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Conceptual Framework of Inclusive Human Resource Management to Support Neurodiversity Employment

Ong Sin Ru and Dr. Rossilah Jamil

Azman Hashim International Business School, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Email: dorisongsnr89@gmail.com, rosillah@ibs.utm.my

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Abstract

This study aims to proposed a conceptual framework for inclusive human resource management in supporting neurodiversity employment. As organizations increasingly commit to fostering diversity and inclusion, the integration of neurodiversity into the workforce has emerged as a contemporary trend. This concept seeks to harness the unique talents of neurodivergent individuals, thereby enhancing organizational performance. However, the adoption of neurodiversity also introduces distinctive challenges within organizations' human resource management practices, an aspect that has received limited attention in the human resource management literature. To address this gap, the study explores institutional forces, human resource management approaches, and perceived inclusion that influence the support for neurodiversity within organizations based on relevant literature. Through this exploration, the authors aim to provide a comprehensive understanding and a practical framework for guiding future research on neurodiversity in the workplace, enriching the discourse on inclusive human resource management and facilitating more informed organizational practices.

Keywords: Neurodiversity Employment, Neurodivergent, Institutional Forces, Human Resource Management Approach, Perceived Inclusion

Introduction

The global workforce has undergone substantial demographic shifts, leading to a heightened awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusion. This is evidenced by the increased employment of individuals with neurological conditions, indicating the recognition of neurodiversity as a vital dimension of diversity within organizations. The term neurodiversity was first introduced by sociologist Judy Singer in 1999 (Singer, 1999). Neurodiversity refers to the biological variation in human brain function and cognition which encompasses different types of brain functionality (CIPD, 2018; Walker, 2021). It spans a spectrum of conditions, such as autism spectrum disorders (ASD), dyslexia, attention deficit

hyperactivity disorders (ADHD), dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia, and is characterised by neurology that diverges from the typical range or involves 'differently wired' brains with cognitive disabilities (Walker, 2014; CIPD, 2018; Brinzea, 2019; Morgan, 2019; Goldberg, 2023). Individuals within this spectrum are commonly known as 'neurodivergent' (Walker, 2014). Those categorized as high-functioning or requiring minimal support may have the potential to undergo training for integration into the employment market (Jamil et al., 2022).

The adoption of neurodiversity initiatives is gaining prominence in management practices (Austin and Pisano, 2017). Human resource (HR) practitioners are increasingly tasked with the responsibility of managing diversity effectively (Richards et al., 2019). Notably, organizations in Western countries are integrating neurodiversity into their HR strategies to identify and harness the talents of neurodivergent individuals while adeptly handling diversity issues. This underscores the imperative for HR professionals to implement interventions supporting employee well-being and resilience, fostering an environment where individuals can thrive (Walshe, 2022). However, a tension arises between the scalability of HR processes and the goal of attracting neurodiverse talent (Austin and Pisano, 2017). The evolving nature of work poses additional challenges in successfully accommodating disabled employees in the workplace. The recruitment, training, development, and workplace design practices are often challenged when hiring neurodivergent individuals, disrupting established social norms (OECD, 2017). Pérez-Conesa et al. (2020) argue for the normalization of disability in Human resource management (HRM) practices. Austin and Pisano (2017) stress the need to reform HRM processes to better support neurodivergent individuals in recognizing their strengths and talents, potentially offering a competitive advantage to employers. This study aims to explore and provide insights into these complex dynamics, contributing to the ongoing discourse on inclusive HRM practices for neurodiversity.

Problem Statement

This study is prompted by the existing gap in inclusive human resource management practices and neurodiversity. Literature on neurodiversity in the context of HRM has been notably limited. Firstly, the field of HRM and neurodiversity lacks systematic theory building (Cavanagh et al., 2017; Richard et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2022). Despite the increasing interest in exploring neuroatypicality within organizational diversity, there exists a surprising scarcity of research effectively bridging these two realms of study (Khan et al., 2022; LeFevre-Levy et al., 2023). Recognizing the necessity for HRM theories to guide empirical investigations into neurodiversity Krzeminska et al (2019); Patton (2019), this study employ institutional theory to offer insight into how institutional forces, norms, and organizational practices shape the adoption of neurodiversity employment.

Secondly, there is a notable scarcity of literature addressing comprehensive HRM practices that effectively support neurodiversity in the workplace (Seitz and Smith, 2016; O'Hara, 2022). For instance, Kulkarni and Valk (2010) argued that many HR professionals often rely solely on personal experiences in managing neurodiversity due to limitations in organizational policies and practices. Consequently, the absence of a well-established HRM framework can lead to significant challenges in seamlessly managing routine activities within an organization (Parameswari and Yugandhar, 2015). To address this, the study explored an

comprehensive HRM approach that included HR philosophy, roles, overall HR policies, and HRM practices to facilitate neurodiversity in the workplace.

Thirdly, although neurodiversity is conceptualized as a strategy for neurodivergent individuals to secure employment, they continue to face barriers in the workplace. Therefore, gaining insights into the perceived inclusion of neurodivergent individuals is crucial for a deeper understanding of how this specific population perceives and responds to societal expectations (Jolley, 2018). This study proposes a conceptual framework to address the key gaps identified in current research on inclusive human resource management supporting neurodiversity.

Literature Review

Neurodiversity Employment

The concept of neurodiversity is employed to address a distinct aspect of organizational diversity and inclusion efforts in which aiming to tap into the distinctive talents of individuals with diverse cognitive perspectives (CIPD, 2018). At its core, neurodiversity is grounded in a strength-based perspective that encourages recognizing valid and diverse pathways within the spectrum of human capabilities (Krzeminska and Hawse, 2020; Walkowiak, 2021). Essentially, neurodiversity employment involves acknowledging, embracing, and accommodating individuals with neurological differences in the workplace.

Neurodiversity introduces distinctive challenges in the workplace. The intricate nature of neurodiversity can pose hurdles for employers, particularly those lacking the necessary resources to support inclusive employment initiatives (Krzeminska et al., 2019). Firstly, employers express significant concerns about providing suitable accommodations for neurodivergent individuals, as these accommodations may vary. Secondly, there is a common apprehension among employers that hiring neurodivergent workers will impose a heavier burden on managers, supervisors, and human resource personnel, necessitating a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved in providing human support measures. Thirdly, neurodivergent individuals encounter substantial challenges from the early stages of the employment process, especially during applications and interviews where communication and social difficulties may become apparent (Muller et al., 2003).

Human Resource Management (HRM) Approach

In the contemporary landscape, HRM is oriented towards strategic endeavours such as mergers and acquisitions, talent management, succession planning, industrial and labour relations, ethical considerations, and fostering diversity and inclusion. Diverse definitions of HRM offered by different authors underscore the varied perspectives scholars bring to this field. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) describe HRM as a broad and integrated framework for managing people in organisations. It suggests that HRM encompasses a wide range of organisational activities and responsibilities. Essentially, HRM aims to resolve the complexities of managing people in the modern organisational landscape and is concerned with the ethical dimension of how a set should treat people of moral values (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). Furthermore, Boxall and Purcell (2022) described HRM as an essential and continuous process deeply integrated into the organisation's core.

The perspective of Human Resource Management (HRM) presented by Armstrong and Taylor (2020) holds significance in the context of neurodiversity employment. Their

comprehensive approach to HRM suggests that HRM is implemented through HRM systems operating within an HR delivery framework. HRM systems are described as '*patterns of planned human resource activities intended to enable an organisation to achieve its goals*' (Jiang et al., 2012). The architecture of the HRM system includes components such as philosophy, which provides guiding principles and values about human resources, HR roles of support employees, policies that offer guidelines on what is to be achieved, and practices necessary to fulfil the policies (Jiang et al., 2012; Armstrong, 2014; Ostroff and Bowen, 2016). This HR delivery framework becomes essential in addressing challenges within HR, particularly in the context of workplace neurodiversity.

HR philosophy plays a crucial role in providing guiding principles that define the value and treatment of employees (Riaz et al., 2021; Monks et al., 2013; Kellner et al., 2016; Blom et al., 2021; and Posthuma et al., 2013). Armstrong and Taylor (2014) emphasise the theoretical underpinnings guiding HR practices. It suggests that HR philosophy is not just a set of operational principles but a strategic and theoretical framework that shapes the management of individuals within an organisation. In the context neurodiversity, HR philosophy emphasizes equal opportunities, accommodation, and the importance of creating a culture that embraces and understands the varied needs of neurodivergent employees. It is grounded in ethics aligns with creating policies and practices that ensure equitable treatment for neurodivergent employees, promoting a work environment free from bias and prejudice.

HR plays a multifaceted role in addressing the evolving needs and challenges faced by organizations and employees (Sarala et al., 2016; Johnson, Ennis-Cole, and Bonhamgregory, 2020; Sarvaiya, Arrowsmith, and Eweje, 2021; Indradevi and Sathya, 2023). According to Armstrong and Taylor (2014), the fundamental role of HR is to deliver HRM services, with HR managers responsible for translating HR policies into practice. In the context of neurodiversity employment, However, Armstrong and Taylor (2014) remind that HR practitioners need to be mindful of ethical considerations in serving as role models and confronting unethical practices. In neurodiversity employment, HR plays a crucial role in aligning the organization with neurodiversity goals. This involves fostering commitment, addressing specific needs of neurodivergent individuals, and recognizing and developing their unique strengths.

Additionally, HR policies serve as guiding principles for the development of HRM practices (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014; Damhuis, 2014; Ostroff and Bowen, 2016; Boon et al., 2019; Collins, 2021). Armstrong and Taylor (2014) claim HR policies serve as formal expressions of an organization's values, specifically designed to articulate how employees should be treated. As the overall HR policy, this comprehensive statement actively defines the organization's commitment to fulfilling its social commitments to neurodivergent. Notably, Yosminaldi and Ahmad (2022) highlight the ethical considerations embedded in HR policies which emphasise the role of HR policy in promoting the well-being of employees through well-planned and effective policy-making. Malik, Lenka, and Sahoo (2018) emphasize the importance of HR managers confront in developing policies that effectively meet the varied needs of neurodivergent workers.

HRM practices are significant to drive HRM practices to integrate knowledge into organizations and enhance employees' informal workplace learning (Khandakar and Pangil, 2019). HRM practices involve organization design and development, employee resourcing,

learning and development, performance and reward, as well as the provision of services to enhance employee well-being (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014). Armstrong and Taylor (2014) emphasize a broad perspective of HRM practice which includes employee well-being. In the context of neurodiversity, HR practitioners play a crucial role in adapting HR practices to meet evolving challenges (Kowalski and Loretto, 2017). Recognizing this, Austin and Pisano (2017) astutely advocate for the incorporation of adaptability in HRM practices, especially in hiring, recruiting, and embracing perspectives from 'the edges' which includes neurodiverse talent. Bruyère and Colella (2022) emphasize the need for HRM practices to focus on diversity, inclusion, and ethical climates to support neurodiversity. Markel and Elia (2016) propose recruitment, training and development, performance management, and employee relations as HRM practices to foster a more inclusive environment for neurodiversity. Molloy et al (2022) further recommend prioritizing individual considerations and recognizing the unique needs of each worker across various HR practices, including recruitment, training, performance management, and team participation.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory focus on the impact of both formal and informal rules, norms, and practices within organizations. This theory offers insights into how institutional pressures, cultural norms, and organizational practices shape the adoption of neurodiversity employment. Institutional theory explores how individuals, groups, and larger entities shape social structures, including rules, norms, and established modes of interaction (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Scott (2001, 2008, and 2014) further articulates institutional theory by presenting a conceptual framework that identifies three foundational pillars—regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive—that collectively shape the structures of institutions.

The regulative pillar underscores how institutions constrain and standardize behaviour, exerting a significant influence on organizational entities like human resource management practices. This regulatory impact is manifest in public laws, regulations, codes, rules, directives, relational governance, power systems, standard operating procedures, and concrete mandates (Scott, 2014; Theodorakopoulos and Budhwar, 2015). Meyer and Rowan (1977) suggest that organizations can be influenced or invited to collaborate, implying that the implementation of neurodiversity may be guided or constrained by these regulatory factors within institutional frameworks.

The normative pillar in institutional theory focuses on prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory aspects in social contexts. According to Scott (2014), expectations within this pillar are defined as specific goals and roles, resulting in the formation of roles that dictate suitable goals and activities for individuals in particular social positions. This is particularly relevant to neurodiversity initiatives, as obtaining accreditation and certification from standard-setting bodies, such as professional associations, aligns with the normative aspects of institutional theory. Theodorakopoulos and Budhwar (2015) underscore the role of the normative pillar in promoting fairness, inclusiveness, and leveraging diversity for competitive advantage in organizational procedures. In the neurodiversity employment context, adhering to morally guided attributes becomes crucial for upholding legitimacy within normative institutions.

The cultural-cognitive pillar within institutional theory underscores the significance of actors and their interactions in shaping cognitive structures through internalized social

realities (Scott, 2014). This pillar emphasizes that cultural-cognitive elements can be strategically influenced through intentional processes guided by regulative and normative agents. Within organizations striving for neurodiversity acceptance, the cultural-cognitive pillar involves fostering narratives, shared perceptions, and a shared logic of action, highlighting the importance of internalized and culturally accepted change (Scott, 2014; Palthe, 2014). Company culture as a vital component of this pillar. It plays a pivotal role in shaping workplace dynamics, especially regarding the acceptance of neurodivergent individuals. Achieving neurodiversity inclusion requires concerted efforts from leadership and human resources to embed and promote neurodiversity acceptance within the organizational culture (Loiacono and Ren, 2018).

Perceived Inclusion

Perceived inclusion develops as a nuanced viewpoint in inclusion debates. Shore et al. (2011) define perceived inclusion as the simultaneous satisfaction of belonging and uniqueness. Building on this idea, Jansen et al (2014) refine the concept of perceived inclusion, claiming that it is significantly affected by the messages individuals receive from their social group about their status within it. In essence, an individual's experience of inclusion or exclusion is influenced by the communication, behaviour, and treatment they get within the group. Furthermore, Jansen et al. (2014) present a two-dimensional perspective on inclusion, emphasizing perceptions of belonging and authenticity.

Belongingness is described as employees' perceptions of creating and maintaining supportive and caring relationships with their colleagues (Shore et al., 2011). In the workplace, people aim for positive relationships with colleagues across all levels in the company. This pursuit creates sentiments of connection and integration into the workplace while also earning praise from peers and superiors. Given the difficulties neurodivergent people encounter in social relationships and communication, challenges to fitting in and getting along with others may arise in the workplace (Baldwin and Costley, 2016). Understanding perceived belonging among neurodivergent people is critical for developing inclusive environments that meet their various needs and improve their overall well-being.

Authenticity is fundamentally built in the humanistic psychology tradition (Reis, Braga, and Trullen, 2017). Jansen et al (2014) define authenticity as the degree to which a group member feels allowed and encouraged to be true to oneself. Perceived authenticity is critical for relational functioning and well-being, particularly for people who have concealable stigmatized identities, such as neurodiversity. Feelings of authenticity are important in determining if one is living according to common cultural values of a good life (Rivera et al., 2019). In contrast, the perception of inauthenticity has been linked to low well-being (Newheiser et al., 2017). Understanding how neurodivergent individual navigate authenticity at work is critical for developing inclusive workplaces that value their unique needs and contribute to great professional experiences.

Conceptual Framework

This study is motivated by a compelling desire to fill a significant gap in existing research of inclusive human resource management in supporting neurodiversity. The study proposed a conceptual framework of inclusive human resource management dedicated to support neurodiversity employment. The proposed conceptual framework is illustrated in Diagram 1.

This framework comprises institutional forces, human resource management approaches, and perceived inclusion to facilitate neurodiversity employment. Within the conceptual framework, institutional forces encompass regulative, normative, and culture-cognitive pillars, playing a pivotal role in shaping neurodiversity employment. These forces prompt the human resources management approach to facilitate neurodiversity employment, integrating HR philosophy, roles, overall HR policies, and practices for effective support. The focus on perceived inclusion within the workplace emphasizes belongingness and authenticity. This integrated approach aims to provide a solid foundation for understanding and implementing inclusive practices tailored to the diverse needs of neurodivergent individuals in the workplace. It serves as a valuable resource for academics and practitioners seeking to guide organizations in cultivating a diverse and inclusive workforce.

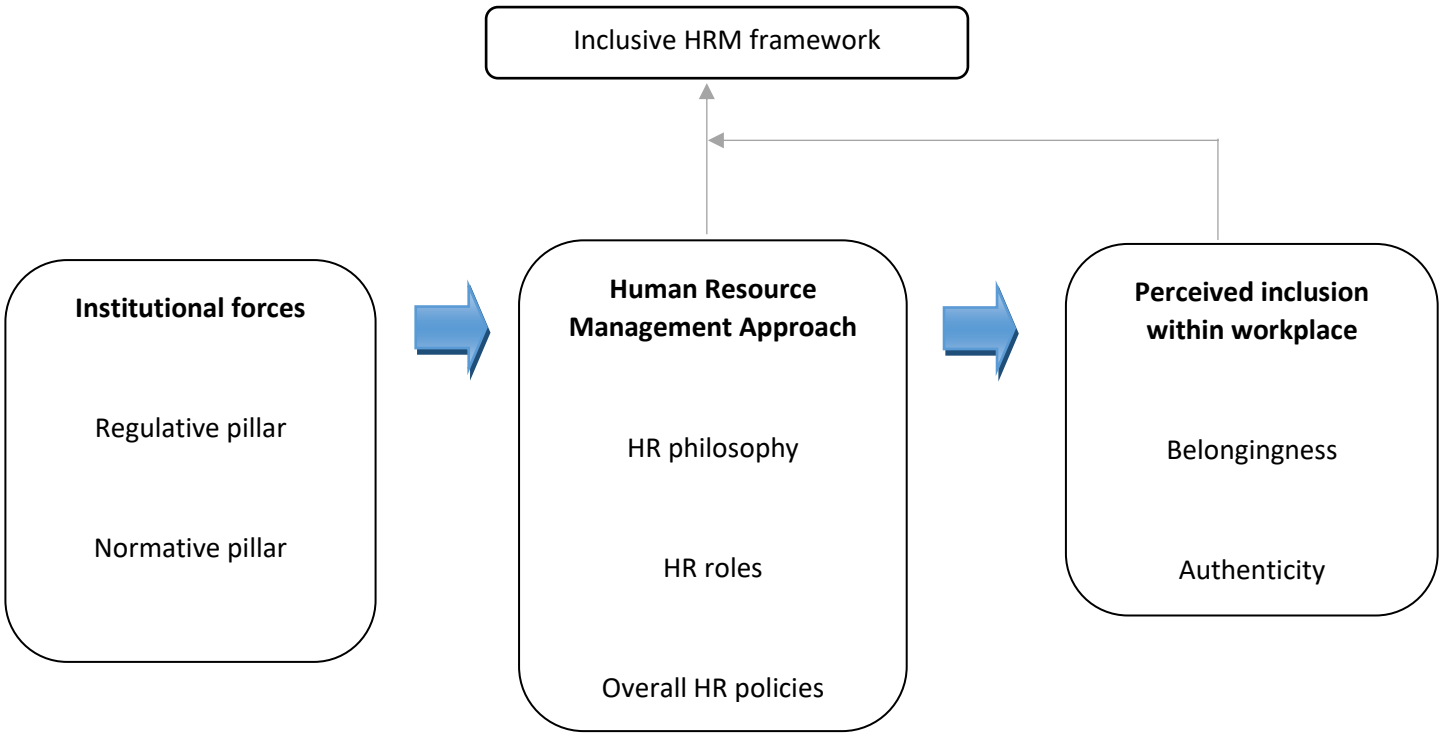

Diagram 1 : Conceptual framework of Inclusive Human Resource Management in supporting Neurodiversity Employment

Conclusion

This study embarks on a ground breaking effort to seamlessly integrate neurodiversity concepts into the HRM framework, driven by the imperative to address a notable research gap in inclusive human resource management. It pioneers the study of neurodiversity employment initiatives in the workplace through using institutional theory. This study makes a unique contribution by providing an organized and practical approach to inclusive human resource management, as well as a thorough roadmap for supporting diversity and nurturing inclusive workplaces. Firstly, by adeptly addressing existing gaps in HRM theories concerning neurodiversity research, this study significantly advances the HRM literature and contributes to the ongoing neurodiversity initiatives. Second, the adoption of a holistic HRM and inclusion approach establishes a robust framework, not only guiding current practices but also serving as a foundational guide for future investigations into HRM approaches supporting neurodiversity in the workplace. Thirdly, this framework forms a theoretical basis for

understanding the generation and manifestation of disadvantage, as well as the formulation and dissemination of strategies for managing diversity and inclusion. Within this inclusive HRM framework, the study encourages the exploration of alternative strategies aimed at ensuring the long-term sustainability of neurodiversity, marking a crucial step toward a more inclusive and equitable organizational landscape.

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