

The role of HRM and HR professionals in making change happen



Anna Sender & Markus Gmür

The world is constantly in motion, and people and organizations are always trying to regain stability in order to design, plan and implement their strategic initiatives with some level of certainty. Simultaneously, change creates opportunities, drives innovation and accelerates processes in organizations which all may lead to building competitive advantage over time. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has speeded the digitalization of the workplaces in an unprecedented and unexpected scale and has led to rethinking not only of business models but also emerging opportunities in the HR practice.



An essential task of managers and human resource management (HRM) professionals is to navigate between systemic changes on the one hand and organisation's need for stability and orientation on the other: through organization and work design, structural and cultural development, and provision of opportunities for individual growth.

However, research indicates that many change initiatives in business, public and civil society organizations fail. Specifically, change efforts often fail because organizations tend to underestimate the importance of employees in the change process. Consequently, HRM practices, such as training in relevant skills, retention of key employees, and incentivizing change, may positively influence the employees' readiness for change and, therefore, the success of organizational change initiatives. However, the effectiveness of HRM practices is likely to heavily depend on how they are designed by HRM professionals and top management, implemented by supervisors, and perceived by employees.

This special issue provides a forum for original contributions in understanding of the role of HRM practices and HR function in the organizational change processes. Five scholarly papers and two practitioner statements illuminate the role of HRM in managing organizational change from different perspectives:

- *Hannah Mormann* and *Nada Endrissat* show how the profession of HRM has developed along a series of social or technological challenges: Each new challenge offers a new opportunity to base the legitimacy of HRM as an indispensable management function.

- *Léonie S. Mollet* and *Stephanie Kaudela-Baum* build their contribution on the role of HRM for the implementation of business agility. Case examples from New Zealand and Switzerland emphasize self-organized teams, individual and collective learning, continuous sensemaking and connecting individual engagement to a common purpose. *Jörg Staff* complements this HRM orientation in his practitioner statement as Chief People Officer of a German IT-provider.
- *Martina Kohlberger* explores tensions and conflicts that HRM professionals are exposed to during organizational change processes. Her case study demonstrates how HRM professionals cope with these challenges using different resourcing strategies: situational reframing, organizational preframing and institutional deframing. *Feena May* complements this view with her practitioner statement on the igniting, energizing, and inspiring role that HRM leaders can play for people and organizations.
- *Lukas Hölzl*, *Stefan Berger* and *Heike Bruch* develop the concept of an ambidextrous HRM linking explorative and exploitative HRM-practices in recruiting, training and development, feedback and compensation systems. Based on survey data on 16'740 employees from 94 organizations they show the direct effect of HRM on employees' ambidextrous behavior and organizational performance, moderated through transformational leadership.
- *Lea Rutishauser* and *Steffen R. Giessner* explore and empirically test the interactive influences of empowerment enhancing HRM practices and a relational leadership on job satisfaction change and turnover intentions of employees. HRM and leadership must be seen in a close connection, when it comes to dealing with organizational change.

As editors, we hope that with this special issue can make a significant contribution to the discussion about HRM's role in initiating and harnessing organizational change and coping with its side effects, and that the papers will receive the appropriate dissemination in international research and practice.

Anna Sender, Dr., is senior research associate at the Center for Human Resource Management at the University of Lucerne and lecturer at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. She holds a PhD in economics from University of Zurich. Her areas of expertise include strategic Human Resource Management imperatives such as talent management, compensation, international HRM as well as organizational and individual opportunities and challenges related to non-standard work. She represents Switzerland in the international network CRANET and serves as a board member of ZGP, Zürich HR professional association.

Address: Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Zentralstrasse 9, 6002 Luzern/CH, anna.sender@hslu.ch

Markus Gmür, Dr., is full professor of npo-management at the University of Fribourg/Freiburg and research director of the Institute for Research in Management of Associations, Foundations and Cooperatives (Verbandsmanagement Institut, VMI). Until 2008 he was professor of human resource management at the European Business School, Oestrich-Winkel (Germany). His current research focus is on leadership, human resources and entrepreneurial orientation in nonprofit organisations.

Address: Universität Fribourg/Freiburg, Verbandsmanagement Institut (VMI), Boulevard de Pérolles 90, 1700 Fribourg/CH, markus.gmuer@unifr.ch