

## **HRM PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF GENDER AMONG BANKING SECTOR EMPLOYEES, BANGLADESH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The core objective of this empirical study is to identify the determinants of employee engagement. This research also explores moderating role of gender on the linkage of HRM practices with employee engagement. Respondents of this study include 383 banking employees working in Dhaka city who participated in fulfilling the survey questionnaire and tests using the partial least squares approach. Findings of the structural path model reveal that HRM practices are statistically significant and positive towards employee engagement. Further, it is also found that the relationship is positive and more robust for male workers compared to female counterparts. Results highlight that HRM practices play a crucial role in fostering banking employees' engagement towards their work. Moreover, it also suggests that different policies are essentials to be employed by organizations to facilitate the males and females. The study further explores the moderating role of gender on HRM practices-employee engagement link particularly within developing context (namely Bangladesh) is considered a crucial effort in the present literature.

**Keywords:** employee engagement, HRM practices, gender, banking industry, Bangladesh

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In recent times, the concept of employee engagement has become the dominating term among academic researchers along with corporate consultants. It is frequently treated as a critical component in organizational competitiveness and sustainability (Jha et al., 2019). Engaged staffs are engrossed, loyal, and fascinated with jobs, and being attracted, they can perform with their best effort, which ultimately has a positive impact on company success (Saratun, 2016). As engagement influences how employees perform their tasks, it benefits both employees and organizations (Rai & Agarwal, 2017). According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement has a positive association with employees' performance outcomes. Schneider et al. (2018) also state that highly active personnel are the intangible resources for firms to get a competitive advantage to make the firm more competitive in the business environment. Indeed, engaged taskforces are more creative and energetic (Sahoo & Mishra, 2012), better performers (Whitman et al., 2010), and can be more helpful and further can maintain a sustainable competitive advantage (Rich et al., 2010). Moreover, contemporary studies have found that engagement is the critical determinant of individuals' attitude, behavior, and performance (Huang et al., 2018; Shuck & Reio, 2014), consequently has a positive influence on profitability, individuals' performance, and customer satisfaction (Schneider et al., 2018). Thus, the employee engagement construct needs to be traced and given priority by the organizations to enhance employee performance and overall firms' performance.

Getting the strong empirical evidence of a positive correlation between employee engagement and its outcome, a growing number of scholars focuses on exploring the determinants to increase individuals' engagement among a diversified and changing workforce. The research identified a different range of antecedents by concentrating on either job or personal related factors (Bakker et al., 2011). Job-related factors include autonomy (Taipale, et al., 2011), social support (Othman & Nasurdin, 2013), supervisory support (Othman &

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Nasuridin, 2013), job control (Biggs, et al., 2014) and personal related factors include self-efficacy (Lee & Ok, 2015), optimism (Innanen, et al., 2014), Psychological capital (Chen, 2018). However, it is suggested that job-related resources are more important to shape an individual's personal attitudes and behaviors (Suan&Nasuridin, 2014). Given the importance, studies (Huang et al., 2018; Chen, 2018) focuses on exploring different job-related resources, such as HRM practices, as the antecedents of engagement. In addition, Huang et al. (2018) state, within the tenet of social exchange theory (SET), that if employees get adequate resources from their organizations in terms of HRM practices that help employees develop themselves, employees will return through engagement to their respective organizations. SET explains the importance of mutual interactions among the parties that abide by the rule of exchange and reciprocity (Cropanzano& Mitchell, 2005). Based on SET, this study proposes the link between HRM practices and engagement.

Gender is another crucial aspect in organizational settings, particularly in the HRM agenda for professionals, policymakers, and academics to understand the diverse issues in the workplace related to gender (Strachan et al., 2015). Previous studies show an inconclusive result of gender on workers' engagement in their workplace. For instance, Vincent-Höperet al. (2012) reveals that women are more energetic and happy at the workplace, while contradicted found by Suan and Nasuridin (2016) arguing that male employees are more engaged in their job. On the other hand, Rigg et al. (2014) find statistically insignificant differences among men and women while predicting workforce engagement. These despondencies of literature trigger further research to conceptualize the role of gender on engagement.

Furthermore, a significant limitation is found in HRM-employee engagement research that prior empirical studies are mainly, with little exclusions, concentrate on the manufacturing context. The essential contribution of HRM factors to shape up individuals' engagement in the service industry, particularly in banks, is still unexplored (Ghosh et al., 2016). Moreover, Presbitero (2017) mentions that HRM-engagement linkage is critical for almost all companies, primarily in service-related organizations. As a service industry, the performance of the banking industry crucially depends on the availability of competent human resources and the proper utilization of human resources (Ghosh et al., 2016). Managing human resources for optimum performance is one of the significant challenges faced by the banks in Bangladesh (Masum, et al., 2016). It is, therefore, a crucial topic to observe banks employees' engagement in Bangladesh.

Therefore, the objective of this present study is to investigate the relationship between HRM practices and banks employees' engagement in Bangladesh. Furthermore, this study also proposes an empirical check to explore the moderating role of gender in HRM practices- engagement linkage. This study expects to enrich the academic literature by supporting HRM practices as the antecedents of engagement and the influence of gender on the relation of HRM practices and banking employees' engagement in Bangladesh.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1 Employee Engagement***

The term employee engagement started to extend its impact on the academic and organizational literature two decades back (Ugaddan& Park, 2017). Schaufeli et al. (2008) explain the notion of engagement through burnout literature as the opposite phenomena not to always observe individuals' poor psychological feelings but instead focus on their psychological well-being. In contrast, employees experiencing burnout, engaged workers are more composed and capable of accomplishing the given responsibilities, as they seem to have full of energy and attached to works and the workplace (Schaufeli et al., 2008).In the current literature, different researchers and contexts conceptualize employee engagement from different perspectives.

At the very early, Kahn (1990) contributes to engagement in the academic and professional literature. Kahn (1990), called as the academic guardian of engagement study, defines two facets of people behavior as the personal engagement as well as disengagement, while engagement is defined as the personal and psychological attachment in their workplace where people involve and expose them physically, cognitive and emotionally in doing their responsibilities. On the other hand, disengagement is defined as the psychological withdrawal of someone's form their role performance that leads to a lack of involvement, relations, and emotional attachment towards their workplace. Kahn (1990) further states that people would be engaged in three-dimensional psychological settings such as meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Meaningfulness describes as the employees' perception of how logical it is to bring themselves in their job place; safety defines as the individuals' thinking to understand that how safe it is for them to have their job roles, and availability explains people rationality that how available they would be at the time of job performance. In addition, Rothbard (2001) demonstrates engagement as the emotional presence and suggests two crucial constructs to explain engagement, i.e., attention and absorption.

Nelson and Simmons (2003) conceptualize workforce engagement as the condition where workers are expected to feel progressive emotions towards work settings, find encouragement into their jobs, bring meaningfulness on their workloads, and hold hopes for their future performance. Authors (e.g., Shaw, 2005; Richman, 2006) also define engagement as individuals' cognitive/affective commitment towards their corporations. Another group of scholars (e.g., Maslach et al., 2001; May et al., 2004) explains the concept of engagement considering the opposite term of burnout. Maslach et al. (2001) characterized engagement by energy-efficacy-involvement, directly opposite dimensions of burnout such as exhaustion-cynicism-inefficacy. Later, Macey and Schneider (2008) define engagement by adding new dimensions considering different aspects of individuals (e.g., attribute, conditions and behavior) in respect to situational context (e.g., working environment). In addition, Albrecht (2010) theorizes workforce engagement as full of favorable psychological conditions that contribute to a company's long-term success and sustainability.

Saks (2006) investigates that employee engagement is often described as the other well-established constructs like organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior and suggests that engagement should be aligned with organizations and works as different people have different attitudes and behaviors with their workplace settings. Considering this ground, Saks (2006) proposes that two components of employees' engagement should be observed: work engagement and organizational engagement. A review of engagement literature shows plenty of concepts, the most prominent definitions of engagement is given by Schaufeli et al. (2002) state that engagement is a progressive and satisfying state of mind that is expressed by vigor (high energies and resilience), dedication (fully passionate), and absorption (fully devoted to works). In addition, prior research (Chen, 2018; Ghosh et al., 2016) investigate the HRM-engagement link considering the definition given by Schaufeli et al. (2002) in the Asian context. With this premise, this study includes a three-dimensional description of engagement that comprises vigor, dedication, and absorption to give practical implications of HRM practices to improve employee engagement, particularly in the Asian context.

## **2.2 Underlying Theory**

The use of resources in the form of organizational factors to inspire and encourage human intellect is not new in the competitive business environment. When people appreciate their job performance, they will act as per the "rule of reciprocity"; such people will have a strong feeling of obligation, give back with a high psychological engagement, and work performance as per SET (Saks, 2006). This study explains the relations among constructs under the tenet of mutual interdependence because of its dominant theoretic paradigms to conceptualize the working behavior of the employees. Indeed, the social exchange has been used in this study because it describes the employees' behavior and the affiliated parties such as employee and their employer

(Presbitero, 2017). According to SET, a mutual association develops over time with a sequence of collaborations among the parties converted into loyalty and commitments, such that parties engaged in reciprocal relations abide by the rule of exchange and obligations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET also highlights that if employees are given adequate social, economic, and emotional resources by organizations, they feel obligated and repay back with increased engagement that accordingly leads to high company performance (Bal et al., 2013). In other words, when companies offer different HRM practices, they hold the expectations that their employees will be highly encouraged and repay the investment by showing high engagement. More specifically, the degree to which an employee will be engaged will depend on the job resources from companies. Concerning this theoretical principle, this research expects the positive link of job resources (in the form of HRM practices given by companies) and employees' engagement.

### ***2.3 HRM practices and employee engagement***

HRM practices refer to policies and procedures of managing people in the organization that incorporate interrelated activities (Jiang et al., 2012), and an integrative system of HRM practices values workers as a vital asset in the organization, which in turn enhances the quality of performance of the employees (Huang et al., 2018). Wright and Kehoe (2008) state that organizations should deploy a bundle of activities to protect employees' rights in order to achieve organizational goals and activities and this bundle of interrelated activities is called HRM practices. More precisely, HRM practices remain the essential and fundamental arrangements through which companies develop and facilitate a set of skills, competencies, and behaviors of employees that lead to successful job performance to organizational competitive advantage. In this regard, HRM practices and policies should be more precise, not general, as these policies will help organizations to nurture employees within the work environment and lead to the better individual as well as company performance (Karatepe, 2013). Delery (1998) states that organization should design their HRM policy by combining a set of HRM programs to define the "best HR practices." Similarly, Jiang et al. (2012) demonstrate that high-performance HRM practices are a broader set of work systems that incorporates performance-based pay, employee skill-enhancing programs, various employee communication systems, which are used in a combination that helps to reinforce organizational performance (Chen, 2018). Several studies (Huang et al., 2018; Presbitero, 2017) state that though different predictors of employee engagement are identified, contextual factors (i.e., HRM practices) are more significant to shape an individual's personal attitudes and behavior.

Kahn (1990) explores that if employees get adequate rewards, cognitive safety, and honor from the companies, they tend to be engaged more at jobs. As the HRM system is considered as one of the crucial tools to boost the psychological settings of the employees, organizations can have an enhanced level of engagement by establishing appropriate human capital policies (Chen, 2018). In addition, Huang et al. (2018) explore that organizational factors such as HRM practices are more critical to positively influence human attitudes, behaviors, and motivation levels that all are characterized by employee engagement. Thus, a probable linkage of HRM practices with employee engagement is anticipated. However, most of the previous studies (Lee & Ok, 2015; Biggs, et al., 2014; Inananen, et al., 2014; Othman & Nasurdin, 2013; Taipale, et al., 2011) considered job-related factors such as autonomy; social support; supervisory support; job control; and personal related factors such as self-efficacy; optimism; self-esteem as the predictors of employee engagement.

Furthermore, Kusluvan et al. (2010) recommend that no single policy can establish an HRM practices system for the service industry, suggesting that HRM practices should be tailored for empirically testing in the context of different service organizations. These despondencies of literature imply the limited implications of extant evidence on HRM-engagement linkage, which merits further research on the relationship (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). The current study, thus, attempts to fill up these research gaps by conceptualizing the role of HRM practices on employees' engagement.

In addition, previous studies (Jiang et al., 2012) categorized HRM practices into three distinct groups, such as skill-motivation-empowerment enhancing practices. Karatepe (2013) states that training, as a skill-enhancing practice, may help employees improve their skills during job performance. Moreover, employees should participate in administrative decision-making procedures to build an empowered task force that allows making right attitudes, which are essential for employee competitiveness (Cooke et al., 2016). Authors (Presbitero, 2017) also mention that skill-enhancing practices such as training can make employees more empowered and aligned with proper rewards to give them a feeling of belongingness among organizations and employees. Participation in the administrative policymaking process can only be successful if employees make valuable decisions and are motivated.

Moreover, the antecedents of engagement are enlightened with the essence of SET proposed by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005). It argues that when two parties (e.g., employer and employee) will be in an exchange relationship for a long time, they will have a trustworthy, mutual understanding as they abide by the rule of reciprocity. It further leads to the activities that an employer will directly impact a response or actions of employees (Jensen et al., 2013). Hence, this research aims to fill these research gaps, under the tenet of SET, by examining the correlation between ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) enhancing HRM practices and engagement in the banking industry. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed,

H1: There is a positive correlation between HRM practices (training and development, rewards and recognition, and employee participation) and employee engagement.

#### ***2.4 Moderating role: gender in HRM practices-engagement linkage***

According to Eagly and Karau (1991), gender refers to social differences where male and female individuals are differently socialized, recommending their choices to the extent of behaviors, which are expected and acceptable. Similarly, participation of gender reflects a cognitive plan of an individual who could do based on their gender identification (Munshi, 2019). For example, Dick (2006) states that females are likely to become good daughters, mothers, and wives who are responsible for maintaining their household, whereas men are considered as bread earner for their family. For personality concerns, women are more socially oriented than their male counterparts, who are more dominant and achievement-oriented (Gkorezis et al., 2012). These social positioning of men and women bring them within the job context (Lester, 2008) under organizational procedures and practices (Bellou et al., 2015). These social divisions, informal interactions, and cultural images make an unequal and imbalanced organizational setting. Accordingly, Bellou et al. (2015) suggest that gender is a vital element within an organizational structure, and thus, gender investigations in an organizational context are needed.

In prior research (Rigg et al., 2014), gender is studied as a determinant of employee engagement and shows an inconsistent result. For instance, Pitt-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa (2008) conducted a study among 22 different companies with a sample of 18,3454 employees. They concluded that female staffs are more engaged compared to men at jobs. In contrast, Schaufeli et al. (2006) find a more engaged male workforce than female workers in countries like Norway, Belgium, Finland, and Germany. On the other hand, studies ((Rigg et al., 2014) find no differences between males and females while predicting engagement. This study considers a unique feature of service sectors. Since service sector employees are more likely to serve the customers within diverse working behavior, it leads to psychological anxiety during their job performance (Karatepe, 2011). The present study treats men as independent and achievement-focused (Gkorezis et al., 2012) and highly self-centric (Babin & Boles, 1998). Hence, when emotional exhaustion arises within the job context, male workers can build their emotional resilience independently to overcome it. Indeed, men are likely to be less demanding for organizational resources to be engaged at work. Female employees, however, seek more resources available to cope with stresses arises from jobs (Suan & Nasurdin, 2014) since they are more socially

affiliated (Gkorezis et al., 2012). Thus, any emotional strain appears at work; females are likely to require more job resources to show engagement during role performance.

Moreover, in this job intensified era, where employees maintain a very tight work schedule might be blurred and thus affecting their work-life balance (Mooney & Ryan, 2009). Particularly, excessive work pressure at the job is becoming a negative aspect for women, such that they are treated as primary caregivers at home (Munshi, 2019; Lopez-Claros & Zahidi, 2005). This is a critical factor for developing countries like Bangladesh, where females are expected to contribute to household income and satisfy the traditional roles of nurturing the family. This different role of formal and informal work domains creates high emotional exhaustion (Greenhaus et al., 1987). As such, available working resources, i.e., appropriate HRM practices for female workers, can mitigate the emotional strain that helps to buffer the influence of work and social demands. Such types of resources can further improve employees' engagement level at work. Thus, it is expected that the positive linkage of HRM practices and engagement is stronger for women than their male counterparts. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis as,

H2: Gender moderates the positive relation such that HRM practices-engagement link is stronger for female workers than for male workers.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### ***3.1 Research context: banks in Bangladesh***

Bangladesh is an emergent economy that got plenty of concentration globally because of its consistent progress in previous years. The banking industry plays a dominant role in the country's monetary system. Although Bangladesh primarily reformed as a socialistic financial structure since its inception in 1971, it eventually converted to a market-based economic structure. The banking sector is one of the vital service providers in Bangladesh that contributes to domestic economic growth (Masum et al., 2016). Being a bank-based financial system, Bangladesh mostly depends on banks for its consistent business expansion and economic development. Since banks are service-related organizations, the institutional success of banks depends on physical infrastructure and needs to have a pool of intellectual and competent people. In this era where the business environment is becoming more challenging and costly because of the country's macroeconomic conditions, banks develop expense control mechanisms such as optimum usage of human resources and technology.

#### ***3.2 Data collection procedures and respondents***

This study population incorporates banking employees working in different private commercial banks in Dhaka, which is considered an economic hub in Bangladesh. The selected banks are listed in Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), and currently, 30 banks are listed in DSE. To enhance the response rate, researchers personally administered the questionnaires among banks employees in their respective locations. The researcher takes help from human resource managers of each bank and distributes survey questionnaires. Of the 30 banks, 580 questionnaires are distributed, and after giving a repeated reminder, 383 completed questionnaires are returned. This process accounted for a usable response rate of 66%, adequate for further analysis suggested by Sekaran and Bougie (2013).

Respondents of this study represent slightly skewed data concerning male and female participation (only 24% females). The plausible reason might be male dominating society where females are primarily considered to maintain their family and thus results in a poor presence of women in the workplace (Aktar&Pangil, 2018). It also presents that most participants (an average of 72.6%) are married and belong to the age group of 30-40 years, showing a percentage of 77.3%. In addition, the sample represents the highest number of employees who have a master's degree (46 percent) and an MBA degree (43.6 percent).

### 3.3 Measures

HRM practices components are measured with 15 items adopted from different standardized measurement instruments covering AMO enhancing constructs, particularly training and development, employee participation adopted from Delery & Doty (1996), rewards and recognition taken from Saks (2006). In addition, three-dimensional constructs of employee engagement, namely vigor, dedication, and absorption, are measured with 17 items instrument is taken from Schaufeli et al. (2002). Gender is dummy coded where 0 is coded for male and 1 is coded for female.

Participants are invited to give their opinion on the given items of HRM practices and employee engagement constructs and spread a Likert scale between 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Study results show that all the components of AMO enhancing practices, namely, training and development (T&D), rewards and recognition (R&R), and employee participation (EP), have an adequate reliability value of .83, 0.87, 0.80, respectively. Results also confirm a high internal consistency value of all the dimensions of employee engagement such as vigor,  $\alpha=.84$ ; dedication,  $\alpha=.86$ ; and absorption,  $\alpha=.82$ .

**Table 1**

*List of Research Variables*

		Variable	Number Dimensions	Source of Questions
Dependent Variable	Employee Engagement	Vigor	6	Schaufeli & Baker, 2004
		Dedication	5	
		Absorption	6	
Independent Variable	<i>HRM Practices</i>			
	Employee Participation	-	4	Delivery & Doty (1996)
	Rewards & Recognition	-	7	Saks (2006)
	Training & Development	-	4	Delivery & Doty (1996)

### 3.4 Analytical tools

This study uses SPSS 22.0 version software to analyze the descriptive part of the data, such as data screening, normality, multicollinearity, and other relevant tests are conducted. Since SPSS results of normality test of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilks Statistics show that all the 32 metrics of a dataset are significant at  $<.001$ , indicating the violation of normality rules, thus, it is concluded that this study dataset is not normally distributed and giving justification to use PLS-SEM for further path analysis.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Results of measurement models

To investigate the measurement model, this study examines convergent validity and discriminant validity of all the latent variables. According to Hair et al. (2014), to assess the reliability values of each indicator by using PLS-SEM system, it is necessary to evaluate the external loading factors for all constructs. Thus, concerning the rule of thumb (Hair et al., 2014), this research retains the items that confirm loading values of .40 to .70. Accordingly, it is identified that among 32 items for all the constructs, 29 items are kept for further analysis to have an acceptable value of outer loadings (see in Appendix B: Table 2). Consequently, 3 items are eliminated for having a poor loading value. On the other hand, the constructs indicators that are retained in the research framework confirm the loadings from .64 to .87 correspondingly. Table 2(see in Appendix B) shows the values

of composite reliability (CR) for latent constructs used in the analysis, observing a range between .82 to .90, which suggests an adequate internal consistency value for all the constructs, as mentioned by Hair et al., 2014. Further, it is found that all the constructs of this framework confirm the rule of thumb of average variance extracted (AVE) value ranging from .51 to .80 as noted by Chin (1998) that threshold of AVE value should be more than .50.

**Table 2**

*Outer loadings, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)*

Construct	Items	Initial	Modified	Cronbach's		
		Model	Model	Alpha	CR	AVE
Vigor	EE1	0.66	0.64	0.76	0.84	0.51
	EE2	0.64	0.66			
	EE3	0.70	0.71			
	EE4	0.77	0.79			
	EE5	0.74	0.75			
	EE6	0.51	Del			
Dedication	EE7	0.75	0.76	0.80	0.86	0.56
	EE8	0.69	0.70			
	EE9	0.78	0.78			
	EE10	0.80	0.80			
	EE11	0.71	0.71			
Absorption	EE12	0.58	Del	0.71	0.82	0.53
	EE13	0.59	Del			
	EE14	0.71	0.77			
	EE15	0.70	0.74			
	EE16	0.68	0.71			
	EE17	0.65	0.71			
Training and Development	T&D1	0.83	0.83	0.83	0.89	0.67
	T&D2	0.72	0.72			
	T&D3	0.86	0.87			
	T&D4	0.84	0.84			
Rewards and Recognition	R&R1	0.78	0.78	0.87	0.90	0.56
	R&R2	0.79	0.79			
	R&R3	0.73	0.73			
	R&R4	0.68	0.68			
	R&R5	0.79	0.79			
	R&R6	0.73	0.73			
	R&R7	0.74	0.74			
Employee Participation	EP1	0.76	0.77	0.80	0.87	0.63
	EP2	0.83	0.83			
	EP3	0.81	0.81			
	EP4	0.77	0.77			

CR=Composite Reliability, AVE=Average Variance Extracted, EE=Employee Engagement, T&D=Training & Development, R&R=Rewards & Recognition, EP=Employee Participation

Moreover, Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest that to assess the adequate value of convergent validity for any latent construct, the value of AVE needs to be .05 or above. Results of loadings and cross-loadings (see in Appendix C: Table 3) indicate that all the loading values of these items exceed the threshold value of .50. This indicates that all the latent constructs are not only fulfilled the AVE criteria of .50 and above but also converged



with the higher loading towards their respective constructs, suggesting that all the latent variables of this research have attained satisfactory convergent validity. This study has two second-order constructs: employee engagement includes vigor, dedication, absorption, and HRM practices include training and development, rewards and recognition, and employee participation. It is deemed to measure the outer model with their first-order construct. Therefore, all the outcomes of the measurement model such as CR, AVE, cross-loadings are investigated based on the first-order construct.

**Table 3**

*Loadings and cross-loadings*

<b>Items</b>	<b>VIG</b>	<b>DED</b>	<b>ABS</b>	<b>EP</b>	<b>R&amp;R</b>	<b>T&amp;D</b>
EE1	0.64	0.34	0.40	0.24	0.40	0.29
EE2	0.66	0.48	0.40	0.20	0.29	0.25
EE3	0.71	0.43	0.37	0.27	0.43	0.36
EE4	0.79	0.59	0.43	0.35	0.44	0.41
EE5	0.75	0.53	0.39	0.36	0.41	0.39
EE7	0.52	0.76	0.34	0.45	0.40	0.37
EE8	0.42	0.70	0.36	0.37	0.30	0.32
EE9	0.52	0.78	0.33	0.35	0.37	0.37
EE10	0.54	0.80	0.38	0.39	0.37	0.40
EE11	0.51	0.71	0.48	0.43	0.43	0.37
EE14	0.43	0.43	0.77	0.37	0.37	0.31
EE15	0.47	0.42	0.74	0.27	0.38	0.28
EE16	0.35	0.29	0.71	0.32	0.34	0.33
EE17	0.36	0.32	0.71	0.28	0.37	0.38
EP1	0.32	0.39	0.38	0.77	0.31	0.29
EP2	0.35	0.44	0.28	0.83	0.36	0.42
EP3	0.29	0.43	0.35	0.81	0.33	0.38
EP4	0.33	0.43	0.35	0.77	0.44	0.37
R&R1	0.45	0.39	0.42	0.34	0.78	0.42
R&R2	0.42	0.36	0.44	0.31	0.79	0.37
R&R3	0.42	0.34	0.33	0.27	0.73	0.40
R&R4	0.40	0.35	0.28	0.29	0.68	0.40
R&R5	0.50	0.45	0.44	0.42	0.79	0.45
R&R6	0.33	0.32	0.33	0.38	0.73	0.34
R&R7	0.37	0.40	0.35	0.36	0.74	0.35
T&D1	0.41	0.48	0.35	0.46	0.44	0.83
T&D2	0.32	0.33	0.31	0.30	0.39	0.72
T&D3	0.44	0.36	0.35	0.32	0.42	0.87
T&D4	0.38	0.42	0.43	0.40	0.45	0.84

EE=Employee Engagement, VIG=Vigor, DED=Dedication, ABS=Absorption, T&D=Training & Development, R&R=Rewards & Recognition, EP=Employee Participation

The present study uses Fornell and Larcker (1981) approach to examine the discriminant validity of the constructs. It suggests positioning the square root of AVE of all the latent constructs on its correlational matrix diagonal, as presented in Table 4 with bold values. It is supposed to be greater than the correlational values among latent variables. Results show greater values of the square roots of AVE than the correlational values of latent variables. Thus, it is confirmed that latent constructs are distinct from another construct and fulfill discriminant validity criteria.

**Table 4**

*Results of Discriminant validity*

	ABS	DED	EP	R&R	T&D	VIG
ABS	0.73					
DED	0.506	0.749				
EP	0.426	0.533	0.793			
R&R	0.5	0.5	0.455	0.75		
T&D	0.443	0.491	0.458	0.522	0.816	
VIG	0.553	0.669	0.406	0.554	0.48	0.714

VIG=Vigor, DED=Dedication, ABS=Absorption, T&D=Training & Development, R&R=Rewards & Recognition, EP=Employee Participation

**4.2 Structural model: hypotheses testing**

To evaluate the association between predictors and consequences, this study employs PLS-SEM bootstrapping method with 5000 samples. Table 5 and similarly Figure 1 exhibit the standardized path coefficients ( $\beta$ ), standard error, t values, p values, and the decision are taken based on the results for the theorized relationships.

**Table 5**

Results: structural path modeling (Hypotheses testing)

Hypothesis	Relationships	Path Coefficient	Std. Error	T-Value	P-Value	Findings
H1	HRM practices -> EE	0.71	0.03	26.22	<.001	Supported
H2	Gender -> EE	-0.06	0.03	1.81	0.07	
	HRM practices*Gender -> EE	-0.67	0.03	4.57	<.001	Rejected

The findings of this study show the beta coefficient of proposed links between exogenous and endogenous variables. It represents a positive and significant association of HRM factors with bank employees' engagement ( $\beta=.71$ ;  $p<.001$ ) and confirms the acceptance for H1.

H2 hypothesizes the moderating role of gender on the relationship between HRM practices and employee engagement. This study uses the product indicator method to estimate this hypothesis, as recommended by Chin et al. (2003). Notably, this study examines (a) the positive link of HRM practices with employee engagement, (b) the impact of gender on employee engagement, and (c) the buffering interaction of HRM practices and gender on engagement.

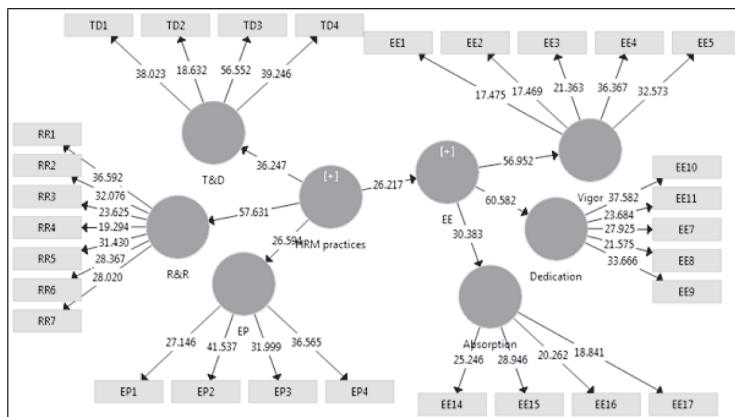


Figure 1 PLS bootstrapping: HRM practices-employee engagement

Table 5 represents a significant interaction impact on engagement, confirming the moderating role of gender on HRM practices and engagement linkage. Surprisingly, the path coefficient direction indicates a contradiction with the proposed hypothesis, suggesting a stronger correlation between HRM practices and employee engagement for men than their female counterparts. Hence, H2 is rejected. In addition, the structural path model posits that HRM practices can explain 51% variances in engagement ( $R^2=.51$ ). Moreover, entering gender in the path model can explain 52 percent variances in employee engagement ( $R^2=.52$ ). Figure 2 illustrates the role of gender on HRM practices and employee engagement.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Study results suggest that HRM practices are the vital job-related resources that predict employees' engagement. Results of this study are consistent with prior literature such as Huang et al. (2017) and Cooke et al.(2016) reveal the crucial role of HRM practices in helping workers to reduce work demands while fulfilling their work roles. In addition, job-related resources is shown to reduce psychological strain and ill health (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Therefore, HRM practices as an emotional factor can lower job demands and inspire work goals that ultimately help to improve employees' engagement within their job.

In contrast, the results of this study reveal a reverse direction in regards to the proposed hypothesis. It suggests that male employees are more likely to engage in their work with a strong perception of having available job resources in the form of HRM practices. A possible explanation could be that men are more achievement-oriented (Eagly, 2013) and are treated as more competitive to accomplish their work goals (Tomlinson et al., 2013). Thus, it is expected that the availability of adequate HRM practices is highly esteemed by male workers since support from their organizations makes sense of feeling to have a greater career path, resulting in a highly dedicated and engaged workforce. SET also explains that if organizations provide a conducive working environment through different HRM systems, employees will be obligated and give higher engagement. This finding is also factual for the banking sector. Employees are the key to success and will be dedicated and engaged to the job if they get proper learning opportunities to flourish their careers with an adequate reward package (Presbitero, 2017).

### *Figure 2 Moderating effect of gender*

Surprisingly, results show a weaker correlation between HRM factors and engagement for females. This study suggests some reasons, for example, the traditional structure in organizations where males dominate almost all the management positions (Mehedi & Sumon, 2017). Basically, males are more results-oriented, achievement-centered and self-governing (Gkorezis et al., 2012) and highly initiated by autonomy (Alimo-Metcalf, 1993). Female employees are more caring that engage them in social activities since they are nurtured to be gentle and compelled towards common goals (Konrad et al., 2000). As such, females are likely to perceive poor support from their male-focused organizational policies that are more results-oriented. Being stressed with dual roles of maintaining job and family, female employees feel ignored at job places where they are evaluated with manlike norms (Williams et al., 2012), resulting in a less engaged female workforce.

Compounding this condition, service sector employees always work in anxiety and stressful work contexts where they deal with customer service and connect with different departments (Kim et al., 2009). Female employees, particularly in Bangladesh, are generally more responsible for taking care of their families and might face difficulties making a strong connection with the organization. Moreover, female employees are challenged to maintain a dual role of fulfilling the needs of a career and a family; as such, they may have trouble reconciling their needs to organizations. Further, this interruption may hinder female workers from creating a strong sense of belongingness with organizations, resulting in poor engagement during job performance.

The current research framework theoretically offers additional knowledge regarding the antecedents of employee engagement under the tenet of SET in organizational and industrial behavior literature. It applies the reciprocal norms of SET and empirically establishes the link between HRM practices and employee engagement. It demonstrates that employees' perceptions regarding the availability of resources in the form of HRM practices build the feelings of employees that they are valued, recognized, and cared for by their organizations and thus make obliged to give back with high engagement during their job performance. Furthermore, it suggests bank managers establish practices like training programs that enhance female employees' confidence and handle the emotional exhaustion while doing their job. It also recommends managers to think beyond male dominating norms while establishing policies in introducing social communication systems that make the working environment comfortable, particularly for female employees. As such, organizations should incorporate different employee-focused HR policies such as flexible working times, compressed working week or flexible working schedule (Kacmar et al., 2013). Such people-oriented HR practices may build a sense of care for their well-being. Consequently, such activities are likely to make the organizational environment more friendly, fostering banking employees' engagement.

Most importantly, the findings of this current study provide a new dimension in the knowledge of understanding SET (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The norms of SET (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) proposes that in a social exchange setting (in organizations), the parties who are involved in an exchange relationship need to have a sense of mutual benefits, where a positive gesture from one part needs to be reciprocated by the other counterpart. This study applies the reciprocal norms of SET and empirically establishes the link between HRM practices and employee engagement. It demonstrates the perception of employees regarding different HRM practices that build feelings of obligation and concern for the organization, which subsequently make them obligate to repay in kind and reciprocate by performing with more dedication, enthusiasm, and concentration, resulting in a high level of engagement. The study findings confirm that HRM practices give feelings to the employees that they valued, recognized, and cared for by their organizations and thus obliging them to give back with high engagement during their job performance.

The findings of this study also recommend bank managers facilitate their employees' engagement; it is essential to realize the gender differences in response to the job-related resources at the workplace. Being a family-oriented society in Bangladesh, organizations, specifically, banks should introduce supportive organizational practices to assist female workers considering their family role. Banks might give flexibility to their female employees to reschedule their work times (Kacmar et al., 2013). Permitting time-off to fulfill their role of caregiver towards child or elders, providing meals and transportation facilities could be other factors that ensure the quality of life in society. In a word, banks should introduce several employees concerned HRM practices such as flexible working hours, flexible work routine, compressed workweek, and support their female employees (Michel et al., 2013). These employee-centered HRM practices may satisfy female workers' needs and give them feelings that organizations care about their well-being. Further, it will foster a supportive working environment that consequently enhances employees' engagement.

This study finding also suggests that if bank management wants to enhance their employees' engagement, they need to identify the differences of sub-group responses to organizational resources in which gender has a crucial role in understanding the influences of HRM practices on engagement. Being the policymaker of a family-oriented society like Bangladesh, managers should ensure convenient organizational support for female workers by considering their family roles. For example, the supervisor can allow female workers to make a flexible work schedule, permit time off or provide cooked meals. Such actions allow employees to spend more quality time with family, which will enhance employee well-being and result in a higher level of engagement.

## **6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS**

Despite having several contributions to this study, this study carries some limitations and gives researchers the grounds for further research. For instance, this study collects data using self-reported questionnaires that might create a common method bias problem (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This study employs Harman's single factor test to reduce this problem and reveals that the first common factor does not account for most variances. Therefore, future studies may consider multiple sources (such as supervisors or managers) for collecting the data in their research. In addition, this study considers only the private commercial banking sector employees located at Dhaka city in Bangladesh. Thus, this study finding may not have generalizability for the employees to other industries. Therefore, further research may incorporate different sample settings, particularly in the public sector banks or other financial institutions, giving a good opportunity to make comparative analyses and potential generalizations. Finally, this study considers HRM practices in predicting employee engagement. Further study might consider personal resources such as optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem, or other job-related resources such as supervisor support, autonomy to predict employees' engagement.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the linkage between ability, motivation, and opportunity enhancing HRM practices and employee engagement among the banks' employees' engagement towards their job roles. Further, it also explores the gender impact on HRM practices-employee engagement link. Results show that HRM practices are significantly associated with employee engagement. It is also found that male workers can be more engaged than females when adequate job resources are available. In conclusion, despite a mixed result, this study suggests that critical predictors facilitate engagement among the banking sector employees and help to address banking employees' gender concerns. Indeed, improving employees' engagement is influential in enhancing the service delivery quality of banking sector employees, making them capable of fulfilling within a competitive business environment.

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