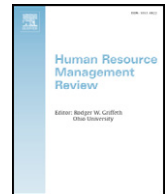




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The historical development of American HRM broadly viewed



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ABSTRACT

This paper surveys the development of the American human resource management field from the late 19th century to the start of the 21st century. Important people, ideas and events are identified as are contributing fields of study and schools of thought. Interesting and sometimes revisionist insights emerge, partly because human resource management is defined broadly to include industrial relations and personnel economics. The historical analysis is also used to derive implications for improving the current-day HRM research program.

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“The historical method has come more and more into vogue; it has been realized that to know the present we must know the past.”

[James Garnett, 1894, p. 23.]

1. Introduction

In this paper I survey the historical development of the American human resource management (HRM) field from the late 19th century to the start of the 21st century. The history of American HRM has been described by a number of other authors, including Eilbert (1959), Ling (1965), Lawrence (1985), Dulebohn, Ferris, and Stodd (1995), Jacoby (1985, 2003), and Wren and Bedeian (2009). After additional investigation I have found that there is still more to the story. Building on previous books and articles, this paper provides a synthesized account of the main events, ideas and people that have formed the HRM field as we know it today.

The history of HRM is interesting in its own right and needs no more justification than this. However, not all readers are history buffs or interested in events many decades ago. For these people, there is still much value to be gained from this article because – as the epigraph claims – understanding the past and how we got to the present is vital for charting the best direction forward for both HRM research and practice. This article gains extra saliency, therefore, because it suggests that the conventional wisdom on HRM's roots and development are in important places incomplete and too narrowly framed, with interesting and perhaps challenging implications.

Attention in this paper is limited to American experience. An entree to the historical development of HRM in other countries and their associated literatures is provided in Brewster and Mayrhofer (2012), Guillén (1994), and Kaufman (2007, 2014). Events in industry are woven into the story at relevant places but the focus is on HRM as an academic area of research and teaching.

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2. American HRM: diagrammatic overview

Before getting into specifics, it is useful to provide a broad-brush portrait of the main lines of American HRM's historical development. This is done in Fig. 1. The diagram shows the HRM field's family tree (initials defined in the text). In the next section I start at the top and then section-by-section work toward the bottom. Not everything relevant to the 20th century development of HRM can be included in one figure; the main trends and most important factors are captured, however.

3. HRM: traditional and modern

A person writing on the history of HRM immediately confronts one vital question: *what is human resource management?* The current literature features a number of distinct and partially incommensurate definitions of HRM (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Dulebohn et al., 1995; Mahoney, 2008; Strauss, 2001), each of which starts the narrative at a different point. For example, if HRM is a strategic and high involvement approach to people management then the beginning of the story starts in the 1970s–1980s; alternatively, if HRM is viewed as more or less equivalent to what an HR department does then the story starts back in the late 1910s when personnel departments first appeared. Yet another definition of HRM is that it covers all employment relationships

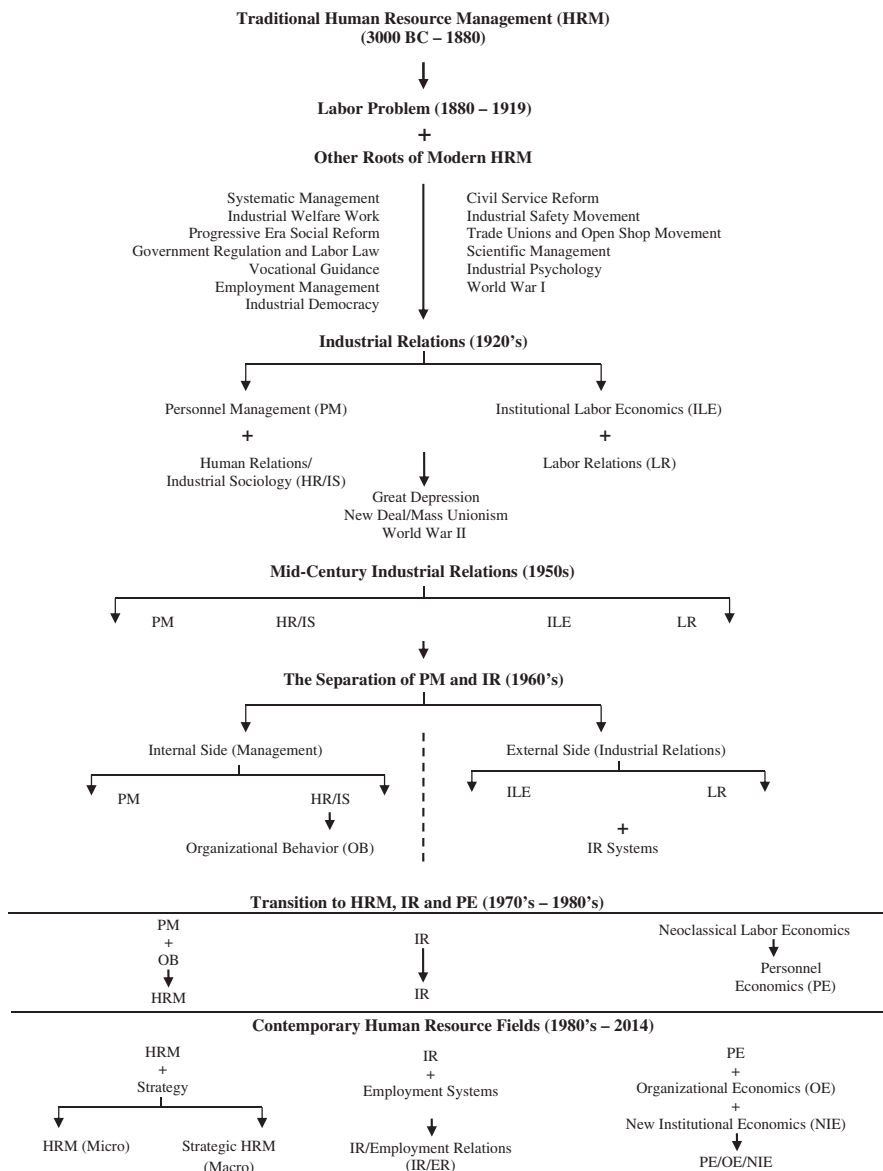


Fig. 1. Historical Development of Human Resource Management in the USA.

and situations were one or more persons directs and coordinates the work of others. By this conception, the history of HRM goes back to the dawn of human civilization when the Egyptian pharaohs and Chinese emperors directed tens of thousands of laborers in the building of the Great Pyramid and Great Wall.

Faced with this range of choices and the desire to avoid arbitrary and normative-laden distinctions, the history writer is led to adopt a broad and generic definition in which human resource management means *the management of people in organizations for economic production of goods and services*. But then the subject to be covered includes all supervised work since the dawn of human civilization (Bass, 1994; Mahoney, 2008) – a conception so expansive it defies meaningful analysis.

A useful compromise is to define HRM generically but then distinguish two different broad models or types of HRM. The first is *traditional HRM*, the second is *modern HRM*.

The hallmark of traditional HRM is absence of a self-conscious conception of people management as a distinct business activity guided by at least rudimentary scientific principles and practices. The traditional approach to people management was the only type known up to about 1880 in the USA (Chandler, 1977; Jacoby, 1985; Nelson, 1995). It was then challenged and displaced in bits and pieces by modern methods during the next 35 years (up to World War I); at the end of World War I (WWI) the traditional HRM model was mostly displaced in advanced firms by an integrated modern HRM model and displaced more slowly and incrementally among smaller or less-progressive firms.

Before the 1880s HRM had to have been practiced in some form – even in a *strategic* form per accounts of Robert Owen's innovative employment practices at the New Lanark cotton mills in England and those of Andrew Carnegie at the Homestead steel mill in the USA, given that the large factories and railroads of this period employed several hundreds to a thousand or more people and alternative models of HRM practices (e.g., hourly wage vs. piece rate; union vs. no union) were available (Wren & Bedeian, 2009). Nonetheless, this form of HRM was traditional because it was not performed on any kind of systematic, formalized and planned-out basis; rather, traditional people management was just one of many different general management tasks that owners, foremen and gang bosses did during a day and, further, they performed HRM largely based on custom, tradition and personal judgment as passed from one generation to another or as acquired through experience on the job. In this era, managing people was considered a combination of an art and a talent – an art in the sense it is acquired not from books or school but from experience and observation and a talent in that some lucky people are born with the gift of being good people managers (Nelson, 1995).

As practiced at most firms, traditional HRM viewed workers as a commodity on a market (or perhaps a dumb animal at work) and the road to high performance was buying it as cheap as possible, driving it to work hard through threats and strict discipline, and then firing it when no longer useful. Labels attached to this style of people management were, respectively, demand/supply model, drive system, and industrial monarch employer. Many firms relied on this approach because their owners and executives made a strategic calculation that it was the best fit to the situation they faced – i.e., an environment where the production technology is simple and repetitive, jobs mostly involve low-skill physical labor, competitive advantage comes from volume and low cost, and immigrant workers are plentiful, cheap, and compliant (Slichter, 1919a). Others added a dose of paternalism. Regardless, part of the hallmark of the traditional approach is that it frequently falls short of high performance because of the manager's ignorance, prejudice, and non-systematic decision methods. Examples in this era include keeping no records on employee turnover, conviction that a 12 hour work day is cost effective, and a view that listening to employees' suggestions or grievances undercuts managers' authority and shop discipline.

Modern HRM does not mean that companies necessarily have Human Resource (HR) departments or a system of formal personnel procedures nor that they necessarily adopt a particular model or philosophy of HRM; what it does mean is that business managers think about and implement people management in a way that is guided and informed by systematic thinking, elementary scientific principles, and administrative procedures. The transition to modern HRM in America began in the early 1880s and then grew in breadth and depth; it is still unfolding today in many less developed nations (Kaufman, 2014).

4. The roots of modern HRM

Historical discussions of HRM typically put forward two propositions about the roots of the field. The first is that the modern HRM field grew out of the earlier field of *personnel management* (PM) and, second, PM in turn originated out of *industrial welfare work*, *scientific management*, and *industrial psychology* (Dulebohn et al., 1995; Eilbert, 1959). Both perspectives are incomplete and give an unduly narrow portrait of the origins of the field. Each proposition is briefly reexamined, starting in this section with the origins of personnel management.

The historical record indicates that the roots of PM extend to fourteen developments and subject areas (Kaufman, 2008). These are listed below.

- Labor Problem
- Systematic management movement
- Government civil service reform movement
- Industrial welfare movement
- Industrial safety movement
- Progressive era social reform movement
- Trade union and open shop movement
- Government regulation and labor law movement
- Scientific management movement

- Vocational guidance movement
- Industrial psychology movement
- Employment management movement
- World War I crisis
- Industrial democracy movement.

Space constraints preclude discussion of all fourteen roots. Of them, the first – the Labor Problem – is most important to briefly describe.

The Labor Problem grew in seriousness and concern over the period from 1880 to 1915 and then peaked during the late WWI years of 1917–1919. Not coincidentally, it was at this peak of the Labor Problem when the new field of personnel management was born.

The Labor Problem was the term widely used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to describe the increasingly maladjusted and conflict-prone relationship between employers and employees (Leiserson, 1929). More specifically, it referred to the many workplace problems then afflicting the nation, such as bitter and bloody strikes, sky-high job turnover, poverty-level wages for a large fraction of the workforce, extensive child labor, poor work effort, and autocratic workforce governance. Many employers were fearful that the Labor Problem was going to usher in socialism, radical unions and/or growing government regulation; at a business level the Labor Problem was costing them large amounts of money through work stoppages, deliberate go-slow practices of workers, inefficient labor practices, and excessive hire and fire costs (Slichter, 1919a).

Since the ramifications of the Labor Problem were huge, employers and academic writers started to think about labor management in strategic terms. With regard to employers, Kennedy (1919) observed at the height of the WWI labor crisis, “the highest officials of the largest corporations... are devoting 99% of their time and talents to the labor problem” (p. 357). Also indicative of a strategic perspective is the book *Choosing a Labor Policy* by management consultant William Basset (1920). Among academic writers, Commons (1919) outlined five alternative HRM strategies and employment systems with a mix of “Commodity” and “Autocracy” anchoring the low end and a mix of “Goodwill” and “Citizenship” anchoring the high end. Alternatively, Tead (1926) distinguished three labor strategies: “Constructive,” “Drift,” and “Repressive.” An example that seems to illustrate a strategic HRM approach is the White Motor Company. The author (Wisler, 1921) says that the company prospered through the upheavals of 1918–1919, “by keeping their eye intently on their business and designing the entire machinery of their labor management to accomplish their one avowed purpose – the ultimate survival of the White Motor Company” (p. 338).

Viewed in historical context, modern HRM has its origin in the employers' response to the Labor Problem in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Textbooks of the 1920s–1940s explicitly linked HRM to the concept of “personnel problems” and referred to HRM as the *employer's solution* to the Labor Problem (Jucius, 1948; Tead & Metcalf, 1920; Watkins, 1922). The Labor Problem has now disappeared as a widely-used term, its severity has been much tamed over the preceding century, and neither it nor the subsidiary idea of personnel/HRM problems finds much mention in the modern-day field. However, an insight of history is that employers of every age always have labor and HRM problems – e.g., problems with motivation, turnover, skill deficits – and, indeed, if labor problems disappeared business firms would have a much reduced need for HRM. Another insight is that firms also confront their modern-day labor problems with a broadly similar choice of HRM strategies, anchored on one end by a low road commodity/autocracy/adversarial approach and on the other by a high road human capital/participative/cooperative approach – with numerous combinations and permutations in-between. Yet an additional insight (documented in Kaufman, 2008) is that many HRM practices developed in recent years (e.g., performance based pay, employee involvement, workforce/HR scorecards) are not entirely new discoveries but advanced/sophisticated versions of practices implemented almost a century ago (e.g., profit-sharing, employee representation, labor/IR audits) – just as a 2014 Ford auto is an evolved version of the Model-T.

5. The emergence of modern HRM: personnel management and industrial relations

Up to the 1890s the management of labor was a general part of running a business handled by owners and line managers among their many other duties. As large-scale industry and labor problems grew, some firms began to carve-out and delegate handling of certain parts of the labor function. In the mid-1890s, for example, a few firms established a welfare office directed by a welfare secretary (often headed by a woman) to oversee things such as lunchrooms, wash-up facilities, and recreation programs. A decade later some pioneering companies started a safety bureau run by a safety director who oversaw joint manager–worker safety committees. Yet other firms shortly after 1900 created the first hiring offices, staffed by a hiring manager with one or several clerks and secretaries. In the 1910s, yet other firms created the first training programs and factory schools operated by a director of training while others started shop councils and assigned a manager to serve as the firm's industrial representative.

Slowly and incrementally these disparate parts of the HRM function were brought together and placed within one functional area. This movement began in the early 1910s under the label *Employment Management* (EM) spearheaded by Meyer Bloomfield of Boston (a leader in the vocational guidance field). Employment management departments typically amalgamated three HRM functions: hiring/staffing, welfare/service and training. Bloomfield (1917: 441) described EM as “the new profession of handling men.”

The next phase in the formalization of the HRM function occurred in the war crisis years 1918–1919. The first functionalized and relatively integrated labor management departments of the kind today recognized as “HR” appeared at several dozen pioneering companies (Douglas, 1919, Slichter, 1919b). These new departments emerged at the same time as employment management was

transforming into two new and expanded management activities. The first was called *Personnel Management* (PM), the second *Industrial Relations* (IR).

To some degree personnel management and industrial relations were different names for the same generic HRM function of labor management. Closer investigation reveals, however, subtle but important distinctions (Kaufman, 2001a, 2008). Of the two, IR was considered the more strategic, encompassed the entire employment relationship, covered a wider range of employment subjects, and in most accounts subsumed PM as part of it. As defined at the time, industrial relations (a short-hand term meaning “the relationship between employers and employees in industry”) covered employment situations in all types of firms (e.g., union and nonunion, public and private), looked at the causes of and solutions to labor problems from a combined managerial, worker, and public/social perspective, and was concerned with formulating overall corporate labor policy. It was also regarded as more liberal, social-minded, and externally oriented.

The locus of the industrial relations group in American industry was John D. Rockefeller, Jr., his network of companies, and other allied companies run by like-minded executives (known as “corporate liberals”). In the academic world industrial relations was a separate field but with its main intellectual base in *institutional labor economics* (ILE) led by John R. Commons and associates of the Wisconsin School. ILE looks at the employment relationship (rather than labor market in neoclassical labor economics) as the central subject and takes a multidisciplinary approach grounded in economics but with significant content from sociology, management and law (Budd, 2004; Kaufman, 2004). The most distinctive HRM practice associated with IR of the 1920s was the nonunion-type employee representation plan (ERP) — that era’s vehicle for an indirect form of group employee participation (Kaufman, 2000b; Nelson, 1982; Taras, 2003). In industry, Standard Oil of New Jersey (SONJ), a nonunion company, was an exemplar of the IR model. At SONJ the IR function was divided into six areas: personnel and training, medical, annuities and benefits, safety, service, and industrial representation and the executive in charge of industrial relations reporting directly to the president and board of directors.

Personnel management was the lineal outgrowth of employment management but took on a modestly more integrated and broad-range of employment-related activities. PM positioned itself (relative to IR) as a more closely identified part of the management team and focused on functional activities of hiring/staffing, compensation, training, benefits and similar employment areas. In addition to the tireless promotional work of Bloomfield, PM benefitted greatly from the work of the Committee on the Classification of Personnel formed by the U.S. Army during WWI and led by psychologist Walter Dill Scott (Ferguson, 1962). In the academic world, PM was also promoted by people such as Ordway Tead and Henry Metcalf; they were consultants, adjunct professors, and authors of numerous PM books and articles. Personnel management was more “internal” and “managerialist” in orientation; was influenced considerably more by “micro” behavioral disciplines such as industrial psychology, and took an “individualist” approach to workforce governance and voice (see Scott & Clothier, 1923). Because of these characteristics PM was less often strategically framed. The Western Electric division of AT&T was an exemplar of the advanced PM model; also individualist and progressive were IBM and Endicott-Johnson (none had ERPs).

Based on the foregoing, I have concluded that the American HRM field has three co-founders (Kaufman, 2008). They are Meyer Bloomfield, John R. Commons, and Walter Dill Scott. Bloomfield more than any other person promoted creation of a separate business function devoted to managing an organization’s labor resources while Commons and Scott, respectively, were the academic leaders of the externalist (economics) and internalist (psychology) wings of the new field. Ordway Tead also deserves special mention on the PM side.

6. HRM from 1920 to the Great Depression

The 1920s was a growth period for HRM. In 1918 only a handful of firms had a personnel/industrial relations (PIR) department; ten years later one-third of plants with over 250 workers had one. The range of activities undertaken in these departments also grew dramatically in breadth and depth, with particular emphasis in the areas of compensation, benefits, and employee participation (Milkovich & Stevens, 2000; Kaufman, 2001b; Mitchell, 2003; Burton & Mitchell, 2003; Taras, 2003). A survey of industrial relations programs in 1927 at 1600 large plants (National Industrial Conference Board, 1929) revealed more than 80 separate employment-related programs and practices. These spanned five broad areas: Employment Management (e.g., centralized hiring, 42% of plants; exit interviews, 36%), Benefits/Welfare (e.g., pensions, 26%; athletic teams 43%), Safety/Health (company hospital, 24%; safety committee, 67%); Training (company school, 9%; apprentice training, 30%); and Joint Relations/Voice (works council, 8%; suggestion system, 23%). As these figures indicate, HRM practices in the 1920s spanned a very wide spectrum, per the different strategy models outlined earlier (also see Baron, Jennings, & Dobbin, 1988; Licht, 1992; Jacoby, 1997).

On one end were labor commodity/autocracy employers. For example, a large radio manufacturer had no PIR program beyond a one room hiring office and used hire–fire methods to attract, motivate and discipline labor. It employed 13,000 workers in the summer of 1929, cut employment back to 6000 in only three weeks (winter was its slow sales season) and then next summer ramped employment back up to 23,000 in ten weeks (Kaufman, 2010). The autocracy side of HRM was widespread in this period. For example, at a large textile mill workers were quickly fired for minor infractions, discrimination and favoritism were widespread, the company kept a blacklist and employed labor spies, and intimidation and violence were used to discourage workers from unionizing (Fink, 1993).

On the other end were employers practicing a cooperative and human capital type of HRM. An elite of welfare capitalist companies sought to develop unity of interest and labor commitment by replacing reliance on external labor markets (ELMs) and concomitant hire/fire methods with a new system of internal labor markets (ILMs) in which workers were given above-market wages, extensive welfare benefits, job security, fair treatment, and a voice in plant affairs through ERPs in exchange for greater

cooperation, higher productivity, and labor peace. Standard Oil, as noted above, was an early pioneer; other notable examples in the 1920s were AT&T, General Electric, Goodyear, International Harvester, and Leeds & Northrup. In the middle were companies such as the auto manufacturers who had PIR departments limited to administrative matters, modest-sized welfare programs with no representation plans, but the attraction of above-average wages. Then there was the unionized sector, relatively small in the 1920s (10%–15% of employment) but comprising some important industries such as railroads, construction, and printing. Here collective bargaining regulated most aspects of employment and the personnel function was either small and administrative or non-existent.

The welfare capitalist companies were the 1920s version of today's high performance workplace (Kaufman, 2003a). Their new mass production systems with complementary PIR programs were so transformative that delegations of visitors came from around the world for company visits and plant tours, just as happened in Japan in the 1980s when that country's management methods caught world attention. Butler (1927), deputy director of the International Labor Organization (ILO), remarked after a tour of American companies:

The attempt which is now being made in America to raise it [industrial relations] to the dignity of a science comparable to the study of politics or economics is in itself both significant and important... The American literature on the subject during the last ten years probably exceeds that of the rest of the world put together (p. 70).

A member of an Australian delegation (Adam, 1928) remarked after touring the Western Electric plant in Hawthorne, IL (site of the famous Hawthorne experiments a few years later),

There, surely, was the highest development of American industry... I could not help being deeply impressed by the beauty, the orderliness, and the smoothness of modern industry conducted on a scale unimaginable in Australia, and by the comfort and well-being of the workers in a place where the management was genuinely concerned for their welfare.

The delegation of which he was a member submitted a lengthy report to the Australian government. It noted (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1927),

An important part of the management is the conduct of industrial relations... Generally, it may be said that management aims at collecting a good work force, giving it the opportunity of earning good wages, keeping it working steadily and continuously gaining confidence, and, above, all, absolutely keeping faith with it... The effort of employers generally to understand the wants and requirements of their employees, and, on the other hand, the readiness of the employees to grasp the idea of the employer that the interests or both are identical is very pronounced (p. 25).

The strategic dimension of PIR was frequently articulated during the welfare capitalist era of the 1920s–early 1930s. The first article published on HRM in the *Harvard Business Review* (*HBR*), titled “Industrial Relations Management” (Hotchkiss, 1923), uses the strategy term, argues PIR policy needs to be shaped by top executives, and should be conceived and implemented in an integrated manner. Wharton professor Canby Balderston signals a strategic perspective when he titled his book *Executive Guidance of Industrial Relations* (Balderston, 1935). In it he provides twenty-five short case studies of companies with the most advanced PIR programs, including a table (p. 252) with a list of thirteen HRM practices considered in today's terminology “high performance.” Cyrus Ching, director of industrial relations at U.S. Rubber, provides this clear anticipation of the resource based view (RBV) of the firm now widely used in today's strategic HRM literature. He states (Ching, 1928):

More and more we are coming to understand that proper attention to these personnel questions yields a return out of all proportion to the amount of time and money invested... [R]eal loyalty ... is practically the only thing which a competitor cannot buy in the open market. It is the one asset which gives a company a definite lead over all less far-sighted organizations (pp. 83–84).

Also widely encountered today is the idea that a strategic perspective on HRM is required because of the more competitive business environment. Interestingly, writers in the 1920s cited exactly the same reason for taking a more strategic view of PIR. Donald and Donald (1929) tell readers of the *HBR* that “the end of the war marked the beginning of more severe competition due in part to excessive plant capacity” and improved methods of PIR are a way to “bring costs of production down to even lower levels” (p. 147).

Turning from the world of practice to research and education, HRM also made considerable strides during the 1920s. For example, the first university HRM textbook – *Personnel Administration* by Tead and Metcalf (1920) – was published; the first university specialization in HRM – a “concentration” in industrial relations within the Economics department – was created at Wisconsin; and, the nation's first broad-based HRM professional association – the Industrial Relations Association of American (IIRA, formerly the Employment Managers' Association) – was launched (Kaufman, 2004). A number of universities also set up HRM courses and some created HRM majors. A study of thirty-eight large business schools found, for example, that in 1930 sixteen had some type of personnel/industrial relations specialization in their undergraduate program (Bossard & Dewhurst, 1931). Several universities created separate HRM-oriented research centers. The most notable was the Industrial Relations Section at Princeton, created in 1922 with funding and support from Rockefeller and Standard Oil.

Teaching and research on HRM took place both in economics departments and business schools. The economics departments carried greater intellectual prestige – one person caustically called business schools of the period “glorified schools of typing and secretarial science” (quoted in Daniel, 1998: 48) – but the business schools' more vocational orientation made them attractive to students and employers. The economics departments taught HRM in introductory courses called, respectively, Labor Problems or

Industrial Relations. Larger departments also often offered higher-level specialized PIR courses. The introductory courses focused on the cause and solution of labor problems with the latter typically organized into three parts: employers' solution (labor management), workers' solution (unions and collective bargaining), and community's solution (labor law and social insurance). They took a social science perspective, gave emphasis to problems and shortcomings in the work world (e.g., twelve hour work days, child labor, high turnover), presented selective criticism of employers and the social case for unions and labor law, and were longer on theory than practice. Watkin's text *Introduction to the Study of Labor Problems* (1922) illustrates the genre. These courses were often considered "applied labor economics" (Brissenden, 1926). The HRM courses in business schools were most often titled Personnel Management or Personnel Administration. They took a business management perspective, emphasized the purpose and practice of personnel management with much less attention to unions and labor law, contained separate sections on the functional activities of PIR departments, had a much larger dose of psychology, and emphasized practical tools and techniques (e.g., interviewing methods, types of wage incentive schemes). Scott and Clothier's *Personnel Management* (1923) exemplifies this genre. The business school PM courses were more often taught by a person either with practical experience in business or consulting work or with academic training in psychology or commerce (in the 1920s doctoral degrees in management were not yet offered).

At the time both the labor problems and personnel approaches to HRM were considered as falling under the rubric of industrial relations. Nonetheless, tensions and divergent perspectives quickly arose between the two approaches and groups of people. Illustrative is this observation by Frank Stockton (1932), dean of the business school at the University of Kansas:

Labor economics men, who have the social point of view, coupled perhaps with an anti-management complex, look with suspicion upon personnel management as a means of driving labor and eliminating trade unionism. They disdain personnel further because of its apparent lack of theory. The personnel instructor, on the other hand, thinks that at least he is working in terms of reality, and may be inclined to dislike the fault-finding tone of labor economics and to belittle the socioeconomic approach to industrial questions (p. 224).

The PM instructor's jaundiced view of the economist's approach to the subject is evident in this comment by Tead (1921):

no thought is more appalling... than its [personnel administration's] teaching might someday fall into the hands of the routineer or the conventional college professor of economics equipped only with the erudition which his possession of a Ph.D. betokens (p. 355).

Returning the compliment, an economist described management courses such as personnel administration as "intellectual deserts" (quoted in Lampman, 1993: 84).

Scholarly research on HRM in the 1920s also tended to divide between the external economics wing and the internal management/psychology wing (Kaufman, 2002). The dominant group in terms of influence and visibility was the labor economists and their work predominantly appeared in economics journals, including leading publications such as *American Economic Review*, *Journal of Political Economy*, and *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. The titular head of this group was Commons. He had more publications listed in Rossi and Rossi's *Personnel Management: A Bibliography* (Rossi and Rossi, 1925) than any other academic person. Likewise, his book *Industrial Goodwill* (1919) – a treatise in favor of competitive advantage through a high commitment ("goodwill") HRM strategy – was lauded as "the most important book for the intelligent employer since Taylor's *Scientific Management*" (*New York Evening Post*, April 26, 1919: 18). Many of the other big research names who wrote on labor management in this period were affiliated with the Wisconsin School, including Sumner Slichter, William Leiserson and Don Lescohier; also influential were others, such as Chicago labor economist Paul Douglas. The two most comprehensive academic surveys of the state of HRM in the late 1910s were by Douglas (1919) and Slichter (1919b); the three most comprehensive overviews of HRM in the decade of the 1920s were authored by Slichter (1929); Leiserson (1929), and Lescohier (1935).

If a person wanted to learn more about HRM as a distinct management activity and its associated "how to's," he or she would look not to the economists but to researchers in business schools, management consulting and research groups, and psychology and sociology departments. This group was highly diverse, less academic, and had closer connections to business firms and the practice of HRM; in fact, many of the best-known management-wing writers on HRM in the 1920s and early 1930s were business executives, consultants, and HRM practitioners (Bruce, 2006; Tonn, 2003; Wren & Bedeian, 2009). Important names include Chester Barnard, Henry Dennison, Mary Follett, David Houser, Edward Filene, Sam Lewisohn, and Whiting Williams. They published on a wide set of subjects, ranging from a macro organizational level – e.g., the role and function of management, the organization and staffing of a PIR department – to a micro individual level – e.g., selection tests, incentive pay methods. This stream of research was featured in academic journals such as *Journal of Applied Psychology* and *Harvard Business Review*; periodicals sponsored by the Personnel Research Federation (*Personnel Journal*), American Management Association (*Personnel*), Taylor Society (*Bulletin of the Taylor Society*), reports from research/consulting groups such as Industrial Relations Counselors, Inc. (IRC; Kaufman, 2003b) and the National Industrial Conference Board (NICB); and a diverse set of practitioner periodicals.

7. HRM in the Great Depression

The Depression decade of the 1930s was a wrenching experience for HRM with many long-lasting repercussions. Every business cycle downturn leads to cut-backs in HRM; firms, for example, are forced by deteriorating profits to reduce operating costs while growing unemployment makes labor plentiful and eager to work without positive inducements. This situation was revealed a decade

earlier during the short but severe economic slump of 1920–1921 when many of the newly created PIR programs of the World War I years were closed or drastically downsized and companies quickly cut wages in reaction to demand and supply.

The slump of 1920–1921 soon ended and with the return of prosperity major American companies rebuilt and expanded their HRM programs, as just reviewed. When the nation's economy slumped again in late 1929, the influence of the new goodwill HRM philosophy became evident when the nation's leading employers resisted the demand/supply pressure to “liquidate labor” for fear that this would ruin their decade-long investment in employee cooperation and loyalty. They instead pledged to hold the line on wages and jobs and “share the pain” through work-sharing (reduced hours for everyone), cuts in benefit programs, and reduced profit (O'Brien, 1989). However, by the fall of 1931 nearly all companies were forced to abandon this strategy as the depression lengthened and deepened (U.S. Steel's production shrank to less than one-quarter of capacity); hence, starting that year one after another of the welfare capitalist employers began a several-round process of large-scale lay-offs, wage cuts, and speed-ups in a desperate effort to avert bankruptcy. The traditional HRM firms, having made little investment in labor, began layoffs and wage cuts much sooner; now they were joined on the downward escalator of HRM practice by the industrial elite (Kaufman, 2008).

In early 1933 Leiserson (1933) surveyed the wreckage and observed, “this depression has undone fifteen or so years of good personnel work” (p. 114). Thus, HRM people of this period learned a very humbling but important lesson: a huge strategic contingency in HRM practice – and one they had little ability to control – is the state of the economy. They also learned that a commitment HRM can switch from a source of competitive advantage and high performance to just the opposite if layoffs and downsizing break the psychological contract earlier established with employees (Moriguchi, 2005; Zatzick & Iverson, 2006). In return for cooperation, managerial flexibility and no unions the welfare capitalist employers promised the *quid pro quo* of good pay, stable jobs, and fair treatment. The Great Depression forced them to break this promise – not just once but several times – and as a result their workers became increasingly angry, distrustful, and insecure. Lastly, HRM practitioners felt great pressure to “get aligned” with top management (to become “business partners”) and wring every dollar possible out of the workforce lest they lose their own jobs. Thus, Leiserson (1933) notes, “The whole trend in personnel management since 1931 has been to hire a man for personnel work who thinks like the higher executive, that is, in terms of profits, sales, etc., instead of thinking of the human factor,” while another (quoted in Edsforth & Asher, 1995, p. 74) notes with respect to time-study people, “They have been forced to make inequitable reductions in working time to hold on to their jobs.” Not surprisingly, on the shop floor feelings of unity of interest evaporated and the Labor Problem began to reemerge with renewed vigor.

8. The new deal and mass unionization

The Great Depression wrecked the welfare capitalism HRM model on the reefs of corporate bankruptcy; not unexpectedly a new HRM model therefore arose to take its place. The centerpiece of this new model, enacted during the New Deal period of the mid-1930s, was industry-wide collective bargaining, supplemented and supported by a web of protective labor laws and social insurance programs. Pluralism (partially conflicting interests and multilateral workplace governance) replaced a largely discredited unitarism.

The widespread diagnosis of the cause of the depression was, first, inadequate income and purchasing power among the broad-base of the workforce and, second, the ill-effect of destructive competition as rivalry among firms to cut costs initiated a downward spiral of wage cuts, lay-offs, and speed-ups (Kaufman, 2012a; Mitchell, 1984). The solution pressed upon President Roosevelt by a wide range of people and interest groups – including many business associations and prominent corporate leaders – was to stop this process by using measures to increase wages and limit excessive competition. The dilemma facing Roosevelt was choosing among the many different options to accomplish this. He endeavored to reach a compromise: the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA, 1933) allowed firms to cartelize product markets and thus stabilize prices and wages (the business-advocated approach), then, to increase wages and purchasing power he and allies enacted the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA, 1935) in order to promote industry-wide collective bargaining (the labor-advocated approach). Collective bargaining was viewed as accomplishing three worthy goals: first, it puts a floor under labor costs and thus stops destructive competition; second, it promotes spending and economic recovery by raising wages and redistributing income from capital (high saving) to labor (high spending); and, third, it promotes industrial democracy in workplace governance and gives workers a means to end oppressive and exploitative treatment. To round-out the package, Roosevelt and allies also passed several key pieces of legislation (i.e., the Social Security Act, 1935; the Fair Labor Standards Act, 1938) that in various ways sought to promote purchasing power, protect the superior employment conditions at high road firms from being undercut by low road competitors, and give workers greater economic security through minimum wages, maximum work hours, prohibition on child labor, unemployment insurance, and government-provided old age pensions (Gordon, 1994; Kaufman, 2003c).

The business groups ended up on the short-end of this bargain, with great ramifications for the practice of HRM. The business class lost a huge amount of public credibility in the early 1930s when they had to renege on their promise of management-led prosperity and good jobs for all; further, their part of the recovery program (the NIRA) was soon declared unconstitutional. Thus, the program of industry-wide collective bargaining and supplementary labor laws and social insurance programs became the New Deal's answer to the depression. The new legal protections for collective bargaining, coupled with workers' deep anger and anxiety and the message that the nation needs higher wages, soon led to a wave of union organizing and strikes that in several years brought collective bargaining to most parts of the industrial economy (Bernstein, 1970). Union density (the percent of workers in unions) leapt from less than 10% before the New Deal to nearly one-quarter at the end of the 1930s; after being further stimulated and protected during World War II (WWII) union density grew to 80% and more in a number of major industries.

The implications for HRM were substantial. The depression had forced large cut-backs in the breadth and depth of PIR programs; the New Deal then filled this vacuum with a new model based on collective bargaining and protective labor law. Further, the credibility and allure of a nonunion model of HRM was greatly damaged and would not recover for nearly four decades. Not only did it now seem more like a hollow sham, increasingly people concluded its major purpose – once all the lofty rhetoric about cooperation and mutual interests was stripped away – was to keep out unions, either by a substitution strategy of buying off the workers through wage increases and better conditions or a repressive strategy of coercing them into acquiescence through firings and discrimination. Thus, people like Leiserson and Slichter, who just a decade earlier were writing glowing reviews of the welfare capitalist (unitarist) type of HRM, turned highly critical and shifted to support of a pluralist collective bargaining based model of HRM. Illustratively, Leiserson (1938) comments, “Popular judgment now favors collective bargaining... The organization of labor and collective bargaining [are] necessary and inevitable” (p. 40, 43).

The effect of the New Deal and rise of mass unionism on the nomenclature, organization and practice of HRM was quite diverse (Harris, 1982). In terms of nomenclature, the old labels remained in place – industrial relations was the umbrella term covering all HRM models, personnel management was a more management-led, individualist and (if possible) nonunion model, but now a third term became popular – *Labor Relations* (LR). Originally appearing a decade earlier, the term Labor Relations became widely used in the 1930s to describe the collective bargaining HRM model. In terms of structure and practice, after the depression stabilized and unions started to make large inroads HRM began to rebound (Kochan & Cappelli, 1984). Companies started to rebuild their PIR departments and add HRM staff. Some did so in a rear-guard effort to remain nonunion. Many others did so because they suddenly had to bargain with unions and found themselves woefully unprepared. Likewise, although unions circumscribed management's authority and room for maneuver in HRM, unions paradoxically also led to an expansion of HRM because they demanded companies put in place new practices such as job classification systems, standardized wage scales, formalized benefit programs, and grievance systems. Finally, in many areas HRM also got a boost from the new government labor laws and social insurance plans; for example, companies now needed HRM staff to monitor compliance with the new wage and hour law and handle the increased record-keeping that went with unemployment insurance and social security.

One area of HRM practice was greatly curtailed, on the other hand. The NLRA included a ban on all forms of representational committees and councils in nonunion firms that deal with terms and conditions of employment (Kaufman, 2000b); this not only effectively eliminated the 1920s-style ERP (banned as an illegitimate “company union”) but also significantly restricted the use of representational groups for general purposes of employee involvement. This legal shift, still in force today, takes on strategic importance since many modern HRM writers contend that employee participation is a key driver of a high performance work system (Cappelli & Neumark, 2001; Lawler, 1992; Pfeffer, 1998).

9. Human relations

Parallel with the depression was another major event that also deeply influenced the development of HRM. It is the *human relations* movement.

The human relations movement was born in the early 1930s out of the Hawthorne experiments at Western Electric's huge factory outside Chicago, IL (Gillespie, 1991; Wren & Bedeian, 2009). It then grew and expanded in terms of academic participants and topics and, in the process, helped to create the new field of industrial sociology (Miller & Form, 1951). Core ideas from human relations and industrial sociology (HR/IS), along with industrial–organizational psychology, gradually fused in the early 1960s to form the new field of organizational behavior (OB) (Miner, 2006). The father of human relations is widely considered to be Elton Mayo of the Harvard Business School (O'Connor, 1999; Trahair, 1984). Mayo was trained in Australia as a psychologist and sociologist and specialized in psycho-pathology.

The early field of management grew up straddling economics and industrial engineering. Illustrative of this parentage is Henry Towne's article “The Engineer as Economist” (Towne, 1886), widely considered to mark the birth of modern management (Wren & Bedeian, 2009). In the search for theoretical generalizations and guiding principles about the workplace, orthodox economists and engineers-turned management specialists (e.g., Frederick Taylor) both used a model of “economic man” – that is, a person portrayed as a highly rational/mechanical being who responds in an individualistic and predictable way to changes in incentives, particularly financial incentives. One thing that united all participants of early PIR was rejection of this narrow model and substitution of a broader behavioral–social model. From this perspective, labor is a human factor of production and this fact, they argued, makes a crucial difference for theory and practice (Kaufman, 2008).

The problem going into the 1930s was that this alternative behavioral–social model of man was still relatively rudimentary. A flavor of early work, for example, is given by Tead's book *Instincts in Industry* (Tead, 1918). Several years later Henry Link integrated psychology more closely with PIR with his book *Employment Psychology* (Link, 1924). It is considered an antecedent of the modern field of personnel psychology. In the 1920s other industrial psychologists in universities worked in the PIR area, such as Walter Dill Scott, Arthur Kornhauser, and Morris Viteles. Work motivation received considerable attention but with respect to personnel management per se the focus was largely on personnel measurement issues, or what Kornhauser (1948: 172) labeled “technical personnel procedures,” and also certain behavioral problems such as work fatigue. Thus, big topics were selection tests, job classification schemes, and rest periods and the theoretical perspective was the psychologist's individual differences' framework (Münsterberg, 1913). However, a large share of the literature on the behavioral–social aspects of HRM came from outside universities, such as consultants, business people, and independent researchers. Examples include David Houser, Henry Dennison, Whiting Williams, and Mary Follett. Some of the practitioners' insights were deep and influential (Bruce, 2006; Tonn, 2003; Wren, 1987); nonetheless, they ultimately rested on personal experience and lacked the credibility that goes with scientific

research and affiliation with a university. Thus, through the 1920s the psychological side of the personnel field was rather thinly staffed and largely engaged in developing better functional PM tools.

The human relations movement did much to energize the application of psychology and sociology to the study of workplace problems. Mayo and colleagues were invited in the late 1920s by AT&T executives to come to Chicago and help investigate workers' reactions to changes in work conditions. The project evolved in an unanticipated way into a multi-year and multi-part investigation that shifted attention from work conditions to inter-personal relations, informal work groups, social norms, and leadership styles. Mayo (1945) identified the central problem of industrial relations as “the maintenance of spontaneous cooperation throughout the organization” and observed, “Problems of absenteeism, labor turnover, ‘wildcat’ strikes, show that we do not know how to ensure spontaneity of cooperation; that is, teamwork.” (p. 9). Drawing on psycho-socio theories of Durkheim, Janet and Pareto, Mayo argued that lack of cooperation and the resulting labor problems stems from workers' feelings of anomie, insecurity and alienation brought on by working in large-scale factories, the ceaseless job changes and work pressures caused by outside market forces, and the fragmenting effect of Taylor-inspired management methods. Workers, therefore, plunge into “pessimistic reveries” and only work at part of their potential. Mayo concluded, therefore, that the factory is not only a technological/economic system but also a social system and that effective cooperation can be gained only when a balance is worked out between the “logic of efficiency” and the “logic of human sentiments.” Labor problems, therefore, reflect social maladjustments inside organizations that produce conflict and inhibit teamwork; management, accordingly, has the ability to solve labor problems through HRM practices that meet workers' psycho-social needs, collaborate with rather than undercut informal work groups, and promote a humanistic leadership style — all of which engender an alignment of interests, more effective cooperation, and higher organizational performance.

The Hawthorne experiments and the studies that grew out of them, such as Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939), were soon followed by a widening range of other research programs by management and behavioral scientists dealing with effective management of people in organizations. These research programs often had little connection to the Hawthorne experiments per se or, in particular, their somewhat idiosyncratic and controversial interpretation by Mayo. Examples include the Committee on Human Relations at Chicago (Burleigh Gardiner, W. Lloyd Warner, William Foote Whyte), the Center for Group Dynamics at Michigan (Kurt Lewin), and the Tavistock Institute in London (Eric Trist). What did unite them was a shift from the individual differences focus of traditional industrial psychology and toward a more group- and organization-oriented social psychology, thus helping pave the way for a broader integration of psychology and the micro side of sociology into business schools and management studies. For more than two decades, however, they lacked a well accepted label for their area of study; Whyte (1965), for example, used the general descriptor “human behavior in work organizations” (p. 306). At the time, human relations was widely seen as falling under the umbrella of industrial relations but was separate from personnel management (e.g., Arensberg, 1951; Miller & Form, 1951; Wilensky, 1954).

10. HRM in the Golden Age of industrial relations: 1945–1960

The highpoint of the industrial relations field in the 20th century was attained in the roughly fifteen year period stretching from the end of World War II to 1960 (Kaufman, 1993). Coming out of the Great Depression and WWII, labor-management relations were hugely disrupted, unions had spread across much of industry, strikes were in record numbers, companies had substantially augmented their personnel function, and the nation faced the challenge of effectively utilizing its manpower to win the Cold War. America again had a huge Labor Problem and, not surprisingly, industrial relations vaulted to the top of the academic and practitioner agendas.

Before the war, PIR had a modest institutional presence in the American academic world; the larger colleges and universities offered industrial relations and personnel courses, somewhere up to perhaps one hundred professors identified themselves as labor economist/PIR teachers and researchers, and in the 1930s with additional Rockefeller-connected funding four new management-oriented IR research and executive education centers similar to the one at Princeton were established (MIT, Stanford, Michigan, and Cal Tech). On the downside, no academic journal catered exclusively to either IR or PM, no professional association existed for either IR/PM academics or practitioners (the IRAA turned into the National Personnel Association which was absorbed into the American Management Association in the mid-1920s; the journals *Personnel* and *Personnel Journal* were largely vocational oriented), and no university offered a stand-alone graduate degree program in PIR.

By the end of the 1950s, the situation had completely changed and IR (broadly defined) was now one of the most visible, important and popular areas of practice and scholarship. Student enrollments in labor courses soared, American universities created over two dozen new centers, institutes and schools devoted to industrial relations. The largest was Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations (1945). It had over forty faculty members and study concentrations in areas spanning the employment relationship, including collective bargaining, labor history, personnel management, labor economics, organizations and management, and labor law. New doctoral programs were established in industrial relations (first was Wisconsin in 1956), new academic journals were founded (e.g., *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 1947; *Personnel Psychology*, 1948); new professional associations were created (Industrial Relations Research Association, IRRA, 1947; American Society for Personnel Administration, ASPA, 1948) and a bevy of nationally recognized researchers from across a variety of fields and disciplines were working on IR-denominated research. Examples include: Benjamin Aaron (law), Conrad Arensberg (anthropology); Chris Argyris (psychology/OB); E. Wight Bakke (economics/sociology), Irving Bernstein (history), John Dunlop (economics); George Homans (sociology); Clark Kerr (economics); Douglas McGregor (psychology/management); Charles Myers (economics/personnel); William Foote Whyte (sociology/OB); and Dale Yoder (economics/personnel).

In the 1950s industrial relations was still defined broadly and included as subfields the management-oriented subject of personnel management and the union-oriented subject of labor relations. An authoritative statement on this matter is provided by Yodes, Heneman, Turnbull and Stone (1958) in an ASPA-commissioned handbook (emphasis in original):

“In current practice, careful usage employs the terms *management* or *personnel administration* to refer to the management of manpower within a plant or agency, and the terms emphasize employer relations with individual employees, in such activities as selection, rating, promotion, transfers, etc. In contrast, the term *labor relations* is generally used to describe employer relations with groups of employees, especially collective bargaining contract negotiation and administration. *Industrial relations*, or *employment relations*, in recent years, has come to be used as the broadest of these terms, including the areas of both personnel management and labor relations. ‘Industrial relations’ or ‘employment relations’ thus describes all types of activities designed to secure the efficient cooperation of manpower resources” (p. 22).

IR's inclusive nature was reflected in universities where the typical IR major included four courses: personnel management, labor economics, collective bargaining, and labor law (Estey, 1960). This pattern continued to mirror the pattern of the 1920s — that is, industrial relations was offered outside management departments and often outside business schools (e.g., in stand-alone centers and institutes) and put the subject of HRM in an expansive interdisciplinary and social science framework. HRM was also offered in business schools and management departments but in this case as a more focused and detailed business subject dealing exclusively with personnel procedures and practices, usually starting with an “Introduction to PM” course and then followed by one or more functional area specialization courses (e.g., staffing, training, compensation). Similar to the 1920s, industrial relations in the 1950s also had distinct externalist and internalist wings anchored, respectively in economics and psychology. This bifurcation is revealed, for example by a comparison of the articles published in the first issue of *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* and *Personnel Psychology*, respectively. In the former, 6 of 7 articles deal with organized labor or economics; in the latter, all 9 articles have an internal/psychological dimension (e.g., attitude surveys, measuring leadership ability).

Enrollment in personnel courses expanded considerably in the decade after WWII and many business schools added to their offerings in this area. Nonetheless, PM labored under a number of handicaps and shortcomings (Jacoby, 2003). Due to the events of the previous twenty years, for example, PM and human relations were widely regarded with suspicion as covert tools of union avoidance. Another strain of thought was that they were tools of manipulation companies used to make workers happier on the principle “contented cows give more milk.” Leaving the realm of ideology, PM also played a secondary role to the labor relations function in companies and was widely seen as an unexciting, low level, largely administrative function having little organizational power or room for upward advancement and the place where companies put their low performers and managerial dead wood (Drucker, 1954; Kochan & Cappelli, 1984).

In the academic world, PM's reputation suffered because it was housed in vocational-oriented business schools, lacked intellectual content, and was mostly a descriptive and technique-laden subject. Arnold Weber (1987), an IR center director and president of Northwestern University, said of business schools,

“When I received my PhD in economics from MIT in 1958 and went to teach at a business school, it was something like running away with a bareback rider at the circus... Business schools had courses in window display design and turret lathe set ups, and all those pragmatic things” (p. 19).

Then he says of personnel management,

“When I studied labor relations at Illinois in 1950–1951, there were a few students at the institute who were taking personnel; they were *déclassé* by definition. I would approach these fellows and quizzically ask why they were going into personnel ... They always gave one of the two answers that were descriptive of the field: (1) ‘I did it in the Army,’ or (2) ‘I like people.’” (p. 15).

In the same spirit, a highly influential Ford Foundation report on the state of American business education concluded: “next to the course in production, perhaps more educational sins have been committed in the name of personnel management than in any other required course in the business curriculum” (Gordon & Howell, 1959: 189).

11. IR and PM drift apart: darkest before the dawn for PM?

Toward the end of the 1950s IR and PM started to drift apart and two decades later they were typically seen as separate if moderately overlapping subjects. Mahoney (2008) notes: “The emerging contradictions of viewpoints became more apparent beginning in the 1960s. The behaviorist approaches, with their relatively micro focus, implicitly competed with the more analytical and macro foci of the more traditional IR/HRM approach” (p. 35).

The specific causes of the break-up are numerous and complex: the inevitable disciplinary fragmentation and loss of common ground that accompanies growing academic specialization and division of labor; the mounting difficulty of communicating across disciplinary boundaries; lack of an integrative theoretical framework, and intellectual and ideological rivalries. These fault lines were most clearly revealed in the late 1950s by the “spectacular academic battle” (Lansberger, 1958: 1) that broke out over the human relations school, with some well-known economists mounting a fairly harsh critique and some equally well-known behavioral scientists heading up a stout defense (see the exchanges between Dunlop (1950) and Whyte (1950), respectively, and

Kerr and Fisher (1957) and Arensberg and Tootle (1957)). Sociologists tended to divide down the middle (micro on one side, macro on the other).

By the end of the 1970s IR was noticeably less multidisciplinary with a center in a now-fading institutional tradition. Its intellectual boundaries also became more closely defined around pluralism, unions, collective bargaining, and labor policy. Paradoxically, Dunlop (1958) endeavored to give the IR field a broader and more integrative provenance with his theory of *industrial relations systems* but in important ways it actually reinforced the splintering and narrowing of the field. His book – widely considered field defining in IR – did so by minimizing or ignoring altogether the behavioral, personnel, nonunion, and unitarist dimensions of employment relationships. PM, on the other hand, remained largely as it had been – a managerial subject heavily identified with the personnel function in companies, an emphasis on an administrative/psychological approach to employment problems, and a belief that while unions might be necessary and even socially advantageous they nonetheless were most often at the enterprise level an impediment to more effective workplace cooperation and performance.

This shift left IR considerably more in the hands of (institutional) labor economists and associated faculty from IR schools; the major journals became the *American Economic Review*, *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, and *Industrial Relations*; and the major academic meeting – the IRRRA – was held in conjunction with the American Economics Association. Industrial relations thus took on a more overtly externalist, macro, and collectivist complexion. PM, on the other hand, reacted by strengthening its management credentials and connections by distancing itself from IR, anchoring itself in business schools, and emphasizing business goals and its role in accomplishing them. It also moved away from contact with labor economists and became more closely associated with people trained in the administrative and behavioral sciences; downplayed conflict and power inequalities and emphasized cooperation and goal alignment, and oriented itself to journals such as *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Academy of Management Journal*, and *Management of Personnel Quarterly* (now *Human Resource Management*) and made the HR Division of the Academy of Management (created in 1971 as the Manpower Management Division) its central meeting place. PM thus became more internalist, micro, behavioralist, and individualist.

Until the late 1970s the IR field was in the top-dog position: collective bargaining remained the dominant mode of workplace governance; in most people's eyes economics trumped psychology and management for a strong theoretical base and set of research tools; the IR institutes and schools remained the most visible and prestigious centers for graduate work in both labor relations and personnel; and even in companies like IBM, Kodak, and Delta Air Lines where personnel management played an influential role (Foulkes, 1980; Jacoby, 1997; Meyer, 1976) it too often looked – to the skeptics at least – like a sophisticated union avoidance strategy. When the divorce happened, IR walked away feeling it had not lost much. Personnel management in industry was for the most part on the lowest rung of the managerial ladder; in the academic world no professor achieved a “big name” by specializing in personnel and few found intellectual stimulation in instructing students in the mundane techniques of staffing, training, compensation, and other such activities (Strauss, 2001). Illustratively, Fred Foulkes (1975) noted in the mid-1970s that of the 39,000 graduates of the Harvard Business School only 150 had taken a job in personnel, the reason being “Many of them feel the personnel field is ‘low status’ and ‘bad news’ (p. 1). PM's marginal status in academe is telling revealed by perusal of the edited volume *Classics in Personnel Management* (Patten, 1979). Of the 54 chapters, most are descriptive and oriented toward methods and administration (e.g., “New Practices and Ideas in Compensation Administration”), the most visible and well-known authors do not come from personnel per se but from human relations, OB and general management (e.g., Argyris, Drucker, Herzberg, Maslow, McGregor), and the lead article for the Section “The Role of Personnel” has the revealing but inauspicious title “Is Personnel Management Bankrupt?”

12. Personnel becomes HRM

From the 1970s onward the fortunes of personnel management improved – surprisingly so by century's end, while those of industrial relations followed an opposite course. The next section outlines several reasons behind PM's new-found forward momentum. The beginning of the story, however, starts with a name change.

The personnel management term came into usage in the late 1910s and until the 1960s vied with industrial relations as the label for both the practice and study of the employment management function. A number of people combined them, such as in the title of Miner and Miner's textbook *Personnel and Industrial Relations* Miner and Miner, 1973. The IR label started to fade, however, in part because it acquired an outdated smokestack persona and identity with unions; not until the 1990s did a substitute start to appear – *employment relations* (ER) – but its take-up was halting and lukewarm. The PM label had also acquired a variety of negative connotations over the years – not all fair or accurate but widely believed nonetheless. Unlike IR, however, people in PM successfully came up with a new label that helped give the field an updated, broader and more progressive image. This new label was *Human Resource Management* (HRM).

The use of the term “human resource” with respect to employees goes back at least to Commons (1919: 129); through the 1950s it was occasionally repeated but without creating any noticeable ripples (Marciano, 1995). Its first discernable appearance in the mainline literature was in 1964 when Myers, Pigors and Malm renamed their personnel readings text to *Management of Human Resources: Readings in Personnel Administration* (Myers et al., 1964) and in the same year when Wendell French (1964) published the first edition of his text *The Personnel Management Process: Human Resources Administration* (see Strauss, 2001).

French (1964: 5) indicates that he got the idea for the HR term from a published lecture by IR scholar E. Wight Bakke titled *The Human Resource Function* (Bakke, 1958). Bakke defines the human resources function broadly and generically as: “the managerial function of dealing with people” (p. 4) and asserts “The tasks in the human resources function ...are necessarily performed by all in the company who supervise the work of others, not just people labeled with personnel or labor relations titles” (p. 21).

Hotchkiss (1923) had articulated much the same idea thirty-five years earlier (previously described) but Bakke links the idea to the human resource concept – a concept which was starting to get attention through comparative IR studies spawned by a multi-million Ford Foundation grant led by Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison, and Myers and called the Inter-University Study of Labor Problems in Economic Development (see Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison, & Myers, 1960). Bakke highlights the strategic aspect of the human resources function, stating it must “contribute to major decision-making in all areas of company operations” so that human resources “[are used] effectively for an organizational objective” (p. 17).

For the next ten-to-fifteen years the PM and HRM terms were used more or less interchangeably (Strauss, 2001). When, for example, ASPA changed its name in 1990 to Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), it also renamed its magazine from *The Personnel Administrator* to *HR Magazine* but told readers they would “[only] notice a few cosmetic changes” (Adams, 1989: 4). Others went a step further and indicated the name change signaled an accommodation to gradual shifts in the field’s subject area and emphasis. In this group, for example, were the editors of the Michigan-based journal *Management of Personnel Quarterly* who in 1972 renamed the publication *Human Resource Management* on the grounds that “the industrial relations field has changed... to include... manpower, organizational behavior, management education, and the effective utilization of human resources” (Connellan, 1972: 3).

Only in the early 1980s did the HRM term start to take on a meaning significantly different than connoted by PM. This is indicated by the fact that people started to talk about HRM as if it were a relatively new innovation, suggested by the statement of Galang, Elsik, and Russ (1999): 43) that, “HRM is recognized to have originated [post-1970s] from U.S. business schools.”

Of these business schools, the ones at Harvard and Michigan played particularly important roles in this transformation (Legge, 2005; Reichel & Mayrhofer, 2009). First Harvard.

In 1984–1985 a group of Harvard Business School professors, including Michael Beer, Paul Lawrence, D. Quinn Mills, Burt Spector, and Richard Walton, published a series of books and articles announcing a new approach to HRM. This new approach proved very influential and led to a major rethinking of what HRM is about. According to Lawrence (1985), HRM had evolved through five different stages or models from the early 1800s: Craft (dominant to 1820s), Market (dominant to WWI), Technical (dominant until WWII), Career (dominant into 1980s), and Commitment (emergent). The theme of all of these writers was that the HRM term was not just a new label for PIR but a new paradigm built around the emergent commitment model of managing people. Walton (1985) developed the commitment model idea in a influential *HBR* article “From Control to Commitment in the Workplace” (1985) and then tells readers in a companion book *HRM Trends and Challenges* (Walton & Lawrence, 1985) “I have coined the term *high commitment* work system and have proposed that high commitment is the essential ingredient in the future pattern of HRM” (pp. 3–4).

Beer and Spector (1984) then describe in considerable detail the different assumptions, philosophies and practices that distinguish the new HRM model from the old PIR model (see the fourteen items in their Fig. 1). The then-dominant approach to people management (PIR), they claimed, was bureaucratic and control-oriented, rested on an adversarial balancing of interests model of the employment relationship, treated employees as a variable cost and expense to be minimized, took a reactive and administrative approach to dealing with people problems, and looked at personnel practices divorced from broader corporate objectives and in isolation of each other. The “new HRM” was much the opposite: it endeavored to gain competitive advantage by creating unity of interest and mutuality; cut cost by reducing hierarchy and control mechanisms and fostering greater employee self-management; created a more productive and dynamic “learning organization” by creating extensive forums for employee participation and training; promoted greater work effort and good citizenship behavior by providing job security, mutual-gain pay and opportunities for upward progression; and moved toward a much more egalitarian workplace culture. A major theme of the new HRM model, as announced in the book *Managing Human Assets* (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills, & Walton, 1984), was to view employees not as commodities and a variable cost item but as a form of longer-lived human capital that with sufficient investment and appropriate management can yield a distinct long-run productivity and profit edge.

An outcome of the Harvard studies was that the concept of HRM came to have a dual connotation. The first meaning of HRM is broad and generic, per the statement at the beginning of *Managing Human Assets* that, “Human resource management (HRM) involves all management decisions and actions that affect the nature of the relationship between the organization and its employees – its human resources” (p. 1). But they also give the HRM term a second meaning that equated it with the new collaborative model of people management, per the statement of Beer and Spector (1984), “Thus, pressures for change are leading to an integration of two fields that, in the past, have been largely separate, and even sometimes opposed: Industrial Relations and Organizational Development. Out of this integration is emerging what we identify as Human Resources Management” (p. 261).

The Harvard Group’s identification of HRM with a new workplace paradigm quickly led to other associations. They claimed that the existing PIR management model led to systemic underutilization of the nation’s human resources, thus contributing to the United State’s slackening rate of productivity growth and growing competitive problems with Japan and other countries. The solution, they claimed, was to transition to the new HRM paradigm because “High-performance organizations require high-commitment work systems” (*HRM Trends and Challenges*, p. 47). Thus, in the decade that followed many writers began to equate “HRM” with a “high commitment” or “high involvement” work system (e.g., Lawler, 1992). This association also gained a boost by writings that linked the philosophy and practices of HRM with Japanese management – a hot topic in the 1980s and subject of many books and foreign visits – and, in particular, its collaborative “theory Z” approach (Ouchi, 1981). These ideas and terms, coupled with the socio-technical concept pioneered at the Tavistock Institute in the UK, evolved into the very popular and much-researched concept of a *high performance work system* (HPWS) with associated high performance work practices (HPWPs) (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000; Huselid, 1995; Nadler, Gerstein, & Shaw, 1992). By the mid-1990s, therefore, a significant school of thought in America gravitated to the view that the quintessential model of HRM is some approximation of an

HPWS and since an HPWS by definition optimizes firm performance one can therefore derive the hypothesis: advanced HRM → higher firm performance. This linkage was attractive because it separated HRM from its low-status predecessor PM, put HRM on a foundation of new and exciting management and behavioral science research, gave HRM a much more updated and progressive image, and suggested that HRM could be an important source of higher economic performance in an age of intensified global competition. On the downside, the “new discovery” billing neglected the commitment model's roots in the unitarist-goodwill model developed by IR companies and writers of the 1920s (Kaufman, 2001b, 2003a).

A number of European writers in the 1990s asserted that American HRM was almost entirely synonymous with the HPWS philosophy and concept and proceeded to define it this way (e.g., Storey, 1992). Although having a significant truth element, this claim went too far (Strauss, 2001). As indicated above, by the 1990s the Americans had settled on a two-track strategy in defining HRM. On one hand, they continued to define HRM broadly as “all forms of people management” in order to provide as wide a provenance as possible for the field; then, on the other, to give the concept cache and importance they narrowed the concept to the specialized “high performance” version. Illustratively, on one page Ferris, Barnum, Rosen, Holleran, and Dulebohm (1995): 1–2) define HRM broadly as “the science and the practice that deals with the nature of the employment relationship and all of the decisions, actions, and issues that involve that relationship” but then on the next page define it more narrowly: “The term HRM reflects the evolution of a science and practice distinct from its predecessor label, personnel management... HRM emphasizes the potential of employees as organizational assets.”

13. HRM's ascendancy: the contribution of OB

The HRM field appeared to make an impressive forward leap in the 1980s and 1990s at both the practitioner and academic levels. Illustrative of the former, Foulkes and Morgan (1977, May/June) quote an HRM executive who says in the mid-1970s, “The image of personnel is zero” (p. 142); three decades later Schuler (1998) reports, “by the year 2000 more than 90% [of HR managers] expect the human resource department to be critical [to organizational success]” (p. 122).

A variety of reasons account for this upward trend, not all of which can be given attention here. An example is the steady expansion of employment law since the early 1960s, such as equal opportunity, family and medical leave, and workers with disabilities, which were most often delegated to the HR department to administer and maintain compliance (Lee & Sockell, 1997). Among other developments, two rank as the most important factors propelling HRM's rise. These are discussed, respectively, in this and the next section, starting here with organizational behavior.

In the 1950s the dominant disciplinary influence in the PIR field remained economics, albeit broadly conceived in the ILE tradition. Even in the personnel management wing most of the best-known experts, such as Douglas Brown, Herbert Heneman, Charles Myers, Sumner Slichter, and Dale Yoder, and authors of the most widely-used textbooks (e.g., Myers & Pigors, 1951; Strauss & Sayles, 1960; Yoder, 1959) had a PhD in economics (Kaufman, 2000a). Also in the PM wing were industrial psychologists but their preoccupation with traditional topics, such as employment tests and job evaluation, kept them in what Leavitt (1961: 25) describes as a “peripheral technician's role” in PIR. Human relations, on the other hand, was more broadly conceived and had greater success in bringing the behavioral dimension to the PM-IR fields yet it also labored under some of the intellectual and ideological limitations earlier noted.

This situation was transformed by development of the new field of *Organizational Behavior* (OB) and its close off-shoot organizational development (OD). OB formed in the 1960s out of confluence of industrial-organizational psychology, industrial sociology, human relations, organization theory, and management; it came into its own in the 1970s — exemplified, for example, by the creation in 1971 of an OB division in the Academy of Management (Dent, 2002; Katzell & Austin, 1992). Miner (2006) defines OB as “a social science discipline ... [with] its intellectual home in business schools... The concern is first with the behavior and nature of people within organizations, and second with the behavior and nature of organizations within their environments” (p. 3). The two sides of OB distinguished by Miner are often called micro and macro OB.

OB was a welcome development since it seemed better positioned to give PM a stronger theoretical foundation than either economics or industrial relations could provide. It did so both at the micro and macro levels, although the former played by far the larger role through the 1980s (O'Reilly, 1991). Micro OB provided theories of motivation, leadership, decision-making, and small group dynamics that could then be applied to standard PM topics, such as compensation, staffing, training and dispute resolution. Dunnette and Bass (1963) were among the first to note this change, observing “many of the leading schools of business and industrial administration have shifted from the descriptive study of current personnel practices to the application of principles of the social sciences to the analysis of organizational problems” (p. 116). A decade later Martin echoed this observation, stating Martin, 1975, “Personnel administration and management as taught in collegiate schools of business changed drastically during the 1960's. This change stemmed in large part from two 1959 foundation-sponsored studies of business schools, which argued persuasively that business school curricula should incorporate more of the behavioral sciences” (p. 150). Martin found that the five most cited academic authors in the practitioner personnel literature were all behavioral scientists associated with OB-OD: Herzberg, McGregor, Porter, Maslow, and Argyris.

The common denominator in the writings of these OB-OD scholars is that organizations can gain higher productivity and performance by practicing management and designing work in ways that take into account the social and relational dimensions of employment and the psycho-social needs and internal motives of people — aspects not given adequate recognition in the economic man model of scientific management and orthodox economics. This duality was influentially framed by McGregor (1960) as “theory X” versus “theory Y,” theory Y in turn became the foundation for the commitment strategy of people management proposed by Walton (1985); and this strategy was then fleshed-out as a high commitment or high performance set of HRM practices.

The high performance model transitioned from an academic theory to a organizational reality in the 1970s when a small group of pioneering companies created new greenfield plants based on socio-technical/high-commitment design principles utilizing a transformed HRM system with self-managed teams, job sharing, cross-training, and extensive employee participation (Kochan, Katz, & McKersie, 1986; Nadler et al., 1992; Walton, 1974). The decade of the 1970s was ripe for this innovation because union density was receding and companies began to feel confident they could keep new plants non-union and experiment with involvement and mutual gain practices; also important were changes in technology and organizational design that created more room for flexible production, flatter hierarchy, and greater collaboration among job tasks (Adler, 2003). These plants and the HPWS model caught the public and academic imagination – not only because they seemed to boost productivity and lower cost but also because they led to greater job satisfaction, more cooperative employee relations, and a much-reduced worker desire for outside representation. *Business Week* (May 11, 1981) announced the new era with an article titled “The New Industrial Relations;” it was soon followed by books with much catchier titles, such as *In Search of Excellence* (Peters & Waterman, 1982), *The Ultimate Advantage: Creating the High-Involvement Organization* (Lawler, 1992) and *Competitive Advantage Through People* (Pfeffer, 1994). As organizational behavior's influence grew and business schools added to their OB faculty positions (due in part to accreditation requirements), HRM gradually became at many universities a course in “applied OB” and OB-trained professors were hired with the expectation that part of their annual teaching load was a section or two of HRM. The tilt away from IR and toward OB is indicated by Strauss's (2001) observation that of 21 board members of the HR Division in 1999 18 belonged to SIOP (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology) and only 4 to the IRRRA.

14. HRM's ascendancy: the role of strategy

By the 1970s labor economics had undergone its own transformation and had largely abandoned the cross-disciplinary institutional approach to labor and instead practiced a more abstract microeconomic and market-centered neoclassical approach (Boyer & Smith, 2001; Kaufman, 1993). Further, most industrial relations researchers were moving toward a greater focus on unions and collective bargaining and were expressing indifference-to-skepticism about the new field of OB (Strauss, 1970). Thus, a feature of personnel management in the 1960s and 1970s was that it gravitated toward a more micro-psychological and internal theoretical orientation, partly because the external wing anchored in economics and IR moved away and partly because behavioral scientists steeped in psychology and organizational studies moved in.

This development had positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, Mahoney and Deckop (1986) note in PM an “increased emphasis on theoretical contributions as related to managerial practice, particularly behavioral science theories” (p. 5) and, further, that, “both scholarship and practice shifted from design and administration of activities to managing a work force for the accomplishment of organizational objectives” (p. 5). On the downside they noted two other things. First, “developments in organization science are contributing to rediscovery of concepts from interdisciplinary contributions to industrial relations in the 1950s and 1960s ... [and] are relatively ignorant of contributions from economics;” second, that PM “continued to evolve as a collection of activities, each associated with a particular model from psychology ... [and] none of these models truly provided integration of personnel activities, and, at most, suggested that the activities individually contributed to some set of outcomes for organizations” (p. 6). Hence, PM had greater theoretical content but remained a fragmented series of activities, leading PM scholars to “search for an integrating conceptual framework” (p. 7). It was also heavily oriented toward micro-level workplace topics – per the observations of Patten (1965) and Fisher (1989) that the most researched topic in PM over a two decade period was employee selection and in particular test validation – and thus necessarily distanced from macro organizational concerns and the influence of external environment factors.

Here enters the strategy concept and the role of the University of Michigan. The idea that HRM activities need to be considered as an integrated system and this system needs to be aligned with organizational objectives was hardly a new one, as documented earlier; further, some firms had been practicing an identifiable form of strategic HRM since the first part of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the time was ripe in the early 1980s for strategy to be incorporated into HRM in a much more central and formal way. One reason was the rise to prominence in general management of the strategy idea (a modernization and re-conceptualization of the older idea of business policy); a second was a series of environmental factors – e.g., intensified competition, globalization, shorter product life cycles, financial market pressure for higher returns – that forced companies to think about systemic change in all areas of their business; and, third, disenchantment with the low value-creation record of the traditional PIR model.

The PM/HRM literature of the 1970s started to feature more commentary and discussion about the importance of taking a strategic perspective to the subject. The break-through moment occurred, however, in 1982–1984 due to events and publications at the Michigan Business School. More than any other institution, Michigan was the first to really push the incorporation of strategy into HRM.

The Michigan-sponsored journal *Human Resource Management* was originally published under the aegis of the Bureau of Industrial Relations in the business school and its first editor, George Odiorne, had the title Professor of Personnel and Industrial Relations. In the early 1980s, however, the new editor Noel Tichy substantially reoriented the journal. He states in an “Editor's Note” (Tichy, 1983: 1), “This is the inaugural issue of a newly focused *Human Resource Management*. The journal's focus will shift dramatically to be strategic...” Looking back almost a decade later, new editor David Ulrich (1990: 357) observed that the old version of the journal had a “rather technical focus and narrow audience of HR professionals. When Noel Tichy became editor, he immediately worked to transform the journal to ... strategic human resource management issues.” To jump-start the research program, Tichy organized a special double issue of articles on strategy and HR obtained from a symposium attended by prominent management academics and industry executives. Michigan faculty members also made a substantial contribution to getting SHRM off the ground; in particular, a Devanna et al., 1982 paper “Strategic Planning and Human Resource Management” by

Devanna, Fombrun, Tichy, and Warren and a follow-up book *Strategic Human Resource Management* (Fombrun, Tichy, & Devanna, 1984).

It did not take long for the strategic HRM idea to take off. Several years later Mahoney and Deckop (1986) devoted a short section in the middle of their review article to “From Human Resource Planning to Strategy” (pp. 9–10), signaling that change was in progress, but they also noted that, “there is not an acceptable conceptual framework yet” (p. 10). Three years later, Fisher (1989) published an in-depth review of the HRM field and now the first section was devoted to the strategic dimension. She also cited a growing number of theoretical and empirical articles, such as by Schuler and Jackson (1987), Cook and Ferris (1986, Fall), and Balkin and Gomez-Mejia (1987). Fast-forwarding to the early 21st century, Ferris, Hall, Royle, and Martocchio (2004) observe in their review of the field, “Within the last decade or so, probably the single most notable trend in HRM research has been the strategic human resource management movement (SHRM)” (p. 234).

During the 1980s the strategic dimension was typically included as part of HRM, in the early 1990s a separation began and the strategic “macro” part became a new subfield called *strategic human resource management* (SHRM) while the functional/practice area became the “micro” part (Wright & Boswell, 2002).

Other interesting and important developments also followed that fundamentally shaped the evolution of HRM. For example, if HRM systems should align with company's business strategies then it is crucial to identify the nature of these alternative strategies. In the first decade SHRM researchers focused on external-oriented typologies of business strategies, such as cost minimization versus product differentiation (Porter, 1980) and prospector versus defender (Miles & Snow, 1978). Some of these strategies (e.g., cost minimization) did not seem to provide much scope for HRM to be an influential player nor did they fit well with researchers' disciplinary base in psychology-OB; as a result, in the 1990s SHRM gravitated toward an internal-driven and psychology-friendly typology based on the resource based view (RBV) of the firm and ability, motivation and opportunity (AMO) framework of the individual employee (Barney, 1991; Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, & Drake, 2009). The key ideas in the RBV-AMO dualism are: internal firm resources can provide a sustainable source of competitive advantage and superior organizational performance if they are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable; a firm's employees (human capital) can be a particularly value-creating resource if firms can tap into their unique and highly productive abilities, motivations, and desire for engagement; and HRM is the critical organizational function for strategically aligning employee behaviors with organizational goals and eliciting the maximum of employees' knowledge, skills and abilities. Thus, Allen and Wright (2007) note that the RBV, “has become the guiding paradigm on which virtually all strategic HRM research is based” (p. 90), its key contribution is to provide, “a legitimate foundation upon which HRM researchers could argue that people and human resources of firms could in fact contribute to firm-level performance” (pp. 91–92), and “HRM in the form of HRM practices directly impacts the employees either by increasing human capital or motivation or both” (p. 93).

The next big step in the development of SHRM was Huselid's, 1995 pioneering article in the *Academy of Management Journal* that provided an empirical study of the link between HRM practices and firm performance. Wright and Boswell (2002) claim Huselid's article, “serves as probably the seminal, and definitely most-cited work in this area” (p. 251), a conclusion buttressed by findings of a recent bibliometric analysis (Fernandez-Alles & Ramos-Rodríguez, 2009). On the first page he discusses how high performance work practices can increase employees' knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA's) and thereby organizational performance; after more theory development he posits “All else being equal, the use of high performance work practices and good internal fit should lead to positive outcomes for all types of firms” (p. 644). Huselid then uses regression analysis to determine for a sample of 3452 firms the relationship between thirteen advanced HRM practices and two measures of overall corporate financial performance (Tobin's q , gross rate of return on capital) and find's a large, positive and statistically significant relationship. This positive “main effect” remains even after controlling for various contingent and control variables. Huselid's study was then followed up by dozens more. Although varying in details and findings, a meta-analysis of 92 studies concludes, “our results lay to rest any doubts about the existence of a [positive] relationship... We estimate that organizations can increase their performance by .20 of a standardized unit for each unit increase in HPWP use” (Combs, Ketchen, Hall, & Liu, 2006: 524). These findings have become encapsulated in the fundamental SHRM proposition “*more is better*” (Wright & McMahan, 2011: 97). Although this proposition, and its underlying methodological and theoretical foundations, have been questioned (Boxall & Macky, 2009; Cappelli & Neumark, 2001; Godard, 2004; Kaufman, 2012b), it would be difficult to overstate how influential and energizing this line of research has been to modern HRM.

Also accompanying the burst of SHRM-related empirical work was a similar burst of new theorizing. An influential and oft-cited study was by Delery and Doty (1996) who distinguish three different theoretical frames of reference in SHRM research: universalistic, contingent and configurational. The universalistic frame – Pfeffer's book *Human Equation* (1998) being most often cited as an exemplar – explained the positive main effect between HRM and performance; the contingent frame introduced internal and external moderator variables that explained variation across firms in the types of HRM practices that provide optimal performance; and the configurational frame emphasized the importance of looking at HRM practices as well-integrated synergistic bundle. Concepts such as vertical and horizontal fit, best practice and best fit, and HRM architectures followed (e.g., Becker & Huselid, 2006; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009; Lepak & Snell, 1999).

In a recent review of the literature, Becker and Huselid (2006) observe, “The field of strategic human resource management (SHRM) has enjoyed a remarkable ascendancy during the past two decades” (p. 898). SHRM, however, is not the entire HRM field and a considerable part of modern HRM research continues to explore micro-functional topics, such as compensation, staffing, training, and performance appraisal. Indeed, Rynes, Gulik, and Brown (2007) asked editors of HRM journals to identify the most important findings of HRM research and only one came from the macro HRM side (“HR practices are important to organizational outcomes”) and four were concentrated in the employee selection area (e.g., “structured interviews are more valid than unstructured ones”) – the central topic investigated by industrial-organization psychologists since the 1920s. Perhaps even more

disconcerting, these authors found evidence of a quite large disconnect between the research agenda and findings of academic HRM researchers and the importance and attention given to them by HRM practitioners.

The modern HRM field is also broadening with the addition of a number of new topics, such as work-family balance, environmental sustainability, and corporate social responsibility. Also receiving growing attention is international and comparative HRM (Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2012; Schuler, Dowling, & De Cieri, 1993), often framed in a strategic perspective. Recent handbooks provide an excellent survey of the breadth and depth of modern HRM (e.g., Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007; Storey, Wright, & Ulrich, 2009; Wilkinson, Bacon, Redman, & Snell, 2009). Nonetheless, as the modern HRM field – more specifically, the portion associated with American business schools and management departments – crossed-over into the 21st century the strategic dimension is fairly characterized as its focal point and leading edge. Illustratively, Fernandez-Alles and Ramos-Rodríguez (2009) performed a bibliometric analysis of all articles published in the journal *Human Resource Management* from 1985 to 2005. They find that the core of the academic HRM field, as revealed by citation counts, is the subject of HRM-firm performance with ancillary nodes in strategy/structure, international HRM, and the resource based view of the firm. Interestingly, one area of HRM *not* a part of the field's conversation is people management in the public sector. Popular mainstream HRM textbooks largely omit the subject and those that specialize in it still often use the term “public personnel management” in the title (e.g., Nigro, Nigro, & Kellough, 2007).

15. Meanwhile...: industrial relations and personnel economics

Industrial relations moved away from PM/OB in the 1960s–1970s to concentrate on union–management relations, only to see union density erode and then plummet. In the 1980s IR writers started to shift course and began to give more attention to management side of the employment relationship. They also followed the trend in HRM and gave more emphasis to the behavioral sciences and the newly emergent high performance paradigm (e.g., Kochan et al., 1986; Lewin & Feuille, 1983); similarly, IR researchers also started to incorporate the strategy concept and, arguably, were in the lead during the 1980s (e.g., Cappelli, Kochan, & McKersie, 1984; Lewin, 1987). IR had also pioneered looking at employment practices as a system (e.g., Dunlop, 1958) and Mahoney and Deckop (1986) proposed that an integrative framework for the PM/HRM field could be built using economist Clark Kerr's typology of different labor market structures with their associated HRM systems (Kerr, 1954). HRM writers did not take up this idea but later IR authors developed it into the concept of *employment systems* and then derived different discrete models of employment systems (Arthur, 1992; Begin, 1991; Kaufman, 2013; Marsden, 1999; Osterman, 1987).

IR scholars arguably also got off the mark first with theoretical and empirical studies of the HRM-firm performance topic, per the 1987 IRRA research volume on *Human Resources and the Performance of the Firm* (Kleiner, Block, Roomkin, & Salsburg, 1987), and followed up with a steady stream of books, articles and symposiums (e.g., MacDuffie, 1995; Appelbaum et al., 2000; the symposium in *Industrial Relations* “What Works at Work?” (Ichniowski, Levine, Kochan, Olson, & Strauss, 1996)). Thus, a significant track of the IR literature ran roughly parallel to or modestly ahead of the HRM literature and, in particular, the SHRM component. The IR literature differed, however, in that it continued to give more emphasis and attention to collective voice and union-related aspects of strategy and HPWS, gave greater attention to the socio-economic-legal context of employment systems, gave employees' interests more emphasis, and in some cases adopted a more critical and questioning stance about unitarist principles and ideological precepts (Delaney & Goddard, 2001; Thompson & Hartley, 2007). IR writers were also more likely to question the viability and spread of the HPWS model when the economic environment is shifting to a “new employment relationship” with more short-term market mediated jobs and the erosion of internal labor markets (Cappelli, 2000).

Although IR made a good showing in these high-visibility topic areas and made some notable efforts to re-broaden its domain, the academic tide was strongly running against it. IR was burdened with an increasingly out-of-date name and image, retained a strong link to union subjects and interests, brought to the table relatively few new ideas or methods not borrowed from somewhere else, and particularly in Europe and Australia sometimes adopted an over-the-top defensive reaction to HRM (Strauss, 2001). For their part, PM/HRM scholars – having been treated for so many years as second-class citizens – could now relish being in the top spot and letting the IR side fade away through benign neglect. A modest amount of IR research on the HPWS did manage to successfully cross-over into the HRM field (e.g., Appelbaum et al., 2000; Ichniowski, Shaw, & Prenzushi, 1997; MacDuffie, 1995); in general, however, HRM writers turned a mostly blind eye to industrial relations and treated IR as having modest-to-little relevance. Efforts on the IR side to generate a dialog, such as the symposium in the *HRM Review* (Winter 2001) on “What Can HR Learn from IR?,” typically fell into a black hole. The “who needs IR?” tone is conveyed by Ferris et al. (2004) when they remark, “Indeed, if... organized labor is in severe, noncyclical decline, ... then IR is left with HRM as the only healthy, viable avenue for inquiry for the immediate future” (p. 232).

While IR went into the academic doldrums, a new field called Personnel Economics started to take-off and generate a large literature. It was later joined by other new fields, such as Organizational Economics (OE) and New Institutional Economics (NIE), that took an interest in business firms and their internal management practices (Colombo & Delmastro, 2008; Furubotn & Richter, 2005; Williamson, 1985). IR has its roots in the original institutional economics of Commons and colleagues; PE is firmly anchored in neoclassical microeconomic theory and the other new fields are predominantly but not wholly in this tradition. PE bloomed in the late 1980s as part of a Chicago-led program of economic imperialism and its father is Edward Lazear. The beginning date of PE is effectively marked by the special symposium “The New Economics of Personnel” in the *Journal of Labor Economics*, October 1987; its progress since then has been surveyed by Gunderson (2001), Neilson (2007), and Lazear and Shaw (2007). The essence of economic imperialism is to apply the standard concepts and tools of microeconomics – rationality, constrained maximization, competition, incentives (relative prices), and equilibrium – to as wide a range of non-traditional subjects as possible (Lazear, 2000).

PE shares with traditional HRM several features. Writers in both areas claim the field covers the entire employment relationship (Ferris et al., 2004; Neilson, 2007) – a challenge to IR's jurisdiction on both sides. Similarly, PE's research agenda is very similar to

HRM's – per Lazear and Shaw's (2007) remark that PE “drills deeply into the firm to study human resource management practices like compensation, hiring practices, training, and teamwork” (p. 91). PE is also like SHRM in that it is expressly interested in pinpointing individual HRM practices that maximize firm performance and the systems of practices that provide best fit; PE also seems germane to SHRM because economic theory provides a useful way to analytically represent concepts such as strategy, contingencies, fit and complementarities (e.g., Kaufman & Miller, 2011; Laursen & Foss, 2003). After these similarities and compatibilities come huge differences. PE's home discipline is economics, not psychology-OB; the discourse is very theoretical and mathematical; PE theory makes assumptions and uses concepts that many HRM writers find unrealistic; and at the same time PE omits or downgrades in the interests of abstraction and model-building a number of features of people and organizations that HRM scholars regard as critical (e.g., organizational culture, multiple firm goals). For example, Pfeffer (2007) claims that PE looks at HRM through the lens of “rationality and competitive market efficiency” while OB stresses that employer–employee behavior is embedded in a social context, thinking is customary and sometimes ill-logical, social comparisons and imitation are prevalent, work performance is discretionary, social relations matter, and organizations sub-optimize.

Although HRM and PE explore the same topic domain, they are in other respects very much like the two proverbial ships in the night. The two most recent reviews of the PE and SHRM literatures (Lazear & Shaw, 2007; Lepak & Shaw, 2008), for example, include very few citations to the other side. The general journal literature is much the same. As Mitchell (2001) notes, this seems like a large loss since both sides could gain from intellectual exchange. An original purpose of industrial relations was to bridge this economics–psychology and externalist–internalist divide. The good news is that to the degree HRM and PE speak to each other it is largely through IR; the bad news is that this exchange is very selective and often perfunctory.

16. A few food-for-thought items

Part of the reason for taking an interest in the history of HRM is to discover insights from the past that are useful for charting a path forward for the field. Here, briefly, are four food-for-thought items.

16.1. The HRM concept

After a century of development, the concept of HRM still does not have consistent definition. Twenty-five years after the HRM concept was popularized multiple definitions flourish. Is HRM: (1) a general management function?, (2) a new high commitment approach to managing people?, (3) a functional activity associated with HR departments?, or (4) a distinctly American approach to people management? As Paaue and Boselie (2005) ask, “how can a field of academic inquiry ever manage to make progress if it is not able to come to terms with one of its central concepts?” (p. 69). History suggests a broad and inclusive “people management in organizations” definition lest the field be artificially truncated across time, companies, and countries.

History also suggests that the popular distinction between micro and macro HRM is useful but perhaps could be reframed a bit. Since the late 1910s, writers have recognized that organizations conduct people management with a portfolio of employment functions, tools and practices. Although the specific tools and practices evolve and proliferate over time, the basic functions of HRM have maintained considerable consistency over nearly a century (look at the chapter topics in Tead and Metcalf's (1920) *Personnel Administration*). At the same time, these early writers also noted that companies do not mix and match these HRM tools and practices in a random way but, rather, package them into distinct systems and configurations. Examples apparent then were commodity, technical, bureaucratic, goodwill, and collective bargaining systems. Building on this tools–system distinction, micro HRM becomes the study of the individual parts (functions, structures, tools, practices) that generically comprise a people management system and their individual effectiveness while macro HRM (SHRM) is the study of the alternative configurations these systems form, the determinants of managerial choice among them, and the performance of the systems. Employment systems in IR and human resource architectures in HRM become the common foci of SHRM (Kaufman, 2013).

16.2. HRM fads and reinventing the wheel

As often noted (e.g., Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2008; Carson, Lanier, Carson, & Birkenmeier, 1999), the management field is subject to recurrent fads and a penchant for writers to reinvent the wheel. An historical review of HRM reveals both at work. The concepts of HRM strategy, horizontal and vertical fit, resource based view of the firm, and commitment model of employment were all identified in the early part of the twentieth century. Here, for example, is a statement made almost one hundred years ago with clear RBV roots (Hopkins, 1915):

The day of large profits is passing... Machinery and methods of production alike are becoming standardized... Now, attention is centered on the status of the individual worker, and the individual worker is coming into his own as a supremely important subject for study and for development... Where there is no advantage to one over another in a plant [machinery, etc.], varying grades of success will be determined by the intelligence of selection of the personnel and the reasonableness of the adjustments with it.

Many other examples could be given. Yes, it is of course the case that modern writers have much improved on these earlier authors. And, admittedly, it is unreasonable to expect modern HRM scholars to pour through dusty archives to discover what their forebears said on a given subject. The field would, nonetheless, operate from a more solid foundation if modern HRM writers had

greater awareness and sensitivity for the historical dimension of their subject. They would, for example, be less prone to put all their SHRM eggs in the high performance basket upon realization that this model is a special case suitable for only certain firms and works well only when supported by an accommodative economic environment. At the height of welfare capitalism, for example, the goodwill–commitment model covered perhaps only 10% of industrial employment and then came crashing down in the early 1930s.

16.3. *Multi-disciplinary approaches and external vs. internal perspectives*

The subject of HRM, broadly viewed, is about managing employment relationships. Employment relationships, in turn, are widely recognized as influenced by diverse economic, legal, social, psychological, organizational, political, and historical forces. Further, while HRM is about management this does not limit research on HRM to management departments since other disciplines and fields are also interested in this form of organizational coordination and bring to the subject alternative tools and concepts. An economist, for example, could claim that HRM is the study of internal labor markets done through management direction rather than price direction.

Ideally, therefore, the subject of HRM should be examined in a multi-disciplinary context and researchers and teachers, while understandably giving emphasis to one approach or another, should at key points aim for a holistic perspective with integration across fields. From the beginning of personnel and industrial relations in the early 1920s, however, the study of HRM has tended to fracture along several fault lines which divide the field into disciplinary/subject silos. One fault line centers on unions and, more generally, the need for curbs on management power and parallel protection for employees. Another divider is level of analysis, ranging from individual cognitions on the micro end to national unemployment on the macro end. Yet a third is the split between internalist and externalist perspectives. This divide in the study of HRM is anchored on the internalist side by psychology and on the externalist side by economics. Currently, externalist and internalist wings of HRM are much like two long-separated wings of a family (per the family tree in Fig. 1) unable to communicate to each other because they speak different languages and have different cultural traditions.

To some degree SHRM and IR serve as bridges between disciplines and externalist vs. internalist perspectives; however, these bridges appear to be relatively thin and sporadically crossed. Just as a historical review of HRM suggests that research and teaching in, say, the 1920s, 1950s, or 1980s would have been strengthened by greater contact, integration and ecumenical spirit across disciplines, such is surely the case today. Unfortunately, history also teaches that getting researchers to talk to each across these dividing lines (or to talk across the academic–practitioner boundary) is difficult to initiate and sustain, particularly as publish or perish pressures ratchet upward.

17. **History normatively interpreted?**

When I first started to investigate the history of HRM more than a decade ago, I was quickly struck by the discordance between how HRM writers in textbooks and journal articles describe the origins of the field and what I encountered in the historical record. I wondered how the two could be so far apart. Partly this gap arises, I concluded, because most HRM writers come from the internalist–management wing and, unsurprisingly, look at the field's historical development through this lens. A person in labor history or critical management studies (or economics/IR in my own case) would see HRM's history through a different lens and construct a different account. However, I came to surmise that a more normative-grounded cause may also be at work.

The conventional account, as noted earlier, locates the field's origins in personnel management of the 1920s; it also paints PM of this era as a very low-level, administrative, and non-integrated activity mainly responsible for payroll and company picnics. Then, in this story, PM was joined in the 1930s by the union-oriented IR function and the two grew together as PIR through the 1960s, albeit still embedded in a traditional command-control, transactional, and functional silo approach. Next, the field discovered the new HRM idea – i.e., strategy, commitment, RBV-AMO, value rather than cost focus – and transformed into a value-added business partner with a seat at the executive table (e.g., Ferris, Hochwater, Buckley, Harrell-Cook, & Frink, 1999).

Based on the evidence presented in earlier parts of the paper, this account considerably overstates PM's lowly role in the 1920s, entirely omits IR and its strategic-goodwill model, overstates the degree of difference/discontinuity between PIR and HRM, and considerably exaggerates the spread of the HPWS (per the widespread erosion of ILMs over the last two decades). Why? A possible normative-driven reason is that omitting these data points creates a steeper and more impressive historical trajectory for the PM–now-called HRM part of the field (see, for example, Vosburgh, 2007, Fig. 1; Ulrich, 2011, Fig. 1). Adding in a discontinuous upward step in the trajectory as the field circa the 1970s–1980s transitions from PIR to SHRM make the upward climb even more impressive. My point is not to dispute the HRM field's long-term record of growth and development, as the account offered in this paper supports such an interpretation. Rather, I am suggesting the possibility that HRM's upward trajectory may be over-stated because researchers have been unduly influenced by desire to provide the field the influence, status, and respect it has so long struggled to attain in companies and business schools. To the degree such an upward bias is present, contemporary researchers could with benefit be more generous to accomplishments of earlier generations of PIR researchers and practitioners, exercise greater restraint in touting the “new discovery” and “transformational” nature of advances in recent HRM ideas and practices, and practice greater caution and critical discernment viz. the appealing but questionable universalistic “more is better” proposition.

18. Conclusion

Much of academic HRM research is forward looking with emphasis on discovering new ideas, developing better theories, and improving practice. Looking backward into the history of HRM may seem, therefore, a not particularly productive exercise. I have tried to make the case, however, that understanding the field's roots and historical development is good not only so young HRM scholars come to the field with a well-rounded perspective but also because it helps scholars of all ages and interests produce better educated students and accurate research. Toward that end, this article has been used to paint a century-plus portrait of the HRM field's origins and stages of developments. I have painted with a broader than usual brush by bringing into the picture HRM contributions from economics and industrial relations, endeavoring thereby to provide a more integrative account. Also noteworthy are presentation of new facets of HRM history and a number of revisionist interpretations and findings. Besides representing an interesting story, my hope is that it does indeed serve as a vehicle for the past to inform the future — per the epigraph to the article.

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