

From Administration to Strategy: A Systematic Review of Traditional HR to Talent Management Transition in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

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Objective: This paper is a systematic review of the literature that reviews and summarizes the literature findings and identifies critical research gaps for further research in the context of Pakistan.

Design/methodology/approach: A systematic literature review has been performed as per PRISMA guidelines. A structured search string was used to perform searches on various reliable electronic databases. Studies were selected if they had to be peer-reviewed, published between 2013 and 2025, and reported HRM in work organizations in Pakistan or a comparison of HRM in other developing countries. The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) was used to assess the quality. Out of 777 original records, 27 comparative studies for Pakistan and 5 studies for the other countries were made.

Findings: HRM in Pakistan is found to be administrative in nature, with a rigid structure and culturally bound, with the banking sector being the most studied one. Comparative studies among the international also prove that even though some barriers (resource constraints, change resistance) are common across the developing economies, Pakistan has unique cultural barriers such as the hierarchical nature of authority and favoritism, which the western model does not take into consideration. Four types of gaps are identified: (1) sectorial (pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, government under-researched); (2) methodological (78% qualitative, zero longitudinal studies); (3) comparative (minimal cross-national analysis despite available benchmarks); and (4) theoretical (blind use of Western frameworks). The pharmaceutical industry, which is economically important and experiences specific regulations, is especially neglected.

Originality/value: This is the systematic mapping of HRM literature in Pakistan that includes international comparative studies in order to differentiate between universal and context-specific barriers. It proposes a theoretically based research agenda that can be empirically tested, and it offers a diagnostic framework in the service of practitioners negotiating HR transformation in the context of developing economies.

Keywords: Traditional HR, talent management, Pakistan, systematic literature review, HR transformation.

1| INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years, the world has been shifting towards strategic human resource management, as opposed to the traditional, administratively oriented management of human resources (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). Nonetheless, this change has been skewed within the national settings. Researchers in Pakistan continue to describe HRM as being at a very early stage (Zaheer et al., 2023), but with formal, taller structures, centralized authority, and poor manager-employee communication being characteristic of organizations in Pakistan.

This paper sets out to critically review the available literature on HRM in Pakistan, and in particular, what the studies have concluded about traditional HR practices, adoption of talent management, barriers to transformation, and solutions. More to the point, it determines what remains unknown, the gaps that the future research will have to fill.

2 | Literature Review

2.1 Traditional HR in Pakistan:

The literature is in agreement that the traditional HR practices in Pakistan were:

Administratively focused: In research by (Omar et al., 2023), the traditional HR is described as task-oriented, reactive, and compliance-oriented but not strategy-oriented. This finding also aligns with the hoorulain (2014) study that also highlighted the persistent mismatch between the actual HR functions and the desired strategic human business partner role.

Structurally rigid: In Pakistani banks, Nausheen and Zakaria (2013) have found that the HR policies are not necessarily aligned with the corporate strategy because of the organizational culture and the lack of access to data. According to Asadullah et al., (2015) the HR professionals of a not-for-profit organization in the healthcare industry were doing well as employee champions but poorly as strategic partners or change agents - a direct result of role rigidity.

Culturally embedded: Saqib et al., (2022) proposed the notion of the so-called Seth cultural script family-owned business norms that are characterized by authority, hierarchy, and favoritism, which have a profound influence on HRM practices in Pakistani banks. Shahnawaz (2015) investigated the existential qualities of HR managers in Pakistan and discovered that psychological and interpersonal factors, such as alienation and meaningfulness, have an impact on their performance.

Technologically underdeveloped: Ahmer (2013) investigated the adoption of HRIS within Pakistani organizations and discovered that relative advantage, compatibility, and support of the top management are important drivers of adoption, yet the adoption is low. Aqeel (2013) has related strategic HRM practices to manufacturing performance but observed a lack of technology integration.

2.2 HR Competencies and Effectiveness

Another considerable body of literature looks at what renders HR professionals effective in Pakistan. Build on the competency framework developed in the IT sector by Chaudhary et al., (2020), Pakistani researchers classified the HR competencies into three categories: HR Technical Competencies (payroll, hiring, benefits), HR Social Competencies (relationship building, trust), and HR Professional Willingness (motivation to share knowledge). Credible Activist or Culture and Change Steward was the most important competency in both public and private banks. Whereas Rashid et al., (2015) also validated this tripartite classification in Pakistani banking sector, discussing both the social and technical competencies that significantly predict HR effectiveness.

Both technical and social competencies, paired with willingness, have an effect on HR effectiveness, according to Rashid et al., (2015) and Rahman et al., (2025). Mufti et al., (2016) discovered that the most influential competencies that influence the organizational performance in Pakistani banks are strategic contribution and personal credibility. Ahmed et al., (2022) introduced a moderating variable of organizational support, which has a significant positive impact on the effectiveness of HR competencies and willingness.

2.3 Barriers to HR Transformation

The literature recognizes several impediments to the transition to strategic HR versus traditional:

Line manager deficiencies: Shah et al., (2022) enumerated five primary barriers, namely, poor understanding of HR principles by line managers; poor recruitment and selection outcomes; poor training needs assessment; performance review bias, and unfair compensation practices.

Cultural resistance: According to Usman (2023), cultural issues, the unavailability of the necessary knowledge, resource limitations, unwillingness to change, and inflexibility were found to be major barriers. Strategic disconnection: Hoorulain (2014) discussed the mismatch between the real and the desired roles of HR as a strategic business partner, and the fact that it is hard to align the business goals with the functions of HR as a strategic business partner. Ansari (2015) claimed that only in the case of strategic alignment, HR can be instrumental in talent management and culture development. Research-practice gap: Negt and Axel (2024) reviewed the literature gap in HR research versus practice and identified inadequate knowledge of professions, differences in priorities, and barriers to translating research findings to practical applications as the main causes.

2.4 Sectorial Findings

Various sectors show various trends:

Banking (most examined): HR competencies and effectiveness are comparatively higher, yet strategic alignment is incomplete.

Telecom: Research is on employee resilience, HR effectiveness, and human capital development.

SMEs: HRM practices are typically rudimentary, yet innovative HRM practices have a positive influence on performance.

Pharmaceutical: There is a lack of literature. Bilal et al., (2023) analyzed the turnover-related aspects between national and multinational pharma companies. Waheed et al., (2024) examined the effects of new HRM practices on innovative performance through innovation capability and climate.

2.5 The Case for Talent Management

The literature claims that talent management has some obvious advantages over conventional HR. As it has been defined by Farooq and Rayees (2023), Talent Management is a three-stage process, which includes acquisition, transformation, and exit. Niedzwiecka et al., (2016) define talent as individuals with strategic thinking, leadership qualities, emotional intelligence, and adaptability.

Ingram and Deann (2010) state that the Talent Management plan must correspond to the HR management strategy and the corporate strategy, in general. Omar et al., (2023) differentiate between traditional HR (reactive, lengthy process-based) and strategic HR (proactive, forward-thinking, aligned with the organizational strategy), concluding that strategic HR is better at improving performance, employee engagement, innovation, and flexibility. Thoman and Lloyd (2018) trace the history of HRD as the secretarial duty turned into a strategic position, with a high-performing organization focusing on the development of its employees to achieve financial outcomes through a qualified workforce.

2.6 Emerging Themes

New themes are presented in recent literature:

AI and digitalization: Rehana et al., (2025) found six factors that affect AI adoption in the recruitment process: complexity, competitive advantage, senior management support, organizational readiness, vendor partnership, and competitive pressure. Nella et al., (2025) discovered that larger organizations tend to implement more advanced digital HR tools, whereas publicly based organizations are typically only implementing electronic attendance systems.

Gig economy: Shubham (2025) emphasized the issues of human resource management in the gig economy, such as the lack of bias in the recruitment system, legal considerations, the experience of working in gigs, and the transition of the traditional employment system to the project-based system.

Human sustainability: According to Deloitte (2024), human-centric strategies are vital as empathy, creativity, and curiosity are crucial in enabling organizations to succeed in a rapidly changing environment.

3 | Methodology and Design

3.1 Search Strategy

A systematic search of reliable electronic databases was carried out. These databases were chosen due to their exhaustive nature in terms of coverage of peer-reviewed literature in the field of business, management, and social sciences. The search string that was developed and applied is as follows: (("HRM" OR human resource OR talent management or personnel management) AND (Pakistan) AND (traditional HR or HR transformation or strategic HR or barriers or challenges)). Another search string was used to capture international comparative studies to use them as a benchmark to achieve the desired results: (("HRM" OR human resource* OR talent management) AND (modern HR OR talent management OR traditional HR)). The search was restricted to studies published in the years 2013-2025 and written in English.

3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To include studies in this review, the following criteria were considered: (1) the study must be published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals or conference proceedings; (2) the study should be focused on human resource management practices, traditional HR, talent management or HR transformation; (3) the study must include empirical data on Pakistani organizations or in case of international comparative studies, must include at least one developing economy to compare it with. Articles, blogs, or practitioner magazines that were not peer reviewed; articles that only discussed the context of the Western or developed economy but did not have comparative implications on Pakistan; articles that used only the conceptual material and not empirical data; articles that discussed HR topics only tangentially (e.g., finance, marketing, or operations with brief mention of HR); or (5) duplicate publications based on the same data were excluded.

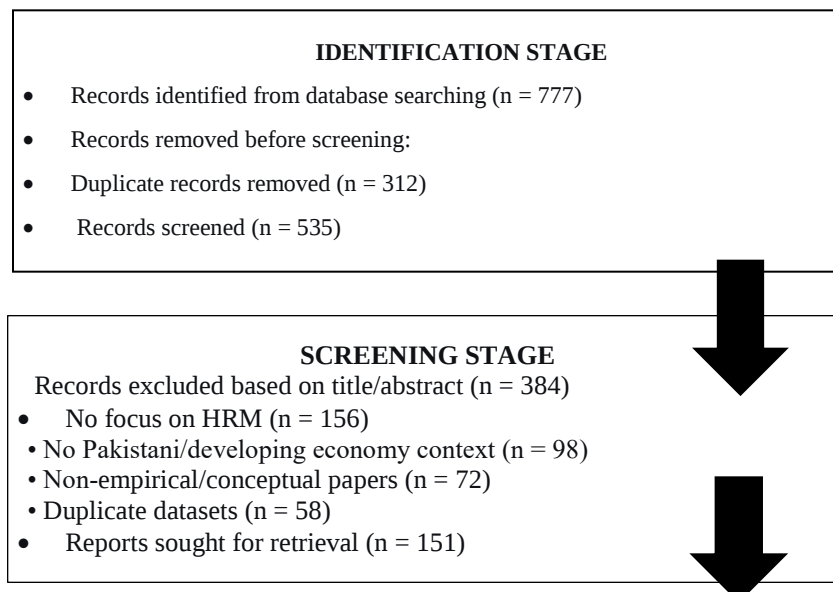
3.3 PRISMA Selection Process

Page et al., (2021) suggest that the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) is a reporting guideline that aims to improve transparency and reproducibility of systematic reviews by requiring authors to clearly document the steps they followed to identify, select, and synthesize relevant studies. This is a methodology that has been systematically reported with regards to the literature.

A thorough and traceable search and selection process was conducted in this review to guarantee a thorough and traceable selection process.

to map the evidence on the specified topic.

3.4 PRISMA Flow Description



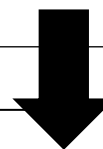
ELIGIBILITY STAGE

Reports assessed for eligibility (n = 151)

Reports excluded after full-text review (n = 119)

- No empirical evidence (n = 34)
- Wrong sector focus (n = 28)
- Inadvertent duplicate data (n = 16)
- Other reasons (n = 41)

Reports included in review (n = 32)



INCLUSION STAGE

Total studies included (n = 32)

Pakistani studies (n = 27)

- Qualitative (n = 21)
- Quantitative cross-sectional (n = 6)
- Longitudinal (n = 0)

International comparative studies (n = 5)

- Qualitative (n = 4)
- Quantitative (n = 1)

MMAT Quality Appraisal

- Qualitative studies: Mean 78.6% (Range 60-100%)
- Quantitative studies: Mean 71.4% (Range 50-80%)
- Comparative studies: Mean 75.0% (Range 60-80%)

- a) Identification Stage: The initial database searches returned 777 records. All records were exported to reference management software, where duplicates were removed. The number of duplicate records was determined as 312, and the number of unique records to be screened was identified as 535.
- b) Screening Stage: The titles and abstracts of all 535 records were screened against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This screening saw the elimination of 384 records. The main criteria that eliminated papers at this stage were: (1) no focus on human resource management (n = 156); (2) no Pakistani or developing economy context (n = 98); (3) non-empirical or conceptual paper lacking original data (n = 72); and (4) duplicate datasets identified before (n = 58). After screening titles and abstracts, 151 full-text articles were obtained for explicit assessment.
- c) Eligibility Stage: Detailed assessment of the full-text articles against the inclusion criteria was conducted. The 119 articles excluded during this process were due to: no empirical evidence despite appearing empirical in the abstract (n = 34); focus on a different sector (n = 28); inadvertently duplicate data (n = 16); and other reasons (n = 41).

- d) Inclusion Stage: After eligibility of full-text was completed, 32 studies were selected as meeting all inclusion criteria. Out of these, 27 studies were specifically on Pakistani organizations and 5 studies were international comparative studies that included developing economy contexts.

3.5 Quality Appraisal (MMAT)

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2018 (Hong et al.,2018) was used to assess the quality of included studies. Each study was rated on five criteria relevant to its design (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods). Studies were not excluded based on MMAT scores, but scores were used to inform the confidence in synthesis findings.

Table 1 Study design and Scores

Study Design	Number of Studies	Mean MMAT Score (%)	Range (%)
Qualitative (interviews,case studies)	21	78.6	60-100
Quantitative (cross-sectional surveys)	6	71.4	50-80
Mixed Methods	0	N/A	N/A
International Comparative (qualitative)	5	75	60-80
TOTAL	32	76.2	50-100

All included studies met at least 50% of MMAT criteria, indicating acceptable methodological quality for inclusion in this systematic review.

3.6 Inter-Rater Reliability

Given the methodological significance of the replicable screening processes, the review has been carried out by a single reviewer with the support of the supervisory team. Inter-rater reliability was not performed as it was a single-reviewer design. The following measures were taken to reduce the possibility of bias and increase transparency: Clear and comprehensive documentation of all screening decisions (Section 3.4), including a detailed rationale for exclusion. Thematic coding was facilitated by the regular consultation with the supervisory team (second author) at the relevant decision-making stages (search strategy refinement, application of inclusion/exclusion criteria, thematic coding). Systematic quality appraisal: MMAT instrument validated (Hong et al.,2018).

Clear reporting of all methodological limitations, following PRISMA guidelines (Page et al.,2021) . Formal interrater reliability is not available and is recognized as a limitation in Section 5.5. Future systematic reviews in this field could be improved by dual independent screening and coding with Cohen's κ calculation to enhance the replicability of the results and minimize potential selection bias.

4 |Results and Analyses

4.1 Descriptive Characteristics of Included Studies

Table 2: Summary of Included Studies (N = 32)

	PAKISTANI STUDIES (N=27)	COMPARATIVE STUDIES (N=5)
PUBLICATION YEARS	2018-2024	2018-2024
RESEARCH DESIGN: QUALITATIVE	21 (78%)	4 (80%)
RESEARCH DESIGN: QUANTITATIVE	6 (22%)	1 (20%)

RESEARCH DESIGN: LONGITUDINAL	0	0
SECTORS STUDIED: BANKING	15 (56%)	1 (20%)
SECTORS STUDIED: TELECOM	4 (15%)	1 (20%)
SECTORS STUDIED: SMES	5 (18%)	2 (40%)
SECTORS STUDIED: MANUFACTURING	2 (7%)	1 (20%)
SECTORS STUDIED: PHARMACEUTICAL	1 (4%)	0
SECTORS STUDIED: MULTIPLE/GENERAL	0	0

4.2 Synthesis of Findings

The findings from the literature search are grouped around themes identified in the literature.

Findings HRM in Pakistan remains predominantly administrative and reactive

Finding 1: is that HRM in Pakistan is still largely administrative and reactive HRM in 27 studies conducted in Pakistan is characterized by its administrative and compliance-oriented approach. Omar et al. (2023) concluded that "Traditional HR functions are task-oriented, reactive, and compliance-oriented but not strategy-oriented. In the case of HR policies, Nausheen (2013) also proved that the policies do not always coincide with the corporate policies in Pakistani banks because of cultural constraints and lack of data availability. The HR professionals have been found by Asadullah et al.(2015) to be good at being champions but not good at being strategic partners due to role rigidity.

Line managers' lack of HR understanding, recruitment-related issues, training needs assessment, biased performance monitoring, and unequal compensation are the five operational barriers Shah et al.(2022) identified. Hoorulain (2014) reported that there has been an ongoing gap between role expectations and role reality – between HR and being a strategic business partner.

Finding 2: Sectoral generalizability is constrained by banking-sector dominance. The dominant position of the banking sector limits the generalizability of finding 2. The sectoral distribution shows a significant imbalance: banking (15 studies, 56%), telecommunications (4, 15%), SMEs (5, 18%), manufacturing (2, 7%), and pharmaceuticals (1, 4%). Rashid et al.(2015) warned against drawing sector-wide conclusions, relying mainly on banking data. Additionally, the pharmaceutical industry, which accounts for about 4.5% of Pakistan's GDP and faces distinct regulatory challenges, is a major sector that has been insufficiently studied. The first study on the determinants of turnover covered only the pharmaceutical sector and was undertaken by Bilal et al.(2023) , and the second study examined the impact of innovative HRM practices on performance and was conducted by Waheed et al.(2024). There is no detailed research report on the HR transformation of this industry.

Finding 3: There are uniquely Pakistani barriers that Western models do not pick up on, which are cultural factors. To explain the profound impact of the norms of family business on HRM practices, the Seth cultural script, a group of norms in the family business characterized by authoritarian leadership, hierarchy, and systemic favoritism, was proposed by Saqib et al.(2022). Results from Shahnawaz (2015) show that psychological factors (alienation, meaningfulness) significantly influence HR manager performance, which is not well covered by the Western competency models. Usman(2023) recognized cultural resistance as one of the main transformation barriers applicable in a high-power distance and collectivistic culture like Pakistan, which is distinct from Western cultures. Comparative studies Negt & Axel (2024) further corroborate that Pakistan has unique cultural features which present unique challenges as compared to other developing contexts.

Finding 4:HR competencies have a positive impact on effectiveness with organizational support. HR effectiveness is tied to technical competencies, social competencies, and the HR professional's willingness, which

are influenced by organizational support. Both technical and social skills, together with willingness, were found to be significant in predicting HR effectiveness by Rashid et al.(2015). These results were corroborated by Rahman et al.(2025) in other sectors. According to Mufti et al.(2016), the most influential were strategic contribution and personal credibility. This was demonstrated by Ahmed et al.(2022)that organizational support bonds the competencies-effectiveness relationship in conformity with social exchange theory.

Finding 5: Talent management is conceptually established but empirically invalidated in Pakistan The finding shows that, conceptually, talent management is established, but no empirical validation is found in Pakistan. The theoretical rationale for the superiority of talent management is quite solid but there is no empirical validation of the same in Pakistan. Farooq(2023) stated TM through acquisition, transformation and exit. Niedzwiecka et al. (2016) defined talent as the ability to think strategically, lead and exhibit emotional intelligence and adaptability. Ingram and Deann (2010) determined that TM should fit in with HR strategy and corporate strategy. Theoretically, Omar et al (2023) compared traditional HR (reactive and compliance-oriented) with strategic HR (proactive and aligned) and found that strategic HR is better. No included study, however, quantified the impact of TM in Pakistan in terms of retention, productivity, and profitability. No data was available on Pakistani specific in the 5 comparative studies from the international community.

Finding 6: There are still emerging themes in HR that are poorly studied in Pakistan. Pakistani scholarship is still very low when it comes to digital transformation, alternative work arrangements and human-centric sustainability. Rehana et al (2025) performed the only study in the recruitment process of Pakistan and found six factors: complexity, competitive advantage, senior management support, organizational readiness, vendor partnership, and competitive pressure. According to Ahmer (2013), the adoption rates of HRIS are still not high, and the relative advantage and the top management support still account for the adoption of HRIS. No empirical research was conducted in Pakistan for the gig economy or human sustainability. According to Nella et al (2025), higher organizations have more sophisticated digital HR applications, while public organizations mostly utilize electronic attendance systems.

5 | Discussion

5.1 Critical Mapping of Gaps

There still exist some serious gaps, although a large amount of literature has been reviewed. These are arranged below in categories.

5.1.1 Sectoral Gaps

Table 3 : Sectoral Coverage in Pakistani HRM Literature

Sectors	Well-Researched	Under-Researched or Missing Sectors
	Banking	Pharmaceutical
	Telecom	Manufacturing
	SMEs	Services(hotels,retail.logistics)
		Academia
		Government/public sector
		Construction/engineering
		Textile

The literature is greatly biased towards banking. Among many different sectors, very little attention has been given to the pharmaceutical sector, though it is economically important and has a unique regulatory environment and impact on the economy.

5.1.2 Thematic Gaps

Table 4: Thematic Gaps in Existing Research

What is covered	What is missing
HR competencies and effectiveness	Causal relationships between competencies and financial outcomes
Barriers to HR implementation (general)	Industry-specific barriers (e.g., Pharma regulations)
HRIS adoption factors	ROI of HRIS implementation
Talent management benefits (conceptual)	Quantified impact of TM on retention, productivity, profit
Role of organizational support as a moderator	Mediating mechanisms (e.g., employee trust, engagement)
Leadership commitment (mentioned as important)	Specific leadership behaviors that enable transformation

Most of the studies are cross-sectional and of a qualitative nature, capturing perceptions at a given moment. No study followed HR transformation over a number of years to measure effects over time. A number of authors explicitly acknowledged such gaps.

5.1.3 Comparative Gaps

There are only a few studies that make a comparison:

- Pakistani HR practices with those of other developing economies (Bangladesh, Egypt, Vietnam, Nigeria)
- Subsidiary companies that are part of a multinational group and local companies in the same industry sector.
- The question of public vs. private sector HR effectiveness. Issue of Public versus Private Sector HR effectiveness.

5.1.4 Theoretical Gaps

Table 5: Theoretical Gaps

Theory used	Missing theory integration
Ulrich's HR competency model	Institutional theory (how local norms shape HR)
Resource-based view (implied)	Contingency theory (what works when and where)
Diffusion of innovation	Social exchange theory (employee reciprocity)
Existential attributes	Dual-process models (individual + organizational)

The literature tends to be western in orientation and not adapted to the cultural context in Pakistan. However, a very significant exception is the work by Saqib et al., (2022) which gives rise to the cultural script 'Seth'. Further theoretical work is required that is more culturally "situated".

5.1.5 Practical/Application Gaps

Many studies provide recommendations, but few specify:

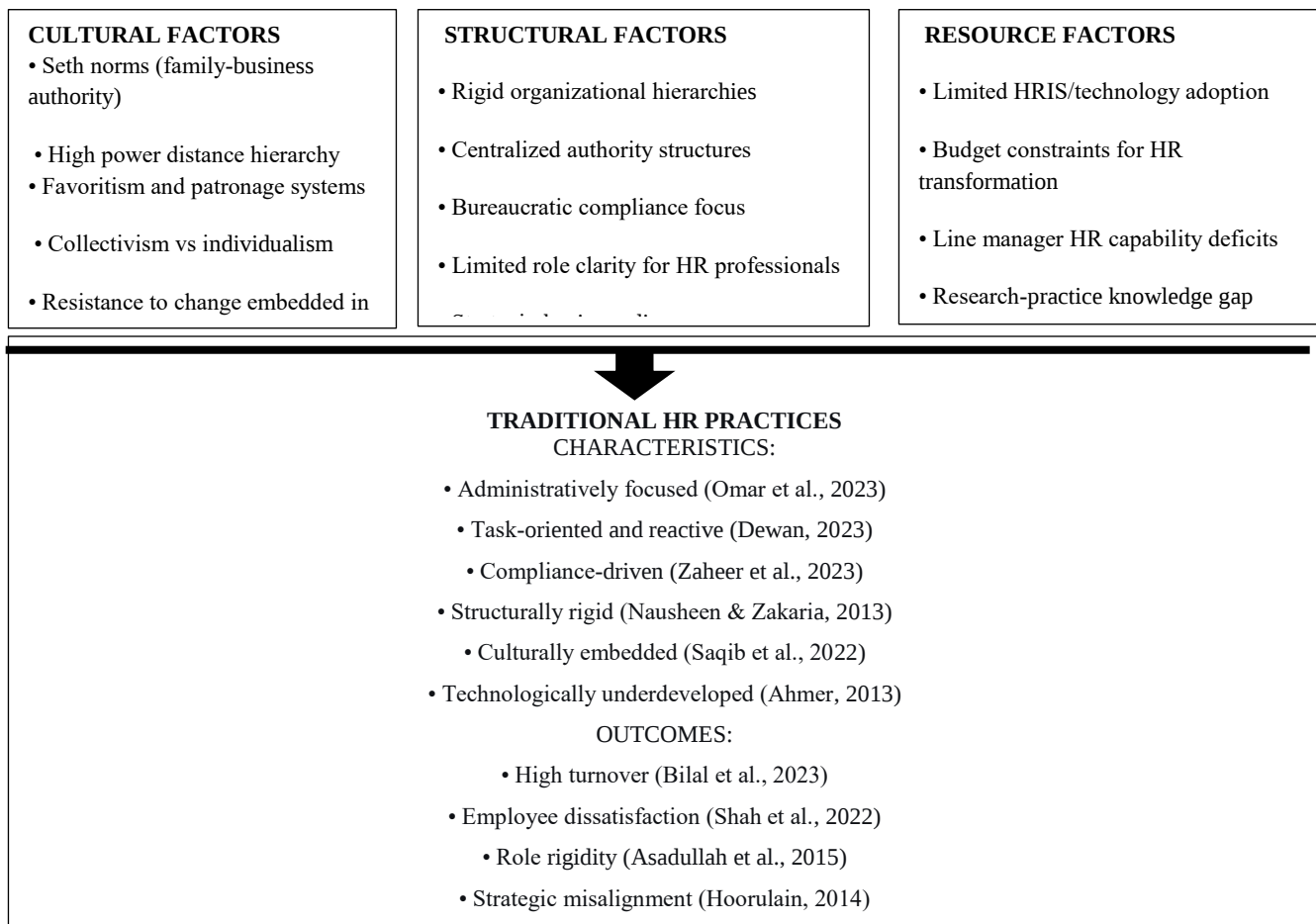
- Step-by-step implementation protocols
- Cost estimates for transformation initiatives
- Risk mitigation strategies during transition
- Metrics for tracking transformation progress

Omar et al., (2023) stated that the challenges and barriers that companies might encounter when implementing strategic HR policies have not been explored in the article.

5.2 Synthesized Conceptual Framework for HR Transformation in Pakistan

This review is a contextualized conceptual framework, which is derived from the systematic synthesis of 32 studies to understand transition from traditional HR to talent management in Pakistan. The framework includes cultural, structural, and resource related aspects of organizational context in Pakistan.

Pakistani organizational context





BARRIERS TO TRANSFORMATION

- CULTURAL BARRIERS (Unique to Pakistan):
 - Seth cultural script (Saqib et al., 2022)
- Psychological factors (alienation, meaningfulness) (Shahnawaz, 2015)
 - Favoritism in recruitment/promotion (Usman, 2023)
 - Power distance resistance (Negt & Axel, 2024)
- OPERATIONAL BARRIERS (Common to developing economies):
 - Line manager deficiencies (Shah et al., 2022)
 - Resource constraints (Usman, 2023)
 - Technology adoption gaps (Ahmer, 2013)
 - Research-practice gap (Negt & Axel, 2024)
- STRUCTURAL BARRIERS (Sector-specific):
 - Banking: Strategic alignment gaps (Nausheen & Zakaria, 2013)
 - Healthcare: Role rigidity (Asadullah et al., 2015)
 - Telecom: Technology adoption barriers (Ansari, 2015)
 - Pharma: Regulatory HRM challenges (Bilal et al., 2023)



TALENT MANAGEMENT OUTCOMES

- TALENT MANAGEMENT COMPONENTS (Farooq & Rayees, 2023):
- Talent acquisition
 - Talent transformation
 - Strategic exit management
- ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES (Omar et al., 2023; Thoman & Lloyd, 2018):
- Improved performance
 - Enhanced employee engagement
 - Increased innovation and flexibility
 - Strategic workforce alignment
 - Sustainable competitive advantage



ENABLERS OF TRANSFORMATION

- HR COMPETENCIES (Chaudhary et al., 2020):
- Technical competencies (payroll, hiring, benefits)
 - Social competencies (relationship building, trust)
- Professional willingness (knowledge sharing) (Rashid et al., 2015)
- ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT (Ahmed et al., 2022):
- Resource provision
 - Role clarity
- Managerial backing
- Strategic alignment (Mufti et al., 2016)
- LEADERSHIP FACTORS (Rahman et al., 2025):
- Top management commitment (Ansari, 2015)
 - Credible activism (Chaudhary et al., 2020)
 - Culture/change stewardship (Mufti et al., 2016)



MODERATING FACTORS

SECTORAL CONTEXT (Proposed):

- Banking - Most studied, moderate transformation
 - Manufacturing - Under-researched
- Pharmaceutical - Critically under-researched
 - Government - Missing from literature
 - Services - Emerging

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (Gap identified):

- Qualitative dominance (78%) limits generalizability
- No longitudinal studies track transformation over time
 - Cross-sectional designs capture perceptions only

The proposed framework is multi-level as cultural, structural, and resource factors are interconnected in Pakistan's organizational context to influence HR practices, barriers to transformation, and the eventual adoption of talent management.

Level 1: Contextual Factors Cultural factors (Seth norms, power distance, favoritism) are features that are specific to Pakistan and set it apart from those in Western contexts. Saqib et al (2022) put forth "the Seth cultural script" as a prerequisite for understanding why the Western HR models do not work when they are transferred without thinking it through. Structural factors (rigid hierarchy, compliance with bureaucracy), organizational architecture that restricts HR transformation, but in Pakistan, is reinforced by culture. Resource factors are real constraints that are limiting modernization (technological gaps, cost constraints, capability gaps, etc.).

Level 2: Traditional HR is viewed as a state of balance, where the focus is on administration, tasks, compliance, and structures, which are supported by the contextual elements mentioned above.

Level 3: Barriers to Transformation Barriers are classified as cultural (Pakistan specific), operational (developing economy), and structural (sector specific) and hence differential intervention strategies are possible.

Level 4: Enablers of Transformation HR competencies, organizational support and leadership factors are three critical enabler categories that serve as leverage points for interventions to break the traditional HR balance. The outcomes of Talent Management

Level 5: Talent management is seen as a continuum of progressive adoption. Farooq (2023) describes the process framework (acquisition, transformation, exit), and Omar et al. (2023) discuss expected performance outcomes.

Level 6: Moderating Factors Relationships are moderated by sectoral context and research methodology in the framework. The dominance of banks can lead to overgeneralization risk, and the lack of longitudinal designs restricts causal conclusions.

The framework is based on three related theories:

Resource-Based View (RBV): HR competencies and organizational support are valuable, rare, and inimitable resources, and when used effectively, they can lead to long-term competitive advantage for the company (Barney, 1991). Within the framework of Institutional Theory, the pressures for isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) can be the reasons for ritualistic imitation of HR practices without substantive change. This is why Pakistani organizations may resort to strategic HR rhetoric without altering the actual practices.

Contingency Theory: This approach recognizes that HR transformation will be effective if there is a 'fit' between the characteristics of the proposed transformation and the context, meaning that what works in banking may not work in pharmaceuticals or manufacturing. The Framework identifies gaps with the intent to correct them.

The framework brings to the fore four major gaps in the Pakistani HRM literature:

Sectoral Gap: Large data gap for banking and small/nonexistent data gap for pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, government, and services.

Methodological Gap: 78% qualitative, cross-sectional research; no longitudinal, mixed methods research.

Comparative Gap: Low level of cross-national comparison, although some measures are available.

Theoretical Gap: Western theoretical frameworks without cultural adaptation

The above gaps are not only academic blunders, but also have practical implications. If there is no sectoral diversity, it is not possible to say if the findings from the banking sector are relevant to pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, or government. The pharmaceutical industry, especially, is subjected to special regulatory pressures, quality requirements, and talent competition - and is under-researched. It is not possible to distinguish between short-term compliance with the laws and real transformation without having longitudinal designs. It is not sufficient to only look at one survey to know the dynamics of resistance, adaptation, and institutionalization. Since there are no comparative studies available, we cannot determine what barriers are prevalent in Pakistan and what barriers are prevalent in all developing economies. This limits the possibilities for learning from other peer countries. Without quantitative validation, there is no way to estimate the size of the relationships (e.g., by what percentage cultural resistance reduces the adoption of talent management). Without practical implementation guidance, there are only unclear tips and suggestions (invest in training, gain management commitment to the change, etc.) and no roadmap.

5.4 Research Implications

5.4.1 Implications for Policy and Practice

This systematic review offers several actionable implications for practitioners and policymakers in Pakistan:

Organizations need to do HR diagnostics before they begin a transformation process, and for this, what may be true in the banking sector may not be true in the pharmaceutical or manufacturing sector.

Explicit consideration of the cultural barrier (Seth norms, hierarchy, favoritism) is needed as part of change management programs, and cannot be assumed to be solved by changing structures alone.

Before investing in HR technology (HRIS, AI recruitment tools), a clear ROI analysis tailored to the context of Pakistan should be conducted.

Government and industry associations should invest in longitudinal studies and cross-sectoral benchmarking to create evidence-based HR policies.

The HR leaders need to promote the concept of alignment with business objectives and shift from being administrative to strategic.

5.4.2 Implications for Theory

Future theoretical work must: Customize western HR practices into Pakistani culture (high power distance culture, collectivism, norms of family-owned businesses).

Apply institutional theory to examine how isomorphic pressures do not necessarily lead to talent management being adopted

Build culturally-relevant models of HR transformation, including the "Seth" script, and other local models.

5.4.3. Alignment with SDGS

The findings of this study support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, specifically:

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): Improved HR transformation and talent management practices contribute to decent work, job satisfaction and inclusive economic growth. Sustainable and resilient organizational development is an outcome of effective talent management.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality): Transforming traditional HR to talent management can help reduce gender biases in recruitment, promotion, and compensation, promoting equal opportunities for women in Pakistani organizations.

SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure): HRIS adoption, AI in recruitment, digital HR tools, foster innovation in organizational infrastructure.

5.5 Future Research Directions

Based on the above analysis, future research should prioritize:

5.5.1 Sectoral Expansion

Carry out extensive research in the fields of pharmaceutical, manufacturing (particularly textiles), government, and service sectors (retail, logistics, hospitality) Compare HR practices across sectors in the same study

5.5.2. Methodological Diversification

- Design and test a scale that will measure readiness to change HR
- Conduct longitudinal research on organizations over 3-5 years to track transition
- Use mixed methods: large-N surveys with subsequent qualitative analysis of non-conformers

5.5.3 Comparative Research

- Compare Pakistan to Bangladesh, India, Egypt, and Vietnam on selected HR practices
- Compare subsidiaries of MNCs with local companies regarding talent management adoption
- Compare public and private sector effectiveness

5.5.4 Theoretical Development

- Test which Western models of talent management need to be changed according to Pakistani conditions
- Develop a culturally based model of HR transformation that includes Seth norms, power distance index (PDI), and collectivism
- Combine institutional theory to understand why isomorphic pressures cannot necessarily result in talent management adoption

5.5.5 Causal and Impact Studies

- Assess the correlation between the use of talent management and organizational outcomes (retention, productivity, profitability)
- Projected ROI of HRIS & Talent Management program in Pakistani rupees
- Identify mediators (employee trust, psychological safety, organizational commitment)

5.5.6 Implementation Research

- Document effective and ineffective talent management transformation experiences in detail
- Develop stage-based implementation frameworks with specific milestones
- Create validated organizational diagnostic instruments to help organizations determine readiness to transform

5.5.7 Emerging Topics

- Capture in detail, effective and ineffective talent management transformation experiences
- Create frameworks of implementation with specific milestones at each stage
- Develop organization diagnosis tools that are validated to assess an organization's readiness for transformation.

5.6 Limitations of the review

This systematic review has a number of limitations that should be recognized to properly put the findings into context. **First**, a thorough search of literature through major databases might have led to missing relevant studies because of the exclusion of non-English publications and the choice to limit the search to peer-reviewed sources exclusively. The grey literature, such as unpublished theses, conference proceedings, and practitioner reports, was excluded, which could have introduced publication bias toward studies with positive or significant results.

Second, the studies included in the review were restricted to those published between 2013 and 2025; although this timeframe encompasses the latest decade of literature on HR transformation, seminal works published before 2013 may have been excluded.

Third, the scope of the gap analysis to other developing economies does not have further cross-national substantiation since the study focused on Pakistan.

Fourth, the included literature (78% of Pakistani studies) was predominantly qualitative and cross-sectional, which limited the ability to synthesize quantitative effect sizes or carry out meta-analytic processes.

Fifth, publication bias is an issue because studies with null or negative outcomes are less likely to be published, which can skew the literature toward a narrative of barriers and challenges, and underrepresent successful transformation cases.

Finally, although PRISMA guidelines were used, the synthesis process could not be done without interpretive judgment by the author. Different reviewers may have sorted themes in different ways or weighted individual studies differently. The gap analysis in this review should therefore be taken as a baseline and not as an exhaustive or conclusive set of limitations of the Pakistani HRM litera.

6 | Conclusion

This review has critically examined what the existing literature on HRM in Pakistan establishes and what it does not answer. The literature convincingly shows that HRM in Pakistan is characterized by administrative orientation, structural rigidity, cultural barriers (including Seth norms), and lack of strategic integration. It has defined core competencies, barriers, and enablers. It has presented a strong argument in support of talent management.

The gaps, however, are of equal importance. The literature is sectorally imbalanced (banking dominates), methodologically narrow (qualitative and cross-sectional), theoretically derivative (Western frameworks applied uncritically), and practically under-specified (few actionable implementation guides). There is almost a total absence of comparative studies, longitudinal studies, and causal studies.

Researchers should not repeat the qualitative study on the banking sector to develop the field. The host thesis's field is the pharmaceutical sector, a field where knowledge is rarely generated, making it an ideal setting for new knowledge to be discovered. Similarly, the manufacturing, government, and services sectors have not yet

been researched. Longitudinal designs, cross-national comparisons, and quantitative validation are no longer optional; it's what's required.

The gaps it addresses are the following: it is oriented toward the pharmaceutical industry, uses a rigorous qualitative methodological approach, and creates a contextualized framework. Future research should be conducted on this framework, including quantitative testing, expansion to other sectors, and time tracking transformation.

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