Introduction

Making critical sense of human resource management in a globalized world

Jawad Syed and Robin Kramar

Welcome to the first edition of *Human Resource Management in a Global Context: A Critical Approach*. The book has been written with the aim of developing our understanding and practice of human resource management (HRM) in an increasingly globalized world of work. The book uses a critical lens to develop an approach to HRM that is not only business-focused but also context-sensitive and socially responsible – we will explain our rationale for this below.

The emergence of HRM in the 1980s was accompanied by a sustained theoretical assault on its pretensions, highlighting the gap between the rhetoric of HRM and the reality, which was focused on impersonal economic rationalism. The reconstruction of the employment relationship as a singularly individual market exchange did not go uncontested in management education. However, whereas the proponents of HRM once felt the need to engage and respond to critique, the field now seems to have narrowed as the major concerns relate merely to strategic 'fit' and identifying mechanisms to facilitate 'high-commitment' and 'high-performance' organizations.

We consider the overemphasis of HRM on strategic performance to be problematic in view of the considerable gap between the policy and practice of strategic HRM. Vaughan (1994) argues that although organizational mission statements usually hold that employees are their most important asset, organizational reality is characterized by impersonal economic rationalism. Wilmott (1993) asserts that the rhetoric of HRM tends to turn employees into 'willing slaves' who negate their own interests, assuming the organization will take care of them. Seen from this angle, HRM's unitary rhetoric may compromise the individual and collective needs of employees and may instill an HRM culture

that advantages organizations at the expense of employees. This is particularly true in periods of economic recession and instability. Although the economic gains for the organization are always a priority, issues related to individuals and societies remain subject to various concerns and tensions. Furthermore, a number of changes have occurred in factors influencing the way people are used in organizations, for example globalization, migration, environmental sustainability, governance, ethics, work–life balance and workforce diversity.

Bringing together eminent international scholars, this book places a premium on the critical thinking and analytical abilities that can be successfully applied to HRM. We take a different view of HRM theory and practice from that of often mechanically prescriptive orthodox texts. Our take on the theory and practice of HRM is far from US- or UK-centric: our choice of the topics as well as geographies covered in the text (that is, continental Europe and Asia-Pacific) is an attempt to situate the critical issues facing HRM in a global context.

Each chapter in this volume addresses a core topic and reflects the current state of critical scholarly activity in the field, highlighting some enduring theories and approaches, and then pushing the boundaries of HRM beyond those ideas. Our approach differs most widely when we consider that the practice and theory of HRM involves a number of key issues, including but not limited to managing diversity, ethics, corporate social responsibility, national context, knowledge management, relationship between work and non-work, implementing HRM (which often requires managing change), understanding the expectations and motivations of individuals and groups, and the role of external factors, for example legal and regulatory requirements, in influencing HRM. We consider these topics to lie at the heart of real-life HRM situations, and we believe that a critical approach offers a more effective outcome. We identify and challenge assumptions, develop an awareness of the context, seek alternative ways of seeing a situation and relate these to real-world examples in contexts as diverse as Europe and the Asia–Pacific region.

Each chapter follows a common structure by first identifying learning outcomes, and then moving on to a discussion of fundamental theories and key concepts related to the chapter, an integration of contextual and critical insights with the HRM literature, and one or more case studies exemplifying the application of theory to the world of HRM practice.

Each case study is designed for students who are taking a course in HRM with a significant international component. The aim is to provide a dynamic example and critical illustration of the HRM theory that readers are studying. As a learning tool, Clegg et al. (1984) and Hoffman and Ruemper (1991) identify several advantages of the case study approach:

☐ For students, case studies provide an opportunity to think logically and imaginatively, to experiment and to debate ideas free of risk.

☐ Cases provide an opportunity for experiential learning with particular reference to interpersonal skills and group work.

☐ Cases provide an opportunity to evaluate critically some of the theories covered in the textbook and on the course.

☐ A series of set case tasks typically provides an opportunity to improve a student's ability to write business communications.

The case studies we present in this book are expected to encourage students to integrate knowledge and skills relating to HRM and to avoid 'compartmentalizing' or 'silo' thinking and action. They also encourage students to look for multicausality when examining workplace problems and solutions, to think across disciplines and subdisciplines, and to think logically. We hope that students and practitioners alike will find these cases useful for testing and developing human resources theories, stimulating a critical insight into and a contextual understanding of this subject.

Structure of the book

There are 16 chapters in this book, and these are divided into three parts: The Human Resource Management Arena (five chapters), Human Resource Management in Practice (six chapters) and Human Resource Management and Contemporary Issues (five chapters).

Part 1: The Human Resource Management Arena

Syed and Pg Omar's chapter on 'Contextualizing Human Resource Management' (Chapter 1) begins with a literature review of the contextual forces that influence the design and practice of HRM. The authors also consider certain latent tensions between globalization and HRM. The case study presents an empirical study of HRM practices in Brunei Darussalam. It describes the influence of the macroenvironmental context on the design and implementation of HRM strategies, policies and practices in government sector organizations. The study reveals that culture, especially the Malay Islamic Monarchy ideology, plays a significant role in shaping HRM in Brunei.

In their chapter on 'A Critical Perspective on Strategic Human Resource Management' (Chapter 2), Jamali and Afiouni provide a critical assessment of strategic HRM (SHRM), shedding light on its differentiating attributes and theoretical foundations, as well as on the lingering gaps and challenges in this rapidly growing field. This chapter shows that SHRM undoubtedly presents significant advances and new insights in relation to people management, but it is not a panacea and is still plagued by both conceptual ambiguity and a dearth of empirical support. These challenges, coupled with the difficulty of translating theory into practice, are possibly stumbling blocks in the way of a fully fledged maturation of SHRM and are fleshed out and discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

In their chapter on 'Human Resource Management in Contemporary Transnational Companies' (Chapter 3), Cappellen, Zanoni and Janssens discuss the latest evolution in HRM in transnational organizations and the emergence of the global professional as a new profile within these organizations. For each topic presented in the chapter, the authors first discuss the 'mainstream' approaches and then reflect on them by drawing on more critical literature.

Kamenou and Syed's chapter on 'Diversity Management' (Chapter 4) explains the concepts of managing diversity and equal opportunities in employment. Given the demographic transformation of the population and the labour force in many countries, workforce diversity is a major issue facing managers and organizations. There is, however, evidence of an application of unrelenting stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours that not only permeate the workplace, but are also found in abundance on a societal and institutional level. The authors introduce students to various forms of employment discrimination, as well as legislation in various countries to tackle discrimination. With respect to theorizing diversity management, two key approaches are discussed: the business case approach and the social equity approach. The authors also discuss some methodological issues in conducting research on diversity and equal opportunity, and present a case study on ethnic minority women in the UK.

In their chapter on 'Human Resource Management and Ethics' (Chapter 5), Wilcox and Lowry discuss human resources practices from an ethical perspective. The authors identify how and why human resources activities have an ethical dimension and also highlight the connections between ethical human resources practices and ethical global business operations. In addition, the chapter identifies some key distinctions between ethical relativism (the view that the definition of right or wrong depends on culture, history and the individual) and ethical pluralism (the view that there are multiple, possibly incompatible definitions of right or wrong that may be equally correct and fundamental; see also Chapter 5), and describes some of the features of critical business ethics.

Part 2: Human Resource Management in Practice

In her chapter on 'Human Resource Planning' (Chapter 6), Sheehan explains how current changes in socioeconomic circumstances require innovative responses and careful HRM planning. The author explains that, as a custodian of the people resource in organizations, it is the function of the HRM role to assist in the development of human resource planning initiatives that match changes in the supply and demand for labour, and also manage initiatives for attracting and retaining talent strategically rather than reactively. Sheehan's chapter broadly reviews approaches to human resource planning and also critically analyses some of the strategic responses to issues associated with the supply and demand of labour that impact on talent management.

Holland, in his chapter on 'Job and Work Design' (Chapter 7), examines the development of modern job and work design to better understand the contemporary nature of work organization. The chapter reviews the literature on work organization and provides a contextual analysis for the development of 'modern' job and work design, explaining how it has already evolved and continues to evolve.

In her chapter on 'Recruitment and Selection' (Chapter 8), Kyriakidou explores the classical theories and current research that underpin the three basic elements of a personnel selection system: (1) studying the job to be

performed, (2) recruiting a pool of applicants for the job, and (3) selecting the 'best' people from the applicant pool. Such an exploration is enriched by international considerations and implications for recruitment and selection, with a special focus on expatriate managers. Finally, the author adopts a critical perspective that tries to reveal the ethical issues underpinning personnel staffing and questions the current emphasis on connecting selection practices with performance.

Maley's chapter on 'Performance Management' (Chapter 9) discusses an organization's most critical procedures, that is, the performance management system. These systems are now widely and routinely used for many employees. Their use increased through the 1990s as a result of the pressures of globalization, increased competition and a greater analysis of all the characteristics of employee performance. Performance management systems were originally used for managers, professionals and technical employees, but today they are frequently used to appraise staff at all levels in many parts of the world. The author explains the purpose, criteria and ethics of performance management, and also considers approaches to and effective methods of conducting appraisals, the limitations of the process and the value of multiple sources. The chapter includes various suggestions to help improve the performance management process and evaluates performance management in an international context. Finally, the chapter discusses the need for a critical evaluation of and future direction for performance appraisal.

In his chapter on 'Reward Management' (Chapter 10), Shields explains how reward strategies, programmes and policies are structured in both domestic and international contexts. The chapter discusses the variety of reward possibilities and practices covered by the notion of 'total reward' and the different motivational and behavioural assumptions associated with particular types of reward. It also explains how social and cultural factors affect employees' perceptions of pay fairness and how these perceptions affect the design and effectiveness of pay programmes. Finally, the chapter explains the worth of a constructively critical (pluralist) approach to understanding reward management theory and practice.

Murray's chapter on 'Training, Development and Learning' (Chapter 11) discusses and explores a number of critical issues related to training, development and learning in organizations. It does so by highlighting the differences between the terms, reflecting on older, more classical approaches to training compared with more contemporary and recent trends that are more situation- or context-specific. The latter mean that the older approaches to training, albeit useful, have to be rethought. More recent trends in global organizations, such as technological advances, human expectations of what constitutes a valuable job, the organization's expectations related to capabilities that match strategic business needs, and increased social interaction, have meant that the older approaches are less valuable. The chapter explores the nuances and differences between individual and organizational learning, including, but not limited to, developing versus recruiting workers, needs assessments linked to training design and performance issues, various training and learning methods, the link

between learning and knowledge, and critical issues within an international context. The chapter is designed to take the reader from existing normative and traditional views of training, development and learning to a more critical creative view that is context-specific.

Part 3: Human Resource Management and Contemporary Issues

In their chapter on 'Change Management and Human Resource Management' (Chapter 12), Kirsch and Connell discuss several eras in the literature on the management of organizational change. The authors explain the various approaches, drivers and change measurements utilized in the last few decades. They also explain some of the key roles associated with change agents and human resource managers concerned with implementing organizational change. The chapter offers two case studies depicting different change management approaches and identify the key issues associated with each case.

Pyman's chapter on 'Human Resource Management, Productivity and Employee Involvement' (Chapter 13) deals with a critical evaluation of the relationship between employee involvement (EI) and productivity. The chapter focuses on direct and indirect means of EI, which can take a wide variety of forms. EI is management-initiated and management-led, and has a number of objectives. Some examples of the objectives of EI are summarised for the reader. The chapter demonstrates that management introduce EI for a variety of reasons, with the overarching objective of improving productivity and competitiveness.

In her chapter on 'Work–Life Balance in the 21st Century' (Chapter 14), Kamenou engages in key debates on work–life balance through a global context perspective, acknowledging national and cultural differences in how work–life balance is perceived and how flexible working arrangements are negotiated. She also notes the diverse legal frameworks and workplace practices involved in dealing with work and employment, as well with rights for parents, carers, and so on. The experiences of social groups, including among others women, older workers and ethnic minority groups, in relation to work–life balance issues are also explored. A range of work–life balance organizational initiatives and flexible working types are presented, together with the legal protection associated with these practices. A discussion on the social and economic benefits of a healthy, fulfilled workforce is presented, as is an evaluation of the costs of inaction by organizations and the government, such as the costs of high absenteeism and work-related stress.

Soltani's chapter on 'Managing Human Resources and Quality' (Chapter 15) explores and analyses the link between total quality management and HRM. By reviewing the relevant literature, the author presents a case for compatibility between the two concepts. In doing so, he makes use of the frequently cited elements of the 'HRM cycle' to discuss the vital role of human resources in enhancing quality and organizational productivity. The author also provides empirical verification for the link in order to base his arguments on inferences made from a range of theoretical and previously published research in the domains of both quality and HRM.

Finally, in their chapter on 'Human Resource Management in Small to Medium-sized Enterprises' (Chapter 16), Raby and Gilman address the role of HRM in small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and in doing so will explore the following: how SMEs are defined; the importance and contribution of SMEs to national economies; the employment relations environment within SMEs; and the role of HRM and its influence on performance within SMEs. The chapter also offers an extensive case study of HRM in SMEs by drawing upon detailed action research conducted during a 2-year Knowledge Transfer Partnership programme, a UK government scheme that creates a strategic partnership between a company and a knowledge base (for example, universities) to transfer and develop the latest in management thinking.

Finally, we summarise the book in the Conclusion, providing a critical synthesis of the various topics and themes covered in the book and highlighting a number of challenges and opportunities for HRM scholars and practitioners.

Features of the book

By virtue of the range of topics as well as the geographical regions covered in the theoretical discussions and practical examples offered in the various chapters, we believe that this volume will be equally beneficial for undergraduate and postgraduate students in business and management studies, particularly those pursuing a major in HRM. Courses on HRM or/and industrial relations or/and international HRM are generally compulsory in undergraduate and postgraduate management programmes across a number of universities in the UK, Australia and other countries. This book will be useful for students enrolled on such programmes.

Although the book is primarily designed for students, it will be of equal interest to research scholars as well as practitioners of HRM. Academic as well as governmental libraries and academic associations, such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and the Society for Human Resource Management, may be interested in procuring copies of this book.

The book has several important features:

☐ It has been specially designed to relate to HRM in the UK, Australia, continental Europe and Asia, but it is, however, accessible to a wider international audience.
☐ It is suitable for undergraduate and graduate teaching programmes on general HRM, as well as for specialist modules on critical HRM and international HRM.
☐ It is an international text, written for an international audience, with the ability to be adapted for various countries and continents.
☐ It offers a critical perspective on HRM, integrating fundamental theories and practices of HRM with critical insights.
☐ Original case studies provide critical and contextual insights into HRM practice.
☐ The text is jargon-free but deals with cutting edge research, and it is easily accessible to scholars from non-English speaking backgrounds.

- □ The book has a logical structure and pedagogy that is useful for teachers, students and practitioners alike.
- □ Contributions have been made by eminent scholars in the field.
- □ There is a common structure for all the chapters.

With a view to reconnecting a critical HRM perspective to the mainstream, we feel that the time is right for an in-depth evaluation of the phenomena of HRM. Although old debates cannot be ignored, our concern is to provide a critical text integrating the fundamental theories and practices of HRM with critical insights and relevant practical examples from a variety of international contexts. This book is expected to stimulate a discussion of how to destabilize the prevailing orthodoxy in the field of HRM and deconstruct some aspects of the HRM paradigm. While the book has been designed and written primarily for students, we believe that it will be equally useful for academics and practitioners who want to understand and meet the increased challenges facing HRM in the current global crisis and beyond.

References

Clegg, C., Kemp, N. and Legge, K. (1984) *Case Studies in Organizational Behaviour*. London: Paul Chapman Publishers.

Hoffman, R. and Ruemper, F. (1991) *Organizational Behavior: Canadian Cases and Exercises*. Whitby, ON: Captus Press.

Vaughan, E. (1994) The trial between sense and sentiment: a reflection on the language of HRM. *Journal of General Management*, 19(3): 20–32.

Wilmott, H. (1993) Strength is ignorance; slavery is freedom: managing culture in modern organizations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 30(4): 515–53.