

# The importance of emotions in contemporary human resource management

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The literature currently offers only fragmentary insights into the research on the relationship between employee emotions and human resource management (HRM). Therefore, further research is essential to bridge this knowledge gap. Our study aims to identify the mediating effects of positive employee emotions and exhaustion in the relationship between HRM and employee engagement.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Drawing on the literature review findings, a conceptual model was formulated to illustrate the relationship between HRM, employee emotions and engagement. A confirmatory analysis was conducted using structural equation modelling (SEM CFA) on a sample of 1,000 employees to validate the proposed model. The data were collected in 2021, with a particular emphasis on exploring the indirect influence of HRM on engagement through positive employee emotions and exhaustion.

**Findings** – The quantitative research aimed to test a model depicting the relationship between HRM and employee emotions. The findings indicate the robust effect of HRM on positive employee emotions and exhaustion. The authors observed significant variation in the level of impact depending on the size of the organisation (stronger in large firms) and the sector (stronger in the public sector).

**Originality/value** – The study bridges the gap in our understanding of the link between HRM and employee emotions. It would be advisable to further explore the specific impact of individual HRM practices on both positive and negative employee emotions. It is worth extending the scope of future research to explore components of the investigated constructs as well as mediators and moderators of the relationship between HRM and employee emotions.

**Keywords** Human resource management, Positive emotions, Exhaustion, Employee engagement

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Operating in an environment characterised by high uncertainty poses unique challenges for human resource management (HRM). The COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with a perpetual sense of insecurity and potentially distressing personal experiences, can significantly impact

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## JEL Classification — J24, M12, M54

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employees within the organisation. This can lead to anxiety, despair and a propensity to experience pessimism and occupational burnout (Demerouti & Bakker, 2022). As a result, statistics show increased levels of depression, anxiety disorders, increased rates of suicide and alcoholism. The experience of these emotions by employees can generate new phenomena in the labour market and amplify negative behaviours that have significant consequences for employee engagement (Grabmeier, 2020). This context of contemporary management is driving the evolution of the concept of HRM towards an emotional paradigm, that is, management oriented towards employees' emotions. Direct manifestations of this approach can be observed in labour market trends such as the "great resignation" and "quiet quitting", as well as in employee attitudes such as absenteeism, i.e. unscheduled absences for reasons other than a diagnosed illness and changes in their hierarchy of expectations. These trends significantly influence employee engagement levels.

Therefore, the main objective of the article is to analyse the relationship between HRM and employee engagement mediated by positive emotions and exhaustion. The correlation will be examined across two key dimensions: sector (private and public sector) and organisation size (small, medium and large companies). The authors have also developed two specific objectives:

- (1) To determine how HRM impacts employee emotions,
- (2) To identify how HRM affects work engagement by indirectly influencing positive emotions and exhaustion.

The paper is structured into three parts: (1) provides a theoretical introduction covering the context of contemporary HRM and the essence of the emotional paradigm in HRM, which serves as the basis for formulating research hypotheses, (2) covers the empirical research methodology, including the purpose, assumptions, research sample and results of statistical analyses and (3) presents a discussion of the findings followed by conclusions. Drawing on the findings of the literature review, we developed a conceptual model that examines the relationship between HRM, employee emotions and work engagement. To test our model empirically, we conducted a using structural equation modelling confirmatory factor analysis (SEM CFA). Specifically, our analysis focussed on investigating the indirect effect of HRM on work engagement through two key factors: positive employee emotions and exhaustion. To collect the necessary data, we conducted an empirical survey in 2021 using computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) with a sample of 1,000 respondents.

## Literature review

### *The rationale of the emotional paradigm in human resource management*

In a highly dynamic environment, the external and internal management context in volatile conditions caused by the pandemic, the outbreak of war, the energy crisis and inflation is triggering new trends observed in today's labour market. The year 2021 witnessed the emergence of a trend in the labour market: a wave of employee-initiated resignations, known as the Great Resignation. The phenomenon of the Great Resignation is particularly affecting highly skilled employees and specialists with scarce skills in Poland. According to a survey by Hays Poland, 77% of employees are considering switching jobs and nearly half of those surveyed are willing to leave their current employer without securing a new job beforehand, particularly among those in higher positions or with specialised skills (Hays, 2023). An Antal study revealed that 53% of employees leave their jobs due to poor management within their organisation. Therefore, it appears that the managerial and leadership competencies of team managers are a critical prerequisite for curbing this trend (Petrus, 2023).

The recent increase in employee turnover has been accompanied by a growing trend known as "career cushioning", which predominantly affects the younger generation Z.

This phenomenon is characterised by employees' strong interest in browsing job offers, analysing labour market demand and actively participating in the recruitment process to assess their own attractiveness. Additionally, employees seek to build their professional networks, develop an expert image and enhance their visibility in the industry to safeguard themselves in case a job change becomes necessary. This behaviour is motivated by the fear of job loss or a reduction in real wages in the face of uncertain economic conditions and dynamic changes.

Another trend seen on the Polish labour market is "quiet quitting". This phenomenon implies a lack of emotional engagement in work, where employees view their jobs solely as a source of income and abandon any aspirations that go beyond their basic duties. This trend has multiple reasons, including a desire for a better work-life balance, the pursuit of self-fulfilment through work, a lack of agency or engagement with one's job and unsatisfactory employment conditions. "Quiet quitting" is not a new trend (Fuller & Kerr, 2022). It is considered to be a continuation of the "downshifting" phenomenon observed in highly developed countries. Its scale has been increasing, driven by a shift in the hierarchy of values. Based on employee statements, 37% of respondents are motivated by strong company values, mission and objectives, whilst 36% prefer organisations that prioritise social equality and environmental protection (Kowalska, 2022).

Employees are drawing more attention to their satisfaction and mental health, fighting for more free time and work-life balance. Around 45% of Polish employees agree with the statement, "I am ready to quit my current job even without any other offer in case the current place of employment adversely affects my well-being" (Kowalska, 2022). The Manpower Group's research on "what employees want" reported the following rank of expectations: the possibility of choosing the time of starting and ending work (45%), more days off work (36%), the flexible choice of work location (35%) (2021). About 49% of employees would move to another organisation if it offered them well-being at a higher level (Kowalska, 2022). By the same token, working remotely or in a hybrid form is conducive to increased job burnout and depression. The results of a survey conducted by UceResearch and Syno Poland indicated that 65% of working Poles show signs of professional burnout and 73% display symptoms of depression (Leśniak, 2023).

The aforementioned trends confirm the increasing importance of emotions, which have a significant impact on employees' decisions and attitudes. Emotions constitute a motivational system and determine reactions to other people and to various life events (Jarymowicz & Imbir, 2010). That being the case, managers are recognising the need to depart from traditional principles that have guided the implementation of the HR function. This shift in perspective confirms the evolution of HRM towards the concept of human capital management, which represents an improvement direction. (Juchnowicz, 2014; Pocztowski, 2018). Employers implementing environmental, social and governance (ESG) and sustainability-related programmes in Polish companies primarily focus on activities related to the human and social domains (35%) (ManpowerGroup, 2022).

#### *Human resource management and positive emotions and employee engagement*

HRM is an informational and decisional process that aims to align the objectives of its internal and external stakeholders. Nowadays, it is deemed appropriate to base this process on an emotional paradigm, that is, management oriented towards employees' emotions. This paradigm is supported by recent labour market trends described above and the need to adapt the HR function to evolving market requirements. This includes managing the emotions of employees who are also considered internal customers. (Lipka, 2022).

In today's increasingly common hybrid work settings, employers play a crucial role in promoting positive emotions among their employees (Tabor-Błażewicz, 2021). Achieving this goal requires a genuine concern for employee well-being, which is shaped by positive emotions.

The concept of well-being in an organisation can be approached from two distinct perspectives: hedonistic and eudaimonic (Czerw, 2017). The hedonistic perspective pertains to the experience of positive emotions (a favourable balance of emotions) and a positive cognitive appraisal of life, often measured by the construct of “job satisfaction”. On the other hand, the eudaimonic lens focusses on the meaningfulness, value and purpose of work. To attain a sense of well-being, it is crucial to perceive work as significant, serving meaningful goals and needs that are valuable to the individual (Czerw, 2017; Yeoman, 2014). The study presented in this paper applies a well-being model that combines three dimensions: health, happiness and relationships (Price, Grant, & Christianson, 2007). It entails two aspects of happiness: experiencing hedonistic pleasure at work and eudaimonic perceptions of work as meaningful and engaging (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Emotions arising in the context of the work environment offer valuable insights into human behaviour, thereby constituting a crucial factor for comprehending the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and social interactions (Lindebaum, Geddes, & Jordan, 2018). They manifest as a multi-faceted phenomenon, spanning from the apex of the organisational hierarchy down to the everyday encounters of the organisation’s individual constituents (Ashkanasy, 2003). Positive emotions in employees have a significant impact on their engagement, which is characterised by an above-average readiness to engage, passion and a high degree of professional activity, including creativity and a willingness for continuous development (Juchnowicz, 2012). Prevailing positive emotions shape an engaged employee who can also become an employer brand ambassador (Lipka, 2022). Employee engagement and positive experiences interact mutually. However, globally, only 9% of employees are engaged and experience well-being (Gallup, 2022).

Based on an analysis of literature describing the relationship between HRM and positive employee emotions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

*H1.* HRM reinforces positive employee emotions.

*H1a.* HRM positively influences employee engagement by reinforcing positive emotions.

#### *Human resource management and employee exhaustion and engagement*

Indicators of employee well-being include not only positive emotions but also the feelings that arise from experiencing difficulties, such as stress. Research has shown that engaged employees who experience positive well-being in the workplace tend to experience less stress, anger and health problems. Unfortunately, employee engagement and well-being levels have remained very low across the globe in recent years, and employee stress has reached an all-time high, hindering the potential for significant growth (Gallup, 2022).

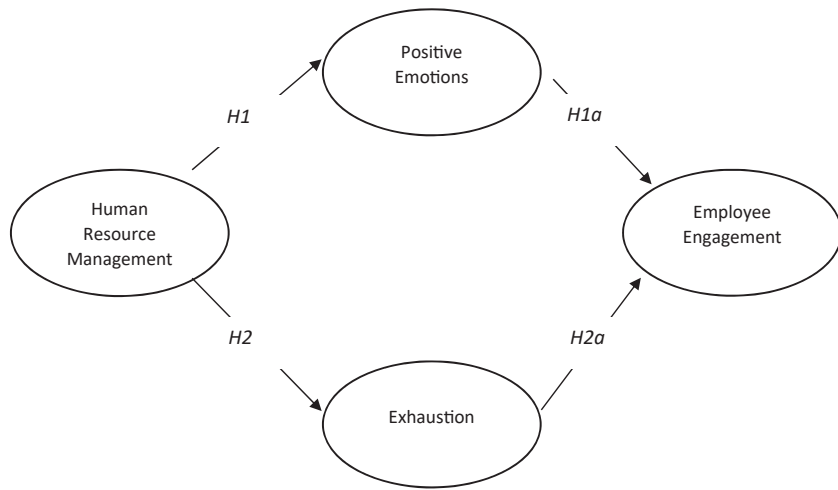
Physical and psychological exhaustion resulting from work, which leads to a lack of motivation, is referred to as job burnout and has been the focus of researchers for many years (Freudenberger, 1974). It is characterised by emotional exhaustion, a distant attitude towards work and a sense of incompetence and lack of success in the workplace (Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2002; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). A burned-out employee is tired, exhausted and disengaged at work (Schaufeli, Desart, & De Witte, 2020). Therefore, for the sake of employee well-being and engagement, a key imperative for HRM improvement is to prioritise the emotions of members of the organisation, including measures to reduce exhaustion.

Based on the literature review on the relationship between HRM, employee engagement and exhaustion, the following hypotheses are formulated:

*H2.* HRM decreases employee exhaustion.

*H2a.* HRM, by reducing exhaustion, has a positive effect on employee engagement.

The hypothesised relations between the study constructs are shown in [Figure 1](#).



Source(s): Authors' own study

**Figure 1.**  
The mediating effect of positive and negative employee perceptions between human resource management and employee engagement – a research model

### Research method

#### Research design and data collection

In 2021, a quantitative survey was conducted to test the relationship between HRM and employee emotions and engagement. The survey was based on a nationwide accredited survey panel (Norstat) and administered using the CAWI method to a sample of 1,000 economically active Poles ( $N = 1,000$ ). The sample was selected randomly to ensure it accurately represented the population being studied. Regarding the composition of the study sample, the majority of respondents (52%) had a tertiary education and were employed on a contract basis (77%) in the private sector (77%). The survey sample was balanced in terms of gender (55% men, 45% women) and age to ensure a representative distribution of respondents. More than three-quarters (77%) of employees were employed in the private sector and 20% in the public one. Slightly more than 40% of respondents were employed in small organisations (up to 50 employees). Representatives of medium-sized companies (50–249 employees) accounted for 27% and large companies (250 or more employees) - 31% of the sample (Table 1).

#### Variables

To measure HRM, employee engagement and employee emotions, the study used adaptations of the following research tools: “Gallup-Healthways, Well-being 5 Index” (all questions, except those listed below, covering: a positive attitude towards daily activities and motivation to achieve goals, supportive relationships in one’s life, financial security, a sense of security and pride in being part of a community, as well as good health and energy to perform everyday

Organisation size	Up to 50 employees	42%
	50–249 employees	27%
Sector	250 and more	31%
	Public	20%
	Private	77%
	Foundations, associations and others	3%

**Table 1.**  
Structure of the survey sample by organisation size and sector

Source(s): Authors' own study

tasks) (Gallup-Healthways, 2017) and UWES (questions number: 1.22, 1.21 and 1.18, covering: vigour, dedication and absorption in one's work) (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-romá, & Bakker, 2002). The tools were expanded by authorial questions about work-life balance, finding joy in personal development and feeling intellectually and emotionally exhausted (question numbers: 1.10, 1.12, 1.14 and 1.06). Respondents rated the statements on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 equals 'strongly disagree' and 5 means 'strongly agree'.

"Employee engagement" was the dependent variable in the model. To measure it, we used items examining the declaration of feeling vigorous, committed and passionate at work. The dependent variable showed a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.88.

The explanatory variables were measured in the following way:

- (1) "Human resource management" – The variable was tested with nine items evaluating: team atmosphere, trust towards colleagues and a supervisor, relationship with a supervisor, satisfaction with personal growth, opportunities to apply competencies in daily tasks, work-life balance, adequacy of salary in relation to everyday tasks and adequate compensation differentiation. The coefficient of reliability was Cronbach's alpha = 0.84.
- (2) "Positive emotions". – the variable was analysed by using six items describing: positive attitude and work pleasure, enthusiasm regarding the future, pride, satisfaction and the sense of meaningful work. The reliability coefficient was Cronbach's alpha = 0.82.
- (3) "Exhaustion" – This variable was analysed with three items, two of which had reverse-scaled statements assessing health and physical condition and vigour and enthusiasm, as well as a statement exploring the evaluation of intellectual and emotional exhaustion. The reliability coefficient was Cronbach's alpha = 0.86.

All the variables were constructed in a reflexive manner. The standardised estimates for the path loads between statements and each construct were significant and all but one exceeded a value of 0.5. (See Table 2).

### *Study findings*

The aim of the study was to assess the quality of the conceptual model with the assumption of the relationship between HRM, positive experiences, employees' exhaustion and their commitment. The model has used latent variables, i.e. those which cannot be directly observed, but can be detected through other observable variables. Using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the structure of the variables was verified and the relationships between the identified latent variables were assessed through the use of path analysis.

The analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS AMOS software (version 28).

### *Validation of measurements*

At the initial stage of the analyses, the relevance and reliability of the scales were checked. The described scales show convergent and differential validity (Pleśniak, 2009), which confirms their theoretical relevance (Table 3).

### *Structural model estimation*

The model of relationships between constructs was estimated by using the SEM CFA approach. Matching the measurement model can be considered satisfactory. The Chi-square value was 2507.742 (187 df),  $p < 0.001$ . Measures of absolute match like goodness-of-fit (GFI) = 0.903 and adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = 0.857 are at the appropriate level (above and close to 0.9). Measures of relative match are close to 0.9. Root mean square error

Variable	Item	Loading factor
Employee engagement	1.22. I do my work with passion	0.920
	1.21. I am dedicated to my work	0.858
	1.18. I feel vigour at work	0.752
Human resource management	1.02. There is a nice and friendly atmosphere in my team	0.719
	1.17. I trust my colleagues and supervisor	0.757
	1.05. I have a very good relationship with my supervisor	0.725
	1.16. My supervisor treats me more like a partner than a subordinate	0.666
	1.14. Developing knowledge and skills gives me joy	0.700
	1.15. At work, I do my best every day	0.658
	1.10. I keep a work-life balance	0.527
Positive emotions	1.12. The level of salary at different positions in my workplace is properly differentiated	0.576
	1.04. My salary is adequate for my job	0.599
	1.01. I like my job	0.821
	1.11. I look to the future with hope and enthusiasm	0.634
	1.20. I go to work every day with pleasure	0.817
	1.03. I am proud of the work I do	0.838
Exhaustion	1.07. I believe that my work is meaningful	0.800
	1.13. My work gives me satisfaction	0.877
	1.08. My health and physical conditions are suitable for the work I do. (R)	0.650
	1.19. I feel vigorous and full of enthusiasm at work. (R)	0.654
	1.06. I feel intellectually and emotionally exhausted by my work	0.409

**Table 2.**  
Variables in the model **Source(s):** Authors' own study

Variable	CR	MSV	AVE	Correlations/root of AVE*			
				Human resource management	Positive emotions	Exhaustion	Employee engagement
Human resource management	0.987	0.648	0.775	<i>0.880</i>			
Positive emotions	0.845	0.648	0.732	0.805	<i>0.856</i>		
Exhaustion	0.763	0.356	0.532	-0.597	-0.342	<i>0.729</i>	
Employee engagement	0.773	0.540	0.452	0.735	0.652	0.582	<i>0.672</i>

**Table 3.**  
The assessment of psychometric properties of scales

**Note(s):** CR – composite reliability, MSV – maximum shared variance and AVE – average variance extracted  
\*On the diagonal, the root of AVE is shown in italic  
**Source(s):** Authors' own study

approximation (RMSEA) has a value of 0.056 and does not exceed the value of 0.06 considered the threshold for well-matched models, and the confidence interval for RMSEA does not contain the value of 0.1 disqualifying the model.

To test the relationships between “Human Resource Management,” “Positive Emotions,” “Exhaustion” and “Employee Engagement,” path coefficients were estimated (Table 4).

The variables in the analysed model explained more than 87.7% ( $R^2 = 0.877$ ) of the variance in “Employee Engagement.” “Human Capital Management” explained 89.2% ( $R^2 = 0.892$ ) of the variance in “Positive Employee Emotions” and 85.4% ( $R^2 = 0.854$ ) of the variance in “Exhaustion”. “Positive Employee Emotions” explained 82.7% ( $R^2 = 0.827$ ) of the

variance of “Employee Engagement,” and “Exhaustion” explained 78.4% ( $R^2 = 0.784$ ) of the variance of “Employee Engagement”.

The conducted study confirmed the hypotheses of a positive effect of “Human Resource Management” on “Positive Emotions” (H1) ( $\beta = 1.076, p < 0.001$ ) and on “Employee Engagement” by enhancing “Positive Emotions” (H1a) ( $\beta = 1.676, p < 0.001$ ).

The received results also supported the hypothesis of the effect of “Human Resource Management” on reducing “Exhaustion” (H2) ( $\beta = -0.905, p < 0.001$ ). Empirical support, on the other hand, was not given to the hypothesis on the relationship between “Exhaustion” and “Employee Engagement” and (H2b). The study found that “Exhaustion” and “Employee Engagement” had a significant positive relationship ( $\beta = 0.677, p < 0.05$ ), that is, as “Exhaustion” increased, “Employee Engagement” increased as well.

*The impact of organisation size and sector on the studied relationships*

In order to determine the specific nature of the relationship between the studied variables depending on the sector and the size of the organisation, a separate SEM model was calculated for each of the distinguished groups (Table 5).

Structural paths	Path coefficients
Human resource management → Positive Emotions	1.076*
Human resource management → Exhaustion	-0.905*
Positive emotions → Employee Engagement	1.676*
Exhaustion → Employee Engagement	0.677**
RMSEA	0.056
CFI	0.841
AGFI	0.857

**Note(s):** \* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$   
**Source(s):** Authors' own study

**Table 4.**  
Path coefficients for studied relationships between variables

Structural paths	Sector		Size of the organisation		
	Public	Private	Small organisations (up to 50 employees)	Medium-sized organisations (50–249 employees)	Large organisations (250 or more employees)
Human Resource Management → Positive Emotions	1.076*	1.061*	1.032*	0.944*	1.140*
Human Resource Management → Exhaustion	-0.935*	-0.875*	-0.907*	-0.829*	-0.941*
Positive Emotions → Employee Engagement	1.676*	1.326*	1.236*	1.889*	1.181*
Exhaustion → Employee Engagement	0.677**	0.324**	0.213	0.799**	0.190
RMSEA	0.052	0.056	0.054	0.053	0.055
CFI	0.794	0.848	0.815	0.833	0.836
AGFI	0.839	0.857	0.812	0.806	0.816

**Note(s):** \* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$   
**Source(s):** Authors' own study

**Table 5.**  
Structural analysis results for sector and organisation size



The values in Table 5 indicate an acceptable match of all the analysed models to the data.

In the model analysed for the two studied sectors, the variables explained more than 85.2% ( $R^2 = 0.852$ ) for the public sector and 81.4% ( $R^2 = 0.814$ ) for the private sector of the “Employee Engagement” variance. “Human Capital Management” explained:

- (1) The “Positive Employee Emotions” variance in: 82.7% ( $R^2 = 0.827$ ) for the public sector and 84.8% ( $R^2 = 0.848$ ) for the private sector;
- (2) The “Exhaustion” variance in: 79.7% ( $R^2 = 0.797$ ) for the public sector and 78.4% ( $R^2 = 0.784$ ) for the private sector;

The variables in the analysed model explained 90.4% ( $R^2 = 0.904$ ) for small, 87.2% ( $R^2 = 0.872$ ) of medium-sized and 85.2% ( $R^2 = 0.852$ ) for large organisations of the “Employee Engagement” variance. “Human Capital Management” explained:

- (1) The “Positive Employee Emotions” variance in: 87.2% ( $R^2 = 0.872$ ) for small, 86.4% ( $R^2 = 0.864$ ) for medium-sized and 79.3% ( $R^2 = 0.793$ ) for large organisations;
- (2) The “Exhaustion” variance in: 79.3% ( $R^2 = 0.793$ ) for small, 74.3% ( $R^2 = 0.743$ ) for medium-sized and 72.6% ( $R^2 = 0.726$ ) for large organisations.

The received results supported the hypotheses (H1 and H1a) regarding the relationship of “Human Resource Management” with “Positive Emotions” and “Employee Engagement” for both studied sectors and each of the three distinguished organisation size categories. Higher path coefficients have been obtained for the public sector than for the private sector, indicating a higher strength of the relationship between “Human Resource Management” and “Positive Emotions” and “Exhaustion” in the public sector than in the private sector.

The level of path coefficients linking “Human Resource Management” with “Positive Emotions” and “Employee Engagement” varied according to the size of the organisation. The weakest strength of the relationship between “Human Resource Management” and “Positive Emotions” was observed for medium-sized organisations and the strongest for large organisations. On the other hand, in the case of the relationship between “Positive Emotions” and “Employee Engagement,” the strengths of the relationships are arranged inversely, that is, the highest are for medium-sized organisations and the lowest are for large organisations.

The carried-out analyses made it possible to confirm the hypothesis of reducing “Exhaustion” due to “Human Resource Management” (H2) for the studied sectors and the distinguished categories of the organisation’s size. A stronger impact was noted for the public sector than for the private sector. “Human Resource Management” reduced “Exhaustion” most notably in large organisations and least visibly in medium-sized ones.

There was no empirical support for the hypothesis of an increase in “Employee Engagement” as a result of a decrease in their “Exhaustion” (H2b). For both studied sectors, the opposite relationship to the hypothesis was noted, that is, as “Exhaustion” increased, “Employee Engagement” increased as well. The strength of this relationship was greater for the public sector. A similar relationship linked “Exhaustion” with “Employee Engagement” in medium-sized organisations. In small and large companies, there was no relationship between these constructs (no statistical significance).

### Discussion of results

The conceptual model developed on the basis of the literature review and proposed in this paper was empirically verified and confirmed the relationships between HRM, positive emotions, exhaustion and employee engagement. The adoption of comprehensive practices in

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the area of HRM (including: a good atmosphere and proper relations in the workplace, opportunities to use and develop one's competences, adequate remuneration and work-life balance) has a positive impact on employees' emotions (reduces exhaustion and reinforces positive emotions). As a result, by reinforcing positive emotions, it increases employee engagement. Our study fosters the rationale for managing human resources, leading to positive employee experiences. Empirical evidence suggests that the effects of HRM practices directed at positive employee experiences are a key determinant of employee engagement and thus can lead to the desired work outcomes.

According to the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, demands and resources influence employees' sense of workload and motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2023). Engagement is created when employees take advantage of the opportunities presented to them and have the resources to cope with the demands. In specific situations, when the workload increases, employees may increase their efforts to cope with the requirements and maintain a high level of productivity. This increases their exhaustion (Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008). In our study, as employees' exhaustion increased, their engagement increased as well. This may be a consequence of the circumstances under which the study was conducted. At the beginning of 2021, the pandemic was underway. For many employees, this period was characterised by increased work intensity, due to, for example, the remote nature of the work, which may have caused an increase in exhaustion. The results of our study highlight that comprehensive analyses of the adverse consequences of persistently high engagement in conditions of employee exhaustion are necessary. In the context of Polish workplace environments, it is crucial for organisations and managers to consistently monitor employee workload levels and allocate work resources accordingly to meet current demands.

It is also important to note the differences in the strength of the relationship linking HRM and employee emotions depending on the size of the organisation and the sector. The literature indicates that activities of organisations aiming to support workplace well-being vary depending on their size (Kinowska & Sienkiewicz, 2023). Previous research has shown that involvement in employee well-being programmes decreases with the size of the workplace (Hannon, Garson, Harris, Hammerback, Sopher, & Clegg-Thorp, 2012). Our research indicates that the impact of HRM on employee emotions varies according to the size of the organisation. It was highest in large organisations and lowest in medium-sized ones. This can be explained by the fact that the structure and nature of medium-sized companies gives them limited opportunities and resources to manage human resources in a way that influences positive emotions. There is no closeness characteristic of small companies, where everyone knows one another and understands the specifics of their work. At the same time, they do not yet have the solutions specific to large organisations. Large companies, particularly multinational corporations, possess comprehensive HRM tools that aid in promoting positive employee emotions. The results of our study indicate the relevance of conducting separate research on the determinants of employee emotions in the field of HRM depending on the size of the organisation, as well as developing practical support tools for medium-sized entities.

Previous research indicates that the specifics of HRM vary between the public and private sectors (Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2022; Juchnowicz, Kinowska & Rostkowski, 2021). Our study has shown that the strength of the impact of HRM on employee emotions is higher in the public sector than in the private sector. It means that in the case of employees in public administration institutions, the efforts of employers and managers should be specifically directed at employee emotions through the use of a comprehensive programme of activities, within the framework of the organisation's HRM system. These conditions are not realised by efforts of an action and intervention nature.

### Summary

Empirical evidence has demonstrated the impact of HRM on increasing positive emotions, reducing employee exhaustion and indirectly enhancing work engagement through positive emotions. The study examined the variation in the level of influence according to the size of the organisation (divided into: small, medium-sized and large enterprises) and sector (private and public). For larger organisations, especially those with comprehensive HRM tools, the emphasis should be on nurturing positive employee emotions, with a focus on building a positive work environment. In contrast, medium-sized enterprises can benefit from tailored HRM strategies that take into account their specific challenges and resources. For smaller organisations, fostering interpersonal relationships and understanding the unique dynamics of their workforce is pivotal. Additionally, in the public sector, there is a clear need for a dedicated and comprehensive HRM approach aimed at managing employee emotions to enhance well-being, whilst in the private sector, a more targeted approach may suffice.

Although the role of employee emotions is now widely discussed, empirical evidence on its relationship with HRM is severely limited. Our research fills this gap and suggests that HRM reinforces positive emotions and reduces employee exhaustion and that HRM has a positive indirect effect on employee engagement through employee emotions.

### Limitations and direction for future research

The research captures the relationship between HRM, positive emotions, exhaustion and employee engagement. It was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced changes in work practices. A static approach has been presented. The studied relationships were not examined from a long-term perspective. The analysed relationships are time-dependent and variable in nature. Therefore, studying them in a long-term perspective is recommended.

The present research refers to Polish employees. In order to generalise the results, it would be necessary to conduct the study covering employees in other countries and regions.

The research on HRM and employee engagement should take into account two perspectives - those of employees and employers. It diagnosed relationships between the constructs on a sample of employees. In order to get a complete picture, conducting the study from the perspective of employers as well is recommended. In addition, the constructs in this study were measured through an employee self-assessment survey. Future research should validate the findings by utilising additional sources of evaluation.

In future research, examining the analysed components of the studied constructs and the relationships between them in more detail seems advisable. In addition, future research can be expanded to include mediators and moderators of the relationship between HRM and employee emotions.

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