## Editorial

# Now is the time for a critical analysis of the pandemic's legacy

Dear readers, dear authors,

We are pleased to present the new special thematic issue of *Human System Management*. It is no coincidence that it refers to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the consumption, work and operations of organizations and individuals as their members. A critical analysis of what happens during a crisis and its consequences is only possible if we move away from the situation itself. Such an approach is especially necessary in the social sciences, which deal with the functioning of the human system at the micro (individual) and macro (different sizes and degrees of complexity of collectives) levels.

Winter 2020, a point in time that almost all of us now consider a period that separates the pre- from the post-pandemic period. The situation we found ourselves in at the beginning of 2020 was something completely new and different. Every new situation requires us to change. Certain situations require major changes, and we found ourselves in such a situation. Public health measures to contain the pandemic were changing the planning, organization, and daily routines of our lives. We had to change the "logistics" of our lives virtually overnight. Research today confirms that the COVID-19 pandemic affected our wellbeing and mental health. Public health measures and movement restrictions confined us to a small space: our homes. The working world faced the need to reorganize, considering all available resources, while information, instructions, and tasks changed daily. Working from home, waiting for work, and for many, losing their jobs, became

the new reality. In some sectors, however, the situation was quite different: increased workloads combined with an increased risk of infection. During the pandemic, sectors became further polarized, particularly into those who continued to work at increased intensity and those who unfortunately had to downsize or close their business or operation. Yes, polarization is one of the most pronounced legacies of the pandemic. Managing change in organizations depends on many factors, one of them is relationships. Unfortunately, the pandemic often exacerbated dysfunctional relationships and forms of social influence.

Perhaps because of fear and uncertainty, and especially because of initial health concerns, we followed developments in the first wave of the pandemic with a bit more patience and solidarity. Probably in the hope of a quick return to the "old normal"; however, this was not the case. It quickly became clear that the "old normal" was a thing of the past. In the summer of 2020, the pandemic stabilized somewhat, but we knew it was not over yet. In the fall of 2020, a new wave of the pandemic emerged in many countries, especially those that had not been hit as hard by the first wave. This period was long, with new waves of infection and new strains of virus. It lasted practically until 2022. The awareness that the crisis is not over, that it continues to change and make new demands, has made us tired and demotivated. The term pandemic fatigue has come to mean such a state. It represents a general decline in people's motivation to learn about COVID-19, to follow public health measures, and generally to act productively.

Studies with children and adolescents have shown a similar pattern of response. The lack of social contact, of familiarity with modern technologies, of distance education infrastructure, the need for parents' or caregivers' help with distance education, and the lack of productive leisure activities all took their toll on children and their caregivers. Especially in the early stages of adolescence, social contacts, friends, classmates, and teachers are very important for psychosocial development. And it was this age group that spent the longest time learning at home in many countries.

Coordinating work and leisure has become a particular challenge, especially in companies that have moved their business to the home environment of their employees. Organizing the workplace and work schedule, rearranging family relationships, and the fact that caregivers often took on new roles in relation to children (the role of teacher or/and peer) placed a serious additional burden on remote workers. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the labor market. In particular, the service industry, tourism, hospitality, entertainment, culture, and many other sectors have been shaken by the it. Although systemic incentives in many countries attempted to mitigate the financial and social crisis, many organizations were forced to close their businesses, and many workers, especially those with less stable employment and (sub)entrepreneurs, lost their jobs.

The situations described above are also addressed in scientific articles in this issue of *Human System Management*. Moving catering operations offsite has been one of the main solutions implemented by many restaurants for the survival of the business. However, the use of food delivery applications cannot be taken for granted, especially in a situation where consumer health and safety are paramount. The article "Are there any key factors that encourage food delivery applications use during the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand and the role of HRM?", by Jankit Chotigo and Yasuo Kadono, addresses consumer behavior in relation to the use of food delivery services during the pandemic. "Nexus between perceived job insecurity and employee work-related outcomes amid COVID-19: Attenuating effect of supervisor support", authored by Shuaib Ahmed Soomro, "Measuring innovative practices for workplace safety, health and well-being in Tunisia during the COVID-19 pandemic", by Hanen Khanchel,

"Strengthening of work-life balance while working remotely in the context of COVID-19 pandemic", by Živilėq Stankevičiūtėq and Svetlana Kunskaja, and "Telework and perceived workload: Learnings prior to the COVID-19 upheaval", by Tuuli Turja et al., describe and explain various aspects of changes in the work environment during the COVID-19 pandemic and how these changes and approaches to their implementation affected workers. The results of research conducted in different social settings show that there is no single answer to the question of how the transition to telework affected workers, because workers' reactions depend on the characteristics of the work or activities, their living environment, and the specific relationships in the organization, especially the degree of support that the organization and its main actors (managers) provide to their workers. Organizational support is also critical in another legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic, the long COVID or so-called post-COVID, a condition experienced by many COVID-19 survivors long after the acute phase of the disease. Long COVID continues to affect a significant portion of the working population today and manifests itself in a range of symptoms that limit an individual's ability to work. For an overview of the approaches needed to support workers facing long COVID, see a review article "Some of the workforce face post COVID after the acute phase of illness: the supportive role of the employer", by Babnik et al. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on organizational practices, including boomerang hiring, is discussed in an article titled "Boomerang hiring: strategy for sustainable development in COVID-19 era", by Penumadu V. Raveendra and Yellappa M. Satish. Rehiring workers who have been laid off due to COVID-19 downsizing can be a positive action for customers or clients with whom the workers have been in regular contact, and is therefore well accepted by customers. However, the effectiveness and especially the morale of such forms of employment depend on several factors, most importantly, the relationships that existed within the company prior to the layoff. The practice of reemploying workers could represent socially responsible behavior on the part of employers, but only if the practice is based on positive intentions that are grounded in a sincere focus on the welfare of their (former) employees. In the article "Breach of employer obligation and employee well-being during COVID-19 unlock phase," Karani et al. report an empirical study confirming the importance of reciprocity in the employee-employer relationship

during the COVID -19 pandemic. The violation of exchange obligations by the employer is positively related to family-work conflict, which increases psychological distress and decreases employee well-being. Internal organizational factors also had a significant impact on the activity of HEI. The article "The impact of internal factors on the use of technology in higher education in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic", authored by Abdullah Mohammed Al-Ghurbani et al., confirms that several factors (e.g., perceived usefulness, ease of use, self-efficacy, attitudes toward information and communication technology) influenced the intention of higher education institutions to use modern technology during the COVID-19 lockdown. However, these factors can also be significantly influenced by the work environment through providing appropriate educational and technological support to employees.

The article "The association between the initial outcomes of COVID-19 and the human development index: An ecological study", by Mohamed Buheji et al., represents the conclusion of this editorial. It shows that broader socioeconomic factors, expressed through the human development index, are related to mortality rates in the first wave of the pandemic. Being prepared for a health and social crisis such as the pandemic COVID-19 means creating the conditions to mitigate the negative consequences of the life changes caused by the crisis.

Crisis preparedness is a concept that is inherently paradoxical. It can be understood positively, as it implies security that we can prepare for possible future unexpected changes; however, this is not entirely the case. The term crisis implies a situation that is new to people, a situation that they have not yet faced and that therefore requires a change in the way we have been thinking, feeling, and behaving. It is true that we have learned a lot from the pandemic COVID-19 and that many things have changed as a result. However, we perceive a certain situation as a crisis when we realize that we cannot cope with it with our previous knowledge, skills, and behavior patterns. A crisis is primarily a situation for which we are not prepared. The assumption that we can prepare for a crisis can therefore be dangerous because it places a demand on the individual along the lines of "you must respond adaptively", a demand that can inadvertently shift all responsibility to the individual. Mohamed Buheji et al. note in their article that the functioning of a society in such a situation depends on the functioning of its subsystems. In other words, societies that allow their members the right to perceive a situation as stressful are inherently contexts in which individuals are better enabled to respond to a crisis. Such societies are forward-looking and result-oriented, tolerant, and supportive in relation to their members.

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