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Institutional theory and HRM: A new look

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ABSTRACT

The context of HRM is important but undertheorized (Paauwe, 2009) and subsequently underresearched (Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2014). We offer two recent perspectives of institutional theory—institutional logics and institutional work—as theoretical lenses through which scholars can explore the influence of institutional context on HRM and more intriguingly the influence of HRM professionals on their institutional contexts. Though others have introduced institutional theory to HRM scholarship (e.g. Paauwe & Boselie, 2003), we bring a conceptualization of institutional theory that reflects its advances over the last fifteen years, advances highly relevant to HRM scholars. While previous conceptualizations of institutional theory focus on the direct constraint of institutions on HRM, institutional logics emphasizes complexity, multilevel dynamics, and agency. Similarly, institutional work addresses agency at the day-to-day level, exploring how actors create, maintain, and disrupt the institutional contexts in which they are embedded. Directions for HRM research are discussed.

1. Introduction

The field of HRM has been criticized for its absence of theoretical foundations (Ferris et al., 1998; Wright & McMahan, 1992). Though tremendous progress has been made in the decades since those early calls for more theory, HRM scholars are still quick to point out areas with pronounced theoretical lacunae (e.g. Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005; Hesketh & Fleetwood, 2006; Murphy, Klotz, & Kreiner, 2017; Paauwe, 2009; Wright & Ulrich, 2017).

One area requiring greater attention is the context of HRM (Jackson et al., 2014; Murphy et al., 2017; Paauwe, 2009). Though speaking specifically to organizational context, Ferris and his coauthors (Ferris et al., 1998) argue that context is necessary to understand the nature and effectiveness of HRM systems and that doing so requires a departure from simple rationality to attention to symbolic and political processes, the latter an argument consistent with some seminal works of organization theory (Cyert & March, 1963; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). While their theorizing is focused within the organization, Ferris et al. conclude by highlighting the importance of the macro context in which organizations are embedded. Paauwe and Boselie (2007); Paauwe, 2009) expand on the need to focus on the macro context of HRM. They point out that many factors which shape HRM practices are external to the organization and thus macrolevel theorizing is necessary to understand how and why HRM practices respond to external pressures. To address this theoretical need, we suggest institutional theory. Based on the institutional theory perspective, “the how” and “the why” are not simply a matter of adhering to environmental prescriptions but also a function of the environment shaping the identities, values, and schemas of HR professionals. Institutional theory also addresses the means by which HRM can, in turn, influence those environmental pressures.

We are not the first to suggest that the institutional theory perspective be applied to HRM. Wright and McMahan (1992), Barringer and Milkovich (1998), and Paauwe and Boselie (2003) each offered institutional theory as an important theoretical lens for HRM research. Despite this, institutional theory has not gained significant traction in HRM research (Boselie et al., 2005; Paauwe, 2009). However, institutional theory has evolved tremendously from its early form, in which institutions were iron cages constraining agency and imposing isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997) with little opportunity for agency beyond

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reaction (Oliver, 1991) and little opportunity for research below the field level (Powell & Colyvas, 2008). In its current form, however, we believe that institutional theory is highly amenable to HR scholars interested in understanding the macro, meso and even microlevel contexts of HRM, with these contexts not only serving as independent and moderating variables but also, with institutional theory's embrace of agency, as dependent variables as well.

Institutional theory now foregrounds agency, a characteristic enabled by institutional complexity (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011; Kraatz & Block, 2017; Seo & Creed, 2002) and skilled actors capable of navigating and influencing the social construction of institutions themselves (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Dorado, 2005). Institutional theory at present provides a toolkit with which to understand how organizations and individuals are able to escape or redirect the normative, coercive, and mimetic isomorphic forces identified by DiMaggio and Powell, forces which still heavily feature as constraints in HRM scholarship. Furthermore, with the rise of the institutional logics perspective (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012) and a new focus on the microfoundations of institutions (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Powell & Rerup, 2017), institutional theory is multilevel, with robust research streams at the field, organizational, intraorganizational, and even individual levels. As a result, it provides a vocabulary which allows researchers to explore the top-down and bottom-up flows of influence between an organization's social environment and the individual within the organization, a direction of increasing importance to HRM scholars (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Wright & Ulrich, 2017).

The intended contribution of this paper is to close the gap between the present state of institutional theory and the way in which institutional theory is currently used in HRM scholarship. We argue that closing this gap is important because institutional theory at present is much more conducive to studying the phenomena of interest to HRM scholars than it was in the past. To do this, we first review a series of conceptual papers which integrate institutional theory into HRM, providing a foundation for the current state of integration. We follow this with a thorough literature review of institutional theory within HRM research, dividing past scholarship into dominant themes, themes which almost entirely reflect the institutional theory of the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, we end with a consideration of the implications of current institutional theory for HRM scholarship. In particular, we consider the implications of two increasingly important institutional perspectives, institutional logics and institutional work.

2. The old neoinstitutionalism

Neo-institutional theory is primarily associated with the idea that an organization's institutional—normative, cognitive, and regulatory—environment influences the organizations embedded within it such that organizations become more similar than different, a state described as isomorphism (Scott, 2014). This view of institutional theory dominated its study until the early 2000s. The immediate origins of institutional theory can be traced to two papers: Meyer & Rowan's, 1977 “Institutionalized organizations: formal structure as myth and ceremony” and DiMaggio & Powell's, 1983 “The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields.” While institutional theory has evolved tremendously over the last four decades, the propositions put forth in the two works are still widely accepted (and rightly so) and remain the primordial foundations of much institutional scholarship.

Meyer and Rowan present an alternative to simplistic rational approaches of understanding organizational decision making, arguing that rather than being motivated by efficiency, organizations are motivated by legitimacy in their adoption of institutional myths, or rationalized institutional elements, from their environment. Subsequently, organizations are constrained as they face a narrow range of legitimate actions, and these shared constraints then lead to isomorphism, wherein organizations sharing an environment begin to resemble each other to a great degree. DiMaggio and Powell constructed arguments at the level of the organizational field, extending Meyer and Rowan's work by proposing mechanisms by which isomorphism occurs. Coercive isomorphism occurs as a result of formal expectations (e.g. laws and regulations) and informal expectations (e.g. large companies engaging in CSR) and the formal and informal sanctions (e.g. fines, loss of legitimacy, etc) that occur when those expectations are not met. Normative isomorphism describes the rules, routines, norms, and values which get codified and diffused as work becomes professionalized. Universities, professional associations, and consulting groups are the major mechanisms of normative isomorphism, and the degree of isomorphism occurring as a result of normative pressures is dependent on the influence of those normative organizations on the industry or profession. Mimetic isomorphism occurs as organizations seek to reduce search costs in the face of uncertainty (Cyert & March, 1963) or as practices become so diffused they are adopted by default (March, 1981) and a failure to adopt results in a loss of cognitive legitimacy, or taken-for-grantedness (Suchman, 1995).

Over the next decade and a half, a broad selection of institutional work helped establish the institutional theory most prevalent in HRM scholarship. Introducing institutional change, Tolbert and Zucker (1983) observed that the early diffusion of civil service reform was driven by formal coercive mechanisms (regulations) while in the later stages diffusion was motivated by informal coercive mechanisms (legitimacy pressures). Oliver (1991) provided a typology of strategic responses available to organizations within an institutional environment and in 1992 (Oliver, 1992) a description of deinstitutionalization, a condition in which institutional forces may weaken and institutional change occurs. Drawing on the work of Max Weber and Talcott Parsons, Suchman (1995) is the most widely cited work on institutional legitimacy, elucidating three types: moral legitimacy (legitimacy accrued as a social entity is consistent with prevailing moral or ethical values), pragmatic legitimacy (legitimacy accrued as an entity provides some benefit to an evaluating audience), and cognitive legitimacy (achieved as a structure or practice becomes so commonplace that it becomes taken-for-granted as a social fact). That same year, Scott (1995) published the first edition of his book, Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities. Within it, he presents a framework to understand the content of institutions and sources of isomorphism: the regulative pillar (laws, regulations, etc), the normative pillar (socially held norms and values pertaining to appropriate behavior), and the cultural-cognitive pillar (identities, schemas, scripts, etc).

These works are the foundations of what is often conceived of when non-institutional theorists think of institutional theory. They reflect what in the mid-1990s was described as new institutionalism or neoinstitutionalism (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997; Selznick, 1996) and what we, for the purpose of this paper, describe as the old neoinstitutionalism. These works and the works they have inspired largely focus on constraint and the mechanisms of constraint (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995; Suchman, 1995; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983) or organizational and field level influences on that constraint (Oliver, 1991, 1992). As discussed in the subsequent sections, it is this foundational conceptualization of institutional theory which is most prevalent in HRM scholarship.

3. Reviewing institutional theory in HRM scholarship

In order to assess the current state of institutional theory in HRM scholarship, we conducted a thorough search of prior literature. First, we reviewed all articles including "institutional theory" or "institutions" in the abstract or keywords in the following journals: Human Resource Management, Human Resource Management Journal, Human Resource Management Review, and International Journal of Human Resource Management. By impact factor, these journals are the most influential within HRM scholarship. We then supplemented this with two additional searches in a selection of journals all classified as 4 s in the Association of Business School (ABS) journal rankings; the journals represent general management as well as organization theory and international management, both fields in which institutional theory is often used and HRM is potentially studied. We reviewed all articles with "institutional theory" or "institutions" in the abstract or keywords and "human resources" in the abstract or keywords in the following journals: Academy of Management Review, Academy of Management Journal, Administrative Science Quarterly, British Journal of Management, Human Relations, Journal of International Business Studies, Journal of Management, Journal of Management Studies, Journal of World Business, Organization Science, and Organization Studies. The same search in the same journals was conducted, replacing "human resources" with specific HRM topics, such as compensation, hiring, or training in the keywords. Excluded were articles which dealt with CEO compensation with a clear strategy orientation (did not cite HR journals) and articles which drew on economic institutionalism, citing North (1990), as opposed to sociological institutionalism, citing DiMaggio and Powell (1983) or Meyer and Rowan (1977).

In reviewing the articles, the first author generated six themes (see Table 2 further below). The third author then read a random selection of 25 articles, using the same search criteria, from Personnel Review, Human Resource Development Quarterly, Journal of Business Research, and Group and Organization Management to confirm that there were no additional themes which addressed the intersection of institutional theory and HRM scholarship. These journals are all classified as ABS 3 s or are ABS 2 HRM journals. Our inclusion of these additional articles reflected our desire to cast a wide net in order to comprehensively discuss the way in which institutional theory is used by HRM scholars. Because the purpose of this second search was merely to confirm that the themes generated through the first search were exhaustive, the third author only reviewed 25 articles rather than every article from the second search. After 25 articles were reviewed without a new theme emerging, we concluded our six themes were comprehensive and captured much of the current state of institutional theory in HRM scholarship.

The six themes generally all fit within the previously described conceptualization of institutional theory (the old neoinstitutionalism). However, several recent papers were fairly consistent with recent conceptualizations of institutional theory and are discussed later in this paper.

Overall, 64 articles from the first search were identified based on the search criteria (see Table 1). Overall, the search and review process lead to two conclusions. First, relative to other fields of management research (e.g., entrepreneurship, strategy, international business), there is little work done in HRM scholarship which draws on institutional theory. We believe this may be the case due to institutional theory's focus on macrolevel phenomena as well as the central role constraint plays in the theory. Second, the perspective which is drawn upon reflects a dated approach to institutional theory, one which perhaps does not seem to provide much utility to an HRM scholar. In contrast, our contention is that the present state of institutional theory offers much more to HRM scholars than the prior state.

3.1. Prior conceptual integrations

Institutional theory has been tremendously successful in its influence on other fields of organizational scholarship (Glynn et al., 2016), and we found three conceptual papers seeking to integrate institutional theory into the study of HRM. Each broadly reflects the foundational understanding of institutional theory, consistent with the findings of the literature review.

Both Wright and McMahan (1992) and Barringer and Milkovich (1998) introduce institutional theory to HRM scholarship in order to address a perceived theoretical lacuna in the field. Wright and McMahan suggest institutional theory provides a strong framework through which to understand the determinants of HRM practices, arguing that not all HR practices are the result of rational decision making based on organizational goals and that some are a reflection of outside influence. Drawing on Scott (1987), they describe four institutional mechanisms by which HRM practices are influenced by the institutional environment: 1) laws and regulations, such as the EEO regulations, 2) seeking authorization or legitimation from superordinate entities, such as pursuing accreditation, 3) outside rewards, such as quality awards, and 4) imitation of others as a means to appear legitimate. Though they do not reference DiMaggio and Powell (1983), their arguments map onto the three different isomorphic forces, coercive (1, 2, 3), normative (2, 3) and mimetic (4). Similarly, Barringer and Milkovich (1998), using the adoption of flexible benefit plans as an example, make two propositions about mimetic forces and three propositions about coercive forces.

Paauwe and Boselie (2003) argue explicitly that institutional theory should feature more prominently in strategic human resource

Table 1
Summary of institutional theory in HRM scholarship.

Study	Journal	Study type	Summary of the application of institutional theory
Arthur, 2003	Academy of Management Journal	Quantitative	The adoption of work-family initiatives increases shareholder returns due to the legitimacy of such initiatives.
Bakuwa & Mamman, 2012	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Quantitative	A lack of participation in relevant interorganizational activities (normative and mimetic isomorphism) inhibits the adoption of HIV/AIDS workplace policies.
Barringer & Milkovich, 1998	Academy of Management Review	Conceptual	Mimetic and coercive isomorphism influence an organization's decision to adopt flexible benefit plans.
Beamond, Farndale, & Härtel, 2016	Journal of World Business	Conceptual	Successful MNC to subsidiary transfer of corporate talent management strategies is contingent on an MNCs ability to assess and navigate local institutional environments.
Belizon et al., 2013	Human Resource Management Journal	Quantitative	The home institutional environment influences the degree of HR autonomy an MNC affords its subsidiary.
Beszter, Ackers, & Hislop, 2015	Human Resource Management Journal	Qualitative	Collective bargaining in the UK is resilient to change due to its institutionalization as well as coercive institutional pressures.
Björkman et al., 2007	Journal of International Business Studies	Quantitative	Host country institutional environments explain the differences in MNC subsidiary adoption of high performance work practices.
Boselie, Paauwe, & Jansen, 2001	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Literature review	Institutional pressure explains the adoption of 12 of 16 best practices in the Netherlands.
Boselie et al., 2003	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Quantitative	The more institutionalized an industry, the weaker the effect of HRM on performance. This is due to the constraint placed on HRM in highly institutionalized environments.
Boussebaa, 2009	Human Relations	Qualitative	In multinational professional service firms, human resource practices can be used to counteract the influence of national institutional environments.
Brandes, Dharwadkar, & Das, 2005	Human Resource Management Review	Conceptual	Expectations towards the use of stock options change at different stages of the institutionalization of the practice.
Brookes, Croucher, Fenton-O'Creevy, & Gooderham, 2011a, 2011b	Human Resource Management Review	Quantitative	Institutional factors are a more powerful explanation of "calculative" HRM practices than are cultural factors.
Brewster, Wood, & Brookes, 2008	British Journal of Management	Quantitative	Local isomorphic forces push back against the global adoption of HRM practices in MNC subsidiaries.
Carberry, 2012	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Qualitative	Due to misalignment with the institutional environment, the adoption of US style employee stock options in India is fragmented.
Chowdhury & Mahmood, 2012	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Qualitative	The institutional environment of Bangladesh influences the HRM practice of MNC subsidiaries there, but different HRM practices were subject to different degrees of institutional pressure, allowing some agency on the subsidiary's part.
Collings, McDonnell, Gunnigle, & Lavelle, 2010	Human Resource Management	Quantitative	Institutional factors at the national and industry levels influence the staffing flows of MNCs.
Cooke, Shen, & McBride, 2005	Human Resource Management	Conceptual	Institutional context, in addition to strategic considerations, influences HR outsourcing decisions.
Decramer et al., 2012	British Journal of Management	Quantitative	Coercive institutional pressures significantly increase the probability that academic university units adopt employee performance systems, while mimetic pressures do not.
Delmestri, 2006	Human Relations	Mixed (qualitative/ quantitative)	HRM structures facilitate the diffusion of an Anglo-Saxon managerial role identity in Italian firms.
Delmestri & Walgenbach, 2009	International Journal of Human Resources	Mixed (qualitative/ quantitative)	Though there exists local variation, transnational institutions have facilitated the diffusion of assessment centers across a number of Western countries.
Edwards et al., 2016	Journal of International Business Studies	Quantitative	The constraining effects of the local institutional environments on the global standardization of HRM practices may be overstated in some national settings.
Eisenhardt, 1988	Academy of Management Journal	Qualitative	Compensation strategies are so institutionalized that managers cannot conceive of alternatives.
Everly & Schwarz, 2015	Human Resource Management	Quantitative	Mimetic and coercive isomorphism explain the adoption of LGBTQ friendly policies in states were such policies are not mandated.
Farndale & Paauwe, 2007	Human Resource Management Journal	Qualitative	A combination of global isomorphic pressures, national isomorphic pressures, and internal processes explains the different patterns of HRM practice adoption, adaptation, and innovation.
Fenton-O'Creevy, Gooderham, & Nordhaug, 2008	Journal of International Business Studies	Quantitative	MNCs will attempt to maintain control over subsidiary HRM practices unless the host country institutional environments prevent them from doing so.

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Table 1 (*continued*)

Study	Journal	Study type	Summary of the application of institutional theory
Fernandez-Alles et al., 2006	Human Relations	Qualitative	The adoption of variable compensation practices is not necessary motivated by economic considerations and can be instead motivated by a desire to increase legitimacy.
Ferner et al., 2005	Journal of International Business Studies	Qualitative	Because workforce diversity is less institutionalized in the UK than in the US, US MNCs struggle to transfer diversity practices to their UK subsidiaries.
Forstenlechner & Mellahi, 2011	Journal of World Business	Qualitative	The employment of host country nationals by MNC subsidiaries increases subsidiary legitimacy
Geary & Aguzzoli, 2016	Journal of International Business Studies	Qualitative	Differences between local institutional environments partially explain the ability of an MNC to transfer its HRM practices to subsidiaries.
Gooderham et al., 2015	Journal of International Business Studies	Quantitative	In local environments with stricter employment laws, devolution of HR decision making to MNC line managers is more likely.
Gooderham, Nordhaug, & Ringdal, 1999	Administrative Science Quarterly	Qualitative	The institutional environment, as indicated by national embeddedness, influences the application of calculative and collaborative HRM practices.
Harcourt, Lam, & Harcourt, 2005	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Quantitative	Legitimacy concerns motivate firms to avoid discriminatory hiring practices.
Harrell-Cook & Ferris, 1997	Human Resource Management Review	Conceptual	Coalitions of institutional stakeholders exert varying influence over firm level HRM practices.
Ingram & Simons, 1995	Academy of Management Journal	Quantitative	Coercive and mimetic isomorphism influence organizations to be response to work-family issues
Jain, Horwitz, & Wilkin, 2012	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Conceptual	In South Africa, as opposed to Canada, weak support for employment equity practices from the institutional environment hampers their efficacy.
Krausert, 2017	Human Resource Management Review	Conceptual	Normative isomorphism associated with the professionalization of HRM professionals constrains firm level HRM practices.
Kossek et al., 1994	Human Relations	Quantitative	In addition to coercive pressures, the normative isomorphism of the HRM profession encourages the adoption of employee sponsored childcare initiatives.
Kulkarni & Ramamoorthy, 2011	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Conceptual	Subordinate stewardship practices are influenced by mimetic, coercive, and normative isomorphism.
Lau & Ngo, 2001	Journal of International Business Studies	Quantitative	The effectiveness of organizational development interventions by MNCs is in part determined by local isomorphic forces.
Lawler, Chen, Wu, Bae, & Bai, 2011	Journal of International Business Studies	Quantitative	The institutional environment can hamper the success of high performance work systems; however, the institutional environments of emerging economies are highly supportive of the implementation of high performance work systems.
Lazarova, Peretz, & Fried, 2017	Journal of World Business	Quantitative	Subsidiary HR autonomy is more likely in institutionally distance settings, but institutional distance also decreases the strength of the positive relationship between HR autonomy and subsidiary performance.
Lee & Kramer, 2016	Human Resource Management Review	Conceptual	The strength of the institutional environment can mitigate the ability of purposeful diversity and inclusion strategies to create unique organizational cultures.
Lippmann, 2008	Human Relations	Quantitative	The institutionalization of the social contract between employers and workers in the minds of older cohorts renders them less able to adjust to the rise of flexible employment.
Luo, 2007	Organization Science	Quantitative	Attitudes towards training are a reflection of societal level institutional logics.
Newburry & Thakur, 2010	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Quantitative	Office level attributes, such as size and multinationality, expose constituents to institutional pressures addressing global integration.
Nolan, 2011	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Qualitative	Despite global institutional pressures countering the use of guanxi, Western managers in China will engage in strategies which reinforce guanxi.
Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 2008	Journal of International Business Studies	Quantitative	Institutional factors such as globalization, unionization, and type of economy influence the choice to centralize MNC HRM practices.
Pasamar & Valle, 2015	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Quantitative	Mimetic and some normative pressures encourage responsiveness to work-life issues in Spanish firms, while coercive pressure does not.
Paauwe & Boselie, 2003	Human Resource Management Journal	Conceptual	Strategic HRM in constrained by the isomorphic pressures of its institutional environment.
Peters & Heusinkveld, 2010	Human Relations	Quantitative	CEO attitudes towards telehomeworking are influenced by mimetic pressures, while HR manager attitudes are influenced by normative pressures.

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Table 1 (*continued*)

Study	Journal	Study type	Summary of the application of institutional theory
Phillipson, 2013	Human Relations	Essay	The cognitive legitimacy of early retirement will create conflict as the practice is now less aligned with organizational and societal environments.
Pohler & Willness, 2014	Human Resource Management	Qualitative	HR professionals in Canada have engaged in institutional work to legitimate the field.
Point & Tyson, 2006	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Qualitative	Mimetic and coercive pressures have led to the widespread reporting of executive pay and the standardization of those reports.
Schröder, Muller-Camen, & Flynn, 2014	Human Resource Management Journal	Qualitative	Both societal and industry level institutions influence the adoption of age management practices.
Shipton, Sparrow, Budhwar, & Brown, 2017	Human Resource Management Journal	Conceptual	Isomorphic pressures constrain HRM innovation.
Süβ & Kleiner, 2007	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Quantitative	Diversity management in Germany is implemented due to mimetic pressures and coercive pressures (i.e., the need to be legitimate).
Tlaiss, 2014	The International Journal of Human Resource Management	Qualitative	Women in Lebanon face a number of institutionalized barriers in their careers.
Tregaskis & Brewster, 2006	Journal of International Business Studies	Quantitative	Local institutional forces prevent a convergence of HRM practices in Europe.
Tregaskis, Edwards, Edwards, Ferner, & Marginson, 2010	Human Relations	Quantitative	The institutional environment of the MNC home country is a predictor of the use of transnational social learning structures by subsidiaries.
Tsai, 2010	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Quantitative	Industry level institutional pressures result in isomorphism in HRM practices in SMEs in Taiwan.
Vaiman & Brewster, 2015	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Conceptual	Institutional factors explain much of the difference in HRM practices between countries, and these differences are less easily bridged than those stemming from other factors (e.g., culture).
Wang, Freeman, & Zhu, 2013	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Qualitative	Institutional differences between home and host country attenuate the relationship between personality and cross-cultural competence in expatriates.
Wang & Verma, 2012	Human Resource Management	Quantitative	Industry level institutional pressures explain differences in the adoption of work-life balance programs.
Williamson & Cable, 2003	Academy of Management Journal	Quantitative	Top management team hiring patterns are shaped by mimetic isomorphism in Fortune 500 firms.
Wright & McMahan, 1992	Journal of Management	Conceptual	Coercive and mimetic isomorphism influence SHRM practices in organizations.

management (SHRM) research as an alternative perspective to the resource based view. To make their arguments, they provide a thorough discussion of the ways in which institutional theory can contribute to SHRM theory and practice, building their case around DiMaggio and Powell's isomorphic forces and providing propositions which exemplify each: mimetic, that blueprints (e.g. HR scorecards) will lead to HRM isomorphism; normative, that the professionalization of HRM (e.g. formal education, professional associations) will result in HRM isomorphism; and coercive, that legislation and directives will result in HRM isomorphism. However, like Wright and McMahan (1992) and Barringer and Milkovich (1998), their use of institutional theory is understandably grounded in the old neoinstitutionalism; at the time, little was published that reflects the current understandings of institutional theory (e.g. institutional entrepreneurship, Dimaggio, 1988; institutional logics, Friedland & Alford, 1991 and Thornton & Ocasio, 1999).

3.2. Prior institutional theory in HRM scholarship

The scholarship leveraging institutional theory to explore HRM is generally consistent with the principles set forth by Paauwe and Boselie (2003) and can generally be classified into six broad themes. These themes, however, are not taxonomic and are not mutually exclusive but are all to some degree rooted in the idea of institutional constraint (See Table 2).

The first two themes occur commonly in HRM specific journals. The first, and broadest, is that the institutional environment dictates the HRM practices implemented by HR managers. These articles generally explore the fact that the HR strategy of a firm is not solely influenced by market considerations and that social context is necessary to understand what practices are and are not adopted by organizations. For example, Wang and Verma (2012) find that business strategy predicts the adoption of work-life balance programs (WLBPs), but that different industries vary in their adoption in response to strategy due to the distinct institutional environments of the industry. Similarly, Everly and Schwarz (2015) compare different institutional environments to explain the non-mandated adopted of LGBTQ friendly HR policies: even where not legally mandated to do so, organizations in states in which non-employment related gay rights are legally protected and in which peer companies had previously adopted friendly policies were more likely to adopt progressive policies towards their LGBTQ employees, indicating the presence of informal coercive and mimetic isomorphism. In this vein, other scholars highlight the implication of this constraint for SHRM. To the degree that HR practices are uniform within a field, as predicted by institutional theory, the potential for HR practices to contribute to the performance of one firm

Table 2
Extant institutional themes in HRM scholarship.

Theme	Description	Examples
General constraint on HRM practices	HRM is constrained by its institutional environment; normative, mimetic, and coercive forces foster isomorphism in HRM sharing similar environments.	Cooke et al., 2005; Everly & Schwarz, 2015; Kossek et al., 1994; Lee & Kramer, 2016
Institutionalization of HRM practices	HRM practices gain a high degree of cognitive legitimacy and become taken-for-granted and unquestioned.	Carberry, 2012; Eisenhardt, 1988; Lippmann, 2008
Cross-national differences in HRM practices	As a result of different national environments, the HRM practices differ from one country to the next.	Carberry, 2012; Gooderham et al., 2015; Tregaskis & Brewster, 2006; Edwards et al., 2016
MNC transfer of HRM practices	Because of different institutional environments, MNCs struggle to transfer home country HRM practices to host country subsidiaries.	Björkman et al., 2007; Farndale & Paauwe, 2007; Ferner et al., 2005; Geary & Aguzzoli, 2016
Strategic use of HRM to gain legitimacy	Organizations strategically align their HRM practices to environmental expectations in order to gain legitimacy	Fernandez-Alles et al., 2006; Forstenlechner & Mellahi, 2011
HRM as a mechanism for diffusion	HRM structures serve as a mechanism for normative, mimetic, and coercive isomorphism	Bakuwa & Mamman, 2012; Belizon et al., 2013; Delmestri, 2006

relative to another is indeed limited as both firms will pursue similar HR strategies. Coupled with the fact that institutional pressures do not necessarily align with efficiency considerations (Westphal, Gulati, & Shortell, 1997), that institutional constraint dampens the potential for HRM to effect performance is not surprising. For example, Huselid, Jackson, and Schuler (1997) find that HR practices adopted as a result of institutional pressures do not impact performance, consistent with the argument that the more institutionalized a field is, the less of an effect HRM has (Boselie, Paauwe, & Richardson, 2003).

A second theme also directly addresses constraint but is more focused on cognitive constraint, fostered by the institutional environment, than with the direct effect of the institutional environment. As HRM practices gain cognitive legitimacy, they become taken-for-granted and unquestioned (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002; Suchman, 1995). This property bestows practices with tremendous resiliency as they become decoupled from rational considerations and remain in place until some shock (Sine & David, 2003), socially adept change agent (Battilana et al., 2009), or internal contradiction (Seo & Creed, 2002) erodes that cognitive legitimacy (Tost, 2011), allowing the practice to be assessed and for change to be considered. Essentially, when social entities gain high levels of cognitive legitimacy, they become the unquestioned default, “just the way things are done.” Eisenhardt (1988), for example, suggests that managers tend to support the compensation policies used in their stores simply because the policy is so institutionalized that an alternative is never even considered. The institutionalization of HR practices is particularly problematic as environmental or market forces drive organizational change. For example, Lippmann (2008) finds that birth cohort, rather than chronological age, is a better predictor of who struggles with the rise of flexible employment. Older cohorts, socialized in a different era and possessing a dissonant conceptualization of employment, struggle to adapt relative to more recent cohorts, whose socialization better reflects current trends in employment. Speaking to a similar problem, Phillipson (2013), in his essay, cautions that the cognitively legitimate conceptualization of retirement in Europe no longer reflects its reality, in which retirement is delayed and pension requirements are stricter.

We found the third and fourth themes commonly published in international journals (e.g. Journal of International Business Studies, Journal of World Business). Both built on the fundamental idea that organizations respond to the isomorphic forces of their institutional environments. The third theme specifically argues that as a corollary to the above argument, HRM practices will vary from country to country. Though there exist international structures that facilitate the diffusion of HRM practices across borders (Delmestri, 2006), local institutional environments exert a powerful force on those organizations embedded within them (Orr & Scott, 2008). For example, Gooderham and coauthors (Gooderham, Morley, Parry, & Stavrou, 2015) compare the HR autonomy of line managers across 21 countries and find that line managers are given greater discretion in societies with stringent employment laws (regulative pillar) and lower power distance (normative pillar). Addressing the debate between convergence (are organizations becoming more similar over time?) and divergence (are organizations becoming more different over time?) by tracing the evolution of contingent employment practices in Europe over a ten-year period, Tregaskis and Brewster (2006) find that national level institutional environments facilitate convergence within nations but inhibit convergence across nations. That divergence occurs as a result of different organizations operating in different fields is a clear and obvious implication of institutional theory.

Building on the third theme, other scholars have argued the fourth theme, that if distinct national institutions create a heterogeneity of HRM practices internationally, those same forces should also inhibit the transfer of HRM practices by an MNC from its headquarters to its host country subsidiaries. Subsidiaries of multinational corporations (MNCs) are embedded in at least two distinct institutional environments, that of their host country and that of their headquarters and by extension home country (Kostova & Roth, 2002). Exacerbating this is institutional distance—the difference between the institutional profiles of the two environments (Xu & Shenkar, 2002); institutional distance both reduces the likelihood that a practice which is legitimate in one environment is also legitimate in the second as well as increasing the difficulty with which the foreign institutional environment is accurately assessed and responded to (Kostova & Zaheer, 1999; Orr & Scott, 2008; Xu & Shenkar, 2002). Companies can struggle to transfer HR practices from host to subsidiary as a result of employing host country nationals (e.g. Björkman, Fey, & Park, 2007; Ferner, Almond, & Colling, 2005; Geary & Aguzzoli, 2016). A local workforce will have largely been socialized by a different institutional environment than the one which conditioned the HR practices of the MNC; as a result, some practices will make less sense to workers and even be viewed as illegitimate (Björkman et al., 2007). For example, the role of diversity management in organizations is cognitively legitimate—taken

as a social fact, independent of approval—in American companies but can receive pushback or noncompliance as headquarters try to transfer it to subsidiaries in countries in which diversity management is less understood and less familiar, such as England (Ferner et al., 2005). As a response to this, HRM practices will often take on some degree of local isomorphism (e.g. Belizon, Gunnigle, & Morley, 2013; Parry, Dickmann, & Morley, 2008).

The final two themes do not so much reflect the use of institutional theory by HRM scholars as they do the use of HRM to better understand institutional processes. First, several papers discussed the fifth theme, which addresses the ways in which HR practices could be used strategically to gain legitimacy or signal desirable social categorization (Fernandez-Alles, Cuevas-Rodríguez, & Valle-Cabrera, 2006; Forstenlechner & Mellahi, 2011). Legitimacy provides access to financial and social resources (Baum & Oliver, 1991; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002) and is thus associated with firm performance and survival (Deephouse, 1999; Heugens & Lander, 2009). As a result, organizations can approach legitimacy pressures strategically, recognizing that their actions can legitimate the organization to its benefit. A pair of other papers addressed the sixth theme: HRM structures as a mechanism through which practices can diffuse and normative isomorphism occurs (Bakuwa & Mamman, 2012; Belizon et al., 2013; Delmestri, 2006). Normative isomorphism refers to the influence professionalization has on organizations in which those professions are embedded. It occurs as professional norms, values, and schemas are diffused through entities like professional associations, universities, and consultancies. HR structures facilitate this process, particularly through hiring practices (hiring from particular labor pools, requiring certain qualifications) as well as training and potentially even compensation, to the degree that institutionalized behaviors are likely to be encouraged and rewarded.

4. The new neoinstitutionalism and HRM

Over the last two decades, institutional theory has metamorphosed into something far more complex, dynamic, and applicable than its original form; most importantly for this paper, it has developed into something much more useful to HRM scholars seeking to understand the ways in which social contexts influence and are influenced by individuals, professions, and organizations embedded within them. While Dimaggio (1988) coined the term “institutional entrepreneurship” to describe the ability of skilled social actors to shape their institutional environment, study of institutional entrepreneurship did not really begin until the mid-2000s (Dorado, 2005; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004). Institutional complexity was substantively addressed by Friedland and Alford (1991) in their paper introducing institutional logics, but again, until the mid-2000s, institutional complexity was treated as a temporary condition in which one logic was in the process of supplanting another (e.g. Thornton & Ocasio, 1999); now it is widely accepted that institutional complexity can be enduring and even institutionalized (Greenwood et al., 2011; Reay & Hinings, 2005, 2009). The same pattern is present in the microfoundations of institutional theory. Though one of the earliest pieces of neoinstitutional research was microfoundational (Zucker, 1977), the microfoundations of institutional theory were largely neglected until the last decade (Powell & Colyvas, 2008) and still scholars are calling for greater attention to be given to the individuals who operate within institutionalized environments and whose shared social constructions give rise to those institutions (Powell & Rerup, 2017; Zilber, 2016).

The focus of the following section is to establish that institutional theory, at present, has much to offer HRM scholarship. We do this by focusing on two increasingly popular concepts which embody the evolution of institutional theory over the last two decades: institutional logics and institutional work (Zilber, 2013). These perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but they represent two different—albeit complementary and sometimes overlapping—streams of work that could be of value to HRM researchers. The purpose of this section is not to provide exhaustive reviews of either concept but to provide a substantive introduction (see Table 2 for a list of recommended readings), highlighting features of each perspective with potential to contribute to HRM scholarship.

We believe that these new perspectives of institutional theory hold a great deal of promise as a theoretical framework for HR scholars (See Fig. 1). Institutional logics provide HRM relevant identities, goals, and schemas. These in turn influence the attention, decision making, sensemaking, and actions of HR professionals and are ultimately a major determinant of HR structures and practices. That most organizations, and the HR departments within them particularly, are embedded in institutionally complex environments creates both tension and opportunity within HRM. Tension occurs as different relevant logics may prescribe different behaviors and opportunity occurs because multiple logics can provide multiple legitimate rationale for varied actions. Complementing these effects, HR professionals engage in institutional work to maintain or disrupt current institutionalized arrangements of work or to create new ones. In maintaining, they reinforce the pertinence and legitimacy of incumbent logics and associated artifacts; disrupting, they do the opposite. Creating, they establish new institutional arrangements, through action ranging from incremental to dramatic. Through their everyday institutional work—as well as through more dramatic institutional entrepreneurship—HR professionals then influence organizational and directly and indirectly institutional processes.

These ideas are not absent from the existing HR scholarship leveraging institutional theory. However, when addressed, they are typically decoupled from the relevant precepts of institutional theory (for exceptions, see Keegan, Bitterling, Sylva, & Hoeksema, 2017 and Heizmann & Fox, 2017). Findings consistent with institutional theory are occasionally presented as contradictory to the theory. For example, Nolan (2011), in his study of local adaptation of Western bank managers in China to guanxi culture, concludes that “another group of managers…contrary to the assumptions of neo-institutional theory, actually engage in strategies” (3357) and “Managers built solutions to local problems which were not entirely new but, rather, were a recombination of existing ideas they held about the importance of guanxi in China and their own organizational values. … Contrast this with traditional explanatory concepts such as ‘isomorphism’ which assume homogeneity in organization form occurs through a process of mimesis. In fact, the participants here drew on a variety of practices as they formulated different ways of advancing their business objectives in a rapidly changing environment” (3368). However, both of these conclusions are consistent with institutional theory, which had long established the

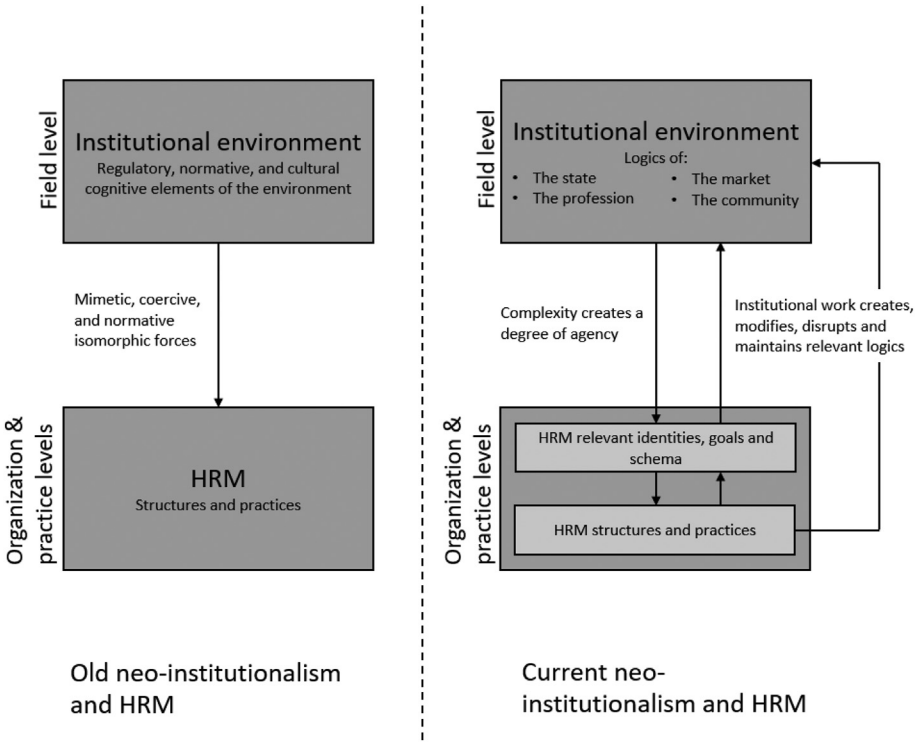

Fig. 1. Comparison of prior and current conceptualizations of institutional theory and HRM.

potential for institutional agency (Dimaggio, 1988) and more recently the role of multiple logics in enabling it (Dorado, 2005; Kraatz & Block, 2017), as is the case with bank managers embedded in the logics of their home country and those of China's financial sector.

The lack of application of current institutional theory to HRM is not surprising since many of the advances to institutional theory have yet to fully diffuse outside of the realm of organizational theory. However, our hope is that the present consideration of institutional theory will help motivate hypotheses and models and will help to place findings in the institutional theory nomological network. In the subsequent sections, we consider prior HR scholarship in the context of current institutional theory and suggest directions for HRM research based on application of current institutional theory.

4.1. Institutional logics

Institutional logics are the "socially constructed historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality" (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999: 804) and guide the interpretation of organizational reality (Thornton, 2004). Thornton (2004) introduces six ideal type logics: state logic, market logic, family logic, religious logic, corporate logic and professional logic, to which Thornton et al. (2012) add a seventh, community logic. These logics are broad categories through which more specific logics might be understood. Thornton and her colleagues (Thornton, 2004; Thornton et al., 2012; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) arrange the content of institutional logics along a y-axis to the x-axis of different ideal types (See Table 3), proposing the logics are comprised of some root metaphor, sources of legitimacy, authority, and identity, bases of norms, attention, and strategy, and formal and informal control systems. This y-axis then provides a tool with which scholars can structure the content of institutional influence and understand the substance of institutional change. Thus, for example, the shift from professional logics to market logics in the publishing industry saw market position replace personal reputation as a basis for legitimacy and the basis of attention shift from author-editor networks to resource competition (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Zilber (2013: 80) synthesizes the several seminal institutional logics pieces, laying out four features of the perspective: 1) that it integrates agency and structure; 2) that it integrates the material with the symbolic; 3) that it pays attention to the historical contingencies of institutions; 4) that it is provides a multilevel perspective to institutions.

4.1.1. Institutional complexity

One of the strengths of the institutional logics perspective—indeed, one of the motivations for its development—is its ability to capture institutional complexity, which occurs as organizations face incompatible prescriptions from different institutional logics, a circumstance both often ignored in earlier institutional work and increasingly common in organizational life (Greenwood et al., 2011; Kraatz & Block, 2017; Pache & Santos, 2010). Complexity is troublesome for organizations, as conflicting prescriptions result in internal (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; D'Aunno, Sutton, & Price, 1991) and external conflict (Luo, Wang, & Zhang, 2017; Pache &

Table 3
Introductory readings for institutional logics and institutional work.

Study	Focus	Summary
Battilana et al., 2009	Work	Reviews institutional entrepreneurship scholarship
Besharov & Smith, 2014	Logics	Discusses different configurations of institutional complexity and the likelihood they become problematic
Greenwood et al., 2011	Logics	Reviews institutional complexity scholarship
Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006	Work	Introduces institutional work and an associated typology
Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009	Work	Provides an overview of institutional work
Maguire et al., 2004	Work	Early paper re-introducing institutional entrepreneurship to the field
Pache & Santos, 2010	Logics	Discusses intra-organizational processes and dynamics associated with institutional complexity
Reay & Hinings, 2005, 2009	Logics	A pair of papers establishing that institutional complexity could be enduring and is not necessarily a temporary state
Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013	Work	Explores how everyday work and interaction can result in deliberate institutional change
Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005	Logics and work	Explores how institutional logics can provide the content for institutional work
Thornton et al., 2012	Logics	Provides an overview of the institutional logics perspective
Zilber, 2013	Logics and work	Reviews logics and work and their relationship to each other

Santos, 2010) and even failure (Kitchener, 2002). As a result, there is a growing body of work focusing on organizational strategy in the face of institutional complexity (e.g. Greenwood, Díaz, Li, & Lorente, 2010; Kodeih & Greenwood, 2014) and on how that complexity is reflected in the structures and practice of organizations and experienced by those within them (e.g. Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Delbridge & Edwards, 2013; Marano & Kostova, 2016). However, while complexity brings challenge, it also creates opportunity, allowing organizations agency through their choice of logics (Jarzabkowski, Smets, Bednarek, Burke, & Spee, 2013; Thornton et al., 2012). For example, for-profit schools in Canada were able to legitimate themselves due to the presence of two logics within their organizational field (Quirke, 2013). While the activities of the studied schools were illegitimate by the standards of a professional education logic, the schools were able to gain legitimacy and support by appealing to a market logic and its associated actors. Additionally, institutional logics can function as strategic resources as logics can be a source of strategic opportunities and appealed to in order to justify and legitimate an action (Durand, Szostak, Jourdan, & Thornton, 2013; McPherson & Sauder, 2013; Thornton et al., 2012).

Though largely decoupled from its theoretical foundations and even unnamed, institutional complexity is regularly encountered by HR scholars in their research, most frequently in the context of international research (e.g. Boussebaa, 2009; Chowdhury & Mahmood, 2012; Edwards, Sánchez-Mangas, Jalette, Lavelle, & Minbaeva, 2016; Nolan, 2011). In international settings, institutional complexity is highly salient as the institutional environments will differ drastically from one country to the next. However, scholars also recognize the existence of institutional complexity in domestic settings (e.g. Decramer, Smolders, Vanderstraeten, & Christiaens, 2012; Harrell-Cook & Ferris, 1997). For example, Zhu, Zhang, and Shen (2012) find that the heterogeneity of HRM practices in China is a product of the institutional complexity born of the transition from paternalistic socialism to market socialism; such a finding is consistent with research on complexity stemming from field and societal change (Dacin, Goodstein, & Richard Scott, 2002). Other scholars are able to tie institutional complexity to agency, again, consistent with existing theory (Battilana et al., 2009; Dorado, 2005). For instance, Chowdhury and Mahmood (2012) and Geary and Aguzzoli (2016) both describe the way in which the multiplicity of institutional constituents enabled MNCs to engage in political advocacy and build coalitions to support their HRM policies.

Institutional complexity is both a challenge and an opportunity confronting HRM (Aust, Brandl, Keegan, & Lensges, 2017; Keegan et al., 2017). Indeed, we suggest that no functional unit within an organization confronts greater institutional complexity than the HR department, which must contend with the demands of government regulatory bodies (state logic), the performance pressures exerted on its organization (market logic), the logic of the HR profession itself (professional logic), and even community logics, manifesting as movements such as the #metoo movement and pushes for greater protections for LGBTQ employees. It should be noted that the professional logic of HR itself has likely adopted content from other ideal type logics, particularly market logics, as is common with professions developed primarily in organizational settings (Hodgson, Paton, & Muzio, 2015). The degree with which these logics matter to HR professionals is contingent on both their coercive power and their representation within organizations (Pache & Santos, 2010). Arguably, the market logic is the internally most well represented logic in terms of powerful actors, with top management teams heavily embedded in an organizational performance first mindset. This, in turn, likely explains one of the more common strategies to deal with complexity, devolution of the tasks not driven by market logics to line managers (Francis & Keegan, 2006; Sheehan, De Cieri, Greenwood, & Van Buren, 2014; Teague & Roche, 2012). In this vein, Keegan and her coauthors (Keegan et al., 2017) draw on paradox theory, a stream of research developed to complement institutional complexity scholarship at the intraorganizational level (Smith & Lewis, 2011), to explore the complexity inherent in HRM work, highlighting several paradoxes HR professionals must confront within organizations and concluding that these paradoxes are interwoven with each other and their contexts.

Individuals confronted with institutional complexity will try to delay action, allowing them to assess different options before taking some action (Raaijmakers, Vermeulen, Meeus, & Zietsma, 2015). They may attempt to engage in institutional work to create structures to accommodate that complexity (Reay & Hinings, 2009; Smets, Jarzabkowski, Burke, & Spee, 2015). They may attempt to determine which prescriptions can most easily be ignored or decoupled (D'Aunno et al., 1991) or to which logic will adherence result in greatest reward (Greve & Man Zhang, 2017). At the extreme, they may seek to undermine or delegitimize one logic, eliminating

that complexity (Raaijmakers et al., 2015). Additionally, what action they choose is influenced by situational factors, such as the appropriateness of a logic for its context (Smets et al., 2015), the visibility of conformity (D'Aunno et al., 1991) and the power of relevant actors (Pache & Santos, 2010), as well as individual factors, such as role identity (Moore & Grandy, 2017), prior socialization (Pache & Santos, 2013b), and personal beliefs (Raaijmakers et al., 2015).

While embracing complexity is arguably necessary for HRM (Keegan et al., 2017), it also invites several important lines of inquiry: how are competing goals and identities managed by HRM? what HRM characteristics are needed to effectively manage complexity and paradox? what determines which logic a HR professional adheres to in a given situation? how do HR departments prioritize competing logics? There are no easy answers to these questions; indeed, they are questions which institutional theorists are still themselves trying to answer, independent of context (e.g. Martin, Currie, Weaver, Finn, & McDonald, 2017; Moore & Grandy, 2017; Raaijmakers et al., 2015; Ramus, Vaccaro, & Brusoni, 2017; Smets et al., 2015). These complexity-related issues may be useful research questions that spur new perspectives and new research in HRM. Keegan and her coauthors (Keegan et al., 2017), for example, highlight the interdependencies of paradoxes generated by complexity and suggest that partitioning the functions associated with one logic from another does not eliminate associated individual tensions. Given the intransigence of such complexity, the paradoxes, tensions, and associated coping mechanisms should prove fruitful and arguably necessary ground for future research.

The presence of institutional complexity also creates the potential for institutional agency on the part of HR professionals. Though complexity both motivates and necessitates institutional work, independent of work, it enables agency by providing an expanded repertoire of justifiable practices, structures, and identities (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; McPherson & Sauder, 2013). Viewed through the lens of complexity and agency, the need for HRM professionals to be able to apply different approaches and norms is underscored. For example, emphasizing merit may be important in one instance while emphasizing and investigating equity may be important in another situation (Smets et al., 2015). The ability to engage in and to shift among various roles could be an important characteristic for HRM professionals. Agency is discussed more comprehensively in a subsequent section (institutional work).

4.1.2. Multilevel logics

In addition to capturing institutional complexity, the institutional logics perspective helps provide an understanding of inter-organizational processes influence organizations and are ultimately experienced (and inhabited) at the individual level. While logics are most easily conceptualized as a top-down process, they are created and maintained recursively, with influence traversing from the field to organizations to individual actors with then the actions of individuals and coalitions influencing organizations and ultimately field level entities (Reay & Hinings, 2009; Thornton et al., 2012). While societal (field) and organizational level study are more commonly researched and the individual level underresearched (Zilber, 2013; Zilber, 2016), the theoretical foundations of the microlevel foundations and effects have been explicated (Thornton et al., 2012) and are beginning to be explored (e.g. Glaser, Fast, Harmon, & Green Jr., 2016; Kyratsis, Atun, Phillips, Tracey, & George, 2017; Pache & Santos, 2013b; Raaijmakers et al., 2015). In a chapter of their book (Thornton et al., 2012: 76–102), Thornton and her coauthors explore the ways in which institutional logics "shape individual preferences, organizational interests, and the categories and repertoires of actions to attain those interests and preferences" (77). They argue that when individuals are embedded within an institutional logic, it focuses their attention, directs their sensemaking, and provides criteria for decision making. Complexity then creates multiple foci and multiple sets of criteria for individuals, and the influence of each logic on individual action is determined by the availability of the logic (knowledge of the logic and its associated content), the accessibility of the logic (how salient its content is), and the activation of that logic (whether that knowledge and information are used) (83–84). Furthermore, embedded within institutional logics are social identities, goals, and schemas. These in turn focus attention, and then in tandem with attention, influences how decisions are made, how decisions are understood, and how change is mobilized (see Table 4). Thus the institutional logics perspective provides both a clear and comprehensive framework with which to connect higher social levels (e.g. society, the field, the organization) to microlevel actors (e.g. groups or individuals) and therefore a socialized context to understand the complexity of microlevel action.

Like institutional complexity, the microfoundations of institutions are also present, though largely untheorized, in existing HRM research leveraging institutional theory. Predating any substantive discussion of the microfoundations of institutions, Kossek, Dass,

Table 4
Examples of ideal type institutional logics.

	State logic	Market logic	Professional logic	Community logic
Root metaphor	Redistribution mechanism	Transaction	Relational network	Common boundary
Sources of legitimacy	Democratic participation	Share price	Expertise	Belief in trust & reciprocity
Sources of authority	Bureaucratic domination	Shareholder activism	Professional association	Commitment to community values and ideology
Sources of identity	Social & economic class	Faceless	Association with craft and personal reputation	Emotional connection, ego-satisfaction, and reputation
Basis of norms	Citizenship membership	Self-interest	Associational membership	Group membership
Basis of attention	Status of interest group	Status in market	Status in profession	Investment in group
Basis of strategy	Increase community good	Increase profit	Increase reputation	Increase status & honor of members & practices
Informal control mechanism	Backroom politics	Industry analysts	Celebrity professionals	Visibility of actions

Adapted from Thornton et al., 2012: 57.

and DeMarr (1994) explore individual level differences which make HR managers more or less likely to respond to institutional pressures to adopt employee sponsored childcare. Lippmann (2008) argues that the vestigial schemas held over from an older institutional order will inhibit older cohorts—socialized within an older order—from adapting to a labor market dominated by flexibility and contingency. Peters and Heusinkveld (2010) find, unsurprisingly, that HR managers' attitude towards telehomeworking is influenced by their professional community, an example of an interorganizational entity influencing organizations through individual cognitions. However, Luo (2007) grounds her study in institutional logics to show that societal level logics influence attitudes towards training in different national settings. As is the case with institutional complexity, increased attention to the relevant institutional theory will create opportunities for greater understanding and rigor.

Institutional logics also explain the values, identities, and schemas which define and influence HR professional work. Socialization into the professional logic of HRM begins at university (Pache & Chowdhury, 2012; Vaara & Fay, 2011). In textbooks and classes, students encounter models of HRM that emphasize effectiveness on the one hand and employee well-being on the other. They quickly learn that things that might be done to improve levels in one category may not affect or may negatively affect levels in another category. Further, they learn that there is an uncertain relationship between measures of effectiveness and well-being. At the core of instruction in HRM, students are also typically presented the job as the basis of the HRM framework, with the importance of fit between job and worker characteristics as a fundamental aspect of the HRM schema. HRM students often join student chapters of the Society for HRM and develop an identity drawing on and an affinity for the society's professional standards. Due to the ingrained complexity of HRM, they also begin encountering logic content associated with market and state logics which have been absorbed by the HR profession. Thus, for example, classes in strategic human resource management are now required for HR majors and concentrations. Much of how HR professionals interpret and react to their work and their environment is a product of their socialization into these logics. For example, in their study of HR roles, Sheehan and her coauthors (Sheehan et al., 2014) find that upon entering an organization, many HR professionals are attracted to the "employee advocacy" component of HRM and are driven primarily by the value of "caring." This then creates conflict as HR professionals have a strategic role imposed upon them in which they are expected to create added value for the firm through their HRM tasks. Francis and Keegan (2006) note a similar finding. While the attraction-selection-attrition model provides a framework for the process (Schneider, 1987), institutional logics both explain the qualities possessed by the professionals (through prior professional and general socialization) and the attributes of HRM which attract them.

In addition, the logics framework can help elucidate the mechanisms by which a variety of societal trends are now influencing HRM practice (e.g. Dumont, Shen, & Deng, 2017; Webster, Adams, Maranto, Sawyer, & Thoroughgood, 2018). Institutional logics can develop at a variety of levels, including those of markets, industries, inter-organizational networks, and geographic communities (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). As these sectors become relevant to organizations, so too do the logics associated with them. For example, an environmental logic has become a significant influence on organizational life across a variety of industries (Ansari, Wijen, & Gray, 2013; Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017). This logic coalesced in the context of journalism and social movements (Hoffman, 1999; Lounsbury, 2001), and its increasing presence in both organizational life and broader society has influenced organizations directly though social and community expectations (Bansal & Clelland, 2004;Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017; Lee & Lounsbury, 2015), in which deviance results in a loss of legitimacy, and indirectly through its influence on regulation (Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017; Lee & Lounsbury, 2015), in which deviance results in legal sanction. In addition, professional associations, such as the Society for Human Resource Management, will respond to these changes, disseminating (and institutionalizing) new content, such that HRM does not only feel the influence of society through employing organizations, it also manifests it through the profession. For example, the passage of the Affordable Care Act marked a major shift from a market logic driven healthcare system to one channeling a state logic; organizations responded to this change for legal reasons and the Society for Human Resource Management responded to for legitimacy reasons: had they failed to prepare their constituent professionals for this change, they would have lost legitimacy in the eyes of the organizations employing their professionals.

4.2. Institutional work

A second promising stream of research for HRM scholars looking to study the dynamics between individuals and the environment in which they are embedded is that of institutional work. Institutional work refers to the "purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at maintaining, creating, and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 215). We focus here primarily on creating and disrupting institutions; we believe these two types of work have more to offer to HRM scholarship than does maintaining. However, HRM certainly plays an important role in institutional maintenance, and as such, should be of interest to institutional scholars studying institutional work.

Drawing on the sociology of practice (Bourdieu, 1977), Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) introduce institutional work in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics between individuals and their environments. Traditionally, individuals (and organizations) had been portrayed as either cultural dopes, blindly adhering to institutional socialization and prescription, or heroic entrepreneurs, engaging in paradigm shifting change of their institutional environment. Embodied within institutional work is the idea that individual action affects institutions in more mundane ways, that institutions can be maintained, created, and disrupted through the everyday work of individuals (See Table 5). Like institutional logics, institutional work bridges the gap between structure and agency, but where institutional logics is multilevel and has a focus on the content on institutions, institutional work primarily conducted at the microlevel and has an explicit focus on action (Zilber, 2013).

Institutional work is primarily carried out by professionals (Lawrence, Leca, & Zilber, 2013), such as those of HR. In part, this is because professionals are often forced to do so, being influenced by their professional socialization and the need to integrate their work into bureaucratic and often market driven organizations (Muzio, Brock, & Suddaby, 2013). In part, it is because professionals

Table 5
Types of institutional work.

Type of work	Definition
Creating	
Advocacy	The mobilization of political and regulatory support through direct and deliberate techniques of social suasion
Defining	The construction of rule systems that confer status or identity, define boundaries of membership, or create status hierarchies within a field
Vesting	The creation of rule structures that confer property rights
Constructing identities	Defining the relationship between the actor and the field in which the actor operates
Changing normative associations	Re-making connections between sets of practices and the moral and cultural foundations of those practices
Constructing normative networks	Constructing of interorganizational connections through which practices become normatively sanctioned and which form the relevant peer group with respect to compliance, monitoring, and evaluation
Mimicry	Associating new practices with existing sets of taken-for-granted practices, technologies, and rules in order to ease adoption
Theorizing	The development and specification of abstract categories and the elaboration of chains of cause and effect
Educating	The educating of actors in skills and knowledge necessary to support the new institution
Maintaining	
Enabling work	The creation of rules to facilitate, supplement, and support institutions, such as the creation of authorizing agents or diverting resources
Policing	Ensuring compliance through enforcement, auditing, and monitoring
Deterring	Establishing coercive barriers to institutional change
Valorizing and demonizing	Providing for public consumption positive and negative examples that illustrate the normative foundations of an institutions
Mythologizing	Preserving the normative underpinnings of an institution by creating and sustaining myths regarding its history
Embedding and routinizing	Actively infusing the normative foundations of an institution into the participants' day to day routines and organizational practices
Disrupting	
Disconnecting sanctions	Working through state apparatus to disconnect rewards and sanctions from some set of practices, technologies, or rules
Disassociating moral foundations	Disassociating the practice, rule, or technology from its moral foundation as appropriate within a specific cultural context
Undermining assumptions and beliefs	Decreasing the perceived risks of innovation and differentiation by undermining core assumptions and beliefs

Adapted from Lawrence & Suddaby (2006: 221, 230, and 235). This represents a list of types of institutional work that emerged from their review and is not exhaustive.

often possess the requisite characteristics laid out as necessary by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). Regardless, professionals feature prominently in the scholarship of institutional work reviewed by Lawrence and Suddaby to inductively generate three types of institutional work: creating, maintaining, and disrupting. Applied to HRM, institutional work provides HR managers an opportunity for agency and influence on their institutional environments.

Institutional creation—the most studied form of institutional work—refers to the creation of new institutions or modification of existing ones through overt political work (e.g. advocacy), the reconfiguration of belief systems (e.g. constructing identities), and the alteration of abstract categorizations and other meaning systems (e.g. educating). The most researched form of creation is institutional entrepreneurship; institutional entrepreneurs are “agents who initiate, and actively participate in the implementation of, changes that diverge from existing institutions” (Battilana et al., 2009: 72). However, unlike most research conducted under the lens of institutional work, institutional entrepreneurship research tends to focus on dramatic changes and heroic change agents (Lawrence et al., 2013), like the construction of new organizational forms by skilled social agents (Bisel, Kramer, & Banas, 2017; Hampel & Tracey, 2017). A second stream of research, however, focuses on the way in which mundane, day-to-day action can alter institutions (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007). For example, the now institutionalized practice of active money management had its origins in varied and diffused sets of individuals within the mutual fund industry engaging in independent experimentation; these practices grew increasingly popular, forcing a conflict and eventual resolution in which active money management was acknowledged as legitimate (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007). Such on-the-ground work also results in the resolution of institutional complexity and the creation of hybrid logics. For example, the everyday interactions of German and English lawyers working together after a wave of cross-border mergers around the year 2000 gave rise to a hybrid logic drawing on elements of English legal practice and German legal practice (Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013).

A related form of work is disruption, though disruption does not necessitate the creation of a new institutional arrangement, nor does the creation of a new arrangement require disruption. The outcome of disruption is the deinstitutionalization of some practice, structure, or order (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Deinstitutionalization occurs as something previously institutionalized loses cognitive legitimacy, allowing for challenge, dissipation, rejection, and replacement (Oliver, 1992). Disruption can be a discursive process wherein individuals use rhetoric to undermine the incumbent institutional order (Bisel et al., 2017; Maguire & Hardy, 2009). For example, the use of the pesticide DDT was deinstitutionalized as a result of efforts of authors and journalists to disconnect the practice from its moral foundations as well as their questioning of the assumption of its efficacy (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). Alternatively, individuals can disrupt institutionalized arrangements through the introduction of alternative logics, undermining the cognitive legitimacy of the present institutional order by presenting a viable alternative (Bisel et al., 2017; Symon, Buehring,

Johnson, & Cassell, 2008). For example, qualitative researchers, in seeking to erode the institutionalized bias in academia towards quantitative research, highlight alternatives to the market logic buttressing quantitative research (i.e. that quantitative research is most easily published and is therefore legitimate), appealing to professional autonomy associated with a professional logic (Symon et al., 2008).

One reason institutional work deserves a presence in HRM scholarship is the crucial role in development of the HR profession as an influential business partner within employing organizations, particularly as the current institutional arrangements arguably fail to privilege the HR function (Heizmann & Fox, 2017). As the profession has made efforts to increase their standing, HRM scholarship describing the institutional work involved has proliferated, albeit without a unifying theoretical framework. Identity creation is a prevalent form of institutional work studied in this context (Pritchard, 2010) in which "the relationship between the actor and the field in which the actor operates" is defined (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 221). For example, Wright (2008) suggests that in their efforts to legitimate themselves within organizations, HR professionals have developed an "internal consultant" role identity in which legitimacy in the eyes of top management derives from their expertise and subsequent ability to improve performance; furthermore, in the context of Wright's study, it appears that such effort also involved the disruption of the professional identity rooted in the professional logic of HRM, the "dismissal of any broader professional/occupational ethos" (1081). On the other hand, Roche and Teague (2012), exploring a similar dynamic in the context of a recession, find that HR professionals were "relaxed or resigned" about the coexistence of a strategic partner identity and the traditional identity of the employee advocate, though they also found the tension to be "demanding" for HR professionals (1354–1355). Other forms of institutional work are present in the literature as well. Heizmann and Fox (2017)—drawing on discourse theory, heavily applied in the study of institutional change (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004)—explore the theorization (the development of abstract categories and elaboration of causal relationships) and the deliberate change of normative associations (establishing new connections between practices and their cultural foundations) by HR professionals in their work to legitimize their role within organizations, specifically constructing a relationship between HRM and performance to emphasize the strategic value of the HR function. Wylie, Sturdy, and Wright (2014) studied the attempts of HR professionals to establish change agency as the domain of HRM. In doing so, HR professionals engage in defining work, work intended to establish boundaries of membership and create status hierarchies (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In their study of the establishment of the human resources business partner, McCracken, O'Kane, Brown, and McCrory (2017) suggest that the HR professionals studied need to engage in greater educating work, "the educating of actors in skills and knowledge necessary to support the new institution" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 221). Specifically, the authors highlight an absence of capabilities necessary for HR professional claims to this role to be taken seriously by organizational constituents.

Second, and as stated earlier, HRM as a profession and function is tied to a complex web of competing institutional prescriptions, with some of this complexity stemming from efforts of the profession to legitimate itself within organizations dominated by a market logic (Wright, 2008). Complexity and paradox necessitates institutional work by those confronted with it (Bjerregaard & Jonasson, 2014; Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013). The presence of conflicting logics entails conflicting criteria for legitimacy such that it becomes a challenge to take action that is legitimate under one logic but is not simultaneously illegitimate under the other (Scherer, Palazzo, & Seidl, 2013; Smets et al., 2015); thus, for example, efforts of HR professionals to legitimate themselves in the eyes of top managers undermined their legitimacy with employees (Heizmann & Fox, 2017). This challenge requires institutional work at the practice level, the creation of identities, routines, and arrangements that allow individuals to function in complex environments (Smets et al., 2015), work which itself may be institutionalized, elevated to the field level, and diffused (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Smets et al., 2015). Because of the work necessitated by complexity, HR professionals must develop high levels of social skill, a general awareness of their institutional environment (both external and within the organization), and the reflexivity to understand their place in it (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In their chapter discussing HR roles, Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) engage in identity work for the HR profession. Identity work is a form of institutional work which allows institutional complexity to be resolved via the crafting of identities capable of accommodating that complexity (Creed, Dejordy, & Lok, 2010). In the context of the role complexity faced by HR professionals, Ulrich and Brockbank suggest an overarching role identity, that of the HR leader, which is capable of encompassing the HR professional as an employee advocate and the HR professional as a strategic partner. This role identity, they argue, will both have legitimacy within the profession (in the context of a professional HRM logic) and within employing organizations (in the context of a market logic). Similarly, Sheehan et al. (2014) describe the way in which some HR managers, in dealing with the conflict between the "employee advocate" and "strategic partner," develop a big picture schema in which the conflicting tasks and roles are understood in relation to each other and their broader context (theorizing type institutional work, see Table 5). These examples of work, if institutionalized and diffused (e.g. Reay & Hinings, 2009), provide potential solutions to the intransigent complexity with which HRM must contend (Keegan et al., 2017).

A third way in which institutional work can contribute to HRM scholarship is its ability to explain the legitimation efforts of HR professionals as well as the profession itself. The criticisms of HRM indicate the need for HRM to increase its legitimacy (Heizmann & Fox, 2017; Legge, 1995; Sheehan et al., 2014; Wright, 2008). Legitimacy is most easily achieved by aligning defining structures and practices with environmental expectations (Suchman, 1995); this approach, however, is less viable under conditions of institutional complexity (Scherer et al., 2013), which are characterized by disparate environmental expectations. A second approach is the creation of new expectations through collective action aimed at coordination, justification, and education (David, Sine, & Haveman, 2013; Greenwood et al., 2002). Such action increases cognitive legitimacy through simple awareness creation and sociopolitical legitimacy through justification and demonstration of worth. Though detached from institutional work scholarship, Pohler and Willness (2014) provide an excellent example of institutional work undertaken by the HR profession as a whole. In it, they examine the efforts of a Canadian HR professionalization project to establish legitimacy for the field, an important form of institutional creation work (Lawrence et al., 2013). They highlight the creation of a professional association through which professional norms can

be debated and diffused and as a mechanism of gaining external legitimacy, a type of work described by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) as the construction of normative networks. This professional association then creates a set of common standards and codes of conduct (defining type institutional work) and a professional body of knowledge and set of core competencies (educating type institutional work). Finally, Pohler and Willness observe that the HR professional project overall was attempting to imitate other established professions (mimicry type institutional work). However, these observations were all generated inductively, and while they align well with existing theory, because data collection and analysis was not guided by that theory, the authors may have missed other forms of institutional work through which the HR profession was seeking to legitimate itself in Canada.

Given the taken-for-grantedness of human resources departments, efforts to legitimate the field have arguably been successful. However, the legitimation work within organizations is still ongoing, and the complexity—stemming both from the aforementioned work and disparate institutional pressures—is not yet resolved. In this light, institutional work bears tremendous promise as a theoretical frame: not only does it allow for the unification of prior work in terms of action on the part of HR professionals, it also provides theoretical guidance to the continued study of HR efforts to legitimate itself within organizations and contend with intra- and interorganizational complexity.

5. Discussion

A key issue in HRM has been further development of a theoretical foundation, particularly one which addresses the context of HRM (Jackson et al., 2014; Murphy et al., 2017; Paauwe, 2009). Indeed, a forthcoming special issue of Human Resource Journal is dedicated to the empirical exploration of the macrolevel context of HRM (Vincent et al., 2018). The present paper puts forth current institutional theory as a promising framework with the potential to supplement and broaden the existing theory and research in HRM. While traditional institutional theory has emphasized constraint and isomorphism, current institutional theory emphasizes the role of agency and the dynamic nature of the relationship between organizational actors and their institutional environments.

We presented institutional logics and institutional work as current and developing streams of research that may have value for the study of HRM. Institutional logics frame and provide the values, beliefs, and actions of institutional actors. However, there are typically multiple competing logics that create a context of complexity; HRM professionals are certainly subject to this complexity and often balance competing logics, and the institutional logics that impact HRM professionals drive the values, identities, and schemas of HRM professionals.

As discussed, there are interesting implications of the institutional logics perspective to research in the HRM domain. For example, the means by which HRM deals with competing identities and goals and what approaches might be more effective could be an interesting and useful line of research, one with potential to contribute not only to HRM scholarship but also to institutional theory. Additionally, study of the characteristics needed for HRM to effectively deal with complexity and paradox could be a relevant and illuminating direction for research. Overall, the recognition of complexity and paradox in the operation of HRM could lead to research that has theoretical and applied value.

Discussion of institutional logics also included consideration of how HRM representatives are socialized into the professional logic of the field. There is a role played in the formal education process at universities, as well as influence from professional organizations and other sources. We noted that many people are attracted to the HRM profession because they embrace the employee well-being, or caring logic, associated with HRM (e.g. Sheehan et al., 2014). However, other people may embrace the performance and bottom-line logic that is associated with HRM. To the extent that both of these logics operate in organizations, there is tension and possible paradox in the values, actions, and rationale HRM might apply in various situations. Examining how this and other possible conflicts are managed by HRM, the effectiveness of the approaches, and possible moderators could be a useful stream of research. Beyond this descriptive work, it could be useful to consider how HRM might be structured to reduce or eliminate this caring versus profit tension, drawing on institutional research in which the conflict was successfully resolved (e.g. Reay & Hinings, 2009; Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013). For example, a focus on professional education in the context of complexity can reduce the tension experienced by HR professionals. Institutional theorists have already engaged in this discussion in the context of hybrid social enterprises. In social enterprises, prior socialization into the disparate logics represented creates conflict (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). To address this, some institutional theorists have proposed strategies to socialize pre-professionals into hybrid logics (Pache & Chowdhury, 2012; Zhu, Rooney, & Phillips, 2016). Doing so engages scholar-teachers in the institutional work of codifying and diffusing the new hybrid logic as well as in the socialization of pre-professionals such that the institutional complexity of HR work does not necessarily result in conflict or tension.

Institutional work was also identified as a key concept in institutional theory. Institutional work can take a variety of forms but they involve organizational actors going beyond their assigned tasks. In terms of HRM, the importance of the recognition of institutional work was associated with three purposes. First, institutional work can increase the reputation of HRM. Second institutional work is needed to deal with complexity and paradox, particularly as the incumbent arrangements are not without serious issue (Pritchard, 2010; Sheehan et al., 2014). And, finally, recognition of the occurrence of institutional work is a lens which can improve understanding of legitimation efforts made by HRM. More broadly, the study of agency through an institutional lens invites new avenues of research not addressed in their social contexts. For example, new organizations lack legitimacy and will therefore seek to gain legitimacy though conformity in their structures and practices (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002), including HRM. However, organizational age legitimates (Baum & Oliver, 1991), meaning that the need for HRM to conform to social expectations will diminish as an organization ages. This then increases potential agency for HR professionals, allowing them to engage in institutional work within their domain. Furthermore, borrowed legitimacy from their organization may make their institutional work more likely to succeed (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Ruef & Scott, 1998).

Overall, the application of current institutional theory to HRM holds promise as a new and dynamic framework for HRM research. Our hope is that the consideration in this paper will lead to additional conceptual and empirical work that applies institutional theory to HRM.

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