

Transforming Human Resource Management (HRM) in Higher Education: Strategic, Inclusive and Wellness-Focused Practices

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This exploratory paper investigates the growing need for a transformational shift in Human Resources Management (HRM) within higher education institutions. Traditionally operating from a transactional and administrative foundation, HR in higher education is now being called upon to serve as a proactive, strategic partner in institutional development. The paper is grounded in a review of current scholarly and professional literature, supplemented by interviews and informal discussions with HR practitioners and a clinical psychologist. These conversations provided firsthand insights into current challenges and innovative practices being explored across institutions.

The research focuses on three interrelated pillars of HR transformation: leadership development, diversity and inclusion, and employee wellness, particularly mental health. Each area is explored not only as a standalone function but also as part of an integrated HR strategy that supports organisational sustainability and campus-wide well-being.

The findings suggest that leadership development is essential to succession planning, talent retention, and building next-generation administrative capacity. Equipping staff with modern leadership competencies and growth pathways enhances institutional resilience and supports academic excellence.

Diversity and inclusion are examined as more than policy mandates they are essential components of institutional culture. HR practitioners interviewed highlighted the value of embedding inclusive practices into every level of campus operations, creating a sense of belonging among faculty, staff, and students. The paper discusses how HR can facilitate this shift by aligning hiring practices and training efforts with broader equity goals.

Employee wellness, with a strong emphasis on mental health, emerged as a critical area. Professionals stressed that wellness initiatives are often underfunded or reactive, rather than strategic investments in human capital. Insights from the psychologist and counsellors emphasised the connection between workplace mental health and institutional productivity, suggesting that

healthier staff directly contribute to a more vibrant academic environment. This paper proposes that for higher education institutions to thrive, HR must move beyond compliance-driven tasks to become organisational transformational agents. By embracing a transformational approach centered on proactive engagement strategic development, and community well-being, HR professionals can play a key role in shaping inclusive, supportive and future-ready campuses. Administrators and professionals attending this presentation will gain practical insights into how HR can be repositioned as a catalyst for institutional renewal and developing partnerships in fostering dynamic, people-centered learning environments.