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Human resource management in times of crisis: what have we learnt from the recent pandemic?

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the body of empirical work on human resource management in times of crisis, including that which was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and that which has been published since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following this, we introduce the special issue, summarizing the six articles included. Finally, we present a comprehensive agenda for future research on how to manage human resources during times of crisis based on the insights from the review and our own knowledge of the literature.

KEYWORDS

Human resource management; pandemic; times of crisis

Introduction

Over the last two decades we have witnessed several global crises including the Global Financial Crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, regional crises such as the energy crisis resulting from the war in the Ukraine, and local crises such as the bushfires in Australia, the tsunami in Japan and wildfires in California. These crises, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, have fundamentally led organizations to rethink how best to manage their human resources during the early to middle stages of a crisis, which are characterized by high levels of uncertainty, and in the later stages of the crisis and post-crisis stages, as organizations and their employees readjust to the 'new normal' and in some cases return to the pre-crisis environment (Butterick & Charlwood, 2021; Collings et al., 2021).

In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the management of human resources in several main ways that were not evident across previous crises. First, across certain sectors of the economy, such as the tourism and hospitality sectors, human resource (HR) professionals were responsible for managing the mass layoffs of workers or obtaining support from government support schemes, as businesses and consumers changed their behavior because of government imposed lockdowns and health regulations (Butterick & Charlwood, 2021; Stuart et al., 2021). Post the COVID-19 pandemic, as countries have come out of lockdown and removed health regulations, HR professionals have had to manage the rapid recruitment of replacement employees in such sectors, as demand for services have increased. This has been challenging due to almost full employment, limited migration, and resultant labor market shortages. We have also witnessed the phenomenon referred to as the 'great resignation' where an increasing proportion of employees are re-evaluating their career options and deciding to change jobs and even occupations (Fuller & Kerr, 2022; Newman et al., 2022). This has exacerbated the problems faced by HR professionals in recruiting talent for their organizations (Serenko, 2023).

Second, HR professionals had to facilitate employees' transition to new ways of working as across many sectors of the economy organizations required employees to work from home because of

government-imposed lockdowns and health regulations (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). HR professionals had to support employees to work effectively at home through the provision of technology, assist employees with care responsibilities to manage work-life demands (such as having to work whilst home-schooling their children) and help employees that live alone to deal with the loneliness and boredom that resulted from working from home (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). As employees and organizations began to understand the benefits of working from home during the crisis, flexible working arrangements have become the new normal across many industries in the post pandemic period, as organizations and their employees recognize the productivity that such arrangements bring (Davis, 2021). HR professionals were also required to balance this with an amplified focus on employee mental health and well-being (Ripamonti et al., 2020), employee psychological and physical safety (Kulik, 2022), supporting where they can, employees working in environments that were not always conducive to productive work. HR professionals have had to manage employees' return to work across many industries where employers require it, and manage the demands by some employees for continuing flexibility in their work arrangements (Clayton & Hoyle, 2020; Collings et al., 2021).

Third, as the face of the organizations response to the pandemic (Collings et al., 2021), HR professionals were required to maintain currency of public health orders and government mandates, while interpreting the consequences for the organization and mitigating any associated risks. In addition, HR professionals have had to manage employees' compliance with health regulations, especially regarding the use of personal protective equipment and vaccination requirements (Collings et al., 2021; Zacher & Rudolph, 2022). In some countries, and in certain sectors of the economy, such as the education and healthcare sectors, HR professionals have had to enforce mandatory vaccination requirements and manage employees who were non-compliant.

In this article, we briefly review the literature on HR management (HRM) in times of crisis more generally, with a specific focus on examining key themes in the empirical literature on HRM in times of crisis prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and recent empirical literature which has been published since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, we summarize the six articles that make-up this special issue. Based on the insights obtained from the review, and the content of the special issue, we then develop a comprehensive agenda for future research on how to manage human resources during times of crisis.

HRM in times of crisis: insights from empirical work conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic

Before reviewing empirical literature that has been published since the beginning of the recent COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it is critical to provide an overview of work that has been published on HRM in times of crisis prior to the recent pandemic. A systematic review article was published in 2021 that examined empirical work from 2000 to 2018 on international HRM in the context of uncertainty and crisis (Ezerdi et al., 2021). This article highlighted three key types of crises that had been examined in previous work: economic crises, natural disasters, and political instability and hostile environments

Economic crises

A significant number of studies have examined the impact of economic crises such as the Global Financial Crisis and Asian Financial Crisis on how organizations manage their human resources, and the effectiveness of different approaches (e.g. Chu & Siu, 2001; Gunnigle et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2013; Sparrow et al., 2013; Teague & Roche, 2014; Zagelmeyer & Gollan, 2012).

In their systematic review, Ezerdi et al. (2021) highlighted the use of both soft and hard approaches by organizations in the management of their human resources during times of economic crisis. Whilst

some studies highlighted the importance of adopting soft HRM practices (e.g. investing in training and development, knowledge and information sharing, mentoring and coaching) during crises to get out of the other side unscathed (e.g. Marchington & Kynighou, 2012; Nijssen & Paauwe, 2012), the overwhelming majority of studies highlighted organizations' use of hard HRM practices (e.g. laying off-employees, pay cuts/freezes, recruitment freezes, reducing training and development expenditure) to navigate crises effectively (Chu & Siu, 2001; Datta & Basuil, 2015; Gunnigle et al., 2013; McDonnell & Burgess, 2013; Shen & D'Netto, 2012; Teague & Roche, 2014; Tsao et al., 2016; Yu & Park, 2006; Zagelmeyer et al., 2012). Overall, findings from the research suggest there is no overall right approach to managing human resources during an economic crisis. While many organizations are forced to adopt hard approaches in the short-term, others benefit from soft approaches over the long-term as they prepare for life after the crisis. In particular, there is no consensus on whether hard HRM practices such as employee layoffs and pay cuts actually benefit the organization over the medium to long term (Tsao et al., 2016). While some studies highlight a negative association with firm performance over time (e.g. Tsao et al., 2016; Yu & Park, 2006), others highlight a positive association (e.g. DeDee & Vorhies, 1998).

Other research has examined how economic crises have led organizations to change their approaches to managing human resources. For example, Kim et al. (2013) explored whether and how Korean firms changed their HRM systems as a result of the Asian Financial Crisis. They found that over half of firms changed their HRM systems, and that the most dominant pattern of change was from a control-based HRM system to a high-performance HRM system.

Natural disasters

Another type of crisis that has been examined in prior empirical work is that of natural disasters. As highlighted by Ezerdi et al. (2021) in their systematic review, we have witnessed only limited work in the HRM discipline on how organizations manage their human resources when faced with natural disasters. Merlot and de Cieri (2012) examined the challenges faced by multinational nonprofit organizations in dealing with the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. They established that the quality of organizations' human resource management systems were critical to organizational responses to managing natural disasters. Other work by Goodman and Mann (2008) has highlighted the importance of HRM as part of the crisis management plan during natural disasters. They found it was important to include HR Directors as part of the crisis management team. In addition, Opdyke et al. (2017) found that it was important for non-governmental and governmental organizations to coordinate their human resources in response to natural disasters.

Political instability and hostile environments

Extensive research has been undertaken on how organizations manage their human resources in response to political instability or hostile events such as terrorist attacks. We consider political instability to be similar to a crisis because both situations involve uncertainty, volatility, and potential harm to the society. Political instability refers to the volatility in politics that can lead to a change of regime or government. A crisis, on the other hand, is a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger. Both political instability and crisis can have a negative impact on the economy, security, social cohesion of a country or region. Therefore, continuing political instability can be considered as one type of crisis that requires urgent and effective responses.

In their systematic review of prior work, Ezerdi et al. (2021) found a growing focus of empirical work on how organizations respond to events or circumstances that constitute a threat to the personal safety and security of expatriate employees (e.g. Fee et al., 2019; Fee & McGrath-Champ, 2017). Other research has examined how multinational enterprises acquire knowledge in hostile environments characterised by political instability (Suder et al., 2019). For example, Suder et al. (2019) found that

adapting HR practices and interventions to suit hostile environments, together with the willingness of expatriates to share and learn new knowledge, led to the creation, capturing and leveraging of new knowledge by the organization in other hostile environments.

HRM during the COVID-19 pandemic

Compared to the other types of crisis highlighted above, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in new sets of challenges, many of which stem from government imposed lockdowns in many parts of the world. HR professionals across many industries have had to manage mass layoffs of employees or obtain government support for compensating their employees, facilitate employees' transition to working from home arrangements, and manage employees' compliance with health regulations. In the following sections we review empirical research that has been published since the onset of the crisis.

Effectiveness of different HRM practices

HR practices or bundles of practices are critically important to managing the workforce in the context of crises. Researchers have begun to identify the different bundles of HR practices that proved effective in the crisis, compared to before the crisis. Adikaram et al. (2021) identified the different bundles of HRM practices that were used to manage the crisis. These included an increased focus on health and safety, cost saving, and employee motivation/engagement bundles. However, they also identified that such bundles were dependent on the organization and industry. Chang et al. (2022) found that employees from organizations who use more commitment HRM practices before the pandemic experienced fewer threat appraisals and as such were more committed to the organization. They also found that the negative link between an organization's commitment HRM and its employees' threat appraisals were accentuated when they had a lower level of trust in the government. This indicates the need for HR practices to be well aligned to organizational needs to create a supportive (commitment) environment for employees in order to navigate the crisis.

Researchers also examined specific HR practices that were effective in creating supportive work environments during the COVID-19 crisis. For example, Vu et al. (2022) found that when employees had positive perceptions of the workplace safety practices implemented during the pandemic, they were less likely to experience burnout and that such perceptions reduced the negative influence of employees' perceptions of health risks associated with COVID-19. In addition, Ortiz-Bonnin et al. (2023) explored the perceived effect of the strategies that organizations took to support employees during the COVID-19 pandemic on employees' performance and well-being. They found that when employees were satisfied with the support provided by the supervisor and organization to continue work during the pandemic, they had higher levels of satisfaction with work-life balance, which in turn had a positive influence on their performance and psychological well-being. These findings highlight the influence of supportive environments in assisting employees to navigate working through the crisis. At the individual employee level, McDaniel Sumpter and Gibson (2022) identified the importance of HR management for crisis recovery, particularly a focus on the ways in which employees are energised from their colleagues to help them successfully navigate crisis recovery (COVID-19 recovery). They found that relational energy from others, can be leveraged by HR to aid in individual crisis recovery, providing a positive way in which to assist individuals to recover.

The full implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for HR are only now starting to emerge. Contrary to popular belief, Chung (2022) found that the use of variable work schedules by organizations actually predicted higher levels of employee turnover and lower levels of financial performance among hospitality employees. In hospitality, variable work schedules were required to ensure employees remained employed and also to manage the variability of the changed working circumstances. Chung

(2022) further identified that the negative impact of variable work schedules was more pronounced during the pandemic and inhibited performance recovery. This further supports the findings by Adikaram et al. (2021) that the bundles of HR practices used to effectively navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic was dependant on industry and organization, suggesting the importance of contextualising HR practices relevant and applicable to the organization/industry in times of crisis.

What predicted the use of different HRM strategies?

Empirical research has examined the factors which influenced the HR strategies adopted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Bentley et al. (2021) found that firms' relative exposure to pandemic financial pressures predicted their need to cut costs during the pandemic. They also found that a firm's prior investments in employees' human capital reduced the attractiveness of workforce reductions as a cost-cutting response to pandemic financial pressures. This distance from downsizing results from human capital investment that enhances the value of employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities and motivation, leading firms to seek alternative measures to reduce costs. Therefore, the role of the HR professional is crucial in supporting organizations to manage through crises. Branicki et al. (2022) examined the role of HR managers in shaping organizational responses to societal paradox - i.e. whether to focus on protecting lives or the economy. They found that HR managers play a critical role in shaping whether organizational responses 'replicate' the initial societal paradox, or 'magnify' existing latent paradoxical tensions in the organization. Aitken-Fox et al. (2022) found that HR professionals generally responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with agility and flexibility, through extensive trial and error, with varying degrees of success, and had not simply activated a predetermined continuity plan.

Overall, research on HRM during the pandemic highlights several strategies that firms may adopt to manage their human resources, the relative effectiveness of different strategies and the factors which determine the use of such strategies.

Articles in the special issue

In this section we review the six articles in the special issue. In doing so we look at the findings and contribution of each of the articles.

Huo et al. (2023) found that an increasing number of businesses used telecommuting to help employees manage their work during the COVID-19 crisis. However, previous studies have found inconsistent or even conflicting evidence regarding the effectiveness of telecommuting. This study explored the motivation for employees to engage in telecommuting and its impact on organizations and employees. More specifically, the researchers asked multiple questions regarding telecommuting during COVID-19. For example, will telecommuting have different effects on employees with different telecommuting motivations and can co-workers play a key role in determining the effectiveness of telecommuting? Based on the job demand-resources model, the authors divide telecommuters into voluntary and involuntary types, and examined the impact of different types of telecommuting on employees' innovative behavior, as well as the mediating effect of co-worker emotional support and the cross-level moderating effect of organizational identification. Using the daily diary method, the researchers collected 455 valid observations from 65 employees over eight consecutive days to examine the abovementioned research questions. They found that compared with involuntary telecommuting, voluntary telecommuting leads to more co-worker emotional support and innovative behaviors of employees. In addition they found that co-worker emotional support mediated the relationship between voluntary versus involuntary telecommuting and employee innovative behaviour. In doing so these findings make a strong contribution to the literature through revealing how telecommuting influences employees' innovative behavior. Moreover, through studying the

moderating role of organizational identification the article highlights its role in heightening the effectiveness of telecommuting. Furthermore, this paper provides some suggestions for management practice. For example, it highlights how organizations can reduce the negative impact of involuntary telecommuting by creating better working conditions. During times of crisis, organizations can also help assist colleagues to maintain good relationships with one another and ultimately promote innovative behavior by organizing regular online or offline gatherings to improve employees' organizational identification.

During the COVID-19 pandemic both employees and leaders were required to work remotely. Gan et al. (2023) make an important contribution by examining the role of the leader in supporting remote work. They examined the influence of supervisor behaviors on employees' self-regulation at work and the work performance of employees who telecommute. Gan et al. (2023) pointed out that supervisor support and control behaviors are critical for remote workers, and that prior research has only focused on the isolated effects of each supervisor behavior. Therefore, to address this limitation, Gan et al. (2023) drew on the job demands-resources model to examine the consistency of supervisor support and control behavior, and their effects on employees, including task performance and helping behavior. Additionally, they also studied the mediating effect of self-regulation at work on the relationship between supervisor behaviors and employees' work performance. Using data from 303 telecommuters, they adopted polynomial regression to examine the hypothesized model. This led to some interesting results that contribute to both theory and practice. For example, they found that when supervisors exhibited high congruence in control and support, employees exhibited higher self-regulation at work and better work outcomes (task performance and helping behavior), than when supervisors showed low congruence. They also found that when supervisors exhibited incongruence in their behaviors, employee outcomes were better when supervisor support was higher than control than when control was higher than support. This study makes an important contribution by using congruence analysis to examine the combined effects of support and control behaviors and identifying the mediating effect of employee self-regulation on the link between congruence in such behaviors and employee work outcomes. The article also provides guidance for remote leaders in how to manage remote workers in times of crisis more effectively.

Chambel et al. (2022) extended the research of Gan et al. (2023) by incorporating the influence of leaders' family-oriented behavior on remote workers. Specifically, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers conducted two studies drawing on the conservation of resources theory. Study 1 examined the mediating role of work-family conflict on the relationships between family supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB) and both the exhaustion and work engagement of remote workers. The researchers adopted a cross-sectional study design with a sample of 318 workers from a bank that implemented telework over seven months. Furthermore, study 2 built on the first study by examining the mediating role of work-family enrichment and the moderation role of intensity of telework. The sample in study two was obtained from another bank with 290 participants. The researchers adopted a two-wave study design— where time 1 was prior to lockdown and time 2 was ten months later. The results of the two studies suggest that FSSB is positively related to work-family balance, which in turn fosters employee well-being at work. They also found that the strength of such relationships were conditional on the levels of intensity of telework. This study made significant empirical and theoretical contributions. First, this study made an empirical contribution by highlighting the role of FSSB in equipping remote workers with a set of resources to reduce work-family conflict and increase work-family enrichment. Second, it made a theoretical contribution by highlighting the mediating mechanisms (work-family conflict and work-family enrichment) linking FSSB to both exhaustion and work engagement. Third, it made an additional theoretical contribution by highlighting the boundary conditions of the mediated relationship. In particular, it demonstrated that the indirect effect of FSSB on work engagement through work-family enrichment was conditional upon the intensity of telework. This study also had important implications for practice. It highlights the need for organizations and leaders to embrace the

use of FSSB to help employees effectively manage the work-interface during crises, and ensure they maintain their well-being. By promoting training and encouraging those in leadership positions to develop a family-friendly approach to leadership that helps remote workers manage their competing demands, the organization will become more family-friendly and a healthier workplace.

Straus et al. (2022), examined the experience of Austrian employees engaged in telework during the COVID-19 pandemic. They examined how remote work affected employee's work and life during the COVID-19 pandemic and what resources were critical for remote workers to protect work-life quality. Based on event system theory and transactional stress theory, they looked at the role played by multiple personal resources (self-goal setting, self-efficacy, home-office experience), external resources (equipment at home), and organizational resources (work-related and social) in supporting employees' well-being, productivity and engagement. They drew on a daily diary method design, to collect data twice daily over five working days. They found that when teleworkers reported higher levels of self-efficacy and social support at the start of the crisis, their levels of well-being and engagement decreased the least. They also found that employees who experienced an increase in resources during the study, experienced less of a decline in well-being, productivity and engagement, than those who did not. These findings make a contribution by providing a holistic understanding of the role played by personal and organizational resources in supporting the well-being, productivity and engagement of remote workers during times of crisis. They highlight the need for HR managers to support employees to build personal resources and access organizational resources to cope with the challenges they may experience during the crisis period. Straus et al. (2022) argue that HR practices may be adopted to help employees build self-efficacy (through coaching etc) and obtain social support.

Hahn and Semrau (2023) investigated how virtual interaction affected team failure learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and examined whether the effect of team virtual interaction on failure learning was contingent upon the exchange relations between team leaders and team members. Drawing on data collected from 73 teams working for a service unit of a large international bank located in Luxembourg during the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors found that virtuality hampered team failure learning, and that team LMX quality and team LMX differentiation alleviated the negative relationship between virtuality and team failure learning. The study made an important empirical contribution by being the first to investigate the relationship between virtuality and team failure learning, which is crucial for performance improvement through quality and efficiency gains. It also made an important theoretical contribution by examining team LMX quality and team LMX differentiation as important boundary conditions that explain how virtual interaction affects team failure learning. This study has important implications for practice. As well as figuring out ways in which virtual teams may learn from failure, HR managers should seek to invest in team building exercises to foster high team LMX.

Löffert and Diehl (2023) investigated how employees assessed and managed their psychological contracts during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they managed possible contract changes during a crisis when the 'normal parameters' of assessing contract fulfilment were not possible through the lens of psychological contract theory. After interviewing with 14 pilots and 18 flight attendants, the results revealed that during the pandemic the normal parameters of assessing contract fulfilment or violation are not feasible. This study makes significant theoretical contributions in several ways. First, it extends the understanding of psychological contracts, whereby in times of crisis, employees can consciously accept a temporary imbalance in the contract favoring the employer that would, in normal times, most likely be considered as a breach or a violation. Second, it highlights the phenomenon of psychological contract inactivation, where employees postpone the active maintenance and monitoring of the contract in a crisis context. In addition to making a theoretical contribution, this study has important implications for practice. First, it highlights the need for HR managers to navigate crisis situations by providing timely, up to date information for employees. Second, it highlights the need for organizations in crisis situations to strengthen the contact between employees and direct

supervisors to improve horizontal information flows. By focusing on these aspects, organisations can maintain functioning psychological contracts even in times of crisis, and gain credit with employees, which can then be paid back when the situation improves.

Suggestions for future research

Our review of previous literature opens several ideas for future research on the effectiveness of different HRM practices by focusing on the internal and external consistency of HRM practices, on the antecedents of HRM strategies and crisis management processes, and the implications of crises for research methods.

Effectiveness of different HRM practices

Internal consistency of HRM practices

Several studies have highlighted the importance of organizational support in times of crisis (e.g. Adikaram et al., 2021; Ortiz-Bonnin et al., 2023; Vu et al., 2022). The internal consistency of support measures - not only with respect to each other as they are implemented in the crisis situation, but also with respect to practices already established in the past - could promote their positive impact on employees. As such researchers might examine the following questions in future research:

- Which bundles of crisis management support measures/HR practices prove to be particularly positive for employee commitment and performance in times of crisis?
- Under what conditions are the measures/HR practices specific to the crisis situation perceived as being supportive versus patronizing?
- To what extent does the importance of the three basic human needs - autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000) - and the career goals (Briscoe et al., 2021) shift in times of crisis, and what are the implications for the HR practices to be implemented? For example, has the basic need for relationships or the importance of positive relationships at work increased during the pandemic in the context of lockdowns and greater use of remote working, and with it the need for support from the company, supervisor, and colleagues?
- Since what is considered a crisis is in the mind of the beholder, HRM serves to manage the individual meanings, behaviors and perceptions of employees during a crisis (Iqbal et al., 2021). How does an organization's choice of communication channels influence employee perceptions?

External consistency of HRM practices with macro-level policies

Studies have shown that the effectiveness of bundles of HR practices depends on trust in government (Chang et al., 2022). Therefore, the external consistency of HR practices also appears to be essential to have a positive impact on employees. In particular, during the COVID-19 pandemic, governments introduced very different policies ranging from liberal (e.g. Sweden) to restrictive (e.g. China). Thus, to varying degrees, HRM in different countries was called upon to supplement or fill perceived gaps in the government's management of the pandemic, or to mitigate what were perceived as very strict government measures to ensure the safety, well-being, and motivation of employees internally. For example, some companies maintained their own risk lists for travel countries that differed from the government's risk assessments and imposed internal self-quarantine requirements (e.g. working from the home office for a limited period of time) for employees returning from those countries. Similarly, stricter home office requirements were imposed after major local popular festivals. The following sample research questions arise on the role of HRM in times of crisis:

- In crisis-affected countries, when does the external consistency between internal HR practices and macro-level crisis management measures become established in employees' perceptions?
- Which constellation - higher versus lower rigor of HR practices compared to macro-level crisis management practices - proves to be particularly beneficial for employee attitudes and behavior, and under what conditions?
- What differences in the effectiveness of crisis-related HR practices across countries can be identified in international comparative research studies, and what contextual variables are responsible for these differences (e.g. cultural values such as collectivism/individualism or institutional trust)?

Antecedents of different HRM strategies and crisis management processes

Leaders: self-management and contextual intelligence

Leaders are under high pressure as a result of multiple crises in the early 2020s (so-called polycrisis; Homer-Dixon et al., 2021), such as the COVID-19 pandemic, war in the Ukraine, energy transition, inflation, recession, skills shortages, the climate crisis, digitalization of business models, and the earthquake in Turkey, some of which are overlapping or interdependent and not temporary. In Germany, for example, according to a recent survey by the McKinsey Health Institute, 41% of top executives and 24% of employees in non-leading positions self-report symptoms of burnout (Brassey et al., 2022). Managing the pressure without burnout requires good self-management, but it also requires new approaches to leadership. Successful leadership depends in large part on circumstances, or context (Mayo & Nohria, 2005). Successful leaders need contextual intelligence, that is, a special sense of social change and its impact on the organization. Some examples of research that may be examined in future research are:

- What strategies (e.g. positive thinking, daily routines, consistent self-optimization) have a positive impact on leaders' crisis management success?
- How do executives interpret crises? How can contextual intelligence be developed?
- What role does the leader's past experience (e.g. career path, social origin) play in crisis perceptions, contextual intelligence, and action definition and prioritization?
- What is the impact of leader narcissism and empathy on an organization's response to a crisis?

Employees: subjective well-being

As a result of a crisis situation, employees may experience subjective job insecurity as well as de facto unemployment when companies make layoffs to cope with the crisis. Well-being research shows that unemployment initially has a negative effect on subjective well-being, but that it recovers over time (Diener & Ryan, 2009), although on average individuals generally do not regain their previous baseline levels of satisfaction (Lucas et al., 2004). However, the reduction in subjective well-being may be mitigated to the extent that multiple individuals in the environment are affected (Clark, 2009). These findings lead to the following research questions that may be addressed in future research:

- How do crises - such as the pandemic - affect employees over time (longitudinal research design over several years at different stages- pre crisis, during the crisis and after the crisis is resolved)? To what extent are the effects influenced by HR practices implemented during the crisis?
- To what extent are the negative effects of crises on subjective well-being mitigated when social comparisons are promoted through internal company reporting or media coverage, and when a broad sense of being affected by negative influences is communicated?

Research methods

Effective research on crises and crises management requires methodological advancement. This applies to all facets of research design, from sourcing and collecting data to data analysis and interpretation. For example, crisis responses may require time-sensitive insights (Hill et al., 2021). In this research, it is essential that samples and cases are well defined, purposively selected, and clearly documented to provide more accurate insights. Researchers may adopt some of the following techniques in future research endeavors:

- Analysis of public statements, press releases over several weeks before and after a crisis, e.g. to capture traits, humility, decision biases, for example by using text analysis techniques (natural language processing)
- Leverage longitudinal, panel data structures to capture the temporal adjustments of organizations before and after a crisis, as well as the long-term behavioral and tangible effects of crises on organizations and employees
- Collect multi-case qualitative studies to observe intra-organizational processes and inter-organizational specificities during crises
- Use multilevel modeling to identify contextual effects that influence employees responses to crises
- Identify systematic similarities and differences in HRM across crises or countries by using fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA)

In addition, crisis situations may require some methodological flexibility and adaptation when unexpected endogenous and exogenous factors beyond the researchers' control make methodological plans impossible (Jung et al., 2021). A specific example is the loss of access to samples due to circumstances, such as expatriates during the COVID-19 pandemic due to their mass repatriation to their home countries, often initiated by the sending employer, or through a shift to virtual assignments/international remote work rather than physical relocation (Nguyen & Andresen, 2021). One means during the pandemic was to replace face-to-face interviews or observations with the use of online interviews or videos. Crises also lead to a more intensive use of media by individuals, especially during lockdowns. This offered researchers access to alternative sources of data from which to obtain insights. While many researchers may try to avoid explaining the adaptations adopted in how they undertook research, we believe that this process of adaptation should be outlined in the documentation of the research study. Selected data collection approaches are:

- Videos of virtual business meetings provide an opportunity to assess how the non-/verbal behaviors of individuals influence their work success. Other potential sources to analyze employees' thoughts and behaviors are TikTok videos or youtube videos and corresponding storyboards.
- Computer-generated protocols make it possible to track at what times and for how long individuals work and what kind of work they do online.
- E-mails can be analyzed both in terms of content and social networks (who writes to whom, how often about which key themes). For example, the use of emails, MS Teams and other media in organizations allows the identification of emerging social networks as well as the diffusion of messages from company leaders within the organization.
- Data generated by mobile phones allows individuals' physical (international) mobility to be tracked.
- Blogs and mobile ethnography allow to understand the experiences and attitudes of workers.
- Diary studies can be used to gain insights into the attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of individuals over time.

Conclusion

In this article, we reviewed empirical work that has been conducted on HRM in times of crisis more generally, including that which had been conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and that which has been published since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following this, we summarized the six articles that make-up this special issue. Finally, drawing on the insights of the review and our own knowledge of the literature, we present a comprehensive agenda for future research on how to manage human resources during times of crisis.

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