Wicked problems (and solutions?) in Management Research

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'Wicked Problems; Wicked Solutions'

Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management

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OUTLINE:
What and how should we be studying:

1. **Practitioners' needs; and improving firm performance**
2. **Strategic management (or SHRM), organisational change, improvement**
3. **Global talent management**
4. **The real world**

5. **Using 'management science'**
6. **Research Impact**

7. **Looking forward**

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1.Focused on practitioners' needs, and on performance: Why not?

- **Who are the 'practitioners'?**
- **Who do we serve?**
  - Shareholders or stakeholders?
- **What is 'performance'?**
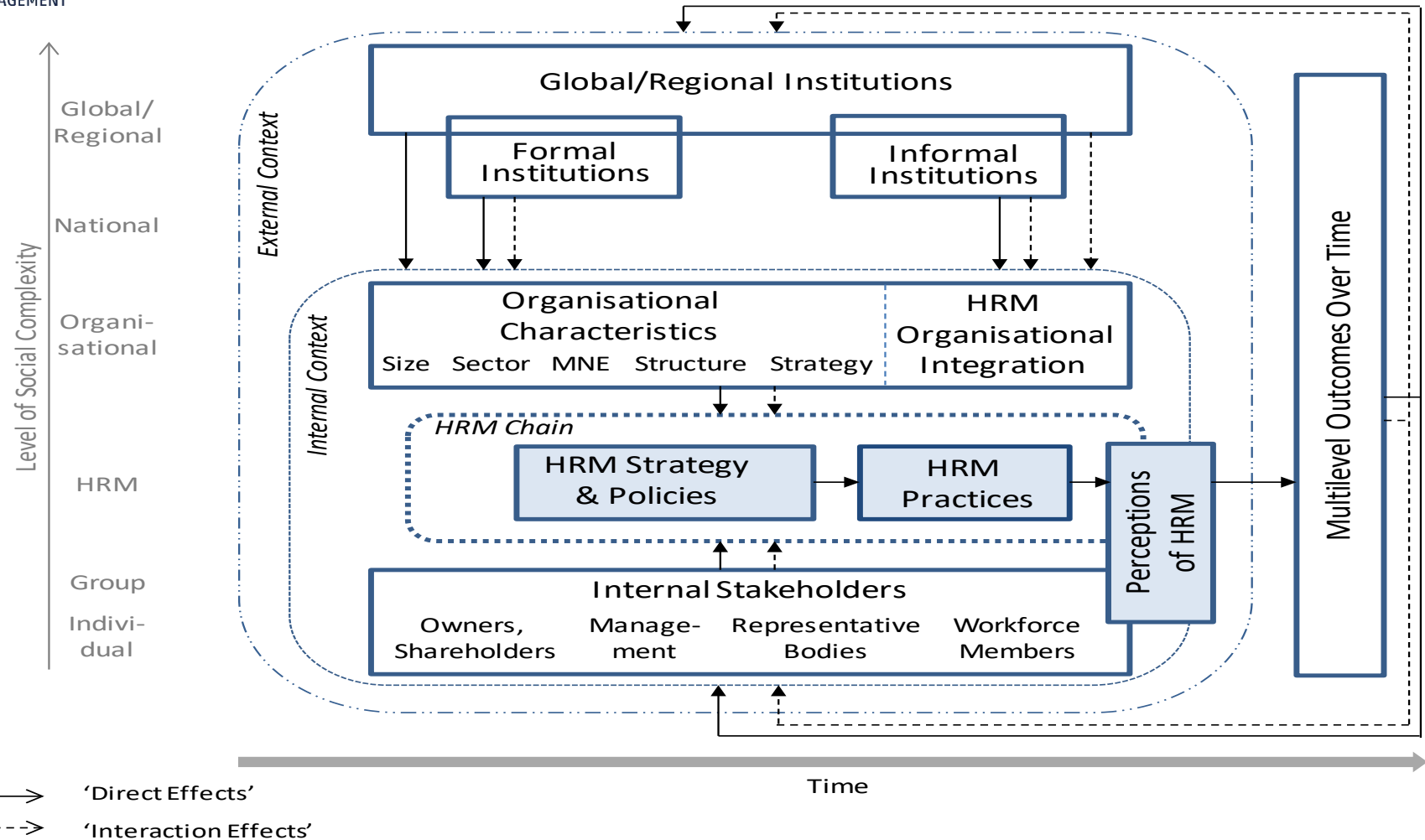- **Short-term or long-term outcomes?**

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2. Examining Strategic Management (SHRM), organisational change, improvement: Why not?

1. **SHRM (SIHRM) assumes that it is what management does that matters (and what they think that counts)**

2. **Of course it does but, apart from there being other stakeholders, and other views of what matters, managers are not free to do as they wish**

3. **'Context', particularly national context, size and sector, matters; and constrains what management can do, more than many like to believe**

Contextual model of HRM

Tip: think outside the box

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3. Global talent management: Why not?

- **What do we mean by Talent Management?**
  - Broad (=HRM) or Elitist
- **But elitist is wrong: most people are not in the elite: but still have to be managed**
- **What about low status members of the workforce/ those outside the workforce/ low status expatriates/ migrants/ those in unlawful work/ those in countries with very low standards?**
- **And it doesn't work ...**

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4. Dealing with the real world as it is: Why not?

- **The boundaries of organisations are dissolving;**

- **HRM (IHRM) studies 'employment';**
  - but the world is changing: robots, artificial intelligence, etc. The 'fourth industrial revolution';
  - work is not employment;
  - and so, first, work is being off-shored to 'cheaper' locales; or done through supply chains; or ways are being found to operate in rich societies that mimic 'cheaper' locales;

- **And, eventually, work will not be done by humans …**

- **AND, our vision of the real world ignores the wicked problems …**

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5. Applying proper scientific principles: Why not?

- **It is what the top journals want -**
  - **Theory;**
  - **Novelty;**
- **But it is 'proper science'; it is NOT real science;**
- **and it is leading us into ever narrower kinds of enquiry.**

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6. Concerned with Research Impact: Why not?

- **It is what the Government, funders and our Business Schools want, but**

- **Our business is understanding: we are not consultants; and**

- **How do we define impact? (see examples above …)**

A challenging scenario

One more slide (what **HRM** should be about), but first a few caveats:

- I am a weirdo: not many people agree with me;

- Ignoring my ideas is good for your career;

- But, taking up the challenge would mean a huge, much wider, cross-disciplinary, research agenda and one that addresses the Grand Challenges –

Much tougher/ much more interesting/ much more important;

- *It is your choice …*

Looking to the future

- "Drill for oil? You mean drill into the ground to try and find oil? You're crazy." (Drillers whom Edwin L Drake tried to enlist to his project to drill for oil, 1859)

- "This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us." (Western Union memo, 1876)

- "Heavier than air flying machines are impossible." (Lord Kelvin, president, Royal Society, 1895)

- "I have travelled the length and breadth of this country and talked with the best people, and I can assure you that data processing is a fad that won't last out the year." (Editor in charge of business books for Prentice Hall, 1957)

- "There is no reason why anyone would want to have a computer in their home." (Ken Olson, president, chairman and founder of Digital Equipment Corp, 1977)

- "640K ought to be enough for anybody." (Bill Gates of Microsoft, 1981)

7. So what should we be about?

- Explaining work (not employment); and recognising the changing way work is getting done;

- Explaining what is happening in the way people are managed; and how and why it differs internationally; and how *all kinds* of multi-national enterprises deal with that;

- No limits - *all* working people in *all* places and *all* kinds of work relationships;

- Casting light into the dark and hidden areas of work; exploring the 'Dark Side';

- Addressing the Grand Challenges;

- Different research technologies; international collaborations; cross-disciplinary collaborations;

Best of luck with it …

if you have been listening:

Thank you!

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Handbook of Research on Comparative Human Resource Management

Edited by Chris Brewster and Wolfgang Mayrhofer

THIRD EDITION

International Human Resource Management

Contemporary Human Resource Issues in Europe

MICHAEL DICKMANN, CHRIS BREWSTER, AND PAUL SPARROW

Human Resource Management and the Institutional Perspective

EDITED BY
GEOFFREY WOOD, CHRIS BREWSTER, AND MICHAEL BROOKES

SECOND EDITION

Globalizing Human Resource Management

PAUL SPARROW, CHRIS BREWSTER, & CHUL CHUNG

EDITED BY
CHRIS BREWSTER
JEAN-LUC CERDIN

HRM IN MISSION DRIVEN ORGANIZATIONS

Managing People in the Not for Profit Sector

International Human Resource Management

4th edition

Chris Brewster, Elizabeth Houldsworth, Paul Sparrow, Guy Vernon

Online resources

CIPD

Recent (relevant) publications

- Holland, P. and Brewster, C. (eds) (2019 forthcoming) *Contemporary Work and the Future of Employment in Developed Societies*. New York, Routledge

- Stahl, G., Harjo, A., Collings, D. & Brewster, C. Understanding the Role of HRM in Sustainability: A Wake-Up Call for HRM Researchers (and Practitioners): [under review]

- Gooderham, P.N., Mayrhofer, W. and Brewster, C. (2019 forthcoming) Towards a comparative institutional research agenda for HRM*International Journal of Human Resource Management.* DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2018.1521462

- Stévenot, A., Guery, L., Brewster, C. and Wood, G.T. (2018) Country of Origin Effects and New Financial Actors: A comparative analysis of the impact of foreign and French Private Equity investment on HRM in French firms. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 56 (4): 723-750.

- Farndale, E., Ligthart, P., Brewster, C. and Poutsma, E. (2017) Institutional frameworks and HRM practices in Europe: The market economy effect over time *Journal of International Business Studies* 48 (9), 1065-1086.

- Haak-Saheem, W. & Brewster, C. (2017) 'Hidden' expatriates: international mobility in the United Arab Emirates as a challenge to current understanding of expatriation *Human Resource Management Journal* 27 (3): 423-439

Recent (relevant) publications

- McNulty, Y., & Brewster, C. (2017). Theorizing the meaning(s) of 'expatriate': establishing boundary conditions for business expatriates. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 28*(1), 27-61

- Brewster, C., Gooderham, P. & Mayrhofer, W. (2016) Human Resource Management: the promise, the performance, the consequences *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance* 3 (2): 181-190

- Beer, M. Boselie, P. & Brewster, C. (2015) Back to the future: implications for the field of HRM of the multi-stakeholder perspective proposed 30 years ago. *Human Resource Management* 54 (3): 427-438

- Walker, J. T., Brewster, C. & Wood, G. T. (2014) Diversity Between and Within Varieties of Capitalism: transnational survey evidence *Industrial and Corporate Change* 23 (2):493-533

- Goergen, M., Chahine, S., Brewster, C. & Wood, G.T. (2012) Trust, Owner Rights, Employees and Firm Performance *Journal of Business Finance and Accounting* 40 (5-6) 589-619

- Mayrhofer, W., Brewster, C., Morley, M. & Ledolter, J. (2011) Hearing a Different drummer? Evidence of convergence in European HRM *Human Resource Management Review* 21 (1): 50-67

- Wood, G.T, Croucher, C., Brewster, C., Collings, G.C. & Brooks, M. (2009) Varieties of Firm: complementarity and bounded diversity. *Journal of Economic Issues* 43 (1): 241-260