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Strategic human resource management and the decline of employee focus

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to critique the shift from employee focus to strategy focus in the role of HRM. It is our contention that, contrary to assumptions of unitarism, organizational goals and employee goals remain largely in conflict. We conceptualize unitarism at three levels – “normative, conceptual, and empirical” in order to explain the disparity between strategic HRM's rhetorical promotion of unity of organizational and employee goals and actual HRM practice of privileging strategic interests over employee interests. We analyze responses to a national survey of the membership of the professional body of the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) to illustrate how HRM professionals prioritize competing strategic and employee foci, finding support for the argument that HRM professionals have made the shift to a strategic mindset. In so doing, HRM professionals have marginalized employee-focused HRM responsibilities and ethics activities. We discuss the implications of the decline in

employee focus within HRM and suggest further areas of research development.

Research highlights

â–° We critique the shift from employee focus to strategy focus in the role of HRM. â–° We analyze a national survey of members of the Australian Human Resources Institute. â–° We consider how HRM professionals prioritize competing strategic and employee foci. â–° Findings show that HR professionals have marginalized employee-focused responsibilities. â–° We discuss the implications of the decline in employee focus within HRM.



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Keywords

HRM profession; Unitarism; HRM role; Responsibility; Ethics

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