



HUMAN RESOURCE CENTRALITY AND HUMAN RESOURCE EFFECTIVENESS: THE MODERATING ROLE OF LEADERSHIP LEARNING AGILITY

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Abstract

Purpose – Human Resource Management (HRM) is no more an administrative role but has become a strategic organizational competency, which has been found to be a contributing factor towards sustainable organizational success. Human Resource (HR) Centrality is a strategic role for HR professionals to be involved with organizational decision making and HR practices aligning with business goals. Based on Resource-Based View (RBV), the present study explores relationship between HR centrality and HR effectiveness and moderating role of Leadership Learning Agility (LLA) in service sector organizations in Pakistan.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach – The research conducted in this study was a quantitative research design with positivist research paradigm. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from 180 HRD professionals, managers of private service-sector banking, telecommunication and IT organizations in Pakistan. To investigate the direct and moderating effects among the variables of the study, the proposed hypotheses were tested using the IBM SPSS Statistics and Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 1).

Results – The findings show that HR centrality positively influences HR effectiveness. Leadership Learning Agility also has a significant positive direct impact on HR effectiveness. The overall regression model accounts for a significant amount of variance in HR effectiveness. The interaction effect between HR centrality and Leadership Learning Agility, however, was not significant, suggesting that Leadership Learning Agility is not a moderator of the relationship between HR centrality and HR effectiveness. Practical Implications – The results indicate that HR function must be strategically positioned to increase the effectiveness of HR in the organizations. Moreover, the ability of developing leaders to have high levels of learning agility can directly have a positive impact on HR outcomes without necessarily having a positive impact on the influence of HR centrality. It is therefore prudent for organizations to invest at the same time in strategic HR integration and leadership development to enhance organizational effectiveness.

Originality/Value – This study contributes to the RBV by discussing about HR centrality as a valuable organizational capability that improves HR effectiveness. It also enriches the strategic human resource management literature by empirically investigating the contextual variable of Leadership Learning Agility in the HR centrality–HR effectiveness relationship in service-sector organizations in Pakistan. The results offer empirical evidence findings in an emerging economy and add to knowledge of the contribution of strategic HR capabilities in supporting the effectiveness of the organization.

Keywords: Human Resource Centrality, Human Resource Effectiveness, Leadership Learning Agility, Resource Based View, Strategic Human Resource Management



1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Today's business world is being defined by technology breakthroughs, globalization, growing competition, and ongoing organizational change. These changes have made Human Resource Management (HRM) more than an administrative administration, it has become a strategic management tool for the organization, which adds to the sustainable competitive advantage. Hence, the vision of the HR function is increasingly perceived as a key element to ensure alignment of HR practices with business goals and to support organizational success in the long-term (Markoulli et al., 2017).

Human Resource (HR) Centrality involves the level of involvement of HR in organizational planning, policy development and strategic decisions and is considered to have four implications. Strategically placed HR departments aren't just support units, they are part of the decision-making process and help make HR policies align with organizational objectives. Previous studies indicate that HR centrality is associated with increased coordination, increased information sharing, increased strategic integration, and increased alignment of HR practices and business strategies (Fields et al., 2000; Markoulli et al., 2017).

With the growth of knowledge-based organizations, which are oriented toward people, Human Resource Effectiveness (HR Effectiveness) has become an important measure of organizational success. HR effectiveness is the degree to which HR functions add value to support organizational goals, develop employee skills and capacity, increase workforce productivity and meet stakeholder expectations (Guest & Conway, 2011). Effective HR departments play a role in employee development, talent retention, organizational performance and sustainable competitive advantage as HR policies and practices are effective in supporting organizational goals (Stone et al., 2015).

The strategic human resource management literature indicates that HR departments in organizations that are strategically positioned have greater chances of ensuring an organization's HR effectiveness since HR professionals directly engage in the decision making and strategic planning of the organization. Involvement allows HR professionals to shape organizational policy, integrate HR activities between functional areas as well as design HR workforce plans to support organizational goals and objectives (Brandl & Pohler, 2010). Therefore, centrality of HR is one of the significant HR competencies that enable companies to improve the effectiveness of their HR operations.

However, outcomes in the organization are not only affected by the central role of HR but they are also affected by the leadership capabilities. Business today is a dynamic landscape, and leaders need to constantly learn new things, embrace change, and appropriately react to new challenges. Leadership Learning Agility (LLA) is the openness and ability of a leader to learn from experience, solicit input, gather information, and effectively use all of this learning in new and different contexts (Bouland-van Dam et al., 2022). Learning-agile leaders are flexible and adaptable, willing to learn and improve, and can better help the organization change and execute strategic HR initiatives (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

This conceptualization of the HR centrality, HR leadership learning agility, and HR effectiveness relationship is well supported by The Resource Based View (RBV) of the firm. Barney (1991) states that the key part of sustainable competitive advantage for organizations is when they have valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable resources and capabilities (RIRNC). With this lens, HR centrality is seen as a strategic capability of the organization to make use of human capital, and leadership learning agility as a complementary capability that promotes organizational adaptability and contributes to effective use of human resources. All of these strategic capabilities are anticipated to boost HR performance and organizational effectiveness.

Strategic HRM has been studied extensively in academia, but the empirical evidence on the relationship between HR centrality and HR effectiveness is still scarce especially in developing countries like Pakistan. Research studies have primarily centred around HR analytics, digital HR transformation and organizational performance, and only a handful have examined the strategic role of HR functions and the



organizational environment in which HR centrality is positively linked to HR effectiveness. Further, the moderating role of leadership learning agility has not been widely explored in empirical research in HRM literature.

To fill these gaps, the current study examines the impact of HR centrality on HR effectiveness and explores the moderating effect of LLA on HR effectiveness in Pakistani service sector organizations. In so doing, the study has implications for the strategic human resource management literature and for organizations that wish to further reinforce the strategic position and effectiveness of their HR functions.

1.2 Research Gap

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) literature now has a growing emphasis on the role of the HR function as strategic organizational partner. Despite this increasing interest, however, there is limited empirical evidence considering the connection between HR centrality and HR effectiveness, especially in developing countries like Pakistan (Bannya et al., 2023). Most existing studies have dealt with HR analytics, digital HR transformation and organizational performance compared to little research dedicated to grasping the contribution of the HR strategic positioning to HR effectiveness (Ali et al., 2025).

Moreover, leadership competences have been identified as one of the valuable assets of the organization, but the moderating effect of Leadership Learning Agility on the relationship between HR centrality and HR effectiveness has been under-researched in the strategic HRM literature (Suwandi et al., 2026). Little evidence exists, therefore, on the impact of learning-agile leadership on the effectiveness of these strategic functions in HR, especially in service sector companies in emerging economies.

1.3 Study Objectives

The present study seeks to address the above research gaps by:

1. Examine the effect of Human Resource Centrality on Human Resource Effectiveness.
2. Investigate the direct effect of Leadership Learning Agility on Human Resource Effectiveness.
3. Investigate moderating effect of Leadership Learning Agility on the relationship between Human Resource Centrality and Human Resource.

The study aims to find answers to these objectives, and thereby contribute to the understanding of how strategic HR capabilities and leadership competences together can improve HR effectiveness in modern organizations.

1.4 Study Contribution

1.4.1 Theoretical Contribution. This study is a significant addition to the existing Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) literature because it applies the Resource based View (RBV) of the organization to build a better understanding of how strategically located HR functions improve organizational results. Traditionally, RBV has focused upon organizational resources and capabilities to derive sustainable competitive advantage, but this study defines HR centrality as a strategic competency in an organization that enhances HR effectiveness. Moreover, the study integrates Leadership Learning Agility into the suggested framework to give a wider perspective of the role leadership capabilities play in complementing strategic HR resources. These constructs are incorporated to help build theory on how strategic HR capabilities relate to organizational effectiveness.

1.4.2 Empirical Contribution. Despite the above, this study is empirical in nature and is significant in the context of the current research in the field of SHRM as it explores the relationship between HR centrality and HR effectiveness in the service sector of Pakistan. Past studies have mostly been on HR Analytics, digital HR transformation and organizational performance and are relatively light with regards to positioning of HR functions strategically. In addition, the study empirically explores the direct impact of Leadership Learning Agility on HR effectiveness and examines the moderating effects of the HR centrality and HR effectiveness relationship. The results give evidence in an emerging economy, which adds to the existing knowledge on strategic HRM in that field.

1.4.3 Methodological Contribution. In terms of methodology, this study is a quantitative research method as it aims to examine the proposed relationships between HR centrality, leadership learning agility and HR effectiveness. Data from the service sector organizations were analysed with IBM SPSS Statistics



and PROCESS Macro (model 1) for direct and moderating effects. Moderation analysis is a methodologically sound way of analysing the relationship between strategic HR capability and leadership capability, hence serving methodological evidence for the strategic HRM research.

1.4.4 Practical Contribution. The findings of this study have practical value for organizational leaders, HR professionals and policy makers. The positive correlation between HR centrality and HR effectiveness underscores the role of HR as a strategic partner in organizational decision making, which can be done by establishing a strong central role. The fact that Leadership Learning Agility is a key direct factor also implies that organizations should focus on leadership development programs to enhance leaders' learning agility, which will enable them to adapt and respond to the changing business context. Leadership Learning Agility was not a significant moderator variable between HR centrality and HR effectiveness, but had a positive direct relationship with HR effectiveness, which shows its importance in enhancing the capability of the organization. In total, the results offer practical advice to organizations looking to increase the effectiveness of their HR and improve their long-term performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Human Resource Centrality

The role of the Human Resource (HR) function has undergone a substantial transformation over the past few decades. Human resources is no longer just a department for personnel management but rather a department that has become a strategic partner of the organization and plays a role in the organization's competitiveness and sustainability. This change has sparked the academic interest in Human Resource (HR) Centrality, which is characterized by the strategic position, influence, and involvement of the HR function in organizational decision making and strategy implementation (Zhou et al., 2020).

HR centrality is the degree to which HR professionals are involved with strategic planning, policy making, workforce planning, organizational change and business decision making. Correia et al. (2013) state that HR centrality is the positioning and influence of the HR function within organizational governance, with special reference to HR's involvement in strategic decision making, the formal HR strategy and centralized coordination of HR activities. If HR is at the heart of the business, it's no longer a reactive function and is a key part of business strategy and value added.

In the literature on Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), it is consistently said that HR practices and business strategies must be closely linked to enable the organization to perform better. The strategic role of HR allows companies to build the skills of their employees, manage talent well, foster innovation and enhance their flexibility and adaptability. As a result, HR professionals engaged in strategic planning will be more able to formulate HR policies that will facilitate organizational growth, competitiveness and longer-term goals. Empirical research conducted previously shows that HR functions in an organization that are strategically located are linked to better organizational coordination, implementation of HR initiatives and organizational performance (Brandl & Pohler, 2010; Abt & Knyphausen-Aufseß, 2017).

HR centrality from Resource Based View (RBV) is a significant capability of an organization to manage and put human capital resources into use. Sustainable competitive advantage is possible when the organization possesses valuable resources that are rare, inimitable and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). Human capital is one of the most valuable strategic resources of the organization, but only if the HR function has enough power to be a part of organizational decision making. Thus, HR centrality helps firms to make their human resource a sustainable competitive advantage.

In addition to its strategic value, HR centrality enhances communication, coordination and knowledge sharing between organizational units. An HR function that is well placed works to improve the communication of management and staff, contributes to HR strategies being integrated with organizational goals and to the effective delivery of organizational change program. According to Markoulli et al. (2017), the HR centrality of organizations is associated with better coordination, improved HR practice implementation, and better organizational change support.

With the rise of digital transformation, workforce analytics, and organizational agility, HR centrality is more important than ever. Today's organizations are increasingly looking to HR professionals for assistance



in workforce planning, talent management, organizational development and strategic decision making. Thus, organizations which have understood HR as a strategic organizational partner are more likely to build the capacity of their employees, enhance organizational responsiveness as well as to attain sustainable organizational performance.

In conclusion, the current literature indicates that HR centrality is a strategic organizational competency that facilitates the effectiveness of HR-related activities by combining HRM with organizational strategy. While its importance is being increasingly acknowledged, there is limited empirical research on how it affects HR effectiveness, especially in developing economies. This gap serves as a stepping stone to the focus of the present study on HR centrality as a key antecedent for HR effectiveness.

2.2 Human Resource Effectiveness

Human Resource Effectiveness (HR Effectiveness) has become a central concept in Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) because it reflects the extent to which HR functions contribute to organizational performance and the achievement of strategic objectives. The effectiveness of HR departments is not just measured from an administrative standpoint, but also by their contribution to the generation of organizational value, the development of employee capabilities and their role in sustaining the success of the business in the long term as organizations continue to see human capital as a source of competitive advantage. HR effectiveness is the extent to which HR policies, practices and systems are able to play a positive role in achieving organizational goals and meeting employee and stakeholder expectations. According to Wright et al. (2001), HR effectiveness is the value added by HR systems and practices to the organization's outcomes. In like manner, Ferris et al. (2007) explain HR effectiveness as the ability of HR activities to create positive outcomes in the organization by the way they manage human capital. The importance of effective HR functions is demonstrated in their roles of attracting, developing, motivating and retaining talented employees and maintaining workforce capabilities aligned with organizational objectives is highlighted. While there is a close relationship between effectiveness and efficiency, they are two different areas of organizational performance.

According to Zheng et al. (2010), effectiveness is defined as reaching the desired organizational outcomes, while efficiency is defined as getting the most for the resources. Similarly, Mouzas (2006) states that successful organizations need to accomplish their goals and to use resources effectively at the same time. In HRM, effectiveness can hence be measured by the successful implementation of HR policies, increased employee satisfaction, increased workforce productivity, talent retention, and the strategic addition of HR to organizational performance. HR effectiveness is supported when HR practices are aligned to the organizational objectives, as illustrated in the literature throughout SHRM. HR departments that are actively involved in strategic planning are better suited to create policies that will help in increasing employee engagement, development of the workforce and improve the organization's competitiveness. This strategic match-up allows organizations to derive the greatest benefit from their human assets and turn HR activities into assets that help create sustainable competitive advantage. In addition, technological innovations have enhanced the strategic importance of HR functions by improving the process of workforce planning, performance management, recruitment, and employee development.

The use of information technology for HR tasks enhances the quality of organizational decision making and HR processes become more efficient (Lengnick-Hall & Moritz, 2011). As a result, the function of HR has become more data-driven and proactive in supporting organizational strategy with evidence-based decision-making that utilizes digital HR systems. Further, HR effectiveness has gained significant importance in terms of organizational resilience and sustainability. HR functions help to support the organization's ability to adjust to environmental uncertainty by building the capacity of employees, enabling organizational change, promoting innovation and increasing employee commitment. Company with an effective HR program are better positioned to gear up to transforming business environments and compete for the long term. HR effectiveness from the point of view of (RBV) is an outcome of the organization that is due to the effective use of valuable resources and capabilities of the organization. Value creation and sustainable organizational performance can be attributed to the combination of human capital, organizational knowledge, and



strategically aligned HR practices (Barney, 1991). For this reason, strategic HR practice is more likely to result in better organizational performance and long-term growth for organizations that can integrate strategic HR practices into their management systems. The literature reviewed in this paper suggests that HR effectiveness is more than just operational efficiency; it has to do with strategic role of HR functions in achieving organizational success. Organizations increasingly engage in human and knowledge-based competition; grasping the organizational aspect to make HR effective continues to be an important research issue.

2.3 Leadership Learning Agility

The complexity of this current business world has made a need for leaders who are quick to respond to change, learn new skills and be ready to face new challenges in the organization. Leadership needs have changed radically as a result of technological development, globalization and ongoing organizational change, with traditional managerial skills being found to be inadequate for ensuring organizational success. As such, Leadership Learning Agility (LLA) has attracted much interest in leadership and organizational studies as a key leadership attribute that promotes organizational agility and the ability to handle uncertainty (Pulakos et al., 2019; Milani et al., 2021).

Leadership Learning Agility is the willingness and capacity to learn from experience and to use what has been learned in the face of new and changing contexts. Learning Agile Leaders are not only looking for ways to build on what they already know and what they have done before, but they are also always looking for ways to improve, adapt their approach and find new solutions for the problems they encounter in their organizations. According to De Meuse (2019), leadership learning agility is when a leader has the ability to keep learning, adapting and improving throughout their life, which is essential for successful leadership in a changing business environment. According to Bouland-van Dam et al. (2022), Leadership Learning Agility is a multi-dimensional construct with three factors: Developing Leadership, Seeking Feedback, and Developing Systematically. These dimensions together account for how leaders continually develop their skills and abilities in the face of changing organizational needs.

The first dimension focuses on Developing Leadership, highlighting the importance of leaders' engagement in developmental experiences to build their leadership skills. Learning-agile leaders will look for challenging opportunities, take on new roles and opportunities to grow personally and professionally. This developmental focus allows leaders to see organizational problems as learning opportunities, which helps them to be more effective in managing organizational change (Yukl, 2012).

The second dimension, Seeking Feedback, captures a leader's openness to receiving, accepting and acting on feedback to improve. Leaders who are proactive in seeking feedback are more likely to be able to capitalize on their strengths and develop areas for growth, to enhance decision making skills and to modify their leadership actions. De Meuse et al. (2017) propose that feedback-seeking behaviour is associated with continuous learning and stresses that learning-agile leaders are able to effectively incorporate feedback into their future leadership decisions, thereby enhancing their adaptability and effectiveness.

The third dimension, Developing Systematically, is a specifically targeted aspect of the leaders' intentional approach to ongoing learning and development, both formal and informal, such as training, mentoring, professional development, etc., and experiential learning. According to Nijs et al. (2014), systematic learning can be used by leaders to enhance their current skills, acquire new skills and skills and to anticipate future organizational challenges. Organizations can also benefit from continuous learning by helping leaders to be more flexible, innovative and problem-solving, which helps them to adapt to the evolving business landscape.

Leadership Learning Agility is an emerging Organizational capability identified in recent organizational studies to be important for the sustainability of the organizations, innovation and resilience. Learning-agile leaders are able to deal with uncertainty, change their beliefs, and find effective solutions to complex organizational problems (Pasmore & Mallis, 2020). In the same way, Lee and Song (2022) state that learning agility is an attribute of a leader that supports them to operate successfully in situations of ambiguity



and fast change, as it allows them to be adaptable, think strategically, and make decisions in an innovative way.

Leadership Learning Agility is a desirable organizational capability, from the RBV perspective, that can complement other organizational strategic resources. High learning agile leaders share their knowledge, flexibilities and effective decision making, helping organizations to realize the strategic value of their human assets. As a result, Leadership Learning Agility is anticipated to improve the organizational learning, HR implementation, and organizational responsiveness to strategic HR initiatives.

Based on the overall findings from the literature, the strategic leadership ability of Leadership Learning Agility is considered as an important capability for adaptation to change in business environments successfully for organizations. Learning-agile leaders foster continuous learning, adaptability and effective decision making, which puts them in a favourable position to enhance HR effectiveness. This theoretical background enables exploring the concept of Leadership Learning Agility either as a direct antecedent of HR effectiveness or as a moderating variable when considering the impact of HR centrality on HR effectiveness.

2.4 Theoretical Foundation: Resource Based View (RBV)

This study is rooted in the Resource Based View (RBV) which is one of the strategic management theoretical frameworks that mainly explains how organizations can derive and maintain competitive advantage. Barney (1991) states that resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable (VRIN) give organizations sustainable competitive advantage. While external approaches to markets focus on market conditions, RBV highlights the importance of internal resources, including strategic capabilities, as the key factors in achieving superior organizational performance.

Human capital is one of the most valuable resources of an organization in the context of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM). Strategic value of human resources is not just the quality of the employees but also the management and development of the human resources in an organization. As a result, the organizational skills that enhance the strategic management of human resources become key sources of competitive advantage.

Human Resource Centrality, from the RBV point of view, is a strategic organizational capability that puts the HR function at the core of organizational planning and decision making. By involving HR in strategic decisions, companies can better integrate HR policies with business goals and ensure workforce initiatives are coordinated, and human capital is used more effectively. The strategic placement makes it better equipped to transform its human resources into a valuable competitive asset.

Likewise, Leadership Learning Agility is an important intangible one that goes hand-in-hand with organizational resources. Leadership that continually learns, solicits input, adjusts to new surroundings and applies new knowledge enhances organizational learning and better strategic decision making. These leadership abilities help organizations better cope with an uncertain environment and the successful execution of strategic HR efforts.

RBV defines organizational effectiveness as the ability of complementary resources and capabilities to create value. HR Centrality in the current study serves as a structural capability that enables HR to play a strategic role, while Leadership Learning Agility helps leaders to leverage and support that strategic role of HR. These organizational capabilities are anticipated to enhance Human Resource Effectiveness through better strategic alignment, adaptability of organizations and HR practices implementation.

Thus, the Resource-Based View offers a comprehensive theory base for the proposed relationships between HR Centrality, Leadership Learning Agility and HR Effectiveness. HR functions in a strategic position, coupled with learning-agile leadership, are able to help organizations better use their human resources and thus reduce organizational performance.

3. Hypotheses Development

3.1 Human Resource Centrality and Human Resource Effectiveness

The strategic role of the Human Resource (HR) function has emerged as a key factor in organizational effectiveness in the Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) literature. HR centrality shows how much the HR role is involved in strategic planning, organizational decisions making and business policy



formulation. HR professionals who are proactively engaged in deciding are able to align HR policies to the organization goals, coordinate workforce initiatives and support organizational change (Correia et al., 2013). Previous studies indicate that organizations with strategically positioned HR departments have more organizational coordination, better communication, and more effective HR practices implementation (Markoulli et al., 2017). Similarly, Brandl and Pohler (2010) believe that HR involvement in strategic decision making can help the organizations to design HR systems which can facilitate business goals and better the organizational performance. Likewise, Abt and Knyphausen-Aufseß (2017) determined that strategic integration of HR leads to better coordination in the organization and helps in the realization of long-term organizational goals. The Resource Based View (RBV) adds to this explanation by suggesting that sustainable competitive advantage is realized by the valuable organizational capabilities (Barney, 1991). HR centrality is such a capability as it helps organizations to strategically use their human capital resources. HR roles when placed in centre of the strategic position allow the organizations to build HR competencies, optimize employee performance, and increase HR effectiveness. The above theoretical and empirical arguments suggest the following hypothesis:

H1: Human Resource Centrality has a positive and significant effect on Human Resource Effectiveness.

3.2 Leadership Learning Agility and Human Resource Effectiveness

In these times of rapid and unpredictable change, growing reliance is being placed on leaders who are capable of ongoing learning, adaptation and response. Leadership Learning Agility (LLA) has thus become a key leadership skill that helps to improve the overall performance of the organization, innovation, and organizational change. Such leaders who possess a high level of learning agility, are better able to transfer knowledge they have gained from experience to new situations, enhancing individual and organizational effectiveness (Pulakos et al., 2019; Milani et al., 2021).

Leadership Learning Agility refers to the ability of leaders to continuously develop, ask for and use feedback, and learn new information in a systematic manner to meet new challenges within the organization (Bouland-van Dam et al., 2022). These leaders are more flexible, have a greater appetite for learning and are more adaptable, allowing them to drive strategic initiatives and successfully lead organizational change. De Meuse (2019) states that leaders who are learning agile are continually developing their competencies, and De Meuse et al. (2017) stress that feedback-seeking leaders are more likely to improve their leadership and decision-making skills.

Leadership abilities have a crucial function in influencing the HRM functions effectiveness, as from the strategic HRM point of view, leadership is an essential component in determining the HRM effectiveness. Learning-agile leaders foster an organization in which employees grow, learning happens, and HR policies and practices are implemented effectively. These leaders understand how to address an organization's evolving needs, enhancing workforce skills, strengthening collaboration, and help the organization accomplish its goals.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) also offers some theoretical backing for this link, as it acknowledges leadership capability as a critical intangible resource of the organization (Barney, 1991). Leadership Learning Agility is a valuable competence that contributes to the agility of the organization, to better decision making in strategy and to a better use of human capital resources. For this reason, HR systems that are more effective and levels of HR effectiveness are expected to be higher in organizations where the learning-able leader is in the leadership position.

Based on the above theoretical and empirical arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Leadership Learning Agility has a positive and significant effect on Human Resource Effectiveness.

3.3 Moderating Role of Leadership Learning Agility

While HR Centrality sets the framework for the strategic role played by HR, its effectiveness might rely on the leadership qualities that support organizational learning and adaptation. Leaders with the ability to learn continuously, to adapt to changing circumstances in the environment and to be effective supporters



of organizational change are more likely to be successful in implementing strategic HR initiatives. Therefore, Leadership Learning Agility has been suggested as another contextual variable that can moderate the effect of HR Centrality on HR Effectiveness.

SHRM literature indicates that a strategically placed HR department will perform better if it is led by managers who foster learning, innovation and flexibility. Learning-agile leaders can more easily sense or decode changes in the environment, assimilate new information into the organization's algorithm, and more effectively implement strategic HR practices (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). In addition, leaders who proactively engage in developmental opportunities and make use of past experiences are more likely to benefit HR professionals in aligning workforce planning and deployment with organizational goals and objectives (Bouland-van Dam et al., 2022).

The Resource Based View (RBV) also suggests that the sustainable competitive advantage is achieved by combining complementary organizational resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991). In this context, HR Centrality is a strategic organizational capability and Leadership Learning Agility is a complementary leadership capability that can add value to the capabilities that are strategically positioned in the HR field. The integration of these capabilities is supposed to benefit HR implementation, enhance workforce management and boost HR efficiency.

H3: Leadership Learning Agility positively moderates the relationship between Human Resource Centrality and Human Resource Effectiveness, such that the positive relationship is stronger when Leadership Learning Agility is high.

3.4 Conceptual Framework

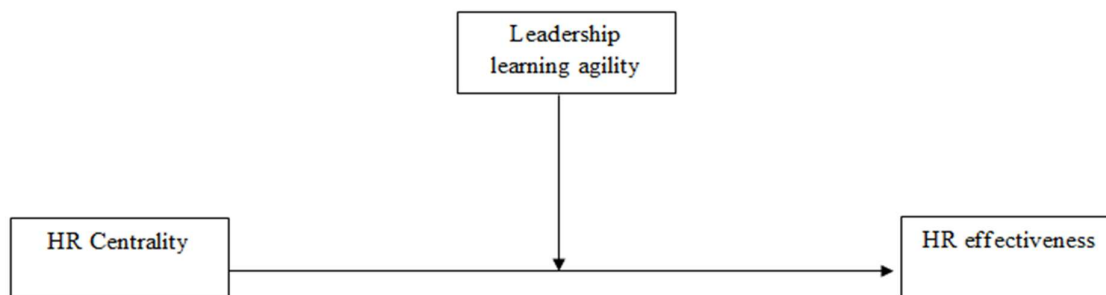
This study argues that Human Resource Centrality serves as a strategic capability of an organization that could boost Human Resource Effectiveness in the following ways; firstly, HR departments are able to be involved in strategic decision making, secondly, HR practices are aligned with organizational goals. This approach is based on the Resource Based View (RBV) which argues that, the centrality of HRD is one of the strategic capabilities of an organization that can support HRD effectiveness. The HR value chain is expected to be performed more efficiently and better in organizations that have a strategic role of HR.

The framework also suggests that Leadership Learning Agility directly impacts HR Effectiveness by empowering leaders to continually learn, adapt and respond to evolving organizational needs. Learning-agile leaders are instrumental in organizational learning, in employee development and the execution of strategic HR activities.

Beyond this, the study hypothesizes that Leadership Learning Agility is a moderator between HR Centrality and HR Effectiveness. Organizations with highly learning-agile leaders should be more successful with strategically placed HR functions, since these leaders are more likely to be able to assist with strategic HR implementation and organizational adaptation. Conceptual framework of the study is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



4. Methodology & Design

4.1 Sampling Procedure and Data Collection

To study Human Resource Centrality (HRC) and Human Resource Effectiveness (HRE) relationship and to explore the moderating effect of Leadership Learning Agility (LLA) in service sector organizations of



Pakistan, two-wave time-lagged survey design and quantitative research approach were considered. To prevent common method bias, the predictor and outcome variables were measured at different times (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Respondents filled out a questionnaire at Time 1, which included the independent variable (Human Resource Centrality), moderating variable (Leadership Learning Agility), and the demographic variables (organization type, gender, age, designation, and education). Since the four-week interval, the same respondents were contacted again at Time 2 to fill the same questionnaire but with the dependent variable, Human Resource Effectiveness.

Target population were HR professionals and HR managers of organizations engaged in private service sector in Pakistan specifically from telecommunication, banking and IT sector. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling as these respondents had good knowledge on the HR practices, leadership and HR effectiveness in their organization (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The 250 questionnaires were first distributed via professional networks, organizational contacts, email, LinkedIn and personal contacts. After the second wave of data collection, 180 matched questionnaires were kept for statistical analysis, and each questionnaire assigned a unique identification number to match the responses between the two waves. The study was not compulsory, and the respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. The sample size of 180 met the minimum sample size of 180 recommended for moderation analysis and behavioural research (Hair et al., 2022).

4.2 Measures

The previously validated scales for all study variables were adapted from the literature. The respondents were asked to rate their agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree) with the exception of Human Resource Centrality, which was rated on a 7-point frequency scale (1 = Never to 7 = Always). All measurement instruments were taken in English as English is the main language of communication in organizations in Pakistan.

Centrality of HR (Independent Variable). The strategic role of HR and the active involvement of HR in decision making and policy making within the organization is considered as the human resource centrality. The construct was assessed with the scale developed by Fields et al. (2000) with a total of 6 items. One item is: "The degree of influence of the human resources department on top management." Items were scored on a seven-point Likert-scale from 1 = Never to 7 = Always.

HR Effectiveness (Dependent Variable). Human Resource Effectiveness is defined as how well the HR function is able to help the organization meet its goals and objectives by managing the human resources efficiently. A validated scale from the literature was used to assess the construct. Each statement was given a seven-point Likert scale, from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree.

Leadership Learning Agility (Moderating Variable). Leadership Learning Agility is the leader's capacity, and eagerness, to learn from experience, accept feedback, and use the knowledge gained to enhance leadership performance in new or evolving contexts. The construct was assessed with the 18-item, three-dimensional Scale constructed and validated by Bouland-van Dam et al. (2022). The 3 dimensions are Developing Leadership, Seeking Feedback, and Developing Systematically. Examples of samples are: "I made an effort to improve my skills at influencing others to achieve the goals of our project", "I take time to carefully consider the feedback I receive from others to learn from it", and "I engage in learning activities (e.g., training and workshops) at work to develop myself." Responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree.

4.3 Control Variables

One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to check the effects of the demographic variables of gender, organization type, age, designation and education on Human Resource Effectiveness (HRE). The aim of this analysis was to establish if the demographic variables had an effect, statistically significant or not, on the dependent variable, and thus should be controlled in the future analyses.



The ANOVA results (Table 1) showed that none of the demographic variables had a significant ($p > .05$) effect on Human Resource Effectiveness. Therefore, none of the demographic variables were used as control variables in the regression or moderation analyses.

Table 1*Results of One-Way ANOVA*

Demographics	Dependent Variables	F Value	Sig.	Remarks
Gender	HR effectiveness (HRE)	0.142	0.751	Not Controlled
Organization Type	HR effectiveness (HRE)	0.703	0.339	Not Controlled
Age	HR effectiveness (HRE)	0.732	0.673	Not Controlled
Designation	HR effectiveness (HRE)	1.312	0.524	Not Controlled
Education	HR effectiveness (HRE)	1.213	0.423	Not Controlled

Note. N = 180

4.4 Data Analysis Technique

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 21 and PROCESS Macro created by Hayes (2022). The data used for hypothesis testing were checked for missing values, outliers, normality, and multicollinearity to meet the assumptions of the statistical tests.

Descriptive data such as frequencies, means, standard deviations and Pearson correlation coefficients were performed to describe the characteristics of the respondents and to look at the relationships between the variables of the study. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of the measurement scales (internal consistency). The data was analysed by using a Hierarchical regression analysis. A Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the direct effect of Human Resource Centrality on Human Resource Effectiveness. Moderating effect of Leadership Learning Agility was explored using 5000 bootstrap samples in PROCESS Macro Model 1 (Hayes, 2022). To prevent the potential multicollinearity, both the independent variable and moderator were mean-centred before the interaction term was created. Moderation effects that did not contain the null value in the 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the interaction were deemed statistically significant. Simple slopes analysis was used to explain significant interaction effects.

5. Results and Findings

5.1 Descriptive Statistics, Correlation, and Reliability Analysis

Table 4.1 shows descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients and reliability estimates for the study variables: Human Resource Centrality (HRC), Leadership Learning Agility (LLA) and Human Resource Effectiveness (HRE).

The descriptive statistics showed that the mean scores of the study variables ranged from 4.60 – 5.05, which suggests that the respondents agreed with the statements measuring the constructs. The HR function was seen as being strategically involved in the activities of the organization with the highest mean score ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.41$) recorded by Human Resource Centrality. The mean scores of Human Resource Effectiveness and Leadership Learning Agility are 4.70 ($SD = 1.23$) and 4.60 ($SD = 1.02$) respectively. The standard deviation values for the study variables ranged from 1.02 to 1.41, which implies that there is an acceptable level of variation in the respondents' feelings towards these variables.

Reliability analysis showed that all measurement scales had high internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for Human Resource Centrality was 0.96, for Leadership Learning Agility was 0.97 and for Human Resource Effectiveness was 0.97. The reliability values of the measuring instruments used in this study were above the recommended value of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) indicating high reliability of the instruments used.

All the study variables showed correlation in the positive direction, at significant level in Pearson correlation analysis. Human Resource Centrality was shown to be positively and significantly related with Leadership Learning Agility ($*r = .691$, $*p < .01$) and Human Resource Effectiveness ($*r = .696$, $*p < .01$). Similarly, Human Resource Effectiveness was positively and significantly related to Leadership Learning Agility ($*r = .639$, $*p < .01$). The results suggest that HR centrality is correlated with HR



effectiveness and HR leadership learning agility. Likewise, HR effectiveness is more likely to be found in organizations that are more leadership learning agile.

In addition, value for all correlation coefficients did not exceed the recommended values of 0.80 indicating that there is no multicollinearity nor any construct was redundant. The preliminary findings of the descriptive statistics, reliability analysis and correlation results support the proposed relationships among the study variables and would certainly support the further progression of the regression and moderation analysis to test the study hypotheses.

Table 2

Mean, Standard Deviation, Correlation and Reliability Analysis

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. HR Centrality	5.05	1.41	(0.96)		
2. Leadership Learning Agility	4.60	1.02	.691**	(0.97)	
3. HR Effectiveness	4.70	1.23	.696**	.639**	(0.97)

Note. $N = 180$. Cronbach's alpha reliability is given in parenthesis. ** $p < .01$.

5.2 Regression Analysis

The hierarchical regression analysis results of the moderating effect of Leadership Learning Agility (LLA) on Human Resource Centrality (HRC) and Human Resource Effectiveness (HRE) are shown in Table 4.2.

The two main effects, Human Resource Centrality and Leadership Learning Agility, were included in the regression model in Step 1. Overall, the model was statistically significant and accounted for 53.7% of the variance in Human Resource Effectiveness ($R = .733$, $R^2 = .537$). HR Centrality had a strong positive relationship with HR Effectiveness ($\beta = .411$, $SE = .0626$, 95% CI [.2877, .5350], * $p < .001$): HR centrality positively impacts HR effectiveness, with stronger HR centrality corresponding to higher HR effectiveness. Likewise, the effect of Leadership Learning Agility on Human Resource Effectiveness ($\beta = .3632$, $SE = .0957$, 95% CI [.1743, .5520]) was significant and positive, indicating that higher levels of leadership learning agility are correlated with HR effectiveness.

To examine the moderating effect, the moderation term Human Resource Centrality $\times$ Leadership Learning Agility (HRC $\times$ LLA) was included in Step 2. The addition of the interaction term yielded only a small increase in the amount of variance explained ($\Delta R^2 = .005$). The interaction effect was not significant ($\beta = -.0634$, $SE = .0444$, 95% CI [-.1510, .0243]) as the confidence interval contained zero. So the relationship between Human Resource Centrality and Human Resource Effectiveness was not significantly affected by Leadership Learning Agility.

These findings suggest that Human Resource Centrality and Leadership Learning Agility are independent contributors to improving Human Resource Effectiveness, but that Leadership Learning Agility has no significant ability to strengthen or weaken the contribution of Human Resource Centrality to Human Resource Effectiveness. Therefore, the moderation hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3

Results of Moderator Leadership Learning Agility Between HRC and HRE

OUTCOME	HR effectiveness					
	R	R ²	Estimate	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Step 1	.733	.503				
HRC			.411***	.0626	.2877	.5350
LLA			.3632***	.0957	.1743	.5520
Step 2	ΔR^2	.005				
HRC x LLA			-.0634	.0444	-.151	.0243

*** $p < .001$

6. Discussion

6.1 Discussion



The impact of Human Resource Centrality on Human Resource Effectiveness was directly examined, and the hypothesis was that Leadership Learning Agility (LLA) would moderate the relationship between Human Resource Centrality and Human Resource Effectiveness. The results validated H1, which hypothesized that HR Centrality has a positive relationship with HR Effectiveness. This finding aligns with the Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) literature which suggests that strategically placed HR functions are associated with better organizational coordination, strategic alignment and HR practice implementation (Brandl & Pohler, 2010; Markoulli et al., 2017). In the Resource Based View (RBV), HR centrality is seen as a valuable characteristic of the organization which can help the firms to better utilize their human resources and improve HR effectiveness.

Likewise, the results confirmed the H2 as it showed the positive impact of Leadership Learning Agility on HR Effectiveness significantly. Leaders who commit to ongoing learning, seek input and are willing to adjust to evolving organizational needs are better equipped to develop employees, foster innovation, and implement the HR function effectively. This result is consistent with earlier research conducted by De Meuse (2019), Bouland-van Dam et al. (2022), and Pulakos et al. (2019), who showed that learning-agile leaders have a positive impact on the effectiveness of their organizations through their ability to adapt and make decisions.

But unlike H3, there was no significant moderation between HR Centrality and HR Effectiveness with Leadership Learning Agility. The interaction between HR Centrality and Leadership Learning Agility was not statistically significant, but both explained a part of HR Effectiveness.

Unexpectedly, the relationship between Human Resource Centrality and Human Resource Effectiveness was not statistically significantly mediated by Leadership Learning Agility. Leadership Learning Agility had a strong direct effect on HR Effectiveness; however, this was not statistically significant when combined with HR Centrality. This discovery indicates that learning-agile leadership has a separate effect on organizational effectiveness that is not reinforcing the effect of strategically placed HR function. This finding theoretically explains the result, as HR Centrality is a part of the governance and strategic decision making in the organization. If HR is now in the strategic arena, the role HR can play in HR effectiveness can be more or less stable, depending on the learning agility of the leaders.

This is also supported by the recent literature. A systematic review by Lundqvist et al. (2023) concluded that while leadership is always linked with learning and organizational outcomes, there is much less empirical evidence on moderating mechanisms and boundary conditions. The authors also suggested that a leadership-learning relationship is more likely to be accounted for in terms of direct or mediating effects than in terms of moderation, suggesting that leadership competence can have a direct impact on organizational outcomes without affecting the relationship between organizational capabilities.

Likewise, Mahapatra et al. (2025) emphasized that agility of leadership is a crucial organizational ability that improves organizational adaptability, innovation, and organizational responsiveness. Their systematic review however indicates that leadership agility is an organizational capability in itself and not as a contextual condition which regularly enhances the impact of other organizational resources. Thus, the agility of leadership may have a direct effect on increasing organizational effectiveness, not necessarily through the wedge of HR strategic positioning.

In addition, there are recent reviews of learning agility which indicate that the concept of learning agility is still developing, and that there are still ongoing debates regarding its dimensions, measurement, and theoretical boundaries. Watkins (2026) suggest that further conceptual development and empirical support are needed before the nuanced interactions of learning agility can be consistently identified within the context of organizations. The fact that Leadership Learning Agility had a significant direct effect but not a significant moderating influence in the current study, may be attributed to this.

The results suggest that HR Centrality and Leadership Learning Agility are two valuable but independent organizational resources from the Resource Based View (RBV). Each capability, in isolation, helps to increase HR Effectiveness. So, organizations need to invest in both strategic positioning of HR and



cultivating learning-agile leaders at the same time, as both have the capacity to add value to the organization, and do so in parallel and not through interaction.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

The current study has several significant contributions to the literature on strategic human resource management (SHRM), and the resource-based view (RBV). First, it offers empirical evidence that Human Resource Centrality is a strategic organizational capability that has a significant influence on Human Resource Effectiveness. The discovery reinforces the RBV theory which suggests that the capabilities of an organization that are ingrained in strategic decision-making produce value for the organization and, in turn, enhance the chances of organizational success. This study is based on a few contributing strengths: first, it builds on the research that has been conducted in the field of HR practices and emphasizes the strategic placement of the HR function itself; second, by documenting HR functions that are in the heart of organizational decisions, the study extends previous research that has mainly been limited to HR practices.

Second, the study is another addition to the existing literature on Leadership Learning Agility as it confirms the significant direct impact that LLA has on HR Effectiveness. This discovery aligns with previous studies indicating that learning-agile leaders foster adaptability within the organization, continuous learning and the successful execution of HR projects (Boulant-van Dam et al., 2022; Watkins, 2026). Leadership learning agility is thus an important intangible organizational capability, which contributes independently to an organization's success.

Third, the study contributes to theory by showing that Leadership Learning Agility has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between HR Centrality and HR Effectiveness. Complementary resources could also work together to produce better organizational results, as RBV proposes, but the results of the present study suggest that strategic organizational capabilities could be able to create value on their own. The result is consistent with recent leadership research that indicates that leadership ability often has direct and not interaction effects on organizational outcomes (Lundqvist et al., 2023). Thus, the study suggests that future scholars of SHRM should rethink the boundary conditions with which leadership capabilities moderate.

6.3 Practical Implications

The findings have several practical implications that would be useful to the managers, HRD and policy makers in the context of service sector in Pakistan.

The first is that HR needs to be strategically placed in the executive decision-making process. HR departments that are involved in the organization's planning, policy making and strategic decisions can function more effectively to integrate HR practices with organizational goals.

Second, organizations should persist in investing in leadership development initiatives for improving leaders' learning agility. While Leadership Learning Agility did not have a significant relationship with HR Centrality and HR Effectiveness, its direct impact suggests it has a positive effect on organizational adaptability, employee development and HR implementation. So leadership development is a key investment for organizations.

Third, it is important that organizations do not underestimate the value of good HR structures and assume that leadership development is enough to make up for this. Rather, organizations should simultaneously build up strategic HR integration and strategic leadership skills, both of which are independently associated with organizational effectiveness.

Last, and most important, HR executives need to be formally included in strategic planning within the organization by incentivizing governance arrangements. The structural integration helps organizations to make better use of human resources and improves the competitiveness of organizations in dynamic business environments.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

First, the study was based on data of only service sector organizations from Pakistan. Thus, the results might not be transferable to other manufacturing companies or other companies in other cultures or countries. Secondly, the current study used a two-wave time-lagged design to minimize common method bias, but the



study is still observational in design and so does not allow for the establishment of causal relationships between the variables in the study.

Thirdly, purposive sampling was used because the respondents had to have knowledge of HR practices and leadership in their organization. Probability sampling was used for this study but could increase the generalizability of future research. Fourthly, the study only explored one moderating variable—Leadership Learning Agility. However, other contextual factors (organizational culture, top management support, strategic leadership, digital HR capability, organizational learning climate, or environmental uncertainty) might offer more insight into when HR Centrality leads to increased HR Effectiveness.

Finally, the study was limited to HR Effectiveness as the outcome variable only. This research focused only on organizational outcomes as these were not captured by other organizational outcomes, including organizational performance, employee engagement, innovation capability, talent retention, and organizational resilience.

6.5 Future Research Directions

Future research is needed to test the relationships found in the model across other industries and countries and determine if they are similar in other organizational and cultural environments. Further moderating factors that could reinforce or deter the relationship between HR Centrality and HR Effectiveness should be explored. The organizational level of factors like organizational culture, strategic leadership, digital HR transformation, organizational learning capability, psychological safety, and environmental dynamism might better capture the context of differences than leadership learning agility.

Further studies could also explore the mediating processes between HR Centrality and HR Effectiveness. The following constructs could account for the ability of strategically placed HR functions to create organizational value: organizational learning, employee engagement, knowledge sharing, HR innovation, strategic alignment and organizational agility.

Longitudinal studies over the years would give more evidence of causal relationships and would enable studies on the development of HR capabilities over time. Last but not least, the combination of RBV and other theories like Dynamic Capabilities Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework should be performed in future studies to gain a deeper understanding of strategic HR capabilities and organizational effectiveness.

6.6 Conclusion

This study attempted to explore the relationship between Human Resource Centrality and Human Resource Effectiveness and moderating role of Leadership Learning Agility among the service sector organizations in Pakistan. The results showed that Human Resource Centrality has a significant positive effect on Human Resource Effectiveness, thus supporting the existence of strategic placement of HR functions which can provide added value for the organization. Leadership Learning Agility also had a considerable positive direct impact on HR Effectiveness, signifying that continuous learning and adaption by leadership is crucial for improving HR outcomes. Leadership Learning Agility, however, did not significantly moderate the relationship between HR Centrality and HR Effectiveness, indicating that the two organizational capabilities do not interact and influence one another.

In conclusion, the study adds to the literature on Strategic Human Resource Management by building on the Resource Based View and the finding that strategic HR positioning and learning-agile leadership are two organizational capabilities that on their own contribute to the effectiveness of HR. The findings provide empirical evidence from the service sector in Pakistan and give applicable recommendations to the organizations aiming to enhance their strategic HR roles and leadership skills. In today's context of continuous change and competition, there is a need to invest in strategic HR integration at the same time as in leadership development for organizational effectiveness to be sustainable.

Author Contributions

All authors participated in ideation, development, and writing the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement



The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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