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MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HRM PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

This research intends to strengthen the importance of Employee Empowerment as a mediator variable between HRM Practices and Employee Job Satisfaction in Telekom Malaysia. The respondents involved were 313 employees via a questionnaire. This research used Structural Equation Modelling in SPSS-AMOS to measure inter-relationship between constructs. The results recorded HRM practices has a positive and significant influence on employee empowerment and employee empowerment has significant influence on employee job satisfaction. Interestingly, this research found employee empowerment fully mediates the relationship among HRM practices and employee job satisfaction. The results highlighted the importance of employee empowerment in enhancing employee job satisfaction.

Keywords: *Human Resource Management (HRM), Employee Empowerment, Employees Job Satisfaction, Telekom Malaysia (TM)*



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INTRODUCTION

In the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (12MP) from 2021 to 2025, the government focuses on nation prosperity by enforcing three strategic dimensions which are economic empowerment, environmental sustainability, and social re-engineering. Economic empowerment is inclusive of increasing labor productivity in the organization in today's digital economy. Focusing on HRM via enhancement of labor force skills as well as development in science and technology in this new global economy are key elements to achieving this objective (Amoramo & Ekpe, 2021). Most of the telecommunication industry in Malaysia has accomplished significant improvement in previous years. Unfortunately, recently the HRM progress is still low among developing countries especially in telecommunication industries in Malaysia. Almadani (2017) highlighted telecommunication industries in developing countries facing massive challenges as experiencing low perception in HRM focus which causes low employee's commitment and organizational performance.

Based on the 2017 Trends in Global Employee Engagement Report, employee commitment levels in Malaysia dropped by 2 points to 59%. This report compared job trends in seven Asian nations which is India, China, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia and Singapore. Majority of Malaysian employees refuse to propose their current organization to other job seekers hence showing less satisfaction (Hewitt, 2017). 52% from 5200 employees that were interviewed felt dissatisfied with their job based on the survey conducted by JobStreet.com in 2016. The Job Happiness Index in Malaysia showed that Malaysia is the second least happy country (4.22%) as compared to the other seven countries which are Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong and Singapore based on the Employee Job Happiness Index 2016 survey conducted by JobStreet.com. Many previous research supported that HRM practices is important, unfortunately its impact on employee satisfaction with existence of employee engagement still not appropriately explored in organizational literature (Najwa et al., 2016). The nexus of HRM Practices and employee job satisfaction with existence of employee engagement in TM organization still remain complex and yet to be fully explored (Sonnentag, Mojza, Demerouti & Bakker, 2012).

Organization is moving towards having engaged and satisfied employees (Pradhan & Jena, 2016). Employee engagement is an emerging factor that seeks attention of leader and HR practitioners nowadays. Razak and Ismail (2016) highlighted there was a correlation between HRM Practices and employee engagement towards employee job satisfaction. The nexus of HRM Practices and employee job satisfaction with existence of employee engagement still remain complex and yet to be fully explored (Sonnentag, Mojza, Demerouti & Bakker, 2012). Many previous research supported that HRM practices have been an important aspect in most of the organizations. Unfortunately, its impact on employee satisfaction with existence of employee engagement as mediator variable is still not explored appropriately in organizational literature (Najwa et al., 2016). Hence, the inspection of the impact of HRM practice on employee job satisfaction, as well as mediating role with employee empowerment in TM organization is not investigated. Hence, this research has been conducted to produce a theoretical improvement by mitigating the literature gap as there is no such investigation that has approved the relationship between HRM practice with employee job satisfaction with existence of employee empowerment as mediator variable.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

HRM Practices

Fombrun, Tichy and Devanna (1984) has developed the Matching Model of HRM Practices at Michigan Business School where they highlighted the strategic HRM is highly related to achieve organizational mission and vision. This model also emphasized the nexus between HR system with organizational hierarchy with supported HRM and business strategy (Fombrun et al., 1984). This Matching model also enlighten the importance of matching the employee to carry job scope. This model requires employees to achieve organizational mission with supported by HR procedures. Employee and employers need to unite to avoid any conflict as they will strive to achieve the same



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goal. As such, this model is very fit to portray the best HRM. This model consists human resource cycle which consist of selection, appraisal, employee development and rewards.

Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment refers to feelings of intellectual and emotional motivation by the employees towards completing their jobs (Amhalhal, Anchor & Dastgir, 2015). Employee empowerment is an involvement of the employees in any decision making and the correlation between the employee themselves and their job (Yalabik, Bruce & Andriana, 2017). HRM practices has correlation with empowerment as it able to enhance employees' level of job empowerment (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey & Saks, 2015; Muduli, Verma & Datta, 2016; Turner, 2020). Previous research highlighted that HRM practices are able to enhance employee engagement and performance (Rothenberg, Hull, and Tang, 2017) and reducing employee turnover (Nie, Lamsa & Pucetaite, 2017). Employee empowerment has been a primary focus of HRM practices because its impact towards organizational outcomes (Baird, Tung & Yu, 2019). Embracing HRM practices across the organization are positively linked with employee empowerment, development as well as performance (Buciuniene & Kazlauskaitė, 2012; Clarke & Hill, 2012). Tensay and Singh (2020) revealed positive association between HRM Practices and employee empowerment. Alfes, Shantz, Truss & Soane, 2013 demonstrated positive association between HRM Practices and employee empowerment. Memon, Salleh, Mirza, Cheah, Ting, Ahmad & Tariq (2020) found HRM Practices impact the employee empowerment.

H1: HRM Practices has a positive and significant effect on Employees Empowerment

Employee Job Satisfaction

Abubakar et al., (2018) highlighted job satisfaction indicated an individual's psychological state in which they are satisfied with their working environment. Satisfaction refers to which an individual felt fulfilled via their working environment (Ahn & Chaoyu, 2019). Job satisfaction refers to the level whereby an individual is prone towards their job (Yousaf, Sanders & Yustantio, 2018). An individual positive feeling towards their job scopes also been considered as job satisfaction (Karimi & Rahimi, 2020). Researcher used The Two Factor Theory of Job Satisfaction that been developed by Herzberg, Mausner & Synderman (1959). This theory highlighted importance of individual motivation (Dirar, Alias & Tamara, 2019). They informed hygiene and motivators are two important factors that will affect individual motivation (Maaitah, Alias & Maaitah, 2018). The workplace, colleague relationship, policies, leadership and salary factors will affect job dissatisfaction if been disregarded. In addition, the motivator factors such as performance, rewards, responsibility, job scope and career development can motivate employees that will lead job satisfaction. Job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are different which job satisfaction is depending on motivators while job dissatisfaction is depending on hygiene factors (Abubakar et al., 2018).

Previous research mentioned that high level of employee empowerment will reduce turnover rate hence increase job satisfaction (Albrecht et al., 2015; Bailey, Madden, Alfes & Fletcher, 2015; Juhdi, Pa'wan & Hansaram, 2013; Shuck, Twyford, Reio & Shuck, 2014). Work engagement brings positive job experience, positive mindset that positively related with enhancement of efforts (Shuck et al., 2014). (Shuck et al., (2014) uncovers empowered employee increase employee motivation. Empowerment has positive impact on employees' teamwork, self-esteem and level of satisfaction (Abu Elnaga & Imran, 2014). Bailey et al., (2015) found there was a significant negative correlation between employee engagement and employee job satisfaction. Kokila (2016); Abraiz, Tabassum, Raja & Jawad, (2012) reveal empowerment with autonomy in decision making and career development has positive and significant correlation to employees' job satisfaction.



H2: Employee Empowerment has a significant and direct effect on Employees Job Satisfaction.

The success of an organization relies heavily on the management of HRM (Uma, Aurolipty & Madhusmita, 2017) which focusing talent of the employee (Ong and Koh, 2018; Ong, Maria, Lee, Kowang & Chin, 2019). HRM practices has been recognized as a set of practices to develop and enhance employee responsibility, skills and satisfaction (Elrehail, Harazneh, Abuhjeeleh, Alzghoul, Alnajdawi & Ibrahim, 2019). Ana, Gisela and Tatiane (2019) highlighted HRM is to guide human capability in order to meet organizational mission and vision hence enhance employee job satisfaction. Research conducted by Faiza, Wei, Banyai, Nurunnabi and Subhan (2019) strengthened the HRM practices provide positive and significant effect on employee job satisfaction. HRM gave positive and significant influence towards enhancing employee job satisfaction (Mohammed, Yap & Chan, 2019). HRM has linked to employee job satisfaction as it is able to improve employee motivation hence increase their satisfaction towards job function (Cai, Shumaila, Muhammad, Basil & Majid, 2019). HRM impact organizational outcomes as it able to frame employee attitude hence to increase their satisfaction level (Norhasnina, Dato Mohamad & Wan, 2018).

H3: HRM Practices has a positive and significant effect on Employees Job Satisfaction

Employee empowerment is very important as it gives flexibility to employee to carry job function. As the employee empowerment goes high, the employee job satisfaction also going high as it gives large opportunity to employee to perform their duties (Biron & Bamberger, 2011). Aldaihani (2020) informed employee empowerment has significant effect on employee competency, commitment, motivation and job satisfaction. Previous research highlighted employee empowerment as mediator in relationship between HRM and employee job satisfaction. Employee empowerment mediates relationship between HRM on strategic leadership on employee job satisfaction and organizational success in China's public sector company (Qing, Asif, Hussain & Jameel, 2019). Para-Gonzalez, Jimenez-Jimenez & Martinez-Lorente (2019) performed research on mediating role of employee empowerment on relationship between Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) with employee job satisfaction in manufacturing companies in Spain.

H4: Employees Empowerment mediates the relationship between HRM Practices and Employees Job Satisfaction

Therefore, Figure 1 shows the connections among the constructs that can be illustrated through a comprehensive conceptual model:

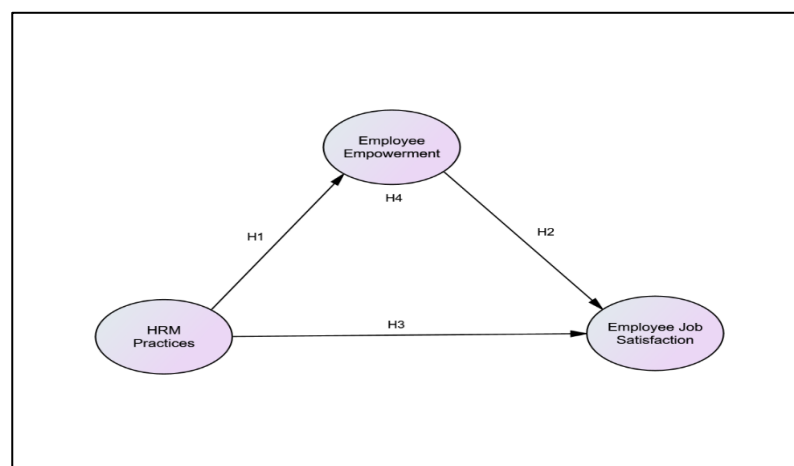


Figure 1. *The Framework of the Research*

Source: The framework of the research developed by the researcher based on literature review



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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The target population of the research was employees of GNT division TM. This research conducted a quantitative approach in assessing the inter-relationship among the constructs as presented in Figure 1 via Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in IBM-SPSS-AMOS 24.0.

Method of Sampling and Data Collection

This research involves 313 respondents selected randomly from the sample size. Researcher used random sampling technique to make sure sample size has been selected randomly to represent the population. Hence, this technique achieved parametric statistical analysis criteria. Researcher gave respondents a questionnaire via Google Form with assistance from Human Capital Business Driver (HCBD) and to be answered in one week time. The researcher received back a total of 313 completed responses with 100% return rate.

Measurement of Construct

Researcher adapted the items for HRM Practice construct from HRM practices questionnaire (Chandrakantan, Faridahwati & Shamsudin, 2011), consists of 16-items with a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The employee empowerment items were adapted from Conditions for Work Effectiveness Questionnaire (CWEQ-II) with 19 items by Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian & Wilk (2001) that measure empowerment factors with 5-point Likert scale (1 = None and 5 = A lot). Researcher used Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) that consists of 36 items of six-point Likert scale; 1 = disagree very much, 2 = disagree moderately, 3 = disagree slightly, 4 = agree slightly, 5 = agree moderately, and 6 = agree very much) to measure overall job satisfaction (Spector, 1985).

Pre-Test and Pilot Testing of the Instruments

Researcher sent the adapted and modified instruments to suit with current research to selected experts for face validity and content validity assessment as the instruments were adapted from previous researchers (Shkeer & Awang, 2019a; Bahkia et al., 2019; Rahlin et al., 2019a). Researcher has modified the instruments accordingly based on the comments received by the experts. Then, researcher begin performing the pilot study via distributing the questionnaire to 200 selected respondents for data collection. The researcher performed the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) procedure to explore the items to measure individual constructs using the pilot research data (Shkeer et al., 2019a; Bahkia et al., 2019; Rahlin et al., 2019a).

Demographic Profile

The respondents were asked to provide their demographic profile for instance gender, current age, marital status, unit, highest level of education, employee group, length of current service, promotion opportunity throughout their service, frequency of attending competency development program and their level of satisfaction towards their leaders' HRM quality.

FINDINGS

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Researcher conducted the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to approve the measurement model of all variables via unidimensionality, validity, and reliability for all constructs prior proceeding Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) (Aziz et al., 2016; Yusof et al., 2017; Shkeer & Awang, 2019b; Asnawi et al., 2019; Rahlin et al., 2019b). Researcher also performed normality distribution assessment of the data. CFA procedure requires three types of validity which are construct validity which been assessed via Fitness Indexes, convergent validity been assessed via Average Variance Extracted and Discriminant Validity been assessed via Discriminant Validity Index Summary (Yusof, Awang, Jusoff & Ibrahim, 2017). Researcher also compute the composite reliability (CR) value for every construct for CR (Awang et al., 2018; Afthanorhan et al., 2018; 2019; Mohamad et al., 2017, 2018, 2019). Figure 2 shows the



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Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results. The CFA results provided the fitness indexes: The Fitness Indexes, which indicate Construct Validity is RMSEA = 0.053, CFI = 0.964, and ChiSq/df = 1.888 (Awang, 2015; Yusof et al., 2017; Awang et al., 2018). Table 1 showed the AVE values for all constructs. All AVE is higher than 0.5, which confirmed the convergent validity for all constructs. Figure 2 also shows the factor loading values for all items which is above 0.60, which showed the unidimensionality of the measures (Asnawi et al., 2019; Rahlin et al., 2019b; Majid et al., 2019). The next stage is to assess the discriminant validity of the latent constructs which was conducted via the discriminant validity index summary as presented in Table 1. Since all diagonal values are higher than any other values in its rows and column, the discriminant validity of all constructs are accomplished (Awang et al., 2015;2018; Shkeer and Awang, 2019b).

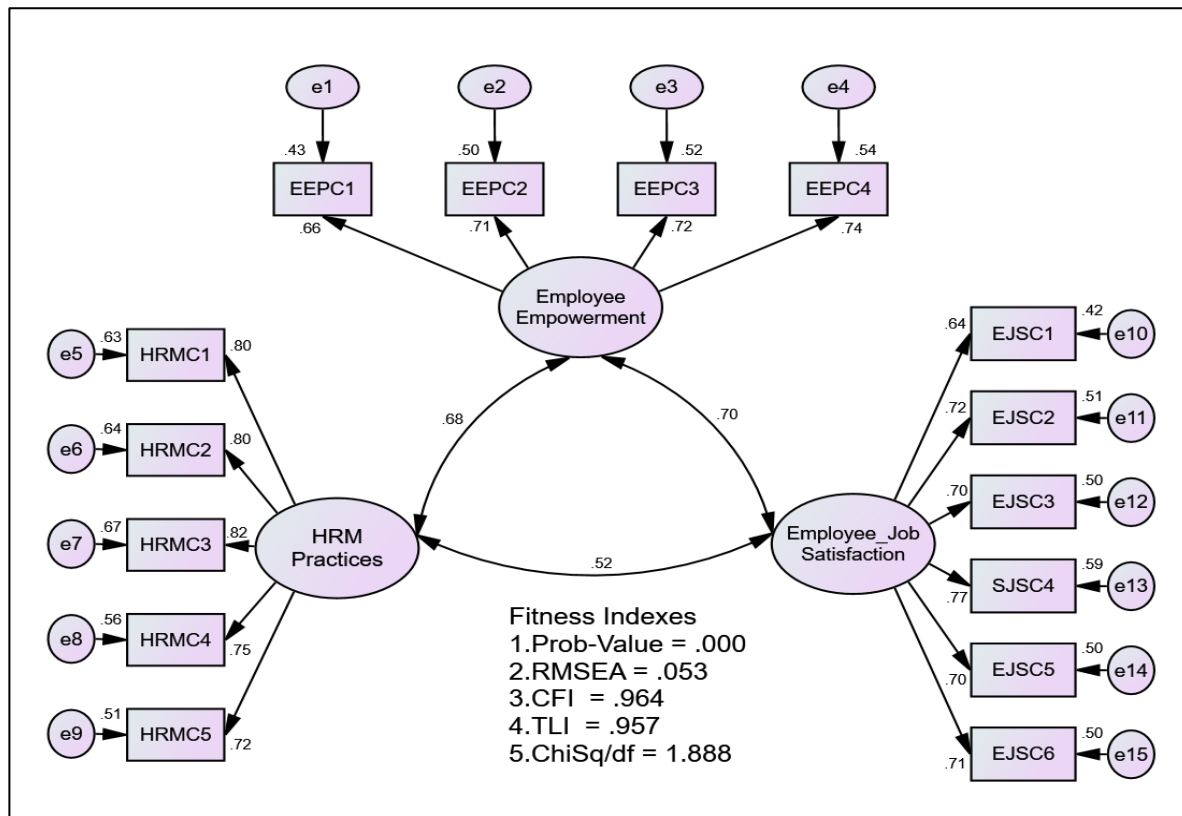


Figure 2. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Results

Table 1. Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability and Discriminant Validity Index Summary

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)	HRM Practices	Employees Empowerment	Employees Job Satisfaction
HRM Practices	0.607	0.885	0.78		
Employees Empowerment	0.651	0.830	0.68	0.72	
Employees Job Satisfaction	0.643	0.878	0.52	0.70	0.85



The CR value for all constructs as Tabulated in Table 1 are all higher than 0.6, which indicated the measurement model for all constructs had met the composite reliability requirement (Hair et al., 2014; Yusof et al., 2017; Awang et al., 2015,2018; Mahfouz et al., 2019). Researcher conducted the normality distribution assessment of the item using the value of skewness and kurtosis. The result shows the skewness for all items fall in the range between -1.5 and 1.5, while value of kurtosis falls in the range between -3 and 3. These skewness and kurtosis showed the data was normally distributed and meet the assumption for employing parametric statistical analysis (Hair et al., 2014; Awang et al., 2018; Mohamad et al., 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; Afthanorhan et al., 2018;2019).

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

The researcher performed the structural model via executing the structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the predefined hypothesis once the constructs met the requirement for unidimensionality, validity, reliability, and normality. Figure 3 shows the results from the SEM procedure in IBM-SPSS-AMOS.

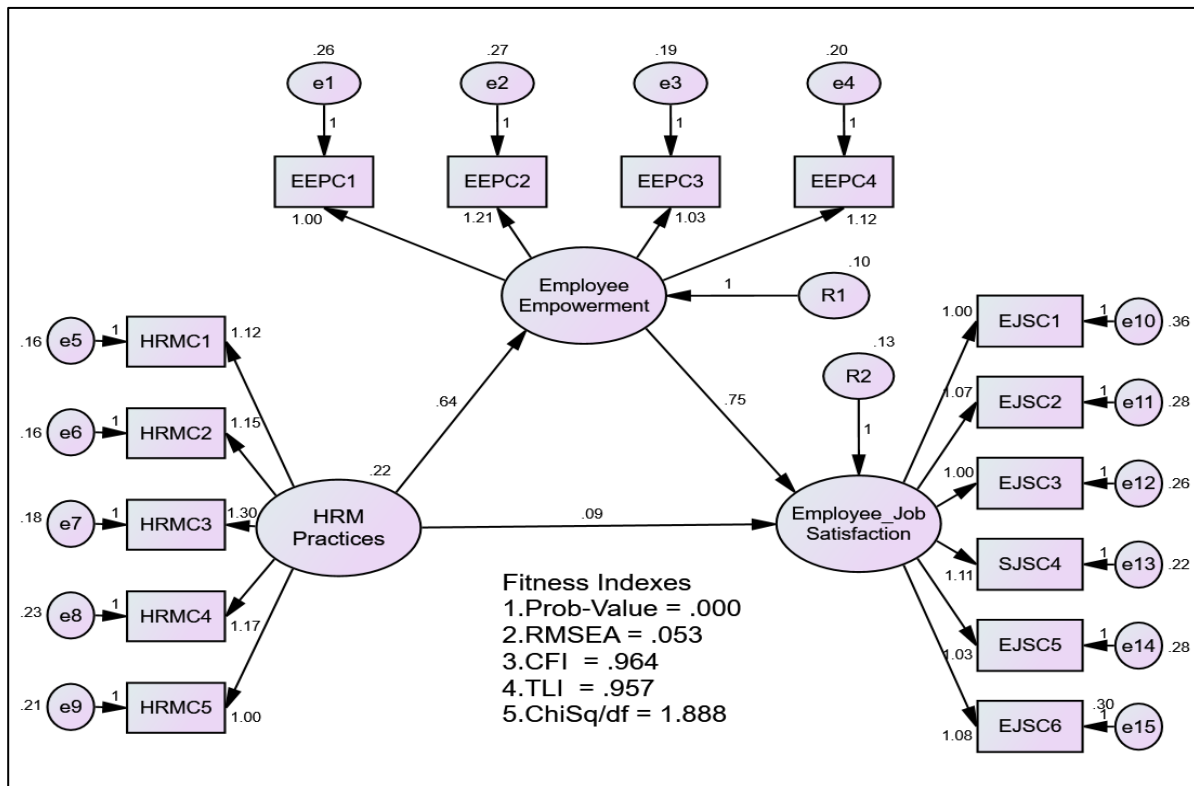


Figure 3. The Regression Path Coefficient among the Constructs in the Model

Data Analysis

The researcher performed Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using IBM-SPSS-AMOS 24.0. SEM is able to assess relationship among latent constructs shown by indicator variables. The second point, it can take it can consider correlations among measurement errors. The third point, it can quantify the recursive association between constructs.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 showed the regression path coefficient and its significance. The hypothesis, H1 is supported which showed there was a significant and positive direct impact of the HRM Practices on employee empowerment. Besides, the direct impact of employee empowerment on employee job satisfaction was observed to be positive and significant which indicated H2 is supported. Contradict with H3 was not supported where the direct impact of the HRM Practices on employee job satisfaction was examined to be not significant.

Table 2: *The Regression Path Coefficient and its Significance*

Construct	Path	Construct	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
Employee Empowerment	<---	HRM Practices	0.638	0.076	8.376	.001	Significant
Employee Job_Satisfaction	<---	Employee Empowerment	0.749	0.123	6.101	.001	Significant
Employee Job Satisfaction	<---	HRM Practices	0.090	0.090	1.006	.314	Not Significant

This research concludes that the mediation exist since indirect effects is significant. The type of mediation is full mediation since the direct effect is not significant. In other words, the Employee Empowerment has a significant mediation effect linking between HRM Practices and Employee Job Satisfaction. The effect of HRM Practices on Employee Job Satisfaction has to go indirectly through Employee Empowerment. Meaning, without Employee Empowerment, the HRM Practices will not result in Employee Job Satisfaction. The result in Figure 4 indicates that 50% of the employee job satisfaction could be estimated by utilizing the constructs in the model, namely HRM Practices and employee empowerment into the model.

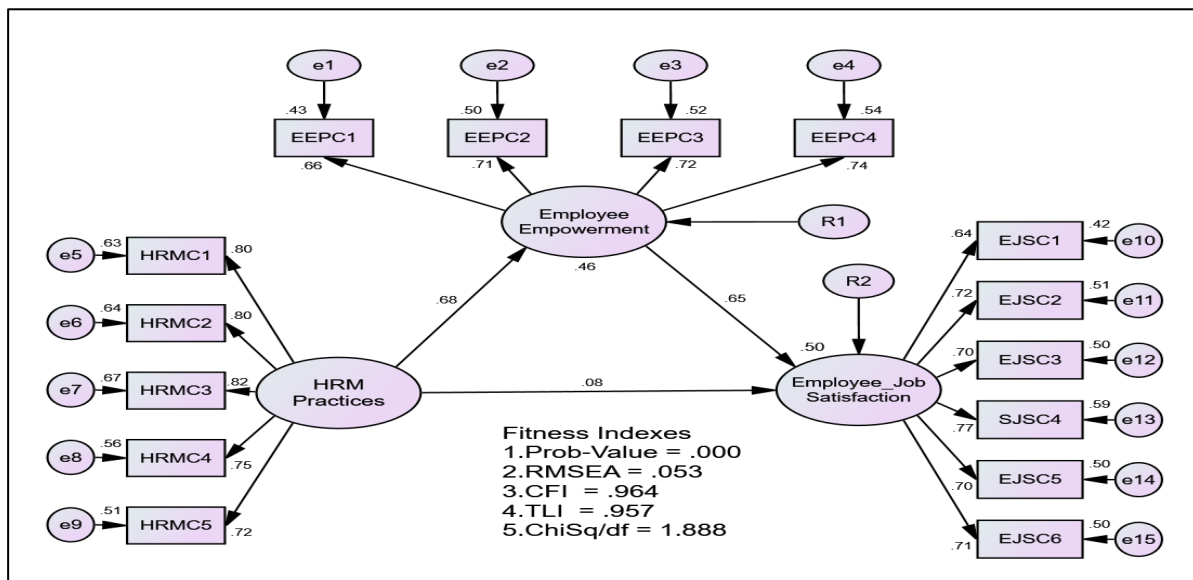


Figure 4. *The Standardized Regression Path Coefficients between Constructs in the Model*



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The first hypothesis recommends that the HRM Practices has a significance and direct impact on employee empowerment. This result supported the hypothesis 1 that the HRM Practices has a significant and direct impact on employee empowerment. This portrayed TM employees put perception the HRM practices would display high employee empowerment. This supported by previous research showed that HRM practices was able to improve employee empowerment (Albrecht et al., 2015; Muduli et al., 2016; Turner, 2020). Like Rothenberg et al., (2015) explored the HRM practices influences employee empowerment in a sample of 1,430 employees in New York. Besides, Nie et al., (2017) found HRM practices positively affect employee empowerment in a sample of 212 employee from eight organizations from private and public sectors in Finland. Tensay et al., also enlighten the correlation between HRM practices and employee empowerment in sample of 340 federal employees in government organizations in Ethiopia.

The second hypothesis indicated employee empowerment has a significant and direct impact on employee job satisfaction. This showed that as TM employee been empowered to make decision in completing their job, they were more satisfied. This result supported by research conducted by Bailey et al., (2015) using narrative evidence synthesis method from previous literature indicated that employee empowerment could be one of the dimensions that able to improve employee job satisfaction. Like a study conducted by Kokila (2016) on a sample of 513 employees from 10 public sector banks and 10 private sector banks in India confirmed that employee empowerment has significant influence on employee job satisfaction. In addition, research conducted on 600 employees from hotels, hospitals, and education sector in Wah Cantt, Pakistan found that there exist a positive relationship between employee empowerment and employee job satisfaction (Abraiz et al., 2012). Besides than showing the nexus between employee empowerment and satisfaction of employees, employee empowerment can be a tool to measure the job satisfaction level. In this way, employee empowerment plays an important role in increasing TM employees job satisfaction as they have been given authority to upskill their knowledge and skills hence having autonomy in making best decision to TM organization.

The third hypothesis showed HRM Practices has not significant and direct impact on employee job satisfaction. The result from this research does not support the hypothesis that HRM Practices has a significant and direct impact on employee job satisfaction among TM employees. This finding found contradiction with the previous research conducted on 439 employee works in five-star hotels in Northern Cyprus that revealed HRM is a set of practices that is able to develop and enhance employee responsibility, skills and satisfaction. (Elrehail et al., 2019) This finding also contradicts with finding from Faiza et al., (2019) on 130 teaching employees of two publicly owned universities in Pakistan which found the HRM practices give positive and significant effect on employee job satisfaction. In addition, contradict with finding found from Cai et al., (2019) on 250 respondents from the private textile sector, located in Lahore and Faisalabad, Pakistan which HRM has linked to employee job satisfaction as it is able to improve employee motivation hence increase their satisfaction towards job. This finding most probably happened due to existence of mediator variable of employee empowerment in this research framework. Therefore, the hypothesis three was rejected in this research.

The last hypothesis found indirect relationship between HRM Practices and employee job satisfaction via employee empowerment as mediating factor. The exploration found that employee empowerment mediated the correlation between HRM Practices and employee job satisfaction. Interestingly, employee empowerment acts as a full mediator between HRM Practices and employee job satisfaction which indicated that employee empowerment should exists to ensure HRM Practices are able to give impact to employee job satisfaction. This supported by previous research on 467 employees in Chinese public sector stated that psychological empowerment fully mediates the relationship between HRM and affective commitment and satisfaction (Qing et al., 2019). Similar to research conducted by Bhatnagar (2013) using a sample of 640 Indian managers confirmed that the mediating role of psychological empowerment on organisational commitment in the relationship between strategic human resource (HR) functions and organisations' performance. TM employees need to be empowered in making decision, upskill



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knowledge and career development as well as been appreciated via reward and recognition given in order to ensure the HRM Practices will give meaning and impact to enhance their level of job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

This research finding explored the nexus between HRM Practices and employee job satisfaction among workers in TM telecommunication company in Malaysia. Results supported the hypothesis HRM practices has significant and direct impact to employee empowerment, same goes employee empowerment has significant and direct impact to employee job satisfaction but rejecting hypothesis that HRM Practices has significant and direct impact on employee job satisfaction. In this research, the researcher also investigated mediating impact of employee empowerment between HRM Practices and employee job satisfaction. The outcome showed employee empowerment fully mediated the relationship between HRM practices and job satisfaction of TM employee. Finding of this research give interesting theory and practical implication. Firstly, HRM can develop work practices that will absolutely impact employee empowerment. Secondly, employee empowerment has been identified as a factor to enhance employee job satisfaction (Kokila, 2016; Abraiz *et al.*, 2012; Ali *et al.*, 2017; Madanat *et al.*, 2018). Thirdly, the outcome of this research revealed that HRM Practices embraced by the organizational leader should be more focusing on employee empowerment to enhance and build satisfaction level of the employee. HRM Practices portrayed by the organizational leader will become meaningless to improve employee job satisfaction without empowering the employees to be part of the decision maker in the organization. Lastly, this finding also predicts and develops a new compatibility model to demonstrate relationship between HRM Practices, employee empowerment and employee job satisfaction among TM employees.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In spite of this research findings which give new theoretical and practical assumption, there are a few limitations of this research that will object significance contribution to future research. Firstly, since this research is more focusing in TM organization, this finding cannot be generalized to other telecommunication industries. Future research can examine relationship between HRM practices with employee job satisfaction in other telecommunication industries in different countries. Secondly, further investigation via longitudinal method to examine relationship between HRM practices and employee job satisfaction using other mediator variable. The finding of this researcher that develop compatibility model of HRM practices with employee job satisfaction via mediating role of employee empowerment will encourage top management to better understand the contribution of HRM practices that focusing on empowering employee in the organization. In addition, the importance of HRM practices and employee empowerment will give useful insight to Human Capital Business Driver (HCBBD) in crafting training framework on how the best HRM practices can be embraced and implemented by the top management towards subordinates.

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