

Abstract

Future-concepts of HRM put in perspective

Do they leave more space for sensemaking, trust and freedom?

This article deals with a systemic perspective on the transition of HRM. The field of study addresses how four recent contributions on HRM transition might be understood according to the framework of the *reflective business paradigm* (Holmström, 2005). The contributions are building on different streams of applied research penetrating future-concepts. Each of the contributions is from highly influential knowledge institutions. The contributions are chosen as to enlighten different elements of the HRM transition. A Luhmann based approach is applied creating a meta-analysis (a third order analysis) of how the four contributions on HRM transition might be understood according to the framework of the *reflective society and business paradigm*

The transition regards the concept of HRM from being process driven to being reflective as part of the emerging reflective society and business paradigm. The means of transforming are different from each contribution of applied research – and the Luhmannian third order analysis shows the contributions and boundaries of each approach. The findings are:

1. Being reflective is about more than enabling HRM to create an adequate intraorganizational representation of external systems by adjusting HRM processes to be “outside-in”.
2. Also, it might be to generate not only short term but sustainable, “future-proof” organizational equity by taking part in heterogenous networks of ethical guardians in which HRM plays a part by developing processes and practices. By doing so HRM has to be aware of legitimacy paradoxes.
3. Learning to think differently from traditional knowledge workers is another issue. This implies HRM to embrace third or even fourth order management letting flexibility flourish in knowledge creating and design thinking FREIE Ecosystems.
4. As complexity grows, HRM has to develop intra-organizational higher order communication tools, allowing flexibility by enabling individualization within a framework of metacommunication. However, this might imply intrinsic ambiguity and instability

In the reflective business paradigm, the practices of reflexion are becoming institutionalized and crucial for businesses in gaining legitimacy. This is seen as one of the major driving forces of the transition. Another major driving force is the irritation of the inner representations of the external environment held by previous HRM systems and other business systems.

The transformation of business practices is in this chapter seen as a megatrend or transformation from an “inside-out” towards an “outside-in” perspective. This is found in business communication (from oneway communication towards dialogue and relationship building), accounting (from shareholder to stakeholder perspective), innovation (from closed to open innovation), the increasing institutionalization of CSR and concerns for business ethics etc. However, coevolving with this megatrend, HRM also seems to be in transition from being process driven to being reflective.

Future-concepts of HRM are often provided by consultancy companies. They are sometimes founded in research, but seldom theorized based on a broader theory of social change. By applying a Luhmannian approach, this meta-analysis of the transition of HRM reveals, that being reflective of third order is about more than each of the perspectives taken for its own. By taking a third order perspective pieces of the puzzle are put together.

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The article ends by discussing to what extent the future concepts seems to leave more space for sensemaking, trust and freedom, and point to future research questions on this issue.

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