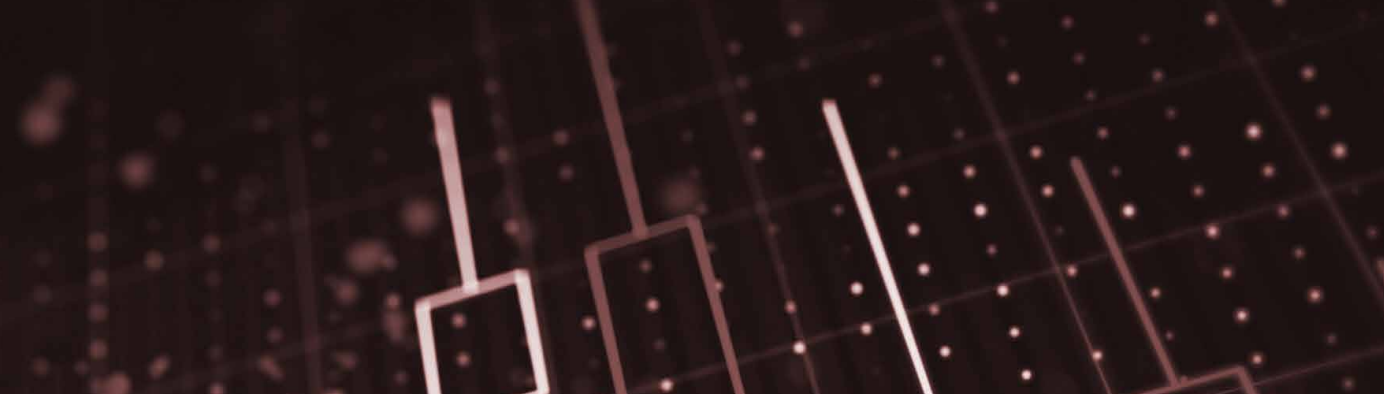




IntechOpen

IntechOpen Series
Business, Management and Economics,
Volume 45

**A Review of
People Oriented Leadership**
Evolving Approaches to Work, Culture,
and Management

Edited by Alvaro Felipe Alejandro Espinosa



A Review of People
Oriented Leadership
- Evolving Approaches
to Work, Culture, and
Management

Edited by Alvaro Felipe Alejandro Espinosa

Published in London, United Kingdom

A Review of People Oriented Leadership – Evolving Approaches to Work, Culture, and Management
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1005728>
Edited by Alvaro Felipe Alejandro Espinosa

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First published in London, United Kingdom, 2026 by IntechOpen

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For EU product safety concerns: IN TECH d.o.o., Prolaz Marije Krucifikse Kozulić 3, 51000 Rijeka, Croatia, info@intechopen.com or visit our website at intechopen.com.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

A Review of People Oriented Leadership – Evolving Approaches to Work, Culture, and Management
Edited by Alvaro Felipe Alejandro Espinosa
p. cm.

This title is part of the Business, Management and Economics Book Series, Volume 45

Topic: Business and Management

Series Editor: Taufiq Choudhry

Topic Editors: Vito Bobek and Tatjana Horvat

Print ISBN 978-1-83634-611-1

Online ISBN 978-1-83634-610-4

eBook (PDF) ISBN 978-1-83634-612-8

ISSN 2753-894X

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IntechOpen Book Series

Business, Management and Economics

Volume 45

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This series will provide a comprehensive overview of recent research trends in business and management, economics, and marketing. Topics will include asset liability management, financial consequences of the financial crisis and covid-19, financial accounting, mergers and acquisitions, management accounting, SMEs, financial markets, corporate finance and governance, managerial technology and innovation, resource management and sustainable development, social entrepreneurship, corporate responsibility, ethics and accountability, microeconomics, labour economics, macroeconomics, public economics, financial economics, econometrics, direct marketing, creative marketing, internet marketing, market planning and forecasting, brand management, market segmentation and targeting and other topics under business and management. This book series will focus on various aspects of business and management whose in-depth understanding is critical for business and company management to function effectively during this uncertain time of financial crisis, Covid-19 pandemic, and military activity in Europe.

Meet the Series Editor



Prof. Choudhry holds a BSc degree in Economics from the University of Iowa, as well as a Masters and Ph.D. in Applied Economics from Clemson University, USA. In January 2006, he became a Professor of Finance at the University of Southampton Business School. He was previously a Professor of Finance at the University of Bradford Management School. He has over 80 articles published in international finance and economics journals. His research interests and specialties include financial econometrics, financial economics, international economics and finance, housing markets, financial markets, among others.

Meet the Volume Editor



A senior HR leader with 35+ years in higher education and health-care, Alvaro Felipe Alejandro Espinosa, Ph.D., serves as Program Chair for the HR Management Program at Post University. His operational work as a consultant and CHRO focuses on leadership and HR effectiveness. His work centers on building leadership capacity, advancing effective people practices, and treating employees as essential contributors and investors in organizational success. Espinosa brings a deep understanding of how organizational support, leadership behaviors, and workplace culture shape the employee experience. His approach integrates practical insights with a strong belief in the value employees bring to every level of organizational life.

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Preface

As we approach the quarter-century mark of the 21st Century, we are called to reflect on the dynamics between employees and the organizations for which they work.

It can be argued that we have moved beyond thinking of employees as resources, assets, or capital. Though terminology has not evolved to reflect this perspective, what makes work meaningful is the people who do the work.

How employees are treated in the workplace can be universally categorized as people practices, whether manifest through policies, procedures, plans, leadership actions, the employee experience, organizational support, or other factors intentionally deployed in the workplace that impact employees.

This book explores this perspective of organizational people practices.

Notably, as we explore the rise of people practices as an emerging nexus for enhancing our understanding of the employee experience and for how organizational leaders can reimagine a workplace that places greater value on employees, we will encounter tensions between a people-practices perspective and those inherent in today's view.

The chapters in this book touch on various aspects of people practices; however, they do so from a traditional human resource organizational perspective. Our challenge is to embrace the concept of organizational people practices as essential for the future while we continue to operate within our current dynamic.

Contributors examine continuous performance management as an organizational competence, hybrid work dynamics in a public-sector context, the integration of employee well-being into HR strategy, the cultivation of non-toxic and inclusive cultures, and the implications of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies for employment relationships. Our challenge is to effect a paradigm shift from within our current one. Each topic covered will touch on this paradox. We are called to action as professionals in the human resources discipline to lead the embrace of organizational people practices.

Look for opportunities within each chapter that might apply to your professional practice and to the organization you serve. Knowing that collectively, the term 'human resources' is frequently used to represent what employees experience and also to denote an organizational functional departmental unit. As we shift to more effective people practices, we begin to understand that a functional department does not own people practices; instead, they are an organizational competence.

When we think of the rise of people practices from a broader, universal perspective, we can see that this shift is not a goal, a desire, or a prediction. It is something that is happening.

This book invites you to question familiar routines and traditional approaches. What people practices define your team, your organization, and your leadership? What assumptions about performance management, workplace arrangements, well-being initiatives, organizational culture, or technological integration are ready to be reexamined?

Thank you to those who submitted chapters for inclusion.

Thank you to our readers and to all those professionals committed to recognizing the role, contributions, and value employees make to their organizations on a daily basis.

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Section 1

Engaging the Employee

Perspective Chapter: Integrating Continuous Performance Management (CPM) into Organizational People Practices

Sabokro Mahdi and Yousofi Atifa

Abstract

This chapter examines the evolution of performance management systems, highlighting the shift from traditional, rigid appraisal methods to Continuous Performance Management (CPM). Traditional performance reviews, often conducted annually, are increasingly recognized as ineffective in meeting the dynamic needs of modern organizations and their employees. As a people-centered approach, CPM emphasizes continuous feedback, collaborative goal-setting, and real-time performance monitoring, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and employee engagement. This chapter comprehensively analyzes, synthesizes, generalizes, and systematizes the existing scientific literature related to CPM. The research findings discuss the theoretical foundations of CPM, its key components, the reasons for its adoption, and the challenges organizations face during implementation, as well as the factors contributing to its successful integration. Ultimately, the chapter advocates for a more adaptive, people-oriented approach to performance management that aligns with individual and organizational objectives.

Keywords: continuous feedback, continuous performance management, employee development, employee engagement, organizational effectiveness, performance appraisal

1. Introduction

In recent years, performance management systems have undergone significant evolution. Traditionally, these systems relied mainly on annual or semi-annual performance reviews that served as the basis for various human resource management (HRM) decisions. These decisions encompassed evaluations of training requirements, staff development programs, promotions, salary adjustments, and other essential human resource functions [1]. Traditional hierarchical structures and rigid management methods do not meet modern requirements and the ever-changing needs

of staff. Consequently, the shift toward flexible, employee-centered management practices is a response to the ever-changing nature of today's work environment [2]. However, the contemporary approach to performance management emphasizes the importance of continuous and agile feedback mechanisms.

Traditional approaches to performance management often consider employees merely as organizational resources or passive participants in the production process. In contrast, current perspectives recognize employees as human beings endowed with intellectual capabilities, who actively engage as decision-makers and innovators [3]. This shift in perception has led to a new understanding of the relationship between organizations and their employees. Modern organizations strive to create a framework in which individual and organizational objectives are aligned. According to Alcântara et al. [4], such people management practices promote a model of shared success, ensuring that achievements are not realized at the expense of others, but rather through collective effort and cooperation. This shift reflects a deeper understanding of the dynamics within the workplace and the value of nurturing a motivated and engaged workforce.

Continuous Performance Management embodies a transformative approach to HRM that moves away from infrequent performance evaluations toward an ongoing dialog between employees and managers. This model prioritizes regular feedback, objective alignment, and collaborative planning [5], all aimed at enhancing employee engagement and overall organizational success. The significance of CPM lies in its acknowledgment that real-time communication and consistent support are vital for adapting to the rapidly changing demands of the contemporary workforce.

As organizations increasingly adopt CPM practices, they are experiencing a range of benefits, including heightened employee engagement [5], improved collaboration [6], and enhanced retention rates [1, 7]. These results reinforce the concept that effective performance management is essential to drive organizational performance. This trend reflects a broader movement toward a more agile and adaptive human resource management (HRM) landscape, aiming to create environments where employees feel valued, engaged, and empowered to contribute meaningfully to organizational success. In this chapter, we will explore CPM as an innovative approach to people management. We aim to highlight how CPM can reshape the dynamics of employee-manager interactions and contribute to a more effective and responsive organizational culture. By analyzing relevant literature, this chapter will provide insights into the implementation and potential benefits of CPM.

2. Theoretical foundations

2.1 Historical context

The evolution of human resource management (HRM) reflects a significant shift in performance management systems, moving from a control-oriented to a people-oriented approach. Initially, during the British Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, workforce management practices were dominated by a control-oriented mindset in which employees were primarily viewed as resources to be managed for maximum productivity. The aim was to increase efficiency through close supervision and standardization [8], as seen in the influence of scientific management introduced by Frederick Taylor in the 1920s. In the early twentieth century, the focus of Human Resource Management transitioned

toward personnel management, reflecting a growing recognition of the critical role that human capital plays in fostering organizational success. This shift underscored the increasing importance of effectively managing personnel to enhance productivity and drive overall performance within organizations. The aim of personnel management was not only to maximize productivity but also to ensure that employees were treated fairly. This was the beginning of recognizing employees as valuable assets and not just tools for production. The human relations movement of the 1930s further changed this perspective.

Other research, such as the Hawthorne research, has emphasized the critical role of employee motivation, job satisfaction, and social dynamics within the workplace. These studies showed how interpersonal relationships and environmental factors significantly affect the productivity and morale of employees, thus emphasizing the necessity of creating a supportive and attractive work environment for organizations. This movement encouraged a more humanistic approach to management and integrated psychological factors into human resource management practices [8]. After that, organizations sought to regulate employee performance through various appraisal methods. In a remarkable 1957 article, social psychologist Douglas McGregor proposed that employees should actively participate in setting their performance goals and evaluating their own progress, with guidance from their supervisors. The goal of this collaborative approach was to increase the strengths of the employees. McGregor later coined this perspective as “Theory Y,” which posited that employees inherently desire to perform well and will thrive when adequately supported. In contrast, “Theory X” operated on the premise that motivation relied primarily on material rewards and punishments [9]. Then came Edwin Locke’s goal-setting theory (1968), which proposed that goals drive individual motivation, and later Herzberg’s two-factor theory (1974). All these theories and perspectives, in turn, paved the way for the creation of a human-centered performance management system. This historical context and their subsequent studies demonstrate a profound shift from controlling employees to nurturing environments in which they feel valued and empowered to manage their own performance.

2.2 Definitions and concepts of CPM

Continuous Performance Management emphasizes collaborative goal-setting between employees and their managers, fosters more frequent discussions about performance, and encourages two-way conversations [10]. Additionally, CPM facilitates real-time feedback, creating a more dynamic and responsive performance management process [11]. Moreover, frequent performance management provides numerous opportunities for meaningful interactions between managers and employees [7]. Having these conversations every day, not just once a year, shows employees how their work contributes to the team and the company as a whole. Many employees do not fully appreciate the growth opportunities offered by their companies through performance management strategies. Corporate Performance Management seeks to address this issue. By fostering a culture of open communication and ongoing improvement, CPM aims to empower employees to take charge of their own development. Consequently, employees will seek additional opportunities for improvement to maintain their competence at work, which can be facilitated by real-time, engaging, and continuous performance management [10]. This approach fosters a culture of ongoing feedback and development, encouraging employees to refine their skills and enhance their contributions to the organization.

Many companies are still stuck in traditional and rigid HR processes and practices that work against the business rather than supporting it [5]. The fundamental

objectives of traditional performance management often conflict with the realities of human nature, inherent diversity, and the complexities of system dynamics [1]. These methods do not meet the modern requirements and the ever-changing needs of employees. The transition to flexible and employee-oriented management methods is a response to today's dynamic work conditions [2]. Agile organizations that prioritize employee development not only increase operational efficiency but also empower people to pursue their own initiatives [6].

2.3 CPM key components

In the continuous performance management approach, employees receive ongoing feedback, and their skills are developed through coaching [7]. Continuous employee performance management paves the way to provide continuous support to achieve organizational goals and objectives effectively and efficiently [5]. The key components of this approach are the following:

2.3.1 Goal setting

Goal setting is a foundational element of continuous performance management. In this process, goals are created in line with organizational objectives [5] and then divided into manageable and short-term goals. This structure enables employees to stay focused while also offering the flexibility to respond to unexpected challenges.

2.3.2 Real-time performance monitoring

Regular interactions allow teams to assess performance in real-time, pinpointing strengths and areas needing enhancement. This real-time assessment helps organizations quickly identify when goals are not being achieved, facilitating timely interventions and necessary adjustments [11, 12]. Ultimately, real-time performance monitoring is crucial for maintaining effective operations and ensuring that teams stay on track to meet their objectives. This approach not only enhances productivity but also fosters a culture of accountability and continuous improvement within organizations.

2.3.3 Continuous feedback and coaching

Consistent and frequent meetings between managers and employees promote immediate recognition of accomplishments and provide constructive feedback on areas needing improvement [7]. Regular and frequent dialog is the most important element of continuous performance management. As noted by Rivera et al. [13], the practice of corporate performance management has shifted from relying solely on a formal annual review to emphasizing the importance of ongoing dialog and real-time feedback. Team leaders work to foster a unified team by motivating, coaching, and offering feedback to all members [14]. Moreover, ongoing evaluation facilitates timely adjustments to performance goals.

2.3.4 Collaborative planning

Collaborative planning is another crucial aspect of continuous performance management. This includes working with employees to set relevant and achievable goals, encouraging participation and commitment to the performance management

process [6]. This collaboration not only enhances goal alignment but also empowers employees to take ownership of their performance, leading to higher productivity levels and job satisfaction.

3. Review approach

This research deals with the comprehensive analysis, synthesis, generalization, and systematization of existing scientific literature related to continuous performance management. The employed methodology facilitates a deeper understanding of the emergence of continuous performance management as an agile and human-centered approach. In addition, it clarifies the main concepts and main components of this framework as well as the effective factors in its successful implementation and the challenges ahead in this process.

4. Findings

4.1 Why shift to CPM?

Organizations are increasingly moving away from traditional annual performance reviews to a continuous feedback culture. This shift emphasizes regular check-ins and real-time feedback, allowing for timely adjustments and support. The reasons for this shift in performance management are as follows:

First, the traditional approach to performance management often fosters a retrospective assessment of employee performance, leading to reliance on potentially outdated assessments that may not accurately reflect employees' current abilities or contributions. This model often results in a lack of timely feedback, limiting opportunities for employee improvement and development [1]. As a result, employees may experience a disconnect between their performance and the feedback they receive, which ultimately affects their engagement and motivation. In contrast, contemporary performance management advocates for an ongoing, agile process that prioritizes regular feedback and coaching. This shift is based on the premise that ongoing dialog between managers and employees facilitates real-time adjustment of performance expectations, fosters a culture of development, and increases employee engagement in their growth paths [4]. By implementing mechanisms for frequent reviews, feedback loops, and shared goal-setting, organizations can create an environment that not only promotes individual accountability but also aligns employee goals with organizational goals [7]. As such, organizations today are increasingly adopting performance management systems that are more responsive, supportive, and aligned with the principles of continuous learning and development. This transition not only improves individual performance but also boosts overall organizational effectiveness by promoting a more adaptable and responsive workforce.

Second, traditional performance appraisal systems are rooted in a paternalistic management philosophy that portrays employees as inherently unmotivated, unreliable, and unaccountable. The flawed assumptions of this approach about human nature foster a culture in which management feels compelled to use rewards and punishments to motivate desirable behaviors and to manage employees with strict supervision. Although performance appraisal practices are widely accepted in organizations, they often lead to dissatisfaction among managers and employees.

Several studies have emphasized the ineffectiveness of such systems and pointed to their unintended negative consequences [1]. In the new approach, employees are not inherently seen as lazy, irresponsible, and untrustworthy, but rather as responsible, reliable, and self-controlled. The continuous performance management approach is based on respecting employees, creating motivation, and increasing collaboration. In this approach, employees are considered key assets, and emphasis is placed on their development, skills, and capabilities.

Third, as today's organizations increasingly rely on knowledge-based talent, traditional performance appraisal systems, which often rely on numerical ratings and rankings, are inadequate. Leading leaders are shifting their focus to continuous feedback and employee development to increase employee engagement, performance, and retention.

Fourth, in a dynamic work environment, feedback should not be limited to annual or semi-annual evaluations. Instead, it should be an ongoing conversation aimed at increasing team performance and nurturing relationships between team members, customers, and stakeholders. However, effective feedback should focus on coaching and guiding individuals and teams toward self-sustaining performance [7]. This is a fundamental aspect of management that involves establishing a clear vision, reinforcing essential skills, and fostering a collaborative team environment.

Fifth, traditional performance management systems promoted competition rather than collaboration and participation in the organization. In the new approach, the main goal is to foster collaboration, sharing ideas, and continuous improvement collectively [4].

Sixth, in traditional and periodical evaluation approaches, due to personal biases, employees are not treated fairly and equally. Many studies have confirmed that employees perceive their performance evaluations as subjective and unfair. Eren et al. [15–19] showed that continuous performance-based feedback is seen as a form of fairness among employees.

The traditional performance appraisal model, characterized by infrequent evaluations, is not aligned with the needs of modern workplaces. Instead, continuous feedback should be integrated into organizational culture as a tool to foster communication, growth, and performance improvement. Employees who receive regular feedback on their work are more engaged in the process of improving their skills and developing the organization [20]. By adopting a coaching approach, in which managers actively engage with their teams and facilitate continuous improvement, organizations can create a work environment where performance is consistently observed and celebrated. This approach not only promotes the success of individuals and teams but also fosters a culture of collaboration and shared goals among all stakeholders. Furthermore, unlike traditional HR practices, the new approach emphasizes flexibility and encourages people to break free from rigid guidelines, make mistakes, embrace creativity, and engage in continuous self-evaluation and learning [21].

Schultz [1] suggests that effective performance management resembles a coach's approach to leading a sports team. He emphasizes that the strongest motivators for employees are not financial rewards or threats, but rather the ongoing recognition that their work is meaningful and enjoyable. By creating a clear vision that inspires everyone, promoting a positive team environment, assigning engaging tasks, and empowering individuals by removing obstacles to their daily responsibilities, managers can eliminate the need for annual or semi-annual performance reviews. Instead, they will observe effective performance on a daily basis.

4.2 Challenges of implementing CPM

Implementing Continuous Performance Management systems involves various challenges and considerations that organizations need to address to ensure their effectiveness and acceptance among employees. We will examine some of these challenges in the following.

4.2.1 Resistance to change

One of the most significant hurdles in adopting CPM is resistance to change. Employees often exhibit reluctance when faced with new systems [22]. Moreover, traditional management practices often involve top-down decision-making, where leaders retain a significant degree of authority; they may be hesitant to fully support agile system initiatives because they fear a reduction in their power [12, 23].

4.2.2 Time and resource constraints

Time and resource constraints can pose significant challenges, as regular review and feedback sessions require the involvement of managers and employees. In fast-paced environments, maintaining this commitment can be particularly difficult [24]. These limitations can impede the successful implementation of CPM practices. To mitigate these constraints, organizations should prioritize effective time management and allocate dedicated periods for feedback sessions.

4.2.3 Quality of feedback

Ensuring the quality of feedback remains a challenge, particularly if managers lack proper training in delivering constructive criticism [24]. A culture that promotes positive feedback alongside constructive criticism is essential to maintain employee engagement.

4.2.4 Overemphasis on quantifiable metrics

A significant challenge is the excessive focus on quantifiable metrics, which can obscure essential qualitative attributes such as creativity, interpersonal skills, and leadership qualities [24]. While quantifiable data can offer valuable insights, it may not capture the full range of an individual's capabilities. Important attributes like effective communication, innovative thinking, and the ability to inspire others are often difficult to quantify but are essential for success in various fields. By prioritizing numerical measurements, organizations may overlook these crucial qualities, leading to an incomplete understanding of an individual's potential. Therefore, it is vital to strike a balance between quantitative assessment and qualitative evaluation to ensure a comprehensive assessment of talent and effectiveness in professional settings.

4.3 Opportunities for continuous feedback and coaching

CPM facilitates ongoing feedback and coaching, allowing employees to identify areas for improvement while building on their strengths [7]. This continuous support can lead to increased job satisfaction and overall performance [25], as employees feel more secure and empowered in their roles.

4.3.1 Ensured objective alignment

Continuous performance management enhances goal alignment between employees and the organization [6, 7]. By engaging in frequent discussions about performance and progress, managers can assist employees in identifying areas for development and creating actionable plans to address them. This proactive approach leads to improved performance outcomes for both individuals and the organization as a whole [5].

4.3.2 Fostering a culture of learning

Continuous performance management encourages a culture of continuous learning and development, which is essential in today's rapidly changing labor market [1, 13]. Employees are prompted to adapt and innovate, as the CPM framework nurtures an environment where learning from experiences is valued.

4.3.3 Enhanced employee retention

Organizations that successfully adopt continuous performance management strategies are likely to experience significant improvements in employee retention. By fostering ongoing communication and feedback between managers and employees, these organizations create a more engaging work environment. This approach not only enhances employee satisfaction but also aligns individual goals with organizational objectives. As a result, employees feel more valued and committed to their roles, leading to lower turnover rates and a more stable workforce.

4.3.4 Perceived fairness using artificial intelligence

Technological advancements have dramatically reshaped performance management, especially with the emergence of AI-driven tools and platforms that enable continuous feedback [26]. These innovations play a crucial role in the current landscape of performance management by automating many aspects of the feedback process. These tools are capable of analyzing extensive amounts of data from various sources, including employee communications, customer feedback, and project management tools. Consequently, they offer real-time insights into employee performance [26]. The ability to gather and interpret data from multiple channels enhances the understanding of individual contributions and areas for improvement. As a result, organizations can make more informed decisions about employee development, engagement, and overall performance management. This not only streamlines the feedback process but also fosters a culture of continuous improvement within the workplace.

4.4 Case studies of implementing CPM in organizations

4.4.1 Netflix: Revolutionizing performance management

Netflix has set a benchmark in performance management by moving away from traditional annual reviews and rigid structures. Instead, the company has adopted a culture of continuous feedback, where regular, candid conversations between

managers and employees occur. This shift allows for real-time adjustments and fosters an environment of empowerment and accountability [27].

4.4.2 Deloitte

Deloitte has redefined performance management by separating compensation decisions from day-to-day performance assessments. Their innovative approach includes quarterly or project-based “performance snapshots” and regular weekly check-ins between employees and managers. This system is designed to enhance insights into employee performance and support continuous improvement, moving away from outdated practices such as annual reviews and rigid ranking systems [28].

4.4.3 Adobe

Adobe has implemented a continuous performance management system known as “Check-In,” which eliminates traditional annual performance reviews in favor of real-time feedback and regular interactions between employees and supervisors. This shift toward continuous evaluation has proven beneficial for both employees and the organization, fostering a more adaptive and high-performing workforce [29, 30]. Adobe’s Chief People Officer and EVP Gloria Chen says:

Feedback and ongoing conversations between managers and employees are at the heart of what makes check-ins successful - both to ensure employees have the clarity they need to be successful in their roles and to support their career growth [31].

4.4.4 Microsoft

Microsoft embraces a growth mindset culture that prioritizes employee development and continuous feedback. This approach involves regular check-ins and discussions centered on learning and improvement rather than punitive evaluations. By fostering an environment where employees feel safe to take risks and learn from failures, Microsoft aims to enhance engagement and productivity [29].

5. Conclusion

The evolution of performance management systems signifies a pivotal shift from traditional, rigid frameworks to more adaptive, employee-centered approaches. The transition to Continuous Performance Management (CPM) reflects an understanding that contemporary work environments demand flexibility, real-time feedback, and a culture of collaboration. As organizations face rapid changes in technology, market dynamics, and workforce expectations, the need for performance management systems that prioritize ongoing dialog and engagement has never been more critical.

CPM represents a fundamental departure from the conventional model of infrequent performance appraisals, which often resulted in outdated evaluations that failed to capture employees’ current capabilities and contributions. By embracing regular check-ins and continuous feedback, organizations can enhance employee engagement, motivation, and performance. This ongoing communication not only allows for timely adjustments to goals and expectations but also fosters a culture of collective development. Employees are no longer seen merely as resources; instead,

they are acknowledged as active participants in their growth and the organization's success.

The theoretical foundations of CPM reveal a rich historical context that informs its principles. The evolution from control-oriented management styles to people-oriented approaches underscores a growing recognition of the intrinsic value of human capital. The insights derived from theories such as McGregor's Theory Y and Locke's goal-setting theory emphasize the importance of nurturing a motivated and engaged workforce. This historical perspective reinforces the notion that effective performance management should not only focus on productivity but should also focus on the overall well-being and development of employees.

Moreover, the key components of CPM—goal setting, real-time performance monitoring, continuous feedback and coaching, and collaborative planning—serve as essential building blocks for creating a responsive performance management culture. Together, these components form a cohesive framework that encourages employees to take ownership of their performance and development. By aligning individual objectives with organizational goals, organizations can cultivate a sense of shared purpose, which leads to enhanced productivity and job satisfaction.

Despite its numerous advantages, implementing CPM is not without challenges. Resistance to change, time constraints, and the quality of feedback are significant hurdles that organizations must navigate. Employees may be hesitant to embrace new systems, particularly if they are accustomed to traditional management practices. To address this resistance, organizations should prioritize effective communication, training, and support to facilitate the transition. Additionally, it is essential to ensure that feedback is constructive and meaningful to maintain employee engagement and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

The shift toward CPM also presents unique opportunities for organizations. By fostering a culture of learning and development, organizations can better adapt to the fast-paced changes of the modern workplace. Regular feedback allows employees to identify areas for improvement and build on their strengths, ultimately leading to increased job satisfaction and retention. Organizations that effectively implement Continuous Performance Management strategies are likely to experience enhanced alignment between employee objectives and organizational goals, resulting in a more agile and resilient workforce.

In conclusion, Continuous Performance Management represents a transformative approach to people management that aligns with the evolving needs of today's dynamic work environments. By prioritizing ongoing dialog, constructive feedback, and collaborative goal-setting, organizations can create a culture that values employee development and well-being. The shift from traditional performance management systems to CPM not only enhances individual performance but also strengthens organizational effectiveness and adaptability. As organizations continue to navigate the complexities of modern work, embracing CPM will be essential for fostering a motivated, engaged, and high-performing workforce. The future of performance management lies in recognizing the intrinsic value of employees and cultivating an environment where they can thrive, contribute, and succeed together.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Exploring Hybrid Work Dynamics in Public Organizations: Remote Work and Blended Office-Home Arrangements

Xolani Ngonini

Abstract

The shift to remote work has had a profound impact on the way companies function, recruit staff, and balance their work and personal lives. Technological progress and shifting workplace mindsets have driven the growing importance of remote working and management practices. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated changes to the work procedures of various organisations. Before the pandemic, only 8% of South African workers were able to work entirely from home, whereas a third, or 33%, had access to flexible hybrid arrangements, highlighting the limited nature of remote work choices available. A study was undertaken among public water sector employees in South Africa to further investigate these changes. Data were collected from 93 TCTA staff members, comprising 22 supervisors and 71 subordinates, using a mixed-methods approach involved in-depth questioning. Findings revealed diverse views on productivity in hybrid work environments, with non-supervisory staff indicating greater productivity than their supervisory counterparts. Finding depicted a rise in subordinate productivity in combined work settings, underscoring the significance of collaborative efforts. The difference in perceived productivity levels may stem from varying job roles and responsibilities, highlighting the importance of customised management strategies in mixed work environments. These results provide a foundation for re-examining workplace interactions in Africa and influencing the design of contemporary work settings and business management structures. The TCTA study offers valuable insights into implementing hybrid work models in government settings by introducing remote work policies, regularly updating these policies, and providing training in virtual software systems.

Keywords: hybrid work, team dynamics, remote management practice, leadership, organizational culture, TCTA

1. Introduction

Remote work has significantly altered the employment landscape, influencing organizational operations, talent acquisition strategies, and the work-life equilibrium of employees. While technological advancements and evolving perspectives on the workplace have precipitated the work-from-home revolution (digitization), organizations have been compelled to substantially modify their work practices and employment structures because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Kniffin et al. argued that the pandemic disrupted normal work routines and accelerated the existing trends of migrating work to online or virtual environments [1].

Many public and private entities adopted remote or hybrid work arrangements under stringent regulations and physical distancing measures. In this context, the latest technology and communication tools have become necessary to facilitate productive collaboration between remote and office-based employees. While digitization has made remote and telework more common globally, these practices in the public sector were relatively new before the pandemic [2]. Studies indicate that before the COVID-19 outbreak, only 8% of South African workers had the option to work entirely from home, whereas approximately 33% could access flexible hybrid arrangements [3]. These figures underscore the limited scope of remote work opportunities in the country prior to the pandemic.

Given this backdrop, this chapter aims to fill this gap by exploring how emergent hybrid work arrangements have influenced productivity and managerial perceptions within the water sector in South Africa. This chapter examines the impact of hybrid work arrangements on employee productivity and managerial perspectives in South African organizations. It seeks to answer the following research questions: How do hybrid work arrangements impact employee productivity and work-life balance in South African public organizations? What managerial and non-managerial perceptions of productivity should be considered in such arrangements?

These findings illuminate managers' heterogeneous perspectives on productivity in a hybrid work environment. Notably, non-managerial personnel perceived higher productivity levels than their managerial counterparts. This chapter also reveals perceptions of substantial improvements in subordinate productivity within a hybrid context, underscoring the importance of collaborative efforts across an organization. This research provides a framework for re-evaluating industrial relations and workspace concepts within the African context, influencing the conceptualization of office spaces beyond traditional physical environments and the organization's performance and culture in this novel setting. This chapter investigates the perceptions of productivity in hybrid work environments among managers and non-managerial staff in South African public organizations and assesses how these perceptions influence the conceptualization of workspace and industrial relations within the African context.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 44% of workers have preferred remote work arrangements, surpassing the worldwide average of 24%. A Deloitte survey of 1500 US CEOs from major corporations corroborated this trend, with 85% of CEOs reporting a reduction in office space of up to 50% [4]. These findings elucidate alterations in employee-employer expectations and occupational preferences.

During the global health crisis, employees have struggled to balance their professional duties and family obligations while maintaining open communication channels with colleagues [5]. This requires collaboration between employees and managers on workload organization, task prioritization, and the provision of increased autonomy and flexible working hours. Employers recognize the need for attractive

and adaptable work environments that offer flexible working hours [5]. These adjustments have led to digital transformation in the business sector, with employees establishing home offices and IT infrastructure updated to include advanced security protocols [4–6].

Wontorczyk and Roznowski observed that the remote work equipment used during the pandemic was generally of lower quality than employer-provided alternatives [7]. Additionally, home workspaces are frequently modified and lack ergonomic considerations. Acknowledging the impact of the pandemic, organizations should adapt to the new remote work paradigm and its challenges, and recognize that the traditional office is no longer the primary workspace, despite providing essential furnishings and technology for efficient work [3, 6–8].

This study assessed TCTA employees' experiences and perceptions of pandemic-induced work arrangements, including their preferences, self-assessed performances, and plans. The objective was to examine the transition of management practices from traditional to remote and hybrid work environments by referencing key management documents and distilling insights from employees' perceptions.

2. COVID-19-induced management practices

Organizations that possess robust, well-established, and adaptable management practices have demonstrated resilience in addressing COVID-19 and remote work challenges. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, TCTA launched crisis-oriented initiatives in March 2020. Initially, non-essential personnel worked remotely during the strict lockdown period from March 20 to April 3. Following the presidential directives, the remote work policy was extended to all employees. This measure adhered to lockdown regulations, suspending onsite activities for all public and private sector employees, except essential public service providers [9–11].

At the onset of the pandemic, TCTA management engaged in essential discussions and adjusted its work practices. Prior to lockdowns, eligible employees were permitted to work remotely. After a thorough evaluation, TCTA mandated that all employees stay at home, which aligns with the government's nationwide closure [10, 11].

The Microsoft Windows 360 suite made it easier for departments to conduct virtual meetings using Microsoft Teams. This ensured that all employees could perform their work remotely and away from their designated offices. According to the findings of a survey conducted by the Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority, the integration of MS Teams proved remarkably effective in assisting the organization in sustaining its operations with the aid of committed employees [11].

An exclusive website was introduced within the internal network of the company to enhance employees' understanding of the importance of staying well-informed. This website disseminated up-to-date news and developments related to the pandemic and provided access to real-time data on the spread of COVID-19. To facilitate a more effective exchange of information between departments, a cross-functional response team comprising management, occupational health and safety experts, and risk analysts is required. The purpose of this team is to engage in open discussions about the pandemic, systematically evaluate the risk factors that the organization may encounter, and establish a strong connection between management and employees [10, 11].

TCTA conducted a comprehensive assessment of its organizational environment to ensure compliance with the government's COVID-19 response plan and pertinent

health measures. Based on this assessment, two policies were enacted to support business continuity during the pandemic: the Interim Remote Working Policy (August 2021) and the hybrid working policy (March 2022) [11].

This public entity has implemented several measures to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission. These measures included the implementation of safety protocols and the appointment of COVID-19 compliance officers. A thorough risk assessment was performed, and a plan was devised in conjunction with essential personnel to facilitate the resumption of office operations. The TCTA began assessing its workspace in March 2022 to initiate the reopening process. The objective of the plan was to establish a balance of 60/40 between hot and permanent desks [10].

3. Literature review

Due to social distancing guidelines, many public sector organizations have shifted to remote or hybrid work models in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, approximately 8% of South African employees worked remotely, whereas one-third adopted hybrid work arrangements [3].

According to Patel, 88% of major South African corporations expressed a strong intent to permanently adopt hybrid work arrangements, according to a Microsoft Research Group survey [3].

Despite the unparalleled uncertainty, TCTA and other public entities are compelled to make uncharted decisions. Owing to the global health crisis, telecommunications and hybrid work models have become priorities [9].

Operating in a hybrid space has real-world consequences. Organizational employment strategies must be sufficiently flexible to accommodate future technological change. According to Petani and Mengis, labor comprises both physical and technical aspects [12]. The effect of videoconferencing technology varies depending on several factors, such as setting, companionship, time, and device. Understanding employees' technology usage in their daily work is essential, because the interconnectedness of work, employees, and technology makes them inseparable [13].

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended both professional and personal routines. While some operational strategies have been seamlessly implemented across institutions, others have proven to be challenging. Numerous studies [10, 11, 14, 15] have demonstrated the impact of SARS-CoV-2 on employees and the business environment.

These studies were conducted by Trevor and Holweg [16], and Aksoy et al., Bloom, and Iqbal et al., indicated that combining work and family life can lead to feelings of isolation for employees, family conflicts, a weakened organizational culture and performance, increased cyber risks, reduced costs, and greater flexibility [13, 17–19].

The productivity, organizational culture, and work-life balance of remote and hybrid work arrangements are still subject to ongoing debate. Several jurisdictions have passed new safety regulations. European laws mandate that employers manage workplace safety and assess employees' job performance. Under these new regulations, workplace accident coverage can be expanded to include employees' home offices. A logging system is employed to monitor and restrict workers from exceeding their workload assignments [18, 20].

3.1 Hybrid work concept

The concept of remote or blended work, a globally prevalent practice, is not new. Since the 1970s, remote/hybrid systems have been modestly adopted in Europe, the United States, and Asia [21].

Telecommuting allows people to work from home instead of in an office. Employees have autonomy to work in their homes with minimal supervision. This arrangement supports remote work, which encompasses labels such as homework, home offices, mobile work, and flexible [18]. Working remotely can blur the lines between personal and professional lives because of increased autonomy, fewer interpersonal connections, and a stronger sense of isolation [13, 22]. Remote work offers benefits, including enhanced performance, increased flexibility, regulatory compliance, higher ethical standards, and higher visibility, while decreasing instability, resignations, absenteeism, and fixed costs [5, 6, 21]. Remotely working employees enjoy greater freedom because they avoid constant supervision by colleagues and superiors. Long-term self-control is fortified by autonomy [6, 17]. According to Wontorczyk and Roznowski, flexible working conditions lead to increased personal and familial satisfaction [7]. Remote work contributes to employees' balanced lifestyles, resulting in increased job performance [21].

Employees in hybrid work environments often balance remote and office work, based on their autonomy [13]. Large corporations have adopted a hybrid work model that combines in-office requirements for certain employees with remote work options for others [18, 20]. A company may arrange its hybrid workforce with a small, frequently rotating team onsite and the rest working remotely.

Businesses can adopt various methods to incorporate hybrid solutions into their routine operations. The common hybrid operations are described below.

3.2 Location-centric hybrid work

This strategy highlights the flexibility dimension of the hybrid approach, indicating an organization's desired work location flexibility for its employees. Some location-centric models offer both remote and onsite work options. Managers should adhere to established policies during office visits.

3.3 Office-centered hybrid model

Employees can work from their offices 2 days per week using this telecommunications model. Co-located workspaces enhance collaboration and cohesion among team members [14]. Waller proposed a weekly office attendance requirement for a hybrid work model. Traditional office settings foster collaboration among employees. Quickly receiving feedback from colleagues through desks or office visits [15].

In a fixed hybrid setup, managers decide on remote work eligibility and scheduling. These employee systems adhere to a strict schedule that determines whether the work is performed remotely or in an office.

3.4 A fully flexible hybrid model

Employees can work either in an office or remotely. Analysts warn that this model could hinder employee collaboration, particularly among line managers. With team

autonomy, employees can achieve successful outcomes in a fully hybrid, flexible work environment. Mature organizations demonstrate superior employee performance because they adopt a more flexible model than a rigid location-based one [14]. All organizational activities, including communication, decision-making, documentation, and productivity tracking, occur digitally in this model [13–15].

3.5 Human-centric

Empathy-driven models enhance employee performance, decrease employee exhaustion, and strengthen empathetic leadership. This design caters to individual human needs and preferences, allowing flexibility away from traditional practices and locations. Flexible work arrangements can promote productive employees with better work-life balance [15].

3.6 Split weekly model

The model alternates between remote and office work on specific days. Business departments present remote workdays as an office alternative. Hybrid work systems facilitate direct manager-employee engagement. The length of the study period was also considered. The debate revolves around the flexibility and inflexibility of these guidelines [20, 23]. This approach facilitates the gathering of employee feedback on office hour balance and company model suitability. A hybrid space that is cooperative and capable of remote task execution should be considered a continuous entity [17].

3.7 Designing a hybrid office

A detached, impersonal office filled with productivity-boosting devices and technology was the conventional workspace for many people. The current global health crisis allows work to be performed at personal homes, branch offices, coffee shops, or a combination of these locations. The pivoting time is shown on the other axes as well as on the place axis. Owing to the overlap of work hours with personal time, employees need to adjust their work, family, and self-care schedules. 9–5 schedules can facilitate flexible hybrid work arrangements [13].

Supervisors/line managers should establish a framework for hybrid/flexible work environments and address workspace designs to enhance productivity. According to Wilson et al., an individual's vitality significantly impacts productivity [22]. Positive vitality and well-being boost productivity, whereas negative stress and unhealthy work habits decrease productivity. Productivity surges when employees engage in their tasks but plummets when they are distracted [5, 8, 18]. Productivity rises when employees concentrate on fitting contexts but falls when they are distracted [8].

Consideration of place, time, collaboration, and synchronization is crucial. The hybrid design surpasses the boundaries of conventional physical, collaborative, and adaptable work environments. Understanding the roles, regulations, and directives of a hybrid workplace is essential for all employees to ensure success. Managers must undergo training in order to manage a hybrid workforce. Employees are expected to perform their responsibilities concerning diligence during their interactions. Middle management plays a crucial role in the successful construction of hybrid workplaces. After making major organizational decisions, employees usually consult their supervisors for guidance. To effectively perform new roles, middle managers require appropriate training and assistance.

3.8 Technology as an enabler

A successful hybrid work configuration hinges on effective technology and resource use. The work-from-home trend is driven primarily by technology. Technology enables organizations to identify opportunities for enhancement. To thrive, companies must invest intelligently in improving their workplaces because technology blurs the lines between work and home.

Recent technological advances have made hybrid workspaces distinct. Companies must select the most suitable technology for an intuitive and seamless process. Ensuring data security is crucial because it empowers employees to perform effectively in all situations. A company's success in remote work depends on providing employees with essential tools and resources. Home offices require monitors, noise-canceling headphones, and dependable broadband connections. Providing employees with a stipend instead of covering cellular and Internet costs is a viable alternative [12, 20].

Using workplace management software, employees can easily locate and enter office spaces using digital signs and quick response (QR) codes on their phones. The software can also manage office capacity and oversee post-use cleaning and disinfection procedures [12].

The optimal method for managing flexible workplaces differs among departments and teams. While some companies have permanent seating arrangements for their business units, others have implemented flexible seating solutions. Free-address workspaces lack designated areas [5, 12]. Organizations implement cost-effective, incentive-driven, and productivity-enhancing methods, such as hoteling, hot desking, telecommuting, and coworking.

3.9 Culture of organization

An organization's culture is initially established and continually shaped by employee behaviors and beliefs. This system continually evaluates business values, ethics, and employee viewpoints and uses work, company, and results as metrics. The shift from office work to remote work and the anticipated transition to hybrid work during the pandemic have substantially impacted employee well-being. To keep employees loyal, businesses must create a non-corporate atmosphere in the workplace [18].

Assessing the impact of a hybrid work setup on employee well-being and the acceptance steps required are essential for determining the influence of the pandemic. Employee stress includes psychological elements, such as depression, tension, and stress, as well as employment factors, such as loneliness, uninspired feelings, and eagerness. Corporate culture requires prioritizing employee well-being [21]. Studies have indicated that employees report experiencing depression, whereas 32% report experiencing anxiety. Conducting inspections and implementing initiatives that reinforce company culture and support employee well-being strengthen team members' bonds [1, 21, 23].

Seventy-six percent of the employees found that organizational culture is crucial for job performance, with leaders taking the lead when they are absent. Establishing robust cultural bonds is crucial for achieving a hybrid workplace [14, 21].

The preceding analysis illuminates the multifaceted nature of remote work, encompassing both its merits and drawbacks. While affording enhanced flexibility and potential financial benefits for employees and employers alike, it simultaneously introduces obstacles in the realms of interpersonal communication, team unity, and

demarcation between professional and personal spheres. Entities should evaluate these considerations judiciously when formulating remote work strategies. The efficacy of telecommuting arrangements is contingent upon adept managerial approaches, a robust technological framework, and an organizational ethos conducive to such practices.

The pandemic's impact and benefits to employees, organizations, and the environment have fueled the adoption of the hybrid work model. Remote work provides advantages, such as increased adaptability, effectiveness, compliance, morality, and visibility, while concurrently reducing instability, turnover, absenteeism, and overhead costs [22, 24]. Remote work grants employees a higher degree of independence because of the lack of continuous supervision. In the future, autonomy will enhance self-control and lead to long-term satisfaction by providing flexibility to manage work hours according to personal and family needs [25]. To optimize the efficiency of remote work, work and leisure time should be distributed equally. A hybrid work model reduces a company's real estate holdings when a specific number of employees work from home. Several businesses have adopted hybrid models to reduce space costs. The pandemic has enabled employees to save time and money by commuting infrequently. Remote work enables employees to live and work in areas with lower living costs beyond major economic hubs.

Hybrid work offers businesses and employees distinct benefits and challenges. Prolonged remote working can disconnect individuals from their colleagues. Inadequate collaboration restricts organizational culture growth [14]. A weak organizational culture heightens conflict, mistrust, and silo formation [24].

4. Method

This investigation was conducted through a quantitative survey encompassing 93 of 173 TCTA employees. The sample comprised 22 line managers, several members of the executive committee, and 7 subordinates. Junior employees and executives were queried regarding their intentions to work during the pandemic, their experiences with remote work, their preferences for work arrangements post-pandemic, and the employer's intentions concerning the extent of remote work permitted once the pandemic had subsided.

A comprehensive review of the emerging literature on workplace culture and hybrid work was conducted to provide a more thorough analysis. A pilot study was conducted with five employees to validate the questionnaire's efficacy. These employees assessed the phraseology of the questions, evaluated whether the response options were sufficiently comprehensive and unambiguous, and determined whether all the potential scenarios were adequately addressed. Data were collected through online surveys and virtual interviews and were subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis.

Conceptual analysis was conducted to answer the survey questionnaire. Defining the precise meaning of a concept entails rigorously identifying and delineating the conditions under which any entity or event is classified within that concept. Conceptual analysis is employed to enhance our comprehension of remote or hybrid working arrangements.

5. Results

This section presents the results of a survey on the transition of TCTA from a fully remote pandemic response to a hybrid working arrangement, examining employee

and executive perceptions of the hybrid landscape, work style preferences, self-assessment of performance and employer plans, and expectations for the future of work at TCTA. The responses obtained were more favorable than anticipated regarding working from home, which may suggest an overly pessimistic outlook before the pandemic. When employees were queried about the availability of the digital infrastructure (hardware and software) necessary to perform their duties efficiently, 97% responded affirmatively, with 3% indicating that they did not have all the requisite infrastructure.

Highlighting changed employee expectations: 50% of employees preferred to work once a day per week in the office, and 36% preferred to create a team every quarter. Team members' productivity was assessed by line managers and executives, who categorized them based on options: "substantially more," "substantially less," "moderately less," "moderately more," or "equally productive." The evaluation of line managers ignited a debate about the meaning of workplace productivity. Among the line managers, 41% indicated that their teams were significantly more productive than those in the office, while 23% of executives believed that their teams were equally productive, with fewer managers observing a decline in productivity under hybrid working arrangements.

Conversely, 70% of line managers and executives reported significantly increased productivity, whereas only 16% of non-managerial employees reported consistent productivity. Non-managerial employees were asked to evaluate their teamwork and collaboration skills in the hybrid work environment. Regarding collaboration, 56% of subordinates reported a notable increase in productivity, whereas 21% observed no change in collaborative tasks after transitioning to remote work. In hybrid work environments, employees assess their stress levels against their usual experiences. The quality of relationships among line managers, executives, and employees is vital to organizational health. Although 56% of respondents rated their interactions with managers positively, only 40% rated their interactions with executives positively. Employees were surveyed about their current work-life balance: 44% noted significant improvement, 21% saw no change, and 10% experienced moderate deterioration from transitioning to hybrid work.

These findings indicate that the shift from TCTA to WFH due to COVID-19 may have persisted during the pandemic. The respondents preferred working in an office for at least 1 day per week. Impacts on productivity, individuals, organizations, and work-life balance are substantial and multifaceted. In addition to answering the scaled questions, the survey participants were asked to qualitatively voice their opinions on the advantages of the fixed hybrid model and suggest areas for enhancement. In the TCTA survey, all the respondents received a qualitative portion of the questionnaire. The key perceptions regarding respondents' anonymity are listed in **Table 1**.

The survey results indicate that a hybrid work model that combines remote and office work can satisfy TCTA employees' needs and productivity standards. Managerial staff have reported mixed productivity results in hybrid work settings, whereas non-managerial employees generally experience substantial productivity gains. Collaborative tasks demonstrate significant productivity increases in hybrid environments compared to traditional offices. Improved cross-team collaboration is vital for successful organization-wide teamwork in a hybrid setting.

Given the mental health implications of the global health crisis, this study underscores the need to assess the impact of hybrid work on employee well-being. The survey results indicate that public entities should revise their productivity

Benefits of working remotely	Challenges of working remotely
No interruptions from clamorous colleagues in the office	Disconnection from organizational culture
Privacy in my family space	Inability to effectively use TCTA digital platforms
Being away from a toxic environment, with intimidation and bullying	Isolation from colleagues
Enhanced work-life balance	Difficulty in onboarding new employees
Quality time with family	Inaccessibility of colleagues
Flexibility to attend to personal matters	Delayed responses to emails
Less stress	Long and many virtual meetings
Learning opportunity	Slow decision-making
Increased productivity	Lack of access to printers and scanners
Improved focus time	Prolonged power outages
Less commuting and saving on fuel	Old laptops, affected by power outage with less than 3-hour battery power
Reduced costs for office refreshments	Differing work schedules across divisions impact the quality of client service provision
	Not respecting boundaries
	Receiving work-related questions while on sick leave
	Perception that not being online, you are not working (working from home treated as a 24/7 duty)
	Slow response to IT-related challenges

Table 1.
Perceptions of what works and does not work.

definitions and measurement methods for hybrid environments. Notably, 41% of the line managers and 23% of the executives reported higher team productivity, whereas 77% claimed improved productivity. Continuous, qualitative, and quantitative employee feedback is crucial for identifying changes and meeting demands in hybrid work settings.

6. Discussion

In 2020, TCTA employees benefited significantly from the hybrid work system introduced in response to COVID-19. As the pandemic waned and normalcy returned, debates arose about the long-term efficacy of hybrid work, new management practices, and their optimization for maximum performance. Adaptive management practices, implemented by the agency, enhanced organizational flexibility, productivity, job satisfaction, reduced commuting time, and improved work-life balance.

COVID-19-induced management practices integrate traditional office environments and remote work technologies into a cohesive system. Some employees visit the office several times a week, while others work online. Half of the respondents preferred working from home 1 day per week, whereas the remaining 36% preferred quarterly onsite team-building sessions.

6.1 Leveraging technology

The eminent evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin championed the idea that natural selection favors organisms with the ability to adapt. Survival often favors those who can adapt rather than the mightiest. TCTA's investments in hybrid workplace technology reflect how the pandemic influenced human adaptability. Although 97% of the staff members received essential tools for efficient remote work, those using desktop machines encountered difficulties in adapting to the new arrangement. The TCTA leadership foresees potential increases in employee expenses during shifts to remote work because of the need for additional equipment such as monitors, noise-reducing headsets, and subscriptions to the Internet and mobile data services. Recent research has revealed that home-based work equipment typically does not meet the quality of employer-provided tools, with most home offices being repurposed as living spaces that lack ergonomic design. Transitioning from office to homework requires specific furniture and technology, highlighting the critical differences between these environments.

6.2 Employee satisfaction and wellness

Research indicates that the effectiveness of hybrid or flexible work setups depends on how managers create spatial and temporal frameworks. Wilson et al. [22] proposed that increased productivity should consider vitality. The hybrid model enables employees to balance the need for office-based collaboration with the convenience of remote working.

Remote work enabled participants to engage with their children, thus enhancing their psychological well-being. One participant noted no health concerns after shifting to remote work. The hybrid model provides employees with time to recover from their professional duties, thus reducing the risk of burnout. Although the staff valued the organization's wellness programs, they sought more personalized work schedules and time management options.

6.3 Commuting and hybrid work

The COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing have caused notable job losses and changes in work and travel habits. Reduced commuting time will benefit employees, enabling hybrid work setups and lower fuel costs. However, for some TCTA staff members, the isolation of remote work offsets this advantage. Despite these benefits, remote work does not benefit employees who prefer in-person interactions over long meetings. With heightened work and family responsibilities, workers no longer spend their time commuting.

6.4 Communication and team collaboration

Effective communication is crucial for team cohesion in distributed work environments. Some staff members have difficulty recognizing colleagues despite using certain tools, such as MS Teams and instant messaging. Hybrid teams face additional challenges, such as poor communication regarding departmental availability and slow responses to emails and calls. Workers often find it difficult to reach coworkers because of absences or connectivity issues. Establishing efficient communication protocols and conventions is essential for fostering successful hybrid working relationships.

6.5 Trust and accountability

Organizations that supply devices to staff facilitate remote work using a hybrid model. Frequent connectivity issues stem from electricity and Internet problems. Managers may undervalue the efforts of less visible remote workers. The survey highlighted the complex nature of productivity, as evidenced by reports from various management levels and subordinates. Persistent mistrust among team members can harm overall team efficiency.

Trust and responsibility are crucial in a hybrid work setting. Many participants desired greater independence from their supervisors. Adopting an outcome-focused management style rather than excessive oversight is recommended. Online team-building exercises can strengthen the relationship between office workers and remote workers. The evolving work model's impact on collaboration and communication influences employee productivity.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

TCTA's transition to a hybrid model demonstrated numerous advantages for other public entities, including enhanced flexibility and productivity, reduced commute times, improved employee well-being, ameliorated environmental conditions, and substantial cost savings. However, successful implementation of a hybrid system necessitates careful consideration of several key factors. These include establishing effective communication protocols, transforming organizational culture, strengthening team dynamics, and fostering a sense of organizational loyalty among employees. Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that remote workers constitute a diverse group with varying needs and work styles. Some employees excel at independently planning their work and maintaining strong communication with managers, whereas others may require additional support. To effectively meet the needs of all employees, public entities should seek to maximize the benefits of a hybrid model by adopting a nuanced approach that acknowledges and accommodates this diversity within the workforce.

To fully leverage the potential of the hybrid model, public entities should invest in strong technological infrastructure that facilitates seamless collaboration and communication in both remote and in-office environments. This investment should include secure cloud-based platforms, virtual project management tools, and reliable videoconferencing systems that promote real-time interaction and information sharing. Additionally, organizations need to develop comprehensive training programs to equip employees with essential skills and knowledge for success in a hybrid work setting. Topics should include time management, digital literacy, and effective remote-team collaboration. It is also important to regularly assess and refine hybrid work policies to ensure that they align with the evolving goals of the organization and the needs of employees. This approach will help to foster a culture of continuous improvement and adaptation.

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Perspective Chapter: The Role of Human Resources Management in Employee Well-Being

Gökten Öngel, Erkan Taşkıran and Gülşah Gençer Çelik

“What if the next global crisis is a mental health pandemic?”

Clifton and Harter, 2021

Abstract

The rules of the game have been changed for actors of business life due to the unpredictable and unforeseen impacts of COVID-19 pandemic. These changing conditions have reshaped the fierce competition and challenges among business establishments. The key to success in such an environment is attributed to the qualified labor force. However, the impact of difficult conditions has created significant and important effects not only on organizations but also on employees. Therefore, organizations need to focus on the well-being of their employees and ensure their health and increase their performance. Well-being refers to the totality of both mental and physical health of an employee. The main purpose of this chapter is to conceptually discuss the role of human resource management in ensuring employee well-being. Within the scope of the main purpose, the importance and necessity of the human resource department for the well-being of employees has been underlined.

Keywords: human resources, management, well-being, organizations, employees

1. Introduction

Following the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the dynamics of business life have changed significantly. While it was possible to compete in a more stable and predictable business environment before the pandemic, the changing rules of the game after the pandemic have altered and diversified the conditions of competition and the field of struggle across borders. Today's organizations, which are struggling to exist in these changing conditions, are trying to maximize their performance and contributions by having more and different expectations from their employees while renewing their managerial tools and business processes. From the perspective of organizations, the effects of the above perspective on employees have been realized as positive aspects such as career alternatives, job field diversity, and creating development

opportunities, as well as many negative factors such as excessive workload, constant control, high expectations, and pressure created by the necessity of success. Especially when evaluated in the context of negative effects, burnout, absenteeism, and emotional inadequacies may be questioned. In this context, it is necessary to support the fact that the pressures on employees are increasing. The human resource management department is this support's main determinant and director.

Employee well-being is a complex, multi-faceted concept grounded in research on psychology and organizational behavior [1]. On the one hand, well-being is important regarding employees' well-being. On the other hand, it significantly affects employees' performance outcomes and overall productivity for their work organizations. Given the evidence linking employee well-being to key organizational outcomes such as performance and productivity, examining employee well-being and identifying ways to improve it is unquestionably one of the core functions of contemporary human resource management [2].

In recent years, the rise and development of positive psychology has been increasing rapidly. As a result, studies on employee welfare are becoming widespread [3]. It is predicted that employee well-being will be at the center of new future-oriented trends in human resources [4–6]. In addition, recent reports suggest that more than 80% of employees will in the future seek work environments that put their well-being at the center and support them in pursuit of these practices [4]. Work-life, including new and different working methods such as hybrid and remote working, is one of the most important issues for C-Suite leaders. Deloitte's 2023 Workplace Wellbeing survey of over 3000 employees working in companies in the US, Canada, Australia and UK destinations revealed two important findings. Firstly, 84% of the respondents stated that ensuring employee well-being is one of this year's most important and prioritized issues. The second finding of the related research is that 74% of the respondents believe that employee welfare is more important than their career advancement opportunities [7]. It is seen that even if employees do not have the opportunity to advance in their careers and their gains do not increase, they reveal that the most important thing they pay attention to in the organizational environment is the care and work done for their well-being.

Research demonstrates the costs to organizations of needing to focus on employee well-being. Increased employee well-being leads to significant results in favor of the organization, such as less sick leave, higher performance and added value, and lower burnout and turnover rates. For example, Gallup's [8] research results reveal that employee burnout causes a global loss of \$322 billion in turnover and productivity, as well as an average voluntary turnover cost of 15–20% of total payroll. Organizations that constitute business life are environments where many very different employees come together. It is of great importance to build a culture that focuses on the welfare of employees so that they can work in harmony and share their values in these environments. The construction of this culture starts with the human resource management department, one of the most important departments of organizations.

The main purpose of the book chapter, which is planned to be prepared in the light of this information, is to discuss conceptually the role of human resource management in ensuring employee well-being and to discover the practices, models, and future trends supporting employee well-being throughout the organization. Within the scope of the main purpose, the human resource department's importance and necessity for employees' well-being will be underlined.

2. The main concepts

This book chapter mainly focuses on two concepts: human resource management and well-being. These main concepts have been explained below.

2.1 Human resource management

Human Resource Management is at the interface between employees' systems and a company's social system [9]. It includes many functions that are independent of each other and, at the same time, closely interact with each other. These functions include job design, recruitment and selection, training and development, remuneration, performance and career management, employee participation, and occupational health and safety [3].

The idea that human resources are an organization's most important competitive resource dates back to ancient times. Effective human resource management as a tool for competitive advantage involves attracting, retaining, and developing highly qualified and motivated employees. The presence of qualified human resources will result in added value at the organizational level, such as high product and service quality, rapid strategic deployment and implementation, low cost, less rotation, and ultimately high profitability [10].

In this respect, human resource management practices ensure that the employees working in the organization both contribute to the organizational strategy by understanding it and increase organizational performance by improving their motivation, competencies, skills, and attitudes [3]. Therefore, while human resource management aims to increase employees' competencies, it also aims to make them willing to perform more [9].

Human resource management is not only about using the services of talented individuals to bring together a group of individuals into a functioning organization; it is also about developing the organization's social capital, promoting the overall performance needed, and increasing the value added created. Justifying the benefits of human resource management as a driver of organizational learning and growth by directing entrepreneurial activities is a rather meaningless and empty notion [11]. In practice, human resource management focuses on the employees of the organization and aims to benefit from their experience at the maximum level throughout the entire employment process. In this context, for this whole process, organizations attract qualified and well-equipped employees to the organization with the perception of employer brand, make the right choices, make recruitment, provide training and development, support performance and career management, and consequently evaluate and reward their talents [12].

2.2 Well-being

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars have turned their attention to the concept of employee well-being, firstly introduced in 1959 by American therapist Dunn [13], engaging in comprehensive discussions to refine its definition [14]. Well-being at work is a multidisciplinary research field encompassing many disciplines, such as economics, anthropology, organizational psychology, social psychology, and sociology. Therefore, conceptualizing what exactly well-being refers to is complex [2]. Workplace well-being is, in part, shaped by creating an environment that empowers

employees to act in ways that align with their natural strengths and values. This is achieved by removing obstacles and providing the support they need to thrive. When employees are free to engage in tasks that resonate with their intrinsic motivations, it fosters higher levels of employee engagement, increasing positive emotions and overall job satisfaction [15].

In general, well-being covers the emotions related to life satisfaction, from depression and anxiety to joy and happiness. In this sense, it includes the presence of positive emotions and moods and distancing from negative emotions and satisfaction by providing life satisfaction and the functional existence of positive values and outputs [16]. Well-being is often defined or discussed as a synonym for wellness, health, happiness, and satisfaction. The academic community defines it as a multifaceted construct with definitions that vary by domain [17]. According to Ref. [1], employee well-being refers to an individual's overall psychological health, encompassing various elements such as emotional well-being, job satisfaction, personal aspirations, anxiety levels, and the risk of burnout.

From an integration perspective, Zheng et al. [18] argue that employee well-being encompasses not only their perceptions and satisfaction with work and life but also their emotional and psychological experiences. This includes well-being both in the workplace and outside of it and their overall psychological well-being. Well-being at work is defined as creating an environment that encourages a state of satisfaction that allows employees to thrive and achieve their full potential for the benefit of themselves and their organization [19]. Well-being encompasses the complete mental and physical health of an employee. It is understood as achieving an individual's full potential across multiple dimensions—physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and economic—while meeting the expectations of their roles in family, society, the workplace, and other areas of life.

3. Human resource management and well-being

The expectations of business leaders as to which topics they will focus on in the coming years, which situations will challenge them, and what they will experience as a result have shaped the human resource trends 2023 within the scope of a recent assessment. Among these trends, while the in-depth focus in terms of content is necessary, the main ones are gamification, metaverse, strong communication, flexibility, self-reliance, internal upgrading, reliance on human resource technologies, transparency, and, finally, employee well-being in such challenging and complex environments [6]. 2023 has been particularly challenging as organizations need to focus more on sustainability rather than growth [5].

Scientific sources and research on human resource management indicate that it is widely accepted that one of the most important key factors that can provide a competitive advantage for organizations is their human capital. Therefore, prioritizing the well-being of employees in today's business life is the most important justification for placing them at the forefront of human resource strategy [2]. In this context, investing in employee welfare and taking the necessary steps to focus on it now defines the new normal for today's organizations. Conditions such as stressful work environments, uncertainties, and happiness being key factors for productivity and motivation orientation point to the importance of employee well-being.

The literature on human resource management has revealed that sustainable HRM practices that focus on meeting the needs of employees are particularly

important because they positively affect employee well-being [13]. Accordingly, human resource management positively affects employee well-being [1]. Evidence from research results showing a clear link between human resource management practices and well-being will provide the information that organizational managers need to encourage them to invest in human resources [2]. For instance, according to Ref. [1], a direct link between human resource management, employee well-being, and typical work-related factors better explains this. Van de Voorde et al. [20], as a result of their research on the relationship between human resource management and employee well-being in terms of organizational performance, found that employee well-being in terms of happiness and relationships is compatible with organizational performance. However, on the other hand, health-related well-being has a contradictory result. Mahdia [21], as a result of his literature review, found that human resource management practices such as providing flexibility in working time; career development opportunities; creating a fair, safe, and healthy work environment; recognizing success; and participating in decisions and decision-making processes have an important role in employee well-being. In another study, Bhoir and Sinha [22] conducted a systematic literature review and found that human resource management initiatives positively support employee well-being. The authors also found that employee welfare-oriented human resource management practices are the most important tool in achieving and sustaining employee well-being.

The human resource management department generally tries to impact employee welfare through the activities and practices it organizes. In contrast, at a more specific level, some organizations try to manage the relevant activities and practices by appointing a C-level senior managerial position directly related to employee well-being. The Chief Well-Being Officer role was virtually unheard of until 2015 when Deloitte and Kirkland and Ellis LLP appointed top executive leaders responsible for employee well-being in their organizations. However, it took several more years and a pandemic for other organizations to take notice and recognize the need to engage more deeply with the well-being of their employees [23]. Another example is Delta Air Lines, which has a strategy of employing senior managers responsible for employee welfare who provide high-level managerial representation to focus on the welfare of all its employees. Upon taking office, Dr. Ting, Delta Air Lines' most senior executive in employee welfare, surveyed 24,000 Delta employees to ensure their health and well-being. He also supported this study by conducting qualitative interviews with some selected employees. As a result, training programs were planned to improve the well-being of employees through expert coaches focusing on improving their financial competencies, healthier and more affordable food was offered at the organization's food and beverage outlets, and free mental health treatment was provided for 10 sessions a year [4].

4. HR leader's role in employee well-being

Human resource leaders need to balance employees' needs and, on the other hand, the costs to be incurred with the investments to be made in which skills to meet the job requirements [5]. Human resource leaders are change agents with strategic importance as enablers of all developments and advancements in the organizational environment [24]. Brown et al. [25] emphasize that the traditional employee-centered role of human resource leaders is to promote the well-being

of employees, while the new definition frames the role of human resource leaders with strategic importance and relates it to the impact of employee well-being on organizational performance.

Employee well-being includes employees' physical, emotional and psychological needs, including anxiety, stress, insecurity, and burnout, beyond their experiences of organizational life and well-being in general [26]. In this context, the fact that leaders at the managerial level talk about employee well-being and include it in meetings, practices, and policies will make employees feel how important they are when seen from the employees' point of view. Planning necessary training, creating an ideal work environment and conditions, organizing internal meetings and events where employee opinions are taken, and designing new structures will reveal how much organizations are trying for employee welfare [5]. Therefore, organizational leaders must ensure that employee welfare is discussed in all organizational environments and processes.

Today's leaders focus on the quality of work as a critical determinant of employee well-being. In this context, to adopt a more holistic approach, organizations need to create value for their employees accountability by making clear measurements and work to ensure organizational health and well-being. As a result of their study, Fisher et al. [7] revealed that concrete steps need to be taken under four dimensions: physical, mental, financial, and social well-being to reveal today's leaders' role in employee well-being.

Physical well-being: Ensuring the health and safety of employees in the workplace includes providing ergonomic workstations, encouraging regular physical activity, and complying with health and safety regulations [27]. Actions can be taken to ensure physical well-being. Leaders should reinforce behaviors that have long-term benefits, communicate the importance of physical well-being with their employees, and ensure that the employees are aware of the facts about well-being [28].

Mental well-being: Mental well-being focuses on the psychological aspects of employee health, such as stress management, building resilience, and providing access to mental health support services. It highlights the importance of fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment that prioritizes and values employees' mental health [27]. Clifton and Harter [28] emphasize the actions that leaders can take for mental well-being, such as hiring or outsourcing professional counselors or therapists to provide mental health support for employees arising from various issues, such as workload pressure or a volatile work environment; including socialization in recruitment programs; getting to know employees better by integrating with them; and creating opportunities for employees to get to know each other better.

Financial well-being: Financial well-being encompasses subjective perceptions and objective measures of an individual's financial health. Objective indicators include income, debt, savings, and financial capability—such as knowledge of financial products, planning for the future, and managing a budget. On the other hand, subjective perceptions reflect an individual's satisfaction with their current and future financial situation [29]. Actions can be taken to ensure financial well-being; leaders should provide financial planning, tracking, saving resources and tools; encourage long-term savings and retirement investments; use team incentives; and consider employee well-being supports in compensation packages.

Social well-being: Fostering a sense of community and belonging in the workplace involves promoting positive relationships among colleagues, encouraging teamwork, and creating opportunities for social interaction and collaboration [27]. Clifton and

Harter [28] underline the actions leaders can take for social well-being, including socialization in recruitment programs, getting to know employees better by integrating with them, and creating opportunities for employees to get to know each other better.

5. Supporting well-being throughout the organization

The PERMA model, flexible work arrangements, and employee assistance programs have been explained in this sub-heading.

5.1 The PERMA model

Increasing empirical evidence suggests that the PERMA model can be an effective framework for measuring, managing, and developing well-being [30]. The PERMA model, developed by Dr. Martin Seligman, one of the founders of positive psychology, identifies five key elements necessary for human flourishing and well-being. The acronym PERMA stands for Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. These five components represent the pillars of a fulfilling and meaningful life. Seligman's work has significantly shaped the field of positive psychology by shifting the focus from merely addressing mental illness to fostering human strengths and positive experiences [31]. These elements provide a comprehensive framework for enhancing employee well-being within organizations.

The first element, Positive Emotions, the backbone of Seligman's well-being theory [32], refers to experiencing pleasant feelings such as joy, hope, and gratitude. These emotions contribute to overall happiness and resilience in the face of adversity [33]. When organizations cultivate an atmosphere of positivity, they create an environment that supports individual well-being and collective productivity [34]. Engagement involves the concept of "flow," a state of complete immersion and absorption in challenging and enjoyable activities. This deep engagement contributes to fulfillment and satisfaction [35]. Organizations can enhance individual and collective engagement by aligning tasks with employees' strengths and fostering a sense of competence. Relationships are another central component, highlighting the importance of strong, supportive, and meaningful connections with others for overall well-being [36]. Meaning refers to the sense of purpose and value derived from participating in activities that align with one's values. At the same time, Accomplishment involves pursuing and achieving goals that provide a sense of competence and mastery [37].

Since its publication in 2016, the PERMA model has been recognized as one of the most important approaches to employee well-being. Five pathways have been found to serve as indicators of positive emotions and optimal functioning, which are considered the most effective in determining what individuals seek for their well-being [38].

5.2 Flexible work arrangements

As a result of the developments and changes we are experiencing, the question "Do we need to be together in an office to do our work?" is now much more on the agenda [39]. Unpredictable and dizzyingly fast-developing technology and unexpected and difficult-to-manage crises such as COVID-19 have necessitated new practices in business life. The impact of COVID-19 on the way we work represents the most

drastic and rapid change we have seen in the global workforce since the Second World War. According to a recent study, the proportion of remote workers in the US has quadrupled, reaching nearly 50% of the country's workforce. As organizations and employees gradually transitioned to remote work over time, the sudden shock of COVID-19 represented an unexpected and major trial period for many employees and organizations [40]. Although it cannot be applied in all sectors at present, the working methods of employees, such as flexible working arrangements, which seem inevitable for each sector in the near future, are at the top of the requirements in question.

Flexible work arrangements have become increasingly widespread as an effective means of coping with a dynamic and competitive business environment [41]. Flexible work arrangements refer to an employee's ability to change the schedule and place of his work shift [42].

Flexible working arrangements are a strategic part of the ecosystem in which development-oriented organizations operate. An increasing number of organizations provide flexible working arrangements for their employees. Flexible working arrangements have an important role in improving employees' overall well-being [42]. As the future of work continues to evolve, FWAs will likely remain a key component of organizational strategy, reflecting changing employee expectations and the growing importance of well-being in the workplace [43]. For job applicants, the existence of flexible working arrangements is a highly regarded and, therefore, popular practice. Flexible working arrangements are characterized by flexibility as they ensure that work is not restricted spatially (where it is done) and temporally (when done). Therefore, it is assumed to enable employees to cope with competitive demands arising from work and personal interests [44]. Indeed, various studies reveal the positive effects of flexible working arrangements on employees. For example, Jiang et al. [41] found that flexible working arrangements encouraged employees' innovative behaviors. In addition, the impact of flexible working arrangements on broad work behaviors common to all employees, such as absenteeism, turnover, and job satisfaction, or on work-related gains, such as work-family balance and well-being, has also been determined.

5.3 Employee assistance programs (EAPs)

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) have become an integral part of corporate strategies aimed at promoting employee well-being, offering confidential support for personal and work-related challenges that can affect mental health and productivity. EAPs can be defined as a work-based program that operates within a work organization and provides counseling services to employees in need in order to identify employees who have problems in their work and social lives and to provide motivation by solving their problems [45]. EAPs typically provide a range of services, such as counseling, financial advice, and legal support, to help employees navigate stress, personal problems, and mental health issues. This program covers the structured, regularly scheduled meetings between an employee and their direct supervisor to review performance, identify training needs, and discuss the employee's suggestions for improving their role, department, or even the organization as a whole [46].

A good EAP can support positive change and well-being for all employees [47]. Therefore, EAPs, which are seen as one of the main tools for managing stress encountered in professional life, are an important complement to the rapidly developing holistic well-being programs in business life. For EAPs to be successful, they should

be carried out by professionals specially trained in the relevant field and structured and provided individually for each employee [48].

6. Strategies for human resource management to ensure well-being

Kelly et al. [49] proposed the strategies that can be applied to ensure employee well-being and suggested seven strategies that can be used. These seven strategies are explained in **Table 1**.

Giving employees more control over their work	→	Employee well-being can be improved by relatively small changes in employee autonomy [49]. Giving employees more control over how they do their work is of great importance as a key way of enabling employee creativity, developing their skills and competences, creating learning experiences and overcoming the problems resulting from constant work overload [50]. Holman and Axtell [51] found that employees' well-being is positively affected due to job redesign to take control over work and receive feedback. In this way, human resource management takes an important step toward employee well-being.
Allowing employees to be more flexible in terms of when and where they work	→	Creating autonomous working environments through creating self-managed teams provides conditions where employees can flexibly take control and decide how to fulfill their work tasks [52].
Increasing the stability of employees' schedules	→	Employees who work under irregular and unpredictable conditions struggle to manage their personal lives and cannot fulfill their responsibilities. Studies indicate that employees with irregular work schedules experience negative effects such as low sleep quality and emotional exhaustion [49]. Therefore, ensuring stability in determining work schedules within the scope of human resource management stands out as a remarkable strategy.
Empowering employees to identify and solve problems in the workplace	→	An effective approach to fostering employee well-being can be to give employees opportunities to participate in workplace improvements [49]. Decentralization leads to better and quicker decisions and keeps employees inspired and feeling important and needed [53].
Ensuring workloads are reasonable by keeping the organization adequately staffed	→	Workload refers to all activities in which employees' time is spent, directly or indirectly, in carrying out their professional duties, responsibilities and interests at work [54]. Research reveals that high work demands, such as long hours or pressure to work too hard or fast, can significantly harm employee well-being [49].
Encouraging the organization' leaders to support employees' personal needs	→	Encouraging organizational leaders to actively support employees' personal needs is essential for fostering a positive work environment and enhancing overall well-being. Research highlights that when leaders show genuine concern for their employees' personal lives, including their mental health, work-life balance, and family obligations, it leads to increased trust, engagement, and loyalty [8]. By actively addressing personal needs, such as offering flexible work arrangements or mental health support, leaders improve individual well-being and contribute to higher organizational performance and retention.
Taking initiatives to promote a sense of social belonging among employees	→	Fostering a work culture that facilitates the development of supportive interpersonal relationships among colleagues can serve as a crucial strategy for enhancing employee well-being. Studies have shown that these relationships are strongly correlated with reduced psychological distress, a key indicator of mental health challenges [49].

Table 1.
 Key Strategies to Ensure Employee Well-Being (Created by authors).

Well-being is a multidimensional concept that can reflect individuals' quality of life and satisfaction, daily emotions and cognitions, and high-level needs [55]. There is now a proliferation of mobile health interventions for physical activity, healthy eating, smoking and alcohol cessation or reduction, and improved mental well-being [56]. Therefore, the focus should be on the well-being of individuals through as many different and new tools as possible. The human resource department may provide such tools for their employees. For instance, digital health tools and well-being apps can be used. Digital health tools and well-being apps are rapidly emerging as key components of modern employee well-being strategies, offering personalized, accessible, and scalable solutions to support physical, mental, and emotional health. Digital health tools mean utilizing digital technologies to improve the health of individuals. While the initial developments only involved keeping health records electronically, today, the development and widespread use of mobile device technologies include new services that include empowering individuals and monitoring their well-being remotely [57]. Digital health tools are one of the important tools that enable individuals to take control of their well-being. Individuals' obtaining information about their health and well-being causes them to take control to make informed decisions. This self-management approach improves health outcomes and can maximize individual well-being and increase life satisfaction and quality [58]. In this context, it is becoming increasingly important for businesses to invest in employee well-being support programs to reduce stress levels and improve morale. These initiatives that help employees feel better can positively impact the business by reducing absenteeism and increasing employee retention and production [59].

7. Enhancing HR support for employee well-being through artificial intelligence

Maintaining employee well-being has become a critical factor in the success of organizations in today's fast-paced work environment. AI-driven predictive analytics offers a transformative approach to proactively addressing employee well-being as workforce demands evolve. HR teams can implement personalized interventions to promote a healthier, more engaged workforce through the integration of predictive analytics. This insight enables timely adjustments to workload distribution, improved work-life balance initiatives, and the creation of tailored wellness programs. In addition, this data-driven approach empowers leaders to create a culture of care and responsiveness, ensuring that employee well-being is treated as a strategic priority [60].

With the prevalence of technological tools such as the Internet of Things and artificial intelligence (AI), it is expected that today's organizations will seek to provide a better and healthier working environment to benefit from these technologies [61]. AI, one of those improvements, has become increasingly prevalent in workplace well-being in recent years [62]. Technological advancements in 2024 are creating a new landscape for employee well-being, with digital health platforms, wearable technologies, and AI-driven solutions becoming central components of well-being programs. These innovations facilitate real-time health and well-being monitoring, personalized health and well-being plans, and instant access to many health resources and services, enabling an advanced and tailored approach to employee well-being. These

technological solutions effectively promote preventive health, enabling early detection and management of potential health problems. The availability of personalized data allows employees to learn about their health status and make informed decisions about their lifestyle and health choices. Moreover, virtual health platforms provide accessibility to healthcare services, closing gaps and overcoming barriers to accessing healthcare services [63].

Garcia-Madurga et al. [62] revealed that AI can be applied in several areas, including monitoring mental health, offering emotional counseling and support, creating personalized wellness programs, identifying psychosocial risk factors, considering career counseling, and facilitating training and development. Their study concluded that while AI has the potential to transform mental health management and workplace well-being, it is crucial to address ethical concerns related to employee monitoring and privacy. Another key finding is that AI can be used to design personalized well-being programs tailored to employees' specific needs. Wearables and mobile apps can track health data, including mental health indicators, and help create effective workplace well-being initiatives. Additionally, AI can enhance training and development programs, equipping employees with the tools they need to sustain well-being in the workplace.

As AI technologies continue to evolve, predictive analytics will become even more sophisticated, allowing organizations to anticipate and mitigate risks to well-being in real time. This integration not only boosts employee satisfaction and retention but also drives long-term organizational productivity and resilience. As a result, AI-driven predictive analytics has immense potential to transform well-being strategies in the workplace and to promote a healthier, more sustainable working environment [60]. Moreover, this approach does not just seek to treat the symptoms of the burnout or stress problem but goes further to offer a roadmap for constant evaluation. This integration points to the increased development of technology in the field of human resource management and its applicability toward improving the workplace climate and the well-being of the employees [64].

8. Conclusion

Employees are the most important element of today's organizations that create added value. Selecting, recruiting, retaining, and maximizing the potential of qualified human resources can be associated with the effective and efficient operation of the human resource department. Managing this situation requires focusing on the well-being of employees through human resources. In particular, high commitment, engagement, and identification of employees via human resource management or the adoption of high-performance human resource practices will improve individual and organizational performance by increasing the well-being of employees and their positive attitudes and behaviors in the business environment [65]. Moreover, as sustainable HR practices help to develop employees' skills, ensure their commitment to the organization, and support the achievement of goals, there are mutual benefits such as employee well-being and improved performance. In this context, a strategy focused on sustainable human resources allows the organization to ensure the well-being of its employees and enhance their trust and sense of security [13].

Employee well-being is one of the most important challenges for today's organizations. To manage this situation, it is necessary to focus on two important elements:

leadership and culture. First, it is essential to have a leadership understanding that manages organizational processes and systems with an employee-centered approach. It is of great importance that leaders adopt and prioritize employee welfare and plan and implement the necessary work and activities. Then, it is inevitable for leaders to build a culture based on employee welfare to adopt employee welfare as a culture. While building this culture, leaders' prioritization should be supported by employee engagement. Workplace well-being has positive effects on employee performance beyond personality. Employee well-being results in positive organizational citizenship, customer satisfaction, and greater productivity. Moreover, since certain organizational variables are known to increase well-being at work, corporate policies can enhance employee well-being and thus make notable contributions to corporate citizenship and profitability [33].

In summary, it is inevitable for organizations to focus on employees' well-being and identify ways to sustain this well-being to achieve success under challenging competitive conditions. Ensuring well-being in the work environment is important for employees, managers, and organizations to ensure organizational health. The most important tool to fulfill this requirement is human resource management. Many studies reveal that human resource management positively affects employee welfare [66]. On the other hand, Guest [67] underlines that although most current human resource management practices focus on employee attitudes and behaviors, employee outcomes are seen as a means to an end rather than an end. Therefore, to successfully achieve the targeted organizational performance, organizations should prioritize employee well-being as one of their main responsibilities toward their employees rather than as a standard tool [22]. To achieve this, it may be advisable to use digital health tools and well-being apps, flexible working arrangements, or employee assistance programs, especially artificial intelligence applications, to take advantage of today's technologies.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Section 2

Engaging the Organization

Chapter 4

Perspective Chapter: Designing a Non-Toxic, Inclusive, and Ethical Organizational Culture

Rana Marcella Ozenc Incekara

Abstract

We live in a world where uncertainty is stronger than ever, especially since the pandemic. Several organizations were tested during the pandemic, and not surviving in the long run became a significant threat. On the one hand, technology advanced significantly and rapidly; on the other, rapid changes and advancements meant speedy adaptation, which was challenging for many. Having a result-oriented approach may have worked in the past. Still, in contemporary times, this approach alone is no longer sufficient, especially if it means gaining results no matter the cost while causing harm in other areas, such as employee work-life balance or the environment. Finding band-aid cures may be acceptable; however, organizations must practice more sustainable methods while applying the ethical imperative to sustain organizational effectiveness in the long run. This chapter explores the creation of a non-toxic, inclusive, and ethical organizational culture that is sustainable in the long run.

Keywords: burnout, quiet-quitting, organizational culture, organizational effectiveness, work-life balance, wellness, dynamic inquiry, emotional intelligence (EI)

1. Introduction

We live in a world where uncertainty is stronger than ever, especially since experiencing the pandemic. Change is constant. Several organizations were tested during the pandemic, and not surviving in the long run became a significant threat. On the one hand, technology advanced significantly and rapidly; on the other, rapid changes and advancements meant speedy adaptation, which was challenging for many. Having a result-oriented approach may have worked in the past, but in contemporary times, being result-oriented alone is no longer sufficient, especially if it means gaining results no matter the cost while causing harm in other areas, such as employee work-life balance or the environment. Finding band-aid cures in the short term may be acceptable; however, organizational practices must be more sustainable and apply the ethical imperative to sustain organizational effectiveness in the long run.

This chapter investigates the importance of pursuing results in a modern organization while implementing an ethical balance and sustaining organizational effectiveness and success. First, organizational culture and how it should be created ideally

will be examined. The role of innovation in the long-term success of an organization will be discussed in relation to a result-oriented approach. The ethical imperative and its importance will be presented. Following the ethical imperative, the sustainability imperative will also be addressed while problematizing the concept of sustainability in how the definition can be taken in a limited manner to ensure results by not considering the ethical imperative. Concepts such as burnout and quiet quitting will be explored in relation to emotional intelligence (EI). Finally, how to assess the organizational culture will be discussed, and organizational practices will be suggested to evaluate the internal climate.

2. Creating the organizational culture

Employees often see themselves as passive recipients of climate ([1], pp. 162, 178). Employees do not realize that the environment and organizational culture are not just created by upper leadership; on the contrary, everyone is responsible for developing and generating the climate. Employees often talk among themselves and define what is wrong. Still, the expectation is that leadership will trigger change, as a given, not realizing everyone should take the initiative. I would argue that a non-toxic and healthy culture is where effective communication occurs between leadership and everyone else, turning the organization into one big team; this starts by creating a healthy and inclusive organizational culture.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines “culture” as the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social groups [2]. Imagine a community in which there are several members. This community interacts within the society; everyone shares information and makes decisions regarding the role and responsibility of each member. These interactions create a common culture. Culture is the force that bonds the people who live in the community. Soon, common values, norms, and principles are shared ([3], p. 359).

Culture is a dynamic phenomenon that grows and advances like a living organism. Similarly, culture is the element needed to keep an organization together. An organization would be null without culture, and its lifespan would be short. Without a common culture, individuals in an organization would merely be acquaintances, even strangers, endangering the organization’s success. Culture is one of the ingredients of organizational effectiveness ([3], p. 359). A group of people work together within the organization and the community; they work together harmoniously to reach the organization’s goals. Therefore, organizational culture can be defined as the set of shared values and norms that control the members’ interactions with one another and with suppliers, customers, and all other people outside the organization. The organizational culture controls employee behavior. The individuals in the organization interpret the environment, shaping how they would react to certain situations ([4], p. 31); this is the basis of creating a climate in which the concept of inclusion is understood and applied effectively.

Culture does not just appear; it is not a quick process that happens overnight. Since it is a dynamic phenomenon, its evolution never ends. It grows and evolves regularly and adapts to the internal and external environment. This process involves hard work, dedication, innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship. Moreover, culture creates a sense of belonging for individuals, which also means it is needed to fulfill the need for relatedness in individuals. An organization’s culture advances its effectiveness, and

the growth and development of the culture are directly correlated with its efficacy ([4], p. 31). All employees and leadership are a team ([5], pp. 159, 174), and everyone is responsible for creating the organizational culture and climate together.

3. The role of innovation in long-term success

Innovation is a vital component of economic development for all businesses, organizations, and even governments. Innovation refers to “newness” in the organization, such as any new idea. Innovation consists of new combinations, new ways of doing things, new production lines and methods of production, new distribution channels, new procedures, new products and services, and new formation of ventures. Innovation is a process, and an idea triggers it. This idea then turns into the development of an invention. New ideas and designs allow product advancement and further services and processes. Traditional methods are left behind. Past innovations generate knowledge, which, in turn, leads to new opportunities and strategies ([6], pp. 46, 56).

Innovation can be defined as introducing something new, novel, and advanced while benefiting from accumulating knowledge from past experiences. Innovation requires understanding the organizational environment, within and externally. Innovation is the driving force that will create successful future growth. Innovation is a central element that impacts competitiveness, organizational performance, and organizational effectiveness ([6], pp. 46, 56).

Innovation also means to take risks. In a world where conditions are ideal, resources would not be limited, whereas resources are always limited in reality. The conditions of the world we live in are far from ideal ([6], pp. 46, 56). Organizations are still experiencing the aftermath of the pandemic, and uncertainty is at the core of the modern world. Within this framework, risk-taking is also part of the definition of innovation.

Innovation leads to competitiveness, competitive advantage, organizational performance, and organizational effectiveness. In contemporary times, competition is intense. Organizations that cannot adapt and advance are bound to fail and disappear. Innovation must be constant for an organization to become successful and sustain its position in the competitive global arena. Once success is achieved, I would argue that the *status quo* should not become a reason to celebrate just yet, as it can be an illusion since it may not be sustainable in the long run. Innovation and sustainability become primary goals in this sense, and this cycle never ends ([6], pp. 46, 56). Innovation is a concept that affects everyone, in other words, everyone in the organization, all shareholders, the community, the society, and the government ([7], p. 125). Innovation significantly impacts developed economies and economies in development ([6], pp. 46, 56).

When the term innovation is used, what comes to mind is often products that will bring some profitability and satisfy shareholders. The definition is not as limited, and any new idea implemented and brought to life within an organization signifies innovation. Organizations must have an innovative mindset to survive in the modern world under contemporary circumstances, especially since the pandemic. The innovative mindset is what generates a healthy and inclusive organizational culture. However, the adoption of an innovative mentality does not happen quickly; in other words, it is not a process that occurs overnight; it takes time and planning ([6], pp. 46, 56).

4. The ethical imperative

Leadership is complicated, and making a universal definition or claim is challenging. Most simply, leadership is an influential process where all team members and leaders influence one another ([3], pp. 2, 5). It is a continuous process; in other words, it requires sustainability. The ultimate goal is to get results and inspire trust. For many years, organizations aimed solely to get great results and ensure that shareholders are satisfied, no matter the price; this approach has recently changed. In contemporary times, effective organizational practices require that obtaining great results is only one of the goals. At the same time, an ethical environment is created in which a safe and trustworthy organizational culture is generated ([8], pp. 24, 30). Pursuing results and the ethical imperative are both priorities.

There is no magical formula for effective organizational practices where a non-toxic and healthy organizational culture is created and an innovative mindset is applied while sustaining the ethical imperative. Lacking one of these elements can lead to band-aid solutions to save the day, but in the long run, problems will occur. All organizations are result-oriented; however, only being result-oriented can lead to unethical behavior. Ignoring ethical practices can easily make team members resent the organization; this is not a climate in which a sense of belonging and psychological safety occurs ([8], pp. 24, 30). Research shows a positive relationship between excellent results and ethical practices. Ethical behavior leads to fair treatment and responsible practices. The ethical imperative also brings integrity. Value-based leadership generates powerful cultural norms ([8], pp. 24, 30).

When ethics is referred to, what comes to mind is generally the fundamental idea that it is the difference between right and wrong. The definition is not that simple. Right and wrong are complicated concepts that vary depending on context and discourse. It can be said that ethics is the choice between right and wrong that is context-dependent ([4], pp. 65, 69). I would argue that a deeper understanding of ethics is crucial, especially while applying organizational practices. The term ethics derives from the Greek word *Ethos*, which refers to character ([9], pp. 3, 4). Let us analyze this further. Ethics deals with context-based right and wrong ([4], pp. 65, 69). and is the basis of character ([9], pp. 3, 4); therefore, it is a significant component of the decision-making process. In other words, we make decisions every day, and each decision also involves an ethical choice that theories of ethics can map out. Making better decisions for better results can only come from the ethical imperative ([8], pp. 24, 30).

Organizations must create systems and processes for instilling ethics into the organizational environment, covering all aspects of the operation, from recruiting and rewarding people to reporting abuses and maintaining transparency ([8], pp. 24, 30). The ethical imperative is the basis of a safe, inclusive, and effective organizational culture. The ethical imperative and the expectation to gain better results work interchangeably. On the one hand, an ethical environment is essential for everyone involved and all shareholders to feel safe with a sense of belonging and psychological safety. In addition, it can become a source of intrinsic motivation among team members.

On the other hand, gaining good results and being result-oriented are equally required since an organization without good results can quickly become an environment without rewards and lack extrinsic motivation, which is also probably the reason behind the organization's existence. An organization must be result-oriented and aim to obtain good results. However, this should not be at any cost; all decisions

should involve the ethical imperative and not only focus on results. The ethical imperative and the expectation of good results should be applied interchangeably and not alone. I would argue that only by implementing the ethical imperative can an organization form a safe, inclusive, and effective organizational culture, fostering intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and, as a result, ensuring significant return.

5. The sustainability imperative

Earlier in this chapter, the concept of innovation was introduced, and its definition was discussed. As discussed earlier, innovation is the core element in sustaining success, organizational performance, and organizational effectiveness ([6], pp. 22, 42). The concept of sustainability, however, is a complicated one. On the one hand, it refers to the organization's position in the global arena where competition is intense. On the other hand, sustainability refers not only to maintaining success but also to the organization's internal environment and its role in the external environment ([8], pp. 33, 35). An influential leader triggers an innovative culture ([3], pp. 8, 12). This culture should aim to reach and sustain the organization while ensuring the ethical imperative is applied, no one within or outside the organization is harmed, and the environment is protected.

The sustainability imperative is a broad umbrella term. Sustainability is essential for all organizations, but sustaining all the categories listed is challenging. Organizations may face the challenge of sacrificing certain elements to do the right thing. Several organizations may not abide by the ethical imperative to ensure the sustainability of success while harming the environment or causing or disregarding human exploitation, mainly if profit-driven and result-oriented. Sustainability and corporate social responsibility are also a part of the leadership process. Sustainability is also a term that houses several approaches. It ensures the continuance of excellent results while applying the ethical imperative. It is the stabilizing force that the organization requires. It has an ethical foundation and involves using sources responsibly without harming the environment or exploiting the people in the organizations and supply chains. For this reason, organizational practices involve navigating between employing the ethical imperative and making challenging decisions ([8], pp. 24, 30, 33, 35).

Compared to the past, organization leaders have become increasingly aware of the importance of the sustainability imperative. Sustainable organizational practices include the potential for sales, cost reduction, risk mitigation, reputation engagement, operational efficiency, customer loyalty, revenue diversification, pricing premiums, innovation benefits, competitive advantage, talent attraction, motivation, and retention ([8], pp. 24, 30, 33, 35).

In the contemporary world, organizations follow the rule to do well by doing good, referring to the ethical imperative; however, this is not that easy and comes with several sacrifices. Sometimes, doing the right thing may require a sacrifice in profit or higher costs ([8], pp. 24, 30, 33, 35); for example, the topic of outsourcing opens a can of worms regarding the ethical imperative.

6. Burnout and quiet quitting as a result

Today, we are mostly back in our offices and trying to leave the peak of the pandemic times behind. However, we are no longer in our comfort zones and are far from

what we once knew as “normal.” The workplace model is now still primarily hybrid. In other words, for the most part, we remain present in our workplace, whereas we still have some limitations. E.g., large meetings that would once be in-person are still being held on digital platforms. Employee-centered events provided a certain level of motivation where employees would enjoy themselves and feel appreciated. We now compensate for this by giving shout-outs during meetings, but this does not seem to have the same effect as the events we used to organize. Often, individuals seem to struggle while adapting to the new world order, and work-life balance has been challenging.

Burnout is a significant problem in contemporary times. Burnout is the feeling of energy depletion or mental exhaustion. It causes an increase in one's mental distance from one's career. As a result, professional productivity decreases, and motivation drops significantly. All of the above takes a toll on the individual's mental health. Burnout is no longer classified as a simple stress syndrome. WHO has recently categorized it as a syndrome recognized as a mental disorder. It is defined as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed ([10], pp. 11, 16).

Another problem is “quiet-quitting.” People have bills and similarly various life expenses; therefore, they cannot simply up and quit their positions. Quiet-quitting refers to people not doing any work or doing the minimum possible in their jobs [11]. In other words, they quietly opt out of their tasks, doing the minimum possible to avoid being fired. Yet, motivation is lacking, which directly results from burnout [11].

As people managers, it is our responsibility to find a middle ground for organizational practices where work is not entirely slowed down to the extent it is sabotaged, and employees are content, motivated, and feeling validated while showing higher performances. The quest should be to support all employees during these challenging times.

7. The role of EI in non-toxic organizational practices

Leadership is a complicated process, as discussed earlier. It is challenging to make a universal definition of leadership. A leader must be influential and influenced by followers; in other words, this is a two-way street. Effective leaders are not made, nor are they born with talent; research shows that talent is needed as much as learned skills to become effective. Not all managers are good leaders, but leaders must be good managers ([3], pp. 8, 12). In the contemporary world, there is a need for a new form of leadership where the leader is part of the team and not merely a task delegator ([5], pp. 33, 101, 114). For this reason, an effective leader must also have empathy and strong EI skills to become part of the team ([3], pp. 14, 15). In return, I would argue that team members must possess the same abilities; otherwise, communication would be flawed, and the team spirit would be endangered.

Knowledge, talent, relevant skills, and experience are all needed while leading with the head and the heart. It is the leadership's responsibility to spot clues about these features, starting with the interview process, which is challenging to do in a short period in which the interview process occurs. A leader can only recognize the heart skills, which are soft skills, via EI, and robust EI is crucial ([8], pp. 41, 55).

EI is a set of abilities individuals use to perceive emotions in the self and others ([12], pp. 1, 28). EI is the ability to work well with people ([3], pp. 14, 15). Emotions

generate performance, and recognizing emotions aids in identifying with self and others. EI has been widely implemented in managerial and organizational practices and employee development programs ([12], pp. 1, 28).

EI is an authentic quality that impacts effective interpersonal relationships. Moreover, EI is the ability to ensure influential leaders create relationships that generate respect and aim for the personal good of others. EI shapes shared values, especially in a climate where individuals work towards common goals, e.g., organizational effectiveness. EI is the foundation of integrity, dependability, and trustworthiness, which inspire the future ([13], pp. 43, 44).

Influential leaders must see signs they can identify and interpret while interviewing candidates. Once hired, the leader must continue supporting employees in this manner ([8], pp. 107, 113). An effective leader is part of the team, not a separate entity who only delegates work ([14], pp. 152, 156). EI is central to effective leadership ([13], pp. 43, 44). If an overwhelming event occurred in an employee's life, stress could lead to a loss of intrinsic motivation. The lack of EI from the supervisor would not be ideal ([14], pp. 152, 156). I would argue that an effective leader has to work towards helping increase the individual's motivation rather than becoming the demotivating power.

Since EI is a must for everyone in the organization, it should also be a part of the hiring process and sought during interviews ([3], pp. 14, 15); this will ensure the creation of a non-toxic and inclusive organizational culture from the start. However, Measuring EI is challenging, especially during the initial interview process. For this reason, it could be argued that a trial period is essential for all new hires to gain more time for an initial assessment to determine if the new team member is the best fit for the organization. During this period, seeking feedback from other team members could be beneficial. The assessment should not only be an initial process but a continuous one ([3], pp. 14, 15).

Furthermore, questionnaires could be used in the workplace and disseminated to everyone, not only people in leadership, since EI is vital in everyone's role; this can also help assess that the organizational culture is non-toxic and inclusive. Several EI questionnaires can be found online to take as examples. In addition, I would argue that discussing EI in the workplace is crucial, a topic that should be addressed often. It is essential to emphasize its importance while generating awareness on the subject. It may also be a good idea to design workshops and organize trainings where exercises around EI can be practiced. Such activities are also beneficial for team building, where leadership and team members can work on exercises and practices together; this is also an opportunity to ensure leaders are part of their teams and not just task delegating managers.

8. Assessing the organizational culture

The organizational culture should be created by everyone involved, as discussed earlier. Everyone is responsible for ensuring the ethical imperative is applied and the climate is safe and inclusive. At the same time, an organization's primary goal is to obtain good results ([4], pp. 31, 33); however, this should not come at any cost ([8], pp. 24, 30, 33, 35). The ethical imperative concerns the organizational culture, the internal climate, and the external environment ([4], pp. 31, 33). I would argue that the best place to start assessing the organization's position is within, in other words, by investigating the internal climate.

An internal ethical environment is one where every member is valued, and psychological safety is generated ([8], pp. 24, 30, 33, 35). Ideally, employees and leadership should have shared goals and work towards these goals. Employees will work towards these goals in their ideal state. For this reason, the task of the leadership is to ensure that employees are supported ([14], pp. 157, 161). I would argue that assessing whether employees feel safe, included, and supported is essential to reveal the internal climate and determine if the ethical imperative is successfully applied.

Several methods can be used to seek feedback and determine whether or not there are problems in the organization. Feedback is a good source for such information ([15], pp. 189, 190). Each individual needs to be heard and validated ([15], pp. 127, 132); this is a strategic step in determining problems ([4], pp. 50, 52). One-on-one meetings can be held between leadership and employees. Workshops can be held where open discussions are welcomed, and employees can find the space to voice their thoughts and opinions. Everyone may not feel comfortable expressing their views openly ([16], pp. 247, 249), for example, for fear of retaliation from leadership if there are trust issues. Anonymous surveys can be employed for this reason, where it is possible to gather more honest data ([16], pp. 247, 249).

Once the relevant data is collected, a strategic plan can be developed to address the identified problems and determine what kind of change is called for within the organization to improve ([4], pp. 50, 52). It is never too late to build trust or rebuild lost trust between employees and leadership.

9. Suggested organizational practices to assess the internal climate

An assessment of the internal climate to determine whether or not everyone is a fit for the organization, including the individuals in leadership positions, is essential. Several organizational practices can be used for this assessment: (1) informal assessment, (2) dynamic inquiry, and (3) formal assessment. Whether in a leadership position or part of a team, informal assessments are beneficial in determining the organization's climate ([1], pp. 162, 178).

It is easy not to realize that we carry unconscious bias or are unaware of issues in the team dynamic, especially if we are not directly affected. Often, individuals do not realize that there is a problem unless the problem impacts them directly ([17], pp. 1, 5, 7, 14). In addition, not everyone will express their feelings if something is affecting them, so as their colleague and team member, we do not realize what is happening. Several reasons exist for why they would stay quiet; for example, it could be due to their character. No matter the reasons, we must assess the dynamics to determine if something is off. We can observe individual actions, pay attention to our perceptions regarding interactions, and have open discussions to encourage others to share experiences and gain insight into the team. Much informal data can be collected from informal assessments, such as experiences we would have never heard without starting a discussion ([1], pp. 162, 178). Stories from individuals reveal a lot, and stories are essential in determining problems in the climate. In addition, these stories can reveal if we indeed have any unconscious bias. These stories and data we collect can lead us to find solutions to create a more inclusive environment in our space where everyone feels included and safe ([18], pp. 83, 86). Informal assessments can be conducted by organizing one-on-one or group meetings where open and honest discussions can occur in a safe space ([1], pp. 162, 178).

I would argue that one other essential aspect here is to be an active listener. The team leader may assess informally, but this does not always mean they aim to build an inclusive space. Intentions matter. Forming an inclusive organizational culture depends on trust, collaboration, and shared values ([1], pp. 162, 178). Dynamic inquiry is where active listening is an essential tool. Every organization has a story, in fact, many stories. Each individual in these organizations experiences life differently within an organization and brings their personal truths. Similarly, the organization has truths. Sometimes, what the administration and leadership see may not reflect the same stories that the individuals at lower levels in the hierarchy see, especially if specific people try hiding certain realities from the administration by shielding or covering some of the stories. For a leader to get the full view, it is necessary to become part of the lower levels of the hierarchy in the organization. Only this way can all truths be revealed. Dynamic inquiry is a model that admits such facts. Dynamic inquiry is interacting with others in a diplomatic, appreciative, and strategic conversation ([5], pp. 127, 136).

Dynamic inquiry is a term coined by Chris Argyris (1974), and creating intentional dialog is a method of dynamic inquiry. This process requires practice and presence to work in an actionable manner. Dynamic inquiry reveals internal perspectives by understanding the organization's absolute and potentially unflattering truths ([5], pp. 127, 136).

Dynamic inquiry starts with acknowledging that personal and organizational truths do not align; this signifies a problem. Dynamic inquiry is a suggested method to gain insight ([5], pp. 127, 136). The reality of leadership must be the same as everyone else in the organization, but organizational effectiveness will drop if this is not the case. This problem indicates that employees are no longer striving towards organizational goals. The relationship between the individual and the organization is mutually beneficial ([14], pp. 165, 167). If team members have become checked out, this can lead to poor performance, burnout, and quiet quitting.

Dynamic inquiry is a process that leads to communication by providing active interaction between upper-level leadership and everyone else in an organization. For this reason, effective organizational practices involve communicating with all team members to understand and determine where the problems occur. Dynamic inquiry effectively reveals problematic organizational areas through open and honest conversation ([5], pp. 127, 136).

Finally, more formal assessments can also be used, such as anonymous surveys distributed to everyone in the organization. As aforementioned, anonymous surveys are crucial while searching for feedback that may not be revealed otherwise since not everyone is comfortable voicing their opinions. There may be several reasons for this; it could be their character, they could be timid or insecure, or they may fear retaliation ([16], pp. 247, 250).

10. Conclusion

In contemporary times, change is constant, and uncertainty is more robust than ever, especially since the pandemic. Organizations are facing a new normal in the modern world. On the one hand, organizations must be result-oriented to welcome success, expand, and survive. On the other, it is essential to trigger the creation of a healthy, non-toxic, and inclusive organizational culture in which everyone is included and feels validated. The secret ingredient to creating this culture is the innovative

mentality. In addition, having an innovative mindset is essential to sustaining success. However, sustainability is a much more complicated term under which several concepts are housed. Sustainability refers to not only innovation, competitive advantage, and success but also the internal and external environment where the ethical imperative is applied. Being result-oriented should not mean doing so at any cost, such as ignoring human exploitation or harming the environment. Internally, the organizational culture not only needs to be formed into a climate where every individual is safe and included but also feels psychological safety, and gains the sense that they are validated and supported. EI is a primary component in an inclusive environment. While working on designing and sustaining such a climate, regularly identifying problems in the internal environment is an effective organizational practice. Several methods can be used to determine the problematic areas within the organizational culture, such as seeking feedback via anonymous surveys and moderating open discussions where all willing voices can be heard. Once issues are identified, a strategic plan can be developed to implement change. It is never too late to build trust or reinstate lost trust between leadership and employees and ensure that the organizational practices are based on trust and integrity, leading the way to a non-toxic and inclusive organizational culture.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank Dr. Alvaro Felipe Alejandro Espinoza for bringing this project to life and encouraging me to participate. I am grateful to my professors and mentors, Dr. Gayle Grant, Dr. Angela Holzer, and Dr. Harriet Thompson, for guiding me throughout my studies. I would like to offer a special thanks to Dr. Sehnaz Tahir Gurcaglar for her endless support even when I decided to change my field of study. In addition, I am grateful to Dr. Turkay Bulut, who has supported and encouraged me since the beginning of my academic career. Lastly, many thanks to my mother, Kathleen Mary Ozenc, and my husband, Kutluhan Incekara, for being by my side and providing me with a lifeline whenever needed.

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Perspective Chapter: The Nexus of Fourth Industrial Revolution Technologies and Employee Labour Relations: Practical Roadmap and Policy Implications

Omoseni Oyindamola Adepoju and Tobi Titilayo Nwulu

Abstract

Employee labour relations (ELR) is an important HRM practice that establishes an equitable, peaceful, and productive working environment. The fourth industrial revolution (4IR) presents technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things, Big Data, Cloud Computing, Blockchain, etc., that have transformed people management practices. This chapter explores the application of 4IR technologies to Employee labour relations procedures and practices. The chapter examined the traditional ELR practices, which in their original form were primarily completed through manual processes, paper-based systems, and interpersonal interactions. This chapter discusses the application of 4IR technologies with ELR issues such as grievance procedures, safe working conditions, fair compensation, occupational health and safety, labour law compliance and employee misconduct. The chapter concludes that the application of 4IR technologies has transformed labour relation practices, thereby improving workplace safety, efficiency, and compliance. The chapter recommends continuing adaptation of policies, procedures, and organizational cultures to maximize the benefits while mitigating potential challenges.

Keywords: employee labour relations, human resource management, fourth industrial revolution, technologies, policy implications

1. Introduction

Organizations are significant to any economic system's growth, development and sustainability. This system creates a platform for bringing people together to collaborate and achieve set goals and objectives. More importantly, the employer-employee relationship is vital in creating a conducive atmosphere in increasing productivity, building job satisfaction and organizational success. Employee labour relations (ELR) is a crucial aspect of human resource management, which specifies procedures and guidelines intended to keep an equitable, peaceful, and productive work environment

at work. ELR focuses on preserving a positive and productive working relationship between employers and employees. Yandi and Havidz [1] state that good labour relations increase employee engagement, productivity, and satisfaction, all directly impacting organizational performance. Employees are more likely to give their all and use their creativity when they feel appreciated, heard, and treated fairly. Better organizational outcomes follow, such as better-quality goods and services, happier customers, and eventually stronger financial performance. Effective ELR procedures lower the likelihood of expensive disputes and legal challenges by assisting organizations in navigating the complex web of labour laws and regulations. Companies can prevent potential conflicts that could otherwise disrupt operations and harm their reputation by proactively addressing issues like fair compensation, safe working conditions, and equitable treatment [2]. ELR's fundamental goal is to create an environment of respect and cooperation between the organization and its employees by balancing their interests.

To achieve a positive work environment where employers and employee work harmoniously, policy is important to establish guidelines and procedures in the workplace. Roszkowska and Melé [3] stated that the provision of structured frameworks that direct organizational behavior, guarantee consistency in decision-making, and safeguard the interests of both employers and employees is made possible by policy.

Considering the current technology era and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), the narratives in the relationship in the work environment need to be addressed for a seamless workflow. The fourth industrial revolution (4IR) presents technologies such as AI, the Internet of Things, Big Data, Cloud Computing, Blockchain, etc., that have transformed people management practices. These technologies have fundamentally reshaped traditional ELR practices and enhanced efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness while introducing new considerations for workplace policy and employee rights. For instance, blockchain, AI, and IoT bring with them transparent compensation tracking, real-time workplace monitoring, and automated grievance systems [4]. ELR procedures are being radically changed by 4IR technologies due to automation, data-driven decision-making, and improved monitoring features [5]. New policy frameworks are required to handle new privacy issues, algorithmic bias, automated system worker rights, and the evolving nature of workplace surveillance [6]. This book chapter explores how organizations can enhance employee labour relations processes and procedures by implementing 4IR technologies, thereby providing a practical roadmap for technology adoption in ELR. It further specifies the policy implication for the effective implementation of 4IR and ELR. First and foremost, to explore the application of 4IR technologies to ELR, it is important to examine the traditional ELR practices.

2. Traditional employee labour relation practices

Before the general use of cutting-edge technology, employee labour relation practices were implemented in their original form, covering several important tasks that were primarily completed through manual processes, paper-based systems, and interpersonal interactions. The relationships between employees and employers and workplace management are based on traditional employee labour relations practices [7]. Decades of industrial evolution have produced these practices, which set basic guidelines for managing workplace conflicts, guaranteeing worker safety, and upholding equitable working conditions. Since they provide a baseline for assessing

how 4IR technologies alter relationships in the workplace, it is essential to comprehend these conventional practices. The traditional employee labour relations practices are discussed below:

- i. *Grievance procedure*: Managing grievances is an essential role of ELR. HR specialists created and oversaw official grievance procedures, receiving and recording employee complaints *via* written forms or face-to-face conferences [8]. The conventional grievance procedures are hierarchical and include formal written complaints, management review meetings, direct supervisor consultation, and potential union intervention [9]. Interviewing pertinent parties and going over actual documents were common steps in the grievance investigation process. In the past, town halls, frequent staff meetings, and creating and distributing company bulletins and newsletters were used to accomplish this. Paper-based documentation, in-person meetings, and drawn-out investigative procedures are typical components of this process, which frequently result in postponed resolutions and possible irregularities in the way similar cases are handled. Strong interpersonal skills were necessary for this process since HR professionals had to handle delicate situations and remain impartial while seeking a solution [10]. To achieve a fair grievance procedure, employee communication must be effective.
- ii. *Safe working conditions*: Every organization has genuine reasons to be concerned about the health and safety of its employees [11]. Employees' working conditions comprised the physical and psychological conditions which are significant to the well-being and delivery of service. Employee labour relations play a major role in ensuring safe working conditions as poor implementation poses significant safety risks, which can damage employees' health, and the employer can be held legally liable for ensuring safe working conditions irrespective of the company size, whether big or small [12]. Reactive incident reporting, manual monitoring systems, and physical inspections are the mainstays of traditional workplace safety [13]. Regular walk-through inspections, written safety guidelines, and in-person safety training sessions are how organizations put standard safety protocols into practice. Traditional safety measures are based on manual equipment checks, warning signs, and physical barriers.
- iii. *Fair compensation*: Employee labour relations play an important role in ensuring fair compensation for its employees. Compensation is the remuneration received by an employee in return for their contribution to the organization. These include salary and wages, benefits, bonuses, and additional perks [14]. Standardized pay scales, recurring performance reviews, and manual payroll processing are all part of traditional compensation management [15]. Organizations use market comparisons, union negotiations, policies, proper compliance and industry surveys to determine wage structures and ensure fair compensation. Physical punch cards or simple digital systems are also frequently used for time tracking, and overtime and benefits are manually verified.
- iv. *Occupational health and safety*: Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) is cross-disciplinary and focuses on the safety, health and welfare of employed

and working people [16]. OHS can be explained as forecasting, assessing and controlling of risks that exist in the workplace which could harm the health and the well-being of the employees, considering the wider impacts on the environment [17]. OHS outlines the obligations of employers, the rights and obligations of employees to comply with the implementation of health and safety regulations in the workplace, and details as to the working time and the way of working [17]. Mulroy [18] asserted that the primary function of traditional OHS procedures is to perform safety training programmes, manual incident reporting, and planned health examinations. OHS covers physical workplace assessments, first aid prescriptions, and frequent fire drills. Historical incident data and frequent safety audits are the foundation of prevention mechanisms. Employers are expected to encourage and uphold their workers' physical, mental and social health to maintain employee labour relations towards improving the working conditions of workers.

- v. *Labour law compliance*: Employee labour relations are vital for labour law compliance as they establish employers' and employees' equal rights and obligations. One of the main reasons for labour law is the protection of employee rights, and these laws mediate between employees, employers, unions, and the government. Labour laws also ensure stringent adherence of employers to employee compensation, health and safety, and maternity laws in a particular nation or state. This serves as a guide for employees and their employers to maintain a healthy, peaceful and functional work environment as well as society [19]. Traditional compliance management involves manual monitoring of legal requirements, keeping paper records, and participating in in-person training sessions. The human resource department is responsible for keeping employee records in paper files, regularly performing internal audits and updating policies through official review procedures.
- vi. *Employee misconduct*: Employee labour relations establish an acceptable workplace attitude and behavior and address employee misconduct. Misconduct among employees may include fraud, corruption, and other forms of unethical behavior that undermine the integrity, ethics and culture of organizations and must be investigated and eradicated [20]. Organizational misconduct may present unpleasant outcomes for organizations and their stakeholders. This includes the consumers, employees and shareholders. Some of these organizational misconducts can also destabilize financial markets and reduce public confidence in the organization [21]. Conventional misconduct management is based on in-person disciplinary hearings, physical evidence collection, and eyewitness accounts. Also, physical surveillance footage is reviewed, interviews are conducted, and manual documentation is frequently a part of the investigation process.

While these traditional ELR practices have served organizations well for many years, they often face efficiency, consistency, and scalability limitations. Their reliance on manual processes and physical documentation can lead to delays, human error, and subjective decision-making. These limitations and the increasing complexity of modern workplaces highlight the need for technological advancement in ELR practices.

2.1 Relevant fourth industrial revolution (4IR) technologies

Technologies of the fourth industrial revolution are transforming employee labour relations practices. The application of these technologies presents several benefits and has resulted in a more efficient and productive workforce, allowing professionals in the human resource management field to streamline labour relations processes and improve efficiency [22]. The technologies are as follows: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Cloud Computing, Block Chain, Robotics, Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS), 3D Printing, Augmented and Virtual Reality. The application of some of the technologies is discussed below:

2.1.1 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is recognized by many organizations of the world as one of the most relevant technologies in the twenty-first century [23]. AI can be described as a technology that operates as the human mind that can perform cognitive functions such as learning, perceiving, problem-solving, creativity, logic and socializing with the environment [24].

2.1.2 Cloud computing

Cloud computing is an Internet-based technology that stores information in servers, which is eventually provided as a service on-demand to clients [25]. Cloud computing is a rapidly growing technology that provides on-demand access to computing resources, including servers, storage, and software applications, over the Internet. The adoption of cloud computing can offer several benefits to businesses, including cost savings, scalability, and flexibility. Many businesses have already started adopting cloud computing to improve their operations and gain competitive advantage [26].

2.1.3 Blockchain

Blockchain technology, which powers cryptocurrencies, has potential uses in several sectors, including labour relations and human resources. The decentralized, transparent, and unchangeable digital ledger system has the potential to completely transform the way businesses engage with their workforce and manage personnel [27]. One important use of blockchain is keeping employment records and data, such as work history, credentials, performance evaluations, and pay information. This may simplify hiring procedures and lower fraud by ensuring data integrity and facilitating simple verification by authorized parties.

2.1.4 Robotics

The application of robotics to employee labour relations (ELR) is quickly changing the workplace dynamics, posing opportunities and difficulties for businesses and their employees. The impact of robots on labour relations is growing as they become more advanced and commonplace in many industries. Dornelles et al. [28] explained that collaborative robots, or cobots, are replacing traditional job roles in manufacturing and logistics by assisting human workers. Human workers can concentrate on more intricate, high-value tasks while these robots take care of physically taxing or

repetitive jobs, lowering the risk of workplace accidents. HR specialists must now effectively manage the integration of human-robot teams, create new training curricula, and rewrite job descriptions considering this change.

2.1.5 Cyber-physical systems (CPS)

CPS is an internet-based system that incorporates functions such as sensing, computation, control and networking into physical objects and infrastructure [3]. Cyber-physical systems (CPS) are computational systems tightly unified with physical components to monitor and regulate physical processes seamlessly between humans and machines. CPS is a network of several variables that comprise both physical input and output technology. It possesses the ability to communicate, interact, and adapt by increasing the capabilities of the physical world through computation. CPS is a data-powered system presenting novel and advanced automation and autonomy, such as robotics, that function according to analytical intelligence. The physical components involve power sources, communication and distribution lines, loads, and control devices. The interface between computational and physical systems demands new skills for implementation. The system interphase is considered an important element in CPS because the backplane provision guarantees timely transmission of information and controls [29].

2.1.6 Augmented and virtual reality

Augmented reality and virtual reality are reality technologies that either enhance or replace a real-life environment with a simulated one. AR is designed to coexist with the real environment, be informative, and provide additional data about the real world, which a user can access without having to search. Virtual reality, on the other hand, encompasses a complete environmental simulation that replaces the user's world with an entirely virtual world. Because these virtual environments are entirely fabricated, they are often designed to be larger than life [12].

2.1.7 IR Technologies to employee labour relations practices

This section seeks to discuss the application of 4IR technologies to traditional ELR practices. It serves as a bridge between the conventional ELR approaches discussed above and emerging technological solutions, which have also been briefly explained above. This section will highlight the intersection of traditional labour relations processes with contemporary digital innovations.

2.1.8 Application of artificial intelligence (AI) to employee labour relations

Artificial intelligence (AI) in employee labour relations (ELR) is changing the human resource management game by providing previously unheard-of levels of efficiency, insight, and personalization. AI technologies are transforming how businesses manage various labour relations issues, from performance management and dispute resolution to hiring and onboarding [30]. A study by Gay and Kagan [31] suggested that employee data can be analyzed by machine learning algorithms to anticipate possible problems before they become formal grievances. By identifying patterns in employee behavior, communication, and performance metrics, these systems can alert HR professionals to potential conflicts or dissatisfaction, allowing for proactive intervention. The application of AI in ELR practices is discussed below:

- i. *Artificial intelligence in grievance procedure*: AI-powered systems use natural language processing to screen and classify complaints at the outset. Machine learning algorithms, a subset of AI, examine past grievance data to find trends, offer solutions, and guarantee consistent handling. Chatbots offer initial assistance and grievance process guidance around the clock. These systems are further enhanced by automated case routing mechanisms that efficiently direct complaints to appropriate handlers while sentiment analysis tools evaluate the emotional content to prioritize urgent cases. Advanced predictive models work alongside these systems to forecast potential outcomes based on historical resolution patterns. The AI infrastructure also maintains comprehensive documentation through automated tracking systems while providing real-time analytics dashboards that offer insights into grievance handling metrics. This enhances human resource management systems and ensures seamless communication and follow-up throughout grievance resolution.
- ii. *Artificial intelligence in safe working conditions*: Real-time detection of PPE infractions and dangerous behaviors with the use of AI is made possible by computer vision systems, which continuously monitor workplace safety compliance. To detect possible safety hazards before incidents happen, predictive AI models examine workplace trends for increased safety; intelligent algorithms optimize workplace design and procedures. The system incorporates real-time alert mechanisms that immediately notify supervisors of critical safety concerns, while machine learning models assess equipment operation patterns to identify potential risks. Advanced simulation capabilities allow for testing and validation of safety protocols before implementation. The AI system maintains comprehensive safety incident tracking and analytics, combining data from multiple sources, including environmental sensors and worker feedback.
- iii. *Artificial intelligence in fair compensation*: AI algorithms examine a variety of data sources, such as internal performance metrics, market trends, and skill requirements, to guarantee equitable compensation. Machine learning models automate performance-based reward computations while identifying and flagging pay disparities. These systems are augmented by sophisticated predictive analytics that forecast future compensation needs based on evolving market conditions. Advanced benchmarking tools continuously compare compensation against industry standards, while skills assessment algorithms evaluate job roles for appropriate pay levels. The AI infrastructure includes a comprehensive performance metric analysis that establishes clear links between productivity and compensation adjustments.
- iv. *Artificial intelligence in occupational health and safety*: AI-powered systems use wearables to track employee vital signs, forecast risks associated with fatigue, and instantly assess environmental conditions. While AI analytics pinpoint high-risk areas that need attention, predictive maintenance algorithms help avoid accidents involving equipment. The system incorporates sophisticated environmental monitoring that provides real-time assessment of workplace conditions and potential hazards. Machine learning models analyze historical health and safety data to predict potential issues before they arise. Emergency response protocols are automated through smart systems that coordinate immediate action when needed.

v. *Artificial intelligence in legal compliance*: AI systems create automated compliance reports and audit workplace procedures for infractions. Natural language processing automatically identifies the need for policy updates and keeps an eye on regulatory changes. Labour agreements are automatically enforced thanks to smart contracts. The system is enhanced by real-time compliance monitoring that flags potential violations occur while maintaining comprehensive documentation through automated record-keeping systems. Policy impact analysis tools evaluate the effects of regulatory changes on workplace operations. Advanced training systems ensure staff remain current with compliance requirements through personalized learning modules. The AI infrastructure includes predictive compliance modeling that identifies potential future regulatory challenges and helps organizations prepare proactively.

vi. *Artificial intelligence in misconduct management*: By using sophisticated pattern recognition, AI surveillance systems identify anomalous behavior patterns and policy infractions. Machine learning algorithms examine workplace behaviors and communication patterns to detect possible misconduct proactively. These systems are supported by advanced alert mechanisms that flag potential violations for immediate investigation. Natural language processing monitors digital communications across various platforms to identify potential misconduct indicators. Predictive modeling helps identify risk factors that might lead to future misconduct incidents. Investigation tools powered by AI assist in gathering and analyzing evidence efficiently.

2.1.8.1 Policy implications of application of artificial intelligence (AI) to employee labour relations

Organizations need robust frameworks governing their AI implementations. This includes ensuring transparency in how AI systems reach decisions and maintaining stringent data privacy safeguards. Equal attention must be paid to detecting and eliminating algorithmic bias while maintaining appropriate human supervision over AI processes. Organizations should clearly define the boundaries of AI-based employee monitoring to protect worker rights. When AI systems make decisions affecting individuals, clear appeal mechanisms must be available. These foundational elements help create responsible, ethical AI deployment while maintaining trust and accountability.

Ultimately, while AI significantly enhances ELR practices through automation and advanced analytics, it requires careful policy consideration to balance efficiency gains with employee privacy and rights.

2.1.9 Application of cloud computing (CC) to employee labour relations

Cloud Computing transforms employee labour relations by providing accessible and integrated platforms for the management of workplace relationships. This technology enables seamless collaboration, real-time data access, and enhanced flexibility in managing labour relations processes. Cloud platforms create centralized systems that connect various aspects of employee relations while ensuring data security and accessibility.

2.1.9.1 Cloud computing in grievance management

In the field of employee labour relations (ELR), cloud computing (CC) has become a game-changer because it provides previously unheard-of levels of accessibility, scalability, and flexibility for HR procedures and data management. Modern cloud platforms transform grievance handling through secure digital submission portals and comprehensive case management tools. The system ensures automated documentation and timely follow-ups while maintaining strict confidentiality standards. The technology maintains comprehensive audit trails of all grievance activities and efficient tracking of resolution timelines and outcomes.

2.1.9.2 Cloud computing in compensation management

Cloud-based systems enable real-time payroll processing and automated benefit calculations across locations. The platform ensures consistent application of compensation policies while maintaining secure access controls. Advanced solutions facilitate global compensation management and tax compliance requirements. Automated adjustments reflect performance metrics and policy changes in real-time. The system provides secure access to individual compensation information. Cloud technology enables efficient processing of international payments. Integrated monitoring ensures accurate performance-based compensation calculations. The platform maintains detailed records of all compensation transactions.

2.1.9.3 Application of cloud computing in occupational health

Cloud platforms provide instant access to safety training materials and incident reporting systems. The technology enables collaborative safety management and automated notification procedures. Real-time access to health and safety documentation supports efficient operations. Cloud-based training modules ensure consistent safety instruction delivery. The system maintains accurate records of safety certifications and compliance. Automated alerts ensure timely response to safety incidents. The platform enables efficient sharing of safety protocols across locations. Cloud technology facilitates comprehensive safety performance monitoring.

2.1.9.4 Cloud computing in legal compliance

Application of Cloud solutions automates compliance reporting and maintains current regulatory requirement updates. The system ensures secure storage and access to legal documentation and records. Real-time monitoring capabilities enable early detection of compliance issues. The platform maintains consistent policy implementation across multiple locations. Automated updates reflect the latest regulatory changes and requirements. Cloud technology enables efficient compliance audit preparations. The system provides comprehensive compliance monitoring and reporting. Secure storage ensures the protection of sensitive legal documents.

2.1.9.5 Cloud computing in misconduct management

Cloud-based systems provide secure platforms for recording and investigating misconduct cases. The technology maintains detailed audit trails while restricting

access to sensitive information. Integration with HR systems ensures consistent policy implementation organization wide. The platform enables efficient case management and documentation. Secure access controls protect confidential misconduct investigation data. Cloud technology facilitates collaborative investigation processes. The system maintains comprehensive records of case outcomes. Automated tracking ensures consistent handling of misconduct cases.

2.1.9.6 Policy implications of application of cloud computing (CC) to employee labour relations

Organizations must establish comprehensive cloud governance policies addressing data security and privacy. The framework should specify access control protocols and data retention requirements. Policies must ensure compliance with regional data protection regulations. Clear guidelines should govern cloud system integration and maintenance. The framework must address cross-border data transfer requirements. Regular policy reviews ensure alignment with evolving technology standards. Organizations need clear procedures for cloud data management. Security protocols must protect sensitive information across all cloud services.

Cloud Computing creates more accessible, efficient ELR systems while requiring careful attention to data security and privacy considerations. Technology enables global collaboration but necessitates robust policies to protect sensitive information.

2.1.10 Application of Blockchain to employee labour relations

Blockchain technology has potential uses in a number of sectors, including labour relations and human resources. The decentralized, transparent, and unchangeable digital ledger system has the potential to completely transform the way businesses engage with their workforce and manage personnel [27]. Blockchain technology represents a paradigm shift in managing employee labour relations by introducing immutable, transparent, and decentralized record-keeping systems [32]. This revolutionary technology has transformed various aspects of workplace management, from grievance handling to compensation tracking, while ensuring unprecedented levels of trust and security in employment-related transactions.

2.1.10.1 Application of blockchain for workplace safety

Smart contracts automatically monitor and enforce safety protocols, creating unchangeable records of compliance and violations. Real-time tracking of safety equipment maintenance and certifications ensures continuous compliance monitoring. The system provides instant verification of safety training completions and authorizations. Automated alerts notify relevant parties of safety incidents or certification expirations. The technology maintains detailed histories of safety implementations and improvements. Smart contracts enforce safety protocol adherence through automated monitoring. Distributed ledgers ensure consistent safety standards across organizational units.

2.1.10.2 Application of blockchain in occupational health

Comprehensive blockchain records maintain detailed histories of workplace health assessments and exposure monitoring. Encrypted access controls protect

sensitive health data while enabling authorized sharing among stakeholders. The system creates permanent records of health and safety training certifications. Smart contracts automate health compliance monitoring and reporting requirements. The technology ensures secure transfer of occupational health records between facilities. The system enables real-time tracking of health-related incidents and responses. Distributed ledgers facilitate coordinated health and safety management across locations.

2.1.10.3 Application of blockchain in compensation management

Smart contracts automate salary disbursement based on verified performance metrics and documented work hours. Immutable records track all compensation-related calculations, including overtime and bonuses. The system ensures the transparent processing of benefits and compensation adjustments. Blockchain provides real-time verification of payment processing and distribution. Smart contracts maintain accurate records of all compensation-related transactions. The technology enables secure international payment processing and tracking. Distributed ledgers ensure consistent application of compensation policies. The system maintains comprehensive audit trails of all payment activities.

2.1.10.4 Application of blockchain in legal compliance

Distributed ledger systems create verifiable records of working conditions and regulatory compliance. Smart contracts automatically monitor labour law requirements and flag potential violations. The technology maintains permanent records of all compliance-related activities. Blockchain ensures accurate tracking of employee certifications and qualifications. The system enables real-time monitoring of regulatory submission requirements. Smart contracts automate compliance verification and reporting processes. Distributed ledgers maintain comprehensive compliance histories across operations. The technology facilitates efficient regulatory audits and inspections.

2.1.10.5 Policy implication of application of blockchain to employee labour relations

Organizations must establish comprehensive blockchain governance frameworks addressing smart contract protocols and data privacy. The policies must balance transparency requirements with employee privacy rights and data protection. A framework should specify access control protocols and record retention guidelines. Organizations need clear procedures for managing blockchain-based records. Policies must address cross-border data transfer requirements and regulations. The framework should include protocols for smart contract updates and modifications. Organizations must establish clear guidelines for blockchain data management. Regular policy reviews ensure alignment with evolving technology and regulations.

In conclusion, new benchmarks for workplace management efficiency, security, and transparency have been set by the incorporation of blockchain technology into employee labour relations. The emphasis must continue to be on developing balanced implementations that safeguard the interests of both employers and employees while adhering to changing regulatory requirements as businesses continue to use this technology.

2.1.11 Application of robotics to employee labour relations

Robotics' application to employee labour relations (ELR) is quickly changing workplace dynamics, posing opportunities and difficulties for businesses and their employees. The impact of robots on labour relations is growing as they become more advanced and commonplace in many industries.

Dornelles et al. [28] explained that collaborative robots, or cobots, are replacing traditional job roles in manufacturing and logistics by assisting human workers. Human workers can concentrate on more intricate, high-value tasks while these robots take care of physically taxing or repetitive jobs, lowering the risk of workplace accidents. The dynamics between workers, employers, and operational procedures are all drastically changed by the incorporation of robotics into employee labour relations, which represents a groundbreaking development in workplace management [4]. Beyond simple automation, this technological revolution includes advanced systems that improve worker safety, expedite grievance processes, and guarantee regulatory compliance. With its capacity to conduct accurate measurements, ensure reliable operations, and produce unbiased data, robotics technology has raised the bar for accuracy and equity in several employee relations domains. There are new opportunities and challenges in the modern workplace because of this integration. This is a substantial departure from traditional labour management techniques.

2.1.11.1 Application of robotics in workplace safety

Collaborative robots execute advanced safety protocols while continuously monitoring workplace conditions. Sensor-equipped robots automatically detect potential hazards and trigger immediate shutdowns. The systems provide real-time safety alerts and status updates to operators. Robotic monitoring ensures consistent enforcement of safety boundaries. Advanced sensors continuously assess environmental safety parameters. Automated systems maintain detailed safety compliance records. Robots perform routine safety inspections with precise accuracy. The technology enables immediate response to safety violations.

2.1.11.2 Application of robotics in occupational health

Robotic systems conduct continuous monitoring of workplace environmental conditions, including air quality and noise levels. Automated systems track exposure to hazardous materials and maintain detailed records. Robots perform high-risk tasks to minimize human exposure to dangers. The technology enables precise measurement of workplace health parameters. Automated systems provide real-time health risk alerts and notifications. Robots maintain consistent monitoring across all operational areas. The systems generate detailed reports on workplace health conditions. Advanced sensors ensure accurate environmental health assessments.

2.1.11.3 Policy implication of application of robotics to employee labour relations

Organizations must establish clear guidelines governing human-robot interactions and safety protocols. Policies should address workforce training requirements and potential job displacement issues. The framework must define boundaries between automated and human decision-making. Organizations need clear procedures for

managing robotic system data. Policies should address privacy concerns in automated monitoring. The framework must include regular reviews of robotic system effectiveness. Organizations should establish clear protocols for system maintenance and updates. Policies must ensure fair integration of robotic systems in workplace operations. Between automated and human decision-making processes should be specified in policies.

In conclusion, as robotics technology continues to evolve, organizations must maintain flexible and inclusive policies that address both the opportunities and challenges presented by this technological revolution while ensuring that the fundamental principles of fair and effective labour relations are preserved and enhanced.

2.1.12 Application of cyber-physical system to employee labour relations

Cyber-physical systems represent a sophisticated integration of computational algorithms and physical components, revolutionizing workplace monitoring and management. These systems create intelligent environments where digital and physical worlds converge, enabling more sophisticated approaches to employee relations [33]. The utilization of cyber-physical systems (CPS) in the context of employee labour relations (ELR) signifies a noteworthy advancement in the amalgamation of digital technologies and tangible workplace procedures. Integrating computational and physical capabilities in CPS transforms workforce management, safety, and labour relations for organizations [34].

El-Kady et al. [35] explained that CPS is important in the context of workplace safety. Real-time monitoring of the surroundings, personnel movements, and equipment status is possible with sensors and actuators. This continuous flow of information enables the prompt identification of possible risks, resulting in automated reactions or warnings to human supervisors [13].

2.1.12.1 CPS in grievance management

Cyber-physical systems enable real-time tracking of workplace conditions relevant to grievance cases. Smart sensors and integrated systems provide objective data for thorough grievance investigations. Digital twins create detailed workplace situation models for accurate grievance analysis. The system maintains continuous monitoring of resolution progress and outcomes. CPS technology ensures comprehensive documentation of workplace incidents. Automated tracking systems provide unbiased evidence for grievance resolution. Integrated sensors enable accurate verification of reported conditions. The technology facilitates efficient investigation of workplace complaints.

2.1.12.2 CPS in workplace safety

Intelligent workspaces automatically adjust to maintain optimal safety conditions through integrated systems. Smart sensors interface with physical systems for immediate hazard response capabilities. The technology enables predictive maintenance and real-time safety parameter adjustments. CPS continuously monitors workplace conditions for potential risks. Automated systems provide instant alerts to safety violations. The technology maintains detailed safety compliance records. Integrated monitoring ensures comprehensive workplace safety coverage. Smart systems enable proactive safety management approaches.

2.1.12.3 CPS in compensation management

Advanced monitoring systems combine digital and physical tracking for precise work measurement. The technology provides detailed data on productivity, working conditions, and skill utilization. Automated systems ensure accurate recording of overtime and shift differentials. CPS maintains comprehensive performance monitoring for incentive calculations. The technology enables real-time tracking of work activities. Integrated systems provide objective performance measurement data. Smart monitoring ensures fair compensation assessments. The technology maintains accurate records of all compensable activities.

2.1.12.4 CPS in occupational health

Integrated sensor networks create comprehensive health and safety monitoring environments. The system enables quick identification and response to potential health hazards. Real-time monitoring maintains optimal workplace conditions continuously. CPS provides automated emergency response capabilities when needed. The technology enables precise measurement of workplace health parameters. Integrated systems ensure comprehensive health risk management. Smart sensors maintain continuous environmental monitoring. The technology facilitates immediate response to health concerns.

2.1.12.5 CPS in legal compliance

Comprehensive monitoring systems ensure adherence to labour laws through integrated tracking. Digital and physical monitoring systems record working hours and break periods. Real-time alerts notify management of potential compliance issues. CPS maintains detailed compliance documentation automatically. The technology ensures consistent application of labour regulations. Integrated systems provide comprehensive compliance monitoring. Smart tracking enables efficient compliance verification. The system maintains accurate records of all compliance-related activities.

2.1.12.6 Policy implication of application of cyber-physical system to employee labour relations

Organizations must establish clear guidelines for automated monitoring systems and privacy protection. The framework should specify integration requirements and emergency response protocols. Policies must balance operational needs with employee privacy rights. Clear procedures should govern data collection and retention practices. The framework must address system maintenance and upgrade requirements. Regular policy reviews ensure continued effectiveness and compliance. Organizations need clear protocols for handling monitored data. Security measures must protect sensitive monitoring information.

2.1.13 Application of augmented and virtual reality to employee labour relations

Employee labour relations have undergone a radical change because of augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR) technologies, which offer engaging and interactive answers to problems that arise in the workplace [7]. These technologies have

completely transformed how management and staff interact and resolve workplace problems, which allows organizations to produce lifelike simulations for training, safety demonstrations, and dispute resolution.

2.1.13.1 AR/VR for workplace safety training

Advanced AR systems VR creates risk-free training simulations for dangerous operations and emergency procedures. These platforms enable staff to practice complex safety protocols without exposure to actual dangers. AR technology guides workers through safety equipment inspection and maintenance procedures. Virtual environments simulate various emergency scenarios for comprehensive preparedness training. VR applications facilitate team-based emergency response training exercises. The technology enables detailed analysis of safety procedure compliance and effectiveness.

2.1.13.2 Policy implication of application of augmented and virtual reality to employee labour relations

Organizations must establish comprehensive AR/VR implementation guidelines in sensitive workplace environments. These policies should address data security, privacy protection, and fair access to technology-based training. The framework must include clear data collection and storage protocols from immersive technologies. Policies should specify appropriate uses of AR/VR in different workplace contexts. Guidelines must ensure equitable access to technology-enhanced training opportunities. Organizations need clear procedures for handling technology-generated data and records. Policies should address potential privacy concerns in virtual workplace environments. The framework must include regular review and updates of AR/VR usage guidelines.

It is pertinent to note that the incorporation of AR/VR technologies into labour relations for employees has opened up previously unheard-of possibilities for innovation in safety, workplace training, and conflict resolution. Organizations must strike a balance between human-centred approaches and technological advancement as these technologies continue to develop, all the while guaranteeing ethical implementation and equal access for all staff members.

2.2 Road map to 4IR technology implementation in ELR

After analyzing the implementation of 4IR technologies for ELR practices, we conclude by providing a veritable roadmap for ELR practitioners to use as they seek to deploy the technologies practically. This discussion will cover various subheadings, which include the following:

2.2.1 Organizational requirements

It is pertinent for organizations to first evaluate their level of technology readiness before implementing 4IR solutions in ELR. An organization's technology readiness assessment can be carried out by investigating existing infrastructures, the availability of resources, accessing staff capabilities, and securing the support of key stakeholders. This aims to identify the gaps in the existing systems and determine the specific requirements for the successful implementation of the 4IR solutions.

2.2.2 Change management essentials

For the successful adoption of 4IR solutions in ELR, a structured change management approach is required. Organizations must have clear communication strategies that will detail the benefits and impact of new technologies. Also, a basic training roadmap should detail how employees will be equipped with the necessary skills required for the implementation of the 4IR technologies. The resistance management plan must address common concerns and obstacles. Lastly, success metrics should be established early to track the progress of implementing the 4IR technologies and demonstrate value.

2.2.3 Policy guidelines

The importance of laying down clear policies to govern the implementation of 4IR technologies in ELR cannot be over-emphasized. These policies should establish data protection standards, define the protocols for technology usage, detail governance structures, and create review mechanisms. Also, these policies must balance innovation with privacy and compliance requirements.

2.3 Conclusion

A thorough examination of the many technological applications in employee labour relations shows how workplace management and HR procedures have changed significantly. Numerous technologies have been integrated to create a complex ecosystem that improves workplace safety, efficiency, and compliance. The fundamental technology is artificial intelligence (AI). AI particularly shows promise in grievance and compensation analysis, where it can process large amounts of data to identify patterns and support the making of decisions. Also, Cloud computing provides essential infrastructure for document management and collaboration. Blockchain offers secure verification systems for employment and certification records. Employee-employer relationships now have previously unheard-of levels of transparency and trust thanks to blockchain technology, especially when it comes to grievance documentation, certification verification, and compensation. Also, Robotics has revolutionized safety procedures and operational efficiency by bringing collaborative systems that operate alongside human workers while guaranteeing rigorous adherence to safety rules.

By redefining training in safety procedures and training methods, augmented and virtual reality technologies have produced immersive learning environments that drastically lower workplace hazards. Furthermore, Sensitive employee data is protected, and the integrity of digital ELR systems is preserved through strong cybersecurity measures. The successful integration of these technological developments with traditional ELR procedures has produced a hybrid approach that balances human insight with technological efficiency. This technological transformation in employee labour relations represents a significant shift from traditional practices, necessitating continuing adaptation of policies, procedures, and organizational cultures to maximize the benefits while mitigating potential challenges. The key to success lies in creating synergies between various technological solutions while maintaining a focus on human-centric workplace practices.

Several significant progress would result from the combined use of these technologies, such as:

1. Improved safety at work *via* real-time monitoring and predictive analytics.
2. Simplified grievance processes with enhanced documentation and transparency.
3. More precise and equitable pay structures supported by insights from data.
4. Enhanced adherence to labour laws by means of automated monitoring and reporting.
5. A decrease in employee misbehavior due to improved oversight and instruction.
6. Better workplace safety and health protocols *via* technology integration.

Therefore, organizations should prioritize implementing the 4IR applications that offer high impact and require relatively low complexity. The focus should be on initiatives that demonstrate clear business value, which can also be built on existing infrastructure. Implementation must skillfully balance this technological advancement with employee privacy considerations.

The future of employee labour relations will continue to evolve with technological advancements, requiring organizations to maintain flexible policies and frameworks that accommodate innovation while protecting employee rights and well-being.

Going forward, organizations should start with a detailed assessment of their readiness for the ELR 4IR technologies. This should be followed by recognizing the specific applications that align with organizational needs and capabilities. Thereafter, a resource plan should detail the required investments in technology, training, and support. Lastly, an early stakeholder engagement is vital for securing buy-in and support for the implementation of the required ELR 4IR technologies.

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Chapter 6

It Is Time for HR to Lead: People Practices as a Differentiator

Alvaro Felipe Alejandro Espinosa

Abstract

This article argues that, to meet the demands of modern organizations, human resources (HR) must finally and fully shift from an administrative function to a business-centered architect of organizational people practices. Starting with an exploration of how the workforce is defined, modern thinking posits that employees should be viewed as valued partners, rather than resources or assets. Drawing on the author's professional experience, research based on the literature, and data from two sources, an argument is made that now is the time for HR to transform. The literature suggests that HR can transform itself by eliminating low-value work and partnering with leadership to own organizational people practices. Practical insights are shared that HR leaders can use to redesign HR's role in positioning people practices to deliver desired business outcomes. HR leaders must take the initiative to transform the HR function and focus on strategic priorities. Failing to do so places the HR profession at the risk of becoming irrelevant by allowing others to complete this essential transformation in their stead.

Keywords: people practices, culture, organizational competence, strategic HR, leadership accountability

1. Introduction

This article is based on a presentation titled *Abolish HR!* delivered at a regional human resource conference in 2025.¹ It explores why HR must be abolished in its current form and reimagined, not just made more efficient. Building on insights from the literature and examples such as Zappos' distributed people practices [1], an argument is presented that HR must move from a task-driven support function to an architect of organizational competence centered on people practices. Experiences are drawn from the author's professional experiences and supported by data from two sources to illustrate how organizations can rethink people practices to achieve better outcomes.

Before proceeding, there is value in considering how the term *business architect* is used within the context of this article. The term business architect is used to describe how the organization or a subset of designated leaders within the organization uses organizational competences to develop and align strategies that allow for the effective and efficient delivery of desired organizational outcomes [2]. From a systems

¹ UPHRA Spring Summit, The U.P. Annual HR Conference, April 24, 2025, Marquette, Michigan.

perspective, business architecture includes the relationships between domains and platforms [3]. When considering HR's role and the ideas of organizational people practices, the concept of business architect suggests that human resource leaders must execute as strategic partners, must look beyond the silo of the HR department, and must be visible and active leaders who lead and architect the workforce dimension within the complexity of other business domains. HR professionals "...should not be an island..." and must find ways to go beyond the traditional HRM function and integrate with other organizational domains to "achieve strategic goals" ([4], p. 1225). This necessarily requires engagement beyond traditional HR centric strategies. Hence, HR as a business architect is considerably different than HR as an HR practices architect.

Insights from the literature indicate that human resources, as traditionally practiced, is no longer equipped to meet the needs of modern organizations. For decades, HR has operated primarily as an administrative support function focused on compliance and personnel processes [5]. However, the realities of today's workplaces, characterized by rapid change and rising employee expectations that demand greater purpose and engagement, require a fundamental rethinking of HR's role [6]. To be clear, the purpose of this article is not to restate the need for HR as a strategic partner. There is ample evidence in the extant literature that makes this argument [7–10]. The purpose of this article is to suggest that the literature, data, and experience collectively indicate that HR as a profession has yet to fully realize what it means to be a strategic partner, and more importantly, that new opportunities are emerging that challenge now dated understandings of strategic contribution [9, 11]. HR is challenged to be proactive and lead, not merely be reactive [12].

Limitations influencing HR's full access to a strategic partner role are related to themes such as framing employees as *resources*, *capital*, or *assets*. A resource-based view (RBV) of the workforce considers the cost of acquiring and maintaining the workforce as an asset management problem [13]. Managing the workforce from an RBV perspective has been critiqued as limiting, narrow, and indicative that employees merit the same consideration as equipment [14]. Such perspectives diminish engagement and weaken long-term organizational health [15]. Healthy and productive workplace cultures and experiences that engage employees rarely manifest when employees feel they are "dehumanized" when viewed as assets or capital that must be managed ([16], p. 3).

Additionally, despite opportunities to engage strategically, the perception that HR's ongoing focus is on transactional work also limits its ability to influence strategic outcomes [17]. The need for HR transformation remains prevalent in current literature, for example, noted as comprising "manual processes, administrative rigidity, and reactive strategies" ([18], p. 90). Survey data from the Society for Human Resource Management [19] indicate that HR practitioners continue to spend the majority of their time on administrative tasks rather than maximizing leadership and organizational capabilities. This pattern is not sustainable. It threatens HR's future relevance and leaves a leadership vacuum others are eager to fill.

The findings from a recent study point to a clear choice. HR can either step into a broader, business-centered role or risk becoming irrelevant. Building this new role requires competencies such as consultative advising and leadership coaching [20]. It also requires skills in organizational system design and workforce planning [21]. To assist in the delivery of desired organizational outcomes, HR must move beyond the comfort of daily busyness and prioritize promoting people practices as an

organizational competence as one approach that goes beyond the traditional perspective of HR strategic contribution.

In the sections that follow, this article explores the mindset shifts required, practical models for transformation, real-world examples of organizational competence, and the urgent call for HR to lead. To be clear, espousing strategic HRM is not new. The literature supports that this has been proposed for several decades [5, 22]. In particular, and as discussed in greater detail below, the data indicate that HR has not fully embraced or realized this transformation. For example, Harney and Collings [23] stated “[n]otably absent is a sense of the nature of strategic decision making around how HR delivers value...” (p. 2). To a greater extent, newer voices are entering the discussion, suggesting that organizational practices that directly affect the workforce may be influenced by others if HR professionals do not take the lead [24]. When HR accepts this challenge, it has the ability to shape organizational success. When it does not, organizations will find a way to move forward without HR.

2. Contextual background

For decades, HR has struggled with a reputation that is, at best, mixed and perceived as administrative and of low value [25]. Some have called for HR to be abolished [26]. While the idea of abolishing HR might seem extreme, it highlights an important challenge. Without substantial change, HR risks sliding into irrelevance. Although no one will likely eliminate HR departments outright, we cannot take their value for granted. HR must rethink its purpose and its practices to remain a meaningful contributor to organizational success.

Observations shared in this article are based on over four decades of leadership and HR experience across organizations of varying sizes, supported by doctoral research in leadership. My lived experience across a wide range of organizational settings and supporting data inform the patterns and realities described as follows.

3. Employees as resources

An outdated lens, diminishing employee value and contribution, still defines how many organizations view their employees. A consulting experience I had illustrates this. A company’s senior leadership team sought help to improve its performance management system. When asked how frequently managers provided feedback, they admitted meetings occurred only once a year during annual evaluations. A suggestion to implement monthly feedback conversations was dismissed as impractical because leaders were too busy. This revealed a mindset that viewed employees as passive assets to be managed rather than as active contributors to be engaged.

Historically, HR professionals have viewed employees as *assets* of the organization [27]. The extant literature also touts shifting from the term resources to capital [28, 29]; however, this misses the mark. We use up resources. We depreciate assets. We spend capital. This resource-based view of the firm, widely cited in academic literature, promoted the idea that employees are resources to be managed for competitive advantage [15]. Framing employees in this way, even unconsciously, shapes organizational practices, reducing people to commodities rather than respecting them as full participants in business outcomes. This perspective no longer aligns with the expectations of a twenty-first-century workforce.

What we call people shapes how we think about them and how we act toward them [15]. Organizations that treated employees as expendable, such as through mass layoffs to protect executive bonuses, compromised trust and engagement. In contrast, organizations that viewed employees as partners prioritized people practices as an organizational competence. Scholars have increasingly argued that continuing to label people as *resources* results in low trust in the workplace [30]. Today's employees expect to have meaningful work and engage as collaborators in achieving organizational success. It can be deduced that managing the people side of the business should not be confined to HR. It must be the shared responsibility of leadership throughout the organization.

The shift to recognizing employees as partners rather than assets is not a superficial change. It demands a transformation in mindset across the HR function and among senior leaders. Although the term *human resources* is unlikely to disappear in the near future, understanding its limitations is essential if HR transformation is to take place. A new approach requires designing people practices that reflect a commitment to culture, engagement, and long-term contribution, not simple resource management.

4. Adding value

One of the challenges facing human resources is the persistent perception that HR does not deliver significant value. Research has shown that while HR professionals often rate their own contributions highly, non-HR stakeholders rate HR's value contribution much lower [21]. This perception gap points to a critical failure. HR has not demonstrated how it contributes to higher-order business outcomes [23]. In consulting engagements, my experience is that often it is senior leaders outside of HR who first express concerns about HR's effectiveness. They recognize gaps in HR's impact and seek external assistance to address this need, while HR teams themselves remain unaware that change is needed. This internal lack of awareness is a major obstacle to elevating HR's role. Building self-awareness within HR about what stakeholders expect and value is an essential foundation for HR transformation.

HR value creation must be tied to organizational priorities that include outcomes for investors, customers, and communities [31]. Yet, many HR teams remain focused on internal administrative processes and reactive problem-solving, missing opportunities to shape business outcomes. Too often, conversations about HR's role devolve into debates about having a seat at the table, rather than addressing HR's actual contribution [10, 32]. Adding value is not a factor of being included; it requires the ability to consistently demonstrate impact [33]. When HR is able to demonstrate meaningful impact, it gets invited to attend and be included.

Building the competencies needed to deliver this value requires deliberate effort [22]. As Ulrich and Brockbank [5] argue, HR professionals must move beyond administrative excellence to develop their business knowledge and consultative skills. Without these capabilities, HR remains vulnerable to being sidelined from critical decision-making. In practice, many HR professionals underestimate the gap between their current competencies and the demands of a strategic HR function. This pattern reflects the Dunning-Kruger effect, where individuals inaccurately estimate their abilities because they lack the awareness to know what they do not know [34]. Overwhelmed by day-to-day demands, many HR teams default to a reactive mode, focusing on immediate operational needs rather than the work of building organizational capability.

I have seen this conflict in my professional practice. For example, in one organizational engagement, the employee experience was identified as a major challenge. Yet, rather than taking collective ownership, senior executives blamed middle managers, middle managers blamed employees, and employees blamed leadership. This cycle of blame revealed an absence of ownership for a culture that values employees. While HR was able to help reshape accountability, sustainable accountability belongs to the entire organization in the form of an organizational people practice.

Scholars reinforce the urgency of this shift. HR must evolve from an administrative function to being an enabler of organizational capabilities [35]. Becker and Huselid [36] argued that HR's true value emerges when practices are integrated with business strategy and measured against organizational outcomes. To add real value, HR must abandon the reactive service-provider mindset and embrace the role of architect of organizational success. This transition demands competencies in business literacy, consulting, systems design, and influence [33]. Collectively, these can be considered a consultative mindset, a competency that must be intentionally developed if HR is to fulfill its potential as a true strategic partner that adds value to the organization [7, 20].

5. What is the role of the HR function

The traditional view of HR as a standalone department responsible solely for *people issues* is no longer sufficient [37, 38]. Modern organizations increasingly recognize that HR is part of a broader *HR community*, which includes not only the formal HR team but also every leader and manager who holds responsibility for managing and supporting people [5]. CEOs state they desire this broader, more strategic role for HR, yet few of them are ensuring organizational structures are in place to support this need [39]. Though structural changes are part of this type of organizational transformation, more than structure must change [40]. This broader view shifts the structure of HR from an isolated function to HR as a shared organizational competence.

Understanding this shift is essential. The role of HR is not simply to manage transactions or administer programs and can no longer be treated as a siloed functional department [41]. HR must be part of shaping, sustaining, and strengthening the systems that connect people practices to business outcomes [42]. Embedding people practices throughout the organization, with every leader and manager actively accountable for workforce outcomes, is essential for delivering value [43]. Only by embracing this distributed responsibility can organizations fully realize their people's potential [44].

Moreover, as organizations increasingly automate or outsource transactional tasks such as benefits administration and payroll processing, the expectations for HR professionals change. Organizations need HR to contribute strategically [5]. This requires HR to redefine its purpose, rethink its core competencies, and rebuild its relationships across the organization. Bolman and Deal [45] argued that many organizations still operate based on assumptions from an early industrial era. A more forward-looking approach requires HR and business leaders to reimagine how work is structured and how people are treated [46]. This change requires HR to understand the business [5] and contribute to the overall business architecture, extending HR's role beyond the traditional notion of HR strategy to encompass involvement in business strategy [4].

In practice, this transition exposes significant gaps. In one client organization, HR, and payroll employees expressed the hope that new leadership would return to

practices from a decade earlier. However, the goal was not to look to the past, but to look forward, anticipating how work, technology, and employee expectations would evolve over the next decade. Encouragingly, some leaders were ready for a new direction. Discouragingly, few understood that the future required more than minor adjustments; it demanded a complete rethink of how people and work would intersect.

This misunderstanding is common. Research shows that many senior leaders are not fully prepared to lead people-related transformation [47]. Often, executives focus on surface-level operational fixes instead of addressing the systemic redesigns needed to create sustainable performance through people practices. Leaders who lack the skills or knowledge to lead workforce transformation may also lack the self-awareness to seek help [34]. Recognizing this blind spot is a critical first step toward meaningful change.

HR's role must evolve from processing transactions to building organizational competence that involves shared organizational people practices. This approach embraces employees as partners through authentic engagement and mutual value creation [48]. This is not a matter of adjustments to achieve efficiencies. It is a complete redefinition of HR's purpose. Responsibility for people outcomes has to shift from HR departments to leadership teams, along with the embedding of people practices as core organizational accountabilities.

6. To change is to transform

In many organizations, there is a persistent belief that adjusting a few human resources practices, such as updating staffing models, refining performance appraisals, or revising workflows, is enough to create strategic change. This belief is mistaken. Isolated changes to HR practices do not lead to transformation [5, 49]. Real transformation demands a comprehensive rethinking of how HR integrates into and supports the organization and how the organization engages with the workforce [50]. Instead, transformation allows organizations to “adapt, innovate, and thrive” based on results from redefining purpose, structures, and behaviors to achieve better outcomes ([51], p. 135).

For HR, this means moving beyond its historic focus on administering processes. Modern HR must build healthy organizational cultures where leadership behavior and people practices are aligned with business goals [52]. Positive people practices, grounded in leadership accountability and ethical decision-making, must become the central. Unfortunately, many organizations are not ready for this shift. In one case, when asked to support a redesign of a compensation program, the leadership team was unable to produce a current list of core values or a strategic plan. Without this foundational clarity, it was unclear what behaviors or outcomes the compensation system would incentivize. Without a coherent strategy, HR efforts are at best reactive and at worst counterproductive.

Another persistent obstacle is the outdated reflex for HR to step in and manage day-to-day employee issues. As Dank and Hellstrom [53] noted, poor performance management can be a symptom of deeper organizational issues, such as flawed recruitment practices or weak leadership trust. When HR assumes responsibility for performance issues that should rest with managers, it enables poor leadership behaviors instead of strengthening organizational capacity [54, 55].

Real-world examples highlight the contrast. In one organization, HR investigated every minor employee concern, leaving little time for strategic work. However, in another, a senior executive directed the vice president of HR to focus on building

leadership capacity and enabling strategic value, explicitly discouraging HR from managing employee discipline issues, noting that this responsibility belonged to leadership. The differences in the approaches taken by these organizations are striking. One organization focused on traditional HR enablement, and the other focused on HR empowerment.

Academic research reinforces this approach. Beer et al. [56] argue that HR's role must move beyond administrative functions toward building systemic organizational capability. Sustainable success requires aligning HR initiatives with business strategy and leveraging organizational people practices [8]. Transformation is not the result of administrative efficiency. Workforce transformation comes from designing, deploying, and demanding that people practices be embedded in the organizational DNA.

7. Introducing people practices

As organizations reconsider the role of HR, one of the most important shifts underway is the growing focus on *people practices*. This approach moves beyond managing isolated HR processes to building systems that create value for the business [57]. At its core, people practices focus on aligning how the organization engages with the workforce in order to deliver desired outcomes that are valued by those the organization serves [58].

A review of HR workloads often shows that urgent tasks take priority, signaling that underlying systems may be inefficient, outdated, or poorly aligned [59]. Dank and Hellstrom [53] argued that HR must move toward an experimental model, involving the design of processes, testing, gathering feedback, and refining approaches continuously. This shift from being an administrator of static processes to deploying flexible and experimental solutions keeps HR responsive to business needs rather than becoming stuck in outdated models. Adopting this kind of mindset, treating urgent problems as shared challenges requires HR to embrace experimentation.

Importantly, this transformation is not a task that HR can undertake alone. Transformation requires shared ownership of people practices across the organization. Fulcher et al. [57] emphasize that HR professionals must automate or eliminate low-value administrative work to focus on integrating people practices into business strategy. Value is defined by business leaders and employees, not by internal HR measures. Progressive ways of working are no longer optional. As Dank and Hellstrom [53] observed, modern business challenges demand a different approach, one where HR leads efforts to build shared value across employees, customers, and the organization. Waiting for permission or for ideal conditions will only entrench HR's traditional, limited role. Leadership in HR today means stepping forward to create new models and inviting others to join. This kind of change must start inside the HR function itself. Ulrich and Brockbank [5] argued that HR transformation must begin *at home*. Without credibility, meaning operational competence, business literacy, and strategic alignment, HR cannot lead broader change efforts.

However, building new capabilities is difficult. Two common barriers block progress. First, many HR professionals remain connected to traditional administrative models [60, 61]. Excellence in process management does not translate into competence in strategic advisory work. Second, many organizations tolerate a high level of *transactional noise*, inefficient demands and tasks that consume time and attention, leaving little energy for strategic work [62]. Overcoming these barriers requires deliberate action and sustained focus. Green [63] reinforced this view, emphasizing

that developing consultative skills is essential for HR's future. Moving from reactive administration to proactive advising requires structured skill-building and a deliberate focus on strengthening HR's ability to influence leadership and business outcomes.

One client engagement highlighted this tension. Senior leadership downgraded the HR function by replacing an executive-level HR leader with a mid-level manager. While this decision reflected a problematic misunderstanding of HR's potential value, it also highlighted an important truth: organizations must be intentional in how they define HR's role. HR's value must be earned and demonstrated. This is an example of non-HR leaders disenfranchising HR professionals and distancing them from the business of the organization.

When working with HR teams to support transformation, my first recommendation is always to focus on internal readiness. It often takes a year or more to build the right mix of competencies, develop consultative skills, and establish the internal credibility needed to lead broader change efforts. Throughout this process, it is critical to gather external insights, internal feedback, and a clear understanding of organizational priorities to shape an approach that fits the specific context.

8. The need for change

Being aware of the need for change must be acknowledged. This can be done by examining current practices and available data. The 2025 Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) report opens with the assertion that change is now a constant in shaping HR's future [19]. While this framing sounds urgent, it is not new and overlooks the long history of calls for HR transformation. Warnings about HR's outdated practices have been raised for decades, and evidence continues to show that too many HR teams have not adjusted to this need.

As early as 2021, Schmidt and Holloway argued that traditional HR practices were insufficient to meet the needs of modern organizations [52]. In 2005, Hammonds wrote "HR people are, for most practical purposes, neither strategic nor leaders" (p. 40). In 2005, Ulrich and Brockbank noted that the need for HR to evolve had been evident for 20 years. At the time of this writing, this suggests that there have been calls for HR transformation over 40 years ago. This history suggests that HR's challenge is not a lack of knowledge but a persistent failure to act on insights that have been available for decades.

Despite these warnings, many HR departments remain focused on basic operational improvements, such as transitioning from paper-based systems, rather than pursuing initiatives that add organizational value. Ulrich and Brockbank [5] emphasized nearly two decades ago that meaningful transformation demands that HR practices be placed firmly within the larger context of business realities. Without this broader alignment, efforts to improve HR remain superficial. Recognizing the need for change is not the same as achieving it. Many organizations acknowledge that HR must change, but few move beyond minor adjustments.

One explanation for this failure may lie in HR's historical preoccupation with administrative efficiency and effectiveness at the expense of reinvention. Tamkin [64] reported that HR struggled to move beyond administrative functions. The reader should note this observation dates back over two decades. However, contemporary observations affirm this struggle persists. For example, Bennett et al. [9] refer to "tensions" faced by the HR profession (p. 942) that have impeded a transition to strategic business roles. While operational effectiveness is necessary, it alone is no substitute for the broader value HR must deliver if it hopes to remain relevant [65].

The reality facing HR today is stark. The need for change is not coming soon; it is already here. HR professionals must decide whether they will lead change or react to it. Those willing to rethink outdated models and abandon transactional thinking have the opportunity to position HR at the forefront of business performance. Those who hesitate risk further marginalization.

Thus, the debate about whether HR needs to change is settled [11]. What remains is the more difficult work of executing real change [27]. Organizations can no longer afford another generation of missed opportunities. HR transformation is not about modernizing paperwork or improving existing systems; it is about reimagining the function's purpose, capabilities, and contribution to organizational success.

9. Stuck in the past

The human resources profession continues to wrestle with a long-standing identity problem. Too often, HR is viewed primarily as an administrative function, centered on paperwork, compliance, and transactions. Although tasks such as processing benefits, managing payroll, and completing documentation are necessary, they do not contribute meaningfully to strategic business outcomes. As Robinson et al. [66] argued, HR must complete transactional work efficiently, but this work does not define HR's value to the organization.

Advances in technology have created new opportunities for HR. For example, much non-value transactional work can be shifted or outsourced. Self-service platforms, automation tools, and outsourced services can remove much of the administrative burden traditionally carried by HR departments [67]. Yet, despite these opportunities, many HR teams remain entrenched in low-value activities. The reasons for this inertia are complex, rooted in organizational expectations, professional comfort, and a reluctance to redefine HR's role. Recognizing that administrative work will always be necessary is important. However, allowing it to dominate HR's identity limits the profession's ability to contribute to business success. A fundamental mindset shift is required: administrative excellence is a baseline expectation, not the ceiling of HR's contribution, nor should it be the pinnacle of HR ambition.

The conditions for change have never been better. Organizations have access to the tools needed to automate and streamline much of HR's traditional workload. But technology alone is not enough. A deeper transformation must occur, one that repositions HR as a core business contributor rather than a reactive service provider.

A real-world example illustrates this challenge. At one organization, hiring managers expected HR to draft interview questions for them. When encouraged to design their own questions, the feedback was that they did not know what to ask. This revealed both skill gaps and misplaced responsibility for staffing. Until HR repositions itself as a builder of organizational capability rather than a task provider, real transformation will remain elusive.

Ulrich et al. [31] emphasized that true HR transformation is not about making HR itself better; it is about connecting HR's work to business success. Achieving this shift demands a clear redefinition of identity. HR must be seen as a business function dedicated to creating value through people practices. According to Pfeffer and Veiga [68], organizations are advised to do more than manage employees as resources. The ability to succeed and excel is improved through the use of organizational people practices.

This change requires courage and clarity. HR professionals must challenge assumptions about their role and lead the conversation about what it means to build business

success through people. They must move beyond operational busyness and into work that is connected to desired organizational outcomes. The transformation of HR will not happen by invitation. It will happen only if HR steps forward to reclaim its purpose and build new expectations, both for itself and for the organizations served [69].

10. Using data to find opportunities

To better understand the opportunities for HR, there is a need to look beyond personal experience or professional intuition. A critical engagement with relevant data is needed. However, data must be approached with a discerning mindset. Accepting findings at face value without questioning the underlying assumptions creates the risk of reinforcing outdated assumptions. Two data sources are used for the discussion in this article. The first is a survey conducted by the Society of Human Resource Professionals (SHRM), and the second is data gathered from attendees at a human resource conference.

The SHRM report published in 2025 identified the top five areas where HR departments report spending most of their time: 23.58% in administration and operations, 22.33% in leadership development, 19.18% in recruiting, 15.72% in employee relations, and 13.84% on retention [19]. These categories seem familiar to anyone who has worked in HR. They reflect the pressures felt in daily practice. However, the data show that HR remains entrenched in administrative tasks, despite decades of calls for transformation. The distribution of HR time suggests that, for all the talk of strategic HR, many teams remain locked into traditional functions. HR administrative operations, a figure that should have dropped significantly given the availability of automation, self-service platforms, and outsourcing solutions, consumed almost one-quarter of HR's time. If HR's role is evolving, as many claim, it appears to be belied by the data that still reflects an overwhelming focus on transactional work. Critically examining data like the SHRM survey exposes these contradictions. It forces a deeper question: Are we organizing HR's work around business needs, or are we preserving traditional functions because they are familiar and comfortable? Without rethinking how time is invested, HR risks perpetuating a service-provider mindset rather than claiming its leadership role.

Some of the survey's highlighted categories, such as leadership development and recruiting, are rightly noted as areas of focus. But these must be reframed. Leadership development should not be an outcome HR delivers to managers; it should be a shared organizational competence owned by business leaders [70]. Similarly, recruiting must move beyond being a transactional task performed by HR to a core people practice that defines how leaders manage and are accountable for their teams. Because talent is a differentiator and can be a competitive advantage [71], leaders bear the accountability for developing and retaining capable teams.

Advances in technology offer tools to support this shift. Platforms for AI-assisted recruiting, automated onboarding, and real-time engagement feedback can dramatically reduce administrative burdens [72]. Technology-driven change can support HR strategy, but technology is only one factor. Organizations must rethink how work is owned and distributed or run the risk that HR will continue to be the default owner of people-related tasks that should belong to leaders across the enterprise [73, 74].

Viewed critically, the SHRM survey offers more than a snapshot of activity. The survey highlights where time is spent and where effort must be redirected. It reveals where HR can and must transition from an enabler to a force that empowers organizational capability [75]. The path forward is not to eliminate HR activities, it is to

redistribute responsibility for them to embed ownership of recruiting, retention, development, and culture within the broader leadership community. The core message is that HR needs to take the initiative [69]. As Dank and Hellstrom [53] emphasized, sustainable success comes when HR shifts from executing tasks to building organizational systems that others lead and sustain.

By using data as the basis for inquiry, HR professionals can challenge traditional assumptions, reframe their role, and lead the transformations their organizations demand.

11. 2025 Study on people practices

In 2025, during a regional human resources conference, participants were invited to complete a voluntary survey examining familiarity with the concept of *people practices*, readiness to promote them, and perceptions of their organizations' preparedness to distribute responsibility for people practices beyond HR. Thirty-six participants responded, of whom 75% identified as HR professionals.

The survey revealed critical insights. Approximately 64% of respondents indicated they were unfamiliar with the concept of people practices, and 44% reported having little or no influence over how people practices were carried out in their organizations. These findings show that while interest in evolving HR's role is increasing, conceptual understanding and operational readiness remain low.

11.1 People practices understanding vs. organizational readiness

The survey showed a clear relationship between individual understanding of people practices and the assessment of organizational readiness. Respondents who reported a stronger conceptual grasp, such as being able to define people practices or give examples, were more likely to perceive their organizations as prepared or moving toward shared ownership models. Conversely, those unfamiliar with people practices rated their organizations as unprepared or lacking clear plans to include people practices at the organizational level.

This connection suggests that individual comprehension is not an isolated factor; it shapes organizational momentum. Without a shared operational understanding of what people practices are and how they function, organizational readiness lags. Organizations cannot expect leaders to embrace distributed ownership of people outcomes if the foundational concepts remain vague or misunderstood.

For HR leaders interested in real transformation, building a shared conceptual framework is a first step. Before new systems, programs, or accountability models can succeed, there must be deliberate, consistent efforts to build shared conceptual frameworks across leadership and management teams. The organization must learn what people practices are, which are needed to differentiate itself in the market, and educate leaders and employees on these practices as an organizational competence.

11.2 Leadership support vs. organizational readiness

Another significant pattern emerged around leadership commitment. Respondents who perceived executive support for people practices overwhelmingly rated their organizations as prepared or gaining momentum. Where leadership engagement was weak or sporadic, readiness ratings were low.

This finding reinforces a vital truth. Leadership modeling is not an enhancer of readiness, but rather a prerequisite. Declarations of support mean little unless leaders adopt people-centered behaviors, sponsor changes visibly, and link people practices to business outcomes. For HR, the implication is that change management begins by securing executive commitment and requiring visible leadership engagement, not treating it as a secondary consideration.

11.3 Confidence in supporting people practices vs. willingness to expand

Survey data showed a strong correlation between individual confidence and willingness to support expanded people practices. Participants who felt highly confident in their skills were more likely to express readiness to adopt greater responsibility if provided with organizational support. Those with lower confidence were more hesitant, even when structural support was assumed.

This highlights an overlooked aspect of change, which is the need for psychological readiness. Training alone is insufficient. Organizations must invest in building confidence through coaching, mentoring, skill application opportunities, and celebrating early wins.

Confidence is an accelerant for adoption. Without it, even strong systems will falter as individuals hesitate or defer responsibility back to HR. In part, this psychological readiness must include shifting HR from an enabler to a force that empowers the organization and its leaders.

11.4 Openness to shifting responsibility vs. organizational readiness

Openness to shifting responsibility was also aligned with readiness. Organizations that were open, or beginning to show openness, to broader ownership of people practices were also rated as prepared or building momentum. Organizations resisting change did not appear open to adopting people practices. This finding emphasizes evidence from the literature noted earlier in this paper that policy changes or procedural redesigns will not result in transformation unless they are paired with actual practices that have a positive impact on the workforce.

11.5 Influence level vs. confidence in supporting people practices

Finally, the survey found that perceived influence correlated with confidence. Those who felt they had moderate or significant influence in their organizations also reported higher confidence levels. Those who described themselves as feeling marginalized or powerless reported lower confidence. This insight reveals that perceived personal agency is connected to engagement. Building influence, clarifying decision rights, expanding leadership roles, and recognizing contributions must be treated as a necessary investment and not as an afterthought.

11.6 Summary of findings

Together, these findings showed that if organizations want to move beyond HR-centric models to embedded people practices as an organizational competence, they must focus on five interconnected areas:

- Build conceptual understanding.
- Secure leadership modeling.

- Develop individual confidence.
- Value cultural and diversity.
- Increase perceived influence.

Without deliberate investment in these areas, efforts to distribute ownership of people practices will remain superficial or symbolic.

For HR leaders committed to building real organizational capability, these findings offer a guide for action. They show that successful transformation does not start with tweaking current processes. It starts with developing and deploying beliefs, behaviors, and capabilities that must be deliberately embedded throughout the organization.

12. Four examples

Understanding how people practices become part of an organization's core competence is essential for shifting HR from a reactive service provider to a proactive contributor to business outcomes. To illustrate this, four real-world examples show how integrating people practices across the organization, not isolating them in HR, builds stronger, more sustainable results.

12.1 Customer service at Zappos

Zappos, the online retailer based in Las Vegas, offers a clear example of customer service as an organizational competence. Although Zappos maintains a formal customer service department, service excellence is everyone's responsibility, from executives to frontline staff. Every employee participates in direct customer interactions as part of their employment with the company [1]. This reinforces the company's cultural priority that customer service is a shared organizational value. Kopelman et al. noted that, when all employees own and are accountable for the customer experience, outcomes are more real-time, adaptable, and resilient than when owned by a single department. Customer service is an organizational competence for Zappos.

12.2 Retention responsibility

Another example comes from a hospital that struggled with severe nursing shortage. To address the situation, an intentional choice was made to reposition retention as a shared business priority rather than solely as an HR concern. Initially, turnover was HR's problem. However, drawing from Gallup's Q12 research [76], leadership realized that supervisors have the greatest influence on employee engagement and retention. By redefining supervisors as *chief retention officers*, the hospital elevated retention to an operational priority. Turnover rates declined, engagement scores improved, patient satisfaction increased, and patient outcomes improved. Positioning retention as an organizational competence demonstrated that success depends on distributed ownership.

12.3 Recruiting and hiring ownership

Similarly, another hospital system faced a 25% vacancy rate in nursing positions. This was addressed by recasting recruiting and hiring as a leadership responsibility

rather than exclusively owned by HR. The hospital's hiring processes had collapsed. Instead of assuming that HR alone should solve the problem, HR partnered with nursing leadership to redesign the hiring process. By placing operational leaders in charge of staffing their teams, with HR serving as a facilitator rather than a controller, 99 of 100 vacancies were filled within 60 days. The problem was not a hiring issue; it was a failure to distribute responsibility for workforce outcomes across leadership. Staffing was not an organizational people practice until the accountability for hiring included operational leaders. Having leaders accountable for staffing their areas of responsibility is an organizational competence [77].

12.4 Onboarding

The final example comes from onboarding new employees at Zappos. Employees from different departments participate in onboarding teams. This incorporates varied perspectives and strengthens new hires' integration into the company culture. Instead of HR owning onboarding, it is an organizational competence owned by the entire community [1, 78, 79]. This approach not only accelerates cultural alignment but also reinforces a sense of shared responsibility and accountability from day one.

Organizations seeking to replicate these types of successes must ask themselves critical questions:

- How do we ensure that key people practices are shared responsibilities?
- How do we redesign systems to support ownership across departments and levels?
- How do we measure success in terms of business outcomes, not just HR process completion?

While the examples discussed focus on customer service, retention, recruiting, and onboarding, other people practices should also be considered for shared ownership. These may include the following:

- Recognition and rewards
- Leadership development
- Diversity and inclusion efforts
- Culture building
- Performance management

Each organization must identify the competences that are critical to its success and design systems that encourage shared responsibility. The role of HR is not to own these practices, but to provide expertise and to support leaders across the organization in owning and promoting them as an organizational competence.

The examples shared are illustrative of what can be done. These examples demonstrate how organizations can transition from transactional to strategic work. More importantly, these examples demonstrate that functional domain strategies, such as

customer service or employee-centric approaches, can be effectively integrated at the organizational level and become an integral part of the business architecture. Being strategic is not new; however, going beyond the boundaries of a functional domain to lead the organization's structure is a new challenge.

13. A cautionary ray of hope

HR professionals have demonstrated the ability to transform. Notably, in response to extreme external environmental pressure, such as COVID-19, HR is recognized for adapting and pivoting on short notice, placing an emphasis on employee-centric initiatives [80, 81]. Such transformation is encouraging and provides evidence that meaningful change is possible. However, it is incumbent upon HR to use external pressure or internal motivation to effectuate transformation.

A recent blog post by Norris L. Beren [24] shared on LinkedIn offers both insight and a warning for the future of human resources. Writing about driver turnover in the trucking industry, Beren noted “If you have a driver turnover problem and can’t keep drivers, especially new ones, and can’t attract new, qualified drivers, regardless of what you try or the money you throw at the problem, what you’re doing is not working. But why? Simply put, it’s not about them, it’s about you—the motor carrier CEO. Change must start at the top of your organization” (paragraph 1).

Beren’s [24] statement highlights an essential principle: leadership accountability is central to workforce outcomes. Beren’s post does not mention HR at all. This omission is a wake-up call for HR. If HR professionals do not assert leadership in shaping people practices, others will fill the gap. Operational leaders, external consultants, and business advisors will define workforce strategies without HR’s expertise or involvement. Beren’s observations are not limited to the trucking sector. They reflect a broader shift across industries. Organizational leaders increasingly view talent, retention, engagement, and culture as business priorities, not as HR problems. However, unless HR professionals deliberately position themselves as essential partners in addressing these challenges, they risk being overlooked.

The future of HR depends on a workforce that uses critical thinking and creativity and a business-centered HR function integrated with organizational leadership [82, 83]. HR must move beyond transactional management and demonstrate how people practices translate into business capability and results. Achieving this shift requires development in both mindset and capabilities. HR professionals must deepen their understanding of organizational behavior, leadership development, employee experience, and cultural systems [21, 52]. They must also develop business literacy, linking people outcomes to business metrics [36, 84].

The consequences of failing to act are serious. If HR does not lead in shaping people practices, operational leaders will develop fragmented solutions, external consultants will dominate change initiatives, and business units will treat workforce challenges as operational issues rather than strategic opportunities.

14. Opportunities for future research

While this article argues that, for the HR profession to be relevant in the long term, HR professionals must accept organizational strategic responsibilities. Failure to do so will encourage non-HR leaders to fill the gap with respect to workforce

strategy, the employee experience, and ultimately leadership capacity and overall organizational effectiveness to deliver desired outcomes.

Opportunities for future research include identifying the specific mechanisms through which HR leaders can transform human resource practices into organizational competences that drive business outcomes. For example, this may involve exploration that goes beyond abstract connections between HR and performance to investigating the causal pathways linking workforce investments to operational and financial results. Scholars have begun mapping these relationships [13], yet more empirical evidence is needed to establish under what conditions HR interventions translate into organizational advantage.

Another important area for future research is in clarifying the shared accountability between HR and organizational leaders. While HR has traditionally been seen as having the responsibility for workforce strategy, talent systems, and employee experience, this article suggests that greater value may be achieved when these outcomes are owned by all leaders within the organization. Future research should explore how the HR function can lead by sharing its people domain with all leaders. This research aligns with calls for distributed leadership of people strategy [31] and could provide insights into HR's role as an architect of business systems.

Exploring leadership adoption of people practices also raises new questions. What capabilities do leaders need to co-create and effectively discharge people practices? How do organizational incentives, culture, and governance structures support or inhibit leaders from integrating workforce considerations into daily decisions? Addressing these questions would push the research agenda forward by examining HR's capacity to lead the organization, and the organizational conditions that enable leaders to own people practices.

Finally, it is recommended that future research explores the integration of HRM practice and organizational strategy, moving beyond a narrow functional view of HR to broader contributions [85], providing additional insights for the HR profession to transform from a functional area strategic partner to a strategic architect of business outcomes.

15. Conclusion

In addition to the SHRM findings, further insight from the 2025 Study on People Practices conducted during an HR conference serves as a call to action. The survey revealed that approximately 64% of HR professionals were unfamiliar with the concept of people practices, and nearly half reported having minimal influence over people practices in their organizations. Where understanding and leadership modeling were strong, readiness to expand people practices followed. Where understanding and leadership modeling were weak, organizations were not perceived as ready to embrace organizational people practices.

Sustainable people practices cannot be achieved through process redesign. Embedding positive people practices into the organization requires deliberate investment in education, leadership engagement, cultural openness, and setting an expectation of individual and collective ownership. To build successful organizational people practices on these principles, HR and operational leaders must collaborate to create a supportive, welcoming culture of shared ownership and accountability.

This article explored how the perception of HR as a service function focused on administrative tasks, though aspiring to strategic contribution is no longer sufficient.

In fact, it has not been for almost half a century. Organizations have long struggled when they treated people practices as isolated responsibilities belonging solely to HR rather than as core drivers of organizational success [36]. Framing employees as *resources* or *capital* restricts the ability to build a meaningful employee experience and is antithetical to the efficacy of organizational people practices.

Meeting today's organizational demands requires a fundamental rethinking of HR's role. HR has to do more than make existing processes more efficient. As Ulrich and Brockbank [5] noted, meaningful value creation happens when HR shifts its focus from internal activities to business outcomes. The goal is not to defend the HR department or preserve traditional HR tasks; it is to build the organizational competence necessary for business success through people practices, as practiced by all leaders throughout the organization.

Examples were shared, such as one from Zappos, where people practices are integrated into the culture rather than confined to an HR department [1]. This and other examples illustrate how shifting the focus from administrative tasks, through strategic contribution, and to business architecture is essential for sustainable business success. In particular, these examples illustrate how people practices can be embedded within the organization without being reliant on an individual departmental function.

Transformation must start within HR, but must extend to include others to be successful. Change happens when HR helps leaders and teams across the organization take ownership of hiring, engagement, development, retention, and culture. When this happens, HR becomes an architect of business capability and moves away from outdated perceptions of being an isolated reactive service function. Crowther [86] indicated that when people are put at the center of the organization, outcomes improve.

Yet, the warning signs are clear. Other voices are moving into the space HR has not claimed forcefully enough. If HR does not overcome barriers and weak incentives [87], consultants, operational leaders, and external advisors are increasingly shaping people practices without HR leadership. If HR does not evolve, it risks becoming irrelevant and sidelined from the most important decisions affecting the future of work [21].

There is hope, but it is a cautious hope. Hope depends on whether HR professionals are willing to lead competence development. HR does not need an invitation to move beyond the comfort of administrative activity or strategic partnership to engage in the more challenging work of designing systems, building leadership competence, and enabling organizational success.

This shift is a foundational redefinition of what HR can and must be. Evidence from the literature and personal experience shows the shift is not easy. But it is achievable. We know it is achievable because we see it happening already, for example, in organizations where customer service, retention, hiring, and onboarding are a shared organizational competence. This is evidence that organizational people practices are possible. Beren's [24] blog post reminds us that the world outside HR is already recognizing the importance of leadership in driving workforce outcomes. The question is whether HR will claim its rightful place in leading that conversation or leave it to others who may not yet fully understand the power and complexity of effective people practices, yet desire the outcomes that such practices deliver.

The time to act is now.

I invite you to join me in this work. Let us stop defending outdated models. Let us step forward deliberately to create something better. Let us rethink, redesign, and rebuild the way we think about people, leadership, and the role of HR itself.

Let us abolish HR as we know it and, by doing so, help our organizations achieve more than ever thought possible.

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Edited by Alvaro Felipe Alejandro Espinosa

As we reach a pivotal point in the 21st century, this book invites reflection on the evolving relationship between employees and the organizations they serve. People practices, expressed through leadership, policy, experience, and culture, shape how employees are treated and valued. This collection explores performance, hybrid work, culture, engagement, technology, and fit, highlighting a shift already underway: from HR as a department to people practices as an organizational competence. Each chapter offers insight into how leaders can reimagine the workplace through intentional choices. Readers are encouraged to recognize the tension of imaging a new paradigm through the lens of the current paradigm to identify applicable ideas and rethink traditional assumptions.

*Taufiq Choudhry,
Business, Management and Economics Series Editor*

Published in London, UK

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ISSN 2753-894X

ISBN 978-1-83634-611-1

