A Discussion on empowering role of education on HR practitioners' ethical conduct

Sevgi Dönmez Maç[a], Onur Metin[b], Şule Aydın Turan[c*], Semih Okutan[d]

[a]Sakarya Üniversitesi, Orcid: 0000-0002-3937-9703
[b]Sakarya Üniversitesi, Orcid: 0000-0002-0773-6489
[c*]Corresponding author, Sakarya Üniversitesi, e-mail: saydin@sakarya.edu.tr, Orcid: 0000-0002-2927-545X
[d]Sakarya Üniversitesi, Orcid: 0000-0002-9430-0367

Abstract

This study aims to discuss whether HR education could be a source for empowering HR professionals to overcome unethical behaviors and ethical dilemmas. Accordingly, in the paper, first of all, the unethical behaviors and ethical dilemmas that the HR professionals may encounter are outlined. After that, HR education, for more humanistic workplace development, is discussed conceptually. Thirdly, the current perspective of the undergraduate's level of HR education and the national occupational standards prepared by the Vocational Qualifications Authority regarding HR-related professions are examined in terms of mainstream and ethical/critical HR approaches. Finally, the contribution of ethical HR education for a more balanced perspective on working life is discussed. Content analysis is used for the evaluation of the curriculum of the HR departments in higher education institutions, and the occupational standards. The findings of the study reveal that both the private sector's expectations and HR education are highly in line with the mainstream perspective of HR. The findings are significant in terms of showing that the HR practitioners at present have a dominantly unitarist perspective, and their expectations from the HR-related occupations' practitioners have clearly managerialist and unitarist tendencies. The orientations of higher education programs, on the other hand, are in the same direction to a large extent. In the context of the findings, in conclusion, it is suggested that the HR education for a more humanistic and balanced working life, even if in the long-term, may be redesigned in an ethically and critically strengthened, and strategically and morally balanced manner.

Key Words: Ethics, HRM, Education, Critical HRM

İK profesyonellerinin etik eğilimlerinde eğitimin güçlendirici rolü üzerine bir tartışma

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, İK profesyonellerinin etik olmayan davranışların ve etik ikilemlerin üstesinden gelmesine destek olabilecek bir kaynak olarak İK eğitimini tartışmaktır. Makalede öncelikle, İK profesyonellerinin karşılaşabileceği etik dışı durumlar ve etik ikilemler ana hatlarıyla incelenmiştir. Ardından, daha insancıl bir işyerinin geliştirilebilmesi için İK eğitimi kavramsal olarak tartışılmıştır. Üçüncüsü, Mesleki Yeterlilik Kurumu'nun İK ile ilişkili mesleklere ilişkin hazırladığı ulusal meslek standartlarında mevcut olan bakış açısı ile lisans seviyesindeki İK eğitiminde geçerli olan mevcut perspektif ana-akım ve etik/eleştirel İK anlayışları bağlamında incelenmiştir. Son olarak, çalışma hayatına daha dengeli bir bakış açısı için etik İK eğitiminin katkıları tartışılmıştır. İK eğitimi veren bölümlerin ders planlarının ve meslek standartlarının değerlendirilmesinde içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları hem özel sektörün beklentilerinin hem de İK eğitiminin ana akım İK anlayışı ile oldukça uyumlu olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bulgular, mevcut İK profesyonellerinin baskın bir biçimde ana-akım İK anlayışına sahip olduğunu ve İK ile ilgili meslek mensuplarından beklentilerinin açık bir biçimde yönetimci ve tekilci eğilimler barındırdığını göstermesi anlamında önemlidir. Öte yandan, yükseköğretim programlarının eğilimleri de büyük ölçüde aynı yöndedir. Bulgular bağlamında, çalışmanın sonucunda İK eğitiminin, ancak uzun vadede gerçekleştirilebilecek olsa bile, daha insancıl, daha dengeli bir çalışma hayatı için etik ve eleştirel olarak güçlendirilmiş ve stratejik ve ahlaki açıdan dengeli bir şekilde yeniden tasarlanması önerilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etik, İKY, Eğitim, Eleştirel İKY

Introduction

Since the end of the nineteenth century, within an increasing number of organizations in the working life, the majority of employees' contact with their organizations via the Human Resources Management (HRM) functions and practices. Therefore, one of the critical occupational areas, in terms of building a humanistic working environment, is human resources management. On the other hand, in terms of HRM discipline, the extent to which a humanitarian workplace establishment mission is accepted in practice is controversial. In conceptual terms, some assign such a mission to HRM, while others provide different frameworks.

The literature on HRM, reveals that there are three different perspectives on what HRM really is; and according to these perspectives, characteristics, and requirements of HRM differ. These differences can be based on the antecedents of the perspectives. Accordingly, the most prominent perspective, *mainstream HRM,* deals with employees as resources for achieving organizational objectives. The mainstream view of 'HRM is accused of being managerialist, technocratic, positivist and lacking in reflexivity' (Alvesson, 2009:55). Greenwood (2013) bases this approach on the fields of psychology and organizational behavior that HRM has derived from. For mainstream HRM, the company serves the interests of financial stakeholders, so advocates of this perspective deal with employees, HR practices, and companies for the capital owners. Depending on its unitarist perspective, they see contradictory interests between employer and employee as unnatural and undesirable. HRM department, as an organization tool, reinforces and develops these organizational arrangements (Greenwood, 2013).

The second perspective is the radical one, which is referred to as critical HRM. *Critical HRM* perspective stems from labor process analysis or Marxist political views (Mueller and Carter as cited in Greenwood, 2013) and assumes a pluralist and collectivist nature of the workplace so that multiple purposes and goals of different parties may exist (Greenwood, 2013). This view tries to move beyond instrumentalism and assumptions of performativity (Greenwood, 2013), and according to the proponents of critical HRM, the purpose of the company is to uphold existing power relations and structures. Therefore, they address the company, society, institutions, class, and capitalism as their focus of attention. They consider both the views of employees and their organizations. They define conflicting interests between employer and employee as natural, but they see it as impossible, too. In this regard, HRM, as a control device, reinforces and constructs power hegemonies at institutional and societal levels (Greenwood, 2013).

The ethical perspective is (the) one with a more optimistic position between two others. Derived from applied ethics and social philosophy, ethical HRM serves the interests of a broad range of legitimate stakeholders. Therefore, it concerns companies, stakeholders and society as the focus of analysis. It also has pluralist assumptions, but it differs from the radical point of view by accepting divergent interests between employer and employee as natural and manageable. In this regard, HRM refers to a moral activity and has the potential to improve the quality of working life (Greenwood, 2013). Humanism is also crucial because society has advanced far enough in its ethical and moral principles. Accordingly, employees are not merely a material means to an economic end but are human beings with rights to decent terms and conditions of employment, fair treatment, voice and participation, and opportunities for personal growth and development (Kaufman, 2008:282).

HRM, as a de facto labor-management mechanism, is a fundamental output of the capitalist production organization. In this regard, the question of what kind of policy will accompany HRM practices matters for the development of more humanistic workplaces becomes crucial. This policy will also be determined by the attitudes of professionals in this field. In this context, ethical and critical understandings of HR may be assumed to complement each other. When the ethical perspective which recognizes the HRM practitioners' role for better conditions of working life is empowered with the critical thinking of the radical critical view, it may be a standpoint for HR practitioners to improve the quality of working life.

Based on the above, HR professionals must understand the ethical challenges, namely situations that confront them with unethical behaviors and ethical dilemmas. In this regard, this study aims to discuss whether HR education could be a source for empowering HR professionals to overcome such situations. Figure 1 shows the aim of the study.
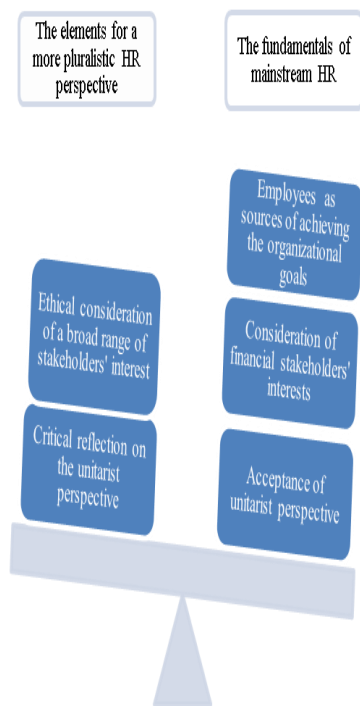

Figure 1. *The aim of the study*

Accordingly, in the following sections, the unethical behaviors and ethical dilemmas that the HR professionals may face will be outlined. After that, the possibilities of an HR education, for more humanistic workplace development, will be discussed conceptually. Thirdly, the current perspective valid in HR education in Turkey will be examined concerning the expectations of occupational standards for HR-related jobs. Finally, the promises of ethical HR education for a more balanced perspective on working life will be discussed.

Ethical issues and HRM

In their daily activities, HRM professionals may encounter ethical issues in different ways. In this context, they may experience ethical dilemmas,

may get involved in activities that they consider unethical, or remain quiet in some cases.

An ethical dilemma is defined as multifaceted demands on HR professionals, which conflict with each other. Dilemma may arise from the conflict of personal, professional, and organizational beliefs, expectations, values, and needs, and they influence HRM functions, duties, roles, services, and activities (Wooten, 2001:165). However, unethical behavior is a decision or behavioral result of an HR professional that causes personal, professional or organizational harm doing (Wooten, 2001:165). In a research conducted by Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM, 1991) the ten most unethical severe situations of HR managers were defined as hiring/training/promotion based on favoritism, differences in pay, promotion, etc. based on friendship with top management, sexual harassment, gender discrimination in promotion, using discipline inconsistently, nonperformance factors used in appraisal, arrangements with vendors leading to personal gains, and gender discrimination in recruitment/hiring (SHRM, 1991 as cited in Wooten, 2001:162). HR professionals believe that ethical misconduct takes place more often in HR recruitment function and it is followed by health and safety and compensation (Wiley, 1998). Ethical misconduct is also seen in labor relations, training and development, and benefits.

In addition to the ethical dilemma and unethical behavior, ethical inactivity may be discussed under this heading. Fisher (2000) points out three primary forms of ethical inactivity among HR managers. The first one is quietism. In this context, HR professionals side with the organization as they are coerced, and they do not consider the cost. The second form of ethical inactivity is neutrality. It could be defined as a moral muteness due to a lack of opportunities to 'blow the whistle' as a result of perceived power or organizational politics. The third one is stated as acceptance of the business case. Justification is provided through compromising of personal ethical viewpoints with the business case (Fisher, 2000).

As for the factors that cause ethical dilemmas and unethical behaviors, various issues were addressed in previous studies. Accordingly, senior management and immediate supervisor's attitude or behavior, personal values, internal drive for success, and performance pressures are vital factors that influence the managers to make unethical decisions (Wiley, 1998). On the other hand, conflict among the logic of market capitalism, the logic of professional practice, and the logic of state interpretations of the employment relationship (Wilcox, 2012:87) could also be influential for the ethical dilemma.

Wooten (2001) presents a multidimensional framework for the study of HRM ethics. According to this framework, the ethical environment of the HRM professional is affected by demographic trends, legislative/regulatory climate, economic climate, and social trends. For example, economic stagnation may bring downsizing steps, new laws may improve or worsen employee rights, and demographic trends (aging population, youth workforce, number of immigrants ready to work, etc.) may change the employment relations in the workplace. The law defines at least minimum standards, but adhering to the law does not mean behaving ethically or acting responsibly (Parkes & Davis, 2013). Besides, adherence to the law may occur in various forms. Schwartz and Carroll (2003) state them as passive compliance, restrictive compliance, opportunistic compliance, avoidance of civil litigation and anticipation of the law. For example, in the case of opportunistic conformity, a corporation may take advantage of loopholes in the legislation, and they can take part in certain activities. In this case, the corporation abides by the letter of the law but not the spirit of the law (Schwartz and Carroll, 2003: 510). Another opportunistic compliance case may occur when the corporation chooses to operate in an environment having weaker standards. Corporations operating in the developing countries which have less stringent standards on employee rights may be given as examples (Schwartz and Carroll, 2003: 511). On the other hand, although there are universal principles for ethical behaviors in organizations, their application in different contexts may vary due to cultural norms and stages of development in the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) field (Parkes & Davis, 2013:2418).

Parkes and Davis' (2013) study shows that HR managers were ready to meet the expectations of ethical stewardship, and they knew what is right and wrong, but they face difficulties in the organizations. Accordingly, Parkes and Davis (2013), based on their study conducted in 2009, state that individual, organizational and contextual factors operate independently and shape professional behavior. At the organizational level, the presence of corporate policies and commitment to ethical conduct and HR representation at the senior level together increases awareness of ethical standards within the sample. Especially the policies defining expected

behavior and providing protection for the employees who are willing to challenge is stated as critical. For example, if the number of passive witnessing is so high in the organization, an individual's propensity to intervene decreases because people do not need to intervene. Besides, inaction could be used as self-preservation if a threat is perceived in the case of intervening (Latane and Darley 1969, 1970, as cited in Parkes & Davis, 2013:2417). Therefore, Parkes and Davis' study reveals that if organizations had whistle-blower policies, it provides protection for the HR professionals both for encouraging responsible disobedience and challenging as prescribed by professional bodies. Parkes and Davis also question the appearance of some organizations as more ethical than others. They point out that they see ethics and CSR as vital because, according to them, it is the 'right thing to do' (Cadbury, 2006 as cited in Parkes & Davis, 2013:2429). However, some others just do it to appease the public pressures, competition, and scrutiny.

Ethics and HRM professional as a moral agency

The examples in the section above point to the factors surrounding HR professionals. However, how professionals should handle ethical issues as individuals is also a matter of discussion. In this regard, the role of HRM professionals could be discussed.

Many scholars discuss if ethical behavior is possible in an environment where the market logic of twenty-first-century contemporary capitalism predominates. Because the interpretive schemes, values, discourses, and priorities of global capitalism, which favor competition, efficiency, and shareholder profit, become taken-for-granted 'facts' of organizational life (Wilcox, 2012:88). Consistent with that, Van Buren, Greenwood, and Sheehan (2011) highlight contributing to the 'bottom line' and strategy and distancing of HR professionals from the more 'humanistic' aspects of the role and employees. In this regard, shifting the focus away from issues not directly related to performance, such as occupational health and safety, low wage work, etc., may reduce the ethical consideration (Greenwood, 2013).

However, Wilcox (2012) discusses the circumstances where HR managers can act ethically. The author considers MacIntyre's (1999) moral agency in constraining contexts. According to this approach, social actors need a capacity for self-reflection and the critical examination of established orders to act as moral agents. Therefore, social settings of the moral agents should enable reflective critical questioning of standards, and in this setting, individuals can deliberate with 'reliable others' (MacIntyre, 1999:316-317). In this regard, MacIntyre (1999:322) questions the availability of these settings in contemporary business organizations, and he introduces the concept of 'compartmentalization.' Compartmentalization includes insulation so that the professionals perform the values, norms, and expectations of their roles without questioning the effect of them on the others. It is the ever-present feature of contemporary society due to the elevation of market values (such as individualism, acquisitiveness, etc.) to a central social place (McIntyre, 2000 as cited in Wilcox, 2012:88). Therefore, modern social structures do not provide an opportunity for reflective critical questioning, and ethics and HRM can be discussed in this context. As pointed out by Wilcox (2012), not just the dominance of neoliberal economic logic, but also the compartmentalization of roles may disable the moral agency.

In another study, De Gama, McKenna, and Peticca-Harris (2012) discuss neutralization of the moral impulse through three mechanisms of Bauman (1993): distancing, depersonalization, and dissembling. Distancing means that there is a space between the 'doing' one and the 'suffering' one. In this regard, if the decisions are often driven by law, the doer just follows the requirements and may not consider the impact on others. Lay off could be given as an example in this context (De Gama, McKenna & Peticca-Harris, 2012:99). Depersonalization stands for focusing on classification, categorization, measurement, and surveillance instead of the person. For example, during the recruitment and selection process, extensive use of personality tests is defined as depersonalizing and classifying. In this regard, the person is not viewed as worthy as an object of moral responsibility (De Gama, McKenna & Peticca-Harris, 2012:99). Dissembling is linked to depersonalization. From an HRM point of view, people are seen as 'aggregates of the functionally specific traits,' and their performance is 'measured' against tasks and characteristics dissembled into measurable formats as expected from HR professionals (De Gama, McKenna & Peticca-Harris, 2012: 99). Briefly, the authors point out that HRM professionals put distance between 'I' and 'Other' and have constructed HRM as part of the 'Third' (Bauman, 1993 as cited in de De Gama, McKenna & Peticca-Harris, 2012). This creates distance, and the Other, which refers to an employee, becomes an object to do things *on*, not to *be for.* According to this

perspective, HRM activities are conducted calculatively and to some extent, self-interestedly (De Gama, McKenna & Peticca-Harris, 2012:105). Therefore, HR professionals may not consider the employees' wellbeing and justice and thus cannot apply moral agency. This discussion bears a resemblance to the compartmentalization concept of MacIntyre discussed by Wilcox (2012).

HRM education's role for empowering HR practitioner as a moral agency

The above discussion reveals that the contemporary working life brings about structural limitations for HR practitioners' ethical behaviors. Even if various reasons enable engaging in ethical dilemmas and unethical behaviors and make HRM professionals feel under pressure, this does not mean that they should totally avoid their ethical and personal responsibilities. Instead, their capacities could be developed to tackle these pressures. In this context, the role of HRM education comes to the forefront. Through education, awareness of moral agency could be increased, and the position of the HR practitioner as the moral agency could be strengthened.

Parkes and Davis (2013) argue that enabling ethical behavior does not need a macro-structural change but a more subtle establishment and enactment of authentic values. This process is defined slow because it requires focusing on behaviors and attitudes. However, at the same time, the authors pay attention to its relation to structures and systems that support the new approach. They claim that such a change relies on education and critical modeling of appropriate behaviors.

On the other hand, according to De Gama, McKenna, and Peticca-Harris (2012), if HRM professionals develop a close and proximal relationship with employees, tools and techniques would no longer be based on classifications, measurements, traits, and attributes. However, HRM education offered through post-secondary education or professional associations cannot provide an alternative ethical approach that is concerned with being for the Other. Because it implies a disruption not only of what HRM is but of the whole system. Therefore HR education and professional associations should shift their focus to the human element of organizations and away from the managerialist orientation to 'add value' to the organization. In this regard, they should establish firm objectives and capabilities that privilege being for the Other above all else. In this context, they suggest that HRM education and the HR professional bodies should question the meaning of ethics for HRM and whether HR is for the human or for the human as a resource (De Gama, McKenna, and Peticca-Harris, 2012:106). The answer to this question can define what HR education should be about and what the ongoing role of HR professional associations should be. But according to the authors, this portrays something very different from what HRM is now.

Wilcox (2012) suggests that HRM education should provide human resources professionals with the means to identify competing logics, assess practices against diverse standards and norms, and re-frame issues as necessary. According to Wilcox (2012: 95), managers need to be exposed to a critical pedagogy that embeds ethical practice at its core and encourages the exercise of moral agency. In this way, there may be a place for the moral agency in business life.

Bratton and Gold (2015) point out that HRM education should be sensitive to context, power, and inequality, and they discuss the Critical Human Resource Management Education (CHRME) approach. The authors present this approach as an antidote to prescriptive practitioner-oriented approaches and a radical alternative to HRM education in universities. Bratton and Gold (2015) set out five principles based on CHRME, which derive from critical management, the traditions of industrial relations, critical HRM teaching and the sociology of work traditions. These principles are using the 'sociological imagination' prism, emphasizing the social nature of employment relationship, investigating paradox within HRM, designing learning outcomes that encourage students to appraise HRM outcomes critically, and reflexive critique.

The *sociological imagination* principle points out that personal problems could be understood by looking beyond them. Therefore HRM pedagogy should connect workplace problems to larger macro and global social structures (Bratton & Gold, 2015:502). In this regard, pay gap between CEO and employees should be considered as an issue of social justice (Wilkinson and Pickett as cited in Bratton and Gold, 2015:502) and female graduates fail to be selected or promoted should be considered as the outcome of male-dominated hierarchies (Wajcman points out that as cited in Bratton & Gold, 2015:502).

The *social nature of the employment relationship* principle stands for as a reminder of an economic relationship. According to Bratton and Gold (2015), 'pay-effort' bargain is the source of many conflicts and according to Hyman (1975) employment relationships should be examined within the 'capitalist totality.' Thirdly, since there are differences between HR rhetorics and realities, *investigating (the) paradox within HRM* is necessary. In this regard, there are remarkable questions: How did the profession of HRM, which was born out to provide human welfare and support ethical and social values, evolve to the profession contributing to the 'bottom line' and strategy? How HRM distanced itself from the 'human' aspects of the role and employees (Van Buren, Greenwood & Sheehan, 2011)?

Fouth, Bratton, and Gold (2015) emphasize that questions regarding critical HRM evaluation should be asked instead of just focusing on the performance syllabus. It requires questioning the effect of HRM practices on employees and society. Therefore, students should be aware of the processes regulating employment contracts, and they should explore interconnections between the power relations and socio-economic context. The *reflexive criticism* method is embraced as the fifth concept. Supporting this, Antonacopoulou (2010) states that 'reflexive critique' includes a critique of dominant theories, assumptions, and existed meaning and propositions. Therefore the students should realize that personal and workplace problems are related to broader global and macro structures, and their understandings of reality are subjective (Cunliffe, 2004).

Considering the evaluations of De Gama, McKenna, and Peticca-Harris (2012), Wilcox (2012), and Parkes and Davis (2013), it can be stated that HR education may contribute to resolving ethical dilemmas and unethical behaviors of HR professionals. Based on the above, the following part aims to outline the current situation of HR education in Turkey, considering suggestions as to how HR education should be.

Expectations of the private sector and the current situation of HR education in Turkey

In this part, the occupational standards identified by the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) of HR-related jobs and the orientation of HR education in Higher Education will be examined. Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) is an institution which has the mission of "establishing and operating a quality-assured National Qualifications System which describes and recognizes the qualifications in cooperation with the stakeholders" (MYK, 2019a). VQA approves the national occupational standards to create a framework for the practice of specific professions. Accordingly, as MYK stated as "a national occupational standard (NOS) is the minimal norm that displays the required knowledge, skills, behavior, and manners." Considering the development process of the standards, "they are identified by taking into consideration top priority needs of the labor market and educational institutions along with the suggestions of the sector committees" (MYK, 2019b).

Looking at the details of the identification of standards, it has seen that although several actors (ministries, workers' and employers' unions, non-governmental organizations, professional chambers, chambers of commerce and industry, higher education institutions and Higher Education Board, etc.) are asked for a subsequent review, the standards are initially defined by HR professionals (experts and managers, consultants and trainers etc.) from the private sector (M.Y.K, 2019c). Thus published national occupational standards can be assumed as the reflection of the expectations of private sector representatives on how HR-related occupations to perform. The examination of the published national occupational standards reveals that there are 13 HR related occupations (MYK, 2019d).

Furthermore, there are 12 active 4-year HR-related programs in higher education in Turkey and Northern Cyprus. Thus within the scope of the study, firstly, the 13 HR related occupational standards; and then the 4-year course curriculums of the HRM undergraduate departments that educate prospective HRM professionals have been examined. As for the examination of the standards and course plans, the content analysis method (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014) was used. The contents were evaluated by two of the authors and checked by the other two authors for trustworthiness (Lincoln, 1995). The conceptual framework of the content analysis has been derived from the literature discussed above. The findings were evaluated regarding the mainstream and ethical/critical perspectives on HR.

Findings of the occupational standards of VQA

Looking at the definitions of the occupations, it has seen that various elements of HR practices are mentioned. Among these, business or human resources functions can be evaluated as the indicators of a mainstream approach to HR. On the other hand, pluralistic, critical, and ethical mentions can be evaluated as the indicators of an alternative HR perspective. Accordingly, the definitions of the jobs are mostly consistent with the perspective of mainstream HRM (Table 1). Significant about this finding is that even the definition of *Industrial Relations Specialist,* which may be expected to indicate a more critical view, reflects the perspective of mainstream HR to some extent. The only definition that ultimately reflects the alternative HR perspective belongs to the occupation of *Work and Job Counseling.*

Table 1. *Perspective in definitions of occupations*

Occupation	Perspective
Human resource assistant	Mainstream
Personal affairs staff	Mainstream
Recruitment staff	Mainstream
Human resources specialist	Mainstream
Wage and benefits specialist	Mainstream
Recruitment specialist	Mainstream
Organizational development specialist	Mainstream
Job and vocational counseling	Alternative
Training specialist	Mainstream
Performance specialist	Mainstream
Career and talent specialist	Mainstream
Industrial relations specialist	Mainstream and alternative
Human resources manager	Mainstream

However, a detailed examination of the occupational standards brings about the fact that, for all of the 13 jobs related to HR (including *Work and Job Counseling* which was defined in an alternative perspective of HR), the expected knowledge-skills and behaviors-attitudes are highly in line with the mainstream HR perspective. Table 2 displays the items of the expected knowledge-skills and behaviors-attitudes related to mainstream HR thinking and alternative HR perspective. 71% of all items are overlapping with the mainstream HR understanding, which is unitarist, technocratic and managerialist. A more pluralist understanding of HR, which is concerned with a broader range of stakeholders, seems to be limited to 29% of the defining items. Thus we can suggest that the pluralist perspective has a weak reflection on the expectations of the private sector actors. Furthermore, it is crucial to remember that all of the standards were reviewed subsequently by actors other than private sector representatives.

Table 2. *Expected knowledge-skills and behaviors-attitudes*

Occupation	Main-stream (f)	Balanced (f)	Total Number of items	Main-Stream (appx. %)	Balanced (appx. %)	Total percentage (%)
Human resource assistant	14	5	19	3	1	4
Personal affairs staff	17	10	27	4	2	6
Recruitment staff	17	9	26	4	2	6
Human resources specialist	25	7	32	6	2	8
Wage and benefits specialist	22	9	31	5	2	7
Recruitment specialist	18	9	27	4	2	6
Organizational development specialist	22	9	31	5	2	7
Job and vocational counseling	35	20	55	9	5	14
Training specialist	20	8	28	5	2	7
Performance specialist	19	5	24	5	1	6
Career and talent specialist	23	7	30	6	2	8
Industrial relations specialist	23	11	34	6	3	9
Human resources manager	33	9	42	8	2	10
Total	288	118	406	71	29	100

Findings of the HRM education

The course plans of the 11 out of the 12 HRM departments of higher education institutions has been reached. Nine of these departments have been founded under a faculty title, and the remaining 2 have been founded under a college title (Table 3). The majority of the faculties are in the field of Economics and Administrative Sciences, which is followed by Business Faculties. One of these faculties is a distance education faculty.

Table 3. *HRM undergraduate programs*

University	Faculty/School
İstanbul Medipol University	Faculty of Business and Management
Aydın Adnan Menderes University	Faculty of Business
Sakarya University	Faculty of Business
Alanya Aladdin Keykubat University	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
Gümüşhane University	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
İzmir Demokrasi University	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
Süleyman Demirel University	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
Yakın Doğu University	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
Doğu Akdeniz University	School of Business and Finance
Yeditepe University	School of Applied Sciences
İstanbul University	Faculty of Open and Distance Education

The distribution of the courses in the related departments was also analyzed based on mainstream and alternative perspectives on HRM. Table 4 represents the distribution of courses according to these approaches. In 67% of all courses the mainstream perspective on HRM seems to dominate, while the alternative perspective is seen in 33% of the courses. Mainstream courses related to business and HR functions are dominant in the range of all courses. Organizational behavior related courses have the lowest share in the mainstream range. The courses which place the employment relationship in broader (social, political, historical) context and offer a critical and ethical framework are rare. In the range of alternative approach related courses, the ones which provide an ethical standpoint have the smallest share.

Table 4. *Themes in HRM education*

Themes	Number of courses (f)	Percentage (%)
Mainstream		
HR Functions	74	25
Business Functions	107	35
Psychology and Organizational Behavior	24	7
Ethical and Critical		
Political, Historical and Social Context	81	27
Ethics	6	2
Critical Thinking	12	4
Total	304	100

Discussion: HRM Education with a Balancing Approach

The findings of the private sector's expectations and HR education reveals that both of them are highly in line with the mainstream HR understanding. The casual relationship between the sector expectations and the educational programs can not be assumed, depending on the above findings. However, the findings are significant in the sense of showing that the private sector has a dominantly unitarist HR perspective, and the orientations of higher education programs are in the same direction to a large extent. Those findings seem to be problematic regarding the disputes about enhancing the quality of working life and more balanced relations of power among the actors in labor relations.

Since the neoliberal economic dominance, HR education turns out to gain significance for the hope of a more humanistic, balanced working life, even if in the long-term. In this sense, Bratton and Gold (2015:503-504) suggest that the students should learn how to balance demands for profit, social justice, and environmental protection. In this regard, the companies and HRprofessionals (also the students) as the members of this system should

provide a balance among ethics (employee rights, justice, equality, etc.), profit, and environment & sustainability. Therefore more emphasis should be given to the balance seeking systems, models, and curriculum. In this regard, balancing approaches (Budd, 2004; Wilcox, 2002) could be scrutinized. While Budd (2004) defines his approach as the geometry of the employment relationship and argues balance among voice, efficiency and equity, Wilcox (2002) suggests a balance between strategic and moral agendas.

Another approach to designing HRM education is related to the delivery of ethics education that should also contribute to balancing approaches. HRM perspectives deal with ethical issues differently. Mainstream HRM perspective addresses topics related to fairness and justice in HR practices, compliance with regulation and codes of ethics, ethical responsibilities of employees and the ethical characteristics and development of employees and HR managers. The problem is that this approach, focusing on micro-level practices and individual behaviors are stated as conforming to the "bad apples" approach

(Trevino and Youngblood as cited in Greenwood, 2013). Within this context, individuals can be rewarded and punished and held responsible for all ethical rights and wrongs. It is believed that these "aberrant" behaviors can be overcome by policy development, training or exclusion/punishment/elimination of deviant individuals (Greenwood, 2013). Without underestimating the importance of these activities, their basis could be strengthened considering the philosophy of multiple ethical theories and broader political and social context of the employment relationship and its inherent conundrum. In his regard, ethical and critical perspectives may contribute to a more balanced HRM education.

Laffer (2005) points out that workplace relations cannot be modeled on relationships between two free and independent actors, and reliance on the traditional theories of rights/justice, deontology, and consequentialism has a limited debate to micro-level issues and the search for a solution. (Laffer, 2005; Greenwood and Freeman, 2011). In this regard, Greenwood (2013) presents stakeholder theory (which could be based on normative rationale of Kantianism, utilitarianism and justice ethics) and contemporary philosophies (feminist ethics and discourse ethics) as options for the ethical analysis of HRM and integrative social contracts theory is indicated as another model of

ethical pluralism in business ethics. Greenwood (2013) also highlights the involvement of contemporary ethical theories such as virtue ethics, ethics of care, discourse ethics and ethical theories drawn from a range of postmodern thinkers (such as Levinas, Bauman, Foucault, etc.) as significant potential for both micro level and macro levels of analysis.

Budd and Scoville (2005:6) state that many HRM textbooks include ethical discussion, but they lack a foundation of ethical theories. Greenwood (2013) also underlines that brief exposure to specific absolutist traditional theory may stay as too theoretical for the students so that they could not convert into practice without enough background in philosophy. Besides, these theories tend to be too reductionist and rationale to account for the realities of post-industrial corporate life, hence HRM. To overcome this shortcoming, Crane and Matten (2010) suggest that students should expose to a spectrum of views so that they can fully conceive the issue and offer solutions and justifications.

Then, depending on the above discussion on findings, HR education may be redesigned in an ethically and critically strengthened, strategically, and morally balanced manner. The conceptual model of the study can be modified as such:
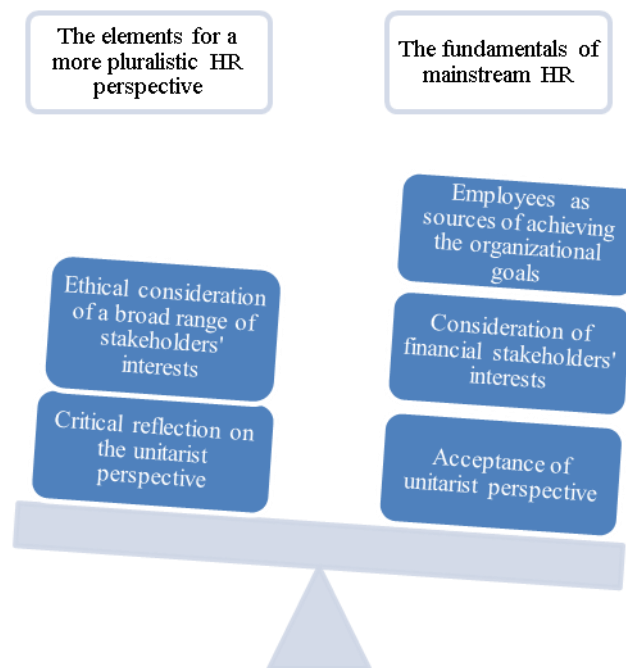

Figure 2. *HR Education as a balancing factor*

Conclusion

This paper is about the practices of HRM professionals and the promises of education in the course of better working life conditions. Many factors can pave the way for ethical dilemmas and constitute an enabling environment for unethical behaviors for HR practitioners. However, it was emphasized in this study that the ethical stance of HRM students and professionals can be strengthened by HRM education. In this context, first, HR students/professionals could learn different perspectives of HRM so that they could question what HRM really is for and how the answer changes according to perspectives. In this way, they could go beyond the debates of efficiency and performance, and question how they incorporate ethics and critical thinking into their daily professional activities. Second, the CHRME approach of Bratton and Gold (2015) is presented as a potentially transformative force by challenging all taken for granted assumptions about management practices, asking questions challenging power and inequality, and encouraging critical reflection on employment issues and the effect of societal and global contexts. Therefore, CHRM offers an opportunity to influence HR policy and practice and create a more equitable, dignified and sustainable workplace and hence make a contribution to the balancing approaches. Thirdly, students/professionals can learn traditional and contemporary ethical theories and the understandings behind them. In this way, HRM students and professionals should have critical thinking on HRM and understand the broader world around HRM practices, objectives and policies. In this way, they can be aware of the effects on the employees and

society. Educational reconstruction is not a solution for all the ethical problems that HR professionals face and involved in. However, it is hoped at least to provide an idea of what they are actually doing and what they should be doing.

Future research directions

For further research, in addition to HR curriculums, first, contents of the courses could be examined. Second, HRM textbooks could be studied, and models including preceding discussions could be proposed. In this regard, considering ethics and critical thinking discussions, balancing approaches could be placed. Third, HRM departments are not the only ones that educate prospective HRM professionals. A comparative and historical analysis of different departments such as Business Administration and Labor Economics and Industrial Relations can contribute more to this discussion. This contribution also has the potential to investigate HRM's trajectory in Turkey as a concept.

References

Antonacopoulou, E. (2010). Making the business school more 'critical': reflexive critique based on phronesis as a foundation for impact. *British Journal of Management*, *21*, 6-25.

Bratton, J., & Gold, J. (2015). Towards critical human resource management education (CHRME): a sociological imagination approach. *Work, Employment and Society*, *29*(3), 496-507.

Budd, J. W. (2004). *Employment with a human face*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.

Budd, J. W., & Scoville, J. G. (2005). Moral philosophy, business ethics, and the employment relationship. In The ethics of human resources and industrial relations. Editors: Budd J. W.; & Scoville J. G., Champaign, IL: IL Press.

Crane, A., & Matten, D. (2010). *Business ethics: Managing corporate citizenship and sustainability in the age of globalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cunliffe, A. (2004). On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner. *Journal of Management Education*, *28*(4), 407-26.

De Gama, N., McKenna, S., & Peticca-Harris, A. (2012). Ethics and HRM: theoretical and conceptual analysis an alternative approach to ethical HRM through the discourse and lived experiences of HR professionals. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *111,* 97-108.

Fisher, C.M. (2000). The Ethics of Inactivity: Quietism and Human Resource Managers. *Business and Professional Ethics Journal*, *19*(3), 55–72.

Greenwood, M. R. (2002). Ethics and HRM: A review and conceptual analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *36,* 261-278.

Greenwood, M. (2013). Ethical analyses of HRM: a review and research agenda. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *114* (2), 355–366.

Greenwood, M., & Freeman, R. E. (2011). Ethics and HRM: The contribution of stakeholder theory. *Business and Professional Ethics Journal*, 30(3/4), 269-292.

Hyman, R. (1975). *Industrial relations: A Marxist introduction*. Basingstoke: MacMillan.

Kaufman, B. E. (2008). *Managing the human factor: the early years of human resource management in American industry,* 1st ed., Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt7zfmd

Kochan, T. (2007). Social legitimacy of the Human Resource Management profession: A US perspective, in Oxford Handbook of Human Resource Management. Editors: Boxall P.; Purcell J.; & Wright P., Oxford: Oxford University Press

Laffer, G. (2005). The critical failure of workplace ethics. In The ethics of human resources and industrial relations. Editors: Budd J. W.; & Scoville J. G., Champaign, IL: IL Press.

Legge, K. (1998). Is HRM ethical? Can HRM be ethical?. In Ethics and Organizations. Editor: M. Parker, London: Sage.

Lincoln, Y. (1995). Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1, 275–289.

MacIntyre, A. (1999). Social structures and their threats to moral agency. *Philosophy*, 74, 311-329.

Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed., Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Sage.

MYK (2019a). *History of the Vocational Qualifications Authority*, Retrieved from, https://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/en/about-vqa/history

MYK (2019b). *National Occupational Standards*, Retrieved from, https://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/en/national-occupational-standards

MYK (2019c). *Sector Committees and Approval*, Retrieved from, https://www.myk.gov.tr/index.php/en/ulusal-meslek-standard-hazrlama-suereci/sector-committee-and-approval

MYK (2019d). *Ulusal Meslek Standartları*, Retrieved from, https://portal.myk.gov.tr/index.php?option=com_meslek_std_taslak&view=taslak_listesi_yeni&msd=2&Itemid=432

Parkes, C., & Davis, A. J. (2013). Ethics and social responsibility – do HR professionals have the 'courage to challenge' or are they set to be permanent 'bystanders?'. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* 24 (12), 2411-2434.

Rowan, J. R. (2000). The moral foundation of employee rights. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 24(2), 355-361.

Schwartz, M. S., & Carroll, A. B. (2003). Corporate social responsibility: a three domain approach. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 13(4), 503-530.

Van Buren, H. J., Greenwood, M. & Sheehan, C. (2011). Human resource management and the decline of employee focus. *Human Resource Management Review*, 21, 209-219.

Wilcox, T. (2002). Ethics, sustainability and strategy: a question of balance in human resource management education. *Business & Professional Ethics Journal*, 21(2), 61-78.

Wilcox, T. (2012). Human resource management in a compartmentalized world: whither moral agency?. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 111, 85-96.

Wiley, C. (1998). Reexamining perceived ethics issues and ethics roles among employment managers. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17, 147-161.

Winstanley, D., & Woodal, J. (2000). The ethical dimension of HRM. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 10 (2), 5-20.

Wooten, K. C. (2001). Ethical dilemmas in human resource management: An application of a multidimensional framework, a unifying taxonomy, and applicable codes. *Human Resource Management Review*, 11, 159-175.