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HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES OF SELECTED TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANIES FOR STRATEGIC POSITIONING IN THE POST-COVID ERA

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this research is to synthesize existing qualitative literature to articulate human resource (HR) strategies for selected telecommunication companies in the post-COVID era. To achieve this, the study employs a qualitative meta-analysis that integrates meta-ethnography and thematic synthesis. This methodology enables higher-order interpretations of empirical findings across individual studies, fostering the generation of a novel conceptual framework for strategic HR positioning. The research investigates six key HR functions-recruitment and selection, onboarding process, compensation and benefits, training and development, performance management, and

retirement-analyzing their historical metamorphosis across five distinct periods: the early 1980s, the 1990s, the 2000s, the 2010s, and the post-COVID digital era (incorporating Digital Eras 4.0 and 5.0). Anchored in foundational motivation theories, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and Vroom's Expectancy Theory, the findings reveal a profound evolution from traditional administrative control to a strategic, human-centric paradigm that emphasizes employee experience, digital-human synergy, continuous upskilling, and outcome-based leadership. The report addresses critical research gaps concerning managerial experiences in the telecommunications sector and offers actionable strategic recommendations across the complete employee lifecycle to enhance organizational resilience and competitive positioning.

Keywords:

Digital Era 5.0, Human Resource Management, Post-Covid Era, Strategic Positioning, Telecommunications Industry, Qualitative Meta-Analysis, Outcome-Based Leadership

1. Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) practices are increasingly recognized as pivotal mechanisms for redefining the strategic alignment of an organization's human capital. Globally, this shift toward strategic positioning in the post-COVID era reflects a broader organizational imperative to adapt to rapid technological disruptions and changing market dynamics (Gözkara, 2024). HRM encompasses the integrated policies, practices, and systems that influence employees' behaviors, attitudes, and performance to secure a sustainable competitive advantage (Pachori et al., 2024). Modern HR operates within a structured strategic flow where core functions recruitment, onboarding, compensation, training, performance management, and retirement are interconnected with broader strategic dimensions, including agility, talent magnetism, employee experience, and data-driven decision-making.

In the landscape of continuous digital evolution, telecommunications companies serve as the foundational pillars of global communications infrastructure. Over recent decades, telecommunication firms have transitioned from labor-intensive operational models to knowledge-intensive, highly dynamic sectors driven by relentless technological innovation, network expansions (5G/6G, IoT), and market restructuring (Gözkara, 2024). This structural dynamism has elevated HRM from a traditional personnel administrative function into a core strategic partner essential for attracting, nurturing, and retaining specialized technical and managerial talent (Pachori et al., 2024). Historically, core HR functions within the telecommunications sector have progressed through distinct paradigms:

- The Early 1980s (Human Relations & Manual Labor Era): Characterized by rigid personnel administration, localized manual labor systems, heavy administrative overhead, and process enforcement (Ulrich, 1996).
- The 1990s (Personnel Administration & Early Strategic Alignment): Marked by industry deregulation, market privatization, and initial digital adoption (e.g., legacy databases, early digital job advertising), with a shift toward basic talent management (Ulrich, 1996).
- The 2000s (Strategic Human Resource Management & Retention): Focused on competitive total rewards structures, targeted technical training, and the retention of high-value technical specialists amid burgeoning wireless network developments (Cascio, 2003).

- The 2010s (Digital HR & Performance Systems): Introduced automated HR technologies, such as Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS), Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) tools, and continuous feedback systems (DeNisi & Smith, 2014).
- The Post-COVID-19 Era & Digital Eras 4.0/5.0: Accelerated by global health disruptions, this era mandates managing distributed remote/hybrid workforces, AI-human augmentation, and human-centric agility to mitigate severe operational risks such as employee burnout and technological obsolescence (Dhanpat et al., 2020; Sarkar & Gohain, 2025; Fraumeni & Liu, 2021).

1.1 Problem Statement and Research Gap

Despite extensive research on generic HR evolution (Guest, 1987; Ulrich, 1996) and broad digital transformation (Strohmeier, 2020), a significant empirical and theoretical gap persists within the global telecommunications sector. Existing literature often provides fragmented insights into individual HR practices (e.g., focusing solely on ATS recruitment or remote performance appraisals) rather than delivering a synthesized, longitudinal analysis spanning from early deregulation through Digital Eras 4.0 and 5.0 (White, 2021; Verma et al., 2023).

Crucially, existing scholarship frequently overlooks the unique position of managers in telecommunications, who function simultaneously as policy subjects (experiencing HR practices directly) and policy implementers (executing HR directives across technical teams). Qualitative meta-analyses capturing the lived experiences and dual roles of managers across historical transitions remain scarce (Bassett-Jones, 2023). Furthermore, there is a critical need to understand how HR balances technological automation with the human touch required to foster managerial resilience and psychological safety in hybrid work settings (Cascio & Montealegre, 2019; Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2021; Palmucci et al., 2025). Finally, much of the existing data remains geographically concentrated, emphasizing the need for an integrated global synthesis (Ojha & Venkateswaran, 2023).

1.2 Objectives of the Study

To address these gaps, this study sets out to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. Systematically review and synthesize the historical evolution of six core HR functions (recruitment and selection, onboarding, compensation and benefits, training and development, performance management, and retirement) within telecommunications companies from the early 1980s through the post-COVID era.

2. Analyze the impact of digitalization, particularly Digital Eras 4.0 and 5.0, on these core HR functions and managerial roles.
3. Identify thematic commonalities, shifts, arguments, and empirical gaps across the qualitative literature base.
4. Examine how evolving HR practices directly influence the performance, motivation, and well-being of telecommunication managers across the employment lifecycle.
5. Develop a novel, evidence-based Strategic HR Positioning Framework tailored for global telecommunications firms navigating the post-COVID landscape.

2. Theoretical Framework

This qualitative synthesis is anchored in foundational theories of human motivation, organizational behavior, and strategic management, primarily adapting Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) alongside Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) and Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964). While Maslow's theory was originally formulated for general human psychology, it serves as a robust analytical lens for examining managerial motivation and workforce behavior across employment lifecycles. Managers cannot focus on higher-order organizational ambitions such as driving innovation, demonstrating strategic agility, and fostering resilience if lower-order foundational needs remain unfulfilled or unstable (Maslow, 1943).

- **Physiological & Safety Needs:** In the modern corporate context, these translate into competitive base compensation, comprehensive healthcare, financial security, clear remote/hybrid operational guidelines, job stability, and virtual integration support during times of crisis.
- **Social & Belonging Needs:** Satisfied through structured onboarding, virtual peer buddy systems, transparent team communication, and inclusive organizational cultures that counter managerial isolation in remote environments.
- **Esteem Needs:** Fulfilled via continuous coaching, real-time performance recognition, project ownership, meritocratic total rewards structures, and professional autonomy.
- **Self-Actualization Needs:** Realized through continuous AI-powered personalized upskilling, strategic leadership opportunities, and phased retirement mentorship roles where veteran managers transfer institutional wisdom to emerging talent.

Complementing Maslow, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory illuminates the distinction between hygiene factors (e.g., baseline salary, working conditions, administrative rules and

motivators, challenging work, recognition, career advancement). In the hyper-productive digital era, competitive compensation acts as a necessary baseline, while culture, flexibility, and psychological safety serve as primary motivators. Vroom's Expectancy Theory further highlights how clear alignment between effort, performance metrics, and meaningful rewards directly shapes managerial commitment and performance output.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative meta-analysis (also termed qualitative meta-synthesis) combining meta-ethnography (Noblit & Hare, 1988) and thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Qualitative meta-analysis systematically aggregates, translates, and interprets primary qualitative findings across multiple independent studies to generate higher-order conceptualizations and overarching theoretical frameworks (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Thorne, 2025; Levitt et al., 2018).

3.1 Search Strategy and Selection Criteria

Following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021), a comprehensive literature search was executed across premier electronic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCOhost, ResearchGate, and ProQuest.

Sampling was deliberate and purposive, targeting theoretical saturation rather than statistical representativeness (Patton, 2015). Included studies met strict predefined criteria: (a) primary qualitative or mixed-methods studies with rich qualitative data; (b) explicit focus on HR practices in telecommunications; (c) coverage of targeted time periods (1980s through the Post-COVID Era); and (d) focus on managerial or professional workforce impacts. Purely quantitative surveys, non-peer-reviewed opinion pieces, and studies unrelated to telecommunications were excluded.

3.2 Data Extraction and Analytical Synthesis

Data extraction was conducted using a standardized template capturing study characteristics, methodological parameters, core qualitative themes, and verbatim participant quotes. Analytical synthesis proceeded through three iterative phases outlined by Thomas and Harden (2008):

1. Free Line-by-Line Coding: Primary findings and participant narratives were inductively coded to establish an initial thematic dictionary.

2. Developing Descriptive Themes: Codes were organized into hierarchical clusters reflecting commonalities and contrasts across historical eras and HR functions.
3. Generating Analytical Themes: Utilizing reciprocal translation (comparing concepts across studies), refutational synthesis (exploring contradictory findings), and lines-of-argument synthesis, lower-order descriptive themes were translated into higher-order analytical constructs that formed the strategic framework.

3.3 Rigor, Trustworthiness, and Ethical Standards

Trustworthiness was rigorously maintained following Lincoln and Guba's evaluative criteria (Walsh & Downe, 2005; Levitt et al., 2018):

- **Credibility:** Achieved through engagement with primary text sources, researcher triangulation, and cross-referencing synthesized findings with established theoretical constructs.
- **Transferability:** Ensured by providing thick description of source contexts, organizational settings, and industry conditions.
- **Dependability & Confirmability:** Supported by maintaining a meticulous audit trail detailing search protocols, coding evolution, and interpretive decisions, alongside reflexivity practices to minimize interpretive bias.
- **Ethical Integrity:** Plagiarism was strictly avoided through scrupulous citation. Primary study findings were presented accurately without distortion, and original participant anonymization was fully respected (Levitt et al., 2018).

4. Results and Discussion

The qualitative meta-analysis reveals a dramatic historical metamorphosis in telecommunications HR practices-evolving from control-oriented personnel administration in the early 1980s to an agile, human-centric strategic partnership in Post-COVID Era 5.0. Table 1 synthesizes this structural trajectory across six lifecycle phases/HR functions.

Table 1: *Thematic Synthesis of HR Practice Evolution across Eras and Lifecycle Phases*

Lifecycle Phase & Era	Core HR Theme	Traditional / Early Paradigm (1980s-1990s)	Strategic Evolution (2000s-Post-COVID)	Impact on Managerial Role & Performance

Pre-Employment (1980s -1990s)	Recruitment & Selection	Informal, localized, manual-digital hybrid (print ads, physical resumes, fax); systemic biases (Taylor, 2005).	AI-powered, global e-recruitment via ATS, digital platforms; focus on DEI and skills-first hiring (Black & van Esch, 2020).	Broadens candidate pools; increases "managerial burden" of screening; requires ethical AI oversight and virtual interview competencies.
Pre-Employment (2000s-2010s)	Onboarding Process	Informal, administrative, compliance-focused cultural indoctrination (Wanous, 1992).	Structured, multi-stage digital journeys; LMS integration, virtual buddy systems (Jeske & Olson, 2022).	Reduces early turnover; satisfies safety/belonging needs; accelerates time-to-productivity for remote managers.
During Employment (2000s-2010s)	Compensation & Benefits	Fixed base pay, rigid wage structures, paternalistic employer-controlled pensions (Munnell, 2012).	Holistic Total Rewards; flexible benefit ecosystems, mental wellness, DC plans (Prentice, 2022).	Mitigates burnout; demands managers navigate the motivation-compensation paradox amid wage stagnation.
During Employment (2010s-Era 5.0)	Training & Development	Standardized on-the-job training; viewed as a secondary administrative cost (Noe, 2013).	Continuous, AI-personalized upskilling, micro-learning, 5G/IoT technical sprints (Agrawal et al., 2020).	Drives self-actualization and technical agility; elevates continuous learning into a key retention lever.
During Employment (2010s-Era 5.0)	Performance Management	Top-down, rigid annual appraisals; stack-ranking and compliance checks (Aguinis, 2009).	Continuous, data-driven coaching; real-time feedback loops, agile goal alignment	Transforms manager role from "commander" to "coach"; fosters psychological

			(Cappelli & Tavis, 2016).	safety and team trust.
Post-Employment (Era 5.0)	Retirement & Transition	Terminal exit event; abrupt employer-discretionary severance (Feldman, 1994).	Human-centric resilience; phased retirement, financial wellness, knowledge transfer models (Breque, 2021).	Preserves institutional memory; repositions senior managers as mentors, brand stewards, and consultants.

4.1 Detailed Analysis across the Employee Lifecycle

4.1.1 Pre-Employment Phase: Digital Sourcing and Empathy Balance

In early telecommunications paradigms, recruitment was localized and administrative. Modern talent acquisition in the Post-COVID Era 5.0 leverages Generative AI and advanced ATS for global sourcing (Sigelman et al., 2024; Verma et al., 2023). However, the synthesis highlights a critical "Digital-Empathy Paradox": while AI dramatically accelerates candidate screening, excessive reliance on automated algorithms risks dehumanizing the candidate experience and introducing algorithmic bias (Black & van Esch, 2020). Telecommunication managers must develop dual competencies combining technical proficiency in interpreting predictive hiring analytics with high-touch, empathetic interviewing to assess cultural fit and soft skills in virtual settings.

Similarly, onboarding has evolved from administrative indoctrination into a strategic multi-month socialization journey. Post-COVID remote onboarding relies heavily on Virtual Reality (VR) immersions and virtual peer buddy systems (Jeske & Olson, 2022; Chen, 2020). Effective digital onboarding fulfills new managers' basic safety and belonging needs (Maslow, 1943) by providing immediate role clarity and social connectivity, directly mitigating early managerial isolation and churn.

4.1.2 during Employment Phase: Motivation, Total Rewards, and Continuous Coaching

During the 2010s and transitioning into the post-COVID era, the analysis reveals a pronounced Motivation-Compensation Paradox: hyper-productivity demands driven by 5G rollouts and digital transformations frequently outpaced real wage growth (Scott et al., 2021). To maintain managerial motivation and prevent severe burnout, HR functions have shifted from traditional cash-

centric compensation to Total Rewards Ecosystems incorporating flexible work arrangements, mental wellness stipends, and pay transparency (Prentice, 2022; Zafar et al., 2020).

In Training & Development, the rapid obsolescence of technical skills in Era 5.0 makes continuous learning a core survival imperative. HR functions act as technology curators, implementing AI-powered micro-learning platforms that deliver personalized upskilling (Likic, 2024; Agrawal et al., 2020). In Performance Management, rigid annual reviews have been replaced by real-time, data-driven feedback loops and developmental coaching (Cappelli & Tavis, 2016; Edmondson & Mortensen, 2021). This transition redefines the managerial mandate, shifting managers from administrative overseers into developmental coaches who cultivate psychological safety within distributed hybrid teams.

4.1.3 Post-Employment Phase: Knowledge Preservation and Phased Transition

Historically treated as a terminal administrative event, retirement in Era 5.0 is re-conceptualized as a strategic transition. Telecommunications firms possess deep institutional memory and specialized legacy expertise embodied in senior technical managers. Abrupt retirements risk catastrophic loss of intellectual capital during major infrastructure shifts (La Rue et al., 2022; Rabat et al., 2024). Modern HR strategies have implemented phased retirement, consultancy models, and structured digital mentorship programs, allowing veteran managers to satisfy self-actualization needs while transferring critical technical knowledge to incoming digitally native leaders (Vui-Yee, 2022; Breque, 2021).

4.2 Era 5.0 Managerial Competency Shifts

The shift into Digital Era 5.0 fundamentally redefines core managerial competencies. Unlike the automation-heavy Era 4.0, Era 5.0 centers on human-centricity, resilience, and sustainability (Breque et al., 2021; Vrontis et al., 2024). Table 2 outlines the specific competency shifts required for telecommunications managers.

Table 2: *Key Competency Shifts for Telecommunications Managers in Era 5.0*

Traditional Competency	Era 5.0 Competency	Strategic Organizational Impact
Administrative Control	Ethical AI Oversight & Analytics Literacy	Governs AI integration in recruitment and performance evaluation while ensuring DEI standards and algorithmic fairness.

Standardized Training Delivery	Personalized Upskilling Facilitation	Guides teams through continuous 5G/IoT micro-learning sprints to prevent technical skill obsolescence.
Terminal Exit Supervision	Knowledge Transfer Facilitation	Executes phased retirement and mentorship models to preserve institutional intellectual capital.
Transactional Supervision	Psychological Safety & Well-being Advocacy	Prioritizes employee mental health, flexibility, and trust to drive retention and team resilience in hybrid work environments.

4.3 Thematic Mapping to Organizational Strategic Outcomes

Through thematic synthesis, descriptive findings were aggregated into analytical themes mapped directly to five core strategic positioning outcomes (Dependent Variable). Table 3 details these mappings supported by literature evidence.

Table 3: *Thematic Mapping of HR Lifecycle Functions and Strategic Outcomes*

HR Lifecycle Phase (IV)	Key Derived Analytical Theme	Strategic Outcome / Pillar (DV)	Supporting Authors
Pre-Employment	Digital-Empathy Balance in Sourcing & Culture-Centric Onboarding	Talent Magnetism: Elevates employer branding and candidate attraction.	Bauer (2010); Sigelman et al. (2024); Chen (2020)
During Employment	Shift from Administrative Welfare to Holistic Total Rewards & Well-being	Employee Experience Driver: Fosters engagement and mitigates burnout.	Bankins (2021); Sinha & Yadav (2020); Prentice (2022)
During Employment	Continuous AI Upskilling & Agile Real-Time Coaching	Agility & Adaptability: Enables rapid workforce pivots during tech shifts.	Henderikx & Stoffers (2023); Edmondson & Mortensen (2021)
Post-Employment	Phased Knowledge Transfer & Ethical Offboarding Models	Strategic Influence: Safeguards intellectual capital and organizational memory.	Shuey & O'Rand (2004); Walsh & Beach (2021); Breque (2021)
Cross-Lifecycle	Centralized Unified People Analytics & Evidence-Based Governance	Data-Driven Decision Making: Aligns human capital metrics with business goals.	Boudreau & Ramstad (2007); Fitz-enz & Mattox (2014)

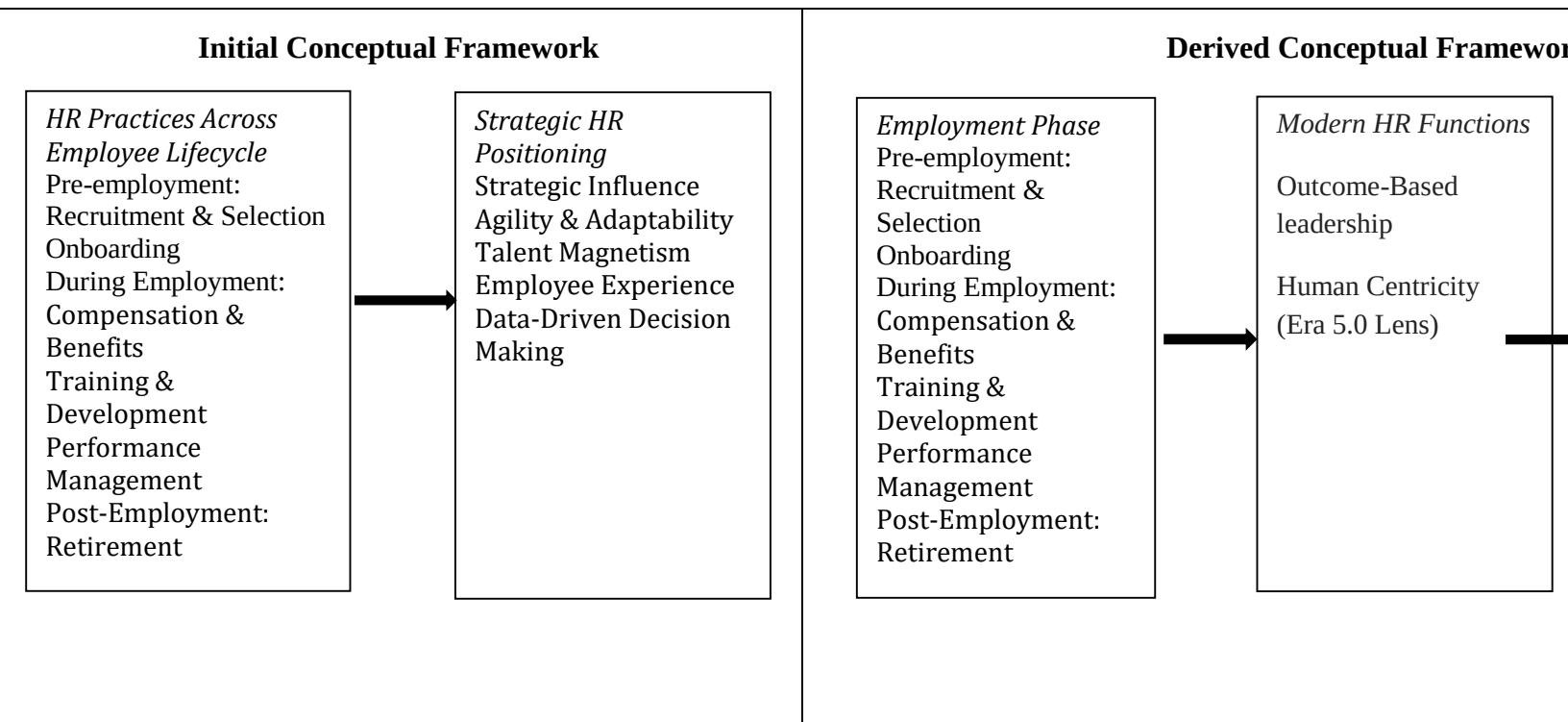
5. Conclusion

The metamorphosis of HR practices in global telecommunications represents a profound evolution from administrative control to a human-centric strategic imperative. This study demonstrates that HR evolution is not merely chronological, but a responsive adaptation to intersecting forces of technological disruption (Eras 4.0 and 5.0) and post-pandemic work paradigms.

A central conclusion is the fundamental transformation of the managerial mandate: telecommunication managers have evolved from transactional overseers into strategic coaches and culture architects. Furthermore, resolving the Motivation-Compensation Paradox requires organizations to embrace holistic Total Rewards that address higher-order psychological needs, well-being, and continuous self-actualization. HR practices alone cannot transform an organization; ultimate strategic positioning is achieved when modern HR functions are powered by outcome-based leadership and an unwavering human-centric philosophy.

5.1 Conceptual Framework for Strategic HR Positioning

To bridge theoretical divides between isolated HR practice evaluations (Verma et al., 2023) and strategic management models (Bassett-Jones, 2023; Fesa, 2025), this study proposes an integrated Conceptual Framework for Strategic HR Positioning in the Post-COVID Era.



The framework posits that robust, modern HR practices across the employee lifecycle serve as critical enablers (Independent Variables). However, technological modernization alone is insufficient. What translates core HR functions into sustainable Strategic Positioning (Dependent Variable) are two mediating pillars: Outcome-Based Leadership and a Human-Centric Approach (Fesa, 2025). By balancing data-driven automation with empathetic leadership that satisfies managers' full hierarchy of needs, telecommunications firms achieve organizational resilience, superior talent retention, and heightened competitive advantage.

6. Strategic Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Based on the synthesized findings, telecommunication executives, HR leaders, and managers should implement actionable policy reforms categorized by employment phase and organizational strategy:

6.1 Phase I: Pre-Employment (Strategic Talent Acquisition & Integration)

- Implement a Skills-First Recruitment Architecture: Transition beyond traditional academic credentials toward skills-based hiring. Utilize AI predictive tools for preliminary candidate screening while training managers in empathetic virtual interviewing techniques to safeguard human connection.
- Redesign Onboarding as a Continuous "3 Cs" Experience: Structure onboarding as a 6-to-12-month journey centered on Culture, Connections, and Competence. Deploy VR tours, LMS micro-modules, and virtual peer buddies to accelerate social integration and role clarity.

6.2 Phase II: During Employment (Developmental & Retention Strategies)

- Adopt a Total Rewards and Wellness Ecosystem: To resolve the motivation-compensation paradox, combine competitive base pay with flexible work arrangements, mental wellness stipends, and transparent pay equity policies. Establish "Right to Disconnect" guidelines to prevent burnout.
- Institutionalize Learning Sprints & AI Micro-Learning: Implement AI-powered adaptive learning platforms offering personalized, bite-sized skill development in 5G, IoT, and cybersecurity, allowing technical managers to continuously upskill without cognitive overload.

- Transition to Continuous Coaching-Based Performance Management: Replace rigid annual reviews with agile, real-time feedback loops and developmental coaching. Train managers to operate as facilitators of growth rather than transactional evaluators.

6.3 Phase III: Post-Employment (Knowledge Preservation & Transition)

- Institutionalize Phased Retirement and Knowledge Transfer: Structure flexible, phased exit options for veteran managers. Re-engage retirees through part-time advisory roles, structured mentorship, and digital knowledge repositories to capture institutional wisdom.

6.4 Organizational & Strategic HR Recommendations

- Unify HR Data Architecture: Integrate siloed HR databases into a centralized people analytics platform to provide real-time benchmarks for evidence-based decision-making across the entire employee lifecycle.
- Foster Psychological Safety and Inclusive Leadership: Equip hybrid leaders with training in empathetic communication, active listening, and inclusive management to cultivate high trust in distributed teams.

7. Future Research: Directions for Scholarly Inquiry

Future academic research should build upon this synthesis through several avenues:

1. Longitudinal Qualitative Studies on AI Integration: Track the multi-year psychological impact of Generative AI and automated assessment tools on managerial trust and psychological contracts.
2. Cross-Regional Comparative Analyses: Examine contextual variations in telecommunications HR practices across emerging versus developed markets (e.g., Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Africa).
3. In-depth Qualitative Case Studies on Hybrid Trust Dynamics: Investigate how organizational trust and team cohesion are built, maintained, or eroded in fully virtual telecommunication environments.
4. Empirical Interventions Evaluation: Conduct qualitative process evaluations on specific reskilling programs targeting legacy workforce transitions in 5G/6G environments.

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