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Explore the Human Resources Challenges in the Higher Education Sphere

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Abstract

Research study entitled "Addressing HR Challenges in Higher Education Institutions: Implications for Faculty Performance and Institutional Sustainability" examines HR challenges affecting HEIs and sustainable solutions to gain institutional efficiency. The goal was to detect important HR matters, study their consequences for faculty and institutional productivity and suggest implementable plans. This study is significant because it potentially closes a gap in the literature around HR development in the higher education sector, which is key to societal advancement and economic development. The study seeks to guide scholars and practitioners in adopting policies that will aid attracting and retaining top-tier faculty and staff by providing practical recommendations that can be adapted to the particular contexts of HEIs, boosting employee satisfaction, and facilitating professional development. The study adopts a qualitative research design to capture participants' overall experiences, perceptions, and feelings regarding HR challenges being witnessed in HEIs currently. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 15 participants, including faculty members, administrative staff and HR managers, from different higher education institutions. They are: (1) invest in modern HR management technology (2) take continuous professional development seriously (3) focus on diversity and inclusion (4) support work-life balance (5) make cross-departmental collaboration easier (6) add recognition and reward systems. The focus is on improving institutional performance and creating culture of innovation and excellence in HEIs.

Keywords: Human Resource Challenges, Higher Education Institutions, Faculty Well-being

1. Introduction:

The higher education sector is a key driver of social progress, innovation and economic growth. Recognizing that globalization, technological transformation, and a pursuit of excellence for all are changing education, higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly being called upon to serve as agents of change leading the charge for sustainability. Deep and wide perspective on

higher education institutions, their academic quality and their ability to adapt to new challenges is afforded by effective human resource (HR) management. However, the HR landscape of HEIs is complex with challenges of talent acquisition, retention, skills mismatch and adoption and application of cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) in administration and academics (Marginson, 2023). With an ongoing increase and burgeoning demand for higher education, the world is expected to have 250+ million students by 2025 (UNESCO, 2022). That said, HEIs are grappling with (if not battling) HR issues ranging from faculty shortages (coupled with higher currently degree of labour stress) to staff dissatisfaction and uncompetitively low incentive structures (Walker et al., 2022). These challenges not only impact operational efficiency but erodes institutions' ability to afford equitable access to quality education. In addition, McCarthy et al. (2023) describe how the pandemic of COVID-19 has accelerated the digital transformation, including in business operations, and how tools for digital work have grown into a necessity, thereby altering the employee experience that Higher education institutions (HEIs) have historically viewed as HR strategy. In pursuit of this goal, the paper presents a case for why human resources issues are critical to the future of the higher education sector, examines the implications of HR issues for institutional performance, and explores how those challenges can best be addressed.

Human Resources literature exists in abundance, with thousands of articles, books and studies written about HR challenges across the workforce, HR in higher education has not received the same level of concerted attention. Due to the dual academic and administrative character of HEIs, the HEI context calls for HR strategies that are different from other sectors. Despite the significance of HR management in achieving institutional objectives, research on HR remains limited, specifically in addressing the complexities of globalization, technology, and emerging competition for valuable human resources. The present study addresses this knowledge gap by providing a thorough overview of HR-related issues in higher education through comprehensive analysis and empirical insights to offer evidence-based tools and methods to contend. The study's observations are both time-sensitive and relevant to the academic and pragmatic communities. It aligns with and deepens the global agenda, such as UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), reinforcing the commitment to equitable and quality education underpinned by strong HR systems (UNESCO, 2023). Ultimately, this can result in institutional resilience, cascading innovation, and the creation of inclusive spaces that attend to diverse needs of faculty and staff. This study is the realization of where HR management could become a singular impetus for change in the higher education space. This effort builds upon the field of HEIs, an essential landscape for the survival and advancement of HEIs. This study aims to analyze and propose solutions to HR challenges that HEIs are currently facing and will consider to give practical recommendations for these types of challenges to help guide policymakers, administrators, and academic leaders. Ultimately, research seeks to spark change to benefit educators, students, and society at large.

1.1 Research Problem

Human resource management (HRM) is one of the most critical factors in the success and sustainability of higher education institutions (HEIs), there are many challenges HEIs face in managing their human capital. Concerns such as faculty shortages, growing workload pressures,

employee dissatisfaction, and lack of continued professional development influence HEIs' capability to realize academic excellence and institutional efficiency. Also, fast adopting advanced technologies, such as AI (artificial intelligence), have made workforce management complex for HEIs, demanding for innovative HR strategies that many of them are not prepared to address. Research addressing HR challenges specifically in the context of higher education is scarce, resulting in a gap in our understanding of the effect of these issues on institutional performance and how they are mitigated.

1.2 Research Objectives

This qualitative study aims to:

1. Explore the primary human resource challenges faced by higher education institutions.
2. Investigate the impact of these challenges on faculty well-being and student outcomes.
3. Develop evidence-based strategies for addressing HR challenges in HEIs, focusing on sustainable and innovative practices.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the most significant human resource challenges encountered by higher education institutions?
2. How do these HR challenges affect faculty performance and employee satisfaction?
3. What strategies can higher education institutions adopt to effectively address HR challenges while fostering sustainability and innovation?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study provides an important perspectives on the human resources development in higher education, and a sector which as we know are critical for both societal progress and economic growth in any country. Filling a large gap in the literature, it offers practical recommendations of how to measure so as to inform HR policies and practices suited to the very specific environments of higher education institutions (HEIs). Policymakers, administrators, and academic leaders are expected to use the findings to create HR strategies that not only attract and retain top-notch faculty and staff but also boost employee satisfaction and professional development while promoting resilience to global upheavals, including technological advance and economic instability. Additionally, this work highlights the development of inclusive workplace cultures to encourage innovation and ensure fair access to opportunities. In line with international movements, e.g., the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), the research emphasizes the necessity of effective HR management in providing quality and fair education (UNESCO, 2023). With these contributions, this study seeks to enhance institutional performance, promote academic excellence, and provide value at the larger community level served by the HEIs.

2. Literature Review

Human Resource Management (HRM) has often been termed as a critical component of academic and operational excellence in higher education institutions (HEIs) influencing faculty performance, student outcomes, and the resilience of an institution. Even so, one may wonder if the effective recruitment of good teachers and researchers working in HEIs contributes to long-term HR challenges such as the (lack of) qualified workforce, low staff turnover, skilled workers shortage and new technologies. The challenges are compounded by bigger global trends,

including increasing demand for higher education, digital transformation and the pandemic. The findings of this literature review categorizing the themes into HEIs, have been synthesized across three years going from 2022 to 2024 concerning HR challenges and its effect on institutional performance.

2.1 Faculty Shortages and Retention Challenges

One of the major HR issues in HEIs (Higher Educational Institutions) is faculty shortage. Walker et al. In their brief, Snyder and Paterson-Smith (2022) underscore that growth in student enrollments has resulted in greater need for faculty with credentials to prepare individuals likelier to be successful which then places academic units into competition with each other for faculty. Problematic workload pressure, according to the critical care nurses who participated in the survey, was also referenced as factors contributing to faculty turnover, including compensation and limited opportunities for career advancement. This trend is especially prevalent in developing areas, where resource limitations further limit the capacity to offer attractive incentives (UNESCO, 2022). Challenges with retention are bigger than just dollars and cents. A study by McCarthy et al. (2023) Highlighting the importance of workplace culture and professional development opportunities to faculty satisfaction and retention Institutions that do not invest in these areas will continue to lose their top talent while also damaging academic quality and reputation.

2.2 Skills Mismatch and Professional Development

The increasingly rapid change in academic fields and experience with technology has created a skill disparity between existing faculty and staff. He summarizes that “many HEIs are unable to match talent with modern curricula and research needs” (Marginson, 2023). The difference is most pronounced when it comes to digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI) in education and administration. Solving Skills Mismatches: The Need For Professional Development Programs Yet these are often limned, as a pencil tries to write on the outer lining of subnational communities where economic resources and infrastructure are limited which carries with it the question of whether such funds can be successfully applied in a tensed-up Haitian province. Chen et al. conducted a meta-analysis Institutions with good training programs did enjoy higher faculty productivity and better student outcomes this much was also true of the study by Fabry et al. These responses highlight the imperative for higher education institutions to invest in upskilling and learning opportunities for employees.

2.3 Workload Pressures and Employee Well-Being

One big thing that staff and faculty are really stressed about is the increased administrative pressure on top of everything else from academic work. Walker et al. According to (2022), the pressures of course have been further increased as a result of the transition from the traditional to online and hybrid learning models during the COVID-19 pandemic. Faculty can be asked to do too much - teaching, especially in sessional or adjunct positions with high course load and highly-classified universities stifling research opportunities; add in administrative employment conditions for a disaster that will leave you feeling burned out, frustrated, and as though there has got to be something better. One part of the HR management in HEIs is particularly important employee well-being. Some recent survey reported mental health support and flexibility in work arrangements as facilitators to manage workload pressure effects. For instance, McCarthy et al.

(2023) call for a push to get wellness programs and tech-aided solutions that help administrative work.

2.4 Technological Advancements and Digital Transformation

The use of technology, particularly AI, has revolutionized HR practices in HEIs. This type of technologies, even when, may yield new opportunities for efficiency and engender innovation but concomitantly bring with them workforce training impedance, and ethical considerations. Marginson (2023) describes a double-edged influence of AI on the HEIs, as it contributes not only to rationalisation and efficient allocation of resources but also requires hefty spending on training and infrastructural development. Digital transformation also changed the way employees experience and expect. According to Chen et al. (2023), advancement in the adoption of digital tools has fueled a greater appetite for faculty and staff to be tech-savvy making it possible to split those that can vs. cannot adopt new technologies. We need effective transformation support through digital literacy programs.

2.5 Equity and Inclusion in HR Practices

At HEIs inclusion and equity are also two of the most important dimensions of HR management. Although efforts to increase diversity have made gains in most places, many institutions continue to struggle with equitable representation of faculty and staff. Walker et al. Of Orange County (2022) make the case for inclusive hiring practices and support systems for those from traditionally underrepresented groups. The mission goes well beyond hiring those in the program are also expected to participate in events, Workplace culture and be given the chance to obtain professional development opportunities. McCarthy et al. The importance of mentorship programs and leadership training to create a culturally competent inclusive space conducive for diverse talent is also underscored by Means (2023). Such efforts are key to bolstering institutional sustainability and creativity.

2.6 Impact on Institutional Performance

Challenges with HR in HEIs have broad consequences on institutional performance. Faculty shortages and skills mismatches have a direct impact on the quality of education and research output. On the other hand, cumbersome workloads and poor employee gratification threaten organizational results and company morale. Marginson (2023) says that the solutions proposed address key challenges that must be resolved if academic prime is to survive and flourish in a world characterized by turbulent global turbulence. Execution complex technologies into the university system and establishing mutual equity as well as inclusion helps institutions continue performing. HEIs can become future ready by increasing their ability to innovate and adjust using technology and recruiting a multicultural workforce. Chen et al. The 2023 goals add to this and suggest a strategic approach to HR management is essential to achieve this suggests we need evidence based practices for the rapidly evolving challenges on our horizons.

HR is paramount for HEIs but its challenges are multifaceted, including teaching staff shortages, skills imbalances, issues around workload pressures and the roll-out of new technologies. Further, they may also be associated with performance-related challenges at the institutional level and student level. These challenges are as prevalent in the function of HR itself, with recent studies highlighting the importance of strategic HR management interventions such as professional development, workplace well-being initiatives and inclusive practices (Luchak &

Shih-Jiun 2018). Using evidence-based strategies, HEIs can address these HR challenges and be better prepared to grow sustainably in an environment that is rapidly becoming increasingly globalized.

3. Research Methodology

This research was conducted to explore the HR pains prevailing in higher education field, such as the effect of these pains over the performance of faculty, employee satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. It also sought to investigate some of the possible ways and means by which higher education institutions can respond to these challenges, while promoting sustainability and innovation. In order to investigate these issues, I elected to make use of qualitative research methodology as it is capable of providing a deep insight into the complexities surrounding HR management higher education institutions.

3.1 Research Design

In this research researchers used a qualitative research design as it offers great insights of the contextual nature of human resources challenges in higher education institutions. Because of the inherent complexity, asking big questions can lead to mixed methods data collection and analysis (such as how students understand what they learn) or a qualitative approach capturing research subjects' experiences, perceptions, and feelings particularly when studying organizational challenges in complex settings such as higher education (Creswell 2014). In addition, this method allows the investigator to appreciate how HR issues impact certain institutional performances as well as employee and faculty work habits, which may not be captured by quantitative methods (Patton, 2015).

3.2 Participants and Sampling:

This research was conducted on academic staff (5 faculty, 5 administrators and HR 5 managers) from different insti-tutes of higher education. The study used a purposive sampling technique, which intentionally selects participants for their expertise and experience on the HR practices and challenges in their organizations. This would allow relevant data to be collected and answered research questions that the study required, which would in turn make the data rich (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Selection of 15 Participants, with Representation from Faculty Members, Administrative Staff, and HR managers.

3.3 Data Collection Method

The data for this research was collected via semi-structured interviews, which gives the participants freedom to provide answers that reflect their views and experiences and at the same time they are provided with a clear framework for addressing the research questions. The semi-structured format allows the researcher to pose follow-up inquiries and delve more thoroughly into participant responses or examine new themes as they arise (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016). More to the point, The interview questions were constructed in a manner that would capture data related to the research questions and facilitate gaining an in-depth understanding of HR challenges of higher education. Interview questions used to operationalize these research questions are presented below:

1. What are the most significant human resource challenges you believe higher education institutions are currently facing?

Can you elaborate on the specific HR issues that seem to have the most impact on your institution?

2. In your opinion, how do these human resource challenges influence faculty performance, employee satisfaction, and the overall efficiency of the institution?

Could you provide any examples or experiences that highlight the effects of HR challenges on day-to-day operations and overall institutional goals?

3. What strategies or practices do you think higher education institutions should adopt to address these HR challenges, while also promoting sustainability and innovation in their workforce?

Are there any particular initiatives or changes that have been successful in your institution, or that you believe could be beneficial?

It was hoped that these interview questions would elicit more meaningful responses leading to a substantive understanding of the HR challenges that confront higher education institutions.

3.4 Interview Process

The interviews were based on participants' availability and location and were conducted face to face or through online video conferencing. The interviews were about 45 and 60 minutes on average. Before the interviews, participants were provided with information about the study and assured confidentiality. The participants were informed before they participated in the interviews and an informed consent was obtained.

3.5 Data Analysis

Researchers used a manual thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), because it is an analytic method for reporting qualitative data that allows researchers to identify, analyze and report patterns or themes. Several key steps were followed during the analysis process. The data were first familiarized with by the researcher; all interviews were verbatim transcribed and the transcripts repeatedly read through. And it ensured that the researcher was familiar with the data and thus generated initial coding ideas.

1. The first phase involved generating initial codes through highlighting sections of the data that related to the research questions focusing on HR in higher education and more specifically challenges, impacts, and strategies. These segments were coded afterwards.
2. Following the coding process, the researcher searched for patterns and clustered together codes into broader themes. Thematic maps were produced to visually structure the relationship between some set of themes and the research questions in order help facilitate this process.
3. The themes were then reviewed and further revised to ensure they captured the essence of the data. Themes that were less common or related to the same idea were combined, and others not found in their original form were excluded.
4. Final themes were similarly clearly defined and assigned descriptive labels for the presentation of findings.
5. The last action was the report writing, where the themes were discussed in relation to final study questions and compilation of other literature. Quotes were drawn from interviews to back up the analysis and stitch together a coherent story of what was found.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical implications played a large part in this research. Before collecting data, participants were briefed on the study objective, voluntary participation and their confidentiality rights. Ethical approval was granted by the appropriate institute review board, and all work performed followed their standards pertaining to human experimentation. Finally, in order to ensure confidentiality of participants the audio recordings of all focus groups, and transcripts were digitally recorded using pseudonyms. These steps served to protect participants from harm during the research process.

3.7 Trustworthiness

The researcher used several strategies to support the trustworthiness of the study. Triangulation: We conducted interviews with interviewees in different organisations such as faculty, HR manager and administrative guys (Participant). This method supported us in collecting varied views on the HR complexities. Second, member-checking was used to the interview transcripts, and preliminary themes given to participants for review. This way, an audit trail was procured for thorough documenting of the data collection and analysis procedures. This would increase the transparency in presenting the research process and allow others to validate the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.8 Limitations

The study was also limited by sample size, and the qualitative nature of the focus groups. The sample included only a small number of participants from one geographic region, so the findings may not be generalizable to other higher education institutions. Furthermore, by utilising qualitative analysis in combination with the large dataset this type of bias is likely circumvented although we have gone to great lengths to minimise this through data quality and selection processes.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion:

Following is participants responses elaborated by themes and quotes from a 15 participant sample based on semi-structured interview method, to the specific research question:

4.1. Human Resource Challenges in Higher Education Institutions

Theme 1: Challenges for recruitment and retention

Participant 3 identified recruitment and retention as one of the biggest challenges higher education is facing. They noted:

Quotation:

"This is a common problem in my institution: Recruiting qualified faculty, especially in the specialized subjects. So many gifted people go to fields that pay and provide better than education that education has a hard time competing." (Participant 3)

Theme 2: Workload and Burnout

The participant 5 also highlighted workload issues contributing to the burnout and dissatisfaction of staff members:

Quotation:

"Faculty members have increased administrative duties. That detracts from their teaching and research, causing frustration and burnout. "The balance of academic versus administrative responsibilities requires urgent reform." (Participant 5)

Theme 3: Remuneration and Professional Development

Participant 7 raised the issue of competitive salary packages and well-defined career progression opportunities for academic staff:

Quotation:

"Longer-term commitment of employees is compromised by a lack of clear criteria for promotion, and salaries at institutions of higher education are often lower than what is offered in other sectors. (Participant 7)

Theme 4: Utilisation of technology in HR practices

The 10th participant explained that technology was not efficiently integrated into HR processes which resulted in wastage of resources:

Quotation:

"Our HR systems are outdated. From recruitment to performance evaluations, the dependency on manual processes is inhibiting decision-making and affecting staff morale." (Participant 10)

Theme 5: Diversity in institution

Another obstacle cited was the lack of sufficient emphasis on diversity and inclusion policies:

Quotation:

"The faculty hiring space promoted diversity and made efforts to make it diverse, to reach out to students of color, but there is a distinct gap in that about faculty hiring." The responsibilities of institutions to be more inclusive, are things that they need to represent across genders, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds." (Participant 12)

Theme 6: Budgetary Constraints

According to Participant 15, budget constraints were a cross-cutting theme relevant to nearly every HR function across institutions of higher education:

Quotation:

"Limited budgets inhibit hiring, training, and providing competitive packages. Even efforts to support staff well-being sometimes end up further down the list: "Well, that's money we can't spend." (Participant 15)

4.2. Impact of Human Resource Challenges on Faculty Performance and Institutional Efficiency**Theme 1: Impact on Faculty Performance****Quotations:**

"HR issues impact the faculty substantially, especially around workload sustainability and career development." For example, faculty are often asked to assume new duties in light of budget cuts without additional compensation. That leads to burnout, which, of course, impacts their quality of teaching and research productivity." (Participant 2)

"Faculties are doing a lot of different jobs, and this dilutes their focus and energy, and ability to be top of their game in their most important role of teaching and researching." (Participant 6)

"In the absence of a clearly defined career progression framework, this dampens faculty motivation, which subsequently affects their performance in institutional long-term goals."

Theme 2: Employee Happiness**Quotations:**

“Employee satisfaction depends a lot on the way that HR policies are carried out. Such challenges delayed appraisals, favoritism in promotions — make employees unhappy. “This disengagement breeds culture and this is a huge problem for the institution.” *(Participant 8)*

“I’ve seen staff quit over unaddressed complaints that were regarded as a failure of HR.” *(Participant 9)*

“Regular feedback mechanisms are often absent, leading employees to feel undervalued, which has a negative impact on morale and job satisfaction.” *(Participant 14)*

Theme 3: Institutional Efficiency

“HR issues such as ineffective communication and resource allocation slow down the institution’s ability to effectively deliver on its goals. Delays in recruitment lead to departments working with less than adequate staff amounting to operational bottlenecks and slick operation disruptions,” said an audit of the report. Participant 5(HR Manager):

Quotations:

“We had a situation in which core functions of the institution remained unsupervised because its administrative functions were not being recruited for in a timely fashion, and the institution’s efficiency suffered as a result.” *(Participant 5)*

“When employee complaints are not resolved quickly, they cause a domino effect which slows down the institutional processes and tarnishes the overall image of the organization.” *(Participant 7)*

Examples of Participant 11 Experiences

“I recall one where faculty in a department redoubled administrative work because of staff shortages. “Due to that, not only was their teaching quality hampered but it also delayed academic processes like result compilation.” *(Participant 1)*

“Then it caused a gap in expertise that took months to fill and affected a number of important institutional projects.” *(Participant 12)*

These insights give a thorough insight into how HR challenges impact faculty performance, employee satisfaction, and the overall operational efficiency of higher education institutions.

4.3. Strategies for Addressing Human Resource Challenges and Promoting Workforce Sustainability and Innovation**Theme 1: Use of Technology to Make HR More Efficient**

Participant 2 (Academic Staff): “Implementing modern HR management software is one of the major areas that higher education institutions need to focus on. The ideal platforms like this can automate recruitment, performance reviews and even staff training making the entire process seamless. There we deployed a cloud-based HR solution, dramatically reduced admin workload and freed us up to be more academically innovative.” *(Participant 2)*

Theme 2: Creating Opportunities for Professional Development

Participant 7 (HR Manager): “Sustainability and innovation begin with professional investment,”. Staff retention has been positively impacted by continuous training programs particularly in respect of emerging technologies and leadership skills. For instance, we opened a Leadership in

Academia workshop series, which has built skills but also raised morale amongst our staff.” (Participant 7)

Theme 3: Focus on DEI

Participant 12 (Administrative Staff): “Diversity and inclusion must be an integral part of the strategic HR agenda for higher education institutions. Different perspectives lead to greater innovation, too, and hiring a diverse workforce helps create that. We implemented a mentorship program for underrepresented groups at our university, and its success in fostering a more inclusive culture has been fantastic.” (Participant 12)

Theme 4: Ensuring work-life balance

Participant 3 (Faculty Member): “An additional thing is maintaining a work-life balance. Institutions need to offer flexible working arrangements or provide well-being programs to counter staff burnout. For example, our department began allowing hybrid working, which has significantly increased employee satisfaction and productivity.” (Participant 3)

Theme 5: Working Together Across Departments

5th Participant (Member of the Faculty): Inter-departmental collaboration can also help engender sustainability and innovation. Within our institution, we have had success in creating “idea boroughs” for faculty, administrators, and HR teams to share resources. “For example, our new monthly ‘Innovation Dialogue,’ wherein staff across departments suggest initiatives that have the potential to enhance teaching and administrative processes.” (Participant 5)

Theme 6: Systems of Recognition and Reward

Participant 13 (HR Manager): “Institutions need to implement reward systems that applaud both academic and non-academic staffs. “In my organisation we introduced a ‘Staff Excellence Awards’ programme which is held every year to recognise and celebrate employee and innovative practices. (Participant 13)

Participants emphasized the need to implement practices that integrated technology, developed the leadership of the profession, were diverse, balanced personal with work, collaborative and rewarded success. These not only solve HR problems but fuel sustainability and innovation in his higher education institutions.

Diagram 1: Themes of All research questions



This is the diagram showing the themes for each of the three research questions. The centralisation of each research question isolation of its corresponding themes below it brought a clear structure to the action/reaction points required.

Conclusion:

Diverse HR issues faced by HEIs as elicited from respondents underscore and add to literature review gap analysis. The new areas of difficulties such as recruitment and retention problems, workload and burnout, pay inequalities, ineffective use of technology, diversity issues, and budgetary constraints resonate with several common areas of focus identified in HRM research. The findings are synthesized with the literature and also some implications for faculty performance, institutional efficiency, and sustainable HR strategies in HEIs are identified.

The identification of recruitment issues by Participant 3 mirrors Walker et al. (2022) and UNESCO (2022) that revealed that HEIs were suffering from talent shortage, antimicrobial supply, and inability to compete with the private-sector incentives. Unfortunately, it is even worse in niche industries where high-paying jobs and role growth opportunities are hard to come by. The battle for maintaining high performers in the workplace, especially in emerging economies, emphasizes the critical need for policy-level measures to help maintain attractive employment packages and an enabling workplace, countering employee turnover. Also, as noted by Participant 5 and aligned by McCarthy et al. (2023) underscore that administrators' overburdening with excessive administrative responsibilities diffuses faculty attention away from teaching and research. Institutions must also work to correct this disproportionate imbalance by rethinking faculty workloads and hiring administrative support staff to share burdens that should not fall on academic shoulders.

Participant 7's remarks around payment and career advancement align with the key point made by Marginson (2023), which is that transparent pathways to academic careers and competitive reimbursement frameworks are essential to staff retention. Fabry et al. also predicted that more transparent promotion systems and formal professional development opportunities would lead to greater employee satisfaction and productivity in the institutions where those systems were present. This also highlights the technological gap of most HEIs, particularly since Participant 10 described that manual HR processes are highly inefficient. The literature notes the promise of digital tools and AI in terms of the ability to streamline HR operations, yet many institutions, as Marginson (2023) noted, struggle to embrace such technologies. Modern HR management systems can rectify resource wasting and provide better capabilities for decision-making.

Participant 12 observed that the challenge to diversity reflects broader, global demands for inclusive hiring practices. McCarthy et al. (2023) recommend putting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices at the core of HR strategies. These initiatives not only work to enrich the institutional culture but help drive innovation via diverse perspectives. Moreover, the prevalence of the need for limited budgets, as stressed by Participant 15, accords to UNESCO (2022), stating resource constraints remains a barrier for adequate HR practices. Prioritizing budgets around hiring, training, and wellbeing must be a focus if institutions want to sustain their quality and performance.

Participants' comments on the sustainability of their workloads and career development challenges reflect their negative impacts on the quality of teaching and research. McCarthy et al. (2023) also highlight how HR-type stress impairs scholarly performance and innovation. Systemic change, including the redistribution of workloads and the investment of public dollars in faculty development programmes, is needed to address these issues. Participants 8 and 14 describe employee dissatisfaction as a result of inadequate or unjust HR policies, illustrating the need for transparent and equitable policies for employees in organizations. McCarthy et al. (2023) argue that delayed appraisals and cronyism undermine morale and trust in institutions. One way to prevent and address such issues is through proactive feedback mechanisms and recognition systems. Participants 5 and 11 note the operational inefficiencies arising from delayed recruitment and unresolved grievances, illustrating the broader implications of HR challenges. These results are similar to those reported by Walker et al. (2022), emphasizing that unresolved HR hurdles form bottlenecks that prevent progress within an institution.

The solutions suggested by participants are consistent with expert-recommended best practices documented in published literature, making for practical and easily implementable action items for HR professionals. It sets out the role of digital tools in transforming HR management (Participant 2). As Marginson (2023) and Fabry et al. AI-powered platforms can streamline processes such as recruitment, performance evaluation, and training, helping to increase innovation while also reducing the administrative burden on employees, they suggest. Participant 7: Chronic training and leadership programs— Even, there is a gap in the Previous studies, but once identified, chronic training programs lead to the gap in the curriculum and improve faculty retention. Fabry et al. showed professional development positively impacts both quality of school academic learning and quality of the staff environment. Participant 12's focus on DEI highlights its increasing prominence in HR strategies. This can include programs to promote inclusion and mentorship for underrepresented groups, such as those described in McCarthy et al. (2023), help instantiate a more just and creative institutional culture.

As Participant 3 mentioned, hybrid working arrangements and well-being initiatives help to mitigate burnout and increase productivity. McCarthy et al. (2023) bolstering this work, call for wellness programs that address faculty needs. Participant 5 describes sharing resources and being innovative when working across departments. These approaches align with those of Walker et al. (2022) which underscore the impact of cross-functional collaboration when it comes to reaching institutional objectives. The other level is at the leadership level as well mentioned by Participant 13, 11 and 12 "recognition programs are important and motivate the staff to perform well". There should reward mechanisms for all staff members. McCarthy et al. (2023) emphasize that recognition of accomplishments increases the morale and loyalty of staff.

Although HR challenges in higher education institutions (HEIs) have been widely discussed in the literature, there are still many gaps. There are gaps in existing research, including the oversight of the long-term implications of technological amalgamation into human resources (HR) methods as well as the need for better clarity on how diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategies connect with institutional outcomes and performance, the absence of comparative studies of HR approaches in the developed vs. the developing world, and minimal scrutiny around sustainability in academia's hybrid work environment. Further studies need to fill these

gaps to enhance implementing holistic solutions for HR dilemma in HEIs. These ensuring that institutions are relevant to global trends and can maintain academic and operational excellence.

Recommendations:

Drawing on themes discussed by participants, six key recommendations are presented below:

1. Traditional recruitment practices are not only time-consuming but also limit the breadth of the talent pool. This technology has the potential to greatly minimize administrative burden and allow time to be devoted to academics and innovation.
2. Invest in Professional Development Continuous professional development, focusing on the latest technologies and leadership skills, is key. These institutions need to implement programs like leadership workshops to empower their staff, boost morale and ultimately contribute to the retention of staff.
3. DEI needs to be at the heart of every HR approach. Encouraging a multi-faceted employee body and mentorship initiatives for minorities allow institutions to also increase innovation, while engineer a more diverse environment.
4. Institutions should provide flexible work arrangements and well-being programs to help reduce burnout among staff. Another essential element is the adoption of hybrid working models that have proven to increase employee satisfaction and productivity, favouring work-life balance.
5. The more departments collaborate, the more innovation and sustainability-centric ideas tend to surface. Establishing opportunities, such as monthly “Innovation Dialogue” sessions, to get staff from different areas together to share ideas can come up with new ways of teaching or improving administrative practices.
6. There should be an incentive system, either to recognize the business or a reward system for academic or non-academic staff at education institutions. Annual “Staff Excellence Awards” programs, for example, can recognize achievements helping to spur motivation, creativity, and a culture of excellence.

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