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Contemporary Human Resource Management Practices in Occupational Safety, Global HRM, and Small Businesses: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary human resource management (HRM) practices constitute a rapidly developing field; however, comprehensive syntheses connecting occupational safety, global HRM, and small-business and entrepreneurship contexts remain limited. This article aims to review and synthesize the literature on contemporary HRM practices published during 2023–2026. Searches were conducted in Scopus using keywords related to occupational safety and health, global human resource management, small business HRM, entrepreneurship, and HR practices. Thirty articles were included after a systematic selection process from 667 initial documents based on titles, abstracts, keywords, and substantive relevance. The review identified three major themes: HRM practices in occupational safety and health, global HRM, and HRM in small businesses and entrepreneurship. The literature indicates that occupational safety is moving toward a people-centred approach; global HRM emphasizes cross-cultural adjustment, supervisor support, and local adaptation; while small businesses highlight HRM formality, practice bundling, digitalization, and policy consistency. Effective HRM should be contextual, integrated, and adaptive. The identified gap concerns the limited cross-context synthesis linking HRM practices, psychosocial factors, and organizational outcomes in an integrated manner.

Keywords: human resource management, occupational safety, global HRM, small business, systematic review

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Topic

The development of contemporary human resource management (HRM) practices shows that the HR function is no longer understood merely as an administrative function, but as a strategic system that connects organizational policies, employee capabilities, and sustainable performance. In recent years, organizations have faced pressures ranging from occupational safety and health requirements and cross-border workforce mobility to the need to establish HR systems in small-business and startup contexts. These conditions strengthen the need for adaptive and integrated HRM approaches.

In occupational safety, the research focus has shifted from accident prevention alone toward the integration of safety, wellbeing, burnout, mental health, and the design of organizational practices. The literature highlights the importance of safety leadership, the transfer of safety training, psychosocial safety climate, and the integration of occupational health and safety management systems (OHSMS) with people management (Athamneh, 2024; Navarro Claro et al., 2025; Pham et al., 2023). This indicates that occupational safety is increasingly understood as part of the HRM architecture.

A substantial body of HRM literature focuses on expatriation, cross-cultural adjustment, the replication versus adaptation of HRM practices, and workforce localization in multinational subsidiaries. These studies emphasize that successful international assignments are determined not only by technical competence, but also by supervisor support, cultural intelligence, training quality, and institutional sensitivity to the host country (Baneviciene et al.,

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2025; Mahdy et al., 2026; P. Patel et al., 2024; X. Wang et al., 2023). At the same time, small businesses and entrepreneurs face resource constraints, informality, and the need to adapt. Consequently, SME HRM research highlights the roles of policy formalization, HRM practice bundling, HR digitalization, HR analytics, talent management, and policy consistency in innovation, engagement, survival, and performance (Alexander et al., 2025; Burhan et al., 2023; Islami & Mulolli, 2024; Kroon et al., 2024; Meurs et al., 2025). Although all three domains have developed rapidly, their literatures remain fragmented. Therefore, this review is needed to map themes, patterns of findings, and research gaps across the three domains in an integrated manner.

Review Objectives and Questions

This review aims to map, synthesize, and evaluate the literature on contemporary HRM practices in three main contexts: occupational safety and health, global HRM, and HRM in small businesses and entrepreneurship.

Component	Description
Review Objective	To synthesize patterns of HRM practices, major findings, and literature gaps across the three contemporary HRM domains.
Review Question 1 (RQ1)	What research designs, contexts, and methods are dominant in studies of HRM practices across the three domains?
Review Question 2 (RQ2)	What are the most consistent major findings concerning HRM practices in occupational safety, global HRM, and small businesses?
Review Question 3 (RQ3)	What methodological gaps, contextual gaps, and theoretical-practical implications remain open for future research?

Scope of the Review

Time Period: 2023–2026

Source Language: English

Included Study Type: Open-access journal articles indexed in Scopus

Topic Boundaries: Articles had to focus explicitly on HRM practices in at least one of three domains: (1) occupational safety and health, (2) global HRM, or (3) small businesses/SMEs/entrepreneurship.

REVIEW METHOD

Literature Search Protocol

Component	Description
Database	Scopus
Search Keywords	TITLE-ABS-KEY(("human resource management" OR HRM OR "people management") AND (("occupational safety" OR "occupational health" OR "workplace safety" OR burnout OR "job stress") OR ("international human resource management" OR expatriate* OR "global staffing" OR repatriation OR "cross-cultural adjustment") OR ("small business*" OR SME* OR MSME* OR startup*)))
Search Filter	2023–2026
Search Date	20 April 2026
Initial Results	667

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Published in 2023–2026	Duplicate records
English-language journal articles	Review articles, bibliometric studies, protocols, or editorials
Available as open-access Scopus documents	Peripheral topics such as green HRM/CSR without a substantive focus on the three themes
Explicitly discusses HRM practices	Technical/biomedical contexts without a substantive link to HRM

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Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Relevant to at least one of the three review themes	Study focus is too partial or not predominantly concerned with HRM practices
Provides sufficient abstract and methodological information	Insufficient abstract information for synthesis

Article Selection Process (PRISMA)

A total of 667 Scopus documents were identified at the initial stage. No duplicates were found in the document set used. Screening was conducted by reviewing titles, abstracts, and keywords; 546 documents were excluded because they did not explicitly focus on HRM practices within the three review themes, addressed peripheral topics, or were situated in irrelevant technical/biomedical contexts. A total of 121 documents were then assessed at the eligibility stage. After further evaluation of thematic fit, the dominance of the HRM focus, and the adequacy of methodological information, 91 documents were excluded. Consequently, 30 articles were included in the final synthesis.

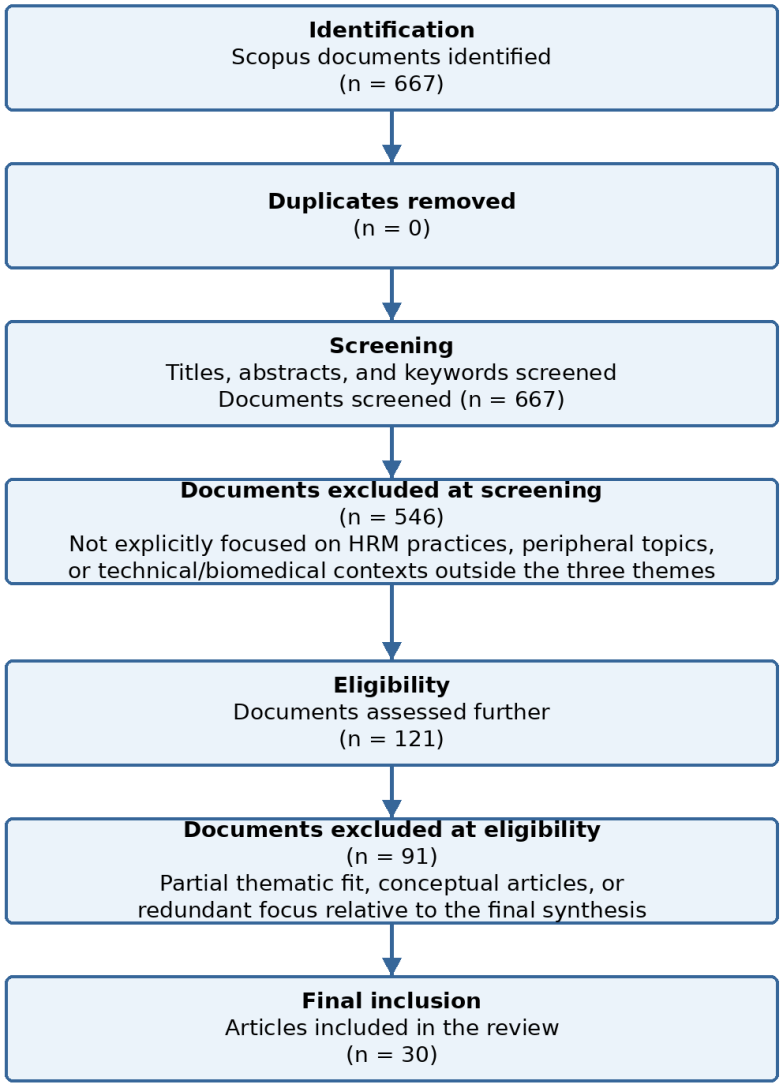


Figure 1. Article selection flow diagram (PRISMA)

Analysis and Synthesis Technique

The analysis was conducted through narrative-thematic synthesis. Each article was coded according to publication year, journal source, study context, design/method, variable focus, and major findings. The coding process produced three macro themes corresponding to the reviewed chapter structure: (1) HRM and occupational safety and health, (2) global HRM, and (3) HRM in small businesses and entrepreneurship. Cross-study comparisons were then conducted to identify consistent patterns, contradictions, and literature gaps.

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Quality assessment was conducted descriptively by considering the clarity of study objectives, adequacy of research design, sample information, and the relevance of findings to the review questions. Because the article set was heterogeneous, the review did not apply a single appraisal instrument; instead, it emphasized substantive fit and methodological clarity.

Method	Description
Review Type	Systematic review with narrative-thematic synthesis
Content Analysis	Three macro themes: (1) HRM and occupational safety and health, (2) global HRM, and (3) HRM in small businesses and entrepreneurship
Quality Assessment	Assessment of study-objective clarity, research-design adequacy, sample information, and the relevance of findings to the review questions

REVIEW RESULTS

Overview of the Analyzed Articles

The overall profile shows that the studies included in the final synthesis were reasonably balanced across themes, although quantitative designs remained dominant. This means that the recent literature has placed greater emphasis on testing relationships among variables than on longitudinal, ethnographic, or mixed-methods explanations. In terms of publication outlets, Safety Science was prominent in occupational-safety research, while Employee Relations and Cogent Business and Management appeared frequently in work on SMEs and contextual HR practices.

Characteristic	Description
Final number of articles	30 articles
Theme distribution	Occupational safety/OHS = 10; global HRM = 10; small business/SMEs = 10
Year distribution	2023 = 11 articles; 2024 = 8; 2025 = 10; 2026 = 1
Dominant method	Quantitative = 24 articles; qualitative = 6 articles
Most frequent journals	Safety Science (n=3); Buildings, PLOS ONE, Employee Relations, and Cogent Business and Management (n=2 each)
Most frequent first-author affiliation countries	United Kingdom and the Netherlands (n=3 each), followed by India and Poland (n=2 each)

Literature Synthesis Matrix

No.	Author(s) (Year)
1	Nilsson et al. (2025)
2	Biermann-Teuscher et al. (2024)
3	Irvine & Suter (2023)
4	Seo & Shirasawa (2025)
5	Pham et al. (2023)
6	Slil et al. (2025)
7	Navarro Claro et al. (2025)
8	Athamneh (2024)
9	Vaktskjold Hamre et al. (2023)
10	Desai et al. (2025)
11	Baneviciene et al. (2025)
12	X. Wang et al. (2023)
13	Abdyrakhmanova & Poór (2023)
14	Ashta & Stokes (2023)

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No.	Author(s) (Year)
15	Reddiar & Schultz (2023)
16	Mahdy et al. (2026)
17	Olejniczak & Froese (2023)
18	Patel et al. (2024)
19	Darwish et al. (2023)
20	van Bakel et al. (2024)
21	Alexander et al. (2025)
22	G. Wang et al. (2024)
23	Islami & Mulolli (2024)
24	Awasthi et al. (2025)
25	Islami & Mulolli (2024)
26	Belas et al. (2024)
27	Kroon et al. (2024)
28	Burhan et al. (2023)
29	Meurs et al. (2025)
30	Pocztowski & Pauli (2023)

Major Themes of the Review

Theme 1: HRM and Occupational Safety and Health as a People-Centred System

The literature in this theme reveals a shift from compliance-based safety approaches toward a people-centred approach that places behavior, leadership, psychosocial climate, and managerial practices at the core of risk control. Safety-training transfer, safety leadership, morale, empowerment, communication, learning and development, and the integration of OHSMS with people management consistently emerge as strong explanations of safe behavior and safety performance (Desai et al., 2025; Navarro Claro et al., 2025; Pham et al., 2023; Slil et al., 2025).

The evidence also shows that safety can no longer be separated from wellbeing. A study of healthcare workers in Jordan demonstrates a direct relationship between HRM practices, job satisfaction, and burnout (Athamneh, 2024), while a study of small businesses in England and Scotland shows that workplace mental-health management tends to be informal but is highly consequential for the continuity of employee support (Irvine & Suter, 2023). At the organizational level, psychosocial safety climate has been shown to reduce the risk of workplace bullying and weaken the effects of role stressors (Vaktskjold Hamre et al., 2023).

A new dimension in the safety literature is work digitalization. Nilsson et al. (2025) show that algorithmic management in logistics can reduce autonomy and increase physical and psychological strain when it is not balanced by supportive organizational design. Meanwhile, the ethnographic study by Biermann-Teuscher et al. (2024) emphasizes that field safety is a collective competency embedded in work practices; excessively rigid standardization can therefore displace tacit knowledge and inhibit safety learning.

Theme 2: Global HRM as a Practice of Adaptation, Transfer, and International-Assignment Support

Within global HRM, the largest body of work concerns expatriation, cross-cultural adjustment, and the management of multinational subsidiaries. The reviewed studies show that international-assignment success is not merely a matter of technical competence; it results from a combination of emotional intelligence, cross-cultural adjustment, supervisor support, work engagement, and digital cultural intelligence (Abdyrakhmanova & Poór, 2023). In other words, global adaptation is multidimensional and strongly influenced by the design of organizational support.

Beyond individual adjustment, the literature emphasizes organizational decisions concerning the transfer or adaptation of HRM practices across countries. Olejniczak & Froese (2023) show that HRM in foreign subsidiaries develops gradually and is influenced by the fit among HR-practice elements. Patel et al. (2024) demonstrate that multinational enterprises from emerging economies can replicate home-country HRM models when they possess

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firm-specific advantages and strong staffing support. Conversely, Darwish et al. (2023) show that localization policies in Saudi Arabia encourage the indigenization of HRM functions, particularly through recruitment and training for local employees.

Another prominent finding is the importance of support quality throughout the assignment cycle. Reddiar & Schultz (2023) show that expatriate-assignment failure is closely associated with inadequate training, mentoring, cultural acclimatization, and re-induction upon repatriation. X. Wang et al. (2023) add that expatriate management should be understood through a multi-foci psychological-contract lens because line managers and HR departments play different roles from the pre-departure stage onward. Thus, the IHRM literature increasingly emphasizes support that is not episodic but continuous throughout the assignment life cycle.

Theme 3: HRM in Small Businesses and Entrepreneurship as a Combination of Formality, Flexibility, and Digitalization

The small-business literature shows that HRM quality is determined by how small firms balance resource constraints with the need to build sufficiently formal systems. Burhan et al. (2023) show that firm age, the presence of a strategic plan, affiliation with a larger entity, and the availability of an HRIS encourage HRM formalization in SMEs. Kroon et al. (2024) further demonstrate that consistency in HRM practices is an important prerequisite for perceived organizational justice, particularly among non-family employees in family SMEs.

Another strong finding is that bundles of HR practices are more effective than isolated implementation. Islami & Mulolli (2024) show that bundles of HRM practices have a stronger effect on SME organizational performance than individual practices. A similar pattern appears in Awasthi et al. (2025), Belas et al. (2024), and Islami & Mulolli (2024), which emphasize the importance of combining training, communication, job design, appraisal, compensation, and engagement to promote innovation, survival, and work engagement in SMEs.

However, the SME literature also shows that informality is not always negative. Meurs et al. (2025) find that informal HRM practices can improve innovation performance when they meet employees' needs for competence and autonomy. At the same time, HR digitalization is becoming an increasingly prominent agenda. G. Wang et al. (2024) show that digital leadership operates through high-involvement HRM practices and dynamic capability, while Alexander et al. (2025) emphasize the contribution of digital HRM, digital training, flexibility, innovation in recruitment and retention, and HR analytics to productivity and organizational performance among MSMEs and startups in Indonesia.

DISCUSSION

Synthesis and Interpretation of Findings

Overall, this review shows that contemporary HRM practices are becoming increasingly contextual, configurational, and integrative. Across the three domains examined, HRM effectiveness is not determined by the presence of a single practice, but by the quality of fit among practices, organizational support, and alignment with the work context (Islami & Mulolli, 2024; Olejniczak & Froese, 2023; R. D. Patel et al., 2025). In occupational safety, this is reflected in the importance of interactions among leadership, climate, training, and safety systems (Navarro Claro et al., 2025; Pham et al., 2023; Slil et al., 2025; Vaktskjold Hamre et al., 2023). In global HRM, the same pattern appears in combinations of supervisor support, cross-cultural adjustment, staffing strategy, and institutional adaptation (Abdyrakhmanova & Poór, 2023; Baneviciene et al., 2025; Reddiar & Schultz, 2023; van Bakel et al., 2024). In small businesses, the highest effectiveness appears when SMEs appropriately combine formalization, flexibility, practice bundling, and digitalization (Alexandro, 2025; Burhan et al., 2023; Islami & Mulolli, 2024; Meurs et al., 2025).

The review also shows that psychological and relational dimensions are becoming increasingly central to HRM. Burnout, mental health, psychological contract, work engagement, perceived justice, and cultural adjustment repeatedly emerge as important mediators or outcomes (Athamneh, 2024; Irvine & Suter, 2023; Kroon et al., 2024; van Bakel et al., 2024; X. Wang et al., 2023). This indicates that contemporary organizational performance cannot be separated from employees' subjective work experiences, including perceived support, the quality of relationships with supervisors, perceptions of fairness, and the ability to adapt to changing work environments (Awasthi et al., 2025; Baneviciene et al., 2025; Vaktskjold Hamre et al., 2023). Thus, the main contribution of recent literature is

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not merely an expanded list of HRM practices, but a clearer account of the psychosocial mechanisms that make those practices effective or ineffective.

From a strategic perspective, the three review themes overlap substantially. Occupational safety requires HR systems that are adaptive and sensitive to wellbeing, psychosocial safety, and safety learning that can genuinely be transferred into work behavior (Athamneh, 2024; Pham et al., 2023). Global HRM requires support designs and practice-transfer mechanisms that are sensitive to cultural and institutional contexts, before an assignment, during the assignment, and at repatriation (Darwish et al., 2023; Olejniczak & Froese, 2023; Reddiar & Schultz, 2023; X. Wang et al., 2023). Small businesses require HR systems that are sufficiently formal to maintain consistency yet sufficiently flexible to preserve rapid adaptation and innovation (Burhan et al., 2023; Kroon et al., 2024; Meurs et al., 2025; G. Wang et al., 2024). The three domains can therefore be understood as contextual variations of the same principle: effective HRM must align policies, capabilities, and employees' work experiences.

Gaps and Contradictions in the Literature

Gap / Contradiction	Explanation
Methodological gap	The literature on occupational safety, global HRM, and small businesses remains dominated by survey approaches, case studies, and cross-sectional designs, so it is not yet sufficiently strong to explain long-term dynamics among variables. In occupational safety, longitudinal and mixed-methods studies are still needed to assess when safety-system standardization actually improves performance and when it suppresses workers' tacit knowledge. In small-business research, contingency studies are still needed to test variations in the effectiveness of formal and informal practices across different organizational conditions.
Contextual gap	The literature shows that the effectiveness of HRM practices is strongly influenced by sectoral context, organizational size, and the institutional environment, but cross-country and cross-industry evidence remains limited. In global HRM, the debate between replicating home-country HRM practices and adapting them locally underscores the importance of cross-industry and cross-country comparison. In small businesses, few studies have examined in depth how HRM formalization and informality differ in their effects across SMEs with different characteristics.
Contradictory findings	In occupational safety, some studies show that OHSMS and safety systems improve organizational performance, whereas ethnographic evidence indicates that excessive standardization can suppress learning and workers' tacit knowledge. In global HRM, some studies suggest that replication of home-country HRM practices remains effective, while others show that localization and institutional adaptation are more decisive. In small businesses, HRM formalization, practice bundling, and policy consistency are often associated with higher performance, yet some findings indicate that certain informal practices can serve as sources of innovation.

Beyond these substantive contradictions, the methodological gap is also clear. Of the 30 included articles, 24 used quantitative approaches and only 6 used qualitative designs. The dominance of cross-sectional surveys makes the literature relatively strong in mapping relationships among variables but still weak in explaining processes of change, temporal dynamics, and implementation mechanisms at the organizational level.

A contextual gap is also evident in the limited number of studies that directly connect the three domains. The literatures on occupational safety, global HRM, and SME HRM still tend to develop in silos, even though issues such as digitalization, wellbeing, staffing flexibility, and capability building appear across all three. Future research should therefore make greater use of cross-domain and cross-level approaches.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this review strengthens the argument that HRM should be understood through contingency and configurational perspectives. In other words, the effectiveness of HR practices is not universal but depends strongly on institutional context, type of work, organizational size, support design, and the combination of practices. The review findings also support the view that HRM outcomes are increasingly determined by psychological mediating variables such as engagement, adjustment, justice, morale, and wellbeing.

Practically, managers should avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. In occupational safety, attention should extend beyond compliance to psychosocial safety, training that transfers into practice, and supervisor competence. In global HRM, organizations need to design integrated support before departure, during assignments, and upon repatriation.

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In small businesses, owners or SME managers need to build HR systems that are simple but consistent, use HRIS or digital HR where appropriate, and prioritize coherent bundles of practices over sporadic policies.

CONCLUSION

Main Conclusion: Studies of contemporary HRM practices across the three reviewed domains remain dominated by quantitative approaches, particularly surveys and SEM/regression analyses, while qualitative studies are fewer although they provide important analytical depth. The literature indicates that the most effective HRM practices are those that are integrated and aligned with the organizational context. In occupational safety, the most influential factors include safety leadership, psychosocial safety climate, training, and integration with people management. In global HRM, central factors include cross-cultural adjustment, supervisor support, organizational support, and the balance between replication and adaptation of HRM practices. In small businesses, HRM effectiveness is determined by an adequate degree of HRM formality, practice bundling, policy consistency, and HR digitalization that fits business needs. The main literature gaps lie in the dominance of cross-sectional designs, the limited number of cross-domain studies, and insufficient explanation of the conditions under which formalization, standardization, or informality is most effective.

Review Limitations: This review has several limitations, particularly the use of one main database, restriction to open-access articles, and document selection that emphasized substantive fit with the review focus. These conditions may limit the breadth of the literature and create selection bias, although they still allow a structured and relevant map of the literature to be developed.

Future Research Agenda: Future studies should expand the use of longitudinal designs, mixed methods, and comparative cross-context research so that the mechanisms through which HRM practices are implemented can be explained in greater depth. The research agenda should also identify the conditions that determine when formalization, standardization, or informality is most effective in occupational safety, global HRM, and small-business and entrepreneurship contexts.

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