

Name of University: University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Birmingham

MBA (Master of Business Administration) Human Resource Management

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Module code: (LCMB7020_BIRM)

Research title: The lack of HR (Human Resource) practices and employee engagement in SMEs in the UK (United Kingdom)

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Title: The lack of HR practices and employee engagement in SMEs in the UK

Acknowledgement

I am deeply grateful to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David Birmingham for granting me the opportunity to have been able to study here and pursue and achieve my academic aspirations. I would like to thank my lecturer Vasilios Tavlaridis for the introduction of the dissertation, His guidance, patience knowledge, and understanding are very much appreciated. My sincere thanks to Professor Dennis Pepple for his unwavering guidance, belief in my potential, and for bringing out the best in me throughout my research. His faith and confidence were a constant source of encouragement which cultivated trust during the preparation of my dissertation. It not only enhanced my academic journey but also served as a lifeline during challenging times, enabling me to navigate and successfully complete this academic pursuit. Thank you deeply for everything.

Abstract

A substantial gap in HR practices and employee engagement exists within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). These businesses vary significantly in capital structure, size, finances, management styles, and workforce. This study addresses the issue and the factors of inadequate HR practices and its impact on employee engagement in UK SMEs. SMEs are crucial to the UK economy, and this research aims to tackle the challenges they face in creating productive work environments. Using a systematic review of secondary data, I will analyse existing literature to identify the causes and consequences of insufficient HR practices in SMEs. Additionally, the review will explore strategies and theories and best practices for improving HR procedures and employee engagement. The findings aim to offer practical recommendations for SMEs in the UK, helping them enhance HR practices and foster a more engaged workforce with the ambition of fulfilling organization goals.

Key words HR practices. Employee engagement. SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises). UK (United Kingdom). England. Work environments. Gap. Factors. Strategies. Theories.

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Chapter 1: Introduction	
1:1 Introduction	

This study delves into the prevalent issue of insufficient HR practices and low employee engagement within UK Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), addressing overlooked areas, providing valuable insights to aid small and medium-sized enterprises in deploying successful HR tactics, benefiting both their workforce and overall business operations. Inadequate HR approaches lead to diminished engagement, impacting organizational success and employee well-being. Wilkinson's (1999) case studies shed light on HRM adoption influences, but their broader relevance to SMEs remains uncertain. To fill this gap, there is a need for extensive research using nationally representative data. This will clarify the factors influencing HRM adoption in SMEs. Understanding their significance and applicability is key to identifying barriers in implementing advanced HRM practices. Additionally, Challenges in recruitment, training, and compensation contribute to reduced productivity and higher turnover rates in SMEs (Zaid, Jaaron, & Bon, 2018). This research aims to uncover causes, consequences, and solutions for these challenges, offering crucial insights theories and recommendations to enhance HR strategies, acknowledging SMEs' substantial role in the UK economy.

Furthermore, this research aims to address three key questions related to this topic through a systematic review of secondary data from various sources such as The University of Wales Trinity Saint David. academic journals, news articles, books, libraries, and government publications. The underlying principle of systematic reviews is that they are a type of research that can be enhanced by employing precise and transparent methodologies. As the techniques of systematic reviews have been applied to various research inquiries, there has been a growing diversity of systematic review types. Therefore, in this chapter, the term 'systematic review' is utilized to encompass a range of research approaches that involve secondary-level analysis, consolidating the findings of primary research to address a specific research question. Systematic reviews can be defined as "an examination of existing research employing well-defined, transparent, and rigorous research methodologies" (Suri, 2023). The first question explores the HR practices employed by SMEs in the UK.

The second question examines the extent of employee engagement within these SMEs. Lastly, the third research question investigates how HR practices impact employee engagement in small-medium sized businesses. To answer these questions, the paper will employ a systematic review of secondary data using a standardized methodology. The aim is to fill this empirical void by establishing a theoretical framework that explains how SME behaviour relates to HRM support, by introducing two models that elucidate the decision-making capabilities guiding access to HRM support. Firstly, the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm has significantly influenced the understanding of business support for SMEs (Brown and Mawson, 2016) and HRM (Boxall, 1996; Boxall and Purcell, 2016; Kaufman, 2015). Secondly, the Agency theory, developed by economists Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling in the late 1970s, aims to elucidate the dynamic between principals (e.g., shareholders) and agents (e.g., managers) in an organizational context. It delves into the conflicts of interest arising when appointed individuals (agents) make decisions on behalf of those who hired them (principals), according to Jensen and Meckling, (2019).

1:2 Problem Statement

This research focuses on the issue of inadequate HR practices and low levels of employee engagement within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the United Kingdom. According to Nishii & Wright, (2008), the absence of robust HR practices leads to decreased employee engagement, which is a critical factor in achieving organizational objectives. Engaged employees typically display higher dedication, productivity, and job satisfaction. However, numerous SMEs in the UK face challenges in their HR practices, including recruitment, training, compensation, and overall employee management. These challenges have a ripple effect on employee engagement and well-being. This situation can reduce productivity, increase turnover rates, and hinder the growth and profitability of these businesses. Addressing this issue is crucial for the well-being and success of both SMEs and their workforce. Employee engagement is a crucial factor and important for success in organizations, as it results in higher productivity, increased innovation, and greater job satisfaction. In the United Kingdom, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a significant role in employment and the economy.

Employee engagement is the level of commitment and involvement an employee has toward the organization and its values (Nishii & Wright, 2008). Engaged employees understand their role in achieving organizational goals and motivate others to do the same. When there is trust and commitment between the organization and individuals, it leads to increased development opportunities, enhanced productivity, and improved organizational performance (Anitha, 2014). Engaged employees are also vital for an organization to achieve its strategic goals (Vu, 2020). Medium-sized enterprises are defined as companies with fewer than 250 employees and turnovers lower than €50 million, Small enterprises, as per the same source, are those with fewer, than 50 employees and turnovers under €10 million. Micro enterprises are characterized by, having less than 10 employees and turnovers below €2 million according to Turner, Ledwith, and Kelly, (2010). In comparison to the study of Gupta, Gregoriou, and Healy, (2015) Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are commonly described as pivotal job creators. A study by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2009 indicates that they sustained job growth even during the economic downturn. Moreover, SMEs, alongside entrepreneurs, are recognized as essential contributors to economic development.

However, many of these SMEs face a pressing issue: the lack of effective human resource (HR) practices, which directly impacts employee engagement. This problem is not only important for the well-being of employees but also holds considerable economic and strategic significance. This study delves into the interconnected challenges of inadequate HR practices and low employee engagement in UK SMEs. It aims to uncover the root causes, consequences, and potential solutions for these issues. By shedding light on this critical topic, the goal is to offer insights and recommendations for improving HR strategies and increasing employee engagement in the SME sector, benefiting both individuals and organizations. Employee engagement is a strategy in the workplace that creates an environment where all members of an organization can consistently perform at their best. This leads to employees' strong commitment to their company's goals and values, an elevated level of motivation to contribute to the organization's success and an increased sense of personal well-being. Despite the clear advantages of employee engagement in boosting productivity for small businesses, it is worth noting that only a small fraction of these enterprises in the UK, approximately 12%, prioritize it as a top business concern, even though 87% claim to be actively working on enhancing it (Nagori, 2022).

The conducted research presents an expansive scope for further investigation. It offers opportunities to delve into various aspects contributing to the challenges faced by SMEs in implementing effective HR practices and fostering employee engagement. The aim is to uncover gaps in HR practices within SMEs and gain valuable insights that will serve as the foundation for practical enhancements in HR strategies tailored specifically for SMEs. The goal is to translate this research into actionable recommendations that can effectively address the challenges faced by small businesses in fostering robust HR practices and bolstering employee engagement.

1:3 Background

Ahmad et al, (2021) believe the most valuable and essential asset within any business enterprise are its human resources. It is the employees who are responsible for conducting operations across all facets of the business, spanning from resource procurement to the final sale of products. Vu, (2020) conveys that Human resources are recognized as a critical asset that empowers organizations to gain a competitive edge. Therefore, having committed and engaged employees is crucial for advancing the strategic goals of the organization. HR management encompasses various responsibilities, including the recruitment and selection of competent employees, employee training and development, offering rewards and compensation to acknowledge employee performance and the ongoing monitoring, assessment, and enhancement of employee effectiveness. The successful application of HR management practices equips business enterprises with a proficient, capable, and skilled workforce. This workforce understands business policies and requirements and carries out their tasks with an intense sense of responsibility towards the enterprise, thereby contributing to the achievement of market objectives (Zaid, Jaaron, & Bon, 2018). In addition, the study of Kianto, Sáenz, and Aramburu, (2017) states that Human resource (HR) management is a strategic methodology that involves efficiently overseeing employees within business enterprises, aiming to leverage their contributions to achieve business objectives and gain a competitive edge over competitors. The primary objective is to optimize employee performance. HR management centres on the administration of employees within an enterprise, with a particular emphasis on business policies and systems. In comparison, the study of Piwowar, (2021) conveys that HRM (Human Resource Management) has changed to sustainable human resource management strategies and practices that aid in the success of financial, social, and ecological goals, with an impact on the inner and outer part of the organization.

In addition, research conducted by Ghassemieh et al in (2005) addressed the ambiguity surrounding the HR support requirements of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the context of strategic HR. Their study aimed to bridge this knowledge gap and highlighted the critical importance of activities such as recruitment, training, employee retention, job satisfaction, compensation management, and worker's compensation insurance for SMEs in building strong capabilities and gaining a competitive advantage. The authors reviewed existing HR literature for SMEs and introduced a decision model to assist SMEs in selecting a cost-effective HR strategy, which encompasses diverse options ranging from establishing an in-house HR function to adopting electronic HR (EHR) or outsourcing. Outsourcing has gained widespread recognition as a significant trend in HR management, driven by the pursuit of financial savings, the ability to focus on strategic matters, access to specialized skills and technology, and the potential for improved and measurable

service quality. However, there are indications that these advantages may not always be fully realized. Furthermore, there are potential downsides to outsourcing, such as its impact on employee morale and the risk of sharing internal knowledge with outsourcing providers. Effective management of the outsourcing relationship is deemed crucial, as discussed by Belcourt, (2006).

Moreso, In the study by Yang et al, (2015) the relationship between e-commerce investments made by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the United Kingdom and their overall performance was explored. This study adopted the Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective and analysed data from 430 British SMEs spanning 16 different industries. The findings of the study underscored the significant contributions of business resources, human resources, and e-commerce readiness to enhancing firm performance. Notably, the sophistication of SMEs' e-commerce websites was positively associated with improved performance. However, direct investments in information technology (IT) and e-commerce training did not appear to be significant drivers of performance. The study emphasized that UK SMEs could distinguish themselves through their e-commerce capabilities by integrating e-commerce resources with their existing organizational strengths.

1:4 Research Aim

This study seeks to assess how the absence of HR practices affects employee engagement in UK SMEs. By exploring into the causes and outcomes of this deficiency, the research aims to offer insights and recommendations for improving HR strategies and fostering greater employee engagement within this sector.

1:5 Research Objectives

- ❖ Identify the factors responsible for the absence of HR practices in UK SMEs.
- ❖ Investigate the factors causing diminished employee engagement in UK SMEs.
- ❖ Suggest strategies and provide recommendations for UK SMEs to enhance HR practices and, in turn, boost employee engagement.

1:6 Research Questions

- ❖ **Question 1:** What are the HR practices used in SMEs in Uk?
- ❖ **Question 2:** How does employees engage in SMEs in UK?
- ❖ **Question 3:** How does HR practices effect employee engagement in SMEs?

These pivotal inquiries shape my study on the deficiency of HR practices and employee engagement in UK SMEs, guiding a focused exploration of their interplay. They aim to reveal critical factors, assess the current landscape, and identify avenues for improvement. These three questions will provide me with a structured path, ensuring a direct approach to unravelling core challenges and gaining fresh insights. Regarding review methods, Sandelowski et al. (2012) distinguish configurative and aggregative synthesis, while Gough et al. (2012) caution against rigid classifications, advocating for an approach that integrates elements from both categories, emphasizing the need to align methods with specific research questions.

1:7 Rational research

The rational is to Investigate the deficit of HR practices and employee engagement in UK SMEs holds considerable significance due to their pivotal role in the country's economy. Improving these aspects is vital for bolstering productivity and competitiveness. This research aims to enhance employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall motivation, consequently boosting workforce morale and performance. Addressing this issue is crucial for talent retention, legal compliance, and gaining a competitive edge (Li & Branine, 2019). By bridging potential research gaps, this study offers insights to assist SMEs in implementing effective HR strategies, benefiting both employees and businesses.

1:8 Significance / Relevance of Study

The importance of the subject matter, which revolves around "The absence of HR practices and employee engagement in UK SMEs," cannot be overstated. It is critical because SMEs play a significant role in the UK's economy, influencing factors such as employee welfare, business performance, talent retention, and compliance with labour regulations. Additionally, it is essential for enhancing productivity, staying competitive, encouraging innovation, and adapting to market dynamics. Moreover, governments and policymakers have a personal stake in promoting efficient HR practices in SMEs. Closing this research gap is imperative to yield positive results for employees, businesses, and the overall economy (Yadav et al, 2019).

1:9 Chapter summary

This study focuses on the problem and issues of insufficient HR practices and low levels of employee engagement within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the United Kingdom. Inadequate HR practices lead to decreased employee engagement, which negatively affects both organizational success and employee well-being. Engaged employees tend to be more dedicated and productive. However, many UK SMEs encounter challenges in areas like recruitment, training, and compensation, which, in turn, can result in reduced productivity, higher turnover rates, and limited business growth. Addressing these issues is crucial for the overall well-being and success of SMEs and their workforce (Zaid, Jaaron, & Bon, 2018).

The research aims to uncover the underlying causes, consequences, and potential solutions for the HR and employee engagement challenges faced by UK SMEs. It seeks to provide valuable insights and recommendations for improving HR strategies, considering the significant role SMEs play in the UK economy. Despite the clear benefits of employee engagement, only a small fraction of SMEs prioritizes it, highlighting the importance of this research in addressing the gap and contributing to the broader economic development of the UK (Yeo & Carter, 2018)

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2:1 Introduction

My literature review on the topic of the deficiency of HR practices and employee engagement in SMEs in the UK delves into a comprehensive examination of existing research and scholarship. It synthesizes key studies and findings that shed light on the challenges and opportunities within this context. The review explores the HR practices prevalent in SMEs, the factors influencing employee engagement, and the intricate relationship between the two. Additionally, it examines the impact of the lack of HR practices on employee engagement, job satisfaction, and overall organizational performance. Through this literature review, I aim to build a solid foundation for my research, identify gaps in the current knowledge, and offer insights for addressing the issues surrounding HR practices and employee engagement in SMEs in the UK. Newman and Gough, (2020) identify that most systematic review types follow a series of interconnected stages, portrayed as Fig: 1 systematic review process in appendices.

2:2 Research methodology

While investigating the subject of inadequate HR practices and employee engagement within UK SMEs, it becomes evident that this area has garnered significant scrutiny. However, there remains substantial unexplored territory for additional research and examination. The existing body of literature highlights critical aspects but also reveals a notable gap, signifying the potential for further in-depth investigation and analysis in this domain (Cassell et al, 2002). An extensive variety of scholarly search engines such as UWTSD (University of Wales Trinity Saint David) library, Google Scholar, Scopus, EBSCO, PsycINFO, were utilized in the systematic literature review (SLR) to fulfil the study's objectives. This approach aimed to encompass a wide range of academic resources and publications, enhancing the comprehensiveness of the review process. Moreso, "HR practices" "Employee engagement" "SMEs" "Small and Medium-sized Enterprises" "UK" "Lack of HR practices" "Work environments" "Gap" "Factors" "Strategies" "Theories" were utilised as keywords for the systematic literature research. Therefore, my research will investigate further and primarily focus on three key research areas stated below:

1: Factors relating to the absence of HR Practices in SMEs: The first area involves a comprehensive examination of the HR practices currently in use by SMEs in the UK. This will include an in-depth exploration of recruitment, training, employee development, and performance appraisal strategies.

2: Factors of Employee Engagement in SMEs: The second area centres on understanding the levels and determinants of employee engagement within SMEs. I aim to critically analyse factors that impact employee morale, motivation, and job satisfaction in these organizations.

3: Impact of HR Practices on Employee Engagement: The third area seeks to establish a critical link between HR practices and employee engagement in SMEs. It involves a nuanced examination of how the lack of HR practices may affect employee engagement and, subsequently, the overall performance and competitiveness of these businesses. According to Saridakis, Torres & Johnstone, (2013) HR practices represent significant tools that can enhance commitment and potentially elevate effort and performance within underperforming SMEs characterized by low employee satisfaction. Through these research areas, my study aims to offer valuable insights into enhancing

HR strategies and boosting employee engagement in SMEs, addressing critical gaps in the existing literature while contributing to the betterment of organizations in the UK.

2:3 Factors relating to the absence HR Practices in SMEs: In the United Kingdom, a sizable portion of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) comprising 51 percent expresses concerns about the impact of national employment regulations on their business success. This apprehension is primarily driven by the administrative burdens associated with these regulations. The key areas of concern for SMEs revolve around regulatory aspects such as the national minimum wage, health, and safety regulations, and working time regulations (Bacon & Hoque). Moreover, both SME owners and managers exhibit a lack of in-depth knowledge about employment legislation and are resistant to increased regulation in the field of employment. Moreover, employees working within SMEs tend to have limited awareness of their legal entitlements and often refrain from asserting their rights due to job insecurity, as noted by Marlow, (2002).

Furthermore, the absence of advanced HR practices within SMEs has been associated with several adverse HR-related outcomes. For instance, SMEs are recognized as the primary source of unfair dismissal claims filed with UK employment tribunals (Earnshaw et al, 2000), and job security within SMEs is notably lower compared to larger corporations. However, research studies extracted from Bacon & Hoque, (2005) suggest Additional surveys conducted among SMEs indicate that a shortage of skilled labour poses a hindrance to the growth of small businesses. The 2001 Employers Skill Survey, for instance, reported "significant numbers" of UK SMEs facing skills shortages or skills gaps. In another survey, almost one-third of SMEs identified training (32 percent) and employment-related issues (30 percent) among the top five challenges they expected to encounter in the coming year. The absence of advanced HR practices in SMEs leads to problems like unfair dismissal claims and job instability. Skills shortages and training concerns hinder SME growth. Recent evidence indicates improved performance in SMEs implementing advanced HRM practices. See the table; 1 below for a summary of internal and external influencing factors. Despite previous scepticism regarding the relationship between Human Resource Management (HRM) and the economic performance of SMEs (Storey, 2004), recent evidence suggests that the small number of SMEs that have embraced more advanced HRM practices do report enhanced performance, as highlighted in studies by Hayton, (2003) and Way, (2002).

Table: 1 internal and external influences

Table 2 *Independent variables*

	%
Internal influences:	
<i>Workforce skill-mix and employee dependency:</i>	
Proportion of skilled employees:	
0 per cent unskilled	42.30
>0–24 per cent unskilled	39.35
25–49 per cent unskilled	8.98
50–74 per cent unskilled	5.36
>75 per cent unskilled	4.01
<i>Personnel/HR expertise:</i>	
Personnel/HR specialist present	6.57
External influences:	
<i>Corporate governance and proprietary control:</i>	
Single independent workplace	81.40
Higher-level policy followed	34.80
Part of a franchise	3.92
Family owned and involved	39.50
Family owned but not involved	9.90
Non-family owned	50.59
<i>Influences from the wider business community:</i>	
Member of an employers' association	61.64
<i>Relationship with/size of customers:</i>	
Non-trading sector	16.27
Largest customer accounts for:	
<5 per cent of output	21.21
5–10 per cent of output	18.09
11–25 per cent of output	15.96
26–50 per cent of output	10.44
>50 per cent of output	18.03
<i>Trade union influence:</i>	
Union recognized	12.63

Note: Weighted percentages given

Source: (Bacon & Hoque, 2017).

This view is clearly supported by the UK government. For example, the UK Department for Trade and Industry argues that 'Improving the growth capability of UK businesses will only be achieved by raising performance across a range of areas such as management skills, workforce development, and the use of innovation and adoption of best practice across different business functions. Similarly, ACAS notes the growing acceptance that good employment relations can play a vital role in giving organizations, particularly small and medium-sized organizations, a competitive edge. In the UK, governments have sought to improve the overall productivity and survival of SMEs through the introduction of over 200 support measures (Curran and Blackburn 2000) such as the Small Firms Initiative launched in 2003 to increase the take-up of Investors in People (IiP) among small businesses. It is clear, therefore, that the UK government views the development of more sophisticated HRM practices as central to the economic success of the sector.

The UK government strongly endorses the viewpoint that emphasizes the importance of advanced Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in the success of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). This support is evident through various government statements and initiatives (Curran and Blackburn, 2000). The message regarding the significance of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices appears to be making inroads into some Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs, as indicated by the incorporation of fragments of HRM practices according to Bacon et al, (1996). Downing-Burn and Cox, (1999). Cully et al. (1999) suggest that small workplaces do not exclusively operate informally.

In fact, only 8 percent of SMEs reported having no "new management practices" in the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey, with 28 percent implementing five or more such practices. Thus, the disparities in HRM practices between large firms and SMEs are characterized as a matter of degree rather than an absolute absence of structure (Cully et al,1999). Contrary to the common assumption that SMEs do not invest in staff training, the data reveals that they allocate £5.8 billion annually to training efforts. Approximately 53 percent of SMEs offer some form of training to their employees, and 15 percent are engaged with the Investors in People program (Small Business Service, 2001). These changes may be attributed to the adoption of new practices among existing SMEs, as well as an increase in the number of small knowledge-intensive firms that rely heavily on human resource expertise for recruiting, selecting, and retaining talented staff (Baron and Hannan, 2002). Hence, informality is a prevalent but not universal characteristic within the SME sector, and a range of "enterprise characteristics" accounts for the differences in employer strategies.

These significant characteristics encompass the skill level of employees, ownership patterns, access to professional management guidance, and relationships with other businesses. However, while case studies have effectively identified potential influences on the adoption of HRM practices in the SME sector, the relative importance and broader applicability of each of these influences have yet to be firmly established (Wilkinson, 1999). The analysis conducted here seeks to address this gap in knowledge by utilizing data from a nationally representative survey of British workplaces to investigate the factors that clarify the variations in the adoption of HRM practices within the SME

sector. Given the current limited sophistication within SMEs, it is crucial to gain insights into the barriers that impede the implementation of more advanced approaches. This understanding is essential for the development of policies aimed at ensuring the survival and growth of SMEs.

2:4 Factors of Employee Engagement in SMEs:

Recognizing employee engagement as a crucial element that enhances organizational achievements, (Kohl et al, 2009). It is evident that it can bring about favourable outcomes across various dimensions of any business. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) must prioritize employee engagement to achieve success (Rashid & Bin Mohd, 2015). In addition, to the study of Bakker & Schaufeli, (2008) employee engagement has been recognized as a crucial factor that contributes to the success of organizations and can yield positive outcomes across various aspects of business. Many experts have asserted that employee engagement is a predictor of outcomes at the organizational level that can have favourable implications for both large enterprises and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), (Kishore et al., 2012). Therefore, the adoption of employee engagement is deemed essential for enhancing organizational performance. In comparison to the study of Koh et al, (2009) In the case of SMEs, they confront not only a dynamic and highly competitive business landscape but also contend with specific challenges such as financial constraints, a shortage of expertise, marketing difficulties, intense competition, and rising cost factors (Muhammad et al, 2010).

Despite these obstacles, SMEs play a vital role in the economic development of their respective countries (Khalique et al., 2011). They also serve as a source of employment opportunities and offer support to larger corporations (Haron & Hashim, 2015). Furthermore, in the research of Rashid & Bin Mohd Harif, (2015) Employee engagement outcomes can be categorized into two levels: individual level and organizational level Jose, (2012). Scholars concur that for employee engagement to have an impact on organizational-level outcomes, it must first affect individual-level outcomes (Saks, 2006). Within the field of Human Resource Management (HRM), employee engagement can be leveraged to enhance organizational performance, and this approach is often called "positive HRM" (Truss et al, 2013). Therefore, it can be anticipated that this perspective offers a theoretical expansion of the outcomes associated with employee engagement and can further develop performance implications through the lens of organizational-level outcomes, thus becoming a "new best practice" HRM approach. As a result, SMEs are often regarded as the cornerstone of the national economy (Radam et al, 2008).

Employee engagement is influenced by a combination of factors that shape an employee's commitment, motivation, and enthusiasm for their work. These factors encompass a sense of purpose and alignment with the organization's goals, clear communication and supportive leadership, opportunities for skill development and growth, a positive work environment that promotes well-being and work-life balance, fair recognition and rewards, and a feeling of autonomy and involvement in decision-making (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Additionally, an intense sense of belonging, trust in the organization, and meaningful interactions with colleagues and supervisors are essential elements. When these factors are nurtured, employees are more likely to be engaged, leading to increased productivity, job satisfaction, and a positive impact on organizational success.

In comparison to the study of Sharma and Kaur (2014, p. 45) defined employee engagement as the degree to which an employee experiences a psychological investment in their work, leading to a behavioural and intellectual focus on organizational objectives. This psychological state, as noted by Hewitt (2014, p. 11), can potentially result in behavioural outcomes that support enhanced organizational performance. Numerous studies in existing literature have explored the impact of employee engagement on organizational performance. For instance, Shantz et al, (2013) illustrated the mediating role of employee engagement in explaining how job design influences eventual job performance. Their findings revealed that "engaged employees" demonstrated higher performance levels and advocated for job structures offering increased autonomy, task variety, and significance. Furthermore, a Gallup study in 2006 examining 23,910 business units observed that those with higher employee engagement exhibited greater productivity and profitability (Wagner and Harter, 2006). These studies represent correlational research in literature, establishing a unilateral connection between increased employee engagement and organizational performance.

Despite these correlational findings, some studies have started to highlight a lack of research examining the causal links between employee engagement and other organizational variables. For example, Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) suggested that exploring ambidexterity within a business unit might significantly influence overall organizational performance. The authors propose that investigating ambidexterity at both the group and individual levels could provide valuable insights for organizations navigating the dynamic business and economic landscapes of today.

2:5 Impact of HR Practices on Employee Engagement:

As per Piwowar (2021), sustainable human resources management involves implementing HRM strategies and practices that support the achievement of financial, social, and environmental objectives, influencing both the internal and external dimensions of the organization. (Bacon and Hoque, 2005) investigated HRM (Human Resource Management) practice adoption in SMEs, using data from the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey, identifying key factors influencing adoption. Workforce skill diversity, unionization, and customer base nature were significant predictors. Skill diversity was particularly influential. SMEs adopting HRM practices tend to have highly skilled personnel and connect with other organizations. The primary driver of employee engagement within an organization is its HR system, as noted by the Center for Human Resource Strategy (2009). Human resource management (HRM) practices are strategically designed to shape employee behaviour. Wright et al, (1994) regarded HR practices as how employee perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours are shaped.

Employee engagement, influenced by HRM practices, is nurtured through employer initiatives like job design, recruitment, training, compensation, performance management, and career development (Vance, 2006). Desler (2005) compares HRM to a range of practices ensuring an efficient workforce capable of meeting operational needs. HRM encompasses acquiring, training, appraising, compensating, handling labour relations, health, safety, and ensuring fairness. Focusing on training, performance appraisal, work-life balance, and rewards, this study delves into HRM activities. Training and development aim to enrich individuals' skills, knowledge, and attitudes, vital

for current and future performance. Performance appraisal evaluates job execution against set standards, involving feedback to employees. Work-life balance denotes effectively managing work, family, and non-work obligations. Rewards and benefits encompass financial and non-financial acknowledgments for employee contributions (Vance, 2006; Desler, 2005).

Furthermore, according to Jafri, (2013) empirical investigation of the Melcrum employee engagement survey 2007/08 shows that the HR department accounts for 40 percent of an organization's engagement program. Training and development, an integral part of HRM practices, contribute significantly to cultivating an engaged workforce (Vance, 2006). Employees who enhance their skills through training are more likely to engage fully in their work, finding satisfaction in mastering new tasks (Sardar et al, 2011). Compensation, encompassing rewards and benefits, strongly influences employee engagement (Vance, 2006). Monetary recognition plays a vital role in shaping employee behaviour and engagement (Gratton, 2004). Studies also highlight the impact of performance appraisal and management on employee engagement (Pulakos, 2004). Effective performance management nurtures engagement via feedback and clear expectations. Though direct studies linking work-life balance (WLB) to engagement are lacking, research suggests that WLB impacts organizational outcomes, hinting at a potential link to engagement.

Konrad (2006) outlines three key facets of engagement: cognitive, affective, and behavioural. Cognitive aspects involve beliefs about goals, values, and conditions; affective aspects focus on emotional connections and attitudes; behavioural aspects concern actions contributing to goals. Employee engagement is influenced by workplace elements (Miles, 2001) and individual traits (Harter et al., 2002), implying a fusion of organizational and personal factors in fostering engagement.

2.6 Theory explaining HR practices and employee engagement in SMEs.

In the context of SMEs, the interplay between HR practices and employee engagement is critical due to resource constraints. Hence, adopting the right combination of HR practices guided by these theories can help SMEs create a workplace environment where employees are engaged, motivated, and committed to contributing to the organization's success. In addition, research was conducted by Garavan et al (2016), emphasizing the crucial importance of leadership capabilities within a company for achieving a competitive advantage. They suggest that, drawing from the resource-based theory which can be seen below as Fig:1, a significant perspective within strategic management, extensively can be used as a managerial model to identify crucial resources necessary for a company to gain a lasting competitive edge. This theory provides a foundational framework to predict a firm's performance and competitive advantage. SMEs can gain a competitive edge through skilled leadership and unique, rare, and irreplaceable resources, serving as a significant barrier to imitation when tailored to their context.

SMEs typically lack formal leadership development structures and internal expertise in leadership development (Smallbone et al, 2015). Managers face time constraints, limiting their participation in formal leadership development (Gibb, 2009), and owner-managers similarly struggle due to time limitations (Chadwick et al, 2013). However, the SME environment does offer informal avenues for leadership development (Smith and Morse, 2005), capitalizing on the closeness of management

teams to facilitate observational learning (Kempster and Parry, 2014). Managerial quality significantly impacts SME performance, given the necessity to operate under resource constraints. Managers in SMEs play both strategic and operational roles but might exhibit varying competence across these functions (Lubatkin et al, 2006). The implementation of leadership development practices is expected to yield direct and indirect performance benefits (Teo et al., 2011) and enhance employee management (Schlosser, 2015). Leadership development is crucial in enhancing the human capital of managers in SMEs (Subramony, 2009), and aligning unique managerial resources with SME strategies (Ployhart, 2006). According to the resource-based view, SMEs cultivate internal capabilities and distinct resources to address external demands. The Resource-Based View (RBV), introduced by Penrose in 1959, suggests that a company is made up of both physical and human assets organized within its structure. According to Gottschalk & Solli-Sæther (2005), RBV theory highlights two main ideas: first, for a resource to give a competitive advantage, it needs to be rare, hard to copy, unique, and not easily available elsewhere (McIvor, 2008); second, a company's success is influenced by the quality of its resources (Gottschalk & Solli-Sæther, 2005).

Similarly, the research by Kamyabi and Devi, (2012) emphasizes how a diverse resource base can create a distinct competitive advantage. RBV focuses on optimizing assets, developing core skills, and leveraging resources to gain an edge in the industry. It assesses an organization's ability to effectively utilize and integrate resources for competitiveness in a dynamic business environment. Hence, highlighting the need for managerial growth. While acknowledging the significance of leadership development, limited insight exists into its integration within SMEs. Factors influencing the adoption of HR practices may not directly correspond to leadership development (Behrends, 2007; Marchington and Suter, 2013). However, these studies offer potential avenues for investigation. The constructive interaction between HR management and strategy concerning leadership development, coupled with the scarcity of HR and leadership proficiency in SMEs, influences practice adoption. SMEs grapple with leadership skill gaps, impacting their performance against larger counterparts. Bridging these gaps becomes pivotal for competitive advantage, thereby shaping the uptake of leadership development practices (Cantner et al., 2010).

Furthermore, the agency theory addresses conflicts between business owners (principals) and company executives (agents), particularly focusing on shareholders and corporate leaders. It explains that when significant conflict exists between the principal and agent, the agent will act in their self-interest, particularly when they have more information. In contrast, when there is less conflict, the agent's actions are more likely to align with the principal's interests. This theory aims to solve these conflicts by linking employee compensation to the company's success, favouring outcome-based contracts that tie rewards to profit increases and lower compensation during profit declines (Jensen & Meckling, 2019). Therefore, aligning with the above research and theories I would suggest, Resource-Based Theory (RBT) and Agency Theory within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and involve practical strategies and actions tailored to their specific circumstances. RBT suggests that a firm's resources (tangible or intangible) contribute to its competitive advantage and performance.

It emphasizes that resources that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable can lead to sustained competitive advantage. Agency Theory explores the relationship between

principals (owners/shareholders) and agents (managers) within a company. It examines potential conflicts of interest between these parties and how to align their objectives (Jensen and Meckling, 2019). Therefore, my recommendation would be that small businesses should put either one of these theories into practice according to the business's aims, objectives and goals as suggested below:

Figure:1, emphasizes that resources can be subcategorized into tangible and intangible resources and both resources are important for the proper functioning of the organization (Wu, 2010). When applying Resource-Based Theory (RBT) to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the VRIO framework seen in Fig: 2 serves as an evaluative tool to assess the value, rarity, imitability, and organization of a firm's resources. The RBT underscores the significance of resources as a foundation for long-term competitive advantage, while the VRIO model provides a structured approach to analysing these resources. For SMEs, this combined approach allows a systematic evaluation of their unique strengths, like specialized skills or exclusive partnerships, to determine their competitive advantage. By using the VRIO criteria within the RBT context, SMEs can identify and leverage their most valuable and rare resources, strategizing on their effective utilization to sustain a competitive edge within their industry. This integration helps SMEs in pinpointing distinct, hard-to-imitate resources and organize them to foster continued success and market competitiveness (Donnellan and Rutledge, 2019).

Fig:1 Resource based view

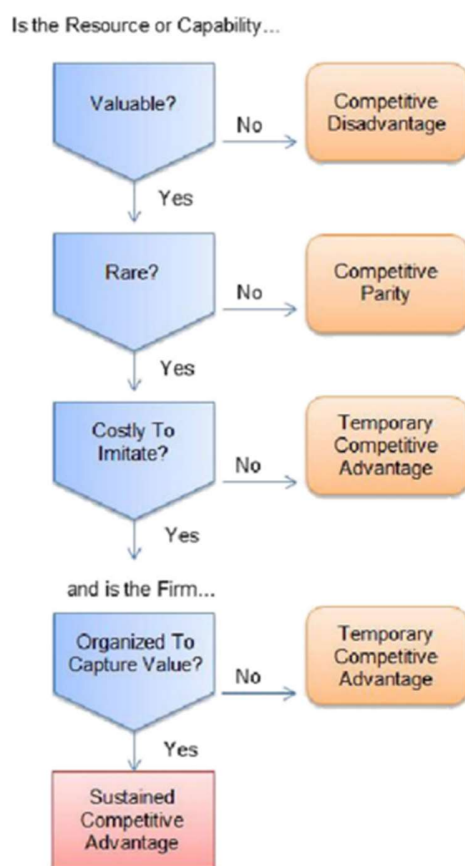


Source: (Donnellan and Rutledge, 2017).

The model presented above as FIG: 1 outlines the resource-based view, emphasizing the VRIO framework: assessing the value, rarity, imitability, and organizational aspects of resources within a

company. Therefore, VRIO serves as an essential tool for strategic decision-making, enabling small businesses to effectively compete in their respective sectors and industries. small and large businesses can apply the VRIO framework to evaluate their internal environment. This framework aids in recognizing key resources and capabilities, determining their value, rarity, imitability, and the supportive organizational structure needed to leverage these resources effectively (Georgiadis and Pitelis, (2012). The diagram presented below provides a summary of the diverse results that could be adopted for SMEs to be successful if thoughtfully executed through the VRIO analysis.

Fig: 2 The VRIO framework



Source: (Donnellan and Rutledge, 2019).

The strategic management framework known as "value, rareness, imitability, and organization" (Rothaermel, 2016) can be rephrased as the VRIO framework in strategic management. small and large businesses can apply the VRIO framework to evaluate their internal environment. This framework aids in recognizing key resources and capabilities, determining their value, rarity,

imitability, and the supportive organizational structure needed to leverage these resources effectively.

The VRIO framework, established in 2006 by scholars Barney and Hesterly, aids businesses in evaluating their internal environment to identify core strengths and weaknesses. Rooted in the belief that a firm's competitive advantage is derived from its internal resources, this approach, known as the resource-based view of strategy, emphasizes the importance of a company's internal capabilities. VRIO stands for Value, Rarity, Imitability, and Organization. The representing key questions can help determine and aid in small businesses' competitive advantage. The above diagram in Fig: 2 offers key insights for small businesses. if SME's resources lack value, consider outsourcing them; valuable but not rare resources put SME's at a disadvantage, needing urgent action; rare and valuable resources easily imitated offer only a temporary edge; valuable, rare, and costly-to-imitate resources can be fleeting if SME's lack weakness, but when small businesses have valuable, rare, hard-to-copy resources and strong organization will achieve in a sustained competitive advantage.

Garavan et al, (2016) highlight three crucial factors shaping HR practice adoption in SMEs: alignment with HRM strategies, leadership expertise, and skill gaps. Owner-managers' positive stance on leadership development significantly influences practice adoption, mediating the fit between HRM strategies and leadership practices. Prioritizing support and resources for effective leadership development is vital due to this mediating role. Applying Resource-Based Theory (RBT) emphasizes valuable, rare, and non-substitutable resources for sustained competitive advantage. Additionally, Agency Theory addresses conflicts between owners and managers, vital for aligning SME objectives (Garavan et al, 2016). Therefore, implementing either theory aligns with business aims and goals.

Implementing Resourced based view

Identify and Assess Resources for SMEs: Small business managers must recognize that specialized knowledge, patents, and unique operational processes create a competitive advantage. Hiring skilled personnel contributes to success, while strategic partnerships offer access to resources and markets, strengthening the SME's competitive stance. **Evaluate Resource Competitiveness for SMEs:** Managers must evaluate each resource's impact on SME goals and ensure alignment. Rarity is key, making replication by competitors difficult. Assessing potential imitation, especially among other SMEs, is crucial. Evaluating organizational readiness helps small businesses effectively manage resources for a competitive edge (Donnellan and Rutledge, 2017). **Strategic Planning for SMEs:** For SMEs, optimizing resources means developing tailored strategies, allocating funds to enhance identified resources. Emphasizing sustained competitive advantages, SMEs should focus on identifying and investing in resources for long-term success and differentiation. **Adaptation to Market Changes for SMEs:** SMEs must embrace adaptability, staying flexible amid market or technological changes. Regularly reviewing and aligning resources with evolving dynamics is vital. Continuous assessment ensures resource relevance, bolstering SME competitiveness by managers' proactive adjustments to market shifts. **Continuous Improvement for SMEs:** Managers of small businesses should focus on the importance in Cultivating an innovation culture which is crucial for SMEs, promoting continuous improvement.

Allocating resources for tailored research and development will enhance and evolve existing resources, ensuring the SME remains competitive and adaptable. (Kaufman, 2015). Pagdonsolan et al. (2020) note a significant shift in business performance management toward continuous performance management (CPM), emphasizing an employee-centric HR paradigm, and prioritizing support for professional growth.

Additionally, Cohen, Brinkman, and Neerincx (2016) stress the importance of prompt feedback in enhancing performance management. Managers, supervisors, and HR professionals play vital roles in maintaining an effective performance management process across the organization. FIG: 3 in the appendices illustrates the Strategic Performance Management Development Cycle of three stages, encompassing goal alignment, continuous feedback, development, evaluations, and recognition. Furthermore, **SMEs should Align Strategy with Resources:** SMEs should align their business strategy with identified resources. By concentrating efforts in areas of unique advantage, the SME can maximize resource impact, contributing to a sustainable competitive edge (Donnellan and Rutledge, 2019). Therefore, by implementing these steps collectively can contribute to the effective application of the Resource-Based View theory in small and medium-sized enterprises, helping them build and sustain a competitive advantage in the market.

Identification & Evaluation for SMEs through VRIO framework:

Value: SMEs should recognize and prioritize resources crucial to their success, such as unique knowledge, patents, skilled employees, and strategic partnerships. **Rarity:** Assess how uncommon and distinctive SME resources are compared to competitors, including patents, specialized knowledge, or processes that are not easily replicated. **Imitability:** Evaluate the difficulty competitors, especially other SMEs, face in reproducing resources. This includes considering the complexity and uniqueness of processes. **Organization:** SMEs should analyse how effectively they organize and utilize these resources internally to ensure optimal utilization of identified strengths. **Leveraging Competitive Advantages:** SMEs should focus on resources that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and organized effectively, as these provide a competitive edge in the market. **Strategic Decision-Making:** SMEs should strategically invest in developing and enhancing these valuable, rare, and difficult-to-imitate resources. Allocate resources to sustain and expand the competitive advantages identified. **Continuous Evaluation and Improvement:** SMEs must continuously reassess their resources, adapting to market changes. Continually refining and enhancing resources is essential to stay ahead and maintain a competitive edge. **Align Strategy with Identified Strengths:** SMEs should ensure their overall business strategy aligns seamlessly with the identified resources. Directing efforts towards areas where the SME has a unique advantage maximizes the impact of these strengths. Adopting these practices fosters a strategic and competitive business approach (Kaufman, 2015).

Structured within the VRIO framework, SMEs efficiently identify, assess, and strategically develop resources for competitive advantages. Analysing physical, human, intellectual, and organizational aspects help identify valuable and rare resources. Prioritizing these unique resources over common ones ensures sustained advantages, as easily imitable resources offer temporary benefits. Valuable, rare, hard-to-imitate, and well-organized resources signify lasting competitive edges for SMEs. This approach guides continuous innovation, enabling SMEs to navigate market changes and maintain

leadership (Barney, 1991). Focusing on VRIO-defined resources drives SMEs to achieve business goals and uphold market leadership through ongoing innovation.

Implementing Agency Theory

Agency theory, formulated primarily by economist Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling in the late 1970s, seeks to explain the relationship between principals (such as shareholders) and agents (such as managers) within an organization. Model can be seen in Fig: 3 as Agency model.

Fig: 3 Agency model



Source: (Wright, Mukherji and Kroll 2001)

The theory addresses the inherent conflicts of interest that arise when individuals (agents) are hired or appointed by others (principals) to make decisions on their behalf. SMEs can apply the principles of Agency Theory by following these steps **(1) Recognizing Principal-Agent Relationships** such as Identifying the principal (business owners or shareholders) and agent (managers or employees) relationships within the company. **(2) Alignment of Interests:** SME management should understand the potential conflicts of interest between principals and agents, particularly related to decision-making and goal alignment. **(3) Designing Appropriate Contracts:** Creating contracts or systems that align the interests of both principals and agents. These might include performance-based incentives, clear job descriptions, and well-defined responsibilities to bridge potential gaps in interest. **(4) Minimizing Information Asymmetry:** Managing and minimizing information asymmetry between principals and agents, ensuring transparent communication and access to necessary information. **(5) Monitoring and Accountability:** Implementing monitoring mechanisms or systems for accountability to ensure that agents act in the best interest of the principals. Regular evaluations, reporting structures, and checks and balances may be implemented for this purpose. **(6) Applying Effective Governance Structures:** Developing organizational structures and decision-making processes that align with the company's best interests. These can mitigate conflicts

and ensure that decisions are in line with overall SMEs business objectives (Wright, Mukherji and Kroll, 2001).

To strengthen internal operations, SMEs can effectively apply Agency Theory by addressing principal-agent relationships, aligning interests, creating suitable contracts, managing information asymmetry, and implementing monitoring and governance structures. Establishing transparent communication and shared objectives among stakeholders, from owners to managers, is crucial. SMEs should create governance structures supporting decision-making in the company's best interests, with accountability measures to prevent conflicts. Designing incentive systems that encourage contributions to long-term goals aligns incentives with overall company performance. These measures manage conflicts, ensuring owner-managers' decisions foster sustainable growth and success in the dynamic UK business environment.

2:7 Literature gap

The evolving landscape of small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) practices, incorporating elements of Human Resource Management (HRM), challenges assumptions of absolute informality within these sectors. Wilkinson, (1999) identifies influences on HRM adoption through case studies, yet their broader applicability across the SME sector remains unclear. This knowledge gap underscores the need for comprehensive research using nationally representative data to elucidate factors shaping HRM adoption in SMEs. Understanding the relative importance and widespread applicability of these influences becomes crucial in identifying barriers to implementing advanced HRM practices, supporting policy development aimed at fostering SME survival and growth. While existing literature primarily establishes correlations between employee engagement and organizational performance, there is a scarcity of research delving into causal relationships. While studies demonstrate positive associations between engagement and outcomes like productivity and profitability (Shantz et al, 2013; Wagner and Harter, 2006).

A critical gap exists in understanding the causal pathways, especially concerning broader organizational variables like ambidexterity (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004). Closing this gap involves delving into the nuanced impact of employee engagement on diverse organizational aspects, vital for navigating intricate business landscapes. However, despite references to Piwovar (2021) and Bacon and Hoque (2005), the absence of extensive empirical studies hinders understanding the holistic relationship between HRM practices—like training, compensation, performance appraisal, and work-life balance—and employee engagement. Empirical validation of these impacts is crucial for comprehending their interconnection within organizational contexts, as emphasized by scholars such as (Van,2006) and the Center for Human Resource Strategy (2009). Thus, deeper insights into HRM adoption factors, their broader relevance, and the causal mechanisms linking HRM practices, employee engagement, and organizational outcomes are pivotal for policymaking and understanding SMEs' behavioural dynamics (Van, 2006, Center for Human Resource Strategy, 2009, Piwovar, 2021, Bacon & Hoque, 2005).

2.8 Chapter summary

The literature outlines a change in basic assumptions in SME practices, embracing HRM elements contrary to assumptions of complete informality. However, despite case studies identifying factors

influencing HRM adoption, their broader applicability remains ambiguous, necessitating comprehensive nationally representative research (Wilkinson, 1999). Understanding these influences' significance across the SME sector is crucial for policymaking, addressing barriers to advanced HRM practices, and promoting SME growth. Similarly, while existing literature links employee engagement to outcomes like productivity and profitability, there is a dearth of research exploring causal relationships, particularly regarding broader organizational variables such as ambidexterity (Shantz et al, 2013; Wagner and Harter, 2006; Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004). Investigating the nuanced impact of employee engagement on multifaceted organizational aspects is essential for navigating complex business landscapes effectively. Moreover, although the literature extensively discusses the correlation between HRM practices and employee engagement, a significant gap persists in empirical studies establishing a comprehensive relationship between these concepts (Piwowar, 2021; Bacon and Hoque, 2005; Van, 2006; Center for Human Resource Strategy, 2009). Further empirical research validating the specific impacts of HRM practices on employee engagement is vital to solidify our understanding of their interconnection within organizational contexts. Closing these gaps is essential to bridge the existing knowledge divide highlighted in this research by various scholars and research organizations.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3:1 Introduction

This chapter encapsulates vital elements essential for robust research. It intricately discusses the research design, approach, philosophy, and strategy, forming the foundational pillars of the study. The research design delineates the methodological structure and organization. Simultaneously, the research approach defines the guiding perspective—whether deductive, inductive, exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive. Complementing these, the research philosophy underpins fundamental beliefs, encompassing perspectives like positivism or interpretivism. Additionally, the research strategy outlines an overarching plan, including data collection methods and anticipated challenges. Furthermore, the chapter delves deeply into specifics regarding the data collection method, aligning it with research objectives. It elucidates the step-by-step data analysis process, encompassing tools and methodologies for insightful conclusions. Ethical considerations also feature prominently, addressing participant rights, confidentiality, consent, and risk mitigation. Overall, this chapter provides a comprehensive guide, detailing the research framework, methodologies, and ethical protocols, ensuring a systematic and ethically sound pursuit of objectives.

3:2 Research Methodology

Yousof & and Aspinwall (2000) define research methodology as a systematic approach crucial for achieving research project goals, forming the foundation for reporting findings. It represents a structured journey to acquire new insights and knowledge, categorizing research broadly into quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative research emphasizes numbers, data, and statistics, employing a hypothetico-deductive method aligned with a positivist viewpoint. In contrast, qualitative research focuses on subjective aspects, utilizing interviews, exploration, and description within a relativist worldview (Kirongo & Odoyo, 2020). For investigating HR practices and employee engagement in UK SMEs, a systematic literature review (Tranfield et al., 2003) is essential to

minimize bias. This approach involves keyword searches like "HR practices," "SMEs," "UK," and "employee engagement," retrieving 45 articles from various databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, online libraries, organizational websites, and Web of Science. Analysing 300 articles aims to draw overarching conclusions about the relationship between HR practices and employee engagement in SMEs, assessing scholars' attention to this topic in the UK's human resource practices through a period of twenty-three years from 2000 to 2023.

3:3 Research Philosophies

In Kamal's (2019) study, the term "research philosophy" was defined as encompassing a set of beliefs, assumptions, and principles guiding a study's methodology. This philosophy encompasses the origins, essence, and progression of knowledge, as well as methods for collecting, assessing, and utilizing data to address research inquiries. Various research philosophies exist based on beliefs about reality's ontological (nature of reality), epistemological (nature of knowledge), and axiological (nature of values) aspects. Examples include positivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism. In this specific research, I will be opting for interpretivism enabling a nuanced understanding of subjective realities, emphasizing context and meanings, and fostering comprehensive insights into my chosen research topic "The lack of HR practices and employee engagement in SMEs in the UK. According to Bonache and Festing (2020), interpretivism, viewing reality as subjective and shaped by the observer, is a research philosophy that emphasizes understanding meanings and contexts to comprehend the world.

3:4 Research Design

The review highlighted articles using empirical research, integrating diverse methods, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This empirical approach relies on real-world data for conclusions, employing experiments, surveys, or interviews. Notably, studies embraced various methodologies, blending quantitative numerical analysis and qualitative subjective narratives. This mix facilitated triangulation, enriching investigations with statistical trends and nuanced insights, enhancing the research's depth and comprehensiveness. (Disman & Barliana, 2017). The research is justified as it employs a blend of quantitative and qualitative empirical studies, offering a comprehensive exploration. Using real-world observations and various methodologies, including experiments, surveys, and interviews, enhances the depth of analysis. This inclusive approach allows for triangulation of findings, capturing both statistical trends and nuanced insights.

3:5 Research Approaches

According to Vears, and Gillam (2022) research approach shapes a study's structure, defining data collection and analysis methods while reflecting its philosophical stance. It significantly influences method selection and analysis techniques, ensuring alignment with research objectives. For my exploration of HR practices and employee engagement deficiencies in UK SMEs, a systematic review and secondary data analysis prove the most suitable. This method rigorously evaluates existing data from diverse sources, such as peer-reviewed journals, enabling systematic accumulation and synthesis of prior studies' insights. Valuable for examining existing knowledge, it

facilitates extracting insights from varied sources, enriching the overall comprehension of the subject.

3:6 Sources of data and search strategy

Alam et al. (2021) define the 'data collection method' as systematically gathering information from various sources to meet study goals. Two main approaches, primary and secondary data collection, are used in research. Avoiding primary data collection, as per Aivazpour et al, (2020), is advisable due to time and resource constraints, access difficulties to diverse organizational structures, reluctance to share sensitive data, and potential response biases. This study opts for 'secondary data collection' due to available data relevance. Windle et al. (2019) describe it as using existing information, collected by others for different purposes, in research. Hence, this research will rely on secondary data for researching HR practices and employee engagement in SMEs for its cost-effectiveness. Utilizing academic studies, government sources, and reports will form a robust base for my systematic review. This method allows well-informed conclusions about the HR practices and employee engagement link in SMEs without costly data collection. Using existing data avoids duplication of efforts, conserving time and resources. Ensuring literature relevance to the UK context remains a priority. As seen in table:1 focus on my search strategy on keywords related to HR practices in SMEs and included terms like UK, England, and "United Kingdom.

Table 1: Applied Search strategy

Key words	HR practices. Employee engagement. SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises). UK (United Kingdom). Work environments.
Outcome	Results in the Organisations response Results in the response of Employees
Context	UK, (United Kingdom) England

3:7 Selection of studies

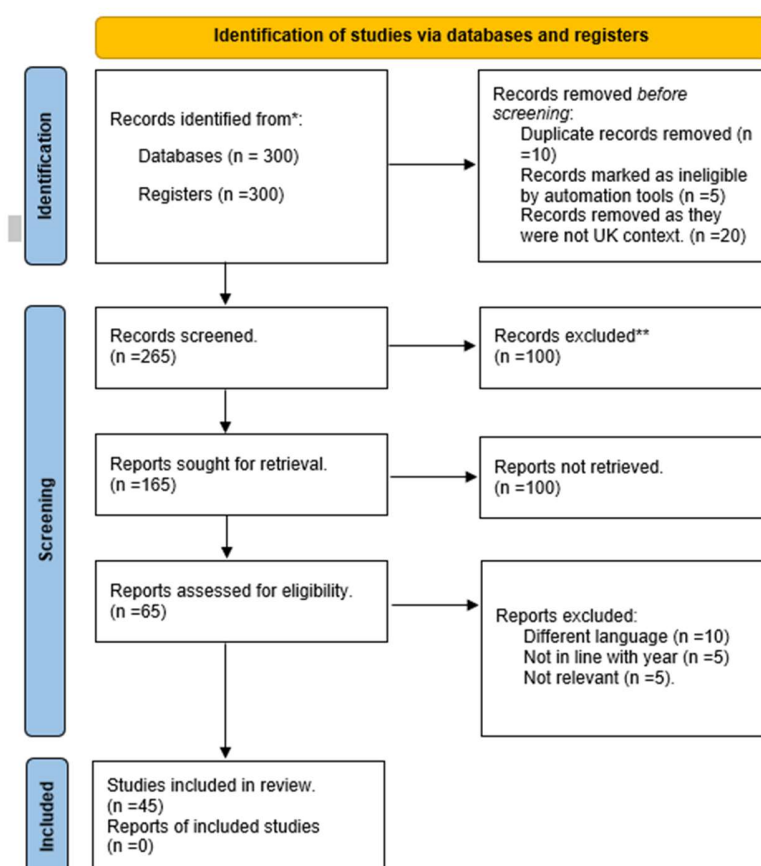
Based on the mentioned article selection criteria, an initial screening of titles was conducted, leading to the exclusion of certain papers. Subsequent screening occurred by reviewing the abstracts. The remaining articles from this abstract review were obtained from a UK University's online library database. Twenty-six (45) articles met the criteria and were selected for this review after accessing the full article text. Refer to Fig:1 Prisma flow diagram, for a breakdown of the article selection criteria.

3:8 Selection criteria/ Prisma model screening of 300 articles.

The systematic literature review (SLR) adhered to defined criteria, examining documents from 2000 to 2023 in English, focusing solely on UK SMEs. in research journals, periodicals, proceedings, and

reports. Initially, 300 relevant documents were gathered and assessed, eliminating 5 articles due to automation tools, 10 duplications, and 20 non-UK sources. Of the 265 remaining, 100 were excluded for low relevance. Out of 165 documents sought for retrieval, 100 were not retrieved, leaving 65 for assessment. Further exclusions included 10 non-English documents, 5 irrelevant ones, and 5 not aligning with the specified year, 45 research papers were included. This method ensured a systematic, unbiased evaluation, minimizing biases through independent assessments. Implementing clear inclusion criteria and the PRISMA model enhanced research credibility, facilitating transparent reporting for study validity and reliability.

Fig: 1 Prisma flow diagram, article selection criteria



Source: (Al Marshoudi, 2023).

3:9 Ethical Considerations

Recognizing and valuing ethical principles in my research is of utmost significance. This is because it plays a critical role in safeguarding the rights, welfare, and privacy of the individuals involved, upholding the integrity of my research, and conforming to the ethical norms established within the

scientific community. Embracing ethical guidelines allows me to reduce potential harm, secure informed consent, and carry out my research with openness and impartiality. In doing so, I fulfil my ethical obligation as a researcher and ensure that the findings of my research are dependable and applicable for the betterment of society.

3:9 Chapter summary

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the research methodology, emphasizing the use of qualitative strategy, descriptive design, and inductive approach. Adopting an interpretivist philosophy, the researcher conducted thematic data analysis while maintaining ethical standards. This chapter serves as a cornerstone, intricately discussing key elements such as design, approach, philosophy, strategy, data collection methods aligned with objectives, and a detailed analysis process. Ethical considerations regarding participant rights, confidentiality, and risk management are thoroughly addressed, ensuring a systematic and ethically sound research approach.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS / RESULTS

4:1 Findings and results available in Appendix as Fig: 4 chapter 4- 45 Articles findings and results

4:2 Analysis and discussion of Results

Discussion on question:1 What are the HR practices used in SMEs in Uk?

Georgiadis and Pitelis (2012) emphasize key HR elements influencing financial performance in UK THL SMEs. Their study reveals that entrepreneurial expertise predicts profit margins, aligning with skilled personnel and strategic knowledge (RIB). Positive correlations between staff development, generous compensation, and profits exist, particularly concerning customer-centric differentiation. However, such correlations do not align with pricing or innovation-driven strategies. The entrepreneur's role is pivotal, emphasizing the need for HR-strategy alignment for profitability. Moreover, the Resource-Based View theory highlights HR's role in sustaining a competitive edge by focusing on unique, hard-to-imitate human resources, leveraging distinctive strengths for long-term success. This echoes the importance of workforce development in line with UK business growth initiatives. Similarly, the study by Antcliff, Lupton, and Atkinson (2021) reveals that among SMEs, the pursuit of HRM support is limited, with a preference for informational assistance over strategic guidance, particularly in procedural and compliance domains. Unlike other business areas, HRM needs are perceived as more transactional, with larger-sized SMEs inclined toward seeking HRM information while family-owned businesses exhibit a negative association.

Though certain aspects align with general business support trends, HRM support seeking displays variations. Surprisingly, identifying issues did not prominently drive the quest for HRM support, contrary to conventional size-related problem perceptions. Interestingly, plans for workforce skill development correlated with seeking strategic HRM advice, mirroring broader business support patterns. SMEs may overlook HRM concerns due to undervaluing their strategic importance or limited awareness of these issues. This study introduces two key theoretical contributions. Firstly, it redefines the Resource-Based View's (RBV) interpretation by highlighting its value in HRM literature,

shifting the focus from RBV's deficit interpretation in general business support. Secondly, it integrates dynamic management capabilities with RBV, introducing a model that highlights the significance of managerial awareness and responsiveness to HRM challenges as dynamic capabilities. This model emphasizes the process of identifying opportunities, seeking HRM support, internal scanning, and the perceived value of external HRM support, reframing HRM support as a proactive, dynamic capability rather than a reactive response to HRM issues in SMEs.

Research by Reid et al, (2000) portrays family and non-family businesses reveals that the former allocate less salary budget to training than the latter. Both acknowledge the challenge of 'training and development,' echoing wider concerns about insufficient training investment in the UK. Family businesses engage fewer employees in training, while non-family enterprises more rigorously assess training needs. This suggests that non-family businesses may implement HR practices from literature more comprehensively, highlighting a divergence in HRM approaches between the two.

Similarly, the findings of Reid et al, (2002) align with the notion that family businesses, potentially due to limited organizational capability, trail behind non-family counterparts in adopting HRM policies. However, many are in a transitional phase, with the newer generation potentially aiming for change once they assume control, highlighting the significance of aligning organizational capability and HRM practices in family firms, especially considering the substantial portion of operating budgets attributed to 'people costs. The study anticipated by Bacon and Hoque, (2005) suggests that internal factors (like workforce composition) and external influences (such as trade unions) would predict HRM adoption in SMEs. Findings revealed a link between a less skilled workforce and lower HRM implementation, indicating inadequate training investment. External factors like trade unions and major clients exerted stronger influence than employers' associations, signalling greater pressure for change. However, relying solely on coercive networks might not significantly improve HRM practices. While influential, these networks alone may not suffice. Emphasizing employee skill investment is crucial, highlighting the need for a balanced approach between coercive and advisory networks for more robust HRM practices in SMEs and comprehensive organizational development.

Discussion on Question 2: How do employees engage in SMEs in UK?

In their research, Davies, and Crane (2010) explored the challenge of engaging employees in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), particularly focusing on strategies used by fair trade organizations. They highlighted the importance of aligning employee values with the company's CSR philosophy during recruitment to ensure successful integration. However, limited resources and competition hinder SMEs in attracting candidates whose values align, as they tend to prioritize skills as the company grows, struggling to balance this with competitive compensation limitations. Nonetheless, the research suggests that a strong social purpose can compensate for remuneration deficits, potentially influencing the broader remuneration package in CSR-oriented SMEs. They advocate a shift from valuing congruence in recruitment towards enhanced socialization methods, such as formalized induction programs and mentoring, to embed CSR values within organizational culture. The study emphasizes encouraging employee engagement in CSR activities and involving them in targeted communities to gain successful employee buy-in to the company's triple bottom line approach.

As indicated by Brammer, Hoejmoser, and Marchant (2012), Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the UK rely significantly on employee engagement. HR practices play a pivotal role in fostering engaged employees, leading to heightened motivation, promoting innovation, and encouraging collaboration within these SMEs. Effective communication channels maintain transparency, while HR-driven initiatives like recognition, rewards, professional growth avenues, and involvement in decision-making bolster engagement, reinforcing a positive work culture. Hence these HR strategies also impact SME productivity, customer satisfaction, talent attraction, and overall success in the fiercely competitive UK business sector.

Lai, Saridakis, and Johnstone (2017) aimed to elucidate the vital role of employee engagement in driving success within UK Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). Their work underscores how engaged employees, exhibiting higher motivation and commitment, cultivate an innovative and collaborative culture crucial for SME growth. The chapter underscores the importance of communication, ensuring transparency and inclusivity, and highlights the impact of recognition, rewards, and other incentives in significantly boosting engagement levels. Furthermore, it delves into the significance of professional development, involvement in decision-making, and maintaining work-life balance as essential aspects of SME employee engagement. Prioritizing engagement yields heightened productivity, increased customer satisfaction, and the attraction and retention of top talent, fostering success within the competitive UK business landscape. The emphasis on balancing formal and informal methods, particularly in conducive work environments, suggests that engagement is not solely reliant on rigid structures but involves informal approaches fostering teamwork, communication, and reciprocal relationships. Customizing HR practices to contextual needs supports employee engagement, acknowledging the value of a combination of formal and informal strategies for workforce involvement and satisfaction.

Darcy et al, (2014) highlight SMEs, sustainability, and competitive advantage, it urges a new research trajectory, spotlighting overlooked organizational facets like competence and talent, eclipsed by tangible assets. Furthermore, it stresses exploring developing firms' distinct cultures stemming from individual traits, advocating a shift towards resource-based viewpoints. The paper insists on probing SME management competency, particularly entrepreneurial and HR capabilities, to foster enduring competitive edges. Additionally, it pushes for deeper inquiries into how SMEs leverage social interactions and personal networks, crucial for harnessing intangible resources towards sustained viability and triumph. Furthermore, SME context lacks a deliberate, focused strategic approach to strategy formulation and implementation, contrasting the resource-based view's emphasis on managing internal resources strategically. The owner/manager's recognition of strategy's importance drives potential for strategic and market advantages, crucial for navigating market dynamics and determining growth or decline.

Jones et al, (2007) explore the concept of "strategic space" vital for learning within SMEs, emphasizing the need for owner-managers to possess time, resources, motivation, and capabilities to review organizational practices. It identifies absorptive capacity and social capital as pivotal factors in enabling this space. While diverse skills and advanced management techniques correlate with better owner-manager performance, the traditional view of absorptive capacity does not align with SMEs. Instead, it highlights the processual aspect inherent in internal and external relationships, emphasizing the significance of activities like fostering a positive work atmosphere

and social interactions in enhancing SME performance. Consequently, HR's role is crucial in facilitating strategic space and leveraging elements for organizational learning within SMEs. HR practices that foster positive work environments, encourage social interactions, and implement training programs contribute to enhancing absorptive capacity and social capital.

The concept of Devins, Johnson, and Sutherland, (2004) provides valuable research into ESF Objective 4's impact on 1,000 SME employees, emphasizing the delicate balance between skill enhancement and staff retention. Qualified employees seeking career advancement did not raise alarms among employers. While most SME workers gained confidence and qualifications, women tended to outpace men in certifications, while older employees exhibited diminished interest. Organizational approaches like Investors in People correlated with superior outcomes. Contrary to expectations, smaller enterprises witnessed a higher rate of employees acquiring qualifications. Employee engagement revolved around ESF Objective 4 training, fostering skill development, confidence, and commitment. Actively participating in formal training programs, employees applied these newfound skills within the SME workspace, illustrating the challenge of effectively implementing interventions.

Sheffield, (2020) findings underscore the importance of workforce stability in achieving success. Developing HR practices centred on employee motivation amplifies overall performance in SMEs. Recognizing contemporary motivators offers avenues for productivity enhancement. Enhanced staff motivation stemming from these strategies could bolster retention, leading to improved organizational efficiency and competitiveness. This increased motivation, fostered through stable workforces, and tailored HR approaches, actively engages employees, nurturing commitment and potentially elevating the organization's efficiency and competitive edge. Therefore, prioritizing workforce stability and cultivating employee motivation through HR practices emerges as a pivotal strategy. Understanding modern motivators not only enhances productivity but also elevates staff retention. This heightened motivation, nurtured by stable workforces and effective HR approaches, fuels organizational efficiency, and bolsters its competitive advantage.

On the other hand, Nagori, (2022) discussion highlights the impact of middle to senior managers on employee engagement in SMEs. It emphasizes the importance of managerial openness to ideas, boosting engagement and job satisfaction. There is an emphasis on improving managerial capabilities and encouraging regular communication and forums in SMEs to enhance employee engagement. This underscores the pivotal role of managers in driving engagement within these enterprises. Therefore, HR should focus on developing and supporting middle to senior managers in SMEs, encouraging them to be receptive to employee ideas and fostering regular communication channels. This proactive approach can significantly enhance employee engagement and job satisfaction within these enterprises. Similarly, in this context the study and findings of Al Marshoudi, (2023) state that the relationship between leaders and employees underscores their combined impact on organizational performance. It suggests a reorientation of leadership focus towards day-to-day operations to empower and energize employees, nurturing their enthusiasm and practicality.

Highlighting leaders' crucial role in motivating and sustaining employee engagement and productivity. HR should consider reshaping leadership strategies, aligning them with Al Marshoudi's findings, emphasizing day-to-day operations to empower and energize employees. Fostering this approach can enhance employee enthusiasm, practicality, and engagement and productivity in

SMEs. (Hinzmann, Rašticová, and Šácha, 2019) study reveals seniority's impact on engagement, with new hires 27% more engaged than employees with over two years' tenure. Monetary rewards have less effect on highly tenured employees, suggesting diverse HR strategies to sustain engagement. Understanding varied influences is crucial, indicating a multifaceted approach for leaders and HR. However, the study's limitations suggest a need for further research considering regional, cultural, gender, and age influences on engagement in SMEs.

As per the opinion by Sharma and Kaur (2014) emphasize that defining employee engagement centres on emotional and psychological investment, along with providing suitable roles. Proactive behaviour, driven by intellectual engagement, emerges as another key dimension. Factors like emotional response, intellectual involvement, and role absorption significantly contribute to these dimensions. Examining their correlation elucidates the pivotal role of these factors. Employees operating within their capabilities become emotionally engaged, articulate themselves intellectually, and contribute to achieving organizational objectives. Additionally, promoting proactive behaviour through intellectual engagement is crucial. HR can facilitate this by recognizing and encouraging emotional responses, fostering intellectual involvement, and ensuring employees are absorbed in roles that leverage their capabilities.

Discussion on question 3: How does HR practices effect employee engagement in SMEs?

In this context found by Idris, Saridakis, and Johnstone, (2023) extensively focuses on the HR practices of staff and managerial training within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). It highlights the considerable influence of both off- and on-the-job training on SMEs' perceived actual and intended performance. A combination of these training types is emphasized for its stronger impact. Moreover, managerial training is underscored as crucial for enhancing SME performance. Therefore, it is evident that these training practices stand out as crucial HR initiatives within SMEs, contributing to workforce adaptability, career progression, and overall competitiveness. Despite resource limitations in SMEs, the study emphasizes the pivotal role of training in stimulating growth, engagement, and performance, hinting at the indispensable nature of these HR practices for SMEs' sustained success.

Amah (2023) examined crucial leadership behaviours affecting job satisfaction and SME engagement. Identified were eight positive behaviours—empathy, communication, work-life balance, recognition, meeting management, resource provision, development, and workload balancing—enhancing work experiences. Conversely, poor work-life support, inadequate planning, and communication were stressors. Post-COVID, 81% preferred remote work, highlighting leadership adaptability's importance for diverse employee preferences, emphasizing effective communication, empathy, and work-life balance to boost engagement. Hence, it is pivotal to recognize and implement adaptive HR practices, notably focusing on effective communication, empathy, and work-life balance. These initiatives are vital in accommodating diverse employee preferences, enhancing engagement, satisfaction, and streamlined communication amid the evolving dynamics of remote work in SMEs.

In response to the study of Nolan and Garavan's (2016) analysis underscores the scarcity of varied theoretical underpinnings in SME HRD studies, stressing an overdependence on limited theories. They advocate for the complex resource-based theory, upper echelons theory, and strategic choice theory as apt frameworks, aligning with informal HRD practices and owner-managers prominence.

The complex resource-based view highlights how informal HRD could inherently bolster employee engagement by cultivating adaptability and a competitive edge in SMEs. This perspective positions informal HRD not as a constraint but as a potential strategic asset, suggesting its capacity to elevate engagement by leveraging adaptability and competitive advantage.

Additionally, the findings of Drummond and Stone's (2007) discussion centres on the success of SMEs, attributing their performance to high-performance work systems (HPWS). However, it argues that while HPWS contributes significantly to their success, the understanding of this impact should not solely focus on the specific HR practices. Instead, it emphasizes the need to consider the broader system, including organizational culture, values, and norms. These cultural elements play a pivotal role in shaping, empowering, and perpetuating the effectiveness of HR practices within these businesses. The aim is to finalize an understanding that successful SMEs' performance is not just a result of HR practices but is deeply intertwined with the organizational culture and values, forming a holistic system driving their success.

Harney (2021) examines HRM perspectives in SME contexts, spotlighting the diverse interpretations of HRM and talent management. The focus is on questioning established assumptions and theoretical constraints, advocating for nuanced definitions and analyses tailored to SMEs. The discourse emphasizes defining SME parameters, critiquing limited HRM theories, and proposing empirical investigations for a holistic understanding. This highlights the need for context-sensitive approaches, encompassing agency, environmental influences, and multifaceted HR activities. The objective is a deeper comprehension of HRM in SMEs by critically engaging with existing theories and endorsing inclusive, multi-level perspectives that consider the intricate dynamics among HR agents, theories, and the SME environment. Therefore, this comprehensive assessment highlights the imperative for nuanced HRM understanding within SMEs, aiming to evolve inclusive perspectives that account for their diversity, unique HR practices, and the intricate interplay between theories and the SME landscape.

Pajo, Coetzer and Guenole, (2010) discussed the impact of formal training on employee retention in SMEs, revealing that increased participation correlated with reduced turnover intentions and neglectful behaviour. They highlight that the effects are mediated by perceptions of organizational support and job satisfaction. Surprisingly, contrary to expectations, affective commitment did not significantly influence turnover intentions or neglect. While formal training positively impacts employee attitudes, elements like opportunities for promotion, distributive justice, and organizational commitment, vital in larger firms, may hold less relevance in SMEs. This underscores the complexity of factors influencing retention, offering insights into HR practices' potential advantages and limitations in enhancing employee engagement. Hence, the study underlines the significance of formal training in SMEs, noting its positive impact on reducing turnover intentions and neglectful behaviour through enhanced organizational support and job satisfaction. It also sheds light on the nuanced differences between factors affecting retention in SMEs compared to larger firms, suggesting that certain elements like promotional opportunities and distributive justice might not hold the same relevance

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5:1 Summary of main findings

This section delves into the diverse mechanisms through which HR practice's function and the strategies they employ to effectively influence employee engagement. It explores various viewpoints from different authors, highlighting distinct HR practices as examples to illustrate their varied approaches to enhancing both employee engagement and organizational growth and development in SMEs in the UK.

5:2 Conclusion

This research analysed a systematic review of 300 articles that were screened, data from 45 articles were found eligible for research spanning a period over 23 years, from (2000-2023), indicating the deficiencies in HR practices within the UK significantly influenced the engagement and performance of SMEs. These outcomes align with earlier studies and additionally demonstrate varied effects of HR practices on employee engagement in SMEs. This study aimed to identify the deficiencies in HR practices within UK SMEs and their correlation with employee engagement, aligning with HR theories. By scrutinizing the gaps in HR strategies and practices within small and medium-sized enterprises, the research delved into understanding how these shortcomings directly influence the level of employee engagement which was done through the three identified research questions. The focus was on discerning specific areas where HR theories are not effectively applied or where practices are inadequate within SMEs, thereby shaping the degree of commitment and involvement demonstrated by their workforce.

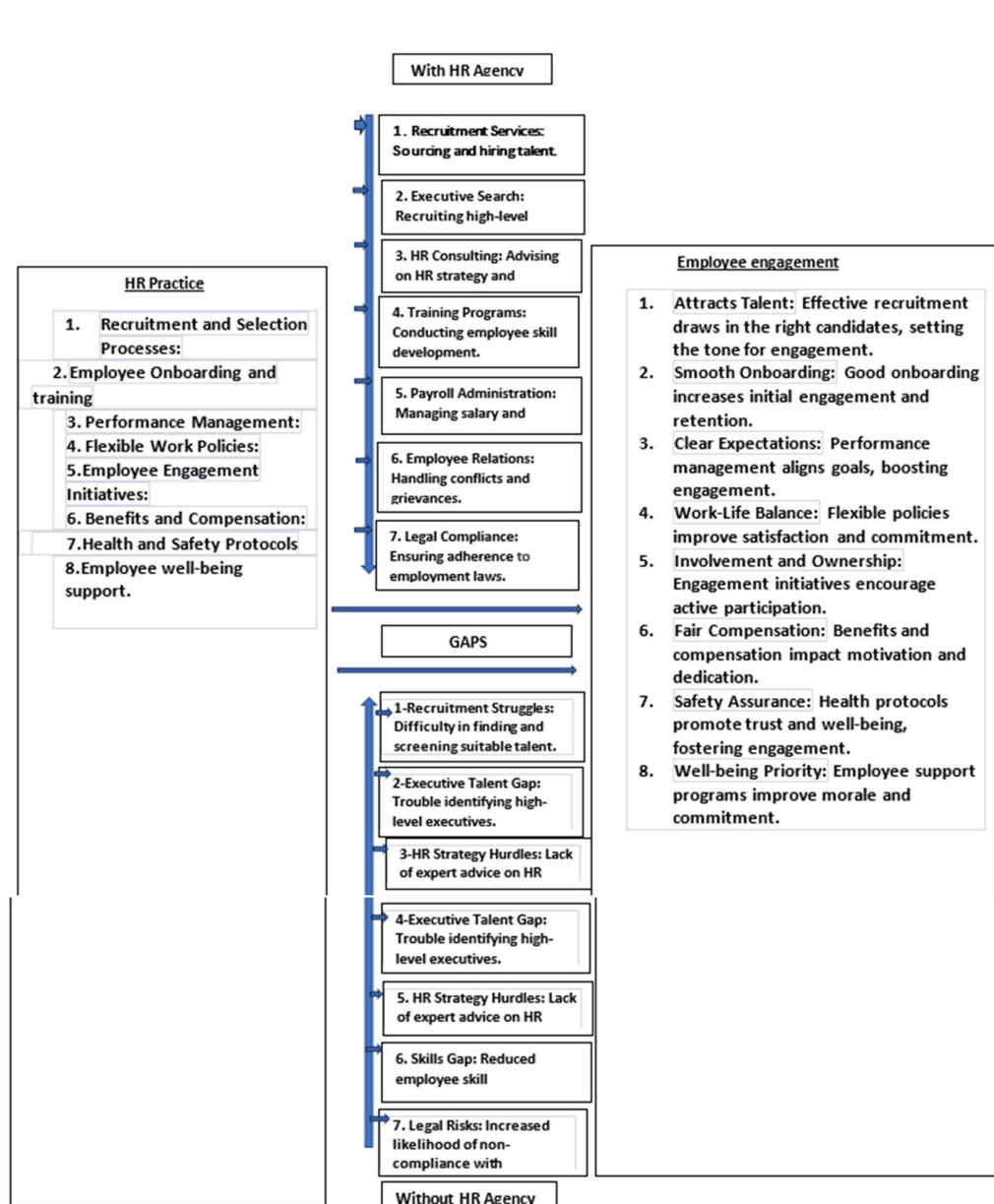
Davies and Crane (2010) stress aligning employee values with CSR, and overcoming recruitment challenges, while (Brammer and Marchant 2012) underscore HR's impact on SME productivity and competitiveness through engagement initiatives. Lai, Saridakis, and Johnstone (2017) highlight engagement's multifaceted nature, necessitating formal and informal HR strategies. Moreover, Darcy et al. (2014) advocate for resource-based approaches in enhancing SME competitiveness. These insights emphasize HR's strategic significance in cultivating engagement, supporting CSR integration, and amplifying SME performance, offering a holistic view vital for sustained growth and success (Davies & Crane, 2010; Brammer, Hoejmosse, & Marchant, 2012; Lai, Saridakis, & Johnstone, 2017; Darcy et al., 2014). Final Question three, on how HR practices effect employee engagement in SMEs research underscores the pivotal role of HR practices in SMEs' sustained success. Idris, Saridakis, and Johnstone (2023) highlight the influential nature of training initiatives, stressing their significant impact on SMEs' performance and competitiveness.

Furthermore, it is evident in the research by Jensen and Meckling (2019) insights from RBV theory and agency theory suggest that SMEs can effectively apply these frameworks. RBV emphasizes resource control's significance in operational dynamics, while agency theory aligns with SME contexts, recognizing informal HR structures and owner-managers' roles. Implementing these theories in HR strategies for UK SMEs proves pivotal, fostering supportive environments, transparent communication, impacting job satisfaction, productivity, retention, and innovation positively. Integrating RBV's resource optimization and agency theory's alignment of owner-employee interests offers SMEs strategies to optimize resources, align interests, and bolster

employee commitment, enhancing competitiveness and sustainability. Nolan and Garavan, (2016) advocate for varied theoretical frameworks in SME HRD studies, highlighting the potential of informal HRD practices to drive engagement and competitive advantage. Drummond and Stone, (2007) emphasize the interplay between high-performance work systems and organizational culture, crucial for SME success. Harney's (2021) discourse calls for nuanced HRM perspectives, acknowledging the need for context-sensitive approaches tailored to SMEs' diverse dynamics and practices.

Thus, the holistic view accentuates the multifaceted nature of HR's impact, encompassing training, leadership adaptability, organizational culture, theoretical frameworks, and nuanced HRM approaches essential for SME prosperity (Idris, Saridakis, & Johnstone, 2023; Amah, 2023; Nolan & Garavan, 2016; Drummond & Stone, 2007; Harney, 2021). Hence, for a comprehensive understanding of HR practices in UK SMEs, a conceptual framework was adopted that considers contextual factors, as depicted in Figure 2, which was crucial to conduct the notable gaps in exploring the impact of HR practices on employee engagement within SMEs in the UK, highlighting the need for further investigation.

Fig: 2 conceptual frameworks for forthcoming research endeavours.



The framework offers a wide knowledge base for managers to ponder over when implementing HR policies. Despite its limited scope, the analysis remains strong as it draws from empirical studies spanning 23 years. It highlights a significant gap in the literature regarding HR practices in SMEs and employee engagement, particularly in terms of direct employee participation and HR involvement as outlined in this study. The paper would have benefited from grounding in empirical evidence, suggesting a crucial recommendation to anchor future findings in real-world data. Moving forward, the research aim was to empirically explore how SMEs might moderate the relationship between HR practices and employee engagement. Given the growing reliance on HR managers' expertise in navigating uncertainties within SME HR practices, the forthcoming empirical study is anticipated to significantly contribute to both theory and practical application. This paper offers three key contributions to knowledge: firstly, it addresses the scarcity of studies focusing on HR practices and employee engagement in the UK's SME landscape, providing a theoretical framework for comprehension. Secondly, it introduces the idea that employee engagement involves both managers and employee involvement and direct participation in decision-making, broadening the understanding of this concept. Lastly, it proposes the conceptualization of HR practices in SMEs as a potential influencer of organizational responses to work and employment engagement.

5:3 Recommendation (Practical and Theoretical)

The upcoming empirical investigation is expected to offer valuable insights valuable for theoretical comprehension and practical implementation. Referenced studies by Van (2006) and the Center for Human Resource Strategy (2009) emphasize the HRM practices and employee engagement link. However, current empirical research on this remains limited, urging further exploration for a comprehensive understanding. Despite the prevalence of findings from consulting or research organizations, there is a crucial need for expanded empirical studies to substantiate and generalize these connections.

5:4 Limitation of Research

The study, focusing on HR practices in SMEs and their impact on employee engagement, extends implications beyond the UK and larger organizations. Challenges persist in obtaining nationally representative SME data, impeding comprehensive understanding. Investigating causal links between engagement and organizational aspects faces complexities due to multifaceted variables. Validating HRM practices' impacts encounters challenges isolating specific influences within organizational dynamics. Despite inclusive search strategies, potential exists for missing relevant papers, impacting review comprehensiveness. However, the study's diverse methods and stakeholder involvement enrich its scope and potential contributions.

5:5 Recommendation for Future Work

For future work, the recommendation would be to conduct empirical studies bridging the gap between theoretical frameworks and real-world application in UK SMEs' HR practices and employee engagement. This would involve a comprehensive exploration of how HR policies directly impact employee engagement, particularly focusing on direct participation and managerial involvement.

Further, integrating diverse theoretical perspectives like Resource-Based View and agency theories into practical strategies for UK SMEs could significantly enrich understanding and guide effective implementation, fostering enhanced organizational effectiveness and employee commitment.

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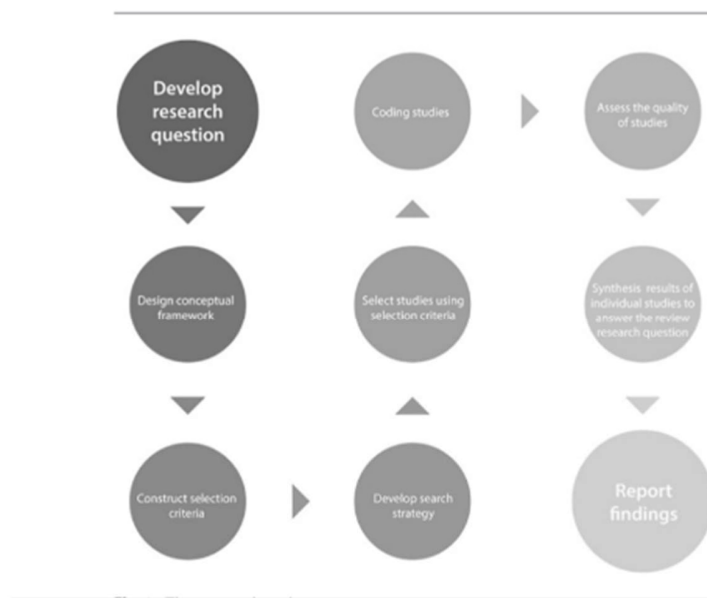
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7:0 Appendices

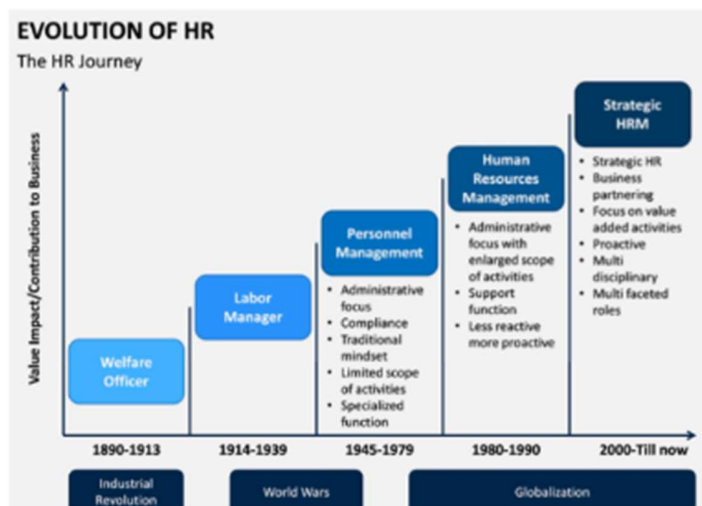
Fig:1 Systematic review process



Source: (Newman & Gough, 2020)

Typically outlined in a protocol before the review begins. Establishing a detailed plan in advance helps define the review's scope and methodologies. Therefore, the proposed research topic "The lack of HR practices and employee engagement in SMEs," as per Torgerson (2003, pg. 26), suggests crafting a comprehensive protocol beforehand would be essential to minimize reviewer bias and ensure a systematic, unbiased assessment for this systematic review dissertation.

Fig: 2 Evolution of HR



Source: (Sketchbubble,2023)

Furthermore, it is questionable on our own understanding of "What do we know about HRM" The perspective study by Obedgiu, (2017) suggests that the evolution of HRM roles has been significant. During the Industrial Revolution, the emergence of Labor Unions in 1790 marked a crucial turning point. Factory workers faced extensive overtime for minimal wages, leading to global protests and unrest. This pressure gave rise to the establishment of labor organizations. To navigate the challenges between management and labor issues, the need for political and diplomatic skills resulted in the creation of the Industrial Relations Department within the Personnel Management Department. The study of Obedgiu, (2017) highlights the evolution of leading HR associations. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, founded in England in 1913 as the Welfare Workers' Association, underwent name changes over the years, becoming the Institute of Industrial Welfare Workers and later the Institute of Labor Management (Cipd, 2011). Similarly, in the United States, Cornell University established the School of Industrial and Labor Relations 1945, known as a premier institution for workplace studies. Despite a decline in union memberships in the latter half of the 20th century.

The field of workforce management gained prominence within businesses. Terms shifted to "personnel administration" for internal management while "industrial relations" and "labor relations" dealt with collective representation concerns. In 1948, the American Society for Personnel Administration (ASPA) was founded, later growing into the largest professional HR group. Advancements in communication and transportation in the twenty-first century facilitated greater mobility and collaboration among workers. Businesses began viewing employees as valuable assets rather than mere components of a system. This shift led to the widespread use of the term "human resources management" (HRM). In 1998, reflecting this transformation, ASPA changed its original name to SHRM (SHRM, 2011). Furthermore, research expressed by Stankevičiūtė & Savanevičienė (2018) highlights the emergence of sustainable HRM in Germany, Switzerland, and Australia towards the late 1990s. In the German approach, organizations are viewed as open, resource-dependent systems requiring a continuous influx of resources to function and achieve their objectives. This strategy is grounded in an interpretation of sustainability that emphasizes economic factors, advocating that businesses should invest in relationships with environments as they are sources of resources. This balanced approach aims to

Fig: 3 The strategic performance management development cycle



Source: (De, Waal, 2007).

Implementing the strategic performance management development cycle's three stages are, (1) creating a strategic management model, (2) developing a strategic reporting model, and crafting a (3) behavioural model focused on driving performance shown as Fig: 3 as proposed by De, Waal (2007), facilitates this process. These stages encompass goal setting, ongoing measurement and feedback, skills enhancement, performance assessment, and rewarding employees for their contributions, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and accountability.

Fig: 4 chapter 4- 45 articles findings and results

Question:1 What are the HR practices used in SMEs in Uk?

This segment sheds light on the pivotal role of Human Resource (HR) practices in the context of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the UK. It emphasizes their fundamental contributions to talent acquisition, retention, and the enhancement of workforce productivity. These practices encompass managing talent, ensuring compliance with legal standards, and fostering a positive work environment to bolster employee engagement, a critical aspect for increased productivity. Additionally, they enable adaptability in ever-evolving business settings, nurture robust leadership, and prioritize employee well-being. These measures streamline administrative tasks and nurture a positive organizational culture, crucial for SME triumph (Cassell et al, 2002). The chapter's objective is to highlight the importance of HR practices in fortifying SME competitiveness and ensuring their sustained viability. It explores their multifaceted impacts, drawing from a range of research methods, case studies, and practical implementations. By scrutinizing their role in talent management, compliance, engagement, adaptability, leadership, employee well-being, administrative efficiency, and succession planning, it underscores their foundational significance in steering SME success through challenging business landscapes.



Citation and number of studies	Title of study	Purpose	Organizational approach to HRM	Impact on employees
1. Altinay, L, Altinay, E. and Gannon, J., (2008)' Exploring the relationship between the human resource management practices and growth in small service firms' <i>The Service Industries Journal</i> , 28(7), pp.919-937.	Exploring the relationship between the human resource management practices and growth in small service firms	The research focuses on HRM practices in small UK service firms and their impact on growth. Findings from 196 face-to-face interviews with business owners reveal employee empowerment and formal recruitment in catering. The study emphasizes the influence of contextual factors like competition and workforce availability on HRM practices in these businesses.	The organizational approach to HRM in this study Ethnic minority entrepreneurs in the catering sector adapt HR practices to compete. They adopt formal recruitment for quality employees but also emphasize formal training. This dual approach aims to secure skilled labour and suggest income and non-monetary incentives to increase business performance.	Not all employees are motivated by the same incentives and benefits. Diverse groups of employees prioritize numerous benefits at various stages of their career, increasing employee job satisfaction, enhancing employee capabilities and performance.

2- Saridakis, G., Muñoz Torres, R. and Johnstone, S, (2013) 'Do human resource practices enhance organizational commitment in SME s with low employee satisfaction?' <i>British Journal of Management</i> , 24(3), pp.445-458.	Do Human Resource Practices Enhance Organizational Commitment in SMEs with Low Employee Satisfaction?	The author aimed to analyse how firm size, management styles, and employee satisfaction intertwine to impact organizational commitment in UK SMEs. The study highlighted the correlation between employee satisfaction and commitment while emphasizing the pivotal role of formal HR practices, particularly in smaller SMEs, underscoring the	In this study the organizational approach is Formal HR practices in discontented small businesses, enhancing commitment through fairness and shared goals. offering unique non-material advantages like diverse tasks, involvement, personal connections, and a tight knit community ambiance (Holliday, 1995; Wilkinson, 1999).	Formal HR practices significantly impacted employees by creating a keen sense of belonging within the organization. Employees felt more committed, increasing job satisfaction and dedication to their roles and the company's objectives.
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		need for tailored HR strategies to bolster commitment.		
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3. Cassell, C, Nadin, S., Gray, M. and Clegg, C, (2002). Exploring human resource management practices in small and medium sized enterprises. <i>Personnel review</i>, 31(6), pp.671-692.	Exploring human resource management practices in small and medium sized enterprises	The paper discusses recent empirical research on HRM practices in SMEs. A telephone survey of 100 SME senior managers and in-depth interviews with 22 others explored HR practice utilization and its effectiveness in meeting company objectives. Results indicate significant variation among SMEs regarding their utilization of HR practices	The HR practices in SMEs include recruitment and selection, often relying on traditional methods such as word of mouth for hiring. While around half of the respondents use some form of appraisal, formal systems are infrequent, leading to diverse interpretations and implementations	Certain incentives were observed to have negative rather than positive effects on employees. Also, appraisals that were conducted by employees expressed by employees caution and described challenges faced in their implementation negatively.
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4. Antcliff, V., Lupton, B. and Atkinson, C, (2021) 'Why do small businesses seek support for managing people? Implications for theory and policy from an analysis of UK small business survey data' <i>International Small Business Journal</i>, 39(6), pp.532-553.	Why do small businesses seek support for managing people? Implications for theory and policy from an analysis of UK small business survey data.	The author explores how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) engage external HR support based on the resource-based view (RBV). They analyse UK Longitudinal Small Business Survey data to understand the limited HR seeking behaviour, linking it to business changes rather than resource deficiencies, and develop a novel model integrating	HR practices encompass policies like recruitment, training, and performance reviews.	When implemented HR practices effectively, they can positively impact employee engagement by fostering growth and satisfaction.
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		'human process advantage' and 'human capital advantage' within dynamic capabilities theory.		
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5- Georgiadis, A. and Pitelis, C.N, (2016) 'The impact of employees' and managers' training on the performance of small- and medium-sized enterprises: Evidence from a randomized natural experiment in the UK service sector' <i>British Journal of Industrial Relations</i>, 54(2), pp.409-421.	The Impact of Employees' and Managers' Training on the Performance of Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Evidence from a Randomized Natural Experiment in the UK Service Sector	The author in this study aimed to explore how employees' and managers' training impacts firm performance in the UK accommodation and food service sector. The research involved a policy intervention where training support was randomly assigned to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As the demand for training exceeded available spots,	The HR approach places a strong emphasis on investing in employee training and skill development, recognizing the significance of employees' abilities, which take precedence over managerial skills in the organization's priorities.	The employees' growth was enhanced through training. Employees fostered empowerment, elevating job satisfaction, and nurtured a culture of ongoing learning and personal advancement.
		some firms were randomly chosen to receive training, forming a randomized natural experimental design to assess the average effect of training on the treated firms. The study found that employees' training had a notably more substantial positive influence on the labour productivity and profitability of firms compared to that of managers.		



6. Shafeek, H. (2016)' The impact of human resources management practices in SMEs' <i>Annals of the Faculty of Engineering Hunedoara</i> , 14(4), p.91.	The impact of human resource management practices in SMEs	This study investigates how human resource practices affect small and medium enterprises (SMEs), emphasizing organizational structure, staff training, and company culture. It confirms that effective human resource management significantly influences SME performance. However, obtaining timely	The HRM approach emphasizes the importance of regular performance reviews and setting clear expectations for employees, offering constructive feedback, and recognizing their achievements, addressing performance issues early, providing opportunities for improvement. The approach advocates for a	This HRM approach profoundly impacted employees by cultivating a culture of growth. Employees felt more engaged, valued, therefore enhancing overall performance and satisfaction.
		data is a challenge due to SMEs' distrust, limiting performance improvements. The findings indicate a positive connection between Best Practice HRM and SME success, suggesting adaptable elements for organizational structure, culture, and staff training.	structured evaluation system based on performance standards and individualized goals, ensuring fair and tailored assessments for each employee.	



7- Sheehan, M., (2014)' Human resource management and performance: Evidence from small and medium-sized firms' <i>International Small Business Journal</i> , 32(5), pp.545-570.	Human resource management and performance: Evidence from small and medium sized firms	The article explores HRM practices in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), focusing on the relationship between HR practices and performance indicators. It identifies a significant, positive impact of HRM practices on performance, persisting even after considering past performance to address reverse causality. This study	In the SME context, a correlation between human resources and performance is evident, specifically highlighting formal HR practices encompassing six key areas: recruitment, performance appraisal, performance-based pay, training, employee engagement, and strategic people management.	This study showed that investing in specific HR practices significantly boosted employee performance. The long-term gains positively affected employees by enhancing job quality, commitment, and contributing to a thriving work environment.
		emphasizes the role of HR practices in enhancing and sustaining a competitive advantage within SMEs, contributing to both HR and SME literature.		



8. Tsai, C.J., Edwards, P. and Sengupta, S., (2010)' The associations between organisational performance, employee attitudes and human resource management practices: An empirical study of small' businesses. <i>Journal of general management</i> , 36(1), pp.1-20.	The associations between organizational performance, employee attitudes and human resource management practices	This paper challenges the traditional view that HRM practices drive employee attitudes, which then impact organizational performance. It suggests that organizational performance directly influences employee attitudes, with HRM practices playing a mediating role. Revealing a link between better business performance and ...	The HRM approach involves strategies focusing on optimizing employee potential. It includes continuous training, structured development, and performance-linked incentives. and reinforcing the link between performance and rewards.	HR practices influenced how employees perceive work, enhanced their skills, growth and provided more autonomy in their roles.
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		more positive employee attitudes, partially mediated by HRM practices.		
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9: Rauch, A., and Hatak, I, (2016) 'A meta-analysis of different HR-enhancing practices and performance of small and medium sized firms' <i>Journal of business venturing</i>, 31(5), pp.485-504	A meta-analysis of different HR-enhancing practices and performance of small and medium sized firms	This article delves into small and medium-sized businesses suggesting that the link between HR practices and performance remains uncertain. The authors emphasize that HR practices boost skills, motivation, and empowerment. According to the author a meta-analysis of 56 studies shows a positive correlation ($r_c = .228$) between these HR practices and firm performance,	The HRM approach emphasizes empowerment-focused HR practices for SMEs, highlighting participation commitment, motivation, and skill development practices to balance costs and benefits.	This HR practice impacts employees by boosting their skills, motivates and empowers them. Employees adequately qualified, incentivized, contribute effectively to the firm's objectives.
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		especially in young firms, high-tech SMEs, and countries with strict labour regulations. These findings stress the significance of tailored HR approaches in SMEs.		
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10. Georgiadis, A. and Pitelis, C.N., (2012)' Human resources and SME performance in services: Empirical evidence from the UK.' <i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , 23(4), pp.808-825.	Human resources and SME performance in services: empirical evidence from the UK	This paper aims to investigate an under explored area by identifying crucial HR aspects linked to superior financial performance in micro-SMEs within the UK's Tourism, Hospitality, and Leisure (THL) sector. Existing SHRM literature and UK SME surveys indicate that employee and entrepreneur human capital, along with a company's dedication to employee well-being, fair	SHRM research among UK SMEs in services underscores critical HR factors: employee and owner human capital, well-being commitment, fair compensation, and strategic HR alignment. Certain strategy-HR blends notably boost profitability, stressing the need for tailored HRM approaches aligning with strategic goals for SME success.	Effective HR practices in high-performing THL SMEs cultivate skilled, motivated employees through continuous development, a supportive work culture, and attention to individual growth. This fosters engagement, innovation, and service excellence, crucial for success in the Tourism, Hospitality, and Leisure sector.
		compensation, and development, are vital factors for SME success. Also, the theoretical study implemented the use of the resource-based view (RBV) to show how HR connects to a company's long-term competitive edge.		



11. Doherty, L. and Norton, A. (2013). 'Making and measuring "good" HR practice in an SME: the case of a Yorkshire bakery' <i>Employee Relations</i>, 36 (2), pp.128-147.	Making and measuring "good" HR practice in an SME: the case of a Yorkshire bakery	This study in a South Yorkshire bakery employs action research to study effective HR practices in SMEs. Using interviews, observations, and document analysis, it assesses the bakery's HR practices against UK SMEs using an organizational lifecycle framework. While studies show positive links between HR practices and performance. The goal is to improve business performance by ..	Bacon and Hoque (2005) HRM practices include compliance measures (grievance, discipline), investing in people (selection, training), skill development (briefings, quality circles, performance pay), and strategic management (formal development plans, investors in people) aiding in the assessment of practices at Fosters and their ..	The operations director championed HR initiatives to address past workforce problems, and recruited a workforce with a better work ethic, and then enhanced the workforce through training, career pathways and apprenticeship. Creating a motivated and skilled workforce which would be able to deliver Fosters' new vision and mission
		connecting exceptional HR practices to measurable outcomes, revealing that external factors and internal dynamics significantly influence HRM.	adoption across UK SMEs.	



12- Guest, D.E., Michie, J., Conway, N., and Sheenan, M. (2003), 'Human Resource Management and Corporate Performance in the UK,' <i>British Journal of Industrial Relations</i> , 41, 2, 291- 314.	Human Resource Management and Corporate Performance in the UK	The objective of this paper is to explore the relationship between HRM and performance across 366 UK companies. Assessing both objective and subjective performance measures alongside cross-sectional and longitudinal data, the study aims to ascertain HRM's impact on various performance indicators, delineating its associations and potential	Human resource management practices encompass 48 items sourced from various literature, focusing on high-commitment or high-performance approaches. These practices span nine fundamental areas: recruitment, training, appraisal, financial flexibility, job design, communication, job security, labour market,	The study suggests HRM's varied impact on employees: higher usage links to reduced turnover and increased profit per employee, with subjective measures indicating a strong association with productivity and financial performance, but without clearly showing
		causative role.	status harmonization, and quality.	direct cause.



13- Currie, G. and Procter, S., (2003) 'The interaction of human resource policies and practices with the implementation of teamworking: evidence from the UK public sector' <i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , 14(4), pp.581-599.	The interaction of human resource policies and practices with the implementation of teamworking: evidence from the UK public sector	The author aims to explore the influence of human resource policies on teamwork adoption. They emphasize the necessity of comprehending various teamworking methods and highlight the significant impact of certain HR policies, such as front-line manager selection and development, compared to others like team member selection, on the implementation process.	The author suggests that the organizational approach and HRM practices for teamworking are recruitment, training, and other personnel policies which are vital for successful team implementation, acting as essential support for effective teamworking.	Specific HR policies, notably front-line manager selection and development, significantly impacted its execution. Inconsistent adoption of team development activities did not notably affect teamworking. Many team members expressed positivity about the outcomes, gaining valuable teamworking experience.
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14- Batt, R, (2002) 'Managing customer services: Human resource practices, quit rates, and sales growth' <i>Academy of management Journal</i>, 45(3), pp.587-597.	Managing customer services: Human resource practices, quit rates and sales growth.	The author of this research attempts to investigate the correlation between human resource practices and organizational performance in the service sector, particularly call centres. Using a nationally representative sample, the authors find that establishments emphasizing high skills, employee participation, and incentives experience lower	High-involvement HR systems focus on acquiring firm-specific human capital through revolving around three key dimensions. Firstly, they prioritize hiring individuals with strong general skills and invest in their initial training. Secondly, these systems design work to encourage ongoing learning and collaboration among employees.	Influencing employees, high-involvement HR practices elevate workforce skills and adaptability. First dimension systems facilitate ongoing learning to assimilate latest information. The second-dimension impacts employees to enhance learning and problem-solving for heightened performance. Additionally, the third dimension offers incentives like training, job
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		quit rates and higher sales growth, with quit rates mediating the link between HR practices and sales. The customer segment served also moderates these relationships.	Lastly, they incorporate HR incentives like continuous training, job security, competitive pay, and trust-based performance management.	security, and competitive pay impacting employees by improving productivity and job satisfaction. However, the prevalent use of electronic monitoring for performance management in call centres indicates employee disengagement and stress, indicating negative repercussions on customer interactions due to this practice
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15- Reid, R., Morrow, T., Kelly, B., Adams, J. and McCartan, P, (2000)' Human resource management practices in SME's: A comparative analysis of family and non-family businesses SME's: A comparative analysis of family and non-family businesses' <i>Irish Journal of Management</i> , 21(2), p.157.	Human resource management practices in SME's: A comparative analysis of family and non-family businesses	The author's research, based on the NISBS, analyses 219 responses from a sample of 1,369 Northern Irish organizations with 10 to 100 employees. Their objective is to highlight HR practices and key differences in practices between family and non-family divisions within the SME sector.	The findings state that the organizational approach of HR reveals stark differences: non- family businesses prioritize employee involvement in appraisals and extensively use appraisal systems for various training and organizational needs, unlike family businesses. Family businesses prefer flat rate and individual	Divergent HR practices impact employee involvement and reward systems, with non-family businesses highlighting advanced structures, potentially impact employee performance, motivation, and organizational dynamics across family and non- family enterprises.
			bonuses for manual workers, potentially influenced by their prevalence in certain manufacturing sectors. Conversely, non- family businesses favour merit- based pay for management, indicating more advanced HR structures.	

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16	Bacon, N. and Hoque, K, (2005) 'HRM in the SME sector: valuable employees and coercive networks' <i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , 16(11), pp.1976-1999.	HRM in the SME sector: valuable employees and coercive networks	The authors aim to examine factors influencing the adoption of HRM practices in SMEs. They explore internal and external influences, highlighting the significance of workforce skill-mix, unionization, and customer base, suggesting that SMEs might lack HRM capability but can adopt practices through skilled employees and networking.	HR practices respond to skilled workforce demands, shaping recruitment, development, and retention strategies, notably impacting internal dynamics, External networking and collaboration play a vital role for SMEs lacking internal expertise in	The impact of HR practices on employee engagement within SMEs highlights a disparity: settings valuing skilled labour invest in employee growth, potentially fostering engagement, while those prioritizing cost-saving practices might hinder engagement due to limited skill development and job insecurity.
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			adopting advanced HRM practices. Connectivity with other organizations facilitates HRM knowledge exchange and implementation . Corporate governance, community influences, supplier connections, and trade union relationships shape these practices.	
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17. Bryson, A. and Forth, J, (2018)' The impact of management practices on SME performance' <i>National Institute of Economic and Social Research</i> , (488).	The impact of management practices on SME performance	The author aims to explore the impact of management practices on SME performance in Britain using comprehensive data. They note SMEs' lower utilization of formal management practices compared to larger firms but highlight the tangible advantages, particularly in growth and productivity, especially for those investing in HR practices and setting formal performance targets.	In the context of the research explored identified highlighted HR practices such as off -the-job training, incentive pay, and target-setting strategies.	These practices positively impact SME performance, correlating with higher growth rates and enhanced labour productivity. Thus, they potentially contribute positively to employee engagement and performance within SMEs.
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18. Forth, J. and Bryson, A, (2018) 'The impact of management practices on SME performance'	The Impact of Management Practices on SME Performance	The author's aim is to analyse how management practices impact SME performance in the UK between 2011-2014. They note SMEs' lesser adoption of formal practices but emphasize their significant benefits, particularly for those investing in human resource management, like training, performance-related pay, and formal performance targets.	The research investigated and found that the practices and HR approaches were off-site training and performance incentives which correlated with increased growth rates.	These HR practices fostered positive employee engagement, correlating with enhanced growth and labour productivity in SMEs.
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19. Dietz, G., Van der Wiele, T., Van Iwa Arden, J. and Brosseau, J. (2006) 'HRM inside UK e-commerce firms: Innovations in the 'new' economy and continuities with the 'old'. <i>International Small Business Journal</i> , 24(5), pp.443-470.	HRM Inside UK E-commerce Firms	The author aims to explore HR practices in small-medium UK e-commerce firms, investigating practices such as employee involvement, communication, financial participation, and training. Through survey and interview data, they aim to uncover the balance between new HR approaches and traditional practices within this sector.	The HR practices included employee involvement in decision-making, internal communication, financial participation, reward schemes, performance evaluation, and training in e-commerce firms, impacting their organizational structures and approaches.	The struggle between informality and structured approaches created a dilemma, impacting employee engagement by challenging the balance between autonomy and control, a common issue beyond e-commerce.
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20. Hill, R. and Stewart, J., (2000) 'Human resource development in small organizations' <i>Journal of European industrial training</i> , 24(2/3/4), pp.105-117.	Human resource development in small organizations	The authors aim to examine the limitations and characteristics of HR development in SMEs, utilizing case studies from the northwest of England. They investigate how SME traits impact HRD policies and practices, presenting findings and comparisons of HRD models within these organizations.	The HR practices observed in SMEs include varied approaches such as quality systems for innovation and dialogue-based appraisal systems, reflecting unique organizational needs and cultures.	The impact on employee engagement varies; some systems foster dialogue, potentially aligning with theories of control and motivation, yet requiring further examination for overall effectiveness.
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Question 2: How do employees engage in SMEs in UK?

The objective is to emphasize the significance of employee engagement, highlighting its role as a predictor of favourable organizational outcomes. It underlines the challenges faced by SMEs and their crucial contribution to the UK economy. The primary aim is to draw attention to the importance of investigating employee engagement specifically within SMEs, offering insights into how these businesses can leverage engagement strategies to enhance their competitiveness, sustainability, and overall success in dynamic business landscapes. This focus aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of engagement's impact on SME performance while acknowledging its relevance in driving organizational effectiveness (Rashid & Bin Mohd, 2015).

Citation and number of studies	Title of study	Purpose	Organizational approach to HRM	Impact on employees
1-Lai, y Saridakis, G.and Johnstone, S, 2017) 'Human resource practices, employee attitudes and small firm performance' <i>International Small Business Journal</i> , 35(4), pp.470-494.	Human resource practices, employee attitudes and small firm performance	The author underscores the significance of HR practices in SME performance, highlighting their direct impact on financial performance and productivity. Notably, they emphasize how organizational commitment and job satisfaction moderate this relationship, indicating that HR strategies can significantly boost small firm performance,	The organizational HR approach prioritizes specific HR practices' impact on SME performance, recognizing the moderation of this impact by varying levels of job satisfaction and commitment, emphasizing tailored strategies for enhanced performance.	Employees engage through varying levels of commitment and job satisfaction, influencing how HR practices impact SME performance, emphasizing the role of satisfaction in shaping HR's effectiveness within small firms.

2: Brammer, S., Hoejmoose, S. and Marchant, K. (2012) 'Environmental management in SME s in the UK: Practices, pressures, and perceived benefits' <i>Business strategy and the environment</i> , 21(7), pp.423-434.	Environmental management in SME s in the UK: Practices, pressures, and perceived benefits.	The article explores environmental engagement among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), analysing their involvement in various practices, highlighting differences based on size, perceptions of benefits, and challenges faced by the smallest companies in environmental initiatives.	The organization engages employees in environmental efforts via policy development, recycling programs, and impact audits. Strategic alignment drives engagement, with medium-sized firms perceiving greater long-term benefits and market advantage, linking environmental initiatives to their overall strategy for employee buy-in.	Employees are more engaged through the businesses policy development, recycling programs, and impact audits. This strategy links environmental efforts to strategic intent, enhancing employee engagement by highlighting long-term financial gains and increased market share.
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3- Sheffield, D.J., (2020) 'How and why are hourly paid employees motivated to work in a family-owned food manufacturing sector SME within the United Kingdom?'	How and why are hourly paid employees motivated to work in a family-owned food manufacturing sector SME within the United Kingdom	This study explores hourly employees' motivations in a UK food SME, noting motivation sources vary based on hierarchy and life stage. It highlights that intrinsic, extrinsic factors, and social influences shape motivation within a family-owned cheesemaker, offering insights into work-based motivation from a managerial perspective.	HR practices include ensuring job security, fair financial incentives, enriching job roles, adapting motivation strategies over time. Encouraging camaraderie, promoting company reputation, managing overtime effectively enhancing motivation and productivity through social influence and strategic HR approaches.	Employees engage through factors like job security, financial incentives, meaningful work, and evolving motivation. Socially driven themes, camaraderie, and a progressive company culture further enhance engagement, fostering increased productivity within the organization.
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4- Devins, D. and Johnson, S, (2002). 'Engaging SME managers and employees in training: lessons from an evaluation of the ESF Objective 4 Programme in Great Britain' <i>Education+ Training</i> , 44(8/9), pp.370-377.	Engaging SME managers and employees and in training: Lessons from an evaluation of the ESF Objective 4 programme in Great Britain	The author aims to assess the impact of training interventions on HR practices and business performance in British SMEs. Despite positively influencing HR practices, the study finds limited effects on business performance, highlighting disparities in engagement with training interventions among SMEs.	The HR purpose revolves around fostering employee engagement through training interventions. These initiatives establish HR practices to meet organizational needs, albeit with a modest impact on overall business performance, primarily targeting managerial training for engagement.	Employees in SMEs engage through training interventions targeting managers. Although these interventions establish HR practices and meet organizational needs, their impact on business performance is modest, and non-participating SMEs remain unaffected by policy interventions.
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5- Hinzmann, R.A., Rašticová, M. and Šácha, J, (2019) 'Factors of employee engagement at the workplace. Do years of service count?' <i>Acta Universitatis Agriculturae et Silviculturae Mendelianae Brunensis</i> .	'Factors of employee engagement at the workplace. Do years of service count?	This paper investigates employee engagement in SMEs, analysing seniority's impact on engagement levels. Based on a survey across 70 SMEs in mechanical engineering, it reveals that recently hired employees display 27% higher engagement than longer-tenured ones, emphasizing seniority's influence and differences in engagement priorities.	The HR approach highlighted the need for multifaceted strategies to maintain employee engagement throughout their tenure. While acknowledging seniority's impact, it emphasized a nuanced approach beyond monetary rewards, focusing on a positive work environment and tailored HR initiatives for different employee groups based on tenure.	Seniority impacts engagement; recent hires are 27% more engaged than long-term employees. Monetary rewards matter less for tenured staff, urging diverse HR strategies to sustain engagement across tenure.
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6- Al Marshoudi, F.B., Jamaluddin, Z, Aween, A.M.B., Al Balushi, F.I. and Mohammad, B.A, (2023) 'The mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between leadership styles and organizational performance' <i>International Journal of Management Thinking</i> , 1(2), pp.40-61.	The Mediating Role of Employee Engagement in the Relationship between Leadership Styles and Organizational Performance: A Conceptual Model	This study examines how employee engagement mediates Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) performance. Through a mixed methodology involving a literature review and case study, it highlights the influence of leadership style and employee engagement on organizational performance, aiming to propose a testable model applicable across diverse industries.	The organizational HR approach involved fostering open communication and understanding leadership's impact on employee engagement. It emphasized the significance of effective working relationships, acknowledging their role in enhancing organizational performance through social, emotional, and psychological support.	The emphasis on open communication and understanding leadership's influence directly impacted employee engagement. These factors contributed to improved working relationships and provided social, emotional, and psychological support, thereby enhancing employee engagement within the organization.
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7. Wilkinson, A., Dundon, T. and Grugulis, I, (2007) 'Information but not consultation: exploring employee involvement in SMEs' <i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , 18(7), pp.1279-1297.	Information but not consultation: exploring employee involvement in SMEs	The author's goal is to assess whether EI strategies tailored for larger corporations comply with the 2004 ICE Regulations in smaller enterprises. Concentrating on SMEs that prefer informal involvement, the research unveils regulatory hurdles, stressing the precedence of organizational dynamics over company size.	Utilizing strategies focused on communication channels and participative decision-making, HR practices encompass fostering effective communication, consultation, and involvement to enhance workforce productivity.	Employee engagement enhanced through strategies such as open communication, participative decision-making, and cultivating a collaborative culture within the organization.
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8. Devins, D., Johnson, S. and Sutherland, J., (2004) 'Employer characteristics and employee training outcomes in UK SMEs: A multivariate analysis. <i>Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development</i>, 11(4), pp.449-457.	Employer characteristics and employee training outcomes in UK SMEs: a multivariate analysis	This study aims to explore how training interventions in SMEs impact employee employability. Despite workforce development prioritization by the government, evidence of training's effect on individual firms and SME employees remains limited. Using a survey of 1,000 employees, the research investigates training's equity and its influence on SME workforce development.	The organizational HR practices highlighted in the study included the implementation of structured training programs such as Investors in People (IiP). adoption of this strategy promoted a favourable outcome for employees undergoing training.	ESF Objective 4 a policy framework or program aimed at supporting training and skill development for employees encouraged employee engagement by providing training for skill development and career growth, motivating active participation and application of learned skills within SMEs.
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9. Nagori, R, (2022) 'Improving Employee Engagement in Small and Medium Enterprises' in <i>Small Business Management and Control of the Uncertain External Environment</i> (pp. 151-177). Emerald Publishing Limited.	Improving Employee Engagement in Small and Medium Enterprises	The authors propose prioritizing employee engagement as a fundamental business strategy, despite its underemphasized status in small enterprises. They advocate recognizing its impact on fostering commitment, motivation, well-being, and organizational success, urging businesses to elevate its significance to maximize productivity and enhance employees' overall contribution.	The organization's HR approach centres on cultivating employee engagement through various strategies. This includes fostering open communication, providing development opportunities, recognizing achievements, and creating an inclusive and supportive work culture to maximize employee motivation and commitment.	Key findings from the research demonstrate that there are similarities and differences in the enablers that drive employee engagement based on the size of the business. In small businesses, engaging managers and employee voice are key enablers to drive employee engagement in their staff.
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10. Pritchard, K, (2008) 'Employee engagement in the UK: meeting the challenge in the public sector' <i>Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal</i>, 22(6), pp.15-17.	Employee engagement in the UK: meeting the challenge in the public sector	The purpose is to leverage insights from the ORC Putting it in Perspective Report, utilizing its findings from employee research projects in a benchmarking database. This aims to identify key influencers of employee engagement while offering comparative analyses across various sectors.	effective HR strategies engage employees by fostering a positive organizational culture, building a strong employer brand, addressing employee needs and satisfaction, and utilizing feedback mechanisms to continually improve and enhance engagement within the workforce.	Employees engagement is fostered through organizational pride and loyalty, prioritizing a strong employer brand to attract and retain talent, understanding and meeting joiners' needs, ensuring employee satisfaction, and utilizing feedback from ex-employees for organizational improvements to enhance overall employee engagement.
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11- Owalla, B., Nyanzu, E. and Vorley, T, (2021) 'Intersections of gender, ethnicity, place and innovation: Mapping the diversity of women-led SMEs in the United Kingdom' <i>International Small Business Journal</i>, 39(7), pp.681-706.	Intersections of gender, ethnicity, place, and innovation: Mapping the diversity of women-led SMEs in the United Kingdom	The purpose of this article is to examine the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and location in the context of women-led SMEs in the UK. By analysing how these factors influence their engagement in innovation, the aim is to shed light on the diversity and heterogeneity within this sector.	The HR practice highlighted here is to promote diversity, inclusivity, and innovation within women-led SMEs by aligning strategies to address intersectional factors influencing their engagement in innovation	Employees are engaged by fostering diversity, inclusivity, and innovation within women-led SMEs. Aligning strategies to address intersectional factors drives their involvement and commitment to innovation initiatives.
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12.- Jones, O, Macpherson, A., Thorpe, R. and Ghecham, A., (2007)' The evolution of business knowledge in SMEs: conceptualizing strategic space' <i>Strategic Change</i>, 16(6), pp.281-294.	The evolution of business knowledge in SMEs: conceptualizing strategic space	The article aims to introduce and define the concept of "strategic space" within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It explores how owner-managers utilize resources, time, motivation, and capabilities to reflect on existing practices, fostering learning, transformation, and enhancing organizational performance. Through empirical data analysis from a longitudinal study across various sectors, it examines correlations between specific activities within SMEs and their overall performance.	The identified factors, including fostering a positive work atmosphere, social interactions, training, knowledge, allocating resources for review, structures, certifications, and established systems, suggest influential HR practices in enhancing SME organizational performance through continuous improvement.	factors, like positive work atmosphere and social interactions among employees, impact employee engagement. Additionally, structural elements such as training, knowledge structure, certifications, and established systems and procedures contribute to higher levels of employee engagement within the organization.
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13- Darcy, C., Hill, J., McCabe, T.J. and McGovern, P., (2014) 'A consideration of organisational sustainability in the SME context: A resource-based view and composite model. <i>European Journal of Training and Development</i>, 38(5), pp.398-414.	A consideration of organisational sustainability in the SME context A resource-based view and composite model	This paper aims to explore organizational sustainability within the context of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by emphasizing the resource-based view. It combines two distinct viewpoints, namely those of SMEs and human resources (HR), to create a comprehensive model of organizational sustainability tailored for SMEs. It focuses on three aspects: the Human Capital pool, people management practices, and employee relationships and behaviours.	HR practices emphasize developing, leveraging, and nurturing human resources within the organization to harness unique capabilities, difficult to replicate or mimic. The highlighted HR practices encompass talent nurturing, emphasizing employee behaviour, skill development, talent management, strategic investment alignment, and fostering long-term sustainability to secure competitive advantage in SMEs.	These HR aspects affect employees: talent acquisition, development, and utilization; structured management practices guiding behaviour and performance; and fostering engagement and alignment with organizational goals through relationships and behaviours.
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14- Cinar, A.B. and Bilodeau, S., (2022). 'Sustainable workplace mental wellbeing for sustainable SMEs' how? <i>Sustainability</i>, 14(9), p.5290.	Sustainable Workplace Mental Well Being for Sustainable SMEs: How?	The paper focuses on the crucial link between sustainable mental health and wellbeing (MHW), SDGs 8, 9, and 11, notably for SME growth. Highlighting the significant impact of poor MHW post-COVID, the authors emphasize a need for tailored, proactive MHW frameworks, diverging from ineffective one-size-fits-all solutions. They aim to provide a 5-stage MWH model to address this gap and promote synergistic interactions with SDGs relevant to SMEs. The emphasis is on tailored, proactive solutions for sustainable	The information from the study indicates the incorporation of extensive coaching approaches, linking personal values with organizational goals, potentially aligning with HR practices	There is a potential positive impact on employee engagement through coaching methods enhancing well-being and performance during crises.
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		mental health in workplaces, moving away from ineffective broad strategies and integrating mental health efforts with business goals and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).		
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15- Davies, I.A. and Crane, A., (2010)' Corporate social responsibility in small-and medium-size enterprises: investigating employee engagement in fair trade companies' <i>Business Ethics: A European Review</i>, 19(2), pp.126-139.	Corporate social responsibility in small-and medium-size enterprises: investigating employee engagement in fair trade companies	The study explores how small- and medium-sized fair-trade enterprises utilize HR practices, especially in recruitment and socialization, to foster employee engagement in a robust triple bottom line approach. It finds a tension between hiring those aligned with the philosophy and those with brand management skills. To address this, the author proposes enhancing socialization programs, emphasizing increased employee understanding and empathy towards CSR beneficiaries, aiming to intensify moral consciousness, enabling stronger employee engagement.	HR practices such as work shadowing or mentoring were favoured for fostering ideological alignment. Immersion within teams influenced values significantly, employing mentors for technical and value training during employee selection and socialization, thus exhibiting HR practices.	The study observed positive impacts on employee engagement due to formalized induction and mentoring programs. However, challenges arose in balancing ideology with necessary skills and compensation, potentially affecting engagement in CSR activities.
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Question 3: How does HR practices effect employee engagement in SMEs?

HR practices significantly impact SME employee engagement by fostering a positive work environment. Effective communication, recognition, and training initiatives enhance employee value. Involvement in decision-making, work-life balance, and fair performance management bolster well-being and engagement. Aligning HR practices with employee values influences commitment and productivity. Understanding this impact aids SMEs in tailoring strategies to meet workforce needs, identifying HR policy improvements, and fostering a positive workplace culture. In a competitive landscape, comprehending HR's impact on engagement becomes a strategic advantage, empowering SMEs to create supportive work environments for long-term success, (Saridakis, Muñoz, and Johnstone, 2013)

This chapter aims to clarify how HR practices significantly influence employee engagement in SMEs through the adoption of different methods, instances, and real-world uses to grasp. It explores practices like communication, recognition, and training that foster a positive work environment. Additionally, it delves into decision-making involvement, work-life balance, and fair performance management, emphasizing their impact on employee well-being and engagement. Aligning HR practices with employee values is highlighted for its influence on commitment and productivity, enabling SMEs to tailor strategies, improve HR policies, and cultivate a supportive workplace culture for long-term success in competitive landscapes.

Citation and number of studies	Title of study	Purpose	Organizational approach to HRM	Impact on employees
1- Lai, Y, Saridakis, G. and Blackburn, R., (2015) 'Job stress in the United Kingdom: Are small and medium-sized enterprises and large enterprises different'. <i>Stress and Health</i>, 31(3), pp.222-235.	Job Stress in the United Kingdom: Are Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Large Enterprises Different?	The study explores Firm size's impact on work stress using UK data (Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2011). Initially, smaller firms show less stress, but adjusting for factors nullifies this. Stressors vary smaller firms link to workload and relationships, while larger ones associate with autonomy and engagement, highlighting size-specific stress influences.	HR employed a dataset matching employers and employees to investigate work stress across diverse company sizes. Findings outlined specific stressors: smaller businesses tackled workload and job security, while larger enterprises grappled with issues regarding autonomy and employee engagement.	Employees in SMEs experienced lower job stress. However, factors like work overload, job insecurity, and communication negatively impacted them, while decent work relationships positively engaged them. In larger enterprises, issues with job autonomy and employee engagement were more prevalent, impacting employees differently based on company size.



2- Amah, O. E, (2023) 'Linking the COVID-19 work experience of SMEs employees to post-COVID-19 superior productivity of SMEs' <i>Journal of the International Council for Small Business</i>, 4(2), pp.128-142.	Linking the COVID-19 work experience of SMEs employees to post-COVID-19 superior productivity of SMEs	The study highlights key leadership behaviours that positively impacted SME employees during COVID-19 and identifies detrimental behaviours. It emphasizes employees' preference for remote work post-pandemic to enhance work-life balance and reduce costs. The focus is to uncover leadership behaviours influencing work experiences for SME employees, focusing on employee engagement, job satisfaction, and work stress, seeking to understand their desired work style and the rationale behind these preferences.	The highlighted leadership behaviours suggest eight potential HR practices emphasizing adaptable leadership for remote work challenges. Prioritizing empathy, communication, work-life balance, recognition, meeting management, resource provision, development, and workload balancing, aligns with key HR strategies to boost job satisfaction and engagement in evolving work environments.	The study identified eight positive leadership behaviours enhancing work experiences: empathetic, communicative, promoting work-life balance, providing recognition, managing meetings effectively, offering resources, facilitating development, and balancing workloads. Additionally, three negative behaviours exacerbating stress were poor support for work-life balance, inadequate planning, and ineffective communication.
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3. Cuéllar-Molina, D., García-Cabrera, A.M. and Deniz, M.D.L.C., (2019)'Emotional intelligence of the HR decision-maker and high-performance HR practices in SMEs' <i>European Journal of Management and Business Economics</i>, 28(1), pp.52-89.	Emotional intelligence of the HR decision-maker and high-performance HR practices in SMEs	The paper aims to explore how the emotional intelligence (EI) of HR decision-makers in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) impacts the adoption of high-performance HR practices. It investigates the correlation between the EI of these individuals and the integration of effective HR strategies within SMEs.	The HR practices influenced by Emotional Intelligence (EI) include internal promotion, participation, training, and assessment. Managers' relationship management skills drive internal promotion and participation, fostering engagement. EI's impact on training and assessment enhances employee skills and performance, indirectly contributing to higher engagement levels.	EI-influenced HR practices like internal promotion and participation foster engagement. Strong relationship management leads to a participative environment, while EI-driven training enhances skills, impacting engagement positively.
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4. Idris, B., Saridakis, G. and Johnstone, S. (2023) 'Training and performance in SMEs: Empirical evidence from large-scale data from the UK' <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i>, 61(2), pp.769-801.	Training and performance in SMEs: Empirical evidence from large-scale data from the UK	The author analyses training's impact on UK SME performance, using data from the 2015 Small Business Survey. They identify a positive link between training and performance, finding that both on-the-job and off-the-job training positively affect outcomes. Interestingly, simultaneous engagement in both types yields stronger performance gains, suggesting a synergistic effect from combining diverse training methods for SMEs.	the HR practices highlighted are staff training (both off- and on-the-job) and managerial training within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).	Training initiatives, encompassing both staff and managerial development in SMEs, serve as highlighted HR practices. These programs bolster employee engagement by enhancing skills, fostering growth, and aligning goals.
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5. Drummond, I., and Stone, I. (2007) 'Exploring the potential of high-performance work systems in SMEs' <i>Employee Relations</i>, 29(2), pp.192-207.	Exploring the potential of high-performance work systems in SMEs	This study delves into employee relations within UK's "Best Small Companies to Work For," focusing on high performance work systems' (HPWS) impact on these businesses. Through surveys and CEO interviews in 60% of the firms, it analyses the success linked to HPWS. The research aims to explore how the overall system, including culture and norms, influences the effectiveness of HR practices beyond their individual impact on performance.	The mentioned HR practices are High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS), which consist of coherent bundles of HRM practices that synergistically enhance business outcomes by working together effectively.	HR practices, particularly High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS), significantly impact employees beyond tangible practices. The broader organizational culture, shared values, and deeper structures within businesses contribute to coherence and empower mechanisms for successful outcomes.
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6. Carlson, D.S., Upton, N. and Seaman, S. (2006) 'The impact of human resource practices and compensation design on performance: an analysis of family-owned SMEs' <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i>, 44(4), pp.531-543.	The Impact of Human Resource Practices and Compensation Design on Performance: An Analysis of Family-Owned SMEs	The author aims to analyse the impact of specific HR practices on sales growth in family-owned SMEs. They seek to identify key practices, such as training, recruitment, morale maintenance, appraisals, and compensation, and their varying influence on high versus low sales-growth performing firms.	The organizational HR practices evaluated are training, recruitment, morale maintenance, performance appraisals, competitive compensation, and various forms of incentive compensation (cash, noncash, benefits) across different employee levels.	The HR practices positively affected high sales-growth firms. The increased use of cash incentive compensation across employee levels positively impacted employees, enhancing engagement, and potentially contributing to higher sales growth.
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7. Patel, P.C. and Cardon, M.S., (2010)' Adopting HRM practices and their effectiveness in small firms facing product-market competition' <i>Human Resource Management: Published in Cooperation with the School of Business Administration, The University of Michigan and in alliance with the Society of Human Resources Management, 49(2), pp.265-290.</i>	ADOPTING HRM PRACTICES AND THEIR EFFECTIVENES S IN SMALL FIRMS FACING PRODUCT MARKET COMPETITION	The authors investigate the impact of product-market competition on labour productivity in small and medium-sized enterprises, focusing on the role of human resource management practices and the influence of a group culture within organizations based on data from 145 UK-based SMEs.	The HR practices involve fostering a robust group culture within firms, amplifying the adoption's influence, and enhancing its impact on labour productivity	This enhanced productivity, driven by HRM practices in conjunction with a cohesive group culture, suggests improved employee engagement and performance. However, in less competitive markets or without a group culture, the adoption of HRM practices may not yield substantial benefits for employees' engagement, potentially limiting their impact on enhancing overall workforce engagement.
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8- Coetzer, A. and Perry, M, (2008) 'Factors influencing employee learning in small businesses' <i>Education+ Training</i>, 50(8/9), pp.648-660.	Factors influencing employee learning in small businesses	The research aims to identify and categorize factors influencing employee learning in small firms, exploring elements from external business environment, work setting, job roles, and employee learning tendencies. This pursuit intends to create a preliminary framework guiding future investigations into comprehensive factors driving employee learning and aiding owners/manager s' awareness.	HR practice approaches in small enterprises vary, with learning often driven by immediate market needs rather than strategic evaluation. Learning sources are diverse, including supplier-provided training, yet individual enterprises may be limited to few mechanisms. Challenges persist in aligning formal training with business expansion needs, potentially affecting engagement in more substantial learning practices.	This diverse learning approach may affect employee engagement by influencing training preferences, potentially impacting their readiness for comprehensive formal training and the depth of skill development.
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9. Lewis, D., Megicks, P. and Jones, P, (2017) 'Bullying and harassment and work-related stressors: Evidence from British small and medium enterprises' <i>International small business journal</i>, 35(1), pp.116-137.	Bullying and harassment and work-related stressors: Evidence from British small and medium enterprises	The study examines work-related stressors' link to bullying in British SMEs, highlighting the prevalence and factors influencing such behaviours. It aims to underscore the relevance of HR practices in addressing these issues and warns against informal attitudes toward workplace stressors.	The HR practice discussed primarily revolves around addressing bullying and harassment issues within SMEs through policy creation, training, and managerial intervention strategies.	Absence of clear policies risks legal implications. The impact involves potential stressors, raising demands, lack of fairness, and risks of autocratic environments, affecting employee well-being and organizational conduct.
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10. Pajo, K., Coetzer, A. and Guehrole, N, (2010) 'Formal development opportunities and withdrawal behaviours by employees in small and medium-sized enterprises' <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i>, 48(3), pp.281-301.	Formal development opportunities and withdrawal behaviours by employees in small and medium-sized enterprises	The study investigates the impact of formal training on employee attitudes and withdrawal behaviours in SMEs. It emphasizes the mediating role of perceptions of organizational support and job satisfaction, offering insights distinct from findings in larger organizations concerning turnover intentions and neglectful behaviour.	The HR practice involved active participation in formal training and development activities among SME employees.	This effect was mediated through enhanced perceptions of organizational support and job satisfaction. organizations, affective commitment did not significantly predict withdrawal behaviours, highlighting distinct factors influencing SME employee retention.
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Ethical declaration form

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

Please read the notes for guidance before completing ALL sections of the form.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity. Please see Checklist for details of process for different categories of application.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:	Nurjahan begum			
2	Tick all boxes that apply:	Member of staff:	☐	Honorary research fellow:	☐
	Undergraduate Student	☐	Taught Postgraduate Student	☒	Postgraduate Research Student
					☐

3	Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:	UWTSD Birmingham campus
4	Campus:	Birmingham Quay place
5	E-mail address:	1912210@student.uwtsd.ac.uk
6	Contact Telephone Number:	07967872872
For students:		
7	Student Number:	1912210
8	Programme of Study:	(MBA) Human resource management
9	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Professor Dennis Pepple

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

1	Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)	YES	☐	NO	☐
		Date			
2	If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known): <i>Approval in principle must be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval</i>	Research Degrees Committee	☐		
Institute Research Committee		☐			
Other (write in)		☐			

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.	
1	UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice ☒
2	UWTSD Research Data Management Policy ☐
3	[List any other relevant documents here] ☐

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

If there are external collaborators then you should gain consent from the contact persons to share their personal data with the university. If there are no external collaborators then leave this section blank and continue to section E.



1	Institution					
2	Contact person name					
3	Contact person e-mail address					
4	Is your research externally funded?	YES	☐	NO	☐	
5	Are you in receipt of a KESS scholarship?	YES	☐	NO	☐	
6	Are you specifically employed to undertake this research in either a paid or voluntary capacity?	Voluntary	YES	☐	NO	☐
7		Employed	YES	☐	NO	☐
8	Is the research being undertaken within an existing UWTSD Athrofa Professional Learning Partnership (APLP)?	If <u>YES</u> then the permission question below does not need to be answered.	YES	☐	NO	☐
9	Has permission to undertake the research has been provided by the partner organisation?	(If YES attach copy) If <u>NO</u> the application cannot continue	YES	☐	NO	☐

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation

10	Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	YES	☐	NO	☐
	If <u>Yes</u> , please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation (this may be a copy of an email if appropriate).				

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	The lack of HR practices and employee engagement in SMEs in UK		
2	Proposed start date:	September	Proposed end date:	January
3	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words per section) Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u> when outlining your response to the points below: <i>Purpose of Research Activity</i> <i>Proposed Research Question</i> <i>Aims of Research Activity</i> <i>Objectives of Research Activity</i> Demonstrate, briefly, how <u>Existing Research</u> has informed the proposed activity and explain <i>What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge</i> <i>How it addresses an area of importance.</i>			
	Purpose of Research Activity A substantial gap in HR practices and employee engagement exists within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). These businesses vary significantly in capital structure, size, finances, management styles, and workforce. This study addresses the issue of inadequate HR practices and its impact on employee engagement in UK SMEs. SMEs are crucial to the UK economy, and this research aims to tackle the challenges they face in creating productive work environments. Using a systematic review of secondary data, I will analyze existing literature in my research searching for articles using keywords like "HR practices," "SMEs," "workplace" "UK", and "employee engagement." The review will include qualitative and quantitative studies encompassing a total of 50 articles from databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, online library, journals organizational websites. and Web of Science. The primary goal is to draw general conclusions about the relationship between HR practices and employee engagement in SMEs, focusing on hypothesis testing. The findings aim to offer practical recommendations for SMEs in the UK, helping them enhance HR practices and foster a more engaged workforce.			

4	Research Question Question 1: What are the HR practices used in SMEs in <u>UK</u>? Question 2: How does employees engage in SMEs in UK? Question 3: How does HR practices effect employee engagement in SMEs? (this box should expand as you type)
5	Aims of Research Activity

July 2021

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PG2 Ethical Approval Form



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

PG2 / E1 FORM

	This study seeks to assess how the absence of HR practices affects employee engagement in UK SMEs. By exploring into the causes and outcomes of this deficiency, the research aims to offer insights and recommendations for improving HR strategies and fostering greater employee engagement within this sector. (this box should expand as you type)
6	Objectives of Research Activity ❖ Identify the factors responsible for the absence of HR practices in UK SMEs. ❖ Investigate the factors causing diminished employee engagement in UK SMEs. ❖ Suggest strategies and provide recommendations for UK SMEs to enhance HR practices and, in turn, boost employee engagement. (this box should expand as you type)

	Proposed methods (maximum 600 words) For my topic and questions related to the lack of HR practices and employee engagement in SMEs in the UK, a secondary data would be most suitable. This would involve conducting a systematic review of existing literature, which is a form of qualitative research, and analysing relevant numerical data from existing studies to address my research questions more comprehensively.		
7	(this box should expand as you type)		
	Location of research activity Identify all locations where research activity will take place.		
8	(this box should expand as you type)		
	Research activity outside of the UK If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants. If you live in the country where you will do the research, then please state this.		
9	(this box should expand as you type)		
10	Use of documentation not in the public domain: Are any documents NOT publicly available?	NO ☐	☒
		YES ☐	☐
11	If Yes , please provide details here of how you will gain access to specific documentation that is not in the public domain and that this is in accordance with the current data protection law of the country in question and that of England and Wales.		

	Does your research relate to one or more of the seven aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?	YES	NO
12	A prosperous Wales	☐	☒
13	A resilient Wales	☐	☒
14	A healthier Wales	☐	☒
15	A more equal Wales	☐	☒
16	A Wales of cohesive communities	☐	☒
17	A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	☐	☒
18	A globally responsible Wales	☐	☒
19	If YES to any of the above, please give details:		
	(this box should expand as you type)		

5	University/institutional risks For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection		
	Risk to the University:	How you will mitigate the risk to the University:	
	(this box should expand as you type)	(this box should expand as you type)	
6	Environmental risks For example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems		
	Risk to the environment:	How you will mitigate the risk to environment:	
	(this box should expand as you type)	(this box should expand as you type)	

Disclosure and Barring Service				
	If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any contact with such participants.	YES	NO	N/A
7	Does your research require you to hold a current DBS Certificate?	☐	☒	☐
8	If YES, please give the certificate number. If the certificate number is not available please write "Pending"; in this case any ethical approval will be subject to providing the appropriate certificate number.			

SECTION I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

1	Feedback What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
2	Informed consent Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before

July 2021

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PG2 Ethical Approval Form



PG2 / E1 FORM

	data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
3	Confidentiality / Anonymity Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

SECTION J: Data Protection and Storage

	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 "GDPR" and the Data Protection Act 2018 "DPA")?	YES	NO
1	"Personal data" means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ("data subject"). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants is considered to be personal data.	☐	☒
	If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
2	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	YES	NO
3	"Special category data" means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects' – (a) racial or ethnic origin, (b) political opinions, (c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature, (d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992), (e) physical or mental health or condition, (f) sexual life, (g) genetics, (h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes).	☐	☒
	If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
4	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
	Will data from the research activity (collected data, drafts of the thesis, or materials for publication) be stored in any of the following ways?	YES	NO
5	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	☐	☒
6	University computers?	☐	☒
7	Private company computers?	☐	☒

8	Home or other personal computers?	☐	☒
9	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☐	☒
10	"Cloud" storage or websites?	☐	☒
11	Other – specify:	☐	☒
12	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of backup procedures, password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		

Data Protection			
	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	YES	NO
13	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☒	☐
14	Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	☐	☒
15	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☒
16	Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	☒
17	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, <u>emails</u> or telephone numbers?	☐	☒
18	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
19	Use of data management system?	☐	☒
20	Data archiving?	☐	☒
21	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and any international equivalents, where appropriate):		
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
22	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		

	(this box should expand as you type)
22	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:
	(this box should expand as you type)
23	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:
	(this box should expand as you type)
24	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.
	(this box should expand as you type)

25	Please indicate if your data will be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository (see https://researchdata.uwtsd.ac.uk/). If so please explain. (Most relevant to academic staff)		
	(this box should expand as you type)		
26	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	YES	☒
27	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	YES	☒

SECTION K: Declaration

The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants. In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
1	Signature of applicant:	Nurjahan Begum Date: 17.10.2023

For STUDENT Submissions:

2	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Prof DG Pepple	Date: 17.10.2023
3	Signature:	Prof DGP	

For STAFF Submissions:

4	Academic Director/ Assistant Dean:		Date:
5	Signature:		

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

☒	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
☒	I have completed ALL RELEVANT sections of the form in full.
☒	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
☐	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (where appropriate)
☐	I have attached a full risk assessment (where appropriate) ONLY TICK IF YOU HAVE ATTACHED A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT

☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the <u>above named</u> research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
☒	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Academic Director.

RESEARCH STUDENTS AND STAFF ONLY

All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk, with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name. You will be informed of the outcome of your claim by email; therefore it is important that you check your University and personal email accounts regularly.

STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.

This form is available electronically from the Academic Office web pages:
<https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/academic-office/appendices-and-forms/>

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