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Title of the Paper: "Bridging HRM Practices and Productivity: A Conceptual Model of Employee Engagement in Start-Ups"

Theme 6: Human Capital, Leadership & Future of Work (Sub-theme: *Employee Engagement and Performance*).

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Abstract

Start-ups operate in environments that are characterised by growth and risk, where traditional human resource management (HRM) models are often inapplicable (Keir, 2019). While existing literature addresses operational difficulties, a critical theoretical gap remains in how specific HRM configurations influence employee engagement and subsequently drive productivity in startups. Addressing this gap, this conceptual paper integrates Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. We propose a conceptual architecture grouping HRM practices into Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity-enhancing

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(AMO) bundles. Furthermore, the paper considers operational hurdles such as prolonged working hours, job insecurity, and well-being impacts (Mohadkar & Aurangabadkar, 2024), positioning employee engagement as a mediating bridge translating internal HRM practices into enhanced venture productivity while highlighting Perceived Organisational Support (POS) and leadership as moderators. By moving beyond reviews that are descriptive, the study proposes a structured methodological approach, a formal architectural framework, and operationalised propositions for future empirical exploration.

Keywords: HRM Practices, Employee Engagement, Start-ups, Social Exchange Theory, Job Demands-Resources Model, Venture productivity.

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