Journal of Management Science Research Review
https://jmsrr.com/index.php/Journal/about

Volume. 4 Issue No. 3 (2025)

Online ISSN: 3006-2047
Print ISSN: 3006-2039

Harnessing HR Analytics for Strategic Human Resource Management in Pakistan

Syed Luqman Hakim
Senior Lecturer at Hamdard University Faculty of Management Science.
E-mail: luqman.hakim@hamdard.edu.pk

Syeda Rida Shujat
MBA scholar at Hamdard University Faculty of Management Science,
E-mail: s.rida.shujat.17@gmail.com

Anoshfa Mehaq
Lecturer at Hamdard University Faculty of Management Science.
E-mail: anoshfa.mehaq@hamdrad.edu.pk

Mr Sikandar Hoath
Assistant Manager at Department of Human Resource Management, Hamdard University, Main Campus, Karachi,
E-Mail: sikander.hoath@hamdard.edu.pk

Abstract
In the contemporary landscape of organizational management, the integration of data analytics into Human Resource (HR) functions has emerged as a transformative force. Globally, HR analytics—also referred to as talent analytics or workforce analytics—has evolved from a peripheral tool into a strategic asset that informs decision-making, enhances employee engagement, and aligns human capital with organizational goals (Davenport, Harris & Shapiro, 2010).

Key word: HR Analytics, Human Resource Management, Workforce Analytics, Talent Analytics, Data-Driven Decision Making, Employee Engagement

Introduction

Background and Rationale

In the contemporary landscape of organizational management, the integration of data analytics into Human Resource (HR) functions has emerged as a transformative force. Globally, HR analytics—also referred to as talent analytics or workforce

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Online ISSN: 3006-2047
Print ISSN: 3006-2039

analytics—has evolved from a peripheral tool into a strategic asset that informs decision-making, enhances employee engagement, and aligns human capital with organizational goals (Davenport, Harris & Shapiro, 2010). In developed economies, HR analytics is increasingly embedded within strategic HRM frameworks, enabling predictive modeling, performance optimization, and evidence-based policy formulation (Fitz-enz & Mattox, 2014).

However, in developing contexts such as Pakistan, the adoption and institutionalization of HR analytics remain limited and uneven. While multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in Pakistan often import global HR practices, indigenous organizations—particularly in the public sector and academia—struggle with infrastructural constraints, cultural resistance, and a lack of analytical capacity (Khan & Qureshi, 2021). This research seeks to explore the nuanced realities of HR analytics in Pakistan through a qualitative lens, capturing lived experiences, institutional narratives, and practitioner insights via in-depth interviews.

Defining HR Analytics

HR analytics refers to the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of HR-related data to improve organizational outcomes. It encompasses descriptive analytics (what happened), diagnostic analytics (why it happened), predictive analytics (what will happen), and prescriptive analytics (what should be done) (Bassi, Carpenter & McMurrer, 2012). The scope of HR analytics includes recruitment, performance management, employee retention, learning and development, and succession planning.

In Pakistan, HR analytics is often conflated with basic HR metrics or reporting functions. The conceptual clarity and strategic orientation required for advanced analytics are frequently absent, resulting in underutilization of available data and missed opportunities for organizational growth (Ahmed & Shah, 2020). This study aims to unpack these conceptual ambiguities and examine how HR professionals in Pakistan perceive, implement, and negotiate the role of analytics in their institutions.

Research Problem

Despite the global momentum surrounding HR analytics, its penetration into Pakistani organizations remains limited. Existing literature suggests that while awareness of HR analytics is growing, its practical application is hindered by several factors: lack of data infrastructure, limited analytical skills among HR personnel, absence of strategic alignment, and cultural resistance to data-driven decision-making (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2015; Khan & Qureshi, 2021).

This research problem is compounded by the fact that most studies on HR analytics in Pakistan adopt quantitative or survey-based methodologies, which often fail to

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capture the depth and complexity of organizational realities. There is a pressing need for qualitative research that foregrounds the voices of HR practitioners, explores institutional contexts, and theorizes the socio-cultural dimensions of analytics adoption.

Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following objectives:

To explore how HR professionals in Pakistan conceptualize and define HR analytics within their organizational contexts.

To examine the extent and nature of HR analytics adoption across different sectors in Pakistan.

To identify the barriers and enablers influencing the implementation of HR analytics.

To theorize the role of HR analytics in shaping strategic HRM practices in Pakistan.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to both academic scholarship and institutional practice. From a scholarly perspective, the research fills a critical gap in the literature by offering a qualitative, interview-based exploration of HR analytics in Pakistan—a domain that has been largely under-theorized. By engaging with practitioners across sectors, the study generates grounded insights that challenge dominant narratives and offer alternative frameworks for understanding analytics in developing contexts.

From a practical standpoint, the findings can inform policy formulation, capacity-building initiatives, and strategic planning within Pakistani organizations. For HR departments seeking to transition from transactional to strategic roles, this research offers a roadmap for integrating analytics into their operational and developmental agendas.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in the **Resource-Based View (RBV)** of the firm, which posits that human capital is a strategic resource that can generate sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). HR analytics, in this context, serves as a mechanism for optimizing the value of human capital through data-driven

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insights. Additionally, the study draws on **Institutional Theory** to examine how organizational norms, values, and structures influence the adoption of analytics (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

By combining RBV and Institutional Theory, the research captures both the strategic and socio-cultural dimensions of HR analytics, offering a holistic understanding of its role in Pakistani organizations.

Literature Review

Conceptual Foundations of HR Analytics

Human Resource (HR) Analytics, also known as workforce analytics or talent analytics, refers to the application of statistical and analytical techniques to HR data for the purpose of improving decision- making and organizational performance (Davenport, Harris & Shapiro, 2010). It encompasses a spectrum of analytical approaches—descriptive, diagnostic, predictive, and prescriptive—that enable HR professionals to move beyond intuition and anecdotal evidence toward evidence-based strategies (Fitz-enz & Mattox, 2014).

The conceptual evolution of HR analytics has been shaped by the broader shift toward data-driven management in the 21st century. Early HR practices were largely administrative and reactive, focusing on compliance and record-keeping. However, the emergence of strategic HRM reframed HR as a driver of organizational value, prompting the need for tools that could quantify and optimize human capital (Bassi, Carpenter & McMurrer, 2012). HR analytics thus emerged as a response to this strategic imperative, offering a framework for aligning workforce capabilities with business goals.

Global Trends and Applications

Globally, HR analytics has gained traction across industries, with organizations leveraging data to enhance recruitment, performance management, employee engagement, and succession planning. In the United States and Europe, firms such as Google, IBM, and Deloitte have pioneered the use of predictive analytics to forecast attrition, identify high-potential employees, and design personalized learning pathways (Rasmussen & Ulrich, 2015).

Academic literature underscores the transformative potential of HR analytics. For instance, Minbaeva (2018) argues that HR analytics enables organizations to "connect people data with business outcomes," thereby enhancing strategic agility. Similarly, Angrave et al. (2016) caution against the "fetishization of data," emphasizing the need for ethical considerations and contextual understanding in analytics implementation.

Despite its promise, HR analytics faces challenges related to data quality, integration, and cultural acceptance. Scholars such as Marler and Boudreau (2017) highlight the importance of organizational readiness, leadership support, and analytical capability in determining the success of HR analytics initiatives.

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Regional Perspectives: South Asia and the Global South

In South Asia, the adoption of HR analytics is uneven, shaped by infrastructural constraints, cultural norms, and varying levels of digital maturity. Studies from India suggest that while large corporations are investing in analytics, smaller firms often lack the resources and strategic orientation to do so (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2015). Moreover, the hierarchical nature of many South Asian organizations can impede the democratization of data and the empowerment of HR professionals.

Research from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka indicates similar trends, with HR analytics being confined to basic reporting functions rather than strategic modeling (Rahman & Akter, 2019). The literature also points to a lack of formal training in analytics among HR practitioners, resulting in a reliance on external consultants and software vendors.

These regional insights underscore the need for context-sensitive approaches to HR analytics—ones that account for socio-cultural dynamics, institutional legacies, and sectoral variations.

HR Analytics in Pakistan: Current Landscape

In Pakistan, scholarly engagement with HR analytics is still emerging. Most existing studies adopt quantitative methodologies, focusing on adoption rates, perceived benefits, and technological barriers. For example, Khan & Qureshi (2021) conducted a sectoral analysis of HR analytics adoption in Pakistani firms, finding that only 18% used analytics beyond basic metrics. The study identified key barriers such as lack of data infrastructure, limited analytical skills, and resistance to change.

Ahmed & Shah (2020) explored the role of HR analytics in the banking sector, noting that while multinational banks had begun integrating analytics into talent management, local banks remained hesitant due to concerns about data privacy and cost. Similarly, Raza & Jamil (2022) examined HR analytics in higher education institutions, highlighting the disconnect between administrative data systems and strategic HR planning.

These studies reveal a fragmented landscape, where HR analytics is often viewed as a technical add-on rather than a strategic enabler. Moreover, the literature lacks qualitative depth, with few studies engaging directly with HR practitioners to understand their experiences, challenges, and aspirations.

Theoretical Anchors in HR Analytics Research

The literature on HR analytics is informed by several theoretical frameworks. The **Resource-Based View (RBV)** posits that human capital is a strategic resource that can generate sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). HR analytics, in this context, serves as a mechanism for optimizing the value of human capital through data-driven insights.

Institutional Theory offers another lens, emphasizing how organizational norms,

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values, and structures influence the adoption of analytics (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In contexts like Pakistan, where institutional inertia and cultural norms play a significant role, this framework is particularly relevant.

Other scholars have drawn on **Technology Acceptance Models (TAM)** to examine how perceived usefulness and ease of use affect the adoption of HR analytics tools (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). While useful, these models often overlook the socio-political dimensions of analytics implementation, which are critical in developing contexts.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite growing interest in HR analytics, several gaps persist in the literature:

Lack of Qualitative Inquiry: Most studies rely on surveys and statistical analysis, failing to capture the lived experiences and contextual nuances of HR practitioners.

Limited Sectoral Diversity: Research is often confined to corporate settings, with minimal engagement with public sector institutions, academia, or healthcare.

Neglect of Cultural Factors: Few studies explore how cultural norms, power dynamics, and organizational politics shape the adoption and use of HR analytics.

Absence of Longitudinal Perspectives: There is a need for longitudinal studies that track the evolution of HR analytics practices over time, particularly in transitional economies.

Toward a Contextualized Understanding

This study seeks to address these gaps by offering a qualitative, interview-based exploration of HR analytics in Pakistan. By engaging directly with HR professionals across sectors, the research aims to generate grounded insights that reflect the complexities of organizational life. It also seeks to theorize HR analytics not as a universal solution, but as a contextually embedded practice shaped by institutional histories, cultural logics, and strategic imperatives.

In doing so, the study contributes to a more nuanced and inclusive literature on HR analytics—one that recognizes the diversity of organizational contexts and the multiplicity of practitioner perspectives.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a **qualitative exploratory design**, rooted in an interpretivist paradigm. The goal is to understand how HR professionals in Pakistan perceive, experience, and implement HR analytics within their organizational contexts.

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Qualitative research is particularly suited for this inquiry because it allows for deep engagement with participants' lived experiences, institutional narratives, and socio-cultural dynamics—elements often overlooked in quantitative studies.

The exploratory nature of the design reflects the nascent stage of HR analytics adoption in Pakistan. Rather than testing hypotheses or measuring variables, the study seeks to generate grounded insights and develop a contextualized understanding of HR analytics as a strategic and cultural phenomenon.

Research Approach: Interview-Based Inquiry
Data Collection Method: Semi-Structured Interviews
Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data collection method due to their flexibility and depth. This format allows the researcher to guide the conversation around key themes while also enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives.

Interview Guide Topics:
Definitions and conceptualizations of HR analytics
Current practices and tools used
Strategic alignment with organizational goals
Barriers to adoption (technical, cultural, structural)
Perceived benefits and future aspirations

Interview Duration: 45–60 minutes per session

Mode of Interview: In-person (Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad) and virtual (Zoom/Teams) depending on participant availability and geographic location
Recording and Transcription: With consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis

Sampling Strategy
A **purposive sampling** technique was employed to ensure diversity in sector, organizational maturity, and professional experience. Participants were selected based on their active involvement in HR functions and familiarity with analytics-related practices.

Sample Size: 15–20 HR professionals

Sectors Represented:
Corporate (e.g., banking, telecom, FMCG)
Academia (e.g., universities and educational institutions)
Healthcare (e.g., hospital HR departments)
Public Sector (e.g., government HR units)
This cross-sectoral approach allows for comparative insights and highlights sector-

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specific challenges and innovations.

Ethical Considerations
Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the research process in accordance with institutional guidelines and international standards for qualitative inquiry.

Informed Consent: All participants received a detailed consent form outlining the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits.

Confidentiality: Participant identities were anonymized using pseudonyms. Organizational names were withheld unless explicit permission was granted.

Voluntary Participation: Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

Ethical Approval: The study received clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Hamdard University.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis
Thematic analysis was chosen as the analytical framework due to its suitability for identifying patterns and meanings within qualitative data. The process followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase model:

Phase 1: Familiarization
All interview transcripts were read multiple times to immerse the researcher in the data. Initial notes were made to capture early impressions and recurring ideas.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes
Using NVivo software, transcripts were coded line-by-line. Codes were both inductive (emerging from the data) and deductive (based on literature and research questions). Examples of initial codes include:
"Data resistance"
"Strategic disconnect"
"Excel dependency"
"Analytics as reporting"

Phase 3: Searching for Themes
Codes were grouped into broader themes that captured significant patterns across the dataset. Preliminary themes included:

Conceptual ambiguity around HR analytics
Technological and infrastructural barriers
Cultural resistance and leadership inertia
Sectoral disparities in adoption

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Aspirational visions for analytics integration

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes
Themes were reviewed for coherence, distinctiveness, and relevance to the research objectives. Overlapping themes were merged, and outliers were re-examined for contextual significance.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes
Each theme was clearly defined and named to reflect its essence. For example:
"Strategic Misalignment" refers to the disconnect between HR analytics and organizational planning
"Cultural Resistance" captures the reluctance of leadership and staff to embrace data-driven practices

Phase 6: Producing the Report
Themes were woven into a narrative that integrates participant quotes, theoretical insights, and contextual analysis. This forms the basis of the Findings and Discussion section.

Ensuring Trustworthiness and Rigor
To enhance the credibility and reliability of the study, the following strategies were employed:

Credibility: Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with select participants for validation.

Transferability: Thick descriptions of organizational contexts were provided to allow readers to assess applicability to other settings.

Dependability: An audit trail was maintained, documenting all decisions related to coding, theme development, and interpretation.

Confirmability: Reflexive journaling was used to monitor researcher bias and ensure that findings were grounded in participant narratives.

Limitations of the Methodology
While the qualitative approach offers depth and richness, it also presents certain limitations:

Generalizability: Findings are not statistically generalizable but offer analytical insights applicable to similar contexts.
Access Constraints: Some organizations declined participation due to confidentiality concerns or lack of interest.

Subjectivity: Interpretation of data is inherently subjective, though mitigated through triangulation and reflexivity.

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Findings and Discussion

This section presents the key themes that emerged from semi-structured interviews with HR professionals across corporate, academic, healthcare, and public sector organizations in Pakistan. Each theme is supported by direct quotes, interpretive commentary, and connections to the literature.

Conceptual Ambiguity and Misunderstanding of HR Analytics

Despite growing global awareness, many HR professionals in Pakistan struggle to define HR analytics beyond basic reporting.

"We use Excel sheets to track attendance and turnover. Is that HR analytics? I'm not sure." — HR Manager, Telecom Sector

This confusion reflects a lack of formal training and exposure to strategic analytics frameworks. Most participants equated HR analytics with operational metrics (e.g., headcount, absenteeism) rather than predictive or prescriptive tools.

Interpretation: This theme aligns with Khan & Qureshi (2021), who found that only 18% of Pakistani firms use analytics beyond basic metrics. The conceptual gap hinders strategic integration and limits the transformative potential of analytics.

Strategic Misalignment between HR Analytics and Organizational Goals

Participants consistently reported a disconnect between HR analytics initiatives and broader organizational strategy.

"Our leadership wants data, but they don't know what to do with it. There's no strategic direction." — HR Director, Private University

In many cases, HR departments collected data reactively, often to satisfy compliance or audit requirements, rather than proactively to inform strategic decisions.

Interpretation: This misalignment reflects a lack of top-down commitment and strategic clarity. According to Marler & Boudreau (2017), analytics must be embedded within organizational planning to be effective. In Pakistan, this integration remains weak, especially in public and academic institutions.

Technological and Infrastructural Constraints

Limited access to advanced HRIS platforms and analytics tools was a recurring concern.

"We still rely on manual records. There's no centralized system for HR data." — HR Officer, Public Hospital

Even in corporate settings, participants noted that legacy systems and fragmented databases made it difficult to perform meaningful analysis.

Interpretation: Technological barriers are a major impediment to analytics adoption. This finding echoes Ahmed & Shah (2020), who highlighted

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infrastructural gaps in Pakistani banks. Without integrated systems, data remains siloed and underutilized.

Cultural Resistance and Leadership Inertia

Several participants described a cultural reluctance to embrace data-driven decision-making.

"Our senior management prefers intuition. They think analytics is too technical or unnecessary." — HR Lead, FMCG Sector

This resistance was often rooted in hierarchical organizational cultures, where decisions are centralized and innovation is discouraged.

Interpretation: Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) helps explain this phenomenon. In Pakistan, deeply embedded norms and power structures shape organizational behavior, often resisting change. Cultural resistance must be addressed through leadership development and change management.

Sectoral Disparities in HR Analytics Adoption

The study revealed significant differences in analytics maturity across sectors:

Corporate Sector: MNCs showed higher adoption due to global mandates and access to tools.
Academic Sector: Universities lacked strategic orientation and relied on administrative data.
Healthcare Sector: Hospitals faced infrastructural and regulatory constraints.
Public Sector: Government units were largely unaware of HR analytics as a concept.

"We've heard of HR analytics, but it's not something we're trained in or expected to use." — HR Coordinator, Government Office

Interpretation: These disparities suggest that sector-specific strategies are needed. One-size-fits-all solutions will not work in Pakistan's diverse institutional landscape. Tailored interventions, including training and policy support, are essential.

Aspirational Visions and Future Potential

Despite challenges, many participants expressed optimism about the future of HR analytics.

"If we had the right tools and training, HR analytics could really help us understand our people better." —

HR Manager, Higher Education

Some organizations had begun pilot projects, such as predictive modeling for employee turnover or engagement surveys linked to performance metrics.

Interpretation: This aspirational theme reflects a readiness for change. With proper investment and leadership support, HR analytics can evolve from a technical function to a strategic enabler in Pakistan.

Integrating Analytics into Strategic HRM: A Path Forward

Based on the findings, the following integration model is proposed:

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Strategic Element	Required Action
Leadership Buy-In	Executive training on data-driven HRM
Infrastructure	Investment in cloud-based HRIS platforms
Capacity Building	Analytics certification for HR professionals
Policy Alignment	National HR analytics guidelines via HEC or MoE
Cultural Change	Promote data literacy and innovation culture

Interpretation: This model aligns with the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991), positioning HR analytics as a strategic capability. It also reflects the need for institutional reform and cross-sector collaboration.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and institutional realities surrounding HR analytics in Pakistan through a qualitative, interview-based approach. The findings reveal a complex and fragmented landscape, where HR analytics is both a promising innovation and a misunderstood concept.

Thematic analysis uncovered six dominant themes: conceptual ambiguity, strategic misalignment, technological constraints, cultural resistance, sectorial disparities, and aspirational visions. These themes reflect not only the technical and infrastructural challenges but also the deeper cultural and strategic tensions that shape HR practices in Pakistan.

At its core, HR analytics in Pakistan is still in its infancy. While multinational corporations and select private institutions have begun integrating analytics into strategic HRM, the majority of organizations remain stuck in transactional modes of operation. The lack of formal training, leadership buy-in, and integrated systems continues to hinder progress.

Yet, the interviews also revealed a strong desire among HR professionals to evolve—to move beyond spreadsheets and intuition toward evidence-based decision-making. This aspiration, if nurtured through policy, investment, and education, could transform HR departments into strategic partners capable of driving institutional growth and resilience.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to support the development and integration of HR analytics in Pakistan:

Institutional Capacity Building

HR Analytics Training Programs: Universities and professional bodies should offer certification courses in HR analytics, covering tools like Power BI, Tableau, and SPSS, as well as strategic frameworks.

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Faculty Development: Academic institutions should train HR faculty to incorporate analytics into business and management curricula.

Cross-Sector Workshops: Organize national workshops bringing together HR professionals from corporate, public, and academic sectors to share best practices.

Strategic Alignment and Leadership Engagement

Executive Education: Senior leadership must be educated on the strategic value of HR analytics through targeted programs and seminars.

HR Strategy Integration: Organizations should embed analytics into HR planning cycles, linking workforce data to KPIs and strategic goals.

Analytics Champions: Appoint internal champions within HR departments to lead analytics initiatives and foster a data-driven culture.

Technological Infrastructure Development

Investment in HRIS Platforms: Organizations should transition from manual systems to cloud-based HRIS platforms with built-in analytics capabilities.

Data Governance Frameworks: Establish protocols for data collection, storage, privacy, and usage to ensure ethical and effective analytics practices.

Interoperability: Encourage integration between HR systems and other organizational databases (e.g., finance, operations) to enable holistic analysis.

Cultural Transformation and Change Management

Promote Data Literacy: Conduct internal campaigns to demystify analytics and promote its relevance to everyday HR functions.

Inclusive Decision-Making: Encourage participatory approaches where HR staffs are involved in analytics design and implementation.

Recognition and Incentives: Reward data-driven initiatives and innovations within HR departments to reinforce cultural change.

Policy and Regulatory Support

HEC and MOE Guidelines: The Higher Education Commission and Ministry of Education should develop national guidelines for HR analytics in academic institutions.

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Public Sector Reform: Government HR units should be supported in adopting analytics through pilot programs and policy mandates.
National HR Analytics Framework: Develop a standardized framework for HR analytics adoption across sectors, aligned with Pakistan's Vision 2025 and SDGs.

Final Reflection

HR analytics is not merely a technical tool—it is a strategic lens through which organizations can understand, empower, and optimize their human capital. In Pakistan, the journey toward analytics maturity will require more than software and dashboards; it will demand a cultural shift, institutional commitment, and visionary leadership.

This study contributes to that journey by amplifying the voices of HR professionals, illuminating the barriers they face, and offering a roadmap for transformation. As Pakistan continues to modernize its organizational landscape, HR analytics can serve as a catalyst for evidence-based, inclusive, and strategic human resource management.

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