

## Abstract

This paper explores the maturity of Human Resource (HR) practices in the **skills development** across selected **Turkic countries**, including Hungary, Turkey, and Kazakhstan in the **higher education** sector. Drawing upon established **HRM maturity** models, the study assesses the extent to which higher institutions in these countries have implemented a system of **strategic HRM and** influence to the **skills development**. At the same time, on the one hand, researchers in the literature note the particular complexity of the transition from **traditional HR** to strategic HRM. On the other hand, there is no comprehensive research on comparative HRM maturity across the Turkic region and its universities covering only studies on separate countries.

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, primary data from HR professionals and secondary sources, including policy documents and relevant reports from selected **higher education** institutions.

The findings expect significant differences in HRM maturity, shaped by institutional development, economic reforms, and global integration. It is hypothesized that Hungary and Turkey show more advanced, European-aligned systems, while Kazakhstan remains in transitional stages from **traditional HR** to strategic HRM. Preliminary results highlight both challenges and opportunities for HR modernization and offer practical insights for policymakers and leaders in emerging markets.

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## "Strategic HRM Maturity in Higher Education: A Comparative Study of Hungary, Turkey, and Kazakhstan"

Education reforms are a cornerstone for both countries in their efforts to build competitive knowledge economies. The strengthening of higher education (HE) is thus viewed as a strategic priority worldwide. In this context, HE institutions are not only tasked with delivering quality education but also with integrating their internal processes—including human resources—with broader national and institutional strategic goals of countries. One of the tools for achieving this alignment is the transition to **Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM)**.

Strategic HRM encourages the integration of HR functions—recruitment, development, performance and talent management, and compensation—with the strategic objectives of the organization. This holistic and integrative approach enhances institutional performance by

ensuring that human capital development is closely tied to long-term organizational goals (Beer, 1997). The Strategic HRM model requires both **horizontal integration** (coherence across HR functions) and **vertical alignment** (connection between HR activities and institutional strategy), as well as the active involvement of internal stakeholders in its development and implementation (Darwish 2013).

The incentives of moving to the SHRM where HR practices operate as a synergy and have greater effect on the organizational performance than individual HR practices (Darwish, 2013, p.10). This logic is also supported by Azmi, (2019, p 18) and Lengnick-Hall (1988, p. 454), who recommend, when developing the system, to pay attention to vertical fit, which is concerned with ensuring integration of HRM with the strategic management process, and horizontal fit that is concerned with ensuring integration at the same level. In other words, horizontal fit analyzes in more depth, including: (1) Internal Fit: which focuses on the integration of various internal functions and sub-functions, systems and HRM subsystems, such as staffing, compensation, and training; (2) External Fit: which focuses on the integration of HRM and other external areas of activity such as marketing, operations, financial management, and more. The researchers argue that such an analysis (vertical and horizontal fits) is important for a deeper understanding of the components of SHRM and the environment in which they are developed and, more importantly, the essential importance of this environment to the SHRM system. Moreover, these researchers argue that synergy is very important both in the SHRM system itself and with external systems, its effectiveness depends on this (Azmi, 2019, p 18; Lengnick-Hall, 1988, p. 454).

The transition to Strategic HRM is part of a broader global trend, with many leading international universities having already adopted Strategic HRM frameworks. However, the path toward full HRM maturity varies significantly across countries, particularly between those in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, particularly in Hungary, Turkey and Kazakhstan.

In **Hungary**, studies suggest that higher education institutions are at an **intermediate stage of HRM maturity**, having begun integrating strategic HR practice, though challenges persist in areas such as performance management and stakeholder engagement. For example, Tóth et al. (2018) found that while Hungarian universities recognize the importance of aligning HR with strategy, many still lack integrated talent management systems and data-driven HR practices. <https://journals.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/index.php/vezetestudomány/article/view/1033>

In **Turkey**, the shift toward SHRM is more pronounced, driven in part by public sector modernization and EU harmonization efforts. According to Yildiz (2013), Turkish universities have made significant progress in implementing performance-based HRM systems, yet institutional autonomy remains a limiting factor in achieving full strategic alignment. Research by Ertürk (2010) further highlights cultural and organizational resistance to change as barriers to SHRM maturity.

By contrast, in **Kazakhstan**, the maturity of SHRM in higher education remains at an early stage. While the national education strategy (e.g., Kazakhstan 2050) has emphasized modernizing universities and improving their global competitiveness, most institutions still rely on traditional, administrative HR models. A formative analysis of six Kazakhstan universities (Zhardayeva et al, 2020) reveals limited horizontal and vertical integration of HR practices, a lack of performance data (e.g., turnover and retention rates), and insufficient technological and human capital to support SHRM. Moreover, HR professionals in these institutions often operate in siloed environments, with minimal involvement in strategic planning or institutional governance.

In summary, previous studies show while Strategic HRM adoption is a global trend in higher education, the **maturity levels differ**:

- Hungary is in transition, with formal SHRM elements in place but lacking deep integration (Buzady, 2016; Poór et al 2009; Molnár & Cseh Papp, 2024)
- Turkey demonstrates stronger policy alignment but is hindered by structural rigidity and cultural inertia ( Yildiz, 2013).
- Kazakhstan remains in the initial stages, with a fragmented understanding of SHRM and significant institutional and resource challenges (Buzady & Abdrazakova, 2019; Zhardayeva, 2020; Kudaibergenov 2021).

Despite global recognition of the importance of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), its implementation within higher education institutions—particularly in emerging economies—remains fragmented and inconsistent. While countries like Hungary have taken initial steps toward developing strategic HR frameworks, studies reveal that these efforts are often limited to isolated functions such as talent attraction or employee training, lacking the systemic integration needed for full SHRM maturity (Daruka, 2022; Poór et al., 2009). In Kazakhstan, although education reforms emphasize the strategic development of human capital, the transition to SHRM is still in its infancy.

These findings echo international concerns over the complexity of SHRM implementation. Beer (1997) emphasized that SHRM requires systemic coordination, leadership support, and the involvement of all internal stakeholders—a level of coordination that remains underdeveloped in many Kazakhstani institutions. Moreover, comparative research on HRM maturity across Central and Eastern Europe (e.g., Hungary, Turkey, and Kazakhstan) in the context of higher education is

sparse, especially with regard to how leadership competencies influence the institutionalization of SHRM practices.

Thus, **a clear research gap exists** in understanding:

- The **extent and depth of SHRM maturity** in higher education institutions across emerging economies;
- The **role of leadership** in shaping and sustaining SHRM implementation;
- The **comparative dynamics** of SHRM integration between post-socialist contexts like Hungary, Turkey, and Kazakhstan.

Thus, in this study we intend to compare the situations in universities that have made transition or are in the process of transformation towards SHRM. It is intended, through analysis of the current situation in selected universities, to come to an answer to the main research questions -

RQ1: How is the transition to the SHRM taking place in Hungary, Turkey and Kazakhstan? What are the key steps to succeed in the implementation of SHRM?

RQ2: How do leadership competencies influence the maturity of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) systems in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Hungary?

Based on this discovery, the study determined the several hypotheses as follows:

***H1: Implementation of SHRM in universities may vary from one turkic nation country to other***

***H2: Leadership competencies influence the maturity of Strategic HRM***

The study will utilize a mixed-methods approach, primary data from HR professionals and secondary sources, including policy documents and relevant reports from selected **higher education** institutions.

The study adopts the case study as a research method. The scope of the case study covers the review of 3 universities per country in total 12 universities from Hungary, Turkey and Kazakhstan.

These universities were selected based on the following criteria: 1) the age (2 young universities and 2 long-established universities); 2) their degree of involvement in HR transformation (started, in process, intends to start; finished); and, 3) participation in translating knowledge initiative within the country and beyond. All of the above universities are currently at different stages of HRM evolution moving towards strategic HRM. Therefore, the following universities were selected from Hungary, Turkey and Kazakhstan:

- Kazakhstan: SDU University, Almau and Satpayev University

- Turkey: 3 TBD
- Hungary: Corvinus University of Budapest (Business/Economics), Budapest Technical University (Engineering), ELTE (Diverse Portfolio of Science)

The information in the case study includes secondary and primary data collection. The secondary data serves as a basis for primary data collection, specifically for developing semi-structured interviews. The following resources are used as a secondary data: 1) websites of selected universities from 3 countries implementing Strategic HRM and available internal documents; and, 2) HRM documentation and HR business processes from 12 selected universities available on the websites. This information helped to identify the variables that can be used as possible measurement criteria for the study. However, due to the different approaches in disclosing internal data in Kazakhstan, Hungary and Turkey, some data may be considered sensitive (confidential) by the universities examined here. For this reason, the study accepted the possibility of limitations to accessing sensitive information. Taking into account this limitation, the study is careful in selecting the most relevant variables. Therefore, from the analysis of the literature review, the study selected the following variables: form of ownership, age, dependence on state funding, size of the organization, availability of internal IT system in HR and involvement of academic staff in HR transformation, HR business processes related to horizontal and vertical fit. The study assumes that the universities can share these variables without any potential risk of disclosing sensitive information. These variables helped to frame the data collection from the 12 **\*\*\*\*9** selected universities. Afterward, the collected variables will be analyzed across the 12 selected universities for possible associations or correlations (positive, negative or have no effect) between each other. These interrelationships of variables served as the basis for questions posed in the semi-structured interviews. In order to get these variables from selected 12 universities, the researchers made extensive secondary data analysis of websites of the universities (i.e., learned from the available HRM and strategic documentation) as well as will work closely with HR managers and Strategy managers (or any responsible person from their strategic planning units) where it was possible. The following HRM documentation will be used for analysis: HR strategy, Code of Ethics, newsletters, published interviews as well as any available HR performance reports on KPIs. As for the strategic documentation, the study will analyze any available strategic planning documents, including reports on the strategic accomplishments of the 12 universities under examination. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the form of individual interviews (online in person) at two different levels within the HE organizations: HR employees, and employees responsible for strategic planning. The sample size for the semi-structured interviews is a total of 16 people (1 HR Director and/or 1 employee responsible for strategic planning per university). This purposive sample targeted those most involved in, and knowledgeable about SHRM and will help to understand the overall picture: the nature of HRM within the universities, knowledge of SHRM and familiarity with the concept, influence on organization performance in these universities, attitudes to transforming HR, and, the strategic focus in HRM.

The questions (3-7 questions per level) of the semi-structured interviews were focused on identifying approaches in HRM, the expectations and engagement of HR in HR practices and employee performance, HRM role in the organization, and any challenges in HRM. During the interviews, the researchers will bring to the attention of the respondents the following information: 1) the rationale and purpose of the study; 2) the researchers role in this study: i.e. to explain that we (researchers) are not auditors, we look for their contribution; 3) the role of respondents, benefits and opportunities for them: i.e. to explain that they (respondents) are contributors and will be the end-users of the study results; 4) the difference in concepts of HRM (traditional) and SHRM; 5) the confidentiality.

About Questions, make clear reference of your earlier studie where the Qs have already been applied for KZ only, now extensions...

To new countries.

HERE ADD your earlier concrete results.

Now a short section about why TUK and HUN might be different?

HUN> EU regulations, long century history university admin, competitive transformation since soviet collaps, advanced internationaliation \*kz zero...(

Why would we think that there should be factors making shrm maturity different in tur and hun compared to kz study<

Therefore proposed study and toolkit>

1. proposed QR about establishing the shrm maturity level in 3 countries

2. Plus turaeva buzadz prague existing findings plus draft phd defense. In short \*about ldsp style differences, which are measured and established via 29 different skills in the 3 respective countries.

Expected results are:

In sync with economic diversification and integration into an international higher educational environment and standard, we expect a( differences across countries(.

And b) we expect a different level of skills set to influence the shrm maturity.

Limitations:

Explore role of organizational culturel<

Explore obstacles of shrm maturity evolution in practice

Role new technology and international exposure of staff and leaders to accelerate development process.

Turkic nations integration how could it benefit mutual development?

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## INTO APPENDIX

Please see further the proposed list of questions to the different levels of participants:

### A Questions to the HR Director: SHRM IN HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

123

- What do you understand about the concept of SHRM? What are the benefits or difficulties in adopting SHRM?
- What role, if any, does HR play in the strategy of the organization and the achievement of its goals by employees?
- Do HR and strategic goals support each other at your university? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Are you satisfied with the work of HR in the organization?
- Are you satisfied with the way your employees achieve the goals of the organization?
- How does the university manage attrition and retention rates?
- Do you use HR analytics in strategic decision making? If so, how? If not, why not?

### 2. Questions to the Employees responsible for strategic planning?

- Do you participate in the process of guiding and coordinating the implementation of strategic goals? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you collaborate with HRM in strategic planning? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How does your unit contribute to managing the attrition and retention rates?

The study adopts qualitative and quantitative analysis of secondary and primary data for the case study.

For the secondary data, the study plans to use cross-tabulation. Cross tabulation has been developed based on the characteristics of the universities (age, source of funding and etc.). The cross-tabulation tool helped to evaluate the characteristics across universities, find out gaps and differences that contributed to formulate a conclusion (see the Table 4).

**Table 4. Framework for identifying characteristics #1: basic features**

Features	University # 1-7

Local/ Foreign	
Age (in years)	
Dependence on state funding (%)	
Form of ownership	
Size of organization (# of employee)	
Internal IT system in HR	
Academic staff are involved in SHRM	
HR transformation (started, in process, intends to start; finished)	

Source: Zhardayeva, 2020

Besides, the secondary data analysis has been implemented using framework analysis of qualitative data. This tool helped to identify the thematic framework of traditional HRM and SHRM based on HR characteristics presented in Table 5.

**Table 5 Framework for identifying characteristics #2: Traditional or Strategic HRM**

	<b>Traditional HRM</b>	<b>Strategic HRM</b>	<b>University # 1-7 EXPERT EVALUATED TOTAL SCORE</b>
<b>Guidelines</b>	Contacts and rules focus on the process	Vision and mission	<i>T or S</i>
<b>Objectives</b>	Organizational interest	Organizational and individual interest	<i>T or S</i>
<b>Scope</b>	Personal department	General managers	<i>T or S</i>
<b>Methodology</b>	Technical, specialist	Professional, managerial	<i>T or S</i>



<b>Approach</b>	Segregated, emphasis on staff function	Systems approach	<i>T or S</i>
<b>Function</b>	Traditional, administrative	Modern development	<i>T or S</i>
<b>Nature</b>	Short-term, constrained	Evolving strategic role	<i>T or S</i>
<b>Thrust</b>	Monitoring	Nurturing	<i>T or S</i>
<b>Status</b>	Implementer, reactive	Formulator, proactive	<i>T or S</i>
<b>Role</b>	Attain goals	Design goals	<i>T or S</i>
<b># of THRM features</b>			
<b># of SHRM features</b>			
<b># of principles</b>			

*Source: Zhardayeva, 2020*

Besides the framework analysis helped to make a comparative analysis of HR systems in the selected 4 local universities against current practices and development plans according to the strategic documentation in the form presented in Table 6.

**Table 6 Framework analysis of HR systems against current HR practices and university strategic documents**

<b>HR systems</b>	<b>University #1-7</b>
HR Strategy	
Recruitment, Selection, and Placement	
Training & Development	

Performance Appraisal	
Compensation	

*Source: official web-resources of selected universities*

In addition, the qualitative secondary data has been analyzed using cross sectional analysis according to the vertical and horizontal integration of HR business processes (Azmi, 2019, p 18; Lengnick-Hall, 1988, p. 454) as presented in Table 7 which helped to understand the SHRM implementation.

**Table 7 Cross sectional analysis: Vertical and horizontal integration**

<b>Integration type</b>	<b>University #1-7</b>
<b>Vertical Fit</b>	
The organizational vision is used to provide an overarching frame of reference for laying down the HR vision and plan	YES/NO
HRM activities are designed keeping the organization's strategy in mind.	YES/NO
Organizational strategy is also designed keeping in mind HR issues	YES/NO
Top-level strategic teams include HR head or executives.	YES/NO
Inputs about HR are considered an integral part of the organizational strategy	YES/NO
Top management takes special interest in HR issues and strategies.	YES/NO
There is existence of a comprehensive exchange and feedback mechanism between the senior managerial team and the HR department	YES/NO
Senior HR executives are provided training in general managerial skills.	YES/NO
<b>Horizontal Fit</b>	YES/NO
<b>Internal Fit</b>	YES/NO
The HR vision helps integrate all the HRM activities +/- (goals not vision)	YES/NO
HR policies, such as recruitment, training, and reward, are consistent with each other. There is a common vision that runs across these sub-functions. All HRM activities are, thus, integrated and coherent with each other.	YES/NO
An information sharing mechanism between HR sub-areas exists	YES/NO
A coordinating mechanism between HR sub-functions is established	YES/NO

<b><i>External Fit</i></b>	YES/NO
Consistency of HR activities with other functional activities is established by aligning all functional areas with the organizational vision and strategy (Data analytics system development).	YES/NO
All managers are in some way HR managers, as they all deal with people issues.	YES/NO
HR decisions are taken jointly with managers of other areas	YES/NO
Managers of other areas are actively involved in HR activities, such as recruitment, selection, training, appraisal, and compensation	YES/NO

*Source: Azmi, 2019, p 18; Lengnick-Hall, 1988, p. 454*

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