The Impact of Human Resource Strategies on Employee Relations: Mediating Role of Work Culture in Entrepreneurial Organizations Operating in Dubai

Abstract

This study examined the impact of Human Resource Strategies (HRS) on Employee Relations in entrepreneurial organizations operating in Dubai, with Work Culture serving as a mediating variable. A structured questionnaire was administered to 370 employees from startups and innovation-driven enterprises, and the data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results revealed that HRS positively affected both Work Culture and Employee Relations. Additionally, Work Culture significantly mediated the relationship between HRS and Employee Relations. These findings supported all proposed hypotheses and contributed to the strategic human resource management literature by highlighting the pivotal role of organizational culture in entrepreneurial contexts. Practical implications were drawn for HR practitioners and policymakers to design culture-aligned HR interventions that enhance employee engagement and organizational cohesion. Despite limitations related to the study's cross-sectional design and geographic scope, the research provided a strong foundation for future investigations into HR dynamics within high-growth entrepreneurial environments.

1. Introduction

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) is vital in helping organizations stay competitive, especially in a fast-changing, complex, and global business world. With constant technological progress, growing market competition, and changing employee expectations, companies must connect their people strategies with their long-term business plans (Collings et al., 2021; Budhwar et al., 2023). This is particularly important in industries focused on knowledge and innovation, where employees are seen not just as workers, but as key contributors to a company's ability to stand out and grow over time (Rivera-Prieto et al., 2025; Collins, 2022).

In this context, Human Resource Strategies (HRS) are organized plans to hire, train, motivate, and keep the right people to meet business goals (Rachmad, 2025; Marchington et al., 2025). These strategies include connected practices such as recruitment, employee development, performance reviews, pay systems, and encouraging employee participation. When done well, these approaches help organizations become more flexible, creative, and productive (Schulze & Dada, 2025; Ngoc Su et al., 2021). Effective HR strategies improve individual skills and job satisfaction and build workplaces based on trust and teamwork, supporting long-term unity and success (Hamouche, 2023; Taylor et al., 2024).

Recruitment and selection aim to bring in people whose skills and values match the company's direction (Stone et al., 2024; Schulze & Dada, 2025). Training ensures employees keep up with new developments and stay innovative (Tran Huy, 2025; Rachmad, 2025). Performance management links each employee's efforts with the company's wider goals, promoting responsibility and ongoing improvement (Boselie & van der Heijden, 2024; Anwar & Abdullah, 2021). Pay and reward systems help keep employees motivated and loyal, especially based on merit (Alsafadi & Altahat, 2021;

Tawfig & Kamarudin, 2022). Involving employees in decisions builds a culture of shared responsibility and openness (Vegas-Gallo et al., 2025; Wani & Ganaie, 2025).

In businesses driven by entrepreneurship—like startups and small to medium enterprises (SMEs)—these HR strategies take on added importance. Unlike larger firms with structured systems, smaller entrepreneurial businesses tend to be flexible, fast-moving, and less formal (Arnaut, 2024; Al Mulla et al., 2025). While this can boost creativity and quick decision-making, it creates problems like limited resources, high staff turnover, and inconsistent management practices (Facchini et al., 2021; Slaiby & Matta, 2025). Therefore, strategically applying HR practices becomes critical to keeping employees committed and the business stable (Tantry et al., 2025; Alqasimi et al., 2022).

Dubai offers a unique setting for exploring these issues. The city has seen a rise in entrepreneurship thanks to supportive government policies, strong infrastructure, and initiatives to reduce dependence on oil (Balawi, 2021; Alhammadi & Rahman, 2025). Dubai also has a global workforce and moves quickly, requiring flexible and flexible HR systems for a multicultural environment (Tahir, 2025; Moghadam, 2021). As a result, startups in Dubai must deal with both rapid growth and cultural differences, making effective HR strategies essential (James et al., 2024; Sandhu et al., 2021).

However, many entrepreneurial firms in Dubai still rely on informal or temporary ways of managing people (Biron et al., 2024; Hamouche, 2023). Without formal HR systems, problems such as weak communication, lack of trust, and unfair treatment can arise (Ahmed & Bein, 2023; Abdullahi et al., 2021). In companies where performance depends heavily on their people, these issues can reduce employee satisfaction and organizational success (Collings et al., 2021; Sinambela et al., 2022).

Work culture is key in shaping how HR strategies affect employee relationships. Culture—built from shared values and behavior norms—shapes how people understand and react to HR efforts (Abdullahi et al., 2021; Ahmed & Bein, 2023). When culture and HR goals are in sync, outcomes like better collaboration, satisfaction, and trust are more likely (Lu et al., 2023; Afzal et al., 2023).

Five aspects of work culture are especially important. A culture of innovation encourages new ideas and supports learning, making training programs more effective (Xu et al., 2023; Aggarwal & Agarwala, 2023). A team-oriented environment boosts cooperation and strengthens the benefits of shared decision-making (Ahmed & Bein, 2023; Abdullahi et al., 2021). Focusing on results helps link performance rewards with company targets (Lu et al., 2023; Armstrong & Taylor, 2023), while a supportive culture ensures inclusivity and emotional well-being (Saks, 2022; Bahuguna et al., 2023). Lastly, stability in the workplace brings consistency, helping employees see HR systems as fair and reliable (Gerhart & Feng, 2021; Collins, 2022).

On the other hand, if the culture is fragmented or weak, even well-planned HR practices might not work as intended. This can lead to disengagement, conflict, and low trust (Gill et al., 2021; Islam et al., 2021). So, understanding how culture influences HR outcomes is crucial in fast-changing, entrepreneurial environments.

Although SHRM has been widely studied, most research focuses on large, Western companies with structured systems (Biron et al., 2024; Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). These studies often assume formal HR departments and processes, which may not reflect the realities of small, agile firms (Sinambela et al., 2022; Anwar & Abdullah, 2021). Moreover, research has typically looked at HR practices and culture separately, with little attention to

how they work together to shape employee experiences in high-growth, resource-limited businesses (Xu et al., 2023; Gerhart & Feng, 2021).

This gap is especially noticeable in the Middle East, where places like Dubai rapidly develop entrepreneurial ecosystems but remain underrepresented in global HR studies (Afzal et al., 2023; Ahmad & Bein, 2023). The diverse labor markets, innovative business approaches, and changing policies in Dubai make it an ideal location to explore how HR practices and culture jointly affect employee relationships (Biron et al., 2024; Collings et al., 2021).

Although some research has looked at culture's role in areas like sustainable HR practices (Aggarwal & Agarwala, 2023; Haldorai et al., 2022), there is limited empirical work examining culture as a bridge between HR strategies and employee outcomes—especially in entrepreneurial firms (Islam et al., 2021; Abdullahi et al., 2021). Filling this gap is important for theory and practice, particularly in developing regions where formal HR structures are still emerging (Saks, 2022; Collins, 2022).

To address these issues, this study looks at how HR strategies affect employee relationships, focusing on work culture in this context, specifically within entrepreneurial firms in Dubai. It examines how key HR practices—such as hiring, training, performance evaluations, pay, and employee engagement—impact trust, communication, involvement, and fairness. It also analyzes how work culture aspects—like innovation, teamwork, goal focus, support, and consistency—help shape these effects (Aggarwal & Agarwala, 2023; Xu et al., 2023).

This research offers several contributions. Theoretically, it expands current SHRM models by adding culture as a central factor, providing a more complete view of how HR strategies function in less formal settings (Gerhart & Feng, 2021; Bahuguna et al., 2023). Regarding real-world relevance, it brings insights from Dubai—a global hub of innovation with unique challenges—thus addressing the lack of geographical diversity in HR research (Hamouche, 2023; Collings et al., 2021). Practically, the study provides useful recommendations for HR managers, business owners, and policymakers looking to improve people management in growing firms. Identifying the most effective HR strategies and showing how culture influences their success supports creating more adaptive and locally appropriate HR systems (Ahmed & Bein, 2023; Saks, 2022).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The next section covers the literature review and theoretical background, followed by the development of hypotheses and the conceptual model. After that, the methodology section outlines the research design, sample, and data collection. The findings are then presented and analyzed, leading to a discussion of implications and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Human Resource Strategies

Human Resource Strategies (HRS) refer to organizations' planned and coordinated actions to align their workforce with long-term business goals (Boselie & van der Heijden, 2024; Rachmad, 2025). These strategies are central to Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), which treats employees as support staff and valuable contributors to an organization's lasting success and competitive edge (Collings et al., 2021; Boon et al., 2025).

HRS typically includes five closely connected areas: recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, compensation and rewards, and employee

involvement. Together, these areas form a broad framework that helps businesses attract, grow, and retain talent in ways that support their objectives and promote employee participation (Marchington et al., 2025; Collins, 2022).

Recruitment and selection involve more than just filling job openings; they aim to bring in individuals whose abilities and values align with the organization's direction. This process also considers future needs by seeking candidates who fit the culture and show potential for long-term growth (Stone et al., 2024; Schulze & Dada, 2025). In fast-moving and innovative settings like startups, hiring people who are adaptable and capable of handling change is especially important (Schulze & Dada, 2025; Rivera-Prieto et al., 2025).

Training and development efforts are designed to improve employee skills and support continuous learning. These programs can include onboarding, technical education, leadership training, and reskilling, all aimed at helping staff keep up with evolving roles and technology (Tran Huy, 2025; Rachmad, 2025). As businesses rely more on their people to drive innovation and solve problems, offering structured learning becomes essential for individual growth and overall organizational progress (Taylor et al., 2024; Azizi et al., 2021).

Performance management is structured to ensure that individual efforts align with company goals. This includes setting clear expectations, providing regular feedback, and creating development plans. It helps hold employees accountable while giving managers the information needed to make informed staffing decisions (Boselie & van der Heijden, 2024; Anwar & Abdullah, 2021). This process becomes even more critical in fast-changing industries where adaptability and steady improvement are part of daily operations (Hamouche, 2023; Boon et al., 2025).

Compensation and rewards aim to encourage the right behaviors and boost motivation through financial and non-financial incentives. These may include salaries, bonuses, public recognition, and equity options, all designed to reflect performance and support business goals (Alsafadi & Altahat, 2021; Tawfig & Kamarudin, 2022). In startup environments, where funding might be limited, creative and well-planned reward systems can make a big difference in keeping employees motivated and committed (Marchington et al., 2025; Collins, 2022).

Employee involvement focuses on giving workers a voice in the organization's operations, encouraging open communication and participation in decision-making. When employees feel heard and empowered, they are more likely to be satisfied, loyal, and willing to collaborate (Vegas-Gallo et al., 2025; Wani & Ganaie, 2025). This approach is particularly relevant in entrepreneurial settings, where roles can be flexible, and employee initiative is vital for success (Knies et al., 2024; Schulze & Dada, 2025).

Understanding the difference between strategic and operational human resource management is important. While strategic HRM aligns workforce strategies with long-term business plans, operational HRM involves everyday tasks like payroll and compliance (Boselie & van der Heijden, 2024; Taylor et al., 2024). By linking HR practices with broader business decisions, strategic HRM helps organizations stay flexible and resilient (Collings et al., 2021; Boon et al., 2025).

Research consistently shows that effective HR strategies lead to better employee outcomes. Practices that support development, recognize contributions, and create meaningful work can improve job satisfaction, boost motivation, and reduce turnover (Alsafadi & Altahat,

2021; Vegas-Gallo et al., 2025). These factors are increasingly important as employees seek purpose and career growth (Rachmad, 2025; Budhwar et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, putting HRS into practice in entrepreneurial firms can be challenging. These organizations often face rapid changes, limited budgets, and informal systems (Rivera-Prieto et al., 2025; Hamouche, 2023). Job roles may overlap, and decisions are often made on the fly, making it harder to implement standard HR processes (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021; Facchini et al., 2021). Still, when tailored to the firm's context, strategic HR approaches can help small and growing businesses become more adaptable, strengthen their culture, and support innovation (Collins, 2022; Schulze & Dada, 2025).

In conclusion, Human Resource Strategies offer a well-rounded way for businesses—especially those in rapidly changing or emerging markets—to manage their workforce in line with company goals. These strategies must be flexible and customized to succeed, ensuring that each part supports long-term performance and strong employee relations.

2.2 Employee Relations

Employee relations (ER) involve formal and informal interactions between employers and staff, and the quality of these relationships directly impacts workplace harmony and productivity (Hans, 2021; Onkila & Sarna, 2022). Effective ER depends on five key elements: clear communication, mutual trust and respect, handling conflicts fairly, encouraging employee input, and treating employees equally (Boselie & van der Heijden, 2024; Lee & Kim, 2021). Open and clear communication, supported by regular feedback, helps build understanding and transparency, strengthening the organization's ability to adapt (Kim, 2021; Li et al., 2021). When communication is strong, employees feel safer to express themselves, leading to higher trust and stronger engagement (Tao et al., 2022; Verčič, 2021).

Trust and respect are essential for maintaining healthy employee relationships. A culture that values honesty and mutual respect helps build employee loyalty and encourages behaviors beyond job expectations (Kähkönen et al., 2021; Espasandín-Bustelo et al., 2021). Trust also plays a vital role during challenging times by boosting employee confidence and reducing pushback during change (Collings et al., 2021; Lee & Kim, 2021). Managing conflict effectively is also crucial. Conflicts handled promptly and fairly prevent issues from escalating and support long-term cooperation (Hans, 2021; Wikhamn et al., 2022). If left unresolved, conflicts can lower morale and lead to employee turnover, especially in fast-growing or low-resource settings like startups (Men et al., 2025; Ghani et al., 2022).

Giving employees a platform to share ideas and take part in decisions helps them feel more connected to the company's mission (Boselie & van der Heijden, 2024; Cachón-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Employees who see that their input matters tend to show more commitment and creativity (Onkila & Sarna, 2022; Jung et al., 2021). Fair treatment—including equal policies, transparent reward systems, and justice in procedures—also plays a major role in building trust and reducing the desire to leave (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021; Kang & Lee, 2021). These practices are especially important in startups, where informal approaches to HR are common (Hans, 2021; Roopavathi & Kishore, 2021).

ER is strongly connected to wider outcomes like loyalty, employee retention, and cooperative behavior, which are particularly relevant in entrepreneurial environments with informal structures (Hans, 2021; Roopavathi & Kishore, 2021). In small businesses and startups, where formal HR systems may be lacking, the quality of leadership and company

culture often determines whether employee relations are strong or inconsistent (Men et al., 2025; Wikhamn et al., 2022). Given the limited resources in these organizations, keeping ER practices well-aligned with company goals and culture becomes even more important (Al-Tit et al., 2022; Espasandín-Bustelo et al., 2021).

In Dubai's fast-paced and diverse business scene, where talent frequently moves between jobs, managing ER effectively becomes more complex (Ghani et al., 2022; Kim, 2021). The city's multicultural workforce requires communication that respects cultural norms, inclusive practices, and leadership that can adapt to various needs (Boselie & van der Heijden, 2024; Men et al., 2025). If these differences are not properly addressed, companies may face disengaged employees and higher turnover, especially in startups already competing for skilled workers (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021; Cachón-Rodríguez et al., 2022).

In addition, leadership communication plays a major role in building strong employee relationships, especially in startups where team structures are less formal and company culture develops quickly (Tao et al., 2022; Men et al., 2025). Genuine, passionate, and caring leaders help create emotional connections and foster trust (Kim, 2021; Lee & Kim, 2021). Clear, inspiring messages from leaders set expectations and encourage employees to connect their personal goals with the organization's vision (Li et al., 2021; Tao et al., 2022). Therefore, good ER practices must be part of larger efforts to shape company culture and share a clear vision, particularly in fast-growing cities like Dubai (Boselie & van der Heijden, 2024; Espasandín-Bustelo et al., 2021).

2.3 Work Culture

Work culture refers to the shared values, norms, and expectations that guide how people behave, interact, and make choices within an organization (Kim & Jung, 2022; Cherian et al., 2021). Though often unwritten, these shared beliefs influence the overall environment, employee involvement, and business performance (Juliati, 2021; Tampi et al., 2022). A strong work culture can provide direction and unity in startups and entrepreneurial firms, where roles and rules often shift quickly (Priadi & Thariq, 2023; Wu et al., 2021).

Five aspects of work culture are especially important in entrepreneurial settings: innovation and willingness to take risks, teamwork, focus on results, a supportive atmosphere, and operational stability (Virgiawan et al., 2021; Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021). A culture that embraces innovation and risk allows startups to remain flexible and experiment with new approaches—important traits in unpredictable markets (Sugiarti et al., 2021; SAPTA et al., 2021). This mindset encourages learning and constant improvement (Abbas & Dogan, 2022; Pan et al., 2022). A team-oriented culture, where members rely on each other and share responsibility, builds trust and helps solve problems collectively, especially when there is little formal hierarchy (Widarko & Anwarodin, 2022; Selimović et al., 2021).

Focusing on results ensures that organizations stay productive and competitive by keeping employees accountable and aligned with performance goals (Jufrizen et al., 2021; Lin & Huang, 2021). At the same time, a supportive culture—where colleagues and leaders show care and encouragement—helps employees feel secure and able to handle change (Kim & Jung, 2022; Wu et al., 2021). While fast-moving companies may overlook the importance of stability, having clear processes and predictable systems reduces stress and helps retain staff (Saleem et al., 2021; Cherian et al., 2021).

Several theories help explain how culture contributes to achieving business goals. Schein's Organizational Culture Theory shows that culture operates on different levels—from visible behaviors to deeply held beliefs—and shapes how people find meaning in their

work (Schein, 2010; Juliati, 2021). Denison's Model connects four cultural traits—involvement, adaptability, mission, and consistency—with strong organizational performance, aligning closely with the needs of entrepreneurial firms (Virgiawan et al., 2021; Tampi et al., 2022). These theories make it clear that culture changes over time in response to leadership choices, strategy shifts, and external pressures (Abbas & Dogan, 2022; Pan et al., 2022).

Research consistently shows that culture links HR strategies and employee outcomes like commitment, job performance, and cooperative behavior (Espasandín-Bustelo et al., 2021; Sugiarti et al., 2021). For example, workplaces that promote empowerment and ethical behavior help HR initiatives like communication and skill-building become more effective (Priadi & Thariq, 2023; Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021). When company values match HR goals, employees are likelier to stay engaged, creative, and loyal (Jufrizen et al., 2021; Pan et al., 2022). This connection is especially important in places like Dubai, where diverse cultures and fast changes require companies to stay flexible without losing internal unity (Cherian et al., 2021; Tampi et al., 2022).

In startups, work culture is both shaped by and shapes how organizations learn and form their identity (Selimović et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021). Unlike well-established companies, startups build their culture through trial and error, shared experiences, and new practices that emerge over time (Virgiawan et al., 2021; SAPTA et al., 2021). Because of this fluid nature, leaders, HR teams, and internal communication must work together to maintain unity and prevent confusion (Kim & Jung, 2022; Priadi & Thariq, 2023). Therefore, building a strong and aligned culture is not just useful—it is essential for startups working in fast-moving, high-pressure environments like Dubai (Pan et al., 2022; Cherian et al., 2021).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is built upon three key theories—Social Exchange Theory (SET), Organizational Culture Theory, and Contingency Theory—which help explain how human resource strategies (HRS), employee relationships, and workplace culture are connected. Social Exchange Theory forms the core of this framework by showing how employees respond to how they are treated at work. When human resource practices are seen as fair, supportive, and focused on employee growth, staff are more likely to respond with loyalty, trust, and positive behaviors that benefit the organization (Collings et al., 2021; Rachmad, 2025). This theory emphasizes the give-and-take nature of workplace relationships, where well-executed HR strategies can lead to stronger employee connections and better performance at both individual and organizational levels (Boon et al., 2025; Stone et al., 2024).

Organizational Culture Theory, particularly as introduced by Schein, adds another layer by explaining how a company's culture shapes how employees understand and react to HR practices (Vegas-Gallo et al., 2025; Taylor et al., 2024). From this point of view, workplace culture acts as a mental and emotional framework that guides employees' opinions on whether HR policies are trustworthy and consistent (Tawfig & Kamarudin, 2022; Marchington et al., 2025). Cultures that promote values like teamwork, creativity, and shared goals make HR practices more effective by strengthening the connection between personal and company objectives (Azizi et al., 2021; Collings et al., 2021). This perspective supports the idea that workplace culture does more than influence outcomes—it actively

shapes how HR strategies affect employees' thoughts, feelings, and actions (Espasandín-Bustelo et al., 2021; Schulze & Dada, 2025).

Furthermore, Contingency Theory provides a context-sensitive viewpoint, emphasizing that HR strategies work best when they match the environment in which they are applied (Knies et al., 2024; Budhwar et al., 2023). This is especially important for entrepreneurial companies, particularly in Dubai's fast-changing, culturally diverse, and innovation-centered setting (Ngoc Su et al., 2021; Hamouche, 2023). HR practices that may succeed in large, established firms must be adapted in startups, where quick decision-making, informal structures, and evolving identities are common (Schulze & Dada, 2025; Anwar & Abdullah, 2021). As a result, aligning HR strategies with the specific environment helps support workplace relationships and organizational culture in new ventures (Collins, 2022; Boon et al., 2025).

These three theories create a strong basis for the study's conceptual model. Social Exchange Theory explains how positive, thoughtful HR strategies shape employee interactions. Organizational Culture Theory clarifies how culture plays a key role in influencing and enhancing these interactions (Boselie & van der Heijden, 2024; Vegas-Gallo et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Contingency Theory ensures that the model considers the unique characteristics of entrepreneurial settings in Dubai, where adaptability in culture and strategy is essential (Knies et al., 2024; Rivera-Prieto et al., 2025). The integration of these theories supports the proposed connections and provides a practical, evidence-based framework for understanding how strategic HR efforts contribute to strong employee relationships within the cultural context of startups.

2.5 Hypotheses Development and Conceptual Framework

2.5.1 Hypotheses Development

The hypotheses developed in this study are grounded in established theories and supported by previous research. Social Exchange Theory (SET) offers an important lens for understanding how employees view and respond to human resource practices. When HR strategies are seen as fair, supportive, and focused on growth, employees often respond positively with behaviors such as trust, loyalty, and cooperation (Collings et al., 2021; Saad et al., 2021; Alsafadi & Altahat, 2021; Anwar & Abdullah, 2021). This reciprocal response helps to strengthen workplace relationships and reinforces the importance of strategic HR efforts.

Practices like performance-based rewards, training and development programs, open communication, and participative decision-making are often linked to higher levels of engagement and satisfaction among employees (Biron et al., 2024; Elisa et al., 2022). These practices go beyond operational benefits—they signal care and commitment from the organization, reinforcing a strong psychological connection between the company and its people (Lu et al., 2023; Amjad et al., 2021). During challenging times, such as the COVID-19 crisis, the role of HR strategies in maintaining workplace stability became even more evident (Collings et al., 2021; Hamouche, 2023).

The influence of HR strategies on employee relations also depends on how employees perceive organizational support, particularly in fast-paced settings like Dubai's entrepreneurial firms (Knies et al., 2024; Nyberg et al., 2024). These companies often operate with fewer formal systems, relying instead on trust and collaboration to stay productive and aligned (He et al., 2021; Aboramadan & Karatepe, 2021). In such

environments, effective HR practices help clarify expectations and reduce confusion, making it easier for teams to work together (Saad et al., 2021; Elisa et al., 2022).

Additionally, sustainable and environmentally-focused HRM approaches have shown strong positive effects on employee attitudes and behaviors, highlighting how strategic HR extends beyond transactional benefits to foster long-term relationships (Lu et al., 2023; Amjad et al., 2021). Research from the Middle East and North Africa shows that HR practices adapted to the local context can improve performance and relational satisfaction (Alsafadi & Altahat, 2021; Hamouche, 2023). A mix of strategic HR initiatives and employee-centered approaches helps build a work environment rooted in open communication, shared purpose, and continuous collaboration (Biron et al., 2024; Lu et al., 2023).

Based on these theoretical and empirical insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Human Resource Strategies positively influence Employee Relations.

Strategic HR practices—such as rewarding performance, providing development opportunities, encouraging employee input, and maintaining effective communication—play a key role in shaping not only how employees perform but also how they relate to each other and the organization (Biron et al., 2024; Elisa et al., 2022). These actions signal genuine organizational care and reinforce trust, particularly during uncertain times (Lu et al., 2023; Amjad et al., 2021; Collings et al., 2021; Hamouche, 2023). Strong HR strategies are vital for entrepreneurial firms in dynamic markets like Dubai, where workplace culture is often informal and evolving, fostering solid relationships and maintaining unity (Nyberg et al., 2024; Knies et al., 2024).

While the direct connection between HR strategies and employee relations is well-recognized, their role in shaping work culture is just as important. According to Organizational Culture Theory, HR practices help create and reinforce shared beliefs, values, and behavior norms within an organization (Boxall & Purcell, 2022; Akpa et al., 2021). Actions like onboarding, performance management, and team development play a crucial role in forming a consistent and recognizable culture, particularly in newer organizations where values and identity are still being shaped (Biron et al., 2024; Paramarta et al., 2021; Hamouche, 2023; SAPTA et al., 2021).

Various studies confirm a strong link between HR strategies and workplace culture. For example, green HRM practices help shape eco-conscious values, influencing how employees behave at work (Aggarwal & Agarwala, 2023; Hooi et al., 2022). Similarly, when HR efforts align with an organization's purpose and leadership style, they foster values like innovation, ethical behavior, and cooperation (Al-Swidi et al., 2021; Ahmed et al., 2023). These practices also help build a consistent internal environment and strengthen cultural unity, especially in rapidly changing situations (Rezaei et al., 2021; Amjad et al., 2021). In places like Dubai, where startups must remain flexible, aligning HR practices with cultural values supports growth and cohesion (Widarko & Anwarodin, 2022; SAPTA et al., 2021).

Given this background, the second hypothesis is stated as:

H2: Human Resource Strategies positively influence Work Culture.

Beyond direct effects, a growing body of literature emphasizes the key role of work culture in shaping overall organizational outcomes. Organizational Culture Theory describes culture as a system of shared values and expectations that guide how employees interact with each other and with leadership (Espasandín-Bustelo et al., 2021; Kim & Jung, 2022).

A strong and well-aligned culture promotes trust, collaboration, and mutual respect—key ingredients for healthy employee relations (Juliati, 2021; Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021). Research consistently shows that supportive and participative cultures help reduce stress and build strong social ties, especially during uncertain times (Virgiawan et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021; Kim & Jung, 2022; Saleem et al., 2021). Such cultures encourage shared understanding and respectful communication, which enhances formal and informal work interactions (Tampi et al., 2022; Jufrizen et al., 2021). Moreover, culture has a powerful influence on important factors like psychological safety, employee voice, and organizational citizenship behaviors—elements that directly impact employee relations (Widarko & Anwarodin, 2022; Priadi & Thariq, 2023). Workplaces that emphasize fairness and ethical behavior tend to see higher levels of openness, conflict resolution, and commitment to goals (Cherian et al., 2021; Abbas & Dogan, 2022).

This is particularly true in entrepreneurial settings like Dubai, where companies may still build internal systems. In such cases, a strong culture helps unify diverse teams and supports collaboration amid rapid changes (Selimović et al., 2021; Pan et al., 2022). Cultures that offer clear values, consistent practices, and employee empowerment make it easier for workers to feel heard and treated fairly, strengthening relationships (Lin & Huang, 2021; Li et al., 2022).

Based on these insights, the third hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Work Culture positively influences Employee Relations.

Although HR strategies have a clear and direct impact on work culture and employee relations, there is increasing recognition of culture's role in connecting these two. Organizational Culture Theory suggests that employees use the internal culture to interpret management decisions and assess the sincerity of HR efforts (Espasandín-Bustelo et al., 2021; Kim & Jung, 2022). In this way, culture acts as a filter, influencing how effective HR strategies are in shaping behavior and relationships (Virgiawan et al., 2021; Priadi & Thariq, 2023).

Studies show that when HR practices match the organization's values, they help create a more cohesive environment where cooperation and trust flourish (Widarko & Anwarodin, 2022; SAPTA et al., 2021). A culture that supports shared norms, openness, and ethical behavior allows employees to view HR policies as genuine, which increases their influence on workplace relationships (Tampi et al., 2022; Cherian et al., 2021). This becomes particularly important in fast-changing organizations, such as startups, where a clear and consistent culture plays a key role in maintaining unity (Selimović et al., 2021; Pan et al., 2022).

There is strong evidence that culture serves as a mediator between leadership practices and performance, and also in areas such as green HRM and sustainability efforts (Jufrizen et al., 2021; Sugiarti et al., 2021; Abbas & Dogan, 2022; Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021). In the UAE, research links culture to performance, employee well-being, and loyalty (Wu et al., 2021; Lin & Huang, 2021). In fast-paced work settings, culture helps employees make sense of change and reduces uncertainty, helping align their actions with organizational goals (Li et al., 2022; Juliati, 2021).

For startups, where roles may be less defined, culture provides the consistency needed to build strong relationships and team spirit (Saleem et al., 2021; Pan et al., 2022). Based on these theoretical and practical findings, the fourth hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Work Culture mediates the relationship between Human Resource Strategies and Employee Relations.

2.5.2 Conceptual Framework

This study presents a conceptual framework that examines how Human Resource Strategies (HRS) affect Employee Relations (ER), with Work Culture playing a key role in linking the two. As shown in Figure 2.1, the framework includes three main components: Human Resource Strategies as the independent variable, Employee Relations as the dependent variable, and Work Culture as the mediator. Each component consists of five sub-dimensions that describe how it functions within organizations.

Human Resource Strategies involve essential activities such as hiring, employee development, managing performance, reward systems, and encouraging employee participation (Boselie & van der Heijden, 2024; Marchington et al., 2025). These practices align employees' skills and efforts with the organization's goals. At the same time, they shape how workers perceive fairness, support, and career opportunities within the company (Collings et al., 2021; Rachmad, 2025). When effectively carried out, these strategies can improve organizational performance and positively impact employee attitudes, motivation, and behavior (Saad et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2023).
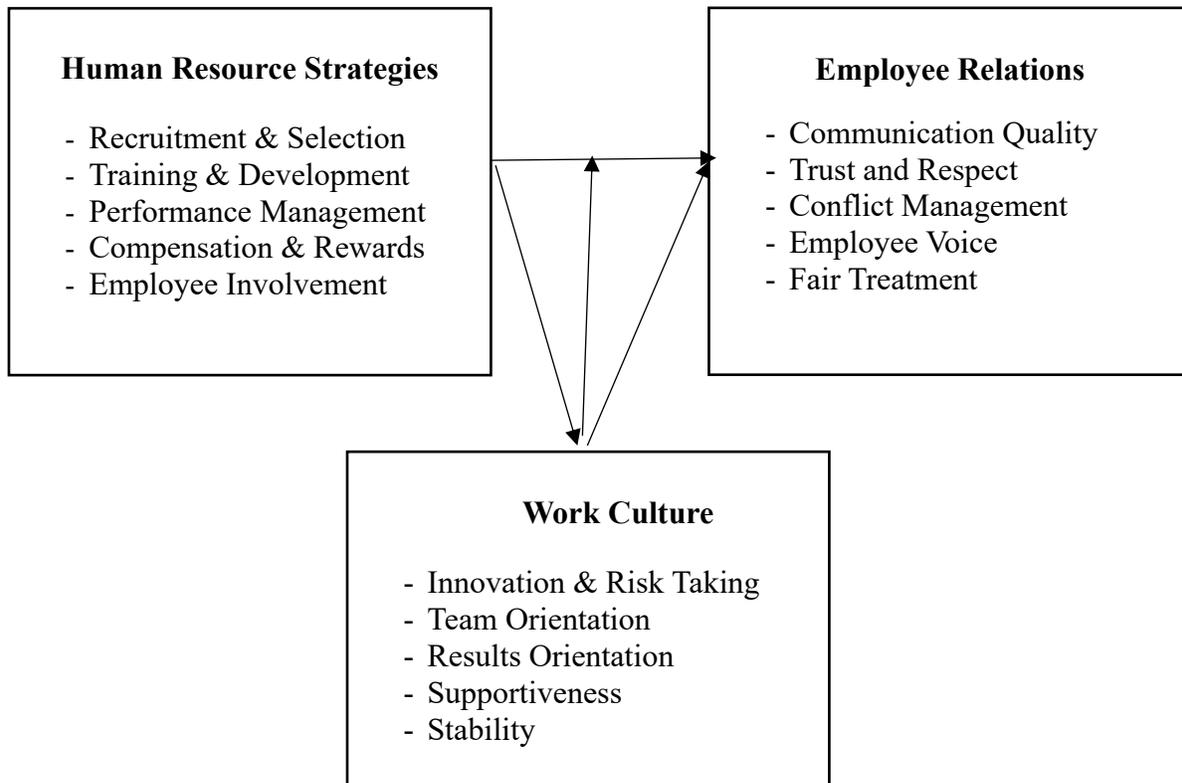
Employee Relations, the outcome variable in this framework, refers to the quality of interaction and understanding between employees and management. This includes communication, mutual trust and respect, resolving disagreements, listening to employee feedback, and ensuring fair treatment (Hans, 2021; Kim, 2021). Strong employee relations lead to greater job satisfaction, loyalty, and a lower turnover rate—factors especially important in fast-paced environments like startups in Dubai (Espasandín-Bustelo et al., 2021; Men et al., 2025). Research shows that these outcomes are closely linked to how HR practices are carried out and how they are viewed by employees (Boselie & van der Heijden, 2024; Li et al., 2021).

Work Culture, which serves as the mediator in this model, refers to the shared beliefs, values, and behavioral expectations that shape how people work together (Tampi et al., 2022; Kim & Jung, 2022). The model includes five cultural traits relevant to entrepreneurial organizations: openness to innovation, teamwork, a focus on results, supportiveness, and consistency (Virgiawan et al., 2021; Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021). A strong culture helps connect strategic HR goals with day-to-day employee behavior by influencing how HR efforts are received and acted upon (SAPTA et al., 2021; Abbas & Dogan, 2022). Earlier studies have shown that while HR strategies can shape culture (Aggarwal & Agarwala, 2023), it is often the culture that determines how effective those strategies will be in improving employee relationships and organizational outcomes (Rezaei et al., 2021; Hooi et al., 2022).

The model outlines two pathways. The first is a direct connection from HRS to ER, showing how HR practices influence employee relations. The second is an indirect path, where HRS affects ER through Work Culture. This highlights how culture helps translate HR policies into practical behaviors and relational outcomes (Virgiawan et al., 2021; Priadi & Thariq, 2023). In entrepreneurial settings like Dubai—where structures may be informal and culture plays a unifying role—this indirect effect becomes especially important (Arnaut, 2024; Al Mulla et al., 2025).

In summary, the framework is grounded in Social Exchange Theory and Organizational Culture Theory, supported by research in strategic HRM and organizational behavior. It

offers a clear picture of how human resource strategies influence employee relations, both directly and through the shaping force of work culture, particularly in the context of entrepreneurial organizations.

Human Resource Strategies

- Recruitment & Selection
- Training & Development
- Performance Management
- Compensation & Rewards
- Employee Involvement

Employee Relations

- Communication Quality
- Trust and Respect
- Conflict Management
- Employee Voice
- Fair Treatment

Work Culture

- Innovation & Risk Taking
- Team Orientation
- Results Orientation
- Supportiveness
- Stability

Figure 2.1. Conceptual Model

3. Methodology
3.1 Research Design
This research uses a quantitative method combined with a cross-sectional and descriptive-correlational design. This approach is well-suited for exploring how various underlying factors—such as human resource strategies, workplace culture, and employee relationships—are related. Quantitative research helps test assumptions and uncover connections between different factors through statistical methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). The cross-sectional aspect means that data was gathered at one specific time, allowing for an efficient analysis of patterns within various entrepreneurial firms (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Hair et al., 2021) since the correlational study looks at how factors are linked—directly and indirectly—without trying to change or influence them, making this design ideal for real-world business environments (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019).

The study used a structured questionnaire filled out by participants on their own to collect information. This method is commonly used in human resources and organizational studies because it effectively captures employees' views about strategic activities and cultural aspects (Podsakoff et al., 2003; DeCoster et al., 2011). The survey consisted of closed-ended questions rated on a five-point Likert scale, allowing for consistent and measurable responses (Hair et al., 2021). This also helped evaluate complex ideas like workplace

culture and employee relationships across different entrepreneurial businesses in Dubai reliably and accurately.

The study is based on the principles of positivism, which assumes that knowledge can be gained by observing measurable facts and that reality exists independently of our interpretations (Neuman, 2014; Collis & Hussey, 2021). This perspective supports using statistics to test theories and produce findings that can be applied more broadly. Positivism offers a strong and repeatable approach for research aiming to understand behavior in organizations based on their structure and strategies (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.2 Sampling Strategy

The research focused on employees working in entrepreneurial businesses in Dubai, such as startups, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and innovation-focused firms. These companies are usually known for their fast-paced development, flexible organizational structures, and emphasis on creativity and competitiveness (Al Mulla et al., 2025; Arnaut, 2024). To identify suitable organizations, a list was created using public and institutional sources, including Dubai SME, the Dubai Future Foundation, and verified business directories (Alqasimi et al., 2022).

The study used purposive sampling to select participants most relevant to the research goals. Specifically, it focused on employees from firms with fewer than 250 staff members actively growing and involved in innovative work (Alqasimi et al., 2022; Arnaut, 2024). When initial contacts were limited, the study expanded its reach using snowball sampling, where existing participants referred others from their professional networks within similar organizations.

To ensure that the number of participants was statistically sufficient, the sample size was calculated using Cochran's (1977) formula, adjusted for smaller population sizes. Based on Cohen's (1992) and Hair et al.'s (2019) recommendations for structural equation modeling (SEM), the study aimed to meet the necessary criteria for analyzing multiple variables and relationships. Using a confidence level of 95%, a 5% margin of error, and an estimated population size of 10,000 employees, the minimum required number of responses was set at 370. This number allows for strong statistical analysis and ensures the findings represent the broader entrepreneurial workforce in Dubai. Details of this calculation are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sampling Parameters Used to Determine Minimum Sample Size

Parameter	Value
Estimated Population Size	10,000 employees
Confidence Level	95%
Margin of Error	5%
Z-Score (for 95% Confidence Level)	1.96
Assumed Response Distribution (p)	0.50
Initial Sample Size (Infinite Population)	384
Adjusted Sample Size (Finite Population)	370

As outlined in Table 1, the sample size was calculated using cautious assumptions to ensure reliable findings. By setting the expected response rate at 50%, applying a Z-score of 1.96, and using a 5% margin of error, the initial calculation for an unlimited population resulted in a sample size 384. However, since the population was estimated at 10,000 employees, the figure was adjusted using the finite population correction method, bringing the required number of valid responses down to 370. This adjusted sample size satisfies the basic

requirements for structural equation modeling (SEM) and helps improve the estimated relationships within the study's conceptual model (Hair et al., 2019; Cohen, 1992).

3.3 Instrument Design

The primary tool for collecting data in this study was a structured questionnaire, which incorporated previously tested measurement items to ensure content accuracy and the reliability of the studied constructs (Wright & Boswell, 2002; Denison & Mishra, 1995; Guest, 2007). The questionnaire was organized into three main sections, each representing one of the key concepts in the research framework: Human Resource Strategies, Work Culture, and Employee Relations. Each section included several statements rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This type of scale allows for the capture of varying levels of agreement, supporting consistency in measuring different concepts (DeVellis, 2016).

Five key areas were assessed for the Human Resource Strategies (HRS) component: Recruitment & Selection, Training & Development, Performance Management, Compensation & Rewards, and Employee Involvement. These were adapted from widely recognized strategic human resource management models (Delery & Doty, 1996; Lepak & Snell, 1999; Wright & Boswell, 2002). The Work Culture (WC) construct was based on the cultural framework developed by Denison and Mishra (1995) and further shaped by Schein's (2010) theories. It covered aspects such as Innovation and Risk-Taking, Team Orientation, Results Orientation, Supportiveness, and Stability. Lastly, the Employee Relations (ER) section included measures of Communication Quality, Trust and Respect, Conflict Management, Employee Voice, and Fair Treatment. These indicators were drawn from the works of Guest (2007), Morrison (2011), and Kwon and Kim (2020).

A summary of the questionnaire structure and the sources of the measurement scales is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Construct Dimensions and Measurement Sources

Construct	Sub-Dimensions	Measurement Sources
Human Resource Strategies	Recruitment & Selection Training & Development Performance Management Compensation & Rewards Employee Involvement	Wright & Boswell (2002); Delery & Doty (1996); Lepak & Snell (1999)
Work Culture	Innovation & Risk-Taking Team Orientation Results Orientation Supportiveness Stability	Denison & Mishra (1995); Cameron & Quinn (1999); Schein (2010)
Employee Relations	Communication Quality Trust and Respect	Guest (2007); Morrison (2011); Kwon & Kim (2020)

	Conflict Management Employee Voice Fair Treatment	

To improve the reliability and accuracy of the questionnaire, a small pilot test was conducted with 30 participants who worked in similar organizational environments. This step helped confirm that the questions were clear and consistent, and that the instrument measured what it was intended to (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Feedback from this test led to minor revisions that enhanced the overall quality of the survey.

In addition, to ensure accessibility for Arabic-speaking participants, the questionnaire was translated from English to Arabic and back-translated into English. This process followed Brislin's (1970) cross-cultural translation method, which helped maintain the original meaning and ensured the translated version was culturally and linguistically appropriate.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Collecting data was guided by recognized ethical and methodological standards for survey-based research. Before starting, ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the academic institution conducting the study. This approval confirmed that the research met ethical requirements, including transparency and participant protection (Saunders et al., 2019). All participants were given a consent form outlining the purpose of the study, their voluntary involvement, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data were gathered through an online survey hosted on Google Forms and Qualtrics. This allowed for wide distribution and real-time tracking of responses. The survey link was shared through various channels, including HR departments, professional networks like LinkedIn, and entrepreneurial hubs in Dubai such as Dubai SME and startup incubators. This approach ensured the study reached employees working in innovative and fast-growing firms.

The data collection period lasted six to eight weeks, providing enough time for participants to complete the survey at their convenience. To encourage more responses, reminders were sent through email and social media. Participation was anonymous, and no personal or identifying details were collected, which helped maintain the data's privacy and integrity (Bell et al., 2022).

Once the survey closed, the responses underwent careful screening to identify and remove incomplete, duplicate, or inconsistent data. This step ensured the dataset was clean and ready for detailed statistical analysis, particularly for structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2019).

3.5 Statistical Analysis Approach

The analysis of the collected data followed a well-structured, multi-step process that combined basic descriptive statistics and more advanced techniques to test the study's model. Preliminary analyses were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26), while software such as SmartPLS 4 or AMOS was used to perform Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for examining the relationships between variables (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016).

The analysis was conducted in five key stages. First, descriptive statistics summarized the respondents' demographic information and provided an overview of responses to the

survey items. Measures such as averages and standard deviations describe how responses were distributed (Pallant, 2020).

Next, the data were checked to ensure quality. This included identifying any missing responses, detecting outliers using Mahalanobis distance, and evaluating the normality of the data by examining skewness and kurtosis (Byrne, 2016).

In the third stage, the measurement model was assessed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to verify whether the survey items effectively represented their respective constructs. The internal consistency of each set of items was measured using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability, with acceptable thresholds set at 0.7 or higher. To ensure that the items captured the intended meaning, convergent validity was tested using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥ 0.5), while discriminant validity was confirmed using both the Fornell-Larcker method and the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015).

Following this, the structural model was analyzed to explore the direct and indirect relationships proposed in the study. This included examining the impact of Human Resource Strategies (HRS) on both Employee Relations (ER) and Work Culture (WC), as well as any mediating role played by Work Culture. The strength of these relationships was assessed using path coefficients, significance levels, and model fit indicators like SRMR, RMSEA, and CFI (Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2019).

Finally, mediation analysis was performed using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to test whether Work Culture acted as a link between Human Resource Strategies and Employee Relations. The mediation effect was evaluated using confidence intervals and adjusted p-values, following the approach developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008).

Altogether, this detailed statistical approach ensured that the measurement tools were reliable and valid, and that the relationships within the proposed framework were examined thoroughly and accurately.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

4.1.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 3 presents a summary of the demographic characteristics of the respondents (N = 370), which helps in understanding the diversity and representativeness of the sample. All participants were employed in entrepreneurial organizations across Dubai and came from different roles, educational levels, and company sizes.

Regarding gender, 55.7% of respondents were male (n = 206), while 44.3% were female (n = 164), indicating a fairly even gender distribution in the sample. When looking at age, most respondents were between 26 and 35 years old (37.6%), followed by those aged 18 to 25 (23.2%) and 36 to 45 (23.0%). This points to a workforce made up mostly of young and mid-career professionals.

As for educational background, a significant portion of respondents held a bachelor's degree (50.8%), while 28.4% had completed a master's degree. Those with diplomas comprised 13.0% of the sample, and 7.8% had earned a PhD. These figures suggest that employees in entrepreneurial firms in Dubai tend to be well-educated.

Regarding job roles, the largest group occupied mid-level positions (34.1%), followed by senior-level roles (30.8%) and entry-level jobs (25.7%). Only 9.5% of respondents were in executive or top-management positions. This distribution reflects the typical structure of

startups and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), where mid- and senior-level professionals comprise most of the workforce.

Regarding work experience, 32.2% of participants worked for 4 to 6 years, 24.3% for 1 to 3 years, and 19.7% for more than 7 years. This mix shows a good balance of professionals with varying levels of experience. Looking at the size of their organizations, 40.0% of respondents worked in firms with 10 to 49 employees, 24.9% in companies with 50 to 99 employees, and 20.5% in businesses with fewer than 10 employees. These figures support the entrepreneurial profile of the firms involved in the study.

Table 3. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 370)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	206	55.7%
	Female	164	44.3%
Age Group	18–25	86	23.2%
	26–35	139	37.6%
	36–45	85	23.0%
	46–55	42	11.4%
	Above 55	18	4.9%
Education Level	Diploma	48	13.0%
	Bachelor's Degree	188	50.8%
	Master's Degree	105	28.4%
	Doctorate (PhD)	29	7.8%
Job Position	Entry Level	95	25.7%
	Mid-Level	126	34.1%
	Senior Level	114	30.8%
	Executive/Top Manager	35	9.5%
Work Experience	Less than 1 year	41	11.1%
	1–3 years	90	24.3%
	4–6 years	119	32.2%
	7+ years	73	19.7%
	Over 10 years	47	12.7%
Organizational Size	Fewer than 10 employees	76	20.5%
	10–49 employees	148	40.0%
	50–99 employees	92	24.9%
	100–250 employees	54	14.6%

4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the average scores and variability of the main study constructs and their related components, which included Human Resource Strategies, Work Culture, and Employee Relations. All responses were based on a 5-point Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), allowing for a consistent measure of participants' attitudes and perceptions.

According to the results presented in Table 4, within the Human Resource Strategies category, the Recruitment & Selection sub-dimension recorded the highest average score (M = 3.84, SD = 0.65). This suggests that many organizations prioritize matching the right person to the right job and follow structured recruitment processes. Training &

Development (M = 3.77, SD = 0.69) and Employee Involvement (M = 3.76, SD = 0.70) also received strong responses, indicating positive views of skill-building efforts and participatory practices. On the other hand, Compensation & Rewards had the lowest mean in this group (M = 3.58, SD = 0.75), implying that employees may perceive inconsistencies in how rewards are distributed or in the link between performance and compensation.

Within the Work Culture construct, Supportiveness was rated highest (M = 3.89, SD = 0.69), pointing to a workplace atmosphere that values collaboration and mutual assistance. Innovation & Risk-Taking followed closely (M = 3.81, SD = 0.68), reflecting a general openness to new ideas and calculated experimentation. In contrast, Stability had the lowest mean (M = 3.52, SD = 0.76), possibly highlighting the fast-changing and unpredictable environment typical of entrepreneurial firms.

In Employee Relations, Communication Quality stood out with the highest mean (M = 3.91, SD = 0.64), indicating that clear and effective communication is a strength in many of the surveyed organizations. Fair Treatment (M = 3.82, SD = 0.70) and Trust and Respect (M = 3.75, SD = 0.67) also received favorable ratings, suggesting that employees generally feel valued and respected. However, Conflict Management scored lower (M = 3.68, SD = 0.74), showing that there may be opportunities to improve how workplace disagreements and tensions are handled.

Overall, these results offer important insights into how employees view their organizations' key strategic, cultural, and relational aspects. They serve as a starting point for understanding strengths and identifying areas requiring further attention or development within entrepreneurial settings.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Constructs (N = 370)

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Human Resource Strategies				
Recruitment & Selection	3.84	0.65	2.00	5.00
Training & Development	3.77	0.69	2.10	5.00
Performance Management	3.69	0.72	2.00	5.00
Compensation & Rewards	3.58	0.75	1.90	4.90
Employee Involvement	3.76	0.70	2.10	5.00
Work Culture				
Innovation & Risk-Taking	3.81	0.68	2.10	5.00
Team Orientation	3.79	0.70	2.20	5.00
Results Orientation	3.73	0.71	2.00	5.00
Supportiveness	3.89	0.69	2.30	5.00
Stability	3.52	0.76	1.90	4.90
Employee Relations				
Communication Quality	3.91	0.64	2.00	5.00
Trust and Respect	3.75	0.67	2.10	5.00
Conflict Management	3.68	0.74	2.00	5.00
Employee Voice	3.73	0.72	2.10	5.00
Fair Treatment	3.82	0.70	2.00	5.00

4.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to determine whether the measurement model was valid and reliable. This process focused on three main aspects:

internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, in line with the guidelines outlined by Hair et al. (2021).

Internal consistency reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR). As shown in Table 5, all constructs met or surpassed the recommended cutoff value of 0.70 for both measures, indicating that the items within each construct consistently measured the same concept (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). For example, the Recruitment & Selection dimension achieved an α of .87 and a CR of .90, while Trust and Respect recorded α = .88 and CR = .91. These values confirm that the scale items for each construct are internally consistent.

Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which measures how much of the variance in the indicators is explained by the underlying construct, relative to error. All AVE values were above the required minimum of 0.50, suggesting that the items strongly correlated with the construct they were intended to measure (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). For instance, Training & Development had an AVE of 0.71, while Employee Voice reported an AVE of 0.66.

Together, these results indicate that the items used in the survey accurately and reliably represent the theoretical constructs of interest. The strong reliability and validity scores suggest that the measurement model is sound and provides a solid foundation for further analysis.

Table 5. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity Assessment

Constructs	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Human Resource Strategies			
Recruitment & Selection	0.87	0.90	0.68
Training & Development	0.86	0.93	0.71
Performance Management	0.85	0.91	0.66
Compensation & Rewards	0.83	0.89	0.64
Employee Involvement	0.81	0.87	0.52
Work Culture			
Innovation & Risk-Taking	0.84	0.88	0.61
Team Orientation	0.85	0.90	0.66
Results Orientation	0.83	0.87	0.60
Supportiveness	0.82	0.88	0.63
Stability	0.80	0.86	0.58
Employee Relations			
Communication Quality	0.86	0.89	0.65
Trust and Respect	0.88	0.91	0.69
Conflict Management	0.84	0.88	0.64

Employee Voice	0.82	0.86	0.66
Fair Treatment	0.85	0.90	0.67

Note. All values meet or exceed minimum thresholds: $\alpha \geq 0.70$, $CR \geq 0.70$, $AVE \geq 0.50$. These results establish the internal reliability and convergent validity of the instrument. In the next sections, the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio evaluate discriminant validity.

4.3 Structural Model Evaluation

To test the proposed relationships between the study variables, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used. This analysis helped determine the strength and significance of the connections between the key constructs. All three hypothesized relationships were statistically significant, supporting the research model. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 6.

The first hypothesis (H1) examined the direct impact of Human Resource Strategies (HRS) on Employee Relations (ER). The standardized path coefficient was $\beta = 0.46$, with a t-value of 6.23 and a significance level of $p < .001$. These results confirm a strong and meaningful link, showing that structured HR practices—such as effective hiring processes, performance-based rewards, and opportunities for employee involvement—are closely related to positive employee relationships within entrepreneurial organizations.

The second hypothesis (H2) explored how HRS influences Work Culture (WC). The results showed a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.54$, $t = 7.10$, $p < .001$), indicating that solid HR strategies contribute to building a supportive and constructive work environment. This supports the idea that HR practices shape shared workplace behaviors and values, which is especially relevant in the fast-paced, innovation-focused climate of startups in Dubai.

The third hypothesis (H3) focused on the connection between Work Culture and Employee Relations. The findings revealed a significant association ($\beta = 0.42$, $t = 5.89$, $p < .001$), suggesting that a positive culture—characterized by trust, communication, and fairness—is vital in improving relationships between employees and management.

In terms of how well the model explains these relationships, the coefficient of determination (R^2) values offer useful insight. Human Resource Strategies accounted for 36% of the variance in Work Culture ($R^2 = 0.36$). HRS and WC explained 48% of the variance in Employee Relations ($R^2 = 0.48$). These figures indicate a moderate to strong explanatory power, reflecting a well-fitting model as noted by Hair et al. (2021).

Additionally, the model's overall fit was evaluated using several key indices. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.961, surpassing the acceptable threshold of 0.90. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.045, and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was 0.041. Both values fall within acceptable ranges, indicating that the model fits the data well (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

These results confirm that the relationships between Human Resource Strategies, Work Culture, and Employee Relations are statistically significant and practically meaningful, offering valuable insights for improving management practices in entrepreneurial environments.

Table 6. Structural Path Coefficients, Significance, and Model Fit

Hypothesized Path	β (Standardized)	t-value	p-value	Supported	R² (Endogenous Variable)
H1: HRS → Employee Relations	0.46	6.23	< .001	Yes	0.48
H2: HRS → Work Culture	0.54	7.10	< .001	Yes	0.36
H3: Work Culture → Employee Relations	0.42	5.89	< .001	Yes	—

Model Fit Indices:
- **CFI** = 0.961
- **RMSEA** = 0.045
- **SRMR** = 0.041

Note. HRS = Human Resource Strategies; ER = Employee Relations; WC = Work Culture. These results underscore the importance of aligning human resource strategies with organizational culture to enhance employee relationships. The findings are particularly relevant for entrepreneurial firms in Dubai, where fostering a culture of innovation, teamwork, and fairness is essential for sustained growth and employee engagement.

4.4 Mediation Analysis

To test Hypothesis 4, the study investigated whether Work Culture (WC) plays a mediating role in the relationship between Human Resource Strategies (HRS) and Employee Relations (ER). This analysis used bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, a method recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008) to produce reliable indirect effects estimates without assuming the data follows a normal distribution.

The results showed a significant indirect effect of HRS on ER through WC, supporting the mediation hypothesis. The indirect path coefficient was β = 0.23, with a t-value of 4.87 and a p-value of less than .001. The 95% confidence interval ranged from 0.142 to 0.319, which does not include zero, confirming that the mediation effect was statistically significant.

Importantly, the direct path from HRS to ER remained significant (β = 0.46, p < .001) even after including WC as a mediator. This indicates that Work Culture partially mediates the relationship. In other words, while HR strategies indirectly influence employee relations by shaping workplace culture, they also directly and independently impact how employees relate to one another and management.

A closer look at the components of Work Culture revealed that team orientation and supportiveness had the strongest influence on employee relations. These cultural traits encourage collaboration, respect, and a shared sense of purpose, particularly important factors in entrepreneurial environments. Although innovation and risk-taking contributed to improved relations, their effect was smaller, suggesting that while creative freedom is valued, maintaining positive interpersonal dynamics relies more heavily on teamwork and a supportive atmosphere.

These findings highlight the importance of developing a healthy and inclusive work culture as a key way for HR practices to enhance trust, communication, and connection among

employees. In the context of Dubai's innovation-driven firms, fostering such a culture appears essential for building strong employee relationships.

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Table 7. Bootstrapping Results for Mediation Analysis of Work Culture

Path	β (Indirect Effect)	t-value	p-value	95% CI (Lower - Upper)	Mediation Type
HRS → WC → ER	0.23	4.87	< .001	0.142 – 0.319	Partial

Note. HRS = Human Resource Strategies; WC = Work Culture; ER = Employee Relations; CI = Confidence Interval.

This analysis confirms that Work Culture is a significant mediating mechanism, partially explaining how strategic HR practices improve employee relations. Entrepreneurial firm managers should prioritize cultural development alongside HR systems to reinforce relational quality and organizational cohesion.

5. Discussion

This study sheds light on how Human Resource Strategies (HRS) shape employee relationships within entrepreneurial companies in Dubai, highlighting the important role of work culture as a connecting factor. All four proposed hypotheses were confirmed, giving theoretical depth and practical insight into Dubai's fast-changing business environment.

The results strongly backed the first hypothesis (H1), which proposed a direct connection between HRS and employee relations. This aligns with earlier studies that have emphasized how well-planned HR strategies, such as employee development, fair pay systems, and inclusive decision-making, can lead to increased trust, engagement, and stronger organizational outcomes (Biron et al., 2024; Saad et al., 2021; Alsafadi & Altahat, 2021). Approaches that invest in staff training and active participation help form a stronger bond between employees and the organization (Collings et al., 2021; Knies et al., 2024). These findings are especially relevant for Dubai's entrepreneurial sector, where rapid growth demands responsive and people-focused HR systems (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021; Hamouche, 2023).

Support was also found for H2, which tested how HRS impacts work culture. The evidence shows that HR strategies influence workplace values by guiding how people are hired, trained, and led (Aggarwal & Agarwala, 2023; Al-Swidi et al., 2021; Boxall & Purcell, 2022). As Denison and Mishra (1995) suggested, HR practices can shape internal traits such as innovation, supportiveness, and goal orientation. This is particularly important in startups, where culture must be created deliberately instead of inherited from existing systems (Akpa et al., 2021; SAPTA et al., 2021).

Hypothesis three (H3) was also supported, showing that work culture directly affects how employees relate to one another and to the organization. Findings from Kim and Jung (2022) and Cherian et al. (2021) similarly highlight how a culture that encourages teamwork, trust, and stability improves communication, reduces conflict, and promotes respect in the workplace. A healthy work culture encourages employees to speak up and perceive the organization as fair, strengthening overall morale and resilience (Wu et al., 2021; Virgiawan et al., 2021). This is especially valuable in entrepreneurial companies, where shared values and behavioral norms are still forming.

The final hypothesis (H4) explored whether work culture links HRS and employee relations. The analysis revealed a partial mediation effect, meaning that HR practices do

more than influence employee relations directly—they also shape those relations through the work culture they help create. This supports existing views that culture plays an active role in determining how HR policies are received and implemented (Widarko & Anwarodin, 2022; Virgiawan et al., 2021). The findings align with Schein (2010) and Denison (1995), who emphasized culture as a vital layer that connects management systems with employee experience.

Theoretically, this study expands the understanding of strategic HR by showing that HR policies function not just as resource tools but also as cultural instruments that embed desired behaviors and values in organizations (Collins, 2022; Boselie & van der Heijden, 2024). The research supports the idea that aligning HR systems with workplace culture is essential for effective implementation (Boon et al., 2025; Rivera-Prieto et al., 2025).

From a practical angle, HR managers and entrepreneurs in Dubai should view HR strategies as key to shaping performance outcomes and interpersonal dynamics within their firms. Methods such as structured hiring, ongoing staff development, and inclusive leadership should be combined with efforts to build a culture of teamwork and shared purpose. In fast-paced and innovation-driven sectors, creating a workplace that offers psychological safety and support is essential to keeping employees engaged and loyal (Stone et al., 2024; Lee & Ahn, 2025).

Policymakers in the UAE can apply these findings by creating HR support systems that cater to the unique needs of startups and small businesses. Organizations like Dubai SME and the Dubai Future Foundation could design programs that build HR capabilities in smaller enterprises. Furthermore, employment regulations could promote value-based and inclusive HR practices to improve employee satisfaction and foster proactive workplace behaviors (Marchington et al., 2025; Wani & Ganaie, 2025).

Nevertheless, the research has a few limitations. Its cross-sectional design does not allow for conclusions about cause and effect, and purposive sampling limits how widely the findings can be applied beyond Dubai's startup scene. While the sample size met statistical requirements for SEM, a broader and more varied sample across different sectors and regions would provide more reliable results. Additionally, since the data was collected through self-reporting, there may be bias, although steps were taken to reduce this.

Future studies could adopt a longitudinal approach to track work culture and employee relations development. Researchers might also explore other influencing factors, such as leadership approaches, employee empowerment, or the use of technology, to gain a more complete understanding of HR-employee interactions (Tran Huy, 2025; Meijerink et al., 2021). Comparing organizations across GCC countries could also reveal useful regional differences and guide cross-national HR practices that fit specific cultural and institutional contexts.

To summarize, this study provides strong evidence that Human Resource Strategies positively affect employee relationships directly and through their influence on organizational culture. These insights offer valuable guidance to scholars and professionals looking to strengthen people-centered practices in Dubai's growing innovation-driven economy.

6. Conclusion

This research aimed to explore how Human Resource Strategies affect Employee Relations in entrepreneurial firms in Dubai, with Work Culture playing a central connecting role. The study confirmed all four hypotheses using quantitative analysis and grounded in strategic

HR theory. It found that HR strategies significantly enhance employee relations (H1), shape the organizational culture (H2), and that culture itself has a strong positive impact on employee relations (H3). In addition, it showed that work culture partly explains how HR practices influence employee dynamics (H4), underscoring the idea that culture is a key channel through which HR efforts affect staff relationships.

This study holds value for several reasons. First, it combines concepts from strategic HR, organizational behavior, and entrepreneurship to form a unified framework for small and medium-sized enterprises. It builds on the work of scholars like Collings et al. (2021), Boselie and van der Heijden (2024), and Schein (2010) by demonstrating that HR practices are not only operational tasks but also strategic tools that influence culture and relationships in organizations. Using well-established measures and structural equation modeling adds reliability, while the Dubai-specific context addresses the need for more localized HR research (Knies et al., 2024; Rivera-Prieto et al., 2025).

In terms of application, the findings offer clear guidance for startup founders and HR professionals in Dubai. By intentionally developing HR systems that promote positive culture through recruitment, training, and inclusive leadership, they can build trust, encourage open communication, and boost employee involvement. These are all essential for success in high-pressure and rapidly changing industries. The research outlines a practical strategy for aligning HR practices with cultural goals to strengthen employee relations and achieve long-term competitive advantage.

From a policy perspective, the results suggest the importance of building a supportive HR environment within the UAE's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Government bodies like Dubai Future Foundation and Dubai SME could expand their training efforts to include cultural development and relationship-building in HR. Regulations promoting training, diversity, and employee voice could help foster healthier, more innovative workplaces.

However, there are a few limitations to consider. Using a cross-sectional design limits the ability to conclude changes over time, and self-reporting could introduce bias. Also, the study focused only on Dubai-based startups, which may limit how broadly the findings apply. These gaps open the door for future work. Long-term studies could track how HR strategies and workplace culture evolve together. Regional comparisons or studies across different types of organizations could offer a more complete picture. Adding other mediating factors, such as leadership style or perceptions of fairness, provides deeper insight.

In conclusion, this research shows that Human Resource Strategies are not just back-office functions but are key to shaping strong employee relationships and building a supportive culture. By aligning HR practices with cultural goals, entrepreneurial firms can inspire loyalty, encourage innovation, and create a collaborative atmosphere. In Dubai's fast-growing economy, where entrepreneurship is central, combining skilled people and a healthy work culture will be essential for lasting success.

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