Keith Jackson*

Comparing HRM responses to ageing societies in Germany and Japan: Towards a new research agenda**

This concluding discussion re-connects with some of the key themes presented in previous contributions to this Special Issue. Adopting a systems view, this discussion attempts to broaden the terms of reference for the aforementioned themes. Drawing on a review of recent HRM literature, we proposes a number of topics that HRM researchers, policy makers and practitioners might elaborate on in future contexts for investigating, formulating and implementing their responses to ageing societies in Germany, in Japan and, indeed, across other nationally or regionally defined societies that are subject to processes of demographic shift.

Key words: **demographic trends, discrimination, HRM research, systems**
(JEL: J11, J21, M12)

* Keith Jackson, Doshisha University, Kyoto. Karasuma-Imadegawa, Kamigyo-ku, Kyoto 602-8580 Japan. E-mail: kj2@soas.ac.uk

** Article received: January 10, 2016
Revised version accepted after double blind review: February 5, 2016.

management revue, 27(1-2), 97-113 DOI 10.1688/mrev-2016-Jackson
ISSN (print) 0935-9915, ISSN (internet) 1861-9908

Introduction

This concluding discussion outlines how HRM policy-makers, practitioners and researchers might adopt a systems view of the two nationally defined HRM systems under discussion (cf. Jackson, 2013; Redding, 2014). Drawing on a review of recent HRM literature combined with a summary view of the previous contributions to this Special Issue, this concluding discussion suggests questions for a future research agenda relevant to this dynamic and complex field of regional, national and international HRM enquiry.

Specifically, this discussion attempts to:

- Outline broader research contexts for the HRM themes presented and developed in previous contributions to this Special Issue
- Suggest approaches towards researching HRM in contexts defined by ageing societies
- Suggest a research agenda that might guide HRM researchers, policy makers and practitioners in their attempts to investigate, formulate and implement effective responses to processes of demographic shift.

Context

As stated in the Introduction to this Special Issue, it is common to compare countries as contexts for researching HRM; as further stated, for historical reasons it is common to compare business, management and HRM in Germany and Japan. Various defining conceptualisations can be applied in this endeavour, ranging from 'countries' (cf. Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2013) though 'nations' as geographically and/or socio-politically boundaried contexts for describing and comparing 'national cultures' (cf. Hofstede, 2001, 2003). An alternative analytical approach is to define and research within nationally defined business, management or HRM 'systems' (cf. Warner, 2013; Hasegawa & Noronha, 2014). Although an eclectic research approach informs the design of this Special Issue, we encourage future HRM researchers to consider adopting the type of a systems approach outlined in this current discussion. Relevant to our core theme of illustrating HRM responses to ageing societies, we make this recommendation for a variety of reasons. Firstly, there are inherent problems and inconsistencies when attempting to refer to 'country-specific' HRM policies and practices: what of Taiwan and Hong Kong? Palestine? North Korea? Similar risks of conceptual inconsistency and ambiguity are inherent in seeking to invoke 'national cultures' as contexts for defining and comparing HRM policies and practices. This commonly adopted approach is premised on a standardised conceptual structure designed primarily to identify *differences* between cultures: what of the similarities inherent in being individually and distinctly 'human', arguably the more essential element in the 'HRM' endeavour (cf. Rowley & Jackson, 2011a).

To illustrate, the parallel exploration of approaches to diversity management in Germany and Japan is premised on assumptions of similarity and difference, manifested convincingly though the gathering and analysis of quantitative research data. This approach can be balanced with more individually and qualitatively narrative pre-

sented subsequently by Heike Schröder and her colleagues, whose individualised case studies prompt us to re-consider whatever we might have previously assumed 'typical' or possibly even 'unique' about employer-employee relationships in Germany and Japan. These two research examples suggest that working exclusively to established and often dated conceptualisations of 'national' cultures risks invoking an audience expectation of homogeneity that is embedded, path dependent and thereby potentially misleading (cf. McSweeney, 2002).

To illustrate further, Boyer (2014) makes a compelling case for researchers to consider that one impact of 'globalisation' (however defined) might not be towards increased global homogeneity and convergence – an expectation driven by Western research bias, perhaps. In East Asian contexts, the observed 'national-level' response to the forces of globalisation has been – politically and economically, at least - towards the increasing social, economic, and (sub-) cultural relevance of regional contexts for political and economic activity. For example, HRM research conducted in Tokyo might not be convincingly replicable on the island of Kyushu, just as researching 'HRM in China' might fail to fully detail the specificities of HRM responses to ageing societies in Shanghai cosmopolitan region or across the Pearl River Delta (cf. Warner, 2009; Cooke, 2012). Such considerations should alert HRM researchers to the risks involved in pursuing an agenda statically fixated on seeking to establish benchmark examples of 'best practice' that might be applied across 'national' contexts for HRM activities, and the relative distances from such benchmarks to indicate differences, and perhaps even imply relative inferiority or unsophistication of HRM responses, as when working with established paradigms of 'developed' economies (Germany, Japan) in contrast to 'developing' or 'emerging' economies as in the case of 'China' – and, again, what of Hong Kong and Taiwan? The contribution to this collection by Philip Taylor and Catherine Earl offers critical insights that serve to alert researchers in this regard: for example, by foregrounding considerations of 'good' in relation to 'best' HRM practices.

Alternative approaches

The 'national cultures' approach to comparative HRM research first specifies a model then generalises across political-economic entities categorised as 'nations'. For example, the researcher might first accept markedly Western conceptualisations of 'collectivistic' or 'masculine' before applying these across non-Western (Asian) contexts for HRM, thereby running the risk of transferring unreflexive bias to the research endeavour (cf. Harry & Jackson, 2007; Jackson, 2011a; Boyer, 2014). In social scientific research, such bias can be accepted as inevitable; the fundamental challenge to researchers is to be critically aware and control for it. Consequently, researchers can appreciate how institutional or systems based approaches to research first generalise and then specify relative to locally defined contexts for HRM research, ideally and systematically combining both 'insider' and 'outsider' voices or, expressed more formally, balance emic and etic research perspectives, as we have attempted to demonstrate in this Special lssue.

Environmental scanning

In contexts for social or 'real world' research, 'validity' can be defined as 'the degree to which what is observed or measured is the same as what was purported to be observed or measured' (Robson, 2002, p. 553). One valid option relevant to our research theme is to describe and compare contexts for HRM research by invoking techniques commonly used by global business analysts. One of these is environmental scanning, applying analytical frameworks such as the familiar STEP / PEST or the more elaborate STEEPLED framework. Here, the context for identifying distinct and perhaps region-specific series of HRM policies and practices can be described with reference through time as strategic responses to the confluence of Social-cultural, Technological, Economic, Ecological, Political, Legal, Ethical and (very importantly, in our case) Demographic factors and pressures that appear to promote observable patterns of HRM responses across a variety of business sectors and organisations. Applying STEEPLED analysis towards describing and comparing strategic business environments and, by extension, contexts for HRM policy, practice and research can serve to foreground the enduring influence of historically embedded institutions towards shaping the employment expectations of both older and younger employees. To illustrate briefly, these include the apprentice and dual-vocational training systems in Germany (cf. Euler, 2013) and, for comparison, the combined social and political expectations governing employment and HRM polices and practices of major employers in Japan (cf. Witt, 2014). The contributions by Nobuo Sueki and Philippe Debroux each give some detailed insights into this Japanese-style interpretation of what in Western contexts for management research has become termed Corporate Social Responsibility (cf. Debroux, 2014).

Overall, and echoing Boyer (2014) along with Boehm, Schröder, & Kunze (2013), conducting international HRM research by comparing across national institutional contexts as opposed to relying primarily on national cultural or country-specific contexts is likely to generate a theory-grounded environment for HRM research, and especially when attempting to discern, explain and (ideally) predict patterns of HRM responses to the dynamic and complex contexts emerging as a result of unprecedented demographic shifts in Germany, in Japan, and, indeed, globally. We initiated this broader contextualisation of our research theme in our Introduction to this Special Issue; we return to in the closing section of this discussion.

Developing a systems view

In contexts for social scientific or management research, 'reliability' can be defined as 'the extent to which data collection technique or techniques will yield consistent findings, similar observations would be made or conclusions reached by other researchers in how sense was made from the raw data' (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012, p. 680). We suggest that developing a systems view towards comparative HRM research offers a relatively stable and globally valid framework for working towards achieving convincing degrees of research validity and reliability.

Etymologically speaking, a 'system' is a construct or artefact formed by human endeavour - the original Greek term denoted a series of parts that are 'brought together' towards serving a particular purpose such as solving a practical problem or

giving structure to a specific line of philosophical enquiry. In this sense, entities as diverse as trees, human blood cells and business organisations can be visualised, conceptualised and then theorised as 'systems' and their respective behaviours described and explained – even predicted – by developing a standard systems view to research. Correspondingly, we can talk of education systems and health care systems that can be described and analysed and the results thereafter used to compare differences in 'national' and 'regional', public and private systems of provision. In the contributions to this Special Issue we have presented explicit and 'systematic' reference to education, health, pension, welfare, and pay or rewards/benefits systems, each distinctive and yet each designed roughly to achieve recognisably common or similar human and social purposes. Relevant to our theme, research has been done into discrete management systems that might be contextualised by nationally defined boundaries (cf. Koike, 1995; Chen, 2004). Equally, these systems might be distinguished by reference to function or purpose: for example, the Toyota Production System (TPS) or the National Innovation System (NIS) of Japan as compared to that of Germany, where we should note again the influence of institutional factors as appearing both valid and reliable in relation to describing and explaining similarities and differences between such nationally defined systems (cf. Jackson & Debroux, 2009; OECD, 2015).

For research purposes, it is useful to adopt a systems view when seeking to identify and explain patterns of change: most notably, the responses of one or other system or set of sub-systems to changes in their immediate environment – a reason, therefore, to apply iterative processes of environmental scanning such as STEEPLED analysis. This combined systems view and environmental scanning approach can help researchers demonstrate and explain both how and why deciduous tress lose leaves in winter and how and why women are routinely disadvantaged in the design and application of promotion and reward systems across organisational and national cultural boundaries. Hence, each basic system can be visualised as a source of inputs that become outputs through processes of transformation, which might be natural or created by human intervention. Feedback from the relative quality of the outputs generated by the system is channelled back to the source of inputs, and so the system continues to operate. The underlying theory is that each system and subsystem develops towards a dynamic state of equilibrium as it responds to pressures that emerge both from within and from outside the defined boundaries of the system (cf. von Bertalanffy, 1968).

Specific to our research theme, one application of a systems view would illustrate how a national pension system is challenged both to respond to fluctuations in the value of a national currency on global markets and simultaneously cater for the welfare needs of retirees in a rapidly ageing society – a scenario detailed by Sueki in respect of Japan. Another nationally defined social system might open its boundaries to fresh or rejuvenating inputs: for example, by facilitating the immigration of younger tax-paying workers in order to contribute financially towards supporting a similarly ageing society. By stark comparison, Germany might be identified as a relatively 'open' system while Japan appears to remain relatively 'closed'; however, we should as researchers expect the social reality of each national context to be far

more complex than this (Jackson, 2013). Thus, one research approach towards comparing HRM systems in relation to how they appear to be responding to ageing societies is to assess their respective 'permeability' (Córdoba-Pachón, 2010).

Correspondingly, when attempting to identify the responses through time of two selected nationally defined HRM systems to the pressures exerted by rapidly ageing societies, researchers can invoke and apply several levels of comparative analysis. To illustrate, Chen (2004) compares national and regional systems of management in Asia by reference to observations of their respective 'management philosophies' and 'environmental factors' as input factors to the development and expression of distinct processes of competitive strategy development supported by operational management practices. The performance outcomes of these systematically interdependent processes become evident in measures of operational and strategic management effectiveness. Chen overtly distinguishes between national and regional (sub-) systems of management by observing each system's distinctive responses over time to challenges generated by the type of STEEPLED factors highlighted earlier. Redding (2014) adopts a similar approach towards distinguishing and comparing between business and management systems. In his complex hierarchical model for describing and comparing business and management systems, culture-specific values and norms are seen to 'condition' the formation of institutions that in turn support social order as they form and negotiate linkages between 'capital', 'social capital' and 'human capital' (Redding, 2014, p. 20). As the integrity of the boundaries contextualising nationally defined business systems become ever more challenged by 'globalisation' and thereby ever more inter-dependent (cf. Ohmae, 2009), sources of capital such as 'social capital' or trust can be assessed as ever more valuable towards supporting and sustaining established institutions (Luhmann, 2000; Möllering, 2006) – a theme we revisit in the literature review.

Literature review

The collection of articles edited by Philip Taylor (Taylor, 2013a) represents one of a growing number of texts that global publishers are commissioning: we can talk of a growing academic 'market' for research comparing nationally defined contexts for HRM responses to ageing societies or, with semantic variations in emphasis, towards managing or working with 'older workers' in the context of 'ageing societies' (cf. Taylor, 2013a; Field, Burke, & Cooper, 2013). We drew on such sources to aggregate and set the age threshold at which workers or employees in Japan and Germany might be categorised as 'older' - for our research purposes, 'fifty plus' ('50+'). We recognise that applying a comparative STEEPLED analysis to this numerical calculation of age across contexts for HRM is likely to uncover a range of variables, for example, in relation to 'legal' (allowed) ages of retirement, and in terms of distinctive and socio-culturally shaped perceptions of being 'older' as opposed to being 'younger' in particular sectors for employment and in society generally. To illustrate, being perceived as 'rather old' or 'rather young' to be an airline pilot and/or a university professor might or might not vary across nationally defined contexts for HRM; or, it might. This uncertainty is part of the excitement of comparative research.

Consequently, for this Special Issue Philip Taylor and Catherine Earl made ‘a case for older workers', motivated in part by a recognition across societies that older workers might be commonly perceived as performing less ably or nimbly than their younger counterparts, and especially in an era of rapidly advancing information communication technologies (ICTs). One observable behavioural outcome of such attitudes might be processes of what might be assessed by HRM researchers and policy makers as *negative* discrimination. Such thinking on the part of younger workers and of HRM practitioners might be influenced by social expectations of what a ‘career’ might or 'should' look like in generalised age-dependent terms (cf. Inkson, Richardson, & Houkama, 2013). Bringing a systems view to this and related topics of HRM research might prompt us to refer to processes of human perception. Here we might recognise that ‘discrimination’ *per se* is natural: human beings seek to discern between (for example) sensations of the more or less familiar, the apparently more welcoming and/or threatening: we do this as a systematic expression of a survival instinct (cf. Gleitman, 1981; Sekuler & Blake, 1994). Taking this instinct as a base research assumption leads towards incorporating a wide array of concepts and constructs drawn from studies in human psychology in HRM research (cf. Verworn, Hipp, & Weber, 2013).

In practice, ethical dimensions of what might be perceived and sensed/experienced as negative and/or positive discrimination become apparent when the values and attitudes shaping individual perception are expressed in action ensuing from such expressions, and regardless of whether the underlying attitudes informing such actions remain tacit or are made explicit (cf. Kline, 2010). Consequently, younger workers might *perceive* older workers as less productive than they consider themselves to be, or even as a threat or barrier to their own career ambitions (cf. Beier & Kanfer, 2013). They might, however, refrain from vocalising such perceptions, both to co-workers and to HRM researchers. A relevant theoretical framework within which to develop a research agenda focussing on human perception linked to policies and practices expressing and/or seeking to moderate processes of employee discrimination is given by theories of social attribution, whereby people seek to justify the causes and (likely) consequences of their own and other people's behaviour as they try to make sense of their place and role in the social world (cf. Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). As we saw in the Taylor and Earl and subsequent contributions to this Special Issue, one feature of negative discrimination that HRM researchers might elicit or observe is evidence that older workers experience – or *perceive* – being blamed for poor performance of a work team or other form of organisation.

Processes of discrimination also underpin HRM investments in diversity, as discussed in relation to older workers by Lena Kemper, Anna Bader and Fabian Froese in this Special Issue. From a global HRM perspective, diversity management has become a major area of research, policy and practice across business sectors and other defined contexts for HRM practice and research (cf. Wei & Rowley, 2011). As with numerous HRM research paradigms, current reference to ‘diversity management’ represents a shift from analytical emphasis from ‘management’ and ‘workers‘ (Industrial Relations) to advantaged and disadvantages social segments (Equal Opportuni-

ties) and so on to diversity management. (cf. Jackson & Rowley, 2011). In contexts for HRM research, invoking 'equal opportunities' tends to be organised around social segments or categorised groups of workers: for example, considerations of business (and research) ethics and equity in relation to 'members of minority communities' and (as in our case) 'workers aged over 50'. In contrast, diversity management as an HRM investment tends to focus on observed or inferred differences among individuals: for example, of gender, educational background, ethnicity, and/or age. One application of diversity management in processes of recruitment, selection and retention focuses on individuals identified as (potential) 'high-performers' or 'talent' and thereby in high demand across markets for employment (cf. Cappelli, 2008). However, and in line with previous comments about discrimination, the attention of HRM research and practice tends to orientate towards younger employees, the biased assumption being that 'talented' employees tend to be younger rather than older (Jackson, 2011b).

As discussed by Kemper and colleagues, the assumed and/or assessed link between effective diversity management and enhanced business performance is vital to the diversity argument. Adopting a combined systems and evolutionary research perspective can lead HRM researchers towards re-conceptualising links between diversity and performance in terms of 'sustainability' (cf. Ehnert, 2011). Doing this can lead researchers further to consider how (for example) individual job descriptions combined with data from ergonomic analyses of the workplace can be adapted in order that older employees might perform more effectively (cf. Burke, Cooper, & Field, 2013). Equating 'more effectively' with 'more sustainably' can lead HRM researchers towards conceptualising entire organisations as 'work systems' (Docherty, Kira, & Shani, 2009). Here, sub-systems defining worker activity might be arranged and managed interdependently and, as a business performance objective, *sustainably* (Lifvergren, Huzzard, & Docherty, 2009; Jackson, 2012). As Kemper and her colleagues suggest, adopting a systems-based approach towards managing older workers as an investment in diversity appears currently more advanced in German contexts for HRM than in Japanese equivalents.

Re-assessments in relation to performance management lead naturally to considerations of compensation and benefits (cf. Fay, 2011b). Two key terms here are 'rewards', which tend to describe monetary and non-monetary benefits allocated to employees in relation retrospectively to work they have done, and 'incentives', which are designed to guide or motivate worker thinking and behaviour during a determined future time period. As the Sueki contribution demonstrates, the welfare and benefits/pensions systems in Japan are coming under increasing strain on account of the ageing of Japanese society. As a consequence, older workers across sectors for business and employment in Japan might be looking to the future with some trepidation. This mood impacts on the health and motivation of those still in employment, as they perhaps worry about how they might appeal to and be retained by their current and possible future employers. In line with the earlier reference to 'talent', emphasising employee retention - and, from a strategic HRM perspective, thereby also investments in employee recruitment and selection – connects with growing research interest into 'silver' markets for services targeting employment

and/or individual career development for older workers (cf. Kohlbacher, Güttel, & Haltmeyer, 2009; Guillemard, 2013; Field, 2013). As a market, the dynamics of current developments can be understood systematically using the frame of economic and financial analyses presented by Sueki.

Consequently, a further focus for HRM research might be on the systems used by governments in attempts to regulate markets for employment. The contribution by Heike Schröder, Masa Higo and Matt Flynn eliciting and analysing the experiences of older workers in the education sector illustrate the salience and impact of these systems quite vividly. As alluded to above, researching the investment of time, effort and health made by older workers to remain employed and/or take 'early retirement' in public sector organisations raises a number of issues in relation to how international markets for employment can operate generally and specifically to older workers. As with the examples presented by Schröder and her colleagues, these include the value attributed to individual skill sets, experience, knowledge and espoused values of those competing in markets for the hiring, promotion, rotation and/or retirement of 'professionals' such as those working in education. Focussing on professionals encourages researchers to apply psychological concepts such as worker self-esteem, perceived/attributed social status along with theories of human motivation linked to employee performance (cf. Fenwick, 2013; Rudolph, Baltes, & Zabel, 2013). As suggested earlier, research attention to these complex phenomena might be framed in reference to processes of social attribution and perception – including *self-perception* – among older workers.

Competing in increasingly 'crowded' markets for recruitment and retention is likely to cause personal stress – an essentially human experience shared by both younger and older segments of societies (cf. Siegrist & Wahrendorf, 2013; Toivonen, 2013). Consequently, and as illustrated by Schröder and her colleagues, investigating the psychological well being of older workers links directly to consideration of their physical health. Here the salience of combining institutional and systems views informed by the results of iteratively applied STEEPLED analyses become relevant and can provide a research framework within which to trace and compare evolving German and Japanese contexts for HRM policy-making and practices in relation to (for example) health support systems generally and preventive health investments specifically. Socio-cultural, political and legal factors might be deemed salient when determining the extent to which the resources and responsibilities allocated towards this objective might be found within family systems and institutions in Japan. For comparison, in European Union (EU) countries such as Germany and (for triangulated comparison) European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries such as Switzerland research attention is likely to focus on the actions of public sector institutions working in collaboration with private sector providers of health and insurance in response to (for example) EU and other transnational directives (cf. Naegele, 2013; Sargeant, 2013; Zölch & Mücke, 2015).

In the penultimate contribution to this Special Issue Philippe Debroux prompts us to reconsider the credibility and, in research terms, reliability and validity of specifying age in relation to decisions fundamental HRM policy making and practice. How old is 'old'? How might one 'older' worker be perceived by HR managers and

other actors in markets - internal and external - for selection and promotion in comparison to other 'older' and 'younger' workers, and why? In such contexts, who assesses the value of 'age' in the form of a number, as a potential source of relevant knowledge and experience, or as a potential source of 'talent'? Debroux builds on earlier research into HRM in Japan to suggest that the time has arrived for a 'new approach' towards managing human resources in Japan (cf. Debroux, 2011; Sekiguchi, Takeuchi, & Takeuchi, 2011). Which sets of evolving STEEPLED factors might influence the design and purpose of this 'new approach' to HRM', how, and why?

When introducing this current discussion we invoked Rousseau (1762) in order to suggest how the established and - to observable effect - institutionalised *contrat social* between employees and employers across so-called 'developed' social and political economies is being tested (cf. Lechevalier, 2014). Taking an institutional view, established social relationships between citizens and successive governments in Japan are becoming challenged: in Japan, Germany and across societies trust in governments appears to be ebbing at an accelerating rate (cf. Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994; Cook, 2001; Sato, 2007; Pew, 2015). In this context, there is an opportunity for social and HRM researchers to examine the extent to which employee trust is currently faring between employees, employers and, by extension, the markets for employment within and across which they interact and negotiate relationships (cf. Bachmann, 2006; Beckert, 2006; Hope-Hailey, Farndale, & Kelliher, 2010).

One further approach towards informing 'new' approaches to HRM policy-making and practice is to begin asking questions designed to re-conceptualise, re-structure and re-negotiate established 'psychological contracts' between employers and their older - and, by corollary, younger – employees. Rousseau distinguishes between 'psychological' as opposed to formal or written employment contracts by defining the psychological contract as:

> Individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between the individual and their organization (Rousseau, 1995, p. 9).

Although established as a key concept and theoretical construct in HRM research (cf. Rousseau, 1989, 1998; Conway & Briner, 2006; Dundon, 2011), there remain few published studies comparing the conceptualisation and negotiation of psychological contracts across nationally and regionally defined contexts for and systems of HRM. Furthermore, and beyond a few notable exceptions (cf. Vantilborgh, Dreis, de Vos, & Bal, 2014), there appear to be few that focus on exploring the contracts perceived, experienced and negotiated by older workers across ageing societies. This 'gap' represents a major opportunity for researchers in comparative and international HRM. Indeed, the evolving structure of the relationships implied by reference to psychological contracts might be well served by invoking 'new' conceptualisations of the HRM paradigm itself. Those already prevalent include paradigms of Human Resource Development (HRD), where the exchange agreement between employee and employer might be premised on learning and knowledge sharing and managing employee expectations of self-development (cf. Poell, Rocco, & Roth, 2015). As with HRM, HRD investments can be conceptualised in terms of systems and sub-systems (Truss, Mankinn, & Kelliher, 2012). Framed in specific reference to 'older workers', the HRD paradigm can guide researchers towards eliciting and comparing employee

expectations and expressions of 'active ageing' extending into and after retirement (cf. Kolland & Wanka, 2013; Walker & Aspalter, 2015). Another putative paradigm shift is manifest in the growing emphasis being given to 'Generation Resource Management', both as a 'new' approach to HRM (cf. Taylor, 2013a) and as an emerging paradigm that might guide HRM policy makers, practitioners and researchers towards the achievement of sustainability (Rimser, 2014): for example, in contexts where HRM researchers, policy makers and practitioners explicitly and systematically take the interests of future or as yet unborn generations as a specified business performance objective or desired work system outcome (Ehnert, 2011).

Ageing societies: implications for future HRM research

As the literature exploring and comparing HRM responses to ageing societies grows, so the list of recommendations for relevant research topics becomes longer. The current discussion has already highlighted several actual and potential research topics.

In order to anchor these in a more broadly drawn HRM research context, we can note how Taylor (2013c) reinforces the value of including 'comparative perspectives': for example, by inviting contributions from various nationally defined contexts for HRM activity, suggesting further that such contributions can serve to further inform the 'discourse of working longer' (Taylor, 2013c, p. 265) – a discourse that from a human perspective can be interpreted as having global relevance to processes of HRM policy-making, practice and research beyond the constraints of any one (national) language or code, hence our earlier encouragement to HRM researchers to experiment with a variety of emic and etic approaches.

In another informative and insightful contribution to a growing field of HRM enquiry, Kunze and Boehm (2013) focus on researching current and emerging conceptualisations of 'age diversity'. Doing this allows them to invoke a number of research questions relating to definition, application, and effect. To illustrate, they consider both 'positive effects' of age diversity on decision-making processes, an approach that might be researched at individual (micro), group/organisational (meso) and governmental/policy (macro) levels of analysis. According to Kunze and Boehm (2013), options towards identifying and investigating 'negative effects' of age diversity include researching within a similarity-attraction paradigm, applying a social identity approach, and seeking to elicit individual and social perceptions of inequality.

Towards a new research agenda: example

Inspired both through the preparation of this Special Issue and by the collaboration over significant time and geographical distances with contributors, I have begun to formulate a specific research project. This involves re-connecting with conceptualisations of individual identity (cf. Taylor, 1989) and more specifically of 'self-identity', described by Giddens as 'a reflexively organised endeavour' whereby social actors engage in 'the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives' – altogether, a process that 'takes place in context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems' (Giddens, 1991, p. 5). Giddens subsequently be-

gan to ask questions of commodified terms of sociological and institutional reference: for example, 'marriage' like 'career' can be analysed as processual and perhaps overlapping experiences (Giddens, 1994). Consequently, first steps towards drafting this current research proposal include re-conceptualising social identity as a process: hence, *self-identification*. Drawing on Erikson (1994), the 'biographical narrative of the self' highlighted by Giddens (1991) can be re-formulated as an individual employee's 'career', conceptualised as an experienced, perceived and expected 'narrative' that accrues value both in the perceptions of others, the self-perception of the employee, and while being 'filtered through abstract systems'. These abstract systems might equate to markets for employment; by extension, and from a 'self' perspective, they might give context to an individual's career development. Given current trends in (for example) social economic and technological globalisation, and in tandem with what we have been discussing here as demographic shift, processes of individual self-identification can be conceived as proceeding through what might be perceived as being increasingly globalised contexts (cf. Jandt, 2010) – or, echoing Giddens (1991), 'filters'. Consistent with the theme developed in this and in previous contributions to this Special Issue, there are possibilities to develop this research project in relation to self-identification variables such as gender and age, further contextualised across and even beyond nationally defined contexts for self-identification and individual career development.

Limitations

The research limitations immediately evident in the aforementioned putative research topic on 'self-identification' are evident across the contributions to this Special Issue. Social reality is complex; human beings are complex; HRM is a very broadly defined field of academic enquiry and practitioner activity; HRM researchers are people. In this concluding discussion we addressed explicitly and systematically the challenges faced by social and HRM researchers in relation to research validity and reliability, to researcher credibility and bias. These challenges are there to be met – something that all contributors to the collection have endeavoured to achieve. We accept that investing in this endeavour easily raises more questions than answers.

Conclusions

This discussion set out to outline broader research contexts for the HRM themes presented and developed in previous contributions to this Special Issue. It suggested approaches towards researching HRM in contexts defined by ageing societies along with a research agenda that might guide HRM researchers, policy makers and practitioners in their attempts to investigate, formulate and implement effective responses to processes of demographic shift. One proposal towards for inclusion in a 'new research agenda' is to focus on processes of 'self-identification' in relation to older workers and the markets for employment – and retirement – they compete in.

The overarching objective of this Special Issue has been to identify, illustrate and compare current and emerging HRM responses to ageing societies in Germany and Japan. Across the various contributions we have attempted to present and de-

velop themes that highlight various experiences, perceptions and experiences of older workers alongside HRM policy-makers and practitioners in Germany and Japan. In addition to contextualising our discussion with references to 'ageing societies', we have sought further to outline the relevance of demographic trends across national and international markets for employment. By focussing our attention on the HRM activities ('responses') that impact immediately on the lives of older workers in Germany and Japan, we recognised consistently that the employment experiences and expectations of workers aged fifty and over impacts on the experiences and expectations of workers below this age; indeed, and as illustrated in this current contribution in relation to sustainability, the expectations of 'workers' who are not yet born.

Correspondingly, by proposing a new research agenda this final contribution to the Special Issue has sought to look beyond considerations of age and nationality in order to connect with what has been and what is yet to come in people's experiences and expectations of managing and of being managing as human resources.

References

Bachmann, R. (2006). *Trust and/or power: towards a sociological theory of organizational relationships.* In Bachman, R., & Zaheer, A. (Eds.), *Handbook of trust research* (pp. 393-408). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Bachmann, R., & Zaheer. A. (Eds.). (2006). *Handbook of trust research.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Bal, P. M., Kooij, D.T.A.M., & Rousseau, D. M. (Eds.). (2014). *Aging workers and the employee-employer relationship.* Berlin: Springer.

Bebenroth, R., & Kanai, T. (Eds.) (2011). *Challenges of Human Resource Management in Japan.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Beckert, J. (2006). Trust and markets. In Bachman, R., & Zaheer, A. (Eds.), *Handbook of trust research* (pp. 318-331). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Beier, M. E., & Kanfer, R. (2013). Work performance and the older worker. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp. 97-117). London: Sage.

Boehm, S. A., Schröder, H., & Kunze, F. (2013). Comparative age management: theoretical perspectives and practical implications. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp. 211-237). London: Sage.

Boyer, R. (2014). Foreword: from 'Japanophilia' to indifference? Three decades of research on contemporary Japan. In Lechevalier, S. (Ed.), *The great transformation of Japanese capitalism* (pp. xiii-xxv). Abingdon: Routledge.

Brewster, C., & Mayrhofer, W. (Eds.) (2011). *Handbook of research on comparative Human Resource Management.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Burke, R. J., Cooper, C. L., & Field, J. (2013). The aging workforce: individual, organizational and societal opportunities and challenges. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp 120-156). London: Sage.

Cappelli, P. (2008). *Talent on demand: Managing talent in an age of uncertainty.* Cambridge (MA): Harvard Business School Press.

Chen, M. (2004). *Asian management systems.* Stamford (CT): Cengage.

Conway, N., & Briner, R. B. (2006). *Understanding psychological contracts at work: A critical evaluation of theory and research.* Oxford: OUP.

Cook, K. S. (Ed.) (2001). *Trust in society.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Cooke, F. L. (2012). *Human Resource Management in China: New trends and practices.* London: Routledge.

Córdoba-Pachón, J.-R. (2010). *System practice in the information society.* London: Routledge.

Debroux, P. (2014). Corporate social responsibility and sustainable development in Asia. In Hasegawa, H., & Noronha, C. (Eds.), *Asian business and management: Theory, practice and perspectives* (pp. 139-158). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Debroux, P. (2011). Human Resource Management and employment systems in Asia: Directions of change and new challenges. In Bebenroth, R., & Kanai, T. (Eds.), *Challenges of Human Resource Management in Japan* (pp. 79-96). Abingdon: Routledge.

Debroux, P., Harry, W., Hayashi, S., Hwang, H., Jackson, K., & Kiyomiya, T. (2013). Japan, Korea and Taiwan: Issues and trends in Human Resource Management. In Brewster, C., & Mayrhofer, W. (Eds.), *Handbook of research on comparative Human Resource Management* (pp. 620-664). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Docherty, P., Kira, M., & Shani, A. B. (Eds.) (2009). *Creating sustainable work systems*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Dundon, T. (2011). Psychological Contract. In Rowley, C., & Jackson, K. (Eds.), *Human Resources Management: The key concepts* (pp. 185-189). London: Routledge.

Ehnert, I. (2011). Sustainability and Human Resource Management. In Wilkinson, A., & Townsend, K. (Eds.), *The future of employment relations* (pp. 215-237) London: Palgrave.

Ehnert, I., & Harry, W. (2012). Recent developments and future prospects on sustainable Human Resource Management: Introduction to the special issue. *Management Revue, 23*(3), 221-238. DOI 10.1688/1861-9908_mrev_2012_03_Ehnert.

Erikson, E. H. (1994). *Identity and the life cycle*. New York: Norton.

Euler, D. (2013). *Germany's dual vocational training system: A model for other countries?* Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.

Fay, C. (2011a). Labour markets. In Rowley, C., & Jackson, K. (Eds.), *Human Resources Management: The key concepts* (pp. 122-126). London: Routledge.

Fay, C. (2011b). Compensation strategies. In Rowley, C., & Jackson, K. (Eds.), *Human Resources Management: The key concepts* (pp. 21-26). London: Routledge.

Fenwick, T. (2013). Older workers in the professions: Learning challenges and strategies. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp. 300-313). London: Sage.

Field, J. (2013). Migration and workforce aging. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp. 75-93). London: Sage.

Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.). (2013). *The Sage handbook of ageing and society*. London: Sage.

Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (1991). *Social cognition*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giddens, A. (1994). *Beyond left and right*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gleitman, H. (1981). *Basic psychology*. New York: Norton.

Guillemard, A.-M. (2013). Prolonging working life in an aging world: A cross-national perspective on labor market and welfare policies toward active aging. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp. 60-74). London: Sage.

Harry, W., & Jackson, K. (2007). Globalisation, the wave, and the undertow. *Management Revue, 18*(4), 472-482.

Hasegawa, H., & Noronha, C. (Eds.) (2014). *Asian business and management: Theory, practice and perspectives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences*. London: Sage.

Hofstede, G. (2003). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage.

Hogg, M. A., & Vaughan, G. M. (2002). *Social psychology*. Harlow: Pearson/Prentice-Hall.

Hope-Hailey, V., Farndale, E., & Kelliher, C. (2010). Trust in turbulent times: organizational change and the consequences for intra-organizational trust. In Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thorn-

hill, A. (Eds.), *Research methods for business students* (pp. 336-357). London: Financial Times, Prentice-Hall.

Inkson, K., Richardson, M., & Houkama, C. (2013). New patterns of late-career employment. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp 141-156). London: Sage.

Jackson, K. (2013). East Asian management: An overview. In Warner, M. (Ed.), *Managing across diverse cultures in Asia: Issues and challenges in a changing world* (pp. 49-63). London: Routledge.

Jackson, K. (2012). An essay on sustainable work systems: An agenda for future research. *Management Revue, 23*(3), 296-309, DOI 10.1688/1861-9908_mrev_2012_03_Jackson.

Jackson, K. (2011a). Models of HRM. In Rowley, C., & Jackson, K. (Eds.), *Human Resources Management: The key concepts* (pp. 140-146). London: Routledge.

Jackson, K. (2011b). Talent management. In Rowley, C., & Jackson, K. (Eds.), *Human Resources Management: The key concepts* (pp. 206-213). London: Routledge.

Jackson, K., & Rowley. C. (2011). Introduction: Human Resource Management in context. In Rowley, C., & Jackson, K. (Eds.), *Human Resources Management: The key concepts* (pp. xix-xxvii). London: Routledge.

Jackson, K., & Debroux, P. (Eds.). (2009). *Innovation in Japan: Emerging patterns, enduring myths*. London: Routledge.

Jandt, F. E. (2010). *An introduction to intercultural communication: Identities in a global community*. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage.

Kline, J. (2010). *Ethics for international business.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Kohlbacher, F., Güttel, W. H., & Haltmeyer, B. (Eds.) (2009). The ageing workforce and HRM – challenges, chances, perspectives. *International Journal of Human Resources Development and Management, 9*.

Koike, K. (1995). *Nihon no koyo system* [The Japanese Employment System]. Tokyo: Toyo Keizai Shimposha.

Kolland, F., & Wanka, A. (2013). Learning in later life. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp. 380-400). London: Sage.

Kunze, F., & Boehm, S. A. (2103). Research on age diversity in the workforce: Current trends. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp 41-59). London: Sage.

Lechevalier, S. (Ed.) (2014). *The great transformation of Japanese capitalism*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lifvergren, S., Huzzard, T., & Docherty, P. (2009). A development coalition for sustainability in healthcare. In Docherty, P., Kira, M., & Shani, A. B. (Eds.), *Creating sustainable work systems* (pp. 167-185). Abingdon: Routledge.

Luhmann, N. (2000): *Vertrauen: Ein Mechanismus der Reduktion sozialer Komplexität*. Stuttgart: Lucius and Lucius.

McSweeney, B. (2002). Hofstede's model of national cultural differences and their consequences: A triumph of faith - a failure of analysis. *Human Relations, 55*(1), 89-118.

Möllering, G. (2006). Trust, institutions, agency. In Bachman, R., & Zaheer. A. (Eds.), *Handbook of trust research* (pp. 355-376). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Naegele, G. (2013). Older workers and older worker policies in Germany. In Taylor, P. (Ed.), *Older workers in an ageing society: Critical topics in research and policy* (pp. 39-61). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Ohmae, K. (2009). *The next global stage: Challenges and opportunities in our borderless world.* Philadelphia: Wharton School Publishing.

OECD (2015). National innovation systems. Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, available at: www.oecd.org/science/inno/2101733.pdf.

Pew (2015). Public trust in government: 1958-2015. Washington (DC): Pew Research Center, available at: www.people-press.org/2015/11/23/public-trust-in-government-1958-2015.

Poell, R. F., Rocco, T. S., & Roth, G. L. (Eds.) (2015). *The Routledge companion to human resource development*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Redding, G. (2014). The business systems of Asia. In Hasegawa, H., & Noronha, C. (Eds.) (2014), *Asian business and management: Theory, practice and perspectives* (pp. 15-35). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rimser, M. (2014). *Generation Resource Management: Nachhaltige HR-Konzepte im demografischen Wandel.* Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research.* Oxford: Blackwell

Rousseau, D. M. (1998). The 'problem' of the psychological contract considered. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 19,* 665-671.

Rousseau, D. M. (1989). Psychological and implicit contracts in organizations *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal, 2,* 121-139.

Rousseau, D. M. (1995). *Psychological contracts in organisations: Understanding the written and unwritten agreements.* London: Sage.

Rousseau, J.-J. (1762). *Du contrat social, ou, principes du droit politique.* Amsterdam: Rey.

Rowley, C., & Jackson, K. (Eds.) (2010). *Human Resources Management: The key concepts.* London: Routledge.

Rudolph, C. W., Baltes, B. B., & Zabel, K. L. (2013). Age and work motives. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp. 141-156). London: Sage.

Sargeant, M. (2013). Legal aspects of age discrimination. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp. 514.529). London: Sage.

Sato, Y. (Ed.) (2007). *Deciphering stratification and inequality: Japan and beyond.* Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.

Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2010). *Research methods for business students.* London: Financial Times, Prentice-Hall.

Saunders, M. N. K., Skinner, D., Dietz, G., Gillespie, N., & Lewicki, R. J. (Eds.). (2010). *Organizational trust: A cultural perspective.* Cambridge: CUP.

Sekiguchi, T., Takeuchi, N., & Takeuchi, T. (2011). Strategic Human Resource Management in the Japanese context: Unique opportunities for theory advancement. In Bebenroth, R., & Kanai, T. (Eds.), *Challenges of Human Resource Management in Japan* (pp. 133-153). Abingdon: Routledge.

Sekuler, R., & Blake, R. (1994). *Perception.* Singapore: McGraw-Hill.

Siegrist, J., & Wahrendorf, M. (2013). Quality of work, wellbeing and retirement. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp. 14-326). London: Sage.

Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making of modern identity.* London: Sage.

Taylor, P. (Ed.) (2013a). *Older workers in an ageing society: Critical topics in research and policy.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Taylor, P. (2013b). Introduction: Older workers in an ageing society. In Taylor, P. (Ed.). (2013a). *Older workers in an ageing society: Critical topics in research and policy* (pp. 1-16). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Taylor, P. (2013c). Review: Agendas in researching ageing and work. In Taylor, P. (Ed.). (2013a). *Older workers in an ageing society: Critical topics in research and policy* (pp. 264-271). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Toivonen, T. (2013). *Japan's emerging youth policy: Getting young adults back to work.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Taylor, P. (2008). *Ageing labour forces: Promises and prospects.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Truss, C., Mankinn, D., & Kelliher, C. (2012). *Strategic Human Resource Management.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vantilborgh, T., Dreis, N., de Vos, A., & Bal, P. M. (2014). The psychological contracts of older employees. In Bal, P. M., Kooij, D.T.A.M., & Rousseau, D. M. (Eds.), *Aging workers and the employee-employer relationship.* (pp. 107-127). Berlin: Springer.

Verworn, B., Hipp, C., & Weber, D. (2013). Demographic challenges for human resource management: implications from management and psychological theories. In Field, J., Burke, R. J., & Cooper, C. L. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of ageing and society* (pp. 238-249). London: Sage.

Von Bertalanffy, L. (1968). *General system theory: Foundations, development, applications.* New York: Brazilier.

Walker, A., & Aspalter, C. (Eds.) (2015). *Active ageing in Asia*. Abingdon: Routledge

Warner, M. (Ed.). (2013). *Managing across diverse cultures in Asia: Issues and challenges in a changing world*. London: Routledge.

Warner, M. (Ed.) (2009). *Human Resource Management 'with Chinese characteristics'*. London: Routledge.

Wei, Q., & Rowley, C. (2011). Diversity management. In Rowley, C., & Jackson, K. (Eds.), *Human Resources Management: The key concepts* (pp. 59-64). London: Routledge.

Wilkinson, A., & Townsend, K. (Eds.) (2011). *The future of employment relations*. London: Palgrave.

Witt, A. (2014). The business system of Japan. In Hasegawa, H., & Noronha, C. (Eds.), *Asian business and management: Theory, practice and perspectives* (pp. 161-178). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Yamagishi, T., & Yamagishi, M. (1994). Trust and commitment in the United States and Japan. *Motivation and Emotion*, *18*(2) 129-166.

Zölch, M., & Mücke, A. (Eds.) (2015). *Fit für den demografischen Wandel? Ergebnisse, Instrumente, Ansätze guter Praxis*. Bern: Haupt.