



Call for Papers for a Special Issue of

Human Resource Management

The Ripple Effect: HRM and Social Cohesion Beyond the Workplace

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Rationale and Objectives

The world's social cohesion fabric is increasingly disintegrating. Following Schiefer and Van der Noll (2017), we operationalize social cohesion along three wide dimensions: the quality of social relations, sense of belonging, and orientation towards the common good among members of a given society. According to Edelman's 2023 Trust Barometer, the world is "deeply and dangerously polarized" (Edelman, 2023). This data is supported by multiple reports showing that social cohesion globally is the lowest on record (The World Bank, 2022; 2023), and the number of hate-related crimes is on an unprecedented rise (e.g. the cases in the United States (FBI, 2023), and in Ireland (An Garda Síochánam, 2023)). Simultaneously, public faith in social institutions such as the media and government is increasingly declining, placing a considerable onus on the private sector to guide the way forward and become the force restoring the fragile social cohesion fabric (Edelman, 2023). The public expects businesses' direct engagement with increasingly polarizing issues, such as discrimination and immigration (Edelman, 2023). Calls amplifying the **need for businesses' engagement in advancing social cohesion** have also been recently made by policymakers across the world (Belong, 2022).

Despite the public's trust bestowed on the private sector, management literature remains silent regarding businesses' roles in facilitating social cohesion, and the topic rarely appears on corporate agendas. Despite the centrality of the concept of social cohesion in policymaking, management scholarship, and HRM literature in particular, thus far has focused almost exclusively on intra-organizational diversity (e.g., Yadav & Lenka, 2020; Umeh et al., 2023) rather than social cohesion within society at large (Janssens & Zanoni, 2021). This narrow view has largely ignored the potential benefits and opportunities of businesses' engagement in advancing the goals of depolarization and social unity. Further, despite a notable history of critical analysis of HRM (e.g., Legge, 1991; Steyaert & Janssens, 1999), the potential negative consequences of HRM practices for the broader community remain under-examined and require interrogation.

Corporate engagement in addressing social cohesion is especially timely and urgent given the socio-economic aftermaths of the COVID-19 pandemic and the escalating global tensions. Businesses, recognized as trusted pillars within society, possess a unique and powerful platform to contribute to much-needed solutions. Given the extensive resources at their disposal, including financial and human capital as well as the extensive know-how around the issues of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), there is a significant opportunity for businesses to step forward and share the responsibilities and costs traditionally borne by governmental and non-profit institutions. By doing so, the private sector can play a pivotal role in building stronger, more cohesive communities while advancing meaningful Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agendas. Yet, such extension of the role of businesses and the effectiveness of their HRM strategies and practices to tackle social concerns outside of their organizational boundaries have been limited to date. This is despite the fact that we recognize the growing interest in sustainable HRM (e.g., Stahl et al., 2020) and common good HRM (Aust et al., 2020). We view these research streams as complementary, yet distinct from our focus on social cohesion.

This special issue aims to broaden the way in which we conceptualize the role of businesses as the drivers of social cohesion. Taking HRM's expertise in DEI initiatives as a starting point, we aim to broaden the potential impact of corporate practices and expand it beyond the organizational boundaries. To this end, we move the HRM's loci from an *inward-focused* perspective on internal diversity (e.g. through inclusive recruitment and teamwork management) towards an *outward-directed* perspective, exploring the increasing societal expectation of employers' role in facilitating social cohesion (e.g. through strategic investment in social infrastructure that will widen the potential talent pool while achieving a wide set of broader community outcomes). To this end, we move from the conceptualization of social cohesion as a within-organizational outcome and focus on HRM's potential to impact broader social outcomes, following increasing calls for such engagement (De Stefano et al., 2018; Jamali et al., 2015; Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016).

Potential Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Given our focus on how HRM practices can affect social cohesion beyond the workplace, the potential theoretical and practical contributions of this special issue are vast and varied. By exploring the external impacts of HRM strategies on community engagement and social responsibility, this issue aims to bridge the gap between organizational practices and societal well-being. Theoretically, it could extend current HRM frameworks to include a broader societal perspective, incorporating concepts from social capital theory, community engagement models, and theories of CSR. This expansion of HRM theory would not only enrich academic discourse but also provide a more holistic view of the function of HRM in society.

Practically, the special issue has the potential to guide HR professionals in designing and implementing practices that not only benefit their organizations, but also contribute positively to the communities in which they operate. It could offer insights into effective strategies for corporate-community partnerships, volunteer initiatives, and social engagement programs that enhance social cohesion. By highlighting best practices and innovative approaches to community engagement, the issue could serve as a resource for organizations looking to play a more active role in societal development.

Furthermore, this special issue could contribute to policy discussions by providing evidence-based recommendations for policymakers on how to support and encourage the role of businesses in

fostering social cohesion. It could illuminate the ways in which HRM practices intersect with public policies aimed at social integration, community development, and the promotion of social equity. Through a multidisciplinary lens, the issue could advocate for a collaborative approach between the private sector, government, and civil society to address social challenges.

Lastly, by emphasizing the role of HRM in societal well-being, this special issue could inspire future research into the external impacts of HR practices, encouraging scholars to explore beyond traditional boundaries of HRM research. This could lead to a more dynamic and impactful understanding of HRM's role in society, stimulating further academic inquiry into how organizations can contribute to a more cohesive and inclusive world.

Key Themes of the Special Issue

This Special Issue centers on the critical role HRM plays in affecting social cohesion beyond the confines of the workplace. It aims to explore how HRM practices and policies can extend their impact into the broader community, contributing to building inclusive, equitable, and unified societies. Alternatively, it also aims to identify and explain how some HRM practices can be detrimental to communities and their cohesion. We seek papers that deepen our understanding of the positive and negative external societal impacts of HRM strategies and the ways in which organizations can affect social cohesion in the wider community.

Recognizing the possible dissonance between espoused values, outward-facing activities and internal practices, we also encourage research that critically examines the disconnect between internal and external corporate actions. This is particularly relevant where corporations' own employees might be exposed to practices that undermine human rights and social cohesion, even as the public-facing agenda claims the company's leading role in advancing positive societal outcomes.

We invite submissions that provide empirical research, practice-based insights, and conceptual explorations into the ways HRM can influence social cohesion outside the workplace. This call welcomes contributions from a diverse set of empirical contexts that consider the varied legal, social, and cultural environments, and how these environments shape the external societal roles of HRM.

Contributors are encouraged to utilize foundational theories and concepts from a diverse set of fields, such as sociology, social work, and corporate citizenship, to examine the broader social implications of HRM practices. We are looking for diverse theoretical viewpoints and research methodologies that can appeal to a wide readership. This includes interdisciplinary work, studies that examine the societal levels of impact, and research that promotes collaboration with community groups and external stakeholders.

By focusing on HRM's role in enhancing social cohesion in the larger societal context, this Special Issue aims to offer insights into how HR practices can extend their benefits beyond organizational performance to contribute significantly to societal well-being and peaceful co-existence. We especially encourage contributions that propose innovative strategies and actionable solutions for HRM practitioners to engage with and positively impact their communities.

Following the broad definition of social cohesion, we invite papers addressing, but not limited to, a

wide range of topics at the intersection of HRM, DEI and social cohesion.

We recognize that social cohesion is a distal outcome for HRM practices in any organization, and acknowledge that it may be a stretch for some authors to conclusively demonstrate social impact as an outcome of their studies. Hence, we encourage efforts to look beyond organizational performance or individual outcomes, to explore the potential for HRM to contribute to social cohesion. Each submission will be expected to include a section that explicitly addresses how the paper links HRM to social cohesion. This might be in the form of implications for social cohesion, or in demonstration of a real social impact.

Illustrative Topics for the Special Issue

Below is a list of research questions to exemplify what we hope might be addressed by submissions to the Special Issue. The list is not exhaustive, and the suggested questions are simply illustrative of the areas that could be covered.

The Conceptualization and Operationalization of Social Cohesion in HRM Scholarship

- What are the key areas where HRM, as both a scholarly discipline and a field of practice, can impact social inclusion?
- How could social cohesion be conceptualized and measured in the context of HRM?
- How can the impact of HR practices on social cohesion outside of organizational boundaries be measured in quantitative and/or qualitative studies? What are the best practices for measuring the external social impact of HRM and DEI initiatives on community cohesion?
- What innovative methodologies could be used to assess the impact of HRM on social cohesion (e.g. co-creation of research with community, indigenous research methods, action research)?
- What areas of HRM activity represent the highest potential for impact in advancing social cohesion (e.g. recruitment, training, volunteerism, mentoring, outreach initiatives, etc), and how?

Impact of DEI and HRM Initiatives on Social Cohesion Outside the Workplace

- Can HRM initiatives designed to support DEI within organizations also play a role in fostering unity and reducing divisions outside of the workplace? What are the opportunities for impact?
- How can DEI initiatives within organizations influence the reduction of societal polarization more broadly?
- How can HRM ensure equitable engagement and access to opportunities for underrepresented groups in a way that reduces societal divides?
- What is the role and opportunity for HRM to support depolarization of attitudes around political, socio-economic, ethnic, religious and many other divides?
- How do DEI initiatives (e.g., inclusive behavior training; flexible work arrangements) enhance the quality of social relations outside the workplace?
- How effective are internal HR strategies in combating polarization and discrimination outside organizational contexts?
- To what extent do organizational HR policies contribute to or mitigate systemic inequalities within the wider society?
- How can employee engagement initiatives be structured to not only support DEI within organizations but also promote social cohesion externally?
- What is the relationship between CSR initiatives, DEI efforts, and the promotion of social

- cohesion outside the organization?
- What is the adverse effect of the HRM and DEI activities on social cohesion outside the workplace? Can badly implemented practices lead to further societal polarization?
 - What are the unintended consequences of the HRM and DEI activities on social cohesion outside the workplace?
 - What is the alignment between the corporation's internal actions and its public-facing agenda regarding social impact?
 - How do the internal HRM and DEI practices, especially those undermining human rights and social cohesion, contrast with the publicly stated values and commitments to advancing positive societal outcomes?

Technological Transformation in HRM and the Impact on Social Cohesion Outside the Workplace

- In what ways does technology (e.g., generative AI, social media) facilitate or hinder the extension of HRM efforts from organizations to the broader community?
- In what ways can technological advancements used by organizations facilitate (de-) polarization in the wider community?
- How has the shift towards remote work impacted organizational contributions to social cohesion in the communities where they operate?
- Does technological innovation and flexible working arrangement facilitate or hinder social cohesion (e.g. access to meaningful employment and opportunities for all)?

Cross-Sector and Cross-Industry Collaborations in HRM and Implications for Social Cohesion

- How can cross-industry collaboration enhance HRM efforts and contribute to social cohesion in the broader community? What are the best practices in this domain?
- What is the role of cross-sector partnerships in advancing social cohesion? What are the best practices in this domain?
- What is the role of external stakeholders, such as government and unions, in advancing social cohesion? How do they improve or hinder social cohesion through organizational practices?
- What are the public policy constraints of HRM's impact outside the organization?
- How can HR managers work with policy makers on initiatives that advance social cohesion efforts locally and globally?
- Seeing the abundance of resources and reputational assets, how can multinational corporations (MNCs) lead global efforts in advancing social cohesion?
- What are the unique opportunities and challenges in advancing social cohesion for small and medium organizations?
- How does the wider societal context impact the implementation of HRM and DEI initiatives with a focus on advancing social cohesion outside the workplace?

When in doubt, we encourage authors to contact us with an abstract before they prepare a full submission to discuss alignment with the theme of this special issue.

We invite both empirical and conceptual papers rooted in a diverse set of epistemologies, traditions, and methodologies. The Special Issue is open to all methodological approaches, recognizing that methodological pluralism is critical to advancing our understanding and that methodological fit is essential for investigating real-world phenomena.

Central to this call is the acknowledgement of the multiple contexts (social, historical, and structural) in which HRM practices emerge and evolve. This perspective is key to locating the emerging action in the ever-evolving socio-political context in which it occurs. We invite, therefore, papers from a wide range of contextual settings. We encourage contributions from colleagues working in various disciplines and with different cultural, societal, and geographic perspectives.

We aim for this special issue to be an important scholarly contribution to establishing workplaces as active sites in facilitating social cohesion.

Submission Process

Authors can submit papers between April 1-30, 2025 to *Human Resource Management* for publication consideration. Details on the manuscript submission process will be made available nearer to the submission period. Papers should be prepared and submitted according to the journal's guidelines: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/1099050x/homepage/forauthors.html>. To ensure that all manuscripts are correctly identified for consideration for this Special Issue, it is important that authors select "SI: The Ripple Effect: HRM and Social Cohesion Beyond the Workplace" when they reach the "Article Type" step in the submission process. All papers will be subject to the same double-blind peer review process as regular issues of *Human Resource Management*.

To help authors develop and improve their papers, the Special Issue editors will organize two virtual workshops in late 2024 or early 2025, in two separate time slots, to accommodate a larger group of interested authors across countries. The exact dates and times for the workshops will be widely publicized in due time.

If you have any questions about a potential submission, please contact Prof. Betina Szkudlarek via betina.szkudlarek@sydney.edu.au, Dr Eun Su Lee via jeannie.lee@newcastle.edu.au, Prof. Helen De Cieri via helen.decier@monash.edu or Prof Catherine Connolly via connell@mcmaster.ca.

Submission Window: April 1-30, 2025

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