

Intrapreneurship Management and Its Impact on Human Resource Development in Business Organizations

A conceptual and qualitative synthesis for international publication

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between intrapreneurship management and human resource development (HRD) in business organizations, using a qualitative, literature-based thematic synthesis approach. Intrapreneurship, the exercise of entrepreneurial behavior by employees within an existing organizational structure, has increasingly been recognized as a strategic lever for innovation, adaptability, and competitive advantage. Yet its human-development dimension remains under-theorized relative to its economic and strategic dimensions. Drawing on the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Corporate Entrepreneurship Theory, and synthesizing recent empirical and conceptual literature (2019–2026), the paper interrogates how intrapreneurship management practices, autonomy, managerial support, reward systems, training, and organizational structure, shape employee competence development, psychological empowerment, and career growth. The review finds that intrapreneurship functions not merely as a performance mechanism but as a developmental pathway that builds human capital, and that HR practices act as both antecedents and outcomes of intrapreneurial behavior. The paper concludes that organizations seeking sustainable innovation must treat intrapreneurship as an HRD strategy rather than an incidental by-product of entrepreneurial culture, and offers recommendations for HR policy design, leadership practice, and future empirical research.

Keywords: Intrapreneurship, Human Resource Development, Organizational Innovation, Resource-Based View, Corporate Entrepreneurship, Employee Empowerment

1. Introduction

Business organizations operating in the twenty-first century face a paradox: the same environmental turbulence that threatens their stability also rewards the organizations most capable of continuous internal reinvention. Intrapreneurship, variously defined as corporate entrepreneurship, internal venturing, or entrepreneurial behavior exhibited by employees within an existing firm, has emerged as one of the principal mechanisms through which organizations attempt to resolve this paradox. Rather than relying solely on external innovation sourcing, firms increasingly look inward, cultivating employees who identify opportunities, take initiative, and champion new ideas from within.

Contemporary scholarship situates intrapreneurship as increasingly important in both scientific literature and business practice, particularly given its contribution to innovation, performance, organizational competitiveness, and economic growth (Hernandez-Perlines et al., 2023). Organizations pursue this through deliberate programmes and through cultivating environments that empower employees to champion new initiatives (Alt & Craig, 2016, as cited in intrapreneurship-process literature). Scholarly interest now spans sociology, psychology, economics, organizational science, and technology management and strategy.

While the strategic and economic value of intrapreneurship is well documented, its implications for human resource development, the deliberate, systematic process of enhancing employees' knowledge, skills, competencies, and psychological capacities, have received comparatively less integrated attention. Much of the intrapreneurship literature treats HR practices as antecedents (inputs that trigger intrapreneurial behavior) without adequately exploring the reverse relationship: how the practice of intrapreneurship itself develops employees. This gap is significant because it obscures a central proposition of this paper, that intrapreneurship management, properly designed, is itself a human resource development strategy, not merely an innovation strategy that happens to involve people.

Recent systematic reviews reinforce this concern. A 2026 review of individual-level intrapreneurship observed that its outcomes align closely with HRD's focus on developmental outcomes, suggesting that intrapreneurship should be viewed not only as a behavior but as a pathway for strategic self-development, career growth, and psychological empowerment (Pelica et al., 2026). Yet the same review found that only a small proportion of the specialty journals covering intrapreneurship are situated within the human resources field, indicating that the HRD lens on intrapreneurship remains structurally underdeveloped within the broader literature (Pelica et al., 2026). This paper responds to that gap.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite growing organizational investment in innovation culture, many firms continue to treat intrapreneurship as a discretionary, informal, or leadership-dependent phenomenon rather than as a managed HRD process. Several interrelated problems justify this study:

1. **Conceptual fragmentation.** Terms such as corporate entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship, internal venturing, and strategic renewal are frequently used interchangeably, producing definitional confusion that undermines both theory-building and practical policy design (Covin & Miles, as discussed in strategic entrepreneurship literature).
2. **Weak organizational enablement.** Employees are frequently expected to behave entrepreneurially without corresponding investment in the structures that make such behavior sustainable. Organizational support for entrepreneurship functions as a fundamental antecedent of intrapreneurship, and providing employees with a system that supports their ideas, through allocated time, autonomy, or material resources, is critical to converting employee ideas into practical outcomes (Hornsby et al., 2002).
3. **HR practice treated as peripheral rather than central.** Where HR is considered at all, it is often treated as a mediating variable rather than the strategic architecture of intrapreneurship. Evidence from high-performance work systems research suggests intrapreneurial behavior can carry a substantial mediating influence on organizational outcomes, with HR management practices moderating that relationship, meaning the development of an entrepreneurial mindset functions as a strategic HR instrument rather than an incidental by-product (Hernandez-Perlines et al., 2023).

4. **Underdeveloped human-capital framing.** Much existing research foregrounds firm performance, competitiveness, and financial outcomes, while the developmental effects on the employee, competence acquisition, self-efficacy, career mobility, are treated as secondary or unmeasured outcomes.
5. **Methodological imbalance.** Broader HRD scholarship itself shows a skew toward quantitative approaches, with mixed-methods designs remaining rare; one review of empirical HRD research found that quantitative ($n = 269$) and qualitative ($n = 185$) methodologies dominated published studies, with mixed-methods research accounting for only 7.0% ($n = 34$) of the sample (Park et al., 2024). This underscores a need for more qualitative, meaning-focused inquiry into how employees themselves experience intrapreneurship as a developmental process, the gap this paper addresses through thematic literature synthesis.

The problem, in sum, is that intrapreneurship management and human resource development are frequently pursued as parallel organizational agendas rather than as integrated strategy, leaving both innovation potential and human capital development below their achievable levels.

3. Review of the Literature

3.1 Conceptualizing Intrapreneurship

Intrapreneurship denotes entrepreneurial behavior, opportunity recognition, initiative-taking, risk tolerance, and innovation championing, exercised by individuals operating inside an established organization rather than as independent founders. It is frequently discussed alongside corporate entrepreneurship (the organizational-level strategy of fostering such behavior) and corporate venturing (the creation of new business units), though corporate entrepreneurship is difficult to distinguish cleanly from strategic renewal and corporate venturing, whereas intrapreneurship tends to be better defined and conceptually separable from these adjacent constructs.

3.2 Organizational Antecedents of Intrapreneurship

A consistent finding across the literature is that intrapreneurship does not occur in an organizational vacuum. Organizational support, encompassing resource availability, managerial encouragement, and structural flexibility, has repeatedly been identified as decisive. Organizational support for entrepreneurship is a fundamental antecedent of organizational intrapreneurship, and providing a system that allocates time, autonomy, or material resources to employee ideas is essential to converting those ideas into outcomes (Hornsby et al., 2002). Middle managers' perceptions of the internal environment, including work discretion, management support, rewards, and available time, have been shown to shape whether corporate entrepreneurship is enacted at all (Hornsby et al., 2002).

Complementary work applying the resource-based view has shown that key factors for intrapreneurial development include the resources and capabilities of an organization, such as firm size, the provision of intrapreneurship-specific training, and the prior competencies and experience of employees, while personal networking with external entrepreneurs appears to exert comparatively little influence on intrapreneurial engagement (Urbano, Alvarez, & Turró, 2013).

Leadership and structural design also feature prominently. High-performance work systems have been found to shape intrapreneurial behavior both directly and through knowledge-management processes, with human resource management practices acting as a moderating influence on this relationship, underscoring that intrapreneurship is substantially an HR-engineered phenomenon rather than a spontaneous individual trait (Hernandez-Perlines et al., 2023). Similarly, facets of "new ways of working", specifically time- and location-independent work and management-by-output, have been found to relate positively to intrapreneurial behavior, with the effect of a freely accessible open workplace on intrapreneurial behavior mediated by transformational leadership, although no comparable mediating role was found for co-worker social interaction (Gerards et al., 2021).

Managerial communication style also shapes intrapreneurial participation at the point of idea submission: an opt-out framing for idea-submission systems has been shown to increase employee participation without reducing idea quality, while providing employees with worked examples increases the usefulness of submitted ideas but reduces their novelty and overall volume (Rigtering et al., 2019).

3.3 Intrapreneurship and Human Resource Development Outcomes

The developmental, employee-centered dimension of intrapreneurship has gained more explicit attention in recent scholarship. Systematic review evidence indicates that intrapreneurial engagement functions as a mechanism of strategic self-development, contributing to career growth and psychological empowerment for the individuals who practice it, situating intrapreneurship as a legitimate HRD outcome variable rather than solely an antecedent-driven behavior (Pelica et al., 2026). This reframes intrapreneurship management from a purely innovation-output lens to one that recognizes cumulative human-capital gains: employees who engage in intrapreneurial activity develop enhanced self-efficacy, opportunity-recognition skill, and resilience, competencies with value beyond the specific venture or idea pursued.

At the same time, reviewers note that intrapreneurship research remains concentrated within management and entrepreneurship journals, with only a minority of outlets situated specifically within human resources disciplines (Pelica et al., 2026). This imbalance suggests that although the conceptual linkage between intrapreneurship and HRD is increasingly recognized, the empirical infrastructure connecting the two fields is still emerging.

3.4 Qualitative and Mixed-Methods Evidence

Recent mixed-methods research combining survey data with qualitative thematic analysis has illustrated the mechanisms linking HR practice to intrapreneurial and innovative behavior. Multi-method designs , combining field experiments, vignette experiments, and interviews , have proven useful for capturing both the behavioral and interpretive dimensions of intrapreneurship (Rigtering et al., 2019), supporting this paper's own qualitative, thematic approach to synthesizing the literature.

3.5 Gaps Identified

Taken together, the literature reveals: (a) strong and consistent evidence that organizational and HR-related resources condition intrapreneurial behavior; (b) emerging but still peripheral recognition of intrapreneurship as a human-development outcome in its own right; (c) persistent conceptual ambiguity between related constructs; and (d) a continuing methodological preference for quantitative designs that may underrepresent the lived, meaning-making experience of employees engaged in intrapreneurial activity. These gaps collectively justify a qualitative, HRD-centered theoretical treatment of intrapreneurship management, which this paper undertakes.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Resource-Based View (RBV)

Originally developed by Barney, the Resource-Based View holds that firms possess resources, a subset of which enable competitive advantage, and a further subset which leads to superior long-term performance , specifically resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 2018). Barney's later extension of the theory further argues that a firm's model of profit appropriation is logically inconsistent if shareholders are treated as the firm's only residual claimants, implying that resource-based theory must incorporate a broader stakeholder perspective , including, by extension, employees as bearers and developers of firm-specific human capital (Barney, 2018). Applied to intrapreneurship, the RBV directs attention to the internal organizational resources and capabilities , including human capital, training infrastructure, reward systems, and managerial support , that determine whether intrapreneurial potential is activated.

4.2 Corporate Entrepreneurship Theory

Corporate Entrepreneurship Theory examines how established organizations design structures, incentives, and cultures that permit entrepreneurial behavior to occur within their boundaries. It is particularly useful for this paper because it explicitly treats intrapreneurship as a manageable organizational process rather than an incidental personality trait, directing attention toward the deliberate managerial architecture , leadership style, autonomy provisions, reward design, and resource allocation , required to sustain intrapreneurial activity over time. Middle managers'

perceptions of internal organizational conditions (work discretion, management support, rewards, time availability, and organizational boundaries) have been developed into a validated measurement framework for assessing how conducive an organization is to corporate entrepreneurship (Hornsby et al., 2002), providing empirical grounding for this theoretical lens.

4.3 Integrated Conceptual Model

The paper proposes a linear-cyclical conceptual model:

Organizational Resources & Capabilities (RBV) → Intrapreneurship Management Practices (autonomy, training, reward, managerial support, structural flexibility) → **Intrapreneurial Behavior** (opportunity recognition, initiative, innovation championing) → **HRD Outcomes** (competence development, self-efficacy, psychological empowerment, career growth) → **feedback loop reinforcing organizational resource base** through enhanced human capital.

This model positions HRD not as an endpoint but as a resource that re-enters the system, consistent with the RBV's emphasis on renewable, firm-specific advantage.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative, interpretive research design**, specifically a **thematic literature synthesis** (a form of qualitative content analysis applied to secondary scholarly sources). This design was chosen because the research question, how intrapreneurship management shapes human resource development, is conceptual and relational in nature, requiring interpretive synthesis across a fragmented body of literature rather than statistical hypothesis-testing on primary survey data.

5.2 Data Sources and Sampling

Sources were purposively selected from peer-reviewed journals, systematic reviews, and scholarly databases (including management, entrepreneurship, and human resource development outlets) published predominantly between 2019 and 2026, in line with the recency requirement typical of internationally publishable social science research. Purposive sampling prioritized sources that explicitly addressed (a) organizational antecedents of intrapreneurship, (b) HR practices and intrapreneurial behavior, and (c) individual-level developmental outcomes of intrapreneurship.

5.3 Analytical Procedure

The synthesis followed a structured thematic process of familiarization with source material, open coding of recurring concepts, development of candidate themes, and refinement of themes against the full body of literature, an approach consistent with recent mixed-methods intrapreneurship research that combines quantitative and qualitative evidence to interpret how HR practices shape intrapreneurship and innovation processes (Rigtering et al., 2019). Four dominant themes were identified through this process: (1) organizational resource conditions, (2) HR-practice architecture, (3) individual intrapreneurial behavior, and (4) developmental/HRD outcomes. These themes structured both the literature review and the theoretical model presented above.

5.4 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was pursued through source triangulation (drawing on multiple independent studies for each theme), transparency regarding source selection criteria, and reflexive attention to the conceptual ambiguity noted within the literature itself, so that contested definitions were flagged rather than silently resolved.

5.5 Limitations

As a literature-based qualitative synthesis rather than a primary-data study, this paper does not generate new empirical measurements of intrapreneurship–HRD relationships within a specific organizational setting. It is intended to provide theoretical and conceptual grounding for future primary qualitative research (e.g., interview-based phenomenological studies within specific business organizations), which is proposed in the recommendations below.

6. Findings and Conclusion

6.1 Findings

The thematic synthesis produced four integrated findings:

Finding 1 , Resource conditions are foundational, not incidental. Across the literature, intrapreneurship consistently depends on tangible and intangible organizational resources, training investment, time allocation, managerial backing, and reward structures (Hornsby et al., 2002; Urbano et al., 2013). Where these are absent, intrapreneurial behavior is suppressed regardless of individual employee disposition.

Finding 2 , HR architecture actively produces intrapreneurial behavior. HR systems are not passive facilitators but active architects of intrapreneurship; high-performance work systems, transformational leadership, structured autonomy provisions, and even the framing of idea-submission processes each show demonstrable influence on the likelihood, volume, and quality

of intrapreneurial engagement (Gerards et al., 2021; Hernandez-Perlines et al., 2023; Rigtering et al., 2019).

Finding 3 ,Intrapreneurship generates measurable developmental returns for employees.

Beyond firm-level innovation outcomes, employees who engage in intrapreneurial activity accumulate self-efficacy, opportunity-recognition competence, and psychological empowerment , outcomes that satisfy the definitional core of human resource development (Pelica et al., 2026).

Finding 4 , The HRD framing of intrapreneurship remains structurally marginal. Despite the conceptual convergence identified above, specialty HR journals represent a minority of the outlets publishing intrapreneurship research, indicating a persistent disciplinary gap between entrepreneurship scholarship and HRD scholarship that limits the practical uptake of intrapreneurship as a formal HRD tool (Pelica et al., 2026).

6.2 Conclusion

Intrapreneurship management and human resource development are best understood not as separate organizational agendas but as mutually constitutive processes. Organizational resources and HR architecture create the conditions for intrapreneurial behavior; that behavior, in turn, produces durable human-capital gains that feed back into the organization's resource base, consistent with the resource-based view's treatment of firm-specific capability as a renewable strategic asset (Barney, 2018). Business organizations that continue to treat intrapreneurship as a spontaneous cultural by-product , rather than a deliberately managed HRD strategy , forfeit both innovation capacity and workforce development potential. The evidence synthesized here supports treating intrapreneurship management as a core HRD function, deserving explicit integration into training design, performance management, and leadership development systems, rather than being left to informal organizational culture.

7. Recommendations

1. **Integrate intrapreneurship into formal HRD strategy.** Organizations should embed intrapreneurship training, mentoring, and reward mechanisms within their formal human resource development plans rather than treating entrepreneurial behavior as an unmanaged cultural outcome.
2. **Invest in resource-based enablers.** Consistent with the RBV, firms should allocate dedicated time, budget, and managerial support structures for employee-driven initiatives, since resource scarcity remains a primary suppressor of intrapreneurial activity.
3. **Develop leadership capable of sustaining intrapreneurship.** Leadership development programmes should explicitly build managerial competencies in supporting autonomy, tolerating calculated risk, and translating employee ideas into resourced projects, and

should attend to how managerial framing of idea-submission systems affects both the quantity and quality of employee ideas (Rigtering et al., 2019).

4. **Clarify conceptual boundaries in organizational policy.** HR and strategy departments should adopt precise, shared definitions distinguishing intrapreneurship from adjacent constructs (corporate venturing, strategic renewal) to avoid diluted or inconsistent policy design.
5. **Expand qualitative and mixed-methods primary research.** Future studies should employ interview-based, phenomenological, or case-study designs within specific organizational contexts to empirically validate the conceptual model proposed here, particularly regarding the felt, subjective developmental experience of employees engaged in intrapreneurial activity.
6. **Strengthen the HRD–entrepreneurship research bridge.** Scholars and journal editors in human resource development should actively solicit intrapreneurship-focused research to correct the current disciplinary imbalance and support theory-building at the intersection of the two fields.

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