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The International Journal of Human Resource Management

SPECIAL ISSUE:
Alternative Work Arrangements:
The Role of HR in Responding, Managing and Championing

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Objectives of the Special Issue
"Alternative work arrangements" is an umbrella term to capture the "different manifestations of work seen in today's workplace" (Spreitzer, Cameron & Garrett, 2017; p. 474). Although the use of alternative work arrangements have been developing for some time with past studies on telecommuting (Feldman & Gainey, 1997) and working at home arrangements (Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea & Walters, 2002), it is the COVID-19 pandemic that accelerated these alternative work arrangements to become more common and prevalent in organizations. Alternative work arrangements include a range of different forms such as remote work, hybrid work, flexible work, and working from home that are now implemented in many organizations today. Studies continue to emerge which showcase how employees benefit, adapt, or struggle in using alternative work arrangements (e.g., Becker, Belkin, Tuskey & Conroy, 2022; Troll, Venz, Weitzenegger & Loschelder, 2002).

Although these studies shed important light on various responses to alternative work arrangements, there remains to be a dearth of knowledge on the **response of human resource departments, units, and professionals (referred to as "HR" onwards) in relation to alternative work arrangements**. Specifically, we have yet to determine how HR fits within these alternative work arrangements. This leads us to raise important questions such as "*Under which conditions are these alternative work arrangements viewed by HR as challenges or opportunities to rethink and redesign conventional human resource management (HRM) practices? In other ways, how are these work arrangements considered disruptive to the established workflow characterized by the conventional "nine-to-five; office-centered" HRM arrangements?*

As we know, HR professionals occupy unique positions in organizations as strategic partners, change agents, administrative experts, and employee champions (Ulrich, 1997) which can impact the extent to which these alternative work arrangements can be successfully enacted and implemented in workplaces. However, we have limited knowledge on how HR has championed or hindered alternative work arrangement within organizations. Hence, we ask: *How has HR, given its multi-faceted roles, proactively facilitated organizational shifts toward alternative work arrangements? Or under what condition has HR became reactive and passive to the emerging new ways of working? Also, how has HR balanced its dual responsibility toward employees and toward management regarding alternative work arrangements?*

Theoretical Contributions

This line of inquiry which focuses on HR's responses, management and championing of alternative work arrangement requires novel theoretical lenses and rigorous empirical support. Thus, in this Special Issue (SI) we aim to generate knowledge to advance our understanding of HR's role in the formalization and institutionalization of alternative work arrangements in organizations. Specifically, we would like studies that offer new theoretical perspectives on alternative work arrangements, for instance, drawing from systems theory (Chadwick, Super & Kwon, 2015), to surface both the benefits and challenges of alternative work arrangements for HR and the organization as a whole. We also would like studies that leverage, for example, signaling theoretical perspective (Connelly, Certo, Ireland & Reutzel, 2011) to enrich our understanding of HR's role and the signals that they convey in relation to responding to, managing, and championing alternative work arrangements. Furthermore, we would like studies that anchor on existing HR frameworks such as HRM systems strength model (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016) to provide insights on how HR professionals can effectively send messages to both senior management and employees in relation to alternative work arrangements.

We also seek studies that present fresh conceptual frameworks and empirical evidence on how HR can be champions of alternative work arrangements. Tapping into the different HR practices, we are interested in advancing knowledge on how HR has proactively considered alternative work arrangements in the following HR practices:

- *In terms of recruitment, what initiatives has HR taken to effectively convey current and emerging work arrangements to prospective applicants?*
- *In terms of work design, how has HR partnered with line managers in effectively aligning tasks with alternative work arrangements?*
- *In terms of training, how has HR supported employees to build capabilities to constantly adapt to alternative work arrangements?*
- *In terms of rewards, has HR developed initiatives to reward positive behaviors related to alternative work arrangements?*
- *In terms of career development, how has HR facilitated mentoring and career advancement of employees in light of alternative work arrangements?*
- *In terms of employee relations and HR process, how has HR communicated and signaled support for alternative work arrangements to line managers and employees?*

By examining the role of HR in responding to, managing, and advocating for alternative work arrangements, we also hope to reexamine the well-studied HR functions within organizations as strategic partners, change agents, administrative experts, and employee champions (Ulrich, 1997). Doing so will generate significant implications for the future of work with HR at the forefront.

International Coverage and Fit

The SI aims to solicit studies from different countries and contexts addressing how HR has responded to, managed, and championed alternative work arrangements. This aligns well with the objective of IJHRM which is "concerned with the expanding role of strategic human resource management in a fast-changing global environment". Moreover, the insights to be generated in this SI are expected to assist human resource practitioners in different countries to effectively manage the constantly changing work designs in organizations. This SI will also offer a new and fresh look at HR as potential facilitators and champions of these alternative

work arrangements. This SI aims to put the spotlight on HR and generate new theoretical lenses to help us better understand how HR can become an important partner in organizations amidst the evolving nature of work in different countries and contexts.

For this SI, we welcome both theoretical and empirical research using quantitative and qualitative approaches. Here, we especially seek research utilizing multiple waves (i.e., longitudinal), levels of analyses, sources of data, and/or methods. Submitted papers should not have been previously published nor be currently under consideration for publication elsewhere. Authors should indicate upon submission (in the cover letter and in the submission portal) that the paper is for this SI. If you have any questions about a potential submission, please feel free to contact any of the guest editors.

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