
Guest editorial: “Better than us” workers, robots and the HRM of the future

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The theme of this special issue, “Better than us? Workers, robots and the HRM of the future,” aims to explore themes related to automation, robotics and their impact on the workforce, which are certainly relevant to discussions about the future of human resource management (HRM).

The TV series “*Better than US*,” setting in a near-future where advanced humanoid robots called “Bots” are integrated into society, was used to provide some thought-provoking insights stimulate explorative researches on ethical, social and managerial themes and on the implications of advanced robotics, the human–robot relationships and the potential for robots to replace human workers in various organizations. It was served as a starting point for discussions about how HRM might need to adapt to the increasing use of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace.

The authors have put in evidence in their papers the challenges and opportunities posed by the integration of automation, AI and robotics in the workplace.

M. N. Jatobá, J. J. Ferreira, P. O. Fernandes and J. P. Teixeira provided the first systematic literature review, which showed, through a strategic and managerial perspective, the AI applications related to the HRM dimensions, thanks also to the identification of the key trends in the related literature. In particular, with the use of the Scopus database, 61 articles between 2002 and 2022 have been collected and analyzed. It can be sum up that the practical implications of the paper concern essentially the HR area for which it presents relevant guidelines supporting decision-making processes and, basically, the adoption of AI.

H. Peng’s paper is based on the awareness that as long as the presence of robots (traditional or new) at work increases and entails their coexistence with workers, the need to rethink work and workplaces emerges. Thus, new HRM questions continuously need to be answered through the examination of the implication of new spatiotemporal dynamics of work created through the interaction between the categories of actors abovementioned. More specifically, by developing the notion of work universes, which are the spatiotemporal boundaries generated by the act of working through the interaction between workers and robots, the study presented a theoretical framework that separates three forms of spatiotemporal dynamics and their relative work universes at different levels and also offered two arrays in order to suggest how to manage the change of work in organizations due to these.

The interactions between humans and commercial robots are the heart of the S. Y. Chou, K. Barron and C. Ramser’s paper, which had the specific purpose to provide a new theory that can explain and predict in which way and time the former interact with the latter. In order to achieve their goal, the scholars grounded their work on the utility maximization theory (UMT), made up of four guiding principles and propositions focused on how humans and commercial robots interact. First, humans are proposed to invest sufficient resources to let the interaction start, and then they have expectations of utility gain maximization from that connection, but if they cannot reach what they expect from it, they interrupt the specific human-to-commercial robot interaction. Finally, humans try to reinvest sufficient resources in another interaction with the same expectation of utility maximization. In conclusion, it can be easy to understand that this study can suggest many managerial implications for effectively managing human-to-commercial robot interactions.



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E. de Boissieu and P. Baudier, through 32 interviews conducted on Chinese and French consumers of luxury products from the Gen-Z and millennial generation, put into light how the perception of the consumers is closely related to their cultural setting and their familiarity with the technology, determining an ambivalence of the perception of social robots versus human-like influencers. Social robots are invading our daily lives; however, little research has been done on how individuals perceive them. Results were discussed using the source credibility theory, analyzing the attractiveness (physical and content), expertise, trustworthiness and similarity.

R. Ulatowska, E. Wainio and M. Pierzchała drew our attention to the innovative trends used in HRM in the business services sector in Finland and Poland. Chatbots, dashboards, application software systems, virtual HRM assistant and digital tools are emerged as main innovations in HR departments in both Poland and Finland. In Finland, these innovations were already introduced by modern businesses organizations before the pandemic period, while in Poland, the innovations were mostly implemented during and after the pandemic period. The need for new competencies in HRM follows these innovations.

E. Uguz Arsu and E. Sipahi Döngül, in their article, explore the human-robot interaction and the effects of robotic systems on employment. An accurate systematic literature review systematically that examining six dimensions (job satisfaction, performance, job loss, employment, motivation and employment) has shown there is a gap in descriptive quantitative studies. The effects of employee-robot collaboration, robotic systems and robotic systems on variables, such as motivation, job satisfaction, job loss, performance and employment, require further study.

Yu Zhou, Lijun Wang and Wansi Chen aimed, by conducting a systematic review of 126 articles, to analyze the dark side of AI-enabled HRM on employees based on AI algorithmic features such as comprehensiveness (analysis and data collection), instantaneity (intervention and interaction) and opacity (hard-to-understand and hard-to-observe). Findings highlight the importance for organizations to adopt ethical and employee-friendly approaches when implementing AI algorithms. This article establishes a foundation for advancing research in AI-enabled HRM.

In summary, the integration of robots and automation in the workplace presents both opportunities and challenges for HRM. The HRM of the future will need to be agile, tech-savvy and focused on the well-being and skill development of employees while ensuring that human and robot workers can collaborate effectively. Ethical, legal and social considerations will also play a significant role in shaping the HRM landscape in a world where robots and automation are more prevalent.

As guest editors, we would like to express our profound appreciation to the reviewers for their insightful criticism during the articles' evaluation and revision processes. Furthermore, we would like to extend our deepest thanks to the esteemed people who allowed us to bring our ideas in this special edition. Finally, we express our gratitude to each and every author for their contributions. Their hard work, commitment and vision have made this volume possible.

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