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CRITICAL ROLES OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN TRANSFORMING AND ADAPTING ORGANIZATIONS IN THE POST-CRISIS MIDDLE EAST

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ABSTRACT

Organizations across the Middle East operate in an environment shaped by armed conflict, political instability, economic volatility, displacement, demographic pressures, technological disruption, and rapidly changing workforce expectations. In such conditions, recovery cannot mean returning organizations to their pre-crisis state; they must instead develop new structures, capabilities, cultures, and workforce models. This study examines the critical role of Human Resource Management (HRM) in transforming and adapting organizations in the post-crisis Middle East. Its objective is to articulate how HRM can move from an administrative support function to an architect of organizational resilience, human-capital reconstruction, and strategic renewal, and to consolidate this role into an actionable framework. Methodologically, the paper adopts a structured conceptual review and synthesis design, integrating strategic HRM, organizational resilience, dynamic-capabilities, psychological-safety, and human-capital perspectives with regional evidence drawn from international-organization reports and Gulf labour-market sources covering both post-conflict states (Syria, Lebanon, Iraq) and Gulf Cooperation Council economies (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain). The analysis identifies seventeen critical HRM roles and organizes them within an integrative pathway running from post-crisis conditions through workforce stabilization and human-capital reconstruction to resilience, adaptation, transformation, and sustainable performance. Results show that the region simultaneously exhibits acute human-capital loss in conflict-affected economies and ambitious, state-led workforce nationalization and diversification in the Gulf, both of which reposition HRM as a strategic institutional capability. The study concludes that organizations cannot rebuild sustainable competitive capability without simultaneously rebuilding their human and social systems, and it proposes the HR RESET framework to guide practice and future research.

Keywords: Human Resource Management; Middle East; Post-Crisis Management; Organizational Resilience; Human Capital; Workforce Nationalization

1 INTRODUCTION

The Middle East represents one of the world's most complex environments for organizational management. Organizations in several countries operate amid overlapping political, economic, technological, demographic, and social pressures. Armed conflict, displacement, inflation, currency volatility, migration of skilled professionals, supply-chain disruption, weakened institutions, unemployment, demographic pressures, and shifting employee expectations frequently occur simultaneously rather than sequentially. Such overlapping disruptions create environments in which organizations must manage immediate operational pressures while preparing for longer-term recovery and transformation.

Traditional HR systems are typically designed around assumptions of relative workforce stability, predictable structures, functioning labour markets, stable compensation, identifiable career paths, manageable turnover, accessible professional talent, consistent laws and institutions, and predictable operating environments. In post-crisis environments, many of these assumptions no longer apply. The contrast within the region is stark: conflict-affected economies such as Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq confront severe human-capital loss and institutional damage, while Gulf economies pursue ambitious, state-led diversification and workforce nationalization under national visions. Both contexts, though different in kind, reposition HRM from administrative support toward strategic institutional capability.

Objectives of the study

The central question is: What should Human Resource Management do when the organization itself must be rebuilt, reoriented, and adapted to a radically changed environment? The study pursues three objectives: (i) to conceptualize the post-crisis organization and the distinction between recovery and renewal; (ii) to identify and systematize the critical roles HRM must perform in post-crisis transformation, grounded in both theory and Middle Eastern evidence; and (iii) to propose an integrative framework and strategic recommendations. The paper argues that HRM becomes one of the principal institutional mechanisms through which organizations regain stability, rebuild capabilities, maintain continuity, and prepare for future disruptions.

2 UNDERSTANDING THE POST-CRISIS ORGANIZATION

A post-crisis organization is not necessarily one operating after a crisis has completely ended. In many Middle Eastern contexts, the boundaries between crisis, stabilization, recovery, and renewed disruption are unclear. Organizations may experience cycles of crisis, stabilization, recovery, adaptation, transformation, and new disruption (Figure 1). Post-crisis management must therefore combine recovery with readiness.

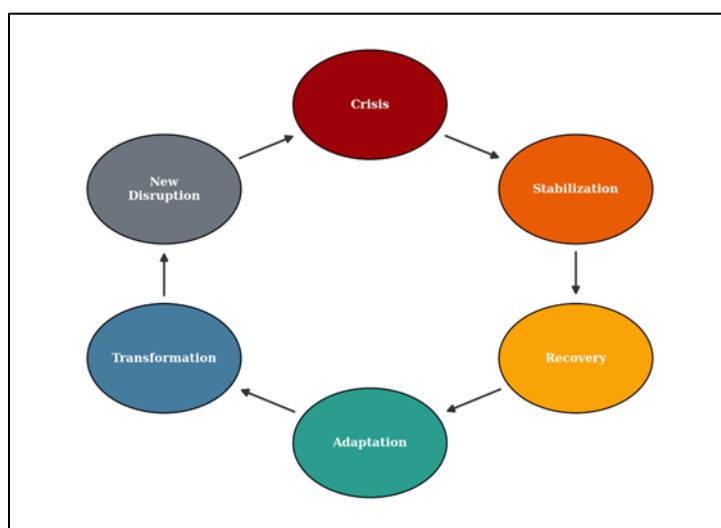


Figure 1: The post-crisis organizational cycle, in which recovery and renewed disruption are recurrent rather than terminal states.

For the purposes of this research, post-crisis conditions include organizational environments affected by political instability, armed conflict, economic collapse or severe recession, extreme inflation, currency depreciation, sanctions and trade restrictions, infrastructure disruption, workforce displacement, emigration of skilled employees, institutional weakness, supply-chain disruption, technological discontinuity, demographic transformation, and declining social and

institutional trust. The objective is not simply to restore the previous organization but to build an organization capable of functioning successfully under the new reality.

3 FROM ORGANIZATIONAL RECOVERY TO ORGANIZATIONAL RENEWAL

There is an important distinction between recovery and transformation. Recovery asks how an organization can return to where it was; transformation asks what organization it now needs to become. For Middle Eastern organizations emerging from prolonged crises, returning to former operating models may be neither possible nor desirable. Pre-crisis structures may have become obsolete, locally available skills may have migrated, employee expectations may have changed, technology may have altered business models, leadership pipelines may have weakened, and traditional compensation structures may no longer correspond with economic realities.

Consequently, organizational resilience should not be interpreted merely as resistance to disruption; it involves the capacity to absorb shocks, adapt operations, learn, reorganize resources, and continue functioning (Lengnick-Hall, Beck, & Lengnick-Hall, 2011). This corresponds closely with the dynamic-capabilities perspective, which emphasizes an organization's ability to sense environmental changes, seize emerging opportunities, and transform resources and structures accordingly (Teece, 2007; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). HRM is central to organizational adaptation because organizational capabilities ultimately reside in people, relationships, knowledge, leadership, culture, and systems of cooperation (Barney, 1991; Boxall & Purcell, 2016).

4 MATERIALS AND METHODS

4.1 Research design

This study adopts a structured conceptual review and synthesis design. Rather than reporting new primary data, it consolidates theory and regional evidence to build an integrative framework for post-crisis HRM. The approach is appropriate where the aim is to organize a multidisciplinary literature—spanning strategic HRM, organizational resilience, dynamic capabilities, psychological safety, and human-capital theory—into a coherent, actionable model suited to a specific empirical context.

4.2 Sources and selection

Two bodies of evidence were combined. The first comprised foundational and peer-reviewed theoretical works on resource-based advantage (Barney, 1991), strategic HRM (Boxall & Purcell, 2016), resilience and HRM (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011), dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007; Teece et al., 1997), organizational culture (Schein, 2010), psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), resilient leadership (Carmeli, Friedman, & Tishler, 2013), and HR roles (Ulrich, 1997). The second comprised regional and country-level evidence from international organizations and Gulf labour-market sources addressing conflict-affected economies and Gulf diversification and nationalization, including reports by the International Labour Organization (2024), the United Nations Development Programme (2023, 2024), and the World Bank (2025). Sources were included when they addressed the relationship between crisis conditions, human capital, and organizational or workforce outcomes in the Middle East, and excluded when they lacked methodological or evidential transparency.

4.3 Analytical framework

Evidence was organized against an a priori socio-technical logic in which post-crisis conditions act on sustainable performance only through HRM-enabled mediators—workforce stabilization, human-capital reconstruction, organizational resilience, and adaptation—culminating in transformation (Figure 4). Each identified HRM role was mapped to one or more mediators, and recurring relationships were consolidated into the HR RESET framework presented in Section 6. Because the study synthesizes published secondary evidence and contains no human-subject data, ethical approval was not required; the analysis is interpretive, and its limitations are discussed in Section 12.

5 RESULTS: CRITICAL ROLES OF HRM IN POST-CRISIS TRANSFORMATION

Synthesis of the theoretical and regional evidence identifies seventeen critical roles that HRM must perform in post-crisis Middle Eastern organizations. These are presented below and consolidated in the framework and pathway that follow.

5.1 HR as an organizational resilience architect

HR must develop people resilience and organizational resilience simultaneously, identifying critical positions and competencies, leadership gaps, single-person dependencies, vulnerable departments, emergency staffing requirements,

succession risks, knowledge concentration, and alternative workforce arrangements. Workforce resilience should be embedded in business-continuity planning rather than treated as a separate activity (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011).

5.2 HR as a human-capital reconstruction function

Conflict and instability frequently produce significant human-capital loss; experienced employees migrate, professionals change industries, organizational knowledge departs, and educational pipelines weaken. The scale can be severe: analyses of Syria's war economy concluded that, with a large share of the population displaced, the restoration of human capital should be accorded the highest priority in reconstruction (World Bank, 2025). HR should conduct capability audits—moving from current capability to required capability, capability gap, and a development or acquisition strategy—supported by reskilling, accelerated leadership development, apprenticeships, university partnerships, corporate academies, return-of-talent initiatives, mentoring, and digital learning.

5.3 HR as guardian of organizational memory

Prolonged crises can cause institutional knowledge to disappear. HR should establish mechanisms to capture, document, transfer, store, teach, and renew knowledge through structured handovers, mentoring, knowledge interviews, standard operating procedures, lessons-learned databases, internal academies, job shadowing, and communities of practice.

5.4 HR as workforce stabilizer

Employees require clarity concerning organizational direction, job continuity, reporting relationships, compensation, expectations, policies, and management decisions. HR should distinguish environmental uncertainty, which may lie outside organizational control, from managerial ambiguity, which can be reduced through transparent policies, reliable communication, clear decision rights, consistent treatment, and credible leadership.

5.5 HR as culture rebuilder

Crisis can damage organizational culture as survival behaviours replace healthy practices. Drawing on Schein (2010), HR must identify which crisis-era behaviours should be retained, discontinued, or replaced, reinforcing cultural transformation through recruitment, onboarding, leadership behaviour, recognition, promotion, performance management, communication, and employee relations. In the Gulf, where offices commonly bring together dozens of nationalities, building a unified culture across a highly diverse workforce is a distinctive cultural task for HR.

5.6 HR as builder of psychological safety and trust

Employees who have experienced prolonged uncertainty may avoid reporting problems, challenging authority, proposing innovations, admitting mistakes, or discussing risks. Following Edmondson (1999), who defines psychological safety as a shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, HR should build employee-listening systems, grievance processes, confidential reporting channels, leadership development, team dialogue, pulse surveys, and open-door mechanisms.

5.7 HR as leadership pipeline rebuilder

Post-crisis HR requires systematic succession planning, leadership assessment, high-potential identification, management development, cross-functional exposure, mentoring, and emergency replacement planning. Organizations need replacement planning for immediate coverage, succession planning for future readiness, and leadership-pipeline development for sustainable continuity (Carmeli et al., 2013).

5.8 HR as an agent of organizational agility

Traditional hierarchical organizations may struggle in uncertain environments because decisions move too slowly. HR should facilitate shorter decision chains, empowered teams, cross-functional collaboration, rapid communication, decentralized operational decisions where appropriate, clear accountability, and flexible role architecture. The guiding principle is to centralize strategic control while decentralizing operational responsiveness.

5.9 HR as strategic workforce planner

Post-crisis workforce planning should begin by asking what capabilities the future business model will require, following a sequence from business strategy to future capabilities, critical roles, workforce requirements, and decisions to build, buy, borrow, automate, or redeploy.

5.10 HR as architect of flexible talent ecosystems

Human capital need not reside permanently inside the organization. Post-crisis organizations can create talent ecosystems involving permanent employees, returning expatriates, consultants, freelancers, retired experts, universities, external specialists, remote professionals, temporary project teams, and technology-enabled resources. In the Gulf, the emergence of dual-talent strategies—deliberately blending national and international expertise—illustrates this ecosystem logic in practice.

5.11 HR as driver of digital transformation

Post-crisis reconstruction offers an opportunity to avoid rebuilding inefficient legacy systems. Organizations should redesign processes before automating them, following a sequence to simplify, standardize, digitize, automate, and analyze. HR transformation can incorporate HR information systems, employee self-service, digital records, recruitment platforms, digital learning, analytics, dashboards, AI-assisted workforce planning, automated transactions, and collaboration technologies.

5.12 HR as organizational learning architect

Organizations exposed to repeated crises must learn faster than their environments change. After-action reviews should examine what happened, what was expected, what worked, what failed and why, what capability was missing, and what must change—progressing from experience to reflection, knowledge, system change, and new capability.

5.13 HR as employee wellbeing and workforce sustainability champion

Employees may experience prolonged stress, uncertainty, displacement, family separation, financial pressure, and occupational insecurity. HR should treat wellbeing as part of workforce sustainability through workload management, assistance mechanisms, flexible work where feasible, supportive management, emergency assistance, wellbeing education, appropriate leave management, and manager development. Wellbeing programs should not substitute for correcting poor management practices.

5.14 HR as compensation strategist

High inflation, currency instability, migration, and talent shortages can rapidly render conventional salary structures obsolete. Post-crisis compensation may require a total-rewards architecture combining base salary, variable compensation, allowances, transportation support, healthcare, learning opportunities, flexibility, retention incentives, career advancement, recognition, and non-financial rewards.

5.15 HR as talent-retention strategist

Retention cannot depend exclusively on salary. High-performing employees are more likely to remain when they perceive fairness, purpose, growth, leadership, recognition, opportunity, and reasonable reward. Retention strategies should distinguish regrettable, non-regrettable, critical-role, and capability-risk turnover—particularly salient in Gulf sectors such as hospitality and construction, where turnover is high.

5.16 HR as facilitator of expatriate and diaspora talent return

The Middle Eastern diaspora represents a distinctive talent opportunity. Returning professionals may bring international management experience, technical and digital capabilities, cross-cultural competence, networks, and exposure to international standards. Structured return-of-talent programs should follow a sequence to attract, reconnect, reintegrate, and retain, with careful management of reintegration dynamics. Diaspora remittances and returning skills are recognized as important channels in regional reconstruction financing (UNDP, 2023).

5.17 HR as a contributor to social stability

In fragile and recovering environments, employment contributes to social stability by providing income, skills, professional identity, social connection, and expectations of advancement. Fair employment, youth development, workforce inclusion, skills creation, and career development can therefore contribute indirectly to wider social and economic reconstruction (International Labour Organization, 2024; UNDP, 2024).

6 THE HR RESET FRAMEWORK

The seventeen roles can be consolidated into a five-component framework—HR RESET—that organizes post-crisis HRM into an actionable agenda (Figure 3).

- **R — Resilience:** build workforce continuity, emergency capability, succession coverage, organizational preparedness, and business continuity.
- **E — Employee stability:** restore trust, fairness, communication, psychological safety, wellbeing, and organizational credibility.
- **S — Skills reconstruction:** identify capability gaps and systematically reskill, recruit, develop, and redeploy talent.
- **E — Ecosystem & engagement:** create flexible talent networks involving employees, diaspora professionals, universities, consultants, external specialists, and strategic partners.
- **T — Transformation:** redesign organizational structures, leadership, culture, processes, technology, performance systems, and HR operating models.



Figure 3: The HR RESET framework for post-crisis HR transformation.

These components operate within an integrative pathway in which post-crisis conditions lead, through HRM intervention, to workforce stabilization, human-capital reconstruction, organizational resilience, adaptation, and transformation, and ultimately to sustainable organizational performance (Figure 4).

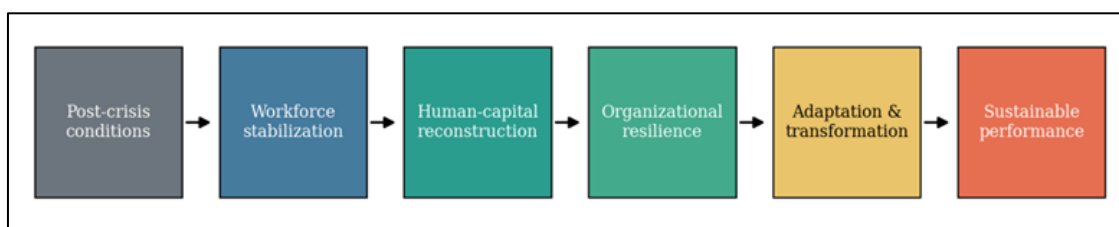


Figure 4: Integrative pathway from post-crisis conditions to sustainable organizational performance through HRM-enabled mediators.

7 DISCUSSION: REGIONAL EVIDENCE AND INTERPRETATION

7.1 From traditional to post-crisis HRM

The central implication of the analysis is a shift in the very conception of HRM. Table 1 contrasts the assumptions of traditional HRM with those required in post-crisis conditions. The movement is from personnel administration toward

organizational resilience, from recruitment toward capability reconstruction, from local recruitment toward global and diaspora talent networks, and from an HR support function toward a strategic transformation partner.

Table 1: From traditional HRM to post-crisis HRM.

Traditional HRM	Post-Crisis HRM
Personnel administration	Organizational resilience
Recruitment	Capability reconstruction
Job descriptions	Flexible role architecture
Annual manpower planning	Dynamic workforce planning
Annual training plans	Continuous reskilling
Employee records	Workforce intelligence
Replacement planning	Leadership pipelines
Salary administration	Total rewards strategy
Employee relations	Trust reconstruction
Performance appraisal	Performance enablement
HR procedures	Organizational governance
Local recruitment	Global and diaspora talent networks
Administrative technology	Digital HR ecosystem
HR support function	Strategic transformation partner

7.2 The conflict-affected economies: human-capital reconstruction

In conflict-affected economies, the binding constraint on organizational renewal is the depletion of human and institutional capital. The scale of loss is considerable: reconstruction-cost estimates for Syria have reached hundreds of billions of dollars, and a large share of the population has been displaced, which is why analyses emphasize that restoring human capital should take the highest priority (World Bank, 2025). International-organization guidance similarly frames recovery as human-centered, linking refugee returns and reintegration to decent-work creation, skills-recognition and bridging systems, and modular training tied to reconstruction sectors (International Labour Organization, 2024; UNDP, 2023, 2024). For organizations, this validates the reconstruction, memory-guardianship, and diaspora-return roles identified above: the firm that can most rapidly rebuild capability, capture departing knowledge, and re-attract skilled returnees holds a decisive advantage.

7.3 The Gulf economies: nationalization and diversification

Table 2: Workforce nationalization programs across selected Gulf Cooperation Council states.

Country	Nationalization program	Enforcement mechanism	Indicative target
Saudi Arabia	Saudization (Nitaqat)	Colour-coded compliance bands; Qiwa documentation	Rising sectoral quotas; localization deepening under Vision 2030
United Arab Emirates	Emiratisation	Fixed annual quota growth; financial penalties	+2% Emirati headcount per year in large private firms
Qatar	Qatarization	Regulated framework; ministry inspections	20% private-sector national participation by 2030
Bahrain	Bahrainisation	Sectoral requirements	Among the highest achieved localization rates in the GCC

The Gulf presents a different but equally instructive post-crisis logic, in which state-led diversification and workforce nationalization are reshaping HR practice. Every Gulf Cooperation Council state now operates a nationalization program, each with distinct enforcement mechanisms (Table 2). These policies interact with skills shortages to produce

a recognizable tension: reducing dependence on foreign labour can entail short-run losses of efficiency, prompting many organizations to adopt dual-talent strategies that combine national and international expertise while investing heavily in national upskilling. Figure 2 summarizes indicative nationalization benchmarks across four Gulf states.

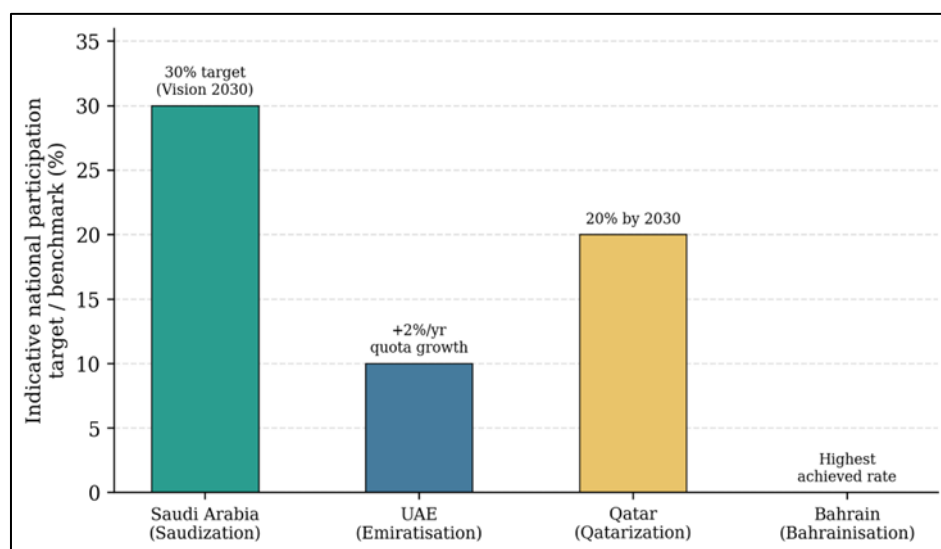


Figure 2: Indicative workforce-nationalization targets and benchmarks across selected Gulf states. Figures are illustrative of policy design rather than precise, directly comparable measurements.

The Gulf case reinforces several roles in the framework—strategic workforce planning, flexible talent ecosystems, culture rebuilding across highly diverse workforces, and digital transformation—while adding a distinctive imperative: reconciling nationalization objectives with the flexibility needed to attract international talent. This is fundamentally an HRM challenge, requiring simultaneous capability-building among nationals, knowledge transfer from expatriates, and culture work to integrate both.

7.4 The role of leadership

HR transformation cannot occur independently of executive leadership. Senior management must recognize that organizational resilience is ultimately a leadership responsibility supported by HR expertise. Ulrich (1997) argued that HR should operate simultaneously as a strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion, and change agent; under post-crisis conditions, HR increasingly becomes strategic partner, culture architect, capability builder, change leader, resilience architect, employee advocate, and institutional guardian. Leadership behaviour must reinforce HR systems rather than undermine them (Carmeli et al., 2013).

7.5 Performance management and measuring HR's contribution

Traditional annual appraisals may become inadequate where priorities change rapidly. Post-crisis performance management should balance results, behaviours, adaptability, learning, and collaboration, focusing discussions on future contribution rather than merely documenting past activity. HR itself must become accountable for organizational outcomes, tracking indicators such as workforce resilience, critical-position coverage, succession readiness, competency-gap closure, reskilling completion, internal promotion, regrettable turnover, critical-talent retention, employee trust, psychological safety, engagement, labour productivity, HR digitization, internal mobility, and change readiness. The central question is no longer what activities HR completed, but what organizational capability improved because of HR intervention.

7.6 Challenges facing HRM in the post-crisis Middle East

Key challenges include resistance to change, hierarchical leadership traditions, talent migration, compensation volatility, institutional uncertainty, digital-capability gaps, trust deficits, and short-term management thinking. A dangerous cycle can emerge in which crisis leads organizations to reduce development, which erodes capability, lowers performance, increases vulnerability, and invites new crisis. Breaking this cycle is one of HR's most important strategic responsibilities.

Strategic Recommendations

Middle Eastern organizations operating in post-crisis environments should conduct organizational capability and workforce-risk assessments; identify critical positions and emergency successors; rebuild trust through transparency

and procedural fairness; establish internal capability academies; develop diaspora talent programs; create agile structures; introduce integrated talent and succession systems; digitize HR while redesigning inefficient procedures; incorporate workforce resilience into business continuity; strengthen employee listening and psychological safety; adopt dynamic workforce planning; redesign compensation for economic volatility; institutionalize knowledge transfer and learning; and position HR leadership directly within strategic business decision-making. In Gulf contexts, organizations should additionally align these measures with national visions and nationalization requirements, pairing local capability-building with structured expatriate knowledge transfer.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations qualify this study. First, it is a conceptual synthesis of secondary evidence and does not test causal relationships; the framework is a structuring device to be validated empirically. Second, the Middle East is highly heterogeneous, and the same framework will apply differently in conflict-affected economies than in high-investment Gulf states, so context-sensitive adaptation is essential. Third, several regional indicators are drawn from policy and practitioner sources with differing methods, so quantitative benchmarks (including Figure 2) should be read as indicative rather than precisely comparable measurements.

These limitations define a research agenda. Future empirical work should test the HR RESET framework and the integrative pathway through longitudinal and comparative designs across Gulf and post-conflict settings; examine which HRM roles most strongly predict resilience and performance; evaluate dual-talent and diaspora-return strategies against objective outcomes; and investigate how nationalization policies interact with capability-building, knowledge transfer, and organizational culture. Primary, country-specific studies would materially strengthen the evidence base on post-crisis HRM in the region.

8 CONCLUSION

The post-crisis Middle East requires a fundamentally different philosophy of Human Resource Management. Organizations characterized by conflict, economic disruption, workforce migration, technological change, and institutional uncertainty cannot rely exclusively on HR systems developed for stable operating conditions. The evidence reviewed—from human-capital depletion in conflict-affected economies to state-led nationalization and diversification in the Gulf—shows that HRM has become a strategic institutional capability rather than an administrative support function.

HR must increasingly assume strategic responsibility for resilience, capability, trust, leadership, culture, knowledge, adaptation, and transformation. Its broader responsibility is to help build the workforce, leadership, culture, systems, and organizational capabilities that the future organization will require. The central proposition of this study is that organizations cannot rebuild sustainable competitive capability without simultaneously rebuilding their human and social systems. In a post-crisis environment, HR does not merely participate in organizational recovery; it becomes one of the architects of organizational reconstruction, adaptation, and sustainable renewal.

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