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Beyond “Hero-based” Management: Revisiting HRM Practices for Managing Collective Expertise

Au-delà d’un management basé sur un modèle de « héros » : une reconsidération des pratiques de GRH en gestion collective de l’expertise

Más allá de la gestión « *hero based* »: revisión de las prácticas de gestión de recursos humanos para dirigir el conocimiento experto colectivo

Olga Lelebina et Sébastien Gand

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Pour une approche renouvelée de la gestion des ressources humaines (GRH)

A Renewed Approach to Human Resource Management (HRM)

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Résumé de l'article

Bien que le savoir expert soit une ressource cruciale pour les entreprises fondant leur activité sur la science, la gestion de la population spécifique des experts reste une problématique délicate pour la GRH. Pour reconnaître et conserver ces employés, les entreprises mettent traditionnellement en oeuvre une double échelle, à savoir un outil de gestion des carrières qui propose une alternative de carrière technique à la managériale, permettant ainsi la reconnaissance d'un statut d'expert dans l'organisation. Cependant, de nombreuses études ont montré que la mise en oeuvre de la double échelle ne générerait pas les effets escomptés. Tandis que des recherches précédentes ont exploré les aspirations individuelles des experts comme raison de leurs mécontentements face à cet outil managérial, nous montrons l'importance de la dimension collective de l'expertise et arguons que cette dernière est insuffisamment soutenue par des pratiques de GRH.

À partir d'une étude de cas dans une grande firme multinationale, nous explorons les conséquences de pratiques « individualisantes » sur le travail d'expertise et discutons du rôle de la GRH dans le « *hero-based* » management. Les résultats montrent que les pratiques individualisées pourraient mettre en danger les capacités d'apprentissage et d'innovation de l'entreprise, ainsi que compromettre des processus tels que la prise de décision et la résolution de problème. Cela pourrait également mettre en danger la continuité de l'expertise sur le long terme, alors que les jeunes générations refusent d'endosser la culture « *hero-based* ». Les résultats montrent également que la fonction GRH agit très difficilement sur la dimension collective de l'expertise. Cela ouvre de nouvelles perspectives pour la fonction RH qui pourrait mener le management des experts vers de nouveaux horizons en assurant un équilibre fragile entre les dimensions d'« agence » et de « communion » de l'expertise organisationnelle.

Beyond “Hero-based” Management: Revisiting HRM Practices for Managing Collective Expertise

Olga Lelebina and Sébastien Gand

While expertise has been traditionally described as an individual phenomenon, some streams of research in social sciences have demonstrated its relational and collective dimensions. Given these findings, the global trend of the individualization of HRM practices, which did not preclude the specific population of “experts”, could be antagonistic to the development of collective forms of expertise. Drawing on a case study in a large science-based company, we analyze the impact of individualized managerial practices, and in particular the dual ladder, on expert work. We show that neglecting the collective dimension of expertise could endanger critical organizational processes, such as knowledge sharing, learning, innovating, decision making and problem solving. We discuss how overcoming the limitations of “hero-based” management could open the way for the HRM function to support a collective dimension in managing expertise.

KEYWORDS: human resource management, individualization, collective expertise, experts, dual ladder.

Introduction

In a business world characterized by increasing complexity of technologies and the globalization of markets, technical and scientific knowledge become a crucial asset and a primary condition for developing competitive advantage (Blackler, 1995). In this context experts have become increasingly important figures in organizations. Indeed, these professionals, who are the privileged holders of “an advanced level of expertise that is recognized within large industrial R&D companies” (Bobadilla and Gilbert, 2015), are usually considered as a source of technological excellence and innovative solutions (Gastaldi, 2007). It is thus critical to retain these key people and to create favorable conditions for the development of their expertise and their commitment to the firm.

Olga Lelebina, Assistant Professor, ISG International Business School, Paris, France (olga.lelebina@isg.fr).

Sébastien Gand, Associate Professor, Sciences Po Grenoble and CERAG-CNRS, Université Pierre Mendès France, Grenoble, France (sebastien.gand@sciencespo-grenoble.fr).

It has been observed that this category of employee has distinctive characteristics and values (long learning cycles, autonomy, commitment to professional organizations) that require a differentiated approach to their management (Lelebina, 2014; Raelin, 1986). Yet, as for knowledge workers in general (Cushen and Thompson, 2012), the Human Resources Management (HRM) initiatives towards the experts have not entirely met the expectations of the targeted population. Indeed, in their efforts to respond to the specificity of these employees, HR departments usually rely on a so-called “dual ladder” system (Allen and Katz, 1986; Bobadilla and Gilbert, 2015; Gand, Lelebina and Sarda, 2010; Katz and Allen, 1997), that proposes an alternative career track to the managerial one, thus aiming to recognize expertise and avoid transforming excellent experts into rather mediocre administrators (Moore and Davies, 1977; Smith and Szabo, 1977). However, despite more than half a century of existence of the dual ladder in industrial companies, the latter has produced quite ambiguous results. But while the most studies have analyzed the attractiveness and usefulness of the dual ladder by questioning the individual preferences of technical and scientific staff—for example, their career orientations (Schein, 1987; Tremblay, Wils, and Proulx, 2002) or their quest for equal remuneration with their management colleagues (Loh, Sankar and Yeong, 1995)—they have not questioned the consequences of such individualized practices on expert work and, more globally, on expertise development. Yet, expertise studies, initiated in such diverse disciplines as social psychology, sociology, and educational psychology, have shown that expertise has a strong collective dimension that reinforces expert action and makes possible the interactions with those who are in need of expertise (Edwards, 2010; Engeström, 1992; Mieg, 2001). These debates on the collective and shared nature of expertise have not spread significantly into management studies, even though neglecting this collective dimension in managing experts could be a potential cause of dissatisfaction among concerned employees. With its orientation towards individual recognition, individual compensation and individual career, the dual ladder can be considered a symptom of a highly individualized management that neglects the collective, shared nature of expertise in an organization. This paper explores the consequences of such individualized policies both for experts and the organization, and specifically for the capacity of the latter to create, maintain and develop critical expertise. It analyzes the perceived role of the HR function in dealing with the problems of individualization trend and its capacity to support the collective turn in managing expertise.

We draw on a case study in a large multinational firm that has lately introduced a dual ladder system in order to recognize its experts. Through analysis of multiple qualitative data sources, we show that the individualized managerial practices of recognition, reward and evaluation tend to reinforce an individual-

ized, “hero-based” culture and consequently endanger critical processes in the organization such as learning, innovating, decision-making and problem solving. These findings propose a renewed HRM perspective on managing experts and an invitation to integrate the collective dimension of expertise into the HRM agenda.

The article unfolds as follows. The literature review first identifies that the global trend towards individualization, observed in HRM practices, is also relevant for a specific category of experts. The dual ladder is presented as a vehicle for such an individualization process. While little is written in the field of HRM about the two-dimensional nature of expertise (individual versus collective dimensions), the debates in expertise studies, launched in diverse disciplines such as psychology, social psychology and education studies, provide a promising ground to develop a renewed HRM perspective. We then turn to the research settings of “Alpha”, a large, multinational, science-based company, as well as the methodology of data collection and analysis. The findings section underlines managerial practices perceived by experts as “hero-based”. We identify the drawbacks of such individualized practices and eventually show the difficulties that the HRM function is facing in dealing with the challenging task of managing collective expertise. The last section highlights the contributions of our research to the field of expertise management and HRM and invites reconsideration of the agenda for integrating a collective dimension of expertise.

Literature review

Individualization of HRM practices

The process of individualization of HRM practices as well as its consequences has been reported in numerous studies (Gvaramadze, 2008; Taskin and Devos, 2005). This process corresponds to managerial practices that are becoming more and more centred on individual needs (Taskin and Devos, 2005) rather than embedded in a collective dynamic. As Jenkins and Klarsfeld put it (2002: 198), individualization happens “when the qualities, capacities and outputs of individual persons, as opposed to those of groups and larger populations” become the basis for evaluation and decision-making in HR management. This tendency has been observed in almost all the traditional areas of HR management: recruitment, staffing, contracting, compensation, appraisal, and training and development (Jenkins and Klarsfeld, 2002; Storey and Bacon, 1993; Taskin and Devos, 2005). “I-deals”—or the “individualized working arrangements negotiated by employees with the organizations for which they work”—are common (Bal and Rousseau, 2016; Rousseau, 2005). Some studies, however, reveal the dual nature of this individualization process. Indeed, it has been argued that

while contemporary management seems to support the aspirations for higher autonomy and responsibility (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999), not every employee possesses the necessary resources or networking options to accomplish the tasks (Lallement, 2001). The individualization process is thus ambiguous: it promotes the accountability and the responsibility of employees while at the same time creating the basis for differentiation based on their individual characteristics (Taskin and Devos, 2005). The implications of this differentiation are substantial. It can affect the organizational culture of the company, promoting the “me-first” society (Taskin and Devos, 2005), where cooperation transforms into competition. It could also cause the segmentation of employees based on their competencies and performance indicators (Gvaramadze, 2008). Finally, individualization could be a potential source of stress and uncertainty among employees (Härenstam, 2005).

The debates on this issue emerged under the terms of “agency” versus “communion” (Marshall, 1989; Svejenova, Vives and Alvarez, 2010; Weick, 1996). Agency corresponds to the individualistic dimension characterized by independence, self-protection and self-assertion, individual initiative, and control over the environment, while “communion” is presented through integration and cooperation, adaptability and togetherness, fusion and continuity (Marshall, 1989; Svejenova, Vives and Alvarez, 2010; Weick, 1996).

Although the agency orientation is predominant in managerial practices, some scholars propose that both dimensions should be present, enacted and empowered in the organization. Marshall suggests that “communion” could “draw on agency to supplement, protect, support, aid, focus and arm it” (Marshall, 1989: 280). Edwards advances the idea of “relational agency”, which she describes as “working alongside others towards negotiated outcomes” (Edwards, 2010: 61). In line with these debates, some practices traditionally under the responsibility of Human Resource Management have been revised (although more theoretically than practically), giving more importance to the collective, shared dimension. The work on collective competence gained considerable attention (Lorino, 2008; Michaux, 2005), demonstrating its importance for reinforcing individual competences and contributing to the global competitiveness of the company (Retour and Krohmer, 2006). In the field of career studies, Svejenova, Vives and Alvarez (2010) argue that the career, which is usually seen as an individual attribute, has a strong collective element. Providing multiple examples, the authors advance the notion of “shared career” and discuss its developmental stages. Finally, there is a dearth of research on knowledge creation and knowledge sharing that underlines the collective and interactive aspects of these processes (Gvaramadze, 2008; Lewis *et al.*, 2007). Beyond the theoretical advancements, these debates struggle to find a practical application in HRM policies.

Expertise and experts’ management: a challenge for HRM

Knowledge workers have been at the centre of attention of HRM for a long time. Indeed, the uniqueness and the strategic value of their human capital have become a guarantee of a privileged position within organizations. Some researchers have thus claimed that a specific HRM architecture is required for such employees to maximize opportunities for flexibility, adaptation and change (Lepak and Snell, 1999, 2002). The investments in training, development and other skill-reinforcing activities have been considered as crucial for the retention and the loyalty of these key personnel.

However, these efforts by HRM to ensure commitment and performance have not always brought the hoped-for results. Indeed, even if knowledge workers usually meet (and sometimes even surpass) expectations in terms of their performance, they are not necessarily committed and engaged with the organization. Indeed, such good performance could be explained instead by their professional commitment and their intrinsic interest for their work, rather than the multiple performance-improving practices introduced by the organization (Cushen and Thompson, 2012).

It also worth noting that the general term “knowledge worker” covers a diverse range of employee groups (Krausert, 2014), that could be quite different in their aspirations, professional values and nature of work. Generally, two major categories of knowledge workers are distinguished: managers and professionals. While the literature usually differentiates between middle, top, and project managers, professionals often appear as a homogeneous category. However, under this general term, one could find rather diversified groups. Barley distinguishes three major types of professionals who work either inside or for organizations—professionals in PSF (professional service firms), contractors and corporate professionals (Barley and Kunda, 2006). While the first two categories have received the attention of management scholars, the corporate professionals remain an under-researched area. Thus, the experts forming the focus of this study are corporate professionals who have been given an expert status as a sign of recognition of their high-level scientific knowledge and company-specific expertise, which is considered to be strategic for the company.

The management of this particular group of employees remains a challenge for HRM. So far, efforts have been primarily focused on the individual recognition of experts. The dual career ladder has progressively become a dominant approach proposing two major career tracks—the managerial and the technical. Highlighting the unclear origins of the dual ladder, Allen and Katz (1986: 185) mention that it was originated “somewhere in the dim past by a research manager or personnel administrator, who hoped to increase

the number of career opportunities available to high performing technical professionals and thereby to sustain their motivation". The original idea consisted in assuring the symmetry between the two ladders both in terms of status and pay level. Thus, at some point in their career, the industrial scientists and engineers had the choice to follow one or the other ladder. However, such presupposed orientations were further criticized as unrealistic. Indeed, it was observed that professionals in organizations could have hybrid careers and pass from one ladder to the other (Bailyn, 1991).

Despite the ongoing problems associated with the implementation of the dual ladder (Gastaldi and Gilbert, 2016), the latter has progressively gained notoriety worldwide and has become a reference model in managing the careers of technically and scientifically gifted employees (Erdoğan, 2004; Loh, Sankar and Yeong, 1995; Ta-Cheng, 1997; Tremblay, Wils and Proulx, 2002). Today, the implementation of the dual ladder is often considered as a starting point for any managerial efforts towards expertise recognition and the career management of experts (Gand, Lelebina and Sardas, 2010; Lelebina, 2014). However, difficulties persist and debates are still ongoing, both in the academic community and between practitioners, on the origins of the dissatisfaction with this managerial practice. Some authors point out the insufficiency of the dual ladder, as it does not correspond to the career aspirations of experts. These authors refer particularly to the concept of "career anchor" (Schein, 1978) or a "self-concept" that corresponds to the career orientations of individuals. Indeed, it has been claimed that, apart from aspirations to technical competencies, other "anchors" like autonomy (Debackere, Clarysse and Rappa, 1996), creativity (Lee and Wong, 2004), or security (Igbaria, Meredith and Smith, 1995) could play a crucial role in the choices of technical and scientific experts and thus be at the origin of the dissatisfaction with the dual ladder. Another stream of critics addresses the inequality of both paths, claiming that the expertise path is missing a crucial ingredient, namely power (Allen and Katz, 1986).

Thus, critics of the dual ladder generally concentrate either on the managerial tool itself or on the individual preferences and orientations of experts (Lelebina, 2014). However, this managerial tool could be a cause of more complex problems that organizations are facing today in managing their experts (Bobadilla and Gilbert, 2015). Indeed, the dual ladder operates at the individual level, by proposing the recognition of individual expertise as well as individual career promotion. As such, it is contributing to the individualization of managerial practices towards experts and the reinforcement of "agency", while neglecting collective aspects of expertise.

"Agency" and "communion" in expertise studies and the perspectives for HRM

While in the HRM field the debates on agentic and collective dimensions of expertise have been rather limited, other disciplines have pursued a long-standing debate about this issue. Depending on the disciplinary grounding and the objects of study, scholars have brought varied perspectives on the nature of expertise and the progression of experts, advancing different viewpoints on whether expertise can be seen as an individual attribute or rather a social construct.

The proponents of the first view examine cognitive processes and knowledge acquisition patterns of experts as individuals. They are particularly interested in the relation between the knowledge of experts and their exceptional performance (Sternberg, Jarvin and Grigorenko, 2010). The effort is focused on the mental models of experts, the patterns of knowledge acquisition, the capacities of memorization and representation of information (Feltovich, Prietula and Ericsson, 2006). The experts thus excel and differentiate from novices in their capacities for problem detection and problem solving, in their ability to provide a qualitative analysis, and to propose adequate solutions and strategic orientations (Chi, 2006).

However this "cognitive" view on expertise has been challenged by some social psychologists, sociologists and education scientists who consider expertise as a social and relational construct that could not be studied outside of the context (Edwards, 2010; Mieg, 2001). For those scholars, an expert does not exist in isolation, but only in interaction with others (Mieg, 2001). These relational and collective aspects of expertise have been highlighted by numerous authors (Ackerman, Pipek and Wulf, 2003; Edwards, 2010; Evans and Collins, 2008; Gorman, 2010; Huber, 1999; Lelebina, 2014; Mieg, 2001). Engeström and Middleton criticize the view of expertise as a "stable individual mastery of well-defined tasks" and propose to consider it as a "collaborative and discursive construction of tasks, solutions, visions, breakdowns and innovation" (Engeström and Middleton, 1996: 4). Following the work of Vygotsky (1999) and then Engeström (1992), Edwards (2010) reinforces this relational turn in the studies of expertise. Instead of considering experts as "heroes" who are attributed their expert status for their independent and autonomous work, the author highlights the importance of professional practice that is created in relationship with others and becomes more advantageous than autonomous action.

The collective aspects of expertise have also been supported by the work on group cognition, and more specifically on "transactive memory". The seminal work of Wegner (1986) explored the effects of group mind and in particular how the sum of individual memories could constitute the global memory of the group. The appearance of this global memory is conditioned by knowledge transmission

between the members of the group on their respective expertise domains, which would assure both the quantity and the quality of knowledge of each individual and, also, of the organization in general (Wegner, 1986). Thus it has been argued that the strategic knowledge of the company is highly dependent on collective working practices, cooperation and day-to-day problem solving (Gvaramadze, 2008), as well as on the capacity of the organization to create the environment for the enactment of this knowledge (Richtnér, Ahlström and Goffin, 2014).

These debates provide a new perspective for the HRM field. By questioning the solely agentic view on expertise, they suggest that the individualization of managerial practices could be potentially damaging for organization. It remains, however, unclear how these practices could affect the work of experts and the development of their expertise. Investigating the consequences of individualization on this particular group of employees is all the more relevant as experts remain, so far, a rather unexplored area for the HRM function.

Research background and methodology

Research settings

The interpretative case study approach is particularly suitable for exploring the “how” and “why” of the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2014). Indeed, the single case allows the uncovering of complex phenomena with multiple-related dimensions of analysis (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007); this matches our objective to investigate the relationship between the agentic and collective dimensions of expertise and to analyze their impact on expert work.

The research setting of this study is a leading multinational company, operating worldwide, which we call Alpha. The company produces a large number of diversified products for daily consumer use. Scientific and technological expertise is considered both by employees and by top management to be at the core of the company's activities and a source of competitive advantage in the very challenging environment in which the company operates. To preserve this, several corporate initiatives were launched. First, Alpha implemented a dual ladder system in 2014. It was followed by the nomination of experts who were positioned on three expertise levels: Expert, Senior expert and Fellow. Some of these nominated experts also had managerial responsibilities, which has initiated a long-standing debate inside the expert community on the eventual compatibility of two statuses. All the nominated employees have had a long career with Alpha, generally between twenty and thirty years. The interviews have demonstrated that the risk of turnover for these employees is almost nonexistent. The creation of expert status was thus more oriented towards the recognition of existing expertise rather than avoiding brain drain.

The nominations were celebrated at the end of the year during a traditional meeting with all the employees of the company. The newly nominated experts were invited on stage to join one of the top managers and were congratulated in front of all the employees. Shortly after the nominations, the Scientific Division, together with the HR department, initiated "Expertise days", namely seminars dedicated to the challenges related to expertise that gather together all the company's experts. The first author of this paper was invited to participate in two "Expertise days", which were followed up by exchanges with the Scientific Division¹ on the diverse issues of expertise management.

The chosen company provided a privileged ground for studying the impact of the individualization process on expertise and the management of experts for three major reasons. First, Alpha is a truly knowledge-based organization, where scientific expertise and innovation play a crucial role in developing new products and services. Second, it has recently launched the nomination campaign for experts, thus making it possible to analyze the effects of these managerial efforts on the experts' work. Finally, the company traditionally has a strong corporate culture based on the recognition and rewarding of individual performance, which provided the necessary insights into the individualization process.

Data collection and analysis

Our data collection process followed two consecutive stages. First, meetings with the Scientific Division of the company allowed the deepening of our understanding of the general context of expertise management and its drawbacks. It also helped to prepare the second phase of data collection based on semi-structured interviews with diverse organizational actors (specialists², experts, research team leaders, R&D managers and HR managers).

Meetings with the Scientific Division of Alpha were scheduled from the beginning of the fieldwork. Overall, 16 meetings were held between 2014 and 2016, each lasting between an hour and a half and two hours. Seven of these meetings were recorded and detailed notes were taken during the rest of the meetings.

The first author also had the opportunity to observe two "Expertise days". These seminars, which gathered together the majority of experts of the company, provided both useful insights into the company strategy towards this specific category of personnel and granted privileged access to direct feedback from the participants. Detailed notes were taken from the first seminar and almost all presentations and exchanges were recorded for the second one.

Diverse internal documentation was also collected during the fieldwork, including PowerPoint presentations summarizing managerial practices and the

dual ladder implementation approach; CVs of specialists, experts and managers; and posters and notes from “Expertise days”.

The second phase of data collection consisted of 26 in-depth semi-structured interviews that were held between December 2015 and March 2016. The overall aim was to deepen the understanding of the processes that allow experts to develop and enact their expertise. The list of interviewees was established together with Alpha’s Scientific Division in order to cover diverse expertise domains as well as different degrees of expertise (Table 1). The interview guide included the following topics: the experts’ career trajectory, their perception of managerial policies, the challenges for the development of their expertise, and the future of their expertise domain. The interviews lasted from an hour and a half to two hours and they were all recorded and transcribed in their entirety, which yielded 791 pages of data.

TABLE 1
List of interviewees

Interviewee position	Number of interviews
Experts	3
Senior Experts	4
Expert “Fellow”	3
Specialists	5
Research team leader	3
R&D department managers	5
R&D director	1
HR managers	2

The data analysis was conducted following a thematic coding in two directions (Boyatzis, 1998):

- How do the experts describe their job content and the processes of expertise?
- How do the experts perceive managerial practices of expertise recognition, reward and evaluation?

The collective dimension of expertise emerged as a dominant construct. To explore this expertise dimension further, we undertook a second round of coding that generated eight thematic codes that we used to organize our findings. The individualized managerial approach has appeared to be a critical issue and an important barrier to the development of collective forms of expertise. A number of interviewees referred to “heroes” while talking about individualized managerial practices, which has further inspired and guided our analysis and terminology.

A validation process was then engaged in the form of repeated presentations of the results to different organizational actors. First, two meetings with representatives of Alpha’s Scientific Division were dedicated to the presentation of themes and tensions that had emerged, followed by detailed discussions on the topic. Second, the analysis was presented during the second “Expertise day”

in front of the community of experts, initiating their direct feedback both during formal discussion time and in informal talks during the day.

The single-case study approach thus allowed the longitudinal engagement with the research field, which provided a better understanding of the contextual factors and interdependencies. The interactions and interviews covered a large diversity of organizational actors, which allowed varied perspectives on the subject to be gathered and confronted. The triangulation of data sources was used to reinforce the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Finally, the data were collected in real time and the analysis was presented and discussed with diverse organizational actors of the company (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Findings

Drawing on our data analysis, the findings cover three major topics. First, we reveal how individual experts operate in collective processes of expertise. We then show that the managerial practices of recognition, reward and evaluation are perceived by experts as highly individualized. The drawbacks of such “hero-based” management are then presented. Finally, the role and the involvement of the HRM function in supporting a fragile equilibrium between the agentic and collective dimensions of expertise are discussed.

Individual experts in a collective dynamic of expertise

The experts expressed a twofold perception of expertise. The agentic dimension is present and corresponds to cognitive investment and initiative taking. Becoming an expert in an organization is a highly demanding journey, requiring a specific set of competences. The capacity and willingness to spend a significant number of years on domain-specific learning, the ability to monitor the latest scientific advancements, and to intelligently adapt and integrate them in the corporate context, all requires a true passion for the subject of study, an important dose of curiosity, and a perseverance to always go further on the path of expertise. Apart from being a crucial element in the process of “becoming” an expert, agency also influences the process of “being” an expert. Indeed, it shapes professional identity and is a motivation for being a referee for the domain of expertise:

I think there is a form of charisma, of leadership, that could be individual. That means that in the personal involvement that you have, in the form of the exemplarity that you could show, in the involvement in the research, in the risk-taking that you do concerning the messages that are not specifically the messages one would like to hear, you are recognized as someone relatively independent and trustworthy. (Anthony, Senior expert)

On the other hand, the relational aspects of expertise were reported to be of high importance. Indeed, the experts could not exist without interaction with

those who are either in need of their expertise or who could reinforce the expertise with complementary skills and knowledge:

If one is an expert, he is not just an expert like that, alone in his corner, that's not possible. [...] It's true that, well, I work better in the team. I don't know everything. Well... What I want to say—it is more rewarding to work with others. And, in any case, the expert, necessarily, he is obliged, well... he is obliged to be part of the interaction with the others. (Elena, Fellow)

It is not only that agency and communion are both present in the work of experts, but also that these two dimensions are interdependent. Indeed, on the one hand, the individual excellence and initiative-taking capacity could reinforce the communion dimension and thus bring a considerable contribution to group dynamics. On the other, collaborative work on complex tasks will enrich and expand individual expertise. However, while the two dimensions could be mutually reinforcing, they are also potentially conflicting. If agency takes too much space then collective action could be compromised. For example, as mentioned by one of the interviewed experts, "If there is a patent with only one inventor, he will get much more [money] than if there are five [inventors]. So that could be an obstacle for collaborative work". The dominance of agency over communion could create individualistic, "me-first" attitudes that could be detrimental for group work. It could also be damaging for a number of crucial organizational processes to which experts are expected to contribute.

Indeed, the expert role is highly relational. As one expert remarked, "There is no sense in expertise if it is not for bringing value to others. We are not here just for pleasure!". Like many science-based companies, Alpha has expected its experts to contribute to strategic processes such as knowledge sharing, learning, strategic decision making, problem solving and innovation. Our interviews have shown that while these processes require individual excellence and motivation, they also rely on a strong collective capacity.

The example of Lise demonstrates how the collective learning process reinforced her individual competencies, brought her to a new level of expertise and allowed her to be recognized as an expert within the company:

I was recognized indeed because of my competencies [...], and because of what I was able to bring to [Alpha]. But if I am here today, it's because I was not alone. It's because I was working with others who... well... it is thanks to collective work that I am who I am today. (Lise, Expert)

Problem solving is another area where the contributions of experts are particularly expected. While some problems can be resolved individually, others will require an effective interaction between different areas of expertise. The challenge consists not only in bringing complementary knowledge, but also in

efficiently confronting individual interpretational patterns, questioning, doubting and searching for a satisfying solution. The capacity of balancing agency and communion thus becomes a mark of the quality of the decision taken:

There is a clinician who is a specialist in the collection of data, there is another person, analyst, who will say what is there in the content, and there is even a third person, a physiologist, who will say: 'You have described this to me, but what is important, what is new there?' And that is someone who could replace the analytical data in the context of physiology. Finally, to have a good answer to the question is to have three kinds of expertise that function together. (James, Specialist)

Apart from using well-established expertise to resolve complex problems, experts are also expected to initiate creative processes and to bring innovative solutions to the organization. While creativity is usually considered as an individual attribute, the perception of experts is more nuanced. The organization considers the work of the expert community as critical to the success of new product development. Not without a certain pride, our interviewees have confessed that a number of pioneering innovations in Alpha were made possible through the collective contributions of specialists and experts from different fields:

It was collective, it was the knowledge community that brainstormed together and which has succeeded. Every person brought his or her contribution and it resulted in the disruptive innovation, the disruptive prototype, and that's how we succeeded. (Alexander, Expert)

Finally, the communion form of expertise also reinforces agency when the legitimacy of expert judgment is in question. As our interviews show, the experts could have more difficulties communicating and defending their opinions when they act individually. Indeed, a collective perspective on an issue will have more chance of being taken into consideration and could have potentially much more impact on the strategic decisions of the organization. Thus, through collective action, experts gain more power—an element that was reported as missing in the technical/scientific path of the dual ladder and considered as a matter of dissatisfaction (Allen and Katz, 1986):

I assure you, if you say at the committee meeting or at the research meeting, 'Listen, there are six or seven experts that were gathered around this subject, they all agreed that it's not the right thing to do for this or that reason', the boss will probably not say, 'I'll do it, but ok, I've heard you.' I assure you that in his decision it will be another thing if one expert says, 'I would definitely not go there', because in this case it will be considered as a personal opinion. (Anthony, Senior expert)

Like a two-faced Janus, agency and communion are both critical for expert work. The balance between the two dimensions is fragile but constitutes a primary condition for an expert to fulfill his or her role and to bring strategic contributions to the organization.

“Hero-based” management and its drawbacks

Like many science-based companies, Alpha has decided to recognize its experts and to bring more visibility to their expertise. The company has launched a nomination campaign and attributed different expert statuses to selected individuals—Expert, Senior expert and Fellow—according to their degree of expertise. By applying *de facto* the dual ladder, Alpha has created a new category of employee—the expert. However, despite considerable communication and recognition efforts, these nominations have not brought the expected satisfaction. While the nominated individuals were proud and touched by these signs of recognition, they nevertheless felt that the latter remained superficial. Indeed, beyond the distribution of nice certificates, they felt doubtful about the expected contributions and seriously questioned their latitude of action. Those who were not nominated (but considered themselves as being in possession of expertise) felt that Alpha had created a group of “heroes” with uncertain purposes. The nominations thus reinforced the already individualistic culture of the organization without counterbalancing it with any encouragement for collective action. This created an imbalance towards a strong agentic attitude at the expense of a communitarian spirit:

At [Alpha] we have seen it everywhere, the idea of a hero, the one who will defend his project alone. (Yann, R&D director).

The experts are still in the, well, in the rewarding of an individual. Being nominated as expert... We are nominated as individuals, experts. We are not nominated as an expertise group. So there is still a crown placed on the individual. (Kevin, R&D department manager)

The experts also felt that, for the company, it was easier to identify and reward “heroes” than to find alternative ways of recognizing and rewarding collective contribution:

Finally, we recognize the individual a lot, that’s much simpler to identify. Finally, this molecule—it’s that person. It is much easier than to say that this molecule—it’s forty people. It is important to improve the recognition of collective creativity. (Robert, Research team leader)

This feeling is reinforced by HRM practices and, in particular, the evaluation process. Expert performance is a complex construct that could require a thoughtful adaptation of existing tools. Indeed, the object, the method and the temporality of evaluation should be refined in order to take into consideration the specificity of the expertise domain and the role of a particular expert in a particular context. However, the classical approach to the evaluation process does not differentiate between diverse groups of employees. It remains a standardized approach that specifies the individual goals and evaluates the individual results. The collective

contributions are secondary and less valued because the achievements are distributed:

At the end of the year we have what we call an annual evaluation interview and the guy will see his boss and the boss counts: "You have done this, this, this and that", so it doesn't take into consideration the collective side. That's a true human problem. (Jeremy, Specialist)

These individualized practices of recognition, rewarding and evaluation could be a potential source of frustration and inequality, as the projects and issues on which the experts are working are rarely individualistic. Indeed, the complexity of technology implies that numerous organizational actors will contribute at the different stages of product development. However, when it comes to the rewards, the collective contribution is put aside. The recognition of intellectual property represents in this sense a striking example. Formally, only one person could be considered as inventor, while in reality, behind any serious invention, there are the joint efforts of a number of people:

What is happening in a company like [Alpha]? The chemist makes his molecules. He passes them through the tests that were conceived by biologists. He says: 'I have invented something', so I'm an innovator. And the biologist, he doesn't exist there. Do you see the problem? There is no collective rewarding. The company rewards the chemist because he has made his molecule, because technically the patent works like that. (Jeremy, Specialist)

It is thus not surprising that in such a context the resistance to cooperation becomes a norm. Moreover, it potentially creates unhealthy competition where everyone acts in his or her own interests. The consequences of such an attitude could be dramatic for the capacity of the organization to ensure knowledge development. Indeed, if the experts in different organizational units are driven by competition rather than cooperation, they will most likely be resistant to the innovative ideas of their colleagues:

A person from applied research will invent the new platform that could do an extraordinary thing [...]. He will characterize his platform; he will explain it in all the meetings. It is incredible, that is the platform of Mr. X, so he is a hero. And afterwards, he will pass it to the pre-development laboratory, where they have only one desire—to shatter the heroes: "Well, this is not going to work, if I put this and that, it breaks down. But I have another idea..." So everyone is in competition and everyone is in denial of what others have invented." (Jean, R&D department manager)

Finally, hero-based management could have long-lasting consequences for the durability of expertise and its strategic renewal. Indeed, the objective of any organization is to maintain its competitive advantage for the years to come. This requires anticipating the knowledge transmission between the current experts

and the younger generations. However, in their efforts to ensure the recognition of the current experts, organizations tend to pay little attention to the strategic issues of tomorrow. How to attract the young scientists and engineers to follow an expertise path? How to persuade them to invest a significant number of years in specialized learning? The interviews showed that the younger generation in Alpha is resistant to the idea of becoming experts, as they do not align themselves with the individualization trend and “hero-based” management:

To be able to nominate anyone, to be able to identify, to have, I don't know, the handshakes at the end of the year, we need to know what we are talking about. We need to know the challenges of expertise, because the idea is not to recognize, the recognition is the opposite, particularly as the big experts are already recognized. What interests me personally is why young people today think that being an expert is the worst of punishments? (Christopher, Senior expert)

There is recognition and we have insisted too much on individuality. If we want to have the talents coming from every part of the world, we need to work as the talents like to work, and that means in a community. (Yann, R&D director)

Our interviews demonstrate that hero-based management, nourished by individualized practices of recognition, rewarding and evaluation could be damaging not only for the collaborative actions of current experts, but may also compromise the strategic renewal of expertise for the years to come.

Managing collective expertise: a challenge for HRM

Our interviews have exposed a strong divergence in the way that HR representatives and experts perceive expert work. The HR managers have expressed a concern that the experts tend to follow personal ambitions that are not directly contributing to the company goals. For example, the aspirations of the experts to participate in various congresses, conferences and meetings are often interpreted as an individualistic need for external recognition rather than a means of finding the solution to identified company challenges:

They aspire to go to congresses and to the representations beyond what is strictly necessary to maintain their expertise to contribute to the innovation. (Nadia, HR manager)

They could present it as if they are proud to represent [Alpha] [at the scientific congresses], but probably for some of them they are just proud to represent themselves and not the company. (Kate, HR manager)

The perception of experts is different, however. They consider that maintaining and cherishing scientific excellence is a primary condition for assuring their expertise missions. Building legitimacy requires significant effort and is conditioned not only by internal but, also, by external recognition of expertise. The participation

of experts in diverse scientific events was thus considered as critical for gaining visibility and credibility with the peer community. This, in turn, allowed more reliability and soundness to be brought to the experts' judgment:

When a company needs to be defended on the scientific subject, it needs the word of an expert. And to have this, the expert should be recognized by his peers; and in order to be recognized by his peers, he must have been on 'holidays' at the congresses. (Florence, Fellow)

Thus, while both the experts and HRM recognize the necessity to align seemingly agentic behaviour with organizational goals, a certain level of incomprehension exists on the reasons and the justification of such an attitude. For HRM, agency is only legitimate if it corresponds to the actual goals of the organization and, more specifically, to product development. On the one hand, the link between individual actions and company-specific outcomes should be identifiable and likely to bring results within a reasonable period. The frustration of experts, on the other hand, is related to the fact that, in their opinion, expert work is not properly understood. The experts highlight that the supposedly "unnecessary" expert activities, such as participation in congresses or any other involvement in scientific activities, could bring concrete results if only the company would adopt a strategic perspective on experts' role and take into consideration the diversity of expert missions. They underline the relational and collective nature of such scientific activities and insist on the importance of the peer community in strengthening individual expertise and in legitimizing expert status both inside and outside the company. According to our interviewees, successful expert relations and the opportunity to simply assume their expert role are dependent on such expertise-reinforcing activities.

However, the predominance of agentic behaviours over collective forms of expertise could create tensions even among experts. The individualized practices and "hero-based" culture, in turn, could strengthen such tensions and consequently endanger expertise processes. There is thus a need to mediate between agentic and collective forms of expertise and reduce the consequences of individualized culture. HRM could potentially be well placed to take up the role of mediator. However, the vision of the "ideal" expert projected by the HR function is that of a "self-managing" employee (Gvaramadze, 2008) who expresses a high level of autonomy and responsibility and who is capable of successfully initiating change, by becoming an example for others. "Hero-based" management is thus reinforced even if the "hero" is expected to transmit, collaborate and create:

I stay with the example of Patrick. It's been 20 years that he has had his idea in mind; he thinks that this expertise should be diffused worldwide. His roadmap, the way he organized his career, his organization—he has been driven by that. That's his principal driver. [...]. What I want to say is that it is not the HR system that will make the difference. It's

rather to encourage this model, to make it easier, to encourage them. When they are nominated as Fellows – that's what is recognized. (Nadia, HR manager)

Thus, HRM does not seem to take a lead in managing a relational turn by counterbalancing individualized orientations. It sees its role rather as a supportive function that should encourage and recognize appropriate behaviours once they appear rather than anticipating or provoking them. Indeed, the HR system, their policies and practices are not perceived as potential mechanisms to move practices towards a more collective representation and management of expertise, but rather as ways to recognize, support and reward the individual contribution, by promoting "management by example". The strategic role of initiating and sustaining collective expertise is therefore delegated to the other functions or to the experts themselves, leaving HRM with the modest role of a follower: "I'm not sure it's an HR subject. I think it's rather a question of expertise management, in a global sense." (Nadia, HR manager).

This self-perception of the HRM function influences in turn the way the employees, and particularly experts, see its role in accompanying their work and dealing with strategic issues associated with expertise:

From the HR standpoint, I don't see clearly how HR could accompany this movement [movement of supporting collective expertise], apart from the fact that they are in contact [with us]. (Victor, Research team leader)

Hence, HRM is perceived neither by its managers nor by the experts as a change agent in making a strategic turn towards recognizing and promoting collective forms of expertise. Indeed, despite the challenges of individualization that impact the strategic functioning of the organization, the Human Resource department sees its primary contribution in supporting role-model behaviours, which could be potentially dependent on the personality of the employee or other organizational contingencies, thus reinforcing involuntarily the "agentic" view of expertise. This philosophy of recognition rather than anticipation, and the focus on "agency" rather than on "communion" could, however, be detrimental for expertise development from a long-term perspective.

Discussion

When agency-oriented HRM compromises the collective dynamic of expertise

The global tendency of the individualization of managerial practices did not miss out the specific population of "experts". Managerial tools like the dual ladder and the resulting nomination, recognition, rewarding and evaluation procedures are indeed focusing on the individual dimension of expertise—the knowledge,

the behaviour, the level of competency, and the leadership of an expert. This "agentic" view of expertise remains dominant in organizations, creating the myth of a "hero"—the one who is able by his or her exemplary behaviour and advanced knowledge to become a renowned expert. The recognition policy is thus oriented towards rewarding these heroes and positioning them as role models (Ibarra, 1999).

While personal recognition remains important both for the individuals themselves and for the visibility of expert status and expert career tracks in Alpha, our findings show that considering and accompanying the collective dimension of expertise is vital as it conditions critical processes within the organization to which experts have important contributions to make. Indeed, the interviews have shown that expertise sharing, learning, strategic decision making, and problem solving, as well as the innovative capacities of the organization, are substantially dependent on collective forms of expertise. Agency and communion are both present in expert work and could be mutually reinforcing if the equilibrium between the two dimensions is respected. The absence of such equilibrium and the prevalence of agentic attitude could have long-standing consequences for the company.

First, it could affect the motivation of those whose contribution to the collective processes is neither considered nor rewarded. The competition for individual visibility could provoke "me-first" attitudes and create unnecessary elitism. This, in turn, could have important consequences for the possibility for an expert to exercise his or her role. Indeed, separating experts from the rest of the company could compromise the expertise relationship with those who are potentially in need of expertise. Further, tough competition between experts themselves could be damaging for collective actions requiring multidisciplinary knowledge. The exclusion and isolation could thus become the permanent attributes of the "heroization" process.

Second, the newly created "expertise career track" could lose its viability and attractiveness as the younger generation refuses to align with individualized expertise management in which all the career risks are taken by the employee. This could endanger the continuity of expertise and provoke "organizational forgetting" of crucial specialized knowledge (Martin de Holan and Phillips, 2003). The hero-based management of today could thus compromise the perspectives of the expertise development of tomorrow.

Beyond individualization: new avenues for HRM in managing collective expertise

Despite such a strategic challenge, the role of the HR function in supporting and managing the fragile equilibrium between the agentic and collective dimensions

of expertise remains underexplored. While some scholars have argued that HRM has undertaken an important transformation from a support function to a truly strategic partner and change agent within organizations (Devanna, Fombrun and Tichy, 1981; Martell and Carroll, 1995), we have observed that in the case of expertise management, HRM doesn't consider itself as an important institution of regulation, a "fonction en devenir" (Taskin and Devos, 2005). HR managers rather perceive their role as a support function that endures the individualization process and delegates the responsibility to promote and animate the collective dimension of expertise either to the general management or to the community of experts themselves. In this vision, experts are expected to be a community of "self-organizing" employees who should find the best way to contribute to the strategic challenges of the company, communicated to them (or not) by the general management.

While this self-managing perspective could bring more flexibility and liberty to the employees, it could also be problematic in a number of ways. First, the introduction of the dual ladder and the consequent nomination of experts necessarily create expectations about the expert role and the way it could be enacted in organizations. Indeed, the nominated experts aspire to contribute to the strategic processes that could benefit from their expertise. However, an absence of any change in their role following the nomination creates a feeling that the engagement of the company towards expertise development and expert community reinforcement ends where it should be just starting. Second, the "self-managing" perspective delegates to the experts the full responsibility for their expertise relations. They are supposed to identify themselves the organizational needs in expertise, engage in the relationship with expertise seekers and finally make use of their expertise to resolve a problem, to consult on an issue or to transmit a piece of knowledge. While this could be possible for some of the most proactive individuals, with a good network of contacts and an already established reputation, it could prove to be more challenging for more reserved and less connected employees. Finally, the "self-managing" perspective reinforces the "hero-based" mindset as it increases the emphasis on individualization. Our findings have shown that collectively experts gain more power and legitimacy and could potentially become a strong internal force within the organization. Does the management feel ready to support and to deal with such a new force? While our research does not find any evidence that management try to neutralize the potential power of the newly created expertise community, it does show that individualization practices do not stimulate the reinforcement of such a community. The possibility for the experts to carry out collective action is thus significantly reduced.

We could assume that while for HRM the management of expertise remains *terra incognita* (Gastaldi, 2006), experts also express the same ignorance towards

the role of HRM in accompanying their expertise missions. This may open a new avenue for a possible evolution of the HR function. Indeed, HRM could contribute to the creation of a favourable environment that could strengthen expertise relations. Identifying the needs of expertise, enlightening diverse organizational actors on the importance of expertise, connecting expertise seekers with expertise holders, facilitating the interventions of experts, creating the possibilities for collective actions of the expert community—all these actions could help to enact expert knowledge and to get the most value out of expertise. HRM could thus adopt a role of mediator, striving to reinforce the complementarity between agentic and collective dimensions of expertise. This may also require rethinking some classical HRM tools and practices like evaluation and reward to better reflect the necessary balance between these two dimensions.

In dealing with the hero-based attitude and in searching for a new equilibrium in managing expertise, HR managers, however, could not act alone. In order to be legitimate, HRM initiatives should be convergent with the company's overall knowledge strategy and supported through collaboration with diverse organizational actors such as top management teams, the Scientific Division, department heads, experts' communities, etc. Their joint efforts in supporting relational and collective forms of expertise should be part of a strategic agenda for the company. Such an agenda could create a space for innovative HR practices designed to lead expertise management beyond the sole implementation of a dual ladder.

Conclusion

While the individualization trend in HRM practices has been reported in numerous studies, the impact of these practices on expert work and organizational expertise has not yet been investigated. Our study proposes a renewed perspective on the management of experts by questioning individualized managerial practices, particularly the dual ladder, and exploring the consequences of such “hero-based” management. Our findings point out that the failure to consider the collective dimension of expertise could endanger critical processes such as knowledge sharing, learning, innovating, decision making, and problem solving—areas in which experts are expected to make decisive contributions. We also highlight that the HRM function should undertake an important role in integrating the collective dimension of expertise in its strategic agenda. This role, however, could not be undertaken without the close collaboration of HR managers with other organizational actors such as the Scientific Division, department heads and experts' communities.

Although Alpha is representative of the big science-based companies in many aspects, future research is needed in order to deepen our understanding of the

diverse forms that collective expertise could take in different organizational contexts, as well as of the HRM practices that could support the delicate equilibrium between agentic and collective dimensions of expertise from a long-term perspective.

Notes

- 1 The Scientific Division of Alpha has an overall responsibility for coordinating research and innovation activities worldwide, identifying the perspectives for scientific development, fostering partnerships with universities and other scientific institutions, and ensuring the development of expertise.
- 2 The status of specialist does not officially exist in Alpha, but these individuals clearly possess an important level of specialized knowledge and assume leadership in a specific expertise domain. Many of them could be considered as “pre-experts”—individuals who could potentially become experts in a number of years.

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SUMMARY

Beyond "Hero-based" Management: Revisiting HRM Practices for Managing Collective Expertise

While expert knowledge is a crucial resource for large science-based companies, management of the specific population of experts remains a sensitive issue for the HRM. In order to recognize and retain these employees, companies traditionally implement a dual ladder—a career management tool that proposes an alternative technical career track to the managerial one, thus allowing recognition of an expert status in the organization. However, multiple studies have demonstrated that the implementation of a dual ladder does not bring the expected results. While previous research has investigated the individual aspirations of experts as possible reasons for their dissatisfaction with this managerial tool, we show the importance of the collective dimension of expertise and claim that the latter is insufficiently supported by HRM practices.

Drawing on a case study in a large multinational firm, we explore the consequences of individualized practices on expert work and discuss the role of HRM in dealing with so-called "hero-based" management. The findings show that individualized practices could endanger the learning and innovation capacities of the firm and compromise processes such as decision making and problem solving. It could also jeopardize the continuity of expertise from a long-term perspective as younger generations refuse to align with a "hero-based" culture. Despite such a strategic challenge, HR managers experience difficulties in reinforcing the collective dimension of expertise. This opens up new perspectives for the HRM function that could lead the management of experts towards new horizons by supporting the fragile equilibrium between "agency" and "communion" in expertise processes.

KEYWORDS: human resource management, individualization, collective expertise, experts, dual ladder.

RÉSUMÉ

Au-delà d'un management basé sur un modèle de « héros » : une reconsidération des pratiques de GRH en gestion collective de l'expertise

Bien que le savoir expert soit une ressource cruciale pour les entreprises fondant leur activité sur la science, la gestion de la population spécifique des experts

reste une problématique délicate pour la GRH. Pour reconnaître et conserver ces employés, les entreprises mettent traditionnellement en œuvre une double échelle, à savoir un outil de gestion des carrières qui propose une alternative de carrière technique à la managériale, permettant ainsi la reconnaissance d'un statut d'expert dans l'organisation. Cependant, de nombreuses études ont montré que la mise en œuvre de la double échelle ne générerait pas les effets escomptés. Tandis que des recherches précédentes ont exploré les aspirations individuelles des experts comme raison de leurs mécontentements face à cet outil managérial, nous montrons l'importance de la dimension collective de l'expertise et arguons que cette dernière est insuffisamment soutenue par des pratiques de GRH.

À partir d'une étude de cas dans une grande firme multinationale, nous explorons les conséquences de pratiques « individualisantes » sur le travail d'expertise et discutons du rôle de la GRH dans le « *hero-based* » management. Les résultats montrent que les pratiques individualisées pourraient mettre en danger les capacités d'apprentissage et d'innovation de l'entreprise, ainsi que compromettre des processus tels que la prise de décision et la résolution de problème. Cela pourrait également mettre en danger la continuité de l'expertise sur le long terme, alors que les jeunes générations refusent d'endosser la culture « *hero-based* ». Les résultats montrent également que la fonction GRH agit très difficilement sur la dimension collective de l'expertise. Cela ouvre de nouvelles perspectives pour la fonction RH qui pourrait mener le management des experts vers de nouveaux horizons en assurant un équilibre fragile entre les dimensions d'« agence » et de « communion » de l'expertise organisationnelle.

MOTS-CLÉS : gestion des ressources humaines, individualisation, expertise collective, experts, double échelle.

RESUMEN

Más allá de la gestión « *hero based* »: revisión de las prácticas de gestión de recursos humanos para dirigir el conocimiento experto colectivo

Si bien el conocimiento experto es un recurso crucial para grandes empresas basadas en la ciencia, la gestión de la población específica de expertos sigue siendo un tema delicado para la gestión de recursos humanos (GRH). Con el fin de reconocer y retener a estos empleados, las empresas tradicionalmente implementan una doble escala, una herramienta de gestión de carrera que propone una carrera técnica profesional alternativa a la carrera de ejecutivo, lo que permite el reconocimiento de un estatus de experto en la organización. Sin embargo, múltiples estudios han demostrado que la implementación de una doble escala no brinda los resultados esperados. Si ciertas investigaciones previas han estudiado las aspiraciones individuales de los expertos como posibles motivos de su insatisfacción con esta herramienta de gestión, nuestro estudio muestra la importancia de la dimensión colecti-

va de la experiencia y destaca que esta última no cuenta con el respaldo suficiente de las prácticas de gestión de recursos humanos.

Basándonos en un estudio de caso en una gran empresa multinacional, exploramos las consecuencias de las prácticas individualizadas en el trabajo de expertos y discutimos el rol de la gestión de recursos humanos en el manejo de la llamada gestión « basada en héroes » (*hero based*). Los resultados muestran que las prácticas individualizadas podrían poner en peligro las capacidades de aprendizaje e innovación de la empresa y comprometer los procesos como la toma de decisiones y la resolución de problemas. También podría poner en peligro la continuidad del conocimiento experto desde una perspectiva a largo plazo, a medida que las generaciones más jóvenes rechazan de alinearse con una cultura « basada en héroes ». A pesar de tal desafío estratégico, los gerentes de recursos humanos tienen dificultades para reforzar la dimensión colectiva de conocimiento experto. Esto abre nuevas perspectivas para la función de GRH que podría conducir a la gestión de expertos hacia nuevos horizontes apoyando el frágil equilibrio entre « agencia » y « comunión » en los procesos de conocimiento experto.

PALABRAS CLAVES: gestión de recursos humanos, individualización, conocimiento experto colectivo, expertos, doble escala.