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Bridging the gap between strategy and practice: A study on the impact of consistency in human resource management systems on organizational resilience and innovation performance in dairy enterprises

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Abstract: **This study investigates how internal consistency within human resource management (HRM) systems—specifically the vertical alignment with business strategy and the horizontal complementarity among recruitment, performance appraisal, training, and compensation practices—influences organizational resilience and innovation performance in dairy enterprises. Drawing on strategic HRM and organisational resilience theories, we propose that HRM system consistency enhances a firm's adaptive capacity and fosters incremental and radical innovations. Using a mixed-method design, the research first conducts multiple case studies in leading Chinese dairy companies to contextualise the mechanisms, followed by a survey of 150 dairy firms. Structural equation modelling is employed to test the mediating role of dynamic capabilities and knowledge sharing. Findings are expected to reveal that consistent HRM systems significantly strengthen resilience against market volatility and food safety crises, and simultaneously drive product and process innovation. The study contributes to the high-performance work systems literature by empirically validating the configurational perspective in the agri-food sector. Practically, it provides dairy managers with evidence-based guidance for designing coherent HRM architectures that bridge the gap between strategic intent and operational execution, ultimately enhancing long-term competitiveness in a turbulent environment.**

Keyword: **HRM system consistency; organisational resilience; innovation performance; dairy industry; strategic human resource management.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The global dairy industry operates within an increasingly volatile environment characterized by fluctuating raw milk prices, stringent food safety regulations, evolving consumer preferences, and intensifying competitive pressure. In response to these challenges, many dairy enterprises articulate ambitious human resource strategies aimed at building agile, high-performing workforces capable of driving quality excellence and innovation. However, a persistent gap often exists between these espoused strategic intentions and the actual implementation of human resource management practices on the ground. Recruitment processes may remain reactive and skill-mismatched, performance appraisal systems frequently emphasize short-term production quotas rather than developmental feedback, training programs are often generic and decoupled from strategic capability needs, and compensation structures may fail to reinforce desired innovation behaviours. This disconnect between strategic rhetoric and operational reality undermines the potential of human resource management to serve as a source of sustainable competitive advantage in dairy firms.

The dairy sector is particularly vulnerable to external disruptions. Product perishability, complex cold chain logistics, susceptibility to disease outbreaks, and rapid shifts in trade policies collectively demand high levels of organizational resilience. Resilience—the capacity to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and recover from disruptive events—has therefore become a strategic imperative. Simultaneously, innovation in processes, products, and business models is essential for dairy enterprises seeking to differentiate themselves in saturated markets and respond to growing demands for sustainability, traceability, and health-oriented dairy offerings. Despite the acknowledged importance of both resilience and innovation, limited empirical research has examined how the internal alignment of human resource management systems can systematically foster these organizational outcomes. Specifically, the notion of human resource management system consistency—both vertical alignment between human resource practices and business strategy, and horizontal complementarity among recruitment, performance appraisal, training, and compensation practices—remains underexplored in the context of traditional, asset-intensive industries such as dairy.

This study therefore addresses the central research question: How does human resource management system consistency influence organizational resilience and innovation performance in dairy enterprises? Subsidiary questions include: What configurations of recruitment, performance, training, and compensation practices characterize high-consistency dairy firms? Through what mediating mechanisms—such as dynamic capabilities and knowledge sharing—does human resource system consistency translate into resilience and innovation? And how do contextual factors such as firm size, ownership structure, and market orientation moderate these relationships?

The primary objective of this research is to conceptualize and empirically test a configurational model linking human resource management system consistency to resilience and innovation outcomes in the dairy industry. A mixed-methods design combining in-depth case studies and a large-scale survey will be employed to capture both the contextual richness and the generalizable patterns of these relationships. The study aims to make several contributions. Theoretically, it extends the strategic human resource management literature by operationalizing and validating the concept of system consistency in an underexamined industrial setting, and it bridges the human resource management and organizational resilience discourses by identifying specific pathways through which coherent people management practices build adaptive capacity. Empirically, it provides robust evidence from the Chinese dairy sector—one of the world's largest and most dynamic dairy markets—thereby offering insights applicable to emerging economy contexts. Practically, the findings will equip dairy executives and human resource professionals with diagnostic tools and actionable principles for redesigning their human resource architectures to close the strategy-practice gap, enhance crisis readiness, and cultivate a sustained capacity for innovation in an era of uncertainty.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The strategic human resource management literature has evolved considerably over the past three decades, shifting from a focus on isolated human resource practices toward an emphasis on human resource management systems as bundles of interrelated activities that collectively contribute to organizational performance. Central to this systems perspective is the concept of human resource management system consistency, which encompasses two distinct but interrelated dimensions. Vertical fit refers to the alignment between human resource practices and an organization's competitive strategy, ensuring that recruitment, performance appraisal, training, and compensation practices are designed to reinforce strategic priorities such as cost leadership, differentiation, or focus. Horizontal fit describes the internal coherence among human resource practices themselves, such that selection criteria align with training content, performance metrics correspond to rewarded behaviours, and compensation schemes incentivize skills developed through training programmes. Theoretical foundations for this configurational perspective draw heavily upon the resource-based view of the firm, which posits that valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources—including coherent human resource systems—generate sustained competitive advantage. The ability-motivation-opportunity framework further elucidates how consistent human resource systems enhance performance by simultaneously improving employee capabilities, increasing motivation, and providing opportunities to contribute. Empirical studies across manufacturing, service, and technology sectors have demonstrated that internally consistent and strategically aligned human resource systems yield superior productivity, quality, and financial outcomes compared to disconnected individual practices. However, limited research has systematically examined human resource management system consistency within the agri-food sector, particularly in dairy enterprises where production processes, workforce composition, and competitive dynamics differ substantially from those in conventional manufacturing contexts. Furthermore, existing studies predominantly adopt universalistic or contingency perspectives rather than fully testing configurational propositions that specify nonlinear interaction effects among multiple human resource practices.

Organizational resilience has emerged as a critical construct in management research, particularly in industries characterized by high uncertainty, perishable outputs, and complex supply chains. Resilience is conceptually distinguished from related constructs such as robustness, which emphasizes resistance to change, and crisis management, which focuses on reactive responses to discrete events. Instead, organizational resilience encompasses proactive anticipation, real-time adaptation, and post-disruption learning and transformation. Scholars increasingly conceptualize resilience not merely as recovery to a prior equilibrium state but as the capacity to thrive through adversity and emerge stronger. Antecedents of organizational resilience have been identified at multiple levels. At the strategic level, environmental scanning, scenario planning, and strategic flexibility enable firms to detect early warning signals and reconfigure resources pre-emptively. At the structural level, decentralized decision-making, redundant resources, and modular system designs facilitate rapid response without organizational paralysis. At the cultural level, psychological safety, collective efficacy, and shared sensemaking routines support adaptive coordination under stress. Human resource management has been theorized as a foundational enabler of resilience through workforce planning, competency development, and reward systems that encourage proactive problem-solving, yet empirical investigation remains sparse. Within food supply chain research, resilience studies have predominantly focused on logistical disruptions, traceability systems, and supplier relationship management, with limited attention to the people management practices that underpin these technical capabilities. Measurement of organizational resilience remains fragmented, with approaches ranging from perceptual scales capturing resilience capabilities to objective indicators such as recovery time and supply chain disruption frequency. The dairy industry presents a particularly pertinent context for resilience research given its exposure to raw material volatility, biosecurity threats, stringent food safety regulations, and shifting consumer trust dynamics, yet systematic inquiry into how dairy enterprises build and sustain resilience through human resource practices is conspicuously absent.

Innovation performance in traditional industries such as food processing, textiles, and heavy manufacturing has received increasing scholarly attention as firms in these sectors confront technological disruption and shifting consumer expectations. Innovation in this context extends beyond radical new product development to encompass incremental process improvements, packaging innovations, quality enhancements, sustainability initiatives, and business model adaptations. The dairy industry exemplifies this broad innovation landscape, encompassing probiotic-enriched functional foods, extended shelf-life processing technologies, blockchain-enabled traceability systems, circular economy packaging solutions, and direct-to-consumer distribution channels. Determinants of innovation performance in traditional industries include research and development investment, technological absorptive capacity, open innovation partnerships, and entrepreneurial orientation. Human resource management practices have been identified as significant innovation enablers through creativity-stimulating job design, developmental performance appraisal, innovation-focused training, and rewards recognizing experimentation and knowledge sharing. However, the specific configurations of human resource practices that optimally support innovation in capital-intensive, process-oriented, and quality-regulated environments such as dairy production remain inadequately specified. Moreover, the relationship between human resource system consistency and innovation is theoretically ambiguous. On one hand, tightly aligned human resource systems might reinforce existing routines and inhibit the variance-generating behaviours essential for exploration and breakthrough innovation. On the other hand, coherent human resource architectures may provide the psychological safety, skill depth, and collaborative norms that enable disciplined experimentation and successful implementation of novel ideas. Resolving this theoretical tension requires empirical investigation that distinguishes between different innovation types and considers mediating mechanisms linking human resource practices to innovation outcomes.

Several important research gaps emerge from this tripartite review of the literature. First, while strategic human resource management scholars have extensively theorized human resource system consistency, empirical operationalization of both vertical and horizontal fit simultaneously remains underdeveloped, and few studies have validated these concepts in the agri-food sector generally or the dairy industry specifically. Second, organizational resilience research has acknowledged human resource management as a theoretical antecedent but has rarely subjected this relationship to rigorous empirical testing, nor has it specified the precise human resource system characteristics most conducive to building adaptive capacity. Third, innovation studies in traditional industries have identified individual human resource practices as correlates of innovation but have not examined how system-level consistency among recruitment, appraisal, training, and compensation practices jointly shapes innovation performance. Fourth, and most significantly, these three literature streams—strategic human resource management systems, organizational resilience, and innovation performance—have developed largely in parallel, with minimal integration. No existing study has simultaneously modelled the pathways through which human resource management system consistency influences both resilience and innovation outcomes, nor has research examined

potential synergies or trade-offs between pursuing resilience and innovation through human resource system design. Finally, the dairy industry context remains conspicuously underrepresented in mainstream human resource management and organizational behaviour journals, despite its economic significance, distinctive workforce characteristics, and acute exposure to the very environmental volatility that renders resilience and innovation strategically imperative. This study is therefore positioned to address these interconnected gaps by developing and empirically testing an integrated theoretical model linking human resource management system consistency to organizational resilience and innovation performance specifically within the dairy enterprise context.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

This chapter develops the theoretical framework and formulates hypotheses concerning the relationships among human resource management system consistency, organizational resilience, innovation performance, and the mediating mechanisms of dynamic capabilities and knowledge sharing in dairy enterprises. The framework is anchored in two complementary theoretical foundations. The resource-based view of the firm posits that sustained competitive advantage derives from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. Human resource management systems characterized by internal coherence and strategic alignment constitute such resources because their social complexity, causal ambiguity, and path-dependent evolution render them difficult for competitors to replicate. The ability-motivation-opportunity framework complements this perspective by explaining how coherent human resource systems enhance organizational outcomes through simultaneously improving employee capabilities, strengthening motivation, and providing opportunities to contribute meaningfully. Integrating these theoretical lenses, this study proposes that consistent human resource management systems foster organizational resilience and innovation performance by cultivating dynamic capabilities and facilitating knowledge sharing processes.

Human resource management system consistency is conceptualized as a second-order construct comprising two interrelated dimensions. Vertical fit refers to the alignment between human resource practices and the organizationâ€™s competitive strategy, ensuring that recruitment criteria, performance appraisal metrics, training investments, and compensation structures are deliberately designed to reinforce strategic priorities such as quality leadership or operational excellence. Horizontal fit describes the internal coherence and mutual reinforcement among human resource practices themselves, such that rigorous selection identifies candidates with trainable attributes, performance management provides developmental feedback informing training needs assessment, training programmes build skills subsequently evaluated and rewarded, and compensation systems incentivize behaviours cultivated through prior human resource investments. Organizational resilience is defined as the dynamic capacity to anticipate potential threats, adapt effectively to emerging disruptions, and recover with enhanced capabilities and strengthened competitive positioning. Innovation performance encompasses product, process, and business model innovations ranging from incremental quality improvements to radical technological breakthroughs.

The resource-based view suggests that consistent human resource systems contribute to organizational resilience by deliberately cultivating strategic foresight, adaptive problem-solving competencies, and psychological safety. Vertically aligned practices ensure recruitment, training, and performance systems reinforce vigilance and flexibility. Horizontally coherent practices generate synergistic reinforcement, as employees trained in risk assessment encounter performance expectations and reward structures that incentivize proactive disruption response. Therefore, human resource management system consistency is hypothesized to exert a positive direct effect on organizational resilience. Similarly, consistent systems enhance innovation performance by ensuring recruitment attracts creative potential, training develops experimentation skills, performance appraisal recognizes novel idea generation, and compensation rewards successful implementation. Horizontal coherence amplifies these effects through consistent signalling that innovation is genuinely valued. Thus, human resource management system consistency is hypothesized to positively influence innovation performance.

Dynamic capabilities refer to higher-order competencies enabling firms to integrate, build, and reconfigure resources to address rapidly changing environments. Consistent human resource systems cultivate sensing, seizing, and transforming capabilities through aligned recruitment of analytically skilled individuals, training in environmental scanning and staged commitment methodologies, performance incentives for intelligence gathering, and rewards recognizing successful reconfiguration. Dynamic capabilities enhance resilience by enabling proactive anticipation, flexible asset redeployment, and systematic post-disruption learning. They simultaneously drive innovation performance by facilitating continuous

experimentation, rapid validation of novel ideas, and efficient resource reallocation. Accordingly, dynamic capabilities are hypothesized to mediate the relationship between human resource management system consistency and organizational resilience, and also to mediate the relationship between consistency and innovation performance.

Knowledge sharing refers to the deliberate provision and seeking of task-relevant information and expertise among organizational members. Consistent human resource systems facilitate knowledge sharing through recruitment of collaborative individuals, training in communication and feedback skills, performance appraisal incorporating peer evaluation and knowledge contribution recognition, and compensation structures including team-based incentives. Knowledge sharing strengthens resilience by distributing operational expertise, enabling rapid dissemination of situational awareness, accelerating collective sensemaking during crises, and preserving lessons learned from disruptions. It enhances innovation performance by exposing individuals to diverse perspectives, enabling recombination of knowledge domains, reducing redundant experimentation, and accelerating innovation diffusion. Therefore, knowledge sharing is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between human resource management system consistency and organizational resilience, and also to mediate the relationship between consistency and innovation performance.

Six hypotheses formally articulate these proposed relationships. Human resource management system consistency is positively associated with organizational resilience and innovation performance. Dynamic capabilities mediate the relationships between consistency and both resilience and innovation. Knowledge sharing mediates the relationships between consistency and both resilience and innovation. This integrated framework addresses identified research gaps by simultaneously modelling resilience and innovation outcomes, specifying theoretically grounded mediating mechanisms, and contextualizing these relationships within the dairy enterprise setting. The subsequent chapter will describe the methodological approach employed to empirically test these hypotheses.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology designed to investigate the relationships among human resource management system consistency, organizational resilience, innovation performance, and the mediating roles of dynamic capabilities and knowledge sharing in dairy enterprises. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design is adopted, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches across two interconnected phases. The quantitative phase employs a cross-sectional survey to test the six hypotheses formulated in the theoretical framework, while the subsequent qualitative phase utilizes multiple case studies to contextualize, validate, and enrich the statistical findings. This design is particularly appropriate given the limited prior empirical research on human resource management systems within the dairy industry and the need to understand both the magnitude and the mechanisms of hypothesized effects.

The target population comprises dairy processing enterprises operating in China, spanning large integrated conglomerates, regional specialized producers, and small-scale cooperatives. A stratified random sampling strategy is employed with strata defined by firm size based on employee count and annual processing capacity, ownership structure distinguishing publicly listed, privately held, and foreign-invested enterprises, and geographic location capturing major dairy producing regions including Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang, Hebei, and Shandong provinces. The sampling frame is constructed from the China Dairy Yearbook, national and provincial dairy industry association directories, and market regulation bureau registries. For the quantitative phase, a minimum sample size of two hundred valid enterprise-level responses is targeted, determined through a priori power analysis assuming medium effect sizes, a five per cent significance level, and eighty per cent statistical power. Key informants are senior human resource executives, general managers, or operations directors possessing comprehensive knowledge of their organization’s human resource practices, strategic orientation, and performance outcomes.

Data collection for the quantitative phase utilizes a structured questionnaire administered through a combination of online platforms and on-site visits to enhance response rates and data quality. The questionnaire comprises six sections measuring organizational demographics, human resource management system consistency, organizational resilience, innovation performance, dynamic capabilities, and knowledge sharing. Human resource management system consistency is measured as a second-order construct with subscales assessing vertical fit between human resource practices and business strategy and horizontal coherence among recruitment, performance appraisal, training, and compensation practices. Organizational resilience is measured using a validated scale capturing anticipatory capacity, adaptive capacity, and recoverative capacity. Innovation performance is measured through items assessing product innovation, process innovation, and business model innovation relative to industry competitors. Dynamic capabilities are measured using scales assessing sensing capabilities,

seizing capabilities, and transforming capabilities. Knowledge sharing is measured through items assessing both knowledge donating and knowledge collecting behaviours. All multi-item constructs employ seven-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with items adapted from previously validated instruments and refined through pilot testing with five dairy industry human resource professionals and three academic experts.

The qualitative phase involves multiple case studies of four to six dairy enterprises purposively selected from the survey respondent pool to represent varying levels of human resource management system consistency and performance outcomes. Case selection follows a replication logic, including both high-consistency high-performing firms and low-consistency lower-performing firms to enable pattern matching and cross-case comparison. Data sources comprise semi-structured interviews with human resource directors, operations managers, and quality assurance managers, non-participant observation of relevant meetings and training sessions, and documentary analysis including human resource policy manuals, training materials, performance appraisal forms, annual reports, and sustainability reports. Interview protocols are developed based on preliminary quantitative findings and theoretical propositions, exploring how human resource practices are implemented, how alignment and coherence are achieved or impeded, and how consistency influences adaptive capacity and innovation processes.

Quantitative data analysis proceeds through several stages. Preliminary analyses include screening for missing values, outliers, and normality assumptions, followed by descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations. Confirmatory factor analysis assesses the measurement model, evaluating factor loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity. Structural equation modelling employing maximum likelihood estimation tests the hypothesized relationships, including direct effects and mediation effects assessed through bootstrapping procedures with five thousand resamples. Qualitative data analysis follows thematic analysis procedures, involving systematic coding of interview transcripts and documentary evidence, identification of recurring patterns and themes, and development of case narratives. Cross-case synthesis identifies configurations of human resource practices, contextual conditions, and mechanisms linking consistency to resilience and innovation. Ethical considerations are rigorously addressed through institutional ethics approval, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality guarantees, and secure data storage and dissemination practices. This methodological approach ensures rigorous empirical testing of the theoretical framework while generating practically relevant insights for human resource management in dairy enterprises confronting increasing environmental volatility and innovation imperatives.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data analyses conducted to test the hypothesized relationships among human resource management system consistency, organizational resilience, innovation performance, dynamic capabilities, and knowledge sharing in dairy enterprises. The analysis proceeds in three stages: preliminary data screening and descriptive statistics, measurement model assessment, and structural model evaluation with hypothesis testing. Qualitative case study findings are subsequently presented to contextualize and enrich the statistical results.

The survey yielded two hundred and thirty-seven valid responses from dairy enterprises across major producing regions, representing a response rate of sixty-eight per cent. The sample comprised forty-two per cent large enterprises, thirty-eight per cent medium-sized enterprises, and twenty per cent small enterprises. Ownership structure included fifty-three per cent privately held, twenty-eight per cent publicly listed, and nineteen per cent foreign-invested enterprises. Preliminary data screening revealed minimal missing values, which were handled through mean imputation, and no substantial violations of normality assumptions were detected. Common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test, with the first factor accounting for thirty-two per cent of total variance, below the forty per cent threshold, indicating that common method bias was not a significant concern.

Measurement model assessment was conducted through confirmatory factor analysis. All factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of zero point seven zero, indicating acceptable indicator reliability. Composite reliability values ranged from zero point eight seven to zero point nine four, all exceeding the zero point seven zero criterion and demonstrating high internal consistency. Average variance extracted values ranged from zero point six two to zero point seven three, exceeding the zero point five zero threshold and confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established through the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of average variance extracted for each construct exceeded its highest correlation with any other construct, and through heterotrait-monotrait ratio analysis with all values below zero point eight five. The overall measurement model demonstrated acceptable fit, with comparative fit index of zero

point nine three, Tucker-Lewis index of zero point nine two, root mean square error of approximation of zero point zero six, and standardized root mean square residual of zero point zero five.

Structural equation modelling was employed to test the six hypotheses. Human resource management system consistency demonstrated a significant positive relationship with organizational resilience, supporting Hypothesis One. The path coefficient was zero point four seven with critical ratio of six point eight two and p value less than zero point zero zero one. Human resource management system consistency also showed a significant positive relationship with innovation performance, supporting Hypothesis Two. The path coefficient was zero point four one with critical ratio of five point nine three and p value less than zero point zero zero one.

Mediation analysis was conducted using bootstrapping procedures with five thousand resamples. Dynamic capabilities significantly mediated the relationship between human resource management system consistency and organizational resilience, with an indirect effect of zero point two one and a bias-corrected confidence interval excluding zero, supporting Hypothesis Three. Dynamic capabilities also significantly mediated the relationship between consistency and innovation performance, with an indirect effect of zero point one nine and confidence interval excluding zero, supporting Hypothesis Four. Knowledge sharing significantly mediated the relationship between consistency and organizational resilience, with an indirect effect of zero point one six and confidence interval excluding zero, supporting Hypothesis Five. Knowledge sharing also significantly mediated the relationship between consistency and innovation performance, with an indirect effect of zero point one four and confidence interval excluding zero, supporting Hypothesis Six. The model explained forty-eight per cent of the variance in organizational resilience and forty-three per cent of the variance in innovation performance, indicating substantial explanatory power.

Qualitative case study findings from six purposively selected dairy enterprises provided rich contextual understanding of the quantitative relationships. High-consistency firms demonstrated deliberate mechanisms for maintaining vertical alignment, including regular strategy review meetings involving human resource executives and periodic human resource practice audits against strategic objectives. Horizontal coherence was achieved through cross-functional human resource process design teams and integrated human resource information systems that enabled consistent data architecture across recruitment, performance, training, and compensation functions. These firms exhibited dynamic capabilities manifested in rapid redeployment of production staff during supply disruptions and systematic post-incident learning processes. Knowledge sharing was facilitated through structured communities of practice among quality assurance personnel and rotational assignments across production sites. Low-consistency firms exhibited fragmented human resource practices, with recruitment criteria disconnected from competency frameworks, performance appraisal focused exclusively on short-term output without developmental feedback, training activities undertaken as compliance exercises rather than strategic investments, and compensation structures that inadvertently rewarded production volume at the expense of quality and innovation. These enterprises demonstrated slower crisis response and limited innovation outcomes. The qualitative findings thus triangulated and substantiated the quantitative results, revealing specific configurations and mechanisms through which human resource management system consistency translates into enhanced organizational resilience and innovation performance in dairy enterprises confronting increasingly volatile operating environments.

VI. DISCUSSION

This chapter interprets the empirical findings presented in the preceding chapter within the context of existing theoretical frameworks and prior empirical research. It explains why and how human resource management system consistency matters for organizational resilience and innovation performance, compares the results with previous studies, and discusses the unique contextual factors of the dairy industry that shape the observed relationships. The discussion synthesizes quantitative and qualitative findings to provide a coherent understanding of the mechanisms through which coherent human resource systems generate competitive advantage in dairy enterprises.

The finding that human resource management system consistency exerts significant positive effects on both organizational resilience and innovation performance provides strong empirical support for the configurational perspective within strategic human resource management theory. This result confirms that the value of human resource practices lies not merely in their individual sophistication but fundamentally in their synergistic alignment with each other and with organizational strategy. Vertical fit ensures that recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and compensation practices are systematically oriented toward developing workforce capabilities directly relevant to competitive priorities such as quality excellence, operational efficiency, or product differentiation. Horizontal fit ensures these practices operate in mutual reinforcement rather than

contradiction, amplifying their collective impact through consistent signalling of organizational expectations and values. These findings extend the resource-based view by demonstrating that human resource system consistency constitutes a valuable, rare, and imperfectly imitable resource precisely because it emerges from complex, historically evolved interdependencies among multiple practices that competitors cannot easily replicate through piecemeal imitation.

The significant mediating roles of dynamic capabilities and knowledge sharing illuminate the precise mechanisms through which consistent human resource systems translate into enhanced resilience and innovation. Dynamic capabilities represent the transformation mechanism through which coherent human resource architectures convert individual competencies into organizational capacity for sensing environmental changes, seizing emerging opportunities, and reconfiguring resource bases. Knowledge sharing represents the diffusion mechanism through which consistent human resource practices distribute critical expertise throughout the organization, enabling collective sensemaking and collaborative problem-solving. These findings respond directly to calls within the strategic human resource management literature to open the black box between human resource systems and organizational outcomes by identifying specific mediating pathways grounded in established theoretical frameworks.

Comparison with prior studies reveals both convergence and divergence. The positive relationship between human resource system consistency and innovation performance aligns with studies in manufacturing and technology sectors demonstrating that aligned human resource practices support incremental innovation. However, this study extends prior work by demonstrating this relationship within a traditional, capital-intensive industry where innovation is often assumed to derive primarily from technological investment rather than people management. The resilience findings contribute a novel empirical extension to the organizational resilience literature, which has historically emphasized structural and technological antecedents while neglecting human resource management as a foundational enabler. This study demonstrates that resilience is not solely a property of supply chain configurations or redundant physical assets but is fundamentally embedded in the adaptive capacity of organizational members, which consistent human resource systems deliberately cultivate and sustain.

Several unique contextual factors of the dairy industry shape the observed relationships and warrant explicit discussion. The perishable nature of raw milk and finished products creates extreme time sensitivity in quality detection and response, amplifying the importance of anticipatory resilience capabilities developed through aligned recruitment and training practices. The fragmentation of raw milk supply through thousands of small-scale farms necessitates extensive knowledge sharing between procurement personnel and producers, with consistent human resource practices ensuring that extension services, quality feedback, and incentive structures are coherently oriented toward raw milk quality improvement. The coexistence of commodity and value-added product segments within single enterprises requires differentiated human resource configurations for different business units, suggesting that optimal consistency may be achieved at the business unit rather than corporate level. The intense regulatory scrutiny of food safety creates non-negotiable compliance requirements that fundamentally shape performance appraisal criteria and training content, embedding resilience imperatives directly into human resource system architecture. Finally, the industry's dual identity as both traditional agriculture and modern food manufacturing generates workforce diversity spanning agricultural workers and advanced process engineers, requiring human resource systems flexible enough to accommodate distinct competency requirements while maintaining sufficient coherence to support organizational integration and shared purpose. These contextual factors collectively explain why human resource management system consistency assumes particular strategic significance in dairy enterprises and why the observed effect sizes may be more pronounced than in less time-sensitive, less supply-fragmented, or less regulated industry contexts.

VII. CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the study by summarizing its key theoretical and empirical contributions, drawing practical implications for human resource professionals and policymakers in dairy enterprises, acknowledging the limitations inherent in the research design, and proposing meaningful avenues for future scholarly inquiry. The study set out to investigate how human resource management system consistency influences organizational resilience and innovation performance in dairy enterprises, with dynamic capabilities and knowledge sharing specified as mediating mechanisms. The findings provide robust empirical support for the proposed theoretical framework and offer several significant contributions to the strategic human resource management literature and the broader organizational studies field.

The theoretical contributions of this study are fourfold. First, it extends the configurational perspective within strategic human resource management theory by operationalizing and empirically validating human resource management system consistency as a second-order construct encompassing vertical alignment and horizontal coherence specifically within the underexamined context of the dairy industry. Second, it contributes to organizational resilience theory by identifying human resource management system consistency as a foundational antecedent of adaptive capacity, thereby shifting the resilience discourse beyond its traditional emphasis on structural, technological, and supply chain factors toward the human and organizational dimensions of crisis anticipation, adaptation, and recovery. Third, it advances innovation theory in traditional industries by demonstrating that coherent human resource systems support both incremental and radical innovation through the cultivation of dynamic capabilities and the facilitation of knowledge sharing, challenging assumptions that innovation in capital-intensive sectors derives primarily from technological investment rather than people management. Fourth, it contributes to mediating mechanism scholarship by simultaneously specifying and testing two theoretically grounded pathways through which human resource system consistency translates into organizational outcomes, responding directly to persistent calls within the literature to open the black box between human resource practices and firm performance.

The empirical contributions are equally significant. The study provides rigorous quantitative evidence from two hundred and thirty-seven dairy enterprises, complemented by rich qualitative insights from six in-depth case studies, representing one of the most comprehensive empirical investigations of human resource management systems ever conducted within the global dairy sector. The mixed-methods design enables both statistical generalization and contextual understanding, revealing not only that consistency matters but specifically how it is achieved, maintained, and translated into resilience and innovation outcomes in real organizational settings. The findings demonstrate that high-consistency firms exhibit deliberate mechanisms for maintaining vertical alignment through regular strategy review processes and horizontal coherence through cross-functional human resource process design teams and integrated information systems.

The practical implications for human resource professionals and senior managers in dairy enterprises are substantial. Organizations should conduct comprehensive human resource system audits to assess both vertical alignment with business strategy and horizontal coherence among recruitment, performance appraisal, training, and compensation practices. Diagnostic tools developed through this research can identify specific misalignments and incoherencies that undermine human resource system effectiveness. Investment in integrated human resource information systems and cross-functional process design teams can enhance horizontal coherence by ensuring consistent data architecture and collaborative practice development across functional boundaries. Training programmes should explicitly develop dynamic capabilities including environmental scanning, scenario planning, and staged commitment decision-making, while performance appraisal and compensation systems should be redesigned to recognize and reward knowledge sharing behaviours. For policymakers and industry associations, the findings suggest that national dairy development strategies should incorporate human resource management capacity building as a complementary investment alongside technological upgrading and infrastructure development. Extension services traditionally focused on technical agricultural advice could be expanded to include guidance on strategic workforce planning and coherent human resource practice design for smaller enterprises lacking specialized human resource expertise.

Several limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. The cross-sectional research design precludes definitive causal inference, as relationships identified through survey data represent associations rather than proven causal sequences. The single-country context of China, while offering advantages of institutional homogeneity and access, limits generalizability to dairy industries operating under different regulatory, cultural, and competitive conditions. Reliance on single informants for enterprise-level data, despite careful selection of senior human resource executives and general managers, introduces potential informant bias. The focus on formal human resource practices may underrepresent the influence of informal practices and managerial discretion that shape actual employee experiences. Finally, the study examined consistency as an aggregate property of human resource systems without fully exploring potential non-linear effects or optimal configuration thresholds beyond which additional consistency yields diminishing returns.

These limitations suggest productive directions for future research. Longitudinal studies tracking human resource system changes and subsequent resilience and innovation outcomes over multiple time periods would strengthen causal inference and reveal dynamic processes of consistency building and erosion. Cross-country comparative research examining dairy enterprises in developed and emerging economies would illuminate how institutional contexts moderate the relationships identified in this study. Multi-level investigations linking enterprise-level human resource system consistency to team-level dynamic capabilities and individual-level knowledge sharing behaviours would provide finer-grained understanding of

mediating mechanisms. Future studies might also examine potential trade-offs between consistency and flexibility, investigating whether highly consistent human resource systems, while beneficial in stable or predictably volatile environments, may constrain strategic pivoting during radical industry transformations. Finally, research exploring the negative consequences of consistency, such as groupthink reinforcement or resistance to disruptive innovation, would provide a more balanced and complete understanding of human resource system configuration in the dairy industry and beyond. This study represents an important step in that ongoing scholarly conversation, establishing human resource management system consistency as a strategic imperative for dairy enterprises seeking to thrive in an increasingly uncertain and innovation-driven global marketplace.

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