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BEYOND FORMAL HRM: RELATIONAL PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN SMES – A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This article develops a conceptual framework and reports a reproducible bibliographic inventory and provisional abstract-level map concerning formal human resource management (HRM), relational practices, and employee retention in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Two Scopus exports dated 19 October 2026 contained 219 records, with 11 duplicates removed and 208 unique records retained. A rule-based preliminary triage of all unique abstracts flagged three direct retention candidates, ten further retention candidates requiring SME confirmation, 24 supporting mechanism studies, six records requiring design checks, one record missing an abstract, and 164 records likely outside scope pending manual confirmation. These categories are not final inclusion or exclusion decisions. Three direct candidates and five illustrative supporting studies are discussed at the construct level. The proposed framework separates organizational practices, employee perceptions, attachment mechanisms, and retention outcomes. Complementarity, compensation, and undermining remain conceptual configurations rather than tested common effects. Enterprise-size verification, family-employee status, full-text statistical estimates, independent screening, and methodological appraisal are outstanding. No final eligible-study count or effect estimate is inferred from preliminary triage.

Keywords: employee retention, small and medium-sized enterprises, relational practices, formal HRM, systematic literature review

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1. INTRODUCTION

Employee retention raises a question about the employment relationship: what makes continued membership worthwhile for employees? In SMEs, a useful explanation must consider employment arrangements together with the interactions through which employees experience work. These dimensions can overlap without being equivalent. A formal development program may offer little support when implemented inconsistently, while an accessible supervisor may provide assistance outside a documented policy. Such examples motivate an inquiry into the relationship between policy and enactment rather than establish their effects in advance.

SME HRM cannot be understood by treating smaller enterprises as a uniform organizational category. Harney and Dundon (2006) show how internal dynamics and external structural conditions shape employment practices. Harney and Alkhalaf (2021) similarly emphasize diversity and the limitations of a simple formal-versus-informal classification. These perspectives support attention to the quality and implementation of practices alongside their degree of formalization.

Research has already linked relational mechanisms with retention in particular SME settings. Pittino et al. (2016) suggest that family social capital may substitute for selected formal involvement and commitment practices, depending on family involvement in governance. This finding motivates a conditional explanation. It does not establish that interpersonal closeness replaces fair compensation or employment security

across smaller firms. The study is cited as an external comparator and is not one of the eight abstract-extracted records.

The present review therefore asks how formal HRM arrangements and relational practices operate together. Relational practices include enacted support, recognition, consultation, mentoring, and communication. Formal arrangements include explicit procedures and employment provisions. Trust, commitment, engagement, and belonging are potential employee experiences or mechanisms rather than interchangeable labels for these practices. Job embeddedness adds attention to links, fit, and perceived sacrifice associated with leaving (Mitchell et al., 2001).

The contribution has two distinct parts. Conceptually, the review differentiates organizational provisions and enacted relational behavior from employee perceptions, attachment mechanisms, and retention outcomes; it then proposes complementarity, compensation, and undermining as testable configurations across two independent axes of HRM formalization and relational enactment. Empirically, the present abstract-based mapping identifies which constructs and retention-related paths appear in three candidates and separates them from five studies with non-retention outcomes. It neither validates the three configurations nor demonstrates effects on actual employee turnover. The conceptual framework therefore extends beyond, rather than summarizes as established, the available empirical evidence. Four questions organize the review:
RQ1: Which formal HRM arrangements and relational practices are examined in research on employee retention in SMEs?
RQ2: Through which psychological and social mechanisms are these practices associated with retention-related outcomes?
RQ3: Under what conditions do relational practices complement, compensate for, or undermine formal HRM arrangements?
RQ4: How strongly does the evidence support these relationships when actual retention is distinguished from intentions to stay or leave?

Retention denotes continued employment, whereas intention to stay and turnover intention are attitudinal outcomes. A desire to stay does not demonstrate subsequent employment continuity, while remaining may reflect reasons beyond positive attitudes. Interpretation must therefore follow the outcome measured. The presence of apparently beneficial practices does not guarantee retention. Development opportunities allocated through transparent criteria may be interpreted differently from opportunities based on proximity to the owner. Recognition may also lose its meaning when comparable contributions receive inconsistent treatment. These analytical illustrations connect provision, enactment, employee interpretation, and outcomes without adding extracted findings.

2. LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Formal Arrangements and Relational Enactment

Formal HRM concerns explicit employment policies, procedures, and provisions. Relational enactment concerns how organizational actors communicate and implement support, recognition, participation, and related treatment. The distinction allows an HRM practice to be both formalized and relationally supportive. Conversely, informality alone does not establish a favorable employment relationship. This approach responds to the need for a more nuanced understanding of SME HRM implementation (Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021).

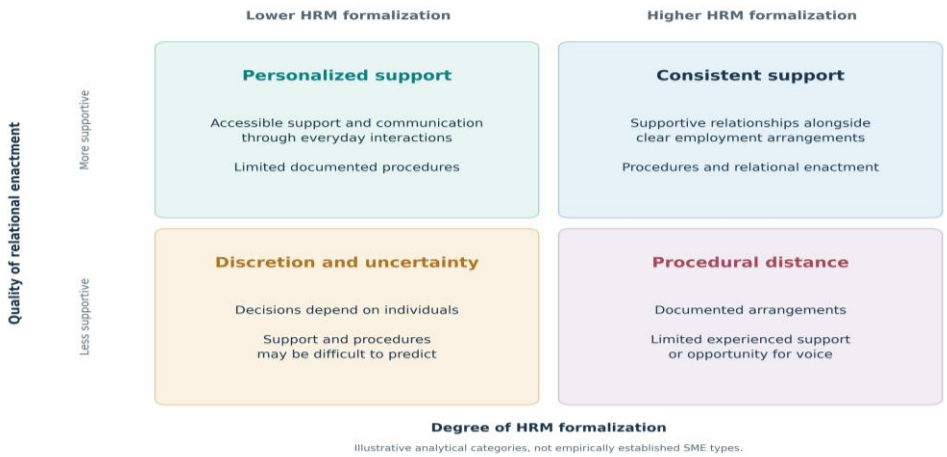
Construct coding must retain the difference between practices, perceptions, and outcomes. Recruitment procedures are practices, whereas person–organization fit is an assessment of compatibility. Supportive supervisory behavior is enacted treatment, whereas perceived supervisor support is an employee perception. Engagement and affective commitment can be mechanisms or outcomes depending on the study design. Assigning these constructs to a single broad category would conceal the process that the review seeks to explain. Informality indicates limited documentation or reliance on discretion, whereas

relational quality concerns experienced treatment. Documented procedures may include attentive consultation, while undocumented support may be unpredictable. Figure 1 separates these dimensions without ranking retention across the four configurations.

Table 1. Data Extraction and Coding Protocol

Analytical position	Constructs/examples	Coding decision	Relevant figure/theory
Organizational arrangements and enacted practices	Written compensation, recruitment, development and fair procedures; enacted supervisor support, recognition, consultation and mentoring	Record policy formalization separately from observed relational delivery; recruitment is not measured merely because fit is assessed	Figure 1 axes; social exchange
Employee perceptions and interpretations	Perceived organizational or supervisor support, trust, procedural fairness, person–organization fit, person–job fit, identity/career-interest alignment	Perceived support differs from supervisor behavior; fit and alignment are not formal HRM programs	Figure 2 interpretation; organizational support
Attachment and motivational mechanisms	Affective commitment, kinship engagement, job embeddedness, psychological ownership where measured	Code mediation only when explicitly tested; do not interchange commitment, engagement, and ownership	Figure 2 mechanisms; embeddedness/ownership
Retention-related outcomes	Intention to stay, turnover intention, questionnaire-labelled green retention; verified continued employment or turnover	Separate attitudinal responses from observed employment events; reverse-coded intentions are not automatically actual retention	Figure 2 outcomes; empirical endpoint

Constructs are classified by analytical function rather than by their favorable or relational connotation. For Figure 1, formalization concerns the existence and consistency of documented employment rules; relational enactment concerns the behavior through which support, consultation, and recognition are delivered.



Source: Authors' proposed two-dimensional framework.

Figure 1. Formal HRM and Relational Practices as Distinct Dimensions

Social exchange theory concerns exchange actors and reciprocity across these dimensions; organizational support theory concerns attribution of fair and supportive treatment; job embeddedness theory concerns links, fit, and sacrifice associated with staying; and psychological ownership theory concerns an optional sense of possession or identification with an organizational target. None independently establishes a quadrant or a causal retention effect. Figures 1, 2, and 3 are author-developed conceptual illustrations, not fitted, validated, or statistically tested models.

Social Exchange and Organizational Support

Social exchange theory directs attention to exchange rules, exchanged resources, and the relationships that develop among actors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Applied to retention, it motivates questions about what employees receive, who provides it, and how employees interpret the relationship. An owner, supervisor, coworker, and organization should not automatically be treated as the same exchange partner.

Organizational support theory gives greater specificity to employees' sense of being valued and cared for. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) associate perceived organizational support with fairness, supervisor support, rewards, and favorable job conditions. Their evidence also connects support with affective commitment and reduced withdrawal behavior. These general organizational findings provide a theoretical basis for examining interpersonal treatment and employment conditions together. They do not establish an SME-specific retention effect.

A relational explanation also requires clarity about attribution. Help offered by a supervisor may be attributed to that individual rather than to the employing organization. A review should therefore examine whether a study measures supervisor support, organizational support, or a general relational climate. Treating these variables as the same mechanism could conceal whether attachment is directed toward a particular person or toward continued membership of the enterprise.

In the proposed framework, trust is an employee interpretation concerning the relationship, while organizational commitment describes attachment to the organization. Recognition is an action or practice when enacted, but perceived recognition is an assessment. These distinctions are proposed coding rules for the present review. They provide a way to compare studies without asserting that all constructs form a single causal sequence.

Embeddedness and Psychological Ownership

Job embeddedness explains attachment through links, fit, and perceived sacrifice. Mitchell et al. (2001) examine its relationship with intentions to leave and voluntary turnover beyond satisfaction and commitment. For the present review, this distinction means that continued membership cannot be interpreted solely as a positive emotional evaluation. The meaning of staying must be assessed using the constructs and employment circumstances actually measured.

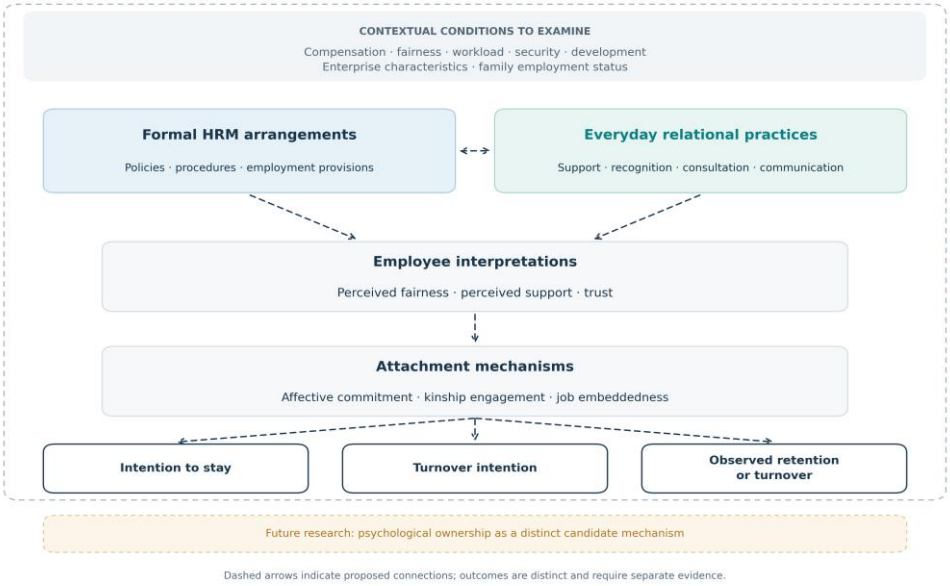
Psychological ownership offers a separate account of employees' relationship with an ownership target. Pierce et al. (2001) develop its conceptual distinctiveness and potential organizational implications. This theory justifies examining ownership feelings when measured, but it does not establish psychological ownership as a required mediator between relational HRM and SME retention. Commitment and kinship engagement remain distinct constructs in the present extraction.

Proposed Conditional Framework

The framework links formal employment arrangements and relational enactment with employee perceptions, attachment mechanisms, and retention-related outcomes. It asks whether compensation, procedural fairness, workload, security, development opportunities, and SME characteristics change those relationships. The framework also allows relational closeness to have mixed implications, including potential favoritism or loyalty pressure. These adverse processes remain propositions unless the eligible studies directly examine them.

Three evidentiary distinctions follow. A statistical interaction is stronger evidence of moderation than a difference between settings. A reported indirect-effect test is different from a sequence of significant direct paths. A questionnaire measure of intention or perceived retention is different from an observed exit. These distinctions govern the interpretation of the preliminary results.

Figure 2 summarizes the proposed relationships. Its arrows denote questions for investigation rather than effect directions supported across the evidence base. The framework permits alternative ordering, reciprocal relationships, and omitted mechanisms. It also separates intention measures from observed employment outcomes so that future evidence can be added without redefining the dependent variable.



Source: Authors' conceptual pathway, not an empirically validated causal or mediation model.

Figure 2. Proposed Pathways Linking Employment Practices to Employee Retention

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Design and Current Review Stage

The review is designed as a context-sensitive synthesis of SME employment practices and retention. Systematic reviewing in management provides a rationale for transparent and reproducible procedures that preserve organizational context (Tranfield et al., 2003). PRISMA 2020 provides reporting guidance for the completed identification, selection, appraisal, and synthesis process (Page et al., 2021).

The current study documents a complete 208-record bibliographic inventory and preliminary title/abstract triage, but not a completed systematic review. The two supplied Scopus exports and accompanying draft Boolean syntax were inspected, duplicate records were identified, and every unique record was assigned a provisional triage category for subsequent human screening. These classifications are neither independent dual-reviewer screening judgments nor final PRISMA exclusions. No complete eligible full-text corpus or study-level critical appraisal was available. The three retention candidates and five illustrative supporting studies in the synthesis are not presented as the complete final inclusion set.

Information Sources and Deduplication

Two supplied Scopus text exports are dated 19 October 2026 and contain 118 and 101 records, respectively (219 total). Matching records on normalized DOI or, when unavailable, normalized title identified 11 duplicates, yielding 208 unique records. The accompanying Boolean document provides a

retention-focused human-centric HRM/SME query and a separate psychological-ownership/SME query. Export dates confirm when the files were generated, not the original query execution timestamps; source-specific filters and a complete search history also remain unverified. All 208 unique records were retained in a record-level audit workbook with bibliographic data, abstracts, DOI or EID where provided, provisional reasons, and pending verification fields. Accordingly, only identification and deduplication counts are confirmed for PRISMA 2020.

A preliminary rule-based triage assigned 3 records as direct retention candidates, 10 as retention candidates requiring SME verification, 24 as supporting SME mechanism studies, 164 as likely outside scope, 6 as possibly nonprimary or requiring design checks, and 1 as lacking an abstract. Each classification remains provisional and requires manual confirmation; no record has been definitively excluded from the PRISMA flow solely because of this rule-based process. The existence of 208 triaged records does not establish 208 independently screened eligibility decisions or any number of full texts assessed. The accompanying record-level workbook preserves decisions and audit prompts for the next screening phase (Page et al., 2021; Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

Table 2. PRISMA Accounting Supported by The Current Source Package

Review stage	Recorded count	Interpretation / outstanding record
Records in two Scopus exports	118 + 101 = 219	Export-level count; query strings/dates not recovered
Duplicate records removed	11	DOI/title matching as reported
Unique records after deduplication	208	Starting corpus for an auditable screening log
Title/abstract screening decisions	Not documented	Cannot derive exclusions or screened count from selected records
Full texts sought / assessed / excluded	Not documented	Acquisition, decisions and exclusion reasons missing
Final eligible retention studies	Not determined	D1–D3 are candidates only
Selected mechanism comparators	5	S1–S5 are contextual examples, not final inclusions

Table 3. Preliminary Record-Level Triage of The 208 Unique Scopus Records

Provisional category	Records	Interpretation
Direct retention candidate; full text required	3	Candidate only; enterprise classification and results remain unverified
Retention candidate; SME not confirmed	10	SME eligibility requires primary-study verification
Supporting SME mechanisms only	24	Not part of a retention-effect synthesis without a retention outcome
Likely outside scope; manual check	164	No final exclusion is assigned by automation
Primary empirical status or design requires checking	6	No final exclusion is assigned by automation
Abstract missing	1	Retrieve title, abstract, or full text before eligibility decision
Total unique records	208	Provisional classification; independent screening still needed

Source: Two Scopus exports dated 19 October 2026 and the 208-record triage workbook. All assignments are preliminary title/abstract triage, not final independent reviewer decisions or PRISMA exclusions.

Eligibility and evidence categories

SME eligibility is assessed at the employing-enterprise level rather than from the number of survey respondents. A study is eligible only where the full text reports workforce, annual turnover, asset-based thresholds, or an officially grounded country- and period-specific SME classification. The audit records the classification authority, relevant threshold and unit, year, sector, enterprise size and evidence page. For multinational studies, country-level criteria must be applied to each employer where ascertainable.

An author-supplied SME label without verifiable size/classification data is coded "unverified", not silently accepted. Microenterprises require both an applicable size definition and a genuine employment relationship. In D1, family membership, paid employment, ownership and succession involvement must be examined separately; intention to remain in a family business cannot automatically be interpreted as non-owner employee retention.

The preliminary extraction uses two categories. D denotes a candidate with an explicit SME setting and retention-related outcome. S denotes a selected SME study relevant to practices or mechanisms but without a retention outcome. Supporting records may inform conceptual interpretation; they do not enter a direct retention-effect synthesis. Family employees require specific checks to distinguish employment attachment from ownership or succession decisions. Startup and shopping-center records remain pending when employer size is not specified.

Direct retention candidates must connect an employment-related exposure or mechanism with a relevant retention outcome. A passing reference to retention in the introduction or practical implications is insufficient. Supporting mechanism studies can help clarify constructs, but their separation must remain visible in tables and narrative synthesis. This rule prevents a large collection of performance studies from being presented as a large retention evidence base.

Operational eligibility decision rule: (1) confirm organizational unit and SME threshold from the full text or an official source valid for the relevant country/year; (2) distinguish respondents with employment duties from owners, successors and mixed-status family members; (3) confirm that the outcome measures employee continuity, employee intention or turnover rather than ownership succession; (4) record eligible, ineligible or unresolved alongside the precise source and reason. Two independent reviewers should apply this rule, resolve disagreements, and retain an auditable decision log. No such completed log is claimed here. None of the eight extracted abstracts provides enough verified enterprise-level data to close these checks.

Extraction and Appraisal

For every study, the planned full-text extraction records bibliographic identifiers, country/sector, enterprise-level SME definition and source, respondent employment/ownership status, design, construct operationalization, outcome type and timing, effect direction, coefficient, standard error or confidence interval, p value, tested mediation/moderation and any reported control variables. Each claim is separately flagged "abstract reported", "full-text verified" or "unresolved". No missing coefficients or significance tests are imputed. A named mediation in an abstract is retained as "author-reported mediation" until an appropriate indirect-effect test is inspected, while positive component paths do not establish a statistically significant indirect effect.

No study-level quality scores are assigned from abstracts. Full-text assessment must examine sampling, construct measurement, confounding, missing data, temporal ordering, and the correspondence between analysis and claims. Design-appropriate appraisal tools will be selected once eligible designs are confirmed. PRISMA is a reporting guideline and does not itself supply a critical-appraisal score. Full-text extraction should retain operational definitions before grouping constructs into themes. Direct, indirect, total, and interaction estimates should be recorded with their uncertainty. Nonsignificant findings should be retained as reported without being generalized into an absence of value across all practices.

Synthesis

The current synthesis groups reported findings by practices, mechanisms, outcomes, and contextual conditions. No pooled effect is calculated. Future quantitative synthesis depends on sufficient comparability of populations, constructs, designs, and outcome measures. If qualitative findings are eligible, thematic synthesis can connect primary-study coding with descriptive and analytical themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). For quantitative intervention effects synthesized without meta-analysis, SWiM

supplies reporting guidance (Campbell et al., 2020). Its transparency principles may inform reporting here, but its intervention-effect scope does not validate an entire observational SME review. A completed synthesis will explicitly distinguish study findings from the review's interpretive framework.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics and Boundaries of The Extracted Evidence

The provisional record-level inventory identified three direct retention candidates already examined in the original extraction, plus ten additional retention candidates for which the SME setting or eligibility requires confirmation. The three previously examined candidates remain Pramudya and Schmuck (2022), concerning 270 junior-generation family employees; Pariyanti et al. (2025), concerning 331 creative-industry MSME employees in Yogyakarta; and Wicaksari et al. (2024), concerning 204 Indonesian SME employees using green employment constructs. Neither the three direct candidates nor the ten additional candidates constitute a final eligible-study set. Enterprise-level size and respondent eligibility require inspection of the original studies.

The record-level triage also flagged 24 supporting SME mechanism studies without an identified retention outcome. The five studies described in Table 1 are selected illustrations addressing family-supportive supervisor behavior, high-involvement HRM, psychological safety, empowerment, kinship engagement, and workplace happiness. These five illustrative studies do not exhaust the 24 records flagged for potential supporting use and cannot be counted as retention-effect studies. All provisional categories require human validation.

Across the three retention-related candidate abstracts, no administratively tracked employee exit, employment continuity date or longitudinal retention rate is established. D1 measures intention to stay and D2 measures turnover intention; D3 uses a self-reported green employee retention measure whose questionnaire items remain unverified. The review therefore reports intention- or construct-based associations and does not equate these with observed employee retention.

Table 4. Study Characteristics and Evidence Scope

ID and study	Setting and sample	Design and analysis reported	Outcome and evidence scope
D1 Pramudya and Schmuck (2022); DOI	Indonesian small and medium family businesses; 270 junior-generation family employees; purposive sample; sector NR Enterprise-size threshold: NR / not verified. Junior-generation family employees; employee versus owner/successor status unverified.	Questionnaire survey; quantitative; PLS-SEM using SmartPLS; timing NR	Intention to stay; SME retention candidate. Family-employee eligibility and distinction from ownership or succession require full-text confirmation Eligibility: provisional; full-text SME verification pending.
D2 Pariyanti et al. (2025); DOI	Creative-industry MSMEs, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; 331 employees Enterprise-size threshold: NR / not verified. Respondents described as employees; employment status not independently verified.	Offline and online questionnaires; SEM; sampling method and timing NR	Turnover intention; direct SME intention-outcome candidate; actual exits not reported Eligibility: provisional; full-text SME verification pending.
D3 Wicaksari et al. (2024); DOI	Indonesian SMEs; 204 employees; quota	Google Forms questionnaire; five-point	Green employee retention; survey construct. Item content

ID and study	Setting and sample	Design and analysis reported	Outcome and evidence scope
	sampling; sector NR Enterprise-size threshold: NR / not verified. Respondents described as employees; employment status not independently verified.	Likert responses; PLS-SEM, version 4	and equivalence to general retention require verification Eligibility: provisional; full-text SME verification pending.
S1 Susanto et al. (2022); DOI	SME employees; sample size and location NR in abstract Enterprise-size threshold: NR / not verified. Respondents described as employees; employment status not independently verified.	SEM-PLS; mediated-moderated model; timing NR	Job satisfaction and job performance; supporting evidence only Eligibility: provisional; full-text SME verification pending.
S2 Cahyadi et al. (2022); DOI	SMEs in Lubuklinggau, Indonesia; 276 complete employee responses Enterprise-size threshold: NR / not verified. Respondents described as employees; employment status not independently verified.	Online self-report survey, November 2021–January 2022; SEM using SPSS and AMOS	Individual employee performance; supporting evidence only Eligibility: provisional; full-text SME verification pending.
S3 Sabrina (2023); DOI	SMEs in Medan, Indonesia; 452 employees at different levels Enterprise-size threshold: NR / not verified. Respondents described as employees; employment status not independently verified.	Longitudinal field survey, as described in abstract; analysis details NR	Knowledge sharing and hiding; supporting evidence only; measurement waves require verification Eligibility: provisional; full-text SME verification pending.
S4 Marampa et al. (2025); DOI	Creative-industry SMEs in Tana Toraja, Indonesia; 512 employees Enterprise-size threshold: NR / not verified. Respondents described as employees; employment status not independently verified.	Quantitative, cross-sectional; SEM	Innovative work behavior; supporting evidence only Eligibility: provisional; full-text SME verification pending.
S5 Rokhman et al. (2025); DOI	SMEs across Central Java, Indonesia; 320 employees; convenience sample Enterprise-size threshold: NR / not verified. Respondents described as employees; employment status not independently verified.	Quantitative; SmartPLS; timing NR	Work engagement and helping behavior; supporting evidence only Eligibility: provisional; full-text SME verification pending.

Source: Preliminary extraction from the abstracts of the studies listed in the table.

Notes: D = SME retention candidate; S = supporting SME study without a retention outcome; NR = not reported in the supplied abstract. All table entries are preliminary extractions.

Extraction note: All eight studies have an SME/MSME label but no independently verified enterprise-size thresholds in the supplied abstracts. Employee samples are not enterprise size. D1 additionally requires confirmation of employee versus owner/successor status. No supplied abstract demonstrates administratively observed retention or departure.

The three retention candidates also differ in their employee populations and conceptual targets. D1 concerns junior-generation family employees, D2 concerns creative-industry MSME workers, and D3 concerns green employment-related constructs. These differences are relevant to interpretation because the meaning of attachment and the opportunities for departure may vary across groups. They do not, however, establish between-group differences without a common design or comparable measurement.

The five supporting studies in Table 4 were selected for their conceptual relevance to the proposed mechanisms. The broader 208-record triage flagged a further supporting-mechanism pool, but none of the preliminary classification totals establishes final eligibility or frequency in the full literature. Counts and geographic patterns for the eight illustrative studies must not be generalized to all retrieved or ultimately eligible research.

Formal Arrangements and Relationally Relevant Constructs

The candidate evidence includes both employee states and possible employment practices. Pramudya and Schmuck (2022) examine identity and career-interest alignment rather than the implementation of a recruitment or career policy. Pariyanti et al. (2025) examine fit and kinship engagement. Their recommendations concerning recruitment, development, flexibility, and competitive salaries must be distinguished from the constructs tested. Wicaksari et al. (2024) examine rewards, engagement, and quality of work life in their green formulations.

Supporting studies expand the range of relationally relevant constructs. Susanto et al. (2022) examine family-supportive supervisor behaviors, while Cahyadi et al. (2022) connect leadership with a high-involvement HRM bundle. Sabrina (2023) addresses supervisor support and psychological safety. Marampa et al. (2025) examine empowering leadership and kinship engagement, and Rokhman et al. (2025) examine faith-based leadership, ethics, and workplace happiness.

Table 5 preserves these distinctions. A construct's relational relevance does not establish that it represents an enacted practice or that its effects concern retention. Formalization also remains unresolved where policy documents or procedural consistency are not measured.

Table 5. Formal arrangements and relational practices

Practice or construct	Sources	Information extracted	Coding for this review
Identity and career-interest alignment	D1	Alignment is examined as an antecedent of affective commitment and intention to stay among family employees	Person-level alignment, not an enacted HRM practice. Recruitment or career matching is an interpretation unless a practice is measured [Construct classification; full-text item verification pending.]
Recruitment and selection for fit	D2	Person–organization fit and person–job fit are modeled; assessment of fit during recruitment is recommended	Fit is measured; recruitment procedures appear as implications. Do not code implementation of formal selection as tested [Construct classification; full-text item verification pending.]

Kinship employee engagement	D2, S4	D2 models engagement as a mediator of fit and turnover intention; S4 models it as a moderator of empowerment and innovation	Relational employee state or mechanism; specific owner, supervisor, and coworker practices need item-level verification [Construct classification; full-text item verification pending.]
Green rewards and green quality of work life	D3	Both are modeled alongside green employee engagement as predictors of green employee retention	Reward arrangement and work-environment construct. Green orientation must be retained; policy formalization is NR [Construct classification; full-text item verification pending.]
Work-life balance and family-supportive supervisor behaviors	S1	Work-life balance, satisfaction, and performance are examined with supervisor support as moderator	Work-life balance is a condition or experience; supervisor behavior is relational enactment. Formal policy adoption is NR [Construct classification; full-text item verification pending.]
High-involvement HRM and leadership	S2	Servant, shared, and empowering leadership are examined with high-involvement HRM practices and performance	HRM practice bundle and leadership constructs. Item content is needed before separating formal procedures from everyday interactions [Construct classification; full-text item verification pending.]
Self-sacrificial leadership and supervisor support	S3	Leadership is examined with psychological safety and perceived supervisor support in knowledge behavior	Leadership behavior is an antecedent; perceived support and safety are employee experiences. No retention practice effect is established [Construct classification; full-text item verification pending.]
Empowering leadership and knowledge sharing	S4	Leadership and knowledge sharing are examined with empowerment, kinship engagement, and innovation	Relationally relevant antecedents; practice details and degree of formalization NR [Construct classification; full-text item verification pending.]
Islamic leadership and work ethics	S5	Faith-based leadership and ethics are examined with workplace happiness, engagement, and helping behavior	Context-specific leadership and ethical constructs; do not relabel them as human-centric HRM without conceptual justification [Construct classification; full-text item verification pending.]

Source: Preliminary extraction from the abstracts of the studies listed in the table.

Coding rule: Distinguish enacted practices from employee states and organizational conditions. Formal HRM and relational quality are separate dimensions; no source is assigned a formal-versus-informal category solely from its construct names.

For RQ1, only actually measured and organizationally implemented provisions may be coded as formal HRM practices. D1 identity/career alignment and D2 person–organization/person–job fit are person-level compatibility constructs. Recruitment, selection, development, and compensation advice appearing as implications of D2 are not tested organizational interventions. D3 green rewards can be coded as a reward-related exposure, although its formalization and item content are unverified. Supporting studies supply practice-related concepts, not evidence of a retention effect.

Mechanisms and reported relationships

Pramudya and Schmuck (2022) report positive relationships from identity and career-interest alignment to affective commitment and from commitment to intention to stay. The supplied abstract does not explicitly

establish significance of an indirect effect. The results therefore support the reported component paths without authorizing a stronger mediation claim.

Pariyanti et al. (2025) explicitly report that kinship employee engagement mediates relationships between both fit constructs and turnover intention. This provides a candidate relational mechanism, although the abstract does not supply indirect-effect estimates or confidence intervals. Wicaksari et al. (2024) report a nonsignificant quality-of-work-life relationship and significant relationships involving green engagement and green rewards. The abstract does not explicitly state the directions of those significant relationships.

The supporting evidence also contains mixed findings. Cahyadi et al. (2022) do not support mediation from leadership to performance through high-involvement HRM. Marampa et al. (2025) report no association between knowledge sharing and empowerment while also reporting mediation involving empowerment, requiring inspection of the full model. Susanto et al. (2022), Sabrina (2023), and Rokhman et al. (2025) identify mechanisms associated with performance, knowledge behavior, engagement, or helping rather than retention.

Table 6 summarizes the pathways and their boundaries. Psychological ownership is not reported as a measured mediator in D1–D3. Its absence from these abstracts does not establish its absence from the wider SME literature.

Table 6. Mechanisms, Findings, and Outcome Strength

ID	Pathway examined	Finding reported in abstract	Evidentiary boundary
D1	Identity alignment and career-interest alignment → affective commitment → intention to stay	Both alignment constructs positively relate to commitment; commitment positively relates to intention to stay	Individual paths are reported. Significance of an indirect effect is not stated; do not claim tested mediation. Coefficients and confidence intervals NR Statistical evidence status: ABSTRACT-ONLY; full-text estimates not verified.
D2	Person–organization fit and person–job fit → kinship employee engagement → turnover intention	Mediation is explicitly reported for both fit relationships; person–job fit is negatively related to turnover intention	Mediation reported, but indirect-effect estimates and confidence intervals NR. Outcome is intention, not observed turnover Statistical evidence status: ABSTRACT-ONLY; full-text estimates not verified.
D3	Green quality of work life, green engagement, and green rewards → green employee retention	Quality of work life: not significant. Engagement and rewards: significant; directions are not explicitly stated in abstract	No mediation reported; coefficients and confidence intervals NR. Retention scale content must be checked Statistical evidence status: ABSTRACT-ONLY; full-text estimates not verified.
S1	Work-life balance → satisfaction → performance; family-supportive supervisor behaviors as moderator	Positive work-life balance links with satisfaction and performance; partial mediation by satisfaction; moderation reported for work-life balance–performance and satisfaction–performance links	Outcome is performance. No inference that satisfaction or supervisor support reduces turnover Statistical evidence status: ABSTRACT-ONLY; full-text estimates not verified.
S2	Leadership styles → high-involvement HRM → performance	Leadership positively relates to HRM and performance; proposed mediation through high-involvement HRM is not supported	HRM–performance path result needs full-text checking; no retention outcome Statistical evidence status:

ID	Pathway examined	Finding reported in abstract	Evidentiary boundary
			ABSTRACT-ONLY; full-text estimates not verified.
S3	Self-sacrificial leadership → safety and perceived supervisor support → knowledge sharing or hiding	Positive association with sharing; negative association with hiding; safety and support described as underlying mechanisms	Exact indirect-effect tests and temporal ordering NR in abstract; no retention outcome Statistical evidence status: ABSTRACT-ONLY; full-text estimates not verified.
S4	Empowering leadership and knowledge sharing → empowerment → innovation; kinship engagement as moderator	Leadership positively relates to empowerment and innovation. Knowledge sharing is not associated with empowerment but positively relates to innovation. Mediation and moderation are reported	Direct-path and indirect-path results need reconciliation from full text; moderation concerns innovation, not retention Statistical evidence status: ABSTRACT-ONLY; full-text estimates not verified.
S5	Islamic leadership and work ethics → workplace happiness → engagement and helping	Leadership links reported; work ethics–engagement link is excepted; workplace happiness is described as mediator	Path-specific mediation estimates NR. Abstract wording about the significance threshold is unclear and requires checking; no retention outcome Statistical evidence status: ABSTRACT-ONLY; full-text estimates not verified.

Source: Preliminary extraction from the abstracts of the studies listed in the table.

Psychological ownership: It is not reported as a measured mediator in D1–D3. Affective commitment, fit, and kinship engagement must retain their original labels.

Relationship-by-relationship evidence classification is essential. D1 reports direct alignment–commitment and commitment–intention component paths; a tested indirect effect is not established from the available abstract. D2 states that kinship engagement mediates fit–turnover-intention relationships, but the indirect-effect estimates and confidence intervals are not supplied in the abstract. D3 reports significance for green engagement and rewards and a nonsignificant green quality-of-work-life relationship, but some directions and scale items remain unverified. S1 reports mediation and moderation for performance, S2 an unsupported HRM mediation for performance, S3 mechanisms of knowledge behaviors, S4 mediation/moderation for innovation with unresolved path details, and S5 mechanism claims for engagement/helping. Every record remains abstract-only pending primary-text verification; no result has been promoted to "full-text verified".

Table 7. Verification Register for Retention-Related Candidate Findings

Record	What the abstract supports	Full-text checks required	Evidence status
D1	Positive component paths via affective commitment to intention to stay	Indirect-effect test and uncertainty; employee vs owner/successor; enterprise size	Abstract only; unresolved
D2	Author-reported mediation through kinship engagement; turnover intention	Indirect coefficient/CI, fit pathways, SME threshold, respondent status	Abstract only; unresolved
D3	Nonsignificant green quality of work life; significant green engagement and rewards	Coefficient direction and uncertainty; retention-item content; SME classification	Abstract only; unresolved

Source: Authors' evidence-status audit of the supplied abstract extracts. "Unresolved" means that no verified full-text result is available; it is not a negative study finding.

The candidate evidence therefore offers different levels of support for a mechanism-based account. D1 supplies a set of reported relationships compatible with a commitment explanation. D2 explicitly reports mediation involving kinship engagement. D3 compares several predictors of a retention-labeled construct without reporting mediation. These designs cannot be collapsed into a common finding that relational practices influence retention through one shared psychological process.

The supporting studies are most useful for checking whether seemingly similar constructs represent the same process. Supervisor support, psychological safety, happiness, and empowerment refer to different employee experiences. Their associations with knowledge behavior, performance, or innovation can inform theoretical questions, but cannot complete a missing pathway from those experiences to employee retention.

Configurations and Contextual Conditions

The preliminary evidence does not establish a comparative test of complementarity, compensation, and undermining. D2 supplies relational engagement and fit constructs but does not explicitly report a formal HRM-by-relational-practice interaction. Its suggestion that kinship may help resource-constrained enterprises is an implication rather than a reported test of substitution. D1 supplies a family-obligation setting but does not report measures of favoritism or exclusion.

Contextual features must likewise be separated from moderators. Family employment, creative-industry activity, and green HR orientation characterize different studies. Their presence does not establish that they statistically change a common retention relationship. Table 4 identifies which configurations remain open questions.

The preceding candidate-level results provide descriptive evidence boundaries, rather than definitive answers to the four research questions. The final RQ-oriented synthesis must follow documented screening, source verification and study-level appraisal. Table 4 therefore identifies the propositions that can presently be discussed and the evidence required to test them.

Table 8. Configurations, Contextual Conditions, and Evidence Gaps

Analytical configuration or condition	Relevant sources	What the extraction supports	What remains unresolved
Complementarity between formal arrangements and relational practices	D2; supporting context from S1 and S2	Fit, relational engagement, HRM bundles, and supervisory behavior provide variables relevant to a joint explanation	D2 does not explicitly test a formal HRM × relational-practice interaction. S1 tests moderation for performance; S2 reports unsupported mediation for performance. Complementarity for retention is not established
Compensation for gaps in formal HRM	D2	Authors suggest kinship may help resource-constrained MSMEs strengthen attachment	Resource scarcity and substitution are presented as implications, not an explicitly reported test. Do not claim that kinship substitutes for pay or employment protection
Undermining through favoritism, exclusion, or loyalty pressure	D1 offers a relevant family-obligation setting	D1 introduces cultural obligation as motivation for examining family employees	The reported findings do not test favoritism, exclusion, or loyalty pressure. Treat undermining as an open question
Contextual variation in mechanisms	D1, D2, D3	Family employment, creative-industry MSMEs, and green HR constructs describe different empirical settings	These contexts are not reported as tested moderators. Differences between studies cannot establish moderation

Analytical configuration or condition	Relevant sources	What the extraction supports	What remains unresolved
Mixed or unsupported relationships	D3; S2 and S4 as supporting comparisons	D3 reports a nonsignificant quality-of-work-life link; S2 reports unsupported HRM mediation; S4 reports a nonsignificant knowledge-sharing–empowerment link	Null results are path-specific. They do not establish absence of all effects from work conditions, involvement, or relationships
Retention intentions versus actual behavior	D1–D3	D1 and D2 examine intentions. D3 uses a questionnaire-based retention construct	Observed exits, follow-up periods, causal direction, and validated equivalence of measures require full-text confirmation

Source: Preliminary extraction from the abstracts of the studies listed in the table.

Synthesis implication: The extracted abstracts identify relationally relevant mechanisms and contextual differences. They do not yet establish a comparative test of complementarity, compensation, and undermining. These categories remain questions guiding the full-text synthesis.

Minimum evidence needed for proposed configurations: Complementarity requires measured formal provisions and relational enactment in the same retention model and an appropriately estimated positive joint or interaction effect, or an explicitly justified qualitative account of reinforcement. Compensation requires a specified deficit in formal provision, observed relational resources, and evidence that the latter offsets the deficit with respect to an employment outcome; simple relational significance is insufficient. Undermining requires measured unequal treatment, favoritism, exclusion, or loyalty pressure connected to the formal–relational arrangement and a retention-related outcome. Cross-study contrasts, managerial recommendations, or hypothetical diagrams cannot meet these tests. Moderation must not be inferred from different countries, sectors, or samples.

Discussion

From Separate Determinants to Employment Relationships

The preliminary mapping suggests a useful direction for synthesis: connect what organizations provide with how employees experience and interpret that provision. The extracted studies do not support replacing formal HRM with interpersonal closeness. Instead, they identify constructs that may explain employee attachment when examined together with actual employment arrangements.

This interpretation is consistent with a contextual view of SME HRM that examines implementation as well as practice presence (Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021). Its present status is an analytical interpretation. The full review must determine whether studies directly evaluate combinations or merely estimate separate associations.

Family-employee evidence illustrates why context matters. Alignment and commitment among family employees cannot automatically explain retention among non-family workers. Likewise, kinship engagement in creative-industry MSMEs may describe a culturally specific relational process. Neither finding establishes that close relationships have uniformly favorable consequences across employees.

The proposed shift in explanation is from practice inventories to the conditions under which practices acquire meaning for employees. A list can establish that rewards, support, and development have been studied. A relational account must additionally explain how access is organized, how treatment is interpreted, and why that experience is associated with a decision to remain. The present extraction identifies parts of this process but leaves the full configuration unresolved.

This approach also accommodates mixed findings. A nonsignificant relationship does not necessarily invalidate a broad theory, particularly when constructs, populations, and outcomes differ. It identifies a specific relationship that was not supported under the reported model. A defensible synthesis preserves that result and investigates whether competing explanations are supported elsewhere, rather than removing it to produce a uniformly favorable account of relational HRM.

Theoretical Contribution and Limits

Social exchange provides questions about the resources exchanged and the actors involved (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). A commitment pathway can be compatible with this account without proving reciprocity as the causal mechanism. Establishing the mechanism requires suitable measurement, indirect-effect testing, and temporal evidence.

Organizational support theory further suggests that relational experiences should be examined together with fairness and employment conditions. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) provide a basis for this joint interpretation through the association of perceived support with interpersonal treatment and material provisions. The implication for future synthesis is to examine whether organizational concern is represented by both everyday behavior and dependable arrangements.

Job embeddedness broadens the interpretation of staying. Mitchell et al. (2001) distinguish links, fit, and perceived sacrifice from satisfaction and commitment. A retention framework should therefore investigate the basis of continued membership rather than treat staying alone as evidence of employee well-being. The current subset cannot distinguish supportive attachment from constrained staying.

Psychological ownership remains conceptually distinct. Pierce et al. (2001) justify its examination as a potential ownership-related mechanism, but the three candidate abstracts do not test that pathway. Presenting ownership as an established mediator would exceed the extracted evidence.

Complementarity and Compensation as Empirical Questions

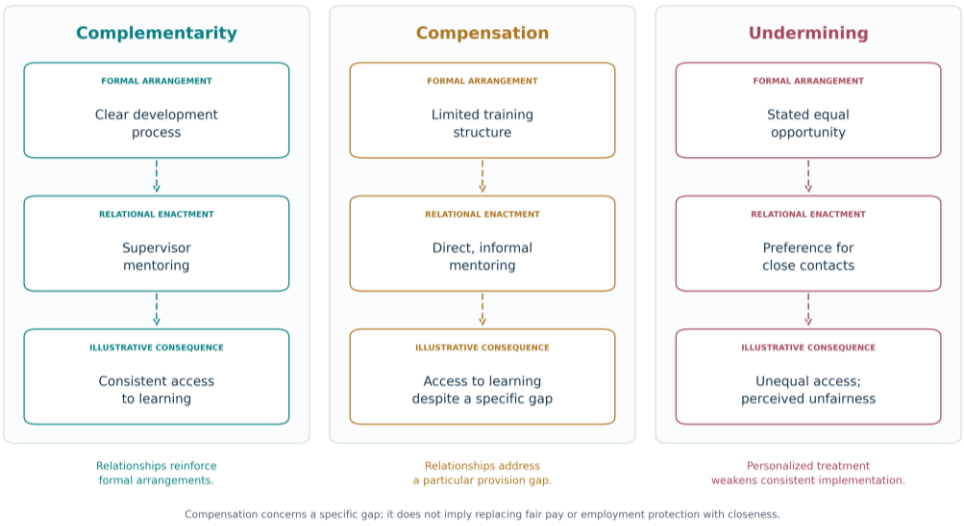
Pittino et al. (2016) provide an external empirical comparator showing that family relational mechanisms may substitute for particular formal practices. That study informs the interpretation but is not counted among the eight abstract-extracted records. Its contextual findings support examining substitution rather than assuming it.

Evidence-source boundaries are explicit: D1–D3 provide included-candidate, abstract-level evidence on retention-related outcomes; S1–S5 provide supporting evidence on other employee outcomes; Pittino et al. (2016) is an externally cited empirical comparator, not an extracted record or a ninth included study; and the scenarios in Figure 3 are author-generated illustrations. The external comparator studied 232 companies with more than 10 and fewer than 250 employees in Austria and Hungary and reported context-specific substitution involving family social capital and selected formal practices (Pittino et al., 2016). That finding cannot be generalized as evidence of compensation, complementarity, or undermining in the eight-record subset.

A stronger test of complementarity would establish how a formal arrangement changes the relationship between relational practices and retention, or vice versa. Compensation would require evidence that a relational process addresses a specified deficit. Undermining would require measurement of the adverse process, such as exclusion or inconsistent treatment, together with the relevant employee outcome.

This distinction prevents recommendations from being mistaken for findings. The resource-constraint implication in Pariyanti et al. (2025), for example, is not itself a test showing that kinship can replace compensation. Similarly, the nonsignificant quality-of-work-life link in Wicaksari et al. (2024) does not establish that acceptable working conditions are unnecessary.

Figure 3 illustrates three possibilities: documented development and supervisor mentoring support consistent learning access; informal mentoring addresses limited training provision; and favoritism undermines equal opportunity. All examples are hypothetical rather than additional study findings.



Source: Authors' hypothetical scenarios and proposed analytical framework.

Figure 3. Complementarity, Compensation, and Undermining in SME Employment Relationships

Managerial Implications

The most defensible present implication is diagnostic: SME managers should distinguish the employment provision, its implementation, and the employee response. If workers describe poor fit, the underlying issue may concern job content, values, development, or another condition requiring specific assessment. Kinship language alone does not identify the appropriate intervention. Pariyanti et al. (2025) direct attention to fit and relational engagement. Wicaksari et al. (2024) indicate that different green HR constructs have different reported relationships with retention. These observations favor precise diagnosis over treating all supportive practices as interchangeable.

The supporting performance and innovation studies can inform questions about supervisor behavior and involvement, but they cannot establish that those interventions reduce employee departures. Managerial recommendations about retention should remain proportional to retention-specific evidence and should preserve the original population and construct definitions. A useful managerial assessment can begin by examining whether an employment promise is clear, whether employees can access it consistently, and whether its implementation is experienced as fair. These are diagnostic questions derived from the framework rather than interventions whose retention effects have been established by the current extraction. They can guide more precise decisions about whether an issue concerns policy design, supervisory behavior, or unequal access.

Family and kinship relationships require particular care in application. A practice that strengthens attachment for family employees may be experienced differently by employees outside the family network. An organization should therefore examine whose experience is represented before extending a recommendation across the workforce. The present evidence does not justify using loyalty expectations as a response to inadequate material employment conditions.

Limitations and Research Agenda

The principal limitation is that the 208-record corpus has been inventoried and provisionally classified but not independently screened with confirmed study-level eligibility decisions. The two Scopus export dates and draft Boolean expressions are available; original search execution timestamps, filtering history, and

comprehensive source logs remain incomplete. Full-text verification of enterprise-size thresholds, family employee versus owner/successor status, statistical estimates, outcome measures, and study-level risk of bias has not been completed. Preliminary triage categories do not represent a PRISMA exclusion flow, and the selected eight illustrated studies are not a final synthesis sample.

Before a completed SLR can be claimed, the original search execution details should be verified or the search reproducibly rerun; independent reviewers should resolve title/abstract eligibility for all 208 records with recorded exclusion reasons; potentially eligible full texts must be sought and assessed; enterprise and respondent status and statistical paths must be verified; and study-level critical appraisal should inform a final evidence synthesis. Only then should the PRISMA flow and final research-question answers be finalized.

Substantive research priorities include longitudinal measures of actual exits, comparisons between family and non-family employees, explicit interaction tests, and attention to potentially adverse relational processes. Psychological ownership is a candidate mechanism where theoretically justified. Proposed models should distinguish ownership feelings from fit, commitment, and engagement rather than infer one from another.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RQ1 (provisional): The illustrative retention candidates address employee alignment, perceived fit, kinship engagement, green rewards, and quality-of-work-life constructs; direct evidence about formal HRM implementation remains inadequately established at abstract level. RQ2 (provisional): D1 reports component paths through affective commitment without a verified indirect-effect test, whereas D2 reports mediation through kinship engagement without extractable indirect-effect estimates in the abstract; D3 reports predictor relationships rather than mediation. RQ3 (provisional): Complementarity, compensation, and undermining are proposed interpretive configurations, not configurations confirmed in the extracted retention studies. RQ4 (provisional): Available candidate abstracts examine intentions or self-reported retention-related constructs rather than verified observed employee exits. The provisional 208-record triage and eight illustrative records are not substitutes for final independent screening and full-text synthesis.

The conceptual contribution is a two-dimensional account of HRM formalization and relational enactment, with an analytical distinction among practices, perceptions, attachment mechanisms, and retention-related outcomes. The empirical contribution at this stage is limited to documenting 219 identified records, 11 duplicates, a provisional triage of 208 unique records, and an illustrative abstract-level examination of three retention candidates and five supporting studies. The review does not establish which of the proposed configurations most reliably predicts actual employee continuity. A final assessment requires the eligible full-text evidence base and methodological appraisal.

Declarations

Availability of Data and Materials: The underlying material comprises two Scopus text exports dated 19 October 2026, a draft Boolean search document, a 208-record bibliographic and preliminary-triage workbook, and illustrative abstract extracts. These materials support source identification and preliminary classification but not completed independent eligibility assessment, final full-text extraction, or critical appraisal. The counts from preliminary triage must not be interpreted as final PRISMA exclusions or included-study totals. **Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. **Authors' Contributions:** The authors contributed to conceptual development, preliminary source compilation, abstract-based mapping, interpretation, manuscript preparation, and revision. The record-level classification is preliminary and does not constitute independently verified eligibility screening. Independent full-text eligibility assessment and formal study-level critical appraisal are not represented as completed activities. All authors read and approved the revised manuscript.

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