

SENTIMENTALISM: CAN PEOPLE MANAGEMENT LEARN FROM A PARADIGM LOST?

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Abstract

People management continues to be a central focus of organisational life in the first decade of the 21st century. This has become more acute with the increasing need for competitive advantage within a global economy and has led to a call for organisations to aspire high performance working practices. Whilst a contested terrain, High Performance Working (HPW) has been defined in terms of the collective use of bundles of human resourcing (HR) and new working practices (Wood and de Menezes, 2008). People management has remained, however, with a short-term maximization of the return on investment for the owners of industrial and commercial capital, and the manipulation of “human capital” and that has been underpinned by a minimum financial risk strategy for the organisation.

The paper argues, from a theoretical precept, that People Management practices have become little more than an instrument of power and knowledge used by organisations to control and manipulate their workers. The human resourcing activity of organisations has been reduced to an instrumentalist function within organisations. The paper calls for a revisiting to the ideas of the sentimentalism of John Ruskin, and the romantic tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in order to think critically about the future of people management practices. Initially, consideration is given to the landscape of current people management and the role HR and then, through an overview of discourses of power from a Foucaultian perspective is considered within the context of organisational elites. Finally, Social justice is discussed with regard to revising the role of the HR function. It suggests that re-visiting of ideas surrounding sentimentalism, as evinced in the tradition of eighteenth and nineteenth century romanticism, allows for a review of the modernistic attitude that pervades Western economic thinking. As a result, it considers the future role for HR and people management within the context of contributions from social justice. In so doing, an appeal is made to those engaged in people management practices to consider the adoption of a critical and radical attitude that engenders ethically driven responses to elevate the worth and dignity of the individual within the organisation beyond the instrumentalism of traditional economic landscape. It argues that the organisation would make fuller benefits in the changing economic environment than those attained solely through the manipulation of human capital that have been inherent within HR practices since the 1980s within the UK.

Key words: Social justice, critical human resource management, sentimentalism, elites, power and knowledge.

Introduction

Since the early 1990's, the rise of a new orthodoxy, where modern analysis emphasizes that human beings are not "commodities" or "resources" but are creative and social beings in a productive enterprise can be identified (Guest, 1991). Generally, in socio-democratic nations, such as France and Germany, this has been reflected historically by the encouragement of "humanising" practices into the workplace. Moreover, it is argued that this has resulted in economies being more productive (see Sparrow *et al*, 1994; Manpower Argus, 1995). By contrast within UK organisations, following from reforming 1980s and 1990s Conservative governments, with an ideological distaste for trade unions, management concerns turned to efficiency and productivity, 'which many felt were best dealt with by line management'. Therefore, 'since the 1980's the UK saw 'a changing balance of power in the workplace' (Redman and Wilkinson, 2001:4). Since then the UK economy experienced increasingly intensified competition because of the impact of global competitiveness. Some consider this affected the management of people within UK organisations, stating that:

'Things are happening in employment that are neither a cause nor an effect of HRM but which could have some impact on it. This includes the intensification of work, the choices of work location provided by technology and the divisive nature of a society in which many are idle and impoverished while others are seriously-over worked'

(Guest, 1998, p.51)

The UK has historically experienced immigration into its labour force. However, since the turn of the millennium the UK has taken advantage of the enlarged European Union and wider economic migrants. Moreover, the growing requirements in terms of managing diversity in terms of a global customer base has been reflected through people management strategies (Cully *et al*, 1999; Alevesson, 2004; Lawrence *et al*, 2004; Schein, 2004). Foreign language and culture skills are competencies, which were exploited from this labour market supply shift. Perhaps, it might be considered that, even from the human capital point of view, migrant workers contribute much more to a productive enterprise than just their productive "work". After all, workers bring their character, their ethics, creativity, their social connections (Redman and Wilkinson, 2001), which contributes to the potential for organisational success. People management then holds strategic implications for the organisation. Yet, since the 1980s, the traditional views of hard Human Resource Management (HRM) have represented, solely, a mechanism to repress employee choice and ingenuity.

The new working practices advocated for the 21st century such as High Performance Working have sought to redress the problem of "firm-specific human capital" as being inadequate to represent the contributions of "human resources" in any modern theory of political economy (Armstrong, 1987; Hendry *et al*, 1988; Williams *et al*, 1989). Yet, Keeble-Ramsay and Armitage (2008) have identified that despite aspirations to improve people management within the UK, short term management practices reward those managers that pursue short-term returns gained through hard people management practices. This seems especially so during the current global recession.

It can be argued then, that in the first decade to the 21st century, UK people management practices have remained within a framework that seeks the expansion of human capital solely by exploitation within the organisation. The combination of training, education and performance management, which seeks to assure continual improvement and growth of the

individual solely for the utilisation of the organisation, is not a new phenomenon. In his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Adam Smith (1759) espouses the need of an individual to realise their potential if they have access to education. More recently Kelly (2001) argues that HRD is the medium that drives the process between training and learning and cannot be defined as a series of organised processes 'with a specific learning objective' (Nadler, 1984), but rather must be aligned to an individual's needs. Thus, arguably, HRD practices merely allow individual development, potentially to satisfy the organisation's goals, even though the by-product may provide some mutual benefit to both the organisation and the individual. Employees simply become assets to an organisation to be exploited, for which whose value can be enhanced by development. The primary focus upon growth and employee development emphasises the need to develop individual potential and skills (Elwood *et al*, 1996) to benefit the organisation. Nadler (1984) notes that a successful HRD program will prepare the individual to undertake a higher level of work, and organised learning over a given period of time, to provide the possibility of performance change (Nadler 1984). In short, HRD has led to the development of human resources by attaining, or upgrading the skills and attitudes of employees at all levels in the organisation, in order to maximise the effectiveness of the enterprise (Kelly 2001). As such, this regards the individual in terms of a "return on investment", viewed from a purely business perspective. It does not focus upon the individual's wider growth and development (Elwood *et al*, 1996). Thus, the education and development of an individual worker lies solely as a tool that provides a means to an end.

This narrow exploitative approach remains limited in its appreciation of the wider contributions that individuals might bring to the workplace. Yet it has been argued that to meet the challenges of the 21st century marketplace, a more humanistic and people centred perspective is needed (Ashton and Sung, 2004) in response to Tayloristic management practices. Despite current people management practices evolving through the spirit espoused by Human Relations School of thought, providing an emphasis upon leadership and cohesion, there continues to be a lack of "humanisation" in current people management and human resource development (HRD) practices.

In the face of intense global competition, and more recently the turbulent economic environment of the global "credit crunch" that organisations now operate within, perhaps, the need for a "humanisation" of the work place becomes more urgent. The business process reengineering ideology of the 1990s has led to a propensity to outsource business functions (Clarke and Clarke, 1990; Pfeffer, 1998; Torrington, 1998; Guest and Baron, 2000). This has resulted in the function of the internal HR department often being moved "outside the organisation" resulting in a more legalistic dealing with employees (Armitage and Keeble-Allen, 2007). Rather than business partners, such consultancy becomes reverted in its practices, perhaps, to the traditional role of Personnel Management. The outsourced supplier providing self-service, e-HR to the organisation, perhaps, provides then a function solely concerned with "hire and fire" activities or being the creator and instigator of regulatory employee frameworks. Moreover, the assumed position of the HR department becomes a "police force" for a cost cheaper to the organisation than the running of an internal HR department.

However, HR practices that place an emphasis upon the human aspects of organisational life are still to be and aspired to (Leopold and Harris, 2009). Rather than thinking of people, themselves, as "resources", 'it is better to focus upon "human resources" in terms the human predisposition which includes capacities such as their skills, knowledge, commitment and further a general predisposition of people to work cooperatively together, (Leopold and

Harris, 2009, p.9). However, within the UK, rather than embracing these aspirations towards 21st century working and people management practices, the changing role of the HR professional's contribution seems to lead to the employer-worker relationship becoming potentially more adversarial in its nature. Inevitably, this potentially causes tensions in the work place where organisational power and exploitative employment contracts might diminish the individual worker. As such, working conditions that rob them of their dignity and self worth as human beings might be pursued. Short-term cost saving focussed 'command and control' Tayloristic people management has become attractive yet leads to the containment of the workforce, rather than moving towards people management practices that might emancipate the spirit of innovation of the workforce, (Keeble-Ramsay and Armitage, 2008). Given the potential context of this potentially detrimental change to the HR function, and by consideration of those whose might work might be contained within such domination of instrumentality, despite aspirations for new people management practices being adopted which might facilitate the full potential of individuals, some examination of possible further contributory factors is demanded.

Powerful discourse and elites

Management literature in the last two decades has begun to witness a growing interest in Critical Management perspectives (see for example Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a; 1992b; Elliot and Turnbull 2005; Grey and Willmott, 2005). These have identified tensions between dominant, modernist and conventional orthodox ideological practices that focus on performance driven "measurable management outputs". This is as opposed to those that espouse humanistic, ethical, empowering emancipatory perspectives and practices. The dilemma facing individuals in contemporary organisations, and their management then, perhaps lies with competing values. They are torn between the domination of managerial controls that monitor them by performance measures and their professional codes of practice that demand an autonomous and ethical attitude towards their work. Perhaps the root of these tensions lies with the historical domination of the modernist organisation. To which, power and authority structures (see for example Weber, 1947; French and Raven, 1959 Emerson, 1962; Hall, 1972; Braverman, 1974) have presented tensions which arise between the conventional orthodoxies of modernism and aspirations for the embracing of emancipatory practices. This may have been further orchestrated by the rise of powerful elites, who wield their "invisible hand" of power and influence upon the lives of the "common man". Such power is founded perhaps within the wider UK society and as a result the economy within commercial and industrial settings.

Foucault refers to powerful discourse as "regimes of truth" (Couzens and Hoy, 1988:19). This enables knowledge to be viewed as 'tied to politics that is to power'. His desire was to appreciate that power relations, and the mechanisms of power, affects everyday lives. Foucault states 'Power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something one holds on to or allows to slip away'. Power has relational attributes. This becomes apparent when it becomes exercised (Foucault, 1981, p.94). As such then, power can be associated with practices, techniques and procedures, not institutions (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). Townley (1995) notes also that 'Power is employed at all levels and through many dimensions' and 'Thus questions such as "who has power?" or "where or in what, does power reside?" are changed to what Foucault termed the "how" of power: those practices, techniques, and procedures that give it effect'. Power and knowledge relations then are inextricably interwoven (see for example Eribon: 1991). 'Modernity's liberal-humanist paradigm', which is dominant in western industrialised countries and whose influence

spreads even wider, accustoms us to seeing knowledge as distinct from, indeed 'as counterpoised to power'. In this view, they claim that 'knowledge is a (disinterested) search for truth which power gets in the way of and distorts' (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p.85). Thus, they go on to posit the view that the implication is, therefore, that 'truth' and 'knowledge are only possible under conditions where power is not exercised (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p.85).

Despite the fact that since the Treaty of Amsterdam, UK employee legislation has afforded wider employee rights and potentially individual freedom, it cannot be overlooked that a 'power elite' can still direct and create organisational values and the "moral tone" in the workplace. Mills (1956) notes, 'The life-fate of the modern individual depends not only upon the family into which he was born, or which he enter by marriage, but increasingly upon the corporation in which he spends the most alert hours of his best years'. Moreover, 'By the powerful we mean those who are able to realize their power, even if others resist it' (Mills, 1956, pp.8-9). Clegg (1989) draws upon the arguments of Foucault, which espouse that knowledge and information, are necessary to success (see Foucault, 1977). Further, how power is experienced in practice remains as the foundations of political agenda and accordingly power exists within its three distinct qualities of origins, nature and manifestations of power (Foucault, 1991, p.68). As Rigg and Stewart note Foucault's project is to 'broaden the analysis from the origins "what?" and "why?" of power to the "how?"' (Rigg and Stewart, 2007, p.245). However, the question always remains 'by what means is power exercised by one individual over another?' (Foucault, 1983, p.217).

It can be claimed, however, that 'subordinates are often ignorant of strategy construction' (Clegg, 1989, p.221) and the negotiation of routine procedures, rules, agenda, protocol setting and assessing the resources of the organisation' (Collinson, 1994). Clegg further notes 'Consequently, it is not only that they [subordinates] do not know the rules of the game, they might not even recognise the game' (Clegg, 1989, p.21). Perhaps from this the implications are clear. Within the UK, subordinates who have little knowledge of their own, or others, who share the same plight as they do and who have little or no discourse with other powerless colleagues with whom they could construct alliances hold limited power. The adoption of "uncritical" discourses and the "dumbing down" of cultural attitudes that now pervade organisational and social life can further exacerbate this. This perhaps exemplifies contemporary organisational discourse and wider national social life. Potentially perhaps then, this assures that individuals lack the means or know how to exchange their stories and experiences openly with each other since potentially this might challenge "managerialist" practices they might not agree with. It can be argued then that modernist organisations have misused Tayloristic-style management controlling practices to fragment and dominate the work environment in order to alienate and disenfranchise employees (Braverman, 1974; Friedmann, 1961 and 1964). Foucault (1979) echoes these sentiments of power and domination where powerful discourses direct, control and continue to condition people (employees) into accepting discipline by others (employers). This develops a type of self-discipline within employees that can be understood through the concept of "governmentality". As Rigg and Stewart (2007) state 'If something is to be controlled, governed or managed, it must first be known. "Governmentality" is the necessary process that precedes administration and control, 'It is the process by which a domain becomes knowable and therefore is "governable"' (Rigg and Stewart, 2007, p.245). Governmentality is present with the fragmentation, specialisation and de-skilling of employees, a feature that pervades much of today's organisational landscape where disinterestedness has replaced pride (Sennett, 2009, p.21. The notion of "governability" in organisational contexts is,

according to Rigg and Stewart (2007), ‘mostly exercised unconsciously by the governed (employees) through the action of “being one’s own policeman”, managing one’s own practices’. Whilst the work setting might have changed, “governability” in the guise of the new professions, is to be found within all levels of business and organisations. “Up skilling” of technical and administrative functions has been re-defined through professional codes of practice and the creation of new professional grades. The obsession (mainly government) of ‘professionalising’ the workforce has overvalued the notion of social and professional mobility and individual freedom. This has been at the expense of underplaying the fact the “new professions” are promising more than they can or will be able to deliver for those individuals who join their ranks. They are given “legitimate” power and authority by the ‘elites’ because of their new found elevated status, “Graduate level certification”, and a perceived self determination of career aspiration, fail to recognise they do not possess any more social or professional mobility than before these “new professions” were created. Usher *et al* (1997) note when referring to Foucault that:

‘His approach is to deconstruct practices and examine in detail how they work....focussed on the process of normalisation whereby practices are sanctioned not by an external authority or an appeal to collective sentiments, but by mundane acts of self-authorization which sustain the practitioner as a compliant identity, a self-policing individual’

Usher et al (1997, p.56)

The legitimate power and authority that ‘new professionals’ wield within a 21st century capitalist free market workplace, it can be argued, is perhaps an illusion exaggerated by ‘the elites’ wielding limited approaches to organisational goal-focussed HRD. The nation has invested a sense of empowerment in the new “*petite bourgeoisie*” worker of the 21st century, as a means to inculcate an impression of “individual freedom”. Further, Adorno notes these new “professionals” cloak themselves with new discourse, a new set of values that articulate themselves through their particular language. He refers to their ‘jargon’, when he states that:

‘In professional groups which as they say, carry on individual work, but which are at the same time employed, dependent, or economically weak, the jargon is a professional illness. Among such groups, a specific function is added to a general social one. Their culture and consciousness limp far behind that spirit which according to society’s division of labor is their realm of activity’

(Adorno, 1973, p.13)

Thus, the extent that “professionalization” has made individuals more critical of their modernist plight might be questioned. Yet Fromm notes, ‘In one word, capitalism not only freed man from traditional bonds but it also contributed tremendously to the increase of positive freedom, to the growth of an active, critical, responsible self’ (Fromm, 1942, p.93). Perhaps, in response to these forces, some have levelled the same criticisms towards failings of western people management practices. They have called for a more radical stance in the way it is conducted or managed (see for example Legge, 2004; Stewart, 2007; Rigg and Stewart, 2007). Stewart (2007) for example, challenges people management practices and philosophies to adopt a critical (radical) attitude stating that:

“We have to move on from the unquestioning acceptance of the “orthodoxy” of free-market economics before real progress in achieving the inherent potential of HRD practice can be achieved. A potential which I believe arises from the inherent ethical nature of that practice’.

(Stewart, 2007, p.77)

Billig (2000) also has challenged current people management practices. He calls for a “critical” HRM, which challenges the accepted conventions of modernist organisational settings by stating that:

‘Basically when academics apply “critical” to their own paradigm, discipline or theory, the label tends to signal two related messages. (a) the new paradigm/discipline/theory includes social analyses, particularly the analysis of social inequality, (b) the “critical” paradigm/discipline/theory is opposing existing paradigms/disciplines/theories, which among other failings, fail to address social inequalities. As such, the critical paradigm signals the “other” – the mainstream, apparently uncritical paradigm’

(Billig, 2000, p.291)

Whilst social inequalities may concern Billig, perhaps it should be further considered to what the extent such issues are central to contemporary HR and people management practices. Moreover, whether there is potential for remedy by the practice of a programme of social justice, which potentially might result in the more ‘successful’ practices within people management strategies. If the current focus of HR practices has not extended beyond the legalist and regulatory requirement incumbent upon organisations (Stewart, 2007) then social justice has been adopted only when one individual perceives their disadvantage at the expense of another’s fortunes. Equally, when they compare their situation with those of others who are subjected to the same rules and regulations but they perceive different treatment has been applied, issues of social justice are identified. Adam Smith (1759) makes this point when he states that:

‘The great source of both the misery and disorders of human life seems to arise from over-rating the difference between one permanent situation and another. Avarice over-rates the difference between poverty and riches: ambition, that between a private and a public station: vain-glory, that between obscurity and extensive reputation. The person under the influence of any of those extravagant passions, is not only miserable in his actual situation, but is often disposed to disturb the peace of society, in order to arrive at that which he so foolishly admires’.

A fuller exploration of social justice, given the backdrop of current UK organisational people management practices, which might be located within Western economic models that seek to elevate financial profit above welfare motives to measure organisational success, is perhaps necessary. As such, revisiting the ideas surrounding Sentimentalism seems worthy of exploration and what follows therefore is a call for the adoption of people centred and human(istic) HR management practices and social justice located within those espoused by sentimentalism.

Sentimentalism: A call for social justice

Sentimentalism provides a return to nature and to belief in the goodness of humanity; the rediscovery of the artist as a supremely individual creator; the development of nationalistic and individual pride; and the exaltation of the senses and emotions over reason and intellect. It is the revolt against organisational domination and those in positions of power who venture to preside over and control the lives of the “common man”. The sentimentalism espoused by Ruskin (1864) criticises the plight of the craftsman, the man who creates with the mind and skilled labour and his struggle for identity in the wake of industrialisation. It provides a call for human imagination and the attainment of wisdom that can transcend the material conditions of existence in an appeal to set man free and to give him his dignity as a human being irrespective of class distinction. As such, sentimentalism rejects powerful discourses and domination and decries the industrial workplace that robs man of his autonomy and commits him to little more than a machine. This perspective, some would argue, still demands attention in today’s contemporary organisational given the failings of its people management practices (see for example Reynolds, 1999; Legge, 2004). Ruskin notes, in order that a man may be happy, it is necessary that he should not only be capable of his work, but a good judge of his work. Ruskin (1834) responded to the ‘troubled craftsman’ (see Sennett, 2009:114) with the Seven Lamps of Architecture to guide him in his work. However, these guides are equally applicable to modern day “craftsman” who work in any type of settings and environments these being the:

- Lamp of Sacrifice: This is the willingness to do something well for its own sake and dedication.
- Lamp of Truth: This breaks and rents continuity and is the embrace of difficulty, resistance and ambiguity.
- Lamp of Power: This is tempered power, guide by standards other than blind will.
- Lamp of Beauty: This is found in the detail of hand-sized beauty rather in large design.
- Lamp of Life: This is life equating to struggle and energy, death with deadly perfection.
- Lamp of Memory: This is the guidance, provided before the rule of machinery.
- Lamp of obedience: This consists of following the example of the master’s practice rather than to his particular works.

These sentiments are testimony in the works of the romantic poets of the nineteenth century such as Byron, Shelley, Robert Burns, Keats, and Blake who foreground an individual’s “self”, and their place in the world. It is through their poems, paintings of radiance and imagination that symbolise a spiritual reality of human existence. There is a call for an individual’s self realisation, personal freedom, respect and dignity and an espousal of an ethics that upholds man’s moral being, justice and fairness, themes central in of Hugo’s work, who in the preface of *Cromwell* (1828) and his play *Hernani* (1830) proclaimed the freedom of the artist in both choice and treatment of a subject.

The challenge that lies ahead is an ethical one that requires us to confront ourselves as individuals in our relations to others. The ethical is where it becomes the right of a *rational* individual to pursue their own life to its full potential and fulfilment. Values are those things an individual holds at the core of their being their being and are immutable: an individual is right of independent and intellectual freedom, the upholding of an individual’s contribution to

society and self worth. These values should not be open to compromise. To do so is to “sell out” since it leaves an individual open to corruption. At the core of such values is justice and fairness, captured eloquently by Shelly’s “What men gain fairly” and is central (and apt) to a thesis that rejects the grand narrative of the modernist age of economic domination:

*What mean gain fairly, that they should possess
And children may inherit idleness
From him who earns it...this is understood –
Private injustice may be the general good.
But he who gains by base and armed wrong
Or guilty fraud, or base compliances
With those, whom force or falsehood has made strong,
May be despoiled; even as a stolen dress
Is stripped from a convicted thief and he
Left in the nakedness of infamy*

At first viewing, Shelly’s romanticism might appear to be a remote comment in terms of the human condition for those working in contemporary organisations. However, Shelly’s call of consciousness should not be dismissed. Sorrell observes that ‘Business ethics continues to have a marginal status in both the theory and the practice of commercial organisation’ (Sorrell, 1998, p.15). However, Sorrell’s observation has given rise for some to suggest that there has also been a lack of ethical analysis within HRD (Stewart, 2007). This has led some to claim that ‘Training and development activities are perhaps the area of HRM policy and practice that is least likely to come under ethical scrutiny, invariably being presented as intrinsically “good activities”’ (Woodall and Douglas, 2000, p.116).

It was Georges Friedmann, the French sociologist and the originator and the driving-force behind the *Sociologie du Travail* in early post-war France and an ardent critic of the scientific management movement who brought attention to the de-skilling and degradation of the labour process. In many ways, this echoes the romantic project of human freedom and imagination. *Sociologie du Travail* emanated from Friedmann's seminars regarding the nature and evolution of the labour process and had an influential affect on the work of Michael Crozier and Alain Touraine. Friedmann's critique opposed the potential fragmenting of the labour process and *technicism*. His studies of work fragmentation and the destruction of craft skills prefigure Braverman, (1974). According to Friedmann (and later Braverman), fragmented work is a characteristic of capitalism, produced by the drive to separate execution from control and thus de-skill workers. By comparison, skilled craftwork is not only more interesting but results in a moral and ethical transformation of those engaged in such work because its technical features exercise an educational and humanising force on practitioners (see Friedmann, 1961 and 1964). Yet HRD pays limited attention to the *human* aspects of its function. This is not a new phenomenon, however. Ruskin (1834) also questioned the diminution of the individual in the wake of industrial progress proclaiming that in order that people may be happy in their work, three things are needed: they must be fit for it, they must not do too much of it and they must have a sense of success in it. Ruskin (1862) extolled the absolute notion of duty sating that ‘We require from buildings, as from men, two kinds of goodness: first, the doing their practical duty well: then that they be graceful and pleasing in doing it; which last is itself another form of duty. Ruskin’s assertions are ethical in their intentions by placing man’s *being* in the world at the centre of his existence. Connock and Johns echo Ruskin’s sentiments in a Transcendental Ethical framework that relies on an:

'...absolute concept of right and wrong, on universal standards of fairness, rightness and justice which should be applied equally in all our human societies (and by inference all business organisations). Transcendental ethics has its origins in two linked causal factors: The growing realisation that social ethics does not cater adequately for relationships between different societies; the desire to show that the ethical standards in one's own society are superior to all others - this can be done by claiming superior applicability'

(Connock and Johns, 1995, p.6)

Ethics, then, in its broadest sense is can be defined as the science of duty. However, HR interprets ethics and morality by way of codes of conduct, procedures, rules and regulations that effectively govern behaviour, expectations and work-based practices. As Rawls states 'major institutions define man's rights and duties and influences their life prospects, what they can expect to be and how well they can hope to do' (Rawls, 1970, p.7). These rights and duties are articulated in diversity, equality, equal rights policies and the like (see for example Connock and Johns, 1995). As such, HR professionals within outsourced provision might promote legalism rather than humanism. The following section will explore the function of HR within the backdrop of an ethical, moral and social justice and will challenge the instrumentality of its function and practices.

The HR function and the question of social justice

Whilst within the HR profession there are claims of upholding equitableness, or "moral rightness" and the justice of a cause through relations as business partners and the effecting of HR strategies and policies is disputed by others (Stewart, 2007). However, the "gift" of organisational values lie with and are imposed by those in positions of power upon the powerless (the workforce). The elite (employers) dispense organisational justice on the masses (employees). Justice then, when couched within employment policies and procedures becomes an affirmation that all organisational members are subjected to and individuals cannot escape any distributive justice espoused. In short, HR professionals utilise instruments to administer justice in the public gaze of organisational life. Moreover, the role of management becomes the implementation of confirmation to onlookers that deviants can and have are been brought to "book" and made to conform to organisational norms and conduct as opposed to 21st century new working practices embracing the individual. In effect, the HR professional's function has been reduced to what Rawls terms this the partial compliance theory. He states these include the 'principles that govern how we are to deal with injustice' (Rawls, 1971, p.18). It comprises such topics as the theory of punishment, the doctrine of just war, and the justification of the various ways of opposing unjust regimes'. Further, Cicero comments that justice is the crowning glory of the virtues and consists in doing no injury to men, is the "set and constant purpose" and gives each man his due, extorts no reward at "any price" and is sought for its own sake. Marcus Aurelius makes the same point stating that:

'Everywhere and at all times, it is up to you to rejoice piously at what is occurring at the present moment, to conduct yourself with justice towards the people who are present here and now, and to apply rules of discernment in your present representations, so nothing slips in that is not objective'

(Marcus Aurelius, 2006, p.66)

From such analogies then the HR profession continues to lack, what Rawls (1971:8) calls, strict compliance theory. Espoused by Hume (1777) in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, these principles of justice regulate a “well ordered” society and everyone is presumed to act justly and to do their part in upholding justice. As such, managers administer the HR professionals’ “derived” punishment and reward through the legitimacy of the “corporate rules and regulations” use employment policies and procedures through self-service e-HR in the manner that a court of law might use, in order to maintain organisational qua public order. Justice in organisational settings become the battle ground for determining right from wrong, monitoring and administrating punishment and rewards on the workers. This battleground lies the confines of outsourced HR departments, who might be regarded as proxy courts of justice who stand in judgement and administer, what Rawls (1971) calls, ‘compensatory justice’ over transgressors by a “judicial process” in the organisational community. The technology pervading the outsourced HR department becomes the place where “judicial officers” reside and act as judge or magistrate on matters organisational.

In effect, despite claims to be “business partners”, the results is a justice department in all but name, or worse where general managers are left to self-serve HR functions through intranet instructions. The ‘self-service’ e-HR function becomes then, the place where distributive justice, which focuses solely upon the outcomes from a decision, is decided. Its role is not to assess whether the distribution of costs and benefits is fair or just. The manager undertaking the people management function is where procedural justice becomes undertaken. It concerns itself solely with the fairness of the process used to arrive at a decision. Both types of justice have removed then, by their wider espousal of social justice, the individual and their identity from the process and consequences of the self-service e-HR intranet based function qua administration of justice. The result is that we have lost the meaning of justice as a virtue. We cannot attain but only raise our gaze to its horizons as we strive for this highest of virtues just as space and time reach out to infinity.

Justice is an ideal humanity seeks, but never finds. This does not mean we have to abandon this ideal because it is ultimately out of reach. It does not mean that people management should be reduced to laws, rules and regulations as the last point of reference to judge human conduct and behaviour or as a means to stand in judgement as to what is right and wrong. Marcus Aurelius sums this up aptly when he states that:

‘Injustice is sin. When universal Nature has constituted rational creatures for the sake of the other – to benefit one another, as deserved, but never to harm – anyone contravening her will is clearly guilty of sin against the oldest of the gods because universal Nature is the nature of ultimate reality, to which all present existence is related’

(Marcus Aurelius, 2006, p.83)

Moreover, a paradox for people management arises when rules and regulations are set down for all to follow. Whilst claiming general application, laws, rules and regulations are by their nature abstract, being not applicable to anyone in particular and cannot be applied in equal measure to every individual or case. In other words, they have general but not a specific application. This is because there are always “exceptions to the rule” which are ultimately applied with subjective judgement. Potentially this leads to an individuals’ perceived sense of injustice because individuals regard themselves to be a “special case”. The law, rules and regulations are not for particular circumstances but for others to follow. Therefore, if we are to attain (absolute) justice, we have to transcend the bounds of regulatory frameworks and

challenge the current orthodoxies of Anglo-Saxon values and morality that are driven by monetary and profit motives. Social justice promotes welfare in the workplace and requires people management practices to adopt a deeper and critical engagement with the workplace. Therefore, if social justice is to progress beyond organisational policies then people management has to adopt as its central project two core objectives. Firstly, it has to put people at the centre of its projection. In other words, it has to put the 'human' back into the human resource. Secondly, it has to engage with people directly. In other words, it cannot progress the wellbeing of the workplace through a propaganda machine of organisational communication protocols. To be effective, people management must become humane in all aspects of its function.

Social justice takes place between individuals, whereby personal one-to-one communion and the meeting of minds is present. It is the place where foregrounds equity, transparency and dignity as its core values are its corner stones and that 'A conception of social justice, then, is to be regarded as providing in the first instance a standard whereby the distributive aspects of the basic structure of society are to be assessed' (Rawls, 1971, p.9). Gorringer echoes these sentiments when he states that:

'We as humans, are fundamentally concerned with what is life conserving....what it is that promotes the human being....that makes for joy, creativity, security, the flourishing of love and happiness....Whatever promotes all those things is good; whatever destroys them is bad. Therein lies our ethics, our mortality, and the foundations of what we call social justice'

(Gorringer, 1999, p.9)

The rise of scientific management and the domination of the organisation robbed workers of their pride, identity and engagement in their work. It led to mistrust between employer and employee. To the detriment of the social function of the workplace in direct opposition to values that respect an individual's self worth, measurement and performance systems now dominate the modern industrial landscape as never before. The wider societal consequence has been that materialism and corporate greed have succeeded at the expense of de-humanisation of employees. As such, social justice within the workplace has been eroded and in some (many cases as some might argue) is nonexistent (see Midgley, 1996; Sorrell, 1998).

Social injustice can be found however at every "turn and corner" within our own working environments. The problems of low wages and poor working conditions of employment for new migrant workers of the EU, who have swollen the employment ranks of the UK economy over the past five years, have kept afloat the rate of economic growth within UK economy pre-credit crunch. Perhaps, the response of the current HR profession, as described herein, might have been to apply more regulations and rules to protect those most vulnerable to the wants of the powerful to incite the use (consciously or unconsciously) of a social contract. However, this is a misconception. At first sight, the social contract (as proposed by Hobbes, 1651) might be a natural response to those who intend to impose their will upon others, requiring that all individuals in society be bound by a common agreement. Whilst this appears to be an equitable manner to proceed and formulate the rules of society and to abide by, however it has hidden flaws. The social contract *may appear* to be an equitable basis to agree the moral tenets of a society, but it ignores that fact that those who can wield power are required to give up some of their "advantages" for the benefit of those who are in a weaker or powerless position in relation to them.

Perhaps the notion of what Hobbes called a ‘commonwealth’, governed by an elected body of men is in fact an abdication of responsibility. This is because those who already belong to the powerful elites within an organisation or of a society defer their moral norms to what they see as the lowest common denominator, namely the rules and laws of that society in which they live as it absolves them of their responsibilities to be moral agents. Rather, they take their lead from legal and rule driven edicts conferred on the society they live in. Likewise those who are in weaker and less powerful positions again can abdicate their responsibilities to the higher authority of the society they belong to for exactly the same reason, namely they will assent to the authority of rules and the law as the highest referent to live their lives. In effect, both the powerful and powerless *converge to a common point of reference* that is (pre) defined by the regulatory framework imposed upon both the powerful and powerlessness. In both cases, both the powerful and powerless are afforded individual rights to the detriment of individual responsibilities. As such, legalism triumphs over morality. As such, individuals acting within this type of society at the last recourse can defer to their rights at the expense of individual responsibility. In *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek (1943) highlights the dangers of collectivism and rails against socialist and totalitarian regimes whereby societies submit themselves to the will and direction of political elites. He argues for societies that elevate individual freedom, confer individual rights and responsibilities to its members by democratic means and create economic growth in favour of the constraints imposed by those of collectivist regimes. He argues that individual and economic freedom is not separate entities and it is only by having the latter can we attain the former. Gorringer also supports this position stating that ‘Sociological and psychological studies, however, seem to confirm Aristotle’s view that we are indeed community animals. We are not “individuals” but persons in relation to each other. The only absolutely “individual” thing about us is a corpse’ (Gorringer, 1999, p.31) and has moved others to comment on the “individuation of man” and the necessity for his social being by stating that:

‘There is only one possible solution for the relationship of individualized man with the world: his active solidarity with all men and his spontaneous activity, love and work, which unite him again with the world, not by primary ties but as a free and independent individual’.

(Fromm, 1942, p.30)

The consequence of taking recourse within the collectivist model is a society governed by rules and regulations rather than a moral code of conduct based on *individual responsibility* (Rand, 1963) and stems from our need for personal protection. This is because according to Midgley we are selfish and this leads to conflict and the setting of priorities and notes ‘It is conflicts which give rise to the need for rules and priorities, and therefore for morality’ (Midgley, 1996, p.96). The creation of rules, procedures and regulations for those engaged in the management of the workforce regard them as the “normal way” of extolling the virtues of moral and value lead cultural identity.

However, because rule, regulations and procedures are imposed upon individuals does not mean they will follow them. No amount of edicts can compel individuals to adhere to their contents. The realisation being that when creating organisational codes of conduct, diversity, equality, equal pay policies and so forth, are instruments that have, in reality, “no teeth”. In short, it is (almost) impossible to manage by fist and compel individuals to comply. Rules, regulations and laws do not prevent transgressions, they merely encourage novel ways for individuals to bend them as far as they can. This is perplexing to those who work as HR professionals. Stewart (2007) also notes that just as a code of practice cannot be imposed or

policed in any meaningful sense, even if it can be remembered and recalled at the point it is needed, so to can a categorical imperative. The adoption of rules and regulations paradoxically aids and abets those who are in powerful positions in organisations and absolves them of individual responsibility so long as they do not break any rules, regulations and laws. Eco counters this by putting forth the notion of “universal semantics” which might be referred to as “natural understanding” where human beings are at the centre of such a system. He states that:

‘and the ethical dimension comes into play when the other arrives at the scene....Just as we couldn’t live without eating or sleeping, we cannot understand who we are without the gaze and reaction of the other’

(Eco and Martini, 2001:93-94)

Gorringe and Eco make a call to those involved within the human sciences to adopt an attitude that challenges us to accept the *being-in-human* and to re-assess our place in the world not only in relation to ourselves but also to others. This challenges HR professionals to adopt a radical stance in their dealings with those they claim to advocate. It is one that demands the (re)emergence of foregrounding the human in people management practices and a (re)defining dignity in the workplace through trust and the exercise of social justice rather than by the mechanisms of distrust by the creation and application of organisational procedures and codes of practice. As Thoreau (1997) states ‘The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly’.

Some will argue that this is idealistic, however this does not mean we have to abandon and avert our eyes from the ultimate goal of human discourse and understanding, that of social justice. This requires us to acknowledge that we as individuals working in the community of organisations have duties that extend beyond our own rationality as to our fellow man (Hadot, 1995). Rawls (1971) posits the notion of the original position whereby society and institutions are created behind a “veil of ignorance”. It is a position that asks us to question (in a critical sense) what type of society do “I” an individual want to live in given the fact that “I” do not know what position or status “I” will be accorded when entering beyond the veil of ignorance. Naturally, whilst an idealist notion and one that cannot in practical terms be ever achievable (because we have our own personal agendas and where this exists so do power relations) it does offer hope. A hope that moves us to question our “*being*” as humans and as *human beings* it helps us retain a sense of what is just and fair, both central to emancipatory the espoused new 21st century working practices. It challenges people management to put values, ethical and moral “self” on the wider organisational canvas where it needs to reassess its in relation to individuals, strategy and operational practice (Chryssides and Kaler (1995).

Conclusions

We currently move in uncertain economic times as society has awoken from its slumbers at dawn to the realisation that capitalism as practiced hitherto has “let them down”. The HR function and professional must re-assess their current practices. This re-assessment will challenge them rebuke the instrumentalism of capitalism past and realign themselves within and regain the “human” in HR If the HR profession cannot unlock the potential of those entering the workplace that have been subjected an “uncritical” educational experience (Rigg *et al*, 2007). An experience that has robbed them of their identity and places its values on examination success within a “production line” culture and measure its effectiveness by

measuring pass rates. The response to this “uncritical” condition can be found within the ethical and value lead approaches to HR if we are to challenge the accepted modernity of western capitalism. HR practices need to adopt a critical stance that *return the human* into HR if we are to create a sustainable economic model that goes beyond legalism, financial and profit motives and ultimately how we are to create just organisations to enable individuals to attain their meaning, identity and humanity Fromm (1994). The critical position espoused by Fromm requires that individuals should have freedom of thought to judge independently. Adorno (1998; 2000 and 2005) called this “immanent critique” and is the rejection of “grand theory and idealism, points echoed by Benjamin (1999). For both Adorno and Benjamin “immanent critique” is a critique that does not come from above, from an idealist, essential category (Böhm, 2007, p.109). Instead, it must be immanent in the sense that it is embedded in a specific societal and political reality and its dynamics. It is a position whereby values are those placed in the free intellectual domain of an individual is necessitated by a code of ethics whereby an individual’s life is the ultimate standard of value (Rand, 1956; Fromm, 1942).

We radically need to define the territory of human resource management if we are to unfreeze untapped human potential and learning (Legge, 2004) and suggest that this achievable through the medium of an ethical discourse and the recognition that those who take part in have equal value (see for example Habermas, 1975). If we are to adopt a sentimentalism attitude that returns the *human* back to HR then we should perhaps give stronger credence to the principles espoused by Discourse Ethics (Habermas, 1983) which is an attempt to explain the implications of communicative rationality within the tenets of moral insight and normative validity (see also Armitage and Thornton, 2009a and 2009b). It is a reformation of the Kant’s deontological ethics in terms of the analysis of communicative structures. It is an attempt to explain the universal and obligatory nature of morality by evoking the universal obligations and communicative rationality espousing a moral theory based upon cognitive foundations, and therefore justifies the validity of moral norms that can be achieved analogous to the justification of facts. As Hadot (1995:89) notes when commenting on what he calls *Learning to Dialogue* ‘In the Socratic dialogue, the question truly at stake is *not what* is being talked about, but *who is* doing the talking’. HR has to abandon its modernist practices and recognise that new understandings require that the rationality of intuition and the imagination of the intellect must become part of a humanising lexicon that is inculcated within its practices and processes. If HR is to take a critical turn it must accept a radical re-think to question current assumptions of organisational practices and its theoretical underpinnings. We argue that sentimentalism embraces and offers a the means to re-evaluate contemporary work settings, but in order to do so HR has to realise a just, fair and democratic ideal of organisational discourse with its foundations of moral insight that is guided by the respect of individuals. If HR as a profession is to respond to the challenges that sentimentalism poses them it has to address the fundamental questions as to what its *real function* is. First, it has to question whether its function is purely instrumental in nature. Second, it must challenge its own function i.e. is it the *management* of human resources or it is the management of *human* resources. The shift of emphasis in the latter is one that puts the focus upon the *people aspect* of organisational life founded upon and an ethical programme of collaboration, respect and dignity as opposed to the former that implies command and control practices founded within a culture of mistrust and opaque organisational practices. Third, it is imperative that professional and learned bodies who represent and speak for the HR profession take a lead in the inculcation of practices that promote social justice. This requires a pro-active rather than re-active attitude in the education and development of those who practice HR at whatever the level of the organisation they operate.

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