

COMPONENT 2- INDIVIDUAL REPORT

Student Name: Windjaba Balde
Student ID: 2424910
Module Code: LCLM5002
Module: Developing and Managing Individuals and Teams
Lecturer: Mohammad Rahman

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Explanation of the Three Key Factors.....	2
Adapting to Technological Advancements	2
Talent Acquisition And Retention.....	3
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	5
Evaluation of Contemporary HR Practices.....	5
Critical Evaluation of Managerial Implementation	8
Conclusion and Recommendations	9
References	11

Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) has become increasingly important as organisations respond to technological change, competition for skilled employees and growing expectations around diversity and inclusion. For large retailers such as Marks & Spencer (M&S), these challenges are particularly significant because the business must manage a large workforce while continuing to improve customer service, productivity and long-term organisational performance.

M&S employs over 65,000 colleagues across its stores, support centres, logistics operations and international teams (Marks and Spencer, 2025a). The company is currently investing in digital technology, data and artificial intelligence (AI), while also focusing on talent development, employee engagement and inclusion. These priorities demonstrate how HR has moved beyond its traditional administrative role and is increasingly involved in supporting organisational strategy and change. Ulrich (1997) argues that HR should contribute strategically by helping organisations develop the capabilities needed to achieve their objectives.

This report examines three important HR factors affecting M&S: adapting to technological advancements, talent acquisition and retention, and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). It then evaluates contemporary HR practices that could address these challenges and critically considers how managers can implement these practices effectively and consistently across the organisation.

Explanation of the Three Key Factors

Adapting to Technological Advancements

Technological development is changing the way employees work and the way organisations manage their workforce. Digital systems, workforce analytics and AI can improve efficiency and support better decision-making, but they also require employees and managers to develop new skills. HR therefore has an important responsibility to ensure that technological change does not leave employees behind.

This is particularly relevant to M&S. The company is investing in digital and technology transformation as part of its wider strategy. In 2026, M&S announced that it was providing 11,000 Microsoft 365 Copilot licences to colleagues, including store managers and support-centre employees. The AI tools are intended to support tasks such as analysing sales information, creating shift rotas and handovers, summarising meetings and accessing information more efficiently (Marks and Spencer, 2026a). This could allow managers to spend more time supporting employees and serving customers.

However, technology can also create challenges. Some employees may worry that AI will eventually replace jobs or increase pressure to perform. Others may lack confidence in using new digital systems. According to Ulrich (1997), HR should play a strategic role in supporting organisational change rather than focusing only on administrative activities. In practice, this means M&S needs to provide training, practical support and clear communication before introducing new technology.

Technological change can also increase cybersecurity and data-protection risks. Employees need to understand how to use digital systems safely and how to handle organisational and customer information responsibly. This means that investment in technology alone is not enough. M&S must also invest in digital skills and ensure that employees understand why changes are being introduced. If employees feel involved and supported, they may be more willing to adopt new ways of working.

Therefore, successful technological adaptation depends on investment in both technology and people.

Talent Acquisition and Retention

Attracting and retaining talented employees is another major HR challenge. Retail organisations compete not only with other retailers but also with businesses in technology, hospitality and other sectors. Employees increasingly consider career progression, pay, flexibility, wellbeing, development and organisational values when deciding where to work.

M&S needs a workforce with different skills, including digital capability, leadership and customer-service skills. Recruitment alone is not enough because high employee turnover can increase recruitment and training costs and affect customer experience. HR must therefore consider why employees join, why they remain and how they can develop within the organisation. Boxall and Purcell (2016) argue that effective HR strategy should align people management with organisational objectives. For M&S, this means workforce planning must consider both current staffing needs and the future skills required as the organisation continues to transform.

M&S has developed initiatives to support employability and career development. Its Marks & Start programme provides people facing barriers to employment with work experience, skills and a route into retail. M&S states that the programme has supported thousands of people and that over 80% of those completing a King's Trust Marks & Start placement are offered an employment contract with the company (Marks and Spencer, 2026b).

These programmes can support recruitment by widening the talent pool while also helping participants develop long-term careers.

M&S also invests in leadership and talent development. The company has identified talent development as an important part of building a high-performance culture, including through Future Leaders programmes and other learning opportunities (Marks and Spencer Group plc, 2025).

These initiatives can support retention because employees may be more likely to remain with an organisation when they can see opportunities for development and progression.

Nevertheless, talent retention remains challenging. Development programmes may not be available equally to all employees, particularly those working part-time, in frontline roles or with limited flexibility. M&S should therefore ensure that training and career opportunities are accessible across the workforce. Transparent progression criteria and regular career discussions could also help employees understand how they can develop within the organisation.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

DEI refers to creating a workplace where employees from different backgrounds are represented, treated fairly and able to participate fully. Diversity concerns differences between people, while equity focuses on fair access to opportunities and inclusion concerns whether employees feel respected, valued and able to contribute.

This is important for M&S because its workforce and customer base are diverse. M&S states that creating an inclusive environment can help colleagues feel able to perform at their best while also helping the organisation reflect the diverse communities it serves. The company has introduced initiatives including early-career programmes, mentoring and its RISE programme to support the development of under-represented talent (Marks and Spencer, 2026c).

M&S also uses colleague networks to bring employees' experiences into discussions about organisational strategy and the colleague experience. These networks provide opportunities for under-represented groups to raise issues and contribute ideas. The company's policies also state that discrimination, bullying, harassment and victimisation will not be tolerated (Marks and Spencer, 2026d).

However, policies alone do not guarantee inclusion. Managers must ensure that employees experience fairness in everyday decisions about recruitment, promotion, performance and development. It is also important to monitor whether opportunities are genuinely accessible to different groups. DEI should therefore be viewed as an ongoing management responsibility rather than a separate HR project. A diverse workforce will only provide its full benefits when employees also feel included and able to express their views.

Evaluation of Contemporary HR Practices

One important contemporary HR practice is the use of digital HR systems and workforce analytics. These systems can help organisations identify recruitment needs, monitor employee turnover, assess skills gaps and understand workforce

trends. For M&S, technology can also support managers with practical tasks and provide quicker access to relevant information.

The introduction of AI tools for managers and support-centre colleagues demonstrates how technology can potentially improve efficiency and free up time for more people-focused activities (Marks and Spencer, 2026a).

However, HR analytics should not completely replace managerial judgement. Employee data can identify patterns, but managers still need to understand the reasons behind those patterns. For example, high turnover in one store could be caused by several factors, including management style, workload or limited progression opportunities. Decisions based on employee data must also be transparent and comply with data-protection requirements. Therefore, the effectiveness of workforce analytics depends on combining data with responsible management and employee communication.

A second important practice is strategic workforce planning. This involves identifying the skills an organisation currently has and predicting the skills it will need in the future. M&S is investing in digital capability and AI, meaning that workforce planning should consider reskilling existing employees as well as recruiting new talent.

This approach may be more sustainable than relying only on external recruitment because existing employees already understand the organisation and its customers. M&S can also strengthen its employer brand by demonstrating that it provides meaningful development opportunities and an inclusive working environment. An employer brand can influence whether potential employees apply for jobs and whether existing employees remain.

However, the external image of an organisation must match the actual employee experience. If M&S promotes itself as supportive but employees experience limited progression or inconsistent management, this could negatively affect retention. Therefore, managers must ensure that the organisation's employment promises are reflected in daily practice.

Employee engagement is another important contemporary HR practice. M&S uses its Pulse survey to understand colleague experiences and measure progress towards its high-performance culture. According to its 2025 reporting, the March 2025 Pulse survey recorded a 76% net promoter score for the statement that employees would recommend M&S as a great place to work, with participation of almost 80% (Marks and Spencer Group plc, 2025).

This suggests that employee voice has become an important part of understanding organisational culture.

However, surveys are only useful if managers respond to the feedback received. Employees may become disengaged if they regularly provide feedback but do not see improvements. M&S should therefore ensure that managers discuss survey results with their teams and clearly communicate what actions will be taken. The company's 2025 report states that leaders are expected to review results and share action plans with teams, which is a positive step towards turning feedback into action (Marks and Spencer Group plc, 2025).

Inclusive recruitment and development are also important contemporary practices. M&S has supported initiatives such as 10,000 Black Interns, cross-company mentoring through the 30% Club's Mission Include programme, early-career opportunities and the RISE programme (Marks and Spencer, 2026c). These practices are positive because they attempt to address barriers and improve access to opportunities for under-represented groups.

However, targeted programmes should be supported by wider cultural change. Otherwise, DEI initiatives could become separate projects rather than part of normal management practice. Inclusive recruitment should therefore be supported by fair promotion processes, inclusive leadership and regular monitoring of workforce outcomes.

Finally, leadership development is essential. Managers strongly influence employee experiences, engagement and inclusion. M&S has recognised the importance of its line managers and introduced measures intended to improve accountability, consistency and performance management (Marks and Spencer Group plc, 2025).

Leadership development should therefore include not only senior employees but also frontline managers, as they make many of the daily decisions that affect colleagues.

Critical Evaluation of Managerial Implementation

Successful HR practices depend heavily on managerial implementation. Senior leaders can create policies, but line managers are often responsible for turning them into everyday practice. This creates a potential gap between what an organisation says it will do and what employees actually experience.

For technological change, managers must communicate clearly about why new systems are being introduced and how they will affect employees. Simply providing technology without sufficient training may increase resistance. M&S's use of AI tools demonstrates potential benefits, but managers need to give employees sufficient time and support to learn new ways of working (Marks and Spencer, 2026a). If employees feel that technology is being imposed on them without consultation, they may be less willing to adopt it. Managers should therefore encourage questions and provide practical support during implementation.

Leadership accountability is also important. M&S has introduced a specific objective for its line managers relating to the quality, engagement and performance of their teams. The company has also used regular performance check-ins and manager development initiatives to improve consistency (Marks and Spencer Group plc, 2025). This is a positive approach because employee engagement and organisational culture should be measured rather than treated as optional activities.

However, managers may face barriers such as lack of time, resistance to change and inconsistent leadership capability. Store managers, for example, may focus on immediate operational targets and have limited time for employee development. M&S should therefore make HR objectives realistic and provide managers with practical training and sufficient resources. Managers should not be held accountable for outcomes without being given the support needed to achieve them.

Communication is another key factor. Managers should not only communicate decisions from senior leadership but also listen to employees. M&S has developed structures that allow colleague views to be shared with senior leaders, including engagement mechanisms connected with its Pulse survey and leadership teams (Marks and Spencer Group plc, 2025).

Nevertheless, communication must lead to visible action. Employees need to see evidence that their concerns have been considered.

Monitoring and performance measurement are also necessary. M&S can use engagement data, retention rates, absence levels, internal promotion rates and DEI indicators to identify where additional support may be required.

However, managers should avoid focusing only on numerical targets. For example, increasing diversity figures is important, but this does not necessarily mean employees feel included. Quantitative information should therefore be combined with employee feedback and regular discussions.

Overall, the biggest challenge is ensuring consistency. Different managers may implement the same HR policy differently. M&S can reduce this risk through clear standards, management training, regular reviews and accountability. A strong organisational culture should also support employees to raise concerns and challenge unfair practices without fear. The most effective approach is therefore one where senior leaders set clear expectations while line managers receive the skills and support needed to implement them consistently.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report has shown that technological change, talent management and DEI are three significant HR challenges for M&S. These issues are connected because technological transformation requires new skills, retaining talented employees requires development opportunities, and sustainable performance depends on a diverse and inclusive workforce.

M&S has already introduced several relevant practices, including investment in AI and digital technology, employability programmes, workforce development, colleague engagement surveys, inclusive recruitment and leadership development. Its public commitments and people-focused initiatives demonstrate that HR and organisational culture are important parts of its wider transformation (Marks and Spencer, 2025a; Marks and Spencer, 2026b; Marks and Spencer, 2026c).

However, the success of these practices depends on consistent managerial implementation. Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Provide continuous digital training so employees can adapt to AI and other technological changes confidently. Training should be available to employees at different levels and not only to managers or specialist teams.
- Improve career pathways, particularly for frontline and part-time employees, so development opportunities are accessible across the workforce.
- Hold managers accountable for DEI and engagement outcomes by including measurable people-related objectives in performance reviews and providing managers with appropriate support.
- Act on employee feedback and clearly communicate what changes have resulted from surveys, listening sessions and other engagement activities.
- Continue monitoring workforce data to identify inequalities in recruitment, promotion, pay and retention, while also using employee feedback to understand the reasons behind the data.

By combining technological investment with effective people management, M&S can continue its transformation while supporting employee development, wellbeing and inclusion. This will help the organisation build the skills and organisational culture needed for sustainable long-term performance.

References

Boxall, P. and Purcell, J. (2016) *Strategy and Human Resource Management*. 4th edn. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Marks and Spencer (2025a) *Our People*. Available at: Marks & Spencer Corporate website (Accessed: 23 August 2026).

Marks and Spencer (2026a) *M&S Gives Every Store Manager and Every Store Support Centre Colleague Latest AI Tools with 11,000 Microsoft 365 Copilot Licences*. Available at: Marks & Spencer Corporate website (Accessed: 23 August 2026).

Marks and Spencer (2026b) *Employability*. Available at: Marks & Spencer Corporate website (Accessed: 23 August 2026).

Marks and Spencer (2026c) *Inclusion and Diversity*. Available at: Marks & Spencer Corporate website (Accessed: 23 August 2026).

Marks and Spencer (2026d) *Code of Conduct*. Available at: Marks & Spencer Corporate website (Accessed: 23 August 2026).

Marks and Spencer Group plc (2025) *Annual Report and Financial Statements 2025*. London: Marks and Spencer Group plc.

Ulrich, D. (1997) *Human Resource Champions: The Next Agenda for Adding Value and Delivering Results*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.