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STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE: HUMAN CAPITAL ADVANTAGE AS A PATHWAY TO CREATING ORGANIZATIONAL UNIQUENESS

Bambang Sutejo[1], Rai Yoges[2*], Pinky Pininta Dewi[3], Davis Febrinanto Prakasa[4], Moh. Ainul Fais[5]
[1,2,3,4,5] Universitas W R Supratman, Surabaya, Indonesia
E-mail: bamsitats@gmail.com, raiyoges212@gmail.com, pinkypinintaddewi@gmail.com, prakasadavis@gmail.com, moh.ainulfais29@gmail.com

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Abstract

Organizational uniqueness is created through valuable, firm-specific combinations of human expertise, routines, coordination, technology integration, and innovation, rather than merely offering an unusual service. This study examined associations among strategic human resource management (SHRM), human capital advantage (HCA), and sustainable competitive advantage (SCA), while considering organizational uniqueness creation as a broader strategic pathway. We analyzed 150 actual field responses from employees of an anonymized port-support services firm in Surabaya using 32 five-point items, ordinary least-squares regression, robust inference, and 5,000 paired bootstrap resamples. Mean scores were 3.399 (SHRM), 3.549 (HCA), and 3.513 (SCA). SHRM was positively associated with HCA (B = 0.4849) and SCA (total B = 0.4091); the indirect SHRM-SCA association through HCA was 0.1985 (95% bootstrap CI [0.1178, 0.2928]). Internal consistency ranged from 0.855 to 0.880, whereas supplementary three-factor confirmatory analysis yielded average variance extracted below 0.50. Researchers confirmed that the company had internally validated evidence concerning organizational distinctiveness, competitor comparison, and persistence; the underlying records remain confidential and were not treated as regression observations. The results identify an empirical resource-related pathway that can inform uniqueness creation, but do not establish a causal or independently quantified organizational uniqueness effect.

Keywords: strategic human resource management; human capital advantage; organizational uniqueness; distinctive capabilities; sustainable competitive advantage

INTRODUCTION

Port-support firms face intertwined demands involving technical execution, safety, coordination, customer interaction, and responsiveness to disruption. Creating organizational uniqueness in such a setting goes beyond launching a distinctive service: it may require difficult-to-imitate combinations of employee expertise, internal routines, cross-unit integration, and adaptive innovation. From a resource-based perspective, the strategic question is whether such combinations create relative value rather than merely accomplish routine tasks (Barney, 1991). In a survey of 250 port-service users, Yuwono et al. (2024) connected human-resource quality and port technology to service-performance outcomes; that user-side evidence is relevant to service value, but does not independently establish firm-level uniqueness.

Strategic human resource management (SHRM) can influence the way organizations acquire, develop, retain, and combine human capabilities. Wright and McMahan (1992) treat HR practices as strategic choices, while Boxall (1996) relates them to human resource advantage. The creation of uniqueness may depend on how recruitment, learning, performance management, rewards, and employee participation interact to produce firm-specific know-how, coordination routines, and innovative responses. None of these practices alone demonstrates that a rare organizational configuration has been established.

Research supports parts of the proposed pathway, but the constructs and settings differ. Hamadamin and Atan (2019) found that human capital development and employee commitment partially mediated the relationship between SHRM and sustainable competitive advantage in higher education. Alfawaire and Atan (2021) examined innovation and knowledge-management mechanisms in Jordanian universities. In Thai logistics services, Putthima et al. (2026) reported heterogeneous human-capital coefficients, including a negative coefficient for experience; such findings caution against assuming every capability contributes equally to advantage. A bibliometric synthesis of

3,503 SHRM articles also identified mediating mechanisms and multilevel effects as recurrent issues (Zhai et al., 2026).

A distinction is needed between possessing useful resources and creating organizational uniqueness from them. Individual competence and adaptability are widespread; distinctiveness may arise when those capabilities are recombined into organization-specific routines, integrated knowledge, coordination mechanisms, and capabilities for adapting to changing conditions. Ployhart and Moliterno (2011) explain the emergence of collective human-capital resources, while Campbell et al. (2012) examine how human-capital mobility affects sustainable advantage. These perspectives motivate analysis of the SHRM-HCA-SCA pathway without treating employee competence as proof that unique organizational value has already been created.

This study examines 150 complete field questionnaire responses from PT XXYZ, an anonymized port-support service company in Surabaya. It tests whether SHRM is associated with HCA and SCA scores and whether HCA accounts for an indirect SHRM-SCA association. Organizational uniqueness is the broader strategic creation objective: potentially expressed through distinctive operating systems, collective expertise, knowledge integration, innovation processes, and service configurations. The analysis does not introduce uniqueness as an additional measured construct or treat the survey as objective evidence that this multidimensional outcome has occurred.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SHRM, human capital, and the resource-based view

The strategic value of HRM depends on how workforce practices fit operational demands and reinforce one another. A strong recruitment process can supply technically suitable employees, but training and performance feedback help turn initial competence into reliable routines. Delery and Doty (1996) showed why the theorization of HRM can take universalistic, contingency, and configurational forms. Gerhart and Feng (2021) similarly emphasized the need to locate human resources and human capital within the resource-based perspective, rather than assume that a checklist of practices necessarily yields superior performance.

The present SHRM indicators cover five domains: recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, compensation and rewards, and employee participation. These domains assess employees' experience of established practices. They do not directly measure the degree of vertical alignment between HR strategy and corporate strategy; thus, SHRM is used as the label of the intended practice bundle while its strategic alignment remains incompletely observed. This limitation is material when drawing implications about organizational strategy.

Human capital advantage and the creation of organizational uniqueness

Human Capital Advantage (HCA) is strategically meaningful when knowledge, specialized skills, accumulated experience, adaptive capacity, and coordination combine into resources that competing firms cannot easily reproduce. Human capital theory explains the productive contribution of acquired skills (Becker, 1993), whereas multilevel human-capital research explains why their organization-specific configuration may matter (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011; Campbell et al., 2012). Coff and Rickley (2021) emphasize firm specificity and worker-firm matching rather than treating all competencies as equally distinctive. In port-support operations, uniqueness may arise through interlocking technical and safety routines, cross-functional problem solving, knowledge continuity, technology-supported workflows, and adaptable customer solutions. Service differentiation is only one possible manifestation of those systems.

The ten available HCA items concern knowledge, technical skills, problem solving, experience, and learning or adaptability. Their wording, including first-person statements, offers evidence about human capabilities that could contribute to creating organizational uniqueness. The items do not directly measure the emergence of firm-specific collective routines, the rarity of the resulting configuration, knowledge integration, or imitation barriers. HCA is retained as the intended construct label while the reported statistical interpretation remains bounded by the actually observed questionnaire content.

Sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) concerns value that competitors find difficult to match over time (Porter, 1985; Barney, 1991). Uniqueness can arise from differentiated capabilities, operating architecture, knowledge integration, and innovation. The twelve SCA questionnaire items cover service quality, efficiency, innovation, responsiveness, differentiation, and continuity; two items explicitly contain comparisons with competitors. Therefore, the statistical outcome is a composite of employee ratings, not an independently estimated measure of company-level distinctiveness or competitive duration. Contextual company evidence is treated separately from this measured score.

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Empirical mechanisms and study propositions

Previous studies support considering human resources as a mechanism of advantage, but they do not establish that organizational uniqueness is created automatically through HR practices. Hamadamin and Atan (2019) examined mediation through human capital development and commitment; Alfawaire and Atan (2021) examined organizational innovation. Masyhuri et al. (2024) investigated human capital, innovation, learning, and performance in Indonesian service firms. Korry et al. (2024) showed that human capital alone may not suffice for sustainable advantage. Together, this literature motivates the indirect association tested here while identifying a separate managerial challenge: transforming capabilities into a distinctive, valuable, and difficult-to-imitate organizational configuration.

Four directional hypotheses were examined: H1, SHRM is positively associated with HCA; H2, SHRM is positively associated with SCA in the total-effect model; H3, HCA is positively associated with SCA after adjustment for SHRM; and H4, the indirect SHRM-SCA association through HCA is positive. The strategic proposition that these resources might be combined to create organizational uniqueness is an interpretation and future development agenda, not a fifth hypothesis or an observed mediator. The survey-based cross-sectional decomposition does not identify the time-ordered creation of uniqueness.

METHOD

Study design and respondents

This quantitative cross-sectional study analyzed 150 complete field questionnaire responses from an anonymized port-support services company in Surabaya, Indonesia (PT XXYZ). The employee was the response unit. The anonymized file includes sex, age group, education, tenure, work unit, and 32 five-point items. The research team confirmed that these records represent actual field data. The analytical materials do not specify the original sampling frame, response rate, or exact field dates; we therefore avoid claiming that the sample represents all organizational personnel. No direct respondent identifiers are reported.

The survey file contains 4,800 item responses with no missing questionnaire items, out-of-range values, or duplicate anonymous identifiers. Respondents worked in operations, safety, maintenance or technical services, and administration. In addition to the survey, the researchers confirmed that the company had internally validated three domains of contextual evidence: the formation of distinctive organizational capabilities, comparisons with competitors, and the persistence of competitive strengths. The associated company records were restricted and were not supplied as respondent-level variables, public benchmarks, or numerical longitudinal series for the present regression models. These company-level confirmations are therefore distinguished from the quantitative results below.

Measures and score construction

SHRM was measured with ten items across recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, compensation and rewards, and employee participation. HCA was represented by ten items covering knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, and learning or adaptability. SCA was represented by twelve items covering service quality, operational efficiency, service innovation, customer responsiveness, competitive differentiation, and sustainability of advantage. Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The observed score of each construct was the arithmetic mean across its items. The original item wording and respondent values were retained.

The field instrument is not characterized as a verbatim scale reproduced from a single prior publication. Its domains reflect strategic HRM, human-capital, and competitive-advantage theory. The research team confirmed that instrument assessment and validation had already been conducted; confidential documentation is not reproduced in this article. To make the visible evidence auditable, we report separately the internal-consistency calculations and supplementary measurement checks that could be independently recomputed from the anonymized response matrix. These analyses neither overwrite previous validation nor modify any original response.

Statistical analysis

We calculated descriptive statistics, corrected item-total correlations, and Cronbach's alpha. Supplementary correlated three-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) used maximum likelihood estimation on the item covariance matrix. Standardized loadings informed average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR). Discriminant separation was examined using heterotrait-monotrait ratios (HTMT), 2,000 bootstrap percentile intervals, and the Fornell-Larcker comparison. Because five-category survey items are ordinal and each proposed

construct aggregates multiple dimensions, this maximum-likelihood CFA is a sensitivity check rather than an exhaustive construct-validity adjudication (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015). Three ordinary least-squares (OLS) models were estimated on composite scores: (1) HCA = i1 + a(SHRM) + e1; (2) SCA = i2 + c(SHRM) + e2; and (3) SCA = i3 + c-prime(SHRM) + b(HCA) + e3. The indirect association was a x b. HC3 heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors were used for regression inference because the SHRM-HCA model had a Breusch-Pagan p value below 0.05. A percentile 95% confidence interval was estimated with 5,000 paired bootstrap resamples (random seed 20261106; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The outcome is an employee-rated SCA composite, not a measured index of uniqueness creation, organizational novelty, or actual competitor displacement.

The regression tests associations among employee-rated composite scores, not a causal sequence or an independent audit of organizational uniqueness. Shared-source tendencies and unmeasured working conditions may affect the associations, while a single-time survey cannot establish the timing required for causal mediation (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Maxwell & Cole, 2007). Aggregate, anonymized results are presented without identifying protected company records or attributing a formal ethics approval identifier that has not been documented in the analytical materials.

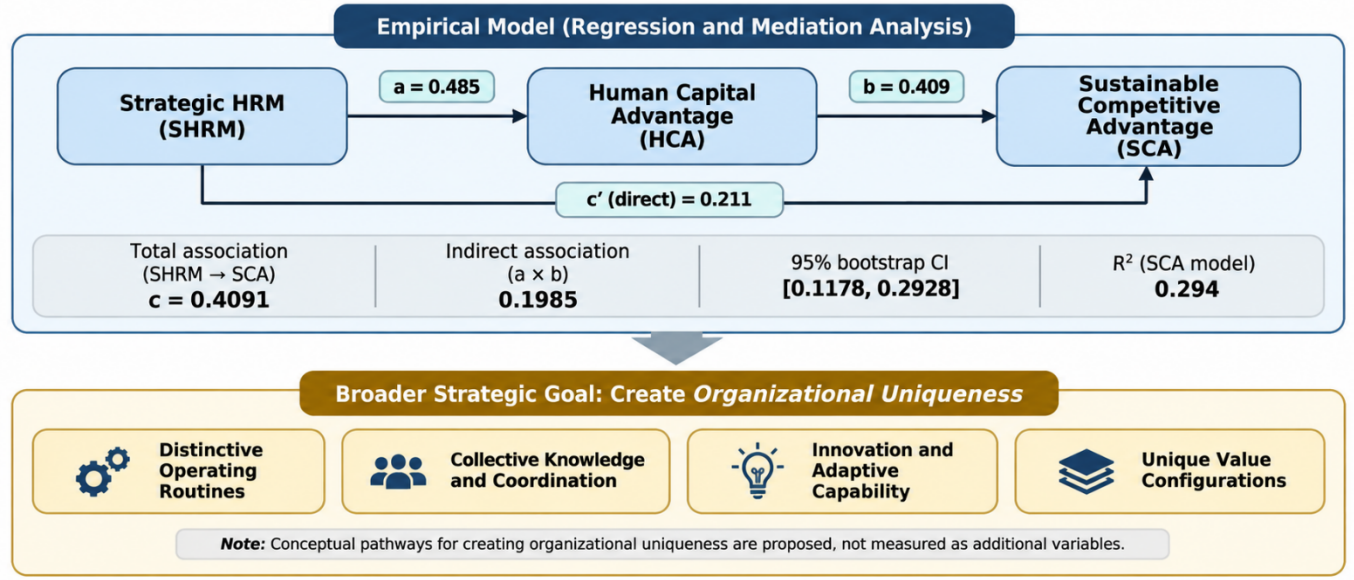

Image 1. Measured regression-based associations among SHRM, HCA, and the SCA composite. The dashed lower band indicates possible domains of organizational uniqueness creation, which were not modeled as measured outcomes. Source: authors' analysis and conceptual interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample composition and construct characteristics

Of the 150 respondents, 116 (77.3%) were men and 34 (22.7%) were women. The age distribution was concentrated in the 26–35-year category (67; 44.7%), followed by 36–45 years (45; 30.0%). Operations accounted for 75 respondents (50.0%), safety and occupational health for 32 (21.3%), maintenance and technical functions for 28 (18.7%), and administration for 15 (10.0%). This profile indicates a sample weighted toward frontline operational roles; it is not evidence that the company workforce has the same proportions.

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Table 1. Selected respondent characteristics (N = 150)

Characteristic	Category	N	%
Sex	Men	116	77.3
	Women	34	22.7
Age	18–25 years	25	16.7
	26–35 years	67	44.7
	36–45 years	45	30.0
	Over 45 years	13	8.7
Work unit	Operations	75	50.0
	Safety / OHS	32	21.3
	Maintenance / technical	28	18.7
	Administration	15	10.0

Note: Percentages are rounded to one decimal place and may not sum to 100.0 within categories. Source: PT XXYZ field responses, authors' analysis.

The mean composite scores were 3.399 for SHRM, 3.549 for HCA, and 3.513 for SCA. On the five-point scale, differences among construct means were modest and cannot be interpreted as a measured degree of organizational uniqueness. Composite-score standard deviations ranged from 0.686 to 0.710. Cronbach's alpha was 0.856 for SHRM, 0.855 for HCA, and 0.880 for SCA. Corrected item-total correlations were positive for all 32 items and exceeded the prespecified 0.30 screening threshold. These results support internal consistency but do not directly establish the organizational distinctiveness of any specific process, capability, or offering.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and internal consistency

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Alpha	Corrected r range
SHRM	10	3.399	0.710	0.856	0.467–0.631
HCA	10	3.549	0.686	0.855	0.486–0.628
SCA	12	3.513	0.698	0.880	0.517–0.667

Note: Corrected r denotes corrected item–total correlations. Values are rounded. Source: authors' calculations from 150 complete field responses.

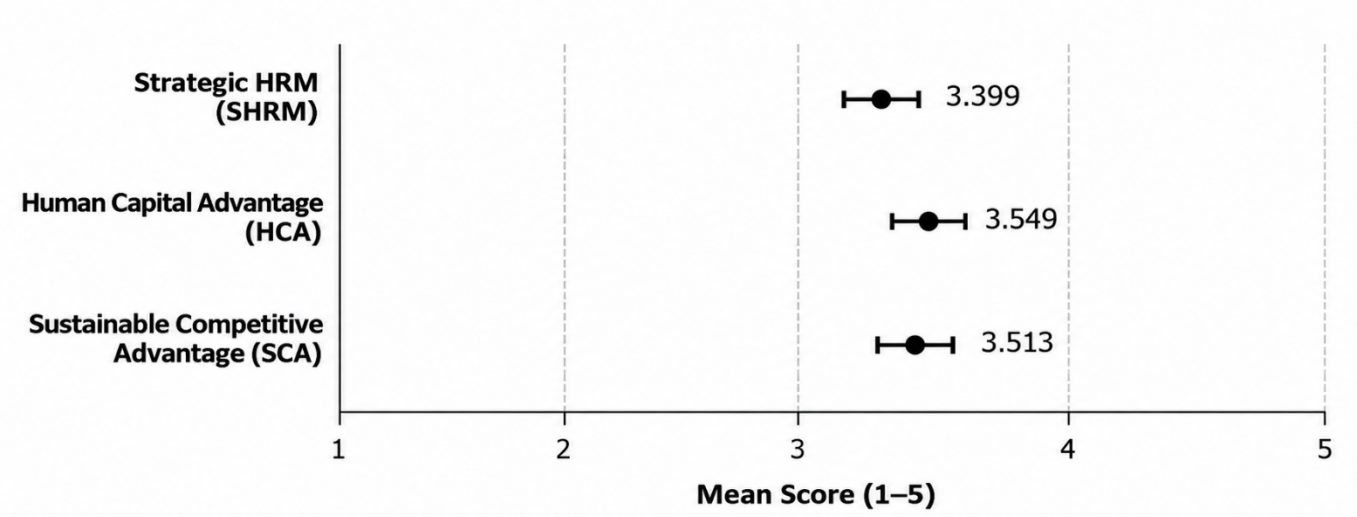

Image 2. Mean scores of the three constructs with 95% normal-approximation confidence intervals for the sample means; scale 1–5. Source: authors' analysis.

Dimension means varied. SHRM training and development averaged 3.500, while compensation and rewards averaged 3.350. Within HCA, abilities averaged 3.690 and skills averaged 3.463. Service innovation, one possible expression of organizational uniqueness, averaged 3.557; sustainability of advantage averaged 3.467. These scores do not measure newly created innovations or distinctive organizational configurations. They identify areas to investigate when examining whether knowledge, coordination, operating routines, and adaptive capability can be combined into unique and demonstrably valuable organizational practices.

Convergent and discriminant measurement evidence

In the supplementary correlated three-factor CFA, composite reliability exceeded 0.85 for each construct, but AVE values remained below the commonly used 0.50 benchmark (Table 3). Standardized loading ranges were approximately 0.500-0.688 for SHRM, 0.537-0.681 for HCA, and 0.561-0.733 for SCA. Overall model fit was mixed: chi-square(461) = 763.92, CFI = 0.826, TLI = 0.813, RMSEA = 0.066, and SRMR = 0.066. The CFI and TLI values caution against strong convergent-validity claims under this specification. Reliability alone does not establish that the items capture the intended differentiation or uniqueness mechanism.

Table 3. Supplementary measurement model diagnostics

Construct	AVE	CR	Std. loading range	AVE ≥ 0.50
SHRM	0.375	0.856	0.500–0.688	No
HCA	0.373	0.855	0.537–0.681	No
SCA	0.381	0.880	0.561–0.733	No

Note: CFA estimated as three correlated factors using ML on item covariances. The values are a supplementary model-based check and do not replace previous validation results obtained under another specification. CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

Discriminant separation was more favorable. HTMT ratios were 0.585 for SHRM–HCA, 0.481 for SHRM–SCA, and 0.591 for HCA–SCA. Their bootstrap 95% intervals did not approach 1.0, and the Fornell–Larcker diagonal values exceeded the pairwise factor correlations under this model. Nonetheless, acceptable HTMT values do not cancel the lower-than-target AVE or weaknesses in global model fit. These two sets of evidence address different questions and must be interpreted jointly (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 4. HTMT discriminant-validity ratios and percentile intervals

Construct pair	HTMT	Bootstrap CI 95%	HTMT < 0.85
SHRM–HCA	0.585	[0.458, 0.715]	Yes
SHRM–SCA	0.481	[0.363, 0.617]	Yes
HCA–SCA	0.591	[0.469, 0.709]	Yes

Note: HTMT based on absolute inter-item correlations; percentile intervals from 2,000 paired resamples. These results refer to a particular three-factor model.

Direct associations and the indirect pathway

Regression models showed positive associations among the three observed composite scores. SHRM was associated with HCA (a = 0.485, R-squared = 0.252) and with SCA (c = 0.409, R-squared = 0.173). In the joint SCA model, the HCA coefficient was 0.409 and the SHRM coefficient was 0.211 (R-squared = 0.294). HC3-robust intervals for these coefficients excluded zero. The Breusch-Pagan test indicated heteroskedasticity in the SHRM-HCA model (p = 0.028), warranting robust inference. These findings support score-level associations but do not establish that organizational uniqueness in processes, collective knowledge, or market value has actually been created.

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Table 5. OLS path estimates with HC3-robust inference

Path (model)	B	Robust SE	95% robust CI	R^2
SHRM → HCA (a)	0.485	0.070	[0.347, 0.623]	0.252
SHRM → SCA total (c)	0.409	0.069	[0.275, 0.543]	0.173
SHRM → SCA adjusted (c′)	0.211	0.068	[0.077, 0.344]	0.294
HCA → SCA adjusted (b)	0.409	0.068	[0.277, 0.542]	0.294

Note: SHRM, HCA, and SCA are mean scores; B coefficients are unstandardized. Robust SEs/intervals use HC3. The last two rows refer to one joint model; R^2 is repeated for clarity.

The estimated indirect association was a × b = 0.1985. In 5,000 resamples of respondent records, the 95% percentile confidence interval was [0.1178, 0.2928], excluding zero. The decomposition identity c = c′ + ab held within rounding (0.4091 ≈ 0.2106 + 0.1985). Accordingly, H1–H4 received statistical support in the prespecified composite-score regressions. This statement is conditional on the operationalized measures and does not convert the regression coefficients into evidence that SHRM causes human-capital accumulation or that HCA subsequently causes lasting market advantage.

Company-validated contextual evidence

The research team confirmed that the company had internally validated three groups of evidence: (1) organization-specific routines and capability combinations, (2) relative differentiation from comparable competitors, and (3) persistence of the advantage. These records are commercially sensitive and therefore not appended to the public manuscript. No numerical benchmark values, comparison period, or repeated company-level observations are disclosed here; as a result, this confirmation is reported as organizational contextual evidence rather than as an additional tested construct, a longitudinal effect estimate, or a fourth data source for the regression. The distinction preserves the company's confidentiality while avoiding the inference that a questionnaire association independently demonstrates uniqueness creation.

Interpretation in dialogue with prior evidence

The positive SHRM-HCA association is compatible with the proposition that coordinated HR practices accompany workforce capabilities. Creating organizational uniqueness, however, requires integrating those capabilities into a valuable architecture that competitors cannot readily reproduce. Firm-specific technical knowledge, linked safety routines, cross-unit problem solving, and tacit-knowledge transfer are plausible mechanisms (Wright & McMahan, 1992; Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011; Coff & Rickley, 2021). The questionnaire's HCA items do not independently quantify rarity, imitation barriers, or newly established organizational routines; that distinction does not negate the company's separately confirmed internal evidence.

The positive indirect association is consistent with earlier evidence on HR-related intermediate mechanisms, although the measured mediators differ. Hamadamin and Atan (2019) considered human capital development and commitment, whereas Alfawaire and Atan (2021) addressed innovation. These comparisons support studying pathways by which skills and HR systems can be combined into distinctive configurations. The R-squared value of 0.294 describes variation in an employee-rated SCA score; it must not be interpreted as the proportion of organizational uniqueness created or as an effect size from internal company benchmarking.

Comparative evidence underscores the boundary between human capital as an input and organizational uniqueness as an outcome. In Indonesian services, Masyhuri et al. (2024) studied how learning and innovation connect human capital with organizational performance. Korry et al. (2024) examined the insufficiency of human capital alone for sustained advantage in weaving SMEs. Putthima et al. (2026) reported mixed human-capital coefficients in Thai logistics, while Yuwono et al. (2024) showed the relevance of human-resource quality to port-service outcomes. Their contexts and measurement levels differ from PT XXYZ; none substitutes for a direct numerical company-level uniqueness outcome in the current regression.

For management, the principal task is to create organizational uniqueness rather than merely label a service distinctive. This can involve a difficult-to-copy configuration of technical expertise, coordinated operating routines, knowledge retention, digital integration, process innovation, and customer value creation. The research team reports that evidence covering these organizational domains, competitor-relative assessment, and continuity has been validated internally by the company. Because the supporting indicators and underlying records are confidential, the

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present article does not publish a quantitative ranking, a comparison effect size, or a duration claim. The relatively lower compensation-and-rewards mean (3.350) is a descriptive signal for review, not proof that compensation causes differentiation.

The supplemental measurement results place important qualifications on interpretation. Cronbach's alpha and CR above 0.85 indicate internal consistency, whereas AVE below 0.50 and CFI/TLI below common fit benchmarks weaken an unqualified three-factor validity claim. HTMT below 0.85 favors separation of constructs under the assessed specification, but it does not directly establish rarity, uniqueness creation, or sustainability. The internally validated company evidence and the statistical survey are complementary sources with different units of analysis; they should not be combined into an unreported fifth construct or causal pathway.

All three tested constructs were reported by employees at one time point. Shared response tendencies, reverse associations, and omitted conditions remain viable explanations (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Maxwell & Cole, 2007). The company-level verification described by the researchers may provide contextual support for distinctiveness and persistence, but the confidential comparison metrics and period-specific observations were not part of the disclosed quantitative dataset. Hence, the strongest independently reproducible claim in this manuscript concerns the SHRM-HCA-SCA score pathway, while the organizational uniqueness contribution is an interpretation supported by internally confirmed contextual evidence.

CONCLUSION

In 150 actual field responses from PT XXYZ, higher SHRM scores were associated with higher HCA and SCA composite scores. The estimated indirect association through HCA was 0.1985 (95% bootstrap CI [0.1178, 0.2928]); the joint model explained 29.4% of the variation in SCA ratings. The strategic argument extends beyond service differentiation: human capital may enable distinctive organizational configurations of expertise, coordination, routines, technology, and innovation. Researchers confirmed internal company validation concerning organizational distinctiveness, competitor comparisons, and durability, but the underlying protected metrics are not reported as quantitative results in this article.

The survey supports associations and internal reliability but not causal uniqueness creation. Supplementary CFA yielded AVE below 0.50 and weaker CFI/TLI fit, even as HTMT values supported discriminant separation under the tested specification. The practical implication is to develop distinctive resource combinations and evaluate them with operational, comparative, and temporal evidence while protecting commercially sensitive information. Public reporting should not equate internal corporate confirmation with an independently estimated organizational effect. Within these limits, the SHRM-HCA-SCA association provides a defensible empirical foundation for a broader organizational uniqueness strategy.

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