

A Review and A Reflection on Branches of Human Resource Management

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Abstract

The objectives of this review were to explore the branches of human resource management (HRM) and investigate interconnections and interdependence among the branches of HRM and to identify the possible research gaps regarding the branches of HRM. In order to achieve these review objectives, a systematic literature review was conducted using 65 relevant and appropriate secondary sources of information which are available and accessible. Findings of the review identified 15 branches of HRM and almost all branches are interconnected and interdependent with each other branches of HRM. In addition, this review also figures out several research gaps which are very useful to the academic and practitioners who are interested in further exploring this research area.

Key Words: Branch, Human Resource Management, Literature Review, Research Gap

Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) is a significant functional field of organizational management concerned with all aspects of how people are employed, managed, developed and retained in organizations (Armstrong, 2021). Given the broad scope of managing people, HRM is typically divided into distinct branches. The core branches of HRM are often structured as systems of several interrelated functions. According to Opatha (2024), HRM branches are described as components of HRM that are responsible for various areas of workforce management within a business. Generally, it can be classified into seven distinct components, such as General HRM, International HRM, Socially responsible (Social) HRM, Green HRM, Strategic HRM, Economic HRM and Evidence-based HRM (Opatha, 2024).

Each branch focuses on a different perspective of human management, ranging from compliance-based and administrative tasks to technology-driven and strategic approaches

that match employee ambitions with organization goals. Normally, General HRM, also called traditional (domestic) HRM, is the foundation of all other branches of HRM, which denotes combinations of practices that manage people effectively to achieve the organization's goals and objectives (Opatha, 2016).

The concept of branches of HRM, fascinates us to think about systematically from the light of the existing literature to further explore the concept of branches of HRM and the nexus among them and how to establish systematic research paths to future researchers who want to further explore this interested area of research. Hence, the objectives of this review were: (1) to explore the branches of human resource management (HRM), (2) investigate interconnections and interdependence among the identified branches of HRM and (3) to identify the possible research gaps regarding the branches of HRM.

Research Method

In order to achieve the review objectives, a systematic review of literature was deployed using the archival method as recommended by Transfield et al (2003). This review process includes classifying the literature from sources such as journal articles, text books, edited works, and other research papers relating to the review topic/concepts, analyzing and reporting the findings of the review. This review reflects the research works on 'branches of human resource management', 'types of HRM', 'classification of HRM' and 'nexus of HRM' which were available in the literature. The archival method was used in this review paper for data collection because it enabled the researchers to structure research and build a reliable knowledge base on existing literature connected with branches of HRM.

Literature Review

Branches of Human Resource Management

According to Opatha (2024, p. 23), *"HRM branch is defined as a part of HRM that is concerned with or responsible for doing a particular aspect or particular aspects of the work of managing people at work in an organization"*. In accordance with him, a branch deals with a particular aspect or particular aspects of managing human resources. The Sri Lankan Advanced Human Resource Management text book written by the Opatha (2024) has identified and defined seven (7) branches of HRM. They are: General HRM, Economic HRM, International HRM, Strategic HRM, Social HRM, Green HRM and Evidence-based HRM.

General Human Resource Management (General HRM)

The concept of general human resource management (General HRM) has been defined by Opatha (2016) as effectively and efficiently managing human resources to achieve an organization's ultimate objectives. According to Armstrong (2021), all of the actions taken to hire, oversee, and develop an organization's human resources are included in general HRM. The prominent purpose of general HRM is to generate and retain an appropriate employee force, which gives the maximum contribution to organizational success.

The origin of practicing general HRM began during the Industrial Revolution, when the factories grew and human-related issues such as discipline, working conditions, and labour relations emerged. The progress of HR practices during this era was focused primarily on administrative and control rather than HR development. In the early 20th century, organizations adopted employee motivation and workplace dynamics in HR practices due to the emergence of scientific management, as well as the awareness in the Human Relations Movement. After World War II, there was a surge in union activities, the introduction of new labor laws, and the formulation of a legal framework for HR practices. This is the period that laid the foundation for the modern HR system and practices that are still in use today (The History and Evolution of Human Resource Management, 2025).

General HRM encompasses employment planning, staffing, human resource development, reward management, employee and labour relations as the main functions, which further extend into job design, job analysis, human resource planning, recruitment, selection, hiring, induction, performance evaluation, training and development, career management, pay management, welfare management, management of incentives, employee movements, health and safety management, discipline management, grievance handling and labour-management relations (Opatha, 2016).

General HRM is recognized as a strategic source of sustainable competitive advantage for organizations. The success of other management functions heavily depends on the quality of HRM within an organization. It incorporates two different approaches as a soft approach that involves managing employees with kindness, care, positive attitudes, and good character, focusing on their feelings and expectations, and a hard approach that involves managing employees objectively through personnel schemes, policies, procedures, rules, and budgets, ensuring decisions are made according to established frameworks (Opatha, 2016, p. 23). Nevertheless, general HRM is subject to certain constraints as it can be considered a modernized form of personnel management by many critics. Secondly, the specific list of appropriate general HRM practices is also not always clear. Additionally, employees have different personalities, expectations, and abilities, and their behavior can be complex and unpredictable. This makes managing them more difficult than managing other resources. *The ultimate objective of General HRM* is to ensure efficient and effective management of workforce to achieve goals of the organizations.

International Human Resource Management (International HRM)/Global HRM

International HRM refers to “International Aspects of HRM” or “International Dimensions of HRM” and it includes HRM practices in business organizations that have international business operations outside their home countries (Opatha, 2002). The term International Human Resource Management (International HRM) broadly covers all issues related to managing the global workforce and its impact on firm outcomes, including comparative analyses of HRM practices in different countries (Dowling et al., 2013). It also refers to the activities undertaken by an organization to utilize its human resources in a multinational context effectively. International HRM involves the worldwide management of people in a

multinational enterprise (MNE). Its ultimate aim is to effectively utilize human resources across international operations to achieve strategic outcomes and sustain global growth (Dowling et al., 2013). International HRM actually describes the actions a company takes to use its people resources effectively in a global setting. According to Dowling et al (2013), International HRM is also crucial for assisting companies in managing the challenges and complexities of conducting business abroad and for striking a balance between localizing and standardizing MNE operations.

Initially, International HRM was focused on sending employees from the parent country as expatriates to manage foreign operations. International HRM was largely seen as an extension of general/domestic HRM. 1980-1990 was a significant period when more companies established operations in multiple countries, requiring a more sophisticated approach to International HRM (Harzing and Van Ruysseveldt, 2004). International HRM has focused on attracting, developing, and retaining talented employees across the globe. While acknowledging the necessity to adjust to local settings, modern International HRM places a strong emphasis on standardizing HR practices across nations.

The model of International HRM consists of types of employees who are attached to International HRM, including host-country nationals (HCNs), parent-country nationals (PCNs), and third-country nationals (TCNs), as well as classification of countries where International HRM is dealing with, such as the Host country, Parent country, and other countries, and main HR activities that can be carried out in International HRM, like procurement, allocation, and utilization. The significance of International HRM emphasizes that it is central to sustaining the increase in International business activity. It helps to balance between global standardization and local responsiveness. It includes various stakeholders, such as MNE Headquarters, Subsidiaries, Employees, Host Country Governments, Trade Unions, Customers, suppliers, and other local stakeholders (Dowling et al., 2013). The *ultimate objective of International HRM* is to achieve global organizational goals by effectively managing a diverse international workforce through the alignment of HRM strategies (identifying, attracting, getting, developing, rewarding and retaining global talent), with business objectives.

Socially Responsible HRM/Social HRM (Social HRM)

Social HRM is people-centered and rooted in corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies, morals, and organizational behavior, which incorporates the idea of social responsibility into HRM practices (Pham et al., 2023). According to Shen and Benson (2016), it is a practical action of HRM divisions adopted by organizations in achieving the successful implementation of corporate social responsibility. It combines corporate social responsibility (CSR) and human resource management (Omid and Dal Zotto, 2022).

The primary purpose of the social HRM is to promote social value creation by aligning corporate strategic goals with sustainable HRM practices and encouraging employees to participate in CSR activities. The concept of socially responsible HRM began to evolve in the

1990s, when the social, cultural, and legal purposes, as well as the multiple roles of HRM, began to help employees meet expectations and exceed them within the organization (Aust et al., 2020). Practically, social responsibility practices are generally incorporated into traditional HRM functions like developing transparent and unbiased processes, encouraging internal promotion, and clearly detailing selection criteria in recruitment and selection, conducting CSR training and development programs to equip employees with social responsibility competencies, establishing monetary and non-monetary rewards in a transparent, nondiscriminatory manner based on employee performance, assessing employees' performance systematically by following principles of objectivity, transparency, and nondiscrimination, practicing flexible working hours, family-friendly HRM, Promoting workforce diversity, adhering to local labour laws and International Labour Law (ILO) standards concerning equality, health and safety, working hours, minimum wage, and avoiding child or forced labour and applying HRM policies and practices that help firms engage in broader CSR initiatives (Aust, et al., 2020; Diaz-Carrion et al., 2019; Omari Somuah et al., 2025; Shen and Jiu Hua Zhu, 2011).

The model of socially responsible HRM was developed by Barrena-Martinez et al (2018), which explains that the socially responsible HRM is initiated based on a social integrative perspective, where the CSR perspective interacts with HRM to formulate socially responsible HRM. This approach considers employees as the main stakeholders, trying to create value for them through socially responsible HRM. Apart from employees, HR professionals, managers, shareholders, employee representatives, customers, and society are also considered stakeholders of socially responsible HRM. Additionally, it contributes to employment creation and job security, as well as psychological contracts related to human needs for employment, safety, and meaningful work. The *ultimate objective of Social HRM* is to achieve social performance of the organization and contribute to the broader well-being of society and sustainability, by proactively enhancing employees' work experiences and meeting their personal and social expectations in ethical ways.

Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM)

Jabbour et al (2010) defined green HRM as the greening of functional dimensions of HRM such as job design and analysis, human resource planning, recruitment, selection, training, performance appraisal and rewards. Renwick et al (2013) defined green HRM as the integration of corporate environmental management into human resource management. *"Green HRM refers to all the activities involved in development, implementation and on-going maintenance of a system that aims at making employees of an organization green. It is the side of HRM that is concerned with transforming normal employees into green employees so as to achieve environmental goals of the organization and finally to make a significant contribution to environmental sustainability. It refers to the policies, practices and systems that make employees of the organization green for the benefit of the individual, society, natural environment, and the business."* (Opatha, 2013, p. 28; Opatha and Arulrajah, 2014, p. 104).

Basically, green HRM transforms ‘normal employees into green employees’ to achieve environmental goals and contribute to environmental sustainability (Arulrajah, et al., 2015). This concept initially emerged in the post-1980s with the advent of ISO 14001 standards, worldwide environmental movements, and awareness of corporate social responsibility (CSR); thus, businesses began experimenting with the idea of going “green” in the workplace. Now, green HRM has become strategic and integrated into overall sustainability strategies that involve sustainability reporting, green employer branding, sustainable leadership development, and green organizational citizenship behavior (GOCB) and use of technology to reduce paper and resource consumption.

Green HRM practices are powerful tools for making organizations and their operations green. They can shape and reshape employees’ green performance, behaviors, attitudes, and competencies. Notably, improved environmental performance can be associated with improved financial performance. Various stakeholders, such as employees and their families, organizations, society, government, consumers, and experts, are involved in and benefit from green HRM. Nevertheless, implementing green HRM practices is not always easy, facing obstacles like the lack of a comprehensive plan and ambiguity in the meaning of “green value” within the organization. It is also important to ensure that employee green performance measurement criteria are carefully aligned with the organization’s overall environmental performance criteria. *The ultimate objective of Green HRM is to foster environmental sustainability by promoting eco-friendly HRM practices and transforming normal workforce of the organizations into a green workforce.*

Strategic Human Resource Management (Strategic HRM)

According to Opatha (2016, p. 904), *“It is about development, implementation and on-going maintenance of personnel systems so that the organisation will be able to achieve a competitive advantage or enhance the competitive advantage for a prolonged period of time. It is about formulation and implementation of HR systems which generate appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes, appropriate behaviours such as presence, punctuality, managerial activities etc. and appropriate (expected) results (quantity and quality of work) of employees at all levels so that the organisation will be able to achieve vision, mission and strategic goals.”*

Strategic HRM is an approach that defines how the organization’s goals will be achieved through people utilizing HR strategies and integrated HR policies and practices (Armstrong and Brown, 2018; Armstrong, 2021). Strategic HRM refers to the branch of HRM which is concerned with HRM systems aiming at creating and enhancing a competitive advantage that is sustainable so that strategic needs such as vision, mission and goals of an organization are accomplished (Opatha, 2024). According to Kaufman (2015), the choice, alignment, and integration of an organization’s HRM system through its human capital resources most effectively contribute to strategic business objectives. Moreover, it is a process of ensuring that key issues of human resource management are dealt with strategically to support the achievement of organizational goals. The fundamental purpose of Strategic HRM is to generate strategic capability by ensuring the organization has the skilled, committed, and

well-motivated employees needed for sustained competitive advantage. Mostly, Strategic HRM is regarded more as a mindset than a collection of prescribed techniques.

The notion of strategic HRM emerged in the 1980s. Initially, it covers the development of the important concept of strategic fit. Initially, Strategic HRM theorists focused on vertical fit, which entails the linking of human resource management practices with the strategic management processes of the organization. Then they recognized Horizontal fit that emphasizes the coordination or congruence among the various human resource management practices (Armstrong, 2021, p. 43).

The emergence of the notions of vertical and horizontal fit sparked a debate at about this time on the relative merits of what became known as ‘best practice’ and ‘best fit’. Lately, SHRM concepts include Resource-based view, Behavioral perspective, AMO Theory, and Stakeholder Theory to achieve fit or integration and to provide a sense of direction in a turbulent environment. Among these, the resource-based view suggests that sustainable competitive advantage is achieved when the firm has a human resource pool that cannot be imitated or substituted by rivals (Armstrong, 2021, pp. 50-53). The *ultimate objective of Strategic HRM* is to drive organizational performance and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage by aligning human resource strategies, policies and practices (right people, right skill and behaviours, right positions, and right time) with the overall long-term business goals, objectives and mission.

Economic Human Resource Management (Economic HRM)

Economic HRM is that part or branch of HRM which is concerned with HRM contributions to profits of the organization. The purpose of economic HRM is to maximize profits through HRM (Opatha, 2024). Moreover, he empathized that under economic HRM, a special focus is given to employee attendance, presentism, counter-productive behaviour, customer satisfaction, high performance organization, and competitive business strategy and HR strategy. Two aspects, i.e., (1) High performance organization, and (2) competitive business strategy and HR strategy can also be considered as two aspects of Strategic HRM, and these aspects imply that economic HRM and strategic HRM are significantly interrelated though economic HRM is broader than strategic HRM (Opatha, 2024).

The economics perspective of HRM (Calculative HRM), also known as personnel economics, applies economic principles to understand and explain a firm’s choices and practices related to managing its workforce (Kaufman and Miller, 2011). It is based on the proposition that people and firms make optimizing choices subject to constraints such as income, time, uncertainty, and legal/institutional requirements (Gunderson, 2001). The general focus of the Economic perspective of HRM is on incentive-compatible contracts to ensure that employers (principals) and employees (agents) act in their joint interest, particularly in situations involving uncertainty, monitoring costs, and asymmetric information. The framework Economic perspective of HRM can combine human capital theory, which treats employees as

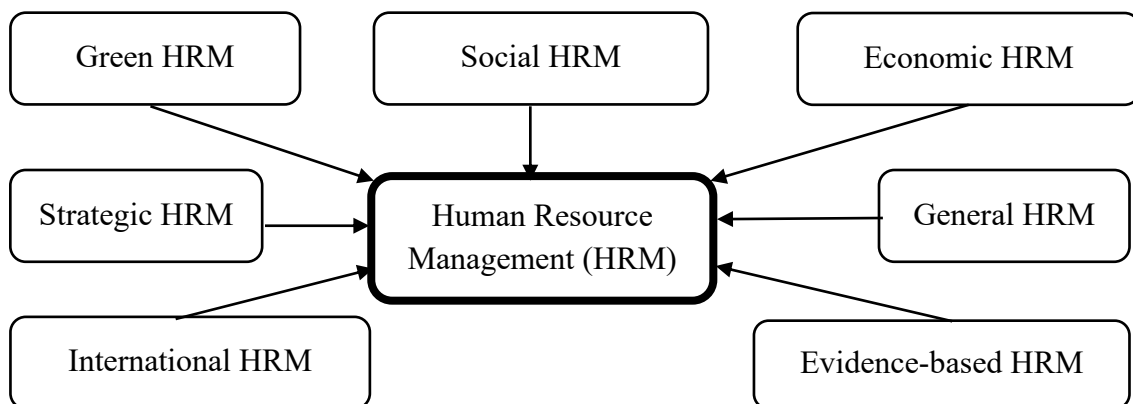
capital assets, and the Efficiency Wage Model that links higher wages with more productivity, lower turnover, and less shirking (Gunderson, 2001; Kaufman and Miller, 2011).

Understanding of this economic perspective demonstrates how costs associated with recruiting, hiring, orientation, training, and anticipated termination influence hiring decisions, leading to implications like reluctance to hire, use of temporary workers, and overtime. This includes actions such as Fixed Hiring Costs, back-loaded pay, Pensions and Mandatory Retirement, and Compensating Wage Premiums. On the other hand, the Economics of HRM often reduces human resource practices to monetary values, ignoring qualitative aspects like employee motivation, creativity, and organizational culture. It tends to treat employees as economic units of labor rather than individuals with emotions, aspirations, and social needs. The majority of economic models might place more emphasis on short-term cost reductions through outsourcing, downsizing, and wage management than on long-term human capital development (Gunderson, 2001; Kaufman and Miller, 2011). *The ultimate objective of Economic HRM* is to maximize the employees' contribution to achieve financial performance of an organization, by enhancing productivity, profitability and overall competitive advantage.

Evidence-based Human Resource Management (Evidence-based HRM)

According to Opatha (2024, p. 25), evidence-based human resource management is defined as that part of HRM which is concerned with the component of 'feedback through evaluation' which is an essential component of his Generic Model of HRM. According to him, the term 'evaluation' is used in a broader sense and therefore it is not merely evaluating. It includes determining objective and subjective criteria that can be used to evaluate success of HRM policies, procedures, rules, systems and practices, collecting data, analyzing data and reporting for better decision making. The purpose of evidence-based HRM is to evaluate HRM for its improvement and organizational improvement (Opatha, 2024). *The ultimate objective of Evidence-based HRM* is to improve organizational performance and achieve strategic goals and objectives of HRM by making better, more effective and objective HRM decisions. Figure 1 shows the above-mentioned seven branches of HRM in one setting.

Figure 1. The Seven Branches of HRM



Source: Opatha, 2024, p. 23

In addition to the above branches of HRM, this review incorporates some other branches of HRM such as Ethical HRM, Digital HRM, Spiritual HRM, Women friendly HRM, Family friendly HRM, Sustainable HRM, Contextual HRM and Innovation focused HRM.

Ethical Human Resource Management (Ethical HRM)

According to De Silva and Opatha (2015), ethical orientation of HRM is defined as “*the extent to which HRM functions incorporate ethical matters so as to make employees ethical*”. Ethical HRM is a kind of HRM that involves identifying the good and ensuring its fair distribution within an organization (Ekuma, and Akobo, 2015). It is about ethics in managing people at work (De Silva et al., 2016). Ethics in HRM is fundamentally concerned with analyzing what is right or wrong in human behavior and conduct within the context of managing people in an organization (Ombanda and K’Obonyo, 2019). The terms ‘ethics in HRM’ and ‘ethical HRM’ are often used interchangeably. According to Rose (2007), ethical HRM involves identifying the good and ensuring fair distribution within an organization. More broadly, it is the study of right and wrong, and the specification of what constitutes right or wrong in HR practices. The primary purpose of ethical HRM is to ensure that organizations manage people effectively and deliberately while upholding moral standards, promoting fairness, and contributing to the well-being of all stakeholders (Kiradoo, 2008).

The earlier concern about ethics was initiated as stakeholder welfare from 1900 to 1940, to safeguard employee well-being and rights, such as ensuring a safe working environment, appropriate salaries, and the right to negotiate and associate freely. Afterward, the development of anti-discrimination and anti-harassment laws emerged to standardize employee behaviors and promote diversity, guiding HR professionals in implementing ethical policies. In 1970, HRM evolved from an administrative function to a strategic role, which also brought ethical considerations to the forefront. As a result of globalization, ethical HRM has extended to global labour standards, human rights, and sustainability, which seeks to balance profitability with employee rights and social goods (Ekuma and Akobo, 2015; Rose, 2007; Thite, 2013; Winstanley et al., 1996).

In addition, ethical HRM in the modern period has focused on issues like diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), workplace privacy in the digital age, and gig economy ethics, including fair compensation, security, contract worker rights, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) and human resource (HR) technology ethics. The ethical HRM broadly includes fairness and justice, avoiding conflicts of interest, adherence to codes of conduct, and fulfilling agency responsibilities while balancing the dual roles of careers. This concept of ethical HRM was explained by using an integrated framework (Schumann, 2001), which combines five principles, such as *Utilitarian principle*, which evaluates actions based on whether the organization produces the best and least harm for all affected stakeholders, *Right principle* that assesses whether the action respects the moral rights of the decision-maker and others, *Distributive justice principle* that determines whether the action results in a fair distribution of benefits and costs, *Caring principle* that focuses on whether the action expresses care and nurtures the special relationships individuals have with each other, and *Virtue Principle* that

evaluates the action based on whether it displays good moral virtues and avoids vices (Schumann, 2001).

Moreover, ethical HRM is essential because HR decisions directly affect people's jobs, their future employment, and their well-being. Employees who perceive ethical HRM practices positively are more motivated and highly satisfied. Ethical HR practices lead to better long-term business survival and create a positive environment for operations. On the other hand, Unethical HR practices can lead to serious legal, societal, and employee behavioral problems, resulting in high turnover rates.

Presently, ethical focus in HRM is executed by more organizations by conducting fair assessment measures, avoiding favoritism and any form of discrimination in recruitment and selection, ensuring fairness in the allocation of pay and benefits, preventing pay inequalities, implementing consistent disciplinary measures, fostering honest conduct, respecting rights to negotiation and representation, ensuring a safe and healthy work environment, evaluating performance achievements fairly, using objective criteria rather than non-performance factors in appraisals, ensuring equal opportunities and equal access in promotion and development and so on (Ekuma and Akobo, 2015; Ombanda and K'Obonyo, 2019; Rose, 2007; Schumann, 2001). The *ultimate objective of Ethical HRM* is to create and sustain an organizational ethical culture of integrity, fairness, trust and respect, ensuring the well-being of all employees while also contributing to sustainable organizational success and growth.

Digital Human Resource Management (Digital HRM)

Digital HRM is understood as the socio-technical result of the digitalization of HRM (Strohmeier, 2020). It involves the effective use of computer systems and telecommunication networks to enable the HR department to perform its functions, essentially utilizing the Internet to facilitate HRM activities (Bektas, 2021). Digital HRM refers to the integration of modern digital technologies into HR processes, extending beyond basic digitization to include digitalization, transformation and disruption (Strohmeier, 2020). The primary purpose of it is to generate performance gains through the synergy between interlinked HR processes and digital technologies. The concept of digital HRM is an evolutionary advancement of previous conceptualizations of technology-based HRM. Historically, organizations and HRM operated in an analogue phase, where digitalization was not considered.

The first phase of discussing digital HRM, starting about half a century ago, primarily focused on the operational application of digital technologies, such as using information systems for order processing or inventory control. About 25 years ago, a second phase emerged with the strategic alignment of digital technologies under the umbrella of 'electronic HRM' (e-HRM) (Strohmeier, 2020). More recently, a third phase introduced the idea of strategic integration of digitization potentials, which constitutes a 'paradigmatic shift'. This involves directly integrating digital technologies into the formulation of strategy to create new business opportunities. This transition from basic personnel management, focused on existing staff and productivity, to more comprehensive human resource management, which includes

employee development, human relations, and strategic roles, has been significantly accelerated by digitalization.

Digital HRM operates within a socio-technical perspective, recognizing that organizations are complex systems where technology and social aspects are interconnected and interdependent. It comprises a social component that includes people and structure, and a technical component that consists of technology and tasks. These Digital HRM models are often rooted in Sociotechnical Theory, which emphasizes that organizations are complex systems where technology and social aspects are interconnected, and Dynamic Capabilities Theory, which underpins the importance of leveraging resources for developing key capabilities and a company's ability to quickly adapt and reconfigure internal resources to respond to market changes. The organization can benefit from digital HRM in a number of ways, including increased productivity and creativity among employees, decreased manual labor, improved work-life balance, data-driven decision-making, stability and long-term sustainability, and improved firm performance.

Digital HRM encompasses a set of HRM practices that cover the full employee lifecycle, and Human Resource Information System (HRIS) is a system that stores, collects, processes, and manages employee data. Anyhow, it is also possible to view digital HRM as simply overlapping with established concepts like electronic HRM (e-HRM). It faces several limitations such as inadequate tech expertise among HR personnel, the threat of cyber-attacks and data breaches, lack of data privacy, increased technical vulnerability, increased surveillance of employees, and the need for continuous infrastructure and transformation. Actually, digital HRM is an evolutionary advancement of previous conceptualizations of technology-based HRM (Strohmeier, 2020). The *ultimate objective of Digital HRM* is to drive overall organizational performance and success by strategically leveraging technology to transform the HRM functions from an administrative support role into a proactive, strategic, data-driven, efficient, innovative, more responsive, and evidence-based accurate and fast HR decisions.

Spiritual Human Resource Management (Spiritual HRM)

Spiritual Human Resource Management (Spiritual HRM) is a branch of HRM that integrates spiritual values, purpose, ethics and empathy into traditional HRM practices to impart a supportive and meaningful work environment. It focuses on creating a culture where employees feel a sense of meaning and connection to their work and peers, leading to benefits like greater job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and increased organizational commitment (Mishra and Tiwari, 2024). According to our view, Spiritual HRM means *the extent to which human resource management practices of an organization create inner peace, happiness and life satisfaction among its members*. Spiritual HRM is an integration of spirituality within Human Resource Management practices. Spirituality is viewed as a source of sustainability when organizations develop HRM practices and policies that raise leaders' awareness of spirituality and sustainability, developing a positive workplace environment based on spirituality that raises awareness and attitudes of employees. From the perspective of human resources, Spiritual HRM enhances employee well-being and quality of life,

considering that the work-family balance is being seen as an important issue (Karakas, 2010). The *ultimate objective of Spiritual HRM* is to realize the holistic well-being and development of employees while concurrently driving sustainable organizational success.

Women Friendly Human Resource Management (Women Friendly HRM)

Women friendly Human Resource Management (Women friendly HRM) refers to a range of strategies, policies, and programs designed to promote gender equality and enhance the work experiences of women (Navya, 2023). Further, a woman-friendly organization provides women with the opportunity to successfully integrate their personal, work, marital, and family roles, making it easier for women to work and build a career within the organization (Chiu and Ng, 2001).

Women friendly HRM aims to create a supportive and inclusive work environment that empowers women and fosters their career development. It also helps employees, especially women, balance professional commitments with personal responsibilities, thereby reducing absenteeism and distraction. Adoption of women-friendly HRM can foster affective commitment among female employees by signaling organizational care and support, leading to dedicated workers. It includes equal pay, fair promotion, flexible work arrangements, paid maternity or parental leave, mentorship as well as sponsorship programs for women, diversity plus inclusion training, career re-entry support, safety activities for late-working women, tracking travel locations, maintaining anti-sexual harassment initiatives, family-friendly facilities, professional development, equitable task allocation, fair performance evaluation, self-transference schemes that allowing women to continue careers in different locations due to marriage or relocation, and supporting work-life balance (Ng and Chiu, 1997, 2001).

Once the organization adopts women friendly HRM, it can address gender inequality, promote diversity and inclusion, augment organizational performance, improve employee well-being, and retain a skilled workforce. Ultimately, women friendly HRM includes not only the female employees, but also male employees, HR managers, companies, policymakers, and society at large (Navya, 2023; Delima and Arulrajah, 2025).

However, many women-friendly policies are not widely adopted or consistently practiced in organizations. There is a common assumption that working women are homogeneous in their needs and desires for organizational support, overlooking differing needs based on marital status, parental status, or age. There can be resistance to equal opportunities, sometimes from male employees, male managers, and even female managers. Traditional gender roles and male-controlled norms can still limit women's career growth and societal acceptance (Chiu and Ng, 2001; Ng and Chiu, 2001; Deniz et al., 2012). The *ultimate objective of Women friendly HRM* is to achieve gender equality and empower all working women within the organization, leading to organizational sustainability and effectiveness.

Family Friendly Human Resource Management (Family Friendly HRM)

Family friendly HRM consists of HRM systems, policies and practices which are designed to help employees balance their work and family responsibilities. Implementing family friendly HRM practices promote psychological empowerment and enhance employee's performance (Anayat, 2023). Initially the involvement of HRM in designing and implementing corporate family responsibility (CFR) paved the way to enter into the family friendly HRM arena to the HR professionals and practitioners. Later, this entry was matured as the Family friendly HRM field (Del Baldo, 2013). According to our view, family friendly HRM refers to a set of HRM policies and practices designed to help employees balance the demands of their workplace and family life, with the intention of reducing work-family conflicts and imbalances and improving employees' performance as well as organizational performance. The *ultimate objective of Family friendly HRM* is to create a 'win-win' situation where employees can effectively balance their work and family needs and responsibilities, leading to both enhanced employee well-being and improved organizational performance.

Sustainable Human Resource Management (Sustainable HRM)

According to Ehnert (2009, p. 74), sustainable HRM is *"the pattern of planned or emerging human resource strategies and practices intended to enable an organizational goals achievement while simultaneously reproducing the HR base over a long-lasting calendar time and controlling for self-induced side and feedback effects on the HR systems on the HR based and thus on the company itself."* Cohen et al (2012, p. 3) define that *"sustainable HRM is the utilization of HRM tools to help embed a sustainability strategy in the organization and the creation of an HRM system that contributes to the sustainable performance of the firm. Sustainable HRM creates the skills, motivation, values and trust to achieve a triple bottom line and at the same time ensures the long-term health and sustainability of both the organization's internal and external stakeholders, with policies that reflect equity, development and well-being and help support environmentally friendly practices."*

Thevanes and Arulrajah (2017) defined that sustainable HRM is the efficient, effective, and innovative applications of human resources and its practices in order to achieve economic (profit), social and environmental goals of an organization in ethical ways and means without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Jarlstrom et al (2018, p. 4), indicate that *"the basic concept underlying the sustainable HRM discussion is that firms seek different kinds of outcomes to satisfy their stakeholders' expectations. These outcomes may be economic, social, human, and ecological, and firms often seek them simultaneously although any one of the outcomes may be more important to an organization than others."* According to Opatha (2019, p. 31), *"Sustainable HRM is that part of HRM which is concerned with planet-related matters, society-related matters and profit-related matters. Its aim is to maximize environmental, social, and economic performance of the organization. It refers to the policies, procedures, rules, practices, and systems of managing employees which contribute to achieving sustainability"*. The ultimate objective of Sustainable HRM is to facilitate organizations to achieve balanced economic, social and environmental

goals over the long term basis, while concurrently ensuring the well-being and development of human capital and contributing to the wider community and planet.

Contextual Human Resource Management (Contextual HRM)

The contextual HRM perspective proposes, as indicated by Martin-Alcazar et al (2005), an important shift in the branches of HRM. It introduces a descriptive and global explanation through a broader model, application to different contexts encompassing the particularities of all geographical and industrial contexts (e.g. Asian context, South Asian context, European context, Manufacturing context, Service sector context, Sri Lankan Context, Indian Context, Project context, Private sector context etc.). Advocates of this branch argue that it is necessary to expand the concept of HRM so as to offer a complex explanation, not only of how it can reinforce the achievement of business goals, but also its influence on the external and organizational context in which managerial decisions are made (Brewster, 1999). The main contribution of this branch of HRM lies in the reconsideration of the relationship between the HRM system and its context.

According to Larsen and Brewster (2000), HRM is understood differently, researched differently and is, in practice, conducted in quite distinct ways in different countries and circumstances. The comparative analysis of HRM is fully justified only within the contextual paradigm (Ignjatovic and Svetlik, 2003). Dewettinck and Remue (2011) also stated that if we do not think about the Contextual HRM perspective such as countries, regions, industrial sectors and organizations, we cannot compare and evaluate against the best model of HRM, as the Universalistic paradigm suggested. If we approach the Contextual HRM perspective, we can have a consistent structure and framework for each context and it will serve very well in its own specific context.

The *ultimate objective of Contextual HRM* is to ensure the long term survival and success of an organization by aligning HRM systems, strategies and practices with its specific context and circumstances. This branch of HRM rejects the 'one size fits for all' concepts of 'the best' or 'universal best' practices. It recognized that what works well in one setting may not work well in another setting.

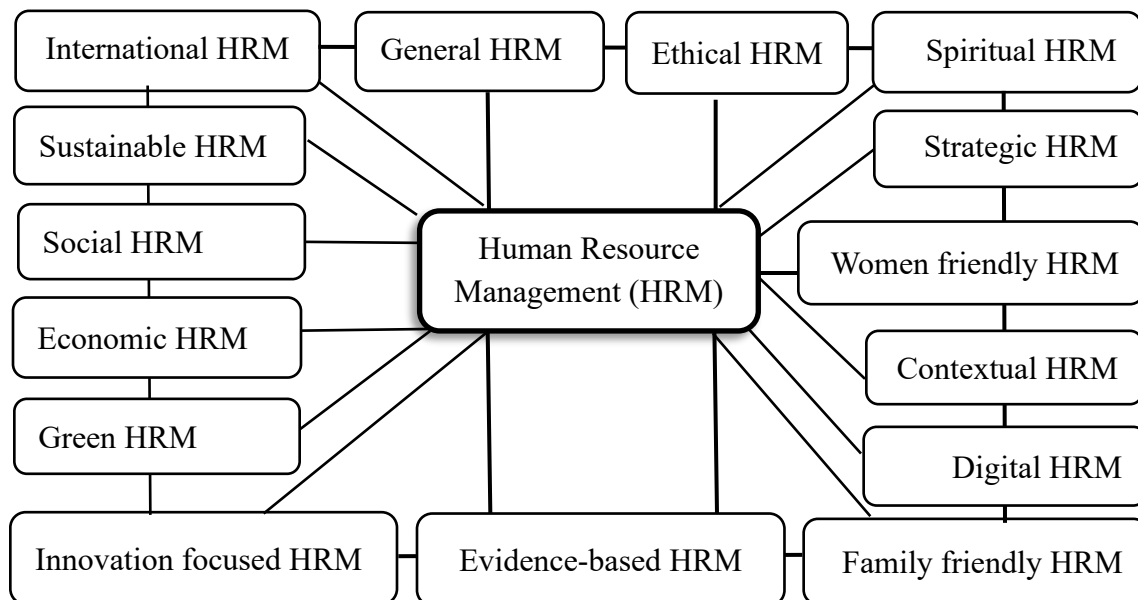
Innovation focused Human Resource Management (Innovation focused HRM)

According to Shipton et al (2005), innovation can be promoted through efficient and effective management of people. The organizations which are intending to innovate should consider the human resources as precious resources (Beugelsdijk, 2008). Innovation focused HRM is a strategic approach that uses HRM practices to foster a culture of creativity and innovation within an organization (Zhang et al., 2024). According to Stock et al (2014), the combination of innovation focused recruitment, training and development, performance evaluation, and rewards works synergistically to achieve innovation outcomes, which refers to innovation focused (oriented) HRM. Through recruitment, selection, training and development, performance evaluation and rewards, innovation oriented HRM seeks to improve employee

competence, motivation and opportunities for creative and innovative performance (Martinaityte et al., 2019).

Nowadays, open innovation (OI) plays a big role in many organizations' innovation strategy. In this context, OI needs more knowledge sharing and sourcing among the employees. This is actually possible through collaborative or participative HRM. Hence, innovation focused HRM can use collaborative HRM practices to enhance OI performance of the organizations (Engelsberger et al., 2025). Empirical findings of Einarsdottir et al (2025) revealed that collaborative HRM practices are more important for organizational performance than calculative HRM practices. The *ultimate objective of Innovation focused HRM* is to drive organizational performance and ensure sustainable competitive advantage by systematically developing a culture of creativity, innovation, and adaptability within the workforce.

Figure 2. The Fifteen Branches of HRM



Source: Developed by the Authors

Relationships among the Branches of HRM

This review has identified 105 possible relationships among the 15 branches of HRM. Exploring the relationships among these branches of HRM is important because this exploration will show the interconnections between and among the identified branches of HRM. This knowledge is needed to design an 'Integrated Configuration Theory of HRM' for organizations. Kramar (2014) wrote a research paper regarding Strategic HRM and Sustainable HRM. In that paper the author raised a critical question beyond strategic HRM: is sustainable HRM the next approach? This paper explores the major characteristics of strategic HRM, provides some meanings of sustainability, highlights the link between Sustainability and

HRM, explores the major characteristics of Sustainable HRM, identifies the characteristics which differentiate Sustainable HRM from Strategic HRM and finally concludes that Sustainable HRM can be understood in terms of a number of complementary frameworks. Actually this type of research paper can be considered as an eye-opening research work that provides more insight about the link between HRM and Sustainable HRM (R7, see Table 1), as well as the link between Strategic HRM and Sustainable HRM (R53, see Table 1). Figure 3 shows a reflective mapping of different branches of HRM as per the reviewers' perspective. All branches individually as well as collectively contribute to overall organizational sustainable (economic, social and environmental) performance.

Table 1. Relationship between Branches of HRM

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|----|--|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | General/Domestic HRM | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Social HRM | R1 | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Economic HRM | R2 | R15 | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Green HRM | R3 | R16 | R28 | 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | Strategic HRM | R4 | R17 | R29 | R40 | 5 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | Evidence-based HRM | R5 | R18 | R30 | R41 | R51 | 6 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | International HRM | R6 | R19 | R31 | R42 | R52 | R61 | 7 | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | Sustainable HRM | R7 | R20 | R32 | R43 | R53 | R62 | R70 | 8 | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | Digital HRM | R8 | R21 | R33 | R44 | R54 | R63 | R71 | R78 | 9 | | | | | | | |
| 10 | Ethical HRM | R9 | R22 | R34 | R45 | R55 | R64 | R72 | R79 | R85 | 10 | | | | | | |
| 11 | Women Friendly HRM | R10 | R23 | R35 | R46 | R56 | R65 | R73 | R80 | R86 | R91 | 11 | | | | | |
| 12 | Family Friendly HRM | R11 | R24 | R36 | R47 | R57 | R66 | R74 | R81 | R87 | R92 | R96 | 12 | | | | |
| 13 | Contextual HRM | R12 | R25 | R37 | R48 | R58 | R67 | R75 | R82 | R88 | R93 | R97 | R100 | 13 | | | |
| 14 | Innovation focused HRM | R13 | R26 | R38 | R49 | R59 | R68 | R76 | R83 | R89 | R94 | R98 | R101 | R103 | 14 | | |
| 15 | Spiritual HRM | R14 | R27 | R39 | R50 | R60 | R69 | R77 | R84 | R90 | R95 | R99 | R102 | R104 | R105 | 15 | |
| Note: ‘R’ denotes ‘Relationship’ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Source: Developed by the Authors

Table 1 shows the simple relationship/correlation matrix among the identified 15 branches of HRM. Actually, Table 1 displays all possible relationships between any two branches of HRM. The total number of pairwise relationships among 15 branches of HRM is 105. This can be calculated using the combinations formula, which determines how many unique pairs can be formed from a set of variables. The number of ways to select two branches from a set of 'n' branches is given by the combinations formula:

$$\binom{n}{2} = \frac{n!}{2!(n-2)!}$$

For n = 15 branches of HRM

$$\binom{15}{2} = \frac{15!}{2!(15-2)!} = \frac{15!}{2! \times 13!} = \frac{15 \times 14}{2 \times 1} = 105$$

These relationships typically refer to bivariate associations, such as linear correlations (Pearson's r) which describe the strength and direction of a relationship between two branches of HRM. The specific type of relationship (example, linear, non-linear, causal) would depend on the nature of the branches of HRM and the analysis performed. Beyond pairwise relationships, more complex multivariate relationships involving three or more branches of HRM can be explored through methods like multiple regression or partial correlations, which analyze how a response branch of HRM is related to a set of predicting branches of HRM.

Figure 3. Mapping Different Branches of HRM

| | | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------------|
| General/Domestic HRM | Strategic HRM↓ | | | International HRM |
| | Innovation focused HRM↓ | | | |
| | Digital HRM↓ | | | |
| | Contextual HRM↓ | | | |
| | Evidence-based HRM↓ | | | |
| | Sustainable HRM | | | |
| | Social HRM ↑ | Green HRM↑ | Economic HRM↑ | |
| | Family Friendly HRM↑ | | | |
| | Women Friendly HRM↑ | | | |
| | Ethical HRM↑ | | | |
| | Spiritual HRM↑ | | | |

Source: Developed by the Authors

Figure 3 displays mapping of different branches of HRM based on reflections of the authors. In this mapping, authors started from an individual employee's point of view within Spiritual HRM at the bottom line, then moved to Ethical HRM. In that upward movement, authors mapped Women Friendly HRM and Family Friendly HRM as the next move respectively. Finally, in the upward movement, Social, Green and Economic HRM lead to Sustainable HRM. On the downward movements, starting from Strategic HRM, the contribution of Innovation focused HRM, Digital HRM, Contextual HRM and Evidence-based HRM are also needed for Sustainable HRM to ensure the 'survival' and 'sustainability' of human resources as well as organizations. At the same time, within the scope of General/Domestic HRM to International HRM, all these branches of HRM play different types of critical roles individually as well as collectively.

Discussion

According to the available literature, this review has identified 15 branches of HRM (first objective of the review). Over time, based on changes happening in global/international, regional, and national contexts, the field of HRM needs to expand its branches according to the changing needs of employees, organizations, businesses, and society (its stakeholders). Each branch is addressing different needs and expectations of the organizations, society, nations, regions and global arenas. The progressive and emerging development of these branches of HRM show the diversity and innovation of the HRM field and its significance. The expansion of branches of HRM indicates the growth and development of the HRM field over the time and how HRM itself updates and adopts quickly to the changing needs of the business organizations and society. It also reflects how the HRM field is penetrated in integrating diversified needs of the business world. HRM is a dynamic and result oriented field, and it has the capacity to address various needs of the organizations, society, nations, regions and the entire globe. The boundaries of HRM are expanding over time. The boundary spanning nature of HRM has to be managed properly to achieve the real objectives of HRM.

As far as relationships (second objective of this review) are concerned among the branches of HRM, this review has identified 105 possible relationships among the identified 15 branches of HRM (see Table 1). We can view these relationships in bivariate and multivariate perspectives. If we consider in a bivariate perspective (only two branches of HRM at a time), we can explore many hidden relationships between any two branches of HRM. For example, what is the relationship between Strategic HRM and Sustainable HRM (R53, see Table 1)? What is the relationship between Green HRM and Digital HRM (R44, see Table 1)? What is the relationship between Ethical HRM and Strategic HRM (R55, see Table 1)? Likewise, we can explore many hidden and unexplored relationships among these branches of HRM.

If we consider in a multivariate perspective (more than two branches of HRM at a time), based on the bivariate relationships established among the branches of HRM, we can explore many hidden influences (interdependence) and impact among any sets of branches of HRM. For example, we can explore the influence and impact of Green HRM, Social HRM and Economic HRM (individually as well as collectively) on Sustainable HRM. If we ask a question ourselves, why exploring these types of relationships and impacts are important for the HRM field? Actually, there may be complementary, competing, substitute and orientation effects among these branches in influencing overall organizational sustainability as well as sustainable performance. If we identify exactly these effects only we can develop an 'Integrated Configuration Theory of HRM'.

However, every branch is essential to maintaining long-term viability, employee happiness, and organizational effectiveness. It is crucial to comprehend each branch of HRM to have a complete picture of how people are handled in organizations. Knowledge of the differences between various HRM branches will help the organizations to modify their people management plans to satisfy its various stakeholders and shifting competitive, technological, and economic constraints. In essence, every branch of HRM makes a distinct contribution to

efficient human capital management. By examining them all together, HR professionals can acquire the information and abilities needed to plan, carry out, and assess strategic HR activities that promote organizational success. In this regard, this review offers a multi-faceted examination of HRM, focusing on its strategic evolution across several critical domains or branches.

The multidimensional field of HRM combines several related concepts to maximize employee performance and satisfaction while accomplishing organizational objectives. Although each branch of HRM focuses on different aspects of managing people at work, they are all related to one another and together influence the HRM functions' overall efficiency and effectiveness. The need for sustainability, ethics, and digitization has been the main force behind the fundamental revolution in HRM. This has resulted in a rigorous reevaluation of the field's goals and methods as well as intense conceptual refining. Further, HRM has changed from a purely economic function to one that embraces multiple purposes as a result of the pursuit of sustainability. The focus on the Digital HRM concept, created to explain the socio-technical process of digital transformation and strategically integrate technology and HR practices to generate synergies and enhance organizational resilience and business performance, reflects this ethical shift. All things considered, the many HRM subfields are complementary pillars that support the organizations' human capital strategy rather than being separate operations. HR professionals can create and execute policies that maintain a balance between corporate success and employee well-being by having a comprehensive understanding of these branches of HRM. This ensures long-term growth and competitiveness in the changing business environment.

Further, this review outlines potential research questions/objectives (third objective of the review) along with expectations for future studies in this field, to reduce and fill knowledge gaps in branches of HRM. A list of potential research questions/objectives for the HRM branches is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of research gaps in branches of HRM

| Research Gaps | |
|---------------|---|
| 1. | To explore associations among the different branches of HRM. |
| 2. | To formulate an integrated model/theory with different branches of HRM. |
| 3. | To develop a simplified scale to measure the applications of different branches of HRM in an organization. |
| 4. | To what extent do the branches of HRM impact individually and collectively sustainable performance of the organizations in different sectors? |
| 5. | To what extent do the interactions of the branches of HRM contribute to achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs)? |
| 6. | To explore the related organizational theories connected or underpinned the branches of HRM. |
| 7. | To what extent each branch of HRM depends on other branch or branches of HRM? |

| | |
|----|---|
| 8. | <p>Which branch or branches of HRM play(s) antecedent, mediating, and moderating roles in connecting performance of HRM and employee as well as organizational performance?</p> <p>Example: Green HRM (independent variable)→Digital HRM (Mediating variable)→environmental performance of organization (dependent variable).</p> |
|----|---|

Conclusion

The development and application of all these identified branches of HRM indicate innovations and diversity of the HRM field over time. HRM is a dynamic and result oriented field of study. It has more scope and future expansion possibilities. The development in the branches of HRM revealed that HRM acclimates, adjusts, alternates, evolves and grows its capabilities, platform and roles to address the dynamically changing needs (circumstances) of business organizations as well as society at large. These trends and patterns of branches of HRM tell us the agility of the HRM field. Defining unambiguous associations and interdependency among these branches of HRM can promote more appropriate and exact applications of these branches of HRM without overlapping and contradictions. By exploring clear relationships among these branches of HRM, we can formulate an 'Integrated Configuration Theory of HRM'. To achieve this, we need more research in this area of study. Hence, this review has proposed possible research gaps in this study area.

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