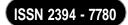
Volume 12, Issue 2: April - June 2025



# HIGH PERFORMANCE WORK SYSTEMS IN THE ERA OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

## <sup>1</sup>Dr. Preeti Vats and <sup>2</sup>Sukant Vats

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, KIHEAT, IP University, Delhi

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Information and Communication Technology, Tecnia Institute of Advanced Studies

## **ABSTRACT**

The rapid integration of digital technologies across organizational processes has profoundly transformed the landscape of human resource management. High Performance Work Systems (HPWS), long valued for fostering employee engagement, innovation, and organizational effectiveness, are being reconceptualized in light of digital transformation. This conceptual review examines the dynamic interplay between HPWS and digitalization, identifying how emerging technologies—such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, cloud-based platforms, and people analytics—are reshaping traditional HR functions including recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and employee involvement. The paper critically analyzes the opportunities and challenges of deploying digital HPWS, especially in relation to data-driven decision-making, agility, and workforce adaptability. It further proposes a revised conceptual framework that integrates digital enablers into the HPWS model, aligning it with the demands of technologically advanced, fast-evolving business environments. By bridging classical HRM theory with contemporary digital practices, this review offers practical insights for managers and highlights key avenues for future research in developing resilient, high-performing, and digitally intelligent work systems.

**Key words: -** High Performance Work Systems, Digital Transformation, Digital HRM, Human Resource Analytics, Organizational Agility, Artificial Intelligence in HR, Workforce Digitalization

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid pace of technological advancement has fundamentally altered the landscape of work, redefining not only how organizations operate but also how human capital is managed and optimized. Digital transformation—broadly defined as the strategic integration of digital technologies into all areas of business—has moved beyond being a technological initiative to becoming a core driver of organizational competitiveness and agility. This transformation is reshaping traditional organizational practices, particularly in the domain of human resource management (HRM), where data-driven tools, automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and cloud-based platforms are increasingly used to manage talent, streamline operations, and enhance decision-making.

Amid this shift, High Performance Work Systems (HPWS) are being re-evaluated for their continued relevance and effectiveness. HPWS refer to a cohesive set of HR practices—such as selective staffing, extensive training and development, performance-based rewards, and participative decision-making—that are designed to enhance employee capabilities, motivation, and opportunities to contribute. Historically, these systems have been instrumental in fostering a high-commitment, high-performance workforce and achieving superior organizational outcomes.

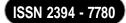
However, in the context of digital transformation, there is a growing need to reconceptualize HPWS to align with digital capabilities and emerging work realities. The infusion of technology into HR practices—commonly referred to as Digital HRM or e-HRM—offers both new opportunities and challenges. This includes leveraging people analytics for strategic workforce planning, using AI for recruitment and talent development, and creating more adaptive and personalized employee experiences.

This paper explores the evolving relationship between HPWS and digital transformation, highlighting how core HR practices are being reconfigured to accommodate and leverage digital tools. It further presents a conceptual model for integrating digital enablers into the HPWS framework and outlines the implications for both theory and practice in the digital era.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF HPWS

High Performance Work Systems (HPWS) refer to a strategically aligned set of interrelated human resource practices aimed at enhancing employee skills, motivation, and overall organizational performance. These systems are grounded in the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm (Barney, 1991), which posits that sustainable competitive advantage arises from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-

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substitutable—attributes often associated with human capital. HPWS are thus designed to develop a workforce that contributes meaningfully to the firm's long-term strategic goals.

## The foundational components of HPWS typically include:

- **Selective recruitment and selection:** Attracting and hiring individuals with the skills and cultural fit needed to thrive in dynamic environments.
- Extensive training and development: Continuous skill enhancement to ensure employee adaptability and knowledge growth.
- **Performance-contingent compensation:** Linking rewards to individual and team outcomes to reinforce goal alignment.
- Employee participation and empowerment: Encouraging involvement in decision-making to foster ownership, innovation, and agility.
- **Job security and work-life balance:** Creating a stable and supportive environment that boosts engagement and retention.

# Job Security and Selective Work-Life Balance Recruitment Attracting and hiring skilled individuals Creating a stable and supportive environment **Employee Extensive Training** Participation Continuous skill Encouraging involvement in decision-making enhancement for adaptability Performance Contingent Compensation Linking rewards to outcomes for goal alignment

#### **Key Strategies for Organizational Success**

Fig: Key Strategis for Organizational Success

These elements are mutually reinforcing, creating synergistic effects that lead to superior organizational outcomes such as increased productivity, innovation, quality of service, and employee retention (Huselid, 1995; Becker & Huselid, 1998).

In recent literature, scholars have emphasized the dynamic nature of HPWS in the face of technological and societal changes (Boxall & Macky, 2009; Jiang et al., 2012). The digital era has further amplified the relevance of HPWS by necessitating new capabilities—such as digital literacy, adaptability, and data-driven decision-making—that can be nurtured through updated HR practices. For instance, traditional training modules are now complemented with AI-based personalized learning platforms, while employee participation is increasingly facilitated through digital collaboration tools and platforms.

Thus, while the foundational logic of HPWS remains rooted in strategic human capital development, its operationalization is evolving in tandem with technological advancements and the digital transformation of work environments.

## 3. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE WORKPLACE

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ISSN 2394 - 7780

Digital transformation refers to the strategic and holistic integration of advanced technologies—such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), cloud computing, Internet of Things (IoT), robotic process automation (RPA), and big data analytics—into all facets of business operations. More than a mere technological shift, it represents a profound reconfiguration of organizational structures, workflows, culture, and decision-making paradigms (Bharadwaj et al., 2013).

This transformation has accelerated in recent years due to factors such as global competition, remote and hybrid work models, and the increasing need for agility in volatile markets. It has led to the emergence of digital-first strategies, where data-driven insights and real-time responsiveness become central to achieving operational excellence and innovation.

In the domain of Human Resource Management (HRM), digital transformation is reshaping how organizations attract, develop, retain, and engage talent. It has catalyzed a shift toward Digital HRM—defined by Parry and Strohmeier (2014) as the adoption of digital technologies to automate, optimize, and transform HR functions.

# Key areas of transformation in HRM include:

- **Recruitment and Selection:** Use of AI-driven platforms for resume screening, predictive analytics for cultural fit, and chatbots for candidate engagement.
- Learning and Development (L&D): Integration of virtual reality (VR), gamification, and personalized AI learning paths to create scalable, self-paced learning ecosystems.
- **Performance Management:** Real-time feedback systems, people analytics dashboards, and continuous performance tracking replacing traditional annual reviews.
- Employee Engagement and Experience: Cloud-based collaboration platforms, digital well-being tools, and sentiment analysis tools enabling real-time pulse surveys and enhanced work-life integration.

HPWS	Traditional Practice	Digital Enhancement
Component		
Recruitment and	Manual screening, structured	AI-based resume screening, video
Selection	interviews	interviews, predictive analytics
Training and	Classroom-based training, static	LMS, gamified microlearning, AR/VR
Development	modules	simulations
Performance	Annual reviews, supervisor	Real-time feedback systems, people
Management	ratings	analytics dashboards
Employee	Team meetings, suggestion boxes	Digital collaboration platforms (Slack,
Participation		MS Teams), pulse surveys
Compensation	Fixed or performance-based	Data-driven recognition platforms,
and Rewards	bonuses	gamified incentives
Job Design and	Fixed roles, office-based work	Remote/hybrid models, project-based
Flexibility		digital collaboration

Table: Traditional HPWS Components vs. Digital Enhancements

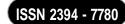
Digital transformation also opens up new possibilities for strategic workforce planning, using big data and predictive analytics to anticipate skills gaps, succession planning, and attrition trends. Furthermore, mobile and remote HR platforms are enabling employees to access services and communicate across geographies, supporting inclusive and flexible workplaces.

However, these opportunities also come with challenges, including issues of data privacy, algorithmic bias, employee surveillance, and the need for constant upskilling. These tensions underscore the importance of rethinking traditional HRM practices—such as High Performance Work Systems—within a digitally transformed framework.

## 4. REIMAGINING HPWS IN THE DIGITAL ERA

The digital era demands a fundamental rethinking of High Performance Work Systems (HPWS), not merely as a collection of human resource practices, but as a digitally integrated ecosystem designed to maximize human capital through technology. Digitally enabled HPWS fuse traditional HR functions with digital tools to deliver greater agility, personalization, scalability, and data-driven decision-making. In doing so, they enable

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organizations to respond dynamically to the demands of the modern workforce and volatile business environments.

This digital shift does not eliminate the foundational logic of HPWS—rooted in developing ability, motivation, and opportunity (AMO) among employees—but instead retools these practices through digital enablers. Below are five reimagined components of HPWS in the digital age:

## 4.1 Digital Recruitment and Selection

Modern recruitment leverages AI and machine learning to optimize the talent acquisition process. AI-based applicant tracking systems (ATS) can:

- Automatically screen large volumes of resumes using keyword and skill-matching algorithms.
- Conduct asynchronous video interviews enhanced by facial expression analysis and sentiment detection.
- Utilize predictive analytics to assess alignment between candidate profiles and organizational culture, job performance potential, and turnover risk (Upadhyay & Khandelwal, 2018).

This enhances both efficiency and quality of hire—critical dimensions of the selective hiring pillar of HPWS.

## 4.2 Virtual Training and Development

Digital transformation has ushered in adaptive, continuous learning ecosystems. Learning Management Systems (LMS), AI-curated training paths, and immersive tools like virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) enable:

- Scenario-based learning simulations (e.g., for customer service, safety, or leadership).
- Microlearning modules tailored to employee skill gaps.
- Gamification elements to drive motivation and completion rates.

These innovations directly support the HPWS principle of developing employee capabilities while also making learning accessible across geographies and time zones (Salas et al., 2012).

## 4.3 Performance Management and People Analytics

Traditional performance appraisal systems are being replaced by real-time, data-informed, and continuous feedback loops. People analytics platforms collect and analyze multi-source data (e.g., behavioral metrics, engagement surveys, productivity KPIs) to:

- Deliver predictive insights into employee burnout, turnover intent, and team effectiveness.
- Identify high-potential talent for succession planning.
- Enable agile goal setting and feedback delivery via dashboards and mobile apps (Bersin, 2019).

This reconfiguration ensures that performance-contingent rewards and recognition—a cornerstone of HPWS—are dynamic, evidence-based, and responsive.

#### 4.4 Digital Communication and Engagement

Employee participation and empowerment—central to HPWS—are now enhanced through digital engagement ecosystems. Platforms like Slack, MS Teams, and Zoom enable:

- Cross-functional, real-time collaboration.
- Flattened hierarchies in communication.
- Distributed decision-making and inclusion across remote or hybrid teams.

Simultaneously, engagement tools such as pulse surveys, digital suggestion systems, and peer recognition apps empower employees to voice opinions and co-create culture.

These tools help build a digitally inclusive environment, fostering organizational citizenship and commitment.

#### 4.5 Flexible and Remote Work Design

The digital era has also redefined job design within HPWS. Enabled by cloud-based infrastructure, project management tools, and asynchronous communication:

• Employees can now work remotely, adopt flexible schedules, or engage in hybrid roles.

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- Teams operate in project-based structures with high autonomy and accountability.
- Organizations support employee well-being through digital wellness tools and work-life integration resources (Gandini, 2019).

This flexibility supports the HPWS dimensions of job security, work-life balance, and autonomy, essential for sustaining motivation and reducing burnout.

Reimagined HPWS in the digital era are not just automated versions of traditional systems but represent a paradigm shift toward dynamic, data-driven, and human-centered HR architectures. By embedding advanced digital tools into every facet of HR practice, organizations can more effectively build workforce resilience, strategic alignment, and long-term competitive advantage.

## 5. BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL HPWS

The integration of digital technologies into High Performance Work Systems (HPWS) introduces both substantial opportunities and critical challenges. While digital HPWS can significantly enhance organizational agility, responsiveness, and employee engagement, they also bring forth new complexities related to workforce well-being, ethics, and infrastructure readiness. Understanding these dual dynamics is essential for organizations aiming to optimize the value of digital HR transformation.

Dimension	Benefits	Challenges
Decision-	Data-driven insights, predictive	Risk of over-reliance on algorithms
Making	modeling	
Accessibility	Scalable systems, global reach	Digital divide among employees
Employee	Personalized learning, engagement	Depersonalization of HR functions
Experience	platforms	
Strategy	Real-time performance tracking, agile	Integration complexity, system
Alignment	goal setting	interoperability issues
Well-being	Flexibility, work-life balance tools	Techno-stress, burnout from always-on
		digital environments

Table: Benefits and Challenges of Digital HPWS

#### 5.1 Benefits

## Enhanced decision-making through data analytics:

One of the most compelling advantages of digital HPWS is the use of people analytics to drive data-informed HR decisions. Predictive analytics can identify patterns in employee performance, engagement, and attrition, enabling managers to proactively design interventions. For instance, machine learning models can forecast employee turnover risks or optimize workforce scheduling—leading to more strategic and responsive human capital management.

## Greater accessibility and scalability of HR practices:

Cloud-based platforms and mobile HR applications allow organizations to deploy HR practices across geographies with ease, supporting global workforces and distributed teams. Recruitment, onboarding, learning, and performance tracking can all be executed at scale with consistent standards, reducing manual workloads and administrative inefficiencies.

## Personalized employee experiences:

Digital HPWS enable hyper-personalization of HR services, tailoring learning modules, performance goals, and well-being initiatives to individual preferences and career trajectories. AI-driven career pathing, chatbots for 24/7 employee support, and custom recognition systems contribute to a more engaging and employee-centric workplace experience.

## Improved alignment between HR and organizational strategy:

Digital tools provide HR with greater visibility into organizational goals and workforce performance, fostering real-time alignment. Dashboards, KPIs, and HR metrics linked directly to business outcomes ensure that talent management is not only operational but also strategic, enhancing the role of HR as a driver of competitive advantage.

#### 5.2 Challenges

## Techno-stress and digital fatigue among employees:

The always-on nature of digital work environments can lead to techno-stress, characterized by cognitive overload, anxiety, and burnout. Employees may struggle with constant connectivity, multiple digital interfaces, and unrealistic expectations for availability, negatively affecting well-being and performance.

## Ethical issues around data privacy and surveillance:

The use of people analytics and monitoring tools raises ethical concerns regarding employee consent, data ownership, and surveillance. Overly invasive systems may erode trust and psychological safety, especially if employees perceive that monitoring is punitive rather than developmental.

## Digital skill gaps and the need for continuous upskilling:

Not all employees are equally prepared to navigate digital systems, leading to skill mismatches and potential exclusion. Organizations must invest in ongoing digital literacy and reskilling programs to ensure equitable access and utilization of new HR technologies across generational and demographic groups.

## Potential depersonalization of HR functions:

While automation increases efficiency, it also risks removing the human touch from critical HR activities such as conflict resolution, coaching, or empathetic feedback. Relying heavily on chatbots or algorithmic decisions can diminish the relational aspect of HRM, undermining emotional connection and organizational culture.

To maximize the benefits while mitigating the risks, organizations must adopt a strategically balanced approach—combining technological sophistication with ethical foresight, inclusivity, and human-centric values. Successful digital HPWS should not only enhance performance metrics but also preserve employee well-being, fairness, and dignity.

#### 6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DIGITAL HPWS

This paper proposes a conceptual framework that reimagines High Performance Work Systems (HPWS) by integrating foundational HR practices with digital technologies, forming what can be described as "Digitally Enabled HPWS." The framework builds upon the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) model and the Resource-Based View (RBV), both of which emphasize the strategic role of human capital in sustaining competitive advantage. In this context, digital tools serve as enablers that amplify the effectiveness of HPWS while maintaining their human-centric ethos.

## The proposed framework incorporates five interconnected components:

## 1. Digital Recruitment and Selection

Digital transformation enhances selective hiring through AI-driven assessments, resume parsing algorithms, and predictive analytics tools that evaluate cultural fit, performance potential, and attrition risk. These systems improve the accuracy, efficiency, and objectivity of the recruitment process—supporting the HPWS goal of acquiring high-quality talent.

## 2. E-Training and Development

Learning Management Systems (LMS), AI-personalized learning paths, gamified platforms, and virtual simulations contribute to continuous and adaptive skill development. This aligns with the 'Ability' dimension of AMO, equipping employees with the competencies required for dynamic, technology-driven roles. Such digital learning environments also promote knowledge sharing across decentralized teams.

## 3. Analytics-Based Performance Management

Real-time performance tracking systems, people analytics dashboards, and sentiment analysis tools offer granular insights into employee behavior, engagement, and outcomes. These systems enable data-driven decisions regarding rewards, recognition, promotions, and interventions, thereby reinforcing the 'Motivation' aspect of HPWS.

## 4. Digital Engagement Platforms

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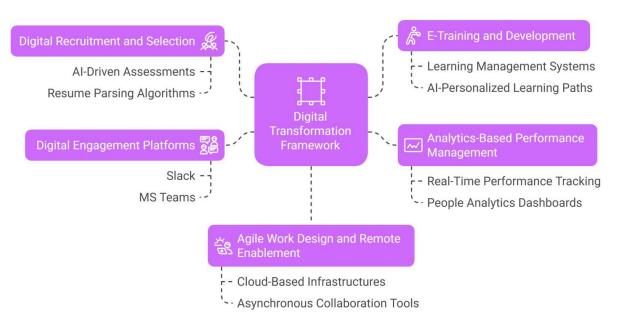
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Platforms like Slack, Yammer, MS Teams, and custom employee engagement apps support collaborative communication, continuous feedback, and social recognition. Additionally, pulse surveys and anonymous suggestion channels foster psychological safety and inclusion. These tools provide employees with greater 'Opportunity' to participate, share ideas, and co-create value—echoing the HPWS emphasis on empowerment.

## 5. Agile Work Design and Remote Enablement

Cloud-based infrastructures, asynchronous collaboration tools, and digital project management systems (e.g., Trello, Asana) enable flexible, hybrid, or fully remote work models. These systems support autonomy, adaptability, and work-life integration, which are essential to sustaining commitment and performance in digitally transformed settings.

## **Digital Transformation Framework for HPWS**



## 7. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The integration of digital technologies into High Performance Work Systems (HPWS) has profound implications for how organizations design, implement, and sustain strategic HR initiatives. To unlock the full potential of digital HPWS while minimizing associated risks, organizations must go beyond tool adoption and invest in culture, capability, and ethical infrastructure. The following strategic considerations are essential for effective practice:

## 1. Ensuring Employee Digital Literacy and Readiness

Digital HPWS are only as effective as the workforce's ability to engage with them. Organizations must prioritize digital upskilling, offering targeted training programs that build competencies in AI tools, data interpretation, and virtual collaboration platforms. This is especially critical in preventing digital exclusion, particularly among older employees or those from less tech-savvy backgrounds. A digitally literate workforce enhances system usage, reduces resistance to change, and supports innovation.

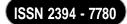
#### 2. Maintaining Ethical Standards in Data Handling

The rise of people analytics and surveillance technologies raises serious ethical concerns around privacy, consent, and algorithmic bias. Organizations must adopt transparent data governance policies and ensure all digital HR interventions comply with data protection regulations (e.g., GDPR). Employees should be clearly informed about how their data is collected, analyzed, and used. Ethical auditing mechanisms and crossfunctional ethics committees can further build trust and accountability.

## 3. Promoting Inclusivity and Accessibility in Digital Access

Digital HPWS must be designed to ensure equitable access for all employees, regardless of their location, role, or abilities. This includes providing remote-friendly tools, multilingual interfaces, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and mobile-optimized platforms for frontline or gig workers. Inclusive digital practices not only

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align with corporate social responsibility but also expand the reach and effectiveness of HR strategies across the entire organization.

## 4. Fostering a Culture of Continuous Innovation and Learning

To sustain performance in a dynamic environment, organizations must embed a culture of digital experimentation and learning. Leaders should model openness to digital change and reward innovation. HR departments can facilitate internal knowledge-sharing platforms, host digital bootcamps, and run innovation labs where employees co-develop new tools or practices. Such initiatives encourage a growth mindset and ensure HPWS evolve alongside emerging technological trends.

Ultimately, successful implementation of digital HPWS depends on the strategic alignment between digital investments and organizational goals. Technology must be viewed not as a replacement for human capital, but as an enabler of augmented performance, collaboration, and strategic agility. A thoughtful approach to implementation ensures that digital tools enhance—not dilute—the core values of HPWS: trust, engagement, and excellence.

#### 8. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the conceptual development of digitally enabled High Performance Work Systems (HPWS) is gaining momentum, several critical avenues remain underexplored. To strengthen both theoretical understanding and practical implementation, future research must focus on the following key areas:

## 1. Empirical Validation of Digital HPWS Models

Although conceptual frameworks offer valuable insight, there is a pressing need for empirical studies that validate the effectiveness of digital HPWS configurations. Quantitative and qualitative research can examine the relationships between specific digital HR practices (e.g., AI-based performance appraisal, virtual learning systems) and employee outcomes such as engagement, productivity, and innovation. Such evidence would support the refinement of theory and inform best practices across industries.

## 2. Sector-Specific Case Studies

Digital transformation is highly context-dependent, with varying implications across sectors like healthcare, IT, manufacturing, education, and public administration. Case studies examining how digital HPWS are designed, implemented, and received in specific organizational contexts can reveal critical insights about barriers, enablers, and success factors. Comparative studies between digitally mature and lagging industries could further illuminate sectoral readiness and adaptation strategies.

## 3. Longitudinal Studies on Organizational Impact

The dynamic nature of digital transformation calls for longitudinal research that tracks how digital HPWS evolve over time and influence organizational performance, culture, and employee development. Such studies can uncover temporal patterns, adaptation curves, and long-term return on investment (ROI), providing organizations with a roadmap for sustainable digital HR strategies.

## 4. Exploration of Employee Experience and Well-being

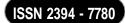
While much of the existing literature emphasizes organizational outcomes, there is a growing need to examine the lived experiences of employees in digital HPWS environments. Future studies should investigate how digital tools affect autonomy, psychological safety, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. Understanding these human dimensions is crucial to ensuring that digital HPWS do not undermine employee well-being or exacerbate workplace stress.

## 5. Cross-Cultural and Global Implementation Studies

Digital HPWS are implemented in diverse cultural and institutional contexts, and what works in one region or country may not seamlessly translate to another. Cross-cultural studies can explore how national culture, legal frameworks, and workforce values influence the design and effectiveness of digital HR practices. This line of inquiry is particularly relevant for multinational organizations seeking globally consistent yet locally adaptable HPWS strategies.

By addressing these research gaps, scholars and practitioners can co-create a more nuanced, evidence-based understanding of digital HPWS. Future studies should aim to bridge the current conceptual-practical divide, ensuring that the digital transformation of work systems enhances not only organizational performance but also employee dignity, equity, and growth.

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#### **CONCLUSION**

Digital transformation represents more than a technological upgrade—it signifies a fundamental reconfiguration of how work is structured, executed, and experienced. In this shifting landscape, traditional High Performance Work Systems (HPWS) must be reimagined to maintain their relevance and strategic value. As organizations increasingly leverage technologies such as AI, people analytics, and cloud-based collaboration platforms, the integration of these tools into core HR practices becomes both a necessity and an opportunity.

This paper positions digitally enabled HPWS as a vital strategic response to the demands of the modern workplace. It highlights how technology can enhance—rather than replace—the core principles of HPWS by amplifying employee abilities, motivation, and opportunities through digital means. The proposed conceptual framework provides a roadmap for aligning HRM strategies with digital capabilities, enabling organizations to build agile, adaptive, and high-performing workforces.

The review also underscores the importance of ethical, inclusive, and human-centered approaches in digital HR transformation. While digital tools offer powerful levers for performance enhancement, they must be thoughtfully implemented to preserve trust, well-being, and employee engagement.

Finally, this paper lays the groundwork for future empirical research, urging scholars and practitioners to explore how digital HPWS function across contexts, evolve over time, and impact both organizational outcomes and employee experience. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of literature at the intersection of strategic HRM and digital transformation—one that is critical for shaping the future of work.

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