

Strategic Human Resource Management As a Translation System In Digital Transformation: Evidence From Haier Smart Home

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Abstract.

Digital transformation often fails at execution because technologies do not automatically alter decision rights, talent allocation, incentives, or cross-boundary coordination. This study examines how strategic human resource management translates digital strategy into organisational action and value creation. A longitudinal embedded single-case study of Haier Smart Home was conducted using six semi-structured interviews (628 recorded minutes) collected in February-March 2026 and archival evidence covering 2020-2025. Gioia coding, process tracing, pattern matching, rival-explanation analysis, and data triangulation were applied. The findings identify four linked mechanisms: dynamic strategic alignment through decentralised authority and human-resource platforms; order-based human-capital reconfiguration through capability labels, opportunity orders, and flexible team boundaries; market-oriented incentives through user-paid compensation and traceable contributions; and platform governance through chain-group collaboration across internal units and ecosystem partners. These mechanisms improve organisational responsiveness and broaden value creation, but their effects depend on reliable data, divisible tasks, attributable feedback, talent depth, transparent rules, and sustained leadership commitment. The study reconceptualises digital human-resource management as a governance mechanism system rather than a set of automated functions.

Keywords: *digital transformation; strategic human resource management; digital human resource management; Rendanheyi and dynamic capability.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has moved beyond the adoption of isolated information technologies towards the redesign of strategy, organisation, and value creation. Digital platforms, data connectivity, artificial intelligence, and user-interaction systems can alter how firms sense demand, coordinate work, and combine internal and external resources [1-3]. However, the strategic promise of digitalisation frequently exceeds its organisational realisation. Technology can accelerate information flows without changing who holds decision rights, how talent is allocated, what behaviour is rewarded, or how multiple actors collaborate. The central implementation problem is therefore not whether a firm owns digital tools, but how those tools become embedded in organisational mechanisms.

Human-resource management is pivotal to this implementation problem because it connects corporate intent with employee capability, motivation, and opportunity. Strategic human-resource management research established that coherent bundles of practices can support strategic execution and organisational performance [4-6]. Digital human-resource management research subsequently examined electronic systems, automation, analytics, and algorithmic decision-making [7-9]. More recent work conceptualises digital human-resource strategy as the integration of digital technologies with human-capital decisions and business objectives [10], while meta-analytic evidence suggests that digital human-resource management can generate operational, relational, and organisational benefits under specific configurations [11]. Nevertheless, these literatures remain only partially integrated. Strategic human-resource management often assumes a relatively stable strategy to which human-resource practices are aligned, whereas digital human-resource management is frequently treated as a functional technology for improving recruitment, training, appraisal, or payroll. Neither perspective fully explains how a changing digital strategy becomes executable through everyday organisational arrangements.

This gap is particularly visible in platform-oriented manufacturing firms. Their digital strategies require rapid responses to user scenarios, flexible deployment of expertise, market-facing incentives, and collaboration across internal units and ecosystem partners. These requirements are difficult to meet through fixed jobs, departmental staffing, supervisor-centred appraisal, and hierarchical coordination. A mechanism

explanation is needed to show how digital connectivity changes authority, resource allocation, incentives, and governance as an interconnected system.

Four theoretical perspectives provide the foundation for such an explanation. First, strategic fit research suggests that human-resource systems create value when they support business strategy [6,12]. In volatile digital settings, however, alignment must be dynamic rather than episodic: strategy, decision rights, and human-resource infrastructure need to co-evolve as user information and business opportunities change. Second, dynamic-capability theory explains how firms sense opportunities, seize them, and reconfigure resources [13,14], but it often leaves the human-capital processes of reconfiguration implicit. Third, agency theory explains how incentives and monitoring address information asymmetry [15,16]. Digital records can bring external user and market signals into internal evaluation, but may also produce new attribution, fairness, and short-termism problems. Fourth, platform-governance research shows how architecture, rules, interfaces, and value allocation coordinate multiple actors [17-19]. In manufacturing ecosystems, these governance arrangements can extend human-resource management beyond internal employees towards cross-boundary capability access, role definition, contribution evaluation, and reward allocation.

Haier Smart Home provides an information-rich setting for examining these mechanisms. Its Rendanheyi model links employees, user orders, and user value through decentralised micro-enterprises, order-based team formation, user-oriented reward principles, and chain-group collaboration. Existing Chinese management research has described Rendanheyi as an important organisational innovation [20], yet its digital human-resource mechanisms remain insufficiently theorised in internationally comparable terms. The case is not treated as a universally transferable best practice. Instead, it is used to identify analytically general mechanisms and the boundary conditions under which they may operate.

This study therefore asks: How does strategic human-resource management translate digital transformation strategy into organisational execution and value creation? It makes three contributions. First, it opens the strategy-execution black box by identifying a linked system of dynamic strategic alignment, dynamic resource reconfiguration, market-oriented incentives, and platform governance. Second, it specifies the human-capital microfoundations of digital dynamic capabilities by showing how capability visibility, task orderisation, and flexible team boundaries enable reconfiguration. Third, it theorises Rendanheyi practices in terms that connect an indigenous Chinese management model with strategic human-resource management, agency, and platform-governance research.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design and case selection

A longitudinal embedded single-case design was adopted because the research question concerns a process that is inseparable from its organisational context [21]. Theory-building case research is appropriate when a revelatory setting permits close examination of mechanisms that cannot be captured adequately by cross-sectional variables [22,23]. Haier Smart Home was selected according to three criteria. First, it is a theoretically relevant manufacturing case in which digital transformation has been accompanied by sustained organisational redesign. Second, its Rendanheyi practices correspond closely to the proposed authority, resource, incentive, and governance mechanisms. Third, sufficient interview, corporate, and public evidence was available for longitudinal triangulation.

The focal period, 2020-2025, captures the deepening of Haier Smart Home's smart-home and scenario-ecosystem strategy. The period was divided analytically into three overlapping phases: platform strengthening and organisational authorisation in 2020-2021; scenario-ecosystem deepening and dynamic resource allocation in 2022-2023; and intensified market-oriented incentives, chain-group collaboration, and ecosystem value co-creation in 2024-2025. Haier Smart Home was treated as the overall case, while the four human-resource mechanisms constituted embedded units of analysis. The objective was analytical rather than statistical generalisation.

Data collection

The evidence base combined semi-structured interviews, corporate archives, public materials, and

prior case research. Six interviews were conducted with informants occupying strategic, business-unit, micro-enterprise, technical, and operational roles. Interviews took place between 24 February and 11 March 2026, lasted between 95 and 118 minutes, and totalled 628 recorded minutes. Questions addressed digital strategy, changes in decision rights, talent allocation, performance and reward, chain-group collaboration, employee experience, adverse effects, and boundary conditions. Participants were anonymised by code. Interview excerpts used in the analysis were translated from Chinese into English and checked against the original transcripts.

Archival evidence covered 2020-2025 and included annual and environmental, social, and governance reports, governance and policy documents, corporate announcements, executive speeches, Rendanheyi forum materials, media reports, and published cases [26]. Archival materials established the strategic and temporal context; interviews illuminated operating mechanisms and employee interpretations; and external materials were used to challenge corporate success narratives. The study did not obtain complete platform-level behavioural data such as task-posting logs, bidding records, user-evaluation files, or compensation-allocation records. Consequently, the analysis focuses on mechanism identification through converging qualitative evidence rather than statistical causal estimation.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

Analysis combined Gioia coding, temporal process tracing, pattern matching, and rival-explanation analysis [24,25]. First-order concepts retained informant and case terms such as 'more decision rights at the front line', 'forming a team around an order', 'user feedback affects income', and 'multiple actors collaborate around a scenario'. Constant comparison generated second-order themes including authority decentralisation, human-resource platform transformation, capability codification, opportunity orderisation, flexible team boundaries, user-signal internalisation, contribution traceability, rule-based coordination, and ecosystem value co-creation. These themes were aggregated into four mechanisms.

Process tracing examined the temporal sequence from digital strategy to organisational redesign and value creation. Pattern matching compared observed evidence with the four theoretical mechanism expectations. Rival explanations were considered explicitly: cultural continuity versus digital strategic change; conventional project teams versus order-based reconfiguration; ordinary performance pay versus user-signal internalisation; and cross-departmental cooperation versus platform governance. Credibility was strengthened through data-source triangulation, construct operationalisation, a case-study database, negative-case attention, and a traceable path from source material to aggregate findings.

Table 1. Interview profile

Code	Role	Interview date	Duration
M1	Former HR Strategy Director	24 February 2026	102 min
P1	Vice President, Water Industry	26 February 2026	118 min
T1	Regional General Manager	28 February 2026	110 min
T2	Micro-enterprise Owner, Smart Home	2 March 2026	95 min
E1	Research and Development Engineer	7 March 2026	99 min
E2	Operations Manager	11 March 2026	104 min

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Case context and temporal pattern

Haier Smart Home is the listed smart-home platform of Haier Group, with activities spanning

household appliances, smart-home solutions, scenario services, and global operations. During 2020-2025, its strategic emphasis increasingly shifted from isolated product transactions towards user experience, smart-home scenarios, and ecosystem collaboration [26]. This shift had three organisational consequences. The strategic logic moved from product output towards user value and scenario solutions; the organisational logic moved from hierarchical control towards platform-enabled micro-enterprises; and the human-resource logic moved from functional administration towards mechanism governance.

The longitudinal evidence suggests an accumulative rather than abrupt transition. In 2020-2021, digital platforms and smart-home strategy strengthened the pressure for local decision rights and human-resource platform support. In 2022-2023, scenario-based demand increased the importance of capability visibility, order-based task definition, and cross-departmental team formation. In 2024-2025, user-paid compensation and chain-group collaboration became more salient as value creation increasingly required traceable contributions and ecosystem coordination. These phases overlap, but they clarify the sequence through which digital transformation generated demands for authority redesign, resource reconfiguration, incentive change, and platform governance.

Dynamic strategic alignment

Haier Smart Home's digital strategy increasingly emphasised smart-home scenarios, ecosystem interaction, and user value rather than isolated product transactions. This strategy exposed a mismatch with centralised approvals and functionally controlled human-resource practices. A former human-resource strategy director explained: 'The hardest part of digital transformation is not building systems but changing the relationship between people and the organisation. If the hierarchy does not change, digital strategy cannot reach the front line' (M1, 24 February 2026; translated by the authors).

The organisational response combined greater decision, staffing, appraisal, and distribution rights for user-facing micro-enterprises with a human-resource platform that supplied rules, data, capability information, and services. This configuration was more than static vertical fit. Digital strategy created recurrent pressure for faster local decisions; decentralised authority allowed business units to act on user information; and platform services enabled autonomy without eliminating organisational coordination. Human-resource management moved from approving personnel actions towards designing the infrastructure through which units could select people, allocate responsibilities, and accept business accountability. The rival explanation that these changes were merely a continuation of Haier's long-standing culture is incomplete. Rendanheyi provided an institutional foundation, but the 2020-2025 evidence indicates that user data, scenario platforms, and more transparent task information intensified the need to redistribute authority and redesign human-resource services. The changes also exceeded ordinary information-technology efficiency improvements because they altered decision rights and responsibility allocation, not simply processing speed. The mechanism is therefore best understood as dynamic strategic alignment: continuing co-evolution among digital strategy, organisational authority, and human-resource governance.

Dynamic resource reconfiguration

The second mechanism concerned how talent moved towards opportunities. Digital platforms increased the visibility of employee skills, project histories, and contribution records. A regional manager reported: 'In the past, finding people depended mainly on departmental familiarity and managerial experience. Now the platform shows capability information and project experience, so people who have handled similar tasks can be identified more quickly' (T1, 28 February 2026; translated by the authors). Capability information reduced dependence on positional identity and managerial memory.

User needs and market opportunities were then represented as orders or scenario tasks. A micro-enterprise owner described the sequence: 'When an order arrives, the first task is to determine which capabilities are needed, who can participate, and how to assemble a small team quickly' (T2, 2 March 2026; translated by the authors). Orderisation converted an external opportunity into an internal resource-allocation problem. Team boundaries could cross departments and change after task completion.

Order-based assembly and disassembly differed from a conventional project team in four respects. The trigger was an external user or market opportunity; capability data supported selection; participants could cross departmental boundaries; and teams could be recombined after task completion. An operations

manager observed that the arrangement created wider project opportunities, but also required employees to demonstrate contribution rather than rely on job identity (E2, 11 March 2026). These findings specify the human-capital microfoundations of dynamic capabilities. Sensing became linked to user and opportunity data; seizing depended on task orderisation; and reconfiguration occurred through capability matching and flexible team formation. This extends firm-level dynamic-capability theory by identifying concrete human-resource processes through which resources are recombined [13,14,27].

The mechanism also generated risks. Dynamic allocation can weaken knowledge retention, increase employment uncertainty, and disadvantage employees whose capabilities are difficult to codify. It therefore depends on sufficiently divisible work, a deep talent pool, reliable capability information, and arrangements that protect long-cycle expertise. Without these conditions, order-based reconfiguration may become unstable internal competition rather than adaptive resource mobilisation.

Market-oriented incentives

The third mechanism internalised user and market signals in evaluation and reward. 'User-paid compensation' does not mean that customers directly transfer money to employees. It means that user recognition, order outcomes, and value contribution become stronger internal signals for team evaluation and income distribution. A business leader stated that user recognition and market results increasingly affected team assessment and returns (P1, 26 February 2026). Digital task records and feedback reduced exclusive dependence on supervisor judgement.

Contribution traceability was central to the mechanism. An operations manager explained that the platform displayed task progress, user feedback, and outcome data, making it easier to establish what a team had done and whether users recognised the result (E2, 11 March 2026). A micro-enterprise owner similarly noted that teams were evaluated not only on whether an internal assignment had been completed, but also on order outcomes, user feedback, and value contribution (T2, 2 March 2026). These data did not eliminate judgement, but changed its informational basis.

The mechanism redirected attention from completing internal procedures towards producing recognised user value. It also redistributed risk. A research-and-development employee observed: 'When user evaluations and project outcomes became more transparent, individual contributions were easier to see, but the pressure also increased because weak results were visible as well' (E1, 7 March 2026; translated by the authors). The evidence therefore does not support an unqualified empowerment narrative. Digital measurement can enable visibility and voice, yet algorithmic and metric-based systems can also intensify control and contested evaluation [28,29].

User-oriented incentives can improve behavioural alignment only when feedback can be attributed reasonably, collective and long-term contributions are protected, and distribution rules are transparent. Otherwise, market signals may become short-term pressure, income volatility, or disputed measurement. The mechanism extends agency reasoning by introducing a user-platform-employee relationship. External market information enters the internal contract, reducing some information asymmetries while creating new attribution and fairness problems.

Platform governance and chain-group collaboration

Smart-home scenarios frequently exceeded the capability of any single department or firm. Haier Smart Home's chain-group collaboration connected product units, research and development, supply, service platforms, and external ecosystem partners around a user scenario. A vice-president explained: 'A smart-home scenario cannot be completed by one department. Product, research and development, supply chain, service, and external ecosystem resources all have to participate; the chain group connects them around the user scenario' (P1, 26 February 2026; translated by the authors).

Digital platforms did more than transmit information. A regional manager reported that cross-departmental work had previously depended heavily on meetings and leadership coordination, whereas the platform increasingly recorded task progress, responsibility allocation, and result feedback (T1, 28 February 2026). An operations manager added: 'The platform records tasks, milestones, responsibilities, and results. Only then is there a basis for later contribution evaluation and value distribution' (E2, 11 March 2026;

translated by the authors). Platform records therefore supported accountability and allocation across organisational boundaries.

The objective was scenario value rather than coordination for its own sake. A micro-enterprise owner stated: 'Users do not want a single product; they want the whole scenario experience. We have to combine internal products, service resources, and external partner capabilities to form a complete solution' (T2, 2 March 2026; translated by the authors). This arrangement was neither ordinary cross-functional cooperation nor conventional outsourcing. Internal and external actors jointly shaped scenario solutions, while platform rules coordinated access, responsibility, contribution evaluation, and rewards. It therefore formed a hybrid governance structure between hierarchy and market [17-19].

The finding also extends the domain of human-resource management. Human-resource governance no longer concerns only internal employment practices; it also influences how capabilities are accessed, roles are defined, contributions are recognised, and rewards are shared across an ecosystem. Platform work can expand opportunity and coordination, but may also blur employment boundaries and shift risk [30]. Effective chain-group collaboration consequently requires clear interfaces, verifiable contributions, dispute-resolution capacity, and capable ecosystem partners.

Integrated mechanism and organisational value creation

The four mechanisms were sequential and mutually reinforcing. Dynamic strategic alignment established user-oriented direction and delegated authority. Dynamic resource reconfiguration converted opportunities into executable teams. Market-oriented incentives sustained attention to user value. Platform governance extended coordination beyond organisational boundaries. Authority without capability matching risked unsupported decentralisation; flexible teams without credible rewards risked weak commitment; and ecosystem collaboration without traceable contributions risked conflict. Digital human-resource management created value when these mechanisms operated as a system rather than as isolated applications.

The evidence indicates effects in four value domains. First, organisational responsiveness improved because front-line units could decide more quickly and teams could be assembled around time-sensitive opportunities. Second, innovation capacity broadened because capabilities from different departments and partner organisations could be combined around user scenarios. Third, user value became more central because evaluation and rewards incorporated user recognition and market outcomes. Fourth, the value-creation boundary expanded from firm-internal efficiency towards ecosystem solutions. Annual and environmental, social, and governance reports for 2020-2025 consistently present smart-home scenarios, digital operations, global collaboration, and user experience as major strategic priorities [26]. The qualitative evidence clarifies the organisational mechanisms through which those priorities were enacted; it does not claim that the four mechanisms alone caused all reported financial outcomes.

Figure 1 summarises the mechanism model. The reverse feedback arrow indicates that platform outcomes and user information can prompt further strategic and human-resource adjustment. The lower box identifies the principal conditions under which the mechanism chain is expected to function.

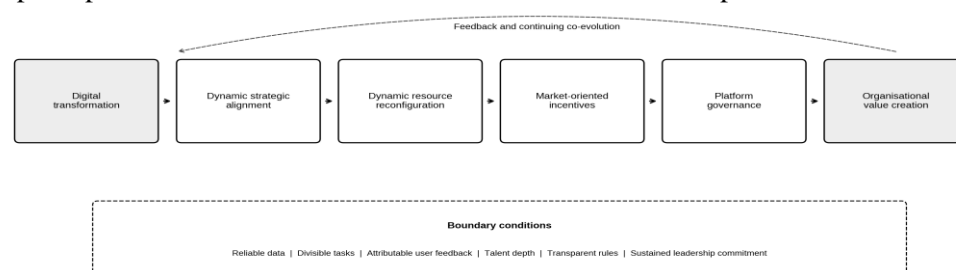


Fig. 1. Strategic human-resource management mechanism system in digital transformation

Theoretical discussion

First, the study opens the strategy-execution black box in digital transformation. Prior research establishes that digital technologies reshape strategy, business models, and organisational design [1-3], but the case shows how value conversion occurs through a human-resource mechanism system. The explanatory sequence is digital connectivity and user information, followed by changes in authority, resource allocation,

incentives, and governance, and then changes in responsiveness and value-creation capacity. This process account avoids attributing organisational outcomes directly to technology.

Second, the findings extend strategic human-resource management from static alignment towards dynamic governance. Human-resource practices did not simply fit a predetermined strategy. Digital strategy, delegated authority, and platform infrastructure repeatedly adjusted to one another. The strategic role of the human-resource function lay less in central control and more in designing rules, information, and services that allowed distributed units to act while remaining accountable. This reconnects digital human-resource management with the strategic and relational concerns highlighted in earlier electronic human-resource management research [7,31].

Third, order-based assembly specifies human-capital microfoundations of dynamic capabilities. Sensing and seizing opportunities required the visibility of individual and team capabilities, while reconfiguration required task representations and flexible organisational boundaries. The analysis therefore links firm-level adaptation to concrete processes of capability codification, matching, and team recombination.

Fourth, user-paid compensation extends agency reasoning by introducing a user-platform-employee relationship. Digital records can reduce some information asymmetries and bring external value signals into internal contracts, but they also create new agency problems when contributions are difficult to attribute or metrics privilege short-term outcomes. Finally, chain-group collaboration extends platform-governance research into a manufacturing organisation where platform rules coordinate both internal work relationships and external ecosystem participation.

Managerial implications, boundary conditions, and limitations

Managers should not treat digital human-resource management as the online replication of recruitment, training, appraisal, and payroll. A more consequential agenda asks four questions: Which decisions must move closer to users? How will capabilities be made visible and matched with tasks? Which user and market signals can fairly inform rewards? Which rules will coordinate internal units and external partners? Technology choices should follow these mechanism requirements rather than precede them. The case also warns against copying Rendanheyi labels. Firms lacking divisible tasks, attributable outcomes, a sufficiently deep talent pool, strong data governance, or sustained leadership commitment may create instability rather than agility. Implementation should therefore proceed through bounded pilots in which tasks, responsibilities, feedback, and contribution rules are clear. Flexible allocation and market-facing rewards must be balanced with knowledge retention, long-term capability development, procedural fairness, income protection, and employee support.

The study has three principal limitations. The single-case design supports mechanism discovery but not statistical generalisation. Haier Smart Home's long history of organisational experimentation, scale, digital infrastructure, and user-oriented culture may make the identified system more feasible than in many firms. The evidence also relies partly on retrospective interviews and corporate disclosures, while complete platform behavioural data were unavailable. Triangulation and rival-explanation analysis reduce but do not eliminate these risks. Future research should compare firms and industries, examine failed or partial implementations, combine qualitative evidence with platform-event data, and test employee-level consequences such as autonomy, strain, fairness, identity, and knowledge development.

Table 2. Mechanisms, evidence configuration, value-translation role, and boundary conditions

Mechanism	Evidence configuration and translation role	Principal conditions boundary
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Mechanism	Evidence configuration and translation role	Principal boundary conditions
Dynamic strategic alignment	Decentralised decision, staffing, appraisal, and distribution rights are combined with human-resource platform rules and services. The mechanism converts digital strategy into accountable local discretion and continuing strategy-human-resource co-evolution.	Reliable data; clear accountability; capable front-line units; sustained leadership commitment.
Dynamic resource reconfiguration	Capability labels, opportunity orders, and cross-boundary team assembly match human capital with user and market opportunities. The mechanism converts external opportunities into executable task-capability configurations.	Divisible tasks; talent depth; credible capability data; knowledge-retention arrangements.
Market-oriented incentives	User-paid compensation, market outcomes, and traceable contribution records direct attention towards recognised user value and reduce exclusive dependence on supervisor judgement.	Attributable feedback; transparent and fair rules; protection of collective and long-cycle work; employee risk support.
Platform governance	Chain-group collaboration, digital task records, and ecosystem contribution rules coordinate internal units and external partners around user scenarios.	Clear roles and interfaces; verifiable contributions; fair value distribution; dispute-resolution and ecosystem-integration capacity.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Digital transformation becomes organisationally consequential only when strategy is translated into everyday decisions, resource movements, incentives, and collaborative rules. The Haier Smart Home case shows that strategic human-resource management can perform this translation through four linked mechanisms: dynamic strategic alignment, order-based human-capital reconfiguration, market-oriented incentives, and platform governance. Together, these mechanisms move digital human-resource management from functional automation towards the redesign of organisational governance.

The analysis is based on six interviews totalling 628 recorded minutes and multi-source archival evidence covering 2020-2025. It shows that decentralised authority and human-resource platforms create continuing strategic alignment; capability labels and opportunity orders enable flexible human-capital reconfiguration; user-paid compensation internalises market signals while redistributing risk; and chain-group collaboration coordinates internal and external actors around user scenarios. The mechanisms can

improve responsiveness and broaden value creation, but they are not universally beneficial or directly transferable. Their operation depends on reliable data, task divisibility, attributable feedback, talent depth, transparent rules, employee adaptability, ecosystem capability, and sustained leadership commitment. The broader implication is that the value of digital human-resource management lies not primarily in automating human-resource activities. It lies in redesigning how an organisation allocates authority, combines human capital, directs behaviour, and coordinates value creation across boundaries.

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