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**AN ANALYSIS UPON THE THEORETICAL
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MANAGEMENT WITH INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS**

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An Analysis upon the Theoretical Concepts of Human Resource Management with Industrial Relations

Dr. Ajay Tyagi*

Principal in Kishori Raman Mahavidyalaya, Mathura

Abstract – A diversity of opinion exists about the definition, intellectual boundaries, and major premises of the fields of human resources management (HRM) and industrial relations (IR). To help provide a common frame of reference for discussion and debate on the symposium topic, I endeavor in this paper to flesh out a consensus position on these matters. The method used is largely historical. Based on a review of the origins and evolution of the two fields from the early 20th century to the present day, I show that human resources (HR) up to the early 1960s was typically considered to be a subfield of IR.

In more recent years, however, HR has largely severed its links with IR and now is widely regarded as a separate, sometimes competing and sometimes complementary field of study. In the last part of the paper I use this historical analysis, together with a review of the literatures in the two fields and the findings and conclusions of the other papers in this symposium, to identify both the commonalities and differences that distinguish the two fields in terms of their approach to science building (research) and problem solving.

Today, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the more successful companies operate with more contingent forms of organization. Such forms of organizations have few layers, encourage empowerment, multiskilling and job enrichment and incorporate a wide range of Japanese manufacturing techniques and personnel systems. The impact of these changes on working practices, together with continuing high unemployment and a marked decline in union membership and influence, have influenced a move from industrial relations towards human resource management approaches.

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INTRODUCTION

It is a paradox that although industrial relations has one of the longest academic pedigrees in the management cannon, its influence on corporate business practice has been minimal. Comparison with for example, finance, management science, or business policy reveals amongst the latter a burgeoning armoury of tools and techniques with which businessmen have been eager to experiment. The reason for this disparity has been that corporate managements do not see industrial relations as a corporate concern - this has contributed to reluctance on the part of academics to address issues of potential managerial interest.

Recent industrial relations literature however, has suggested that this may be changing and this paper is part of that attempt to redress the balance. I argue that industrial relations should be an important strategic corporate concern and propose a definition of industrial relations derived from the business policy literature and an anecdotal picture of traditional, non-

strategic industrial relations management. In the second half of the article, I argue that, like corporate strategies, the researching and recognition of industrial relations strategies is a complex task, and building upon two examples to illustrate that complexity, I attempt to clarify a definition of strategic human resource management.

In considering the relationship between HRM and IR, two central concerns are: in what way does HRM pose a challenge to IR and how can conflicts between the two, if any, be reconciled so that they can complement each other? This section concerns itself with the first of these two issues. In considering the issue, it is necessary to identify the broad goals of each discipline.

The goals of HRM have already been identified in the previous section. It remains to consider some of the basic objectives of IR, which could be said to include the following:

1. The efficient production of goods and services and, at the same time, determination of adequate terms and conditions of employment, in the interests of the employer, employees and society as a whole, through a consensus achieved through negotiation.
2. The establishment of mechanisms for communication, consultation and cooperation in order to resolve workplace issues at enterprise and industry level, and to achieve through a tripartite process, consensus on labour policy at national level.
3. Avoidance and settlement of disputes and differences between employers, employees and their representatives, where possible through negotiation and dispute settlement mechanisms.
4. To provide social protection where needed e.g. in the areas of social security, safety and health, child labour, etc.
5. Establishment of stable and harmonious relations between employers and employees and their organizations, and between them and the State.

IR is essentially pluralistic in outlook, in that it covers not only the relations between employer and employee (the individual relations) but also the relations between employers and unions and between them and the State (collective relations). IR theory, practice and institutions traditionally focus more on the collective aspect of relations. This is evident from the central place occupied by labour law, freedom of association, collective bargaining, the right to strike, employee involvement practices which involve unions, trade unionism and so on. HRM deals with the management of human resources, rather than with the management of collective relations. There is of course a certain measure of overlap. Individual grievance handling falls within the ambit of both disciplines, but dispute settlement of collective issues more properly falls within the scope of IR. Policies and practices relating to recruitment, selection, appraisal, training and motivation form a part of HRM. Team-building, communication and cooperation, though primarily HRM initiatives, have a collectivist aspect. Thus joint consultative mechanisms are as much IR initiatives, which may (as in Japan) supplement collective bargaining. But IR has not, in regard to team-building for instance, developed any techniques or theories about how to achieve it; in fact, it is not a focus of attention because it implies a potential loyalty to the enterprise through the team and is seen as conflicting with loyalty to the union. IR has a large component of rules which govern the employment relationship. These rules may be prescribed by the State through laws, by courts or tribunals, or through a bipartite process such as collective bargaining. HRM differs in this respect from industrial relations in the sense that it

does not deal with such procedures and rules, but with the best way to use the human resource through, for example, proper selection and recruitment, induction, appraisal, training and development, motivation, leadership and intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Thus "at its most basic HRM represents a set of managerial initiatives." Four processes central to a HRM system - selection, appraisal, rewards and development - leave only limited room for IR as a central element in the human resource system. "Based on theoretical work in the field of organizational behaviour it is proposed that HRM comprises a set of policies designed to maximize organizational integration, employee commitment, flexibility and quality of work.

Within this model, collective industrial relations have, at best, only a minor role." A discernible trend in management is a greater individualization of the employer-employee relationship, implying less emphasis on collective, and more emphasis on individual relations. This is reflected, for instance, in monetary and non-monetary reward systems. In IR the central monetary reward is wages and salaries, one of its central themes (given effect to by collective bargaining) being internal equity and distributive justice and, often, standardization across industry. HRM increasingly places emphasis on monetary rewards linked to performance and skills through the development of performance and skills-based pay systems, some of which seek to individualize monetary rewards (e.g. individual bonuses, stock options, etc.). HRM strategies to secure individual commitment through communication, consultation and participatory schemes underline the individualization thrust, or at least effect, of HRM strategies. On the other hand, it is also legitimate to argue that HRM does not focus exclusively on the individual and, as such, does not promote only individual employment relations. Though much of HRM is directed at the individual, "at the same time there is a parallel emphasis on team work, whether in the form of quality circles or functional flexibility, and above all, on the individual's commitment to the organization, represented not just as the sum of the individuals in it, but rather as an organic entity with an interest in survival. The potential conflict between emphasizing the importance of the individual on the one hand, and the desirability of cooperative team work and employee commitment to the organization, on the other, is glossed over through the general assumption of unitarist values ...: HRM stresses the development of a strong corporate culture -not only does it give direction to an organization, but it mediates the tension between individualism and collectivism, as individuals socialized into a strong culture are subject to unobtrusive collective controls on attitudes and behaviour."

Some of the tensions between IR and HRM arise from the unitarist outlook of HRM (which sees a commonality of interests between managements and employees) and the pluralist outlook of IR (which assumes the potential for conflict in the employment relationship flowing from different interests). "It is

often said that HRM is the visual embodiment of the unitarist frame of reference both in the sense of the legitimization of managerial authority and in the imagery of the firm as a team with committed employees working with managers for the benefit of the firm." How to balance these conflicting interests and to avoid or to minimize conflicts (e.g. through promotion of negotiation systems such as collective bargaining, joint consultation, dispute settlement mechanisms within the enterprise and at national level in the form of conciliation, arbitration and labour courts) in order to achieve a harmonious IR system is one central task of IR. The individualization of HRM, reflected in its techniques which focus on direct employer-employee links rather than with employee representatives, constitutes one important difference between IR and HRM. It has been observed that:

"The empirical evidence also indicates that the driving force behind the introduction of HRM appears to have little to do with industrial relations; rather it is the pursuit of competitive advantage in the market place through provision of high-quality goods and services, through competitive pricing linked to high productivity and through the capacity swiftly to innovate and manage change in response to changes in the market place or to breakthroughs in research and development ... Its underlying values, reflected in HRM policies and practices, would appear to be essentially unitarist and individualistic in contrast to the more pluralist and collective values of traditional industrial relations."

How does HRM more specifically challenge IR and trade unions, though HRM is not per se anti-union and its central themes are not necessarily inconsistent with unionism? First, HRM does not focus, as does IR, on collective bargaining, which is a central institution in IR.

However, collective bargaining should not be understood only in the narrow sense of negotiation of terms and conditions of employment leading to a formal agreement. It should be viewed as a process, and as including all mechanisms introduced to arrive at a consensus on matters affecting the two social partners, even if they do not result in formalized agreements. If viewed in this way, it reduces the conflict between HRM and IR within this area. A second area in which HRM is said to pose a challenge to unions is on the issue of flexibility- critical in HRM but traditionally absent as a factor in IR where a degree of standardization for purposes of internal equity has been an objective of unions and of IR. Here the scene is undergoing considerable change. There is today a major thrust towards achieving flexibility in the labour market on matters such as functions, working time, pay and types of contracts. Unions are being compelled to 'participate' in these changes as an alternative to being marginalized. The trend towards greater decentralization of collective bargaining has

compelled viewing issues more from a workplace perspective. It has provided an opportunity for unions in countries with a high rate of unionization to be involved in issues other than wages and related ones, such as technology introduction, new work processes and organization. It involves, on the one hand, the willingness of employers to deal with unions on such matters (which they have to be willing to do in high union-density enterprises), and on the other the willingness of unions to cooperate on legitimate measures to achieve competitiveness -especially where the employees themselves are willing to do so - and to adapt to the realities of the workplace.

A third - and perhaps the principal challenge - emanates from employee loyalty and commitment, which are central objectives of HRM. The issue here is whether dual allegiance is possible i.e. commitment to the goals and values of the organization, and to contribute to its success on the one hand, and commitment to the trade union on the other. It is at this point that IR becomes a critical factor. In principle there should be no antithesis, because trade unionism need not (and should not) be conflictual in approach and attitude. Much of the empirical evidence drawn from the USA indicates that in a workplace with a cooperative IR system dual loyalty is possible, but that it is not possible in one where a cooperative climate is absent or minimal. In some of the larger unionized corporations in Japan, this conflict of loyalty is less felt.

Traditional IR and trade unionism can be challenged in other ways - that is, other than through anti-union activity. Downsizing the labour force as a HRM initiative to achieve competitiveness and offering monetary incentives to employees to improve productivity could create IR tensions, especially if the union has not been involved in the process. A similar result may occur when an employer, without seeking to dismantle existing IR practices, establishes other mechanisms and practices such as direct communication and consultation systems, small group activities, employee share option schemes and so on without involving the union.

The unitarist approach of HRM and the pluralist tradition of IR, though regarded by some as incompatible, are not regarded in the same light by others. There are three issues involved here. The first is whether the pursuit of HRM policies such as employee involvement and commitment, two-way communication and small group activities, and the integration of HRM policies in corporate objectives and strategies pose a challenge to central IR institutions such as collective bargaining and to unionism. The second is whether such HRM policies are pursued consciously as a union avoidance strategy. The third is whether HRM and IR are

necessarily incompatible or whether there is scope for their co-existence.

David E. Guest points out that HRM, which is an American concept, "Finds its fullest expression in a number of well-known and successful American companies." He points out that research indicates that the established model of HRM is often found in a non-union company.

This does not mean that HRM is anti-union or that unions have no role to play in HRM, but rather that effective HRM policies and practices are sometimes either used as a union avoidance strategy or else it can have that effect. Three very influential scholars have put forward the view that there is a role for union involvement in HRM, and point to companies (such as the General Motors' Saturn plant) which have involved unions in the move towards HRM, and by so doing unions have facilitated this move. Such an involvement, if it is to take place, would require, in many countries, a substantial change of attitude on the part of both management and unions.

DEFINING HR AND IR

The **human resource management** (HRM) function of an organisation manages the individual aspects of the employment relationship - from employee recruitment and selection to international employment relations, salaries and wages. HRM is a complex blend of science and art, creativity and common sense. At one level, HR practice draws on economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, political studies, and strategic and systems thinking. At an operational level, success depends on interpersonal relationships. HR professionals are often the "go to" people in an organisation for advice and information. When things go wrong employees rely on the integrity and ability of HRM staff to manage and advise on issues without taking sides. They may also train and develop staff to ensure the business performs well, that it meets its goals and continually improves within legislative frameworks. HRM practitioners also keep up-to-date with legislation and analyse contemporary employment issues.

Industrial relations is also a multidisciplinary field that studies the collective aspects of the employment relationship. It is increasingly being called employment relations (ER) because of the importance of non-industrial employment relationships. IR has a core concern with social justice through fair employment practices and decent work. People often think industrial relations is about labour relations and unionized employment situations, but it is more than that. Industrial relations covers issues of concern to managers and employees at the workplace, including workplace bargaining, management strategy, employee representation and participation, union-management co-operation, workplace reform, job design, new technology and skill development. An IR expert will more usually work for a trade union in order

to represent employees' interests. However, they may work for an employer in an HRM department, or for an employers' association or consultancy, serving the employers' interests.

Major tasks of HRM and IR are: hiring staff, negotiation of employment contracts and conditions, performance management and reward systems, dispute resolution, disciplinary processes, ensuring health and safety of staff, employee motivation, design of work, team and organisation restructuring, and training and development.

HRM practitioners are responsible not only for the smooth running of processes but also at a senior level for the bigger picture planning, strategizing and policy-making as they affect staff and employment relationships. Senior HRM practitioners can take a lead in advising on the where and the how of an organisation's direction - on the staffing, skills and training requirements to get there and on the communication or influencing processes needed to pave the way. For example, an organisation establishing online services will require a certain skill set to deliver this. The HR function will assess current staff capability, their training needs, and the options if some staff are unable to meet requirements.

Managers in a company may also fulfill many HRM functions. Smaller businesses may not employ HRM professionals. Instead they may use HRM consultants as needed, or do it themselves with variable success. A degree in Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations (HRM & IR) or a combination with another major/minor or degree such as law, psychology, management, marketing, economics, information technology, anthropology or sociology and others, will be useful in many lines of work.

THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF HR AND IR

Since there is a diversity of viewpoints and some confusion about the meaning of the HR and IR labels and the subject areas they represent, it is useful to take a closer look at the historical evolution of the HR and IR fields in order to better understand their juxtaposition today. The reader should note that the account provided here of the origins and development of the IR and HR fields is in certain important respects quite different relative to oft-cited research works on the subject and most textbook accounts.

The fields of HR and IR had their genesis in the concept of labor problems. Beginning in the last quarter of the 19th century, public concern began to grow about the conditions of labor in this country and the adversarial, sometimes violent relations between employers and their workers. This period was marked by large-scale immigration, the development

and spread of the factory system, long periods of recession and depression, and the emergence of a wage-earning labor force. Out of this confluence of factors developed numerous problems and maladjustments that came to increasingly occupy and worry public opinion. Collectively known as “labor problems,” these maladjustments included an apparent growing hostility between employers and workers (evidenced by growing numbers of strikes and acts of violence), widespread inefficiency and waste in industry brought on by stupendously high rates of labor turnover, haphazard management methods, and worker “soldiering” on the job (standing around or working as little as possible), and often deplorable conditions for workers, including poverty-level wages, 12-hour workdays, primitive health and safety conditions, and autocratic and often discriminatory treatment by managers. These concerns came to a head in the World War I (WWI) years when the production demands of a wartime economy, the political drive “to make the world safe for democracy,” and the “Red Scare” associated with the Bolshevik revolution in Russia most clearly exposed the contradictions and shortcomings of the existing industrial order.

It was in the years immediately preceding WWI that the previously mentioned terms, such as “employment management,” “personnel management,” “industrial relations,” and “employment relations,” first appeared and only during the 1918–1920 period that they came to connote a new movement in industry and field of study in academe. The common denominator of these terms was that they represented an attempt to reform the employment system used in American industry and put it on a more scientific and humane footing. By the early 1920s, as earlier indicated, the term “industrial relations” was widely used as the descriptor for the entire field of study. As seen at the time, IR covered all aspects of work and, in particular, focused on the causes and solutions to labor problems. A consensus also emerged among academic writers that improved IR (i.e., reduced labor problems) could best be accomplished along three broad avenues of reform. These were collectively known as the employers’ solution, the workers’ solution, and the community’s solution to labor problems. The employers’ solution involved the science and practice of personnel management, the workers’ solution was trade unionism and collective bargaining, and the community’s solution was protective labor legislation and social insurance. None of these methods sought to replace capitalism, private property, or a market economy; they sought only to make capitalism and markets operate more efficiently and equitably.

Through the 1950s the concept of IR succeeded in serving as the umbrella concept that brought together people with otherwise disparate interests and perspectives on the work world. The common denominator that brought people together under the IR

banner was rejection of two principles of the traditional employment model: (1) the “commodity” conception of labor and (2) the “autocratic authority/unrestricted rights” model of management.

Thus, the personnel manager in industry, the social worker in a settlement house, the trade unionist, and the university professor teaching a labor/personnel course could all agree on the importance of treating workers as human beings and in providing channels for due process and employee voice and they all found common ground within IR through their commitment to the cause of employment reform and the use of man-made institutions (e.g., firms, unions, government) to improve the efficiency and equity of the labor process. But, there were also within IR numerous tensions and rivalries that made this coalition of reformers a fragile one and that ultimately led to its splitting apart.

At its founding the academic and practitioner wings of IR were dominated by two quite different groups. The IR practitioners were largely from the ranks of industry, composed principally of personnel managers and, secondarily, of management consultants and writers.

The academic wing, on the other hand, was composed primarily of institutional-oriented economists specializing in labor economics, along with a smaller cadre of scholars and adjunct faculty drawn from psychology, sociology, political science and business administration.

This diverse grouping contained at the very birth of the field the seeds of its eventual dissolution.

Despite its longstanding intellectual and practical shortcomings, the HR (PM) side of the field enters the 21st century with an air of forward momentum and intellectual energy. The same is much less true for what remains of IR (the ILE side). Since the Golden Age in the 1945–1960 periods, IR as a field of study and practice experienced a slow but cumulatively significant decline to the point some have questioned its long run survival. Indicative is the query of Weber (1987) “Will IR institutes and the study of industrial relations go the way of home economics?” and the statement of Strauss (1989), “Short of an unexpected resurgence of union victories academic IR will have to make major readjustments. Otherwise it may follow the example of the Cigarmakers and Sleeping Car Porters, both leaders in their times.” [I note, however, that IR outside the US is in better shape, albeit possibly following the same trajectory.]

HRM & IR COMPETENCIES

HRIR Graduates are able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of, and the implications of, different perspectives of the employment relationship.
- Critically analyse and solve workplace issues.
- Apply HRM & IR competencies to contribute to organisational capability and employee wellbeing.
- Identify issues and interactions between local and global employment relations and work environments.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS TO EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

Industrial relations became a social science; workplace relations, primarily those between industry and industrial workers, were analyzed using academic disciplines such as sociology and economics. Some authors of the industrial period defined “industrial relations” as “the study of rules governing employment and the way in which the rules are changed, interpreted and administered”. Others, argued that “industrial relations deal with certain regulated or institutionalized relationships in an industrial unit” and in Hyman’s opinion they are “the study of control processes on employment relationship”.

The field of study that covers employment relationships in their entirety is called industrial relations. In general, it is believed to be the study of relations between the employees and employers. There are a multitude of factors at play at the workplace that shape up the relations between workers, employers, and the government. The field of industrial relations came into existence with the advent of the industrial revolution as an important tool to understand the complex relations between employers and employees. There are many different ways to look at industrial relations as there are the perspectives of workers, employers, government, and the perspective of the society. If you are a worker, you would obviously associate industrial relations with better wages, safety at workplace, job security, and training at workplace. On the other hand, industrial relations for an employer are all about productivity, conflict resolution and employment laws.

Sound industrial relations and effective social dialogue are a means to promote better wages and working conditions as well as peace and social justice. As instruments of good governance they foster cooperation and economic performance, helping to create an enabling environment for the realization of the objective of Decent Work at the national level.

Instead, employers now use the term “employee relations,” which refers to relationships that exist in both unionized and nonunionized workplaces. Employers hope to manage employee relations successfully with each respective individual, as a

means to raise morale and productivity. ‘Employee relations’ is a concept that is being preferred over the older industrial relations because of the realization that there is much more at the workplace than industrial relations could look or cover. In general, employee relations can be considered to be a study of relations between employees as well as employer and employees so as to find ways of resolving conflicts and to help in improving productivity of the organization by increasing motivation and morale of the workers. The field is concerned with providing information to employees regarding the goals of the organization so that they have a better understanding of the aims and policies of the management. Employees are also informed about their poor performances and ways and means to correct performance. Employee relations also take care of grievances and the problems of the employees and let them know all about their rights and what to do in case of discrimination.

Therefore “new employment relationship” go beyond the collective bargaining level to include non-union organizations where dialogue might be between employers and their employees, although with alternative bargaining structures.

Industrial and employment relations covers:

- Tripartite social dialogue;
- Negotiation, consultation and information exchange between and among the different actors;
- Collective bargaining;
- Dispute prevention and resolution.
- Other instruments of social dialogue, including corporate social responsibility and international framework agreements.

Industrial relations have come to dominate the workplace because of the need to deal with conflicts, mainly between workers and management, whereas, employment relations are dealing with developing a working environment where conflict is less likely to occur, and when this happens, is dealt with promptness and effectiveness by those involved.

IR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR LABOR ECONOMICS AND HRM

The industrial relations field as a formal entity in the social sciences goes back to the early 1920s in North America, the late 1940s in the United Kingdom, and one to two decades later in most other countries and regions. As an identifiable area of writing and research, its roots extend far back into the nineteenth century. Over this period, researchers have attempted to identify the core principles that distinguish the subject of industrial relations from other labor fields and build upon these principles

theories and models that explain key labor/employment outcomes and processes. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, John R. Commons, and Lujó Brentano began this task in, respectively, Britain, the United States, and Germany at the end of the nineteenth century, and succeeding generations of scholars have followed suit up to the present day. The most notable exemplars include contributions by Kelly (1998), Budd (2004), Müller-Jentsch (2004) and Piore and Safford (2006), along with the “classics”.

The record in developing a unique base of industrial relations (IR) theory, with its associated body of tools and concepts, is mixed, but on balance surely disappointing.

Despite the century of effort as well as numerous books and articles on the subject of IR theory, there is relatively little impact or presence of this theorizing in the literature of the last two decades.¹ In this paper I strive to move the project of IR theory building and tool development another step forward.

In particular, I hope to make five contributions to IR theory. First, I use historical analysis to identify the field's core theoretical and normative principle—the proposition that *labor is embodied in human beings and is not a commodity*. Second, I use this principle to develop a theoretical explanation for the twin “dependent variables” of industrial relations, the *employment relationship* and its attendant *labor problems*. Third, I develop this theoretical explanation using concepts from institutional economics (IE), American IR's intellectual home base, and in so doing help meld “original” and “new” versions of IE. Fourth, I use the theoretical framework as a platform for a wide-ranging critique of neoclassical labor economics and, to lesser degree, human resource management.

Fifth, I utilize this framework to deduce new concepts and hypotheses about the employment relationship, including delineation of the field's “fundamental theorem.”

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this essay I noted that a good deal of controversy and uncertainty exists as to the definitions and intellectual domains of HR and IR as fields of study and how the two fields relate to each other. Largely through an historical analysis of the two fields' respective origins and developments, I have tried to shed further light on these matters. The HR and IR fields are also distinguished, however, by numerous differences in their approach to research and practice. When the fields were born in the late 1910s, three alternative “solutions” (or strategies) to employment problems were advanced: the “employer's,” the “workers’,” and the “community's.” HR and IR envision a role for all three, but the

emphasis differs. The HR field focuses on the “employer's” solution of personnel/HRM, makes increased organizational effectiveness the primary goal, and examines the role management and HRM practices can play in this process. IR also considers organizational effectiveness an important goal but emphasizes, in addition, the independent importance of protecting and promoting the interests of employees. An implication of this viewpoint is that HR and IR are really parts of a larger field, one that prior to the 1960s was called “industrial relations” and subsumed both of the PM and ILE schools. Today this intellectual confederation has largely dissolved, leaving HR and IR as separate and competing fields.

There is no doubt that the strategic management of human resources is a neglected field in the study of business. A substantial reason for this is that, as in strategy research generally, it is difficult to recognise an organization's approach to the management of its employees. Further than this however, there is little consensus in the literature about the meaning to be attached to the term ‘strategic industrial relations’ or strategic human resource management’. The lack of definition of the subject matter is partially explained by the fact that, for many organizations, practitioners and academics, the human resource has not been thought of as a strategic one. As a result little thought has been given to developing tools and techniques for managing it.

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Corresponding Author

Dr. Ajay Tyagi*

Principal in Kishori Raman Mahavidyalaya, Mathura

E-Mail – tyagidra@gmail.com