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CERTIFICATE

Business Strategy & HR: Strange Bedfellows or

Strategic Allies?

(A qualitative study to unlock the value of HR as Strategic

Business Partner in the business environment of Pakistan)

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The thesis has been submitted for the fulfillment of Ph.D. requirement on July 15, 2021.

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DECLARATION

I, Syeda Hoor-Ul-Ain d/o Syed Ali Nawaz Akhtar Naqvi hereby declare that no part of the work presented by me has been plagiarized from anywhere. Proper references are cited wherever necessary.

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My Ph.D. thesis is dedicated to.....

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved family members who helped me in getting back on my feet after the knee ligament injury I had in February 2016. My complete recovery took three-and-a-half years, but their continuous encouragement has made this research work possible. Their names are important to mention as they made life easier for me:

- 1. My father - Syed Ali Nawaz Akhtar Naqvi
2. My mother - Syeda Narjis Bano
3. My younger sister - Syeda Itrat Fatima
4. My uncle - Syed Ali Niaz Akhtar Naqvi
5. My aunt Syeda Nageen Fatima
6. My younger cousin brother - Syed Muhammad Tafseer Naqvi

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¹ SHRM stands for Society of Human Resources Management. It has 3 levels for HR Generalist:

- Global Professional HR (GPHR)
- Senior Professional HR (SPHR)

- Mr. Zahid Mubarik, SHRM-SCP, SPHRI, GPHR
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- Professional HR (PHR)
- It has 2 more following levels for top tier HR professionals who lead the HR function and align HR strategies to organizational goals.

- SHRM-SCP
- SHRM-CP

² CIPD stands for Certified Institute of Personnel Development.

It has following levels:

- Student Member.
- Foundation Member.
- Associate Member.
- Chartered Member.
- Chartered Fellow.
- Academic member grades.
- Affiliate Member.

³ HRCI stands for HR Certification Institute.

⁴ HRMP stands for Human Resources Management Professional.

⁵ SPHRI™ stands for Senior Professional in Human Resources - International™

⁶ Global remuneration professional.

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Abstract

This qualitative study reviews the paradoxical incertitude and the conundrum of strategic perceived value of HR in the global and Pakistan's business environment. In Pakistan, the enigmatic perceived image of HR function vandalizes its strategic status with a significant magnitude in the post pandemic (COVID-19) world and hurled it at the risk of irrelevancy in the changing world of digitalization. HR function as a strategic ally faces huge pre, during, and post pandemic challenges ranging from 'rampant paradoxical navigation of its strategic positioning' to 'limited freedom/ authority of performing as a credible activist in the digital business environ'. The study focuses on evaluating the known determinants in the existing literature about the strategic fit between the dialectically scoped concepts: business strategy and HR, and documenting empirical evidence of the existing quandaries, predicaments, and dilemmas involved in the perceived and real strategic value of human resource (HR) function. Predominantly, the analysis is interpretive in nature, which uses 'Systematic Investigation' based on 'Saunders Research Onion' and 'Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)' for the evidentiary appraisal of the qualitative analysis. Nevertheless, convergent triangulation is carried out simultaneously by interviewing the top-tier representatives of HR Community of Practice to compare, equate, interpret, and justify the theoretical qualitative analysis and furnish a compendium of the authentic evidences. The views of the interviewees eased in understanding the country specific aspects, hurdles, and challenges of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) with a view to suggest a way forward of strategic alliance between dialectically aligned concepts of business strategy and HR function. In principle, this research provides an empirical evidence through which business strategy and HR function could be reliably and usefully connected in the post pandemic world. The study may become an impetus for further research and could be used in cross-societal, cross-border, and cross-state comparative research for the business world.

Key words: Strategic Ally or Business Partner; Strategic Human Resource Management, Digital HR, Global Pandemic (COVID-19), Crisis Management, Pakistan

کاروباری حکمت عملی اور ایچ آر: اجنبی رفیق یا اسٹریجک اتحادی؟

پاکستان میں ایچ آر کی بطور اسٹریجک کاروباری ساتھی کی اہمیت کو بیان کرنے

کے لیے معیاری تحقیقی تجزیہ

خلاصہ

زیر نظر معیاری تحقیقی مقالے کا مقصد عالمی اور پاکستانی کاروباری ماحول میں ایچ آر حکمت عملی کے حوالے سے رائج خلاف حقیقت ہے یقینی، ہے اعتباری اور ابہامات کا جائزہ لینا ہے، بالخصوص پاکستان میں ایچ آر افعلات کے حوالے سے اس شعبہ کی ناقص تصویر کشی نے اس کی اسٹریجک اہمیت کو بڑا نقصان پہنچایا ہے۔ کرونا کے بعد کی بدلتی ہوئی دنیا جس میں ہر چیز ڈیجیٹل ہو رہی ہے، مستقبل کے بیشتر ابہامات نے اس شعبہ کو غیر ضروری شعبہ بن جانے کے خطرے سے دو چار کر دیا ہے۔ قبل از کرونا، عہد دوران، اور بعد از کرونا، کاروباری دنیا میں ایچ آر افعلات کے بطور اسٹریجک ساتھی کی حیثیت کو بیشمار چیلنجز کا سامنا ہے جس میں ایچ آر افعلات کے اسٹریجک مقام کے تعین کی جانب تیز ترین قیاس آرائیوں سے لے کر "نئے ڈیجیٹل کاروباری ماحول میں ایچ آر کے ایک قابل اعتماد کا رکن ہونے کی حیثیت سے اپنا کردار ادا کرنے کی محدود آزادی" تک کے مسائل شامل ہیں۔ مزید برآں زیر نظر تحقیق میں اس حوالے سے موجود مطالعہ جات میں جدلیاتی وسعت کے حامل دو اہم تصورات جن میں کاروباری حکمت عملی اور ایچ آر اور انسانی وسائل (ایچ آر) افعلات کی حقیقی اور تصوراتی اہمیت اور اس پر موجود شبہات و ابہامات، اور ناپسندیدگی کے حوالے سے شواہد کی تجرباتی دستاویز سازی کے درمیان اسٹریجک فٹ کا بھی جائزہ لیا گیا ہے۔ یہ تجزیہ بنیادی طور پر تشریحی ہے جو کہ سونٹرس ریسرچ ان بن" اور "ریڈی ایویٹنس انسٹیٹیوٹ (آر ای اے)" کی بنیاد پر کیا گیا ہے، تاکہ معیاری تجزیہ کے لیے شواہدات کی جانچ کی جا سکے، اس مقصد کے لیے مماثل مٹلی تقسیم کے طریقہ کار کا استعمال کرتے ہوئے ایچ آر سے منسلک اعلیٰ عہدوں پر فائز افسران کے انٹرویو کیے گئے تاکہ نظری معیاری تجزیہ کی وضاحت، تشریح اور موازنہ کے ساتھ درست شواہدات کا خلاصہ پیش کیا جا سکے۔ انٹرویو میں پیش کیے جانے والے خیالات سے نہ صرف اسٹریجک ہیومن ریسورس مینجمنٹ کو سمجھنے میں آسانی ہوئی بلکہ اس کے ساتھ پاکستان میں اس شعبہ کے مختلف پہلوؤں، اس میں حائل رکاوٹوں اور چیلنجز کو جاننے میں بھی مدد ملی، جس سے کاروباری حکمت عملی اور ایچ آر افعلات سے منسلک جدلیاتی تصورات کے درمیان تعلق کے حوالے سے تجاویز مرتب کرنے میں مدد ملی ہے۔ مذکورہ تحقیق کے حوالے یہ کیا جا سکتا ہے کہ اس تحقیق میں ایسے تجربی شواہد فراہم کیے گئے ہیں جن کے ذریعے وبا کے بعد کی دنیا میں رائج ہونے والی کاروباری حکمت عملی اور ایچ آر افعلات کے درمیان تعلق کو کارآمد طور پر استعمال کرنے میں مدد ملے گی۔ پیش نظر تحقیق، اس موضوع پر مزید تحقیق کے لیے ایک ایسی تحریک فراہم کرے گی جس کو بین المعاشرتی، بین الزیاسمی اور موازنہ جاتی تحقیق کے لیے استعمال کیا جاسکتا ہے۔

Chapter 1

Introduction and Overview of Thesis

Business Strategy & HR: Strange Bedfellows or Strategic Allies?

(A qualitative study to unlock the value of HR as Strategic Business Partner in the business environment of Pakistan)

Chapter 1» Introduction and Overview

Today's paradoxical business environment leads to strategic and policy incertitude where the human resources (HR) function has been struggling for the last three-and-a-half decades to establish its credibility and value as strategic business ally in the eyes of key stakeholders, as well as the C-Suite Officers and Board Members across the world. The highly competitive, ruthless, uncertain, ambivalent, and precarious business environ forces organizations to deal with socio-economic crisis where all C-Suite Officers and Board Members look at HR Function to join them as a Strategic Business Partner to capitalize on human resources expected competencies to maximize productivity and return on investment (ROI) (Eifron, Gandossy, & Goldsmith, 2003; Armstrong M., 2006; Ulrich D., 2009; Mahendru & Kaleka, 2011; Hoor-UI-Ain, 2014). Over the years, specifically during the last three-and-a-half decades, the role of HR function keeps on changing from an administrative expert to employee champion and then from change agent to strategic partner which later transformed into catalyst of change and HR as Strategic Business Partner⁷ (Ulrich D., 1997; Ulrich & Beaty, 2001). Ulrich's

⁷ Strategic Business Partner (SBP): As stated by Hoor-UI-Ain (2014), "SPB is a relationship between business and HR function characterized by cooperation and responsibility on a strategic level for the fulfillment and achievement of specified shared business goals".

Model of HR Roles⁸ explained in his book "Human Resource Champions: The Next Agenda for Adding Value and Delivering Results" is illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Ulrich's Model of HR Roles: From Administrative Expert to Strategic Partner

Dave Ulrich Model of HR Roles



In the mid-1990s, the concept of HR business partnering was enunciated in the literature (Ulrich D., 1997) and the credit goes to Dr. Dave Ulrich⁹ who is also the recipient of the "Lifetime Achievement Award" from HR Magazine for being honored with the title "Father of Modern Human Resources" in 2012 (Tay, 2015; Sengupta, 2017; Nguwi, 2020). Ulrich identified four chief/ central roles for HR professionals that are shown above in figure 1. According to him, these four roles are very critical during the pre-pandemic era for all those organizations who were striving to gain the

⁸ Source: (Web-link: https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=qTxz67INSEC&printsec=frontcover&source=qbs_g_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&l=false)

⁹ Dr. Dave Ulrich's Profile: <https://www.rbl.net/about-us/consultants/dave-ulrich>

competitive edge in meeting the technological and politico-socio-economic challenges at the global, regional, local levels. Such organizations must need to adapt to this basic Model of HR Roles for the future success in terms of profitability. His research work sets the baseline for the recognition of HR function as a champion as it holds the key to make the business partnership a reality and has an eager to develop business acumen to transform itself into a 'value adding function'. His 360-degree study covering the responses of HR professionals, line managers, academics and consultants that began in 1987 is now in its 8th round in 2021. The study is focusing on aligning the HR strategy to the business strategy by adopting the befitting HR competencies to address the pre, during, and post pandemic HR challenges through workforce planning and development while measuring an organization's competencies as well (RBL Group, 2021).

This paradoxical research work is an analytical study of the scholarly contributions of Dr. Dave Ulrich and several other HR professionals to bridge the gap between theory and practice. It is important to redefine the roles of human resource professionals to deal with the post pandemic challenges organizations face to stay relevant in the industry/ market.

The emerging concept of Equal Opportunity Employer¹⁰ has not only surmounted the extra-ordinary expectations from the HR function to become an ambassador of employees' physical, social, emotional, and mental wellbeing but also look forward at HR to contemplate and embrace all forms of 'Workforce Ethics, Inclusion & Diversity' at workplace all across the world (Cornelius, 2002; Stella & Hoobler, 2014; Shore, Jeanette, & Sanchez, 2018). Correspondingly, at present, struggling and striving for a C-Suite¹¹ role HR

¹⁰ **Equal Opportunity Employer:** It refers to an employer who does not discriminate against any job applicant and appreciates diversity and inclusion. Such employer welcomes credible applicants with physical or mental disabilities from all races, colors, religions, castes, creeds, national origins, ethnicities, marital statuses, ages, sex, etc.

¹¹ **C-Suite:** It refers to the top-level executives within a company/ firm/ bank etc. For example - Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO), and Chief Information Officer (CIO).

While the significance of the HR function is being recognized in Pakistan and it is becoming a priority agenda item of the corporate world in the country to be partaken as a business ally but still facing precariousness of poor perception within the organizations. This qualitative research will be a detailed inquiry for exploring the eliciting ideas, expanding knowledge perspectives, uncovering business partner issues involved in re-inventing and changing context of HR business partnering to unlock the value of HR as a Strategic Business Ally/ Partner in the business environment of Pakistan.

In this study, the challenges, focusing on the implications COVID-19 has for Human Resources Management (HRM) to help the organizations and their workforce to cope-up with the newly altered work environment and learn to adapt to the new normal. Furthermore, several approaches for future research are recommended for tackling the up-coming challenges and to advocate the role of Strategic Business Partner during global healthcare and economic crisis.

1.1 Research Objective

This qualitative study examines the key challenges for dealing with the emerging role of the HR function in Pakistan's pre and post COVID business environment. It also expounds on the existing quandaries, predicaments, and dilemmas involved in the perceived and real strategic value of human resource (HR) function and aims to focus on the transference of its transactional role to high-tech advancement which now has translated into a great focus on strategic business initiatives.

The explicit objectives of the study are:

- Determine and infer HR professionals' knowledge about the businesses in which they operate.
- Identify the overall level of concern of top management (C-Suite Officials and Board Members) for not recognizing HR as a Strategic Business Partner.
- Obtain precise cognizance of the top management (C-Suite Officials and Board Members) and HR professionals' behaviors, choices and

function must continue its journey a long way to take the lead as a Strategic Business Partner by enabling itself to deal with business crisis by embarking upon business continuity plans during economic turmoil. Henceforth, crisis management has also been added to the portfolio of HR function in the modern-day corporate world. Inclusion of HR function in 'crisis management' as a 'Strategic Business Partner' is a significant development enabling the business to equip its human capital with the requisite skillset for crisis management through proper HR planning and training to alter worsening business situations to favorable outcomes (Naznin & Hussain, 2016; Athamneh, 2018).

In the recent times, HR function has experienced dynamic, vital, and vigorous shifts in its roles, functions, and practices which has created a global impact in transforming organizations to embrace technology at the strategic front. It is a high time for HR function to embed technology in its portfolio for driving strategic business growth and exhibit leadership at C-Suite level. The need for a digital transformation has now become indispensable for the HR function as sooner or later the inclusion of data science and business technological shift will put a big question mark on the traditional operations of HR function (Rao, 2019; Strohmeier, 2020).

The idea of '**business driven HR function**' has been positively hailed across the world and received very vital attention in Pakistan as well. Unlike today's HR function, the function of the ancient times was viewed as personnel department which was underrecognized as a support function and held responsible for record keeping of the employees (Armstrong M. , 2006). The concept still prevails in the developing and third world countries with a makeover in name only. In Pakistan, the business approach of including HR function as 'Strategic Business Partner' has achieved important status during the last decade. Relentlessly, the idea is receiving vital attention for its incubation in indigenous environment predominantly as 'Business Driven HR Competency Models' to embark upon business continuity plans.

Depending upon the organization hierarchy or charter, this slot includes Directors, Executive Directors, Board of Directors, Vice Presidents and Presidents as well.

actions that are critical to business performance in today's business tech-savvy environment.

- Document the HR function's inclination for being involved in strategic affairs and to enumerate their opinions in policy-making and decision-making processes.

This study also aims to encounter the ill-perceived value of human resource (HR) function against the expected performance in terms of strategic effectiveness.

1.2 Research Problem

Pakistan stands within the developing countries enclave on the global map. The country's economy has been managed by various multi-national companies (MNCs)/ Banks which are operational on its land since ages and many subsidiaries of these MNCs/ Banks are also mushrooming as well. These MNCs have well established HR Departments but many of the local businesses/ organizations are still running with older version of personnel departments across the country. In today's post pandemic world, the digital business environment forces HR function to deliver business results faster than the competition in the nosedived economy. The HR Function is at a critical inflection point where it is expected to act as a strategic business ally to equip an organization with high-performance teams to win in the marketplace. Unluckily, the ill-perceived value of human resource (HR) function against the expected performance in terms of strategic effectiveness is continuously turning into disrepute for multiple reasons. Rational affirmation of varied reasons during these unprecedented circumstances unfolds stressful realities. However, some of the reasons are unrealistic (Batool, Khan, Tahir, & Idris, 2016). The concept of strategic business partner has been emerging as one of the burgeoning business practices over the last three decades across the globe. The HR practitioners have been actively trying their level best to deal with the 'conundrum of strategic perceived value of HR' in the business context across Pakistan since pre COVID era. The ill-perceived value mayhem of human resource (HR) function against the expected performance in Pakistan has exacerbated with a large magnitude in terms of strategic

effectiveness in the post pandemic (COVID-19) world and has now become the most heightened issue being faced by HR practitioners (Gerpott, 2015). The HR function had already been tagged with a poor reputation in the pre COVID era. The study reveals that the earlier discussed conundrum may be dealt tactfully by mitigating the dichotomy between dialectically scoped concepts of business strategy and Human Resources Management (HRM). This shall help the HR function in becoming a strategic fit in the post COVID digital environ of the business world.

In post pandemic world, HR practitioners are in an ultra-critical position to develop the requisite competency set for the strategic HR development to partner with the business and deliver sustainable financial results during these unprecedented testing times. More significantly and specifically in Pakistan, HR practitioners lack in digital capacity building to develop potential resources that will increase an organization's future value. This requires a well-thought-out strategic approach to value creation and a deeper understanding of the stakeholders to develop a sustainable digital ecosystem for the organizational survival in the post pandemic world. One of the biggest hindrance in becoming a strategic ally is the exceptional and distinctive business strategy of each organization. HR practitioners are facing dearth of concrete guidance/ models in fulfilling the role in different industries. The HR practitioners may grow and develop the skill set within the same industry, but they face with variety of challenges when they switch from one industry to the other.

The study explores by what means and to what degree HR practitioners may be able to improve the alluded perception of Pakistan's contemptuous business leaders and stake their claim to be a credible player as a 'strategic business ally' in the post pandemic world. This matter of contention has also received a great deal of attention both in practice and in the literature. However, the literature does not provide a definitive solution to bridge the gap between business strategy and HR function over the last three-and-a-half decades but provides with an academic viewpoint towards the vision synchronization between the two dialectically scoped concepts. The

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) in its operations and organizational development as a digital evangelist.

Specific research purpose includes strategic implications of HR role in the pre, present, and post pandemic dynamic business environment of Pakistan. Aligning human resources and strategic plans by contributing strategic value as a Strategic Business Partner is the urgent need in the digitally revolutionized post pandemic world. Unlike several organizations across the world, many local organizations in Pakistan are still struggling to realize the theoretical concept of HR business partnering at work. Some of the small and medium sized organization may suffer from ostracism if they failed to take their HR functions on board for identifying the market opportunities and then seize to realize those opportunities as strategic allies. Besides, this research provides with a way forward to the local organization to survive in the digital economy. The study will also impact the organizational success in the marketplace by establishing their HR functions as a true strategic allies and successful contributors to business performance, its continuity plans, and crisis management.

Subsequently, the study helps the author in growing academically and professionally in the field of Human Resources Management. It also helps in shaping the future of the organizations and winning business in the country with a competitive advantage. Qualitative research findings enrich the author's knowledge bank and ease in career progression as a consultant in the field of organizational development. The research also enables the author in providing with business advisory on HR issues by developing customized learning programs for all business sectors of Pakistan. Notwithstanding the above, the research opens a gateway for HR fraternity of Pakistan to accelerate business through human capability in the post pandemic world. It will also help in establishing "market-oriented ecosystem" (MOE) for the local organizations to operate in the global digital world and anticipating market opportunities by reinventing to deliver employee well-being, customer value, investor confidence, and community reputation.

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study also contributes to the evaluation of future HR management from the perspective of top tier HR professionals and offers help to the budding HR professionals and students in understanding the changing role of HR.

1.3 Research Questions

The contextual framework of the following research questions is explicated in Chapter 3 in the methodology section 3.4.2:

- 1.3.1 What is known in the existing literature in general about the 'conundrum of strategic perceived value of HR' in the business context across the world?
- 1.3.2 What is known in the existing literature about the 'conundrum of strategic perceived value of HR' in the business context across Pakistan?
- 1.3.3 Will the strategic fit between business and HRM strategy influence HRM Effectiveness and organizational performance?
- 1.3.4 What is known in the existing literature about the social paradox of the pivotal role to be played by the HR Function in bringing business transformation ranging from Pre-COVID to Post-COVID era?
- 1.3.5 What are the known determinants that provokes the controversial debates on the digital HR evolution for shaping the future of HR Function as a strategic ally?
- 1.3.6 Is HR at risk of irrelevancy in the changing world of work?

1.4 Research Rationale

The purpose of this study is to deal with the emerging provocations in the field of Human Resources Management in the 21st Century; to challenge the conventional wisdom; and proposing a novel way forward for future research to analyze the relationship between the dialectically scoped concepts: business strategy and human resources management in the post pandemic world. Both the concepts are associated with the dogma of HR function and its role in sustaining the business success, contributing towards strategic decision-making, and adding tangible value through embedding

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Moreover, the research will help the author in navigating the required competency set, characteristics of an effective HR department for delivering business driven results to create HR's impact in post pandemic crisis. It is very challenging and yet not attainable goal of refereeing HR as a strategic business partner in Pakistan.

1.5 Research Design and Methodology:

The study follows systematic investigations – a step by step process of applying 'Saunders Research Onion' to embark upon a model. The research design, paradigm, philosophy, methodical choice, strategy, time horizon, and overall techniques and procedure are discussed in Chapter 3 in detail.

The brief overview of the research design edifies that the foundation of research design of this qualitative epistemological research is standing on the pillars of interpretivism and pragmatism. Convergent triangulation is applied to compare and interpret results to justify qualitative analysis carried out via Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) methodology and Interviews of the representative members of the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM). The complete details are explained in Chapter 3.

1.6 Limitations

This study covers a sizeable and significant utilization of a wide-ranging literature to assess the authenticity, value, and strength of the evidence available to answer the research questions focusing on the 'conundrum of strategic perceived value of HR' in the business context of the pre and post pandemic eras. All-inclusive secondary resources have been critically analyzed to surmount the conventional opposition of locking out the C-Suite HR Professionals from the boardrooms and expecting them to contribute as strategic allies. Although, ample scholarly and popular/ grey literature is available to debate on HR's potential as a Strategic Business Partner in pre pandemic era, but much lesser research is being done over the last year during the pandemic period (i.e., from January – December 2020) to cope-up the HR challenges of the post pandemic world.

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The research design and methodology outlined in section 1.5 which will be further delineated in Chapter 3 illustrates a huge reliance upon the efficiency and effectiveness of the search engines used in this research. This study uses a structured method of evidence identification, assessment, and review of the literature in line with the itemized search axioms or phrases in form of search terms or strings and follows all requisite protocols of assigning weights of evidence (WoE) for the extracting reliable and authentic results.

To address these limitations, many authentic research repositories were used as search engines to fetch and extract the most relevant literature by developing a broad scoped search string(s). Strict protocols of Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) methodology often filter a set of studies that fall beyond the scope defined in search protocols but somehow deems merit to be relevant to present the contrary arguments. To avoid the element of search biased results, a snowball search technique was undertaken while finalizing the evidence assessment, along with a specified series of REA process through manual searches. This helped in including a wide range of studies that would have been omitted or got unnoticed if considerate approach is not applied. However, the research findings presented in this study include a broader review of the pre-COVID outbreak literature but identifying and assessing evidence of post-COVID literature is not covered on a very large scale as it's been one-and-a-half year only. During the pandemic, RBL Group¹² has conducted a very comprehensive study which is very thoroughly analyzed in conjunction with the interviews conducted for triangulation. Overall, the traditional process of identifying and assessing evidence for a systematic review is mainly focused on digital libraries and publicly available search engines. A few of the researches published by the Department for International Development, London, England, UK also dealt with this limitation in the same way (Department for International Development (DFID), March 2014, p. 18; White & Fortune, 2015).

¹² The RBL Group is a business consulting firm. The Group has HR experts who develop leaders and increase the capabilities of HR professionals to contribute to the business for the sustainable results. (Source: <https://www.rbl.net>).

Now, the upper echelons of the business world at the global level are ready to give the strategic seat to HR function to deal with the post pandemic challenges but HR leaders are still facing obstacles in getting into the decision making at the local level in Pakistan. On top of that most of the HR professionals in Pakistan's are reluctant to share quantitative data for HR Analytics as their organizations has a data confidentiality issues. Using an objective and logical framework of sampling, Pakistan based HR professionals from renowned International HR Professional Certification Bodies were interviewed. They had been advised not to disclose the organizational identity so that they may be able to share their honest views in a capacity of a member of International HR Professional Certification Body. In-depth interviews of these HR professionals were also taken to avoid biased outcome of the research. Categorical and procedural details are explained in the sections of 3.4.3, 3.4.4, and 3.6 of Chapter 3.

1.7 Practical Implications

More research needs to be done on the conundrum of strategic perceived value of HR in the Pakistan's business environment. The rising importance of HR as a strategic and technological evangelist indicates an urgent need for development interventions to nurture the profession and also to protect it from the risk of irrelevancy in the digital era.

1.8 Originality Value

The study contributes towards the pre and post global pandemic (COVID-19) challenges of HR as business ally and suggested that the present-day literature requires a rational systematic revision along with a substantial evaluation of the contemporary and unprecedented circumstances of the global pandemic to provide pragmatic, customized, and business strategy driven solutions in the light of observational evidence.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Chapter 2» Literature Review

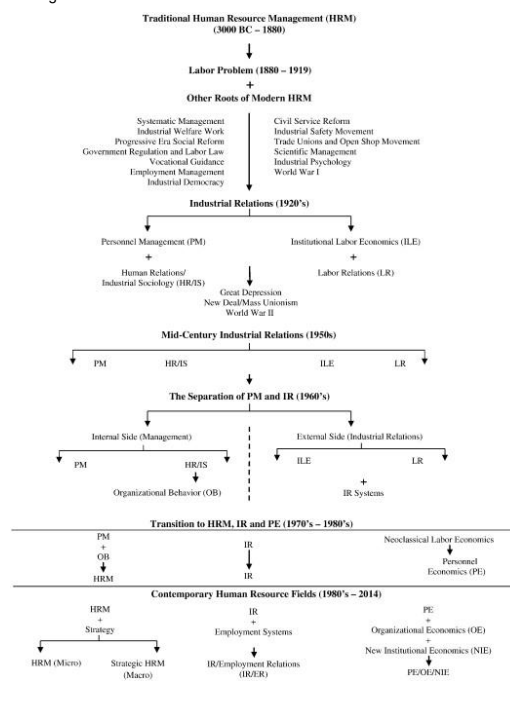
The 'conundrum of perceived value of HR' as a strategic business partner in business studies has received a considerable degree of attention both in the scholarly literature and in practice across the globe (Snell & Youndt, 1995; Mishra, Sarkar, & Singh, 2013; Gerpott, 2015; Nankervis, Rowley, & Salleh, 2016; Storey, Wright, & Ulrich, 2019). Over the years, the plenitude of ill-perceived value of human resource (HR) function against the expected performance of HR professionals has also resulted into a mayhem not only in the entire world (Lawler, 1995; Brockbank, 1999; Orlov, 1999; Lawler & Mohrman, 2000b; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003b; Storey, Wright, & Ulrich, 2019) but also in Pakistan as well (Riaz, Ayaz, Wain, & Sajid, 2012; Hoor-Ul-Ain, 2014; Batool, Khan, Tahir, & Idris, 2016; Tahir & Batool, 2016; Hanif & Imran, 2017). However, the literature does not provide a perfect customized solution that may be applied to multiple businesses operating in several industries (Lawler & Mohrma, 2003) but provides with the generalized understanding of the genesis of HR journey from personnel management to strategic business partner. This chapter covers both global and Pakistan's perspectives in the context of scholarly and popular literature.

2.1 The genesis of evolution: from personnel management to Human Resources Management

In business studies, Human Resource Management (HRM) is comparatively an evolving and a new discipline of management sciences which has been considered very essential for managing workforce in organizations over the last three-and-a-half decades across the globe (Tsui, 1987; Tubey, Rotich, & Kurgat, 2015). The phrase "Human Resource Management (HRM)" is an outgrowth of "Personnel Management" (Torrington, 1988; Wilkinson, 1989). The term Human Resources Management (HRM) has largely supplanted the concept of personnel management as a rendition of the processes involved in managing workforce in organizations (Kaufman, 2002; Henderson, 2011; Ulrich D. , 2015; Saha & Rowley, 2015). The concept of personnel management emerged in the late middle of 19th century and grew

into scientific management era which later focused on the welfare of the people (Eilbirt, 1959). The evolution of personnel management embraced the concepts of idealism and realism to make industries functional and provide them with a number of compatible options to deal with human beings efficiently and effectively in a professional environment (Wrege & Greenwood, 1919; Copley, 1923; Jones, 1925; Nelson, 1980). Building upon the above-mentioned evidence, it is verified that traditional HRM is a synthesis of the emergence of labor problems arose in 1880s and got resolved in 1919 through Scientific Management which later transformed into Industrial Relations in 1920s having two significant pillars namely, Personnel Management (PM) and Industrial Labor Economics (ILE). After the World War II, the mid-century Industrial Revolution which took place in 1950s introduced the concept of Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS) along with the Personnel Management and Industrial Labor Economics (ILE) which later separated Personnel Management and Industrial Relations in 1960s (Jacoby, 2003; Kaufman, 2014). During the decade of 1970s - 1980s, the concepts of Personnel Management and Organizational Behavior clubbed together, and the transition phase led to the formation of the concept of Human Resources Management (HRM) whereas Personnel Economics had replaced the concept of Neoclassical Labor Economics. However, Industrial Relations remains intact and enjoyed its powerful role with its own realm of jurisdiction (Wren & Bedeian, 2009; Kaufman, 2014). Contrarily, a swift periodic transition had been witnessed in the history of traditional Human Resources Management (HRM) from 1980s to 2014 where contemporary issues in the field of Human Resources Management (HRM) were mainly focused to introduce the concepts of Strategic Human Resources Management (SHRM) to deal with macro level business issues. Similarly, the concept of Employee Relations replaced Industrial Relations to broaden the management of employee systems (Kaufman, Beaumont, & Helfgott, 2003). Furthermore, Personnel, Organizational, and New Institutional Economics were clubbed together to operate collectively for running the businesses (Kaufman, 2009). Diagrammatic impression is illustrated in figure 2 (Kaufman, 2014).

Figure 2: Historical Development of Traditional Human Resources Management¹³



¹³ Source: (Kaufman, 2014, p. 197) https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1053482214000114?casa_token=Q9GBerrnodAAAAAA:kenj_mXand09id3xflw1Pw5ddExNys-i74l8CaPloK76sIt2SKIH337hvb120Bsbsjy58KONWArne

The advancement in the field of Human Resource Management from the 19th century to the beginning of the 21st century is a developmental journey and documented/ described as a roller coaster of change by several authors in literature, including (Eilbirt, 1959; Ling, 1965; Skinner, 1981; Lawrence, 1985; Guillén, 1994; Dulebohn, Ferris, & Stodd, 1995; Kaufman, 2009; Szabla, Pasmore, Barnes, & Gipson, 2017). Many authors noted with extra saliency that the historical development of HRM has its roots in personnel management provide which provides an authoritative and authentic account of current trends and developments in Human Resource Management (HRM) (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2009). Moreover, the evidence quoted in earlier discussed researches accentuates that the historical perspective is very instrumental in deriving a way forward for developing good understanding and enhancing the present-day Human Resources Management (HRM) research.

2.2 The genesis of evolution: from Human Resource Management to Strategic Human Resource Management

The evolution of the concept of HRM emerged with the 'human relations movement'¹⁴ in the 20th century. It was the time when importance was given to creating business value through the strategic management of the workforce in scholarly literature (Lundy, 1994; Nankervis, Baird, Coffey, & Shields, 2011; Ahammad, 2017; Zhu & Warner, 2019). The human relations movement is witnessed as the antecedent of the modern human resources function and took the concept of human resources management forward from traditional to modern phase of development. George Elton Mayo's Hawthorne studies played a heraldic role in bringing a historical paradigm shift in the organizational systems by giving importance to the employee wellbeing for adding value to an organization in term of higher workplace productivity (Uddina & Hossain, 2015; HR Zone, n.d.). Modern era of Human Resources

Management addressed various problems and issues of scientific management. It was founded on the principles of optimal utilization of human resources and mechanical objects in a systematic way to increase organizational performance (Berg, 2001; Uyar & Deniz, 2012). It denotes the key developments in HR practice during the last two to three decades. Mainly, the development of symbolic relationship between 'theory and practice' in HRM concepts (Armstrong M., 2006).

The hallmark of the genesis of Human Resources Management (HRM) evolution is underpinned in its definition. The historical overview of literature envisages several divergent and disproportionate definitions of HRM (Dulebohn, Ferris, & Stodd, 1995; Ferris, Rosen, & Barnum, 1995; Strauss, 2001; Mahoney, 2008; Boxall & Purcell, 2016) and brings multi-faceted narratives from 1970s to 1980s (Kaufman, 2014). Encountered with the wide range of narratives, a few authors did a classical work to evade the inclusion of arbitrary and prescriptive definitions in scholarly literature. Their masterpiece work helped in adopting a comprehensive and generic definition as it comprises of very authentic supervised work covering the studies carried out since the beginning of human civilization. In the light of their intellectual contribution Human Resource Management (HRM) is defined as:

"The management of people in organizations for economic production of goods and services." (Kaufman, 2014, p. 198)

This above-mentioned ideation is viewed as a very extensive work by various scholars because it disregards the previous prescriptive definitions based on meaningful analysis (Bass, 1994; Mahoney, 2008). This brief review presented earlier on the evolution of human resource management is focused on rational business continuity and societal change. Presently, the socio-technical, socio-technological, and socio-emotional aspects of work are considered essential for the business continuity as well as sustainable future developments. Interestingly, the two distinct broad models of HRM namely, the

traditional approach to the scientific management phase and then to the modern era of management.

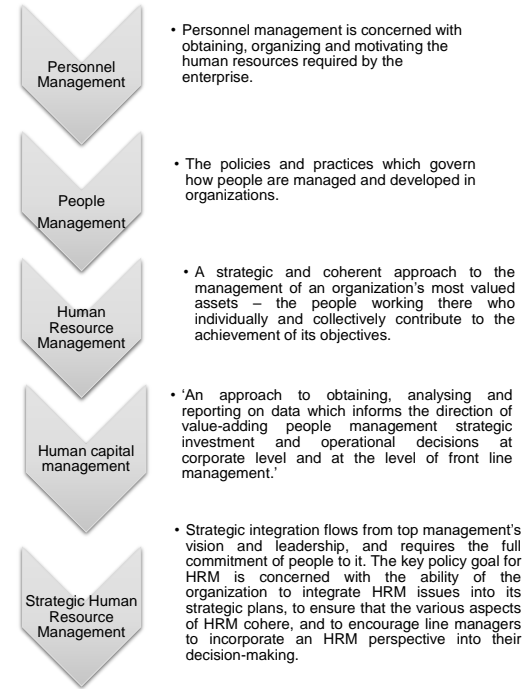
¹⁴ **Human Relations Movement:** A renowned sociologist George Elton Mayo is known as the father of the human relations movement. In 1930s, he founded the movement through a series of experiments of Hawthorne studies by exploring the impact of employee satisfaction/wellbeing on workplace productivity. The movement took HRM studies from

Traditional HRM and Modern HRM are an outgrowth of the generic definition of HRM (Kaufman, 2009; Kaufman, 2014). The symbolic characteristic of traditional HRM is dearth of people management as a recognizable business activity. The traditional era of HRM was led by the elementary scientific management principles and practices till 1880 (Jacoby, 1985; Nelson, 1995). A revolution of modern HRM challenged the traditional principles within the next thirty-five years i.e., up to World War I. In 1919, the traditional HRM model was replaced by an integrated modern HRM model (Kaufman, Beaumont, & Helfgott, 2003; Kaufman, 2009; Kaufman, 2014).

Evidence from literature stated that the evolution factor of HR begins from 'personnel management' which later transformed into 'people management' and in the recent times has taken the shape of 'human capital management', 'talent management', 'learning and development', and over all transformation of HR processes along with 'organizational development' in Human Resources Management (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Boxall & Purcell, 2006; Frigo & Uebelhart, 2016; Boon, Eckardt, Lepak, & Boselie, 2018). Similarly, other studies also refer the evolution of Human Resource Management (HRM) as a fortifier of all the HR activities as a way of disrupting old 'theory and practice of personnel management' and making a way for new framework for defining the concepts of HRM, its system, and describing its various models and discussing the aims and objectives of its strategic transformation (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007; Storey J., 2007; Armstrong M., 2009). The summary of the evolution of strategic human resources management as defined by Armstrong (1977; 1984; 1988; 1991; 1995; 1996) in his six Handbooks on Personnel Management Practice, five Handbooks on Human Resources Management Practice (1999; 2001; 2003; 2006; 2009), and three Armstrong's Handbooks on Human Resources Management Practice (co-authored by Taylor) (2014; 2017; 2020), respectively is illustrated in figure 3. These studies also contributed towards developing an edifice of strong foundation of Human Resources Management and helped in revising its role as a strategic ally. The road travelled through these studies played a significant role in compounding schools of thoughts and doing historical analysis to derive the contemporary implications for transforming Human

Resources Management (HRM) into Strategic Human Resources Management (SHRM).

Figure 3: Evolutions of Strategic Human Resources Management



As explained earlier that Human Resources Management (HRM) is fundamental to management curriculum and it is verified through research-

based evidence (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2009). Over the years, HRM has been emerged as an important field for businesses both in its traditional and modern ways (Strauss, 2001; Kaufman, 2014; Boxall & Purcell, 2016). Emphasizing Human Resources Management pedigree in personnel management, industrial relations, and industrial psychology, many authors noted that people management and enabling high performance teams fall under the ambit of its traditional role whereas aligning the human resource function with the strategic goals of the business to gaining competitive advantage in the market signifies its modern role (Clark, Grant, & Heijltjes, 2000; Mahoney, 2008; Bratton, 2017).

Over the period of years, the evolution of HR function ranges from transactional role to technological advancement which now has translated into a great focus on strategic business initiatives (Fritsch & Brezinski, 1988; Armstrong M., 2006; Bondarouk, Marsman, & Rekers, 2014; Dessler, 2020). The emergence of the concept of human resources has been hailed as a significant and meaningful development in business studies with an emphasis on practical implications of academic evolution in terms of novelty and originality with major ramifications for HR practitioners (Sheehan, 2005). Initially, the concept of Human Resource Management (HRM) has been labelled with two distinct models: soft and hard. The soft model emphasizes on the HRM's ascendancy as a contribution towards organizational behavior which is based on the self-regulated behavior at the hub of people-centric strategic approach. Contrarily, the hard model accentuates the logical framework of a strategic fit and gives prominence to the performance management by placing importance on the economic output of an organization (Truss, 1999). Both the models were debated and reappraised to analyze the contradictory approaches in the literature. Several in-depth empirical studies reviewed and challenged the theoretical foundations of both the models and concluded that the rhetoric of HRM is 'soft', the reality is always 'hard' as it is based on rationalism. This peculiarity between rhetoric and reality is further conceptualized to build the foundation of strategic human resource management and more authentic HRM models were presented in 1980s and 1990s (Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern, & Stiles, 1997;

Lapaña, Maurâne, & Stariñeca, 2014; Aust (Ehner), Matthews, & Muller-Camenb, 2020).

Many researchers claimed the advent of the concept of Human Resource Management into the Strategic Human Resource Management through comparative studies, case studies, organizational discourses, and practical implementation (Özçelik & Aydınli, 2006; Petrovic, Saridakis, & Johnsto, 2018; Zhao, Sheehan, Cieri, & Cooper, 2019). However, other studies contributed academically to develop the acceptance and understanding of Human Resource Management as a contemporary issue within the realm of education to enable aspiring HR professionals with the requisite competency set owing to the sustained evolutionary nature of the HRM discipline (McCartney, Murphy, & Mccarthy, 2020). The concept of Strategic Human Resources Management or Strategic HRM evolved in the literature through the models of HRM namely, the matching model of HRM (Fombrun, Tichy, & Devan, 1984); the Harvard model of HRM (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills, & Walton, 1984); the 5-P model of HRM (Schuler R. S., 1992); the contextual model of HRM (Schuler & Jackson, 2007); the European model of HRM (Brewster, 1993; Mabey, Salaman, & Storey, 1998). These models collectively and unanimously indicated a focused congruency in organizational structure with organizational strategy and discussed the alignment of critical management tasks, human resource systems, practices, and policies with the organizational strategic goals to drive the set strategic objectives of the organization with a view to add value to the organization(s). However, a few authors are of an opinion that the concept of strategic human resource management evolved in late 1970s. Subsequently, the theoretical revisions in the previous models brought exponential development in the quantum of models and their customized propositions in the 1990s (Wright & McMahan, 1992; French, 2002). Over the years, the literature classifies four theoretically perspectives namely, universalistic, contingent, configurational, and contextual approaches. Despite the differences among these approaches, it is likely possible to utilize these multiple approaches and develop congruent-compatible business solutions while equating their limitations. (Martín-Alcázar, Romero-Fernández, & Sánchez-Gardey, 2005).

The institutional dimension was noted in scholarly literature in the early third millennium¹⁵ era (Strauss, 2001) when it was discovered that Chicago's HRM School was represented by the classical work of (Becker G. S., 1965; 1975; 1994)¹⁶ focusing on Human Capital¹⁷ characterizing the value of investment in the learning and development of an organization's workforce is equally significant as investing in machines in the business for the technology advancement. On the other hand, the Harvard's HRM School was embodied by the intellectual contribution of (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills, & Walton, 1984)¹⁸. A few British authors looked at Harvard's HRM Model as an industrial version of Thatcherism¹⁹ which usurped labor union rights (Strauss, 2001) whereas Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD)²⁰ clarifies the enduring misunderstanding of anti-union plot by setting a standard of people's development excellence and defies the assumptions based on Thatcherism (McCracken, Mclvor, Treacy, & Wall, 2017). However, US scholars have chiefly contrasted HRM with personnel administration (Strauss, 2001; Scarpello, 2009). Contrarily, comparative studies/ case studies contributed a lot towards developing the essential understanding of HR philosophy, its important

¹⁵ **The third millennium:** According to the contemporary history which is a subset of modern history ranging historical period from 1945 to the present, defines the third millennium as the AD (Anno Domini) in the Gregorian calendar. It is the current millennium spanning over the 10 centuries i.e., from 21st to 30th In years, it ranges from 2001 to 3000.

¹⁶ **Gary S. Becker** is a 1992 Nobel Laureate in Economic Science. He is known as the pioneer of applying economic analysis to human behavior and his work is recognized as the most noteworthy contribution to the field of economics in the history.

¹⁷ **Human capital:** It consists of an origination's workforce (the people) who works for the business's success. Many authors describe human capital in various contexts, but it is defined by (Bontis, Dragonetti, Jacobsen, & Roosc, 1999) in a very comprehensive manner which is as follows: "Human Capital represents the human factor..... can ensure the long-term survival of the organization".

¹⁸ The standout professor at Harvard Business School - **Michael Beer** is mainly known for his work on organizational change and strategic human resource management, and for the development of approaches/methods for strategic renewal. He was a scholar cum practitioner. He did both empirical and action researches which have been very instrumental in theory and practice (Fredberg & Pregmark, 2017).

¹⁹ **Thatcherism:** The phenomenon describes the socio-political-economic policies which were principally patroned by the former British Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher which has changed many aspects of British life. Here the term Thatcherism is particularly linked with the "privatization of nationalized industries and trade union legislation". (Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-22079683>).

²⁰ **Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD)** is the professional body of HR in the Great Britain which is a hallmark of people and organizational development for more than 100 years.

functions, and practices that are followed in different organizations of different countries in different situations so that more befitting HRM practices are evolved in the relevant situations (Storey J., 2007). The present-day outbreak of literature requires a rational systematic revision along with a substantial evaluation of the contemporary and unprecedented circumstances of the global pandemic to provide pragmatic, customized, and business strategy driven solutions in the light of observational evidence.

2.3 The genesis of revolution in Strategic Human Resource Management: a periodic journey

In 1970s, the literature set out to bring revolutionary idiosyncrasy by means of commentary and discussion about the importance of taking a strategic perspective to the field of Human Resource Management. The dramatic development which is recognized as a quantum leap in the history took place during early 1980s i.e., from 1982 to 1984 (Kaufman, 2014; Tubey, Rotich, & Kurgat, 2015). The sensational development for the incorporation of strategy into HRM was a result of a periodic publications in a Journal of Human Resource Management sponsored by the Michigan Business School. The school is accoladed as the pioneer of revolution in shifting the field of HRM from support function into a strategic zone (Tichy, 1983; Ulrich D., 1990). Drs. George Odiome, Noel Tichy, and Dave Ulrich had played a substantial and noticeable role in getting this dream come true through their groundbreaking editorial notes. They organized several research programs, surveys, and symposiums where they had invited famous and top-tier business professional along with the prominent business management academics to share their valued thoughts as a thrilling jump-start (Kaufman, 2014, p. 211). The other faculty members of the Michigan Business School acted as the trailblazers and set a landmark in the history by publishing a paper on "Strategic Planning and Human Resource Management" which later publishes as a book on "Strategic Human Resource Management" (Devanna, Fombrun, Tichy, & Warren, 1982; Fombrun, Tichy, & Devanna, 1984).

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) is also defined as "the pattern of planned to enable an organization to achieve its goals" (Wright & McMahan, 1992, p. 298). This definition played an instrumental role in bringing an eminent change in the history of the field and helped in distinguishing between Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the traditional Human Resource Management (HRM) which is founded on the following two pillars.

- It envisaged the need for an active alignment of HRM vertically with the organization's hierarchy to embed the strategic recognition of HR in an organizational culture.
- It necessitated the horizontal coordination of HR practices through a sequence of planned activities and the right composition of the "human capital resource pool" which enables the key determinants of strategic decision-making skill set of HR professionals to deliver competitive business results.

The revolutionary periodic journey of the strategic human resource management consists of three eras that links the HR strategy with the organizational performance. It also describes the multi-level issues of strategic fit and flexibility in the global context (Wright & Ulrich, 2017). The pre-eminent eras of SHRM are known in the history as the era of conceptual models which elaborated the theoretical framework for embedding the concept of SHRM in practice (Baird & Meshoulam, 1988; Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 1988); the era of empirical examination that examined the significant impact of a firm's HR practices on its return on assets (Snell & Dean, 1992; Huselid, 1995; MacDuffie, 1995; Youndt, Snell, & Dean, 1996); and the era of empirical critiques evaluated and questioned several aspects of the research conducted to recognize HRM as a strategic ally (Gerhart, Wright, Mc Mahan, & Snell, 2000; Huselid & Becker, 2000; Becker & Huselid, 2006; Aguinis, et al., 2010). These research evidences have determined that HR strategy research was primarily focused on the effects of business goals and contingencies on HR systems and policies of an organization. Relatively, lesser attention had been given to the impact of Strategic HR policies on the business results. This is regarded as the largest discrepancy in the practice

because HR had been reckoned as a support function with an operational orientation without strategic focus on business goals (Wright & Ulrich, 2017). Although, many authors presented several theories and models to bridge the gap between theory and practice, but their efforts still need periodic appraisal of the historically established theories to deal with the 'conundrum of strategic perceived value of HR' at the global, regional, and local levels (Kenton & Yarnall, 2010; Deloitte Consulting LLP, 2011; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2013; KPMG International, 2019).

2.4 The genesis of revolutionary role of HR as strategic business partner: a periodic journey

Numerous evidences in literature provides a very thorough, modern, and critical review of the key practices of Strategic Human Resource Management theories and have drawn the major focus on their application to synthesize and evaluate the proactive role for human resource management professionals in organizations as HR practitioners or change agents (Salaman, Storey, & Billsberry, 2005). The in-depth review of the strategic human resource management literatures highlights a strong connection among the following three critical strategic variables namely: knowledge management, management development, and strategic agility to establish a strong foundation for HR to stand as a strategic business ally. Likewise, many others have argued that strengthening the linkage of the above-mentioned variables played an instrumental role in the application of theory at work and understanding the practical implications of the strategic business partner roles in the field of human resource management (Ananthram S., 2016).

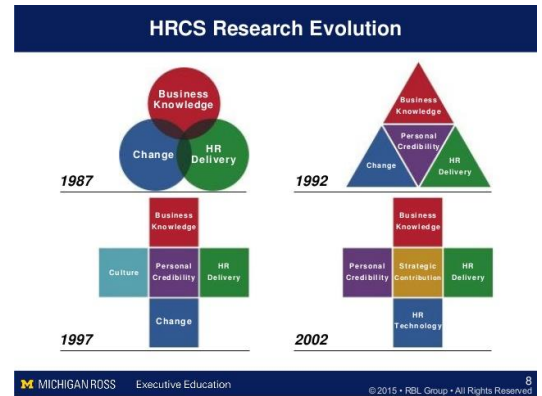
As discussed earlier, countless Handbooks of Human Resource Management have been written by several authors with an emphasis on theory and practice. In 1990s, a revolution came, and around 78 authors including prominent HR academics and practitioners joined hands to design a curriculum and wrote a few Handbooks of Human Resource Management to bridge the gap between academic research and professional practice. The handbook had been considered an exclusive resource for HR practitioners

and an essential advanced level learning for under and post graduate students of Human Resources Management (Ferris, Rosen, & Barnum, 1995). The trend continued in the next decades and the scientific literature reflected very comprehensive coverage of the periodic journey of HR as a strategic business partner both in theory and practice consisting of contemporary issues and future challenges. (Ulrich D. , 1997; Becker, Huselid, & Ulrich, 2001; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; Ulrich, Brockbank, & Johnson, 2008; Ulrich D. , 2009). The road travelled via global surveys conducted over the years to diagnose the befitting competency set for the HR professionals to contribute towards the business as a strategic ally entails several rounds, conducted by The RBL Group and the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan (Ulrich D. , 1997; Becker, Huselid, & Ulrich, 2001; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; Ulrich, Brockbank, & Johnson, 2008; Ulrich D. , 2009). The journey of HR competency study focusing on the best strategic fit commenced in 1987 which has an impressive impact on scientific literature. The journey was led by Dr. Dave Ulrich and it involves 8 rounds from 1987 to 2021 encompassing five Ph.D. dissertations, seven books, hundreds of articles on HR Transformation, thousands of presentations in academic and corporate conferences, more than ten thousand people participated in 360-degree surveys, and greater than hundred thousand HR professionals have been developed across the world (Ulrich, Burns, Wright, & Ulrich, 2021).

The evolutionary perspective of HR competencies ranging from 1987 to 1997, consisting of initial four rounds of the study, was primarily focused on defining essential competencies of HR professionals with a specific focus on personal credibility to be the change agent in an organization to deliver HR performance (Ulrich D. , 1992; Ulrich D. , 1997; Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2011; Shingal, 2020). However, the increasing global competition, technological advancement, artefact innovation in manufacturing and services concerns, unpredictable, precarious, and volatile business environment posed competitive pressures on HR professionals across the world to respond to these competitive pressures by contributing as a strategic ally of an organization. The sensational change came in the year 2002 when HR professionals were thrilled to shed the shackles of the support function image

and ready to unlock the C-Suite cadre of themselves. The cumulative summary of the evolutionary perspective of the global HR competency models is exhibited in figure 4 (Ulrich & Beaty, 2001; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

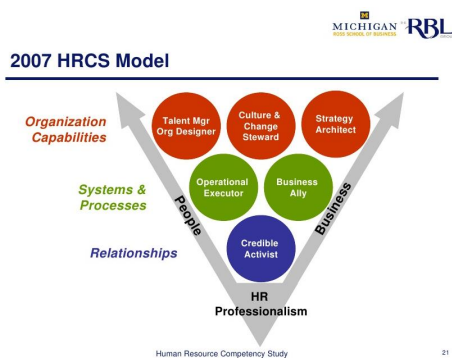
Figure 4: RBL Group's & Michigan University's Global HR Competency Study - Evolutionary Perspective²¹



In 2007, Dave Ulrich's and his co-authors' series of HR Competency study published with a title "HR Competencies: Mastery at the Intersection of People and Business". The fifth round of the study emphasized on adding value to the organization's customers and investors through strategic human resource practices and paved the way for HR professionals to get into the C-Suite regime to become a business ally. The competency model is illustrated in figure 5 (Ulrich D. , Brockbank, Johnson, & Younger, 2007; Ulrich, Brockbank, & Johnson, 2008). However, the model enumerated a wholistic perspective, but it does not offer a stepwise guide to establishing a practical and sustainable HR Business Partner models in organizations (Raj, 2010).

²¹ Source: <https://www.slideshare.net/niramgitan/ulrich-competency-model>

Figure 5: RBL Group's & Michigan University's Global HR Competency Study²²

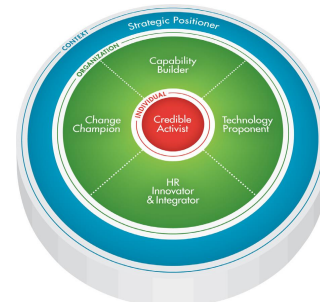


During the 2nd decade of the 21st century, the research carried out on theory and practice of Human Resources Management (HRM) continues to connect with the journey commenced in 1987 and entered its 6th round of Dave Ulrich's and his co-authors' HR Competency Study. The study provides a pragmatic insight for identifying, outlining a framework, mounting, and ameliorating the business solutions to respond to the contemporary business challenges of the time. The study encompasses a distinctive 360-degree global survey conducted with HR professionals, line managers, academics and consultants not only enabled but also embellished their competence levels for shaping the modern-day business advances (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2012; Kieran, 2018). After publishing a detailed book entitled "HR from the Outside In: Six Competencies of Human Resources", they wrote several articles covering the topics of talent management and HR competencies describing the results of the 2012 Global HR Competency Study. These research papers have presented the empirical

²² Source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/30858085_Human_resource_competencies_Respo

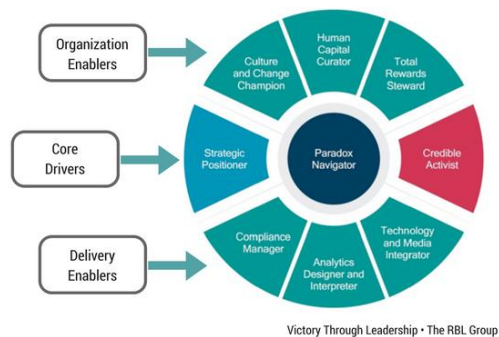
classification of six core competencies expected from HR professionals namely: Strategic Positioner, Credible Activist, Change Champion, HR Innovator and Integrator, Capability Builder and Technology Proponent. A few competencies had been carried forward from the previous HR models while others evolved based on the survey analysis. The study identifies six fundamental competency domains that HR professional expected to demonstrate to accelerate the business performance. The competencies are illustrated in figure 6 (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2012; The RBL Group, 2015).

Figure 6: RBL Group's & Michigan University's Global HR Competency Study 2012²³



²³ Source: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/14754391211234940/full/html>

Figure 7: RBL Group's & Michigan University's Global HR Competency Study 2017²⁴



This model is specifically designed to benefit the entire community of HR Practitioners to enable them for delivering meaningful results and adding tangible value to the organizations (University of Michigan, 2021). Dave Ulrich explained the nine domains of HR competencies in his interview where he clubbed the 9 competencies into three main categories. He defined HR as a 'core business driver' that takes the strategic position to turn business strategy into assertive individual actions as a credible activist. The same is exhibited in figure 8 where HR acts as a paradox navigator to handle the tension between the business strategy and its implementation. He further termed HR function as a strategic enabler in the organization as a steward of cultural change that impacts the organizational performance while acting as a curator of human capital. Exhibit 9 depicted its clear picture. He explicated that the bottom of the model talks about the day-to-day transformation to specify the HR operations as a delivery enabler. In his opinion, this was the

²⁴ Source: <https://hr.umich.edu/about-uhr/hr-staff-unit-hr-partners/hr-community-practice/dave-ulrichs-hr-competency-model>

best HR Competency Model that HR's Community of Practice should look for. The same is shown in figure 10 (Ulrich D. , 2015).

Figure 8: RBL Group's & Michigan University's Global HR Competency Study 2017 (Core Drivers)²⁴



Figure 9: RBL Group's & Michigan University's Global HR Competency Study 2017 (Organizational Enablers)²⁴

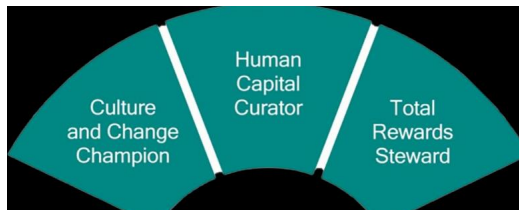
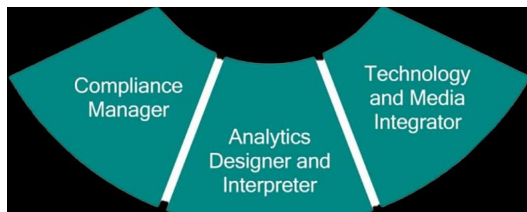


Figure 10: RBL Group's & Michigan University's Global HR Competency Study 2017 (Delivery Enablers)²⁴



Prof. Dr. Scott DeRue, Dean of the Ross School of Business also shared his remarkable views on Dave's HR Competency Model. He reckoned the study as a very thoughtful and effective for the HR's Community of Practice to deal with the conundrum of strategic perceived value of HR. He also applauded Prof. Dr. Dave Ulrich's and his team's tremendous efforts for developing the practical, relevant, and impactful guidelines to implement the HR Competency Model in Practice (DeRue, 2020).

In May 2021, Prof. Dr. Dave Ulrich and his team embarked upon the results of the 360-degree HR Competency Study, the eighth round led by the RBL Group and Michigan University. The study is specifically conducted to shaping the future of the HR profession and defined an expected competency set for HR's Community of Professionals/ Partitioners and its function during and post COVID-19 outbreak. Dave's eighth model identifies and classifies key competencies that enable HR professionals to act as a strategic ally in the digital business environ to deal with the global pandemic challenges. The model is discussed in Chapter 5 in detail (Ulrich, Burns, Wright, & Ulrich, 2021).

2.5 Conundrum of strategic perceived value of HR: a global and Pakistan's perspectives

The genesis covering the periodic journey of evolution to revolution in the field of Human Resource Management established theoretical evidence of a strong relation between the dialectically aligned concepts of business strategy and human resources management. Several studies suggest that the HR function's role has evolved from a support function to a strategic business partner in the last three-and-a-half decades. During the last two decades HR function has been pushed to converge its focus on its strategic role to bring paradigm shift in the mind set of business leaders for establishing its identity as a strategic business partner. Although, the concept of Strategic Business Partner has been very well received in the developed countries of the world, but its practical implementation is still missing in many organizations across the globe (Hoor-UI-Ain, 2014). Lamentably, HR professionals are still locked out of the boardrooms in Pakistan. Very few blue-chip companies have embraced the reality of HR in the strategic corridor. The HR function is expected to deliver business results as a credible activist that support an organization's business strategy and meet the demands of its stakeholder while acting as a curator of human capital development (Imam, 2021; Haque, 2021).

Scientific and popular literature have discussed the ill-perceived value of human resource (HR) function against the expected performance in great length while acknowledging its strategic importance as well. Lamentably, most of the HR business partners are deeply restricted to deal with operational issues and employees' healthcare crisis as firefighters during the global pandemic (KPMG International, 2019). A larger segment of HR's community of practice in Pakistan comprises of less confident people who are indecisive and practicing wait-and-see approach to the digital change. Staying at the safe harbor of the known will put them in an unsafe zone of irrelevancy in the post pandemic world (Iqbal, Ahmad, & Allen, 2019).

In Pakistan, HR's journey as digital evangelist is packed with realistic demonstrations of fresh insights and the benefit of embedding Artificial Intelligence, Robotic Process Automation, Cybersecurity and Data Analytics in terms of strategic return and forward-looking HR professionals are aiming to be the steward of change. Banking sector is the best example of credible activist of digitalization in the country (Iqbal, Ahmad, Allen , & Raziq , 2018).

Chapter 3

Research Design

Chapter 3» Research Design

This qualitative study is based on a sequential-exploratory research design as a valuable means of discovering and unlocking the value of HR as Strategic Business Partner or Strategic Ally in the business environment of Pakistan. As explained earlier in the Chapter 1 & 2 that the phenomenon of HR Business Partner has been accepted globally for shaping the future of the organizations and many of those across the world are not only striving to embed the theoretical concept of HR business partnering in the real life environment but also taking every step to go for an extra mile for achieving this goal in the years to come (Deloitte Consulting LLP, 2011; KPMG International, 2019).

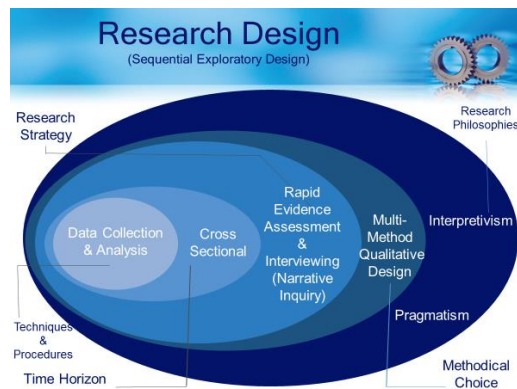
This exploratory research focuses on the epistemological approach²⁵ by exploring the facts within existing scholarly and grey/ popular literature to seeking new insights of the future outlook (Robinson C. , 2002, p. 59) of HR Business Partner and interpret its strategic acceptance; existence; and prevalence/ implementation/ adoption in the business environment of Pakistan with reference to the two dialectically aligned concepts of 'HR and Business Strategy' through *Systematic Investigation* based on 'Saunders Research Onion' and 'Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)'.

The study follows systematic investigations – a step by step process of applying 'Saunders Research Onion' to embark upon a model: where the different layers of the model represent the various stages through which this research has gone through to unlock the value of HR as Strategic Business Partner in the business environment of Pakistan while putting together an effective methodology (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Saunders & Tosey, 2013). The research design of this study is based on 'Saunders

²⁵ **The Epistemological approach** is a derivative of the term 'epistemology' which means study of knowledge. It defines and clarifies what constitutes acceptable knowledge and help in understanding the implications of knowledge in different social, business, and cultural contexts.

Research Onion', which is described in detail in the sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 and shown in figure 4.

Figure 11: Research Design - Saunders Research Onion



Peeling away each layer of *Saunders Research Onion* reveals the next layer which defines the complete model of the research design of the study. The detailed description of the research design is as follows:

3.1 Research Paradigm

This research falls under the ambit of epistemological research paradigm to address the facts by inquiring and questioning the existing and acceptable knowledge available in the literature. The research paradigm defines:

- what is existing and acceptable knowledge about the identified field of research discussed in the earlier chapters.

- what information is known to be true via rigorous qualitative analysis/ interpretation and considered as fact.

This philosophy is used in the sequential-exploratory research as it searches/ investigates for facts-based-knowledge and evidence that can be proved without doubt instead of changeable, variable, inconsistent situations, and opinions. Hence, it is considered the most appropriate philosophy to derive the research forward.

3.2 Research Philosophy

In this research model, following two research philosophies are operating simultaneously.

- **Philosophy of Interpretivism:**

The '*philosophy of interpretivism*' is used as it is more focused on gathering deep and sagacious insights into subjective meanings of the alluded perception of HR function in the current business environ and expectations of the C-Suite Officers from the function as well. The philosophy does not provide any law-like generalizations as it is more likely to reflect on the situational patterns of pre and post COVID-19 healthcare crisis scenario. This philosophy connects the study of social phenomena with the field of human resources management in Pakistan's business environment. In this study, the philosophy of interpretivism focuses upon the following aspects of pre and post COVID-19 paradigms:

- Conducting research on the existing literature to predict the future-outlook of the HR function as best strategic ally.
- Directing research focus on the behavioral aspect of the people in the organization and how do they respond to the new normal conditions.
- Adopting an empathetic attitude (a humanistic perspective) to understand and deliberate upon people's

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social world in the new normal and the develop healthcare guidelines for the workforce which may prove to be meaningful to provide them with safe working environment at workplaces or at their homes.

- Considering research as a value adding scholarly work in the form of a set of circumstances and workforce at a specific time.

- **Philosophy of Pragmatism:**

This philosophy is very wisely plugged-in with interpretivism in this study as it focuses on the expectations from the HR function to add tangible value from its dynamic activities and interventions which has practical consequences or impact on the business success and strategic decision making. The philosophy of pragmatism focuses upon the following aspects of pre and post COVID-19 scenarios:

- In the pre COVID-19 era, HR was at a crucial intonation point and holding a poor reputation for not producing tangible results for the business.
- In the post COVID-19 era, there is no single viewpoint that may provide with the complete picture of the role of the HR function in the new normal.
- Having multiple realities attached to the future-outlook of the HR function, the research design has been developed on the foundation of multi-method qualitative model consisting of Rapid Evident Assessment (REA) and narrative inquires in term of interviews which is further explained in 3.3 and 3.4.
- Enabling the research model to gather more credible, relevant, and reliable evidence to produce authentic recommendations that support subsequent actions at the HR's end.

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3.3 Methodical Choice

Multi-Method Qualitative Design is used for data collection and analysis which involves qualitative data from in-depth investigations from existing scholarly and grey/ popular literature with small samples of interviews as narrative inquiry through triangulation (Cooper & Schindler, 2014; Neuman, 2014; Creswell, 2009). This methodical choice is recommended instrumental when more than one qualitative data sets or collection techniques are used in the study for the analysis of dialectically associated concepts (Saunders & Tosey, 2013).

3.4 Research Strategy

The research strategy followed in this qualitative study comprises of two significant methods to answer the research questions is explicated in the following sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.4.3, 3.4.4, and 3.4.5.

3.4.1 Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA):

This method is very meticulously chosen to assess of "what is known?" and "what is unknown?" in the scientific literature about the '*conundrum of strategic perceived value of HR*' in the business context. It is a systematic methodology to explore and critically evaluate empirical studies conducted in this discipline (Barends, Rousseau, & Briner, 2017). The method helped in evaluating the studies in terms of breadth, depth, and all-inclusiveness of the generalized search. This systematic review specifically aims to thoroughly identify all relevant studies; sift-out apropos literature; and to stipulate appropriate/ befitting studies based on a set -out criteria on the topic of research (Barends & Rousseau, 2018; Higgins, et al., 2019). Systematic review based '*Rapid Evidence Assessment*' is pellucid²⁶, verifiable, palpable, irrefutable, evincible, and reproducible as compared to the conventional literature review with a negligible bias (Barends, Rousseau, & Briner, 2017). This systematic review involves well

²⁶ Pellucid means transparent or crystal clear.

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organized and thorough search for finding the befitting and apropos literary and practical evidence within the spheres of scholarly and grey/ popular literature. The method is chosen for this research with absolute cogitation, discernment, and dexterity to identify and classify the most relevant existing studies conducted to compare the pre and post COVID-19 role of human resources management in forming the strong alliance with the business strategy in various aspects of evidences (Davies, 2003). Another reason behind using REA in this research is to portray the current state of the research literature in a systematic and crystal-clear way (Saini & Shlonsky, 2012) and to suggest what is still needed to be worked on to develop HR function as a strategic panacea. As stated by Davies (2003) "*the fundamental purposes of Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) are to: perform comprehensive search to gather electronic and print literature within the constraints of research time frame; assemble descriptive evidences collected on a topic of research; critically and meticulously evaluate the evidences; sieve out studies of compromised quality; and furnish an overview of the relevant evidences*".

In this connection, the rationale of using Rapid evidence assessment (REA) within the field of human resources management to figure-out reliable association between business strategy and HR through evidence-based practice. Business leaders comprising of HR professionals and C-Suite officials require timely reviews to take well-informed decisions to form efficacious alliance between the HR function and business strategy to produce profitable results in the contemporary scenarios. REA is also known as a rapid review which has come-up as a modern literature review methodology in recent years. It highlights what is known in a literature to the scholarly world in a relatively lesser time. The methodology and procedure are further explained in section 3.4.2 and 3.4.3.

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3.4.2 Methodology:

The research methodology is based on PICOC²⁷ led Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) model to fathom out the breadth and reach of academic research on the alluded perception of HR and its poor reputation for the multiple reasons. Moreover, corporate publications such as surveys and reports including views and news reported in scholarly and grey/ popular literature²⁸ about the juxtapositions of the two dialectically aligned concepts of business strategy and human resources management are reviewed in global and Pakistan's contexts.

In the 21st century, decision-making and strategy driven policy development has become the most fast-paced phenomena. Precise and concise (to the point) reviews are vital for quick decision making that often requires examination of stringent evidence-based struggles to keep pace with rapidly changing business horizons in the post COVID-19 era of the emerging digital world (Thomas, Newman, & Oliver, 2013). To deal with this challenge in a timely manner, modern-day contemporary techniques of evidence review have been developed with an objective to provide with the rigor of full systematic review, while being cost effective and more swift result oriented (GSR, 2013).

Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) toolkit is commonly used and applied by Government Social Research²⁹ (Booth, Meier, Shapland, Wong, & Paisel, 2011; Adler, et al., 2016) and the same is applicable in business research (White & Fortune, 2015; Laidlaw, 2020). Moreover, corporate publications such as surveys and reports including

²⁷ **PICOC:** It is a mnemonic of systematic review that stands for Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, and Context.

²⁸ **Scholarly and grey/ popular literature:** Scholarly literature is an intellectual contribution of the research scholars or experts such as Ph.Ds. in the field of research in academic journals whereas grey literature includes news/ evidence published in the newspapers and/or research reports published by various organizations that do not fall under academic publishing and distribution channels.

²⁹ **Government Social Research is available at:**
<http://web.archive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140305122816/http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/net/works/csr/resources-and-guidance>

views and news reported in popular literature about the best strategic fit of HR function are also reviewed in detail.

Following research questions are developed in the form of PICOC Grids 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 to respond and to deal with the 'Provocation: Human Resources Management in the 21st Century' to challenge the conventional wisdom and proposing a novel way forward for future research.

PICOC Grid 1

REA Question no. 1	• What is known in the existing literature in general about the 'conundrum of strategic perceived value of HR' in the business context across the world?
P: Population	• C-Suit Officers and HR's Community of Practice
I: Intervention	• Existing scholarly and grey/ popular literature
C: Comparison	• Comparison between the existing literature and the qualitative data collected from HR's Community of Practice via interviews.
O: Outcome	• How to improve the alluded perception of contemptuous business leaders and stake its claim to be a credible player as a 'strategic ally'?
C: Context	• Business Strategy and HR alliance in the global context.

PICOC Grid 2

REA Question no. 2	• What is known in the existing literature about the 'conundrum of strategic perceived value of HR' in the business context across Pakistan?
P: Population	• C-Suit Officers and HR's Community of Practice in Pakistan
I: Intervention	• Existing scholarly and grey/ popular literature
C: Comparison	• Comparison between the existing literature and the qualitative data collected from HR's Community of Practice via interviews.
O: Outcome	• How to improve the alluded perception of contemptuous business leaders and stake its claim to be a credible player as a 'strategic ally'?
C: Context	• Business Strategy and HR alliance in the local (Pakistan's) context.

PICOC Grid 3

REA Question no. 3	• Will the Strategic Fit Between Business and HRM Strategy Influence HRM Effectiveness and Organizational Performance?
P: Population	• C-Suit Officers and HR's Community of Practice in Pakistan.
I: Intervention	• Existing scholarly and grey/ popular literature and interviews of Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) Certified HR Practitioners.
C: Comparison	• Comparison between the existing literature and the qualitative data collected from HR's Community of Practice via interviews.
O: Outcome	• To find whether a better fit between firm's strategy and HRM strategy would strengthen HRM effectiveness and organizational performance.
C: Context	• HRM effectiveness and Organizational Performance.

PICOC Grid 4

REA Question no. 3	• What is known in the existing literature about the social paradox of the pivotal role to be played by the HR Function in bringing business transformation ranging from Pre-COVID to Post-COVID era?
P: Population	• C-Suit Officers and HR's Community of Practice in Pakistan.
I: Intervention	• Existing scholarly and grey/ popular literature and interviews of Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) Certified HR Practitioners.
C: Comparison	• Comparison between the existing literature and the qualitative data collected from C-Suit Officers and HR's Community of Practice via interviews.
O: Outcome	• Reality check to gauge the gravity of the social paradox.
C: Context	• Business Strategy and HR alliance in the global and local (Pakistan's) context.

PICOC Grid 5

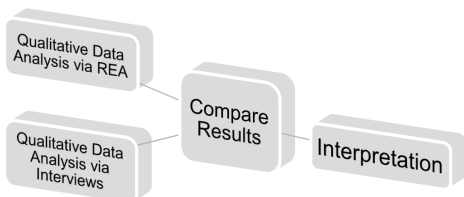
REA Question no. 4	• What are the known determinants that provokes the controversial debates on the digital HR evolution for shaping the future of HR Function as a strategic ally ?
P: Population	• C-Suit Officers and HR's Community of Practice in Pakistan.
I: Intervention	• Existing scholarly and grey/ popular literature and interviews of C-Suit Officers in HR's Community of Practice.
C: Comparison	• Digital HR Evolution: comparison between the arguments for and in against.
O: Outcome	• Exploring the provocative notion that identifies HR at risk of irrelevancy in the changing world of digital work-environ.
C: Context	• Business Strategy and HR alliance in the global and local (Pakistan's) context.

3.4.3 Triangulation

Convergent triangulation is applied to compare and interpret results to justify qualitative analysis carried out via following two modes of qualitative data analysis.

- Rapid Evidence Assessment
- Interviews of the representative members of the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM)³⁰ and Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD)³¹.

Figure 12: Convergent Triangulation Model



3.4.4 Procedure:

The systematic review led procedure was followed to respond to urgent the research question of corporate paradoxical approach of aligning business

³⁰ **Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM):** It is a US based 'professional human resources membership association'. The association not only promotes the profession of HR and provides education, certification, and networking to its members across the world. The old name of association was American Society for Personnel Administration (ASPA) which was headquartered in Berea, Ohio, USA. Later, the headquarter was moved to Alexandria, Virginia, USA in 1984. In 1989, the professional association changed its name from American Society for Personnel Administration (ASPA) to Society of Human Resources Management (web-link: www.shrm.org).

³¹ **Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD):** It is the UK based professional body for HR and people development. For more details, please visit the following web-link: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/>.

strategy and HR function with a view to bring revolution in the business environment of Pakistan in the context of pre and post COVID-19 business scenarios. Following theoretical framework outlines the scope of the research. The salient inclusion criteria cover:

- **Sample size for literature searching (systematic searches of scholarly and grey/ popular literature):** Studies published over the last three-and-a-half decades from 1985 to 2021 with special focus on the role of HR as best strategic fit for the business such as:
 - arguments in favor and against to address:
 - the alluded perception of HR function in the current business environ and expectations of the C-Suite Officers from the function as well.
 - social paradox of corporate governance in term of underrepresentation of HR professionals in the decision-making process and/or in boardrooms.
 - literature highlighting the HR's role in staking its claim to be a credible player as a 'strategic ally'.
 - papers and reports supporting the idea of 'recognizing HR's role as strategic business ally' in general and with reference to Pakistan as well.
 - delineation between HR role as a strategic business partner and business strategy to foster a revolution in unlocking the value of HR function in the business environment of Pakistan.
 - studies/ arguments that provokes controversial debates on the dialectically aligned concepts of HR and business strategy and inclusion of HR professionals in the corporate boardrooms; and
 - review of international models focused on the role of HR function in the pre and post COVID-19 eras.

(Note: The evolution of HRM is accounted for since 1919 in the literature review to cover the genesis of evolution from personnel management to strategic human resource management.)

- **Sample size for 'Call for information via Interviews':** The objective of the 'call for information' to review the prevalent perception of the HR function in the business economy. In this connection, professionals from following HR professional bodies were invited to participate in the interviews as a voluntary HR expert for triangulation as a representative of each.
 - SHRM Certified Professionals consisting of SHRM – Senior Certified Professional (SCP) and SHRM - Certified Professional (CP). They belong to the top tier HR professionals who lead the HR function and align HR strategies to organizational goals. However, the other slot of the three levels of HR Generalist consisting of Global Professional Human Resources (GPHR), Senior Professional Human Resources (SPHR), & Professional Human Resources (PHR) were also included.
 - Members of Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) Anyone from the following was selected as a representative of the UK based professional body.
 - Associate Member.
 - Chartered Member.
 - Chartered Fellow.
 - Academic member grades.
 - Affiliate Member.
 - Senior Professional in Human Resources - International™ (SPHRi™), Global Professional in Human Resources (GPHR), and Human Resources Management Professional (HRMP) from HR Certification Institute HRCI³²
 - Global Remuneration Professional (GRP®)³³ from the World at Work (Total Reward Association).

³² HRCI® is the premier credentialing and learning organization for the human resources profession headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia. It is known for setting the global standard for HR expertise and excellence for more than 45 years. For more details, please visit the following web-link: <https://www.hrci.org/about-hrci/overview/about-hrci>.

³³ GRP® holds the essential knowledge of integrating the global reward programs with business strategy. Professionals with this certification have expertise in designing global reward programs that are meticulously aligned with the global and regional remuneration

It includes a direct in-depth interview request sent to the SHRM Certified Professionals for providing us with the practical insight over the HR challenges faced by different business during the pre and post COVID-19 eras (see appendix III). Qualified professionals from SHRM were purposefully chosen as they have played a big role in establishing their respectable worth in the business economy of Pakistan. Fifteen members of the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) and/ or Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) across different sectors with diversified experience in Pakistan were premeditatedly and purposefully chosen and invited to submit their consent for in-depth 'semi-structured interviews' for triangulation in the study. Five qualified professionals from the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM), Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), HR Certification Institute HRCI®, and the World at Work (Total Reward Association) responded in the affirmative to share their views and experiences for this study. All of them were interviewed for 30 minutes as a representative of these professional HR bodies.

- **Language of publications:** English
- **Literature reviewed from countries:** All Countries across the world with a special focus on Pakistan.
- **Research Methods used in the reviewed papers/ studies/ corporate research reports:** All research methods.

Rapid evidence assessment (REA) methodology was employed to: search the all-inclusive literature within stipulated time; collate descriptive outlines of the available evidences; critically analyze and evaluate it; sieve out studies of poor quality; and provide an overview of the evidence. The details are explained below in the section 3.4.5.

practices. For more details, please visit the following web-link: <https://www.worldatwork.org/certification/global-remuneration-professional>.

3.4.5 Rapid Evidence Assessment Process:

5.2.1 Search Terms & Strings

- Search terms are developed, filtered, and linked with the research's scope via very thought-out process. The main purpose of developing search strings was to explore the answers of the research questions (See Appendix I).
- Following four search strings were created to cross-examine data on the eluded perception of HR function in the current business environ and expectations of the C-Suite Officers from the function as well. Besides, special focus was kept on identifying the best strategic fit.
 - i. Discerning Terms to gauge the gravity of the issue of the eluded perception HR in the Business World.
 - ii. HR & Business Strategy Alignment Terms.
 - iii. Outcome Terms in pre-COVID era.
 - iv. Terms for the resolve in post-COVID era.

5.2.2 Literature Searching

The initial 1000 results of each database were reviewed and evaluated. All results were rated, marked, and classified by relevance and the literature excellence/ precision was identified and gathered via following 3 key mediums:

- **Systematic searches:** It includes befitting studies, reports and literature across high priority academic databases: Web of Science Core Collection, Scopus database of peer reviewed literature, Research Gate, Publons, Mendeley, Digital Library of Latif Ebrahim Jamal (L.E.J) National Science Information Centre, Karachi - Pakistan and International Bibliography of the Social Sciences.
- **Practical experiences documented in popular literature:** Online search for gauging the practical experience of the HR's Community of Practice in popular literature through

Google includes collection of evidence relevant to the specific questions identified in the REA's PICOC Grids from 1 to 5.

• Call for information via interviews:

It includes a direct in-depth interview request sent to the SHRM and CIPD Certified Professionals for providing us with the practical insight over the HR challenges faced by different business during the pre and post COVID-19 eras (see appendix III).

5.2.3 Data Extraction

- Scientific/ scholarly literature comprising of 2000 books and papers were identified through academic database search for screening & 500 significant sources were extracted and 237 are cited in this study.
- Through Google searches, 550 items were identified; 100 of which remained after screening and 75 are cited in this study. However, 11 are extracted as relevant and accorded as high weight of evidence.
- This accumulated into a total of 312 documents, with 1/10th (n = 31) being relevant (to a greater or lesser degree) to review the most relevant evidences. However, 5 interviews taken for triangulation of this study makes it a total number of 317 documents which are appropriately cited in this scholarly piece of work. In this connection, the degree of relevance reaches to n = 32. Considering the importance of the culmination point of business and HR strategy in Pakistan, 17 more evidences are added to the confidence score.

5.2.4 Weight of Evidence (WoE) Coding

- All references were evaluated by means of 'Weight of Evidence (WoE)' approach in which the authenticity of the

literature was appraised and given a strength rating of low (1) medium (2), or high (3).

- Each study was weighted against two dimensions.
 - Confidence in the methodological rigor of the source itself.
 - Relevance of the paper to the REA.
- Methodological rigor assessment: Overall, 49 documents were assigned confidence scores, with 04 deemed medium and 01 low; 45 documents were rated high confidence scores. The Weight of Evidence (WoE) table (Appendix II) can be referred to view confidence and relevance scores of the studies included.

5.2.5 Data Synthesis

- The studies identified by the REA were re-examined and thoroughly evaluated to look for the answers to the research questions established in the PICOC grid.
- Data from the 49 studies pertinent to the PICOC grid research questions were synthesized and written up, ensuring quality, sensitivity, coherence, and relevance. The statistical and qualitative evidences-based data from the papers/ studies with the highest WoE scores are duly highlighted throughout the findings and discussion sections.

3.5 Time Horizon:

The final layer of the research onion is 'time horizon' which takes this study to the core of overall techniques and procedures to answer the earlier stated six questions in the section 3.4.2 of the research design which is based on PICOC led Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) model. This cross-sectional study was conducted over the span of 5 years.

3.6 Overall techniques and procedure:

Data collection and analysis techniques used in this qualitative study are explained in detail earlier in the sections 3.4.2, 3.4.3, and 3.4.5. As described in the section 3.5 that this cross-sectional study involves the pure use of qualitative methods to collect the required information. Fifteen members of the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) and/ or Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) across different sectors with diversified experience in Pakistan were premeditatively and purposefully chosen and invited to submit their consent for in-depth 'semi-structured interviews' for triangulation in the study. Five out of fifteen consented to participate in this interview for academic research. The names of the SHRM and CIPD Certified HR professionals who participated in this study and contributed their valued views and opinions are as follows.

- Mr. Zahid Mubarik, SHRM-SCP, SPHRI, GPHR
- Mr. Sohail Rizvi, SHRM-SCP, SPHRI
- Ms. Rumana Imam, GPHR, HRMP
- Mr. Shuja Ul Haque, Associate CIPD, GRP
- Ms. Salma Faizan, Associate CIPD

Their responses were transcribed and analyzed for the triangulation purpose. The approach of theoretical sampling was adopted. From the initial set of questions, the next set of questions was evolved, and the iteration was continued until saturation was achieved. The duly signed consent forms of the above-mentioned professional of skilled caliber are attached in the Appendices Section as appendix III (a, b, c, d, and e). However, the set of structured interview questions for the triangulation purpose is enclosed as appendix IV.

Chapter 4

HRM challenges in the pre COVID-19 era: Global vs Pakistan's perspective

Chapter 4» HRM challenges in the pre COVID-19

era: Global vs Pakistan's perspective

In the pre pandemic world, the businesses were already going through the unprecedented stride of transformational change which had brought HR profession at the crossroads. Most of the organizations had established their confidence in HR functions to succeed in this changing world. The crossroads ascended the HR function as strategic business partner and many organizations had created specific role of Human Resource Business Partner (HRBP) in every business unit (Ulrich D. , 2016).

4.1 The ill-perceived value of human resource (HR) function against the expected performance: a global perspective

The conviction and inclusion of the idea of Human Resources Business Partner (HRBP) was enunciated by Dave Ulrich in business studies specifically in the discipline of Human Resource Management (HRM) (Ulrich D. , 1997).

Ulrich's four books have been adjudged as an evolutionary contribution Ulrich's business partner model helped the business world in breaking various old myths about the role of HR practitioners and unveiled the new realities (Jamrog & Overholt, 2004). Proclaiming Ulrich's work, many recent articles, books, surveys, and studies accentuate that HR needs to become a strategic partner (Jamrog & Overholt, 2004). Previous studies have examined HR's strategic role generally in organizations (Schuler, Dowling, & Cieri, 1993; Ulrich D. , 1997; Ulrich & Beaty, 2001; Collins & Clark, 2003; Schuler & Jackson, 2007) and in communicating and enhancing HR's value to the organization (Huseilid, 1995; Beatty & Schneier, 1997; Ulrich & Beaty, 2001). Other researches in this domain put emphasis on HR's strategic participation through enabling the employees to create organization-specific competencies (Wright, McMahan, McCormick, & Sherman, 1998; Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 1999; Akhtar, Ding, & Ge, 2008). Recent research, however, suggests

that HR is not making much progress towards becoming a strategic partner despite the belief by HR professionals that it should (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003a; 2003b).

Researchers have held an opinion that despite of compelling arguments supporting the view that HR management is the key strategic issue in most organizations, HR executives have not been strategic partners in history (Lawler, 1995; Brockbank, 1999; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003a). The HR function has been an administrative function headed by individuals whose roles are largely focused on cost control and administrative operational activities (Ulrich D. , 1997). Numerous studies have analyzed the potential for the HR function to be a strategic partner and established that it can be a value-added function. For example, work by Becker and Huselid (1998) found a relationship between HR practices and business performance.

Historically, many within the HR profession have lamented the lack of respect and acknowledgement for the service they provide. Now the opportunity is banging at the door of the HR function to reverse the situation. The need to be more strategic and business-linked is evident (Robinson C. , 2005). Significant attention has been given to this issue, both in practice and in the literature. In this connotation, it is often advocated that an HR head/director should be a member of the board of directors or management team to address the relational aspect of integration between business strategy and human resources management. Researchers emphasized that an HR head/director should have a solid and business strategy- coordinated plan for the organization that defines the future outlook of the business (Orlov, 1999).

Over the last decade, HR professionals have increasingly been urged to develop new competencies as 'HR business partners' in their ongoing search to integrate business strategy with people management practice (Ulrich D. , Brockbank, Yeung, & Lake, 1995; Ulrich D. , 1997; Losey, 1999; Ramlall, 2006). In principle, competency models offer the possibility of creating an integrated and consistent framework for selecting, appraising, training and developing HR managers as business partners, as well as a

mechanism for linking HR strategy and business performance (Boyatzis, 1982; 1993; Ulrich D. , Brockbank, Yeung, & Lake, 1995; Baili, 1999). Many large organizations have developed very sophisticated and role-specific competency models for business partners, and an academic research and consultancy industry has grown up around this area, especially for organizations that wish to move into HR business partnering (Cabinet Office, 2005; Hunter, Saunders, & Constance, 2006; CIPD, 2007). Despite the growth in 'business partnering' competency models and their widespread advocacy, there appears to have been very few empirical or survey-based investigations of the effectiveness of these models in redefining HR roles or in delivering a more strategic HR function (Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997; Boselie & Paauwe, 2005; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). Most organizations are developing their HR Business Partner's capabilities in knowledge, experience, and personal competencies. The right caliber of HR Business Partner has as much to do with personality and orientation as business and professional skills (Lambert, 2009). But the effectiveness of these models for HR's role reinvention, performance improvement and the transformation of the HR function are still subject to research. Effectiveness varies with the degree of change to the HR function, the consistency in implementing business partnering, the level of reduction in transactional HR, and the extent to which the HR function is centralized or decentralized. Moreover, other researches in this dimension highlight the importance of re-contextualizing the constraints on the effectiveness of competency models (Ulrich D. , Brockbank, Ulrich, & Younger, 2013; Ulrich, Kryscynski, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2017).

Correspondingly, at present, research is being done for developing customized models of HRM integration with the strategic business goals. Likewise, in various countries of Europe, Australia, North & South America, Egypt, Asia, and a few in Arica have shown acceptance for Human Resources Business Partners in their organizations (Özçelik & Aydınli, 2006; McCartney C. , 2011; Ananthram, Nankervis, & Christopher, 2013; Petrovic, Saridakis, & Johnsto, 2018; Zhao, Sheehan, Cieri, & Cooper, 2019).

Perhaps the major champion of HR as a business partner is Dave Ulrich. He has argued that the HR function needs to become strategically proactive, that HR needs to go beyond administrative expertise and be an expert in strategic business partnership, change management, and employee advocacy (Ulrich D. , 1997). Conversely, Wright, et al. (1999) discussed the same thing in their HRPS-supported report in which they found a growing consensus in support of Ulrich's model, but HR was not seen as able to execute on this model. Although there has been a great deal of normative writing about the role HR 'should' play, there has been little empirical investigation of whether it is actually playing this role (Lawler & Mohrman, 2000b). Likewise, there has been more speculative than empirical examination of what it takes for HR to become a strategic partner. Even though many organizations are struggling to make business partnering work effectively across the globe - be that in applying the Ulrich model itself or a customized approach and interpretation of its roles, structure, and strategy outputs. However, difficulties include uncertainty over the approach, inadequate preparation, and weak implementation. Although, particular challenges about business partnering are evident but integrating all component parts of the partnering process is crucial.

So, the theoretical background of the relational aspect of business strategy and human resources management suggests that the HR function has evolved from evolutionary to revolutionary role in the last two decades. HR function's evolutionary role is its longest-running role is the delivery of clerical and administrative services, often consisting of satisfying legal and administrative compliance requirements that are directly linked with personnel administration. During the last decade HR has been encouraged to converge its focus on its revolutionary role to bring paradigm shift in the mind set of business leaders for establishing its identity as a strategic business partner. In this role, HR is expected to implement and deliver HR practices and services that support the organization's business strategy and meet the demands of managers and employees.

4.2 The ill-perceived value of human resource (HR) function against the expected performance in Pakistan: a mayhem

In Pakistan, HR function is struggling in meeting the following four challenges. These challenges seem to be the critical impediment in its way of becoming a strategic ally.

- **Poor perception with the organization:** Perception, naturally, is a very difficult thing to change and hence it has been proven from the analytical study of the literature that the perception of HR globally is not very good. Lamentably, in Pakistan, it is driven by many factors including the earlier discussed global challenges. This can simply be explained by the following maxim:

"If one person says you are a horse then feel free to ignore him. If 20 people say you are a horse, then it is time to buy a saddle."

In this context, it is suggested that HR function need to take a simple HR satisfaction survey to find out what does an organization thinks of HR. The survey should cover the following five areas based on an adaptation of the Parasuraman Service Quality (1990).

- **Tangibles/ Appearances:** The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials the HR Function uses/ supplies.
- **Reliability** – The ability to perform HR functions and service dependably and accurately.
- **Responsiveness** – A willingness to help employees and provide prompt service.
- **Assurance** – Knowledge and courtesy of HR staff and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.

- o **Empathy** – Caring individualized attention the HR function provides to its line and employees.

Once perception is defined, HR function can then target action to correct it. The key outcome will always be action and the key perception is that HR does not operate on a strategic level.

- **Inability to show tangible or measurable return on investment (HR & Training):** Many studies reveal that all departments/ functions, with the notable exception of HR, use Return on Investment (ROI) when discussing projects, new equipment, promotions, new products and so on. In contrast, HR expects the organization to fund very expensive HR programs and training events without any talk of a return.

- **Poor Performance Management enforcement:** Performance Management is the core responsibility of the HR Function. However, focus group divulges that the essentials of Performance Management such as Recruitment, Development, Rewards, Succession planning, Talent Management and Competencies are often not properly linked with the corporate objectives due to the deficient competencies of HR practitioners/ leaders in developing business understanding.

- **Absence of written/ documented and synchronized HR & business visions:** The focus group unveils the desire of CEOs and HR practitioners/ leaders for a written/ documented and synchronized HR and business

Like previous studies, this study establishes that HR systems that are actively aligned with organization's business strategy can positively impact the organizational performance. Although many organizations have been struggling in their journey to make the concept of HR business partnering workable in their business spheres but could not achieve the desired goal so far. That's partly because of a lack of understanding about HR function's operations, metrics and analytics it can deliver. Also, uncertainty over the approach, weak preparation, integration, and implementation—along with

shortcomings in HR Business Partner's capabilities—are issues. However, it can be inferred from the responses of the focus group that many organizations in Pakistan are in their teething and budding phases and very few are operating at a competence level of HR Business Partner. Moreover, this study institutes that it is the HR Function that accounts for the improvement in context of its competencies to establish its own vision in line with the organizational strategy.

Even though the name of Personnel Management Department has been evolved into Human Resource Management Function many years ago but the thinking behind this paradigm shift from an administrative role to a strategic partner remains dormant. Unfortunately, for some, the name changed, but the role remained the same. Besides, business speaks and understands the language of finance as defined by the eminent HR authority Dave Ulrich. Therefore, HR must learn to speak finance in order to be taken seriously and make an impact. HR functions vision must cater for the ROTI's concept to reflect the business performance in numbers.

The research agenda was rooted in unlocking the value of HR as the strategic business partner, which focused on providing a link between strategy, people and business results. The study deduced that a well written/ documented and synchronized HR vision with business vision not only helps the function in linking HR objectives with corporate objectives but also establishes and maintains competitive advantage on overall corporate health. It can be encapsulated that the HR strategic challenges in Pakistan are very much similar to the other countries across the globe. Delivering measurable and tangible return is one of the crucial challenges. HR function needs to demonstrate a real return on its activities and interventions in order to change its poor perception. Otherwise, it will get outsourced because there are many outsourcing consultants available in the market who offer their administrative services at cheaper rates with speedy and quality results. Due to the reason, HR has to step up its appetite for ROI information for the training and development budgets to deliver tangible and measurable returns to the business.

The principal implication of this study illustrates that the modern shift towards HR's strategic approach is still in its infancy. It is hoped that this study will inspire other researchers and provide the impetus for further research into the role of HR as a strategic business partner. More importantly, there is a need for greater strategic focus on the business aligned HR's vision. Further study in this direction will considerably increase understanding of the HR's role in strategic decision making. Ultimately, that richer understanding will produce concrete benefits for theories and practitioners alike.

Chapter 5

HRM challenges in post pandemic world: Global vs Pakistan's perspective

Chapter 5» HRM challenges in post pandemic

world: Global vs Pakistan’s perspective

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has unfolded one of the worst unprecedented healthcare, business, and economic crisis across the globe. The entire world has experienced the shockwave of lockdown and xenophobia³⁴ as well. The global pandemic COVID-19 has troubled businesses and economies all over the world, including Pakistan in the South Asian region. The country wide lockdown has halted all businesses and economic activities which resulted into socio-economic meltdown. On one side, the escalating rate of human mortality is the economic aftermath of the outbreak of novel coronavirus and on the other side failure of businesses has gravely impacted global economies. The negative effect of the global pandemic (COVID-19) on Pakistan’s economy has been very severe and drowned the country into massive unemployment. Moreover, the socio-economic crisis has also resulted into a nosedive: the GDP growth, current & fiscal balances, and supply chain are severely reduced, deteriorated, and disrupted. These key economic indicators are positively correlated with the businesses performance (manufacturing industry or service concerns) and only be ameliorated through macroeconomics studies (Dun & Bradstreet, 2020; DAWN, 2020; Bokhari, 2020). Relatively, the world is witnessing this provocation more as an HR challenge to pull-back the nosedived economy as fundamental shift in its new role not only in Pakistan but across the globe (Caligiuri, Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020; PEX (Performance Excellence Network Editorial), 2020; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

³⁴ The word ‘Xenophobia’ has its roots in Greek language which means ‘fear of the unknown’ in general. This composite Greek word has two components: ‘xenos’ and ‘phobos’ which means ‘foreigner’ and ‘fear’, respectively. The phrase xenophobia has different expressions in different ethnicities and its meaning varies in different cultures. In literature, xenophobia is defined as the excessive fear or prejudice against anything and anybody which/ who is out of from one’s frame of reference. For further details, please click on the following web-link: https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-94-007-0753-5_3296.

toolkit to enhance mental effectiveness of employees. It develops a more competent, well-aware, and focused workforce towards the organizational goals. Besides, the emerging theoretical and empirical evidence on taking mindfulness beyond the traditional meditative practice is in the limelight in the new normal. HR practitioners are focusing on developing cognitive and workplace-specific frameworks to develop the customized competence of mindfulness which can adroitly applied to the workplace to enhance vigilance, communication, innovation, teamwork, and sense of well-being (Cheung, Huang, Chang, & Wei, 2020). The practice shall help in exploring the means of strengthening the connection among mindfulness, remote-engagement, and employees’ well-being as a solution to deal with the HRM challenges in the post pandemic world (Reb, Allen, & Vogus, 2020).

The chapter discusses the global and Pakistan’s perspective on the HRM challenges in the post pandemic world. It highlights the role of HR professionals as a protagonist to prepare the organizations to dampen the COVID-19 outbreak’s effects on its business, employees, and the society in which it operates. The chapter deals with the dramatic HR challenges emphasizing the businesses response to the consumers’ behavior in the context of a strategic ally. It outlines the global effort to address the challenging issues affecting the businesses and economy. Conversely, the steps taken up by the HR professionals in Pakistan are also explained concerning ethical business challenges/ issues, and aspects related to employees and leadership (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020).

5.1 Global Perspective as a ‘strategic best fit’

The global outbreak of COVID-19 expanded the role of HR function in developing the global footprints to be followed in recent years. This reveals the growingly evidence of the strategic intent of the C-Suite Business drivers to recognize the emerging capability of the HR professionals to deal with the prevalent unprecedented circumstances and calls for the need to (re)examine how HR strategies could be conceptualized with implications for human resource management (HRM) globally. Nevertheless, insufficient research is

In the recent testing times, all evolving international business research, and most of the scholarly work on international human resources management is focusing to address COVID-19 pandemic challenges in spirit of mindful HR strategy for sustainable competitive advantage (Remon, 2020; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Krishnan, 2021). Scholarly and grey/ popular literature shows that all C-Suite HR professionals have undertaken all possible measures within the realm of their jurisdictions with respect to their countries’ laws to alleviate the disastrous impacts of the global pandemic. Disappointingly, the old question mark on the credibility of HR function is still alive and the world has put them in spotlight for the ultimate resolve as COVID-19 eroded all businesses performances and damaged its people’s reality overnight. (Caligiuri, Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020)

This chapter explores how HR practitioners can integrate ‘mindfulness’³⁵ with the business strategy as an economic revival toolkit for organizations. The concept is deep-rooted in cognitive psychology & neuroscience disciplines (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Daniel & Davidson, 2017). Mindfulness is a human ability that signifies preemptive awareness of the unprecedented economic crisis, while serenely and wisely acknowledging the workforce distress and devising a strategy toolkit for the optimal use of all organizational resources to move forward with an objective to attain sustainable competitive advantage as a strategic business ally (Glomb, Duffy, Bono, & Yang, 2001). Recently, HR practitioners’ burgeoning interest in mindfulness has proved to be a global transformation in their role as an upshot of the global pandemic and help organizations to reevaluate their existing business philosophies and practices. During the COVID-19 crisis, mindfulness is a time-tested practice, which can be used organizational capacity building to surpass all functions in its business operation and add value to create a sustainable eco-system that provides with a viable competitive advantage in a technology environ (Pattnaik & Jena, 2020; Krishnan, 2021). Likewise, a few studies suggested that mindfulness is a best

³⁵ Mindfulness refers to “a receptive state of attention what is taking place” (Brown, West, Loverich, & Biegel, 2011, p. 1024).

available as many studies are in incubation phase right now as scientists are busy in developing vaccines for the cure of this novice virus. Willfully, the social and management scientists/ researchers are trying their level best to address the HRM challenges through scholarly medium. Corona virus has presented HR professionals, researchers, consultants, and practitioners with several challenges such as (Arora & Suri, 2020)

The Economist, a world-renowned periodical noted that during the financial crisis in the previous decade specifically in the years ranging from 2007 to 2009, the role of talented Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) was very crucial. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the role of C-Suite HR professionals or Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs) in making or breaking any organization. The periodical says:

“When the financial crisis rocked the business world in 2007–2009, boardrooms turned to corporate finance chiefs. A good CFO could save a company; a bad one might bury it. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a different challenge – and highlights the role of another corporate function, often unfairly dismissed as soft. Never before have more firms needed a hard-headed HR boss. The duties of chief people officers, as human-resources heads are sometimes called, look critical right now. They must keep employees healthy; maintain their morale; oversee a vast remote-working experiment; and, as firms retrench, consider whether, when and how to lay workers off. Their in-trays are bulging.” (The Economist, 2020)

The empirical evidence of the existing quandaries, predicaments, and dilemmas involved in the perceived and real strategic value of human resource (HR) function can be viewed through three lenses that are business, technology, and professional society. These divergent lenses helped in assessing the desirability, viability, reliability, and responsibility of the top management (C-Suite Officials and Board Members) for attaining a best

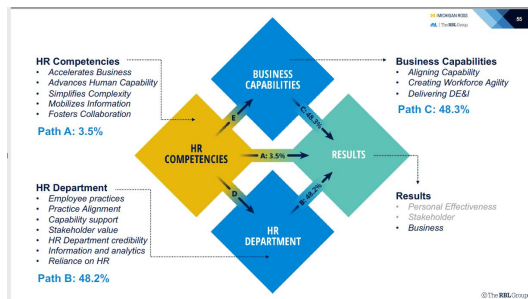
strategic fit between the dialectically scoped concepts of business strategy and HR. Based on a valuation of the potential and limitations of HR function in the existing literature, it is inferred that the capacity building of CHROs is essentially required to integrate the business processes that aim to achieve a technological 'strategic fit' in accordance with the organizational goals and objectives (Harvard Business Review, 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically altered every aspect of the global economy and has presented HR leaders with the most pressing demand of balancing the interest of employees and their respective organizations.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Patrick M. Wright and Michael D. Ulrich (2017) devoted their lives for the field of strategic human resource management (SHRM) by unearthing its foundations, tracking its origin, explicating its present standing, and forecasting its outlook. They have done a great work on expounding upon the evolution of the field, including various concepts, models, rhetoric contributions, and empirical reviews. Recently they have done an emblematic 360-degree survey analysis with Erin Burns under the supervision of Dave Ulrich to address the present time strategy for "accelerating business through advancing human capability" and took the HR Competency Study into its 8th round to deal with the during and post pandemic HR challenges (Ulrich, Burns, Wright, & Ulrich, 2021).

In May 2021, Prof. Dr. Dave Ulrich and his team embarked upon the results of the 360-degree HR Competency Study, the eighth round led by the RBL Group and Michigan University. The study is specifically conducted to shaping the future of the HR profession and defined an expected competency set for HR's Community of Professionals/ Partitioners and its function during and post COVID-19 outbreak. Dave's eighth model identifies and classifies key competencies that enable HR professionals to act as a strategic ally in the digital business environ to deal with the global pandemic challenges. The model exhibited in figure 13 (Ulrich, Burns, Wright, & Ulrich, 2021).

Figure 13: RBL Group's & Michigan University's Global HR Competency Study - 2021³⁶



The arrows defined here illustrates the step-by-step process of implementation of the competency model in the post pandemic world. However, its customization may be done as per the maturity level of the organization.

5.1.1 Vigilance: HR function as a security shield for organizations' survival

Organizations across the globe exhibit vigilance, remain cautioned, demonstrate alert attitude, and create adaptive culture to the unanticipated circumstances, such as economic and financial crises, which may cause increased levels of uncertainty and precariousness among their workforce and present unforeseen threats to the organizations' sustainable performance and existence on the earth's map. However, with the recent outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, organizations are navigating the unprecedented events, fears, threats, challenges, pressures, and making all possible efforts in finding new solutions to challenges arising across many areas of their operations.

³⁶ <https://www.rbl.net/insights/articles/where-have-we-been-and-where-are-we-going-the-hrcs-competency-model-from-round-1-to-round-8>

5.1.2 Employees' Mental, Social, and Physical Well-being

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) global healthcare pandemic has become an abysmal for the organizational workforce across the globe and forced people to work remotely for 24/7 which has impacted their emotional, mental, social, and physical well-being across the globe (Khan, Mamun, Griffiths, & Ullah, 2020). Many of the people have faced with mental health conditions. A large number of populations got infected with COVID-19 and encountered with direct consequences of the infection and took adjustments to subsequent societal changes to operate safely in the new normal (Rains, et al., 2020).

The healthcare crisis urged the employers, specifically, the CEOs to rethink and address the 'always on!' or '24/7' work culture which has compelled the unwell employees to work from home while suffering through COVID-19 and many other diseases. The employers have observed more 'presenteeism' in employees who worked from home while being unwell as compared to those who attended the workplace in 2020. These unhealthy working habits have been continued in 2021 as a malpractice under the curtain of flexible working hours phenomenon. Moreover, unmanageable workloads due to extensive 'leaveism' has been reported as the major cause of work-related stress. It is crucial for the CEOs to address the issue of employee wellbeing on top priority as remote work culture force employees to work when they are unwell and take them to next level of burnout (CIPD, 2021).

As a strategic ally, Chief Human Resources Officer (CHROs) are apprehensive about the pandemic's impact on mental wellbeing of the people and continuously marching forward to promote good mental, social, emotional, and physical health, and tackle work related stress, by means of issuing COVID-19 advisories covering governments', WHO's, and country's regulator's responses across the globe. However, it is difficult to manage mental wellbeing as several other health risks may result from 24/7 culture of work from home (EY Belgium, 2020).

5.1.3 COVID-19 pandemic and HR in a technology spotlight

COVID-19 pandemic came with a technological reverberation. Many authors predicted the future of HRM as technological business ally because the spread of the pandemic has put the business survival in the technology spotlight (Nagele-Piazza, 2020).

HR is viewed as curator of technology-savvy human capital for the business and expected as steward of change by catalyzing and expediting the acceptance, adoption, and implementation of technology with a fast pace at an unprecedented scale. Most of the organizations world over have turned to technology and innovation to deal with the global challenges. Reflecting at the fundamental technology implications arising from the impact of COVID-19 on various HR operations, they anticipate employee layoffs as most of the back-office work will be automated by utilizing various digital innovations such as AI, machine learning, cloud computing, IoT etc. Correspondingly, technology is seen as a huge disrupter which will change the job market. Hence, the challenge of handling layoffs will be dealt with an extra care during this global economic recession. Being an employees' advocate, the CHROs have to play the strategic and people centric role simultaneously (Aurelia & Momin, 2020).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) can transform HR by streamlining and automation of the operational workflows in the areas of talent acquisition, learning and development, and employee engagement and retention. The perception that AI will replace humans with bots from human resources function is not true. AI will serve as a facilitator and can never replace human intervention but reduce it. Because we need people of tech-savvy skillset to monitor its functioning in the organizations. Organizations can use its efficient data-driven insights coupled with human interventions for optimal business solutions (Dixit, 2020).

Although, the HR and IT professionals completed the journey of remote working very nicely in a very short span of time, but there are a few pitfalls that CEOs need to focus on for business continuity in the new normal. In spirit of sustainability, a structured approach is needed, together with a

significant investment to change corporate culture and people's mindset (EY Belgium, 2020).

5.1.4 HR in the COVID crisis: a strategic opinion

Crisis management is all about preparing an organization for the actions and behaviors to be undertaken or chosen to cope-up with a major catastrophic happening in a safe and effective manner (Lockwood, 2005). Over the past years, crisis is taken in the contexts of finance or economy, and it falls under the strategic scope of leadership. But, from a human resources management's perspective, it gains even more importance in times of unprecedented healthcare crises as it makes up an important dimension of crisis management to be looked at from the lens of HR policies that have a significant influence on the workforce. Hence, the strategic role of Human Resources function is equally important during the prevalent COVID Crisis as HR policies are critical for the business survival as it has humanistic consequences (Vardarlier, 2016).

5.2 Pakistan's Perspective as a 'the erosion of fit'

The prevalent rampant uncertainty has become a daily ordeal for HR professionals in Pakistan as the coronavirus continues to spread across the country and they navigate around the unknown challenges or extremely critical problems which are not only pertinent to national economic front but also manifold a range of multifaceted complicated issues such as recurring heat-waves/ cold-waves as a climate change, distressing economic recession, and thumping political instability. Besides, the country underwent complete lockdown for two months which halted all economic activities and resulted into socio-politico-economic meltdown (The World Bank, 2020; DAWN, 2020; Khan, Naushad, Akbar, Faisal, & Fahad, 2020).

Economies are run by a strong and healthy human capital! No unhealthy nation can emerge as a leading economy. In spirit of sustainability, it is an imperative responsibility of HR function to save the people first to deal with the economic crisis in every organization. It is the high time to think about

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the major critical challenges of the HR function specifically in Pakistan where the economic fall-out is on the rise and the inflation rate rose to 14.6 percent (DAWN, 2020; State Bank of Pakistan, January 2020). Another report of the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) titled 'Inflation Monitor' for the month of January 2020 stated that Pakistan observed the highest inflation rate over the last 12 years (State Bank of Pakistan, January 2020). The country witnessed 12-year-high-inflation at the rate of 14.6 percent amongst the developed and emerging economies which has impacted the country's socio-politico-economic condition as well. The fiscal year 2020 has been viewed as the worst year across the country as the residents witnessed highest inflation in the world pushing policy-makers to escalate interest rate which has also impacted the cost of living of the entire population of Pakistan (Iqbal S. , 2020). The country's inflation rate slowed down till the year end but national CPI inflation still stays up (State Bank of Pakistan, 2020; Trading Economics, 2020; Mettis Global, 2020). Under such worsened economic situation, many businesses went for lay-offs, pay-cuts, retrenchments, downsizing, etc. (Shafi, Liu, & Ren, 2020; Asghar, Batool, Farooq, & Rehman, 2020; Javed, 2020). More than 54 percent residents of Pakistan faced pay-cuts and layoffs (Hanif U. , 2020). According to a joint survey published by Dun & Bradstreet (D&B) Pakistan and Gallup Pakistan (2020), millions of residents of the country lost their jobs during the countrywide lockdown. Some organizations opted for laid-off strategy while others chose to send their workforce on privileged (paid or unpaid) leaves for their survival in the economic crisis. Ninety percent respondents of the survey expressed their worries over the marked decrease of their personal finances amid pay-cuts, layoffs, and business closures including redundancies such as terminations, dismissals, severances, etc. However, eighty-seven percent argued that their savings have been badly affected whereas fifty-nine percent feared losses of lives and employment (Shahid, 2020) .

The COVID-19 healthcare and economic crisis resulted into business closures and defaults. Contrarily, the digital/ technology businesses flourished

the mutual beliefs, perceptions and informal obligations between an employer and an

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economic success by going beyond GDP³⁷ and organizational profit. All business heads need to take HR function on board to reconcile the tension between our current economic priorities; to cope up with the prevalent global healthcare crisis by extending our means; and to streamline strategies to shape the way people think about economy to deal with the economic constraints imposed on Pakistan by the natural environment in the form of this novel virus. This is not the right time for HR function to think wisely to lockdown this global epidemic within the shortest possible timeframe to emerge as a socio-politico-economic warrior!

The precipitous and exponential spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) is having an adverse effect on organizations/ institutes and businesses around the world and, particularly, on HR's relationship with the staff and amongst staff. Keeping the contemporary scenario in view, C-Suite HR Officers need to rethink their role to lead organizations as a strategic ally during this Coronavirus pandemic (Lewis, 2020). The business and HR leaders need to collaborate in anticipating and mitigating the undesirable effects of this healthcare and economic crisis. The role of the Human Resource (HR) function has emerged to be more crucial as compared to the pre COVID-19 eras. The decisions taken by HR leaders will not only impact the livelihood of the employees but also effect the overall psychological contract³⁸ of the entire workforce (Khan N. A., 2020; Community World Service Asia, 2020). The psychological contract signifies to the 'informal/ unwritten set of expectations' of the employment between the employer and the employee(s) which are palpably be different from the formal/ written and codified employment contract (Armstrong M. , 2006; HR Zone, 2020). To brace-up the employer-employee relationship during these challenging economic and healthcare crises, the HR function need to act as a buttress (an employees' ambassador) for the sustenance of psychological contract with the codified employment contract. Strengthening the psychological contract is also one of

³⁷ GDP: Gross Domestic Product

³⁸ Psychological Contract: The concept of psychological contract was enunciated by an organizational scholar Denise Rousseau in the contemporary research. It represents

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and gained abnormal profits across the world. This economic recession has proven to be a threat and opportunity for the business community in Pakistan. Retention has become another big challenge for the HR function as technology companies opened the job market not only for the technology experts but also for other support function. In such an enervating situation, managing expectations of disheartened, depressed, and dispirited employees has become vital behavior for employers so that they may be able to maintain the breach of psychological contract of employees. Similarly, the employees should also learn to manage their expectations amid difficult and unfavorable situations or adverse effects of the pandemic on their personal lives and try their level best to maintain their productivity to exhibit their commitment towards their employers. In the prevalent unprecedented circumstances, the perceived breaches of the psychological contract can cause a severe debacle between employer and employee relationship which may lead to disengagement from work, reduced productivity, and workplace deviance.

5.2.1 People's experiences of work-from-home (remote working) Model in Pakistan

Following the global pattern of working and to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus in Pakistan, all public and private sector organizations/ institutes switched to a remote work model as a rapid response to the unprecedented healthcare crisis. Work-from-home model is adopted at a rate and scale the country have neither experienced and nor anticipated such anomalous and strange situation (Irteza, Qadir, & Nishat, 2020). In Pakistan, remote working model evolved into a boundary-less work environment with no time limits for official work. It not only disturbed the work-life balance but also resulted into a big causative agent of employees' burnout. Boundaryless lifestyle between home and office have increased the workload of healthy employees as many of the workforce is affected or exposed to the novel virus and not available to work. Many employees reported complaints about difficulties in completing their tasks during the working hours as they have invested their personal time after working hours to achieve the business goals

employee.

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in the nosedived economy (Khan M. , 2020). Although, working remotely is one of the best ways to stay safe and to minimize/ mitigate the risk of getting infected with COVID-19 (Shafi, Liu, & Ren, 2020) but the flexibility that the work from home option brings have lead employees left with over-worked and stressed-out. Evidently, these arguments are applicable to only a small fraction of the population of Pakistan. The latest most study revealed that only 13.47% of the jobs in the country are tele-commutable (Khan M. , 2020).

During the country-wide lockdown, the face-to-face meetings were swapped with electronic/ telephonic communication and/ or videoconferencing. The HR function exhibited very crucial role in managing the work-life balance of employees under very complicated and challenging circumstances in a country where power breakdowns and outages are very common issue (Hanif U. , 2020; Khan N. A. , 2020). The devastating situation gave birth to a very significant question when the government lifted-up the lockdown – Will the organizations/ institutes in Pakistan continue to operate with remote work model? Perhaps, the answer was found to be yes as many of the C-Suit Officials see it as a business continuity lifeline in the new normal. Interview responses of the few are as follows:

- *“The work from home trend will definitely rise now as it offers both flexibility and a solution to emergencies”,* says CEO of Jazz (Ibrahim, 2020).
- *“The trend was already growing in other countries since the introduction of 4G, but traditional attitudes to work kept it from taking hold in Pakistan until now,”* says HR Expert and Expace Consulting CEO (Shams, 2020)
- *“The crisis may have forced us to adopt it, but once we get out, I think this culture of working online from home is here to stay. Emerging technologies, like 5G, will remove further limitations, making work from home culture*

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more feasible.” said Centre Manager for Aptech (MSG) (Aziz, 2020).

In the nutshell, it may be inferred that the organizations that remained successful in setting work-life time fence for operating with remote working model did reasonably well as compared to those who may not be able to foresee the pitfalls and health hazards of limitless working hours (EY Belgium, 2020). The future outlook requires the nicely planned and well-thought-out implementation of remote working to be successful in the long run as working remotely needs to be embedded in the corporate culture of the country. (The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Pakistan - PAIB Committee, 2020; EY Belgium, 2020).

5.2.2 HR facing with the technology challenge

To achieve digital ambitions and unleash the potential of the HR profession, the foremost role of the CHROs must be to develop acceptance of technology among the employees by creating awareness of its benefits. The technology embracing challenge may only be achieved by removing xenophobic mindset and liberating to bloom in the post pandemic digital economy.

5.2.3 HR at the cross-roads of crisis management evangelist

In Pakistan, HR function is presently standing on the cross-roads where there is no other way out to address people's healthcare crisis, economic miseries, and business ostracism but to emerge as strategic and technological evangelist take the organizations out from the unprecedented socio-politico-economic crisis (Masud, 2019).

HR profession is facing with a bizarre conundrum of ill perceived value to contribute towards the strategic crisis management plans and confronting with serious headwinds in hiring the right people to deal with the looming COVID crises. This sociological challenge plunged the country into a nosedived economy in 2020.

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The above proposed transformations are the possible immediate fixes and are in no way an exhaustive list. In fact, it's merely a starting-point for a long and windy road, whereby these changes will be fully embedded with the merit-oriented culture within public sector. Having said that embarking on these steps will ensure prompt improvement in delivery and successful execution of reform agenda of the Government which is becoming increasing inevitable. The economic crisis or any other crisis that has been debated in the country are shackled due to Human Resource related issues which remains the "Biggest Crisis in Pakistan".

5.2.4 HR on mission agility: a practice evolution

The post-pandemic scenario has set a landscape for the contemporary and contextual changing events to embark upon the agile HR solutions for accelerating the fast-paced business agility (Bresciani, Ferraris, Roman, & Santoro, 2021; McMackin & Heffernan, 2020). Pakistan is facing the same storm as other countries of the world but sailing in a different boat facing with distinct economic challenges (Azizi, Atlasi, Ziapour, Abbas, & Naemi, 2021). Hence, the growing trend of agile HR reflects the implementation of global agile practices in many multi-national organizations operating in Pakistan in a customized manner. Agile HR has to respond to seven different contexts that varies in terms of geo-politico-socio-economic situations namely: COVID – 19 healthcare crisis, political posturing, economic crisis 2020/ 21, global recession, emotional and social agility, and digital revolution (Ulrich, Burns, Wright, & Ulrich, 2021). Keeping the above-mentioned contexts in view, applying 'agile strategy' successfully within the HR function is one of the biggest challenges for the local organizations in Pakistan as majority of the HR professionals are unaware of an agile HR strategy. Their capacity building is required on an urgent basis so that they may be able to plan for a post-

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pandemic future of the country and lead agile business transformations (Masud, 2019; Haque, 2021). Only those CHROs will survive and thrive in the new normal who develop expertise in embedding agile HR strategy in their organizational strategy effectively and efficiently. Currently, agile HR strategy is an emergency response evolution in practice. Its theoretical development is yet to be developed with the passage of time (McMackin & Heffernan, 2020).

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