

SPECIAL ISSUE CALL FOR PAPERS

Reconsidering careers in post-Covid-19 workplaces

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This special issue is motivated by the value of revisiting career research and theory in the context of the current disruptions to labour force experiences. We seek to examine the implications for careers and career theory that flow from the post-Covid-19 world of work.

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted many established organizational practices, ranging from investments in staff training (CIPD, 2021), to face-to-face connections that build social capital. Covid-19 has also seen increased early retirements, resignations, and other forms of labour force churn that impacts workers, their managers, and human resource functions in firms (Stuart et al, 2021). Covid-19 instigated structural changes to the employment relationship that may impact careers significantly. Unemployment rates world-wide now are greater than pre-pandemic (ILO, 2022). At the same time, quit rates have increased to historical levels in almost all industries (ONS, 2022). Alongside this, vacancy-to-unemployment rates have arisen in parts of Europe (OECD, 2022) where, more specifically, there are labour shortages in contact-intensive industries and in manufacturing, information technology, and communication sectors (OECD, 2022). The so-called “Great Resignation” (CIPDa, 2022) poses not only job retention challenges for employers, but a shift in the sectors where workers pursue employment opportunities.

Workers are seeking greater flexibility post-Covid-19, where employee surveys show 52% of employees report that the availability of flexible work policies will affect their decision to stay with an employer (CIPDb, 2022). However, the availability of hybrid working is not equal across the labour force (ONS, 2022). Furthermore, employers have been reported to fail to properly design jobs for hybrid and remote working in such a manner that the post-Covid-19 return to work reinforces the gender-pay and promotion gap (*The Guardian*, 25th September, 2022). Finally, the International Labour Organisation calls for the labour market recovery to be *human-based, resilient, inclusive and sustainable* (ILO, 2022). Nonetheless, the long-lasting effects of post-pandemic structural changes remains speculative and insufficiently evidenced, as they are often based on views offered by professional bodies and think-tank consultancies (e.g., CIPD; Gartner; OECD).

Although research on careers acknowledges the interplay between individual and contextual factors (the “career ecosystem”, Baruch & Rousseau, 2019), disruptions during and after Covid-19 have altered the lived experience of workers, their managers, and HR practitioners. This Special Issue focuses on the implications of such disruptions and the “new normal” in

employment for our understanding of careers and career theory. We view a career as the evolution of work-related experiences over the life course (Arthur et al., 1999). In this Special Issue we seek evidence of such structural shifts and their relevance for careers and career theory.

We find three themes of particular importance: career orientations, career management, and sustainable careers.

A. Career orientations and attitudes

Individual career orientations (i.e., preferences regarding particular career-related opportunities, circumstances and career types; Gerber et al., 2009), and the attitudes they give rise to, shape the careers workers pursue and are themselves shaped by the context of careers. Structural changes suggested by high vacancy-to-unemployment rates coupled with inflation may shape workers' career orientations and preferences.

Concepts such as career success, resilience and sustainability depend on the meaning people ascribe to their work experience (Hite & McDonald, 2020). Have employees' understandings of such career constructs shifted post-pandemic? What constitutes 'good' or 'decent' work for employees (such as new labour entrants; people close to retirement)? While concepts like boundaryless career (Arthur & Rousseau, 2021) and customized career (Valcour et al., 2007) remain useful perspectives for understanding contemporary careers – and were themselves concepts predicated on perceived structural changes to employment relationships place several decades ago – we seek to understand careers through issues paramount to the current time, namely, Covid-19 and its implications.

B. Career management

The second issue are the challenges and opportunities the post-Covid-19 landscape poses for career self- and organizational-management. For *employees*, homework may impact their career trajectories and progress and the way they develop and manage their social capital. *Managers* increasingly need to manage team collaborations, monitor and appraise the performance of employees working remotely, and sometimes lack the necessary support systems and adequate training. The managerial role is crucial for encouraging and maintaining employee motivation and culture connectedness, as they are the main point of contact for their direct reports with their employer. Finally, HRM practices also need to be re-evaluated to promote employee retention. The *HR role* is important for navigating changes following the COVID-19 pandemic to core areas of HR practices, such as enabling remote work, re-skilling and up-skilling, performance management, succession planning, leadership development and global mobility (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Up to now, understanding is fragmented as to how firms responses to the Covid-19 crisis affect careers.

C. Career sustainability

Career sustainability refers to positive career experiences workers can have over the long term that promote organizational and individual effectiveness (Herman & Lewis, 2012; Kossek et al., 2014). To date, the careers literature has under-explored how macro-economic factors

shape individual careers (Kossek et al. 2014). Post-pandemic evidence suggests that organizations' attention to employees' well-being has increased, including its focus on employee mental health (CIPD, 2022b). Due to employees' increased mobility (both outside but also within the same industry), professional bodies urge firms to differentiate themselves as 'employers of choice' (Gartner; CIPDb, 2022) and to offer employee propositions that emphasize the meaning of work and flexible working practices. We seek to understand what a sustainable career means in the wake of recent structural changes. If it is as an opportunity for employers to differentiate themselves to become employers of choice, we call for research to the forms this HR strategy might take. We call for papers that offer novel, clearer and more career-specific approaches to understanding sustainable careers and to invite critiques of the concept.

Expected contributions

These Special Issue aims outlined above point to how theory and practice can be developed further. It aims to use the knowledge acquired to inform and support HRM practice in the post-pandemic reality. It also aims to critically examine whether the extent to which organizational career management arrangements post-pandemic constitute a 'new normal' or revert to pre-pandemic patterns. With this Special Issue, we aim to make careers more central to HRM literature, by using a careers lens to examine a variety of work-related phenomena.

We encourage submissions that explore various phenomena related to the post-Covid-19 world of work, with the intention to generate new theoretical perspectives or critique existing ones, novel methodological approaches, and more evidence-based lessons from the pandemic. We seek theoretical insights from different disciplines including OB, sociology, strategic HRM and industrial relations and are open to conceptual papers and empirical papers drawing on quantitative and qualitative research methods and innovations therein.

Example areas of focus might include, but are not restricted to:

- Examining whether established career concepts and theories require revising in the light of Covid-19
- How Covid-19 and its implications impact early career orientations
- How the shift to homeworking may impact workers' careers, and the challenges faced by managers and HR professionals in managing homeworking's impact on careers
- Examining the career experiences/orientations and trajectories of under-studied cohorts of workers (such as furloughed workers; part-timers; blue-collar workers; frontline workers; working poor; gig workers; workers in areas of acute labour market shortage)
- Deepening our understanding of career experiences of workers at different career stages (e.g., new labour entrants vs workers close to retirement)
- Providing insight into what constitutes 'good' or 'decent' work in the post-covid world of work and for workers in different career phases
- Providing insights into the kind of organizational HR practices which can be strategized to support worker's career management in the post-Covid-19 world of work
- Explore how organizations can promote sustainable careers that enable people to experience well-being during the 'new normal'

- Critiquing past (e.g., orientations) and recent (e.g., sustainable) career constructs in terms of their validity and utility in understanding post-Covid-19 careers.

Submission process

Full papers should be submitted between **1 September- 31 October 2023** at <https://wiley.atyponrex.com/journal/HRMJ>. Please select the ‘Special Issue Article’ as the article type on submission. On the Additional Information page during submission, select ‘Yes, this is for a Special Issue’ and select “*Reconsidering careers in post-Covid-19 workplaces*” from the dropdown list. Please note that papers may not be submitted until 1st September 2023.

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Enquiries related to the online submission process should be directed to: HRMJ.journal@wiley.com.

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