

Fueling the Innovation Spark: How Employee Oriented HR Practices and Career Satisfaction Fosters Innovative Work Behavior?

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ABSTRACT

Employee-oriented HR practices have ascertained their instrumentality in nurturing innovative work behavior (IWB) of employees via career satisfaction (CS). This study aims to investigate how employee-oriented human resource (HR) practices (salary, job enrichment, job stability, training) can influence career satisfaction that subsequently affects employees' innovative behavior. Anchoring on social exchange theory and signaling theory, the data for the study was collected from 358 employees of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) by purposive sampling. The study applied Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS 4 to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings of this study offer useful insights into the degree to which career satisfaction mediates the impact of employee-oriented HR practices on innovative work behavior. The results suggest a significant but moderate to weak; positive association between employee-oriented HR practices and their innovative activity. Furthermore, the research establishes the mediating impact of career satisfaction while investigating the mechanism through which employee-oriented HR practices foster innovative work behavior. The study expands the knowledge base of extant literature by illuminating the critical role of employee-oriented HR practices in driving employees' innovative behavior at the workplace. Besides, it illuminates the mediating role of career satisfaction, accentuating the necessity for companies to not only implement employee-oriented HR practices but also foster a sense of satisfaction within employees to unearth the full potential of innovative behaviors within the workforce.

Keywords: Employee Oriented HR Practices, Career Satisfaction, Innovative Work Behavior

1. Introduction

Research into the connection between human resource practices and organizational outcomes has spanned four decades, though substantial empirical evidence did not emerge until the 1980s [1], [2]. Innovative work behavior (IWB) is fundamental element of organizational innovation [3] as numerous researchers assert its significance in achieving corporate success [4]. Research into the connection between human resource practices and organizational outcomes has spanned four decades, though substantial empirical evidence did not emerge until the 1980s [1], [2]. It increases the prospect of organizational innovation, strengthens the

relationship between the organization and employees, and improves the competitiveness and performance of the firm [5]. Additionally, there is increased interest among HR professionals in positive psychology, which emphasizes employee well-being, happiness, and productive thoughts like employee dedication as a path to individual efficiency [6].

Accordingly, a greater part of scholarly attention in innovation management literature has been attracted by innovative work behavior [7]. The research of earlier scholars profess that leadership [8], the climate of creativity [9] serving as external factors and individual mood and personality [10], self-efficacy [11], serving as internal contextual factors; can be vital in architecting innovative behavior of workers. Nevertheless, inconclusive evidence is available regarding the importance of HR practices in defining the innovative behavior of employees at workplace [12]. Past studies establishes the instrumentality of employee-oriented HR practices [13] as much of the research, conducted till date, is limited to the organizational-level outcomes thereby calling for investigation into employee-level outcomes [14].

Despite the growing research on innovative work behavior on one hand [15] and HR practices on the other hand [16], our knowledge about the relationship between the two has slowly developed [17]. Earlier studies ascertain the instrumentality of HR practices in employee innovation [18], yet the mechanism of influencing the innovative behavior of employees via such practices needs further investigation [17], [19]. In addition, scholars not only have recommended using psychological mediators, such as career satisfaction, [20] but also how career satisfaction may influence job related outcomes of the employees [21]. To fill this gap, the present study attempts to examine the mediating role of career satisfaction in investigating the influence of employee-oriented HR practices on employees' innovative behavior at workplace. There has been a dearth of research on the innovative behavior of employees in small and medium-sized firms (SMEs), with the majority of studies focusing on large scale enterprises (LSEs). Based on financial and capability constraints, SMEs are reluctant to adopt the strategies to innovate rather bracing their innovative capabilities by relying on external sources [22]. The SMEs' incapacity to innovate independently has an even greater impact on how they adopt innovation, which drastically influences their performance in case of industrial turbulence [23]. Therefore, there is a need to investigate how employees' innovative behavior is self-triggered in the context of SMEs [24]. Accordingly this research drawing on social exchange theory [25] and signaling theory [26] ascertain the role of employee oriented HR practices impact on career satisfaction that consequently foster employee innovative behavior.

This research provides several contributions by studying the influence of employee-oriented human resource practices on employee innovative behavior. First, we link employee-oriented HR practices, including job enrichment, salary, job stability and job training with nurturing of employee career satisfaction. Such association is vital given that employee motivation challenges at work are gaining scholarly attention in management and behavioral psychology literature, and that HR practices must foster innovative behavior in workers by enhancing their psychological and human resources capabilities [27]. Second, this research extends the theoretical framework in human resources management, specifically through the lens of positive psychology, to empirically investigate whether or how employee-oriented HR practices can be utilized as a strategic tool to foster innovative work behavior by establishing a "win-win situation". Third, the originality of the present study rests in the conceptualization of career satisfaction as a developable phenomenon that can be influenced by a specific bundle of HR practices. As a result, the study advances knowledge of the multi-staged processes by which employee-oriented HR practices can promote career satisfaction which can be instrumental in the development of innovative work behavior. Finally, this research would add to social exchange theory and signaling theory illuminating the role of employee-oriented HR practices in shaping workplace satisfaction and employee innovative behavior.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Employee-Oriented Human Resource Practices

The concept of employee-oriented human resource (HR) practices refers to the advocacy of investments in human resource through training and development opportunities while also providing a meaningful work experience that covers elements such as humanly possible workloads, defined roles, employee autonomy, transparent communication, and promoting a positive organizational culture characterized by employment stability and teamwork, as well as enabling employee representation through two-way communication [28]. Human resource practices play are instrumental in development of employees' skills, competency, and behavior, subsequently enhancing their creativity and innovative thinking [29]. Similarly, Aragon & Jimenez-Jimenez [30] professed the interconnectedness of human resources and innovation process thereby acting as an influential factor in enhancing innovation at workplace. Salary, as one of the dimensions of HR practices,

was found to have a positive influence on innovation performance. Pan et al., [31] in their work ascertain the influence of salary gap on enterprise innovation. Furthermore, job enrichment [32], job stability [33], and job training [16] were also found to have a positive impact on innovative behaviors of employees.

Majority of the studies investigating the impact of HR practices on employee performance neglected the role of employee well-being [34]. Therefore, an alternate technique that significantly improves employee well-being is required to provide a substitute for employee performance. Yet, the explanation of how HR practices fosters employee well-being and psychology by scholars and practitioners remain limited [13]. The substantial influence of positive psychology on determining employee attitudes and behaviors makes this discussion highly relevant in behavioral research [35].

2.2. Career Satisfaction

In last decade, career satisfaction (CS) has attained much scholarly interest [36] because of its significance in organizational behavior literature particularly determining the dynamics between work environment and job performance [37]. Career satisfaction refers to individual's feelings regarding the accomplishment of their career specific goals and their level of contentment in fulfillment [38].

Although there is a growing interest among scholars regarding career satisfaction literature, limited understanding has so far been developed and calls for further investigation [39]. For example, Oubibi et al., [40] investigated the mediating impact of work engagement and job crafting while studying how perceived organizational support influences career satisfaction. Similarly, Salleh et al., [41] examined how career satisfaction serves as a mediating mechanism while investigating the role of career planning in employees turnover intention. However, Islam and Ahmed, [21] has asked for further investigation of how career satisfaction may influence employees' job-related outcomes.

2.3. Innovative Work Behavior

Innovative work behavior (IWB) denotes the voluntary measures undertaken by individuals to enhance organizational performance and surpass role expectations [42]. Such behavior plays a significant role in organizational competitiveness and innovation. It signifies individual initiatives aimed at generating, developing, and executing innovative concepts to improve organizational performance, encompassing procedures, products, technology, and work processes. [43]. Innovative work behavior is considered a critical phenomenon resulting in increasing scholarly interest in organizational studies. IWB has ascertained its vitality for the firms to achieve competitive advantage [44], and superior performance [12]. While existing research confirms the importance of innovative work behavior (IWB) for achieving competitive advantage [45], there is a paucity of information regarding the methods to motivate employees to exhibit innovative behavior within businesses [16]. Since the vitality of employees in shaping the organization's potential for innovation cannot be ignored [46], scholars profess the investigation of certain HR practices that may foster innovative behavior [27]. Shin et al., [47] argued that the managerial staff is not completely responsible for innovation. Besides, the employees working at the operational level contribute equally to the initiation and implementation of new business ideas [48]. Recent studies on the workers' involvement in innovation process suggest that, if smartly invested, employees can display innovative behavior [12]. Consequently, there is a dearth of studies identifying the bundle of HR policies that can promote innovative behavior among employees.

3. Hypotheses development

The fundamental ideology of the proposed model (see Figure 1) professes the multi-dimensional impact of employee-oriented HR practices on innovative work behavior via career satisfaction. Drawing on social exchange theory [25] and signaling theory [26] as theoretical anchors for understanding the proposed model, this research investigate how employee-oriented HR practices impact the innovative work behavior of employees via career satisfaction. Social exchange theory posits that employees who see their organization as valuing them are likely to respond with positive behaviors. [49]. If HR practices are implemented by an organization that values employees, they will contribute constructively to the company. Furthermore, signaling theory posits that employee-focused HR practices demonstrate the company's ongoing commitment to its staff, enhancing contentment and promoting reciprocal innovative activity among employees. [50].

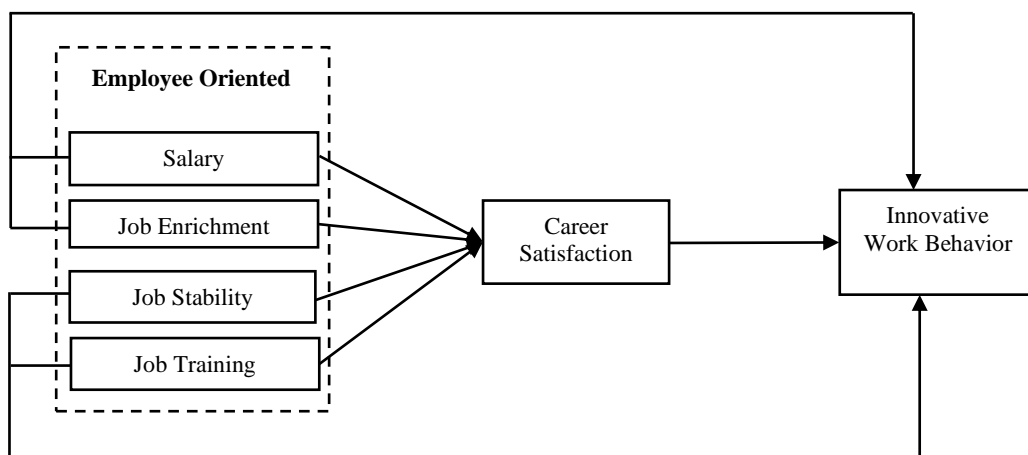


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

The intended behavior of employees can be promoted by the firms by the implementation of HR practices that nurture a particular behavior and actions while discouraging undesirable behaviors. The HR practices plays a pivotal role in the enhancement of employees competence and fosters innovative behavior [12]. Investment in employees is considered to enable greater obligation by individuals towards the company [51]. Drawing upon social exchange theory, grounding in the principles of reciprocity, this research proposes that if a company introduces employee-oriented HR practices, employees will make a valuable contribution as a repayment to the investment made by the organization [52]. Moreover, extant research revealed that salaries, job stability, job enrichment [35] and job training [27] are significantly associated with innovative work behavior and better job performance. Thus, employee-oriented HR practices build a positive perception of organization’s seriousness towards employee development [53] that affects their innovative behavior [54]. Extant studies highlighted the impact of HR practices on innovative behavior of employees, yet, the identification of specific HR bundles that promotes innovative work behavior remains inexhaustive [12]. Therefore, the study posits the following hypotheses:

- H1a: Salary is positively associated with innovative work behavior.
- H1b: Job enrichment is positively associated with innovative work behavior.
- H1c: Job stability is positively associated with innovative work behavior.
- H1d: Training has a positive impact on innovative work behavior.

Career satisfaction has increasingly been recognized as an important variable in organizational psychology due to its significance in achieving organizational goals and objectives [55]. This phenomenon pertains to the factor that establishes a connection between employees and the firm [56], subsequently playing a pivotal role in augmenting the overall success trajectory of the organization [57]. Previous research has shown that employee-oriented HR promotes an enduring social exchange relationship, which enhances employees' satisfaction at their job. [58]. The presence of employee-oriented HR practices cultivates a feeling of care among the employees and a sense of ownership by the company; consequently fostering the feeling of satisfaction toward the firm [59]. This research has used signaling theory as a theoretical anchor to understand the relationship between the constructs. Signaling theory has emerged as a compelling framework for comprehending the ramifications of HR practices oriented towards employees, specifically concerning their effect on fostering career satisfaction [60]. According to the theory, employee-focused HR practices are perceived by employees as a sign of long-term investment in workers, which drives them to repay by performing better in the company [61]. Despite the growing interest, previous studies focused on the firm-level impact of HR practice while the individual-level impacts remain inconclusive [14]. Thus, there is a need for a more holistic understanding of how employee-related HR practices might influence the career satisfaction of employees in the workplace. Hence, based on the above arguments, this research aims at testing the following hypotheses:

- H2a: Salary positively and significantly influences career satisfaction.
- H2b: Job enrichment significantly and positively influences career satisfaction.
- H2c: Job stability significantly and positively influences career satisfaction.
- H2d: Training significantly and positively influences career satisfaction.

In recent years, the career satisfaction of employees has garnered scholarly interest within the domain of employee attitudes and behavior. [62]. It refers to a positive psychological mindset developed by employee from outer and inner aspects of the profession [63]. It relates not just to employees' evaluation of the current working environment but also to their satisfaction with job prospects, chances for promotion, and overall work vitality [64]. Career satisfaction is mostly professed to be a consequent of the assessment of one's own success in the workplace, the accomplishment of career goals, and anticipation of future development [38].

Drawing on social exchange theory, the provision of job related benefits is instrumental in fostering individual's job satisfaction; resulting in a positive and valuable response, such as exhibition of positive work behavior [65]. Extant research has associated career satisfaction with employees' workplace loyalty and engagement, superior performance, and lower employee turnover [66]. Moreover, it has also been found to motivate individuals to shape innovative behavior. Employees may be encouraged for generation, sharing, promotion, and implementation of innovative ideas highly driven for ensuring success and safety of their careers [67]. Having positive emotional states linked to career satisfaction facilitates the development of creative resources and helps individuals to be resilient to setbacks, like unsuccessful innovation attempts [66]. It is assumed that workers having high career satisfaction are more inclined to exhibit reactivity at work, display highly innovative behavior, and resilience from failures. Thus, the study proposed the following hypothesis:

H3: Career satisfaction positively associated with innovative work behavior.

3.1. The mediating role of career satisfaction

In HR literature, there has been a significant increase in interest in determining the antecedents of employees' perceptions of their career prospects in organization [68]. Extant literature suggests that employee-oriented HR practices are instrumental in establishing the role of career satisfaction of employees [21]. Similarly, Kundi et al., [62] professed that employees will experience greater career satisfaction upon receiving support from their organizations in the form of discretionary HR practices, in turn, will result in greater association with their organization. Doing so, career satisfaction mediates the impact of employee-oriented HR practices and innovative work behavior. Making signaling theory as a theoretical base, the research recommend that the signals of concern for employees' career sent by the organization are reciprocated by employees with high-level discretionary behavior like IWB [16]. Numerous studies focused on how HR practices affect firm-level innovation, but less is known about how they affect individual innovation [16], [21]. Hence, this research put forth the hypotheses as below:

H4a: Career satisfaction mediates the relationship between salary and innovative work behavior.

H4b: Career satisfaction mediates the relationship between job enrichment and innovative work behavior.

H4c: Career satisfaction mediates the relationship between job stability and innovative work behavior.

H4d: Career satisfaction mediates the relationship between training and innovative work behavior.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study chose positivism as a relevant research philosophy, as it attempts to predict the impact of employee-oriented HR practices on employee innovative behavior via deductive reasoning. The quantitative approach is deemed suitable for the study due to the availability of extensive literature on the understudied phenomenon [13], [27], [69], which supports the formulation of a conceptual model and hypothesis testing [70].

4.2. Context and Participant of the Research

Data was collected from employees of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) for their significant contributions to the development of national, industrial, and social growth strategies, as well as job creation [71]. In Pakistan, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for nearly 90% of all business operations [72]. Despite such a huge presence and human capital's vital role in sustaining competitive advantage [73], the relevant literature in the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) needs further investigation [71]. investigation [71]. This study proposes that small and medium enterprises serve as an appropriate context for

investigating the role of employee-oriented HR practices in the innovative behavior of employees at work, to address the issues in theory, research, and practices that arise as a result of the scarcity of information about HR in SMEs [74].

This study employed a purposive sampling strategy through direct interaction with the research participants. The research participants, prior to providing questionnaires for carrying out the survey, were provided with consent forms and information sheets describing the objectives of the research. Out of 400 questionnaires distributed among the employees, we received 374 with a response ratio of 93.5 %. Out of which, 16 surveys were eliminated due to errors, inadequacy, incompleteness, and missing values. Consequently, a sample of 358 questionnaires obtained with 89.5% response rate was utilized in data analysis.

4.3. Construct Measures

In order to develop the questionnaire, this research adapted the pre-established scale of past studies. Unless otherwise stated, every question was weighed on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) on a five-point scale.

4.3.1. Salary (Sal)

A three items scale was adapted for measuring the salary on a five-point Likert-scale developed by [75] ranging from totally unsatisfied = 1 to totally satisfied = 5. A sample item included “I am satisfied with my pay in comparison to the employee in similar positions at rival companies.” Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.721$.

4.3.2. Job Enrichment (JE)

A three-item scale was used for assessing job enrichment from Hackman and Oldham's [76] Job Diagnostic Survey with some adaptations. A sample question includes: “I have to use a range of your abilities and skills to accomplish a number of tasks as part of my job.” Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.894$.

4.3.3. Job Stability (JS)

A two items scale for measuring job stability was adapted from the Job Diagnostic Survey of Hackman and Oldham [76]. Items include: “If I perform well in my job, my company will not terminate me”. Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.882$.

4.3.4. Job Training (JT)

A four-item scale of Venkatesh et al., [77] was adopted to assess the overall training program. Such as, “Overall, I am satisfied with the training provided in this company”. Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.821$.

4.3.5. Career Satisfaction (CS)

A five-item scale was adapted from [78] for measuring career satisfaction. For example, “I am happy with the professional accomplishments I have attained.” Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.802$.

4.3.6. Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)

For measuring innovative work behavior, a six-item scale was adapted from the work of Scott and Bruce [79]. A sample item includes, “The employees in my organization search out new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas”. Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.863$.

4.3.7. Control Variables

Prior studies indicated a relationship between demographics and innovative work behavior [80]. The present study, therefore, controlled the demographic variables including age, gender, education and experience. In specific, this research used the following codes for the control variables: employees age (20-30 years = 1, 31-40 = 2, 41-50 = 3, 51-60 = 4), employee gender (male = 1, female = 2), employee qualification (bachelors = 1, masters = 2, PhD = 3) and employee experience (1-10 years = 1, 11-20 years = 2, 21-30 years = 3).

4.4. Non-response bias

The non-response bias was checked as recommended by Armstrong & Overton [81] for assessing the likelihood of non-response bias. The study performed a t-test comparing the dataset of the initial fifty participants with that of the final fifty participants. The t-test results indicated that no significant variance ($p < 0.05$) was observed amongst the two groups. Hence, the t-test confirms that the study’s results are not likely to be significantly influenced by non-response bias.

4.5. Sample Characteristics

In the 358 responses received, 252 were male and 106 were female, constituting 70% and 30% of the entire sample, correspondingly (Table 1). Majority of the research participants were between the age of 21 to 30 (43%) while 41 people under the age of 41-50 represented the lowest group in the sample. On the other hand, 117 people aged from 31 to 40 (33%) while 46 people belong to the age group of 20 years and below (13%). In terms of educational background, more than half of the participants (75%) hold an undergraduate degree while respondents with intermediate certificate was 5%. Similarly, graduate students or above represented 20% of the total sample. Analysis of participants’ work experience showed that the largest group (39%) had between 6 and 10 years of experience, while individuals with more than 10 years of experience constituted just 14% of the sample. Besides, employees having less than one year of experience represented 12%, while respondents with 1-5 years of experience represented 35% of the entire sample.

(N = 358)		
	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	252	70
Female	106	30
<i>Age</i>		
20 years and below	46	13
21-30 years	154	43
31-40 years	117	33
41-50 years	41	11
<i>Academic qualification</i>		
Intermediate	17	5
Undergraduate	270	75
Graduate and above	71	20
<i>Work experience</i>		
Less than 1 year	43	12
1-5 years	127	35
6-10 years	141	39
More than 10 years	47	14

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

4.6. Common method bias

The research included a blend of statistical and procedural techniques to counteract any common method bias [82]. At the procedural level, the research carefully delineated the variables in the questionnaire. In addition, the simplicity of each question was kept to reduce the ambiguity of each item’s construction [83]. Furthermore, the study also used a two-wave data collection technique. In wave 1, employees were asked to share their experience about employee-oriented HR practices being carried out at their organization. With a two-month interval, in wave 2, employees voiced their satisfaction over career advancement and their enthusiasm in fostering innovation. At the statistical level, Harman’s single-factor test was applied which accounted for 30.37 % variance expressed by the first factor thus falling below the 50% threshold [82]. Hence, Harman’s single-factor test offers further confidence that the research findings are not a result of common method variance. The study, following the application of statistical and procedural methods to minimize common method bias, determined that this bias is not a significant issue.

5. Results

5.1. Analysis Strategy

This research presents unique insights into innovative work behavior through employee-oriented HR practices in SMEs. In addition, the research explores the role of career satisfaction as mediator when examining the influence of employee-oriented HR practices on IWB. As SEM has the potential of assessing the inter-relations between many constructs simultaneously, controlling measurement error and providing strong support for measuring reliability and validity [84], the study used partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4 for empirically examining the relationship. The PLS-SEM, with the capacity to comprehensively analyse complex models, is a widely accepted statistical method in the field of behavioral studies and business management [85]. Besides, to test the mediation analysis, the study applied a bootstrapping strategy for testing the conditional indirect effects [86]. Consistent with previous research, a two-stage approach was adopted, wherein the measurement model was evaluated before analyzing the structural model. [87].

5.2. Measurement Model

Construct reliability, convergent and discriminant validity was used for assessing the measurement model [87]. For assessing the reliability, the study checked the composite reliability of each construct. Results showed that all the values were well above the benchmark of 0.70 [88]. The validity analysis is performed through convergent and discriminant validity. The convergent validity was assessed by evaluating the factor loadings of every item against the recommended threshold of 0.7 [87], [89]. All the items have factors loading well above the threshold thus establishing convergent validity. Moreover, the average variance extracted (AVE) of all the variables was above the critical value of 0.05 [90]. The present study's AVE values ranged from the highest of 0.969 for job enrichment to the lowest value of 0.644 for job training. The values of factor loadings, CR and AVE of all the variables are represented in Table 2.

Items	Loadings
Salary ($\alpha = 0.721$, $CR = 0.849$, $AVE = 0.652$)	
Sal1 I am happy with how much I am paid and how much work I get done. .	0.838
Sal2 Given my responsibilities and experience, I believe my salary is fairly positioned relative to colleagues with comparable positions	0.798
Sal3 I am satisfied with my pay in comparison to the employee in similar positions at rival companies	0.786
Job enrichment ($\alpha = 0.894$, $CR = 0.990$, $AVE = 0.969$)	
JE1 I have to use a range of your abilities and skills to accomplish a number of tasks as part of my job	0.982
JE2 I can make independent choices regarding my work	0.976
JE3 I can organize my work as I see fit	0.974
Job stability ($\alpha = 0.882$, $CR = 0.982$, $AVE = 0.964$)	
JS1 If I perform well in my job, my company will not terminate me	0.981
JS2 The employees of other companies are more readily fired as compared to ours.	0.985
Job Training ($\alpha = 0.821$, $CR = 0.878$, $AVE = 0.644$)	
JT1 Our company provides us with chances to enhance and broaden their knowledge. .	0.743
JT2 Our company offers training that enhances the knowledge, skills and abilities of our employees.	0.715
JT3 Our staff members have the chance to enhance their competence by receiving training customized to meet their individual needs.	0.875
JT4 The training need assessment is regularly conducted in our organization.	0.862
Career Satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.802$, $CR = 0.955$, $AVE = 0.811$)	
CS1 I am happy with the professional accomplishments I have attained	0.931
CS2 I am satisfied with my progress in achieving my overall career goals.	0.852
CS3 I am happy with the progress I have made in attaining my monetary goals	0.932
CS4 I am satisfied with the career advancement goals attained in my professional life	0.931
CS5 I believe I have made acceptable progress in achieving my goals of new skills development	0.852

Innovative Work Behavior ($\alpha = 0.863$, $CR = 0.975$, $AVE = 0.865$)

IWB1	The workers in our organization search for new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas	0.869
IWB2	The employees of our organization generate creative ideas	0.896
IWB3	The employees in our company promote and champions ideas to others	0.952
IWB4	The employees in our company investigate and secure funds needed to implement new ideas	0.919
IWB5	The workers in our organization device adequate plans and schedules for the innovative ideas implementation	0.963
IWB6	The employees in our company are innovative	0.977

Note(s): α = Cronbach’s alpha, CR = Composite reliability, AVE = Average variance extracted

Table 2. Constructs Reliability and Validity Values

In order to assess the discriminant validity, the study used Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios [88]. The square root of every construct’s AVE value was greater than its correlation with other variables, as indicated in Table 3, to evaluate the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

	CS	IWB	JE	JS	JT	Sal
CS	0.905					
IWB	0.429	0.930				
JE	0.138	0.194	0.985			
JS	0.126	0.141	0.090	0.982		
JT	0.149	0.457	0.076	0.025	0.802	
Sal	0.153	0.261	0.174	0.054	0.216	0.807

Source(s): Author’s own

Table 3. Assessment of discriminant validity using Fornell-Larcker

Besides the Fornell-Larcker criteria, we also used the HTMT ratio recommended by Henseler et al., [91] for evaluating discriminant validity. Henseler et al., [91] recommended HTMT ratio cut-off values of 0.85 and 0.90. The findings of the research indicated that all the values of the HTMT ratio were below the recommended of 0.85 (Table 4). Hence, the study validated the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

	CS	IWB	JE	JS	JT	Sal
CS						
IWB	0.449					
JE	0.143	0.198				
JS	0.133	0.145	0.092			
JT	0.166	0.510	0.091	0.034		
Sal	0.177	0.294	0.196	0.062	0.271	

Source(s): Author’s own

Table 4. Assessment of discriminant validity using HTMT

5.3. Structural Model

The structural model aims to understand a relation between the variables of the study [91]. The structural model evaluation comprises five steps: significance of the structural model, assessment of collinearity, coefficient of determination (R^2), f^2 (effect size) and Q^2 value (predictive relevance) [90]. For assessing the potential multicollinearity problem, variance inflation factors (VIF) were applied. The results reported that VIF mean value (1.351) and the highest value (2.13) were lower than the benchmark value of 3 [92]. Thus, there was no multicollinearity issue in the study. To determine that the proposed relationships are not spurious, the study used the coefficient of determination (R^2) and goodness of fit test. An acceptable R^2 (0.281)

was obtained for career satisfaction (0.281) and innovative work behavior (0.371) on the basis of recommended threshold value of 0.10 [93].

The f^2 is assessed by examining the values: 0.35 indicates a high effect, 0.15 denotes a medium effect, and 0.02 represents a modest effect of the exogenous constructs. The values lower than 0.02 show minimal impact [89]. The analysis of the data revealed that job enrichment, salary, job training and job stability had a small effect (i.e. <0.15) on career satisfaction. This study indicates that salary, job stability, and job enrichment had a little effect (i.e., <0.15), while job training and career satisfaction significantly influenced (>0.35) employees' inclination towards innovative behavior.

The researchers are recommend to assess predictive accuracy through Geisser-Stone's Q^2 value in addition to R^2 values [94], [95]. The predictive relevance (capability test) of the model check how well it can anticipate the associations between the constructs. The positive value of endogenous variable (greater than 0) Q^2 , determined through blindfolding technique, indicates predictive relevance of the theoretical model [87], [96]. The Q^2 scores for career satisfaction and innovative work behavior were positive at 0.284 and 0.311, respectively. The blindfolding procedure determines the predictive relevance or power of the theoretical model. The square root mean residual (SRMR) value of 0.069, satisfying the model's fitness, was significantly below the threshold of 0.08 [97]. Thus, the results of the study theoretically ascertain the proposed model.

5.3.1. Hypotheses Assessment

To assess the relevance of the path coefficient and analyze the relationships among employee-oriented HR practices, employee commitment, and employee innovative behavior; bootstrapping in PLS-SEM (5000 resamples) at the 0.05 significance level was employed to generate bootstrap t-statistics, standard errors, and p-values. Besides, recent studies have recommended that p-values are not an acceptable or adequate criterion for testing the significance of the proposed hypotheses, rather professing that p-values be reported along with confidence intervals and effect sizes (F^2) as shown in Table 5 [98].

5.3.2. Direct Effects Analysis

The findings of the present study indicated that salary, job enrichment, job stability and job training has a direct and significant impact on innovative work behavior; hence, supporting H1a $Sal \rightarrow IWB$ ($\beta = 0.109$; $p = 0.006$), H1b $JE \rightarrow IWB$ ($\beta = 0.093$; $p = 0.017$), H1c $JS \rightarrow IWB$ ($\beta = 0.076$; $p = 0.037$), and H1d $JT \rightarrow IWB$ ($\beta = 0.375$; $p = 0.000$). Pointedly, the influence of job training on innovative work behavior was stronger as compared to other employee-oriented HR practices. Furthermore, the study also proposed that salary, job enrichment, job stability and job training directly and significantly influence career satisfaction for hypotheses H2a, H2b, H2c and H2d. The results supported the relationships' significance thereby supporting H2a $Sal \rightarrow CS$ ($\beta = 0.105$; $p = 0.006$), H2b $JE \rightarrow CS$ ($\beta = 0.101$; $p = 0.027$), H2c $JS \rightarrow CS$ ($\beta = 0.108$; $p = 0.015$), and H2d $JT \rightarrow CS$ ($\beta = 0.115$; $p = 0.011$). In addition, the study proposed the positive effect of career satisfaction on innovative work behavior. The results stated that the career satisfaction of employees is significantly associated with their innovative behavior H3 $CS \rightarrow IWB$ ($\beta = 0.334$; $p = 0.000$) thus supporting H3.

Hypotheses	Path	β -value	T-value	P-value	BC 95% CI
H1a	Sal \rightarrow IWB	0.109	2.550	0.006	0.037-0.178
H1b	JE \rightarrow IWB	0.093	2.132	0.017	0.022-0.166
H1c	JS \rightarrow IWB	0.076	1.787	0.037	0.006-0.146
H1d	JT \rightarrow IWB	0.375	8.963	0.000	0.305-0.442
H2a	Sal \rightarrow CS	0.105	2.528	0.006	0.032-0.169
H2b	JE \rightarrow CS	0.101	1.926	0.027	0.015-0.188
H2c	JS \rightarrow CS	0.108	2.173	0.015	0.027-0.191
H2d	JT \rightarrow CS	0.115	2.285	0.011	0.031-0.197
H3	CS \rightarrow IWB	0.334	8.825	0.000	0.272-0.396

Note(s): Control variables were excluded from the analysis for being substantially failing to affect the results. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 5. Hypotheses testing and structural relationship results

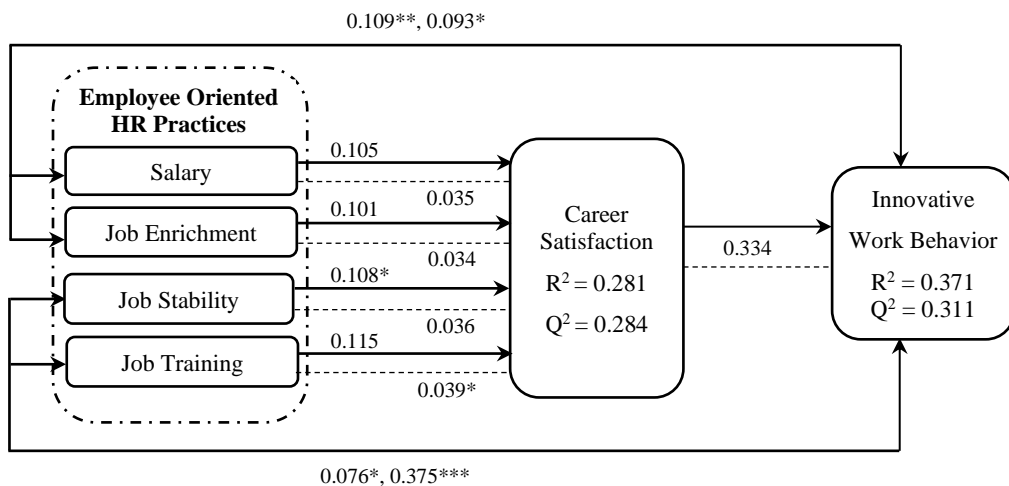
5.3.3. Mediation Effects Analysis

In order to test the mediating effects of H4a, H4b, H4c and H4d, mediation analysis, using a bias-corrected bootstrapping at 95% confidence interval, was conducted in Smart-PLS (see figure 2) [99]. The rationale of using the Hayes and Preacher bootstrapping technique (5,000 iterations) is that it is a nonparametric test that evaluates the indirect effects by repeatedly sampling the data set (Table 6). Findings show that career satisfaction (mediator) significantly influences the relationship between salary, job enrichment, job stability, job training and innovative work behavior. Thus, the findings support H4a Sal → CS → IWB ($\beta = 0.035$; $p = 0.008$), H4b JE → CS → IWB ($\beta = 0.034$; $p = 0.028$), H4c JS → CS → IWB ($\beta = 0.036$; $p = 0.021$), and H4d JT → CS → IWB ($\beta = 0.039$; $p = 0.010$). The results further indicated that the inclusion of a mediating variable resulted in diminishing the direct effect, thus career satisfaction partially mediates the relationship in the proposed model.

Path	Total Effect		Direct Effect		Indirect Effects			
	β -coefficient	P-value	β -coefficient	P-value	β -coefficient	T-value	p-value	95%CIB
H4a Sal → CS → IWB	0.144	0.001	0.109	0.006	0.035	2.404	0.008	0.010-0.058
H4b JE → CS → IWB	0.127	0.003	0.093	0.017	0.034	1.912	0.028	0.005-0.063
H4c JS → CS → IWB	0.112	0.008	0.076	0.037	0.036	2.037	0.021	0.007-0.065
H4d JT → CS → IWB	0.413	0.000	0.375	0.000	0.039	2.312	0.010	0.011-0.066

Note(s): The mediation was tested for significance using a bias-corrected (BC) confidence interval from 5,000 bootstrap samples. CIB means confidence interval bias

Table 6: Results of mediation analysis



Note(s): * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. ——— Direct effect - - - - - Indirect effect
 Source(s): Author's own

Figure 2. Regression results of mediation analysis

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study expands the knowledge base by elucidating the influence of employee-oriented HR practices on the promotion of innovative work behavior among the workers. Furthermore, the research identifies the mediating role of career satisfaction within this relationship. To begin, the findings demonstrated that factors such as job stability, salary, job enrichment, and job training have a direct and positive impact on innovative work behavior. According to Jan et al., [27] and Mahmood et al., [35], who corroborated the findings of this study, employee-oriented HR practices influence the innovative work behavior. Secondly, the results also ascertain the positive impact of employee-oriented HR on career satisfaction. Thus, in line with the work of past researchers like Mackay [100], this research indicates that salary, job enrichment, job stability, and job training has a positive and significant role in innovative work behavior. However, the effect of job training was comparatively higher than other practices. This comparatively higher score of training might be because the majority of respondents were from a young age group (21-30) with relatively less tenure in the firm, training was considered instrumental in building the skill inventory of the workforce [14].

Third, the findings indicated that career satisfaction influences the innovative behavior of employees. These findings are consistent with the work of Zhu et al., [101], who found that a higher satisfaction level of the employee increases the tendency to display innovative behavior in the workplace. Last, the study's findings indicated that career satisfaction mediates the indirect association between employee-oriented HR practices (salary, job stability, job enrichment, and job training) and innovative work behavior. These results are in line with past studies where career satisfaction was found to positively influence innovative work behavior [102]. In conclusion, utilizing social exchange theory and signaling theory, the study advocates for the implementation of employee-oriented HR practices that are essential in promoting innovative behavior. Moreover, the inclusion of career satisfaction partially mediates such relationships. Since it has the potential to encourage employees to behave in an innovative way, the study suggested that greater emphasis be placed on such HR practices. Consequently, if the company implements human resource practices that value individuals, then those employees will feel compelled to make contributions that are of great value to the corporation. Besides, signaling theory suggests that workers see employee-oriented HR practices as a signal of strategic investment in the employee of the company, consequently resulting in feelings of satisfaction from the company with the desire to reciprocate through innovative behavior.

6.1. Theoretical Implication

This study advanced theoretical knowledge in HR practices and behavioral studies in multiple ways. First, at a theoretical level, the study underpins social exchange theory and signaling theory for demonstrating the role of employee-oriented HR practices on innovative work behavior. The findings support and expand social exchange theory demonstrating the significance of employee-oriented HR practices in shaping innovative work behavior [49]. Furthermore, drawing on signaling theory, the research suggests that if organizations send out signals of ownership to the employees will be reciprocated with higher levels of discretionary behaviors like IWB [16]. Second, earlier research has highlighted the influence of HR practices on innovative work behavior, however, limited understanding has been developed regarding the identification of specific HR bundles that foster IWB [12]. In SMEs, innovative work behavior is vital for maintaining their competitive edge. Thus, the study provides empirical evidence to extend the influence of HR practices on workers' innovative behavior.

The findings indicated that employee career satisfaction significantly influences their innovative behavior. An employee is more inclined to exert additional effort and strongly align with the company's objectives and values when they feel satisfied with the organization. Consequently, they vigorously advocate, research and execute innovative ideas that are pivotal in attaining organizational objectives. Finally, the study illuminates the importance of career satisfaction in fostering innovative behavior among employees. Employee-oriented HR practices are advantageous in ascertaining the psychological satisfaction of employees in the organization. Additionally, increasing financial and non-financial investments in employees' capabilities may strengthen firms' engagement [35]. Consequently, this can give rise to innovative behavior of employees.

6.2. Practical Implications

This study delineates multiple practical implications for employees assuming managerial roles in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). First, managers should focus on implementing employee-oriented HR practices because findings advocate that such practices have a significant role in fostering innovative behavior among

employees. Since training was found to have a significant impact on such behaviors, organizations should regularly carry out training programs. Second, the results of the study ascertain that career satisfaction positively influences employee innovative behavior. Thus, companies must strive to increase the satisfaction level of employees to surge the employee's sense of belongingness consequently influencing their innovative behavior. Finally, the research also revealed the mediating role of career satisfaction in elucidating the relationship between HR practices and innovative work behavior. Therefore, managers must be aware of the vitality of career satisfaction while dealing with employees' behavioral issues. Therefore, the deployment of employee-oriented HR practices can serve as a catalyst for increasing workers' satisfaction level which can be instrumental in motivating employees to implement new ideas, think creatively and behave innovatively.

7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study informs scholars and managers on innovative work behavior amongst employees of SEMs, while many limitations must be highlighted. This study employs a cross-sectional approach, limiting the authors' ability to make more certain conclusions. Consequently, further study may employ a longitudinal design to examine the causal relationships among the variables. This study employs a cross-sectional approach, limiting the authors' ability to make more certain conclusions. Consequently, further study may employ a longitudinal design to examine causal relationships among the variables. Secondly, the study's participants comprised employees from the SME sector in Pakistan, which constrains the generalizability of the findings. Consequently, subsequent research may investigate employees working in large organizations. Last, this study ascertains the mediating influence of career satisfaction on the relationship between employee-oriented HR practices and employee innovative behavior. Future studies, as recommended by Cooper et al., [34], can examine the alternative ways of how employee-oriented HR practices influence employee innovative behavior; such as psychological empowerment and social identity. Similarly, looking at how other positive effects of employee-oriented HR practices, such as employee job crafting and proactive behavior at work, while using career satisfaction as mediator can be interesting avenue for research [27].

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