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Embellishing the party with singers and dancers:

Pragmatism in human resource management.

ABSTRACT

This theoretical paper examines pragmatism and its application to the field of human resource management. The paper considers the debate about the validity of research-based practice and practice-based research as significant frameworks for achieving effectiveness in human resource management as a field. The paper, building on Watson's (2010) theoretical perspective, found that in view of the critical activities taking place at the intersection of theory and practice there is a case for a new model of research-practice convergence in HRM and for pragmatism and how it can be used in the HRM research-practice link. The article posits that pragmatism in human resource management serves societal purposes and represents a stakeholder framework by combining the interest of diverse social and organisational spheres (stakeholders) involved in shaping and sharpening the discipline. Pragmatism in HR exemplifies a case of sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) and is therefore a framework for undertaking multi-dimensional research that is meaningful, contemporary and relevant for researchers and practitioners.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Stakeholder, Pragmatism, Sociological Imagination, Collaboration model, Harvard Model.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars are increasingly advocating that Human Resource Management research needs to engage with both the worlds of theory and practice; consequently, the issues and the questions addressed should entail this interaction between these two worlds rather than either on their own (Beer et al., 2015). They further state that, in particular, research should complete a virtuous circle of theory and practice through which research on managerial practice informs practically derived theory which in turn informs managerial practice, thereby enhancing relevant and practical management knowledge (Beer et al., 2015; Beer, 2015; Cascio, 2015).

Watson (2010) contends that HRM research requires bringing together, on the one hand, those who look into how employment management practices might enhance the 'performance' or the competitive advantage' and actors who currently dissociate themselves from such work by attaching the word 'critical' to their work. While equating Mills' 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 1959) with what he called 'social scientific imagination', Watson (2010) argues for working in a primarily 'social scientific manner' which does not mean abandoning an aspiration towards critique but adopting a position which sees social science as a critical enterprise by its very nature. This sociological imagination also entails that links be made between the personal troubles of individuals (for example a person losing his/her job) and broader public issues (the issue of unemployment in society, for example). This imaginative move has clear and immediate relevance to HRM (Watson, 2010). In the same vein, Bratton and Gold (2015) emphasise that HRM pedagogy should also consider the wider context while tackling the workplace problems in line with Mills' intellectual practice.

Watson states furthermore that the analytical approach to the study of HRM as identified by Boxall, Purcell, & Wright (2007) can be associated with this 'Sociological imagination' especially if it is successful in assessing 'the outcomes of HRM, while taking account of both employee and managerial interests, and laying a basis for theories of wider social consequences' (2007, p. 4). Watson (2010) also puts forward a case for the 'new HRM paradigm', proposed by Beer et al. (1984) in the Harvard Model (HM) of HRM and through their concern to make corporate HR functions more 'strategic' and much broader 'HRM' while taking stock of multi stakeholders. This paper extends Watson's theoretical perspective through the conceptualisation of the Collaboration model which advocates the search for organisational solutions in the wider societal nomenclature building on the idea of 'and' as opposed to 'or'. This appear also endeavours to cater to the call by different academics, as mentioned earlier, who bemoan this research practice divide (Beer e al). It endeavours to answer the questions raised by Boxall et al (2007) as above and the importance of the HRM paradigm given by Beer et al (1984) through the Harvard Model (HM) We also propose and show that HM and our proposed collaborative model are mutually reinforcing and make each other stronger; HM provides the basis for collaborative model and the collaborative model strengthens the HM.

For benefitting both HRM theory and practice, this paper also puts forward the case for following the research approach of Pragmatism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Prawat, 2003; Saunders et al., 2012; Watson, 2010). Pragmatism provides a methodological base for theory development and research on HRM processes, working in the sociological-imagination tradition (Watson, 2010). Pragmatic realism also has implications for how HRM scholars engage with the world outside the university. Pragmatism is a way of integrating social scientific underpinnings to HRM for two critical reasons: (1) pragmatism corroborates a key social science position, realism, that brings together two traditionally opposed radical scientific positions, positivism and interpretivism, thus asserting the view that the intrinsic

nature of social facts is that they oscillate between subjectivism and objectivism; (2) pragmatism upholds the perspective that social facts (and organisational reality) are constructed by various actors – stakeholders – whose input in the process of inquiry can bring about more reliable solutions for contemporary social issues, democratising the process of inquiry and addressing the equity dilemma. The next section details our theoretical framework, the collaboration model, building largely on Watson (2010) but also drawing on related theory (Beer et al. 1984).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Watson (2009) laments the fact that study of sociology of organizations has almost disappeared from university sociology departments; they state that “If there was just one area of business and management studies where one might expect a strong sociological input it would be HRM, given its concerns with work deployment and with employment relationships....Yet it can be shown that academic HRM not only pays little attention to issues of ownership, power and structured inequalities, it is also rooted in an essentially uncritical functionalist style of analysis that the discipline of sociology so forcefully rejected decades ago.” Watson (2009, 868). Watson (2009) also emphasises that the solution lies in applying the sociological imagination to issues at workplace and to related organizational matters studied in business and management schools.

Hence, this research proffers to understand the role of Sociological imagination in HRM through the lens of Pragmatism while considering HM as an overall framework that can aid in understanding and implementing such an environment. HM supports the pragmatist research perspective and our collaborative model. HM affords a model where theory meets practice and which gives a stakeholder perspective while mentioning management philosophy and the values in its discussion of HR framework. It brings a pragmatist approach in an otherwise instrumentalist working of HR in real world. Our proposed Collaborative model derives strength from the HM.

As Watson (2010, 919) contends:

“I propose that we treat the so-called ‘new HRM paradigm’, of which Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills and Walton (1984) were the pioneers with their ‘melding of theories and insights from OB/OD into traditional IR/PM’ and their concern to make corporate HR functions more ‘strategic’..... much broader ‘HRM’... This fits with a sociological interest in relating human resource management principles and practices to processes of industrialisation and the institutions of bureaucracy and the capitalist employment relationship”. This statement by Watson testifies to the complexity of societal and organisational relationships, which in turn requires complex ways of approaching such realities which transcend the individual arenas of practitioners and theorists; in other terms, systematising the search for meaningful HRM is through understanding and using the complex and plural forces at play – stakeholder perspective.

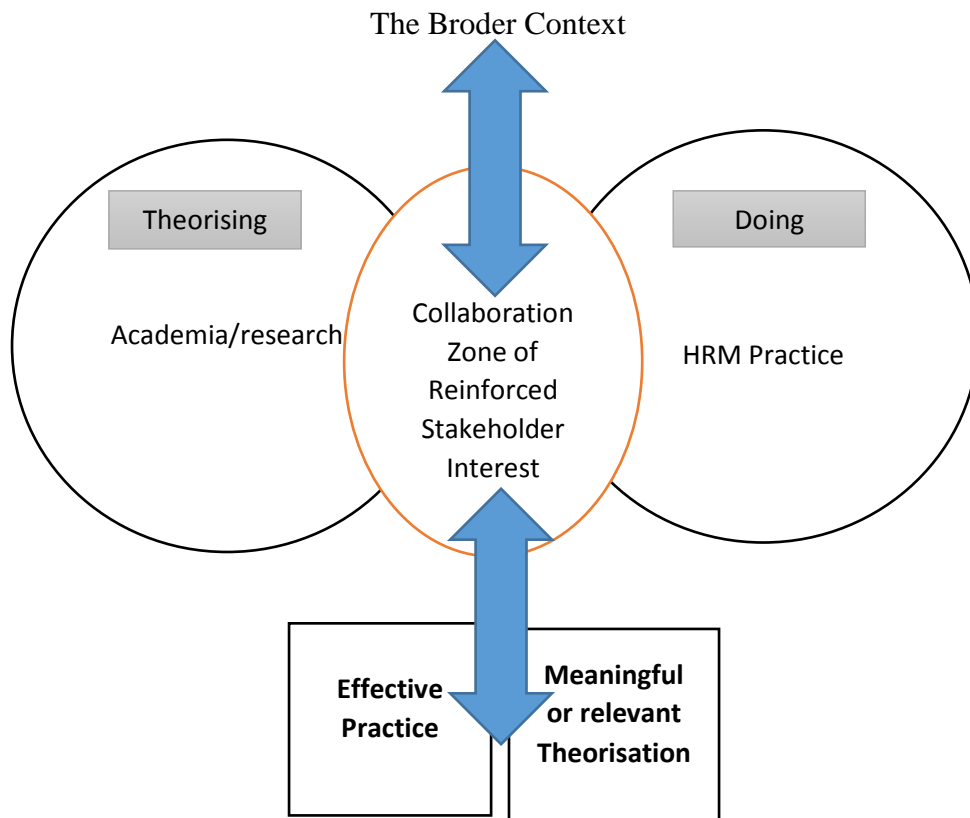
Nevertheless, although HRM research has identified the relationship between certain practices and performance; but the institutional, leadership, values, and cultural context, embedded in the HM have been neglected. There is a call to incorporate these (as per sociological imagination) in the original HM for building HRM theory and scholarship (Beer, Boselie & Brewster, 2015). This (pragmatist) research approach entails analysing the role of

HRM in the broader context from three multiple levels (of standpoints): the broader societal (macro) environment, organizational (meso), and the individuals (micro) (Arnaud & Wasieleski, 2014; Beer et al., 2015; Edwards, O'Mahoney, & Vincent, 2014; Hurrell, 2014; Pimentel, Kuntz, & Elenkov, 2010) which are already catered to by the HM.

Bratton and Gold (2015) have lamented that researchers in academe find it increasingly difficult to break the vicious circle that reinforces the research/practice gap whereby a preference for academic journal publication takes precedence over relevance to practitioners. They argue that academics can work more closely with Practice in a way that does not compromise the need for rigour but can still embrace relevance for the practitioners. Our paper is an effort towards that direction. Furthermore, and in line with our effort, they also stress the importance of collaborative projects between the Academia and Professionals to consider different organizational (HR) issues that carry significant potential for research and practice. In the same vein, the authors of this paper discuss this aspect, the duality between academia and HRM practice other social endeavours [or academia in this research] as a valid Collaboration model, a largely pragmatic approach that can inform HRM practice and at the same time provide a rich ground for developing more relevant HRM theory and present more vetted solutions to organisational problems. In traditional frameworks, academia is perceived as detached from reality, which entails that theoretical perspectives generated by academic would be difficult to apply in real life. Though these assumptions and claims have been gradually dismissed by academics and some practitioners, the debate is still live. This paper aims to reinforce the urgency of the development of an academia-practice partnership as a framework that enhances the search for meaning and dynamics social actions. The perspectives of the authors are that engaging with practice can dissipate some of the claims of academic elitism (Green, Jenkins and Jenkins, 1998) and claims against practice for limited rigor in the systematic generation and use of knowledge.

Our Collaboration model suggests that an intersection zone is created through the interaction between the academic and professional or organisational spheres. This zone of intersection gives rise to pragmatic knowledge that serves society. The proposed Collaboration model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Theoretical framework: The Collaboration model

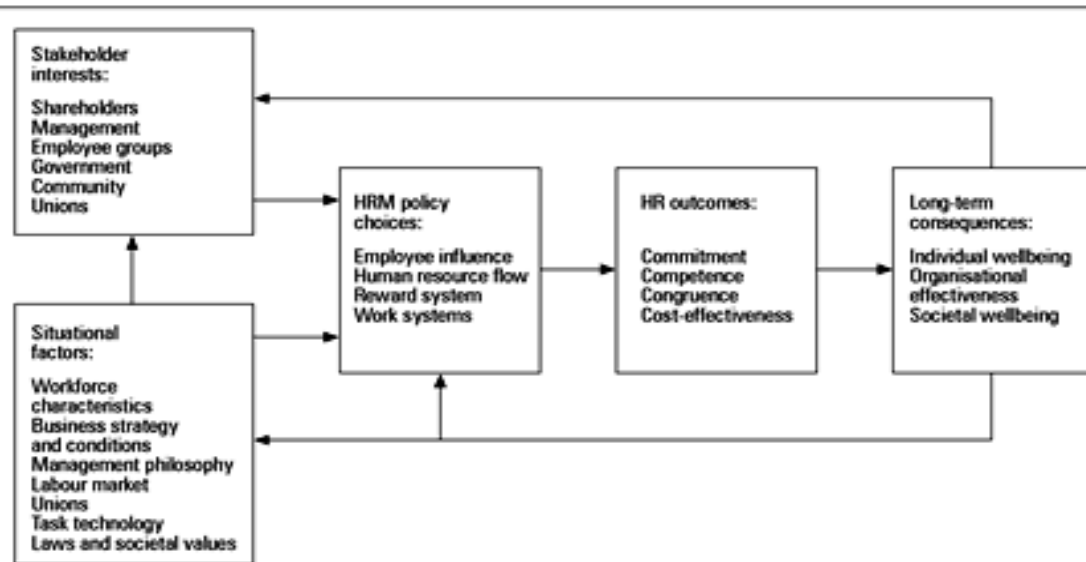


As argued earlier, this paper and the advocated model complement Watson’s theoretical perspective that establishes seeks to bridge the theory-practice divide. Our framework reassert this fundamental formulation expands on the effectiveness of the collaboration between two of the multiple actors in HRM, i.e. academia and practitioners and show the value of pragmatism for both HRM practice and HRM research.

However, Watson (2010) states that Pragmatism is not about pursuing final truths; it is more about making theoretical contributions towards human practices that may help us better understand the relationships between an individual and the broader context. Moreover, and in line with pragmatist principles, these theoretical generalisations should be able to enlighten us about the realities of social life. For better understanding of HR work, we can look to the broader range of theoretical approaches, from within organization theory and beyond, for adopting and adapting concepts from HRM perspective (Watson 2007). This paper proposes that the same research approach can explore the questions related to the multi-stakeholder concept of HRM (Beer, 2015). These authors provide a basis and an extension to our proposed Collaboration theoretical model. In fact, central to Beer et al.’s model, as shown in Figure 2, is the idea of multiple stakeholders whose interaction (both in terms of conflict and consensus) engenders desirable outcomes such individual wellbeing, organisational effectiveness and, in a wider context, societal wellbeing. Similarly, our Collaboration model

takes the perspective that human resources perspectives can be knowable from multiple intelligible angles building the involvement of academics and practitioners whose collaboration gives rise to better services for stakeholders through effective reflective practice and meaningful generalisation.

Figure 2: The HRM stakeholder model



(Beer et al., 1984, p.16)

Beer et al (2015) has specifically mentioned that the future research agenda should pay more attention to the role of different stakeholders under varying contexts from the Harvard model perspective as it has been largely ignored.

As mentioned before and while questioning the extent to which academic researchers on HRM have an interest in engaging in ways beyond the boundaries of academia and into the wider reaches of society and in taking their own critical engagement with HRM beyond the writing of articles in journal and monographs which are read by all too few people; Watson (2010) clearly refers to Mills’ ‘sociological imagination’ and to its corollary the ‘pragmatic realist philosophy of social science’. This philosophy entails that HRM research investigates the realities of workplace practices while utilising both theoretical resources and the ‘data’ collected from Practice.

PRAGMATISM AND ITS METHODS

Pragmatic realism according to Watson (2010) is each concerned with aspects of the social world which have a ‘being’ external to processes of human interpretation. In fact, Watson (2009, 871) states that:

“Pragmatism, which judges knowledge, ideas and ‘truths’ in terms of how they inform human practices, gives us the external reference points which we need when judging one analysis of the world against another.....For human actors to succeed in their projects they must understand the realities of the social world in which they are pursuing those projects. This is

the Pragmatism which inspired MillsOrganizations, occupations, working cultures and social identities are 'real'. But they are not real in the way that the structure of a plant, animal or machine is real. They become real to us as we confront the institutionalized patterns of rules, norms, procedures and expectations that we take for granted as 'reality'. And the work-related dimension of this reality is the subject matter of the sociology of work". Although he was critical of what Pragmatism had become in America in the 20th century, Mills looked back to the original ideas of Pierce, James and Dewey (Watson, 2009).

American philosophers William James and John Dewey were the pioneers in the field of Pragmatism which originated in their writings of early twentieth- century (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Watson, 2010). The Pragmatism standpoint does not accept that there are pre-determined theories or frameworks that shape knowledge and truth; nor can people construct their own truths out of nothing; the key point is that any meaning structures must come from the lived experience of individuals (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Pragmatists accept the notion that there are "real things" in the world that are independent of people knowledge; yet, according to them, there is no way to know those things apart from the concepts individuals make out of their own experience and the language they attach to those constructs (Prawat, 2003). Pragmatism has had a significant impact on theories of learning within organizations; John Dewey was an educationist himself and The Kolb Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984) also adopts a pragmatic approach. This cycle suggests learning in cycle from concrete experience, to reflective observation, to abstract conceptualization, to active experimentation and back to concrete experience (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Kolb, 1984). This learning cycle has implications for action science (Schön, 1987) - the approach recurrently advocated by Beer et al. (2015) and other academics in a recent publication of one of the esteemed HRM journals for solving this academic-practitioner divide (Hayton, 2015). In fact, the Harvard Model has implications for the LO concept in terms of the feedback loop that is in built the model.

Multiple methods – a pragmatic pragmatism research approach

Saunders et al. (2012) state that Pragmatism may lead to a multiple methods research design. Since Pragmatists are not entirely adhering to either positivism or interpretivism, they see these philosophical positions as either end of a continuum thus allowing them to choose whichever position or mixture of positions will help them to undertake their research. Hence Pragmatists value both quantitative and qualitative research; for them, the nature of the research question, the research context and likely research consequences are driving forces determining the most appropriate methodological choice (Saunders et al., 2012). According to William James, organizational theorists have adopted elements of pragmatism because it offers a synthesis between features often regarded as irreconcilable dualisms, such as positivism and anti- positivism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

Furthermore, Watson (2010) states that to the pragmatist there is no final truth, complete explanation or correct analysis of HRM. It strives to develop knowledge which may inform action more realistically than before. In pragmatist terms, if a piece of HRM research proves to be more helpful guide to action, it is more valid. The notion of 'analytical HRM', as put by Boxall, Purcell and Wright (2007: 4) Watson (2010) claims, is fully consistent with this pragmatic realist way of thinking. Boxall et al (2007) characterise analytical HRM as an activity which has as its primary task the building of theory and the gathering of empirical data 'to account for the way management behaves in organising work and managing people across different jobs, workplaces, companies, industries, and societies' (2007: 4).

Watson (2010) further states that this analytical approach to the study of HRM identified by Boxall et al. (2007) can be associated with this 'Sociological imagination' especially if it is successful in assessing 'the outcomes of HRM, taking account of both employee and managerial interests, and laying a basis for theories of wider social consequences' (2007: 4). More importantly, this research entails 'engaged scholarship' by setting up 'participative' research projects which draw on the 'perspectives' of the range of 'stakeholders' who are involved in the area being researched. Such parties include the researchers themselves, together with 'users, clients, sponsors, and practitioners' (Watson, 2010). In line with sociological imagination, Denzin & Lincoln (2005) state that the constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a natural (world) set of methodological procedures. The observer, under social constructionism, is part of what is being observed. The units of analysis may include the complexity of 'whole' situations and the sampling may require small numbers of cases chosen for specific reasons. The ensuing research generates rich data from which ideas are induced, and the generalization takes place through theoretical abstraction. Human interests are the main drivers of science and the explanations aim to increase general understanding of the situation. This research standpoint also entails that the concepts need to incorporate the stakeholder perspectives (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

However, and as insinuated before, Beer et al (2015) state that "a multi-stakeholder perspective requires HRM research to move beyond the "proper" science paradigm, in which social (and management) science aims to mimic the physical sciences (yes/no hypotheses, replicated cases, sophisticated statistics) that HRM has so enthusiastically embraced. HRM practitioners operate in a complex world in which multiple outcomes have to be considered." It is hardly surprising that the HR practitioners struggle to find the present academic research to be usable or actionable. In addition, this practitioner academia divide in HR is part of the larger management academic/practitioner debate (Beer et al. 2015).

Furthermore, from a contextual and sociological standpoint, Beer et al. (2015) have suggested HRM research has so far neglected the distanced geographical locations. They state that the financial measures of HRM have been a particularly powerful factor in the Anglo- Saxon liberal market which has been at the centre of most of the work on HRM. In these countries, the study of HRM has tended to concentrate on private-sector organizations particularly the more researchable and supportive prominent multinational corporations (MNCs). They also share that HRM is the most localized of management practices, and except for the top executives of MNCs, there is little 'convergence' in the way HRM is conceived and managed and what effects its specific practices have in different geographic locations. This assertion aligns with our perspectives about pragmatism research that is useful for the local collectivity and makes sense for that collectivity. In fact, geographic location particularly affects how HRM is understood, which stakeholders it is meant to serve and what (HRM) practices have legitimacy (Beer et al. 2015). They find that most of the SHRM texts during last thirty years were developed from research that was based on either case studies or international comparisons or both and this still is the way forward. According to them, the complexity of HRM can be better captured by these "close up" and "far away" approaches (Beer et al., 2015); and such approaches also lead us towards Case study and the multi-stakeholder perspective we are arguing for will require research that is qualitative and case based, with an action science or action research perspective largely missing from current academic research. (Beer et al. 2015).

The discussion so far indicates the approaches that can underpin the critical-analytical HRM research and writing. As mentioned above, Pragmatism proffers to assess Knowledge in

terms of how effectively it informs the projects of the human beings and who are informed by it rather than in terms of how closely it ‘mirrors’ or represents objectively existing realities. Charles Peirce has also argued that knowledge emerges in the context of particular situations as human beings confront practical dilemmas which have to be overcome. A critical-analytic HRM study could effectively represent the realities of workplace processes and, thus, can be a useful guide for the employer or the employee (Watson 2010).

DISCUSSION

In the past thirty years of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) movement, management has moved from management practice to science, and there is a constant struggle between the questions in research whether to start with ‘problem’ or ‘theory’ (Hayton, 2015). Hayton (2015) implies two modes of knowledge creation currently prevalent: Discovery science and Design science, which also might be viewed as two complementary cycles of knowledge creation, testing, and dissemination; one with the goal of creating theoretical knowledge and the other with the goal of creating effective solutions, respectively (Hayton, 2015). Furthermore, Kaufman (2015: 405) states that in the current HRM scholarly writings, the HRM academic-practitioner gap largely comes from scientific emphasis on theorizing and number-crunching that has little contact with or value for real-life organizations and managers (Kaufman, 2015). He also avers that some of the earlier pioneering SHRM books were written when the academics “built a new field in HR management, not by running more sophisticated regressions or adducing new behavioural antecedents (...) but by getting out into the world of practice, spotting the fundamentals of HR change and progress, and returning to (...) teach and write.”

In addition, scholars such as Cascio (2015) and Kaufman (2015) that most value-added research can emanate when academics advance practitioner- useful knowledge and tools through a mixture of theory, empirical methods and, most importantly, for gaining that experiential insight, through substantial involvement with the operational realities and problems of real-life business organizations. Furthermore, Denisi (in Hayton 2015) contends that the knowledge produced and refined, first by theorizing inductively and then by testing hypothesis deductively, should subsequently inform practice and action in particular the design of solutions to real-world problems (Cascio, 2015; Hayton, 2015). This is where Hayton (2015) assert we, as scholars, currently deserve a failing grade (Hayton, 2015).

Furthermore, Ryans (2011) notes that contemporary doctoral students are interested in creating research that “matters” to the broader society; however, to create a successful research, they need to advance practitioner- useful knowledge and other similar information (in Cascio, 2015). Cascio (2015) emphasises the need for more academic researchers to work in and with organizations; and while doing so, create models that reflect the full range of performance besides the description of the context-internal and external- that shape business and HR strategies. Cascio (2015: 425) aptly contends that “after all, our field is too important to rely on an insular approach.”

As discussed in earlier sections, HM was intended to see the HRM problem in a larger business and stakeholder context while examining the underlying assumptions and values (Beer, 2015; Cascio 2015; Kaufman, 2015). This consideration for larger business and stakeholder context is missing from HRM scholarship for long and especially in the past 30 years when the (Strategic) HRM scholarship started growing. The foundational HM was not dynamic; although it defined the territory, it did not show how to develop that territory or maintain it over time for sustained advantage (Beer et al., 2015). Beer et al. (2015) however

argue that, fortunately, business is taking seriously the concepts of multiple stakeholders, contextual variation, and complex outcomes, and there is a growing academic interest in a more complex and realistic view of HRM (Beer et al., 2015). Research ought to reflect academic interest while endeavouring to understand a multi stakeholder concept in a relatively unknown broader context. Sociological imagination and the pragmatist approaches can benefit the HRM.

Rebalancing HRM through pragmatism

After a review of developments in HRM in the past three decades, Kaufman (2015) suggests the field needs to ‘rebalance’ itself by reducing the emphasis on ‘scientism’ but encouraging and increasing field investigation, participant-observer methods. Such a research direction will pay more attention to the external side of HRM and integrate perspectives emanating from associated social science disciplines. He calls for broadening research from the present predominant focus on best-practice success stories to include more representative and even less attractive case studies (Kaufman, 2015). Hayton (2015) states that action research may offer that model, in a more hypothetical-deductive fashion which simultaneously examines questions of practice while engendering new theories for future testing. However, he also laments the fact that action research has not enjoyed a greater degree of success in terms of penetrating scholarly journal space barring few exceptions (Hayton, 2015). Cascio (2015) implies that the development of systematic (grounded) theory about the causes of problems and the means for change cannot be accomplished through distanced, narrowly focused and precise positivistic methods. In this regard, as Wright et al. (2015) explain, and from this paper’s perspective, the growing internationalization of research on SHRM is one of the significant developments in last 30 years, with research now being undertaken in other countries and published in leading international journals.

Pragmatism as phronesis in HRM

In another development, Habermas, an influential proponent of the Frankfurt School of critical theory, believed strongly in Aristotle’s concept of ‘phronesis’. Phronesis integrates practical and moral knowledge (Githens, 2007). Habermas advocated inquiry that does not neglect the practical daily concerns, but integrates those practical concerns with larger moral and societal issues. Additionally, he rejected the linear notion that theory should drive practice. Instead, he advocated the integration of theory into the daily lives of practitioners (Githens, 2007). This concept while taking a pragmatist standpoint, divulges from the traditional modes of inference – induction and deduction – and complements it by a third mode – abduction – which is qualitatively different from the other two and utilises methods from both (Svennevig, 2001); apparently, to bridge this discovery-design divide. In fact, the concept of abduction is originally attributed to Aristotle (Svennevig, 2001). However, Cascio (2015) contends that it is not an easy task to conduct research that is useful, both, for theory and for practice as there is no one best way to do it. Yet, the field of SHRM is a broad field that can accommodate a variety of approaches to generating knowledge that is useful both to academics and practitioners (Cascio, 2015).

To the pragmatist no final truth, complete explanation or correct analysis of HRM or anything else in the world is possible. We can, however, strive to develop knowledge which might more realistically inform action or potential action than what has come before. The more helpful a guide-to-action a piece of HRM research proves to be to those who read it –

whoever they may be and whatever the projects they are undertaking – the more valid it is, in pragmatist terms (Watson 2010).

CONCLUSION

The classical pragmatists and Mills are considered the inheritors of an ancient philosophy associated with the figure of Socrates that entailed an active work of interpretation in tandem with development of a mode of thought and practice rather than mere followership. While continually questioning shallow opinions, Socrates is believed to have lived a life of perennial struggle. The search for justice and the good life was an ongoing endeavour in it. Socratic criticism propagated harmony of action and word and endeavoured to articulate to others what the critic truly believed in (Barratt, 2011).

For achieving this harmony of word and action while answering its quintessential problems, HRM field needs combination of collaborative (with management) qualitative research motivated by problems that can develop new theories while the ‘positivist’ approach can test the existing HRM theories (Beer, 2015). Beer (2015) asserts that without these methods, the HRM field will stay narrow and will fail to provide useful or actionable knowledge; the field must reorient itself to produce useful and usable (actionable) knowledge, if it is to remain relevant to practitioners. This gulf between science and practice, to the authors, appears artificial and stands in the way of answering effectively vital organisational and societal questions. Easter Smith et al (2015) also assert that the approach Pragmatism sits in the paradigm of Engaged Constructionism and under the ontology of Relativism. Relevant praxis in creating HRM value chains that can be creditably implemented does “require a close connection between HRM “science” and HRM practice beyond the contemporary HRM “proper science” approaches” (Beer et al. 2015: 434). This is where the advocated Collaboration model (academia-practice) represents a framework for making sense of reality, for turning ideas into praxis and using praxis for further idea (theory) generation.

In this respect, Mills’ notion of the sociological imagination provides us with the perspective for studying HRM in a critical style and for giving the fullest possible attention to the relationship between the personal circumstances of individuals in work organisations and the public issues which are raised by current and emerging employment management practices (Watson 2010). Under this perspective, the methods (qualitative approach and case studies) of pragmatism advocated earlier in our elaboration of the Collaboration framework can be seen as geared at the search for meaningfulness in both theorisation and practice.

However, as Watson (2009, 873) states: “if the sociology of work is going to meet the ambitions of Mills’ Pragmatism and his wish to see sociological research informing public debates, we have some distance to go.”

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