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Robert Owen as an Undervalued Pioneer of Human Resource Management: Research Gap Based on State-of-the-art and Systematic Literature Reviews

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of the article is to diagnose whether there is a research gap in the work from the last two decades (on Robert Owen's achievements) related to Owen's contribution to the emergence of human resource management (HRM).

Research Design & Methods: I followed a state-of-the-art review (SotA) and a systematic literature review (SLR).

Findings: Robert Owen is widely recognised as a utopian socialist and/or one of the pioneers of management. He is also one of the first who underlined the importance of an organisation's human resources. Nevertheless, I noticed that researchers underestimate Owen's contribution to the development of human resource management, and their works do not devote much space to Owen's achievements related to this subdiscipline of management. The results of the reviews prove the interdisciplinarity and multicontextual nature of Owen's ideas, while highlighting the research gap related to his achievements in the field of HRM.

Implications/Recommendations: I suggest that studies on Owen should be carried out by HRM experts, as they know the details of this subdiscipline best. Even if business history knowledge does not play a crucial role in management practice, knowledge of the origin of management methods and techniques may help HR managers to correctly apply them in organisations.

Contribution: The article is one of the few (if not the only) in which texts devoted to Owen and his achievements in the field of HRM are analysed through SLR. It can be a source of inspiration for scientists, management teachers, and students who are looking for an insufficiently recognised research topic.

Article type: original article.

Keywords: Robert Owen, human resource management, research gap, state-of-the-art review, systematic literature review.

JEL Classification: B19, M12.

1. Introduction

It is well known that Robert Owen, born in Wales in 1771, was a utopian socialist, a social and political activist, an entrepreneur, and one of the precursors of management sciences. His works and achievements are interdisciplinary and have been analysed (and still are) by representatives of many scientific disciplines, including political scientists, historians, educators, and management specialists. In management studies, Owen is often referred to as a pioneer of cooperatives or city management (Donnachie, 2007; O'Hagan, 2008). His works to improve working conditions are considered revolutionary and have been included in the laws of many countries around the world. However, what is not always remembered, and what is important from the point of view of understanding modern management, is that Owen contributed much more to the development of management science and practice. Some of Owen's so-called social experiments (Hatcher, 2013), conducted in the early 19th century in the New Lanark in Scotland and the New Harmony in the USA, concerned human resource management (HRM). Owen was one of the first managers to recognise the importance of an organisation's human resources. He argued that bringing out and maintaining the best performance in current and future employees required constant care (Kaikai, 1989) and assumed that paying more attention to workers would pay off in increased output (Griffin, 2013, pp. 33–34). Although Owen is considered the precursor of human resource management (Davis, 1957; Dulebohn, Ferris & Stodd, 1995; Thakur, 2020), his achievements related to HRM have not received much attention in the literature, and his contribution to the development of HRM is not fully appreciated. To validate this statement, I decided to conduct research. The aim of my analysis was to check whether (in contemporary research on Owen's achievements) there is a research gap

related to Owen's contribution to the emergence and development of HRM, which can be filled with future studies. To achieve the aim, the study intends to respond to the four conceptual research questions:

RQ1: Which of Owen's achievements are the subject of research?

RQ2: Which scientific disciplines are interested in Owen's work?

RQ3: What has been written about Owen and his achievements in the context of social sciences (especially in the context of management)?

RQ4: Are Owen's achievements analysed from a HRM point of view?

To address these questions, data was collected following traditional and systematic literature reviews.

My analysis proceeds as follows. I begin by presenting the research methods. The second section, based on a state-of-the-art review (SotA), shows Owen's most important achievements. The next section contains the results of a systematic literature review (SLR). The article ends with a discussion (including answers to the research questions, limitations of the analysis, and directions for future research) and conclusions.

The article is not a historical study; it does not show data or examples that illustrate phenomena from the past. The article examines the current interest of researchers in Owen's achievements, i.e., it concerns the present. However, I hope that the text will motivate other researchers to analyse Owen's ideas related to HRM, that is to study the past. I hope that the results of my reviews will inspire not only sociologists and economists but, above all, representatives of management sciences, who will make an effort to accurately identify Owen's contribution to the development of human resource management and its tools. Consequently, the text encourages analysis in the (generally understood) field of business history, which is still rather poorly recognised by representatives of management sciences (Fridenson, 2008). But this is important because, despite being in the middle of a "historic turn" in the study of management (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004), the literature reviews I conducted have shown that human resource management researchers are not very interested in Owen's thoughts or achievements in the field of HRM. Consequently, there is still a research gap to be filled. It would be ideal if HRM scientists wanted to do so because deeper knowledge of the origins of HRM is needed for better understanding the very fast evolving practices of human resource management.

2. Research Design and Methods

To achieve the research goal (and answer the research questions), I used the literature review method. I chose two literature review techniques: 1) state-of-the-art/science review, and 2) systematic literature review. State-of-the-art reviews belong to the group of traditional (non-systematic) reviews. They may offer new perspectives on a problem or highlight areas that require further study (Grant & Booth, 2009),

and show what has and has not been investigated. It should be underlined that SotA reviews are valued by academia, but guidelines or specific methodology descriptions for researchers to follow when conducting this type of knowledge synthesis are conspicuously absent (Barry, Markebu & Varpio, 2022). Systematic reviews attempt to collate all evidence that fits prespecified eligibility criteria in order to answer a specific research question. Their aim is to minimise bias through transparent and systematic methods (Green *et al.*, 2008; Chandler & Hopewell, 2013). Currently, representatives of various scientific disciplines (including management sciences) use systematic literature reviews. Scandura and Williams (2000, p. 1263) argue that “without rigor, relevance in management research cannot be claimed”. I organised my research procedure (in the case of both the non-systematic and the systematic review) according to the SALSA model (Table 1).

Table 1. SotA and SLR according to SALSA Model

Steps in the Review Process	Type of Review	
	SotA	SLR
Search	Aimed at a comprehensive search of current literature	Aims for an exhaustive, comprehensive search
Appraisal	No or limited formal quality assessment	Quality assessment can determine inclusion/exclusion
Synthesis	Typically narrative but may be accompanied by tables or graphics	Typically narrative with tabular accompaniment
Analysis	Current state of the research area on a topic and highlights future research topics; the most recent literature on a topic to provide evidence to support policymakers	What is known; recommendations for practice. What remains unknown; uncertainty around findings, recommendations for future research

Source: (Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou, 2016, pp. 23–27).

For the non-systematic review, I used (mainly) the Google Scholar search engine; the search was conducted on 23 February 2023. The number of texts devoted to Owen (or referring to his achievements) amounted to over 47,000. So, I decided to narrow the search to texts that contain the exact phrase “Robert Owen” in the title (I wanted to be sure that the text is devoted to Owen and/or his achievements), and were published no earlier than 2000 (I wanted to focus on the latest studies on Owen). After narrowing the search, I identified 266 texts (Table 2). I have not adopted any formal criteria for evaluating the quality of selected texts; the evaluation was based on my research experience. I only analysed texts in English, which means that the number of texts was less than 266. The works found in Google Scholar are books, book chapters, scientific articles, and also popular science texts (some of them

were published on the Internet only). It is worth noting that in the SotA review, I did not find any previously published results of other systematic reviews of Owen's work.

Table 2. Narrowing SotA Search Results

The Searched Phrase	The Location of the Searched Phrase	The Year of Publication	Number of Texts
"Robert Owen"	anywhere in the article	no date limits	47,100
	in the title of the article	no date limits	860
	in the title of the article	no earlier than 2000	266

Source: the author.

Table 3. Search Strategies in Scopus and Web of Science Databases

Base	The Searched Phrase	Search within	Year Range	Subject Area	Full Text Available	Search Results
Scopus	"Robert Owen"	all fields	no year range	no subject area	no	1,048
		article title, abstract, keywords	no year range	no subject area	no	151
		article title	no year range	no subject area	no	56
		article title	2000–2023	no subject area	no	40
		article title	2000–2023	social sciences; business, management and accounting	no	30
		article title	2000–2023	social sciences; business, management and accounting	yes	13
Web of Science	"Robert Owen"	all fields	no year range	no subject area	no	271
		article title, abstract, keywords	no year range	no subject area	no	148
		article title	no year range	no subject area	no	87
		article title	2000–2023	no subject area	no	66
		article title	2000–2023	social sciences; management	no	7
		article title	2000–2023	social sciences; management	yes	3

Source: the author.

Table 4. Texts Included in the Systematic Review

Base	Authors	Year	Title	Document Type	Journal/Publisher	Country	Citations
Scopus	del Valle Alcalá, R.	2021	Class Antagonism and the Limits of Utopia in Matthew Lewis and Robert Owen	article	<i>Nineteenth-Century Contexts</i> , 43(4), 465–477	Sweden	0
	Drolet, M., & Frobort, L.	2021	Robert Owen and Continental Europe	article	<i>History of European Ideas</i> , 47(2), 175–190	UK, France	0
	Gioia, V., & Soliani, R.	2021	The Reception of Robert Owen's Thought in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Italy	article	<i>History of European Ideas</i> , 47(2), 374–403	Italy, Italy	0
	Kuligowski, P.	2021	From Rejection to Historicisation: The Reception of Robert Owen's Ideas in the Nineteenth-century Polish Context	article	<i>History of European Ideas</i> , 47(2), 202–215	Poland	0
	Doe, N.	2019	Robert Owen (1820–1902)	review	<i>Ecclesiastical Law Journal</i> , 21(1), 54–68	UK	0
	Trincado, E., & Santos-Redondo, M.	2017	<i>Economics, Entrepreneurship and Utopia: The Economics of Jeremy Bentham and Robert Owen</i>	book	Routledge	Spain, Spain	3
	Humphreys, J. <i>et al.</i>	2016	Disharmony in New Harmony: Insights from the Narcissistic Leadership of Robert Owen	article	<i>Journal of Management History</i> , 22(2), 146–170	US, US, US, US	9
	Leopold, D.	2015	Scientific Socialism: The Case of Robert Owen	book chapter	In: K. N. Demetriou, A. Loizides (Eds), <i>Scientific Statesmanship, Governance and the History of Political Philosophy</i> (pp. 193–209). Routledge	UK	2

Table 4 cont'd

Base	Authors	Year	Title	Document Type	Journal/Publisher	Country	Citations
Scopus	Donnachie, I.	2014	People, Places and Spaces: Education in Robert Owen's New Society	book chapter	In: S. Mills, P. Kraftl (Eds), <i>Informal Education, Childhood and Youth</i> (pp. 81–96). Palgrave Macmillan	UK	1
	Davies, T. R.	2014	Educational Internationalism, Universal Human Rights, and International Organisation: International Relations in the Thought and Practice of Robert Owen	article	<i>Review of International Studies</i> , 40(4), 729–751	UK	3
	Hatcher, T.	2013	Robert Owen: A Historiographic Study of a Pioneer of Human Resource Development	article	<i>European Journal of Training and Development</i> , 37(4), 414–431	US	7
	Leopold, D.	2013	Education and Utopia: Robert Owen and Charles Fourier	book chapter	In: C. Brooke, E. Frazer (Eds), <i>Ideas of Education. Philosophy and Politics from Plato to Dewey</i> (pp. 178–193). Routledge	UK	1
	Harrison, J.	2009	<i>Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World</i>	book	Routledge	US	8
Web of Science	Rogers, C.	2018	Utopian Socialism and Social Transformation	article	<i>Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences</i> , 54(4), 256–271	UK	0

Source: the author.

The search (as part of a systematic review) was conducted on 25 February 2023 in the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases, which are recommended for systematic reviews. The entire search process was documented in real time. I did not use any Boolean operators; I searched for the phrase “Robert Owen”. A search (without any exclusion criteria) for “Robert Owen” returned 1,048 results in Scopus and 271 in WoS. For the systematic review (as in the case of the SotA), I adopted the following narrowing criteria: the phrase “Robert Owen” in the title of the text, and the paper was not published earlier than in 2000. Due to RQ3 and RQ4, I limited the search to the subject area “social sciences” and “business, management and accounting” (for the Scopus database), and “social sciences” and “management” (for WoS). Based on the exclusion criteria used, Scopus reduced the results to 30 papers. After excluding texts by Owen himself (selected works of Owen), as well as texts in languages other than English, and articles that could not be accessed, 13 publications were obtained (Table 3). There were three texts available in the WoS database. Two of them are repeats of the Scopus database. Therefore, only one work found in the WoS was included in the analysis (Table 3). As a result of the selection, 14 texts were examined further (Table 4).

3. Results of a Non-systematic Literature Review

In the literature, Robert Owen is shown not only as one of the most important thinkers of his era but also as a controversial figure of his generation (Donnachie, 2005). As Cole (2019) notes, the Owen who acquired the New Lanark Mills in 1799 and the Owen who purchased the Rappite community at New Harmony in 1825 appear to be two different persons. Humphreys *et al.* (2016) recognise Owen’s narcissistic personality. Contemporaries call Owen an apostle of the new economic order, while in the 19th century, he was referred to as “Mr. Owen the Philanthropist” (Cole, 2019). Although Owen’s ideas never attracted the widespread interest in continental Europe that they enjoyed in Britain, Ireland, and America (Johnson, 2007; Drolet & Frobert, 2021), Owen himself is considered a “personality”, a celebrity of the time, and a political figure (Trincado & Santos-Redondo, 2017) known in the national and international arena (Donnachie, 2011). The New Lanark factory he managed was visited by many well-known figures at the time: abolitionist William Wilberforce, the future US president John Quincy Adams, economists and philosophers including Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, and Thomas Malthus (Witzel, 2003, p. 262). Despite Owen’s popularity in the 19th century, no biography has been written that fully shows his achievements. The first studies on Owen referred selectively to various aspects of his life and were mainly based on his autobiography, first published in 1906. It has been reissued many times, the last one in 2018. There

is still no publication that presents the multifaceted life of this thinker (Harrison, 2009; Cole, 2019).

In texts found in Google Scholar, Owen is most often presented as a visionary socialist, a utopian socialist (e.g. Donnachie, 2005; Rogers, 2018), and even “the utopian prince” (Duncan, 2003). This term was given to him by his contemporaries, who, like Friedrich Engels, included him among the leading utopians. Owen is widely recognised as the father of British socialism (Siméon, 2012). This Welsh thinker is also referred to as a pioneer of the cooperative movement, a trade unionist, a communitarian, a reformer of 19th century British industry, a promoter of common education, a secularist, or even a spiritualist (Leopold, 2015).

Owen is best known to the historians who investigate Owen’s activities for his original approach to the organisation of a socialist society. These views were based on the philosophical assumptions of enlightenment of rationalism, materialism, and even utilitarianism. Owen believed that human nature is shaped by social circumstances – it was Owen’s newfound principle, what he called “the science of the influence of circumstance” (Jones, 2021). Owen’s overriding idea was the community, which was one of the key elements of his thought. He developed the idea of community in the American period of his activity in New Harmony. Owen’s activities in the field of education were related to the concept of community. He thought that a happy society could be achieved with proper education (O’Hagan, 2008). Education (as a subject of consideration) appeared in Owen’s thoughts quite late, but currently, texts devoted to this trend constitute the largest number of publications about Owen and his achievements. In these texts, Owen is presented as a reformer of the education system and pedagogy and the creator of education as we know it today (Bloom, 2003). Owen’s idea was that education should make people aware of what is good and what is to be punished. According to Owen, the process of education was supposed to lead to the disappearance of punishments and rewards. The result of this process was the discrimination between good and bad behaviour. “From the period following 1813–14, there are very few of Owen’s writings which do not contain a substantial reference to the importance of education in forming citizens” (McLaren, 2000, p. 108). For Owen, the starting point in his considerations was individual happiness, which resulted directly from the happiness of the community (Davis & O’Hagan, 2014).

Other works referring to Owen’s achievements are those dealing with cooperatives. This research was initiated in the 1990s by George Jacob Holyoake. Although Owen himself did not show much interest in cooperative worker initiatives (emerging as an expression of spontaneity), this scope of his thought is taken up in research on the cooperative movement in Britain and other countries (Bloy, 2018; Diamantopoulos, 2023; Kurimoto, 2023; Woodin, 2023).

Owen was also an entrepreneur “who became one of Britain’s most successful business leaders during the Industrial Revolution” (Witzel, 2003, p. 258). He developed a factory in New Lanark and made it profitable. However, Owen was not only a businessman, but also (and perhaps above all) a great employer of his time. He decided to reorganise the company and to create an industrial community, it is a whole social system based on a productive unit. At the time he managed New Lanark’s cotton mills, the complex included (among others): mills, an engine house, a mechanics workshop, spacious and well-designed workers’ houses, vegetable gardens, an educational institute, a school, a nursery building, and a store. Owen assumed that investing in people is the best capital investment. First, Owen increased the level of efficiency of work: replaced old machines with new ones, reduced waste, and developed an appraisal system. He improved the working conditions of weavers (reduced the hours of work for adults from 17 to 10 hours a day). In addition, he provided people with accommodation in workers’ houses for which they paid low rent, he offered meals for employees, and free medical care. Owen was the first employer in the world to run a nursery for employees’ children. He also cared for older children: he prohibited the employment of children under the age of 10 and did not allow working children to go to work at night or during the first shift. In the morning, the children attended a school, which was called the Institute for the Formation of Character. Owen consciously improved the working conditions. Today, one would say that he cared about the wellness of employees. As Hatcher (2013) concludes, Owen, by investing in broadly understood employee development (including promoting safe working conditions and protecting the health of employees), was already, undertaking activities characteristic of contemporary human resource management in the 19th century, which makes him a pioneer of human resource development (HRD).

4. Results of a Systematic Literature Review

The papers selected for systematic review (Table 4) are both “white” and “1st tier gray” literature (Adams, Smart & Huff, 2017) – respectively: eight articles, five books (or chapters in books), one review. The journals in which selected texts have been published are: *History of European Ideas* (three articles), *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* (one article), *Journal of Management History* (one paper), *Review of International Studies* (one text), *European Journal of Training and Development* (one), *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* (one). The different aims and scopes of these journals indicate that Owen’s activity and achievements are the subject of analyses of many scientific disciplines. The analysed texts were written by a total of 21 authors. Ten papers are single-author publications, three works are two-person texts, and one article was written by six authors. Fourteen authors represent European countries, seven authors come from the US. Half of the European researchers are British

(seven authors); the others represent the following countries: Italy (two researchers), Spain (two people), Sweden, France, and Poland. Only one research team (Drolet & Frobert, 2021) is international. The British are the authors (or co-authors) of seven texts selected for SLR (three articles, three book chapters, and a review); Americans wrote two texts (one scientific article and a book). The discipline and/or scientific specialisation represented by one of the authors could not be identified. Other authors represent the humanities (nine people) and social sciences (eleven authors). The humanists are historians (eight researchers) and one researcher who represents literary studies (English literature). The representatives of social sciences are management specialists (five people), political sciences and international relations specialists (four authors), economists (one author), and psychologists (one).

The first of the selected texts appeared in 2009. In the following years, there were either no texts about Owen, or their number did not exceed two per year. The exception is the year 2021, from which four selected texts about Owen’s ideas come, and three of them were published in one (dedicated to Owen) issue 47(2) of the *History of European Ideas* journal. Overall: the number of publications on Owen and his achievements (positioned as social science texts) remains at a fairly low level (Fig. 1).

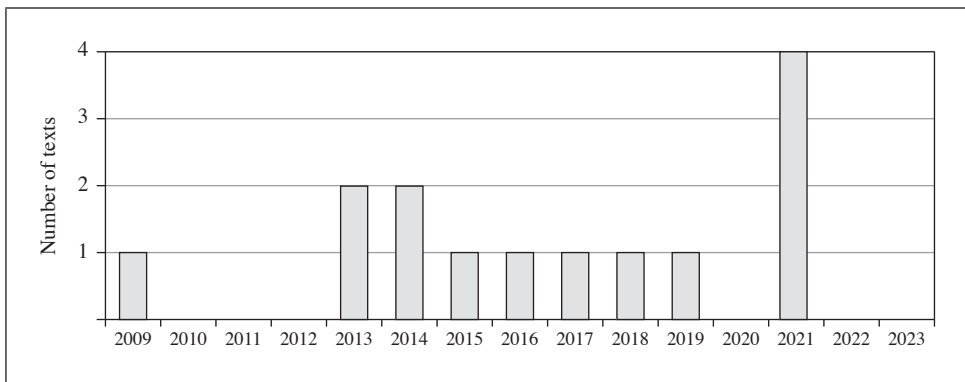


Fig. 1. The Year of Publication of the Texts Selected for SLR

Source: the author.

The selected works were quoted a total of 34 times (Table 4); the average number of citations per publication is 2.4. The leading, most often cited work (nine citations) is the article “Disharmony in New Harmony: Insights from the Narcissistic Leadership of Robert Owen”. Six papers from the researched collection have not been cited at all. The reason for this may be that the writings are relatively new. It can also be assumed that Owen’s achievements are not of great interest to researchers in the fields of social science.

Six of the chosen texts were given keywords. The results of keyword frequency analysis are not surprising. The most frequent keywords (or rather families/groups of keywords) are: Robert Owen/Owen/Owenism (five keywords), socialism/socialist(s) (four keywords), and utopianism/utopian (three keywords). The next six keywords are related to management: management history, management, leadership, narcissistic leadership, charisma, and human resource development. Only one keyword (the last one listed) refers directly to Owen's contribution to the development of human resource management.

Table 5. Research Perspectives in Selected Texts

Authors	Year	Research Perspectives				
		Education	Political science and/or international relations	Economics and/or management	Law	Psychology
del Valle Alcalá, R.	2021	✓	✓			
Drolet, M., & Frobert, L.	2021		✓	✓		
Gioia, V., & Soliani, R.	2021	✓				
Kuligowski, P.	2021		✓			
Doe, N.	2019				✓	
Rogers, C.	2018		✓			
Trincado, E., & Santos-Redondo, M.	2017			✓		
Humphreys, J. H. <i>et al.</i>	2016			✓		✓
Leopold, D.	2015		✓			
Donnachie, I.	2014	✓				
Davies, T. R.	2014	✓	✓			
Hatcher, T.	2013	✓		✓		
Leopold, D.	2013	✓				
Harrison, J.	2009	✓	✓	✓		

Source: the author.

The selected texts are heterogeneous. However, the review made it possible to distinguish three research perspectives most often used by the authors, which are: education (seven texts), political science and/or international relations¹ (seven texts), economics and/or management (five writings). Additionally: one text that focuses on legal issues presents Owen as a co-contributor to canon law; in another text,

¹ This perspective also includes considerations related to the idea of utopian socialism.

one can find threads in the field of psychology (Owen as a person with a narcissistic personality). In some writings, Owen's achievements are considered in several contexts. For example, Harrison (2009) explores various aspects of Owen's activity as activities for the development of education, implementing changes in (factory) management, and philanthropy (Table 5).

It is worth underlining (which is important from the point of view of the purpose of the study) that economic and management threads appear systematically in works devoted to Owen – they can be found in texts from 2009, 2013, 2016, 2017 and 2021. And even more important, there are direct references to human resource management in two texts (Hatcher, 2013; Trincado & Santos-Redondo, 2017). In the first of the aforementioned articles, Hatcher (2013) emphasises Owen's contribution to the promotion of employer activities in the field of human resource development and the creation of safe and hygienic working conditions. In turn, Trincado and Santos-Redondo (2017) call Owen "the father of personnel management" and present him as a management innovator who implemented the idea of well-being into organisational practice (e.g. by reducing the monotony of performed tasks, stimulating employees' creativity, and empowerment). In the articles and books analysed, there are some texts in which the word "management" cannot be found.

The research problems found in selected articles and books (or book chapters) demonstrate the interdisciplinarity of Owen's work. It also shows that Owen's achievements in human resource management are poorly covered in the scientific literature.

5. Discussion

My literature reviews indicate that Owen's views are interpreted differently in contemporary literature. A large part of the publications devoted to Owen, to introduce an analysis of his ideas and show the factors that influenced his work, describe (in greater or lesser detail) his biography or at least the most important events in his life. In answer to the first research question (RQ1: Which of Owen's achievements are the subject of research?), it should be noted that Owen's contribution to the development of the socialist/workers' movement is the most popular subject of articles and books about him. The researchers focus on Owen's (broadly understood) social activities, that is, his achievements related to improving working conditions, the development of cooperatives, and the introduction of education. Some of the texts I analysed dealt with economic issues. Their authors highlighted that Owen, who managed the New Lanark factory, achieved what one would call market success today. Both literature reviews also confirmed that Owen was not only an excellent manager and leader, a utopian socialist, an advocate for education of children and adults, and a religious thinker. The reviews showed that Owen was also a person

who was in the midst of the “big” political questions of his time and had the power to influence the law.

Referring to the second research question (RQ2: Which scientific disciplines are interested in Owen’s work?), it should be noted that the wide range of Owen’s thinking made his ideas and achievements interesting to researchers representing both the humanities and the social sciences. This socio-humanist perspective on Owen’s achievements reflects one of his basic assumptions that concern the human person as a social being. Among the humanists who currently write about Owen are historians (historians of thought, industrial historians, historical geographers), philosophers, scholars of religious studies, and researchers in English literature. Social scientists, on the other hand, are representatives of the political sciences and international relations, educators, psychologists, lawyers, economists, and management experts. It is worth repeating here, as has already been mentioned in describing the SLR results, that there are few publications about Owen that have appeared since 2000 and which can be found in Scopus or Web of Science databases as social science texts.

In response to the third question (RQ3: What is written about Owen and his achievements in the context of social sciences?), it is important to point out that representatives of the social sciences (like humanists) analysing Owen’s work focus on three main themes: 1) utopian socialism, 2) education, and 3) management. However, those who study Owen’s ideas and achievements from a management point of view, while highlighting his contribution to improving working conditions and the foundations he laid for today’s understanding of the wellness of employees, marginalise Owen’s “relationship” with other aspects of modern human resource management.

Among the investigated works, there are only two texts (Hatcher, 2013; Trincado & Santos-Redondo, 2017), in which Owen’s activities are “close” to terms such as “personnel management” or “human resource management”. Incidentally, although this is not the purpose of this study, I want to emphasise that Owen is rarely mentioned as a pioneer of HRM in the Polish literature (the author of the article comes from Poland). In the Polish management literature, Owen is usually called the father of cooperatives or a pioneer of city management. Although some Polish researchers recognise Owen as the precursor of human resource management, in the HRM literature, his achievements do not receive much attention, thus not fully appreciating his contribution to the development of this subdiscipline. This can be confirmed by Google search results. For a query (in Polish) about “Robert Owen and human resource management”, only one result is obtained (Rogowska, 2018). This is an article published in a Polish-language journal in which, similarly to the work of Hatcher (2013), Owen is presented as a pioneer in investing in human resources. Considering the above, and answering the last research question (RQ4),

it should be concluded that Owen's works are not currently widely analysed by HRM researchers and/or practitioners.

Although my research is one of the few (or even the only) to use a systematic literature review to analyse texts devoted to Owen's achievements in HRM, it has limitations. SotA, as a non-systematic review, is burdened with researcher bias. I also acknowledge that I did not include sources other than Google Scholar in the SotA review, which restricted my analysis. In terms of the systematic review, the issue is that, in the text search stage, I limited the search to the phrase "Robert Owen" and abandoned the use of other combinations of words, which weakened the search effect. It is also worth recalling the difficulties with accessing the full content of the searched texts. In addition, both reviews included texts classified as "grey literature". Proponents of purism in research may therefore call my systematic literature review a multivocal literature review, which uses as input not only academic peer-reviewed papers, but also additional sources of knowledge, such as web pages (Patton, 1991).

Based on preliminary archival research, I noticed that some of the solutions Owen used two hundred years ago are practices that are currently recognised as the "new", "contemporary", or "in statu nascendi" HRM toolkit. Examples include the employment of the poor, vagabonds and beggars, which can be called inclusive management or inclusive leadership; the conscious improvement of working conditions, which is currently an element of work humanisation or health promotion, or, more broadly, the support of employee well-being; the provision of cultural entertainment and management libraries to employees, which today fall into the field of artistic intervention in the workplace. Hence, I intend to analyse Owen's achievements in terms of modern solutions used in human resource management. I am particularly interested in which of Owen's social experiments (considered utopian in the early 19th century) are being implemented today as human resource management policies, programmes, practices, or processes that use methods and techniques to put HRM strategic plans into effect. I can say that my next research purpose will be to check whether Owen was one hundred or even two hundred years ahead of his times in the field of HRM, and whether he should be called "the father" of the tools of contemporary human resource management.

The results of the analysis of Owen's achievements from the point of view of his contributions to the development of HRM should be of interest to management teachers and social science students. The recognition and description of Owen's management methods should also inspire management practitioners. Focusing on the analysis of Owen's activities in the field of HRM is also important from the point of view of managers who face the rapid development of HRM. In addition to the recruitment, development, appraisal, and remuneration techniques, the HRM toolkit also includes many other methods (e.g. promoting wellness, work-life balance,

or diversity). Although HRM instruments are the subject of scientific considerations, many of these considerations focus more on the external conditions that “forced” the creation of new methods, and not on their creators or pioneering implementations. In management sciences, and especially in HRM, little is said about the origins of this subdiscipline, its precursors, and the impact of their ideas on current HRM trends. The origins of HRM are limited to short descriptions of the achievements of the most important researchers; however, due to the dynamic development of HRM in the 20th century, the evolution of approaches to HRM has often been analysed since then. Even in one of the most popular HRM textbooks (*Armstrong’s Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice*), the origins of HRM began in the 1940s (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014, p. 4). Therefore, although Owen is sometimes called “the father of HRM” (as already pointed out), his achievements are not thoroughly presented and discussed in the HRM literature.

Finally, I want to emphasise that I believe that studying the history of organisational thought is necessary to better understand the present. Thus, I share the opinion of Wren (1987), who claims that “through the study of the evolution of management thought, modern managers and students of management can be better equipped to face a changing world. History distills for us the lessons of the past and allows us to progress from where we have been to where we need to go” (Wren, 1987, p. 339). Consequently, as postulated by business history researchers (Jones & Zeitlin, 2008), I intend to use various methods and sources of research, i.e., I plan to use triangulation of methods and sources, to analyse (also critically) Owen’s achievements, which formed contemporary thinking about the organisation and its human capital.

6. Conclusions

The results of reviews allow to conclude that there is a research gap related to Owen’s contribution to the emergence and development of human resource management that can (and should) be addressed in future research. My conclusion is partially confirmed by Sirůček (2015), who claims that Owen is a half-forgotten personality in economic thought. Thus, the words of Kaikai (1989) still seem valid, according to which Owen’s dedication to the development of collaboration in work environments and in governance may often be overlooked. It is a pity because all visitors to the restored New Lanark must be impressed by what Owen managed to achieve at the beginning of the 19th century. The local factory, houses for workers, school, walking paths, all these things are inspiring even today.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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