HRM and workplace innovations: formulating research questions

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to review the roles of human resource management (HRM) specialists in the contemplation and implementation of innovation in employing organisations and workplaces.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors review some of the literature and practice in this field as well as 11 other articles that are included in this special issue.

Findings – The authors propose six research questions. First, are HRM specialists analysing relevant trends and their implications for the future of work and the workforce? Second, are HRM specialists enabling employing organisations to identify and enable innovative ideas? Third, to what extent are HRM specialists leading partnership arrangements with organised labour? Fourth, what is the role of HRM specialists in creating inclusive work environments? Fifth, how should HRM specialists change to foster enterprise performance, intrapreneurship, agility, creativity and innovation? Sixth, to what extent is there an HRM function for line managers in coordination with HRM specialists in engendering innovation around "change agent" roles?

Originality/value – The authors argue that HRM specialists should embrace and enable innovation. The authors challenge HRM specialists to consider how they can contribute to facilitating innovation. The paper proposes further research on HRM and range of associated stakeholders who, together, have responsibility for innovating in the design and delivery of HRM to enrich our knowledge of HRM and workplace innovations.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility, Industrial relations, Mixed methodologies, Unions, Workplace change, Creativity, Disabilities, Change agents, Human resource management practices, Enterprise performance, Inclusive work environments, HRM skills

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

There is increasing emphasis by governments, organisational leaders and scholars on the importance of creativity and innovation in workplaces, to help to challenge old ways of thinking and to identify new solutions to meet current challenges. While creativity can be defined as the generation of ideas, innovation is often seen as the "stage of implementing ideas towards better procedures, practices or products" (Anderson *et al.*, 2014, p. 1297).

It is people who are at the heart of creativity and innovation; people develop new ideas and people put them into practice. However, human resource management (HRM) scholars and practitioners are rarely at the heart of such creativity and innovation debates. Instead, as Shipton *et al.* (2017b) argue, most of the innovation discourse takes place in other functions in parallel to HRM. Moreover, while there is a great deal of evidence linking people-management practices to organisational performance or effectiveness (Wright *et al.*, 2005; Sun *et al.*, 2007; Guest and Conway, 2011), there is very little evidence linking the more formal aspects of HRM policies, processes and practices and workplace innovation (Shipton *et al.*, 2017a).

HRM research questions have largely focused around how the HRM-performance link takes place and to what extent it is generalisable across sectors and countries (Data *et al.*, 2005; Boxall *et al.*, 2011; Stanton *et al.*, 2014), across organisations large and small, public, private or not-for-profit (Boxall and Purcell, 2016) and across different institutional and cultural contexts (Cooke, 2009), and different cohorts of employees (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2017; Ang *et al.*, 2013). More recently, there has been a focus on employee outcomes such as commitment, engagement and well-being (Guest and Conway, 2011; Boxall and Purcell, 2016; Ulrich, 2016). However, understanding the links between HRM and employee creativity or innovation is in its early stages and tends to focus on particular enabling practices such as learning and development or creative teams (Shipton *et al.*, 2017a).

Exploring the relevance of particular HRM practices is valuable, but HRM theorists have stressed the importance of "bundles" of practices that work in tandem towards the same goals (MacDuffie, 1995). The logic is that these bundles lead to high-performance work systems (HPWSs), practices and structures which drive desired outcomes and behaviours (Combs *et al.*, 2006; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2009). Similarly, high-involvement work systems (HIWSs) bring together a suite of practices that engage employees in decision making, improve employee commitment and engagement and lead to overall improved organisational effectiveness. Debates also flourish around best practice or contingency approaches to HRM, cost reduction or commitment-based models and whether employing organisations use different approaches for different groups of employees depending on their strategic value (Lepak and Snell, 1999; Ang *et al.*, 2013). Shipton *et al.* (2017b) argue that these top-down paradigms underpinning strategic HRM theory contrast with theories and practice of creativity and innovation which are based around individuals and teams coming together, often through informal collaboration as a "bottom-up emergence". If this is the case and if creativity and innovation is valued or sought after in an employing organisation, then what is the role of HRM?

Shipton *et al.* (2017b) identify two distinct HRM configurations. One is underpinned by control from the top and the other by what they describe as an "entrepreneurial ethos" that promotes reflective innovative behaviour. In this paper, we explore these two configurations and ask, first, can HRM lead workplace innovation through top-down initiatives or, second, should HRM practices focus on fostering the conditions for creativity and innovation to emerge and thrive?

Leading workplace innovation – is HRM a change agent?

Bowen and Ostroff (2004) suggest that for it to be successful, HRM must be a strong system that is distinctive, consistent and based on consensus. They see a strong HRM system as one that signals to managers and employees what is expected, valued, and rewarded within the organisation. So, can such a strong HRM system lead workplace innovation from the top?

We often observe challenges, inconsistencies and contradictions in our own experiences of HRM as academic leaders, managers, employees or consultants. Despite the fact that HRM specialists often assume they are enablers of change, in practice HRM practitioners in large

employing organisations are often seen to be compliance focused; the people who tell you what you cannot do, not what you can! It is a paradox that many organisational development consultants and other change agents tend to see HRM specialists as a "stumbling block"; to be bypassed when trying to introduce workplace change and transformation. Change agents tend to see HRM specialists as "police-like enforcers" of "the rules" and procedures who assess the risk of change and often advise against it, or at the very least put constraints around it. Change often means that "the rules" and procedures have to be re-negotiated, revised or at least relaxed, rather than being rigidly policed. Risk aversion can stifle workplace creativity, innovation and transformation (Hodgson and Briand, 2013).

In reality, workplace change and innovation is often led by other parts of an organisation, rather than the HRM team. For example, in a recent study on the introduction of lean innovations in hospitals, we found that workplace innovations were led by consultants and/or by practitioners with lean management expertise, with little or no involvement of HRM specialists, unless an industrial relations issue emerged (Bamber *et al.*, 2014). The people who led such workplace changes saw the innovations as their "territory" and outside the scope of the HRM function. Further, they did not see HRM specialists as part of "the solution" that is improved organisational processes, but rather as part of "the problem" of organisations having inefficient and counter-productive work processes. For instance, in one hospital the HRM director claimed to be one of the instigators of the intervention, however, this was not obvious to the others involved. In another hospital, the project sponsor did not understand why the research team wished to interview members of the HRM team, arguing that it was beyond the scope of the study. Similarly, members of the HRM team were unsure as to why they were being asked to be interviewed – what did this intervention have to do with them? These findings are in line with McBride and Mustchin's (2013) findings that HRM departments in the healthcare sector may not be part of major workplace change initiatives.

In the current context (the transformation of work due to digital technologies, new forms of organisation and the importance placed on creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship), such attitudes are a concern. Does this reflect reality? Are HRM practitioners and HRM scholars deluding themselves regarding their relevance and importance? Our research experience in the above-mentioned study led to one of the key questions explored in this special issue: to what extent are human resources specialists involved in leading workplace innovations in practice?

HRM as an enabler of innovation?

Even if HRM specialists may not be leading transformations of workplaces, can they still encourage, nurture and promote practices that foster innovation? Perhaps they can by promoting HIWSs, or related practices that reward and encourage creative and innovative outcomes such as employee participation, collective learning and development. Could it be the role of HRM to be invisible, to be the practitioners who are working behind the scenes to foster organisational improvements? While Bowen and Ostroff (2004) see HRM visibility as an important feature of a strong HRM system, might it be a key attribute of successful HRM practitioners to remain invisible? Could a strong HRM system be the lubricant that keeps systems, process and people working in unison towards achieving organisational goals?

The answers to these questions are rather complex. The answers may reflect basic understandings of what HRM is and what are the perceptions of its relevance and value to senior organisational actors. If HRM is an enabler, not a leader, then it may be acceptable that the HRM department's organisation development team is working behind the scenes, with managers and leaders who are representing the outward face of the organisation. It could be that if the HRM department is seen to be leading an initiative or intervention, it is likely to fail, as managers and employees see this as an intervention forced upon them rather than co-partnered or co-created. While such failures are often observed in reports of

research, they are not often a focus of research. This may be due to difficulty in getting such research access, or that it is challenging to get such studies published in leading academic journals. Moreover, it may not be in the interest of HRM practitioners to draw attention to their failures or shortcomings as HRM practitioners in organisations as they strive to demonstrate their relevance and value to attract the resources necessary to carry out their work. This raises an important question for HRM and management practitioners – how do you evaluate HRM effectiveness if you cannot see it? If much HRM work is not visible or understood by organisational actors, then how do HRM specialists raise their prestige, perceived value or credibility, within their organisations and more widely?

Academics and HRM specialists often think in terms of the HRM system or architecture (Paauwe *et al.*, 2013; Ulrich, 2016). They see the big picture and look for strategic links vertically and horizontally between bundles of practices (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Stanton *et al.*, 2010), but the experience of HRM by line managers and employees is often more transactional and task focused (Liu *et al.*, 2015; Ang *et al.*, 2013). For line managers, key issues might be: How do they commence the recruitment and selection process? Do they have to write the position description? How do they onboard staff after they have recruited them? Where do they start them on a pay scale? How should they deal with an industrial relations issue? How do they manage a difficult staff member? Or how do they deal with a disciplinary process? While many of these activities might require a problem-focused response from the HRM specialists they are not seen as strategic or not necessarily linked to other practices. Instead, they are often around compliance. Am I doing the right thing? Rather than an HRM business partner thinking strategically, line managers might prefer an HRM "handmaiden" – someone at their beck and call (Storey *et al.*, 2013).

An employee might have a similar experience of HRM specialists. How do I apply for leave? How do I apply for promotion? What do I do if someone is bullying me or discriminating against me? What if I am being under-paid? The frequently asked questions of most HRM websites contain many variations of such concerns. Again, for employees, HRM is about rules, compliance and tasks.

Many of the things that we can infer from research on HRM can help to enhance employee satisfaction, commitment, productivity and performance, such as autonomy, empowerment and involvement in decision making. However, such activities may not be seen by employees to be in the domain or expertise of HRM. For example, job autonomy, empowerment and involvement in decision making is often seen by employees to either reflect the practice and ability of their immediate line managers, or the independence given by professional practice and status (Ang *et al.*, 2013). There is much literature on the important role of line managers in engaging and developing staff. One of the recommendations emerging from this literature is that line managers need training and development and support. Who does this? Is it the role of HRM specialists? How effective and valued are the HRM specialists by end users?

Much of the current thinking and research on HRM is still based around large, formal employing organisations (Boxall and Purcell, 2016). There is an expanding quest for agility and entrepreneurial thinking, especially along with the growth of an atypical workforce through outsourcing and novel "platform" business models and the growth of independent professionals and micro businesses. Much of the HRM literature assumes that employees are standard as in the old model of manufacturing, but large parts of the workforce are in various forms of "atypical" relationships, for example, conducting periodic gigs with their "employers". Increasingly we see "hybrid" workers who may also move in and out of employing organisations, at other times working for themselves in a range of "start-ups" or social enterprise activities (Wright *et al.*, 2017). We have project-based organisations such as construction or performing-arts companies, for instance, where the nature of the work is short term and where employees might see that their commitment is to the industry or the art rather

than the company. Many of these organisations are not large enough to have a specialist HR manager and the HRM function is carried out by one generalist manager or the functions are spread across a range of managers and in this way devalued. The transformation of organisational forms and modes of employment are creating a need for HRM specialists to respond in creative, flexible, agile and innovative ways to maintain relevance and contribute to the organisational goals.

Moreover, as we move towards an increasingly automated and robotised work environment, new jobs will be in the areas of creativity and innovation. This leads to new challenges for HRM theorists. How can employing organisations foster the conditions for creativity and innovation? Is this a whole-of-organisation approach? Or a team approach? Can HRM be agile enough to enable and support rather than stifle and smother? Research in the games industry suggests that, despite the rhetoric of enabling creativity, the business and financial reality of such enterprises is that there is still an emphasis on monitoring and control, which tends to undermine creativity and innovation (Hotho and Champion, 2011; Hodgson and Briand, 2013). Can HRM specialists challenge this approach by raising questions of motivation and commitment, or do they tend to stifle creativity by focusing on compliance?

Not only is the future of work being transformed, but also the future of the workforce. We are seeing increasing diversity, in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, disability and sexuality. On the one hand, many employing organisations are seeing the value of diversity and inclusion for creativity, innovation, new ways of thinking, as well as understanding their markets and consumers more than hitherto, not least by drawing on the increasing availability of data. Diversity and inclusion can also be a value-add. On the other hand, globally, we live in increasingly ugly times where blame for perceived ills can be blamed on other cultures, religions and races or migrants. Employing organisations are not immune from the context in which they operate and resentment and discrimination can spread into organisations, the results often have to be dealt with by HRM practitioners.

The questions above should be seen against a background that the field of HRM is in a state of flux. There are divisions, for example, between at least two approaches. First, some specialists advocate that field of HRM should be strategic and represented on corporate boards. However, as Bowen and Ostroff (2004) argue, representation alone does not lead to action. If HRM policy and practice is not distinctive (i.e. visible, relevant and understandable), it will not be recognised as valuable by other managers in the hierarchy or by other employees. Moreover, lack of understanding at the top is likely to lead to lack of consistency and consensus further down the organisation (Stanton *et al.*, 2014). Second, others advocate that the role of HRM should be to conduct transactional aspects of people management, and that it could increasingly be outsourced. Will HRM itself become part of the emerging "gig" economy?

Perhaps HRM is losing its relevance and needs to change from compliance to enabling innovation and employee performance. HRM practice needs to enable not stifle performance and HRM specialists must understand the nature of the work or the service context.

Special issue articles
The articles in this special issue reflect some of the phenomena discussed above in this first article. The special issue includes a total of 12 articles each contributing perspectives to various facets of the role of HRM and workplace innovation.

The second article by Bos-Nehles, Renkema and Janssen is a systematic literature review of HRM and innovative work behaviour (IWB). Although we know that HRM practices can have a huge impact on employees' IWB, we do not know exactly which practices make the difference and how they affect IWB. The aim of this paper is to determine the best HRM practices for boosting IWB, to understand the theoretical reasons for this, and to discover mediators and moderators in the relationship between

HRM practices and IWB. Based on a systematic review of the literature, the authors carried out a content analysis of peer-reviewed journal articles. They clustered HRM practices according to the ability-motivation-opportunity framework. The best HRM practices for enhancing IWB are training and development, reward, job security, autonomy, task composition, job demand and feedback. The results of this study provide practical information for those aiming to develop an HRM system that generates innovative employee behaviours that might help build an innovative climate. The authors present a framework that aggregates the findings and clarifies which HRM practices influence IWB and how these relationships can be explained.

The third article by Prus, Nacamulli and Lazazzara is another systematic literature review. This consolidates much research by proposing a comprehensive conceptual framework of workplace innovation and by outlining the research traditions on the phenomenon. The authors review the literature published over the past 20 years, based on a predefined research protocol. They explore dimensions of workplace innovation using a thematic synthesis and textual narrative synthesis. They identify four research traditions on workplace innovation: built container, humanised landscape, socio-material macro-actor, polyadic network – and each of them has its own set of assumptions, foci of study, and ontological bases. The findings suggest that workplace innovation is a heterogeneous process of renovation in eight dimensions: work system, workplace democracy, high-tech application, workplace boundaries, workspaces, people practices, workplace experience, and workplace culture. The article includes implications for developing and implementing workplace innovation programmes. Moreover, it discusses the role of HRM in the workplace innovation process. This paper clarifies the concept of workplace innovation; it discusses implications for future research and implications for HRM specialists.

The fourth article by Whitfield, Sengupta, Pendleton and Huxley examines employee share ownership (ESO) and organisational performance. A range of studies have shown that performance is typically higher in organisations that have innovated with ESO schemes in place. Many possible causal mechanisms explaining this relationship have been suggested. These include a reduction in labour turnover, synergies with other forms of productivity-enhancing communication and participation schemes, and synergies with employer-provided training. This paper empirically assesses these potential linkages using data from British Workplace Employment Relations Surveys. Substantial differences are found between the 2004 and 2011 results: a positive relationship between ESO and workplace productivity and financial performance, observed in 2004, is no longer present in 2011. In both years, ESO is found to have no clear relationship with labour turnover, and there is no significant association between turnover and performance. There is, however, a positive moderating relationship with downward communication schemes in 2004 and in 2011 in the case of labour productivity. There is no corresponding relationship for upward involvement schemes. The results are only partially supportive of extant theory and its various predictions, and the relationship between ESO and performance seems to have weakened over time. The study further questions much rhetoric in support of wider employee share ownership.

The fifth article by Meijerink and Maatman builds an analysis on the premise that HRM shared service centres (SSCs) innovate HRM service through the centralisation of resources and decentralising control, and in doing so, create value for their clients. However, it remains unclear as to how these two features of SSCs allow improvement in the value of HRM services. Based on a survey of business units in Dutch organisations, structural equation modelling reveals that the use of formal control mechanisms such as contracts and service level agreements are negatively associated with shared service value, but that this relationship becomes positive once mediated by informal control mechanisms such as trust and shared language. Moreover, they demonstrate that the dynamic HRM capabilities of SSCs relate

positively with shared service value for the business units, but only through their effect on operational HRM capabilities. Whereas previous studies into SSCs have examined the two antecedents independently, this study shows how organisational control mechanisms and HRM capabilities interrelate in explaining the value of HRM shared services.

The sixth article by Tang, Yu, Cooke and Chen examines the underlying mechanism through which HPWSs influence employee creativity. The authors investigate the contingent factors in the relationship between perceived organisational support and employee creativity. Based on a sample of employee and supervisor dyads from two companies in China, the study demonstrates that HPWSs enhance perceived organisational support, which in turn promotes employee creativity. Findings also show that devolved management positively moderates the relationship between perceived organisational support and employee creativity. This paper is valuable because it illustrates the importance of using HPWSs, in particular, the potential of devolved management to inspire creativity among employees in a Chinese manufacturing context. This is the first study that explores the mediating role of perceived organisational support in the HPWSs-employee creativity linkage. In addition, the study may provide the first test of the moderating role of devolved management.

The seventh article by Xiu, Liang, Chen and Xu examines the role of innovative HRM practices as an important mechanism through which strategic flexibility affects firm performance, as well as the role of female leadership on this relationship. Based on a sample of firms in China, Xiu and colleagues test a moderated mediation model. The authors report that organisations with a strong focus on strategic flexibility are more likely to adopt innovative HRM Practices. Moreover, innovative HRM practices were strongly associated with employee productivity. Interestingly, the authors also report that female leadership enhances the strategic flexibility-performance relationship. The article contributes to the literature in two ways. First, findings suggest that practitioners should put more emphasis on developing innovative HRM practices as they seem to be crucial for building strategic flexibility and effectively competing in the marketplace. Second, the presence of female senior leadership seems to enhance the positive impact of strategic flexibility on firm performance. We would encourage further research that unpacks how female senior leadership is different from male senior leadership, as well as the precise mechanisms by which gender may impact workplace innovation and performance. The results are of value to researchers, HRM managers, employees, and executives who are seeking to develop practices that are flexible and innovative to try to stay competitive in dynamic contexts.

The eighth article by Boyle, Malik and Mitchell uses a qualitative approach to study innovation in the resource-constrained context of India's healthcare industry. The authors argue that organisational ambidexterity and HRM innovation holds significant promise in addressing Indian healthcare management challenges. Boyle and colleagues find evidence of the use of high-involvement HRM practices for exploration of new ideas and efficiency-driven HRM practices for creating contextual ambidexterity in the case organisations. Moreover, leadership style seemed to play an important role in creating trust, openness, risk taking and employee empowerment. Training and development was reported as central to creating ambidexterity to enhance workplace innovation among healthcare providers. This is a valuable study as it examines innovation in India's healthcare sector through intersecting literatures of ambidexterity, innovation and HRM. Importantly, this study demonstrates how contextual idiosyncrasies enhance practitioner and scholar understanding of the role of HRM in facilitating innovation in emerging economies.

The ninth article by Meacham, Cavanagh, Shaw and Bartram is based on two Australian organisations and examines HRM management innovation programmes in the early stages of employment for workers with an intellectual disability (WWID). The first study is conducted in a large company where a film innovation programme was used to enhance the socialisation process of WWID. The second was at a five-star hotel in a large

city where a "buddy" system innovation programme was used in the induction and training process of WWID. This qualitative study is framed by socialisation and career construction theory and examines the ways in which socialisation and socially inclusive HRM practices enable WWID to achieve successful career paths. The authors show that these innovation programmes from the perspectives of participants enhanced creative opportunities for the social inclusion of WWID. The WWID displayed more confidence and independence in their ability and exhibited aspirations to advance and succeed in their roles. This paper is innovative in that it goes beyond traditional disability research that tends to focus on securing employment and disability accommodations rather than promoting the voices of WWID and HRM innovations that enable WWID to self-actualise in the workplace. The article argues that HRM professionals need to be more proactive in finding innovative ways to engage and enable WWID.

The tenth article by Peetz, Brabant, Muurlink, Townsend and Wilkinson examines the question: are new organisations at the cutting edge of employment relations innovation? This is an important question given that if new organisations are operating using leading-edge management practices, then it seems logical that they would be engaged in new methods of employment relations innovation. The authors ask, but are they? This paper includes the results of a national telephone survey of Australian business managers, and explores how the prevalence of particular ER features co-varies with employer characteristics, in particular the age of the firms. This study extends current research of employment relations in younger firms and compares responses from managers of firms of different ages, sizes and industry sectors. Results seem to suggest that within a short time, new firms come to largely resemble older firms, at least in terms of superficial implementation of ER practices. New firms are less likely to be unionised than older firms.

The 11th article by McKeown and Cochrane addresses the call to examine the "black-box" links between HRM innovations and organisational performance by investigating the perspective of a workforce often excluded from the HRM realm: professional independent contractors (IPros). They may play a vital role in achieving workforce flexibility and innovation. While the use of such arrangements has been examined often using a compliance-oriented lens, they explore the value of adding a commitment aspect. McKeown and Cochrane find that organisational support significantly predicted work engagement and affective commitment. Self-efficacy, age and gender were also significant predictors.

The study presents the views of a difficult-to-reach population and the findings suggest that by adopting an innovative hybrid commitment-compliance HRM configuration, practitioners may positively increase desirable contractor outcomes. Few investigations of the impact of high-commitment HRM practices have incorporated the perspective of professional, non-employees. While IPros are recipients of compliance-focused contractor management practices, carefully integrated commitment-based HRM aspects have the potential to deliver positive outcomes for individuals and employing organisations.

The 12th article by Plimmer, Bryson and Teo explores how HIWSs and other workplace innovations affect organisational ambidexterity. Given the demands on the public sector to manage conflicting objectives, and the need to do more with less in increasingly uncertain environments, this paper contributes to enhancing understanding of how HIWSs and organisation systems positively impact public-sector performance. Using a multi-level quantitative approach based on a large survey of supervisory staff, and non-supervisory employees across government organisations, the article identifies two paths to organisational performance; one through a direct HIWSs-performance link; and the second through a double mediation effect from HIWSs to organisational systems, to organisational ambidexterity and then performance. This study contributes to the HRM literature through being one of the first studies to explore how HIWSs can be used to develop collective capabilities in public-sector contexts.

Importantly, the study provides new insights into alternative approaches to improving public-sector performance, rather than through downsizing or restructuring that may not be effective.

Towards a research agenda

The articles in this special issue of *Personnel Review*, "Human resources and workplace innovations: practices, perspectives and paradigms", demonstrate that the HRM profession needs to embrace and enable innovation and HRM practice needs to be re-thought to have innovation at its core. However, where is this happening and how does or could HRM specialists help to foster innovation? We can infer at least six areas for future research from these articles and from the above discussion.

First, there should be greater focus on the newer contexts and sectors to find out if HRM is part of the thinking in the development phase, or an afterthought where HRM practitioners are brought in to impose compliance and rules when things have already gone wrong. HRM specialists could be playing a strategic role and instead of waiting for organisational strategy to be developed, they could be part of strategy formulation. HRM specialists could identify new trends in the labour market, forecasting and investing in future skill requirements and encouraging the enterprise to take risks, thereby demonstrating their relevance and value. To do this successfully in a large organisation the HRM specialists need to have enough time and resources. HRM specialists have long fought for a role at the strategic level, but they should also be fighting to maintain relevance in relation to organisational and workplace innovation. In a small organisation, it would mean having someone with HRM knowledge and experience as part of the development team. Our first research question is as follows:

> RQ1. Are HRM specialists analysing relevant trends and their implications for the future of work and the workforce?

Second, employees are at the heart of innovation. It is employees who can identify new ways of doing things that keep established enterprises alive and at the forefront of their context or sector. Operational employees may be in a good position to identify problems and see new opportunities. They should be valued, rewarded and motivated to contribute their ideas; HRM specialists should encourage organisational leaders to trust and listen to their employees. Employee involvement in decision making takes on greater importance in innovative organisations. A second research question is as follows:

> RQ2. How are HRM specialists enabling employing organisations to identify and enable innovative ideas?

Third, the field of industrial relations has an important role in innovation. On the one hand, industrial-relations systems and the key institutions including trade unions can be blockages through adherence to formal rules and regulation and a backward-looking stance. Unions struggle to protect jobs in increasingly fragmented labour markets. However, as unions seek alternative modes of organisation to recruit those hybrid workers who may be in and out of employing organisations, who are sometimes employees and sometimes self-employed, there is scope for opening up dialogue with far-sighted employers. Ideally, discussions about innovation and change should take place outside of the heat of collective bargaining. Instead, employers could work with unions as partners; identifying new skills and providing training opportunities and new forms of employment security that are sustainable for all. A third research question, therefore, is as follows:

> RQ3. Are HRM specialists leading partnership arrangements with organised labour?

Fourth, HRM specialists should see vulnerable groups through a different lens. People with a disability, either physical or mental, older workers, racial minorities and indigenous people

may experience the world of work in a different way. They have a "lived experience" that can be a source of value. Too often we see such groups as having a form of deficit in skills, ability or knowledge (Meacham *et al.*, 2017a, b). We apply a welfare or a social-justice perspective to their employment – for example it is an element of an organisation's corporate social responsibility to "do good". However, if we look through different eyes we can see that some of the most creative and successful people in history had mental health challenges, there is a huge growth in successful Aboriginal and First Nations entrepreneurship and business development, and older workers may bring wisdom and experience to organisations (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2017). So, inclusion can bring positive benefits to all and HRM specialists can enable this. The Fourth and fifth research questions are, therefore, as follows:

RQ4. What is the role of HRM specialists in creating inclusive work environments?

RQ5. How should HRM specialists change to foster enterprise performance, intrapreneurship, agility, creativity and innovation?

To what extent do they have the skills to support and enable innovation? Are they educated and trained appropriately to support and lead innovation? Does HRM need to be re-configured and re-conceptualised around innovation and if so, how to do this? Perhaps the research question here relates to the relevance of the HRM profession and future HRM skills. HRM specialists should be reflective and decide how they can enable HRM people to compete in the HRM labour market. How do HRM specialists maintain their relevance? We should think beyond notions of HPWSs, HIWSs and strategic HRM, which often assume a large enterprise context with full-time employees that are committed to one employing organisation. Business and employment modes have changed. HRM specialists and their set of skills must change too. How best can HRM specialists facilitate such changes?

Sixth, the HRM function should not be an island. Discussion of HRM and innovation has to extend well beyond the HRM specialist function. To foster innovation, HRM specialists should be part of a team, together with line managers and other stakeholders, in devising and implementing HRM policy and practices that help the enterprise to achieve strategic goals. Line managers might perform an "HRM role", defined in terms of Ulrich's framework (Ashkenas *et al.*, 1995). For example, drawing on research in hospitals, Shipton *et al.* show that line managers performing an employee-champion role in combination with a strategic-partner role is optimum for employee commitment. This leads to a sixth research question:

RQ6. To what extent is there an HRM function for line managers in coordination with HRM specialists in engendering innovation through "change agent" roles?

We propose further research on the range of stakeholders who together have responsibility for innovating in the design and delivery of HRM. This would enrich our knowledge of HRM and workplace innovations and have significant practical implications.

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