# Let's be critical of Critical HRD: Addressing non-human interests in HRD ethics interventions in English Universities

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# CHRD's challenges to HRD:

1. Reimagine 'HRD as a field that leads, rather than responds, to current economic, social, and environmental (defined broadly) challenges' (Gedro et al,2014)

2. Challenge the assumption that the purpose of Human Resource Development (HRD) is to further organisational or shareholder interests (Fenwick, 2004) and consider wider stakeholders (Bierema and Callahan, 2014).

*Is HRD leading on those challenges and if so how?*

*Which stakeholders is it recognising in doing so?*

# Challenge 1: What are the 'current challenges' HRD should lead on?

United Nations identifies challenges relating to inequality, health threats, national resource depletion and climate change (United Nations, no date).

Sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

# Challenge 2: Who are the wider stakeholders HRD should be considering given those challenges?

Stakeholders: 'Those groups and individuals who can affect or be affected' by the business' (Freeman, 1984: 25)

Tends to conceptualise stakeholders as human (Starik, 1995; Schaltegger et al, 2019).

SDGs' core aim of 'improving the lives of populations around the world' (United Nations, no date) also implies human stakeholders

# What about non-human stakeholders?

Should non-humans also be considered as stakeholders? (Haigh and Griffiths, 2009)

If so, which? Just animals, or plants, eco-systems... (Owe et al, 2022)

And why?

- For instrumental reasons?
- The economic competitive advantage they bring (York, 2009; Haigh and Griffiths,2009).
- The value humans ascribe to them and their physical impact (Starik, 1995)
- Or for their own intrinsic value? (Owe et al, 2022)

# How should HRD lead on addressing the challenges?

Key role for talent management, learning and development and organanisational development in ensuring sustainability (Babcock, 2015; CIPD, 2021)

◦ Social and environmental needs must be embedded in ethical practices and standards (Ardichvili, 2013)

   ◦ Key role for learning and development and organisational culture in developing these (CIPD, 2022).

   ◦ Ethics programmes, stakeholder involvement, organisational culture, and leadership are key HRD levers (Foote and Ruona, 2008).

# How should CHRD lead?

One approach to 'Green HRD' is 'Coexistence' : promoting critical reflection and challenging existing paradigms (Valentin, 2015).

Green HRD involves critical reflection and 'paralogy' to develop and implement new models and practices (Scully-Russ, 2015).

# Which stakeholders should HRD / CHRD recognise?

Consideration of stakeholders should take 'organizations, environment and community into account' (Bierema and Callahan, 2014: 437).

But humanistic aim 'of engaging human and organizational systems that relate, learn, change, and organize in ways that optimize human interest, organisation advancement, and social impact' (ibid.: 436), suggests human stakeholders are key

Should align with external expectations:

- 'Fourth wave' of HR: 'Creates value by making sure that services HR offers inside the company align to expectations outside the company' (Ulrich and Dulebohn, 2015: 191).
- SDGs suggest again external expectations are of stakeholders as human

# But which stakeholders is HRD recognising in practice?

Research question:
◦ Is HRD practice recognising the interests of non-human stakeholders?

# Research Objectives

To identify the extent to which general ethics policies/codes and research ethics policies /codes in English Universities recognise the interests of non-human stakeholders.

To identify which if any non-human stakeholders' interests are recognised in these codes / policies.

To explore whether these policies / codes adopt an aspirational or developmental approach to any non-human interests.

To analyse the extent to which these policies / codes demonstrate a CHRD approach.

# Why English Universities?

Espoused expectation to meet needs of wider stakeholders:

◦ Professional body for academics has a strategic goal to 'advance education to meet the evolving needs of students and society' (Advance HE, no date).

◦ UK's Concordat for Research Integrity notes that 'All those engaged with research have a duty to consider how the work they undertake, host or support affects society' (Universities UK 2019).

# Why codes of ethics?

Codes are a key part of ethics programmes (Alizadeh et al, 2020; Stevens, 2008).

Enable HRD to'promote 'socially-conscious practice' (Bierema and Callahan, 2014: 441)

Raise employee awareness of their ethical, social and environmental responsibilities (Garavan and McGuire, 2010).

May be regulatory or aspirational (Bowman, 2000; CIPD, 2019)

# Methods

Identification of 110 institutions in England with permission to use 'University' in title in 2022 (Office for Students, 2022)

Websites of each searched for the terms 'Research Ethics', 'Research Ethics Policy', 'Staff Code of Conduct' and 'Staff Code of Ethics' and codes / policies relevant to research and general staff ethics downloaded.

If this search did not identify relevant policies the University's A-Z of policies was searched, looking under the subheadings research, governance, and human resources.

In some cases, more than one relevant code / policy relating to research and /or general staff behaviour found.

Identified 115 research ethics/ codes from 90 universities. 26 general ethics codes / policies from 25 universities.

# Analysis

Followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis.

References to non-human interests coded using Nvivo, resulting in 21 initial codes.

7 themes identified.

Reviewing the themes identified 2 over-arching themes: Non-human living stakeholders and Environment.

# Findings

| Type of code / policy | Number found | Number mentioning non-human interests | % mentioning non-human interests |
|---|---|---|---|
| General ethics / conduct codes / policies | 26 | 18 | 69.2 |
| Research ethics / conduct codes / policies: | 111 | 65 | 58.6 |

- Over half of general and research ethics codes / policies mentioned non-human interests – but sizeable minorities did not

| Theme | Sub-theme | General ethics / conduct codes / policies | | Research ethics / conduct codes / policies | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | n | % | n | % |
| Non-human living stakeholders | Sentient / non-sentient | 0 | 0 | 12 | 10.8 |
| | Sentient | 6 | 23.1 | 46 | 41.4 |
| | Non-sentient | 0 | 0 | 5 | 4.5 |
| Environment | Unspecified | 17 | 65.4 | 37 | 33.3 |
| | Habitat | 0 | 0 | 8 | 7.2 |
| | Climate-related | 7 | 26.9 | 5 | 4.5 |
| | Waste | 5 | 19.2 | 8 | 7.2 |

- General policies / codes most frequently mentioned unspecified environment, research policies / codes sentient living stakeholders

# Compliance or developmental?

Compliance approach dominant in relation to non-human sentient stakeholders

- 85% of research ethics codes / policies mentioning non-human sentient stakeholders adopted compliance approach -nearly always to conform to external regulations
- General policies / codes only mentioned non-human sentients in relation to research

Developmental approach more common in relation to unspecified environmental interests

- 82% of general codes / policies and nearly 50% of research codes / polices mentioning this stakeholder adopted developmental approach
- But mostly just an aspirational sentence

# HRD practitioner involvement in ethics codes / policies

50% of general ethics / codes included reference to HR / HRD
- As a source of advice
- In a disciplinary role
- Through reference to other associated HR policies
- Occasionally as owner of the policy or party involved in drawing it up

13.5% of research ethics / codes included reference to HR / HRD

# Discussion

Many either did not mention non-human stakeholders at all or made only brief reference to them.

◦ Sentient living stakeholders most often mentioned due to external regulatory requirements, suggesting key motivation for recognising them was instrumental to enable university to keep practising

◦ Unspecified environment mostly addressed through vague aspirational sentence so could be instrumental motivation to meet human needs by protecting environment, rather than recognising non-human stakeholders' intrinsic value (Owe et al, 2022)

Focus on human stakeholders is in line with CHRD's humanistic aims (Bierema and Callahan, 2014) and the expectations of society as outlined in SDGs (United Nations, no date, a)

In adopting either compliance approach or vague aspirations, the codes / policies either failed to encourage the critical reflection CHRD advocates (Valentin, 2015; Scully-Russ, 2015) or were too vague to support behaviour change (Bowman, 2000).

May not reflect HRD input as despite claims for the key role of HR / HRD in sustainability and ethics interventions (Babcock, 2015; CIPD 2021; CIPD 2022; Fuerte and Ruona, 2008), findings suggested limited HRD involvement in drawing up ethics codes / policies, particularly in relation to research.

# Implications for CHRD

HRD could become more involved in development of these HRD interventions to ensure they facilitate behaviour change and the critical reflection CHRD desires.

CHRD could engage in critical reflection about its own values, questioning its humanistic aims and considering whether its interventions should be serving non-human interests as well as human.

CHRD could consider moving beyond the 'fourth wave' (Ulrich and Dulebohn, 2015) to a 'fifth wave' that does not just ensure organisations reflect external expectations, but seeks to question and shape those external expectations.

*Leading on, rather than responding to, current challenges*

# Limitations

Limited sample of policies / codes identified

There may have been other related policies which did include greater reference to non-human stakeholders

Generalisability to other sectors and countries

Codes only one intervention for addressing ethical and environmental challenges

Lack of reference to HR / HRD in the policies / codes does not mean they were not involved in drawing them up

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