The Impact of Employee Satisfaction, Employee Engagement, and Organizational Culture on Human Resource Management Practices in Small Medium-Sized Enterprises, Gender as a Moderator

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Presented to the
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS
in Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
(Management)

2026

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis was conducted in full compliance with the regulations of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). Except where proper acknowledgment is given, this work is solely the effort of the author. This thesis has not been accepted for the award of any other degree and is not being **concurrently** submitted for any other academic qualification.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to seize this moment to express my appreciation to those who have contributed, whether directly or indirectly, to this study.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Center for Graduate Studies for their invaluable guidance and support throughout my tenure at the University of Malaysia, Sarawak.

Last but not least, I wish to convey my deep gratitude to the administration of the University of Malaysia, Sarawak, for enabling me to successfully conclude my academic journey in Sarawak. I am truly thankful to each and every one of you.

The Impact of Employee Satisfaction, Employee Engagement, and Organizational Culture on Human Resource Management Practices in Small Medium-Sized Enterprises, Gender as a Moderator

ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationships between employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, human resource management (HRM) practice, and the moderating role of gender within new energy enterprises. Using a quantitative research design, data from 220 respondents were analyzed through demographic distribution, Pearson correlation analysis, and mediation tests to assess the relationship between these variables. The findings reveal that employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture positively correlate with HRM practice, while gender does not significantly moderate these relationships, suggesting that gender-neutral HRM practices can reduce gender-based disparities. The study highlights the importance of inclusive and equitable HRM practice strategies, fostering a positive organizational culture, and prioritizing employee well-being to enhance satisfaction and engagement. It recommends a holistic HRM practice approach that integrates cultural factors to optimize employee outcomes and calls for further research on gender dynamics in diverse organizational contexts and industries. This research contributes to the broader understanding of HRM practice by emphasizing the role of organizational culture and inclusivity in achieving effective employee management.

Keywords: Human resource management practice, employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, gender.

Kesan Kepuasan Pekerja, Penglibatan Pekerja, dan Budaya Organisasi terhadap Amalan Pengurusan Sumber Manusia dalam Perusahaan Kecil dan Sederhana, dengan Jantina sebagai Pemoderasi

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneroka hubungan antara kepuasan pekerja, penglibatan, budaya organisasi, amalan pengurusan sumber manusia (HRM), dan peranan pemoderasi jantina dalam perusahaan tenaga baharu. Menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan kuantitatif, data daripada 220 responden dianalisis melalui pengagihan demografi, analisis korelasi Pearson, dan ujian perantaraan untuk menilai hubungan antara pembolehubah ini. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa kepuasan pekerja, penglibatan, dan budaya organisasi mempunyai korelasi positif dengan amalan HRM, manakala jantina tidak memoderasi hubungan ini secara signifikan, menunjukkan bahawa amalan HRM yang neutral jantina dapat mengurangkan perbezaan berdasarkan jantina. Kajian ini menekankan kepentingan strategi amalan HRM yang inklusif dan adil, memupuk budaya organisasi yang positif, dan mengutamakan kesejahteraan pekerja untuk meningkatkan kepuasan dan penglibatan. Ia mencadangkan pendekatan amalan HRM yang menyeluruh yang mengintegrasikan faktor budaya untuk mengoptimumkan hasil pekerja dan menyeru kepada kajian lanjut mengenai dinamika jantina dalam konteks dan industri organisasi yang pelbagai. Penyelidikan ini menyumbang kepada pemahaman yang lebih luas mengenai amalan HRM dengan menekankan peranan budaya organisasi dan keterangkuman dalam mencapai pengurusan pekerja yang berkesan.

Kata Kunci: Amalan pengurusan sumber manusia, kepuasan pekerja pengajaran, penglibatan pekerja, budaya organisasi, jantina.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HRM	Human Resource Management
HRMP	Human Resource Management Practice
SMEs	Small and Medium sized Enterprises
ES	Employee Satisfaction
EE	Employee Engagement
OC	Organizational Culture

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Human Resource Management (HRM) practices is a field of management aimed at maximizing employee performance and development by formulating and implementing policies and practices related to organizational human resources, in order to support the overall success of the organization (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021). The importance of HRM lies in enabling organizations to have the right talent and improve employee performance (Miah & Hafid, 2019). In addition, it also focuses on attracting and retaining talent, and promoting organizational development (Tej et al., 2021). Improving employee satisfaction, promoting employee engagement, and creating a harmonious and progressive organizational culture are all goals of HRM practices (Lu et al., 2023). The HRM of enterprises is particularly important as it can help them gain advantages and success in a fiercely competitive environment.

Global HRM practices is undergoing significant development and transformation (Fenech et al., 2019). The application of digital technology, artificial intelligence, and big data in HRM is becoming increasingly popular (Sima et al., 2020). From recruitment to performance management and training, these tools provide more efficient ways to handle human resources (Dessler, 2020). In addition to the transformation of digital transformation, the flexibility of work has also gained popularity (Fenech et al., 2019). The fields of talent management, attention to employee satisfaction and participation, and organizational culture have also attracted widespread attention (Budrienė & Diskienė, 2022; Kravariti & Johnston, 2020; Miah & Hafid, 2019).

China's Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) Promotion Law clearly defines large, medium, small, and micro enterprises. Taking industry as an example, the current regulations stipulate the following standards (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023): large enterprises refer to those with more than 1000 employees and an annual operating

income of over 40 billion yuan; A medium-sized enterprise refers to a company with 300 to 1000 employees and an annual operating income between 20 million to 40 billion yuan; Small enterprises refer to those with 20 to 300 employees and an annual operating income between 3 million to 20 million. Effective HRM will help SMEs attract and retain excellent employees. In addition, HRM practices can also drive innovation and stand out in highly competitive markets. Based on the transformation of HRM practices, new ideas and changes have emerged in the measurement of employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational culture. Therefore, further consideration is needed on the factors that may affect HRM practices.

Jinan's SMEs are aligning with the global trend in the development of HRM practices, encountering a growing array of challenges and opportunities in this field. To maintain competitiveness, these companies need to focus on recruitment, training, performance management, and employee satisfaction, while ensuring legal compliance (Human Resources and Social Security Bureau of Jinan, 2022). Digital transformation, leadership development, and diversity and inclusivity policies have also become key focal points of HRM (Dessler, 2020). In order to cope with the current fierce competitive environment, organizations need to constantly adjust their HRM strategies to adapt to new challenges. In the 2024 government work report, it was mentioned that Jinan City has achieved significant results in attracting investment in 2023, successfully hosting various activities and conferences for external investment (Yao, 2023). In addition, the Jinan government has established a new international investment promotion liaison station for Germany and Japan, and introduced 56 projects from the Fortune Global 500 and China's Top 500 manufacturing enterprises. These policies and achievements demonstrate the Jinan government's attention and assistance to SMEs.

According to the 2022 Jinan National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin from the Jinan Municipal Bureau of Statistics, the city's total GDP in 2022 reached 1,202.75 billion yuan, growing by 3.1%. The primary industry contributed 42.05 billion yuan, also increasing by 3.1%. The secondary industry added 418.02 billion yuan, rising by 3.2%, while the tertiary industry contributed 742.67 billion yuan, marking a 3.0% growth. The total industrial added value for the year was 286.9 billion yuan, reflecting a 2.4% increase. From the perspective of economic types, the public sector of the economy decreased by 1.4%, while the non-public sector of the economy increased by 4.1% (Wu,

2023). In addition, light industry grew by 7.7%, while heavy industry decreased by 0.1%. Overall, Jinan City maintained a certain level of economic growth in 2022, with a relatively balanced industrial structure, good development of non-public economy, good performance of light industry, and low growth rate of heavy industry.

Sun (2019) found that talent management in SMEs in Jinan faces multiple challenges, including talent shortages and high turnover, limited financing and technological support, rising labor costs, and insufficient government policy implementation, which collectively hinder HRM effectiveness and compel enterprises to seek solutions. Beyond these external pressures, many SMEs, particularly those in China's new energy vehicle industry, face significant internal challenges that further constrain HRM practices. Employees in these enterprises often report dissatisfaction due to limited career development opportunities, inadequate recognition, and heavy workloads, which contribute to low engagement and reduced commitment (Kong et al., 2024). In addition, the organizational culture in many SMEs is underdeveloped, with weak communication channels, limited collaboration, and minimal emphasis on innovation or knowledge sharing (Bing, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). These internal shortcomings not only undermine employee motivation and performance but also exacerbate turnover and reduce the overall effectiveness of HRM initiatives.

The coexistence of external pressures, such as talent shortages, high labor costs, limited financing, and insufficient policy support, and these internal HR-related challenges creates a complex environment that threatens the sustainability and competitiveness of SMEs in the new energy sector (Dong & Liu, 2020; Liu et al., 2025; Tian et al., 2024). This combination of factors highlights a critical business problem that motivates the present study: to examine how employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture influence HRM outcomes, in order to provide practical insights for enhancing workforce management and organizational performance in Jinan's competitive new energy vehicle industry.

There is a close correlation between employee satisfaction and human resource management, and the effective practice of HRM practices can directly improve employee satisfaction (Miah & Hafid, 2019). In addition, employee satisfaction can have a positive impact on employee performance and loyalty (Djoemadi et al., 2019; Jigjiddorj et al., 2019; Riyanto et al., 2021). In addition to employee satisfaction, some studies have also shown

that effective practices of HRM practices can directly promote employee engagement (Ababneh, 2021; Saks et al., 2022). The higher the active participation of employees, the greater the benefits they can bring to the organization (Tensay & Singh, 2020). At the level of organizational culture, Yusof et al. (2020) believe that organizational culture is the cornerstone of HRM practices. Organizational culture has a significant impact on employee recruitment and training (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). Moreover, organizational culture and performance management also have a deep relationship (Joseph & Kibera, 2019). The close relationship between organizational culture and HRM practices helps to ensure the inheritance of organizational values and helps the organization achieve its goals and mission.

In short, HRM practices is a key strategy for organizations, and in the era of global HRM practices transformation, SMEs are also facing challenges in the development of HRM practices. Employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational culture are closely related to HRM practices. Studying their impact on HRM practices in SMEs can help provide accurate development directions and suggestions for HRM practices development.

1.2 China Scenario

SMEs in China play a crucial role in driving employment, fostering economic growth, and stimulating innovation across various sectors (Yu & Fu, 2021). The government actively supports the innovation and technological development of these enterprises, while improving the legal and regulatory environment to reduce their burden. In addition, some SMEs are actively exploring the international market and contributing to China's global economic participation (Li et al., 2019). Although SMEs have shown vitality in the Chinese economy, their development also needs to face some challenges, including financing issues, market access barriers, and international competition (Lam & Liu, 2020). The government's policy measures and support will play a crucial role in the sustainable development of SMEs, helping to promote the diversification and innovation of the Chinese economy to adapt to the continuous evolution of the global economy.

The field of SMEs in Jinan is facing a situation full of opportunities and challenges. These enterprises need to pay attention to employee recruitment, training, motivation, and strategies to cope with market competition in HRM practices. Government support, market

competition, and technological innovation all have an impact on the development of these enterprises (Human Resources and Social Security Bureau of Jinan, 2022). Therefore, effective HRM strategies will play a crucial role in helping enterprises attract and retain talent, and improve competitiveness. In this diversified market environment, the development of HRM practices for SMEs is a key factor in achieving long-term success.

1.3 Problem Statement

Despite ongoing efforts to modernize HRM practices, many SMEs continue to face practical challenges such as employee dissatisfaction, low engagement, and weak organizational culture, which limit their competitiveness and sustainability. Although digitalization and training initiatives have been introduced, limited resources and ineffective HR practices hinder their impact. These issues highlight the urgent need to understand how employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture influence HRM practices outcomes, particularly in SMEs striving to improve performance and long-term development in highly competitive environments.

From an empirical research gap perspective, inconsistencies exist in the relationships among the key variables examined in this study. Previous research has widely explored the relationships between HRM practices, employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational culture, generally reporting positive associations (Ababneh, 2021; Božović et al., 2019; Kerdpitak & Jermsittiparsert, 2020; Miah & Hafid, 2019;). However, empirical findings across different contexts remain inconsistent. While some studies report strong positive effects of HRM practices on employee satisfaction and engagement (Al Kurdi et al., 2021; Tensay & Singh, 2020), others reveal insignificant or mixed results, particularly regarding the influence of specific HRM practices and cultural mechanisms (Mira et al., 2019; Singh & Pandey, 2020). Moreover, although organizational culture is widely recognized as a key factor in enhancing HRM effectiveness, evidence suggests that culture alone may not generate positive outcomes without supportive and well-aligned HRM systems (Ballesteros Rodríguez et al., 2012). These inconsistencies highlight a clear empirical research gap, especially within SMEs and emerging industries, where the combined effects of employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture on HRM outcomes remain underexplored.

From a knowledge gap perspective, although previous studies have shown that gender can moderate the relationship between HRM practices and certain variables (Antony et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Hsiao et al., 2020; Rożnowski & Zarzycka, 2020; Shin et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020), the literature remains unclear about the specific role of gender in the relationships among employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices, particularly in the context of SMEs and the new energy industry. Therefore, this study aims to address this knowledge gap by examining the moderating effect of gender on these core relationships.

From a theoretical gap perspective, most existing studies focus on the individual effects of employee satisfaction, employee engagement, or organizational culture on HRM practices, without integrating these variables into a comprehensive framework that captures their combined influence. Consequently, the interplay among these core factors and their collective impact on HRM outcomes remains underexplored. In addition, the potential moderating role of gender in these relationships has received limited attention, leaving a gap in the theoretical understanding of how male and female employees may respond differently to HRM practices. Addressing this gap is essential for developing a more holistic theoretical model that explains the complex mechanisms through which satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture jointly shape HRM effectiveness across diverse organizational contexts.

The purpose of this study is to explore whether employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational culture will have an impact on HRM practices in the cultural context of small and SMEs in Jinan region. Through in-depth research, the aim is to provide more situational and comprehensive insights to help organizations develop more strategic HRM practices strategies, improve employee performance, and emphasize the key role of HRM practices in shaping a modern work environment.

1.4 Research Questions

i.Does employee satisfaction influence HRM practices of SMEs?

ii.Does employee engagement influence HRM practices of SMEs?

iii.Does organizational culture influence HRM practices of SMEs?

iv.Does gender moderate the relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture and HRM practices of SMEs? .

1.5 Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the various determinants and dynamics that shape the practice of HRM practices within SMEs located in Jinan. A primary emphasis is placed on comprehending the multifaceted factors that impact HRM practices strategies and operations. Specifically, this study aim to explore the intricate interplay of HRM practices practices in relation to employee satisfaction and engagement, while also considering the profound influence exerted by the organizational culture on the HRM practices landscape. By delving into these critical dimensions, this study aspire to provide a nuanced and context-specific understanding of how HRM practices is executed and how it influences the workforce in SMEs. This study seeks to offer valuable insights that can inform the formulation of strategic HRM practices initiatives, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of employee well-being. Moreover, this study is to promote the development of employee performance in relevant organizations in the unique context of Jinan region. The specific research objectives are as follows:

i.To determine the influence of employee satisfaction on HRM practices of SMEs.

ii.To confirm the influence of employee engagement on HRM practices of SMEs.

iii.To verify the influence of organizational culture on HRM practices of SMEs.

iv.To identify gender moderating the relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture and HRM practices of SMEs.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Employee Satisfaction: Employee satisfaction refers to how content employees are with various aspects of their job and work environment, such as job responsibilities, compensation, workplace conditions, and other related factors (Dziuba et al., 2020). In this study, employee satisfaction can be operationally defined as the degree to which

employees are content with their salary, find their supervisors helpful, have pleasant working conditions, enjoy their colleagues, and take pleasure in their job tasks.

Employee Engagement: Employee engagement refers to the level of enthusiasm and engagement of employees in their work, including their commitment, enthusiasm, and extra effort to achieve organizational goals (Verčič, 2021). In this study, employee engagement is defined as the extent to which employees feel belonging, care about the company's future, exceed expectations, help their team, find personal meaning in their work, and take pride in their organization.

Organizational Culture: Organizational culture refers to the shared values, behavioral norms, and work atmosphere within an organization, which have a profound impact on employee behavior and organizational performance (Lam et al., 2021). In this study, organizational culture can be operationally defined as the level of collaboration, mutual trust, and the provision of training and development opportunities within a company.

Human resource management practices: HEM practices to the policies and activities organizations use to manage, develop, and support their employees effectively. (Dobrosavljević & Urošević, 2020). In this study, HRM Practices refer to employees' perceptions of how effectively the HR department learns, improves processes, achieves organizational goals, and recognizes employee contributions.

Expectancy theory: Expectancy theory explains how individuals are motivated to act based on the expectation that their efforts will lead to desired outcomes (Vroom, 1964). In this study, it can be operationally defined as employees' perception that their effort and engagement in work tasks will result in satisfactory performance outcomes, recognition, and rewards.

Social identity theory: Social identity theory explains how individuals define their identity through membership in social groups, influencing their attitudes and behaviors (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). In this study, it can be operationally defined as employees' sense of belonging and identification with the organization, which shapes their engagement, collaboration, and responsiveness to organizational culture.

1.7 Significance of Studies

1.7.1 Theoretical Significance

The research objective of this study is to explore the relationship between employee satisfaction and HRM practices in SMEs, to confirm the relationship between employee engagement and HRM practices, and to examine the relationship between organizational culture and HRM practices, and to verify the moderator role of gender. Its theoretical significance lies in:

This study provides theoretical support for understanding the importance of HRM practices in SMEs, as it highlights how well-implemented HRM practices can enhance employee satisfaction and organizational performance. By focusing on the positive impact of HRM practices on employee outcomes, it underscores the need for SMEs to invest in effective HRM practices strategies to foster a motivated and committed workforce.

This study emphasizes the importance of employee participation in SMEs, as it plays a crucial role in fostering a collaborative and innovative work environment. Engaged employees are more likely to contribute valuable ideas, improve problem-solving, and enhance overall productivity. By encouraging active participation, SMEs can strengthen employee loyalty, reduce turnover, and improve organizational outcomes, ultimately leading to long-term growth and success.

This study identifies the impact of organizational culture on SMEs and clarified the importance of cultivating a positive and healthy organizational culture. In a harmonious organizational culture, employees will consciously behave in a way that is beneficial to the organization and improve their work enthusiasm. Therefore, this study provides important guidance and direction for how companies can shape a positive organizational culture and promote the development of HRM practices.

By introducing gender as a moderating variable, this study aims to enrich and expand existing HRM practices theories. It seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the influence of gender on employee satisfaction, participation, and culture, while also verifying the applicability of current theories and promoting the development of new ones. Meanwhile, it emphasizes the importance of diversity and inclusivity in HRM practices research.

1.7.2 Practical Significance

SMEs are crucial to the global economy. Investigating the connection between employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices can provide insights into how employee management influences the economic performance of SMEs in the Jinan region. It can further help enterprises allocate resources more effectively and improve productivity and profitability. In addition, understanding the main factors that affect HRM practices can help SME better shape and improve its HRM practices strategy.

Moreover, these research findings can help create a more attractive work environment, thereby attracting and retaining high-quality talents. From the perspective of social impact, in-depth research on the influencing factors of HRM practices can help improve the quality of life of employees. Employees with high satisfaction and participation are more likely to feel satisfied at work, reduce work pressure, and thus improve the quality of life. From a policy and management perspective, this study can provide recommendations for SME managers on how to improve employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational culture. This helps develop more effective HR strategies, improve employee performance, reduce turnover, and enhance competitiveness.

Understanding the moderating role of gender in these relationships can help SMEs develop more effective and targeted HRM practices strategies, improve employee management, and promote gender equality. In addition, by understanding how gender moderate s the relationship between HRM practices and organizational culture, companies can better consider gender factors when building and maintaining organizational culture, thereby enhancing organizational cohesion and employee sense of belonging.

In summary, the significance of this study lies in the in-depth exploration of the relationships between employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices in SMEs, which help SMEs achieve significant economic, organizational, and social achievements at multiple levels.

1.8 Scope of the Study

SMEs provide strong momentum into the sustained economic growth of the Jinan region. The research scope of this study mainly focuses on the HRM practices development and its influencing factors of SMEs in Jinan, China. The focus of this study is

to investigate the factors influencing HRM practices, aiming to identify the key elements that shape effective HRM practices in these businesses. Jinan, as the capital city of Shandong Province, serves as a representative example for understanding the HRM practices of SMEs in the region. In summary, the research scope covers the HRM practices and environment of SMEs in Jinan, providing valuable insights into the challenges within this field and contributing to the broader understanding of HRM practices in emerging economies.

1.9 Organization of the Chapters

This study aims to investigate the impact of employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational culture on HRM practices, and confirm the moderating role of gender. The first chapter introduces the background of the research and some of the problems and challenges that exist in the current research. And the research objectives were divided and corresponding research questions were proposed. This chapter also emphasizes the significance of this study and defines the key research clauses.

Chapter 2 mainly provides an overview of employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and some key research points of HRM practices in the past, and compares the same and different perspectives among researchers. In addition, Chapter 2 also proposes the basic theory and framework of the study, and proposes research hypotheses based on the results of the literature review.

The third chapter includes the methodology of this study, elucidating the philosophy of research, research methods, research design, etc. The selection of research samples, setting of research subjects, and methods of data analysis will also be elaborated in detail.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed exploration of the fundamental theories underpinning this research and examines the influence of employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational culture on HRM practices. Specifically, the study adopts the expected value theory and social identity theory, as they align closely with the research objectives. The literature review investigates the interconnections among employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices, serving as the basis for developing hypotheses. These hypotheses contribute to constructing the conceptual framework that guides the study's analytical approach.

2.2 Human Resource Management Practices

This chapter introduces the concept and development of HRM practices, as well as important research findings on HRM practices in recent years.

2.2.1 The Concept and Definition of HRM practices

Human resource management (HRM) practices refer to a systematic and strategic approach to managing an organization's workforce with the aim of enhancing employee performance and achieving organizational objectives (Mahapatro, 2021). These practices focus on optimizing human capital by improving employees' skills, motivation, and overall work effectiveness, while also supporting their professional growth and career development (Mahapatro, 2021). In addition, HRM practices emphasize the importance of fostering positive employee–organization relationships and ensuring alignment between individual values and organizational goals (Sardi et al., 2021). By recognizing employees as a critical organizational asset, HRM practices contribute to organizational sustainability and long-term competitiveness.

Moreover, HRM practices encompass a wide range of activities related to employee management, including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and reward systems (Ahammad, 2017). Through the effective design and implementation of these practices, such as attracting suitable candidates, evaluating performance, and supporting continuous development, organizations can create a supportive work environment that enhances both employee well-being and organizational effectiveness (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021).

HRM practices encompass a comprehensive set of activities aimed at developing employees' capabilities and supporting their long-term professional growth. A key function of HRM practices is to provide systematic training and development opportunities that enhance employees' skills and enable them to adapt effectively to organizational changes (Mahapatro, 2021; Joshi et al., 2023). Through structured learning initiatives and career development planning, HRM practices equip employees with the competencies required to meet evolving job demands and organizational challenges (Paauwe & Boon, 2018).

In addition, HRM practices play a central role in managing employee performance. This involves the formulation and implementation of clear performance standards, regular performance evaluations, and constructive feedback mechanisms aimed at continuous improvement (Mizrak, 2023; Malik et al., 2020). By linking performance appraisal outcomes with developmental feedback and reward systems, HRM practices help align individual performance with organizational objectives and promote a high-performance work culture (Sardi et al., 2021).

Another critical dimension of HRM practices relates to compensation and reward management. Effective HRM practices seek to establish fair and competitive salary structures, complemented by appropriate welfare and benefit systems, to enhance employee satisfaction and organizational commitment (Maheswari et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2023). Through equitable compensation policies, organizations can strengthen employee motivation, loyalty, and long-term retention (Alqarn et al., 2023).

Moreover, HRM practices emphasize the importance of maintaining positive employee relations by fostering open communication, managing workplace conflicts, and promoting mutual trust between employees and management (Stahl et al., 2020; Mujtaba &

Senathip, 2020; Triana et al., 2021). Creating a supportive and collaborative work environment contributes significantly to employee well-being and organizational cohesion.

Finally, contemporary HRM practices increasingly prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion as integral components of organizational strategy. By ensuring fair treatment and equal opportunities for employees from diverse backgrounds, HRM practices not only promote ethical standards but also leverage workforce diversity as a source of innovation and competitive advantage (Pattanayak, 2020; Dickmann, 2021).

Overall, HRM practices represent a holistic management framework encompassing recruitment, training, performance management, compensation, employee relations, and diversity management. Through the effective integration of these practices, organizations can enhance employee capabilities, motivation, and engagement, thereby supporting sustainable organizational performance and long-term success (Kaufman et al., 2021; Isede, 2022).

2.2.2 The Development History of HRM Practices

The development history of HRM practices can be traced through various stages, reflecting the evolving nature of the field and its increasing significance in organizational management. The development of HRM practices has mainly gone through the following stages:

Personnel Administration (Late 19th to Early 20th Century): In 19th century, organizations began to recognize the necessity of a structured approach to managing their workforce. During this period, known as the era of Personnel Administration, the primary focus was on basic record-keeping and compliance with emerging labor laws (Griffin, 2007). Organizations began to establish personnel departments to handle administrative tasks related to employee hiring, payroll, and maintaining compliance with evolving workplace regulations (Hendry & Pettigrew, 1990). This foundational phase laid the groundwork for the subsequent development of more comprehensive HRM practices.

Human Relations Movement (1920s-1930s): The Human Relations Movement, spanning the 1920s and 1930s, marked a transformative period in the understanding of workplace dynamics. Elton Mayo (1949) and other researchers highlighted the social and psychological aspects of work, shifting the focus from purely administrative functions to

employee satisfaction and motivation. Organizations recognized the impact of factors such as working conditions and communication on overall productivity. The emphasis on human relations during this era laid the groundwork for a more people-centric approach to management, influencing the evolution of HRM practices.

Post-World War II Era (1940s-1950s): The post-World War II era witnessed significant changes in the workforce landscape, prompting organizations to adapt their management approaches. With the emergence of large-scale industrialization, attention turned to efficiently managing a growing number of employees (Begin, 1992). This era saw the introduction of concepts like job analysis and job evaluation, contributing to the development of standardized HR practices (Townley, 2019). Organizations increasingly recognized the need for systematic approaches to employee management to meet the demands of a changing economic landscape.

Personnel Management (1950s-1970s): The mid-20th century saw the prevalence of the term "Personnel Management," emphasizing administrative aspects of employee management (Cappelli, 2015). Personnel managers were primarily responsible for handling routine tasks, such as maintaining employee records, ensuring compliance with labor laws, and overseeing payroll (Belous, 1989). While administrative in nature, this phase laid the groundwork for more sophisticated personnel practices and set the stage for the subsequent evolution of HRM practices.

Emergence of HRM practices (1980s-1990s): The 1980s and 1990s marked a pivotal period in the evolution of HRM practices as a distinct field (Sanders & De Cieri, 2021). The term "Human Resource Management" gained prominence, reflecting a shift towards a broader, strategic perspective (Bratton et al., 2021). HRM practices began to be acknowledged as a critical component of overall organizational strategy, aligning HR practices with business objectives and contributing to the achievement of long-term goals.

Strategic HRM practices (Late 20th Century - Present): By the late 20th century, HRM practices had transformed into a strategic function, cementing its importance as a vital element within organizations (Bowen, 2024). This shift involved a more proactive and strategic approach to talent management, workforce planning, and leadership development. Strategic HRM practices focused on aligning HR practices with organizational goals, emphasizing the role of HR professionals as strategic partners in achieving business

success (Holbeche, 2022). This era laid the foundation for HRM practices to play a more central and strategic role in shaping organizational success.

Technology and Globalization (21st Century): The 21st century brought about unprecedented changes in HRM practices due to advancements in technology and increased globalization (Duvvuri, 2021). The integration of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) revolutionized HR practices, making them more data-driven and efficient (Majam & Jarbandhan, 2022). Organizations adapted to the challenges posed by globalization, embracing diverse workforce models, and leveraging technology for talent acquisition and management. The dynamic interplay between technology and globalization has continued to reshape HRM practices, influencing how organizations attract, develop, and retain their workforce (Duvvuri, 2021).

F***ocus on Employee Experience and Well-being (Present):*** In the contemporary landscape, HRM practices has embraced a holistic approach that prioritizes the overall employee experience, well-being, and diversity and inclusion (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2022). Organizations recognize that cultivating a positive work environment, fostering a culture of continuous learning, and prioritizing employee mental health contribute to overall organizational success (Agustian et al., 2023). This shift reflects an understanding that employees are not only valuable assets but also key stakeholders in an organization's journey, and their well-being directly impacts productivity and innovation. HRM practices, in the present era, plays a pivotal role in fostering a work environment that values individuals and their contributions, contributing to sustained organizational growth and success.

2.2.3 Current Research Focus on HRM practices

The research direction and focus in the field of HRM practices are constantly evolving, influenced by various factors such as organizational change, technological development, and social trends (Cooke et al., 2022). With the rapid development of technology, researchers are paying attention to the impact of digitization on HRM practices. This includes the application of human resource information systems (HRIS), big data analysis, and artificial intelligence in recruitment and employee performance management ((Majam & Jarbandhan, 2022). The research focuses on the effectiveness of digital tools, employee attitudes towards technological change, and the impact of digitization on

organizational performance and innovation.

In addition, more and more research is paying attention to the impact of employee experience and happiness on organizational performance (Bellet et al., 2023; Vo-Thanh et al., 2020). The research topics cover job satisfaction (Garmendia et al., 2021), work life balance (Gigauri, 2020), the effectiveness of employee welfare programs (Suwarnajote & Mekhum, 2020), as well as organizational culture (Acosta-Prado et al., 2020) and leadership practices (Ali Ababneh et al., 2021) that contribute to enhancing employee experience.

In today's society, diversity, inclusivity, and fairness have become important directions for HRM practices research (Finnegan, 2021). This includes gender equality (Williamson et al., 2020), cultural diversity (Finnegan, 2021), inclusive leadership (Teo et al., 2022), discrimination (Triana et al., 2020), and equal opportunities (Knies et al., 2022). The research focuses on the implementation of organizational diversification strategies (Muktamar et al., 2023), the impact of diversification on employee creativity and innovation (Chand & Ambardar, 2020), and the construction of an inclusive culture (Zulmi et al., 2021).

In the realm of HRM practices, talent management has perennially stood out as a central concern. Researchers are actively exploring strategies encompassing the recruitment, retention, and development of high-performance talents (Ahmed et al., 2022). Furthermore, there is a growing emphasis on understanding the pivotal role of leadership development in fostering organizational innovation and adaptability (Teo et al., 2022).

Another evolving trend in HRM practices research is the increasing attention to the role of organizations in sustainable development and social responsibility (Herrera & de las Heras-Rosas, 2020). Investigations are underway to gauge the extent of employee involvement in sustainability and social responsibility initiatives. Additionally, researchers are scrutinizing the impact of these initiatives on employee satisfaction levels and the overall reputation of the organization (Aslan et al., 2022; Muisyo et al., 2022).

The integration of HRM practices with organizational strategy also is a contemporary focus of research endeavors (Ali et al., 2020). Scholars are examining how HRM practices can seamlessly align with and contribute to the achievement of long-term organizational goals (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2020). This involves understanding the

transformation of HRM practices into a strategic partner in organizational decision-making and recognizing its integral role in driving organizational innovation and facilitating change processes.

Moreover, contemporary organizations are facing unprecedented challenges, including rapid technological change, increasing workforce diversity, talent shortages, and heightened employee expectations regarding work – life balance and meaningful work (Bellet et al., 2023; Muktamar et al., 2023). These challenges have placed traditional HRM practices under pressure, revealing limitations in their ability to sustain employee commitment, adaptability, and performance. However, empirical research has not sufficiently examined how HRM practices can effectively respond to these emerging challenges, especially in contexts characterized by resource constraints and organizational transformation.

Furthermore, existing research often overlooks the contextual role of industry-specific characteristics. In sectors experiencing rapid technological and structural change, such as emerging industries, the effectiveness of conventional HRM practices may vary significantly (Agarwal et al., 2022). However, limited empirical attention has been given to examining HRM practices within such contexts. Therefore, addressing these gaps is essential to identify the key factors that influence HRM practices and to better understand how these factors shape effective human resource management.

2.3 Employee Satisfaction

2.3.1 Definition of Employee Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction is an indicator that measures the satisfaction of employees with their work and work environment (Dziuba et al., 2020). Employee satisfaction reflects the overall experience of employees towards the organization and their evaluation of work experience, and is a comprehensive and multidimensional concept (Maamari & Osta, 2021). In addition, there are many indicators for measuring employee satisfaction, and there are differences in the perception and degree of organizational satisfaction among different employees (Dziuba et al., 2020). Different organizations have different indicators for measuring employee satisfaction, but overall, it mainly revolves around job content,

working conditions, leadership colleague relationships, compensation and benefits, career development opportunities, job safety, and other aspects of satisfaction (Akinwale & George, 2020; Haryono & Sulistyo, 2020; Kalyanamitra et al., 2020).

The indicators of satisfaction are usually collected through surveys, feedback, and evaluations to understand employees' feelings and views on the work environment (Dziuba et al., 2020). A more detailed definition of this indicator also includes a comprehensive consideration of employee emotions, attitudes, and expectations (Joanna & Jerzy, 2020). Higher employee satisfaction can improve employee loyalty, which in turn leads to better performance (Lee & Liu, 2021). Organizations can improve their overall performance and competitiveness by paying close attention to employee satisfaction and taking measures to improve working conditions and employee experience.

Conducting an in-depth exploration of employee satisfaction, as demonstrated by Paais and Pattiruhu (2020), facilitates a nuanced understanding of how employees perceive crucial aspects like organizational culture, values, and leadership style. Such research illuminates specific areas ripe for improvement, offering targeted insights to enhance the overall working conditions and atmosphere within the organization. This comprehensive definition of employee satisfaction goes beyond superficial contentment, delving into the emotional dimensions of the employee experience in their work.Lam et al. (2022) highlight that it reflects the connection between job satisfaction and employees' identification with their roles, offering organizations a holistic view to foster a positive and engaging work environment.

2.3.2 Research History of Employee Satisfaction

The research and attention on employee satisfaction can be traced back to the early 20th century (Uhrbrock, 1934). In the early days, research mainly focused on employee satisfaction with wages and working hours, as well as basic labor conditions (Drobnič et al., 2010). However, over time, research on employee satisfaction has gradually expanded to a wider range of fields, including job content, leadership style, team collaboration, career development, and more (Hajiali et al., 2022; Katharina & Dewi, 2020; Khaliq et al., 2020;).

During the 1950s and 1960s, a burgeoning body of research surfaced, shedding light on the intricate ways in which organizational culture and atmosphere exert influence

on employee satisfaction, as documented by the seminal works of Pai (1957). Transitioning into the 1970s, coinciding with the ascendance of human resource management, the trajectory of research on employee satisfaction underwent a significant evolution. It entered a phase where it became progressively intertwined with human resource practices, forging connections between theoretical insights and practical applications. This pivotal period, exemplified by Flamholtz's influential study in 1971, witnessed a heightened emphasis on the holistic impact of employee training, development, and motivation on overall satisfaction, thereby shaping the contours of contemporary discussions on employee engagement and organizational well-being.

Throughout the transformative decades of the 1980s and 1990s, the landscape of employee satisfaction research underwent a gradual evolution characterized by the infusion of theories from psychology and sociology. Pioneered by Sarata & Jeppesen (1977), this intellectual shift delved into the intricate realm of employee emotions and their overarching identification with work. Concurrently, this era remained marked by an unwavering focus on the perpetual significance of work-life balance and the intricate dynamics of work-family relationships in shaping and influencing overall satisfaction levels. The scholarly discourse during this epoch not only broadened the horizons of understanding employee satisfaction but also underscored the interconnected nature of personal and professional domains in the intricate tapestry of workplace contentment.

The advent of electronic surveys and real-time feedback tools marked the dawn of the 21st century, ushering in a new era that significantly enhanced the flexibility and immediacy of research on employee satisfaction. This technological leap facilitated a dynamic and responsive approach to understanding and gauging employee sentiments. At present, the exploration of employee satisfaction has seamlessly integrated into the fabric of organizational management, evolving into an indispensable facet. Scholars, exemplified by the contributions of Taskinen (2019), now assert that research on employee satisfaction is not merely a discrete endeavor but rather an integral and strategic component advocating for a holistic and exhaustive concentration on the overall employee experience. This paradigm shift emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between employee well-being and organizational prosperity.

2.3.3 Current Research Focus on Employee Satisfaction

Discussions on employee satisfaction have been a focus in recent years, and recent research has emphasized the important role of employee experience in employee satisfaction. The current research not only focuses on the job itself, but also considers the impact of the work environment on employee emotions and satisfaction (Haryono & Sulistyo, 2020). Workplace culture, colleague relationships, or organizational values are closely related to employee satisfaction (Sabuhari et al., 2020). With the popularization of remote work, research focuses on the impact of remote work on employee satisfaction (Yang et al., 2022). Focus on work efficiency, communication methods, team collaboration, and work life balance (Aslan et al., 2022). The study also examined the impact of support measures provided by organizations, such as flexible working hours, remote team building, and technical support, on the degree of employee adaptation and satisfaction with remote work (Kondratowicz et al., 2022).

In addition, current research is increasingly focusing on the mental health and overall well-being of employees (Thompson, 2023). Due to the increasing severity of work environment and competition, research on the mental health of employees is also increasing. Psychological health support is closely related to employee satisfaction and happiness (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2021). By paying attention to the psychological health needs of employees, organizations can establish a healthier and more positive work environment.

In addition to exploring employee satisfaction, current research emphasizes the creation of a diverse and inclusive work environment where every employee feels respected and treated equally. This entails addressing equal development opportunities and fair distribution, factors that significantly impact employee perception. Studies by Hur (2020) highlight that organizational efforts in fostering diversity and inclusivity, revealing a strong correlation with enhanced employee satisfaction (Davidescu et al., 2020).

With the rapid development of technology, the widespread application of technology in work has led to in-depth research on employee satisfaction (Siripipatthanakul et al., 2022). The impact of digital tools and artificial intelligence on workflow, as well as the level of employee acceptance of these technologies, have become the focus of research attention (Borges et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the researchers also examined how the popularization of technology shapes organizational culture and

employee experience, thereby affecting satisfaction levels (Malik et al., 2023).

Despite the growing body of literature on employee satisfaction, several research gaps remain evident. First, although many studies have examined individual factors such as work environment (Hur, 2020), leadership (Hajiali et al., 2022) or technological support (Siripipatthanakul et al., 2022), there is a lack of integrated frameworks that simultaneously consider multiple organizational factors and how they interact to influence employee satisfaction. Most existing studies tend to adopt a fragmented approach, focusing on isolated variables rather than providing a holistic understanding of employee satisfaction within organizational systems (Kong et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Moreover, many studies focus on large organizations or developed economies, resulting in insufficient attention to SMEs and emerging economies, where organizational structures, resource constraints, and employee experiences may differ significantly.

Although diversity, inclusion, and digital transformation have received growing attention, empirical evidence remains inconsistent regarding how these factors jointly influence employee satisfaction. There is also a lack of research examining how organizational policies and management practices shape employees' perceptions and satisfaction in different contextual settings. Therefore, further research is needed to address these gaps by adopting a more integrated, context-sensitive, and empirical approach to understanding employee satisfaction.

2.4 Employee Engagement

2.4.1 Definition of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is the emotional and intellectual dedication that employees feel toward their work, organization, and its goals (Ababneh, 2021). It extends beyond simple job satisfaction, encompassing a strong sense of involvement, enthusiasm, and dedication (Ali Ababneh et al., 2021). Engaged employees not only experience satisfaction in their roles but also take an active role in driving the organization's success and overall performance. This level of engagement is often characterized by a strong connection to the company's values, a willingness to go above and beyond regular job responsibilities, and a genuine interest in the overall well-being of the organization (Budrienė & Diskienė, 2020).

Employee engagement is crucial for creating a positive workplace, enhancing productivity, and retaining talented and motivated employees. Engaged workers are more inclined to make meaningful contributions, promoting a culture of dedication and high performance throughout the organization (Ali Ababneh et al., 2021).

Employee Engagement's emotional facet involves a profound sense of connection and commitment (Rameshkumar, 2020). Engaged employees feel a genuine emotional bond with their work, deriving a deep sense of satisfaction and fulfillment from their contributions (Fait et al., 2023). This emotional commitment extends beyond the day-to-day tasks, fostering a passion that motivates employees to invest their energy and creativity (Rameshkumar, 2020). This emotional resonance arises from alignment with organizational values, fostering a positive environment where employees feel connected..

Engaged employees are not just aware of the organization's goals, they actively align their efforts with these objectives (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021). This awareness enhances their commitment and reinforces their role in achieving organizational success. This alignment creates a cohesive workforce, where employees work toward common goals, share a unified vision, and collectively contribute to the organization's success (Biriowu & Ofurum, 2020).

Effective communication is a crucial aspect of employee engagement (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021). Engaged employees experience open, transparent, and two-way communication channels within the organization (Verčič, 2021). They feel heard and valued, leading to increased job satisfaction. This communication fosters a collaborative environment where ideas are freely shared, concerns are addressed promptly, and feedback loops contribute to ongoing improvement and innovation (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021).

Employee engagement is evident in the collaborative efforts of engaged employees within teams (Rahmadan et al., 2020). Employee actively participate in group initiatives, readily share knowledge, and contribute positively to team dynamics. Engaged team members cultivate a sense of camaraderie and mutual support, creating an environment where collaboration flourishes (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022). This collaborative spirit enhances overall team productivity and contributes to a positive workplace culture.

In summary, employee engagement is self-explanatory, and organizations should continuously improve communication, foster a positive workplace culture, and enhance

engagement to drive organizational success.

2.4.2 Research History of Employee Engagement

The research history of Employee Engagement spans several decades, evolving as organizational and management concepts have developed. The term "Employee Engagement" gained recognition in the 1990s (Kahn, 1990). During this time, researchers began moving away from traditional measures of employee satisfaction, adopting a more comprehensive approach that considered the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of employees' relationships with their work and organization (Schaufeli, 2013). Researchers like William Kahn (1990) contributed to the early discussions, emphasizing the importance of employees' emotional involvement in their work.

In the early 2000s, the Gallup organization played a significant role in popularizing Employee Engagement with the introduction of the Gallup Q12 survey (Thackray,2001). This survey identified twelve key factors that correlated with high levels of employee engagement, such as having clear expectations, opportunities for professional development, and recognition for good work. The Gallup Q12 became a widely used tool for measuring and improving employee engagement.

The academic community started contributing more rigorously to the field of employee engagement during the mid-2000s. Scholars developed models and frameworks to understand and measure engagement. Notable models include the Hewitt Engagement Model (Hewitt, 2011), and the BlessingWhite's "X Model" of engagement (White, 2013). These models aimed to provide a structured approach to analyzing and enhancing engagement within organizations.

As organizations became more global, researchers began examining Employee Engagement in diverse cultural contexts. Studies explored how cultural differences impact engagement levels and how organizations could tailor their engagement strategies accordingly (Li et al., 2021). This period also saw an increased emphasis on the role of leadership in fostering engagement and the impact of engagement on business outcomes.

In recent years, with the advent of advanced technologies, research on employee engagement has incorporated digital tools and analytics (Mer & Srivastava, 2023). Employee engagement platforms, pulse surveys, and real-time feedback mechanisms have

become prevalent (Garg et al., 2021). The focus shifted toward enhancing the overall employee experience (Lemon, 2019), incorporating elements like flexible work arrangements (Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020), well-being programs (Martinez et al., 2021), and inclusion initiatives (Bapat & Upadhyay, 2021).

Current and future research on employee engagement continues to explore holistic well-being, psychological contract, physical, and emotional health (Gil-Beltrán et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2021; MM, 2021). Inclusivity and diversity are gaining prominence as organizations recognize the importance of creating environments where all employees feel engaged and valued (Adisa et al., 2023). The field is adapting to keep pace with the evolving nature of work and the shifting expectations of today's workforce (Anand & Acharya, 2021).

In essence, the history of research on employee engagement has evolved from an emphasis on job satisfaction to a broader understanding of the factors that shape employees' commitment, involvement, and overall well-being within organizations.

2.4.3 Current Research Focus on Employee Engagement

The integration of technology into the workplace remains a focal point in contemporary employee engagement research. Scholars are examining the intricate relationship between digital tools, employee engagement platforms, and artificial intelligence, seeking to comprehend their impact on the overall employee experience (Mer & Srivastava, 2023). This includes evaluating the role of technology in facilitating effective communication, providing timely feedback, and implementing personalized approaches that contribute to an enriched and engaging work environment (Saxena & Mishra, 2023).

A noteworthy emphasis in current research is on employee well-being and mental health as pivotal factors in shaping engagement levels (Rahman et al., 2020). Investigations are underway to understand the correlation between well-being initiatives, mental health support programs, and the overall engagement of employees (Sharma & Kumra, 2020). Researchers are exploring how organizations can cultivate a supportive atmosphere that addresses the holistic well-being of their workforce, recognizing the intrinsic connection between well-being and sustained engagement.

Inclusivity, diversity, equity, and inclusion have become central themes in contemporary employee engagement research (Campbell-Wray & Durham, 2022). Scholars are probing the impact of inclusive leadership practices on fostering a sense of belonging and engagement among a diverse workforce (Cohen, 2022). Concurrently, research is focusing on the effectiveness of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in creating environments that resonate with employees (Davis, 2021). Moreover, acknowledging the pivotal role of an inclusive culture in promoting sustained engagement (Shahid, 2023).

Traditional performance management paradigms are undergoing transformation, and current research is at the forefront of this evolution. Studies are examining the effectiveness of continuous feedback mechanisms, agile performance management, and ongoing development conversations in driving employee engagement (Mone & London, 2021). The shift towards more frequent and constructive feedback aligns with the evolving expectations of the contemporary workforce, emphasizing the dynamic nature of performance-related engagement factors (Tate et al., 2021).

Scholars are exploring how organizations can create environments conducive to employee expression, and active participation in decision-making processes (Geekiyanage et al., 2020). Recognizing that engaged employees often feel empowered to contribute to organizational success, research is focusing on strategies to amplify employee voices and foster a culture of shared responsibility (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021).

The alignment between organizational culture and employee values stands out as a critical area of exploration (Ababneh, 2021). Researchers are delving into how organizations can cultivate cultures that resonate with employees, emphasizing shared values and a collective sense of purpose. Understanding the symbiotic relationship between organizational culture and employee engagement is paramount, as studies highlight the positive impact of a culture that aligns with the values and aspirations of its workforce on overall engagement levels (Fidyah & Setiawati, 2020).

Despite the growing body of literature on employee engagement, existing studies have predominantly examined engagement as an outcome variable influenced by organizational practices, leadership styles, or team effectiveness (Biriowu & Ofurum, 2020; Cohen, 2022; Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022). Relatively limited attention has been given to

understanding employee engagement as a driving force that shapes and influences HRM practices themselves. In particular, there is a lack of empirical research exploring how varying levels of employee engagement affect the design, implementation, and effectiveness of HRM systems within organizations.

Furthermore, most prior studies have focused on large corporations or Western contexts (Clauss et al., 2025; Islam, 2025), leaving a noticeable gap in understanding how employee engagement influences HRM practices in SMEs, especially in emerging economies. The dynamic and resource-constrained nature of SMEs may alter the way employee engagement contributes to HRM decision-making, policy formulation, and management practices (Abas et al., 2024). However, this context has not been sufficiently examined in existing literature.

Current research often treats HRM practices as static organizational mechanisms, overlooking how engaged employees can actively shape HRM processes through participation, feedback, and behavioral contributions. There remains limited empirical evidence explaining how employee engagement functions as an antecedent to HRM effectiveness, rather than merely an outcome of HRM interventions. Addressing these gaps is essential to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the reciprocal relationship between employee engagement and HRM, thereby providing stronger theoretical and practical insights for organizational development.

2.5 Organizational Culture

2.5.1 Definition of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture refers to a common, persistent, and implicit social psychological phenomenon formed within an organization, including shared values, beliefs, and work styles among members (Sackmann, 2021). This culture is formed through factors such as organizational history, institutional arrangements, or work environment, and can be maintained and inherited (Sackmann, 2021). Organizational culture is not only a reflection of common cognition and behavioral patterns among organizational members, but also a source of unique identity and competitive advantage for the organization (Wang et al., 2022). It continuously influences the internal atmosphere of the organization and the work

attitude and performance of employees, thereby shaping the external image and reputation of the organization (Sackmann, 2021).

Organizational culture holds significant importance as it profoundly influences various facets of an organization (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). It directly shapes employee behavior, decision-making processes, and interpersonal interactions, thereby defining the work environment and fostering employee engagement (Acosta-Prado et al., 2020). The impact extends to organizational performance, where a positive and robust culture contributes to heightened productivity, increased employee satisfaction, and overall improved performance (Alshammari, 2020). Additionally, culture plays a pivotal role in recruitment and retention efforts, as individuals are naturally drawn to organizations aligning with their values and preferences (Acosta-Prado et al., 2020).

2.5.2 Research History of Organizational Culture

The concept of organizational culture was first introduced by Jaques (1951) highlighted the transformation of the factory's social environment and its effects on both workers and organizational culture during that period. It focused on a British publicly-held company involved in producing, selling, and servicing metal bearings, analyzing the development of corporate group behaviors (Kummerow & Kirby, 2013).

Though organizational culture did not gain significant attention in business until the 1970s and wasn't formally recognized until the 1980s, scholars began to explore it by drawing on sociology and anthropology. They suggested that organizations could have distinct cultures shaped by shared values, beliefs, and norms, which influence the behaviors and attitudes of their members (Glynn et al., 2013).

2.5.3 Current Research Focus on Organizational Culture

Organizational culture research remains dynamic, adapting to contemporary challenges and trends. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have emerged as crucial focal points, reflecting a growing recognition of the need for inclusive organizational cultures (Chaudhry et al., 2021). Researchers delve into how cultures can be shaped to foster inclusivity, address biases, and create environments that celebrate and embrace diversity, thereby enhancing overall organizational effectiveness (Cary Jr et al., 2020).

Leadership's pivotal role in shaping and transforming organizational culture is a persistent area of interest. Studies delve into various leadership styles and behaviors, exploring their impact on cultural norms and offering valuable insights into effective strategies for leading cultural change (Jamali et al., 2022). This research underscores the critical link between leadership practices and the cultivation of a positive and adaptive organizational culture (Khan et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated heightened interest in understanding how organizational cultures respond to crises and navigate transformative change, as highlighted by recent studies (Martinez et al., 2023). Scholars are delving into the intricacies of organizational resilience during times of crisis, seeking to uncover the specific cultural attributes that contribute to an organization's ability to adapt and thrive in the face of unforeseen challenges (Prihatin et al., 2022). Additionally, there is a dedicated focus on identifying and evaluating effective change management strategies within organizational cultures, with researchers exploring innovative approaches and best practices that facilitate successful adaptation and long-term sustainability (Martinez et al., 2023). This research not only provides valuable insights into organizational dynamics during times of upheaval but also contributes to the development of practical frameworks that can guide leaders in fostering resilient cultures and navigating change effectively.

Exploring the relationship between organizational culture and employee well-being highlights the growing focus on work-life balance (Paz et al., 2020). Researchers examine how cultural factors, such as support systems and flexibility, play a key role in enhancing employee satisfaction and well-being. Additionally, scholars acknowledge the significant impact of organizational culture on both the professional and personal lives of employees (Ficarra et al., 2020).

Given the increasingly globalized nature of many organizations, a sustained and heightened interest persists in comprehending the profound impact of cultural differences on organizational dynamics. Cross-cultural studies, exemplified by the work of Srivastava et al. (2020), delve into the intricate nuances of how organizational culture varies across diverse regions. These studies not only seek to unravel the distinct manifestations of organizational culture but also aim to illuminate the far-reaching implications that such cultural variations hold for the strategic operations of global businesses. By exploring the interplay between cultural nuances and organizational practices in different geographical

contexts, researchers strive to offer actionable insights that can inform international business strategies (Alsharari & Aljohani, 2023). Enhance cross-cultural collaboration can foster a deeper understanding of the intricate fabric that weaves organizational cultures on a global scale.

Previous studies have highlighted the strong interconnection between HRM practices and organizational culture. HRM practices, such as recruitment, training, leadership development, and performance management, help shape employees' cultural adaptation and reinforce organizational values (Oseghale et al., 2023; Alshammari, 2020). Conversely, organizational culture influences employee engagement, performance, and the overall work environment (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). Empirical evidence confirms a positive relationship between HRM practices and organizational culture in various contexts, including hotels and other large organizations (Kerdpitak & Jermsittiparsert, 2020; Botelho, 2020; Belias et al., 2019).

However, some studies reveal that organizational culture alone may not guarantee positive HRM outcomes, as its effectiveness often depends on aligned HRM practices to support training and development initiatives (Ballesteros Rodríguez et al., 2012). Moreover, most existing research focuses on large corporations or specific industries, leaving a notable gap in understanding how organizational culture and HRM practices interact in SMEs, particularly in emerging economies like China. The nuances of this relationship, including potential variations under different organizational conditions and contexts, remain underexplored. Addressing this gap is crucial to provide insights into how SMEs can leverage organizational culture to enhance HRM effectiveness, employee satisfaction, and overall organizational performance.

2.6 Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for men and women (World Health Organization, 2021). In organizational research, gender is commonly examined to understand how differences in socialization, expectations, and behaviors between males and females influence workplace interactions, decision-making processes, and employee outcomes.

Research on gender in organizational contexts has evolved from an initial focus on

workforce participation, representation, and equality to more nuanced investigations of gendered behaviors, leadership styles, and organizational decision-making. Early studies primarily addressed gender discrimination, pay gaps, and underrepresentation in leadership roles. Contemporary research emphasizes the moderating role of gender in shaping the effects of organizational practices on employee outcomes, reflecting an increased scholarly interest in diversity, equity, and inclusion (Shin et al., 2020; Antony et al., 2020).

Studies have demonstrated that gender can moderate the relationship between HRM practices and employee outcomes. For instance, Shin et al. (2020) found that women's emotional commitment responded more positively to high-engagement HRM systems, while Antony et al. (2020) reported that faculty and staff gender influenced the relationship between talent management and organizational commitment. Additionally, gender has been shown to affect the links between leadership styles or organizational diversity and employee satisfaction (Chen et al., 2021; Hsiao et al., 2020), as well as employee engagement in religious, cultural, or organizational contexts (Rożnowski & Zarzycka, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). Research also suggests that gender diversity in leadership teams can enhance decision-making, creativity, and foster inclusive organizational cultures (Eagly & Carli, 2022).

Despite increasing attention, several gaps remain in the literature. First, most studies examine gender as a moderator in specific contexts, such as leadership, diversity, or individual HRM practices, but there is limited research investigating its moderating role across multiple employee-related variables simultaneously, including employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture. Second, research on gender in SMEs and emerging economies is scarce, as most evidence comes from large corporations or Western contexts, limiting understanding of gender's impact on HRM effectiveness in resource-constrained or culturally distinct settings. Finally, there is insufficient exploration of how gender interacts with organizational culture and HRM practices to shape employee outcomes within an integrated, holistic framework.

2.7 Research Gaps

The study revealed inconsistent results in the relationship between HRM practices and employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture, particularly across different industry and regional contexts (Ababneh, 2021; Božović et al., 2019; Miah &

Hafid, 2019; Kerdpitak & Jermsittiparsert, 2020). This highlights the need for further verification of these relationships. Additionally, the impact of various HRM practices practices on employee engagement varies, necessitating further research to identify the most effective management practices (Al Kurdi et al., 2021; Tensay & Singh, 2020). Moreover, although organizational culture influences HRM practices effectiveness, existing research lacks a comprehensive understanding of these conditional effects, especially their manifestation in different organizational environments.

The study also indicates that gender moderates the relationship between HRM practices and various variables (Antony et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Hsiao et al., 2020). However, limited research exists on whether gender moderates the relationship between HRM practices and employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture. There is a need to explore the moderating role of gender in these relationships within the context of SMEs in Jinan, to address this research gap.

In summary, future research should aim to verify the relationship between HRM practices and employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture in various contexts. It should also analyze the impact of specific HRM practices on engagement and explore the interactive effects of organizational culture and HRM practices. Furthermore, in-depth research on the moderating role of gender in these relationships is necessary to provide a foundation for organizations to develop more effective HRM strategies.

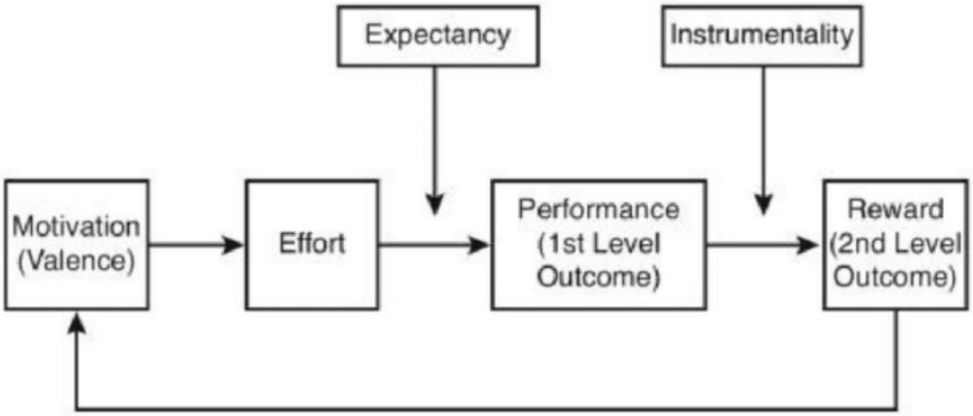
2.8 Underpinning Theories

2.8.1 Expectancy Theory

In 1964, Victor H. Vroom developed expectancy theory, a psychological framework that explains individual motivation and behavior by suggesting that people act based on the expectation that their efforts will lead to desired outcomes (Darboe, 1999). Over the years, expectancy theory has become a foundational concept in organizational behavior and management studies (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018). It provides valuable insights into individual motivation, decision-making, and behavior choices (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020), making it instrumental in understanding employee engagement, job satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, and the design of incentive systems within organizations. Its

significance lies in offering a comprehensive understanding of how individuals make choices to maximize their expected outcomes in various organizational contexts.

Figure 2-1:
Vroom's Expectancy Theory

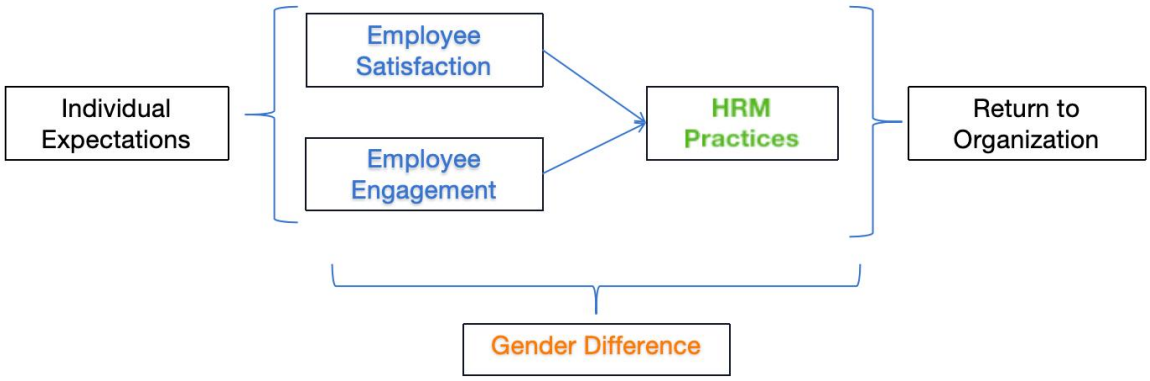


Expectancy theory is applicable to this study as it explains how employees' perceptions, motivations, and expectations influence organizational outcomes (Emmanuel & Nwuzor, 2021). In the context of this study, employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture shape employees' motivation and behaviors, which in turn influence the effectiveness of HRM practices. For example, when employees are satisfied with their job and work environment, they are more likely to participate actively in HRM-related processes, enhancing recruitment, training, performance management, and reward systems (Zboja et al., 2020).

Employee engagement is particularly relevant, as highly engaged employees are more proactive, committed, and willing to contribute to organizational initiatives. Expectancy theory suggests that when employees perceive that their efforts align with organizational goals and that the organization values their contributions, HRM practices are more effectively implemented (Memon et al., 2021).

Gender can further moderate these relationships, as employees of different genders may have varying expectations and responses to HRM practices. Expectancy theory helps explain that tailoring HRM strategies to consider gender differences can enhance the influence of employee satisfaction, and engagement on HRM effectiveness.

Figure 2-2:
Expectancy Theory Applied to the Research Framework

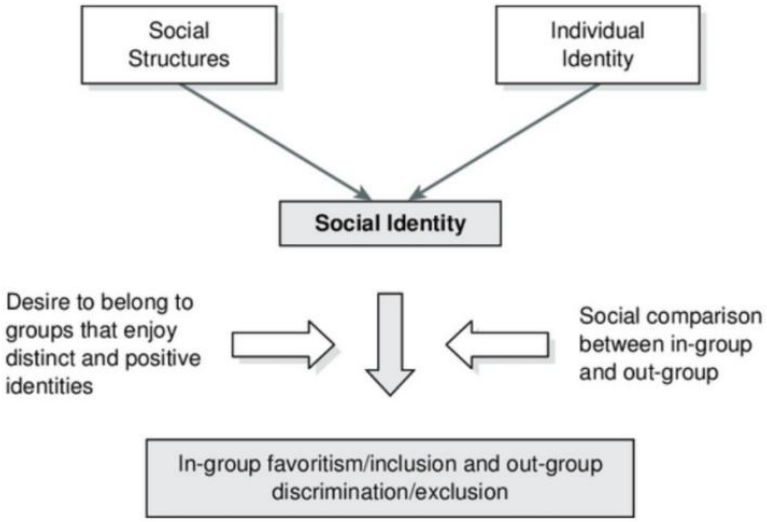


In summary, expectancy theory provides a framework to understand how employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture influence HRM practices, highlighting the importance of employee perceptions and expectations while accounting for gender as a moderating factor.

2.8.2 Social Identity Theory

The social identity theory is a theory proposed by Henri Tajfel, emphasizing how individuals define their identity through identification with specific social groups and shape their self-concept through this group identification (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). The development of this theory includes explanations for phenomena such as group bias and discrimination, and has become one of the key theories in the fields of social psychology, organizational behavior, and cross-cultural research (Hogg, 2016). The theory of social identity not only helps to understand individual behavior and attitudes within a group, but also explains the impact of organizational culture on employee behavior, the formation of group bias and discrimination, and the relationship between leadership and group dynamics (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Overall, social identity theory provides profound insights into how individuals shape their sense of identity within social groups and its impact on behavior and interaction.

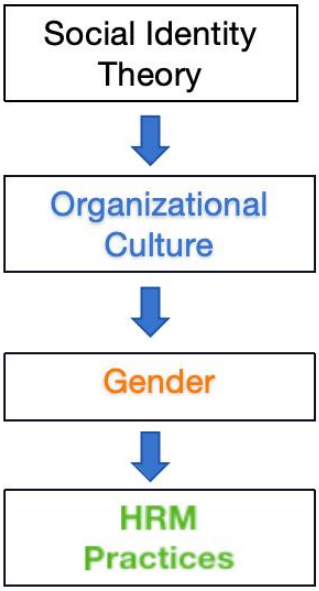
Figure 2-3:
Social Identity Theory's Basic Principles



Social identity theory is relevant to this study as it emphasizes how employees' identification with the organization shapes their attitudes and behaviors. Organizational culture is a central element of social identity, as it establishes shared values, norms, and expectations within the organization (Lubis & Hanum, 2020). HRM practices play a crucial role in reinforcing this culture by selecting employees aligned with organizational values, providing training consistent with cultural norms, and fostering behaviors that consolidate organizational identity. A strong alignment between organizational culture and HRM practices enhances employees' sense of belonging and strengthens their commitment, which in turn supports the effective implementation of HRM strategies.

Furthermore, gender may moderate the relationship between organizational culture and HRM practices. Employees of different genders may interpret and internalize organizational values differently, leading to varying responses to HRM initiatives (Rocha & Van Praag, 2020). Understanding these gender-based differences enables HRM strategies to better accommodate diverse employee perspectives, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of HRM practices in shaping and sustaining organizational culture.

Figure 2-4:
Social Identity Theory Applied to the Research Framework

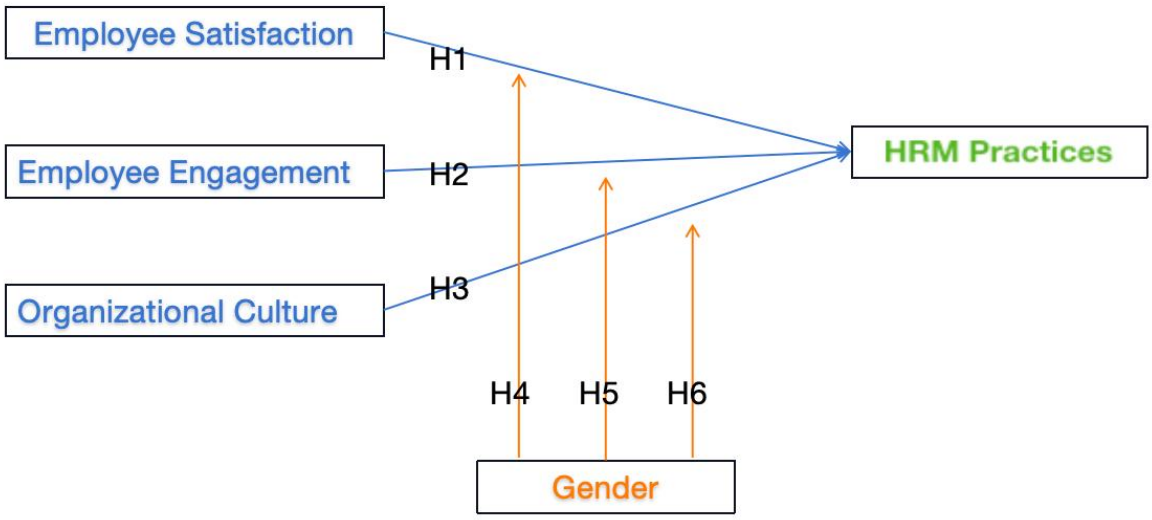


In summary, social identity theory provides a framework to understand how organizational culture influences HRM practices and highlights the moderating role of gender, offering theoretical support for designing more inclusive and culturally aligned HRM strategies.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

Based on the guidance of expectancy theory and social identity theory, this study forms the corresponding conceptual framework for this study. In the structure of this study, employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational culture constitute the independent variables, and HRM practices is considered as the dependent variable, gender as the moderating variable. An in-depth study of the interrelationships between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, gender and HRM practices reveals their important role in organizational operations. This comprehensive research helps organizations deepen their understanding of human resources and cultural factors, providing important insights and guidance for developing targeted management strategies.

Figure 2-5:
Conceptual Framework



2.10 Hypothesis Development

This study develops hypotheses based on the relationships between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, gender, and HRM practices. The hypotheses are grounded in expectancy theory and social identity theory, which provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how these factors influence HRM practices in SMEs.

2.10.1 Employee Satisfaction and HRM practices

Employee satisfaction is closely related to human resource management, and various HRM practices strategies directly or indirectly affect employee satisfaction with work and organization. From recruitment, training, performance management to compensation and benefits, as well as a good communication and work environment, these factors collectively build an employee experience (Kumar, 2022). By focusing on employee development, incentive mechanisms, and a positive work culture, organizations can improve employee satisfaction (Chen et al., 2022), thereby promoting overall performance and employee loyalty (Nadeak & Naibaho, 2020).

Rodjam et al. (2020) found a positive relationship between HRM practices and employee satisfaction. Wikhamn's (2019) study also supports this conclusion. The survey conducted by Cho and Choi (2021) on frontline employees in the hotel industry showed a

positive correlation between HRM practices and employee satisfaction. Further research has revealed that the survey results on the impact of HRM practices policies on job satisfaction among employees in the Kurdistan region of Iraq show that rewards and incentives, empowerment, communication, and motivation are the most important indicators of employee job satisfaction.

However, some studies have produced differing results. For example, Mira et al. (2019) analyzed data from 367 employees at the Saudi Arabian Port Authority and found that while HRM practices did not show a significant connection with job satisfaction. Given this research controversy, further investigation is required to better understand the complex relationship between employee satisfaction and HRM practices.

From a theoretical perspective, expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964; Emmanuel & Nwuzor, 2021) provides a foundation for understanding how employee satisfaction can positively influence HRM practices. The theory posits that employees are motivated when they perceive that their efforts and work outcomes are valued and rewarded. When employees experience high satisfaction, through recognition, supportive work environments, and fulfillment of their expectations, they are more likely to engage constructively with HRM processes, such as providing feedback, participating in training programs, and supporting organizational initiatives. Therefore, drawing on Expectancy Theory, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypotheses 1: Employee satisfaction has a a positive influence on HRM practices in SMEs.

2.10.2 Employee Engagement and HRM practices

From recruitment and training to performance management, communication, leadership, as well as work environment and employee development, HRM practices directly shapes employee engagement in multiple aspects (Saks, 2022). By establishing transparent communication channels, providing development opportunities, implementing effective performance management and recognition plans, HRM practices can stimulate employee engagement, thereby improving the overall performance of the organization and employee loyalty (Govender & Bussin, 2020). Employee engagement is not only a key factor for organizational success, but also the result of the comprehensive influence of

HRM practices strategies, laying the foundation for creating a positive work culture and improving employee satisfaction (Turner, 2019).

Saks (2022) found a positive correlation between employee engagement and HRM practices. The survey results of Saad et al. (2020) indicate that HRM practices have a significant positive influence on employee engagement. Especially, these practices include selection and recruitment, job design, and reward and payment systems. Jose and Mampily's (2021) study suggests that higher HRM practices can lead to greater employee engagement. In a study conducted by Vuong and Suntrayuth (2019) on the banking industry in Vietnam, it was found that HRM practices positively influence employee engagement.

However, some studies have yielded inconsistent conclusions, with Singh and Pandey (2020) finding that green performance management is not a prominent dimension that affects employee engagement. This indicates that the relationship between employee engagement and HRM practices may have different research results under different research backgrounds.

From a theoretical standpoint, expectancy theory helps explain the positive impact of employee engagement on HRM practices (Supatn & Puapradit, 2019). According to the theory, employees are motivated when they perceive a clear link between their efforts and desirable outcomes. Highly engaged employees, characterized by dedication, active participation, and commitment to organizational goals, are more likely to support and enhance HRM processes, including training initiatives, performance management, and organizational development programs. Based on this theoretical perspective, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypotheses 2: Employee engagement positively influences HRM practices in SMEs.

2.10.3 Organizational Culture and HRM practices

HRM practices influences employees' cultural adaptation through recruitment, training, and leadership development, emphasizing the consistency of organizational values (Oseghale et al., 2023). On the contrary, organizational culture has a profound impact on employee engagement, performance management, and the overall work

environment (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). HRM practices plays a crucial role in shaping organizational culture by guiding leaders, driving change management, and ensuring that performance management aligns with culture, creating a work atmosphere conducive to employee development and organizational success (Alshammari, A. A. (2020). This interaction provides a foundation for establishing a positive work culture, improving employee satisfaction.

The research conducted by Kerdpitak and Jermsittiparsert (2020) highlights a noteworthy finding indicating a positive correlation between organizational culture and HRM practices. In alignment with this, Botelho's (2020) investigation similarly underscores the positive influence of organizational culture on HRM practices. Furthermore, the comprehensive case study undertaken by Belias et al. (2019) delves into the intricate dynamics between human resource management and the efficacious cultural development of hotels. The outcomes derived from the survey not only affirm but also shed light on the interactive and mutually influential relationship between human resources and organizational culture. In essence, these collective studies substantiate the interconnectedness and symbiotic nature of HRM practices and organizational culture, emphasizing the significance of a harmonious interplay between the two in fostering a conducive workplace environment.

However, Ballesteros Rodríguez et al. (2012) made a noteworthy discovery in their study. According to their research, organizational culture alone may not significantly influence the success of training programs unless there is concurrent implementation of HRM practices to support the training process. This suggests that the impact of organizational culture on HRM practices is contingent, and under different circumstances, there might be nuanced variations in the relationship between the two.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Mittal et al., 2022) provides a foundation for understanding how organizational culture influences HRM practices. The theory suggests that individuals derive a sense of self and belonging from the social groups to which they belong, including their organization. When employees strongly identify with organizational values, norms, and culture, they are more likely to engage with HRM processes, support organizational initiatives, and align their behaviors with strategic goals. By fostering a cohesive culture through recruitment, training, performance management, and leadership development, HRM practices can reinforce employees' organizational

identification, which in turn enhances their effectiveness. Drawing on this theoretical perspective, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypotheses 3: Organizational culture positively influences HRM practices in SMEs.

2.10.4 The Moderating Role of Gender

Research has found that gender can moderate the relationship between HRM practices and different variables. Shin et al. (2020) found that women's emotional commitment responded more strongly and positively to employees' overall perceptions of store level high engagement HRM practices systems. Antony et al. (2020) also found that the gender of faculty and staff affects the relationship between talent management and organizational commitment.

In addition, research has also found that gender can moderate the relationship between employee satisfaction and other variables. Chen et al. (2021) founded that gender can moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee job satisfaction. Hsiao et al. (2020) also founded that gender plays a a moderating role of organizational ethnic diversity and employee satisfaction (Hsiao et al., 2020). Vuong and Suntrayuth's (2019) study found that frontline male employees can strengthen the positive relationship between HRM practices and employee engagement. The study by Ariyanto et al. (2020) found that gender may serve as a moderating variable in the relationship between cultural and tax evasion moral beliefs.

Based on social role theory (Eagly, 1987), gender shapes individual expectations, behaviors, and interactions within organizational contexts. Men and women may perceive and respond differently to HRM practices due to socialized roles, responsibilities, and motivational priorities. Therefore, gender can influence the strength or direction of the relationships between employee outcomes (satisfaction, engagement, culture) and HRM practices. Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) also supports this rationale: employees of different genders may have differing expectations about rewards, recognition, and career development, which affects how HRM strategies are received.

From the above studies, it can be seen that most of them focus on whether gender moderates HRM practices and other variables, or whether gender moderates employee

satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and other variables. There is relatively little exploration on whether gender moderates the relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypotheses 4: Gender moderate the relationship between employee satisfaction and HRM practices in SMEs.

Hypotheses 5: Gender moderate the relationship between employee engagement and HRM practices in SMEs.

Hypotheses 6: Gender moderate the relationship between organizational culture and HRM practices in SMEs.

2.11 Chapter Summary

Expectancy theory and social identity theory are the fundamental theories studied in this study. Based on these theories, this study proposes corresponding research frameworks. In addition, this chapter reviews the relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, gender and HRM practices. Many studies have confirmed the positive effects of employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational culture on HRM practices, and the mediating effect of gender. However, some studies have yielded inconsistent results, . Based on the research controversy, this study proposes corresponding research hypotheses to further verify the relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices in the context of SMEs in China.

CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter summarizes the research methodology and describes the research design used. Commencing with an introduction, the chapter delves into the research design, elucidating the chosen approach's structure and rationale. It clarifies the research type, indicating whether the study is empirical, theoretical, or exploratory. A comprehensive discussion on sample selection follows, encompassing region and object selection criteria, sampling methods, and considerations for determining sample size. The questionnaire section highlights its development, structure, and design considerations. Data analysis strategies, including reliability and validity analyses and correlation analyses, are explored. The chapter concludes with a concise summary, encapsulating the methodologies applied and ensuring a thorough understanding of the research framework.

3.2 Positivism Research Paradigm

Positivism is a research paradigm that assumes reality is objective, measurable, and independent of the researcher. It emphasizes the use of empirical observation, quantification, and statistical analysis to identify patterns, test hypotheses, and establish causal relationships (Maksimovic & Evtimov, 2023). Within this paradigm, knowledge is considered valid only when it is derived from observable and measurable evidence, allowing researchers to generalize findings across different contexts.

The positivist paradigm is characterized by objectivity, deductive reasoning, and the use of quantitative research methods (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). It emphasizes hypothesis testing, measurement, and statistical analysis to examine relationships among variables. Researchers adopting this paradigm aim to minimize subjectivity and bias, relying on structured instruments such as questionnaires and standardized scales to ensure reliability and validity of findings. Positivism also assumes a clear separation between the

researcher and the research subject, enabling neutral and value-free inquiry (Chirkov, 2024).

In organizational and human resource management research, positivism is widely used to examine relationships among variables such as employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices. By applying quantitative methods, researchers can identify patterns, test theoretical assumptions, and evaluate causal relationships that inform evidence-based management decisions. Positivist approaches are particularly suitable for studies seeking to generalize findings across organizations or industries, as they emphasize measurement consistency and statistical rigor (Sanchez et al., 2023).

This study adopts the positivist paradigm because it aims to examine the relationships between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices through hypothesis testing and statistical analysis. The research seeks to identify measurable patterns and empirically verify theoretical relationships rather than explore subjective meanings or individual interpretations. Given the study's focus on testing established theories and examining causal relationships using quantitative data from SMEs, positivism provides an appropriate and robust philosophical foundation. By adopting this paradigm, the study ensures objectivity, reliability, and generalizability of findings, thereby contributing empirical evidence to the existing HRM literature.

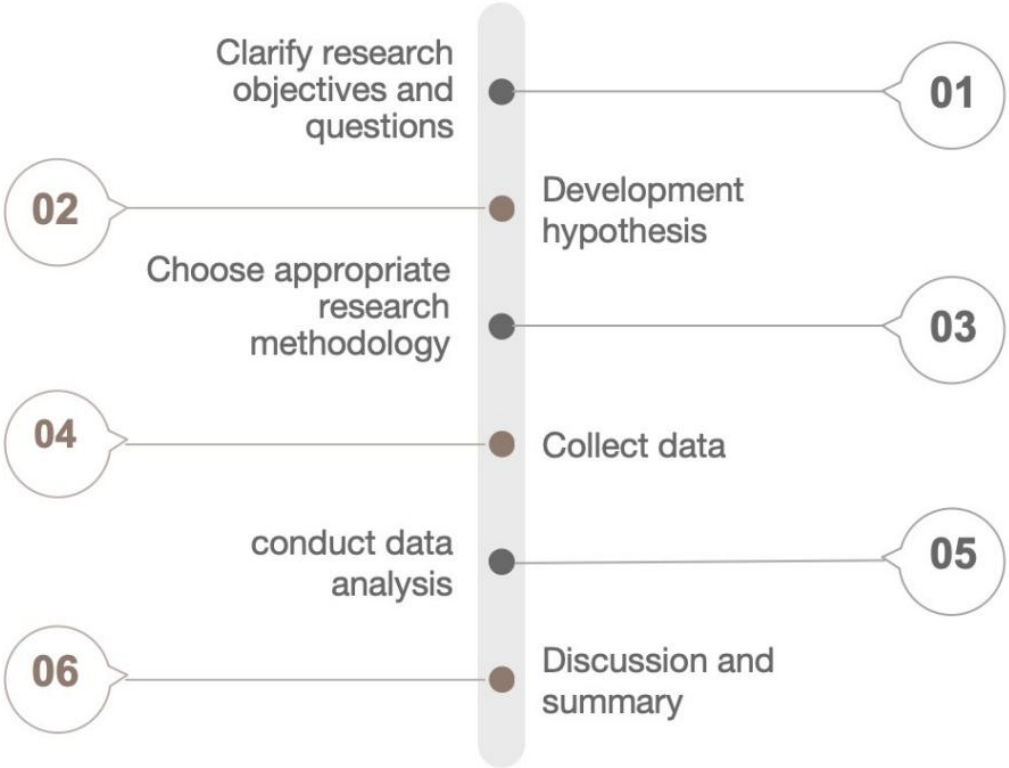
3.3 Research Design

Research design plays an extremely important role in scientific research, not only ensuring the scientific validity and credibility of the research, but also helping to clarify the research objectives and issues (Sovacool et al., 2018). Reasonable research design also helps to improve research efficiency, effectively manage research resources, and enhance the credibility of research results (Ioannidis et al., 2014). Due to the possibility of unpredictable situations during the research process, a reasonable research design can help reduce research risks. A reasonable research design can avoid bias during the research process, making research more targeted and efficient, and providing a solid foundation for the success and advancement of scientific research (Mattes et al., 2022).

This study outlines the research objectives and questions. It then conducts a comprehensive literature review and formulates the corresponding research hypotheses.

The steps of data collection follow closely, and after completing the data collection, the data is organized and analyzed. Finally, the information hidden in the data is discussed and summarized in conjunction with relevant research. To effectively address the research objectives, the research design must provide a comprehensive outline of the overall structure and organizational framework, which will guide the entire study. This design is visually represented in the following figure, illustrating the key components and the relationships between them.

Figure 3-1:
Research Design



3.4 Research Type

The research types are mainly divided into quantitative research, qualitative research, and mixed research. Qualitative research focuses on deep understanding, analyzing non numerical data to provide detailed descriptions, but the results are relatively subjective (Ahmad et al., 2019). Mixed research combines the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative methods, which not only has verifiability but also allows for a deeper understanding of the underlying context, but the execution is relatively complex

(Hall & Hall, 2020). Quantitative research focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis, with objectivity and universality (Ahmad et al., 2019). The advantage of quantitative research lies in its emphasis on quantitative data and statistical analysis, making research results more objective and universal. Through the collection of large-scale samples and standardized data analysis, quantitative research can provide clear and verifiable conclusions. Quantitative research can making horizontal comparisons, and providing scientific support for decision-making and policy recommendations (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019).

Quantitative research suits the study's objectives by systematically measuring the relationships between employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices in SMEs through statistical analysis.

3.5 Population

In recent years, SMEs in Jinan have developed rapidly, with over 2600 industrial enterprises above designated size and 135 newly added SMEs in recent years (Geng, 2023). The government has strengthened support for SMEs by enhancing public service systems and promoting innovation, particularly targeting high-quality enterprises with strong potential for growth and doubling development (Zhu, 2023; Zhang, 2023). Jinan, as the capital of Shandong Province, offers a unique economic environment and industrial structure, making its SMEs a suitable research focus. Studying them allows exploration of policy effectiveness, local economic characteristics, and industrial challenges, while also being operationally feasible due to easier access to data and field research. Overall, examining SMEs in Jinan provides valuable insights into the interaction between local economy, government policies, and enterprise development, offering guidance for regional economic and social improvement.

The population of this study consists of employees working in SMEs within the new energy–related sectors in Jinan, Shandong Province. Although official statistics do not provide an exact figure for the total number of SME employees at either the municipal or provincial level, existing data indicate that SMEs constitute a major source of employment in the region. According to official statistics, by the end of 2023, the number of individual business operators in Shandong Province reached approximately 14.03 million, with a substantial concentration in SME-intensive industries such as wholesale and retail

(approximately 7.13 million) and accommodation and catering services (around 1.75 million). In addition, private enterprises account for more than 80% of total employment in the province. At the municipal level, Jinan High-tech Zone alone accommodates over 1,300 enterprises with approximately 42,000 employees, further reflecting the significant role of SMEs in the regional employment structure. These figures collectively demonstrate the representativeness and relevance of selecting SME employees in Jinan as the target population for this study.

The unit of analysis in this study is the individual employee, rather than the organization as a whole. This is because the research focuses on employees' perceptions and experiences, including employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices. Each respondent represents an independent analytical unit, and their individual responses form the basis of the empirical analysis.

The sample for this study was drawn from three SMEs operating in the new energy vehicle sector in Jinan. To ensure the relevance and reliability of the data, respondents were required to meet the following criteria: (1) being formally employed in the organization, (2) having at least six months of working experience in the current organization, and (3) being 18 years of age or older. No restrictions were placed on gender, job position, or length of overall work experience. This sampling approach allows for the inclusion of diverse employee perspectives and enhances the representativeness of the collected data.

3.6 Research Sample

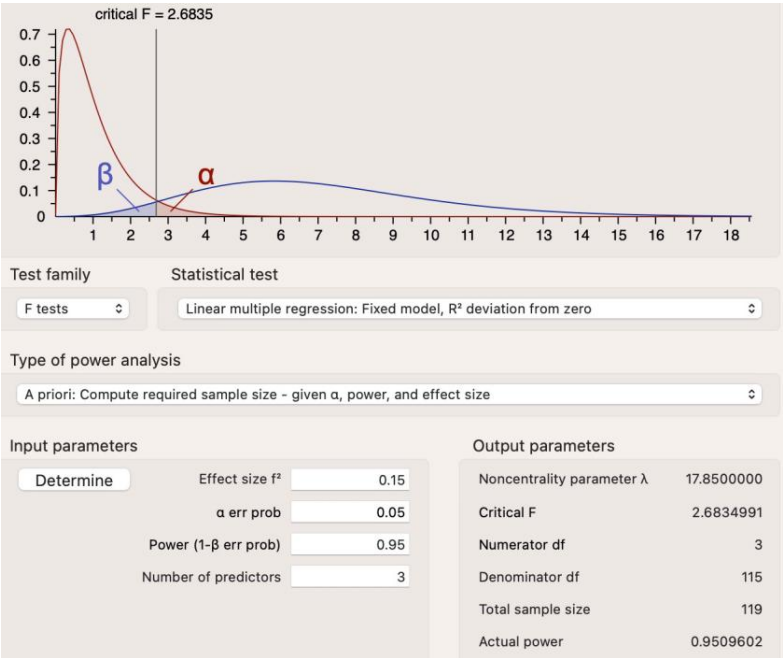
Judgmental sampling is a non probabilistic sampling method characterized by researchers subjectively selecting samples based on professional knowledge and experience (Curtis, 2011). This method has advantages in flexibility and resource efficiency, allowing researchers to quickly select the most critical or representative individuals for research based on the specific needs of the research problem, saving time and cost (Reddy & Ramasamy, 2016). The importance of judging sampling lies in fully utilizing professional knowledge and being suitable for in-depth research in specific fields. At the same time, its subjectivity also needs to be carefully considered when using it to avoid selection bias.

Based on the research objectives and questions of this study, it is judged that sampling is more suitable for this study. This sampling method allows for flexible selection of samples for specific purposes, and researchers can use professional insights to quickly determine the most critical or representative individuals for the study. The advantages of judgmental sampling are reflected in high efficiency, resource conservation, and suitability for personalized research in special situations.

Determining sample size is a crucial step in research design, which requires selecting appropriate statistical tests and formulas for calculating sample size based on factors such as research type, purpose, significance level, and statistical efficacy. Estimating the size of the effect, selecting appropriate statistical tests, and conducting sensitivity analysis are important steps in determining the sample size. Effective sample size calculation helps to ensure that research results have statistical significance and credibility, thereby enhancing the scientific value of research (Berger et al., 2014).

G*Power is a commonly used statistical software used to calculate the required sample size in experimental research. This study verifies the correlation between variables, therefore T-test was chosen and corresponding calculation data were set. The effect size is 0.15, the α error is 0.05, the power (1-β error prob) level is 95%, and the calculated the minimum sample size is 119:

Figure 3-2:
Minimum sample size calculation using G*Power



3.7 Questionnaire Development

A reasonable and rigorous survey questionnaire plays a crucial role in quantitative research. Through well-defined questions, clear logical structures, and appropriate design principles, questionnaires help ensure the quality and credibility of data, enabling research to achieve established goals. Its effectiveness is reflected in improving the feasibility of data analysis, ensuring sample representativeness, promoting participant understanding and enthusiasm, while complying with research ethics and regulatory standards (Fowler, 1995). A reasonable survey questionnaire provides a solid foundation for research and helps to promote the accumulation and promotion of scientific knowledge.

A survey questionnaire for quantitative research usually includes basic parts such as introduction, background information, measurement of research variables and main research questions, operational variables, response methods and scale selection, order and logic of questions, as well as concluding remarks and gratitude. When designing a questionnaire, the key is to ensure the accuracy, clarity, and objectivity of the questions, as well as the ease of understanding and answering by participants. Through careful design and testing, the data required for research can be meet research questions and objectives.

The variables studied include employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices. The questionnaire responses are all multiple-choice questions. This study used a 5-point Likert-type scale to measure participants' responses. The employee satisfaction scale adapted from Anh (2021), employee engagement scale adapted from Chopra et al. (2024), organizational culture scale adapted from Lam et al. (2021), and HRM practices scale adapted from Dobrosavljević & Urošević (2020). The specific terms are as follows:

Table 3-1:
Questionnaire

Statement	Variables
1.Considering my skills and the effort I put into my work, I am satisfied with my salary and professional allowance	**Employee Satisfaction** Anh (2021)
2.My supervisor is not helpful to me in getting my job done.	
3.Physical working conditions make my working unpleasant.	
4.I like the people I work with.	
5.I like doing the things I do at work.	

1.I feel a strong sense of belonging to my job. 2.I care about the future of my company. 3.I do more than what is expected of me. 4.I often go above what is expected of me to help my team succeed. 5.Working at my current organisation has a great deal of personal meaning to me. 6.I am proud to tell others that I work for my current organisation.	**Employee Engagement** Chopra et al. (2024)
1.Our organization promotes a collaborative culture in which employees are encouraged to work together and support one another. 2.There is a willingness to collaborate across organizational units within our organization. 3.Our company members have reciprocal faith in others' ability. 4.Our company members have reciprocal faith in others' behaviors to work toward organizational goals. 5.Our company provides various formal training programs for the performance of duties. 6.Our company encourages people to attend seminars, symposia, etc.	**Organizational Culture** Lam et al. (2021)
1.Human resources are continuously learning on job. 2.Human resources are prepared to use methods and techniques for BPI. 3.Human resources are prepared to manage new or improved business processes. 4.Human resources are reliable and achieve the goals of business processes. 5.Recognized effort of human resources gets rewarded.	**HRM Practices** Dobrosavljević & Urošević (2020)

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

The online data collection method has many advantages, which make it a commonly used choice in research and surveys. Firstly, online data collection can cover a wider area, allowing researchers to obtain data from participants from different regions, cultures, and groups. This helps to increase the diversity of the sample. Secondly, compared to traditional offline data collection methods, online data collection is usually more economical. There is no cost for paper questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and no need to pay for on-site researchers. In addition, online data collection is usually faster. Participants can access questionnaires or surveys anytime and anywhere, reducing waiting time. This is particularly important for research projects that require rapid data acquisition. Finally, for participants, participating in online surveys or filling out online questionnaires is relatively convenient. They can complete it at their own time and place without the need to go to a specific location. Overall, online data collection methods provide researchers with more convenient, economical, flexible.

The platform for this online data collection is Wenjuanxing The reasons for choosing Wenjuanxing as a data collection platform include its intuitive and user-friendly

interface, as well as support for a variety of question types. In addition, Wenjuanxing has real-time data collection capabilities and can distribute options through multiple channels. After completing data collection, Wenjuanxing has convenient data analysis and export functions, and emphasizes anonymity and privacy protection. In addition, the cost-effectiveness of Wenjuanxing also provides an economical and effective choice for this study Choose.

The scheduled time for data collection and analysis is three weeks. The following table presents in a clear manner the different stages of the three-week data collection process, the time allocation for each stage, and the main activities for each stage.

Table 3-2:
Validity Range on KMO

Stage	Time & Activities
Week 1	Day 1-2: Determine the research objectives, questions, and hypotheses, and develop a survey plan.
	Day 3-4: Create questionnaire, including question design and logical setup.
	Day 5-6: Conduct preliminary testing and revise questionnaire.
	Day 7: Set questionnaire logic jump, branching, and logic validation.
Week 2	Day 1-2: Invite testers to conduct questionnaire tests and collect feedback.
	Day 3-4: Revised questionnaire based on test feedback.
	Day 5-6: Retest the revised questionnaire to ensure complete logic and process.
	Day 7: Finalize questionnaire version.
Week 3	Day 1： Configure the Wenjuanxing platform, set questionnaire parameters and distribution methods.
	Day 1-3: Initiate data collection and distribute questionnaires through multiple channels.
	Day 4: Regularly monitor data collection progress and adjust distribution strategies.
	Day 5-6: After data collection is completed, export the data for preliminary analysis.
	Day 7: Conduct in-depth data analysis to obtain preliminary conclusions.

3.9 Pilot Study

Pilot studies helps researchers detect and solve potential problems early by testing measurement tools on small-scale samples (Hazzi & Maldaon, 2015). Pilot studies can ensure the feasibility and effectiveness of the research. Pilot studies not only provide opportunities to optimize research design and tools, but also help evaluate sample size and

improve implementation processes (Pearson et al., 2020).

Before the formal distribution of the questionnaire, a pilot test had been conducted with 30 participants from an SME in the Jinan area to ensure the reliability and validity of the research instrument. During the pilot testing process, the clarity and comprehensibility of the questionnaire items were also examined to ensure that participants could clearly understand and appropriately respond to each item. The pilot test helped refine the questionnaire and ensured the collection of more accurate and reliable data during the large-scale survey.

3.10 Data Analysis

3.10.1 Reliability and Validity Analysis

The importance of reliability and validity analysis in research cannot be ignored. Reliability ensures the stability and consistency of measurement tools, improves data accuracy, and supports the reproducibility and credibility of research (Roberts & Priest, 2006). Validity ensures that the measuring tool accurately captures the concept or feature to be measured, supports the generalizability of research conclusions, reduces the risk of misleading conclusions, and improves the quality of empirical research (Thanasegaran, 2009). Comprehensive reliability and validity analysis helps to ensure the quality of measurement tools and provides a reliable and scientific foundation for research.

Cronbach's alpha is a statistical indicator used to measure the internal consistency of measurement tools, with values ranging from 0 to 1. The closer to 1, the stronger the consistency of each item in the tool when measuring the same concept or feature. Generally speaking, an alpha value greater than 0.8 indicates good internal consistency within the tool, a value between 0.7 and 0.8 indicates good consistency, a value between 0.6 and 0.7 indicates moderate consistency, and a value less than 0.6 may indicate poor consistency.

3.10.2 Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates the strength and direction of linear relationships (Kader & Franklin, 2008). A larger absolute value suggests a stronger

relationship, with positive values showing a positive correlation and negative values indicating a negative correlation.

When the correlation coefficient is within the range of 0.00-0.19, it indicates that the relationship between the two variables is very weak and can be considered almost unrelated; Within the range of 0.20-0.39, the relationship exists but is weak; Within the range of 0.40 to 0.59, the relationship has moderate strength; Within the range of 0.60-0.79, the relationship is strong and shows significant intensity; In the range of 0.80-1.00, the relationship is very strong and can be considered highly correlated.

Table 3-3:
The Scale of Pearson Correlation Coefficients

Scale of Correlation Coefficient	Value
0<r<0.190<r<0.19	Very low correlation
0.2≤r<0.390.2≤r<0.39	Low correlation
0.4≤r<0.590.4<r<0.59	Moderate correlation
0.6Sr≤0.790.6Sr≤0.79	High correlation
0.8<r≤1.00.8≤r≤1.0	Very high correlation

3.10.3 Moderating Analysis

Smart PLS was used in this study to analyze the moderating effect of gender on the relationships between employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices. The analysis involved constructing interaction terms to examine gender's moderating role and assessing their significance through T-statistics, P-values, and confidence intervals. Bootstrap sampling was applied to enhance the robustness of parameter estimates and ensure reliable results. The process also included evaluating the model's fit and interpreting the interaction effects. Smart PLS's user-friendly interface streamlined these steps, allowing for efficient hypothesis testing

A comprehensive structural model was constructed to examine the relationships among employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, gender, and HRM practices. The measurement model was assessed for reliability and validity, evaluating internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of survey items. The structural model was analyzed to determine the significance and strength of

these relationships, incorporating interaction terms to test gender's moderating effect. Finally, hypotheses regarding gender's moderating role were validated by examining path coefficients and the significance of interaction effects.

By using Smart PLS, the study provided nuanced insights into how gender influences the relationship between HRM practices and key employee outcomes within SMEs in the new energy vehicle industry in Jinan. This approach not only enhanced the robustness of the findings but also contributed to a deeper understanding of the differential impacts of HRM practices strategies on diverse employee groups. The results proved instrumental in guiding SMEs in developing more tailored and effective HRM practices strategies that account for gender differences, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and productive work environment.

3.10.4 Data Analysis Tools

Smart PLS is a powerful software tool for partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), particularly well-suited for analyzing complex relationships. Its capability to handle small to medium sample sizes makes it ideal for the context of this study. Using SmartPLS, multiple dependent and independent variables can be analyzed simultaneously, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the relationships among variables.

SPSS version 27 was used in this study to analyze the relationships between employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices through Pearson correlation and regression analyses. The correlation analysis calculated coefficients to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationships between variables, while regression analysis examined the predictive effects of independent variables on the dependent variables, allowing for a deeper understanding of the relative influence of each factor. Statistical significance was assessed in both analyses to ensure the reliability of the results. SPSS's comprehensive tools facilitated data preparation, calculation, and interpretation, providing clear insights into the associations and predictive relationships among the variables, and forming the basis for further discussion.

In addition to correlation and structural equation modeling analyses, moderation analysis was conducted to further examine the moderating role of gender in the relationships between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational

commitment, and HRM practices. This analysis was performed using the PROCESS macro (Version 4.0) developed by Hayes and implemented in SPSS. Model 1 of PROCESS was employed to test the interaction effects between each independent variable and gender on HRM practices. A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was applied to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals, enhancing the robustness and reliability of the moderation results. The significance of the interaction terms was evaluated based on confidence intervals and p-values, allowing for an accurate assessment of whether gender significantly influenced the strength or direction of the relationships examined.

Furthermore, to ensure the robustness and consistency of the findings, SmartPLS was also employed to validate the moderating effects within a structural equation modeling framework. The interaction terms were constructed using the product indicator approach, and path coefficients were estimated through bootstrapping procedures. This dual-analytic approach, combining PROCESS macro and SmartPLS, strengthened the credibility of the results by cross-validating the moderation effects using both regression-based and variance-based techniques.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a detailed introduction to the methodology adopted in this study. The quantitative research method is used in this study. The sampling technique selected judgmental sampling, with the sampling object set as employees of SMEs in Jinan, China. This study adapts previous survey questionnaires. Further data analysis includes reliability, validity, and correlation to facilitate interpretation and analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 4:

DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the data analysis and results of the study are presented. The section begins with an overview of the response rate and the preliminary steps undertaken to ensure data quality, which include data editing, coding, and screening. Following this, the respondents' profile and general background are provided, offering insights into the sample composition. The results of the measurement models are then discussed, with a focus on assessing the reliability and validity of the constructs, discriminant validity, and common method bias. This is followed by a detailed examination of the structural model, including tests for direct and moderating effects as specified in the research hypotheses. The chapter concludes with a summary of the hypotheses testing, highlighting the key findings and their implications for the study. Through these analyses, the chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among the variables and to validate the proposed model using PLS-SEM.

4.2 Response Rate

In this study, a total of 300 survey questionnaires were distributed to the target respondents. Of these, 220 completed questionnaires were returned and deemed valid for analysis, yielding a response rate of approximately 73.33%. The remaining 80 questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to various issues that compromised their validity. Specifically, 36 questionnaires were incomplete, with substantial sections left unanswered; 24 contained repetitive responses; and 20 exhibited contradictory answers, indicating inconsistencies in the respondents' replies. These issues undermined the reliability and quality of the data, resulting in their exclusion from the final analysis. The achieved response rate is considered satisfactory for the study, ensuring a sufficiently large and representative sample for reliable data analysis.

4.3 Preliminary Data Analysis

In this section, the preliminary steps taken to process and prepare the data for analysis are outlined. These steps are essential to ensure the quality, consistency, and reliability of the data before proceeding with the statistical analysis.

4.3.1 Data Editing and Coding

Smart PLS version 4.0 and SPSS version 27 were used in this study. Data editing and coding mainly occurred before data import. In Smart PLS or SPSS, data sets are imported through Excel files. Therefore, before importing, this study used Excel to check the completeness, accuracy and consistency of the data. Spelling errors or inconsistent responses were corrected. After completing data editing in Excel, ensure that the data meets the format requirements, with numerical data listed in numeric format and categorical data listed in standardized coding.

Smart PLS only accepts numeric data or coded categorical data. If there is text data (such as answers to open-ended questions), it can be converted to numeric or coded by category. There were no open-ended questions in this study, so this step was skipped. However, categorical variables (such as gender, age group, etc.) have been coded in Excel, ensuring that each category has a corresponding numeric code (for example, gender: 1 = male, 2 = female). The coded data can be directly imported into Smart PLS for analysis.

4.3.2 Data Screening

In Smart PLS, the purpose of data screening is to check whether the data has missing values, outliers, and other problems. In Smart PLS, after importing the data, you can view the missing status of each variable through the data table. For missing data, Smart PLS will automatically process it, usually using mean interpolation or median interpolation, but you can also choose to delete missing data according to the actual situation.

Since Smart PLS itself does not have a direct outlier detection tool, this study first identifies outliers through SPSS and then decides whether to remove or adjust them. Through descriptive statistics, this study showed that the data distribution of all variables (ES, EE, OC, HRM practices) was within a reasonable range, and no obvious outliers were found.

Table 4-1:
Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ES	1.2	4.8	3.4782	1.03654
EE	1	4.83	3.4447	1.1274
OC	1	5	3.4197	1.11485
HRM	1.2	4.8	3.5355	1.05346

Note: Employee Satisfaction=ES, Employee Engagement=EE, Organizational Culture=OC, Human Resources Management= HRM

The descriptive statistics in Table 4-1 for the variables are as follows: ES ranges from 1.2 to 4.8, with a mean of 3.4782 and a standard deviation of 1.03654; EE ranges from 1 to 4.83, with a mean of 3.4447 and a standard deviation of 1.1274; OC ranges from 1 to 5, with a mean of 3.4197 and a standard deviation of 1.11485; and HRM practices ranges from 1.2 to 4.8, with a mean of 3.5355 and a standard deviation of 1.05346. All variables fall within expected minimum and maximum values, and the means and standard deviations suggest a relatively consistent data distribution. No significant outliers are identified, though further outlier detection methods like box plots or z-scores could be used for more thorough analysis.

4.3.3 Data Distribution

Based on the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk normality tests, the data for all variables (employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and human resources management) significantly deviate from a normal distribution. Specifically, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistics for the four variables are 0.288, 0.287, 0.283, and 0.286, with significance levels all less than 0.001. The Shapiro-Wilk test statistics are 0.771, 0.743, 0.761, and 0.768, with significance values also less than 0.001. These results in Table 4-2 indicate that the distributions of all variables significantly differ from normality, leading to the conclusion that the data do not follow a normal distribution. Since the variables involved in this study are rank data and the relationship between variables may not be linear, the Spearman rank correlation coefficient is used to analyze the correlation between the variables. The Spearman rank correlation coefficient is applicable to non-normally distributed data and can effectively reveal the monotonic relationship between variables, even if the relationship is not linear.

Table 4-2:
Tests of Normality

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
ES	0.288	220	< 0.001	0.771	220	< 0.001
EE	0.287	220	< 0.001	0.743	220	< 0.001
OC	0.283	220	< 0.001	0.761	220	< 0.001
HRM	0.286	220	< 0.001	0.768	220	< 0.001

According to the Spearman correlation matrix provided in Table , ES, EE, and OC all show moderate positive correlations with HRM practices, and these correlations are statistically significant at the significance level of 0.01. Specifically, the correlation coefficient between ES and HRM practices is 0.511, the correlation coefficient between EE and HRM practices is 0.572, and the correlation coefficient between OC and HRM practices is 0.511. These results show that the improvement of employee satisfaction, employee engagement and organizational culture are closely related to the improvement of HRM practices.

Table 4-3:
Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient

Variables	Category	ES	EE	OC	HRM
ES	Correlation Coefficient	1	.545**	.570**	.511**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001
EE	Correlation Coefficient	.545**	1	.560**	.572**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	< 0.001	.	< 0.001	< 0.001
OC	Correlation Coefficient	.570**	.560**	1	.511**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	.	0
HRM	Correlation Coefficient	.511**	.572**	.511**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	.

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.4 Respondents' Profile and General Background

Table 4-4 shows the distribution of population information. Among the respondents, 51.36% are male and 48.64% are female, indicating a fairly balanced gender distribution with a slight majority of males. This suggests that the sample is representative of both genders, with no significant gender bias. The total number of respondents in the study is 220, which further supports the validity of the gender distribution within this sample size.

Table 4-4:
Demographic Information

Demographic Factor		Frequency (N=406)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	113	51.36%
	Female	107	48.64%
Age Group	18-30 years old	90	40.91%
	31-40 years old	76	34.55%
	41-50 years old	22	10.00%
	51-60 years old	12	5.45%
	Over 61 years old	20	9.09%
Work Experience	6 months to 1 year	55	25.00%
	1-3 years	65	29.55%
	4-6 years	63	28.64%
	7-10 years	20	9.09%
	More than 10 years	17	7.73%
Education Level	High school and below	18	8.18%
	Associate Degree	34	15.45%
	Bachelor's Degree	152	69.09%
	Master's Degree	10	4.55%
	Doctoral Degree	6	2.73%

The majority of respondents are in the age groups of 18-30 years (40.91%) and 31-40 years (34.55%), indicating that the sample is predominantly young and middle-aged. The proportions of respondents in the 41-50 years (10%), 51-60 years (5.45%), and over 61 years (9.09%) categories are relatively low, suggesting that there are fewer middle-aged and older employees in the sample.

Regarding the length of employment, 29.55% of respondents have worked for 1-3 years and 28.64% have worked for 4-6 years, showing that most employees are in the early to mid stages of their careers. 25% have worked for 6 months to 1 year, which may indicate a higher proportion of new employees or relatively high turnover in the industry. Employees with 7-10 years (9.09%) and more than 10 years (7.73%) of experience are less common, suggesting that long-term employees are in the minority.

The majority of respondents hold a Bachelor's degree (69.09%), reflecting the organization's preference for higher educational qualifications. The proportions of respondents with Associate degrees (15.45%) and High school or below (8.18%) are lower, indicating fewer employees with lower educational backgrounds. Moreover, Master's degrees (4.55%) and Doctoral degrees (2.73%) are less common, suggesting that the organization has fewer highly academic or research-oriented staff.

Overall, the sample is predominantly composed of young employees, with the majority having 1-6 years of work experience and holding a Bachelor's degree. Additionally, the relatively low proportion of long-term employees and the limited number of high-level academic qualifications suggest that the organization may need to focus on improving employee retention and attracting higher-level talent.

4.5 Results of Reliability and Validity Analysis

4.5.1 Reliability of the Constructs

The measurement model (Table 4-5) demonstrates strong reliability and validity across all constructs, as indicated by the results for employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.92 to 0.953, indicating excellent internal consistency, while composite reliability values (rho_a and rho_c) exceed 0.9 for all constructs, further confirming their reliability. Additionally, the AVE values range from 0.759 to 0.811, surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.5, which signifies strong convergent validity. These results confirm that the constructs are robust and suitable for further structural equation modeling analyses. Overall, the high reliability and validity of the measurement model provide confidence in the accuracy of the data, ensuring that subsequent analyses will yield meaningful and

trustworthy insights into the relationships among the study variables.

Table 4-5:
Cronbach's Alpha of Variables

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Employee Satisfaction	0.925	0.927	0.944	0.771
Employee Engagement	0.946	0.947	0.957	0.788
Organizational Culture	0.953	0.954	0.962	0.811
Human Resources Management	0.92	0.922	0.94	0.759

4.5.2 Discriminant Validity

This study analyzed the discriminant validity of each latent variable, mainly through cross-loadings. The cross-loading analysis showed that the loading value of each measurement item on its latent variable was significantly higher than the loading value on other latent variables, indicating that each latent variable has good discrimination.

For example, the loading value of EE measurement items EE1 to EE6 in the EE column were 0.871, 0.884, 0.864, 0.841, 0.863, and 0.895, respectively, which were significantly higher than the loading values in other latent variable columns, indicating that employee engagement can effectively distinguish other latent variables. Similarly, the loading values of ES measurement items ES1 to ES5 were 0.845, 0.840, 0.838, 0.856, and 0.876, respectively, which were all high in the ES column, while the loading values in the HRM practices and OC columns were lower, further indicating that employee satisfaction has good discriminant validity.

The loading values of the measurement items HRMP1 to HRMP5 of HRMP are 0.905, 0.816, 0.883, 0.861, and 0.867, respectively, all of which are outstanding in the HRM practices column, while the loading values in other latent variable columns are lower, showing good discrimination. The loading values of the measurement items OC1 to OC6 of OC are 0.861, 0.866, 0.875, 0.840, 0.856, and 0.889, respectively, and they also show high loadings in the OC column, indicating that organizational culture can effectively

distinguish other latent variables.

In conclusion, the cross-loading analysis confirmed that each latent variable is distinct, with significantly higher loadings on its respective items. This validates the robustness of the measurement model and the differentiation of each variable.

Table 4-6:
Cross-loadings

ITEMS	EE	ES	HRM	OC
EE1	0.871	0.798	0.812	0.802
EE2	0.884	0.85	0.847	0.821
EE3	0.864	0.819	0.798	0.815
EE4	0.841	0.752	0.778	0.788
EE5	0.863	0.784	0.79	0.81
EE6	0.895	0.835	0.848	0.851
ES1	0.781	0.845	0.775	0.748
ES2	0.771	0.84	0.765	0.791
ES3	0.771	0.838	0.746	0.767
ES4	0.813	0.856	0.81	0.803
ES5	0.811	0.876	0.794	0.835
HRMP1	0.867	0.855	0.905	0.861
HRMP2	0.715	0.696	0.816	0.681
HRMP3	0.836	0.837	0.883	0.843
HRMP4	0.804	0.779	0.861	0.798
HRMP5	0.818	0.786	0.867	0.795
OC1	0.802	0.788	0.782	0.861
OC2	0.833	0.803	0.801	0.866
OC3	0.816	0.844	0.799	0.875
OC4	0.766	0.755	0.759	0.84
OC5	0.777	0.775	0.791	0.856
OC6	0.862	0.842	0.842	0.889

4.6 Descriptive Analysis

According to the descriptive statistics analysis, the five measurement items of employee satisfaction (ES) in Table 4-7 show varying levels of scores. Among all the

items, ES4 ("I like the people I work with") has the highest mean score of 3.66, indicating that employees are highly satisfied with their relationships with colleagues. The next highest score is for ES1 ("Considering my skills and the effort I put into my work, I am satisfied with my salary and professional allowance"), with a mean of 3.61, suggesting that employees are moderately satisfied with their salary and allowances. ES5 ("I like doing the things I do at work") has a mean of 3.58, reflecting a generally average level of satisfaction. In contrast, ES2 ("My supervisor is not helpful to me in getting my job done") and ES3 ("Physical working conditions make my working unpleasant") have lower scores of 3.29 and 3.25, respectively, indicating that employees are less satisfied with supervisor support and working conditions. These results suggest that while employees are relatively satisfied with their relationships with colleagues and the nature of their work, there is room for improvement in terms of salary, supervisor support, and working conditions.

Table 4-7:
Descriptive Statistics of Employee Satisfaction

Items	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ES1	1	5	3.61	1.25
ES2	1	5	3.29	1.177
ES3	1	5	3.25	1.183
ES4	1	5	3.66	1.273
ES5	1	5	3.58	1.204

Based on the descriptive statistics analysis, the six measurement items of employee engagement in Table 4-8 exhibit varying levels of scores. EE1 ("I feel a strong sense of belonging to my job") has the highest mean score of 3.61, indicating that employees generally experience a moderate sense of belonging to their job. Following closely is EE4 ("I often go above what is expected of me to help my team succeed"), with a mean of 3.57, suggesting that employees frequently exceed expectations to contribute to team success. EE5 ("Working at my current organisation has a great deal of personal meaning to me") also shows a moderate score of 3.54, reflecting that employees find personal meaning in their work. On the other hand, EE2 ("I care about the future of my company") has a lower mean of 3.39, indicating a relatively lower level of concern for the company's future. Furthermore, EE3 ("I do more than what is expected of me") and EE6 ("I am proud to tell

others that I work for my current organisation") have even lower means of 3.28 and 3.27, respectively, suggesting that employees are less motivated to exceed expectations and may not feel as proud to share their affiliation with the organization. In conclusion, the cross-loading analysis validated the distinctness and robustness of each latent variable.

Table 4-8:
Descriptive Statistics of Employee Engagement

Items	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
EE1	1	5	3.61	1.209
EE2	1	5	3.39	1.25
EE3	1	5	3.28	1.272
EE4	1	5	3.57	1.307
EE5	1	5	3.54	1.402
EE6	1	5	3.27	1.337

Based on the descriptive statistics analysis, the six measurement items related to organizational culture in Table 4-9 show varying levels of employee satisfaction. OC5 ("Our company provides various formal training programs for the performance of duties") has the highest mean score of 3.70, indicating that employees are relatively satisfied with the formal training programs offered by the company. This is followed by OC6 ("Our company encourages people to attend seminars, symposia, etc.") with a mean of 3.63, reflecting a moderate level of satisfaction with the opportunities provided for professional development outside the organization. However, OC1 ("Our organization members are satisfied by the degree of collaboration") has the lowest mean score of 3.13, suggesting that employees are less satisfied with the overall level of collaboration within the organization. Similarly, OC3 ("Our company members have reciprocal faith in others' ability") and OC2 ("There is a willingness to collaborate across organizational units within our organization") have mean scores of 3.34 and 3.35, respectively, indicating areas where trust in others' abilities and willingness to collaborate across units may need improvement. Overall, while employees express satisfaction with training and development opportunities, the findings reveal that collaboration, trust, and certain aspects of organizational culture require further attention and improvement. These insights highlight specific areas for management to target in order to strengthen the organizational culture and enhance overall employee engagement.

Table 4-9:
Descriptive Statistics of Organizational Culture

Items	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
OC1	1	5	3.13	1.243
OC2	1	5	3.35	1.3
OC3	1	5	3.34	1.336
OC4	1	5	3.37	1.23
OC5	1	5	3.7	1.178
OC6	1	5	3.63	1.442

According to the descriptive statistics analysis, the five HRM practices-related measurement items in Table 4-10 exhibit varying degrees of employee recognition. HRMP1 ("The human resources department is continuously learning on the job") has the highest mean score of 3.62, indicating a relatively high level of employee recognition regarding the HR department's continuous learning capability. HRMP2 ("The human resources department is prepared to use methods and techniques for Business Process Improvement (BPI)") follows with a mean score of 3.54, suggesting moderate acknowledgment of the HR department's ability to implement BPI techniques. However, HRMP4 ("The human resources department is reliable and achieves the goals of business processes") has the lowest mean score of 3.49, indicating comparatively lower confidence in the HR department's reliability and goal achievement. HRMP3 ("The human resources department is prepared to manage new or improved business processes") and HRMP5 ("Recognized efforts of the human resources department get rewarded") have mean scores of 3.51 and 3.52, respectively, reflecting a moderately positive perception of the HR department's ability to manage change. The HR department is well-regarded for learning, process improvement, and change management, but needs improvement in reliability and goal achievement.

Table 4-10:
Descriptive Statistics of HRMP

Items	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
HRMP1	1	5	3.62	1.313
HRMP2	1	5	3.54	1.183
HRMP3	1	5	3.51	1.207
HRMP4	1	5	3.49	1.188
HRMP5	1	5	3.52	1.18

4.7 Common Method Bias Test

Based on the provided model fit indices, the analysis of Common Method Bias (CMB) in Table 4-11 reveals that the model fits well and the impact of CMB is minimal. The SRMR value for both the saturated model (0.036) and the estimated model (0.036) is below the threshold of 0.08, indicating good model fit. Similarly, the d_ULS values for both models (0.362) are identical, demonstrating stable model fit without significant influence from CMB. The d_G values also show minimal change between the saturated (0.407) and estimated models (0.41), further suggesting that the model fit is stable and unaffected by CMB. Although the Chi-square values slightly differ between the two models (457.381 for the saturated model and 458.13 for the estimated model), the small difference indicates that the model fit remains robust. Lastly, the NFI value (0.911) is close to 1, confirming a strong model fit and suggesting that CMB has little impact on the results. Overall, these fit indices demonstrate that the model is well specified and that CMB does not significantly affect the findings.

Table 4-11:
Common Method Bias Test

Category	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.036	0.036
d_ULS	0.362	0.362
d_G	0.407	0.41
Chi-square	457.381	458.13
NFI	0.911	0.911

4.8 Regression Analysis

4.8.1 Testing Direct Effect

The regression analysis in Table 4-12 reveals Employee Satisfaction (ES) has a strong and significant influence on HRM practices. The R^2 value of 0.834 indicates that ES explains 83.4% of the variance in HRM practices, suggesting a substantial impact of employee satisfaction on HRM practices. The F-Statistic of 1095.299 and the p-value for the ANOVA test (< 0.001) further confirm the overall significance of the model, indicating that ES is a meaningful predictor of HRM practices. The unstandardized coefficient of 0.928 shows that for every unit increase in ES, HRM practices increases by 0.928 units,

highlighting the strength of the relationship between the two variables. Additionally, the standardized beta value of 0.913 reflects a very strong positive association, with higher levels of ES strongly influencing HRM practices. The t-statistic of 33.095 and the p-value for ES (< 0.001) further support the statistical significance of ES as a predictor of HRM practices, reinforcing the robustness of the findings. Overall, the results demonstrate that employee satisfaction plays a crucial role in enhancing HRM practices.

Table 4-12:
Regression Analysis of ES & HRMP

R^2	F-Statistic	Sig. ANOVA	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
0.834	1095.299	< 0.001	0.928	0.913	33.095	< 0.001

Independent variable: employee satisfaction, dependent variable: HRM

The regression analysis reveals in Table 4-13 Employee Engagement (EE) has a strong and significant influence on HRM practices. The R^2 value of 0.869 indicates that EE explains 86.9% of the variance in HRM practices, demonstrating that employee engagement has a substantial impact on HRM practices. The F-Statistic of 1444.454 and the p-value for the ANOVA test (< 0.001) confirm the overall significance of the model, indicating that EE is a highly significant predictor of HRM practices. The unstandardized coefficient of 0.871 suggests that for each unit increase in EE, HRM practices increases by 0.871 units, emphasizing the strength of the relationship. The standardized beta value of 0.932 indicates a very strong positive association between EE and HRM practices, with higher levels of employee engagement strongly influencing HRM practices. The t-statistic of 38.006 and the p-value for EE (< 0.001) further support the statistical significance of EE as a predictor of HRM practices, reinforcing the robustness of the findings. Overall, the results highlight that employee engagement plays a critical role in shaping HRM practices.

Table 4-13:
Regression Analysis of EE & HRMP

R^2	F-Statistic	Sig. ANOVA	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
0.869	1444.454	< 0.001	0.871	0.932	38.006	< 0.001

Independent variable: employee engagement, dependent variable: HRM

The regression analysis reveals Organizational Culture (OC) has a strong and significant influence on HRM practices. The model explains 84.4% of the variance in HRM practices, as evidenced by an R^2 value of 0.844, which demonstrates a strong fit. The F-statistic of 1183.705, along with an ANOVA significance value of less than 0.001, confirms the overall significance of the model. Additionally, the unstandardized coefficient of 0.868 suggests that for each unit increase in organizational culture, HRM practices is expected to increase by 0.868 units. The standardized beta of 0.919 indicates a strong positive influence of organizational culture on HRM practices. The t-value of 34.405 further supports the statistical significance of the coefficient. These findings indicate that organizational culture has a strong positive impact on HRM practices.

Table 4-14:
Regression Analysis of OC & HRMP

R^2	F-Statistic	Sig. ANOVA	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
0.844	1183.705	< 0.001	0.868	0.919	34.405	< 0.001

Independent variable: organizational culture, dependent variable: HRM

4.9 Testing Moderating Effect

Table 4-15 presents the results of the moderation analysis examining the effect of employee satisfaction (ES) on HRM practices, with gender as a moderating variable. The results based on 5,000 bootstrap samples indicate that employee satisfaction has a significant positive influence on HRM practices (β = 1.054, BootSE = 0.092, 95% CI [0.867, 1.227]), suggesting that higher levels of employee satisfaction are associated with more effective HRM practices in SMEs.

Gender, however, did not significantly moderate this relationship. The interaction term (ES × Gender) was not statistically significant (β = -0.081, BootSE = 0.054, 95% CI [-0.183, 0.028]), indicating that the effect of employee satisfaction on HRM practices is consistent across male and female employees. These findings suggest that while employee satisfaction is a strong predictor of HRM practices, gender does not alter this relationship in the context of SMEs in the new energy sector.

Table 4-15:
Gender Moderate the Relationship ES & & HRMP

Predictor	Coeff	BootMean	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
ES	1.054	1.051	0.092	0.867	1.227
Gender	0.225	0.217	0.189	-0.165	0.578
int-ES × Gender	-0.081	-0.079	0.054	-0.183	0.028

Note: Outcome Variabl : HRM practices, CI = 95% Bootstrap Confidence Interval

Table 4-16 presents the moderation analysis examining whether gender moderates the relationship between employee engagement (EE) and HRM practices. The results show that EE has a significant positive effect on HRM practices (BootMean = 0.838, BootSE = 0.068, 95% CI [0.705, 0.969]), indicating that higher employee engagement is associated with more effective HRM practices. Gender alone does not have a significant effect (BootMean = -0.131, 95% CI [-0.425, 0.153]), and the interaction term (EE × Gender) is also not significant (BootMean = 0.021, 95% CI [-0.057, 0.101]), suggesting that gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between EE and HRM practices in this sample. Overall, the findings indicate that while employee engagement strongly predicts HRM practices, the influence of gender as a moderating factor is negligible in this context.

Table 4-16:
Gender Moderate the Relationship EE & & HRMP

Predictor	Coeff	BootMean	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
EE	1.054	0.838	0.092	0.867	1.227
Gender	0.225	-0.131	0.189	-0.165	0.578
int-EE × Gender	-0.081	0.021	0.054	-0.183	0.028

Note: Outcome Variabl : HRM practices, CI = 95% Bootstrap Confidence Interval

Table 4-17 presents the moderation analysis examining whether gender moderates the relationship between organizational culture (OC) and HRM practices. The results indicate that OC has a significant positive effect on HRM practices (BootMean = 0.945, BootSE = 0.078, 95% CI [0.788, 1.093]), suggesting that a stronger organizational culture is associated with more effective HRM practices. Gender itself does not have a significant effect (BootMean = 0.113, 95% CI [-0.197, 0.408]), and the interaction term (OC × Gender) is also non-significant (BootMean = -0.050, 95% CI [-0.138, 0.043]), indicating that gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between organizational culture and HRM practices in this study. Overall, the findings suggest that while organizational culture

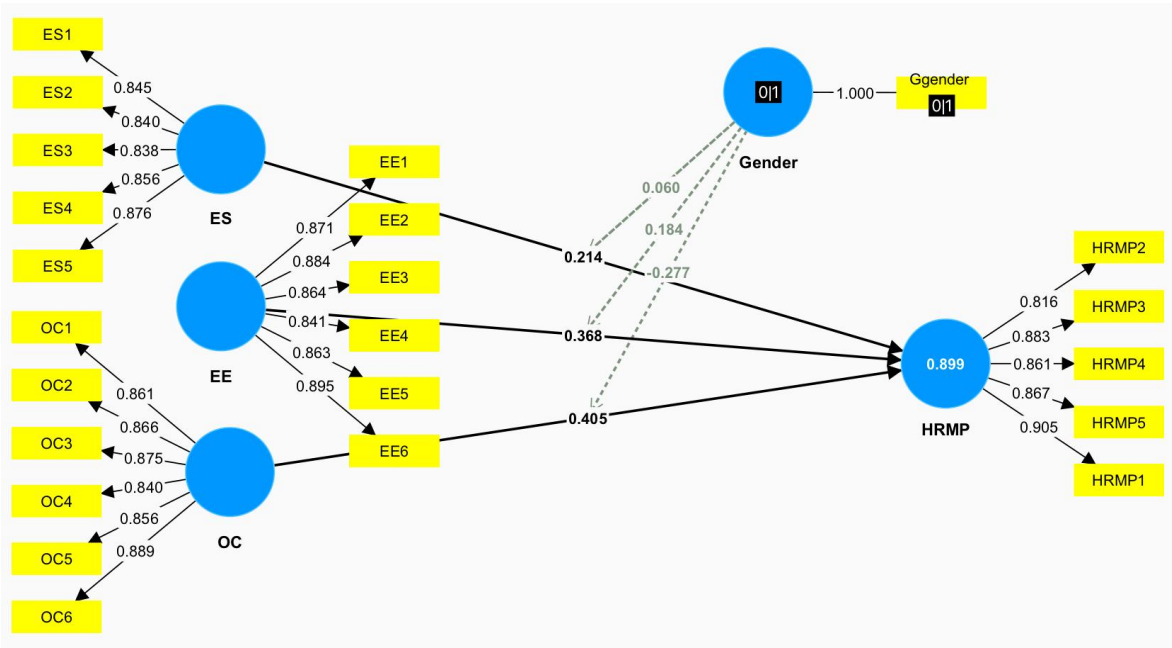
strongly predicts HRM practices, the moderating influence of gender is negligible in the current context.

Table 4-17:
Gender Moderate the Relationship OC & & HRMP

Predictor	Coeff	BootMean	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
OC	1.054	0.838	0.092	0.867	1.227
Gender	0.225	-0.131	0.189	-0.165	0.578
int-OC × Gender	-0.081	0.021	0.054	-0.183	0.028

Note: Outcome Variable : HRM practices, CI = 95% Bootstrap Confidence Interval

Figure 4-1:
Structural Model Results of Variables



The structural model results in figure 4-1 indicate that employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational commitment all exert significant positive effects on human resource management practices. Among these predictors, organizational commitment demonstrates the strongest influence (β = 0.405), followed by employee engagement (β = 0.368) and employee satisfaction (β = 0.214), suggesting that employees' psychological attachment and sense of belonging to the organization play a more critical role in shaping effective HRM practices than attitudinal satisfaction alone. Moreover, the model explains a substantial proportion of variance in HRM practices (R^2 = 0.899), indicating strong explanatory power. Although gender was introduced as a moderating

variable, its interaction effects with employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational commitment were relatively weak, implying that the influence of these antecedents on HRM practices is largely consistent across male and female employees. This finding suggests that HRM practices within the studied context tend to operate in a gender-neutral manner, emphasizing organizational and psychological factors rather than demographic differences.

4.10 Summary of Hypotheses

Table 4-18 shows the final results of the hypothesis analysis of this study. The hypotheses tested in this study explore various relationships between employee-related factors and HRM practices in SMEs, with a focus on the moderating role of gender. The findings provide support for the positive relationships between employee satisfaction (H1), employee engagement (H2), and organizational culture (H3) with HRM practices. However, the hypotheses suggesting that gender moderates these relationships (H4, H5, H6) were not supported by the data. These results highlight the importance of employee-related factors in influencing HRM practices, while suggesting that gender may not play a significant moderating role in these dynamics within the context of SMEs.

Table 4-18:
Hypotheses Summary

Hypotheses	Result
H1: There is a positive relationship between employee satisfaction and HRM in SMEs.	Supported
H2: There is a positive relationship between employee engagement and HRM in SMEs.	Supported
H3: There is a positive relationship between organizational culture and HRM in SMEs.	Supported
H4: Gender moderate the relationship between employee satisfaction and HRM in SMEs.	Not Supported
H5: Gender moderate the relationship between employee engagement and HRM in SMEs.	Not Supported
H6: Gender moderate the relationship between organizational culture and HRM in SMEs.	Not Supported

4.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the relationships between employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices. Beginning with a demographic analysis, it highlighted the distribution of respondents across various factors such as gender, age, work experience, and educational background, offering a clear

understanding of the sample composition. The chapter also examined the moderating role of gender, finding that gender did not significantly affect the relationships between these variables. This may attributed to factors such as gender-neutral HRM practices, a balanced gender distribution among respondents, and inclusive attitudes fostered by education and career stage. The findings were further discussed in relation to existing literature, emphasizing the broader context of HRM practices and their impact on organizational dynamics. Overall, this chapter contributes valuable insights into how employee experiences with HRM practices are influenced by organizational culture, engagement, and gender considerations, offering practical implications for enhancing employee performance and satisfaction.

CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter offers a thorough overview of the study, revisiting the research objectives and methods, discussing key findings, and examining both theoretical and practical implications. It begins by summarizing the core research questions and framework, outlining the relationships between employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices, and considering the moderating role of gender. The findings are then discussed, with an emphasis on the positive effects of employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture on HRM practices, while noting the lack of support for gender's moderating role. The chapter also addresses the theoretical and practical contributions of the study, providing recommendations for HRM practices in SMEs. Lastly, it recognizes the study's limitations and suggests areas for future research, offering insights for further academic exploration.

5.2 Recapitulation of the Study

This study aimed to examine the relationships between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices within small and SMEs. Additionally, it sought to explore the moderating role of gender in these relationships. The study employed quantitative methods, utilizing survey data collected from a sample of employees working in SMEs. The data were analyzed through the PROCESS procedure in SPSS, which allowed for the assessment of both direct and interaction effects. The results revealed a positive relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices, supporting the hypothesis that these factors are crucial drivers of HRM practices effectiveness. However, contrary to expectations, the moderating role of gender was not supported in the relationships between these variables and HRM practices.

In sum, the study confirmed the significance of employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture in enhancing HRM practices in SMEs, but found no evidence to suggest that gender moderates these relationships. The findings provide a valuable contribution to the understanding of HRM practices dynamics in SMEs, while also highlighting areas where further research is needed to explore potential moderating factors.

5.3 Discussion

In the analysis of this study, we explored the relationship between multiple variables, especially focusing on the interaction between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture and HRM practices in SMEs. In this section, we will focus on the relationship between these variables and their impact on HRM practices, and further explain the actual management based on the research findings.

5.3.1 The Relationship between Employee Satisfaction and HRM practices

Extant literature frequently identifies job satisfaction as a mediating variable in the relationship between HRM practices and employee performance (Chen et al., 2023; Keltu, 2024; Marhil et al., 2023). In line with this, the present study corroborates a significant positive relationship between employee satisfaction and HRM practices, consistent with the findings of Hauff et al. (2022), Shafaei and Nejati (2024), and Ying et al. (2024). This evidence underscores the critical role of employee satisfaction in strengthening the effectiveness of HRM practices. Higher levels of employee satisfaction appear to foster greater engagement with HRM practices initiatives, ultimately contributing to improved organizational outcomes.

These findings affirm that employee satisfaction functions not only as a result of effective HRM practices but also as an integral contributor to its success. Furthermore, the alignment of these results with prior research highlights the broad relevance of this relationship across various organizational and cultural settings. Accordingly, organizations seeking to enhance their HRM practices effectiveness should focus on strategies that promote employee satisfaction, including transparent communication, professional development opportunities, and equitable workplace policies.

5.3.2 The Relationship between Employee Engagement and HRM practices

The present study confirms the positive relationship between employee engagement and HRM practices, aligning with existing literature. Saks (2022) reported a positive correlation between HRM practices and employee engagement. Furthermore, Saad et al. (2020) emphasized the significant impact of HRM practices, including selection and recruitment, job design, and reward systems, on fostering employee engagement. Similarly, Jose and Mampily (2021) emphasized that higher levels of HRM practices are associated with greater employee engagement. These findings collectively suggest that well-implemented HRM practices not only enhance employee engagement but also serve as a strategic tool for organizations aiming to improve workforce involvement and productivity.

Furthermore, a strong alignment between HRM practices and employee engagement has been shown to lead to various positive organizational outcomes, such as increased job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and enhanced organizational commitment. The integration of practices such as clear communication, recognition, and opportunities for professional growth creates an environment where employees feel valued and motivated, which in turn drives their engagement levels. As organizations increasingly recognize the importance of employee engagement, HRM practices that focus on promoting engagement will likely become a core component of talent management strategies. For example, organizations can tailor HRM practices to meet the diverse needs of employees, ensuring that engagement is not only sustained but also continuously enhanced through customized training programs, flexible work arrangements, and performance feedback mechanisms. Ultimately, this approach not only benefits the individual employee but also contributes to the overall success and competitiveness of the organization in the marketplace. Therefore, prioritizing employee engagement through effective HRM practices should be seen as essential for fostering a motivated and high-performing workforce.

5.3.3 The Relationship between Organizational Culture and HRM practices

The present study confirms the positive relationship between organizational culture and HRM practices, consistent with prior research. Botelho (2020) emphasized that a supportive organizational culture plays a crucial role in enhancing HRM practices, particularly in fostering innovative capabilities. Similarly, Kerdpitak and Jermsittiparsert

(2020) demonstrated that organizational culture, along with employee commitment and organizational citizenship behavior, positively influences HRM practices. Additionally, Oseghale et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of organizational culture in the successful replication of HRM practices within multinational subsidiaries, underscoring its role in shaping the effectiveness of HRM practices across diverse contexts. These findings collectively underscore the pivotal role of organizational culture in facilitating effective HRM practices, suggesting that organizations aiming to optimize HRM practices should cultivate a culture that supports innovation, commitment, and adaptability.

Moreover, a strong organizational culture provides a foundation for clear communication, shared values, and mutual trust among employees, which in turn enhances the overall effectiveness of HRM practices. By fostering a culture that prioritizes continuous learning and adaptability, organizations can ensure that HRM practices are not only aligned with current business needs but also capable of evolving to meet future challenges. Botelho (2020) noted that organizations encouraging employee feedback and participation in decision-making tend to achieve better outcomes in HRM practices such as performance management, training, and development. Furthermore, as organizations increasingly operate in global and diverse environments, maintaining a cohesive organizational culture becomes even more critical for managing HRM practices across different cultural and structural contexts. In this regard, a strong organizational culture helps align employee behaviors with organizational goals, enhances commitment, and supports consistent HRM implementation. Therefore, fostering a positive and supportive organizational culture should be regarded as a strategic priority for organizations seeking to strengthen HRM effectiveness and achieve long-term sustainable development.

5.3.4 The Moderating Role of Gender

The analysis indicates that gender does not significantly moderate the relationships between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices. This finding can be interpreted in light of contemporary organizational contexts, where gender-neutral HRM practices, such as standardized evaluations, equitable training programs, and inclusive policies, are increasingly implemented (Mehta et al., 2023). Such practices foster consistency in employee experiences across genders, potentially reducing the moderating role of gender. Furthermore, the growing emphasis on diversity, equity, and

inclusion within organizations further diminishes gender-based disparities (Taamneh et al., 2024).

The demographic characteristics of the sample may also contribute to this outcome. A balanced gender distribution, a predominantly younger workforce, and high educational attainment likely cultivate inclusive perceptions of workplace roles, limiting observable gender differences in attitudes and engagement. Additionally, many participants are in the early stages of their careers, where shared professional challenges and opportunities may overshadow gender-specific effects.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the relationships between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices within SMEs in the new energy sector. Specifically, it highlights the conditions under which gender does not significantly moderate these relationships, suggesting that in organizational contexts with inclusive and egalitarian HRM practices, gender differences may be less influential than previously assumed. This finding extends theoretical understanding of the contingency factors affecting HRM outcomes, complementing prior research that reported mixed or context-dependent effects of gender. Furthermore, by integrating employee-centered perspectives with organizational culture and engagement factors, the study offers a more nuanced view of how HRM practices can be effectively designed and implemented, thereby enriching the theoretical framework of HRM and organizational behavior in SMEs.

5.4 Implications of the Research

This section provides theoretical contributions by expanding the understanding of the factors influencing HRM practices, such as employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture. It also offers practical insights for organizations aiming to optimize HRM practices strategies for enhanced performance.

5.4.1 Theoretical Implications

This study advances the existing body of knowledge in HRM practices by providing an in-depth exploration of the interrelationships between employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices. The findings offer empirical

evidence on the critical factors influencing the effectiveness of HRM strategies, emphasizing the theoretical assertion that HRM practices should not be implemented in isolation but rather integrated with employee needs and organizational culture to achieve optimal outcomes.

The discovery that gender does not moderate the relationships between employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices contributes to ongoing debates within HRM practices and organizational behavior research regarding the role of gender in shaping workplace dynamics. This finding challenges the traditional perspective that gender differences are pivotal to organizational outcomes and suggests that, in environments characterized by strong egalitarian practices, gender may have a minimal impact on the effectiveness of HRM strategies (Garcia et al., 2023).

Additionally, this study enhances theoretical perspectives on employee engagement by elucidating its multifaceted connection to HRM practices. The findings highlight the critical role of fostering employee engagement as a central component of effective HRM practices and provide a more holistic framework that integrates organizational-level managerial factors with individual-level psychological and behavioral influences. This integration underscores the importance of aligning HRM strategies with employee needs and organizational goals, offering valuable insights for the design, implementation, and refinement of HRM practices that drive both individual and organizational success.

5.4.2 Practical Implications

This study offers valuable insights for HR professionals seeking to enhance HRM practices. By highlighting the significance of fostering a positive organizational culture and aligning HRM strategies with employee needs, the findings underscore the necessity of implementing practices that prioritize employee satisfaction and engagement. Implementing equitable and transparent HR policies further ensures fairness in recruitment, performance evaluations, and promotions (Cho & Choi, 2021). Collectively, these strategies contribute to the development of a supportive work environment that improves employee satisfaction and drives organizational effectiveness.

Despite the lack of significant moderation by gender, the study emphasizes the importance of adopting gender-neutral HRM practices. Organizations should continue to

develop policies that promote gender equality and inclusivity, ensuring that all employees, regardless of gender, have access to the same opportunities and benefits. By fostering an inclusive workplace, organizations can help eliminate gender-based disparities, leading to enhanced organizational outcomes and employee satisfaction (Panda et al., 2024).

The findings suggest that organizations should place a strong emphasis on employee well-being as a critical element of HRM practices. Establishing transparent communication mechanisms, such as feedback sessions and surveys, ensures that employees feel acknowledged and valued. Providing professional development opportunities, including training and career advancement programs, supports individual growth and enhances job satisfaction (Anh, 2021). Additionally, recognizing employee contributions through performance-based rewards strengthens motivation, while promoting an inclusive organizational culture fosters trust and organizational loyalty (Panda et al., 2024). These initiatives can lead to a more resilient workforce and positively impact organizational success.

The findings of this study carry important implications for SMEs operating within the new energy sector. The positive influence of employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational culture on HRM practices indicates that organizations in this industry should prioritize employee-centered strategies to enhance overall performance and competitiveness. Given the rapid technological advancement and high market demands in the new energy sector, cultivating a motivated and committed workforce through effective HRM practices can improve innovation, productivity, and retention. Moreover, the lack of significant gender moderation suggests that inclusive and egalitarian HRM practices can be broadly effective, allowing managers to focus on designing standardized policies and development programs that benefit all employees, regardless of gender. This context-specific insight underscores the need for industry leaders to integrate employee well-being and organizational culture into HRM strategies, thereby fostering sustainable growth and long-term organizational success in the highly dynamic new energy market.

This study underscores the need for organizations to align HRM practices with their organizational culture to maximize the effectiveness of their strategies. Companies should evaluate their existing culture and ensure that HRM practices are consistent with the values, norms, and goals of the organization.This alignment can enhance workplace cohesion and boost employee satisfaction, engagement, and overall performance (Ababneh, 2021).

5.5 Limitations of the Study

The sample for this study consisted of 220 respondents from the new energy industry, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries or sectors. The results may not apply to organizations with different organizational structures, cultures, or HRM practices. The findings are more context-specific to the new energy industry and may not reflect broader trends in other industries.

The research employed a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time to efficiently explore relationships between employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices. While effective for identifying correlations, this approach limits the ability to establish causality or assess temporal changes. Incorporating a longitudinal design in future research could provide richer insights into the dynamic evolution of these relationships and the long-term impact of HRM strategies on employee outcomes.

The study utilized self-reported data collected through questionnaires, a convenient approach but one susceptible to biases such as social desirability, recall inaccuracies, and subjective self-assessments. These biases may undermine the reliability and validity of the findings, as respondents might provide overly favorable, incomplete, or inaccurate answers, potentially limiting the study's accuracy, credibility, and generalizability to broader contexts.

5.6 Directions for Future Research

Future studies should aim to expand the sample by including participants from a wider range of industries, organizational types, and geographical locations to enhance the external validity and broader applicability of the findings. A more diverse sample would provide deeper insights into how HRM practices impact employee outcomes across varied contexts and help identify whether the observed relationships in this study are universally applicable or industry-specific, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of HRM effectiveness.

Future research should consider adopting a longitudinal design to gain valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of HRM practices and employee outcomes over time. This approach would allow researchers to monitor changes in employee satisfaction,

engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices across extended periods, providing a clearer understanding of the causal relationships between these variables. Moreover, longitudinal studies could explore the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of HRM strategies, shedding light on their enduring impact and adaptability to changing organizational contexts.

To enhance the robustness of future studies, researchers should consider using multiple data sources. Incorporating data from different stakeholders, such as organizational reports, peer assessments, or management evaluations, would minimize the biases associated with self-reported data. This approach would allow for a more comprehensive and balanced perspective on the variables under study. By integrating multiple viewpoints, future research could provide a richer understanding of how HRM practices influence employee outcomes, addressing limitations in self-reported data.

5.7 Conclusion

This study explored the relationships between HRM practices, employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and gender as a moderating factor within new energy enterprises. Using a quantitative approach, data from 220 respondents were analyzed through demographic distribution, Pearson correlation, and mediation tests to assess HRM practices' effects on employee outcomes. The findings show a positive correlation between employee satisfaction, engagement, organizational culture, and HRM practices, while gender did not significantly moderate these relationships, suggesting that gender-neutral HRM practices may minimize gender-based differences in organizational outcomes. Based on these results, organizations should focus on inclusive HRM practices, a positive culture, and employee well-being to enhance engagement and satisfaction. The study also advocates for a holistic approach to HRM practices that incorporates cultural factors and encourages further research on gender's role across different industries. Ultimately, the study contributes to understanding HRM practices' impact on employee outcomes, emphasizing the importance of strong organizational culture and inclusive practices for effective HRM practices.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1:
Questionnaire

Factors Influencing Student Satisfaction in Blended Teaching: The Mediating Role of Perceived Usefulness

Dear Sir/Madam,

尊敬的先生/女士：

Hello! Thank you for participating in this survey. We greatly appreciate your support and cooperation! This survey aims to explore the relationships between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational culture, gender and human resource management. The survey is anonymous, and the data collected will be used solely for academic research purposes. It will be processed by professional researchers in this field and used for overall statistical analysis, without involving any specific individual or organization. We assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. There are no right or wrong answers; please complete the survey based on your actual situation. Your honest and accurate information is crucial for the validity and accuracy of the research findings. After completing the survey, please submit it to us.

您好！感谢您参与此次调查。我们非常感激您的支持和合作！本次调查旨在研究员工满意度、投入度、组织文化,性别与企业人力资源管理之间的关系。调查过程完全匿名，所收集的数据仅用于学术研究，由相关领域的专业研究人员进行处理，并用于整体统计分析，不涉及任何特定个人或单位。我们承诺对您的回答保密。调查没有对错之分，请根据实际情况如实填写问卷。您的真实反馈对确保研究结论的有效性和准确性至关重要。完成问卷后，请将其提交给我们。

Thank you for your participation!
谢谢您的参与！

1. What is your gender ?

您的性别是？

○A.male/男性

○B.female/女性

2. What is your Age Group?

您属于那个年龄组？

○A.18-30 years old / 18-30 岁

○B.31-40 years old/ 31-40 岁

○C.41-50 years old/ 41-50 岁

○D.51-60 years old/ 51-60 岁

○E.over 61 years old/ 61 岁以上

3. How long have you been working in this organization?

您在这个组织工作多久了？

○A.6 months to 1 year / 6 个月至 1 年

○B.1-3 years / 1-3 年

○C.4-6 years / 4-6 年

○D.7-10 years / 7-10 年

○E.More than 10 years / 超过 10 年

4. What is the highest education you have attained?

您的最高学历是？

○A. High school and below / 高中及以下

○B. Associate Degree / 大专学历

○C.Bachelor's Degree / 本科学历

○D.Master's Degree / 硕士学历

○E.Doctoral Degree / 博士学历

Employee Satisfaction 员工满意度

5. ES1: Considering my skills and the effort I put into my work, I am satisfied with my salary and professional allowance.考虑到我的技能和在工作中付出的努力，我对我的工资和专业津贴感到满意。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

6. ES2: My supervisor is not helpful to me in getting my job done.我的主管对我工作任务的完成没有帮助。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

7. ES3: Physical working conditions make my working unpleasant.实际的工作条件让我的工作变得不愉快。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

8. ES4: I like the people I work with.我喜欢和我一起工作的同事。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

9. ES5: I like doing the things I do at work.我喜欢我现在的工作。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

Employee Engagement 员工投入度

10. EE1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my job.我对我的工作有一种强烈的归属感。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

11. EE2.I care about the future of my company.我关心我公司的未来。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

12. EE3. I do more than what is expected of me.我做的比我预期的要多。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

13. EE4. I often go above what is expected of me to help my team succeed.我经常超出预期，帮助我的团队取得成功。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

14. EE5. Working at my current organisation has a great deal of personal meaning to me. 在目前的组织工作对我来说具有很大的个人意义。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

15. EE6. I am proud to tell others that I work for my current organisation. 我很自豪地告诉别人我在目前的公司工作。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

Organizational Culture 组织文化

16. OC1. Our organization promotes a collaborative culture in which employees are encouraged to work together and support one another. 我们的组织倡导一种协作型文化，鼓励员工相互合作、彼此支持。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

17. OC2. There is a willingness to collaborate across organizational units within our organization.我们愿意在组织内跨组织单位进行合作。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

18. OC3. Our company members have reciprocal faith in others' ability.我们公司成员对他人的能力充满信心。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

19. OC4. Our company members have reciprocal faith in others' behaviours to work toward organizational goals. 我们公司的成员对彼此的行为有相互的信任，共同朝着组织目标努力。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

20. OC5. Our company provides various formal training programs for the performance of duties.我们公司为履行职责提供各种正式的培训项目。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

21. OC6. Our company encourages people to attend seminars, symposia, etc.我们公司鼓励员工参加研讨会、座谈会等活动。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

Human Resource Management (**HRM**) **人力资源管理**

22. HRM1: Human resources department are continuously learning on job.人力资源部门在工作中不断学习。

非常不满意 Strongly dissatisfied	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常满意 Strongly satisfied

23. HRM2:Human resources department are prepared to use methods and techniques for Business Process Improvement (BPI). 人力资源部门已准备好使用业务流程改进（BPI）的方法和技术。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

24. HRM3: Human resources department are prepared to manage new or improved business processes.人力资源部门准备管理新的或改进的业务流程。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

25. HRM4:Human resources department are reliable and achieve the goals of business processes.人力资源部门是可靠的，并能够实现业务流程的目标。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree

26. HRM5: Recognized effort of human resources department gets rewarded.人力资源部门的努力得到认可和奖励。

非常不同意 Strongly disagree	○1	○2	○3	○4	○5	非常同意 Strongly agree