

AMR-09-0402.R2 Comments to editors and reviewers

I have now received and considered the reviews of your revised manuscript submitted to *Academy of Management Review* "HUMAN RESOURCE SYSTEMS AND HELPING IN ORGANIZATIONS: A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE" (Manuscript AMR-09-0402.R1). All three of your reviewers agree that your manuscript has made good progress and you've made a good effort to respond to their earlier concerns. We all appreciate the clearer focus on the linkages between HR systems and helping and recognize the time and energies you put into this revision.

Your reviewers also agree that at this stage, several issues remain. I share the opinion that your revised manuscript is much improved and that you undertook great effort to be responsive to the earlier feedback. And, while I agree there are still some issues to address, I believe these issues can be addressed with relatively moderate additional effort and thus, I am pleased to **conditionally accept your manuscript for publication in AMR** subject to the changes below. Congratulations! I will not be returning your revised manuscript to the reviewers, but instead will be ensuring the remaining changes are made on their behalf.

In terms of the remaining changes I'd like you to make, it is important that you consider all the comments made by the reviewers but I would like to highlight the primary factors that I believe are necessary to move forward. I would like you to focus your energies on the points I note below.

Dear Professor Lepak:

Thank you for the positive feedback and conditionally accepting our paper. In this round of revision, we focused our efforts strongly on the points made in your letter. Below, we grouped actions taken in response to your comments, organized under the major headings supplied. As before, we attempted to be succinct while fully explaining our actions. Although we replied directly to you and focused our explanations on points raised in your letter, we took seriously and addressed in some way each of the reviewer comments.

Given your request for an August 1 deadline and your patience waiting for our first revision, we wanted to make every effort to return this revision as promptly as possible. Since your email inquiring about our returning the revision early, my colleagues' and my schedules aligned such that we were able to make this revision our top priority. We have devoted most of our working (and nonworking) days to the revision. As a result, we are able to return the paper earlier than we estimated.

Your and the reviewers' comments have again stimulated changes we feel further improved the paper. Should you find the paper requires further clarification or revision, we most certainly stand ready to do so.

Best regards,

Kevin Mossholder

**Propositions.** One of the more significant concerns that remain for the reviewers and myself relates to the propositions in your manuscript. For example, reviewer 1 (Comment 2) writes, "*The way in*

*which all the propositions are currently stated is clumsy, convoluted, and would benefit from simplification. In each case you might remove the intermediary climate information, as this is contained in the preceding paragraphs. Please see the following examples: ... P1a: In a compliance HR system, helping behavior is motivated by self-interest and instrumentality. (remove the "will lead to a market pricing climate in which") ... P2a: In a collaboration HR system, helping behavior is motivated by in-kind reciprocity and maintained by balanced exchanges (remove "will lead to an equality matching climate") ... P1e is incomplete. Constrained by what or to what?"*

Reviewer 3 (Comments 4-6) raises similar concerns and writes, *"The very first proposition regarding helping indicates that helping will be "constrained." This is not testable as stated. Constrained relative to what? ... All of the propositions regarding risk were worded in a way that I believe renders them impossible to test (1c, 2c, and 3c). I understand risk to be one of the dimensions of relational climate, so you cannot simply delete these propositions. Perhaps they could be reworded to indicate that perceived risk will be greater for X than for Y?... The causal model of hr systems -> relational climates -> helping is never presented, and the abstract even hints that you are not proposing mediation. I would think that at least partial mediation is expected here, and that logic should permeate the manuscript (abstract, introduction to big picture model, propositions, and perhaps even a figure). Is there a reason that you are shying away from proposing mediation?"*

I'm not exactly certain as to what the best course of action is and I do not want to impose specific wording on how you structure your propositions. Having said that, I think it is imperative that you do address these concerns regarding the structure of your propositions. I believe this is doable with some effort to get to the essence of each proposition and to present clear and testable propositions.

Following R1's suggestion, we reworded the "a" through "d" propositions to eliminate the phrase containing intermediary climate information. We think this refinement improves their clarity. We also improved the wording of the "e" and "f" propositions as well.

We also altered all "c" propositions (i.e., those dealing with risk) in response to R3's comment 5. Whereas the previous wording of these propositions simply described risks associated with helping in each climate, the revised wording indicates employees will perceive helping as risky to the extent certain conditions exist.

As requested by R1 (comment 2) and R3 (comment 4), we reworded proposition 1e, to make it consistent with propositions 2e and 3e. It now reads: "In a compliance HR system and market pricing climate, helping behavior will occur less frequently than in collaborative or commitment HR systems." We believe this revision works because the collaborative and commitment systems are now introduced in greater detail at an earlier point in the paper (see our response in the **Structure** section below).

Finally, we agree with R3 (comment 6) that there is an undercurrent of mediation in the paper. However, given that relational climate is a new construct and research underpinning relations between HR systems and helping behavior has been undertaken in earnest only recently (e.g., Chuang & Liao, 2010), we felt it premature to make causal relations among the constructs a focus of the paper. We emphasized developing a

theoretical foundation that might stimulate researchers to investigate both the relational climate construct as well as relations among major components of the paper (i.e., HR systems, relational climate, and helping behavior). Addressing mediational issues would require incorporating an additional layer into a crowded substantive landscape. Another reviewer (R2) stated the opinion (see **Clarification and additional considerations** below) that we were “*really trying to cover a lot of literatures and concepts (as I noted in the prior version of the manuscript)*.” Finally, R3 asked why we were shying away from mediational issues. In short, at this point in the research life cycle of the constructs presented, this was the more conservative and appropriate stance to take.

**Clarification and additional considerations.** The reviewers pointed out several instances where some additional clarification would be very helpful for the reader. For example, reviewer 2 (Comment 1) writes, “*I believe the distinction between a “collaborative” system needs to be more clearly distinguished from collective system in the intro. In particular, if employees/org have “collective commitment” (p. 4) doesn’t this also suggest “collaboration” between them? The distinction becomes clearer later when discussing the climates and the specific systems, but I believe this distinctions needs to be made very clear when first defining each HR system (p. 4).*” This reviewer goes on to note (Comment 2), “[*I found the discussion of the “dimensions” (now bottom of p.8/top of p. 9) a bit difficult to follow as you are really trying to cover a lot of literatures and concepts (as I noted in the prior version of the manuscript). Perhaps most importantly, this discussion seems more focused on emphasizing that it’s important to incorporate these constructs (and why), what “substantive areas “ were reviewed (is it really necessary to state the specific literature, e.g., “social capital... interpersonal helping”), and the “grounding principle” for inclusion. I would suggest it would be more valuable to focus on how these constructs link to your framework (i.e., the link between HR systems, climate, and helping).*”] Reviewer 2 also raises several useful points about your discussion section. [In comment 6 s/he highlights a need for clarifying the relationship with flexibility. I agree with this reviewer that this focus in the discussion section does seem to be disconnected from the rest of the model. Moving forward, you need to be sure to somehow better incorporate this discussion with the major thrust of your contribution or more clearly articulate your arguments to address these concerns by reviewer 2.]

Regarding R2’s comment 1 about distinguishing the collaborative and commitment systems in the introduction, we now explicitly highlight key differences between these systems when first presenting them on pp. 4-5. In particular, the characteristic mutuality and psychological links forged between the organization and employees in commitment systems create situations in which employees become focused on groups, teams, and the organization, thus blurring individual identities in favor of collective identity. In collaborative systems, employees maintain their own identities while working toward common goals, which when attained reward the parties involved. Although both systems entail degrees of interdependence, the ties in a commitment system are analogous to a family or clan, whereas those in a collaborative system are analogous to a partnership or alliance.

We believe the general changes made in the introductory part of the paper also aid in further clarifying differences between commitment and collaborative systems. Specifically, we moved forward to pp. 4-5 the broad descriptions of the three archetypal HR systems, which in the first revision had been located at the beginning of the respectively headed sections—**Compliance HR Systems: Effecting Helping Through**

**A Market Pricing Climate, Collaborative HR Systems: Effecting Helping Through An Equality Matching Climate, and Commitment HR Systems: Effecting Helping Through A Communal Sharing Climate.** (See also responses about moving these descriptions in the **Structure** section below.)

We were a little puzzled by R2's comment 2 about focusing on how the relational climate dimensions link to the proposed framework. Describing why and from where the dimensions were derived demonstrates linkages between them and the core substance of relational climate. R3 (comment 2) had noted that our initial introduction of the dimensions got lost in excess verbiage added during the first revision. We worked to streamline this section in the current revision (bottom p. 8-top p. 9). Specifically, we deleted three unnecessary sentences (including the one containing "grounding principle"), and now cite no more than two references for each substantive area reviewed. With due respect to R2, we feel it is important to let readers (especially ones not familiar with relational constructs) know the underpinnings of relational climate.

We also rearranged the flow of material as requested by R3 (comment 2) to make the relational dimensions more visible. They now are listed and numbered in the first full paragraph, top p. 9. By sharpening the focus of the entire section labeled "Relational Climates: Schema and Dimensions" (beginning at bottom p. 6) and the key paragraph where the relational climate dimensions are introduced (top p. 9), we hope to have sufficiently addressed R2's (and R3's) concerns.

In regard to the organizational flexibility material (R2, comment 6), we view one of the paper's contributions as highlighting helping behavior's connection with organizational flexibility. Perhaps more importantly, we suggest that certain HR systems (and associated climates) promote helping appropriate for meeting more circumscribed or more expansive flexibility needs. We had added extra material on flexibility in the first revision in responding to reviewer comments. In hindsight, this gave organizational flexibility more emphasis in the paper than we really intended. Therefore, in response to your and reviewer requests, we have pared back the amount of material devoted to flexibility (from two paragraphs to one, pp. 23-24) and linked it more clearly with helping behavior. We believe this reduction is consistent with its respective importance in the paper.

In a small point, R2 (comment 2) also asked if "factors" or "elements" could be used to describe relational climate components rather than "dimensions." We had used the term "dimensions" as the descriptor for the climate components because we felt it was the more frequently used term in the climate literature. To double-check this, we examined two recent organizational climate reviews by leading scholars (James et al., 2008; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2011) and other climate articles we referenced in the paper. From this examination, we determined that "dimensions" is the most common label, and therefore prefer to retain "dimensions" in describing components of relational climate.

Reviewer 3 suggests that you consider several additional points for your discussion section. Specifically, in comment 8 s/he writes, "*There are two interesting issues raised by reviewers (one mine, one from another reviewer) that I think could be mentioned as future research. The first is negative*

*effects of competitive HR practices on helping; that is, HR practices that stimulate counter-productive work behaviors. The second is reverse causality, where certain relational climates alter the HR systems adopted, or at least how they are enacted/interpreted by certain managers."*

We addressed R3's comment 8 by including material concerning both topics s/he raised. Keeping length considerations in mind, we first deleted material pertaining to HR research design issues that we had inserted during the first revision. (This deletion addresses R3's comment 7 question about an HR design/measurement issue, as the unclear material is no longer in the paper.) The deleted material was located immediately after the "Implications and Future Research" heading (p. 24). Because HR research design and measurement issues have been more fully addressed in the broader HR literature (e.g., Gerhart, Wright, McMahan, & Snell, 2000), we felt it better to consider future research issues more directly connected with the focus of our paper.

Next, we inserted material concerning the idea of reverse causality where we discuss bottom up influences on helping (p. 28). Relying on structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), we suggest how emergent social interactions conceivably could influence managers to adjust HR practices. Although there is little empirical evidence suggesting relational climates and helping could influence an entire HR system, there is evidence that (a) patterns of helping affect certain HR practices and (b) informal social processes can influence which HR practices an organization adopts. To balance the added length to the paragraph in which bottom up influences are discussed, we added two more sentences (and accompanying references) to the top down paragraph preceding the bottom up paragraph (p. 27).

Regarding the counterproductive work behavior issue, we agree with R3 that outcome- and efficiency-oriented HR practices might decrease the likelihood of helping behavior. We noted this issue is particularly salient in compliance HR systems, which are more likely to use practices such as individual incentives and lead to more constrained helping exchanges than are found in the other two HR systems. To address R3's concern, we discuss that when practices constrain employee helping behavior, employees may withhold help or in extreme cases engage in counterproductive behavior. We have added this material to the paragraph in which we mention helping obstacles and toxic managers (pp. 26-27).

From my own reading of your manuscript, I would like to make a minor suggestion and encourage you to simply refer to "hr systems" rather than "strategic HR systems". I think they convey the same thing and the reality is that any HR system could be used in a strategic manner. The key point that you are emphasizing is that you are focusing on the system.

Throughout the paper, we now refer to the three systems as "HR systems" only.

**Structure.** Reviewer 3 raised several points regarding the structure of your paper. For example, in comment 1, this reviewer writes, "*I'd prefer to see the definition of helping (along with some illustrations to make the definition more concrete and compelling) in the introduction.] Then, in the HR systems section, I'd like to learn more detail about the three archetypes. This would*

*mean shifting Table 2 to become Table 1, and walking the reader through at least some of Table 1 at this juncture. I think the reason to do this is simple – not every reader will understand the archetypes as described. You will want to offer an explanation of each grounded in the details of how employment relationship and employment mode play out with specific HR practices. This will help an AMR reader who is not a specialist in SHRM. [Please note that I am not asking for a complete revision of structure here, I am suggesting shifting some material around to be more consistent with the structure you are now using.]* I am not suggesting that you must conform with this recommendation but I do agree with this reviewer that there are some parts of your paper in which some earlier definitions could help the reader. I agree that it would be helpful to make sure that constructs are defined before you make reference to them.

Following the recommendation of R3 (comment 1), we moved the definition of helping to the introduction of the paper (p. 2). We appreciate this suggestion and believe the definition fits better in its new location. We did not add specific examples, feeling they could fixate readers on the illustrations as opposed to the entire gamut of helping behaviors possible in organizations. Additionally, this change addresses R3's (comment 1) concern regarding the heading "Human Resource Systems and Relational Climates" on p. 3. Because the definition of helping is no longer in this section, the heading now accurately represents the content of the text that follows it.

We also appreciate R3's recommendation to provide more description of the three archetypal HR systems in the "Human Resource Systems and Relational Climates" section. To implement this suggestion, we moved forward (to pp. 4-5) the broad descriptions of the HR systems that had been located at the beginning of the respectively headed sections—**Compliance HR Systems: Effecting Helping Through A Market Pricing Climate**, **Collaborative HR Systems: Effecting Helping Through An Equality Matching Climate**, and **Commitment HR Systems: Effecting Helping Through A Communal Sharing Climate**. For readers less familiar with the SHRM literature, these descriptions should provide an initial understanding of the conceptual objectives underlying each system, and foreshadow how the employment relationship, employment mode, and specific practices might be configured in operationalizing the systems.

Please note that we left explicit discussion of each HR system's employment relationship and mode in their original locations in the paper, however. Our thinking is that discussion of employment relationship and mode should immediately precede the motivation and sustenance propositions for each HR system/relational climate section, because these HR system components are most directly relevant to relational climates. Further, were we to move detailed descriptions of employee relationship and mode to earlier in the paper, it might overwhelm the general links between HR systems, climates, and helping overviewed at that point in the paper.

Finally, we also note that at R2's urging in the first round of revision, we had switched the order of the tables so that relational climate dimensions were contained in Table 1 and the HR systems and practices contained in Table 2. We had also revised the text accordingly. Switching the tables again would require major adjustments in the body of

the paper. For these reasons, we would prefer retaining the content of Tables 1 and 2 as currently set.

**Editing.** I would like to also request a good amount of effort in this final revision to focus on editing. Your paper is relatively long (probably because we asked you to do so much!), and now we need to pare it back. I'm not suggesting a hard page number to cut but I do believe with some careful editing you could probably reduce 4-5 pages of text by sharpening and tightening your message. Some specific suggestions to consider are:

a) *Tighten the discussion.* I realize that I have asked you to add to the discussion section. And, I realize that the discussion section is much improved over the first submission. However, what is currently there could be edited and more precise. Some of the points are speculative and might be reduced in length or eliminated.

b) *General Editing.* Within the body there are some areas in which transitions between sections are excessive. At other points, you note what you are about to discuss, then you state it, and then you state what you did state. This can be reduced. As noted by reviewer 1 (Comment 1), "*The paper contains a fair bit of repetition. In some instances this is called for; in others, it is overkill. Please go through the paper to reduce the repetition.*" Reviewer 2 (Comment 7) adds, "*...throughout the paper, I believe the writing could be made more direct and less complicated.*"

In thoroughly addressing concerns raised in the first review, our wording in the prior revision became pedestrian and repetitious in some places. We took several steps to rectify this situation.

First as you requested, we tightened the discussion. In particular, we reduced the material on flexibility and the section entitled "Implications and Future Research." Please note that in reducing the latter, we also addressed R2's (comment 7) specific concern that this section was repetitive. Additional information about the changes made to the discussion can be found above in our responses to you regarding R3's comment 8 and R2's comment 6.

Second, we attempted to carefully edit the paper to eliminate repetition and increase clarity. In addition to general editing, we explicitly addressed each of the specific editing, wording, and repetition points raised by the reviewers. For example, a concern noted by you and all three reviewers was that our transitional paragraphs (i.e., those that introduce a section and provide an overview of what we do in it) were repetitive. We agree with this assessment, but believe such paragraphs serve a useful purpose in guiding the reader through the paper. Examining other AMR papers, we noticed that most used such transitional paragraphs for the same purpose. Thus, our approach was to substantially reduce the material in each of these transition paragraphs (in most instances by 50% or more), but not eliminate them. This was accomplished primarily by deleting sentences where we reiterated previously stated ideas using different wording (e.g., as noted by R2, comment 7).

Additionally, moving part of the archetype descriptions forward to pp. 4-5 (R3, comment 1) allowed us to reduce the introductions of each archetype section (R3, comment 3). In

the process, we further streamlined the initial and subsequent archetype descriptions. Finally, we also specifically reworded or deleted each of the sentences or sections noted by R2 in his/her comments 5 and 7, and carefully proofed the references as requested by R1 in his/her comment 3. Overall, we reduced the paper by approximately 5 pages.

Finally, only two reviewer comments were not explicitly noted in your above comments. These were R2's comment 3 objecting to referring to Lepak and Snell (1999) as recent, and comment 4 requesting we use "collaborative HR system" rather than "collaboration HR system." To satisfy R2's comment 3, we deleted the word "recent." To satisfy R2's comment 4, we use "collaborative" to describe that HR system throughout the paper.

***References not included in the paper***

Gerhart, B., Wright, P. M., McMahan, G. C., & Snell, S. A. 2000. Measurement error in research on human resources and firm performance: How much error is there and how does it influence effect size estimates? *Personnel Psychology*, 53: 803-834.

James, L. R., Choi, C. C., Ko, C-H. E., McNeil, P. K., Minton, M. K., Wright, M. A., & Kim, K. 2008. Organizational and psychological climate: A review of theory and research. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 17: 5-32.

Schneider, B., Ehrhart, M. G., & Macey, W. H. 2011. Perspectives on organizational climate and culture. In S. Zedeck (Ed.), *APA handbook of industrial and organizational psychology, Vol. 1*: 373-414. Washington: American Psychological Association.