

SPECIAL ISSUE CALL FOR PAPERS

Conceptualising the Nexus between Macro-level ‘Turbulence’ and the Worker Experience in Human Resource Management

Guest Editors:

Rea Prouska (London South Bank University, UK)

Uracha Chatrakul Na Ayudhya (Birkbeck College, University of London, UK)

Alexandra Beauregard (Birkbeck College, University of London, UK)

Alexandros Psychogios (Birmingham City University, UK)

Margarita Nyfoudi (University of Birmingham, UK)

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In this Special Issue we seek to put HRM research into perspective (Cooke, 2018) by exploring the nexus between macro-level ‘turbulence’ and the worker experience. We refer to ‘turbulence’ as economic, political and/or social crisis or uncertainty occurring in the macro-environment and affecting the world of work (Psychogios & Prouska, 2019). Five examples of such crises or uncertainties can be provided here: (i) economic or financial crises, such as the 2009 global financial/economic crisis; (ii) crises/uncertainties caused by socio-political and economic development, transformation or transition, as for example in emerging or transition economies, (iii) political/social crises/uncertainties caused by nationalist or ethnocentric movements and policies, as for example ‘Brexit’ in the UK and ‘America First’ in the US, (iv) the recent socio-economic uncertainty caused by the global outbreak of Covid-19, and (v) the growing socio-political crisis linked to the climate emergency.

The term ‘workers’ is used loosely to include the experience of workers in both traditional and less-traditional work structures (Cañibano, 2019); from the experience of workers in full-time, part-time, fixed-term, temporary, or zero-hours contracts, to the experience of self-employed or freelance workers.

(i) exploring different types of macro-level ‘turbulence’, including economic, political and/or social crises and uncertainties;

More specifically, the Special Issue seeks to develop the concept of ‘turbulence’ in HRM research and practice from an international perspective by:

(ii) delving into the impact of such ‘turbulence’ on the workers’ experience; and
(iii) exploring how the nexus between ‘turbulence’ and the worker experience can be theorised in HRM research and considering the implications for HRM practice in international contexts.

Crises and uncertainties at an economic, political or social level impact how people are managed and experience work (Zagelmeyer & Gollan, 2012). We provide some examples of such macro-level ‘turbulence’ next.

A prominent type of crisis that has dominated the literature in recent years has been the 2009 global financial/economic crisis, which, in many contexts, mutated into a political and social crisis (Zagelmeyer & Gollan, 2012). A decade after this crisis, global recovery was reported by media as 'broad-based and stable' (Tetlow, 2017). Research is already talking about a 'post-crisis' period (Kornelakis, Veliziotis & Voskeritsian, 2017) with some advanced EU countries, such as Austria, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, having returned to their pre-crisis levels by 2015 (Antoshin et al., 2017). Recovery is not experienced at the same rate by all economies, however. Institutionally weaker economies still struggle to bounce back to pre-crisis levels not only economically but also in terms of employment conditions. Some nations experienced large austerity cuts during the crisis while others vigorously resisted such measures (Eurofound, 2013b). Where the crisis has had the most impact, firms responded by downsizing, restructuring work, changing working time arrangements, and implementing pay freezes or reducing pay and rewards (e.g., Prouska & Psychogios, 2018, 2019; Prouska, Psychogios & Rexhepi, 2016; Teague & Roche, 2013; Naude, Dickie & Butler, 2012). At the same time, at a national policy level, many countries observed an impact on employee voice (Gollan & Perkins, 2010); a general decline in collective bargaining due to the termination of national general agreements, the abolishment of policy support for multi-employer bargaining and policy-induced decentralization, with the sharpest decline observed in countries hardest hit by the crisis (ILO, 2015). Where the economic crisis prevailed, this created adverse working conditions for workers (Psychogios, Nyfoudi, Theodorakopoulos, Szamosi & Prouska, 2019), such as increased working hours, work intensification, job insecurity and stress, as well as decreased pay, benefits, training and development opportunities, motivation, and loyalty (Burgess & Connell, 2008; Chatrakul Na Ayudhya, Prouska & Beauregard, 2019; Chung & Van Oorschot, 2011; Cook, MacKenzie & Forde, 2016; Harney, Fu & Freney, 2018; Maley, 2019). Research has also identified the negative impact of the economic crisis on employees' psychological contract (Conway, Kiefer, Hartley & Briner, 2014) and physical and mental health (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Datta, Guthrie, Basuil & Pandey, 2010; Maslach & Leiter, 2008), when intense working schedules become the new standard (McCann, Morris & Hassard, 2008). The long-term effects of the 2009 crisis therefore continue to impact workers on many levels.

Beyond this recent financial/economic crisis, there is also a great number of economies under socio-political and economic development, transformation or transition that still face high levels of uncertainty, volatility and structural change (Psychogios & Prouska, 2019). Two types of economies are of particular relevance here. First, emerging market economies (EMEs) are economies progressing towards becoming more advanced, usually by means of rapid growth and industrialisation. These countries experience an expanding role both in the world economy and on the political frontier. The transformation process refers to the society of these countries and it follows a liberalisation approach (Psychogios & Prouska, 2019). For example, some aspects of EMEs include not only increased market orientation, low income, rapid growth and expansion of economic foundation, but also an informal economy of considerable size (Williams, 2014). Such countries are considered to be in a change process from developing to developed status, and include many countries in Africa, most countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, some countries in Latin America, some countries in the Middle East, and some countries in Asia and Southeast Asia.

The second type of economy relevant to this debate refers to transition economies. Since the 1990s, a number of peripheral European countries are in a process of political and economic transition from centrally planned (socialist) economies to capitalist ones. The countries that used to belong either to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) block

or to the Yugoslav state have undergone a set of structural transformations (Feige, 2017). They are well known as ex-communist or post-communist countries, and they have been classified as ‘transition economies’ (Stark & Bruszt, 1998). The main features of this transformation process can be summarised in the following aspects: removal of trade barriers, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, emergence of various businesses (mainly SMEs) founded on restructured former collectively-run enterprises and resources, and a development of a financial system entitled to support and facilitate macroeconomic stabilisation and private investments (Feige, 1991). For workers, employment has generally become more insecure as firms have become much more opportunistic in their planning, with a large component of the workforce becoming reconciled to insecure/precarious work (Prosser, 2016).

Other types of political and social crises or uncertainties can also affect institutionally stronger economies. For example, influential nationalist and ethnocentric sentiments and movements exhibited by policies such as ‘Brexit’ in the UK and ‘America First’ in the US mean that industrialised countries’ governments are making significant changes to their immigration policies sending negative signals to the skilled, multi-cultural, workforce (Hobolt, 2016; Horak, Farndale, Brannen & Collings, 2017). In the UK, while the Brexit political uncertainty is unravelling, research has recorded the rise in racism and xenophobia on migrant workers (Rzepnikowska, 2019). Similarly, in the US, there has been an increasing incidence of racial, ethnic and religious discrimination as a result of ‘America First’ policies (Nkomo et al., 2019).

More recently, the global outbreak of COVID-19 is another example of socio-economic ‘turbulence’ affecting the world of work that research has yet to examine with respect to how it has impacted on workers, employment and organisations in both developing and developed economies. It has been reported that this new health threat has the potential to halve growth and tip many countries into recession (The Guardian, 2020). Indeed, it has already started affecting global production chains, financial markets, industries, sectors, organisations, employment and workers.

Finally, the growing socio-political ‘turbulence’ linked to the climate emergency means that governments and organisations need to consider ways to tackle climate change because it poses significant challenges to economic growth and employment. Pursuing an agenda for transitioning to a greener economy not only implies the creation of new jobs in environmentally friendly production processes and outputs, but also poses a risk to a number of existing jobs (ILO, 2020). Research should therefore explore the effects of climate change on labour markets, jobs and workers (Olsen, 2009).

Drawing on research conducted in contexts of economic, political and social ‘turbulence’, such as in the examples provided above, we can better understand the worker experience in these economies, evaluate the applicability of HRM theory in this respect and offer practical recommendations to HR for supporting a range of workers.

Expected contributions

We invite manuscripts that address the objectives of this Special Issue in any international context experiencing ‘turbulence’ (crisis/uncertainty) at an economic, political and/or social level, and in any organisational size, industry or sector. We welcome empirical papers, as

well as theoretical/conceptual and review papers advancing the field. Comparative studies are also welcome. Taking into consideration the theoretical and practical nature of HRMJ, all contributions should be seeking to evaluate the applicability of existing HRM theories and extend these or formulate new ones where needed. They should also be offering practical advice for the development of HRM practices targeted towards improving the worker experience. Contributions can study ‘workers’ from a variety of perspectives: full-time, part-time, fixed-term, temporary, zero-hours contracts, self-employed or freelance workers.

With the workers’ experience at the centre of the investigation and situated within particular ‘turbulent’ contexts characterised by economic, political and/or social crises/uncertainties, we invite papers that focus on addressing an overarching research question: *How do workers experience the impact of the ‘turbulent’ macro-context in the world of work?* We invite papers that investigate this topic from various angles - economical, socio-political, employment relations, sociological and psychological among others.

Example areas of focus might include, but are not restricted to, exploring how ‘turbulent’ macro-contexts:

- Change workers’ working conditions, such as the physical and social work environment, legal rights of workers and employment contracts
- Affect employment relations and collective/individual voice mechanisms in the workplace
- Influence workers’ work-life balance, well-being, physical and mental health
- Bring tensions to social inequalities at work and what the outcome is for workers
- Alter workers’ expectations of the employment relationship, including but not confined to worker’s learning and development, career progression and professional development, the psychological contract, commitment and job satisfaction
- Influence workers’ exchanges (e.g. camaraderie, solidarity, information sharing, citizenship, loyalty) at different organisational levels

Sub-questions of interest might include:

- How do institutions interact in ‘turbulent’ macro-contexts to shape the worker experience with the world of work?
- How do organisations, particularly HR, manage the risks and challenges to workers posed by the ‘turbulent’ macro-context?
- How do workers make sense of and respond to these challenges?

In summary, the papers published in this Special Issue will contribute to the development of the concept of ‘turbulence’ and our understanding of the nexus between ‘turbulence’ and impact on the worker experience in HRM research and practice in international contexts.

Submission process

Full papers should be submitted between **1st - 31st January 2021** at <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/hrmj>. Please note that papers may not be submitted until 1st January 2021. Submissions need to indicate that they are for the “Conceptualising the Nexus between Macro-level ‘Turbulence’ and the Worker Experience in Human Resource Management” call.

Submission Deadline Extended: 28 February 2021

Enquiries related to the call for papers should be directed to Rea Prouska (prouskar@lsbu.ac.uk), Uracha Chatrakul Na Ayudhya (u.chatrakulnaayudhya@bbk.ac.uk), Alexandra Beaugard (a.beaugard@bbk.ac.uk), Alexandros Psychogios (Alexandros.psychogios@bcu.ac.uk) and Margarita Nyfoudi (m.nyfoudi@bham.ac.uk).

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

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