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disguise an increase in
management control.

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Abstract

The Critical Perspective proposes that HRM is ineffective, suggesting that only a name change differentiates HRM and its precursor Personnel. Simultaneously, it presents HRM as a predator that uses rhetoric to disguise an increase in management control. This research examines these propositions from the Critical Perspective through a survey sent to Human Resource Managers in 896 large, Australian organizations. The results challenge the propositions of the Critical Perspective indicating that HRM has been implemented in rhetoric and reality. The results also show that HRM does not manipulate the workforce to increase management control by using soft rhetoric to obscure hard reality.

Introduction

This working paper examines a major contradiction in the arguments of the Critical Perspective on the normative model of Human Resource Management (HRM). The Critical Perspective proposes that HRM has only changed organizational rhetoric and reality has not changed since the introduction of Personnel. However it also argues that HRM uses a unitary, soft HRM rhetoric to obscure hard reality characterized by increased management control and diminished job security for employees. The first proposition describes HRM as powerless and the second as powerful. This paper tests these propositions through a survey sent to HRM practitioners in 896 large, Australian organizations.

Literature Review

The Critical Perspective, which dominated the UK literature during the 1990's, followed the emergence of HRM as a concept in the 1980's. Primarily the Critical Perspective proposes that HRM only pretends to be concerned for workers whilst reasserting management control. It believes workers are exploited through work intensification, downsizing and casualisation of the workforce. This exploitation is possible because HRM uses soft rhetoric to disguise hard reality leading to a gap between rhetoric and reality. The debates in the Critical Perspective have paralleled the prescriptive literature on HRM and its criticisms of HRM have continued even though other literature argues that HRM has been progressively implemented. Recent literature detailing Guest's (1999) research has raised some questions about the efficacy of the debates in the Critical Perspective and Keenoy (1999) has presented some compelling arguments about the limitations of its concepts and research methods.

There are four main criticisms of the Critical Perspective. Firstly, it proposes that HRM is ineffective, suggesting that only a name change differentiates the old

personnel and HRM. Simultaneously, it presents HRM as a predator that uses soft rhetoric to disguise an increase in management control. Secondly, the Critical Perspective uses a hard and soft distinction to support its central thesis that there is a gap between rhetoric and reality. It has been proposed that this dichotomy is a limiting framework to develop an understanding of the complex function of HRM. Thirdly, the critical debate occurs in a vacuum because data from all key stakeholders, including management, employees and the HRM function, is discounted because the arguments of the Critical Perspective suggest such data will be flawed. On this basis there is limited evidence to support or refute its arguments. The Critical Perspective's debates rest on the observation of the researchers who may employ selective perception. Finally, the Critical Perspective is accused of indulging in criticism without providing a viable alternative.

This working paper examines the first of these criticisms by considering two conflicting arguments. Firstly, that HRM has not been implemented: the Critical Perspective argues that HRM has changed HRM rhetoric but not reality. Secondly, it examines whether HRM is a wolf in sheep's clothing that uses soft rhetoric to disguise hard reality.

HRM as Rhetoric not Reality: Big Hat – No Cattle

The HRM function, in its prior form, Personnel Management, was focused on administration, welfare and Industrial Relations. Personnel management was the dumping ground for many unwanted tasks and was heavily criticized for being a combination of the functions of file clerk, social worker and fire fighting (Drucker 1954). It is argued that HRM emerged to counter these criticisms and improve its status by acquiring a strategic focus and proposing that employees are a source of competitive advantage (Kamoche, 1996; Kane, Crawford and Grant, 1998).

HRM has its foundation in two United States based models. The Harvard model was associated with a strategic approach, which linked workforce management

to organizational strategy and was later defined as hard HRM. The Michigan model emphasized the importance of human resources and was later defined as soft HRM (Poole and Mansfield 1994; Hendry and Pettigrew 1994). Guest (1989) and Storey and Sisson (1993) used both models to develop the normative or prescriptive concept of HRM. Guest (1989) outlines a theory of HRM, which has four main components that include a set of HRM policy goals. The policy goals include employee commitment based on the soft concept of HRM and strategic integration based on the hard concept of HRM. The goal of commitment requires employees to embrace the organization's goals.

The goal of strategic integration requires that:

(i)   HRM is aligned with strategic planning (external integration);

(ii)   HRM policies are compatible (internal integration); and

(iii)   HRM practices are used by line managers (coherence).

The concepts of hard and soft HRM are central to the arguments of the Critical Perspective. Legge (1995, p.66) explains that soft HRM (developmental humanism) emphasizes:

> "the importance of integrating HRM policies and business objectives, the focus is on treating employees as valued assets, a source of competitive advantage through their commitment, adaptability and high quality skills and performance".

The stress is on collaboration, which is achieved through participation and generating commitment via communication, motivation and leadership. She explains that the hard model of HRM (utilitarian instrumentalism) focuses on the close integration of human resource policies and practices with business strategy. This model sees employees as a factor in the production process. Employees are considered passive and treated as numbers and skills that need to be deployed at the right price. They are an expense of doing business rather than a source of competitive advantage. The hard model is reminiscent of scientific management because rather than valuing employees as people, it reduces them to passive objects whose value is based on how well they can be used by the organization.

The Critical Perspective proposes that HRM has a unitary soft rhetoric and a hard reality. The unitary perspective is illustrated by Walton's (1985) concept of "mutuality" which is central to the High Commitment Work System (HCWS). The HCWS aims to get employee commitment so that behavior is self-regulated rather than controlled by external sanctions. Walton suggests that policies of mutuality (mutual goals, influence, respect, rewards and responsibility) will lead to employee commitment. It is proposed that this commitment will result in better outcomes for employees and the organization and what is good for the organization is also good for employees. This unitary perspective is different to the pluralist conception of employee relations that argues that organization and employee interests are opposed and what advantages the organization will disadvantage employees and vice versa.

Legge (1995) and Kamoche (1996) argue that the rhetoric of HRM was introduced to enhance the status of Personnel practitioners. Personnel struggled to demonstrate its contribution to organizational success because desirable behaviors, such as high productivity, low turnover, low absenteeism and a low incidence of strikes, could not be solely attributed to its efforts alone and could reflect other variables such as the economic environment. In addition to this, managing people was not the exclusive role of Personnel and it could be argued that its activities were substitutable.

Personnel lacked support and credibility, consequently, the Personnel function was treated as less important than other functions such as Finance, Marketing and Manufacturing and as such Personnel Managers could not enjoy high prestige, power and high remuneration, because they could not demonstrate the importance of their function and its strategic value.

Only by demonstrating its strategic importance could it enhance its status and achieve the power and prestige of other organizational functions. It has been argued that HRM's rhetoric delivers status by emphasizing its strategic importance.

Several authors argue that HRM is rhetoric alone.   Skinner (1981, pp:106-14) observed that:

"human resources management appeared to be mostly good intentions and whistling in the dark" and that HRM is "Big Hat, No Cattle".

Noon (1994) argues that the term HRM is ambiguous and that confusions and contractions in the normative HRM literature portray an illusory world. Storey and Sisson (1993) argue that HRM is prominent in organizational rhetoric proposing that most organizations have a mission statement that makes commitments to its employees who are described as it's most important asset. However, the ideals of HRM fall short of reality. Blyton and Turnbull (1994, p. vii) argue in the preface to their book that the:

"vocabulary of HRM has surpassed both its conceptual and empirical foundations and that rhetoric has outstripped the reality".

Finally, Becker and Gerhart (1996, p. 796) believe that:

"at times, there appears to be a major disconnect between what the research literature says that firms should do and what firms actually do".

Until recently, most research evidence supported the Critical Perspective's argument that HRM has not been implemented in reality. United States Research from the mid 1980s supports these views. Kochran and Barocci (1985) found that participative management styles and sophisticated HRM policies were not common; progressive personnel practices had not been implemented; and harsh personnel practices and an aggressive approach to unions were prevalent.

Research in the United Kingdom a decade later presented the same picture with Sisson (1993) finding only fragments of HRM in the 1990 Workplace Industrial Relations Survey. Guest and Hoque (1993) concluded that that HRM had not been substantially implemented, finding that job titles had not changed to reflect HRM in the Workplace Industrial Relations in Transition survey conducted in 1992. However, a more recent study by Guest (1999) found that employees believed HRM had been implemented and was viewed positively which might indicate that it has taken some time for HRM rhetoric to translate in to reality or that the assertions of the Critical Perspective are incorrect.

HRM Uses Soft Rhetoric to Disguise Hard Reality: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

Whilst the Critical Perspective proposes that HRM has not been implemented it simultaneously presents HRM as a predator that uses rhetoric to disguise an increase in management control. Earlier in this working paper Skinner's (1981, p.106-14) assertion that HRM was "Big Hat, No Cattle" was quoted, however, Armstrong (1987) several years later describes HRM as a "wolf in sheep's clothing". Skinner proposes that HRM is powerless and Armstrong that HRM is manipulative which illustrates the conflicting arguments of the Critical Perspective.

Kamoche (1996) suggests that HRM is used as a legitimate device to enhance the status of the function of HRM and reformulate managerial control through a unitary ideology or soft rhetoric. Wilmott (1993) asserts that HRM's unitary rhetoric disguises the pluralist needs of employees. He argues that HRM rhetoric turns employees into 'willing slaves' who negate their own interest because they believe the organization will take care of them. He further suggests that employee's willingness to subjugate themselves results from the sense of identity, security and self-determination that corporate values promise. Organizations prey on the vulnerability of individuals who lack the intellectual resources to respond in a way that is not self-defeating. Vaughan (1994, p.26) asserts that:

> "HRM rhetoric communicates an attractive image of people trusting each other, sharing risks and rewards, and united by a strong feeling of identity, but it gives little sense of the impersonal economic rationalism that characterizes management thinking in the real world."

It is further suggested by Vaughan (1994) that the rhetoric of HRM does not make sense when judged against a background of casualisation of work and the reorganization of work that re asserts management authority in a way that resembles Fordism of an earlier industrial era.   He proposes that HRM's unitary rhetoric disguises employee pluralist needs and facilitates the introduction of HRM practices that advantage organizations at the expense of employees.

Storey (1995) argues that HRM is an elegant theory with no basis in reality and that it is a symbolic label for managerial opportunism. Finally, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles and Truss (1999) propose that soft HRM rhetoric asserts and legitimizes managerial control through a language of individualism, reciprocity and shared commitment. They argue that this rhetoric manages the inherent discontent between organizations and employees and gains employee consent to this control. Sisson (1994, p.15) shows how rhetoric has been used to disguise a range of management initiatives in the following table. He argues that the rhetoric of downsizing disguises redundancies that have transformed permanent jobs in to casual and contract work increasing the flexibility of the workforce and empowerment disguises a transfer of responsibility from the organization to the worker.

Table 1. Rhetoric disguises an unpleasant reality (Sisson 1994, p.15)

RHETORIC	REALITY
Customer First	Market forces reign supreme
Total Quality Management	Doing more with less
Lean Production	Mean production
Flexibility	Management does what it wants
Devolution/delayering	Reducing middle management
Downsizing/rightsizing	Redundancy
New working patterns	Part-time jobs
Empowerment	Employees take responsibility
Training and Development	Manipulation
Employability	No employment security
Recognizing the individual	Undermining the Trade Union
Team Working	Reducing individual discretion

In conclusion the Critical Perspective presents two contrary views of HRM. On one hand it is presented as ineffective and on the other it is seen as a threat. It is proposed that there is little difference between HRM and Personnel and that the transition from Personnel to HRM was a name change only, motivated by a desire to increase the status of HRM by emphasizing HRM's strategic significance. It is

also suggested that HRM uses soft rhetoric to disguise detrimental workplace changes that shift power from the employee to the organization. Its unitary rhetoric proposes that the mutual interests of employees and organization will be met and encourages employees to trust the organization to take care of their needs. Consequently employees prefer an individual, rather than collective, workplace relationship facilitated by unions. HRM in this context is a major threat, which deserves serious critical analysis.

Guest (1999) comments that there is irony in a perspective that argues that HRM has not been effectively implemented and simultaneously suggests that HRM is powerful enough to manipulate employees. He speculates that this contradiction may set up a "straw man" that can be critically analyzed by academics. Keenoy (1999, p.1) suggests that the paradox is that whilst the Critical Perspective makes many academic criticisms of HRM, in practice HRM grows stronger. The Critical Perspective presents:

> "mounting evidence of conceptual fragmentation, empirical incoherence and theoretical vacuum"

However, HRM has gone from strength to strength. Keenoy suggests that it either feeds on its own inadequacies and ambiguities or academics are failing to see what it is.

This research examines these conflicting assertions within the Critical Perspective through two major research questions:

1. Has HRM been implemented by organizations. Specifically what is the nature of HRM rhetoric and reality?

2. Does HRM soft, unitary HRM rhetoric disguise an increase in management control?

Specific propositions derived from the Critical Perspective are examined.

HRM as rhetoric not reality:

1. HRM soft rhetoric has been adopted by organizations.

2. HRM reality has not been adopted by organizations.

HRM as a predator:

3. HRM uses of soft, unitary rhetoric to disguise an increase in management control.

4. HRM lacks integrity.

5. HRM manipulates the workforce.

Method

Respondents

A sample of 189 workplaces was obtained by sending a survey addressed to the Human Resource Manger in a population of 896 large (500+ employees) organizations identified in the Dun and Bradstreet Business Who's Who online data base (1999).

The respondents selected themselves in to the sample by returning the anonymous and confidential survey. Most of the respondents (84.8%) were the most senior HRM manager or a senior member of HRM. Only 7.3% were not functional HRM specialists. HRM managers were targeted because they were easily identifiable and had knowledge about HRM practices within the organization.   It is acknowledged that the results of this research are based on the perceptions of HRM practitioners who are deemed by the Critical Perspective to be on one hand ineffective and the other, as manipulative.

Survey Development

The survey measures developed respond to each research question and are presented in the sections that follow. The first research question asks whether HRM has been implemented by organizations. Specifically it considers the nature of HRM rhetoric and reality. To assess HRM rhetoric respondents were asked to report on the organization's public statements. These survey items were based on Legge's (1995) definitions of hard and soft HRM (see Table 2). In addition to this the prevalence of HRM in organization titles was assessed. To assess HRM reality two survey items were included based on Legge's (1995) definitions of hard and soft HRM (see Table 3). In addition to this the adoption of strategic HRM was assessed using Guest's (1989) concept of Strategic Integration (see Table 4). This concept was included because the literature suggests that Strategic

Integration is a key driver of the implementation of HRM to replace Personnel because it sought to increase its status.

Table 2. HRM Rhetoric

This work place publicly states (In Annual Reports, Employee Hand Books, Media releases etc.) that:

Variable	Survey Items on Public Statements
Soft rhetoric	Employees are our most important asset and a source of competitive advantage Getting employee commitment is important Communication with employees is important
Hard rhetoric	Employees are an expense of doing business Getting the right number of employees at the right price is a high priority Increasing employee productivity is a primary objective

Table 3. HRM Reality

Variable	Survey Items on Public Statements
Soft reality	Management treats employees as its most important asset and a source of competitive advantage
Hard reality	Management treats employees as an expense of doing business

Table 4. Strategic Integration

Variable	Survey Items
External Integration	There is a strong link between HRM strategy and Business Strategy
Internal Integration	HRM policies and practices are integrated
Coherence	Management and the HRM function agree on the way employees should be managed

The second research question asks if HRM soft, unitary HRM rhetoric is used to disguise an increase in management control. To respond to this research question the previously defined measures of HRM rhetoric are used. However, reality is further explored through an assessment of HRM practices based on Walton's (1985) High Commitment Work System (see Table 5) which features prominently in discussions on management control versus commitment systems of employee management.

Table 5. HRM Reality: Survey Items based on the High Commitment Work System (Walton 1985)

Category (HCWS Focus Area)	HRM Practices	Survey Items
Work/Life	*Employees are valued as "human" assets *Policies are in place to ensure individual needs for work/life balance are accommodated	*Work has intensified and/or working hours have increased
Work Design	*Focus on system performance rather than individual job *Emphasis on whole task, where doing and thinking are combined *Focus on team rather than individual *Decentralisation of decision making	*It is common for employees to look beyond their individual jobs to address system problems/improvements *Accountability focuses on the team rather than the individual *Decision making is decentralised *Jobs are designed to empower employees
Employment Security	*Commitment to avoid downsizing and assist in re-employment *Focus on retraining, redeployment and employability *Selective hiring based on cultural fit rather than specific job-relevant skills	This work place is committed to avoiding downsizing where possible *Retraining, redeployment and employability take precedence over downsizing *This work place puts greater emphasis on hiring employees based on cultural fit than on hiring for specific job-relevant skills *Training focuses on the overall development of the employee and is not confined to the current job role
Employee Voice	*Business data shared widely through open book management *Employee participation encouraged on a wide range of issues	*In this work place information is shared widely at all levels In this work place employee participation is encouraged on a wide range of issues *Employee views are actively sought through processes such as attitude surveys

Table 5. HRM Reality: Survey Items based on the High Commitment Work System (Walton 1985) (cont.)

Category (HCWS Focus Area)	HRM Practices	Survey Items
Compensation	*Rewards reinforce group achievement and equity rather than awards geared to individual job evaluation e.g. Gain sharing, profit sharing *Equality of sacrifice in hard times	*In this work place rewards are based more on group achievement than individual pay geared to job evaluation *This work place has a principle of equality of salary sacrifice in hard times *This work place has a profit sharing or share ownership scheme so people are rewarded when business is doing well
Employee Relations	*Reduced status distinctions to de-emphasize hierarchy *Adversarial employee relations gives way to joint planning and problem solving	*This work place reduces status distinctions to de-emphasize hierarchy *This work place uses amicable planning and problem solving rather than adversarial employee relations
Leadership	*Coordination and control based on shared goals, values and traditions *Supervisors facilitate rather than direct the workforce through their interpersonal and conceptual ability	*In this work place coordination and control are based more on shared goals, values and traditions than monitoring and sanctions *Supervisors facilitate rather than direct the workforce through their interpersonal and conceptual ability

Finally, three specific items were included to examine the proposition that HRM is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Items were based on HRM's integrity and role in manipulating and selling to employees (see Table 6). To examine whether HRM manipulates the workforce to obscure negative workplace change three items were developed. The first focuses on HRM's integrity, the second and third items focus on HRM's role as manipulator.

Table 6. HRM Manipulation Items

Category	Survey Item
Integrity	In respect of HRM this work place says what it means and means what it says
Manipulation	HRM aims to reduce employee power and increase organization power
Selling	Part of HRM's role is to "sell" unpopular policies to employees

Analysis

The responses to the questionnaire items were entered into SPSS as individual variables. Negative items were reverse scored. Individual items were then collated into grouped variables. The data was screened and then analyzed using Frequencies, Cross Tabulations and Chi Square.

Results

This research examines the conflicting propositions within the Critical Perspective that simultaneously propose that HRM is ineffective and that HRM uses rhetoric to disguise an increase in management control. Two major research questions are used to examine each proposition in turn and determine the true nature of HRM.

HRM as Rhetoric not Reality: Big Hat – No Cattle

The first research question examines whether HRM has been implemented by organizations. This involves examining the nature of HRM rhetoric and reality. Based on the arguments of the Critical Perspective it was proposed that HRM soft rhetoric has been adopted by organizations and that HRM reality has not been adopted by organizations. The prevalence of HRM rhetoric is explored through examining organization public statements and the use of HRM in organization titles. HRM reality is explored by examining HRM reality based on Legge's (1995) definitions of soft and hard HRM and the level of strategic integration that has been implemented based on Guest's (1989) definitions.

The Prevalence of HRM Rhetoric

The literature suggests that at the rhetorical level many organizations espouse the "soft" version of HRM that focuses on treating employees as valued assets and a source of competitive advantage (Blyton and Turnbull 1994). In support of this, Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern and Stiles (1997) conclude from their study, which analyzed HRM policies and programs in eight organizations, that whilst there were no pure examples of soft or hard HRM in rhetoric or reality, the rhetoric adopted by the companies frequently incorporated the characteristics of the soft, commitment model. Storey and Sisson (1993) assert that soft HRM has been adopted as organizational rhetoric. Consequently, it was proposed that organizations would have a predominantly soft rhetoric.

The results found that a high proportion of respondents agreed with the soft rhetoric public statements and one hard rhetoric public statement (see table 7).

Table 7. Frequency table of respondents agreeing with soft and hard public statements

Public Statements	% Agreeing
SOFT RHETORIC	
Employees are our most important asset and a source of competitive advantage	82.7%
Getting employee commitment is important	79.9%
Communication with employees is important	85.6
HARD RHETORIC	
Employees are an expense of doing business	17.2
Getting the right number of employees at the right price is a high priority	45.7
Increasing employee productivity is a primary objective.	72.4%

Table 8 shows that rhetoric was predominantly soft but that mixed rhetoric, where soft and hard rhetoric are espoused simultaneously, was the most prevalent category. This was consistent with one of Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern

and Stiles (1997) findings that no pure examples of soft HRM were found even though they ultimately concluded that rhetoric was soft.

Table 8. Rhetoric Category Frequencies

Rhetoric Category	Count	Percent
Soft Rhetoric (Above the midpoint on soft rhetoric items and below the midpoint on hard rhetoric items)	66	36.87
Hard Rhetoric (Above the midpoint on hard rhetoric items and below the midpoint on soft rhetoric items)	0	0
Mixed Rhetoric (Above the midpoint on soft and hard rhetoric items)	79	44.13
Minimal Rhetoric (Below the midpoint on soft and hard rhetoric items)	11	6.15

Title of Respondents

There has been some speculation as to whether HRM has been implemented in organizations. Guest and Hoque (1993) found that only a minority (17%) of UK organizations responding to the workplace industrial relations in transition survey (which sampled over 2000 organizations) had a personnel specialist. Only 1% of them had industrial, employee or staff relations in their title and less than 1% had human resource/manpower in their title. Only 12% of respondents from head offices employing more than 50 staff had a respondent with an HRM title. It seems that there was an infrequent use of the title of HRM in the UK in 1993, which is contrary to arguments that suggest that HRM is about rhetoric not reality and has been implemented in name only.

The situation in large Australian organizations in 2000 is not consistent with this result. Whilst the survey was anonymous, 129 of the 179 respondents requested a summary of the survey results by filling in a separate sheet with their name, title

and organization details. An analysis of titles revealed that the majority of respondents requesting a summary had "human resource" in their title (see Table 9). Only 4 respondents had personnel in their title (3% of total). This indicates that adoption rate of HRM titles is higher in Australia or that it has increased over time. This informs the debate on the rhetoric of HRM and the transition from Personnel to HRM. In large, Australian organizations the transition from Personnel to HRM has been made in the titles of practitioners, which supports the argument that HRM rhetoric is used.

Table 9. Proportion of respondents with HRM in title.

HRM in title	No HRM in title
101 (78.29%)	28 (21.71%)

The following table analyses those titles that include HRM. The term 'Personnel' is not frequently used.

Table 10. Titles with no HRM

Term in title	No of respondents
Development	5
Employee	4
Reward/Compensation	2
Recruitment	2
Personnel	**4**
Workforce	1
Business/Administration	2
Director/General Management	4

The Prevalence of HRM Reality

This section examines the proposition that HRM reality has not been adopted by organizations. The literature suggests that the rhetoric rather than the reality of HRM has been adopted by organizations creating a soft rhetoric/hard reality gap and leaving HRM open to accusations that it is manipulative.

In the majority of organizations, management treated employees as its most important asset and a source of competitive advantage. Very few organizations are treating employees as an expense of doing business. Table 11 shows the survey responses for hard and soft reality items. The bracketed number shows the response for the related public statements. A similar pattern emerges for both rhetoric and reality. Rhetoric is predominantly soft and reality is also predominantly soft, rather than hard, as would be expected by the arguments in the Critical Perspective.

Table 11. Responses for hard and soft reality items

Survey Items	Strongly Disagree %	Moder-ately Disagree %	Slightly Disagree %	Neither Agree nor Disagree %	Slightly Agree %	Moder-ately Agree %	Strongly Agree %
HARD REALITY Management treats employees as an expense of doing business *(Public Statement 4: Employees are an expense of doing business)*	20.9 **(42.5)**	**24.3** *(16.7)*	16.9 *(10.9)*	14.1 *(12.6)*	14.1 *(9.8)*	7.3 *(5.7)*	2.3 *(1.7)*
SOFT REALITY Management treats employees as its most important asset and a source of competitive advantage *(Public Statement 1: Employees are our most important asset and a source of competitive advantage)*	4.5 *(3.4)*	5.1 *(2.8)*	14.1 *(2.8)*	14.1 *(7.4)*	**30.5** *(18.8)*	20.9 *(26.1)*	10.7 **(38.6)**

Strategic Integration

It is argued that a primary motivation for the adoption of HRM is its strategic focus, which together with an emphasis on employees as an important asset could improve the status of the personnel function. It is also argued that this has changed HRM rhetoric but not reality. Table 12 includes survey items based on Guest's (1989) concept of Strategic Integration. The results show that HRM was strategically integrated and provides evidence that the transition from Personnel to HRM has occurred in reality.

Table 12. HRM reality

Survey Items	Strongly Disagree %	Moder-ately Disagree %	Slightly Disagree %	Neither Agree nor Disagree %	Slightly Agree %	Moder-ately Agree %	Strongly Agree %
There is a strong link between HRM strategy and Business strategy (external integration)	2.8	6.3	14.2	6.8	21.6	**26.1**	22.2
HRM policies and practices are integrated (internal integration)	1.1	3.4	9	7.9	28.2	**32.2**	18.1
Management and the HRM function agree on the way employees should be managed (consistency)	2.3	3.4	11.4	14.8	25.6	**29**	13.6

HRM Uses Soft Rhetoric to Disguise Hard Reality: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

This section tests the proposition that HRM uses a unitary, soft rhetoric to disguise an increase in management control and the associated proposition that HRM lacks integrity and manipulates the workforce or sells unpalatable change to employees.

As discussed in the preceding section this research shows that HRM rhetoric is predominantly soft or mixed. This is consistent with the Critical Perspective's argument that HRM uses a unitary, soft rhetoric to manipulate employees to accept negative workplace change if reality is hard. However, the proposition would only be accepted if soft rhetoric was espoused simultaneously with hard reality which will be discussed in the next section.

Organization Reality

The Critical Perspective argues that HRM reality is predominantly hard. Legge (1995) suggests that organization reality appears 'hard' with an emphasis on the quantitative, calculative and strategic aspects of managing a 'head count'. Truss and her colleagues (1997) found that even when the soft version of HRM was embraced at the rhetorical level, the reality experienced by employees was more concerned with strategic control, similar to the hard model and:

> "the underlying principle was invariably restricted to improvement of bottom-line performance with the interests of the organization prevailing over the individual" (Truss, et. al., p. 69).

However, the results of this study show that twice as many organizations responding to the survey had a soft rather than hard reality. In the majority of organizations management treated employees as its most important asset and a source of competitive advantage (see Table 13).

Table 13. Reality frequencies

	Count	Percent
High Soft Reality (above midpoint on HCWS reality scale)	112	62.57
High Hard Reality (below the midpoint of HCWS reality scale)	67	37.43

Table 14 shows that the combination soft rhetoric and hard reality is not as prevalent as soft rhetoric and soft reality providing evidence that HRM does not use soft rhetoric to obscure hard reality.

Table 14. Rhetoric and reality combination frequencies

	Theoretical Construct	No. Cases	% of Sample
Minimal rhetoric/soft reality (low on soft and hard rhetoric)	NO MESSAGE/SOFT REALITY	5	2.8
Minimal mixed rhetoric/hard reality (low on soft and hard rhetoric)	NO MESSAGE/HARD REALITY	6	3.4
High mixed rhetoric/hard reality (high on soft and hard rhetoric)	MIXED MESSAGE/HARD REALITY	27	15.1
High mixed rhetoric/soft reality (high on soft and hard rhetoric)	**MIXED MESSAGE/SOFT REALITY**	**51**	**28.5**
Soft rhetoric/hard reality	GAP	21	11.7
Soft rhetoric/soft reality	**NO GAP**	**45**	**25.1**
Hard rhetoric/hard reality	NO GAP	0	0
Hard rhetoric/soft reality	GAP	0	0
Total		155	86.6

HRM Integrity

Guest (1990) proposed that the main impact of HRM in the US may have been to provide a smokescreen behind which management can introduce non-unionism or obtain significant concessions from trade unions. This section examines the variable of integrity and its relationship to rhetoric and reality. It is proposed that HRM's integrity is challenged when there is a gap between rhetoric and reality. If soft rhetoric is used to obscure hard reality integrity would be low as HRM is less likely to say what it means and mean what it says. Table 15 indicates that the majority of organizations agreed that HRM had integrity supporting the argument that HRM does not manipulate the workforce.

Table 15. Integrity Frequencies

Integrity: In respect of HRM this organization says what it means and means what it says

Survey Items	Strongly Disagree %	Moder- ately Disagree %	Slightly Disagree %	Neither Agree nor Disagree %	Slightly Agree %	Moder- ately Agree %	Strongly Agree %
INTEGRITY In respect of HRM this work place says what it means and means what it says	2.3	4	10.3	13.7	**34.3**	22.3	13.1

A Chi Square analysis finds a significant association between soft rhetoric/hard reality gap organizations and integrity (χ^2 = 27.160 S, p<. 0005). Cross tabulations indicate than only 38.1% of organizations with a gap agree that HRM has integrity. They also indicate that those with a mixed message and soft reality have high integrity, which negates the view that HRM uses mixed messages to manipulate the workforce (χ^2 = 17.4 S, p<. 01) with 78.5% of organizations in this category agreeing that in respect of HRM this workplace says what it means and means what it says.

Managerial Control

It has been suggested that HRM is a legitimatory device to increase managerial control through a rhetoric of individualism, reciprocity and shared commitment, thus gaining control through employee co operation and exerising control over employee discretion. This soft HRM rhetoric disguises an unpleasant hard HRM reality. This is the notion of HRM as a wolf in sheep's clothing. It is proposed that increasing managerial control and 'selling' unpalatable changes is an HRM agenda.   If this were true, one would anticipate a significant relationship between manipulation, selling and a soft rhetoric/hard reality gap. It is proposed that manipulation and selling are significantly associated with HRM and a soft rhetoric and hard reality gap.

The results show that increasing management control is not an HRM agenda. Most respondents disagreed that HRM uses manipulation or selling behaviors (see Table 16).

Table 16. Manipulation

Survey Items	Strongly Disagree %	Moder-ately Disagree %	Slightly Disagree %	Neither Agree nor Disagree %	Slightly Agree %	Moder-ately Agree %	Strongly Agree %
MANIPULATION HRM aims to reduce employee power and increase organization power	**38.6**	25	16.5	12.5	4.5	3.3	.6
SELLING Part of HRM's role is to "sell" unpopular policies and practices to employees	**22.7**	17	11.9	16.5	18.8	9.7	3.4

Discussion

One of the most significant criticisms of the Critical Perspective is that it suggests on one hand that HRM has not been well implemented and on the other, that HRM is a threat to employees because it uses soft rhetoric to disguise hard reality. The results of this research examined these conflicting propositions within the Critical Perspective. Firstly the proposition that HRM has been implemented in rhetoric but not reality was found to be incorrect. Although the results found that rhetoric was based on the soft model of HRM, rhetoric was predominantly soft or mixed (a combination of soft and hard rhetoric) rather than hard. In addition to this, an analysis of respondent's titles indicated that most large, Australian organizations have adopted the term HRM rather than Personnel. However, contrary to the propositions of the Critical Perspective, the results also show that HRM reality has been adopted by organizations. Organizations more frequently treated employees as a most important asset and a source of competitive advantage (soft HRM) rather than as an expense of doing business (hard HRM). Most significantly, HRM was strategically integrated, which is associated with the hard model of HRM and seen as the motivation for a shift from Personnel to HRM. In conclusion this research found that rhetoric and reality incorporated elements of the soft and hard models of HRM. This does not support the Critical Perspective's proposal that organizations have adopted soft HRM rhetoric but reality has not changed because HRM is too difficult to implement in practice.

Secondly the proposition that HRM manipulates the workforce through a soft, unitary rhetoric was examined. If this proposition were true organization rhetoric would be based on the soft model of HRM and organizational reality would be based on the hard model of HRM. The response to the first research question challenges this notion, finding that HRM rhetoric and reality were predominantly soft or mixed. A more extensive analysis of organizational reality based on Walton's (1985) HCWS also found that HRM reality was soft rather than hard, however, because a single measure was used, the presence of mixed reality based on a combination of soft and hard HRM could not be determined. It is concluded that a soft rhetoric/hard reality gap was not prevalent in large, Australian organizations, which is a condition that was anticipated if organizations

were manipulating the workforce by using soft HRM rhetoric to obscure hard reality.

Further analyses supported this outcome. HRM integrity was found in the organizations studied and this is not consistent with the role of manipulator. An analysis of the variables of manipulation and selling also did not support the arguments of the Critical Perspective.

In conclusion HRM has been implemented in rhetoric and reality and does not manipulate the workforce by using a unitary, soft rhetoric to obscure hard reality. This provides evidence that refutes both propositions of the Critical Perspective and a further discussion of the contradictions between the two assertions is deemed unnecessary. The results of this research provide considerable support for the normative theory of HRM. HRM, developed in the 1980s, seems to have been adopted by most organizations and taught in most academic courses, whilst simultaneously being challenged by the Critical Perspective. The reasons for this disconnect have not been tested, however, Guest (1999) proposes that a lack of empirical research and/or political motivations could have contributed and Keenoy (1999) argues that the framework of analysis used by the Critical Perspective is unable to adequately represent reality. What is clear is that the debates cannot continue without more empirical research.

Although this research challenges the assertions of the Critical Perspective changes in the employment relationship cannot be ignored. Downsizing, limited career paths, casualisation, extended working hours and increased stress seem to have increased and have had a mainly negative impact on employees. It could also be argued that the decline of unions and the prevalence of employee contracts put employees at risk, but the acceptance of these changed conditions by employees presents a conundrum. On the other hand, there have been increases in employee participation schemes, which promise to deliver autonomy, ownership and job satisfaction to employees, even though some authors challenge their authenticity. The picture is complex and if the acceptance of these changes by employees is not due to the manipulations of the HRM function what other explanations are plausible and what role does HRM play? The prescriptive literature on HRM adopts a unitary perspective and does not see conflict in the employment relationship, advocating that organization

and employee goals are aligned. The Critical Perspective adopts a pluralist perspective and describes HRM as ineffective or manipulative. There is a third possibility, HRM could play a complex role in managing the inherent tension and conflict between the organization's demand for control of employees and the individual needs of people in work. HRM may be juggling employee and organization pluralist needs successfully for their mutual benefit. Keenoy (1999) suggests that inherent contradictions within HRM dissolve when it is viewed as a complex, holistic process that is best understood through the metaphor of the hologram.   It is time to move forward from a perspective that argues that HRM manipulates the workforce to a model that proposes that HRM manages the tension between the pluralist needs of organizations and employees.

Given the findings of this research it is important to note its limitations and consider the opportunities to address them in future research. The survey used as the basis of this analysis considered the perceptions of HRM practitioners, which the Critical Perspective argues are ineffective or manipulative. Future research is required to investigate the findings of this research using a range of stakeholder perceptions and observation of organization practice. In addition to this, mixed rhetoric and reality were identified as significant categories in this research. The role that combinations of hard and soft rhetoric and reality play in this debate has not been explored. It is interesting to note that strategic integration argued to characterize hard reality coexisted with soft reality measures, indicating that soft and hard reality are not mutually exclusive. This research has challenged the dichotomy of soft and hard HRM. Future research can test this dichotomy, which has significant implications for this and other arguments presented by the Critical Perspective on HRM.

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