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Application of Attride-Stirling Thematic Analysis in Exploring the Indicators of a Competitive-Oriented Strategic Human Capital Management Model for Human Capital Development at Iran Khodro

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to apply the Attride-Stirling thematic analysis approach to explore the indicators of a competitive-oriented strategic human capital management model for human capital development at Iran Khodro. In terms of purpose, the study was applied research, and regarding the nature of the data, it employed a qualitative methodology. The study population consisted of 18 selected managers and experts from Iran Khodro who were chosen through purposive sampling. Data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire and analyzed through thematic analysis. The analytical process was conducted in six stages: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme defining and naming, and report preparation. To ensure the quality and validity of the analysis, Holsti's coefficient, Scott's Pi, Cohen's Kappa, and Krippendorff's Alpha were calculated, all of which indicated acceptable and high levels of agreement and reliability. The findings revealed that a total of 104 initial codes were identified, from which 19 basic themes were extracted. These themes were organized into five second-order organizing themes, including human resource infrastructure, capability enhancement and motivation, leadership development and succession, organizational agility and performance, and transformation-oriented organizational alignment. Ultimately, one overarching global theme entitled "A Competitive-Oriented Strategic Human Capital Management Model for Human Capital Development at Iran Khodro" was identified. The results indicated that employer branding, career roadmaps, organizational culture building, workforce diversity management, skill development, organizational learning, performance-based reward systems, human resource intelligence, transformational leadership, succession planning, strategic performance management, human resource agility, and the utilization of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) and data analytics constitute the most significant components of this model. Based on the findings, implementing this model can contribute to talent attraction and retention, increased productivity, improved organizational performance, reduced loss of specialized human capital, and strengthened sustainable competitive advantage within Iran Khodro.

Keywords: Strategic Human Capital Management, Competitive Approach, Human Capital Development, Iran Khodro, Human Resource Management.

Introduction

The study of human capital has become one of the most important areas of inquiry in management and organizational studies due to the increasing prominence of knowledge-based competition, technological transformation, and the growing strategic value of intangible assets. Contemporary organizations no longer derive sustainable competitive advantage solely from physical assets, financial resources, or technological infrastructure; rather, human capital has emerged as the primary source of value creation, innovation, adaptability, and organizational sustainability. The transition from industrial economies

to knowledge-intensive economies has fundamentally altered the nature of competition, emphasizing the importance of attracting, developing, retaining, and strategically managing talented employees. In this context, strategic human capital management has evolved from a traditional administrative function into a critical organizational capability that directly influences long-term performance and competitiveness [1-3].

The growing significance of human capital is particularly evident in industries characterized by rapid technological change, global competition, and increasing innovation requirements. Organizations operating in such environments must continuously enhance workforce competencies, foster organizational learning, and create adaptive structures capable of responding to environmental uncertainty. Human capital development is therefore no longer viewed as an isolated human resource activity but rather as a strategic process integrated with organizational goals and competitive priorities. Strategic approaches to human capital management seek to align workforce capabilities with organizational strategies, thereby enabling firms to improve productivity, innovation, and sustainable performance outcomes [4-6].

The literature on strategic human resource management suggests that organizations capable of effectively integrating human resource practices with strategic objectives are more likely to achieve superior organizational outcomes. Strategic human resource systems influence employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance by creating coherent mechanisms for recruitment, training, evaluation, compensation, and career development. Such systems not only improve workforce effectiveness but also strengthen organizational resilience and adaptability in turbulent business environments. The effectiveness of strategic human capital management depends on the degree of alignment between organizational objectives, managerial practices, and employee expectations [7-9].

Recent developments in management theory have highlighted the relationship between human capital and competitive advantage. Competitive advantage emerges when organizations possess valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources that competitors cannot easily replicate. Human capital, particularly when supported by effective organizational systems and learning mechanisms, represents one of the most important strategic resources capable of generating such advantages. Research has demonstrated that organizational capabilities, employee competencies, and knowledge-based assets significantly contribute to innovation performance, operational excellence, and market competitiveness. Consequently, organizations increasingly seek to design strategic frameworks that enable the systematic development and utilization of human capital as a source of competitive differentiation [10-12].

The strategic role of human capital has become even more critical in the context of digital transformation and Industry 4.0. Emerging technologies, artificial intelligence, advanced analytics, automation, and digital platforms are fundamentally reshaping organizational structures, work processes, and skill requirements. Organizations must therefore cultivate new competencies, digital capabilities, and adaptive mindsets among employees to remain competitive. Human capital serves as the critical intermediary through which technological investments are translated into organizational performance improvements. The effectiveness of digital transformation initiatives largely depends on the ability of organizations to prepare, develop, and engage their workforce in transformation processes [13-15].

Digital transformation also requires organizations to adopt innovative approaches to talent management, organizational learning, and workforce development. Human resource information systems (HRIS), artificial intelligence-based recruitment tools, predictive analytics, and data-driven decision-making mechanisms have become increasingly important in modern human resource management. These technologies enhance organizational capacity to identify talent, predict workforce

trends, support succession planning, and optimize employee experiences. Consequently, strategic human capital management increasingly incorporates technological solutions to improve both operational efficiency and strategic effectiveness [13, 14, 16].

Another important dimension of contemporary human capital management involves organizational sustainability and social responsibility. Sustainable organizations recognize that long-term success depends not only on financial performance but also on ethical governance, employee well-being, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship. Human resource practices play a central role in supporting sustainability objectives by fostering ethical behavior, employee engagement, organizational citizenship, and responsible leadership. Recent studies have emphasized the integration of sustainability principles into strategic human resource management frameworks as a means of achieving balanced organizational development and stakeholder value creation [17-19].

The importance of governance mechanisms in human capital management has also received considerable scholarly attention. Effective governance systems establish accountability, transparency, fairness, and ethical standards that support organizational effectiveness and employee trust. Human capital governance encompasses the structures, policies, and practices through which organizations manage workforce-related decisions and outcomes. Ethical governance practices contribute to employee commitment, organizational legitimacy, and sustainable performance while reducing risks associated with workforce management. These considerations are particularly relevant in large organizations where strategic human capital decisions have substantial implications for organizational success and stakeholder relationships [20-22].

Research has further demonstrated that organizational culture constitutes a critical determinant of human capital effectiveness. Organizational culture influences employee behaviors, learning processes, innovation capabilities, and commitment levels. A culture that supports collaboration, continuous improvement, knowledge sharing, and adaptability creates favorable conditions for human capital development. Conversely, rigid and bureaucratic cultures may inhibit creativity, learning, and organizational responsiveness. Strategic human capital management therefore requires deliberate efforts to cultivate cultural environments that align with organizational objectives and competitive strategies [23-25].

Leadership also plays a fundamental role in shaping human capital outcomes. Transformational leaders inspire employees, encourage innovation, facilitate learning, and promote organizational change. Effective leadership contributes to employee engagement, organizational commitment, and performance improvement by creating supportive and empowering work environments. Leadership development and succession planning are therefore essential components of strategic human capital management systems, particularly in organizations facing complex competitive and technological challenges [21, 26, 27].

Employee commitment and engagement have similarly emerged as key variables influencing organizational success. Committed employees demonstrate higher levels of motivation, productivity, innovation, and organizational citizenship behavior. Strategic human capital management practices such as career development opportunities, fair reward systems, supportive leadership, and participation in decision-making processes contribute significantly to strengthening employee commitment and retention. These practices become increasingly important in competitive labor markets characterized by talent shortages and workforce mobility [9, 16, 21].

Organizational agility represents another strategic capability closely linked to human capital development. Agile organizations possess the capacity to respond rapidly to environmental changes, market uncertainties, and emerging

opportunities. Human resource agility, characterized by workforce flexibility, adaptive competencies, and rapid learning capabilities, enables organizations to maintain competitiveness under dynamic conditions. Research has consistently shown that flexible human resource systems contribute to organizational responsiveness, innovation capacity, and performance improvement [28-30].

Performance management systems have likewise evolved from traditional evaluation mechanisms into strategic tools for organizational development. Contemporary performance management emphasizes continuous feedback, competency assessment, developmental support, and alignment between individual and organizational goals. Effective performance management systems enhance employee motivation, clarify expectations, and facilitate strategic execution. Furthermore, multidimensional evaluation approaches provide organizations with comprehensive insights into workforce capabilities and development needs [6, 8, 31].

The automotive industry presents a particularly important context for examining strategic human capital management due to its complex technological, operational, and competitive characteristics. Automotive manufacturers face ongoing challenges related to technological innovation, digital transformation, production efficiency, workforce development, and global competition. These challenges necessitate comprehensive approaches to human capital management that integrate organizational strategy, technological advancement, and workforce capability development. Sustainable competitiveness in this industry increasingly depends on organizations' ability to develop and leverage human capital effectively [32-34].

Iran Khodro, as one of the largest automotive manufacturers in the region, operates within a highly competitive and dynamic environment characterized by technological changes, evolving customer expectations, economic uncertainties, and increasing demands for productivity and innovation. To address these challenges, there is a need for strategic models that systematically identify and integrate the key dimensions of human capital development within a competitive framework. While previous studies have examined various aspects of strategic human resource management, organizational capabilities, innovation, performance, sustainability, and competitive advantage, limited attention has been devoted to developing an integrated strategic human capital management model specifically tailored to the competitive requirements and developmental priorities of large manufacturing organizations such as Iran Khodro [5, 10, 11].

Moreover, recent evidence highlights the growing importance of self-leadership, human capital governance, digital capabilities, strategic participation, organizational flexibility, and innovation-oriented human resource systems in achieving organizational success. These developments suggest that strategic human capital management should encompass not only traditional human resource functions but also broader organizational dimensions such as leadership development, organizational agility, digital transformation, ethical governance, and sustainable value creation [14, 20, 35]. The integration of these dimensions into a coherent strategic framework can provide organizations with a robust foundation for enhancing competitiveness and achieving sustainable growth [13, 18, 36].

Therefore, given the strategic importance of human capital, the increasing complexity of competitive environments, the transformational impact of digital technologies, and the developmental needs of the automotive industry, the present study aims to identify and explain the indicators of a strategic human capital management model with a competitive approach for human capital development at Iran Khodro through the application of Attride-Stirling thematic analysis.

Methodology

Thematic analysis will be used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within qualitative data. The first stage will be familiarization with the data; the second stage, generating initial codes; the third stage, searching for themes; the fourth stage, reviewing themes; the fifth stage, defining and naming themes; and the sixth stage, preparing the report.

Alternatively, content analysis will be used to analyze the data. In this method, the variables and themes of the conceptual model of the study will be identified using a coding approach through three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding stage, the data collected from the open-ended questionnaire will be examined and concepts will be extracted.

After open coding, in the axial coding stage, the central phenomenon of the study will first be determined based on the emphases of the respondents and the theoretical foundations of the research. Then, the categories, including causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, and consequences, will be identified, and the manner of their interactions will be designed in the form of a paradigmatic model. Selective coding is the third stage of the coding method. This stage is, in fact, the process of theory refinement and the main stage of theorization. In other words, based on the results of the two previous coding stages, theory generation will be carried out; thus, the central category will be systematically linked to other categories, and the categories that require further improvement and development will be revised.

This study was conducted based on the views of 18 managers of Iran Khodro and selected experts. Their frequency distribution is presented in the following table.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Experts

Demographic Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	14	77%
Gender	Female	4	23%
Work Experience	Less than 10 years	10	55%
Work Experience	More than 11 years	8	45%
Total	—	18	100%

In the present study, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis was employed to identify the components of designing a strategic human capital management model with a competitive approach for human capital development at Iran Khodro. The process of qualitative data analysis begins when the researcher identifies and considers meaningful statements and expressions related to the subject. This analysis begins with repeated review and study of the data and continues with coding after meaningful statements related to the research topic have been identified. The practical process of data analysis includes four stages: preparation, familiarization, coding, and extraction of the main categories.

Findings and Results

Stage 1. Familiarization with the data: In order for the researcher to become familiar with the depth and breadth of the data content, it is necessary to become immersed in the data to some extent. Immersion in the data usually includes “repeated reading of the data” and active reading of the data, meaning the search for meanings and patterns.

Stage 2. Generating initial codes: The second stage begins when the researcher has read the data and become familiar with them. This stage involves generating initial codes from the data. Codes represent a feature of the data that appears

interesting to the analyst. Coded data differ from units of analysis, namely themes. Coding can be performed manually or through software programs. In this study, coding was conducted using software.

At this stage, 104 initial codes were extracted from texts and articles. The initial concepts obtained from thematic analysis and the review of the research literature, the design and explanation of the components of the strategic human capital management model with a competitive approach for human capital development at Iran Khodro, as well as articles and books, are presented. The identified indicators are the same verbal statements obtained from responses to the questions. After all these verbal statements were extracted, some of them shared similarities and were categorized based on the existing literature and theoretical foundations; accordingly, secondary concepts were formed.

Stage 3. Searching for selective codes/basic themes: This stage includes categorizing different codes into selective codes and organizing all summaries of the coded data. In fact, the researcher begins analyzing the codes and considers how different codes can be combined to form an overarching theme. At this stage, 19 selective codes were obtained by the researcher. At this stage, the researchers removed incomplete, irrelevant, and duplicate codes in order to arrive at this number of selective codes.

Stage 4. Formation of organizing themes: The fourth stage begins when the researcher has generated a set of themes and reviews them. This stage includes two processes: reviewing and refining, and shaping the subthemes. The first process involves review at the level of coded summaries. In the second process, the validity of the subthemes is considered in relation to the dataset. At this stage, the researchers identified the organizing themes. The results of thematic analysis show that among the 104 existing indicators/items, 19 basic themes were identifiable, and 5 categories of organizing themes were obtained.

Stage 5. Defining and naming the main themes: The fifth stage begins when a satisfactory picture of the themes has been developed. At this stage, the researcher defines and re-reviews the main themes presented for the analysis and then analyzes the data within them. Through definition and review, the nature of what each theme discusses is clarified, and it is determined which aspect of the data each main theme contains. At this stage, after moving back and forth among the subthemes, the researcher ultimately identified one global theme that can be explained within the intended research context. Some of the subthemes from which the main themes were extracted are presented below.

Table 2

Identification of the Global Theme for Designing a Strategic Human Capital Management Model with a Competitive Approach for Human Capital Development at Iran Khodro

Second-Level Organizing Themes	First-Level Organizing Themes	Initial Themes
Human Resource Infrastructure	Effective employer branding	Designing the employer value proposition
Human Resource Infrastructure	Effective employer branding	Promoting employee experience
Human Resource Infrastructure	Effective employer branding	Internal brand ambassadors
Human Resource Infrastructure	Effective employer branding	Active presence in university events
Human Resource Infrastructure	Effective employer branding	Evaluation of employer branding
Human Resource Infrastructure	Career roadmap	Designing a mentoring system
Human Resource Infrastructure	Career roadmap	Succession planning
Human Resource Infrastructure	Career roadmap	Skill-oriented evaluation system
Human Resource Infrastructure	Career roadmap	Clarifying job expectations
Human Resource Infrastructure	Career roadmap	Defining diverse career paths
Human Resource Infrastructure	Purposeful organizational culture-building	Organizational values aligned with digital transformation
Human Resource Infrastructure	Purposeful organizational culture-building	Holding intra-organizational cultural campaigns
Human Resource Infrastructure	Purposeful organizational culture-building	Culture of continuous and effective feedback
Human Resource Infrastructure	Purposeful organizational culture-building	Managers' behavioral model as role models

Human Resource Infrastructure	Purposeful organizational culture-building	Planning organizational cultural occasions
Human Resource Infrastructure	Workforce diversity management	Attention to different workforce generations: Z, Y, and X
Human Resource Infrastructure	Workforce diversity management	Enhancing women's participation at managerial levels
Human Resource Infrastructure	Workforce diversity management	Acceptance of intellectual and cultural diversity
Human Resource Infrastructure	Workforce diversity management	Developing anti-discrimination employment policies
Human Resource Infrastructure	Workforce diversity management	Multicultural interaction programs
Human Resource Infrastructure	Workforce diversity management	Creating equal opportunities and transparency in promotion paths
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Development of key skills	Identifying occupational skill gaps
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Development of key skills	Holding competency-based training programs
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Development of key skills	Strengthening soft and digital skills
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Development of key skills	Establishing in-house skill development centers
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Development of key skills	Evaluating the effectiveness of training programs
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Sustainable organizational learning	Implementing an e-learning system
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Sustainable organizational learning	Organizational knowledge management
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Sustainable organizational learning	Experience-based learning
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Sustainable organizational learning	Creating team learning circles
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Sustainable organizational learning	Culture of lifelong learning
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Performance-based reward systems	Goal-oriented performance evaluation system
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Performance-based reward systems	Motivational non-financial rewards
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Performance-based reward systems	Project- and team-based rewards
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Performance-based reward systems	Dynamic changes in reward structure
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Performance-based reward systems	Transparency and fairness in reward allocation
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Human resource intelligence	Data-driven analysis of employee performance
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Human resource intelligence	Predicting turnover rates
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Human resource intelligence	Modeling job satisfaction indicators
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Human resource intelligence	Using artificial intelligence in recruitment and training
Capability Enhancement and Motivation	Human resource intelligence	Human resource decision-support dashboard
Leadership Development and Succession	Continuous transformational leadership	Vision-based inspiration
Leadership Development and Succession	Continuous transformational leadership	Developing innovative thinking in teams
Leadership Development and Succession	Continuous transformational leadership	Behavioral model aligned with transformation values
Leadership Development and Succession	Continuous transformational leadership	Active support for employee learning
Leadership Development and Succession	Continuous transformational leadership	Creating cultural commitment to change
Leadership Development and Succession	Systematic succession planning	Identifying future-oriented key positions
Leadership Development and Succession	Systematic succession planning	Database of internal talents
Leadership Development and Succession	Systematic succession planning	Individual development programs
Leadership Development and Succession	Systematic succession planning	Multidimensional evaluation of succession readiness
Leadership Development and Succession	Systematic succession planning	Participatory management of the succession process
Leadership Development and Succession	Active organizational commitment	Creating emotional attachment to organizational goals
Leadership Development and Succession	Active organizational commitment	Increasing the sense of job ownership
Leadership Development and Succession	Active organizational commitment	Clarifying roles and responsibilities
Leadership Development and Succession	Active organizational commitment	Encouraging participation in process improvement
Leadership Development and Succession	Active organizational commitment	Providing continuous feedback and recognition
Organizational Agility and Performance	Strategic performance management	Developing key performance indicators
Organizational Agility and Performance	Strategic performance management	Aligning individual goals with the macro-level strategy
Organizational Agility and Performance	Strategic performance management	Continuous and constructive feedback
Organizational Agility and Performance	Strategic performance management	Data evidence-based performance evaluation
Organizational Agility and Performance	Strategic performance management	Team-based performance management
Organizational Agility and Performance	Strategic performance management	Individual performance improvement plan
Organizational Agility and Performance	Human resource agility	Capability to respond rapidly to market changes
Organizational Agility and Performance	Human resource agility	Culture of decentralized decision-making
Organizational Agility and Performance	Human resource agility	Mechanism for rapid recruitment of specialized human resources
Organizational Agility and Performance	Human resource agility	Job rotation and role flexibility
Organizational Agility and Performance	Human resource agility	Increasing digital readiness of human resources
Organizational Agility and Performance	Human resource agility	Project-based human resource management
Organizational Agility and Performance	Multidimensional evaluation system	360-degree evaluation
Organizational Agility and Performance	Multidimensional evaluation system	Assessment of professional behavior and soft competencies
Organizational Agility and Performance	Multidimensional evaluation system	Evaluation based on value creation for the organization
Organizational Agility and Performance	Multidimensional evaluation system	Measurement of job satisfaction and organizational commitment
Organizational Agility and Performance	Multidimensional evaluation system	Performance analysis based on measurable outcomes
Organizational Agility and Performance	Multidimensional evaluation system	Technology-based evaluation management
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Alignment with the human resources transformation document	Implementing a competency-based structure

Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Alignment with the human resources transformation document	Revising recruitment and hiring processes
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Alignment with the human resources transformation document	Aligning training programs with transformation requirements
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Alignment with the human resources transformation document	Establishing a transformation-oriented performance evaluation system
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Alignment with the human resources transformation document	Developing career paths consistent with transformation goals
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Alignment with the human resources transformation document	Monitoring and reporting indicators related to the realization of the transformation document
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Utilization of HRIS systems and data analytics	Integrating human resource data
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Utilization of HRIS systems and data analytics	Predictive analysis of employee turnover rates
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Utilization of HRIS systems and data analytics	Intelligent automation of the performance evaluation process
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Utilization of HRIS systems and data analytics	Creating managerial decision-support dashboards
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Utilization of HRIS systems and data analytics	Data support for succession planning programs
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Utilization of HRIS systems and data analytics	Data-driven management of employee experience
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Improving production chain productivity	Aligning training with production needs
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Improving production chain productivity	Analyzing human resource productivity at workstations
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Improving production chain productivity	Evaluating employee participation in process improvement
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Improving production chain productivity	Applying motivational systems on the production line
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Improving production chain productivity	Creating agile and cross-functional work teams
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Improving production chain productivity	Using human resource data analytics in production
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Reducing the loss of specialized human capital	Creating targeted individual development programs
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Reducing the loss of specialized human capital	Continuous assessment of factors contributing to the departure of key human resources
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Reducing the loss of specialized human capital	Improving employee experience
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Reducing the loss of specialized human capital	Increasing flexibility in working conditions
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Reducing the loss of specialized human capital	Succession planning for specialized roles
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Reducing the loss of specialized human capital	Increasing fairness in rewards and promotion
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Increasing attractiveness to young and knowledge-based workforce	Creating an innovative employer brand
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Increasing attractiveness to young and knowledge-based workforce	Providing opportunities for rapid growth and continuous learning
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Increasing attractiveness to young and knowledge-based workforce	Creating a digital and agile work environment
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Increasing attractiveness to young and knowledge-based workforce	Developing a creative reward system
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Increasing attractiveness to young and knowledge-based workforce	Targeted recruitment from top universities and innovation centers
Transformation-Oriented Organizational Alignment	Increasing attractiveness to young and knowledge-based workforce	Creating a guidance and mentoring network

Stage 6. Preparing the report: The sixth stage begins when the researcher has a set of highly abstract main themes that are consistent with the contextual structures of the research. This stage includes the final analysis and report writing, which will be presented at the end. After reviewing and analyzing the texts using thematic analysis and completing the six stages, the subthemes and main themes were obtained as shown in the table.

Based on the above table, the research model consisted of 1 global theme, 5 second-level organizing themes, and 19 first-level organizing themes. Finally, the research model was presented based on the final categories.

Figure 1

Design and explanation of the strategic human capital management model with a competitive approach for human capital development at Iran Khodro: quality control of the qualitative analysis conducted using the thematic analysis output from ATLAS.ti.



Four quantitative criteria were used to examine credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability: Holsti's coefficient, Scott's pi coefficient, Cohen's kappa index, and Krippendorff's alpha. The level of agreement among experts' views, calculated using Holsti's coefficient (PAO), or the "percentage of observed agreement," was .910, which is a considerable value. Given the criticisms directed at Holsti's method, Scott's pi index was also calculated, yielding a value of .885. The fourth index for estimating the validity of qualitative research is Cohen's kappa. Cohen's kappa index in this study was .862. Finally, Krippendorff's alpha was used, and its value in this study was estimated at .830.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify and explain the indicators of a strategic human capital management model with a competitive approach for human capital development at Iran Khodro using Attride-Stirling thematic analysis. The findings revealed that from 104 initial codes, 19 basic themes were extracted and organized into five second-level organizing themes, namely human resource infrastructure, capability enhancement and motivation, leadership development and succession, organizational agility and performance, and transformation-oriented organizational alignment. These themes collectively formed a comprehensive strategic human capital management model designed to strengthen human capital development and sustainable competitive advantage within Iran Khodro. The emergence of these dimensions demonstrates that strategic human capital management in contemporary organizations extends beyond conventional personnel administration and encompasses a multidimensional system integrating organizational culture, leadership, technological capabilities, workforce development, and strategic alignment. This finding is consistent with the view that human capital constitutes one of the most valuable intangible assets of organizations and serves as a key source of sustainable competitive advantage in knowledge-based economies [1, 2, 13].

One of the most important findings of the study was the identification of human resource infrastructure as a foundational dimension of the proposed model. This dimension included effective employer branding, career roadmaps, purposeful organizational culture-building, and human diversity management. The prominence of these components suggests that organizations seeking to develop human capital effectively must first establish an appropriate organizational infrastructure capable of attracting, developing, and retaining talented employees. Employer branding, in particular, emerged as a significant factor because it enhances organizational attractiveness among current and potential employees. This finding supports previous studies indicating that organizations with strong employer brands experience higher levels of employee engagement, commitment, and talent attraction [9, 21]. Likewise, the identification of career roadmaps reflects the increasing importance of providing employees with transparent development opportunities and structured career progression pathways. Such mechanisms strengthen organizational commitment and reduce turnover intentions by helping employees perceive long-term growth opportunities within the organization [21, 37].

The significance of purposeful organizational culture-building further demonstrates the role of cultural factors in strategic human capital development. The identified themes, including continuous feedback culture, transformation-oriented values, and managerial role modeling, indicate that culture serves as a critical mechanism through which strategic priorities become embedded in employee behaviors and organizational practices. This finding aligns with research emphasizing that organizational culture influences knowledge sharing, innovation, learning, and organizational effectiveness [23, 24]. Moreover, the inclusion of human diversity management reflects the growing recognition that organizations benefit from leveraging diverse perspectives, experiences, and competencies. Contemporary organizations increasingly view diversity not merely as a social objective but as a strategic capability that enhances creativity, problem-solving, and innovation outcomes [10, 33].

The second organizing theme, capability enhancement and motivation, comprised key skills development, sustainable organizational learning, performance-based rewarding, and human resource intelligence. The prominence of this dimension highlights the strategic importance of continuous workforce development in dynamic business environments. Organizations operating in competitive industries require employees who possess both technical and behavioral competencies capable of

supporting innovation and operational excellence. The finding that skill development emerged as a central theme is consistent with previous research demonstrating that employee competencies significantly contribute to organizational productivity, innovation capacity, and competitive performance [4, 27]. Furthermore, the emphasis on sustainable organizational learning supports the notion that learning-oriented organizations are better positioned to adapt to environmental changes and maintain long-term competitiveness. Learning mechanisms facilitate knowledge acquisition, capability development, and organizational adaptation, thereby enhancing strategic flexibility and resilience [18, 24].

The identification of performance-based rewarding as a major component of capability enhancement and motivation also underscores the importance of linking rewards to employee contributions and organizational outcomes. Performance-based reward systems encourage higher levels of effort, accountability, and engagement while reinforcing behaviors aligned with strategic objectives. This finding is consistent with studies suggesting that reward systems influence employee motivation, organizational commitment, and performance outcomes [6, 7]. Equally important is the emergence of human resource intelligence as a critical component. The themes associated with data-driven performance analysis, turnover prediction, and artificial intelligence applications indicate that strategic human capital management increasingly relies on advanced analytical capabilities and technological tools. These findings align with recent evidence highlighting the transformative role of digital technologies and analytics in enhancing workforce decision-making and organizational performance [13, 14].

Another significant finding of the study concerns leadership development and succession. This dimension included continuous transformational leadership, systematic succession planning, and active organizational commitment. The prominence of transformational leadership suggests that leadership capabilities play a pivotal role in fostering employee development, innovation, and organizational adaptability. Transformational leaders create a shared vision, inspire employees, and facilitate organizational change, thereby contributing to both individual and organizational growth. This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of leadership in shaping employee attitudes, learning behaviors, and performance outcomes [26, 27]. The identification of succession planning as a key theme further reflects the strategic necessity of preparing future leaders and ensuring continuity in critical organizational roles. Effective succession systems reduce organizational vulnerability, preserve institutional knowledge, and strengthen long-term sustainability [22, 36].

The emergence of active organizational commitment as a separate theme demonstrates that employee attachment to organizational goals remains a central determinant of workforce effectiveness. The identified subthemes, including emotional attachment, job ownership, participation, and continuous recognition, suggest that employees who feel connected to organizational objectives are more likely to contribute positively to organizational performance. This finding corresponds with the commitment literature, which identifies organizational commitment as a predictor of retention, productivity, and organizational citizenship behaviors [9, 21].

The fourth organizing theme, organizational agility and performance, encompassed strategic performance management, human resource agility, and multidimensional evaluation systems. The emergence of these themes reflects the growing need for organizations to remain responsive and adaptable in uncertain business environments. Strategic performance management allows organizations to align employee efforts with strategic objectives through measurable indicators and continuous feedback. This finding supports prior studies indicating that performance management systems contribute to organizational effectiveness and strategy implementation by clarifying expectations and reinforcing desired behaviors [29,

31]. Similarly, human resource agility emerged as an important factor because organizations increasingly require flexible employees capable of responding rapidly to technological, economic, and market changes. Research has consistently demonstrated that workforce flexibility contributes to innovation, responsiveness, and organizational resilience [28, 30].

The identification of multidimensional evaluation systems further reflects the limitations of traditional performance measurement approaches. Contemporary organizations increasingly rely on comprehensive evaluation systems incorporating behavioral, competency-based, attitudinal, and performance indicators. Such systems provide a more holistic understanding of employee contributions and facilitate more effective developmental interventions. This finding aligns with research emphasizing the value of multidimensional assessment frameworks in improving organizational performance and employee development [6, 8].

The fifth organizing theme, transformation-oriented organizational alignment, emerged as one of the most comprehensive dimensions of the model. This dimension included alignment with the human resources transformation document, utilization of HRIS and data analytics, improvement of production chain productivity, reduction of specialized human capital turnover, and increasing attractiveness for young and knowledge-based employees. The emergence of this theme indicates that successful human capital management requires alignment between workforce initiatives and broader organizational transformation strategies. Organizations undergoing digital transformation and competitive restructuring must ensure that their human resource practices support strategic change initiatives and organizational priorities. This finding is highly consistent with recent research emphasizing the mediating role of human capital in digital transformation and organizational performance relationships [13, 14].

The inclusion of HRIS utilization and data analytics further highlights the strategic importance of evidence-based decision-making in human resource management. Organizations increasingly rely on integrated information systems to monitor workforce trends, evaluate performance, support succession planning, and optimize talent management processes. These technologies enhance organizational agility and improve the effectiveness of strategic workforce decisions [8, 13]. Furthermore, the identification of productivity improvement within the production chain demonstrates the close relationship between human capital management and operational performance. Human resource practices that align workforce capabilities with production requirements can significantly enhance productivity, quality, and efficiency outcomes [25, 32].

The themes related to reducing specialized human capital turnover and increasing attractiveness for young and knowledge-based employees are particularly relevant in today's competitive labor markets. Organizations increasingly compete for highly skilled talent, making retention and attraction strategic priorities. The findings suggest that organizations must create compelling employee value propositions, development opportunities, flexible working conditions, and innovative organizational cultures to attract and retain talented employees. These findings correspond with previous studies emphasizing the strategic importance of talent management and employee experience in sustaining competitive advantage [16, 20, 35].

Overall, the findings indicate that strategic human capital management with a competitive approach represents a holistic and integrated framework that combines infrastructure development, capability enhancement, leadership cultivation, organizational agility, and transformation-oriented alignment. The model demonstrates that sustainable competitive advantage can be achieved when organizations systematically develop human capital while simultaneously aligning workforce strategies with technological, operational, and strategic objectives. The identified themes collectively reinforce the

proposition that human capital is not merely an organizational resource but a strategic asset capable of generating long-term organizational value, innovation, and competitiveness [11, 12, 17].

One limitation of this study is that the findings were derived exclusively from qualitative data collected from a relatively limited number of managers and experts within Iran Khodro. Although the selected participants possessed substantial experience and expertise, the results may reflect perceptions specific to this organizational context. Additionally, the study relied on thematic analysis, which, despite its depth and richness, may be influenced by researcher interpretation. The findings therefore should be generalized with caution to other industries and organizational settings.

Future studies may validate the proposed model quantitatively using structural equation modeling and larger samples drawn from different industrial sectors. Researchers may also examine the causal relationships among the identified dimensions and assess their relative contributions to organizational performance, innovation, and competitiveness. Comparative studies across organizations, industries, and countries could further enrich understanding of how contextual factors influence strategic human capital management. Longitudinal research designs may also be employed to investigate how implementation of the proposed model affects organizational outcomes over time.

Managers should view human capital management as a strategic organizational capability rather than an administrative function. Organizations should invest in employer branding, career development systems, leadership development programs, and data-driven human resource management practices. Greater emphasis should be placed on organizational learning, workforce agility, succession planning, and digital transformation initiatives. In addition, organizations should establish integrated HRIS platforms, strengthen employee engagement mechanisms, promote diversity and inclusion, and align human resource strategies with broader organizational transformation goals. Implementing these practices can contribute to improved productivity, enhanced innovation capability, stronger employee retention, and sustainable competitive advantage.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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