

Digitalization of HR Practices; Overcoming Barriers & Achieving Competitive Advantages

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Abstract

Every organization in this current economic environment is gaining a competitive advantage by enhanced usage of new technology. Businesses are moving towards embracing digitalization as a result of globalization and development of the global economy, since they greatly affect productivity and efficiency. The firms are striving to adapt to the most recent technological advancements due to the fact that the current business practices are closely tied to the internet and online platforms. Accordingly, the main objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of how the digitalization of Human Resource Management Practices gain a competitive advantage and overcome barriers in the current business settings. In Sri Lanka, there is lack of evidence in studies conducted on the human resource practices in companies, and it has been chosen as the gap in this study. Digitalized HR practices have a significant impact on the growth and prosperity of enterprises. The main objective of this research is to identify the impact of digitalized Human Resource practices on achieving a competitive advantage and overcoming barriers. This study was conducted utilizing a multiple-structured interview guide design and a qualitative technique with an inductive approach. The primary information was gathered by conducting in-depth interviews with human resource managers and executives in Sri Lankan manufacturing companies. After collecting data, the researcher identified codes and themes. According to that, the researcher finalized five themes, and through that, the analysis has been done. The result showed that moving to digital Human Resource is enhancing operational efficiency through digital tools. In conclusion, the ongoing process of digitizing Human Resource procedures is incredibly promising for businesses looking to gain a competitive edge in the digital era. Organizations can put themselves at the forefront of the future of work, where human capital and digital ability are the essential elements of success, by embracing technology, actively addressing challenges, and cultivating an innovation culture.

Key words - Competitive advantage, Digitalization HRM, HRM, Technologies

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations aim to get a competitive edge in the competitive environment by enhanced integration of new technology. Digitization resulting from globalization and economic developments has a big impact on productivity and efficiency thus, businesses are now adopting it increasingly. They have a strong connection to the internet and online platforms (Kraus, 2022). Businesses are compelled to digitalized need to go digital in order to thrive in the modern business environment. Apart from posing a challenge to the company, digitalization results in increased productivity, decreased transaction costs, and improved operational management. As a result of the significant technical breakthroughs that have impacted every facet of life, the entire society has undergone quick and strong transformations (kumar, 2022). Technology has advanced to the point where this modern era is referred to as "the Digital era." (Georgios Doukidis, 2024) It has long been accepted that elements like production capacity, Research and development, distribution networks, financial resources, and economies of scale can provide an organization a competitive edge. The term "digitalization" in Human Resource Management (HRM) describes how digital technologies are integrated and used to improve and simplify certain HR procedures inside a company. This innovative strategy makes use of technology to enhance HR operations, boost productivity, and support the success of the company as a whole. A variety of hardware, software, and data-driven tactics are included in the digitalization of HRM, which aims to manage, develop, and engage the workforce. The achieving of a competitive edge and overcoming business obstacles and issues linked with rivalry are significantly influenced by the digitization of HR operations (Sylvia Atwijuka, 2017). The study indicates that digital HRM practices have an effect on HRM effectiveness through internal consistency in HR procedures and external social networking of HR managers with line managers. The effectiveness of digital HRM initiatives depends on how developed an organization's HRM skills are. This also determines the business firm's competitive advantage. The effectiveness of digitalized HRM procedures to improve firms' superior performance is further supported by this research. Therefore, the goal of this current research is to determine how digital HR practices help businesses gain a competitive edge. Every organization needs to have effective human resource management. It has a big impact on how well workers perform. The growing competitiveness of companies has led to a considerable growth in the importance of methods. As a result, consideration is being put into developing new HR procedures that consider worldwide trends.

Organizations have to adopt digitalization because of the rapid developments in technology that impact every element of their operations (marr, 2023). This tendency also affects HRM, which today plays a big role in how a corporation is run. This turns into a crucial requirement for any company looking to gain a competitive edge. Digital HR procedures have a significant impact on a company's growth and performance. The use of the internet and digital HRM has changed HR functions in recent years and has several advantages for the company. Industries in Sri Lanka is not sufficiently aware of the advantages of

using digitalized HR practices to gain a competitive edge (Shift to digital Human Resource Management vital, 2018), despite the fact that numerous studies regarding these practices have been undertaken in an international setting (Transformation of HR in the digital world). In order to fill this knowledge vacuum and produce information on digitalized HR practices and how they affect a company's competitive advantage, modern research has taken up this task. The purpose of this specific study is to look into how firms can obtain a competitive edge by digitalizing their HR procedures and how to get around obstacles in order to do so. The main purpose of this research is to answer the research objective "To identify the impact of digitalized HR practices on achieving a competitive advantage and overcoming barriers. The corporate world is now more competitive than ever because of globalization, which also pushes companies to develop survival strategies. These days, businesses are concentrating on creating policies and procedures that offer them a stronger competitive edge. One such area is human resource management, which has expanded due to the notion that effective people management gives companies a competitive edge. Successful HR practices generate loyal employees, which can support corporate growth (Narang, 2014). Information Technology has enabled HR professionals to provide greater services while simultaneously reducing administrative burdens. Nowadays, "digitalization" is the most popular in the corporate world, and it's widely accepted as a tactic that keeps a company competitive.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Digitalization and Digitization

Data digitization is the process of transforming information into a digital format that a computer can understand (Yasar, n.d.). This is the process of transferring data from analogue to digital format, to put it simply. The digital equivalent of information is what digitalization produces. The use of digital technologies to alter the business model and open up new chances for the company to produce value is known as "digitalization." (Digitization vs digitalization, n.d.) The key difference is that digitalization employs digitization techniques in a wide organizational and social framework, digitization is a technical process. In contrast, digitalization is an entire socio-technological process. (Katu, 2020)). Digitalization, defined as utilizing digital opportunities, is framed by digitization. "digital transformation" is used to characterize the process of reconstructing economies, institutions, and society as a whole. (Rachinger, 2018). Adopting this technology ensures organizational development and success. Further, without complying with the newly introduced technologies, businesses are not able to sustain the competition. Globalization and technology are making the country's economy more complex and unstable. In order to gain a competitive advantage, organizations in this scenario need to be more innovative than their rivals. In order to meet business problems, overcome obstacles, and gain a competitive advantage, digitalization of the company becomes essential. (Kimachia, 2018)

2.2. Digitalized HR practices

The organization's digital performance, effect on society, and workflow have all improved due to technology's rapid expansion. All company levels are impacted by the digital revolution. Additionally, it places pressure on businesses and their staff to adjust to a constantly changing environment and the advancement of digital technologies. (Ali A. M., 2022), The term " (Ali A. M., 2022)" refers to the use of technology in HRM procedures, which is now regarded as necessary for performing HRM tasks. It has been shown that digitizing HRM procedures improves employee performance and productivity while also enhancing overall organizational performance. (Haque & Nishat, 2022). Stated differently, digital HRM refers to the method of carrying out or overseeing all human resource-related tasks via the utilization of internet-based apps, soft technologies, and applications. (Halid et al., 2020). HR professionals can use digital HRM approaches to assess employee and company performance, as well as to aid managers in making strategic decisions. The digital transformation of HR processes and procedures known as "digital human resource management" makes use of information technology, mobile, analytics, and electronic media to increase the effectiveness of HRM.

2.3. Benefits of Digitalized HR Practices

The modern issues that HR managers in firms confront can be better managed by digitalizing HR procedures. It increases efficiency and offers firms a host of operational benefits. Reducing the amount of time employees must spend on HR-related tasks is seen as a significant method of lowering the cost of HR procedures. It improves efficiency in addition to cutting costs. Moreover, digital HR practices can encourage and boost worker productivity while expediting the company's decision-making process. (Baykal, 2020). Digitalized HR practices allow the effective achievement of the company goals and objectives. It facilitated all the HR functions such as recruitment, Training and development, Compensation, Performance Evaluation etc. Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) are also a product of the digitalized Human Resource process which facilitates information management related to HR and facilitate decision-making related to managing Human resource (Neeraj, 2018). Learning and development are also greatly enhanced by digital HR practices. Online learning platforms and e-learning modules enable employees to acquire new skills and knowledge at their own pace, hence facilitating training and skill development. Professional growth and lifetime learning are encouraged by this. In the context of the evolving workplace, digital HR regulations are crucial for permitting remote employment. These protocols provide virtual onboarding, remote performance management, and flexible scheduling—all critical components that support distant and hybrid work arrangements. Cost-cutting is another benefit of digital HR initiative (Acko, 2019). Automation of processes and the adoption of paperless practices can result in significant cost savings for organizations. These measures also reduce administrative expenditures, printing costs, and errors related to payroll and benefits administration.

2.4. Competitive Advantage

A company's ability to manufacture goods or provide services more effectively than its rivals is referred to as its competitive advantage. It enables an organization to produce value for both the business and its shareholders and to attain higher margins (Peterdy). The idea of being in competition advantage is a vital but underutilized component of any business's success. The study examines the economics of the company's operations, with a particular emphasis on the company's potential to yield a higher return on invested capital and its long-term plan relation to the major financial markets. A company gains a competitive edge when it develops and obtains a set of distinctive qualities that allow it to outperform and outcompete competitors (Wang, 2014). A strong competitive strategy is necessary to implement these actions and ensure that the company has an advantage over competitors. A competitive strategy summarizes an organization's view of its rivals. (Yuleva, 2019). A competitive advantage is a benefit obtained over rival businesses by providing customers with superior value, either through lower prices or through the inclusion of extra products and services that make comparable or possibly higher prices justifiable (Competitive Advantage, 2021). Competitive Advantage can simply have defined as the capacity of a certain business to have superior performance to its competitors in terms of operations and profitability (Porter, 1990). The foundation of competitive Advantage is dramatically changing in the modern day because of advancements in digital technologies. Using digital tools enables businesses to think differently about their industry and increase the range of potential problem-solving strategies. (Weinman & Euchner, 2015). In HRM, high-performance or high-commitment work habits are commonly mentioned as possible sources of sustained competitive advantage. Using the latest technological advancements assures a competitive advantage and has a significant impact on professional life. Therefore, gaining a competitive edge and overcoming obstacles and hurdles related to the competition's business environment are greatly aided by the digitalization of HR operations.

2.5. Perceptions of HR managers on the Impact of Digitalized HR practices on Achieving Competitive Advantage

It has been widely accepted and asserted that people or Human resources are the most important organizational Resource and the key to achieving outstanding performance in businesses, which achieve a competitive advantage. (Delaney & Huselid, 1996). But a contradictory conclusion was also made by some scholars, such as Park et al., (2004), based on the perceptions of HR executives in the Asia Pacific region. According to their study, it stated that Static HR procedures have a lower likelihood of becoming effective sources of long-term competitive Advantage. (Park et al., 2004). The study by Wang et al. (2022) indicates that digital HRM practices have an effect on HRM effectiveness through internal consistency in HR procedures and external social networking of HR managers with line managers. Whether digital HRM

activities have positive or negative effects depends on how developed the enterprise's HRM skills are. Which determines the business firm's competitive advantage as well. The capacity of digitalized HRM procedures to improve organizations' outstanding performance is further supported by this research (Zhou et al., 2022)

2.6. Challenges Faced by HR Managers when adopting the Digitalize HR

A major challenge HR managers encounter when introducing digital HR practices is resistance to change (Barisic, 2021) . The introduction of new processes and technologies may cause employees, as well as certain HR personnel, anxiety. This hesitation could undermine the smooth implementation of digital technology; thus, a well-thought-out change management strategy is needed to ease concerns and encourage acceptance. The digital HR landscape's top concerns are data security and privacy. Strong security measures are required when managing sensitive employee data electronically in order to prevent data breaches and maintain compliance with privacy laws like general data protection regulation (GDPR) or protected health information (HIPAA). To safeguard sensitive information, HR managers must make investments in security techniques and technology. (Meet Colony, 2020). And also, the two primary problems that the digital HR industry is experiencing are data security and privacy (Bhat, 2023). Strong security measures must be taken when managing sensitive employee data electronically in order to prevent data breaches and maintain compliance with privacy laws like GDPR and HIPAA. To safeguard sensitive data, HR managers n (Laura, 2022) need to make technological and security investments. HR managers have to decide how much automation is enough and how much human interaction is necessary. They also need to make sure that the digital HR tools and systems they use are easy to use. Ensuring that HR processes retain a human element requires careful balance; although digitalization can boost productivity, it shouldn't take the place of customized interactions that are crucial for HR tasks like employee relations and support. (The HR challenges of digital transformation, n.d.)

3. METHODOLOGY.

The research's study design is its comprehensive strategy or method for conducting systematic research (Khanday, 2023) Additionally, it explains the study methodology, research technique, and research topic design. The methods of conducting the research and how appropriate design options are taken into consideration to fulfil the specific research objectives will be effectively covered in the research design. As such, the current research is a phenomenological investigation that looks at human experiences and how they understand the research problem. Research in these areas will be beneficial to the fields in which little is known (Lester, 1999). To better understand their experiences with the influence of digitalized HR practices on gaining a competitive edge and overcoming obstacles, this study collects the perspectives of HR managers in the specific industrial enterprises located in the Pallakale BOI. The research study has chosen a qualitative research method to address

current research and achieve its goal, taking into consideration the respondents' perspectives on how digital HR practices help businesses gain a competitive edge and overcome obstacles. As a result, this study used an inductive approach.

3.1. Population, Sample, and sampling technique

Population describes the set of elements to which the research's findings can be applied and to which the group findings can be generalized in order to achieve the study's goals. Consequently, the target group for this study is HR executives or managers working for Sri Lankan manufacturing enterprises. In statistical analysis, samples are used when the population sizes are too large for the test to include all possible participants or observations. (Shukla, 2020) A sample can be identified as a group of respondents, objects, or items taken from a larger population for measurement (Bhardwaj, 2019). The HR managers or HR executives of the chosen manufacturing enterprises in the BOI make up the research sample for this study. As a result, one HR manager from a single manufacturing company is chosen to represent the sample of responders, which ranges from 10. The researcher employed judgmental sampling in this modern investigation. The researchers' knowledge and discretion are used to select the respondents in this non-probability sampling technique. In this study, the researcher uses judgmental sampling since it facilitates gathering respondents' perspectives in a way that is more suitable for the research topic.

3.2. Data Collection

Accurate data collection is the process of obtaining relevant information from multiple sources in order to assess the results and identify solutions to research questions. In order to respond to research questions and assess the process of creating knowledge, it involves obtaining and analyzing data pertaining to specific factors. Getting high-quality evidence to support rich data analysis is the primary goal of gathering data for research. Accordingly, this contemporary research uses Qualitative data to gather information about the perceptions of HR managers in manufacturing companies about the impact of digitalized HR practices on achieving competitive advantage and overcoming barriers. In-depth interviews conducted using an interview guide served as the research tool in this study. The researcher conducted interviews with the respondents to learn more about their perspectives on the significance of gaining a competitive edge and overcoming obstacles, as well as suggestions for enhancing digitalized HR procedures and gaining a competitive advantage. The interview guide includes open-ended questions as well as a series of inquiries that can probe respondents' perspectives.

Transcripts from the interviews and other data sources are applied to the theme analysis method in this qualitative study to examine the collected qualitative data. Utilizing the gathered perspectives on the study topics, this thematic analysis (Braun, 2012) will carefully review the data to find recurring themes, concepts, and patterns of meaning. Initially, the investigator become familiar with the gathered information, and in the next step, the initial codes will be expanded upon by incorporating the significant important data. The discovered

codes are grouped into themes in the third stage of the analysis, given names, and given descriptions that include the theme's interesting elements and the reasons they are thought to be interesting. And finally, relevant findings are derived and conclusions are presented while ensuring the validity and accuracy of the demonstrated findings.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results and discussion

Theme 1 - Digitalization HR Activities

The first theme shows the activities that have been digitalized as a whole in the HR Department. Employee recruitment, training and development, payroll and administrative activities are among the top of digitization HR activities.

Theme 2 - Competitive Advantage

In the second theme, the identification of competitive advantage, which is the primary objective of this study, will be explained. Many organizations will gain a competitive advantage by digitalizing their HR department. Many HR managers with prior expertise in this digital HR transition have stated that, through digitalization improving employee trust can enhance staff loyalty towards the organization and that data accuracy can be attained.

Theme 3 – Barriers

In the third theme, it is possible to identify what are the obstacles that a company has to face when it comes to digitalization of human resource practices. According to the table given above, it is shown what obstacles a business has to face in terms of grants.

Theme 4 - Overcome Barriers

Overcoming obstacles to digitization in HRM requires a strategic approach and thorough planning. Theme 4 explores what actions businesses can take to address these issues. As an example, we can identify those are,

1. Before implementing the digitalized system to the HR department, we need to do assessment evaluation.
2. Need to aware employees and officers regarding that
3. Should be give it related training programme

Theme 5 - Future Directions

Future direction provides an overview of the new technology tools that business is using today. Accordingly, facilities to apply digital dashboard, use of AI – driven decision-making tools, use of virtual reality programs for training development are important among them.

4.2. Selected themes

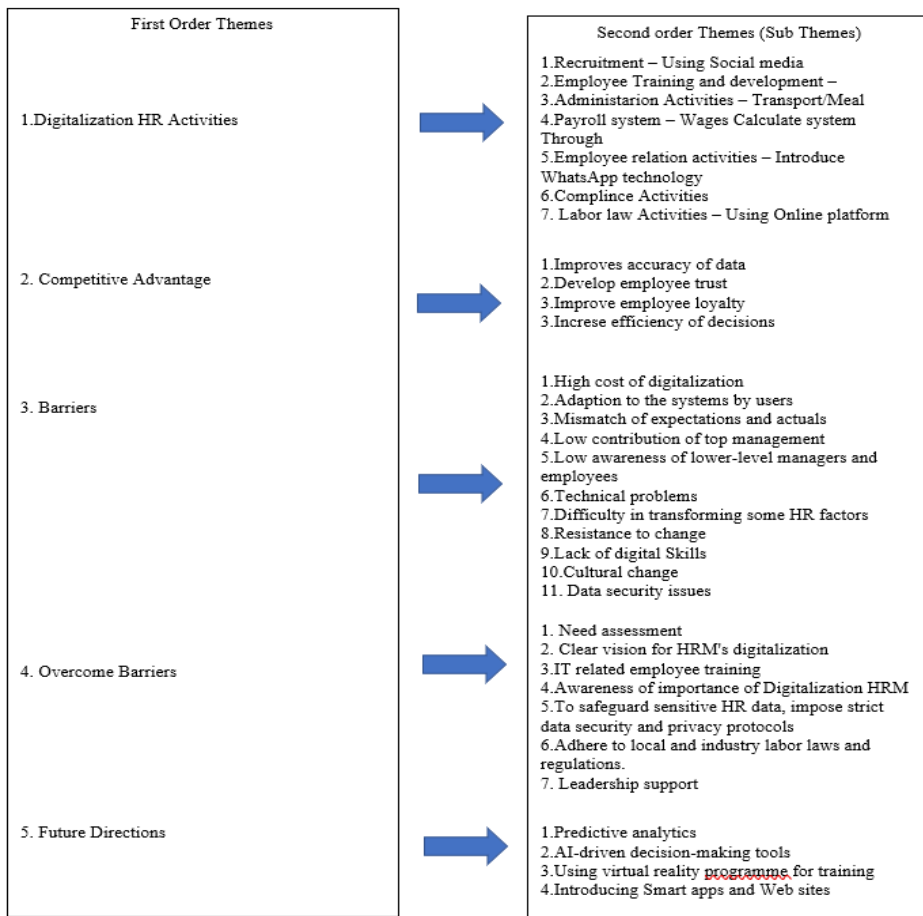


Figure 1: Results of Thematic Analysis

Source: Author generated (2023)

Thematic analysis results showed digital HR practices, competitive advantages, challenges, and HR practices' progress towards digitization. Figure 1 displays the identified primary themes and sub-themes.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

To conclude, the analysis of how digitalized HR practices affect gaining a competitive edge and getting beyond organizational barriers indicates a significant change in the field of HRM. Technology integration has changed efficiency, strategic leadership, training, and recruitment, creating a tapestry of interwoven themes. This life-changing experience demonstrates the enormous potential as well as the complex difficulties organizations must overcome to adjust to the digital age. One important lesson to learn is that digital practices

play a critical role in improving decision-making, staff development, and HR efficiency. Despite the need for ethical considerations, the use of internet platforms and artificial intelligence (AI) tools has revolutionized recruitment by increasing candidate pools and fostering inclusion. The incorporation of e-learning platforms endows employees with the option to customize their learning experiences, hence enhancing their skill set and flexibility. Moreover, data-driven insights and improved HR procedures have improved productivity and guided strategic decision-making. Future developments like artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality, and predictive analytics have the potential to significantly alter HR procedures. To fully benefit from digitalization, businesses should invest in employee digital skills, foster an innovative culture, match HR strategy with business objectives, and regularly assess digital projects.

According to the above findings and conclusions of the research study, there are some recommendations that are suggested by the researcher. To make some important decisions to succeed when moving to digitalization HRM. Accordingly, before implementing Digitalization human resource management (DHRM need to identify alignment with business goals. It is imperative for organizations to ensure that their digital HR strategies are well matched with their overall company goals. And also, to optimize the benefits of digital HR practices, organizations should engage in personnel training and upskilling in digital skills. This requires the collaboration of HR professionals and all other departments that interact with digital HR systems. Also, it is essential to encourage a culture of innovation within the organization. Employees should be given opportunities to propose and experiment with digital solutions that can improve HR processes and the employee experience. In addition, it is recommended for organizations to establish a mechanism to continuously assess the results of digital HR efforts. Regular evaluations can help identify problem areas and improve strategies. It is essential to address the reluctance towards change. To help stakeholders and staff make the shift to digital HR practices, strong change management plans should be in place. It is also essential to pay attention to ethical considerations. When implementing AI and other digital tools in human resources, ethical issues must be considered first. Establishing rules and procedures will help organizations ensure that decision-making procedures are transparent, fair and less biased. Furthermore, ethical issues need to be addressed initially while implementing AI and other digital tools in HR. For decision-making processes to be fair, transparent, and less biased, organizations should set up rules and procedures. Finally, it must be emphasized that organizations must continue to be flexible in light of rapid advances in technology. They must keep up with current developments in the field of HR and be ready to adapt as new technological advances become relevant.

Main limitation of this research is that the findings of the research is limited only for one industry, that is based on the manufacturing industries and considers only the companies in Board of Investment (BOI) in Pallekale. This is cause for the less generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Also, it was difficult to organize interviews with HR managers and executives in the factories due to their hectic and demanding schedules, which made data collection a challenging task. The interviewee withheld certain confidential information about items that were private to the company. The quality of the analysis is impacted by this limitation. Future researchers can conduct longitudinal study rather than cross sectional study to track the changes over a period of time. Moreover, conducting research covering a wide array of industries rather than limiting to one industry helps to identify specific trends and challenges related to the digital HR practices and can conduct quantitative research to quantify the relationship between the Digitalized HR practices and the Competitive advantage.

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