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Abstract

In the current global economic climate, International HRM is facing unprecedented pressure to become more innovative, effective and efficient. New discourses are emerging around the application of information technology, with 'e-HR' (electronic-enablement of Human Resources), self-service portals and promises of improved services couched as various HR 'value propositions'. This study explores these issues through our engagement with the emergent stream of 'critical' HRM, the broader study of organizational discourse, and ethical management theories. We have found that whilst there is growing research into the take-up of e-HR applications, there is a dearth of investigation into the impact of e-HR on the people involved; in particular, the (re) structuring of social relations between HR functions and line managers in the move away from face-to-face HR support services, to more technology-mediated 'self-service' relationships. We undertake a close reading of personal narratives from a multi-national organization, deploying a critical discourse lens to examine different dimensions of e-HR. and raise questions about the strong technocratic framing of the international language of people management, shaping line manager enactment of e-HR duties. We argue for a more reflexive stance in the conceptualisation e-HR, and conclude with a discussion about the theoretical and practical implications of our study, limitations and suggestions for future research.

Key Words: e-HR, critical discourse analysis, ethics, language, voice, innovation, relationships and IHRM

Introduction

Amidst significant growth in the introduction of electronic enabled HR (e-HR) into organizations there is a new vocabulary emerging around 'web 2.0', 'self-service portals' and promises of improved services to employees and managers in the form of various HR 'value propositions' (Bondarouk and Ruël, 2008, 2009). New theoretical frameworks have also emerged to explore the 'absorptive capacity' of HR functions, the content and structure of e-HR applications, links to the 'value creation' of HR and the commitment of employees (e.g. Martin and Reddington, 2009; Maatman et al., 2010). This is particularly important in the development of global business where MNEs (multinational enterprises) operate across different political, economic and cultural boundaries. At the same time, there is evidence of increasing use of e-HR in the context of shared services (including the location of HR in remote regional zones) for their international HR operations (Towers Watson, 2009).

In this context, the role of line managers in the delivery of HRM goals has attracted growing attention amongst analysts, and linked to the emergence of more managerially focused HR departments and increasing devolvement of HR duties to line managers (Kulik and Perry, 2008; Losey, Meisinger and Ulrich, 2005; Larsen and Brewster, 2003; Whittaker and Marchington, 2003; Wright et. al. 2001). Empirical analysis has drawn our attention to the benefits and problems associated with moving from face-to-face HR to a technology-mediated model, including the segmentation of HR roles and distancing of the function from employees and managers (Francis and Keegan, 2006; Hope-Hailey et. al. 2005). Nevertheless, relational consequences of this kind, though a crucial aspect of e-HRM, are for the most part unexamined (Strohmeier, 2007), and there is a marked absence of a critical discourse-based perspective in a recent evidence-based review of E-HRM (Marler and Fisher, 2013).

Our study engages with the emergent stream of 'critical' HRM (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010), relating this to the broader study of organizational discourse (Grant, Hardy, Oswick and Putnam, 2004) and to ethical theories in strategic HRM research (Parkes and Harris, 2008). This allows us to provide critical reading of the impact of e-enabled HR applications upon line management-HR relations, and the development of a more reflexive stance in the formulation of HR support strategies for line managers.

Implicit in our approach is an action-orientated view of language, rooted in discourse theory. Language is viewed as social and dynamic, and does not simply represent the world, but actively constitutes and constructs the world in meaning (Fairclough, 1995; see also Francis 2007, Musson and Cohen, 1999, Tsoukas, 2005). From this perspective, more needs to be understood about the 'power effects' of the language of HRM and change management (Francis, 2002), typically rooted in a pervasive 'managerialist' discourse representing 'knowledge' or 'received wisdom' about what constitutes effective management (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996; Zorn, Page, and Cheney, 2000).

The significance of our study is in addressing the lack of critical insights into both the conceptualization and the practical impact of e-HR upon the people involved. In doing so, we aim to provide fresh theoretical insights and 'actionable knowledge' or guidance (Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep, 2009) to HR specialists, who seek to ameliorate the negative impact of an increasing distancing of the function from managers and employees; notably the closing down of opportunities for dialogue and how this impacts upon the social and infrastructural support available to line managers (Francis and Keegan, 2006).

Particular attention is given in our study, to the discourses by which line managers construct HR support services, at a time when we are witnessing increasing commodification and outsourcing of transactional and more complex HR interactions (Sparrow, Hird, Hesketh, and Cooper, 2010). We recognise that the language of these interactions is highly technocratic in tone, with emphasis placed on process mapping and an instrumental approach to people management, and there is a dearth of research into the practical and ethical implications of this kind of discursive framing of HR service delivery (Keegan and Francis, 2010; Maravelias, 2008). In this paper we use the context of a particular multinational organization to explore these issues, locating these within the broader discourse of 'globalization' and international trends in HR service delivery, to address the following research objectives:

1 to critically examine how e-HR is constituted as discourse, and how this shapes relations of power between HR practitioners, and line managers.
2 to explore the paradox and ambiguity of the emergent e-HR discourse, arising from the wider discursive, social and economic context in which it is located.
3 to consider the practical and ethical consequences of the discursive framing of HR duties required of line managers, focusing upon managerial 'agency' in shaping the practice of HRM, including the type of support services provided by the HR function.

In referring to IHRM in this paper, we adopt Briscoe et. al's (2009) definition of IHRM as (…) "the study and application of all human resources management activities as they impact the process of managing human resources in enterprises in the global environment" (Briscoe et al, 2009, p.20). The globalisation of business has changed the nature of HRM and in the drive to maintain sustainable competitive advantage in the global market place. This presents complex challenges and dichotomies. These include: the need to maintain central control yet recognise differing cultures and customs; pressures on cost control with the need to drive up quality; increased travel and transportation but the expectation of instant access to information and communication; different legal, governance and political environments; varied standards of education and health and safety and the 'minefield' of compensation and benefit strategies. These challenges become heightened because of the shift away from the domination of the MNEs of developed countries to major global players such as Tata from India and CEMEX from Mexico (Stahl et. Al., 2012)

On this basis, the role of IHRM can be categorized into three distinct areas, strategic, operational and support and in the move to e-HR in the context of shared services, it is the area of support (including information and advice) that comes under most pressure for cost reduction (Reilly and Williams, 2003). As Alf Turner then of BOC states, "there is relentless pressure on overhead costs that has consequential pressures on the costs of HR delivery" (Turner, 2000, cited by Reilly and Williams, 2003, p.1)

Pressures to conform to the increasingly dominant framing of e-HR tend to be legitimized by university specialists and recontextualized by consultants and practitioners through professional networks that span organizations and across which new models diffuse rapidly (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Thomas, 2003).

Professional bodies in themselves are an important vehicle 'for the definition and promulgation of normative rules about organizational and professional behavior' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 152). They create a pool of almost interchangeable individuals who occupy similar positions across a range of organizations and override variations in tradition

and control which might otherwise shape organizations (Perrow, 1974). Universities and professional bodies have in one sense, and maybe unwittingly, colluded in maintaining the implicit assumption that everything within organizations is driven by efficiency and 'the bottom line'. As Ghoshal (2005) argues, despite many authors (including Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002; Donaldson, 2002; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002), calling for greater change towards ethics and responsibility, the hesitancy may be that these issues when raised are more visible, whereas the teaching of economic rationality that presents a specific worldview that has influenced managerial behaviour in a destructive fashion, is implicit and therefore less visible.

Building upon the issues raised above, our paper is organised as follows: first we connect practice-orientated, critical and ethical perspectives on HRM, to provide a multifaceted critique of the emergent conceptualisation and application of e-HR programmes. Particular focus is given to the (re) structuring of relationships between HR functions and line managers, typically taking place under the auspices of 'HR transformation' (Martin, Reddington and Alexander, 2008). Second, we detail our methodology, which draws upon critical discourse theory and a close reading of interview transcripts to unearth the issues, paradoxes and ambiguities in the use of e-HR as experienced by key individuals in an international organization. Third, we present our data analysis and findings, and conclude with a consideration of the significance and limitations of our study with suggestions for future research.

Emergent conceptualisation and application of E-HR Programmes

The emergent conceptualization and application of e-HR programmes are strongly influenced by David Ulrich's (1997) HR Business Partner model, evidenced by its wide adoption amongst HR practitioners based in Western Europe and North America (Afiouni, Karam, and El-Hajj, 2013) ; Reilly and Williams (2003); Briscoe, Schuler and Claus, (2009); Stahl, Mendenhall and Oddou, (2012). These programs are characterized by exhortations for the HR function to provide cost efficient and effective HR services that are perceived to add value to its 'customer base' including employees, line managers, the senior management team and relevant external stakeholders.   Within the practitioner world, focus has been given to how 'value' outcomes (variously defined) map on to a new type of e-enabled HR structure (see table 1) captured by the well-known 'three legged stool' metaphor that has become a dominant concept in the HR function (Hird, Marsh and Sparrow 2009) [1].

Table 1 The Ulrich Model
(Adapted from Hird, Marsh and Sparrow, 2009)
Shared Service Centre: Concentrate on administrative and transactional personnel activities separately from the main HR Group through Service centres for 'back office' processes. Commoditised services may be insourced or outsourced but enable common provision of standardised or optimised HR process. Supported by e-enablement of service delivery encouraging employee self-service, 'Intelligent agent' of guiding staff and managers through complex policy. **Capability Management:** Centres of Expertise. Clarifies organizational capabilities and crafts necessary HR investments and policies through centres of excellence of expertise that maintain critical fields of knowledge and a special core HR functional structure. **(**May be part of the shared services center, Reilly and Williams, 2003). **HR Business Partners**: 'Embedded HR' model in which HR personnel provided dedicated support as generalists, business partners and account managers aligned to a business unit of a holding company. While there is no single model of business partnering, generally it is seen as a way forward for HR staff to build greater links with senior managers and the strategic aims of their organizations, so requiring them to gain and display greater business awareness and skills, and often internal advisory, coaching and mentoring skills (Caldwell, 2008; Kenton and Yarnell, 2005).

The concept of value embedded in Ulrich's conceptualization of shared services and e-HR, is strongly results orientated, defined in terms of 'deliverables' or outcomes of HR work (strategy execution, administrative efficiency, employee contribution, and capacity for change) and rooted in the notion of a *'bias for action and impact'* (Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005; Urich et. al. 2008): a bias commonly expressed elsewhere within the literature on organizational and HRM-based change (e.g. Peters and Waterman 1982; Armstrong, 2000).

Debate about the emergence of these Ulrich-style structures and associated framing of e-HR has largely been consultancy/practitioner-led and characterised by functional concerns about improving the quality and efficiency of HR services through building line manager efficacy in the application of various e-HR tools, as they assume increased responsibly for HR issues (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2006; Walker, 2001; Maatman et. al. 2010; Ulrich, 2001; Parry and Tyson, 2011; Martin et. al., 2008; Withers et. al., 2010) [2]. Value is thus placed on measurable outcomes and efficiency. However, implicit in references made about HR support for managers, is the value given to conversational or 'relational' forms of HR assistance, in the form of coaching and informal advice. For instance, this might include advice about the use of more sophisticated on-line reporting of employee data in performance appraisals, handling discipline or managing career development. The scope of this will vary depending upon the level of management activity,' front-line' or more senior grades, (Paglis, 2010).

In practice the nature and level of such relational HR support is rarely made explicit in strategies for e-HRM interventions, and business research in this area is lacking (Strohmeier, 2007). Critical and ethical perspectives on HRM have important potential to address these knowledge and practice gaps, through pro-actively re-framing the HRM agenda. For instance, critical scholars have pointed to problems that can arise from an unquestioned acceptance amongst practitioners and academics of the 'resource' metaphor framing the

term human resource management – a metaphor that likens people as a commodity to be used in an instrumental fashion, and used to invoke resources that govern the way HR issues are talked about and experienced (Keegan and Francis, 2010; Keenoy, 2009; Maravelias, 2008).

The metaphor itself can be seen as ethically fraught (e.g. Greenwood, 2002; Inkson, 2008, Townley, 1994; Francis, 2002), in the sense that the management of humans as a form of 'resource' risks the humanness, dignity, rights and liberty of those managed. Also at risk, as Wilmott (1994) and Alvesson and Wilmott (1996) assert, are the virtue, autonomy and moral well-being of those managing, called as they are to instrumentally direct people's very humanity. HRM specialists can therefore be seen as using their specialist knowledge of the 'human resource' to represent its commodification as entirely normal and legitimate instead of questioning and challenging the pressures to reduce human beings to commodities.

Narratives which emphasize human agency, and the protection and advocacy of employee interests (e.g. Legge, 1995, 1996; Woodall and Winstanley, 2000; Kochan 2007) provide important counterpoints to the apparent narrowing of e-HR discourse to largely functional and business concerns, and the largely optimistic reporting of the 'positive potentials' of e-HR in terms of effectiveness and efficiency (Strohmeier, 2007). Giddens (1991) suggests that human agency and social structures are in a relationship with each other, and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents, which reproduces the structures. While social structures (established ways of doing things) are durable, these can be changed over time (when people start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently) and in an organizational context, this provides the opportunity for HR professionals to re-orientate the e-HR discourse towards a more human and less technocratic approach.

The importance of a climate of trust and shared knowledge in the successful adaptation of organisations to new technologies is exemplified in Pavlou and Majchrzak's (2002) study of the success of business-to-business e-commerce. More broadly, within the practice of organisational development (OD), increasing prominence is being given to the importance of dialogue and collaborative inquiry processes in generating creativity, innovation and high performance (Marshak and Grant 2008). Here, emphasise is placed upon the socially constructed nature of organisational life, and to the multiple and competing realities and power relationships in effecting change (see O'Neil and Jabri, 2007; Bushe and Marshak 2009). In the next section, we draw upon these narratives to open up debate about the need to re-orientate e-HR research and practice in ways that acknowledges the inherently dialectical nature of technology - its potential to enhance employee development and autonomy versus its potential to result in the opposite effect; such as maximising the 'absorptive capacity' of people; enabling them to work longer hours and intensify their work (Martin, 2005).

Re-orientating E-HR Research

Tansley and Watson (2000) usefully draw attention to Hosking and Morley's (1991) distinction between entitive and relational perspectives on organizational studies, to describe the overly functionalist approach to the study of e-HR that we noted earlier, and is summarised in table 2. They explain that the introduction of human resource information systems (HRIS) tend to be construed from an entitive perspective – treated as an unproblematic tool with rare mention of social exchange and the political dynamics shaping this (Liff, 1997, cited by Tansely and Watson, 2000, p.111).

The authors then introduce a 'strategic exchange' perspective to provide a rich description of the processes of negotiation, sense making, and social construction involving the stakeholders involved in the introduction of a global HRIS development project.

Table 2: Entitative and relational perspectives on organizations and individuals (Hosking and Morley, cited by Tansely and Watson, 2000: 111)		
Organizations	- are seen as reified—as having a concrete existence - exist independently of people - exchange, as systems, with 'the environment' · have a relatively fixed form	- are constantly emerging patterns of belief and activity rather than concrete entities - the emphasis is on organis*ing* rather than organization - are constantly re-shaping
Individuals	- are fairly fixed one- dimensional entities - are need-filling, goal meeting 'mini-systems' - exist independently of context - others' are part of the context	- have constantly shaped and - re-shaping identities - are 'emergent' - prominence given to negotiation as a cognitive, social and political process

Tansley and Watson's call for re-orientation of e-HR research in ways that pay more attention to processes of social construction, resonates with the broader social exchange literature about the need for more process-orientated research designs that can better capture the socially constructed, contested and negotiated nature of the employment relationship (Allen, Shore and Griffeth, 2003; Shore et. al. 2009). Here, reciprocation and mutuality are placed at the heart of the employee-organization relationship and effective implementation of HRM strategies (Conway and Briner, 2009; Cole and Bruch, 2006).

Attention has also been given to the role that HR practices can play in shaping perceptions of perceived organizational support (Allen, Shore and Griffeth, 2003) associated with the meeting of socio-emotional needs, and an organization's readiness to reward increased employee efforts made on its behalf (Eder and Eisenberger, 2008). Moreover, there are various exploratory studies that shed light upon the long-standing debate about managing dualities in HRM (Legge, 1995) such as Bondarouk, Looise and Lempsink's (2009) case study investigation of how managers and HR professionals make sense of HR innovations (Bondarouk et. al. 2009), and McConville's (2006) earlier account of role tensions faced by middle-managers taking on expanded HR duties. Nevertheless, there remains a dearth of critique from critical HRM (CHRM) and ethical perspectives regarding the paradox, ambiguities and tensions inherent within the more specialized e-HR agenda (Keegan and Francis, 2008).

On constructively engaging with the emergence stream of critical HRM, our paper questions the 'international language of people management', framed by mainstream HRM discourse, in order to promote more 'intellectual space' for 'critical voices' to be heard in the framing of e-HR research, similar to that happening within the broader literature on international HRM , as observed by Delbridge and Keenoy (2010 : 805) (see also, Boselie, Brewster and Paauwe, 2009). This includes questions being raised amongst scholars investigating links between HRM and performance outcomes, about how HR practitioners might work with

local managers in ways that better support the balancing of organizational and employee goals and interests (Boselie et. al. 2009; Paauwe, 2009). As the employment relationship becomes increasingly fragile and 'localised' (Delbridge, 2007), the spotlight is now being placed on line manager-employee relationships, and the conditions that enable the development of dialogue and 'productive working arrangements' (Francis, Ramdhony, Reddington and Staines, 2013).

CHRM scholars also point to the need for greater 'ethical sensitivity' amongst HR academics and professionals (Woodall and Winstanley, 2000), especially important as the digital revolution reshapes HR practices in ways that still cannot be anticipated (Evans et. al. 2002). This requires sensitivity to the interaction between local conditions and broader ethical, socio-economic and political structures in which HRM discourses are located (Watson, 2010; Spicer et. al. 2009).

As Parkes (2012) observes, organizations are being placed under increasing pressure to deliver on what might be referred to as the broad 'ethics and responsibility (or CSR)' agenda. This encompasses responsibility towards all stakeholders, including employees, communities (local and global) consumers and the environment, in addition to shareholders (see also, Carroll and Shabana, 2010). The need for HR professionals to play a key role in the rebalancing of interests to achieve greater mutuality of purpose and outcomes is emphazised, and is consistent with the rising interest amongst HRM scholars in concepts such as paradox, duality, and ethics in people management - a lexicon that is increasingly being recognised as key to 'sustainable' organizational performance within an international context (Ehnert, 2008; Parkes, 2012; Pollach, 2003).

Developing e-HRM strategies and policies in an international context bring many of the debates about values and ethics into sharp focus. The challenge that different norms and cultures provide in applying policies and practices across continents requires careful consideration. MNE's often find that many of the ethical challenges relate to employment practices (Briscoe et al, 2009). The globalized economy is also bound up with transformations in communication technologies, language and identity, shaping the way organizations do business and in their strategies and practices at local, national and international levels. Much of this can have positive effects but there is also the danger that this results in the 'McDonaldization' or 'commodification' of language (Heller, 2003) and increasing commodification of HR work that reduces professional judgements to standardized interactions and a 'tick box' mentality (Vorster, 2008).

Decisions taken in business are often justified theoretically and practically using concepts that stem from ethical theory, such as a *consequentialist approach*, where 'the end justifies the means', *egoism* that prioritises self-interest, or *virtue ethics* that emphasises the importance of 'good' character and values (Greenwood, 2002). One particular approach to business ethics that could be usefully applied to the re-orientation of the e-HR agenda, is that of an *ethic of care*, which positions connection as fundamental, with human lives being interwoven in a myriad of subtle and not so subtle ways (Gilligan, 1995: 122; Liedtka, 1996). The centrality of relationships is emphasized, with particular attention given to the caring for others in *actual situations*, not in the abstract (Simola 2003; Sandin 2009; Bauman 2011). This requires more than just attentiveness to the 'bonds' that unite different stakeholders such as between managers, employees and HR specialists (Held 2006). It also requires stakeholders to be conscientious, to accept the responsibility for maintaining relationships, and to be considerate in respect of how their actions might impact upon the

feelings of others (Bauman, 2011), with less importance given to individual rights or obligations (Machold, Ahmed, and Farquhar, 2007).

From this relational perspective, a growing number of studies point to the importance of dialogue in the creation and maintenance of employment relationships and effective organizational change (Groysberg and Slind, 2012; Gratton and Goshal, 2003; It is this *ethic of care* that we suggest is neglected in the development of e-HR processes, and in e-HR research. More needs to be understood about the effects of the structural arrangements of technology upon relations between HR specialists and managers as face-to-face interactions become restricted, notably how this may impact upon their 'relational positioning' to one another (McInnes and Corlett, 2012), and upon trust relationships generally (Mather, 2011).

A small but growing number of scholars are investigating these issues. For example Maravelias' study of technology-enabled 'professional communities' within a large insurance company points to the unintended effects of employees' feelings of a constant lack of trust rooted in a desire to 'make their presence known as trusted employees' – Maravelias, 2008: 362). Francis and Keegan's study of HR transformation within UK-based organisations, sheds light upon the nature and impact of the increasing remoteness from employees distinguished not only in terms of a reduction in face-to-face contact, but in the type of dialogues that are now taking place. These are more controlled, and based on a question/answer mode rather than a conversation that focused on the particular needs of the 'client':

> […] It's done over the phone, it's done on a computer, it's done like a question and answer session and it doesn't begin to put the human element into consideration. I think that's just going to lead to more conflict, you know, and I don't think it's necessarily going to get the best out of people (HR Practitioner) (Keegan and Francis, 2010: page 887]

This distancing of HR from individual managers and employees minimises the impact of the key social skills that HR professionals often bring to the employment relationship. In an era when employee 'engagement' is of critical importance to what is deemed the 'war for talent' – retention of the most skilled employees (Lawler, 2008) – distancing appears to be a counter-intuitive move.

Concerns about increasing depersonalization of e-HR practices are also evident within the public domain, including criticism of actions consistent with what Stebbins (1989) refers to as the ''Mafia model'' of management; where difficult and unpleasant processes are carried out hurriedly and quickly forgotten. Newspaper headlines such as "Thousands are sacked by text" (The Independent, 23rd March, 2003) and "Payout for employee sacked by text" (The New Zealand Herald, 18th August 2012) exemplify this trend. Debates about the ethicality of dismissing employees, for perceived and actual reputational damage through social network activity and blogging continue (Valentine, Fleischman, Sprague, and Godkin, 2010) and flag up potential difficulties with the move to more electronic communications.

To conclude, a key point we wish to make here is the significance of building mutual relationships and ways of working that better enable HR and line managers to innovate and to work with paradox and ambiguity inherent in e-HR service delivery. Effective dialogue plays a critical role in building such relationships (Francis et. al. 2013), yet paradoxically, this is often stifled when people feel under pressure, as observed in a recent investigation of consultants' behaviours in a large international consulting firm (Gardner, 2010). In a global

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context, dialogue and communication become even more important to the effectiveness of HR delivery because of the inherent issues involved in cross cultural communication and reliance on mediated forms of communication (Luthans and Doh, 2012; see also, West, 2002).

Methodology

The empirical investigation presented here primarily focuses on interview data gathered as part of a wider case study investigation into e-HR within a leading global oilfield services provider, published earlier (Martin and Reddington, 2010). The case was part of a purposeful rather than random sample, (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003; Teddlie and Yu, 2009), treated in the expert judgement of the researcher as representing a leading international organization in its sector, which had implemented e-HR to a significant level (see case outline in table 3).

The aim of the original research was to elaborate emergent theorization of relationships between HR strategy, e-HR goals and 'architecture', and e-HR outcomes. Data collection included a web-based survey across two strategic business units, followed by interviews with the HR director, and a purposive sample of (nine) line managers who were responsible for different service areas, including contracts, support, finance, business development, health and safety, field services, projects, accounts and information management. All were provided with an overview of the results from the web-based survey which acted as a platform for the deployment of semi-structured interviews, used to probe beneath manager's initial responses to the survey, regarding the introduction of new e-HR 'tools', including descriptions about their usage, and the perceived effectiveness of communications, support and training provided to them by members of the HR function. Interviews lasted between one and a half hours, were tape recorded, transcribed verbatim and interviewees asked to check completed transcripts for any errors such as words they would not normally use, with the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality.

In this paper we revisit this textual data gathered by one of the researchers as part of that study, to give special attention to processes of 'recontextualisation' (Fairclough, 2005: 130), where managers draw upon and modify discourses to meet local conditions or needs. Of particular interest is how (and why) respondents used language to produce explanations of themselves, and their working relationships with the HR function, enabling us to offer fresh insights into the discursive nature of HRM-based change in bringing about new forms of e-HR service delivery, and to offer actionable knowledge to line managers and HR specialists as a means of informing and enhancing e-HR practice. Actionable knowledge is regarded as 'implementable' by the users whom it is intended to engage, such as practitioners and policy-makers' (Antonacopoulou, 2009) and can empower individuals by acknowledging their agency role in shaping their own experiences and employment context (Kreiner et.al. 2009).

We make no assumptions about representativeness in our sampling procedures, because our main units of analysis are various aspects of the narrative, rather than the people themselves (Dick and Cassell, 2002; see also, Dick, 2005). Nevertheless, our approach to critical discourse analysis seeks in analytical terms, to provide sufficient explanation of how and why our sample of respondents constructed themselves and the events around e-HR implementation, for our readers to assess the potential transferability of our assertions to

their own settings, and to raise questions which could be the target for future research in this nascent field of inquiry.

From this perspective, the methodology for data analysis was structured to address the research objectives noted earlier on page 4 - where we refer to our adoption of an action-orientated view of language and a concern with the discursive framing of HR duties required of line managers. There are a wide range of approaches to organizational discourse which focus on different levels of analysis and competing views about agency and structure (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000a). Analysts have tended to take a close-range focus on language in a local-situational context, or a broader longer-range focus for wider discursive patterns/social context in which local discourses are located (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000b).

Table 3 Case Outline

OilCo supplies a wide range of services including directional drilling, consulting and IT infrastructure services, comprehensive reservoir imaging, monitoring and development services. The research into the e-HR initiative at OilCo was carried out during 2004 within a UK subsidiary of a large global organization employing in excess of 60,000 people throughout the world. Parts of the company had been affected by a recent acquisition resulting in related redundancies and office moves, and this also contributed to a reduction in the number of HR professionals physically located within the affected business lines.

For its part in a global HR initiative, the HR function at OilCo had undertaken major structural change broadly similar to the three-box structure noted earlier, and the adoption of information and communications technologies in support of this (Ulrich and Brockbank 2005, Reilly et al. 2007). This involved a move away from an integrated, hierarchical HR function to a flatter, functional design based on the creation of a central shared service centre (known internally as Employee Services), and a cadre of business partners embedded across the company providing direct support to business-facing managers in the field.

Technology-enhanced HR first involved the adoption by Employee Services of a global HR Information System (HRIS) that enabled the function to provide more efficient and effective provision of (globally available) data for all service lines and all business groups from within the same database. This was followed by subsequent introduction of e-HR, with the intention to open up the access to the HRIS, using manager and employee self-service applications (Reddington et. al. 2011).

The espoused benefits of these applications were, according to the HR Director interviewed, included improvement in HR service quality, provision of more accurate and reliable data, and more informed management decisions. He explained that the company also had a longer term goal of introducing information and communication technology (ICT) to improve people management practices through the development and introduction of a bespoke global 'career center' and 'performance management' tool.

In this paper we focus mostly at the organizational level of analysis, concerned with the local constructions of e-HR discourses constituting respondents' accounts of e-HR implementation, locating this where we can, within the broader context of HR practice noted earlier (Keenoy and Oswick, 2004; see also Keenoy, 2009). In doing so, we take a 'critical perspective' on organizational discourse, that treats organizations as dialogic entities where discourses vie with each other for dominance (Grant, Hardy, Oswick and Putnam (2004), and which treats organizations as 'political sites' where various organizational actors struggle to 'fix' meanings in ways that will serve their particular interests (Mumby, 2004: 237). Our approach is rooted in the view that while discourse plays a central role in the

construction of social realities, ways of acting and ways of being have only a partially discursive character, as Fairclough explains:

> In some forms of social action (e.g. certain commodity production processes) discourse is secondary to material action, in others (e.g. meetings) action consists almost entirely of discourse; and particular ways of managing include bodily habits and dispositions as well as ways of communicating (Fairclough, 2005a: 925).

According to Fairclough (2005b), changes in discourse are rarely the substitution of one discourse for another, but changes in relations between discourses create a new articulation (see also Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002). To understand this dialectical struggle, one must view discourse as a social practice and examine the relationship between a discursive event and the situations and structures which frame it. Discourse, therefore, is shaped both by the structures within which the developments take place but also by the agency of the actors seeking to influence it.

Competing HR discourses thus play out in many different ways and we draw upon Fairclough's ideas on 'orders of discourse' to explore this dynamic in our close reading of interview transcripts. These are described by Fairclough as the dominant combinations (of discourses) that control the content of what is said (for example dealing with an inquiry via a shared-service centre according to a routine set of questions); the social relations people enter into in discourse (for example between HR and line managers), and the subject positions people can occupy, such as manager (mentor) and newcomer (mentee) (Fairclough 2001; Fairclough, 2005c).

In this context, we treat discourse as comprising three interconnected elements that act to reproduce or transform e-HR discourse: text (any form of communication that is spoken, visual and written); discursive practices (processes by which texts are produced and interpreted) and material and social practices shaping the nature of the discursive practice (Fairclough, 1995; Oswick et.al. 2007). Focus is placed upon the 'agency' role that managers may play in shaping the concept and practice of HRM, the enabling and constraining effects of the ordering of the two discourses at play and the ethical issues arising from this dynamic. Our analysis oscillates between a focus on specific texts (interview transcripts) and the orders of discourse within which they are related (cognizant of their location within broader socially and historically produced texts (Keenoy, 2009).

Following protocols for template analysis, we created a coding template (Miles and Huberman, 1994; King, 2004), used to identify patterns of evidence to allow for discussion and the reaching of a consensus amongst the researchers, around emerging themes. This enabled us to make constant comparisons and look for similarities and differences in participants' vocabulary and associated subject positions that they used when talking about their experiences of e-HR within OilCo. Careful to avoid an overly reductionist thematic analysis (Nadin and Cassell, 2005), distilled data summaries and illustrative extracts were developed to generate insights into the complex ways in which text and discursive practices emerged and were embedded contextually.

Our approach to coding was thus less concerned with aggregating key themes identified through the coding process, with more emphasis placed on a process of close reading that sought not to simply provide 'the' meaning to 'the' text, but rather to unearth all possible types of ambiguity and issues raised - enacted as an act of dismemberment, of 'tearing open'

in search of hidden meaning (Looy and Baetens, 2003:7). This process helped us to generate new insights around the issues, paradoxes and ambiguities shaping the impact of e-enabled HR applications upon the people involved, and also heightened our awareness that the integrity of respondents' narratives can easily be lost if they are classified in too mechanistic a fashion (Boje, 2001).

In our reading of the texts, we avoided the conventional treatment of e-HRM motives as either 'transactional' or 'transformational' (Bondarouk and Ruël, 2009; Martin and Reddington, 2010), examining these elements in 'both/and' terms, through the eyes of our respondents. Here we share our insights into the enabling and constraining effects of two co-existing e-HR discourses, that we label 'Person-Centred' and 'Technocratic' (see table 4). These resonate with academic accounts of changes in HR technology and the broader discourse of 'globalization' (Bondarouk et. al. 2009; Keenoy, 2009; Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010), enabling us to illustrate how discourses create mental frames that simultaneously highlight certain meanings and exclude others (Marshak and Heracleous, 2005; Fairclough, 2001).

Consistent with the contested nature of discourse (Fairclough, 2003; Thorne, 2001) our analysis points to ways in which the ordering of e-HR discourses at OilCo appeared to be shaping line-HR relations and the subject positions of our sample of managers. As we present our interpretations, we do not seek to generalize from our small sample of texts, but to 'particularize' and provide sufficient 'thick description' for readers to assess the potential transferability for their own settings (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 279), a point we return to in our concluding comments.

Table 4 E-HR Discourses	
Person-Centred Discourse	**Technocratic Discourse**
This discourse is structured round core concepts of 'opportunity', 'choice', 'freedom, 'flexibility', fairness and justice. Expressions of HR support are relational in tone, like 'taking care' and 'motivating'. These prioritise a form of e-HR system functionality that enables managers to assume greater accountability and self-efficacy for people management activities. Line managers and employees are treated as active human agents who seek to shape their own organizational realities. This also implies that they have rights and responsibilities and management is by consent.	This discourse is structured round concepts of 'business', 'profit', 'value' 'compliance', 'efficiency', and resources. Expressions of HR support are technocratic in tone, like 'making employee services work', 'service provision', 'training in the new tools' and 'on-line' help. These prioritise a form of e-HR system functionality that focuses on basic data management and using 'HR data' to support 'operational' HR activities; constituting managers as a passive resource expected by HR to 'comply' with new systems and procedures, and framing employees as 'data' to be managed as commodities in a utilitarian fashion. People are dehumanised and management is through control.

Case Analysis

HR Director's account of the e-HR initiative

The HR director's account of how HR services were to be 'transformed' through e-HR drew explicit attention to issues of reciprocity and exchange between HR and line managers. This is illustrated in his description of the e-enablement of what was called the 'career centre' and

> (...) the need to be able to continue to encourage the use of the system by making sure that the population is seeing *some return* for what they're putting into the system'.

From an ethics perspective the HR business argument appears to be justified in utilitarian terms (serving the greater good) or (at least) using a consequentialist narrative (the end justifies the means). A Kantian approach, consistent with an ethic of care, requires more emphasis on the 'process' by which people are managed, because of the emphasis on 'respect to all persons' and includes the need to examine the systems and procedures involved (Parkes and Harris, 2008).

The importance of *relational* HR support comes across as a key theme in this text, framed by a person-centred discourse signified by the notion of 'taking care' of line management. However, this emphasis on 'care' appeared to be narrowly confined to talk about 'transformational HR outcomes' associated with managerial work that was 'sensitive, strategic value-adding' and critical in achieving 'profit that comes from good (people) management'.

In contrast, transactional HR duties devolved to line managers which were associated with day-to-day management of employees is depicted in this text as being of lesser value, metaphorically trivialised 'to bread and butter stuff'' mediated through the employee services centre. In this context, support for transactional work was framed in highly technocratic terms around a vocabulary of 'service work', 'data' 'compliance' and 'efficiency', consistent with the institutionalized de-valuation of transactional HR work noted by Lawler & Morhman (2003), and reflected in a description of the business partner role:

> The business partner role is one where you're working on relationships, very close to people and you bring along the value to the business, and the employee services role is much more transactional, it's a different model altogether and in many ways it's an operation, it's a very efficient operation rather than a sensitive strategic value-adding one. You're always trying to take the cost out of the transactional side.

This segmentation of HR roles coupled with the introduction of a web-based system, tools and processes, suggested a strong desire by the HR director for an increasing remoteness between the HR function and employees, reflected in statements about the need to 'separate out' conversations with line managers about business-focused issues from discussion about day-to-day employee concerns. The latter are discursively reduced as 'issues' to be dealt with in a rational, efficient manner consistent with practitioner talk about e-HR noted elsewhere (Keegan and Francis, 2010).

> (...) you can't get round a table when you're talking about career development [and get] hijacked by a marketing issue or employees not being paid (...) You've just got to be able to disassociate the two. It's imperative to do so, but I think in the long term the two functions are going to run much more efficiently if they can focus on what they're best at, one which is cost of transactions and the other which is value and career development and being valued in the business and the strategic aspect.

This narrative illustrates a psychological distancing of employee services from what are considered to be higher value added HR activities. The discursive and material positioning of transactional HR work devolved to middle/junior managers is dominated by a technocratic discourse concerned with 'data' and 'operational matters', with very limited room for the more people-centred discourse.

This discursive framing of the value of HR duties raises questions about the potential narrowing of managers' autonomy amongst those working at middle-manager or front-line managerial positions who are more reliant on support from the employee services centre framed in heavily technocratic terms. Consistent with Keegan and Francis' analysis of HR practitioner 'talk', the eclipse of the person-centred discourse appeared to be rooted with the ambitions of the function within the broader 'textscape' of HRM - creating a 'centrifugal logic' for HR organizations and roles (Caldwell and Storey, 2007, cited by Keegan and Francis, 2010: 884) – thereby constraining the way e-HR discourse takes place or where it originates (see also, Thorne, 2001).

Line Manager's Accounts of e-HR

Textual analysis of the nine managerial accounts of e-HR showed how they drew upon a juxtaposition of person-centred and technocratic discourses to make sense of new e-HR applications and procedures with which they were expected to comply, including the perceived opportunities and constraints it appeared to offer them.

The perceived value of e-HR appeared to centre round its potential for managers to be able to assume greater accountability and freedom in the enactment of HR duties, reflected in one interview where a contract manager talked about how senior managers were able to 'shortcut' and 'subvert' the career management system in order to meet their own business requirements:

> Now, some people could argue about wanting to be too *technocratic,* you know, we need *flexibility* in the organization, we have to react quickly, moving people around like that, of course, we totally understand. This is why I'm saying the tool of HR doesn't need to be much more than it is, because it gives you enough freedom and flexibility.

Accepting responsibility for basic data management was recognized by all managers interviewed, reflected in the comments below:

> (...) So we all have to be grown up about it. If I want my information to be correct, I better look after it. These people (employee services) cannot do *everything* for everybody, so some responsibility needs to be taken about our personal information. You know,......our bank information, if you receive information on your bank

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statement not being correct, you take the responsibility of correcting it, you don't blame the bank (Health and Safety Manager).

(..) I think the Career Centre is very good in that we have the ability to look and find people in their particular skills sets through a system. I think it gives the company a good starting point to find or fill the varied opportunities that we have throughout the world. (Business Development Manager)

The language of flexibility and responsibility can be viewed differently through an ethical lens. Absence of clear lines of authority, for example, encourages greater contribution and cross-skilling but also frees management to shift and adapt and rationalise without needing to justify their actions (Sennett, 1999).
.
At the same time, potential for enhanced autonomy in managing more complex people management activities appeared to be heavily circumscribed through the standardization and commodification of HR duties such as performance management, articulated as a 'tick box' exercise. This is reflected in concerns expressed about the requirements imposed on them by the e-HR system, to follow a standard operating procedure that required them to complete four performance reviews per team member per year, while also being expected by HR business partners to provide high quality 'motivational conversations' with their staff.

(...) our process dictates that we have a quarterly review with every member of our staff, our direct reports. If you were to do it properly and you take the average number of people reporting to managers, that is obviously quite a time consuming task. Since it's a task - you *have* to do it every 3 months (,,,) and people say, 'fine, I have to do 12 guys, I'll get them on one after the other, very quick, just to tick the box'.

What you end up having is de-motivated people because the only time that they had or the only opportunity to review their objectives and discuss their own personal development with their manager is being, sort of 'quick, quick, quick, so I can move on to the next guy (Information Management Manager).

From a Kantian ethical standpoint, one of the moral obligations of a firm is provision of meaningful work for employees (Bowie, 1998). The approach described above can result, not only in the demotivation of the employees under review but also the alienation of those conducting, or leading the process.

Perceived support from HR regarding tensions of this nature, was absent in managers accounts, with an implicit assumption that managers, with self-mastery in the tools, would somehow manage to provide high quality person-centred reviews of team members objectives. One outcome of this was a perceived increase in workload and heightened anxiety amongst managers about being considered a 'worse personnel manager in terms of managing your troops'.

Ok, part of our scorecards or our target is to ensure that we have management input on people's development plan and career profile. We have to report by inputting into the system what we think the person is capable of, what are we doing in terms of development and what we think the person would benefit from in terms of development. (...) You have very specific criteria on people's development, they

have to reach a certain level in terms of training and certain grades related to how well they perform in their training programme. The more delayed people you have, you are considered to be a worse personnel manager in terms of managing your troops. (Information Management Manager)

This account points to the need for more critical debate and research about the issue of 'workload' and associated arguments about managerial autonomy and self-efficacy in the implementation of e-HR. In this context, self-efficacy means a whole realm of expectations that involved a considerable amount of work that was previously shared with HR. Previously at OilCo there would have been a higher ratio of HR to line managers, able to provide more personal and relational support to individuals. Reflecting on the movement towards a 'leaner' HR function, one manager explains the importance of maintaining healthy levels of HR support.

> Manager's have a tough enough job...making their numbers, making other people happy, making sure their clients are happy and all that kind of stuff. I think that the support the HR community and the Personnel community give those managers is invaluable and so even if we spend extra money going down the e-HR route, I would be horrified to see a further decrease in the number of personnel people. (Support Manager)

This appeal for continued relational support from HR was in stark contrast to the HR director's framing of day-to-day people matters as routine tasks, as reflected in the following quotation:

> If you've got a good set of data in the system that's been input by managers and employees, you can identify your bottom 10% or whatever percentage you agree on much more clearly if you've got a good set of data. Also, in the realms of discipline, you can discipline someone more effectively in line with the local regulations without any of the potential costs of tribunal, 'passage rumours' and all that other stuff that can be motivated and cost an organization money. (HR Director)

Discussion:

E-HRM is a relatively new research stream in HRM, and while there is a growing evidence base of the take-up of Ulrich-style structures and associated e-HR applications that focus on outcomes and deliverables (e.g. Parry, 2011; Marler and Fisher, 2013), there is a dearth of critique in this literature about the impact upon the people involved. In this paper we have integrated ethical and critical discourse-based perspectives on HRM to explore how an HR director, and a small sample of managers talked about and construed an e-HR implementation programme within our multinational case study (OilCo), placing the spotlight on language-use in shaping working relationships. We have raised questions about the power relations and associated ethical consequences of the reduction in face-to-face relationships between HR specialists, line managers and employees, and increasing commodification of HR work associated with this.

We presented rich descriptions of the paradox and ambiguity of the emergent e-HR discourse framing peoples' accounts of reality, and the dominance of a technocratic discourse of e-HR which was risking the humanness, autonomy and well-being of the

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managers involved in this study. Our findings resonate with Worrall and Cooper's research (2004, 2006) into the changing nature of managerial work in the UK, which points to evidence of growing workloads, work intensification, lack of control and low levels of participation and involvement amongst line managers. With respect to e-HR implementation within OilCo, this has the potential in the words of one of our respondents, to 'tighten the iron first' of HR, treating managers as subjects who are increasingly required to comply with stringent new rules about executing HR duties and which treats both themselves and workers in very instrumental terms. Perceived organizational support (POS) amongst managers might be an important mitigating factor in this regard (Eisenberger et. al. 1986; Dawley et.al. 2008) but was not in much evidence within the textual data under investigation.

POS is concerned with the extent to which the organization addresses employees' socio-emotional needs and describes employees' beliefs that the organization values their contributions and wellbeing, and thus feel obliged to reciprocate (Eder and Eisenberger, 2008; Chen et. al. 2009). Managers are shown to play an important role in shaping both POS amongst their staff, and more needs to be understood about how managers enact this role and the situational influence of this. For instance, a lack of POS by managers in their own employment relationship around e-HR may have detrimental effects upon the level of support they offer to employees (Coyle-Shapiro and Shore, 2007).

We have suggested that an ethic of care approach enables humanity to be placed at the center of discussions about e-HR, rather than peripheral to it; and argue that more research is needed to examine the juxtaposition of the human and technocratic elements of e-HR in order to create a more nuanced understanding of the structural conditions that facilitate dialogue between line managers and HR specialists, and a better e-HR 'value proposition' (Ulrich, 2001) for both managers and employees. This requires more critical engagement amongst e-HR analysts with process-orientated designs that take better account of the inherent commonalities and contradictions in HR work, and the role of context in shaping these (Boselie et. al. 2009; Paauwe, 2009; Watson, 2010; Spicer et. al. 2009).

Similarly, within the practice domain, creation of a mutuality of purpose and expectations amongst HR and line managers requires the actors involved to understand and effectively work with ambiguity and tension (Carr, 2000). This is not an easy task and we are seeing the emergence of new frameworks providing practical advice and support to managers, such as guides to 'managing polarities' (Johnson, 1996), developing values-based arguments (Gentile, 2010), and changing 'conversational profiles' (Ford and Ford, 2008).

 Significance and limitations of study

To conclude, our paper contributes to the growing intellectual space being given to critical perspectives on IHRM within leadership and management research, reflected in a recent a special issue about this topic within this journal (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010). In doing so we call on analysts to proactively re-frame the more specialised e-HR agenda in ways that that take better account of the human and ethical dynamics of the move to more technology- based HR systems and processes – critical at a time when global businesses are making profound structural changes to their HR functions.

As previously mentioned, we do recognise that our study is based on a small sample of texts and therefore we are unable to make assumptions about representativeness. We also recognise

that our choice of illustrative extracts used to demonstrate the significance of these dynamics as a worthy area of investigation, is an inevitably subjective process, reflecting our own beliefs and particular reading and interpretations of the textual data. Nevertheless we have sought to provide sufficient 'thick description' for our readers to assess the potential transferability of our assertions for their own academic and/or practice-based settings, grounding this in a research framework that blends ethical and critical discourse perspectives on HRM.

We have presented instances of intertextuality in ways that demonstrate the powerful ordering of two competing discourses – person-centred and technocratic - that acted to 'rule in' and 'rule out' certain ways of talking and behaving in relation to the e-hr implementation programme amongst our sample of managers. This enabled us to illustrate the potential of the person-centred discourse to position managers as active agents, able to assume greater accountability and freedom in the enactment of HR duties; and how paradoxically, managers were also positioned and constrained by discursive patterns of 'compliance' framed by a technocratic discourse which treated them and their subordinates in very instrumental terms.

Such findings resonate with long-standing debate and critique within the HRM literature on the inherent tensions within people management (Legge, 2005), and the expressed need for organizational development practitioners to form new professional discourses that are 'more accepting, if not embracing, of power dynamics' (Marshak and Grant, 2008: S17). Realization of this discursive shift requires a conceptual language that allows for a combination of the ethos of critical HRM studies, organizational discourse, business ethics research and performance-focused research, *and* which engages with the practitioner world in this endeavour.

We noted earlier, the discursive space opening up within the mainstream academic literature, which calls for analysts to constructively engage in competing approaches and perspectives on HRM, and this requires 'some revision of how we do critical management studies' (Spicer et. al. 2009). We are also now seeing the emergence of practical interventions that usefully open up a space for critique and challenge, and better appreciate the contexts and constraints of management, 'such as multi-stakeholder forums' (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007) and 'critical' management education agendas (for example Lawless and McQue, 2008; Trehan and Rigg, 2005).

The contribution of our study at this more practical level is to elicit thinking and constructive dialogue amongst HR academics and practitioners about the line/employee-facing role in HR work and how various dialogic OD interventions might be used to help facilitate negotiated agreements amongst stakeholders who have a vested interest in e-HR outcomes. As we observed earlier, there is a reported upsurge in the take-up of collaborative inquiry processes amongst OD practitioners that take more account of competing realities and power relationships in effecting change than conventional approaches to HRM (Stanford, 2012). This 'new ensemble' of OD interventions foreground the role of conversation and dialogue in ways that enable stakeholders to challenge and reflect on existing organizational practices, to generate shared understandings, and to engage in more innovative thinking (Barge and Little, 2002; Marshak and Grant, 2008).

Direction for future research

On blending insights from this practice-based literature with theoretical perspective on ethics, CHRM and organizational discourse, we offer a platform for further conversation and

research into the kind of communicative practices that will support this effective 'translation' of more humanistic and ethical concerns as expressed in our paper, into the creation of a more balanced e-HR agenda.

We believe that a particularly fruitful line of inquiry could center round the impact of distancing, resulting from the reduced personal contact between managers and their teams, and HR specialists, and how this may affect the quality of employee-line-HR relations and the subsequent impact upon creativity, innovation and performance within organizations. This is particularly pertinent to MNEs in their drive to reduce the costs of HR support services (Reilly and Williams, 2003).

This would require explicit recognition being given to power and political processes at micro and macro level of analysis, such as an ethical scrutiny about the impact of the internationalization of business, upon increasing use of HR 'shared services' and distancing of the function from the managers and employees they serve, including an assessment around a loss of trust and confidence in line managers and the HR function (Keegan and Francis, 2010).

We argue that it can be very difficult to build genuine relationships based on trust, reciprocity and exchange in the move to e-HR, given that this inevitably undermines HR opportunities to engage with people (and demonstrate their 'much prized' interpersonal skills) together with the risk of alienation as their work becomes more systems led and mechanised. The lack of trust in the systems that concern personal data and decisions that affect individuals including the loss of transparency and reluctance to commit information to electronic means is also important (Barnett, 1992). The increasing mechanization of HR (through e-HR) - especially in large MNEs, may have more serious consequences for the profession as a whole, with the well-being of employees reduced to potential 'collateral damage' (Bartram, and Rimmer, 2012, pages 129-132).

On a more positive note, Mather (2011) provides useful case study examples of organizations that have succeeded in repairing trust through active investment in positively reviewing and reinterpreting their relationships with employees. Moving forward we recommend further empirical research that can extend the range and complexity of our understanding of the 'human' and relational issues involved in the discursively mediated experiences of line managers (and other employees) in the framing and implementation of e-HR programmes.

Notes

[1] Recent evidence suggests that integrated HR functions are being replaced (wholly or partially) with the tripartite framework of delivery through shared services, centres of excellence and business partnering, and strategic alignment achieved through a small corporate centre, described as the fourth leg of the stool that has often been overlooked in debates about moves towards this kind of structure (Hird, Marsh, and Sparrow, 2009; Martin et. al. 2008; Reilly et. al., 2007).

[2] Bandura (1994) defines self-efficacy as people's beliefs about their capabilities to perform a defined task and is regarded as the foundation of human agency. Within the context of e-HR, this refers to: capability in assuming accountability for maintenance of the accuracy and integrity of people-related data, such as personal details and performance data; capability to make sense of and convert people-related data/reports in ways that support effective people management in routine and more complex, non-routine people-related responsibilities. 'User acceptance' has been shown to be a key factor in shaping the

success of technology change, closely linked to perceived value of e-HR in terms of *usefulness* and *ease of use* (Davis, 1989).

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