





High Performance Work Systems in the Tourism Industry: A Systematic Review

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Abstract: In the business context, human resource management is essential to achieve maximum productivity, making it necessary to build high performance work systems. The aim of this study was to know the current state of human resources practices integrated into the high performance work systems of tourism companies and to understand the relationship between HPWSs and staff turnover, absenteeism, productivity and accident rate, as well as the black box variables that mediate this relationship. A systematic review of literature published between 2019 and 2024 (April) was carried out with PRISMA 2020 statement, based on a bibliographic search in databases and which, after applying eligibility criteria, allowed for the compilation of 18 studies. The academic interest of this review stands out because it is a novel topic, postulating it as a starting point for future theoretical and empirical research that would serve to develop a more robust theory and make visible a topic of great impact for companies in the tourism sector, many of them family businesses, as well as for their workers.

Keywords: high performance work systems; black box; human resources



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1. Introduction

In recent decades, and especially in the last few years, the exponential transformation and advance in the context of technologies and artificial intelligence, changes in consumer tastes and needs, demographic transformation of populations, economic fluctuations and many other conditions of a dynamic nature requires companies to be able to adapt and respond as efficiently as possible, as this is considered the only way to survive conditions of maximum global competition (Rulinawaty et al., 2021; Tarigan et al., 2021), where uncertainty and competitiveness turn employees into ‘smart tools’ so that organizations can maintain competitive advantages.

Thus, it is a fact that organizations need to effectively manage their employees through different human resource management (HRM) practices, with the aim of achieving this in the most effective and efficient way possible. And it has been demonstrated that the mutual support of various HRM practices provides better results than the implementation of any single practice (Fu et al., 2017), thereby contributing to the achievement of a large number of goals and their diversity as pursued in companies, all of which has been the subject of research in recent years (Nawang Sari et al., 2023). And it is under this interest in achieving the maximum productivity at all levels where the construction of high performance work systems (HPWSs) is contextualized; framed within HRM, HPWSs are defined as a series

of individual, but linked, human resources (HRs) practices, the aim of which is to achieve an increase in the company's performance (Miao et al., 2021). However, while it seems inescapable to interconnect practices to improve business performance, the reality is that there are numerous, diverse unknowns about how HPWSs impact both business and individual employee outcomes (Andersén & Andersén, 2019; Miao et al., 2021; Pavlova, 2022; Prince, 2019; Xi et al., 2021).

In view of this situation and to provide conclusive results in this regard, numerous models with different approaches (universalist, contingent or configurational approach) and theories (Social Exchange Theory, Resource-Based View, Human Capital Theory) are being proposed as explanatory from a multidisciplinary approach, many of them being known prior to the conceptualization of HPWSs. However, it should be noted that, although research on this subject is currently on the rise, most studies focus on the relationship between HPWSs and business performance, with the effect of these systems on employees being regarded as secondary (Ratten et al., 2020), despite the fact that higher business performance is linked to higher employee performance (Dastmalchian et al., 2020; Fragoso et al., 2022).

In addition, it is crucial to not only know the impact of the HPWSs on employees' performance and organizational results, but also the mechanisms involved in this relationship; this phenomenon is known as the black box. Thus, the black box in HR is defined as a system in which how results are achieved is unknown, as it is a hidden process of relationships and interrelationships that, since it is not known, prevents work being undertaken accurately to improve organizational results through the HPWSs (Javed et al., 2023; Pavlova, 2022). And if delving into all this is crucial due to the amount and diversity of unknowns in this regard in all sectors, it is reaching a great relevance in the tourism sector since, although it has always been considered a relevant sector in the world economy, it has been experiencing exponential development and growth in recent years (Bojović et al., 2024). Within this sector, we cannot ignore the fact that most tourism companies in countries such as Spain are still family businesses, and Spanish family-owned hotel chains are among the largest in the world: Meliá, Riu, Hotusa, Iberostar, Barceló, Catalonia, etc. The list is almost endless. But not all family businesses are large hotel chains; there are also many cases of medium-sized family businesses: Grupotel, Hipotels, Valentín, etc., as well as countless small family businesses.

At this point it is worth noting that HPWSs and the family business concept must be effectively integrated to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of these organizations. In family businesses in the tourism sector, family values and cohesion strengthen HPWS practices by fostering an environment of trust and commitment. In this situation, family businesses can take advantage of their less formal structures and their centralized decision making to implement HRM practices that encourage the responsible selection of staff, continuous training, performance appraisals and performance-based remuneration policies. In addition, the family business culture, which is strongly focused on values and loyalty, could facilitate the adoption of HPWSs by promoting greater employee engagement and motivation. These practices not only improve efficiency and effectiveness but also align employees' personal and professional goals with those of the company, creating a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement and mutual commitment (Jewell et al., 2022). Furthermore, by focusing on practices that promote a positive and supportive work environment, family businesses can create a sustainable competitive advantage that not only improves organizational performance but also increases employee satisfaction and well-being, which are critical for long-term success in the tourism sector (Jiang & Messersmith, 2018).

However, there is currently little knowledge about the value of the various aspects of HPWSs in the job performance of employees in the tertiary sector, and research is therefore

needed (Bojović et al., 2024). Given the growing yet fragmented body of literature on HPWSs in the tourism industry, a systematic review is essential to consolidate current knowledge, identify common patterns, and reveal research gaps. A structured and rigorous synthesis is necessary to advance theoretical understanding and support evidence-based decision making in a sector marked by high employee turnover and intense competition.

For this reason, the aim of this paper is to understand the current state of academic literature on HR practices included in HPWSs in tourism sector companies and to understand the relationship between HPWSs and employee absenteeism, rotation, productivity and accident rate (ARPA items), as well as the black box variables that mediate this relationship, through a systematic review of the literature. Accordingly, this review is guided by the following research question: “What Black Box factors (both of individual and organizational nature) contribute to the impact of HR practices encompassed in a HPWS on the ARPA items (absenteeism, rotation, productivity and accident rate) of employees in the tourism sector?” This paper has been organized into four sections: Section 1 is an introduction to the subject and Section 2 is the theoretical framework; Section 3 deals with the methodology used, on this occasion a systematic review with PRISMA 2020 statement. The next sections contain the results obtained (Section 4), the discussion (Section 5) and the conclusions (Section 6) of the paper.

2. Theoretical Framework

Although HPWSs have been used since 1970 in HRM (Jewell et al., 2022), scientific literature on the background of the adoption of HPWSs is scarce (Prince, 2019). However, the work of Prince (2019) is worth highlighting, as it addresses the issue and states that the design and implementation of work systems to achieve workforce improvement started in Japan, Sweden and Germany in the 1980s. However, it was not until 1994 when Applebaum and Batt (1994) emphasized the need for the United States to redefine its work systems to compete in the global market, which was a milestone for the HPWS and it has become increasingly present in research since then.

Another milestone was in 2015, when Evans and Davis (2015) suggested a definition of these systems that has been widely used in the literature for its integrating perspective. Specifically, they defined the HPWS as an integrated system of HR practices that are consistent internally, due to their alignment between HR department practices, and externally, due to their alignment with the company’s organizational practices (Evans & Davis, 2015), and suggested that well aligned HR practices are the key strategy to achieve the greatest possible effectiveness of both employees and the organization. For this, HPWSs are made up of isolated practices, but they are interconnected to form a system whose maxim is to improve employee performance in a way that is beneficial to the company (Pavlova, 2022; Úbeda-García et al., 2018).

However, knowing which HR practices integrated in a HPWS have a positive impact on the performance of employees and the organization itself is complicated, and current knowledge is scarce, especially in the context of employees and the underlying or black box mechanisms (Pavlova, 2022). It was around 2000 when an important stream of research emerged aimed at understanding how the relationship between HPWSs and organizational performance occurred (Jiang & Messersmith, 2018).

Among the theoretical bases that underpin research is the AMO model (abilities, motivation and opportunities) postulated by Applebaum and Batt (1994); this model has specifically been widely used to try to decompose the black box and find out its relationship with the HPWS, as well as the mediating role between the HPWS and work and organizational performance (Mat et al., 2021). Thus, numerous studies claim that a HPWS based on the AMO model has a positive impact on employee productivity levels

and, therefore, an increase in organizational performance is achieved. However, there is controversy about whether this model would explain the black box, among other reasons, due to a lack of clarity about the concept and assessment of AMO variables, a scarcity of information about how AMO variables interact at both organizational and individual level, and a lack of consideration of the process by which AMO leads to increased performance, among others (Bos-Nehles et al., 2023).

Another theory proposed as an explanation of the mechanism by which HPWSs have an impact on employee behaviors and attitudes, with the intention of unravelling the black box, is Social Exchange Theory, which is based on reciprocity and suggests that one party responds to what it will receive from its counterpart by giving something in return, both parties being represented by the employee and the company in this case (Asante et al., 2022). That is, when employees feel the organization is concerned for their interests, they will respond with positive behaviors that result in higher job performance (Zhang et al., 2019).

The Resource-Based View (RBV) of the company has also been proposed as an essential theory in the business context of seeking HPWS effectiveness and impact on work and organizational performance. It suggests that in a context of exacerbated competition, RBV allows companies to respond by making use of HPWSs (Chang et al., 2017). And in line with such RBV is the Human Capital Theory, which highlights the role of employees in HPWSs and their relationship with organizational performance. This theory emphasizes the relevance of HPWSs not only for improvement through human capital but also for decreasing employee rotation, as HPWSs should be designed to acquire and retain talent (Jiang & Messersmith, 2018).

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that, beyond the various explanatory theories of the relationship between HPWSs and work and organizational performance, a current problem is to recognize what is the most effective way to group HR practices according to the strategies and goals of each company to form an effective HPWS (Opara & Waheduzzaman, 2024). In this context, there are three main approaches: universalist, contingent and configurational. The universalist approach advocates the existence of a set of simple and affordable practices that can be universally applied to all companies and is currently rarely advocated because the interactions between variables are severely limited (Opara & Waheduzzaman, 2024).

The contingent approach indicates that alternative practices exist depending on context and internal and external adjustments, advocating a model based on interactivity (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). The configurational approach advocates, from a holistic principle, the proposal of an HRM system aligned both vertically (alignment of the HRM system with other characteristics of the organization) and horizontally (internal coherence of a company's HRM practices and policies). Furthermore, the principle of equifinality inherent to the configurational approach is worth noting, which recognizes that different companies may follow different patterns of HR practices. That is, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, and it is crucial to consider both external and internal contingencies that may impact HRM effectiveness, the latter approach being the most accepted nowadays (Opara & Waheduzzaman, 2024).

Finally, to provide greater conceptual clarity to the mediating mechanisms that connect HPWS practices with employee outcomes, this review also adopts the Input–Process–Output (IPO) framework (Ilgen et al., 2005) as an analytical lens. Within this model, HPWS practices are conceptualized as inputs; the mediating or moderating variables (e.g., job satisfaction, commitment, psychological capital and leadership) are considered processes; and the employee outcomes (ARPA items: absenteeism, rotation, productivity and accident rate) are the outputs. This framework guides both the synthesis and the interpretation of

the results, offering a structured perspective on the mechanisms through which HPWSs operate in the tourism sector.

3. Materials and Methods

A systematic review was carried out based on the PRISMA statement (The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), which includes the elements considered necessary to carry out a quality systematic review or metanalysis. Specifically, the 2020 statement (PRISMA 2020), which replaces the 2009 statement, has been followed. The 2020 version reflects advances in the methods followed for the identification, selection, assessment and synthesis of papers (Page et al., 2021). Throughout this process, the PRISMA 2020 checklist was systematically followed to ensure transparency and rigor in reporting. This checklist served as a guide for structuring and documenting each stage of this review, from the search strategy and data extraction to the synthesis and evaluation of evidence (Supplementary Materials).

The research question to be answered in this systematic review was as follows: ‘What black box factors (both of individual and organizational nature) contribute to the impact of HR practices encompassed in a HPWS on the ARPA items (absenteeism, rotation, productivity and accident rate) of employees in the tourism sector?’ And, based on the PRISMA statement, the methodological steps followed are set out below.

3.1. Search Strategy

The search strategy is crucial, as it is the basis for compiling suitable studies for analysis and discussion, with the aim of finding out the current state of the subject. In this case, the search strategy designed was carried out in a systematic and precise manner, following the PRISMA recommendation, to compile relevant works on the subject of study. Firstly, the sources of information were selected, which were two databases considered suitable for the quality of the studies indexed: Web of Science (WoS) is a collection of bibliographic reference databases; SCOPUS is a bibliographic reference database.

After selecting the databases, key words or terms related to the research topic were selected. The keywords in English were ‘Black Box’, ‘High Performance Work Systems’, HPWS, Rotation, ‘Staff turnover’, absenteeism, ‘work absenteeism’, productivity, productiveness, ‘accident rate’, tourism and ‘tourism sector’. The Spanish keywords were ‘Caja negra’, ‘Sistemas de trabajo de Alto Rendimiento’, STAR, Rotación, ‘Rotación de personal’, Absentismo, ‘absentismo laboral’, productividad, accidentabilidad, turismo and ‘sector turístico’.

Subsequently, search equations or ‘phrases’ were designed (Table 1), which were entered into the search engines of the databases to compile the documents. Connectors, specifically Boolean operators, were used to form the search equations, to access the largest number of documents with relevant information (Van Dinter et al., 2021). In this case, the Boolean operators used were ‘AND’ (retrieves studies where all the indicated words appear) and ‘OR’ (retrieves papers where one or another of the connecting words appears) (Gutiérrez, 2017).

Table 1. English and Spanish search equations (source: authors).

No.	Search Equations in English	Search Equations in Spanish
1	‘Black Box’ AND (Rotation OR ‘Staff turnover’ OR absenteeism OR ‘work absenteeism’ OR productivity OR productiveness OR accident rate) AND (tourism OR ‘tourism sector’)	(tourism OR ‘black box’) AND (Rotación OR ‘Rotación de personal’ OR Absentismo OR ‘absentismo laboral’ OR productividad OR accidentabilidad) AND (turismo OR ‘sector turístico’)

Table 1. Cont.

No.	Search Equations in English	Search Equations in Spanish
2	'Black Box' AND (Rotation OR 'Staff turnover' OR absenteeism OR 'work absenteeism' OR productivity OR productiveness OR 'accident rate') AND (tourism OR 'tourism sector') AND ('High Performance Work Systems' OR HPWS)	('caja negra' OR 'black box') AND (Rotación OR 'Rotación de personal' OR Absentismo OR 'absentismo laboral' OR productividad OR accidentabilidad) AND (turismo OR 'sector turístico') AND ('Sistemas de trabajo de Alto Rendimiento' OR STAR)
3	('High Performance Work Systems' OR HPWS) AND (Rotation OR 'Staff turnover' OR absenteeism OR 'work absenteeism' OR productivity OR productiveness OR 'accident rate') AND (tourism OR 'tourism sector')	('Sistemas de trabajo de Alto Rendimiento' OR STAR) AND (Rotación OR 'Rotación de personal' OR Absentismo OR 'absentismo laboral' OR productividad OR accidentabilidad) AND (turismo OR 'sector turístico')

3.2. Eligibility Criteria and Selection Process

The establishment and application of eligibility criteria is one of the most crucial stages of the systematic review, as it is the process that makes it possible to limit the number of documents compiled according to the goals to be achieved in the review (Page et al., 2021). In this case, the eligibility criteria considered suitable for both inclusion and exclusion were as follows:

- Inclusion criteria: date of publication of papers (January 2019 to April 2024); language of publication (English or Spanish); type of publication (publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals); and sector of study (tourism).
- Exclusion criteria: type of publication (books, reports, doctoral theses, dissertations, final theses, master's theses and opinion articles).

During the search process, the inclusion criteria regarding the date of publication, language and type of publication were used as a filter to speed up the search.

Once the eligibility criteria had been established, the selection process was defined to sift the references that addressed the goal proposed in this review. The bibliographic manager Mendeley was used to streamline the process, allowing the capture, organization and management of references from the two selected databases (WoS and SCOPUS). Duplicates were removed first, followed by a systematic assessment of titles and abstracts by two independent reviewers to exclude studies that clearly did not meet the eligibility criteria. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer. Finally, the retained documents were read in full to confirm their eligibility. To visually represent the study selection and exclusion process, a PRISMA flowchart was developed (Figure 1).

After finalizing the selection, the papers that finally make up this review remained, and the pertinent data were extracted to properly characterize them and contextualize their results. In this case, it was considered interesting to extract data on the following: ARPA items investigated as well as mediating factors within the "black box" framework. Data from all compatible domains were considered, and when multiple scales or measures were available, those most frequently used across studies were prioritized to ensure comparability. Additionally, the following variables were collected: main author, year of publication, journal of publication, country of development of the research, objective, study design, sample and context.

Data extraction was also performed independently by two reviewers using a pre-defined template to ensure consistency and accuracy. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer. No direct contact with study authors was required to confirm or obtain additional data. The extracted data were prepared

for synthesis through standardization and categorization processes. Missing data were managed by excluding studies with incomplete information on key variables.

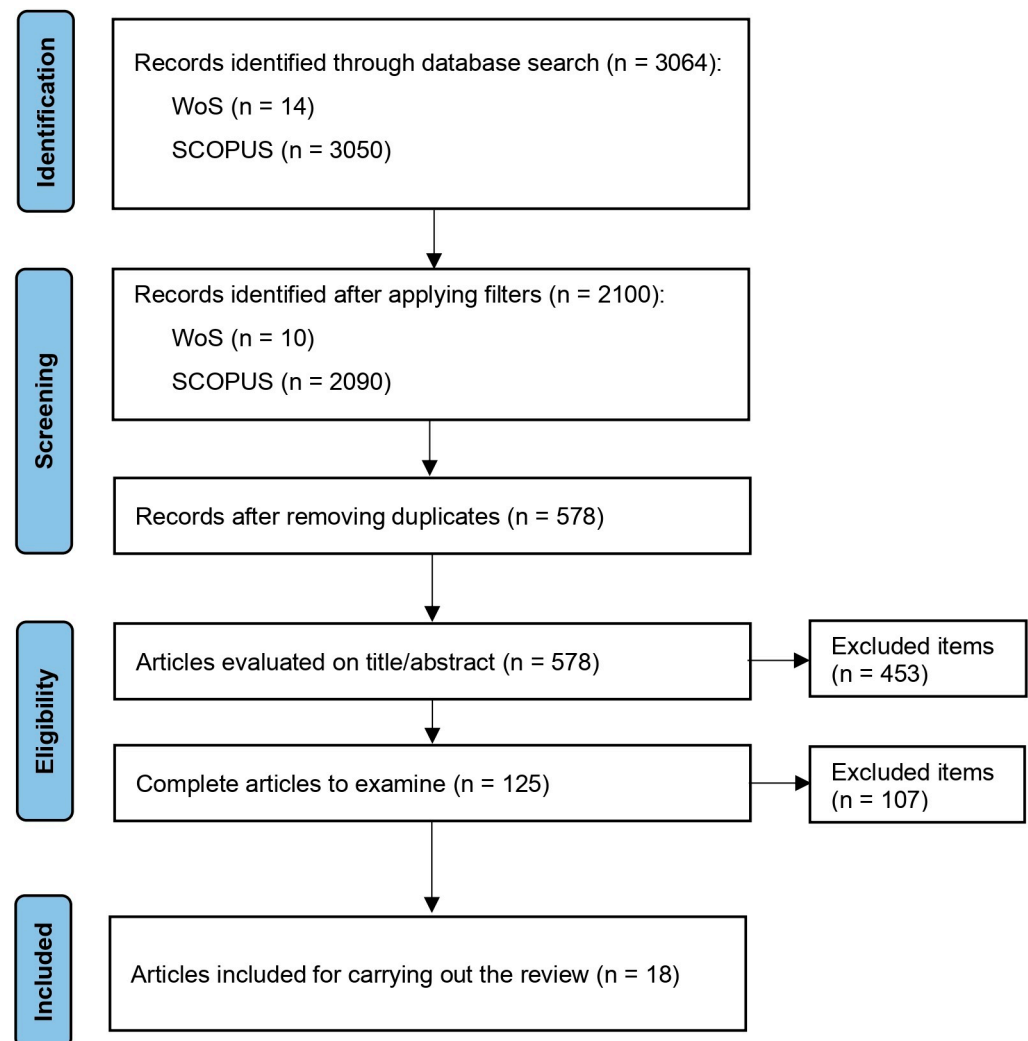


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow chart (source: authors).

For the synthesis of results, the studies were grouped based on the ARPA variables they analyzed: absenteeism, turnover, productivity and accident rates. Qualitative results were thematically categorized for integration into the narrative synthesis. Additionally, key characteristics of the studies, such as design, sample size, objectives, main findings and mediating variables, were organized into detailed tables for clarity and comparison.

The risk of bias and methodological quality of the included studies were assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists, tailored to the design of each study. For observational studies, the CASP checklist for cohort or case-control studies was applied. For systematic reviews, the CASP systematic review checklist was employed, for randomized controlled trials (RCTs), the CASP RCT checklist was used and for narrative reviews, the CASP Qualitative was employed. All assessments were independently conducted by two reviewers, and disagreements were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer. The use of CASP ensured a standardized and rigorous evaluation across the diverse study designs included in this review.

Given the heterogeneity in study designs, contexts and outcome measures, a narrative synthesis was deemed the most appropriate approach. This allowed for the identification of common patterns and discrepancies among the included studies while preserving the

contextual validity of the results. Additionally, a sensitivity analysis was performed by excluding studies with moderate risk of bias to evaluate the robustness of the findings.

Finally, the publication bias was assessed qualitatively by comparing the included studies with the existing literature to identify gaps or underrepresented findings. The types of studies and their transparency regarding limitations were also reviewed to ensure a balanced representation of the evidence. The certainty of the evidence was evaluated using the GRADE approach (Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development, and Evaluation), considering five key domains: risk of bias, inconsistency, indirectness, imprecision and publication bias. Based on these domains, the evidence was categorized into one of four levels: high, moderate, low or very low.

4. Results

Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flowchart that has taken place during the selection process and its four methodological stages: identification of papers, screening, corroboration of eligibility according to the established criteria and, finally, inclusion (Page et al., 2021). As can be observed, by entering the designed equations (Table 1) in the search engines of the databases, a total of 3064 documents were collected. However, by applying the filters of date of publication, type of publication and language, the result was a total of 2100 (Table 2), which were exported to the Mendeley manager. This reference management tool made it possible to eliminate duplicates, of which there were 1522, leaving a total of 578 documents for eligibility assessment. The titles and abstracts of the 578 papers were reviewed and 453 were excluded because they did not meet the criteria for type of publication or subject matter (tourism sector). The remaining 125 papers were read in their entirety and 107 were eliminated for not meeting the previously indicated criteria. Thus, a total of 18 documents were finally included in this review, the characteristics of which are shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Number of documents collected during bibliographic search (source: authors).

Database	Search Language	Search Equation	Studies	Filtered Studies (January 2019–April 2024)	Studies Filtered by Type and Language
WoS	English	1	5	4	4
		2	3	3	2
		3	6	4	4
SCOPUS	English	1	1471	1120	924
		2	273	222	196
		3	1288	1060	962
	Spanish	1	4	3	2
		2	1	1	1
		3	13	8	5
Total			3064	2425	2100

In Table 4, it can be observed that all the reviewed studies (n = 18) presented a low risk of bias, except for four studies (22.22%), which showed a moderate risk of bias. These studies were assessed according to their design using the appropriate CASP checklist. The numerical codes displayed in the table (e.g., 1–10, 1–11 or 1–12) correspond to the specific quality assessment items included in each version of the CASP tool, depending on the methodological design of the study.

Table 3. Documents included in the review (source: authors).

Reference	Country	Purpose	Design	Sample	ARPA Item	Main Results
Alsakarneh et al. (2024)	Jordan	Assess the impact of HRM practices on organizational performance with employee engagement as a potential mediator	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 237 employees from various tourism projects in Jordan	Work performance	There was a relationship between employee engagement and job performance, with the relationship being affected by the HR practices of recruitment and selection, training and development, remuneration and performance appraisal.
Benítez-Núñez et al. (2024)	Spain	Analyze the role of stress factors in the relationship between HPWSs and employee outcomes in challenging contexts	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 202 hotel employees from Gran Canaria (Spain)	Rotation	Reducing stressful obstacles was an important mechanism through which HPWSs improved job satisfaction and reduced rotation intention.
Hai and Park (2024)	China	Exploring which HPWS practices influence job performance the most	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 246 employees of hotels in China	Work performance	Job description was found to be important in predicting job performance, while job security boosts performance.
Dorta-Afonso et al. (2023)	Spain	Analyzing the mechanisms through which HPWSs affect job satisfaction	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 202 hotel employees from Gran Canaria (Spain)	Work performance	There was a direct positive effect of HPWSs on job satisfaction, impacting job performance.
Kloutsiniotis et al. (2023)	Greece	Investigate the role of transformational leadership in work engagement and its effect on productivity and customer service	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 459 employees of 13 Greek 4 and 5-star hotels	Work performance	Transformational leadership was found to impact on employees' trust in their managers and help create a climate of social trust; both factors, in turn, influence work engagement, leading to higher productivity.
Yin (2023)	China	Investigating HPWSs on employee job performance and reviewing previous research and making suggestions for future research directions	Review	Previously published studies on the subject (without specifying a number)	Work performance	A relationship between HPWSs and job performance is observed, mediated by employee job involvement, satisfaction, organizational support, commitment, value consistency, inhibition of emotional exhaustion and reduction of counterproductive behaviors.

Table 3. Cont.

Reference	Country	Purpose	Design	Sample	ARPA Item	Main Results
Cizreliogullari and Babayigit (2022)	Cyprus	Investigating the effects of psychological capital on HPWSs and job satisfaction levels	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 400 immigrant employees from 18 hotels in Northern Cyprus	Work performance	The mediating role of psychological capital between HPWSs and job satisfaction on job performance was identified.
Kaushik and Mukherjee (2022)	India	Conducting a systematic review, consolidating the available literature and proposing a scope for future research	Systematic review	A total of 12 studies	Rotation	A negative relationship was observed between HPWSs and employee rotation intention due to greater flexibility and autonomy granted by HPWS practices.
Mansour et al. (2022)	Canada, Germany and France	Examining how the psychosocial safety climate mediated the relationship between HPWSs and AMO	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 1664 employees of flight attendants in Canada, Germany and France	Work performance	There was a direct relationship between HPWSs and AMO practices, and the HPWSs that improve AMO directly and positively influence the psychosocial safety climate, improving employee performance. The sense of physical safety mediated the relationship between HPWSs and accident rate.
Unur and Arasli (2022)	Norway	Understanding how leadership and HPWSs affect absenteeism	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 427 employees in tourism organizations in Norway	Absenteeism	An indirect relationship between HPWSs and absenteeism, mediated by job security and leadership, was identified.
Dorta-Afonso et al. (2021)	Spain	Examine the underlying mechanisms within black boxes that link HPWSs to well-being and performance	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 494 hotel employees from Gran Canaria (Spain)	Work performance	HPWSs were found to influence motivation, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and quality of life, impacting on better job performance.
Yang et al. (2021)	United States	Examine which HPWS practices impact on performance	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 5290 employees of 180 independent franchise hotels in North America	Work performance	A relationship between HPWSs and work performance was observed, mediated by collective behavior.
Gosnell et al. (2020)	United Kingdom	Empirically identify the impact of HPWS practices with an increase in productivity of highly skilled employees	Prospective randomized experimental (8-month field study)	A total of 335 aviation captains	Work performance	It was found that the relationship between HPWSs and a higher job performance was mediated by performance monitoring, goal setting, job satisfaction and commitment to the organization.

Table 3. Cont.

Reference	Country	Purpose	Design	Sample	ARPA Item	Main Results
Kloutsiniotis and Mihail (2020a)	Greece	Conduct a theory-based qualitative review of the HPWS approach in the field of tourism and hospitality management	Review	A total of 28 published studies	Overall current status of the subject	A significant gap was identified in the progress of HPWS research in tourism and the hotel sector.
Kloutsiniotis and Mihail (2020b)	Greece	Investigate which variables vary between HPWSs and job performance through the development of social climate and fairness	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 448 employees of 10 hotels in Greece	Work performance	There was a positive relationship between the HPWS and the development of a climate of fairness and service in the company, positively influencing work engagement and leading to higher productivity.
Karadas and Karatepe (2019)	Romania	Investigate the potential mediators operating in the black box between HPWSs and employee outcomes	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 282 employees in international 4 and 5-star chain hotels in Romania	Work performance	Both psychological capital and work engagement were found to intervene in the black box between HPWSs and job performance.
Ruiz et al. (2019)	Spain	Analyze the effect of HPWSs and total quality management on performance	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 129 employees in the tourism sector in Spain	Work performance	There was a direct relationship between HPWSs and employee job performance, which occurred through increased participation in decision making, training, performance appraisal and incentive compensation.
Sobaih et al. (2019)	Egypt	Examine the influence of psychological contract compliance on the relationship between HPWSs and work outcomes.	Analytical observational prospective	A total of 36 employees of 36 hotels in the Red Sea tourist region (Egypt)	Work performance	The relationship between HPWSs and job performance was found to occur through the psychological contract, increasing job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior.

AMO = abilities, motivation and opportunity enhancement model; ARPA = absenteeism, rotation, productivity and accident rate; HRM = human resource management; HR = human resources; HPWSs = high performance work systems.

After presenting the individual results of the reviewed studies, it is important to highlight their geographical distribution, as it provides valuable context for interpreting the findings. A significant proportion of the studies were conducted in Spain (four studies; 22.2%) and Greece (three studies; 16.7%), followed by China (two studies; 11.1%). Other countries with one study each include Jordan, India, Cyprus, Romania, Egypt, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States (each representing 5.6%). Additionally, one study covered multiple countries (Canada, Germany and France; 5.6%). This distribution reveals a notable concentration of research in Southern Europe and Asia, particularly in Mediterranean and tourism-intensive economies. In contrast, there is a clear lack of studies

from Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, which may limit the generalizability of the findings and indicate important gaps for future research to address.

Table 4. Results of risk of bias assessment using CASP checklists for included studies.

Reference	Items CASP Checklist for Cohort Studies												Result
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Alsakameh et al. (2024)	yes	partially	yes	yes	no	cannot tell	yes	no	yes	yes	partially	yes	Moderate
Benítez-Núñez et al. (2024)	yes	yes	yes	yes	partially	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Low
Hai and Park (2024)	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	cannot tell	yes	yes	yes	cannot tell	yes	yes	Moderate
Dorta-Afonso et al. (2023)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Low
Kloutsiniotis et al. (2023)	yes	yes	yes	yes	partially	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Low
Cizreliogullari and Babayigit (2022)	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Low
Mansour et al. (2022)	yes	yes	yes	yes	partially	cannot tell	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Low
Unur and Arasli (2022)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Low
Dorta-Afonso et al. (2021)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Low
Yang et al. (2021)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Low
Kloutsiniotis and Mihail (2020b)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Low
Karadas and Karatepe (2019)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Low
Ruiz et al. (2019)	yes	yes	yes	yes	partially	cannot tell	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	Low
Sobaih et al. (2019)	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	Low
References	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Result
Kaushik and Mukherjee (2022)	yes	yes	yes	no	cannot tell	A negative relationship was observed between HPWSs and employee rotation intention due to greater flexibility and autonomy granted by HPWS practices.	Imprecise. Lack of critical quality assessment and absence of confidence metrics (such as intervals) limit accuracy.		partially	yes	cannot tell		Moderate
References	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Result
Gosnell et al. (2020)	yes	yes	cannot tell	yes	yes	yes	yes	cannot tell	yes	yes	yes		Low
References	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Result
Yin (2023)	yes	cannot tell	yes	cannot tell	cannot tell	cannot tell	cannot tell	cannot tell	cannot tell	yes	yes		Moderate
Kloutsiniotis and Mihail (2020a)	yes	yes	yes	cannot tell	yes	cannot tell	cannot tell	cannot tell	yes	yes	yes		Low

Note: Items correspond to the criteria from the CASP checklist (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme), applied according to the design of each study.

Additionally, although the inclusion criteria allowed for the selection of articles published in both English and Spanish, it is important to clarify that all 18 studies included in the final synthesis were published in English. Some of them were conducted in Spanish-speaking countries, particularly Spain, but their language of publication was exclusively English. Therefore, no comparative analysis by language group was possible.

Then, the results of the synthesis are presented based on each of the four variables analyzed (ARPA) in this review. Thus, in relation to employee absenteeism in the tourism sector, only one study has been found that investigates black box variables that intercede in the impact of HPWSs on absenteeism. This is the work of [Unur and Arasli \(2022\)](#), where the

aim was to find out how employee leadership, job security and HPWSs affect absenteeism in a sample of 427 employees in tourism organizations in Stavanger (Norway). The study took Social Exchange Theory as a theoretical basis for explanation and designed a mediation model in which HPWSs would stimulate absenteeism behavior among employees with a permanent contract, through the job security provided by the contract and an authentic leadership as a means of support. In this case, the results indicated the existence of an indirect relationship between HPWSs and absenteeism, intervened by job security and leadership.

Regarding which variables of the black box intervene in the impact between HPWSs and rotation (or intention to do so) by tourism workers, two studies have been identified where this issue has been investigated: that of [Benítez-Núñez et al. \(2024\)](#) (contextualized in Spain) and that of [Kaushik and Mukherjee \(2022\)](#) (developed in India). In the former, stress factors were investigated as mediators embedded in the black box. The results indicated that a reduction in stressful obstacles is an underlying mechanism by which the HPWS improves employee satisfaction and decreases rotation intention ([Benítez-Núñez et al., 2024](#)). In turn, the review study carried out by [Kaushik and Mukherjee \(2022\)](#) to explain the situation of HPWSs in the tourism sector and identify factors involved in the results (including employee turnover), observed a negative relationship between HPWSs and rotation intention, although the intervening variables (black box) identified were greater flexibility and autonomy.

In relation to the black box factors that intervene between HPWSs and employee performance, it is worth noting that this has been addressed in 14 of the 18 papers (77.8%) reviewed. Starting with the results of [Yin's \(2023\)](#) review, it is worth noting that, in most of the papers reviewed by this author, a positive and significant correlation between HPWS use and job performance was identified. Moreover, when analyzing the intervening factors of this relationship (black box), most of them were focused on the behavioral characteristics of workers at the individual level and on their psychological state.

Specifically, the intervening factors of the relationship between HPWSs and job performance in the tourism sector were job involvement, job satisfaction, organizational support, value consistency, inhibition of emotional exhaustion, reduction in counter-productive behaviors and commitment. The latter was identified as a mediating factor in both the study by [Alsakarneh et al. \(2024\)](#) and the work by [Karadas and Karatepe \(2019\)](#). In the former, commitment was positively influenced by recruitment and selection practices, training and development, remuneration and performance appraisal. In the latter, work engagement and psychological capital were identified as the two most influential mediating mechanisms between HPWSs and job performance. In relation to the psychosocial safety climate, considered a relevant and under-researched form of organizational climate, it is worth citing [Mansour et al. \(2022\)](#), who identified how this climate intervened in the relationship between the HPWS (designed based on the AMO model) and job performance. That is, they observed that a HPWS based on improving AMO has a direct impact on increasing the psychosocial safety climate, which ultimately impacts job performance. [Hai and Park \(2024\)](#) identified clear job description as the most relevant variable and found that job security contributed to a higher level of performance in additional roles. [Hai and Park \(2024\)](#) also noted the relevance of managerial leadership in intervening in the relationship between HPWSs and job performance in the tourism sector, as also identified by [Kloutsiniotis et al. \(2023\)](#).

[Dorta-Afonso et al. \(2021, 2023\)](#) gave a crucial role as an intervening variable (black box) to the relationship between HPWSs and performance to job satisfaction, already identified as relevant in [Yin's \(2023\)](#) review. Specifically, [Dorta-Afonso et al. \(2021\)](#) identified a positive relationship between HPWSs and motivation, organizational commitment, job

satisfaction and quality of life, as well as a positive impact of motivation and commitment on job satisfaction.

Gosnell et al. (2020) found that the relationship between HPWSs and employee performance was moderated by job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Specifically, performance monitoring and goal setting increase both variables and, ultimately, performance. Similarly, Ruiz et al. (2019) observed greater participation in decision making, training, performance appraisal and incentive compensation as mediating variables.

It is worth noting that commitment to the organization has also been indicated as relevant by other authors (e.g., Alsakarneh et al., 2024; Karadas & Karatepe, 2019; Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2020a). Sobaih et al. (2019) observed that the relationship between HPWSs and job performance was intervened by psychological contract. That is, the HPWS, through the effect of psychological contract, was found to establish positive and significant relationships with employees' performance level.

With respect to the accident rate, which is linked to job security, it is worth noting that this is the least researched employee variable (of the four under investigation) in the tourism sector according to this review. Specifically, only the work of Mansour et al. (2022) has identified a result in this respect, in this case being that the employees' sense of physical safety seems to intervene between HPWSs and accident rate.

In order to enhance the conceptual clarity and integration of the findings, the results of this review were also mapped according to the IPO framework. It provides a structured and integrative view of how HPWS practices influence employee outcomes. Table 5 presents a conceptual mapping that links specific HPWS practices (inputs) to the mediating or moderating mechanisms (processes) identified in the reviewed studies and finally to the employee outcomes (outputs) measured through ARPA items. This synthesis facilitates the understanding of the black box by systematically categorizing the relationships observed across the included studies.

Table 5. Mapping the reviewed findings according to the IPO framework.

Inputs (HPWS Practices)	Processes (Mediators/Moderators)	Outputs (ARPA Items)
Recruitment and selection	Job satisfaction, job involvement, commitment, job security	Productivity, absenteeism
Training and development	Motivation, perceived fairness, emotional exhaustion inhibition, value consistency	Productivity, turnover intention
Performance appraisal and feedback	Leadership (authentic, transformational), organizational support, trust, participation in decision making	Productivity, absenteeism
Remuneration and incentive systems	Organizational citizenship behavior, psychological capital, goal setting, autonomy	Turnover intention, job performance
Occupational safety and psychosocial practices	Psychosocial safety climate, physical safety perception	Accident rate
Job design and clarity	Job description clarity, role understanding	Performance, satisfaction

On the other hand, to assess the robustness of the results, a sensitivity analysis was conducted by excluding studies with moderate risk of bias ($n = 4$, 22.22%). The findings remained consistent, showing a positive relationship between HPWSs and work performance across the remaining studies ($n = 14$). Key mediators, such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction and psychological capital, continued to play a central role. This confirms the validity and stability of the conclusions presented. The qualitative assessment of publication bias identified some limitations, including the exclusion of studies not published in English or Spanish, which may have led to underrepresentation of certain regions or contexts. Additionally, the overrepresentation of studies with positive results suggests a

potential bias that could emphasize favorable relationships between HPWSs and employee outcomes. Despite these limitations, the consistency of findings across diverse studies supports the robustness of the conclusions.

Regarding the certainty of the evidence using the GRADE approach, for work performance, the evidence was rated as moderate, given the low risk of bias in most studies ($n = 14$) and consistent findings across various contexts. However, the limited sample sizes in certain studies contributed to imprecision. For absenteeism and accident rates, the evidence was rated as low, as only one study addressed each outcome, leading to significant imprecision and potential publication bias. Turnover intentions were supported by moderate evidence, with consistent results but a lack of studies exploring the full range of mediators. Overall, the certainty of the evidence highlights the robustness of findings related to work performance but underscores the need for further research into absenteeism and safety outcomes.

5. Discussion

This systematic literature review has allowed us to firstly understand the current state of the academic literature on HR practices included in HPWSs in companies in the tourism sector. In addition, it has helped us to understand the relationship between HPWSs and employee absenteeism, turnover, productivity and accidents (ARPA items), as well as which black box variables mediate this relationship.

Thus, it has been identified that, at present, research on the underlying mechanisms (black box) in the relationship established between HPWSs and employee variables such as absenteeism, turnover, performance and accidents, is still in its infancy and there are many unknowns to be resolved. In addition, due to the scarcity of literature on the subject, the heterogeneity in terms of black box factors is notable, which makes it difficult to make comparisons that guarantee reliability and, therefore, allow reliable conclusions to be drawn. However, this review shows that there is a relationship between HPWSs and the four employee variables analyzed (ARPA).

The mediating or moderating factors identified in each of the relationships were very diverse. Thus, the indirect relationship observed between HPWSs and absenteeism was attenuated by the job security provided by an open-ended contract and authentic leadership in the only work reviewed where this relationship is addressed (Unur & Arasli, 2022).

These findings align with Social Exchange Theory, which emphasizes reciprocity as a key mechanism. Employees with permanent contracts, supported by HPWSs, may feel secure in their positions, leading to a reduction in the perceived need to maintain high levels of attendance. However, this increased security could also foster absenteeism when employees perceive minimal risk of repercussions, as suggested by Machek (2019).

Regarding the moderating role of authentic leadership, the study demonstrates that leaders who effectively implement HPWS practices create a supportive environment that strengthens employees' perceptions of fairness and trust. This aligns with findings from Cao et al. (2020), who argue that authentic leadership enhances the perceived effectiveness of HR practices.

Regarding the relationship between HPWSs and turnover intention, it is worth noting that the hotel sector has a high staff turnover at both the managerial and operational levels, which reduces efficiency, decreases profitability and increases training and replacement costs (Davidson & Wang, 2011). Therefore, it is considered essential to investigate how the relationship between turnover and HPWSs is established to improve reality. Knowing this, the indirect relationship between HPWSs and turnover intention has been addressed in two of the reviewed works (Benítez-Núñez et al., 2024; Kaushik & Mukherjee, 2022), having observed the existence of moderating factors, with stress factors influencing job satisfaction,

which ultimately impacts turnover intention; that is, a reduction in stress factors impacts greater job satisfaction, which in turn decreases turnover intention (Benítez-Núñez et al., 2024), in line with other studies where job satisfaction is positioned as a key aspect in turnover and turnover intention by employees in the tourism sector (Bakhtiar et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018).

Specifically, it has been suggested that employees who experience meaningful tasks, recognition, opportunities, and positive relationships tend to be more committed and satisfied with their company, which decreases their intention to leave the job (Zhang et al., 2018). Likewise, greater flexibility and autonomy have also been identified in this review as mediating variables in the relationship between HPWSs and turnover intention (Kaushik & Mukherjee, 2022), in line with other studies in which job design, resources, control and feedback are also significantly associated with employee burnout and intention to leave the job (Bakhtiar et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018).

Regarding the relationship between HPWSs and job performance, it has been identified that this is currently one of the most researched topics in the tourism sector, with numerous proposals reviewed. There are numerous moderating factors of this relationship identified in this review, such as job involvement, job satisfaction, organizational support, commitment, coherence of values, inhibition of emotional exhaustion, reduction of counter-productive behaviors, recruitment and selection, training and development, remuneration, monitoring and evaluation of performance, increased participation in decision making, trust in managers and their transformational leadership, organizational citizenship behavior, psychosocial safety climate, clear job description, job security, motivation, quality of life, reduction of burnout, goal setting and psychological contract (Alsakarnef et al., 2024; Cizreliogullari & Babayigit, 2022; Dorta-Afonso et al., 2021, 2023; Gosnell et al., 2020; Hai & Park, 2024; Karadas & Karatepe, 2019; Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2020a, 2020b; Kloutsiniotis et al., 2023; Mansour et al., 2022; Ruiz et al., 2019; Sobaih et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2021; Yin, 2023).

However, among all these factors, satisfaction is a key point that ultimately determines better job performance, in line with numerous previous studies on the subject (Elbaz & Haddoud, 2017; Vo-Thanh et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2020). It is suggested that job satisfaction is a prominent antecedent of employee performance and, therefore, a major concern for managers in the tourism sector, since job performance is highly dependent on job satisfaction (Elbaz & Haddoud, 2017).

Regarding the factors that intervene in the relationship between physical safety and accidents, no study has been identified in this review whose general research objective was this type of factor. However, in one of the reviewed studies a brief reference was made, and it could be suggested that physical safety is an intervening factor in this relationship (Mansour et al., 2022). It is unavoidable that more research is needed in this regard.

It is worth noting that, given the time frame of this review (2019–2024), special attention was paid to the potential influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the findings. Out of the 18 studies included, 3 explicitly collected data during the pandemic: Benítez-Núñez et al. (2024), Dorta-Afonso et al. (2023) and Kloutsiniotis et al. (2023). The first two studies, both conducted in Spanish hotels in 2021, directly situate their analysis within the pandemic context, focusing on stress, uncertainty and job satisfaction as mediators between HPWSs and employee outcomes. The third study, based on data from Greek hotels in autumn 2020, emphasizes the role of transformational leadership in maintaining trust and engagement during the pandemic. These findings suggest that, while the core relationships identified between HPWSs and performance indicators remain consistent, the pandemic may have heightened the relevance of certain mediators (such as stress reduction, psychological support and leadership) as mechanisms of the so-called black box in the tourism sector.

Finally, the integration of the IPO framework also contributed to organizing and synthesizing the reviewed findings in a systematic way. As shown in Table 5, the input (HPWS practices such as recruitment, training, appraisal and safety) trigger a range of processes, many of which are psychological (e.g., job satisfaction and commitment), organizational (e.g., leadership and decision making), or related to climate and security (e.g., psychosocial safety). These processes, in turn, influence employee outcomes related to absenteeism, turnover, productivity and safety. This structure not only clarifies the role of the black box but also highlights the recurrence of certain mediators such as satisfaction and commitment across multiple relationships. Furthermore, the IPO perspective helps identify underexplored connections, such as the limited number of studies linking HPWSs to accident rate, or the potential interaction between job security and absenteeism.

6. Conclusions

This systematic review has synthesized the current evidence regarding HPWSs in the tourism industry, with a specific focus on the mediating mechanisms (known as black box variables) that influence their impact on key employee outcomes: ARPA. This review included 18 studies conducted between 2019 and 2024, most of which presented a low risk of bias. The findings confirm a positive relationship between HPWSs and employee performance and suggest that several psychological, organizational and structural factors mediate this relationship. Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, leadership and psychological capital emerged as particularly relevant mechanisms. However, research remains scarce for absenteeism and accident rate outcomes, as well as for studies in underrepresented geographical contexts.

6.1. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

It should be noted that the scientific literature is scarce in terms of research on the underlying mechanisms (black box) that modulate the relationship between HPWSs and employee variables that are ultimately reflected in job performance and, in parallel, in the organizational performance of companies. Bearing in mind that there is a very large presence of family businesses in this sector and that the GDP of family businesses worldwide is 90%, and in Spain this percentage is 70% (INE, 2022), it goes without saying that it is important to continue research along these lines due to the relevance of human capital and the importance that the tourism sector has acquired in the world economy in recent years.

Additionally, the heterogeneity in study methodologies, contexts and measured outcomes creates challenges in drawing consistent and reliable conclusions. The reliance on studies published in English or Spanish may have excluded relevant research from other regions or languages, contributing to potential publication bias. Furthermore, the review process itself was limited by the use of only two databases (SCOPUS and WoS), which may have restricted the scope of included studies.

These limitations highlight the need for broader and more inclusive research to strengthen the evidence base in future investigations. Future research should address the gaps identified in this review, particularly the limited number of studies on accident rates and absenteeism, as well as the underexplored mechanisms of the “black box” in HPWSs. Expanding the geographic and sectoral scope of studies and incorporating mixed-methods approaches could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of HPWSs on employee and organizational outcomes.

6.2. Implications for Practice

In terms of the practical implications of this systematic review, it can be concluded that tourism companies should prioritize the implementation of effective HPWSs that

encompass practices that have been shown to improve productivity and reduce absenteeism and staff rotation. Thus, the strategies that could be effective in improving performance are as follows:

- It is very important to create a work environment that promotes job satisfaction and employee engagement. Research indicates that these factors are key mediators that positively influence productivity and reduce rotation and absenteeism.
- Despite limited resources, family businesses could see benefits by strategically allocating their resources to HRM practices that have a proven impact. Investments in technologies that facilitate human resource management can also help maximize the use of available resources.
- Reducing emotional burnout through supportive organizational policies and improved working conditions is critical. Research shows that inhibiting emotional exhaustion and improving the work climate contribute to higher job performance.
- Prioritizing occupational safety and creating a safe work climate can reduce accident rates. Companies should implement practices that ensure the physical and psychological safety of their employees.

In addition, governments and industry regulators should consider incentivizing the adoption of HPWSs through subsidies or recognition programs, particularly for small and family-owned businesses in the tourism sector. Policies could also focus on promoting occupational safety standards and reducing work-related stress to lower accident rates and improve overall employee well-being. Furthermore, future research should address the gaps identified in this review, particularly the limited studies on accident rates and absenteeism as well as the underexplored mechanisms of the “black box” in HPWSs. Expanding the geographic and sectoral scope of studies and incorporating mixed-methods approaches could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of HPWSs on employee and organizational outcomes.

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