

# Strategic Human Resources Management as a Factor of Universities Competitiveness in Thailand

Sanhakot Vithayaporn <sup>1\*</sup>, I-Ching Tung<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Business and Technology, Stamford International University, Thailand

\*Corresponding author: Email: sanhakot@hotmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6078-8125>, © Authors

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## Abstract

Thailand's universities are undergoing modernization to integrate better into the global education landscape. However, many universities still struggle with low efficiency and effectiveness in their management approaches, resulting in a significant competitive disadvantage. This study seeks to identify strategic human resource management (HRM) issues in universities and explore ways to enhance their competitiveness. There are two research questions: RQ1: What strategic human resource management is needed for universities' competitiveness? RQ2: To what extent does the implementation of strategic human resource management affect university competitiveness? This study employed a qualitative research design that involved semi-structured interviews with 20 HR professionals from various universities. Data analysis used content analysis alongside Nvivo software analysis. The results indicate that recruitment and selection procedures require adequate training, while individual development plans (IDP) and reward incentives, including fair pay, are necessary. The contemporary notion of strategic HRM has significant implications for management and academia. This study concludes that integrating strategic management theory into best practices for HRM is crucial for enhancing competitiveness in universities. Future research should consider moderating factors, such as workplace culture, organizational climate, and the state of the labor market.

## Introduction:

Throughout history, it has been repeatedly observed that initiatives and advancements in education driven by government entities have seldom achieved success. One of the primary reasons behind this is the failure to consider the unique needs and interests of individual educational institutions, such as schools,

colleges, and universities, as well as those of faculty members. More recently, there has been a shift in the approach to strategic management prompted by the recognition of this lack of success. It is now increasingly acknowledged that there is a necessity for dialogue between educational institutions and society, considering the specific circumstances for strategic management within each institution.

Moreover, it is acknowledged that institutions must operate democratically with active participation and collaboration from society. Consequently, there is a departure from the notion that strategic management should be tied exclusively to comprehensive institutional reforms and a move towards establishing a connection between strategic management, the individual professional development of faculty and academic supporting staff, and the learning processes of students.

European higher education institutions (HEIs) presently navigate a fiercely competitive global landscape, grappling with challenges in managerial, academic, technological, and economic domains (Stukalina, 2010/1). Aligned with the Europe 2020 initiative, higher education occupies a pivotal position, contributing significantly to socioeconomic growth and development. The region's aspiration to evolve into a smart, sustainable, and inclusive economy is intricately linked to the transformative role of higher education. Serving as a catalyst for individual and societal progress, higher education profoundly influences innovation and research. Additionally, HEIs serve as crucial reservoirs of highly skilled human capital, indispensable for fostering growth and prosperity in knowledge-based economies.

Some universities prioritize addressing immediate internal challenges, driven by factors like budget cuts, declining demographics, and prolonged organizational restructuring (Poole, 2001; Shattock, 2000). Conversely, certain institutions, particularly in Russia, display limited adaptability, relying on emulating foreign management practices and strategies from successful participants in the education market. Only a small percentage of Russian higher education institutions, around 2 percent, have made significant strides globally, mainly those participating in the "academic excellence initiative." Strategic management is globally crucial for higher education institutions, including those in Thailand, directly impacting the quality of education. Effective strategic management practices enable institutions to set clear goals, make informed decisions, allocate resources efficiently, and adapt to changing educational landscapes. Crocco (2018) addressed issues in Thai universities, noting challenges in their competitive rather than collaborative treatment. However, all

universities, regardless of type, face the common challenge of improving education quality amid evolving market requirements, including issues related to workforce and academic support.

Strategic management theories offer valuable insights into devising new strategies in higher education institutions. However, these theories may not comprehensively address the complex challenges faced by educational managers. Modern universities are intricate organizations, influenced by a diverse range of contributing factors that influence educational management decisions. Hence, when formulating strategies, education managers must consider the organizational characteristics unique to this sector (Tavernier, 2005). Therefore, it is essential to conduct a comprehensive analysis of both conventional and innovative approaches that can be effectively applied by educational managers in the context of strategy development. By utilizing such tools, universities can significantly enhance their strategic adaptability and competitiveness (Shattock, 2010). The successful implementation of a strategic marketing approach is paramount for universities aiming to achieve prominent positions in the global education market and attain high academic rankings.

The existing literature lacks sufficient research on strategic human resources management (HRM) within the education management system, leaving a gap between the ideal and current state of strategic HRM. This study bridges this gap and contributes to both the literature and managerial practices. This research focuses on universities in Thailand and addresses the following contemporary challenges as the rationale for the study: the turbulent external and internal environment, intensified international competition, changing market requirements for university education, blurred boundaries of education demand, the need for innovation in response to technological advancements, knowledge obsolescence, and the increasing imbalance of internal interests. The formulated research questions aimed to explore how strategic HRM can help private universities navigate these challenges and improve recruitment, retention, and overall human resource practices. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What is strategic human resources management needed for universities' competitiveness

RQ2: To what extent is the implementation of strategic human resource management for university competitiveness?

## Literature Review:

### *The development of strategic management concepts in universities context*

Emerging in the late 1970s, strategic management is recognized for its adaptability in diverse situations, involving modifying an organization's direction, functions, and structure to achieve desired efficiency and quality in response to environmental changes. General strategic management theory encompasses goal formulation, strategic analysis, strategy development, implementation planning, strategic change, and strategic control (Hill et al., 2014; Freeman, 2010; Parakhina et al., 2010). In higher education, strategic management differs from its business counterpart, with a fragmented understanding of its nature, technology, and procedures. Scientific approaches to strategic planning and management in universities began to take shape in the early 1990s, primarily in industrialized developed countries. Scholars like E. Chaffee, M. Peterson, D. Bryson, B. Clarke, M. Cohen, J. March, E. Morgan, P. Lorange, S. Slaughter, and L. Leslie played significant roles in studying applied problems of strategic planning systems, with many being members of the academic community (Morgan, 2004; Dyson, 2004; Shattock, 2010).

Limited research has been conducted on university management in Thailand, particularly regarding practical implementation. Initial publications on the topic of strategic planning emerged in the journal "University Management: Practice and Analysis" between 2000 and 2010. However, these publications mainly provided reviews of specific university strategies, focusing on planned intentions rather than offering a comprehensive overview of the overall strategic development within the university. Consequently, they do not adequately reflect the actual experiences and practices of strategic

management in Thailand (Titov, 2008). It is worth mentioning the recommendations put forth by a group of international and Thai scholars (Veretennikova et al., 2008) as they provide valuable insights into strategic management. Their research stands out because of its comprehensive methodology, strong foundation, and coverage of a wide range of strategic management tools and methods. The suggestions offered by these authors were derived from the experiences of both Thailand and foreign universities in developing strategic plans for higher education institutions.

The diversity in strategic planning and management approaches is evident in the strategies implemented by prominent American universities like Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Virginia, English universities like Durham and Warwick, and Australian universities like Charles Sturt University (Clark, 1998; Antoinetti et al., 2002). These cases illustrate practices observed in North American and European universities, emphasizing their adaptability to changing environments. The variations in strategies and adaptations within these institutions highlight the diverse approaches employed in strategic planning and management in higher education. However, existing publications reveal a lack of extensive research on proactive responses to changes, particularly the adaptation of strategic management theory from business structures to educational institutions (Morgan, 2004; Dyson, 2004). The development of strategic management in universities is influenced by several factors.

1. Life cycle: Strategic planning in business typically spans three to five years, whereas universities often require longer planning cycles of five years or more.

2. Consensus: Unlike commercial organizations, where top-level management determines the general business model, effective planning in universities requires the participation of leading academic staff.

3. System of values: While commercial businesses prioritize profitability, the primary purpose of universities is social and focuses on teaching and education.

4. Consumers: The wide range of interests of university consumers, including individuals, society, and employers, complicates the process of balancing objectives and assessing their achievement.

5. Content of activities: Universities differ from standard commercial organizations in that they must address the inherent conflict between the conservative academic environment and the need for innovation.

These factors contribute to the unique challenges faced in developing strategic management at universities, highlighting the need for tailored approaches that consider the distinct nature and characteristics of educational institutions.

#### *Human resources management needs to be strategic in universities*

Human resource management strategy refers to a set of internal organizational strategies related to personnel management. Effectively implementing human resource management strategies in various scenarios can enable enterprises to efficiently utilize their employees to achieve organizational goals. Several scholars and experts have provided definitions of human resource management strategies, leading to attempts to classify these types. However, various scholars have proposed different classifications. For instance, Shattock (2010) introduced inducement, investment, and participation strategies, while Dyson (2004) identified accumulation, utilization, and facilitation as three other types of human resource management strategies. As a result, Edgar and Geare (2013) presented the development, motivational, reinforcement, and transfer strategies as dimensions of the human resource management strategy.

This study identified that research-intensive universities employ three main groups of ideal human resource management (HRM) practices to enhance research. These practices include (1) recruitment processes, (2) Individual development plan (IDP), and (3) rewards and benefits. This study also highlights the relevance of these practices for developing countries when formulating research enhanced HRM policies. These findings provide an analytical framework for investigating research enhanced HRM practices at prominent universities in Thailand (see Table 1).

#### *Recruitment process*

Both long-standing prestigious universities and newly established world-class institutions place great emphasis on recruiting academics, based on their research accomplishments and potential. Established research universities often evaluate candidates' proficiency in conducting high-quality research with a particular focus on their publication track records (Edgar and Geare, 2013). Some research - intensive universities have a thorough probationary process before granting full appointments, while others seek candidates with international research reputations to attract top talent on a global level (Taylor, 2006). To secure the appointments of highly qualified individuals, these universities are willing to provide competitive remuneration packages and additional benefits.

In their efforts to become world-class universities, emerging countries, such as China and India, have made significant changes to their employment policies. These changes were designed to prioritize candidates with overseas PhD qualifications or work experience (Wang et al., 2011). Attracting highly qualified foreign scholars to developing countries can be challenging because of factors such as lower pay, less favorable living conditions, and potential limitations in accessing national research grants and other funding sources. To counter these challenges, universities in these countries have actively sought to engage diaspora talented scholars and scientists working abroad, encouraging them to return and contribute to the academic development of their home countries (Jayaram, 2011; Postiglione, 2011; Wang et al., 2011). Although these policies have shown some success, they also present certain challenges.

One of the identified problems is the potential difficulty of retaining and integrating returning scholars into the local academic environment. Addressing cultural and institutional differences can also pose a challenge, as well as ensuring sustainable career development opportunities for academics (Jayaram, 2011; Postiglione, 2011; Wang et al., 2011). To fully leverage the potential of attracting and integrating diaspora scholars for research and academic development in their home countries, it is essential that universities

and policymakers address these challenges and create supportive frameworks. By doing so, they can foster a conducive environment for the growth and advancement of academia in emerging nations.

Implementing policies for the repatriation of foreign national academics presents specific challenges that should be carefully considered. While the recruitment of scholars from other countries has the potential to enrich a university's research environment and overall culture, the actual outcomes may not align with initial expectations. A case in point is the 111 Project at Peking University, as highlighted by Cai (2012). According to the study, the intended duration of 1-3 months for foreign national Chinese scholars to stay in China was often not realized due to their dual commitments to both their home institution overseas and Peking University. It is imperative for universities to ensure that the recruitment of distinguished scholars from abroad extends beyond symbolic representation and results in tangible impacts (Cai, 2012).

Universities aiming to enhance their research profiles with expatriate academics should streamline visa application procedures to prevent unnecessary bureaucracy, which could potentially hinder scholars' enthusiasm. Additionally, while attracting foreign scientists is valuable initially, developing countries' universities should prioritize nurturing their own highly qualified local researchers for long-term sustainability (Postiglione, 2013). This approach ensures the establishment of a lasting research culture within universities. By addressing these challenges and implementing suitable measures, universities can effectively leverage the expertise of repatriated academics while fostering the growth of their local research community.

#### ***Individual development plan (IDP)***

Establishing a well-structured staff R&D program is widely acknowledged as a crucial step in enhancing a university's research capacity. This process involves creating an environment that encourages continuous improvement in research skills and sustains academic motivation for research (Cooke and Green, 2000; Calma, 2010). Universities must take on the responsibility

of managing staff research careers institutionally, rather than relying solely on individual academics to seek development opportunities (Connell, 2004). Instead, universities should proactively provide and support staff members with opportunities for research development throughout their career trajectory.

The university's research office plays a crucial role in bolstering the informal research credentials of academics. It can coordinate research development workshops, aiding academics in diverse areas such as formulating research proposals, authoring publishable papers, managing research projects, and overseeing postgraduate research (Taylor, 2006). Furthermore, senior researchers can undergo training in research management skills, and early career researchers can receive mentoring support (Cheetham, 2007; Rath, 2009). Universities can also play a part in enhancing academics' formal qualifications by providing opportunities for pursuing Ph.D. degrees. These collective initiatives significantly contribute to the professional advancement and research capabilities of academics within the university context.

Significant insights have been gleaned regarding the transformation of academics from a teaching-centric to a research-oriented approach in research-emerging universities in developing countries. A case study by Li et al. (2013) focused on young faculty members in humanities and social sciences at Zhejiang University, China. The university underwent a higher education reform, transitioning from a guaranteed tenure system to a contract-based system that assesses faculty based on both quantitative and qualitative research and teaching indicators. The study highlighted challenges faced by faculty members in balancing external accountability and internal values, navigating new appraisal and promotion criteria, all while reconciling with the old system (Li et al., 2013).

For the establishment of effective research-enhanced human resource management (HRM) policies, the authors propose that universities offer sufficient support to help academics overcome transition challenges. These challenges encompass career fatigue for early- and mid-career academics, work-life balance

issues for female faculty, and job burnout and turnover concerns for those without a doctoral degree (Li et al., 2013). Addressing these issues enables universities to cultivate an environment conducive to research engagement and supports the professional growth and well-being of faculty members.

### *Reward and benefit*

To attract and retain talented academics, it is crucial to implement a reward system that acknowledges and incentivizes research. Such a system can significantly boost academic research output, shape work habits, and influence attitudes toward research, creating pressures that encourage career mobility. Developing countries' universities should prioritize a reward system that maximizes opportunities for international and local academics to contribute expertise locally. By creating incentives and recognizing research excellence, universities can attract and retain academics, facilitate knowledge exchange, and foster a vibrant research culture within the local academic community.

Universities can incentivize academic research by linking employment, promotion, and tenure to research outputs, using input and output performance indicators (Rhee, 2011; Taylor, 2006). Input measures include past research income, number of research students and staff, percentage of research-active staff, research funding applications, and success rates. Output measures encompass publications, citations, completed theses, patent applications, and academic distinctions. By utilizing these indicators, universities can establish a framework to reward academics for their research efforts and achievements.

Universities can recognize academics for research performance through financial and non-financial incentives. Non-financial rewards include managerial recognition, praise, acknowledgment in bulletins, and esteem at scientific conferences (Santo et al., 2009; Hedjazi and Behravan, 2011). Financial incentives encompass salary bonuses, expedited promotion, funding for travel and conferences, and additional research support (Taylor, 2006). For example, at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, a policy since 1999 offers a reward of approximately \$1480 USD for each

Science Citation Index (SCI)-indexed paper. This policy significantly increased the university's total SCI papers, reaching 2331 in 2007, aligning it with top 100 world-class universities (Wang et al., 2011).

Management should assess the effectiveness of rewards, considering that monetary incentives may primarily boost productivity and motivation, especially for staff with comparatively lower salaries. While salary, awards, and promotions are important, Hedjazi and Behravan (2011) emphasize that intrinsic pleasures associated with challenging work, intellectual accomplishments, engaging colleagues, and recognition truly motivate researchers. Universities should aim to create an environment fostering intrinsic motivation, providing opportunities for intellectually stimulating work, collaboration with inspiring colleagues, and recognition of contributions. While financial rewards have a role, understanding and nurturing inherent motivators are essential for researchers' excellence.

In a study comparing factors influencing faculty members' time allocation to teaching and research, Fairweather (2009) found that the most significant predictor is the actual reward in the form of basic salary. Additionally, Hedjazi and Behravan (2011) noted that faculty members tend to view financial rewards more positively than symbolic ones. It is crucial to recognize that the most effective combination of financial and nonfinancial rewards may vary for each individual. Moreover, an individual's preferences for rewards are likely to change over their lifespan (McKeachie, 1979, as cited in Bland and Ruffin, 1992).

Therefore, universities should not only offer preferred rewards but also allow researchers access to the rewards they prefer, recognizing that needs and preferences evolve over time (Bland and Ruffin, 1992). While rewards may involve financial remuneration, their true significance lies in acknowledging specialized expertise, intellectual capabilities, and value to colleagues (McKeachie, 1979, 1983, as cited in Postiglione, 2013). A mix of rewards tailored to individual preferences can enhance overall satisfaction and motivation among faculty members, fostering continued dedication to teaching and research.

To effectively motivate and retain talented researchers, universities can acknowledge and appreciate their unique contributions. While specific guidance for rewarding staff at emerging research universities in developing countries is limited, Li et al. (2013) provides suggestions. They propose involving discipline-specific experts, rather than relying solely on the Department of Human Resources, to determine the academic journals considered when evaluating faculty research outputs. This nuanced approach allows for a more precise assessment and recognition of research performance. Additionally, recognizing differences among academic disciplines, universities can establish varied teaching-research workloads for different fields. Rather than applying uniform research performance standards, universities can categorize lecturers into research-oriented, combined research and teaching, or teaching - oriented staff, setting corresponding expectations for research performance. By implementing these measures, universities can align the reward system with the unique characteristics of various academic disciplines, fostering an environment that supports research excellence and recognizes diverse faculty contributions (Li et al., 2013).

In summary, research - intensive universities enhance research performance through three key HRM policies: hiring talented academics, developing their skills, and rewarding achievements. These policies aim to cultivate a skilled and motivated research-focused academic staff. However, the university's context, influenced by external factors, plays a crucial role in decision - making. Salmi (2011) identified eight groups of external factors affecting research universities, with HRM significantly influencing factors 1 to 6. When evaluating research capacity building, it is vital to consider not only the three HRM policies but also key external factors shaping the tertiary education ecosystem. Recognizing and addressing these factors help bridge gaps in knowledge, particularly in establishing strategic human resources management in educational perspectives, especially in Thai universities, for national and international competitiveness.

## Methodology:

This study employed a qualitative research approach, using in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. The qualitative research methodology involves key stages: research design, data collection, data analysis, and report writing (Viphanphong et al., 2023). The primary objective is to understand decision-making processes and actions in a specific context, providing explanations for particular phenomena (Limna & Kraiwanit, 2022). In-depth interviews are valuable for eliciting comprehensive responses on specific research topics, obtaining detailed information to address research questions effectively (Moore, 2004; Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017; Limsakul & Kraiwanit, 2020). The methodology comprises four steps:

Step 1: Review the selected secondary data qualitatively through related literature.

Step 2: Assessing the relevant stakeholders qualitatively through in-depth structured interviews based on interview questions to assess the factors that influence strategic human resources.

Step 3: Analyzing the content of qualitative structure was used to synthesize the result

Step 4: Consolidating the findings from these results to identify the factors influencing strategic human resource management.

### *Data collection*

The study employed a qualitative method to conduct in-depth interviews and examine relevant documents from secondary data to obtain the primary data results. Purposive determination is a widely adopted qualitative research technique that involves the deliberate selection of a sample that would best suit the research questions based on the researchers' expertise. This method aims to gather comprehensive knowledge or phenomenon of interest (Siripipatthanakul et al., 2022). In this study, 20 participants in HR professional positions at private and public universities, including government, autonomous, rajabhat, and

rajamangala universities in Thailand, was selected using purposive sampling. To minimize bias, the study ensured representation from various university systems by including at least two universities from each system. This approach aimed to encompass a diverse range of perspectives and avoid favoring a specific university system. The data collection process employed three inclusion criteria: 1) they were in HR positions in those types of universities in Thailand,

2) they had been working at the university for at least five years of employment, and 3) they were at least senior or manager level. Using purposive sampling to determine the number of sample sizes, Creswell and Poth (2017) suggested that between 20–30 participants are sufficient for qualitative research methods and the theoretical saturation test. Hence, this study conducted 20 participants.

**Table 1**

*Participants' information*

Types of universities	Number of participants	Positions
<b>Government</b>		
- University 1	1	Senior HR officer
- University 2	2	HR Manager
- University 3	1	HR Manager
<b>Autonomous</b>		
- University 1	2	HR Manager
- University 2	2	HR Manager
<b>Rajabhat group</b>		
- University 1	2	HR Manager
- University 2	2	HR Manager
<b>Raja Mangala group</b>		
- University 1	2	Senior HR officer
- University 2	2	HR Manager
<b>Private</b>		
- University 1	2	HR Manager
- University 2	2	Associate Dean/ Dean
<b>Total</b>	20	

This study employed a self - administered approach to data collection. Initially, participants were invited through an invitation letter to obtain their consent. Subsequently, interviews were conducted using various methods, such as telephone, zoom conference, or face-

to-face, based on the convenience of the participants. The data obtained were in the form of voice recordings, which were then transcribed and analyzed to create memos and extract relevant content. The data collection phase spanned May 5th–31st, 2023.

The interview process primarily involved conducting in-depth individual interviews. These one-on-one interviews were chosen to ensure that the interviewees could freely express themselves without interference from their colleagues, thereby encouraging them to reveal more information. The interviews were structured around the following key questions: 1) Why do you believe that human resource management needs to be strategic? 2) According to your perspective, what is the most critical factor in strategic human resources management? 3) What is your approach or strategy in the recruitment process? 4) Do you think it is essential to disclose rewards and pay for job applicants to apply for posted positions? 5) How does management influence human resources policies? 6) Do you strongly support the idea that continuous learning and development should be provided to all the employees? 7) Can implementing a learning and development program, such as an individual development plan (IDP), significantly impact employee retention? 8). Finally, what suggestions or recommendations do you have regarding overall human resources management practices?

#### *Data analysis*

In this study, content analysis was used as a qualitative methodology, which entails a systematic and objective approach to describe and quantify particular phenomena based on verbal, visual, or written data (Namraksa & Kraiwani, 2023; Woodeson, Limna, & Nga-Fa, 2023). The computer - assisted

qualitative data analysis tool NVivo was employed to aid in the organization and analysis of extensive datasets (Brandão, 2015). Consequently, both content analysis and NVivo were used to analyze the data collected in the study.

#### **Results:**

In total, the study conducted 20 interview sessions (see Table 3 for participants' information), each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. After each interview, the materials were sorted, and memos were written in a timely manner. This process resulted in a substantial number of interview records, totaling approximately 6,000 words. Out of the 20 interviews, a random selection process was used to select two-thirds of the interview records, which equates to 14 interviews and approximately 4,000 words, analyzed in the NVivo software to extract the frequency word (see Figure 1). These interviews were coded to explore the various factors influencing the implementation of strategic human resources management. The remaining one - third of the interviews, comprising approximately 2,000 words, were set aside for specific purposes. It was used to test whether there might be any significant categories or factors that were not initially identified during the coding process, essentially conducting a theoretical saturation test. This approach helped ensure that the study captured a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and validated the findings.

**Table 2**

*Participants' information*

Items	No.	Frequency (%)
Gender		
- Male	4	20%
- Female	16	80%
Positions Level		
- Senior Officer	4	20%
- Manager	14	70%
- Management	2	10%

Items	No.	Frequency (%)
Year of services		
- 0 – 5 Year	2	10%
- 6 – 10 Year	12	60%
-10 year up	6	30%
Age		
- 25 – 35	4	20%
- 36 – 45	8	40%
- 46 – 55	5	25%
Total	20	100%

Each respondent was interviewed to address the factors of strategic human resource management for competitiveness in the context of universities. The interviews aimed to gather in-depth insights and perspectives from each individual on this topic. The details are summarized as follows:

“In the context of universities, the most critical factor for strategic human resource management is the alignment of HR strategies with an institution's educational mission and long - term goals. Universities are unique organizations that primarily focus on providing high-quality education, research, and community engagement. Faculty Recruitment and Development: Hiring and retaining qualified faculty members who are not only experts in their fields, but also align with the university's values and commitment to education. Faculty development programs that support their teaching, research, and professional growth are essential” Respondent 1, interviewed on May 05, 2023.

“Staff Development and Training: Recognizing the crucial role of staff members in supporting the university's mission and investing in their development and training. This includes administrative staff, support personnel, and other non-faculty employees, and the training and development plan must be adequate for all levels of university employees.” Respondent 2, interviewed on May 06, 2023.

“Academic Freedom and Governance: Balancing the need for academic freedom with effective institutional governance and decision-making processes

to provide the flexibility of faculty to think differently with supportive from management as the individual development plan (IDP). Research funding to all faculty to develop themselves needs to be budgeted and open for all to propose the research project” Respondent 3, interviewed on May 10, 2023.

“Strategic Human Resources management in universities should be viewed as an integral part of the institution's overall strategic planning, contributing to the achievement of its educational mission, vision, and long-term objectives. By aligning HR strategies with the university's unique needs and values, universities can better attract, develop, and retain the talent required to thrive in the ever - changing landscape of higher education.” Respondent 4, interviewed on May 10, 2023.

“Supporting Educational Mission: Universities have a unique mission of providing high - quality education, research, and community engagement. A strategic HR approach ensures that the faculty and staff hired align with this mission and contribute effectively to the institution's academic excellence.” Respondents 5, interviewed on May 15, 2023.

“Attracting and Retaining Talent: Strategic HR management helps universities compete for top talent in academia. By developing attractive compensation packages, career development opportunities, and a supportive work environment, universities can better recruit and retain exceptional faculty and staff.” Respondent 6, interviewed on May 15, 2023.

“Succession Planning and Leadership Development: In the academic environment, strong leadership is crucial. A strategic HR approach includes succession planning and leadership development programs to ensure a continuous pipeline of qualified individuals for key leadership roles.” Respondent 6, interviewed on May 15, 2023.

“Building a Positive Campus Culture: A strategic HR approach contributes to building a positive campus culture that fosters collaboration, creativity, and a sense of community among faculty, staff, and students.” Respondents 7, interviewed on May 16, 2023.

“By adopting a strategic approach to human resources management, universities can create an environment where faculty and staff are empowered to excel, students thrive in their educational journey, and the institution can fulfill its mission of advancing knowledge and benefiting society as a whole.” Respondent 8, interviewed on May 22, 2023

“Implementing a learning and development program, such as the Individual Development Plan (IDP), can significantly impact employee retention in the university context. A well-designed IDP offers numerous benefits that contribute to employee satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty, thereby leading to higher retention rates. IDPs can positively influence employee retention in universities.” Respondents 9, interviewed on May 23, 2023.

“Enhancing Employee Engagement: Engaged employees are more committed to their work and the institution. IDPs offer a clear pathway for growth, enhancing employees' sense of purpose and engagement and leading to improved retention.” Respondents 10, interviewed on May 26, 2023.

“An effective Individual Development Plan (IDP) can have a substantial impact on employee retention in the university context. By supporting employees' growth and career aspirations, universities can create a more motivated, engaged, and committed workforce that is more likely to stay with the institution in the long term.” Respondent 11, interviewed on May 27, 2023.

“Competing for Top Talent: Universities often compete for top talent with other academic institutions and industries. Transparently disclosing compensation helps universities attract the best candidates who are looking for fair and competitive remuneration.” Respondent 12, interviewed on May 27, 2023.

“Enhancing University Reputation: A university that is open about its compensation practices is more likely to be perceived as a reputable and desirable employer. This can enhance a university's reputation and attractiveness to potential candidates.” Respondent 13, interviewed on May 31, 2023.

“It is important to remember that universities often have unique salary structures based on academic rank, tenure, and other factors. Providing a salary range or explaining how compensation is determined based on qualifications can also help maintain transparency, while considering the complexity of academic remuneration. Overall, transparency in disclosing rewards and pay is beneficial to both universities and job applicants. It helps create a fair, efficient, and positive hiring process that aligns with the principles of openness and integrity often associated with higher education institutions.” Respondent 14, interviewed on May 31, 2023.

Subsequently, data were extracted via open coding from the original statements obtained during the 14 interview sessions.

### *Open coding*

Open coding is a data analysis technique used to divide the collected data into manageable and analyzable segments. This process involves continuous abstraction, comparison, and brainstorming to extract concepts that represent the essence of those segments, extracted from frequency words. These concepts are further organized into categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In the context of this study, the process of open coding led to the discovery of 14 categories. This discovery was made after multiple rounds of data comparison and analysis. Table 4 provides examples of how these categories were formed during the analysis. This table illustrates the steps taken to derive each category and the key elements that contribute to their



No.	Categories	Original statements
3	Management/leadership	Supportive and well-reputed of universities' management also impact high quality applicant. Effective management and leadership are essential for universities to maintain a thriving academic and research environment, attract top talent, adapt to changing circumstances, and fulfill their educational and societal responsibilities. Successful universities often have a strong synergy between their management and leadership functions, with both working collaboratively to achieve common goals.
4	Retirement plan/ provident	Employees look for security job and retirement plan to stay long with the organization. Retirement plans and provident funds are essential components of a comprehensive benefits package offered by universities to attract and retain talented faculty and staff. These plans provide financial security and peace of mind for employees as they plan for their retirement years. The specific details and features of retirement plans in universities may vary based on the institution's policies, regulations, and the prevailing retirement laws in the country or region.
5	Training and development	Training and development must be continued for the entire employment period of all employee. A well-structured training and development plan in universities not only enhances the skills and knowledge of faculty, staff, and administrators but also contributes to the overall quality of education, research output, and the institution's reputation in the academic community.
6	Career path	A clear and transparent career path will be most attractive for joining the organization. An effective and transparent career path in universities not only helps individuals plan and navigate their careers but also contributes to a positive work environment and the overall success of the institution by attracting and retaining talented individuals committed to the university's mission and values.
7	Annual increment	The clear policy of Increment structure, annual increments are an essential component of the compensation package in universities, and they play a role in recognizing employees' dedication and hard work while contributing to employee motivation, job satisfaction, and retention.
8	Personal development plan	Employees in both academic and supportive academic positions prefer to see the prospect of career promotion during their employment period. Creating and following a personal development plan in the universities' context empowers individuals to take ownership of their growth and career progression. It encourages a proactive approach to learning, supports academic success, and enhances the overall university experience for students, faculty, and staff. Universities often provide resources, counseling, and workshops to assist individuals in developing effective PDPs and achieving their personal and professional goal.
9	Facilities at the workplace	The working environment can impact work motivation. Providing quality facilities is essential for creating a positive and supportive work environment that fosters academic and research excellence and enhances the overall university experience for all members of the community.
10	Remote work	Since the outbreak, HR has received feedback and questions from applicants about remote work flexibility. It is essential for universities to carefully assess the feasibility and implications of remote work arrangements to ensure they align with the institution's goals and requirements.
11	Recognition program	This is to recognize employees and establish the engagement. Recognition programs in universities not only boost morale and motivation but also help retain talented faculty and staff and foster a sense of pride and loyalty within the university community. They play a significant role in nurturing a positive and supportive environment that fosters personal and professional growth for all members of the institution.
12	Management support	The vision of management can impact the capability of employee to work for organization. Management support is integral to creating an environment in which faculty, staff, and students can thrive and fulfill their potential. Effective management practices contribute to the university's reputation, academic excellence, and overall success in fulfilling its educational and research missions.

No.	Categories	Original statements
13	Financial aid program	The employee cooperative or any kind of funding for financial aid. Financial aid programs aim to make education more accessible and affordable for students from diverse economic backgrounds, enabling them to enroll, persist, and succeed in their academic pursuits.
14	Promotion	Job promotion in the universities' context refers to the advancement of faculty or staff members to higher positions within the university hierarchy. A promotion recognizes an individual's dedication, expertise, and contributions to the institution and typically comes with increased responsibilities, authority, and often higher remuneration. The promotion process in universities is usually guided by specific policies and procedures established by the university's human resources department or relevant administrative bodies. Here are the key aspects and considerations related to job promotion in universities.

Based on open coding, axial coding is used to reanalyze the extracted categories and discover the internal relations among these categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Through analysis, it was found that the

14 categories formed in open coding can be divided into three main categories, and their correspondence is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Axial coding*

Categories	Connotations statement
<b>1. Recruitment process</b>	The proper recruitment process in the university context involves systematic and fair procedures to attract and select qualified candidates for faculty, staff, and administrative positions. An effective recruitment process ensures that the university can hire the best-suited individuals to fulfill its mission and objectives. A well-structured recruitment process in the university context helps attract talented individuals who align with the university's values and contribute positively to its academic and research pursuits. It also demonstrates the university's commitment to fairness and excellence in hiring and helps build a strong and diverse workforce.
<b>2. Individual development plan (IDP)</b>	The procedure for an Individual Development Plan (IDP) in the university context involves a structured approach to help faculty, staff, and students identify their professional development goals and create a roadmap for achieving them. An IDP typically includes self-assessment, goal setting, action planning, and evaluation. The IDP process in the university context is designed to empower individuals to take ownership of their growth and career progression. It encourages a proactive approach to learning, supports academic success, and enhances the overall university experience for faculty, staff, and students. Universities may provide guidance, workshops, and resources to help individuals develop effective IDPs and achieve their personal and professional goals
<b>3. Reward and benefit</b>	Rewards and remuneration play a crucial role in the university context for both faculty and staff members. They are essential components of the overall compensation package that universities offer to attract, motivate, and retain talented individuals. rewards and remuneration are critical components of the university context as they attract and retain talent, motivate performance, recognize excellence, and support a positive work culture. By investing in competitive compensation packages and effective reward systems, universities can create a supportive and rewarding environment that enhances the overall success and reputation of the institution.

After the axial coding, selective encoding was performed. Its purpose is to explore the internal connections between various main categories and connect them together in a storyline. A theoretical saturation test was performed using the remaining one-third of the data. After the remaining data were encoded, the formed categories were included, and no new and important categories were formed. Subsequently, four interviewees were randomly selected for follow-up feedback. They did not mention any new critical views, and all indicated satisfaction. Therefore, the results found three key components of strategic human resource management in the educational context: an innovative recruitment process to select the right applicant for the right position, an individual development plan (IDP) with a transparent career path and promotion opportunities, and a reward and benefit structure to ensure justice and fairness for every employee at all levels.

### Discussion:

This study focuses on strategic human resource management in higher education in the context of universities. It explores the adaptation of strategic management theory from business structures to educational institutions, building on previous studies by Morgan (2004) and Dyson (2004). Dyson emphasized that the development of strategic management in universities faces complexities due to various factors, particularly the contrasting qualifications and job responsibilities of employees in academic and administrative roles within the university management structure. As a result, human resources play a crucial role in driving university competitiveness in the educational industry in Thailand and globally. The influence of this factor on strategic human resource management aligns with Edgar and Geare (2013), Jayaram (2011), Postiglione (2011), Wang et al. (2011), Cai (2012), and Li et al. (2013).

Academic and administrative employees have different perspectives on career paths. Academic staff focus on research and development skills, while administrative staff prioritize the job hierarchy.

By addressing these concerns, universities can create an environment that fosters research engagement and supports the professional growth and well-being of faculty members. The factors influencing strategic human resources management to be competitive, as found in this study, are consistent with previous research by Hedjazi and Behravan (2011), Li et al. (2013), and Salmi (2011). Salmi (2011) identified eight groups of external factors that directly influence research universities' ability to thrive, and HRM is one of them. The HRM factors found in this study consist of the recruitment process, individual development plan (IDP), and rewards and benefits, which are in line with previous research in the higher education context. This study argues that recruiting graduate applicants overseas can uplift universities' capabilities, considering the context of Thailand, where remuneration may not be as competitive as the business field (Vithayaporn, 2021). Cultivating academic faculty by offering scholarships to pursue doctoral degrees or gain post-doctoral experience would be attractive for developing long-term employability sustainability.

### Conclusions:

The results of this study address two research questions: The first question was: What strategic human resource management is needed for universities' competitiveness? Universities are facing challenges in improving the quality of education and the production of quality students, which require the integration of curricular, academic, and administrative perspectives. Therefore, human resource management in educational institutes, such as universities, should be more strategic, moving away from traditional approaches, and adopting a more corporate dimension. Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) plays a crucial role in enhancing universities' competitiveness by effectively managing and developing human capital. Through the implementation of effective SHRM practices, universities can attract and retain talent, foster a culture of innovation and excellence, and position themselves competitively in the higher education landscape.

To address the second research question - to what extent does the implementation of strategic human resource management affect universities' competitiveness? Several key factors have been identified. First, the recruitment process needs to be strategic in finding the right candidate for the right job, moving away from traditional recruiting methods to more modern and competitive approaches that align with universities' needs. Second, a clear and transparent individual development plan for employees at different levels provides motivation and encouragement, encouraging them to dedicate themselves to the university's success. Finally, rewards and benefits play a crucial role in engaging university employees. Attractive remuneration and work-life balance initiatives contribute to employee retention. Employees who are satisfied with their employment are more likely to perform effectively and contribute to the university's success.

Furthermore, governance in universities plays a crucial role in strategic human resource management (HRM) as it sets the framework and direction for how the institution manages its human capital. Effective governance ensures that a university's HR policies, practices, and initiatives align with its overall mission, vision, and strategic objectives. In summary, governance in universities plays a fundamental role in strategic human resources management by setting policies, aligning HR strategies with institutional goals, allocating resources, ensuring compliance, and promoting talent development and retention. This collaborative approach helps universities build a strong and capable workforce, supporting their mission of providing high-quality education and research.

Inevitably, the limitations of this study could arise from the fact that the effectiveness of SHRM practices can be influenced by various contextual factors including cultural, legal, and economic differences between countries. The findings from studies conducted in the Thai context may not be directly applicable to other countries, making it essential to conduct research specific to the local environment. Therefore, the recommendation for further research is to adopt a cross-sectional design that captures data at

a specific point in time. However, longitudinal studies that track changes over time would provide more insights into the long - term impact of SHRM on competitiveness.

### Contributions of The Study:

For practical contributions, it would likely provide practical recommendations for Thai universities to enhance their SHRM practices, emphasizing the creation of an environment that fosters research excellence, faculty development, and long - term employability sustainability. The study highlights that effective Strategic Human Resources Management is essential for Thai universities to enhance their competitiveness in the educational industry, both domestically and globally. Regarding academic contributions, there is a gap in the literature on the application of strategic management theory to management and business dimensions. Consequently, the theory of strategic management can be applied from the perspective of the educational industry.

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