

Contextualising Human Resource Management through Qualitative Research: Evidence from Australia and New Zealand

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Aim of the special issue

The role of context is important to advance human resource management (HRM) theory and practice (Boxall, Ang and Bartram, 2011; Paauwe & Farndale, 2017). As a concept, context itself is multi-faceted and multi-layered (Johns, 2006; Shapiro, 2007), and in HRM scholarly research, it permeates how studies are conducted, interpreted, theorised and translated into management practice. Cooke (2018) conceptualised context across three levels of analysis; (level 1) descriptive context which may include country, industry, organisation, workforce and demographics; (Level 2) analytical context which focuses on institutional, cultural, and structural environment of the organisation in which HRM is practiced; (Level 3) subjective context which builds on the previous two levels of context and informs the researchers' conceptualisation of empirical data such as their understanding of HRM phenomena and interpretation. Some HRM practices, such as reward and recognitions, are more heavily influenced by context than others such as training and development. Despite the growing trend of de-contextualisation in HRM research over the last decade or so (Dundon & Rafferty, 2018), understanding context is critical as it enables a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of HRM phenomena across descriptive, analytical, and subjective levels (Cooke, 2018).

This Special Issue calls for qualitative research studies that examine HRM phenomena across the full gamut of contexts in Australia and/or New Zealand. The aim of this Special Issue is to encourage the

exploration of HRM for the purpose of enhancing understanding of HRM opportunities and challenges that inform theory and practice.

First, we call for papers within the *context of Australia and New Zealand*. Australia and New Zealand are fertile grounds for innovative and world leading scholarship on HRM theory and practice. The Australian and New Zealand contexts are unique in terms of geographical, cultural, economic, and institutional arrangements. Despite the geographical isolation, Australian and New Zealand are well renowned for HRM innovations and leading the world in employment rights and legislative workplace reforms. HRM scholarship that focusses on research within this context may offer new insights into contemporary workplace challenges and innovative HRM solutions.

Second, we call for papers that explore HRM phenomena through *qualitative methodological approaches*. Traditional approaches to HRM research have promoted the integration of contextual factors such as social and cultural, technological, economic, industry and national institutions as (in part) important determinants of HRM strategies, policies and practices (Mayrhofer, Gooderham & Brewster, 2019). However, more recently, there has been a shift away from studying HRM *in situ* and understanding HRM phenomena within its context to research approaches that emphasize positivist and quantitative approaches with an individual-oriented analytical approach (Budd, 2020; Dundon & Rafferty, 2018; Kaufman, 2015). In this call for papers, we argue that contextual arrangements/forces are important for the purposes of expanding our understanding of HRM theory development and HRM practice. This in line with scholars' recommendations for "more qualitative studies to redress the imbalance in HRM research" (Cooke, 2018, p.1). Importantly, to examine and unpack the complexities of HRM phenomena in context and the views/experiences of different employment relations actors in Australia and New Zealand, we call for papers that use a range of qualitative methodological approaches. The methodology could apply phenomenology, case study, action research, grounded theory, or ethnography approaches. Research may embrace constructivist approaches to examine open-ended perspectives of trustworthiness and authenticity; postmodern approaches that are entrenched in levels of uncertainty; post-positivist perspectives that search for validity; or critical approaches that examine social structures and power inequalities (Silverman & Patterson, 2021). Methods of interviews, focus groups, policy analyses and/or reflective journals could be applied, and we encourage papers that draw on exploratory methodological choices in their data collection and analysis.

Third, we call for papers that explore HRM phenomena and topics across *various industrial and sectoral contexts*. Inter-industry contextual explorations of HRM issues may be conducive to constructing a more comprehensive understanding of HRM as a whole (Cooke, 2018). We call for papers that focus on HRM research in Australian and New Zealand contexts across the full gamut of industries (e.g., healthcare, construction, IT, manufacturing, service, finance etc.), sectors (e.g., private/public) and on contemporary HRM issues (e.g., strategic HRM and performance, diversity and inclusion, mental health and wellbeing, HR analytics and artificial intelligence, worker retention).

By way of example, research papers in context could explore issues such as the implications for HRM practice related to women or minority groups working in industries where they are under-represented (e.g., construction or IT), professionals working in industries suffering from skills shortages and retention issues such as nurses working in aged care facilities, or workers with disability in open employment – all within the Australia and New Zealand.

Proposed topics

We encourage HRM and industrial relations perspectives to address research topics and questions pertaining to important workplace and HRM challenges in Australian and New Zealand workplaces. Example topics are provided below, but are not restricted to the following:

- The role of industry context (e.g., construction, healthcare, finance, IT, education) and across sectors (public and/or private) and how it affects the development, implementation and evaluation of HRM practices and policies.
- Changing expectations of employers and/or employees in Australian and New Zealand workplaces.
- Understanding the needs of the diverse workforce (e.g., gender, disability, ethnicity) and associated HRM implications.
- Understanding intersectionality and the HRM implications for creating diverse workforces and workplaces.
- Contextual influences on the future of work and HRM in Australia and New Zealand.
- Development of a future agenda for HRM qualitative research in Australia and New Zealand.
- The effectiveness of HRM policies and practices and the challenges of implementation across Australia and New Zealand organisations.
- The application of HRM systems (e.g. high-performance work systems, wellbeing HRM, green HRM, sustainable HRM) and effects on employee, team and organisational performance outcomes.
- The use and alignment of sustainable development goals to inform HRM policy and practice in Australia and New Zealand.
- The changing nature of work (e.g., working from home, flexible work arrangements, different employment modes, and geographically dispersed workforces) and the impacts on performance management, training, and development and other HRM functions.
- The growing use and implications of digital innovations, algorithmic HRM, and AI for HRM professionals and HRM departments.
- Implications of workforce shortages and retention challenges for organisations, especially for first responder workers such as paramedics, police, firefighters, nurses and doctors.

Proposed timeline

Submission window: 30 April 2025

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