Don't know, don't care: An exploration of evidence based knowledge and practice in human resource management

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades the integrity (alignment of words and deeds) of the Human Resource Management (HRM) profession has been questioned by scholars who have identified a gap between the rhetoric of 'people are our most important asset' and the reality of 'impersonal economic rationalism'. In a more recent, and as yet unconnected, stream of research there has been concern about a research-practice gap in HRM. This article draws on both streams of research to explain why HRM Does not implement evidence based practice. It focuses on research indicating that HRM practitioners are not incentivized to learn about evidence based practice and develops theory proposing that their satisfaction with the status quo reflects a value proposition based on utilitarian instrumentalism. Further to this, it is proposed that management's focus on the short-term drives and obfuscates current approaches. It concludes that neither academia nor HRM practitioners are incentivized to change current practice with negative consequences for employees, organizations, and HRM practitioners. Arguments are supported and illustrated with High Performance Work Practices and solutions are proposed to implement evidence based practice.

1. Introduction

The research-practice gap in HRM has received recent attention (Briner & Rousseau, 2011; Kaufman, 2012; Rynes, 2012; Rynes, Colbert, & Brown, 2002; Rynes, Giluk, & Brown, 2007) and the cost of this gap regarding competitive advantage through human capital has been proposed (Terpstra & Limpaphayom, 2012). A number of studies have shown that, despite availability of theoretical and empirical advice, many organizations failed to take up effective approaches to HRM (Becker & Gerhart, 1996; de Gama, McKenna, & Peticca-Harris, 2012; Kane, Crawford, & Grant, 1999). There are also questions about whether HRM as a function charged with designing and implementing formal systems for managing people has had a positive impact in its 25 to 30 years of existence (Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010; Kaufman, 2012) coupled with evidence that there is little change in HRM over two decades (Lawler & Boudreau, 2012).

It is proposed that the current divide between research and practice in HRM is problematic for organizations that fail to achieve competitive advantage through people (Gill & Meyer, 2011; Huselid, 1995; Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999); for employees who are treated as 'resources' or inputs rather than 'humans' (de Gama et al., 2012; Legge, 1995); and for HRM professionals who fail to develop competencies that could enhance their organizational status (Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, & Younger, 2007).

HRM's inability to implement evidence based management has been attributed to the divide between academics and practitioners in terms of *lack of awareness* of what the other side knows and cares about; *lack of belief* or confidence in the knowledge generated or held by the other side; and *lack of implementation* of knowledge or ideas, even in the face of awareness and belief (Lawler, 2007;

Rynes, 2012; Rynes et al., 2007). Recent evidence confirms a knowing and belief gap in that practitioners do not have knowledge of evidence based management and do not seek or value this knowledge (Rynes et al., 2002; Rynes et al., 2007). There is also some evidence on a knowing-doing gap in that HRM practitioners implement practices they know are not optimum for employees (de Gama et al., 2012). To date the connection between these three antecedents has not been clearly made e.g., how lack of ability to implement may influence lack of knowledge and belief.

Most attention regarding HRM's failure to implement evidence based management has thus far focused on knowledge transfer from academics to HRM practitioners. In particular, there may be a substantial divide between academics and practitioners (Kieser & Leiner, 2009; Lawler, 2007; Rynes et al., 2002; Rynes et al., 2007) which reduces the transfer of research knowledge. Further, academics may not be incentivized to bridge the research-practice gap (e.g., Bartunek & Rynes, 2014). Theory has been developed on why academics may not transfer knowledge to practitioners but little attention has been given to investigating why practitioners may not seek evidence based knowledge. Further, there is an assumption that closing the knowledge gap will translate into implementation of evidence based management with certification of HRM practitioners being a recent focus of academia (see fall 2015 issue of People & Strategy and 2012 issue of Human Resource Management Review devoted to HR certification) and professional bodies (Society of Human Resource Management, 2016) as a vehicle to achieve this. However, whilst good management depends on the implementation of practices based on research evidence, managers may not make rational choices and instead implement decisions based on dogma and belief, and even self-interest (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006). Consequently, this article moves beyond the divide between academics and practitioners to consider the organizational context (Pfeffer & Cohen, 1984) – namely the HRM function's power relationship with management (Ferris & King, 1991) – that influences HRM's intentions to implement evidence based management. The focus is placed on HRM practitioners' motivation to seek and use evidence based knowledge in a context that (i) is not supportive of evidence based management and (ii) affords HRM practitioners' limited power to effect change. More specifically, this article contributes to understanding on why HRM does not implement evidence based management or value evidence based knowledge. This article will make three contributions. First, it reviews and consolidates what is known about the causes of the research-practice gap which is currently deemed to be a key antecedent of HRM's failure to implement evidence based management. Second, it sheds light on reasons why HRM practitioners may favour the status quo rather than seek and implement evidence based knowledge. Third, recommendations are developed for academics and practitioners to embed evidence based management in organizations that move beyond existing solutions focussing on HRM competency and certification. The proposed model that is presented in this article is outlined in Fig. 1 below.

2. Causes of low evidence based management in HRM: a review of extant literature

To date most attention on evidence based management in HRM has been focused on HRM practitioners' lack of knowledge. It has been proposed that practitioners operate in a vacuum of knowledge (Taylor, Keelty, & McDonnell, 2002) with Rynes et al.'s (2002) research finding that practitioners' knowledge did not align with research evidence. She and her colleagues cite an 'unimpressive' average level of knowledge, high variability in knowledge, and poor alignment between academic and practitioner beliefs. This was a 'best case' scenario given they sampled the highest-level HRM practitioners and those with less knowledge were more likely to be non-respondents. Specifically, Rynes et al.'s (2002) research found that HR managers typically do not know the evidence with less than 1% of HR managers reading the academic literature regularly (Rynes et al., 2002).

To date the reasons for the knowledge gap in HRM have focused on the failure of academics to consider translation of their findings for practitioners or to communicate in a way that practitioners can understand. It has been proposed that HRM practitioners do not have access to academic knowledge because HRM roles may be filled by managers without HRM expertise who are 'passing
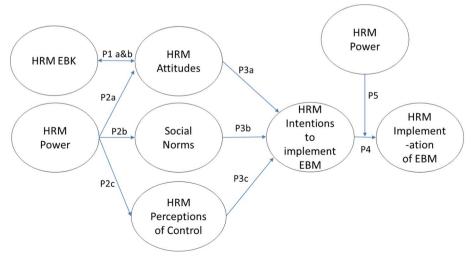

Fig. 1. Power and HRM practitioner intentions to implement evidence based management.

through' on their way in or out of general management roles (Lawler, 2007; Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2013). Those practitioners who do have an HRM qualification may not be educated in evidence based management because many faculty are adjunct or permanent faculty who are not research active and who are more likely to teach than research (Lawler, 2007). Further, graduate students may not recognize that their acquired knowledge can be superseded over time, requiring continuous updating (Lawler, 2007).

Further, there is a decline in practitioner publications in academic journals shifting journals' focus to rigorous academic topics which limits communication of research to practitioners (Rynes et al., 2007). Greater corporate concern for protecting intellectual property, together with increased global competition and limited time and resources, means practitioners are unlikely to conduct research or publish their research which means that academics are asking the research questions and interpreting the answers (Briner & Rousseau, 2011). However, academics are not incentivized to present their work in practitioner journals because academic incentive structures regarding promotion and tenure do not reward publication in practitioner outlets and academics may be reluctant to have their scientifically rigorous work published alongside articles that diminish or contradict research findings (Rynes et al., 2002). Even if academics were to publish for practitioners their academic style may alienate because research literature is written in a way that is alien to HRM practitioners (Lawler, 2007; Rynes et al., 2002); research evidence is not always clear, making research findings difficult to interpret (Evans & Dean, 2000); academics may make excessive claims based on partial analysis of complex phenomena (Ghoshal, 2005); academic publications are not always relevant to practitioners (George, 2014); and, research outcomes take a while to emerge so academic content may be out of date by the time it is ready to be disseminated to practitioners (Lawler, 2007; Rynes et al., 2007). Further, there are many new practices emerging in HRM that are not yet evidence based (e.g., social media) and some that may be contrary to extant evidence (e.g., elimination of the performance review) which makes the extant body of knowledge deficient or problematic for practitioners.

Based on this, it may not be surprising that HRM practitioners see little relevance in the academic literature (Armstrong, 2000) which means they don't read academic publications (Rynes et al., 2002) and turn to their own journals for knowledge. The most widely read periodical is *HR Magazine*, which is published by HRM's major professional association (Society for Human Resource Management, 2016) and has a circulation of more than 200,000 (Rynes et al., 2007). Rynes et al. (2002, 2007) found that practitioner journals have a mix of academic research and managerial opinion. In particular, bridge journals, which were the most important source of knowledge for HRM practitioners, had little coverage of research findings deemed most important by researchers. These journals included some research consistent content but also made claims that went beyond that which was substantiated by research. The evidence used came primarily from quotes derived from practicing professionals, managers, and employees, and consultants or vendors, with only 4% coming from academics with very little quantitative data being used (Rynes et al., 2007).

The inclination of HRM practitioners to seek knowledge from practitioner sources may reflect their limited access to useable academic knowledge but it may also be because they believe that academic knowledge will not be of value. HRM practitioners felt that research findings don't work in practice and that they are satisfied with their existing approach (Rynes et al., 2002). In addition to this, Industrial/Organizational psychologists, who have the ability to translate academic knowledge into practice, report that HRM practitioners had often already decided what they wanted and asked the psychologist to deliver it (Rynes, 2012). Further, whilst scepticism is a key ingredient of evidence based management, psychologists found it difficult to acknowledge evidence limitations to clients. HRM practitioners may also resist external knowledge because evidence may challenge managerial prerogative and the value placed on experience and judgement (Briner & Rousseau, 2011). For example, Dipboye (1994) found that one reason that practitioners were reluctant to implement structured interviews, which have superior reliability and validity, was because they reduced control and increased accountability through explicit standards.

Practitioners may also choose to derive their knowledge from other practitioners and consultants who may have an agenda to sell their products which may not be consistent with evidence based knowledge. In support of this, the first choice information source of most managers was other managers (Brown & Duguid, 2002; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Rynes et al. (2002) found that HRM practitioner knowledge was gathered from other HRM practitioners in the same organization, together with practitioner magazines (which have questionable efficacy as discussed above), the Society for Human Resource Management website, and other internet sites. It may be that managers adopt widely accepted practices to garner legitimacy (Simons, 2002) because modelling off other organizations may make existing practices appear legitimate or up to date (Ferris et al., 1998).

In conclusion, extant research indicates that HRM does not have or seek evidence based knowledge. HRM practitioners may not have access to evidence based knowledge because practitioners are not formally educated or certified and academics do not disseminate their knowledge to practitioners. Further, there is evidence that practitioners derive knowledge from insular sources. A lack of evidence based knowledge may influence HRM's attitudes towards evidence based management such that they fail to see value in evidence based management and there are indications that HRM practitioners do not believe evidence based knowledge is valuable or that evidence based management will work in practice. It is likely that this presents a vicious cycle in that attitudes towards evidence based knowledge influence HRM practitioners' efforts to seek evidence based knowledge. Despite assumptions about the reasons why HRM practitioners do not have, seek, or use evidence based knowledge, and the conclusion that HRM certification may address the failure of HRM practitioners to implement evidence based management, there is little evidence on the relationship between HRM practitioners' evidence based knowledge and attitudes towards evidence based knowledge and evidence based management. This manuscript advances the following propositions to definitively test existing theory on the research-practice gap antecedent of evidence based management in HRM.

Proposition 1a. HRM practitioners' lack of evidence based knowledge increases their unfavourable attitudes towards implementing evidence based management.

Proposition 1b. HRM practitioners' unfavourable attitudes towards the value of evidence based management reduces their motivation to seek and use evidence based knowledge.

3. Additional explanations for HRM practitioners' failure to implement evidence based management

Thus far this article has demonstrated that practitioners do not have access to knowledge on evidence based management because the field is not professionalised and there is a divide between academics and practitioners. These issues imply that evidence based management can be resolved through increasing HRM knowledge and competence and this approach has been adopted by prominent scholars (e.g., Ulrich et al., 2007). However, it is possible that dissemination of academic knowledge is not a panacea and that solutions are more complex. This section will consider why the transmission of evidence based knowledge may not substantially increase the implementation of evidence based management in HRM. The extant literature makes three assumptions that will be challenged in this article: (i) if evidence based knowledge were made more accessible practitioners would use knowledge on evidence based management; (ii) if HRM practitioners had knowledge on evidence based management they would be incentivized to implement evidence based management; and (iii) if HRM practitioners had knowledge on evidence based management they would implement evidence based management.

3.1. Inherent contradictions in HRM: developmental humanism versus utilitarian instrumentalism

Two decades ago it was proposed that theory emerged to take HRM from its lowly status of file clerk, social worker, and firefighter to strategic business partner (Kamoche, 1997) which resulted in the current normative concept of HRM. HRM theory has its foundation in two distinct United States based models. The Michigan model was associated with a strategic HRM approach, which linked workforce management to organizational strategy. It has also been linked to 'hard' HRM or 'utilitarian instrumentalism' (Legge, 1995) given the pressure for organizations to focus on short-term results. This model may encourage high control practices that take the 'low road' to competitive advantage and are designed to produce cost effective, reliable, but not outstanding performance. In contrast, the Harvard model emphasized the importance of employees who are a source of distinctive and sustainable competitive advantage through their commitment, adaptability, and high quality skills and performance (Porter, Smith, & Fagg, 2007) and was later defined as 'soft' HRM (Poole & Mansfield, 1994) or 'developmental humanism' (Legge, 1995). This latter model focuses on high commitment work practices that result in in mutually beneficial outcomes for both employees and organizations (Walton, 1985). Subsequently, evidence has supported the efficacy of HRM practices based on developmental humanism linking them to organizational performance (see meta-analyses by Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Saridakis, Lai, & Cooper, 2016; and taxonomy by Posthuma, Campion, Masimova, & Campion, 2013 on High Performance Work Practices).

It is argued that this foundation produced inherent contradictions in the normative concept of HRM (Kaufman, 2012). For instance, developmental humanism characterizes organizations' mission statements that espouse that employees are their most important asset, and utilitarian instrumentalism characterizes organization reality where impersonal economic rationalism dominates in that employees are considered an expense of doing business rather than a source of competitive advantage (Vaughan, 1994). The utilitarian instrumental model is reminiscent of scientific management because, rather than valuing employees as people, it reduces them to passive objects whose value is based on how well they can be *used* by the organization (Legge, 1995). This tension may require two conflicting HRM roles of strategic business partner and employee champion (see HRM roles advocated by Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). Further, this conflict may produce lack of alignment between espoused and enacted values in HRM practice (Legge, 1995) as HRM practitioners espouse developmental humanism and enact utilitarian instrumentalism. This implies that HRM is unable to manage the tension between the competing demands of utilitarian instrumentalism and developmental humanism and professional associations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development have been criticised for failing to "eradicate the tensions and ambiguities that have long characterised personnel roles" (Gilmore & Williams, 2007, p. 398).

3.2. Evidence based management in HRM: High Performance Work Practices

Evidence based management in HRM (the dependent variable in Fig. 1) can be broadly defined as *formal practices for managing human resources that evidence demonstrates are linked to organization performance*. This definition of evidence based HRM builds on extant definitions in the HRM and strategic HRM (SHRM) literatures which focus on formal practices for managing human resources and HRM's role in linking human resources to organization strategy (Buller & McEvoy, 2012).

Evidence based management research in HRM has focused on High Performance Work Practices (HPWP) (Kaufman, 2012) which have their origins in Walton's (1985) high commitment management indicating that they have a foundation in developmental humanism. HPWP focus on long-term and open ended relationships with employees in contrast to short-term contractual arrangements. They are based on social exchange founded in trust between interdependent exchange partners with reciprocal obligations i.e., there is a reciprocal effect in that the organization invests in employees who reciprocate with commitment and loyalty (Hom et al., 2009). Thus evidence based management is inconsistent with a utilitarian instrumental value proposition. HPWP impact on organizational outcomes through increasing employee ability, motivation, and opportunity to contribute. Practices that enhance employee ability, or human capital, include recruitment, selection, and training. Those that promote motivation include performance management, compensation, benefits, promotion, career development, and job security. Those that enhance opportunity include flexible job design, work teams, employee involvement, and information sharing (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012).

Causal links have been made between HPWP and performance. Whilst there has been some debate about whether these practices work in all organizations the weight of evidence indicates that all firms benefit from HPWP irrespective of business strategy (Combs et al., 2006; Huselid, 1995). Such impact has been specifically measured in Huselid's (1995) seminal research, e.g., a one standard deviation shift in HPWP practices increase sales per employee by $27,000 and market value per employee by $18,000. Further, a recent meta-analysis of longitudinal studies indicates an overall correlation of 0.287 between HPWP and firm operational and financial performance (Saridakis et al., 2016). Thus, HRM practices with a 'soft' orientation are the vehicle through which high involvement and commitment deliver 'hard' performance outcomes to organizations who are prepared to invest in the development of people (Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999).

Despite strong associations with performance, less than a quarter of organizations adopt practices to any significant extent (see summary of research on HPWP; Tamkin, 2004). For instance, the most recent U.K. WERS survey (fieldwork concluded in 2012) found that employers were least likely to consult employees on changes they thought had the greatest impact on them i.e., new technology and changes in work techniques, with half of employees surveyed reporting they did not receive any consultation (van Wanrooy et al., 2013). It has been concluded that there is widespread underinvestment in employees, human capital, and HRM (e.g., Kaufman, 2010).

One reason for poor adoption of HPWP is that implementation is complex. There is agreement that individual practices work better when synergistically aligned (see meta-analysis of 92 empirical HRM-performance studies by Combs et al., 2006 and meta-analysis of 8 longitudinal studies that included 1661 organizations exploring the relationship between HRM and firm performance by Saridakis et al., 2016). There is evidence to support the need to align practices with each other (Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997) and evidence that the adoption of single practices do not deliver the same improvement (i.e., Saridakis et al., 2016).

Further, turning good HRM intentions into practice requires systematic implementation (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Combs et al., 2006) which requires line manager support (Cunningham & Hyman, 2006; Sikora & Ferris, 2014). Implementation requires the co-operation of leaders throughout the organization who operationalize HRM policy and model an organization's values (Holt Larsen & Brewster, 2003; Sikora & Ferris, 2014). Whilst HRM policy may reflect best practice, the quality of implementation may be poor if line managers fail to see the value of the practice or are not resourced to implement the practice effectively (Woodrow & Guest, 2014) which may lead them to resist (i.e., ignore or sabotage) implementation (Sikora & Ferris, 2014). In particular, leaders have numerous responsibilities and competing priorities which may influence their capacity to implement practices (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Pfeffer (1998) speculated that half of organizations fail to implement HPWP because managers don't believe there is a connection between investment in human resources and financial performance. The other half that do invest fail to engage in comprehensive and systematic implementation required for success or persist with these practices long enough to derive benefit. More recent literature supports this with Kaufman (2012) proposing that managers may underestimate the returns from investing in people because costs of HRM investment are more immediate whilst benefits are derived in the future and are less tangible. In addition it takes some time for HPWP to filter through to performance (see longitudinal studies by Patterson, 1995, and Bartel, Ichniowski, & Shaw, 2004).

In addition, line managers may not implement practices effectively based on their lack of ability or motivation (Holt Larsen & Brewster, 2003). If line managers do not implement HRM practices well it can lead to poor visibility of the practice, inconsistency, and inequity leading to an 'interpretation gap' (between implementation and employee's perceptions) even when intended practices are implemented (Piening, Baluch, & Ridder, 2014). Line managers' perceptions of the extent to which they implement their organization's HPWP was found to be a mediator of the relationship between HPWP and employee attitudes and behavior (Sikora, Ferris, & Van Iddekinge, 2015).

Finally, top management's beliefs and values impact on HPWP implementation. Arthur, Herdman, and Yang (2016) found that management's employee centred values influenced whether lower-level managers implemented HPWP but values supporting HPWP were rare. This indicates that HRM must be able to influence line managers to effectively implement evidence based management. The next section will show that this is difficult given evidence based management may conflict with management's utilitarian instrumental values.

3.3. Management has a utilitarian instrumental value orientation

It has been argued that organizations have a short-term focus driven by environmental changes that have influenced government policy, organization ownership, and organization executives (Nasar, Solow, Dertouzos, & Lester, 1989) such that most executives in the United States felt that the market would penalize them for a long-term view (Dertouzos, Lester, & Solow, 1991). This has not changed – the requirement for a rapid response to change, accompanied by increasing cost consciousness, has forced organizations to seek quick fixes to long-term problems (Briner & Rousseau, 2011). Managers sacrifice longer run profitability in favour of shorter-term profits at the expense of longer-term value creation.

This approach may be consistent with shareholders who also have a short-term outlook and markets that put pressure on top management to deliver quarterly growth. Consequently, managers may be myopic in their preference for avoiding losses by discounting losses in the future relative to losses in the present and CEO incentives (created by stock options) can incentivize destructive short-termism (Martin, Wiseman, & Gomez-Mejia, 2015). Managers want short-term and simple solutions that bolster their status and perceived contribution (Briner & Rousseau, 2011) and this influences HRM behavior and outcomes (Beer, 2015).

A short-term focus may promote a utilitarian instrumental (cost focussed) approach to human resources which is inconsistent with evidence based management's developmental humanistic focus delivered through HPWP. Evidence based management is difficult and costly to implement in the short-term although delivering long-term benefits (Lawler, 2007). As a consequence line managers may

ignore HRM's attempts to implement evidence based management or HRM may feel that implementing evidence based management is futile and possibly detrimental to their status in an organization. In support of this Boudreau and Lawler (2014) found that when management had a bureaucratic and low cost approach HRM was less likely to play a strategic role and make data based decisions on human capital that add value.

A short-term orientation may obfuscate the consequences of utilitarian instrumental behavior. For example, management may improve organization performance through downsizing, reduced compensation, and cutting training budgets, which may deskill and demotivate human capital with negative implications down the road. However, these results may not be known until HR managers have 'moved on' given the short tenure of general managers rotating through HRM (Lawler, 2007). Managerial decisions often involve long time lags and little feedback and substantial time may pass before the true quality of decisions can be discerned (Stamp & Stamp, 1993). Further to this, it is not always obvious that a decision is being made given the array of interactions that compose managerial work (Walshe & Rundall, 2001) which dilutes accountability of both HR and senior managers. Given the transient occupation of HRM roles, current incumbents may not be held accountable for ineffective decisions with long-term consequences. Thus empirical research indicates that management is likely to have a utilitarian instrumental orientation towards employees derived from a short-term orientation. This is problematic for HRM practitioners' who wish to implement evidence based management in the form of HPWP, particularly, in light of their power position in relation to line managers.

3.4. HRM's power to implement evidence based management is limited

Power is defined as a force that affects outcomes (Hardy, 1996) and social power is defined as the asymmetric control over valued resources in social relations (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Whilst those with high power promote agendas, those with low power are inhibited due to the social threat of losing favour of higher ranking individuals. Possessing or lacking power transforms individuals' psychological states in that low power individuals are subject to more social and material threats making them more likely to obey high power individuals. Further, power sets the agenda and imbues the status quo with legitimacy (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). The powerful set agendas, norms and rules, and standards for thought and opinion, making them more action oriented and engaged in strategic change, whilst low power places constraints on behavior (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Further, there is an association between power and objectification, or the tendency to view others through an instrumental lens i.e., as a means to an end (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008). Consequently, management's power position in relation to employees may facilitate a utilitarian instrumental approach consistent with external pressure and rewards for short-term results. In addition, power over HRM implementation and HRM practitioners may lead managers to *use* HRM practitioners to implement their utilitarian instrumental agenda.

Theory on power indicates why HR managers may struggle to influence HRM strategy leading them to maintain the status quo despite their prescribed change maker role (Caldwell, 2001; Khiiji & Wang, 2006). The HRM function battles to justify its position and value (Kaufman, 2012). In particular, HRM directors may not be accepted as strategic partners by other functional heads, making it difficult for them to challenge senior management decisions. In 2001 only 41.1% of companies reported HRM was a 'full partner' in strategic decision making and this percentage had not changed since 1995 (Sanders & Frenkel, 2011). One reason why HRM may lack power and status in organizations is because line manager support is needed to implement HRM practices (see earlier discussion on implementation of HPWP). This places limits on HRM's direct control over valued resources which delivers social power (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Sheehan, Cieri, & Cooper, 2014). Given HRM's current power and status it is likely that HRM practitioners do not have power to change management's utilitarian instrumental approach.

HRM's power position in organizations and management's utilitarian instrumental agenda may combine to influence HRM practitioners' motivation to implement evidence based management given that motivation is based on estimates that effort will lead to desired results (expectancy theory; Vroom, 1964). HRM practitioners must have power to influence managers to adopt, and effectively implement, evidence based HRM practices even when these practices detract from operational concerns that dominate managers' workloads (Watson, Maxwell, & Farquharson, 2007). As discussed, effective implementation of evidence based management requires investment and returns on this investment may only be realised in the longer-term. Lack of evidence based knowledge may be an *advantage* under such conditions because ineffective implementation of HRM practices may not appear to be a choice if HRM practitioners are not aware of the consequences of current practice due to a knowing gap. HRM practitioner's lack of power may influence their attitudes towards evidence based knowledge and evidence based management, based on the potential negative consequences of promoting evidence based management in their organizations. It is more likely that HRM practitioners will adopt management's utilitarian instrumental attitudes.

3.5. HRM has a utilitarian instrumentalism value proposition

Based on this theorizing it is likely that HRM's power position in relationship to management, together with management's utilitarian instrumental orientation, has led to HRM also adopting a utilitarian instrumental value proposition. It is proposed that HRM as a function continues to demonstrate an instrumental concern for employees and focus on the roles of administrative expert (Sheehan et al., 2014) or strategic partner rather than employee champion (Guest & Woodrow, 2012). In support of this, de Gama et al. (2012) found that most HRM practitioners think of the role and practice of HRM as a business function that manages human resources for greater efficiency and 'return-on-investment'. Only a minority of HRM participants in their study struggled with the moral ambivalence arising from the tension between concern for 'people' and the needs of the 'business'. For example, HRM may respond ambivalently to reports of sexual harassment and bullying because further investigation may disadvantage management

(e.g., see media reports on Uber; Newcomer, 2017).

Given HR managers' power and status, short tenure, and line manager rotation into HRM positions, HRM is likely to adopt and benefit from a utilitarian instrumental value proposition or be penalised for promoting evidence based management because it is not consistent with utilitarian instrumentalism. Consequently, it is also likely that HRM practitioners will not benefit from evidence based knowledge or set intentions to implement evidence based management. Alternatively, HRM may "cherry pick" evidence based knowledge and evidence based management by selecting aspects that are consistent with a utilitarian instrumental value proposition in two ways. First, they may adopt HPWP but implement these practices instrumentally. For example, during a performance management discussion feedback for development purposes may take the form of evaluation; self-managed work teams may focus on peer surveillance; and executives may be rewarded with stock options for individual and short-term performance.

Second, HRM may use evidence based management rhetoric to implement utilitarian instrumentalism and elicit employee compliance with a utilitarian instrumental agenda. Rhetoric characterized by developmental humanism and mutuality may obfuscate an instrumental approach and overcome employee resistance. For example, rhetoric has featured in accounts of 'inhumane' workplaces such as HubSpot where getting fired was called "graduation" (Lyons, 2016; Pfeffer, 2016). This implies that HRM may be valued as a discursive instrument that can deliver management value in the short-term by making instrumental work practices palatable to employees and persuading them to accept management views. What HRM says, as well as what it does through HRM policy and practice, influences change (Caldwell, 2001). The HRM unitary rhetoric of 'people are our most valued resource' may support a managerial attempt to obtain employees' discretionary effort and commitment (Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010). It has even been suggested that HRM "may be best understood as a discourse and set of practices that attempt to reduce the indeterminacy or ambiguity involved in the employment contract" (Townley, 1993, p. 518). This suggests that HRM may use soft rhetoric to disguise, and gain employee commitment to, a hard reality characterized by work intensification and job insecurity (e.g., it is a 'wolf in sheep's clothing'; Armstrong, 2000).

A combination of soft and hard HRM rhetoric was observed by McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, and Truss (1997) who found that even when development humanism was embraced at the rhetorical level there was still an emphasis on improving bottom line performance and the interests of the organization which always took priority over the individual employee. Whilst this gap has been attributed over time to HRM's ineffectiveness in that it has been suggested that HRM does not have the ability to translate its rhetoric into reality (e.g., 'big hat, no cattle'; Skinner, 1981) and "HR's aspirations do not yet fully align with its ability to deliver" (Boudreau & Ziskin, 2011, p. 255), it is possible that HRM and management are not incentivised to close this gap.

The potential for HRM to implement management's utilitarian instrumental agenda may confer power and status on an otherwise marginalised HRM function. More specifically, HRM promises to coordinate large numbers of people through practices that differentiate between employees, predict their behavior, and rationally and efficiently deploy them (Townley, 1993). This conclusion was drawn from Foucault (1977, p. 148) who suggested that HRM promises to transform "confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities" through HRM practices that classify, categorise, measure, and make individuals observable, measurable, and quantifiable (e.g., performance appraisal systems, intelligence and personality testing, and more recently, data analytics). In this way, HRM may acquire knowledge of employees that precedes power over them. HRM rhetoric promises to deliver practices, techniques, and procedures that make employees knowable and governable (Townley, 1993) thus enhancing the status of HRM (Kamoche, 1997). An example of this approach concerns the use of testing in selection practices which may contribute to HRM's value proposition that is predicated on specialist practices that are consistent with rational and efficient deployment of employees (Townley, 1993).

Further a discourse of developmental humanism may provide coherence to the HRM function. HRM rhetoric may glue together a conflicted and incoherent HRM comprised of fragmented 'sets of bits' (disparate practices) which have limited significance on their own but are combined into an intelligible whole through an input-process-output model of organizing (Townley, 1993) i.e., SHRM. This is consistent with the notion that discourse produces, transmits, and reinforces power (Foucault, 1977). It can make a group both visible and vulnerable and may be used to construct and reconcile corporate success, failure, and subjectivity (Dick & Collings, 2014). Such discourse indicates that HRM is able to deploy key resources (employees) on which managers depend (Sheehan et al., 2014).

Based on this logic it is likely that HRM will benefit from a mix of soft and hard rhetoric and from implementing reality based on utilitarian instrumentalism because management will reward the HRM function for an approach that operationalises their agenda. For example, the implementation of testing in selection processes is inconsistent with evidence based management because testing is frequently used in isolation of other selection techniques and without candidates being adequately debriefed on the test results (International Test Commission, 2013; Marx, 2002). However, in the short-term these practices provide the illusion of efficiency and accuracy whilst alienating and potentially harming job applicants who do not have power in the recruitment process.

Job candidates selected in this way may develop an instrumental rather than committed relationship with their employer (Ambrose & Rosse, 2003) which is inconsistent with the philosophy of HPWP. However, implementing HRM practices consistent with research evidence is likely to be time consuming and costly in the short-term i.e., debriefing multiple job candidates on test results. Thus implementing evidence based management could disadvantage HRM practitioners who may not derive benefit from positive distal outcomes that may not be attributed to HRM practitioner effort. In addition, negative long-term consequences may not be identified or attributed to HRM. This is consistent with the critical perspective on HRM that proposed that rhetoric or 'illusory claims' maintain HRM's status despite reality that falls short of this rhetoric (Wilmott, 2003). This leads to poor HRM behavioral integrity, or misalignment between words and deeds, which has been shown to have negative organizational consequences (Simons, 2002; Simons, LeRoy, Collewaert, & Butler, 2015). Paradoxically HRM may be rewarded for practices that undermine its rhetoric of managing people for competitive advantage. This type of organizational hypocrisy has already been discussed in the literature (Kerr, 1975).

3.6. Explanatory model for HRM's implementation of evidence based management

Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior is a valuable framework to consider the antecedents of HRM's intentions to implement evidence based management. This model proposes three antecedents to intentions. The first concerns favourable versus unfavourable attitudes towards a behavior. The second is subjective norms or the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform a behavior. The third is perceived behavioral control which is the perceived ease or difficulty of performing a behavior. This framework will now be used to shed light on why HRM practitioners do not implement evidence based management based on the arguments presented thus far.

Attitudes develop from beliefs, such as the cost incurred in performing a behavior, with undesirable consequences producing unfavourable attitudes. The implementation of evidence based management is unlikely to produce desirable consequences for HRM practitioners because (i) HRM practitioners have less power than senior managers who determine organization strategy and values towards human resources based on short-term, low-cost considerations (ii) HRM practitioners have less power than line managers who implement HRM policy and practices based on senior managers' utilitarian instrumental values (iii) evidence based management is inconsistent with management's utilitarian instrumental approach to human resources because evidence based management is costly to implement in the short-term and delivers benefits in the longer-term. These factors indicate that HRM practitioners would be 'swimming upstream' to implement evidence based management. Evidence based knowledge is unlikely to be of benefit in such a context and indeed could produce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962) that creates unnecessary discomfort and disadvantage as futile attempts are made to influence what one knows to be correct, result in failure and frustration. Under these conditions if practitioners, incentivized by evidence based knowledge, attempted but failed to implement evidence based management, they may change their beliefs about the value of evidence based management to reduce dissonance given constraints on behavior change, engaging in a vicious cycle that reduces evidence based knowledge.

Subjective normative beliefs are based on the likelihood that *important* referent individuals or groups approve or disapprove of performing a behavior. HRM practitioners hold senior and line managers as important referents (but not employees) because of their power relationship with managers vis a vis employees. In support of this Van der Zee, Bakker, and Bakker (2002) found norms of colleagues and management influenced intentions to implement structured interviews. Consequently, it is likely that HRM practitioners may be influenced by managers' normative beliefs of utilitarian instrumentalism and evidence supports this proposition (see section on HRM's utilitarian instrumental value proposition).

Perceived behavioral control is based on the presence or absence of requisite resources and opportunities. More resources and opportunities and fewer anticipated obstacles increase perceptions of control. It is likely that HRM practitioners' power position increases their perceptions of obstacles and reduces their perceptions of resources and opportunities in regards to implementing evidence based management because attempts to influence more powerful senior and line managers to adopt evidence based management are likely to result in negative consequences. First, managers' utilitarian instrumental focus will influence whether HRM practitioners believe they will be rewarded (or punished) for promoting and implementing evidence based management. Second, HRM practitioners will be under direct social pressure from senior managers and line managers to implement practices with a utilitarian instrumental orientation. Third, HRM practitioners may believe they cannot implement practices that do not have a utilitarian instrumental orientation, affecting their perceptions of control. Based on these arguments it is proposed that:

Proposition 2a. HRM practitioners' low power position in relationship to management increases their unfavourable attitudes towards implementing evidence based management.

Proposition 2b. HRM's low power position in relationship to management increases their responsiveness to management's utilitarian instrumental normative beliefs.

Proposition 2c. HRM's low power position in relationship to management reduces HRM practitioners' perceptions of control regarding evidence based management implementation.

Attitudes, social norms, and perceptions of control have a strong relationship with intentions to implement (Ajzen, 1991). If HRM practitioners' attitudes towards evidence based management were favourable, social norms were supportive of the implementation of evidence based management, and HRM practitioners' believed that they could implement evidence based management, it is likely that they would set intentions to implement. However, the arguments presented in this article indicate that management has a utilitarian instrumental attitude towards human resources and so do HRM practitioners. Second, social norms of management are likely to be focussed on utilitarian instrumentalism which is inconsistent with developmental humanism. Further, it is likely that HRM practitioners may be responsive to management norms based on their power position in the organization in relationship to senior managers who influence HRM values and line mangers who implement HRM practices. Third, it is likely that HRM have low perceptions of control in terms of implementing evidence based management given low levels of successful implementation in the past and the low probability of successful implementation in the future (based on their low power in relationship to management who implement evidence based management). Based on these arguments the following propositions are presented.

Proposition 3a. HRM practitioners' unfavourable attitudes towards implementing evidence based management will reduce their intentions to implement evidence based management.

Proposition 3b. Management's negative social norms regarding evidence based management will reduce HRM practitioners' intentions to implement evidence based management.

Proposition 3c. HRM's low perceptions of control regarding their ability to implement evidence based management will reduce HRM practitioners' intentions to implement evidence based management.

Intentions to implement evidence based management when combined with behavioral control have been found to account for a considerable proportion of variance in behavior (Ajzen, 1991). However, it is possible that actors may not accurately perceive their behavioral control resulting in intentions but not actual behavior if actual control is low. Thus it is proposed that power is both an antecedent of HRM practitioners' intentions to implement evidence based management and a moderator of the intention to behavior relationship. Given senior and line management's role in the implementation of HRM practices it is unlikely that HRM practitioners would be able to implement evidence based management even if they had evidence based knowledge because evidence based management is inconsistent with a utilitarian instrumental agenda. Thus it is proposed that:

Proposition 4. HRM practitioners' intentions to implement evidence based management are related to their implementation of evidence based management with low intentions resulting in low implementation.

Proposition 5. The relationship between HRM's intentions to implement evidence based management and HRM's actual implementation of evidence based management will be moderated by HRM's power to implement evidence based management such that high intentions to implement evidence based management result in low implementation if power to implement is low.

3.7. Boundary conditions that may influence the model

It is also likely that a number of boundary conditions may influence the intention to and actual implementation of evidence based management and it is suggested that these be included in future research. For instance, the relationship between HRM practitioners' power and their intentions and ability to implement evidence based management may be moderated by organizational factors i.e., organization size, industry, and strategy. For example, an organization listed on the stock exchange may be required to deliver shorter-term outcomes than a not-for-profit or private organization, influencing management's attitude to employees and HRM practitioners' power and motivation to implement evidence based management. In particular, private organizations may not be subject to short-term pressures because business owners may be more invested in long-term returns. These owners may also be influenced by their personal values which may influence their attitude to human resources.

Second, it may also be that industries operating in competitive labor markets need to provide an employee experience based on developmental humanism to attract and retain human resources (e.g., technology companies such as Apple and Google). In this case, competitive labor market contexts may influence management's attitudes towards developmental humanism and social norms that influence HRM practitioners' attitudes to evidence based management. This may also be the case for organizations requiring innovative, adaptive, and creative competencies that require a committed workforce that is facilitated by HPWP.

In contrast, organizations that adopt a low cost strategy and don't require employee discretionary effort may adopt utilitarian instrumental attitudes. Further, private sector organizations operating in a non-competitive labor market who have a low cost strategy may also be more likely to adopt utilitarian instrumental attitudes towards human resources. This will then decrease HRM practitioners' positive attitudes towards evidence based management and/or reduce HRM practitioners' perceived control and actual power to implement evidence based management.

Thus the strategy and context of an organization may influence management's attitudes and HRM strategy (see Miles and Snow [1984] for more on the links between strategy and HRM). In support of this, a relationship between strategy and HPWP implementation has been found in extant research (e.g., Gill & Meyer, 2008) although further empirical research is required (Combs et al., 2006: Jiang et al., 2012).

It is also possible that HRM practitioners' experience, age, gender, and traits such as proactive personality, may influence their power in regards to management and their motivation to seek and use evidence based knowledge. However, this may not be in the expected direction. For instance, prior research has found a negative correlation between experience and desire to learn about academic research with more experienced HRM practitioners less likely to be motivated to seek evidence based knowledge (Rynes et al., 2002). The reasons for this are unclear but it is possible that those with more experience have more confidence in their existing knowledge.

Based on these arguments the following propositions are presented (but not included in Fig. 1).

Proposition 6. The relationship between HRM practitioners' power and their intentions and ability to implement evidence based management will be moderated by organizational factors i.e., organization size, industry, and strategy.

Proposition 7. The relationship between HRM practitioners' power and their intentions and ability to implement evidence based management will be moderated by HRM practitioner individual characteristics i.e., experience, age, gender, and traits.

4. Discussion and conclusion

This article seeks to explain the many contradictions, paradoxes, and ironies that characterise evidence based management in HRM and makes a contribution in three significant ways. First, it reviews, consolidates, and extends theory on an intractable research-practice gap in HRM, providing additional explanations for why this gap exists and is difficult to close. Second, this article links evidence on the research-practice gap to evidence of a rhetoric-reality gap in HRM to explain the dearth of evidence based knowledge

and evidence based management in HRM. In doing so it combines parallel and related research streams, thus consolidating the body of knowledge to provide nuanced propositions. Third, this article illustrates theory with the case of HPWP to show the practical application and implications of this theory.

Thus far it has been assumed that HRM decision making is rational and if knowledge of evidence based management in HRM was available that HRM practitioners would make decisions to implement it. However, there are non-strategic determinants of HRM practices (Pfeffer & Cohen, 1984) such as the political context in which HRM decisions and behavior occur (Ferris & King, 1991). Organizations are political arenas with competing interests (Mintzberg, 1985) and managers and HRM practitioners may act with self-interest and guile in pursuing goals (Wright & McMahan, 1992). In particular, the power relationships between managers, HRM practitioners, and employees determine the way in which HRM practices are implemented. Evidence based management is characterized by developmental humanism which is inconsistent with HRM's utilitarian instrumental value proposition. This together with power dynamics in organizations may lead to dysfunctional espousal and enactment of evidence based management which may explain why HRM does not seek evidence based knowledge or implement evidence based management unless it is consistent with a utilitarian instrumental value proposition. Different interpretations are possible when examining evidence based management through a political lens.

Several reasons have been proposed for the knowing gap in HRM (Lawler, 2007; Rynes et al., 2007). The low status of HRM means that managers without expertise may rotate through HRM practitioner roles for development purposes bringing with them a utilitarian instrumental orientation or a propensity to defer to managers with this perspective. These 'visiting' practitioners are unlikely to have an HRM specific education or be members of professional bodies that could provide up to date guidelines consistent with research evidence. There are also questions about research content in university courses and how HRM practitioners are updated post university given an identified academic-practitioner divide and lack of incentive for academics to communicate research evidence to practitioners. This vacuum may encourage practitioners to seek knowledge from unreliable and insular sources (e.g., practitioner magazines and other HRM practitioners) that reinforce the status quo. Closing the gulf between academics and practitioners may be difficult given the significant differences between the two. However, an exclusive focus on the difficulties of transferring knowledge from academics to practitioners may obfuscate more fundamental issues on why HRM practitioners do not adopt evidence based management. Based on their own self report HRM practitioners do not value research knowledge nor are they motivated to seek it out from academic journals or bridge professions that have evidence based knowledge (Rynes et al., 2007).

Further, HRM practitioners may not implement evidence based management even if they have the knowledge to do so (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006) because they have a utilitarian instrumental value proposition which is inconsistent with evidence based management. Consequently HRM practitioners may implement practices that diminish or even destroy value in organizations whilst espousing a value creation role. Ironically, HRM espouses competitive advantage through people but fails to adopt evidence based management that could achieve this. The question is why would HRM practitioners engage in these practices? To date scholars have focused on HRM practitioners' lack of knowledge (e.g., Rynes et al., 2002) and how to close this knowledge gap (e.g., Bansal, Bertels, Ewart, MacConnachie, & O'Brien, 2012; Bartunek & Rynes, 2014). In particular, it is proposed that HRM practitioners' impact and status can be enhanced through knowledge that helps an organization improve its competitive advantage (e.g., Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

However, the illusion of knowledge and expertise, rather than actual knowledge, may be sufficient to enhance HRM power and status when this (pseudo) knowledge is consistent with the salient HRM value proposition. Thus HRM practitioners may be incentivized to seek confirming evidence (Nickerson, 1998) consistent with current approaches. If HRM practitioners acquired knowledge on evidence based management they may be compelled to use this knowledge which may undermine their current role in organizations. This is not to suggest that HRM practitioners are Machiavellian in their agenda. Whilst there is evidence that HRM practitioners are aware of their instrumental utilitarian approach (de Gama et al., 2012) there is also evidence that they are unaware that current practices are not evidence based (Rynes et al., 2002). However, HRM's lack of motivation to seek evidence based knowledge may reflect their satisfaction with the status quo which, together with short-term organizational horizons, defends against cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962) that may motivate change.

Future research may wish to test the propositions within this article. It is likely that when operationalised they will result in incremental variance hypothesis testing that can examine whether motivation does explain additional variance over evidence based knowledge. Operationalization of evidence based management in HRM may draw on a substantial body of HPWP empirical research which includes valid measures.

Research at multiple levels will be required to test the propositions in this article to explore the role of HRM systems in the 'trade-offs' that may exist between organizational performance and employee well-being (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2016). First, organization strategy developed by senior management and the HRM function's acquisition of knowledge, use of rhetoric, and intentions to implement evidence based management, are at the organizational level of analysis. Second, HRM's actual implementation of HRM occurs in partnership with line managers operating at the group level of analysis and it is at this level that individual employees have the opportunity to contribute. Third, evidence based management's impact on human capital can be considered at the individual level of analysis in terms of the ability and motivation of employees who experience the HRM practice.

The impact of evidence based management can be operationalised through HPWP which can be assessed at multiple levels of analysis in terms of individual, group, and organizational performance. These propositions may be tested with a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods, however, qualitative research through interviews with management and HRM practitioners is recommended in the first instance to flesh out some of these initial propositions. To date the research-practice gap has focused on HRM practitioners but it may be fruitful to explore whether management would be prepared to adopt and implement evidence based management if they had evidence based knowledge.

4.1. Practical implications

This article has practical implications for employees, HRM practitioners, organizations, organization' stakeholders, and HRM educators, including academics and professional associations. It is probable (although not certain) that the HRM practitioners and managers are under the illusion that current HRM practices deliver competitive advantage and are unaware that HRM has been given "a failing grade" (Kaufman, 2012) by some academics. This has implications for organizational stakeholders, e.g., investors and shareholders. Further, employees (and potential employees) are likely to be disadvantaged by this approach (e.g., see Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010; de Gama et al., 2012). Finally, there are implications for academics and professional associations who may need to consider how they transfer knowledge to, and encourage the implementation of, evidence based management in HRM professionals and line managers who are partners in implementing HRM practices (Sikora & Ferris, 2014).

Academic publications could do more systematic reviews and pay more attention to the complexity of implementing research findings, acknowledging the context that HRM practitioners operate in. For example, HRM needs to enlist the support of managers to create a strong HRM system that influences employees' perceptions. Currently, academics may oversimplify the practical implications of their research by ignoring power relations and the inherent tensions within HRM.

Solutions may not lie soley in more effective and palatable communication of academic research to a resistant practitioner audience or academic/practitioner research collaborations. Further, market short-termism drives counterproductive behavior in organizations but changing senior management incentive structures, and the investing behavior that drives this, is ambitious. However, better communication of the competitive advantage in implementing HPWP to these audiences may be possible. The professionalization of HRM may make this possible and facilitate other change. First, it may end the practice of using transitory HRM roles as training for general business graduates 'passing through' on their way to more senior general management roles (Lawler, 2007). Second, it may give more power and status to governing bodies who could promote evidence based knowledge and practice to a range of stakeholders including institutional investors. Finally, it may give HRM the power, status, and motivation to promote and implement evidence based management in organizations because professional status is defined by knowledge (Fanning, 2011; Ulrich et al., 2013). Ulrich et al. (2013) have recently and optimistically proposed that HRM is increasingly moving towards professional status. However, further dialogue on how to improve the professional status of HRM is warranted.

Professional associations and educators may also need to consider the inherent contradictions in prescriptive HRM roles of administrative expert, strategic partner, change agent, and employee champion (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005) and prepare HRM professionals to deal with these competing roles. In particular, strategic partnership may be at odds with administrative expert, change agent, and employee champion roles. Specifically, managers' perceptions of HRM as administrative expert may undermine HRM's strategic role; HRM practitioners' attempts to be an employee champion may be perceived as them not being commercially minded; and, HRM's change agent role may be undermined by HRM's lack of power, utilitarian instrumental value proposition, and developmental humanistic rhetoric which maintains the status quo and obfuscates failure to implement evidence based management.

To address this, HRM may need to promote a unitary vision (i.e., that treating people well is good for business in the long-term) or to be an organization's conscience (i.e., espouse that treating people well is the right thing to do even if there is cost involved). Further, HRM practitioners may consider the importance of their discourse in HRM policy and practice. Research has demonstrated that the powerful (management) will only treat less powerful (employees) well if they have higher values (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). To influence management values HRM practitioners may need to demonstrate political leadership (Douglas & Ammeter, 2004) and use positive influence tactics (i.e., rational persuasion, inspirational appeals, and consultation) that lead to positive impressions (Yukl & Tracey, 1992). These skills could be the focus of additional HRM curriculum and professional development.

In addition, professional bodies could facilitate examination of the values of the HRM profession given that ethical and human values may be required to prevent practices that exploit the power discrepancy inherent in the employment relationship. In particular, the importance of HRM values and ethics may be important in moderating the natural inclination to use power to exploit the powerless (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Consequently, in addition to evidence based education, values-based education (Biesta, 2010) could be introduced into curriculum because values influence HRM policies which influence practices and competencies (Posthuma et al., 2013). Further, HRM values could be a foundation of HRM competency models.

Another solution may be to include HRM education in the undergraduate and post graduate curriculum for general managers i.e., Bachelor of Business and MBA students (Burke & Rau, 2010). This may create an educated internal stakeholder that requests evidence based management from HRM; diligently implements evidence based management; and realises the importance of HRM if given an HRM role on the way through to general management. Whilst managers may not be initially incentivized to learn about HRM ethics/values, strategy, and practices, lecturers can show the importance of doing so for organizational competitive advantage and the moral obligations associated with power. In this way business schools may create an appetite for evidence based management in managers who will influence HRM practitioners to deliver in line with their expectations. Consequently, it is not proposed that the academic profession is absolved of their responsibility to communicate evidence based material in their courses, or that they should not be incentivised to communicate to practitioners, but that the audience must be broadened to achieve change.

In conclusion, HRM's current value proposition based on a discourse of utilitarian instrumentalism may be incompatible with evidence based HRM. Evidence based implementation may be inconsistent with HRM's current 'power over employees' value proposition and may not pass cost/benefit hurdles. In addition, HRM may not have the power to implement evidence based management. Whilst the research-practice debate has considered both knowledge and implementation hurdles this article suggests that these may be linked. It is proposed that both academics and practitioners could consider HRM practitioner power and discourse in decision making regarding the adoption and implementation of HRM practices. Once acknowledged, academics may consider this in theory development, research design, practical implications of research, and teaching curriculum for HRM practitioners and line managers.

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