Perfection of Meritocracy or Ritual of Bureaucracy? – HRM in a Management Consultancy Firm

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Abstract
The paper addresses HRM systems and practices in a large multinational management consultancy company. The company invests a lot of resources in HRM tasks, and is frequently praised by employees for its accomplishments in hiring, developing and promotion in practice. HRM as a belief system and as practices then do not harmony particularly well. The paper critically interprets the meaning and the functions of the HRM system and the beliefs supporting it. The paper suggests a re-interpretation of HRM systems and practices based on a cultural-symbolic perspective. It points at a) the limits and shortcomings of HRM systems in terms of rationality, b) the significance of organizational symbolism in accounting for the role of HRM systems and practices – symbolizing rationality and commitment to people improvement as well as a highly competent work force and c) the various effects of these systems and practices on employee compliance.