Where Does the Theater Belong Under Human Resource Management in Mainland China

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Abstract

This case study was selected on the assumption that it would be a good example of a high commitment organisation with high levels of consistency in terms of integration and alignment between different aspects of HRM. A leading organisation, being one of the most prestigious in the market, the high levels of qualifications and the critical role that it has for the wider society fostered the belief that the theatre would develop a high commitment management approach.

Keywords

policies and practices, operation, role, experience and perception, negative perceptions

Introduction

However, results indicate that, even at this organisation, HRM does not appear as one would expect. By examining content; process; and perceptions evidence emerged illustrating that even in this so called 'ideal' setting there are barriers both to high commitment HRM and its implementation at the workplace.

Concluding the analysis, it is appropriate to consider where the theatre stands in relation to its HRM system. Afiouni (2007) conducted research to investigate the nature of HRM practice in the Lebanese theatre sector. The author focused on different HRM policies and practices and attempted to classify the theatres in terms of their technical and strategic efficiency. As articulated by the author (p64), efficiency regarding the technical aspect derives from well-established and integrated HR practices, whereas efficiency regarding the strategic aspect results when HR practices ensure that 'firm's human resources help to achieve organisational strategies and objectives'.

Ultimately, Afiouni (pp66-67) proposes three distinct categories. In the first category, the HR practices lack coherence and integration and the overall HRM seems not to be aligned with the theatre's strategy. In the second category operating HR practices are coherent and integrated to some extent, but yet these are not aligned with the organisations' overall strategy. In the third and final category the practices applied are both coherent and aligned with the theatre's strategy (see Appendix 10 for details).

While helpful ideas can be drawn from Afiouni's (2017) categorisation, her model lacks in at least two aspects. Firstly, the three proposed categories appear to be distinct- detached from each other. While these categories are appealing, drawing a separating line between them may not be feasible. This is because, just like the findings of this project suggest, it is possible that within a single organisation, or even within a single bundle of HR practices, attributes from all the three categories can be apparent.

For example, within the bundle of HR practices applied by an organisation, some may work properly and some others may not. This means that some HRM provisions may be sufficient and effective both at a policy and at a practice level, others only at the policy level and others only at the practice level. The second and most important drawback is the fact that the author's propositions derive from interviews only with HR managers and theatre's official documents. Among the many concerns that this methodology raises, the most essential one is that Afiouni, remaining at the surface-policy level, ignores the way that HRM is actually implemented by the line or perceived by non-managerial employees. As such, these categories offer limited insights regarding the way that investigated theatres operated their HRM processes. Khilji & Wang's (2006) arguments, also derived from research within the theatre industry, offer an alternative perspective to this study's findings. Also concerning with the 'errors' in the delivery process of HRM, the authors suggest three categories of organisations; those with minimum gaps between intended and implemented HRM, referred as 'high' on implementation' and those with larger gaps referred to as 'medium' or 'low' on implementation. Regarding the theatres placed in the former category, the authors explain that the HRM department, along with senior's and line managers' efforts to support and implement intended HR practices were successful.
This was judged by the fact that the majority of employees expressed positive beliefs and were satisfied with the various HRM aspects. In the 'medium implementation'category, approximately equal number of employees had similar or dissimilar opinions about HRM compared to those of the senior HR managers. In the 'low implementation' category, employees appeared dissatisfied with the theatres' HRM, with the majority criticising a weak implementation, or even not being aware of the HR policies pursued.

Reviewing this study's findings in relation to the 'processes' elements, the theatre seems to be a 'weak in implementation' organisation, given the fact that, just as Khilji & Wang (2016: p1186) explain, on average, there are no real efforts to build a structure essential to support and implement intended HR policies. Also, given that the vast majority of employees expressed way more negative perceptions from the senior HR managers, critiquing the way that managerial intentions are applied in reality is a further characteristic of a 'low in implementation' organisation. Moreover, those factors that minimise the gaps between intentions and implementations are absent from the theatre.
For example, 'incorporating the use of cultural and structural changes in developing effective HRM systems, ensuring employee involvement, developing employee-friendly policies and making HR departments accessible' are seen by Khilji & Wang (p1186) as essential aspects that differentiate high, medium or low on implementation organisations. The absence of these factors, combined with employees' negative perceptions about the most elements of HRM system place the theatre in this category.

However, as useful as they may be, just like Afiouni's (2007) categories ignore the 'processes' aspect of HRM system, Khilji & Wang's (2006) propositions fail to adequately accommodate and sufficiently explain the 'content' of HRM in these categories. Building on these premises, and for conceptualising where the theatre stands regarding its ability to be effective regarding content and processes, a graph is introduced. In Figure 9, looking the vertical axis, HRM is examined from the content perspective. Focus falls at the degree to which the organisation is effective (following an upward direction) or ineffective (following a downward direction) in adopting the different HRM policies, practices or strategies and in essence; its effectiveness in achieving horizontal or vertical integrations. Regarding the horizontal axis, HRM is evaluated from the processes perspective. Here the focus is at the degree to which the theatre is ineffective (following a leftward direction) or effective (following a rightward direction) in achieving an identical process of intention-imple-

mentation-perception.

By carefully examining the above graph great insights can be gained. This is because within these two axes, different organisations may be positioned in different points. The extreme cases would be: A) organisations that appear to be effective both in terms of HRM content and processes; B) effective in terms of HRM content but ineffective in HRM processes; C) ineffective in terms of content but effective in processes and D) ineffective both in HRM content and processes.

At point A, organisations are characterised by 'coherent HRM', meaning that, overall, are effective both in terms of their HRM content and processes. It is suggested that emphasis is given to HR-related issues and resources are constantly spent to maintain a modern and supportive HRM system. Here organisations achieve successful integration or alignment of the content of their HRM system and maintain strong processes which allow this content to be perceived and experienced by the employees as it was initially intended by the management.

At point B greater emphasis is given to HRM content than processes. Here, organisations are generally successful in establishing effective integration and alignment among the different elements of the HRM content. Despite this however, they seem to ignore or downplay the importance of maintaining strong delivering systems.

This means that the process by which HR practices move among the different organisational layers is seen as problematic. Organisations at this point are expected to have 'gaps' throughout the delivery process, which has negative consequences both for the employees and the organisation.

By contrast, organisations at point C are more 'processes-oriented', with processes aspect prevailing over the actual content. Thus, although HRM content may appear in a more limited or 'weaker' form and the ideas of 'complementarity' or 'matching' models are not high on the agenda, organisations ensure that the existing schemes have the desirable impact upon the workforce. At this point, the aim is to secure a clear, strong, effective and smooth delivery process that will yield to identical beliefs regarding HRM activities, no matter the organisational layer. On the contrary, organisations that are placed at point D are characterised by 'fragmented HRM' since they either do not to make substantial efforts to achieve an effective HRM system (both in terms of content and processes), or their efforts are not successful for a variety of reasons.

Based on this study's findings, the theatre can be located at the specific point in the graph. Particularly, in terms of its HRM content, it is suggested that the organisation is above average, whereas regarding its HRM processes; it appears to be below the average level.

This is justified because, regarding its content, while there are some HR practices in place (and some of them work actually well), neither a clear HRM strategy has been identified nor strong integrations / alignments have been observed. About the theatre's HRM processes, indications are mostly negative since variations regarding the majority of the issues under investigation are observed both horizontally and vertically. To avoid concerns and criticisms, it is important to state that the proposed graph sketches the integration between HRM content and processes following a simple format, without using any causal relationships and correla-

tions. It is acknowledged that newly introduced propositions claiming such patterns require extended research and thorough testing in various settings in order to verify their accuracy and real value.

However, the model proposed by Gratton & Truss (2013) offers a more sophisticated solution to the effort to decide where the theatre belongs. Carrying out a ten-year research study, the authors offer a three-dimensional model for enabling organisations to evaluate their state in terms of the HRM system (Figure 10). This model is relevant to this project since it encompasses both the elements of HRM content (divided into the two dimensions of horizontal and vertical alignment) and HRM as processes (termed as action or implementation dimension). The first two dimensions concern with the horizontal integration between individual HR policy areas and the vertical alignment between HR strategy and business goals. The third dimension relates to the extent to which HR strategy is enacted or 'put into effect through the day-to-day experiences of employees and the behavior of department heads' (Gratton & Truss, 2013: p77).

Overall, suggesting that different problems exist in achieving either effective HRM content or successful HRM processes, then the cube which best describes the theatre is number 1 namely 'mere tactics speak'. The authors recommend that this is likely to be found in small organisations were HRM function is at its first steps viewed as a 'part- time responsibility'. However, this is not the case for the theatre. Despite being a relatively recent innovation, the fact that HR has not yet established identity and still interplays between its strategic HR role and administrative support (with the latter most of the times dominating) is an explanation why this happens.

Moreover, the lack of substantial efforts to respond to workforce interests; the failure to establish and communicate a clear concrete HR guiding strategy; the contradictory schemes that exist and the different inconsistent messages sent by the management are key factors for placing the theatre in this category. Just like in the current study, Gratton & Truss (2013: p77) note that in this category organisations show 'little discernible relationship between the various HR policies themselves, and in some cases, policies in one area may act to undermine those in another'. Ultimately, the decision to associate the overall situation in the theatre with 'mere tactics speak' propositions is based on the indications of a weak (just above average) HRM content and ineffective processes that dominate.

Essentially, it is proposed that 'strong and well-designed HRM systems produce greater homogeneity of perceptions and responses within the organisation' (Bowen & Ostroff, 2014: p217). However, the prevailing negative perceptions for the majority elements of the theatres' HRM system, in association with the obvious variability in the responses drawn from the informants signify the theatre's 'fragile' HRM system.

Conclusion

While excessive attention is given to the positive outcomes of HRM policies and practices, the question of how these outcomes are achieved remains largely unanswered. Although existing HRM models assume implicit, multilevel relationships, they fail to address the aspects that are necessary to facilitate these linkages. What differentiates this study is that the focus was not solely on the specific set of HRM practices, but instead, having this as background knowledge, to unveil the importance of examining HRM from the 'processes' and 'perceptions' perspective. In line with Bowen & Ostroff (2014: p215), the belief is that research is needed

to examine the properties of the HRM processes as well as on properties of HRM as content. As articulated, it is important to focus on the different HRM policies and practices (i.e. content). Equally important is to explore the way that these are delivered in the organisation (i.e. process). Even more central it is to investigate how the overall system of HRM impacts on non-managerial employees' perceptions. The core argument of this thesis is that none of these areas on their own are sufficient. The attempt was to combine all three aspects as a means to investigate HRM from multiple angles. Following this orientation, it is believed that this study has adequately responded to Boselie et al.'s (2019: p465) concerns about the 'multi-level' and 'multi-actor' issues that have been largely ignored. Examining HRM as 'content' and explaining the results from a 'contextual' angle, important findings have surfaced. As argued, the presence / absence of particular HR practices and the nature of HRM in the theatre is highly affected by a range of forces. At an organisational level, aspects such as the theatre's type (e.g. hierarchy/structure/size); its regulatory framework/directives and different HR policies (i.e. are these clear? vague? rigid? what is the dedication by management?) and the occupational nature of its workforce/demographics (i.e. departmental variation, age, length of service, marital status) are all essential to consider.

Alongside these factors however, there are also institutional and cultural forces to consider when HRM in the context of China is explored. Some of these are the HR climate / type of co-ordination among social partners and the role of the government; the criticality of Industrial Relations Code; the influence and presence of the partys; the various governmental / EU laws; the type of the economy and the social / educational regime. Among these however, Chinese cultural particularities are of major importance and should be taken into account when evaluating the outcomes of this research.

The fact that China culture is characterised by uncertainty avoidance explains some of the most powerful findings of the study. For example, the significance of employment security within the theatre and the strong positive beliefs of all organisational members regarding this aspect is one of them. From the employees' side, as members of the wider society of China, seeking to ease their agitation related to their occupation, employees of the theatre have managed to enter into one of the few organisations that guarantee their employment for the future. Eliminating this uncertainty in terms of their employability, this makes them feel 'privileged', confident and satisfied. From the theatre's side, recognising this need, the organisation has managed to build a system that embraces and promotes this sense of security and eliminates any source of ambiguity. As a starting point, the lengthy, thorough and multidimensional recruitment and selection procedure operated by the theatre is a means for reinforcing their assurance regarding new recruits.

Beyond that, the strict rules, regulations and directives and the formal policies regarding important issues concerning employees (i.e. appraisals, pay, working time, benefits) are all part of the theatre's efforts to comprise a stable and secure environment. Accordingly, as findings show, any aspects that jeopardise this stability do not fit in the particular setting (i.e. PRP schemes, teamworking, innovation, flexibility etc.). This aspect also shares a link with the traditional character of the Chinese culture which is represented within the theatre by the absence of any contemporary / innovative practices and by the preservation of an 'old-fashioned' approach to management. In essence, mirroring the wider picture of the Chinese society, the theatre has cultivated a traditional; rule-oriented environment where control, close supervision and limited tolerance to any employment-related risks are of fundamental importance.

Additionally, the 'power distance' element explains some of the study's main results. The absence of any obvious or at least formal policies minimising status differentials was the primary signal affirming this argument. Beyond that however, there are also other indications illustrating how this Chinese cultural attribute is experienced at the theatre. The extended hierarchy merged with the centralisation of authority, alongside the hierarchical approach to information sharing and the deficiencies in employees' actual involvement and participation are some of them. Moreover, the identified distance that management maintains from non-managerial employees and the fact that, on majority, efforts to promote harmonisation and to come closer to the workforce were not identified. Ultimately, all these influence and negatively impact on aspects such as HRM's visibility and legitimacy; as well as impairing employees' understandability and sense of equity in the context of the theatre. In essence, the above testify how the 'power distance' tendency characterising the Chinese society is transferred within the organisational settings.

Equally, the 'family-focused' and the patriarchal character of the Chinese culture is also connected with important outcomes of this research. For instance, as the findings convey, the way that married women value their employment in the theatre can be largely explained by assessing their role as members the wider Chinese society. Their contentment and positive stance regarding particular provisions offered by the organisation mainly flows from their desire to meet the society's expectations. Indeed, trying to achieve the 'model' of the Chinese woman (e.g. to be proper wives and mothers; mostly accountable for family-caring responsibilities), this specific group of employees was particularly concerned (beyond employment security) with work-life balance provisions, working time regulations and the satisfactory salary.

Fundamentally, given that Chinese women have accepted their role in China, and provided that their most important needs are fulfilled, this makes them feel that they have achieved congruence between what the theatre offers to them and what they personally pursue. Of course, just like women, the majority of employees in the theatre are also 'entangled' and are affected to some extend by this cultural particularity. As argued, this is because they seek to achieve and remain within an occupation which is approved by their family and which is well-regarded by the wider society. Ultimately, this feeling is so strong that it even supersedes employees' negative experiences and own sense of dissatisfaction with their employment.

Moving away from the 'content' of HRM and examining the concept of HRM as 'processes' and 'perceptions' through the line o'intention-implementation-perception', here is no wonder why the attempt to associate HRM all the way to organisational performance has been defined as the 'Holy Grail'. Given its wide focus, this study can be appealing to many audiences. However, results are particularly valuable for those obsessed with linking different HRM-related variables with performance-related outcomes. This is simply because implicit assumptions about the most basic notions involved in the HRM causal chain need to be reconsidered. As other authors suggest (e.g. Gratton & Truss, 2003, Khilji & Wang, 2006, Purcell et al., 2009), it is essential to distinguish not only between HRM content and processes, but also to isolate 'intended', 'implemented' and 'perceived' HRM and to study the gaps between these links. In particular, this study draws attention to: The Core Plus Context specific HRM policies and practices; The importance of influential forces that shape the overall operation of HRM; The gaps between senior managers' intentions and department heads' implementations; The role of department heads and the barriers they face in effectively delivering HRM; The way that employees experience and perceive HRM; The reasons why employees have different and mostly negative perceptions.

This thesis was motivated by different authors' voices calling for the need to start considering research endeavors towards this particular direction. Purcell (1999: p36) and colleagues were among the first to recognise that 'we need to look on the whole of HRM choices and processes in the context of the external and internal environment' and that 'while knowledge of individual HR policies is not rare, the knowledge of how to create positively reinforcing blend of HR philosophy, process, practice and investment within a particular context is likely to be very rare' (Boxall & Purcell, 2003: p86).

Others have also pointed that such an approach represents an encouraging avenue for research. Wright & Boswell (2002: p262) stated that 'the dearth of research aimed at understanding how multiple (or systems) of HR practices impact individuals certainly suggest a ripe opportunity for future research'. Similarly, Liao et al. (2009: p385) propose that a promising route for researchers is to 'examine explicitly what gives rise to employees' differential experiences by considering the potential antecedents…such as employment status, organizational justice...' or to explore those features (referring to Bowen and Ostroff 2014 propositions) 'that may influence the level to which employees build shared perceptions about the HR system'. In its simplest form, this thesis has attempted to answer the question 'what actually happens once the strategy statement has been written', which has received scant attention (Gratton & Truss, 2003: p76). This becomes even more apparent in recent papers which emphasise that 'more research is needed on the way intended strategic goals and HR policies are implemented by direct supervisors, and how this is related to employee perceptions' (Veld et al., 2010: p353). Trying to fill the gaps in the literature, and having in mind the more critical voices in the field (e.g. Janssens & Steyaert, 2009, Delbridge, 2011, Guest, 2011), this project has followed an innovative approach. In essence, while not producing radical alternative, this study has been engaged in what Janssens & Steyaert (2019) call 'reconstructive reflexivity', with the ultimate purpose to bring in alternative paradigms and to highlight issues that have been marginalised throughout the years. Indeed, the aim was to offer 'alternative descriptions, interpretations, vocabularies and voices that could be taken into account, aiming to open up new avenues, paths and lines of interpretations that produce 'better' research ethically, politically, empirically and theoretically' (Janssens & Steyaert, 2009: p144). One challenge recognised by Guest's latest paper (2011) is to understand the management processes that affect HRM. This means it is not adequate to gather information only about the presence or absence of practices. Remaining at this level and exploring only the 'content' of HRM may be misleading given that written policies are not always implemented or perceived in the intended way. Therefore, Guest (2011: p10) highlights one important point that provides credence for this study.

Following a 'critical' perspective, he states that there is the need for multiple sources of information about both the presence and the implementation of HR practices. In the literature, there are studies with several focus areas / objectives which base their conclusions on senior members' suggestions (i.e. CEOs, HR directors, senior managers) and official / formal organisational documents (see Afiouni, 2007), others focusing exclusively on department heads (see Renwick, 2003) and others downplaying the role of the line and exploring HRM from employees' viewpoint (see Chang, 2005). Of course, there are also studies that incorporate these levels of analyses and provide a more comprehensive picture of how HRM may have an impact on employees and organisations (e.g. Truss, 2001, Gratton & Truss, 2003, Khilji & Wang, 2006, Boaden et al., 2008, Marchington & Wilkinson, 2008, Purcell & Kinnie, 2018, Purcell et al., 2009). It is within this spectrum of research that this study rests. 'Because managerial and employee reports of HR practices may differ in important ways, future researchers should explicitly recognise this distinction and acknowledge whether their

focus is on intended versus actual and perceived HR practices, and the implications for SHRM theory therein' (Nishii et al., 2008: p528).

The current project is based on the foundations of these perspectives of HRM and its design and key research questions are closely aligned with Boxall et al.'s (2008) and Delbridge's (2011) propositions. As seen from the Figure 11 below, concerning with 'what the management does and why', this study has investigated the 'content' of HRM and the forces shaping its operations at the workplace (research question 1). Concerning with 'how HRM process work', this aspect was accommodated by exploring the way that senior HR managers' intentions are implemented by department heads (research question 2). Trying to identify 'for whom and how well', the focus has shifted to non-managerial employees, exploring their experiences and perceptions and the factors influencing these (research question 3).

Limitations

It is acknowledged that this study is a humble beginning and has some limitations.

Beyond the methodological issues / limitations exemplified throughout Chapter 4, there are also some other concerns. Firstly, data were collected from a single case study organisation operating in the theatre sector of China. This becomes more important considering that the theatre is accepted as a strong and successful organisation in the country. Consequently, concerns regarding statistical generalisations of the findings may exist. As explained however, this project did not aim to generalise results to a broader population. Rather, the aim was to review existing theories and, based on empirical findings, to re-evaluate issues taken for granted, to offer alternative explanations and to link in a different-new way the pieces of the HRM puzzle. By following this case-based analysis and by studying such an organisation in depth the objective was to advance both empirical knowledge and theoretical insights of how HRM as a whole operate.

Secondly, a limitation of this study is the strict restrictions and confidentiality constraints placed upon the researcher. For gaining approval to carry out research activities, it was required that no information referred to in the thesis could reveal the identity of the theatre. In some cases, this inhibited the opportunity to offer more 'vivid' and detailed explanations about particular issues. This conservativism was also apparent throughout the whole thesis, something that is confirmed from the relatively small sample of participants, both in interviews and questionnaires.

Thirdly, perhaps, one of the most important limitations of this study is that it has not followed all the causal links from the stage of managerial intentions to employee outcomes. As articulated in Chapter 4, despite the initial idea of proceeding with correlations between employees' perceptions and their work-related outcomes, the low response rate, lack of sample representativeness and complications in the design of research tools inhibited this endeavor. Being aware of the importance for maintaining high standards, the decision was to stop at the level of employees' perceptions. Accepting the cost, this choice was followed in order to safeguard the study's credibility by not neglecting essential concerns expressed by Wright & Haggerty (2005) about causality and critiques of producing 'weak links but plausible linkages' (Edwards & Wright, 2001), which unavoidably would impair the validity and reliability of the final outcome. However, given that all the links up to the point of employees' perceptions have been scrutinised, this sets strong background knowledge for a future research exploring how these perceptions impact on their work-related attitudes and behaviours.

Future Research

The comprehensive focus and extensive literature review achieved for the different research areas have produced a wealthy theatre of information to be used for future reference. In particular, findings of this study set the foundations for different future research routes to be followed. One of these is to proceed with a similar framework and focus, but under different contextual particularities (i.e. organisations in other types of industries or similar organisations in other countries). This would allow a comparison of the findings and provide an opportunity to test the propositions more fully.

Moreover, a longitudinal study could also be a promising future research avenue. In the theatre, a common suggestion by senior HR managers was that the strategic identity of HRM is improving year by year. Also, a point of criticism by employees was that HRM is lacking because it has only recently been transformed into a pure HRM department. Returning to the same fieldwork, there are opportunities to investigate whether or not HRM in the theatre has changed. Similarly, within this longitudinal paradigm, it would be interesting to explore the views of those employees who were under the 'trial contract'.

Will these individuals achieve congruence between their employment in the theatre with their personal aspirations? Or will they become more cynical and less motivated?

A final proposition for future research perhaps is more radical and even provides a point of criticism for the thesis itself. Indeed, evaluating HRM from employees' position is an alternative way for measuring HRM and this avenue is desirable for gaining further insights about how managerial intentions are implemented and perceived. The expectation, which most of the times is confirmed, is that this process of intentions to implementations to perceptions is characterised by disconnection and gaps. Based on research findings, these inconsistencies are frequently debited to senior HR managers and to department heads; but rarely to non-managerial employees. However, will this be the case by reversing the HRM causal chain? Consequently, exploring how employees' behaviours, attitudes and perceptions affect department heads' implementations and senior managers' intentions perhaps has many insights to offer.

Advantages and Contributions

Despite its limitations, there are various strengths and noteworthy contributions to the existing literature. These can be fitted into three categories; theoretical; methodological and contextual. Advancing the ideas of Bowen and Ostroff (2004) and tailoring the models offered by Marchington & Wilkinson (2008), Purcell & Kinnie (2018) and Purcell et al (2009) in order to fit the needs of this study, this research contributes in the literature in a variety of ways.

In general, this study's design and focus have some value for the literature. A research paradigm was adopted emphasising the need to evaluate HRM as content (referring to the degree that organisations are effective in adopting the different types of integrations and alignments) and HRM as 'processes' and 'perceptions' (referring to the degree that organisations achieve an effective process of intended-implemented-perceived HRM). Collecting information only for one of these aspects is insufficient, offering a partial understanding. The main conclusion is that HRM should not be evaluated only as practices; as processes, or as perceptions. None of these on their own are sufficient. For this thesis it is all about how these are linked together.

Thus, suggesting that all these three areas are equally important for gaining a comprehensive picture of HRM, this project applied the theoretical propositions and empirically tested their substance. In particular, this project was in the search for what Bowen & Ostroff (2004) calls a 'strong HRM Situation', or what Purcell et al. (2009) refer to as 'Human Resource Advantage'. These two propositions are interrelated, since both reveal the importance of evaluating HRM from different lenses.

For example, Bowen and Ostroff draw attention to 'HRM content' by stressing the importance of policies and practices and how these should be driven by organisations' HR strategy. In a similar vein, Purcell and colleagues refer to 'Human Capital Advantage', pointing the need for developing successful policies and practices and producing horizontal alignments / vertical integrations. Also, discussing about 'HRM processes', Bowen and Ostroff (p206) 'concentrate on understanding what features of HRM process can lead employees to appropriately interpret and respond to the information conveyed in HRM practices'. Proposing an equivalent notion – the 'Organisational Process Advantage', Purcell and colleagues focus on developing routines and processes required to put these practices into operation as intended.

Ultimately, achieving these two elements, the outcome is to reach a 'strong HRM situation' (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), or, as Purcell et al. (2009) refer to it, to realise a 'Human Resource Advantage'. Under the spectrum of HRM content, this thesis disagrees with the mimetic metamorphism within HRM and disproves claims about the universality of 'best' practices. Examining the organisational context, a more 'situationally-specific' theory is proposed. Empirical findings indicate that different forces (see Table 11) influence the operation of HRM. Based on these findings, the theoretical argument put forward is the need for an implemented CPC specific approach to HRM. By drawing attention to both 'core' plus 'context specific' aspects, this proposition represents a step forward since it helps to facilitate the tensions that exist between the different models of HRM. Building on that, this conceptualization highlights the 'enactment' aspect, thus avoiding the criticism surrounding many of the prescriptive propositions existing in the HRM literature.

Under the spectrum of HRM processes and perceptions, empirical observations show that the majority of HRM elements are not delivered and perceived as initially intended. As articulated, this happens for a range of reasons. At this stage the attempt was to identify where problems arise and how these cause the observed inconsistencies-gaps between managerial espousals-rhetoric (intentions), department heads' enactment (implementations) and employees' experiences and perceptions. Findings revealed that all organisational members share their portion of responsibility, stressing the need to return back to the 'basics' and examine why this happens before rushing to relate HRM with performance.

Beyond theoretical contributions, the research design / methodology followed could also be considered as a valuable input. Through constant triangulations at all levels, the project tackled issues under investigation from multiple perspectives. This research, based on the indications and the recognised 'pitfalls' observed in other studies, followed an all-inclusive, creative approach.

Regarding the research methods, both interviews and questionnaires were adopted and adapted. Following a triangulated framework, the current research followed a third - a hybrid paradigm by opposing to Guba's (1990: p81) declarations that 'accommodation. Between paradigms is impossible since we are led to vastly diverse,

disparate, and totally antithetical ends'. Mixed methods were seen as the paradigm that bridges the schism between the two extremes of qualitative versus quantitative paradigms and as an approach that develops a model closer to reality. This route offered greater flexibility and in essence, merging different methods was seen as an inclusive 'third wave' and an alternative research paradigm (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Ultimately, through this approach, it was feasible to merge different strategies, thus utilising the strengths and minimising the weaknesses of the selected methods (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, Johnson & Turner, 2003).

In terms of context, in addition to organisational-related data (i.e. theatre's website, organisational directives / documents), other sources beyond the theatre were of great importance in understanding HRM in the particular context. As articulated also in Chapter 4, participation and information drawn from conferences / annual meetings held by HRM, data from Chinese HRM-related journals-periodicals and material from the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance in China were all very supportive. In terms of participants, those were also drawn both from within and beyond the organisation. In particular, outside the organisation, the contribution of academic peers, supervisors and the wider academic community in People, Management and Organisation division of Manchester Business School, HR academics and HR practitioners within the theatre and other industries in China was valuable. Of the most important individuals however who provided crucial information were Dr Stavrou- Eleni Costea (one of the leading researchers in HRM in China); the the party's representative of the theatre and one senior manager who presented his ideas about the current and future role of HRM in the theatre sector of China.

Within the organisation, and to support the theme of the research, this study avoided 'single participant's perspective'. Senior HR managers and organisational documents were involved for exploring intentions; department heads were used for studying the 'implementation' aspect; and non-managerial employees facilitated to capture their experiences and perceptions. This approach was adopted based on the belief that, in order to gain a holistic picture, there is the need to compare the responses of those responsible for developing the different HRM policies, those in charge for implementing these policies into actual practice and those at the 'receiving end' who are mostly affected by these practices. Overall, the aim was not to remain at surface observations (i.e. just 'ticking' the number of practices or measuring their frequency), but to explore HRM from the eyes of 'all the parties involved'.

Summarising, had this study merely relied on a single participant suggestions (i.e. senior HR managers) it would be dangerous to gain a misleading impression that the case study organisation employs a system of HRM to good effect. Just like Guest (2011:p10) argues, 'there is a need for multiple sources of information about both the presence and the implementation of HR practices...it is naive to assume that a senior HR manager can provide information about local practice either in terms of whether practices are implemented or whether they are effective'. Similarly, having remained only on questionnaire indications, this could be problematic given that there would be no opportunity to discover the actual nature of HRM through organisational members' propositions. It is believed that such an approach would not allow for the exploration of essential qualitative issues (i.e. the 'why' organisational members come to have such beliefs and ideas).

Concluding, the fact that this research was carried out in China and in the particular context of theatre sector is also a valuable contribution. This is because essential information about aspects that are related to the way that HRM appears within China are presented. Beyond that, this study has also unveiled the key forces steam-

ing both from the wider environment and theatre industry influencing the operation of HRM.

Even though the significance of differentiating between content; process and perceptions of HRM, as well as the necessity to distinguish rhetoric as opposed to reality have been recognised in other studies, this is the first known empirical research on 'HRM in the theatre Sector of China: Intention-Implementation-Perception'.
By employing a contextualised case study approach; by merging together different methods, sources of information and levels of participants; it was feasible to 'see' below surface and tap into the actual reality. This study adopted a 'pluralistic' approach to HRM research, presented multiple perspectives of HR-related aspects and portrayed the different and mostly oppositional views of those affected by the operation of HRM.

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