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Addressing big societal challenges in HRM research: A Society-Actors-Processes-Policy framework

Abstract

The paper advances a new ‘Society-Actors-Processes-Policy’ (SAPP) framework to aid policy makers and management scholars in addressing big societal challenges. A new sensitizing framework is developed from evaluating and extending policy debates in top management journals linked to societal challenges. SAPP contributes to policy, practice and management theory by offering a novel perspective to conceptualize and examine the relationship between organizations, people management, policy making and big societal challenges across micro, meso and macro levels. The framework supports more meaningful theorizing to a wider public community by encouraging dialogue between academics, policy makers and other stakeholders. SAPP’s conceptual contributions link theory with policy and place management and HRM scholars in a stronger agenda-setting position to impact future equitable and sustainable policy making.

Keywords: societal challenges, grand challenges, policy, HRM, systems theory, stakeholder theory

Introduction

In a recent essay, Harley & Fleming (2021) concluded that relatively few studies (2.8%) in top tier management journals tackle critically major societal challenges – such as inequalities, climate change or precarious employment. The authors offer a reflective analysis of possible explanations: neo-liberal business school demands, publishing metrics and journal rankings, among other ideas concerned with the structures of academia. Similarly, Aguinis et al. (2021) demonstrated that only a small percentage of HRM and OB journals consider policy implications (1.5%). In our paper we build on these insights but take a different angle by

focusing on societal challenges and consolidating policy recommendations published in management journals, including the sub-disciplines of human resource management, work sociology, employment relations, social psychology as well as general management. Only a small proportion of articles published between September 1st 2010 and September 1st 2022 (inclusive) focused on big societal challenges (4%), and even fewer (3%) considered policy implications/recommendations.

Our analysis concludes that while existing research shows ‘potential’ to offer meaningful contributions by working with policy makers to tackle big contemporary problems (Budd et al., 2022; Phan, 2021; Wickert et al., 2021), much scholarship is found wanting in terms of how to connect big societal challenges with theory and the enactment of policy and practice. Building on the existing ‘potential’, we offer a new sensitizing framework which conceptualizes big societal challenges as interconnected by processes of workplace change, policy issues between actors, and policy context dimensions.

The framework is a novel dual-purpose schema for policy makers and management researchers based on four components of ‘Societal challenges, Actor agency, Processes of change, and Policy enactment’ (SAPP). On one hand, the proposed SAPP framing responds to calls for greater empirical, conceptual and policy focus in general management and HRM research on issues that are a source of public concern (Bapuji et al., 2020; George et al., 2016; Phan, 2021). It is proposed that a SAPP perspective can augment linkages between theory and policy to make research more meaningful to a wider public community. The framework further benefits researchers by urging them to evaluate and refine multi-level approaches in their respective research fields, thereby enhancing research reliability and conceptual rigor. Moreover, SAPP supports policy makers with a toolkit for sustainable policy making in order to address societal challenges and make the world a better place (Markman & Wood, 2022). The research questions posed are: 1) How and to what extent are policy options pertaining to

big societal challenges embedded in management research? 2) What are the implications for policy makers, management theory and future research?

The article is structured as follows. Next, we outline the method adopted to consolidate and evaluate the policy implications relating to big societal challenges considered in top management journals. Section three presents the findings, from which we then build a dual-purpose SAPP schema to elucidate the implications for policy, theory and future research. The paper concludes by reflecting on SAPP's limitations and boundary conditions.

Method

We did not conduct a systematic or traditional review in this paper as our aim was to consolidate the policy implications/recommendations considered in top management journals. Notwithstanding, we did employ a specific strategy to identify relevant articles (see Figure 1). We searched general management, HRM, work sociology and employment relations journals for policy considerations and debates associated with societal challenges. The following broad search string was formulated after conducting an initial scoping exercise focusing on articles discussing societal challenges in general management journals: “Global challenges” OR “societal” OR “society” OR “grand challenges” OR “crises” OR “crisis” OR “the changing nature of business” OR “the changing nature of work” OR “the changing nature of organizations” OR “contemporary challenges” OR “practical challenges”.

Insert Figure 1 about here

We first searched the abstracts, keywords and titles in 18 journals classed as 4 or above in the Chartered Association for Business Schools' (CABS) journal ranking list (Wood & Bischoff, 2020; Zahoor et al., 2020)¹. Of these 18 journals, 9 were in the ‘general management’

¹ The CABS list ranks journals from 1 to 4* and has been used by many researchers because of the minimum standards required to feature in the list

category of the CABS list, 5 were in the ‘HRM, Work and Employment’ category, and 4 were in the ‘Organization Studies’ category. This search in the journal databases returned a total of 1802 articles (including conventional articles, book reviews, editorials etc.), which constituted 4% of the total number of articles published in these journals. At this point, it was decided to focus on policy recommendations/implications published in articles from September 1st 2010 to September 1st 2022 (inclusive). The selected timeframe of 12 years provided a window on important major global societal events, such as Trump’s election, the financial crisis, COVID-19, Black Lives Matter protests, the Mee Too movement, and Brexit in the UK and Europe. 13851 articles were published between September 1st 2010 and September 1st 2022 and 984 included our search terms. Of those 984 articles, 515 articles focused on societal challenges, general management, people management and work issues; and 441 articles focused on implicit and/or explicit policy recommendations in their discussion and/or conclusion sections.

The articles were organized in the reference management tool Mendeley. Book review articles were removed along with articles centring on historical events rather than contemporary issues, or articles focusing on organization specific crises rather than societal challenges (such as a team work crisis). Articles were then excluded if they did not provide a clear focus on general management, HRM and workplace issues, which left 515 relevant articles. Following Aguinis et al. (2021) articles were excluded at the final stage if they did not mention explicit and/or implicit policy debates that raise implications and/or recommendations in their discussion or conclusion sections. ‘Policy implication/debate’ is considered an elastic term and we followed AMP’s definition of policy as “governance principles that guide the choices, behaviours and courses of action of individuals, organizations, communities and societies,” (Markman & Wood, 2022: 2). In this way the definition allowed capture of policy debate, policy recommendations and broader implications considered for policy actions and behaviours of actors and/or institutions. Explicit implications

and/or recommendations include the terms ‘policy’, ‘policies’, ‘regulation(s)’, ‘guidelines’, ‘rules’ or similar, while implicit policy implications do not include these words but suggest courses of action and/or behaviour that impact policy making at company and/or societal levels (Aguinis et al., 2021). This left 441 relevant articles, which constituted 3% of the total number of articles published between September 1st 2010 and September 1st 2022.

Big contemporary challenges coverage

Table 1 below lists in column 6 the number of articles from each journal included in our final sample of 441 articles.

Insert Table 1 about here

As indicated in Table 1, only 85 (19%) of the articles in our final sample included ‘policy’, ‘policies’, ‘regulation(s)’, ‘guidelines’, ‘rules’ and/or ‘recommendations’ in their abstract, keywords or title. There was a total of 10 broad or general societal challenges covered in the articles, as listed in Table 2, along with examples of the policy implications these articles considered in their discussion and/or conclusion sections:

Insert Table 2 about here

We next identified three main societal challenges that evidenced a common thread running through all the challenges listed in Table 2: ‘climate change and sustainability’; ‘technological advancement’; and ‘diversity and inclusion’. For instance, the policy implication in Table 2 from Collings et al. (2021) about COVID-19 and Saridakis et al. (2022) about the financial crisis, also link to diversity and inclusion. A cross-check of official reports published by international actors such as the European Environmental Agency (2019); the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and development (OECD) (2019) and the

International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Berg et al., 2018), confirmed these as key policy and practice challenges by reputable international public bodies.

In Table 3 there are 6 illustrative examples of policy recommendations for each of the main societal challenges (see Column 'A', on the left). In Column A we also evaluate the level of suggested policy intervention or implication (e.g. organizational, national, international). Many of the articles in our final sample considered policy implications at one level. For example, Ortiz-de-Mandojana et al. (2019), included in Table 3, examine the electric utilities sector over a three-year period and find that CEOs with higher ownership, lower levels of short-term compensation and a short career horizon are more likely to invest in technologies that enable a higher percentage of electricity generation from renewable resources. They call for organizational level intervention by boards. However, collectively, the excerpts in Tables 2 and 3 suggest that research offering policy implications at both organizational and national levels would benefit stakeholders and advance our conceptualization of regulatory processes. Policies targeting the transnational level are also likely to be appropriate in many articles. However, the 'local community' level could be an additional relevant policy making level that is conceptually and empirically distinct from the national/transnational level, but very few articles considered this nuance. Only 8 articles in our final sample included 'community' or 'communities' in their title, abstract or key words.

The excerpts in Table 3 are relevant for different actors, which are shown in Column 'B'. We did find such actor considerations could be more explicit in some articles, to better guide policy making processes and advance conceptions of actor agency. For example, Omidvar et al. (2023) expose how relying on algorithmic credit rating models can generate organizational inertia. In their data, organizational members made temporal assumptions about the future based on imperfect information, which created environmental disengagement over time. Decision-making governance was convoluted in that few individuals understood how the

algorithms actually worked, and those who did made ad-hoc amendments to the models. Their findings are informative, not least because they contend organizational inertia contributed towards the global financial crisis. However, specific policy considerations applicable to key actor groups were rather vague, in terms of who should be engaging in conversations across areas of expertise to change or fix practice and policy failings. Overall, we found that policy implications in articles adopting sociological and employment relations perspectives covered a wider array of actors and were more likely to target national and/or transnational levels.

Insert Table 3 here

Next, in Table 3, we link the main societal challenges from level and actors, to ‘processes of change’ (see Column ‘C’), ‘policy enactment issues’ and ‘policy context spaces’ (see Column ‘D’), each of which have three dimensions of analysis. The first dimension under process of change is ‘*the re-orientation of objectives*’, which is in tension with the first policy enactment issue - ‘*disconnected from the reality of policy and practice*’. In this regard, many organizations are amending their stated objectives or corporate vision in response to societal changes, but the impact of any new policies, practices and governance mechanisms on addressing societal challenges is rarely meaningfully evaluated. The second process of change dimension is ‘*the re-configuration of experiences*’, which is in tension with the second policy enactment issue – ‘*disengaged from the front line*’. In this sense, policy makers lack awareness of how worker and manager experiences are changing within a context of societal challenges. Finally, the third process of change is ‘*the re-positioning of decision-making governance*’, which can generate a third policy enactment issue - ‘*detached from complexity*’, where policy making fails to consider the nature of interpersonal and power relations.

Our sample of articles also demonstrated how context factors (also Column ‘D’, to the right in Table 3) can affect policy implications and recommendations in three spaces: temporal (e.g., time), geographical (e.g., location) and situational (e.g., profession, occupation etc). As illustrated in Table 3, many of the examples reflect multiple process of change, divergent policy enactment issues, and uneven context spaces, therefore signalling interconnections at the conceptual and practice level. It was found that more articles adopting sociological and employment relations perspectives provided policy implications linked to the re-positioning of decision-making governance and explicitly considered contextual influences at multiple levels.

We now refer to some of the extracts in Table 3 to discuss in more detail how the three ‘process of change’ (*1- re-orientation of objectives; 2- re-configuration of experiences; 3- re-positioning of decision-making governance*), the three ‘policy enactment issues’ (*1- disconnected from the reality; 2- disengaged from the front-line; 3- detached from complexity*) and the three ‘context spaces’ (*temporal; geographical; situational*) are evidenced in our analysis of the articles.

With regards to the first big challenge around climate and the environment, for example, Wright & Nyberg (2017) conducted a longitudinal multiple case study of organizations that had ‘*re-configured their objectives*’ (process of change dimension 1), by setting goals to improve environmental impact. However, they show how organizational initiatives were ‘*disconnected from the reality of policy and practice*’ (policy enactment issue dimension 1) and worsened over time. A normalizing to the ‘processes of change’ occurred, especially when market discourse favoured a narrow profit perspective, undercutting the interests of employees and other actor groups. Furthermore, stakeholders (e.g., employees, NGOs, public) who sought to ‘*re-position decision-making governance*’ (process of change dimension 3) had little impact. To prevent policy and practice that is ‘*detached from complexity*’ (policy enactment issue

dimension 3), the authors argue for a central authority to deal with climate change and the convoluted coordination required of various actors, industries and jurisdictions.

Relatedly, Shevchenko et al. (2016) highlight *'the complexity of policy and practice'* by discussing how organizations that appear to *'re-orient their objectives'* towards advancing wider societal sustainability goals have resources and power to take compensating actions instead. In Table 3, the authors recommend more external stakeholder pressure to *'re-position decision making governance'*, but they expound that pressurizing and financially incentivising smaller firms to change may be the best way of forcing larger firms to follow.

Adopting a different perspective, Goergen et al. (2018) call on HR managers and trade unions to consider how socially responsible investment funds can *'re-configure HRM and work experiences'* and prevent policies that are *'disengaged from the front-line'*. They study the Norwegian Sovereign Wealth Fund as a type of socially responsible investment and find that investee firms were less likely to downsize. To give a related illustration from Table 3, Aguilera et al. (2021) recommend more information-sharing and worker participation in decision-making about environmental management systems to counsel on policy implementation and *'re-position decision making governance'*. At the same time, however, they caution given the complexity of power mobilisations and resource allocation models within large companies, senior managers more often than not choose which information to share, and to whom. They further emphasize how *'the re-configuration of work experiences'* through the introduction of environmental management systems will require providing workers and managers with financial and non-financial resources (e.g., monetary, skills, training, situational support, formal and informal feedback) to prevent policies and practices that are *'disengaged from the front-line'*.

In terms of the second big challenge, technology, organizations may seek to *'re-orientate their objectives'* to capitalise on digital advancement. However, as Jarvennpa &

Välikangas (2020) warn in table 3, technological advancement can negatively impact social time (time spent with others), inner time (individual time to reflect) and temporal human agency if policy is *'disconnected from reality'*. They also note how organizations have *'re-positioned decision-making governance'* by introducing algorithms in recruitment policies and practices, while other organizations have retracted this strategy because algorithms can skew outcomes in complex ways including potentially discriminating against specific groups.

Similarly, Filatotchev et al. (2020) explain how temporal and geographical context dimensions means that how technology is used by employers becomes ambiguous, therefore *'re-positioning decision-making governance'* and *'re-configuring work experiences'* for employees, who are subject to increasing amounts of surveillance. To prevent organizational policy or governance practices that are *'detached from complexity'*, they recommend a shift away from short-term orientated financial controls to greater stakeholder input into monitoring policies and practices.

Very few articles from management journals in our final sample provided policy recommendations concerning platform work. This topic received more attention in sociological and employment relations research (e.g., Inversi et al., 2022; Spencer, 2017). An exception in a management journal includes Cutolo & Kenney (2021), who urge policy makers to focus more on relations between labour providers and digital platforms. They suggest establishing a platform competition authority and enabling trade union representation to help *'re-position decision making governance'*, however, they emphasise how policy and practice can be *'disconnected from complexity'* given an unevenness to the regulation of work standards. In this regard, when individuals first enter the platform market, the firm may offer resources to enter at low cost with access to more customers than traditional business models. However, over time, labour provider experiences may be re-configured. As a consequence, power imbalances and risks to the individual worker can intensify, as platform providers control

access to prices, customers, earnings and can unilaterally enforce changes to work practices. Also acknowledging the intricacies of platform work and the *'re-positioning of decision-making governance'*, Kougiannou & Mendonca (2021 :757) call on platforms to provide stronger voice mechanisms for gig workers because of the knowledge such workers poses about day-to-day operations, which platforms rely on for sustainable functioning.

With regards to the third societal challenge, diversity and inclusion, Kamenou et al. (2013) recommend employers gain more awareness of the *'re-configuration of ethnic minority women experiences'* inside and outside the workplace (e.g., relating to religion, communities, family). They also identified a disconnect between *'the re-positioning of decision-making governance'* and *'the complexity of equality and inclusion policy'*, evident by a lack of equal opportunity monitoring, and confusion among employers over what constitutes positive discrimination. They call on governments to educate employers on regulation, monitor its implementation, but also consider other actors such as recruitment agencies, and the advice women receive to navigate *'the re-positioning of decision-making governance'*. As another example, Corrington et al. (2022) examine how *'the re-orientation of organizational objectives'* can generate public declarations of support for the Black community from employers following race-related mega-threats. They find that such socio-political activism can be viewed by former and current workers as a form of organizational support, but warn that organizations must transform their discourse into policy and practice action rather than engaging in *'woke washing'* that is *'disconnected from reality'*.

Some of the articles in our sample show that the situational context of other employee groups may help connect internal choices and policies with emergent wider challenges. For example, Santuzzi & Waltz (2016) underscore that organizational policies and practices need to *'engage with the front-line'* and consider how the experiences of disabled workers are *'re-configured over time'*. Workers may disclose a previously undisclosed disability due to a

change in job demands, or advice from colleagues, family or professionals and so multiple conversations to discuss accommodations are likely to be necessary. On the other hand, while organizations may introduce formal employee assistance programmes, workers may still refrain from disclosing a disability due to informal situational dimensions, including interpersonal social stigma.

We found that sociological literature paid more attention to immigrant workers than general management or HRM articles (e.g., Collins et al., 2021; Groutsis et al., 2020; Hwang & Beauregard, 2022). However, an exception in a management journal, Dwertmann & Kunze (2021) show how incongruence between customers and employees in terms of whether they were an immigrant or not led to more customer complaints. The negative ratings workers received triggered short-term absenteeism and voluntary turnover. To prevent policies and practices that are *'disengaged from the front-line'*, they advise organizations to monitor how bias customer ratings *'re-configure work experiences'* and are used to influence and *'re-position decision making governance'*. However, the authors also note how the implications of their study may vary across countries.

The above section has presented the findings from our consolidation of policy implications pertinent to societal challenges included in general management, HRM, work and employment journals. The next section presents a new Society-Actors-Processes-Policy framework to guide future policy and research and discusses its implications at the conceptual and practice level.

Discussion

We found that only a small proportion of articles in top management journals published between September 1st 2010 and September 1st 2022 (inclusive) included our search terms and focused on big societal challenges (4%). Moreover, the percentage considering policy recommendations/implications in their discussion or conclusion sections was smaller (3%). By

demonstrating the need for greater attentiveness to policy implications in management research, within the context of big societal challenges, our results contribute to and bridge the findings of Harley & Fleming (2021) and Auginis et al. (2021). In this section we discuss the implications of our findings for policy, management theory and future research. Figure 2 presents a dual-purpose SAPP schema which includes steps for policy makers and researchers to address big societal challenges.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Implications for policy makers

SAPP encourages an alternative perspective on policy making that views societal challenges and their outcomes as interconnected. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate the overlap between the societal challenges and suggest tackling them relies on internal and external interactions and collaborations (Kim et al., 2022; Lee & Szkudlarek, 2021), including ‘polyphonic’ or ‘polycentric’ governance (Banerjee, 2018; Patala et al., 2022). Our framework proposes four steps for policy makers that may help address a wide range of big problems. The ‘Society’ component of SAPP involves policy makers working with academics to identify research projects or programmes that could inform policy on big societal challenges. Making more research funding available is always welcome, although so is extending networks and collaborative institutions between corporate organisations, public bodies, representative groups such as employer associations, trade unions and civil society organizations, as well as funding agencies to help develop networks of knowledge partners to share information and facilitate research access.

The second component of SAPP, ‘Actors’, involves policy makers engaging with researchers and a range of stakeholders relevant to a particular project or challenge and garnering their perspectives. This may include speaking to marginalised groups, workers on

the periphery of the labour market, workers and managers in industries such as health and social care, or high emission industries. Multi-stakeholder initiatives designed by policy makers could help HR practitioners connect with wider societal challenges and realise the needs of vulnerable groups affected by corporate decisions (Banerjee, 2018). At the same time, however, the ‘Actors’ component of SAPP involves policy makers considering how stakeholder cooperation can be hampered. Information can be distorted, lost and deferred during engagement processes or corporate campaign activities (Gasparin et al, 2020). Collaborations between social movement organizations (SMOs) and firms are subject to evaluations from different sets of audiences whose ideologies, interests and experiences can conflict and shift over time, including employees, customers, other SMOs and competing firms (Odziemkowska, 2022). Moreover, Guo et al. (2020), who feature in Table 2, recognize that multilateral collaboration between actors such as NGOs, policy makers, hiring organizations and resettlement agencies to develop workplace practices that integrate migrants can be constrained. For example, due to competition, a lack of resources, or an over-reliance on market values favouring profitability in project decisions (Van der Giessen et al., 2022). Governments may therefore need to provide incentives (Lee & Szkudlarek, 2021), and these could be both structural but also about better relationship-building as a way of encouraging greater collaboration between decision-making actors.

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, the ‘Actors’ component could also involve policy makers connecting in more meaningfully engaging ways with universities, including business school scholars who shape the research agenda to help address societal challenges. Scholars have repeatedly argued that business schools have a key role to play in addressing big societal challenges by educating future managers and influencing their perspectives (Akrivou and Bradbury-Huang, 2015; Bhardwaj et al., 2021; Bunch, 2020; Dundon and Rafferty, 2018; Gasparin et al., 2020; Schwartz et al., 2017; Waddock & Lozano, 2013), but there can be a

disconnect between how business schools transfer research, concepts and knowledge to a policy community outside or beyond corporate interests. Indeed, for the late Sumantra Goshal (2005), ‘bad management theories are... destroying good management practices’ (: 86), adding that business schools ‘propagate ideologically inspired amoral theories’ (: 76) that free their (former) students from moral obligations to wider societal concerns. More recent debates raise concerns about deficiencies in the skills and knowledge taught to students, for instance around how to deal with conflicting interests between stakeholders; how managers can utilize workplace technologies in ethical and inclusive ways (Tschang & Almirall, 2021); how diversity is becoming increasingly convoluted (Schwartz et al., 2017); and how power relations shape the organization of work (Charlwood and Guenole, 2022; Dashtipour & Vidaillet, 2020; Dundon et al., 2020). Policies that enable research scholars and students to better interact with different types of external organizations such as NGOs, not-for-profit and Think Tanks may help, but also policies to amend the way in which business schools embed social goals and societal issues in curricula and research programmes beyond (private) corporate profit is likely to have more impact (Rauch & Ansari, 2022; Tsui & McKiernan, 2022; Woods et al., 2019; Zulfiqar & Prasad, 2021).

The third and fourth interlinking components of the SAPP framework encourage policy makers to advance their knowledge of how processes of change are in tension with policy enactment issues to establish appropriate interventions. Awareness of how the re-orientation of objectives at national, transnational or organizational levels becomes disconnected from the reality of policy and practice at workplace level is essential for several reasons. First, policy makers and practitioners can assess and acquire new perspectives on how work practices are impacted by governance mechanisms, such as dual-class shares where shareholders have different levels of voting rights; climate bonds; and socially responsible investment (SIR) funds (Goergen et al., 2018; Yan et al., 2019). Second, policy makers can identify good and/or bad

policies and practices across organizations. In this regard, management scholars are well placed to contribute insightful perspectives. As an illustration, mental health is a societal challenge, particularly since COVID-19. Kensbock et al. (2022) note in Table 2 that identifying patterns of organizations where workers and/or managers suffer from poor physical and/or mental health is likely to be more effective than interventions targeting new fads exclusively geared towards performance-enhancing HR objectives or lunch-time mindfulness exercises (Dundon et al., 2022). Third, through uncovering inconsistencies between policy and practice, policy makers can engage in evaluation and monitoring. For instance, management researchers have shown there can be much ‘greenwashing’ around Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and inclusion and diversity policies that rarely translate into actual practice on the ground (Leslie, 2019; Scherer & Voegtlin, 2020) and can have varying outcomes (Ugarte and Rubery, 2021). Evaluating the impact of any policies and initiatives is fundamental so that decision makers can budget financial and support resources for organizations and HR departments, such as incentives to implement meaningful sustainability practices (Gasparin et al., 2020; Ortiz-de Mandojana et al., 2019), or to develop cross-organizational partnerships that help integrate immigrants (Lee & Szkudlarek, 2021).

We argue that policy makers also need to recognize the tensions that emerge when policy and practice becomes disengaged from the front-line and the re-configuration of experiences. For example, to know how to identify future skills and education needs relating to AI, environmental management, expanding forms of diversity, or transferring workers from high-emission industries to future sustainable jobs (Aguilera et al., 2021, Tschang & Almirall, 2021). Manager and employer perspectives on cooperation may provide insight into future plans and strategies with regards to automation and how to avoid or manage potential layoffs (Cobb, 2016; Spencer, 2017). As the excerpt from Tschang & Almirall (2021) in Table 3 suggests, academics could work with policy makers and other actors to ensure more sustainable

livelihoods, for example through upskilling and re-skilling. However, higher skilled jobs are also increasingly impacted by AI advances too (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Howcroft, 2013; Wood et al., 2019). Additionally, a deep understanding of worker and manager experiences is also crucial for policy makers because they are influenced by cross-boundary internal and external factors, such as the state, family, religion and living costs. The extract in Table 3 from Liu et al. (2019) show how government approaches influence organizational stances towards investing in renewable energies, but they also note how inconsistent support over time increases prices for consumers. Spiralling living costs is likely to affect worker willingness to support organizational environmental strategies (and other strategies).

Finally, policy makers can focus on the tensions generated when regulation and practice become detached from the complexity of decision-making governance. Policy makers would benefit from knowing how far workers are involved in shaping organizational strategies and practices (Gregorič & Rapp, 2019; Scholz & Vitols, 2019; Nechanska et al., 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2021). The extent to which senior leaders fail to share information with employees may be perceived as a yardstick of intentions towards inclusion or engagement (Aguilera et al., 2021; Corrington et al., 2022). Moreover, governance processes shape day-to-day outcomes, for instance, how managers deal with less visible worker disabilities such as depression or anxiety that may not be included in legal legislation, but will impact their inclusion and performance (Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016). Additionally, as individuals with high levels of decision-making power, CEO activism has the potential to influence practices, policies and the perspectives of internal and external stakeholders in ways that are conducive or detrimental to addressing societal challenges (Hambrick & Wowak, 2021; Wowak et al., 2022).

The third and fourth components of the SAPP schema also urge policy makers to consider how temporal, geographical and situational context spaces can shape regulatory processes and outcomes. In terms of situational, as Table 2 and 3 indicate, societal challenges

may have varying impacts on organizations of different sizes, in different sectors and with different capital structures (e.g., western, non-western) (Priola & Choudhry, 2021). Situational context dimensions also include individual level factors such as (intersectional) demographics, interests and personal values of organizational members at all hierarchical levels.

The temporal dimensions to policy making are also important at a practice level. For instance, pre-existing policies and practices may have different outcomes for organizational members and trigger varying responses at different points in time, for example due to life stage, how long they have depended on digital platforms, changes to macro-economic conditions, or mega threats (Grandey et al., 2020; Leigh & Melwani, 2019; Maddux et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2021). Finally, geographical dimensions are relevant for policy making. Being aware of institutional and cultural differences across countries can motivate policy makers to alter their own approaches or place pressure on other countries to change theirs (Liu et al., 2019). Additionally, more specific initiatives and policies targeting local communities, which may include an organization's employees as community members, could potentially have greater positive impact on their practices than broad national or international initiatives (Barnett et al., 2021).

Implications for management theory

SAPP provides researchers with a new perspective to conceptualize and articulate interconnections between organizations, actors, people management, policy making and big societal challenges. The framework engages with and extends theory. The first two SAPP components, 'Society' and 'Actors', include steps for researchers to follow before conducting research. The first step involves embedding organizations in societal change contexts (say new artificial intelligence technologies, green climate actions, or sustainable decent work goals). The second step involves considering relations between organizations and relevant societal actors (these may be trade unions, employer representatives, NGOs or other charities). As

discussed in the previous section, the third and fourth components of SAPP require scholars to focus on tensions between ‘Processes of change’ and ‘Policy enactment issues’ to extract connections with policy implications. In this section, we elucidate further how SAPP strengthens the relationship between theory, policy and contributes to the conceptual utility of management research in three main ways.

First, the ‘Society’ component of SAPP extends systems theory by re-framing the concept of a ‘system’, or ‘ecosystem’, to emphasize societal challenges. The latter supports a growing argument for more multi-level approaches in management research to embed organizations and their practices in wider contexts (e.g., Budd et al., 2022; Cascio, 2022; Kamenou et al., 2013; Lee & Szkudlarek, 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Miraglia & Johns, 2021; Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016) or ecosystems (Donnelly & Hughes, 2022; Snell & Morris, 2021; Snell et al., 2022). As noted in the findings section, articles that offer policy implications targeting multiple levels in society (organizational, community, national, international) are more useful for policy makers who may need to talk to different (competing) audiences. However, management research rarely considers the trickle-up and down-effects of macro-level factors as they influence meso-level organizations and the choices (and constraints on) individual managers (Leigh & Melwani, 2019; Nkomo et al., 2019; Zhao & Wry, 2016). Exemplifying the need to address this lacuna, Wilkinson et al. (2021) outline the interdependencies between societal changes, economic shifts, and technological advances in relation to policy choices.

Although systems theory has been argued to help scholars embed organizations in their wider contexts (e.g., Bansal & Song, 2017; Baruch & Rousseau, 2021; Filatotchev et al., 2020; Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021; Jackson et al., 2014; Patala et al., 2022; Raisch & Krakowski, 2021), ‘*systems*’ and/or ‘*context*’ are conceptually distinct from ‘*societal challenges*’. The problem is even when research contextualises an organization (or its people and agency within broader

political, economic, cultural and societal conditions), this often leads to a focus on the implications for managers as a vested interest group, or in pursuit of performative gains of individual firms, to the neglect of policy implications in relation to big societal challenges or a wider general polity concern. SAPP enriches the conceptual and empirical value of systems theory by positioning big societal challenges at the fore, and calling for not only multi-level insights, but also multi-directional research that examines how societal challenges impact individuals within organizations and vice versa.

Notwithstanding, multi-level and multi-directional approaches that inform policy will likely require researchers from diverse disciplines to consider the findings of scholars working in different conceptual spaces (Boxall, 2021). Scholars note how a great deal of management and HR research are prone to adopt psychological conceptualizations that mainly focus on micro-level individual traits or group behaviours; while socio-political and employment relations literatures tend to conceptualize wider macro forces such as the economy, labour market institutions and political structures (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Dundon & Rafferty, 2018; Godard, 2014; Kaufman, 2018; Molloy et al., 2011; Morris et al., 2018; Nkomo et al., 2019; Taser-Erdogan, 2021).

Accordingly, general management and HRM literature would benefit from integrating sociological insights about internal and external forces and wider socio-economic contexts, to enhance their conception and understanding of how societal challenges impact different system or ecosystem levels. Conversely, some of the macro socio-political orientation studies could stratify the concept of broader 'contexts' or 'systems' to acknowledge internal management dynamics and power struggles at work unit level. In this regard, Zhao and Wry (2016) examine 2326 small finance social enterprise organizations that lend to the poor across 115 developing countries. Applying institutional logics theory, they find that lending to women was less likely when a national societal belief system had stronger patriarchal elements, shaping institutional

settings such as professionalism, family, religion and the state. One reason for this was because accessing female employees to facilitate dialogue with potential female customers was more difficult. They urge agencies such as the World Bank and the Gates Foundation to be cognizant of institutional environments when making investment decisions. However, they found that patriarchal values can play out differently across the institutional settings within countries. Examining the interplay between higher and lower levels of a system can therefore help avoid fragmented perspectives and conceptual blindness, while refining our understanding of ‘varieties of capitalism’ and institutional contexts to subsequently formulate appropriate policy agendas.

As a second contribution, SAPP expands Stakeholder Theory (Chen et al., 2023; Mitchell et al., 2016) and provides further conceptual clarity on ‘stakeholder relations’ by unearthing potential contradictions between normative values and the agency, interests and power of social actors in wider globalized system outcomes (Carstensen et al., 2022; Rubery et al., 2016; Shevchenko et al., 2016). One plausible reason why articles have neglected a clearer focus on big societal challenges and attendant policy implications relates to calls to consider a broader range of actors involved in organizational operations (Banks et al., 2016; Budd et al., 2022; Filatotchev et al., 2020; Hirst et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2022; Vincent et al., 2021). While sociological research has traditionally focused on a wider array of stakeholders (Beck et al., 2016; Budd et al., 2022; Rubery, 2011), general management and organisational psychology HR research have tended to adopt an insular approach (Cascio, 2015), emphasizing an exclusivity for organizational efficiency and capabilities at the individual firm level (Wright & Nyberg, 2017; Barry & Wilkinson, 2016).

Stakeholder theory is increasingly assumed to extend the boundaries of management research and address the conceptual fallacies of traditional agency theory, by focusing on how organizations should participate in contracts with multiple principles (stakeholders) to benefit

employees, organizations and society (Klettner, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2016). Within this body of literature, researchers have introduced novel perspectives on non-economic wealth as important proxies, such as societal value, social justice and happiness (Bacq & Augilera, 2022; Lumpkin & Bacq 2019); and outlined the role of institutions in shaping how organizations can engage with and include a wider public community (Chen et al., 2023). These approaches also offer some insight into the concept of ethical obligations which have predominantly featured in ethics journals rather than management research.

Notwithstanding, the conceptual foundations of stakeholder theory tend to be normative, which often leads to research paradigms that are descriptive and static, and which tend to foreground ideal outcomes or principles, yet tell us little about the ambiguities and contradictions underpinning relations between organizations and actors, or how they evolve (Bansal & Song, 2017; Snell and Morris, 2021). SAPP assumes the realization of normative values can be constrained in practice due to the agency or associational power of social actors (or lack of), and so policy making can help resolve or pre-empt these issues. Stakeholder perspectives do acknowledge varying degrees of power between stakeholders (Jackson et al., 2014), and the concept of stakeholder salience has been drawn upon (e.g., Chen et al., 2023), which assumes organizations address stakeholder needs depending on their power, urgency and legitimacy (Baruch & Rousseau, 2021; Cutolo & Kenney, 2021; Heaphy et al., 2018). However, SAPP advocates injecting more dynamism into the ‘stakeholder salience’ concept because temporal changes in stakeholder power across time and geographies are rarely as simple as changes to urgency or legitimacy, notably in the context of big societal challenges. For instance, stakeholder theory posits that organizations behaving unethically will be forced to adjust or reappraise their position. But as shown in Table 3, in reality this does not always happen. Organizations with power and resources implement strategies to protect their reputation and what constitutes ‘ethical’ practice can be manipulated (Shevchenko et al., 2016).

How different forms of power manifest in globalized systems receive far more attention in the sociological and employment relations literatures (Carstensen et al., 2022; Dundon et al., 2020; Inversi et al., 2022). An unfortunate by-product of the limited insight into power in management research can be an assumption that collaboration between organizations and stakeholders (or even between academic disciplines) is a ‘plug and play’ approach (Gasparin et al., 2020).

Overall, stakeholder approaches tend to conceptualize actors as relatively easy to comprehend, which downplays the convoluted and dynamic nature of divergent interests relative to big societal challenges (Phan, 2021). Some attention has been devoted in general management research to how the interests of different stakeholders can conflict and/or converge in varying contexts (Aguilera et al., 2021; Boxall, 2021; Cobb, 2016; Rindova & Martins 2021; Scherer & Voegtlin, 2020). Notwithstanding, SAPP helps make sense of the conceptual complexities of ‘interests’ and encourages reflection on how widely applied theories can curtail understanding and policy making. For instance, while agency theory suggests CEO’s voicing socio-political stances is an agency cost that can disadvantage shareholders, as shown in Tables 2 and 3, Wowak et al. (2022) and Corrington et al. (2022) found it can potentially benefit shareholders through increased employee commitment.

Moreover, SAPP avoids pigeon-holing the conceptualization of interests by acknowledging that converging and/or diverging interests and varying levels of power also surface within stakeholder groups, for instance between workers with different individual values around societal challenges or diversity and inclusion (Howard-Grenville et al., 2017; Konrad et al., 2021), and/or between managers at different hierarchical levels (Barraquier, 2011). To illustrate, some extracts in Tables 2 and 3 aim to influence policy by calling for stakeholder participation in decision making about societal challenges. Scholars have referred to how front-line workers are key stakeholders who are often acutely aware of societal

challenges and how company resources and strategies could help address them (Davis, 2021). Examining key individual differences are important to understand and conceptualise the extent of worker participation in decisions. Yet research on these differences has primarily focused on micro psychological traits, while other meso socio-psychological and macro institutional influences can help elucidate change (Aguilera et al., 2021). Some employees may specifically seek a ‘responsible career’ that chimes with their personal values for environmental sustainability or equality (Tams et al., 2011). Other workers may not seek a voice over environmental issues per se, but may be more concerned about other aspects such as fair pay or equal treatment across supply chains and worker groups. Workers may also remain silent due to a lack of meaningful voice mechanisms and constraining power relations (Dashtipour & Vidaillet, 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2021), or due to working in high-emitting industries with no alternative opportunities for a ‘just transition’ into decent jobs (Carstensen et al., 2022; Clarke & Sahin-Dikmen, 2020).

As a third contribution, SAPP illuminates tensions between processes of change, policy issues, and various context spaces that cut across stakeholder relations and system levels. Viewing societal challenges within ‘systems’ and considering how power and agency impact ‘stakeholder relations’ can still trap analyses at a higher conceptual level that limits policy impact. To provide more fine-grained focus and structure, SAPP identifies three specific tensions between processes and policy. Examining such tensions helps avoid fixating on desired outcomes (e.g., sustainability) without evaluating the issues that constrain those outcomes; similar to the pitfall of restricting our conceptual scope to normative principles when applying stakeholder theory.

The tensions included in the SAPP framing also provide conceptual novelty by depicting phenomena more holistically. For example, the ‘re-configuration of experiences’ process in figure 2 assumes that conceptualizing ‘technology advancement’ does not only

require mapping how technology mechanistically re-organizes work. Instead, it also scopes out how both individual and collective experiences are transmuted by technology, thereby generating a broader perspective on policy making influences. Similarly, while conceptualizing ‘power’ may create abstract perspectives detached from workplace realities, SAPP encourages a focus on how power ‘re-positions decision making governance’ within and beyond organizational boundaries. For example, Cutolo & Kenny (2021) explain how power shapes decision making in the platform economy. Their conceptualization of the platform economy is grounded in power dependence theory, thereby illustrating how traditional theories assuming entrepreneurial agency do not account for the different types of risks facing individual workers relying on platform employment. To take another example, extracts from Tables 2 and 3 show how AI and technology can influence actor agency, power and management choice. Managers are often assumed to have power and status from domain specific knowledge but management theories do not usually consider machine actions, only human behaviours (Roth et al., 2016). It is known, for instance, that social bots can wield power by rapidly spreading misinformation about organizations and their members on social media, influencing public opinion and decision making across geographies (Hajli et al., 2021). SAPP therefore enables more relevant and clarifying conceptualizations of power that capture the nuances of decision-making processes to inform policy making that addresses societal challenges.

As an extension of the third contribution, SAPP assumes tensions between processes and policies are shaped by context dimensions of temporal, geographical and situational. A more generalizable implication for context-sensitive research is that it can inform policy making while rejecting an assumption of universal best practice (Filatotchev et al., 2020). Rather than focusing on ‘context’ as an umbrella concept, SAPP includes three specific dimensions that are more empirically tractable and policy relevant. Temporal, geographical

and situational dimensions help define actions and behaviours and their examination will further advance the conceptual and policy scope of multi-level analyses.

Implications for future research to inform policy

Through engaging with and extending existing literature, the SAPP framing sensitises new research questions and contemporary challenges with policy relevance. As noted above, the framework invites scholars to consider perspectives and constructs from other disciplines to identify potential opportunities for conceptual integration and broader impact (Wood & Budhwar, 2021). Below are some further points that deserve elaboration for researchers considering applying SAPP.

To begin with, research designs could place more emphasis on uncovering tensions between written policy and practice, or the re-orientation of objectives and the reality of outcomes. Such research may build on the findings of existing informative studies. In this regard, Klettner (2021) applying stewardship theory argues that stewardship codes seeking to balance the tensions inherent in the role of institutional investors, can potentially counter the dominant focus on efficient short-term value-maximization and integrate accountability, stakeholder concerns and public interest into fiduciary duties. She explains how codes in some countries are veering away from shareholder-centric views of corporate governance and incorporating elements of stakeholder theory. However, her study identifies differences in the *'content'* of stewardship codes across countries which is conceptually distinct from the *'implications'* and *'outcomes'* of the codes.

In addition, linked to the 're-configuration of experiences' process in figure 2, gender research mainly foregrounds female experiences, but further insight into how men who usually have more power, do or do not act as allies would enable researchers to articulate alternative conceptualizations of the connections between actor power, processes of change and how policy and practice outcomes play out in intersectional situations (Leigh & Melwani, 2019;

Metz & Kumra, 2019; Nkomo et al., 2019). Moreover, Collings et al. (2021) who feature in Table 2 elucidate a mixed picture of how remote working potentially re-configures worker experiences and productivity. They suggest situational and geographical influencing dimensions, such as whether remote working is home working, or working from anywhere and the nature of the tasks involved, which will vary across occupations (e.g., Gherardi, 2010). Of course, remote working during and since the COVID pandemic, as important a challenge as it may be, is a privilege for those who can remote work: many cannot due to the nature of jobs, the structure of the labour market, or because of employer power and reluctance to share power or autonomy away from the work setting. SAPP therefore opens up new avenues to clarify the concept of ‘remote working’, how it is experienced and who has access to it.

Finally, and connected to the re-positioning of decision-making governance, our analysis found that although the business opportunities provided by digital platforms over wide geographical contexts have been highlighted, general management studies tell us little about the power relationships between digital platforms, workers, state regulators and legislation. Conceptualizing digital platforms as contested and examining the perspectives of a wider range of stakeholders with different levels of power could arguably produce more useful policy recommendations. Importantly, while conceptualizations of the platform economy usually highlight job characteristics such as app-based work and flexible contracts, these characteristics are permeating other industries such as social care and extending precarity into other occupations. Expanding our conceptual focus will advance the concept of ‘digital platforms’ and potentially enable us to generate policy implications that have relevance for multiple industries (Dundon & Rafferty, 2018; Rubery et al., 2016).

To take another example, problematically, empirical studies to date lack insight into the paradoxes between automation and/or augmentation (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021; Tschang & Almirall, 2021). Diagnostic people analytics techniques collect a vast array of data on

employee needs, home situations, workload, working conditions, personal health, occupational safety. Such information can span a large single workforce or multiple groups across supply chain networks (Sheng et al., 2021). Machine technologies can in some contexts help organizations and workers comply with occupational specific regulations (Filatotchev et al., 2020). However, more research is needed on how machines limit and control manager behaviour and power; and the attendant implications for employees and their capacity to resist technological control (Charlwood & Guenole, 2022; Howcroft & Taylor, 2022). Equally, humans can shape machine behaviour, for instance in machine learning systems where managers provide feedback to machines or human interaction sets algorithm defined parameters (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021). Such considerations are new fruitful policy-driven areas for more research.

In terms of the three context dimensions, more research examining different types of organizations across industries would be beneficial to conceptualize situational influences and formulate policy implications. The examples in Tables 2 and 3 mainly refer to ‘firms’ and ‘corporations’, very few of the articles analysed considered policy implications relating to other types of organizations such as social enterprises. Tracey & Phillips (2016) examine how a social enterprise organization faced stigmatization after supporting immigrants and how this negatively affected worker perceptions of the organization and its’ purpose. They note how policy makers may be in a better position to impact the speed and outcome of stigmatization processes during temporal shifts, as opposed to when industries are inherently stigmatized (e.g., sex work). For instance, policy makers could foreground the distinctness of the organization, raise awareness among workers and citizens and harness wider stakeholder support, including from the media. Moreover, temporal dimensions mean more longitudinal studies are essential to analyse the impact of organizational practices and policy interventions over time, for instance, the implications of adopting or avoiding a stakeholder perspective (Nyberg et al.,

2021). Additionally, temporal research could examine the influence of time-specific big events on organizations, workers, managers and wider society. Globalised economic systems mean that employer-employee bargains are precarious and constrain management choice (Cushen & Thompson, 2016; Morris et al., 2018; Rubery et al., 2016; Thompson, 2013; Zeitoun & Pamini, 2021). The war in Ukraine had a global impact on the cost of living, organizational financial resources, supply chains, not to mention how evacuated people were managed and worked in new countries with uncertain boundaries and timelines. Further research on these issues would augment our conceptualization of macro turbulence and the agency of diverse workers (e.g., immigrants and nationals). As an example, researchers could compare how far policy making across countries supported organizations and workers facing significant financial pressures and/or employment conditions of displaced populations. Moreover, cross-country research that uncovers geographical dimensions can feed into debates around whether western theoretical models and their conceptual foundations are applicable in non-western contexts (Priola & Choudhry, 2021; Taser-Erdogan, 2021). Table 4 provides a broader list of potential research questions to guide the future operationalization of the SAPP framing. It focuses on climate change and sustainability: technology advancement; and diversity and inclusion as indicative examples.

Insert Table 4 about here

Limitations

Our journal searches for policy implications/recommendations may have overstated or understated the number of relevant articles due to human error during the search, database inaccuracies, the search terms used, or disciplinary fields examined. For example, journals in other disciplines (e.g., Health, Information Systems, Marketing) may have added a different

insight and could be included in future research. Our findings may be limited given we focused on contemporary challenges and policy in a recent 12-year window, and a longer time frame could be more fruitful. There may also be limitations with the boundary criteria for the SAPP framework. For example, can the SAPP model be applied to examine all societal challenges? We argue that the first two components of the model, ‘Society’ and ‘Actors’ constitute fundamental steps that are conceptually useful for examining any societal challenge. Empirically operationalizing the framework would test the applicability of the two final components in the context of climate change and sustainability; technological advancement; and diversity and inclusion, but also other interrelated challenges as they emerge and evolve out of crisis and change, such as precarious work, homelessness, COVID-19, migration, social care crises, commercial sex exploitation, mental health, work-life balance, global poverty - among others. Thus, the empirical operationalisation of SAPP may support additional points of intersection as they emerge that develops the framework’s utility to bridge academia, policy and practice.

Conclusion

Through consolidating policy implications in highly ranked general management, HRM and employment journals, we found that only a small proportion of articles focused on big contemporary challenges and the percentage offering policy recommendations was smaller. Our findings necessitated a dual-purpose SAPP framework to re-conceptualize the interface between organizations, people management, policy making and societal challenges. For policy makers the framework encourages engagement with academics and other stakeholders and an awareness of how processes of change generate policy and practice issues. For management and HRM scholars, SAPP extends systems theory, stakeholder theory and offers a conceptual platform to guide future research that can help better connect theory and policy. In particular,

we recommend longitudinal and/or comparative studies in single-country and/or cross-contexts, as one way of examining the influence of temporal, situational and geographical dimensions on big societal challenges and the implications for policy at different (eco)system levels.

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ⁱTable 1: Breakdown of articles by journal							
Journal	1) Number of articles published any time (including conventional journal articles, book review articles, editorials etc.)	2) Number of articles published anytime with search terms	3) Number of articles published between September 1st 2010 and September 1st 2022 inclusive	4) Number of articles published between September 1st 2010 and September 1st 2022 inclusive with search terms	5) Number of articles focusing on societal challenges, general management, people management and work issues	6) Number of articles considering implicit and/or explicit policy recommendations in their discussion and/or conclusion sections	7) Number of articles including ‘policy’, ‘policies’, ‘regulation(s)’, ‘guidelines’, ‘rules’ and/or ‘recommendations’, in their abstract, keywords, or title
Academy of Management Journal	4052	107 (3%)	1023	61 (6%)	21	20	4
Academy of Management Annals	296	26 (9%)	242	26 (11%)	17	15	3
Academy of Management Review	3087	123 (4%)	528	43 (8%)	26	20	2
Academy of Management Perspectives	1993	121 (6%)	349	51 (15%)	31	31	6
Academy of Management Learning and Education	1173	79 (7%)	658	57 (9%)	16	16	3
British Journal of Management	1500	93 (6%)	797	72 (9%)	39	37	8
Journal of Management Studies	2773	141 (5%)	928	73 (8%)	43	39	8
Journal of Management	2402	54 (2%)	1045	34 (3%)	22	20	2
Administrative Science Quarterly	1153	32 (3%)	523	29 (6%)	10	8	1

Human Resource Management Journal	1087	33 (3%)	530	26 (5%)	26	26	4
Human Resource Management	2600	47 (2%)	739	17 (2%)	17	17	2
Work, Employment and Society	2986	198 (7%)	1170	134 (11%)	85	60	21
British Journal of Industrial Relations	2653	121 (5%)	796	55 (7%)	23	23	5
Industrial Relations: A journal of economy and society	2, 085	24 (1%)	482	14 (3%)	14	11	1
Organization Studies	3, 487	236 (7%)	1177	140 (12%)	48	32	2
Leadership Quarterly	1522	84 (6%)	742	48 (6%)	24	23	6
Human Relations	4441	218 (5%)	1082	64 (6%)	41	34	5
Organization Science	2051	65 (3%)	1140	40 (4%)	12	9	2
Totals	41, 341	1802 (4%)	13, 851	984 (7%)	515 (4% of 13, 851)	441 (3% of 13, 851)	85 (0.6% of 13, 851)

ⁱ When determining the total number of articles published, the authors used the search function of each journal database to exclude irrelevant content (e.g., ‘calls for papers’ articles, ‘conference announcement’ articles, ‘issue information’ articles) to the best of their knowledge.

Table 2: Examples of societal challenges covered in top management journals and their policy recommendations

Societal challenge	Example of policy implication
Climate change	Robust action shares an affinity with the problematization of simple metrics for tracking performance highlighted in the strategy and accounting disciplines...To adequately mirror and encapsulate the complexity inherent in grand challenges, the institutional environment may well need to be proportionately complex. The ability to manage and navigate institutional complexity is perhaps a necessary organizational competency for engagement in grand challenges. (Ferraro et al., 2015: 381)
Racial inequalities	Because organizations typically provide few guidelines for responding to external events... managers may often overlook or ignore the influence of these events on their followers. Our model may assist managers in understanding and supporting their employees when they are coping with a mega-threat. One important implication of our theory is that diversity is dynamic and differences that are due to social identity group membership can become more pronounced after a mega-threat. Importantly, our theory highlights that in order to successfully manage a diverse workforce, organizations must attend to both internal and external events. (Leigh and Melwani, 2019: 584-585)
Gender inequities	The study evidenced current challenges for defining and achieving gender equality in Muslims contexts and calls for a critique to those approaches that mimic the 'equal opportunities' policies of western governments and organisations. We argue that any attempt to introduce gender equality in Pakistani workplaces should be integrated within wider social and cultural changes aimed at deconstructing patriarchy and gendered discourses of modesty and men's superiority. (Priola et al., 2021: 318)
Migration	The process of assisting refugees to find work and to enhance inclusion would be improved where there are multilateral collaborations between governments, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), resettlement agencies, NGOs (e.g. Refugee Support Centers), private voluntary agencies and hiring organizations. For example, government and resettlement agencies are likely to be the first in contact with refugees and hence, in addition to existing 28 security checks, they could provide preliminary assistance in evaluating and documenting refugees' qualifications, skill levels and work experiences, which may help hiring organizations reduce redundant resources and time in the hiring process. (Guo et al., 2020: 27-28)
LGBT issues	From a corporate governance perspective, our study suggests that boards would benefit from a better understanding of the pros and cons of CEO activism. While the default position of many directors is consistent with the conventional wisdom, i.e., that CEOs should stay out of the socio political arena, our theory and findings illustrate that CEO activism can—when aligned with the prevailing values of employees—have a positive effect on employee commitment to the firm. It seems reasonable to argue that such an effect can increase shareholder wealth in the long term. In this vein, directors might often be valuable resources for helping CEOs gauge how a given public stance will be seen by stakeholders, including employees. (Wowak et al., 2022: 583)
Mental Health	Initiatives and interventions targeted toward individual employees or single organizations are undoubtedly important and helpful... But given the wide prevalence of mental disorders, such measures only help to tamp down minor fires. We believe that understanding mental disorders in analogy with infectious physical diseases provides a needed bird's-eye view of mental illness, which helps to identify and target larger clusters and "hot spots" of unhealthy organizations. (Kensbock et al., 2022: 77)
Technology	if organisations further incorporate technology into working practices in the aftermath of COVID-19, greater employer awareness of deficiencies in technological support and training must be raised, including how the extent of digital interactions shapes staff experiences and productivity as well as the perceived necessity of interactions at different points in time. (Hughes and Donnelly, 2022: 15).
Covid	In a similar vein, the crisis also reveals how central many front-line and often lower skilled workers are to product and service delivery, and raises questions as to whether firms need to re-examine, for example, how jobs are evaluated and ranked. It will also be helpful to understand the longer-term implication of HR responses to COVID-19 for diversity and inclusion. How can organisations ensure that particular employee groups are not unduly disadvantaged in the longer-term? (Collings et al., 2020: 289).

Financial crisis	Although there is a reduction in the probability of employee promotion in both SMEs and large firms during times of crisis, the promotion rate for women is further reduced in SMEs...We also shed some light on the dynamics of promotion decisions within SMEs. This suggests that the absence of dedicated policies and pathways to encourage compliance with equality regulations is detrimental to women, and this effect is enhanced during periods of crisis. Policies in the areas of childcare, maternity and paternity benefits, together with greater awareness of equality issues, are required, but without some form of regulatory obligation, compliances unlikely based on existing evidence regarding the attitudes of SME owners to HR formality... (Saridakis et al., 2022: 823)
Business School Education	If one looks to how higher and business school education has been extensively politicized and linked with dogmas of national economics, we suggest the need for a new vision for business schools generated at the governmental and educational policy levels and in interacting governmental and higher education top cabinet levels, so business schools and journals' top echelons may engage in political citizenship. Higher and business school education needs to be understood, valued as part of the social economy...(Akrivou and Huang, 2015)

Table 3: Content of explicit and implicit policy recommendations

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(A) Society	(B) Actors	(C) Processes			(D) Policy						
Societal challenge and policy recommendations ⁱ	Level (organizational, national, international)	(e.g., policy makers, organizations)	Processes of change			Policy enactment issue			Policy context spaces		
(1) Climate change and sustainability			1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
research recognizes that critical differences likely exist in the way that senior executives make decisions with respect to firm-specific investments and environmentally beneficial investments ... Even when demographic dimensions (e.g. career horizon or tenure) are unlikely to influence regular organizational operations, boards may want to include incentives that influence the CEO's time perspective to encourage decisions that are more environmentally sustainable. (Ortiz-de-Mandojana et al., 2019: 147)	Organizational	CEOs Senior executives			✓			✓	✓		✓
Corporations are inherently unsuited to deal with issues that play out over the medium to long term. Despite the discourse of business strategy, technological and financial developments have resulted in the global corporation becoming increasingly focused on short-term objectives and outcomes (most evident in the focus on quarterly and semi-annual reporting and the shrinking tenure of executive managers) ... Meaningfully responding to many of the grand challenges facing the world requires systemic intervention based around central authority. (Wright and Nyberg, 2017: 1656)	International	Policy makers Senior executives	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		
The Norwegian Government Pension Fund-Global is generally more likely to sustain employment than many other alternative investors ... HR managers—and trade unionists—need to deepen their understanding of the nature and behavioural patterns of new investor categories, keep abreast of changes in their firm's shareholding, and develop policy options to respond to the latter (Goergen et al., 2017: 298)	Organizational	HR managers Unions Firms		✓			✓			✓	
while the firm needs to learn extensively about potential ways to become truly sustainable, such knowledge alone will not push the firm towards true sustainability if external stakeholders accept or reward efforts aimed at off-setting the harm from current business practices. One means to ensure that firms actually make efforts to reach true sustainability is for external	National/international	NGOs CSOs Policy makers Other stakeholders Firms	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓

stakeholders to keep demanding more substantial changes in the ways firms, especially large firms, do business....results suggest that the best way to drive change is to increase both the (positive) flow of information and support and the (negative) pressure on small innovative firms, which are best positioned to change. These firms are likely to be the future and need information and incentives to change... (Shevchenko et al., 2016: 926-927)											
Employees often lack information on their firms' environmental impacts, meaning that they are unlikely to understand the environmental issues they are tasked with addressing through their engagement in EMS [Environment Management Systems]. Enhanced internal communication can help address this by allowing employees to identify sources of pollution ... and by encouraging employees to share ideas. (Aguilera et al., 2020: 1480)	Organizational	Corporations Line managers Workers Worker representatives			✓			✓			✓
laissez-faire market economies prevalent in common law countries accounts for the disinclination of companies to invest in RE [renewable energies]. ... evidence suggests that RE investment in common law countries is as much a socio-political as a commercial issue and that overcoming financial obstacles depends on societal, as well as fiscal, change at a fundamental level of the market-based system. ... we observe a significant difference in RE investment under civil law systems... The 'stakeholder perspective' that prevails in civil law countries engenders a cooperative business culture in which banks are willing to invest in companies professing ESG credentials. Governments pursue policies of centralized allocation and control... (Liu et al., 2021: 604)	National/international	Policy makers Lenders Companies			✓			✓		✓	
(2) Technology											
governments have not fully grasped how platforms are reshaping the playing field upon which competition and entrepreneurship take place ... It might be possible to establish a Platform Competition Authority, whose role would be to investigate PDE complaints and establish a body of regulations aimed at ensuring the viability and health of platform ecosystems. Governments could also change laws to allow the formation of trade associations or even unions to represent	Organizational National/international	Policy makers Platforms Trade associations Trade unions		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓

PDEs; something that is currently illegal in U.S. (Cutolo and Kenney, 2020: 598)											
technology brings a great deal of ambiguity into what exactly is monitored and how. To capitalize on opportunities provided by technological changes, companies need to make significant adjustments in their governance systems. Governance innovations on the board level, for example, may include transition to a reliance on strategic rather than financial controls ... These strategic controls are less concerned with short-term financial performance and may be focused instead on issues related to long-term sustainability, growth in market share, stakeholder support, and risk assessment ... The openness of a firm's governance mechanisms ensures that stakeholder constituencies provide key inputs into the process of strategic control. (Filatotchev et al., 2020: 176)	Organizational	Senior executives Stakeholders			✓			✓	✓		
attributing the collapse of the entire financial sector to the malfunctioning of a single routine may be simplistic, we contend that such a realization is essential in explaining how the crisis unfolded...By radically retheorizing, departing from existing assumptions, reflexively interrogating representations of the environment and future outlooks, and facilitating conversations across areas of expertise, organizations can avoid producing dynamic inertia, which, as we have shown, may lead to disaster. (Omidvar et al., 2023: 339-340)	Organizational	Organizations Line managers Academics			✓			✓	✓		
we need to keep a watchful eye on advanced technology that renders both social time and inner time absent, and hence potentially reduces human temporal agency and timely intervention. Data-intensive algorithmic technology plays an increasing role in society's technology infrastructure, both in automating processes and in predicting outcomes..Famously, recruitment algorithms have been notorious for hiring only white young males. (Jarvennpa and Välikangas, 2020: 28)	Organizational National/international	Policy makers Firms Line managers HR practitioners	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		
If AI-induced automation replaces more and more work ... there will be a need for policy to ensure jobs for sustainable livelihoods. Governments, firms, and scholars should come together to engage firms in thinking of new models of socially-minded production, and to consider social protections. This also raises implications for business school education ... we do not	Organizational National/international	Policy makers Firms Academics Business Schools			✓			✓			✓

educate enough on how to use new technologies to promote sustainable forms of work, and livelihoods. (Tschang and Almirall, 2021: 657)											
[Online Food Delivery Companies] should reconsider their approach to voice and over-reliance on algorithmic management, and move from silence to voice. Couriers, especially experienced ones, have particularly valuable information and knowledge to share that is crucial for sustainable individual and organizational functioning. (Kougiannou and Mendonca, 2021: 757)	Organizational	Platforms Labour providers		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
(3) Diversity and inclusion											
employers need to recognize issues faced by diverse groups in employment and society in order to adhere to UK and EU discrimination laws ... A key policy implication here relates to the need for greater awareness of, and engagement with, EO responsibilities and duties to engender greater accountability through target setting and monitoring and public reporting. (Kamenou et al., 2013: 410)	Organizational National/international	Policy makers Employers		✓			✓			✓	✓
Visible, explicit signals of support may be crucial in the context of mega-threats [e.g., over Black Lives Matter issues] ... an important caveat in these explicit signals may be that organizations must be authentically signalling their intentions following mega-threats and <i>not</i> just engaging in what other researchers refer to as “woke-washing,” or using appropriate language without any follow-up action. (Corrington et al., 2022: 17)	Organizational	Organizations Line managers Workers	✓			✓					✓
A central implication of these findings is that employers need to: (1) dissolve gendered constructs which remain attached to flexible working; (2) facilitate ‘choice’ in the use of FWAs [flexible working arrangements]; and (3) improve the quality of reduced hours options. Additionally, the findings have important broader implications for policymakers and society, through evidencing limitations in the FWRs [flexible working regulations], and the persistence of social norms which impact care arrangements and act as a source of constraint among many working women, perpetuating gendered structures within organizations <i>and</i> home. (Wheatley, 2017: 581-582)	Organizational National/international	Organizations Line managers Workers Policy makers	✓			✓			✓		

organizations must be prepared for changes in the nature of a worker's disability identity as a function of intraindividual, social, organizational, and societal factors ... employers should be open to changes in disability identity within workers. (Santuzzi and Waltz, 2016: 1130)	Organizational	Organizations Line managers Workers		✓			✓		✓		
customers are more likely to complain for comparable service quality if the employee is different from them calls into question the managerial practice of linking benefits to customer satisfaction. Given the higher likelihood of incongruence, minorities are at a particular risk of receiving insufficient ratings. Organizations, need to monitor satisfaction ratings and potentially account for these effects. This is even more relevant since we find that units that receive higher numbers of biased complaints show increased short-term absenteeism and voluntary turnover, both harmful proximal and distal forms of voluntary employee withdraw. (Dwertmann and Kunze, 2020: 35-36)	Organizational	Organizations Line managers Customers Workers		✓			✓				✓
household organization of employment is not only contingent on dominant societal norms or policies, but is clearly affected by the educational status of household members and their ability to find employment locally ... Gender equality policies need to be formulated in the context of these household effects reflecting different opportunities and constraints on the options available to women in the EU. (Sánchez-Mira and O'Reilly, 2019: 439)	National/international	Policy makers Educational institutions Workers Organizations	✓			✓				✓	✓

Table 4: Future research questions to operationalize the SAPP framework			
Processes of change <i>Policy enactment issues</i>	Climate change and sustainability	Technology advancement	Diversity and inclusion
<p>Re-orientation of organizational objectives but</p> <p><i>Disconnected from reality</i></p>	<p>-To what extent are new / progressive organizational environmental objectives enacted?</p> <p>-What are the outcomes of environmental strategies for individual interests within and beyond the workplace over time?</p> <p>-How can the state incentivise the use of renewable energy in organizations over time?</p>	<p>-How do digitalization objectives / strategies help address big contemporary problems (e.g., racial discrimination, climate change, refugee crisis, healthcare availability)?</p> <p>-How are artificial intelligence and big data used across industries and what policies are adopted to ensure ethical practice?</p> <p>-How do remote working policies impact different worker groups across countries and over time?</p>	<p>-Why do diversity and inclusion initiatives prevent significant changes to representation and pay gaps?</p> <p>-What is the impact of other organizational strategies (e.g., talent management, customer care, product innovation) on diversity and inclusion outcomes over time?</p> <p>-How do employers support the employment and development of immigrants?</p>
<p>Re-configuration of experiences</p> <p><i>Disengaged from the front-line</i></p>	<p>-How are working patterns changing across industries in response to climate change?</p> <p>-What are worker and manager perceptions of how work re-organization can inform pro-environmental behaviours within and outside the workplace?</p> <p>-What are the likely characteristics for future greener jobs across industries from an employer perspective?</p>	<p>-How do employers' future strategies relating to automation vary across countries?</p> <p>-What are the characteristics of human-centred algorithms from a worker perspective?</p> <p>-What AI training and development interventions can the state invest in for citizens and workers in different roles?</p>	<p>-How do elements outside the workplace impact the work experiences of ethnic minority workers?</p> <p>-What are the challenges social enterprise organizations and their members face when seeking to support marginalised groups?</p> <p>-How do high-skilled and low-skilled immigrants experience workplace practices and policies?</p>
<p>Re-positioning of decision-making governance</p> <p><i>Detached from complexity</i></p>	<p>-To what extent do governance practices provide workers with a voice over environmental strategies?</p> <p>-How do power struggles between (inter)national actors / labour market institutions over climate change options unfold?</p> <p>-How can citizens participate in policy making about greener jobs?</p>	<p>-Why does the power of gig firms and their stakeholders vary across country contexts?</p> <p>-How can governance processes involve workers in decisions about the use of algorithms?</p> <p>-Can the state facilitate multi-lateral stakeholder dialogue over the use of AI at macro, meso and micro levels?</p>	<p>-How do social movements, collective alliances and networks shape decision-making related to diversity and inclusion within and beyond organizational boundaries?</p> <p>- How do governance processes account for the cultural experiences of intersectionally diverse workers?</p> <p>-To what extent do governance policies support whistle-blowers exposing discrimination?</p>

Figure 1: Identifying policy implications/recommendations relating to societal challenges

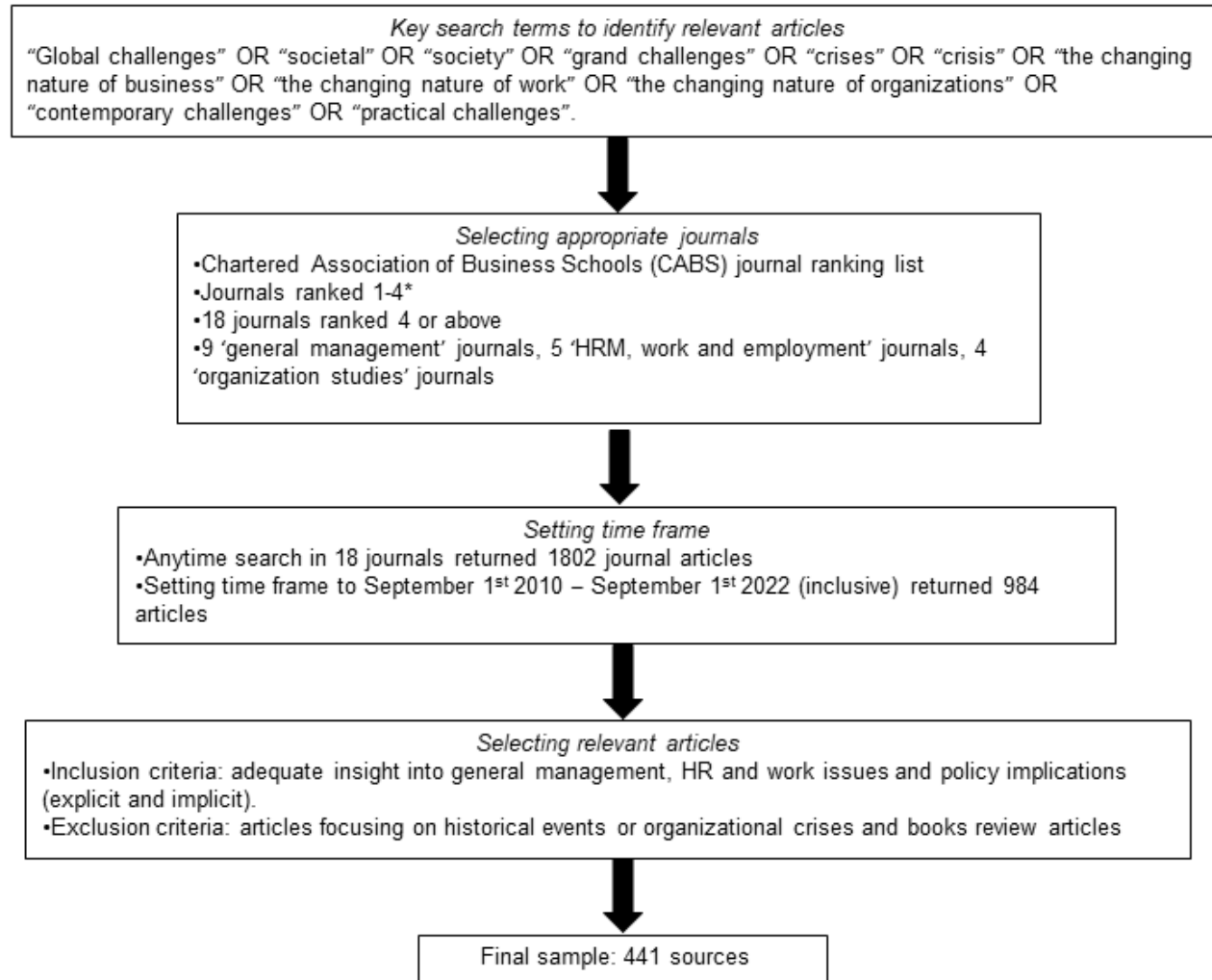


Figure 2: Society-Actors-Processes-Policy dual-purpose framing

