Call for Papers

Scaling Up: Exploring the Role of Human Resource Management in Exponential Growth Contexts

Guest editors

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Rationale and objectives

Rapid growth, often on a global scale, is frequently touted as the blueprint to secure the viability and success of both new and established firms. In recent years, scholarly attention has increasingly moved towards the concept of scaling, which can be broadly defined as a time-limited process of exponential growth (Bohan et al., 2023; DeSantola and Gulata, 2017; Jansen et al., 2023). Scaling successfully requires increasing returns, namely outputs (e.g., revenues), growing at a faster rate than inputs (i.e. resources) (Bohan et al., 2023). Scaling is therefore substantively different from high growth; firms need to expand their customer base across international markets and build capacity rapidly and in a synchronized manner, while in parallel transforming internal processes, systems, structures and resources to support rapid growth (DeSantola & Gulati, 2017; Jansen et al., 2023; Piaskowska et al., 2021; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2022; Tippmann et al., 2023). Scaling requires the capability to simultaneously prepare and (re)configure resources and capabilities internal to the firm, while striving to increase efficiency and attain economies of scale (Coviello, 2019). This challenging endeavour entails a rapid upsurge of managerial and operational complexity. Importantly, scaling is not limited to young firms. In fact, scaling may take place in many different firm contexts, ranging from young to mature firms, and commercial to socially-oriented ones (Jansen et al., 2023).

While the concept of scaling is well established in practitioner and policy circles, the surge in scholarly attention is more recent (Jansen et al., 2023; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2022). Most of the existing literature has focused on defining scaling and describing how the time-compressed, exponential nature of scaling entails unique challenges, compared to simply growing more linearly over time (e.g., Bohan et al., 2023; Coviello, 2019; Jansen et al., 2023; Palmié et al., 2023). The neglect of a focus on scaling in human resource management (HRM) is especially surprising as a well-recognized feature underpinning effective scaling is the ability to attract, organize, motivate and retain value-adding employees. Research exploring scaling points to significant people-related factors. This includes the impact of new hires or 'joiners' in (re)shaping the roles of leadership (Van Lancker et al., 2023), how firms can build coordination mechanisms early on through creating smaller, self-managed teams or flexible routines and rules with an eye towards scaling (Jones & Schou, 2023; Lee et al., 2023), how knowledge spillovers may advance scaling (Belitski et al., 2023), the imprinting role of early HR decisions (Harney et al., 2022), as well as how digitalization enables a new variety of born global, micro-multinationals with differing talent requirements (Nolan & Harney, 2024; Piaskowska et al., 2021). Research has also highlighted that scaling may negatively affect employee wellbeing due to new demands and additional work pressures (Genedy et al., 2024).

As time-compressed periods of exponential growth, scaling mandates a transition from a previous state enabled by replication and synchronization of resources, processes, and systems (Jansen et al., 2023; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2022). Scaling entails substantial internal transformation, that brings with it several firm-level tensions including the desire and need for coordination versus autonomy, stability versus change, and growth versus efficiency, as well as an overall increase in information flows (Bohan et al., 2023; DeSantola & Gulati, 2017; Greiner, 1998). For employees, scaling may present a double-edged sword offering increased opportunities, but also substantial complexity and a risk of overload with the expansion in products, customers, geographies, procedures and systems that scaling brings (e.g., Belitski et al., 2023; DeSantola & Gulati, 2017; Sutton & Rao, 2016; Tippmann et al., 2023). In this way, it is clear that scaling has direct relevance to HRM, relying as it does on enhanced organizational capacity, more efficient ways of working, and the onboarding or accessing of new talent. Yet, while clearly relevant, many questions in the interaction between scaling and HRM remain. Hence, the overarching question this special issue seeks to explore is: *How can HRM contribute to or constrain successful scaling, and equally how may scaling affect HRM?*

Expected Contributions

Addressing the above overarching question through the key themes proposed below, this special issue intends to advance theoretical and empirical understanding of scaling and HRM. As a contemporary phenomenon, nascent research on scaling has been described as 'fragmented and dispersed' (Jansen et al., 2023: 581), while in HRM terms it is noted largely for its absence (Harney &Alkhalaf, 2021). This presents an opportunity for this special issue to bring together thought leaders in this emerging space to map key HRM implications and unpack the extent, nature and means by which HRM can proactively enable or destructively constrain scaling efforts. In so doing, the contributions may draw on core HR concepts such as strategic fit, HR processes, HR ecosystems, ambidexterity and employee attributions of HR to

explore how they play out in a scaling context (Collins & Kehoe, 2016; Patel et al., 2013; Snell et al., 2023). Others might seek to extend our understanding drawing on scaling insights as related to the paradox of change and endurance (DeSantola & Gulati, 2017), relational HRM flowing from role crafting and joiner dynamics (Van Lancker et al., 2023) or the sustainability of change. There is scope for novel theoretical perspectives including: resourcefulness; sustainable HRM; open HR; dynamic attention-based view and, design approaches. In this way, the special issue will have broader relevance for those looking to better explore and accommodate change and transition in firms, providing new theoretical lenses and empirical insights to guide them on this task of scaling up ideas around HRM. We especially welcome novel methodological approaches with new ways of accommodating the dynamics of change, drawing on ethnography, longitudinal perspectives and incorporating employee perspectives.

This special issue calls for theoretical and empirical papers that are specifically focused on the interface between scaling and HRM. We expect papers to draw upon theories and models from HRM, entrepreneurship, growth, strategy, organizational behavior and psychology. Also, consistent with HRM's methodologically inclusive approach, we welcome secondary research including systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and bibliometric analyses; as well as original primary research utilizing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches. Papers are encouraged to focus on, but are not limited to, the themes at the intersection of scaling and HRM including:

1. **The Impact of Scaling on HRM:** How does scaling affect key HR domains such as job design, recruitment, new employee socialization, compensation and benefits, performance management, training and careers? How to effectively design these key HR domains towards scaling? What skills and capabilities are essential for scaling and how do firms acquire, motivate and retain them? How are HR competencies different and/or the same within the scaling process? What accommodations does HRM theory need to make in exploring the scaling phenomenon?

2. **Scaling Organizational Design**: How are people's efforts effectively coordinated when scaling (e.g., through moving from informal to more formal approaches, via firm culture)? What is the role of HR in setting up practices for executive transition, succession and leadership development? What are the configurations of HR likely to enable and/or constrain the process of scaling? What are the potential downsides of scaling, especially with respect to firm structure and performance management?

3. **HRM, Scaling, and Technology**: What is the role of digitizing HR infrastructures, analytics, and platforms, including generative AI? How does HR digitization affect recruitment/talent acquisition pace and timing?

4. **Entrepreneurial Context**: How does industry or sector (e.g., deeptech, ICT, manufacturing, private, social enterprise etc.), business model, ecosystem, and/or geographic location influence the speed and timing of HR scaling initiatives? How can the interaction between the institutional context, founders/managers and employees affect the mode and speed of scaling?

5. **Employee Experiences of Scaling:** Why do employees choose to work in firms that are scaling? What are the implications of the scaling context in terms of ability, motivation, and opportunity to perform (AMO)? What HRM interventions facilitate employees in navigating the 'liability of volatility' especially with respect to role clarity, work intensification, and well-being?

In keeping with HRM's focus on bridging research and practice, it is critical that submissions have practical significance in terms of clear, detailed and well-considered implications to address the HRM challenges and consequences of scaling.

Submission Information

Authors can submit papers between **February1st-28th, 2025** to *Human Resource Management* for review. Authors should select "Special Issue" as the article type, select "yes" to the special issue question, and select which SI (scaling up) the submission is for. Authors should also state the name of the intended SI in their cover letter. Papers should be prepared and submitted according to the journal's guidelines available at:

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/17488583/homepage/forauthors.html

All papers will be subject to the same double-blind peer review process as in regular issues of Human Resource Management. Authors seeking advice or clarity on the scope and parameters of their potential submission are encouraged to reach out to Simon Raby (sraby@mtroyal.ca) with their queries.

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