Exploring the role of HR practitioners in pursuit of Organizational Effectiveness in Higher Educational Institutions

Abstract

This paper focuses on how HR professionals view their role in contributing to organizational effectiveness in the HE sector. Drawing on interview data, we trace how rival definitions of organizational effectiveness relate to two emergent conceptions of rationality. Firstly we identify *instrumental* forms of rationality based on assessments of how well (or efficiently) organisations achieve pre-ordained objectives. Secondly, we identify *stakeholder satisfaction* models of organisational effectiveness, which concern the extent to which competing needs of stakeholders are satisfied and, thus, presuppose a more dialogic view of rationality. Our findings suggest that HR professionals do support attempts to re-orientate their institutions towards a top-down form of organisation, which would privilege high-level objectives and efficiency. This we argue implies a move away from a more traditional view of universities as discursive and participatory organisations, where effectiveness is regarded as meeting the varied needs of stakeholders, such as academics, students and the wider society, in a balanced way. However, whilst the HRM professionals largely favour such a shift, they acknowledge limitations to the extent that is practical or even entirely desirable.

Keywords: Organisational Change, New Public Management, Organisational Effectiveness, HRM Reform Organisational Rationality, Higher Education.

Introduction

The underlying logic of recent public sector reforms across many countries (i.e. the 'New Public Management') can be related to the quest for the three E's; Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness (see, for example, Hood, 1995, Deem, 2004, Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004, Truss, 2008, Boyne 2002). New Public Management and related managerialism of the public sector calls for a set of values and practices drawing on a free market philosophy with an emphasis on cost control and efficiency (Diefenbach, 2009: 893). Whilst specific definitions of Organisational Effectiveness (OE) are seldom advanced, pursuit of effectiveness has often led to a focus on cost reduction policies (Dawson and Dargie 2002, Boyne, 1999) and this is evident in the pay restraint across the Public Sector and requirement for efficiency as set out by the department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) in its most recent higher education funding allocation (HEFCE, 2013). However, OE is a broad concept; it has different definitions and related perspectives, is applicable across different organisational levels and relates different organisational objectives and purposes (Mullins, 2007: 756).

The paper begins with attempts to define the concept of OE and explore its relation to ideas of organisational rationality. The impact of NPM on understanding changing perspectives on organisational effectiveness is then considered before we explore the role of human resource management, and human resource practitioners specifically, in pursuit of OE in the higher education sector. In particular, we are interested in whether definitions of effectiveness based on *process* are being displaced by definitions based on *output*.

In this paper, we provide theoretical and empirical insights about OE and the role of HRM in UK Higher Education Institutions. A key focus of this work is on the attitudes of HRM professionals, contra to the majority of scholarly work on Universities, which focuses upon the Academic.

Organisational effectiveness and rationality

Understanding the pursuit and attainment of OE within a specific context presupposes agreed notions of rationality. Rationality and related terms, such as rationalisation, are 'central in discussion of the formation of organisations, in definitions of organisations, and in studies of their functions and functioning' (Schreurs, 2000:1). The concept of rationality in organizational contexts has a long history, and following Weber (1978), is often taken to mean 'the rational consideration of alternative means to achieve [an] end (goal)' (Weber, 1978:26). This allows for the choice of alternative means to an end to be based on relevant arguments, as distinct from feelings and emotions.

However, rationality is not an absolute concept (Snellen, 2002): policies are more or less rational or may be partially rational. More broadly, rationality has become characterised by the increasing role of calculation and control in social life, accompanied by the declining salience of traditional values and norms of society; although, of course, there are alternative views of rationality. The definitions of OE within the academic literature draw broadly on the following perspectives:

Instrumental and Economic Rationality

Instrumental rationality refers to the use of quantitative calculation and accounting procedures that help to achieve an action or make a decision (Weber, 1978). Rationality

3

depends here on numerical and calculative standards that start with the end goals and then measure the performance towards achieving these goals. According to this type of rationality, OE is 'the degree to which an organisation realises its goals in a resource efficient way' (Daft, 1995: 98). However, technical decisions are limited unless economic questions of comparative costs have been answered. Thus economic rationality refers to the evaluation and selection of alternatives in terms of the most cost-effective means of achieving ends and it applies when two or more options are in competition with each other.

This perspective shares an instrumentally rational view of OE. It presupposes a unitary organization, with clear and non-conflicting objectives that are accepted by all. Similarly, blame and sanction for failure to achieve goals (cost-effectively) is regarded as legitimate. This perspective has clear links to the philosophy of positivism and embraces managerialist techniques, such as performance appraisal. Perspectives based on instrumental rationality are primarily orientated toward achieving clear, non-conflicting economic goals that are accepted by all organisational members (Broadbent and Laughlin, 2009, Roy and Dugal, 2005). According to this type of rationality the managerialist perspective treats organisational effectiveness as rooted in economic principles and motives (the attainment of a maximum positive difference between benefits and costs). Accordingly, technical decisions cannot be settled until the economic questions of comparative costs have been answered. Thus, economic rationality has the same principle of adapting a 'means to an end' but with more consideration to the principle of 'economizing' and calculation. Therefore, the evaluation and selection of alternatives when two or more options are in competition with each other, involves the

cost- benefit nexus (Hartwing, 1978, 2006).

Boyne (2003) refers to the 'goal model' as being particularly relevant to public sector organisations. It is based on the idea that each organisation has objectives to achieve that may change over time, but that initial goals and orientations continue to guide the strategic direction of an organisation. Despite the clarity of this model, public service organisations (including Higher Education Institutions) may not have formal goals that are clearly expressed in legislation or other documents and their goals are likely to be articulated as a general mission rather than concrete objectives. Moreover, public organisations often have a multiplicity of goals that can, and frequently do, conflict. All of this makes the application of instrumental rationality problematic.

OE is thus seen as being orientated to achieve goals and use techniques such as performance to achieve a cost-effective outcome. This perspective adopts an Instrumental Rationality view in which performance indicators are generated by formal rational methods where measures come first and values follow. Significantly, however, 'political' pressures are largely absent from the preceding argument and in organizational settings these are likely to have a substantial influence on defining end goals and on determining the main techniques needed to apply these goals. This is particularly the case in the public sector, which is governed by bureaucratic rules and procedures. These factors restrict managers' ability to take instrumentally rational decisions.

Social / Communicative Rationality

Alternatively, rationality can be considered in the context of the organisation as a social system.   Here rationality is based on interpersonal communication rather than

instrumental thinking or calculative manipulation of alternatives. This concept of rationality reflects the ability of actors to use communicative actions to interact in pursuit of personal and social goals (Habermas, 1984 and 1987, in Benton and Craib, 2001). According to this view, communicative rationality is oriented towards conflict resolutions through negotiation among organisational members. Such an approach relates to social constructionism as a philosophical position, where the nature of reality in organisations is understood to be social, process-orientated and emergent. Communicative styles of management (Herman and Renz, 2008: 26) may be considered, therefore, to be contextually appropriate. Indeed, Gaertner and Ramnarayan (1983: 97) argue that

'Organisational effectiveness is not a thing, or a goal, or a characteristic of organisational outputs or behaviours, but rather a state of relations within and among the relevant constituencies of the organisation'.

These perspectives can be understood as a '*stakeholder satisfaction'* view of OE. Here, the assessment of organisational effectiveness rests not simply on the output being produced, but also on the decision making process for the production of these outputs. This implies deliberative and participative approaches to decision-making: the organisation is seen in pluralistic terms, with managers seeking to convince enough (powerful) stakeholders of the organisation's effectiveness. Moreover, it follows that effectiveness is regarded not as an end state, but a continuous process of relating the organisation to its members.

New Public Management

A key theme of the introduction of NPM ideas into the public sector is to improve public

sector effectiveness via a shift from 'accountability for processes' to 'accountability for managing outcomes' (Hoque, 2005: 369) and this is often associated with a managerialist perspective on organisational effectiveness discussed above. Therefore NPM strategies have an emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness and quality, and aim to make organisations more results-oriented (Noblet et al., 2006:335). This implies. shifting organisations from stakeholder satisfaction models to instrumental rationality models of OE; introducing explicit standards and measures of performance, placing emphasis on output control, and private sector styles of management practice, etc. (Hood, 1991).

Identifying the presence of two possibly divergent approaches to organizational efficiency within public sector organizations raises important questions about the relative strengths and weakness of each approach and an empirical question about the extent of adoption and change across the sector. In this context, how HR managers in the UK's HE sector conceive organisational effectiveness and perceive their role in the attainment of organizational efficiency are intriguing questions and we set out to explore this in relation to the Higher Education context below.

Effectiveness and Human Resource Management

The concept of Human Resource Management is generally accepted to have emerged from US business schools in the mid to late 1980s in specific response to the relative decline of US economic and industrial performance in the context of the rise of Japan as a manufacturing superpower (see, for example, Guest, 1987; Storey, 1992; Legge, 1995). However, despite this specific historical context, key elements in HRM thinking can be traced back to at least the Human Relations movement of the 1920s (Kaufman, 2011).

Indeed, Personnel Management, generally considered a forerunner of HRM, is largely based upon recognition of the 'social' character of work and employment and contrasts with management styles which treat labour as atomistic and primarily economic. This highlights a central dilemma, or conflicting impulse in HRM, the degree to which employees are seen as an asset or a cost. HRM is often seen as viewing human resource as key to long-term organizational performance and competitive advantages and demands policies which, at an organization level, align business strategy and employee relations practice. There has been significant empirical research into the link between HR practice and organizational performance (i.e Delaney and Huselid, 1996, Singh, 2012) but the importance of HR and its contribution to organizational success has increasingly been brought into question (Guest, 1987; Boselie et al., 2005; Guest, 2011)

However, HR is not a static field. Of particular note is the rise of the 'business partner' models of HRM based on work originally carried out by Ulrich (1997). This is often claimed to be a fundamental rethinking of HRM (CIPD, 2005, cited in Francis and Keegan, 2006) where 'HR practitioners partner with line managers to help them reach their goals through strategy formulation and execution' (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005: 27). Although more critical research is required to validate this claim, it us certainly ture the Business Partner thinking has been influential from a practitioner perspective. Thus, following Ulrich, there are a number of potential models for the role and activities of the HRM function, depending on whether the focus is on strategy or operations and on process or people.

Figure 1

A move from the bottom to the top of the figure (1) (i.e. towards 'business partnership')

may offer HR professionals a more strategic role and enhance their status within the organisation. Moreover, Guest and King (2004) suggest that a move to a 'managerially-minded' HR function would remove the inherent tensions in balancing the employment relationship previously experienced by HR professionals.

Ulrich's work has been influential in seeking to engender a shift in perceptions of HRM towards business partnership and in many ways match a state sponsored drive toward partnerships in the management of public service (Todnem and Macleod, 2008) Underpinning Ulrich's conceptual framework is the belief that HR could *'create value'* and contribute to organizations at a strategic and operational level transforming HR from an *'ineffective, incompetent and costly value-sapping function'* (Ulrich, 1998) into a *'critical contributor to business success' (*Ulrich et al, 2009).

The influence of NPM might then suggest that the modern University is fertile ground for HRM functions based on a business partnering model. If this is the case, however, it also raises questions about the effacing of traditional models and HR practices such as the employee champion role and this is, of course, controversial. (See, for example, the critique by Francis and Keegan, 2006). It seems reasonable to suppose, moreover, that this will be even more the case in organisations like universities, which traditionally have had cultures which value professionalisation and participation highly. This raises some potentially interesting questions concerning HR practitioners in higher education sector and how they organizing, determining priorities and resolve conflicts (Alfes et al., 2010)

In light of these questions, this study aims to explore how HRM practitioners themselves are making sense of their role in the face of new models of HR and in the context of

NPM reform. The role of HR professionals as key actors in UK Universities has been obscured by debates that centre on academics and senior managers, but our challenge is to make sense of how HR managers seek to contribute to achieving in the HE sector.

Effectiveness in Higher Education

Higher education in the UK faces massive pressures for change driven by imperatives as diverse as funding, quality, internationalisation and technology. A number of recent changes in the funding and management of HEIs have meant that institutions have become increasingly accountable for measurable outcomes (Rosser et al, 2003:1). Greater competition for scarce resources together with decreasing public trust in higher education practices have resulted in demands for universities to demonstrate publicly their productivity, effectiveness and efficiency. In the absence of a broader debate about the scope, scale and structure of Universities, general goals such as 'employability' and 'impact' are increasing dominating agendas understood as best achieved via standardised multi-faculty institutional forms. There is a significant change in the way the effectiveness of universities is viewed and evaluated and this is therefore increasingly seen as being about economic outcomes such as employability of graduates and value for money. However such is the state of flux of the Higher Education sector, analysis must understood as interim.

Cameron (1978, 1986) argues that higher education institutions have traditionally resisted systematic assessments of their effectiveness. University staff have, for example, argued that HEIs are unlike other types of organisations and, therefore, traditional approaches to assessment and measurement are not applicable. While judgments about university

effectiveness occur regularly (for example, by students, parents, funders, and employers),

no unambiguous criteria for effectiveness had been identified. There are however signs

that this resistance is starting to wane. Smart and Hamm (1993) conclude that there are

other factors that influence effectiveness for higher education (e.g. decision making

process, organisational culture and managerial practices).

Yet despite the intensification of forms of assessment that rank and order educational

institutions, the literature on public service management is replete with cautionary tales

relating to the effectiveness of performance measurement and its potential dysfunctions

and paradoxes. Chaharbaghi (2007), for example, argues that applying managerialism led

to ineffective public services management and 'added a costly administrative burden that

is undermining the morale, motivation and goodwill of public sector professionals…

destroying accomplishment, satisfaction and motivation, and in the end, is destroying

performance (Chaharbaghi, 2007, 319–320).

Higher education in the UK (and elsewhere) has experienced a decline in resource

allocation with a consequent increase in staff-student ratios, as well as attempts to

transplant managerial techniques drawn from the private sector. Barry et al. (2003) point

to an increasing emphasis on the managerialist perspectives and on marketisation across

the sector. Significantly, these changes often involve performance management targets

and the introduction of systems of appraisal in the context of reduced resources and

increased competition. They conclude that from an academic perspective, NPM may be

seen as a governmental initiative and a means to facilitate a growth in student numbers

and financial revenues. However, whilst this analysis is now well established, the views

of managers and particularly HRM professionals in HE are less well explored.

If the deployment of NPM techniques is seen as an attempt to influence public sector organisations to move their emphasis from the stakeholder satisfaction model to a more instrumental rationality model, we might well expect this be accompanied by HRM departments in universities shifting their main focus from the role of 'employee champion' and 'administrative experts' to that of 'strategic partner' and 'change agent'. Such developments, however, would represent a significant change from the traditional model of HEIs as organisations, which seek, primarily, to balance the needs of their stakeholders.

As might be expected, this has been the cause of much dispute and, indeed, resistance in organisations where the prevalent culture values deliberation and participation. The (largely adverse) attitudes of public sector professionals, including lecturers, to these developments are quite clearly established (Barry et al 2003) However, the views of HRM managers are less explored and research into this should be of interest and significance.

Research Methodology

In order to explore the perspectives of HR professionals in UK HEIs, this study is based on a qualitative research framework intended to capture and amplify the voice of practitioners. Initially all HR directors of the UK Universities member organisations (133 institutions) were contacted with an invitation to participate. From the responses received questionnaires were distributed and completed, follow-up interviews with nine HR directors carried out and documentary analysis of HR strategy documents undertaken.

This study, therefore, draws on two sources of data: in-depth semi-structured interviews with HR directors from nine UK HEIs and a documentary analysis of codified HRM strategies in these and other universities. These case studies varied in location, type, size and the foundation year of adopting the HRM strategy (i.e. the year when universities decided to apply strategic direction in HRM through setting and adopting a HRM strategy)

In six of the case studies, a HRM strategy was formulated and applied after 2008, whereas in three of them, formulating and applying a HRM strategy started from 2002. The reason behind that could be the governmental call for adopting HRM strategy, which started in 2003 when the White Paper (The Future of Higher Education) agreed that government should link extra funding to UK HEIs that adopted a HR strategy, to mark its approval.

The following table (Table 1) summaries some of the descriptive data for the case studies involved in this research:

Table 1

Toward a more strategic HRM profile: 'Being Strategic' within a context of constraint

Not surprisingly it was evident that almost all HR professionals interviewed espoused a positive view regarding the value of HR strategy for universities. Furthermore they claimed that the sector was increasingly receptive to the potential valued added that HR can bring. Yet it was also clear that there were still battles to be won regarding the

centrality of HR in university decision-making:

'*HRM has [to have] a much higher profile. It [must be] seen as a business critical and strategic function not just a transactional service' (HR Director UI, Pre 92).*

Several of our respondents suggested a degree of resistance to the strategic integration of HR in University practice but, whilst this was hinted at by several HR directors, they were also keen to stress that they felt that HRM professionals can play a much more proactive role than has previously been the case. This contributed to a pervading sense that the full potential of HR in the sector had yet to be fully realised. It was also clear the grounds for the potential contribution of HR to OE is becoming increasingly specific. For example

'*Human resource management [in my institution has] changed to have more of a focus on strategic management, performance measurement, talent management and employee engagement. It's much more than the usual sort of stuff about hiring and firing. This requires constant review of policies to keep up with legislative developments. (HR Director UF, Pre 92).*

The specificity of HR tasks delimited here clearly and focuses upon measurable outcomes. Whilst these are general employee focused tasks there was also evidence of key engagement in mission critical tasks. Despite the assertion of the importance of the role of HR, directors were keen to stress the emergent nature of HR strategy and the importance of the concept of alignment between employees and organizational objectives.

'*The university's intention [is] to develop an increasingly strategic approach to Human Resource Management, recognising that our success depends on commitment, creativity*

and professionalism of our staff and ensuring that all staff understand their role in delivering success for the university (HRM Strategy UC: 1, Post 92)

Sentiments such as these were common, leading to a sense that HR directors had not quite been able to secure the 'buy-in' of all university stakeholders to the importance of HR strategy. Following Pollitt's (2000:184) argument that an organisation operating under NPM is likely become more concerned with strategy and less with carrying out routine activities or administrative roles, HR directors in these cases appear ambitious to achieve a genuinely more strategic role. Whilst this, of course, reflects their professional background and interests, we can also understand it as an attempt to exert influence to control their own destiny. This is most clearly voiced by HR directors who talk about the need to "*demonstrate*" value added and effectiveness:

'The main task of HR is to show how HR can contribute to University objectives, to teaching excellence, to research excellence, to a broadening of the University's strategy. My role is to try to demonstrate how HR can achieve that link' (HR Director UA, Post 92).

Their assertion of the importance of HR strategically can be perceived "*as yet another tool to pursue group interests and to grant individuals privileges they could not get otherwise*" (By et al. 2008: 23) and a battle to *'increase the authority, privileges and influence of power- and career-oriented managers'* (By et al., 2008:23).

There was also evidence that HR Directors seek to support a more strategic approach and there were clear and high expectations about how the Business Partner role can contribute to achieving strategic objectives. As shown by the HR director in University F that is pre 1992 university and started to have a HRM strategy from 2002 , management of *'outputs'*

is increasingly an objective of HRM reform. The use of the *'performance measurement'*
in the above quote indicates that the perspective of the HR professional in this case is
essentially economistic.

A key theme to emerge in discussion with HR directors is the demands and opportunities
that a changing legislative landscape provides. Indeed there is a perception that change in
the legislative landscape will continue to influence HRM reform at a strategic level. For
example:

*'We work within the framework that the University is a public funded body. 80% of our
income comes via the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). And so
the main influence that has is that our people management processes need to be approved
by HEFCE and deemed as modern and fit for purpose' (HR Director UC, Post 92)*

The requirement for HR developments to be reviewed and approved by funding bodies
and the importance of satisfying governmental and funding requirements results in a
rather limited view from the HR Directors to the prospect of organizational developments
in their work. Beyond the legislative context the key issue identified by HEI HR
practitioners is the importance of the alignment between HR and university strategy,
which is perceived as crucial for HRM practice:

*'I think you've got to accept that you're one small cog in rather a large machine. But that
your overall duty is to make sure that machine turns quite well. The university has got a
board of trustees and the board of trustees set the university's strategy. One of my
obligations is to make sure that the HR strategy does align fully with that. And I have to
report to the board of trustees to make clear that that is so. So I'm quite happy about
that' (HR Director UB, Pre 92).*

However, this seems to challenge the Business Partner model, insofar as HR is clearly seen as responding to strategy rather than shaping it. Thus the linkage between HR strategy and organization strategy is important for understanding the overall direction of HR and its day-to-day operation. These concerns were echoed by the HR professional in case (F):

'[T]he university's strategy and objectives has to be underpinned by our core values, these flow through into our HR practice. Yes we have reference to our strategic plan and values'. (HR Director UF, Pre 92)

Part of HR's role in this context seems to be based on a coordinating (rather than leading) function which seeks to fit notions of HRM strategy into wider university-level strategy. Formulating and assessing the effectiveness of HRM strategy is complex and may even be more important than assessing other forms of organizational effectiveness, because HRM supports and develops a variety of goals from different partners who have different priorities (Ahmed, 1999).

A third central theme to emerge from HR directors indicates a desire to initiate more systematic approaches to performance monitoring, measurement and reward management:

'In higher education where students are paying considerable sums of money for their education as undergraduates and postgraduates, I think that we have, therefore, a responsibility to make sure that the product that we deliver, which is their education, is of the best quality and I think you achieve that through your HR policies and procedure by making sure that, for example, performance appraisal processes [are] in place and you are not afraid to use them' (HR Director UA, Post 92)

'Well I think our staff development seeks to achieve the required quality standards. I think our pay policies help to do that because we have a pay policy called 'The Contribution Pay' where we award people two increments above the top of their pay scale if they can demonstrate a contribution to service over and above that normally expected of their grade. So that's rewarding excellence over and above, excellent performance. We pay contribution pay to about 11% of our workforce. They have to demonstrate that they've enhanced service policy and if they do, we reward that' (HR Director UC, *Post 92**)*

These and other responses indicate an increasing intention to link the application of the quality standards in place in HEIs to payment rewards given to academic and non-academic staff. Whilst, however, there appears to be clarity around this desire, less clear is the proposed mechanics of how this would be achieved in practice. No concrete example of how the exercise of judgment over the quality of academic work and the role of academics in determining quality standards was offered.

Complexity of the sector was well understood and many practitioners recognised the inherent difficult of measuring quality:

'The critical question is how can you measure performance for academics in universities? …. we are working with academic colleagues to make sure we have that flexibility in setting targets for their performance. Within our professional service departments you can perhaps more easily set targets. But on the academic departments it's very difficult to set those targets because when we set targets and use tools they must recognise quality as well as quantity. And the message that our Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor have got to get over to staff is "We've got to work smarter in the future, so we can all provide a better performance with possibly less resources." So it's a real challenge for the higher education sector' (HR Director UD, *Pre 92**)*

Despite the difficulties of definition and measurement outlined above, it is frequently the

case that formal HRM strategies produce by these practitioners seek to articulate a link between individual and organizational performance.

'For academic staff, appraisal discussions will be more explicitly linked to their contribution to research, knowledge transfer and scholarship, alongside their teaching and learning responsibilities' (HR Strategy UC: 3, Post 92)

However, our respondents confirmed that HR as a discipline may be moving towards a greater strategically aligned role; many issues have been raised regarding pushing HRM further into hybrid business oriented roles that may impact on university effectiveness and performance.

The move toward Managerialism (Managing for results)

A review of the literature relating to the implementation of NPM-based reforms suggests that organizations are required to develop strategies to control both their results and their inputs (e.g. Deem et al., 2008; Teelken, 2012). This entails, in many cases, the development of performance appraisal programmes and standards that should help organizations to link input and output systemically.

'Performance appraisal was based on what do you need to do in terms of your development to achieve a better level of performance. We are actually over the next few months going to be rolling that out and getting people to link into how their performance relates to the standards expected of their particular level and have them performance appraised against those standards (HR Director UG, Post 92)

'For performance appraisal we use something called HERA, (Higher Education Role Analysis), so we grade all the jobs using HERA. We try and ensure people have clear job descriptions and person specifications. So that's clearly a tool that we use. We are trying

to change the appraisal process. We see it as critical that everyone has a one-to-one discussion with their manager and told how they performed in the last year and what their objectives will be for the coming year' (HR Director UC, Pre 92)

Here then we find evidence of a move towards what might be termed a 'professional standards' approach to performance management in the HE. This move appears to create more pressures on HR professionals to ensure that organisational members know and understand what is expected of them (often expressed in terms of performance standards) and have the skills and ability to deliver on these expectations. Thus, HR professionals seem to support a broadly defined Managerialist perspective which focuses on performance management targets and many have sought to achieve this through the design and introduction of a system of appraisal. This adds weight to the argument that HR Directors tend toward a more results orientated focus and consequent IR model of OE. A key theme to emerge in the discussion was the limited participation of academics in setting their performance standards and performance appraisals and it was well acknowledged that this is a key source of tension between academics and managers. The following quote support this argument:

'We want every employee and particularly academics to be able to understand what they do to contribute to the university strategy. So that means long term improving communication, long term changing the culture to produce that alignment and changing the skills of management and academics to making them better at people development' (HRMDUC, Post 92)

This finding seems to suggest a challenge for HR in terms of developing constructive relationships with academics around the nature and definition of performance. In many ways this echoes Ulrich's argument (Ulrich and Beatty, 2001) that HR professionals

should create new forms of engagement with employees to achieve HRM reform; but also demonstrates the difficulties inherent in achieving this. This also supports Burnes et al's argument (2014: 919) that change in UK Universities have led to *'an erosion of traditional forms of collegiality and have had a distancing effect on the relationship between academics and senior managers within universities'*. Despite the importance of 'engagement' with participants of the appraisal process in the literature, both in discussion and in formalised strategy the key vehicle of performance management in HEIs remains 'Management' broadly defined.

'As a part of the new process (Appraisal), we will focus on developing managers' skills in setting objectives, assessing competencies and giving constructive feedback on performance. We will also provide training and support in the implementation of University Policies on occupational performance' (HR Strategy UC: 3, Post 92)

It is clear from the above quote that the HRM strategy in case (C) supports the IR model of universities through applying regular imposed appraisals to achieve economic objectives. The extract from the HRM strategy also shows the importance of development programmes for management to ensure that they are involved and engaged in achieving university objectives. The key role of line managers is further outlined by the HR director:

'It's ensuring that appraisal happens consistently across the organisation, right. Appraisal is patchy and some people can work for years for the university and never be appraised. We want to change that. We want to make sure it happens across the university. So, we will be investing in training for managers in acting as reviewers of performance and development needs. But for us performance and development go hand in hand, so we assess performance where we can on a one to one basis but then provide

support to meet people's development needs' (HR Director UA, Post 92)

These words indicate that the HR Director in case (A) recognizes the importance of 'Managerialism' across the whole university and supports managers' responsibility to set and apply performance management. In contrast to the view above which fails to allow for input from other participants in the appraisal process, different views of HRM strategy did emerge and this was reflected in the language of 'partnership'. Interestingly, however, this was often articulated in policy documents rather than by the interviewees themselves:

'The HR strategy recognizes that staff are the university's most valuable and costly resource and that the focused and effective performance of those staff is critical to the university's success and indeed, survival…Developing performance needs to be a partnership between staff and management. Best practice suggests that this is likely to be enhanced by the adoption and consistent application of an effective personal development and performance review process (PDPR)' (HR Strategy UA: 11, Post 92)

Is Higher Education different?

The literature suggests that effective performance appraisal in the public sector differs from that in the private sector (Brown 2008, Boyne, 2002). In line with this, HR professionals seemed aware of the unique characteristics of the sector in the application of Managerialism and performance management systems.

'I think universities are different to a private sector company. The Higher Education sector hasn't necessarily been performance focused in the past. When I talk to our Trade Unions on this they prefer to talk about achievement rather than performance, so performance is still quite a controversial term. So we don't use tools to measure individual performance what we're doing is we've changed our appraisal process to a 'performance and development review' process. We're piloting it now and we're hoping

to provide a one to one context within which employees are comfortable in talking about their performance but we need a culture change here. If I took that question out to Faculties, people will be uncomfortable with it… Yes in the private sector it is day to day evaluation... In university you have to be very careful' (HR Director UC, Post 92)

Following this and other comments presented earlier, it seems that HEIs are attempting to move HR practice from being based on a stakeholder satisfaction model to being based on an IR model; but with some difficulty. The evidence presented here demonstrates that applying performance management is a challenge for the HR professional in case study (C) and for many practitioners this relates to the differences in culture between the private and the public sectors and HEIs especially. Indeed, it may point to a 'hybrid' emerging, which has some characteristics of the public sector and some of the private.

It is interesting, for example, that the use of the term 'achievement' may be more acceptable than the term 'performance' to many HE organizational constituents. This in turn relates to the intangible nature of an educational service that is mainly concerned with knowledge and understanding transactions which are, by their nature, difficult to measure. As HR Director UE (Pre 92) commented:

'*HR is valued in the institution but no one really considers how to count it . There are metrics but it is really about partnership building with the managers and academics and their feedback should count.'*

Deem (2004: 111) points out that '*Managing academic knowledge is not remotely comparable to managing retailing and industrial production and it can be particularly challenging to manage'*. In this context, the HR professional's reference to 'culture change' for academics, in case A, as a means to establish and apply performance

management successfully, seems overly simplistic. This, in fact, represents one of the main challenges that face HR professionals in UK HEIs when attempting to move forward to the IR model of universities.

In summary, the HR professionals' appear keen to apply Managerialism in HEIs. This seems driven by a desire to secure a more strategic role for HR in HEIs, but it is also clear that the tools available to achieve this are severely limited. Important questions remain and key here is a clear awareness of the constraints and limitations specific to the HE sector. It is evident from the data presented that there is a tension and ambiguity about the appropriate role of HR practices in relation to the role HRM can (or, indeed, should) adopt and the legitimacy of that approach. Generally, we have found that the HR practitioners have an unclear view about the how they can apply Managerialism in HE for this to be effective, particularly with respect to academics. This supports Burnes et al (2014: 920) who claim that many university managers '*are still unprepared and untrained for their posts, quickly lose touch with the day-to-day reality of university life, tend to act in a short-term, transactional and inconsistent fashion, and over-focus on box-ticking exercises designed to appease funding bodies'*

The basic challenges to Managerialism in HE

The majority of HR professionals in the research found it difficult to articulate how they would evaluate the quality of academic work and how to deal with academic resistance to the movement toward the IR model. The HR professionals' perspective demonstrates that there are challenges in setting quality targets in HEIs because of financial constraints and because of the 'special status' of academics. Thus Teelken refers to 'professionals or

24

professionalism as a potential source of resistance to change at universities' (Teelken, 2012: 287)

A further constraint lies in what one on HR professionals termed 'a lack of corporateness'

'One of the biggest challenges for me is a lack of a sense of corporateness in universities. That a higher education institution doesn't think in the same way as other business organisations do in terms of things that are seen as corporate. I don't think we're corporately visible in that sense…Obviously we've got the logos for the university and we've won awards, etc., but I'm talking about how it's managed really. So that's quite a challenge' (HR Director UD, Pre 92)

'I have over 25 years' experience of working at senior levels in some of the world's largest/best business organisations. Expectations from the business are different from universities. This university has made some important changes in the areas of performance management, demand led development, internal communications, performance related pay and flexible benefits, to name just a few that I would expect to find in the more sophisticated private organisations. I do not however subscribe to the notion of private sector good, public sector bad, to do so would I feel run the risk of throwing a great deal of value out of the window' (HR Director UI, Pre 92)

'HR reform and managerialism in universities takes more time than in a more commercial environment. The challenge for the future will be how universities are able to transform themselves and do things more quickly in response to market changes' (HR Director UE, Pre 92)

The issue here is that in contrast to the private sector organizations, HR practitioners within HEIs are aware that business language and the change agenda in the public sector are necessarily different because of its different objectives, activities and ethos. The HR professional in case (I) for example acknowledges the particular nature of HEIs, in relation to applying reform and change, but also is clearly leans towards greater

managerialism to achieve reform objectives.

An important element that emerges is the way in which HR practitioners identify a lack of recognition or consideration of the importance of HR in HE compared to the private sector. This represents a reason for HR professionals to focus on advancing the strategic aspirations of HR. The role of HR is crucial in managing and controlling the culture, values, 'hearts and minds' of employees (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). All HR professionals participating in this research indicate that culture represents an important and basic challenge for HE reform:

'The main challenge for HRM change is culture. Lots of academics think that they should be in charge of the HR and they challenge your right to have anything to do with the running of the organisation. Academics would not view HR as a proper function [...]. There is a cultural gap between management and academics and bridging that cultural gap can sometimes be very, very hard. There isn't that cultural gap in the private sector interestingly. … My experience in the private sector was that employees are very grateful for assistance, support. And everyone thinks that HR manager is a person with credibility they will listen to you. That tends not to be the case here in universities' (HR Director UB, Pre 92)

Sentiments such as those expressed above make it clear that tensions exist in relationships between academics and HR managers. The HR professional holds that management power should be welcomed and appreciated as a key tool for change in HEIs. The quote also indicates that bridging the gap between what management wants to achieve in HEIs and academic freedom and autonomy is considered a difficult challenge.

However, the evidence here seems to modify the claims by Kogan and Hanney (2000) that there has been a *'shift in power from senior academics and their departments to the*

26

central institution and the dominance of systems over academic values'. (Kogan and

Hanney, 2000:186). Our findings suggest that whilst HR managers might desire this shift,

the tensions that exist suggest that it has yet to happen fully. This can also be related to

the work of Kirkpatrick and Ackroyd (2003, p. 526) who suggest that some professional

groups in public sector are working to reinforce their position over other groups. These,

in turn, feel they have been excluded from decision-making and that NPM has been done

'to them' and not 'with them'.

The data in this study indicates that HR professionals in HE institutions both promote and

apply Managerialism in their universities and are keen to play an active role in this

practice. However, there is a lack of trust and confidence between managers and

academics in HE sector, which may be because of managers are regarded as working to

strengthen their position and seeing this as being dependent on reducing academic power

and autonomy. This contrasts with By et al.'s argument that in applying Managerialism in

HE '*it is important for management to avoid mock-consultancy and provide stakeholders*

with a real opportunity of having an impact on change initiatives before implementation'

(By, et. al, 2008: 32)

Conclusion

For the organisations in this research, implementing HRM reform seems, to a large

extent, underpinned by a change in orientation from what we term a stakeholder

satisfaction model to an instrumentally rational approach. The role of HRM in this

movement is seen as crucial in pursuit of strategic alignment in order to achieve cost-

effectiveness goals, which represent the core objectives of Managerialism in Higher

Education. We note, however, the distance that this places HR practice from what might

be termed optimistic versions of practice informed by Business Partnering models.

The HR professionals represented here hold that the main challenge in HE reform is bridging the gap between management objectives of moving in a strategic direction and academics' objectives of maintaining academic freedom and autonomy. However, the tensions that are still evident in the material presented here suggest that the realities of changing from promoting academic freedom and autonomy to applying management practices to control academics (Kok et al. 2010) is exaggerated; at least for now. Indeed, it may well be that the result of change in the HE sector is to create 'hybrid' organisations, with features of traditional universities persisting alongside characteristics more familiar in businesses. That said, it is almost certainly the case that the current examples of widespread institutional mimesis across the sector are the outcome if institutions adopting risk-adverse strategy in the face of uncertainty produced by global changes in patterns of Higher Education and changes in National HE policy. It could be the case that greater diversity will emerge as markets reach maturation.

Our cases also suggest that there is only limited evidence of participation by, consideration of, and engagement with, academic staff in the design and the development of human resource management reform activities, for example, performance management. Indeed this lack of engagement seems to, support the notion that *'the power, status and role of academics in university governance and management have declined' (Deem et al., 2008:22).* In turn, this raises fears that, as By et al. (2008:32) suggest, '*Managerialism could be counter-productive, leading to a HE sector that is less effective and purposeful and, ultimately, weaker rather than stronger'*

At the same time, there is evidence that the recasting of the role of HR professionals as Business Partners is largely aspirational at present; although the perspective of the HR professionals supports the idea that the role of HR should become more strategic and more concerned with change management. Thus, whilst the findings indicate that HR professionals welcome the opportunity to adapt and be part of a more strategic approach, there is complexity, conflict and a lack of clarity in terms of how to apply this approach.

In contrast to arguments claimed by many in the HR literature that the function has now firmly established itself both in terms of status and of contribution to the OE (e.g. Armstrong, 2007; Shipton and Davis, 2008), many of the HR practitioners in this research felt that they still struggling to achieve professional status in HE institutions. This also supported by Caldwell (2003) who argued that there is both role conflict and role ambiguity within the HR professional as a result of the re-framing of HR. Similarly, Francis and Keegan (2006) have also questioned the impact of HRM reform on employees' commitment and social interactions in organisations.

That said, the data presented here highlights the complex and multi-faceted nature of HRM in HEIs, and while much of the literature to date has discussed 'traditional' and 'new' public sector HRM as polar opposites, what emerges from this study is that HR departments perform both of these roles at different times, and in different areas of activity.

In this paper, we have presented an empirical account of HRM in action and investigated how senior HR professionals themselves perceive and value reform of the HRM function

in UK Universities. In addressing the views of managers, a different perspective is explored from the more well documented academic perspective.

We propose two ideal types of OE: a stakeholder satisfaction model based on the need to balance the demands of different stakeholders and an instrumental rationality model which focuses on the cost-effective achievement of given objectives. In turn, the first model can be related to social and communicative forms of rationality and the second to notions of technical and economic rationality in organisations. Furthermore, it might be supposed that, under the influence of both the NPM and developments in thinking about HRM, such as the business partner approach, universities may be moving from a stakeholder satisfaction to an instrumentally rational model of OE (although not without some resistance).

The HR professionals in our cases largely support the view that the role of HR has changed over time and has been transformed (at least to some extent) from the traditional role (Employee Champion and Administrative Expert) to the business partner role (Strategic Partner and Change Agent); but there is in fact a constant moving between these roles. However, whilst the HR practitioners in UK universities view these changes as positive and claim that the HR role has grown in its contribution to HEIs' reform; this is not clearly reflected in how they report on their part in achieving managerial objectives. Indeed, this change in status may still be somewhat aspirational.

In all of the cases, there is some evidence that, to an extent, the role of HR has become

increasingly strategic, proactive and intended to apply more business-like practices. The

HR practitioners' views reflected the shift to apply a more managerially aligned role and

they generally welcome the managerial changes in HRM philosophy and practices.

Moreover, they expect more trends towards applying a strategic HRM role in HEIs in the

future. Yet it remains clear that the HR professionals in this research accept that

academics might still have the power to defend their autonomy and freedom, based on

their professionalism. This seems to be resulting in a 'hybrid' type of organisation, which

has some characteristics of the public sector and some of the private. This demonstrates

tensions and conflicts in relationships between academics and managers in setting HRM

strategic objectives and it reflects more challenges for HR professionals to apply strategic

reform whilst respecting academic status in higher education. Ultimately, they seem to

accept that there are limits to Managerialism and that some hybridisation may not only be

inevitable, but desirable.

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