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Revealing the dominant anthropological consideration of humankind in the teaching of Human Resource Management: A critique of individual performance evaluation

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abstract

For many, as is clear from the contents of the most widely disseminated publications on human resource management (HRM) in English- and French-speaking countries, the teaching and practices of HRM are amoral. They believe there is no underlying political project or ideological vision of humans in the workplace in HRM as it is taught and practised in the West. When it comes to management techniques, there is nothing surprising about this acceptance: the question is not even raised. It is a managerial self-evidence. Based on a textual analysis of nine English- and French-language HRM textbooks among the most widely disseminated worldwide, we set out to denaturalise this presupposition. With a particular focus on one HRM practice – performance evaluation – as presented in these texts, which shape the perceptions held by tens of thousands of students and practitioners each year, we demonstrate that HRM is not amoral. On the contrary, it is the bearer of a univocal political project marked by objectification (i.e. the reduction of humans to consumable objects) and subjectification (i.e. the production of subjectivity in line with company strategy). Adopting a phenomenological perspective, necessarily distant from the usual theories and critiques of management, this article offers a fresh look on the normative foundations of HRM theories and practices. Building on an awareness of these normative presuppositions, we invite readers to build a body of knowledge in the field of management based on other presuppositions about humankind.

Introduction

Questioning the normative foundations of management is an essential reflective undertaking but one that is limited in management science. Yet as early as 1958, Hannah Arendt suggested a dissociation between the instrumental end of one's labour (embodied by her *animal laborens*) and its creative and durable end (*homo faber*). By asserting that work has multiple ends, she paved the way for a critical anthropology of work that was later to be taken up by other philosophers, sociologists, ergonomists, economists and managers. But, if economics is a moral science first and foremost, it has been established that it now constitutes a complex technical corpus (Sen, 2004; Etzioni, 1990), and the same can be said about management. There is a powerful force acting in our fields, which some refer to as a '*stupid instrumentalization*' (Ajzen et al., 2015), that turns means to an end into ends in themselves (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). Therefore, in current management research and education, little room is given to question the underlying anthropological foundation of management, i.e. the vision of the person behind management theories, models and practices. It seems especially critical in the field of HRM where alternative ways of managing people are widely promoted, calling for management by values, proposing to give meaning to work, to share leadership or to free organizations and, in general, to put the human element first. But who is the person that we want to liberate and acculturate? To whom do we want to restore meaning in the workplace? Together with Aktouf (1992), we do not think management mechanisms can be understood – and changed – independently of the vision of humans shared in the workplace.

This process of reflexivity is made all the more crucial today by the fact that management methods, as well as management ethics, are now being publicly questioned: violence at the workplace (brutal restructuring processes, management practices resulting in the suicide of employees), mis-management and lies (VW, Enron, etc.) have brought opprobrium on management, both as theories and practices, making it more than necessary to reflect on the underlying vision of humans which shape mainstream HRM practices and models. While such questioning is largely absent from management research studies, thus explaining its amoral nature (ultimately, management is just a series of techniques, right?), we propose to investigate the underlying vision of humankind in the teaching of HRM in some Western countries.

This is achieved by selecting nine of the most widely disseminated HRM textbooks – six in English and three in French. Our multidisciplinary research team, bringing together expertise in philosophy and management, conducted a content analysis of the introductions to these texts, as well as the part (chapter or chapter segment, common to all of them) on performance evaluation. Our analysis shows that, in the underlying anthropology shared by all the books investigated, humans are (i) *objectified*, i.e. reduced to the status of an object, pointing to a form of instrumentalisation with essentially economic aims; and (ii) *subjectified*: they lose their unifying human condition by no longer being considered as fellow human beings capable of discussing their work, but as beings whose importance and qualities depend on the organisation's hierarchy.

We first introduce the notion of performance evaluation as a relevant topic to reveal the global view of humankind promoted in such textbooks and, henceforth, in HRM education inspired by such references. Second, we present the methodology used to conduct our analysis, outlining the selection process of the textbooks and the three perspectives we adopted to interpreting human actions in a phenomenological perspective: the first, second and third person's points of view. Third, we present the results of our analysis, prior to discuss them in identifying avenues for renewing HRM models, theories and practices as well as our teachings.

Considering performance evaluation to reveal anthropological presuppositions on workers in HRM textbooks

In order to operationalize our analysis, we chose to focus on the textbooks' main introduction, as well as on the chapter on performance evaluation, for three main reasons. First, in a pragmatic way, we had to compare 'apples to apples' across textbooks. If they present a similar structure, the selected textbooks also have specificities and each topic does not systematically find a similar place in each of the books we analysed. For that matter, it was not possible to analyse the whole content of each book, and some of the contents are not considered in the same way from one book to the next. Second, among the content that was comparable, we opted for the chapter which we deemed to be most centered on employees as persons. Evaluation seems to involve subjectivity since it is a matter of interpersonal judgement. For doing so, we proceeded through a process of elimination amongst the comparable contents, seeking to discriminate between contents on objects and contents on subjects. This led us to dismiss topics which had tools, processes and objects as central focus, rather than persons. For example, the focus of parts on training or knowledge management was on competencies (abilities, etc.) more than on human subjects; and the focus of parts on culture was more on values than on employees as beings. Other parts were concerned by institutions (chapters on industrial relations, e.g.) and organizational processes (ethics, strategic HRM, flexibility), attaching little importance to social and human relationships. After this selection, we had, more or less, three chapters that remained. Parts on selection and assessment appeared too focused on (psychometric and other) techniques, and chapters on career management in fact appeared to us as depending on chapters on performance evaluation (to which they often referred to). Last but not least, evaluation is at the heart of management (according to the general alignment principle, the corporate performance is made of individuals' performance, and corporate objectives determine individual's ones); so, the vision of humans underlying evaluation should reasonably also underlie other practices.

The evaluation of individual performances essentially relates to the processes put in place when it comes to staff appraisals. The use in the textbooks of the term 'appraisal' for what is widely known as an evaluation is noteworthy: the aim is to replace the negative image sometimes associated with evaluations (sanctions) with the more dynamic and positive image of the appraisal, where the objective is to get workers to participate in their own professional and personal development. In this vein, the appraisal is a way of providing recognition in the workplace: it is about identifying and valuing the contribution of each individual based on results achieved, efforts made and skills mobilised.

An individual performance evaluation traditionally takes place in two phases: (a) *observing* an existing situation and (b) *comparing* it to a desirable situation. This is a process that is deeply rooted in our lives, one that takes place constantly whether or not we are aware of it. Evaluating is linked to the act of classifying, and, in social terms, of creating hierarchies. Simply imagine two athletes training together, or two students working on a project, etc. This process also takes place in companies on a daily basis. Employee performance appraisals are a common practice in organisations: we expect to be recruited based on an evaluation of our past or hoped-for performances; we expect to be promoted, to receive feedback, and to grant recognition on the basis of the work we performed; we even expect (other's) firing decisions to be justified with regard to effective work performance.

Furthermore, performance appraisal involves judging one's fellow human beings by analyzing and measuring the results of their work. Yet it is the preserve of the human subject to be able to think for himself and reflect back on his own actions. So what vision does the appraiser have of humans in the workplace when judging the performance of another person with just as much aptitude for reflection as himself? As a corollary of this, and in the context of strategic HRM, where the policies and practices of HRM must contribute to – and even align with – firm's objectives, what is the anthropological representation one has of the worker when the ultimate objective of the performance appraisal is to increase the organisation's competitiveness? It is this question that underpins our investigation.

Methodological considerations

To address this question, we will be reviewing the nine most widely disseminated – and no doubt the most widely read – HRM textbooks used in English- and

French-language business schools in an effort to determine whether they represent a particular anthropological vision of workers. For each text, we analyse and compare a chapter on performance appraisals in order to identify the underlying vision of human beings in the workplace. Our analysis mainly focuses on the objectives and methods used in performance evaluations.

Choice of texts: Dissemination criteria

In order to identify the most popular HRM textbooks, i.e. those that shape HRM practices and students' vision thereof, we selected nine books, six written in English and three in French.

The first indicator we used was the number of editions published. Second, we also relied on information relating to dissemination. This involved combining three sources: the Amazon rankings (which are based on sales), citations in Google scholar, and bookstore sales in France (for the French-language textbooks). We used a third indicator to ensure that the publications were intended for students: the description of the target readership provided on the back cover. This gave us a list of 15 textbooks, from which nine were selected; these are presented in Table 1.

Authors	**# of editions**	**Year**	**Title**	**Target readership (back cover)**	**Google scholar citations**	**Amazon ranking (sellings)**	**2012 sales (French bookstores)**
Armstrong Michael & Taylor Stephen	13	2014	Armstrong's handbook of HRM practice	students and practitioners of HRM	3095	15 (5th textbook)	
Snell Scott, Morris Shad & Bohlander George	17	2016	Managing human resources	unspecified	369	13 (4th textbook)	
Noe Raymond, Hollenbeck John	8	2012	Human Resource Management: Gaining a competitive advantage	students	1,356	8 (2nd textbook)	
Mathis Robert, Jackson John & Valentine Sean	14	2013	Human Resource Management	students	unknown for this edition	2 (1st textbook)	
Gomez-Mejia Luis, Balkin David & Cardy Robert	7	2011	Managing human resources	professionals	900 (2004 edition)	9 (3rd textbook)	
Dessler Garry	14	2014	Human Resource Management	students		20 (6th textbook)	
Peretti Jean-Marie	20	2015	Gestion des ressources humaines	students and professionals	155 (1987 edition)		1,727 (60,000 for all editions)
Cadin Loïc, Guérin Frédéric, Pigeyre	4	2012	Gestion des ressources humaines	students and professionals	240 (2010 edition)		1,484

Frédérique & Pralong							
Thévenet M., Dejoux C., Bender A.-F., Condomines B., Marbot E., Normand E., Pennaforte A., Silva F., Storhaye P.	4	2015	Fonctions RH	students and professionals	29		5,101

Table 1: Selection of HRM textbooks

A phenomenological approach to the practice of individual performance evaluation

One of the fundamental theses of phenomenology is that what is real is ambiguous and that all sensitive data and situations have the capacity to appear differently. For that which is seen by the perceiving subject, is not only seen in broad contours, but also in profile and perspective (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). A *phenomenon*, i.e. that which presents itself to our consciousness or is perceived by the senses, is never a complete whole and never bounded. Anything can only be perceived in a broader environment. According to Merleau-Ponty, to perceive is to perceive a figure against a background. What comes first in perception is the environment, the totality of the phenomenal field within which figures appear and are connected and contrasted, some of them being objects of attention and others objects of inattention (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 18). Taking the perceptive experience as the rudimentary model of all human activities, Merleau-Ponty argues that when analysing reality the perceptive experience prohibits us from stopping at a particular privileged or globalising perspective. For 'all perception, even that of ideas, is always the perception of a figure against a background' (Roviello, 1992: 165). This phenomenological perspective suggests that in order to account for an intentional act, from a methodological point of view, a fluctuation of perspectives is required. Essentially there are three methodological standpoints one can adopt with respect to a human act or a social phenomenon: that of the first person (actor), that of the second person (actor insofar as s/he interacts with another actor) and that of the third person (observer).

The perspective of the third person is that which is supposed to be objective with regard to the reality being analysed. What is crucial in this scenario is that the description of the agent's situation and the attribution of rationality to that agent must be objective. The subject observes the phenomenon or the performance of an act as an impartial spectator. This method is comparable to the approach adopted in the natural sciences. Just as scientists use natural phenomena to identify general laws with objective structures, those who defend the third-person methodology want to do the same for the social world. Hempel (1965), for example, believed that an act is explained by the effective dispositions of the actor that underpin his actions, and not by what he is supposed to do given his beliefs and desires. Many theorists working on actions have remarked that because of the position of the third person, the observing subject does not have access to the actors' reasons for acting and can do no more than establish a hypothesis.

By settling for the position of the third person, we are at risk of misunderstanding the norms that determine one's actions and, in the form of often implicit knowledge, guide one's behaviour. The merit of the first-person methodology is therefore the ability to consider not only the regular nature of one's actions but also the actors' motivations when trying to account for human activities. For Weber (1971), that which makes an activity human is its purpose. On this basis he defined his concept of rational interpretation as part of a theory of intentional social action. He wanted to emphasise the fact that human activity communicates subjective meaning, in other words the notion that the meaning of a particular act is to be found in the perspective of the actor concerned. According to this methodological individualism, human activity can only be understood from the interior (Bohman, 1991: 148). This is a hermeneutical approach which makes it possible to perceive human beings as autonomous and self-interpreting subjects.

Another perspective one can adopt in relation to an act is that of the second person. This is the case of a communicative action, i.e. one that is oriented towards mutual understanding. Actors meet as locutors and auditors to agree on something, they meet as 'second persons' (Habermas, 2003: 69). This notion of the second person's attitude is linked to Habermas's distinction between instrumental action and communicative action. For Habermas, these are two types of elementary actions, and one cannot be reduced to the other (Habermas, 2003: 70). An instrumental action is of a non-linguistic nature; it is how an actor intervenes in the world in order to achieve determined ends by choosing and by using the appropriate means. It refers to daily or craft activities such as running, putting something back in its place, hammering or sawing. The second type of action refers to linguistic enunciations or acts of speech – as Austin taught us, to speak is to act. Linguistic enunciations are actions through which a locutor seeks to reach an understanding with another person about something that exists in the world.

Over the following pages, we will endeavour to determine which of the three perspectives just described is at work in the evaluation of worker performance, before going on to reveal the vision of humans that can be associated to this perspective. To do this, we will consider the role played by the actors who intervene in the evaluation process as well as the perspective they take for their intervention. Our consideration of these three perspectives when it comes to interpreting human actions provides the framework through which we offer a reading of the nine textbooks and will serve as a guide in our presentation of the implicit anthropological visions found therein. The methodological presupposition that acts as the common thread for all that follows is that in order to adequately account for an intentional act, all three of the perspectives described above must be mobilised. We will show that the nine textbooks analysed largely share the same vision of humans in the workplace and do not draw on such multiple perspective.

Phenomenological considerations on the taken-for-granted assumptions on workers' anthropology in management, in the context of performance evaluation.

Part one: The observation phase

Declarative evaluation: According to the textbooks analysed, people from several different categories can serve as evaluators of employee's performance: managers, colleagues, staff teams, clients, etc. Mathis et al. (2014) believe that anyone who is familiar with an employee can evaluate his performance. However, they also assert that the role of evaluating employees falls to the manager, since orienting employee performance is one of his most important responsibilities (Mathis et al., 2014). Noe et al. (2012) also argue that managers are responsible for staff evaluations as they are best informed about their performance and about job requirements:

> Managers are the most frequently used source of performance information. It is usually safe to assume that supervisors have extensive knowledge of the job requirements and that they have the ability to rate their employees. (Noe et al., 2012: 371)

Whether performance evaluation is conducted by managers, colleagues or clients, these textbooks present the evaluator as a third-person judge of the work results and/or behaviour of employees. While it is true that seven of the nine books analysed present self-evaluation as a possible performance appraisal method, this approach, often adopted as a scheme that is pre-established by management, is seen as no more than preparatory work ahead of the interview with the manager, who is primarily responsible for appraising employee performance, especially for administrative purposes such as determining promotions, salary increases or dismissals (Snell et al., 2016; Condomines and Pennaforte, 2015). Self-evaluation in most cases plays no more than a supporting role as part of a formal evaluation process. Condomines and Pennaforte (2015) are quick to place self-evaluation in the category of what they call declarative methods, in opposition to dialogical methods, i.e. interviews. They place self-evaluation in the same category as the 180°, 360°, and 540° feedback methods.

In most cases, a performance evaluation is followed by an interview during which the employee receives feedback. As well as a possible discussion relating to salary, the evaluator may discuss with the employee the possible causes of the difficulties encountered and together they may draw up an action plan in order to improve his performance. But the most important part of the evaluation process is already completed in the first phase, and the self-evaluation, whether presented as an essay or via a standard form, simply serves to assist the evaluator responsible. The feedback given to the employee by the manager during the interview is no more than informative. The employee himself only plays a secondary role in response to what is effectively a *fait accompli*. It is in light of this situation that Gomez-Mejia et al. (2012) point out that many managers dread the post-evaluation interview, especially when they have no good news to announce, and that training courses have been devised specifically to manage these meetings.

> Many managers dread the performance appraisal, particularly if they do not have good news to impart. The HR department or an external group, such as a management association or consulting group, can help managers by offering training in conducting interviews, providing role-play practice, and offering advice on thorny issues. (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2012: 240)

Performance evaluations, as presented in the selected textbooks, are therefore *unilaterally declarative*. They are a process in which the evaluator, without requiring the employee's agreement, declares whether or not the latter's performance satisfies company requirements. This is clearly a third-person action conducted with total indifference for the employee's subjective experience. This declarative form of evaluation usually takes place with the help of various techniques: rating scale, essay, mixed-standard scale, etc. Given the direct nature of the evaluation process, the rating scale is the most commonly used technique (Mathis et al., 2014).

Although their book presents evaluation methods based on the declarative approach, Armstrong and Taylor (2014) seem to find them unsatisfactory and argue for the inclusion in the evaluation process of dialogue and consent on the basis that the declarative evaluation carries connotations as an instrument for command and control.

> Indeed, there are those, including the writers of this handbook, who prefer to avoid the use of the phrase performance appraisal altogether because of its connotations with the worst aspects of traditional merit rating, i.e. top-down pronouncement by managers on what they think of their subordinates, which is used as an instrument for command and control. (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014: 334)

Dissymmetric influence: The primary aim of employee performance evaluations is to serve organization's interests. The contribution made by employees to the organisation's objectives is part of the concept of company performance itself (Thévenet et al., 2015). In order to achieve an organisation's objectives, HRM must therefore have an influence on employees. The performance evaluation is part of this. For both Noe et al. (2012) and Thévenet et al. (2015), HRM is by definition a practice that aims to influence the behaviour, attitudes and performance of employees.

As can be seen from Table 2 (see below), when looking closely at these textbooks, it becomes clear that all of them present the *influence* of management on employees' behaviour as the objective of performance evaluation. This influence is implicit in the objectives of performance evaluation and is directly or indirectly referred to using various terms such as *serving company strategy, professional support, contributing to organisation's objectives*, and, above all, *staff development*.

> HRM is about people's behaviour. It is difficult to act on and influence behaviour, but that remains the core of HRM. (Thévenet et al., 2015: 25, our translation)

> Good performance management systems have the capability to influence employee behavior and improve an organization's performance. (Snell et al., 2016: 300-301)

The desire to influence employees has an impact on the choice of evaluation methods. These methods are mostly modelled and drawn up based on the anticipated behaviour of employees. In this respect, the method that appears to be the most representative in the textbooks selected is the so-called scientific management method.

> From this perspective, it is the notion of one's position that constitutes a vector for objectivity, for it is by adjusting criteria to the position requirements that one can progress towards greater objectification. The position requirements are translated in terms of performance-generating behaviour. (Cadin et al., 2012: 407, our translation)

Cadin and colleagues cite examples given by Morgan, where the evaluator must indicate whether or not the store employee welcomes customers with a smile, makes eye contact with them, has good knowledge of the codes for food items when it comes to taking orders, whether clients have to repeat their orders, etc.

This influence process is dissymmetric in nature. Indeed, only employees must adapt and adjust to the objectives of the organisation, while the reverse is not envisaged. Only employees must change to suit the firm's strategies, what makes it clear that it is up to the workforce to adapt both quantitatively and qualitatively to the objectives of the company:

> HRM must contribute to the objectives of the company and the implementation of its strategy. Profitability, growth and development objectives are reflected by

> quantitative and qualitative adaptations on the part of the workforce. When an objective is broken down in terms of the means and resources needed to achieve it, this also concerns human resources, whose contribution can be verified retrospectively. (Thévenet et al., 2015: 6, our translation)

Although performance evaluation involves people judging the work of their fellow human beings, according to the selected textbooks only one party is supposed to influence the other. There is no mention anywhere in the texts we analysed to the notion that employees are also supposed to influence management. Everything is presented as if employees were intended to be in a position of submission.

This dissymmetric influence underscores the ambiguity of the concept of human resources. Does the term 'human resources' indicate that the people working in a company are resources and should be 'used' as such, or that they are resources to be valued? Under the former interpretation, HRM appears as a technocratic way to manage humans:

> A few years ago, "personnel" simply referred to the administration of people's situations, whereas HRM was suggestive of sophisticated tools and techniques that could be used to take individuals and their development into account. Today, HRM sometimes appears as an overly technocratic approach to managing social relations which fails to sufficiently account for individual situations and wishes. (Thévenet et al., 2015: 12, our translation)

This technocratic approach to human resource management appears to be in line with the objectives of HRM and with the concept of the human resource strategy as shared in the textbooks we analyzed:

> A human resource strategy refers to a firm's deliberate use of human resources to help gain or maintain an edge against its competitors in the marketplace. It is the grand plan or general approach an organization adopts to ensure that it effectively uses its people to accomplish its mission. (Gomez-Mejia et al., 2012: 2)

With regard to the objectives of the performance evaluation and to the interview where it is discussed – which usually follows the evaluation process itself – the relationship between the evaluator and the employee implies a first-person perspective. Although it is conducted in a unilaterally declarative manner, the evaluation, insofar as it targets staff development and to the extent that this development is the subject of the interview that follows the evaluation process, takes the capacities and interests of the employee into account. But where the interaction between the evaluator and the employee is designed to allow the former to exert dissymmetric influence on the latter, the first-person perspective at work, as we will discuss below, becomes perverted.

Objectives	Methods	Authors
Company performance	Rating scale Comparison between performance objectives and results	Thévenet et al. (2015: 123; 133-134) Thévenet et al. (2015: 105; 117-123)
Steer company performance and objectives, as well as support professional development	Rating scale Comparative and attributive approaches; personality test	Peretti (2015: 83-88) Noe et al. (2012: 341-344; 350-355)
Administrative and developmental	Binary appraisal (yes or no) Comparative and absolute judgement Attributive method, rating scale Comparison against company objectives, rating scale Overall evaluation, evaluation via rating scale	Cadin et al. (2012: 406-409; 420) Gomez-Mejia et al. (2012: 223; 226-229) Snell et al. (2016: 302; 311; 317-325) Mathis et al. (2014: 340-341; 350) Armstrong and Taylor (2014: 335-336; 339-340)

Table 2: Objectives and methods of individual performance evaluation

Concluding observations: To summarize our phenomenological analysis, let us remind the reader that to account fully for any reality, one needs to mobilize different perspectives, since reality, and in particular human reality, is complex and can never be seen at once as a complete whole. In perception, for instance, whatever is given to a perceiving subject is given in limited aspects and in perspective. The perceiver looks at the object from a certain angle and distance, under specific lightning conditions, with a certain focus, mood, memory, conceptual scheme, etc. All of these factors affect the way the object is recognized by the perceiver. Similarly, the way we perceive an organization or a management practice such as performance appraisal depends on the perspective we adopt. This is why we chose to use the three phenomenological perspectives as our analytical framework for bringing to light the anthropological vision that is underneath performance evaluation.

By looking at the way the evaluation process is presented, we observed that only two perspectives are considered: the third- and the first-person perspectives. Management tends to favour the observer's perspective, the point of view which is detached from the reality being considered and the participant's perspective, namely, the point of view of the person being evaluated. The second-person perspective, i.e. the consideration of two persons linguistically interacting with one another, is ignored. The evaluation involves one-way influence. The management seeks to influence employees' behaviour and performance without expecting any influence from employees. Moreover, performance appraisal is just a matter of getting and providing information. It is 'the process through which an organization gets information on how well an employee is doing his or her job [and] providing employees with information regarding their performance effectiveness' (Noe et al., 2012: 341). In these two respects, employees are not involved as persons capable of saying 'yes' or 'no' about what concerns them.

But the second-person perspective is even richer than the other two perspectives. It has three forms. The first form is to see another person's situation from one's own perspective. We adopt the second-person perspective when we explicitly or implicitly use our experience to understand other people's experience. In that respect, the second-person perspective is *replicating* (Pauen, 2012). The second form of second-person perspective is to see oneself or one's own situation from the other's perspective (Bohman, 2001). Human interaction in research involves such a perspective. The second-person research occurs, for instance, when we inquire with others in a group about our shared mission or norms. Here taking the second-person perspective means seeking to learn from each other by willingly giving and receiving feedback (Reason and Torbert, 2001). It is the perspective of reflexivity. The third form of the second-person perspective is the dialogic meeting of two persons. Taking the second-person perspective here means moving back and forth from my perspective to another person's perspective, seeking a mutual understanding about something (McCarthy, 1994). What distinguishes the second from the third form is the purpose of interaction. In the second form, we want to understand ourselves, while in the third form the goal is to reach an agreement about something. The second-person perspective we regret to be missing in performance evaluation is in its second and third form.

By considering the three perspectives on intentional actions, we have looked at the roles of the evaluator and of the employee, the way in which the evaluation is conducted, and the goal of the performance evaluation. This approach enabled us to identify two common characteristics found in all nine textbooks: the unilaterally declarative form of the evaluation and the dissymmetric influence exerted by management on employees. These characteristics, respectively associated with the third-person and first-person perspectives, are particularly – although not exclusively – identifiable in the objectives and methods that are cited in Table 2.

Part two: The analytical phase

Having identified the declarative nature of the appraisal and the dissymmetric influence inherent in the objectives of performance evaluation, we can now turn to the identification of the anthropological consideration of the worker underlying performance evaluation (and the relationship between the evaluator and the employee it entails). The two methodological approaches we presented led us to highlight two aspects of the instrumental vision of humans in the workplace: objectification and subjectification.

Objectification of workers: The status of the organisation, of the worker and of the relationship between the two varies depending whether one considers them from the observer's or the participant's point of view. The evaluation methods reveal the perspective that is adopted by the evaluator. When the worker is evaluated using a predetermined and standardised evaluation grid based on the organization's requirements and objectives, without any intersubjective interaction, the evaluator addresses the worker from the third-person perspective. In this process, the employee is dealing with the organisation as a system: the organisation, which is the ultimate evaluator and the intended recipient of the results of the evaluation, is presented to the employee as an entity that exists in its own right, independently of the human beings that work for it. Because of its systemic nature, the organisation is an institution that extends beyond both the evaluating individual and the evaluated individual, even though it is they who allow it to exist.

Under the third-person perspective, where the *system* is given greater consideration than the individual, the evaluator interacts with the employee at once as the subject of an action and as an element of the system. In this process, the employee does not feel as if he is in a relationship with another subject but rather with a system. From the systemic point of view, the organisation is a formal structure with an established internal order and a series of rules governing its operations and the roles that must be fulfilled (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006). Under the third-person perspective, the organisation therefore appears as an abstract entity, and the human in the workplace as an *abstract element* of that entity.

Let us be clear: it is not our intention to denounce the third-person perspective and the associated systemic nature of the organisation. This perspective is necessary if one is to adequately account for a particular action or social phenomenon. The very idea of a performance evaluation implies the need for objectification, i.e. a certain detachment of an action from its author. A performance evaluation considers the results achieved. This implies that objectives have first been identified. Yet these often depend on the departments and positions occupied by employees.

What we critique in this analysis is the over-reliance on the third-person perspective and on the systemic nature of the organisation when it comes to evaluating employees' performances. We question the fact that the systemic action is privileged in an effort to construct and manage employee performances, because under this approach the worker is not only considered as an abstract element of an abstract entity but also as a *predetermined being*.

By exclusively adopting the position of an observer, the evaluator does not expect to be surprised by the experience of the employee. The anticipated behaviour of the employee, together with the norms, categories and objectives of the organisation, form the evaluation framework. While such a framework makes it possible to obtain information about performance, the evaluator cannot be surprised by the experiences of the employee as told from his perspective. The employee is not evaluated as being capable of self-determination. His subjectivity appears to be reified. Yet HRM is most widely interpreted as a reference framework for the organisation, built on the idea of giving workers as much autonomy and responsibility as possible, as well as the idea of recognising their contribution and sense of utility (Morgan, 1997). It is therefore legitimate to ask whether the practice of evaluating employee performances, as it is presented in the textbooks analysed herein, does not in fact run counter to the very notion of HRM itself.

The evaluation methods proposed in these textbooks suggest a craving for objectivity at the expense of the worker's capacity for reflection and self-determination. From the spectator's perspective, a declarative evaluation involves an objectivist and positivist epistemology. Positivist epistemology presupposes that one can find out what is really going on in an organisation by categorising and scientifically measuring the behaviour of people and systems (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006). Positivist organisation theorists study organisations as objective entities and develop methods borrowed from the natural sciences. They seek objectivity because they believe that subjectivity damages scientific rigour. Favouring empirical and quantitative methods, they adopt an approach which privileges a position that is non-reflexive and ostensibly neutral from an axiological standpoint. Seen from this perspective, social structures are objects insofar as they are detached from human consciousness and intersubjective interactions.

As clearly demonstrated by Morgan (1997) in his organisation theory, which looks at the systemic nature of organisations, these appear as machines from the observer's point of view. The dominant mechanist approach adopted in the textbooks analysed here sees humans in the workplace as machine parts, each with a clear role in ensuring the whole operates correctly. It is clear that the declarative form of performance evaluation methods and the methodological approach of the third-person perspective, which are closely linked, involve a certain objectification of the employee, who is presented as if s/he were devoid of consciousness, intentionality and desire.

Subjectification of workers: The instrumental vision of humans in the workplace, as it has just been presented through the concept of objectification, is linked to the declarative nature of employee performance evaluations and the objectifying attitude of the evaluator. As already explained, the third-person perspective is not the only one found in the evaluation process. The objectives of the evaluation and the dissymmetric influence inherent in those objectives show us that there is a moment of empathy in the evaluation process. This empathy, which is indicative of a first-person perspective, manifests itself in the developmental objective targeted by the evaluation process.

When a manager invites employees to participate in an evaluation process based on self-evaluation, and shows how this exercise will contribute to their personal and professional development, he adopts a first-person perspective. He addresses them as subjects with consciousness, intentionality and desires. Through this approach, the evaluation practice is intended to be *in sync* with the aspirations of the employee, and both the evaluator and the employee are therefore seen as beings with desires. According to Spinoza's anthropology, *conatus* is the ability to fulfil one's desires in the first person (Lordon, 2010).

Adopting this perspective, however, does not prevent from an instrumental vision of humans in the workplace, one in which they are involved in the instrumental action of another without any prior mutual understanding. Even from a first-person perspective, as long as the performance evaluation involves dissymmetric influence, it is based on a relationship of power. By definition, power is the capacity to influence others' behaviour. The relationship of power at work in the performance evaluation process is underscored in Thévenet et al.'s textbook. In their search for performance, organisations try to mobilise individual commitment – a source of performance – as much as possible. The appraisal interview is one of the tools used to serve this performance-oriented mindset. But how does the performance evaluation become a tool that serves the ideology of performance? It is through the mechanism that captures the desires of others that the evaluation becomes a tool for dissymmetric influence and the ideology of performance. The relationship of power that hides behind the facade of the performance evaluation objectives consists in capturing the desires of the worker.

As clearly demonstrated by Lordon (2010), the wage-earning class is a meeting between two liberties and two projects – and therefore between two desires. As soon as a company adopts a practice that involves dissymmetric influence, the desire of the employee is forced to align with the dominant desire of the company. Staff performance evaluations conducted in a unilaterally declarative manner and which, at the same time, are designed to influence employees' behaviour, appear to be indicative of a capture strategy. That which is captured is the employees' power to act.

> The dominant desire captures the power to act of the enlisted. It makes sure that the conative energies of third parties work for its benefit, third parties which the social structures, for example those of the salary ratio, have allowed it to mobilise in the service of its enterprise. (Lordon, 2010: 153, our translation)

It is the capture of the desire of others that distinguishes the work of the entrepreneur from that of the employee.

Via this insidious capture mechanism, it is clear that the first-person perspective adopted in the performance evaluation process is a perverted perspective. Although under this perspective, unlike that of the third person, the employee is considered as a subject capable of consciousness and intentionality, the capture mechanism ensures that the subject is subjectified. By organising and controlling the worker, the performance evaluation stimulates the production of a type of subjectivity that conforms to corporate strategy. As shown in Figure 1, and based on our reading, this subjectification is therefore the second form of the instrumental vision of humans in the workplace implicit in the textbooks analysed.

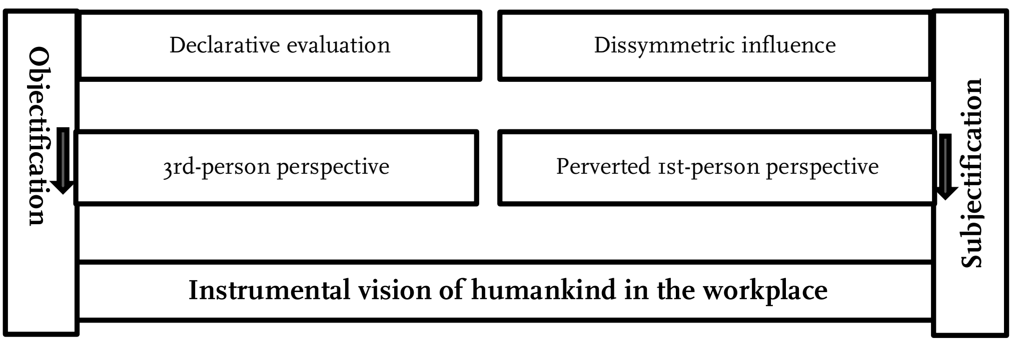

Figure 1: Instrumentalisation of human beings in the workplace (synthesis)

In both forms of this instrumental vision (objectification and subjectification), the worker is not considered as a subject who acts, speaks and interacts with his peers, as an alter ego with whom they can enter into dialogue. The performance evaluation appears as an instrumental action in which the participants are coordinated by calculations for egocentric success. This is a practice that lacks the second-person perspective, whereby 'each individual, from the perspective of the first-person participant, must relate to the other as a second person with the intention of understanding one another, rather than treating him as an object and as an instrument for personal ends' (Habermas, 2003: 55). It is because the performance evaluation is not conducted from the second-person perspective that it is defined as an opinion 'proffered by someone who does not want to give it to someone who does not want to receive it' (Bowman, 1999, in Cadin et al., 2012: 403, our translation).

The foregoing analysis suggests considering the three standpoints as ethical framework for performance evaluation of employees. According to the rhetoric of HRM we analysed, the ultimate objective of performance evaluation is to increase firm's competitiveness. Since organizations compete through people, it is said that the success of an organization depends on its human *capital*, i.e. the employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes that have economic value to the firm. But an employee cannot be reduced to such attributes. An employee is a human person and needs to be recognized and related to as such. A fair performance appraisal should be *holistic*. It can only be holistic if all the three perspectives are taken into account in evaluation process. This is why we propose the tripartite perspective taking, which is recommended in any account of human action (Bohman, 2001), to be an ethical framework for performance evaluation process.

Each perspective has its advantages that need to be taken into account. The third-person perspective is important for objectivity of the performance evaluation. The first-person perspective is useful for understanding the background of the performance's results. But the second-person perspective is the most important of the three perspectives, for it involves an interaction of the parties concerned. For example, in the case of performance evaluation, it involves the meeting in person of the evaluator with the evaluated and listening to one another. Since it involves listening to one another, it contributes to impartiality that is sought in the third-person perspective and paves the way to empathy that is the positive feature peculiar to the first-person perspective.

The tripartite perspective taking may constitute a morally[1] normative framework for performance appraisal, not only because of its holistic nature, but also because it is anchored to *mutual concern*, the concern that the evaluator has for the employee being evaluated, and the concern that the employee has for the evaluator and the organization that the latter stands for. Remember that 'perspective' means a particular way of considering something. In matters of performance evaluation, the third person-perspective considers the employees being evaluated in a distant way. The evaluator is detached from employees' lived experiences. It is a kind of indifference towards a fellow human being. The first-person perspective, on the other hand, is considering employees from their own point of view, that is, considering the feelings they may have, the experience they may have lived, their possible perception of evaluation results, etc. It is an empathic attitude. Compared

1 We use the term 'moral' and 'ethical' as interchangeable.

to the third-person perspective, this is a more humane perspective. But the problem is that we can always be mistaken about other people's situation, needs, feelings, desires, and emotions. That is why performance evaluation should involve a dialogue, in other words, the second-person perspective. This dialogue ought not to mainly consist in intellectual debate, but first and foremost in listening to one another's concerns.

These concerns may not only be about performance as such, they may also be about its context or the working environment. As we can see, in contrast with the first-and third-person perspective, the second-person perspective is not one-way relation, but a two-way relation. It is a dialogical interaction between the evaluator and the evaluated, involving listening and responding to one another, driven by a reciprocal concern. The evaluator does not simply relate to the evaluated employee as an impartial judge, but also as a person who is concerned about another human being. Prinz (2011: 230) describes concern as a cure for heartlessness, as it is a feeling we have for another person in need.

Perspectives	**3rd-person (s/he / it)**	**2nd –person (you)**	**1st-person (I)**
Involvement	Observer	Dialogue partner	Participant
Moral attitude	Indifference	Mutual concern	Empathy

Table 3: Tripartite perspective taking on human action

As shown in Table 3, each perspective taking, owing to the involvement that is its correlate, promotes a particular moral attitude. The third person-perspective promotes indifference; the second-person perspective, mutual concern; and the first-person perspective, empathy. Because of its holistic nature and the mutual concern that it involves, adopting the tripartite perspective taking as a framework in performance appraisal could help avoiding objectification and subjectification that result from the exclusive adoption of the third- and first-person perspective.

From reflexivity to performativity: Exploring the path of founding HRM on an alternative anthropology

Globalization and digital transformation of the economy, together with individualization among many other societal transformations, are leading trends that legitimize, in many contexts (i.e. in the name of a struggle for competitiveness), a hard and violent management. One may (and must) analyse, denounce and criticize such degrading forms of work organization. But one can ask whether we do not have a shared responsibility in the abuses we observe and (sometimes) denounce. Are we not teaching HRM as an amoral background made up of techniques and models whose moral foundations in fact (re)produce self-interest, opportunism, and management practices and theories that de-humanize by degrading humankind to resources? These are the questions we wanted to discuss in this article, by taking on a denaturalisation enterprise which led us to question the anthropological foundations of mainstream HRM through a phenomenological analysis of HRM textbooks and, somehow, management education. The naturalisation at stake does not 'simply' refer here to the internalisation of what is considered as a conventional behaviour to be adopted (like to be flexible, to adapt oneself, to manage his own career, to act autonomously, etc.), or to conventional institutional ends (like to maximize profit, to maximize quality, etc.), but well to the internalisation of the denial of any moral or ethical considerations in our theories and models. We have shown that HRM, as it is taught in some major references in the field, carries a morality where human beings are the instruments of financial capitalism.

It emerges from this analysis that the most widely disseminated HRM textbooks (according to our information) in universities and colleges largely share a common consideration of human beings[2], thereby contributing to a certain standardisation of knowledge in the field of management. Such anthropological foundations present a reifying vision of mankind: human beings are perceived as resources that can be put to work and that are available to support corporate strategy that exhausts them and, more broadly, that reduces them to productivity rates and performance levels. To teach students about these models and tools is therefore to take part in that project, which stretches far beyond corporate governance or social responsibility issues.

> Nothing is more fundamental in setting our research agenda and informing our research methods than our view of the nature of human beings whose behaviours we are studying… It makes a difference in research, but it also makes a difference for the proper design of institutions. (Simon, 1985: 293)

Herbert Simon, like Sumantra Ghoshal (2005), pointed to the need for revealing a specific conception of the humankind on which founding renewed theories and practices in organization studies and management. But few ventured in such risky enterprise. Aktouf (1992) claimed 'it is necessary to construct a vision of the person other than that conveyed by the theoretical framework to be overcome' (1992: 411), and proposed a radical humanist alternative. In the specific field of HRM, few more propose other models and practices that would serve an alternative vision of humans in the workplace. Detchessahar (2015) proposes to bring a moral dimension to markets and to found organizations and HRM namely on a

2 It should be noted that Cadin et al. (2012) is the most nuanced textbook we had to consider here: it presents a vision of human beings in the workplace that is less monolithic than the eight other texts analysed. This is worth pointing out, even though indications of subjectification and objectification were also observed therein.

humanist consideration of dialogue; Taskin and Dietrich (2016), in their proposal to 'manage humanly', systematically deconstruct mainstream approaches to HRM and organizational behaviour and propose alternatives based on a humanist anthropology where human beings are considered as reflexive, giving – and asking for – recognition, and to a large extent *benevolent*. This paves the way to alternative management of people, also requiring alternative governance models.

Such proposals also *simply* remind that managing people requires sincere ethics both professionally and personally. After all, the human being is a *Subject*, in contrast to certain managerial theories that have made the employee an *object* to acquire, shape, profit from and dispose of; and also in contrast to models developed in the field of organisational behaviour that reduce human beings to *organisms* that respond to diverse stimuli or to passive beings who suffer management policies and behave as expected and prescribed (labour sociology has shown us this never in fact proceeds: we systematically appropriate, make sense, divert norms and rules and produce alternative ones – so, why do mainstream theories and practices not rely on such considerations about humankind?). Human beings are equipped with consciousness, judgement and free will; they aspire to their own elevation and are devoted to seeking out that which frees and emancipates them, but they are also guided by their encounters with others (Bruni, 2014; Gomez et al., 2015; Taskin and Dietrich, 2016). So, when it comes to managing humanly, we believe that the human *person* (in opposition to the person as a *resource*, *object* or *organism*) is guided by reasons, feelings and choices. 'Since morality, or ethics, is inseparable from human intentionality, a precondition for making business studies a science has been the denial of any moral or ethical considerations in our theories and, therefore, in our prescriptions for management practice' (Ghoshal, 2005: 77).

Sharing the anthropology conveyed by the *homo economicus*, broadly speaking (i.e. which considers humans as opportunistic and motivated by their self-interest), makes necessary to build hierarchies and to monitor human resources –in order to ensure they perform and behave in the intended direction (and not in an opportunistic way). What would happen if we shared the belief that human beings are different and better than this negative portray that is offered by neo-classical economists and that produce bad theories (Ghoshal, 2005)? Let us conclude with two reflections inspired by this last comment and topical developments in management practice and research.

First, there are alternative ways of managing people and organizations that are burgeoning in the business reality (and which have the names of holacracy, self-management, liberated, agile or teal organization, etc.). Essentially promoted by practitioners, they propose to liberate organizations and employees from the rigidities inherited from bureaucracy. While the purpose to grant more autonomy to employees may be acknowledged, our phenomenological enterprise invites us to remind the questions we asked when introducing this article: who is the person that we want to liberate and acculturate? To whom do we want to restore meaning in the workplace? If the question remains unanswered, if the perspectives remain those of the first- and third-person exclusively, then, the likelihood to face an avatar of the same (homo economicus) is high. Inviting our students to consider the humankind at the centre of their theories, models and practices is a way to reintroduce morality, or ethics, in management (research and practice). This also requires considering the second-person in our perspectives on HRM.

Second, and finally, we observe the emergence of a debate about the notion of 'humanization' in management. Concepts of objectification or commodification have long been pointed out in different contexts, in management, to denounce the alienation of workers and their degradation to tools of production. But speaking about de-humanization has something stronger: this should imply we agree on what is humanity and on what characterize a 'standard humanized' situation. If I feel devalued by my supervisor, can I for that reason convey this feeling and its effect in terms of disengagement, in the terms of a de-humanization? The notion of de-humanization bears something stronger that needs certainly to (a) explicitly question oneself on what consideration of humankind is shared and referred to when investigating or assessing such questions; (b) hierarchize the many concepts carried by organizational behaviour these last three decades in order to measure feelings and attitudes at work, in order not to rename existing constructs/objects by morally-grounded ones (like de-humanization) simply by fashion. Under such conditions, then, the performative way to address the issue raised by de-humanization in management could be to identify the conditions under which a workplace may be humanizing. Our suggestion to address such an ethical (and not technical) issue would be to make the desired or observed anthropology explicit, as well as to adopt a tripartite perspective.

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