

von Eckardstein, Dudo; Konlechner, Stefan

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Dudo von Eckardstein, Stefan Konlechner*

Employer Behavior Human Resource Management Research and Teaching in Germany and Austria**

Employer behavior (“*Arbeitgeberverhalten*”) plays an essential role when it comes to understanding Human Resource Management (HRM). However, rather few studies actually seem to take the concrete behavior of organizations as employers into account. Instead, German textbooks and journals are replete with examples of “good practices” in HRM. We argue that, as a result, there is a growing discrepancy between HRM in research/teaching and practice, which unquestionably is a problematic development in an applied science like HRM. Based on our analysis of five leading German textbooks on HRM and five volumes of the German Journal of Research in Human Resource Management (2005-2009), we highlight current gaps in the academic discussion and we derive some theses concerning the current state of the discussion. Finally, we discuss our findings and highlight some avenues for further research in our field.

Key words: **HRM, employer behavior, textbook analysis, bad practice**
(JEL: M12, M14)

* Em. Prof. Dudo von Eckardstein, Institute for Human Resource Management, WU Vienna, Althanstraße 51, 1090 Wien, Austria. E-mail: Dudo.Eckardstein@wu-wien.ac.at.

Dr. Stefan Konlechner, Institute of Human Resource & Change Management, Johannes Kepler University Linz, Altenbergerstraße 69, 4040 Linz, Austria.
E-mail: Stefan.Konlechner@jku.at.

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1. Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) is an important academic discipline, which is institutionalized at most business schools around the world. Journals dealing with HRM rank at high positions in the VHB JourQual-Ranking and have considerably high Impact-factors. Research on HRM ranges from identifying best practices in separate domains such as recruiting, trainings, incentives and appraisal to examining the impact of creating firm-specific and idiosyncratic bundles of interdependent HR practices in a certain HRM-system on creating competitive advantage (for a current overview, see Reichel & Mayrhofer, 2009). However, the identification of optimal bundles of HR practices and the question for consistency in employer behavior seems to be an important issue only for researchers from Great Britain or the US (cf. e.g. Baron & Kreps, 1999). Although it is obvious that employer behavior (“*Arbeitgeberverhalten*”) needs to be taken into account when it comes to understanding Human Resource Management, few studies from German researchers explicitly address the question, which behavior entrepreneurs and enterprises *actually* show in their role as employers. Instead, German textbooks and journals are replete with examples of “good practices” in HRM (cf. the results of our analysis in the third section of this paper). “Bad practices”, which ultimately lead to a deterioration of working conditions for a large number of employees and which employers regularly use in order to preserve flexibility or to maximize profit, are frequently neglected in research; even though such practices often are heavily discussed in the media. As a result, there seems to be a growing discrepancy between HRM in research/teaching and practice. In a special forum in the Academy of Management Journal on “the separate worlds of academics and practitioners in human resource management”, Rynes et al. (2007, p. 987) argued that, “the gap between science and practice is so pervasive that some have despaired of its ever being narrowed”. Unquestionably, this is a problematic development in an applied science like Human Resource Management.

In this paper, we take a look at the role of employer behavior in research and teaching in Germany and Austria. Based on our analysis of five leading German textbooks on Human Resource Management and five volumes of the German Journal of Research in Human Resource Management (“*Zeitschrift für Personalforschung*”; Zfp) (2005-2009), we highlight current gaps in the academic discussion. The results of our illustrative analysis show, that even though research on employer behavior is essential to understand HRM, it is a widely neglected issue. The paper is structured as follows: In the next section, we define the notion of employer behavior and we discuss recent developments in employer behavior, which occurred during the last years and decades. Subsequently, we examine how scholars approach employer behavior in research and teaching. Finally, we discuss our findings and derive implications for future research. We argue that future research has to account for employer behavior in order to close the gap, which is currently to be seen between science and practice.

2. Understanding employer behavior

Defining employer behavior: Employer behavior (“*Arbeitgeberverhalten*”) is a term, which is often used in everyday (German) language, but hardly defined in the literature on

HRM. In this section, we define the term in the way we will use it throughout the paper. We integrate two different aspects into our definition of employer behavior. These aspects are the *behavior and behavioral patterns*, which a firm displays in its role as employer on the one hand and *characteristics of the employer as a political and social actor* on the other.

Behavior and behavioral patterns: Scholars frequently refer to employer behavior by describing specific practices, measures, or tools. Examples for such frequently described practices are the annual appraisal interview, which is an element of the managerial function of executives or the hiring interview, which is an element of the organizational HR selection strategy. On their own, such practices are separate activities, which do not tell much about how the employer understands its role vis-à-vis its employees. What matters more is the entirety of such singular practices and how they are interrelated, because employers always exercise multiple practices at the same time. In the literature, there are different approaches towards how separate practices should be combined. The best practice-approach suggests that certain HRM-practices always lead to firm success (e.g. Pfeffer, 1998). The best fit-approach suggests that success is the result of the firm's use of consistent bundles of HRM-practices, which have to be internally aligned (internal fit) and embedded into the corporate strategy (external fit) (MacDuffie, 1995; Kepes & Delery, 2007). However, in any case the sum of a firms HRM practices and partial strategies (e.g. selection, appraisal, training) constitutes its HRM system, which provides a rule-based framework that serves as a means to govern the employees' operative and learning behavior and is the expression of its HRM strategy (e.g. Kang & Snell, 2008).

The employer as an actor: Regarding the employer as an actor is necessary to understand employer behavior. Employers usually exercise HRM practices to achieve specific (strategic) aims (Schuler & Jackson, 2007). Employers can for instance conduct annual appraisal interviews for compensation purposes, or they can use it for motivational purposes. They can use it, because it is regarded as a symbol of professional work and therefore for reasons of ensuring legitimacy, or because it is required by law – as it is the case for the public service in Austria. The integration of the employer as an actor into our definition of employer behavior enables us to consider for instance (1) the employer's aims and goals behind the use of certain practices or strategies, (2) the employer's basic attitude towards employees and policies in use (e.g. emphasis on flexibility), and (3) the situational conditions (e.g. firm size, industry, ownership structure, etc.), that shape its behavior. To conclude, employer behavior includes behavior as well as the subject of this behavior, which attributes meaning to its behavior.

Changes in employer behavior: During the last decade, which is characterized by two major economic crises with a short period of recovery between them, employer behavior has changed strikingly; this applies especially to employer behavior concerning employment policy and compensation practices. Numerous employers started to implement new practices and to pursue new strategies, which can be regarded as a result of changing circumstances and emerging business trends (for an overview of current trends in European HRM, see Mayrhofer & Brewster, 2005). These changing circumstances include a shortage of skilled labor, rising cost pressure, changing ideas about justice and fairness, and perceived lower levels of commitment and loyalty of em-

ployees. In order to stay competitive (or for reasons of profit maximization) many German firms, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, have resigned from the tariff commitment with the aim of not having to back decisions on current tariff developments ("*Tarifflucht*") (Kohaut & Schnabel, 2003). This development further accelerates the deterioration of working conditions especially for unskilled labor. Consequently, we can currently witness changes in employer behavior:

First, organizational employment policy is changing. For example, the role of short-time work as employment policy has changed significantly. After the burst of the dot com-bubble at the beginning of the new millennium, hire and fire was the strategy of choice for many employers. However, the last economic crisis was rather characterized by the increasing relevance of short-time work and the use of practices that enable firms to preserve flexibility in order to react to future crises (see for a critical overview, Kaiser et al., 2005). Employers used a decrease of working hours to adapt to financial pressure and declining demand, especially in the segment of skilled labor (Oechsler et al., 2003). Yet, employers still try to secure some flexibility by using subcontracted labor in areas of lesser strategic relevance to the firm (Mitlacher, 2005). Contingent workers at the strategic periphery of the organization are made redundant, whenever firms perceive the need to do so. Additionally, employees at the strategic periphery are confronted with a deterioration of working conditions (Schramm & Schlese, 2005). Some organizations have been in the media, because they fired some employees and offered them new contracts through personnel leasing agencies ("*Personalverleiher*"). However, signing such new contracts usually implies significant wage reductions for the employees.

Additionally, an increasing number of employers offer only temporary contracts to new employees in order to preserve flexibility. This holds true especially for unskilled labor, where such practices have already been employed before, but also for skilled labor, where we can observe increasing numbers of highly educated people in precarious employment situations, e.g. through using practices that urge employees into new forms of self-employment (Pernicka & Mühlberger, 2009). Similarly, organizations offer minijobs and internships, especially to students, who receive less compensation than long-term full-time employees. In many cases internships are not paid at all (Benkhoff & Hermet, 2008). Finally, organizations increasingly outsource tasks that have been completed in-house before, to external providers, which employ employees at lower costs and often also poorer working conditions (Purcell et al., 2011).

Second, in the area of organizational compensation policies, we can also witness the enforcement of many practices, which are less directed towards reducing costs and more towards manipulating behavior. Some of the contemporary developments are striking, especially with regards to findings on organizational justice (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006). For instance, many organizations communicate the expectation to their employees that they have to perform extra work without extra pay. Organizations in the finance sector award some of their executives and key employees additional payments in the form of bonuses. Most large firms have adopted payment schemes for top-executives, which enable those executives to increase their income far disproportionately compared to the rest of the workforce (cf. Schmidt & Schwalbach, 2001). This practice prevails, despite of critical comments in science and society concerning its appro-

priateness and effectiveness (e.g. von Eckardstein & Konlechner, 2008). Additionally, many organizations in the financial industry have also introduced performance-based pay for customer consultants, which have hitherto usually been paid a fixed salary, to better influence and control their behavior. As a result, there is also a passionate debate as to how certain compensation systems can also provide organizational decision-makers with disincentives (Bebchuck & Fried, 2005).

Third, other questionable practices concern the issues of preserving power and perceived lack of loyalty and commitment. They also deserve attention. Recently, even large firms tried to prevent that works councils are set up (cf. Hücker, 2010). In some cases the weapon of choice to do so is firing people, who actively engage in fighting for (legally protected) co-determination, usually for spurious reasons. Few organizations even spied on their employees without their knowledge. They installed hidden cameras or engaged detective agencies to control their employees.

The practices described above are just some well-known examples of current trends in HRM. Every once in a while, media such as television, radio, or newspapers report about some of those developments and capture the attention of society and politicians. However, those are just single practices. How the complete HRM systems of the organizations, that employ such practices look like and which role those practices play for their overall HR-strategy and their business models is hardly reported.

Some of the examples of changing employer behavior mentioned above obviously represent practices, which negatively affect employees in various ways. They affect them as firm-specific resources on the one hand and as autonomous subjects on the other. The negative impact on employees occurs on various levels. Employees are constrained in their legal rights, their energy and labor capacity, their health and their commitment and loyalty vis-à-vis their employer. Consequently, those practices are the manifestation of non-sustainable HRM, which approves or at least accepts physical and mental fatigue of the firm's workforce. Despite of their undisputed relevance, only some of those practices play more or less important roles in current research in the field.

To conclude, we can assume that the public is well informed about some aspects of employer behavior. The media regularly report about the practices used, especially if they display a high potential of creating public arousal. However, the information conveyed usually is of fragmented nature and does not necessarily tell much about the strategic function and value of such practices for the firms, which use them. Additionally, developments in other fields, such as work design, which are less likely to create excitement, are less reported and therefore also less likely to be discussed in society, politics, and academia. In the next section, we will examine how employer behavior is perceived and described in HRM research and teaching.

3. Employer behavior in research and teaching

We assume that employer behavior is a central matter in HRM. If this assumption holds true, then we expect that the current developments outlined above find their expression in relevant textbooks and journal publications. In order to validate our assumption, we review five leading German textbooks on HRM as well as five volumes of the German Journal of Research in Human Resource Management ("Zeitschrift für

Personalforschung"; ZfP) (2005-2009). Our analysis focuses on the questions whether and/or how employer behavior is captured conceptually and which forms of employer behavior are discussed. Our analysis serves the purpose to identify how employer behavior is conceptualized in current literature.

Textbook analysis: For our textbook analysis, we use five textbooks on HRM, which are established since at least ten years and have been published in various editions. We chose the textbooks based on their diffusion within the German-speaking world and the reputation of the authors.¹ The authors and/or editors of the textbooks were or are chairs of University Institutes of Human Resource Management in Germany and Austria. Our textbook sample consists of:

- Jürgen Berthel/Fred G. Becker, Personal-Management, 9th Ed., 2010
- Hans Jürgen Drumm, Personalwirtschaft, 6th Ed., 2008
- Helmut Kasper/Wolfgang Mayrhofer (Hrsg.), Personalmanagement, Führung, Organisation, 4th Ed., 2009
- Walter Oechsler, Personal und Arbeit, 8th Ed., 2006
- Hans Gerd Ridder, Personalwirtschaftslehre, 3rd Ed., 2009

We analyzed the content of the textbooks by using the method of qualitative content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Mayring, 2003). We focused on the question, which topics the authors examine in detail and whether there are more or less common gaps in the textbooks. In particular, we investigated whether employer behavior in its entirety is examined in the textbooks, whether "bad practices" in HRM play a role in HRM teaching and whether current empirical phenomena are depicted in the textbooks.

Journal analysis: The sample of our journal analysis consists of five volumes (2005-2009) of the German Journal for Research in Human Resource Management (*Zeitschrift für Personalforschung*; ZfP). Admittedly, five volumes are a rather small sample of research publications. Nevertheless, the ZfP is the only scientific journal in the German-speaking world, which focuses exclusively on research in HRM. Thus, we expect the ZfP to represent the current profile of research in HRM in the German-speaking countries.

In order to conduct our analysis, we had to specify selection criteria for employer behavior, because all of the articles make at least implicit references to employer behavior in varying intensity. We derived the following two criteria based on our understanding of employer behavior, which is outlined above:

1. In order to be classified as employer behavior-relevant article, the article in question addresses one practice or several practices and interrelates it or them either (a) to other practices or strategies (*conjunction aspect*) and/or (b) to factors which determine the behavior of the employer (e.g. basic attitudes, values and norms,

¹ We certainly acknowledge that employer behavior is made subject to discussion in all of those textbooks at least to a certain extent and that employer behavior is discussed also in other textbooks on HRM and specific aspects of HRM (e.g. Martin & Nienhüser, 1998; Neuberger, 1994).

aims and goals, situational factors such as industry, firm size, profit situation) (*explanation aspect*) and/or (c) to its or their effects on the firm or its employees (*impact aspect*).

2. In order to be classified as employer behavior-relevant article, the article in question addresses aspects of conceptualizing HR strategies and/or methods to analyze HR strategies.

Based on these criteria, we analyzed the five volumes of the ZfP according to whether the articles published during this period make references to employer behavior. Additionally, we analyzed, if the articles of our sample make references to bad practices in HRM.

4. Results

In the following section, we present the results of our textbook and journal analyses by formulating several theses. Consequently, we summarize our findings regarding the contemporary reception of employer behavior in research and teaching, also by formulating theses.

4.1 Results of the textbook analysis

1. *Main content of the textbooks is a description of ideal-typical practices and their theoretical explanation and justification:* All of the authors extensively portray single HRM practices in various activity areas in the latest edition of their textbooks. In doing so, most authors discuss separate functional strategies of organizations (e.g. induction strategies or human resource development strategies in Berthel and Becker). However, those separate practices are rarely discussed in their entirety and interconnection. Additionally, empirical results, which serve to illustrate how firms actually use the characterized practices, are presented only very sporadically. One notable exception is Oechsler, who uses empirical data (e.g. concerning personnel costs, unemployment rates, demographic structures) to highlight some empirically relevant phenomena for future protagonists in HR departments.
2. *'Bad practices' such as the ones we outline above, are rarely depicted. The authors do not link their deliberations to ongoing public discussions:* Illustrations and concretizations of practices are almost exclusively based on examples from large and established companies, which are well-known for using "good practices". Additionally, ethical consequences of employer behavior are rarely discussed. For example, the downsides and disadvantages of certain practices, which serve to secure organizational flexibility, for the firms' employees are usually neglected.
3. *Bundles of separate practices into strategies are seldom discussed. The authors occasionally give recommendations concerning the fit between firm strategies and HRM strategies, but usually on an abstract level and without further specification of how exactly this fit is designed:* Ridder, as an example, presents a theoretically sound outline of the central HRM issues, but he discusses how separate HR practices can be strategically bundled only on a very abstract level. Similarly, the separate HR practices, which are discussed in the various chapters of Kasper and Mayrhofer's edited volume, also do not become interlinked to HRM strategies. As a consequence, the employer with its idiosyncratic features as an actor is rarely addressed in the textbooks of our sample. Such

idiosyncratic features can be basic attitudes, values and norms, goals and aims or situational factors (e.g. firm size, ownership, industry, economic situation). Berthel and Becker mention in this regard that basic attitudes of decision-makers are important for strategy development. However, they do not further explain what that means precisely. Additionally, the authors give hints about how to develop HR strategies (p. 679), but they do not substantially describe or discuss how such strategies could be designed. In Drumms textbook, we find a differentiation of HR strategies on the basis of factors such as the firm's profit situation, size, industry, or culture (p. 581). However, he does not examine the question, how such strategies are actually designed.

4. *Occasionally, the legal conditions, which are the basic framework for managing human resources, are precisely described as formal rules. However, empirical statements concerning the questions if and how employers actually adhere to those rules are missing:* In some of the textbooks of our sample the legal foundation for HRM is rather ignored (e.g. there is no respective chapter in Kasper and Mayrhofer's edited volume). In others we find more or less detailed characterizations of this framework (cf. e.g. the detailed description of the legal foundation for HRM in Oechslers textbook). However, empirical results regarding the question which role employers and employees actually play in filling this framework with life usually are neglected. Some authors describe the legal rights and dues of the works council, however they remain relatively silent about empirical findings concerning conflict and cooperation between works councils and the management of the firm (e.g. Drumm).
5. *Most authors neglect the topics of employment policy and work design:* This development is insofar surprising, as organizational employment policies are intensively discussed in the public and by legislators. However, some authors discuss this topic only in a superficial manner, others ignore it completely. The neglect of work design is insofar remarkable, as some decades ago the issue was at the heart of the "humanization of work"-debate and it is still a highly relevant topic today.

4.2 Results of the journal analysis

1. *At the moment, there are no efforts to create taxonomies in order to classify employer behavior:* We find that one third of the examined articles deals with employer behavior in a certain way. More precisely, based on the criteria for detecting employer behavior, which are outlined above, we find that approximately three out of four articles deal with employer behavior according to the first criterion and that approximately one out of four articles deal with employer behavior according to criterion two. The most heavily discussed practices in connection with employer behavior are recruiting, compensation, human resource development, employment policy, and leadership. However, all of the articles regard only very narrowly defined aspects of employer behavior.
2. *There is a higher probability that articles, which apply qualitative research methods deal with employer behavior than articles which are based on quantitative studies:* We find a tendency towards more comprehensive explanations in articles based on qualitative studies. We can assume that methodological rigor in qualitative studies implies that re-

searchers have to develop a more comprehensive view of the employer as an actor and on the conditions which shape employer behavior.

3. *Authors do not discuss bad practices in human resource management:* Despite of a relatively high numbers of articles dealing with issues such as employment policy and compensation, none of the current trends in employer behavior, which we cursorily described above, is examined in one of the articles. Instead, research seems to ignore such developments and continue to focus on success stories and good practices in HRM.

4.3 Summary and consolidation of the findings

Our findings show that some of the new developments in the field of HRM, which occur in real life, have not yet been subject to empirical research and are not included in some of the leading textbook on the topic. To summarize, we can deduce four theses from our findings and we pose some questions in order to stimulate future research.

1. HRM does not include the employer as an actor

The characterization of the employer as an actor and the connection to its behavior is only, if at all, of superficial nature. However, including the employer as an actor into the analyses of current developments in HRM could stimulate further insights into the field and provide answers to various questions. Some of those questions include differences of firms in various industries such as retailing, banking, or transportation. How does employer behavior differ within those industries? How could such differences be explained? Which business models do employers pursue for which reasons? To answer some of those questions, future research will have to deal with employer behavior more intensively.

2. Employees and employment law do not play prominent roles in empirical research

The German system of co-determination is characterized by the prevalence of works councils in many organizations and the existence of representatives of the employees in supervisory boards of incorporated enterprises. No matter, whether these elements of co-determination are perceived as an enhancing or a restraining factor in employer behavior, how works councils or employees' representatives in the supervisory boards interact with employers, how they influence the implementation of HRM strategies, and how they cooperate or refuse to cooperate with HR-managers, are central questions of crucial importance for HRM. However, despite of their relevance for HRM those questions are, in the best case, introduced in sociological research on industrial relations, but widely ignored in HRM research and teaching.

3. Organizational employment policy and work design do not play prominent roles in empirical research

Although there are some prescriptive indications concerning employment policy offered in the analyzed textbooks, there are few statements concerning the actual gestalt of employment policy systems. Additionally, just like research on the interplay between works councils and employers, research on work design and the organization of work is left to industrial sociologists, despite of being a core issue in HRM.

4. Research on HRM has a good practice-bias, i.e. it ignores bad practices

At the moment, various practices in HRM are heavily discussed in the public. Those practices, described above are not sign of sustainable HRM. On the contrary, they can rather be regarded as practices, which frequently aim at short-term success, on the expense of the motivation, job-satisfaction, and even health of the employees. It is remarkable, that neither the textbooks nor journal publications deal with such bad practices, which are observable empirical phenomena. The question, why this is the case, remains.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we characterize some current developments in HRM. Our analysis of HRM textbooks and journal articles shows that especially in the German-speaking world, so far, many of those developments are widely ignored in HRM research and teaching. Usually, employers are not regarded as actors, which pursue specific aims with their behavior, and they are therefore excluded from researchers' analyses. However, recent discussions in science, business and society show that there are reasonable causes to do so. Our analysis shows that many bad practices in HRM are not reflected in research and teaching. On the one hand some of the currently employed practices, which undermine the motivation and even the health of the workforce are not discussed. On the other hand some of those practices have found their way into journals and textbooks, but are not framed as bad but rather as good practices. Examples for this paradox can be found in the literature on Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) (Baron & Kreps, 1999; Ridder et al., 2000). Some researchers on SHRM, for example, claim that organizations (employers) should actively use methods of segmentation to determine how to shape their relationship to employees, which are of varying importance for them (e.g. Lepak & Snell, 1999). But how should we consider strategic recommendations, which suggest creating precarious employment situations for most employees, at least for those, who are rather at the periphery than at the core of the organization? Similarly, research on bundles of HRM-practices claims that organizations need to create and use various, internally consistent bundles of HRM-practices for different (especially: differently important) groups of employees (Kepes & Delery, 2007). But what if some of those bundles include or even totally consist of bad practices, which undermine the motivation, freedom or even health of certain groups of employees?

There certainly are also limitations of our analysis. Using only small samples, i.e. five textbooks and five volumes of a journal, may bias the validity of our analysis. Additionally, using the method of qualitative content analysis implies subjectivity in assessments. However, if we accept the tendency of our findings, implications for future research and teaching would involve emphasizing employer behavior more directly.

Teaching quality suffers, if scholars are unable to convey to students, how employers act and behave in real life and if the examples used in teaching are detached from empirical reality (Cohen, 2007). Consequently, students will find it harder to comprehend certain topics and they will become de-motivated and not prepared for their future role as protagonists in HRM. Teaching as well as research run the risk of becoming irrelevant, when they start to neglect typical and frequently used practices in

HRM, especially when these are non-sustainable and sometimes even ethically questionable. Scholars lament in this vein, that an increasing number of practitioners ignores insights derived from research on HRM (Rynes et al., 2002). This development is not only due to communication problems between practice and science (cf. Scholz, 2008, p. 5-11), but also a clear manifestation of the limited relevance of most current research in HRM. Despite of controversial views concerning whether the rigor-relevance gap is bridgeable at all (Hodgkinson & Rousseau, 2009; Kieser & Leiner, 2009), the developments highlighted in this paper are highly problematic for an applied discipline such as HRM.

The limited relevance of current research also becomes apparent in the light of missing empirical work regarding the factual consequences of employer behavior on the workforce. However, those consequences need to be considered in order to analyze the sustainability of HRM. Additionally, research on HRM will have to turn towards practices-in-use with special emphasis on the context in which such practices are employed and analyze their impact on the attainment of a firm's objectives and their impact on other stakeholders. To do so, more explorative studies, especially case-based research, building on qualitative research methods, will be necessary. It is questionable, whether managers or members of HR-departments, who seem to be the central respondents for contemporary research, are the most appropriate informants for such purposes. Instead, employees and their representatives as well as Top-Management could become more and more valuable and non-biased (or at least: differently-biased) respondents for some research questions. Obviously, it is easier to gather (and present) data, which shed a very positive light on firms than to gather data concerning questionable practices in human resource management. In particular, we see two reasons for this. First, it is easier for researchers to gain access to successful organizations. We suggest therefore using ex post analysis of cases or using various data sources as means to also illustrate "bad practices" in HRM. Second, researchers are, at least to some extent, prisoners of their research fields, in such a way that they tend to be cautious in generating and pursuing critical research questions in order not to lose access to the field. However, this difficulty must not lead to ignoring such "bad practices", especially in teaching. Finally, we assume that self-perception of HR researchers plays a central role regarding the question for the focus of their research. At the moment, there seems to be a lopsided view concerning HR practices, with a sharp focus on the firm and its HR managers and a neglect of the respondents of such practices. Reflecting those tensions can become a first step in addressing central but under-researched questions in HRM.

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