# PEOPLE BEHIND THE DEAL: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF HR PRACTICES ACROSS M&A PHASES

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**Abstract:** *Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) are a key strategic tool for corporate growth, diversification and gaining a competitive advantage. Research findings indicate that a significant rate of these transactions fail to achieve the expected results, often due to the inadequate management of human factors. For this very reason, the strategic importance of the HR function in the M&A process is becoming increasingly prominent. Despite growing academic and practical interest in the subject, the relevant literature typically examines the role of HR only in certain stages of M&A processes, which limits the interpretation of HR practices across the entire process. This conceptual gap justifies the adoption of an approach that examines all stages of an M&A transaction within a unified framework. This study examines human resource management practices applied during the planning, integration and implementation phases of mergers and acquisitions, with the aim of identifying which HR tools support the success of organisational integration in each phase. The research employs a qualitative, theoretical approach, the methodological basis of which is a review of the international literature. Based on the findings, the planning phase is dominated by HR and cultural due diligence, risk analysis, human capital audits, and the development of integration, communication and training plans. In the integration phase, the focus shifts to the integration of structures, cultures and people, the establishment of knowledge transfer, the management of employee resistance, and targeted communication and training. In the implementation phase, the consolidation of new structures, workforce optimisation, managed redundancies, retraining, succession planning and employer branding become key HR interventions. The study highlights that communication and training are HR practices that span the entire M&A process but appear with different content and focus on each phase. The HR interventions applied in the three phases build on one another, and their common strategic goal is to increase employee engagement, reduce turnover and retain key employees. The study's academic contribution lies in interpreting the role of HR within a unified, process-oriented framework, thereby filling an identified gap in the literature and laying the groundwork for future empirical research.*

**Keywords:** *mergers and acquisitions; human resource management; HR practices; M&A phases.*

**JEL Classification:** *G34; M12; M14; M54*

## 1. Introduction

As a result of globalisation and intensifying market competition, companies are increasingly using mergers and acquisitions (hereinafter M&A) as a strategic tool to achieve growth, diversification and a competitive advantage (Gomes, 2020). M&A essentially covers two distinct phenomena: mergers and acquisitions. We speak of a merger when two or more companies, as equal partners, pool their resources and form a single legal entity. In contrast, an acquisition involves a dominant company gaining ownership and management control over another organisation, whose autonomy is partially or completely lost (García-Nieto *et al.*, 2024). Although a growing global trend can be observed in the M&A market, research highlights that a significant percentage of these transactions fail to achieve the expected results, due to the inadequate management of human factors (Bangura, Chitamba and Ngidi, 2025). The literature emphasises that human resource management plays a key role in the success of the M&A process (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Mora-Valentín and Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado, 2018; Tarba *et al.*, 2020; Bangura, Chitamba and Ngidi, 2025). HR no longer functions merely as an administrative department, but acts as a strategic partner (Dajnoki and Héder, 2017), actively contributing to the successful management of the M&A process (Bruneau De La Salle and Thomas, 2021). HR's involvement is of paramount importance even during the preparatory stages of the transaction, through HR due diligence, the identification of key competencies and talent pools, and the analysis of organisational cultures and HR systems (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Mora-Valentín and Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado, 2020; Lattuch and Ruppert, 2022). Following the completion of the transaction, HR plays a key role in harmonising organisational structures and processes, ensuring the succession of leadership and talent retention, and maintaining employee engagement (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Mora-Valentín and Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado, 2018). Research highlights that well-designed HR practices, such as effective communication (Hasmin, 2025), talent retention strategies (Holland and Scullion, 2021) and programmes supporting cultural integration (Tukuboya, Ibrahim and Irawan, 2024) contribute significantly to a smooth transition and the maintenance of organisational performance during the M&A process.

## 2. Research question and objective

The central research question of this study is to identify which human resource management practices can be identified in the various stages of mergers and acquisitions, such as the planning, integration and implementation phases, and how these contribute to the success of organisational integration. The aim of the research is to explore and systematise, through a review of the international literature, those HR tools and interventions that play a decisive role in the various phases of the M&A process, placing the findings within a unified, process-oriented framework. While previous literature typically examines human resource management in isolated stages of the M&A process, the primary academic contribution of this study is the development of a comprehensive, integrated framework. This novel approach bridges existing conceptual gaps by explicitly mapping how specific HR practices not only function within individual phases such as planning, integration, and implementation but also how they transition and build upon one another across the entire M&A lifecycle. By providing this holistic perspective, the study offers both theoretical clarity and actionable insights for managerial practice.

## 3. Research methodology

The research adopts a qualitative, theoretical approach, the methodological basis of which is a literature review, within the framework of which relevant international empirical and theoretical studies are analysed and synthesised to ensure a comprehensive examination of the topic under investigation. To ensure academic rigour and transparency, the literature review was conducted following a structured approach. The primary databases used for source selection included Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search strategy utilised specific keywords and their combinations, such as “mergers and acquisitions”, “M&A”, “human resource management”, “HR practices”, “M&A phases”, and “post-merger integration”. The review predominantly focused on recent literature published between 2015 and 2026 to capture the most current trends and challenges in the field. Inclusion criteria were strictly limited to peer-reviewed academic journal articles, empirical studies, and established theoretical frameworks. Non-academic articles, opinion pieces, and reports lacking rigorous methodological foundations were excluded from the analysis. This systematic selection process ensures a comprehensive and reliable synthesis of the investigated topic.

## 4. The stages of M&A and their human resource challenges

According to the literature, the process of mergers and acquisitions can be divided into three successive stages: the planning, integration and implementation stages (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Mora-Valentín and Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado, 2018). In the international literature, these are often referred to as the pre-merger (pre-merger integration; pre-integration; pre-M&A), during-merger (during M&A; transaction phase), and post-merger (post-merger integration; post-integration; post-M&A) phases. For the sake of clarity, we will henceforth use the terminology employed by Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. (2018), namely the planning, integration and implementation phases. *Figure 1* summarises the HR challenges and tasks associated with the various phases of an M&A transaction.

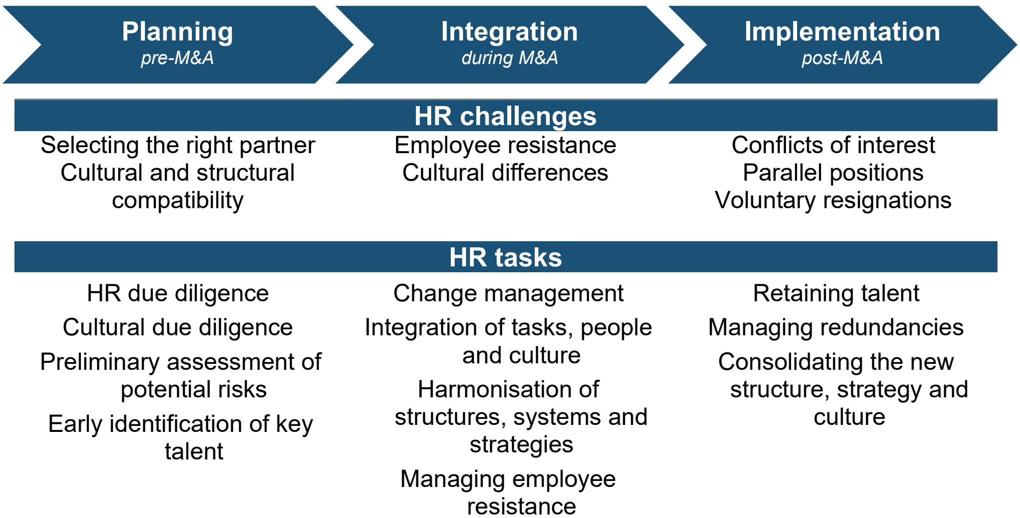


**Figure 1:** HR challenges and tasks at each stage of M&A
Source: Own compilation (2026)

The planning phase is the stage preceding the merger or acquisition, which takes place before the agreement is finalised. The main challenge at this stage is selecting the right partner and assessing cultural and structural compatibility between the organisations. At this stage, HR's role involves HR due diligence, cultural due diligence, preliminary assessment of potential risks, early identification of employees of value to the organisation, and laying the foundations for integration (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Mora-Valentín and Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado, 2020; Lattuch and Ruppert, 2022).
The integration phase follows the signing of the agreement, when the preparatory activities preceding the M&A transaction have been completed and the process of actually merging the two organisations begins. In this phase, the greatest challenge lies in overcoming employee resistance arising from adaptation to new structures and processes, as well as cultural differences. The primary task of HR is change management, which encompasses the integration of roles, people and culture, the harmonisation of new structures, systems, strategies and policies, and the appropriate management of employee resistance (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado and Mora-Valentín, 2019).
Finally, the implementation phase covers the sustained period following the transaction, which is most often characterised by conflicts of interest, tensions arising from the overlap of parallel positions, and voluntary resignations. In this phase, the role of HR is to retain talent, manage redundancies through fair and supportive programmes, and consolidate the new structure, strategy and culture (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Mora-Valentín and Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado, 2018).

## 5. HR practices applied during the various stages of M&A

The following section presents the most important HR practices identified during the planning, integration and implementation phases of mergers and acquisitions. The aim of the study is to provide a comprehensive overview of how the role and focus of HR changes as the M&A process progresses, through a literature review of the tools and interventions used in each phase.

### 5.1. Planning phase

The planning phase of mergers and acquisitions is of critical importance from a human resource management perspective, as it is during this phase that the human and organisational factors which fundamentally determine the success of the M&A can be identified. Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. (2020) point out that only 22% of organisations involve HR in this phase, whilst human resource-related challenges such as cultural incompatibility, employee uncertainty or the departure of key personnel begin as early as the planning phase, even before the transaction is announced. Therefore, research consistently asserts that the early involvement of HR in the M&A planning phase is essential for the success of the transaction (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Mora-Valentín and Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado, 2020; Lattuch and Ruppert, 2022; Ranajee, Naik and Iyengar, 2025).

*Table 1* summarises the HR practices identified during the planning phase, their objectives and their impact on employees.
One of the most important HR practices at this stage is an *HR due diligence review*, which involves a systematic assessment of the target company's human resources, employment contracts, remuneration schemes and HR processes. The aim of this is

the early identification and appropriate management of hidden labour risks (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Mora-Valentín and Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado, 2020; Lattuch and Ruppert, 2022). Closely linked to HR due *diligence* is *cultural due diligence*, which involves comparing the cultures, values and norms of the two organisations with the aim of preventing subsequent integration problems arising from a lack of cultural fit and laying the foundations for the development of a shared organisational culture (Denison and Ko, 2016; Warter and Warter, 2017; Ashiedu *et al.*, 2024).

**Table 1:** HR practices during the planning phase

| HR practice | Objective | Impact |
|---|---|---|
| HR due diligence | Identifying human resources and labour risks | Reduces uncertainty arising from hidden labour risks |
| Cultural due diligence | Early identification and prevention of cultural fit issues | Mitigates conflicts and tensions arising from cultural incompatibility |
| Risk analysis | Ranking of integration risks based on probability and impact | Enables proactive management of risks affecting employees |
| Human capital audit | Identification of key personnel, identification of skills gaps | Facilitates the early retention of key employees and the identification of development needs |
| Development of an integration plan | Defining the steps and timetable for harmonisation | Ensures a transparent process, reduces role uncertainty |
| Preparing a communication plan | Reduces uncertainty and prevents rumours | Increases loyalty and reduces stress in the early stages of the transaction |
| Developing training plans | Laying the foundations for targeted training programmes | Supports adaptation and increases openness to change |

Source: Own compilation (2026)

*Risk analysis* also plays a key role in the planning phase, during which potential risks identified through cultural and HR due diligence that threaten the success of integration are prioritised based on their likelihood of occurrence and their impact on employees (Vertakova, Vselenskaya and Plotnikov, 2021; Routhu and Krishna, 2024).

Another HR practice crucial for successful integration is the *human capital audit*, during which the company assesses the knowledge, skills and capabilities of the current workforce prior to the transaction, in order to identify key personnel, uncover competence gaps and lay the groundwork for subsequent effective integration decisions (McKinney et al., 2017; Budhiraja, Thakur and Yadav, 2024).

A fundamental HR practice during the planning phase is *the development of an integration plan*, which sets out the steps, responsible parties and timetable for harmonising processes, thereby facilitating a smooth transition (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Mora-Valentín and Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado, 2020). In parallel, it is also necessary to prepare a *communication plan* that sets out the timing, channels and key messages for informing employees (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Mora-Valentín and Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado, 2020). Research highlights that early, honest communication reduces feelings of uncertainty and stress among employees, helps prevent the spread of rumours, and increases employees' loyalty to the organisation

(Marmenout and Mignerat, 2015; Rodríguez-Sánchez, Mora-Valentín and Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado, 2020; Asdar, 2023; Hasmin, 2025).
The final steps of the planning phase involve *the development of training plans and systems*, in which those responsible for knowledge sharing, the educational platforms and systems, and the content of training and competence development programmes are defined, thus enabling the launch of various targeted training programmes in parallel with the start of integration, which support employees' adaptation to the new organisational environment (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Mora-Valentín and Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado, 2020; Budhiraja, Thakur and Yadav, 2024).

## 5.2. Integration phase

The integration phase of mergers and acquisitions is one of the most critical stages of the transaction, during which organisations must not only align structures and processes, but also manage the human factors arising from uncertainty, employee resistance and cultural differences. Research emphasises that the success of integration largely depends on the extent to which HR can support this complex process and manage change effectively (Rodríguez-Sánchez, Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado and Mora-Valentín, 2019; Bangura, Chitamba and Ngidi, 2025).

*Table 2* summarises the HR practices identified during the integration phase, their objectives and their impact on employees.

**Table 2:** HR practices during the integration phase

| HR practice | Objective | Impact |
|---|---|---|
| Harmonisation of new structures and policies | Alignment of organisational structure, systems and internal regulations | Reduces uncertainty and the sense of unfairness arising from duplication |
| Integrating tasks, people and cultures | Redefining roles, reorganising teams, establishing a shared value system | Strengthens the sense of belonging and reduces cultural clashes |
| Establishing knowledge transfer | Preserving and sharing knowledge across organisations | Supports adaptation and the realisation of synergies |
| Managing employee resistance | Active involvement in decision-making, providing regular opportunities for feedback | Reduces alienation and increases openness to change |
| Targeted internal communication | Communicating the reasons for, objectives of and impact of changes | Builds trust and reduces uncertainty |
| Training and mentoring programmes | Supporting adaptation to new systems, roles and expectations | Develops the necessary skills and increases openness to change |
| Leadership development | Strengthening leadership guidance and trust-building | Maintains employee commitment and motivation |

Source: Own compilation (2026)

During integration, the first and most important task *is the harmonisation of new structures, systems, strategies and policies*, which involves aligning the organisational structures, infrastructure, information systems, objectives and internal regulations of the two companies (Tukuboya, Ibrahim and Irawan, 2024; Hemanth, 2025). This is crucial, as differing operating models can lead to duplication, uncertainty and a sense of injustice among employees (Bansal, 2019). This occurs simultaneously with *the integration of tasks, people and cultures*, which involves redefining roles and responsibilities, reorganising teams, as well as harmonising different organisational cultures and establishing a shared value system (Van Oorschot *et al.*, 2023; Tukuboya, Ibrahim and Irawan, 2024; Horton *et al.*, 2025). To support this, HR tools are required, such as organising cultural integration programmes and workshops, developing shared values and a vision, and setting up integration teams; these measures promote cooperation and reduce cultural clashes (Marmenout and Mignerat, 2015; Rodríguez-Sánchez, Ortiz-de-Urbina-Criado and Mora-Valentín, 2019; Tukuboya, Ibrahim and Irawan, 2024).

The next key HR practice is *the establishment of knowledge transfer*, which ensures the preservation and sharing of knowledge between organisations, for example through mentoring programmes or joint projects, thereby supporting the realisation of synergies (Zhou, Fey and Yildiz, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2023; Budhiraja, Thakur and Yadav, 2024).

Managing *employee resistance* is of paramount importance during integration, as the uncertainty associated with change can trigger negative emotions in staff, which may lead to alienation (Al Hosani *et al.*, 2020). Research highlights that actively involving employees in decision-making, providing regular opportunities for feedback, and developing a resilient workforce capable of adapting to change reduces resistance during integration (Cooke *et al.*, 2021; Bangura, Chitamba and Ngidi, 2025). *Targeted internal communication* plays a key role in the integration process, ensuring that employees understand the reasons for, the aims of, and the impact of the changes (Thakur and Yadav, 2025). In this context, HR practices such as regular management briefings, two-way communication channels and targeted internal communication platforms emerge, which strengthen trust and reduce uncertainty (Bangura, Chitamba and Ngidi, 2025).

Finally, successful integration is supported by the provision of *training and mentoring programmes*, which help employees adapt to new systems, roles and expectations (Bangura, Chitamba and Ngidi, 2025). These programmes not only develop the necessary competencies but also increase openness to change (Budhiraja, 2021; Pubodhya and Rajapakshe, 2025). Closely linked to this is *leadership development* as a critical HR practice, as leaders are the ones who provide guidance, build trust and support employees during times of change, thereby maintaining commitment and motivation among staff (Fülep, Dajnoki and Barizsné Hadházi, 2023; Pubodhya and Rajapakshe, 2025).

### 5.3. Implementation phase

The implementation phase of mergers and acquisitions is the stage following the completion of the M&A transaction, during which HR plays a key role in stabilising the integrated organisation and ensuring the company's long-term viability.

*Table 3* illustrates the HR practices identified during the implementation phase, their objectives and their impact on employees.

In this phase, one of the most important HR practices is *the consolidation* and continuous review of *new structures, systems and policies* (Liu *et al.*, 2021; Hemanth, 2025). This involves the regular auditing of consolidated HR processes and their conscious integration into daily practice, to ensure that the changes introduced are sustainably embedded into the organisation's day-to-day operations.

*Workforce optimisation* is also essential at this stage, as M&A transactions often involve the elimination of duplicate roles, during which HR must make decisions regarding retention, redeployment or redundancy (McKinney *et al.*, 2017). Each of these three decision paths requires a distinct HR practice. In the case of employees facing redundancy, providing *outplacement* becomes crucial; this encompasses both the financial and non-financial elements of the redundancy package, such as enhanced severance pay, job-search assistance, exemption from work duties, or career counselling. Lawful and people-centred redundancy not only supports the employees who are made redundant, but also strengthens the confidence of those remaining in the organisation and helps to preserve the company's reputation (Anuradha, 2017).

**Table 3:** HR practices during the implementation phase

| HR practice | Objective | Impact |
|---|---|---|
| Consolidation of new structures and guidelines | Sustained integration of implemented changes into day-to-day operations | Reduces role uncertainty and strengthens organisational stability |
| Optimisation of the workforce | Making decisions regarding retention, redeployment or redundancy | Ensures a transparent decision-making process and reduces tensions |
| Outplacement | Providing financial and non-financial support to redundant staff | Strengthens the confidence of those remaining in the organisation and protects the company's reputation |
| Providing retraining | Developing the skills required for new roles | Supports adaptation and reduces resistance |
| Succession planning and career development | Retaining critical knowledge and establishing clear career paths | Reduces staff turnover and increases the commitment of key employees |
| Continuous training and development | Long-term support for adapting to new systems | Strengthens organisational stability and employee competencies |
| Transparent, two-way communication | Reduces uncertainty and maintains employee engagement | Strengthens trust and organisational commitment in the long term |
| Employer branding | Strengthens internal commitment and attracts external talent | Strengthens the organisation's internal and external reputation, supports retention and attracts talent |

Source: Own compilation (2026)

In the case of redeployed employees, providing *retraining* is crucial, as developing the competencies required for new roles supports adaptation and reduces resistance (Anuradha, 2017; Bangura, Chitamba and Ngidi, 2025). Regarding key personnel to be retained, *succession planning and career development* ensure the preservation of critical knowledge and long-term organisational stability, especially in the digitalised economy, where continuous upskilling and digital competency development are essential for both individual career growth and organisational competitiveness (Arany and Popovics, 2025). Research indicates that clear career paths and talent management systems play a key role in reducing staff turnover and retaining critical competencies during M&A processes (Anuradha, 2017; Holland

and Scullion, 2021). Furthermore, the early identification of career needs has a positive impact on employee satisfaction and retention (Gergely and Pierog, 2018). Closely linked to this are continuous *training and development*, as well as the use of transparent, two-way communication, which are HR practices that should be maintained even in the post-integration period, as they strengthen organisational stability and trust in the long term. Training and development activities ensure adaptation to new systems (Anuradha, 2017), whilst continuous, open communication reduces uncertainty and supports employee engagement (Hasmin, 2025).
Finally, *employer branding* helps to stabilise the organisation's internal and external reputation, supports talent retention and the attraction of new employees, whilst fostering the development of a shared organisational identity and increasing employee commitment within the integrated organisation (Andhany and Arief, 2024).

## 6. Findings

A combined interpretation of the HR practices identified in the various stages of mergers and acquisitions highlights that, although the focus and toolkit of human resource management differ by stage, the practices employed build upon one another and form a coherent, process-oriented logic. A critical evaluation of the identified HR practices reveals a significant dichotomy in their application. Practices can be distinctly categorised into two groups: phase-specific interventions and cross-phase (continuous) practices. While phase-specific practices are strictly bound to particular milestones and cannot be delayed without jeopardising the transaction, cross-phase practices act as the critical connective tissue that prevents the fragmentation of the M&A process.

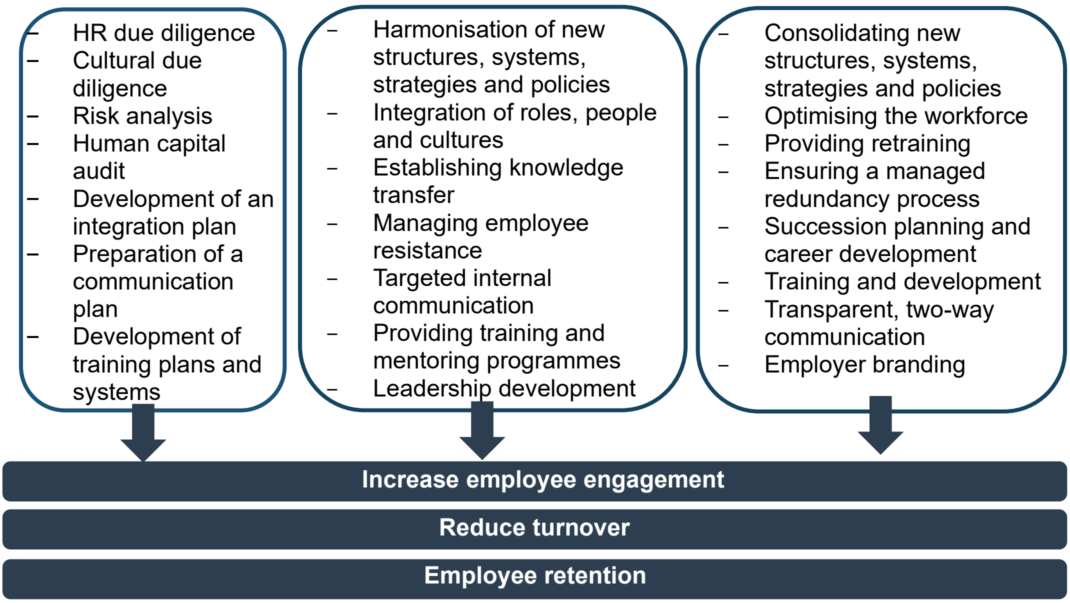


**Figure 2:** An integrated interpretation of HR practices in the M&A process
Source: Own compilation (2026)

The success of organisational integration depends not only on executing isolated tasks but on managing the dynamic interplay between these two categories. *Figure 2* summarises the HR practices applied during mergers and acquisitions.

*Phase-specific HR practices*

*Planning phase:* In the planning phase, HR's primary task is the preliminary identification of human and organisational risks associated with the transaction, the key tools for which are HR and cultural due diligence, risk analysis and human capital audits. These practices lay the groundwork for subsequent integration decisions and enable the company to identify key personnel, identify skills gaps and manage risks arising from cultural differences even before the transaction takes place. In addition, this phase involves the development of the integration and communication plans, which provide the structural framework for the process. Crucially, these planning practices are strictly phase-specific. A critical failure often observed in unsuccessful M&As is the attempt to conduct cultural or HR due diligence retrospectively during the integration phase. If these foundational, phase-bound assessments are neglected, subsequent integration efforts are essentially built on hidden risks, making cultural clashes inevitable.

*Integration phase:* During the integration phase, HR's focus shifts to aligning different structures and cultures and managing change. Harmonising new structures, systems and policies, integrating roles, people and cultures, and establishing knowledge transfer become key priorities in this phase. Managing employee resistance also plays a particularly important role, as this is at its most intense during this period due to organisational uncertainty and drastic changes. HR seeks to address this through targeted initiatives, such as cultural integration programmes, training, mentoring schemes and leadership development, which simultaneously develop the necessary competencies and foster openness to change. Unlike the analytical approach of the planning phase, integration practices are highly reactive. The critical aspect of these phase-specific interventions is timing: if change management and cultural harmonisation are delayed, employee resistance tends to become institutionalised. At this stage, HR must act rapidly to prevent uncertainty from transforming into active alienation and talent drain.

*Implementation phase:* In the implementation phase, the focus shifts to the long-term embedding of changes and the stabilisation of the organisation. At this stage, HR must simultaneously consider consolidating the changes introduced during the integration process and ensuring the organisation's long-term viability. HR's task is to continuously review the new structures, systems and policies and consciously integrate them into day-to-day operations. Workforce optimisation is also a critical task in this phase due to redundancies, during which HR must make decisions regarding retention, redeployment or redundancy. In the case of redundancies, a considerate redundancy process is critical; in the case of redeployment, retraining is key; whilst in the case of retention, career development and succession planning become critical HR tasks. At the same time, employer branding is also necessary, as it supports internal commitment and the attraction of external talent within the integrated company.

*Cross-phase HR practices*

However, a combined examination of the individual phases also highlights that, although with different focuses, certain HR practices must function as continuous,

cross-phase practices. One such practice is communication, which plays a key role throughout the entire transaction process by building employee trust and reducing uncertainty. During the planning phase, early, proactive information sharing and the development of a communication plan are key. The aim is to avoid uncertainty and rumours before the transaction is announced. During the integration phase, targeted internal communication takes centre stage, conveying the reasons for, objectives of, and expected impact of the changes to employees, thereby strengthening trust and reducing resistance. In the implementation phase, continuous, two-way communication and the provision of regular feedback opportunities become crucial. The aim is to maintain employee engagement in the long term and support organisational stability. Similarly, training and development are critical HR practices at every stage of M&A. During the planning phase, the primary task is to develop training plans and systems, as well as to design educational platforms and training content. During the integration phase, the focus shifts to developing the competencies required for new roles and systems, as well as resilience-building training. During implementation, the emphasis will be on ensuring continuous training and development, as well as retraining redeployed employees.
An integrated interpretation of HR practices across the various stages of M&A also highlights that the entire M&A process is guided by three main strategic objectives. The first of these is to increase employee engagement, which can be strengthened through transparent communication, cultural integration programmes, and training and development. The second is reducing staff turnover, which is supported by a range of HR practices, from the early identification of key personnel through talent retention programmes to a considerate redundancy process. The third objective is to retain key employees, regarding those possessing critical knowledge and competencies, whose departure fundamentally jeopardises the success of integration. Together, these three objectives form the strategic framework within which HR shapes its practices at each stage of the transaction.

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the strategic involvement of HR is of critical importance at every stage of the M&A process; however, it also highlights that only a fraction of organisations involves HR in the planning phase, even though challenges arising from human factors begin even before the transaction is announced. For this very reason, it is recommended that companies involve the HR function as a strategic partner as early as the planning stage, so that, through HR and cultural due diligence, they can identify any human risks associated with the transaction and develop appropriate integration, communication and training plans in a timely manner. Based on the literature reviewed, it is also clear that during the integration phase, change management, employee resistance and the harmonisation of new processes and cultures prove to be the most critical HR tasks. The integration of structures, cultures, tasks and people is a complex, parallel process, the success of which depends largely on conscious HR intervention. Organisations are therefore advised to implement targeted cultural integration programmes, internal communication platforms, change management and resilience-building training during this phase. During the implementation phase, HR must simultaneously manage the differing needs of employees who are being made redundant, redeployed, and retained. Decisions relating to workforce optimisation should therefore be prepared in advance as part of the integration plan. During redundancies, it is critical to adopt a caring, people-centred approach; in the case of redeployment, to ensure retraining; and for key employees to be retained, to properly structure succession planning and career development. The research also highlights that communication and training are HR practices that span the entire M&A process. It is important, however, that companies apply these not as one-off, reactive interventions, but as consciously planned, ongoing practices. It is therefore recommended that these practices be considered as early as the planning stage, and that their content be tailored to the needs of employees arising in each phase. Overall, the results of the literature review suggest that the success of M&A does not lie in a single HR practice, but in the deliberate, integrated application of practices employed across the various phases.

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