

Psychologising the Subject: HRM, Commodification, and the Objectification of Labour

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Abstract

Economists have rightly observed that labour commodification is one of the defining characteristics of the market capitalist mode. In this contribution, however, we contend that while a traditional macroeconomic perspective goes some way towards explaining the nature of the employment relationship, it fails to acknowledge that commodification is a necessary but not sufficient condition for labour utilisation. Viewed through the lens of organisation theory, the main employer agenda regarding labour utilisation is that of 'human resource' objectification, rather than market commodification. We seek to demonstrate this by examining how, under contemporary 'human resource management' (HRM), labour management theory and practice have developed into a sophisticated project designed to psychologise the employee subject into a resource object. In line with objectification, it is a project through which management seek to render human capabilities, attitudes and emotions — the basis of the worker's status as a social and organisational subject — classifiable, measurable and, hence, more manipulable.

Introduction: The Argument in Overview

As a starting point, we wish to offer some *a priori* answers to what we believe are five questions that are of central interest to the theme of this special issue of *Economic and Labour Relations Review*:

1. *Is labour a commodity?* The assumption that human labour is (or should be) a marketised and freely traded 'factor of production' with the capitalist mode is one of the key precepts of classical and neo-classical labour economics. However, like much that passes for reality in this realm of academic knowledge, the textbook model fails to match the lived reality.
2. *Does capital want labour fully commodified?* Yes, this has been the aspiration of employers, management practitioners and theorists since the time of the first Industrial Revolution.

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3. *Is commodification all that capital wants or needs?* No, definitely not. Even a passing familiarity with the history of chattel slavery would demonstrate (e.g. Genovese 1976) that to assume that commodification is a sufficient condition for optimising labour value appropriation, reflects a naïvety about the world of work and the human dynamics of the workplace that cannot be allowed to stand.
4. *What else do employers really want?* They want human labour fully objectified — psychologically as well as physically. Through a process of systematic objectification, they want to have total control over workers' hearts and heads as well as their bodies. The underlying dynamic of the capitalist labour process is not market commodification *per se*; rather, it is labour objectification.
5. *Is objectification really attainable?* No, not under any mode where embodied, thinking and emotional labour is still necessary. Workers have their own individual and collective expectations and agendas, and these are most unlikely to be fully congruent with those of management or the employing organisation. This has not stopped management engaging in an ongoing search for congruence, and has meant that capital's objectification project has become more sophisticated over time.

In essence then, we argue that for employers, the primary agenda is not one of commodification but of objectification. Labour commodification is undoubtedly essential for the viability of market capitalism. Indeed, it may take on added significance at particular moments such as periods of skills shortage, but it is not enough. However, the most proximal, intimate and (potentially) insidious facet of labour utilisation, we suggest, is management's desire to transform fellow human beings into value-conferring objects at workplace scale. Commodification gives us labour as an individualised 'exchange' object ('labour power') external to the organisation. Yet, as both structuralist labour process theorists (Legge 1995b; Thompson and McHugh 2002; Watson 2004) and post-structuralist critical management studies writers (Townley 1994; Willmott 1994; Grant et al 2004) contend, it is what goes on within the workplace that really matters: namely, the process of attempted objectification. What lies behind the managerial ideal of human labour as an individualised 'resource' object is the employer's drive to control employee heads and hearts, skill and effort.

As both the classical and radical schools of economic thought acknowledge, labour is a commodity like no other: it thinks, feels and (re)acts. People who happen to be categorised as 'employees' are, first and foremost, social subjects. The fundamental (and ongoing) management dilemma thus has to do with how best to objectify the subject at the point of production.

By way of example: at law, chattel slaves were certainly tradable human commodities; but as the US social historian Eugene Genovese (1976) has documented so movingly, both the slave-owners and the slaves knew only too well that the real struggle in the Deep South was not over who won the slave auction but over who dominated effort and identity within the workplace. Let us not forget that slaves resisted, too. They practiced collective work effort restriction (or 'system-

atic soldiering' as it was later termed); and they knew how to both subvert and accommodate owner coercion and white racist culture. Our argument is that, in these respects at least, the distinction between the slave mode and the so-called 'free labour' is more one of degree than kind.

It is important here not to confuse management intent with workplace reality — what we are dealing with are two forms of managerial fiction: 'commodity fictions' (Polanyi 1944), and 'objectification fictions.' Labour objectification is an employer aspiration, not an accomplished reality. Equally, it is important to acknowledge that management's objectivisation agenda is simultaneously elusive, relational and discursive in nature. It is an ongoing project in which discourse — that is, talk and text intended to achieve a particular social purpose — plays a central role. A highly pertinent observation in this regard comes from two critical management studies writers — Matts Alvesson and Stan Deetz (1999: f.p. 1996). In discussing objectification, they remark:

A 'worker' is an object (as well as a subject) in the world, but neither God nor nature make a 'worker.' Two things are required for a 'worker' to exist: a language and set of practices which makes possible unities and divisions among people, and something to which such unities and divisions can be applied. The questions 'What is a worker really?', 'What is the essence of a worker?', 'What makes one a worker?' are not answerable by looking at the something that can be described as a worker, but are products of the linguistic and non-linguistic practices that make this something into an object. In this sense, a worker is not an isolated thing. To have a worker already implies a division of labor, the presence of management ('nonworkers'). The 'essence' of a worker is not the properties the 'object' contains but sets of relational systems including the division of labor. The focus on the object and object properties is the mistake; the attention should be on the relational systems which are not simply in the world but are a human understanding of the world, are discursive or textual. (Alvesson and Deetz 1999: 201)

Accordingly, it is appropriate to see the employee-object as a work-in-progress — both socially and discursively — rather than as an accomplished fact. However, for all of its insight, the perspective offered by Alvesson and Deetz is open to challenge in one vital respect. While it may be 'wrong' for researchers to conceptualise employees as a resource objects, this is precisely how employers/managers prefer to perceive them. The wider point here is that labour is simultaneously resource object and social subject; both structured and structuring; both embodied and discursive. Acknowledging the indeterminacy of labour helps us understand why two hundred-plus years of managerial aspiration about labour objectification remains unfulfilled — and why it may never be fully accomplished. We argue, though, that the objectification project is so central to managers' own social being that, without it, their own role and identity would become meaningless. Our argument, in essence, is that management's pursuit of the objectification agenda continues unabated — precisely because it

has to. As we hope to demonstrate, it has also taken a particular turn in recent decades, especially under the rubric of ‘human resource management’.

Propositions and Precepts

Building on our opening remarks, there are two main propositions that we wish to advance and discuss:

- *Proposition 1:* The constant in the employment relationship is not so much labour commodification but the pursuit of labour objectification. As numerous critical management studies writers (Townley 1994; Janssens and Steyaert 1999; Watson 2004; Legge 2005a) have observed, the very nomenclature of ‘human resource management’ betrays its objectification agenda. Indeed, as Keegan and Boselie (2006) imply, those of us who research and teach in this area are no less complicit in this project than anyone else who draws a livelihood from disseminating the discourse of ‘HRM’.
- *Proposition 2:* The history of recent labour management thought *and* practice is best understood as an ever-more sophisticated attempt to psychologise the employee subject into a resource object. This flows from the perhaps belated recognition by management theorists that the employee is not simply a ‘hand’; s/he also has a head and a heart. Accordingly, the latest turn in management’s objectification project has been to seek to render human attitudes and emotions — the basis of the worker’s status as a social and organisational *subject* — classifiable, measurable and, hence, more manipulable. This is certainly true of the seemingly employee-centred labour management concepts and practices of the past 20 years that have been labeled, variously, as ‘soft’ HRM, ‘high commitment’ management or ‘high involvement’ management.

Precepts

Before elaborating on these propositions, reflexive rigor demands that we declare the ontological and epistemological precepts that inform our argument.

In line with the work of E. P. Thompson (1963), Alvesson and Deetz (1999) and Norman Fairclough (1995, 2005), we believe a cautious combination of critical realism and social constructionism, coupled with discourse analytic method, provides a means of illuminating and interpreting the deeper aspects of continuity and change in employers’ labour objectification project. We suggest that the key to such an understanding here lies in examining discursive practices — talk, text, imagery — directed to accomplishing the worker as a ‘human resource’ object. Discourse is the means by which social meaning is constructed, conferred and contested (Fairclough 1995; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; van-Dijk 1997; Philips and Hardy 2002; Grant et al 2004). Moreover, it ‘acts as a powerful ordering force’ (Alvesson and Karreman 2000: 1127), ruling in certain ways of thinking and acting and ruling out certain others (Hall 2001).

Our analytical approach also makes use of two particular conceptual frameworks: First, Barbara Townley’s (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1998, 2003) framework for understanding the objectification imperative in contemporary HRM practice;

and second, the framework for analysing HRM and the dimensions of organisational discourse proposed by Grant and his colleagues (Grant and Shields 2002, 2006; Grant et al 2004).

Drawing on the work of French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault, Townley argues that human resource management discourse and practice is best understood in terms of the interplay of power, knowledge and subjectivity. Managers seek simultaneously to empower themselves and subjugate the managed. They endeavour to achieve this by deploying discourses and practices that seek to individualise, objectify and discipline workers, principally by endeavouring to shape worker subjectivity and concept of self and work reality by means of complex regimes of surveillance (the 'panopticon'), employee and job classification and ordering ('taxonomy'), employee and job measurement ('mathesis') and, hence, knowledge construction. Thought of in these terms: 'HRM ... constitutes a discipline and a discourse ... HRM serves to render organisations and their participants calculable arenas, offering, through a variety of technologies, the means by which activities and individuals become knowable and governable' (Townley 1993a: 526).

Following Phillips and Hardy (1997), Grant and Shields (2006) identify three main discursive dimensions:

1. Discursive concepts (e.g. management ideas, including 'human resource management')
2. Discursive objects (e.g. the embodied performative 'human resource')
3. Discursive subjects (e.g. sense-making organisational agents, including management practitioners, workers and customers/clients)

Discursive objects are the means by which discursive concepts are accomplished socially and organisationally. Thus, the living 'human resource' is the object onto which the ideas and ideals of 'human resource management' are projected with a view to the direct enactment of these ideas and ideals. However, the 'human resource' defies physical objectification precisely because — unlike, say, financial or informational resources — s/he is also a discursive subject; that is, s/he thinks and feels and engages in sense-making and behaviour in their own right.

In a very real sense, the thrust of recent labour management thought and practice has been to seek to objectify the worker-subject by means of various devices for measuring and classifying 'human resource' capabilities, attitudes and emotions themselves. Put simply, psychologising the subject in this way is the defining characteristic of the contemporary objectification imperative.

This is not to suggest that it is only recently that management practitioners and theorists have discovered that workers have brains and hearts — as well as hands; nor that these facets need to be formally conceptualised and measured in order to be controlled and directed. There is a long and well-rehearsed history of managerialist interest in mapping and measuring worker motor skills, mental processes and emotions; from Taylorism/Scientific Management, through Human Relations, to Neo-Human Relations and beyond (for historical overviews, see: Rose 1978; Wren 1994). Our point though, is that we are now in an

era where the goal of psychological objectification is occupies centre stage in labour management thought and prescription.

With these general points in mind, we now turn to consider in more detail some of the elements of contemporary labour management thought and practice that focus explicitly on objectifying the 'human resource' subject. In doing so, we reject an approach which posits a structural distinction between management theory and management practice. While such a distinction may have historical validity, in the contemporary context it is unsustainable. Information technology has accelerated dramatically the pace at which management ideas, generated in either the academy or industry (or, as is now commonly the case, in both simultaneously), are 'mainstreamed' and either adopted or adapted by human resource practitioners. This is not to suggest that all management ideas born in the academy permeate into practice. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that application is the ultimate test of conceptual resonance and relevance — and all of the management ideas discussed below have resonated in the field of practice.

Psychologising the 'Human Resource': Objectifying the Worker-Subject in Contemporary Labour Management Thought and Practice

As a distinct body of management thought, 'Human Resource Management' (HRM) emerged in the United States in the early 1980s as a response to the perceived inadequacies of existing labour management practices, particularly the top-down bureaucratic practices characteristic of the 'personnel management' practices of the 1960s and 1970s. As with its Human Relations and Neo-Human Relations antecedents (Rose 1978; Gillespie 1991; Wren 1994), HRM discourse is essentially the work of American and British academic writers, although its dissemination also owes much to the presence of a relatively new set of discursive agents, namely management consultants and popular management writers (Huczynski 1993).

'Soft' HRM

While the concept of HRM involves some broad and commonly applied elements — perhaps most importantly the proposition that 'human resources' *are* the critical ingredients for organisational effectiveness — there are also a host of variants. The discursive concept of HRM might be best thought of as a terrain comprising a number of competing and co-existing ideas and perspectives, of which the 'hard'-'soft' dichotomy is perhaps the most commonly used and understood. In the 'soft' or 'developmental humanist' conception of HRM (Legge 1995a: 35, 1995b: 66–67) employees are presented as valued resources, or even as resourceful humans, warranting significant 'development' and 'involvement'. In the 'hard' conception, the employee is presented as a strategic resource object 'to be used dispassionately and in a formally rational manner' (Storey 1992: 26). Contributors to the 'hard' version, including writers from the 'Michigan School' (e.g. Fombrun, Tichy and Devanna 1984; Schuler and Jackson 1987), tend to conceptualise the employee subject in narrow instrumental terms, especially in terms of material need satisfaction and extrinsic motivation. This is in contrast to

those associated with the 'soft' or 'Harvard School', who regard the classification, measurement and management of employee cognitive ability, value-orientation, perception and emotion as *the* pivotal tasks in the HRM project. It is only the 'soft' version that accentuates desired attitudes such as value-alignment, affective commitment, mutual trust, intrinsic motivation, felt-fairness and global satisfaction. Yet, there is also an undercurrent of historical continuity here, for while it is true that the 'soft' HRM model psychologises the subject in more sophisticated terms, in essence, the goal is still to objectify the subject so as to more effectively manage that subjectivity as the means to achieving a high performance end.

In this section, by way of illustration, we focus on four facets of psychological objectification within 'soft' HRM: firstly, the measurement and management employee 'engagement'; secondly, the application to practice of the concept of the employee 'psychological contract'; thirdly, and relatedly, the application of 'organisational justice' concepts; and fourthly, the use of applied psychology in the form of the psychometric profiling of 'personality traits'. The central proposition here is that while the application of these discursive concepts does entail a widening of the degree of recognition accorded to the employee as a discursive subject, the underlying intent remains one of objectification for the purpose of more effective labour utilisation.

Employee 'Engagement'

In recent years, the concept of 'engagement' has emerged in HR practitioner discourse as the key signifier of the optimal employee state of mind. An 'engaged' employee is one who is 'committed', 'motivated' and 'satisfied'; having an 'engaged' workforce has become a hallmark of 'employer of choice' status; and monitoring and improving engagement levels has become a core concern of the HR profession, with traditional employee surveys assuming new significance and meaning as barometers of engagement (Macey and Schneider 2008).

The facet most central to the engagement construct is that of 'commitment'. As Guest (1987), Legge (1995a, 1995b: 174–175) and others have observed, 'commitment' is one of the defining norms of 'soft' HRM, and it was the Harvard School's Richard Walton who first asserted its centrality to effective HRM. Building on McGregor's Theory X/Theory Y model, Walton (1985: 77), posited a moral dualism between 'control' and 'commitment':

... workers respond best — and most creatively — not when they are tightly controlled by management, placed in narrowly defined jobs, and treated like an unwelcome necessity, but, instead, when they are given broader responsibilities, encouraged to contribute, and helped to take satisfaction in their work.

Advocates of the commitment model contend that the purpose of HRM practice should be to 'shape desired employee behaviour and attitudes by forging psychological links between organisational and employee goals' (Arthur 1994: 672). In essence, this logic constitutes the core of all 'high performance' and 'high involvement' models of HRM (Beer et al 1985; Walton 1985; Lincoln and Kalleberg 1990; Lawler 1992; Pfeffer 1994, 1998; Huselid 1995; Meyer and Allen

1997). Involving and engaging employees in their work stands to elicit stronger task motivation and a greater degree of discretionary effort or 'organisational citizenship behaviour' (e.g. Moorman et al 1993; Motowidlo 2000; Podsakoff et al 2000).

However, in the commitment literature the worker remains a 'resource' object, albeit of a selectively developed and empowered kind, while the identity-selecting/shaping intent remains equally clear. This is highlighted by Lawler's remarkably candid assertions (1992: 107) regarding the type of employee ideally-suited to a high involvement approach. It is an approach, he suggests, which requires:

... individuals who value internal rewards and the kinds of satisfaction that comes from doing challenging work well. Not all people in the work force have these characteristics, and even those who do may not look to the workplace for their intrinsic satisfactions and sense of accomplishment. ... Those individuals who do not look to their work for this kind of satisfaction simply cannot be tolerated in an organization that designs work to involve employees. They are in a very real sense uncontrollable because they do not respond to the rewards that are counted on to create a motivating work situation for most individuals.

Here, the discourse reveals a sharp moral dualism: between the fully-committed, intrinsically-motivated organisational citizen, and the instrumentally-motivated time-server. Such a position also leads inexorably to the systematic use of personality assessment and the application of deep 'competencies' criteria to staff selection, development, and reward practices. These are but the most recent instances of the longstanding managerialist impetus to measure, classify, essentialise and psychologise the worker-subject.

The 'Psychological Contract'

Many academic commentators writing with the 'soft' HR genre (e.g. Robinson et al 1994; Herriot and Pemberton 1995; Hiltrop 1995; Rousseau 1995, 1998a, 1998b; Kessler and Undy 1996; Makin 1996; Robinson 1996; Guest 1998; Albrecht and Travaglione 2003) have suggested that the 'psychological contract' is the key mediating variable between HR practices, on the one hand, and employee attitudes, behaviour and performance, on the other. While the notion of the 'psychological contract' can be traced to the writings of Argyris, Levinson, Schein and the social exchange theorists of the 1960s (Anderson and Schalk 1998; Conway and Briner 2005: 7–14), the concept has only recently found its way into the mainstream of academic and practitioner thinking about the employment relationship. This is due largely to its 'seminal reconceptualisation' in the late 1980s by the US organisational behaviour academic Denise Rousseau (Rousseau 1989; Conway and Briner 2005: 14–15; Cullinane and Dundon 2006).

The psychological contract has to do with the perceptions and expectations by each party as to what they and the other party have undertaken to give and to receive in exchange. Following its reappearance in the mainstream management literature in the 1990s, the basis and scope of the psychological contract was the subject of considerable debate (Conway and Briner 2005: 20–36). However,

there is now a broad consensus that while management is interested in shaping the content of the implicit employment 'deal' by means of an 'espoused' psychological contract, it is the nature of the psychological contract (or contracts) embraced by employees that is of primary importance and interest. Being perceptual and subjective, the employee psychological contract is characterised by limited rationality, in that it reflects the employee's incomplete, selective and possibly distorted view of the basis of relationship and the exchange or 'deal' (Rousseau and Ho 2000: 277–279). Even if promises are made clearly, explicitly and consistently, this does not guarantee that both parties will share, or continue to share, a common understanding of all contract terms. The possibility of perceptual incongruence increases the likelihood of contractual disagreement and disharmony — or 'breach'. Further, since psychological contracts are unwritten, subjective and transient, analysing and influencing them pose significant challenges for management (Rousseau 1989; Robinson and Rousseau 1994). Herein lies a major management dilemma, however, since the attitudinal and behavioural consequences of psychological contract mismanagement may be disastrous for an organisation.

From a practitioner perspective, the notion of the psychological contract helps to explain why, provided core management and employee expectations are met and promises and obligations are fulfilled, the employment relationship may be positive, harmonious and productive. Conversely, if expectations or promises and obligations are not met, the perceived contractual 'breach' may give rise to negative work attitudes, behaviour and relationships. A contractual breach occurs when one party experiences a discrepancy between the actual fulfilment of obligations by the other party and what that party has previously promised to do; that is, a perceived breach of promise and trust (Robinson 1996). The perceived breach may either be short-lived, or develop into an enduring sense of injustice, betrayal or 'violation' (Robinson and Rousseau 1994; Pate, Martin and McGoldrick 2003). Breach may impair key attitudinal drivers, including satisfaction, commitment and motivation. Violation may produce a range of negative work behaviour ranging from lower levels of discretionary effort to higher absenteeism, sabotage and exit (Morrison and Robinson 1994; Robinson 1996; Anderson and Schalk 1998: 643–644; Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler 2002; Conway and Briner 2005: 63–87).

In sum, what this overarching construct does is to cast the worker as a trust-seeking resource object. According to Guest (1998), the core cognitions of the psychological contract are those of generalised trust, felt-fairness and honouring the deal. Significantly, this concept is now beginning to be taken up in the practitioner literature (e.g. Armstrong and Stephens 2005: 85–88).

'Organisational Justice'

Fairness perceptions, and how such perceptions are 'managed', are also seen as being central to the state of the employee psychological contract. Also known as 'organisational justice' perceptions, these feelings of fairness or unfairness are widely acknowledged as playing a central role in the shaping of employee outlook and behaviour. The growing body of academic literature on 'organisa-

tional justice' (Konovsky 2000; Colquitt, Greenberg and Zapata-Phelan 2005) is concerned primarily with employee perceptions of fairness and with how such perceptions can be 'managed' in the organisation's interests.

As a discursive concept, the 'organisational justice' construct can be thought of as having two distinct but overlapping dimensions: 'procedural justice' and 'distributive justice' (Beugre 1998). Procedural justice has to do with the perceived fairness of employment decision-making processes, including those associated with performance assessment and decisions relating to reward allocation. Distributive justice perceptions are those related to the felt-fairness of allocative decision-making outcomes (as opposed to decisional processes). Clearly, reward outcomes are especially pertinent to distributive felt-fairness and, in particular, to feelings of reward injustice and dissatisfaction.

These managerialist notions of 'justice' are not to do with 'fairness' in an absolute ethical or legal sense; rather, the organisational justice construct is concerned, first and foremost, with the causes and performance consequences of employee attitudes and feelings about what is and isn't 'fair'. Accordingly, the organisational justice construct is also concerned quite instrumentally with objectifying the worker-subject. Fairness perceptions can and should be managed, not for ethical reasons *per se*, but because felt-fairness is assumed to be determinant of a positive 'psychological contract', strong 'engagement' and, hence, high individual effort and performance.

'Personality Traits'

While some critics have questioned the relevance and worth of personality constructs and assessment to human resource practice (e.g. Spillane and Martin 2005; Morgeson et al 2007a, 2007b), personality profiling, in its many guises has, in the last two decades come to exemplify the influence of applied psychology over labour management thinking and practice. To exponents, the profiling of personality traits promises a more rigorous means of determining an applicant's suitability for the role and the organisation than more traditional but less scientific methods of staff selection such as interviewing.

The most widely accepted and applied taxonomy of personality 'factors' or 'traits' is the 'five-factor model'. Also known as the 'Big Five', this identifies five primary factors that are said to underlie personality, namely emotional stability, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Of these, conscientiousness is frequently nominated as the most valid predictor of job performance across many occupational categories (Barrick and Mount 1991; Mount and Barrick 1998; Hurtz and Donovan 2000). Conscientiousness is also commonly seen as having a positive association with citizenship behaviour (Konovsky and Organ 1996; Hatrup, O'Connell and Wingate 1998; Hogan et al 1998). More recently, the concept of 'emotional intelligence' has been added to the repertoire of trait-like employee attributes (Ashkanasy and Daus 2005; Conte 2005; Goleman 2001).

While not wishing to dismiss lightly the wealth of scientific research in this domain, personality profiling, we contend, can equally validly be interpreted as

an archetypal instance of employee measurement and classification. Indeed, it is perhaps the ultimate exercise in the attempted psychological objectification of the employee subject.

Conclusion

In capitalist modes, commodification and objectification are parallel social processes. Commodification is a defining characteristic of the market capitalist mode, but it is best understood as a necessary rather than sufficient condition for optimal control over 'human resources'. From the employer perspective, the immediate need is to transform human beings into value-conferring objects at workplace scale. Commodification gives us labour as an individualised 'exchange' object ('labour power') external to the organisation, and the marketisation of human labour is a vital element of capitalist production. Yet it is what goes on within the workplace that matters most. What lies behind the managerial ideal of human labour as an individualised 'resource' object is the drive to control employee productive knowledge, skill, attitudes, emotion and effort at the point of production.

Like the ideal of commodification and free labour market exchange, the objectification ideal is a perpetual aspiration that management is predestined to pursue in order to legitimate its own social and organisational being. Management's pursuit of the objectification agenda continues unabated — precisely because it has to. As with labour commodification, labour objectification remains a work-in-progress at all scales: globally, locally and organisationally.

We have shown that the objectification imperative has taken a particular turn in recent decades, especially under the rubric of 'human resource management'. The history of recent labour management thought and practice is best understood as an ever-more sophisticated attempt to psychologise the employee subject into a resource object. The latest turn in management's objectification project has been to seek to render human cognition and affects — the basis of the worker's status as a social and organisational *subject* — classifiable, measurable and, hence, more manipulable. This is certainly true of the seemingly employee-centred labour management concepts and practices of the past twenty years.

What is particularly noticeable is that it is precisely those iterations of 'soft' HRM which appear to be most academically detached and cognisant of workers as organisational subjects. HRM-related concepts of employee 'engagement', the employee 'psychological contract', and 'organisational justice', as well as constructs and practices from the realm of applied psychology and psychometrics, seek to objectify the worker subject in the most intimate of ways. The classification and measurement of employee 'traits', values, attitudes and emotions — or the psychologising of the employee-subject — is not an end in itself but merely the latest and most systematic means to management securing control of labour. In short, while the worker is cast as a thinking, feeling, wellness-seeking organisational agent, the ultimate aim for management, as agents of capitalism, remains that of 'human resource' objectification.

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