Editorial: Caring for our workers: advancing human resource management to support workforce mental health

Introduction

The World Health Organization (2022) estimates that between a quarter to half of the population will experience debilitating mental health challenges in their lifetime. Mental health challenges, which encompass challenges with social and emotional well-being, significantly impact on or inhibit the performance and functioning of many members in the workforce. Importantly, organizations and their employees have the power and responsibility to create healthy workplaces (Ipsen *et al.*, 2020). The high value and priority on work and productivity in industrialized societies has given rise to continuously increased job stress and encroached sense of security, leading to significant and long-term harm on mental health for many workers (e.g. Marmot *et al.*, 1999; Shoss, 2017). This is further exacerbated by the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic which has profoundly affected peoples' lives and livelihoods, further elevating mental health as a critical concern globally (Moreno *et al.*, 2020; Byrne and Wykes, 2020). With the already high prevalence of mental health challenges significantly increased by the pandemic, it is fair to assume that most, if not all people, will at some point personally experience debilitating mental health challenges or be in a close relationship with someone who does (Danielsen *et al.*, 2021). This widespread and rapid increase of people impacted has influenced changing beliefs about mental health, particularly in challenging the concept of a "them/us" divide, which has previously contributed greatly to stigmatizing attitudes (Byrne *et al.*, 2021). The impacts and saturation of mental health challenges throughout the population, including large numbers of people in paid work, have added a tremendous impetus for organizations to re-think their approach to supporting the mental health of their workforce, with growing and widespread recognition by HR professionals, managers and employees that mental health challenges will likely affect everyone at some point across their lives.

At no time in human history has technology played a more ubiquitous role in almost everything we do. With the unplanned rise of remote work and video-based communication rapidly accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of technology in the workplace is more central than ever before. Consequently, human resource management (HRM) mental health interventions may need to be reconsidered and revised to incorporate and respond to the changing views on and approaches to mental health challenges by the community, especially in relation to the use of technology (Moreno *et al.*, 2020).

However, despite the prevalence, significance and growing re-conceptualization of mental health, organizations are largely yet to develop a comprehensive, contemporary understanding of employees' mental health challenges, let alone having effective, up to date HRM strategies in place to tackle these issues (Hennekam *et al.*, 2021a). Moreover, there

is a dearth of literature examining the use of technology and data/people analytics to support mental health at work. Many organizations have started developing awareness and implemented or made more accessible, well-established responses such as employee assistance programs (EAPs). However, despite the popularity of EAPs with employers, uptake by employees and efficacy of these programs is less compelling. The limited research on EAPs yields mixed results (e.g. Joseph *et al.*, 2018), and research findings indicate that EAPs do not address or improve barriers to help-seeking such as the fear of stigma (Hennekam *et al.*, 2021a, b). Systematically, stigmatizing attitudes towards individuals with mental health issues is still largely prevalent in many organizations, causing grave concerns among employees in revealing their challenges within the workplace and preventing help-seeking (e.g. Elraz, 2018; Follmer and Jones, 2018).

Further, while there is growing interest in mental health at work, there is little research on the role of HRM and related technological innovation to support mental health (Hennekam *et al.*, 2021a; Lecours *et al.*, 2021). A recent review has reinforced the importance of the need for greater research on the interface between technology and management, with a focus on well-being at work (Cooke *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, contemporary research has further highlighted the urgent need for systematic HRM approaches for mental health and re-thinking the role of HRM and new technologies (e.g. data and people analytics) in supporting the mental health of the workforce (Johnson *et al.*, 2020).

To date, mental health in the workplace has often been put in the "too-hard" basket – neglected or under-addressed by HR practitioners and managers. This is not unique to management or HRM, and there is significant evidence that people from all walks of life and cultures seek social distance from those who have mental health challenges (Corrigan *et al.*, 2001; Hopkins and Figaro, 2021) and subsequently, avoid the topic of mental health. Although disruptive, the recent pandemic and its aftermath have provided an opportunity for employers and HRM departments to contribute to the paradigm shift around conceptualizing and responding to mental health. Sheer prevalence suggests that willingly or not, collectively, employers and HRM departments will no longer have the option to avoid this issue. Unprecedented levels of globally experienced distress have influenced re-definition of desirable employment, as indicated by the "great resignation" (Hopkins and Figaro, 2021). Combined with the overwhelming prevalence of mental health challenges globally, these factors mark a point of no return – mental health in the workplace can no longer be swept under the rug or ignored. For organizations seeking to attract and retain a high performing workforce, mental health must be promptly and meaningfully addressed.

Realizing the goal of more mentally healthy work environments requires true leadership, and true leadership requires courage (Brown, 2018). It is the courage of transformational and servant leaders that promotes and facilitates a positive culture where mental health is supported by proactive measures (Blegen and Severinsson, 2011). Enacting this courageous leadership also requires effective and innovative HRM solutions that push past and challenge outdated notions of what it means to have mental health challenges and how to address the topic. This paper sets out to better understand the literature on HRM innovations and interventions to support workforce mental health. We first examine HRM innovations and interventions around mental health, followed by discussion of the papers in the special issue. We then present a future research agenda to promote greater research on HRM and mental health, as well as greater engagement of organizations, HR departments and managers regarding the mental health of the workforce.

Human resource management and mental health
Although there is a dearth of literature on the role of HRM in managing and mitigating mental health challenges within the workforce, there is an emerging emphasis on HRM

interventions and workplace innovations to improve mental health and well-being. We discuss each of these in turn: (1) formal organizational HRM mental health interventions; (2) well-being-orientated HRM; (3) lived experienced mental health workforces; (4) training and development of line management and (5) digital and AI mental health resources.

First, formal HRM mental health interventions such as EAPs are an important formal mental health support service provided by many organizations. An EAP is a "work-based intervention program designed to assist employees in resolving personal problems that may be adversely affecting the employee's performance" (SHRM, 2023). EAPs are designed to support employees with personal and mental health challenges (Hastuti and Timming, 2021). Studies have demonstrated that EAPs support struggling employees through reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety (Richmond *et al.*, 2016), suicidal thoughts (Hastuti and Timming, 2022) and may be associated with increased employee productivity (Joseph and Walker, 2017). However, despite the growth in investment in EAPs by many organizations, there is often a reluctance for many workers to engage with EAPs for fear of employment repercussions, perceived feelings of stigma, lack of promotion and career advancement (Milot, 2019). As we stated earlier, there are also significant limitations and mixed evidence on the effectiveness of EAPs (Long and Cooke, 2023). There is important work to be done by organizations and HR departments to reduce the stigma and fear of mental health disclosure at the workplace, and we argue that greater mental health training and development for managers through a lived experience workforce is important. We further develop this point later.

Second, there has been a growth of interest in well-being-oriented HRM practices to promote employee mental health as a vehicle to support workforce and organizational sustainability (Guest, 2017; Cooper *et al.*, 2019). Well-being-oriented HRM practices may help to promote a mentally healthy workforce by preventing or at least mitigating the severity of mental health challenges among workers. We suggest that well-being-oriented HRM with a focus on contemporary, post-pandemic concepts of mental health which challenge stigma, also help encourage psychological safety, mental health disclosure and access to early interventions. Well-being HRM includes five types of HRM practices: investment in employees, engaging work, a positive social and physical environment, employee voice and emotional support (Guest, 2017) which we briefly outline in turn.

(1) The first set of practices promotes investment in workers and include recruitment and selection, training and development and opportunities for promotion. Greater investment in training and development of emotional skills such as emotional intelligence and resilience skills, as well as intra- and interpersonal skills are important for building mental health resources of the workforce. Opportunities for promotion and career development may lead to advanced technical and emotional skills/leadership training and development (Ayeleke *et al.*, 2019).

(2) The second set of practices aims to create engaging work for employees, with a focus on areas like appropriate workloads, role clarity and worker autonomy. Information sharing about operational and financial matters at the workplace may promote enhanced working relationships between managers and workers, as well as open and honest communication (Pariona-Cabrera *et al.*, 2024).

(3) The third set of practices focuses on a positive social and physical environment through the provision of occupational health and safety, equal employment opportunities, use of teamwork and fair rewards. Safe working conditions that minimize physical and psychological harm are crucial to reducing the mental health risk to workers (Zadow *et al.*, 2017; Jiang *et al.*, 2024). Through teamwork, workers may increase positive social interaction and even collaboration which has been

demonstrated to improve the mental health of workers (e.g. Cooper *et al.*, 2019). Fair rewards and equal employment opportunity promote fairness, equity and inclusion at the workplace which support the well-being of workers. It is important for HR professionals and managers to communicate with staff on mental health needs which must be informed and underpinned by HRM practices that decrease "them/us" divides and stigmatized attitudes.

(4) The fourth well-being set of practices promote employee voice and include participation in decision-making and various employee voice-mechanisms. Employee voice mechanisms such as employee surveys and employee participation committees are important ways to share views and experiences at the workplace which can be used to improve the mental health and well-being of workers (Brooks and Wilkinson, 2021).

(5) The fifth set of practices, focusing on organizational support, include performance management and work–life balance and employee involvement through participative and developmental practices (e.g. feedback and open communication) that are essential to enhance workers' mental health and well-being. Work–life balance practices, such as flexible work arrangements, have also been found to support the well-being of workers (e.g. Timms *et al.*, 2015). We also encourage performance management that is not only performative but also focuses on employee development and growth considering worker well-being, career aspirations and life stage/circumstances.

Third, creating cultural change around mental health at the workplace requires a stakeholder approach (Xiao *et al.*, 2024) in which HR departments, various levels of management and employees work in partnership to reduce stressors causing mental health challenges, especially around reducing the stigma associated with mental health challenges and encouraging mental health disclosure (Hastuti and Timming, 2021). An important cultural change approach towards mental health is a lived experienced (peer) approach. Mental health lived experience (LE) roles may involve coaching workers, line managers and middle managers on contemporary concepts of mental health and contributing to HR process and policy to emphasize more "people-friendly" workplaces. LE roles can be defined as roles held by "individuals who have personally experienced mental health diagnoses, service use, periods of healing and are now employed to use their perspectives, skills and understanding to help those accessing mental health services" (Wang *et al.*, 2023, p. 1974). These roles provide greater social support, training and awareness raising and contribute to safer environments for those experiencing mental health challenges to disclose and seek help. The use of LE roles could enable a program of early interventions in mental health and may support designing a workplace to ultimately change its culture by educating all managers and workers about challenges with mental health as a natural part of a normal life, rather than something to be feared or avoided. LE roles are important because they support greater empathy for mental health challenges through shared understanding and similar experiences, providing hope and modeling recovery (Byrne *et al.*, 2016). Importantly, LE workers can also provide an individual and organizational development role by changing the attitudes of managers and workers to reduce their prejudices towards colleagues suffering from mental health challenges, thereby reducing social categorization and stigma (Wang *et al.*, 2023).

There is growing evidence that LE roles in healthcare are associated with reduced stigma, and an improved culture of disclosing, mental health challenges as well as increased likelihood of healthcare workers with mental health challenges seeking appropriate treatments (Byrne *et al.*, 2022). Further, beyond healthcare settings, Wang *et al.* (2024),

published in this special issue, demonstrate through a case study, that LE-based mental health advocate roles provided a proactive and effective way to manage and mitigate mental health challenges in a corporate context.

Fourth, despite the growing interest in many organizations about mental health of the workforce, there is strong evidence that there are significant barriers to implementing HRM mental health interventions (Wang *et al.*, 2023). Line management plays a critical role in translating HR messages from senior managers to operationalize HR strategies, policies and practices (Stanton *et al.*, 2010). Line managers have the potential to influence employee attitudes and behaviors given their day-to-day interactions with employees (Fu *et al.*, 2020). Martin *et al.* (2015) suggests that line managers often lack the knowledge of appropriate mental health practices and processes to effectively support workers with mental health challenges. There is a growing recognition about the importance of workplace mental health and that line managers may need to enhance their knowledge, skills and practice to support this area (Bartram and Cooke, 2022). A recent qualitative study (Nielsen and Yarker, 2023) examined line managers' experience of managing workers returning from mental health related absences. Findings showed that managing workload, providing flexible working time arrangements and location of work, encouraging mental health check-ups and affording a supportive day to day work environment enabled line managers to provide more effective mental health support to workers. The authors argued that critical to the effectiveness of mental health support was mental health training and development afforded to line managers, beyond that offered by senior managers and HR departments. Gayed *et al.* (2019a, b) conducted a meta-analysis on training interventions to improve managers' confidence to support the mental health of workers. Based on ten studies using controlled trials, they reported that mental health training interventions focused on building managers' mental health knowledge, developing their non-stigmatizing attitudes and motivating their behavioral support had positive effects beneficial for workers and the organization. The authors suggest that training managers in workplace mental health can improve their understanding, attitudes and self-reported behavior to support workers with mental health challenges.

Fifth, we advocate further exploration of the use of HR analytics to provide detailed information for managers to support employees' well-being and mental health (Florkowski, 2021; Lathabhavan, 2024). The development of HR dashboards that track aggregated mental health and well-being indicators (e.g. sick leave, personal leave, anonymized employee attitudes) may contribute to organizations understanding health status, risks and needs, and better target mental health interventions (Lovato and Thomas, 2020). The use of e-mental health applications is innovative, temporally and geographically flexible, and cost effective to provide supportive services such as mental health screening, psychological assessment and treatment (Sprenger *et al.*, 2017), however, we caution it is important the ethical challenges associated with these technologies are explored from the perspective of both the employer and employee. E-mental health applications may also be useful for workers to track and support their own mental health. Moreover, we argue that much of the research on e-mental health resources and HR analytics to support mental health is in its infancy and we must be conscious of the limitations of the research designs and choice of participants with often limited inclusion of workers' perspectives, especially those with lived experience of mental health. We argue that further exploration of the applicability of e-mental health resources and HR analytics to support mental health may be useful to inform organizational approaches to mental health and HR innovations. Lathabhavan (2024), published in this special issue, reported that HR analytics improved organizations' evidence-based management and supported the implementation of mental health support practices. Another paper published in this special issue by Dutta *et al.* (2024) demonstrated that integrating HRM and AI enhanced the management of employee mental health and

well-being (e.g. use of AI chatbots to identify mental health challenges among workers). Figueroa and Aguilera (2020) documented popular digital mental health resources that organizations may utilize to support employees such as teleconferencing mental health services, access to mental health support apps and text-messaging interventions.

Special issue papers

This special issue provides a unique and timely function. We contribute to management understanding of mental health and well-being of the workforce across different work, cultural and institutional environments, with a focus on improving workers' mental health through cutting edge HRM innovation and interventions. The papers in this special issue draw together disparate literatures on mental health, human resource management, psychology, technology and innovation to better understand how to improve the management supports for mental health, particularly in a post-COVID world. Collectively, these papers improve the conceptual, theoretical and empirical base regarding the innovation, implementation and impact of contemporary HRM practices that specifically address the challenges of workforce mental health in post-pandemic employment.

The first paper titled "Extending the research frontiers of employee mental health through contextualization: China as an example with implications for human resource management research and practice" by Cooke and Xu (2024) draws on contemporary HRM literature, and 10 informal interviews with medical professionals, organizational leaders in the public sector and HR professionals, to better understand employee mental health research, practice and challenges in the Chinese work context. Cooke and Xu (2024) show that national, sectoral, occupational and individual-level factors may affect mental health challenges, individual coping techniques and organizational HRM mental health interventions. This paper is valuable because it contributes to sparse literature on mental health and HRM in the Chinese context. The authors call for further research on employees' mental health in this context to provide greater understanding of HRM mental health interventions and their effectiveness, as well as practical insights for policymakers and organizations. This paper presents a multi-level and multi-factor overview of employee mental health in the Chinese context and argues that a resource-based and multi-stakeholder approach is integral to enhance the management and mitigation of mental health challenges in Chinese organizations.

The second paper titled "Mental well-being through HR Analytics: Investigating an employee supportive framework" by Lathabhavan (2024) explores an emerging topic – the role of HR analytics in enhancing employees' mental health. Using cross-sectional survey data collected from 408 employees across various Indian organizations, she investigates multiple mediation mechanisms and boundary conditions underlying the relationship between HR analytics and staff mental well-being. Lathabhavan's findings show a positive contribution of HR analytics to employees' mental well-being. In the context of mental health, HR analytics enhances organizations' evidence-based management and facilitates the implementation of mental health supports. Through these functions, employees' mental well-being is improved. Another noteworthy discovery is that both supervisor support and team support can strengthen the positive effect of organizational mental health support on employees' mental well-being. Interestingly, when there is a lack of supervisor or team support, organizational mental health support may not be effective in enhancing – or might even slightly harm – employees' mental well-being. Despite the use of cross-sectional data, these findings offer novel insights into measures HRM can leverage to improve staff mental health. A key takeaway from the study is that organizations' mental health supports, prompted by HR analytics fostering evidence-based management, should be coupled with supervisor and team support to maximize its benefits for employee mental well-being.

The third paper titled "Bots for mental health: the boundaries of human and technology agencies for enabling mental well-being within organizations" by Dutta and Mishra (2024) builds on open system theory and adopts the technology-in-practice lens, to examine the roles of human and technology agencies in supporting employee mental health. Dutta and Mishra (2024) investigate a highly contemporary topic, the adoption and utility of AI in HRM functions. They conduct a two-stage study using case methodology and a qualitative grounded theory approach across diverse organizations, to assess viability of human and technology agencies in evaluating and enabling the mental well-being of staff. This study makes observations about the potential future application of AI to emerging HR practice and emphasizes the need for human interaction with technology, as well as a context facilitating this interaction. This is an important finding as the understanding of how AI may play a supportive role in creating psychologically safe and supportive workplaces provides new directions for development across organization and management systems and processes. Understanding the impact of human–machine interactions provides important insights to further refine the application of this cutting-edge technology for contemporary HRM practice on employee mental health. Importantly, the authors report that there is some evidence that integrating HRM and cutting-edge technologies appear to be positively affecting employees' mental well-being, while calling for further research to gain a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the interplay between human and machine. This paper makes an important contribution to the HRM literature by illustrating that the integration of HRM and AI and related technological advances has important implications for managing employee mental health and well-being.

The fourth paper titled "Mental health and expatriate psychological adjustment post-COVID-19: towards a new framework" by Derksen *et al.* (2024) adopts an innovative approach to analyzing the significance of mental health in expatriate management. By unraveling theoretical foundations rooted in health psychology, expatriate management and the broader field of HRM, the authors explore the role of HR practices, emphasizing mental health support, in facilitating expatriates' psychological adjustment to new work, family and social contexts in the host country. While pre-existing experiences, such as global impact, environment-related factors and interpersonal interactions, can influence psychological adjustment, the paper highlights that the development of such experiences is largely affected by expatriates' mental health status. This emphasis aligns with their recognition of mental health components as key foundations for pre-departure HRM interventions for expatriates. To delve deeper into the associated phenomena, the authors also conceptualize how pre-existing work experiences, as antecedents, can drive expatriates' mental health status, consequently shaping psychological adjustment and other associated outcomes. The paper establishes a conceptual base for future international HRM researchers and practitioners to identify specific measures or interventions that address expatriates' mental well-being, thereby contributing to their success in international assignments.

The fifth paper titled "Employing people who have 'been there, experienced that' to inform innovative HRM responses to workforce mental health issues: practice insights from industry" by Wang *et al.* (2024) documents a novel, timely and highly practical innovation (lived experienced workforce) which has grown exponentially in the mental health sector and is now starting to be adopted across other industries. This paper is the first of its kind to be published in Personnel Review as an Impact Case Study and sheds new light on HRM phenomenon that aims to generate important practical insights for HRM students, practitioners and scholars. In this Impact Case Study, Wang conducted desktop research and conversed with key stakeholders of an Australian organization, who have invested in a unique means of addressing mental health and well-being in the energy sector. The introduction of "mental health advocate" (MHA) roles provides a different approach, as the roles are employed internally – rather than the traditional provision of access to external Employee Assistance Programs – and importantly, focus on the real-world,

experiential knowledge of people who themselves have "lived experience" of mental health challenges and intimate understanding of specific challenges within their industry. MHAs have demonstrated positive impact on Energy Queensland's large, geographically dispersed workforce via a range of novel approaches including leadership development, mental health awareness training, as well as one-on-one support. Wang *et al.*'s paper outlines milestones and key enablers that supported the success of the roles and provides an initial framework for how other organizations may approach the introduction of similar roles to address workplace mental health proactively and effectively. This paper is among the first to introduce this innovative practice to human resource management scholars, providing inspiration for the further adoption of this practical, human-centered and common-sense initiative.

The sixth paper titled "Should I pet or should I work? Human-animal interactions and (tele)work engagement: an exploration of the underlying within-level mechanisms" by Silva (2024) offered an interesting study that aims at understanding how working at home and spending time with pets can have a positive impact on employees' mental health. Taking the theoretic perspective of human–animal interaction, she articulated that interactions with pets can have various positive benefits in a work setting – an area that has not yet received much attention. Using diary data collected over five consecutive days from 400 Portuguese participants who were teleworking in a range of occupations in early 2022, she revealed that having more interactions with pets produced more positive affect and led to increased engagement, both at within- and between-person level. She further explored the boundary condition of the relationship, identifying that how individuals' mindfulness state – measuring to what extent people are acutely aware of the present moment – can act as a meaningful moderator. Her findings showed that interactions with pets had a more salient positive impact among the less mindful employees – hence offering a compensating strategy when employees lack mindfulness. This study is timely considering the global shift towards teleworking, a flexible work practice that has been triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and appears to persist even after the pandemic. By recognizing that there are positive performance and well-being implications when workers are allowed to interact with pets during working hours, due to their increased work engagement, organizations and HRM departments can purposefully facilitate pet-friendly policies.

The final paper titled "A diary study on location autonomy and employee mental distress: the mediating role of task-environment fit" by Wu *et al.* (2024) in this special issue also explored the implications of flexible work HRM practices. They focused on the concept of location autonomy, or the autonomy that employees have in choosing where to perform their work. Drawing on person-environment fit as a broad perspective, Wu *et al.* (2024) argued that the autonomy workers have over their work location will lead to a perceived fit between their task and their environment, which accordingly helps to improve their mental health. They designed a diary study during COVID-19 period where many companies adopted hybrid work practices and collected data over 10 consecutive days from a total of 316 employees from six British organizations. Their findings supported their hypothesis, demonstrating the positive role of location autonomy in improving employees' perception of task-environment fit and subsequently reducing mental distress and improving job satisfaction. Importantly, Wu *et al.* (2024) controlled for other forms of job autonomy, including decision-making autonomy and work-method autonomy, which allowed them to tease out the unique benefits of location autonomy. Overall, being situated in the broader work design approach, this study offers a fine-grained examination of job autonomy, casting light on location autonomy which has been less well studied. This level of understanding gives organizations useful knowledge about the different types of autonomy supporting HRM practices that they could adopt to improve employee mental health.

Concluding remarks and future research on HRM and mental health

The collection of articles in this special issue presents a variety of interesting perspectives concerning HRM innovations and interventions in supporting workers' mental health. Together, they draw attention to contemporary societal, cultural, organizational as well as individual level factors that impact the way HRM systems, policies and practices are designed, and shed light on their effectiveness in implementation. The breadth of topics covered here highlights the complex and multi-faceted nature of managing workforce mental health issues in organizations in the post-Covid age, which presents both challenges and opportunities for HRM to make a large impact in this regard. In this section, we briefly discuss some of these factors, with the intention to direct future research on mental health and HRM.

The first point of interest concerns social and cultural factors, which sit beyond organizational boundaries and yet intricately impact the way organizations adopt effective HRM strategies in managing workers' mental health. In this regard, Cooke and Xu's (2024) paper in this special issue particularly cast light on an institutional, context-centric perspective in understanding how external (e.g. government, industry associations and unions) and internal stakeholders could promote or impair employee mental health. A contextualized perspective is also reflected in other papers which investigated how technological advancement (in the external context) can bring positive implications for HRM in managing mental health issues, through the adoption of AI-based chatbots (Dutta and Mishra, 2024) and HR analytics (Lathabhavan, 2024), and in papers that tap into changing work practices as a result of COVID-19 (Silva, 2024; Wu et al., 2024). As context plays a crucial role in HRM strategy and implementation (e.g. Mayrhofer et al., 2024), we expect research on HRM and mental health to actively take on this focus and purposefully disentangle how HRM strategies in addressing mental health issues are shaped by both organization's proximate contexts such as market competition, movement in the sector, technology adoption and broader context such as national and international clusters where organizations operate. We particularly call for attention to the latter, as the way mental health issues are viewed and addressed across societies are largely different (e.g. Huang and Zane, 2016; Krendl and Pescosolido, 2020). These cultural differences mean that a culturally sensitive approach is pivotal as organizations and their HRM functions respond to and manage workers' mental health. In this regard, future studies that take a cross-cultural and international approach in understanding HRM's role in mental health would help to address an important research gap. This direction might require future research to: (1) delve into more cultures, countries or regions where evidence about HRM approaches to managing mental health is limited; (2) compare mental health management practices across cultural and/or societal contexts to discover fundamental roots that drive the potential differences and (3) identify culturally-uniformed, as well as culturally-customized HRM approaches to tackling mental health changes; (4) examine different approaches to mental health supports and stigma across different industry and occupational groups (e.g. construction, mining, healthcare, hospitality and tourism industries).

Second, a key focus of HRM is on designing and implementing effective strategies, policies and practices in organizations, and in this regard several papers in this special issue have offered concrete evidence that directly shed light on the useful HRM solutions that help to address employee mental health issues. These solutions include, employing novel designated lived experience roles to create cultural change (Wang et al., 2024), designing work enhancing employee autonomy in work location decisions (Wu et al., 2024), adopting pet-friendly policies to enable telework well-being (Silva, 2024) and designing predeparture and post-arrival HRM interventions for expatriate adjustment (Derksen et al., 2024). This collection of studies covers a broad spectrum of focal HRM functions, and together provide useful knowledge as to how different practices and policies HRM can leverage to

improve workforce mental health. We would like to build on these studies and highlight that HRM is a holistic system, in which multiple focal HR areas need to be considered simultaneously in addressing employee mental health. In this regard, we call for more research to take a broad, holistic approach in studying HRM and mental health, while also addressing the potential interplay between, or joint influence of, diverse HRM domains or functions. For example, the relatively holistic HRM systems or practices such as high-performance work systems or well-being-orientated HRM, which involve various HRM functions (e.g. training and development, quality jobs that emphasize autonomy, developmental performance management and rewards, flexible work practices, employee voice practices), could be positively related to indicators of employee mental well-being (e.g. Alothmany *et al.*, 2023; Pariona Cabrera *et al.*, 2024). Meanwhile, it may be likely that various HRM functions can interact to affect workers' mental health. For instance, well-being-oriented training might be more effective in improving staff mental health, when coupled with other supportive HRM practices such as flexible work arrangements. Conversely, this type of training may be ineffective in addressing mental health challenges at work if no other HR support is in place. Thus, a holistic approach also needs future research to investigate what HRM functions and how they can synergistically interact to enhance mental health among workers. Furthermore, as demonstrated by case studies from Dutta and Mishra (2024) and Wang *et al.* (2024) in this special issue, some organizations have started to take novel approaches that have important implications in addressing mental health challenges. We encourage more academic-practitioner dialogue so that more academic research can cast attention to these types of HRM innovations adopted by industry and develop high-level theoretical frameworks that have potential to be generalized and applied across organizations and sectors.

Third, despite the growing interest in mental health at the workplace, many barriers and challenges remain in the attitudes towards, access and support for mental health at the workplace (Wang *et al.*, 2023). We call for greater research on the changing attitudes towards mental health of managers and employees at the workplace and the extent to which post COVID-19 acceptance and interest in mental health has continued. Importantly, as discussed above there are a diversity of beliefs, views and approaches to mental health which differ depending on cultures, profession, and industry. As such, unfortunately, the stigmatization of mental health persists in many workplaces (Thornicroft *et al.*, 2022) with some workers too afraid to disclose their mental health challenges for fear of negative career ramifications and professional exclusion (e.g. doctors, nurses, pilots, police) (Edwards and Kotera, 2021; Bianchi *et al.*, 2016). We encourage further research into the stigma of mental health at the workplace across a range of different occupations and industries. How can HR departments, managers and lived experience workers change entrenched attitudes towards mental health to reduce stigmatization? Moreover, in industries where stigmatization of mental health is entrenched such as the healthcare, police and construction industries, how can such beliefs be changed? And what is the role of HR departments in liaising with industry and educational institutions to change attitudes?

Finally, papers in this special issue have highlighted a need to include individual factors in understanding the role of HRM on mental health, either through the consideration of individual factors that shape the impact of HRM policies and practices (Derksen *et al.*, 2024; Silva, 2024), or by taking an individual level analysis to understand how HR policies and practices shape individuals' well-being and mental health outcomes (Lathabhavan, 2024; Silva, 2024; Wu *et al.*, 2024). A focus on individual perspectives is an important research stream in studying HRM and mental health, as mental health issues are highly personal and are often intertwined within individuals' personal background and life circumstances. As HRM scholars and practitioners design new systems and strategies in addressing mental health, while understanding the views of decision-makers and other stakeholders, it is also

crucial to incorporate the perspectives from employees who are on the receiving end to understand the impact of these strategies. We thus call for continued research attention by taking an individual level of analysis in understanding whether HRM innovations and interventions in improving mental health can achieve their intended impact. The response to this call involves a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding concerning crucial individual attributes or factors that can act as boundary conditions that assist to maximize the effectiveness of HRM interventions in resolving mental health challenges. These factors can also help to provide finer-grained knowledge as to how different individuals may react differently to the same HRM practices.

In conclusion, the diverse range of research studies covered in this special issue provides an encouraging panorama of insights into the intersection of HRM and mental health. Serving as a contemporary and invaluable snapshot, this collection of research has captured important conversations within the field. The exploration of novel approaches undertaken by HRM offers a forward-thinking perspective and has showcased the dynamic evolution of management strategies in addressing mental health challenges in the workplace. While celebrating the strides made in this collection, our observation underscores a notable gap in HRM research with mental health as its central focus. Despite the progress showcased here, there is a compelling need for a more comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationship between HRM practices and mental health outcomes. We aspire for this special issue to serve as a catalyst that can ignite a renewed interest among HRM scholars to delve deeper into this critical realm. By purposefully embracing mental health as a critical area of investigation, we anticipate a richer understanding and more effective interventions that will positively impact the well-being of workers across diverse organizational contexts.

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