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THE RISE OF MULTI-AGENT AI IN STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: EXPLORING HOW COLLABORATIVE AI AGENTS TRANSFORM TALENT MANAGEMENT, WORKFORCE COORDINATION, AND HR DECISION AUTHORITY

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Abstract

This study examined how professionals in Pakistan understood the role of collaborative artificial intelligence (AI) agents in talent management, workforce coordination and HR decision authority. Guided by Socio-Technical Systems Theory and Organizational Information Processing Theory, the study used reflexive thematic analysis to interpret 20 online interviews with HR, operations and technology professionals. Six themes captured participants' accounts of recruitment, career development, workforce planning, decision authority, procedural fairness and organizational readiness. Participants located a critical point of recruiter oversight at initial screening, when historical hiring preferences could exclude qualified applicants before human review. In development and scheduling, they identified employee aspirations, skills and personal circumstances as information that could change an otherwise plausible recommendation. They assigned responsibility for pay adjustments to compensation committees and staffing reductions to executives. Across functions, participants connected fairness with understandable reasons and access to a reviewer empowered to correct an outcome. The findings show that, in participants' judgments, the value of collaborative agents depends on whether decision owners can inspect underlying evidence, exercise judgment and intervene when recommendations affect employment opportunities.

Keywords: Multi-Agent Artificial Intelligence, Strategic Human Resource Management, Talent Management, Workforce Coordination, Decision Authority

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

A recruitment decision can take shape before a hiring manager sees a single application. One artificial intelligence (AI) agent might screen applicants against a job description, a second might assess the skills of those shortlisted, and a third might invite selected candidates to interview. If the first agent overlooks a qualification, the second may never assess that candidate's skills. This dependence between tasks distinguishes multi-agent AI from the separate use of several HR tools. In a multi-agent system, specialized agents exchange information and coordinate actions toward a shared objective (Hughes et al., 2025). Research

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on recruitment in IT companies illustrates how such coordination can organize the work of evaluating applicants (Kasatkin et al., 2026).

The strategic significance extends beyond recruitment. A skills assessment prepared for one vacancy could later inform a training recommendation, an internal transfer or a succession decision. Each use raises a different question about what the original assessment can reasonably establish. Research on generative AI has identified implications for HR practice and employee well-being (Budhwar et al., 2023), while talent acquisition reains a prominent area of AI–HRM scholarship (Khan et al., 2026). Kim et al. (2025) extend this discussion to work design and human agency, drawing attention to how organizational arrangements shape the use of algorithmic technologies.

This study examines these issues through interviews with 20 HR, operations and technology professionals in Pakistan. Their roles bring different demands into view. A retail executive anticipates seasonal changes in staffing, a healthcare HR manager must reconcile shift coverage with employees' family responsibilities, and a compensation manager must justify differences in pay. These accounts provide a basis for examining where professionals expect shared information to improve coordination, when they consider an automated recommendation incomplete, and who they believe should have authority to act on it.

1.2 Problem Statement

When several AI agents contribute to a promotion recommendation, the manager approving it may see a ranking without knowing why a particular employee fell below the threshold. A performance score may capture individual output yet leave out how the employee develops colleagues or handles conflict. Research on agentic HRM identifies the distribution of decision authority and organizational accountability as governance concerns (Gaddam & Raigoni, 2026; Rena & Aderla, 2026). Technical work demonstrates how a system can trace the reasoning behind a recommendation (Mertzani et al., 2026). A separate organizational question remains: who can reopen the assessment when an employee disputes the evidence? Research on algorithmic management and employee supervision of AI agents helps explain why this responsibility may extend across several roles (Hillebrand et al., 2025; Van Quaquebeke et al., 2026). This study examines how professionals in Pakistan would allocate authority to recommend, approve and reconsider consequential HR decisions.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do professionals in Pakistan expect collaborative AI agents to influence recruitment, employee development and succession planning?
2. How do they expect agents to support workforce coordination across departments, and where do they anticipate difficulties?
3. Which HR decisions do professionals consider suitable for delegation to AI agents, and which require human authorization?
4. What safeguards do participants consider necessary for employees and candidates to understand, question and seek correction of AI-supported decisions?
5. What changes in data systems, professional skills and HR responsibilities do participants consider necessary for adoption?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To identify the roles professionals envisage for collaborative AI agents in recruitment, employee development and succession planning.
2. To examine the opportunities and constraints professionals anticipate when agents connect workforce information across departments.
3. To distinguish the decision rights participants would assign to AI agents, HR practitioners, operational managers and senior leadership.
4. To identify the procedures participants consider necessary for explanation, human review and correction of AI-supported decisions.
5. To examine how data readiness, professional capabilities and changes in HR responsibilities shape participants' expectations of adoption.

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1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to strategic HRM research by examining delegation at the level of an individual decision. An employer may authorize an agent to schedule an interview while requiring a recruiter to reconsider an applicant's exclusion from the shortlist. Both actions belong to recruitment, yet they carry different consequences for the candidate. Examining that distinction gives practical meaning to human oversight. Socio-Technical Systems Theory directs attention to how organizations design professional roles alongside technical tasks. Organizational Information Processing Theory helps explain what departments gain when information moves across functional boundaries and what uncertainty remains for the person making the decision.

For practitioners, the study identifies questions that arise before an employer acts on a recommendation. In workforce scheduling, for example, an operations manager may know which skills a shift requires, while an HR manager may know why an otherwise available employee cannot work it. The employee may hold information neither manager has recorded. Examining whose knowledge can change the roster connects coordination to employee participation. Across hiring, development, staffing and pay, the study offers a grounded account of who professionals believe should check the evidence, explain a decision to the person affected and authorize a correction when the evidence warrants one.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Socio-Technical Systems Theory provides the primary lens for examining how collaborative AI agents may change strategic human resource management. Trist and Bamforth (1951) showed how a change in production technology could alter the organization of work, including workers' discretion and their relationships with colleagues. Applied to HR, this insight directs attention to what happens to professional judgment when tasks previously performed by one person are divided among several agents. A recruiter who once read every application may acquire a different responsibility: deciding whether the system has given qualified candidates a fair opportunity to be seen. Hillebrand et al. (2025) connect such changes to the relationship between human–AI collaboration and managerial control.

Organizational Information Processing Theory supplies a complementary explanation for why employers might connect agents across departments. Galbraith (1974) argued that uncertainty increases the information an organization must process to perform its work. A hospital preparing a duty roster, for example, needs information about clinical skills, staff availability and anticipated demand. Collaborative agents could bring these records together. Whether managers can act on the resulting roster depends on who understands local conditions and who can revise an assignment. Together, the theories connect the allocation of tasks between people and AI with the distribution of knowledge and discretion across the organization (Islami & Mulolli, 2024; Chang, 2026).

2.2 Collaborative Agents in Recruitment and Talent Acquisition

Recruitment illustrates how an apparently administrative choice can influence access to employment. An employer might assign one agent to identify candidates, another to compare qualifications and a third to arrange interviews. Kasatkin et al. (2026) examine how multiple agents can coordinate HR processes in IT companies, where specialized recruitment tasks lend themselves to this division of work. The order of those tasks matters. If the sourcing agent searches a narrow set of professional networks, subsequent assessments can be thorough even as the original pool excludes suitable applicants. Butani (2026) places recruiter involvement alongside productivity and decision quality, raising a practical question about when human review should occur.

Research outside HR helps clarify what happens before a recruiter receives a shortlist. In their study of entrepreneurial ecosystems in Pakistan and China, Qazi, Mehmood, et al. (2026) examine how algorithmic visibility relates to opportunity recognition. Applied cautiously to recruitment, this suggests asking which candidates become visible enough to enter an assessment. Abrar and Amjad's (2026) study of gamified advertising in Pakistan offers a second comparison: people experience a digital interaction through the choices its designers make available. For applicants, those choices include whether they can clarify an unfamiliar

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qualification or correct a misclassified skill. Such design decisions give practical expression to the human agency emphasized in strategic HRM research (Kim et al., 2025).

2.3 Employee Development, Internal Mobility and Succession Planning

A recommendation to take a course and a recommendation to promote an employee may draw on the same performance record, although the two decisions require different evidence. Dutta and Kannan Poyil (2025) examine how human and machine agency can shape learning and development practices. A skills assessment could help a manager identify a development need and offer an employee a relevant opportunity. The same assessment provides a weaker basis for judging readiness to lead a team, particularly where the role demands mentoring, conflict resolution or ethical judgment. Chang's (2026) account of task allocation helps explain why the contribution expected from an agent should vary with the decision.

Development also depends on knowledge that employees and colleagues share through their work (Chen et al., 2026). For instance, an employee may have learned to supervise a shift informally without acquiring a title that records this experience. Research on teachers' experiences with classroom AI offers a relevant comparison because the professional interpreting a learning recommendation can draw on direct knowledge of the learner (Rehmat, Hassan, Khan, et al., 2025). Pakistani research on personalized financial services likewise draws attention to self-efficacy and digital literacy (Qazi et al., 2026b). In a workplace, a corresponding consideration is whether employees can interpret a suggested career path and explain why a different opportunity better fits their experience or aspirations.

2.4 Workforce Coordination, Information Quality and Operational Interdependence

Workforce coordination becomes difficult when information held by one department changes what another department can reasonably do. A production planner may know that an order has moved forward, while HR holds attendance records and a shift supervisor knows which employees can operate the required equipment. Galbraith's (1974) information-processing perspective explains the value of bringing these sources together under time pressure. Research on multi-agent HR processes describes one means of coordinating specialized tasks (Kasatkin et al., 2026), while Chen et al. (2026) connect knowledge sharing with the workforce capabilities involved in organizational adaptation.

The timing and meaning of a record are as important as its availability. An employee listed as available may lack current certification for the proposed assignment. If several agents rely on that entry, their agreement can give a manager unwarranted confidence in the roster. Digital-twin research offers a technical comparison by examining how updated information informs prediction and adaptive decisions (Naseem et al., 2026). A different comparison comes from Hong et al. (2026), who examine how financial development conditions the relationship between financial openness and growth across Chinese urban agglomerations. The relevance to HR lies in asking under what conditions a proposed benefit arises. For workforce coordination, those conditions include the currency of records and a supervisor's ability to correct them before assignments take effect.

2.5 Decision Authority, Explainability and Procedural Fairness

An employee challenging a performance assessment has two questions: how did the organization reach the decision, and who can change it? The first concerns explanation. Work on traceable multi-agent decision systems illustrates how an organization can reconstruct the contributions behind a recommendation (Mertzani et al., 2026). The second concerns authority. Reviews of autonomous business agents and research on agentic HR governance identify the allocation of responsibility as a management concern (Ghane et al., 2026; Rena & Aderla, 2026). A supervisor might explain accurately that an attendance record lowered an employee's rating while having no authority to correct the record or reopen the assessment.

This distinction matters as employees themselves assume responsibility for directing and supervising agents (Van Quaquebeke et al., 2026). Pakistani research on explainable AI indicates that nontechnical users value explanations they can understand in relation to their own circumstances (Rehmat, Hassan, Rumaan, et al., 2025). Research on personalized financial advice similarly places trust and digital financial literacy within the study of perceived decision quality (Qazi, Arshad, & Majeed, 2026). In employment, however, an individual may have limited freedom to disregard an assessment that affects pay or promotion. Procedural

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fairness therefore depends on whether the employee can inspect the relevant evidence, offer a correction and reach someone authorized to act on it.

2.6 Organizational Readiness, Professional Skills and Investment Trade-offs

An employer considering multi-agent AI must decide whether its first investment should be in the agents, the records they will use or the people who will supervise them. Research on AI-enabled FinTech in Pakistan treats organizational readiness as relevant to the use of intelligent financial services (Qazi et al., 2026a). Ashraf et al. (2025), examining access to finance among Pakistani SMEs, provide context for employers with limited investment capacity. For such an employer, the cost of connecting payroll, attendance and recruitment systems may influence which HR application is feasible first.

Cross-sector studies sharpen distinct aspects of this choice. Baig et al. (2026) examine how established arrangements constrain the adoption of mass timber in Pakistan. The parallel for HR is that existing approval routines and departmental ownership of records may persist after new software is purchased. Gondal's (2026) analysis of AI investment in defense raises the question of opportunity cost: expenditure on technology leaves fewer resources for other capabilities, including staff development. Zahid's (2026) synthesis of battery engineering offers a narrower comparison concerning evaluation. Just as immediate performance and cycle life capture different properties, faster HR processing and reliable employee review measure different outcomes. An employer assessing readiness therefore needs to determine who can detect an error, how long correction takes and whether staff have the skills to intervene.

2.7 Gaps in Existing Research

Existing research addresses several parts of the problem at different levels. Maghsoudi et al. (2025) map collaboration within AI–HRM research, while Khan et al. (2026) identify trends and prospects across the field. Budhwar et al. (2023) set out the implications of generative AI for HR practice and research. Work on agentic systems examines how agents undertake and coordinate tasks (Hughes et al., 2025), and Gaddam and Raigoni (2026) bring decision authority into the discussion of strategic HR roles. An unresolved question across these contributions concerns what happens at the point where one agent's recommendation becomes the basis for another person's employment decision.

That question requires attention to the people involved and the consequences of the particular decision. A recruitment manager can inspect a shortlist yet have little knowledge of candidates excluded during sourcing. A compensation committee can approve a pay adjustment while depending on performance data that only a line manager can correct. This study examines how 20 professionals in Pakistan reason through such divisions of knowledge and authority across recruitment, development, staffing and compensation. Their accounts can identify where practitioners anticipate a need for intervention, whose judgment they consider relevant and what would make a review meaningful to the person affected. The empirical contribution concerns these anticipated arrangements, and the reasons professionals give for them.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used an exploratory qualitative design to examine how professionals in Pakistan understood the potential role of multi-agent AI in strategic human resource management. The unit of analysis was the HR decision described in each account, such as shortlisting a candidate, assigning a shift or approving a pay adjustment. This focus made it possible to examine why a participant welcomed automation at one stage of a decision yet wanted a person involved at another. Two Pakistani studies provided methodological precedents for using professional accounts to investigate how people interpret AI recommendations and decide when to trust them (Rehmat, Hassan, Khan, et al., 2025; Rehmat, Hassan, Rumaan, et al., 2025).

3.2 Sampling Strategy

The sample comprised 20 professionals whose responsibilities covered HR, operations, executive leadership, consultancy and technology. Their experience ranged from 6 to 20 years. The range of roles supported comparison across people who prepare workforce information, use it to make decisions or answer for the consequences. For example, an HR analytics specialist could identify weaknesses in employee records, while a compensation manager could explain how those records might affect a pay decision. Cross-sector

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qualitative research on explainable AI in Pakistan offers a precedent for examining such differences in professional perspective (Rehmat, Hassan, Rumaan, et al., 2025). Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, which targeted professionals whose roles involved preparing, using or answering for workforce decisions.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through 20 online interviews lasting 20–25 minutes each. The interviews were not audio or video recorded, so the accounts analysed are the researcher's written records of each interview. Participants discussed possible applications of collaborative AI agents in areas familiar to them, including recruitment, learning and development, workforce scheduling, compensation and employee relations. Their accounts described tasks that agents could perform, information they could share and circumstances in which a manager or employee would need to intervene. Concrete examples, such as reviewing a shortlist or adjusting a duty roster, allowed participants to explain what human judgment would contribute to a particular decision. Ashraf et al. (2025) provide a Pakistani qualitative precedent for using interviews to examine how participants understand institutional constraints through examples from their own work.

3.4 Data Analysis

The 20 accounts were examined using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2022), following the applied interview study of Ashraf et al. (2025). Each account was read for three elements: the task proposed for an agent, the concern raised by the participant and the person considered able to address it. Comparing these elements across accounts helped distinguish related codes. For example, the recruitment consultant's concern about challenging an inaccurate assessment and the employee relations manager's concern about understanding a poor rating supported distinct codes for contestability and explanation. Related codes were grouped into six themes and checked against accounts from different professional roles.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

All 20 participants gave informed consent. No formal ethics committee reviewed the study, and anonymity was maintained by coding participants and withholding employer names. Participant codes P01–P20 identify the accounts throughout the paper. The analysis preserves the distinction between a participant's professional opinion and an established practice at their organization. For example, a concern that historical recruitment data could disadvantage applicants from certain universities is reported as an anticipated risk. It does not establish that a particular employer discriminated against an applicant. This attention to what an account can support is consistent with Hole's (2024) discussion of interpretive care in thematic analysis. The findings are presented through paraphrase, and Table 1 identifies participants by professional characteristics without naming their employers.

3.6 Participants' Profile

Table 1 presents each participant's role, sector, city, professional experience and principal decision context. Six participants were based in Islamabad, five in Karachi, four in Lahore, two each in Faisalabad and Rawalpindi, and one in Multan. The banking participants illustrate why professional role matters alongside sector: the HR director discussed hiring accountability, the analytics specialist emphasized record quality, the talent specialist questioned succession scores, and the compensation manager focused on authority over pay.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Participant	Professional role	Sector	City	Experience	Principal decision context
P01	HR Director	Banking	Islamabad	15 years	Determining who is accountable for a hiring decision informed by several agents

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Participant	Professional role	Sector	City	Experience	Principal decision context
P02	Talent Acquisition Manager	IT	Lahore	9 years	Reviewing shortlists for historical preferences linked to applicants' universities or backgrounds
P03	HR Business Partner	Telecommunications	Karachi	11 years	Coordinating regional staffing while setting limits on access to employee information
P04	Learning and Development Manager	Manufacturing	Faisalabad	8 years	Interpreting skills gaps and discussing training recommendations with employees
P05	Chief Operating Officer	Retail	Rawalpindi	18 years	Responding to seasonal staffing demand and authorizing workforce reductions
P06	HR Analytics Specialist	Banking	Karachi	6 years	Assessing the reliability of linked training, performance and retention records
P07	Recruitment Consultant	Consultancy	Lahore	7 years	Identifying prospective candidates and providing a route to challenge inaccurate assessments
P08	HR Manager	Healthcare	Islamabad	12 years	Reconciling clinical coverage requirements with employees' family responsibilities
P09	Chief Human Resources Officer	Telecommunications	Islamabad	20 years	Weighing productivity alongside leadership conduct and team relationships in promotion decisions
P10	Organizational Development Specialist	Education	Lahore	10 years	Connecting skills needs to internal mobility and involving employees in implementation

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Participant	Professional role	Sector	City	Experience	Principal decision context
P11	HR Information Systems Manager	Manufacturing	Karachi	9 years	Connecting separate HR systems and assigning responsibility for access and monitoring
P12	Employee Relations Manager	Textiles	Faisalabad	13 years	Explaining adverse performance assessments and ensuring access to human review
P13	Talent Management Specialist	Banking	Multan	7 years	Assessing succession candidates whose leadership potential extends beyond recorded scores
P14	Digital Transformation Manager	IT services	Islamabad	8 years	Setting autonomy levels and identifying decisions that require human authorization
P15	HR Consultant	Independent consultancy	Karachi	14 years	Identifying skills HR practitioners need as administrative work becomes automated
P16	Production Planning Manager	Automotive	Lahore	12 years	Checking staffing recommendations against production targets, available skills and absences
P17	Compensation and Benefits Manager	Banking	Rawalpindi	10 years	Reviewing proposed salary adjustments and retaining committee authority over pay
P18	Employee Experience Manager	E-commerce	Islamabad	6 years	Interpreting digital engagement indicators alongside direct employee feedback
P19	Chief Technology Officer	Software development	Karachi	16 years	Monitoring conflicting agent objectives and deciding when supervisors should intervene

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Participant	Professional role	Sector	City	Experience	Principal decision context
P20	Strategic HRM Consultant	Management consultancy	Islamabad	17 years	Assigning decision ownership when several agents contribute to a strategic recommendation

4. Findings and Discussion

The thematic analysis of 20 interviews identified six themes concerning recruitment, employee development, workforce coordination, decision authority, procedural fairness and organizational readiness. Participants discussed multi-agent AI from their respective professional roles in Pakistan. Their accounts established which HR tasks they considered suitable for delegation, where they identified risks and who they held responsible for employment decisions.

4.1 Theme 1: Recruiters Retained Responsibility for Shortlisting

P02 distinguished three tasks within recruitment: screening applications, assessing skills and scheduling interviews. Although coordinating these tasks through specialized agents held value for the talent acquisition manager, screening required particular scrutiny because it determined whose qualifications received further consideration. P02 identified historical preferences for graduates of particular universities as a source of bias. If those preferences influenced the initial screen, a recruiter examining the final shortlist would have little opportunity to recognize qualified applicants excluded earlier. The stage at which review occurred therefore mattered as much as the presence of a reviewer.

P07 examined the same decision from the applicant's position. The recruitment consultant explained that references and interpersonal communication carried information about candidates that an automated assessment could miss. P07 attached importance to applicants understanding how their information was evaluated and being able to challenge an inaccurate assessment. P01 raised the corresponding question inside the organization: who would answer for the outcome when several agents contributed to a hiring decision? Read together, these accounts extend the discussion of recruiter involvement in agentic hiring (Butani, 2026). Participants understood recruitment oversight as responsibility for both the candidates who advanced and those who disappeared from consideration, giving a specific employment consequence to broader concerns about AI in HR practice (Budhwar et al., 2023).

4.2 Theme 2: Career Decisions Required Knowledge of the Individual

P04 identified a limitation of standardized training: employees with different capabilities could receive the same program. The learning and development manager valued the ability to connect information about performance gaps, available training and subsequent progress. However, a performance record answered only part of the development question. An employee's motivation and circumstances also shaped whether a program was appropriate. P10 extended this concern to internal mobility. A match between an employee's competencies and a departmental vacancy identified an organizational opportunity, while the employee's interest in pursuing that opportunity required a conversation.

The distinction became especially important in succession planning. P13 explained that adaptability, interpersonal skills and ethical judgment were difficult to capture in a potential score. P09 identified a concrete tension between individual productivity and leadership suitability: a strong performance record could coexist with conduct that weakened team relationships. P18 made a related observation about engagement. Regular participation in employee surveys could conceal a sense of disconnection. Across these accounts, direct conversation supplied evidence capable of changing a career assessment. This finding clarifies the professional contribution to AI-supported learning and development described by Dutta and Kannan Poyil (2025). It also supports allocating assessment tasks according to the judgment each requires (Chang, 2026).

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4.3 Theme 3: Workforce Coordination Depended on Local Operational Knowledge

The operational problem that participants wanted shared workforce information to address varied by sector. P05 emphasized seasonal demand in retail, where managers needed to coordinate recruitment, employee availability and scheduling before staffing pressures intensified. P16 linked workforce planning to production targets in the automotive sector. For the production planning manager, knowing that additional staff were available had limited value without knowing whether those employees possessed the skills required for a particular production run. Both accounts supported Galbraith's (1974) explanation of why interdependent departments need timely information when operating conditions change.

P08 identified a different constraint in healthcare. A roster could meet clinical coverage requirements while assigning a shift that created difficulties for an employee with family responsibilities. P06 traced another source of error to incomplete or inconsistent records across HR functions. P03, meanwhile, questioned how much employee information organizations should collect in pursuit of more accurate coordination. Taken together, these accounts qualify the relationship between knowledge sharing and workforce adaptability discussed by Chen et al. (2026). Participants assessed the usefulness of shared information through the decision it enabled: whether a manager could assign an appropriately skilled person, at a workable time, using records sufficiently accurate for that purpose.

4.4 Theme 4: Participants Assigned Decision Authority According to Employment Consequences

Participants identified different decision owners for different employment outcomes. P14 distinguished routine administrative activities from actions affecting employee rights and placed the latter under human authorization. P17 gave the clearest account of how that distinction operated in compensation. Performance information, market salaries, internal pay structures and budgets all informed a salary review. The compensation committee still had to judge whether an adjustment recognized an exceptional contribution and whether employees in comparable circumstances received equitable treatment. For P17, the committee's authority followed from its responsibility to justify those differences.

P05 assigned decisions about staffing reductions to senior management because executives bore responsibility for employment and employee welfare. P09 located responsibility for promotion criteria with HR leadership, particularly when productivity measures and leadership conduct supported different judgments. P20 drew attention to an accountability problem common to these decisions: several agents might contribute to one recommendation while responsibility for the combined outcome remained unclear. These findings give organizational detail to research on agentic HR authority and governance (Gaddam & Raigoni, 2026; Rena & Aderla, 2026). Participants identified the accountable person or body by asking who understood the decision, who had discretion to depart from the recommendation and who could explain the consequences to the affected employee.

4.5 Theme 5: Procedural Fairness Required Explanation and Access to Review

P12 approached procedural fairness through the experience of an employee receiving an unfavourable performance assessment. Where several agents contributed to the assessment, an employee could struggle to identify the information that influenced the result. The employee relations manager consequently emphasized two distinct needs: an explanation in understandable language and access to a person who could review the assessment. P07 identified a similar difficulty for applicants challenging an inaccurate evaluation. The recruitment account brought an additional issue into view because a candidate could have less direct access to the organization than an existing employee.

These accounts distinguish the organization's ability to trace a decision from the affected person's ability to obtain reconsideration. Technical traceability can help a reviewer establish which input or rule shaped an assessment (Mertzani et al., 2026). P03 and P11 added that the records used for this purpose contained confidential information, making access permissions and responsibility for information sharing relevant to trust. Pakistani research on personalized financial advice similarly connects trust with users' ability to interpret AI-supported guidance (Qazi, Arshad, & Majeed, 2026). The interview findings identify a further issue specific to employment: an employee may understand an assessment fully and still need an authorized reviewer to correct its consequences.

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4.6 Theme 6: Organizational Readiness Included the Capacity to Detect and Correct Errors

P06 and P11 identified separate weaknesses in the foundations of multi-agent HR systems. The HR analytics specialist focused on the consistency of records across recruitment, attendance, performance and employee engagement. Combining incomplete records could allow a misleading pattern to influence several HR functions. The HR information systems manager focused on the technical demands of connecting separate systems and controlling access to confidential data. These concerns had different implications. Correcting a performance record would improve its accuracy, while determining which agents and employees could access it remained a matter of organizational responsibility.

P15 examined readiness through the changing work of HR practitioners. Less time spent preparing reports or arranging interviews could create room for workforce planning and employee development, but practitioners needed sufficient technical understanding to interpret system outputs. P14 identified digital literacy, implementation costs and management resistance as barriers. P19 added a supervisory concern: agents working with poor data or conflicting objectives could produce an unreliable recommendation, making monitoring and intervention necessary. The accounts bring practical detail to research on employees supervising AI agents (Van Quaquebeke et al., 2026) and organizational readiness for AI-enabled services in Pakistan (Qazi et al., 2026a). Participants judged readiness partly by whether staff could recognize an error, investigate its source and act before it affected an employee.

4.7 Synthesis of Findings

Across the six themes, participants' judgments about delegation changed when information became the basis for action affecting a particular person. P02 welcomed assistance with recruitment administration and called for scrutiny of candidate exclusions. P04 valued the identification of skills gaps and retained a role for conversations about development. P17 accepted the use of several sources of compensation evidence and assigned final pay authority to a committee. Comparing these accounts identified a pattern across HR functions: willingness to delegate information processing coexisted with a clear expectation that an identifiable person would answer for the employment decision. This interpretation connects the themes through a shared analytical finding, consistent with reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2022; Byrne, 2022).

The interviews also located responsibility at several points in the decision process. P06 focused on the quality of the initial record. P08 identified circumstances that became apparent when a recommendation was applied to an employee. P12 addressed review after an assessment had been communicated. Final approval therefore captured only one part of the accountability participants described. Their accounts connected three responsibilities that could belong to different people: maintaining reliable evidence, interpreting it in its workplace context and correcting the outcome when an affected individual raised a valid concern.

Table 2 summarizes the six themes, their subthemes, the participants whose accounts supported each and the analytical finding for each theme.

Table 2

Thematic Analysis of Multi-Agent AI in Strategic HRM Across 20 Professional Interviews in Pakistan

Theme	Subtheme	Interview codes and participant IDs	Analytical finding
1. Recruitment and shortlisting	1.1 Recruitment task allocation	CV screening, skills assessment and interview scheduling (P02)	Participants located recruiter accountability at the screening stage, where an exclusion determines whose skills receive further assessment.
	1.2 Bias in candidate screening	Historical preference for particular universities or backgrounds (P02)	
	1.3 Accountability for exclusion	Human authority over hiring (P01), applicant challenge to inaccurate assessments (P07)	

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Theme	Subtheme	Interview codes and participant IDs	Analytical finding
2. Employee development and succession	2.1 Individual learning needs	Skills-gap identification, training selection and employee motivation (P04)	The evidence needed for a talent decision changed with its purpose. A skills record could inform training, while succession judgments also required knowledge of aspirations, conduct and relationships.
	2.2 Career aspirations and mobility	Employee involvement in internal mobility (P10), career aspirations in succession planning (P13)	
	2.3 Limits of talent indicators	Productivity versus leadership conduct (P09), potential scores and ethical judgment (P13), survey participation and felt engagement (P18)	
3. Workforce coordination	3.1 Forecasting staffing demand	Regional staffing shortages (P03), seasonal demand (P05), production-linked skill requirements (P16)	Identifying a staffing gap and filling it were distinct decisions. The second required current records and local knowledge of who could undertake the assignment.
	3.2 Feasibility of staff assignments	Duty coverage and family responsibilities (P08), skills availability, absenteeism and employee preferences (P16)	
	3.3 Reliability of planning inputs	Incomplete employee records and inconsistent data across HR systems (P06)	
4. Authority over employment decisions	4.1 Boundaries of delegation	Routine administrative autonomy and human authorization for decisions affecting employee rights (P14)	Participants assigned authority according to the consequence of the decision and identified a specific accountable body for staffing reductions, promotion governance and pay adjustments.
	4.2 Decision-specific authority	Executive authority over staffing reductions (P05), HR leadership oversight of promotion criteria (P09), committee approval of pay adjustments (P17)	
	4.3 Ownership of collective recommendations	Accountability for multi-agent hiring decisions (P01), responsibility across agents and managerial hierarchies (P20)	
5. Procedural fairness and employee voice	5.1 Understandable reasons	Visibility of candidate assessment criteria (P07), explanation of inputs to performance assessments (P12)	Fairness had two practical requirements for the person affected: access to the reasons for a decision and access to

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Theme	Subtheme	Interview codes and participant IDs	Analytical finding
	5.2 Access to reconsideration	Opportunity to challenge an inaccurate candidate assessment (P07), human review of an employee assessment (P12)	someone empowered to reconsider it. Privacy concerns bounded the information available for review.
	5.3 Boundaries on data use	Limits on employee monitoring (P03), confidentiality and access controls for HR records (P11)	
6. Organizational readiness and supervision	6.1 Data and system readiness	Record completeness and consistency (P06), integration of separate HR systems (P11)	Participants assessed readiness through the organization's ability to maintain reliable inputs and its staff's ability to detect and interrupt an unreliable recommendation.
	6.2 Professional capability	Digital literacy and management resistance (P14), reskilling and changing HR responsibilities (P15)	
	6.3 Supervisory intervention	Conflicting agent objectives, staged introduction, performance monitoring and human intervention (P19)	

4.8 Discussion

The findings locate a consequential shift in HR work at the point where an assessment moves from one task to the next. In recruitment, an agent could apply a screening criterion consistently while leaving the recruiter unable to see which qualified applicants it excluded. In succession planning, a performance assessment could travel beyond its original purpose and acquire influence over promotion. These accounts extend research on algorithmic HRM and managerial control by identifying where professional discretion matters within a sequence of decisions (Kim et al., 2025; Hillebrand et al., 2025). They also explain why the timing of professional involvement deserves attention in recruitment and development (Butani, 2026; Dutta & Kannan Poyil, 2025).

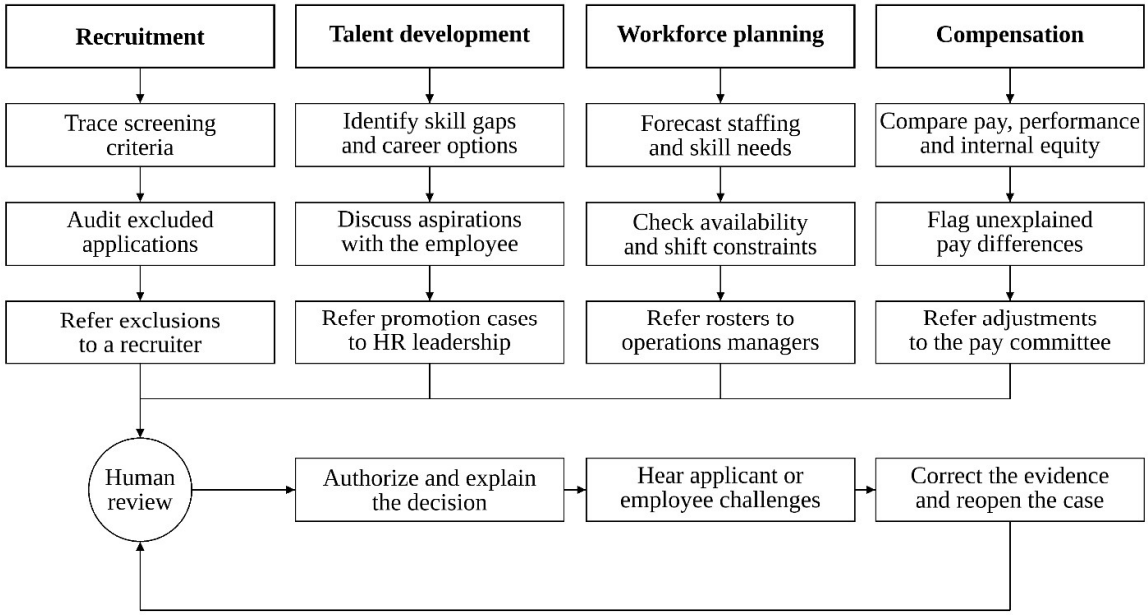
The staffing findings connect the study's theoretical lenses. Retail and production participants valued early access to information about changing demand. The healthcare participant identified knowledge about individual circumstances that became decisive when a roster was assigned. Information sharing addressed uncertainty about coverage, while the organization of work determined whose knowledge could change the assignment. This relationship reflects the socio-technical understanding of work design and human–AI collaboration (Trist & Bamforth, 1951; Islami & Mulolli, 2024).

The interviews also clarify an accountability problem in agentic systems (Hughes et al., 2025; Ghane et al., 2026). Understanding a recommendation requires interpretive capability, an issue also recognized in Pakistani research on personalized digital services (Qazi et al., 2026b). Within employment decisions, participants attached equal importance to authority: who could inspect an exclusion, amend an assessment or reconsider a pay decision. Their accounts place the ability to correct an outcome at the centre of meaningful human oversight. Figure 1 translates these accounts into a proposed action plan that places human review at the end of each HR decision path.

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Figure 1

Proposed Action Plan for Human Oversight of Multi-Agent AI in Strategic HRM



5. Conclusion, Implications and Future Directions

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined how 20 HR, operations and technology professionals in Pakistan understood the role of collaborative AI agents in strategic human resource management. Across the interviews, participants drew a consistent distinction between delegating a task and granting authority over its consequences. In recruitment, they valued the coordination of screening, skills assessment and interview scheduling. Their principal concern arose at the first exclusion. By the time a recruiter receives a shortlist, a qualified applicant may already have been removed on the basis of a historical preference for a particular university. Meaningful oversight therefore begins at the point where a candidate's opportunity can change.

The same reasoning took different forms across HR functions. In employee development, a skills gap provided a basis for discussing training, while an employee's aspirations remained relevant to an internal move. In succession planning, participants considered interpersonal conduct and ethical judgment essential to interpreting performance scores. In workforce coordination, knowing that a shift was understaffed answered one question. Deciding who could reasonably fill it required knowledge of qualifications, availability and personal circumstances.

Participants also identified who should answer for consequential decisions. They assigned responsibility for staffing reductions to executives, pay adjustments to compensation committees and promotion criteria to HR leadership. From the employee's perspective, the value of this arrangement depended on being able to obtain an explanation and reach someone authorized to reconsider the outcome.

The study concludes that the strategic significance of multi-agent AI lies partly in how it redistributes judgment across the stages of an HR decision. Participants saw value in connecting information held by different functions. They also identified what could be lost as information moved between them. Their accounts placed responsibility with people who could establish the accuracy of a record, interpret its significance for a particular employee and act when a decision warranted correction.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Socio-Technical Systems Theory locates work outcomes in the joint design of technical tasks and social responsibilities (Trist & Bamforth, 1951). The interviews specify what this means for multi-agent HRM. A recruiter may retain formal hiring authority yet lose the opportunity to exercise judgment if the

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system presents only candidates who survive an initial screen. This finding extends accounts of human–AI collaboration by identifying the stage at which professional discretion must be available (Islami & Mulolli, 2024). Organizational Information Processing Theory explains why departments facing uncertainty benefit from exchanging timely information (Galbraith, 1974). The staffing accounts add a condition: a shared record becomes useful for an individual assignment when someone with local knowledge can assess and revise it. Together, these findings refine the governance question raised by autonomous business agents (Ghane et al., 2026). The relevant unit of analysis is the sequence through which information becomes a recommendation, an authorized action and a reviewable employment outcome.

5.3 Practical Recommendations

HR leaders should assign responsibility at each stage where an agent's output can change an employment opportunity. In recruitment, reviewers should be able to examine the grounds for exclusion and restore an application when the evidence warrants it. In promotion and compensation, the responsible manager or committee should record which evidence informed the decision and why it accepted or departed from the recommendation. Candidates and employees should receive an understandable reason and a direct route to an authorized reviewer.

For workforce scheduling, HR and operational managers should check the currency of skills and availability records and give employees a practical way to flag constraints before rosters take effect. An initial deployment can be evaluated through processing time, the nature of errors, and the time required to resolve a disputed outcome. Staff development should include supervised practice in tracing a recommendation to its inputs, correcting a record and stopping an action when agents produce conflicting assessments.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study captured the judgments of 20 professionals across several sectors and cities in Pakistan. This breadth enabled comparison across roles, although the small number within each sector limits conclusions about industry differences. The interviews lasted 20–25 minutes and focused on how participants understood the uses and risks of collaborative agents. They establish professional expectations and reasoning. Because the interviews were not recorded, the findings rest on the researcher's written records rather than verbatim transcripts, which is why they are reported through paraphrase. Actual effects on hiring accuracy, staffing efficiency and employee fairness require observation of deployed systems. Applicants and frontline employees directly affected by decisions were also outside the participant group.

Future research could follow a hiring, scheduling or compensation decision from its initial data inputs through approval and any subsequent challenge. Interviews with the affected individual, the reviewer and the final decision-maker could establish where relevant information entered or disappeared. Comparing cases that were upheld, corrected or reversed would show when human review changes an outcome and which organizational arrangements make correction possible.

Ethical Approval

This study is based entirely on secondary data obtained from published sources, including peer-reviewed journals, industry reports, and regulatory documents. No human participants were involved in the research. Therefore, formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not required. However, all ethical considerations were strictly followed, including proper citation of sources and adherence to academic integrity.

Authors' Contributions

All the authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author/s declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Data Availability

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The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The authors are committed to transparency and will provide detailed methodological information and analysis protocols upon request.

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