

Exploring the synergistic effects of flexible work practices, organizational support, and work-life culture in manufacturing firms in Oman



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ABSTRACT

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This study examines how flexible work practices (FWPs) influence job satisfaction in Omani manufacturing SMEs and whether work-life balance culture (WLBC) and perceived organizational support (POS) act as mediators and have a synergistic effect. Data were collected from 100 employees across six organizations. Guided by social exchange theory and organizational support theory, reliability, validity, and the direct, indirect, and interaction effects were tested using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that FWPs are positively associated with job satisfaction and significantly enhance both WLBC and POS, which in turn increase satisfaction, with WLBC emerging as a stronger predictor. The results indicate that FWPs generate value primarily through relational and cultural mechanisms rather than through structural change. Employee satisfaction peaks when FWPs are implemented alongside strong organizational support and a culture that promotes work-life balance. The study advances SET and OST by demonstrating the dual mediation and synergistic processes through which structural flexibility affects employee attitudes in a Gulf manufacturing context. It also proposes an integrated HR model that aligns flexibility, support, and culture to improve satisfaction and retention. Policymakers and industry leaders in Oman are encouraged to institutionalize flexible work arrangements and supportive workplace cultures through national HR frameworks and labour policies to enhance employee well-being, engagement, and productivity in the manufacturing sector.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by empirically examining the synergistic and dual-mediation effects of flexible work practices, organizational support, and work-life balance culture on job satisfaction in Omani manufacturing SMEs. It is the first to develop and validate a combined SET-OST model within a Gulf industrial context.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Job satisfaction among employees is recognized as a key factor in productivity, retention, and organizational performance in today's competitive corporate environment. The COVID-19 pandemic, globalization, and technological advancements have accelerated changes in labor expectations, elevating flexible work arrangements to the forefront as a means to enhance employee well-being (Koutroukis, Chatzinikolaou, Vlados, & Pistikou, 2022). Flexible work arrangements are increasingly linked to improved work-life balance and higher job satisfaction because they provide employees with greater discretion over when, where, and how they work (Chandola, Booker, Kumari, & Benzeval, 2019). Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between employees' job satisfaction,

commitment, and the availability of flexibility (Marx, Reimann, & Diewald, 2021). These strategies enhance employee autonomy and reduce work-family conflicts, thereby improving welfare and morale. However, flexible work arrangements may not always lead to increased employee happiness. Two significant contextual factors often mentioned are the organization's work-life balance culture and perceived organizational support (Sheikh, 2023). According to DeConinck (2010), perceived organizational support (POS) is the belief that employees' contributions are valued and that their organization cares about their welfare. Employee satisfaction has long been associated with POS. Employees report higher job satisfaction, stronger commitment, and lower turnover when they feel supported by their employer through positive policies and treatment, as evidenced by meta-analytic research (Tett & Meyer, 1993).

Work-life balance culture, on the other hand, refers to the common presumptions, convictions, and ideals about how much the company encourages and values its employees' capacity to manage their personal and professional lives (Lester, 2013). Flexible work arrangements may seem beneficial on paper, but their advantages may be undermined by an unsupportive culture, such as one that stigmatizes or views their use as career-limiting. Conversely, a supportive work-life culture enhances the benefits of formal policies and strengthens employee loyalty to the company (Cegarra-Leiva, Sánchez-Vidal, & Gabriel Cegarra-Navarro, 2012).

The manufacturing sector in Oman is a key component of the government's Vision 2040 strategy for economic diversification, which aligns with broader Asian development policy priorities promoting sustainable industrialization, human capital development, and inclusive employment. Across Asia, regional frameworks such as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the ILO's Decent Work Agenda emphasize flexible and equitable employment systems as catalysts for productivity and well-being. Within this context, Oman's manufacturing firms, characterized by rigid hierarchies, on-site operations, and inflexible scheduling, face structural challenges in implementing flexible work practices. Yet, adopting flexibility supports both national and regional goals for sustainable industrial growth and workforce modernization (Lagger, 2023). However, persistent challenges such as limited autonomy, rigid scheduling, and work-family conflict continue to undermine job satisfaction and retention among manufacturing employees (Boamah, Hamadi, Havaei, Smith, & Webb, 2022).

Notwithstanding the increasing global evidence, research on FWPs in Oman is limited, particularly among industrial SMEs (Gudep, 2019; Hashmi, Al Ghaithi, & Sartawi, 2023; Parakandi & Behery, 2016). Most of the current research concentrates on public sector or service-oriented organizations, resulting in insufficient exploration of the industrial sector (Fung, Hui, & Yau, 2021; Krings, Nierling, Pedaci, & Piersanti, 2009). This disparity is crucial considering Oman's structural and cultural obstacles, where flexible work policies may only be effective when accompanied by robust organizational support and a culture that promotes work-life balance. Thus, this study investigates the interplay between FWPs, POS, and WLBC in influencing employee work satisfaction among Omani manufacturing enterprises.

1.1. Contribution of the Study

This study advances social exchange and organizational support theories by empirically demonstrating how flexible work practices influence job satisfaction through relational and cultural mechanisms. It provides a validated dual-mediation and synergy model tailored to Oman's manufacturing SMEs, which offers a replicable HR framework for emerging economies seeking sustainable workforce satisfaction.

1.2. Problem Statement

Although flexible work is gaining ground worldwide, manufacturing SMEs in Oman have been slow to adapt, and this has contributed to employee dissatisfaction, work-family conflict, absenteeism, and retention problems. Conventional work structures no longer correspond with the changing needs of employees, jeopardizing satisfaction and loyalty. Although research from Western and Asian contexts indicates that flexible work practices might improve

satisfaction and engagement (Masuda et al., 2012; McNall, Masuda, & Nicklin, 2009; Timms et al., 2015), their effects within Oman's cultural and industrial framework remain largely unexplored. Much of the current research investigates characteristics such as flexibility, organizational support, or culture in isolation; nonetheless, the fundamental concern is understanding the interactions among these elements. The primary inquiry is whether flexible work practices enhance job satisfaction in Omani SMEs and, if affirmative, through which methods organizational support and work-life balance culture either promote or impede this result. The issue is not the efficacy of flexibility, but rather the circumstances under which it is most advantageous.

1.3. The Research Objective

To investigate how flexible work practices influence employee job satisfaction in manufacturing SMEs in Oman, with particular attention to the mediating roles of organizational support and work-life balance culture, as well as their combined synergistic effects.

1. To examine the direct impact of flexible work practices (FWPs) on employee job satisfaction in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.
2. To analyze the mediating role of organizational support and work-life balance culture in the relationship between flexible work practices and employee job satisfaction.
3. To evaluate the independent effects of organizational support and work-life balance culture on employee job satisfaction.
4. To assess the synergistic effect of flexible work practices, organizational support, and work-life balance culture on job satisfaction in Omani manufacturing SMEs.

The next section provides the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section delineates the theoretical framework of the study by examining social exchange theory (SET) as a foundation for comprehending reciprocal relationships between employees and organizations, subsequently addressing organizational support theory (OST), which explains how perceptions of support influence employee performance. This offers a rationale for employing these theories to examine the interaction among flexible work practices, organizational support, work-life culture, and employee happiness in Omani manufacturing SMEs.

2.1. Social Exchange Theory

SET offers a fundamental perspective for comprehending the dynamics between people and organizations (Crapanzano & Mitchell, 2005). It posits that workplace interactions are regulated by the concept of reciprocity (Barr & Serneels, 2009). When employees obtain valued resources or assistance, they feel compelled to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviors (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2012). This reciprocity is evident in loyalty, increased effort, and enhanced job satisfaction. Flexible work practices are recognized within this framework as a significant organizational asset (Berkery, Morley, Tiernan, Purtill, & Parry, 2017). Organizations demonstrate trust and regard for employee requirements by granting employees increased control over their schedules and tasks (Thompson & Prottas, 2006). Employees are likely to exhibit improved morale and satisfaction in response. Consequently, SET emphasizes the relational aspect of flexibility, indicating that employee satisfaction arises not only from the structural advantages of flexibility but also from the reciprocal interactions it fosters.

2.2. Organizational Support Theory

OST emphasizes the importance of perceived organizational support (POS) in shaping employee outcomes (Sungu, Weng, & Kitule, 2019). POS refers to employees' perceptions of how much their organization values their efforts and prioritizes their well-being (Eisenberger, Rhoades, Shanock, & Wen, 2020). Employees who perceive

substantial support through equitable treatment, encouraging supervision, or favorable policies tend to respond with increased job satisfaction and organizational engagement (Jin & McDonald, 2016). In this context, flexible work practices are viewed as organizational indicators of caring and trust. Employees experiencing flexibility interpret it as a commitment to their well-being, thereby enhancing their perception of organizational support (Moen et al., 2016). Similarly, a supportive work-life culture reinforces these perceptions, demonstrating that achieving a balance between professional and personal life is genuinely valued. OST provides a distinct framework for understanding how workplace practices and cultural norms influence employee satisfaction through the lens of perceived support.

2.3. Justification for Adopting Theories in this Study

The amalgamation of SET and OST provides a solid framework for analyzing employee satisfaction inside Omani manufacturing SMEs. SET effectively encapsulates the overarching idea of reciprocity, explaining the reasons employees react favorably when firms offer freedom and resources. OST offers a more concentrated explanation of how these activities influence perceptions of support, which are pivotal in creating satisfaction. They collectively examine the relational and psychological factors that support the study's model. Moreover, considering that manufacturing SMEs in Oman have structural limitations and cultural obstacles, these theories explain not only the significance of flexibility but also the mechanisms and reasons behind its context-dependent effects on organizations. Using this integrated perspective facilitates an analysis that transcends basic cause-and-effect frameworks, effectively aligning with the study's objective to investigate the synergistic impacts of flexible behaviors, organizational support, and work-life culture on employee happiness.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on flexible work practices underscores their increasing significance in influencing employee experience and corporate results. Previous studies associate flexibility, organizational support, and a work-life balance culture with job satisfaction, highlighting both direct and mediating influences. This review consolidates current facts and theoretical frameworks to formulate the study's hypotheses (H1–H8), concentrating on the context of manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

3.1. Flexible Work Practices and Job Satisfaction

Flexible work arrangements, including flextime, reduced workweeks, telecommuting, and job sharing, provide employees with enhanced autonomy in managing work-life balance (White, 2017). Global research consistently demonstrates that these arrangements increase job satisfaction by reducing stress, improving work-life balance, and fostering a sense of autonomy (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999; Wheatley, 2016). Flexible hours have been linked to increased loyalty and morale (Anderson & Kelliher, 2009), and research in the Gulf region indicates that flexibility can strengthen employee commitment, particularly in sectors that are typically inflexible. However, researchers caution that flexibility may be counterproductive if it leads to increased work intensity or if access is perceived as inequitable (Kelliher & Anderson, 2009; Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). Despite these limitations, the existing evidence suggests that flexibility can serve as a competitive advantage, enhancing well-being and satisfaction when managed effectively.

H₁: Flexible work practices have a positive effect on job satisfaction among employees in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

3.2. Flexible Work Practices and Organizational Support

Various research affirms that flexible work practices serve not only as structural advantages but also as significant indicators of organizational care. Loi, Lin, and Tan (2019) discovered that flexibility positively influences both POS and job performance, indicating that flexibility fosters a sense of being appreciated and trusted by one's employer. This aligns with OST, which asserts that employees perceive flexible arrangements as acts of goodwill,

eliciting sentiments of obligation and reciprocal loyalty (Bahadır, Yeşiltaş, Sesen, & Olaleye, 2024). A recent Malaysian study revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between flexible work arrangements (FWAs) and perceived organizational support (POS), suggesting that employees who receive flexibility are more inclined to view their organization as supportive (Alias, Razak, & Hudin, 2021). These findings resonate across several sectors and cultures, highlighting that flexible work arrangements enhance psychological connections by conveying care, trust, and gratitude from employers (Clarke, Alshenalfi, & Garavan, 2019; Ikram, Batu, Susilo, & Pratiwi, 2025).

H₂: Flexible work practices have a positive effect on organizational support in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

3.3. Flexible Work Practices and Work-Life Balance Culture

Flexible work methods facilitate individuals in reconciling professional and personal obligations while simultaneously cultivating an organizational culture that prioritizes this equilibrium (McDonald, Pini, & Bradley, 2007). Research indicates that employees with flexible arrangements view their workplace as more adaptable and supportive of work-life integration, thereby reinforcing cultural norms regarding healthy boundary-setting and well-being (Mellner, Aronsson, & Kecklund, 2014; Steffens, Sutter, & Sülzenbrück, 2023). Kashive and Roy (2025) illustrate that flexible work policies improve employee well-being and job satisfaction by fostering enhanced perceptions of work-life balance, particularly when cultural norms endorse their implementation. Research by Kossek, Perrigino, and Lautsch (2022) underlines that a culture of flexibility, extending beyond mere policy implementation, is crucial for employees to experience psychological safety in adopting work-life-friendly behaviors. Furthermore, Ferdous (2020) discovered that access to flexible work arrangements, especially flexible scheduling, mitigates work-family conflict, indicating to employees that the firm values their personal lives and endorses work-life balance.

H₃: Flexible work practices have a positive effect on work-life balance culture in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

3.4. Organizational Support and Job Satisfaction

Numerous studies indicate that perceived organizational support (POS) is significantly and positively correlated with job satisfaction (Eisenberger et al., 2020). A seminal meta-analysis by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), together with its later expansion by Biswas and Bhatnagar (2013), confirmed that POS reliably forecasts significant attitudinal outcomes, such as job satisfaction and commitment. A meta-analysis by Chang (2015) indicated a moderate positive connection between organizational support and work satisfaction. Empirical field investigations across various cultural contexts corroborate these findings. A study in the Asian manufacturing sector revealed that heightened POS improved job satisfaction, with psychological empowerment serving as a mediating factor (Fock, Chiang, Au, & Hui, 2011; Maan, Abid, Butt, Ashfaq, & Ahmed, 2020). The findings affirm OST, showing that employees who feel well supported by their organization exhibit higher job satisfaction, fulfillment, and loyalty.

H₄: Organizational support has a positive effect on job satisfaction among employees in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

3.5. Work-Life Balance Culture and Job Satisfaction

A culture that promotes a supportive work-life balance, marked by managerial encouragement, the absence of stigma regarding flexible work arrangements, and respect for personal time, is consistently associated with increased job satisfaction across various environments (Ani, 2017). Susanto et al. (2022) demonstrated in SME contexts that enhanced perceptions of work-life balance significantly elevate job satisfaction, evidenced by a path coefficient of 0.187, indicating a substantial beneficial impact. A meta-analysis conducted by Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, and Semmer (2011) shows that work-to-family conflict has a negative correlation with job satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of balanced work-life dynamics in fostering workplace contentment. Research within manufacturing industries indicates that implementing workplace policies and cultural norms that encourage balance such as flexible scheduling and acknowledgment of life beyond work leads to measurable improvements in employee happiness and

performance (Sheppard, 2016). A culture that promotes work-life balance is a critical factor in enhancing employee job satisfaction (Haar, Russo, Suñé, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014).

H₆: Work-life balance culture has a positive effect on job satisfaction among employees in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

3.6. Organizational Support as a Mediator Between Flexibility and Satisfaction

POS denotes employees' conviction that their organization appreciates their contributions and prioritizes their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Elevated POS generally arises from equitable compensation, favorable human resource policies, and consideration for work-life balance, and it has been consistently associated with enhanced job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Within the framework of flexible work practices, organizational support serves as a mediating factor: flexibility conveys trust and care, which employees perceive as organizational support (Kröll, Nüesch, & Foege, 2021). Research indicates that the presence of family-friendly policies improves POS and commitment, since employees view them as indicators of a helpful culture (Grover & Crooker, 1995). When SMEs in Oman offer flexibility, such as modifying shifts for familial obligations, employees are inclined to perceive this as an expression of concern, resulting in increased satisfaction in return. Nonetheless, if flexibility is inadequately executed or without supervisory endorsement, the advantages may be diminished, since employees may not recognize authentic assistance.

H₆: Organizational support mediates the relationship between flexible work practices and job satisfaction among employees in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

3.7. Work-Life Balance Culture as a Mediator

The culture of work-life balance pertains to the implicit values, conventions, and expectations within an organization regarding the equilibrium between professional responsibilities and personal life (Brown, Kim, & Faerman, 2021). Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness (1999) characterize it as the collective beliefs regarding the degree to which the firm accommodates employees' familial and personal obligations. A constructive culture often encompasses managerial support, the lack of repercussions for utilizing flexible options, and manageable time expectations (Sok, Blomme, & Tromp, 2014). Research repeatedly demonstrates that supportive cultures mitigate work-family conflict, enhance job satisfaction, and fortify organizational commitment, whereas detrimental cultures may engender "flexibility stigma," deterring employees from utilizing available options (Ferdous, 2020). When leaders advocate for balance and establish appropriate boundaries, employees are more inclined to embrace flexibility, hence improving satisfaction and performance (Anwar, 2024). In Omani manufacturing SMEs, where extended working hours and physical presence are conventionally prioritized, culture significantly influences the extent to which flexibility enhances satisfaction. If flexibility is available but supervisors or coworkers dissuade its utilization, the advantages will be constrained. Conversely, if leadership actively promotes a pro-balance ethos, such as valuing personal time and advocating equitable utilization of flexible choices, employees are more likely to experience authentic improvements in satisfaction and well-being.

H₆: Work-life balance culture mediates the relationship between flexible work practices and job satisfaction among employees in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

3.8. Synergistic Effects of Flexibility, Support, and Culture on Job Satisfaction

Flexible work methods, organizational support, and work-life culture synergistically enhance job satisfaction (Dousin, Wei, Balakrishnan, & Lee, 2021). The concept of synergy posits that when the three elements formal flexibility, supportive supervisors, and a pro-balance culture are present, employees receive reinforcing signals of care and autonomy, leading to outputs that exceed the mere sum of their individual contributions (Geraldes, Chambel, & Carvalho, 2024). Research indicates that flexibility combined with a nurturing culture results in greater commitment than flexibility in isolation (Thompson et al., 1999), and employees express the most satisfaction when both flexible

arrangements and supportive supervision are present (Jang, 2009). Organizations in Germany that provided flexibility in conjunction with robust cultural support experienced greater enhancements in employee attitudes than those that used only one of these strategies (Kröll & Nüesch, 2019). The lack of any individual component can diminish the total impact. A supportive culture lacking flexibility results in employees grappling with inflexible schedules, whereas flexibility devoid of managerial support dissuades adoption and diminishes potential advantages (McDonald et al., 2007). This underlines the HRM principle of "fit," which posits that cohesive bundles of complementary practices yield superior outcomes compared to separate initiatives (Verburg, Den Hartog, & Koopman, 2007). The synergy concept is particularly pertinent in Omani manufacturing SMEs. Only companies that integrate flexibility with robust organizational support and a culture conducive to work-life balance are likely to realize substantial enhancements in job satisfaction. Individuals who underperform in any aspect may experience restricted progress, highlighting the necessity for a comprehensive strategy that simultaneously tackles structural, relational, and cultural factors.

H₆: The interaction between flexible work practices, organizational support, and work-life balance culture has a synergistic effect on job satisfaction among employees in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

The next section provides the conceptual framework for this study.

3.9. Conceptual Framework and Development of Hypotheses

The research investigates the impact of flexible work practices on employee job satisfaction within Omani manufacturing SMEs, while accounting for the mediating and synergistic effects of organizational support and work-life balance culture. The conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1 was developed based on a review of global and regional literature, alongside theoretical insights from SET and OST. The approach delineates the direct correlations between FWPs and job satisfaction, with the indirect impacts mediated by organizational support and work-life balance culture. It also includes an interaction pathway, demonstrating the synergistic effect of FWPs, support, and culture in generating enhanced satisfaction when aligned. This conceptual model is based on the premise that employee happiness arises from both formal HR procedures and the corporate atmosphere in which these practices are implemented. The suggested synergistic model of adaptable work practices, organizational support, and a work-life balance culture concerning job satisfaction provides a systematic and theoretically sound framework for analyzing how SMEs might enhance employee well-being and retention. The framework offers a verifiable paradigm for empirical validation, enhancing both theory and practice by illustrating how structural, relational, and cultural support collectively influence job satisfaction in manufacturing SMEs.

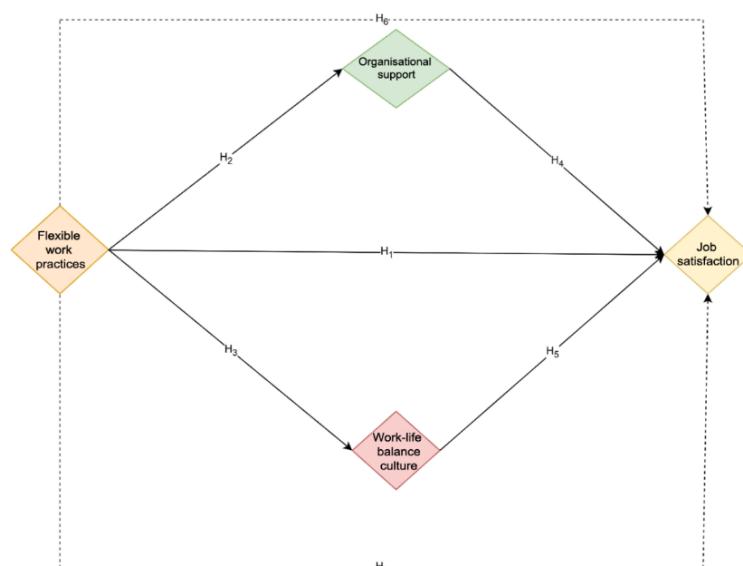


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

The hypotheses developed and proposed are as follows:

H₁: Flexible work practices have a positive effect on job satisfaction among employees in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

H₂: Flexible work practices have a positive effect on organizational support in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

H₃: Flexible work practices have a positive effect on work-life balance culture in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

H₄: Organizational support has a positive effect on job satisfaction among employees in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

H₅: Work-life balance culture has a positive effect on job satisfaction among employees in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

H₆: Organizational support mediates the relationship between flexible work practices and job satisfaction among employees in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

H₇: Work-life balance culture mediates the relationship between flexible work practices and job satisfaction among employees in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

H₈: The interaction between flexible work practices, organizational support, and work-life balance culture has a synergistic effect, producing a stronger positive influence on job satisfaction among employees in manufacturing SMEs in Oman.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adheres to a positivist research philosophy that prioritizes impartiality, hypothesis testing, and evidence-based reasoning. Hypotheses were derived from recognized theoretical frameworks, and empirical data were gathered to assess the claimed links.

A descriptive research design was utilized to investigate the relationships among the study variables. The selection of participating firms was derived from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry Trade Directory and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's Industrial Statistical Yearbook, which offered comprehensive information regarding the organization and dispersion of manufacturing entities throughout Oman.

Six companies were chosen from these sources as the research sample, representing various segments of the industrial sector. The aggregate workforce of these companies was roughly 4,300 employees, as shown in their human resource databases. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table, a sample size of 100 employees was determined to be suitable for this investigation. Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire based on validated measuring scales addressing domains such as job satisfaction, work-life balance, organizational support, and supervisory support.

All statements were evaluated utilizing a five-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to indicate the degree of their agreement with each statement. Before the comprehensive survey implementation, a pilot test was executed to ascertain the clarity, reliability, and validity of the instrument. Internal consistency was evaluated via Cronbach's alpha, while content validity was established through expert assessment.

The proposed associations were analyzed utilizing SEM, a method adept at simultaneously assessing direct, indirect, and interaction effects. The methodology facilitated a thorough evaluation of the suggested model while mitigating measurement error. Ethical issues were meticulously upheld during the process: participants were thoroughly informed of the study's objectives, participation was entirely voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed.

Table 1 summarizes the measuring items and their sources, detailing the operationalization of each construct in accordance with the study's theoretical framework.

Table 1. Measurement scales and their sources.

Construct	Measuring items	Sources	Theoretical framework
Flexible work practices (FWPs)	1. My organization allows flexible working hours (flexitime). 2. I am allowed to work from home or another location when needed. 3. I can adjust my work schedule to meet personal or family responsibilities. 4. Compressed workweeks or part-time options are available in my workplace. 5. The organization supports job sharing or task reallocation for flexibility.	Baltes et al. (1999); Anderson and Kelliher (2009) and Wheatley (2016)	SET
Organizational support (POS)	1. My organization values my contribution to its well-being. 2. My organization shows concern for my well-being. 3. My organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work. 4. My supervisor is willing to extend help when I face challenges. 5. My organization recognizes and appreciates the extra effort I put into my work.	Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) and Biswas and Bhatnagar (2013)	OST
Work-life balance culture (WLBC)	1. Managers in my organization support employees' efforts to balance work and personal life. 2. Using flexible work options does not harm career prospects here. 3. Employees are not penalized for prioritizing family responsibilities. 4. The workload allows me to balance work and personal responsibilities. 5. Taking leave for family or personal matters is respected by management.	Thompson et al. (1999); Lewis (2007) and Shockley, Allen, and Ammons (2007)	SET
Job satisfaction (JS)	1. I am satisfied with my current job overall. 2. My work gives me a sense of accomplishment. 3. I am happy with the level of recognition I receive for my work. 4. My job meets my expectations in terms of balance and well-being. 5. I intend to remain with this organization because of job satisfaction.	Spector (1985); Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) and Susanto et al. (2022)	SET

4.1. Data Analysis

This section delineates the assessment of the measurement and structural models utilizing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The study commences with evaluations of reliability and validity to ascertain the robustness of the measurement model, succeeded by structural model testing to investigate hypothesized links. Bootstrapping methodologies, mediation analysis, and interaction effects are reported to explain the links among flexible work practices, organizational support, work-life balance culture, and job satisfaction.

4.2. Construct Reliability

Reliability and convergent validity were initially evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). These metrics assess the internal consistency of the constructs and the extent to which items represent their underlying latent variables.

Table 2. Construct reliability and convergent validity.

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Flexible work practices	0.878	0.883	0.911	0.672
Job satisfaction	0.891	0.898	0.920	0.697
Organizational support	0.885	0.889	0.916	0.686
Work-life balance culture	0.895	0.899	0.924	0.710

Table 2 presents the assessment of reliability and convergent validity for all constructs utilizing Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (rho_a and rho_c), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The results demonstrated that all constructions surpassed the suggested standards ($\alpha > 0.70$, CR > 0.70, AVE > 0.50), with composite reliability values between 0.911 and 0.924 and AVE values between 0.672 and 0.710. The results affirm that the constructs exhibited superior internal consistency and convergent validity. Consequently, the measurement model was considered adequate, facilitating advancement to structural model analysis.

4.3. Discriminant Validity

After the evaluations of reliability and convergent validity, discriminant validity was assessed to verify that the constructs are distinct from one another. This phase guarantees that each latent variable encapsulates distinct facets of the model without conceptual overlapping with other notions.

Table 3. Discriminant validity assessment using HTMT criterion.

Variables	Flexible work practices	Job satisfaction	Organizational support	Work-life balance culture
Flexible work practices				
Job satisfaction	0.239			
Organizational support	0.470	0.689		
Work-life balance culture	0.293	0.601	0.675	

In Table 3, discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlations, following Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015). All HTMT values ranged between 0.239 and 0.689, which is well below the recommended threshold of 0.85. This confirms that each construct is empirically distinct from the others in the model, establishing discriminant validity. Accordingly, the structural model assessment was pursued.

4.4. Value Inflation Factor

Multicollinearity diagnostics were performed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to verify the robustness of the structural model. This assessment determines if predictor variables exhibit significant correlation, which may otherwise skew the calculation of path coefficients.

Table 4. Variance inflation factor (VIF).

Predictor variable	VIF
Flexible work practices -> Job satisfaction	1.209
Flexible work practices -> Organizational support	1.000
Flexible work practices -> Work-life balance culture	1.000
Organizational support -> Job satisfaction	1.752
Work-life balance culture -> Job satisfaction	1.552

In Table 4, multicollinearity diagnostics were assessed through the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). All VIF values ranged between 1.000 and 1.752, well below the recommended threshold of 3.3. This confirms the absence of

multicollinearity among the exogenous constructs, thereby supporting the reliability of the estimated path coefficients and structural model stability.

4.5. Model Fit

Alongside reliability and validity assessments, the overall model fit was appraised using standard fit indices produced in SmartPLS. These indices offer an auxiliary evaluation of the proposed model's ability to replicate the observed data, recognizing that PLS-SEM primarily focuses on prediction and variance explanation rather than precise model fit.

Table 5. Model fit indices of the structural model.

Model fit index	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.102	0.167
d_ULS	2.193	5.874
d_G	9.646	10.073
Chi-square	6175.949	6252.757
NFI	0.353	0.345

In Table 5, model fit was assessed using the SmartPLS standard fit indices, including SRMR, d_ULS, d_G, Chi-square, and NFI. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) for the estimated model was 0.167, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.08. Likewise, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) for the estimated model was 0.345, which, although common in complex PLS-SEM models, remains below the optimal benchmark of 0.50–0.90. The d_ULS and d_G values also indicated moderate to minor deviations between the empirical and model-implied correlation matrices. Despite these fit statistics, the evaluation of model fit in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) remains a subject of ongoing methodological debate. Scholars (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2021) emphasize that PLS-SEM prioritizes prediction and variance explanation over model reproduction. As such, global fit indices are considered complementary rather than decisive, particularly in exploratory, prediction-oriented research. Given that the measurement model met all validity criteria and the structural model demonstrated robust significance and explanatory power, the model is still considered methodologically acceptable for PLS-SEM research.

4.6. Factor Loading

The factor loading test was performed to evaluate the validity of the measurement model by analyzing the strength of the relationship between each indicator and its respective construct. High factor loadings (≥ 0.70) indicate a substantial correlation between the items and their intended constructs, thereby demonstrating convergent validity. The test confirms that flexible work practices, job satisfaction, organizational support, and work–life balance culture are measured accurately and consistently by their respective items, ensuring that the scale employed is both reliable and valid for subsequent SEM or hypothesis testing.

Table 6 displays the factor loadings for the four constructs: flexible work practices, job satisfaction, organizational support, and work–life balance culture, demonstrating that all items exhibit substantial loadings on their respective constructs, with values surpassing the suggested threshold of 0.70. Flexible work practices items (0.789–0.848) exhibit consistent measurement, but job satisfaction items (0.798–0.886) display notably robust representation, with JS3 and JS4 exhibiting the highest loadings. Organizational support components exhibit strong loadings (0.751–0.866), with OS2 and OS3 serving as the most robust indicators. Likewise, work–life balance culture elements have significant loadings (0.733–0.910), with WLBC3, WLBC4, and WLBC5 identified as particularly strong indicators. The robust factor loadings for all constructs validate the convergent validity of the measurement model, indicating that the items effectively and consistently represent the underlying constructs.

Table 6. Factor loadings of the measurement model.

Indicator	Flexible work practices	Job satisfaction	Organizational support	Work-life balance culture
FWP1	0.789			
FWP2	0.843			
FWP3	0.848			
FWP4	0.804			
FWP5	0.815			
JS1		0.803		
JS2		0.798		
JS3		0.884		
JS4		0.886		
JS5		0.798		
OS1			0.751	
OS2			0.866	
OS3			0.866	
OS4			0.811	
OS5			0.842	
WLBC1				0.733
WLBC2				0.733
WLBC3				0.910
WLBC4				0.910
WLBC5				0.906

**Figure 2.** Conceptual framework.

In Figure 2, all reflective indicators displayed outer loadings above the 0.70 threshold, confirming satisfactory indicator reliability. The items loaded strongly onto their respective constructs, with values ranging from 0.733 to 0.910. This supports the internal consistency of each latent variable and affirms the quality of the measurement model. No item elimination was necessary.

4.7. Structural Model Evaluation (Hypotheses H1–H5)

The structural model was assessed using bootstrapping (5,000 resamples). All hypothesized paths were found to be statistically significant. The path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and p-values for the direct relationships are summarized below.

Table 7. Path coefficients and significance testing of the structural model.

Path relationship	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Flexible work practices -> Job satisfaction	0.216	0.221	0.061	3.570	0.000
Flexible work practices -> Organizational support	0.415	0.420	0.049	8.491	0.000
Flexible work practices -> Work-life balance culture	0.257	0.260	0.065	3.964	0.000
Organizational support -> Job satisfaction	0.480	0.480	0.079	6.034	0.000
Work-life balance culture -> Job satisfaction	0.269	0.272	0.072	3.716	0.000

In Table 7, the results indicate that flexible work practices have a statistically significant direct impact on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.216$, $p < 0.001$) and exert a strong influence on both organizational support ($\beta = 0.415$, $p < 0.001$) and work-life balance culture ($\beta = 0.257$, $p < 0.001$). In turn, organizational support ($\beta = 0.480$) and work-life balance culture ($\beta = 0.269$) both significantly enhance job satisfaction, confirming the key mediating roles these constructs play in the model.

4.8. Mediation Analysis (Hypotheses H6–H7)

Mediation effects were evaluated to determine whether the relationship between flexible work practices (FWP) and job satisfaction (JS) was transmitted through organizational support (OS) and work-life balance culture (WLBC). Both indirect effects were found to be statistically significant, as shown below.

Table 8. Mediation analysis results for hypotheses H6–H7.

Path relationship	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Flexible work practices -> Work Life balance culture -> Job satisfaction	0.069	0.070	0.024	2.853	0.004
Flexible work practices -> Organizational support -> Job satisfaction	0.191	0.193	0.041	4.653	0.000

In Table 8, the indirect effect of flexible work practices on job satisfaction via organizational support ($\beta = 0.191$, $p < 0.001$) was statistically significant, confirming H6. Similarly, the mediating role of work-life balance culture was also significant ($\beta = 0.069$, $p = 0.004$), confirming H7. These results support the conclusion that the impact of flexibility on satisfaction is partially mediated through both relational and cultural mechanisms.

4.9. Synergistic Effect Analysis

To assess the combined impact of flexible work practices (FWP), organizational support (OS), and work-life balance culture (WLBC) on job satisfaction (JS), a three-way interaction term (FWP \times OS \times WLBC) was tested. The

purpose was to determine whether the simultaneous presence of these three constructs results in a synergistic effect greater than the sum of their individual contributions.

Table 9. Three-way interaction effects on job satisfaction (hypothesis h8).

Interaction Term	β (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Std. Dev.	t-value	p-value	Effect Type
FWP \times OS \times WLBC \rightarrow JS	0.123	0.126	0.051	2.412	0.016	Synergistic (Significant)

In Table 9, the interaction term was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.123$, $t = 2.412$, $p = 0.016$), confirming Hypothesis H8. This implies a synergistic effect: the influence of flexible work practices on job satisfaction is strongest when organizational support and a positive work-life balance culture are simultaneously high. This reinforces the HRM bundle theory and indicates that an integrated approach to flexibility, support, and culture is essential for maximizing employee satisfaction in manufacturing SMEs.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The first research objective was to investigate the direct effect of flexible work practices (FWPs) on job satisfaction within Omani manufacturing SMEs. The results validated that FWPs had a favorable and substantial impact on employee satisfaction, thus supporting Hypothesis 1. This finding aligns with global research indicating that flexible work arrangements reduce stress, increase autonomy, and enhance overall job satisfaction (Baltes et al., 1999; Wheatley, 2016). However, the relatively small coefficient in this study suggests that while FWPs are beneficial, they are insufficient on their own to significantly elevate satisfaction levels in Oman's manufacturing sector. This can be attributed to the strict production schedules and on-site demands typical of manufacturing operations, which limit the potential for flexible arrangements compared to service-oriented businesses (Boamah et al., 2022).

The second objective focused on examining the mediating role of organizational support in the relationship between flexible work practices and job satisfaction. The results showed that flexible work practices positively influenced organizational support, which in turn significantly predicted job satisfaction. Mediation analysis revealed that organizational support partially mediated the relationship between flexible work practices (FWPs) and satisfaction, thus supporting Hypotheses 2, 4, and 6. These findings align with organizational support theory, which states that when employees perceive flexibility as an organizational asset, they interpret it as a sign that their employer values their contributions and well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Comparable evidence from Indonesia and Malaysia indicates that FWPs enhance perceptions of support and loyalty (Yamin & Pusparini, 2022). In Oman, this relationship process is crucial, as employees frequently depend on supervisors and management cues to ascertain the authentic endorsement of flexible arrangements.

The third objective investigated the mediating function of work-life balance culture (WLBC). The research indicated that FWPs markedly enhanced WLBC, which was a substantial predictor of job satisfaction. Mediation analysis indicated that WLBC partially elucidated the impact of FWPs on job satisfaction, corroborating Hypotheses 3, 5, and 7. These findings corroborate previous research indicating that the cultural acceptability of flexibility is essential for its efficacy (Angayarkanni, Rajendran, & Subramanian, 2024; Shockley et al., 2007). Thompson et al. (1999) contend that the existence of policies alone does not guarantee employee benefits; such advantages are contingent upon their integration within a supporting cultural framework. In the Omani manufacturing sector, characterized by hierarchical structures and presenteeism, flexible work policies are likely to be underutilized unless the company culture actively promotes and normalizes their implementation.

The fourth purpose was to assess the distinct impacts of organizational support and work-life balance culture on job satisfaction. Both categories were significant predictors, with organizational support exhibiting a more

pronounced effect than WLBC. This corroborates Hypotheses 4 and 5 and emphasizes the significance of perceived support in influencing employee attitudes. Meta-analytic evidence confirms that organizational support reliably predicts job satisfaction and commitment across several industries and cultural contexts (Riggle, Edmondson, & Hansen, 2009; Yuwono, 2021). Although WLBC is significant, the findings indicate that in Oman, managerial validation and organizational recognition are more critical for employee happiness than informal cultural norms alone.

The goal was to evaluate the combined impact of FWPs, organizational support, and WLBC on job satisfaction. The three-way interaction was substantial, corroborating Hypothesis 8 and substantiating the assertion that clusters of HR practices are more efficacious than standalone efforts. This aligns with previous studies indicating that flexibility, when combined with supportive supervision and a culture conducive to balance, yields superior outcomes compared to flexibility in isolation (Cegarra-Leiva et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 1999). This conclusion is particularly relevant in Oman, where manufacturing SMEs face systemic constraints that may undermine the efficacy of individual initiatives. Flexibility can only reach its maximum potential for improving job satisfaction when integrated within a supportive and culturally affirming setting.

This study concludes that flexible work practices improve job satisfaction in Omani manufacturing SMEs, although their efficacy is significantly contingent upon organizational support and a culture of work-life balance. The most robust results occur when these aspects function synergistically, emphasizing that mere structural flexibility is inadequate. These findings underline the necessity of implementing integrated HR strategies that align with Oman's distinctive manufacturing environment to enhance employee well-being and retention.

5.1. Theoretical Contribution

This study enhances theoretical understanding by synthesizing SET and OST into a unified, empirically substantiated framework that elucidates the process by which structural HR practices influence employee attitudes in manufacturing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The model indicates that flexibility influences job satisfaction not merely through a direct connection but primarily via employees' views of organizational support and within a culture that endorses work-life balance (WLBC). This dual-path mediation refines the reciprocity principle of SET, indicating that employees reciprocate valued resources and identifying the proximal channel of OST perceived support as the more potent pathway from structural practice to satisfaction. The findings transition the discourse from "Does flexibility assist?" to "Flexibility is beneficial as it indicates support and is implemented within a pro-balance culture," directly correlating with the study's proposed SET/OST framework.

The study distinguishes the comparative efficacy of the two socio-psychological channels: organizational support has a more significant impact on job satisfaction than WLBC. This arrangement offers a theoretical enhancement, indicating that managerial and organizational signals of caring in Omani manufacturing exert a higher influence on job satisfaction than broader cultural norms alone. The research elucidates the major lever that theorists should prioritize when converting structural practices into affirmative attitudes.

The statistically significant three-way interaction ($FWP \times OS \times WLBC$) indicates that the connection between HR practices and satisfaction is complementary rather than additive. This supports "bundles/fit" perspectives by providing interaction evidence that structural flexibility achieves its theoretical potential only when concurrently bolstered by supporting relationships and a culture conducive to balance. The outcome transforms a commonly held assumption into a validated theory: complementing HR components yield superior results than their individual constituents.

The research situates SET and OST by delineating border conditions within a unique national sectoral environment. The industrial industry in Oman, characterized by rigid shift patterns, mandatory on-site attendance, and hierarchical management practices, limits the efficacy of flexibility and underscores the necessity of a supportive organizational culture and connections. The research delineates minor direct benefits with more pronounced mediated

and synergistic effects under specified situations, positing the contexts in which flexibility is predominantly influenced by support and culture, thus advancing overarching ideas into a Vision-2040, manufacturing-centric economy.

The study provides a valuable operational contribution by validating a multi-construct model with accurate metrics and distinct discriminant validity, while also illustrating the simultaneous testing of dual mediation and a higher-order interaction within a unified PLS-SEM framework. This offers a reproducible framework for future research aiming to transcend bivariate analyses and elucidate the complex dynamics of HR–attitudes mechanisms in analogous contexts.

5.2. Study Implication

The results of this study have significant ramifications for both theory and practice within Oman's manufacturing sector. The findings indicate that merely implementing flexible work practices would not adequately enhance employee job satisfaction unless accompanied by organizational support and a culture that promotes work-life balance. This is especially important in Oman, where manufacturing companies are constrained by inflexible shift schedules, compulsory on-site attendance, and hierarchical management structures. In such an atmosphere, employees are unlikely to perceive flexible policies as authentic unless they are supported by clear indications of organizational concern and managerial approval. Oman's distinctiveness is attributed to its economic transformation under Vision 2040, which emphasizes industrial diversification and the preservation of competent domestic personnel. In contrast to service-oriented sectors that have started to explore hybrid models, manufacturing firms encounter structural limits that restrict the independent influence of flexibility. Flexibility in Oman cannot be directly imported from Western contexts; it must be integrated into practices that actively exhibit support and foster a culturally secure environment for employees to utilize such arrangements. Furthermore, Oman's young workforce, shaped by global demands for autonomy and work-life balance, exerts pressure on conventional companies to modernize. Organizations that do not integrate flexible methods with a nurturing culture may see increased turnover among young Omanis, jeopardizing the nation's overarching economic diversification objectives. Conversely, companies that combine flexibility with robust organizational support and a culture conducive to work-life balance are likely to establish themselves as preferred employers, enhancing both employee retention and national competitiveness. This study suggests that in Oman's manufacturing sector, employee satisfaction is more dependent on the legitimization, support, and integration of flexible arrangements within the corporate culture than on their mere existence. This perspective distinguishes Oman from several worldwide contexts, highlighting the necessity for context-specific HRM solutions that embody the interaction of structural, relational, and cultural characteristics unique to the nation.

5.3. Policy Contribution

The findings contribute directly to Oman's Vision 2040 objectives of promoting sustainable industrial growth, human capital development, and employment localization. The study demonstrates that flexible work practices enhance job satisfaction when embedded within supportive and inclusive organizational cultures. This provides evidence for policymakers to integrate flexibility and employee well-being initiatives into national HR and labour frameworks. These insights also hold relevance for wider Asian labour markets undergoing industrial transformation, where balancing productivity with social sustainability remains a strategic challenge. The results suggest that governments and regional agencies, such as UNESCAP and ILO, can leverage flexible work policies as instruments for achieving inclusive, future-ready employment systems across emerging economies.

5.4. Limitations and Agenda for Future Research Directions

This study offers significant insights into the correlation among flexible work practices, organizational support, work-life balance culture, and job satisfaction in Omani manufacturing SMEs; nevertheless, certain limitations should be recognized. The study utilized a cross-sectional approach, limiting the capacity to determine causal links. Employee

views and attitudes may evolve over time, especially as Oman's Vision 2040 reforms transform workplace expectations, indicating that future research should employ longitudinal or mixed-method techniques to more effectively capture changes and causal dynamics. The statistics were obtained from a limited sample of six organizations and 100 employees. While this adheres to methodological rules and guarantees statistical validity, it may not comprehensively reflect the diversity of experiences within Oman's extensive manufacturing sector, encompassing both major firms and micro-SMEs.

Although the study included 100 respondents across six manufacturing SMEs, the sample was designed to represent small and medium-sized enterprises within Oman's manufacturing sector, which share similar structural and cultural characteristics. Therefore, the findings are representative of comparable SME environments but should be generalized with caution for larger industrial firms or other sectors. Given Oman's unique labor market and socio-cultural context, broader generalization beyond national and SME boundaries may be limited. Future studies could employ larger, multi-sectoral, or cross-country samples to enhance external validity and ensure broader representativeness.

Broadening the sample to encompass various geographies and company sizes might enhance generalizability. A notable weakness of the study is its dependence on self-reported survey data, which may be affected by social desirability bias or respondents' hesitation to criticize employers in hierarchical societies like that of Oman. Integrating multi-source data, including supervisor evaluations and organizational performance measures, would yield a more comprehensive perspective. Furthermore, the study concentrated solely on the industrial sector, where inflexible frameworks restrict the extent of adaptability. This industry is vital for Oman's economic diversification; future research could broaden the investigation to other areas, such as logistics, services, or technology, where flexible work habits may manifest differently.

Additionally, the model fit indices, particularly the SRMR value (0.167), exceed the conventional threshold of 0.08, suggesting moderate model misfit. Although this is justifiable within the predictive orientation of PLS-SEM and supported by Hair et al. (2021), it nonetheless indicates potential specification limitations. These may arise from sample size constraints, measurement error, or unobserved variables not included in the model. Future research should refine the measurement model by expanding construct indicators or applying covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) for confirmatory validation, thereby improving model parsimony and goodness of fit. Comparative analyses across sectors or between Oman and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations would provide deeper insights into cultural and institutional disparities.

The study did not specifically account for individual-level factors such as gender, age, or familial obligations, which may influence how employees perceive and appreciate flexibility. Considering Oman's youthful workforce and increasing female labour force involvement, future research should investigate whether generational or gender-based disparities affect the efficacy of FWPs. Enhancing these areas would not only fortify the validity of the findings but also aid in developing a more nuanced, context-specific theory of work-life behaviors in emerging countries.

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All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study, and their confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Data Availability Statement: Upon a reasonable request, the supporting data of this study can be provided by the corresponding author.

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