PRAGMATIC CRITICAL REALISM: COULD THIS METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH EXPAND OUR UNDERSTANDING OF EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS?

Introduction

Employment relations academics and researchers could expand their use of methodologies in order to enable the advancement of theoretical debate within their discipline and seek more effective ways to understand the emotions and behaviours of individuals within the employment relationship. This may enable the development of sound theoretical foundations to build understandings, rather than restricting debate and conclusions to quantifiable and specific issues. Pragmatic critical realism is an effective approach upon which to expand and develop the theoretical debates surrounding employment relations.

Pragmatic critical realism is founded in the philosophy of perception. Individuals access knowledge and reflect on experiences using senses rather than quantifiable statistics. Critical realism is associated with Bhaskar (3, 4, and 5) who suggested that it is important to research into the behaviour of people and society with the acknowledgement that reality consists of three layers: the empirical layer, the actual layer, and the real layer. This paper argues that employment relations academics and researchers have tended to adopt very limited methodologies and have not taken account of the three layers identified by Bhaskar, thereby restricting the development of theory in the field.

Traditionally, employment relations has been dominated by quantitative studies in an effort to understand individual behaviour by quantifying and interpreting statistics. This paper contends this is not adequate because this approach fails to understand the underlying emotions and actions of both the employer and the employee. It is suggested that the adoption of a pragmatic critical realist methodological approach can add to the data and improve our understanding of the employment relationship.

Pragmatic critical realism is a methodological approach which has added value to the development of theory in a number of areas within the field of social science. To date, it has failed to make a significant impact on the development of theory in relation to the understanding of employment relations. It is for this reason that this paper seeks to explore the value of pragmatic critical realism in relation to the development of employment relations theory and practice. Pragmatic critical realism places importance on the idea that knowledge develops and changes as one theory replaces another. Thus, social scientists who adopt this methodological approach seek to ‘prove’ their hypotheses through the consistency of theory and explanation. Such researchers place emphasis on studying systems within their context but accept that multi-disciplinary approaches may strengthen the reliability and validity of their conclusions.

This paper begins by outlining the term, ‘significant realism’ and its importance to our understanding of ‘reality’. It will further explain the importance of adding pragmatism to the perspective in order to strengthen the foundations upon which the philosophy is developed. Once these areas have been established, it will be necessary to examine how pragmatic critical realism could expand the understanding of employment relations as well as the extent to which it would enable and strengthen its theoretical development.
How we come to ask particular questions, how we assess the relevance and value of different research methodologies so that we can investigate those questions, how we evaluate the outputs of research, all express and vary according to our underlying epistemological commitments (Johnson and Duberley 21).

Critical Realism

Critical realism accepts that both qualitative and quantitative methodologies can generate valid and reliable data that enables researchers to explore issues and to seek out causal explanations. Fleetwood and Ackroyd (1) suggested that this is a major challenge to the traditional orthodox approaches to methodology in the sense that many writers have argued that qualitative and quantitative approaches are ‘incompatible’. Fleetwood and Ackroyd (1) concluded that critical realists are ‘seeking to rewrite the approach to methodology that, until recently, was becoming the orthodoxy in organisation and management studies’. That is, researchers from the critical realist paradigm are attempting to move the focus away from a traditionally positivist focus.

“The perceived domination of research methodology by positivists undoubtedly did give credence to the ideal of the real importance of positivism in organisation and management studies” (Fleetwood and Ackroyd 1).

Positivism aims to identify universal laws that govern how organisations and/or management operate and conduct relationships. Human actions are observed in the same way as physical elements from the natural sciences, for example, ‘as a network of causal relations linking aspects of behaviour to context and stimuli in the external environment’ this then conditions individuals to react in specific ways (Johnson and Duberley 21). There is little doubt that positivism has shaped the development of qualitative methodologies in that researchers from this creed attempted to closely adhere to ‘methodological rules and protocols of procedure similar to those laid down’ by positivist researchers in order to validate their findings (Fleetwood and Ackroyd 1). Ultimately, quantitative and qualitative approaches are seen as two opposing ends of a continuum with the ‘knowledge’ produced from each discipline distinct and totally incompatible with the other approach. Critical realism offers a ‘new’ approach to employment relations theoretical development incorporating, among other evolving theories, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

It is important to highlight that much of the research conducted within the field, in both the United States of America as well as the United Kingdom, has followed a positivist quantitative approach¹, giving quantitative methodologies an undeserved ‘privileged status’ according to Vernon (42). In doing so it has restricted our ability to fully understand the field and impeded the development of theory within employment relations. Vernon (42) argued that the widespread use of official statistics merely provided the discipline of employment relations with ‘remote indicators of the nature of workplace employment relations’. He added that this is not enough to formulate and build theory, it must access the ‘metadata’ which underpin the statistical data, in order to expand understanding and develop theory.

¹ See the Labour Force Surveys and Workplace Employment Relations Surveys.
Rejection or minimising of the contribution that quantitative research has made to the theoretical understanding of employment relations is not the goal. It is important to investigate substantive concerns from a range of angles rather than restricting and thereby limiting, research methodologies.

*Three distinct research methods have dominated research on employment for many years. Survey research, case study and documentary work employing official statistics tend to be performed by researchers inhabiting fairly distinct communities and communication between them can be problematic. Each has distinct potentials and limits in the establishment of knowledge of the social world (Vernon 42).*

Academics and researchers operating in the field must become more inclusive in their approaches to data gathering and analysis in an attempt to uncover how and why the various behaviours and actions within employment relations are reproduced (Goldthorpe 14).

*Research which employs qualitative and quantitative material at various levels, seeking to understand variations across individuals, workplaces, companies, industries and nations seems to stand some chance of illuminating the causal processes which underlie the outcomes apparent in social reality (Vernon 42).*

Without consideration of alternative methodological approaches, researchers run the risk of restricting their analysis and their subsequent debates resulting in the stagnation of theory. The data collected and analysed in this quantitative paradigm is of value to the development of theory in the field of employment relations because it highlights areas of interest, and specific issues and concerns within the field. For example, positivism only acknowledges events that can be observed, events that physically happen. Positivists do not accept some reality which exists independently of our knowledge of it and thus, they only study what can be observed. In fact, Sayer (34) suggested that their approach is a ‘flat, unstratified ontology which cannot comprehend emergence’ and it leads to the assumption that there is a universal closed system which encourages researchers to ‘view the search for empirical regularities as the goal of science’.

Critical realism sees reality as something which exists at a much deeper level preventing or obscuring our ability to observe, understand and verbalise various situations or social structures. It is necessary to combine different epistemological and methodological approaches to employment relations research for theory to evolve in a valid and reliable way.

Critical realism has emerged from a school of thought where people access knowledge and reflect on experiences through ‘sense data’. That is to say people use their five senses to obtain, analyse and rationalise data which, through the process of thought, enables theories to emerge. Critical realism is associated with the British philosopher Bhaskar (3, 4 and 6), who developed a general philosophy of science which he stated stood somewhere between positivism and postmodernism.*

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2 Postmodernism rejects the idea that there is objective knowledge. It argues that knowledge is understood through cultural lenses and transferred between individuals using linguistic and other meaning-making resources.
He critically examined the central methodological debate which focuses on the extent to which society can ‘be studied in the same way as nature’ (Bhaskar 6). Positivists have suggested that society and nature must be studied in the same methodical way and in accordance with scientific method. Bhaskar, however, argued there are different methodologies which allow researchers to access valid and reliable data not dominated by quantitative rules of data gathering and analysis. Thus, he rejected positivisms preoccupation with quantification while at the same time critiquing the postmodernism tendency to reduce the importance of the role of non-linguistic, non-discursive or non-semiotic occurrences. He concluded that postmodernists fail to distinguish between reality and our knowledge of reality which operate on two different levels.

What is so special about the patterns [that scientists] deliberately produce under meticulously controlled conditions in the laboratory is that it enables them to identify the mode of operation of natural structures, mechanisms or processes which they do not produce. What distinguishes the phenomena the scientist actually produces from the totality of the phenomena she could produce is that, when her experiment is successful, it is an index of what she does not produce. A real distinction between the objects of experimental investigation, such as causal laws, and patterns of events, is thus a condition of the intelligibility of experimental activity (Bhaskar 6).

Bhaskar claims that society exists independently of individuals although he does acknowledge that they reproduce and transform it.

People do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so. Society does not exist independently of human activity (the error of reification). But it is not the product of it (the error of voluntarism) (Bhaskar 6).

Bhaskar also suggested that to be in a position to investigate society it is important to recognise that reality is made up of three different layers. The first layer is the empirical layer which can be observed by humans. The next is the actual layer which, he stated, exists in time and space. Finally there is the real layer which goes beyond facts, perceptions and experiences. He suggests that the third layer includes structures, powers and liabilities and allows observable events to emerge. Bhaskar, stated that social phenomena surface from real structures then become actual and finally empirically observable. Bhaskar (6) concluded that there can be an ‘essential unity of method between the natural and the social science’.

The underlying thoughts of Bhaskar and other critical realist philosophers have been developed by theorists such as Archer (2), Sayer (35 and 36), Ackroyd and Fleetwood (1), and Fleetwood and Ackroyd (13) in relation to the social sciences and, in particular, management studies. They have each argued that research should be understood as an on-going process which evolves through space and time. Hence, perception and cognition are important elements of our understanding of the real world.
Turning specifically to employment relations theory, Edwards (11) acknowledged that progress has been made in many areas of employment relations in an attempt to ‘recover some [of its] underlying theoretical and methodological strengths’. In doing so, Edwards (11) stated that the areas where critical realism could add value have become clearer. For example, areas such as work-life balance, partnership and the effects of globalisation on employment relations could be strengthened by utilising a critical realist approach as it would allow comparisons to be made and causal explanations to be investigated. This Edwards (11) suggested, contributed to the ‘scientific’ goals of the field. He added that this is also the area where a strong connection between critical realism and quantitative, hypothesis-driven research exists.

Brown, Slater and Spencer (8) agreed that critical realism uses a process of ‘abstraction and retroduction’ which helps to identify the ‘real’ causal phenomena which are hidden beneath the surface and perhaps obscured from view or interpretation. It attempts to uncover information which, using other epistemological approaches and methodologies, would perhaps remain unknown. Therefore, supporters of critical realism contend that although data gathered from different epistemological foundations may identify some knowledge and understanding of social structures, mechanisms or relationships, they fail to access the areas which exist independently of our knowledge of them.

It is important to highlight that critical realism is not a totally new approach to research methodology. It is merely suggested that it should be used more frequently to add value to understanding and analysis when undertaking investigations in the area of employment relations. Godard (15) appears to be one of the few theorists who recognised the advantages that critical realism had to offer in this field. However, Edwards (11 and 12), after reviewing a range of industrial relations journals and research papers, has concluded that some researchers appear to have adopted a research methodology that is consistent with that of critical realism. Fleetwood (13) agreed and stated that some researchers have adopted a methodology which is clearly ‘akin to’ critical realism3.

As has been seen, critical realism attempts to go beyond the ‘surface phenomena and disclose ‘deep’ social structures’ (Brown et al 8). Bhaskar (15) stated that the social world is the direct result of human action, consequently, there remains the possibility that changing the way individuals act or react will alter existing relationships. If social reality is made up of ‘causal structures it must be possible to intervene and manipulate that structure’ (Johnson and Duberley 21). If this is ‘reality,’ then identifying these would enable management, trade unions, and employees, for example, to adjust and change the way organisations are structured, and indeed, how employment relations function and evolve over time.

Sayer (35) concluded that:

The world can only be understood in terms of the available conceptual resources, but the latter do not determine the structure of the world itself. And, despite our entrapment within our conceptual schemes, it is still possible to differentiate

3 See Watson (2004).
between more and less practically-adequate beliefs about the material world. Observation is neither theory-neutral nor theory-determined but theory-laden. Truth is neither absolute nor purely conventional and relative.

Critical realism therefore, acknowledges that there is an objective, mind-independent reality while at the same time accepting the role of perception and cognition in the understanding of events, situations etc.

However, to stick to a purely critical realist approach may present problems as it has to face two interrelated epistemological issues which may cause concerns in the interpretation of the data:

1. ‘... because critical realists reject the possibility of a theory-neutral observational language how can they then establish the veracity of ... epistemically transitive constructions, yet simultaneously avoid the articulation of the very ‘superidealism’ which Bhaskar so vehemently decries?’

2. ‘... if traditional forms of empiricism are untenable since experience cannot provide us with knowledge of intransitive reality, and if science is not to be exclusively self-referential as in postmodernism, how does science involve socially mediated transitive transactions with the ‘common referent’ – an intransitive reality’ (Johnson and Duberley 21).

Pragmatic Critical Realism

To overcome these problems, as well as addressing the accusation of ontological abstraction, this paper posits that critical realism should be combined with pragmatism to form what Johnson and Duberley (21) have called ‘pragmatic-critical realism’ in order to allow subject-object transactions to be established. Johnson and Duberley (21), however, suggested that pragmatism consists of two parts which may be brought together to reject positivism. Rorty (32, 33 and 34) 1998) characterised the first approach and stated that pragmatism is a social construction where knowledge emerges from the ‘language-games of a community of people which is incommensurable with that of other communities and which cannot be judged by the standards of another community’ (Rorty 33). The second approach to pragmatism has been termed the ‘North American ethos’. This has been outlined by James (20) and Dewey (10) who suggest that to have ‘knowledge is the ability to anticipate the consequences of manipulating things in the world’ (Johnson and Duberley 21). Dewey added that individuals are not passive receptacles of sense-data, they are active participants with the ability to critically reflect and learn from experiences and observations. Pragmatism from this stance believes that knowledge is socially constructed in order to help people solve ‘problems’ and make sense of information in practical day to day situations (Johnson and Duberley 21). Therefore, pragmatism in relation to this paper will be taken to mean that ‘social constructions are bounded by the tolerance of external reality which exists independently of our cognitive processes’ (Johnson and Duberley 21).

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4 In Bhaskar’s terms post-modernism would entail both epistemic [relativism – that knowledge is always socially constructed] and judgmental relativism [- that there are no grounds for preferring one knowledge claim to another] – a superidealism’ which conflates the transitive and intransitive so that reality becomes an outcome of our variable epistemological engagements and allows the propagation of certain variants of the incommensurability thesis’ (Johnson and Duberley 21 pg. 152).
Thus, as Johnson and Duberley (21) suggested;

*While the truth may well be ‘out there’ we may never know it in an absolute sense because we lack the necessary cognitive and linguistic means of apprehending it. [However] … from the pragmatic-critical realist stance we can develop, and indeed identify, in a fallible manner, more adequate social constructions or reality by demonstrating their variable ability to realise our goals, ends or expectations since our practical activities allow transactions between subject and object.*

It is therefore suggested that academics and practitioners investigate the possibility that research into employment relations can be significantly enhanced by adopting a pragmatic critical realist perspective. Pragmatic critical realism is founded on the premise that the ontological debate is refocused from epistemology (the theory of knowledge) to ontology (the theory of being). It highlights the belief that the ontological ‘realm must exist independently of our knowledge of it’ (Joseph 22). In other words, there exists a mind independent reality which cannot be studied or understood in the same way as natural phenomenon. It requires a high level of theory and abstraction (Wikgren 45: Edwards 11). Margolis (25) added that ‘what reality is and how we have conceived it are different questions since many things are beyond our conceptual and linguistic capacities…. things that cannot be measured or observed via our senses may be still real’ (Johnson and Duberley 21). In other words the world of knowledge is not dependent on the cognitive creations of individuals. For example, an individual might believe in the concept of God, however, understanding what or who God is could be beyond our conceptual and linguistic ability, nevertheless this does not mean that God does not exist in reality.

This approach is ‘a synthesis, which emerged from, and attempts to transcend, positivism’s thesis of a foundational-absolute stance and postmodernism’s antithesis of chaotic relativism’ (Johnson and Duberley 21). In fact Brown, Slater and Spencer (8) have argued that the notion of abstraction is central to understanding critical realism and its contribution to social science research. Thus, critical realism has been developed from the ‘post-Kuhnian’ critique of positivism (Bhaskar 15) which suggests that the ‘truth must be more than the outputs of a language game, yet it cannot be absolute’ (Johnson and Duberley 21).

Edwards (11) highlighted that although there is some evidence to suggest that pragmatic critical realism has been used in some management studies it has almost been ignored within the field of employment relations research (Edwards 12). Perhaps this is because the approach is generally used at an ontological abstract level and thus not considered as adding practical knowledge to the field. Pettigrew, Woodman and Cameron (29) comment that research needs to explore contexts, content and processes with their ‘interconnections over time’ in order to present theoretically sound data. Edwards (11) added that as employment relations research attempted to explore social processes which are directly linked to areas such as economics, sociology and politics it needs to cease its ‘elitist’ approaches to the attainment of knowledge and widen its methodology to include a variety of epistemological approaches in order to define, understand and develop employment relations theory. Researchers should, therefore, seek to use an inclusive range of
methodologies in order to develop employment relations theory and increase its credibility.

Thus, a key point in adopting a pragmatic critical realist approach is that ‘although language shapes all forms of science it does not mean that nothing exists beyond language. Reality intervenes and puts limits upon the viability of our descriptions and explanations’ (Johnson and Duberley, 21) in particular what we ‘know’ changes as it evolves through time and space. Polanyi (30) even suggested that as individuals we ‘know more than we can tell’ therefore, to expand this, tacit knowledge must consist of customs, practices and cultures that cannot be accessed and understood by all, in all historical periods.

From this perspective, it is assumed that ‘external casual regularities exist’ and that individual behaviour in everyday life is determined by how people make sense of them and react to them. Knowledge is gained from an independent reality which is accessed by individuals through their ability to reflect and ‘learn’ from experience. Therefore, workplaces are shaped by how people react and respond to each other in specific circumstances.

This was felt to be of significance, in the sphere of employment relations, as the knowledge and experiences of the stakeholders within the employment arena must be accessed in order to analyse their perceptions of a given situation and the subsequent implications for the workplace. For example, tacit knowledge has been the focus of some employment relations studies (Kursterer 24; Halle 16). The data collected and analysed fits comfortably with a pragmatic critical realist approach in the sense that it recognised that knowledge can evolve and become understood. Therefore, it has been established by precedent that theory development can be enhanced through tacit knowledge. It does not have to be expressed verbally to be known, investigated, relevant or have implications for the development and understanding of employment relations theory. Edwards (11) agreed and added that non-conventional ‘forces’ which have shaped employment have not been explained by conventional approaches such as history, custom, ignorance, change and context and thus, is ‘clearly compatible with a [pragmatic] critical realist approach’. Pratschke (31) also supported this stance and further argued that statistical analysis can be consistent with [pragmatic] critical realism.

The adoption of this perspective encourages the use of a multi-methodological approach to gathering and analysing data in order to gain a more ‘rounded’ view of the area under investigation. As already highlighted, this approach is unusual within employment relations research (Gill and Johnson 21). This is surprising given that the more sources used to gather and analyse data increases the validity and reliability of the subsequent findings and strengthens the development of theory. One explanation is that there is reluctance by employment relations researchers to use a multi-methodological approach. Two reasons have been offered: the first is that this approach is time consuming and costly and secondly, research within the field of employment relations is influenced by the academic journals who demonstrate a preference for a single specific, generally quantitative, methodological approach. Therefore, as academics strive for recognition and credence they conform to traditional methods and approaches. Kaufman (23), considered that this has weakened industrial/employment relations research as it has meant that the field has
become focused on problem solving rather than theoretical development. Edwards (11) although agreeing, to a certain extent, has added that although this may be the case it does not imply that theory building has not occurred but that it has been built-up around specific issues rather than developing the industrial/employment relations discipline.

Despite the academic debate, it seems clear that in order for theory to develop and strengthen in the field of employment relations a multi-methodological approach to data collection must be adopted. This allows information to be gathered from a wide variety of sources and from a number of perspectives using contributory rather than conflicting methodological techniques. This methodological triangulation, according to Denzin (9), overcomes any bias which is inherent within a single methodological approach as well as adding value to the theoretical debate. Smith (39) added that:

We are really like blind men led into an arena and asked to identify an entity (say an elephant) by touching one part of that entity (say a leg). Certainly we might make better guesses if we could pool the information of all the blind men, each of whom has touched a different part of the elephant.

Denzin (9) concluded that the use of a multi-methodological approach increased the validity and reliability of data gathered. Hammerseley and Atkinson (17) supported this and added that this approach strengthened research findings through the combination of information sources and analytical approaches. Nolan and Walsh (28) stated that the multi-method approach allowed the combination of analytical strength and qualitative reflection to be drawn from a number of different social science disciplines, increasing the variety of data gathered and improving the understanding of the domain of employment relations research. This, reflects more accurately the nature, characteristics and study of employment relations which, rather than making it ‘atheoretical’, create a strong foundation on which to build and develop our understanding of employment relations. Thompson (41) agreed and stated that researchers are now increasingly using multi-level case studies to develop theory. The author suggests that this is consistent with the approach of pragmatic critical realism. This is borne out by Edwards (11) who considered that although research projects are, on the whole, planned at an early stage they tend to develop in a haphazard fashion. This can mean that certain issues may not be comparable as in the case of employee and management perceptions which in common with their knowledge and understanding may vary. However, the perceptions are no less real than the fact that they will evolve over time. It is the ‘job’ of the researcher to interpret and develop knowledge in order to advance theoretical development.

Sayer (36), stated that explanations as to why organisations or individuals behave the way they do is more easily accessed using a realist approach ‘than would have been possible through seeking determinate statistical relationships’. It is argued that valuable data may be lost or ignored if the research focuses too much on quantitative data at the expense of qualitative gathered in full recognition of pragmatic critical realism’s epistemological beliefs and furthermore, it could limit the evolution of theoretical development.
Pragmatic critical realism, therefore, argues that there is a clear distinction between the natural world and that of the social world. It accepts that the natural world can be measured and statistically analysed. However, the social world is not simplistic as it is made up of unique individuals whose emotions and behaviours cannot be accurately predicted or ultimately controlled by others. Thus, social world research requires a different approach(es). Schostak (38) argued that as the social world is ‘messy’ and open to interpretation by many individuals it needs to be analysed using a range of techniques and analytical tools. Joseph (22) suggested that social structures are ‘ontologically different from natural ones in the sense that they are praxis and concept dependent – that they are dependent on human activity and human conception of that activity’. Joseph (22) added that pragmatic critical realism is able to ‘break free’ of the analytical constraints placed on knowledge by arguing that what we know to be ‘fact’ is not all there is to know. It leaves the possibility that there is knowledge which is beyond our ability to conceive, understand or transfer in any particular historical period, cultural background etc. He stated that many social science researchers confused ontology with epistemology which undermined their understanding of the area and reduced the credibility of the theories which emerged from this.

Mingers (27) has argued that those researching the field of management seriously need to consider adopting a [pragmatic] critical realist approach as many of the disciplinary disputes would be alleviated. For example, the debate about whether management is a science or a technology would become irrelevant from a pragmatic critical realist base as both science and technology could positively contribute to our understanding and to the development of theory. Habermas (18) has suggested that communication is fundamental to the development of knowledge and its subsequent transmission and evolution. It is a crucial point therefore, that people have the ability to communicate, reflect and debate through the medium of language.

Conclusion

Pragmatic critical realism rejects the position that employment relations research and theoretical development can be conducted following a limited positivist approach. It is clear that the employment relationship does not operate in a vacuum, nor does it operate in a sterilised laboratory. Rather it is focussed on the interaction between imperfect individuals. Their interactions are moulded by emotions which can not be explored or even acknowledged through a positivists’ very rigorous but limited acknowledgement of what constitutes ‘knowledge’ and development of theory.

In summary, it is the responsibility of employment relations researchers to, ‘open’ their minds and allow for the theoretical advancement of their discipline by seeking ‘new’ ways of accessing and explaining why and how workplace relationships are shaped, and indeed, develop over time. Obviously we should not ‘throw caution to the wind’ and ignore the reliability and the validity of the data we presently gather. However, we should not allow ourselves to restrict a data rich academic discipline, such as employment relations, by limiting its ability to evolve.

Employment relations do not take place in a controlled environment. Change is continuous and everybody is unique in the way they interpret, make sense of, learn, understand and behave. No two people are the same. Hence, we are an
organisation’s competitive advantage. Would we not be better advised to maximise the methodological, epistemological and ontological approaches used to access a wide variety of data so that we can view the ‘whole elephant’ rather than just glimpse parts which may well lead us to misunderstand the situation, the relationship and the structures? As Reed (40) stated, we can not access reality by ignoring the complexity of history, language, ideology and discussion.

As was argued earlier, it is not the intention of the author to reject the value of quantitative data to the study of the field. What has been suggested here is that pragmatic critical realism has a lot to offer the development of the area and its theoretical foundations. Joseph (22) stated that the approach “helps facilitate an analysis of a complex and contradictory social whole and its different structures and mechanisms.” Pragmatic critical realism is therefore a crucial ‘tool’ in understanding the complex area of employment relations which is, after all, a relationship charged with emotion and feelings.
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