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Employee perceptions of HRM practices and beyond: A bibliometric analysis of theoretical perspectives and research foci

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Abstract

With a growing body of research exploring how employees perceive and respond to human resource management (HRM) practices, the strategic HRM field faces the challenge of assessing how insights have evolved and which theoretical perspectives have shaped them. This study presents a bibliometric review of 292 empirical research on employee perceptions of HRM practices, focusing on (1) the major research interests explored, (2) the theoretical perspectives applied, and (3) their evolution over the last 25 years. The analysis reveals a reoccurring emphasis on performance-oriented variables, such as engagement, suggesting a tendency to rely on quantifiable outcomes while sidelining alternative constructs like employee well-being. It also highlights the dominance of a limited set of theoretical perspectives commonly applied, with alternative perspectives remaining underutilised. By mapping how topical areas and theories intersect, this study refines the classification of theoretical perspectives and contributes to a more critical understanding of the strategic HRM field. Potential implications are discussed to outline actionable recommendations for future research.

Keywords: bibliometric analysis; employee perceptions; human resource management practice; literature review; theoretical perspectives

1 Introduction

After roughly 25 years of exploring employees' perceptions of human resource management (HRM) practices, a simple Google Scholar search for 'employee HRM practice ("HRMP") perceptions' yields close to 18,000 results. Scholars have thereby examined 'perception' under different conceptualizations (Wang, Kim, Rafferty, & Sanders, 2019), including how employees experience, interpret, and respond to them within their organizational context. Measuring employee perceptions of HRMP through management data has been the commonly used approach through many years (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006), assuming a directly comparable experience, ignoring any potential for variation between management intention and implemented or experienced HRM (Cafferkey & Dundon, 2015). Wright and Nishii's (2013) strategic HRM process model explicitly differentiates between intended, implemented, and perceived HRMP, underscoring the crucial role of employees in shaping practices' effectiveness (Fig. 1). This model also highlights the importance of studying HRMP as a system or bundle, as employees interpret HR practices holistically rather than as isolated measures (Combs et al., 2006).

Compelling results have demonstrated the crucial role of employee perceptions of HRMP in explaining how such bundles affect people and organization (Den Hartog, Boon, Verburg & Croon,
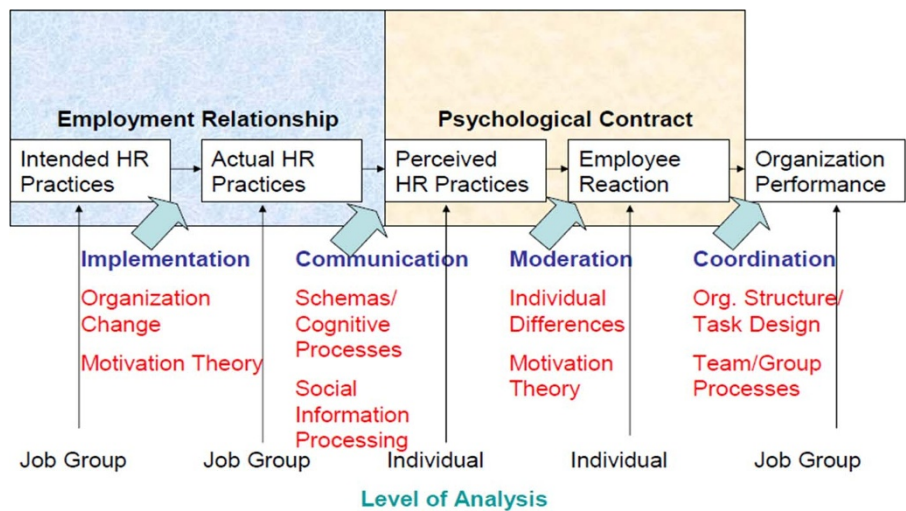
Figure 1. Strategic HRM process mode
Source: Nishii and Wright (2007).

2013; Kehoe & Wright, 2010), showing how employees' direct experiences are a more valid predictor of HRMP outcomes than managerial data on it (Beijer, Peccei, van Veldhoven & Paauwe, 2019; Cafferkey & Dundon, 2015), and how even the same HRMP can be perceived and reacted to differently by employees (Cafferkey, Dundon, Winterton & Townsend, 2020). The growing recognition of the impact of employee perceptions has led scholars to increasingly collect data directly from employees. By 2017, nearly 40% of newer studies in the field had begun using employee ratings to assess HRM practices (Beijer et al., 2019). This marks a significant methodological shift and is particularly relevant given findings showing that employees react differently to the same HRMP.

As the focus on employee perceptions continues to grow, maintaining a comprehensive understanding of how this research domain has developed thematically, theoretically and structurally, is imperative. Although scholars have conducted important reviews, these have been limited in both scope and method. First, while while some have discussed theory use, no prior study has systematically examined how theoretical perspectives relate to different topical areas, such as employee commitment, well-being, or performance, or how this relationship has evolved over time. This matters, as theory is not simply an explanatory tool but a lens that guides *what* is studied, *how* results are valued, and *whose experiences* are prioritised. However, scholars have noted the underrepresentation of such theoretical perspectives in strategic HRM research, including the limited use of organisational health theories (Van Beurden et al., 2020). This may reinforce a prioritisation of certain variables, such as dominant financial and performance-related ones (Legge, 2001), while placing less emphasis on variables such as employee health well-being (Van Beurden et al., 2020). More broadly, critiques of strategic HRM have highlighted its tendency to focus on the intended purposes of HRM practices, often at the expense of actor-centric perspectives, processual understanding of HRM that would account for the real-life complexities (Björkman et al., 2014). By mapping the relationship between theoretical perspectives and research themes over time, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how employee HRMP perception research has evolved, not only in what it investigates, but in the assumptions and priorities that structure the field. This allows for a critical reassessment of the field's intellectual foundations and provides a clearer direction for future scholarship.

Second, previous reviews have largely focused on pre-defined 'high-impact' journals, which, while ensuring quality, risks reinforcing a narrow and potentially biased perspective of the field on a limited

set of papers (e.g., 45 papers in Van Beurden et al., 2020). This selective focus can lead to the exclusion of valuable yet less established contributions, particularly those emerging from interdisciplinary research (e.g., *Social Responsibility Journal*) or applied studies from location-specific journals (e.g., *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*). By expanding the scope beyond these predefined outlets, the contribution of the present study also lies in a more comprehensive understanding of the intellectual structure, capturing the full breadth of theoretical and thematic developments. Lastly, foundational reviews such as those by Van Beurden et al. (2020), and Wang et al. (2019) were conducted before 2020, meaning they do not reflect the latest advancements in strategic employee HRMP perception research.

In a first attempt to structure the field of theoretical perspectives in strategic HRMP research, Van Beurden et al. (2020) identify three major lines present in literature at that time: (i) *exchange perspectives* are used to explore the reciprocal relationship between, typically, the organization and employee, where HRM practices are viewed as incentives for employee contributions (e.g., equity theory (Adams, 1963), person–environment fit (Eccles et al., 1993), stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010), social exchange theory (Homans, 1958), and psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1995)). Perspectives on (ii) *organizational communication* examine how organizations communicate, typically viewing the organization as the sender and the employee as the receiver. Major interests lie in how HRM practices are communicated and interpreted, shaping employee attributions, attitudes, and behaviours (e.g., system strength (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), signalling theory (Karasek & Bryant, 2012), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), and social information processing theory (Walther, 2008). (iii) *Occupational health* perspectives examine the impact that the organizations' actions, such as HRMP, can have on the employee, particularly their well-being. This assumes effects in both negative and positive directions, such as job demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), demand–control model (Karasek, 1979), or conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989).

With this, Van Beurden et al. (2020) provide a valuable foundation for the assessment of theories present, which will be applied throughout the analysis in this study and further refined based on the findings. To dive deeper into over two decades of employee HRMP perception research, its theoretical perspectives, and how they have shaped the field, this research extends beyond observing their presence by examining how perspectives contribute to different levels of analysis and varying conceptual angles of employee HRMP perceptions over time.

To achieve this, we conduct an in-depth review of 25 years of strategic employee HRMP perception research, combining bibliographic coupling and keyword co-occurrence methods. This allows us to explore the influence of papers, their connection across the field, and how themes and theories cluster together while maintaining an understanding of temporal development. This approach thus thus extends on what is currently known, uncovering previously unexplored patterns, gaps, and trends that cannot be revealed by traditional systematic reviews (Vogel, Reichard, Batistič & Černe, 2021).

More specifically, this paper has three central objectives: (1) identifying the major lines of interest scholars explore in the strategic employee HRMP perception literature and how these are connected, (2) mapping and categorizing the dominant theoretical perspectives utilized to study research interests, and (3) exploring the evolution of theoretical perspectives in the field. In short, the contribution of this paper lies in providing an integrative and structured overview of how strategic HRMP perception literature has evolved over time, where it currently stands, and where it may be heading. By providing this multi-faceted review, the analysis advances the understanding of HRMP research by not only identifying existing gaps but also outlining areas for future conceptual development and theoretical integration.

The paper is organized as follows. First, the research design and methodology applied are presented. Baseline descriptive results are explored before focusing on evaluative results through the bibliometric methods chosen. In the last section, results are discussed and overarching conclusions are drawn before formulating recommendations for future research, as well as limitations of this study.

2 Methodology

In the following section, the rationale for the chosen methods and the methodological protocol that was followed throughout this literature review is provided. Based on the results of this review, a comprehensive mapping of research themes and theoretical perspectives is proposed, building on, but going beyond prior literature reviews. The bibliometric methods chosen for this categorization allow for a reproducible research process based on quantitative techniques to reduce subjectivity and improve the rigour of traditional systematic literature reviews (Zupic & Čater, 2015). The review is based on the construction of bibliometric maps, visualized using VOSviewer software (van Eck & Waltman, 2010), an increasingly applied software that allows the researcher to identify clusters based on identified network data. VOSviewer software enables us to draw central conclusions about the chosen field and explore relationships between central aspects from the generated maps. These maps illustrate the intellectual structure and evolution of the field, assisting the researcher in extracting central information, as well as visualising and analysing this information and relationships within it (Oladinrin, Arif, Rana & Gyoh, 2022).

Three main stages of this procedure were followed: sample identification, data collection, and data analysis.

2.1 Sample identification and data collection

To obtain an appropriate sample for the bibliometric analysis, this study relied on two databases: Web of Science database ('WoS') and Scopus, given their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed academic literature in the field of management and social sciences.

To ensure the sample included material that properly reflects the field of literature, a variety of different terms were included. As prior reviews have explored, scholars in HR research have explored employee perceptions under a variety of understandings, often with unclear definitions and measures (Beijer et al., 2019; Van Beurden et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019). In fact, Wang et al. (2019) show how scholars explore such topics under the umbrella term of 'employee perception'. While some scholars may argue for HR attributions, HRM Strength perceptions, and perceptions of HRMP to be considered different constructs, this research understands them as different parts of the same perception process. Thus, for the objectives of our literature review, applying a broader definition seems appropriate. To ensure a consistent flow, this paper refers to 'employee perceptions' as an overarching term throughout this study, encompassing HRMP perceptions in its different facets, if a specification is not necessary.

To include as many relevant articles as possible in our first search, we relied on a broad spectrum of keywords, such as 'employee attribution' and 'employee HR perception'. The later screening then ensured the relevance of literature in accordance with our objectives. Keywords were adapted in a cyclical review and made use of Boolean operators (*, ', and ?) adapting, for example 'signa*ing', to account for different spelling styles and including both plural and singular versions of terms. Applying the so-called 'snowball method' the first lists of keywords was examined, identifying missing keywords based on the results. The search process was then repeated, allowing us to refine and broaden the search.

After an exhaustive phase of defining these keyword sets, we conducted the initial keyword search. To further refine the results and ensure thematical accordance, the search for journals focused on the indexes SCI-Expanded, SSCI, and ESCI in WoS and filtered for several delimiting factors in both databases. (i) The defined time period focused on 2000-2025 to reflect the increasing attention paid to employee experiences of HRMP after 2000 (Guest, 1999; Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). (ii) Further, any strictly conceptual articles, review articles, meta-analyses, or conference articles were excluded to fit the scope of the research interest on empirical literature. (iii) Only research articles published in English were considered, for two reasons. First, the English-language literature is considered the dominant means of distributing scientific knowledge (Ankrah & AL-Tabbaa, 2015), as also shown by

the fact that the most relevant journals publish solely in English. Furthermore, the chosen program, VOSviewer, is only able to process English-language publications (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). (iv) Emphasizing the importance of bundles of HRM practice (Combs et al., 2006; Van Beurden et al., 2020), studies that explore single HRM practices were excluded in adherence with strategic HRM literature and prior reviews. (v) To explore whether papers actually focus on employee perceptions, drawing their data from the employee, papers without a traceable scale or model were excluded.

This initial search identified 655 papers in WoS and 950 in Scopus. After excluding any duplicated papers, a raw sample of 1,179 emerged. After a thorough review of the excluding factors and the thematical accordance, a set of 292 articles was obtained and further analysed, applying bibliometric methodology using VOSviewer. The full sample list is provided as Supplementary material. Additionally, Supplementary Table 1 presents the full sample, detailing author keywords and identified theoretical perspectives to serve as a comprehensive foundation for the subsequent analysis.

2.2 Data analysis

The visualization of data allows for an analysis from different perspectives. Therefore, VOSviewer software (version 1.6.18) was chosen for data extraction, analysis, and visualization. First, descriptive results were obtained to allow for analysis of the influence of documents and journals. The evaluative results were obtained through VOSviewer's construction of bibliometric maps (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Here, two bibliometric analysis types were made use of, namely, bibliographic coupling and co-occurrence of keywords, to enable a more objective and reproducible review, based on statistical techniques (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

The technique of bibliographic coupling is focused on the identification of shared references between articles (Zupic & Čater, 2015). This method of analysis allows the researcher to capture the most relevant studies within the defined field independently of their number of citations. This method is particularly interesting for bibliometric research focused on a specific time frame set close to the research period, as it allows researchers to understand how the field has developed through time (Zupic & Čater, 2015) without focusing on citations of articles. Therefore, bibliographic coupling does not discriminate against more recently published articles that may not yet have been able to reach the same number of citations as older publications (Bretas & Alon, 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015).

In addition, the conceptual structure of the knowledge in the defined field of research was observed by applying keyword co-occurrence (Radhakrishnan, Erbis, Isaacs & Kamarthi, 2017). This type of content analysis allowed us to identify clusters of more or less applied constructs in the defined literature field. It gives an overview of the intellectual and conceptual structures, which allows researchers to develop ideas of prior research trends and future developments (Bretas & Alon, 2021).

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive results

The following section presents and reviews the descriptive results, focusing on the activity of publications and central journals throughout the set time frame. The earliest article in our sample was published in 2000, with publications cited an average of 48.83 times. As shown in Fig. 2, the number of studies on employee HRMP perceptions has increased over time, with a notable spike in 2013. This abrupt rise lacks a clear explanation, as a more gradual increase might have been expected following the introduction of major frameworks after 2005, such as HR attributions (Nishii, Lepak & Schneider, 2008) or HRM System Strength (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). It can be observed that two authors published several papers in 2013 which, potentially, being part of a bigger research project.

Citations within our sample can be described as having developed disproportionately to the overall development of the field. As shown in Fig. 2, two major peaks in 2000 and 2008 hint to seminal works being published (e.g., Nishii et al., 2008). Similar impactful works were published in 2013 (Alfes,
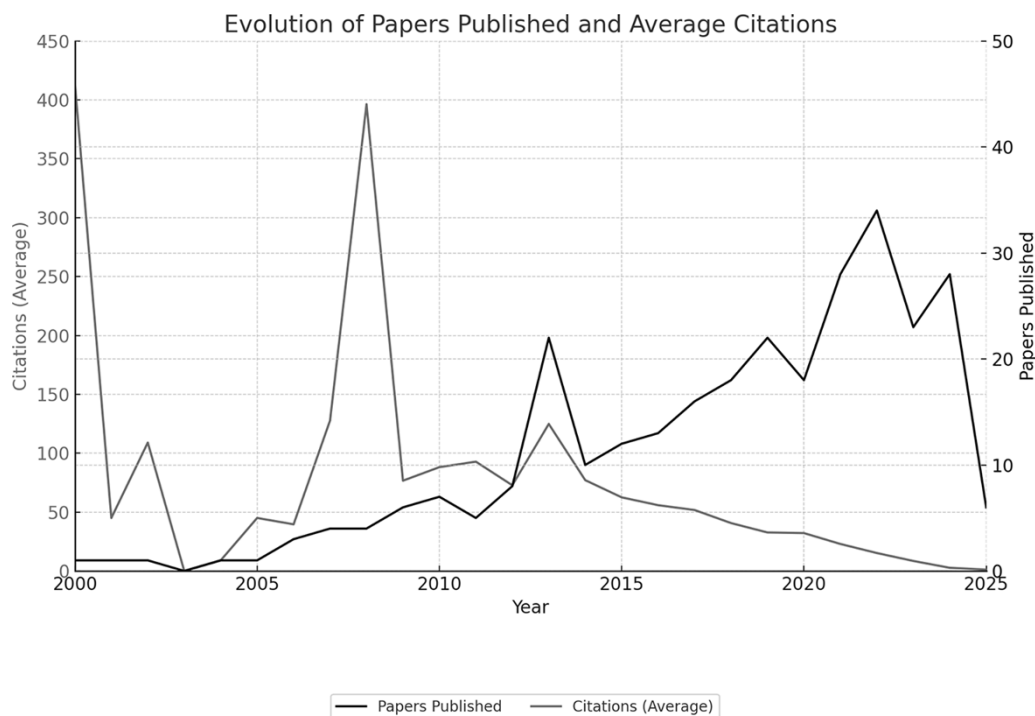
Figure 2. Yearly evolution of publications and citations.

Shantz, Truss & Soane, 2013; Kehoe & Wright, 2013), thus responsible for the height of citations. The decline after 2014 may be due to a citation time lag and growing research fragmentation, dispersing studies across subfields. This may account for the observation that recent publications remain active but garner fewer citations. Additionally, as the field matures, producing highly influential papers becomes increasingly challenging.

The articles in our sample were published across 122 different journals, reflecting a well-connected field that spans both broad and specialized interests (Fig. 3). Five journals published more than 10 articles each: *Human Resource Management* (15), *Human Resource Management Journal* (16), *Personnel Review* (17), *Employee Relations* (17), and *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* (36). This concentration is expected, given these journals' specific focus on HR and employee-related processes. Other journals reflect regional orientations (e.g., *Asia Pacific Journal of Management, European Management Journal*) or topic-specific areas within organizational research (e.g., Behaviour and Information Technology).

3.2 Evaluative results

As previously stated, the analysis of the evaluative part of this literature review was based on the methods of bibliographic coupling and keyword co-occurrence. First, evaluative results of bibliographic coupling were observed, identifying major research interests within our sample and their relationship to each other.

3.2.1 Bibliographic coupling

Figure 4 visualizes the network of bibliographic couplings within the research field of employee perceptions. The figure shows the documents of our sample, represented in nodes. Their size is a representation of the relevance of the document, based on the number of citations it has received since

Figure 3. Journals publishing on employee perceptions of HRMP.

Figure 4. Bibliographic coupling of publications.

publication. The links between these nodes represent bibliographic couplings. The closer the nodes are visualized to each other, the more references these documents share. With this, the intellectual structure of the field of employee HRMP perceptions is explored and central themes are identified.

The visualization demonstrates a total of nine interconnected clusters show several foci of research interests, from which information about the temporal development and conceptual evolution in HRM research can be deducted.

The GREEN cluster appears central to our sample, with Kehoe and Wright (2013) being the most frequently cited paper overall. While slightly distanced from the centre of the visualized network, this cluster maintains extensive interconnections. Thematically diverse, a first subcluster emerges focusing on performance both at the employee (Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees & Gatenby, 2013) and macro-organizational level (Choi, 2014; Katou, Budhwar & Patel, 2014). This interest is further combined with other employee outcomes, such as commitment, engagement, turnover intention (Alfes et al., 2013), or job satisfaction (Choi, 2019). These topics are mostly explored through an exchange perspective, such as social exchange theory, AMO framework, or psychological contract theory. Interestingly, scholars also make use of occupational health theories, such as job demands-resources theory (Sutton & Atkinson, 2023; Teo, Nguyen, Shafaei & Bentley, 2021) and self-determination theory (Gellatly, Hunter, Currie & Irving, 2009). These are also applied in a small but more recently developed subset that focuses on employee health, exploring well-being dimensions as outcomes of HRMP perceptions (Baluch, 2017; Heffernan, Cafferkey, Harney, Townsend & Dundon, 2022; Kilroy, Bosak, Flood & Peccei, 2020; Kilroy, Flood, Bosak & Chênevert, 2017; Sutton & Atkinson, 2023; Teo et al., 2021). Spanning from 2000 to 2023 articles in the green cluster are closely positioned, suggesting studies to frequently reference and build upon each other.

The YELLOW cluster is closely linked to the green cluster, comprising 31 articles of both strong and loose connections. This appears to be due to similarities in theme and sector, focusing strongly on performance. A central subcluster focuses on commitment-related aspects at the workplace, such as affective commitment (Heffernan & Dundon, 2016) but scholars in this cluster combine them with additional interests, such as trust (Macky & Boxall, 2007), justice (Heffernan & Dundon, 2016), or system strength (Chen, Lin, Lu & Tsao, 2007). While primarily grounded in exchange perspectives, particularly AMO framework, social exchange theory, and the resource-based view, this cluster also integrates communication theories, such as signalling theory (Heffernan & Dundon, 2016), setting it apart from the green cluster. The network visualization indicates a high relevance of this cluster, as it contains several highly influential nodes that form links to several other clusters. Articles in this cluster are on the older side of our sample, with the most recent publication being from 2018 (Pombo & Gomes, 2018).

The yellow cluster is closely linked to the BLUE cluster, which appears deeply embedded, reflecting strong conceptual and empirical ties to core themes. Its positioning within the visualization is further strengthened by the range of publication dates (2005–2024). Three major concerns, employee commitment, performance, and turnover, allow us to understand the interconnectivity with clusters previously explored. Like the prior cluster, major interests are combined with specific topics, here socially responsible HRM (Kundu & Gahlawat, 2015), age related questions (Herrbach, Mignonac, Vandenberghe & Negrini, 2009), or knowledge seeking (Fasbender & Gerpott, 2021). A distinguishable feature of this cluster is the focus on India in five articles (Stumpf, Doh & Tymon, 2010), suggesting increasing developments of HRM research in this area as well as its relevance for the general HRM research field. The theoretical foundations of this cluster draw above all from social exchange theory, suggesting the intent to balance organizational and employee.

As evident in the visualization, the blue and TURQUOISE cluster are highly interwoven. This, again, suggests not only at a well-connected body of research but ongoing thematical and theoretical similarities, set apart by additional, distinct research interests. The temporal distribution of publications, 2012 to 2025, highlights both the continued relevance and the evolving nature of these discussions. Like the blue cluster, the turquoise cluster centres on engagement, performance, and organizational citizenship behaviour, with social exchange theory as the dominant perspective. However, here we find research streams, such as organizational support (Alfes et al., 2019), deviance (Malik & Malik, 2024), and fit topics (Mostafa, Boon, Abouarghoub & Cai, 2023) are integrated. One special characteristic is the exploration of the employee as an active actor of HRM (Budjanovcanin,

2018), and the inclusion of different actors (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018; Frenkel, Restubog & Bednall, 2012). This suggests that the cluster not only reinforces existing HRM research streams but also advances them by linking broad HRM frameworks to more nuanced workplace dynamics at a theoretical level.

In a similar timeframe, the RED cluster explores concepts akin to clusters before, such as performance or engagement. However, the articles in this cluster go beyond combining these with emerging topics, such as knowledge sharing (Almarzooqi, Khan & Khalid, 2019) and creativity (El-Kassar, Dagher, Lythreatis & Azakir, 2022) but shift to a different understanding of HRM perceptions altogether. Through HR attributions (Cao, Zhao, Chen & Lv, 2024) and system strength (Guan & Frenkel, 2019) lens, scholars focus on employees' interpretation and sensemaking of practices. With this, the red cluster is centrally located but leans to the outer edge, where several publications lie on the periphery. The close connection is also explained through the strong research interest of engagement. While some topics overlap with other clusters, themes and with it, theoretical perspectives take on a different route.

Entwined with this cluster is the ORANGE cluster, sharing theoretical consistencies through AMO framework, signalling theory, and social identity theory, often combining both exchange and communication perspectives. However, its distinct thematic focus lies in Green HRM and green employee behaviour (e.g., Ojo, Tan & Alias, 2022; Rubel, Kee & Rimi, 2020). This cluster signals an expansion of traditional HRM research into sustainability-related behaviours, reflecting the growing recognition of HRM in promoting environmentally responsible actions within organizations. This is further strengthened by their publication date after 2020, making it the youngest cluster in our sample. The positioning suggests that researchers intend to contribute to the broader evolution of HRM scholarship and recent practice-related discussions that are not yet fully integrated in the field.

Three subclusters¡ formed in the visualization lie outside of the central cluster. The PURPLE cluster, while located outside of the main visualisation remains connected to other clusters. It consists of 19 articles indicating more specialized but impactful topics. The studies within this cluster primarily investigate socially embedded HRM dynamics and their impact on employee attitudes and behaviours, such as work-family conflict (Giancaspro et al., 2021), workplace mistreatment (Baillien et al., 2022), or trust (Rawshdeh et al., 2023). This includes a strong presence of corporate social responsibility ('CSR') and socially responsible HRM practices (e.g. John et al., 2022; Vu 2022). These social aspects, however, are often linked to key organisational outcomes such as employee commitment, performance, engagement, and organisational citizenship behaviour (López-Fernández et al., 2018; Sobhani et al., 2021). The theoretical perspectives applied in this cluster reflect its focus on employee perceptions and social dynamics with a strong exchange focus, including social exchange theory, AMO framework and stakeholder theory. Conway & Monks (2008) emerge as a foundational work that subsequent studies have built upon, visible through node size and extensive connections with other papers. Notably, two-thirds of the publications in this cluster appeared after 2020, suggesting that while still peripheral, this domain is evolving and gaining traction in HRM research.

Finally, two peripheral clusters, labelled pink and grey in the visualisation (Figure 4), each comprise only four publications. While they share several characteristics, their disconnect from other clusters may not warrant a detailed standalone interpretation. Both clusters appear to centre on international HRM, with a focus on specific geographical or institutional contexts, such as Eritrea (Ghebregiorgis & Karsten, 2007), Pakistan (Aboramadan & Albashiti, 2020), and The Netherlands (Steijn & Leisink, 2006). This makes the studies more specific and less generalizable, explaining the clusters distance. A closer reading reveals additional niche research topics, such as Total Quality Management (Boselie & Van Der Wiele, 2002; Wolor et al., 2022). The publications in both cluster are characterised by the absence of explicit theoretical perspectives, potentially indicating a more practice-driven approach or the lack of theoretical grounding which would suggest a gap in conceptual development within this research stream. Given their marginal size and thematic overlap,

we treat them as minor subclusters rather than distinct conceptual areas. Their presence nonetheless illustrates a peripheral but persistent interest in context-specific studies of HRM perceptions that remain theoretically underdeveloped.

3.2.2 Keyword co-occurrence analysis

While bibliographic coupling is particularly relevant to identify the intellectual structure of the defined field and supports the identification of major topics, co-occurrence analysis allows the researcher to dive into the content of articles. This technique thus allowed us to better understand the conceptual structures of the field and identify trends and possible future developments by examining the links between keywords (Bretas & Alon, 2021), as identified by VOSviewer. Keywords are thereby visualized as nodes. The links between these nodes refer to the co-occurrence of the word. The number of co-occurrences contributes to the weight of the link between keywords (Radhakrishnan et al., 2017).

The visualization of the keyword co-occurrence analysis shows a categorization of the identified articles into seven clusters, identifying 23 connected items that represent the key theoretical perspectives in our sample. The visualization is based on perspectives with a minimum of two occurrences. While the clusters represent a stream of theoretical perspectives applied in the defined research context, the analysis also highlights the links between the clusters and nodes. The visualization suggests that the field of HRMP research is not detached; rather, it is interconnected, with various theoretical perspectives overlapping and influencing each other. The presence of links between clusters indicates that researchers often draw on multiple theories to explore complex issues along employee perceptions.

The first cluster '*communicating HRMP*' represented in RED, includes five theoretical perspectives: HRM system strength (17 occurrences), signalling theory (14), uncertainty reduction theory (4), regulatory focus theory (3), and situational strength (3). All items of this cluster show both internal and external links, suggesting these theoretical perspectives to be connected with other perspectives in a well-developed field of relevance. Overall, this cluster focuses on communication theories, emphasizing how HRMP can convey messages and how individuals seek information and interpret them. Theories applied focus on both the employee (e.g., uncertainty reduction theory) and the organization level (e.g., HRM system strength). The interwovenness shown in Fig. 5 suggests that communication is a foundational aspect of HRM research, central to authors understanding, and serves as a bridge between different theoretical perspectives. This furthermore implies that scholars are particularly interested in exploring the process of HRM practices, as opposed to their sole presence.

A key link emerges between this first cluster and the PURPLE cluster, 'reciprocity in HRM', including social identity theory (10 occurrences), fit theories (12 occurrences), and, most prominently, social exchange theory (80 occurrences). While fit theories (P-E fit, P-O, needs-supply fit) and social identity theory remain on the periphery, social exchange theory is the most prominent theoretical perspective in the sample, linking several perspectives. This suggests that fit theories may be the focus of scholars' works when exploring HRMP, whereas social exchange theory is habitually combined with other perspectives. This interconnection might hint at the complexity of the field and the need to apply a multi-faceted approach to deepen the understanding. The integration of fit theories and social identity theory in the field highlights that HRM effectiveness is not just explored as a resource allocation but also about social and cognitive processes.

An important link is formed between social exchange theory and AMO framework, of the ORANGE cluster 'performance through resources'. Again, a small cluster, here comprised of the resource-based view (14 occurrences) and AMO (29 occurrences) emerges. The latter theoretical perspective is particularly well connected throughout the overall visualization. The strong link to the resource-based view suggests that HRMP are framed as a strategic asset with a strong strategic focus on HRMP impacting organizationally relevant performance outcomes. The focus of this cluster lies in examining perception at the macro-organizational level, exploring how employees experience the
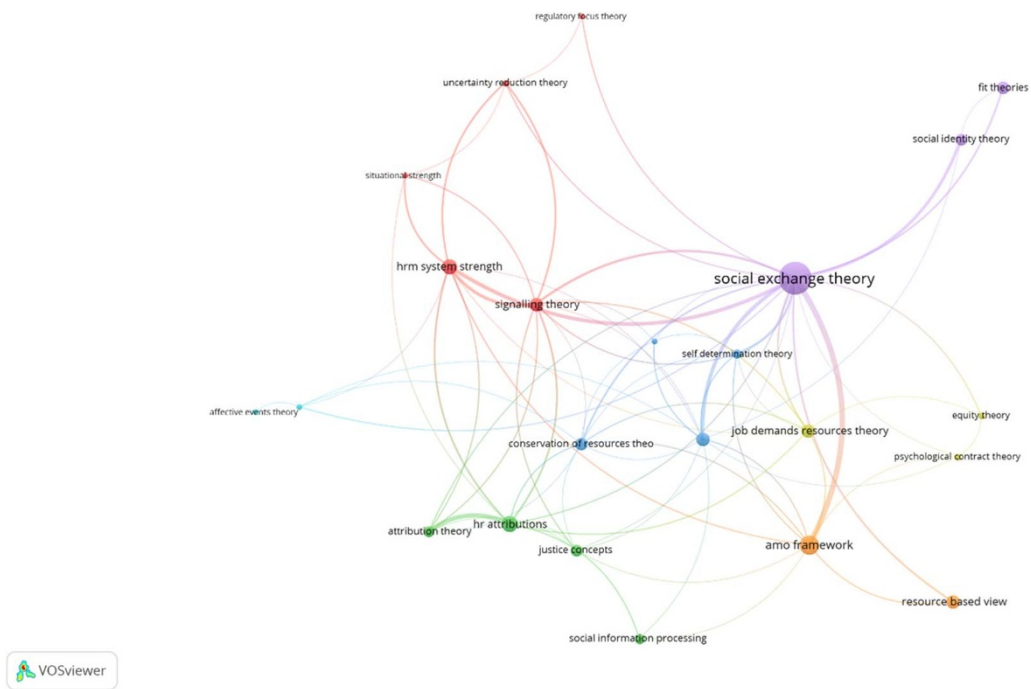
Figure 5. Keyword co-occurrence: theoretical perspectives.

presence of resources. This focus is highlighted by the strong connections between AMO framework and other theoretical perspectives of the visualization.

AMO is further linked to the YELLOW cluster, 'balancing resources and expectations', in particular to job demands-resources theory (14 occurrences), alongside equity theory and psychological contract theory (both 4 occurrences). With this, interestingly, exchange theories and an occupational health theory are bundled together which could hint at how scholars frame job demands-resources theory. At the core, this cluster focuses thus on a balancing approach, either between parties or (work) characteristics. While equity theory and psychological contract theory are somewhat connected, it is job demands-resources theory that connects different theoretical perspectives. This not only suggests that this perspective is more present within the HRMP field but also that it is explored in conjunction with other theoretical perspectives, potentially integrating employee and organizational concerns.

While job demands-resources theory shows a certain impact, scholars appear to apply it as an additional perspective in combination with others, such as conservation of resources of the DARK BLUE cluster 'employee needs and resources', which lies at the centre of the visualization. Conservation of resources theory (12 occurrences) is accompanied by self-determination theory (7 occurrences) and organizational support theory (4 occurrences), plus related organizational support concepts (13 occurrences). The latter distinction suggests that while some scholars explicitly frame their research within a theoretical perspective, others refer to theory-based constructs without explicitly anchoring them. This cluster thus focuses heavily on occupational health theories. The occupational health theory, categorized as job demands-resources theory, however, is not present. This cluster is brought together by the understanding that employees actively seek to satisfy their needs and how they experience the presence of or aim to maintain resources. With this, these perspectives exhibit a particularly strong employee focus. While overall occurrences indicate a rather niche viewpoint, important links are formed.

In close proximity to the dark blue cluster, the GREEN cluster 'employee interpretations' is of prominence. It includes HR attributions (20 occurrences), justice concepts (12 occurrences), attribution theory (9 occurrences), and social information processing (8 occurrences). As indicated by the nodes, all perspectives in this cluster appear to be of significant relevance for the field of HRMP. This cluster thus heavily emphasizes the use of communication theories in the field. The link between HR attributions and justice concepts suggests that scholars explore how employees assess HRMP not just based on what is offered but on how this provision is further interpreted. Strong links can be found with different types of perspectives, such as HRM system strength, social exchange theory, or conservation of resources theory, suggesting that scholars do not rely solely on the employees' interpretation but possibly contrast these with the presence of resources.

Finally, the LIGHT BLUE cluster, 'emotions at work' was explored. Composed of two perspectives, affective events theory (2) and broaden and build theory (3 occurrences), this cluster lies on the periphery of the visualization, indicating a niche in the HRMP field. Both theoretical perspectives focus on the role of emotions in shaping employee workplace experiences and outcomes. Judging from the visualization developed and the low count of theories, employee emotion appears to be an emerging interest in HRMP.

4 Discussion

In the following section, the principal results of the research objectives providing concluding remarks are discussed, before drawing overarching conclusions of the study. Using bibliometric methods on a sample of 292 articles, we provide a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical perspectives applied in HRMP perception research and the major research themes explored through them. In the following, our central findings will be summarized.

These were identified through the use of bibliographic coupling and keyword co-occurrence analyses. In the following, we discuss (i) the intellectual structure of the field, identifying the major lines of interest scholars explore in the strategic employee HRMP perception literature, (ii) the key theoretical perspectives employed within the field to explore research interests, their interconnection, and (iii) their temporal evolution.

(i) The bibliographic coupling visualization of employee HRMP perception research has revealed key insights into the field's intellectual make-up, structured around distinct but interconnected clusters. These primarily focus on employee attitudes and behaviours, particularly engagement, commitment, and turnover intention. Exchange theories dominate as the conceptual foundation, framing HRMP as a reciprocal process between organizations and employees. Supplementary Table 3 provides an overview of these clusters, summarizing their temporal distribution, dominant research themes, and associated theoretical perspectives. The strong focus on performance-related outcomes was identified as a major line of research, which, given the relevance for HRMP to prove its relevance in both research and practice, seems reasonable. The prevailing dominance of this, however, suggests that scholars tend to treat performance outcomes as the primary – or even sole – indicator of strategic HRMP success. This has become furthermore visible in the younger clusters, where new lines of research have been included but still in combination with established interests. The field, while continuously developing, opts for integrating new interests which, so far, has not resulted in a paradigm shift.

However, the concentration of research interests on a limited set of outcomes reflects a potential limitation within the field. This narrow focus can lead to an incomplete understanding of HRM by reinforcing an incline towards variables that are easily quantifiable and directly linked to organizational performance. As Legge (2001) argues, HRM literature has long been dominated by perspectives that prioritize financial and performance-related outcomes, often at the expense of other critical but less tangible aspects. This emphasis appears to shape the trajectory of HRM research by favouring constructs that can be readily measured and validated within mainstream management

discourse. Consequently, other behavioural, psychological, and socio-emotional constructs receive less attention, as visible in our analysis.

Over the past 25 years, the introduction of system strength and HR attribution theories has marked a pivotal shift in HRM research, from an outcome-driven focus to a deeper exploration of the cognitive and structural foundations of employee perception. This development has redirected attention from the mere presence of HRMP to how employees interpret and respond to them. To do so, scholars increasingly rely on communication theories, perspectives focused on the interpretation of practices, supporting this line of theory. This shift is complemented by some interest in actor-centred perspectives that emphasize employee agency and multi-stakeholder dynamics.

Overall, while scholars apply different theoretical lenses to explore different topics, several dominant perspectives shape the field, suggesting limits in our current understanding of such topics. This is furthermore visible in Supplementary Table 2, which presents the top five most articles per cluster, detailing their associated theoretical perspectives and link strength. This table complements the visual mapping by identifying the most influential studies within each cluster, highlighting the theoretical perspectives that have strongly shaped the field's development. Visibly, and despite some diversification, the field continues to be shaped by a few dominant perspectives. Exchange theories remain central, particularly in studies focused on performance outcomes. These perspectives reinforce a focus on how HRMP structures influence employee outcomes under a reciprocal view. However, we observe efforts to expand the theoretical landscape by combining traditional frameworks with less common ones (see green cluster) or with emerging topics (e.g., CSR and exchange theories, see purple cluster).

Communication theories have gained traction by centring on how employees interpret and make sense of HRMP, shifting the research focus toward the cognitive and perceptual processes involved. We find scholars either use these to explore prominent research interests, such as commitment (see yellow cluster) or, in a more recent effort since 2020, combined with emerging interests, such as CSR (see orange cluster). Still, some emerging topics lack a clear theoretical perspective (see peripheral clusters) or make use of already established ones (see purple cluster), pointing to a lack of adequate theoretical development. Additionally, emerging perspectives have begun to appear but remain marginal and not yet fully integrated. The following sub-section will further explore the use and development of theoretical perspectives throughout our sample.

(ii) The exploration through keyword co-occurrence has yielded several important results. In the following, we first add to the previously discussed categorization of such theoretical key perspectives into exchange theories, communication theories, and occupational health theories (Van Beurden et al., 2020), to identify major perspectives as well as research trends and shortcomings within the described field.

Overall, VOSviewer counted 23 connected perspectives. Scholars were shown to highlight in particular three perspectives counting more than 20 occurrences, drawing from communication and exchange theories: AMO framework (29), HR attributions (20), and social exchange theory (80); making up 129 of 299 counts. In contrast, few mentions were made of occupational health theories in our sample.

• *Occupational health theories*

Scholars reference conservation of resources, and job demands-resource theories, self-determination theory, and organizational support. Overall, these appear 50 times in our sample, having a link strength of 72.

• *Communication theories*

Theories, such as signalling theory, HRM system strength, uncertainty reduction theory, regulatory focus theory, situational strength, social information processing theory, attribution theory,

and HR attributions, were visible in our sample. In total, 71 counts are present with a link strength of 104.

- *Exchange theories*

  Nine theories include social exchange theory, fit theories, organizational justice, equity theory, psychological contract theory, AMO framework, resource-based view, and social identity theory. In total, 172 occurrences with an overall link strength of 133 were counted.

With this, the analysis clarified that exchange theories are strongly overrepresented within the employee perception field. Interestingly, exchange theories, in proportion, show a lower link strength than communication theories. This suggests that while exchange theories are widely used, they may not be as deeply interlinked and used as a standalone perspective. Communication theories, on the other hand, appear to be more frequently used together, forming a more connected network. Finally, occupational health perspectives are referenced less frequently but tend to be clustered together, indicating a specialized yet cohesive research focus. The difference in link strength can be explained through the nature of the theoretical perspectives' presence. Exchange theories might allow the scholar to assess multiple aspects of their research through the same lens, while communication theories might focus more on one specific aspect of the research, treating a theoretical concept as a variable.

Two theoretical perspectives in our sample do not fit in either of the categories developed by Van Beurden et al. (2020). While affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 1998) may share some characteristics of the exchange, communication, and occupational health categories, their focus lies on the role of emotions at work. We thus propose a fourth category:

- *Affect-based theories*

  Affective events theory, broaden and build theory make up for five occurrences with a link strength of 7.

These theories remain relatively underutilized compared to other categories, as indicated by their lower occurrence and link strength. This suggests that scholars have yet to fully integrate affect-based perspectives into the broader HRM discourse.

Scholars not only show limited diversity among categories of theoretical perspectives but also within. Specifically, ¡limited diversity among occupational health perspectives emerged. Only four different occupational health theories were mentioned by scholars within our sample as opposed to eight communication theories and nine exchange theories. The limited diversity in occupational health theories as well as the emerging affect at work category may suggest that scholars have not fully explored or integrated the multifaceted aspects of employee emotion, well-being, stress, or health into their research. While several exchange theories are mentioned by scholars, the analysis has shown for scholars to rely in particular on specific ones, such as social exchange theory or organizational justice theories. In contrast, other exchange perspectives, such as psychological contract theory, are little mentioned in our sample. Attribution theory and HRM system strength appear to be the most present representatives of the communication theories category, with other perspectives falling short. This finding shows a limitation of the current field, where expanding the range of occupational health theories could enrich the understanding of how HRMP impacts employees and provide more holistic and strategic long-term outcomes. This could be particularly noteworthy for the exploration of the major research interests, which were previously identified, providing a new 'set of eyes' and supplementing the current understanding.
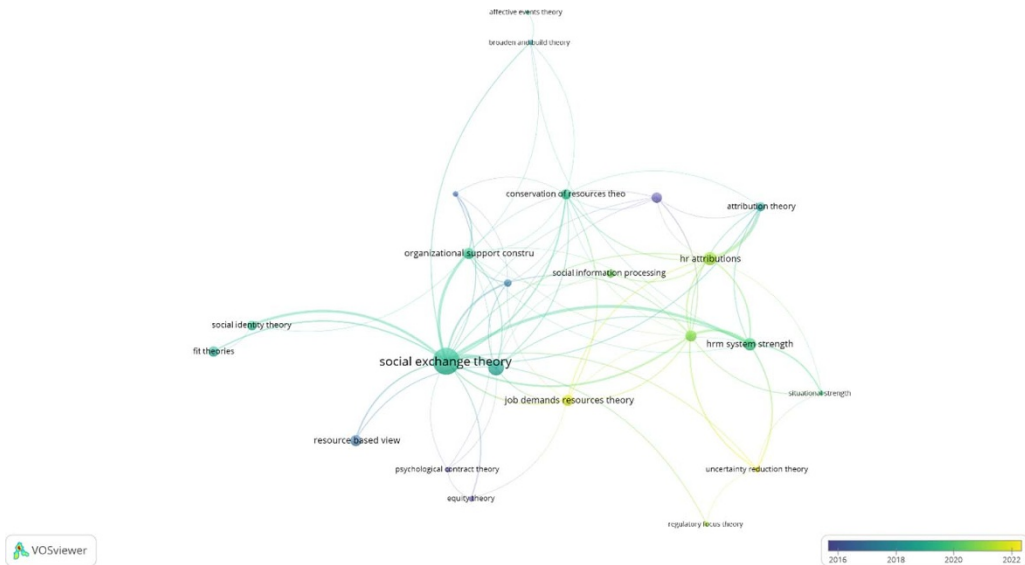
Figure 6. Overlay visualization of theoretical perspectives.

The visualization of theoretical perspectives has also identified a dense interconnectivity and thematic overlap among clusters, with scholars frequently drawing upon multiple theoretical perspectives, both within and across categories. Combining multiple perspectives to develop a more nuanced understanding of HRM appears reasonable, addressing the blind spots of individual theories. Communication theories, for example, are prone to assuming a one-directional flow of information, neglecting the interactive nature of communication. Similarly, the sole focus on exchange theories, while providing a widely applicable framework, runs the risk of oversimplifying the complex dynamics of HRM environments. However, this overlap also presents challenges, as it may complicate efforts to isolate the effects of specific HRM practices or theories. Moreover, an additional interpretation of the combination of key theoretical perspectives points to a lack of theoretical perspectives that are fit for the dynamic and complex field of employee experiences of HRMP, considering the multidirectional and context-dependent nature. Scholars might feel challenged by this and struggle to identify a comprehensive theoretical approach, as also evident in the peripheral clusters. This suggests the need for further exploration of the contents of key theoretical perspectives and the development of new theories.

(iii) To trace the evolution of theoretical perspectives in HRM research, the overlay visualization generated by VOSviewer (Fig. 6) and a supplementary line graph (Fig. 7) are examined. Together, these provide complementary insights into the temporal development of theory use. The overlay visualization highlights average publication years through a colour gradient, from older (dark blue) to more recent (yellow). This allows us to identify when certain theories were most actively used. The line graph (Fig. 7) complements this by providing a longitudinal view of how the frequency of theoretical applications has fluctuated, illustrating trends of adoption, growth, and decline.

The overlay visualization highlights the continued relevance of exchange (average 2016) and communication theories (average 2020) over the past 25 years. While social exchange theory (average 2019) has seen a decline as a standalone perspective, it is increasingly integrated with other frameworks. HR attributions and signalling strength, which link to more recent theoretical developments, reinforce the shift towards understanding employee interpretations of HRMP. At the same time, the visualization reveals a decline in other exchange theories, such as justice concepts (average 2014),
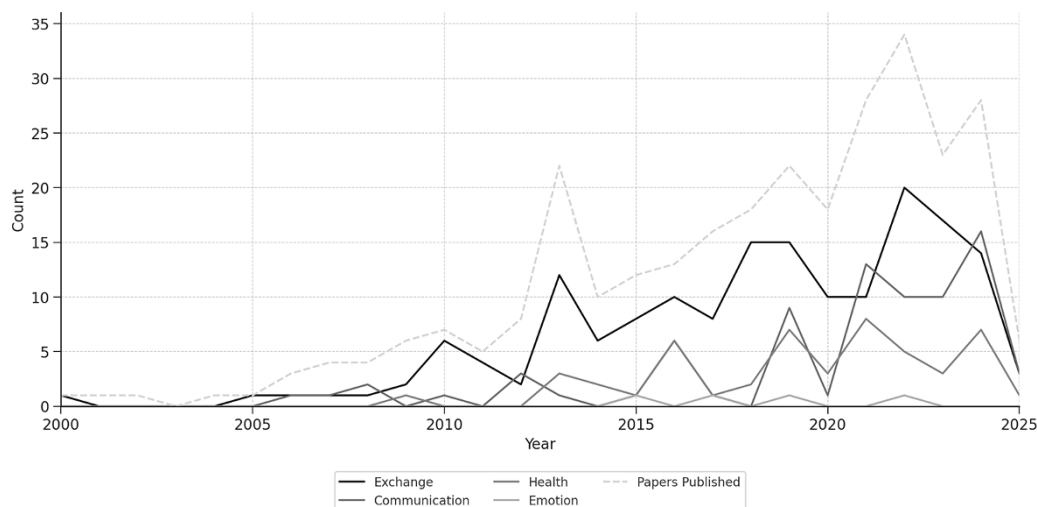
Figure 7. Evolution of key theoretical perspectives.

equity theory (average 2012), and psychological contract theory (average 2014). While justice concepts remain present, their average publication year suggests they may have reached saturation. In contrast, psychological contract and equity theories appear to have lost traction, indicating that while they were initially explored, they did not establish themselves as enduring frameworks in HRM research.

In contrast, emerging theories gaining traction since 2020, uncertainty reduction theory, regulatory focus theory, job demands-resources theory, HR attributions, social information processing, and signalling theory, reflect an increasing interest in how employees experience HRMP. Notably, the job demands-resources perspective (average 2021) contrasts with broader occupational health theories (average 2017). This suggests that scholars have focused on certain perspectives, potentially serving the performance inclination observed. This differentiation is further supported by its co-occurrence with two exchange theories (see Fig. 5). Additionally, the rise of affect-based theories (average 2018) points to increasing attention to emotional and psychological dimensions, though the limited integration signals challenges in gaining broader acceptance so far.

While the overlay visualization identifies the relative recency of theoretical perspectives, the line graph (Fig. 6) extends this analysis by tracking the actual usage trends over time. The use of theoretical perspectives in our sample has steadily increased, in relation to the growth in the number of published papers. This trend suggests that HRM perception research has become more theoretically grounded, integrating multiple frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of HRM phenomena.

This study has shown how exchange theories have remained the most frequently referenced, maintaining a relatively stable and high presence. However, a gradual increase in communication-based theories indicates a growing interest in how HRM practices signal meaning to employees and how these messages are interpreted. This reinforces the findings of the overlay visualization (Fig. 6). Similarly, occupational health theories have gained traction since 2015. While the use of job demands-resources theory showed up as an emerging theory in the overlay visualization, the line graph better visualizes the overall fluctuations in this category, suggesting an episodic rather than a steady interest. A similar trend can be observed for affect-based theories, indicating a rising interest in the emotional and psychological dimensions of HRM.

We can conclude that the evolution of theoretical perspectives in the HRM field indicates that while traditional perspectives persist and appear connected to broader research themes, HRM
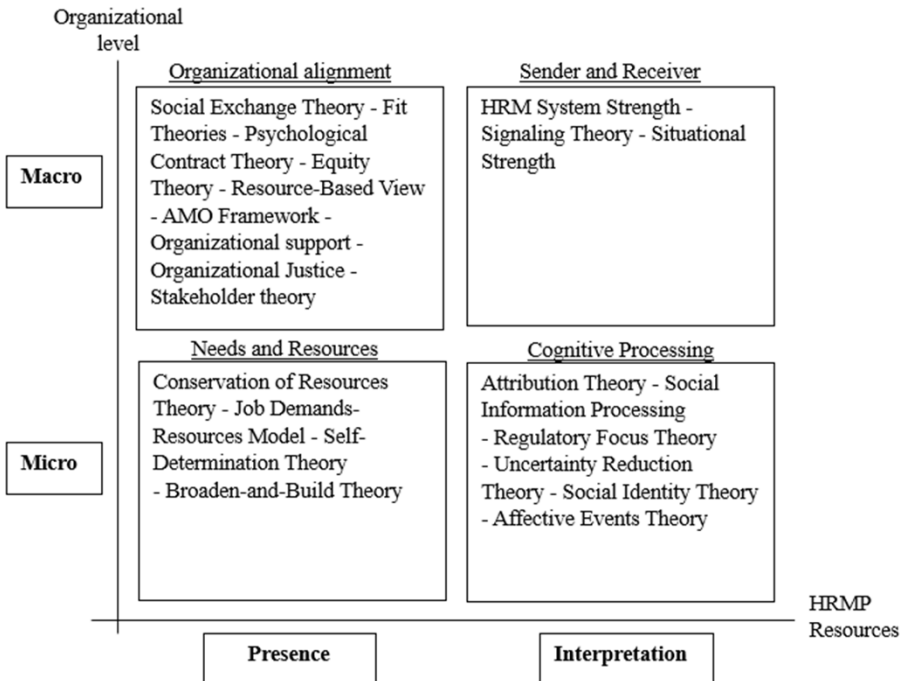
Figure 8. Categorization of theoretical perspectives.

research also shows interest in diversification. Emerging perspectives suggest curiosity in challenging the traditional ways and understandings. Still, these interests have not yet achieved a greater change or even paradigm shift in HRM research and reasons for this ought to be explored.

Throughout the analysis, scholars appear to use theoretical perspectives that explore employee perceptions in two key dimensions which allow us to provide a more structured overview of how different theoretical perspectives have been applied in strategic HRM research. This advanced classification (Fig. 8) intends for a more nuanced representation of research in this field, enabling a clearer understanding of how theories contribute to the HRMP perception literature at different levels. In doing so, it not only facilitates an assessment of past research but also supports future research development.

The categorization based on the use of theoretical perspectives observed in this study differentiates these based on two key dimensions: the organizational level it focuses on (macro vs. micro) and the conceptual angle of perceptions of HRMP resources (presence vs. interpretation). The macro level encompasses theories that include explorations of HRMP perception at an organizational level, focusing on how HRM practices are designed, structured, and aligned within firms. In contrast, the micro level examines HRM at the individual employee level, capturing personal experiences, perceptions, and reactions to HRM practices. The second dimension, presence versus interpretation, differentiates between theories that focus on exploring how employees perceive the existence and availability of HRM resources (presence) and those that more specifically focus on how employees interpret and make sense of HRM practices (interpretation). By applying this refined classification, this study provides a clearer structure for analysing the dominant theoretical perspectives in HRMP research and identifying potential for future theoretical advancements.

The refined classification further highlights notable imbalances in the theoretical landscape of HRM perception research in line with the prior reviews. Theories focused on the perceptions of the presence of HRMP at a macro level dominate the field, with 141 applications primarily grounded in

exchange theories and thus particularly prominent, emphasizing how HRM is structured and aligned at an organizational level. In contrast, interpretation-focused theories are less dominant overall, with 34 applications at the macro level (mainly HRM System Strength and Signalling Theory) and 55 at the micro level, where Attribution Theory and Social Identity Theory are key contributors. Micro-level provision theories, while less frequently used (64 applications), still exhibit a strong presence, suggesting that scholars neither place particular emphasis on them, nor show disinterest. Overall, the classification based on the analysis of our sample suggests that, while research has increasingly recognized employee agency in perceiving and interpreting HRMP, the field still places great emphasis on structural presence and is in need of theoretical developments that adequately assess up-and-coming research interests.

5 Overarching conclusions and implications for research

The aim of this paper was to explore the development of the research field around employee perceptions of strategic HRM practices, focusing on both research interests and theoretical perspectives. Over the past 25 years, research on employee perceptions of HRM practices has gained increasing relevance, with publications now maintaining a steady presence in the field. While 72 studies, around 40% of the literature, relied on employee data up to 2017 (Beijer et al., 2019), the present study has compiled nearly 300 such empirical studies published between 2000 and 2025. Accounting for differences in scope and methodology, this comparison nonetheless represents a significant increase in research interest. This study identified a dense network of links in this larger sample, indicating a robust citation network. The interconnectivity and thematic overlap among clusters point to a highly interdisciplinary and mature field, with studies building upon each other's findings. This study has also identified the field as heavily skewed towards certain lines of interest and theoretical perspectives applied (see also Supplementary Tables 2 and 3). Below, concluding remarks based on our findings are developed, offering suggestions for future research. With this, this paper has not only explored what has been done in the past 25 years but also considers ways for the future of strategic HRM research.

First, our analysis identified an overwhelming focus on research themes like employee engagement, commitment, and performance outcomes, reflecting a consistent emphasis on demonstrating the HRMP value in terms of organizational outcomes (Legge, 2001). While such factors are undoubtedly critical for the understanding of HRMP, the dominance risks an oversimplification of the HRMP experience, as it prioritizes short-term organizational benefits over a more nuanced understanding of HRMP, its dynamics and actors. This narrow scope may not only hinder the development of the field but also frames employees primarily as an antecedent in HRMP effectiveness models, rather than as an active participant who shapes, interprets, resists, or implements HRMP in different ways (Björkman et al., 2014; van Mierlo, Bondarouk & Sanders, 2018). Without acknowledging employee agency more fundamentally, HRMP research may fail to capture how and why perceptions develop, limiting the ability to provide actionable insights into HRMP's evolving role in organizations. While emerging topics like Green HRM and socially responsible HRM are increasingly included, they are primarily integrated into traditional performance-oriented frameworks rather than reshaping the field. This suggests HRMP research has evolved incrementally rather than through a paradigm shift, raising questions about whether new perspectives are being fully explored or merely absorbed into existing models that prioritize organizational benefits.

Suggestion 1: Expanding Research Beyond Instrumental Employee Outcomes.

We recommend that future research broaden its focus beyond quantifiable, performance-oriented variables. This explicitly requires challenging the dominant perspectives, which still prioritize organizational benefits at the expense of broader, non-financial aspects of work (Guest, 2017; Legge, 2001). Scholars should consider integrating psychological and social dimensions to create a more balanced research agenda aligned with employees' lived realities, aiding to bridge the

theory-practice gap. Qualitative studies could offer valuable insights into how employees engage with HRMP, uncovering underexplored dimensions that traditional models may overlook.

The concentration of research interests aligns with a narrow set of theoretical perspectives, dominated by social exchange theory. Aside from a growing application of communication theories, our analysis shows limited theoretical advancement in HRMP research. Instead of broadening the theoretical landscape, scholars largely continue to apply established frameworks to recurring themes. The field may lack sufficient awareness or accessibility to alternative theoretical frameworks and innovative lines of research. This could be due to a combination of limited exposure to diverse theories, a shortage of interdisciplinary collaboration, or a lack of comprehensive reviews that highlight underutilized perspectives. Consequently, scholars might default to the most familiar and widely accepted theories, neglecting other valuable approaches that could enrich our understanding of employee perceptions. Recycling familiar frameworks limits potential for development and novel insights. While social exchange theory's adaptability makes it mouldable, reliance risks conceptual rigidity and may overlook alternative frameworks. For example, from a social exchange theory view, engagement is framed as a reciprocal response to organizational HRM investments, where employees feel obligated to exert effort for favourable treatment. In contrast, self-determination theory emphasizes fulfilling intrinsic psychological needs, suggesting engagement emerges when HR practices support autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These perspectives differ fundamentally in positioning the employee. Such differences are evident in Fig. 8, suggesting an imbalance as scholars focus heavily on theoretical perspectives at a macro level. The prevailing lack of occupational health perspectives (Van Beurden et al., 2020) reinforces that employee interests, while somewhat included, are as a secondary concern rather than a central theme for HRM (Guest, 2017).

Overall, it was observed that HRM research still places more emphasis on HRMP structures rather than how employees actively process at a cognitive and emotional level. The theoretical narrowness evident not only restricts explanatory potential but also overlooks the complexity of how employees interact with HRMP.

Suggestion 2: moving beyond exchange.

Given the strong focus on an exchange perspective and the structure of HRM, future studies should critically assess whether existing theories remain the most suitable or if alternatives are needed to capture emerging questions. Intending to integrate evolving research interests, the field would furthermore benefit from scholars engaging in the development and adaptation of theories that can address the complexities of the dynamic context of HRMP alongside the challenges of employee perceptions. This shift would not only enhance theoretical diversity but also improve the practical applicability of HRM research.

We consider it helpful to explore reasons for why the skewedness we have observed in this research might have occurred. We suggest scholars rely heavily on 'trends', which has led to an 'overuse' of these perspectives, as well as the aspects explored alongside employee perceptions, often as its outcome. This trend-following behaviour can be attributed to several factors, including the desire for publication in high-impact journals that favour certain popular theories, the influence of leading scholars who advocate for specific perspectives, the relevance of certain lines for praxis, and the perceived reliability and validity of well-established measures. While it is a natural development to examine a trending topic in many ways, the reliance on and dominance of certain perspectives and major research lines over a longer period of time would be questionable and risky. This over-reliance can slow down innovation and limit the exploration of alternative viewpoints that might offer valuable insights into employee perceptions. Additionally, it can lead to a form of academic echo chamber, where new research merely reinforces existing paradigms rather than challenging or expanding them.

Suggestion 3. Research beyond trends.

> *Scholars should critically assess whether the dominance of certain topics or theoretical perspectives is driven by their ongoing relevance or simply by their establishment. Does adding to the stream of literature add to the development of the field and if so, in what ways? Instead of reinforcing well-trodden research paths, the field would benefit from a more deliberate effort to integrate and value alternatives that could serve research equally.*

On a concluding remark, this study has underscored the need for scholars to broaden their ways, critically reflect on existing research, and actively challenge prevailing assumptions. While much has been achieved in 25 years of research on employee HRMP perceptions, paths for much needed development were explored. The current skew towards research lines and theoretical perspectives appears to constrain the field's evolution, yet it also presents a clear path for expansion and diversification. Given the strategic HRM focus of this study, it is crucial to emphasize that scholars should not fall into the trap of equalizing 'strategic' for (short-term) performance but rather to move beyond the apparent precedence that, after 25 years (see Legge, 2001), still appears to dominate the field.

6 Limitations

Results of this study should be considered in the context of the limitations inherent to this review. First, while the chosen methodology of bibliometric methods makes use of statistical methods, it does require interpretation of results, which entails a certain level of subjectivity, particularly when interpreting the visualization of VOSviewer. Additional methods in future reviews would thus complement the results. Second, while we consider our choice of keywords representative of the field and the most important terms used, the selection might have influenced our results. However, the inclusion of seminal studies across the full timespan, suggests for this impact to be limited. Lastly, while bibliometric methods can explore the content of a paper, they do not reveal why authors were cited (Vogel et al., 2021). This includes papers criticizing other authors, building on their work, or self-citing, which may explain strong links between some authors' own papers (see Fig. 4). Still, the consistent citation of seminal works over time suggests a significant role in shaping the field, either through direct application or through scholarly debate. Given the scope of our 25-year dataset, we are convinced that the network structure captures the intellectual evolution of the field, as influential works tend to be cited across multiple studies and clusters.

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