Troth and Guest would seem in considerable measure to be responding to my 2014 provocation paper, “The psychologisation of employment relations?” This paper identified a number of shortcomings associated with psychological research in HRM, but it was mainly about: (a) the takeover of HRM faculty positions and research by I-O Psychologists, especially in the area of employment relations, and (b) the implications this could have for how HRM is taught to present and future managers.

Troth and Guest do use quotes from my paper that address these concerns. But the way they do so gives the impression that it was solely an attack on I-O Psychologists. For example, on page 4, they state that “a particularly strident accusation of managerialism is Godard's assertion that 'I-O psychologists are inherently anti-union' and 'potentially totalitarian'.” What I actually said was: “The problem is not so much that I-O psychologists are inherently anti-union as that they often have little comprehension of why unions exist, and, more important, why they should exist” (p. 8, 2014) and that “...the general orientation underlying [psychologisation] is ... potentially totalitarian and repressive....” (p. 7, 2014). Neither of these statements was meant to attack I-O psychologists per se or to “accuse” anyone of managerialism (a term that I did not even use). Rather, they addressed the possible implications of the psychologisation of employment relations for the teaching and ultimately the practice of HRM. This should be evident from the context in which both appear, if not from the statements themselves.

The same is true of other quotes Troth and Guest draw from my paper. However, the problem is not so much that Troth and Guest portray my paper in this way as it is that, in so doing, they never really address the concerns it raises. The result, which is especially important given the spirit in which I wrote the paper, is that they do little to advance the debate it was meant to provoke. Perhaps I can do so here.

The main concern in my paper was essentially that the psychologisation of HRM courses and programs, and the scientism potentially associated with it, could result in HRM becoming the handmaiden for a new corporate order, in which employees would increasingly be treated as objects, to be subject to advanced systems of discipline and control, and in which issues of power and conflict—which have long been central to the study of employment relations—would be completely suppressed.

I have subsequently come to believe (Godard, 2020), even more strongly than stated in my paper (p. 12, 2014), that the more advanced or “new” HRM practices most associated with psychologisation are just not that widely or effectively implemented, and that this is in large part because they often just do not work particularly well. Rather than serving as the handmaiden of a new corporate order, HRM may, as a result, have become a variant of the proverbial emperor with no clothes. This would explain why a function of such economic and social importance seems, in many workplaces, to have become largely an object of derision.
If I am right, this may in considerable measure reflect the failure of HRM by academics, and especially I-O Psychologists, who, as "scientists", too often go merrily about their research with little thought for the actual nature of the employment relationship and the real problems it presents to practitioners, policymakers, and ultimately, society. It may also mean that the concerns raised in my paper were overblown.

Yet I also worry that, with the advent of new technologies of selection, surveillance and control, HRM could indeed become the handmaiden of a new order, in which growing segments of the labour force are treated not just as objects, but also essentially as robots, subject to total monitoring and control by their corporate masters. It is possible that this would render much I-O Psychology, at least in its current form, largely redundant. Yet the concerns I raised about the scientism associated with I-O Psychology would be more fully realized than I had imagined.

Either way, I continue to believe that scholars need to think more deeply about what it is they are doing (in both their research and their teaching) and what the real-world implications may or may not be. This is a question not of defending I-O Psychology on its own terms, but rather of rethinking and possibly even rejecting these terms—and then, perhaps, researching what it is that is actually happening out there.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors have declared that there is no conflict of interest.

REFERENCE

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