

# Analysis of Strategic Human Resource Management Practices

-- A Case Study of Hilton Worldwide

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**Abstract:** In the hospitality industry, human resources are considered one of the most essential and significant resources. This report aims to explore the influence of strategic human resource management through analysing three main HR strategies of Hilton Worldwide on achieving organisational goals and performance. And three models including resource-based view, best practice model, and best fit model will be adopted in the case analysis. It is hoped that this report will provide some insight for hotel enterprises and can indicate a direction for future study with comparison of other valuable human resources strategies.

**Keywords:** Strategic human resource management, The hotel industry, Resource-based view, Best practice model, Best fit model.

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## 1. Introduction

The hospitality industry has been viewed as one of the most important in terms of its economic contribution, but this industry relies heavily on human resources (Ashton, 2018; Liu and Wall, 2006). Threatened by labour shortages and a high turnover rate, the hospitality industry requires effective human resource management systems (Bergs and Lub, 2020; Lockyer and Scholarios, 2004). Some large hotels have employed systematic approaches to manage their human resources to achieve their business strategies by establishing an environment with numerical strategies of motivation, training, and recruitment (Enz, 2009; Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou, 2019). Strategic human resource management (SHRM), which incorporates the perspectives of the best fit model (BFM), best practice model (BPM), and resource-based view (RBV), plays an important role in human resource management (HRM) especially for international enterprises (Gannon et al., 2015; Japutra and Situmorang, 2021). The approach to human resource management in the hospitality industry has significant implications for organisational performance, particularly in terms of service quality, customer satisfaction, and competitive advantage (Baum, 2015; Cooke et al., 2019; Maroudas et al., 2008).

Hilton Worldwide has been chosen as the case for analysis of SHRM strategies for several reasons. Firstly, this organisation has been appraised as one of the best places to work for several years (Corder, 2021; Hilton, 2021). Secondly, evidence detailed in the following chapters implies that Hilton Worldwide has acknowledged the necessity and urgency for SHRM in hotel operation and advancement. In this report, an overview of Hilton Worldwide will be presented followed by a definition of SHRM and critical analysis of BFM, BPM, and RBV. Critical evaluation of SHRM strategies of Hilton Worldwide will follow with theoretical evidence. Finally, the conclusion and recommendations will be proposed.

## 2. Hilton Worldwide

Hilton Worldwide is an international hotel group which

was initially established in the US (Liu and Zhu, 2019). As one of the most well-known chain hotel companies, Hilton Worldwide maintained over 6000 hotels across the globe in 2020 and has approximately 1.4 million employees around the world (Lock, 2022).

According to the Hilton Worldwide website, the mission, vision, and core values of this organisation promote its comprehensive approach to ensuring 'heartfelt experiences for guests and meaningful opportunities for team members' with an emphasis on the values of 'integrity, cooperation, leadership, and partnership'. To achieve these objectives, the company determined its basic business strategy as service differentiation which concentrates on service quality, high standards, and IT system integration with service (Hilton Worldwide, 2021). Dudovski (2016) points out that another strategy of Hilton is international expansion which is reflected in its increasing number of rooms, but this strategy has generated some potential threats, such as financial burden and imitation of its strategies by competitors. Furthermore, in the current climate of fierce global competition, Hilton worldwide desires to be the first choice of tourists from around the world, and to realise this, it has utilised its resources to expand market share, deliver high-quality service, and innovate service products (Ma, 2021; Ponting, 2020; Sufi and Lyons, 2003).

Hilton Worldwide is selected as the target hotel group to be discussed in this report because it has been identified as one of the best companies to work for in the sector by a number of researchers, such as Corder (2021), Jobs (2022), and Russell (2021). To support this, Table 1 highlights some of the key awards and recognition attained by Hilton Worldwide in the past three years. Besides, in order to achieve its business strategies, Hilton has concentrated on cultivating its internal environment, especially its HRM systems, by continuously working to develop a sense of belonging by creating a comprehensive work environment and prioritizing training and programs for employees which facilitate them in achieving their own career goals (Zeng, 2021).

**Table 1.** Awards & Recognition of Hilton Worldwide from 2020 to 2022

Year	Name of Awards & Recognition
2022	Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For® 2022 The second prize
	Fortune 2022 World's Most Admired Companies
	2022 Great Place to Work, Peru - The first prize
	World's Most Valuable Hotel Brand, Brand Finance Global 500 2022 Rankings
2021	2021 Great Place to Work World's Best Workplace - The third prize
	GPTW & Fortune #1 Best Place to Work for Women in the U.S.
	2021 Great Place to Work, Colombia - The fifth prize
	2021 Great Place to Work, China - The first prize
	2021 Great Place to Work, UK - The first prize
2020	2020 US Best WorkPlace for Parents – The second prize
	Top Companies for People with Disabilities, DiversityInc, - The eighth prize
	2020 Great Place to Work, UK - The third prize
	2020 Great Place to Work, China - The first prize

Source: Hilton newsroom (n.d.)

### 3. Strategic Human Resource Management

SHRM is defined as a model implemented by an organisation to designate human resources to realise its intentions and goals (Boxall and Purcell, 2000; Cooke et al., 2019). Research in the field of SHRM focuses on investigating systems of HR practices, viewed as an entirety, to influence the organisational performance (Gifford, 2021; Wright and Boswell, 2002). Based on previous findings, SHRM is influential in organisations on the macro level, while HRM is effective on the micro level (Cross and Kieran, 2018; Guest et al., 2003). As an illustration, SHRM has been found to be a factor contributing to the improvement of the financial performance of companies (Andersen et al., 2007).

SHRM can be categorised into BPM, BFM, and RBV (Bailey et al., 2018; Purcell and Boxall, 2015). In the hospitality industry, numerous scholars have investigated SHRM from various perspectives through analysing case studies of hotel companies (Malik, 2018; Xiao et al., 2012). For example, Collins (2020) and Maroudas et al. (2008) found that hotels seem to adopt not only one approach of SHRM, which implies that it is possible for hotel managers to occupy an advantageous position among fierce competition with a combination of BPM, BFM, and RBV. Thus far, most research appears to support that through these three perspectives, enterprises could adjust the external pressures caused by the industry to motivate internal innovation and cultivate sustainable operation (Lee et al., 2020; Teece, 2007).

#### 3.1. Best fit model

Previous studies have mostly defined the BFM as a means of adjusting the relationship between human resource management and enterprise strategies based on the external as

well as the internal environment, taking into account corporate features including positions and target markets with consideration of the impact caused by vertical integration (Armstrong and Brown, 2019; Delery and Doty, 1996). In the hospitality industry, the BFM could be adopted by close rivals with similar business and operational strategies to enhance performance (Alleyne et al., 2005; Wright et al., 2018). While some scholars assert that the limitations of the BFM are that it mainly focuses on exploring the exterior environment and close competition with rivals sharing similar positions and strategies (Cooke et al., 2019; Garavan et al., 2016). It is also argued that when both external fit and internal fit are achieved, the BFM could contribute to effectiveness in the performance of organisations (Malik, 2018).

#### 3.2. Best practice model

When an enterprise attempts to establish a new human resource system, it is likely to adopt the BPM by default because this model has been widely examined in academic research and successful business cases (Chams and García-Blandón, 2019; Nataraja and Alamri, 2016; Stratford, 2011). However, a consensus has not been reached on the authoritative definition of BPM (Maroudas et al., 2008; Jawaad et al., 2019), and the diverse definitions proposed by various researchers are presented in Table 2. What is consistent among these definitions is the contribution of the BPM in developing an organisation's competitive advantage by advancing financial performance and employee behaviours (Kuvaas and Dysvik, 2010; Purcell et al., 2008). Conversely, the BPM is not effective under all conditions. For example, in the hospitality industry, the high employee turnover rate would obstruct the implementation of the BPM, especially in employee recruitment and training (Alleyne et al., 2005; Safavi and Karatepe, 2018).

**Table 2.** The definitions of best practice model

Researchers	Definitions
Delery and Doty (1996)	The best practice perspective argues that some HR practices or HR systems are universally effective – adopting this set of practices is expected to always lead to better results, regardless of the context.
Johnson (2000)	Best practice or high performance work practice are described as HR methods and systems that have universal, additive and positive effects on organizational performance’.
Paauwe and Boselie (2003)	Best practice models imply a close connection between HR practices and organizational performance and are often associated with high commitment management.
Kreitz (2007)	Best practices are defined as “practices which are most appropriate under the circumstances, esp. as considered acceptable or regulated in business; techniques or methodologies that, through experience and research, have reliably led to desired or optimum results.”
Kuvaas (2008)	Contemporary research on ‘best practice’, high-performance, high-commitment, high-involvement, progressive, or human-capital-enhancing human resource management (HRM) implies that organizations offer resources and opportunities that improve the motivation, skills, attitudes and behaviours of their employees.
Maroudas et al. (2008)	The best-practices approach, generally, refers to the resource-based theory of competitive advantage, which focuses on the role that internal resources (employees) play in developing and maintaining an organization's competitive capabilities.

### 3.3. Resource-based view

RBV could create competitive and sustainable advantages by using the company’s internal visible and invisible resources to differentiate itself (Barney, 1991; Foltean et al., 2019). From the perspective of hoteliers, the RBV could boost performance of groups by highlighting the influence of brand value, HR strategies and other internal resources (Dawson et al., 2011; Hossain et al., 2021). However, some researchers assert that only valuable and inimitable resources benefit organisations from a competitive perspective, and these features of resources would be diminished by the difference of culture, regulation, and industrial convention (Boxall and Purcell, 2008; Ferreira and Fernandes, 2017). In conclusion, compared with other categories of hotel, the global brand hotels are more likely to utilise RBV to realise business development and market extension (Boon et al., 2018; Collins, 2021).

## 4. Evaluation of the Human Resource Practices of Hilton Worldwide

### 4.1. Gender and ethnic diversity in recruitment

Hilton Worldwide has been in the top fifty list of companies achieving diversity during hiring, development, and retention of employees (Hilton Press Center, 2021) for 7 years. Furthermore, this news report highlights that Hilton Worldwide has worked on promoting diversity and inclusion for over 10 years and promises to increase the ethnic diversity ratio to 25 percent by 2027 by executing a project to increase gender and ethnic diversity in recruitment. Additionally, this strategy helps to realise the organisational mission (positively impact the local community) and achieve the global expansion strategy of Hilton Worldwide, because as Llopis (2011) and Zhang (2020) point out, diversity management of employees is beneficial for enterprises to enter diverse markets. Compared with Hilton, Marriott International, as the biggest hotel company in the world, has not only concentrated on employee diversity and developing a comprehensive environment, it has also worked to achieve the diversity in hotel ownership and hotel suppliers (Marriott International, n.d.).

This diversity strategy could be viewed as a form of BFM. Viewing the trend of multicultural and multi-ethnic population composition of many countries, multinational

companies are required to change their HR activities to fit the change of the labor market caused by diverse demographic structure (Jauhari and Singh, 2013; Roberson, 2019). It is argued that acknowledging gender and ethnic diversity in recruitment leads to better organizational performance by encouraging employee behaviours and employee loyalty (Seymen, 2006; Velten and Lashley, 2018), although, supporting diversity in recruitment but without proper management could increase work conflicts resulting from gender or ethnic bias and training costs caused by cultural difference (Gomez and Bernet, 2019; Hunt et al., 2015).

According to Pfeffer (1998), selective recruitment, which aims to seek professional and skilful employees in a more targeted way, is one of the successful aspects of BPM practices. DiTomaso (2021) and Rivera (2011) also points out that some international organisations intentionally recruit staff of different gender and ethnicity. As a multinational enterprise with diverse customer groups, Hilton should be aware of the differences between cultures and areas which could contribute to global success, such as increased market share and higher annual revenue through engagement of various employees (Gannon et al., 2010; Hunt et al., 2015; Tipper, 2004). In the long term, diverse recruitment could alleviate the gender and ethnic discrimination which is commonplace in the wider society to a large extent (Cooke and Saini, 2010; Festing et al., 2014).

### 4.2. Hilton Worldwide University

The Hilton Worldwide University (HWU) includes five colleges which provide more than 2,500 courses relating to high school completion, digital literacy, and professional skills for employees in 91 areas and countries, and these courses are delivered through e-learning, e-book, live teaching, and classroom training (Hilton, 2022; Hilton Global Media Center, n.d.). The official website of HWU states that this university has attained the highest award provided by the Association for Talent Development for three years, which is used to appraise the successful talent training of enterprises. In contrast to Hilton, Marriott International has an additional training course named Voyage Program which is set to develop leadership and professional skills of recent university graduates who intend to work in Marriott, and through this program, graduates could start their career in Marriott International (Marriott Voyage, n.d.). In sum, Namely, the HWU mainly focuses on training internal employees, while

Marriott International not only pays attention to internal training, but also uses the Voyage Program to attract and cultivate potential talents.

The characterizing features of the hospitality industry are intangibility, inseparability, perishability, and variability, which make this industry highly reliant on employees to deliver service and brand equity to customers (Bharwani and Butt, 2012; Iqbal, 2018). To change organisational strategies to correspond with the industry features, the HWU could be viewed as a BFM approach of the Hilton Worldwide to cultivate employees in that it provides employees with meaningful opportunities to receive vocational training, which reflects the mission of the organisation.

Furthermore, Pfeffer (1998) agrees that extensive training is considered the most significant BPM strategy. Particularly after selective recruitment, training could benefit organisations to enhance competitiveness by increasing overall productivity (Ashton, 2017; Bharwani and Butt, 2012). Drawing from the introduction on the HWU website, Eggleston (2012) emphasizes that courses in the HWU such as brand knowledge, leadership, and revenue management are partly developed by internal employee teams with a combination of real business cases and theoretical knowledge. From the perspective of RBV, the ability to design training courses could be regarded as an intangible resource of Hilton. Browning et al. (2009) and Jaworski et al. (2018) highlight the importance of training hotel employees to be skilful and professional when dealing with various needs of customers, which could contribute to shaping the hotel image by providing high-quality service. On account of this, HWU could accomplish Hilton’s organisational mission, namely the

creation of a warm and heartfelt customer experience.

However, globalisation and fierce competition drive customers to raise their standards and expectations of hotel service, and it is a challenge for hoteliers to determine the content of employee training based on the changeable demands of customers (Abdelhamied, 2019; Bharwani and Jauhari, 2011). To summarise, the hospitality industry is human-oriented which implies the inevitability and necessity of hoteliers to develop employee training plans according to customer demand and market trends to occupy an advantageous position among the global competition (Ashton, 2017; Bharwani and Butt, 2012).

### 4.3. Family-friendly benefits programs

As summarised in Table 3, Hilton has established a number of programs which provide family-friendly benefits to staff. According to this table, the current programs created to promote a family-friendly work environment include ‘Parental Leave’, ‘Parenthood Journey’, ‘Milk Stork’, and ‘Adoption Assistance’. Through these programs, Hilton could indirectly or directly support the individual development of employees in both their career and personal life by improving job flexibility (Burjek, 2016). Hilton has a more comprehensive approach to employee welfare in comparison with Marriott International, which created their ‘TakeCare’ program to provide employees with mental and physical health support but failed to take into account the influence of families (Bethesda, 2019). However, some of these family-friendly programs are only available for US team members which may cause negative emotion like dissatisfaction among other employees not working in US (Dudovskiy, 2016).

**Table 3.** Family-friendly benefits programs of Hilton Worldwide

Name of Program	Contents
Adoption Assistance Program	Hilton reimburse Team Members up to \$10,000 per child for qualified adoption expenses—including application fees, home studies, agency and placement fees, legal fees and court costs, immigration, immunization and translation fees, transportation, meals and lodging, and counselling.
Milk Stork Program	Hilton launched a partnership with Milk Stork, allowing Team Members to easily ship or carry breast milk home to their babies while traveling for work.
Parental leave Program	Hilton will increase parental leave by two weeks, providing birth mothers with an industry-leading 12 weeks of paid time off, and fathers and adoptive parents with four weeks of paid time off.
Parenthood Journey Program	In partnership with Stanford Medicine, this program provides support ranging from in-person training for managers of new parents, video e-learning for new moms on themes of wellbeing, connection and purpose, and toolkits for partners to navigate and support their partner and baby.

Source: Hilton Press Center (2019)

Kalleberg (2009) and Liu et al. (2017) show that job insecurity is a global issue caused by economic change and an uncertain business environment. Besides, research has indicated that work-life balance is one of the most important considerations of employees when they are selecting jobs (Gragnano et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2015). The Hilton adopted the BFM to develop these family-friendly programs aiming to meet employees’ expectations by reflecting the external trend of employees’ desire for job security and flexibility.

Meanwhile, employment security as an element of the BPM provided by organisations could drive the employment relationship to be reliable and open based on positive psychological contracts (Bratton et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2019; Wilkinson and Marchington, 2005). In SHRM, companies

could provide some benefit programs such as job flexibility and other welfare plans to encourage employee performance (Choudhury et al., 2021; Gong and Chang, 2008). Especially in the hospitality industry, the high turnover rate of employees has been a challenge for hoteliers, Lam et al. (2015) point out that employment security is a maintenance-oriented HR strategy which could increase employee loyalty.

Furthermore, these family-friendly programs could be treated as RBV approaches. The RBV could accumulate and maintain valuable and rare human resources by creating effective internal management plans, like work-life balance and job flexibility, to help organisations remain competitive (D’Oría et al., 2021; Pereira and Bamel, 2021; Shaw et al., 2012). For hoteliers, these permanent employees who have received long-term training are precious and difficult to

emulate and could be regarded as mediators transferring hotel brand value to customers during the service process (Alleyne et al., 2005; Gannon et al., 2015).

However, some scholars argue that employee welfare programs would increase the financial pressure on companies, and these programs may become levers for managers to avoid accusations from employees regarding misconduct and fraud (Ben-Nasr and Ghouma, 2018; Dyck et al., 2010).

## 5. Conclusion

Considering the complexity of globalisation and HR management, companies would be wise to integrate two or three approaches of SHRM in regulating their human resources. Enterprises should develop their HR strategies with careful selection of SHRM approaches after full examination of the internal and external environments.

Compared with Marriott International, the shortcomings of the SHRM strategies of the Hilton Worldwide group are that both the diversity strategy and training program only consider internal employees while disregarding external shareholders like hotel owners, hotel suppliers, and potential employees. The merits of this company's strategies, however, lie in taking the family factors of employees into consideration which Marriott International fails to do, although it would be more equal and effective if the family-friendly programs were available for global employees and not only for those in US.

Through evaluating real management approaches in the case of Hilton Worldwide, this report has provided some insights into the company's determination of SHRM strategies. The findings suggest that with enough consideration of personal differences, internal factors, the global environment, and proper combination of the three SHRM approaches, the success of the company's strategies of managing employees could be greater. Although some scholars argue that conclusions drawn from case studies cannot be applied to other cases (Baxter and Jack, 2008), others defend generalizing from one case to other similar cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006) so this is not regarded as a limitation of this report. Instead, it is suggested that as only the human resource management of Hilton Worldwide has been examined, which employs two or three approaches of SHRM, future studies should evaluate the strategies which only use one SHRM approach to contribute to this field of research. Moreover, future studies are suggested to examine the SHRM strategies of other Hotel enterprises like Marriott International and Hyatt Hotel Corporation. Especially the Hyatt Hotel Corporation increased from 28th in 2020 to 5th in 2022 in the global best hospitality employer ranking (Jobs, 2022), and it will be worthy to explore the strategies used by this hotel firm which contribute to the rise in rank.

Besides, this study concentrates on evaluating the effectivity of HR strategies used by Hilton Worldwide, while ignores the process of designing and executing these strategies. So, future research could explore the design and implement of HR practices in organisations. For example, Kuvaas and Dysvik (2010) explains that the intrinsic motivation should be considered when designing HR strategies because it can regulate the effectivity of practices used best practice model.

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