Exploring the ideological undercurrents of HRM:

Workplace values and beliefs in Ireland & New Zealand

Despite hints of more pluralist undercurrents, workplace values and beliefs have rarely been surfaced to inform our understanding of HRM. This paper examines management and employee workplace values and beliefs in the national contexts of Ireland and New Zealand. The findings indicate a) a divergence of managerial beliefs at the level of society and the level of their own workplace, b) an overall pluralist orientation amongst employees. These findings highlight the importance of greater sensitivity to ideological orientation and more pluralist understandings of HRM.

Keywords: unitarism; employees; HRM; ideology; pluralism

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Introduction

While debates remain about when HRM precisely emerged, there is less doubt about its subsequent impact (Kaufman, 2007). HRM literature has increased almost exponentially since the 1980s (Harley and Hardy 2004), yet increased volume does not in itself guarantee progress. An expansive literature and research base may simply adhere to and perpetuate the norms of a given paradigm, however limited its assumptions and labels (Brewster 2007; Delbridge and Keenoy 2010). In support of this point, content analysis of key contributions have found a 'consensus' standpoint underpinned by a unitarist orientation and a related bias to assess positive outcomes (Keegan and Boselie 2006; Batt and Banerjee 2012). A specific example concerns employees; originally neglected from HRM research, employees have gradually received more research attention (Guest 2011), albeit largely on HRM's own terms.

This paper is an attempt to broaden the basis for incorporating employees into analysis of HRM. Specifically, the paper focuses on employee orientations, that is, the underlying beliefs and values shaping workplace relations in contrast to simply exploring employee outputs in the form of 'responses' to various HRM practices (Gahan and Abeysekera, 2009; Nishii et al., 2008). Indeed, the logic of our argument holds that an understanding of the former is a prerequisite to understanding the likely nature of the latter. In order to explore the nature of employee orientations the paper therefore grapples with a central paradox underpinning HRM theory and research, namely that HRM endeavours to create a unitarist workplace while frequently presupposing its existence. The task is

empirically advanced by exploring workplace orientations of both managers and workers from the national contexts of Ireland and New Zealand.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section briefly elaborates how employee orientations have been represented in HRM research. Following on from this, the lens of employment ideology is explored as a means to offer a broader understanding of workplace values and beliefs. The methodology section details how workplace values and beliefs were explored in the national contexts of Ireland and New Zealand while also providing a contextual backdrop for the research. Findings are then presented before key implications for HRM theory and future research are discussed. Overall, the findings highlight a divergence in management orientations between the level of society and their own workplace, while employees were found to have a pluralist orientation. This suggests that until managerial and employee workplace values and beliefs have been adequately explored and accommodated, we risk perpetuating a limited understanding of how HRM is likely to operate and diffuse into practice.

HRM and employee orientations

Contemporary understanding of HRM has its major impetus primarily from a small number of books published in the US in the 1980s (Legge 2005). Two key assumptions distinguished HRM from its predecessors, namely that HRM is a strategic activity with clear performative implications and secondly, that the employing organisation has autonomy to act with regard to managing people (Brewster, 2007). As a consequence much HRM research evolved to explore macro-level phenomenon and organisational level outcomes, while debate has been characterised by technical issues rather than deeper ideological introspection (Delaney and Godard, 2001; Strauss 2001). This is evident in the 'consensus orientation'

found in extensive content analysis of HRM research (Francis and Keegan 2006; Batt and Banerjee 2012). From its inception HRM has therefore largely represented a managerialist agenda (Guest, 1999), neglecting the plurality inherent to the employment relationship evident in earlier frameworks e.g. "contracts manager" (Tyson 1995) or "regulator" (Storey 1992). This is also reflected in methodological discussion where some advocate single respondent surveys rather than opening up research to HRM's multiple stakeholders (Becker and Huselid 2006, p. 913).

The early unitarist underpinning of HRM resulted in the prospect of differing interests within organisations, and the significance of direct exploration of workplace values and beliefs being downplayed (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010). Overtime, however, such deficiencies have gradually been addressed. First, a stream of work has highlighted how HRM may be differentially applied to groups within firms contingent on factors such as perceived value added of the employee grouping to firm activities (Lepak and Snell, 1999) or on the basis of employment status (Liao et al., 2009). Second, a 'growing sophistication' in the understanding of how HRM impacts performance (Guest, 2011, p. 5) has led to research which has directly incorporated employees and their shared perception of HR via mechanisms such as social exchange theory and organisational climate (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Takeauchi et al., 2009). Insight has also extended beyond simply examining the outcomes of HRM practices to explore inputs to HR in the form of the varying ways employees attribute meaning to practices (Nishii et al., 2008: 504). Moreover, the idea that the objectives of employees naturally conflate with those of management has been challenged. For example, research has shown that even where HR has achieved the status of a fully integrated 'strategic partner' this may not necessarily be beneficial for employees, indeed it can lead to feelings of estrangement and frustration (Hope-Hailey, et al., 2005: 65). Of particular interest is recognition of the differing evaluations of HR between management

and employees. In their study of public sector health organisations, Conway and Monks (2008: 85) find differences in the HR practices that employees attach importance to relative to management, while in the context of 91 bank branches Liao et al., (2009) found that management tended to be significantly more favourable in their evaluations of the work system relative to other employee groups. This understanding is also reflected in the use of more multifaceted measures of performance, and greater exploration of other HRM stakeholders, most notably line managers (Guest and Bos-Nehles, 2013; Harney and Jordan, 2008). Overall, this line of work hints at the importance of appreciating the plurality of interests that may form the basis of the employment relationship, and cautions against approaches which may simply take these as a given, underwritten by unitarist assumptions.

Understanding Workplace Values and Beliefs: The lens of employment ideology

Reviews of HRM research have highlighted the relevance of alternative, industrial relations orientated lenses to better examine the basis of workplace relations and "in shaping the course of HR policies and practices" (Batt and Banerjee 2012, p. 1751). The concept of managerial, or employment ideology, appeared in the US literature in the 1950's with the work of Taft (1954), Kerr (1955), Bendix (1956), and Dunlop (1958). In more recent times in the ideology has received much less attention in the US employment relations and HRM literature, (notable exceptions include Edwards (1979) and Barley and Kunda (1992)). In the UK, considerably more attention has been afforded to ideology, primarily as a consequence of the work of Alan Fox (1966). The definition of ideology adopted for this study is that it involves:

A connected set of beliefs, attitudes and values held by an
identifiable social group which refer to a specific aspect of social reality,

which comprise normative, empirical and prescriptive elements and which

may be at a general or particular level … (Geare 1994, p. 125).

Fox (1966) identified two significant ideologies as unitary and pluralist frames of reference. The unitarist ideology posits that the organisation functions around shared (harmonious) goals and a common identity between employee and employer (Farnham and Pilmott 1986). A unitarist workplace is one where *all* interests coalesce around official objectives and healthiness stems from there being only one legitimate source of authority (Fox 1966). Kaufman (2008) has recently referred to this as the 'identity of interest' model of the employment relationship promoting a 'top-down' management-dominated form of workforce governance. It must be recognised, however, that ideologies can be inconsistent, indeed a "ragbag of assorted notions to suit various exigencies" (Fox 1971, p. 261). For managers especially, unitarism serves as more than a set of shared understandings. First, ideology provides a basis of managerial *self-confidence*: the reassurance that there is some basic harmony and any dissent is either due to poor management or uninformed agitators. Second, ideology has a *persuasive* capacity: demonstrating to employees and the general public that managers are expert professionals best placed to decide employment policy. Finally, legitimisation of *authority* is conferred through ideological self-assurance and the instruments of persuasion.

In contrast, pluralism sees the organisation as comprising different groups with both common and divergent aims and objectives. Even with common interests there may be differing priorities, and intended outcomes. The likes of Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel (1979), Flanders (1964 1970), Fox (1979) and Goldthorpe (1968) delved deeper than the acknowledgment of the existence of divergent interests that could be controlled and managed

through institutions such as collective bargaining. Instead they illuminated the complexities surrounding the balance of power and the role of democratic and oligarchic tendencies under pluralist institutions (Clegg 1975). Such variability within the pluralist ideology includes a more questioning perspective of the efficacy of social inequality and the structural and hierarchical nature of monopoly capitalism; in particular the perpetuation of low-trust relations between employer and employee (Fox 1974). More recently Ackers (2002) seeks to theorize the basis of pluralist social inclusion with a call to understand cooperation as well as conflict, along with gender and community-based values that were often missed by earlier scholars. Hence, the potential for both conflict and accommodation is present but often under-theorised. Such divergent orientations towards the employment relationship, even within the pluralist camp have become taken for granted as a set of beliefs by respective proponents, and often as being "correct", without being subject to empirical scrutiny (Geare, Edgar and McAndrew 2006).

The unitary–pluralist dichotomy is not without critics. Purcell (1987) questioned the utility of the labels in articulating the complexity of management styles, especially as they are 'by definition mutually exclusive'. While Purcell is correct that it is too simplistic to assume people are either "unitary" or "pluralist" in a perfect sense, the same applies when people are classified as "liberal" or "conservative", "left wing" or "right wing." However, so long as dichotomous classification approximates reality, it has the benefit of clarity. Unitary and pluralist frames are more than style choices; they cut to the heart of how employers view, perceive and approach the management of the employment relationship.

Some theorists have expanded both the unitary and pluralist concepts. Ackers and Payne (1998, p. 544) consider that unitarism has been recast "from a narrow ideology of

shared interests into a more persuasive appeal to common organizational values and culture." Cullinane and Dundon (2012, p. 8) recently unpacked the concept of unitarism to expose various constellations ranging from traditional to paternalistic to human relations. Significantly in this empirical work they found the majority of employers "favoured statements that accorded with the traditional unitary posture." Van Buren and colleagues (2011: 212) present unitarism in a threefold manner as possibly reflecting a normative ('what should be') approach highlighting the necessity of organizations and employees having the same interests; a conceptual ('what could be approach') captured in frameworks connecting HRM practices to the goals of organizations and employees and an empirical or descriptive ('what is') which assessing the actual nature of alignment (Geare et al., 2006). This disaggregated approach is useful as it acknowledges that there can be different elements to a person's values and beliefs, or ideology. Thus, a person will have *different* beliefs in a normative (should be) sense, than in an empirical (what is) sense, unless they believe that reality is ideal. This distinction is significant as it recognises the possibility that individuals preach from one ideology while practicing from another (Budd and Bhave 2008; Cullinane and Dundon, 2012). Ackers (2012) cautions against an overly simplistic presentation of pluralism and unitarism as polar opposites as this risks privileging a conflict tinted version of pluralism at the expense of co-operation, something he seeks to rectify in making the case for neo-pluralism. Akin to unitarism, pluralism therefore is likely to have varying degrees of emphasis (Cullinane and Dundon, 2012), including that which stresses values justice, fairness over and above economic interests (Ackers and Payne,1998, p. 544).

The HRM literature, when it refers to ideology, usually uses the unitary–pluralist dichotomy (Delaney and Godard 2001; Greenwood 2002). Thompson and Harley (2007, p. 149) argue that HRM is 'based explicitly or implicitly on a pluralist perspective of

competing, but containable interests among stakeholders'. By contrast others hold that the unitary view is a "taken for granted assumption" of HRM (Keenoy 1999, p. 2) with much of the HRM literature 'impregnated' by a unitarist approach to managing the employment relationship which assumes that employees' well-being and organisational goals can always be aligned (Janssens and Steyaert 2009; Van Buren et al., 2011). Unfortunately there is very rarely a differentiation between people's values and beliefs in an empirical sense compared to their values and beliefs in a normative sense. This problem goes back to Fox's seminal work. Fox (1966) considered the unitary ideology was "incongruent with reality" and seems "mere sentimental illusion." What Fox did not make explicit was that he was referring to the unitary ideology in an *empirical* sense. The beliefs according to Fox are incongruent with reality. When Anthony (1977) states that as a consequence the unitary ideology was "respectfully abandoned by sophisticated managers," he did not make clear in what sense the ideology was abandoned. As Geare et al. (2006, p. 1192) point out, these managers could well have retained a normative acceptance of the unitary ideology – "believing that it reflected an ideal state." In a normative sense, unitarism would clearly be very attractive to senior management, and if every organisation was in fact an integrated and harmonious whole, existing for the common purpose of achieving senior management's goals and objectives, life would be easier and more pleasant. Therefore, if senior management are *trying to achieve* a unitary organisation (as opposed to believing it exists), they are simply working in pursuit of their own interests. Normally one would assume that sort of behaviour, while hardly altruistic, was rational and acceptable.

A problem within HRM is that so much is written with the assumption that unitarism is an accurate portrayal of *reality*, as opposed to reflecting an ideal situation which management can try to achieve. This is highly problematic, if in fact Fox was correct and the

unitary ideology is a false reflection of reality. It will be problematic for HRM practice as it will encourage practitioners to employ practices in a manner which is unlikely to work, largely ignoring the possibility that "workers, managers (and even vice‑presidents) will resist managerial policies they do not like" (Strauss 2001, p. 892). It will be problematic for HRM academics because it perpetuates an assumed unitarism whereby "employee opinions are either unnecessary or self‑evident." (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000, p. 1119). By contrast this paper examines data which explicitly surfaces and compares management and employee workplace values and beliefs in the national contexts of Ireland and New Zealand.

Methodology

This work echoes a long tradition of examining workplace values and beliefs. For example, Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer and Platt took the theoretical basis of Human Relations to task for its "neglect of the worker's definition of the situation" (1968, p. 69). Likewise Gallie (1983) explored the extent to which conflict might be seen as a natural or necessary feature of society across France and Britain, while also examining worker's generalized image of their employer. The paper reports on the findings from a research collaboration between researchers in New Zealand and Ireland. Both teams of researchers administered national employer studies of HRM practices (n=675 in New Zealand, n=165 in Ireland) and used these to solicit participants for the more in-depth employee surveys reported here. The commitment involved respondent organisations administering a survey to a 10% proportion of their workforce. The results yielded 482 survey responses in New Zealand and 316 in Ireland.

The purpose of the study was to explore the nature of workplace ideological orientation (unitarism vs. pluralism) and the extent to which it was consistent across managers and employees. HRM, both in terms of conception and practice, is premised on the assumption employment relationships either are, or can be made, unitary. If managers and

workers do not share these assumptions, then it is likely the efficacy of HRM practice would be compromised. In addition, the research explored the extent of variation in ideological orientations at different levels of abstraction (general societal vs. organisation specific). By so doing, the research sought to offer a fuller picture of workplace reality than has previously been evident. In bringing employees back into analysis we do so in a manner which focuses on employee orientations, that is the underlying beliefs and values shaping workplace relations in contrast to simply exploring employee outputs in the form of "responses" to various HRM practices (Purcell and Kinnie 2007, p. 548). While surveys are limited in terms of their ability to generate theory, they collect data from a large sample, facilitating macro-level insight (Ichniowski, Kochan, Levine, Olson and Strauss 1996).

Ireland and New Zealand

The choice of Ireland and New Zealand was to an extent convenience and coincidence. Two teams of researchers, one from each country, met and discovered they were independently conducting similar research. Fortunately the national contexts of Ireland and New Zealand provided a fertile ground for this research for a number of reasons. First, in many ways the two countries are very similar, operating as small open export-oriented economies, and largely commensurate in terms of population and the numbers employed in the workforce. At the time the data were collected, 2006-7 (before the global financial crisis (GFC)), both economies were doing well. Certainly, if the research had been conducted after the GFC, when Ireland (but not New Zealand) experienced "full-scale intervention and massive cuts" (Marchington and Kynighou 2012, p. 338), there would have been less similarity. One might expect a resurgence of unitarism in such a context (Marchington and Kynighou 2012), something empirically borne out in recent work surveys of Irish workers, albeit with significant additional stress and work intensity (Russell and McGinty, 2013). More, broadly

both countries are also said be "sufficiently alike" to fit under the broad label of "Anglo-American workplaces" (Freeman, Boxall and Haynes 2007, p. 1).

However, underlying such surface level similarities there is also notable divergence. New Zealand was a Co-ordinated Market Economy (CME) which adopted strategies of a Liberal Market Economy (LME) (Hamann and Kelly, 2008). From the mid-1980s, New Zealand embarked on a neo-liberal course, including deregulating the labour market and replacing the long-established, centralised, and collectivised wage-fixing system with a decentralised, and largely individualised system. Previous research in this context has indicated a largely pluralist orientation, albeit with a unitarist bent more likely amongst managers when considering their own workplaces (Geare et al., 2006). Ireland has been traditionally characterised as a voluntarist, classic LME that subsequently adopted more co-ordinated CME-type policies (Hamann and Kelly, 2008). Faced with national crisis in 1987, Ireland embarked on a series of tripartite social partnership agreements, including national wage agreements, which traded tax concessions for wage constraints. Nonetheless, there are suggestions of a disjuncture between national level and workplace cooperation in Ireland, which may become evident in societal versus workplace comparisons (Dobbins, 2010: 504).

While drawing on such neo-institutional understanding is useful, critically the study is not one of direct comparative research. The limits of collecting adequate national statistics, let alone comparing on this basis across societies are long acknowledged (Gallie 1983). The findings are, therefore, to be treated cautiously, with their value not found in representativeness or testing hypothesis, but in developing a tentative understanding of commonalities in patterns. The purpose is therefore to open up the prospect for enhanced theoretical understanding of the ideological undercurrents of HRM (Crompton and Lyonette 2006). A recent paper highlights that broad studies of contemporary management orientations suggest a unitarist bent (Cullinane and Dundon, 2012). To date in both Ireland and New

Zealand there has been limited research explicitly examining and comparing managerial and employee workplace values and beliefs.

Measures

Empirical work examining workplace ideologies is rare (Budd and Bhave 2008). It follows that there has only been limited development on measures of industrial relations (IR) ideology in the past, and those studies that have measured ideology (see for example, Godard (1997) and Goll (1991)) have employed a variety of approaches. In the domain of HRM, for example, Osterman (1994) utilised a single measure asking respondents to report the level of importance they placed on employee well-being. The present study uses a variant of a measure developed by Geare (1994) to assess values and beliefs. This measure comprises two parts. The first part measures *general empirical* values and beliefs (beliefs about "what is" in society) and the second part measures the *empirical* values and beliefs of respondents about their particular organisation (beliefs about "what is" in their current workplace). The survey was designed so that it could be distributed to both managerial and employee respondents. These two scales measured both managers' and employees' tendencies to prefer a unitary versus a pluralist, or vice versa, interpretation of the employment relationship. This measure had previously been tested to ensure it has sound psychometric properties (Geare, Edgar and McAndrew 2006, 2009).

For each of the seven items respondents were required to indicate a preference between two dichotomous (binary), randomly ordered statements (0 = Pluralist; 1 = Unitarist) – (for example: The principal objectives and interests of management and workers are (a) more or less similar, or (b) similar in some areas, but very different in others). In using this approach, while it is acknowledged that no person is likely to be a "pure" ideologue, it is anticipated respondents will indicate more of a preference for one of the two ideologies studied. The two options, option (a) and option (b), represent either a unitarist viewpoint or a

pluralist viewpoint. The items representing unitarist and pluralist values and beliefs were randomly ordered so that respondents did not fall into a pattern of indicating agreement with, for example all statements marked (a) indicating unitary values and beliefs. A total for each level of abstraction was calculated and collapsed into the following *three* categories, to reflect the orientation of the manager or the worker: 0-2 = Pluralist; 3-4 = Pluralist/Unitarist; and 5-7 = Unitarist.

Findings

Data were analysed using SPSS 15.00. Early piloting in both countries enabled refinement of questions while also facilitating early coding. The demographic profile of the samples (Table 1) reveals them to be reasonably representative of the employment characteristics of the labour forces in New Zealand and Ireland respectively. It is important to note that both samples are skewed towards the professional/semi-professional occupation classification and full-time workers. For example, in New Zealand full-time workers actually comprised around 72 per cent of the total labour force in 2007 while in Ireland the figure is estimated to be 81 per cent (Central Statistics Office Ireland 2009). These are the type of characteristics that might lead to a more unitarist orientation. Finally, manufacturing is overrepresented in the New Zealand sample whereas there is more of a bias towards larger organisations and the public sector in Irish sample.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

The framework for analysis used in this study encompasses (a) two levels of abstraction – (i) society and (ii) workplace; as well as (b) a range of belief dimensions, each reflecting a particular ideological preference – (i) membership within the organisation, (ii) management

of worker interests, (iii) shared objectives, (iv) views towards unions, (v) team spirit, (vi) collective bargaining, and (vii) conflict. It is this framework which is used for reporting results.

Ideological orientations

This study looks at the extent New Zealand and Irish managers and workers have values and beliefs which may be deemed unitarist, as opposed to "mixed", and as opposed to pluralist. The aim here is to establish whether differences exist and, if so, to see if these differences can be explained contextually. In making this assessment this study also gives consideration to levels of abstraction, i.e. are the employment relations values of managers and workers consistent between levels of abstraction or are there differences when individuals focus on their own organisations as opposed to society at large?

To explore these issues, respondent data for both the New Zealand and the Ireland samples were initially analysed using the full sample, with comparisons by country (see Table 2a). Comparisons were also made for country data based on 95% confidence intervals for proportions derived from the crosstabulations. These were all consistent with our chi-square results. We show directionality where the difference is found to be significant.

At the societal level, this analysis showed a significant association between ideological preference and country, with overall the Irish sample being more pluralist than the New Zealand sample. A statistically significant difference between the Irish and New Zealand data sets was found for five of the seven ideological preference statements (membership within the organisation; management of worker interests; shared objectives; views towards unions; and conflict).

At the workplace level of abstraction, where respondents reported on their ideological views in relation to their own workplace, the preference for unitarism for both the New

Zealand and the Irish samples appears to strengthen, and in some cases, considerably (see Table 2a). Indeed data for both countries, across all seven dimensions, indicates that pluralism was weaker. Statistically significant differences between the two country samples are found for six out of the seven dimensions; the exception being conflict where the results were identical between the two countries. On the other hand the area where the most difference between the data sets for the two countries is found is for "management of worker interests". For New Zealand the area where a major ideological shift appears to occur is "shared objectives"; for Ireland, this difference is found for "conflict". Data across both countries reveal a large shift for the dimension related to "team spirit".

INSERT TABLE 2a HERE

Prior analysis of a broader set of New Zealand data on ideological orientation has, however, revealed a difference to exist between the ideological preferences of managers and workers (Geare, et al. 2009), especially at the workplace level of abstraction. We therefore considered it appropriate to analyse these comparative data sets using this same demarcation (see Table 2b). This was also motivated by the fact that the data is disproportionate i.e. the New Zealand and Irish samples do not have the same ratio of respondents from the manager and worker groups.

Thus analysis based only on the combined managerial and employee data might not provide an accurate picture of current ideological orientations across the two countries.

INSERT TABLE 2b HERE

Analysis of manager data at the societal level of abstraction revealed one statistically significant difference for "shared objectives" and when all responses are viewed together it would seem Ireland managers are only slightly more pluralist than New Zealand managers.

As far as workers are concerned (see Table 2b), the sample data reveal greater divergence with statistically significant differences identified across four dimensions. We also observe both these groups to, in general, be more pluralist in their views.

For the manager sample, at the workplace level (see Table 2b), the results are mixed. The views of Irish managers are more generally unitarist than those expressed at the societal level of abstraction, with this same trend evident for New Zealand managers. It is of interest that two statements show very high support for a unitary view from managers in both countries – "management of worker interests" and "shared objectives" – this is a view which is not shared by the workers. Indeed as far as the worker sample is concerned, with the exception of "team spirit", data across both countries vary very little between the levels of abstraction examined.

We then aggregated data for these samples (see Tables 3 and 4). We coded all unitarist responses '0', and coded all pluralist responses '1'. We classified those participants whose responses totalled between 0-2 as holding a unitarist ideology; and those whose total responses ranged between 5-7, we classified as pluralist. The remaining intermediary group we classified as holding a mixed ideology.

INSERT TABLES 3 AND 4 HERE

These results show that 49 per cent of the New Zealand manager sample lean towards pluralism and 21 per cent towards unitarism when viewing the employment relationship from a societal level. Around 30 per cent of managers do not appear to have a strong preference for

a particular ideological stance. This is wholly consistent with data from the Irish managers. When managers from both New Zealand and Ireland respond, based on experiences from within their own organisation, the results are different. Around 25 per cent of New Zealand managers lean towards pluralism, and for Irish managers this percentage drops to only 14 per cent (this difference is not statistically significant, however). This decrease largely accounts for a big increase in preference for a unitary view, with 38 per cent of New Zealand and 46 per cent of Irish managers, holding this perspective. The size of this shift in ideology is considerable, and it appears to be consistent across the two countries examined. Around 40 per cent of managers from both countries do not strongly support either ideological preference.

The results from the worker data are not so consistent. At the societal level, similar to the managers, we find some 49 per cent of New Zealand workers lean towards a pluralist perspective. However, around two-thirds (66 per cent) of Irish workers hold this view. Only six per cent of Irish workers consider employment relationships to be unitary, whereas 17 per cent of New Zealand workers support this view. Similar to the manager sample, just over 30 per cent do not seem to hold a strong preference for either ideological orientation. At the workplace level, considerably more workers from both countries hold a pluralist view (38 per cent from New Zealand and 44 per cent from Ireland) compared to managers from these countries. This difference between the manager and the worker sample is also reflected in their views towards unitarism, with only 16 per cent (less than a third compared to Irish manager data) of Irish workers supporting this view and 26 per cent of New Zealand workers. Again there is about a five per cent increase evident in the group who do not appear to strongly support either preference.

In sum, these findings highlight the limitations of an assumed unitarism, and instead present a workforce with a more pluralist orientation across the samples obtained from both

countries. While such differences have been noted previously it is the magnitude of such differences and the notable distinctions between levels of abstraction that are of particular interest.

Discussion

In their classic study Goldthorpe et al., noted that "orientation to employment can be regarded as mediating between features of the work situation objectively considered and worker's responses" (1968: 182). This type of understanding has largely been absent from HRM research. The findings of inherent pluralism in worker orientations across the two samples from Ireland and New Zealand suggest this deficiency needs to be redressed. Homogeneity of values and beliefs are often assumed in much extant HR theory, but rarely examined empirically. MacDuffie (1995) for example, claims that High Commitment Management (HCM) can only be be successful if workers *believe* or perceive their interests are aligned with those of the company. Consideration of foundational assumptions appears justified given that management and the main recipients of HRM – the employees – have been shown to have notable discrepancies in their perception of the employment relationship. This suggests that previous assertions that HRM or variations of the term provide a mechanism for the attainment of the needs of all relevant stakeholders is problematic, reflecting more of an 'American dream' of what constitutes HRM (Guest, 1990) rather than an empirical reality. This reinforces the value of recent work in HRM which has begun to emphasize differing interests and orientations within firms, especially those between management and employees (e.g. Liao et al., 2009). Arguably, the presupposing of unitarism characterised through notions of a shared organisational identity hinders understanding as the very agents critical to the enactment of HRM processes become passive recipients of practices, while scope for resistance, reinterpretation, or divergent meanings attributed to actions and behaviours becomes defined out of existence (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010).

Consistent with earlier research (Ramsay, 1975) managerial respondents reported ideological differences between different levels of abstraction, holding pluralist views at societal level while maintaining a unitarist perception of their own workplace. This suggests the value of more in-depth insights into the utility of normative unitarism, including its purposeful expression at varying levels of analysis (Cullinane and Dundon, 2012). A layered and deeper understanding of managerial ideological undercurrents should appreciate this interaction of societal and workplace levels. Locating HRM in its broader socio-political will facilitate a move beyond simplistic hard versus soft dichotomies to better animate the complexities of workplace relations (e.g. Watson, 2004).

In comparison with the Irish sample, New Zealand managers and workers exhibit a similar, but in most respects less pronounced, ideological imprint. From comparable pluralist starting points at the societal level of abstraction, New Zealand managers are unitarist in orientation at workplace level, but less so than their Irish counterparts. Similarly, New Zealand workers retain a pluralist perspective at the workplace level, albeit to a lesser extent than their Irish counterparts. New Zealand has a long history of political and social identification of labour and conservative (business and rural) orientations at societal level, coupled with a predominantly small workplace economy and remote industrial relations system. That was largely the way it was until the mid-1980s. Pluralist orientations at societal level, and a relatively "soft" pluralist orientation among workers at workplace level, are consistent with this history. Social and political change since the mid-1980s has been rapid and extensive, diffusing earlier social identifications. At the same time, deregulation of the economy and the labour market has significantly reduced union density and marginalised union identification, particularly among new labour market entrants from both within and outside New Zealand. The relatively soft orientations of both managers and workers at

workplace level, by comparison with the Irish sample, are again consistent with this national transition and broader trajectories of the beliefs and values of the main recipients of HRM.

Finally, there are certain caveats to these findings. The survey approach pursued was largely exploratory. While the research moved to develop the very limited base of research on ideological orientation (Osterman 1994; Godard 1997), the dichotomous measures of ideological orientations can be viewed as relatively crude and fall subject to the same critique typically directed at this dichotomy (Purcell, 1987; Ackers, 2012). In practice, there are no pure "ideologues" so that values and beliefs are best understood in terms of extent. Moreover, the attempt was not one of moving simply across the comparative space of Ireland and New Zealand (cf Akers, 2012) but to explore patterns in underlying ideological orientations in two given samples. Further research is required into the complex factors that shape and determine ideological orientations (Budd and Bhave 2008), including the impact of demographics (Tsui 1990; Edgar and Geare 2004) and employee attributions (Nishii et al., 2008). This is especially important to counter the risk of simplistically transferring the universalistic ideals of HRM across international domains.

It might also be argued that the "difference" in ideological orientation and employment relations climate between managers and employees is compounded by aggregate reporting of data rather than matched organisational-level analysis. However, in securing access to administer the survey there is the reality that organisations were self-selecting while in most cases employee survey respondents were chosen by HR managers. In addition, samples in both countries, particularly so for the New Zealand sample, were skewed towards professional employees. These issues in turn suggest tendencies which are likely to have reduced the discrepancy between the workplace values of managers and employees rather

than exacerbated it. All the while, of course, it must be acknowledged that survey data can only really hint at the broad issues likely to frame the nature of social relations, it cannot unpack the dynamics of how such issues are actually played out in practice (Cullinane and Dundon, 2012).

Conclusion

This paper has helped shine some much-needed empirical light on nature of employer and employee workplace values and beliefs. The findings lend support to recent work which has hinted at a pluralist undercurrent in HRM. Moreover, in illuminating a potential disconnect in ideological orientation, both between managers and employees and at differing levels of analysis, the paper has opened up prospects for a deeper theoretical conversation on the purpose and impact of the 'often-latent but continually present assumption of unitarism' in HRM research (Van Burren, 2011: 210). Overall, the findings suggest that HRM research should readily embrace a more pluralistic analysis which places critical emphasis on the importance of employee insights.

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Table 1: Organisation and Respondent Demographic Profile (Percentages)

	New Zealand (N=482)	Ireland (N=315)
Age:		
Under 34 years	38	66
35 to 49 years	37	26
Over 50 years	25	8
Sex:		
Male	55	54
Female	45	46
Occupation:		
Professional/Semi-professional	62	45
Administration/Clerical	18	31
Tradesperson	7	11
Labourer	6	9
Other	7	5
Length of Service:		
Less than 4 years	49	52
4 to 10 years	28	34
Over 10 years	23	14
Working Status:		
Full time	92	91
Part time	8	9
Union Membership:		
Current Union Member	15	47
Previous Union Affiliation	51	55
Organisation Size:		
Less than 50	36	10
50 to 100	27	15
101 to 500	7	10
Over 500	30	65
Role in Organisation:		
Senior Management	14	2.5
Middle Management	18	6
Supervisor	9	4.5
Team Leader	9	3
Worker (no supervisory responsibilities)	50	84
Industry:		
Manufacturing	34	9
Retail and Service	37	24
Transport	14	5
Information Technology	2	12
Construction	2	14
Government	5	4
Health/Education	5	20
Other	1	12

Table 2a: Comparisons between New Zealand and Ireland Samples[a] for Ideological Orientation

Ideological Orientation Items	Total Sample (%)		Chi-Square[b]	
Society	NZ (n=475)	Ireland (n=316)	Test statistic (including Yates Continuity Correction)	Observed significance
1. Society: Workers in general see themselves as being:				
(a) An integral part of the organisation in which they work (U)	47	26	36.884	.000
(b) Members of a group within the organisation in which they work (P)	53	74	P: I>NZ	
2. Society: Workers interests in general are:				
(a) Looked after adequately by management (U)	78	44	94.851	.000
(b) Looked after adequately by their union/lawyer (P)	22	56	U: NZ>I	
3. Society: The principal objectives and interests of management and workers are:				
(a) More or less similar (U)	28	50	41.545	.000
(b) Similar in some areas, but are very different in others (P)	72	50	P: NZ>I	
4. Society: Unions in general:				
(a) Are a liability as they introduce distrust into the work environment (U)	36	22	16.963	.000
(b) Are an asset as they protect the interests of workers (P)	64	78	P: I>NZ	
5. Society: In the average organisation:				
(a) Management and workers work together as a team (U)	30	28	.330	.566
(b) Management and workers sometimes work as a team, sometimes are in conflict (P)	70	72		
6. Society: Collective bargaining:				
(a) Does not win anything for workers they would not have got from management anyway (U)	27	31	1.040	.308
(b) Is probably the best means of settling differences between various groups (P)	73	69		
7. Society: The major causes of conflict in the workplace (eg: strikes, etc) is (are):				
(a) Basically poor communication or trouble-makers (U)	35	28	4.773	.029
(b) The fact that different groups have different objectives - which sometimes clash (P)	65	72	P: I>NZ	

Workplace

8. Workplace: Workers in general see themselves as being:

(a) An integral part of the organisation in which they work (U)	57	36	34.071	.000
(b) Members of a group within the organisation in which they work (P)	43	64	P: I>NZ	
9. Workplace: Workers interests in general are:				
(a) Looked after adequately by management (U)	84	59	59.547	.000
(b) Looked after adequately by their union/lawyer (P)	16	41	U: NZ>I	
10. Workplace: The principal objectives and interests of management and workers are:				
(a) More or less similar (U)	45	55	5.788	.016
(b) Similar in some areas, but are very different in others (P)	55	45	U: I>NZ	
11. Workplace: Unions in general:				
(a) Are a liability as they introduce distrust into the work environment (U)	41	28	12.295	.000
(b) Are an asset as they protect the interests of workers (P)	59	72	P: I>NZ	
12. Workplace: In the average organisation:				
(a) Management and workers work together as a team (U)	52	41	9.360	.002
(b) Management and workers sometimes work as a team, sometimes are in conflict (P)	48	59	P: I>NZ	
13. Workplace: Collective bargaining:				
(a) Does not win anything for workers they would not have got from management anyway (U)	37	46	5.988	.014
(b) Is probably the best means of settling differences between various groups (P)	63	54	P: NZ>I	
14. Workplace: The major causes of conflict in the workplace (e.g., strikes etc.) is/are:				
(a) Basically poor communication or trouble-makers (U)	46	46	.000	1.000
(b) The fact that different groups have different objectives - which sometimes clash (P)	54	54		

Notes:
[a] Sample Size: N = 791; b Chi-square tests have been conducted as they are the appropriate test for use with discrete data. Where the finding is statistically significant this means there is a significant association between country (i.e. NZ or Ireland) and preference for a particular ideological orientation.

Table 2b: Comparisons between New Zealand and Ireland Manager and Worker Samples[a] for Ideological Orientation

Ideological Orientation Items	Managers (%)		Workers (%)		Chi-Square[c d]	
Society	NZ (n=240)	Ireland (n=49)	NZ (n=242)	Ireland (n=266)	Test statistic (including Yates Continuity Correction)	
1. Society: Workers in general see themselves as being:					Managers	Workers
(a) An integral part of the organisation in which they work (U)	48	33	47	24	3.908	27.246**
(b) Members of a group within the organisation in which they work (P)	52	67	53	76		P: I>NZ
						U: NZ>I
2. Society: Workers interests in general are:						
(a) Looked after adequately by management (U)	82	71	73	38	2.386	60.848**
(b) Looked after adequately by their union/lawyer (P)	18	29	27	62		P: I>NZ
						U: NZ>I
3. Society: The principal objectives and interests of management and workers are:						
(a) More or less similar (U)	27	63	28	48	22.664**	20.282**
(b) Similar in some areas, but are very different in others (P)	73	37	72	52	P: NZ>I	P: NZ>I
					U: I>NZ	U: I>NZ
4. Society: Unions in general:						
(a) Are a liability as they introduce distrust into the work environment (U)	41	35	32	20	.411	9.294*
(b) Are an asset as they protect the interests of workers (P)	59	65	68	80		P: I>NZ
						U: NZ>I
5. Society: In the average organisation:						
(a) Management and workers work together as a team (U)	30	33	29	27	.041	.461
(b) Management and workers sometimes work as a team, sometimes are in conflict (P)	70	67	71	73		
6. Society: Collective bargaining:						
(a) Does not win anything for workers they would not have got from management anyway (U)	29	35	26	30	.351	1.021

(b) Is probably the best means of settling differences between various groups (P)	71	65	74	70		
7. Society: The major causes of conflict in the workplace (e.g., strikes, etc.) is/are:						
(a) Basically poor communication or trouble-makers (U)	35	33	36	26	.019	4.659
(b) The fact that different groups have different objectives - which sometimes clash (P)	65	67	64	74		

Workplace[b]

8. Workplace: Workers in general see themselves as being:						
(a) An integral part of the organisation in which they work (U)	63	40	51	35	8.136*	12.737**
(b) Members of a group within the organisation in which they work (P)	37	60	49	65	P: I>NZ U: NZ>I	P: I>NZ U: NZ>I
9. Workplace: Workers interests in general are:						
(a) Looked after adequately by management (U)	90	88	78	54	.023	32.069**
(b) Looked after adequately by their union/lawyer (P)	10	12	22	46		P: I>NZ U: NZ>I
10. Workplace: The principal objectives and interests of management and workers are:						
(a) More or less similar (U)	49	81	41	49	15.131**	3.473
(b) Similar in some areas, but are very different in others (P)	51	19	59	51	P: NZ>I U: I>NZ	
11. Workplace: Unions in general:						
(a) Are a liability as they introduce distrust into the work environment (U)	46	54	37	23	.834	9.353*
(b) Are an asset as they protect the interests of workers (P)	54	46	63	77		P: I>NZ U: NZ>I
12. Workplace: In the average organisation:						
(a) Management and workers work together as a team (U)	57	48	47	40	.981	2.646
(b) Management and workers sometimes work as a team, sometimes are in conflict (P)	43	52	53	60		

13. Workplace: Collective bargaining:

(a) Does not win anything for workers they would not have got from management anyway (U)	43	69	32	42	9.867*	5.354*
(b) Is probably the best means of settling differences between various groups (P)	57	31	68	58	P: NZ>I U: I>NZ	
14. Workplace: The major causes of conflict in the workplace (eg: strikes, etc) is (are):						
(a) Basically poor communication or trouble-makers (U)	49	56	44	44	.629	.011
(b) The fact that different groups have different objectives - which sometimes clash (P)	51	44	56	56		

Notes:

[a] Sample Size: N = 797 (this varies due to a small amount of missing data for some items) (Manager n = 289; Workers n = 508) b Items were reworded to reflect a view of the respondent's current workplace c ** $p < 0.001$ * $p < 0.05$ d Chi-square tests have been conducted as they are the appropriate test for use with discrete data. Where the finding is statistically significant this means there is a significant association between country (i.e. NZ or Ireland) and preference for a particular ideological orientation for the particular group (i.e. manager or worker) being assessed.

Table 3: Comparisons between New Zealand and Ireland Manager and Worker Samples for Aggregate Ideological Orientation

Ideological Orientation	Managers (%)		Workers (%)		Chi-Square		Cramer's V [a]	
	NZ	Ireland	NZ	Ireland				
					Managers	Workers	Managers	Workers
Ideological Orientation - Society								
Pluralist	49	50	49	66	.203	21.975**	.027	.211**
Mixed	30	33	34	28				
Unitarist	21	18	17	6				
Ideological Orientation - Workplace								
Pluralist	25	14	38	44	2.572	7.353*	.099	.125*
Mixed	37	40	36	40				
Unitarist	38	46	26	16				

Notes
[a] These aggregate data were collapsed as follows. Group one, called 'unitarist', comprised those respondents who selected the unitarist option for five or more of the seven statements; group two, called 'pluralist', comprised those respondents who selected the pluralist option for five or more of the seven statements; group three, called 'mixed', comprised those respondents who showed no strong preference for either ideological orientation by selecting three or four unitary or pluralist statements. Cramer's V statistic (small effect = .07; medium = .21 and large = .35) is used where data do not fit a 2 x 2 table.

Table 4: Cross-Country Comparisons of Group Ideological Preferences using Aggregate Data

Level of Abstraction	Managers	Managers	Workers	Workers
	New Zealand	*Ireland*	*New Zealand*	*Ireland*
Society	Pluralist	Pluralist	Pluralist	Pluralist+
	(moderate)	(moderate)	(moderate/strong)	(moderate/strong)
Workplace	Unitarist	Unitarist+	Pluralist	Pluralist+
	(weak)	(weak/moderate)	(weak)	(weak/moderate)

+ Denotes ideological preference is stronger than that for the comparative group