

Article

# Experience at Work: Why Employees Experience Their Work Differently

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## Abstract

Research on Employee Experience Management (EXM) has traditionally emphasized demographic segmentation—age, gender, or educational level—as the main differentiators in how employees perceive their career path within organizations. However, this demographic focus shows fragmented evidence and limited explanatory power regarding the mechanisms that truly shape EX. To fill this gap, this study proposes a structural and contextual reformulation of EX segmentation, arguing that employee experiences vary less depending on who they are and more depending on their position within organizational systems. Using data from 403 employees across various sectors and an 18-item EXM scale covering Reputation, Recruitment, Physical, Technical, and Cultural Experiences, we performed *t*-tests, ANOVAs, cluster analysis, and effect size estimates. Findings show that hierarchical position is the main predictor of EX in the dimensions of Physical, Technical, and Cultural Experience, as well as in the overall dimensions, while demographic differences—especially age and education—are negligible. Employee seniority and organisational size have a significant impact on Cultural Experience, which emphasizes how socialisation and organisational structure shape the EX. These findings reveal that EX segmentation is essentially structural, underscoring the necessity of EXM strategies that prioritize employees, particularly those without management functions, and enhance cultural integration through leader communication and onboarding procedures.

**Keywords:** employee experience; individual characteristics; career position; organisational context; hierarchical level; cultural experience; HRM; EXM

## 1. Introduction

In today's work environments, Employee Experience (EX) has gone from being a transactional concern for Human Resource (HR) to a strategic priority across the entire organisation. EX is defined by several authors as the holistic and subjective perception that employees build up through touchpoints during their professional journey in the organisation, integrating the physical, technological and cultural domains (Morgan, 2017; Mohanty & Kulkarni, 2023; Plaskoff, 2017; Lee & Kim, 2023). This multifaceted perspective is in line with contemporary Human Resource Management (HRM) trends that link EX to engagement, commitment, and performance in unpredictable and hybrid settings. Employees' perceptions of work are influenced by their demographics, particularly flexibility, purpose, and digital autonomy, according to recent studies on digital transformation, digital employee experience, and multigenerational dynamics (Santos et al., 2025; Saraiva &



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Nogueiro, 2025; Al-Omari et al., 2025). Uncertain and even contradictory empirical conclusions regarding demographic differences are the result of a fragmented body of evidence and inconsistent effects, according to several analyses (Das & Dhan, 2023; Andrés-Reina et al., 2024; Grover & Chawla, 2022).

Building on this observation, the present study problematizes the dominant logic of EX segmentation. Predominant approaches tend to privilege who employees are (age, gender, educational level) while potentially neglecting how organisations are structured—namely, hierarchical position, seniority and organisational size—which determine employees' access to resources, autonomy, information and cultural integration (Morgan, 2017; Lee & Kim, 2023; Al-Omari et al., 2025). Therefore, we argue that the demographic emphasis may be theoretically incomplete and that EX could be better understood through a structural–contextual perspective that prioritizes organisational design and sociotechnical systems.

Despite the growing attention to EX, literature continues to rely predominantly on demographic indicators to explain variation in experience. However, demographic predictors often produce unstable or modest effects, suggesting limited explanatory power on how EX is formed within organisations (Das & Dhan, 2023; Grover & Chawla, 2022; Andrés-Reina et al., 2024). What is under-theorized is the role of organisational mechanisms—the distribution of resources and autonomy, proximity to leadership and decision-making, and the cumulative cultural integration that accumulates with seniority and organisational size. This reveals the following conceptual gap: EX may be shaped less by individual attributes and more by structural conditions embedded in organisational contexts. The empirical contrast between these two segmentation logics (demographic versus structural/contextual) can therefore clarify which levers are most significant for EXM.

Several theoretical perspectives help explain why structural positioning may shape EX more strongly than demographic attributes. Job Characteristics Theory highlights that autonomy, task significance and access to information depend on one's role within the organisational hierarchy (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Social Exchange Theory suggests that employees develop more favourable perceptions when they receive resources, support and discretionary benefits from the organisation (Blau, 2017), all of which are distributed asymmetrically across hierarchical levels. Power and status theories further emphasize that positional authority shapes voice, psychological safety and exposure to risk (A. Edmondson, 1999; Bunderson & Reagans, 2011). From a resource-based perspective, Conservation of Resources theory proposes that those occupying higher roles accumulate more tangible and psychosocial resources (Hobfoll, 1989), placing them in structurally advantaged experiential conditions.

Building on these perspectives, this study proposes that EX segmentation should be understood as a competing logic, that is, demographic segmentation versus structural segmentation. Whereas the former assumes that experience varies according to who employees are, the latter suggests that experience is shaped by where employees are positioned within organisational systems and by the resources, autonomy and cultural integration associated with that position (Morgan, 2017; Lee & Kim, 2023). This reframing offers a theoretical contribution by challenging the demographic emphasis prevailing in EX research (Das & Dhan, 2023; Grover & Chawla, 2022) and advancing a structural–contextual explanation grounded in organisational design, resource distribution and sociotechnical systems (Sungailé et al., 2024; Al-Omari et al., 2025).

This theoretical shift from a person-centered view to a position-centered view of the employee experience is closely aligned with recent developments in Talent Management research. Studies in Strategic Human Resource Management demonstrate that contemporary Talent Management differentiates employees not primarily by demographic characteristics, but by the structural importance of the positions they hold within the organisation

(Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Becker & Huselid, 2006). These authors argue that the creation of organisational value increasingly depends on “pivotal positions,” that is, positions differ in terms of access to autonomy, information flows, decision-making authority, and cultural integration, rather than individual characteristics such as age or gender. In parallel, recent research highlights that traditional talent approaches continue to rely on excessively binary and individualized distinctions, which obscure the structural conditions that shape the employee experience at work (Vardi & Collings, 2023). This reinforces the need for a more nuanced and systemic understanding of the employee experience, one that recognizes how organisational design, resource allocation, and hierarchical positioning generate differentiated experiential conditions. By framing the segmentation of the employee experience (EX) as position-centric, this study builds directly on this line of reasoning and challenges the assumption that demographic categories remain the primary determinants of experiential variation in contemporary organisations.

Guided by this gap, we pursue two objectives: (i) to test whether the perception of EX differs between individual profiles (age, gender, educational qualifications), career profiles (hierarchical level, seniority), and organisational profiles (sector, nature/type, size); and (ii) to identify which segmentation levers are most relevant for interventions aimed at managing EX. We approached these objectives using a multi-sector sample and a validated EX measure that encompasses reputational, recruitment, physical, technical, and cultural dimensions. We thus present a clear theoretical proposal by redefining the logic of segmentation in EX, shifting the analytical focus from who the employees are to how organisations are structured. Framing EX as a socio-structural phenomenon based on resource access, autonomy, and cultural integration, this study encourages further research beyond systemic explanations, organisational design, and demographic characteristics. Thus, this viewpoint is consistent with recent bibliometric research showing that organisational learning, knowledge management, and psychological safety function as structural mechanisms that influence EX at work (P. Figueiredo et al., 2025).

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses

### 2.1. Employee Experience as a Multidimensional Construct

EX has established itself as a central paradigm in contemporary HRM, defined as the holistic and subjective perception that an individual develops throughout all interactions and touchpoints in their organisational journey (Mohanty & Kulkarni, 2023; Morgan, 2017; Plaskoff, 2017; Yadav & Vihari, 2021). Unlike traditional concepts such as engagement or satisfaction, EX covers the entire employee lifecycle, from initial recruitment to the post-employment period (Başar, 2024; P. C. N. Figueiredo et al., 2025b; Grover & Chawla, 2025; P. Yang & Zhang, 2025).

Jacob Morgan’s theoretical framework is fundamental to understanding this multidimensional nature, structuring EX into three critical environments (Morgan, 2017): the physical environment (workspace and flexibility), the technological environment (digital tools and systems), and the cultural environment (values, leadership, and relationships). This model posits that EX attributes are bilateral, positively impacting both individual performance and organisational effectiveness when properly managed.

Lee and Kim’s (2023) research reinforces this view by demonstrating, through empirical evidence, that the physical, technological, and cultural dimensions act as critical resources that directly influence employees’ organisational commitment. According to these authors, investing in the quality of these experiences is essential to strengthen the bond between the individual and the organisation, especially in highly competitive contexts (Lee & Kim, 2023). Complementarily, the work of Sungailé et al. (2024) focuses on validat-

ing the conditions that shape EX, establishing it as a decisive predictor of engagement and a determining factor in the intention to leave the organisation.

Through the lens of the Conservation of Resources Theory (CRO), EX can be understood as a system of socio-technical and psychosocial resources that, when integrated, promote employee resonance and vitality (Al-Omari et al., 2025). Thus, EX ceases to be seen as an accidental byproduct of management and becomes a deliberate organisational design strategy (P. C. N. Figueiredo et al., 2025a; Plaskoff, 2017). The transition to experience-based HRM requires organisations to abandon one-dimensional control models in favor of approaches that value the intrinsic needs and subjective motivation of their workforce (P. Yang & Zhang, 2025).

According to the literature, EX has changed from discrete satisfaction measures to multifaceted, holistic models that incorporate technological, cultural, and physical environments. A summary of the primary scales and measurement models is shown in Table 1, along with the dimensions that make up each one.

**Table 1.** Scales and Measurement Models of EX.

Author(s)	Dimensions/Main Constructs	Scale/Measurement
Morgan (2017)	Physical Environment, Technological Environment, and Cultural Environment.	17 attributes (reduced to 12 in recent validations) that intersect with expectations and organisational design.
Yadav and Vihari (2021)	(1) Cohesion, (2) Vigor, (3) Well-being, (4) Achievement, (5) Inclusivity, and (6) Physical Environment.	61-item scale validated with multinational workers.
Patil et al. (2023)	Leadership, HR Practices, Organisational Culture, and Company Image.	21-item multidimensional scale focused on academic workers.
Lee and Kim (2023)	Physical Experience, Technological Experience, and Cultural Experience.	This study analyzes how these dimensions act as resources that influence organisational commitment and well-being, focusing on the context of South Korea.
Sungailé et al. (2024)	Reputation, Recruitment Process, Physical Environment, Cultural Environment, Relationship with Former Employees	Construct validation focused on the impact on employee engagement and intention to leave the organisation.
Acuña-Hurtado et al. (2024)	Dimensions adapted to the educational context (Physics, Technology, Culture).	Focus on primary school teachers in Peru.
P. Yang and Zhang (2025)	Related to Work, Interpersonal Harmony, Organisational Management, Professional Development, and Compensation.	Validated 20-item scale based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in the Chinese context.
Al-Omari et al. (2025)	Digital Autonomy, Inclusivity, Sustainability, AI, Design, Agility, and Well-being.	Employee Experience Capital (EEC): focuses on integrated socio-technical resources for performance.
Mohanty and Kulkarni (2025)	Work (Environment, Skills Development), Career (Leadership, Feedback, Growth), and Care (Well-being).	Integration between task execution, professional growth, and interpersonal support.
Gheidar and Zanjani (2021)	Strategy, Technology, Physical Environment, Leadership, Career, Brand, People, and Culture.	Focus on Digital Employee Experience (DEX) with 70 items to measure digital maturity.
Ameu et al. (2024)	Business Strategy, Technology, Physical Environment, Leadership, Career, Brand, and Culture.	Content validation for DEX (38 final items accepted by experts).

Own source.

Although Morgan's model is the most widely cited for measuring EX, new scales have emerged, providing greater accuracy in current contexts. The choice of EX measurement scale should therefore be aligned with the organisation's profile and even with the technological maturity of the workforce itself.

EX is a complex concept that includes data, digital activity, and interpersonal relationships. Metrics that evaluate both productivity and experience quality are therefore required (P. C. N. Figueiredo, 2025; P. C. N. Figueiredo et al., 2026). Because EX is subjective, employees interpret these characteristics considering their personal and professional experiences as well as the culture of the employer. Thus, this variability reinforces the need to segment the workforce for effective strategic employee management. This assumption is supported by data demonstrating that psychologically safe settings and trust-based climates enhance collaboration, communication, and learning—all of which are critical elements of EX (P. Figueiredo et al., 2025).

Several theoretical traditions reinforce the idea that EX is shaped primarily by structural rather than demographic factors. Job Characteristics Theory argues that autonomy, task complexity and access to information depend on one's position in the organisational system, not on individual attributes (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Social Exchange Theory further suggests that favourable work perceptions arise when employees receive support, discretion and resources from the organisation (Blau, 2017), all of which are distributed asymmetrically across hierarchical levels. Power and status theories also show that positional authority shapes psychological safety, voice and exposure to interpersonal risk (A. Edmondson, 1999; Bunderson & Reagans, 2011). From a resource-based perspective, Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory proposes that those in structurally advantaged roles accumulate materially and psychologically protective resources (Hobfoll, 1989), thereby experiencing work more positively. These perspectives jointly provide a theoretical basis for understanding EX as a structurally conditioned phenomenon.

## 2.2. Individual Characteristics and Employee Experience

Employees' perception of organisational experience is influenced by their individual profiles and demographic characteristics, which, in turn, influence their demands, motivations, and perceptions of the work environment (Başar, 2024; P. Yang & Zhang, 2025). Due to the subjective nature of EX, employees' reactions to organisational stimuli depend on their developmental stages and career paths (Grover & Chawla, 2022).

According to Erwina (2022), Ince (2022), and Joaquim and Figueiredo (2023), age and generational diversity seem to be important differentiators. Because employees at different stages of life tend to prioritize different aspects of the employment relationship, prior research indicates that experiential expectations vary across age groups (Mohanty & Kulkarni, 2025). Generations Y and Z, being digital natives, are more critical of technological usability and onboarding procedures, whereas older employees tend to value organisational stability and company reputation (Santos et al., 2025). Non-monetary elements like flexibility, well-being, and digital autonomy are the primary reasons that attract and retain these young people (Al-Omari et al., 2025; Mohanty & Kulkarni, 2025). Additionally, the fact that almost 40% of all turnovers happen in the first year of employment, disproportionately harming fresh talent who have not yet produced a return on the company's investment, highlights the importance of EX (Kim, 2025). According to Laia and Palupiningtyas (2025), EX is therefore an essential instrument for managing the expectations of a workforce that values inclusive leadership and meaningful work.

Although demographic differences are frequently assumed in EX research, empirical findings remain mixed and often inconsistent across contexts (Das & Dhan, 2023; Grover & Chawla, 2022). Therefore, the following hypotheses adopt an exploratory stance to-

ward the potential influence of demographic characteristics on EX. These ideas underpin Hypothesis 1 (H1):

**H1.** *Employees' perceived EX may vary by age.*

HR and well-being studies have shown that gender affects how people view organisational situations (Jindal et al., 2024; Ramalho & Porto, 2021). As a result, gender greatly influences the experience. Perceptions of psychological safety and fairness are generally lower among women (Ramalho & Porto, 2021). Because of this, gender differences appear in many facets of the experience, with female employees placing a higher value on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and work–life balance (Das & Dhan, 2023; Saraiva & Nogueiro, 2025). This research thus supports Hypothesis 2 (H2):

**H2.** *Employees' perceived EX may vary by gender.*

According to Laia and Palupiningtyas (2025) and M. Yang et al. (2025), the level of educational qualifications affects EX by increasing expectations for organisational behaviours. According to Laia and Palupiningtyas (2025), employees with higher education levels tend to express a larger desire for career prospects and expect greater transparency in the recruitment, development, and communication processes. These high expectations influence how EX is evaluated, leading to differentiated perceptions according to the human capital invested. In contrast, low levels of education have been associated with a greater 'willingness to leave', since these individuals may be forced to accept roles without the proper skills alignment or preparation, hindering their journey within the organisation (Gulo & Hidayat, 2025). This evidence supports the formulation of Hypothesis 3 (H3):

**H3.** *Employees' perceived EX may vary by educational level.*

### 2.3. Career Position and Employee Experience

An employee's journey within an organisation, defined by their seniority and hierarchical position, constitutes one of the most powerful filters in interpreting EX. According to Jindal et al. (2024), employee seniority is associated with cultural alignment, a sense of belonging, and familiarity with organisational norms. Greater seniority can foster stronger bonds and deeper cultural integration, but on the other hand, it can reveal organisational deficiencies, particularly regarding early career experiences (Kim, 2025). More senior employees serve not only as knowledge bases but also assess how the company updates its resources over time.

Given that hierarchical position determines access to autonomy, information, support and resource flows (A. Edmondson, 1999; Bunderson & Reagans, 2011), career-related attributes are expected to differentiate EX more strongly than demographic variables. This dynamic of perception underlies Hypothesis 4 (H4):

**H4.** *Employees' perceived EX may vary by seniority in the company.*

The hierarchical level of employees is a critical determinant of autonomy, decision-making processes, and access to resources (Jindal et al., 2024; Okolie et al., 2021). Management or supervisory positions are considered a key moderator when studying EX (Alam et al., 2024). Employees in management positions not only view HR practices more favorably but also have defense and support mechanisms that make them more resilient to organisational failures. Therefore, they gain more authority over their workplace, exclusive access to strategic data, and greater support from the organisational system (Jindal et al.,

2024). Non-managerial employees, on the other hand, depend exclusively on the quality of direct leadership to determine their career path.

Psychological safety, a crucial component of EX, is a direct reflection of this power disparity (A. C. Edmondson, 2019). Empirical studies conducted in work contexts have identified a significant trend between organisational status and psychological safety (Rodrigues & Figueiredo, 2025). The perception of a safe environment to take risks and innovate increases substantially as the employee ascends to management and service leadership positions (Ramalho & Porto, 2021). In contrast, employees at operational or lower-status levels often tend to opt for silence to avoid being perceived as ignorant or disruptive by managers.

This asymmetry of experiences between different levels of the organisational structure supports Hypothesis 5 (H5):

**H5.** *Employees' perceived EX may vary by hierarchical level.*

#### 2.4. Organisational Context and Employee Experience

Before examining the organisational context variables, it is important to clarify the analytical stance adopted in this study. The profile categories included in the conceptual model do not represent equivalent segmentation logics. Instead, the model contrasts two theoretical approaches: one based on demographic segmentation and another based on structural–contextual segmentation. The latter is grounded in organisational design, access to resources and employees' structural positioning. Accordingly, the model functions as a comparative analytical framework rather than implying equal theoretical weight or predictive strength across all categories.

Factors within the organisational context, such as the nature and size of the organisation and its sector of activity, decisively shape the availability of resources, HR practices, and the structural complexity of organisations (Leuhery, 2024; Soeling et al., 2022). Larger organisations and those in the private sector tend to invest more robustly in employer branding strategies, advanced technological infrastructure, and formalized HR practices to attract and retain talent (Andrés-Reina et al., 2024; Santos et al., 2025).

Recent mappings of organisational learning cultures reinforce the idea that psychologically safe environments and effective knowledge-sharing practices contribute to more favourable experiential climates (P. Figueiredo et al., 2025).

The literature highlights significant contrasts between the public and private sectors; while the public sector is often associated with more autocratic leadership, bound by rigid regulations, the private sector demonstrates greater agility in implementing experience platforms and a focus on creating value for its stakeholders (Okolie et al., 2021). These differences in strategy and interpersonal processes support the idea that the nature of ownership influences the employee's journey, grounding Hypothesis 6 (H6):

**H6.** *Employees' perceived EX may vary by organisational nature/type.*

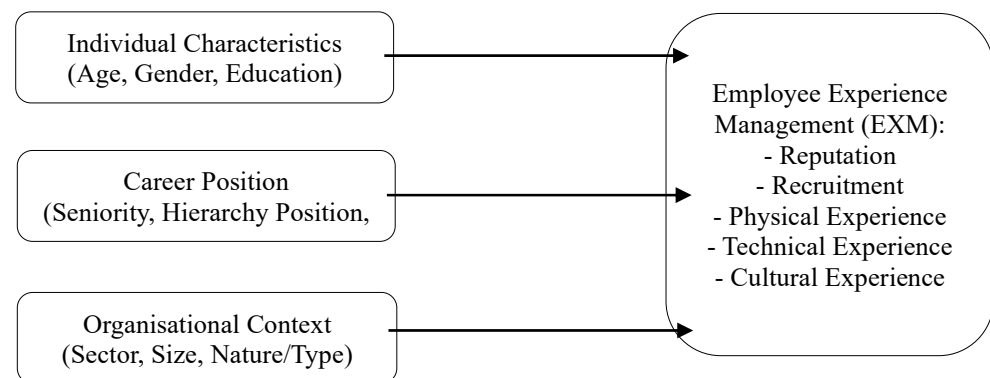
Organisational size also acts as a conditioning factor for EX, since increasing company size generates greater structural complexity and a growing need for formalized onboarding, monitoring, and communication systems (Kulkarni & Mohanty, 2024; Santos et al., 2025; Stup et al., 2025). While large multinationals use AI-based HR ecosystems to manage experience on a global scale, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) adopt EX as a central component of their agility and digital transformation strategy (Laia & Palupiningtyas, 2025; Malik et al., 2023). This structural variability supports the formulation of the seventh hypothesis (H7):

### H7. *Employees' perceived EX may vary by organizational size.*

Finally, EX is modulated by the sector of activity, as each industry faces specific challenges that redefine management priorities. In the Information Technology (IT) sector, experience is dominated by the need for retention in the face of a critical shortage of qualified professionals, while in high-risk sectors such as Healthcare and Aviation, EX focuses on the psychological safety needed to avoid fatal errors (Newman et al., 2017; Santos et al., 2025). In contrast, in sectors such as Agriculture, clarity of roles and safety training are the primary elements of lived experience (Stup et al., 2025). Based on this evidence, the final hypothesis (Hypothesis 8) is formulated:

### H8. *Employees' perceived EX may vary across sectors.*

Contemporary research on EX highlights that employee experience is best understood as a multidimensional construct shaped by the interactions between individual characteristics, career-related attributes, and organisational conditions. Validated EX measures developed by Lee and Kim (2023), which emphasize physical, technological, and cultural environments, and the scale proposed by Sungailé et al. (2024), which incorporates reputation and recruitment processes, provide a comprehensive basis for conceptualizing EX. Based on this evidence, the present study integrates these profile categories and the dimensions of EX into a conceptual model that guides the formulation of the eight hypotheses. Figure 1 presents this model, illustrating how individual, career, and organisational profiles should shape perceptions of the five dimensions of EXM.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model. Own source.

It is important to note that the conceptual model does not assume the same theoretical weight across all profile categories. Instead, the three groups of variables (individual, career, and organisational) are treated as analytically distinct domains, whose relative influence on EX is an empirical question. Therefore, the model illustrates the conceptual structure of the study but does not imply equivalence in explanatory power across categories.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. *Sample and Procedures*

The study was conducted in Portugal and reflects the organisational, cultural and labour-market context of Portuguese employees. It used a non-probabilistic, heterogeneous sample of 403 employees working in organisations from different sectors and organisational contexts. Although the sample includes participants from both private and public organisations and represents multiple hierarchical levels and educational backgrounds, its composition does not allow claims of statistical representativeness. Instead, the sample

should be understood as capturing a broad range of employee profiles, enabling exploratory examination of the segmentation logic underlying EX.

Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 68 years ( $M = 41.99$ ), and 64.0% of the respondents were women and occupied different hierarchical positions, including non-managerial roles and operational, middle, and top management positions. The sample included employees from both private (72.7%) and public (23.1%) organisations, predominantly from the tertiary sector (85.4%), and from organisations of varying sizes, with a higher representation of large organisations (more than 250 employees). These characteristics reflect the natural distribution of the professional networks through which the survey link circulated and are typical of convenience and snowball sampling procedures (Dragan & Isaic-Maniu, 2022). Such imbalances may restrict the variability needed to detect differences across sectors or organisational types, and this limitation is explicitly recognized in the interpretation of H6–H8. However, the heterogeneity within hierarchical levels, educational backgrounds and organisational sizes provides sufficient variance for testing structural segmentation patterns related to EX.

Data were collected between October and December 2025 through an online questionnaire disseminated on professional networks, direct contact with organisations, and institutional mailing lists. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were offered. As the survey link was distributed through open professional channels and organisational contacts, it was not possible to calculate the exact response rate. However, all completed responses that met the inclusion criteria (employment relationship and complete completion of the EXM scale) were retained for analysis.

Anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation were guaranteed, and informed consent was obtained on the first page of the online questionnaire. No identifying or sensitive personal data were collected. The study involved only anonymous, minimal-risk survey research with adults and is exempt from Ethics Committee approval under Portuguese Law No. 58/2019 (GDPR implementation).

### 3.2. Measures

EX was assessed using items adapted from two validated instruments: the Physical, Technological, and Cultural Experience scale developed by Lee and Kim (2023) and the Reputation and Recruitment multidimensional scale validated by Sungailé et al. (2024).

The combined 18-item EX measure used in this study was derived from these structures and organized into five dimensions: Reputation (4 items), Recruitment (4 items), Physical Experience (3 items), Technical Experience (3 items) and Cultural Experience (4 items). Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The 18-item EXM scale showed adequate internal consistency across all five dimensions (Reputation  $\alpha = 0.70$ ; Recruitment  $\alpha = 0.79$ ; Physical Experience  $\alpha = 0.74$ ; Technical Experience  $\alpha = 0.79$ ; Cultural Experience  $\alpha = 0.88$ ), confirming the reliability of the adapted version for this sample.

To validate the measurement model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in AMOS (v29). The five-factor EXM structure demonstrated acceptable fit ( $\chi^2/df = 2.64$ ; CFI = 0.895; TLI = 0.886; RMSEA = 0.064, 90% CI [0.061–0.066]; SRMR = 0.053), consistent with recommended thresholds for models with multiple indicators (Hair et al., 2018; Kline, 2023). All standardized factor loadings were significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and mostly above 0.50, supporting the coherence of the latent structure.

Internal consistency was high ( $\alpha = 0.89$  for the EXM total). Composite reliability values (CR > 0.90) and average variance extracted (AVE) values indicated strong convergent validity. Discriminant validity was confirmed following the Fornell–Larcker criterion, with the square root of AVE values exceeding corresponding inter-construct correlations.

All items were translated into Portuguese and back-translated into English by independent bilingual researchers, ensuring semantic equivalence. A pre-test with 12 employees confirmed clarity and cultural adequacy, requiring only minor wording adjustments.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Data analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 29). Prior to hypothesis testing, the psychometric properties of the measurement instruments were examined through principal component analysis (PCA) and Cronbach's alpha, confirming one-dimensionality of each factor and internal consistency of the scales.

Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients were computed for all study variables. The assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances were assessed using distributional indicators (Kolmogorov–Smirnov, Shapiro–Wilk, skewness and kurtosis), graphical inspection, and Levene's test, respectively. Given the large sample size, data were considered suitable for parametric analyses.

To test the research hypotheses, independent-samples *t*-tests and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed to examine differences in EX dimensions across individual and organisational profiles.

In addition to significance testing, effect sizes were computed to assess the magnitude and practical relevance of group differences. Hedges' *g* was used for *t*-tests and eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) for ANOVA models, following common recommendations in HRM research.

Before testing the hypotheses, preliminary analyses were conducted to examine the assumptions of normality and the potential presence of common method bias. Skewness and kurtosis values fell within acceptable ranges ( $|Sk| < 2$ ;  $|Ku| < 7$ ), and Mardia's coefficient did not indicate problematic multivariate non-normality, supporting the use of parametric tests.

As data were collected via a self-report questionnaire in a single wave, several diagnostics were performed. Harman's single-factor test revealed that the first factor accounted for 50.76% of the variance, a borderline but acceptable value. Variance inflation factors (VIF = 2.2–5.7) were below the conservative threshold of 10, and a single-factor CFA showed substantially poorer fit than the proposed measurement model. Together, these indicators suggest that common method variance is not a dominant concern.

Differences in EXM dimensions across individual, career and organisational profiles were tested using independent-samples *t*-tests and one-way ANOVA. Given the exploratory nature of the analysis, effect sizes (Hedges' *g* and  $\eta^2$ ) were reported to assess the practical relevance of group differences. Pearson correlations complemented the interpretation of associations between EXM dimensions.

To complement the hypothesis-driven tests, we conducted an exploratory cluster analysis to identify natural employee profiles based on the five EXM dimensions (Reputation, Recruitment, Physical Experience, Technical Experience, Cultural Experience). Because clustering is an unsupervised procedure, it was treated as an additional analytical objective, not associated with any formal hypothesis. To identify natural experiential profiles, a *k*-means clustering procedure was conducted. The selection of *K* = 2 was based on internal validation indices (silhouette = 0.356; Calinski–Harabasz = 301.84; Davies–Bouldin = 1.075) and on the interpretability and parsimony of the two-cluster solution.

Given the cross-sectional design, all findings reflect associations rather than causal effects.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The sample was predominantly composed of women (64%), highly educated employees, and workers from medium-to-large organisations. Educational qualifications were high, with 45.7% holding a bachelor's degree and 25.3% a master's degree. Regarding job roles, 45.7% were non-managers, while the remaining respondents were distributed across middle (25.3%), operational (17.1%), and top management levels (11.9%). Seniority in the company was heterogeneous, with 33.3% reporting that it was between 1 and 5 years in their current organisation and 17.4% more than 20 years (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Sample Socio-Demographic Characteristics.

Variable	N	%
Age (M = 41.99; DP = 11.37; Min = 19; Max = 68)	403	100
Gender		
Male	145	36.0
Female	258	64
Educational Qualifications		
Up to 9th grade	4	1.0
10th–12th grade	80	19.9
Bachelor's degree	184	45.7
Master's degree	102	25.3
Doctorate	33	8.2
Seniority in the company		
<1 year	68	16.9
1–5 years	134	33.3
6–10 years	64	15.9
11–20 years	67	16.6
>20 years	70	17.4
Hierarchical Level		
Top manager	48	11.9
Middle manager	102	25.3
Operational manager	69	17.1
Non-manager	184	45.7
Organisational Nature		
Public	93	23.1
Private	293	72.7
Other	17	4.2
Organisational Size		
<10 employees	37	9.2
10–50 employees	70	17.4
51–150 employees	72	17.9
151–250 employees	37	9.2
>250 employees	187	46.4
Sector/Industry		
Primary sector	5	1.2
Secondary sector	54	13.4
Tertiary sector	344	85.4

Most participants worked in private-sector organisations (72.7%), predominantly within the tertiary sector (85.4%), and nearly half were employed in large organisations with more than 250 employees (46.4%). Overall, the sample reflects a highly educated, service-sector workforce concentrated in medium-to-large organisations, providing a robust empirical base for the study of EX and organisational dynamics.

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients and correlations among the five EXM dimensions. All dimensions exhibited satisfactory internal consistency ( $\alpha \geq 0.70$ ). Correlations were positive and moderate to strong, supporting the multidimensional structure of EX.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlations.

Variable	M	SD	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5
EXM_Reputation	3.63	0.75	0.70	-				
EXM_Recruitment	3.57	0.77	0.79	0.76 **	-			
EXM_Physical Experience	3.48	0.93	0.74	0.72 **	0.75 **	-		
EXM_Technical Experience	3.53	0.88	0.79	0.69 **	0.71 **	0.78 **	-	
EXM_Cultural Experience	3.51	0.99	0.88	0.82 **	0.80 **	0.84 **	0.86 **	-

Note. N = 403. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

#### 4.2. Differences in EX Across Employee and Organisational Profiles

The analysis of the results presented in Table 4 reveals a clear pattern that EX is shaped primarily by structural factors within the organisation, rather than by the individual characteristics of employees. More than 'who' people are, what matters most is 'where' they are positioned within the structure and 'how' they interact with organisational systems and cultures.

**Table 4.** Differences in Employee Experience Across Employee and Organisational Profiles.

Profile Variable	EXM Dimension	Test	p-Value	Result
Age	All dimensions	Pearson r	>0.05	Not significant
Gender	EXM Total	t-test	<0.05	Significant
Gender	Physical Experience	t-test	<0.05	Significant
Gender	Cultural Experience	t-test	<0.05	Significant
Educational Qualifications	All dimensions	ANOVA	>0.05	Not significant
Seniority in the company	Cultural Experience	ANOVA	0.029	Significant
Hierarchical Level (Manager/No Manager)	All dimensions	t-test	<0.05	Significant
Hierarchical Level (Top manager, Middle manager, Operational manager, Non-manager)	EXM Total	ANOVA	<0.05	Significant
Hierarchical Level (Top manager, Middle manager, Operational manager, Non-manager)	Physical Experience	ANOVA	<0.05	Significant
Hierarchical Level (Top manager, Middle manager, Operational manager, Non-manager)	Technical Experience	ANOVA	<0.05	Significant
Hierarchical Level (Top manager, Middle manager, Operational manager, Non-manager)	Cultural Experience	ANOVA	<0.05	Significant
Organisational Nature	All dimensions	ANOVA	>0.05	Not significant
Organisational Size	Cultural Experience	ANOVA	0.014	Significant
Sector/Industry	All dimensions	ANOVA	>0.05	Not significant

Overall, the results indicate that hierarchical level shows the most consistent associations with differences in EXM dimensions. Although effect sizes are modest, the pattern is systematic across Physical, Technical and Cultural Experience, suggesting that structural positioning within the organisation is meaningfully related to how employees perceive

their work contexts. These findings align with theoretical perspectives linking role-based autonomy, resource access and decision-making proximity to experiential advantages.

In contrast, demographic characteristics such as age and educational level did not produce statistically significant differences. These null findings are theoretically informative, as they corroborate recent literature showing inconsistent or weak demographic effects on EX. However, they may also reflect restricted variability in the sample (e.g., high educational attainment and clustering in service-sector roles), which limits the ability to detect such differences. This dual interpretation is acknowledged and considered in the discussion.

Gender showed small but significant differences in overall EXM, Physical Experience and Cultural Experience. While effect sizes remain small, these results are aligned with prior studies showing that women tend to report lower perceptions of organisational fairness, psychological safety and support, which may subtly influence their EXM ratings. These patterns are consistent with research showing that women often report lower perceptions of organisational justice, inclusion and psychological safety due to heightened exposure to interpersonal risk and uneven distribution of informal support (Ramalho & Porto, 2021; A. Edmondson, 1999). Such mechanisms may contribute to subtle but systematic experiential disparities.

Seniority differences emerged only for Cultural Experience, suggesting that this dimension captures processes that develop gradually through exposure to organisational norms, routines and relational patterns. Larger organisations may offer more consolidated cultural ecosystems, with more stabilized communication flows, structured socialisation practices and clearer normative expectations. This interpretation aligns with theoretical views of culture as both a product of organisational history and a function of structural complexity.

The absence of significant differences for organisational nature, sector and industry may reflect a homogenization of EXM practices across organisational contexts or, alternatively, may stem from sample composition (e.g., 85.4% tertiary sector). This limitation is recognized and prevents overinterpretation of contextual null effects.

Although effect sizes were modest, such differences can accumulate over time in daily interactions, making them meaningful for HRM practice.

The results obtained provide partial support for the proposed conceptual model, as can be seen in the structured summary presented in Table 5.

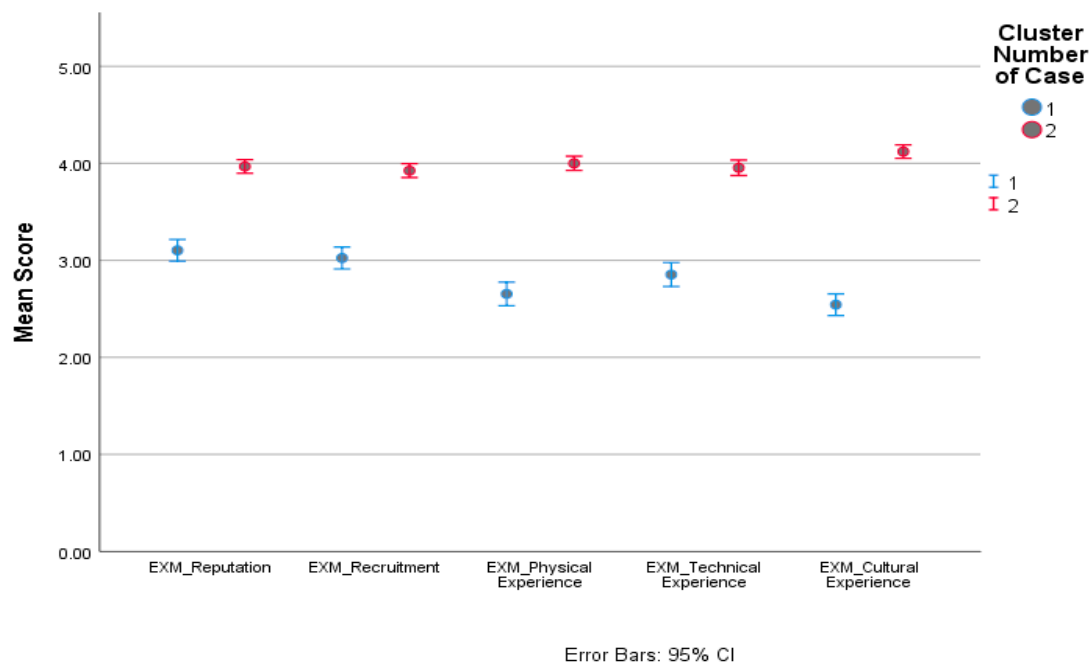
**Table 5.** Summary of Hypothesis Testing.

Hypothesis	Description	Result
H1	Age and EXM	Not supported
H2	Gender and EXM	Partially supported (EXM_Total, Technical Experience, Cultural Experience)
H3	Educational Qualification and EXM	Not supported
H4	Seniority in the company and EXM	Partially supported (EXM_Cultural Experience)
H5	Hierarchical Level and EXM	Supported
H6	Organisational Nature and EXM	Not supported
H7	Organisational Size and EXM	Partially supported (EXM_Cultural Experience)
H8	Sector/Industry and EXM	Not supported

#### 4.3. Exploratory Cluster Profiles of Employee Experience

The exploratory k-means analysis (K = 2) identified two distinct experiential profiles. Cluster 1 (N = 157) showed systematically lower scores across all EXM dimensions (Reputation: M = 3.10; Recruitment: M = 3.02; Physical Experience: M = 2.65; Technical Experience: M = 2.85; Cultural Experience: M = 2.54). Cluster 2 (N = 246) presented consistently higher scores (Reputation: M = 3.97; Recruitment: M = 3.92; Physical Experience: M = 4.00; Technical Experience: M = 3.95; Cultural Experience: M = 4.12). The largest separation between

clusters occurred in Cultural Experience, reinforcing the idea that cultural perceptions are particularly sensitive to structural and relational mechanisms within organisations. These patterns are visually represented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Employee Experience Profiles Based on Cluster Analysis. Note: Cluster 1—Lower EX Profile; Cluster 2—Higher EX Profile.

To enhance interpretability, the two clusters can be conceptualized as experiential personas. Cluster 1 reflects a profile we label Constrained Contributors: employees who report systematically lower scores across all EXM dimensions, typically experiencing reduced access to autonomy, information, physical resources and cultural clarity. This profile aligns with employees positioned closer to operational levels of the organisation, where resource asymmetries and limited decision latitude are more salient. In contrast, Cluster 2 represents Empowered Integrators: employees who experience consistently higher levels of physical, technical and cultural support, greater informational access and clearer integration into organisational norms and communication flows. These personas provide an intuitive basis for practitioners to design structurally sensitive EXM strategies that target resource access, leadership involvement, and cultural onboarding in differentiated ways.

This pattern suggests that Cultural Experience captures deeper qualitative aspects of work, such as communication routines, coherence of norms, socialisation processes and relational atmosphere, that tend to vary more sharply across structural positions. Unlike the more operational Physical or Technical Experience dimensions, Cultural Experience reflects deeper interpretive processes stemming from organisational history, relational patterns and the stability of norms. This helps explain why this dimension shows greater separation between clusters.

ANOVA on composite EXM Total confirmed substantial differences between clusters ( $F = 737.70$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Age did not differ significantly between the profiles ( $p = 0.133$ ), reinforcing the broader pattern of weak demographic segmentation.

Cluster membership showed no alignment with demographic characteristics but was significantly associated with hierarchical level ( $\chi^2 = 21.14$ ,  $p = 0.0001$ , Cramér's  $V = 0.229$ ) and organisational size ( $\chi^2 = 11.83$ ,  $p = 0.019$ , Cramér's  $V = 0.171$ ). This strengthens the interpretation that experiential profiles reflect structural conditions, such as access to resources, autonomy, information and cultural stability, rather than demographic identity.

Overall, the cluster analysis provides convergent evidence for a structural segmentation of the EX. In other words, employees positioned differently within organisational systems tend to experience their work in systematically distinct ways, independent of age, education or other demographic factors.

## 5. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that differences in employee experience (EX) are more systematically associated with structural characteristics, such as hierarchical level and organisational size, than with demographic attributes. Although the statistical effects were modest, their practical relevance should not be underestimated, as structural differences tend to accumulate through daily interactions and shape employees' ongoing perceptions of fairness, clarity and support.

Rather than implying causal mechanisms, these associations align with established theoretical perspectives showing that resource access, autonomy, decision-making proximity and relational safety vary according to role-based positioning within organisations (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Blau, 2017; A. Edmondson, 1999). These findings support the emerging view of EX as a sociotechnical phenomenon shaped by structural conditions and organisational design, rather than by individual traits.

The absence of significant effects for age and educational level is theoretically informative. Although demographic segmentation is common in EX research, evidence across the literature remains inconsistent and often weak. The present results therefore suggest that demographic characteristics may not be reliable predictors of how EX works. At the same time, the reduced variability in some demographic categories within this sample such as high educational attainment and strong service-sector representation, may have further limited the likelihood of detecting demographic differences. Both explanations are plausible and reinforce the need to revisit demographic segmentation as a central analytical logic in EX research.

Career-related attributes, particularly hierarchical level, showed the most consistent associations with differences in EXM. Although effect sizes were modest, the pattern was systematic across physical, technical and cultural dimensions, suggesting that structural positioning within the organisational system plays a meaningful role in shaping employees' perceptions. This is coherent with theoretical accounts that highlight how autonomy, information access, organisational support and authority differentials vary across hierarchical levels, creating distinct experiential conditions.

This differentiation across dimensions clarifies that structural influences on EXM are multifaceted and operate through distinct mechanisms embedded in each experiential domain. In the case of Physical Experience, the structural effect manifests itself primarily through access to material resources, operational support, and working conditions, which are distributed according to hierarchy. In Technical Experience, the structural effect reflects differences in access to information, digital autonomy, and the ability to adapt technological tools. The dimensions of Reputation and Recruitment are shaped by hierarchical visibility, proximity to institutional narratives, and privileged access to formal communication channels. Finally, Cultural Experience is influenced by denser relational processes, including collective routines, relational climate, shared norms, and interpretative stability, which develop unevenly across structural positions. This differentiation by dimension clarifies that the structural impact is multifaceted and operates through distinct mechanisms within each experiential domain.

Employees in managerial positions reported higher EX scores across several dimensions. Although effect sizes were modest, this pattern is consistent with theoretical perspectives suggesting that hierarchical roles differ in access to autonomy, information and

organisational support (Alam et al., 2024; Okolie et al., 2021). This aligns with COR theory, which argues that individuals in structurally advantaged positions accumulate resources that protect them from loss and enable more favourable experiential appraisals (Hobfoll, 1989).

It is important to note that the present study did not aim to examine remote-work arrangements, and therefore the questionnaire did not include a measure of work modality (on-site, hybrid or remote). For this reason, no empirical comparison can be made regarding how Physical Experience varies across different work arrangements. Nevertheless, because the Physical Experience dimension captures employees' perceptions of workspace conditions, ergonomic support and access to material resources, it is reasonable to expect that future research should explore how these structural conditions differ between remote and on-site roles. Such differences may interact with hierarchical positioning, given that access to physical and technical resources is often unevenly distributed across organisational levels. While this remains outside the scope of the present study, the findings highlight the relevance of investigating work modality as a structural factor in subsequent research on EX.

Cultural Experience emerged as the dimension most sensitive to structural variation. This pattern is theoretically coherent with the idea that cultural perceptions reflect deeper interpretive processes, such as belonging, relational climate, communication routines and value alignment, that evolve gradually through organisational socialisation. The finding that seniority only influenced Cultural Experience aligns with socialisation theories, which propose that cultural integration develops gradually through repeated interactions and accumulated relational history (Jindal et al., 2024; Wang & Ning, 2024). These mechanisms help explain why Cultural Experience showed greater differentiation across clusters and profile comparisons than physical or technical dimensions.

These results suggest that culture can operate as a higher-order structural condition, whose formation depends on time, scale, and organisational stability. Processes such as socialisation, normative alignment, and the construction of collective meaning crystallize slowly and are profoundly shaped by the organisation's structural architecture. Thus, differences in hierarchical levels or organisational size contexts can translate into more pronounced variations in how culture is experienced. This suggests that culture may function as a higher-order structural condition that crystallizes gradually and is therefore more sensitive to positional asymmetries within the organisation.

The exploratory cluster analysis provided convergent evidence for the structural interpretation of EX. The two experiential profiles differed sharply across all dimensions, particularly Cultural Experience, yet showed no alignment with demographic attributes. Instead, cluster membership was associated with hierarchical level and organisational size, reinforcing the proposition that employees' positions within organisational systems better explain experiential variation than individual characteristics.

Overall, these findings advance a clear theoretical proposition: EX is more accurately explained by a structural-contextual segmentation logic than by a demographic one. Whereas demographic segmentation assumes that experience varies according to 'who employees are', the present study demonstrates that experience varies according to 'where employees are positioned' within organisational systems. This reframing challenges prevailing assumptions in EX research and introduces a structural conceptualization grounded in resource distribution, autonomy, socialisation processes and access to cultural information.

These results contribute to a more precise understanding of EX by showing that improvements in EXM depend primarily on organisational structures and leadership-related mechanisms rather than on demographic tailoring. If organisations aim to enhance employees' lived experience, interventions should prioritize structural levers, including clearer

communication, supportive leadership, equitable resource distribution and cultural integration, especially for employees with less access to autonomy, information and influence.

## 6. Conclusions

EX is shaped by structural conditions affecting autonomy, support, information and opportunities for cultural integration. The present study contributes to a clearer understanding of these mechanisms by showing that experiential differences align more closely with hierarchical positioning and organisational size than with demographic profiles. These findings reinforce the structural–contextual interpretation of EX proposed in this work.

The most consistent differences were observed between employees in managerial and non-managerial roles. Although effect sizes were modest, this pattern suggests that employees with greater autonomy, informational clarity, and organisational support tend to evaluate their work more positively. Cultural Experience reflects relational and normative processes that develop over time and are more salient in larger, more structured organisations.

Conversely, demographic attributes, such as age and educational level, did not significantly differentiate EX. These null findings contribute to ongoing debates in literature and indicate that demographic segmentation may have limited explanatory power in comparison with structural variables. This reinforces the need to reassess demographic assumptions in EXM research and practice.

Taken together, these results offer a clearer lens through which EXM can be approached. Improving EX requires interventions that prioritize structural levers, such as leadership support, communication practices, cultural integration and equitable access to resources, rather than strategies centred on demographic segmentation. Organisations seeking to enhance EX should focus on redesigning systems, not merely tailoring initiatives to demographic categories.

### 6.1. Practical Implications for HRM

Given that demographic characteristics were not the main drivers of Employee Experience (EX), HR departments should redesign their Employee Journey Maps using structural rather than demographic segmentation. This means differentiating touchpoints according to employees' access to autonomy, information, decision-making proximity and cultural integration, which vary systematically across hierarchical positions. For operational employees, this involves reinforcing clarity of expectations, simplifying access to information, ensuring frequent leadership availability and creating routine communication touchpoints that replicate some of the visibility and support typically available to managers. In contrast, managerial roles may require touchpoints focused on strategic alignment, organisational stewardship and relational leadership capacities. Reframing journey maps in this structural way allows HR to address the structural EX gap between managers and non-managers and to design more equitable, role-sensitive experience interventions.

From a practical standpoint, the findings highlight that EXM interventions should prioritize structural conditions, particularly those affecting employees in non-managerial roles, who rely most heavily on leadership, communication and cultural integration to shape their daily experience.

For operational employees, targeted interventions may include simple digital autonomy tools (e.g., self-service HR platforms, shift-swap apps), structured daily or weekly feedback loops, micro-learning modules for cultural onboarding, visual communication dashboards, and simplified access to decision-support resources. These practices replicate, at scale, part of the informational clarity and autonomy typically available to managers.

The results of this study show that EX arises primarily from the structural conditions that the organisation creates—and that is where people management finds its most impactful space for intervention. Improving EX implies looking more closely at employees in

non-managerial roles. These professionals experience the day-to-day life of the organisation more closely, more exposed, and often with less access to information, autonomy, and support. Thus, it is up to HRM to ensure that these employees find clarity in their tasks, accessible communication channels, opportunities for participation, and leaders who listen to them.

The Cultural Experience, so sensitive to time and organisational size, reveals the central role of socialisation, from the first day of work to the relationships that are built along the internal journey. This reinforces the need to invest in more human onboarding processes, in team rituals that promote belonging, and in communication practices that bring people closer to the decisions that affect them. The larger the organisation, the more important it becomes to preserve proximity, combat distance, and reinforce the culture with authenticity.

It is also clear that improving the experience requires not only large programs, but above all consistency in daily life. A functional workspace, technological tools that truly help, accessible managers, and clarity in expectations. Technology and organisational design play a key role here, not to automate relationships, but to remove friction that consumes energy and diminishes the sense of purpose.

For SMEs, cultural stability can be supported through lightweight rituals (e.g., team huddles, monthly culture touchpoints), informal but regular communication routines, onboarding narratives that clarify organisational identity, and relational leadership practices that compensate for the absence of large formal structures. These low-cost mechanisms help maintain cohesion and psychological safety even in fluid environments.

Finally, this study reminds us that the experience is not transformed with uniform strategies. Each layer of the organisation faces distinct challenges, and a segmented approach allows HR professionals to respond to these differences with truly relevant solutions. A policy that works for managers may be irrelevant to an operational team; a practice that enhances creativity in a technical team may not have an impact on an administrative department. Personalizing without losing consistency is probably the greatest challenge and the greatest opportunity for EXM.

## 6.2. Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study makes three contributions. First, it challenges the demographic segmentation logic that has dominated EX research by showing that demographic attributes have limited explanatory value. Second, it introduces a structural–contextual framework grounded in resource distribution, organisational design, socialisation and role-based conditions. Third, it demonstrates empirically that hierarchical positioning is a consistent differentiator of EX, supporting emerging perspectives that conceptualize experience as a relational and systemic phenomenon.

First, this study challenges a dominant assumption in the EX literature: that demographic segmentation is the primary and most informative way to explain variations in EX. Decades of EXM, HRM and organisational psychology research have implicitly assumed that age, gender or education generate systematic experiential differences. The present study contests this assumption by demonstrating empirically that demographic variables showed either weak or non-significant associations with EX, contributing to a growing body of evidence that demographic predictors have limited explanatory power in contemporary EX models.

Second, the study advances a structural–contextual segmentation logic. Drawing on traditions such as Job Characteristics Theory, Social Exchange Theory and power/status perspectives, the findings show that hierarchical level and organisational size provide a far more consistent lens for understanding experiential variation. These structural indicators capture fundamental differences in autonomy, access to information, resource availability, psycho-

logical safety and cultural integration, providing a theoretically grounded explanation for why employees in different organisational positions experience their work differently.

Third, the study offers empirical support for a relational-sociotechnical conceptualization of EX. Rather than seeing EX as the sum of isolated perceptual states, the results indicate that it is the interaction between structural positioning and relational conditions that shapes the lived experience of work. This aligns with COR theory, which argues that resource accumulation is unevenly distributed across organisational roles, and with socialisation theories that describe culture as a gradual interpretive process. By demonstrating that Cultural Experience is the most sensitive dimension to structural variation, the study strengthens conceptualizations of EX as embedded in organisational systems rather than rooted in individual attributes.

Fourth, the findings move the field forward by formalizing EX segmentation as a competing theoretical logic: demographic versus structural. The study empirically supports the structural view. Whereas demographic segmentation explains little experiential variation, structural segmentation explains patterned, theoretically coherent differences. This reframing clarifies a conceptual ambiguity in the literature and provides a testable theoretical proposition: that EX is primarily shaped by structural conditions—and only secondarily, or residually, by individual demographics.

Finally, by articulating these contributions, the study positions leadership, organisational design and cultural systems as central mechanisms in EXM theory. This expands existing EX frameworks beyond descriptive models and situates EX within broader organisational theories of structure, power, resource allocation and socialisation. In doing so, the study provides a theoretical foundation for future EXM research to integrate structural design principles into models traditionally dominated by demographic interpretations.

### 6.3. Limitations

Although the study provides robust insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. The non-probabilistic sample and its concentration in the tertiary sector may limit the generalisation of contextual effects. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inference, and although a CFA supported the validity of the EXM measure, future work should examine measurement invariance across groups.

Like any research focused on people's lived experience, this study has limitations that need to be acknowledged to balance the interpretation of the results. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data prevents us from tracking the evolution of the experience over time. EX is dynamic, changing with internal events, leadership changes, or life moments. Capturing it at a single moment reveals only a clear, but inevitably static, snapshot.

Secondly, the data were collected through self-assessment, which means they depend on each participant's perception. While this method is appropriate to the subjective nature of the EX, it can introduce biases associated with mood, memory, or individual expectations. It does not invalidate the results, but it reminds us that experience is always reported from the perspective of the person living it.

Another limitation is related to the composition of the sample, mostly from the tertiary sector and large organisations. This means that some conclusions may reflect more formal and structured practices, typical of these contexts. Future investigations would benefit from including more SMEs, industrial organisations, or highly regulated public contexts to understand the extent to which these patterns hold.

Although we ensured the reliability and one-dimensionality of the scales through PCA and Cronbach's alphas, confirmatory validation of the framework was not performed. These procedures would allow us to deepen the robustness of the EXM model and ensure

that comparisons between groups are accurate. Nevertheless, this choice is in line with the exploratory nature of the study.

Finally, although we explored differences between groups, we did not analyze the internal mechanisms that explain why certain dimensions (such as culture) are more sensitive to the seniority or size of the organisation. Nor did we explore moderators such as remote work intensity, team digital maturity, or leadership styles—factors that recent literature suggests have a significant impact on experience.

#### 6.4. Future Research Directions

Given these limitations, several opportunities open up to deepen our understanding of EXM. A first line of research would be to develop longitudinal studies that allow us to track how experience changes throughout the professional lifecycle, especially during critical moments such as onboarding, job changes, or internal reorganisations. These moments are rich in meaning and can reveal how experience is built, lost, or recovered.

Another promising avenue would be to integrate multiple data sources, combining employee perceptions with objective indicators such as turnover, absenteeism, team performance, or leadership evaluations. This triangulation would reduce self-report biases and provide a better understanding of how experience translates into organisational behaviour.

Future research could also explore explanatory models, examining factors that mediate or moderate the relationship between employee profiles and their experience, for example, psychological safety, leadership styles, organisational justice, or the intensity of hybrid work.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) restrictions.

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