41 Labor and Employment Practices: The Rise and Fall of the New Managerialism

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Abstract

Since the beginning of industrial capitalism, labor resistance and control have been central problems for management. Yet these problems have varied considerably, in large part depending on the context within which the employment relation is embedded and particularly the broader political economy characterizing it. Workplace and management practices have tended to develop in reflection of this context, while forming an important component of it, with social as well as economic consequences. This chapter addresses these practices, the conditions under which they have developed from the 1950s to present, and what some of their consequences have been.

Keywords

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Since the beginning of industrial capitalism, labor resistance and control have been central problems for management (Bendix 1956) and ultimately states. These problems arise largely from the nature of the capitalist employment relation, yet have varied in large part depending on the context within which this relation has been embedded and particularly the broader political economy characterizing it. Labor and employment practices have tended to develop in reflection of this context, while forming an important component of it, with important social as well as economic consequences. In this chapter, I address these practices, the conditions under which they have developed since the so-called "golden age" of the post-World War II era, and what some of their consequences have been. A problem with any such analysis is that management practices have varied extensively within and across nations. I focus on practices dominant in the USA, but refer to this variation where relevant (see Godard 2019 for a comparative analysis).

The Golden Age and Industrial Pluralism

There is perhaps no better example of the importance of the broader political economy in which labor and employment practices are embedded than the "golden age" of the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, unemployment was at historically low levels and productivity, GDP, and income growth rates at historically high ones throughout the developed world. These conditions were associated with the growth of large scale work organizations, characterized by mass production technologies and operating in largely stable, concentrated markets. At risk of oversimplification, increased economies of scale achieved by these firms fuelled productivity increases that were shared with workers, thus enabling them to purchase more goods and services, and in turn generating increased demand and hence further expansions of productive capacity and the economies of scale deriving from them. A "virtuous circle" is thus said to have existed.

Of central importance to this circle were so-called labor-capital accords in most developed nations. These accords were often implicit, and many had begun to emerge prior to the Second World War. They also varied substantially from one nation to the next. But at minimum, they entailed economic policies designed to smooth economic cycles and minimize unemployment, coupled with social and labor market policies designed to ensure some minimum quality of life for those both in and out of employment.

In industrial relations and (what is now known as) human resource management, these accords meant improved rights and protections at work, including (in theory, if not always in practice) the right to meaningful collective representation and bargaining. This was especially true in the United States, where they also meant the adoption of bureaucratic workplace practices, including extensive job descriptions specifying what could be expected of employees, and seniority-based rules for determining promotion and layoff. They also entailed employer recognition and accommodation of what were seen to be distinctive employee interests and provision of wage and benefit gains commensurate with productivity gains and inflation. The expectation was that, in return, workers would come to accept their positions of subordination and that labor unions would play an important role in ensuring that they did so. In this regard, unions would address worker discontent through collective bargaining and representation, thereby helping to "institutionalize" and control conflict in the workplace and beyond. In effect, they were to serve as "managers of discontent," essentially playing an important if often contentious role for management (Mills 1948).

These practices were especially characteristic of large US employers located in what came to be labeled the "core" of the economy (Averitt 1968). State social and labor market programs were weakest in this nation, creating a condition under which workers remained highly dependent on employers for their economic and social welfare. Core employers typically provided an array of benefits, essentially ensuring that this would be the case, and workers came to enjoy the various rights and protections associated with union coverage. These firms were typically characterized by well-developed personnel and IR departments, which, in addition to performing basic personnel administration, were responsible for negotiating collective agreements and administering the various rights and benefits arising from them.

In an era characterized by low unemployment and rapid growth, and limited if any skill requirements for entry-level jobs, employee selection largely amounted to ensuring that applicants possessed minimum educational qualifications and capabilities. Once hired, new employees might be subject to some formal training, but for the most part the expectation was that they would develop firm-specific skill sets and experience over time. As they did so, they could expect to move up a "job ladder," into jobs characterized by higher pay and greater responsibility. Coupled with seniority-based benefits (e.g., vacation entitlements), workers had a strong incentive to conform to managerial expectations and remain "loyal" to their employer (Edwards 1979). Workers also came to expect regular, after inflation, improvements in pay and benefits, largely in reflection of ongoing improvements in productivity and ultimately their employers' ability to pay.

Although these arrangements were subject to criticisms that they favored more senior male and white workers, and although they fell far short of fully "democratizing" the workplace, they were in many respects much more consistent with democratic values than either the welfare capitalist practices that often preceded (and continued to compete with: Jacoby 1997) them or the new managerialist practices that were eventually to (in theory) supersede them. Clear work rules limited the range and amount of work that workers could be required to do, providing them with some measure of "concrete freedom on the job" (Perlman 1949). Workers could not be arbitrarily disciplined and had a right to due process should they be. Promotion was based not on currying favor with supervisors or with willingness to "rate bust," but rather on largely objective seniority criteria that could reasonably be associated with ability and experience. Workers could expect to receive decent pay and benefits, enabling them to participate as equals in civil society. They also enjoyed substantial job and income security, protecting them from the exigencies – and coercion – of market forces. Finally, through their union, they could develop a true sense of fraternity and empowerment at work, and even meaningful voice in their political system.

These arrangements were in considerable measure a product of the times. It would appear, for example, that the willingness of US employers to accept and work with labor unions was largely pragmatic. Labor stability and acquiescence were essential if these employers were to take advantage of expanding markets and achieve ongoing productivity gains, providing unions with substantial power at the bargaining table, and rendering employers dependent on union ability and willingness to manage discontent in the workplace – in return for substantial concessions and acceptance of the union as a legitimate entity. Many of the rights and protections granted at the bargaining table were also consistent with the orderly management of human resources and largely complementary to the bureaucratic organizational structures that had become predominant in large employers – structures that were in turn conducive to relatively high levels of market stability and high levels of market concentration. Indeed, most large nonunion employers adopted similar policies and practices, in part as a "union substitution" strategy, but also because they were consistent with efficiency interests. Finally, this was the cold war era, in which a central tenet of the dominant ideology (especially in the USA) was that only capitalism could be expected to deliver steadily improving jobs and living standards. This tenet became central to worker expectations and, in the USA, the "American way."

These arrangements were also limited in both coverage and effectiveness. There continued to be a large economic periphery characterized by relatively low pay and largely autocratic employment practices (Averitt 1968; Galbraith 1973). Employers in this sector tended to be small or intermediate in size and to operate in more competitive markets than their counterparts in the economic core. They also tended to be more labor intensive and less subject to the kinds of productivity gains enjoyed by these employers. Most important, they were typically not just nonunion, but aggressively antiunion.

Even in the economic core, however, a number of employers managed to remain nonunion, and groups and associations backed by many core employers continued to mount substantial attacks on 'Big Labor' (Jacoby 1997; Godard 2009). There also continued to be substantial resistance on the shop floor (see Fairris 1994). Although workers and their leaders had come to largely accept management's right to manage, they still found themselves in positions of subordination, often in dehumanizing, Taylorized jobs (O'Toole et al. 1973: 29–38). But because they had substantial rights and protections, they could engage in acts of resistance with less fear of retribution. It is little coincidence that the study of "organizational behavior," with its focus on problems of motivation, leadership, and group norms, flourished in the 1950s and 1960s – even if this field has failed to ever grasp how the nature and context of the employment relation gives rise to these problems.

There were also important differences between the archetypical US "core" model and the dominant management models in other developed countries (see Marsden 1999). For example, British workplaces during this period were characterized by less formal structures and hence by greater reliance on worker discretion and good will than in the USA (e.g., Burawoy 1985: 139–40). Union recognition by employers was also voluntary, yet with density much higher than in the USA, and formal bargaining tended to be at the industry level, yet supplemented by on-going, informal bargaining at the workplace level. Personnel management and industrial relations would seem to have been largely undeveloped (Guest and Bryson 2009: 124).

In Germany, the combination of a strong state, a strong vocational training system, very high union density, industry-wide bargaining, worker representation on supervisory boards, mandatory works councils, and ultimately an alternative variety of capitalism, made for a substantially different management context. Although German workplaces may have been bureaucratic in design, workplace rules were jointly determined and hence differed substantially from those of US workplaces. Moreover, US-style internal labor markets were unsuited to the German workplace, where training and advancement were based on the German vocational skill system and depended much less on informal, on-the-job learning and seniority (Marsden 1999: 119–28). Finally, decision making was not just accommodative, it came to be largely collaborative (see Adams 1995: 142–49).

Despite these differences, it can be reasonably concluded that, indeed, bureaucratic work organization in some form came to be omnipresent, and accommodation of worker interests and organizations (i.e., unions) central to managerial policies in the core of major developed economies. In this regard, the term "industrial pluralism" was popularized to refer to the widespread belief that workers and management had distinctively different and often conflicting interests and that accommodation of these differences was not only essential to the maintenance of industrial stability but was also a hallmark of modern democracy. The practical realization of this belief may have varied, but it was made possible by the ability of employers to grant bureaucratic terms and conditions of employment and continual improvements in incomes. It was also accompanied by a culture of entitlement, under which workers came to believe that they had a right to expect fair and just treatment at work and steadily improving living standards in return for their subordination.

The Demise of the Golden Age

The preconditions for the post-World War II model began to break down in the mid-1960s, as the economies associated with large scale mass production (aka "Fordism") began to diminish (see Harvey 1989: 141–72; Arrighi 2007:123–30; Glyn 2006). Not only did productivity growth and profitability begin to decline, price inflation began to increase, largely in reflection of massive US-government spending on the Vietnam War but also the inability of firms to provide the steady wage increases central to postwar accord without having to raise prices. Where the former made it increasingly difficult for employers to grant the kinds of increases in real income that had been central to the postwar accord, the latter threatened to undermine living standards and increased cost uncertainty for employers. Labor unrest also began to increase, as employers attempted to reduce annual wage increases, workers rebelled against often boring and even dehumanizing work, and employers increasingly sought productivity gains by intensification of work processes rather than efficiency gains. These problems continued throughout much of the 1970s and into the early 1980s. Inflation was further fuelled by OPEC oil price increases in 1973 and then 1979. International competition, particularly from Japanese producers in the automobile and electronics sectors, also became increasingly intense, putting pressure on employers to enhance quality and output levels.

By the end of the 1970s, the political climate had also begun to shift considerably. Economic liberalism, which many thought had been fully discredited half a century earlier, was resurrected and reborn under the nomenclature of "neoliberalism." The postwar accord and the government policies associated with it came under increasing attack from politicians and pundits adhering to this dogma, supported by a network of privately financed "think tanks" and institutes (e.g., Harvey 2005).

These developments were most pronounced in the UK, the USA, and to a lesser extent Canada. The postwar accords in these countries were always relatively weak, especially in comparison with those in their more corporatist European and Scandinavian counterparts, where worker rights and protections were stronger, labor unions represented a large majority of workers, and institutional conditions induced employers to adopt more of a "stakeholder" orientation. These differences, coupled with different political traditions and more "coordinated," social market economies, meant that employers, labor unions, and governments found it to be in their interests and capacities to achieve consensus as to how to address the new economic "realities" they confronted. This was reflected in strike activity. Although there was some increase in labor unrest in these countries, strike activity remained almost trivial compared to levels in the USA, Canada, and the UK (Godard 2011), where there was little foundation for such consensus.

These differences were stark with regard to the USA, which had a long history of institutional norms favoring strong property rights, weak labor rights, and weak government (e.g., Godard 2009), and a political system with only weak checks and balances against corporate interests (Jacoby 1991). As a result, commitment to the postwar accord had always been pragmatic, but the "new deal" labor laws and policies supporting it had always been fragile. Indeed, laws supporting the right to form a union were virtually gutted within only a few years after the conclusion of the Second World War, if not earlier, and union density had begun to slowly decline before the end of the 1950s (Godard 2009).

Combined with the rise of the political right and the election of Ronald Reagan, the result was a shift to neoliberal state policies, characterized by weak rights and protections for workers, government and corporate attacks on labor unions, deregulation, privatization, liberalization of international capital markets, and harsh monetary and fiscal policies. There was an ensuing substantial weakening (or even gutting) of the postwar accord, creating a more hostile environment for both workers and their unions. This was accompanied by the growing "financialization" of the economy, as financial interests gained enhanced control over firms, and decision making came to be increasingly emphasize short term financial gain over longer term growth, productivity, and even profitability (Harvey 1989; Ho 2009). Repeated acts of "downsizing" and plant closures, coupled with high levels of unemployment and a substantial weakening of labor unions, essentially created a more submissive and insecure workforce, achieving labor "peace" in considerable measure through coercion rather than consent.

In contrast to the US case, governments in Canada and the UK made some effort to forge a new consensus, in reflection of their more paternalistic and hence accommodative political traditions. But these efforts ultimately failed. In the UK, a Labor government's efforts at a corporatist settlement collapsed during the "winter of discontent" in 1978–1979, helping to create the conditions for the election of Margaret Thatcher and a dramatic shift towards neoliberalism in the 1980s. In Canada, an effort to cure inflation with wage and price controls in the late 1970s failed, ushering in a conservative government and a turn towards neoliberalism, albeit one that was more gradual and less dramatic than in the UK.

Although it varied in specifics, the shift to neoliberalism came to be largely institutionalized in western countries. It also came to dominate elite economic and political thought, giving rise to the "Washington Consensus" and the neoliberal trade policies and agreements associated with it. Growing hyperbole over globalization, along with enhanced competition from newly industrializing economies, only served to further cow workers and their leaders. The culture of entitlement that had developed during the golden age gradually gave rise to one of compliance. Within this culture, it was no longer appropriate to expect more, or even to expect either states or employers to provide the rights and protections that could be taken-for-granted in the postwar era. There was to be no quid pro quo for subordination – other than a permanent, full-time job if one was lucky, and decent pay and benefits if one was very lucky.

Managerialism Redux

The developments of the 1970s and 1980s created the conditions for the emergence of new managerial ideologies. Pundits argued that the postwar model of management was obsolete and that there was need for corporations to eliminate bureaucratic hierarchies and replace them with more organic, "clan" forms of organization (e.g., Ouchi 1980, 1982). These were sold as consistent with Japanese management practices, which were to become a fad in business schools throughout the 1980s.[1] As promoted by business school academics, there was need to return to a more unitary, managerialist approach, albeit under a new and more sophisticated guise than in the past (Godard and Delaney 2000). Under this approach, workers would in theory be viewed not as "costs" or "problems" to be managed, but rather as resources to be developed and deployed so as to unleash their potential. A critical underlying

[1]Arguably, much of the management literature on Japanese practices was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of how and why the Japanese system actually appeared to work The Japanese system has traditionally been characterized by a collectivist (almost feudal) orientation, with strong norms privileging worker ("member") interests over those of shareholders, a strong belief in relative equality, and noncompetitive (within Japan) markets. This could not be more different than the US case, yet is something that business school academics seemed unable (or unwilling) to process (e.g., Dore 2000).

assumption was that worker attitudes and behavior could be readily molded to suit managerial goals.

This argument was both facilitated by and facilitative of the continuing shift towards neoliberalism and the culture of compliance it generated. Both made it increasingly possible and profitable to discard the more pluralistic, accommodative practices of the postwar era. In particular, compliant workers, faced with a growing scarcity of good jobs and constant threats of job loss should their performance be unsatisfactory, coupled with weak employment laws and weakened labor unions, meant that employers virtually had a green light to either ignore or radically reshape the post-World War II accord as they saw fit. Emergent managerial ideologies provided both the justification and the motivation for doing so. Although they overlapped, there were three such ideologies: (1) the "new" HRM (aka "strategic" HRM), (2) the high performance paradigm, and (3) the flexible firm thesis.

The new HRM was perhaps the most central to the new managerialism. Although there were initially different variants of this new paradigm (see Legge 1995b; Strauss 2001), all were predicated on the argument that the management of "human resources" is of key strategic importance and can serve as an inimitable source of competitive advantage if only the appropriate policies and practices are adopted (Tichy et al. 1982). Under the new HRM, selection is to become more "scientific" and based on values and social skills as much as technical acumen or general ability. The implicit assumption is that workers should be hired only if they are likely to buy into management goals and be good "team" players. Training and development are to be enhanced, but more so as to further inculcate management values and skills than so as to develop technical abilities. Workers are to be subjected to regular performance appraisals, based on "scientific" supervisory assessments, and on specific performance criteria against which employees can be evaluated and compared. In turn, pay and promotion are to be linked to performance rather than to seniority. Finally, firms should engage in strategic HR planning, and HR conisderations should play a key role in strategic management decision processes.

Proponents of the new HRM typically had little to say about worker rights or labor unions, at most tending to advocate nonunion communication and "justice" systems.[2] In effect, where the traditional model assumed that workers were distinctive stakeholders and hence that there was need to accommodate their interests and values, proponents of the new HRM assumed that worker perceptions of their interests could be altered so as to conform to managerial goals. Unions were considered to be both unnecessary and undesirable unless they were willing to discard their traditional, adversarial approach and collaborate with the employer.

There were also a number of variants of the high performance paradigm (e.g., Godard 2004). But as conceived by the "MIT school," this paradigm focused more

[2] I need to emphasize "typically." The so-called "Harvard" version (Beer et al. 1984, 1985) did pay attention to labor-management relations, as did an "MIT" version (Kochan and Barocci 1985). Yet these variants seem to have been rapidly eclipsed by a more unitary, performance driven version, dominated by psychologists with little concept of labor unions or why they exist (Godard 2014; Beer et al. 2015).

on the design of work and on workplace participation systems than did the new HRM (see Kochan and Osterman 1994; Pfeffer 1994). Under the postwar model, workers tended to be assigned to clearly defined, individualized jobs and had little input into decisions that might affect how they performed these jobs. In effect, they were hired into a job and simply expected to do it. The high performance paradigm instead advocated more flexible job designs, with multiskilling, job rotation, and, most important, team-based work systems, where workers could perform a wider variety of tasks in conjunction with their fellow team members. In the ideal, teams would be self-directed or "autonomous," controlling the pace at which they worked and how they did their work, and with limited if any direct supervision. They would also have responsibility for a measurable output, with bonuses based on team rather than individual performance. Accompanying these teams would be various participation and communication systems, including labor-management "steering committees," "quality circles," team "briefings" (information sessions), periodic "town-hall" meetings, and a variety of added information sources (e.g., newsletters) on developments in the workplace.

In theory, these practices were most effective at enhancing performance if implemented in conjunction with lean production and total quality management systems (Lawler 1986) and if fully accompanied by complementary HRM practices (Pfeffer 1994). The HRM practices advocated were largely consistent with the new HRM, although they also entailed promises of job security and efforts to work with unions under the guise of a win-win "mutual gains" approach (Pfeffer 1994; Kochan and Osterman 1994). In theory, both helped to create the levels of loyalty and "buy-in" necessary for the effectiveness of high performance systems. They also facilitated flexibility in the allocation and use of human resources.

The major difference between the new HRM and the high performance paradigm was that the former typically assumed an entirely unitary model of the firm, under which workers can be selected, indoctrinated, and "incentivized" to identify with employer interests, while the latter viewed workers as distinctive stakeholders. The latter, however, may also be labeled as "managerialist," as it also assumed that loyalty and commitment can be maximized, and conflict minimized, if management only adopts and correctly implements the appropriate policies and practices (Godard and Delaney 2000). It was also predicated on the existence of a compliant labor force, with only weak rights and protections in the labor market, and largely compliant labor unions. Again, neoliberal government policies largely created these conditions.

The third ideology emergent during this era was the "flexible firm thesis" (Atkinson 1984; see Legge 1995b: 139–73). This thesis included more flexible job descriptions, multiskilling, job rotation, and team-working, all of which are part-and-parcel of the high performance model but do not require implementation in conjunction with it. It also included, however, increased use of temporary and part-time employees, increased "outsourcing," and an increased willingness to lay-off workers, none of which is consistent with the high performance model. These practices were argued to have been increasingly adopted by employers in order to adjust to fluctuations in demand in a more uncertain and competitive economic environment. In this regard, the flexible firm thesis may have been somewhat less normative than its other two counterparts, although a clear implication was that firms would and *should* become increasingly flexible over time.

Again, the assumption underlying the flexible firm thesis was of a largely neoliberal environment, under which management was subject to few meaningful constraints from either governments or unions and could count on a largely compliant labor force, with few options other than to take whatever jobs were on offer. It became commonplace for management pundits to proclaim that the full-time, permanent jobs of the postwar era were largely dead, except perhaps for a privileged group of essential workers, and that workers must expect to constantly "remake" themselves as they moved from one job to another. More important, this thesis became central to the argument that problems of economic growth were caused by unduly rigid labor markets and that there was a need to further weaken labor rights and protections in order address them. This thesis became especially prominent in European economies and provided the justification for a variety of neoliberal reforms (Thelen 2014).

The Limits to the New Managerialism: Ideology vs. Practice.

The new managerialism, and particularly the new HRM, became very much the rage in business schools within but also beyond the USA, spawning the newly formulated (or reformulated) area of study, Human Resources Management, and gradually eclipsing the field of industrial relations in both academia and management practice. The practices associated with it also generated considerable controversy. Although proponents typically assumed that these practices were "win-win," improving both job quality and performance, more critical scholars argued either that they involved work intensification and management by stress (Graham 1993), or that they largely amounted to ideological justifications for undermining the quality of employment (Legge 1995a, b), or that they represented a new and more insidious form of control, characterized by hidden forms of power and domination and designed to alter worker norms and consciousness (Townley 1994), or that they simply did not generate the promised "payoffs" in most contexts (Godard 2004; Kaufman 2015).

The available empirical evidence, however, calls into question just how widely the sets of practices associated with the new managerialism ever came to be adopted (Godard 2004) or how much of a difference they have made where adopted. To begin, increases to part-time and temporary employment have been relatively limited and highly variable across nations. For example, in the USA, only 4 percent of labor market participants were in temporary positions as of the mid-2010s, and although part-time work accounted for 13 percent of the labor force, this was little changed from the 1970s (OECD 2017; Bernhardt 2014: 5). In the UK, the equivalent statistics were 6 and 24 percent, respectively, with the latter having increased by only 6 percentage points from the early 1980s. Moreover, those increases that did occur in the UK and elsewhere may have been in large measure attributable less to employer practices in large firms than to the expanding share of jobs in the retail and accommodation sectors. Although larger, "core" sector employers may have made increased use of these practices, it would seem to have been indirectly, through the contracting out of subsidiary functions (e.g., food services, security, janitorial; see Bernhardt 2014: 8–13; Bernhardt et al. 2016: 27).

Moreover, evidence as to job stability suggests that, if anything, there has been an increase in average job tenure in most developed nations (at least, since1992: OECD StatExtracts 2017). This is not consistent with arguments that employers have become quicker to lay off workers than in the past. Indeed, even in the USA, where restrictions on layoffs are perhaps the lowest in the developed world, it appears that, at least since 1984, those changes that occurred largely tracked changes in unemployment levels and in this sense suggest little major shift in employer practices (Bernhardt 2014; Farber 2015). UK data also suggest a long term decline in both voluntary and involuntary separations since at least the mid-1990s (Bewley 2013).

Similarly, as of the early 2000s, large scale government surveys revealed that fewer than one in ten employers in the USA, UK, and Canada had adopted autonomous teams for their core workers (e.g., Blasi and Kruse 2006; Kersley et al. 2006; Godard 2017: 137), even though these are central to the high performance model. It would appear that some of the practices (e.g., appraisals) associated with this model and with the new HRM have been widely adopted (Godard 2004; Wood and Bryson 2009: 160); my own surveys of workers in the USA, UK, Canada, and Germany in 2003 and 2009 tend to bear this out as well (see Godard 2019: appendix). But the adoption of these practices does not appear to reflect any widespread fundamental change in management regimes (e.g., see Boudreau and Lawler III 2014). In most cases, their adoption seems to have been piecemeal and grafted on to more traditional (albeit perhaps weakened) bureaucratic practices (Godard 2004; Godard 2019: appendix), involving what Legge has labeled "thinking pragmatism" (1995b: 330) and Boudreau and Lawler III (2014) as "stubborn traditionalism."

This is not to suggest that there have been no substantive changes in management practices over the past three or more decades. In actuality, available data on the former are almost nonexistent for the period prior to the mid-1990s, which is when these practices were most heavily promoted. The best available (UK) data do suggest, however, that the level of real change in work and HRM practices would appear to have been limited to a few "new" practices (e.g., information sharing and briefings) and to have been gradual (e.g., Wood and Bryson 2009: 159).

How much of an actual difference these practices have made to labor and employment relations is also not clear. There has in this regard been a virtual cottage industry of studies attempting to establish that both high performance and new HRM practices have meaningful effects. Yet reviews of the most carefully conducted studies have concluded that these studies have typically yielded either weak or readily contestable results (Delaney and Godard 2001; Godard 2004; Wall and Wood 2006; Marsden and Canibano 2010; Kaufman 2015). The most widely cited meta-analysis of the research (Combs et al. 2006) finds a modest positive effect, but to obtain this effect, it lumped together all manner of practices, including those associated with the traditional, postwar model (Kaufman 2015). It also found little association for performance appraisal systems, teams, and information sharing, all of which are central to the literature. A subsequent meta-analysis (Jiang et al. 2012) is also unconvincing.[3]

A particular problem has been that employers may adopt some or many of these practices in some form, but just how extensively they do so, or whether they even represent anything new, may vary considerably. For example, the organization of work in groups or small departments has always been widespread, and so it is possible that the word "team," which seems to have become widespread (e.g., Kersely et al. 2006: 90), often entails more of a semantic than a substantive change to how work is performed. This is especially so given the limited implementation of "self-directed" teams noted above. In addition, however, appraisal systems would seem too often be largely bureaucratic exercises with little purpose other than to placate HR departments and create the appearance of professional management.

The research does seem to show that some professional HRM and "new work" practices have, on average, positive performance effects (e.g., training, performance pay, profit sharing), and it may be that some of these practices (e.g., in the UK, appraisals: see Bewley 2013) have continued to diffuse across employers. But even if so, this may simply reflect the adoption of more formally rational management techniques, made more possible by a neoliberal context and a more compliant workforce, rather than a magic elixir associated with these techniques or some Foucauldian spell they cast over workers. Employers adopting such practices may be more sophisticated than those that do not do so, but how much of a change in workplace relations or even in the employment experience their adoption has entailed remains uncertain in view of the existing research. This is especially true if one compares their implications to those of more traditional bureaucratic practices. It is in this respect quite likely that the latter may indeed have been weakened somewhat, especially in nonunion workplaces in the private sector, but they would still appear to be prevalent and, indeed, judging by much of the research on high performance work systems, many of them (e.g., seniority rules, internal "justice" systems) now seem to be considered as part-and-parcel of "best practice" (Godard 2004; Kaufman 2015).

This conclusion is reinforced by research into the effects of new HRM and work practices on workers, which suggests that only limited effects for various new work and HRM practices (see Bockerman et al. 2012; Godard 2010). In this regard, a particularly striking finding from a more recent (2009) survey of US workers is that more traditional bureaucratic practices have far more positive implications for

[3]It suggests positive effects for various categories of work and HRM practices, and for a combined overall measure labeled as "high performance work systems" – which now seems to have become a generic term that includes any and all HRM and nonbureaucratic work practices rather than those associated with the high performance paradigm as initially formulated. As for other meta-analyses, however, this analysis included such a potpourri of measures, from studies of such varying quality that it is difficult to know what the authors really found. It also suffered from a number of the problems associated with these sorts analysis (see Jiang et al. 2012: 1278–79).

various dimensions of job quality than do their more recent "new" counterparts (Frege and Godard 2014). Thus, to the extent that the former have replaced by the latter, the net outcome is likely to be worsened. But the available evidence suggests that this has not, in any case, generally happened, and that "old" and "new" practices bear quite strong positive associations (Frege and Godard 2014: 961). So it would seem that "new" practices may have altered the experience of work somewhat in the USA, but not in any fundamental way.

Again, however, it is difficult to generalize across nations, as much may depend on the institutional context within which various practices are implemented. For example, drawing on the European Working Conditions Survey, Lorenz and Valeyre (2005) found that the adoption of new work practices tended to be much more consistent with a learning model in Germany and the Scandanavian countries than in Britain and Ireland, likely in reflection of better employment protection and vocational training systems in the former. In their study of US and German workers, Frege and Godard (2014) found that the frequency with which individual "new" practices have been adopted varied considerably between the USA and Germany, likely because German institutions allow a much greater role for worker interests in the determination of these practices than is the case for the USA, but also because the problem of control is addressed through national institutions rather than employer practices, thereby altering both their purpose and their design. It also found that the "effects" of these practices on workers are far more positive in Germany than in the USA; in turn bureaucratic practices had much smaller effects than in the USA, likely because institutions ensure less need for the various protections these practices provide in the latter. So, again, it would appear that the practices adopted and their apparent effects depend very much on the institutional environment in which they are adopted. Perhaps paradoxically, a neoliberal context may make it easier to implement these practices, but it may also mean that they are less effective for management (Godard 2004).

It would also be a mistake to assume that these practices have remained static and hence that their effects on labor and employment relations have not strengthened over time. As for any "innovative" practices, there has likely been substantial learning and adjustment, as employers determine what seems to work and what does not and as new iterations emerge. For example, the term "talent management" has become increasingly predominant in the HRM literature, suggesting a stronger human capital development orientation than initially found in the new HRM literature (Dundon and Rafferty 2018). It would also appear, partly in reflection of this orientation, that employers have begun to rely somewhat more on external labor markets than in the past and are more likely to focus on (and reward) "core" employees at the expense of their more peripheral counterparts.

In addition, the "subjects" of "new" work and HRM practices may adjust to them over time in ways that either enhance or diminish any effects that they do have, or they may develop ways to alter or undermine them depending on their orientations and opportunities to do so (see Vallas 2006). Alternatively, many of these practices (e.g., appraisal, performance pay) may remain in name only, as managers seek to avoid discord and hence only go through the motions (e.g., give everyone the same bonus). My own (Canadian) research finds, for example, that although high performance work practices appeared to have had both positive and negative effects for workers as of the 1990s, their negative effects seem to have declined a decade later, and any positive effects they still had were limited to participative practices in union workplaces (Godard 2010).

More important, the effects of these practices on workplace relations may have been altered over time as complementary information and communications technologies have become more sophisticated. This may be the case if the latter enhance access to knowledge and facilitate learning through various feedback systems (Martin 2017). It may also be the case if they facilitate the constant surveillance of workers, through secondary listening devices, automatic customer feedback surveys, remote tracking systems, and performance metric systems (Green 2004).

These caveats notwithstanding, the available evidence just does not suggest that the practices associated with the new managerialism have in themselves had particularly strong effects on labor and employment relations Their main effect would seem to have been to help HRM practitioners elevate their stature and hence influence in organizations, adopting various credentialing systems and promoting themselves as “professionals” (Guest and Bryson 2009: 124). These practitioners would in the process also seemed to have undergone an ideological shift, under which they are less likely to recognize that workers may have distinctive interests and more likely to try to legitimate themselves as essential to the “strategic” interests of the employer (Kochan 2007). This shift has been accompanied by an Orwellian change in language-in-use, designed to create the impression of a unity of interests (e.g., “team” instead of “group,” “unit,” or “department”), and an implied expectation that workers will behave accordingly.

Underpinning much of this change has been the emergence of a new and (initially) burgeoning area for business school academics with a vested interest in establishing the performance effects of new work and HRM practices (Legge 1995b: 319–21; Kaufman 2015) and in developing seemingly new “innovations” for management (e.g., Gittell 2016). Often, this research has been highly instrumentalist, promoting an objectified view of workers (and employees in general), not as *human* resources, but rather as simply resources (Godard 2014). This may in turn be transmitted to HRM practitioners and students, ultimately hardening managerial orientations towards workers.

Overall, the primary effect of the new managerialism may have been to alter how managers think about workers, and what they expect from them, rather than to alter the actual work and HRM the practices adopted. To be sure, both popular accounts and the available research point to an intensification of the labour process (Green 2004, 2006) and a lowering of job quality (Green 2004, 2006). But these developments have been largely made possible by the rhetoric and the realities of neoliberalism, the culture of compliance that they have generated, and the application of new technologies of control. To the extent that the new managerialism has played a role, it has been mainly to reinforce and help to obfuscate these developments through its introduction of a unitary ideology and language-in use.

The End of the New Managerialism?

Although its overall implications may be debated, it would now appear that the era of the new managerialism is coming to an end (if it has not already done so). For a significant portion of the economy, we may even be witnessing the decline if not the end of the HRM function and even management as it has come to be understood.[4] This may be especially so in liberal market economies, where the new managerialism (and neoliberalism) has been most prominent.

First, even if new work and HRM practices do make some difference to performance, their overall success has proven to be limited, and any contributions that they have made are likely to have already been realized (e.g., in the UK: see van Wanrooy et al. 2013). It would appear in particular that HRM has failed as a "strategic" area (Boudreau and Lawler III 2014) and that those employed in it are once again perceived to be performing a largely bureaucratized, secondary function – one that may actually do more to frustrate than to facilitate performance. In larger, more "responsible" employers, there has been a proliferation of various family friendly, diversity, "wellness," and "respectful workplace" initiatives, but these are just sticking plaster for problems largely created by the more coercive and stressful environments (both at work and outside of it) in which workers find themselves. Although they may help to advance employer scores on various "best employer" rankings and may have positive implications for subsets of workers, they are a long way off from the strategic role promised by proponents of the new managerialism.

The HRM function itself may also be increasingly falling victim to outsourcing to third parties specializing in selection, appraisal design, training, and pay systems (Greer et al. 1999), thereby hollowing out HR departments and rendering them little more than clearing houses for the selection and monitoring of these parties and their programs. There seem to be no strong data on the extent to which this has occurred, but in an environment in which most labor market participants are desperate to get a "good" job, there is in any case rarely much need for elaborate search, selection, and indoctrination processes. Again, this may be especially true of the USA, where workers have very little by way of rights and protections both within and outside of the employment relationship.

New technologies may also have significantly altered the HRM function. The application of these technologies can reduce selection, monitoring, and evaluation processes to little more than the use of elaborate online score-cards, essentially eliminating the need for judgement or expertise (Head 2014: 66-71). Of particular

[4]This section is largely speculative and calls for a more thorough analysis than is possible here. Such analysis would likely be most effectively informed by some variant of regulation theory and couched in terms of the end of neoliberal globalization as a "regime of accumulation," drawing parallels with the end of "Fordism." However, I am struck by just how much the analysis in this and the preceding section is consistent with Karen Legge's analysis more than two decades ago (Legge 1995a, b, esp. 286–340). I had not read this carefully until putting the final touches on the present chapter.

note has been a corresponding growth in consulting firms selling sophisticated information systems with the potential to marginalize or even eliminate HR departments.

The ability to continuously monitor employees and track their performance would appear to have become widespread, in effect leading to the "robotization" of much work if not the replacement of workers with actual robots. These systems would appear to be especially characteristic of major employers emergent during the neoliberal era (e.g., WalMart, Amazon: see Head 2014: 30–40) and have implications not just for the function of HRM but also for the practices to which workers are subject. These employers are generally intensely antiunion, provide workers with few if any meaningful rights or benefits, pay low wages, and rely extensively on temporary and part-time workers. They also outsource extensively, relying either on "temp" firms for a portion of their labor force or on "offshoring" for a sizeable portion of their production. To an extent, these practices may be viewed as an extension of the flexible firm thesis, although they appear to be motivated entirely by cost considerations and not by any need for flexibility per se. Where they are adopted, the employment relationship tends to be both autocratic and exploitive, with HRM departments playing, at most, a legal monitoring role.

The growth of so-called "platform work" and the "gig" economy would appear to take the application of new technologies to an even further level. These jobs give rise to highly controlled, autonomized conditions, in which workers have very little task discretion and limited if any interaction with co-workers. Rather than adopting practices that are merely facilitated by a neoliberal environment, these jobs actually internalize this environment, with workers treated as independent contractors and expected to perceive themselves as such, yet subject to employer rules and monitoring. New technologies, and the firms that control them, have been the handmaidens for these developments, essentially playing a mediating role between employers on the one hand and workers on the other (Katz and Krueger 2017), and effectively obfuscating the employment relationship through a technological variant of Marx and Engels' "cash nexus" (1848). Although these jobs would appear to account for a minute portion of the labor force as of this writing, the evidence suggests that they have been growing rapidly over the past decade.[5]

Overall, these developments suggest that the era of the new managerialism is at an end. This is not because the traditional employment relationship is no longer prevalent; indeed, the overwhelming majority of jobs continue to fit this characterization or some variant of it. But notions of self-directed teams and employee consultation now seem to be almost quaint, and the elaborate selection, socialization, and performance management practices of the new HRM just another set of bureaucratic rituals, designed mainly to bolster management's belief in its own

[5]Although it would appear that the so-called gig economy amounts to only a tiny percentage of jobs (in the USA, less than 1.0%: Hall and Krueger 2018: 708), the available evidence suggests that roughly one in six workers in the USA is now either an independent contractor, an on-call worker, a temporary help agency worker, or a contract firm worker. It further suggests that these jobs have accelerated since the mid-2000s, increasing by from 60 to 70 percent between 2005 and 2015 (Katz and Krueger 2016).

professionalism. Not only does HRM for-the-most-part fail to deliver much “strategic” payoff, even its basic functions seem to be increasingly obsolete or at best highly routinized and threatened by outsourcing.

Of equal or even greater importance, the conditions that initially gave rise to the new managerialism may also be coming to an end. To begin, it would appear that the compliant worker has been giving way to the calculative worker of neoliberal theory, where workers are characterized by low levels of engagement and motivated largely by carrots and sticks, à la Taylor’s scientific management. To the extent that it is possible to continuously monitor behavior and performance, this augurs well for employers, in effect providing the basis for a new regime of control. Yet the ability to do so would, despite the application of new technologies, seem to be inherently limited in most sectors. This has left many employers having to face a “crisis” of engagement. Their workers may still be highly compliant, but this compliance is contradicted by low levels of loyalty and, more important, hidden forms of resistance (e.g., Paulsen 2014: 1–16). Within such an environment, “new” HRM practices and their high performance counterparts are even more futile, especially if their objective is to develop high levels of commitment or involvement rather than to merely intensify the work process or exact greater compliance.

More important, substantial declines in unemployment, coupled with a growing awareness of inequality, a lack of meaningful income growth, inadequate pensions, increasingly precarious health coverage, and a hollowing out of democratic institutions (e.g., labor unions) may create a complementary yet broader culture of generalized hostility. There has been an expectation of eventual reciprocity and hence reward after many, many years of compliance, only to be met with continued degradation. This has been substantially worsened by the great recession of 2008, which reversed any gains that workers were beginning to enjoy at the turn of the century, and subsequently reinforced the perception that the system is rigged against the “average” citizen.

In the post-World War II era, the workplace was in many respects the outlet not just for discontent at work, but also for broader sources thereof. Labor and employment practices, and particularly the willingness to accommodate the distinctive interests of workers, coupled with effective union representation and regular income gains, played an important role in lessening not just economic instability, but political and social instability as well. Neither would appear any longer to be so. Instead, discontent has come to pervade civil society. This discontent is not just a reflection of labor market and work experiences. It also reflects the broader failure of neoliberalism, and especially neoliberal globalization, to deliver on its promises.

Yet, again, the extent to which this has been the case varies within, and more important, across nations, depending on occupational location but also broader institutional conditions and cultural traditions. These problems would appear to be most pervasive in neoliberal economies, and this would indeed appear to have been the case, especially if one judges by the management literature, but also if one judges by political developments in the USA (Trumpism) and the UK (Brexit) at the time of this writing. These developments will likely only lead to even greater public anger and frustration once the populist promises driving them have proven to be false. Yet even if not, they portend an end to the era of neoliberal globalization, the limitations *to* which, and consequences *of* which, have in any case been increasingly exposed since the 2008 crisis.

The great question is not so much one of whether these developments will usher in a new political economic era, but rather one of what this era will look like. The answer to this question will have major implications for labor markets and ultimately labor and employment practices. Whether it will entail a further neo-liberalization and intensification of work and employment, or whether it will entail some sort of "new" new deal, in which genuinely democratic values and principles predominate (e.g., Frege and Godard 2014) remains to be seen. The answer will likely vary by sector and nation, and be substantially influenced by the ways in which emergent technologies are deployed. But either way, it would seem that the new managerialism is now, or will soon become, yesterday's news.

Cross-References

▶ A Return to the Good Old Days: Populism, Fake News, Yellow Journalism, and the Unparalleled Virtue of Business People
▶ Conclusion: Management Theory in Crisis
▶ Introduction: Public Policy Failure, the Demise of Experts, and the Dawn of a New Era
▶ Management History in the Modern World: An Overview
▶ The New Executive: Interconnected Yet Isolated and Uninformed – Leadership Challenges in the Digital Pandemic Epoch
▶ Trade Union Decline and Transformation: Where to for Employment Relations?
▶ What Is Management?
▶ Why did the Great Recession Fail to Produce a *New* New Deal in the USA?

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