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Department of Organisational Behaviour**

Summary of Thesis

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**Human resource management as a moral maze
Ethical issues in human resource management**

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I. Background to the research and justification of the topic

“Human or inhuman resource management?” this is the (hypothetical) question put forward by Steyaert and Janssens (1999) on the pages of ‘Organization’, referring to one of the basic dilemmas of human resource management in modern-day organisations i.e. the downgrading of human beings into ‘resources’ and the challenges to human dignity here. In this connection, we can also pose a question: ethical or unethical HRM? What might ‘being ethical’ mean as related to the HR function? When and why does an HR manager act ethically or unethically? In my thesis I would like to get to understand and discuss this topic - and I come up with one possible answer to this question.

In the last two decades, there has been a surge of interest and a miniature explosion in academic publications on business ethics (and in related fields, e.g. corporate governance or CSR), yet only a ‘modest growth of interest’ in the field of ethics and HRM (Pinnington et al. 2007:2). As a sign of this modest interest, books and collections of essays have been published on the subject (e.g. Parker 1998; Deckop 2006; Johnson 2007; Pinnington et al. 2007; Boulton and Houlihan, 2007) and theoretical articles and research project results have appeared in leading business ethics’ and HRM journals (e.g. Journal of Business Ethics, Personnel Review, Human Resource Management Review). These discussions build on previous works, namely issues related to employees and to the rights of the employee (Bowie 1998; Werhane et al 2004; Crane and Matten 2007), which have been part of business-ethical discussions right from the start; CSR activity dealing with employees, as the most significant stakeholder group (Simmons 2006); and HRM professional literature, especially critical HRM, which touches upon ethical issues (e.g. Towney 1993; Legge 1998, 1999, 2005; Delbridge and Keenoy 2010). However, the number of theoretical works and research efforts explicitly focusing on this field is rather low, considering its importance. Thus, neither the HRM profession itself nor workplace role ethics literature have enjoyed major focus regarding individual ethical behaviour - in contrast, for example, to medical, police or even management activities and roles.

I wish to contribute to filling up this gap with my research work. I would suggest that HRM is an area of great importance in several respects - and it is an exciting place for ethical research. This importance has, in general, been underlined in the last two decades by its (perceived) increased value as a ‘human resource’ – that is, as a critical organisational resource - and also by its strategic significance as a function (Legge 2005).

It seems indubitable, that in modern corporations HRM professionals, as individuals and as members of HRM departments, are key players there, being persons who face increasing levels of external pressure to cope with multiple levels of ethical dilemma (Greenwood 2007). Based on the existing literature, an ethical analysis of HRM theory and practice is relevant at three inter-related

levels: the macro (system), mezo (company and HRM department) and micro (individual) levels (Martin and Woldring 2001). On a macro (i.e. social, economic system) level a fundamental issue is how we can see theoretical assumptions and practices of modern corporations as ethical - and if these are not or are only partially to be seen as such, then how we can form a judgement at all on HRM ethics (Legge 1998; Guest 2007)? The HRM department may have a critical, formal and informal role in developing overall company ethics (the mezo level, Simmons 2008). This may have a major impact on which ethical aspects are regarded (e.g. fairness, equal treatment) and to what extent these might be applied to developing and operating various HRM systems. Finally, individuals and group of individuals (the HRM department) will face such issues in their organisational and professional roles - where they will encounter moral situations that are different from what ethical values are applied in private life (Wiley 1998); thus organisational and professional roles themselves can well have contrasting sets of expectations (for example, Ulrich, 1997: sub-roles tied to HRM activities, the employee champion and the strategic partner). For HRM activities do have a direct effect on employees themselves, on their physical, intellectual and mental health; and they may also affect close relatives; so serious responsibilities pertain to the issue, with further ethical concerns emerging (Greenwood 2007). (Below, in Table 1, I illustrate some of the characteristic questions occurring in HR ethics literature

	Characteristic questions, focus	Related article, author
Macro (system)-level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analyses of modern market economy and economic systems; the basic assumptions and operations of modern organizations. - The ethical nature of basic propositions of HRM activity (e.g. hard and soft HR). 	Legge (1998) Bauman (1993) Ackers (1999) Guest (2007)
Mezo (corporate)-level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contribution to - and participation in - the responsible behaviours of corporations. - The role of HR as moral champion within the corporation, ethical organizational culture and communication, and participation in the creation of ethical leadership. 	Lepak and Colakoglu (2006) Orlitzky and Swanson (2006)
HR function/department level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An examination of HR systems based on one (or more) ethical schools. - Analysis of ethical problems related to HRM in general, or focusing on special cases/phenomena. - Examination of the ethical aspects of HR functions or roles (e.g. Ulrich (1997). Ethical analyses of role conflicts. - Detecting, classification of and managing individual-unethical behaviour in the workplace; employee deviance. 	Mathis and Jackson, (2006) Alford and Naughton (2004) Murphy and Pyke (2002) Wooten (2001) Wiley (1998) Ulrich and Beatty (2001) Cardy and Selvarajan (2006) Schumann (2001)
Micro-individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual moral decision-making connected to HRM functions and roles; individual perceptions and sense-making. 	Wooten (2001) Dachler and Enderle (1989). O'Higgins and Kelleher

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Table 1: Levels of ethical examination of HRM

What I shall claim here is that HR managers are trapped in dominant mental models concerning the functioning of the modern corporation, expected roles and the functions of HR, and the unavoidable role morality inherent in HR. An individual's basic assumptions and beliefs related to the world and to other people (and to the individual him/herself) are of fundamental importance in his/her ethical behaviour (Johnson 2005). The HRM area has clearly become a management-focused activity in struggles for its strategic role, and in recognition of shareholders and corporate management and professionalism (Legge 2005; Wray-Bliss 2007; Deelbridge and Keenoy 2010). People are regarded as resources, managing human capital requires impersonal, neo-classical business logic, decision-making is based on rational and emotion-free methodologies, and profit-orientation is predominant –these are the characteristic features of the profession's dominant mental model. Today, business education at the university-level strongly represents these forms of mental model at the level of the individual - and it is incorporated in the curricula (Ghoshal 2005; Pedersen 2009); then, as a result, organisations, institutions and the professional medium further strengthen these fundamental conclusions of young HRM experts (i.e. who have been socialised into such perceptions). Ethics and morality can be detected at a lower level in this dominant logic, therefore – and in its organisational context they barely exist: they may appear intermittently as a tool for maintaining profitability, competitiveness and efficiency (e.g. strategic CSR activities and related rhetoric; HRM programs aimed at retaining manpower; values linked to ethical behaviour in the organisational culture). At this point, then, concepts related to moral imagination (Werhane 1999; 2005) can have importance. Moral imagination is *'the ability in particular circumstances to discover and evaluate possibilities not merely determined by that circumstance, or limited by its operative mental models, or merely framed by a set of rules or a rule governed'* (Werhane 2005:358).

Not irrespectively of the above-mentioned factors, **moral muteness** and an ensuing silence regarding moral and ethical problems may typically be found within HRM activities (Waters et al. 1987; Bird and Waters 1995; Bird 2005). Arguing about ethical issues might seem to be a 'pseudo' form of action, a wasting of precious energy in HRM 'efficiency-rhetoric', so it might appear a weakness (thus it may jeopardise a position of power that was so difficult to capture). Ethics and morality issues can be only be grasped with difficulty, for they are so complex and theoretical; the concepts do not easily relate to language used in the organisation; thus all of this might even seem frightening. Though the Ulrich (1997; 2008), Ulrich and Beatty (2001) models can perhaps define a professional identity in the most accepted way, they cannot offer reliable orientation as regards finding solutions to ethical conflicts arising from HRM roles - indeed its unambiguous management-focused approach and unitary mindset can make the whole issue appear superfluous.

Although ethical discussion might incorporate certain risks – e.g. organisational pseudo-action, downgrading ethical arguments to mere rhetoric (Bird and Waters 2005) – encouragement could be important for both individuals, the organisations and for actual members of the profession.

Closely connected to tendencies, the coordination of tasks related to corporate responsibility and ethical behaviour within some organizations is undertaken by persons in the HRM field. Certain authors stress that in spite of there being heterogeneous organizational CSR solutions, HRM is usually regarded as being ‘the conscience of the organization’ (Wiley 1998), the focal point of ethical conduct concerning employees, the ‘ethical champion’, ‘ethical steward’, or the authority in charge of ethical affairs (Greenwood 2007; Simmons 2008; Caldwell et al. 2011).

There has recently been a growing number of studies focussing on HRM professionals and how they relate to ethics (Toffler 1986; Wiley 1998; Wooten 2001). Researchers in most cases have an outsider’s role, necessarily - i.e. are objective observers. The theoretical models and empirical methodologies (based on such models) cannot easily integrate both theory and actual practices, and do not support people in being able to manage such situations more successfully or easily (indeed, this is not included in the goals). In my view, such a topic can be understood and the processes discovered only from *the inside* - that is, in a cooperative manner - via the provision of genuine support for people, and all by integrating theory, action and reflection. A starting dilemma for my research was thus to see whether it was possible to conduct such scientific research, i.e. in which the researcher generates scientifically valid and reliable knowledge, and where, at the same time, ongoing study results helped participants in their practices.

I have therefore selected the participatory paradigm and co-operative inquiry research method for my analyses (Heron and Reason 2001). Theory and practice, rationality and emotions can be integrated via this methodology - based on participation and democracy - and research participants (in addition to making discoveries and gaining theoretical data) will be able to acquire practical, pragmatic and usable knowledge. I hope that this will help deal with the phenomena of moral muteness, too.

The basis of my research is the following, general question: **What do HRM ethics/the ethics of HRM actually mean? How can one make sense of ethical HRM?**

1. **Question group:** What do ‘ethics’ and ‘ethical behaviour in the context of the workplace’ mean in research participants’ interpretations? What do persons think of inter-relations between ‘private life’ ethics and ‘workplace’ ethics - and why? What ethical dilemmas can be seen as related to HRM responsibilities and roles - and what inter-relations might be identified as existing between them?
2. **Question group:** What mental models, scenarios and role-interpretations do persons detect and identify in themselves in referred-to situations? What inter-relations can people identify between ethical principles, intentions and acts, as well as between theory and practice? In what ways do they perceive and judge their moral imagination? How might individual

ethics develop due to the effects of emerging ethical dilemmas and issues, and how can this contribute to organisational ethics?

3. **Question:** How can one develop, practice and make experiments in referred-to situations, as an individual and as a community?
4. **Question:** Are there any special Hungarian characteristics in relation to HRM ethics?

II. Research methodology

II. 1. Research paradigm and methodology

As far as research methodology is concerned, I wanted to use action-based research, which is ‘*a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview... It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities*’ (Reason and Bradbury 2001:2).

Within the action research family, I have put my research in a **co-operative inquiry** group (sometimes referred to in US professional literature as *collaborative inquiry*) (Reason 1988). Co-operative inquiry has different roots: besides a critical and emancipatory attitude, the anthropocentric, democratic approach of humanistic psychology also plays a central role. Its theory and practice is built, inter alia, on Lewin’s (1946) research on theory/methodology for experience learning and on action research that has participation and democracy as its basis. This is additionally supported - primarily in the area of humanistic psychology - by the thoughts of Maslow (2003) and Rogers (2004) on the individual who is able to act freely, under self-direction and towards self-development, and who is able to decide how they would like to live their life.

Thinkers from the critical school had significant effects on how the co-operative school evolved. The aim of critical theory is to open up culturally-conditioned worldviews of actors and to unveil the asymmetrical power relations which sustain the prevailing socio-economic environment (Duberley and Johnson 2009). Freire’s (1982) opinions must be emphasized here, too - especially the concept of ‘*consciencisation*’, that is the phenomenon of sensitivity and conscience development as related to social, political and economic injustices. Habermas’ work (1981) on the theory of communicative action (the importance of the evolution of agreement, free-of-violence consensus and communicative space) and the significance of emancipation have also had a great effect on the evolution of cooperative inquiry.

The theoretical foundation of the methodology and the elaboration of practical research factors are primarily connected to John Heron's and Peter Reason's work (Heron 1996; Heron and Reason 1997; Heron and Reason, 2001; Reason 1988; Reason 1999).

My decision to choose the cooperative inquiry method was based on two main motives. Primarily, I thought that the deep roots of ethical behaviour could not be seen, explored or understood as an objective outsider; thus, only as a deeply involved participant in a research process 'with' people who are fully involved as partners and co-researchers could these roots be identified - rather than in research 'on' people (i.e. who are only passive subjects of the observation or experiments) (Heron 1996). I agree with Brinkmann (2009) that moral criticism should be empathetic and constructive; for listening and understanding, encouraging self-reflection and self-criticism are a vital part of ethical studies. Secondly, I wanted to integrate theory and practice and to facilitate individual- and group-level learning through an experiential learning process (Kolb 1984) while taking into consideration the idea that professional competencies include deep *a priori* assumptions too (Gelei 2005).

The purpose of cooperative inquiry may be exploration and/or transformation – and I wished to take steps in both of these directions in my research project (Heron 1996).

A cooperative inquiry cycle contains four phases of reflection and action (Heron and Reason 2001). In Phase 1, a group of co-researchers come together, they agree on the focus of the research, develop a set of questions which they would like to investigate, plan the methodology, and lay out the rules. In Phase 2, the co-researchers become subjects and undertake action, observe themselves and each-other, and, finally, they record the outcomes. In Phase 3 they go more deeply into the experience and become fully involved with the action; thus, new understanding is born from the research. In Phase 4, co-researchers gather and share their experiences and lessons learned - and might develop new ideas or reframe their original ideas, and then decide on follow-up action to be taken.

II. 2. The research process

Research sampling: selecting the research groups

In my research I am looking for individual and collective interpretations - and, based on these, the inter-relationship between HRM profession and ethics can be better understood and interpreted while transferring all into a contemporary social, business and organisational environment and context. Several individual stakeholders appear in the research (e.g. experts working in HRM, other organisational players, academic experts in HRM and/or ethics, society as a whole, etc.); yet HRM profession representatives are the focus of the research and of research questions based on these problems - thus I regard them as the unit of analysis in the research. Based on the said principles

and selection opportunities, I shall apply the *purposive* and, in justified cases and also supplementing it, so-called *snowball* sampling processes (Blakie 2009).

According to Reason (1999), and with the co-operative inquiry methodology, the research group selection issue is important in several respects. Firstly, the research process requires serious, regular and long time periods and energy investment as well as genuine, full commitment from participants (i.e. rather than, let's say, filling in a questionnaire or having a single interview). Secondly, based on Reason's ideas (1999), the level of sampling is also a concern, i.e. an initiating researcher may look for an already existing group as his/her research focus, or may him/herself come up with a group for the research. There are clear benefits and disadvantages in both cases - and I have decided to utilize both forms (identifying them as projects "A" and "B").

Characteristics of the group	Research group "A"	Research group "B"
Forming the research group	Existing group – HR department of a Hungarian bank of 600 employees	New research group formulated for this research: committed HR professionals who are interested in HR ethics, with various company backgrounds and experiences
Number of participants	7+1 persons	6+1 persons
Date of research	May- December 2011(7 months)	October 2011 - April 2012
Number of research cycles	7 research cycles	6 research cycles
Age and gender profile of the group	HR manager (50+), other participants were women with a university degree (30-40 years old)	Two participants were women aged under 30, other participants were women with a university degree (30-40 years old); one man with a university degree
Location of discussions	Corporate site, during working hours (usually 2-4 p.m.)	University rooms, usually in the evening (5-9 p.m.)
Duration of cycles	2-5 weeks	2-5 weeks
Place	Company, other sites	Everybody's own company, other sites
Nature of activity/action	Common, individual, paired	Individual
Examples of actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watching a movie together. - Having an interview with a person involved in an ethically interesting case. - Participation in/observation of ethical code workshops. - Carrying out activities laid out in a case analysis. - Analysis of Loyalty Regulations on the basis of previously agreed aspects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having an interview with a person involved in an ethically interesting case - Mini research: on the basis of two hypothetical cases, everybody does an interview with 3 people within the same organisation - Analysis of the Hungarian New Code of Labour

Table 2: Characteristics of the two research groups

Researchers' role

In conformity with the chosen paradigm and methodology, I was to be present in the research as a reflective partner (Blakie 2009). In this role, understanding is based on dialogue, where the researcher and research subjects participate as research partners, with a focus on the (inter alia) emancipation of research partners (Habermas 2001) and, via Freire's concept (1982), on the development of sensitivity and conscience as related to social, political and economic injustices. My belief is that looking at reflectivity - firstly on a group level - is critical for every phase of the research (planning, reflection, action, analysis); and in the research projects I have deliberately strived to ensure active and deliberate understanding and self-reflection as related to my own pre-assumptions, role and courses of action. Thus, learning and development by research partners and the research group was my goal throughout the entire process, in addition to what I could gain for my own learning and development.

Research cycles

At the first meeting, all co-researchers shared their motivations and expectations concerning the research aims and output - and we then considered individual objectives and decided about common group aims. Also, during this meeting we discussed the cooperative inquiry method, agreed on the number of cycles, on the types of action to be taken, and we additionally discussed our shared norms.

At follow-up meetings, we followed the same structure. First, we reflected on the latest types of action to be looked at, following Kolb's (1984) learning cycle, and decided on the following: focus, time and locations, and special tasks. (In Table 2, above, I have introduced details of the two research projects and also activities to be undertaken.)

II.3. Data collection and analysis

In my preliminary analysis and interpretations I rely on the following data:

- (1) Transcripts: during research cycle reflection phases, group members reflected and debated issues - and I recorded these discussions and made word-for-word transcripts of them.
- (2) I also recorded other materials connected with reflection, conversations and thoughts as written on flip-charts, and also I made a note of research materials.
- (3) Documents, interview protocols and accounts born in the action phases of research cycles (for example in the "A" research I saw as action documents the materials of the ethical codex workshops and in the case of group "B" there were interview notes and protocols).

- (4) My own research diary: during the research projects I kept a research diary, where I put down plans, emotions, thoughts and experiences related to specific meetings in great detail, and in chronological order.
- (5) E-mail communication during the research: especially in the case of group “B”, e-mail exchanges between meetings were an important group-formative element and also a communication channel.
- (6) Group members received my analyses, and we discussed them in detail. Transcripts of these conversations are also available.

In order to help interpret the texts, I first of all carried out a meaning categorization, which means building up a category system and systematically coding texts (Kvale 1996; Gelei 2002). In doing so, I relied on the help of the 'Nvivo' software. Even though on the basis of codes, sub-codes, their connections and contradictions some patterns were already being outlined, I didn't feel they were sufficient; so as another leg of my analysis I searched for background patterns and interpretations spanning a number of codes that went beyond the existing texts, including my own impressions and changes of mind, too. To help with the transparency of these interrelationships according to a particular script, I outlined thoughts arising in meetings - that is, how particular questions and lines of thought were interweaving and shaping one another. This can be seen as a sort of meaning-compression (Gelei 2002).

In accordance with the original texts, and structured by the codes, and condensed by them, I carried out interpretations of meaning. I approached the texts with an understanding orientation: I firstly strove for true-to-text interpretations, rendering individual and shared interpretations of specific co-researchers; secondly, I sought out critical interpretations of hidden meanings. The two interpretations were interwoven and framed by continual critical reflection - so the research group reflected on its own functions and we co-researchers reflected on our own individual functions.

II.4. Validity, reliability, and generalization in relation to the research

Based on Maxwell (2005), the validity of qualitative research means the correctness and validity of the descriptions, explanations, interpretations and conclusions arrived at (Maxwell, 2005:86). The validity issue is somewhat re-defined via a co-operative inquiry methodology: how can such frames evolve where research partners do not mis-interpret their individual and collective experiences? In such a frame system there are three supporting pillars to ensure validity: critical subjectivity (sharing discoveries based onto individual or collective experiences; their revision and conflicts - applying critical aspects; and their validation in practice), integration of theory and practice in

research cycles, and the principle of participation (research partners have a chance to be present in every phase of the research process, so can influence research results with their own interpretations and decisions made).

During the research, in order to ensure validity I built on criteria as shaped by Maxwell (2005):

- The intensive presence of the researcher, where his/her long-term relationship with research subjects facilitates validity because it helps subjects loosen up, open up and supports the researcher in his/her overcoming incorrect presuppositions so s/he can more fully understand the research subjects. Both research projects meant persons' working together over several months (in both research projects more than 25 hours) and common experiences being shared; thus group members were open, relaxed and honest, and got to know one another. In my assessment, 6 or 7 cycles proved to be a suitable duration. In the process, experiential knowledge and reflection appeared in parallel, strengthening one other.
- The detailed quality, accuracy, richness and concrete nature of the research data provides a suitable basis for giving shape to made, valid interpretations. In the research projects, which were many-coloured, different situations arose, and both theory and practice showed themselves.
- Asking for co-researcher feedback relating to recorded data and research results meant that misunderstandings/mis-interpretations of the researcher might be kept to a minimum. We listed research issues, norms and plans - and in the research we continually reflected on them to keep processes moving in the right direction. During research cycles, commonly held reflections shaped actions taken, emotions, thoughts and ideas. The created research data was at the disposal of everyone. (In group "B" we set up a common 'drop-box', in which we stored all the common documents, and the participants were able to comment on my own analyses.) Co-researchers received my final interpretations and could unreservedly reflect on them. Both groups had to jointly discuss these analyses. Reactions and opinions seen here were later (and in different ways) built into my own analysis.
- Searching for different pieces of evidence: negative cases and analyses running contrary to expectations could provide evidence strengthening explanations. In the research we strove for critical consciousness, openness and continual questioning. At the beginning of this 'questioning', the role was mine, but it became a practice for all in both groups. In group "B" we undertook formal 'devil's advocate' practices during analyses of hypothetical cases (Reason 1999).

Criterion reliability in scientific research refers to how the research process is consistent (in time and space) and whether other researchers working later on or simultaneously are able to get the

same results (Maxwell 2005). In qualitative research this kind of reproducibility is not a realistic expectation, however - i.e. the personality of the researcher cannot be reproduced. Here, reliability means coherent and clear descriptions of research factors (paradigm, tradition, role) and research processes (Blakie 2009). Accordingly, in my own research I strove to acknowledge such factors in full detail.

Criterion generalisation points to how research results and acquired knowledge can go beyond the research's direct context (Blakie 2009). With internal generalisations, conclusions can be generalised in relation to the studied area or group; whereas external validity means that they are valid beyond that (Gelei 2002). In my research I strove to get internal generalisation, but it might also happen that some of the conclusions are relevant to the HRM profession as a whole (that is, other HRM area experts might also recognise their own mental models and ethical problem situations).

III. Main empirical results of the research

When I was planning the research I relied on literature and my own previous experience - and eventually created four question groups via which to try to find answers within my two research projects. Apart from exploring phenomena it was also my objective to take steps towards 'transformation' i.e. to change participants' ways of thinking, possibly the HRM operations of the involved organisations and also the organisations themselves. This emanates from the fundamental nature of participatory research and from the integration of theory and practice. When dealing with research results, I first depict the theoretical knowledge (basic concepts in Figure 1); then I go on to share practical results.

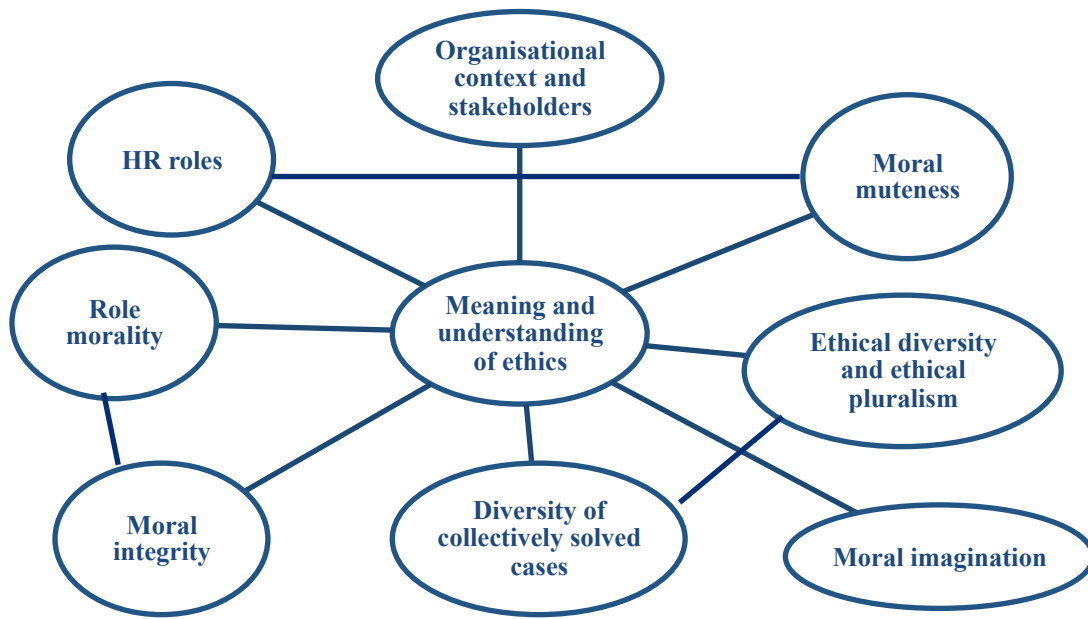


Figure 1: Mapping of main concepts

III.1. What does ethical HR mean? How does one make sense of ethical HRM?

Difficulties with the formulation of an ethical framework

The formulation of the concept of ethics – or, more specifically, **HRM ethics** - involved a **taxing and lengthy process with both teams**; yet the participants themselves were aware of and emphasized its fundamental **importance and indispensability**. The incomprehensibility of ethical or unethical behaviour, repeated efforts to produce definitions together and the research’s creative process all reflected the (analogous) story in 'The Little Prince' (Saint-Exupéry 2011) as cited by Levinas (1999). Levinas refers to the scene where the pilot draws a lamb enclosed in a box to the Little Prince. The participants came from various backgrounds and represented different set of values. Therefore, it was rather difficult to precisely define ethical terms either individually or as team members - or to see what would we like to discover exactly (i.e. one doesn't know for sure what is inside the box one is leaning over). Nevertheless, we were confident that during this process of thinking in concert and carrying out actions together in this 'leaning over' we might eventually forge a community and make advances in unison; we could get to comprehend and experience things that individuals or outsiders simply couldn’t do. The trust we had in one another, and the research project as a cooperative achievement and learning process had all become the essential element in the process. This kind of experience also became apparent in Imre's reflection on the research: *"I think we're creating value as we go along, even if we don't concentrate on one specific value. We're just doing it, and by this process alone we are creating values... Goal-oriented, performance-focused operations can no longer make sense at all."* (Imre) The process itself and the road we were taking with all its burdens and difficulties had become as important as

the goal we were heading towards – which echoes findings made by other authors (e.g. Reason and Marshall (2001), dealing with cooperative research.

The challenge of **tackling ethical diversity** was a dilemma for both teams. As one learning point, Team "A" saw that diversity in our own way of thinking is not necessarily a symptom of weakness or unethical behaviour (so there is no need to deny it or hide it behind a seemingly homogenous stance); rather, it might bring about a new opportunity to produce real ethical solutions (after giving them thorough consideration in several respects). Team "A" members realized that if they consciously accept undeclared but existing roles - special views (employer vs. employee centeredness or a rational vs. emotional attitude), differences in ethical definition (e.g. rule ethics vs. consequence ethics) and various moral arguments (e.g. relying on rules or cases) – they might attain a higher level of ethical sensitivity, which could then help in interpretations of specific cases too. This way, persons could also cultivate one another and contribute to the advancement of the team as a whole. Another significant factor is that team members faced and critically reacted to other people's roles and views - so their aptitude for critical reflection was also improved. It would seem that putting critical reflection into practice may in itself get people closer to more ethical ways of operating both on individual and organisational levels.

The creation of a universally accepted definition of ethics, at both team or organisational levels, represented an important learning point for both teams. **Resulting shared interpretations along with efforts made in common in processes, common construction, participation and involvement all became of equal importance.** In the light of this, conscious organisational development and value-centered (or commonly accepted ethics-based) organisational culture development processes may have a major significance (Orlitzky and Swanson 2006). It remains to be seen how HRM conceives its own role within the corporate conscience (Wiley 1998, Ulrich and Beatty 2001) or in the role of moral champion (Greenwood 2007).

Problems were mostly dealt with at the **micro and mezo levels**. In the "A" research, according to the expectations of fellow researchers we focused on a given organization, on problems that might be encountered there, and on relevant individual perceptions and concerns. Here, macro level thinking appeared in 'flashes' - only making hints at the role played by business higher education and reflections on people's responsibility in the reproduction of moral-free organisational operations. In the "B" research, the main focus was also at the level of individual perceptions and decision-making, and interactions between the individual and the organization - though the issue of the present and future sustainability of HRM (with direct reference to the the current economic set-up) had appeared at the level of research questions. Such a difference may (also) be due to the composition of teams (individuals vs. members of a given organisation). A surpassing of individual micro level observations was important for two reasons. In accordance with the opinion of Wray-Bliss (2007), participants declared that ethical factors had their relevance

in economic organisations at micro, mezo and macro levels – and with this they took a big step towards genuine integration of ethical concerns. On the other hand, in both teams we experienced an interlocking of different levels, and it became clear that (though to different extents) everybody is in a decision-making position at his/her own level.

Breaking moral muteness

On the basis of fellow researchers' personal experiences and perceptions, moral muteness is a characteristic feature of both their own organisations and the HRM profession as a whole – and its being broken will not be easy (as our own later experiences confirm).

In both projects we gradually got to the stage where participants ventured to do actions (e.g. made interviews) outside the team. This meant that - openly or less openly - they made interviews on ethical issues with other involved parties in the company or they launched programs that had ethical overtones. This 'moving out' was not easy: even interested and committed fellow researchers saw it as dangerous and risky to expose ethical concerns in an organisational environment and to ask direct questions about ethics. In order to act confidently they needed some previous absorption in the topic, a common interpretation of concepts, a secure background and a shared commitment, and mutual support; and they needed to build up a daring attitude so as to break down moral muteness (which occurred to differing extents and with different forcefulness.) **Moral courage** (Trevino and Weaver 2003) leading to a breaking of moral muteness has clearly-drawn steps: (1) start talks and discussions in a high-quality communicative space within the group (Pataki et al. 2001), (2) take action with group members, with immediate/off-line reflections, (3) start talks outside the group, either in the organisation or at professional forums, (4) initiate action outside the group. It should be possible to create a secure communication background within an organisation's HRM department – and using this as a starting point it may be possible to formulate and develop ethical discourse and to integrate results, in practice, on an organisational level.

An individual's ethical behaviour is basically influenced by the **moral reference group**, in which the individual seeks moral reassurance. The opinion of Jones and Ryan (1998) is that the individual forms his/her own responsibility level in the light of expectations via the reference group. Although both teams had critical comments relating to Hungarian HRM communities, they were identified as potential reference points or reference groups. In the aftermath of our research projects, one might see the viability of a professional community - a communicative environment where HRM professionals would be able to critically react to situations and get a deeper understanding of ethical problems and their roots. Consequently, they would also be able to put into question current conditions. Building on understanding and a willingness to change, they could shape their closer and wider environment in a learning process that integrates theory and practice and makes use of their own ethical framework. This reform process must start within the HRM

profession and can only be successful with the voluntary and committed participation of the involved parties. It remains to be seen whether the representatives of HRM in today's Hungary have this kind of interest and commitment, though. Another intriguing question would concern the role and responsibility of the academic sphere, of HRM teachers dealing with reform procedures. Ghoshal (2005) says that today's higher education reproduces moral-free and opportunistic behavior, and it frees students from moral ties. The question arises: how can this situation be changed in the medium and long term? How might professionals obtain theoretical and practical help? A starting point for responsible HRM education would be the launching of graduate and post-graduate programs with a more thorough integration of ethical aspects and ethically questionable case studies. One practical way of using such research could be application of more than 40 specific cases for educational purposes (with the permission of participants). Education could also have an important role to play in establishing a 'lingua franca' which would link allegedly abstract ethical concepts and terms with specific company practices (Wray-Bliss 2007).

Some of the organisations involved in the research had ethics-related concepts for use in everyday practice and organisational culture. These concepts might be used as a starting point for ethical discourse within an organisation. As experience proved in both research projects, **even these currently used and accepted concepts may become empty and lose their meaning** (e.g. see the concepts of sincerity and equal opportunity in mini research "B"). **In extreme cases these ethical concepts even legitimize unethical ways of operating on the individual or organisational level.** This, again, calls attention to the ethical role of HRM - i.e. it has a far greater significance than just being a factor in shaping systems and sets of values. Major importance should be given to continual reflection, common interpretations, redefinitions and development.

Yet how can we involve organisational members in reinterpretation processes pertaining to ethical concepts? One potential obstacle might be this moral muteness; another problem might be that the created common ethical framework – one arrived at with difficulty - might go against the 'performance-centered approach' of an organisation. There is a great risk that, instead of genuine involvement, a handful of appointed representatives (say, management and a few opinion-leader employees), with a need for quick results and efficiency, will come up with ethical definitions and pass them on to others as ready-made products. **This, however, may contribute to a "culture of silence"** (Reason 1994) in both the medium and long terms, while alienating people from the accumulation of knowledge (in this case from a critical interpretation of the concept of ethical behaviour) and, in a wider sense, from autonomy. Such a finding was further confirmed by thought-provoking experiences in our "A" research, concerned with revision of the ethical code of an organisation (Cycles 5-6). A significant number of interviewed employees did not really want to have a say in reinterpretation of the code, had no serious comments to make and did not take part in procedures. Few of them felt it was a responsibility to make use of a genuine opportunity to

participate, did not want to sacrifice time and energy to it; few saw it as their *own* business, that this code would be a creation coming from their cooperation. How does one address and really involve silenced and alienated groups? A so-called 'alienation from knowledge' was also conspicuous in our "A" research, for at the start our participants backed off from the researcher's role; it was difficult to convince them that they had 'valuable' inputs that would be of use in each phase of the process.

Genuine participation is important for another reason: with a lack of open discourse, parties will be able to get little information regarding mutual expectations. A recurrent theme in the "B" research was that involved parties (including HRM) may only have a vague picture of others' ethical expectations in any specific or more general situation; then they either want to - or don't want to - respond to these imaginary or construed expectations.

A 'paradox of credibility and incredibility' was also identified in the research. From the beginning of the projects, members had great confidence in one another, in both teams. (In the "A" research, such confidence was underlined by permission having been gained from company management to take part in research that would probably entail novel and unpredictable lesson learning via cooperative effort; or where research "B" participants had sacrificed their free evenings to do such activity/reflect upon issues.) We shared many previously had experiences, presented dilemmas, saw private life situations and played political or organisational 'games'. However, in perceptions of and in reflections on the outside world – and especially in discourses related to the operations of today's Hungarian companies, and social and economic processes – the most marked theme was non-credibility. Our research team (who "trusted one another and wanted to make a better world") and 'present-day Hungarian reality' ("where individualism, egoism and unethical behaviour rules") contrasted drastically with each other. How could one break down the wall of silence? How could such a team attain a higher level of credibility in a business organization? These may be key issues for ethically-grounded social reforms, too. The question arises once more: What might be the role of the academic sphere in this process?

HRM roles

Emerging as one of the important learning points is that **there is no such thing as a minimum level of responsibility in HRM ethics or in the ethical nature of HRM operations: each and every HRM professional has to make ethical decisions.** The 'nature' of experienced dilemmas may vary depending on positions held in the hierarchy, the organisation itself or the kind of industry involved. The diversity of industry-based backgrounds had to be *personally* experienced, and we had experiences from FMCG, the media, energy, transport, telecom - and from such 'stigmatized' areas as tobacco production or alcoholic beverages, too. Yet, in each situation and at each level, HRM operations have to face up to ethical issues and decision-making requiring short-

and long-distance solutions. **Our job here is for a person to take responsibility for the provision of ethical ways of working – everybody at their own level and area.** In the phase of making subsequent reflections on the research, someone from research group "A" put it like this: *"I think everyone is an (ethical) flagship in their own right - but with a different composition..."* (Zsófi, research group "A")

However, the role of '**ethical compass**' and '**moral champion**' is neither simple nor rewarding – and this proved to be a basic finding in both teams! The dilemma may be interpreted at several levels: Does this kind of responsibility really exist and, if so, where is the source of such expectations? Society increasingly wants HRM to meet ethical requirements - though the same kind of expectations and requirements from organisational parties are not so definite or structured.

Secondly, the question may arise: **If HRM does not adopt the role of 'moral champion' – who will?!** Let us see a tough opinion on this: *"In a company context it is only HRM which is able to represent humanity and ethics. Several managers give it the right to do this. But whether the manager has to take these aspects into account and how openly it is declared is another question! It's not a HRM task to make a manager's wishes accepted - rather, it has to be prepared for fighting, because if you bring in ethical aspects, you'll get conflict situations and clashes. HRM should be able to have courage... This should be declared institutionally, and it should say that it is its mission to bring in those ethical factors...."* (Zsófi, research group "A")

Thirdly, what could this role mean? On one hand, HRM may adopt the role of the **moral champion who plays with open, revealed cards**, trying to directly represent and legitimize this aspect. On the other hand, it may take on the role of **orientating compass, one which exerts influence from in the background** and has the talent to 'sell' ethics (under the label of economic necessity, investing in the future, employee branding, lawfulness, humanity), where, in an indirect and continuous way, it can get more and more ethical operations within the organisation. A similar pattern (champion vs. 'éminence grise', see Bokor et al. 2005 and 2010) appears in the general role concept of HRM too, though it is especially vivid in connection with ethical issues. Even people who are unsure about practical implementations attach great importance to such roles.

Tense, complex ethical controversies are also reflected in the **employee champion role**. In larger-sized organisations 'partnership' might be overshadowed and ethical dilemmas might be generated if a HRM professional is 'loyal' first and foremost to his/her own HRM unit. Such dilemmas will usually come interwoven with a political bias - and are created by conflicts of interest caused by power games in the organisational background. Interestingly enough, HRM – in its own perceptions – is often regarded as a means, a 'counter- weight' or 'a pawn on the chess board' that gets involved in these power games. Solutions applied in the research, critical reflection, and the developing of moral imagination all helped, in both teams, to reveal and to evaluate power games from ethical perspectives - and to try to find solutions to issues.

The most characteristic question, however, concerned the **extent and intensity of employee representation**. One emerging pattern is '**keeping employees in check**', which means laying them off, avoiding responsibility, (the occasional 'demonization' of employees) and the general notion that employees are tricksters, thinking only about themselves, putting on fake shows, etc. This concept partly reflects the image found in 'The Human Mirror' (Bokor et al. 2005), where there is a mainly combative, assertive approach – but with a difference: here, HRM acts as an outsider playing the role of a kind of referee, who blows his whistle when there is foul play, eliminates serious offenders – in short, who monitors the 'fairness' of the game. This interpretation confirmed the presence of the **conscience role** (see Ulrich and Beatty 2001). Such a role is not popular in the eyes of employees – and if HRM adopts the same stance towards management, it will not be popular for them, either. A recurrent and relevant question is whether employees accept the 'referee's judgments'? How ethical do they think HRM decisions are? Supposing HRM defines this role for itself: how does *it* react if its 'judgments' are considered unethical? Another dilemma in this role concept is how much does HRM regard itself as pro-active and future-oriented? In what ways does it create linked ethical systems and frameworks? Or does it confine itself to a strictly reactive role (i.e. trying to find solutions to specific cases only)?

The other general pattern with the employee-champion role is the **supportive, coach-role-conception**. Here, HRM is 'at one's service', giving help to those who ask for it or who fall within its scope, be it a manager or employee. (This may partly go in parallel with the feminine interest-harmonizing role as identified by Bokor et al, 2005.) But what happens to those who do not dare, are unable to or are unwilling to ask for help? Or to those who are not in key positions or do not have a personal contact with HRM staff? How can we 'weave a cobweb' with which anyone who needs support *will get* support? According to interpretations in both teams 'upward' communication channels in the majority of organisations work with low efficiency – if they work at all! Also, there are serious problems with the interest representation competence of trade unions (and with trade unions in general). A solution here might be existing practice at company "A", where opinions are directly 'channeled in' through regular social consultations. This way, communicative spaces among HRM professionals, workers and employees, and management are created. Although it is not altogether free from power and dominance exercising, at least such a thing exists!

At a crossroads between role morality and moral integrity (at present and in the future)

Team members drew a sad picture of amorality in present-day workplaces and of the defenselessness of employees. Seen like this, HRM representatives are – like other employees – victims. In interpretations of situations related to HRM tasks the dilemma of classic moral consistency can be identified (Whyte 2002): are we able to harmonize our principles and actions in specific situations so as to attain **dynamic consistency**? Is it important that our moral sensitivity,

the process and result of moral decision-making and our actual deeds should strictly cover or be harmonious with each other (Rest 1986)? Especially in Research "A" there was a distinct division between those who stressed the importance of consistency and those who accepted a lack of it. Yet **role morality and moral integrity** issues did appear (Goodpaster 2007); and do we deem it acceptable or legitimate to act differently in a HRM role in comparison with how we would act in our private lives? Or do we believe in the feasibility of a moral integrity which does not differentiate between public or private roles? Interaction between the two concepts is shown in Table 3.(Practical relationships between the two concepts still need further clarification.)

	Same principles in private life and in a HRM role (moral integrity)	Different principles in private life _ with an HRM role (role morality, a lack of moral integrity)
Moral principles, arguments, logics and action harmonize (consistency)	Full moral harmony	Consequent role morality
Moral principles and actions have no harmony (lack of consistency)	Disharmony of principles and actions	Moral chameleon

Table 3: Moral consistency and role morality

Fellow researchers have put forth diverse ways in which to tackle the above dilemmas. Some have pointed at HRM's buffer role and defenseless position when seeking to justify (permanent or occasional) differences between their principles and actions, and a lack of consistency, thus legitimizing HRM-related role morality. Here, 'naturalization' of the phenomenon of role morality had become clearly palpable: some persons simply accepted role morality as a fact - and saw it as natural, while others described it as a struggle and a type of pain. Openly declaring the above issue came as an important turning point in both teams, i.e. when participants actually questioned the **"unalterability of conditions"** (and also the lack of consistency and the 'embeddedness' of role morality). To our astonishment, we realized how 'imprisoned' we had become in our own misconceptions and stereotypes (in relation to amoral managers, selfish employees, good-for-nothing trade union representatives etc.), instead of thinking over current, specific cases (and making use of our own powers of moral imagination).

Role morality and a lack of consistency are worth mentioning not only because they are

justified and well-grounded but also because of their individual and organisational effects. Especially in Research "B" we saw that, on the basis of personal and shared examples, this kind of dissonance may demand. Given an unremitting inner tension, some individual people may be forced to make constant self-justifications - and this may lead to moral burn-out and an erosion of responsibility-taking (Baumann 1993). Indeed, consistent stress may force some people to quit a given organisation or give up a career in HRM altogether. On an organisational level, however, individuals may support one another by mutual justification of role morality and via their giving up on moral integrity. The moral reference group may play an important role in this perspective as well. When HRM experts encounter role morality questions, one might ask: 'Can they reasonably expect 'moral impulses' from their own professional reference group or other organisational party?'

The issue of moral integrity (Goodpaster 2007) has surfaced in research studies on two levels. On one part – as has been said before – **HRM experts themselves struggle with contradictions between professed and followed principles, that is, there is a tension between principles and action.** Formulation of a definition of 'ethics' has played a significant part in realization of the above notion - or, rather, discussions about whether 'ethics' are defined by principles, sets of values and/or action); all-round examination of the general, theoretical concept helped a great deal, too – something that was complemented with case solutions (where principles were declared again but were now linked to actions/consequences) and with concrete action taken (where one faces the consequences of action and can reflect on definitions). The presence or lack of moral integrity surfaced in other organisational groups, too. During research work with Team "B" (building on several cases) it was astonishing to see how often **interviewees went against their own professed ethical principles in practice (within the same case) or how inconclusively they behaved (between cases).**

Different cases and moral imagination

In the two research projects we had more than 40 specific cases. One part were processed together (a formula-routine for case processing constituted one of the major learning points of the researches). The relevance of these cases for HRM systems reflected literature groupings (Wooten 2001) and we plan that they will be put to good use in HRM education.

As regards the structure(s) of ethical problems, certain patterns can be identified (which in all probability constitute only one component of all possible patterns):

- The HRM professional in his/her own field of operations is **faced with a dilemma or situation that possesses ethical relevance; an ethical challenge has to be responded to.** These dilemmas appear at every hierarchical level but obviously differ when it is a HRM manager or junior specialist. In these situations, individuals often experience conflicts between

ethical principles and interests ("When do I really act ethically?") or when they have to choose a lesser evil (as in a case of lay-offs).

- The HRM professional **experiences an ethically questionable situation or phenomenon running in parallel with his/her own field of operations or elsewhere in the organisation.** In such situations the individual often clearly sees what the ethical solution would be, but is unsure whether he/she can act according to his/her own personal or professional judgment. The fundamental issue here is how much is it *their* business? How much can *they* have a say in it? Such cases often involve conflicts among organisational roles (e.g. organisational member vs. HRM professional). Or the old dilemma arises: **Does HRM have a 'conscience' role?** And, if so, what does this mean in a given situation?
- The HRM professional is instructed to do something he/she deems ethically questionable - or is not allowed to do something he/she deems ethically necessary. A fundamental dilemma in these situations is to what extent and by what means do they resist and 'stick to' their own solution? This issue can be clearly linked to the **conflict between different role interpretations (i.e. ethical brake vs. serving maid).**
- The HRM professional does not personally face an ethical problem but another organisational party questions the ethics behind a certain HRM decision. The question here is **how much the HRM professional is able or willing to understand and shape the views of other involved parties? How clearly can they communicate their own views? And how much are they able to surpass their own pre-conceptions?**
- In this latter case it might be problematic if **organisational parties have opposing ethical views or if there are contradictory interpretations of ethical behaviour within HRM itself.** Do any of the stakeholders enjoy priority? On what grounds? Which of the different interpretations should have priority? How does one reach a consensus?

The actual practice of solving cases spanned a bridge between theory and practice. Cases we, in the research program, solved together often yielded concrete practical results - and even organisational level changes (e.g. the 'proprietor' of a given case could reassuringly close it; or by making amendments to loyalty regulations, future dilemmas could be avoided).

(1) By solving cases in a team, individual pieces of information were added up, clarified - and were confronted by different interpretations from other team members. Questioning and critical alertness had become a natural part of the common solution-finding process. Apart from alertness, moral sensitivity was also enhanced; our own reasoning and framework formulations had been made things persons were conscious of, and typical answers and solutions were revised. 'Self-recognitive elements' had appeared in team "A", not only at individual but also at the team level.

(2) Aquired solutions differed by qualitative measures from those usually routine actions suggested *before* a case analysis. On the basis of the team's retrospective evaluations, the interests of more

involved parties had been considered, while new, freshly proposed starting points and aspects had emerged and – in a more holistic way – other time spans had also been taken into account. Apart from given cases, suggestions for change concerning organisational operations had been made as well.

(3) Cooperative work boosted self-confidence, too: team members managed to formulate a fuller, ever more multi-faceted diagnosis in relation to a complex situation. Thus, persons had become 'armed' with the ability to transform occasionally frustrating situations.

(4) Especially memorable was the phase concerning **moral memory**. A solution to the case led to specific actions which – according to team perceptions – meant a more ethical solution to an employee's problem; and this satisfied the HRM staff. Yet beyond concrete cases people had also made decisions about changes that could endorse more ethical company processes and decisions in the future. **Conclusively- and theoretically-based, common decisions may not only affect current specific situations - they can also lead to concrete, long-term changes involving the whole organization, and not just HRM itself.**

III.2. Learning, development and transformation in cooperative research: how theoretical and practical knowledge is accumulated

A basic characteristic of cooperative research is that researchers and non-researchers take part together in each phase of the research process. Scientific knowledge as represented by the researcher (e.g. specialized theoretical knowledge, knowledge of the theory and related practices with a qualitative methodology), and non-scientific knowledge and experiences (theoretical and practical expertise, experience, familiarity with the context) – all of these together are able to create and build up manifold, complementary and mutually-refined knowledge in line with participants' interests, goals and expectations (Stirling 2006; Balázs 2011). Yet how can one convince participants that *their* gained knowledge is not secondary to scientific knowledge - and that they do have a role to play in each phase of the research (and in the creation of new knowledge)? Both research programs were continually being overshadowed by participants' doubts about the 'value' and strength of various pieces of knowledge (most specifically, their own). When I look back on it as an initiating researcher - as the 'representative of scientific thought' - I realize that one of my greatest challenges was to convince team members that *their* knowledge, beyond traditional knowledge, complemented my professional skills, could create space for research and ultimately bring results. **Faith in the value of participants' own knowledge combined with an ability to create new knowledge, as a team (as opposed to alienation from knowledge i. e. the 'culture of silence', Reason 1994), is, to my mind, the cornerstone of the quality and success of cooperative research.**

The kind of actual knowledge thus accumulated greatly depends on the nature of fellow researchers' expectations and goals. A desire for learning and development had appeared among the motivations and expectations of both teams. In Team "A", apart from the learning and development of individuals, lessons about the company's HRM organisation (i. e. the team) was also a major objective: "*Basically, we ourselves wanted to learn something we could use later...*" In team "B", a desire for individual learning and development was the predominant factor. Learning new things about ourselves emerged in results from both teams. As Málovics et al. (2011:111) so aptly put it, such research processes were, in effect, study trips to the realms of self-recognition. Albeit to varying degrees, each individual faced their own prejudices, schemas and ideas about the outside world.

In the requirements formulated at the beginning of the research, theoretical (propositional) knowledge diverged little from practical knowledge (Heron 1996). The most likely reason for this – especially in research group "A", where nobody had previous experience – is that persons here could hardly imagine what might come of it or what kind of practical knowledge they could acquire. This had two important consequences: firstly, the fact that action made manifest unexpected experience (with an accumulation of knowledge) and also gave palpable results, genuine successes, freedom and released energies in the team; secondly, I, as initiating researcher, had been seriously stressed by a lack of explicit and well-prepared practical expectations on the part of fellow researchers as I had ideas about the kind of practical knowledge that might be accumulated. For my part, I would have liked to support their development and to make them 'better' - while I, of course, would by no means dominate or sway the process.

Concerning the learning focus, both teams put forward content-related expectations about HRM ethics. Besides this, Team "B" showed a marked interest in and curiosity about the cooperative methodology. The formulated goals were built on the objective framework of the initiating researcher, which I presented at the beginning of both research programs.

In cooperative research participants create four kinds of knowledge, ones closely related to each another - and by this common support and common grounding they can help the individual or team (Gelei 2001). Practical knowledge has primacy within research results (*primacy of practical*); and propositional knowledge (e.g. formal research reviews or publications), which has mainly been produced for academic communities, is only secondary (Heron 1996:34). This relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge had appeared in a somewhat controversial format in both teams, as my PhD research project had been the declared objective for processes from the beginning. Therefore, in this case we can make no or little reference to the actual primacy of practical knowledge. Nevertheless, as a result of the research we may still produce practical knowledge which, in its effects (at the individual or organisational level), may go well beyond theoretical knowledge.

Experiential knowledge comes from shared personal experiences, meetings, action taken, talks and reflection. This kind of knowledge is based on what we have experienced, the way we have resonated to our own and other people's experiences, how we tuned in to a common wavelength and, with empathy's help, experienced and saw similarities and differences (Gelei 2005:11). Experiential knowledge is tacit and hard to grasp. In my opinion, though, we had generated experiential knowledge - when in both research projects we created a power-free communicative space and experienced the power of discourse therein. According to Pataki et al. (2011:30-31), communication space is an arena where a community has constructive dialogue and solves problems creatively on issues that concern it. The quality of communicative space is defined by (1) the level of trust and cooperation, and (2) the strength of impulses to act. Concerning these dimensions, we managed to achieve a high level of trust and cooperation (proved by the permanently sustained relationship or, with Team "B", a commitment to continue research). How completed projects would be able to induce further action by participants is still an open question! An important revelation here is that there is no such thing as a minimum responsibility level in HRM ethics, for everyone may strive to find (more) ethical solutions to problems within his/her own sphere of operations.

Presentational knowledge comes from and is based on experiential knowledge. The point here is how one can express, implement and present experiential knowledge as propositional knowledge. Presentational knowledge may serve as a bridge between hard-to-grasp, tacit elements of experiential knowledge and propositional knowledge (Reason 1994:326). This kind of knowledge is still tacit in character. The fact that we have learned to talk about ethical issues in general and specific terms, both at individual and specific organisational levels, may be regarded as an element of presentational knowledge; people acquired practical skills in being able to often express difficult feelings, ideas and concepts concerning theoretical concepts or specific situations. Experiences gained from action were shared, and we reflected critically on one another's interpretations, even if it meant taking on conflicts that may have resulted from different opinions.

According to Heron (1996), **theoretical or propositional knowledge** is 'knowledge of something', including acquired and comprehended theories, and concepts shaped by research reflection and action. This kind of differing knowledge' was rooted and validated in participants' practical or experiential knowledge. However, when we talk about theoretical knowledge, 'scientific' and 'non-scientific' knowledge appear together, complementing or confronting each other. As another dimension of theoretical knowledge, theoretical findings, as understood and formulated by individual members, and the accumulation of team 'knowledge' complemented each other. (This phenomenon was especially exciting with Team "A", which has kept on working together.)

Theoretical knowledge accumulated in several phases of the research. Findings or

revelations were often made during reflective talks under the influence of experiences gained in action. Here, theory and practice, along with individual perceptions were brought face to face. Findings were formulated during or after joint case-solving processes or at the end of the research. As an initiating researcher, I especially welcomed written or oral reactions to my own views (which contributed to the accumulation of my theoretical knowledge).

By **practical knowledge** we mean those skills and/or competences that rely on and complement the other three kinds; and by giving sense to the other three a fullness of knowledge is achieved. While in research group "B" the main focus was on individual learning and competences (e.g. mustering up courage to openly speak about ethical concerns, practice in active participation in the cooperative methodology), in research group "A", apart from individual competences, new knowledge, influences and changed behavioural patterns were to be identified at both team and organisational levels. (e.g. revision and changes in internal recruitment procedures, see Table 4).

With reference to theoretical and practical knowledge – especially in relation to Team "A" - **joint case solutions** played an important role in crossing the bridge between theory and practice, between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. We were able to 'give a try' to theoretical, abstract concepts, and we could make them concrete in a given/current situation. Suggestions for solutions were looked at from an ethical point of view, with reflections on feasibility in practice, too. We could then put the jointly-shaped and -selected solution to the test, i.e. in practice. This was followed by feedback looking at theory - and preparation for potentially similar cases in the future.

In my interpretation, theoretical and practical knowledge at individual and team levels come from three elements: (1) reflection and argument, (2) joint case solutions, (3) action taken – and this process is shown in Figure 2.

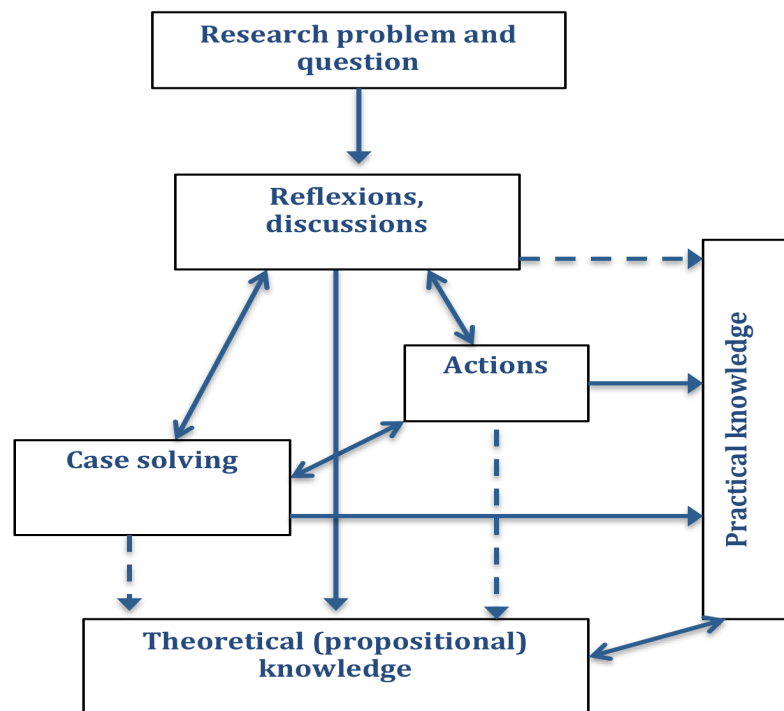


Figure 2: The accumulation of theoretical and practical knowledge

At the beginning of research, in both teams we (after lengthy argument) created a common understanding and definition of ethics, more specifically of HRM-operation ethics. This definition was then put to the test in several aspects during joint talks and case solutions; and at this point we immediately had to face up to the fact that even frequently 'used' theoretical concepts (e.g. fair treatment or the involvement of stakeholders) might be interpreted differently, so will possess little practical use when finding a solution to a specific issue (e.g. whose perception of fair treatment is most important? What should be done if an involved party does not want to get involved?) Here, the dilemma of theoretical (professed ethics) vs. concrete action (practiced ethics) emerged. Individual coping techniques used to tackle these differences were shared and identified - and we also faced our own individual and team-based schemes (improvement of self-recognition). Thirdly, during the case solution procedure, teams also confronted the diversity of factors and potential solutions, gradually recognizing the potential benefits of different approaches (employee vs. employer-centeredness, rational vs. emotional attitude, thinking with rule ethics vs. thinking with consequence ethics). Fourth, a need arose in participants to make changes in situations they had always thought to be unalterable.

This collective solving of cases- from certain perspectives – may be seen as actions carried out in 'laboratory conditions' (Kolb 1986 -type experimental phase) and, as such, they could

prepare the ground for genuine action by providing participants with ‘training’. Gained experiences both refined theoretical propositions and affected action taken. Some of these actions concerned the actual carrying out of decisions arrived in in the case-solution process, so direct feedback could be given on the occasion of the next reflective discussion.

Type of knowledge	Aquired knowledge or change (levels, predominance in research team, if any)
Practical knowledge, competency, changes	<p>Development of critical reflection and consciousness (individual).</p> <p>Development of self-recognition (individual).</p> <p>Knowledge of and practical skills in the case solving methodology, with integrated ethical aspects (individual and team, “A”).</p> <p>Self-confidence in adopting ethical dimensions in decision-making (individual and team).</p> <p>Changes in regulations and protocol as a result of planned or completed, specific action based on case solutions (organizational - e.g. in research group ”A”, changes in internal recruitment regulations affecting regular staff).</p> <p>Aquiring knowledge and experience of the cooperative methodology (individual).</p> <p>How to conduct a conversation dealing with ethical issues; how to interview on this subject (individual).</p> <p>As a result of interviews/talks, news of the research spread, inducing talks in and about the given organisations (organisation).</p>
Theoretical knowledge, recognition, findings	<p>Differing aspects and experiences as channelled by team operations may be advantageous in finding ethical solutions to problems. Consequently, by the integration of ethical factors and the creation of a genuine communication space, more ethical HRM operations can be achieved.</p> <p>There are different interpretations of the morality of HRM's role. Long-term presence of this phenomenon may have negative effects at both individual and organisational levels.</p> <p>HRM ethics have no minimum responsibility level, yet the role of Moral Champion has different interpretations.</p> <p>The phenomenon of moral muteness exists.</p> <p>Explicit ethical considerations may entail risks in 'power games', but they may also enhance discourse on ethics and the formulation of ethical expectations by involved parties.</p> <p>With involvement-based cooperative research, the <i>actual process</i> of accumulating knowledge is just as important as the resultant knowledge itself.</p> <p>Theoretical knowledge need not only be generated in an academic environment.</p>

Table 4: A few examples of generated theoretical and practical knowledge

Some of the activity was intended to generate direct theoretical knowledge (e.g. the result of

interviews built on complex case solutions in Team "B"), which was then individually processed and formulated. Such findings were interpreted and questioned at the team level. In the aftermath of one above-mentioned 'action' (in Team "B"), one fellow researcher made a point of different understanding and subsequent emptiness of ethical terms (e.g. equal treatment, sincerity) - which then became an important theoretical way of recognition at a team level, too. Other actions on the other hand yielded more practical results. In Team "A", for example, a joint solution to a rotation issue - and action taken to implement the rotation program - did lead to short term changes in relevant regulations and practices. In the reflective phase, however, the same case caused arguments about contradictory ideas and practices concerning the role of interest representation, and the theoretical conclusion was reached via individual individual interpretations. In Table 4 one can see summarized some of the types of knowledge and changes that participants noted as a result of the research.

IV. The theoretical and practical relevance of the research

As one of the most important results of this research, a **Hungarian language summary of HRM ethics literature** has been compiled - filling a gap in this field of publications. I expect it will contribute to raising interest in the topic and in the formulating and developing of HRM ethical discourse in Hungary, both in the academic sphere and among organisational HRM experts.

The Hungarian interpretation of the concept of **moral imagination** (Werhane 1999) is especially close to me. On the basis of my research it may be asserted that in cooperative research the moral imagination of the individual can be 'improved' - and steps can be taken towards the same thing at both organisational and team levels. Among other concerns, in the last two years my colleagues and I have taken substantial steps towards analysing moral imagination on the basis of case studies (Csillag et al., 2012) as well as via quantitative analysis (Csillag-Kiss, 2012); and I hope these research projects will become closely related to pertinent discourse and also raise interest in international, professional circles.

As far as I know, **cooperative research concerning HRM ethics has not been done so far** (or at least this has not been published in English), neither in an organisation nor in a professional HRM team. With the theoretical and methodological results of my research I would like to join the international community of HRM ethics; I also wish to demonstrate how the democratic methodology of cooperative inquiry (based on participatory paradigm and practice) relates to HRM research. Research results - e.g. experiencing a breaking of moral muteness, interpretations of various HRM roles, the integration of theory and practice - all mean a concrete contribution to existing HRM ethics' literature.

With my research projects I have joined the (ever growing) **Hungarian and international society of action researchers**, and with my content-related and methodological findings I have

contributed to cooperative inquiry on ethics. In addition, I hope I have presented the family of ‘action research’ as a realistic methodological alternative to **Hungarian organisational and management research**. In order to lay grounds for further action research work I have given a detailed methodological presentation of research projects - and have honestly shared my own doubts and thoughts. I would also like to inspire other researchers into organisational issues to turn their attention to cooperative methodologies.

My research – in essence – has an explorative approach. The objective was – within the methodological limits - to give a picture of the ideas HRM representatives have in relation to ethical dilemmas and situations. I hope the picture I have drawn will, at least **in Hungary, challenge the professional community as regards debating the issue**.

At the beginning of the research my objective was not only to reveal but to transform as well! I think my fellow researchers have gained a deeper understanding of their own ethical conducts, the ethical dilemmas of HRM operations and have improved their skills with regard to being able to solve such cases. I hope their competence regarding providing critical reflection and having ethical sensitivity and commitment will live on after the research is finished. I also trust that, apart from directly induced organisational changes, further professional and organisational changes will occur.

I would like to make use of both theoretical and practical problem-solving in education. With the permission of fellow researchers, I shall put forward **ethical cases** for MA and postgraduate level HRM education. Building on my thesis results, HRM Ethics was launched - for the first time - as an academic subject at the Human Manager course of our institution in May 2012. I would like to see the application of cooperative inquiry in work with students, too, in a more radical way.

V. References

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VI. Publications of the author of the field

Articles:

1. Csillag Sára - Hidegh Anna (2011): *Hogyan bonthatók le a látható és láthatatlan falak? Kooperatív kutatás a megváltozott munkaképességűek foglalkoztatásával kapcsolatos mentális gáta lebontásáról.* Vezetéstudomány, XLII. évfolyam, 2011. 12. szám, 23-36.
2. Takács Sándor - Csillag Sára - Kiss Csaba - Szilas Roland (2012): *Még egyszer a motivációról avagy „Hogyan ösztönözzük alkalmazottainkat itt és most?”* Vezetéstudomány, 2012. 2. szám, 2-17
3. Toarniczky Andrea - Csillag Sára - Bácsi Katalin (2011): *Szervezeti elkötelezettség és munkavállaló-barátság tudásalapú szervezetekben.* Munkaügyi Szemle II. 17-25.
4. Csillag Sára (2011): *Vállalatok társadalmi felelősségvállalása. Államférfiak és könyvelők Magyarországon.* Munkaügyi Szemle, 2011. I. 12-24
5. Csillag Sára (2010): *A vállalatok társadalmi felelőssége és a munkavállalók,* Munkaügyi Szemle 2010. I. 65-74.
6. Csillag Sára - Szilas Roland (2009): *A valódi integráció nyomában,* Munkaügyi Szemle 2009. I. 16-23.

Accepted articles:

7. Csillag Sára - Kiss Csaba - Szilas Roland - Takács Sándor: *Ethical dilemmas in call centres: how to survive in the modern sweatshops?* International Journal of Workplace Innovation (under publication, expected publication: 2012 June)
8. Csillag Sára (2012): *Emberi erőforrás menedzsment és etika.* Vezetéstudomány (under publication, expected publication: 2012 June)
9. Kiss Csaba - Csillag Sára - Szilas Roland - Takács Sándor: *A szervezeti elkötelezettség és a munka-család viszonyrendszer összefüggései.* Vezetéstudomány (under publication, expected publication: 2012 June)
10. Csillag Sára - Kiss Csaba: *Az elkötelezettségprofilok és a morális képzelőerő (lehetséges) összefüggései egy call-centerben.* Fenntartható Életmód. (under publication, expected publication: 2012 June)

Book chapters

11. Csillag Sára: *Van-e kiút a morális útvesztőből? Kooperatív kutatás emberi erőforrás menedzsment szakértők bevonásával.* In: Pataki Gy.-Vári A. (2011.): *Részvétel - akció - kutatás,* MTA Szociológiai Intézet, Budapest, pp.163-206.
12. Hidegh Anna - Csillag Sára: *Hogyan bonthatók le a látható és láthatatlan falak? Kooperatív kutatás a megváltozott munkaképességűek foglalkoztatásával kapcsolatos mentális gáta lebontásáról.* In: Glózer R.-Gelei A.(2011): *Valóság konstrukciók. A szervezeti jelentésvilág interpretatív megközelítései,* Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest
13. Csillag Sára: *Emberi erőforrás-menedzsment és etika - egy régi/új kapcsolat?* In: Dobák M.-Bakacsi Gy.-Kiss Cs. (2011): *Stratégia és menedzsment. Tanulmányok Balaton Károly tiszteletére.* ISBN: 978-963-503-445-1, Aula Kiadó, Budapest, pp.85-108.
14. Hidegh Anna - Csillag Sára: *Toward "mental accessibility" - changing mental obstacles of future HR experts concerning the employment of disabled people* (Hidegh Anna társszerzővel). In: Dobák M.-Bakacsi Gy.-Kiss Cs. (2011): *Stratégia és menedzsment. Tanulmányok Balaton Károly tiszteletére.* ISBN: 978-963-503-445-1, Aula Kiadó, Budapest, pp. 171-188.
15. Csillag Sára - Szilas Roland - Szentkirályi András (2008): *Dolgozni velük illetve értük"- egy emberközpontú rehabilitációs gyakorlatról* in Kopp M., szerk (2008): *Magyar lelkiállapot. Esélyerősítés és életminőség a mai magyar társadalomban,* ISBN 978-963-9879-16-4, Semmelweis Kiadó, Budapest, pp.322-327.

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16. Hidegh Anna - Csillag Sára - Kováts Gergely: '*Breaking the walls*'. *On teaching Organization Theory and Human Resource Management. A critical pedagogy perspective* In: New perspectives for management education, Excon Publishing, Barcelona (under publication, expected publication: 2012 June)
17. Csillag Sára - Hidegh Anna: *Alternatív módszerek az emberi erőforrás menedzsment oktatásban. Két kísérlet felvilágosult, szilárd etikai és szakmai alapokkal rendelkező HR generáció kinevelésére*. In: Poór J. et al: *Átalakuló emberi erőforrás menedzsment. Múlt-Jelen-Jövő*. Complex Kiadó, Budapest (under publication, expected publication: 2012 June)
18. Csillag Sára: *Etikai kérdések vizsgálata az emberi erőforrás menedzsmentben*. In: Poór J. et al: *Átalakuló emberi erőforrás menedzsment. Múlt-Jelen-Jövő*. Complex Kiadó, Budapest (under publication, expected publication: 2012 June)

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19. *How to survive in the modern sweatshops?* 24th EBEN Annual Conference, Antwerp, Belgium, September 15-17, 2011
20. *Ethical issues in human resource management*. 24th EBEN Annual Conference, Antwerp, Belgium, September 15-17, 2011
21. *Ethical dilemmas in call centers*. 7th International Critical Management Studies conference, Napoli, Italy, 2011. 07.11-13.
22. "*Droids with feelings*" - *Systems psycho-dynamic aspects of customer service worker regeneration*. 28th ISPSO Annual Meeting and Symposium, Melbourne, Ausztralia, 17-19 June, 2011
23. *Alternatív módszerek az EEM oktatásában*. II. Országos Emberi Erőforrás Menedzsment konferencia, 2011. október 21., Budapest (HSZOSZ-MTA)
24. *HR és etika*. II. Országos Emberi Erőforrás Menedzsment konferencia, 2011. október 21., Budapest (HSZOSZ-MTA) – Humánpolitikai Szemle különdíja
25. *Toward "Mental Accessibility". Changing mental obstacles of future HR experts concerning the employment of disabled people*. 11th International Conference on Human Resource Development Research and Practice across Europe, Pécs, Jun 2-4 2010 – Alan Moon Price for the Best Conference Paper
26. *Életminőség és rehabilitáció*. Munkaerőpiaci Szakmai Konferencia, Érd, Szepes Gyula Művelődési Központ. 2009. március 30.
27. *Integration of people with disabilities to the world of work. Is it an act of CSR or business reality?* 13th European Business Ethics Network UK Conference, Bristol, 4-6 April 2009
28. *Human or inhuman management?* HRD Research and Practice Across Europe. The future of HRD - 2020 and beyond: challenges and opportunities. Universidade Lusíada de Famalicão and CLEGI, 23-25 May 2012
29. *Moral mazes. The story of two cooperative inquiry projects with HRM professionals*. The Fifth ISBEE World Congress. Tradition and New Horizons: Towards the Virtue of Responsibility. Warsaw, Poland, 11 -14 July 2012