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Impact of Human Resources Management on Organizational Effectiveness – Still More Questions than Answers

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The article presents an analysis of the previous research concerned with the effect of human resources management on organizational effectiveness. The first part discusses the development of research in the historical aspect and focuses on the role it may play in popularization of the concept of human capital management. The last part discusses the basic problems related to empirical verification of interrelations between HRM and organizational effectiveness.

Keywords: human resources management, human capital, human capital management, organizational effectiveness, cause and effect relationships.

Introduction

The past 20 years, we have been witnessing the growing interest in relations between activities in the field of human resources management (HRM) and organizational economic effectiveness. Mutual relations of these two areas are becoming the point of interest of not only scientists, but also management practitioners. The representatives of scientific environment aim at showing and proving, by means of more and more sophisticated statistical methods, the impact of activities performed by personnel departments on the economic situation of an organization, while the practitioners, in particular personnel managers, are looking for arguments justifying e.g. the increase in spending on employee development. In the subject literature numerous examples of researches indicating the positive impact of human resources management on economic organizational effectiveness can be found. However, the same research, forming the basis for statements

often used in scientific discussions in the form of “a key to maintain good profitability of a company and good condition of the economy is the productivity of workforce, namely human capital” or “this capital (the human capital), properly motivated to work efficiently and developed by employing talented employees and continuous mastering of skills necessary for manufacturing products and providing services of high quality becomes the factor of competitive advantage of a company, frequently operating in the international field” (Fitz-enz, 2001, p. 15; Masłyk-Musiał, 2011, p. 9), are questioned and criticized because of methodical errors made at the time of their conduct as well as not entirely explained causal and effect relationships. The purpose of this article is a critical analysis of interrelations between human resources management and organizational effectiveness, along with discussing the major problems appearing in the course of research on this type of interrelations.

1. The development of research on the relations between HRM and organizational effectiveness from a historical perspective

Since the 1980s a growing interest in relations between human resources management and organizational effectiveness can be observed. Subsequent years, above all, in the late 1990s and in the early 21st century, brought in this field many empirical researches supplemented with an appropriate theoretical structure. The achievements in the literature became so comprehensive that they enabled separating five phases through which this area of science developed (Guest, 2011).

The first phase is the 1980s. At that time theoretical basics of the concept of human resources management was established, which pointed to the potential relations with organizational effectiveness. They usually include the Michigan model, the Harvard model or the strategic model of human resources management by R. S. Schuler (Lundy, Cowling, 2000, p. 84). To the greatest extent these relations were presented in the so-called Harvard model, which distinguishes four main areas of human resources management: employee participation, employee mobility, remuneration systems and system of work. This model assumes that actions undertaken in the mentioned areas have impact on the results in the area of human resources, in the form of increase in involvement, competencies, consistency and effectiveness-and in the form of long-term effects on satisfaction of the entity, organizational effectiveness and social well-being. These outlined relations became the source of the first empirical research, published mainly in the mid 1990s. On their basis, the second phase of development in the area

concerned – called empiricism can be distinguished. During this period, pioneering works were published by, i.a.: M. Huselid, J. B. Arthur, C. Ichniowski, K. Shaw, G. Prenzushi, J.P. MacDuffie, J.Delery or D. Doty. A short description of their research works has been presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The first research works concerning the relations between human capital management and organizational effectiveness

Author	Methodology	Results
MacDuffie JP., Krafcik J. F. (1992)	The research was conducted in 70 car assembly plants representing 24 companies and 17 countries	Companies with limited process of production are characterized by higher productivity and quality of the manufactured products as compared to the companies using mass production system; In companies with mass production system the employee development strategy is focused on a deep specialization in a given field, without developing additional skills. In turn, in companies with limited production system the employee development is focused on growth in their knowledge, skills, motivation in order to solve any emerging problems. The success of companies with limited production system is a result of deep decentralization of responsibility for the end production, the occurrence of works requiring skills in several fields, wide classification of work posts or increased safety of employment.
Pfeffer J. (1994)	The identification of five best prospering companies in the years 1972-1992 and seeking among them common areas	All the companies had a common feature: their functioning was based on practices shaping high commitment of employees, in particular safety of employment, modern selection methods, high pays, motivation bonuses, easy access to information, participation and decentralization and a wide range of offered trainings.
Arthur J. B. (1994)	The research covered 30 steel mills located in the USA	The research was focused on the relations between two configurations of the human resources management system. The first configuration was based on control (management based on determined principles, procedures, measurable work results), on the other hand, the second on commitment (combining on the psychological plane the organizational objectives with the objectives of an employee). Companies where the system of human resources management was based on commitment, were characterized by higher productivity, lower waste level and lower employees fluctuation.

Author	Methodology	Results
Huselid M. (1995)	The research covered 968 companies	The research presented interrelations between systems of highly effective work and fluctuation, productivity, sales or profit. The research proved that improvement in the HPWS ratio by one standard deviation affects reduction in fluctuations by 7.05%, growth in sales by 16% per one employee, increase in the market value of the company by \$ 18641 per one employee and increase in the profit of the company by 3814 \$ per one employee hired
Delery J., Doty D. H. (1996)	The research was conducted in 216 banks	The purpose was presentation of interrelations between and organizational effectiveness and the structure of the human resources management system from the universal, situational and configuration perspective. The strongest relations with organizational effectiveness was demonstrated by the universal perspective.
Ichniowski C, Shaw K., Prennushi G. (1997)	The research covered 36 steel trade plants	The research proved that innovative practices of human resources management constituting a uniform system (motivation bonuses, participation in management, a broad trainings offer, work in task teams etc.) have a positive impact on the productivity of employees.

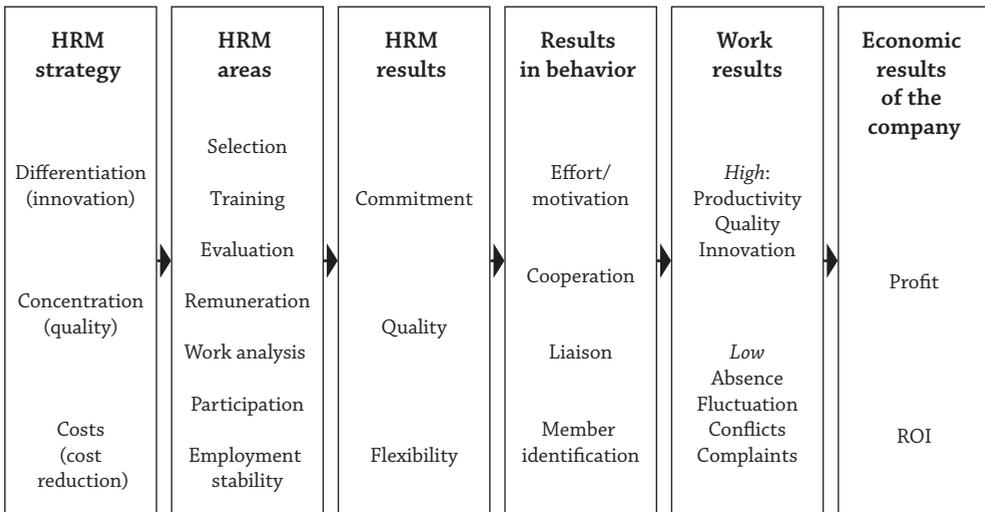
Source: prepared by the author on the basis of: (Yeung, Berman, 1997; Huselid, 1995; Arthur 1994; Ichnowski, Shaw, Prennushi, 1997; Delery, Doty, 1996).

The publication of the first research results concerning the relations between human resources management and organizational effectiveness aroused very high interest in this area of science. The results were widely commented and analyzed, both in terms of methodology as well as their position in the previous theoretical constructs. Attention was also paid to any kind of selection of the HRM areas taken into consideration in the research, measurement of those areas by means of various, incomparable methods or the lack of general theory concerning the analyzed relations. This type of criticism was the third phase in development of the analyzed area.

The answer to a wave of criticism was theoretical proposals of many scientists in the form of model depictions of the relations between human resources management and organizational effectiveness, an example of which may be D. Guest's model (Fig. 1). In the proposed model, D. Guest starts with the selection of strategy according to the classification proposed by M. Porter, which determines the activities implemented in the basic fields of human resources management. These, in turn, are reflected in the effectiveness of HRM system in the form of commitment, quality or flexibility and changes in the area of employee behaviour. The

final results that may occur in the organization cover higher productivity, quality or innovation of products and/or services as well as lower absenteeism, fluctuation and the number of complaints. These effects are visible in such economic parameters as profit or rate of return. Similar dependencies can be distinguished in other models whose authors are J. Paauwe and R. Richardson and B. E. Becker, M. Huselid, P. Pickus and M. Spratt (Ławrynowicz, 2004).

Fig. 1. The relations between human resources management and economic results in an organization – Guest’s model



Source: Guest, 1997.

After the phase related to proposals with regard to theoretical models a phase occurred in which much broader extent in the research conducted, opinions of employees on HRM practices used in the examined organizations started to be taken into account (Guest, 2011). This change took place under the influence of criticism of data collection methods about the HRM systems operating in organizations. In many cases questions about a given area of human resources management were addressed directly to the representatives of personnel departments who expressed their views on the undertaken activities or the used tools and methods very positively, without analyzing the real receipt by employees. It was also observed that very little attention in research was paid to changes in behaviour of particular employees, and it was them who were a unique platform between the practitioners of human resources management and economic effectiveness of an organization.

The last phase being witnessed now, is characterized by a growing degree of sophistication and complexity. This is proven by the use of complex statistical methods, analyzing the effects of human resources management not only on the level of an organization, but also individual and group ones, and this use to a definitely greater extent of achievements from other domains of science, e.g. psychology.

Attempts to present the impact of HRM on the economic performance of the organization are undertaken also in Polish literature. As evidenced by studies showing relationships between HRM and enterprise innovations (Borkowska, Laskowska, 2010). In these studies, three types of HRM models were distinguished, i.e.:

1. A general model of HRM (Model 1)
2. HRM model based on the concept of HPWS (High Performance Work Systems) (Model 2)
3. HR model based on the concept HIWP (High Involvement Work Practices) (Model 3).

Highlighted models were the starting point in the cited studies. Their authors tried to show the relationship between the architecture of HRM and innovation or selected financial metrics. One of these metrics was the market value of organization. According to the survey, the greatest impact on the market value has increase HRM index by one standard deviation in the model 3 (0.677%), then in model 2 of 0.414% and in model 1 – only about 0.263% (Borkowska, Laskowska, 2010, p. 73).

2. The dependences between HRM and organizational effectiveness as an argument for change in terminology

The briefly presented evolution of research on the influence of HRM on organizational effectiveness may become over time the foundation of changes leading to determining activities within the personnel function as human capital management. Currently, such activities are defined as human resources management and the majority of research is analyzed in terms of relations between HRM and organizational effectiveness. At this point, it is worth noting that HRM is the current concept of implementation of personnel functions of an organization, defined, i.a., by:

- treating employees as the basic resources of an organization, ensuring implementation of its objectives, especially the source of competitive advantage,
- strategic connection of personnel matters with the economic strategy,
- commitment of the management, in particular line management,

- undertaking activities aimed at combining interests of both employers and employees (Król, 2006, p. 55).

This concept, under the influence of many internal and external conditions is subject to continuous evolution. One of them is growing importance of human capital at all levels of social and economic life and the implementation of achievements of the theory of human capital to the level of an organization. In connection with the above, some scientists are of the opinion that the contemporary human resources management is evolving towards human capital management. A. Poczowski states that “the future human capital management will be to a lower degree a sequence process of recruitment, assessment, remuneration, development and employment reduction, and more and more an interactive, non-linear configuration of particular elements comprising the system of human resources management, which will constitute the network of value creation” (Poczowski, 2003, p. 46). In turn, D. Urlich and W. Brockbank analyze the areas which personnel managers should pay particular attention to in order to maximize the value that departments run by them generate. These areas include: the knowledge of internal and external business conditions, serving internal and external stakeholders, shaping HR activities, creating HR and ensuring professionalism of the HR department (Urlich, Brockbank, 2008, p. 23). The identification of values that may be provided by personnel departments to different groups of recipients both internal and external and, above all, their measurement and informing are becoming the main characteristic feature of activities referred to as human capital management. This point of view emerges in the definitions of this concept. In one of them, human capital management was recognized as “an approach to managing people which treats the employees as a strategic resources of an organization and during which analyses and measurements are conducted systematically and which conducts assessment of values delivered under the adopted personnel policy and implemented practices” (Weiss, Finn, 2005). Based on the abovementioned deliberations, it can be assumed that human capital management, as compared to human resources management, puts greater emphasis on the capital perspective of executed personnel processes by showing the material and intangible benefits that an organization may gain when these processes are characterized by high quality. Therefore, the research on the relations between HRM and organizational effectiveness aimed at presentation of values provided by personnel departments at organizational level, may significantly contribute to increasingly frequent determination of the personnel function as human capital management filling the term with appropriate and verified in practice theoretical content.

3. Problem areas at the meeting point of human resources and organizational effectiveness

When seeking the relations between areas whose wide range and complicated character is visible not only at the theoretical level, but also practical, it is impossible not to note many problems and traps which to a smaller or larger extent make it difficult to recognize them. The literature on the subject indicates that in spite of 20 years of research and discussions of many scientists still there are unresolved problems which result in the fact that many applications resulting from the conducted research should be approached very carefully.

The essential problem appears already at the initial stage of designing the research. It is related to operationalization of key terms – human resources management and organizational effectiveness. As indicated by J. Paauwe and P. Boselie, human resources management is sometimes defined in the context of personnel department effectiveness, knowledge, skills and competences of the employees, single practices or a package of practices forming a consistent system (Paauwe, Boselie, 2005). They add at the same time that to a large extent the notion of HRM includes also practices or a set of them.

Despite large scientific achievements, both in the Polish literature and foreign one, still there is no full consent with regard to the areas/practices constituting human resources management. When analyzing this problem only in publications of Polish scientists, it can be observed that the number of areas of human resources management ranges from 4, most often observed as employing, employees development, remuneration and assessment, to 20, including shaping organizational structures, employees records, selection of leaders, social services of employees, communication, cooperation with trade unions or compliance with the labor law (Kozioł, Piechnik-Kurdziel, Kopeć, 2000, pp. 27-29; Łukasiewicz, 2009, pp. 47-48). Lack of detailed and widely accepted number of those areas results in the fact that during research on the influence of HRM on the organizational effectiveness their executors in a subjective manner select a set of practices, on the basis of which they assess the level of human resources management. It is confirmed by research carried out by P. Boselie, G. Dietz and C. Bonn. In 104 articles analyzed by them concerning the discussed relationships, they demonstrated that scientists referred to 26 various practices. Despite such a wide range of research they clearly stated that it is impossible to indicate the agreed list of areas, which are components of human resources management. Most often, however, in the analyzed research such practices appeared as: personnel development, remuneration, assessment and recruitment and selection (Boselie, Dietz, Bonn, 2005).

The second key notion requiring operationalization is effectiveness. This is one of key terms used in economic sciences and is applied, above all, as a criterion of evaluation of activities performed at the level of entire companies as well as in their different areas. When attempting to define effectiveness, it should be noted that this is a very broad term and may be discussed from different perspectives. However, most often this term reflects the relations between objectives, expenditures and results. When it is referred to the whole organization, then the most important role is played by the degree of objective achievement. Thus, we may assume that an effective organization is one which achieves its objectives (Majowska, 2012). The notion can be also examined in two dimensions: market and economic ones. The market dimension is expressed in shaping the optimum structure of added value provided to the client, while the economic dimension is analyzed in the context of relations of expenditures to the benefits obtained thanks to them, and exemplary definitions of efficiency in this dimension have been presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The selected definitions of effectiveness

Definitions	Source
Effectiveness (economic) – a result of business operations, defined by the relation of the achieved result to the outlays	<i>Encyklopedia Popularna PWN</i> , Warsaw 1997, vol. 3, p. 35
Effectiveness (economic) – a result of business operations, defined by the relation of the obtained effect to the outlays	<i>Słownik Języka Polskiego</i> , PWN, Warsaw 1996, vol. 1, p. 484
Effectiveness (economic) – the method of measuring the efficacy and purposefulness of given economic operations, expressed in the comparison (relation) of values of the achieved results to the factors used to obtain it	<i>Popularna Encyklopedia Powszechna</i> , FOGRA Publishing House, Krakow 1995, vol. 5, p. 21
Effectiveness – it is assessed on the basis of the achieved results to necessary outlays incurred to obtain these results	Pasieczny (1987, p. 14)
Effectiveness – relation of effects to investments	Melich (1980, p. 17)

Source: Matwiejczuk, 2000.

Despite the outlined problems of definition nature effectiveness measurement at the level of an organization in the case of the analyzed research is made most often in three areas by means of adequately selected measures. These areas include:

- financial result – (profit, sales value, market share, Tobin's Q ratio)
- organizational result – (productivity, quality)
- result of personnel activities (the level of an entity) – (satisfaction, involvement, absence, fluctuation) (Paauwe, 2009).

Referring to the results of already quoted research whose authors are P. Boselie, G. Dietz and C. Bonn, in half of the 104 analyzed research concerning the relations between human resources management and efficiency of an organization, measurement of efficiency is conducted with the use of financial measures, such as profit or sales value (Boselie, Dietz, Bonn, 2005). However, these measures raise many controversies. Firstly, between the practices and final financial results of an organization we can notice a very large distance in the context of cause and effect relationships. It can be observed on the presented Guest's model (Fig. 1). Actions within HRM practices affect the economic performance of an organization but indirectly, subsequently by the results of HRM system, the results in the field maintain and work results. During such impacts it is very difficult to separate the impact of practices on even the results of work in the form of productivity, from the impact of other factors determining changes in this area. Such factors may be technological changes or effects of works in the field of research and development. Secondly, financial results in the form of profit or value of sales in many cases depend on the factors located beyond the organization. Examples can be changes in the price of raw materials on the world commodity exchanges or changes in legal regulations increasing or decreasing competition on a given market (customs duties, licences, etc.). Changes in these external factors can significantly affect the financial results of many organizations, thus hindering the examination of the analyzed relations. How to demonstrate that the growth in sales entirely or in some part results from changes in the motivational system, rather than increasing product prices by competition, which took place at that time?

It becomes problematic in the field of efficiency to restrict measures only to the internal area of operations. Organizations operate in some environment which on the one hand affects their activities, while on the other making changes in this environment often becomes the purpose of the organization. This two-way impact is well reflected in the theory of stakeholders or intensely promoted and developed idea of corporate social responsibility. With such assumptions, the efficiency of an organization should be also examined in from of e.g. taking care of natural environment or shaping local communities.

If some assumptions concerning key terms, namely human resources management and efficiency of an organization are made, bearing in mind restrictions resulting from them, the next question arises which bothers the scientific environment. How to carry out empirical research to obtain credible results?

Very important conclusions in this respect result from the research conducted by P. Wright, T. Gardner, L. Moynihan and M. Allen (Wright, Gardner, Moynihan, Allen, 2005). In their deliberations they start with reminding the conditions to be met by a cause-effect relation for it to be considered significant, i.e.:

- between the presumed cause and effect covariance must occur,
- there is temporary priority of cause over effect,
- the researcher has the possibility to control or totally exclude other factors that may affect the observed relation.

After conducting an analysis of 68 researches concerning the discussed relationships the quoted authors came to surprising conclusions. A vast majority of them do not meet these three conditions at the same time, and the least frequently met condition was 2 and 3, while condition 1, covariance occurrence, was met in all the researches. On the basis of these observations they distinguished four approaches to research on relations between HRM and efficiency of an organization. They are presented as follows:

- post – predictive approach, which consists in HRM practices measurement after the time for which financial results are available. Such an approach to the research leads measurement of the dependences between HRM practices and the past economic results and even suggest a reverse dependence than the one expected;
- a retrospective approach – for the purpose of preserving temporary priority the data on HRM practices and financial performance are collected simultaneously, given that the assessment of the former is made for the period preceding obtaining financial results. Most often, the respondents are requested in such situations to analyze and evaluate HRM practices that took place even several years ago. For obvious reasons, information obtained this way may not fully transfer the reality that took place at that time;
- simultaneous approach – the data on HRM practices and financial performance are collected within the same period. In this case the period is missing when possible changes in practices can be observed in financial results;
- predictive approach – information about HRM practices is collected in advance, sometimes even 3 year long in relation to the data about financial results.

From among 68 researches subject to analysis as many as 50 were based on the post-predictive approach and only 10 on the predictive approach with temporary priority of cause over effect. Such a situation, namely non-compliance with fundamental research principles, results in the fact that most of the research showing the relationships between HRM and the efficiency of an organization can be easily negated. There are several reasons for excessive use of the post-predictive approach. The most important of them is limited time that the researcher may

devote to empirical research (data collected in the possibly fastest manner), limited financial means (long-term research require greater outlays) or the desire for rapid publication of the article in scientific magazines.

It is also worth mentioning the problem that appears in the case of this type of research, resulting from the so-called reverse dependence (Paauwe, Boselie, 2005). Namely, the assumption that the relationships between HRM and economic results of an organization are unidirectional may very rapidly prove to be incorrect. Companies with very good financial situation are more willing to invest in human capital of their employees by offering greater range of trainings or expanding the motivational system with additional components than companies in a more difficult financial situation. Also in the time of economic slowdown many companies may limit spending related to human resources management, e.g. by offering a smaller number of trainings. This type of situations suggest that in theoretical models we should also consider a reverse dependence, than the one assumed. It raises another question – how to solve this problem in the course of empirical research.

Summary

The complexity of the issue, namely the relations between human resources management and efficiency of an organization, results in the fact that in spite of substantial scientific achievements in this field there are still many areas requiring further conceptual and research work. In particular, we should seek answers to basic questions fundamental for this type of relations. They are as follows:

- what should be understood under the term human resources management? How to operationalize the term? How to measure it?
- how to define organizational effectiveness? How to measure organizational effectiveness?
- what is the cause and effect relationships between human resources management and organizational effectiveness?
- how to examine in practice a reverse dependence of relations?
- how to control and measure the impact of other factors on economic performance of an organization?
- how to organize the course of research? How to gather data concerning human resources management?

It is difficult to expect that quite rapidly we can successfully obtain answers to these questions, since some of them would require the consensus of the scientific environment for instance in the terminology issues, which at the moment, appears

to be very unlikely. The remaining ones require in turn further theoretical and empirical works and closer cooperation of the scientific environment by combining various scientific disciplines. Every progress in this area will bring us closer to recognize real interrelations between HRM and efficiency of an organization and, at the same time, provide additional knowledge to personnel managers with regard to the most effective methods of human resources management.

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Резюме

Измерение связей между управлением человеческими ресурсами и эффективностью организации – все время больше вопросов, чем ответов

В статье представлен анализ проведенных до сих пор исследований в области связей между управлением человеческими ресурсами и эффективностью организации. В первой части статьи обсуждается развитие этих исследований в историческом аспекте, а также обращается внимание на роль, которую могут сыграть результаты этих

исследований в популяризации концепции управления человеческими ресурсами. Последняя часть содержит обзор основных проблем, связанных с измерением этого типа связей.

Ключевые слова: управление человеческими ресурсами, человеческий капитал, управление человеческим капиталом, эффективность организации, причинно – последственные связи.

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