 1983), there is an exchange between the organization and the individual with regard to employees’ feelings at work; feeling at work itself becomes a form of labour (p. 186), referred to as ‘emotional labour’:

> What was once a private act of emotion management is sold now as labor in the public-contact jobs. What was once a privately negotiated rule of feeling or display is now set by the company’s Standard Practices Division … All in all, a private emotional system has been subordinated to commercial logic and it has been changed by it.

Hochschild’s publication sparked the start of extensive research in the area of ‘emotional labour’ and the management of private, individual feelings to achieve the outcome the organization requires. This suggests that each organization, or group within it, has a set of either implicit or explicit rules for displaying emotion, akin at times to job requirements, that regulate when and how certain emotions should or should not be displayed. For example, waiters are expected to smile, to externally display happiness, when taking a customer order, but a surgeon is expected not to display any emotion, even when communicating potentially distressing news to a patient. In this way, the display, or otherwise, of certain emotions becomes part of the job role and is expected, and therefore managed, by the organization. It has also been argued that organizational intervention can change not only what individuals display, but also what they feel at or about work – hence the suggestion that the organization intrudes into the regulation of individuals’ private emotions, as in the quote above.

Since the 1980s, our understanding of emotional labour has become more detailed and more sophisticated.

(continued)
The psychological contract has a number of important features that employers need to appreciate. First, ineffective practices may communicate different beliefs about the reciprocal promises and obligations that are present (Guest and Conway, 2002). Thus, individuals will have different perceptions of their psychological contract, even when the legal contract is identical. Managers will therefore be faced with a multitude of perceived psychological contracts (PPCs) within the same organization (Bendal et al., 1998). Second, the PPC reaffirms the notion that the employment relationship is thought to be one of exchange – the promissory exchange of offers and the mutual obligation of the employer and employee to fulfil these offers. Third, PPCs are shaped in particular contexts, which includes HR practices. For example, with respect to the training element of the PPC, there is evidence that the perceived investment in employee development relates positively to employees' openness to develop themselves and adapt to organizational change requirements – ‘internal employability orientation’ – and their active pursuit of new competencies and career trajectories within the organization – ‘internal employability activities’ (Solberg and Dysvik, 2016). For Rousseau, HR practices, such as investment in HR development (see Chapter 7), ‘send strong messages to individuals regarding what the organization expects of them and what they can expect in return’ (Rousseau, 1995, pp. 182–3). Again, context and culture is important when evaluating the assumptions underpinning PPCs. A study in the Netherlands, for example, found that the relationship between fulfilment of the psychological contract and work outcomes can be moderated by generational differences (Lub et al., 2016).

Although it was initially argued that emotional labour applies especially to jobs that involve high levels of direct contact with the public, it is currently considered to be relevant in many other job types and roles, even within leadership and management. Much of the original research into emotional labour argued for an inevitable adverse impact of employees ‘faking’ certain emotions at work; more recently, however, it has been suggested that this process might manifest itself differently across different situations, with the impact also depending on the individuals concerned and their specific job circumstances. The core importance of understanding aspects of how the organization manages the display of feelings and emotions remains, however, unchallenged, and this is still considered essential for gaining insight into emotion at work.

Changes in the way work is organized have become a ubiquitous part of organizational life (Datta et al., 2010; Mellahi and Wilkinson, 2010; van Wanrooy et al., 2013a). Since 2008, a substantial minority of UK employees has experienced more than one change in their employment conditions, including a wage cut or freeze (32 per cent), an increase in workload (28 per cent) or some reorganization of work (19 per cent) (van Wanrooy et al., 2013a, p. 174). Research suggests that organizations that reorganize the work, such as by increasing workloads or downsizing, can reduce the likelihood of violation of the psychological contract by ensuring that HR practices contribute to employees’ perceptions of ‘procedural fairness’ (Arshad and Sparrow, 2010).
On any reading, the essence of the PPC thesis is the idea that a workforce is a collection of free, independent people, as though individual beliefs are fixed features of an employee’s day-to-day behaviour. However, this addresses concerns of individual motivation and commitment within a unitary ideological framework. In doing this, in total contrast to critical paradigms, it neglects a well-established body of research grounded in sociology showing that people’s beliefs and expectations about employment form outside the workplace. For our purposes, we will define paradigms as established frameworks of interrelated values, beliefs and assumptions that social science scholars use to organize their reasoning and research. The work experiences of parents, for instance, shape the attitudes and career aspirations of their teenage children. The idea that family members and peers can influence expectations about work and career opportunities is called ‘orientation to work’ (Goldthorpe et al., 1968; Hyman and Brough, 1975).

What do you think of the concept of the psychological contract? How important is it to manage the psychological contract for (1) employees, and (2) managers?

Scope and functions of HRM

HRM is a body of knowledge and an assortment of practices to do with the organization of work and the management of employment relations. The mainstream literature identifies three major subdomains of knowledge: micro, strategic and international (Boxall et al., 2008).

The largest subdomain refers to micro HRM (MHRM), which is concerned with managing individual employees and small work groups. It covers areas such as HR planning, job design, recruitment and selection, performance management, training and development, and rewards. These HR subfunctions cover, for instance, numerous evidence-based practices, training techniques and payment systems, many of them informed by psychology-oriented studies of work (see, for example, Warr, 2008). The second domain is strategic HRM (SHRM), which concerns itself with the processes of linking HR strategies with business strategies and measures the effects on organizational performance. The third domain is international HRM (IHRM), which focuses on the management of people in companies operating in more than one country.

Drawing on the work of Squires (2001), these three major subdomains help us address three basic questions:

- What do HRM professionals do?
- What affects what they do?
- How do they do what they do?

To help us answer the first question – What do HRM professionals do? – the work of Harzing (2000), Lewin (2008), Millward et al. (2000) and Ulrich (1997; Ulrich et al., 2007, 2012) identifies the key MHRM subfunctions performed by the HR department, including, for example, workforce planning, recruitment and selection, training and development, pay and benefits, employee relations and health and safety. Each function is designed in response to organizational goals and contingencies, and each one contains alternatives from which managers can choose. Some of these functions, such as recruitment, training and pay administration, have been outsourced to specialist companies. Another trend is for key HR functions to be devolved from the HR department to line managers. For some
observers, these trends have been characterized as a ‘crisis’ as HR professionals struggle for relevance and status in post-2008 cost-conscious times (Sparrow et al., 2011).

How the HR function is organized and how much power it has relative to that of other management functions is affected by both external and internal factors unique to the establishment. A regulation-oriented national business system, with strong trade unions, employment laws on equity and affirmative action, and occupational health and safety regulations, elevates the status of the HR professionals and strengthens the corporate HR function. In contrast, a market-oriented corporate culture, minimum investment in employee training and shorter precarious employment contracts is associated with outsourcing and decentralization of the HR function, which weakens the corporate HR function (Jacoby, 2005; Parry, 2011). Perhaps of more concern are studies showing a large gap between what HR professionals see as their role in the organization and how non-HR managers see it (Guest and King, 2001; Hird et al., 2010; Kulik and Perry, 2008). As Lewin (2008) has observed, the main challenge in the twenty-first century is for HR professionals to keep focused on a strategic role in their organization while also performing the essential operational role.

The many functions performed by the HR department and the different roles HR professionals serve in modern organizations depend on the size of the organization. Klass et al’s (2005) study, for example, found that an increasing number of small and medium-sized organizations – defined typically as those with up to 49 and between 50 and 250 employees, respectively – have turned to external companies for delivering their HR services, a process referred to as ‘outsourcing.’ Klass et al. argue that the choice is not between an internal HR department and outsourcing the HR services, but is one in which limited resources mean that it is a case of either obtaining HR expertise externally or foregoing such services. In addition, an increasing number of European organizations have redesigned the HR function to enable their HR specialists to ‘partner’ with line managers to broker HR solutions to workforce issues. This ‘devolved’ and ‘business partnering’ model allows the HR function to assume a more strategic role (Andolšek and Štebe, 2005; Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development [CIPD], 2006; Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich et al., 2012).

**SHRM** underscores the need for the HR strategy to be integrated with other management functions, and highlights the responsibility of line management to foster the high commitment and motivation associated with high-performing work systems. SHRM is also concerned with managing sustainability, including, for example, establishing a low-carbon work system and organization, communicating this vision, setting clear expectations for creating a sustainable workplace, and developing the capability to reorganize people and reallocate other resources to achieve the vision. As part of the integrative process, all managers are expected to better comprehend the strategic nature of ‘best’ or better HR practices, to execute them more skillfully, and at the same time to intervene to affect the ‘mental models’, attitudes and behaviours needed to, for instance, build a high-performing sustainable culture (Pfeffer, 2005). Furthermore, national systems of employment regulation shape SHRM: ‘the stronger the institutional framework ... the less [sic] options a company may have to impose its own approach to regulating its HRM’ (Andolšek and Štebe, 2005, p. 327).
The changing context of work, the peculiarities of national employment systems and national culture shape the employment relationship, and these forces and processes create different tendencies in HR practice operating across national boundaries. As such, they relate to the second question we posed earlier – What affects what managers and HR professionals do? The HR activities that managers and HR professionals perform vary from one workplace to another depending upon the contingencies affecting the organization. These contingencies can be divided into three broad categories: external context, strategy and organization.

The external category reinforces the notion that organizations and society are part of the same set of processes – that organizations are embedded within a particular capitalist society (see Chapter 15). In the UK, work and employee relations continue to evolve ‘in the shadow of the recession’ (van Wanrooy, 2013a, p. 1). To meet the challenges posed by global competition, market contraction and government expenditure cuts, organizations have downsized and relentlessly introduced numerous new ways of working and change initiatives (Brown et al., 2009; Farnham, 2015; Van Der Heijden et al., 2015; Wilkinson and Townsend, 2011). Against an ever-changing economic and political backdrop, Brown et al. (2009) have noted the collapse of collective bargaining in the UK (see Chapter 9). The external context impacts on corporate strategies (see Chapter 2), and the internal organizational contingencies, including organizational design and technology (see Chapters 13 and 16, for example), also drive developments in HRM. In addition, pressure on executives to support the firm’s short-term share price, which puts the short-term interests of shareholders front- and centre-stage, reduces the incentive to invest long term in employee development and innovation – a phenomenon sometimes called ‘quarterly capitalism’ (Hutton, 2015b). Together, these global and internal changes and the growing use of migrant labour around the world (Ness, 2014) have created a wide variety of employment relationships and different forms of labour conflicts (Gall, 2014), all of which demands the increasing sophistication of micro HRM on the one hand, and increasing diversity on the other (Farnham, 2015). These micro HR functions, when integrated with different macro contexts and overall strategy considerations, define the subdomain of IHRM (see Chapter 17). It is therefore important to recognize that HR policies and practices are contingent upon external and internal contexts and are fundamentally interrelated.

The third of our three basic questions – How do managers and HR professionals do what they do? – requires us to note the skills and key competencies that HR professionals need so that they can accomplish operational functions and strategic functions. Managers use a wide range of technical, cognitive and interpersonal skills and competencies to accomplish their managerial and HR work (Agashae and Bratton, 2001; Ellinger, 2015; Squires, 2001; Ulrich, 1998). Research suggests that personal credibility, the ability to manage change and culture (Ulrich, 1998), communication (Guest and Conway, 2002) and coaching and mentoring (Ellinger, 2015) are the highest key competences managers need to fulfil the HR role.

Managing people is complex, and individual managers vary in terms of their capacity or inclination to use established processes, skills and competencies. Power, for example, is important because it is part of the influence process, as are legal procedures. Overall, these processes and key competencies concern human relationships and go some way to explaining different management styles and the distinction between a manager and a leader (Bratton et al., 2004). The micro, strategic and international domains, the contingencies influencing domestic and international HR practices, and managerial skills are combined and diagrammatically shown in Figure 1.2.
The model implies not only that HRM is a multidimensional activity, but also that its analysis has to be multidirectional (Squires, 2001). We might, for that reason, examine the effect of new technology (a contingency) on HR functions, such as training and development, and investigate how HR functions are translated into action, such as learning processes. The model is useful in other ways too: it serves as a pedagogical device that allows its users to discover and connect a specific aspect of HRM within a consistent, general framework. It also helps to develop an ‘analytical conception’ of HRM by building theory and generating data based on managers’ actual social actions in managing work and people across workplaces, sectors and different market societies (Boxall et al., 2008) – the classic rhetoric–reality gap notably highlighted by Legge (1995, 2005). It also offers HR specialists a sense of professional ‘identity’ by detailing professional functions, processes and skills. Finally, it helps HR specialists to look beyond their immediate tasks and to be aware of the ‘totality of management’ (Squires, 2001, p. 482).

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Figure 1.2 HRM functions, contingencies and skills

Source: Based on Squires (2001)

Visit the online resource centre at www.palgravehighered.com/bg-hrm-6e to compare the practices that HR professionals are formally accredited to practise with those practices listed in Figure 1.2.

Theoretical perspectives on HRM

Practice without theory is blind. (Hyman, 1989, p. xiv)

So far, we have focused on the meaning of management and on a range of HRM practices used in the contemporary workplace. We have explained that HRM varies across organizations and market societies depending upon a range of external and internal contingencies. In addition, we have identified the skills by which managers accomplish their HRM goals. We now turn to an important part of the mainstream HRM discourse – the search for the defining features and goals of HRM – by exploring the theoretical perspectives in this area.
Over the past 25 years or more, HRM scholars have debated the meaning of the term 'human resource management' and attempted to define its fundamental traits by producing polar or contrasting models with multiple concepts. A number of polar models contrast the fundamental traits of HRM with those of traditional personnel management, while others provide statements on employer goals and HR outcomes. These models help to focus debate around such questions as ‘What is the difference between HRM and personnel management?’ and ‘What outcomes are employers seeking when they implement a HRM approach?’ Here, we identify four influential HRM models that seek to demonstrate in analytical terms the distinctiveness and goals of contemporary HRM (Beer et al., 1984; Fombrun et al., 1984; Storey, 1992; Ulrich, 1997). These models fulfil at least four important intellectual functions for those studying HRM:

- They provide an analytical framework for studying HRM (for example, HR practices, situational factors, stakeholders, strategic choice levels and HR and performance outcomes).
- They legitimize HRM. For those advocating 'Invest in People', the models help to demonstrate to sceptics the legitimacy and effectiveness of HRM. A key issue here is the distinctiveness of HRM practices: ‘it is not the presence of selection or training but a distinctive approach to selection or training that matters. It is the use of high performance or high commitment HRM practices’ (Guest, 1997, p. 273, emphasis added).
- They provide a characterization of HRM that establishes the variables and relationships to be researched.
- They serve as a heuristic device – something to help us discover and understand the world of work – that explains the nature and significance of key HR practices and HR outcomes.

**The Michigan model of HRM**

The Michigan Model developed by Fombrun et al. (1984) is associated with the Michigan Business School. The model’s ‘cycle’ consists of four core HR activities: selection, appraisal, development and rewards. The model emphasizes the fundamental interrelatedness and coherence of HRM activities, which requires HR strategies to have a tight alignment to the overall strategies of the business (see Chapter 2). The Michigan model takes a ‘hard’ approach to people management, with a focus on performance that is based on human capital theory, in which workers are merely a means to an end or a ‘resource’ without concern for people's well-being (Lee, 2015, p. 7). The weaknesses of the Michigan model are its prescriptive nature and its focus on just four HR practices. It also ignores different stakeholder interests, situational factors and the notion of management's strategic choice. The strength of the model, however, is that it expresses the coherence of internal HR policies and the importance of ‘matching’ internal HR policies and practices to the organization’s external business strategy (see Chapters 2 and 17). The idea of the ‘HRM cycle’ is useful as a heuristic framework for explaining the nature and significance of key HR practices that make up the complex field of HRM.

**The Harvard model of HRM**

As was widely acknowledged in the early HRM literature, the ‘Harvard model’ offered by Beer et al. (1984) provided one of the first comprehensive statements on the nature of
HRM and the issue of management goals and specific HR outcomes. The Harvard framework (Figure 1.3) consists of six basic components:

1. **Situational factors**
2. **Stakeholder interests**
3. **HRM policy choices**
4. **HR outcomes**
5. **Long-term consequences**
6. A feedback loop through which the outputs flow directly into the organization and to the stakeholders.

In the Harvard model of HRM, the *situational factors* influence management’s choice of HR strategy. This model incorporates workforce characteristics, management philosophy, labour market regulations, societal values and patterns of unionization, and suggests a meshing of ‘product market’ and ‘sociocultural logics’ (Evans and Lorange, 1989). Analytically, both HRM scholars and practitioners will be more comfortable if contextual variables are included in the model because this reflects the reality of what they know: ‘the employment relationship entails a blending of business and societal expectations’ (Boxall, 1992, p. 72).

The *stakeholder interests* recognize the importance of ‘trade-offs’, either explicit or implicit, between the interests of business owners and the interests of employees and their organizations, the trade unions. Although the model is still vulnerable to the charge of ‘unitarism’, it is a much more pluralist frame of reference than is found in later models.

*HRM policy choices* emphasize that management’s decisions and actions in HR management can be fully appreciated only if it is recognized that they result from an interaction...
The term ‘precariat’ was introduced by Guy Standing (2011) to reflect the creation of a new class of workers who could be flexible in order to meet the needs of the market as demanded by neo-liberal employment practices. Savage (2015, p. 351) summarizes Standing’s identification of the precariat as ‘people living and working precariously, usually in a series of short term jobs, without recourse to stable occupational identities or careers, social protection or relevant protective regulation.’ As Savage points out, many such workers possess little economic or social capital and have been frequently blamed for their own poverty.

However, not all precarious workers lack social or economic capital. The casualization of teachers and lecturers through the practice of zero-hours contracts helps us to understand that the precariat refers to the structural location of jobs in a globalized market and that people are ‘at the mercy of that structure’ (Savage, 2015, p. 353). The University and College Union (2015) found that universities and colleges are twice as likely to use zero-hour contracts compared with other employers.

Sixty-one percent of further education colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have teaching staff on zero-hours contracts and 53% of UK universities ... Of the universities that reported they use zero-hour contracts 46% had more than 200 staff on zero-hour contracts ... five institutions had more than 1,000 people on zero-hour contracts.

The University and College Union complained that, without a guaranteed income, workers on zero-hours contracts are unable to make financial or employment plans on a year-to-year or even month-to-month basis.

Casualization and exploitation of supply teachers also occurs in UK schools. In a survey by the teachers’ union NASUWT (2014), 71 per cent of supply teachers stated that they were members of the Teachers’ Pension Scheme, whilst 39 per cent of those working for agencies were not. When questioned about rates of pay, 56 per cent of supply teachers stated that they were currently not paid on national pay rates at a level that was in line with their experience. Fifty-seven per cent reported that they had not been made aware that after 12 weeks of working in the same workplace, they would be entitled to the same pay and conditions as permanent members of staff. Sixty-four per cent reported that they had not had any access to continuing professional development.

Stop! Does your university use staff on zero-hours contracts? What impact do you think zero-hours contracts have on the quality of teaching and on staff–student relations? In what ways do the unions argue that lecturers and teachers employed on short-term or zero-hours contracts are exploited?

Sources and further information: See Savage (2015), Standing (2011), NASUWT The Teachers’ Union (2014) and University and College Union (2015) for background to this feature.

Note: This feature was written by David Denham.
between constraints and choices. The model shows management as a real actor, capable of making at least some degree of unique contribution within the environmental and organizational parameters that are present, and of influencing those parameters itself over time (Beer et al., 1984).

In terms of understanding the importance of management's goals, the HR outcomes of high employee commitment and competence are linked to longer term effects on organizational effectiveness and societal well-being. The underlying assumptions built into the framework are that employees have talents that are rarely fully utilized in the contemporary workplace, and that they show a desire to experience growth through work. Thus, HRM is indivisible from a 'humanistic message' about human growth and dignity at work. In other words, the Harvard framework takes the view that employment relations should be managed on the basis of the assumptions inherent in McGregor's (1960) classic approach to people-related issues, commonly called 'Theory Y', or, to use contemporary parlance, in terms of conditions of human dignity at work.

The long-term consequences distinguish between three levels: individual, organizational and societal. At the level of the individual employee, the long-term HR outputs comprise the psychological rewards that workers receive in exchange for their effort. At the organizational level, increased effectiveness ensures the survival of the firm. In turn, at the societal level, as a result of fully utilizing people at work, some of society's goals (for example, employment and growth) are attained. The strength of the Harvard model lies in its classification of inputs and outcomes at both the organizational and the societal level, creating the basis for a critique of comparative HRM (Boxall, 1992). A weakness, however, is the absence of a coherent theoretical basis for measuring the relationship between HR inputs, outcomes and performance (Guest, 1997).

The sixth component of the Harvard model is a feedback loop. As we have discussed, situational factors influence HRM policy and choices. Conversely, however, long-term outputs can influence situational factors, stakeholder interests and HR policies, and the feedback loop in Figure 1.3 reflects this two-way relationship.

As Boxall (1992) observed, the Harvard model clearly provides a useful analytical basis for the study of HRM. It also contains elements that are analytical (that is, situational factors, stakeholders and strategic choice levels) and prescriptive (that is, notions of commitment, competence, and so on).

**The Storey model of HRM**

The Storey (2007) framework attempts to demonstrate the differences between what John Storey terms the ‘personnel and industrials’ and the HRM paradigm by creating an ‘ideal type’. Storey devised the model by reconstructing the ‘implicit models’ conveyed by some managers during research interviews. We should note that the usage of an ‘ideal type’ is a popular heuristic tool in the social sciences. It is a ‘mental image’ and cannot actually be found in any real workplace. Its originator Max Weber wrote, in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, that ‘In its conceptual purity, this mental construct [Gedankenbild] cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality’ (Bratton and Denham, 2014, p. 240). An ideal type is not a description of reality; neither is it an average of something, or a normative exemplar to be achieved. It is a *Utopia*. Its purpose is to act as a comparison with empirical reality in order to establish the differences or similarities between the two positions, and to understand and explain causal relationships.
Storey posits that the HRM model emerged in the UK as a ‘historically situated phenomenon’ and is ‘an amalgam of description, prescription, and logical deduction’ (Storey, 2001, p. 6). The four main elements in his HRM framework (Table 1.2) are:

- Beliefs and assumptions
- Strategic qualities
- Critical role of managers
- Key levers.

According to the stereotypes depicted in Table 1.2, the HRM ‘recipe’ of ideas and practices prescribe certain priorities. In this framework, the most fundamental belief and assumption is that, ultimately, among all the factors of production, it is labour that really

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<th><strong>Strategic qualities</strong></th>
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<th><strong>Critical role of management</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Management role</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Key managers</strong></td>
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<th><strong>Key levers</strong></th>
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<td>Training and development</td>
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*Source: Based on Storey (2007, p. 9)*
distinguishes successful firms from mediocre ones. It follows logically from this that employees ought to be nurtured as a valued asset and not simply regarded as a cost. Moreover, another underlying belief is that the employer’s goal should not merely be to seek employees’ compliance with rules, but to ‘strive’ for ‘commitment and engagement’ that goes ‘beyond the contract’ (Storey, 2001). The strategic qualities contained in Storey’s framework show that HRM is a matter of critical importance to corporate planning. In Storey’s words, ‘decisions about human resources policies should ... take their cue from an explicit alignment of the competitive environment, business strategy and HRM strategy’ (p. 10).

The third component, the critical role of managers, argues that line and general managers, and not HR specialists, are vital to the effective delivery of HR practices (Purcell et al., 2009; Storey, 2007). An important reason why line managers are increasingly responsible and accountable for operational HR delivery is that such duties have been dispersed to them (Brewster and Larsen, 2000; Legge, 1995; Storey, 2007). ‘If human resources really are so critical for business success, the HRM is too important to be left to operational personnel specialists,’ writes Storey (2007, p. 10). Research evidence from UK organizations suggests that line managers have emerged in almost all cases as the crucial players in HR issues, and also suggests closer ‘relationships’ between line managers and the HR department (McGuire and Kissack, 2015; Purcell et al., 2003).

The key levers element in the model focuses on the methods used to implement HRM. In researcher–manager interviews on HRM, Storey found considerable unevenness in the adoption of these key levers, such as performance-related pay, harmonization of conditions and investment to produce a work-related learning company. What is persuasive about the HRM narrative is evidence of a shift away from personnel procedures and rules as a basis of good practice, to the management of organizational culture as proof of avant-garde practice. Indeed, Storey notes that this paradigm shift is so significant that ‘the twin ideas of “managing culture change” and moving towards HRM [have] often appeared to coincide and become one and the same project’ (2007, p. 11).

As HRM has reinvented itself, different models of HR delivery have emerged: HR shared services, centres of expertise, self-service e-HR and HR business partnering. HR shared services are designed to achieve economies of scale, and are tasked with providing cost-effective processes to run transactional HR services such as payroll, monitoring of absence and simple advice for employees. Centres of expertise provide specialist knowledge and development to produce innovations in more complex areas such as leadership and management development. This potential synergy in the centre is designed to achieve economies of skill. Self-service e-HR is part of a wider shift of business operating models towards web-based systems of delivery, note Caldwell and Storey (2007, p. 26). Business partnering involves HR specialists working alongside line managers, perhaps as a member of a project team. The literature suggests that, in large organizations, ‘business partnering’ that offers a new set of proactive roles for HR specialists has become a dominant model in contemporary redesign of HRM (Ulrich, 1997).

**Ulrich’s strategic partner model of HRM**

To overcome the traditional marginalization of the personnel function and to strengthen the status of the profession, the UK’s CIPD has long sought to demonstrate the added value of HR activities in business terms. Such a position requires a transition from the functional HR orientation, with the HR department primarily involved in administering policies,
Contemporary globalization is the defining political economic paradigm of our time. In terms of HR strategy, HRM policies and practices have to be aligned to the global activities of transnational enterprises, and must be able to attract and retain employees operating internationally but within different national employment structures. The word ‘globalization’ became ubiquitous in the 1990s. It was, and still is, a thoroughly contested concept depending on whether scholars view it as primarily an economic, a political or a social phenomenon.

In the economic sphere, globalization is understood as a worldwide process of integration of production and consumption resulting from the reduction of transport and communication costs – a global system of economic interdependences. Arguments that build only on these technical conceptions emphasize the positive aspects of globalization, and draw attention to the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs to China and India from high-wage Western economies. The economic argument is captured by these extracts from a Foresight 2020 research report (© reproduced by permission of The Economist Intelligence Unit):

‘On a per-capita basis, China and India will remain far poorer than Western markets and the region faces a host of downside risks. Asia will narrow the gap in wealth, power and influence, but will not close it… The pace and extent of globalization will be the single most important determinant of world economic growth. Our baseline scenario is for gradual trade and investment liberalization, but if protectionism were to take greater hold, the consequences for world growth would be substantial and adverse… Although the industrial base in developed markets will continue to be eroded as jobs transfer to emerging markets, fears of the demise of Western manufacturing are unfounded. Developed manufacturing economies will still hold an advantage in high-value and capital-intensive activities… Despite the expected strong growth in wages in many emerging markets, the differential with average wage levels in the developed world will still be enormous in 2020… In China’s case the average wage—at 5% of US and EU15 levels in 2005—will rise to about 15% of the developed-country average in 2020.’

Writers who conceptualize globalization in terms of politics and power argue that ‘big business’ has relegated national governments to being the ‘gatekeepers’ of free unfettered markets. Because there is little competition from alternative ideologies, twenty-first century capitalism ‘is more mobile, more ruthless and more certain about what it needs to make it tick’ (Giddens and Hutton, 2000, p. 9). Modern capitalism has been called a ‘febrile capitalism’ that is serving the needs of Wall Street and the financial and stock markets.

Stop! Critics charge that national governments have lost power over their own economies as a handful of large corporations are being permitted to control natural resources and social life. In other words, civil society is perceived principally through the ‘prism of economics’. Take a moment to assess critically the various standpoints in the globalization debate. What economic and political forces encourage outsourcing? What are the implications of outsourcing for HRM?

Sources and further information: See Giddens and Hutton (2000), Hoogvelt (2001), Chomsky (1999) and Gereffi and Christian (2009) for more on this. The Foresight 2020 report can be downloaded free of charge; see the link at Economist Intelligence Unit (2006).

Note: This feature was written by John Bratton.
towards a partnership orientation, with the HR professional engaged in strategic decisions that impact on organizational design and organizational performance. In the last decade, the HRM model most favoured to support such a move has been provided by David Ulrich’s (1997) business partner model. Ulrich presents a framework showing four key roles that HR professionals must accomplish in order to add the greatest value to the organization. The roles are arranged on two axes that represent focus and activities. HR professionals must focus on both the strategic and the operational, in both the long and the short term. Activities range from managing business processes to managing people, suggesting that there are core competencies that HR professionals must develop to help deliver value to the organization. A core HR competency, according to Ulrich et al. (2012), is that of being both credible (respected, listened to, trusted) and active (taking a position and challenging assumptions).

The two axes delineate four principal roles:

- **Strategic partner** – future/strategic focus combined with business processes
- **Culture and change agent** – future/strategic focus combined with people
- **Administrative expert** – operational focus combined with process
- **Employee champion** – operational focus combined with people.

A later variant of the model integrates the change agent role into the strategic partner role, and gives greater emphasis to HR professionals playing a leadership role (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005; Ulrich et al., 2009). As such, the first two roles require a strategic orientation; for example, as a strategic partner, HR professionals work with general and line managers to formulate and execute strategy, and as a change agent, they facilitate transformation and significant change. During the 2000s, the Ulrich business partner model was widely espoused in the mainstream HRM literature and gained popularity or what academics call ‘rhetorical ascendancy’ among HR professionals in the UK and the USA (Caldwell and Storey, 2007). This is explained partly by the perceived increase in status and prestige of HRM, because the strategic partner and change agent roles proved highly attractive to many ambitious HR practitioners, and because of its rhetorical simplicity (Brown et al., 2004). Furthermore, the administrative role provides for processes to ‘re-engineer’ the organization towards great efficiency, while the employee champion relates to listening to employees and providing resources for employees. Research shows, however, that, of the small sample surveyed, few HR practitioners considered their primary roles to be those of the ‘less trendy’ employee champion and administrative expert (Guest and King, 2004; Hope-Hailey et al., 2005). Despite the popularity of the business partnering model, a survey of managers also revealed that only 47 per cent of those polled believed that Ulrich’s model was successful in their organization, and 25 per cent said the model was ineffective (Pitcher, 2008).

Inevitably, perhaps, the role of the strategic business partner attracts most attention, while the employee champion role, which concerns employees’ well-being, tends to be devolved to line managers and is therefore likely to be neglected. Inconsistency in HR delivery can be a source of conflict (Caldwell and Storey, 2007; Francis and Keegan, 2006; Marchington et al., 2011). There is another aspect of the business partner model that is problematic. A recurrent theme in SHRM is that organizations need to align or ‘match’ their HR strategy to their corporate strategy (see Chapter 2). However, the parallel tendency in business partnering to devolve HR activities – what has been called ‘centrifugal logic’ – may undermine the agenda of ‘alignment and integration’ in the strategic HRM
dynamic. Post-2008, there has been growing interest in sustainable growth and improved performance through new leadership models, employee engagement and capacity-building (CIPD, 2011). It is suggested, however, that none of these goals can be achieved without an investment in employee learning and development – see Chapter 7 on human resource development, which, at its heart, relates to people learning, growing and flourishing in the context of the workplace (Poell et al., 2015, p. xiii).

Unilever is an Anglo-Dutch global consumer goods company co-headquartered in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and London, UK. Its products include food, beverages, cleaning agents and personal care products. In 2009, Unilever acquired TIGI, a small B2B business in the professional hair care industry, world leaders in styling and the fastest growing colour brand.

Alison joined Unilever in September 2012 on the Unilever Future Leaders Programme (UFLP), a two to three year programme for graduates who are fast-tracked into management positions. The UFLP prides itself on developing graduates into the business leaders of tomorrow – and quickly. The programme allows real on-the-job responsibility from day one, and all the training and experience needed to become a manager is provided within two to three years.

Over her two-year programme, Alison completed three rotations. First, she worked in the supply chain function in the factory at Unilever’s historic home, Port Sunlight, Wirral, where there are three home care and one personal care manufacturing facilities. Moving to Unilever’s UK head office, in Leatherhead, Surrey, she worked in the UK and Ireland HR Expertise team, focusing on talent and capability. Next Alison worked in the Global HR Team, based at the London Head Office. In September 2014, Alison moved to TIGI, where she began her first management position as a Global HR Business Partner.

Prior to her Unilever career, Alison worked in a small boutique head-hunting company that specialized in recruiting high-calibre executives and non-executives. This was Alison’s first role within HR after graduating from Durham University in 2010.

Click on Alison’s photo in your ebook to watch her explaining how she started working in HR and what her role entails. When you have watched her video, try to answer the following questions:

1 What attracted Alison to HRM as a career choice?
2 Thinking of Ulrich’s strategic partner model, how does Alison describe her HR role?

Reviewing the four models, what beliefs and assumptions do they imply? How well does each model define the characteristics of HRM? Is there a contradiction between the roles of ‘change agent’ and ‘employee champion’ as outlined in Ulrich’s model? Is it realistic to expect line managers to be given responsibility for the HRM function?
Studying HRM

It has become commonplace to point out that HRM is not a discipline in its own right, but a field of study drawing on concepts and theories from core social science disciplines including anthropology, economics, psychology, sociology, law and political science. This provides relatively elastic boundaries within which to analyse how the employment relationship is structured and managed. In addition, these elastic boundaries generate multiple ways of making sense of the same organizational phenomenon or the differing standpoints found in the HRM canon. How we understand HRM is very much influenced by key social discourses. Management in the twenty-first century is being influenced by multiple social discourses that include globalization, environmental destruction, social injustice and fundamental neo-liberal economic failure.

Reflexivity is an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, of her or his values, beliefs and interests, at every step of the research process. It is the ability to encounter the familiar as new and to reflect on one’s reflection. In understanding the recent debate that management education and pedagogy should be more reflexive and critical (Currie et al., 2010), it is crucial to develop a knowledge base of competing ideological perspectives or paradigms. Each paradigm in the social sciences makes certain bold assertions about the nature of social reality and, in turn, provides legitimacy and justification for people’s actions (Babbie and Benaquisto, 2010). When people ask, ‘What paradigm are you using?’, they might just as well be asking, ‘What is your own bias on this aspect of social life?’, as each paradigm has a particular bias based on a particular version of knowing about social reality (Hughes, 1990). Paradigms are a ‘lens’ through which we view the world of work. Thus, when we refer to a particular paradigm to study the HRM phenomenon, we are speaking of an interconnected set of beliefs, values and intentions that legitimize HR theory and practice. For the purpose of developing a critical, analytical conception of HRM, we will in this section compare and contrast three major paradigms – structural-functionalism, conflict and feminism – that have emerged to make sense of work, organizations and HRM.

The intellectual roots of the structural-functional paradigm can be traced to the work of the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917). Comte believed that society could be studied and understood logically and rationally, and he used the term positivism to describe this research approach. Durkheim studied social order and argued that the increased division of labour in modern societies created what he called ‘organic solidarity’, which maintained social harmony: ‘The division of labour becomes the chief source of social solidarity, it becomes, at the same time, the foundation of moral order’ (Durkheim, 1933/1997, p. 333).

The popularity of the structural-functionalist approach is commonly attributed to the US sociologist Talcott Parsons (Mann, 2011). For Parsons, organizations can function in a stable and orderly manner only on the basis of shared values. In his words: ‘The problem of order, and thus the nature of the integration of stable systems of social interaction ... thus focuses on the integration of the motivation of actors with the normative cultural standards which integrate the action system’ (1951, p. 36). Although there are variations and tensions, the structural-functional paradigm takes the view that a social entity, such as a whole market society or an organization, can be studied as an organism. Like an organism, a social system is composed of interdependent parts, each of which contributes to the
functioning of the whole. A whole society or an organization is held together by a consensus on values – a value system. The view of an organization as a social system thus looks for the ‘functions’ served by its various departments and members and the common values shared by its members.

It is frequently assumed that managerial functions and processes take place in organizations that are rationally designed to accomplish strategic goals, that organizations are harmonious bodies tending towards a state of equilibrium and order, and that the basic task of managers is to manage resources for formal organizational ends. Thus, the structural-functionalism paradigm, sometimes also known as ‘social systems theory’, becomes inseparable from the notion of efficiency. The focus of much of the research and literature on management using this ‘lens’ is about finding the ‘winning formula’ so that more managers can become ‘effective’ (Thompson and McHugh, 2009). Common to all variations of structural-functionalism, which is often seen as the dominant or mainstream perspective, is a failure to connect management processes to the ‘master’ public discourse on market-based societies and globalization.

The intellectual roots of the conflict paradigm are most obviously found in the works of the German philosopher Karl Marx (1818–83). In his early manuscripts of 1844, Marx analysed the fundamental contradiction of capitalism that arose from structured tensions between capital (employers) and labour (employees). Specifically, he made the assumption that these two social classes have competing interests. For Marx, the relationship between capitalists and workers was one of contradiction. Each is dependent upon the other, and the two must cooperate to varying degrees. However, there is a fundamental conflict of interest between capital and labour: the capitalist seeks to minimize labour costs; the workers seek the opposite. As a result, economic forces compel employers and employees to cooperate, but also there are forces that simultaneously cause conflict between the two groups. Importantly, workers also experience alienation or ‘estrangement’ through the act of labour. Marx’s alienation theory continues to inform contemporary studies of work and the prerequisites for dignity in and at work (see, for example, Bolton, 2007).

Similar to Marx, Max Weber’s (1864–1920) analyses of advanced capitalist societies centre on work and organizations, especially large bureaucracies. Two themes within Weber’s work are especially relevant to understanding contemporary theories of work and management. One is the notion of paradox in capitalist societies. In The Protestant Ethic (1904–1905/2002), Weber pessimistically warns of creeping rationalization and of the tendency of people to experience a debilitating strait-jacket of rules and control, or what he called the ‘iron cage’. The process of rationalization is, according to Weber, unremittingly paradoxical (Bratton and Denham, 2014). He, and subsequent writers in the Weberian tradition, focused on the notion of ‘paradox of consequences’ – two or more positions that each sound reasonable yet conflict or contradict each other. A paradox of consequence results when managers, in pursuit of a specific organizational goal or goals, call for or carry out actions that are in opposition to the very goals the organization is attempting to accomplish. A second theme that lies at the centre of Weber’s sociology is his analysis of power and domination by social elites (Bratton and Denham, 2014, p. 260). In Economy and Society (1922/1968), Weber stresses that power is an aspect of virtually all social relationships. He famously argued that every form of social elite attempts to establish and cultivate belief in its own legitimate authority, which he defined as ‘a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands’ (Weber, 1922/1968, p. 215).
Critical scholars draw heavily on the works of Marx, and to a lesser extent Weber, to explain management activities in terms of basic ‘logics’ underlying capitalist production: goods and services are produced for a profit. The motive force of profit is the unifying, quantitative objective of corporate strategies and policies, the touchstone of corporate rationality, the measure of corporate success (Baran and Sweezy, 1968). The agents acting for the capitalists – the managers – decide how and where goods and services are to be produced within the context of the profit imperative that does not allow for substantial differences in management style or approach. Thus, managerial control is a structural imperative of capitalist employment relations, causing what Edwards (1986) calls ‘structural antagonism’. Labour process analysis is part of the conflict school of thought. It represents a body of theory and research that examines ‘core’ themes of technology, skills, control and worker resistance, as well as, more recently, new ‘postmodern territories’ with a focus on subjectivity, identity and power (Thompson and Smith, 2010). The conflict paradigm, when applied to work organizations, sets out to discover the ways in which power, control, conflict and legitimacy impact on contemporary employment relations. It emphasizes that HRM can only be understood as part of a management process embedded within the wider sociocultural and political economy order of a capitalist society, which determines the nature of work and employment practices (see Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010; Thompson and Harley, 2008; Watson, 2010).

The third social science paradigm examined here, the feminist paradigm, traces its intellectual roots to eighteenth-century feminist writings, such as Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792/2004), and, in the 1960s, to Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963). Whereas Marx chiefly addressed the exploitation of the working class, the early feminist writers provided a sophisticated understanding of the gender-based, persistent and pervasive injustices that women continue to experience through a variety of ‘entrenched social processes, such as patriarchal strategies and sexism’ (Bratton and Denham, 2014, p. 10). Researchers looking at the capitalist society from a feminist perspective have drawn attention to aspects of organizational life that have been overlooked by other paradigms. In part, feminist scholarship has focused on gender differences and how they relate to the rest of society. Over the decades, gender has become a concept to be wrestled with, but here we use the word to refer to a set of ideas that focuses on the processes of gender roles, inequalities in society and in the workplace, problems of power, and women’s subordination and oppression.

Theoretically, one of the most important consequences of gender analysis is its power to question the research findings and analysis that segregate studies of HRM from those of gender divisions in the labour market (Dex, 1988), patriarchal power (Witz, 1986), issues of workplace inequality (Phillips and Phillips, 1993) and ‘dual-role’ and work–life issues (Knights and Willmott, 1986; Platt, 1997; Warhurst et al., 2008). More importantly, however, including the dimension of gender in the study of contemporary HRM has the

## Reflective Question

It is important to explore your own values and views and therefore your own perspective on HRM. What do you think of these social science paradigms? How do they help us to explain the actions and outcomes of behaviour in organizations? Which perspective seem to you to be more realistic, and why? How do these paradigms help us to understand the uncertainties and conflicts evident in contemporary workplaces?
potential to move the debate forward by examining the people who are deemed to be the ‘recipients’ of HRM theory and practice (Mabey et al., 1998a). The feminist paradigm takes it as self-evident that gender inequality in the workplace can only be understood by developing a wider gender-sensitive understanding of society and employment practices.

Critique and paradox in HRM

Since Storey’s (1989) landmark publication, the HRM canon has been subject to ‘external’ and ‘internal’ criticism (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010). The external critique has come from academics within the broad field of critical management studies and labour process theory. These critics include Alvesson and Willmott (2003), Godard (1991), Thompson and McHugh (2009) and Watson (2004). They expose structured antagonisms and contradictions, and contend that HR practices can only be understood in the context of the wider cultural and political economy factors that shape or direct those practices. Critical management theorists also argue that mainstream HRM researchers have routinely neglected or marginalized those most directly impacted by HR practices – the employees. Generally, there has been an intellectual failure to engage in the process of ‘denaturalization’ – of questioning ‘taken-for-granted’ beliefs and assumptions and ‘unmasking’ the questionable results of HRM research. Finally, critics hold that most HRM researchers have largely failed to subject HR practices to a critical scrutiny of ‘unintended consequences’ and ‘paradox’ (Bratton and Gold, 2015) or the ‘collateral damage’ resulting from their application (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010, p. 803). The notion of paradox has its roots in Weber’s classical text The Protestant Ethic, as discussed earlier. The process of rationalization is, according to Weber, unrelentingly paradoxical. Predictably, therefore, external critics of HRM consider paradox theory to be a key analytical tool to investigate and critique contemporary organizations (Guerci and Carollo, 2016).

The principal ‘internal’ critics of HRM provide a sustained critique with respect to the divide between what can be described as the ‘rhetoric’ and the ‘reality’ of HRM (Legge, 2005). Townley (1994) offers a sustained analysis and critique based on the writings of the late French philosopher Michel Foucauld (1926–84), and Winstanley and Woodall (2000) present an ethical critique of HRM. More generally, Keenoy and Anthony (1992) have sought to explore the ambiguity associated with the term ‘human resource management’ itself. This relates to the question of where the emphasis of strategic management policy is placed: is it on the word ‘human’ or on ‘resource’ in management? This ambiguity has generated the notion of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ HRM and, more recently, provoked a collection titled Searching for the ‘H’ in HRM in the ‘moral’ market society (Bolton and Houlihan, 2007).

Since the early 1990s, labour market reforms have been high on the political agendas of EU governments. Between 1990 and 2007, the EU countries undertook over 100 deregulatory reforms, of which about a quarter were structural and involved a significant weakening of employment protection for standard workers, while the rest primarily facilitated an extension of more precarious employment (Avdagic and Crouch, 2015). This far-reaching libertarian rebuilding of the employment relationship, especially in the UK, has arguably made British capitalism less inclusive by deterring people from participating fully in the workplace and developing their potential (Hutton, 2015a). The expression of Britain’s labour market dysfunctionality is obvious in the growth of precarious employment, which offers less security, less employment protection and fewer rights, entrenched low wages...
especially for those under 30, the collapse of defined benefit pension schemes, the emasculation of workers’ bargaining power, and the rise in excessive pay inequality alongside executive pay that averages 150 times more for mediocre performance.

In this context, studying HRM remains highly relevant. The triple-headed crisis of climate change, global capitalism and Britain’s more flexible, which is to say more inhuman, labour market, together with demands for social justice, are the drivers of social change that will cast a long shadow over contemporary organizations and employment activities. Evidence-based analytical HRM is therefore relevant given that its *raison d’être* is to leverage people’s knowledge and capabilities and manage employment relationships. In particular, given the growing demands for organizations to develop strategies that are environmentally sustainable and socially just, a reflexive, critical analysis of HRM is increasingly important for understanding organizational life (Bratton and Gold, 2015).

**Applying the sociological imagination**

The conception of critical HRM put forward in this opening chapter resonates with analytical frameworks holding that HR practices can only be understood in the context of economic-societal factors that shape or direct those practices. With regard to recent concerns about an absence of reflexive critique in business schools, Delbridge and Keenoy’s (2010) contribution elaborating what constitutes critical HRM is both important and timely. When scholars call for critical perspectives in HRM practice and research, however, what exactly does ‘critical’ mean? There are wide-ranging theoretical ideas in critical management studies, but common objectives in all critical studies are to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and accepted configurations of power and control (Fenwick, 2015).

Using the prism of Mills’ sociological imagination, what we have called ‘critical human resource management education’ or ‘CHRME’ helps to introduce critical perspectives in HRM and addresses concerns to make the learning culture in business schools more critical. CHRME focuses on the development of a learning culture that focuses less on the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of HRM, but shifts the emphasis towards the ‘why’, with the everyday practices and processes and human actions that occur in the workplace, and their impact on workers and the local community in which any work organization is situated. The emphasis is on the idea that, to understand HRM-related ‘troubles’, both students and educators are required to look beyond them, at the social embeddedness of HRM. CHRME, we contend, adds to a growing body of critical management pedagogy.

As in previous editions of *Human Resource Management: Theory and Practice*, we are concerned with developing a context-sensitive understanding of work and HR practices. Throughout the book, we emphasize that paradox and antagonism are structured into the employment relationship, that different work regimes and HR strategies and practices can only be understood in the context of the wider cultural-political economy and market factors that direct or influence work and employment. We aim to provide a more critical, nuanced account of the realities of the workplace in capitalist societies, one that encourages a deeper understanding of and sensitivity towards employment and HR-related issues. We hope that *Human Resource Management: Theory and Practice* captures the range of change evident in today’s workplaces, and will moreover lead to the kinds of sensibility that encourage the reader to question, be critical and seek multicausality when analysing contemporary HRM.
The setting
Emenee (pseudonym) is an established international hotel chain with over 4500 hotel operations in over 100 countries. It has undertaken two forms of growth: (1) the acquisition of established hotel companies in mature markets, and (2) the development of greenfield sites in emerging markets. When Emenee acquired an existing hotel company in Australia and the South Pacific, it also acquired the vast knowledge base of a mature management and leadership team embedded within that company. Not surprisingly, it was soon recognized that, by leveraging existing systematically arranged knowledge, Emenee could have the advantage of providing mature operational knowledge from the acquired chain at the many greenfield sites it had in the emergent and high-growth Asian market, thus reducing the need for replication of practice and process development.

This realization led to the design and implementation of a vast computerized repository or knowledge library that was accessible to every site manager in every hotel across the Australia/South Pacific/South East Asia region. The system was designed to initiate a long-term knowledge-sharing culture by making it easier to share value-added practices and processes, thus reducing wastage of time and resources through replication.

The problem
The knowledge library operated as a two-way system whereby managers could both add ideas or effective innovative practices and find solutions to some of their own operational problems that demanded new ideas or innovation. To simplify its use, the system was designed to store ideas by hotel function (that is, food and beverage, housekeeping, etc.), with both functional and key word search tools available. Knowledge transfer was considered to have occurred once an idea had been implemented at another site.

Emenee's management realized that they would need to create support systems to motivate sharing between the sites and geographical regions. This opened up an opportunity to embed the desired knowledge-sharing actions and behaviours throughout the performance management system, alongside key performance indicators (KPIs). As a result, for each site manager to pass their annual performance review, they had to retrieve a minimum of two ideas from the system and implement these in their hotel, as well as add two ideas to the system for others to be able to access and use.

On paper, this system worked very well, with site managers seemingly keen to add and implement ideas to pass their annual performance review. This acceptance of the knowledge management system was, however, superficial. In reality, the Australian site managers felt threatened by the pressure and the surveillance nature of the system, saying that it was like having a ‘gun pointed at your head’. Further resentment was experienced as managers were forced to share innovation with the managers of the very hotels whose performance was being rated against their on a bi-annual basis. This led to a reluctance to share effective innovations, and resistance against the system by site managers. At a meeting to review the programme, one site manager put the issue like this:

_We were mandated through our KPIs, so would that influence me to share? Yes, it would, but it turned into a dog’s breakfast, everyone’s throwing in ideas just to tick the box._

Two years after the system had been implemented, the link between knowledge-sharing and performance review was severed. Another site manager summed up the outcome this way:
In this introductory chapter, we have emphasized the importance of managing people, both individually and collectively, over other ‘factor inputs’. We have examined the history of HRM and emphasized that, since its introduction, it has been highly controversial. The HRM phenomenon has been portrayed as the historical outcome of rising neo-liberalism ideology, closely associated with the political era of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative premiership in Britain.

We have conceptualized HRM as a strategic approach, one that seeks to leverage people’s capabilities and commitment with the goal of enhancing performance and dignity in and at work. These HRM goals are accomplished by a set of integrated employment policies, programmes and practices within an organizational and societal context. We suggest that the HRM approach as conceptualized here constitutes critical HRM, extending the analysis of HRM outcomes beyond performance to include equality, dignity and social justice.

To show the multiple meanings of the term ‘human resource management’, we have examined four theoretical models. We have discussed whether HRM now represents a new orthodoxy; certainly, the language is different.

We have explained that tensions are always present. These include tensions between profitability and cost-effectiveness and employee security; between employer control and employee commitment; and between managerial autonomy and employee dignity. Throughout this book, we illustrate and explain some of these tensions and inevitable paradoxes to encourage a deeper understanding of HR-related issues.

Finally, workplace scholars use a variety of theoretical frames of reference or paradigms – here the focus has been on structural-functionalism, conflict and feminist paradigms – to organize how they understand and conduct research into HRM.

The assignment
You are the assistant HR manager of Emenee, based at the head office. You have been asked to prepare a report for the HR manager on why the programme failed and to identify an alternative. In your answer, address the following:

1. Which management systems were at play here, and how did they influence the outcomes?
2. Which other HR practices might help influence a knowledge-sharing culture through the use of the database?
3. How could the main reasons for resistance to the knowledge management sharing system be overcome?

Sources and essential reading

Note: This case study was written by Roslyn Larkin and is based on the research papers listed above.

Visit the online resource centre at www.palgravehighered.com/bg-hrm-6e for guidelines on writing reports.
1. What is ‘human resource management’ and what purpose does it play in work organizations?

2. How, if at all, do the three major paradigms – structural-functionalism, conflict and feminism – help us make sense of work, organizations and HRM?

3. Suppose an entrepreneur is planning to open a chain of high-quality restaurants. What area of HRM would they have to consider and why? If the plan is to open a chain of fast-food outlets, how would the approach to HRM be affected?

4. Based on your own work experience or that of a friend or relative, can you identify three statutory employment rights? Do you think employment rights will be changed as a result of the Brexit vote?

5. How, if at all, do theoretical models of HRM help (1) practitioners and (2) academics?

Visit www.palgravehighered.com/bg-hrm-6e to watch John Bratton talking about the sociological imagination, and then answer the following questions:

➤ How can the sociological imagination help you understand why zero-hour contracts have become common practice in the labour market?

➤ Can the personal ‘trouble’ of an unpaid internee, for example, seeking work experience be explained through the prism the sociological imagination?

Reading these articles and chapters can help you gain a better understanding of the changing role of HRM and potentially a higher grade for your HRM assignment.


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