

Human Resources as Business Partners: A Bibliometric Journey Towards Strategic Human Resource Management

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the evolving role of human resource management (HRM) as a strategic partner within organizations through a bibliometric analysis. Using publications indexed in Scopus, this research maps the intellectual structure and thematic development of HRM in strategic contexts such as business processes, innovation, and sustainability. The findings highlight HRM's growing alignment with organizational goals, fostering innovation and adaptability in response to global challenges. By analyzing citation patterns, co-authorship networks, and keyword co-occurrences, the study identifies key trends, influential scholars, and emerging themes, offering insights into how HRM has transformed from a transactional function to a strategic asset. This study contributes to both academic discourse and practical strategies by emphasizing HR's critical role in achieving organizational success and long-term sustainability.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic business environment, the role of human resources (HR) has evolved beyond administrative and operational functions, emerging as a critical strategic partner within organizations [1], [2]. Traditionally, HR was viewed primarily as a support function, concerned with hiring, payroll, and compliance. However, contemporary organizations increasingly recognize that sustainable competitive advantage is driven not only by technological

innovation or financial resources but also by the effective management of human capital. This shift has prompted a conceptual transition from traditional personnel management to Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), which aligns HR practices with overarching organizational goals and strategic priorities [3]. As businesses face unprecedented global competition, the integration of HR into strategic decision-making is no longer optional but essential.

The notion of HR as a business partner emphasizes collaboration between HR professionals and line managers to achieve organizational objectives [4]. By participating in strategic planning, HR departments can influence decisions regarding workforce development, talent acquisition, and performance management, ensuring that human capital contributes directly to organizational outcomes. Furthermore, this approach fosters a culture where employees are viewed as assets whose skills, knowledge, and motivation must be leveraged to drive innovation and growth. Literature indicates that organizations adopting the HR business partner model experience higher employee engagement, lower turnover, and enhanced organizational performance, demonstrating the tangible benefits of strategic HR integration [5].

Bibliometric studies provide an effective method for understanding the evolution and impact of HR as a business partner within scholarly discourse [6]. By analyzing publications, citation patterns, and co-authorship networks, researchers can identify key trends, influential scholars, and emerging themes in SHRM. Such an approach not only maps the development of theoretical frameworks but also highlights gaps in empirical research. For instance, bibliometric analysis can reveal which industries, geographical regions, or HR functions are most frequently studied, guiding future research agendas and enabling organizations to benchmark their practices against academic insights.

The adoption of HR as a strategic partner has been influenced by broader organizational and societal trends. Globalization, technological advancements, and the increasing prevalence of knowledge-based economies have created complex workforce challenges that demand strategic foresight. Organizations must now address issues such as talent scarcity, workforce diversity, digital transformation, and employee well-being while simultaneously achieving operational efficiency. This multifaceted environment necessitates HR professionals who not only understand

policies and procedures but also possess analytical, leadership, and strategic capabilities to shape organizational outcomes [7]. As a result, HR's evolving role reflects a broader redefinition of organizational structures where human capital is central to value creation.

Despite its growing importance, the strategic integration of HR remains uneven across industries and regions. While some organizations have successfully embedded HR into decision-making processes, others continue to treat HR as a purely administrative function, limiting its potential impact [8]. Understanding the factors that facilitate or hinder the adoption of HR as a business partner is therefore critical. Empirical evidence suggests that organizational culture, leadership commitment, HR competencies, and technological infrastructure are key determinants of successful implementation. By synthesizing research trends through bibliometric analysis, scholars and practitioners can gain a clearer understanding of how HR contributes to strategic goals, which, in turn, informs policy, practice, and future research directions.

Despite the growing recognition of HR as a strategic partner, several challenges persist in both practice and research. Organizations often struggle to quantify the impact of HR on strategic outcomes, and the literature exhibits fragmented conceptualizations and diverse methodological approaches [9]. Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that systematically map the intellectual structure and evolution of HR as a business partner across disciplines and regions. Without such understanding, organizations risk implementing HR practices that are misaligned with their strategic objectives, and scholars may miss emerging trends that could advance the field of Strategic Human Resource Management. This fragmentation underscores the need for a bibliometric exploration to provide a consolidated perspective on the development, themes, and scholarly influence within the HR business partner domain.

This study aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis of the literature on Human Resources as business partners to map the intellectual structure, key themes, and research trends in Strategic Human Resource Management.

2. METHODS

This study employs a bibliometric research design to systematically explore the literature on Human Resources (HR) as business partners within the broader context of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM). Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative approach used to map the intellectual structure of a research field, track knowledge evolution, and identify influential authors, institutions, and publications [6]. By leveraging bibliometric techniques, this study aims to provide an evidence-based overview of the conceptual and empirical developments in HR's strategic role. This method is particularly suitable for the present research as it allows the identification of publication trends, collaboration patterns, and emerging research themes over time, offering a comprehensive view of how HR has evolved from an administrative function to a strategic business partner.

Data for the bibliometric analysis were collected from Scopus which provide broad coverage of peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, and book chapters relevant to HR and SHRM. The search strategy utilized keywords such as "human resources as business partner," "strategic human resource management," "HRBP," and related terms, combined with Boolean operators to ensure precision. Inclusion criteria were applied to select studies published in English from 1990 to 2025, reflecting the period in which the HR business partner model gained prominence in scholarly and practical discourse.

The bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer, which enable visualization of co-authorship networks, citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence, and thematic mapping. Co-citation and bibliographic coupling techniques were applied to uncover the intellectual structure and emerging research clusters. Through these analytical procedures, the study not only highlights the evolution of HR as a strategic partner but also identifies gaps and opportunities for future research, providing valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners in SHRM.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Keyword Co-Occurrence Network

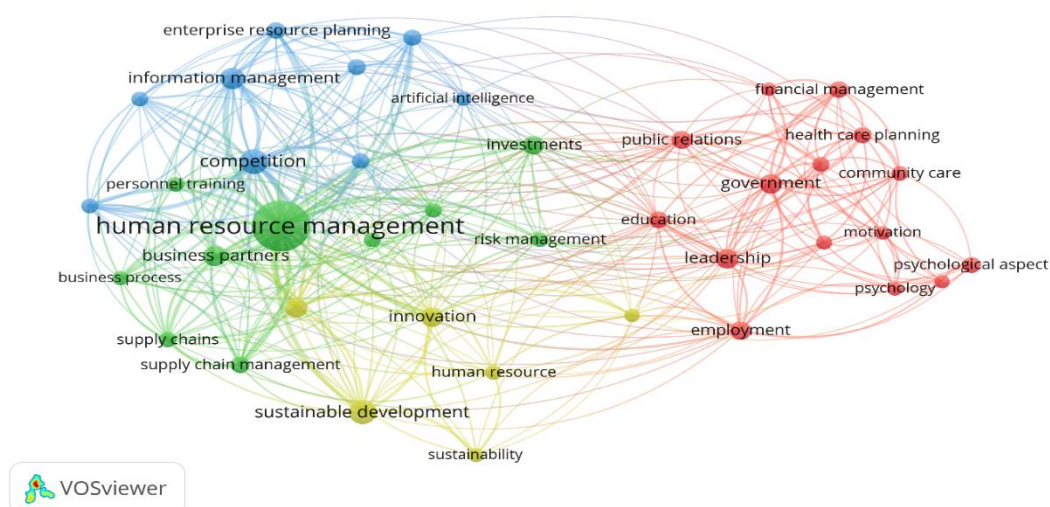


Figure 1. Network Visualization

Source: Data Analysis Result, 2025

Figure 1 highlights the key themes and connections within the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) and its evolution towards being recognized as a strategic business partner. At the center, we see "human resource management" as the dominant theme, surrounded by a range of interconnected concepts. These concepts reflect the breadth and depth of HRM research, touching on critical areas such as business processes, personnel training, and the integration of HRM into organizational strategies.

The left-hand side of the map is dominated by themes related to business management and supply chains, emphasizing HRM's connection to broader organizational functions. Keywords such as supply chain management and business partners suggest that HRM is increasingly viewed through the lens of cross-functional collaboration. Additionally, terms like sustainability, sustainable development, and innovation further imply a growing focus on aligning HR practices with corporate social responsibility and long-term environmental and economic goals. The green cluster, which includes terms like human resource, risk management, and competition, illustrates how HRM research has been integrated into broader discussions of organizational efficiency, competitiveness,

and adaptability. There's a clear indication that HRM is seen as pivotal in managing risks, driving innovation, and improving overall business processes. This shift aligns with the growing recognition of HRM as a strategic partner, rather than just an administrative function, within organizations.

On the right side of the map, there is a significant cluster of terms associated with psychology, motivation, and leadership. These terms reflect the increasing importance of understanding the psychological aspects of employee engagement, performance, and well-being. Leadership and motivation are critical themes, showing how HRM is expanding to focus not just on operational efficiency, but also on leadership development and the fostering of a motivated workforce. This shift highlights HR's role in fostering organizational culture and developing leaders who can drive strategic goals.

The top of the map shows connections to government, health care planning, and public relations, indicating that HRM's strategic role also extends into sectors such as public administration and health care. This suggests that HRM is evolving to consider not only corporate goals but also the societal and regulatory contexts in which organizations operate.

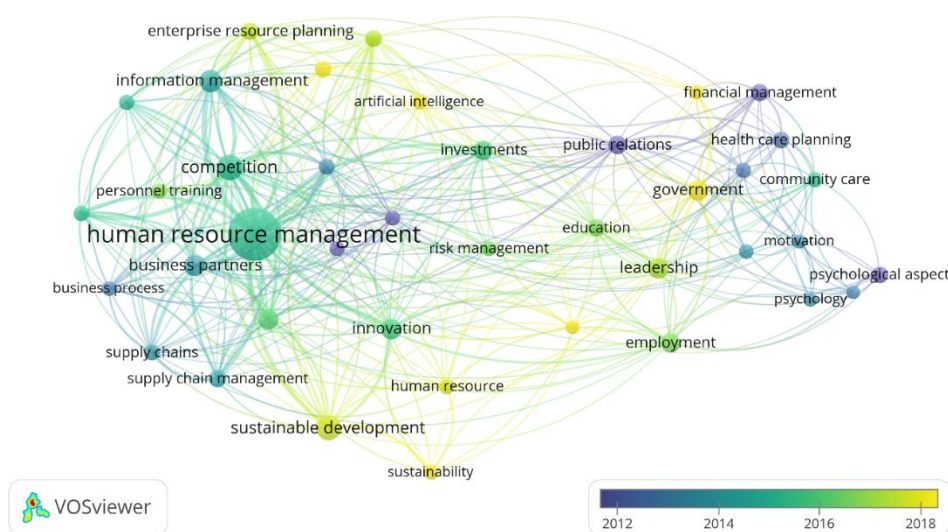


Figure 2. Overlay Visualization

Source: Data Analysis Result, 2025

Figure 2 presents a temporal evolution of key research themes in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM), with the color gradient indicating the years of publication, ranging from 2012 (purple) to 2018 (green). The central node, human resource management, remains consistently dominant throughout the years. It is surrounded by emerging themes related to HRM's strategic role, such as business partners, personnel training, and competition, which show a gradual increase in research focus over time, particularly around 2015 to 2018. The left side of the map features research themes linked to business processes, supply chain management, and sustainable development, which have gained momentum since 2014. This suggests a growing trend of integrating HRM into broader organizational functions such as supply chain and sustainability management. This integration reflects the increasing recognition of HRM's

strategic value in fostering organizational agility, innovation, and long-term sustainability. Keywords like sustainability and innovation show a rise in research interest, reflecting HRM's expanding role in corporate responsibility and adaptive business strategies.

On the right side, the cluster of terms like psychology, motivation, and leadership illustrates the continued focus on HRM's influence on individual employee engagement and organizational culture. These areas gained more attention around 2016 and are now key themes for understanding HRM's role in enhancing workforce motivation and leadership development. The thematic shift towards psychological aspects and leadership reflects a growing understanding of HRM's impact on the well-being and performance of employees.

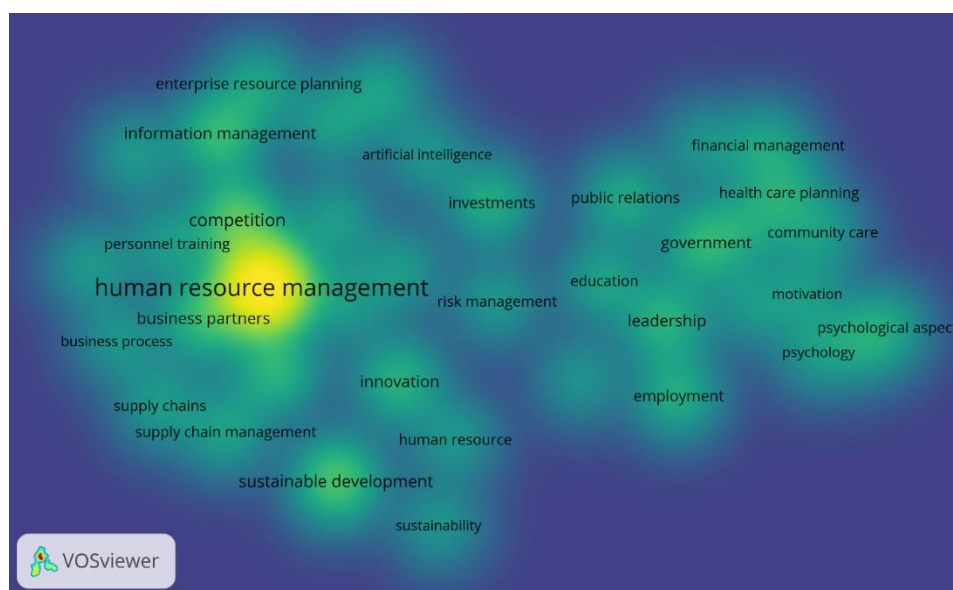


Figure 3. Density Visualization

Source: Data Analysis, 2025

Figure 3 offers an insightful view of the density and prominence of various themes within the field of Human Resource Management (HRM). The central cluster, human resource management, stands out with the highest intensity, signifying its central role in HRM research. The surrounding terms like business partners,

competition, and personnel training also show high density, indicating that these areas are key focal points within the HRM landscape. The map suggests a strong interest in exploring HRM's strategic role in organizational competitiveness and workforce development. On the periphery, the clusters related to leadership, motivation,

psychology, and government highlight growing interest in HRM's influence on individual and organizational well-being, particularly in terms of leadership development and employee motivation. These themes are associated with enhancing workplace dynamics and aligning HRM with

broader societal and public sector needs. The increasing density in areas like sustainability and supply chain management also reflects a shift towards integrating HRM with sustainability goals and cross-functional business strategies.

3.2 Co-Authorship Network

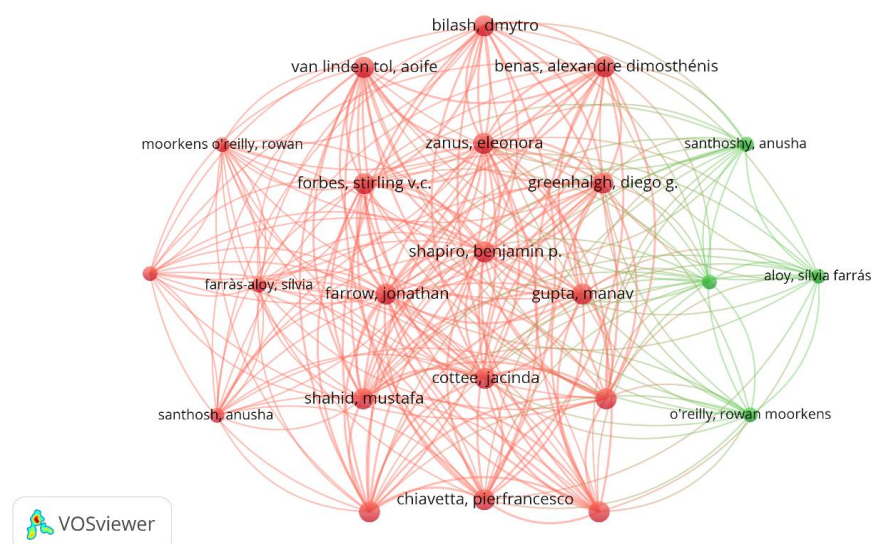


Figure 4. Author Collaboration Visualization

Source: Data Analysis, 2025

Figure 3 illustrates the co-authorship relationships among a group of researchers, with nodes representing individual authors and edges indicating collaborations. The color coding distinguishes between two groups, with red nodes and edges indicating a more prominent cluster of authors who have collaborated frequently, and green nodes showing a secondary, less connected group.

Central figures such as bilash dmytro, gupta, manav, and shapiro, benjamin p. are highly connected within the red cluster, suggesting these researchers have substantial collaboration networks. Meanwhile, the green cluster, including authors like alo, silvia farrás and santhosh, anusha, appears more peripheral but still linked through occasional collaborations.

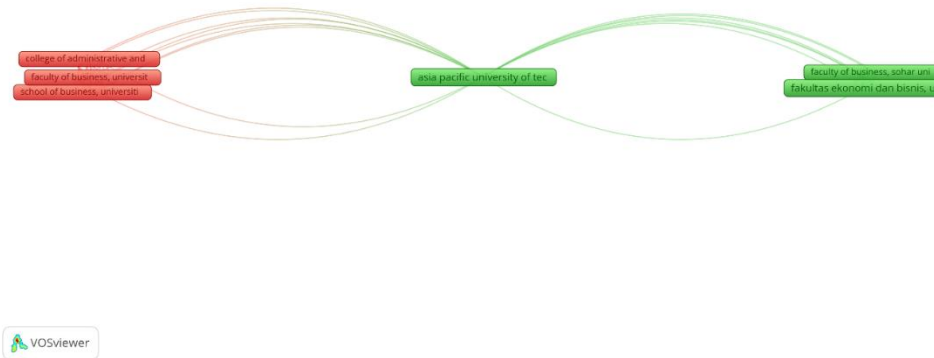


Figure 5. Affiliation Collaboration Visualization

Source: Data Analysis, 2025

Figure 5 represents institutional affiliations and their connections, with a focus on business faculties. The left side of the map (colored red) includes nodes such as College of Administrative and Faculty of Business, Universiti and School of Business, Universiti, indicating a group of institutions associated with business studies. On the right side (green), institutions like Asia Pacific

University of Tec and Faculty of Business, Sohar Uni are shown, with connections suggesting collaboration or citation links between these academic entities. The central link between the two clusters reflects an academic exchange or collaboration in business-related research, highlighting the connections between various global business faculties and universities.

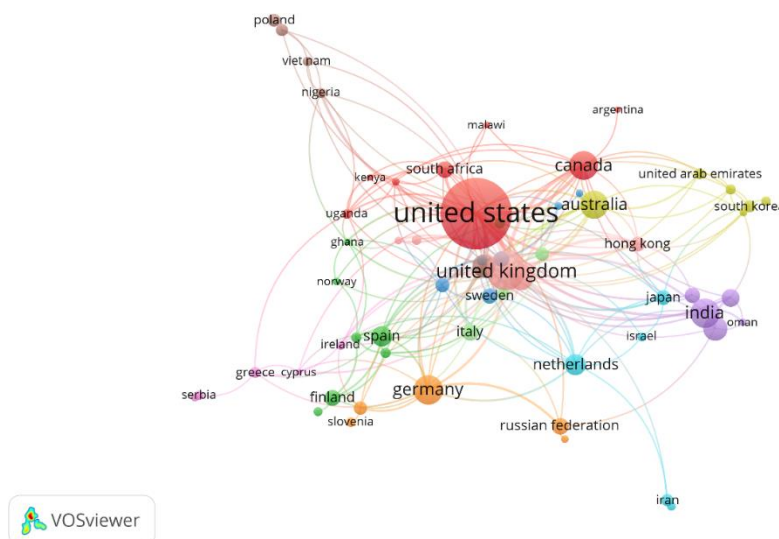


Figure 6. Country Collaboration Visualization

Source: Data Analysis, 2025

Figure 6 maps the global connections between countries based on academic or

research-related collaborations, as represented by the links between them. The

United States stands out as the central hub with the largest node, surrounded by strong connections to United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and South Africa, indicating significant collaboration or influence. Other notable clusters include European countries like Germany, Spain, and Italy, and Asian countries like India, Japan, and South Korea. The colors of the connections reflect different

thematic or regional ties, with red, green, and purple indicating different types of collaborations, likely aligned with specific research areas or academic networks. Countries like Poland, Vietnam, and Russia appear more peripheral, indicating less frequent but still notable connections.

3.3 Citation Analysis

Table 1. Top Cited Research

| Citations | Authors and year | Title |
|-----------|------------------|--|
| 648 | [10] | Why humans have sex |
| 377 | [11] | Climate change and river ecosystems: Protection and adaptation options |
| 352 | [12] | Filling the institutional void: The social behavior and performance of family vs non-Family technology firms in emerging markets |
| 274 | [13] | Are we there yet? What's next for HR? |
| 265 | [14] | Match or mismatch: Strategy-structure configurations in the service business of manufacturing companies |
| 263 | [15] | Priorities for science to overcome hurdles thwarting the full promise of the 'digital agriculture' revolution |
| 244 | [16] | Open innovation in the manufacturing industry: A review and research agenda |
| 194 | [17] | An integrated supply chain model with errors in quality inspection and learning in production |
| 191 | [18] | The biobank of the Norwegian mother and child cohort Study: A resource for the next 100 years |
| 186 | [19] | Making business partners: A case study on how management accounting culture was changed |

Source: Scopus, 2025

Table 1 showcases the top-cited research in a variety of academic fields, with each entry representing a significant contribution to its respective discipline. The most cited work, "Why humans have sex" by [10], leads with 648 citations, highlighting its widespread influence in the field of psychology and human behavior. Other highly cited works span diverse areas, including climate change and river ecosystems [11], family vs. non-family technology firms in emerging markets [20], and human resources management [13]. Research on digital agriculture [15] and open innovation in manufacturing [16] reflects current trends in the intersection of technology and industry. The table illustrates the broad reach of interdisciplinary research, with a focus on both practical applications (e.g., supply chain models and management

strategies) and theoretical contributions to understanding human behavior and organizational practices.

Discussion

Practical Implication

The findings of this study have several practical implications for both academia and business practice. First, the study underscores the importance of viewing human resource management (HRM) as a strategic partner in organizational success. By identifying the key areas where HRM intersects with business strategy, such as innovation, sustainability, and supply chain management, organizations can better align their HR functions with broader strategic goals. This alignment can foster a competitive advantage by ensuring that HR practices contribute directly to organizational

innovation and adaptability in the face of global challenges, including technological advancements and sustainability goals. Moreover, the emphasis on leadership development, employee motivation, and business processes suggests that HRM can play a crucial role in shaping organizational culture and enhancing employee engagement. Organizations can use these insights to tailor HR strategies that not only attract top talent but also retain and develop employees to drive long-term success.

Theoretical Contribution

The study also makes significant theoretical contributions. It extends existing HRM literature by integrating contemporary topics such as sustainability, digital transformation, and open innovation into the discourse on HRM as a strategic partner. The mapping of HRM's evolving role in business strategy supports the theoretical shift from HRM as a transactional function to a transformational one. This study contributes to the growing body of research emphasizing the strategic role of HR by exploring its influence in cross-functional business strategies. The insights into how HR practices impact broader organizational processes provide a comprehensive framework for understanding HRM's contributions to business success. Additionally, the interdisciplinary nature of the study, combining insights from HRM, business management, and sustainability studies, offers a novel perspective for scholars aiming to explore HRM's strategic role in the evolving global business landscape.

Limitation

Despite the valuable insights provided, this study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the study relies heavily on secondary sources, such as bibliometric analyses of existing literature, which may not fully capture the nuances of HRM practices in specific organizational contexts. This limitation suggests that the

findings may lack depth in terms of understanding the real-world application of HRM strategies in different industries and regions. Future research could benefit from primary data collection, such as case studies or interviews with HR practitioners, to provide richer, more context-specific insights. Additionally, while this study examines a broad range of topics, it does not delve deeply into the cultural and contextual factors that may influence HRM strategies in different countries or sectors. As HRM practices vary significantly across cultures and industries, further research should explore how these contextual factors shape the implementation and effectiveness of HRM strategies. Finally, the study does not address the potential challenges organizations face in implementing HR strategies aligned with business goals, such as resistance to change, resource constraints, and leadership buy-in, which could be explored in future research.

4. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the evolving role of human resource management (HRM) as a strategic partner within organizations. By examining the intersection of HRM with business strategy, sustainability, innovation, and digital transformation, the study underscores the importance of aligning HR practices with broader organizational goals to foster competitive advantage. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how HRM can drive organizational success by enhancing employee engagement, leadership development, and adaptability in the face of global challenges. While the study provides significant theoretical and practical insights, it also acknowledges the limitations of relying on secondary data and the need for further research that explores the contextual factors influencing HRM strategies. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the growing recognition of HRM as a key driver of business success and a critical enabler of long-term organizational sustainability.

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