Unpacking Social Economy:
The Mediating Role of Eudaimonic Well-being in the Relationship between Employee Support HR Practices and Creative Performance across Social Economy Organizations

Research Work

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Abstract

The importance of human resource practices (HRP) for organizational success is well recognized in several studies. HRP have consistently positively affected employee performance and job satisfaction. More recently, attention has shifted toward integrating sustainability into human resource management, emphasizing the role of people management in supporting long-term organizational and societal goals. At the same time, there is a growing need to explore how sustainable HRP vary according to different organizational objectives, particularly in companies whose aims extend beyond purely economic outcomes. Therefore, this study focused on social economy (SE) organizations, an increasingly important sector with a social purpose and environmental vocation as its defining characteristics. When considering existing literature, there is an evident need for research incorporating less contextual measures of job satisfaction to promote an approach to business that considers the overall well-being of employees. Additionally, the commonly used performance measures tend to concentrate on a traditional view of task-related performance, neglecting the importance of creative performance, including contributing to novel ideas and solutions. Finally, limited insight exists about distinctions among social economy organizations. They have proven to be an option that meets the expectations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are an alternative to traditional capital-based enterprises. Given the rapid changes and unprecedented challenges of the current global landscape, understanding nuanced aspects of employee well-being and performance is crucial for effective HR management and organizational sustainability. This study investigated how employee-support HRP influence creative performance (CP), considering the mediating role of eudaimonic well-being (EWB). The study sought to explore whether the specific organizational type within the Social Economy acts as a boundary condition for our model. The study included 1.589 participants from various sectors of Spain's social economy who responded to anonymous, online, self-report questionnaires. Path analysis was performed, and it confirmed direct effects between all variables, as well as a partial mediating role of EWB, in the overall sample. However, multi-group analysis revealed that not all relationships are significant when examined within social economy organizations separately, and in some, EWB fully mediates the relationship between HRP and CP. We conclude that, although the model is robust when the entire sector is considered, there are underlying differences between SE organizations that should be further examined. Practical implications of these results are discussed, limitations addressed, and further research directions recommended.

Keywords: social economy, HR practices, eudaimonic well-being, creative performance.

Introduction

As the focus on sustainability grows, there is a rising acknowledgment of the significance of the social economy sector. Social economy organizations are characterized by their commitment to advancing social and environmental goals and economic objectives. They typically operate within entities like cooperatives, mutual societies, and non-profit organizations, aligning their activities to promote a positive impact on both society and the environment (Doherty et al., 2014). They emerged from the need to combat social exclusion and increased unemployment, which resulted in a heterogenous and vague notion of social economy with a confusing relationship between economic and social goals (Diaz et al., 2017). Critical attention has been directed at untangling this relationship and differentiating social economy organizations from the public or private sectors (Haugh & Kitson, 2007). However, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the organizational aspects of different types of organizations within this sector, especially regarding HR management (HRM).

The effect of HR practices on organizational and employee benefits has been extensively researched and documented in the literature (Boon et al., 2011; Ketchen Jr et al., 2015; Subramony, 2009). Numerous studies across various sectors, including the private, public, and non-profit sectors, have consistently demonstrated the significant impact of HR practices on different employee outcomes (Acosta-Prado et al., 2020; Blom et al., 2018). Research has shown that well-designed HR practices can positively influence employee well-being and performance (Van de Voorde, 2012). Moreover, well-being has been positively associated with creative and innovative performance (Huhtala & Parzefall, 2007).

There is sufficient evidence to assume this also applies to social economy organizations. Moreover, it can be hypothesized that due to the heavy emphasis on people preservation, it is crucial to tailor HR practices to desired employee outcomes, such as well-being and performance. Some efforts exist to understand the social economy organizations' inner functions, most notably through the "International Comparative Social Enterprise Models" project (ICSEM). The project engages over 200 researchers from over 60 countries, examining social enterprise models worldwide (ICSEM Project – EMSE, n.d.). While its research scope may include various aspects of social enterprises, such as their organizational structures, governance models, financing

mechanisms, and impacts on society, it does not specifically target HR practices as its main area of research. Some empirical studies look into the HR management of certain entities within the social economy sector, such as social enterprises (Royce, 2007) and cooperatives (Voigt & von der Oelsnitz., 2023) but report a pressing need for further research. We conclude that there is considerable room for investigating social economy organizations more closely and exploring options for tailoring HR practices to suit their distinct needs.

Therefore, the primary objective of this study was to examine the relationship between HR practices and employee performance, focusing on the mediating role of employee well-being across different types of social economy organizations. This model has garnered consistent support in the existing literature (Van De Voorde, 2012). However, the current study included some less investigated conceptualizations of the mentioned variables – more specifically, it explored the influence of employee support HR practices, eudaimonic well-being, and employees' creative performance. The research intended to apply this model within the social economy sector, which consists of organizations focused on social objectives and collective ownership or governance structures, prioritizing social impact and sustainability over profit maximization (Doherty et al., 2014). Spain's status as a leader in recognizing and regulating the social economy sector makes it an optimal location for conducting this research (Monzón & Chaves, 2017). Our main aim was to deepen the understanding of the complexities of various types of social organizations. Although part of the same conceptualization, different types of social economy entities have particularities that make them unique and with their own challenges. We argue that this can affect how human resources are managed and how they affect employees. The findings could offer valuable insights into the most effective HR practices and tailoring possibilities for specific social economy organizations.

Theoretical Overview

Human Resource Management

Human Resource Management (HRM) encompasses operational and strategic activities to manage an organization's workforce to achieve its objectives effectively (Subramony, 2009). Studies have consistently shown that organizations with HRM systems outperform those without such systems (Jackson et al., 2014; Jiang et al., 2012). The theoretical foundations of HRM systems

have traditionally relied on various productivity-oriented models that viewed employees primarily as resources that have strategic importance and impact organizational performance. This tactical approach emphasized metrics like productivity and efficiency, reflecting a "hard" model of HR practices. Although soft and hard models are well known, with the former emphasizing employee well-being and development and the latter focusing on productivity, this division is increasingly seen as outdated and insufficient (Guest, 1999).

The tactical approach is further explored within Strategic HRM, which investigates the relationship between HR practices and business outcomes (Boxall, 2018). It is exemplified in the Resource-Based View (RBV) and High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) models. The RBV posits that an organization's competitive advantage lies in its unique bundle of resources, including human capital (Barney, 1991). From this perspective, HR practices are strategic assets that contribute to a sustained competitive advantage by retaining skilled and motivated employees (Wright et al., 2001). This theory suggested that investing in human capital through training and development programs can create unique capabilities that are difficult for competitors to replicate, thereby leading to long-term organizational success. Similarly, HPWS integrates various HR practices to enhance organizational performance. It emphasizes selective hiring, extensive training, performance-based compensation, and employee involvement to foster motivation and productivity (Huselid, 1995). These systems align the organization's goals with those of employees, creating a synergistic environment where both parties thrive. Research has consistently shown that HPWS can significantly improve employee performance and overall organizational effectiveness (Jiang et al., 2012; Liao et al., 2009). However, it is well recognized that these hard practices alone may not fully account for employee retention and motivation. As suggested in a review by Paul & Shah (2022) the integration and balancing of soft HR practices, which focus on maintaining employee motivation and commitment through elements like employee development and rewards, with hard HR practices, is crucial for fostering sustained motivation and commitment among employees, which are essential for long-term retention and organizational success.

In addition to productivity-oriented models, Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) provides a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics between employees and organizations. SET emphasizes the importance of reciprocal relationships, suggesting that when organizations invest in their employees, employees are likely to respond with higher levels of work performance, commitment, and loyalty. While performance-enhancement practices are primarily

designed to optimize output through mechanisms such as goal setting, close performance monitoring, and contingent rewards, supportive HR practices represent a distinct and complementary approach. Rather than focusing on control or performance per se, supportive practices reflect the organization's concern for employees' well-being and longer-term development. These practices typically include opportunities for participation in decision-making, fairness in reward distribution, and access to personal and professional growth opportunities (Allen et al., 2003).

Within the framework of Social Exchange Theory (SET), supportive practices play a foundational role in fostering high-quality, enduring relationships between employees and the organization. By signaling organizational support and respect, these practices encourage employees to reciprocate through greater engagement, affective commitment, and sustained contributions. While the core principles of SET remain relevant, Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu (2018) argue that the modern workplace, shaped by technological advancement, globalization, and flexible work arrangements, demands an updated understanding of reciprocal relationships. They highlight that the diverse and dynamic nature of contemporary work environments influence how trust and mutual obligations are perceived and managed.

Recent reflections on the Strategic HRM paradigm emphasize the need to balance both sides of the employment relationship: organizational performance and employee well-being (Boxall, 2018). This evolving perspective is increasingly evident in contemporary HRM thinking, which recognizes that sustainable success cannot be achieved at the expense of employee health, satisfaction, and engagement. Guest (2025) argues that HRM must move beyond a narrow focus on economic outcomes to consider the interests of a wider set of stakeholders, including employees and society. Similarly, Di Fabio (2017) highlights the importance of psychological well-being and positive organizational interventions that support employees not only as workers, but as individuals. Together, these views reflect a growing shift toward HR practices that prioritize sustainability, mutual gains, and long-term value for both organizations and their people.

Moreover, the Quality of Work Life (QWL) paradigm advocated for HR practices prioritizing employees' well-being, suggesting that a balance between job demands and personal life can lead to better overall performance. This approach emphasizes creating a supportive work environment, offering flexible working conditions, and ensuring a healthy work-life balance, which is crucial for maximizing productivity and employees' holistic well-being (Horst et al.,

2014). This theory posits that when employees feel their personal lives are respected and supported by their employer, they are more likely to be motivated and productive.

Recent discussions in HR literature increasingly highlight the role of Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) in shaping HR practices that support both long-term organizational objectives and employee well-being (Enhert, 2009). Guest (2025) argues that effective HRM must incorporate a wider perspective that values not only economic performance but also the needs and interests of employees and the broader community. This viewpoint reflects a growing emphasis on human sustainability - ensuring that workforce health, motivation, and capacity are maintained over time. Pfeffer (2010) echoes this by advocating for social sustainability and calling on organizations to prioritize employee well-being as a cornerstone of sustainable success.

Given the diverse operational contexts of social economy organizations, this study adopts the SHRM framework to examine how HR practices influence employee outcomes in this sector. SHRM is especially relevant because it proactively integrates long-term organizational goals with employee well-being and engagement (Di Fabio, 2017), reflecting the core values that underpin the social economy (Doherty et al., 2014). This balanced approach recognizes that sustainable organizational success depends on meeting both business objectives and the ongoing needs of employees.

Eudaimonic Well-being

Well-being encompasses the holistic state of an individual's physical, psychological, and social health, reflecting their overall quality of life and satisfaction with various domains (Diener et al., 2018). Subjective well-being, encompassing emotional experiences and life satisfaction, provides valuable insights into employees' overall happiness levels and overall functioning (Diener et al., 2018). In organizational settings, higher levels of subjective well-being have been associated with increased employee engagement, reduced turnover intentions, and stronger organizational commitment (Harter et al., 2002). The significance of measuring well-being in HR research lies in its implications for individual job satisfaction, organizational effectiveness, and employee engagement, highlighting its importance in personal and professional contexts (Guest, 2017).

Eudaimonic well-being is a conceptualization of well-being that represents a state of flourishing and fulfillment. Carol Ryff defined eudaimonic well-being as the individual's

development and self-realization, proposing a model with six key components: purpose in life, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relationships, autonomy, and personal growth (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Among these components, purpose in life and personal growth are particularly significant (Ryff et al., 2021). The importance of measuring this type of well-being stems from the broader recognition of less context-dependent satisfaction measures, especially concerning work. Eudaimonic well-being not only enriches individuals' work experiences but also fosters resilience and enhances overall life satisfaction and psychological well-being. Eudaimonic characteristics, such as purpose in life and personal growth, have been found to have protective effects on both physical and mental health, underscoring their significance across the lifespan (Ruini & Ryff, 2013).

The Happy Productive Worker Hypothesis (Staw, 1986) posited that employee well-being significantly influences individual and organizational performance. Numerous studies stemming from this hypothesis have supported models using well-being as a mediator (Van De Voorde, 2012). Research has consistently demonstrated that employee well-being is a critical mechanism through which HR practices impact performance outcomes. While research investigating eudaimonic well-being as a mediator remains limited, emerging evidence suggests its potential importance in understanding the relationship between HR practices and performance outcomes (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018). Peiró et al. (2019) advanced the Happy-Productive Worker Thesis by emphasizing the role of eudaimonic well-being as a key psychological mechanism linking HR practices to employee performance. Rather than treating well-being as a passive outcome, their work highlights how eudaimonic elements such as meaning, engagement, and personal growth mediate the effects of organizational factors, like supportive leadership or job design, on performance. These findings, support a more dynamic, contextualized understanding of the well-being–performance link, moving beyond job related or solely hedonistic interpretations.

Creative Performance

Performance in work settings has been traditionally defined as the execution of specific tasks within a job role (Arvey & Murphy,1998). This conceptualization primarily focuses on task performance, which entails the direct activities that contribute to producing goods or services. Task performance is critical as it ensures that employees fulfill their core responsibilities and meet the established standards of their job roles (Sonnentag & Frese, 2012). However, the notion of

performance in organizations extends beyond mere task execution. The increasing complexity of modern work environments and job roles has led to greater emphasis on creativity in the workplace. Research has suggested that understanding the interaction between employees and their work environment is pivotal for fostering innovation (Zhou & Hoever, 2014).

Creative performance encompasses an employee's capacity to contribute by generating innovative, adaptable, and imaginative outcomes (Tierney & Farmer, 2011). Despite its significance, this measure has often been overshadowed by the predominant focus on task performance. However, in the contemporary landscape, characterized by unprecedented challenges, creativity emerges as a crucial attribute for organizational growth (Mumford et al., 2012). Organizations now recognize that fostering an environment that encourages creativity can lead to competitive advantages. Social economy organizations, which often emphasize democratic participation and collective decision-making, further underscore the importance of creative contributions. The participation of members and employees in decision-making activities suggests that readiness to contribute innovative and practical ideas is beneficial for organizational effectiveness (Defourny et al., 2021).

HR Practices and Employee Outcomes

HRM was largely investigated by examining how HR practices like training and development, recruitment and selection, and performance management impacted dependent variables like employee performance, job satisfaction, and turnover (Al-Qudah et al., 2014; Boon et al., 2011; Guest, 1997; 2002; 2025). These studies have established a clear link between HR practices and a range of outcomes, encompassing employee performance, satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness (Jackson et al., 2014; Ketchen Jr et al., 2015). However, researchers have found that HR practices had a better effect on employee outcomes when employed together in "bundles" of HR practices (MacDuffie, 1995). A commonly used framework distinguishes between ability-enhancing, motivation-enhancing, and empowerment-enhancing HR bundles, also known as the AMO model (Lepak et al., 2006). Studies relying on this model underscored the importance of HR bundles and showcased a positive impact on employee and organizational performance (Demortier et al., 2014; Subramony, 2009). Results of one study confirmed a positive and statistically significant correlation between HRM activities and companies' financial

performances, emphasizing that the correlation is more significant if HR practices are observed as "bundles" (Tadić & Pivac, 2014).

Most studies, however, have focused on performance and productivity-oriented models. By adopting the SHRM paradigm, researchers are encouraged to adopt frameworks that put the employee in the center (Pfeffer, 2010). Moreover, the increasingly relevant QWL paradigm promotes research investigating the relationship between employee well-being and performance productivity (Horst et al., 2014). Supportive HR practices which emphasize commitment, self-direction, flexibility, adaptability, and communication, rooted in the idea that employees enjoy work and take responsibility (Allen et al., 2003). Empirical evidence suggests that employees' perceptions that their organization offers care and support are positively associated not only with job performance (Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davis-LaMastro, 1990), but also with job satisfaction (Eisenberg et al., 1997) and affective commitment (Eisenberg et al., 1990). These positive perceptions have also been linked to reduced turnover intentions, further underscoring the value of supportive organizational practices (Allen, Shore & Griffeth, 2003). Together, this calls for special attention toward designing supportive and inclusive HR practices that promote employee well-being.

The HR bundle of practices under research in this study was employee support HR practices, as operationalized by Villajos and colleagues (2019b), adapted from the HRM scale created by Boon and colleagues (2011) (for further information, see the Methodology section). We focused on exploring the effect of these HR practices on employee well-being and performance, recognizing them as critical employee outcomes.

We first aimed to examine whether there are direct effects of employee support HR practices on creative performance and eudaimonic well-being.

A review of the existing literature highlighted the significance of supportive and inclusive HR practices in promoting positive employee outcomes and enhancing overall workplace well-being (Guest, 2017). Studies have shown that employees who perceive their organizations as supportive and caring are likelier to experience higher eudaimonic well-being, characterized by a sense of purpose, personal growth, and fulfillment (Guest, 2002). Villajos and colleagues (2019a) found a significant positive relationship between HR practices and eudaimonic well-being. Their findings contribute to a refined understanding of the Happy-Productive Worker hypothesis by integrating eudaimonic well-being and creative performance. Moreover, longitudinal evidence

suggested that HR practices can have lasting effects, enhancing eudaimonic well-being over time, which in turn supports improvements in creative performance. Finally, Peiró et al. (2021) reinforced this view by identifying a number of studies that confirmed a positive relationship between HR-related practices and the provision of organizational resources on various facets of eudaimonic well-being. Therefore, our first hypothesis is as follows:

H1a: *There is a positive relationship between employee support HR practices and eudaimonic well-being.*

A broad body of research indicated that effective HR practices enhanced performance outcomes both at the organizational and individual levels. Meta-analyses consistently confirmed a positive relationship between HR practices and employee performance (Ketchen Jr et al., 2015; Subramony, 2009). Fewer studies have explored their impact on creative performance, although some recent empirical research confirmed a strong positive association between HRM practices and creative performance, providing further support for this relationship across different contexts (Al-Dulaimi & Turki, 2024; Villajos et al., 2019a). Zhou and Hoever (2014) underscored the critical role of the work environment in fostering employee creativity. While certain researchers have emphasized that HR systems are vital in communicating and facilitating employee creativity (Panigrahy & Pradhan, 2015), others have suggested that high-performance HR practices might adversely affect creativity (Hou et al., 2019).

Our earlier conclusion highlighted that social economy organizations employ contemporary HRM systems characterized by an employee-oriented, supportive approach, distinct from traditional productivity-focused approaches in High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS). Perceived organizational support has been shown to positively influence innovation (Eisenberger, 1990), and one study found that the relationship between HR practices and employee creativity was mediated by trust in management (Lee et al., 2019). Therefore, we aimed to investigate whether supportive HR practices directly influence creative performance in social economy organizations. We hypothesized the following:

H1b: *There is a positive relationship between employee support HR practices and creative performance.*

Well-being is significant in HR research, as it influences employee and organizational outcomes, including performance (Van de Voorde et al., 2012). The Happy Productive Worker Hypothesis provides a foundational framework for this connection, suggesting that employees with higher well-being tend to be more productive and engaged. Supporting this, Judge et al. (2001) offered a comprehensive re-evaluation of the job satisfaction–job performance link, revealing a stronger and more consistent relationship than previously assumed. Their findings not only reinforced the practical importance of employee satisfaction but also encouraged a shift toward more integrative models that consider alternative conceptualizations of satisfaction and performance, such as subjective wellbeing and motivational dimensions of performance - key elements when examining broader outcomes such as creativity and innovation.

The QWL paradigm led to research showing a positive and undeniable relationship between employee well-being and performance productivity (Horst et al., 2014). Poor employee well-being, marked by elevated stress or burnout, often correlates with reduced productivity, leading to organizational-level consequences such as lowered productivity, increased absenteeism, and higher turnover rates (Guest, 2017).

Moreover, research has consistently demonstrated that, alongside heightened productivity and job performance, employees with higher levels of well-being tend to exhibit enhanced creativity in the workplace (Huhtala & Parzefall, 2007). Huhtala and Parzefall identified innovativeness and well-being as consistently intertwined phenomena. This symbiotic relationship between well-being and creativity enhances individual fulfillment and contributes to broader organizational resilience and effectiveness in dynamic environments. Therefore, our following hypothesis was:

H1c: *There is a positive relationship between eudaimonic well-being and creative performance.*

Researchers underscored the need for organizations to consider the diverse impacts of HR interventions on employee outcomes, highlighting the interconnectedness between well-being and performance in the workplace (Boon et al., 2011). Several studies have consistently confirmed the significance of the HR – well-being – performance relationship (Guest, 2002; Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019; Van de Voorde et al., 2012). In a systematic review, Peccei and Van De Voorde

(2019) reported that most empirical articles support the idea that HRM enhances performance directly or through well-being.

This relationship can be further explained through Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that favorable treatment from the organization, such as investment in employees' development and well-being, fosters a sense of obligation and reciprocation among employees. As a result, employees are more likely to engage in behaviors that enhance both individual and organizational performance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). HR practices that support eudaimonic well-being, such as opportunities for personal growth, meaning, and purpose, are thus likely to encourage positive reciprocation in the form of engagement and creative performance (Gichohi, 2014).

Research suggests that employee eudaimonic well-being and creative performance are pivotal in achieving organizational objectives and promoting social and economic sustainability within goal-oriented organizations (Ouedraogo & Koffi, 2018, Villajos et al., 2019a), which is why we intended to test this highly researched model using these less investigated measures. We hypothesize that:

H2: *Eudaimonic well-being mediates the relationship between employee support HR practices and creative performance.*

Social Economy Organizations

Social economy organizations are defined as entities that prioritize social and environmental objectives alongside economic goals, often operating as cooperatives, mutual societies, and non-profit organizations (Doherty et al., 2014). Rooted in principles of democratic ownership and equitable profit distribution among members, these entities operate within unique institutional frameworks (Defourny, 2009). This distinct organizational context underpins their approach to HRM), thereby increasing the relevance of practices that emphasize participation, equity, and social impact (Lewis et al., 2019). Understanding these intrinsic characteristics is pivotal for exploring how HRM strategies contribute to both organizational effectiveness and employee well-being within the social economy sector. The social economy sector is gaining growing recognition worldwide as a key contributor to inclusive and sustainable development, supported by legislative frameworks and policies in various countries (European Commission,

2020). Spain, among other nations, has enacted legislation that formally recognizes and regulates the social economy sector, complementing a broader international movement to strengthen the role of these organizations (Monzón & Chaves, 2017). This study focuses on Spain, providing insights within the context of a globally relevant social economy sector.

In recent years, considerable organized efforts have emerged to understand the internal functioning of these organizations, some on a national and some on an international basis. Most notably, the already mentioned ICSEM is a global research initiative focused on analyzing and comparing social enterprise models across countries to deepen understanding and inform policy and practice in the field (Defourny et al., 2021). Also noteworthy are the efforts of CIRIEC, the International Centre of Research and Information on the Public, Social, and Cooperative Economy and other international research networks and centres. The study of recent developments in the social economy sector in the European Union suggests that there is a need for a comprehensive review examining various types of social organizations concerning their HR practices and employee outcomes, as different foundational principles might require different HR management approaches (Monzón & Chaves, 2017).

These organized efforts also attempted to categorize and analyze the typology of organizations to understand their functioning, statistics, or differentiating characteristics. The current study will utilize the categorization proposed by CEPES (2022) derived from the Spanish legislation (Law 5/2011, of Social Economy). The following categories were included:

1. Associated Work Cooperatives - Cooperative enterprises where the workers collectively own and manage the business, ensuring democratic decision-making and equitable distribution of profits among the employees.
2. Other Cooperatives - Various other cooperative types serving specific needs, such as agricultural production, consumer goods distribution, housing provision, transportation services, and social welfare support.
3. Worker-Owned Companies – Also known as labour companies or workers' societies, are cooperative businesses where employees collectively own and manage the organization, fostering democratic decision-making and equitable distribution of profits.
4. WISE: Work Integration Social Enterprises - Social enterprises that facilitate job opportunities and support for marginalized individuals, promoting their workforce integration alongside social and economic objectives.

5. Special Employment Centers - Organizations that offer jobs and support specifically tailored to individuals with disabilities or other disadvantages, fostering their inclusion in the workforce and promoting their economic independence.

6. Social Enterprises - Businesses that balance profit-making with social or environmental goals, using their revenues to create positive societal impact or support community development.

7. Rest of Social Economy Companies - Capitalist entities controlled by the social economy; mutual insurance companies; social security mutual societies, associations, and foundations with some economic activity, for-profit organizations run by a social economy enterprise, among others.

Social economy organizations often operate within distinct institutional environments characterized by unique regulatory frameworks, cultural values, and stakeholder expectations (Defourny, 2009). The Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) can be applied to explain how these entities conform to societal expectations and norms within their respective communities or sectors. When applied to HRM, new developments in institutional theory emphasize the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the relationship between employees and their work environments (Lewis et al., 2019). Rather than viewing employees as passive recipients of organizational norms, this perspective recognizes them as active agents capable of shaping institutional practices. As a result, HR practices increasingly focus on fostering open communication, a participatory work culture and collaborative decision-making. This adaptive approach positions HRM as a key mechanism through which these organizations align with evolving societal expectations while preserving their distinct identities.

Drawing on data from two large organizations in different sectors, Boon et al. (2011) emphasized the importance of HR practices that reflect and communicate organizational strategy. On the empirical side, studies related to social enterprises, a prominent type of social economy organization, show a clear positive effect of HR practices on organizational performance (Iskandar, 2022). However, few studies have included employee-level measures, and some have found that HRM systems in these organizations are not robust or structured (Royce, 2007). This suggests a need for more detailed examinations of how HR practices impact individual employee outcomes within social economy organizations. Recent studies have proposed aligning HR practices with organizational strategy and rationale.

A meta-analysis by Blom et al. (2018) on the effect of HR practices on performance in different types of organizations—including for-profit companies, public, and semi-public

entities—revealed some differences according to the practices used. This raises the question of whether the social economy sector also contains uncharted differences in relation to other types of organizations and within the sector itself. Voigt and von der Oelsnitz (2023) focused on the HR framework across cooperatives, a single type of social economy organization. They conducted a systematic literature review and found specific characteristics of cooperatives, such as membership, related to the importance of employment security as an HRM policy. However, they also identified a gap in literature regarding a comprehensive review or synthesis specifically focusing on HRM in cooperatives. This highlights a critical need for further empirical investigations to understand the nuances and effectiveness of HR practices within various social economy organizations.

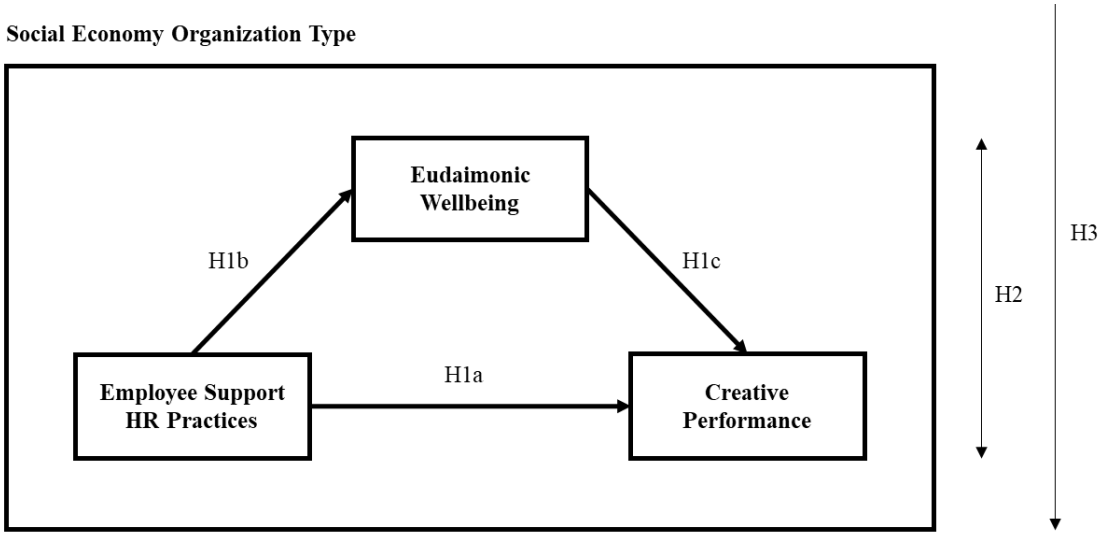
Based on the scarce and differing empirical data on the state of HR practices and their relation to employee outcomes within social economy organizations, we aimed to explore whether the hypothesized model will show different results depending on the type of organization. We hypothesized the following:

H3: *The model describing the relationship between employee support HR practices, eudaimonic well-being, and creative performance varies across different social economy organizations.*

In summary, this study examined the relationships between employee support HR practices, eudaimonic well-being, and creative performance within various social economy organizations. For a visual summary of the research hypotheses, see Figure 1.

Figure 1

Visual Representation of Research Hypotheses



Methodology

Sample

The study involved 1.589 working individuals from various sectors of the social economy in Spain. Figure 2 shows the distribution of participants across different types of social economy organizations. Additionally, Table 1 demonstrates the distribution of participants based on different demographic variables.

Figure 2

Sample Distribution Across Social Economy Organizations

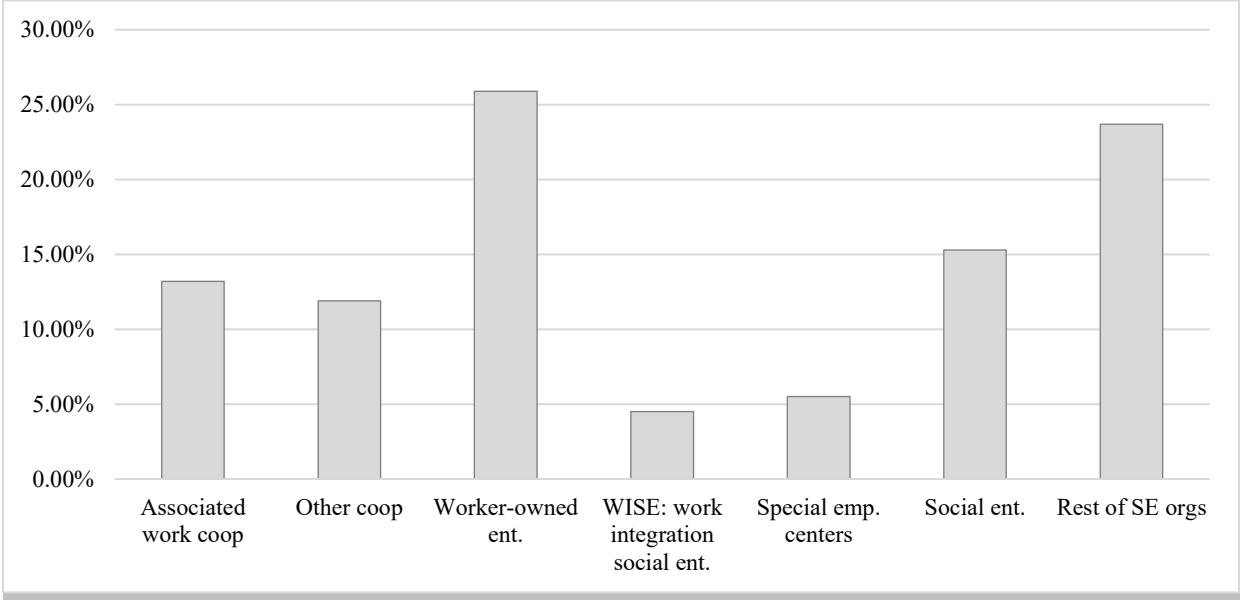


Table 1

Demographic Distribution Across Social Economy (SE) Organization Types

	Associated Work Coop (n = 210)	Other Coop (n = 189)	Worker Owned Ent. (n = 412)	WISE: Work Integration Social Ent. (n = 71)	Special Emp. Centers (n = 87)	Social Ent. (n = 243)	Rest of SE Orgs (n = 377)
Age							
<35	47.1%	52.9%	43.2%	54.9%	31.0%	39.5%	28.1%
35-50	40.5%	34.9%	39.6%	32.4%	48.3%	42.4%	51.7%
>50	12.4%	12.2%	17.2%	12.7%	18.1%	18.1%	20.2%
Gender							
Women	49.5%	45.0%	49.3%	38.0%	58.0%	46.2%	49.8%
Men	49.0%	55.0%	50.2%	63.0%	39.1%	53.3%	49.7%
Non-binary	1.4%	.0%	.5%	.0%	.4%	.5%	.5%
Educational Level	6.7%	4.2%	2.9%	2.8%	5.7%	2.1%	2.4%
Doctorate	18.1%	13.2%	11.9%	8.5%	17.2%	17.3%	17.2%
Master's Degree	34.3%	31.7%	34.7%	23.9%	29.9%	49.0%	40.8%
Bachelor's Degree	19.0%	24.3%	29.6%	26.8%	26.4%	22.6%	26.5%
Vocational training	12.4%	18.0%	13.6%	22.5%	11.5%	6.6%	10.1%

Secondary education	7.6%	7.9%	7.3%	12.7%	9.2%	2.5%	2.1%
Basic Education	1.9%	.5%	.0%	2.8%	.0%	.0%	.8%
No Education	6.7%	4.2%	2.9%	2.8%	5.7%	2.1%	2.4%
Professional category							
Unskilled manual labour	18.10%	23.80%	12.60%	12.70%	21.80%	6.20%	10.60%
Administrative work	20.50%	22.80%	37.90%	36.60%	37.90%	34.60%	35.30%
Middle technician	22.90%	27.00%	23.30%	33.80%	18.40%	28.40%	24.70%
Highly qualified professional	28.60%	22.20%	19.90%	11.30%	18.40%	28.00%	24.90%
Management	10.00%	4.20%	6.30%	5.60%	3.40%	2.90%	4.50%

Measures

The survey consisted firstly of a sociodemographic questionnaire that requested the following information: gender, age, employment status, type of social economy organization in which the participants work, professional category, professional qualification, educational level, membership in the organization, sector, level of service, tenure, number of children, age of the youngest child, and province. For a complete list of demographic variables alongside their respective categories and item lists of all scales used in the study, see Appendix A.

Social Economy Types (SE Type)

As previously mentioned, social economy types were differentiated based on the adaptation of the CEPES (2022). Participants were chosen from the following categories: 1) associated work cooperatives; 2) other cooperatives (agricultural, consumer, housing, transport, social cooperatives, among others); 3) worker-owned companies; 4) WISE: work integration social enterprises; 5) special employment centers; 6) social enterprises; and 7) rest of social economy organizations (capitalist entities controlled by the social economy, mutual insurance companies, social security mutual societies, among others).

Employee-Support HR Practices (HRP)

The measurement of employee-support practices used the HRP scale developed by Villajos et al. (2019b), comprising four variables: Job security (three items; e.g., "My organization offers me the guarantee of keeping my job"; α = .72), Work-life balance (three items; e.g., "My organization offers me the opportunity to organize my work schedule in order to meet my family obligations"; α = .79), Exit (five items; e.g., "My organization offers me the possibilities for leave of absence"; α = .87), and Voice (four items; e.g., "My organization offers me the opportunity to make suggestions for improvement in the way things are done"; α = .90). Respondents rated each item on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a lot*). The overall HRP scale demonstrated strong reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .94.

This scale was adapted from the initial comprehensive HRM scale by Boon et al. (2011). The refined scale was created by dividing practices into bundles: performance enhancing and employee supporting practices. This operationalization was validated and showed a better fit, providing a more nuanced framework for investigating the impact of HR practices on employee outcomes. However, the Employee support scale utilized in the current study is an additional adaptation. On top of the existing facets, employment security, work-life balance, and exit management, the fourth facet titled voice was identified by differentiating the participation-encouraging items. To justify this adaptation, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed (EFA) (see Results).

Eudaimonic Well-being (EWB)

Eudaimonic well-being was evaluated using the following two scales together: Purpose in life (six items; e.g., "I try to improve or make important changes in my life" ; α = .87) and Personal Growth (five items; e.g., "I am interested in activities that open new horizons for me"; α = .87), as proposed by Ryff (1989). Respondents rated each item on a scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*). The scale demonstrated excellent reliability (α = .93).

Creative Performance (CP)

Creative performance was assessed using the scale developed by Oldham and Cummings (1996), which consists of three items. Participants rated their responses on a scale from 1 (*totally*

disagree) to 7 (*totally agree*). For instance, "I am practical in my work, and I propose useful ideas for my organization." The scale exhibited good reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .83.

Control Variables

Age

Age will be a control variable for eudaimonic well-being (EWB) and creative performance (CP). Participants numeric responses were converted into a categorical variable with the following categories: younger than 35, 35 to 50, and older than 50.

Age and Eudaimonic Well-being. Research has found that eudaimonic well-being steadily declines with age (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). This trend is observed in adults ranging from 25 to 75, particularly in the dimensions of purpose in life and personal growth, and has been confirmed through extensive worldwide studies (Joshanloo, 2018). Some studies have found age to significantly predict eudaimonic well-being for men but not women (Joshanloo et al., 2018). Due to these findings, we will examine the influence of gender in the following paragraphs. Overall, we conclude that sufficient empirical evidence justifies using age as a control variable in the current study.

Age and Creative Performance. The relationship between creative performance and age is somewhat inconsistent in research. Ng and Feldman (2008) found that when examining creativity as a dimension of job performance, it is unrelated to age, indicating no significant differences in creative performance between younger and older workers. However, other studies suggest this relationship is significant and warrants further exploration. Binnewies et al. (2008) found that age positively relates to creativity at work when support and job control are included as moderators. These authors concluded that employees' creative performance can be enhanced using different supportive managerial tactics depending on employee age. Given that our study consists of a supportive bundle of HR practices as the independent variable affecting creative performance, we added age as a control variable.

Gender

Gender was also used as a control variable for both EWB and CP. Participants were offered the following categories: woman, man, and non-binary.

Gender and Eudaimonic Well-being. The relationship between eudaimonic well-being and gender yields inconsistent results. Some studies have shown that women score significantly higher in personal growth than men (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Other studies, however, reported significantly higher values for personal growth in men when composite scores for eudaimonic well-being were considered (Bookwala & Boyar, 2008). Due to the noticeable inconsistency in the relationship with eudaimonic well-being, this variable was controlled in our analysis.

Gender and Creative Performance. Research suggests that although men and women have equal creative abilities (Baer & Kaufman, 2008), men tend to exhibit higher levels of creative performance (Dul et al., 2011). However, one study showed that supportive practices intended to increase creative performance by improving self-efficacy have a stronger effect on women than men (Hora et al., 2012). The authors concluded that these findings have important implications for HR practices. Considering these differences, we decided to control for gender.

Procedure

Two different procedures were used for data collection. First, the research team contacted several social economy enterprises (through their CEOs or one of the partners) to invite them to complete the questionnaires. Additionally, an external company was hired to support further data collection. We used a pre-designed self-report questionnaire administered through the online software Enquest. A quota sampling approach ensured proportional representation across genders, resulting in a balanced composition in the overall sample. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were based on two questions: 1) type of social economy organization where the participant worked; and 2) employment status. If they answered that they did not work in a social economy organization, the survey was terminated, and these participants were not considered. Regarding the second question, the participants who answered that they were self-employed or employed were accepted, while those who were retired or studying without working were excluded. Data collection lasted approximately two months, from November to December of 2022.

All participants provided informed consent and were introduced to the following information: "The study will be carried out in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013) and the Organic Law 3/2018, of 5 December, on Personal Data

Protection and guarantee of digital rights, and the publications and reports made will only present aggregated data, never on an individual basis. Your data and results will always be treated confidentially and anonymously."

Analysis

Data analyses were performed using the statistical software SPSS (IBM Corp, 2020) and AMOS (Arbuckle, 2019). First, we conducted an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for the newly adapted HRP scale. Then, the descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and reliability values were displayed. The reliability analysis assessed the internal consistency of all measurement scales (see Appendix C). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to determine the reliability of the items, following generally established guidelines (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

As a preliminary analysis, we conducted a One-Way ANOVA to determine whether there were significant differences between different social economy (SE) types in HRP, EWB, and CP.

Next, we tested a mediation model using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in the overall sample (Streiner, 2006). The model was specified based on the research objectives and hypotheses outlined. This model was tested to evaluate direct relationships between the latent constructs (H1). The mediation hypothesis was tested by examining whether EWB mediated the relationship between HRP and CP (H2). Bootstrapping was used to assess direct and indirect effects, providing confidence intervals to determine the significance of these effects. Model fit was evaluated using indices such as the chi-squared (χ^2) goodness-of-fit test, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). These indices were evaluated to assess how well the proposed model fitted the observed data, referencing the threshold values established by Hu and Bentler (1999).

Finally, multi-group analysis was conducted to examine potential variations in the model across different types of social economy organizations (H3). This analysis aimed to determine whether the regression paths exhibit the same significance patterns within each organizational type. Two categories of social economy organizations were not included in the multi-group analysis: other cooperatives (e.g., agricultural, consumer, housing, transport, social cooperatives) and other social economy organizations (e.g., capitalist entities controlled by the social economy, mutual insurance companies, social security mutual societies). These categories were excluded

due to their broad within-group diversity, which could limit the validity and applicability of the analysis conclusions.

Despite this exclusion, we note that it was essential to include participants from these organizations in the overall sample for the initial analyses. This approach aligns with our aim to first test H1 and H2 across the entire sector of social economy organizations. By doing so, we comprehensively understand the relationships among PRH, PWB, and CREA within the broader context. Subsequently, we examined differences that arise when well-established groups are analyzed individually. Including all seven categories in the overall sample ensures that our findings reflect the diversity of the social economy sector while focusing the multi-group analysis on the five more homogeneous groups, which enhances the precision and relevance of the subgroup comparisons.

Results

Exploratory factor Analysis (EFA)

As the HRP scale was additionally adapted for this study, an EFA was conducted to assess the validity of the newly structured scale. The Minimum Residuals extraction method was used with an oblimin rotation method. First, the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) and Bartlet's Test were examined. KMO measure of .939 indicated excellent sampling adequacy for conducting factor analysis (Field, 2009). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (χ^2=15353, df=105, p<.001), confirming that the correlation matrix is significantly different from the identity matrix. Next, model fit indices were examined. The RMSEA of .0539 and a TLI of .968 both indicated a reasonably good fit according to established criteria (RMSEA<.06; TLI>.95) (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Factor loadings were examined to assess the relationship between each variable and the underlying factors identified through EFA (see Table 2). The analysis demonstrated robust loadings across the expected factors, with all variables showing loadings above .3, consistent with established guidelines (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). However, one item (P12HR26; "My organization offers me possibilities for leave of absence") exhibited unexpected loadings with items from the work-life balance dimension (factor 3) instead of the exit dimension (factor 2). This could be logically explained due to possibilities for leave of absence often being perceived by

employees as a tool to manage personal and family needs, which aligns more closely with work-life balance concerns than with actual exit intentions. Even so, the item displayed relatively low factor loading (~.3) and relatively high uniqueness (>.5). Thus, we recommend further evaluation and potential reconsideration of its inclusion in future applications. Despite this slight anomaly, the scale demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties suitable for our analytical purposes.

Table 2

EFA: Factor loadings for HRP scale

	Factor				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**Uniqueness**
P12HR30	.889				.239
P12HR29	.801				.267
P12HR31	.763				.373
P12HR28	.703				.317
P12HR24		.804			.273
P12HR23		.786			.340
P12HR22		.633			.364
P12HR25		.569			.425
P12HR21			.829		.268
P12HR20			.787		.382
P12HR19			.730		.379
P12HR26			.314		.532
P12HR17				.803	.352
P12HR16				.756	.318
P12HR18				.601	.327

Descriptive Statistics

The following tables present descriptive statistics and correlations for the variables of interest. Table 3 provides insight into the central tendency measures and relationships between variables in the overall sample, while Table 4 provides this information for each social economy organization that will be included in the multi-group analysis separately.

Table 3

Descriptives and correlations in the overall sample

	N	*M*	*SD*	*HRP*	*EWB*	*CP*
HRP	1589	3.11	.89	-		
EWB	1589	5.61	1.00	.34**	-	
CP	1589	5.73	1.19	.22**	.49**	-

Note. HRP = Employee Support HR Practices; EWB = Eudaimonic Well-Being; CP = Creative Performance; ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

Table 4

Descriptives and correlations by SE types

	N	*M*	*SD*	*HRP*	*EWB*	*CP*
Associated Work Cooperatives						
HRP	210	3.39	.80	-		
EWB	210	5.64	1.04	.38**	-	
CP	210	5.70	1.27	.52**	.24**	-
Worker Owned Enterprises						
HRP	412	3.07	.91	-		
EWB	412	5.62	.96	.35**	-	
CP	412	5.78	1.13	.30**	.41**	-
WISE: Work Integration Soc. Ent.						
HRP	71	3.30	1.03	-		
EWB	71	5.65	1.12	.23	-	
CP	71	5.61	1.26	.16	.59**	-
Special Employment Centers						
HRP	87	3.11	.89	-		
EWB	87	5.61	1.00	.47**	-	
CP	87	5.73	1.19	.19	.56**	-
Social Enterprises						
HRP	243	3.04	.84	-		
EWB	243	5.66	.95	.30**	-	

CP	243	5.90	1.05	.13**	.42**	-

Note. N = Sample Size; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; HRP = Employee Support HR Practices; EWB = Eudaimonic Well-Being; CP = Creative Performance. p < .01 (2-tailed).

ANOVA

As a preliminary analysis, a One-Way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences between the mean values of the variables (HRP, EWB, and CP) across different social economy (SE) organizations (see Table 5). The results indicated significant differences between SE types in HRP, $F(6, 1582)=7.215$, $p<.001$, suggesting variations in employee support practices among different organizations. Significant differences were also found for CP, $F(6, 1582)=2.281$, $p=.034$, indicating variability in creative performance across organizational types. However, no significant differences were found for EWB, $F(6, 1582)=1.799$, $p=.096$.

The presence of significant differences in HRP and CP provides further support for the hypotheses we aim to test with multigroup analysis. The lack of significant differences in mean values of EWB among the SE does not negate the possibility of differences in their relationships (mediation paths) across organization types, which is why we proceeded with the multigroup analysis.

Table 5

One-Way ANOVA for Differences Between SE Types

	F	*p*
HRP	7.215	<.001***
EWB	1.799	0.096
CP	2.281	0.034*

*Note. *p<.05, **p<.01 (2-tailed), **p .001*

Hypothesis Testing

A path analysis was conducted in AMOS to test the hypotheses (Steiner, 2005). The model fit indices were as follows: $\chi^2/df = 7.06$, $p<.001$; RMSEA=.048; CFI=.911; TLI=.7; SRMR =.057. The RMSEA indicated a good fit (RMSEA<.05), and the SRMR suggested a good fit (SRMR<.08)

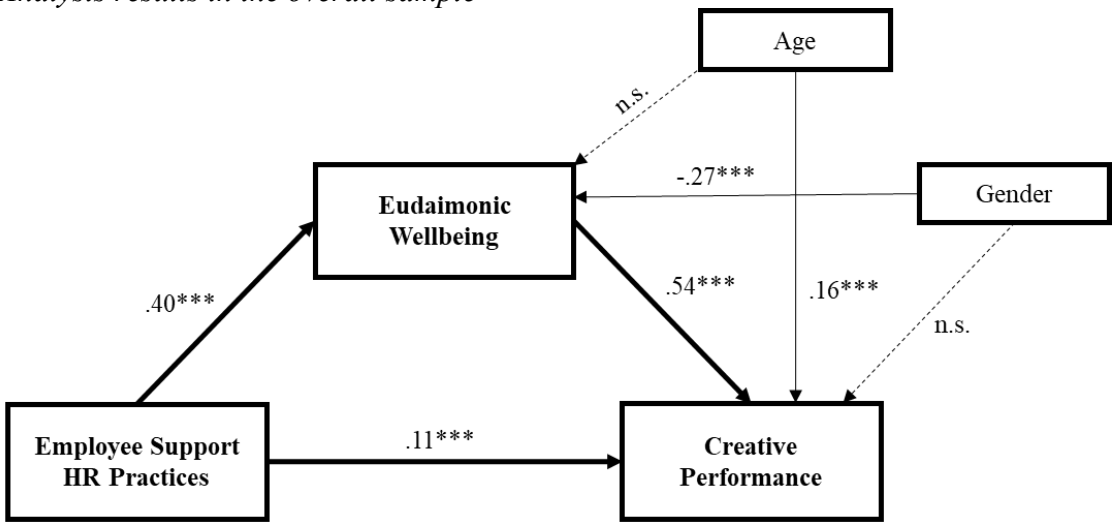
as well. The CFI was above the acceptable threshold (CFI>.90), indicating an acceptable fit. However, the TLI was below the desired threshold of .90, suggesting that the model fit could be improved. Modification indices indicate potential improvements by including a regression path from HRP to age, currently treated as a control variable. However, this adjustment exceeds the scope of our theoretical model under investigation. Given that the fit indices suggest an overall satisfactory model fit in some respects, we analyzed the results within the current model framework.

H1: Direct Effects

We found significant direct effects between HRP and CP (β=.108, SE=.031, $p \leq .001$) (H1a), HRP and EWB (β =.398, SE =.27, $p \leq .001$) (H1b), and EWB and CP (β=.544, SE=.028, $p \leq .001$). These results fully supported Hypothesis 1, suggesting positive relationships among these constructs. The described relationships are visually presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Path Analysis results in the overall sample



Note. n.s. = non-significant; ***p* .001(2-tailed)

H2: Mediation

Table 6 presents the results of the mediation analysis. The indirect effect of HRP on CP through EWB was significant (β =.261, p=.001). The significant indirect effect and the narrow 95% confidence interval [0.178, 0.261] provided evidence supporting Hypothesis 2, which posits

that EWB mediates the relationship between HRP and CP. Considering the existing significant direct effect of HRP on CP, we can determine that the mediation is partial. In other words, EWB acts as an explanatory mechanism of the relationship between HRP and CP, but it does not fully account for their relationship. This finding underscores the importance of fostering employee well-being to enhance creative performance within organizations.

Table 6

Indirect Effects

	β	*SE*	*p*	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
HRP → CP via EWB	.261	.021	.001***	.178	.261

Note. HRP = Employee Support HR Practices; EWB = Eudaimonic Well-Being; CP = Creative Performance; β = standardized beta coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval**;** ***p < .001

H3: Group Differences

Finally, we performed multi-group analysis to test whether the organizational type was a boundary condition to the suggested model of the relationship HRP, EWB, and CP. Table 7 displays the regression weights across different types of social economy (SE) organizations multi-group analysis. Each cell in the table shows the standardized regression coefficients (β) for the relationships between employee support HR practices (HRP), eudaimonic well-being (EWB), and creative performance (CP) within each SE type. Regression path significance patterns for each organization separately are displayed in Figures 3 to 7.

Table 7

Comparison of regression weights across SE types

	HRP → CP	HRP → EWB	EWB → CP
Associated Work Coops	n.s.	.50***	.61***
Worker-Owned Companies	.25***	.40***	.40***
WISE: Work Integration Soc. Ent.	n.s.	n.s.	.76***

Special Emp. Centers	n.s.	.54***	.65***
Social Enterprises	n.s.	.35***	.45***

Note. n.s.= non-significant, **p<.05, **p<.01 (2-tailed), **p .001*

HRP → CP. The regression weight from HRP to CP is non-significant (n.s.) across all SE types except worker-owned companies. This suggests that employee support HR practices predict creative performance in worker-owned enterprises but not consistently across other types of social economy organizations. Interestingly, we found this direct effect significant when examining the overall model. To explore whether there is potential full mediation present in isolated SE types, we examined the indirect effects (see Table 8). The results suggest significant full mediation in all remaining SE types under consideration, albeit with wider confidence intervals. This implies that when looking at social economy organizations separately, the relationship between employee support and creative performance is not significant, but it is fully explained through eudaimonic well-being that acts as a mediating mechanism.

Table 8

Indirect Effects (HRP → CP via EWB) across SE types

	β	*SE*	*p*	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Associated Work Coops	.306	.109	.001***	.113	.533
Worker-Owned Companies	.159	.030	.001***	.107	.227
WISE: Work Integration Soc. Ent.	.265	.143	.011*	.044	.175
Special Emp. Centers	.355	.110	.001***	.176	.611
Social Enterprises	.158	.043	.001***	.085	.260

Note. HRP = Employee Support HR Practices; EWB = Eudaimonic Well-Being; CP = Creative Performance;
** p<.05, ** p<.01 (2-tailed), *** p .001*

HRP → EWB. Significant positive relationships are observed between HRP and EWB across all SE types, except WISE, suggesting that this direct effect is confirmed in almost all SE types.

EWB → CP. This direct effect is confirmed in all SE types.

These findings highlight the variability in the relationships between employee support HR practices, eudaimonic well-being, and creative performance across different social economy organizations, thereby confirming Hypothesis 3. The significant differences in regression weights underscore the importance of considering organizational context when examining the impact of HR practices on employee outcomes. However, these differences cannot fully be discovered through this analysis. Further interpretation of the analysis results and limitations are provided in the Discussion.

Discussion

This study contributes to the well-established field of HR practices by exploring their impact on employee outcomes within social economy organizations. With growing attention to employee well-being, there is a rising acknowledgement that broader measures, such as eudaimonic well-being, are needed beyond traditional job satisfaction. As society moves towards recognizing the value of meaningful work and work-life balance, it is important to reconsider how work influences overall well-being and creativity (Shorthose, 2020). Similarly, performance metrics must also evolve beyond task-oriented measurements to include creative performance, which reflects employees' abilities to contribute with novel ideas and problem-solving abilities (Ouedraogo & Koffi, 2018).

This study tested a well-established model from scientific literature examining the relationship between HR practice, well-being and performance, which has most often been applied to public and private organizations (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019). Given the rising importance and prominence of social economy organizations, we questioned whether supportive HR practices have the same relationship with employee outcomes in this context. We further argued that the social economy sector encompasses significant within-group diversity that is often overlooked in both research and practice, as these organizations are often generalized under the broad 'social economy' label.

Our findings confirm the positive relationship between supportive HR practices and eudaimonic well-being, highlighting how HR initiatives focused on employee support foster a deeper sense of purpose, growth, and fulfillment. This resonates with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which explains that employees tend to reciprocate organizational investments with positive attitudes and outcomes. It also supports the Quality of Work Life (QWL) paradigm (Horst et al., 2014) and Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) frameworks (Ehnert, 2009), emphasizing the centrality of employee well-being to organizational success.

Interestingly, while supportive HR practices showed a direct positive association with creative performance in the overall sample, this effect diminished across most social economy organization types. This suggests that, in contrast to traditional Strategic HRM models such as the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) and High-Performance Work Systems (Huselid, 1995), which emphasize direct HR impacts on performance, the social economy context favors an indirect route. This pattern underscores the mutual gains perspective typical of social economy organizations, where employee welfare is both a valued outcome and a performance driver. Here, HR practices nurture employee well-being, which in turn enables creativity. It is worth noting that for Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE), this direct relationship was not significant either, possibly reflecting their unique social missions and operational challenges that may require more tailored HR strategies.

The positive relationship between eudaimonic well-being and creative performance aligns with the Happy Productive Worker Hypothesis (Staw, 1986), underscoring well-being as a key precondition for creativity at work (Dul et al., 2011). The mediating role of eudaimonic well-being reveals the psychological mechanism through which HR practices influence creativity, by fostering fulfillment and engagement rather than exerting direct pressure (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019). This highlights a more human-centered approach to HRM in social economy organizations, consistent with their broader social objectives (Defourny et al., 2021).

Further emphasizing sector diversity, multi-group analysis revealed that in most social economy types, the relationship between HR practices and creative performance was explained entirely through eudaimonic well-being. However, in Worker-Owned Companies, the relationship appeared to be influenced both directly by HR practices and indirectly through well-being, reflecting their distinct governance structures that blend cooperative principles with traditional

management elements. This suggests that in some contexts, HR practices may influence creativity through multiple pathways. These findings resonate with contingency theory (Boon et al., 2011) and recent calls for contextualized HRM approaches that account for organizational idiosyncrasies in the social economy sector (Defourny et al., 2021; Lewis et al., 2019).

This study underscores the importance of recognizing organizational diversity within the broader category of social economy entities. As highlighted by our findings, supportive HR practices influence employee outcomes differently across various types of social economy organizations and therefore are not universally applicable. Rather, they must be adapted to align with the specific values, goals, and operational contexts of each organization type within this diverse sector, in order to optimize employee well-being and performance levels.

Practical Implications

Building on these findings, it is evident that supportive HR practices play a critical role in fostering employee well-being and creative performance across organizational settings. According to Harter et al. (2002), organizations that cultivate work environments where employees feel valued, supported, and engaged experience not only higher employee satisfaction and retention but also enhanced productivity, reduced absenteeism, greater customer satisfaction, and improved business performance. This underscores the strategic importance of investing in flexible, employee-centered policies such as work-life balance initiatives and inclusive feedback mechanisms. Kundu (2013) emphasizes the necessity of regularly updating these practices to reflect the specific organizational context, especially as work-life dynamics evolve. Such practices can positively influence job satisfaction and reduce employees' intention to leave, thereby contributing to sustained organizational success. Actively involving employees in the co-creation and ongoing refinement of HR initiatives ensures these efforts meet their evolving needs and fosters greater engagement. Furthermore, supportive HR practices should proactively promote diversity and inclusion to address the unique challenges faced by underrepresented groups and ensure equity.

For social economy organizations, supportive HR practices hold particular significance due to their mission-driven focus. Aligning HR policies with the organization's social mission can strengthen employee motivation and deepen commitment. Based on our research and existing knowledge, we argue that tailoring HR approaches to reflect the unique values and operational

realities of different social economy types can significantly enhance employee eudaimonic well-being and creative output. This context-specific approach moves beyond generic private-sector HR models and fosters a work environment conducive to meaningful, sustainable engagement and innovation (Blom et al., 2018). Providing targeted training for HR managers and leaders on these context-specific practices is critical for effective implementation and long-term sustainability.

Practitioners should recognize the diversity within social economy organizations and avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach to HR. Designing HR policies that align with the distinct needs and cultures of each organization type will better promote well-being, motivation, and ultimately, performance. Regular measurement and evaluation of HR practices, using comprehensive metrics that include well-being and creative performance, enable data-driven improvements and greater impact. Future efforts should continue refining these models and developing HR practices sensitive to organizational diversity, ensuring supportive HR systems serve as a foundation for both employee flourishing and organizational success (Boon et al., 2011; Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019).

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into HR practices within the social economy sector, it is important to recognize its limitations alongside its contributions. One limitation concerns the scale used to measure employee supportive HR practices, which is newly adapted and has yet to undergo full statistical validation. While the theoretical justification for this adaptation is sound, future research should prioritize validating the scale to enhance the reliability and robustness of measurement.

Additionally, this study focused on a specific subset of supportive HR practices, which may not fully capture the broad range of HR strategies that influence employee outcomes. Therefore, expanding the scope of HR practices in future studies will be important to better understand their varied effects on well-being and creative performance. However, by offering a closer examination of these particular practices, the study provides valuable insights relevant for the contemporary work environment, where flexibility and work-life balance are becoming increasingly important.

All data was collected from employees' perspectives, reflecting subjective perceptions of HR practices, well-being, and creative performance. While these perspectives are essential to

understanding employees' experiences, reliance on self-report measures introduces risks of biases such as social desirability. Incorporating multi-source data such as manager evaluations or objective performance metrics in future studies would provide a more comprehensive and unbiased view of the relationships under investigation.

Despite these limitations, the study's use of a fairly large and diverse sample from the underexplored social economy sector represents a notable strength. This focus helps fill a research gap by examining HR practices and employee outcomes in organizations dedicated to social missions, thereby expanding understanding in an important but often overlooked context.

Future Directions

This study found that the HRP–well-being–performance model varies across different social economy organizations. While we briefly highlighted where some of these differences may lie, a more in-depth investigation is needed. Although our findings confirm the existence of within-group diversity, we are not yet able to link these differences to specific organizational characteristics. Future research should aim to include variables that can more precisely identify and explain the distinctions between these organizations.

As previously mentioned, incorporating multi-source data in the future, such as objective outcome metrics and data from different sources, would enhance the understanding of the studied relationships. This approach would allow for a more holistic view, capturing employees' subjective experiences, managerial insights, and tangible performance and well-being outcomes. By triangulating data from different sources, researchers can better identify the strengths and limitations of current HR practices and develop more effective strategies tailored to the unique needs of social economy organizations. Additionally, this method could help mitigate biases in self-reported data, providing a more accurate and comprehensive picture of how supportive HR practices influence employee well-being and performance. Moreover, conducting longitudinal studies to track these relationships over time and across different contexts within the social economy is essential. This approach will help establish causal relationships and observe changes in HR practices and employee outcomes over time.

Lastly, we recommend examining organizational aspects through additional measures not considered in this study. Blom and colleagues (2018) advised testing various moderators, such as culture, organization size, and industry type. Organizational climate, which encompasses support

for innovation and employee well-being initiatives practices (Patterson et al., 2005), could further explain how HR practices translate into desired outcomes. A positive organizational climate that fosters support for creativity and well-being might enhance the effectiveness of supportive HR. Understanding the interplay between HR practices and organizational climate can help develop more targeted and effective strategies to improve employee well-being and performance in social economy organizations.

Conclusions

This study aimed to extend the body of knowledge surrounding the influence of employee supportive HR practices on employee outcomes in social economy organizations. We confirmed a nuanced variation of the HR – well-being – performance model, demonstrating that supportive HR practices positively influence performance and well-being outcomes, with eudaimonic well-being as a significant partial mediator of the relationship between HR practices and creative performance. Notably, our findings indicate that while this mediation is robust in most social economy organizations, there are variations across organizational types. Specifically, in most organizations analyzed individually, the influence of supportive HR practices on creative performance appears to operate primarily through eudaimonic well-being, with little to no evidence of a direct effect.

Apart from its theoretical contributions, this study offers practical implications for HR management in social economy organizations. Understanding these relationships provides insights that could be utilized for crafting HR practices that foster satisfactory employee eudaimonic well-being and enhance creative performance. Specifically, it opens the idea of tailoring HR strategies to accommodate the unique needs of different types of social economy organizations to optimize organizational effectiveness. This approach contrasts with the one-size-fits-all HR principles often borrowed from the private sector, emphasizing the importance of contextually aware research.

Our study leverages the prominence of social economy organizations in Spain, conducting an exploratory comparison to uncover nuanced differences across various types within this sector. This research promotes a dialogue on how HR practices can be customized according to the distinct characteristics of each social economy organization type, thereby potentially advancing sustainable HRM practices. By aligning HR strategies with the core values of social economy organizations, these efforts contribute not only to organizational success, but also support broader

Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those focused on decent work, reduced inequalities, and inclusive economic growth.

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Appendix A. Item Lists

Table A1

Demographic Variables

P0_1	Type of social economy organization where you currently work	Associated Worker Cooperative
		Other cooperatives (agricultural, consumer, housing, transport, social cooperatives, etc.)
		Worker-owned company
		WISE: Work Integration Social Enterprise
		Special Employment Center
		Social Enterprises
		Rest of social economy organizations (capitalist entities controlled by the social economy, mutual insurance companies, social security mutual societies, etc)
		I do not work in any social economy entity
P0_2	Employment status	Self-employed
		Employed by others
		Unemployed student
		Retired
P1	Gender	Woman
		Man
		Non-binarzy
P2_cod	Age	<35
		35-50
		>50
P3	Professional Category	Unskilled labour
		Administrative or auxiliary work
		Middle technician
		Highly qualified professional
		Management
P4	Professional classification	MOD (Directly related to the manufacture of the products or the provision of a service)
		MOI (Not directly involved in the manufacture of a product or the provision of a service. It is generated by support personnel in the administrative areas).

P5	Educational level	No education
		Mandatory basic education
		Secondary education
		Vocational training
		Bachelor's degree
		Master's degree
		Doctorate
P9	Membership	Yes
		No
P8	Sector	Primary (agriculture, livestock)
		Secondary (industry, production)
		Tertiary (services)
P10	Length of service in the company	<5 years
		5-10 years
		>10 years
P7_1	Children	Yes
		No
P7_2	Number of children	
P7_3	Age of the youngest child	
P11	Province	52 provinces

Table A2

Employee Support HR Practices (HRP) Scale

P12HR17	Job security	My organization offers me an employment contract that offers me job stability.
P12HR16	Job security	...the guarantee of keeping my job.
P12HR19	Job security	...flexible working hours.
P12HR20	Work-life balance	...the opportunity to work part-time if needed.
P12HR21	Work-life balance	...the opportunity to organize my work schedule in order to meet my family obligations.
P12HR18	Work-life balance	...greater than normal job stability.

P12HR22	Exit	...good conditions in the retirement process.
P12HR23	Exit	...support in seeking other employment in the event of dismissal.
P12HR24	Exit	...good conditions in the event of dismissal.
P12HR25	Exit	...the opportunity to change position or work team.
P12HR26	Exit	...possibilities for leave of absence.
P12HR28	Voice	...a relationship with supervisors that favors participatory decision making.
P12HR29	Voice	...the opportunity to participate in decisions.
P12HR30	Voice	...the opportunity to make suggestions for improvement in the way things are done.
P12HR31	Voice	... open communication between supervisor/employees.

Table A3

Eudaimonic Well-being (EWB) Scale

P21PWB1	Purpose in Life	I live life with my future plans in mind.
P21PWB2	Personal Growth	I am interested in activities that open new horizons for me.
P21PWB3	Purpose in Life	I feel I have important things to do in life.
P21PWB5	Purpose in Life	I enjoy making plans for the future and trying to make them come true.
P21PWB6	Personal Growth	For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, change and growth.
P21PWB7	Purpose in Life	I am clear about what I am trying to achieve in life.
P21PWB9	Purpose in Life	My daily activities seem important to me.
P21PWB10	Personal Growth	I have the feeling that, over time, I have developed a lot as a person.
P21PWB12	Personal Growth	I try to improve or make important changes in my life.
P21PWB13	Purpose in Life	I am clear about the direction and meaning of my life.
P21PWB14	Personal Growth	It is important to have new experiences that challenge what you think about yourself and the world.

Table A4

Creative Performance (CP) Scale

P15CREA1	I am practical in my work and come up with useful ideas for my organization.
P15CREA2	I am flexible in my work and creatively adapt the resources available in my organization.
P15CREA3	I am creative in my work and develop original ideas for my organization.

Appendix B. Reliability Analysis

Table B1

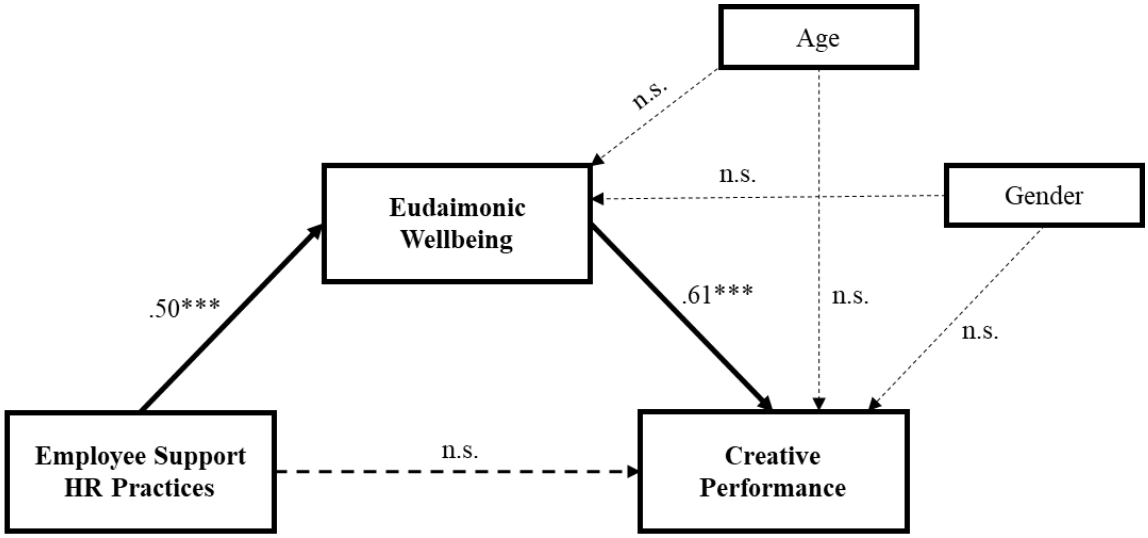
Reliability Analysis

	Number of Items	*Chronbach's Alpha*
HRP	15	.94
EWB	11	.93
CP	3	.83

Appendix C. Multi-group Analysis

Figure C1

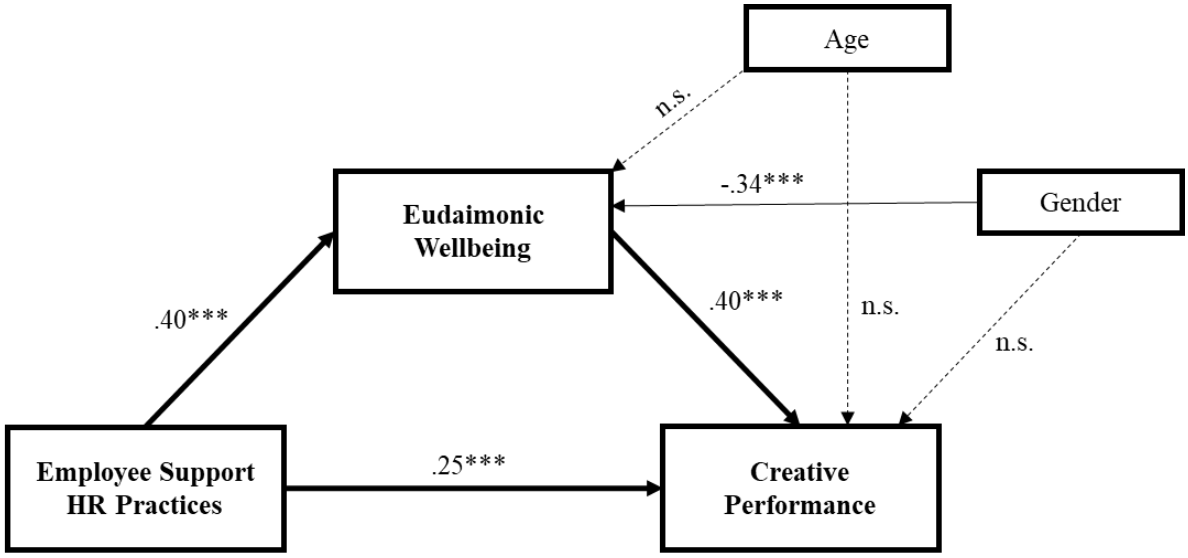
Multi-group analysis results for associated work cooperatives



Note. n.s. = non-significant; **p .001(2-tailed)

Figure C2

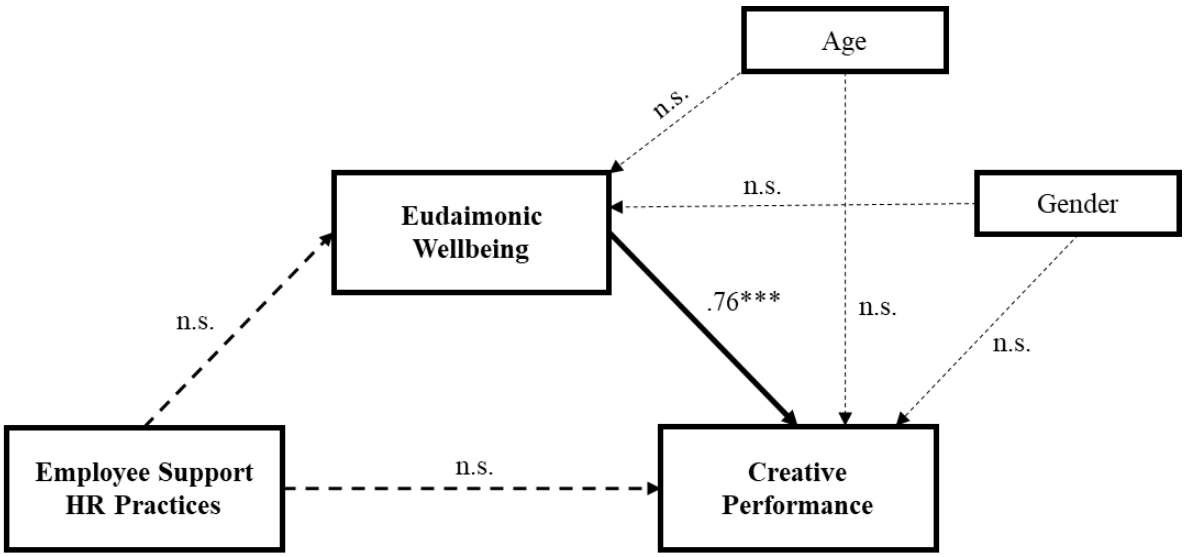
Multi-group analysis results for worker owned companies



Note. n.s. = non-significant; **p .001(2-tailed)

Figure C3

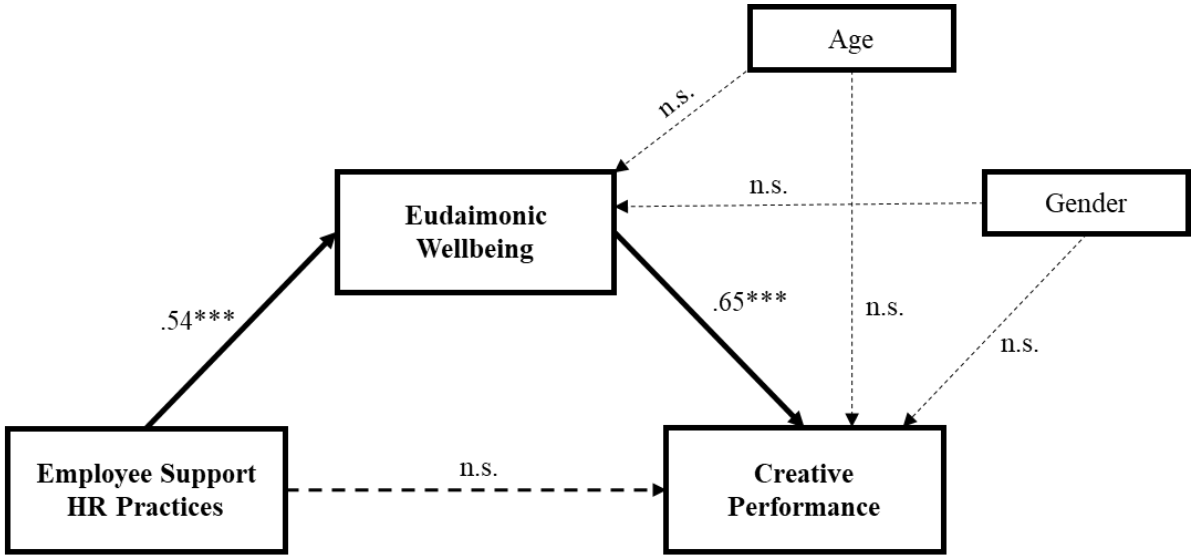
Multi-group analysis results for associated WISE: work integration social enterprises



Note. n.s. = non-significant; **p .001(2-tailed)

Figure C4

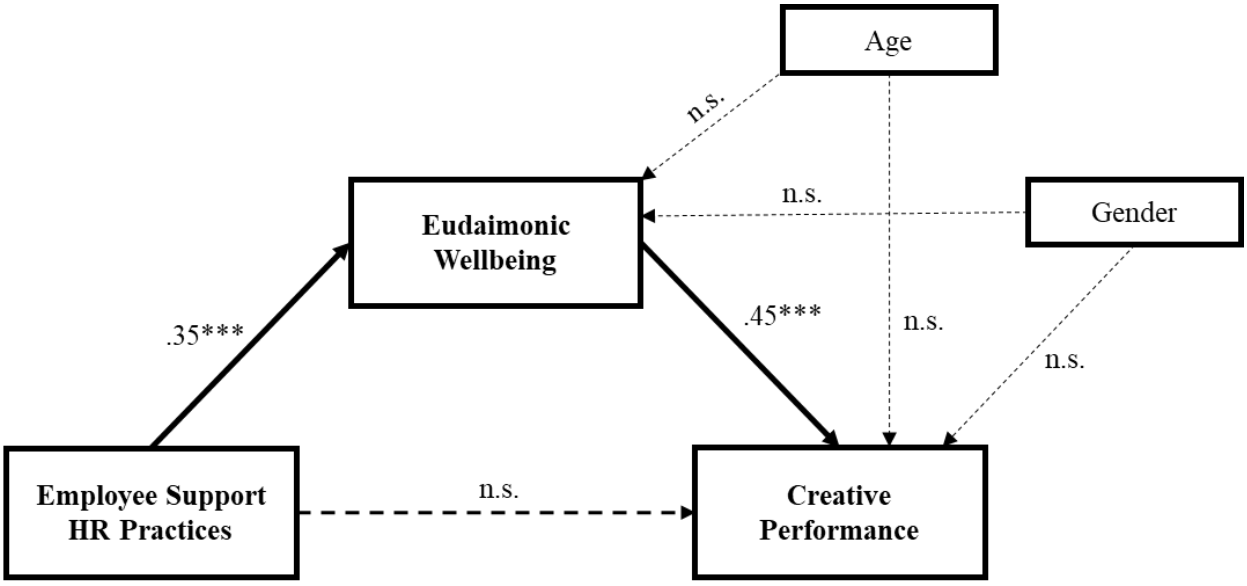
Multi-group analysis results for special employment centers



Note. n.s. = non-significant; **p .001(2-tailed)

Figure C5

Multi-group analysis results for social enterprises



Note. n.s. = non-significant; **p .001(2-tailed)

Annex: Integration of Supervisor Feedback

The development of this master's thesis was guided by continuous and constructive feedback from both my home and host supervisors. Their input was essential in refining the content, structure, and focus of the research. This annex outlines how their suggestions were systematically addressed and incorporated throughout the process, focusing on two main checkpoints: the Position Paper and the Research Work submissions.

1. Revisions following the Position Paper

After submitting the Position Paper, I received feedback that emphasized three main areas for improvement:

1. Expansion of the theoretical background;
2. Reframing of the hypotheses introducing section;
3. Greater detail in the methodological section.

1.1 Expansion of the theoretical background

Initially, the theoretical framework lacked depth, especially in relation to established models of human resource management (HRM). To address this:

- I provided more detailed explanations of traditional HRM systems, grounding the study more firmly in foundational theories.
- An additional theoretical perspective, the Quality of Working Life (QWL) paradigm, was incorporated to better capture employee well-being in sustainable HR practices.
- I conducted a more thorough review of empirical literature, particularly studies examining the links between HR practices, employee well-being, and performance outcomes.
- The revised version clearly stated which theoretical frameworks were used to guide the study and interpret the findings, helping to clarify the study's academic positioning.

1.2 Reframing of the hypotheses introducing section

Based on my host supervisor's recommendation, I made a significant structural change to how the hypotheses were presented:

- Rather than grouping all hypotheses into a separate section, I introduced them progressively within the theoretical and empirical explanations. This created a more natural flow of ideas and strengthened the arguments presented.
- The previously standalone list of hypotheses was removed and replaced with a comprehensive figure that visually summarized all hypotheses, allowing readers to see the model holistically.

1.3 Greater detail in the methodological section.

Suggestions from my home supervisor led to several improvements in the methods section:

- I added a detailed description of the creation and adaptation process for the Employee Support HR scale, including justification for using the revised version.
- Multiple example items were provided for each scale, improving clarity and transparency.
- The description of the tables of descriptive statistics was expanded to better inform readers about the sample characteristics.
- Instead of using a graph to show the sample distribution, I created a structured table that presented the data more clearly and comprehensively.

2. Revisions following the Research Work

Further feedback focused on clarity, theoretical integration, and the practical applicability of the findings. The following key revisions were made:

2.1 Abstract Restructuring

Feedback indicated that the opening of the abstract was somewhat dense and complex. In response:

- I segmented the abstract introduction more clearly, making sure to include ideas gradually and accurately, that way improving readability and avoiding conceptual overload.

2.2 Clear Emphasis on Supportive HR Practices

The specific subtype of HR practices was previously introduced, but slightly underrepresented and underdeveloped.

- I clarified how traditional hard HR practices, while beneficial, are not sufficient alone, emphasizing the need to integrate them with soft practices.

- I included concrete examples of Employee Support HR practices and elaborated on how they function in practice, providing both theoretical and empirical arguments for their inclusion in the study.
- The motivation for examining these practices specifically within Social Economy (SE) organizations was more clearly stated.

2.3 Enhanced Theoretical Integration

The theoretical framework was strengthened by:

- Expanding the explanation of Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Happy-Productive Worker Hypothesis, both of which underpin the study's conceptual model.
- Tying each of these theories directly to the development of specific hypotheses making them more robust.

2.4 Reworked Discussion Section

The discussion was restructured to improve its connection with theory:

- I had initially mainly focused on the finding regarding SE types. When rewriting, I made sure to comment on each relevant result and provide explanations for them.
- I more explicitly tied the results back to the theoretical framework, showing how the findings support, extend, or challenge existing literature.
- The implications of variations across different types of SE organizations were also given greater emphasis.

2.5 Refined Limitations and Strengths

The limitations section was rewritten to offer a more balanced view:

- In addition to noting the study's limitations, I highlighted its strengths and contributions, offering a more constructive and realistic assessment of the research.

2.6 Strengthened Practical Recommendations

- I expanded the section on practical implications, incorporating relevant supporting studies.
- I emphasized the main takeaway: the importance of tailoring HR practices to specific types of social economy organizations, based on their unique goals and structural features.

Conclusion

The thesis has been significantly shaped and strengthened by the valuable feedback received from both supervisors. Each round of input led to improvements in clarity, theoretical depth, methodological rigor, and practical relevance. The final version of the research reflects not only a personal academic effort but also a collaborative and iterative process that has enhanced the overall quality of the work.