

Agile HR-Based Employee Management Practices for Improving Hospital Service Delivery

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Abstract

The effective management of the human resources of a hospital is essential for the delivery of high-quality healthcare services, a task that has become incredibly challenging in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in India. The efficient management of employees is a top priority in healthcare organisations, which is why human resources (HR) plays a pivotal role in their functioning. It includes strategies for improving employee engagement, productivity, motivation, adaptability to change, welfare, and overall health in addition to traditional HR concerns. As part of this process, conducive working conditions must be created, talent management practices must be implemented, and flexibility must be provided to meet the evolving needs of healthcare professionals. The adoption of Agile HR practices is gaining momentum among hospitals in response to the dynamic challenges they face. In the Agile approach, the development cycle of 'Plan, Do, Check, and Act (PDCA)' enables real-time responsiveness. Through a qualitative research design with in-depth interviews conducted through purposive sampling, this study explores the implementation of Agile HR practices in hospitals located in Kerala and Karnataka. The research presents a novel human resources operating model, termed the 'Agile HR Model,' which advocates the integration of Agile principles into the management of healthcare employees. A key objective of this model is to enhance hospital service delivery by embracing agility and adaptability. The study provides HR managers and healthcare professionals with insights into enhancing the delivery of healthcare services.

Keywords: Agile HR Practice, Healthcare Services, Hospitals, HR Management, Service Delivery.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of healthcare, as well as the value of healthcare professionals. We require highly skilled and efficient healthcare professionals in order to provide the highest quality healthcare services. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was crucial for the entire healthcare sector to remain focused and cooperative in a dynamically changing environment (1). In the age of Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA), hospital management is primarily concerned with human resources management. Indian healthcare services and systems are still in the process of developing, with challenges such as a shortage of personnel, absenteeism, inadequate infrastructure, and poor quality of care (2). An appropriately trained and motivated workforce is critical to the success of a

health system, and improved human resource management facilitates the delivery of more effective, efficient, and quality health care (3). Healthcare delivery organizations require innovation in order to survive and thrive, following in the footsteps of other industries that depend on innovation to remain competitive (4).

Many healthcare organisations have recognised the need for innovative and sustainable methods to maintain human resources. It is generally accepted that Agile HR can be conceptualized as an HR operational strategy that uses agile principles to implement the HR function's processes; to our knowledge, HR researchers have not explored this conceptualization of Agile HR in depth (5). In order to help the whole organization, become more agile, the HR function must become more agile as well.

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A flexible operating model is a critical component of finding ways in which human resources can contribute value in an environment that is constantly evolving (6). It proves to be a highly effective management technique to apply agile principles to HRM practices. The Agile HR philosophy aims to reduce waste and maximize customer satisfaction by organizing the human resources function into multidisciplinary, empowered teams that continuously align with the changing needs of the business by sensing and adapting through open communication and short cycles of operation. HR operations are guided by agile principles in all areas, including structures, roles, processes, tools, as well as HR management and employee behaviours (5). Healthcare HR managers and administrators are looking for an HR model that best suits their hospital. In this context, we conducted a qualitative study in selected private hospitals in the states of Kerala and Karnataka, India, to examine Agile HR-based employee management practices in hospital settings for improving service delivery.

Review Of Literature

According to Swain Sumant et al. (7), providing quality healthcare services requires a properly oriented, trained, and skilled health workforce to meet the functional requirements of the healthcare delivery system at varying levels. In their research study, Aksenova et al. (8), identify and define the challenges of human resource management in healthcare and highlight the importance of employing HRM practices to improve the quality of healthcare delivery. According to Holden et al. (9), agility can be viewed as a customer-centered innovation process for complex adaptive systems that can be employed as a standard practice within healthcare delivery organizations. Chakraborty et al. (10), investigate the relationship between green and agile practices and aim to empirically validate their findings. An article published in Junita (11), explores Agile HR strategies designed to develop and maintain agile workforces that play a significant role in achieving and preserving sustainable competitive advantage. Subramanian and Suresh (12), offer managers a framework for evaluating their store's performance using agile HRM techniques in their literature review. Additionally, it suggests that HRM

can be applied in conjunction with agile techniques in order to improve an organization's agility. McMackin and Heffernan (5), describe Agile HR as an area of increasing interest among HR professionals in response to uncertain environments. Their analysis indicates that HR operational models are largely overlooked in SHRM research, and they propose a research agenda that integrates agile as an HR operational strategy. Dank and Hellstrom (6), provide an overview of Agile HR and the benefits that can be gained when Agile HR practices are implemented within organizations in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in their celebrated work.

It is evident from the extant literature that Agile HR is transforming Human Resource practices in hospitals. HR management practices are increasingly incorporating Agile principles into their practices that have the potential to bring about a radical change in service delivery models and enhance the delivery of healthcare services.

Objectives of the Study

- To understand HRM challenges and Agile HR practices in healthcare in India.
- To explore the application of Agile HR practices in HRM in healthcare.
- To recommend Agile HR-based employee management practices to healthcare to improve hospital service delivery.

Research Problem

According to Dank and Hellstrom (6), hospitals in the Indian healthcare system face numerous challenges. Among these challenges are an increase in patient demands, an increase in competition, evolving public health issues, and a persistent shortage of human resources. In order to meet the growing demand for healthcare services in India, hospitals need to enhance efficiency, as noted by Sindhwani et al., (13). It is clear that improving employee satisfaction is critical to achieving this objective, with the belief that content and engaged healthcare professionals are better positioned to meet the demands of an ever-evolving healthcare environment. Berlin et al. (14), emphasize the relationship between employee satisfaction and prioritizing customer needs, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of internal organizational dynamics and external service

delivery. To address these challenges, a holistic approach is required that aligns employee satisfaction with the overarching goal of meeting the diverse and increasing healthcare needs of Indians.

Research Method

We employed a qualitative research approach based on a semi-structured interview guide. In-depth interviews were conducted with ten participants, including seven males and three females, from five NABH-accredited: (National Accreditation Board for Hospitals), large private hospitals, (each with more

than 100 beds) from the state of Kerala and Karnataka, India. Table 1 provides a list of selected hospitals and details regarding participants. Interviews were conducted between September to November 2023. We selected this sampling strategy and methodology in order to gain nuanced insight into the perspectives and experiences of healthcare professionals in accredited hospitals with a diverse representation of both genders for a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Table 1: List of selected hospitals and participants

Hospital Name	State	Number of beds	Participant 1	Participant 2
Hospital 1 (H1)	Kerala	670	P1	P2
Hospital 2 (H2)	Kerala	650	P3	P4
Hospital 3 (H3)	Kerala	500	P5	P6
Hospital 4 (H4)	Karnataka	250	P7	P8
Hospital 5 (H5)	Karnataka	1250	P9	P10

Research Design

A phenomenological research design was adopted in this study. It aimed at elucidating the personal experiences of individuals about the implementation HR principles in healthcare and service delivery across Indian healthcare institutions. The study takes an interpretivist epistemological position derived from phenomenology, which exemplifies how humans interpret their surroundings and is concerned with their lived experiences. The interpretive paradigm was used because it helps the researcher better understand Agile HR practices in hospitals. The method facilitates the collection of in-depth information on Agile HR practices in healthcare to improve hospital service delivery (15). The in-depth interviews assisted the researcher to draw conclusions regarding existing and emerging Agile HR practices, even if the participants were unaware of Agile HR principles or Agile HR practices. The study employed a purposive sampling approach in order to interview participants (16). HR managers/HR team members and administrative heads holding the position of CEO, COO, or Director/Assistant Director/Administrator of the identified private Hospital in Kerala and Karnataka. In order to maintain privacy, codes were issued to

both the hospitals and participants. The hospitals were designated with codes such as H1=Hospital 1, H2=Hospital 2, and so on, while the individuals were designated with codes such as P1=Participant 1, P2=Participant 2, and so on.

Data Collection Technique

The researchers collected qualitative data from participants through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured guide. Drawing on literature regarding HR difficulties in hospitals and the implementation of innovative and Agile HR methods, the data was gathered through these interviews, capturing the associated challenges. Interview questions were constructed in a way that centers around the subject matter of interest, without restricting the scope to a particular aspect of the experience.

A semi-structured interview protocol was devised to collect comprehensive data, including face-to-face interviews recorded on audiotape to ensure accuracy. The interview guide was validated by three academic experts and one healthcare industry expert. The duration of each interview was approximately 35 to 45 minutes during each interview, there was a thorough discussion on the

subject between the researcher and the interviewees. There was a total of 14 questions in the interview guide, two of which served as introductory questions. The first question, 'could you please explain in brief what are the 'major issues and challenges' you face in managing Human Resources at your hospital?' was to understand the existing HRM challenges in Healthcare while the second question, 'Could you please explain a few 'latest developments' in Human Resource management at your hospital?' was to explore the latest developments in HRM, especially in healthcare. The remaining twelve questions were tailored to address the 12 agile principles outlined in the article being discussed. Participants were deliberately aligned with agile principles to elicit nuanced responses, offering insight into the practical application and understanding of these principles in the context of the discussed HR practices (17, 6). The semi-structured format provided a balance between guided inquiries and the flexibility needed for participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions. In this manner, a thorough exploration of how agile principles are manifested in HR practices within a selected context was undertaken,

enriching the depth and relevance of the data collected.

Sampling Technique

In this study, purposive sampling was chosen based on practical considerations. In particular, the selected hospitals were strategic large-scale facilities with more than 100 beds, as well as accredited by the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH). The criteria were specifically selected for the purpose of ensuring a robust representation of multi-speciality private hospitals committed to delivering high-quality care (18). The inclusion of hospital administrators and HR managers as key participants were imperative since they are well-versed in HR practices. A minimum of three years of hospital experience was also required for participants, ensuring that the insights gathered were grounded in a thorough understanding of the complexities and challenges associated with HR practices within the healthcare sector. Purposive sampling was carefully designed to align with the specific parameters essential for obtaining meaningful and contextually relevant data. Table 2 provides a visual representation of the samples' characteristics and properties.

Table 2: Sample Description

Gender	Designation	Number of Matching Cases
Male	COO/CEO	3
Female	COO/CEO	0
Male	HR executive/Manager	3
Female	HR executive/Manager	2
Male	Administration	1
Female	Administration	1

Data Analysis

A comprehensive analysis of the information gathered from interviews was conducted using word clouds and reflexive thematic analysis techniques using NVIVO Software as the analytical tool. Braun and Clarke (19) delineated a reflexive thematic analysis as a six-step procedure, encompassing the stages of: 1. Familiarizing oneself with the data, 2. Generating preliminary codes, 3. Constructing themes, 4. Reviewing potential themes, 5. Defining and naming themes, and 6. Producing the report. There were four steps involved in the data analysis

process: open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and theme integration. As a first step in coding, meaningful units were identified and categorised after reviewing and organising the data into a more manageable format. Based on these meaningful units, categories were subsequently developed, using the research objectives as a guide (20).

A specific code was assigned to each characteristic or expectation, and these codes were further categorized into broader categories. In the end, these broader categories were used to generate overarching themes. During the initial coding phase, memoing was employed as a strategy to facilitate

idea development. Afterwards, the data was entered into the analysis, with the properties associated with each category guiding the analysis. In accordance with the research objectives, this rigorous and systematic approach ensured a thorough examination of the collected data. We conducted a

word cloud analysis to better understand the data by identifying the 50 most frequently occurring words as shown in Figure 1. The following word cloud shows the highest-frequency words within the dataset.



Figure1: Word Cloud Analysis- 50 most frequent words.

Findings

Critical HR Challenges in Healthcare

This study explores the profound challenges associated with human resources (HR) within the healthcare sector, shedding light on critical issues that impede the sector's productivity based on the first question: - 'Could you please explain in brief what are the 'major issues and challenges' you face in managing Human Resources at your hospital?' Among the principal challenges is the persistently high attrition rate among nurses, which contributes to workforce instability and threatens the continuity of patient care. In addition, the migration of healthcare professionals abroad adds pressure to the local talent pool, ultimately resulting in a reduction in the quality of healthcare services provided. The shortage of personnel exacerbates these challenges, resulting in increased workloads and potentially compromised patient care (21).

Healthcare organizations face a nuanced yet significant challenge of language competitiveness,

which affects the effectiveness of communication. The proliferation of facilities within hospitals also introduces logistical complexities, requiring strategic management solutions. In the healthcare industry, human resource challenges are further exacerbated by employee turnover intentions, recruitment difficulties, employee commitment issues, and burnout (22).

The importance of addressing these challenges promptly is underscored by a powerful insight from a human resources manager. It emphasizes the importance of implementing comprehensive strategies in order to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of healthcare delivery. This observation emphasizes the multifaceted nature of HR challenges within the healthcare domain, which call for holistic and adaptive approaches to address the intricate interplay of factors affecting the healthcare workforce. Recognizing and proactively addressing these challenges become increasingly important as the healthcare landscape evolves. One HR manager stated:

“The major challenges are scarcity of the workforce, high attrition rate, burnout, training and development. After Covid, the opportunities for healthcare workers have grown huge in India and

abroad, and thus, people are leaving us and mostly migrating abroad.” (Participant- P2)

Figures 2 and 3 show the latest Human Resource Challenges in healthcare as expressed by the participants.

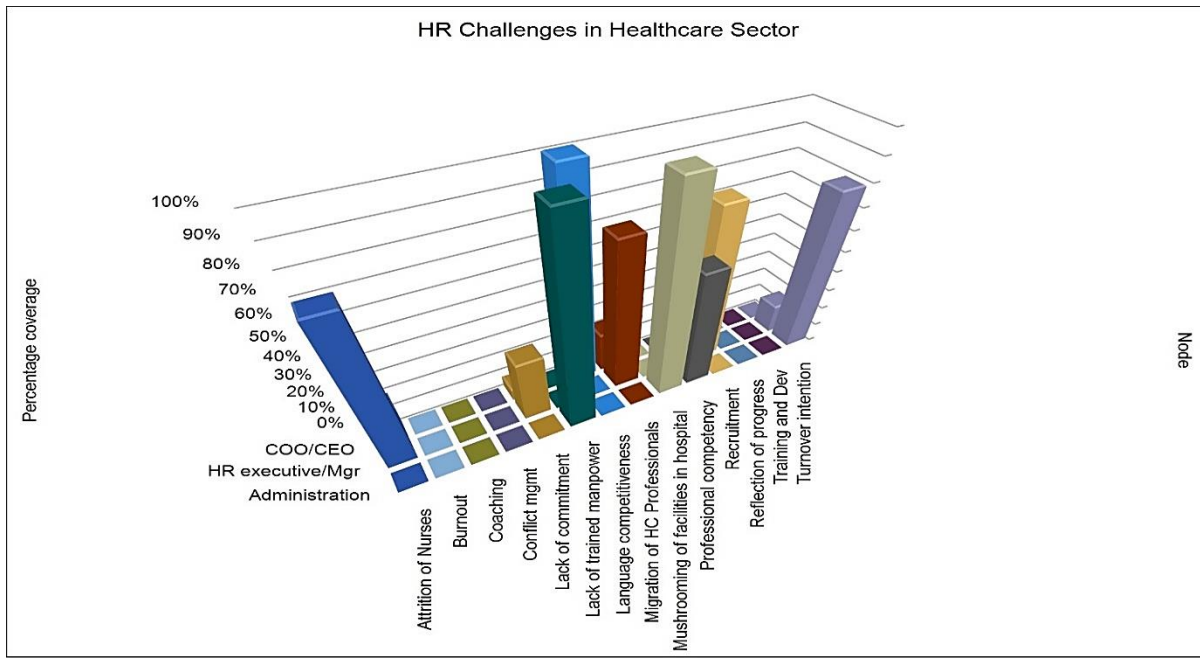


Figure 2: HR Challenges in healthcare

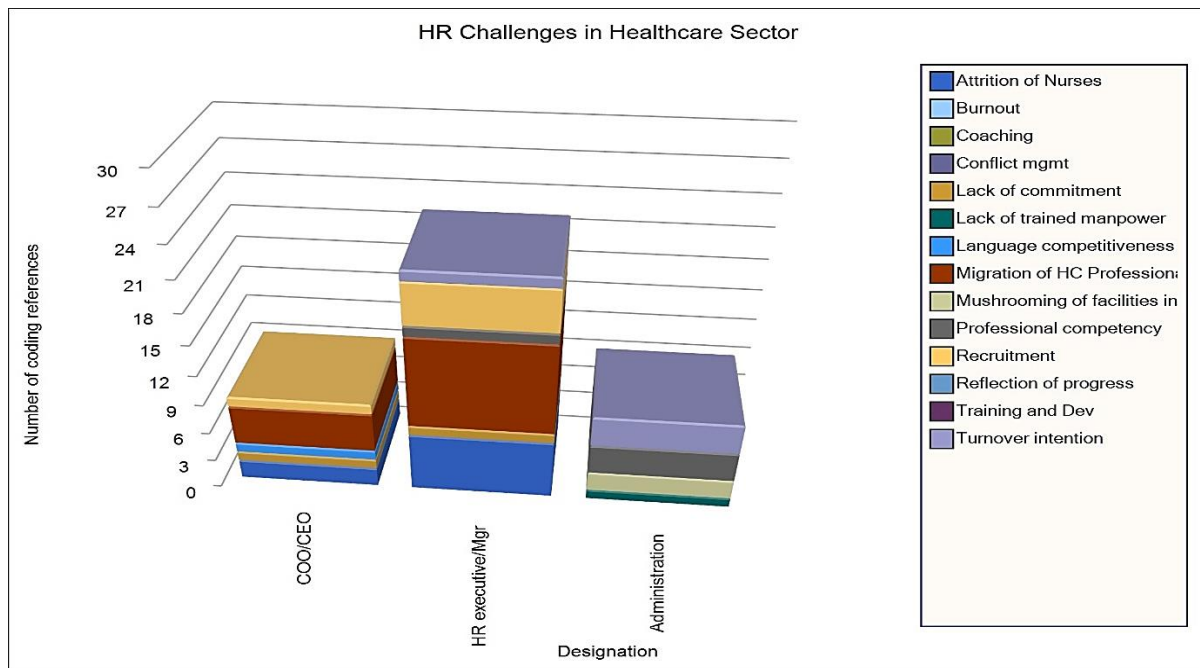


Figure 3: HR Challenges in healthcare

Latest Developments in HR in Healthcare

Inquiring about the contemporary landscape of Human Resources Management in healthcare, participants were asked about their awareness of recent developments; the second question: - 'Could you please explain a few 'latest developments' in Human Resource management at your hospital? A number of key aspects were highlighted in the responses. First, there was a focus on adaptive learning, illustrating a recognition of the need for HR strategies that accommodate the evolving skills and knowledge of the healthcare workforce. Feedback mechanisms were included in order to demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement and employee engagement. Fostering a healthy work environment requires transparency in communication and a culture of safety (23). As a result of the mention of empowerment, it was suggested that there was a shift towards decentralization and employee involvement in decision-making processes.

A notable innovation was the integration of artificial intelligence into recruitment, as well as the use of app-based applications. A number of participants acknowledged the adoption of HR practices from other industries, emphasizing the importance of cross-sector insights. An attractive compensation package, accommodations, transportation facilities, profit sharing, and enticing incentives are all examples of a holistic approach to talent management in the healthcare industry (24). As a whole, these insights indicate a dynamic and multifaceted shift in HR strategies within the healthcare industry.

"One of the latest strategies is 'going digital'. Nowadays, getting paper works is becoming weaker and weaker. App-based HR Module is something latest. AI-based recruitment strategies are something that is coming to the forefront." (Participant- P3)

Figures 4 and 5 show the New HR strategies in healthcare/ latest developments in healthcare as expressed by the participants.

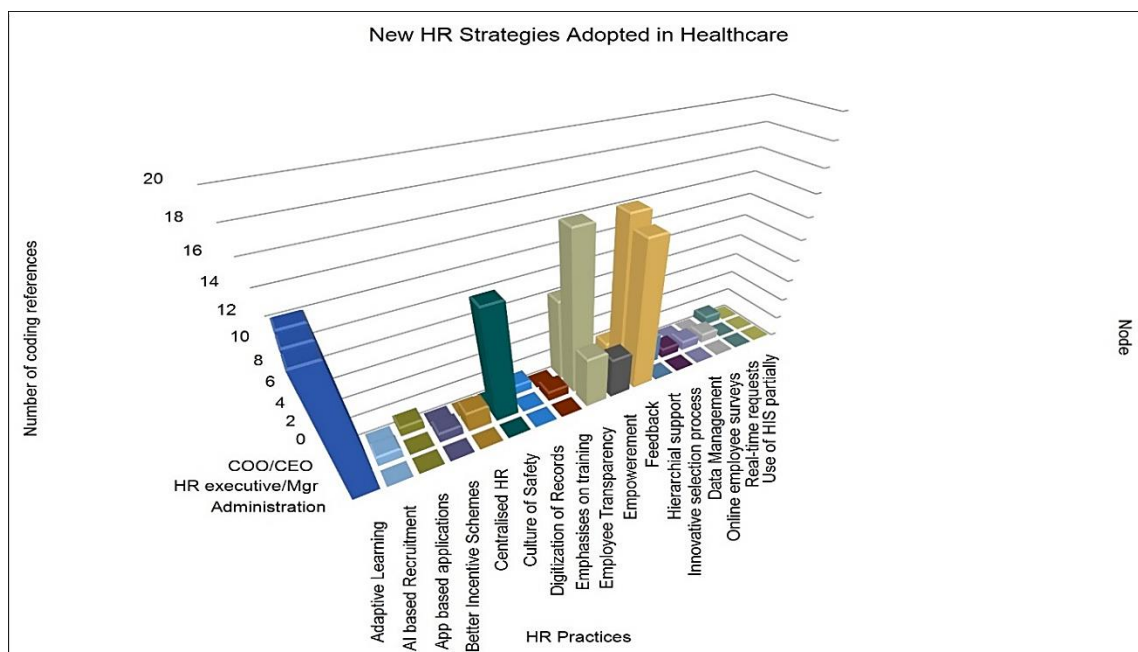


Figure 4: New HR strategies in healthcare/ Latest developments in healthcare

Agile Principles at HR practices in healthcare

The inquiry was structured around 12 fundamental Agile principles in order to examine the integration

of Agile principles into Human Resources (HR) practices within selected hospitals. In order to foster agility in organizational operations, these principles encompass a spectrum of values. The Agile mindset

is founded upon the principles delineated in the Agile Manifesto, which are encapsulated in the following 12 guiding tenets: 1. Prioritization of customer needs, 2. Flexibility in planning, 3. Incremental value delivery, 4. Commitment to continuous improvement, 5. Emphasis on transparency, 6. Focus on simplicity, 7. Utilisation of evidence-based

approaches, 8. Maintenance of sustainable velocity, 9. Ensuring simplicity in Execution, 10. Encouragement of self-organising teams, 11. Valuing individuals and their interactions, and 12. Fostering trust. Questions three to fourteen were formulated to assess and comprehend the integration of these Agile principles into HR practices (25).

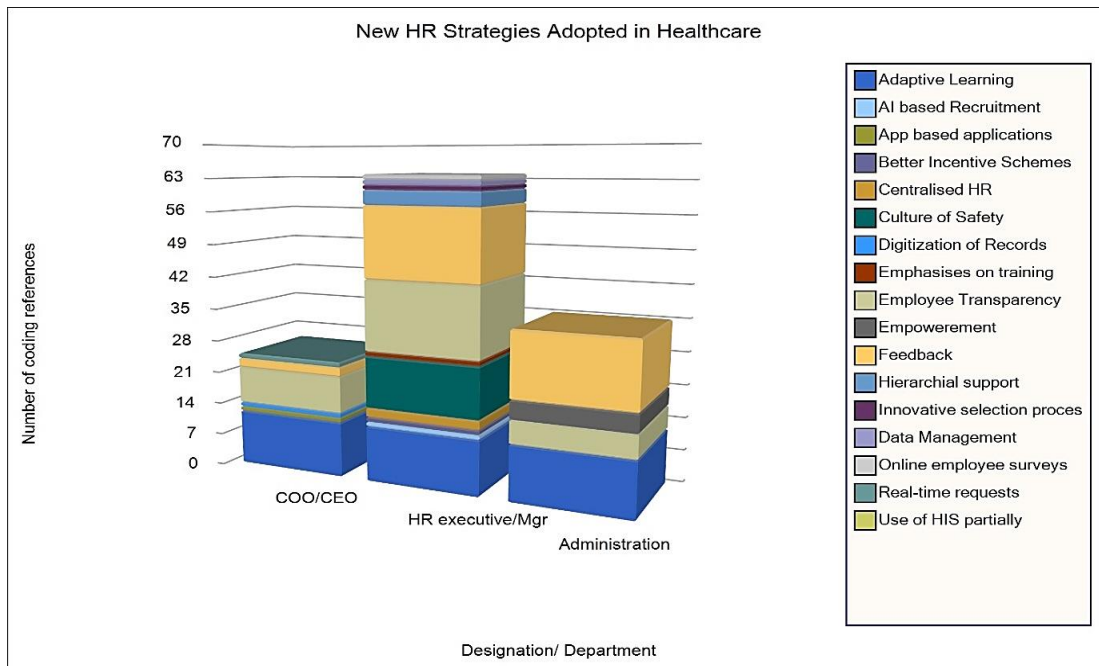


Figure 5: New HR strategies in healthcare/ Latest developments in healthcare

The Network Map in Figure 6 illustrates the intricate relationships and dynamics among Agile principles as they manifest in HR practices within hospitals. This approach not only allows for a comprehensive understanding of the Agile framework's application but also serves as a practical guide to align HR strategies with the principles that contribute to organizational flexibility, responsiveness, and overall effectiveness within the healthcare context.

- **Customer centricity:** Delighting the patient or the end customer.
- **Adaptive planning:** Embracing short cycle PDCA ('Plan, Do Check, Act'); welcoming changes even at the later stages of development.
- **Incremental value delivery:** Collaborate with the patient/end-customer to discover value increments.

- **Continuous improvement:** Using inspect and adapt cycle to improve working and service delivery continuously.
- **Transparency:** Clarity in work to enable quick decision making and self-organization.
- **Prioritization:** Focusing on the most valuable work in a disciplined way.
- **Evidence-based:** Gathering evidence before making decisions and prototyping and testing to understand the problem before committing to the project.
- **Sustainable velocity:** Limiting the work in progress to actual capacity and seeking to discover a sustainable workflow.
- **Simplicity:** Improving patient-centric healthcare by streamlining complex processes.
- **Self-organizing teams:** In solving complex business problems, we need cross-functional

teams that can self-organize and innovate together.

- **People and interaction:** Creating the best solutions through collaboration.
- **Trust:** Trusting and supporting people to solve problems. (6)

Discussion

Most hospitals incorporate one or more of the 12 Agile principles into their Human Resource

Management (HRM) practices, according to the research. Interestingly, the participants exhibited a lack of knowledge of the concept of 'Agile HR' when questioned about the latest developments in HRM. The respondents were unanimous in their acknowledgement that new HRM strategies are necessary in order to address current and emerging challenges in healthcare, particularly in hospital settings.

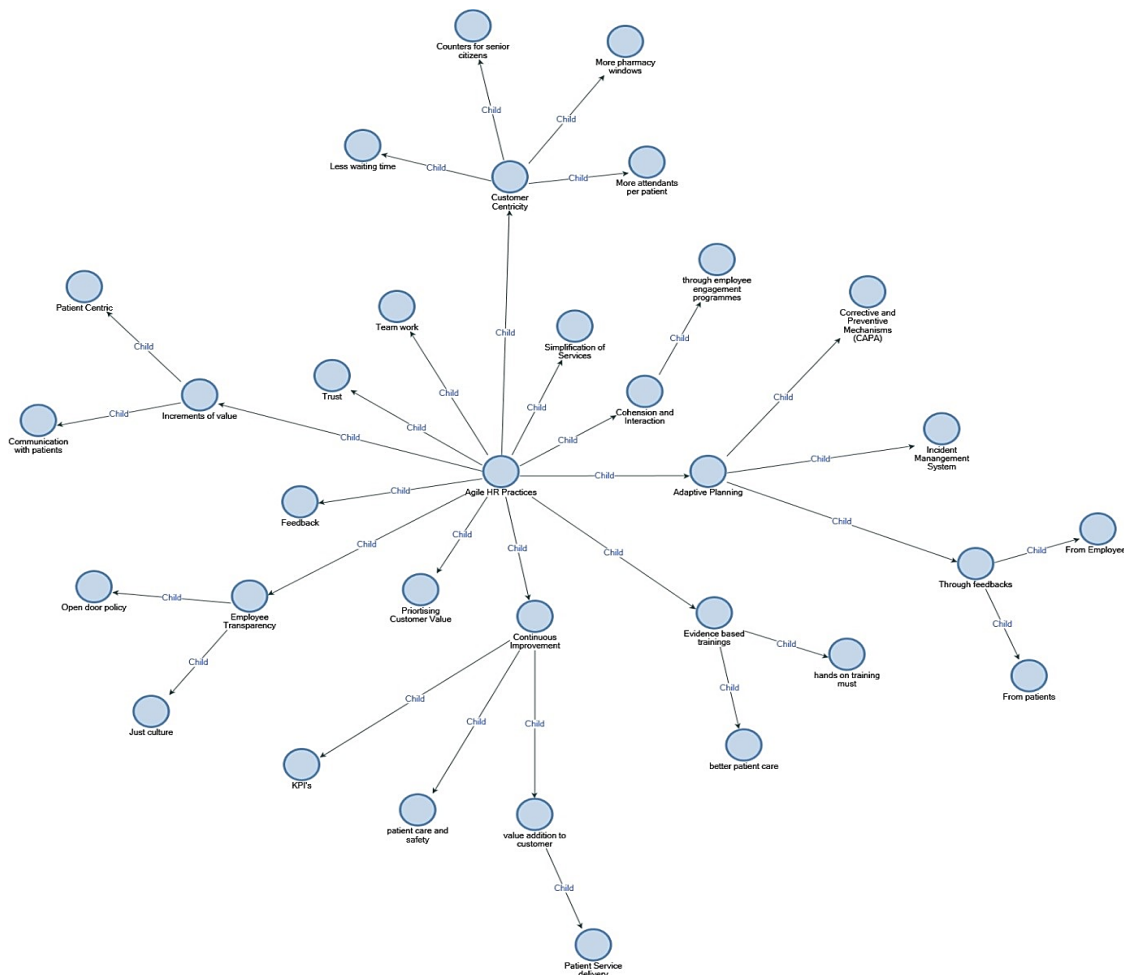


Figure 6: Network Map of Agile Principles at HR practices in healthcare

HR managers expressed a willingness to embrace innovative HRM practices in order to enhance their HR processes. Participants stressed that patient care should be the highest priority. They advocated a customer-centric approach. A hospital actively engages in periodic training of its staff, focusing on patient safety and satisfaction. There was a notable

divergence regarding the concept of 'Sustainable Velocity', despite the majority supporting agile HR principles. In many cases, participants argued that patient care was a dynamic and continuous process, rejecting the notion that it can be reduced to a mechanical progression through predetermined tasks. It is evident from this nuanced insight into the

intersection of Agile principles and HRM practices in hospitals that healthcare management strategies are complex and evolving (26). This is evident from:

“Patient care is a continuous process. See, by saying finish the task and move on to the next; you are dividing the task; you are talking about when there is a particular job. But in places like hospitals, it’s a repetition.” (Participant-P5)

Key Agile HR Principles and Practices in Healthcare

This study examined Agile Human Resource Management (HRM) practices within healthcare and identified dominant principles. Several themes are prominent in HRM practices, indicating their prevalence and importance. According to the findings, all of these principles are in practice, with some exerting a more significant influence on HRM strategies in the healthcare sector. An understanding of these fundamental Agile HR principles is essential for optimising workforce management strategies and enhancing organisational effectiveness within the healthcare sector. The following principles emerged as predominant.

Customer Centricity

According to interviewed HR managers and administrative heads, a strategic commitment to customer or patient centricity is integral to the delivery of services. It reflects the fundamental importance of meeting the needs and expectations of individuals seeking healthcare services. As all stakeholders acknowledge, the healthcare industry, including HR management, revolves around improving patient care. The focus on customer-centricity aligns these professionals' practices with a broader industry shift toward patient-centred care, emphasizing empathic communication and responsiveness to the needs of the individual patient. It fosters a positive and trusting relationship between healthcare providers and patients as well as contributes to the overall quality and effectiveness of healthcare services (27). It signifies a holistic approach to improving the healthcare experience for individuals seeking medical care that is demonstrated by a collaborative approach in HR and administrative domains to customer or patient-centricity.

“Customer centricity, actually that’s what we are always promoting in the hospital, ‘the customer is the king’ is in the front. Whatever they wanted, or whatever is happening in the hospital, all the processes, we make sure that it’s for the benefit of the customer.” (Participant-P6)

Continuous Improvement

The pursuit of continuous improvement is a pervasive and ongoing endeavour across organizations, and the healthcare sector, particularly the hospitals visited, exemplifies this commitment. The acknowledgment that improvement is an ongoing process underscores a proactive approach to refining service delivery. In the context of healthcare, continuous improvement initiatives reflect a dedication to enhancing patient care, operational efficiency, and overall organizational effectiveness. The observation that most hospitals host numerous ongoing improvement programs suggests a dynamic response to the evolving needs of patients and the healthcare sector (28). These initiatives likely encompass diverse aspects, including operational processes, technology integration, and staff training, all aimed at fostering a culture of adaptability and refinement. By prioritizing continuous improvement, hospitals demonstrate a responsiveness to emerging challenges and an unwavering commitment to providing optimal healthcare services in a continually evolving environment. One of the participants says:

“We actually seek out accreditations. We seek out comments, we seek out criticisms, we seek out audits, and that is the basis. Their advice, their comments, and standards help us to improve our system continuously.” (Participant P7)

Employee Transparency

Most participants emphasised the importance of employee transparency, underscoring the need to foster a workplace culture characterized by openness and collective responsibility. When employees are informed that nothing is hidden from them, it indicates a departure from traditional hierarchical structures in favour of more inclusive decision-making processes. In environments where employees are integral to decision-making, a just

culture prevails, distinguishing it from a blame culture. Increasing transparency between management and staff not only improves trust but also promotes a sense of shared responsibility for organisational outcomes (5). Organizations that embrace employee transparency create an environment where information is freely shared, facilitating informed decision-making and fostering a collaborative culture. The use of this approach contributes to a positive work environment, promotes employee engagement, and aligns with contemporary workplace principles which recognize the importance of involving employees in shaping the future of the organization. This stand has been corroborated by Participant P6 thus:

“Transparency is part of the decision-making process. Whatever we do, we declare in an open forum, like the town hall session, what is going to happen in the next month. Any kind of departmental decisions made in consultation with the department staff and the guidelines.”

Prioritizing Customer Value

A comprehensive feedback system coupled with hands-on management practices facilitates a deeper understanding of patient priorities at the hospital. A management team must engage actively with patients, seeking their feedback to make intelligent decisions. Thus, the organisation's response aligns closely with the needs and preferences of its patients. For example, a hospital implemented general-duty doctors on floors after evaluating patient complaints and preferences. This allowed patients to receive immediate assistance and reassurance. The hospital prioritises its activities to add value to the patient experience. A continuous review of processes and policies is conducted, with departments presenting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) every quarter for analysis and action. Data-driven decision-making ensures that decisions are made to enhance patient satisfaction and outcomes. Comprehensive training programs are conducted for all staff, including doctors, to align service delivery with patient expectations. A patient-centric culture permeates the organisation, encouraging a culture of continuous improvement and a tangible impact on the patient's experience.

“The patient is important, and the hospital exists to provide the best possible quality service to the patients. The staff know they were trained and instructed to always focus on patients' priority and patients' satisfaction. We say na? The customer is the king” (Participant P-10).

Self-Organising Teams

Participants unanimously emphasised the importance of teamwork in hospital settings, underscoring its critical role in patient care. It is important to note that the recognition of teamwork as an essential quality signifies a collective understanding that the complexity of healthcare delivery requires collaborative efforts. In hospitals, where the well-being of patients is of utmost importance, effective teamwork is essential for providing comprehensive and coordinated care to patients. A highly transformative effect of teamwork on the quality of healthcare services is underscored by the statement that it brings out excellence. Moreover, the mention of several team-building exercises in practice across hospitals illustrates a proactive approach to fostering an environment of collaboration and teamwork (29). It is likely that these exercises enhance communication, trust, and mutual understanding among healthcare professionals, ultimately improving the overall effectiveness of the healthcare team as a whole. It is evident from the participants' emphasis on self-organising teams that they have a nuanced understanding of its importance in promoting excellence and optimizing patient outcomes in an increasingly dynamic health care environment. One of the participants (P8) said, thus:

“When we talk about teams, we talk about excellence; we don't talk about individual excellence. We understand that a chain is only as strong as the weakest link.”

Trust

The importance of trust in organisational dynamics cannot be overstated, since it serves as a cornerstone for fostering various positive attributes and contributing to the overall development of an organization. A culture of trust establishes a foundation for openness, allowing individuals to express ideas, concerns, and feedback without fear of

retribution. In turn, this openness fosters a just culture, emphasizing fairness and accountability rather than punitive measures (30). A climate of trust fosters honest feedback, enabling constructive communication and continuous improvement. Trust promotes collaborative efforts and synergy among team members, which promotes collaboration. A sense of respect is intrinsically linked to a sense of trust, based on the trust that individuals have in the value and acknowledgement of their contributions. Furthermore, trust is a fundamental element of effective teamwork, which enhances coordination and communication between the members of the team. To create a positive and thriving workplace culture, trust must be established and nurtured at the core of an organization's development. Participant P9 mentioned, thus:

“See, essentially; everything is a relationship, right? The words we call tasks, or service, ultimately these all can be boiled down into relationships, between the patient and doctor, between doctor and nurse, between the doctors, between the doctor and the housekeeping staff; these are all relationships, ok, and the basic essential for any relationship to develop is trust.”

Service Delivery Improvements in healthcare through Agile HR Practices

In this study, content analysis demonstrated that agile HR practices can significantly enhance the delivery of healthcare services. Adopting these practices, characterised by adaptability and responsiveness, marks the beginning of a profound operational shift. Through initiatives such as cross-functional teams, flexible staffing models, ongoing training, and agile feedback mechanisms, communication, resource allocation, and patient care pathways can be optimised (31). Agile HR practices facilitate adaptability and responsiveness, optimise resource allocation, and improve communication. An improvement in patient satisfaction is anticipated because engaged staff will provide personalised care, and operational changes will result in smoother patient interactions. These Agile HR-based techniques collectively facilitate organisational effectiveness and improve patient care outcomes, thus emphasising their importance in

enhancing healthcare service delivery in hospitals (32).

Successful implementation of agile HR practices significantly influences the parameters of service delivery in hospitals, as follows:

Accessibility

Agile HR practices enhance employee flexibility and responsiveness to patient needs. Cross-functional teams, for example, permit swift adjustments to meet the needs of diverse patients. Providing flexible scheduling facilitates timely service, reduces waiting times, and includes separate counters for senior citizens, dedicated counters for vulnerable patients, and ambulance pick-up and drop-off services (33). Agile performance management facilitates rapid feedback loops that allow quick adjustments to enhance accessibility.

Timeliness

A fundamental principle of hospital service delivery is the importance of timeliness. Agile HR practices can significantly improve the delivery of timely services by prioritising customer value and maximising staff flexibility and efficiency. Staff can swiftly adapt to fluctuating demands by engaging in cross-training initiatives, reducing waiting time and ensuring patients receive priority treatment. Training and development programs prepare employees to expedite processes and minimise delays by setting a time-to-market (34). For example, hospitals have implemented agile rostering systems, enabling them to adjust staffing levels quickly in response to the influx of patients.

Effectiveness

Agile HR practices are transforming hospital service delivery by encouraging adaptive workforce strategies, continuous improvement initiatives, teamwork, transparency, customer focus, and evidence-based practices. Through cross-functional teams, hospitals are improving communication and collaboration among staff. A flexible staffing roster enables rapid adjustments to match patient demand, optimising resource allocation and reducing bottlenecks (35). The use of agile performance management facilitates goal alignment and accountability, which enhances the efficiency of service delivery.

Patient Safety

The use of agile HR practices can play a critical role in improving patient safety in hospitals through effective workforce strategies and proactive risk management initiatives based on evidence-based research. A regular safety and security round conducted by the patient safety officer and his team would mitigate the risk of patient safety concerns. It is common for multi-specialty hospitals to implement continuous training programs to ensure that their employees are proficient in safety protocols (36). Embracing agile HR practices can enable hospitals to mitigate risks and improve patient safety, thus improving the quality of healthcare.

Patient-centeredness

Hospitals can implement several strategies to ensure patient-centred care and implement agile HR practices. Participants suggested that rapid skill development programs, on-the-job training, soft skills training, and patient communication training would enable staff to adapt quickly to changing patient needs. A streamlined recruitment process, such as interview dashboards, enables quick responses to staffing shortages, minimising the need for patients to wait, as is the case with some corporate hospitals (37). Continuous feedback mechanisms allow hospitals to address patient concerns and improve service delivery actively.

Efficiency

Agile HR practices can improve the efficiency of patient care services in hospitals through dynamic workforce management and streamlined processes. There are a number of hospitals in which the HR department utilizes cross-functional teams to enhance communication and collaboration, resulting in reduced patient waiting times and increased patient efficiency (38). Flexible staffing models were used in some of the hospitals that participated in the study, allowing rapid adjustments to match patient demand, thus maximising resource allocation and minimising idle time.

Continuity of Care

Several innovative HR practices are being implemented in hospitals to facilitate seamless transitions and enhance continuity of care. Hospitals

with flexible work arrangements, such as rotational shifts, maintain a consistent caregiver team for patients despite scheduling changes, fostering continuity of care. The most advanced corporate hospitals utilise agile communication systems to facilitate efficient sharing of patient information between care teams, resulting in a more coordinated and cohesive approach to patient care (39). Through adopting agile HR practices, Indian hospitals can provide continuous, patient-centred care throughout treatment, thereby enhancing patient satisfaction and continuity of care.

Equity

Adopting agile HR practices in Indian hospitals contributes to equity by fostering fairness and inclusivity throughout service delivery. Hospitals have implemented training programs to address biases and ensure that patients of all races, ethnicities, colours, socioeconomic statuses, and castes receive equal treatment. A culture of inclusion empowers lower-level employees, exemplifying equitable treatment. Many hospitals offer online learning platforms that provide equal growth opportunities (40). Several hospitals use 360-degree feedback to reduce bias in performance evaluations effectively. By adopting agile practices, hospitals can ensure equitable service delivery by promoting talent based on merit rather than background.

Implications and Conclusions

The workforce/human resource, is the cornerstone of any hospital, bearing a major impact on the efficiency of service delivery. Modern hospitals face a variety of challenges in managing their employees, necessitating innovative and flexible approaches within their human resources departments. As a remedy for these challenges, the research at hand advocates for the incorporation of Agile principles into HR management. In contrast to traditional HR practices, Agile HR emphasizes flexibility, encouraging individuals to break free from rigid guidelines, make mistakes, embrace creativity, and engage in continuous self-assessment and learning (41).

Unlike conventional HR practices, agile HR promotes transparency and trust between employees, employers, and customers. This approach enhances

the customer experience. A transformative recommendation emanates from the study: hospitals should develop and implement an Agile HR model, which incorporates Agile HR-based employee management practices. By doing so, hospitals will be able to make substantial improvements in service delivery. As a result of this shift towards Agile principles, traditional, rule-bound approaches to human resources are being replaced with an environment where experimentation, creativity, and learning are the driving forces behind improved service delivery. Embracing the Agile HR model offers a path towards more responsive, transparent, and value-driven human resource management. In response to the dynamic challenges faced by modern hospitals, it is positioned as a strategic response.

Limitations and Future Scope of Research

This study includes only private hospitals, excluding those affiliated with the government. During the data collection process, some respondents asked for clarification of specific terminology used in the questionnaire. It should be noted that the research team observed instances where hospitals shared Human Resource Management (HRM) responsibilities with the Department of Operations Management. There is considerable potential for future exploration of this study, particularly in light of the promising innovations that are expected in the field of Human Resource Management within the healthcare industry. Further research could focus on a comprehensive study of Agile HR-based employee management practices within government or state-run hospitals. The investigation has not delved into an exhaustive examination of agile implementation methodologies, nor has it explored evaluation methodologies for enhancing service delivery, utilising performance assessment metrics.

It is intended that this extension serves to reaffirm and elaborate on the observed benefits of integrating Agile practices into Human Resource Management, providing valuable insights for optimizing employee management in a variety of healthcare settings. It may be possible to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the applicability and effectiveness of Agile HR practices across various healthcare

organizational structures through such a nuanced examination.

Abbreviation

PDCA: Plan, Do, Check, and Act

HRM: Human Resource Management

VUCA: Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous

NABH: National Accreditation Board for Hospitals

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

COO: Chief Operating Officer

KPI: Key Performance Indicators

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Author Contributions

The authors confirm sole responsibility for the following: Development of the study concept and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethics Approval

Ethical approval was not required. However, the first author obtained a letter of permission from the registrar, Christ (Deemed to be) University, Bangalore seeking permission for data collection from the selected hospitals.

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