Wicked problems (and solutions?) in Management Research

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‘Wicked Problems; Wicked Solutions’
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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
What and how should we be studying:

1. Practitioners’ needs; and improving firm performance
   No!
2. Strategic management (or SHRM), organisational change, improvement
3. Global talent management
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What and how should we be studying:

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6. Research Impact No!
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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4. The real world  *No!*
5. Using ‘management science’  *No!*
6. Research Impact  *No!*
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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6. Research Impact **No!**
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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   No!
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3. Global talent management
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4. The real world
   No!
5. Using ‘management science’
   No!
6. Research Impact
   No!
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 ...
What and how should we be studying:

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4. The real world **No!**

5. Using ‘management science’ **No!**
6. Research Impact **No!**
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.
What and how should we be studying:

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5. Using ‘management science’ **No!**
6. Research Impact **No!**
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 ... )
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 ...**
"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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Recent (relevant) publications

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