HR differentiation between professional and managerial employees: Broadening and integrating theoretical perspectives

Achim Krausert
Achim Krausert, Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 3 August 2015
Received in revised form 13 November 2016
Accepted 15 November 2016
Available online xxxx

Keywords:
HR differentiation
Strategic HRM
HR architecture
HRM systems
HRM configurations
Professional employees
Managers
Professionalism

ABSTRACT

Recent HR differentiation research has been concerned with HRM differences within job groups (such as between more and less talented managerial employees) and HRM differences between job groups of different strategic value (such as knowledge and manual workers). Less attention has been paid to HR differentiation among strategically valuable job groups. This paper reviews literature relevant to the question whether (and how) firms should differentiate their HRM systems between professional and managerial job groups. Four broad theoretical perspectives are adopted, including firm-level economic (“macro”), psychological (“micro”), institutional, and technical-feasibility perspectives. Psychological, institutional, and technical-feasibility perspectives are argued to favor a two-pronged approach, whereby professional HRM systems are nested within firm-level managerial HRM systems (while being subject to influence by field-level institutions). The economic (resource-based) perspective, by contrast, implies HR homogenization across the two job groups. Integrating the four perspectives, the paper points to potential longer-term negative effects of trends toward HR homogenization on professional skill standards and dedication to higher-order professional goals.

Crown Copyright © 2016 Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

HR differentiation research is concerned with differences in HRM practices and their effects across employees within the organization. This includes the talent management literature, which studies HR differentiation within a given job group (such as between more and less talented managerial employees) (e.g., Collings, Scullion, & Vaiman, 2015). And it includes literature concerned with HR differentiation across job groups, such as managerial and professional employees (Krausert, 2014), semi-professional and clerical employees (McCLean & Collins, 2011), and knowledge and manual workers (Yan, Peng, & Francesco, 2011). Literature on job-level HR differentiation has typically adopted a firm-level economic (“macro”) perspective. For example, building on the resource-based view of the firm, it has examined differences in HRM effects on firm performance depending on the strategic value of the job (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Huselid & Becker, 2011; Lepak & Snell, 1999, 2002; McClean & Collins, 2011; Melián-González & Verano-Tacorante, 2004). And it has studied how the strategic value of the job affects the adoption of HRM practices (Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayton, & Swart, 2005; Lepak & Snell, 2002). Differences in HRM effects across job groups were also studied from a human-capital- and transaction-cost-theoretical perspective (Lepak & Snell, 1999, 2002; Williamson, 1981) and from an organizational-control-theoretical perspective (Krausert, 2014).

E-mail address: achim.krausert@wbs.ac.uk.

Please cite this article as: Krausert, A., HR differentiation between professional and managerial employees: Broadening and integrating theoretical perspectives, Human Resource Management Review (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2016.11.002
Psychological (“micro”) perspectives on job-level HR differentiation have been adopted to a lesser extent, for example examining differences in individual-level (attitudinal and behavioral) responses to HRM practices across job groups (Clinton & Guest, 2013; Kinnie et al., 2005; Yan et al., 2011). The psychology-based literature on HR differentiation also includes research concerned with injustice perceptions among employees subject to lower levels of HRM investment (Marescaux, De Winne, & Sels, 2013).

Professional employees are employees performing jobs requiring a high degree of technical specialization (such as lawyers, accountants, engineers, and medical doctors). They are distinguished from managerial employees in that their expertise is more defined and specialized, their education and qualification more standardized (taking place in professional qualification institutions), and in that their job requires a greater degree of autonomy (e.g., Barker, 2010; Freidson, 1986, 2001; Krausert, 2014). Professional and managerial employees both perform jobs of high strategic value to the firm (Lepak & Snell, 2002). A high strategic value of the job, however, was argued to warrant firm investments in the tailoring of HRM systems to the specific demands of the job (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Huselid & Becker, 2011). Thus, the question needs to be asked whether the demands on HRM differ and whether, consequently, firms should differentiate systems of HRM practices across these two job groups—or whether both job groups should be subject to the same HRM systems (such as a high-involvement HR system or a high-performance work system, which are commonly argued to have positive effects on firm performance in the strategic HRM literature) (e.g., Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2014).

The existing HR differentiation literature contains a limited amount of theory and evidence relevant to that question. Krausert (2014) explored differences in HRM effects across the two job groups from a firm-level economic (control-theoretical) perspective, suggesting that the economic benefits of adopting high-involvement HR systems are likely to be greater if applied to managerial compared to professional jobs. Lepak and Snell (1999) likewise adopted an economic (resource-based and human-capital-/transaction-cost-theoretical) perspective. Their model linked two dimensions of the job (its strategic value and firm specificity) to the effectiveness of different HRM systems (high-involvement, productivity-oriented, and control-oriented HR systems). Their arguments are, in principle, applicable to the distinction between professional and managerial jobs, too. However, Lepak and Snell’s (2002) empirical work yielded that professional jobs do not consistently map onto the proposed categories, implying that other factors may be at play, besides the two economic dimensions covered by their model. While the HR differentiation literature includes psychological perspectives on HR differentiation between knowledge and manual workers, such perspectives have not been applied to HR differentiation among different groups of knowledge workers to date (Clinton & Guest, 2013; Kinnie et al., 2005; Yan et al., 2011). Other perspectives than firm-level economic and psychological perspectives, such as institutional perspectives, have generally not found their way into the HR differentiation literature yet.

This paper reviews a wider range of literature relevant to the question whether (and how) firms should differentiate their HRM systems between professional and managerial job groups. This includes a review of the existing HR differentiation literature in HRM as well as of sociological literature concerned with professionalism and managerialism. The focus of the literature review is on theory as opposed to methodology. The literature will be discussed from four broad theoretical perspectives, including the firm-level economic (“macro”) perspective, the psychological (“micro”) perspective, the institutional perspective, and the technical-feasibility perspective. It will be argued that the four perspectives are systematically interrelated in that the institutional and technical-feasibility perspectives define social and technical constraints on firm-level economic choices, respectively. While the psychological perspective is argued to inform economic choices, specifying likely employee-level (attitudinal and behavioral) responses to HRM choices.

Across the four perspectives, the literature review yields different answers to the question whether (and how) firms should differentiate HRM systems across professional and managerial employees. Institutional and technical feasibility constraints as well as psychological factors are argued to favor a two-pronged approach to HRM (whereby professional HRM systems are nested within firm-level managerial HRM systems while being subject to influence by field-level institutions). By contrast, the firm-level economic perspective includes both theory implying HR differentiation (human capital/transaction cost theory) and theory implying HR homogenization across the two groups (the resource-based view of the firm).

Building on the literature review, the paper then develops an argument to suggest that the institutional perspective may relate to the economic perspective not only in that it defines constraints on firm-level HRM choices. Field-level professional institutions may potentially also serve to enable a higher standard of professional skills and dedication to higher-order professional goals, facilitating firm competitiveness in the longer term. Thus, recent trends toward firm-level HR homogenization across professional and managerial job groups may perhaps enable a greater focus on strategic goals of the firm in the near term (from a resource-based view). However, from a functionalist institutional point of view, it might also entail a risk of lower standards of professional (technical) skill, reduced dedication to higher-order professional goals, and consequent negative effects on the international competitiveness of firms in the longer term.

The integration of multiple theoretical perspectives in this paper is consistent with recent calls for a greater integration of macro and micro perspectives on HRM (Huselid & Becker, 2011; Ployhart & Hale, 2014; Wright, Coff, & Moliterno, 2014). It goes beyond such calls in that it suggests that economic and psychological perspectives will be more relevant if they are also integrated with institutional and technical-feasibility perspectives, introducing the context that affects economic choices and influences psychological responses in practice. Finally, the scope of this paper shall be limited to HR differentiation between professional and managerial employees in heteronomous professional organizations (such as automobile or chemical firms). The arguments are not applicable in the same way to questions of HR differentiation in professional organizations (such as law or auditing firms).
دریافت فوری متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت‌های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات