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Strategic Flexibility and Social Networks in the Effect of High-Performance Work Systems on Organizational Performance

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the Introduction, the paragraph discussing Dynamic Capabilities Theory and citing Teece et al. would benefit from a more explicit derivation of the hypotheses. The current statement that “high-performance work systems can be interpreted as an organizational infrastructure that develops the human capital necessary for strategic reconfiguration” is plausible, but the theoretical chain remains implicit. The authors should explain step by step how specific high-performance work practices develop sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring capabilities and why strategic flexibility should therefore mediate the effect on organizational performance. A stronger theoretical derivation would move the manuscript beyond an empirical association model and provide a more persuasive explanation of the proposed causal mechanism.

The discussion of social networks in the Introduction, particularly the sentence “Social networks constitute an important organizational resource because they determine patterns of interaction, information exchange, knowledge access, cooperation, and resource mobilization among organizational members and external stakeholders,” requires greater conceptual precision. The manuscript does not specify whether social networks refer to network size, network strength, network density, internal

organizational ties, external professional connections, structural social capital, relational social capital, or some combination of these. Because social networks are modeled as a moderator, the exact nature of the construct is theoretically consequential. The authors should provide a formal definition, identify its dimensions, explain how the five-item instrument operationalizes those dimensions, and distinguish the construct from related concepts such as social capital, social support, and organizational communication.

Table 4 appears inconsistent with the Fornell–Larcker criterion as described in the text. The manuscript states that "the square root of the extracted variance values located on the main diagonal of the matrix was greater than the corresponding values," yet the diagonal cells in the presented table are blank. Moreover, several reported interconstruct correlations are extremely high, including .897 between high-performance work systems and strategic flexibility and .847 between strategic flexibility and social networks. These values raise substantial concerns about discriminant validity and possible construct overlap. The authors should present the complete Fornell–Larcker matrix with the square roots of AVE on the diagonal and also report the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT), preferably with bootstrap confidence intervals. Given the correlations approaching .90, discriminant validity should not be claimed without stronger evidence.

The structural-model evaluation is incomplete. The manuscript currently focuses primarily on path coefficients and t-statistics, but a PLS-SEM study should report additional diagnostics, including variance inflation factors to assess collinearity, coefficients of determination (R^2) for endogenous constructs, effect sizes (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and preferably out-of-sample predictive assessment where feasible. The statement "all relationships were statistically significant, and the construct validity of the measures was confirmed" also conflates structural significance with measurement validity. Statistical significance of structural paths does not establish construct validity. The authors should separate measurement-model assessment from structural-model assessment and interpret each set of criteria according to its proper statistical purpose.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the new document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The Introduction should formulate explicit research hypotheses rather than moving directly from the literature review to the final aim statement. The manuscript discusses five empirical relationships: high-performance work systems → strategic flexibility, high-performance work systems → organizational performance, strategic flexibility → organizational performance, the mediating role of strategic flexibility, and the moderating role of social networks. These should be formally stated as H1–H5 after the relevant theoretical arguments. The current narrative structure makes the expected relationships inferable, but a hypothesis-driven structural equation modeling study should specify each directional hypothesis explicitly and link each one to the preceding theoretical rationale.

In the Research Methodology section, the sentence "The statistical population consisted of engineers working in the civil engineering and urban development departments of District 4 of Isfahan Municipality, as well as engineers employed by construction companies undertaking projects in District 4 of Isfahan Municipality during 2022–2023, totaling 250 individuals" needs clarification regarding the unit of analysis and organizational boundaries. Municipal engineers and engineers employed by external construction firms may operate under substantially different human resource systems. It is therefore unclear how respondents from external companies could validly assess a common "high-performance work system" if they were employed by different organizations. The authors should clarify whether participants evaluated the HR practices of their own employer, the municipality, or the project environment. If multiple employing organizations were represented, organizational clustering and between-organization heterogeneity should also be addressed analytically.

In the Research Methodology section, the statement "Using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size table, the required sample size was determined to be 148 participants, and ultimately, 151 completed questionnaires were included in the analysis" is insufficient justification for sample adequacy in a PLS-SEM study. The Krejcie–Morgan table is designed primarily for survey sample determination relative to population size and does not establish statistical power for a structural equation model

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containing mediation and moderation effects. The authors should perform and report an a priori or post hoc statistical power analysis based on the maximum number of predictors, expected effect size, significance level, and desired statistical power. This is especially important because interaction effects generally require larger samples than direct-effect models.

The sampling procedure described in the sentence "Convenience sampling was employed" raises concerns regarding selection bias and external validity. The authors should provide detailed information about how respondents were approached, how many individuals were invited, how many declined participation, whether questionnaires were distributed electronically or in person, and whether any systematic differences existed between municipal and private-company respondents. The response rate should be reported if available. In addition, the limitations associated with non-probability sampling should be explicitly acknowledged because the sample may overrepresent employees who were more accessible, more engaged, or more willing to express favorable perceptions of organizational practices.

Table 1 requires substantial methodological improvement. The source names "Kristaliz and Risuchu (2013)," "Wijand et al. (2012)," and "Chin Jutsai (2007)" should be checked carefully against the original publications because the transliterated names may not correspond accurately to identifiable scholarly sources. More importantly, the manuscript should report the number of items, response scale, anchors, example item, scoring procedure, dimensions, original reliability, evidence of prior validation, and any translation/back-translation procedures for each questionnaire. Merely reporting item numbers such as "1–5" and "11–36" is insufficient for reproducibility. If Persian versions were used, the authors should explain how linguistic and cultural equivalence was established.

The sentence "organizational performance was measured across seven dimensions: validity, motivation, feedback, ability, support, adaptability, and recognition" appears to reflect the ACHIEVE framework associated with Hersey and Goldsmith, but the terminology and construct interpretation require careful revision. These dimensions traditionally represent factors affecting performance rather than seven direct dimensions of organizational performance in the conventional strategic management sense. The authors should justify why an individual- or managerial-performance diagnostic framework is being treated as a measure of organizational performance. They should also clarify the level of analysis because employee perceptions of ability, clarity, help, incentive, evaluation, validity, and environment may not be equivalent to organizational-level performance. This conceptual issue potentially affects both construct validity and interpretation of the structural relationships.

The paragraph reporting the Kolmogorov–Smirnov results contains a potentially serious statistical problem. Table 2 reports a Kolmogorov–Smirnov statistic of "190.8079" for high-performance work systems, whereas the other values are approximately 9–18; such values do not resemble conventional Kolmogorov–Smirnov test statistics and may reflect transcription, decimal-formatting, or software-output errors. The authors should verify every value directly against the original SPSS output. Moreover, the manuscript should explain why univariate normality testing was considered necessary for PLS-SEM, which does not require multivariate normality in the same way as covariance-based SEM. If non-normality motivated the use of PLS-SEM, this rationale should be stated explicitly and supported with appropriate distributional diagnostics such as skewness and kurtosis.

Table 3 provides Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE values, but the measurement-model assessment remains incomplete for contemporary PLS-SEM reporting standards. The authors should report individual indicator loadings, preferably with bootstrapped significance values, and clarify whether rho_A was also examined. The statement that "all factor loadings were greater than .40" is particularly concerning because retaining indicators merely because they exceed .40 may be too permissive. Loadings between .40 and .70 generally require examination of their impact on composite reliability and AVE before retention. The authors should report all item loadings transparently, identify any weak indicators, justify their retention, and demonstrate that the resulting measurement model has adequate reliability and convergent validity.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the new document.

2. Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.
Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.

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