

Optimizing Job Performance through HRM Practices: A Conceptual Framework for Local Government in Malaysia

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Abstract

The performance of local government employees in Malaysia is a critical factor in ensuring effective and efficient public service delivery. However, persistent human resource management (HRM) challenges, including inadequate training, poor job-role alignment, and limited career development pathways, continue to hinder employee productivity, particularly in local government such as Majlis Perbandaran Kuala Langat (MPKL). This conceptual paper proposes a framework examining the influence of three core HRM practices, employee training, job suitability, and career development, on job performance, with job satisfaction serving as a moderating variable. Drawing from multiple theoretical foundations such as the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model, the Transfer of Training Model, Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory, the Person–Job Fit Theory, and Career Anchor Theory, this study integrates these perspectives into a unified conceptual model tailored to the Malaysian local government context. The framework responds to identified gaps in the public-sector HRM literature, particularly the lack of comprehensive models exploring the interaction between multiple HRM dimensions and their combined effect on job performance. The paper also outlines theoretical and practical implications, suggesting that HRM strategies should not only be individually strengthened but also designed in alignment with employees’ levels of job satisfaction. The proposed framework offers a valuable foundation for future empirical testing and contributes to ongoing efforts to improve organizational effectiveness and service quality in Malaysia’s public sector.

Keywords: Job performance; Job satisfaction; Job suitability; Training; Career development; Local government

INTRODUCTION

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The 12th Malaysian Plan (12MP) 2021–2025 highlights the importance of a high-performing civil service workforce in driving national transformation. However, despite notable improvements in public service delivery, significant challenges remain in workforce development, governance, and digital transformation. Issues such as misaligned roles, skill mismatches, and limited career development can reduce public-sector employee performance and hinder the achievement of 12MP goals (EPU, 2023) by lowering employee motivation, job satisfaction, and overall effectiveness. In response, the *Rangka Kerja Pemerkasaan Pihak Berkuasa Tempatan* (RKPBPT) 2022–2030 emphasizes the critical role of local governments in adapting, innovating, and managing urbanization to meet growing public demands for more efficient and higher-

quality services (KPKT, 2022). Among the key human resource management (HRM) challenges identified by the framework are unclear career paths, low skill levels, and limited growth opportunities, factors that may impede local governments' ability to enhance public-sector performance. At the organizational level, *Majlis Perbandaran Kuala Langat* (MPKL) has recognized similar systemic HRM issues in its Strategic Plan 2021–2025, including mismatches between employee skills and job roles, unstructured career development, and inadequate training (MPKL, 2021). These challenges have negatively affected employee motivation and job satisfaction, resulting in lower performance and inefficiencies in public service delivery. This study aims to identify key HRM factors, namely job suitability, employee training, and career development, that can enhance MPKL employee performance, with job satisfaction acting as a moderating factor. Effectively addressing these HRM challenges will provide practical insights and strategies for MPKL to improve employee performance, public service efficiency, and employee competencies by ensuring an optimal fit between employee skills and organizational goals.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Local governments in Malaysia are primarily responsible for public service delivery, including waste management, infrastructural maintenance, and urban planning (KPKT, 2024; Matthews, 2024), although numerous local governments, such as MPKL, have continuously encountered persistent HRM issues (Bahardin et al., 2019; Harris, 2005), including mismatch between employees skillsets and job roles (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Yahya et al., 2012), ambiguous or insufficient career growth opportunities (Jamaludin, 2019; Mohd Nor Silmi & Abdullah, 2024), employee shortages (Azmi et al., 2011; Ismail et al., 2020), and obsolete or inefficient work procedures (KPKT, 2022). As a result, employees productivity, innovation, and service responsiveness have been diminished (Ismail et al., 2023), which have engendered operational interruptions, reduced employee morale (Ibrahim et al., 2013; Johari et al., 2019), subpar employee performance (Abdul Hamid et al., 2021; Aziz et al., 2022), and decreased public service delivery and effectiveness (Mariana, 2020). The issues also symbolize wider systemic barriers among Malaysian local governments frequently due to high bureaucracy, limited resources, and obsolete administrative processes (Harding, 2022; Rasli et al., 2020). Therefore, complaints regarding ineffective infrastructural maintenance, delayed public services, and low responsiveness to public demands have gradually increased, which underscores higher public dissatisfaction (Manaf et al., 2023; Abdul Hamid et al., 2021).

Public discontent and performance decline are apparent via two primary key performance indicators (KPIs). First, there was an increase in public complaints, rising from 1,317 in 2018 to 1,560 in 2022 (MPKL, 2024). Second, the STAR Rating or *Sistem Penarafan Bintang Pihak Berkuasa Tempatan* (SPB-PBT), a federal initiative that appraises local governments based on core services, management, community participation, and customer management, experienced a sudden decline from 95.50% in 2022 to 93.95% in 2024 (KPKT, 2024). The decline in performance is closely linked to underlying HRM challenges that continue to affect MPKL's operations. These challenges include a mismatch between employees and job roles, inadequate employee training, and unclear career development opportunities (MPKL, 2021), as outlined in the Strategic Plan 2021–2025 of MPKL. The persistent ineffectiveness in addressing these HRM issues has contributed to the rise in citizen complaints and the decline in the STAR Rating.

Previous studies on HRM have highlighted the importance of improving job performance (Waxin & Bateman, 2009). However, a key gap in the existing literature is the limited research on Malaysian local governments, as most studies have focused on the private sector or federal public organizations (Demo et al., 2024), leaving research on local government bodies, including MPKL, relatively rare (Harris, 2005; Hutchinson, 2014). Additionally, findings on HRM factors like job suitability (Zazali, 2019), training (Abd Razak & Zahidi, 2024), and career growth (Mohamad et al., 2023) are fragmented because many studies have examined these factors in isolation rather than as part of a comprehensive framework (Mat et al., 2021; Romaiha et al., 2022). Research on HRM in the specific context of Malaysian local governments has also been limited, as many scholars have generalized findings without fully considering the cultural, operational, and structural differences in local government settings (Bahardin et al., 2019; Ibrahim & Nordin, n.d.).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between HRM practices and job performance has been extensively explored in both public and private sector contexts. However, studies focusing specifically on Malaysian local governments remain limited. This literature review aims to critically examine prior research related to the three key HRM

dimensions, training, job suitability, and career development, and their connection to job performance, while also exploring job satisfaction as a moderating variable.

Training and Job Performance

Employee training is considered a cornerstone of effective HRM, as it enhances the skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary for optimal job performance. Salas et al. (2012) emphasized that well-designed training programs improve individual learning outcomes and organizational effectiveness. In the context of Malaysian public service, training has often been criticized for its lack of strategic alignment and practical relevance (Mohd et al., 2020). Research by Lee et al. (2023) found that when training is aligned with organizational goals and employee roles, it significantly improves task performance and service delivery.

The Transfer of Training Model (Baldwin & Ford, 1988) provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how training impacts performance. According to this model, training effectiveness depends on the ability of employees to transfer acquired knowledge into their job context. Factors such as motivation to learn, managerial support, and work environment influence this transfer process. Within Malaysian local governments, a lack of systematic follow-up mechanisms often results in limited training transfer, undermining potential gains in employee performance (Abd Razak & Zahidi, 2024).

Job Suitability and Job Performance

Job suitability, also referred to as person–job fit, describes the alignment between an employee’s skills, interests, and values with the requirements of their job role. Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) demonstrated that a high level of person–job fit leads to greater job engagement, lower turnover intentions, and higher performance outcomes. In the public sector, especially at the local government, job mismatch remains a widespread issue, often resulting from ineffective recruitment processes and outdated job descriptions (Rasid et al., 2021).

Sathappan and Adamu (2022) argue that poor job-role alignment in Malaysian local governments contributes to reduced productivity and operational inefficiencies. Employees who lack the appropriate technical competencies for their assigned roles may face difficulties in handling permit approvals, complaint management systems, infrastructural maintenance coordination, and digital administrative procedures. Such mismatches may contribute to delayed public services, slower responses to citizen complaints, and reduced service quality, as highlighted in the problem statement.

This sentiment is echoed in MPKL's Strategic Plan (2021–2025), which highlights skill-role mismatches as a core HRM challenge. The Person–Job Fit Theory (Cable & DeRue, 2002) suggests that when employees perceive congruence between their abilities and job requirements, they experience greater motivation and perform more effectively. Zazali (2019) supports this by showing that job fit positively influences civic engagement and task efficiency in local government settings.

Career Development and Job Performance

Career development encompasses structured pathways for professional growth, including promotions, lateral job movements, mentoring, and skills development opportunities. According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959), career advancement acts as a motivator that enhances employee satisfaction and drives performance. Schein's (1978) Career Anchor Theory further supports this by suggesting that career development aligned with an individual's internal values and competencies fosters long-term organizational commitment.

In Malaysia, the rigidity of promotion systems and lack of clear career trajectories in the public sector have been identified as demotivating factors (Harun et al., 2022; Mohamad & Yahya, 2017). Noor and Abdullah (2024) emphasized that when employees perceive fairness and transparency in career advancement processes, their performance improves. Hosen et al. (2024) similarly observed that investment in continuous professional development leads to higher service quality and staff retention in government departments.

Job Satisfaction as a Moderator

Job satisfaction plays a critical moderating role in the relationship between HRM practices and job performance. Defined by Spector (1997) as the extent to which individuals feel positively about their jobs, job satisfaction influences employee engagement, effort, and commitment. Diana et al. (2023) found that satisfied employees are more receptive to training and more likely to internalize developmental opportunities.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) supports the notion that job satisfaction acts as a psychological resource that enhances the positive effects of job-related resources, such as training and career development. In public sector environments, factors contributing to job satisfaction include recognition, supportive leadership, equitable rewards, and autonomy (Yusof et al., 2022). When these elements are present, HRM initiatives have a stronger impact on employee performance.

Furthermore, empirical studies in Malaysian settings support the role of job satisfaction in influencing HRM-performance relationships. Yahya et al. (2012) observed that employees who are satisfied with their roles and organizational policies are more likely to maximize the benefits of training, job-role alignment, and career development opportunities. In this study, job satisfaction is specifically conceptualized as a moderating variable that strengthens or weakens the relationship between HRM practices and job performance, rather than functioning as an intervening mechanism.

The reviewed literature confirms that training, job suitability, and career development are significant predictors of job performance, and that job satisfaction plays a crucial moderating role. The next sections of this paper will discuss the theoretical foundations, develop hypotheses, and propose a framework for future empirical testing.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This conceptual paper draws upon five well-established theories to explain the relationships between training, job suitability, career development, job satisfaction, and

job performance. These theories provide the necessary theoretical grounding to justify the proposed framework and hypotheses.

Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model

The JD-R Model, developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), posits that job characteristics can be categorized into demands and resources. Job resources, such as career development support, training opportunities, and role clarity, are positively associated with work engagement and performance.

In this model, job satisfaction operates as a psychological resource that strengthens the effects of HRM practices (Mohamad Hajari, 2020). In the context of Malaysian local governments, the JD-R model helps explain how HRM initiatives can buffer stress and enhance performance, particularly when employees are equipped with the right tools and support systems.

Transfer of Training Model

Baldwin and Ford's (1988) Transfer of Training Model focuses on how learning acquired through training is applied in the workplace. Three main factors influence transfer: trainee characteristics, training design, and work environment. Job satisfaction strengthens the positive effects of training, job suitability, and career development on employees' job performance by enhancing employees' engagement and responsiveness toward these HRM practices (Abd Razak & Zahidi, 2024). Therefore, in the context of MPKL and similar institutions, job satisfaction can be seen as a catalyst that improves training transfer and, ultimately, job performance.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory differentiates between factors that lead to satisfaction (motivators) and those that prevent dissatisfaction (hygiene factors). Motivators such as achievement, recognition, and career growth are directly linked to improved performance (Diana et al., 2023). Career development, in particular, falls under the category of motivators. This theory supports the conceptual framework by explaining why employees who perceive growth opportunities are more likely to be satisfied and perform better.

Person–Job Fit Theory

The Person–Job Fit Theory, elaborated by Cable and DeRue (2002), emphasizes that congruence between an individual’s abilities and job demands leads to positive outcomes such as increased satisfaction, commitment, and performance. In Malaysia’s public sector, job mismatches are common due to rigid placement systems and limited competency-based recruitment (Sathappan & Adamu, 2022). This theory provides justification for including job suitability as a key antecedent to performance, especially when employees experience high satisfaction with their job roles.

Career Anchor Theory

Schein’s (1978) Career Anchor Theory postulates that individuals have internal career orientations, such as managerial competence, autonomy, and security. When organizational career development opportunities align with these anchors, employees are more likely to remain motivated and committed (Mohamed et al., 2023). The alignment between personal career anchors and developmental pathways contributes more positively to job performance when employees experience higher levels of job satisfaction.

Collectively, these five theories support the conceptual model by offering complementary perspectives on how HRM practices influence job performance, and how job satisfaction moderates these relationships. By integrating these theories, this paper presents a theoretically robust and contextually relevant framework for understanding HRM effectiveness in Malaysian local governments.

PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the preceding theoretical foundations and literature review, this paper proposes a conceptual framework that positions three core HRM practices, training, job suitability, and career development, as key antecedents of job performance. The model also introduces job satisfaction as a moderating variable that influences the strength and direction of these relationships.

The framework addresses the growing need for a more integrated understanding of how HRM practices interact within public organizations, particularly in Malaysian local governments, where human capital constraints and bureaucratic inefficiencies are prevalent (Mohamad, et al., 2023). The proposed model is grounded in empirical observations and is supported by multiple theories, ensuring both conceptual validity and contextual relevance.

Direct Relationships

The first component of the framework posits that each HRM practice, training, job suitability, and career development, has a direct and positive influence on job performance. Training equips employees with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to perform tasks effectively (Aldehaim et al., 2024; Elnaga & Imran, 2013). Job suitability ensures alignment between the employee's competencies and job requirements, enhancing engagement and minimizing performance gaps (Sathappan & Adamu, 2022; Wang et al., 2023). Career development provides growth opportunities that motivate employees to improve their performance and invest in organizational outcomes (Hosen et al., 2024; Noor & Abdullah, 2024). These direct paths are supported by extensive literature and practical evidence. In local governments such as MPKL, employees frequently cite lack of training, unclear job roles, and stagnant career opportunities as key barriers to productivity (Mohamad Hadzar, 2024). Thus, addressing these three domains can lead to substantial improvements in job performance.

Moderating Role of Job Satisfaction

The second component of the framework introduces job satisfaction as a moderator. Job satisfaction reflects the extent to which employees feel content and valued within their roles and the broader organizational environment (Spector, 1997). When job satisfaction is high, employees are more likely to benefit from HRM interventions, increasing their willingness to apply learned skills, align with organizational goals, and pursue career advancement (Nauman et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2023).

Moderation implies that the strength of the relationship between each HRM practice and job performance depends on the level of job satisfaction. For instance, even

well-designed training programs may have limited impact if employees are dissatisfied with their supervisors or work environment (Mohamad Yunus et al., 2022). Conversely, employees who are highly satisfied are more motivated to take advantage of development opportunities and are better positioned to perform at higher levels (Judge et al., 2001; Harter et al., 2002).

This dynamic interaction aligns with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and the JD-R Model, both of which suggest that psychological states such as satisfaction amplify the effects of external job resources (Mohamad Hajari, 2020). In this sense, job satisfaction acts as a psychological enabler that enhances the impact of HRM practices on performance outcomes.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Based on the proposed model, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Training has a significant positive relationship with job performance.
- H2: Job suitability has a significant positive relationship with job performance.
- H3: Career development has a significant positive relationship with job performance.
- H4: Job satisfaction moderates the relationship between training and job performance such that the relationship is stronger when job satisfaction is high.
- H5: Job satisfaction moderates the relationship between job suitability and job performance such that the relationship is stronger when job satisfaction is high.
- H6: Job satisfaction moderates the relationship between career development and job performance such that the relationship is stronger when job satisfaction is high.

VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework in *Figure 1* below is visually represented as a model where training, job suitability, and career development are independent variables pointing toward job performance, the dependent variable. Job satisfaction is positioned as a moderator that intersects each of these three relationships. This structure allows for empirical testing using statistical techniques such as multiple regression and moderation analysis (Hayes, 2022; Field, 2018).

The visual framework also facilitates comprehension among policy-makers and HR managers, illustrating how employee-centered initiatives interact to drive performance outcomes. It underscores the importance of taking a holistic view of workforce development, particularly within complex public sector environments (OECD, 2015; UN-Habitat, 2020).

This proposed conceptual framework provides a theoretically grounded and practically relevant model for examining job performance in Malaysian local governments. By recognizing the interdependence between HRM practices and the psychological states of employees, the framework offers nuanced insights into how local councils can improve workforce effectiveness. Future empirical testing of this model will not only validate the hypothesized relationships but also inform HRM policies and interventions that are both strategic and human-centered.

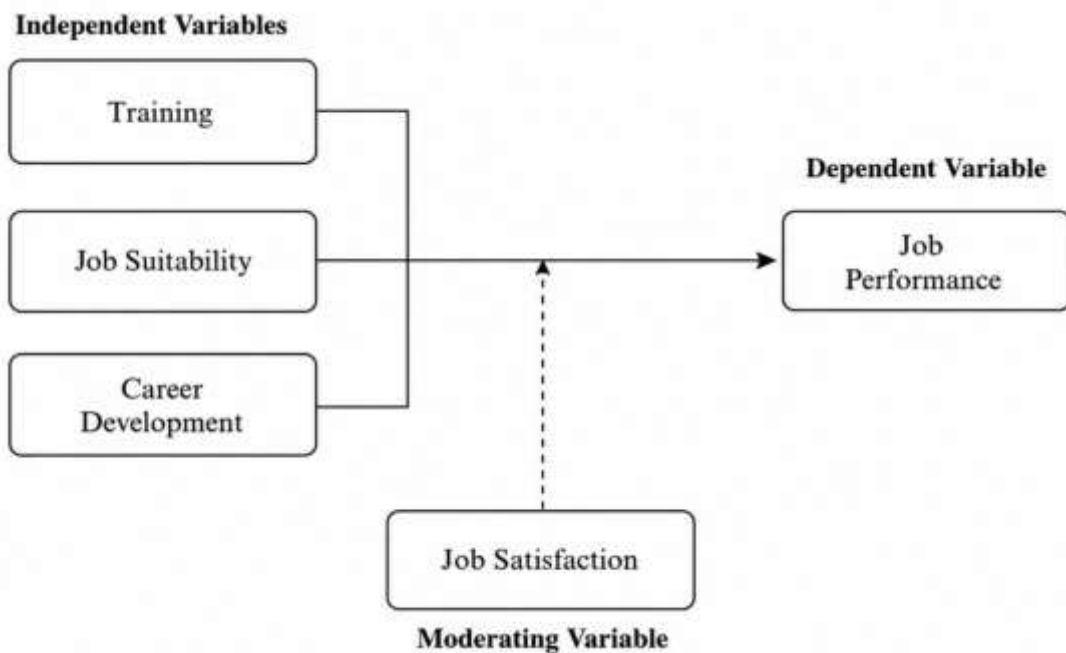


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

The framework illustrates job satisfaction as a moderating variable that influences the strength of the relationships between training, job suitability, career development, and job performance.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The conceptual framework proposed in this study holds significant theoretical and practical value for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners in the field of human resource management, especially within the context of the Malaysian public sector.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on HRM-performance linkages by integrating multiple well-established theories, namely, the JD-R Model, Transfer of Training Model, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Person-Job Fit Theory, and Career Anchor Theory, into a cohesive framework. This multi-theoretical foundation enhances conceptual rigor and addresses a common criticism in HRM research: the lack of robust theoretical grounding (Sinclair, 2007). Moreover, by introducing job satisfaction as a moderating variable, the model highlights the dynamic interaction between structural HRM practices and psychological outcomes, offering new avenues for academic inquiry (Hayes, 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2013).

Practically, the framework provides strategic direction for local government administrators who seek to improve organizational performance through workforce development. First, it emphasizes the need for customized and continuous training programs that are aligned with employees' job roles and organizational objectives. Training should not be seen as a one-off activity, but rather as an ongoing process that builds competencies and enhances service delivery capabilities (Noe, 2017; Salas et al., 2012).

Second, the framework draws attention to the critical importance of job suitability. Ensuring that employees are placed in roles that match their skills, qualifications, and preferences can reduce inefficiencies and enhance motivation (Potosky & Greenberg, 2020; Sekiguchi, 2004). This requires HR departments to adopt more sophisticated recruitment, placement, and job redesign strategies that prioritize fit over hierarchy or tenure.

Third, the framework underscores the necessity of structured career development pathways. Local governments must invest in mentorship programs, succession planning, and promotion systems that are transparent and merit-based (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2012; Baruch, 2004). When employees perceive a clear future within the organization, they are more likely to be committed and productive.

Finally, the moderating role of job satisfaction suggests that even the best-designed HRM practices may fall short if employees are not satisfied with their work environment (Supramaniam & Singaravelloo, 2020). Public sector leaders must therefore foster a culture of recognition, inclusion, and engagement. Satisfaction is not a passive outcome but an active enabler of HRM effectiveness (Mat et al., 2021; Harun et al., 2022).

The study also recognizes that HRM improvements in local governments must operate within highly bureaucratic and hierarchical administrative systems (Harding, 2022; Rasli et al., 2020). Within such constraints, transparent and merit-based career development practices can still be strengthened through standardized promotion criteria, competency-based performance evaluations, structured training assessments, and digital HR monitoring systems. Incremental HRM reforms that enhance procedural transparency and accountability may help local governments modernize workforce management practices without disrupting existing administrative structures.

Overall, the proposed model serves as a strategic tool for aligning HRM practices with performance outcomes, ultimately supporting Malaysia's public sector reform agenda and enhancing the capacity of local governments to serve the public effectively (EPU, 2023; KPKT, 2022; MPKL, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This conceptual paper has proposed an integrated framework linking training, job suitability, and career development to job performance, with job satisfaction serving as a moderating variable. The framework draws upon a range of well-established theories, including the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model, the Transfer of Training Model, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the Person–Job Fit Theory, and Career Anchor Theory. Together, these theories offer a holistic explanation for how HRM practices

influence employee performance and how job satisfaction enhances or diminishes the impact of those practices.

The paper contributes to the existing literature in several important ways. First, it addresses a significant gap in HRM studies related to Malaysian local governments, where theoretical models are often underutilized (Bahardin et al., 2019). Second, it presents a comprehensive and context-specific framework that considers the complexity of public sector environments, including hierarchical structures, rigid job placement policies, and limited career mobility (Hutchinson, 2014; Ployhart & Hale, 2014). Third, it emphasizes the central role of job satisfaction, not merely as an outcome but as an enabler of HRM effectiveness (Wang et al., 2023).

In practical terms, the framework provides actionable insights for HR professionals and policy-makers. By tailoring training programs, enhancing job-role alignment, and establishing transparent career development paths, local governments can create a more productive, engaged, and high-performing workforce (Demo et al., 2024; Georgiadis & Marinakou, 2024). Equally important is the cultivation of a work environment that supports job satisfaction, which amplifies the benefits of these HRM practices (Samsuri et al., 2022). This dual focus on systems and sentiment can help transform public organizations into more dynamic and citizen-responsive institutions.

Nonetheless, the framework remains conceptual and requires empirical validation. Future research should seek to operationalize and test the model using quantitative methods such as correlation, regression and moderation analysis (Hair et al., 2018; Hayes, 2022). Large-scale surveys among employees of various local governments in Malaysia can provide the data needed to assess the strength and direction of the proposed relationships (Dillman et al., 2014; Fink, 2013). Particular attention should be paid to variations across departments, job grades, and urban-rural localities to understand context-specific dynamics.

Future research should examine how bureaucratic structures, administrative rigidity, and digital transformation readiness influence the implementation of HRM practices in Malaysian local governments. Understanding how local governments balance merit-based HRM initiatives with hierarchical public service systems may provide valuable insights into improving governance effectiveness and public service responsiveness (Harding, 2022; OECD, 2019).

Further studies may also consider additional moderators or mediators, such as organizational culture, leadership style, or employee engagement, which could enrich the model and offer more nuanced insights (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Johari et al., 2019). Longitudinal designs would be beneficial in capturing the temporal aspects of HRM interventions and their long-term impact on performance (Taris & Kompier, 2003; Harrison, 2005).

Finally, comparative studies between Malaysian local governments and those in other ASEAN countries could shed light on regional trends, challenges, and best practices. Such cross-border research would not only contribute to theory-building but also inform regional policy initiatives aimed at strengthening governance and public sector innovation (OECD, 2019; UN DESA, 2018).

In summary, this conceptual paper lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of how HRM practices and job satisfaction interact to shape job performance in Malaysian local governments. Through empirical testing and contextual adaptation, this framework holds significant potential to inform both scholarship and practice in public sector HRM.

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Dr. Mazlan Che Soh, as the main supervisor, provided primary guidance in shaping the research framework, refining the methodology, and reviewing the overall content. Dr. Radduan Yusof, as the co-supervisor, contributed to refining the conceptual structure, enhancing the clarity of the arguments, and reviewing drafts of the manuscript. The first author conducted the research, and wrote the manuscript under their supervision.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to the publication of this paper.

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