From Resource to Human Being: Toward Persons Management

Michel Fortier and Marie-Noëlle Albert

Abstract
Modern human resource management (HRM) has been found to be unsatisfactory as a model and as a praxis concerning human beings in organizations. This article proposes a conceptual change from resource to human being, which we define as "persons management." After addressing what a person is (a subject navigating between individualism and collectivism; a creative, ethical, and complex being), this text examines how persons can be managed, remembering that persons manage persons. In a dialogical sense, they can help each other and work together, even if they are adversaries. In that sense, persons management must strive to be sustainable at the human, organizational, and environmental levels. We examine certain theoretical and conceptual aspects implied by this restructuring of the field.

Keywords
complexity, HRM, human nature, person, stakeholder

Introduction: Modern Human Resource Management (HRM) Is Unsatisfactory in Its Design and in How It Treats Human Beings

All organizations are filled with people. They are often managed like purely material resources that can be bought, sold, modified, or discarded after use. However, from an ethical standpoint, are people really resources like any other resource? In this sense, the central question is not “can we treat human being like objects,” which is often the case, but how and why not to do it. Moral philosophy from Kant (categorical imperative) to Jonas (responsibility principle) has proposed conceptual frameworks to guide us in that direction. Furthermore, the humanities and social sciences have specifically evolved by clearly differentiating people from the rest of the physical world (Giddens, 1976; for reasons, among others, grounded in the hermeneutical dimension of human being and sociological inquiry), as both their interiority and their will must be taken into account. Although it is possible to objectify a person, this does not result in a complete picture of a “human being,” a picture that could do justice to its richness and complexity. There is a strong humanistic current in management that have evolved in the 20th century from the human relations school to the development of organizational behavior and organizational development with important figures such as Likert, Maslow, Argyris, and McGregor. They still are read and are sources of inspiration. However, many of their ideas and suggestions are still not used widely in organizations today. In this article, we will propose a critique of HRM, guiding us toward a management of persons in organizational settings, which we hope could be more ethical.

The context and content of HRM teaching are important to consider. In North America and in other English-speaking countries, HRM is mainly taught in management programs offered through administration faculties, which often advocate a unitary vision of HRM, and in industrial relations (IR) programs through social science faculties, which offer a pluralist vision of HRM. HRM is built as a discipline that is part of the general field of management, which addresses the operational dimensions in relation to human beings within organizations. Thus, generally speaking, management deals with organizational behavior, organizational theory, and strategic management. According to this point of view, HRM implements the organizational strategy that is recognized by current organizational theory, usually expressed in a form that stems from the contingency theory rooted in a financial conception of increasing shareholders’ equity (Khurana, 2007). This legitimacy process draws also on a conservative and often positivist approach to human behavior, despite what organizational behavior has to offer. This could lead, in

1Université du Québec à Rimouski, Canada

Corresponding Author:
Marie-Noëlle Albert, Professor, Sciences de gestion, Université du Québec à Rimouski, 300, allée des Ursulines, C. P. 3300, succ. A, Rimouski, Québec, Canada G5L 3A1.
Email: marie-noelle_albert@uqar.ca

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Some operational principles of HRM of managing human beings. Winstanley and Woodall (2000a, b), Deckop (2006), Gilliland, Steiner, and Skarlicki (2007), as well as Pinnington, Macklin, and Campbell (2007), have all published collective works dealing explicitly with moral issues raised by HRM practices and by management, but a clear model challenging HRM has not emerged from their efforts, nor has a coherent ethical stance.

Hence, to achieve a new model, a first step would be to question HRM’s very name (Inkson, 2008, has aptly ask this question), for “[t]here are implicit assumptions inherent in the conception underlying the expression human resource management” (Dachler & Enderle, 1989, p. 598). We believe that the passage from personnel management to the conceptualization of human beings as “resources” has paved the way for renewed exploitation and abuse. The objectification of the human being is most certainly possible, but it does not mean that human beings should be treated mainly as objects. Over the past few decades, several authors have also expressed the wish to see HRM profoundly transformed according to ethical criteria, even if there is no real consensus on those ethical criteria (Greenwood, 2002; Legge, 2005; Melé, 2008; Payne & Wayland, 1999; Pirson & Lawrence, 2010; Shultz & Brender-Ilan, 2004; Sloan & Gavin, 2010; Winstanley & Woodall, 2000a, 2000b). From our point of view, this has not resulted in a transformation of theorizing or practices in HRM. To achieve those goals, we propose switching from HRM to person management.

In defining person management, one must clarify what a person is and how a person differs from a resource. This is not a trivial difference because human beings viewed as resources do not hold the same status and, above all, are not treated in the same manner. Thus, we will compare what constitutes a person with its counterpart in the resource tradition. Table 1 shows the elements and the structure of our proposition, which must be understood as ideal types in the Weberian sense.

### Table 1. From Resources to Persons.

| Human as Resources | Persons |
|--------------------|---------|
| *An object* | *A subject* |
| *A category* | *A flesh and blood being* |
| *An underling* | *A creative being* |
| *Egoistic* | *Oriented toward other: but strategic* |

**Reductionist view of human nature**

**Person management**

| Managers lead employees | *Person management* |
| Employees as subordinates | |
| Stakeholders are few | |
| *Specialist view* | |

**Moralizing of behavior**

| Impersonality in human relations | *Impartiality in human relations* |
| Asymmetrical power and advantages | *Sharing of advantages and risks* |
| Emphasis on tools | *Tools as guide and not as ends* |
| Short-term orientation | *Long-term orientation (sustainable)* |
| Optimization of financial costs | *Taking into consideration hidden costs* |

**Shareholder value maximization**

**Articulating different logics**

**Complex view of human nature**

**Person management**

| All persons are stakeholders | *Persons manage persons* |
| Employees as collaborators | |
| *Generalist view* | |

**Ethical comprehension of behavior**

Costs and advantages of tools

A first observation that stems from those preceding comments is that North American HRM, mainly centered on practitioners, corresponds to the alignment of HRM practices with strategic management and its contribution toward the profitability and use of the “best practices” in the industry as a means of achieving those ends. Critical HRM, as is well known, is European and more present in IR. Its supporters challenge the unitary vision of their colleagues on the other side of the Atlantic, denouncing the authoritarian and manipulative character of an HRM designed only for the sole benefit of management and shareholders. Greenwood (2002) goes even further, claiming that ethics is almost absent from current practices in modern HRM. Based on the works of Legge (1996), she explains the existence of two very clear tendencies among businesses: “hard” HRM, where human beings are simply factors of production obtainable at the lowest possible cost and disposable after usage; and “soft” HRM, where the same results can be achieved in a more subtle way through manipulation. Until very recently, few treaties had been making ethics their central theme in the general field of management and in the more specific branch of managing human beings. Winstanley and Woodall (2000a, 2000b), Deckop (2006), Gilliland, Steiner, and Skarlicki (2007), as well as Pinnington, Macklin, and Campbell (2007), have all published collective works dealing explicitly with moral issues raised by HRM practices and by management, but a clear model challenging HRM has not emerged from their efforts, nor has a coherent ethical stance.
A Person Rather Than a Resource

What in fact is a “person”? In a sense, it is the opposite of a centaur: we know what it is without ever being able to point one out in the flesh. (Lenclud, 2009, p. 4)

The term person is widely present in common language. However, although everyone seems to be familiar with its meaning, grasping it specifically remains difficult. How do we then truly define a person?

A Subject Rather Than an Object

If we consider a non-human resource, it is for us an object or an instrument devoid of will power. Because of its human nature, a person must be treated with respect and approached differently from other resources (Melé, 2009c). A person is first and foremost defined as a subject, that is, a source of influence and intervention. According to Morin (1999), a subject “is both an obvious and mysterious notion” (p. 144). Nevertheless, it is possible to imagine a subject as the cause of its own action because of the subject’s interiority, freedom, and personal autonomy (Melé, 2009c). Yet, this autonomy and freedom cannot be separated from certain dependencies, even from subservience (Morin, 1999). Subjects oscillate between selfishness and altruism. On one hand, subjects can be egocentric—placing themselves in the center of their own world until they disintegrate at the time of death—while others may mean nothing to them. On the other hand, subjects can be altruistic, devoted to others and not seek all the attention (Morin, 1999). We will come back to this complexity of the subject, and thus the person (cf. A Complex View of Human Nature Rather Than a Reductionism View of Human Nature section) and to these notions of altruism and selfishness (cf. Oriented Toward Other, but Strategic Rather Than Egoistic section).

A Flesh and Blood Being Rather Than a Category

HRM defined human beings as resources; this founding definition is theoretical categorization, which has profound practical impacts. A resource can be easily “tagged” and that helps us know in which compartment we can “store” it for its eventual use. A resource has no say in this regard. The same could be done with a person even though a person is whole and complete, in body and soul, and could object to our type of categorization. In this respect, Mounier (1952) explains what is a person:

One might expect that personalism would begin by defining the person. But one can only define objects exterior to man, such as can be put under observation. Here is my neighbour. He has a unique feeling of his body, which I cannot have; but I can look at this body from without, examine its dispositions, its heredity, its form, its maladies; in short, I can treat it as an object of physiological, medical, or other knowledge. He exercises functions, and there is a functional order and a functional psychology, which I can apply to the study of his case, although they are not he, the whole man in his total reality. Moreover, and in the same way, he is a Frenchman, a bourgeois, a socialist, a Catholic, etc. But he is not a Bernard Chartier, he is Bernard Chartier. The thousand ways in which I can distinguish him, as an example of a class may help me to understand him, and above all to make use of him, they show me how practically to behave towards him. But these are merely sections taken, in each case, through one aspect of his existence. (p. xvii)
the perspective of enhancing capabilities (Giovanola, 2005, 2009). Imagination (the traditional madwoman of the house) helps persons find original solutions to contingencies they are faced with in daily life. This possibility has always disturbed rationalists who, at best, saw it as an aesthetical side to the mind and, at worst, an irrational aspect that must be eliminated through rigor and logic. Yet, imagination implies the possibility of moving forward, creating, innovating, and being visionary. Human beings are able to gravitate toward an ideal even if they cannot fully attain it and, what is more, they seem to be able to question received ideas. Persons, as creative beings, are also intuitive and base their actions on impulses, which lead them to reach their goals (Shlien, D’Arifat, & Ducroux-Biass, 2007). Although their actions are turned toward the future, which is to say toward their goals, they are not mechanical. Being creative is more an instinctive process, set apart from the intellect (Bergson, 1946). It is true that “a creative mode of thought operates outside of the visible limits of a problem. It requires a sense of freedom that enables a person to focus on a problem by using his or her imagination” (Shlien et al., 2007, p. 78). Persons are therefore subjects, which imply that they are free, notably free to act in a creative way in any given situation and according to their own views. As bureaucratic organizations tend to foster hierarchical procedures where creativity is anathema, at least when it comes from below, this poses a serious problem for anyone wishing to standardize and control human behavior from above. In practice, the underlings have the unfortunate habit of behaving unpredictably at times, which leads to elaborate contraptions to control this nefarious tendency. In that controlling sense, HRM could be seen as one of the best models to date. Last the notion of “human richness” (Giovanola, 2005) offers us a range of varied possibilities that are tangibly embodied within capabilities, as meant by Sen (2009) and Nussbaum (2011). It seems preferable to find all possible means to enable people to express their abilities in society and within organizations and to try to reduce inequalities instead of waiting for the perfect system, which may never come to exist. It appears that, in its actual form, HRM is incapable of enabling the full expression of human capabilities, whence the importance of evolving toward persons management.

**Oriented Toward Other, but Strategic Rather Than Egoistic**

Human resources, if we follow economic lore, are individualistic and selfish. More realistically, Flahault (2008), like Morin (1973), demonstrates that a person can be altruistic and selfish, as well as nice and mean to others. Consequently, it is possible for selfishness to inhabit a person who is nonetheless opening up to others. Instead of denying this phenomenon, being aware of it and taking it into consideration might be preferable. Human nature, as a concept, seems to condition a person’s ethical standpoint and moral behavior. From a restricted view, human nature becomes one-dimensional, whereas, from a broader view, human nature can expand in a more complex and realistic fashion (e.g., Jonas’s ethics of responsibility or Morin’s ethics of complexity). To be open to others, a person should follow certain rules (Mounier, 1952): going out of the self—the antithesis of ego-centrism, narcissism, and individualism; understanding—stop seeing things from your personal point of view and try instead to see them from the point of view of others, while remaining yourself; taking upon oneself—sharing the destiny, the trouble, the joy, or the task of one another; feel what others feel; giving—a person’s economy is an economy of giving, not an economy of compensation or calculation; and last, faithfulness. In fact, a person’s trajectory is a constant adventure, even though a person’s general state continually changes (Bergson, 1946). This faithfulness does not mean being bound to a restricting agreement, but agreeing to a sustainable relationship. These rules are similar to those described by Melé (2009e). In this respect, the “Golden Rule” or “ethics of reciprocity” require persons to put themselves in someone else’s shoes (Maxwell, 2003). Melé (2009e) also develops the principle of human dignity: One can neither use nor treat persons as objects. Others are treated like objects when they are treated as absentees or used in an instrumental fashion. To treat others as subjects, as a presence, means acknowledging that they can neither be defined nor classified for good, that they are inexhaustible and filled with hope (Mounier, 1952). The value of openness to the Other was developed by Levinas (1972/2006). He explained that openness to the Other can be understood in three different ways. In the first, openness relates to the essence of a human being opening up to be seen. In the second, openness refers to consciousness opening up to the other’s presence. In the third, the one Levinas (1972/2006) develops, “openness is the skin made vulnerable by insults and wounds” (p. 105). This openness relates to sincerity, which means “to embrace vulnerability, let go, and surrender.” For this reason, one cannot ask someone else to sincerely open up to others in this fashion, this process can only be part of a very personal journey. Being open toward others can encourage others to open up. Faÿ and Albert (2005) distinguish the logic of closing up from the logic of opening up to others. When a person closes up, exchanges and reasoning patterns become robot-like (Faÿ, 2004). Thus, closing up becomes an impediment to persons management. This sincere openness to others can reflect a humanistic leaning, which focuses on the wealth that develops within relationships. In this context, a person, the whole person, develops actions that can be endlessly renewed, an approach that cultivates long-term closeness and friendship (and not only calculated trust).

Consequently, moral foundations depend on the wholeness of a being, that is, of a person. According to this perspective (Morin, 2004), ethics is rooted in the human trinity of “person-society-species.” A person is a psychological being who voluntarily develops an ethical standpoint through which to view the world. A person is also a member of a given society that influences this person’s very being and moral standards. Last, a person is a complete biological
being too, sharing common traits with other members of the same species, such as gregariousness and a need for cooperation. Ethics associated with this trinity is necessarily complex as it emerges from dialogic relationships between individual voluntarism, constraints, social permissions, and the animal nature of a person. Furthermore, for human beings, moral responsibility is a responsibility that cannot be shared, transferred, or abandoned (Levinas, 1981).

**A Complex View of Human Nature Rather Than a Reductionism View of Human Nature**

HRM uses a simplified model of human nature, often implicit in its theorizing and not acknowledged either in practice. This model is tailor-made to suit the demands of HRM strategic requirements. Contrary to this tendency, persons management put forth a conception grounded in complexity theory. Morin (2001) explains that human beings are both complex and interwoven into complexity. Human beings are both similar and different from one another. A person is a homo sapiens (a rational/wise being) and a homo demens (an irrational/insane being), living with this limitless polarization and never knowing for certain when it will be one or the other. Rationality is not localized, but rather scattered, saturated with irrationality, and only instrumental. Rationality is adapted to the practical finalities to which it is dedicated (Morin, 1973). Persons are therefore complex beings in whom the principles of complex thinking can be found (Morin, 2001, 2005; Tsoukas, 2005). First, by being multifaceted, persons comply with the dialogic principle, which is to say that persons make the existence of antagonisms possible. In this respect, dialogic is defined as

> the complex unity that exists between two logics, entities, or instances, that are complementary, concurrent and antagonistic, and which feed on one another, cooperate, but are also in opposition and battle each other. In dialogic, the oppositional forces remain and constitute complex entities or phenomena (there is no synthesis, which is the expected result in classical dialectic). (Morin, 2001, p. 281)

“Oriented Toward Other, but Strategic Rather Than Egoistic” section reflected this dialogic nature for humans, as we noted that persons can be altruistic and selfish, as well as nice and mean. Second, emergence is rendered possible through intuition and creativity. This is where we find the recursive principle, which open up new forms of participation for persons in the organizational setting. Third, persons are also governed by the hologramatic principle (“the whole is in all the parts, which constitute the whole and is more than the sum of its parts”). In this sense, we find some of “Bernard Chartier” in the French part of Bernard Chartier (cf. A Flesh and Blood Being Rather Than a Category section). Fourth, persons are interdependent, and so are their multiple facets. Finally, persons’ common goals (cf. A Flesh and Blood Being Rather Than a Category section) follow the teleological principle. This conception of human nature is a far cry from the reductionist view used in HRM and is best suited for a world in constant mutation.

**Principles of Person Management Rather Than HRM**

The term management comes from the Italian maneggiare, which, in turn, comes from the Latin manus meaning “hand.” The hand naturally symbolizes force and power, so the word manus originally meant the authority of the head of the family, the pater familias. The father had the power of life and death over the people living under his roof, as well as imposing moral obligations on them (Sampley, 2003). For these reasons, the word “management” does not accurately fit the ideas we defend. Yet, to date, we have not found a term likely to suit our purposes, so for the moment, we use the expression persons management. This expression refers to people managing other people, where a person is the common denominator (i.e., basic unit) for all stakeholders involved in cooperation and mutual aid, allowing the sustainable development of persons and organizations.

**Persons Manage Persons Rather Than Managers Leading Employees**

HRM helps to lead employees, and in this sense, managers and employees are seen as categories (cf. A Flesh and Blood Being Rather Than a Category section). This conception of resource overlooks all the different facets of human beings. Persons are unique while sharing common features. They live together and may choose to be open or not be open to others, revealing as such their complex, creative, ethical, and political facets. Persons management is more specifically a relationship where a person manages another person. It goes beyond the traditional manager–employee relationship by bringing together two persons who are unique and who share a number of goals. They both occupy different functions, interact with each other and with others (Weick, 1969/1979), but they never cease to be persons, with all the complexity that this involves. Both share the same community, which means that they are not only involved in mutual relationships but that they form a whole, a “we” (Melé, 2003). This “we” neither automatically implies that these agree with each other nor that they naturally envision reaching the same goals, but rather that they share a certain number of common elements. This humanistic way of managing persons evolves within a humanistic organizational culture, which has four characteristics (Kleinfeld, Cludts, & Melé, 2003). The first relates to the recognition of humans’ dignity and uniqueness, their sociable character, and their capacity for self-development. The second focuses on respect for persons and human rights.
The third looks at the need to care for those around us, and the fourth explores the need for management that encourages public interest instead of self-interest. These characteristics imply that persons are complex, unique, with common traits, and are open to others. This also infers that organizations are composed of persons (not resources) who have a number of common goals. This humanist conception does not ignore the fact that businesses need a set of formal mechanisms to make profits and to adapt to markets and their natural and social environments (Kleinfeld et al., 2003; Melé, 2009a).

Morin (1999) views persons as subjects oscillating between selfishness and altruism. Selfishness contributes to opportunism, whereas altruism calls for benevolence. Brun (2008) defines benevolence as an attitude leading to desiring goodness and facilitating problem-solving with real respect for each person. To offer a genuine interest, benevolence should be present in everyday situations and not only in policy statements. Brun (2008) explains that benevolence is not a constraint but an opportunity and a choice leading to the healthy growth of people and organization. Cappeletti, Khalla, Noguera, Scouarnec, and Voyynet-Fourboul (2010) think that the time has come to find a benevolent approach compatible with economic constraints. They define benevolence as the well-being of others, comparing it with charity, which also promotes well-being, but which does not take into account others’ true motivations. Benevolence can, therefore, operate according to person management perspective in which selfish and altruistic human beings can sincerely open up to others. It is only in the presence of sincere openness that benevolence can exist. However, because of the complex nature of persons, one must be clever and prevent the subordination of one’s altruistic behaviors to others’ selfish behaviors.

**Employees as Collaborators Rather Than Employees as Subordinates**

Most jurisdictions in advanced societies defined the hired people in organizations either as officers or as subordinates. This entails specific rights and duties for all, but the rights portion of the legal contract is rather thin for the subordinates who must obey the officers of the corporation. If civil society is democratic as an institution, most organizations in business and government are not. In the market economic system, competition is the predominantly favored mechanism thought to ensure regulation, within and between companies, with wealth being the ultimate goal to strive for. Yet, competition is far from being the only significant and efficient mechanism capable of ensuring economic and social regulation. One of the great characteristics of constructs relative to collective actions (organization), according to Crozier and Friedberg (1980), is the actors’ mutual adjustment within the strategy. If confrontation is a possibility, it is rarely the first choice. Thus, mutual aid stands as an important factor of resilience for those often submitted to important stressors in their work-related environment. A clear shift from patriarchal and warlike values to more feminine ones based on sharing, mutual aid, and, above all, on concern for others, the very foundation of ethics (Ricoeur, 1995) is also emerging with many new ventures. One must recall that Ricoeur’s definition of ethical ambitions is the aim of a “good life” with and for others, inside fair institutions. Consequently, if competition is sometimes an acceptable mechanism, its omnipresence or even prevalence can seriously slow down all ethical developments. Furthermore, if employees are pitted against each other in an endless competition for economic survival where they are only hands executing orders obediently, the results could be counterproductive to say the least.

As Khurana (2007) points out, the alignment of modern management on a purely financial conception of strategic management relies on a very specific definition of human nature and consistent ethics. The highly controversial text of Jensen and Meckling (1994) on “The Nature of Man” presented human nature triumphantly filled with selfishness, calculation, and some form of rationality. This conception of persons seems to dominate in strategic management circles, even though it is criticized (Mintzberg, Simons, & Basu, 2002) as being incompatible with companies’ reality. A player’s economical selfishness abstractly built, shall we say, outside of physical life presents a psychological and social horizon too narrow for human nature to be based on. Thus all employees of a giving organization are best understood as collaborators with different roles and talents, not as cogs in a well-oiled machine or as subordinates ordained along a hierarchical chain of command. Furthermore, we could picture all collaborators as valued human beings from the humblest janitor, to the receptionist and up to the manager who must help them do their work and not be served by them like a noble of old.

**An Expanded View of Stakeholders Rather Than a Narrow One**

In HRM, the stakeholder theory has been cited as an example of how complex and conflicting political relations can be within organizations (Ferrary, 2009). Hence, in general, few stakeholders, except employees and managers, are considered important topics of research for the discipline. However, the stakeholder’s perspective has become one of the pillars of business ethics over time. As a result, stakeholder theory had given a voice to persons who often struggle to be heard. We adopt here the most extensive conception of stakeholder management and considered all persons affected by the organization as within our field of interest. We will not extend further on our comments regarding this aspect, except to note a trend in the recent evolution of the workforce in Western societies. One of the most salient elements in the present-day context of person’s management is that the workforce is transforming toward diversity. This situation commands the management of diversity and welcomes tolerance of otherness. Over the past
few decades, we have witnessed the development of a feminine and masculine multiethnic workforce (even transgender in some countries), of all ages, social environments, with various curricula, and so on. The monolithic nature of the workforce seems to belong to the past, but tensions subsist even though laws in several countries prohibit discrimination. There is, therefore, a need to become more sensitive to difference and to adopt management styles, which reflect that difference. Last, workers are also consumers and that dimension cannot be excluded from our conception of germane topics in person management as a human life must not be conceived in isolated fragments (the employee at work) but constituted of many inter-related dimensions (employee, consumer, parent, citizen, player, etc.; see also Cleveland, Byrne, & Cavanagh, 2015).

A Generalist View Instead of a Specialist View

Kaufman (2007) in his review of the historical evolution of the field reminds us that in the personnel management era, a generalist stance was the norm:

It goes on to say that the term “personnel” as used in the USA stresses that the function is “recognized as part of the Management” and that personnel is not just a staff function but includes “anyone who supervise employees, from the assistant foreman to the president.” (p. 25)

In contrast, HRM has evolved and defined itself as a specialized field of study, a kind of technocratic solution to the human “problem” in organizations. A question could then be asked: Are the other business specialties not concerned with human beings? Nevertheless, being the specialist of the human “variety” of resources, hopefully on par with the other organizational resource specialists, entails professional opportunities and financial privileges. However, this has been gained at a price far too high in our view: the dehumanizing of organization, the reification of the discipline, and the subservience to economic elites often oblivious to those not in the fold. We believe that person management is best understood as the management of management and calls, for that reason, for a generalist stance, which embraces all the aspects of management. Organizations are many things, as Morgan (1986) has aptly shown, but fundamentally it boils down to a tool at the service of humanity; not the other way around. In becoming a specialty of “the using up of humans as resources, among others,” HRM is oblivious to its most noble aims, the complexities, and the possibilities implied by them, which, we insist, is a tool for the betterment of human beings. In that sense, it must be reformed in a profound way.

Ethical Comprehension of Behavior Rather Than Moralizing of Behavior

From our prior comments, we can conclude that we need a nuanced ethical comprehension of human behavior and endeavor in organizations. But more often than not, what we observe in HRM practices is a moralization5 of the actions of the participants in organizational life, mostly directed to lower level employees and aimed at achieving purely economic goals. The flourishing of behavioral codes of conduct, of so called ethical codes (which are purely deontological, if not legal, in their conception and application), cannot replace the moral subject, that is, a person. Human beings are the sole repository of moral impulse, moral imagination, and moral conduct. What must be put forward is the possibility of developing and using, beyond bureaucratic control, the moral compass guiding persons. All the ethical codes in the world will be of no avail if there are no moral human beings to comprehend them, interpret them, and correct them as the situation commands. We are conscious that some people cherish the idea that human being cannot be moral if they are not constrained to be.6 It is not a belief we share, as history has amply proven otherwise; on the contrary, human beings are the only and last moral bastions. Following the rules blindly had resulted in all sorts of disastrous and inhuman deeds.7 This is not to say that rules are not important but that they alone cannot be the solution. We need persons with real ethical understanding, not the factice or cosmetic window dressing offered by many ethical codes, which is all the morality some organizations have to offer (Pinnington et al., 2007).

Some Operational Characteristics

Following our discussion on principles used to manage persons, we will now look at elements characterizing implementation, which will help understand how person management could distinguished itself from HRM in concrete organizations. We are not exhaustive in this demonstration.8 We will present only a few salient examples, which are impartiality, the sharing of advantages and risks, the use of tools, the implied time horizon, the hidden costs, and, as a synthesis, the articulation of different types of logic.

Impartiality in Human Relation Rather Than Impersonality

Managers and employees have traditionally had an impersonal and task-oriented relationship with one another. This impersonality was put forth to avoid nepotism and favoritism. Impersonality refers to an abstraction of the person. With this impersonality, a human is not a subject, but instead an object, and persons need to be recognized as subjects. So, to avoid favoritism, we have to use another principle of action, which is not fraught with difficulty like impersonality. Duhamel (2003) distinguishes impartiality from impersonality. Impartiality does not require that you be friends or that you make friends, but if you do have friends, you are linked to them through social obligations that fall under the criterion of impartiality. Özler and Buyukarslan (2011)
define impartiality as the opposite of favoritism. It combines individualist and collectivist dimensions (like the notion of the person). The difference between impersonality and impartiality is not just conceptual. In a practical way, impersonality puts processes at the center of organizations and makes them responsible for all actions. As Bauman (1994) have aptly commented, if things go wrong within an organization where the responsibility is impersonal, the result is astonishing: In practice, nobody is held responsible if everyone has followed the rules. When nobody feels responsible, horrible deeds could be accomplished. Impartiality allows person to be responsible and promotes relationship between different persons, not necessarily friendship, but openness to others.

**Sharing of Advantages and Risks Rather Than Asymmetrical Power and Advantages**

Much has been said about the financial risks incurred by entrepreneurs and investors in business projects. In this matter, the most adverse outcome is bankruptcy, which happens quite frequently with small businesses. Yet, employees also experience risks and inconveniences. Senior executives are in a distinctive situation because they can negotiate considerable advantages that often shelter them from the basic contingencies of everyday life. The situation of “mere” employees is strikingly different. Certain employees risk their health, even their lives. Each year, in every country, work-related accidents and deaths paint a sad picture. When we add employees who have mental health problems in the workplace, it seems that any financial compensation would seem negligible for those facing these risks. But work is rarely a choice; it’s a necessity for most people. We must also take into account the inconveniences and sacrifices necessary for employees to obtain a position, not to mention to keep it. Thus, employees must be mobile and available; they must accept the fact that work ties are weak and that they will have to cope with the business cycle. Although the notion of suffering at work has long interested specialists, few have highlighted the advantages of pleasant working conditions. It is possible that the Puritan attitude, which stemmed from Protestant work ethics, has held up the development of a work organization focused on the well-being of its employees, and not solely on work discipline as it is usually understood (Barbash, 1984). Relationships with colleagues have long been recognized as a key factor of resilience in the workplace (Brun, 2002). Contrary to competitive situations in which workers are pitted “against” each other, cooperation and participation foster interpersonal ties, which permit the unfolding of positive effects through supportive social relationships. In the same way, hierarchical relationships within the workplace provide a plethora of possibilities, which stems from the style of leadership adopted, a style that must be chosen to induce respect and morality toward the employees.

Considering the set of mental and physical health factors, entailed by the psychosocial factors of work within firms, we are forced to conclude that one must have a global and ethical vision to use the tools to manage employees, from job attribution to performance appreciation. Only a wide perspective enables corrections to be made to current practices and makes it possible to go beyond traditional HRM. Traditional HRM has proven to be successful in terms of increasing a firm’s sales figures, but demonstrates far less success in terms of increasing human well-being. A good start would be to better balance all the advantages and disadvantages encountered by working in organization (Cleveland et al., 2015).

**Tools as Guide and Not as Ends in Themselves**

HRM in practice is mainly concerned with tools as it is fashioned as a bureaucratic solution to the human problem in organizations. In keeping with this spirit, Pettersen (2000) explains how to develop and validate measurement instruments to assess human potential in organizations. He advocates a mechanistic approach to lessen the judgment and interpretation of the persons building and using the tool. This conception comes close to the computer metaphor (Morgan, 1986). Yet, if one wants to be able to take into account the complexity of persons and their environment, it would be preferable to change metaphors. An alternative metaphor founded on the concept of enaction may better take into account at the same time the subjective character of the subject as well as the objective character of the object. This would allow persons to use the tools as guides and use their professional judgment to act. The tools are representations of a reality, but they are not the reality (the map is not the territory). Although these representations are useful for understanding reality, they should leave room for professional judgment. Acting within the computer metaphor may lead to being less responsible, because, in this case, the action does not depend on reflection but on an automatic procedure. The actor is not responsible for the action because he has not made a decision; rather, he has applied a procedure mechanically. In this instance, the tool, which can be seen at the outset as a way of attaining finality, can become an end unto itself. This change from medium to end makes it possible to disregard the essential finality. A mechanistic approach, through its determinism, puts emphasis on the fulfillment of prefixed criteria. However, complex situations (the same is true of persons) shed light on unexpected elements. This unpredictability can help reach the original finalities differently from the way previously programmed. Must we favor the ends we strive to reach or stick to the ways we have chosen for reaching them? Adopting logic based on finalities rather than on processes would seem to us preferable for ordering priorities. The professionalism of managers allows them to use their judgment in attaining their goal because they are guided, not blinded, by management tools. This
could be embraced by all persons working in organizational setting.

**Long-Term Orientation (Sustainable) Rather Than Short-Term Orientation**

For Pirson and Lawrence (2010), the “economic man” engages only in short-term transactions because he acts on opportunities. At its extreme, it is predatory behavior often founded on individualistic premises. In contrast, humanist philosophers envision the long-term relationships with others as a central element for human beings, a condition stemming from “being together” in this world. Management, as Melé (2009a) points out, is often guided by the idea that each person is different and must be treated according to her or his qualities and personality. Even if these concepts apply mainly to the management of talents, it is possible that they will become the key to the success of organizations, leading to humanistic and economic approaches complementing each other (Pirson & Lawrence, 2010). Beaupré, Cloutier, Gendron, Jiménez, and Morin (2008) explain that sustainable development does not condemn all economic activity; it means considering this activity differently, taking into account the limits of both the environment and the developmental aspirations of individuals and organizations. According to these authors, complying with these precepts of corporate social responsibility (CSR) can have positive consequences on organizational health. Nevertheless, Beaupré et al. notes that the implementation of CSR practices and sustainable development had not really helped integrating the human dimension at the heart of values and principles of social responsibility within organizations. Consequently, introducing CSR and sustainable development principles into HRM practices remains in an embryonic state or is only slowly being implemented in businesses. Plinio (2009) defines the sustainable performance of organizations as the performance that makes the attainment of short-term objectives possible while remaining focused on long-term objectives. Therefore, all results, short term as well as long term, increase the benefits for the organization, the parties involved, and our civil society. Delios (2010) explains that organizational leaders should proactively modify the nature of their competitive environment by promoting social responsibility. Finally, Marchington (2015) have recently noted that HRM is neglecting the long-term perspective in looking up too much on the hierarchy and with his narrow focus on performance goals even if unfortunate consequences will follow for its practitioners.

Garriga and Melé (2004) have classified the different CSR conceptions into several categories: instrumental, political, integrative, and ethical. The CSR advocated by Beaupré et al. (2008) can be identified with the fourth group, the ethical one. This corresponds to person management based simultaneously on ethics and sustainability. Thus, by rethinking management sciences according to a humanist perspective, we are looking at the long-term horizon even though it is possible to have partial objectives helpful in attaining ulterior goals (Melé, 2009b). The CSR, whatever its shape, is an integral part of an organization’s strategy. To work, such a strategy should be part of the common goals shared by the members of the organization, even though the intent might change over time. This sustainable development of persons can also help reduce costs (often hidden costs) associated with turnover, absenteeism, and so on.

**Taking Into Consideration Hidden Costs Not Just the Obvious One**

Managing persons with little benevolence may seem to increase performance in the short term. For example, Melé (2009a) explains that massive layoffs and relocating factories in view of saving money on salaries, as well as other practices, illustrate how powerful and widespread this conception of short-term economics is. Yet, practices that do not emphasize persons management can generate substantial hidden costs, as defined by Savall and Zardet (2008). For example, based on the literature regarding work-related stress, Leung, Skitmore, and Chan (2007) re-explore the different kinds of stressors. There are personal stressors, task-related stressors, organizational stressors, and physical stressors. It is therefore possible to observe that only the personal stressors (type A behavior, for example), cannot be lessened through an ethical and responsible management of persons. Persons management means, among other things, taking into consideration almost all of the stressors to decrease their impact. The American Institute of Stress estimates that work-related stress costs American companies more than US$300 billion per year (Bishara & Schipani, 2009). In fact, stress can lead to absenteeism, employee turnover, mistakes, reduced productivity, increased professional burnouts, lower morale, as well as higher risks of drug and alcohol use, violence at work, and harassment (Bishara & Schipani, 2009; Brown & Mitchell, 2010). While management often looks carefully at the costs related to their division, numerous hidden costs are not considered (Garman, Corbett, Grady, & Benesh, 2005). For example, according to O’Connell and Kung (2007), there are three main components associated with retention costs not often calculated: staffing, vacation, and training. Cascio (1999) defines four types of hidden costs: separation, replacement, training, and the difference in the performance between those who have left and their replacements. Few studies have measured these costs, but Hillmer, Hillmer, and McRoberts (2004) evaluate the “real costs” of turnover in call centers, which were major. However, even if it is obvious that employee turnover generates other types of hidden costs, the difficulty of evaluating them makes it also difficult to document them. Following this lead, recent studies have focused on the hidden costs of absenteeism, such as Cascio and Boudreau (2010). Even if many authors agree that there are costs generated by
presenteeism, this type of cost is even less examined than the first two we cited. The studies evaluating costs are sparse, because it is difficult to quantify the amount of money that organizations could save by reducing employee turnover, presenteeism, and other adverse effects of stressors (Bishara & Schipani, 2009). But these costs could nevertheless be estimated important, and HRM does not even acknowledge them most of the time. Person management tries to obtain estimates of all the costs and not only those traditionally considered.

**Articulating Different Logics Rather Than Shareholder Value Maximization**

Persons use points of view, ways of thinking, and values, which convey a genuine strategy and way of understanding organizational life. These different logic perspectives can sometimes converge, but they are frequently divergent, if not contradictory. Morgan (1986, as well as Burrell & Morgan, 1979), in presenting the political nature of the organization, underlines the three all-important ideologies that are in direct opposition within the organizational space, ideologies emphasizing the different types of logic that sustain persons as strategic actors. Therefore, the unitary vision, often fostered by owners and top managers, denies that there are differences in interests and power, and that conflicts are inherent in the organization of work. Unlike the previous perspective, the radical perspective challenges not only a difference in interests at work and power relationships but also the legitimacy of the claims made by leaders in market economies. The pluralist vision, which is sometimes seen as an awkward reformist perspective, favors the multiple stakeholder perspective. This view recognizes the plural nature of interests and forms of power in organizations and accepts the conflicting nature of the relationships between the protagonists that this entails. Yet, this perspective opens the door for an eventual agreement between the actors. Recently, Buren, Greenwood, and Sheenan (2011) examine the hypotheses behind the strategic management of the unitary perspective, which informs the conception of many HRM practitioners. Their analysis of HRM reflects Khurana’s (2007) insights for management as a whole. It is useful to remind the reader that Khurana, after having traced the history of major North American schools of management, was deeply concerned about the fact that the high ideals that had spurred on the creators of these schools had not resulted in a professionalization of management. On the contrary, given the alignment of the financial strategy on the valorization of shareholders’ assets since the early 1980s, these schools of management had become mercenary training camps. In addition, the idea of taking into account employees as primary stakeholders seems to have been abandoned, and the pluralist vision that recognizes the differences between organizational actors also appears, in practice, to have been dropped. In our view, the choice we face consists either of adopting the uncertain revolution implied by the radical partisans of change or a return to a revived pluralist view. We tend to favor the pluralist conception as a guide for person management as it appears to be grounded more solidly in business practices and from an ethical point of view.

**Conclusion**

Based on numerous comments about the inadequacies and limits of present-day HRM, in particular its alignment with strategic management, which tends to commodify humans to being in the sole service of maximizing shareholders’ assets, we proposed that the real nature of human “resources” must be urgently reconceptualized. It appears that human beings are not like other resources or assets of the organization. In this sense, the notion of the “person” provides us with an important and complex conception of the organizational actors, a conception, which can serve as the foundations of renewed practices. It may also point out to new directions in helping emancipate human beings through a more humanistic management. In that sense, persons management may also be seen as an ideal type in the Weberian sense. Even if it did not fully exist in reality, it serves as a guide to improve our practices.

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**Notes**

1. The plural of person is people in English. In Human Resources, including in the Canadian Government, people management is used, and not persons management. Terminologically, person is considered very impersonal and cold, and is just a term used in legal writing. However, people management possesses a meaning which does not convey what we are talking about here. Person in its singular and plural use to describe human beings in organization offer a more complex and nuance picture as Melé (2012) shows in a recent article.

2. For each domain, “popular” textbooks in a university setting make it possible to define the conception being transmitted; for example, in organizational behavior (McShane & Steen, 2008), organizational theory (Hodge, Anthony, & Gales, 2002), and strategic management (Dess, Lumpkin, & Eisner, 2009).

3. It could be argued that changing the name human resource management (HRM) for person management does not change anything in the field. We are in accord with the spirit of this comment. However, if we want to change something, we must start from somewhere. Language games are not innocuous and have the potential to change our thinking and our actions (see, for instance, Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Human beings in organizational setting have been characterized in many ways,
and this fact must be taken into account. Wren and Bedeian (2009) in outlining the evolution of managerial thought help us remember that we have talked in the past of people management, personnel management, the human factor, human relations, the social person, before settling for HRM where human beings (persons) are conceived primarily as assets (for the use of other human beings [persons]). In the same vein, Kaufman (2007) insists on the historical duality in coming to term with the human factor that is represented in the managerial tradition and the industrial relations (IR) school. Those strands fuse together in HRM around the idea that we need to go from a cost conception of persons in organization to an assets conception. HRM was in that sense viewed justly as a progress; however, the strategic shift of the 80s and 90s does not have delivered what was hope for. Suggesting “persons management” is a proposal to go beyond the ambiguity of HRM label.

4. The English translations in this text from French sources will be our own unless otherwise noted.

5. Moralization is imposing, controlling, and judging the moral behavior of others while not be constrained by the same rules. This offers no leeway for the person to use his own moral judgment, only rules to follow.

6. See the convincing demonstration of Bauman (1987, 1993, 1994) about the lack of faith in human morality not guided by “legislators,” but also his presentation of bureaucratic and business ethics hindrance to morality. “In other words, no one else but the moral person themselves must take responsibility for their own moral responsibility” (Bauman, 1994, p. 14).

7. See, for instance, Bauman (1989, 1994) for the links between modern bureaucracies and inhumanity.

8. For a more detailed presentation, see Dion and Fortier (2011, Chapter 7).

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**Author Biographies**

**Michel Fortier** is titular professor of business ethics in the Business Department of the University of Quebec (Rimouski) and founder of the master’s program in persons management. As a work sociologist, his main interests are in organization theory and complexity theory.

**Marie-Noëlle Albert** is titular professor at the Administration Department of the University of Quebec (Rimouski). She obtained her doctorate after 10 years as a manager in a multinational corporation and an entrepreneur. She is especially interested in the person notion, complexity theory, also in autobiographical methodology and the pragmatist constructivism paradigm in organizational studies.