PEOPLE FIRST: TRANSFORMING HR PRACTICES TO ENHANCE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION

PEOPLE FIRST: MENTRANSFORMASI PRAKTIK-PRAKTIK SUMBER DAYA MANUSIA UNTUK MENINGKATKAN KETERLIBATAN DAN RETENSI KARYAWAN

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ABSTRACT
This study examines transformative human resource (HR) practices that enhance employee engagement and retention through a people-centered approach. As organizations navigate dynamic work environments and shifting workforce expectations, the importance of effective HR strategies that prioritize employee well-being, inclusivity, and career growth has become increasingly evident. Using a qualitative approach with literature review and case study analysis, this research identifies key HR practices such as flexible work arrangements, personalized career development, and inclusive workplace culture. Thematic analysis of qualitative data reveals how these strategies meet employees' intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence, and belonging, thereby fostering long-term commitment and satisfaction. Case studies of leading organizations highlight the practical applications of these practices and the conditions for their success. The study concludes by offering recommendations for HR professionals to implement effective, adaptable strategies and suggests avenues for further research, particularly in the role of emerging technologies in shaping human-centered HR practices. These findings underscore the value of a people-focused HR approach in building a resilient, engaged workforce poised for sustainable growth.
Keywords: Employee Engagement; Human-Centered HR; Employee Retention; Inclusive Workplace

ABSTRAK
Penelitian ini mengkaji praktik-praktik sumber daya manusia (SDM) transformatif yang meningkatkan keterlibatan dan retensi karyawan melalui pendekatan yang berpusat pada manusia. Ketika organisasi menghadapi lingkungan kerja yang dinamis dan pergeseran ekspektasi tenaga kerja, pentingnya strategi SDM yang efektif yang memprioritaskan kesejahteraan karyawan, inklusivitas, dan pertumbuhan karier menjadi semakin jelas. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan tinjauan literatur dan analisis studi kasus, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi praktik-praktik SDM utama seperti pengaturan kerja yang fleksibel, pengembangan karier yang dipersonalisasi, dan budaya tempat kerja yang inklusif. Analisis tematik terhadap data kualitatif mengungkapkan bagaimana strategi-strategi ini memenuhi kebutuhan intrinsik karyawan akan otonomi, kompetensi, dan rasa memiliki, sehingga menumbuhkan komitmen dan kepuasan jangka panjang. Studi kasus dari organisasi-organisasi terkemuka menyoroti aplikasi praktis dari praktik-praktik ini dan kondisi-kondisi yang mendukung keberhasilannya. Studi ini diakhiri dengan memberikan rekomendasi bagi para profesional SDM untuk menerapkan strategi yang efektif dan mudah beradaptasi serta menyarankan jalan untuk penelitian lebih lanjut, terutama dalam peran teknologi yang sedang berkembang dalam membentuk praktik-praktik SDM yang berpusat pada manusia. Temuan-temuan ini menggarisbawahi nilai dari pendekatan SDM yang berfokus pada manusia dalam membangun tenaga kerja yang tangguh dan terlibat yang siap untuk pertumbuhan yang berkelanjutan.
Kata Kunci: Keterlibatan Karyawan; SDM yang Berpusat pada Manusia; Retensi Karyawan; Tempat Kerja yang Inklusif.

INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement and retention are essential for creating a sustainable and thriving organization, as they directly affect productivity, innovation, and overall business outcomes. Engaged employees are generally more committed to their roles, demonstrating higher levels of motivation, accountability, and

alignment with organizational goals. This commitment positively influences customer satisfaction, contributes to increased profitability, and reduces turnover rates, as shown in Gallup's research (2020). High employee engagement typically fosters a supportive work culture, where individuals feel valued, leading to improved collaboration and a stronger sense of loyalty toward the organization. Retention, meanwhile, is crucial for maintaining organizational knowledge and reducing the recurring costs associated with recruitment, onboarding, and training, allowing companies to focus on long-term strategic growth (Kumar & Mathimaran, 2017).

To meet these demands, HR management has shifted towards a people-centered approach, emphasizing employee well-being as a critical driver of engagement. Recent trends in HR focus on flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options and flexible schedules, to accommodate employees' diverse needs and promote a healthier work-life balance. Additionally, mental health support programs and personalized career development opportunities are increasingly prioritized, reflecting the understanding that employee satisfaction enhances commitment and performance (Society for Human Resource Management, 2022). Furthermore, integrating advanced technology in HR processes—like AI-driven personalized learning experiences and predictive analytics for assessing turnover risks—has empowered HR departments to proactively address employee needs and engagement trends (Boudreau & Cascio, 2018). These strategies align with modern workforce expectations, where employees are regarded as partners in achieving business success rather than

merely resources, helping organizations build a resilient, engaged workforce.

The focus of this research is to examine transformative human resources (HR) practices that prioritize employee engagement and retention through a people-centric approach. This study seeks to explore specific HR interventions that emphasize employees' personal and professional well-being, such as personalized development plans, flexible work environments, and supportive mental health resources. Prior research highlights the benefits of such HR practices, as they not only improve job satisfaction but also foster a sense of belonging and commitment, which are essential for long-term organizational success (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Saks, 2006). Furthermore, recent advances in HR technology, such as predictive analytics and AI-based systems, allow companies to identify at-risk employees and proactively address concerns, thereby enhancing retention rates (Chamorro-Premuzic & Bersin, 2018). Another critical aspect of this study is examining how HR can strategically balance automation with human interactions to maintain meaningful employee connections. This approach aligns with emerging trends that view employees as strategic partners rather than mere assets, ultimately contributing to a sustainable, engaged workforce (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2009). Through qualitative analysis and case studies, this research will evaluate these people-centered HR strategies and their effectiveness in fostering a supportive and productive work environment.

In the rapidly evolving work environment, organizations face increasing challenges in maintaining employee engagement and retention. Key issues include adapting to shifting employee expectations, such as the demand for flexible work arrangements

and a greater emphasis on work-life balance. A recent Gallup report reveals that only 32% of U.S. employees are engaged in their work, with engagement levels declining amid remote work adaptations and changing workplace dynamics (Gallup, 2022). The rise of the "Great Resignation" further exemplifies these challenges, with record numbers of employees leaving their jobs in search of better conditions, more meaningful work, and a greater sense of autonomy (Cook, 2021). Moreover, younger generations, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, expect a workplace that aligns with their values, emphasizing inclusivity, growth opportunities, and mental health support (Morgan, 2020). Organizations must also navigate the complexities of remote work management, as remote and hybrid work models increase the difficulty of creating cohesive and engaged teams (Bailey & Kurland, 2020). Consequently, companies are compelled to innovate their HR strategies to retain talent and meet these emerging needs, while balancing technology's role in fostering authentic employee connections. Addressing these issues has become critical for organizations aiming to sustain a competitive and motivated workforce.

While existing research highlights the benefits of employee engagement and retention initiatives, a gap remains in understanding the long-term effectiveness of these strategies across different organizational cultures and industries. Studies have shown that engagement can drive productivity and reduce turnover (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002), but limited research has explored how these practices sustain engagement over time, especially in remote or hybrid work settings (Van Yperen, Rietzschel, & De Jonge, 2020). Furthermore, while flexible work arrangements are increasingly seen as

critical for engagement, little is known about their impact on different demographics within the workforce (Spreitzer, Cameron, & Garrett, 2017). The role of technology in mediating engagement, such as the use of AI-driven tools, is also understudied, particularly regarding potential unintended consequences on work satisfaction (Bloom et al., 2015). Additionally, there is a lack of consensus on the optimal balance between employee autonomy and organizational structure that best supports sustained engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Addressing these gaps is essential for organizations seeking to create effective, adaptable HR strategies that meet the evolving needs of a diverse workforce. This study aims to bridge these knowledge gaps by exploring how a people-centered approach in HR can achieve enduring employee engagement and retention across varied organizational.

The primary objective of this research is to explore how human resources (HR) practices can be transformed to effectively enhance employee engagement and retention, with an emphasis on a people-centered approach. This study aims to understand which specific HR strategies—such as personalized career development, flexible work models, and mental health support—most significantly impact engagement and retention across diverse organizational settings. By investigating how these practices align with employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, this research builds on the principles of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008), suggesting that fulfillment of these needs is critical for sustaining engagement. Additionally, the study examines the role of digital HR tools, such as AI-driven insights for personalized employee development,

which have shown promise in adapting HR practices to individual preferences (Bersin, 2020). Understanding how these tools contribute to a more adaptive, responsive HR framework is essential for modern organizations facing dynamic workforce expectations (Deloitte, 2019). By focusing on these transformative HR practices, this research ultimately aims to provide a framework for organizations to create a supportive and engaging work environment, thereby enhancing retention and ensuring long-term organizational success.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach that combines literature review and case study analysis to investigate HR practices that enhance employee engagement and retention. A qualitative approach is especially suitable for exploring complex dynamics in HR, as it allows a deep dive into practices that may not be fully captured by quantitative methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study draws on peer-reviewed journal articles, industry reports, and case studies from companies known for their employee-focused HR transformations, providing a comprehensive view of effective strategies (Yin, 2018). By reviewing academic literature, the research identifies core engagement and retention principles, while industry reports illustrate how these practices are implemented across different sectors, highlighting their adaptability. Additionally, case studies offer specific examples of companies that have successfully addressed employee needs to foster supportive work environments (Guest, 2017).

Data analysis employs a thematic approach to uncover recurring patterns in HR practices that are linked to higher engagement and retention (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). This method enables a nuanced understanding of employee-centered HR strategies, clarifying the conditions under which these practices are most effective. By identifying common themes, the study aims to shed light on adaptable and sustainable HR practices that align with the psychological and professional needs of employees. Ultimately, this research seeks to provide practical insights for organizations, supporting the implementation of HR transformations that contribute to a positive, lasting impact on employee satisfaction and overall organizational success.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
Human Resource Practices that Enhance Employee Engagement and Retention

This research indicates that several HR practices play a vital role in improving employee engagement and retention. One of the primary and impactful practices is career development programs. Career development encompasses personalized career pathways and regular opportunities for skill enhancement. According to Collins and Clark (2003), employees feel more committed and satisfied when they perceive growth opportunities within the organization. When employees have a clear development path and relevant upskilling, they tend to be more motivated and loyal. Conversely, the absence of career development opportunities can increase turnover risk as employees may feel stagnant and underappreciated (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003). This underscores that investing in career development significantly contributes to creating a supportive work environment that fosters long-term retention.

In addition to career development, an inclusive culture that values diversity is also a significant factor in enhancing employee engagement. According to Thomas (2004), an inclusive work culture that respects individual differences can create a sense of belonging and appreciation. Workplace diversity includes not only demographic backgrounds but also varied perspectives and skills. When employees feel valued and accepted, they are more likely to connect with the organization and be more productive. Companies actively engaged in inclusion and diversity programs often report higher employee morale and lower turnover rates. This is due to the sense of connection and recognition, which encourages employees to contribute more meaningfully and remain longer with the organization.

Work flexibility has also become an essential element in retaining employees, especially in the modern work era. With the increasing demands of personal life, flexibility has become a necessity that cannot be overlooked. Bloom et al. (2015) suggest that flexibility, such as remote work or flexible hours, allows employees to balance work and personal responsibilities, thus reducing stress and burnout. Furthermore, Kossek and Thompson (2016) note that younger generations, in particular, consider flexibility an essential part of the compensation package. Companies that support flexibility in work arrangements have proven more effective in attracting and retaining young talent, who increasingly desire autonomy in managing their work-life balance. HR practices that focus on flexibility, career development, and an inclusive culture can create a supportive and sustainable work environment, thereby enhancing

overall employee engagement and loyalty.

Case Studies in HR Transformation and Employee Retention

Transformative HR practices have become a cornerstone of success for organizations aiming to enhance employee engagement and retention. Companies like Microsoft and Google serve as prominent examples of how strategic shifts in HR practices can lead to significant improvements in employee satisfaction and loyalty. Through comprehensive HR transformations centered on growth, flexibility, and inclusivity, these organizations have redefined what it means to foster a supportive and engaging work environment.

A standout example of HR transformation is Microsoft, where CEO Satya Nadella introduced a "growth mindset" culture that revolutionized how the company approaches employee engagement. According to George (2020), this shift encouraged a learning-focused environment, where continuous development and embracing challenges became core organizational values. Under Nadella's leadership, Microsoft promoted a culture where employees are encouraged to take calculated risks and learn from failures, thereby fostering a sense of empowerment and trust. This change not only improved employee engagement but also instilled a feeling of value and support in the workforce, as individuals perceived Microsoft's commitment to their professional growth. Furthermore, Microsoft introduced flexible work arrangements, especially during the pandemic, allowing employees to better manage their work-life balance. This initiative was instrumental in enhancing overall employee satisfaction, as flexibility emerged as a critical factor in supporting

well-being and reducing burnout. As a result, Microsoft has not only bolstered employee loyalty but also positioned itself as a top employer globally (Boyce et al., 2018).

In a similar vein, Google has made employee well-being and inclusivity central components of its HR strategy. Known for its extensive benefits packages and commitment to work-life balance, Google has implemented a variety of programs aimed at supporting employees' health, professional growth, and personal fulfillment. As noted by Newman and Ford (2019), Google's wellness initiatives, professional training opportunities, and diverse support networks have collectively created a workplace where employees feel valued and supported. These initiatives go beyond conventional perks, addressing both the personal and professional needs of employees, thereby enhancing their engagement and loyalty. Additionally, Google has prioritized inclusivity through policies and programs that recognize and celebrate diversity. By fostering an inclusive workplace culture, Google has built a strong sense of belonging, which has proven especially effective in reducing turnover among younger employees who prioritize workplace inclusivity and flexibility. As Cameron et al. (2017) suggest, Google's commitment to these values has solidified its reputation as an attractive employer and set a benchmark for other organizations aiming to reduce turnover and cultivate a thriving workplace.

Both Microsoft and Google illustrate how transformative HR practices can lead to sustainable employee engagement and retention. By embedding growth, flexibility, and inclusivity into their corporate cultures, these companies have shown that employee loyalty is deeply connected to the overall support and opportunities

provided by the organization. Microsoft's focus on growth through its "growth mindset" culture and Google's emphasis on well-being and inclusivity highlight the importance of creating a holistic employee experience that addresses professional and personal needs alike. These case studies underscore the value of adopting HR strategies that not only align with current workforce expectations but also anticipate the evolving needs of future talent. In doing so, organizations can create engaging and resilient work environments that foster long-term commitment and satisfaction among their employees.

Analytical Approaches in Studying Effective HR Practices

The data analysis in this research utilizes thematic analysis to identify core themes and patterns in HR practices that enhance employee engagement and retention. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), is a qualitative method for pinpointing, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of qualitative data sources, including journal articles, industry reports, and case studies. By analyzing these diverse sources, researchers can uncover recurring concepts and practices across different organizational contexts, providing a comprehensive understanding of effective HR interventions. Systematic coding and categorization of data allow thematic analysis to reveal essential HR strategies, such as flexible work arrangements, career development programs, and inclusive work environments, which have been shown to consistently improve employee engagement and retention (Nowell et al., 2017). Through this structured process, thematic analysis supports a detailed examination of how

these practices address employees' intrinsic needs, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby fostering a culture that values employee well-being and satisfaction.

Following the initial thematic coding, this study employs cross-case analysis to compare HR practices across a range of organizational case studies, offering insights into the contextual factors that may impact the effectiveness of these interventions (Eisenhardt, 1989). Cross-case analysis is particularly valuable in identifying similarities and differences in HR strategies across different organizational settings, allowing researchers to understand how specific practices adapt to variations in organizational culture, size, and industry. By comparing cases, this method helps to elucidate the unique conditions under which particular HR practices may thrive, uncovering insights into the interplay between organizational context and the success of HR initiatives. For instance, flexible work arrangements might be more effective in technology-driven industries that prioritize innovation and adaptability, whereas structured career development programs may yield better results in traditional industries with hierarchical progression models (Stake, 2006). Cross-case analysis thus enriches the research by providing a nuanced perspective on the adaptability and effectiveness of HR practices across varied organizational landscapes.

The combined approach of thematic and cross-case analysis offers a robust framework for identifying and examining best practices in HR that drive employee engagement and retention. By integrating these two methods, the research provides a holistic view of how certain HR interventions meet employees' psychological needs while aligning with organizational goals. This approach acknowledges that while

certain HR practices may appear universally beneficial, their success often depends on contextual factors unique to each organization. Thematic analysis enables the identification of recurrent themes, while cross-case analysis brings an understanding of the practical implementation of these practices across different industries. This dual analytical approach facilitates the development of practical recommendations for HR professionals, ensuring that the strategies suggested are both evidence-based and contextually adaptable.

In summary, the research's methodological approach, incorporating both thematic and cross-case analyses, provides HR professionals with actionable insights into designing and implementing sustainable engagement and retention strategies. The thematic analysis identifies key HR practices—such as flexible work, career development, and inclusivity—that align with fundamental employee needs and support an engaging workplace culture (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Meanwhile, cross-case analysis provides a comparative perspective, enabling HR professionals to understand how these practices can be tailored to different organizational settings, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable HR interventions (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 2006). This comprehensive approach not only contributes to academic understanding of HR practices but also offers practical guidance for creating supportive work environments that promote long-term employee engagement and loyalty.

People-Centered HR Practices for Enhanced Engagement and Retention

The analysis of effective HR practices underscores that a people-centered approach is instrumental in

improving both employee engagement and retention across a range of organizational contexts. Organizations like Microsoft and Google exemplify how HR strategies that emphasize personal and professional growth, inclusivity, and work-life balance lead to increased employee satisfaction and loyalty. According to Grant (2019), when organizations prioritize these human-centered strategies, they create a supportive work environment that fosters long-term commitment. Flexible work arrangements, wellness initiatives, and structured career progression opportunities are particularly impactful as they align with employees' intrinsic motivations. Such practices meet fundamental needs related to autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are key to sustained engagement (Claus, 2019). Moreover, this people-centered approach proves effective in diverse and remote work settings, where acknowledging individual needs and offering tailored support can enhance employees' sense of belonging and commitment (Neal & Griffin, 2020). As competition for talent intensifies, HR practices that emphasize a growth-oriented and supportive culture become essential for retaining skilled employees and cultivating a productive workforce.

To implement successful human-centered HR practices, organizations should prioritize key areas, beginning with personalized career development opportunities. Wright and Ulrich (2017) argue that developing individualized career paths and providing continuous learning programs enhance motivation and engagement, as employees feel that their aspirations are valued. Career progression not only supports employees' professional growth but also helps address the organization's future skill needs by developing internal talent. In addition, continuous learning initiatives,

such as mentorship programs and access to online courses, contribute to a culture where development is valued. When employees perceive clear pathways for advancement, they are more likely to commit to the organization and engage fully in their roles. Microsoft, for example, emphasizes a "growth mindset" culture that encourages employees to embrace challenges and learn from mistakes, leading to greater resilience and adaptability in its workforce (Grant, 2019). Through such initiatives, organizations can foster a work environment where employees are encouraged to pursue personal growth alongside organizational goals.

A second critical element of people-centered HR practices is the implementation of flexible work policies. Stavrou and Kilaniotis (2010) highlight that flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options and flexible scheduling, are effective in reducing burnout and turnover. Offering flexibility helps employees better balance their professional and personal responsibilities, which is particularly important in today's fast-paced and often remote work environments. Flexibility is especially valued by younger employees, who often prioritize work-life balance over traditional career incentives. This shift toward flexible work also supports inclusivity, as it accommodates diverse needs and lifestyles. Google, for instance, is well-known for its adaptable work policies, which contribute to a highly satisfied workforce that is able to balance personal and professional obligations (Claus, 2019). Organizations that adopt similar flexible policies are better equipped to attract and retain top talent, as these arrangements contribute to a healthier, more balanced work environment.

Fostering a culture of inclusivity and open communication is another

essential aspect of people-centered HR practices. A culture where employees feel valued and heard promotes job satisfaction and organizational loyalty. Neal and Griffin (2020) note that inclusive workplaces are characterized by transparent communication, opportunities for employee feedback, and active measures to celebrate diversity. Inclusivity is crucial for organizations aiming to create a sense of belonging, particularly in diverse or global workforces. Google, for example, invests in support networks and diversity initiatives that empower employees from all backgrounds, contributing to a strong, cohesive workplace culture (Grant, 2019). Open communication further reinforces inclusivity by creating an environment where employees feel safe expressing their ideas and concerns. When employees believe their voices are valued, they are more likely to remain engaged and loyal to the organization, resulting in lower turnover and a more resilient workforce.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The research highlights the critical role of human-centered HR practices in enhancing employee engagement and retention. Key findings indicate that strategies focusing on flexible work options, career development, and inclusivity create a supportive work environment that satisfies employees' intrinsic needs for autonomy, growth, and belonging. These practices contribute to increased job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and stronger organizational loyalty, demonstrating the value of a people-centric approach across diverse organizational contexts. Practically, these insights encourage organizations to implement HR policies that prioritize employee well-being and development, ultimately building a resilient, committed workforce capable

of sustaining long-term success. Additionally, fostering an inclusive and adaptable HR environment aligns organizations with modern workforce expectations, improving their ability to attract and retain talent in an increasingly competitive market. For future research, an exploration into the specific impacts of emerging technologie such as AI-driven personalization in career planning and predictive analytics in employee engagement could provide valuable insights. These areas offer potential for understanding how technology can further support and evolve human-centered HR practices, ensuring they remain relevant and effective in dynamically changing work environments.

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