

# Human Resources Management Theories and Their Applications in Local Government: A Study of Aatharai Rural Municipality, Nepal

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## Abstract

This study explores the application of classical and emerging Human Resource Management (HRM) theories within the context of a rural local government in Nepal, focusing on Aathrai Rural Municipality. The research integrates frameworks such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, McGregor's Theory X and Y, Public Service Motivation (PSM), Strategic HRM, the Resource-Based View (RBV), and Human Capital Theory to assess how employee motivation, performance, and institutional effectiveness are influenced in decentralized governance setting. Using a mixed-methods case study approach, data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to municipal staff and supplemented by secondary sources including official documents, government reports, and academic literature. The findings reveal that while Aathrai has established a structured administrative system with diversified staffing and some training initiatives, significant gaps persist in areas such as career development, staff retention, and performance-based recognition. Employees reported strong public service motivation, but also expressed dissatisfaction with limited promotion opportunities and insufficient investment in capacity building. The study concludes that although elements of HRM theory are evident in practice, systemic issues such as political interference, resource constraints, and unclear policy alignment limit their full implementation. The research underscores the need for localized HRM reforms, and recommends that future studies expand across multiple municipalities and incorporate qualitative methods to capture deeper organizational insights.

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## Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) refers to the strategic and coherent approach to managing people within an organization. It involves the recruitment, selection, training, development, Maintenance, compensation, and retention of employees to ensure the effective and efficient achievement of organizational goals. HRM focuses on maximizing employee performance while ensuring their well-being and development. According to Gary Dressler Human Resource Management involves recruiting, developing, evaluating, and rewarding employees, while also addressing workplace relations, ensuring health and safety, and promoting fairness throughout the organization, (Dessler, 2005). HRM is all about managing people at work to build a productive and positive work environment that benefits both the organization and its employees.

Effective Human Resource Management (HRM) is critical for the success of any organization, and its importance is especially pronounced in local governments tasked with delivering public services and development. In Nepal's new federal system (Constitution 2072 B.S./2015 A.D.), local governments (municipalities and rural municipalities) were endowed with significant powers, responsibilities, and autonomy. The Local Government Operation Act 2017 (2074 B.S.) further recognizes local bodies as autonomous corporate entities responsible for a wide array of functions. Consequently, HRM at the local level involves strategic management of personnel to meet development goals. Since human resources – the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees – are the “human capital” of an organization, maximizing their performance is essential for effective local governance. Human Resource Management (HRM) theories provide key insights into employee motivation and organizational effectiveness. Classical theories Human Resource Management (HRM) theories provide the foundation for understanding how organizations can effectively manage their human capital to achieve strategic goals. In the context of public sector institutions like Nepal's local governments, these theories offer valuable insights into employee motivation, performance, and organizational efficiency.

## Classical Theories

Among the most influential classical theories are Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) posits that individuals are motivated by a series of hierarchical needs: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. In HRM terms, this implies that organizations must ensure basic employee needs—like fair salaries and job security—are met before expecting higher levels of motivation such as innovation or leadership. In a rural municipality like Aathrai, many employees may still be primarily motivated by the lower levels of the hierarchy due to resource constraints, making salary,

benefits, and job stability critical areas of focus.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) separates workplace factors into hygiene factors (such as salary, job security, and working conditions) and motivators (such as recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for growth). For public institutions, ensuring that hygiene factors are adequately addressed prevents dissatisfaction, but motivation requires investing in training, recognition programs, and career development—a challenge in many Nepali local governments where administrative budgets and autonomy are limited.

McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y (1960) present two opposing views of employee behavior. Theory X assumes workers are inherently lazy and require strict supervision, while Theory Y views employees as self-motivated and capable of self-direction. In practice, many Nepali local governments, including Aathrai, often lean toward Theory X styles due to bureaucratic legacies and limited managerial training. However, transitioning toward Theory Y could enhance employee engagement and innovation in public service delivery.

An important theory for the public sector is Public Service Motivation (PSM), developed by James Perry and others, which suggests that public employees are often driven by altruism, commitment to the community, and a desire to contribute to societal welfare. This framework is especially relevant in the Nepali context, where many local government officials and staff may be motivated by a sense of duty rather than material rewards. Recognizing and nurturing this intrinsic motivation through supportive leadership and public recognition can improve morale and service delivery.

### **Emerging HRM Theories**

In recent years, Kor & Mahoney, (2004) presents Resource-Based View (RBV) and Strategic HRM approaches have gained traction. RBV views employees as key strategic assets that contribute to sustained competitive advantage. In local governance, this implies that talent management—recruiting, developing, and retaining skilled personnel—should be a priority. Strategic HRM emphasizes aligning HR practices with long-term organizational goals. While more commonly applied in corporate settings, strategic HRM has increasing relevance in local governments striving for efficiency, accountability, and development outcomes.

Another emerging approach is Human Capital Theory, which views investment in education, training, and health as a way to enhance productivity (Becker & Scoltz, 1964). In the case of Aathrai Rural Municipality, this suggests the importance of continuous capacity-building programs and performance-based incentives for staff. These theories provide a framework for evaluating HRM practices in Aathrai Rural Municipality. By analyzing how classical and modern theories are reflected—or absent—in local HR policies and practices, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of public sector HRM in the context of Nepal's evolving federal system.

Several scholars have examined the application of Human Resource Management (HRM) theories within Nepal's public sector, particularly in local government institutions. Sarada Prasad Trital (2018) emphasizes the critical role of strategic HRM in enhancing the administrative performance of rural municipalities, noting that decentralized governance in Nepal requires more contextualized HR practices to ensure transparency, accountability, and service delivery. Trital argues that aligning HRM strategies with local needs—such as training, motivation, and performance appraisal—can significantly improve staff efficiency and citizen satisfaction in rural areas like Aathrai. Similarly, Dr. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai (2016) highlights the challenges faced by local governments in implementing modern HRM practices due to political interference, lack of trained personnel, and limited autonomy. His study recommends capacity-building programs and policy reforms to bridge the gap between HRM theory and practice in rural Nepal. Basudev Dhakal (2019) also explores the adoption of participatory HRM approaches in Gaunpalikas, showing that inclusive decision-making and community involvement in personnel management lead to better institutional trust and service responsiveness. These studies collectively underscore the need for adaptive HRM frameworks tailored to the socio-political realities of rural Nepal, providing a strong foundation for analyzing Aathrai Rural Municipality as on study.

Aathrai RM was constituted in 2017 under the new constitution by merging former Village Development Committees (VDCs), and it now administers seven wards with its headquarters at Sankranti Bazar. Its responsibilities span infrastructure, agriculture, health, education, and local governance. For such an institution, effective HRM is vital to recruit, develop, and motivate skilled staff (e.g. engineers, health workers, administrators) to meet citizens' needs. Yet local bodies often face challenges: a government survey noted most local governments suffer from a shortage of technical manpower and limited capacity-building. Political interference in transfers and deployments has also been reported as rampant at provincial and local. In this context Despite the availability of both classical HRM theories—such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory, McGregor's Theory X and Y, and Public Service Motivation (PSM)—and emerging frameworks like Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), Resource-Based View (RBV), and Human Capital Theory, there remains a significant research gap in their practical application within Nepal's local governance structures. Most existing literature either generalizes HRM practices across the public sector or lacks in-depth, context-specific analysis at the rural municipal level. This study addresses that gap by exploring how both classical and emerging HRM theories are applied in the real-world HR practices of Aathrai Rural Municipality. The objective is to evaluate the alignment between theoretical principles and local HR strategies, identify key implementation challenges, and propose context-appropriate recommendations to strengthen human resource management and service delivery in rural local government

### Methodology

This study employed a *mixed methods case study approach* to explore the application of classical and contemporary Human Resource Management (HRM) theories in Aathrai

Rural Municipality, Nepal. Primary data were collected from 50 purposively selected municipal employees through a structured, theory-informed multiple-choice questionnaire. The survey addressed key HRM dimensions including leadership style, employee motivation, working conditions, performance evaluation, training, and retention. Data from this instrument were analyzed using percentage, tables to identify patterns and trends in responses.

Complementing the quantitative aspect, secondary sources were used to gather qualitative data. These sources included the municipality's official website, public notices, HR policy documents, training records, academic literature, and relevant news coverage. The qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, guided by established HRM and organizational behavior frameworks such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, McGregor's Theory X and Y, Public Service Motivation theory, Strategic HRM, Human Capital Theory, and the Resource-Based View.

This integrated methodological approach allowed for data triangulation, enhancing the robustness of the findings. Nonetheless, limitations included the use of closed-ended survey questions, dependence on publicly available documents, and the study's focus on a single rural municipality.

## Data presentation and Results

Human Resource Management (HRM) theories provide the foundation for understanding how organizations can effectively manage their human capital to achieve strategic goals. In the context of public sector institutions like Nepal's local governments, these theories offer valuable insights into employee motivation, performance, and organizational efficiency.

**Table 1.**

*Summary of Survey Findings and Theoretical Frameworks*

Thematic Area	Survey Question	Theoretical Framework	Survey Results
Job Category	What is your current job category?	N/A (Demographic)	Technical: 78%; Managerial: 4%; Admin: 2%; Other: 16%
Basic Needs Fulfillment	Are your basic needs (e.g., salary) met?	Maslow's Hierarchy (Lower Level)	Fully met: 8%; Partially met: 56%; Not met: 36%
Self-development Opportunities	How often do you get self-development opportunities?	Maslow's Self actualization, Human Capital Theory	Frequently: 6%; Never: 28%; Occasionally/Rarely: 66%

Thematic Area	Survey Question	Theoretical Framework	Survey Results
Motivation to Work in Local Govt.	What motivates you most?	Public Service Motivation (PSM)	Service to Community: 82%; Other factors: 18%
Working Condition	How do you rate your working environment?	Herzberg's Hygiene Factors	Poor: 18%; Excellent: 4%; Others: 78%
Opportunities for Growth	Are there regular opportunities for promotion/responsibility?	Herzberg's Motivators	Not at all: 38%; Regularly: 18%; Occasionally/Rarely: 44%
Leadership Style	How would you describe your supervisor's style?	McGregor's Theory X and Y	Participatory (Y): 56%; Authoritative (X): 6%; Others: 38%
Trust to Work Independently	Are you trusted to work independently?	McGregor's Theory Y	Always: 40%; Often: 34%; Occasionally/Rarely: 26%
Link Between HR Policy and Goals	Are HR policies aligned with municipal goals?	Strategic HRM	Very clear: 34%; Somewhat clear: 52%; Not clear: 14%
Performance Evaluation	How often are performance evaluations conducted?	Strategic HRM, ResourceBased View (RBV)	Annually: 48%; Occasionally: 36%; Never: 16%
Investment in HR	Does the municipality invest in staff development?	Human Capital Theory	Strongly agree: 8%; Disagree: 24%; Others: 68%
Retention of Skilled Employees	Are skilled employees retained in Aathrai?	ResourceBased View (RBV)	Yes: 46%; Rarely: 28%; Others: 26%

*Sources:* Field survey 2025

### Current Job Category

The majority of respondents (78%) were technical staff, which reflects the professional composition required for local service delivery in sectors such as engineering, agriculture, and health. This aligns with the HR needs of rural municipalities like Aathrai, where technical competency is vital for infrastructure development and citizen welfare. The high percentage also underscores the need for targeted HRM practices specifically suited for technical professionals, such as regular skill upgrades and performance-linked career progression.

## **Fulfillment of Basic Needs**

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, basic physiological and safety needs like salary and job security must be met before employees can be motivated to perform at higher levels. In Aathrai, (56%) of staff report that their needs are only partially met, while a mere (8%) feel they are fully satisfied. This suggests a pressing issue in meeting foundational employee expectations and highlights the importance of competitive compensation, timely pay, and employment stability in local governance HR policies.

## **Opportunities for Self-Development**

Human Capital Theory and Maslow's concept of self-actualization emphasize that personal growth opportunities are crucial to motivation and productivity. However, the survey shows that (28%) of respondents have never received such opportunities. This indicates a weakness in institutional support for professional development and points to the need for structured capacity-building programs to enhance employee capabilities and satisfaction.

## **Motivation to Work in Local Government**

An overwhelming (82%) of employees are motivated by public service, reflecting strong alignment with the Public Service Motivation (PSM) theory. This finding suggests that intrinsic motivation and social commitment are powerful drivers in rural municipalities. Hence, HR strategies in Aathrai should focus not only on financial incentives but also on fostering recognition, public appreciation, and a sense of contribution to community development.

## **Working Conditions**

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory suggests that while poor working conditions lead to dissatisfaction, good conditions alone don't guarantee motivation. In Aathrai, (48%) describe their working conditions as "Normal" and (18%) as "Poor." This signals a need for investment in workplace infrastructure, tools, and comfort. Improvements here will reduce dissatisfaction and create a more enabling environment for public service delivery.

## **Availability of Promotions**

Only (18%) of respondents reported having regular opportunities for promotion, while (38%) claimed there were none. This underlines a gap in career advancement pathways—one of Herzberg's key motivators. Without such opportunities, even committed employees may feel stagnant, leading to reduced morale and higher attrition. Establishing clear, merit-based promotion systems is thus vital for employee retention and motivation.

## **Leadership Style**

More than half (56%) described their supervisors as participatory, indicating a tilt



toward McGregor's Theory Y style of management, which encourages employee involvement and autonomy. Only (6%) reported authoritarian leadership. This is a positive development, suggesting a shift from bureaucratic rigidity to inclusive governance. Continued training on leadership and delegation can further institutionalize this trend.

### **Trust and Autonomy**

A combined (74%) of staff (40%) "Always", (34%) "Often") feel trusted to work independently. This strong sense of autonomy supports Theory Y's assertion that employees are capable and self-motivated when given responsibility. Encouraging such empowerment through decentralized decision-making can further improve performance and innovation in service delivery.

### **Alignment Between HR and Municipal Goals**

Strategic HRM emphasizes that HR policies must align with organizational goals. In this study, (52%) of employees felt the alignment was "Somewhat Clear" and only (34%) said "Very Clear." This partial alignment indicates that while strategy is acknowledged, there is a need for better communication and integration between HR planning and development objectives to ensure effective governance outcomes.

### **Performance Evaluation**

Almost half (48%) of the staff reported annual performance evaluations. While this shows that monitoring systems exist, the lack of consistency (36%) said occasionally suggests evaluations may not be systematic or effectively used for promotions and capacity building. Integrating regular, objective performance assessments tied to rewards and training is essential for sustaining high service quality.

### **Investment in Staff Development**

Only (8%) of employees strongly agree that the municipality invests in their development. This weak investment contradicts the principles of Human Capital Theory, which treats education and skill enhancement as assets. Increasing training budgets, partnerships with training institutes, and routine professional development programs are critical steps for improving municipal performance.

### **Retention of Skilled Employees**

Though (46%) believed skilled workers are retained, (28%) said retention is rare and (4%) said most leave. These results highlight a moderate but unstable retention situation. Based on the Resource-Based View, retaining skilled personnel is essential to maintaining institutional knowledge and service capacity. Policies around recognition, promotion, and work-life balance should be strengthened to minimize turnover.



## Discussion

Aathrai Rural Municipality maintains a structured and functionally diverse administrative system. According to its official directory, the municipality has recruited a mix of technical and administrative staff, including a Chief Administrative Officer, engineers, health workers, agricultural officers, IT and accounting personnel, and mid-level support roles such as MIS operators and technical assistants. This reflects an attempt to meet the municipality's service mandates across infrastructure, health, education, and agriculture. Recruitment includes both permanent and contract-based positions, indicating flexibility in workforce management. Additionally, public records show the municipality organizes periodic capacity-building programs, such as judicial training and budget planning workshops. These activities align with modern HRM expectations, especially the need to upskill staff in a changing federal context.

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Aathrai's HRM

Maslow's theory suggests employees are motivated through a hierarchy of needs: from basic (salary, security) to self-actualization. Aathrai addresses basic needs by offering government-fixed salaries, benefits, and job security. Survey data supports this, with (56%) of employees stating their basic needs are "partially met," and only (8%) stating they are "fully met," indicating room for improvement in salary adequacy. Social and esteem needs may be partially addressed through structured teamwork in specialized branches and the formal recognition of staff roles on the municipal website. Self-actualization is evident in the municipality's investment in training and task variety (e.g., engineering works, agricultural outreach), with (18%) of employees confirming regular training opportunities. Although opportunities exist, the limited scope and scale of training suggest that higher-level needs are met inconsistently.

### Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory: Hygiene and Motivators

Herzberg's theory separates job satisfaction into hygiene factors (salary, job conditions) and motivators (recognition, achievement). In Aathrai, hygiene factors such as pay and job security are structurally guaranteed through public service regulations. Yet only (4%) of employees reported being "very satisfied" with their working conditions, while (18%) rated them as "poor," revealing dissatisfaction with the workplace environment. On the motivator side, some efforts—such as training programs and project assignments—offer responsibility and development, but only (18%) of employees reported regular opportunities for advancement. The absence of formal recognition systems (e.g., awards, promotions) means that intrinsic motivators may not be fully harnessed. Thus, while dissatisfaction is managed through hygiene, true motivation may be lacking due to weak implementation of career advancement practices.

## McGregor's Theory X and Y: Leadership and Control

McGregor's Theory X and Y explore contrasting assumptions about worker motivation. While Aathrai retains a classical bureaucratic hierarchy, its organizational structure—with functionally decentralized branches like IT, Finance, and Agriculture—allows for participative management. This is supported by survey findings: (56%) of employees described their supervisors as “participatory,” and (74%) reported being trusted to work independently, reflecting a shift toward Theory Y (collaborative, trust-based). The municipality's engagement in planning and training activities further suggests a belief in employee growth and self-direction. However, persistent bureaucratic norms and reports of political interference in staffing (as seen nationally) indicate occasional reliance on Theory X-style oversight, especially in recruitment and transfers. Aathrai thus appears to adopt a hybrid approach, with increasing inclination toward Theory Y.

## Public Service Motivation (PSM) in Local Governance

PSM posits that employees in public institutions are driven by a commitment to serve the public good. In Aathrai, roles such as medical officers, health inspectors, and agriculture officers are inherently service-oriented. Survey data show (82%) of employees are primarily motivated by “Service to the Community,” strongly affirming the presence of PSM. This intrinsic drive appears resilient even in the face of limited financial incentives and infrastructure challenges. Municipal practices such as facilitating participatory planning and community audits reinforce this motivation by directly involving staff in impactful local governance. However, political pressure and bureaucratic constraints could dampen PSM over time. To sustain this valuable motivation, Aathrai should institutionalize mechanisms like public recognition, regular feedback on community outcomes, and civic pride campaign.

The findings of this study reveal that Aathrai Rural Municipality's HRM practices reflect both classical motivational theories and the practical challenges faced by Nepal's decentralized local governance system. The municipality has established a reasonably structured HR framework, employing diverse technical and administrative personnel to deliver core services in health, agriculture, infrastructure, and administration. This structure meets fundamental employment standards—such as job security and stable income—thereby satisfying Maslow's physiological and safety needs, and Herzberg's hygiene factors like pay and working conditions. However, survey data show that only (8%) of employees feel their basic needs are fully met, and (56%) feel only partially satisfied—suggesting ongoing challenges in salary adequacy and resource allocation.

In terms of higher-order motivation, Aathrai has initiated capacity-building programs, enabling employees to develop skills and take on meaningful roles, aligning with Maslow's self-actualization level and Herzberg's motivators. For example, (18%) of employees reported regular training opportunities, and (74%) said they are trusted to work indepen-

dently—signaling a shift toward McGregor’s Theory Y leadership, which emphasizes autonomy and employee development. Nonetheless, the lack of formal promotion systems and limited access to recognition with (38%) noting no promotional opportunities) indicates that intrinsic motivators remain underutilized. The continued reliance on contract-based hiring to address staff shortages—while necessary—may limit the job security and long-term commitment of some employees, affecting their satisfaction and performance.

Public Service Motivation (PSM) is clearly evident in Aathrai’s workforce, with (82%) of employees reporting that their primary motivation is serving the community. This is consistent with broader trends in Nepal, where civil servants are often driven by social values and a sense of public duty. However, political interference in staffing decisions, as reported nationally, can undermine such motivation. Arbitrary transfers or favoritism disrupt perceptions of fairness and achievement, thereby threatening both Herzberg’s motivators and Maslow’s security needs. To mitigate this, Aathrai must institutionalize transparent HR policies, including standardized hiring, evaluation, and promotion processes. The Local Government Operation Act (2017) empowers rural municipalities to create such systems, and Aathrai is well-positioned to leverage this legal authority.

Encouragingly, staff perception of participatory leadership (56%) described their supervisors as participatory) and their involvement in community-linked programs suggest a growing alignment with Theory Y and the core dimensions of PSM. Practices like social audits and inclusive planning processes can further embed public value into institutional culture. Leadership development—particularly among mid-level officers—should emphasize participatory, supportive styles to foster innovation and trust. Moreover, regular performance reviews, clearly defined career pathways, and internal recognition mechanisms would enhance both motivation and retention. In sum, Aathrai’s HRM practices demonstrate a foundational alignment with motivational theories but require strategic refinement to fully leverage employee potential in the evolving federal governance landscape of Nepal

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Human Resource Management (HRM) practices of Aathrai Rural Municipality are moderately aligned with established motivational and strategic HRM theories, including Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory, McGregor’s Theory X and Y, Public Service Motivation (PSM), and emerging models such as Strategic HRM, Human Capital Theory, and the Resource-Based View (RBV). While the municipality has developed a structured workforce and shown efforts in staff development, several gaps remain. These include insufficient promotion opportunities, limited investment in staff training, and unclear alignment between HR policies and strategic goals. Despite these challenges, employee’s exhibit strong intrinsic motivation—especially a sense of public duty—indicating a valuable human capital base that, if properly supported, can significantly enhance local governance outcomes.

Future researchers are encouraged to expand on this case study by conducting comparative analyses across multiple rural municipalities in Nepal to explore regional variations in HRM practices and outcomes. Additionally, incorporating qualitative tools such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and ethnographic observations would provide deeper insights into employee experiences, organizational culture, and the nuanced effects of political interference. Exploring the long-term impact of capacity-building initiatives, digital HR systems, and performance-based rewards in federal local governance settings could offer further practical insights. As Nepal's decentralized governance system continues to evolve, there is a pressing need for evidence-based HRM reforms, and future research can play a vital role in shaping inclusive, efficient, and motivated public institutions at the grassroots level.

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