Organising HRM work: a cross-national comparative perspective

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Questions

- What are the possible options to organise HRM work?

- Why do organisations employ a particular form of organising HRM work?
Organising HRM work

“the task of assigning HRM tasks and authority to different units within an organisation (and sometimes beyond) and enabling these units to coordinate their work with each other”

(Brandl, Ehnert and Nehles forthcoming)

Classical HRM organisation

- Ideals: Scientific Management, Weber’s Bureaucracy Model
- Differentiated task definitions
- Administrative tasks, low devolvement to line managers
- HR specialists control line managers
- Differentiated skills and little interaction
- Replacement of position holders and externalisation of tasks easy
- Rewards for compliance with job-descriptions
### Neo-Classical HRM organisation

- **Ideals:** Behavioural perspectives of the firm
- Complex and holistic task definitions
- Strategic integration, devolvement of responsibilities to line managers
- Mutual control of HR specialists and line managers
- Need for exchange, mutual understanding
- Replacement of position holders and externalisation of tasks rather difficult
- Rewards for skills and performance

### Modern HRM organisation

- **Ideals:** evolutionary and systems perspectives
- Wide-ranging and temporary task definitions
- All employees have HRM responsibilities
- Self-control and networks important for control
- Low boundaries between “HR specialists” and others
- Replacement of position holders and tasks desirable
- Rewards for capabilities and networks
## A comparison of options for organising HRM work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work systems characteristics</th>
<th>Classical</th>
<th>Neo-classical</th>
<th>Modern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task fragmentation (specialisation)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR strategy integration and devolvement</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Limited to high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control of HR work</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation of HR specialists from line managers</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low to high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company commitment to in-house HR activities</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Considerable</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards for engaging with HRM activities tied to…</td>
<td>Standardised jobs / roles</td>
<td>Skills, individual performance</td>
<td>Capabilities, networks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Strategic integration of HR departments and devolvement to line managers in Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Devolvement to the line</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
<th>Switzerland</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Norway</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategic Integration (Cranet)
Arguments of institutional approaches

- societal arrangements and structures
- constraints and incentives (e.g., national interest groups, rules, control over resources)
- efficient operation of HR function

Institutional Factors

- Industrial relations system (in particular, union strength)
- Labour legislation
- National traditions and history
- Labour market situation
- Demographic profiles of HR professionals
- ...
Arguments of cultural approaches

- assumptions of individuals operating in local settings
- values and attitudes (e.g., to power differences, uncertainty)
- adequate organisational forms
- selective perception
- ≠efficiency of organisational forms

What are the features of a well-functioning organisation?

- “an authority network where the power to organize and control the actors stems from their positioning in the hierarchy”
  French manager
- “a coordinated network of individuals who make appropriate decisions based on their professional competence and knowledge”
  German manager
- “a network of relationships between people who get things done by influencing each other by communicating and negotiating”
  British manager  (Laurent 1986)
How do you rate the importance of HRM activities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HRM activity</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff well-being</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication of values and attitudes</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff development</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision/Coaching</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating others</td>
<td>4.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegation</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team building</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling conflicts</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling information</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Brandl, Madsen, Madsen 2009)

Outlook

- Expanding focus of frameworks to modern HRM work organisation
- Explanatory research designs
- Variation within similar HRM work forms
- Variation in use of HRM work forms within countries
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