Focus section guest editorial: Methodological advances in HR research

1. Introduction and context

The aim of this focus section is to promote creative scholarship and scientific progress in HR research by encouraging the use of research methods that are aligned with HR issues in the real world. Advanced research methods such as diary studies, intersectionality, big data analytics (BDA) and other advanced, methodological settings (adopted/derived from other social science disciplines) have become well established in fields such as organizational behavior, sociology of work, psychology and labor economics, but they have not yet diffused widely into HR research.

Against this background, innovative methods are encouraged to advance the understanding of systemic inequality and diversity in the workplace. Diverse groups of employees may have various experiences of policies, programs and initiatives at individual, interpersonal and social structural levels. Identity factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age and mental or physical disability may interact with each other, rendering joint effects on people's experience and work outcomes. As a result, we believe that it is important for HR researchers to acknowledge the importance of intersecting identities, develop research with an intersectionality perspective in mind and adopt innovative research approaches to deal with these methodological challenges. Recent contributions to intersectionality and implications for HR scholarship include Atkinson et al. (2021), Hwang and Hoque (2023), and Knepper et al. (2023).

As a further methodological advancement for HR research, diary studies have been recognized for their scope to track HR implementation processes through time, specifically on a micro-basis (Ohly et al., 2010) and in various forms (daily diaries and experience sampling). Diary studies provide opportunities for scholars to examine ongoing experiences and events. This can be achieved by allowing study participants to take periodic or event-based assessments about their activities. To this end, their use is promising and provides particular relevance for HR implementation researchers. Recent examples of diary studies in HR scholarship include Cheng et al. (2023) and Kilroy et al. (2022).

We also note that research methods developed in different social science fields (behavioral experiments, survey, archived data, machine learning and Big Data) each contribute to the understanding of important HR questions and yet may have their own limitations regarding method biases. Therefore, it is important to recognize the interconnection among methods in different fields and seek the synergy of adopting various methods to understand the important questions in HR fields. Recent contributions in this context include Garg et al. (2021) and Malik et al. (2020).

By enhancing this creative scholarship, we hope that this focus section helps with the advancement of the HR research field, exploring the relevance of the improvement and

expansion of data collection and analytic techniques to the development of new theories and the real problems of organizations.

2. Papers in this focus section

This focus section comprises four papers that delve into innovative areas of HR research. The papers explore the application of intersectionality in HR research, the relationship between work engagement and employee well-being in the context of daily micro-events, the integration of BDA in HRM and the examination of developmental paths to executive positions using a unique combination of job analysis, competency assessment and sequence analysis. Collectively, these papers offer valuable insights for theory and practice in these areas of human resource management research. Moreover, they underscore the importance of employing innovative methodologies to advance our comprehension of systemic inequality and diversity in the workplace.

In the study titled "Intersectionality in HR research: challenges and opportunities," Gunderson conducts a comprehensive review of the existing literature on intersectionality and delves into its potential applications in HR research and practices. Intersectionality, as a framework, examines how interdependent categories such as race, gender and disability intersect and interact to shape outcomes. Unlike viewing these categories as independent or additive, intersectionality recognizes their interlocking nature, resulting in unique interactive effects that go beyond the sum of individual factors. Gunderson's study highlights the methodological and data complexities associated with studying intersectionality in HR research. It outlines several approaches to address these challenges. These include exploring interaction effects to capture the nuanced relationships between intersecting categories, utilizing separate equations for key groups to account for their distinct experiences, reducing data requirements through strategic sampling techniques, incorporating qualitative analysis to capture subjective experiences and harnessing machine learning methods with large-scale datasets for more comprehensive analyses. The study further reveals a significant gap between the concept and its practical application in HR research, particularly concerning prediction and causal analysis. Applying intersectionality in practice involves inevitable trade-offs. The study acknowledges this reality and proposes seven practical steps to navigate these trade-offs in HRM research. By following the proposed steps, researchers can enhance quantitative analyses of HR issues by incorporating an intersectional lens, ultimately leading to more inclusive and nuanced insights into the complex interplay of various social categories within organizations.

The study entitled "Daily work engagement is a process through which daily micro events at work influence life satisfaction" by Junça Silva, Caetano, and Rueff delves into the role of work engagement as a mediating mechanism in the association between micro-events and well-being. Employing two diary-based studies, the research seeks to enhance our comprehension of the antecedents of well-being within the workplace context. Specifically, the study finds that work engagement operates as a mediator, whereby daily uplifts stimulate work engagement, subsequently leading to enhanced well-being. Conversely, daily hassles impede work engagement, consequently diminishing well-being. These insights highlight the dynamic nature of daily micro-events and work engagement within individuals and underscore the value of diary studies in the field of human resources research.

The study titled "Bibliometric review on human resources management and big data analytics" conducted by Fauzi, Kamaruzzaman and Abdul Rahman provides a thorough exploration of the integration of BDA within the field of human resource management. Employing citation, co-citation and co-word analyses, this research critically examines the historical progression, current landscape and future directions of BDA in HRM literature. The citation analysis reveals three prominent themes: firm performance, challenges and barriers to BDA adoption and BDA job characteristics. Additionally, the co-citation analysis identifies

four distinct research clusters, shedding light on the prevailing knowledge structure within this domain. Furthermore, the co-word analysis uncovers four clusters that reflect emerging trends and future trajectories of BDA implementation in HRM. These findings hold significant implications for both scholarly advancement and practical application, emphasizing the crucial role of knowledge management systems in fostering an analytics-driven culture and facilitating knowledge sharing to enable successful BDA implementation in HRM. Moreover, the research highlights the paramount importance of developing predictive and prescriptive analytics capabilities to empower proactive decision-making, leveraging historical data, real-time analysis and artificial intelligence techniques to optimize HRM performance and drive sustainable organizational success.

Finally, the study titled "Your leadership pipeline: leveraging HR analytics for C-Suite executive development" by Wang, Zhu and Hall employs sequence analysis as a research methodology to examine the work experiences of 53 general managers within a Fortune 100 company over a period of 57 years ($n = 2,742$). The study addresses three primary research questions, namely the identification of primary developmental paths leading to the first-time general manager position, the examination of the impact of these developmental paths on executive turnover and the exploration of the significance of self-awareness and technical skills in executive development. By integrating job analysis, competency assessment and sequence analysis, the study identifies three distinct developmental paths, namely stayers, internal movers and external hires, leading to the attainment of the first-time general manager role. Notably, there is a relatively even distribution of these developmental paths among the general managers in the sample. The research underscores the pivotal role of rich and diverse work experiences in executive development, as they are found to be associated with lower turnover among executives. The findings emphasize the importance of organizations providing leaders with diverse work experiences encompassing varied work content, contexts and timing to effectively foster leadership development. A noteworthy aspect of the study is the innovative use of sequence analysis as a methodology, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the complexity inherent in leadership development through work experience across individuals' career trajectories.

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