

Paradoxes and tensions in HRM: Exploring the field and moving ahead

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Call for Papers

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Tensions and ambiguities are inherent in organizational life and frequent anecdotal evidence is available in the literature on HRM in general and on International HRM in particular. It seems to be widely acknowledged that HR managers face tensions and ambiguities. Since Karen Legge (1978) has characterized HR managers as ‘victims of ambiguity’ and outlined corresponding ‘vicious cycles’, scholars have begun to explore different types of tensions and the consequences of tensions on HR practitioners. Examples mentioned in the literature are, among others, tensions between added economic value vs. moral value, hard vs. soft HRM, or core vs. peripheral workers.

Currently, we observe a rising interest of HRM scholars in understanding the nature of tensions in the management of workforce. While the terms duality, paradox, ambiguity and tension are widely used in contemporary HRM research, the underlying concepts and theoretical assumptions are rarely explored systematically. In addition, research in HRM has focused largely on describing tensions and their effects on HR managers or employees and how to avoid them. With few exceptions, the work on tensions in HRM has emphasized the negative consequences on HR managers and their jobs (e.g., stress, dissatisfaction, helplessness, work-related health problems or inertia in decision-making). Confronted with tensions on a daily basis, HR managers become “victims of ambiguity” (Legge 2005). In contrast, organization theory scholars view tensions as a source of change and innovation. While we acknowledge the existence of negative effects, we argue that HR managers do not necessarily have to be passive victims, but that they can actively respond to tensions and even take advantage of them. In other words, positive effects of tensions and paradox seem to be either ignored in HRM or taken for granted.

In this workshop we seek to explore recent developments in studying tensions in HRM and theoretical perspectives that help to increase our understanding of tensions, their origin and dynamics in HRM, and how they can be dealt with. We are interested in papers that address questions such as: What tensions are of relevance for HRM and why/how are they (not) experienced by HRM and employees? How are these paradoxical tensions dealt with in HRM today and how could they be dealt with? By exploring the usefulness of frameworks for paradox from organization theory for HRM research, we hope to sharpen the theoretical underpinning in the debate on tensions in HRM. Moreover, we seek to contribute to an understanding of if/how HR actors can address tensions proactively and positively – instead of being paralyzed by the (fear of) unfolding dynamics, victimizing HR managers and employees, or ignoring and suppressing tensions.

Deadlines

Abstract submission (approximately 500 words): November 15, 2012

Notification of acceptance: December 3, 2012

Submission of full paper (maximum 8,000 words): January 31, 2013

Contact

Please email your submissions to the workshop to Julia Brandl, Innsbruck (Julia.brandl@uibk.ac.at) and Ina Ehnert, Louvain (Ina.ehnert@uclouvain.be). If you have any questions, feel free to contact any members of the workshop organizing committee.

Venue

Innsbruck University School of Management is located in the center of the largest city in the Austrian Alps with 125,000 inhabitants. The city is surrounded by beautiful ski and hiking resorts and only short drives away from world-famous ski resorts such as Soelden, Ischgl, and St. Anton. Innsbruckians can reach the 2350m high Hafelekar ski resort through a 30 minutes cable car ride departing 500 meters west of the entrance of the school. Innsbruck is internationally known for its picturesque downtown and the beautiful environment. It is also known as a center for mountain sport enthusiasts. Major cities such as Berlin, London, Paris, Prag, Munich, or Roma are easily reachable. Innsbruck airport is only 20 minutes away from downtown connecting the city conveniently to the world. The school is part of the University of Innsbruck, founded 1669, which currently hosts about 20,000 students and 3,500 employees.

Conveners

Julia Brandl is Professor of Human Resource Management at University of Innsbruck School of Management where she specializes on institutional perspectives on work and HRM. Her research interests center on the values of HRM, performance evaluation and the legitimacy of the HR profession. In her current projects she analyzes the emergence of contradictory expectations to HRM and organizational responses. Her work has been published in journals including Human Resource Management, International Journal of Human Resource Management, Human Resource Management Journal and Journal of Management Inquiry.

Ina Ehnert is Professor of Human Resource Management with a specialization in Corporate Social Responsibility and sustainability, Louvain School of Management, Belgium. She has published her PhD in 2009 on the topic 'Sustainable Human Resource Management: A conceptual and exploratory analysis from a paradox perspective. Ina has actively attended the paradox tracks organized for the EGOS colloquium in 2010 and 2013. In particular, she is interested in research on paradoxes and tensions in HRM, Sustainable HRM, and expatriation.

Dionne Pohler is an Assistant Professor at the Edwards School of Business at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada. Her primary research interests center around union impact, strategic human resource management and the role of the HR profession. She has published her work in Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society and Human Resource Management. She has received a number of national research fellowships and grants, including a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Standard Research Grant.

Risto Sääntti works as an associate professor in the University of Vaasa Department of Management, and has been responsible for the topics of strategic human resource management, diversity management and cross-cultural management. Risto has held several managerial positions in HR in large multinational organizations. His PhD from year 2001 focused on cultural integration in a cross-border bank organization merger. A dilemma or paradox analysis lens has been of interest to him, and utilized in research first time in year 2003 book article.