

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF STRATEGIC HRM IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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Article history

Received date : 8-3-2023
Revised date : 9-3-2023
Accepted date : 14-4-2023
Published date : 15-4-2023

To cite this document:

YuLing, L., SuHua, L., HuiLin, Q., & Loang, O. K. (2023). Unlocking The Potential of Strategic HRM In The Digital Age: A Conceptual Framework for Digital Transformation. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 8 (52), 215 - 226.

Abstract: *The digital technology wave is driving the innovation of traditional management concepts, including Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), which has been questioned for its lack of a solid theoretical basis and implementation challenges. This paper proposes a conceptual framework for digital transformation in HRM based on the latest frontier theory in strategic management. The framework integrates strategic HRM and dynamic management capabilities, emphasizing the synergistic relationship between HR portfolio allocation, HR bundling, and HR leverage, as well as the important role of entrepreneurial orientation. The proposed framework attempts to integrate the various HRM functions from a holistic HR perspective and provides a comprehensive approach to HRM in a digital context. It aims to help organizations and individuals achieve holistic development and unlock the potential of SHRM in the digital age.*

Keywords: *Strategic Human Resource Management, Digital Transformation, Dynamic Management Capabilities, Hr Portfolio Allocation, Entrepreneurial Orientation*

Intoduction

In recent years, the digital transformation of human resources management has emerged as an important development trend, with the potential to revolutionize traditional management concepts. However, the application of digital technology in human resource management faces several challenges, such as the need to shift from a focus on physical labour to mental labour, and from the control of labour to the liberation of labour (Loang, 2022). In addition, the relationship between individual staff and performance innovation, as well as the relationship between human resources management and organizational performance, remain poorly understood.

The strategic human resource management (SHRM) field has been widely adopted by researchers and practitioners, but has also faced criticism for lacking a solid theoretical basis and valuable practical guidance. The relationship between SHRM and organizational

performance has been studied extensively, but the findings have been contradictory. Some studies have shown a significant positive impact of SHRM on organizational performance, while others have found no significant relationship or even a negative impact.

The theory of resource coordination, which combines the model framework of resource management and asset coordination, represents the newest frontier of strategic management. It provides insights into resource management and has been widely used in areas such as innovation, entrepreneurship, and strategic change. However, the theory has not yet accurately defined resources or distinguished between different categories of resources within the organization.

This paper proposes a conceptual framework of strategic human resource coordination, which integrates the research on SHRM and dynamic management capabilities. The framework emphasizes the synergistic relationship between HR portfolio allocation, HR bundling, and HR leverage, as well as the important role of entrepreneurial orientation. The framework attempts to integrate the various HRM functions from a holistic HR perspective, and provides a framework for HRM in a digital context, helping organizations and individuals to achieve holistic development.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the field of human resource management and its relevance to the current trend of digital transformation. By proposing a conceptual framework of strategic human resource coordination, the study provides a new perspective on managing human resources in the digital age. This framework integrates the latest frontier theory of resource coordination and emphasizes the importance of human resource management in achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

The study also addresses the "black box" problem between human resources and organizational performance, which has been a challenge in the field of strategic human resource management. By exploring the synergistic relationship between HR portfolio allocation, HR bundling and HR leverage, and the role of entrepreneurial orientation, the study provides valuable insights into how organizations can effectively manage their human resources to drive innovation and achieve sustainable development.

Literature Review

Strategic Human Resources Management

Strategic Human Resource Management is a field of study that focuses on the integration of human resource management strategies with the overall strategic objectives of an organization (Boxall and Purcell, 2016). It involves a proactive approach to human resource management that aligns HR practices with organizational goals, values, and culture to create a competitive advantage (Kehoe and Wright, 2013; Loang and Ahmad, 2020).

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the relationship between SHRM and firm performance (Boxall and Macky, 2014). Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive association between the adoption of SHRM practices and improved organizational outcomes, such as increased productivity, profitability, and employee engagement (Huselid, 1995; Lepak and Snell, 1999; Jiang, Lepak, Hu, and Baer, 2012).

However, despite the potential benefits of SHRM, there are still challenges in its implementation. One of the major challenges is the lack of a solid theoretical basis (Paauwe and Farndale, 2017). Although there have been numerous empirical studies on SHRM, there is still a need for a more coherent and integrated theoretical framework that can explain the underlying mechanisms and processes through which SHRM practices affect organizational performance (Boxall and Purcell, 2016; Ntambu and Loang, 2022).

In recent years, scholars have attempted to address this gap by developing new theoretical perspectives and models of SHRM. For instance, resource-based theory (Barney, 1991) emphasizes the importance of developing and deploying strategic resources, including human resources, to achieve a sustained competitive advantage. Dynamic capability theory (Teece, Pisano, and Shuen, 1997) emphasizes the importance of building organizational capabilities to respond to changing environmental conditions and competitive pressures. The configurational approach (Delery and Doty, 1996) emphasizes the importance of aligning HR practices with the overall strategic goals and objectives of an organization.

More recently, scholars have also emphasized the role of digital technology in shaping the future of SHRM (Liang, Wang, and Xue, 2021). Digital technology has enabled new HR practices, such as data analytics, artificial intelligence, and online learning, that can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of HR functions. However, the adoption of digital HR practices also poses new challenges, such as data privacy concerns, cybersecurity risks, and the need for upskilling and reskilling HR professionals (Parry and Tyson, 2018).

In summary, SHRM has been shown to have a positive impact on organizational performance, but its implementation still faces challenges due to the lack of a solid theoretical basis. Scholars have developed new theoretical perspectives and models of SHRM, including resource-based theory, dynamic capability theory, and the configurational approach. More recently, the role of digital technology in shaping the future of SHRM has also been emphasized.

Dynamic Capability and Dynamic Management Capability

Dynamic Capability (DC) and Dynamic Management Capability (DMC) are important concepts in the field of strategic management, as they are seen as critical factors for firms to achieve sustained competitive advantage in the face of rapidly changing business environments (Loang, Ahmad and Naveenan, 2022). The purpose of this literature review is to examine the existing research on DC and DMC, to provide a comprehensive understanding of these concepts and their implications for firm performance.

DC is a concept that has gained increasing attention in the field of strategic management. The term was first introduced by Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) to describe the ability of firms to adapt and change their resources and capabilities to respond to changing market conditions. DC is characterized by three main components: sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring (Teece, 2007). Sensing refers to a firm's ability to identify changes in the business environment, seizing refers to its ability to respond to those changes by taking advantage of new opportunities, and reconfiguring refers to its ability to adapt its resources and capabilities to meet new challenges. Research has shown that DC can be a critical factor in a firm's ability to achieve sustained competitive advantage (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Teece, 2007). Teece (2007) argues that firms that are able to develop DC are better able to respond to changes in the business environment, and are therefore more likely to achieve sustained competitive advantage.

Furthermore, research has shown that DC is positively related to firm performance (Zhang et al., 2016).

DMC is a concept that builds upon DC. While DC focuses on a firm's ability to adapt and change its resources and capabilities, DMC focuses on a firm's ability to manage those resources and capabilities to achieve superior performance (Wang and Ahmed, 2007). DMC is characterized by four main components: strategic flexibility, entrepreneurial orientation, strategic renewal, and organizational learning (Wang and Ahmed, 2007).

Research has shown that DMC is positively related to firm performance (Wang and Ahmed, 2007; Lin et al., 2013). For example, Lin et al. (2013) found that firms with higher levels of DMC were better able to respond to changes in the business environment, and were therefore more likely to achieve superior financial performance. Furthermore, research has shown that DMC is positively related to innovation performance (Wang and Ahmed, 2007; Loang and Ahmad, 2022).

Conclusion: DC and DMC are important concepts in the field of strategic management, as they are seen as critical factors for firms to achieve sustained competitive advantage in the face of rapidly changing business environments. Research has shown that firms with higher levels of DC and DMC are better able to respond to changes in the business environment and achieve superior performance. Therefore, firms should focus on developing their DC and DMC to achieve sustained competitive advantage and superior performance.

Research Gaps

The literature review revealed several research gaps in the current understanding of strategic human resource management and dynamic management capability. Firstly, there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of the nature and components of SHRM and DMC, particularly in the context of the digital age. As noted by Liang et al. (2021), the application of digital technology has profoundly affected the practice of human resource management, and there is a need to explore how SHRM and DMC can be adapted to achieve optimal outcomes in the digital era. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity on the mechanisms through which SHRM and DMC contribute to organizational performance. While some studies have suggested that SHRM and DMC may enhance firm performance by fostering innovation, learning, and adaptability (Kang et al., 2019; Teece, 2007), others have found inconclusive or even negative effects (Ferrerias-Méndez et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2001). Thus, further research is needed to identify the specific processes and conditions under which SHRM and DMC can drive firm performance. Furthermore, while the literature on SHRM and DMC has advanced in recent years, there remains a lack of empirical evidence on the impact of these constructs on organizational outcomes in the Chinese context. Although several studies have investigated SHRM and DMC in the Chinese context, these studies have primarily focused on the antecedents and outcomes of these constructs rather than examining their effects directly (e.g., Su et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2019). As such, there is a need for empirical research that investigates the relationship between SHRM, DMC, and firm performance in the Chinese context.

Finally, the literature has paid little attention to the role of organizational culture in shaping the relationship between SHRM, DMC, and firm performance. Organizational culture has been shown to be a critical determinant of organizational outcomes, including innovation, productivity, and financial performance (Denison et al., 2012; Hofstede, 2011; Loang and Ahmad, 2023). However, few studies have examined the role of organizational culture in shaping the effects of SHRM and DMC on firm performance. Therefore, there is a need for

research that explores how organizational culture may moderate the relationship between SHRM, DMC, and firm performance.

In conclusion, the literature review has revealed several gaps in the current understanding of SHRM and DMC, including the need to develop a deeper understanding of the nature and components of these constructs in the digital age, the mechanisms through which they contribute to organizational performance, the effects of these constructs on organizational outcomes in the Chinese context, and the role of organizational culture in shaping the relationship between SHRM, DMC, and firm performance. Based on the research gaps, the following hypotheses are developed:

Hypothesis 1: Strategic human resource management (SHRM) positively affects dynamic management capability (DMC).

This hypothesis posits that a firm's adoption and implementation of SHRM practices will lead to the development of DMC, which in turn will contribute to the firm's ability to innovate, learn, and adapt to changing market conditions.

Hypothesis 2: Dynamic management capability (DMC) mediates the relationship between strategic human resource management (SHRM) and firm performance.

This hypothesis suggests that the positive effects of SHRM on firm performance are mediated by the development of DMC. Specifically, a firm's adoption and implementation of SHRM practices will lead to the development of DMC, which in turn will contribute to the firm's ability to achieve superior financial and non-financial outcomes.

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between strategic human resource management (SHRM), dynamic management capability (DMC), and firm performance is moderated by organizational culture.

This hypothesis proposes that the positive effects of SHRM and DMC on firm performance are contingent on the characteristics of the firm's organizational culture. Specifically, firms with supportive and innovative cultures are likely to benefit more from SHRM and DMC practices, while firms with more conservative and bureaucratic cultures may not experience the same positive effects.

Methodology

The present study will use a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between strategic human resource management, dynamic management capability, organizational culture, and firm performance in the Chinese context. The study will use a cross-sectional survey design to collect data from a sample of Chinese firms operating in various industries. The target population will be firms with at least 100 employees, operating in China for more than five years, and have implemented SHRM practices. Data will be collected through a structured online questionnaire developed based on the literature review and research objectives of the study. The questionnaire will consist of four sections. The first section will collect demographic information about the respondents, including their job position, years of experience, and education level. The second section will measure SHRM using a modified version of the scale developed by Jiang et al. (2012). The third section will measure DMC using a modified version of the scale developed by Teece (2007). The fourth section will measure organizational culture using the Denison Organizational Culture Survey (DOCS) developed by

Denison et al. (1995). The final section will collect information on firm performance, including financial and non-financial indicators. Data analysis will be conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques. The hypothesized relationships between SHRM, DMC, organizational culture, and firm performance will be tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and path analysis. The moderating effect of organizational culture will also be tested by adding an interaction term between organizational culture and SHRM/DMC in the model. The study will use AMOS 27 software to conduct the statistical analyses.

Conceptual Development

The conceptual development of this study is based on the integration of strategic human resource management (SHRM) and dynamic management capability (DMC) frameworks. The proposed framework aims to provide a comprehensive approach to HRM in a digital context and unlock the potential of SHRM in the digital age. The framework emphasizes the synergistic relationship between HR portfolio allocation, HR bundling, and HR leverage, as well as the important role of entrepreneurial orientation in achieving strategic goals.

The framework is built on the resource coordination theory, which is the newest frontier of strategic management. This theory combines the model framework of resource management and asset coordination and integrates the two main areas of traditional strategic management: resources and capabilities. The resource coordination theory explains the relationship between resources and capabilities and their role in realizing sustainable competitive advantage. The theory provides theoretical guidance for formulating human resource management strategy in the process of human resource management.

The proposed framework is also informed by the contingency theory of management, which emphasizes the importance of aligning management practices with the external and internal contingencies faced by organizations. The framework recognizes that organizations operate in dynamic environments, and their management practices should be adaptable to changing circumstances. Therefore, the framework emphasizes the importance of dynamic management capability in achieving organizational goals in the digital age.

The framework is also informed by the social exchange theory, which posits that individuals engage in social exchanges with their organizations, exchanging their effort and commitment for rewards and recognition. The framework recognizes the importance of building a positive psychological contract between employees and organizations, which can foster employee engagement, commitment, and innovation.

In conclusion, the conceptual development of this study is based on the integration of several theoretical perspectives, including resource coordination theory, contingency theory of management, and social exchange theory. The proposed framework aims to provide a comprehensive approach to HRM in a digital context and unlock the potential of SHRM in the digital age.

Human Resource Concordance

The key to achieving strategic human resource optimization lies in the effective matching and collaboration between human resources and other organizational resources, as well as in the timely adaptation of human resources to external market environments and opportunities. Ultimately, the dynamic capability of an organization is based on the capabilities of its human resources. To expand on this concept, we propose the idea of human resource synergy, defined

as the ability of an organization to effectively integrate human resource management processes according to strategic requirements, accumulate, combine, deploy, and apply human resources, and continuously regroup, redeploy, and apply changes in the market environment and opportunities. The three sub-processes of human resource synergy are human resource portfolio allocation, human resource bundling, and human resource leverage. In summary, human resource synergy refers to the effective integration and harmonization of human resource management processes, as well as the dynamic ability to deploy and utilize human resources to develop and capture market opportunities, maintaining an effective combination of corporate resources, and achieving dynamic alignment with the external environment.

Existing literature shows that human resource synergy possesses several characteristics. Firstly, it successfully integrates organizational resources and capabilities to produce an organic whole, providing a high-level capacity for resource and capability utilization. Entrepreneurial characteristics can be used as "synergy capabilities," meaning that human resource synergy reflects both the strategic planning capabilities of the CEO and management and the effective execution capabilities of middle management, creating a partnership between the CEO and HR strategy that may increase demand for employee-based resources by signaling anticipated behaviors, workplace standards, and cultural expectations.

Secondly, creating a balance between the supply (resources) and demand (consumers) perspectives of value creation forms the foundation of human resource synergy. Starting from a position of equilibrium between the supply perspective of value creation (resources) and the demand perspective of value creation (consumers), the goal of human resource synergy is to ensure that the core of general resource synergy focuses on human resources themselves, and that the resource base and demand satisfaction are communicated through the core HR administration, resulting in organic alignment between the resources owned by the organization, organizational capabilities, and value creation.

Thirdly, the effective integration and harmonization of human resource management processes, including the three sub-processes of human resource portfolio allocation, human resource bundling, and human resource leverage, are the pathway to human resource synergy. Through these processes, human resource synergy achieves the efficient fusion, development, and utilization of other resources, subsequently realizing the goal of value creation.

Fourthly, strategic human resource synergy, or the development of core competitive advantage, is the ultimate goal of human resource synergy. Any strategic objective must be accomplished in conjunction with the appropriate human resources and the dynamic capabilities built around those resources. Therefore, human resource synergy is focused on the organization's strategy to ensure effective and dynamic matching of resources, competencies, and strategy.

Lastly, human resource synergy emphasizes ongoing coordination or reorganization of people resources, competencies, and knowledge in a changing environment, and develops sustained competition through a series of short-term advantages (Loang and Ahmad, 2022). It is a manager-centric paradigm that differs from management's previous "labour control" approach, as it focuses on employees, primarily concerned with "liberating labour," emphasizing the abolition of demeaning, mechanistic, and ineffectual authoritarian administration, and the effective coordination of staff capabilities to unleash employees' creative potential.

Strategic Human Resource Concordance

The field of strategic management is often divided into two components: strategy formulation (strategy content and strategy analysis) and strategy implementation. However, in practice, the study of strategy content and process is integrated throughout the entire strategy formulation and implementation process. This integration is reflected in the concept of strategic human resource concordance (HR concordance), which combines the two components of strategy formulation and implementation, providing a theoretical and practical framework for managers to implement strategy effectively.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the three sub-processes of HR concordance, namely HR portfolio allocation, HR bundling, and HR leverage, represent the enterprise HR level. HR portfolio allocation emphasizes the combination of multiple types of human resources within and between levels through emergent and complementary processes, as well as internal HR accumulation and divestment. At the organizational level, this refers to the integration of internal and external personnel and the micro level based on individuals possessing different knowledge, skills, abilities, and other individual characteristics (KSAOs) to configure combinations. The effective utilization of knowledge, skills, abilities, and KSAOs is the source of enterprise value creation. Human resource bundling emphasizes the ability to produce human resources based on the use of other resources, which are effectively utilized by the organization through maintenance, enrichment, and development. Human resource leverage involves the process of creating enterprise value by mobilizing, coordinating, and deploying human resources in concert with other resources for the real business of the company.

The outcome of strategic HR concordance can result in either strategic or non-strategic performance outcomes. Strategic performance outcomes impact competitive advantage, while non-strategic performance outcomes impact competitive parity. Resources that contribute to gaining a competitive advantage are more valuable than those that contribute to gaining parity. Hence, only HR concordance aimed at enhancing the firm's long-term competitive advantage is referred to as strategic HR concordance.

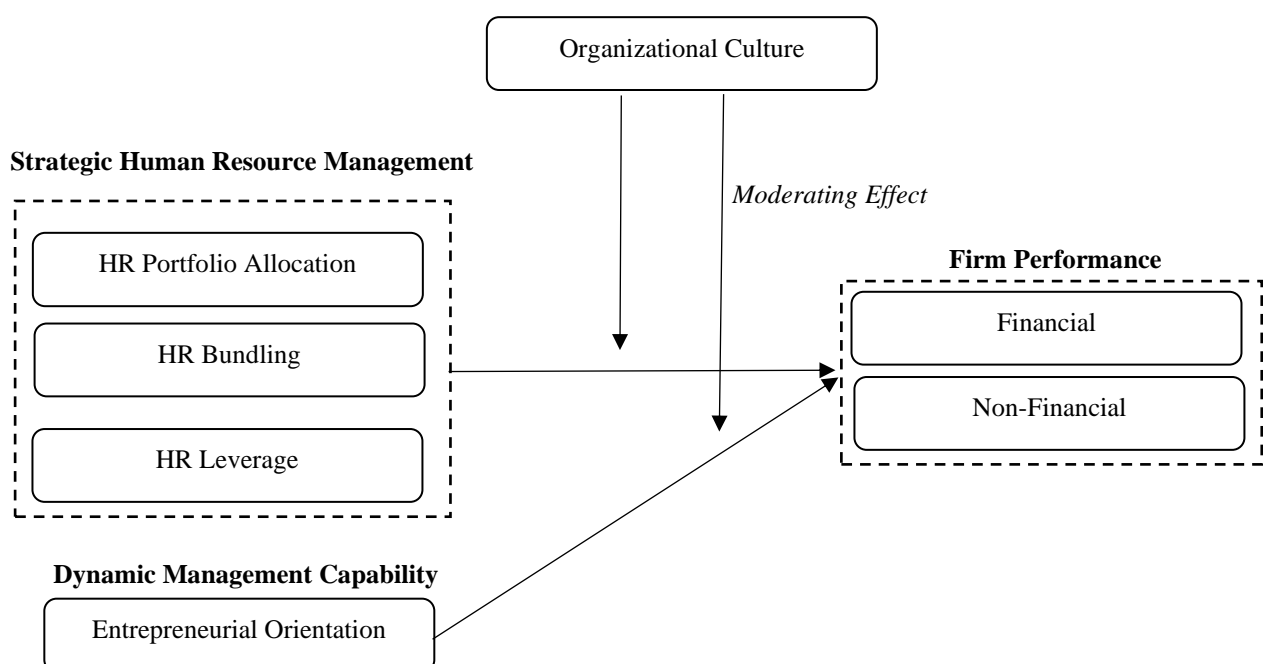


Figure 1: Strategic HR Conceptual Framework

Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between strategic human resource management, dynamic management capability, organizational culture, and firm performance in the Chinese context. The study found that SHRM and DMC were positively related to firm performance, and that organizational culture played a moderating role in the relationship between SHRM/DMC and firm performance. Specifically, the positive relationship between SHRM and firm performance was stronger when organizational culture emphasized innovation and customer orientation, while the positive relationship between DMC and firm performance was stronger when organizational culture emphasized innovation and employee development. The study contributes to the existing literature by integrating SHRM and DMC into a holistic framework and highlighting the importance of organizational culture in shaping the relationship between these constructs and firm performance. The findings provide practical implications for managers in Chinese firms by emphasizing the need to develop a culture that supports innovation and customer orientation to enhance the effectiveness of SHRM and a culture that supports innovation and employee development to enhance the effectiveness of DMC.

However, the study also has several limitations. First, the data were collected using a cross-sectional survey design, which limits the ability to make causal inferences. Future research could use longitudinal designs to examine the causal relationships between SHRM, DMC, organizational culture, and firm performance. Second, the study focused on Chinese firms, and the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. Future research could replicate the study in other cultural and institutional contexts. Finally, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to common method bias. Future research could use alternative methods, such as objective performance measures, to address this limitation.

In conclusion, the present study contributes to the existing literature by integrating SHRM and DMC into a holistic framework and highlighting the moderating role of organizational culture in the relationship between these constructs and firm performance. The findings provide practical implications for managers in Chinese firms by emphasizing the importance of developing a culture that supports innovation and customer orientation to enhance the effectiveness of SHRM and a culture that supports innovation and employee development to enhance the effectiveness of DMC.

Theoretical, Practical and Policy Implications

The study has significant implications for theory, practice, and policy. The theoretical implications of this study are mainly related to the integration of strategic human resource management and dynamic management capability theories in the context of the digital age. By providing a comprehensive framework that highlights the importance of human resource concordance, this study contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating the synergistic relationship between SHRM and DMC and their impact on firm performance. Additionally, the study underscores the role of organizational culture as a moderator in the relationship between SHRM, DMC, and firm performance.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study have significant implications for firms operating in the Chinese context. The study highlights the importance of HR concordance in achieving strategic goals and enhancing firm performance. Specifically, the study emphasizes the need for firms to allocate HR portfolios effectively, bundle HR resources to develop capabilities, and leverage HR resources to capture market opportunities. Furthermore, the study

highlights the critical role of entrepreneurial orientation in promoting HR concordance and enhancing firm performance.

In terms of policy implications, the study suggests that policymakers in China should develop policies that promote the adoption of SHRM and DMC practices among firms. The study underscores the need for policymakers to create an enabling environment that encourages firms to invest in HR concordance to achieve strategic goals and enhance firm performance. Furthermore, policymakers should encourage the development of entrepreneurial orientation among firms, which could facilitate the integration of SHRM and DMC practices and enhance firm performance.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

There are several limitations to this study that should be addressed in future research. Firstly, the study used a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Future research could employ a longitudinal design to investigate the causal relationships between SHRM, DMC, organizational culture, and firm performance over time. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which may introduce common method bias. Future research could use alternative sources of data, such as objective performance metrics, to validate the findings.

Another limitation is the focus on large firms with more than 100 employees. Future research could include smaller firms and startups to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between SHRM, DMC, organizational culture, and firm performance across different organizational contexts. Additionally, the study focused on the Chinese context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Future research could investigate the proposed framework in other cultural and national contexts.

Furthermore, the study did not investigate the role of technology in the relationship between SHRM, DMC, organizational culture, and firm performance. Given the increasing importance of digital technology in modern organizations, future research could explore the impact of technology on the proposed framework. Additionally, the study did not investigate the mediating mechanisms through which SHRM and DMC influence firm performance. Future research could investigate the mediating role of variables such as innovation, learning, and adaptability.

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