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Strategic Human Resource Management as a Driver of Organizational Ambidexterity

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Abstrak: *This article develops a conceptual explanation of how Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) acts as a primary driver of organizational ambidexterity by drawing an analogy from research on the social and structural determinants of women's reproductive health. Health studies consistently show that outcomes are not determined mainly by the presence of medical services, but by contextual factors such as norms, socio-economic conditions, literacy, autonomy, and access that enable individuals to utilize those services effectively. Using this cross-disciplinary insight, the article argues that organizational ambidexterity is not primarily determined by structural design or strategic intent, but by SHRM systems that create enabling conditions for employees to engage in both exploratory and exploitative activities. Employing a conceptual integrative approach, the study maps determinants identified in reproductive health research to their organizational equivalents within SHRM practices and develops a framework positioning SHRM as the contextual architecture that supports ambidexterity. The findings suggest that culture building, empowerment mechanisms, learning systems, access to information, and aligned performance practices are essential HR-driven enablers that allow exploration and exploitation to coexist. The article contributes theoretically by reframing ambidexterity as a human and systemic capability rooted in SHRM, and practically by highlighting the need for organizations to prioritize HR system design alongside technological and structural investments to achieve sustainable performance.*

Keywords : *SHRM, Ambidexterity, Exploration, Exploitation, Social Determinants Analogy*

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational ambidexterity the capacity to pursue exploration and exploitation at the same time has become indispensable for firms navigating digital disruption, market volatility, and knowledge intensity. Organizations must innovate, experiment, and learn while simultaneously preserving efficiency, reliability, and process excellence. While early explanations of ambidexterity emphasized structural separation, strategic posture, or top-down leadership design, recent scholarship increasingly shows that ambidexterity is less a matter of structure and more a matter of how people, practices, and systems are orchestrated across the organization. Systematic reviews and empirical studies demonstrate that firm-level HRM systems directly stimulate both exploratory and exploitative learning within teams, enabling employees to switch between innovation and refinement as required (Mehralian et al. 2025; Varandas et al. 2024). Furthermore, flexibility-oriented HRM combined with empowering leadership has been shown to create conditions where employees feel capable of experimenting while maintaining operational discipline (Islam et al. 2025; Gouda & Tiwari 2022). These findings suggest that ambidexterity emerges not primarily from formal organizational design but from human resource systems that cultivate learning, empowerment, and participation.

A compelling way to understand this dynamic is by drawing an analogy from women's reproductive health research. Extensive evidence shows that reproductive outcomes are not determined mainly by the availability of clinics or medical professionals, but by social and structural determinants such as gender norms, socio-economic position, literacy, autonomy, migration status, and access (Abhari et al. 2024; Habibi et al. 2023). Even where healthcare infrastructure exists, women may be unable to benefit from it due to cultural restrictions, lack of knowledge, or limited decision-making power. Studies on sexual health literacy and reproductive autonomy

further demonstrate that services become effective only when individuals understand and are empowered to use them (Vakili et al. 2025; Fernandes et al. 2025). In this sense, medical resources are necessary but insufficient; what determines outcomes is the enabling environment.

The same logic applies to organizations. Firms may possess advanced IT infrastructures, sophisticated analytics, and well-designed structures, yet still fail to achieve ambidexterity because employees lack strategic understanding, empowerment, or access to these systems. Without contextual enablers, resources remain underutilized. SHRM plays the role of creating these enablers by shaping organizational culture, designing learning systems, empowering employees, and ensuring access to knowledge and decision processes. Just as social determinants enable women to convert healthcare services into positive health outcomes, SHRM enables employees to convert organizational resources into exploratory and exploitative behaviors.

This analogy clarifies why SHRM should not be viewed as a supporting administrative function but as the contextual architecture that makes ambidexterity possible. SHRM establishes the cultural, structural, and cognitive conditions under which exploration and exploitation can coexist. Therefore, SHRM functions as the organizational equivalent of social and structural determinants in health research, providing the enabling environment within which ambidexterity can emerge, be sustained, and ultimately translate into superior organizational performance.

METHOD

This study employs a conceptual integrative approach to develop a theoretical explanation of how Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) drives organizational ambidexterity. Rather than relying on primary empirical data, the study synthesizes two bodies of literature that, at first glance, belong to different domains: research on social and

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structural determinants of women’s reproductive health and research on SHRM and organizational ambidexterity. The rationale for this approach is based on the recognition that both domains exhibit a similar causal pattern. In reproductive health, outcomes are shaped not mainly by the availability of medical services but by contextual enablers such as norms, literacy, autonomy, and access. In organizations, ambidexterity is shaped not mainly by structure or technology but by contextual enablers created through SHRM systems.

The integrative process was conducted through several systematic stages. First, consistent findings were identified from reproductive health studies that emphasize how social and structural determinants enable individuals to utilize available services. Second, these determinants were abstracted into broader conceptual categories representing contextual enablers of outcomes. Third, each determinant was mapped to its organizational equivalent within the SHRM domain, such as organizational culture, empowerment practices, learning systems, access to information, and strategic literacy. Fourth, this mapping was used to construct a conceptual model explaining how SHRM creates the enabling conditions necessary for exploration and exploitation to occur simultaneously. Finally, the model was interpreted within strategic management theory to explain how SHRM functions as a driver of ambidexterity.

This approach allows insights from health research to inform strategic management theory, offering a novel cross-disciplinary explanation for why ambidexterity depends on contextual HR mechanisms rather than structural design alone.

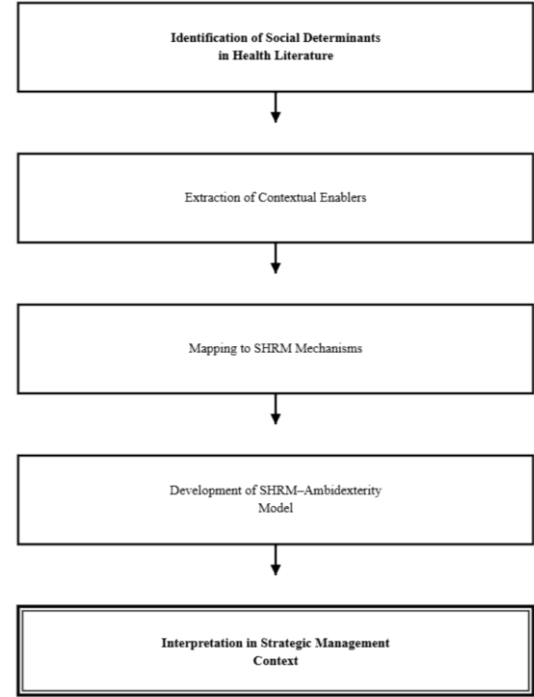


Figure 1. Research Procedure for Conceptual Mapping

Figure 1 illustrates the logical pathway followed in constructing the conceptual framework of this study. The process begins with a review of reproductive health literature that consistently highlights the importance of social and structural determinants. These findings are then distilled into broader categories representing contextual enablers such as norms, literacy, autonomy, and access. The next step involves mapping these categories onto SHRM mechanisms within organizations, identifying equivalents such as culture, empowerment, learning systems, and access to information. Based on this mapping, a conceptual model is developed to show how SHRM creates the enabling environment necessary for ambidexterity. The final stage interprets this model within strategic management theory, resulting in a coherent explanation of SHRM as a driver of exploration and exploitation.

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The conceptual mapping conducted in this study reveals a strong correspondence between the contextual determinants identified in women’s reproductive health research and the organizational mechanisms created through Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM). The analysis shows that ambidexterity does not arise simply because organizations possess advanced systems, formal structures, or technological capabilities. Instead, ambidexterity emerges when SHRM creates enabling conditions that allow employees to engage in both exploratory and exploitative activities. These enabling conditions closely resemble the social and structural determinants that allow women to benefit from reproductive health services.

The mapping demonstrates that cultural norms in health contexts correspond to organizational culture shaped by HR practices; socio-economic conditions resemble how HR allocates resources for learning and development; literacy in health contexts parallels strategic literacy among employees; autonomy in reproductive decisions mirrors employee empowerment; and access to healthcare services resembles access to organizational systems and decision-making processes. These parallels indicate that SHRM acts as the contextual architecture that allows ambidexterity to function effectively within organizations.

Table 1. Mapping Social Determinants to SHRM Mechanisms Driving Ambidexterity

Social Determinant in Health	SHRM Equivalent	Effect on Ambidexterity
Gender norms	Organizational culture & role clarity	Encourages participation in learning and innovation
Socio-economic status	HR resource allocation &	Enables capability development

	training investment	
Health literacy	Strategic literacy learning systems	Supports exploration and exploitation
Reproductive autonomy	Employee empowerment	Enables decision-making for innovation and efficiency
Access to services	Access to systems, information, and processes	Facilitates resource utilization
Social capital	Collaboration and teamwork practices	Enhances knowledge sharing

Table 1 presents the conceptual equivalence between determinants found in reproductive health research and SHRM mechanisms within organizations. Each determinant that enables women to utilize healthcare services has an organizational counterpart that enables employees to utilize organizational resources effectively. This mapping clarifies that ambidexterity is less about structural design and more about how SHRM shapes culture, learning, empowerment, and access to systems.

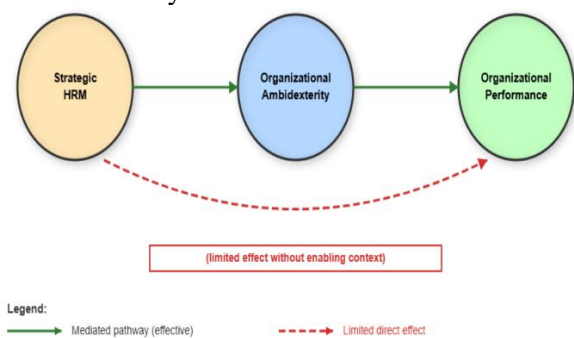


Figure 2. SHRM as a Driver of Organizational Ambidexterity

Discussion

The analogy developed earlier between social and structural determinants in women’s reproductive health and the organizational conditions required for ambidexterity provides

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a powerful lens for understanding why ambidexterity cannot be explained by structure alone. In reproductive health, the presence of clinics, doctors, and medicines does not guarantee positive outcomes unless women possess literacy, autonomy, and access that allow them to utilize those services. In a parallel manner, organizations may possess advanced technologies, formal structures, and strategic blueprints, yet still fail to achieve ambidexterity because employees lack empowerment, strategic understanding, and access to systems that enable them to act in both exploratory and exploitative ways. This perspective shifts attention from structural design to the human and systemic conditions that make ambidextrous behavior possible. Empirical evidence demonstrates that firm-level HRM systems directly stimulate exploratory and exploitative learning at the team level, showing that ambidexterity is embedded in how HR systems are designed rather than how units are separated (Mehralian et al. 2025). Comprehensive reviews of ambidextrous organizations reinforce this argument by identifying HRM as the most consistent enabler across contexts, surpassing explanations based purely on structural or strategic arrangements (Varandas et al. 2024).

SHRM enables ambidexterity through a constellation of mutually reinforcing mechanisms that shape how employees think, learn, collaborate, and make decisions. HR practices cultivate a culture that values learning, experimentation, and psychological safety while maintaining role clarity and accountability, allowing employees to innovate without undermining operational stability. Flexibility-oriented HRM, when combined with empowering leadership, creates discretion at lower organizational levels, enabling teams to decide when to explore and when to exploit based on situational demands rather than rigid structural prescriptions (Islam et al. 2025; Gouda & Tiwari 2022). Training systems, job rotation, and collaborative knowledge-sharing routines foster what can be described as

strategic literacy, equipping employees with the understanding needed to align their exploratory initiatives with broader organizational goals (Pak et al. 2023).

In addition, SHRM plays a central role in ensuring accessibility to systems and information through effective HRIS and digital infrastructures. High-quality information flows and user-friendly systems allow employees to access data, coordinate across functions, and maintain operational discipline while experimenting with new ideas. Research demonstrates that HRIS effectiveness, combined with staff IT capabilities and executive innovativeness, contributes to IS ambidexterity that supports sustainable digital transformation (Siddique et al. 2025). This shows that digital platforms become enablers of ambidexterity only when HR designs processes that ensure inclusivity, usability, and participation.

SHRM also influences the reward and performance architecture that legitimizes both exploration and exploitation. When performance systems recognize only efficiency, employees avoid experimentation; when they reward only innovation, operational reliability suffers. Integrative performance frameworks help balance these priorities and reduce the inherent tension between the two modes (Al-Dhubaibi 2025). At the same time, HR must manage emerging tensions introduced by automation and digitalization, where innovation pressures can disrupt employee relations and stability (Hiebl & Pielsticker 2023). Context-specific applications such as green HRM demonstrate further how HR practices can be tailored to support ambidexterity in sustainability contexts (Úbeda-García et al. 2021), while institutional environments like universities illustrate the need for HR reforms to reconcile competing logics for ambidexterity to emerge (Xia et al. 2023).

Taken together, these findings converge on a consistent conclusion: SHRM acts as the contextual architecture that makes

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ambidexterity feasible. Through culture building, empowerment, learning systems, information accessibility, and aligned incentives, SHRM constructs the environment in which exploration and exploitation are not competing demands but complementary activities. Ambidexterity, therefore, is less a matter of structural arrangement and more a reflection of how effectively organizations manage their human resources as a coherent, strategic system.

CONCLUSIONS

Building on this discussion, it becomes clear that organizational ambidexterity should be understood as a human-centered capability rooted in the design of SHRM systems rather than as a structural or purely strategic arrangement. Structures may separate units, and strategies may declare dual priorities, but it is SHRM that determines whether employees possess the mindset, skills, discretion, and access required to enact those priorities in daily work. In this sense, SHRM does not merely support ambidexterity; it enables and sustains it over time.

This perspective offers an important theoretical shift in ambidexterity research. Instead of treating HRM as an auxiliary function that follows strategic decisions, this study positions SHRM as the foundational mechanism through which exploration and exploitation become operational realities. It complements structural and leadership explanations by highlighting the contextual conditions that allow those elements to function effectively. By integrating insights from social and structural determinants research, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of how organizational capabilities emerge from enabling environments.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that organizations aiming to build ambidexterity should invest not only in technology, structural redesign, or strategic planning, but also critically in the design of SHRM systems. Emphasis should be placed on cultivating learning-oriented cultures, empowering employees with decision authority, building strategic literacy through

training and collaboration, ensuring access to information systems, and aligning performance and reward mechanisms with dual priorities. Without these HR-driven conditions, ambidexterity initiatives are unlikely to succeed.

Ultimately, this study reinforces the idea that SHRM functions as the organizational equivalent of social and structural determinants in health research: it is the enabling foundation that transforms resources and intentions into sustained ambidextrous capability and improved organizational performance..

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