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**The Rise of High Involvement Management in
Britain**

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Abstract

We discuss the nature and genesis of high involvement management (HIM) in Britain. Although an increasing proportion of British workplaces have adopted HIM practices over the last quarter century only a minority of managements have a strong high involvement orientation. HIM is associated with Total Quality Management and other lean production methods but is no more likely to be adopted in a context of enriched jobs than where jobs are more routinized. HIM usage is linked with the characteristics of the organization itself, such as whether the organization is family-owned, and the size and the composition of the workforce. External factors are much less important. There is little evidence that HIM is driving trade unionism out, as suggested by the union substitution hypothesis. Although there is recent evidence that it is associated with higher workplace productivity there is no evidence to suggest that HIM improves worker well-being. If anything, it is associated with higher levels of anxiety. Work enrichment, on the other hand, is correlated with positive outcomes for workers and employees alike.

Key words: high involvement management; trade unions; productivity; well-being.

JEL Classification: L23, M12, M52, M53, M54

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INTRODUCTION

High involvement management (HIM) came to the fore in the early 1980s. Heralded by the American organizational psychologist, Lawler, it was akin to what Walton and Beer called high commitment management (Lawler, 1986; Walton, 1984; Beer *et al.*, 1984). These authors were describing an innovative approach to management that would – and that they felt should – supersede the Taylorist model, or what Walton called the control approach, which was characterised by its tight division of labour, narrowly defined specialist jobs, limited opportunities for employee involvement and consequently low levels of worker commitment and trust.

Lawler and Walton believed that HIM was increasingly relevant to all organizations as they faced intensifying competition and uncertainty. But past approaches to employment relations that were associated with the Taylorist control model might have to change. HIM implied a more cooperative approach between management and workers or their representatives than the adversarial relationships that had developed on the bedrock of narrow job specifications, payment systems based on rigid job structures or piecework, and oligopolistic product markets.

While some of the early adopters of HIM in the United States were non-union, and some commentators saw HIM as a strategy to undermine unionism, Walton viewed the two as potentially compatible and Lawler implied that union engagement in HIM could be beneficial for its implementation (Lawler, *et al.*, 1995:124). Changes in the role and attitudes of both management and trade unionists might, however, be necessary. Participation on a wider range of issues might be required, perhaps centred on information sharing and consultation rather than bargaining. Kochan and Osterman

went further, envisaging that, through these activities and the greater mutual understanding that they engendered, positive gains from HIM might be even greater when trade unions were involved in their introduction and operation (Kochan and Osterman, 1994).

The bottom line, it was argued, was that organizations that adopted HIM would achieve superior performance to those that continued with traditional methods. HIM enabled managements to confront increasing global competition whilst providing opportunities to workers for greater rewards and security, as well as the intrinsic satisfaction that employee involvement offered. Indeed, by the early 1990s the performance effects were so taken for granted by some that they labelled HIM “high performance work systems” (U.S. Department of Labor, 1993; Huselid, 1995).

It is thus timely, a quarter century on from the emergence of the high involvement concept, to examine three aspects of its impact. First, the nature and extent of the use of high involvement practices in Britain, and whether a unified HIM emerged. Second, the relationship between HIM and trade unionism. Third, whether HIM is associated with improved organizational performance and, if so, whether this reflects greater levels of job satisfaction and well-being. In this paper we offer an overview of its development in Britain, to the extent that WERS and other data allow, from the 1980s to the present, focusing on these three questions. Before we address them, we discuss the concept of HIM.

HIGH INVOLVEMENT MANAGEMENT

Lawler's concept of HIM and Walton's high commitment approach, which can be treated as synonymous, grew out of their earlier concern with work enrichment, the central feature of which is the development of distinctive job design principles that would reverse the narrow job specifications and rigid divisions of labour associated with Taylorism. Such jobs would increase worker well-being through greater autonomy and more challenging work. According to Walton, such principles should apply, so "jobs are designed to be broader than before, to combine planning and implementation" (Walton, 1995: 79).

HIM, in contrast, meant involving workers in changing, not only their roles, but also what Lawler calls "the business as a whole" (Lawler and Benson, 2003: 156). This "organizational involvement" extends beyond the role involvement associated with work enrichment (Wall, Wood and Leach, 2003). We thus use the term HIM to refer to practices offering workers opportunities for organizational involvement, either directly or indirectly through the use of information dissemination and skill acquisition. HIM thus involves firstly work organisation practices such as team-working, flexible job descriptions, and idea-capturing schemes which are means of encouraging greater flexibility, pro-activity, and collaboration; and, secondly practices that give workers the opportunities for skills and knowledge acquisition that are needed to ensure that they have the capacities to work in an involved way. These include intensive training geared towards team-working, functional flexibility and idea generation, and information sharing, particularly about the economics and market of the business.

An emphasis on increasing pro-activity and idea generation at all levels of the organization increasingly became a distinguishing characteristic of HIM, especially in the wake of the effective adoption of quality circles and other idea capturing schemes in Japanese firms, which were seen as successful innovators, particularly in manufacturing (Wood, 1989, 1993; Jürgens, 1989). The thrust of the HIM model is towards the development of broader horizons amongst all workers, so that they will think of better ways of doing their jobs, connect what they do with what others do, and take initiative in the face of novel problems. The purpose of HIM is to encourage workers to participate in what modern management theory calls a continuous improvement culture, the aim being to induce higher performance through the adaptation and pro-activity that are thought to characterise modern work requirements (Griffin *et al.*, 2007).

A number of motivational or supporting practices are also associated with HIM (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2000; Forth and Millward, 2004: 100; de Menezes and Wood, 2006). These include incentives for individuals to make use of opportunities for participation, and to gain the skills required in a high involvement regime, and help the organization to attract and retain suitable employees in order to secure the stable and committed workforce that underpins an effective high involvement regime. They include minimal status differentials, group compensation schemes, internal recruitment and job security guarantees.

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE USE OF HIM IN BRITAIN

The literature emphasises the importance of using HIM as a coherent set of practices if performance is to be optimized (e.g. Appelbaum, *et al.*, 2000: 34; Huselid, 1995).

This raises the question of the extent to which management has in practice adopted HIM in a holistic fashion to achieve what has been termed “internal fit” (Baird and Meshoulam, 1988). It was, however, commonplace in the 1990s to doubt whether British management was capable of systemic thinking, the contention being that managers were orientated towards short-term profits and were inclined to eschew a long-term strategic approach to human and organizational issues (Edwards, 1995; Storey and Sisson, 1993:68-79; Hutton, 1996). It was also believed that management was unduly susceptible to the latest ideas in management circles (Protherough and Pick, 2002: 61). The implication was that initial enthusiasm for particular practices with high visibility would wane as new competing ideas emerged (Marchington *et al.*, 1992. Since certain HIM practices are given more prominence than others at a particular time, one might expect management to adopt them in a rather piecemeal way, and not as a total package.

Organizations may also match their human resource system to its context, which can be either the organization’s core strategy or aspects of its environment (Baird and Meshoulam, 1988; Wood, 1999a). According to contingency theory, we might expect HIM’s effect on performance to vary with the extent to which it is consistent with relevant external factors. It may even be that there are contexts in which HIM will have no effect or even be counter-productive, which contrasts to the claim of Walton and Lawler that HIM is appropriate to all contexts. Some maintain that HIM’s benefits are highest where organizations face a turbulent and uncertain environment or HIM is best-suited to organizations adopting a high quality as opposed to cost minimization strategy (Porter, 1985). If organizations are performance maximisers they will match their human resource management to the environmental or strategic

context (Wood and Albanese, 1994: 5). If this theory relating fit to performance holds, then external or strategic factors would be associated, at least in the medium to long term with the extent of HIM usage. Alternatively, if the theory assuming it is universally relevant applies, we would expect HIM not to be limited to certain situations. We would expect it to be more evenly spread across the economy, and its determinants largely to be factors internal to the organization. It is also possible that the adoption of individual HIM practices has been more idiosyncratic to particular workplaces, or concentrated in certain industries, perhaps because followers of management fashion have mimicked their competitors.

In this section we shall examine first whether the use of high involvement practices has increased as anticipated; then whether their use tends to be in an integrated way; and finally, where they are used.

The rise of HIM

Initial accounts of HIM in Britain were based on case studies. Some of the first reported examples of its intensive use in the 1980s were from the new Japanese-owned manufacturing plants. The first personnel director of the Nissan car factory in the North-East of England, for example, chronicled how he and his colleagues introduced many of the practices associated with HIM (Wickens, 1988). The significant innovations relative to the conventional approach to assembly-line car workers included team-working, complete functional flexibility, intensive selection, daily morning team briefing, intensive training and development, continuous improvement groups akin to quality circles, single status, and merit pay for all workers, coupled with an enhanced role and status for the supervisor. Not only were

all workers formally appraised, but the criteria used in the appraisal included creativity.

An investigation of fifteen large British organizations in both the private and public sector showed that some of the practices that were used in the Nissan site were being introduced elsewhere (Storey, 1992). These included direct communication methods such as team briefing and team-working; increasing functional flexibility; and quality circles and problem solving teams, typically allied to other quality initiatives. Single status or harmonization – where common terms and conditions are applied for production and white-collar workers – was confined to a small minority of organizations. The adoption of performance-related pay was often confined to managers. These initiatives were increasingly related to each other and viewed as linked. Managers were not merely being opportunistic; the process of change appeared to be becoming more strategic. It was often part of a broader business change agenda led significantly by general or operational managers rather than by the personnel function (Storey, 1992: 266–67).

One of the first attempts to chart the rise of HIM in Britain was conducted in manufacturing. A survey of 135 plants in 1990, drawn from a sample of workplaces representative of British manufacturing industry in terms of size, region and sector distribution, showed that the use of practices characteristic of the Walton model had increased between 1986 and 1990 (Wood and Albanese, 1995). Work organisation practices such as functional flexibility, team-working, and workers being responsible for their own quality had all increased significantly in the period 1986 to 1990, as Table 1 shows. Quality circles, a type of idea capturing scheme, were less popular, but

their use had doubled from 8 per cent in 1986 to 16 per cent in 1990. Skill and information acquisition practices such as team briefing, training budgets, and formal assessment for workers had also increased.

Table 1: Early Evidence on the use of High Involvement in UK manufacturing Plants

	Percentage use	
	1986	1990
<i>High Involvement Practices</i>		
<i>Work Organization</i>		
Flexible job descriptions	38	69
Team-working	41	62
Quality circles	8	16
Production workers are responsible for their own quality	51	76
<i>Skill and Knowledge Acquisition</i>		
Team briefing	15	49
Training budgets	17	29
Formal assessment	23	39
<i>Work Enrichment</i>		
Explicit policy of designing fulfilling jobs	21	38
<i>Motivational Practices</i>		
Trainability as a major selection criteria	50	76
Motivation as a major selection criteria	53	72
Career ladders and progression	20	35
No compulsory redundancy	12	19
Single status	13	15
N	135	

Source: Wood and Albanese (1995:234)

Motivational supports, such as career ladders and progression, no compulsory redundancy and single status, were only used in a minority of workplaces. But half of them used motivation as a selection criterion in 1986, with this figure rising to nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) in 1990. Work enrichment, which was measured by whether the workplace had “an explicit policy of designing jobs for ensuring the full use of workers’ skills and abilities”, was confined to 38 per cent of workplaces and was less common than the high involvement practices. But there had been a rise of 17 percentage points in its use since 1986.

Table 2: High Involvement Practice-Use: A Comparison of Japanese and Non-Japanese Plants

	Non-Japanese plants	Japanese plants	
	Percentage Use	Percentage Use	X^2
<i>High Involvement Practices</i>			
<i>Work Organization</i>			
Flexible job descriptions	68	91	13.8****
Team-working	67	72	1.4
Quality circles	16	39	13.2****
Production workers are responsible for their own quality	70	94	12.0****
<i>Skill and Knowledge Acquisition</i>			
Team briefing	52	86	26.9****
Training budgets	30	29	0
Formal assessment	29	80	28.4****
<i>Work Enrichment</i>			
Explicit policy of designing fulfilling jobs	38	56	5.1**
<i>Motivational Practices</i>			
Trainability as a major selection criteria	77	86	3.2*
Commitment as a major selection criteria	74.	90	9.2****
Career ladders and progression	35	77	33.3**
No compulsory redundancy	15	58	36.4****
Single status	23	77	57.7****
Merit pay of production workers	50	76	12.0****
Profit-sharing for production workers	25	23	0.6
N	134	73	

Source: Wood (1996: 515)

A similar survey was carried out of Japanese manufacturing plants in Britain. Considerable publicity was being given to this inward investment and it appeared from this that key plants were being established, like Nissan, with an emphasis on HIM. Moreover, HIM was widely associated with Japanese production methods such as just-in-time production and total quality management, which were beginning to be referred to as “lean production” (Womack *et al.*, 1990). Comparison of results from 73 Japanese-owned manufacturing plants in Britain with those from the earlier study of 135 manufacturing workplaces showed that all practices, with the exception of team-working, were more common in the Japanese workplaces (Wood, 1996a).

Evidence of the increasing use of HIM practices between 1996 and 2000 is available from a survey of 126 manufacturing companies with more than 150 employees conducted at the Institute of Work Psychology (IWP) (Wood *et al.*, 2004). This uncovered three trends. First, there had been growth in “empowerment”, a measure that combined both job and organizational involvement of workers. It was defined as “passing considerable responsibility for operational management to individuals or teams (rather than keeping all decision-making at the managerial level)”. Second, there had been an increase in the intensive development of workers, defined as “providing a range of development opportunities for all employees (rather than training people occasionally to meet specific job needs)”. Third, there had been a growth in the use of teamwork, defined as “placing operators into teams with their own responsibilities and giving them the freedom to allocate work between team members (rather than having everyone work as individuals)”. This increase in HIM practices was largely attributable to a more comprehensive deployment of existing practices within firms. But there were also a small number of new users, who were as

likely to have commenced HIM by using all three practices together as to have introduced practices gradually.

The early WERSs contained few questions on HIM but, to reflect the growing interest in it, questions were added to the 1998 survey. They included questions about task flexibility, team work, and performance appraisal systems, as well as about total quality management, the operational management method authors most commonly associated with HIM (Marginson and Wood, 2000: 490–492). This meant that, for the first time, it was possible to establish fully the incidence of HIM practices, track trends over time, and explore where they might be used across the whole economy. Table 3a presents the data on practices for the years that it is available in the WERS series for the whole economy, while Tables 3b and 3c present data for the private and public sectors respectively.

The two high involvement work organization measures for which WERS series provides data since 1990 are suggestion schemes and quality circles. Suggestion schemes were used in a quarter of workplaces in 1984 and over one-third in 2004, a growth wholly accounted for by change in the private sector. The use of quality circles has fluctuated since 1990, but at no time did a majority of workplaces use them.

Table 3 (a): Incidence of High Involvement Practices in Workplaces with 25 or more employees for the Whole Economy¹

	1980	1984	1990	1998	2004	p value for change from first year with data to 2004
High Involvement Practices						
<i>Work Organization</i>						
Team-working				55	60	0.08
Functional flexibility				70	74	0.23
Quality circles			35	42	30	0.05
Suggestion schemes		25	28	32	35	0.00
<i>Skill and Knowledge Acquisition</i>						
Team briefings		36	48	52	72	0.00
Induction training				77	90	0.00
Training in human relations skills				53	62	0.00
Information disclosure about investment plans		27	41	53	49	0.00
Information disclosure about financial position		55	60	65	63	0.00
Information disclosure about staffing plans		67	60	60	66	0.58
Appraisals				47	66	0.00
<i>Work Enrichment</i>						
Job variety				41	44	0.39
Method discretion				22	21	0.70
Time discretion				20	20	0.90
<i>Motivational Practices</i>						
Motivation a major selection criterion				85	81	0.05
Internal recruitment				29	22	0.02
Job security guarantees				13	15	0.21
Single status				66	64	0.35
Profit-related pay			41	46	44	0.22
Share-ownership scheme	13	22	30	24	28	0.00
<i>Total Quality Management</i>						
Self-inspection				54	47	0.03
Records on faults and complaints				64	63	0.59
Customer surveys				49	55	0.03
Quality targets				42	57	0.00
Training in problem-solving				24	25	0.54
Just-in-time production				29	27	0.52

Source WERS series.

1. The following variables relate to practices as they pertain to core workers: team-working (equals 1 if 80%+ core employees in teams); functional flexibility; appraisals (equals 1 if all core employees appraised); work enrichment. Single status is if core workers are treated the same as managers in terms of benefits such as pensions.

Table 3 (b): Incidence of High Involvement Practices in Workplaces with 25 or more employees for Private Sector¹

	1980	1984	1990	1998	2004	p value for change
High Involvement Practices						
<i>Work Organization</i>						
Team-working				49	54	0.11
Functional flexibility				71	75	0.21
Quality circles			30	39	28	0.45
Suggestion schemes		22	26	30	36	0.00
<i>Skill and Knowledge Acquisition</i>						
Team briefings		31	42	49	70	0.00
Induction training				76	90	0.00
Training in human relations skills				38	52	0.00
Information disclosure about investment plans		32	44	49	46	0.00
Information disclosure about financial position		56	56	60	58	0.47
Information disclosure about staffing plans		57	52	52	61	0.01
Appraisals				49	67	0.00
<i>Work enrichment</i>						
Job variety				40	39	0.65
Method discretion				21	19	0.59
Time control				20	21	0.77
<i>Motivational Practices</i>						
Motivation a major selection criterion				84	80	0.11
Internal recruitment				32	26	0.04
Job security guarantees				6	10	0.01
Single status				63	61	0.57
Profit-related pay			42	46	45	0.31
Share-ownership scheme	14	23	31	24	28	0.00
<i>Total Quality Management</i>						
Self-inspection				53	44	0.01
Records on faults and complaints				64	62	0.52
Customer surveys				47	53	0.05
Quality targets				39	55	0.00
Training in problem-solving				23	23	0.90
Just-in-time production				35	32	0.47

Source WERS series.

1. The following variables relate to practices as they pertain to the core non-managerial occupation at the workplace: team-working (equals 1 if 80%+ core employees in teams); functional flexibility; appraisals (equals 1 if all core employees appraised) work enrichment. Single status is if core workers are treated the same as managers in terms of benefits such as pensions.

Table 3 (c): Incidence of High Involvement Practices in Workplaces with 25 or more employees for the Public Sector¹

	1980	1984	1990	1998	2004	p value for change
High Involvement Practices						
<i>Work Organization</i>						
Team-working				72	77	0.29
Functional flexibility				32	32	0.96
Quality circles			45	49	36	0.04
Suggestion schemes		31	31	38	33	0.34
<i>Skill and Knowledge Acquisition</i>						
Team briefings		46	62	60	76	0.00
Induction training				80	87	0.11
Training in human relations skills				51	65	0.00
Information disclosure about investment plans		18	33	62	58	0.00
Information disclosure about financial position		52	70	79	80	0.00
Information disclosure about staffing plans		85	79	82	83	0.33
Appraisals				41	64	0.00
<i>Work enrichment</i>						
Job variety				45	61	0.00
Method discretion				27	28	0.70
Time discretion				19	16	0.31
<i>Motivational Practices</i>						
Motivation a major selection criterion				89	86	0.20
Internal recruitment				18	12	0.07
Job security guarantees				33	33	0.92
Single status				74	71	0.44
<i>Total Quality Management</i>						
Self-inspection				56	59	0.57
Records on faults and complaints				64	65	0.91
Customer surveys				55	61	0.23
Quality targets				52	63	0.03
Training in problem-solving				24	31	0.10
Just-in-time production				12	10	0.55

Source WERS series.

1. The following variables relate to practices as they pertain to the core non-managerial occupation at the workplace: team-working (equals 1 if 80%+ core employees in teams); functional flexibility; appraisals (equals 1 if all core employees appraised) work enrichment. Single status is if core workers are treated the same as managers in terms of benefits such as pensions.

Information on two skill acquisition practices is available from 1984, namely team briefings and information disclosure. The incidence of team briefings doubled between 1984 and 2004 from use in 36 per cent of workplaces to 72 per cent. Three

areas of information disclosure are measured. Disclosure about investment plans of the workplace rose significantly between 1984 and 2004, whereas disclosure of information about staffing plans remained at a fairly constant, high level. The use of disclosure of information about the financial position of the workplace was constant in the private sector but rose significantly in the public sector; such that, by 2004, it was more common in the public than the private sector. The only other data going back to the 1980s relate to financial participation schemes. The percentage of private sector workplaces with share ownership schemes has doubled from 14 per cent in 1980 to 28 per cent in 2004 (Table 3b), but its peak use was in 1990 when it was used in 31 per cent of workplaces.

For 1998 and 2004 we have data on a fuller range of HIM practices. Since 1998 there has been a small but statistically non-significant increase in the two additional measures of flexible work organisation: team-working and functional flexibility. The use of skill acquisition practices – team briefings, induction training, off-the-job training, training in human relations skills, and employee appraisals – grew in both the private and public sectors.

Evidence on work enrichment is also only available between 1998 and 2004. It shows that in four-in-ten workplaces core employees had ‘a lot of variety’ in their jobs (job variety), but with only one-fifth of work places providing core workers with or ‘a lot of discretion’ over their working methods (method discretion) and ‘a lot of control’ over their time (time discretion). It is notable that there was no overall change in this pattern between 1998 and 2004, although job variety rose significantly in public

sector workplaces. The extent of enriched work remained, however, fairly static in the private sector.

Apart from information on financial incentives and participation, that on other motivational supports is only available since 1998. It shows that employee motivation as a selection criterion was used in around four-fifths of workplaces in both 1998 and 2004. The provision of single status was used in around two-thirds of workplaces. In contrast, the use of internal recruitment and the provision of job security guarantees were much less popular. Use of internal recruitment had actually fallen, from 29 per cent of workplaces in 1998 to 22 per cent in 2004. Job security guarantees had remained constant in the public sector and risen a little in the private sector.

Reflecting these developments, the total use of high involvement practices rose over the period, the rise being statistically significant in the private sector. But this is largely attributed attributable to a rise in the use of the skill acquisition practices. The uptake of high involvement work organisation practices has not changed: the modal score is 2 on a scale where 4 is maximum flexibility. The rise of total skill and acquisition practices reflected a big increase in the percentage of workplaces scoring the maximum score, rising from 7 per cent to 23 per cent over the period.

The total use of work enrichment remained static over the period 1998 to 2004 in both sectors, and is somewhat higher in the public than the private sector throughout. The modal score across the economy is 6 on a scale where 9 is maximum work

enrichment, with no significant difference between the private and public sectors.

The total use of motivational support scores declined a little but not significantly so.

Table 4: Mean Use of Practices in Workplaces with 25 or more employees, by Sector, 1998-2004

	Whole economy	Private sector	Public sector
<i>High Involvement Practices¹</i>			
1998:	5.37	5.26	5.65
2004	5.86	5.79	6.05
Significantly different over time ²	Yes	Yes	No
<i>High Involvement Work Organization Practices³</i>			
1998	1.99	1.90	2.25
2004	1.99	1.93	2.16
Significantly different over time	No	No	No
<i>High Involvement Skill and Knowledge Acquisition Practices⁴</i>			
1998	3.26	3.23	3.34
2004	3.81	3.78	3.92
Significantly different over time	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Work enrichment Practices⁵</i>			
1998	5.75	5.59	6.18
2004	5.79	5.62	6.31
Significantly different over time	No	No	No
<i>Motivational Practices⁶</i>			
1998	1.94	1.86	2.15
2004	1.83	1.76	2.03
Significantly different over time	No	No	No

Source: WERS90 and WERS2004.

1. The total High Involvement practices is the sum of the use of nine work organization (functional flexibility, quality circles and suggestion schemes, team-working) and skill/knowledge acquisition practices (team briefing), , induction training, training in human relations skills, disclosure of information, appraisals.
2. Significance tests report whether mean differences between 1998 and 2004 are statistically different.
3. The total HIM Work Organization Practices index is on the sum of the use of team-working, functional flexibility, quality circles and suggestion schemes
4. The total high involvement skill and knowledge acquisition practices is a the sum of the use of team briefing, induction training, training in human relations skills, disclosure of information, appraisals.
5. Work enrichment Practices is the total score on three scales measuring job variety, method discretion and time discretion for core employees
6. The total motivational support practices is the sum of on the use of motivation as a major selection criterion, preference for internal recruitment, job security guarantees for non-managerial staff, harmonized fringe benefits for managers and core employees.

We may conclude, from both case studies and surveys, that there has been some growth in HIM practices in the 1980s and 1990s, but the WERS series suggests that this has been uneven across the private and public sector. Overall, the picture is of high use of some practices, particularly those geared toward team-working and functional flexibility, but this is within a context in which jobs may have relatively low levels of discretion and internal promotion, and in which guarantees of job security remain scarce. The sustained increase in practices such as team-working and team briefing suggests that their use does not reflect ephemeral initiatives on the part of most organisations that have used them. Moreover, what limited information we have suggests that it was very rare for firms to drop HIM practices

The connected use of HIM practices

Is it the case that the organizations which use one type of high involvement tend to use the other types? That is, are the correlations between the use of individual HIM practices strong? If so, does this reflect an underlying management philosophy in which “a belief that eliciting employee commitment will lead to enhanced performance” (Walton, 1985: 80)? It has been shown that the HIM practices used in British manufacturing plants in 1990 were correlated, and that this correlation between most practices could be explained by an underlying high involvement orientation on the part of management (Wood and Albanese, 1995). However, merit pay and profit sharing, and a “permanent employment policy” were statistically unconnected, and piecework and individual bonuses were negatively associated (Wood, 1996b).

Analysts of the early, rather sparse, WIRS/WERSs HIM data concluded that a new high involvement style was not readily identifiable (Millward, 1994; Sisson, 1993; Sisson and Marginson, 1995). When the WIRS/WERS data were supplemented with data on a broader array of practices from a sister survey, The Employers' Manpower Skills Practices Survey, however, it was found that practices such as multi-skilling, human relations skills as a selection criterion, and training needs analysis, were evident in a majority, and in most cases a sizeable majority, of workplaces (Wood and de Menezes, 1998). There were correlations between the practices, and a pattern was evident in their use that was not consistent with piecemeal adoption. Integrated use of HIM in the early 1990s might not have been as uncommon as contemporary commentators were suggesting.

Examination of the correlations between the practices in the WERS98 and WERS2004 shows that the practices within each of the three groupings of practices – high involvement, work enrichment and motivational practices – are on average more highly correlated with each other than they are with practices in one or other of the other groups. The correlations between the motivational practices are however considerably higher in the private sector than they are in the public, where they are in most cases not significant.

Analyses of the practices in WERS98 by de Menezes and Wood (2006) showed that the correlation between the high involvement practices was explained by a common factor, and thus they tended to be used as a single coherent system, which reflected an underlying involvement orientation. The work enrichment practices also formed a coherent system but this was discrete from the high involvement orientation. The

motivational practices were neither part of the high involvement orientation nor formed a unified set. This again suggests that HIM is an identifiable phenomenon, the use of which is not limited to contexts where jobs have high levels of autonomy or variety. It also suggests that the use of the motivational supports may be quite common without HIM.

These results are reflected in the correlations between the total use of practices. But the results using both 1998 and 2004 WERS data reveal differences between the private and public sectors and over time. The total use of high involvement practices was unrelated to work enrichment in the private sector in 1998 but it was significantly positively related in 2004. The reverse was the case in the public sector where the two were significantly related in 1998 but not in 2004. The count of high involvement practices was significantly related to the total use of motivational supports in the private sector in both years but in the public sector there is no relationship in either year.

Where HIM is likely to be found

Assessments of where HIM is to be found have to be cautious because sources differ in sample and definition. Extending the IWP survey series to services showed that HIM practices were just as likely to be used in public and private services as they were in manufacturing although work enrichment was slightly more prevalent in services than manufacturing (Wood, *et al.*, 2004: 425). This is broadly consistent with our analysis of WIRS/WERS series thus far which suggests some small differences in the extent of use between private (regardless of sector) and public organizations.

Data from manufacturing also suggest that links between HIM and the market or strategic context are weak (Wood and Albanese, 1995). The one external factor of importance, identified in analysis of the whole economy using WERS98, is membership of an employers' association or Chamber of Commerce. These networks appear to propagate or diffuse HIM (Bryson *et al.*, 2007).

Various internal factors appear to play a role in where HIM is to be found. Two factors were identified as crucial in Wood and Albanese's (1995) manufacturing survey: whether the organization is a profit centre, and the degree to which personnel management is integrated into the business. Ownership is also important. An analysis of WERS98 found that family-owned firms were significantly less likely to adopt HIM. It also found that HIM practice adoption was higher in workplaces belonging to multi-site organizations than it was in single-site organisations (Bryson *et al.*, 2007).

Perhaps most significant is the positive association between HIM and the use of total quality management or lean production methods. The IWP study showed that HIM is used in conjunction with four distinct practices (Wood *et al.*, 2004). First, it is associated with total quality management, which makes all staff responsible for quality and continuous improvement. Second, it is associated with just-in-time production, because of the need to make products in direct response to internal and external customer demands and not for stock. Third, it is associated with integrated computer-based technology, the linking together computerized equipment to enable enhanced integration. Finally, HIM is associated with supply-chain partnering, which is concerned to develop strategic alliances and long-term relationships with suppliers

and customers. The use of these practices has also been shown to have increased between 1996 and 2000, as had their correlation with the HIM. This suggested an increased integration of lean operational methods with HIM. The association between HIM measured by de Menezes and Wood's scale and Total Quality Management was confirmed for the whole economy by an analysis of WERS98 (de Menezes and Wood, 2006).

This picture is confirmed by analysis of the total use of high involvement practices in 2004. Concentrating on the private sector, where external competitive and strategic factors are likely to have the most effect, we find that external factors were less important than internal ones. The number of competitors a workplace faced was not important, although those workplaces with no competitors were more likely than others to use work enrichment, perhaps because they face more uncertainty. By far the most important factor was total quality management, as the total use of total quality practices was positively associated with high involvement management. Second, workplace size plays a role, as the smallest workplaces (with 10 to 24 employees) are the least likely to use HIM, though they are the most likely to use job enrichment. Third, the percentage of non-manual workers was positively correlated with total use.

Nonetheless, industrial factors are important since, controlling for other factors, we found significant variance across industries. "Other services" was the biggest user of HIM practices, but this association was driven by greater use of skill acquisition practices, rather than work organisation ones. The industry making the most use of HIM work organization practices is in fact Energy and Water. 'Other Services' also

on average had a higher level of work enrichment. There is little industry variance in motivational supports, apart from their low incidence in the Construction sector.

Overall, the evidence suggests that external or strategic product market factors are less significant than internal factors in determining the use of HIM. The fact that it is used where work enrichment is not used, and that it is used alongside lean production, suggests that HIM is being driven by the priorities of production rather than by any humanistic values on the part of management (Sabel 1982: 213).

HIM AND TRADE UNIONISM

When HIM came to the fore in the 1980s it was widely associated with non-unionism. Well-known non-union firms in the USA such as IBM and Hewlett Packard were seen as HIM pioneers. It was presented, particularly in the prescriptive management literature (e.g. Beer, *et al.* 1984), as providing the basis for a new win-win relationship between workers and managers, offering management the prospect of improved performance while improving workers' job satisfaction, security, and perhaps also pay and benefits. This, it was suggested, would make redundant the unions' role in voicing workers' grievances. Given this, managements might use HIM as a means of reducing worker demand for unionism. In Kochan's terms, HIM would be used as a union substitution tactic (Kochan, 1980: 183). Even if managements did not directly use HIM as an industrial relations weapon, some thought that managements who were pursuing it would prefer to deal directly with individuals either independently or as members of teams, rather than with unions (Guest, 1989: 48). In a similar vein, one overview of HIM concluded that "although there are formulations which give an important place to trade unions . . . most are

silent on the issues or assume a non-union environment”. Unions were generally regarded as “at best unnecessary and at worst to be avoided” (Sisson 1994:12).

The initial tendency to associate HIM with non-unionism was, however, never as strong in Britain as it was in the United States, except when the practices were associated with U.S. multinationals. In the early 1970s Fox saw the greater use of employee involvement methods aside from collective bargaining as a potential way of addressing the ills of the British industrial relations system (Fox, 1974). He saw low levels of employee involvement as a major problem contributing to the low-trust dynamics between managers and workers. He maintained that job redesign could reverse this. In so doing it could strengthen collective bargaining by transforming relations between managers and workers and their representatives into co-operative relationships based on high trust. According to this we might expect job redesign, or HIM more generally, to be used in unionised organizations; not as a way of undermining support for them, but to maintain, if not reinforce, their role.

The decades following Fox’s book witnessed unprecedented union decline coupled with the increasing use of HIM practices. But, as this increase by the early 1990s appeared to be limited, some speculated that the non-union, low involvement workplace might be more prototype of the future than a sign of high involvement management. Reflecting on the findings of WERS90, Sisson referred to this as the “bleak house” model; though not akin to the happy home of Ester in the Dickens novel, but more to do with the austerity characterised by management *dictat* and high dismissal rates. It was even suggested that what little HIM there was might be more likely in unionised than in non-unionised workplaces (Sisson, 1993: 207; 1994).

Though underestimating the rise in the use of high involvement practices and their integrated nature, this argument served to suggest that we should not take any link between the decline of unionism and the rise of HIM for granted.

The coincidence of a decline in trade union recognition with an increase in HIM begs the question of whether union substitution has taken place by design or default. Most cross-sectional analyses of the relationship between HIM practices have revealed no strong association between HIM and trade union recognition *per se*. Wood's analysis of his sample of manufacturing plants found no relationship between unionisation and HIM. Union recognition was, however, associated with a lower rate of HIM adoption from 1986 to 1990. Two individual practices – merit pay and appraisal – were exceptional in that they were significantly less likely to be used in union plants (Wood, 1996c).

Analysis of WERS90 and WERS98 found HIM or work enrichment was unrelated to unionism, when controlling for employment size (Wood and de Menezes, 1998: 500–501; de Menezes and Wood, 2006). Union recognition was, however, strongly positively associated with the use of motivational supports in both 1998 and 2004. This is perhaps to be expected, since three of these four motivational supports are longstanding goals of trade union bargaining – preference for internal recruitment, job security guarantees, and single status.

The most thorough investigation of the HIM-union substitution hypothesis over time used the WIRS/WERS series up to 1998 (Machin and Wood, 2005). Those practices directly associated with HIM that were included in the three surveys from 1984 to

1998 – quality circles, suggestion schemes team briefing, and other direct communication methods – had all increased over time. But the rate of change did not differ between the union and non-union sectors. The one practice where the rate of increase was greater in the non-union sector than the union sector was flexible pay, reflecting the fact that it is the practice that is most antithetical with traditional unionism. When the practices were looked at jointly, there was again no significant difference in the rate of change between the union and non-union sectors.

Our further analysis including the additional practices that were first added in the 1998 survey reveals a similar story. The use of HIM practice in union workplaces are either higher than, or on a par with, those in the non-union sector. Table 5 presents the incidence of individual HIM practices for the first and last time-point where the data on them are available in WERS. It does so for union and non-union workplaces separately. The figures relate to the whole economy, with the exception of the share ownership and profit-related pay figures, which of necessity are for the private sector only.

The rate of change in use of HIM does not differ markedly across the union and non-union sectors, although there are few exceptions (see last column of the Table 5). For instance, the increase in use of suggestion schemes was greater in the non-union sector, though the incidence of suggestion schemes has always been higher in the union sector. Also, share ownership grew more quickly in the union sector. But the biggest differences relate to skill and knowledge acquisition practices. The increase in the disclosure of information on investment plans and the workplace's financial position has been more marked in the union sector than the non-union sector. On the

other hand, the growth in the disclosure of information about staffing plans has been greater in the non-union sector.

The lack of an HIM-union substitution effect is, perhaps, less surprising given that a major driver of HIM is innovative approaches to production, which implies that HIM's role as a tool of industrial relations is at best secondary. Nor is it surprising given that, at least in Britain, some of these HIM practices are viewed positively by unions and their members. Moreover there is evidence that the average total use of high involvement practices is higher in workplaces that have joint consultative committees, which suggests that managements practising HIM are far from antithetical to providing formal mechanisms for employee voice. There are, of course, other underlying factors, far more influential than HIM that explain the decline of trade unions in Britain.

Table 5: Incidence of High Involvement Management over Time in Union and Non-union workplaces with 25 or more Employees for the Whole Economy

	Start year	End year	Union workplaces			Non-union workplaces			Difference (non-union - union)	p value for non-union-union difference between first and last year
			% in start year	% in end year	Absolute change	% in start year	% in end year	Absolute change		
High Involvement Practices										
<i>Work Organization</i>										
Team-working	1998	2004	62	71	9.3	50	53	2.8	-6.6	0.23
Functional Flexibility	1990	2004	45	74	28.9	40	73	33.4	4.5	0.39
Quality circles	1990	2004	39	36	-3.3	30	27	-3.5	-0.2	0.97
Suggestion schemes	1984	2004	31	39	8.4	15	32	17.9	9.5	0.04
<i>Skill and Knowledge Acquisition</i>										
Team briefings	1984	2004	39	76	37.0	31	69	38.1	1.1	0.81
Induction training	1998	2004	83	89	5.6	73	90	17.0	11.4	0.02
Training in human relations skills	1998	2004	59	61	2.1	47	62	14.8	12.8	0.03
Information disclosure about investment plants	1984	2004	28	60	32.3	25	42	16.9	-15.4	0.00
Information disclosure about financial position	1984	2004	60	79	19.1	45	54	9.3	-9.8	0.05
Information disclosure about staffing plans	1984	2004	78	74	-4.3	47	61	14.7	19.1	0.00
Appraisals	1990	2004	55	64	9.6	61	67	6.3	-3.3	0.53
Work enrichment										
Job variety	1998	2004	40	44	3.9	42	44	1.4	-2.5	0.65
Method discretion	1998	2004	22	21	-1.6	22	22	-0.5	1.1	0.81
Time discretion	1998	2004	20	16	-4.0	20	22	2.0	6.0	0.16
Motivational Practices										
Motivation a major selection criterion	1998	2004	89	84	-4.5	83	79	-3.9	0.6	0.89
Preference for internal recruitment	1998	2004	28	23	-5.5	29	22	-6.4	-0.8	0.87
Job security guarantees for any non-managerial employees	1998	2004	26	25	-0.9	4	10	5.3	6.1	0.12
Single status	1998	2004	76	75	-0.8	59	56	-2.6	-1.8	0.72
Profit-related pay ²	1990	2004	38	42	4.4	42	45	2.5	-2.0	0.76
Share-ownership scheme ²	1980	2004	16	46	29.4	10	23	12.8	-16.5	0.00

Source: WERS series.

1. The following variables relate to practices as they pertain to the core non-managerial occupation at the workplace: team-working (equals 1 if 80%+ core employees in teams); functional flexibility; appraisals (equals 1 if all core employees appraised) work enrichment. Single status is if core workers are treated the same as managers in terms of benefits such as pensions.
2. Figures for private sector only.

HIM, ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND WELL-BEING

In the wake of the claims being made for HIM, a line of research developed that sought to test its association with organizational performance. HIM may directly enhance worker productivity by, for example, improving working methods, achieving high quality without reworking (right-first-time) and greater knowledge sharing, including from workers to managers. Indirect effects may arise through HIM's purported effects on employees' well-being. If HIM improves job satisfaction or organizational commitment, this may spill over into higher productivity through greater discretionary effort, lower turnover and lower absenteeism. On the other hand, HIM may be costly to adopt and maintain, thus depressing the impact of productivity gains on the financial performance of the organisation.

As well as being of potential value to the employers' objectives, HIM's association with workers' well-being is important for Kochan and Osterman's (1994) mutual gains thesis, according to which HIM can create organizations that marry high organizational performance with high worker satisfaction – the 'win-win' model as it is sometimes called. In contrast, other analysts have associated HIM with labour intensification and have suggested that it may increase stress levels, with the implication that it will reduce satisfaction (Ramsay *et al.*, 2000). Thus, whether either the employer or the employee gains from HIM, and whether there are links between the two, are *a priori* uncertain.

HIM and organizational performance

The majority of studies of the connection between HIM and organizational performance have been in the USA, and the early studies suggested that there were

significant positive links (Arthur, 1993; MacDuffie, 1995; Huselid, 1995). Subsequently, however, reviews of the research that followed these studies indicate considerable unevenness in the results, both across studies and across the performance measures used within individual studies (Wood, 1999a; Godard., 2004; Wall and Wood, 2005). One review of twenty-five studies concluded that there is sufficient variability between the results, and of the practices included in the studies, to make any positive generalisation impossible (Wall and Wood, 2005). Moreover the major study in the USA that used longitudinal data, found no HIM effects on performance (Cappelli and Nuemark, 2000). Four British studies tested the universal HIM-performance model prediction that positive performance effects would be associated with HIM equally throughout the economy; three out of four (Guest and Hoque, 1994; Guest, *et al.*, 2003; Wood and de Menezes, 1998) of these found no connection between HIM and performance, the exception being confined to the hotel industry (Hoque, 1999).

A subsequent study using WERS98 found stronger relationships between HIM and performance. Using measures based on core HIM practices, it found HIM was associated with higher productivity in the private sector, but only in unionised workplaces (Bryson *et al.*, 2005). The authors showed that there was no evident relationship between HIM and financial performance, and thus the productivity gains might be partly being offset by higher wages which were related to HIM in WERS98 (Forth and Millward, 2004) They thus speculated that the combination of results might reflect the fact that union success in bargaining for concessions, rather than mutual gains arising from more co-operative relationships between employers and unions. Another analysis of WERS98 found that both HIM and work enrichment were

significantly related to higher productivity (Wood and de Menezes, 2008a). Furthermore, the positive association of HIM with productivity is greater when total quality management is used, a result that may help explain why they tend to co-exist. The studies that use WERS2004 to analyse HIM's association with productivity and performance found that some HIM practices were positively associated with labour productivity, but that many were not, and there was little association with financial performance (Kersley, et al., 2006: 293; Wood, *et al.* 2008). This may reflect the costs of HIM as well as the fact that labour productivity is not necessarily the dominant influence on financial performance.

HIM and employee well-being

When considering the implications of HIM for workers themselves, it is useful to identify three dimensions of job-related well-being: between job satisfaction and dissatisfaction; between contentment and anxiety, and between enthusiasm and depression (Warr, 2002: 2–4; 2007: 19–60). The job satisfaction-dissatisfaction dimension is concerned with the pleasure a person gains from their job and their affective attachment to it. The contentment-anxiety and enthusiasm-depression dimensions are identified on the basis of their relationship to arousal in terms of mental alertness and energy. Anxiety is associated with low affect and high arousal while contentment is associated with high affect and low arousal. Enthusiasm is associated with high affect and high arousal, while depression is associated with low affect and low arousal. Job strain is often taken to be a combination of anxiety and depression.

The employee survey of WERS2004 included measures of job satisfaction and contentment-anxiety, but not enthusiasm-depression. Using data from both the management and employee surveys in 2004, it has been shown that HIM was unrelated to job satisfaction, and negatively related to anxiety-contentment. HIM increased anxiety, which is not consistent with a mutual gains model (Wood and de Menezes, 2008b). A core measure of work enrichment – the employee’s job autonomy – is, in contrast, positively related to both job satisfaction and anxiety-contentment. Also, the more supportive or informative management is in the workplace, as gauged by the individual employee, the greater the level of job satisfaction and anxiety-contentment. Thus, while job characteristics, information sharing, and consultation are important determinants of job satisfaction, HIM tends to increase anxiety and is unrelated to job satisfaction.

There is thus more support for the view that stress is increased by HIM, rather than the mutual gains view. However, work enrichment was related to well-being. It has also been found that some, but not all, of the relationship between work enrichment and higher productivity was accounted for by its effect on job satisfaction (Wood *et al*, 2008). Similar effects were found for other outcomes: quality of output, financial performance, and absenteeism. These results for enriched jobs support the mutual gains model of employment relations.

The findings for HIM suggest that there may be a conflict between its effects on employers’ outcomes and those on employees as their anxiety may increase with its use. This may arise if HIM entails labour intensification, as some argue. But there is not a strong link between HIM and job demands in WERS2004. This suggests that

the lowering of the well-being of workers is more likely to arise because the encouragement of workers to be proactive and flexible creates anxieties through the implied pressure to improve their overall contribution to the organization. These may, in turn, raise concerns in the worker's mind both about their competencies, and also about their job security, since the high involvement management may be seen as threatening their jobs if they do not raise their performance.

CONCLUSION

This paper started with a specification of the nature of HIM, differentiating it from the associated notions of work enrichment or job-level involvement. It has shown that use of HIM has risen in Britain over the quarter century, albeit to some extent unevenly between the public and private sector. There are signs of the systematic use of HIM and an underlying managerial philosophy of high involvement management. But it is still the case that only a minority of managements have a strong high involvement orientation. Furthermore, HIM is no more likely to be adopted in a context of enriched jobs than where jobs are more routinized. It is, however, strongly associated with Total Quality Management and other lean production methods.

HIM usage was also found to be linked with the characteristics of the organization itself, such as whether the organization is family-owned, and the size and the composition of the workforce. There was no evidence that external factors are important. There was little evidence that HIM was driving trade unionism out, as suggested by the union substitution hypothesis.

The benefits of HIM are not clear-cut. But it is associated with higher productivity according to the more recent WERS surveys. There was, however, no evidence from WERS2004 to suggest that HIM improves worker well-being. If anything, it is associated with higher levels of anxiety. Work enrichment, on the other hand, is correlated with positive outcomes for workers and employees alike.

It may be argued that HIM is less widespread than early advocates might have anticipated; but it has been an important influence on management thinking and on the evolution of the modern workplace, particularly through its connection with operational management philosophies such as total quality management. The consequences have been mixed in Britain with the evidence so far of positive consequences for productivity and negative ones for worker's contentment. An emphasis on the negative consequences for trade unions appears misplaced, as its role in the decline in trade unions appears to have been minimal. It is incorrect in the British context to view HIM as an alternative to management with trade unions. HIM appears to be as important to the organization of work in unionized workplaces as it is elsewhere.

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