

The use of News Media as a Data Source in HRM Research: Exploring Society's Perceptions

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by

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Introduction

Few studies of public representations of HRM issues via the news media have been undertaken. Although HRM topics are well-represented in the news media, little is known about the content, perspectives or impacts of such stories. This chapter focuses on the important, innovative contribution that news media research can make to the field of HRM. We refer to our exploratory study into workplace bullying, a key HRM concern, to exemplify key points throughout. This chapter provides a context for HRM research, discusses the contribution of the news media as a data source, strengths and limitations of the method, and makes recommendations for future research.

Context for HRM research

HRM, defined broadly as the management of people within the employment relationship, is comprised of networks of public and private actors, making it a complex area to study (Greenwood, 2013). Accordingly, the meaning and significance of various research approaches to HRM continue to be debated (Harley, 2014; Marchington, 2015; Van Buren & Greenwood, 2013). For example, a widely considered aspect is HRM's perceived lack of strategic influence within organisations. By positioning itself more with senior management in driving performance goals and shareholder value, it may be argued that HRM is narrowing its focus, with the risk of overlooking key stakeholders and roles (e.g. employee advocates) and contributions to society (e.g. ongoing development of fair, inclusive and sustainable processes) (Marchington, 2015).

HRM methodological approaches have also been questioned, with Greenwood (2013) suggesting there are three different approaches that can add particular value. Firstly, mainstream HRM research tends to focus on the organisation, employees and HR practices, often using positivist empirical methods of inquiry. This use of positivist methods, which is becoming increasingly dominant, has led to calls for more methodological pluralism to allow for expansion of HRM knowledge and understanding (Harley, 2014; Van Buren & Greenwood, 2013). Secondly, critical HRM, in seeking to question the espoused values of HRM and examine its actual impacts on stakeholders, draws on a variety of methodologies and therefore can provide greater depth to the field (e.g. see literature review

on work intensification; Mariappanadar, 2014). It has been argued that the third approach, which favours a conceptual style of analysis and focuses on the organisation, society, and multiple other stakeholders (e.g. organisations, government, employers, employees, occupational groups) (termed ethical HRM by Greenwood, 2013), can provide even more in-depth perspectives.

This multiple stakeholder perspective is used as a framework in this chapter as it is relevant to the news media's portrayal of complex social phenomena. The news media plays a key role in people's knowledge and appreciation of current issues, and the illumination of normative boundaries that are acceptable within the particular society (Stanley, Mackenzie Davey & Symon, 2014). Analysis of news stories has shown great promise in explaining social phenomena (e.g. stigma associated with so-called "dirty work" occupations such as stockbrokers; Stanley et al., 2014) and arguably, some sections of the news media can play an important role in surfacing, discussing, and legitimizing or otherwise, management theories and practices that are relevant to society. Accordingly, the role of the news media is "worthy of a deeper historical and social exploration" (Mazza & Alvarez, 2000, p. 584).

Furthermore, the interplay of theory and practice has long been emphasised in HRM education, with reality brought to the classroom in many guises, including current, topical issues in the news media. For example, Latham, an internationally recognised academic and MBA teacher, describes his method of presenting a class with a headline and story from a newspaper, which students then analyse theoretically and practically (Charlier, 2014). Likewise, case studies are used to bridge the theory/practice gap. The Enron case, for example, has been widely reported and analysed in the media, as well as in academic forums. Interestingly, many of the toxic behaviours ascribed to leaders in Enron (Marchington, 2015) could be conceptualised as workplace bullying, and therefore well within the remit of HRM.

News media as a data source

We note that the news media has not been used as a focus of research into HRM to any extent and, in making the argument for its potential as an innovative approach, we draw on our exploratory study of

workplace bullying, conceptualised academically as “a situation in which one or more persons systematically and over a long period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative treatment on the part of one or more persons, in a situation in which the person (s) exposed to the treatment has difficulty in defending themselves against this treatment” (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007, p. 735). From these interactions, workplace bullying unfolds as a complex, and very costly phenomenon that negatively affects individuals, organisations, multiple stakeholders, and wider society (Beswick, Gore & Palferman, 2006; Hoel, Sheehan, Cooper & Einarsen, 2011), for which many unanswered theoretical and practical questions remain (Branch, Ramsay & Barker, 2013). Likewise, HRM research in general is confronted by complexities, as well as frequently unclear definitions and constructs that provide impediments to research (Klein & Delery, 2012). We therefore contend that taking innovative methodological approaches to HRM research can be useful in highlighting different perspectives, and showing a way forward, which can ultimately lead to greater understanding, knowledge and clarity in the field.

Our focus on using print-based news media as an innovative data source in HRM research involves several important considerations, including the context of newspaper publishing itself. Firstly, in relation to the news media’s role in presenting complex social phenomena, debate continues about the many conflicting forces, such as the required speed of delivery, the need for journalists to become subject experts quickly, decisions on how events will be presented and from which perspectives, and a requirement to make sure the public support and see value in the news media. Compounding these issues is the stress for those who work in the news industry, with growing job insecurity and multiple changes (Ekdale, Tully, Harmsen & Singer, 2015). Secondly, there has also been extensive discussion about how the news media and in particular newspapers can distort reality. When such distortions are accepted as reality by the public, there may be severe ramifications for public policy and appropriate distribution of resources (Spitzberg, 2002). For example, Turkewitz’s (2010, p. 3) analysis of the media’s representation of the crime of rape suggests that we need to “be critical of how newspapers represent their narratives”, including their potential biases and any narrowing of “the public’s understanding of crime, and the actors involved”. Thus, the news media including

newspapers can shape and direct their messages, influencing societal culture (Peelo, Francis, Soothill, Pearson & Ackeerley, 2004). Thirdly, the choices of journalists and editors as to what is reported often places an emphasis on (more engaging) individual factors related to the phenomenon, which “essentially ignores the economic and social underpinnings of the problem” (Johnstone, Hawkins & Micener, 1994, p. 870) and could reduce the potential for a well-informed public.

Interestingly, the role of newspaper reports has been discussed in relation to workplace bullying. Lewis’s (2001) survey research suggests that most respondents identified hearing about workplace bullying through the news media (when compared to other sources such as Unions). Some within the workplace bullying field have warned that an increase in news media attention may result in counter effective responses. For instance, creating a sense of fear or ‘moral panic’ may have led to an increasing tendency to use the term ‘workplace bullying’ as a way of capturing a sense of distress or resentment (McCarthy, 2004) and voicing dissatisfaction about more general organisational issues such as change and management style (Liefoghe & Davey, 2001). There are certainly questions about how workplace bullying is understood by the public and whether this impacts on their behaviour in any way (Branch et al., 2013). In this chapter, we illustrate how workplace bullying is conceptualised and portrayed within the news media, and how this may differ from academic representations, with the aim of contributing to knowledge about the value of using news stories as data in HRM research.

News media methods and workplace bullying example

Turning to specific details of the method itself, there are several factors to consider. For the actual newspaper selection, broad readership is an important consideration. In our study, we selected two newspapers (both in broadsheet format at the time); *The Australian* (published by News Limited) is the national daily newspaper for Australia and *The Sydney Morning Herald* (published by Fairfax), which covers national events in addition to its primary base in Sydney, and is considered to provide a counter to the conservative perspective of *The Australian*. To identify our data set, we undertook a delimited search of the two newspapers with the news database Factiva, used by researchers to search

individual or groups of newspapers from around the world using keywords and date ranges (in our case from July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011).

With newspapers composed of many sections, it is important to be clear about the types of articles that are included in a data set. We limited our search of news articles to general news stories, that is those appearing in the news section of these newspapers and inclusive of feature articles (i.e. extended indepth articles focussed on a topic), as well as journalists’ opinion pieces and editorials (i.e. published pieces that reflect the writer’s opinion, rather than relying on traditional journalistic devices). These make up the majority of the newspaper and are produced by paid employees considered to be authoritative in their content and approach (i.e. we excluded certain published pieces such as “letters to the editor”). The search term also has to be carefully considered. For example, we found in our initial search that ‘workplace bullying’ was a rarely used term, so our search was based on the broader terms of: ‘bully’, ‘bullies’, ‘bullying’ or ‘bullied’ (referred to as ‘the term’ in this chapter). Our final data sample consisted of two hundred and twenty-five articles. Table 1 contains a summary of the articles and the number of references to the term. As shown, the number of general news articles exceeded opinion articles, as would be expected. A high percentage of articles with singular references to the term (62% general news articles and 65% opinion pieces) occurred, with the number of references to the term decreasing as each article continued.

Table 1. Summary of 225 articles identified during Factiva search

	The Australian	Sydney Morning Herald	Total Sample
Total Number of Articles	119	106	225
Number of General News Articles	102	75	177
1 reference to the term	65	47	112
2 references to the term	16	15	31
3 references to the term	8	3	11
4 references to the term	5	1	6
5 references or more to the term	8	9**	17
Number of Opinion Articles	17	31	48
1 reference to the term	10	21	31
2 references to the term	2	5	7
3 references to the term	3	4	7
4 references to the term	1	1	2
5 references or more to the term	1*	-	1

References within the Headline	21	14	35
References within the 1 st paragraph block [^]	56	50	107
References within the 2 nd paragraph block	44	45	88
References within the 3 rd paragraph block	29	27	56
References within the 4 th paragraph block	21	21	42

Note: *8 or more references; **8 articles with 8 or more references; [^] A paragraph block includes 5 paragraphs

Following these simple frequencies, the 225 articles were content and thematically analysed using the software program NVivo, which enables data to be managed, coded and categorized (NVivo, 2012). Analysis commenced by assessing and categorising each of the 225 identified articles against the key aspects of the academic definition of Workplace Bullying presented earlier (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). This is not to indicate that the academic definition would be superior to a more “lay” definition but rather to give us a starting point. Thus, each article was assessed against the four main criteria within the definition: evidence of inappropriate behaviour; repeated inappropriate behaviours; behaviours occurred over a period of time; and evidence that the target felt unable to defend his/herself. We also coded for a number of other elements that could be considered important within a newspaper, including the page number of each newspaper story (to determine the prominence given to stories about bullying), the contents of the headline, frequency of usage of the term within paragraphs and the overall story, and use of related terms (e.g. sexual harassment) within articles.

Another important consideration within newspaper reporting is that of sources (also known as voices), defined as “any named individual to whom a reporter attributed news-story information” (Ewart & Massey, 2005, p 101). That is, the source/s is important to identify in the research and, depending on the issue being explored, may be a significant variable on which to base analysis. For instance, in relation to a research topic, comparisons could be made between elite sources (e.g. those in public office) and non-elite sources (e.g. lay people). In our case, we coded each article for both direct and indirect quotes. Direct quotes, which speak to the reader without interpretation by the article writer, are considered to be more powerful than indirect quotes and paraphrases that do not represent a source’s own words. Our analysis identified voices of targets, perpetrators, the judiciary, spokespeople, third parties, author’s voice (found only in opinion articles, e.g. *‘Everyone knows that the minister is a bully, so this latest incident is of no surprise’*), and author’s contextualization (no

direct evidence of anyone in the story using the term, indicating an author's description).

Typical of research of this type, it is most important to have experienced researchers conducting the analysis, and having quality checks in place. In our case, an experienced research assistant conducted the initial analysis of the data with the close guidance of the research team. At the half way point of the initial analysis, one of the chief investigators, who had experience with coding of newspaper articles and with news framing analysis undertook a check of a sample of the articles coded by the research assistant. The analysis was approached using Gitlin's (1980, p. 7) definition of news frames as "persistent selection, emphasis, and exclusion" that enables journalists to process and package large amounts of information quickly". While consistency in coding was at an acceptable level, to ensure a rigorous approach, the research team then reviewed the entire process with the research assistant prior to completion of the analysis.

Following further consideration of the content and frequency of the various categorisations associated with the definition and source, we moved to a more open, inductive approach to examine the data more deeply and to identify themes to give us more holistic information (that may or may not be present in the academic literature). As Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) indicate, inductive framing involves analysis of news stories that maintains 'an open view to attempt to reveal the array of possible frames" (p.94). This involved several passes of the data, identifying themes and linkages, reflecting on the articles over a period of time, and referring back and forth to the more numerical analysis already conducted. Thus, thematic analysis was conducted to identify aspects of the articles such as the context/topic of each article which was then considered in light of the definition and source categories already identified (Marks & Yardley, 2004).

As can be seen, many perspectives can be gained from using newspapers as a data source in HRM research. The following demonstrates the types of information that can be gathered, including the depth that some stories achieve, and how the data itself can generate further questions. For instance, in order to address one aspect of our research interest, we attempted to discern whether or not the identified newspaper articles used the term in a way that accorded with the academic definition.

Initially we focussed on the nine articles that used the phrase ‘workplace bullying’. Two of the articles met the academic definition of workplace bullying, four did not meet the definition, and three either partially fulfilled the definition or were considered to have insufficient evidence to meet the definition (see Table 2).

Table 2. Articles with the term ‘workplace bullying’

Article	Headline	Definition Met
21-09-10 - Sydney Morning Herald	Intimidation and fear: welcome to agency charged with stamping out <i>bullying</i>	Insufficient
08-06-11 - Sydney Morning Herald	<i>Bullied</i> at work and it's not just the boss to blame	Partial
24-07-10 - The Australian	Bulldogs dismiss <i>bullying</i> claims - JOHNSON HITS BACK AT AKER	No
29-07-10 - The Australian	Air controllers claim sexual bias	Yes
01-10-10 - The Australian	Cops say recording ban lets <i>bullies</i> off	No
10-02-11 - The Australian	Nuclear reactor under investigation	No
08-04-11 - The Australian [Opinion]	Legislation not needed to tackle work <i>bullies</i>	Yes
09-04-11 [3] - The Australian	Courts cannot catch every workplace <i>bully</i>	No
25-05-11 - The Australian	Nuclear agency safety culture ‘stuck in 70s’	Insufficient

Note: Bold and italics added

One of the articles that met the definition focussed on a case of sexual harassment and discrimination (see Table 3) and clearly demonstrates the similarities and overlaps between the behaviours associated with repeated sexual harassment and workplace bullying. In this case the term was used regularly in conjunction with the words discrimination, harassed and/or abuse.

Table 3. Example of an article that met the definition of workplace bullying

<p>Date: 29-07-10 Publication: The Australian Headline: Air controllers claim sexual bias Claims of ‘extreme’ sex discrimination and <i>bullying</i> heard in court. TWO female air traffic controllers are seeking more than \$1 million each from their government-owned employer, alleging they endured years of <i>workplace bullying</i>, discrimination and abuse. Among the allegations in the Federal Court action against Airservices Australia is that the two Melbourne controllers, Jacki Macdonald and Kirsty Fletcher, were exposed to pornography circulated by email by a manager. On one occasion, a manager allegedly told a pregnant Ms Macdonald that her pregnancy did not suit the roster and that he had a “coat hanger in the back of his car”. When she complained about the comment, she was allegedly told the manager was “having a bad day”.</p>

The women's lawyer, Maurice Blackburn principal Josh Bornstein, said that while the women loved their jobs, he claimed they had faced "extreme" sex discrimination and **bullying** over five years.

The women allege they were refused access to professional development and training; abused and belittled for being pregnant, and told that part-time employment was not welcome.

"Australia may have its first female prime minister but the attitudes and behaviour of managers at Airservices is light years away from what a workplace should be in the 21st century," Mr Bornstein said.

Ms Macdonald, who fought back tears as she spoke to the media yesterday, said she had been an air traffic controller for 18 years but "enough is enough" and she did not want other young women to be exposed to such a workplace culture.

"What people don't realise when you are **bullied** and harassed is how belittling it makes you feel, how small it makes you feel and how inadequate and undervalued," she said. "Eighteen years I have been an air traffic controller and it's counted for nothing."

The women allege the circulation of the pornography continued even after a number of staff complained. The manager allegedly circulating the material was warned by a superior to desist "because the last thing you need is that stuff to get into the wrong hands". Despite the warning, the material continued to circulate.

Mr Bornstein said the manager who allegedly **bullied** the women had been sacked but was claiming unfair dismissed and seeking reinstatement.

In a brief statement, Airservices said it was aware of the issues raised yesterday.

"The matter is being taken seriously by Airservices management," the statement said.

"Our investigations have only just been completed and the matter is in the hands of respective legal advisers."

Note: Bold and italics added

One of the articles that partially met the definition was mainly based on the references to inappropriate behaviour (see Table 4). In this case the article reported the results of a national survey. Again the term was used in conjunction with the word discrimination, with other words such as abuse or intimidation also used throughout the article.

Table 4. Example of an article that partially met the definition of workplace bullying

Date: 08-06-11

Publication: The Sydney Morning Herald

Headline: ***Bullied*** at work and it's not just the boss to blame

Bullying and discrimination are still rife in the workplace, with a national survey finding little improvement in the past three years.

Almost a third of workers claim to have been ***bullied*** in the workforce, with a quarter having experienced ***bullying*** in the past two years.

Almost half of the 5100 workers surveyed said they had also witnessed a colleague being ***bullied*** or discriminated against.

More than one in 10 workers claimed they had been the victim of systemic workplace abuse or intimidation.

But the boss is not necessarily to blame, with the unwelcome behaviour just as likely to come from colleagues as superiors.

The results, which come on the tail of Victoria becoming the first state to legislate against ***workplace bullying***, are similar to those found three years ago in an earlier study.

Tania Evans, the manager of WorkPro, which commissioned the study, said employers refusing to address the issues were underestimating their risk of liability over future occupational health

and safety claims.

"It comes down to lack of education. Employers are assuming that because the issue has gained more media attention in the past few years everyone is aware of what is and what is not acceptable in the workplace," she said.

"But the Australian workplace is a melting pot, and a lot of the **bullying** and discrimination which is taking place is crosscultural."

Racial and religious conflict appeared to be at the heart of the problem, she said, with inappropriate jokes, unwanted physical approaches and deliberate exclusion from social events all common complaints.

The survey also found widespread confusion in the workplace over what the correct channels were for reporting complaints, while some felt their workplace culture discouraged reporting incidents at all.

Ms Evans said employers needed to be proactive about making sure employees got the information they needed to understand their rights and responsibilities at work.

"They need to ensure employees feel they can report inappropriate behaviour," she said.

Last week the Victorian Parliament passed legislation making **workplace bullying** a criminal offence, with offenders facing sentences of up to 10 years' jail.

Note: Bold and italics added

One of the articles that did not fulfil the academic definition (see Table 5) used the term only once.

The article itself related to the operation of a nuclear reactor, and focused on allegations of workplace bullying and harassment allegedly not being investigated. While only used once, the term was used in conjunction with the word harassment.

Table 5. Example of an article that did not meet the definition of workplace bullying

Date: 10-02-11

Publication: The Australian

Headline: Nuclear reactor under investigation

SCIENCE Minister Kim Carr has launched an investigation into the safety and operation of Australia's nuclear reactor.

Senator Carr yesterday asked department officials to work with the independent safety regulator -- the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency -- to examine occupational health and safety practices in place at the radiopharmaceutical product facility at the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation at Lucas Heights in Sydney.

The move follows a report by the ABC's Lateline revealing damning details of an earlier investigation conducted by Australia's workplace regulator, Comcare.

The Comcare report found that ANSTO broke federal laws involving safety breaches and failed to investigate allegations of **workplace bullying** and harassment arising from the breaches.

"I take allegations such as those aired last night very seriously," Senator Carr said. "I have been closely monitoring these events for a considerable time."

In one such event investigated by ARPANSA and cited in the Comcare document, a staff member dropped a vial of radioactive molybdenum 90.

According to the ARPANSA report, obtained by The Australian, radiation levels near the dropped vial were "abnormally high".

"This is 100 times what would have been expected," said the inspectors, who further concluded that facility staff were poorly trained and did not know how to report incidents. Staff received no feedback about safety concerns following the incident.

The inspectors found while similar accidents had occurred over the years, the situation was not corrected. "ARPANSA inspectors noted that ANSTO acknowledged the . . . facility is more

akin to a research facility than a production facility," the report states. That means problems will continue, it warns.
Officials at ANSTO pointed The Australian to a media release claiming the Comcare report was "flawed".
A spokesman for Comcare said it stands by its report.

Note: Bold and italics added

Turning to the use of the broader term, interestingly, the majority of articles that did not meet the definition had a singular reference to the term (119 of 164) (only three articles that did not meet the definition had more than 8 references to the term). These three articles discussed the usefulness of bullying legislation (24 references to the term), the reporting of research linking social skills and bullying (15 references) and an example of a bullying prevention effort within schools (10 references). While not meeting the academic definition we consider the term was used appropriately in these three articles. Interestingly, the one article that met the definition, but only had one reference to the term, was about a person who was a whistleblower, where the use of the term related to the behaviours the whistleblower experienced. This example shows the range of ways the term is used within the newspapers, and led us to reflect on the practical usefulness of the academic workplace bullying definition and the possible overuse of the term in general.

Indeed, our exploration of the data identified for us a substantial number of articles with only a single reference to the term (143 of the 225 articles; 64%). This led us to explore in more depth this sub-set of the data. Often the majority of singular references occurred in articles identified as those that did not meet the definition of workplace bullying (119 of the 143 articles). Similarly, when the thematic analysis for the context/topic of the article was considered, 140 articles (of 143) were identified as discussing topics other than bullying (e.g., the topic of the article was considered to be about Business because it was about an industrial dispute) and having one reference to the term. When we removed the articles whose topic was considered to be related to bullying (i.e., articles that were about bullying, for instance bullying legislation or a related issue such as sexual harassment) from the 143 articles with a singular reference, 87 remained. That is, 39% of the 225 articles had one reference to the term and the topic of the article had no relation to bullying or inappropriate behaviour. As noted,

this seemed a possible overuse of the term and led us to question how the term was used in this specific group of articles.

Broadly speaking, there were two main topics within this group of articles; politics and business. Interestingly, the majority of references to the term occurred at the beginning of the article (indicating its possible news worthiness), and the term was often related to, or used in conjunction with, the word intimidation. Examples include: Political intimidation - *Bullied into silence by Kevin Rudd, the captains of industry are fearlessly speaking out* (09-10-10 – The Australian – first sentence of article) and Business intimidation - *Australians are sick of watching large profitable companies bullying government for special treatment* (06-01-11 – The Sydney Morning Herald [Opinion] – second sentence of article). When the use of the term was further explored within the business theme we found the term was often used in relation to a broad-based group, such as a particular country or organisation, as highlighted by the following selected quotes: *India has further enhanced its bully boy status with a series of extraordinary acts in relation to other nations' cricket in the past few days* (22-06-11 – The Australian); *Like all bullies, the Knights don't know when to stop* (28-10-10 [3] – The Sydney Morning Herald [Opinion]); *PAG has accused API of bullying and has threatened to take its 400 members, generating about \$600m in revenue, and walk* (20-04-11 – The Australian); *He accused Australia's Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance and New Zealand Actors Equity of trying to bully the production into illegal collective bargaining* (22-10-10 – The Sydney Morning Herald); and *...last year accused British American Tobacco of attempting to bully and intimidate his family by warning that their Cranbourne home could be sold to recover the tobacco giant's costs* (01-04-11 – The Australian). The analysis gave us new insights into usage of the term in the public domain, and will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Turning to the question of sources within the 225 articles, 109 articles were identified where the author paraphrased a spokesperson, target, third party, perpetrator or judiciary, although it was unclear if the original source used the term (i.e., 'bully', 'bullies', 'bullying' or 'bullied') or not. Direct quotes where the term was used were only identified within 77 articles. In the case of opinion pieces, the journalist appeared to use the term themselves within 34 articles (from 48). For 87 general news

articles, no direct evidence that anyone in the story had actually used the term was found, indicating the author had chosen to use the term. When reflecting on this data, especially in relation to the possible over use of the term (i.e., singular use of the term) and the use of the term early in the articles, we concluded there may be a willingness by the author to choose the term for its news value. This may be because conflict is a key news value and journalists may perceive that readers are more likely to engage with a story that features conflict. Additional research using interviews with journalists who wrote the stories would determine whether this is the case.

Contributions, strengths and weaknesses of the method, and future directions

Our chapter aimed to contribute to knowledge about the value of using news stories as data in HRM research, with the particular example of the portrayal of workplace bullying. We consider that the approach is innovative and has a number of strengths, including the provision of important and interesting HRM data that can augment that already in the field. Firstly, the method gives deep insights into the way the public accesses information about a HRM issue. From a frequency point of view, our study indicates that the term ‘bully’ can be readily found in newspapers, suggesting the public would be well aware of the topic and its broad relationship with societal difficulties. Lewis’s (2001) research would support this. We also examined how the term was used, and can see that, while the reporting rarely reflects the academic definition, the general meaning is communicated in a reasonably accurate way at times. In fact, the necessary brevity of many newspaper articles means that it is usually impractical to impart a long and complex definition and nuances of meaning. Nevertheless, having a well-informed public is important as they can contribute to debate and communication that can ultimately build a stronger society, with well-developed policies that can be augmented with appropriate resources on the basis of public support and understanding. As well as imparting information appropriately (e.g. introduction of anti-bullying legislation), the use of the term appeared to have various other aims, including to emphasise problematic situations (e.g. paired with another descriptive word such as “bullying and intimidation”) and to gain attention or dramatic effect (e.g. the term used in the headline where a substantive story on the topic did not follow). Indeed, for a large percentage of the articles it appeared that the author had chosen to use the term in this way.

Some uses therefore appear to have the potential to detract from the public's understanding of the serious nature, impacts, costs, and complexity of bullying, which is an important HRM perspective in relation to the public's understanding.

Another strength of the method is that totally new perspectives can arise. Interestingly, as indicated earlier, bullying was often depicted as emanating from a broad-based group, such as a particular country, organisation, government structure, occupational group, political alliance, union or sporting team, and directed towards an equivalent entity or, more often, a smaller party (e.g. individuals and families). While this is perhaps a convenient, "shorthand" way of communicating, it does have the effect of depersonalising perpetrators and ascribing to them an overwhelming sense of power. In comparison, academic usage is more focussed on processes that occur between individuals and/or small groups where effects and complexities of power are potentially more identifiable (as indicated in the definition provided in this chapter). Indeed, for academics, there tends to be tacit agreement that bullying is carried out by people (not entities), and it is only people who can devise policies and procedures and enact behavioural norms within contexts and processes that can encourage or could reduce bullying. However, within the literature there is certainly recognition that bullying is not isolated from its context (e.g. Einarson et al., 2011), highlighting its occurrence within, and influence by, particular organisational processes, leadership styles, norms, and more recently, national cultures (Branch et al., 2013; Escartin, Zapf, Arrieta & Rodriguez-Carbelleira, 2011; Ramsay, Troth & Branch, 2011). Thus, the present research has highlighted how a HRM topic can be portrayed in newspapers, allowing some comparisons between academic conceptualisations and more publically accessible communications, which can ultimately serve to produce higher quality information on the topic.

The method described here can contribute to HRM research in several ways. Importantly, a strength of the method is that newspapers provide a rich source of data on HRM topics that is readily available via newspaper databases, such as Factiva, at low cost, and can be analysed from a wide range of perspectives with programs like N-Vivo. Accordingly, researchers have the opportunity to reflect on how a particular HRM phenomenon is portrayed to the general public, which allows insights into

matches or mis-matches across different informational arenas (e.g. academic writings and newspapers in the public domain). This can generate important insights into future research questions that could bridge perceived gaps between academic and public understandings of a complex phenomenon. Thus, researchers have an important opportunity to reflect on their own role as academics in bridging any identified gaps, which can ultimately contribute to new research directions and, in turn, theoretical and practical developments. In the study presented, many stakeholders are clearly involved, including society, various groups and individuals, the newspaper itself and journalists, and the identified sources. Such an analysis allows researchers insights that can guide actions, which have the potential to develop a more informed public (e.g. offering to write informed feature articles or to communicate with interested journalists about professional development in an area of HRM), and to contribute to teaching in higher education.

While a strength of the method is the level of detail provided (as exemplified in tables 4-6) that can be readily accessed, a limitation is the static nature of the data in that we cannot add to what is there or clarify it any further (e.g. as in an indepth interview). Also, we offer a note of caution here in relation to the effect news media has on its audiences in that research has shown that news media audiences do not uncritically accept what they see, read or hear (Scheufele and Tewksbuy, 2007), which highlights the need to examine the actual reactions of the public to stories. Therefore, one approach to overcome this limitation, would be to use more interactive data that could be sourced from the internet (e.g. comments on news stories). Branch and Murray (in press) recently used an evolving conversation on social media to demonstrate the differing reactions individuals had to a case of workplace bullying. In essence, this review identified two groups of people, those who thought the alleged perpetrator was justified and the target needed to toughen up and another who felt the alleged perpetrator was a bully and something needed to be done to support the target. The methodology could also be applied to other forms of news media such as broadcast and online news sites or blogs, although analyses of television in particular would require consideration of images that accompany stories about workplace bullying.

As with any research there were challenges and shortcomings to our study. While the methodology and approach we selected did illuminate public representations of workplace bullying, we recognize limitations in relation to firstly the form of media studied and secondly to what we have termed the ‘multiple-perspectives’ of those involved in these news stories. In relation to the first point, our study only involved two broadsheet newspapers. With some amendments to the methodology described here, further examinations of how workplace bullying is represented in broadcast, online and social media and the impacts of that coverage, could enhance understanding of HRM issues.

In relation to the second limitation of our study, the need for multiple perspectives about workplace bullying stories, it would be useful for researchers to investigate the perspectives of journalists about the workplace bullying stories they write. This could be done within the context of the restrictions that are imposed by news production and practices and journalists’ understandings of what workplace bullying means both in practice and in relation to academic and legislative definitions of it. The views of those cited or quoted in stories about workplace bullying, in relation to how they were represented and how the issue of workplace bullying was covered, would also be instructive in terms of improving journalistic practice and public understandings of workplace bullying. Because the perspectives of news media audiences are often overlooked in research about news media, a more nuanced approach to understanding how news media audiences respond to representations of HRM issues such as workplace bullying would be instructive, particularly in relation to any attempts that might be made to change the way such stories are reported. The impacts of citizen journalism such as alternative news media and blogs on audiences’ understandings of HRM issues would also add to our understandings of the impacts of this kind of reportage.

An alignment with the multiple stakeholder approach to HRM discussed at the beginning of the chapter can be seen in this study (e.g. the range and types of sources), and the methodology could be applied to other HRM research areas, as well as to comparisons of stories over time (e.g. revisiting these two newspapers in the future to identify any shift in the way workplace bullying stories are reported). Other areas of HRM that could be examined include the public’s access to information about workplace stress, workplace accidents, discrimination, and cultural diversity; all examples of

areas that would benefit from application of this innovative method to uncover important information, and build new approaches to understanding various stakeholders in the complex area of HRM.

Alternatively, as recommended by Hauptmann and Stegar (2013), social media can be especially helpful to HRM in terms of facilitating recruitment, organisational learning processes and the development of culture through communication, and is therefore an important future research opportunity.

In conclusion, this approach has emphasised the multiple perspectives of organisations, stakeholders and society on a complex phenomenon as conveyed by the news media. The research has contributed to greater understanding of the use of news media in terms of HRM, and specifically more knowledge as to how the public may perceive workplace bullying. The strengths of the methodological approach include the generation of new insights, including gaps in the portrayal of HRM topics, as exemplified by the workplace bullying study presented, between publically accessible media and academic approaches to the issue. Reflection on the aforementioned issues may ultimately contribute to greater theoretical and practical insights in HRM. As we begin to catch up with advances in technology and as technology continues to develop the use of online media may provide HRM researchers and practitioners with fertile ground for future research of this kind.

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