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THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

There is persistent challenge of low employee productivity and inefficiencies in local government administration, despite the presence of various Human Resource Management Practices (HRMP). This study examined the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between human resources management practices and employee productivity in the local governments of Southwestern Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design which involve the use of structured questionnaire for data collection. The population comprised 376 senior officers and stakeholders in selected local governments in Ogun, Osun, and Ondo States, and census sampling technique was employed. A total of 329 valid responses were retrieved, representing a response rate of 87.5 per cent. Data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling. The findings revealed that employee engagement significantly mediated the relationship between human resource management practices and employee productivity, with a significant indirect effect (β = 0.284, p = 0.000), alongside strong direct effects of

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human resource management practices on employee engagement (β = 0.672, p = 0.000) and employee engagement on productivity (β = 0.422, p = 0.000), indicating partial and complementary mediation. The study concludes that human resource management practices significantly enhance employee productivity in local governments, particularly through employee engagement. Thus, the study recommends that local governments should prioritise strengthening employee engagement strategies, as these constructs exhibited the most significant and impactful effects on employee productivity.

Introduction

Human Resource Management Practices (HRMP) have emerged as a vital focus for both academics and professionals (Rono et al., 2024). Researchers and practitioners have engaged in discussions about its application, theoretical foundations, and its practical implications for survival of organisations in developed economies such as USA and Europe. The link between human resources management practices and employee productivity has been broadly employed and documented (Shiferaw et al., 2025). HRM practices play a crucial role in helping organization achieve their goals across various fields (Teym et al., 2025). It establishes the attitudes and behaviors of employees and fosters the relationship between employers and employees, motivating them to invest greater effort in creativity and innovation which helps organization to meet their objectives (Zeleke, 2025).

Globally, all organizations stressed that the most valuable resources in an organization is the people and to ensure survival and success, it is essential for every organization to put the right personnel in the right place at the right time (Jimoh et al., 2023). The human resources within organizations are crucial for maximizing employee productivity which can be achieved through the effective implementation of HRM practices (Kerdpitak & Jermsittiparsert, 2020).

In Africa, over the past decade, organizations have been confronted with the reality that competitive advantage was rooted in their people. Organizations have increasingly recognized the potential for their people to be a source of competitive advantage. Until recently, HR functions were primarily handled by "Personnel Managers" whose responsibilities included recruitment, selection, appraisal, promotion and demotion (Alasan & Eyanuku, 2020). These basic duties could be performed by any manager, leading *to* the misconception that employing a human resource manager or establishing an HR department was not necessary. Consequently, little attention was paid to human resource management issues and their impact on organization productivity (Zeleke, 2025).

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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HRMP has the ability to create organizations that are more intelligent, flexible and competent than their opponents through the application of policies and practices that concentrate on recruiting, selecting, compensating, training skilled employees and directing their best efforts to cooperate within the resource bundle of the organization (El-Ghalayini, 2017; Ibrahim & Paul, 2020). However, in developing countries, such as Nigeria, the application of effective HRM practices and their influences on employee productivity may face distinctive challenges. Factors like socio-economic dynamics, cultural distinctions and resource controls can influence the translation of global best practices into effective rules tailored to the local scenery. In recent years, the role of HRMP has become increasingly crucial in shaping the productivity of employees in the local government service, particularly in southwest region (Katembo, 2024). The significance of HRM practices in enhancing employee productivity has been widely recognized. Human resource plans have been shown to have a positive influence on both employee and organizational productivity, according to previous researchers (Alinno & Igwe, 2017; Piwowar-Sulej, 2025). Employee engagement is a state of professional fulfillment where vigor and dedication drive meaningful performance. (Corbeanu, 2023; Eseye, 2024). Employee engagement has emerged as a critical mechanism that can translate HRM practices into improved productivity.

In recent times, HRMP has been recognized as a strategic driver of organizational success, influencing employee performance, productivity, and overall service delivery (Arokiasamy et al., 2024). In the public sector, effective HRMP such as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management and compensation management are essential for ensuring that employees possess the requisite skills, motivation, and engagement to achieve organizational objectives (Poljasevic et al., 2025; Tabiu et al., 2016). In the Nigerian perspective, the local government system serves as the third tier of governance, mandated to deliver essential grassroots services including primary healthcare, environmental management, and rural development. However, despite this strategic role, local governments have been criticized for incompetence, low productivity, and poor service delivery (Sukare & Abdullahi, 2025). Scholars have attributed these shortcomings partly to ineffective HRM practices, bureaucratic bottlenecks and lack of employee engagement (Nwambuko et al., 2026).

Against this backdrop, it is expedient to examine the mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between HRMP and employee productivity in the Local Governments of Southwestern Nigeria. This study highlighted the importance of employee engagement in boosting productivity through effective HRM practices in the Local Government of Southwestern Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Human resource management practices have been widely linked to improved productivity. Empirical evidence suggests that their direct impact may not always be significant, particularly in public sector contexts, where bureaucratic inadequacies and political interference are dominant (Olonade et al., 2022; Sharif et al., 2024). In Nigeria's local governments, employees often face low morale, inadequate recognition and partial compensation management, which may inhibit the possible benefits of HRM Practices (Chakwizira, 2023).

Existing studies have examined the HRM Practices–productivity link in the Nigerian private sectors (Jimoh et al., 2023; Aburumman et al., 2023) but, limited research has investigated this relationship in the public sector, especially at the local government level (Sharif et al., 2024) and fewer, still have explored the mediating role of employee engagement in this relationship (Khan et al., 2024). Without this understanding, human resource efforts might be routine and compliance-focused, misplaced the chance to boost motivation and engagement which are the actual drivers of productivity.

While previous research has established the importance of HRMP in enhancing organizational performance (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Sharif et al., 2024), there is a scantiness of empirical studies focusing on the Nigerian local government sector, particularly in Southwestern Nigeria. Furthermore, few studies have employed a mediation framework to assess the role of employee engagement in translating HRMP into concrete productivity gains (Khan et al., 2024). This gap limits policymakers and HR managers' ability to design targeted strategies that both improve HR processes and foster sustained employee engagement in the local government service.

This research aimed to bridge these gaps by delving into the intricacies of HRM practices and their direct influence on employee productivity metrics with a specific emphasis on the selected LGs in Southwest, Nigeria, and to recommend tailored employees' engagement roles that could address and enhance overall productivity. Thus, this study examined the mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between Human Resource Management Practices (HRMP) and employee productivity in the Local Governments of Southwestern Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the role of employee engagement with a view to enhancing employee productivity through HRM practices among Local Governments in Southwestern Nigeria.

The specific objective is to:

i. examine the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between Human Resource Management Practices (HRMP) and employee productivity in the Local Governments of Southwestern Nigeria.

Human Resource Management Practices (HRMP)

Human Resource Management Practices refer to the formal systems, policies, and processes implemented by organizations to attract, develop, motivate, and retain employees (Olonade et al., 2022; Sharif et al., 2024) Common dimensions include recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and compensation management. In the public sector, HRMP are essential for ensuring that employees possess the skills, knowledge, and motivation to deliver quality services. However, in many Nigerian local governments, HRMP are often hindered by bureaucratic inefficiencies, political interference, and inadequate funding (Ailabouni, et al., 2010).

Employee Engagement (EE)

Employee engagement (EE) has become a central concept in Human Resource Management (HRM) research due to its role in enhancing employee performance and organizational sustainability (Trisanti & Silalahi, 2026). EE is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Awoitau et al., 2024). Engaged employees are highly energetic, committed to their work, and deeply involved in their tasks. In the context of HRMP, engagement serves as a motivational bridge between management practices and employee performance outcomes (Olonade et al., 2022). Research has shown that organizations with higher engagement levels tend to experience better productivity, lower turnover, and improved service quality (Khan et al., 2024).

The employee's participation to achieve the goals of the organization and how this participation is effective for the sake of creativity and presentation of ideas affects the decisions within the organization (Dede, 2019). When confidence and commitment exist between the organization and individuals, this will lead to an increased opportunity for development, an increase in the productivity that the organization seeks to achieve, and ultimately success in organizational performance (Al Amin & Islam, 2022). Employee involvement helps the organization expand knowledge within the organization. It is significant to have engaged employees to make the strategic goals of any organization because, the participation of employees is necessary for any organization seeking to achieve commitment to the organization's values and its performance (Al Amin & Islam, 2022; Vuong & Nguyen, 2022).

Employee Productivity (EP)

Employee productivity (EP) refers to the efficiency and effectiveness with which employees accomplish assigned tasks and contribute to organizational goals (Ali & Barishal, 2022). In public sector organizations like local governments, productivity may be reflected in timely service delivery, policy implementation, and responsiveness to community needs. In the Nigerian local government system, challenges such as inadequate staffing, poor working conditions, and low employee morale have been identified as barriers to optimal productivity (Chakwizira, 2023). EP is the engine of the success of any organization. (Vuong & Nguyen, 2022) It forms the total value and survival of the firms. EP has been used in a variety of ways keeping similar operational meaning. Previous authors, academic scholars, and researchers have synonymously applied in relevant research such as work performance (Hosen et al., 2024); job outcome (Lathabhavan & Griffiths, 2023); workplace outcome (Pereira et al., 2023); job performance (Deng et al., 2023); job output (Malik, 2025); task performance (Aslan, 2022) and so on. The productivity described the extent of efforts rendered by the individual in a team or single set of responses. Following this trend, employee productivity has been thoroughly studied in the spirit of desired value proposition in a highly effective and efficient manner (Nikmanesh et al., 2023). Owing to the growing importance of these major resources, it has drawn enormous attention as the central focus of the organizations.

Relevantly, the productivity powered the organization's growth and winning competitive advantage in industries (Vuong & Nguyen, 2022). As a result, employee's productivity and its accelerating factors have become a topmost priority in modern day's business organisations (Vuong & Nguyen, 2022). Remarkably, the employee productivity is not merely concentrated to individual performance level; rather it constitutes the collective productivity of the whole team or department that moves forward organization's total performance. To this end, EP is the heart of the firms that permits a strong and sustainable fit. For this reason, previous scholars attested to the need for employee productivity capacity and set out future plans of the organizations, (Shaw et al., 2024).

According to Reif et al. (2021), he stated that, the HRM practices studies came in common concurrence that there are many factors that stimulate the productivity of employee such as job satisfaction, technology, leadership support, organizational commitment, Motivation, ability, and employee engagement in decision making a friendly workplace environment, a sense of job satisfaction that makes it more efficient and abandoned of those that may create huge noise and disruptions like un-stabilizing organizations' retention and growth (Reif et al., 2021; Al Amin & Islam, 2022).

Employee productivity in the same vein is described as the use of knowledge, skills, employee experiences, and abilities to complete the organization's designated task (Singh & Chaudhary, 2022). For this reason, the significant goal is to figure out how to make the best utilization of efforts, capacity, and resources and ensure the output of people's efforts at work. An organization should concentrate on the best method to use human productivity at work by creating, facilitating, and nurturing it (Hessari et al., 2024). Employee productivity which is the concern of this study is the employee's actual contribution to the productivity of the organization, in terms of volume or personal capacities and quality of output of the employee or the strength of their effort that reflects the productivity of employees (Banday & Erdem, 2024). Employees' productivity is the measure of single-2factor productivity that reflects output units produced per unit of a specific input (Rahman, 2023).

Employee Engagement (EE) and Employee Productivity (EP)

A strong link exists between employee engagement (EE) and employee productivity (EP) (Quraishi, 2024). EE has become a central concept in Human Resource Management (HRM) research due to its role in enhancing employee performance and organizational sustainability (Trisanti & Silalahi, 2026). EE is a key driver of productivity and HRMP plays a significant role in shaping engagement levels. EE plays a vital mediating role in the relationship between HRMP and EP. When HRMP factors like training, compensation, and performance management are effectively implemented, they foster a positive work environment and boost employee engagement. As engagement rises, employees become more committed, innovative, and productive, ultimately enhancing organizational performance. HRMP powers engagement, which in turn drives productivity. By leveraging HRMP to nurture engagement, organizations can create a positive feedback circle where motivated employees drive productivity, fueling growth and impact on performance. Engaged employees are more likely to be proactive, empathetic and focused (Bakker &Albrecht, 2018).

The implication is that local governments in Southwest Nigeria can boost productivity by focusing on HRMP that enhance employee engagement. This means prioritizing practices like training, fair compensation, and transparent appraisals to motivate employees. By doing so, they can increase productivity, improve service delivery, and drive development in their communities.

Motivation Theory (MT)

Motivation theories including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Frederick Herzberg's two-factor was proposed in 1943 and 1957 respectively. They provided insights into how HRMP

can influence employee motivation and satisfaction. For instance, when local government organizations implement HRM practices that address both hygiene factors (such as salary and working conditions) and motivators (such as recognition, compensation and opportunities for advancement), they can significantly boost employee morale and productivity. A motivated workforce is likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement, commitment, and output (Ihensekien & Joel. 2023; Durmuş, 2024).

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory was initially developed by sociologist George Homans and Peter Blau in the 1960s and it was further expanded and refined by scholars such as Richard Emerson, John Thibaut and Harold Kelly. They postulate that, the relationship between employers and employees is based on mutual benefit. These theorists contributed to the development and application of the theory in different contexts. In the context of human resource management, this theory can be applied to examine the reciprocal relationship between employees and the organization, particularly in terms of the resources provided by the organization (e.g. training, compensation, job security) and the productivity demonstrated by employees. An important criticism of social exchange theory however, is that it lacks sufficient theoretical exactness, and thus has limited utility.

Applied to local governments in the study area, SET can illuminates how the perceived fairness of HRM Practices influences employee commitment, trust, and productivity. Scrutinizing the reciprocal nature of the employment relationship, can provide insight into how LGs can improve HR practices to enhance employee and subsequently productivity. Employees who perceive their organization as supportive are more likely to reciprocate with increased effort and productivity (Amoozegar, 2024). This engaged workforce is then more motivated and equipped to deliver high-quality service. The JD-R model supports this by suggesting that leadership acts as a job resource that enhances engagement, ultimately leading to positive outcomes like improved service quality.

Empirical Review

Several studies have investigated the HRM practices–productivity relationship, though findings differ, depending on context.

Khan et al. (2024) conducted a study on 'The impact of human resource management practices on employee performance and the mediating role of employee commitment in the IT industry of Pakistan'. Structural Equation Modeling for data was collected from 102 responses which were processed through SPSS AMOS 29 and Smart PLS 4. Results revealed that proper HRM practices have been initially found as major variables in the creation of staff commitment and worker performance. Then, employee commitment

negatively associated with performance levels, thereby affecting other dimension in the organization, it therefore opposed evidence.

Also, Wijayathunga and Karunarathne (2024) examined 'Impact of high-performance human resource management practices on role performance: Mediating role of employee engagement among non-academic staff at state universities in Sri Lanka'. Data from 334 non-academic staff were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using simple linear regression analysis and Sobel test. The results showed that high-performance human resource management practices directly influenced role performance, and employee engagement mediates the relationship. These findings supported the resource-based theory which emphasizes the importance of psychological resources like expertise, promotion and opportunities for human resources, healthy working climate, and leadership skills in addition to the existing resources like capital, organizational, physical, and human capital resources for gaining competitive advantage.

Sharif et al. (2024) carried out a study on 'Human resource management (HRM) practices and organizational commitment in higher educational institution (HEI): A mediating role for work engagement'. The study investigated the effects of HRM practices on administrative and faculty members' work engagement and organizational commitment at Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan. The authors found that engagement mediates the effect of HR practices on job performance in Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan. The study used a quantitative research methodology using a survey questionnaire given to academic and administrative staff at Minhaj University Lahore. Results showed that while selection and recruitment, rewards and compensation and job security do not show a significant direct impact, training and development, employee participation and performance appraisal significantly influenced work engagement. Also, work engagement influenced organizational commitment. Again, work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between training and development, employee participation, performance appraisal and organizational commitment. Conversely, selection and recruitment, rewards and compensation and job security do not show significant mediation effects.

Moreover, Ashley and Brijball (2024) investigated on 'The relationship between organisational culture and employee engagement in private hospitals in Ghana'. The objective was to create a culture of perceptions that are favorable to increasing employee engagement. The study adopted a mixed method approach using both qualitative and quantitative data. It was carried out on a sample of 155 respondents using a simple random sampling approach and 15 respondents were selected using a purposive sampling approach from selected private hospitals located in Accra, a region in Ghana. Data were collected electronically (closed-ended questionnaires and semi structured interviews) Result showed that there is a significant relationship between organisational culture and

employee engagement. It also revealed that there exist significant inter-correlations between organisational culture (involvement, consistency, adaptability, mission) and employee engagement (vigour, absorption, dedication) respectively.

Furthermore, Eshete and Kassahu (2025) conducted on 'The mediating role of employee's engagement in the relationship between adaptive leadership and service quality in the health sector'. The objective was to examine the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between adaptive leadership and service quality within the health-care sector in Ethiopia. The study adopted a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey method. Data was collected from health-care professionals through structured questionnaires. Partial least squares structural equation modeling was used to analyze the hypothesized relationships. It was found that adaptive leadership (ADL) indirectly enhances service quality (SVQ) through employee engagement (EME). While ADL had no direct effect on SVQ, it positively influenced EME, which, in turn, significantly improved SVQ. The findings emphasized the critical role of employee engagement in translating leadership into better service outcomes in health-care setting.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design which involves the use of structured questionnaire for data collection. Survey strategy was used to collect detailed information from 376 participants with the use of census approach from a small population of respondents in selected Local governments. This allowed the researcher to gather data from the population of senior officers (stakeholders) across the selected states and local governments in Southwest Nigeria. This approach enabled the researcher to gain comprehensive insights into the subject matter. The questionnaire was made up of four parts which contain questions relating to demography of the respondents, HRMP, employee engagement, and employee productivity. The indicators for each of the construct employed a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = moderately agree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. The data collected were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling. The structural equation model is represented below:

Model 1 shows the mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between Human Resource Management Practices (HRMP) and employee productivity in the Local Governments of Southwestern Nigeria;

$$EP = \alpha + \beta_1 RS + \beta_2 TD + \beta_3 CM + \beta_4 PM + \beta_5 Eng + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

Where:

EP = Employee Productivity (Dependent Variable)

RS = Recruitment and Selection (Independent Variable)

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. R. Rena [South Africa]

TD = Training and Development (Independent Variable)
CM = Compensation management (Independent Variable)
PM = Performance Management (Independent Variable)
EE = Employee Engagement (Mediator Variable)
α = Constant term (intercept)
β_1 to β_5 = Regression coefficients representing the effect of HRMP practices on Employee Productivity
ε = Error term.

Response Rate

A total of 376 copies of the questionnaire were administered to respondents across the selected local governments in Southwestern Nigeria. As presented in Table 1, 329 copies were returned, properly completed and found usable for analysis. This represents a response rate of 87.5 per cent of the total number of questionnaires distributed.

Table 1: Response Rate

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Distributed copies of questionnaire	376	100.0
Returned and used copies of questionnaire	329	87.5

Source: Author's Research Work (2025)

Measurement Model for Mediating Role of Employee Engagement in the Relationship between HRM Practices and Employee Productivity

This section presents the measurement model assessment for the fourth specific objective of the study, which is to determine the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between human resource management practices and employee productivity in the study area. In order to achieve this, the study examined the quality of the data obtained from the survey through the assessment of the formative measurement model. The constructs in this model comprise HRM practices, employee engagement, and employee productivity, each operationalised through multiple indicators derived from the questionnaire.

Following the procedure for formatively measured constructs (Hair et al., 2017; Hair & Alamer, 2022), the study assessed the relevance and significance of the indicators as presented in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 1. The interpretation follows the guideline that when the weight of an indicator is significant, such an indicator is regarded as

relatively important. However, when the weight is not significant, the loading of the indicator is examined. If the loading is greater than 0.5 and statistically significant, the indicator is considered absolutely important and retained in the model. Indicators that do not meet these conditions may be evaluated based on theoretical relevance, although all retained indicators in this study satisfied the minimum requirements.

For the HRM practice constructs, all recruitment and selection indicators were found to be relatively important. Specifically, bBRS1 had a significant weight (weight = 0.217, t = 2.744, p = 0.006), bBRS2 (weight = 0.229, t = 2.508, p = 0.012), bBRS3 (weight = 0.363, t = 4.056, p = 0.000), and bBRS4 (weight = 0.587, t = 7.785, p = 0.000). This indicates that all the indicators of recruitment and selection contribute meaningfully to the construct.

For compensation management, bCM1 and bCM3 were relatively important as their weights were significant, with bCM1 (weight = 0.635, t = 4.756, p = 0.000) and bCM3 (weight = 0.404, t = 2.703, p = 0.007). However, bCM2 (weight = 0.175, t = 1.011, p = 0.312) and bCM4 (weight = 0.013, t = 0.073, p = 0.942) had non-significant weights. Despite this, their loadings were above the acceptable threshold and statistically significant, with bCM2 having a loading of 0.688 and bCM4 having a loading of 0.515, both significant at p less than 0.05. Therefore, these indicators were retained and considered absolutely important.

All performance management indicators were relatively important. The weights of bPM1 (weight = 0.313, t = 3.940, p = 0.000), bPM2 (weight = 0.218, t = 3.186, p = 0.001), bPM3 (weight = 0.504, t = 6.441, p = 0.000), and bPM4 (weight = 0.373, t = 4.498, p = 0.000) were all significant, indicating that each indicator contributes substantially to the measurement of performance management.

Similarly, all training and development indicators were retained. bTD1 (weight = 0.348, t = 3.693, p = 0.000), bTD2 (weight = 0.561, t = 5.566, p = 0.000), and bTD4 (weight = 0.221, t = 2.258, p = 0.024) were relatively important. Although bTD3 had a non significant weight (weight = 0.173, t = 1.700, p = 0.089), its loading of 0.640 was above the acceptable threshold and statistically significant, and it was therefore classified as absolutely important and retained.

For the employee engagement construct, all discretionary effort indicators were relatively important. cDE1 (weight = 0.304, t = 2.603, p = 0.009), cDE2 (weight = 0.631, t = 6.124, p = 0.000), and cDE33 (weight = 0.300, t = 2.612, p = 0.009) had significant weights. Although cDE4 had a non-significant weight (weight = 0.133, t = 1.261, p = 0.207), its loading was above 0.5 and statistically significant, hence it was considered absolutely important.

For the low absenteeism and turnover construct, cLAT1 (weight = 0.302, t = 2.499, p = 0.012), cLAT3 (weight = 0.520, t = 5.474, p = 0.000), and cLAT4 (weight = 0.611, t = 6.685, p = 0.000) were relatively important. cLAT2 had a non significant weight (weight = 0.048,

t = 0.376, p = 0.707), but its loading of 0.339, although relatively low, was statistically significant and retained as absolutely important due to its contribution to the construct.

All positive attitude and morale indicators were relatively important. Specifically, cPAM1 (weight = 0.287, t = 3.105, p = 0.002), cPAM2 (weight = 0.366, t = 3.557, p = 0.000), cPAM3 (weight = 0.453, t = 5.363, p = 0.000), and cPAM4 (weight = 0.295, t = 3.199, p = 0.001) all had significant weights, indicating their relevance to the measurement of employee engagement.

For employee productivity, all teamwork and collaboration indicators were relatively important, with eTC1 (weight = 0.459, t = 6.541, p = 0.000), eTC2 (weight = 0.305, t = 4.407, p = 0.000), eTC3 (weight = 0.328, t = 4.275, p = 0.000), and eTC4 (weight = 0.272, t = 3.476, p = 0.001) all showing significant weights. Similarly, all task efficiency indicators were relatively important, with eTE1 (weight = 0.374, t = 4.872, p = 0.000), eTE2 (weight = 0.448, t = 5.301, p = 0.000), and eTE3 (weight = 0.497, t = 6.643, p = 0.000) being statistically significant.

For time management, eTM2 (weight = 0.329, t = 4.298, p = 0.000), eTM3 (weight = 0.413, t = 5.186, p = 0.000), and eTM4 (weight = 0.456, t = 6.281, p = 0.000) were relatively important. Although eTM1 had a non significant weight (weight = 0.138, t = 1.678, p = 0.093), its loading of 0.697 was significant and above the threshold, and it was therefore retained as absolutely important.

All work commitment indicators were relatively important. Specifically, eWC1 (weight = 0.335, t = 4.282, p = 0.000), eWC2 (weight = 0.491, t = 7.241, p = 0.000), and eWC4 (weight = 0.522, t = 8.068, p = 0.000) all had significant weights, confirming their relevance in measuring employee productivity.

In addition, the variance inflation factor values for all indicators ranged between 1.106 and 1.727, which are well below the recommended threshold of 5.0. This indicates that multicollinearity is not a concern in the model and that the indicators are sufficiently independent of one another.

Overall, the results presented in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 1 show that the formative measurement model for HRM practices, employee engagement, and employee productivity is satisfactory. The majority of the indicators were relatively important, while those with non-significant weights were retained based on their acceptable and significant loadings. All indicators met the required thresholds, and the absence of multicollinearity further supports the adequacy of the model. Consequently, the measurement model is considered reliable and suitable for subsequent structural model analysis to examine the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between HRM practices and employee productivity.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. R. Rena [South Africa]

Table 2: Relevance and Significance of HRM Practices, Employee Engagement and Employee Productivity

Path	Weights	T stat	P values	Loadings	T stat	P values	VIF	Decision
bBRS1 -> bRS	0.217	2.744	0.006	0.564	7.713	0.000	1.229	RI
bBRS2 -> bRS	0.229	2.508	0.012	0.604	9.062	0.000	1.326	RI
bBRS3 -> bRS	0.363	4.056	0.000	0.696	10.332	0.000	1.273	RI
bBRS4 -> bRS	0.587	7.785	0.000	0.830	17.427	0.000	1.199	RI
bCM1 -> bCM	0.635	4.756	0.000	0.892	14.325	0.000	1.382	RI
bCM2 -> bCM	0.175	1.011	0.312	0.688	6.446	0.000	1.727	AI
bCM3 -> bCM	0.404	2.703	0.007	0.759	9.211	0.000	1.513	RI
bCM4 -> bCM	0.013	0.073	0.942	0.515	4.259	0.000	1.537	AI
bPM1 -> bPM	0.313	3.940	0.000	0.637	9.519	0.000	1.192	RI
bPM2 -> bPM	0.218	3.186	0.001	0.568	8.855	0.000	1.203	RI
bPM3 -> bPM	0.504	6.441	0.000	0.825	17.671	0.000	1.337	RI
bPM4 -> bPM	0.373	4.498	0.000	0.700	11.639	0.000	1.218	RI
bTD1 -> bTD	0.348	3.693	0.000	0.738	10.948	0.000	1.342	RI
bTD2 -> bTD	0.561	5.566	0.000	0.873	20.790	0.000	1.429	RI
bTD3 -> bTD	0.173	1.700	0.089	0.640	8.234	0.000	1.474	AI
bTD4 -> bTD	0.221	2.258	0.024	0.646	9.000	0.000	1.441	RI
cDE1 -> cDE	0.304	2.603	0.009	0.764	10.622	0.000	1.511	RI
cDE2 -> cDE	0.631	6.124	0.000	0.864	15.901	0.000	1.369	RI
cDE33 -> cDE	0.300	2.612	0.009	0.621	6.983	0.000	1.260	RI
cDE4 -> cDE	0.133	1.261	0.207	0.276	2.334	0.020	1.106	AI
cLAT1 -> cLAT	0.302	2.499	0.012	0.313	2.878	0.004	1.383	RI
cLAT2 -> cLAT	0.048	0.376	0.707	0.339	2.948	0.003	1.427	AI
cLAT3 -> cLAT	0.520	5.474	0.000	0.773	11.835	0.000	1.214	RI
cLAT4 -> cLAT	0.611	6.685	0.000	0.797	12.141	0.000	1.177	RI
cPAM1 -> cPAM	0.287	3.105	0.002	0.645	9.576	0.000	1.291	RI
cPAM2 -> cPAM	0.366	3.557	0.000	0.735	11.585	0.000	1.359	RI
cPAM3 -> cPAM	0.453	5.363	0.000	0.771	12.791	0.000	1.291	RI
cPAM4 -> cPAM	0.295	3.199	0.001	0.667	8.819	0.000	1.266	RI
eTC1 -> eTC	0.459	6.541	0.000	0.778	16.498	0.000	1.353	RI
eTC2 -> eTC	0.305	4.407	0.000	0.739	14.441	0.000	1.469	RI
eTC3 -> eTC	0.328	4.275	0.000	0.703	13.729	0.000	1.454	RI
eTC4 -> eTC	0.272	3.476	0.001	0.688	13.018	0.000	1.384	RI

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. R. Rena [South Africa]

Path	Weights	T stat	P values	Loadings	T stat	P values	VIF	Decision
eTE1 -> eTE	0.374	4.872	0.000	0.721	13.056	0.000	1.268	RI
eTE2 -> eTE	0.448	5.301	0.000	0.776	14.185	0.000	1.292	RI
eTE3 -> eTE	0.497	6.643	0.000	0.770	13.363	0.000	1.184	RI
eTM1 -> eTM	0.138	1.678	0.093	0.697	12.007	0.000	1.641	AI
eTM2 -> eTM	0.329	4.298	0.000	0.695	12.391	0.000	1.352	RI
eTM3 -> eTM	0.413	5.186	0.000	0.755	13.243	0.000	1.404	RI
eTM4 -> eTM	0.456	6.281	0.000	0.796	15.985	0.000	1.339	RI
eWC1 -> eWC	0.335	4.282	0.000	0.653	9.888	0.000	1.188	RI
eWC2 -> eWC	0.491	7.241	0.000	0.777	17.347	0.000	1.224	RI
eWC4 -> eWC	0.522	8.068	0.000	0.766	15.477	0.000	1.145	RI

Source: Researcher's Data Analysis (2026)

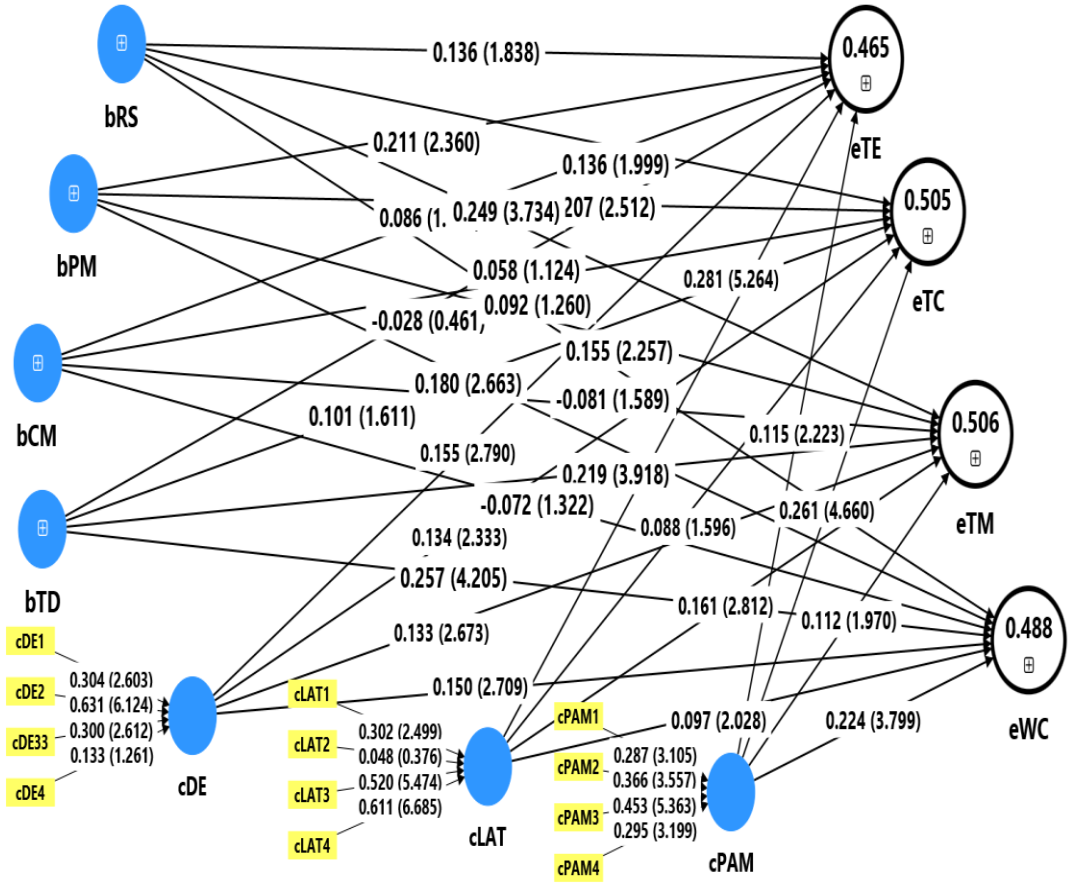

Figure 1: Measurement Model for HRM Practices, Employee Engagement and Employee Productivity

Source: Researcher's Data Analysis (2026)

Structural Path Analysis for Mediating Role of Employee Engagement in the Relationship between HRM Practices and Employee Productivity

This section presents the structural path analysis for the fourth specific objective of the study, which is to determine the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between human resource management practices and employee productivity in the study area. After establishing the adequacy of the formative measurement model, the study proceeded to the structural model assessment. The interpretation follows the standard guidelines for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling. Statistical significance is determined at the 5 per cent level where the t statistic is greater than 1.96 and the p value is less than or equal to 0.05. Moderate significance is considered at the 10 per cent level where the t statistic exceeds 1.65 and the p value is less than or equal to 0.10. The coefficient of determination is interpreted using the threshold that values of 0.26, 0.13, and 0.02 represent substantial, moderate, and weak explanatory power respectively. In the same vein, effect size is assessed using the thresholds of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 for small, medium, and large effects respectively.

The structural model for this objective involved the direct effect of HRM practices on employee engagement, the direct effect of employee engagement on employee productivity, the direct effect of HRM practices on employee productivity, and the indirect effect of HRM practices on employee productivity through employee engagement. These relationships are presented in Table 3 and illustrated in Figure 2. The model therefore enables the study to determine whether employee engagement mediates the relationship between HRM practices and employee productivity, and whether such mediation is full, partial, or complementary.

Before examining the structural paths, collinearity was assessed using the variance inflation factor values reported in Table 3. The VIF values for the relevant relationships were either 1.000 or 1.825. Since these values are far below the conservative threshold of 3.0, collinearity was not a concern in the model. This indicates that the predictor constructs are sufficiently distinct and that the structural model is robust for interpretation.

Table 3: Mediation Analysis

Direct Effect	Beta	T Stat	P values	f-square	VIF
Employ_Engage -> Employ_Prod	0.422	7.574	0.000	0.287	1.825
HRMPs -> Employ_Engage	0.672	20.663	0.000	0.825	1.000
HRMPs -> Employ_Prod	0.467	8.353	0.000	0.351	1.825
Indirect Effect					

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. R. Rena [South Africa]

HRMPs -> Employ_Engage -> Employ_Prod	0.284	7.309	0.000		

Source: Researcher's Data Analysis (2026)

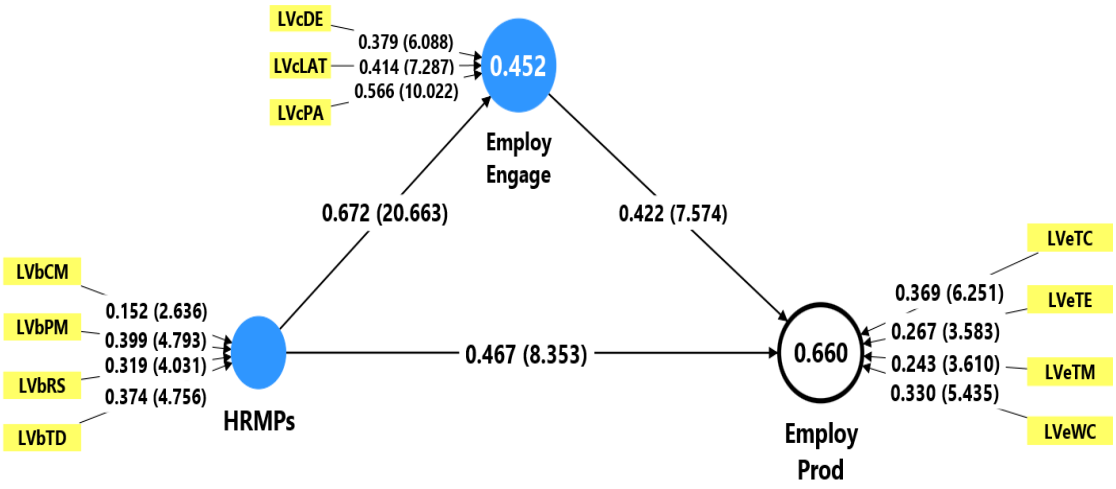

Figure 2: Structural Path for HRM Practices, Employee Engagement and Employee Productivity

Source: Researcher's Data Analysis (2026)

The direct effect of employee engagement on employee productivity was found to be positive and highly significant, as shown in Table 3 (β = 0.422, t = 7.574, p = 0.000). This means that an increase in employee engagement leads to a corresponding increase in employee productivity. The result shows that employee engagement is an important predictor of productivity in the study area. In practical terms, when employees exhibit stronger discretionary effort, lower absenteeism and turnover intentions, and more positive attitude and morale, their productivity is significantly enhanced.

The direct effect of HRM practices on employee engagement was also positive and highly significant (β = 0.672, t = 20.663, p = 0.000). This is the strongest direct path in the model, indicating that HRM practices exert a substantial influence on employee engagement. This implies that improvements in recruitment and selection, compensation management, performance management, and training and development strongly enhance employee engagement in the selected local governments. The size and significance of this path show that HRM practices are a major antecedent of employee engagement.

Similarly, the direct effect of HRM practices on employee productivity was positive and highly significant (β = 0.467, t = 8.353, p = 0.000). This indicates that HRM practices independently and directly improve employee productivity. Thus, beyond their effect through engagement, HRM practices still have their own direct contribution to

productivity. This confirms that HRM practices remain a fundamental driver of employee productivity in the study area.

The indirect effect of HRM practices on employee productivity through employee engagement was equally positive and statistically significant (β = 0.284, t = 7.309, p = 0.000). This shows that employee engagement transmits a substantial portion of the effect of HRM practices to employee productivity. In other words, HRM practices improve employee productivity not only directly, but also indirectly by first enhancing employee engagement, which in turn increases productivity. Since both the direct path from HRM practices to employee productivity and the indirect path through employee engagement are significant and move in the same positive direction, the mediation is partial and complementary. This means that employee engagement does not fully account for the effect of HRM practices on productivity, but it significantly strengthens and complements that relationship.

Figure 2 provides further insight into the structural relationships among the constructs. The figure shows that HRM practices explained 45.2 per cent of the variance in employee engagement, as indicated by the R square value of 0.452. Based on the established threshold, this represents a substantial level of explanatory power. This means that HRM practices provide a strong explanation for variations in employee engagement in the study area. The figure also shows that HRM practices and employee engagement jointly explained 66.0 per cent of the variance in employee productivity, as indicated by the R square value of 0.660. This represents a highly substantial level of explanatory power and suggests that the model captures a large proportion of the variability in employee productivity.

The effect size values presented in Table 3 provide further evidence on the practical importance of the structural relationships. The effect of employee engagement on employee productivity had an f square value of 0.287, which falls within the medium effect range. This shows that employee engagement makes a practically meaningful contribution to employee productivity. The effect of HRM practices on employee engagement had an f square value of 0.825, which exceeds the threshold for a large effect. This indicates that HRM practices have a very strong practical impact on employee engagement. The effect of HRM practices on employee productivity had an f square value of 0.351, which is also within the large effect range, though just above the threshold. This shows that HRM practices have a strong practical effect on employee productivity even without considering the mediating role of engagement. Therefore, the effect size results suggest that HRM practices are not only statistically significant but also substantively important in explaining both employee engagement and employee productivity, while employee engagement itself has a meaningful practical role in enhancing productivity.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. R. Rena [South Africa]

Figure 2 also sheds light on the relative contributions of the higher order dimensions to the major constructs in the model. For employee engagement, the dimensions of positive attitude and morale, low absenteeism and turnover, and discretionary effort all contributed positively, with positive attitude and morale showing the highest loading, followed by low absenteeism and turnover, and then discretionary effort. This suggests that among the dimensions of employee engagement, positive attitude and morale play the strongest role in defining engagement in the study area. For employee productivity, teamwork and collaboration recorded the highest loading, followed by work commitment, task efficiency, and time management. This indicates that productivity in the selected local governments is most strongly reflected in the extent of teamwork and collaboration among employees.

On the basis of the mediation analysis presented in Table 3 and Figure 2, the null hypothesis which states that employee engagement does not significantly mediate the relationship between HRM practices and employee productivity in the study area is hereby rejected. This decision is justified because the indirect path from HRM practices to employee productivity through employee engagement was found to be positive and statistically significant. In addition, the direct effect of HRM practices on employee productivity remained significant, showing that the mediation is partial and complementary rather than full.

In sum, the structural model results presented in Table 3 and Figure 2 reveal that employee engagement plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between HRM practices and employee productivity. HRM practices significantly enhance employee engagement, employee engagement significantly improves employee productivity, and HRM practices also directly influence employee productivity. The indirect effect of HRM practices on productivity through engagement was significant and positive, confirming the existence of partial complementary mediation. The model recorded substantial explanatory power for employee engagement and very substantial explanatory power for employee productivity. In addition, the effect size results show that HRM practices have a large practical effect on both engagement and productivity, while employee engagement has a medium practical effect on productivity. These findings confirm that employee engagement is an important pathway through which HRM practices translate into improved employee productivity in the study area.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study show that employee engagement plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between human resource management practices and employee productivity in the selected local governments in Southwestern Nigeria. The structural

results revealed that HRM practices significantly influenced employee engagement, employee engagement significantly influenced employee productivity, and HRM practices also retained a significant direct effect on employee productivity. Since both the direct and indirect paths were significant and moved in the same positive direction, the mediation is complementary and partial. This means that HRM practices enhance employee productivity both directly and indirectly through employee engagement.

The strong positive relationship between HRM practices and employee productivity in the present study is consistent with several empirical studies. Ede and Oketa (2024) found positive and significant relationships between selective hiring, job security, training, and organisational performance, while. These studies support the present finding that HRM practices are important antecedents of improved employee productivity.

The significant effect of HRM practices on employee engagement found in this study also agrees with the empirical studies. Sharif et al. (2024) found that training and development, employee participation, and performance appraisal significantly influenced work engagement, while work engagement itself significantly influenced organisational commitment. The present study is therefore in consonance with the wider empirical position that HRM practices shape how employees feel, behave, and invest themselves in their work.

The finding that employee engagement significantly influences employee productivity is equally supported by the empirical review. Wijayathunga and Karunarathne (2024) found that high performance human resource management practices directly influenced role performance and that employee engagement mediated the relationship. Their study is particularly relevant because it confirms that employee engagement functions as a behavioural and psychological channel through which HRM practices are translated into stronger work outcomes. Similarly, Setyo et al. (2021) reported that employee engagement, though not directly significant in isolation in all respects, became significant in mediating the effects of motivation and job satisfaction on employee performance. The implication of their finding is that engagement remains an important mechanism through which organisational and motivational conditions affect performance outcomes. In the context of the present study, the significant path from employee engagement to employee productivity confirms that engaged employees in local governments are more likely to be productive.

More importantly, the present finding that employee engagement significantly mediates the relationship between HRM practices and employee productivity is strongly corroborated by previous studies. Sharif et al. (2024) found that work engagement significantly mediated the relationship between training and development, employee participation, performance appraisal, and organisational commitment in higher

educational institutions in Pakistan. Although their outcome variable was organisational commitment rather than employee productivity, the central logic of mediation through engagement is consistent with the present study. In the same vein, Wijayathunga and Karunarathne (2024) established that employee engagement mediates the relationship between high performance HRM practices and role performance among non academic staff in Sri Lankan state universities. This finding is very closely aligned with the present result because both studies demonstrate that employee engagement functions as a key intervening variable between HRM practices and employee outcomes. Although Setyo et al. (2021) noted that employee engagement did not directly affect employee performance in all cases, they still found significant mediation effects through motivation and job satisfaction. That position differs slightly from the present study, where employee engagement had a direct significant effect on employee productivity. This difference may be due to contextual variation between private sector information technology firms and public sector local government institutions. It may also suggest that in local government settings, employee engagement is more directly tied to observable productivity outcomes than in some other organisational contexts.

Another important aspect of the result is the very substantial explanatory power of the model for employee productivity. This suggests that HRM practices and employee engagement jointly explain a large proportion of the variation in productivity among local government employees. This finding is consistent with the broader empirical literature which repeatedly showed that employee productivity is not explained by one factor alone, but by a combination of organisational practices and behavioural outcomes. For example, Olasanmi et al. (2021) found that management and organisational factors had the greatest influence on employee productivity, while Awoitau et al. (2024) reported that motivation, training, and compensation significantly influenced employee performance both individually and collectively. The present study supports this multidimensional understanding, while specifically demonstrating that employee engagement is one of the key channels through which HRM practices yield productivity gains.

Implication of Findings

The implication of these findings is that local governments in Southwestern Nigeria cannot rely on HRM practices alone if they seek to maximise employee productivity. Since employee engagement significantly and complementarily mediates the relationship between HRM practices and productivity, administrators must ensure that HRM practices are deliberately designed to deepen employee involvement, enthusiasm, commitment, and positive workplace attitude. In practical terms, policies on recruitment and selection, performance management, compensation management, and training and development

should not only be administratively sound but must also be engagement driven. This is particularly important because the model shows that HRM practices exert a very strong influence on employee engagement, which in turn significantly boosts productivity. Therefore, local government authorities should strengthen developmental appraisal systems, participatory management, staff recognition, and continuous professional development in ways that make employees feel psychologically connected to their work and organisation. Such an approach will not only sustain the direct contribution of HRM practices to productivity but will also amplify that contribution through stronger employee engagement.

Conclusion

The study concludes that employee engagement plays a significant complementary mediating role. The model shows that HRM practices exert Human resource management practices significantly have a very strong influence on employee engagement, which in turn significantly boosts productivity. Since both the direct and indirect effects are significant and move in the same direction, the mediation is partial and complementary. This implies that while human resource management practices directly enhance productivity, their effectiveness is further strengthened when employees are actively engaged.

Recommendations

Following the outcome of this study and the conclusion, the following recommendations are thereby proffered:

- Management should actively promote employee engagement initiatives to maximise the complementary mediating role of employee engagement in enhancing productivity. This can be achieved by creating an inclusive work environment that encourages participation, commitment, and emotional attachment to organisational goals and implementation of strategies such as recognition programmes, career development opportunities, and participatory leadership to strengthen employee engagement, thereby amplifying the effectiveness of human resource management practices.
- Administrators should ensure that HRM practices are deliberately designed to deepen employee involvement, enthusiasm, commitment, and positive workplace attitude. In practical terms, policies on recruitment and selection, performance management, compensation management, and training and development should not only be administratively sound but must also be engagement driven.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. R. Rena [South Africa]

- Local government authorities should strengthen developmental appraisal systems, participatory management, staff recognition, and continuous professional development in ways that make employees feel psychologically connected to their work and organisation. Such an approach will not only sustain the direct contribution of HRM practices to productivity but will also amplify that contribution through stronger employee engagement.

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