



Strategic HRM in the Hybrid Work Era: A Multi-Case Study of Practice and Transformation

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Abstract. The widespread adoption of hybrid work arrangements has prompted organizations to fundamentally rethink how human resource management (HRM) systems are designed, integrated, and enacted. While the Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) literature emphasizes the alignment of HR practices with organizational objectives, limited empirical research has examined how HR departments operationalize SHRM principles to support hybrid work transformation. This study addresses this gap by investigating how HR departments enact strategic HRM across four key dimensions—strategic alignment, horizontal integration, performance orientation, and HR as a strategic partner—in the context of hybrid work adoption. Drawing on a qualitative multiple-case study of four diverse organizations in Vietnam, the findings reveal that HR departments adopt varied yet interdependent approaches to embed hybrid work within organizational strategy, realign HR subsystems, reconfigure performance logic, and assert strategic influence. The study contributes to SHRM theory by extending its application to hybrid work environments and highlighting the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of strategic HRM practices. Practically, it offers insights for HR leaders seeking to lead hybrid transformation through integrated, data-informed, and strategically positioned HR functions.

Keywords: Hybrid work, strategic human resource, case study, transformation, human resource management.

1 Introduction

The transformation of work in the post-digital era has accelerated the adoption of flexible and hybrid work arrangements, fundamentally altering how organizations design roles, manage performance, and engage with their workforce. No longer confined to crisis response, hybrid work has become an enduring feature of organizational life, driven by technological advancement, evolving employee expectations, and shifting competitive dynamics (Kelliher & Anderson, 2021; Choudhury, Foroughi, & Larson, 2021; Wang, Liu, Qian, & Parker, 2021). As organizations restructure around distributed teams and asynchronous workflows, the role of the Human Resources (HR) function has come under renewed scrutiny. Traditional HR practices—centered on physical

presence, standardized routines, and formal supervision—are being reimaged to accommodate flexibility, autonomy, and digital collaboration at scale (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2021; Ipsen, van Veldhoven, Kirchner, & Hansen, 2021).

Amid this transformation, there is growing recognition that HR must evolve from a transactional or administrative role to a strategic partner that co-shapes organizational responses to the complexities of hybrid work (Cooke, Dickmann, & Parry, 2021; Raghuram, Hill, Gibbs, & Maruping, 2021). This evolution is particularly evident in how organizations design and execute their HR strategies to maintain alignment with business goals, ensure coherence across HR systems, and support both individual and organizational performance in distributed contexts (Gibbs, Mengel, & Siemroth, 2021; Rudolph & Baltes, 2021). The Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) perspective provides a useful theoretical lens for examining this evolution, emphasizing the importance of aligning HR practices with long-term organizational objectives and treating HR as a core driver of strategic success (Bailey & Kurland, 2021; Foss & Saebi, 2021).

However, existing SHRM literature has largely focused on traditional or co-located work environments, with limited empirical attention to how HR departments strategically reconfigure their practices to enable hybrid work transformation (Nagori & Lawton, 2024; Zhang & Venkatesh, 2021). Much of the current discourse either centers on individual-level experiences—such as employee engagement or remote work satisfaction—or narrowly addresses policy adjustments (Hickman & Robb, 2021; Vyas, 2022), overlooking the broader organizational processes through which HR enacts its strategic role. Moreover, there remains a lack of understanding about how different types of organizations—varying in size, sector, and structural maturity—internalize and operationalize SHRM principles in response to the demands of hybrid work (Kniffin et al., 2021; DeRamachandaran et al., 2024). Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how HR departments strategically support hybrid work transformation through practices that are aligned, integrated, performance-oriented, and strategically embedded. Drawing on qualitative data from four organizations that have adopted hybrid work models, this research offers an in-depth exploration of how HR functions engage in strategic alignment, horizontal integration, performance redefinition, and strategic influence. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research question: How do HR departments enact strategic HRM practices to support hybrid work transformation in organizations?

The remaining sections of this study are organized as follows. The next section presents the theoretical framework guiding this research, and Section 3 details the methodology employed. Section 4 focuses on analyzing the results, while Section 5 offers an in-depth discussion of the findings. Finally, Section 6 highlights the theoretical and practical implications of this study, addresses its limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM)

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) is broadly defined as the alignment of HR practices and policies with the strategic objectives of an organization to foster long-term value creation (Cooke, Dickmann, & Parry, 2021). Central to this view is the notion of vertical alignment, where HR systems and initiatives are integrated with the broader strategic direction of the firm, and horizontal alignment, which emphasizes internal coherence across various HR practices—such as recruitment, performance management, learning and development, and compensation (Bailey & Kurland, 2021; Raghuram, Hill, Gibbs, & Maruping, 2021). The SHRM perspective has evolved from its initial emphasis on formal alignment models toward more dynamic and capability-based understandings, where HR is seen not only as an administrative function but also as a strategic lever for competitive advantage (Foss & Saebi, 2021; Zhang & Venkatesh, 2021).

A core assumption in SHRM theory is that HR systems are most effective when they are not only technically sound but also mutually reinforcing, contributing to the firm's adaptability, innovation, and responsiveness (Kniffin et al., 2021). While this theory has been widely applied in contexts of business growth, digital transformation, and international expansion, relatively few studies have explored how SHRM principles are reconfigured to address evolving work structures—particularly in hybrid work environments, where organizational boundaries, control mechanisms, and performance expectations are fundamentally redefined (Devi Ramachandaran et al., 2024; Rudolph & Baltes, 2021).

2.2 Hybrid Work as an Organizational Transformation

Hybrid work, broadly understood as the intentional combination of remote and on-site work arrangements, represents more than a logistical shift—it is a structural transformation with wide-ranging implications for workforce management (Kelliher & Anderson, 2021; Choudhury, Foroughi, & Larson, 2021). Unlike temporary remote work or ad hoc flexibility, hybrid models often involve systemic redesigns of task allocation, team composition, managerial oversight, and technology enablement (Yang et al., 2021; Wang, Liu, Qian, & Parker, 2021). As such, hybrid work challenges traditional organizational architectures, especially those built around standardized schedules, face-to-face supervision, and co-located teamwork (Ipsen, van Veldhoven, Kirchner, & Hansen, 2021).

This shift has placed new demands on HR departments to develop work policies, coordinate across digital platforms, and support managers in leading distributed teams (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2021; Raghuram et al., 2021). At the same time, hybrid work introduces ambiguities around performance, accountability, and collaboration, which HR must address through system-wide interventions (Hickman & Robb, 2021). However, the literature remains fragmented in its understanding of how hybrid work is managed strategically. Much of the scholarship has focused on employee-level outcomes—such as productivity, wellbeing, and engagement—while the strategic role of

HR in designing and institutionalizing hybrid models remains underexplored (Nagori & Lawton, 2024; Gibbs, Mengel, & Siemroth, 2021).

2.3 Dimensions of Strategic HRM in Hybrid Contexts

This study adopts four key dimensions of SHRM—strategic alignment, horizontal integration, performance orientation, and HR as a strategic partner—to examine how HR departments engage with hybrid work transformation (Cooke, Dickmann, & Parry, 2021; Raghuram, Hill, Gibbs, & Maruping, 2021). Strategic alignment refers to the extent to which HR policies and planning processes are intentionally linked to organizational strategy. In hybrid contexts, strategic alignment involves embedding flexibility and digital capabilities into workforce planning, role design, and talent strategy (Devi Ramachandaran et al., 2024; Wang, Liu, Qian, & Parker, 2021). However, the challenge lies in aligning hybrid practices with both formal strategic documents and evolving operational realities, especially when hybrid transformation is incremental or decentralized (Foss & Saebi, 2021; Zhang & Venkatesh, 2021).

Horizontal integration involves the internal coherence of HR practices and the coordination between HR and other business functions. In the hybrid environment, achieving such integration is particularly complex. Recruitment, onboarding, training, and performance management systems must not only be consistent with each other but also compatible with remote and hybrid modalities (Ipsen, van Veldhoven, Kirchner, & Hansen, 2021; Bailey & Kurland, 2021). Moreover, HR must increasingly collaborate with departments such as IT, facilities, and operations to deliver a seamless employee experience. Yet, this level of cross-functional coordination remains under-theorized in SHRM scholarship (Kniffin et al., 2021; Raghuram et al., 2021).

Performance orientation in strategic HRM reflects the system's capacity to translate organizational objectives into individual and team-level performance expectations. Hybrid work necessitates a shift from input-based performance assessment (e.g., visibility, attendance) to output-based models that prioritize deliverables, outcomes, and value creation (Gibbs, Mengel, & Siemroth, 2021; Hickman & Robb, 2021). This transformation requires HR to redesign performance frameworks, introduce digital monitoring tools, and retrain managers in remote supervision—all while safeguarding fairness and motivation (Rudolph & Baltes, 2021; Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2021). Despite its importance, few studies have examined how performance orientation is recalibrated in hybrid work systems (Kelliher & Anderson, 2021).

HR as a strategic partner is a well-established concept in SHRM literature, highlighting the transition of HR from an administrative support role to an active contributor to strategic decision-making. In hybrid contexts, this role expands further, requiring HR to act as a change leader, data interpreter, and cultural architect (Nagori & Lawton, 2024; Yang et al., 2021). However, the conditions under which HR gains strategic influence—particularly in hybrid transitions—are not well understood. Some research suggests that formal structure (e.g., HR's place on executive teams) is insufficient unless accompanied by analytical capability, interdepartmental trust, and strategic foresight (Cooke et al., 2021; Raghuram et al., 2021).

2.4 Gaps and Research Need

Despite the conceptual richness of SHRM theory, there is limited empirical understanding of how HR departments operationalize these strategic dimensions in response to hybrid work transformation. Existing studies tend to treat hybrid work either as a technical or behavioral issue, with limited attention to the system-wide recalibration of HRM practices that strategic transformation entails (Allen et al., 2021; Rudolph & Baltes, 2021). Moreover, few empirical works have examined how different organizational types—varying in size, maturity, and sector—enact strategic HRM principles when faced with the uncertainties and complexities of hybrid work adoption (Bailey & Kurland, 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021). This study addresses these gaps by examining how HR departments in four organizations engage in strategic alignment, coordinate HR subsystems, reconfigure performance systems, and assert strategic influence in the design and execution of hybrid work models. By doing so, it advances both theoretical and practical understanding of SHRM in a rapidly transforming world of work.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Setting and Sample

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case research design to explore how HR departments enact strategic HRM practices to support hybrid work transformation. A multiple-case approach was selected to enable analytical comparisons across organizational contexts and to identify patterns of variation and convergence in strategic HRM enactment (Yin, 2018). The research was conducted in Vietnam, a rapidly developing economy where organizations are increasingly formalizing hybrid work systems amid digitalization and labor market shifts.

Four leading organizations were purposively selected based on their active implementation of hybrid work models and the presence of mature or evolving HR systems. The sample included a large technology consulting firm (Case A), a mid-sized consumer goods manufacturer (Case B), a small digital marketing enterprise (Case C), and a diversified conglomerate (Case D). This diversity in industry, size, and structural maturity enabled a nuanced exploration of SHRM practices in heterogeneous settings. All four firms had formally adopted hybrid work policies for at least 12 months at the time of data collection and demonstrated engagement in HR-led transformation processes.

3.2 Data collection

Data were collected through a combination of semi-structured in-depth interviews and archival documents, ensuring both depth and contextual understanding. A total of 12 interviews were conducted with key informants, including HR directors, HR business partners (HRBPs), learning and development (L&D) coordinators, founders, analytics managers, and senior leadership members. These participants were directly involved in

the design, implementation, or oversight of hybrid work strategies and HR system transformations.

Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and followed an interview protocol designed to elicit insights into the four SHRM dimensions: strategic alignment, horizontal integration, performance orientation, and HR's strategic role. Interviews were conducted in English or Vietnamese, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Where necessary, transcripts were translated and verified to preserve meaning. In addition to interviews, the study collected archival materials such as HR policy documents, strategic planning reports, organizational charts, and internal communications related to hybrid work. To enhance data credibility, triangulation was pursued through cross-verification of interviews and documents, and through follow-up queries to participants where clarification was required.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013), which is particularly suited to inductive research seeking to build theoretical insights from qualitative data. The analysis followed three iterative stages. In the first stage (open coding), the researchers conducted line-by-line reading of interview transcripts and archival documents to extract first-order concepts expressed in participants' own terms. This stage produced a wide range of informant-centric codes reflecting specific practices, routines, and perspectives related to hybrid work and HRM systems.

In the second stage (axial coding), the first-order concepts were grouped into second-order themes based on conceptual similarities and alignment with the four dimensions of SHRM. This stage involved iteratively comparing concepts within and across cases to refine the thematic structure and ensure interpretive clarity. In the third stage (aggregate dimension development), the second-order themes were synthesized into four overarching dimensions: strategic alignment, horizontal integration, performance orientation, and HR as a strategic partner. These dimensions served as the analytical scaffolding for the findings and discussion sections.

To ensure reliability and validity, the study employed an intercoder agreement process. Two researchers independently coded a subset of transcripts, compared interpretations, and discussed discrepancies to refine the coding scheme. A final round of full coding was conducted with the agreed-upon structure. Member checking was also conducted with selected participants to verify key interpretations and ensure authenticity of representation. Additionally, constant comparison techniques were used to enhance internal consistency and theoretical saturation across cases. This rigorous and reflexive analytical process enabled the development of grounded, yet theoretically informed insights into how HR departments enact strategic HRM practices to support hybrid work transformation in diverse organizational settings.

4 Findings

4.1 Strategic Alignment in Hybrid Work Transformation

This section presents the findings related to how HR departments align their practices with organizational strategies to support hybrid work transformation. Across the four case organizations, three interrelated themes emerged within the strategic alignment dimension: integration of HR and business strategy, hybrid-focused workforce planning, and HR's participation in strategic decision-making. While all organizations demonstrated efforts to align HR initiatives with the hybrid agenda, the scope and formality of this alignment varied considerably depending on organizational size, maturity of the HR function, and perceived strategic importance of hybrid work.

Case A – a large, export-oriented technology consultancy – exhibited the most comprehensive alignment between HR and organizational strategy. The HR director described the hybrid work model not as an HR-led initiative but as a co-designed strategic transformation between HR and business leadership. As she stated, “We didn’t just adjust our policies after the fact—our people strategy was built alongside our digital transformation goals.” Strategic HR documents were revised in parallel with the company’s new operating model, embedding hybrid roles, remote leadership competencies, and virtual team structures. Workforce planning was data-driven and prospective, as indicated by the workforce analytics manager: “We forecasted the ratio of roles that could go remote, hybrid, or remain in-office, and shared that projection with every business unit as part of our annual strategy cycle.” HR’s presence in senior leadership planning meetings and their contribution to scenario modeling was indicative of high-level strategic participation.

In Case B, a domestic consumer goods manufacturing firm, strategic alignment emerged more incrementally and reactively. Initially, HR played a limited role in the firm’s shift toward hybrid operations, which was driven by supply chain disruptions and cost containment. The HR manager reflected, “At first, HR just responded to urgent needs—moving some admin staff online and managing attendance records. But over time, we began to formalize it.” As the labor market tightened and employee retention challenges grew, HR gained visibility in strategic discussions. A mid-level HR specialist explained, “Only when we started losing good candidates to companies offering remote options did we get asked to rethink our recruitment and job design policies.” Although formal alignment between HR and long-term strategy was emerging, it remained largely issue-driven rather than embedded in forward-looking plans.

Case C, a digital marketing SME, demonstrated a more fluid and culturally driven form of alignment. For this firm, hybrid work was embedded from the start as part of its identity as an agile, values-based organization. The founder, who also directly oversaw HR functions, stated, “We see hybrid not just as a perk but as a strategic asset—our flexibility is part of how we compete for talent and clients.” Workforce planning was informal but deliberate, focusing on recruiting for roles suited to remote delivery and designing flexible teams. Although the company lacked a formal HR strategy document, strategic alignment was practiced through close coordination between business objectives and people management decisions. As the founder noted, “We adjust our

hiring plans based on campaign cycles and remote readiness—it's a continuous conversation, not a static plan."

In Case D, a diversified services conglomerate, strategic alignment was formal, data-driven, and deeply institutionalized. Hybrid work transformation was part of a broader enterprise-wide modernization program. According to the Chief People Officer, "Hybrid wasn't a policy change—it was a structural change, and HR was one of the architects." HR strategy was integrated into the group's three-year strategic roadmap, with explicit deliverables tied to hybrid role transitions, digital infrastructure investment, and change management initiatives. The workforce planning team worked closely with finance and IT to model talent requirements across remote, hybrid, and on-site divisions. A senior HR business partner explained, "Our strategic alignment starts with the workforce plan—it's not just a headcount table, but a forecast of capabilities linked to business goals."

The cross-case comparison revealed clear variation in how HR departments align with hybrid transformation strategy, ranging from reactive policy adaptation to proactive strategic leadership. In both Case A and Case D, HR departments demonstrated high levels of strategic integration, marked by their active participation in leadership forums, alignment of HR documents with corporate strategy, and forward-looking workforce planning. These cases illustrate a strategic alignment model in which HR is not merely a support function but a co-driver of transformation, consistent with SHRM theory's emphasis on vertical integration and strategic partnering.

Conversely, in Case B, strategic alignment was reactive and driven by emerging operational and talent pressures rather than long-term strategic planning. HR's involvement increased only after hybrid work began impacting workforce outcomes, suggesting a lag between strategic need and HR capacity. Case C offered a distinctive perspective, illustrating how even in the absence of formal HR structures, strategic alignment can be embedded culturally and operationally through leadership philosophy and flexible work design. The case demonstrates that in agile, founder-led organizations, strategic HRM may manifest through informal but consistent integration with business practices.

Overall, the findings suggest that strategic alignment in hybrid work transformation is shaped not only by organizational size and structure but also by HR's institutional legitimacy, access to strategic decision-making forums, and capacity to operationalize workforce intelligence. The extent to which HR can align hybrid policies with organizational direction determines whether hybrid work serves as a reactive adjustment or a strategic enabler of performance and innovation.

4.2 Horizontal Integration of HR Practices for Hybrid Work

This section presents findings related to the horizontal integration of HR practices—defined as the internal coherence across HR subsystems and cross-functional collaboration with other departments in support of hybrid work transformation. Three second-order themes were identified: synchronization across HR functions, cross-department collaboration, and standardization of employee experience. While all four organizations introduced hybrid work models, the degree to which their HR practices were integrated

and coordinated varied significantly based on organizational structure, technological capacity, and interdepartmental dynamics.

In Case A, horizontal integration was achieved through deliberate alignment of core HR functions—recruitment, onboarding, learning and development, and performance management—with the firm's broader hybrid strategy. The HR transformation manager noted, “Our entire HR system was restructured around flexibility. From job ads to KPIs, everything speaks the same language—remote-ready, digitally fluent, and team-oriented.” The company introduced a unified digital HR platform that served as a single interface for employee lifecycle management, reducing friction across subsystems. Furthermore, HR collaborated intensively with IT and Operations to ensure that remote infrastructure, training, and performance metrics were jointly designed. As the Head of Digital HR stated, “We designed the onboarding flow and digital workspace together with IT. It wasn't a handover—it was a joint build.”

Case B revealed partial and fragmented integration. While some HR functions—particularly payroll and attendance tracking—had been adapted for remote work, other subsystems remained siloed. The learning and development (L&D) function, for instance, struggled to keep pace with performance appraisal updates. The L&D coordinator reflected, “Training materials still assume face-to-face delivery, while appraisals are now done online. There's a mismatch.” Interdepartmental collaboration was limited, with HR often operating reactively to system-level changes. The HR executive admitted, “We were not looped in when IT introduced the new communication tools. It caused confusion in our workflows.” Despite these challenges, efforts were underway to establish a more integrated system through recent investments in cloud-based HR solutions.

In Case C, integration was informal but consistent due to the company's small size and fluid communication practices. The founder explained, “Everyone talks to everyone here—HR, project leads, creatives. That's how we align.” HR practices were lean and agile, with recruitment, onboarding, and team management often handled by the same person. This fluidity allowed for quick alignment across processes. For example, new hires were onboarded through asynchronous video walkthroughs created jointly by HR and marketing. As the team lead described, “We didn't wait for a formal L&D unit. We just recorded what worked and shared it on Slack.” Although lacking formal systems, the case showed strong functional consistency and seamless collaboration driven by a shared vision and open communication culture.

Case D presented the most advanced level of horizontal integration, supported by enterprise-wide digital infrastructure and formal governance mechanisms. The firm had implemented an integrated HRIS (Human Resource Information System) that linked recruitment, performance evaluation, training, and employee engagement data. A senior HR systems analyst described, “All our platforms talk to each other—if a manager flags a performance issue, the system suggests a training module and alerts the HRBP [HR Business Partner].” Cross-departmental collaboration was structured through inter-functional steering committees. The Hybrid Work Committee, co-led by HR and IT, met monthly to review data, resolve frictions, and update hybrid work policies. As one committee member shared, “Our integration isn't just technical—it's also about routines, rituals, and shared goals.”

The cross-case comparison demonstrates significant differences in the degree and mechanisms of horizontal integration. In both Case A and Case D, horizontal integration was not only technologically enabled but also strategically structured through interdepartmental governance, co-designed workflows, and shared platforms. These organizations exemplified the SHRM ideal of horizontal integration—ensuring that all HR functions reinforce each other and are aligned with hybrid work strategy. Their integration efforts enhanced system-wide coherence, minimized duplication, and created a seamless employee experience regardless of work location.

In contrast, Case B's HR practices remained fragmented, with partial adjustments made in isolation and limited coordination across HR subsystems or with other departments. The lack of horizontal integration led to misalignments between employee development, appraisal, and communication systems, resulting in confusion and inefficiency. Case C, despite lacking formal systems, achieved functional integration through cultural cohesion, open communication, and role fluidity. The findings here suggest that small, agile organizations can achieve practical integration through informal routines and interpersonal trust, even in the absence of robust systems or codified policies. Taken together, the findings emphasize that horizontal integration is a critical enabler of hybrid work effectiveness. Whether achieved through formal system integration or informal coordination, the coherence of HR practices across functional domains and organizational units determines the consistency of the employee experience and the reliability of HR as a strategic function. These findings extend SHRM theory by illustrating the forms and implications of internal HR alignment under hybrid work conditions, particularly in organizations facing different structural and technological constraints.

4.3 Performance Orientation in Hybrid Work Settings

This section presents findings related to the performance orientation dimension of strategic HRM, which refers to how HR departments develop performance management systems that reflect evolving expectations of productivity, accountability, and development in hybrid work environments. Three second-order themes emerged: the shift toward outcome-based performance metrics, alignment of individual goals with organizational strategy, and the use of data-driven HR practices to monitor and guide employee performance.

Case A demonstrated a robust transformation of performance management to accommodate hybrid work conditions. The HR team led a shift away from traditional input-focused appraisal systems (e.g., attendance or working hours) to output- and results-oriented performance indicators. A senior HR business partner explained, “We no longer ask ‘how long’ people worked—we ask ‘what impact’ they made. Our evaluation forms have been completely rewritten to focus on deliverables.” Goal-setting frameworks such as OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) were introduced across business units to ensure alignment and clarity for both remote and office-based staff. Digital performance dashboards provided real-time visibility into individual and team progress. As the performance and analytics lead noted, “Managers can see how each team

is progressing, and employees know exactly what's expected. It creates fairness and autonomy."

In Case B, the transition toward performance orientation was partial and uneven. Although some departments adopted project-based performance criteria, others retained legacy evaluation systems centered on physical presence. A mid-level manager admitted, "It's hard to assess performance when we can't observe employees. We're still experimenting with what works." HR had introduced some training to help supervisors set measurable goals and give feedback remotely, but uptake remained inconsistent. As the HR director acknowledged, "We're trying to move away from hours and toward outcomes, but it takes time to shift the mindset, especially among senior managers who are used to physical visibility." Integration between performance and development remained weak, with limited feedback loops to inform upskilling.

Case C approached performance orientation through a culture of transparency and mutual accountability. Without a formal performance management system, the company relied on clear project timelines, shared goals, and frequent feedback embedded in daily operations. As the team lead described, "We don't have annual appraisals—we do weekly check-ins, and everyone knows their deliverables. If someone misses a deadline, it's obvious to the whole team." The founder noted that this informal system suited their fast-paced and creative environment: "We recruit people who thrive on responsibility. That's our performance model—it's trust, not tracking." While effective for small teams, this approach posed potential risks in scalability and consistency.

Case D presented a highly formalized and data-driven approach to performance orientation. The organization had institutionalized a comprehensive digital performance management system that linked individual KPIs to team and divisional goals. The HR analytics manager explained, "Every employee's dashboard reflects their targets, and their performance feeds into business unit performance. It's vertically integrated." This system allowed for dynamic adjustment of goals, especially for hybrid roles where deliverables were redefined during the shift to flexible work. Managers received training in coaching techniques and feedback delivery tailored for virtual contexts. Moreover, performance data were tied to developmental pathways. As the learning and development head noted, "We use the same data to guide coaching, suggest training modules, and identify talent for leadership programs."

The cross-case analysis reveals contrasting levels of maturity and institutionalization in performance orientation across the four organizations. Case A and Case D exemplify advanced models in which performance systems were not only redesigned for hybrid work but also tightly coupled with organizational strategy and technological infrastructure. These firms operationalized a performance logic centered on outcomes, transparency, and continuous alignment. Through tools like OKRs, dashboards, and integrated analytics, they created a shared language of performance that enabled autonomy and accountability across work arrangements.

By contrast, Case B's experience highlighted the inertia of traditional evaluation systems and the difficulties of transitioning from presence-based to results-based assessment. The lack of clear metrics and reliance on managerial discretion led to inconsistent performance expectations, particularly between remote and onsite

employees. This suggests that without a coherent and standardized framework, hybrid work may exacerbate ambiguity and bias in performance evaluation.

Case C, while lacking formal systems, achieved a functional form of performance orientation through its cultural and operational norms. Frequent communication, mutual visibility of deliverables, and a trust-based model supported performance in a small, agile environment. However, the absence of structured data or documentation limited HR's ability to systematically evaluate or develop talent.

Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of performance orientation as a critical SHRM dimension in hybrid work contexts. Organizations that succeed in redefining performance around outcomes—supported by aligned technologies and development strategies—are better positioned to sustain accountability, motivation, and fairness in distributed teams. These insights extend SHRM theory by illustrating how performance orientation must be actively reinterpreted and embedded across practices to support the strategic goals of hybrid transformation.

4.4 HR as a Strategic Partner in Hybrid Work Transformation

This section presents findings on how HR departments enact their role as strategic partners in the context of hybrid work transformation. This dimension captures HR's active involvement in shaping organizational change, leveraging people analytics for strategic decision-making, and contributing to structural and cultural redesign. Three second-order themes emerged across the cases: HR's leadership in organizational change, strategic use of people analytics, and HR's influence on structure and workplace culture. In Case A, HR played a proactive and co-leadership role in the hybrid transformation process. The HR Director described a deep collaboration between HR and the executive team in redesigning the organizational structure to support hybrid work: "We weren't just asked to implement—we helped design the model. HR co-authored the transition roadmap, including workforce planning, change communication, and success metrics." HR led scenario planning exercises that modeled productivity, engagement, and space usage under various hybrid configurations. This strategic involvement enhanced HR's visibility and influence across the firm. As one senior manager noted, "This was the first time HR's voice was treated as essential in shaping the future of the business."

Case B demonstrated a more traditional and operationally reactive HR function, but signs of strategic evolution were emerging. HR initially focused on policy compliance and administrative coordination of hybrid work, such as attendance logging and eligibility tracking. However, as hybrid work implications for talent attraction, engagement, and productivity became more pronounced, HR began adopting a more strategic lens. The Head of HR shared, "We realized we had to move beyond rules and support broader decisions, like who thrives remotely and what managers need to lead hybrid teams." While HR was not yet central to strategic planning, it began offering workforce insights and proposing policy changes based on informal data from pulse surveys and turnover tracking.

In Case C, the HR role was integrated directly into leadership through the founder and senior team, allowing for agile and strategic decision-making. Although the company lacked a formal HR department, the founder described HR as a central function:

“People decisions are business decisions—we think about team structure, incentives, and values at every strategy meeting.” The firm used lightweight people analytics to track remote productivity, engagement, and turnover intentions. This data was not highly structured, but it informed leadership intuition and continuous adjustments to hybrid practices. The culture of transparency and the founder’s direct involvement allowed HR principles to be embedded in broader strategy organically.

Case D demonstrated a highly institutionalized model of HR as a strategic partner. HR was embedded in the organization’s top leadership and worked alongside finance, IT, and operations to design and execute the hybrid transition strategy. The Chief People Officer described their mandate: “Our role was to ensure that hybrid work was not a temporary fix but a sustainable operating model. That required designing new structures, leadership roles, and values.” The organization had a mature people analytics function that generated reports on hybrid productivity, engagement differentials, and retention risks. As the workforce analytics lead explained, “Our data informs C-level decisions, from space planning to succession pipelines. HR is now data-rich and influence-heavy.” HR also played a leading role in reshaping the organizational culture around trust, flexibility, and accountability, with formal training programs and communications aligned to these values.

The cross-case findings reveal distinct trajectories in how HR departments position themselves as strategic partners in hybrid work transformation. In both Case A and Case D, HR played a leading and proactive role, contributing directly to business strategy, organizational design, and culture change. These cases represent the strongest alignment with SHRM theory’s conception of HR as a strategic partner—where HR is both structurally empowered and substantively influential in shaping long-term organizational direction.

In contrast, Case B reflects a transitional model, where HR is evolving from a compliance-oriented function to a more strategic enabler. While not yet embedded in strategic decision-making forums, HR in this case has begun offering data-informed insights and advocating for structural and leadership adaptations based on hybrid work challenges. This suggests a growing recognition of HR’s potential as a strategic contributor, albeit within constraints imposed by legacy practices and organizational hierarchy.

Case C offers an alternative model in which strategic HR is enacted informally and organically through founder leadership. Although lacking formal HR structures, the integration of people considerations into strategic conversations—particularly around team design, trust, and flexibility—demonstrates that strategic HRM can be practiced even in small and flat organizations. The case highlights the role of leadership philosophy and culture in enabling HR’s strategic presence outside of bureaucratic formalization.

Collectively, these findings illustrate the variability of HR’s strategic positioning in hybrid transformation and underscore the importance of both structural access and strategic capability. Organizations that invest in HR’s analytical capacity, leadership integration, and culture-shaping influence are better positioned to translate hybrid work into sustainable value creation. The analysis advances SHRM theory by emphasizing that the realization of HR’s strategic role depends not only on formal positioning but

also on relational capital, cross-functional trust, and access to decision-making infrastructures.

5 Discussion

This study set out to explore how HR departments enact strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices to support hybrid work transformation across diverse organizational settings. Drawing on rich qualitative data from four case organizations, the findings reveal that HR departments operationalize strategic HRM through interrelated yet contextually varied practices across four dimensions: strategic alignment, horizontal integration, performance orientation, and HR as a strategic partner (Cooke, Dickmann, & Parry, 2021; Raghuram, Hill, Gibbs, & Maruping, 2021).

Strategic alignment emerged as the foundational dimension through which hybrid work was positioned within the broader organizational trajectory. In organizations where HR was embedded early in strategic planning (Cases A and D), hybrid policies were codified into long-term roadmaps, workforce planning was data-informed, and hybrid roles were structurally integrated (Foss & Saebi, 2021; Wang, Liu, Qian, & Parker, 2021). In contrast, in less mature contexts (Case B), strategic alignment was reactive and issue-driven, with HR responding to operational disruptions rather than proactively shaping hybrid transformation (Devi Ramachandaran et al., 2024). Case C demonstrated that even in the absence of formal strategy documents, alignment could be achieved informally through leadership vision and cultural clarity (Kniffin et al., 2021).

Horizontal integration was equally critical, reflecting the extent to which HR subsystems (e.g., recruitment, onboarding, performance, and L&D) were harmonized and coordinated with other departments such as IT and operations. Cases A and D institutionalized integration through digital HR systems and interdepartmental governance structures, facilitating consistency in employee experience and alignment of hybrid practices (Bailey & Kurland, 2021; Ipsen, van Veldhoven, Kirchner, & Hansen, 2021). Case B, however, showed the risks of fragmentation, where siloed systems created misalignments and inefficiencies. Case C, though lacking formal structures, achieved practical integration through informal coordination, agile roles, and a unified team culture—aligning with emerging literature on agile HR and relational capability (Yang et al., 2021).

The findings also underscore the significance of performance orientation in hybrid work systems. Organizations that successfully shifted to outcome-based performance models were able to sustain clarity, fairness, and accountability across distributed teams (Gibbs, Mengel, & Siemroth, 2021; Hickman & Robb, 2021). Cases A and D implemented digital dashboards, measurable KPIs, and aligned development systems that supported both autonomy and strategic performance tracking (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2021). In contrast, Case B struggled with legacy mindsets and inconsistent evaluation practices, while Case C relied on cultural norms and peer accountability to manage performance informally but effectively within a small, transparent team setting (Rudolph & Baltes, 2021).

Finally, the dimension of HR as a strategic partner revealed variation in the scope of HR's influence. In more mature cases, HR was directly involved in organizational design, culture change, and scenario planning, leveraging people analytics to inform executive decision-making (Zhang & Venkatesh, 2021; Raghuram et al., 2021). In Cases B and C, HR's strategic role was either emerging or embedded informally through leadership involvement, suggesting that structural positioning alone does not guarantee strategic impact—relational capital, analytical capability, and organizational trust are equally important to exercising influence (Nagori & Lawton, 2024; Cooke et al., 2021). Taken together, the findings suggest that HR departments enact strategic HRM to support hybrid work transformation not as a standardized blueprint but through a dynamic, multi-dimensional process shaped by organizational size, digital maturity, leadership orientation, and institutional context. Strategic HRM in hybrid environments is not simply about creating new policies—it is about reconfiguring the role of HR as an integrative force that aligns people systems with strategic priorities, fosters horizontal coherence, reinforces performance-based cultures, and occupies a trusted seat at the table of organizational transformation (Kelliher & Anderson, 2021; Allen et al., 2021).

6 Conclusion

6.1 Theoretical Contribution

This study makes several contributions to the literature on strategic human resource management in the context of hybrid work transformation.

First, it extends the SHRM framework by empirically illustrating how strategic HRM practices are enacted within hybrid work transitions across diverse organizational contexts. While prior SHRM studies often emphasize alignment between HR practices and static strategic goals (Cooke, Dickmann, & Parry, 2021; Bailey & Kurland, 2021), this research highlights how strategic alignment becomes an iterative and adaptive process under hybrid work conditions. In particular, the study shows that strategic alignment is not merely a top-down exercise but involves constant recalibration of workforce planning, HR involvement in digital strategy, and policy codification in response to emerging hybrid work dynamics (Foss & Saebi, 2021; Zhang & Venkatesh, 2021).

Second, the study contributes to the literature on HRM systems design by foregrounding the role of horizontal integration as a critical but under-theorized dimension of strategic HRM. Existing scholarship tends to focus on vertical alignment (i.e., HR strategy and organizational goals), whereas this study reveals that internal coherence across HR functions and cross-departmental collaboration is vital to delivering a seamless employee experience in hybrid work environments (Ipsen, van Veldhoven, Kirchner, & Hansen, 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021). This insight invites further theoretical refinement of SHRM to account for the intra-HR and inter-functional coordination mechanisms that enable successful hybrid work implementation (Raghuram, Hill, Gibbs, & Maruping, 2021).

Third, the research adds empirical depth to the understanding of performance orientation in SHRM by documenting how organizations reconfigure performance systems

for distributed teams. It highlights how the shift from input-based to output-based performance management is not uniformly implemented but shaped by organizational size, digital maturity, and managerial readiness (Gibbs, Mengel, & Siemroth, 2021; Hickman & Robb, 2021). This underscores the need to treat performance orientation as a contingent and evolving process, rather than a fixed HRM attribute (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2021; Rudolph & Baltes, 2021).

Finally, the study enhances conceptualizations of HR as a strategic partner by demonstrating the varied pathways through which HR departments acquire strategic influence. The findings suggest that HR's strategic positioning is not solely dependent on formal structure or seniority, but also on access to decision-making forums, the use of people analytics, and the ability to shape organizational culture and values (Nagori & Lawton, 2024; Raghuram et al., 2021). These insights refine existing SHRM theory by emphasizing relational, analytical, and cultural dimensions of HR strategic influence—particularly in hybrid and post-hybrid organizational settings (Devi Ramachandran et al., 2024; Kelliher & Anderson, 2021).

6.2 Practical Contributions

For practitioners, this study offers a range of actionable insights to support hybrid work transformation through strategic HRM.

First, organizations should actively involve HR departments in enterprise-level planning and transformation initiatives, not just in implementation. The cases demonstrate that when HR is positioned as a strategic partner early in the design of hybrid work policies, it leads to better alignment with organizational goals, more effective workforce planning, and increased legitimacy for HR-led change initiatives. Second, HR leaders should prioritize horizontal integration of systems and practices. This means not only aligning recruitment, performance management, and training around hybrid work principles, but also fostering strong collaboration with IT, operations, and line managers. Where full system integration is not feasible, even informal coordination mechanisms—such as cross-functional teams or shared communication platforms—can significantly improve consistency and employee experience.

Third, performance management systems must be reoriented toward measurable outcomes and behavioral competencies suited to hybrid environments. Organizations should train managers in setting remote-compatible objectives, using digital feedback tools, and ensuring fairness in evaluations. The linkage between performance data and employee development should also be strengthened to support both accountability and growth. Fourth, HR departments should develop people analytics capabilities to provide decision-makers with timely, data-driven insights on workforce engagement, productivity, and turnover risks in hybrid settings. These insights can inform structural adjustments, policy changes, and cultural interventions. Lastly, smaller or resource-constrained firms can still enact strategic HRM through leadership integration, cultural embedding, and agile practices. As illustrated in the SME case, strategic HRM does not require sophisticated systems, but rather a deep connection between people management and business intent.

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