**The Duality of Logics in SHRM as a Source of Engagement**

**Abstract**

The literature on strategic human resource management (SHRM) categorizes two distinctive types of human resource management (HRM) practices. One type of practices aims to contribute to the alignment of employees’ performance to the economic objectives of the organization while the other set of practices is humanistic oriented and pursues the development and well-being of employees. To understand the origin, design and implementation of these two different types of practices this research builds on the institutional logics theoretical perspective. This theory states that dual logics that contribute to different purposes co-exist and influences the types of practices organizations decide to implement. Furthermore, when there is not a clear dominant logic, hybrid practices emerge to comply with both logics. However, it is not clear how organizations manage this duality in the context of HRM practices and what the outcome is in terms of employees’ behaviors or attitudes. Thus, this research proposes to explore the nature of institutional logics that support different HRM practices and how organizations manage the institutional complexity created by the duality of institutional logics in HRM. Additionally, this research plans to identify the outcome of this duality through employees’ attitudes related to their job and organizational engagement. Employee’ engagement is a nascent concept that focusses on how individuals connect with others, with work and beyond work activities through the impact he or she makes. The source of this connection has been overlooked by the main stream literature at the same time than what HRM practices are linked to employee’s engagement. Hence, I propose to link the notion of institutional logics of HRM practices to identify the sources of employee’ engagement in organizational settings. Therefore, the purpose of this research is twofold: the nature and management of institutional logics of HRM practices; and, according to the logics of HRM practices what constitute as sources of employee engagement. To achieve these purposes a qualitative study will be designed.

Keywords: institutional logics, duality, human resource management practices, engagement.

**Introduction**

SHRM is most commonly defined as alignment of individual’s performance towards the achievement of the organization’s strategic objectives and the satisfaction of employee needs (Jackson, Schuler & Jiang, 2013). Yet, the HRM practices that help to achieve high performance are not necessarily the same as those that maximize employee well-being and development (Baptiste, 2008). HRM practices tend to be designed and implemented under a duality of logics, one is the economic and the other one is the humanistic logic. In other words, HRM practices need to oversee for the organizational performance at the same time than for the development of the individual wellbeing (Winstanley & Woodall, 2000). This research builds on the institutional logics theoretical perspective to understand how and why this duality of logics emerges and how organizations overcome the latent conflict in which HRM is involved.

Institutional logics are defined as “the way individuals create and recreate their material subsistence, organize time and space and give meaning to their social reality based on the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs and rules” (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 4). Institutional logics present a relevant theoretical framework because logics center the attention on a specific set of issues and solutions and influence the decision to adopt specific practices (Ocasio, 1997).

Although the literature acknowledges both logics for HRM practices, greater attention has been directed towards the economic one because SHRM is generally associated to the organization’s financial performance. Therefore, the accomplishment of business objectives that is translated into better financial performance has minimized the importance of employee’s well-being and satisfaction of individual needs (Baptiste, 2008). Yet, recently, a novel HRM stream of research that focuses on employees as individuals has emerged following the humanistic perspective in management (Davila & Elvira, 2012; Elvira & Davila, 2005). Humanistic HRM derives from the humanistic management perspective that emphasizes the human condition and is concerned with the development of human virtue, in all its forms and to its fullest extent (Melé, 2003).

Although there is evidence that SHRM and humanistic HRM are based on different logics both tend to seek and produce similar outcomes. That is, in both streams theoretical and empirical studies seek for job satisfaction (Guest, 2002), commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991), loyalty (Huselid, 1995) and human development (Lepak & Snell, 1999) limiting the research scope to the relationship of the individual with his/her job. This has left aside the positive involvement of the employee in other organizational activities that might result in engagement. In other words, both streams have overlooked the concept of organizational engagement. Kahn (1990) defines engagement as “the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s ‘preferred self’ in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional) and active, full performances.” Engagement becomes relevant nowadays because it connects the individual with his/her relationship with others, with work and beyond work activities with the impact he/she makes. Moreover, according to the Gallup’s State of the Global Place Report (2013) only thirteen percent of the world’s employees are engaged at work. This calls for attention in new ways to study how to achieve such engagement and the way HRM influences such attitude. Given the two main streams in the literature in which HRM practices are categorized, the economic and the humanistic, and adding that the organization’s aims are in the middle, theoretical integration seems difficult unless we understand the deep logic behind each stream. Moreover, we could also understand why certain HRM approaches produce particular attitudes and not others.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is twofold: the nature and management of institutional logics of HRM practices; and, according to the logics of HRM practices what constitute as sources of employee engagement. To achieve these purposes a qualitative study will be designed in three parts. The first part will seek to identify the logics that support HRM systems. For this study, a HRM system is composed by the organizational philosophy, policies, practices, processes and benefits related to employees. Once the logics of HRM systems are identified the research will turn to define if there is a duality and to understand how the organization copes with such duality. The third part will focus on the impact of such a duality in the engagement of the employees and whether it is to the job or the organization. In-depth interviews to HRM managers and employees will be planned.

This doctoral research proposal has three sections. The first with a literature review, the second with expected findings and the third with discussion and conclusion.

Research Questions

Given the relevance of understanding the institutional logics the support specific HRM practices and their corresponding impact on the employees’ organizational engagement, this thesis will be guided by three research questions:

1. What is the nature of institutional logics that support HRM practices?

2. How do organizations manage institutional complexity created by the duality of institutional logics in HRM?

3. What are the sources of employee engagement given a duality of institutional logics in HRM?

Literature Review

The purpose of this section is to briefly present the background of the study and the theoretical perspective in which this dissertation will be built. In general, studies on SHRM identify high-performance, high-commitment and high-involvement behaviors as the outcomes of HRM practices(for a review see Jackson, Schuler & Jiang, 2013). The general pattern in those studies is that high-performance practices result in lower rates of turnover, greater employees’ productivity (e. g., Arthur, 1994; Huselid, 1995), higher organizational citizenship behaviors, greater job satisfaction, better relationships with managers, and impact human capital development and safety (Jiang, Lepak, Hu & Baer, 2012). However, there is also evidence that these practices increase job stress and anxiety (Wood, Van Veldhoven, Croon, & DeMenezes, 2012) affecting the employee’s health and therefore, well-being. Although the literature provides a clear distinction of the objectives for each set of SHRM systems either for performance, commitment or involvement, taking a closer look at the practices, it is possible to observe there are not clear delimitations in each classification for a certain practice. That is, one practice can comply with more than one objective. This makes the study and classification of practices overwhelming for research and practice. However, high performance, high commitment and high involvement HRM can be analyzed with a broader approach that might simplify the task for the use of one specific practice. There is a well-accepted classification defined as hard/calculative HRM and soft/collaborative HRM (Truss Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern, & Stiles, 1997). The categories of hard/calculative and soft/collaborative HRM are opposed along a number of dimensions, and are based on different approaches to manage people according to the developmental-humanist or utilitarian-instrumentalist principles (Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern & Stiles, 1997).

Humanistic HRM considers employees as members of a community and seeks to make work enjoyable as well as developing attitudes of identification, commitment and loyalty to the mission, values or goals of the organization, fosters self-actualization and adds the appropriate culture for developing the individual (Melé, 2003). According to Pirson and Lawrence (2010), organizations that have a purpose beyond profit maximization are better able to motivate employees and possibly generate engagement.

Previous studies on engagement have studied this construct as an antecedent to business outcomes like performance (Salanova, 2005), customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, employee retention, and employee safety (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002), as a mediator between value congruence, perceived organizational support, and core self-evaluations, as well as with two job performance dimensions: task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010).

However, there is a lack of studies that examine whether HRM practices are linked to employee engagement. Thus, it becomes relevant to understand how and when HRM becomes a source of employees’ engagement and whether engagement is to the individual’s job or the organization. Previous research suggests that engagement might be related at the organizational level. Yet, today the research focus is still at the micro-level that of the individual with his/her job. Given that HRM practices might be built in a duality of logics there is an opportunity to discern the sources for employees’ engagement.

Institutional logics provide an understanding on how a determined social world works (Jackall, 1988). Furthermore, they provide an understanding on behavior based on the different institutional orders that determine the implementation of practices. Thus, it offers a solid approach to study HRM and the practices organizations employ. This study aims to contribute to the theory of institutional logics by examining the organizational level through the duality of HRM. Furthermore, logics are used to explain the behaviors that result from each logic, specifically the impact on engagement.

The coexistence of practices manifested from contradictory institutional logics could create a dual institutionality. This might occur when distinct but related practices used by organizations have legitimacy but are rooted in diverse institutional logics and coexist due to different levels of discretion associated with their implementation (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011). This concept is distinct from previously identified institutional duality in multinationals, where competing institutional logics of subsidiary and the host country influence how a particular practice is implemented and internalized by organizations (Kostova & Roth, 2002).

Proposal Discussion

It seems that the different intents to manage the dual orientation of HRM practices such as strategic HRM, hard/soft, calculative/ collaborative and sustainable are based in two main assumptions either they group practices that follow the economic or humanistic approaches. On one hand, hard/calculative HRM practices are based on the purpose of achieving the economic goals of the organization. On the other hand, soft/collaborative HRM and sustainable HRM practices are concerned with the development and care of employees and position the individual as more important than economic singular results. This second stream of HRM practices fits well with the theoretical proposition that in Latin America the individual should be placed as part of the collectivity and at the center of the organization and society (Davila & Elvira, 2009).

To study HRM practices, Davila and Elvira (2009) propose that decomposing HRM into a series of activities one identify three main stages: the content, the implementation and the outcome of the practice. For instance, the content of the performance appraisal practice is the measurement tools and instruments that are designed according to what the organization understands by performance and how to assess it. The implementation includes feedback interviews where employees are noticed how they are doing their work and where improvement is needed. At last, the outcome of the practice focuses on rewards and recognition given to the employee for their performance (Davila & Elvira, 2009). By studying practices in this way, it is possible to suggest that the duality of logics could occur since the content translates into the implementation and outcome levels. Truss and colleagues (1997) found that although organizations aim for a soft/collaborative approach for HRM practices the underlying principles are always restricted to the improvement of economic performance. Therefore, it is likely that the content of HRM practices is embedded in the economic logic that may also apply to the implementation and outcome stages. Therefore, the emerging question is: What is the nature of the institutional logics that support contrasting HRM practices, and where can one identify this contrasting view of the practices: at the content, implementation or outcome level?

The recent trends in the literature of institutional logics refer to the issue of having multiple logics (Pache & Santos, 2012; Purdy & Gray, 2009). Alon (2013) introduces the term of dual instituionality that occurs when distinct but related practices are legitimate but are rooted in different institutional logics; however, they coexist given the different levels of discretion associated with their implementation. The term of dual institutionality was introduced in the context of transition economies, where organizations have to deal with local and global pressures. This concept is different from previously identified institutional duality, where competing institutional logics of subsidiary and the host country influence how a particular practice is implemented by organizations (Alon, 2013). In this vein, the absence of a clear dominant logic might turn into a hybrid practice. Furthermore, there is evidence that shows that it is possible that practices based on different logics coexist turning into hybrid practices. The question that emerges is: How does HRM comply with the duality of logics and does this duality of logics compete or produce hybrid practices?

The study by Gooderham, Nordhaug and Ringdal (1999) presents how institution’s impact on firm’s use of HRM practices. That is, the HRM department has to fulfill the strategic economic needs and goals of the organization at the same time than it has to satisfy the needs and goals of employees (Hall & Goodate, 1986). Similar to the definition of a hybrid organization that combines different institutional logics (Battilana & Dorado, 2010) organizations can combine different institutional logics for HRM practices. Furthermore, it is also possible that organizational practices become hybridized by altering the content, implementation and outcome levels of the practice. For example, Truss and colleagues (1997) identified the practices of career development with the aim to provide employees the opportunity to manage their career. However, the real options were limited to organizational terms. Here, multiple logics might be combined within one practice (Van den Broek, Boselie & Paauwe, 2014).

A different perspective proposed by Pache and Santos (2010) is that hybrid organizations adopt a combination of intact practices borrowed from the different logics they are embedded in. This means that organizations only borrow practices from the different logics that fit into the current demands of the environment but they are not combined into creating a new one.

Greenwood and colleagues (2011) conclude that most empirical studies assume that there is institutional complexity that means incompatible logics. However, there are studies that show how hybrids combine multiple logics within organizational practices (Battilana & Dorado, 2010) either by taking existing practices from both logics or through a combination that results in new practices. These new resulting practices are of great importance to organizations given positive effects it will have on internal and external legitimacythus: What are the types of practices that result when there is a duality of logics that supports organizational practices?

Stakeholder engagement is used in the corporate social responsibility (CSR) literature to recognize the need that it is no longer enough for firms to interact with its stakeholders because in this simple transaction there is a lack of connection with the needs, well-being and capabilities of the other (Noland & Philips, 2010). Therefore, engagement is used as a type of interaction that involves recognition and respect of common humanity and the ways in which the actions of each may affect the other. Given the financial, physical and environmental effects that businesses can have on individuals and communities, it is important that businesses actually identify and communicate with those individuals who have legitimate stake in them (Noland & Philips, 2010). Greenwood (2007) proposes the stakeholder view and defines stakeholder engagement as the practices the organization undertakes to involve stakeholders in a positive manner in organizational activities. Considering employees as stakeholder (Davila & Elvira, 2012), this perspective suggests that the organization seeks to engage the employee and will seek to implement practices for engaging the employee.

The concept of stakeholder engagement pursues a positive outcome in the employee, but the CSR approach changes the focus from the employee to the organization. This shift in focus to what the organization does for the employee results in two types of stakeholder engagement rather on dimensions of the construct. The first type is strategic engagement and the second is moral engagement (Noland & Philips, 2010). However, the literature has not yet identified if engagement is to the work itself or the organization. It only assumes that through work activities employees become engaged to the organization but not to its performance objectives. Therefore, there is a need to change the approach to engagement to the meso-level that of the organization.

The antecedents and conditions identified such as task characteristics, role characteristics, job resources and work interactions among others belong to different sources of engagement. For instance, an employee could feel engaged to the work activities he/she performs because of the task and role characteristics. However, this does not mean he/she is engaged to the organization and its purpose. At the same time, he/she might not enjoy the work activities, but feels identification to the mission and values of the organization and therefore, he/she is engaged to the organization.

Therefore, it is important to identify What is important for employees to feel engagement to the organization and is it different from job engagement?

Methodology

Given that the three research questions seek a deeper understanding on the duality of institutional logics on HRM and what is important for employees to produce engagement rather than testing hypotheses with causal relationships to make generalizations, the main recommendation is to follow a qualitative approach. At the same time, prior work in the field of institutional logics has been developed through case studies (e. g., Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Pache & Santos, 2010) and research on engagement is still focused on the definition and dimensions of the construct (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Therefore, a qualitative approach is more appropriate for this study.

The planned research design includes in-depth interviews with HRM managers to identify if there is a duality in the practices implemented as well as with employees to find the sources of engagement for them. This research will follow the grounded theory approach for data gathering and analysis. The questions included in the protocol are oriented in understanding the policy, values and objectives of HRM as well as what elements are considered when choosing a practice to unravel the logic behind. For employees, questions relate to engagement and what can HR do to increase engagement.

Expected Findings

Findings will be presented as case studies portraying an exemplar of the HRM practices organizations implement to cope with the duality and how they are a source of engagement. The expected results are that HRM implement hybrid practices to comply with both logics. Furthermore, this duality will allow engagement of employees, both with work and the organization itself.

Discussion and Conclusion

An institutional field composed by multiple institutional logics is called a heterogeneous field (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Though most fields are heterogeneous, there is an institutional logic that usually holds one dominant position (Reay & Hinings, 2005). At the same time, logics provide a guide to match the type of practices to specific problems and to explain why organizations should change or incorporate new practices (Shipilov, Greve, & Rowley, 2010). Logics center the attention on a specific set of issues and solutions; therefore, they influence in the decision to adopt specific practices (Ocasio, 1997).

One stream of research has emphasized how dominant institutional logics originate and shape organizations. This can result in the spread of a practice that belongs to the dominant institutional logic or in the loss of the practices from the no longer legitimate logic (Shipilov, Greve, & Rowley, 2010). Another stream of research suggests that institutional logics can comprise multiple practices. For example, from 1955 to 1988, organizations in the United States improved in their personnel management practices. This was possible through the spread of an institutional logic that involved the diffusion of formal employee evaluation mechanisms, formal job descriptions and formal pay-systems (Scott, 1994). Moreover, multiple practices related to the same institutional logic sometimes spread in different time. Like the adoption of ISO 9000 standards worldwide. This was preceded by specific quality norms that companies in individual countries had adopted (Guler, Guillen, & Macpherson, 2002). This is similar to the expected conclusion that there is a duality in institutional logics and determines the implementation of HRM.

Previous research suggests that engagement might be related at the organizational level. Yet, todays’ focus is still in a micro-level that of the individual with his/her job. Given that HRM practices might be built in a duality of logics there is an opportunity to discern the sources for employees’ engagement. Lockwood (2007) suggests that HR leaders can foster a culture of engagement by implementing practices and policies that design, measure and evaluate proactive workplaces. Some of the actions recommended are to clearly and consistently communicate organizational goals and objectives, establish policies and practices that promote a workplace culture that stimulates employee engagement, align organizational goals to day-to-day work, reward managers whose behavior fosters employee engagement, listen carefully to what employees want and need, provide opportunities and challenges to leverage the respective talents of employees, verify if are employees engaged, find out what is working and what is not, hold managers accountable for demonstrating organizational values, development of team members and results, be sure that employees know how they can contribute, genuinely thank employees for their contributions, maintain an open dialogue among senior management, managers and employees (Lockwood, 2007). Therefore, there is a relationship between HRM and engagement that has not been fully addressed through empirical research.

The proposed model that aims to explain this study is represented on Figure 1 that shows how the type of logic either economic or human results in different HRM practices that can generate either job engagement or organizational engagement. The hard/ calculative HRM approach is based on the premise of financial outcomes. Therefore, it focuses on how employees can do better at their jobs to increase performance. Thus, it could be more aligned to job engagement where the literature on engagement has being concentrated. In contrast, the soft/collaborative HRM approach based on a humanistic logic seeks to create a partnership with the employee. The commitment that results from this partnership transcends the job. Therefore, I suggest that it could result in a type of engagement beyond the job that is, with the organization.

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Figure 1. Theoretical Framework.

Economic logic

Humanistic logic

Hard/

Calculative

HRM Practices

Soft/ Collaborative

HRM Practices

Hybrid HRM Practices

Job engagement

Organizational

engagement

Duality of logics