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# STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT MODEL BY INTEGRATING HUMAN CAPITAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE ENTERPRISE IN GUIZHOU, CHINA

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## ABSTRACT

*The sustainable development of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is a vital driver of human sustainability, encompassing cultural continuity, social cohesion, economic vitality, and ecological responsibility. As key stakeholders, ICH enterprises integrate cultural capital and human capital as strategic resources, functioning as engines of heritage transmission, productive protection, and rational utilization. In this role, they advance inclusive development while supporting SDGs such as poverty alleviation and employment (SDG 1, SDG 8), women's empowerment (SDG 5), resilient local industries (SDG 9), cultural distinctiveness (SDG 11), and sustainable production (SDG 12). This study develops and validates a strategic management model integrating High-Performance Work Practices (HPWP) and the AMO framework, using mixed-methods data from 428 employees across 40 Guizhou ICH enterprises to reveal how HPWP, employee competence, and motivation jointly drive sustainable development performance. Explaining 46.9% of the variance in sustainable development performance, the model highlights competence as the primary determinant and motivation as a core mediator. The study refines strategic HRM theory by linking HPWP and AMO dynamics to the integration of cultural and human capital. It further outlines practical strategies for policymakers, enterprises, inheritors, and communities to advance competency building and sustainable ICH development.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Intangible Cultural Heritage, Sustainable Development Performance, High-Performance Work Practices, Competence, Motivation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has become a defining global priority, as reflected in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda, which outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encompassing economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Yet recent assessments reveal that global progress remains alarmingly insufficient. According to the 2025 SDG Progress Report, only 35% of targets are on track, while nearly half show stagnation and 18% are in decline—a situation attributed to economic instability, widening inequalities, and systemic social vulnerabilities. In this context, leveraging underexplored resources—particularly culture—has emerged as essential for building resilient and inclusive development pathways.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) has increasingly been recognized as a strategic resource for resilient and inclusive development, with UNESCO's Convention and subsequent guidelines underscoring its contributions to social inclusion, economic opportunity, environmental sustainability, and peace. Building on global assessments by UNESCO and the World Bank (2021) and prior empirical studies(Kim et al., 2021; Wasela, 2023 ), ICH—through its cultural capital and creative potential—offers substantial yet underutilized capacity to drive economic growth, strengthen social cohesion, support cultural tourism, expand employment, and reinforce community identity.

China holds a global leadership position in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) , with 44 UNESCO-listed elements—the highest worldwide—and nearly 870,000 registered ICH items across various administrative levels. Within China, Guizhou Province, though economically underdeveloped, holds China's seventh-largest reserve of national intangible cultural heritage with 159 items, making its rich and renewable ICH resources a crucial driver for the province's potential economic revitalization. However, Limited industrialization (Luo Jiabin et al., 2021; He & Wu, 2023), shrinking artisan populations ( Zhou, 2023; Zhang, 2024), weak transmission mechanisms, and insufficient enterprise-level management capacity (Feng, He, & Xiang, 2025; Hu & Hou, 2021)have constrained Its sustainable development performance. In this context, ICH enterprises have emerged as pivotal actors linking cultural heritage with sustainable development (Zhang, 2023; Qiu, 2022). ICH enterprises have become key drivers of sustainable and inclusive growth by transforming cultural capital into economic and social value. Through employment generation, rural

revitalization, gender empowerment, and the expansion of cultural and creative industries, they contribute directly to multiple Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDGs 1, 5, 8, 9, 10, and 11. Despite growing scholarly interest in intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and the social-enterprise characteristics of many ICH enterprises, the contribution of enterprise-level practices to enhancing bearer competence and fostering sustainable development remains insufficiently examined. Existing research primarily focuses on safeguarding systems, inheritance behaviors, and cultural functions, with limited quantitative evidence conceptualizing bearer competence as a multidimensional construct or identifying its organizational and managerial antecedents (Min, W., 2025).

This study addresses these gaps by integrating High-Performance Work Practices (HPWP) with the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) framework, proposing a strategic management model that explains how HPWP enhance bearer competence and motivation to drive sustainable development in ICH enterprises. Theoretically, it bridges strategic human resource management and cultural heritage studies, offering an enterprise-level perspective on cultivating ICH talent and linking human and cultural capital to heritage sustainability.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

### 2.1. Theoretical Foundations and Hypotheses

The theoretical foundation of this study integrates the Resource-Based View (RBV), High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) theory, the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) framework, and the Cities, Culture, and Creativity (CCC) framework. RBV posits that organizational competitive advantage derives from valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources, particularly human capital and employee capabilities (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991). In Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) enterprises, employees' skills and competencies represent such strategic resources, driving both cultural and economic sustainability. HPWS operationalizes RBV by deploying synergistic bundles of HR practices that enhance employee ability, motivation, and opportunity, transforming human resources into organizational performance outcomes (Arthur, J.B., 1994; Appelbaum, E. et al., 2000; Ferreira, J. J. M., & Ferreira, F. A. F., 2024). The AMO framework specifies the mechanisms through which these practices influence performance, with skill development mapping onto

ability, engagement and incentives reflecting motivation, and enabling systems corresponding to opportunities. Complementing this internal perspective (Appelbaum, E. et al., 2000; Ferreira, J. J. M., & Ferreira, F. A. F., 2024). The CCC framework reinforces this perspective by highlighting the importance of human capital (skills and innovation) and supportive institutional regulatory environments (inclusive policies, partnerships, and incentive structures) in driving sustainable growth (UNESCO & World Bank, 2021). By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study posits that High-Performance Work practices and employee competence enhance motivation, which in turn promotes ICH sustainable development performance, providing the theoretical basis for the proposed hypotheses (H1-H7).

### 3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND HYPOTHESES

#### 3.1. High-Performance Work Practices and ICH Sustainable Development Performance

High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) represent a coherent bundle of human resource practices designed to enhance employee abilities, motivation, and opportunities, and their performance-enhancing effects have been extensively validated across diverse organizational contexts (Mahdy & Alhadi, 2021; Abu-Mahfouz et al., 2023; Pandey et al., 2023). Grounded in the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) framework, HPWS integrates ability-enhancing, motivation-enhancing, and opportunity-enhancing practices that jointly provide employees with structural, developmental, and motivational support (Alkhazali et al., 2020, 2021; Rincon-Roldan & Lopez-Cabral, 2022). Prior research consistently demonstrates that HPWS fosters employee skill development, participation, innovative behavior, and long-term performance, thereby promoting organizational sustainability (Feng et al., 2024). So within ICH enterprises, HPWS contributes to the cultural and economic sustainable development performance of ICH enterprises (supporting H1). Furthermore, HPWS creates a supportive and equitable work environment characterized by fair incentives, developmental opportunities, and participatory mechanisms, all of which strengthen employee motivation. Motivated employees are more likely to engage in knowledge sharing, collaborative craftsmanship, and innovation—key pathways enabling the translation of HPWS into sustainable ICH performance (Alkhazali et al., 2021; Khan & Ahmad, 2023). Thus, motivation functions as a critical mediating mechanism in the relationship between HPWS and

sustainable development performance of ICH enterprise (supporting H4 and H6).

#### 3.2. Employee Competence and ICH Sustainable Development Performance

Employee competence constitutes a core human capital foundation of ICH enterprises. Unlike standardized industrial skills, ICH-related competence is predominantly tacit, experience-based, and culturally embedded, encompassing craftsmanship proficiency, cultural understanding, and adaptive innovation capability. Competence is conceptualized as a relatively stable individual characteristic that predicts behavior and performance across work contexts. Empirical research shows that competence positively affects organizational performance, competitive advantage, and sustainability across cultural, tourism, and creative industries (Gustafsson & Lazzaro, 2021).

In ICH enterprises, competent practitioners ensure transmission continuity, maintain quality standards, mentor apprentices, and creatively adapt traditional techniques to market change (supporting H2). Competence also strengthens professional identity and self-efficacy, thereby enhancing intrinsic motivation. Quantitative studies in cultural and creative organizations confirm that higher competence significantly increases motivation and job satisfaction, reinforcing performance outcomes (Siddiq et al., 2023; Wulandari & Indratjahyo, 2024) (supporting H5).

#### 3.3. Employee Motivation and ICH Sustainable Development Performance

Employee motivation is a central determinant of organizational performance. Research has shown that supportive work environments, fair incentive systems, and recognition practices significantly enhance intrinsic motivation, which subsequently fosters higher levels of work engagement, knowledge sharing, innovative behavior, and socially responsible conduct (Feng et al., 2024). In ICH enterprises, motivated cultural bearers are more willing to participate actively in the preservation, teaching, and revitalization of traditional craftsmanship. Such behaviors directly advance both cultural sustainability and related economic development (Kocot et al., 2024; Peccei et al., 2023). Accordingly, motivation is expected to exhibit a significant positive association with ICH sustainable development performance (supporting H3).

Collectively, the literature indicates that HPWS, employee competence, and motivation are key determinants of ICH sustainable development

performance.

However, empirical studies examining these mechanisms within ICH enterprises remain scarce. This study proposes seven hypotheses (H1-H7) and develops a strategic AMO-based HRM model to determine how HPWS and competence influence motivation, and sustainable development performance in ICH enterprises.

Drawing from these theories and prior empirical research, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: High-Performance Work Practices positively influence the sustainable development performance of the ICH enterprise.
- H2: Employees' competence positively affects the sustainable development performance of the ICH enterprise.
- H3: Employees' motivation positively affects the sustainable development performance of the ICH enterprise.
- H4: High-Performance Work Practices positively influence employees' motivation.
- H5: Employees' competence positively influences employees' motivation.
- H6: Motivation mediates the relationship between High-Performance Work Practices and the sustainable development performance of the ICH enterprise.
- H7: Motivation mediates the relationship between employees' competence and the sustainable development performance of the ICH enterprise.

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research

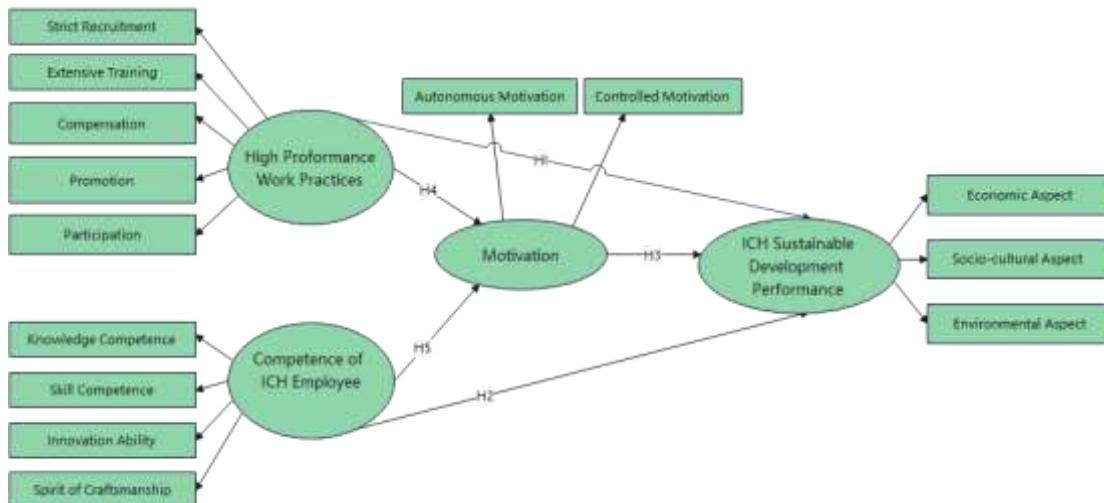


Figure 1: Research Framework.

### 4.2. Measurement Model Analysis

design, integrating qualitative exploration with quantitative validation to investigate how high-performance work practices (HPWP), employee competence, and motivation contribute to the sustainable development performance of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) enterprises in Guizhou, China.

The mixed-methods approach enables qualitative insights to guide the construction of the theoretical model and the development of the questionnaire, while quantitative analyses are employed to empirically examine the proposed causal relationships. China, which ranks first globally in the number of ICH items, provides an important empirical context; however, ICH development and utilization are unevenly distributed, with eastern regions significantly outperforming western areas.

Guizhou Province, ranking seventh nationally in ICH resources yet lagging in economic and social development, represents a typical western region characterized by rich cultural assets but limited development capacity. Therefore, Guizhou offers a theoretically and practically meaningful setting to examine how ICH-based human capital and organizational systems can promote sustainable development under resource-constrained conditions and contribute to narrowing regional development disparities.

The design aligns with the objectives: 1) To determine the factors influencing the ICH sustainable development performance and their mechanisms; 2) To model the empirical structural relationship among HPWP, competence, motivation, and ICH sustainable development performance.

#### 4.2.1. Reliability and Validity Analysis of Variable

Reliability of the survey instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), with 0.7 as the minimum acceptable threshold. The overall scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha=0.905$ ). For the four latent constructs – High-Performance Work Practices (HPWP), Competence, Motivation, and Sustainable Development –  $\alpha$  coefficients ranged from 0.818 to 0.899, indicating high reliability. All 14 sub-dimensions also exceeded the 0.7 threshold ( $\alpha=0.752-0.929$ ), confirming the questionnaire's suitability for empirical analysis.

**Table 4.1: Reliability Analysis Of Variable.**

Primary Category	Secondary Category	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha
HPWP	SR	3	0.795	0.818
	ET	4	0.855	
	CO	5	0.900	
	PR	3	0.781	
	PA	5	0.912	
Competence	KC	3	0.835	0.831
	SC	3	0.929	
	IA	3	0.752	
	SCP	3	0.837	
Motivation	AM	4	0.881	0.856
	CM	4	0.864	
Sustainable Development	ECA	5	0.916	0.899
	SOCA	5	0.906	
	ENA	5	0.874	
Total Scale		55	0.905	

Construct validity was evaluated using the KMO Value measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO value of 0.833 and a significant Bartlett's test ( $\chi^2 = 18,814.63$ ,  $df = 1,485$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) indicated that the data were suitable for factor analysis, confirming the

structural validity of the questionnaire (Shrestha, 2021).

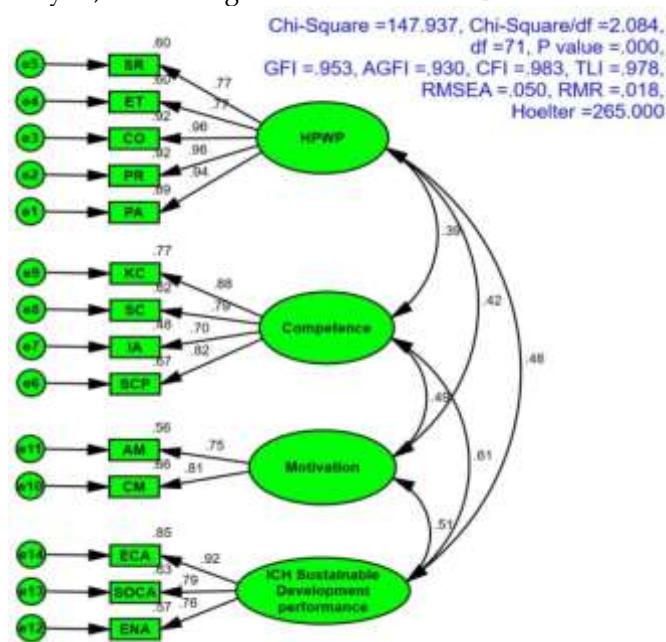
**Table 4.2: Validity analysis of variable.**

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
KMO Value		0.833
Bartlett's Sphericity Test	Approximate Chi-Square	18814.634
	df	1485
	p	0.000

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$

#### 4.2.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The confirmatory factor analysis results indicate that the measurement model demonstrates strong structural validity. All observed variables loaded significantly onto their respective latent constructs – HPWP, Competence, Motivation, and ICH Sustainable Development – with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.56 to 0.96, evidencing good convergent validity. Model fit indices confirmed an excellent fit, including absolute fit ( $GFI = 0.953$ ,  $AGFI = 0.930$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.050$ ), incremental fit ( $NFI = 0.968$ ,  $IFI = 0.983$ ,  $CFI = 0.983$ ,  $RFI = 0.959$ ), and parsimonious fit ( $CMIN/df = 2.084$ ;  $PGFI = 0.644$ ). Correlations among latent constructs ranged from 0.39 to 0.61, reflecting moderate to strong positive relationships and supporting discriminant validity. Overall, these findings indicate that the measurement model reliably represents the underlying constructs and is suitable for subsequent structural equation modeling and hypothesis testing.



**Figure 2: CFA Model.**

#### 4.3 Structural Equation Modeling Analysis

The structural equation modeling (SEM) results indicate that the hypothesized model fits the

empirical data well. All fit indices met or exceeded recommended thresholds:  $\chi^2/df = 2.084$ , RMSEA = 0.05, RMR = 0.018, and GFI, NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI all above 0.9, suggesting that the model adequately explains the data. The squared multiple correlations ( $R^2$ ) of the observed variables ranged from 0.483 to 0.921, with Motivation at 0.306 and ICH Sustainable Development at 0.469, indicating strong explanatory power for the latent constructs. Regression results show that high-performance work practices (HPWP) significantly and positively influence Motivation ( $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and ICH Sustainable Development performance ( $\beta = 0.227$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), while Competence also significantly and positively affects Motivation ( $\beta = 0.388$ ,  $p < 0.001$ )

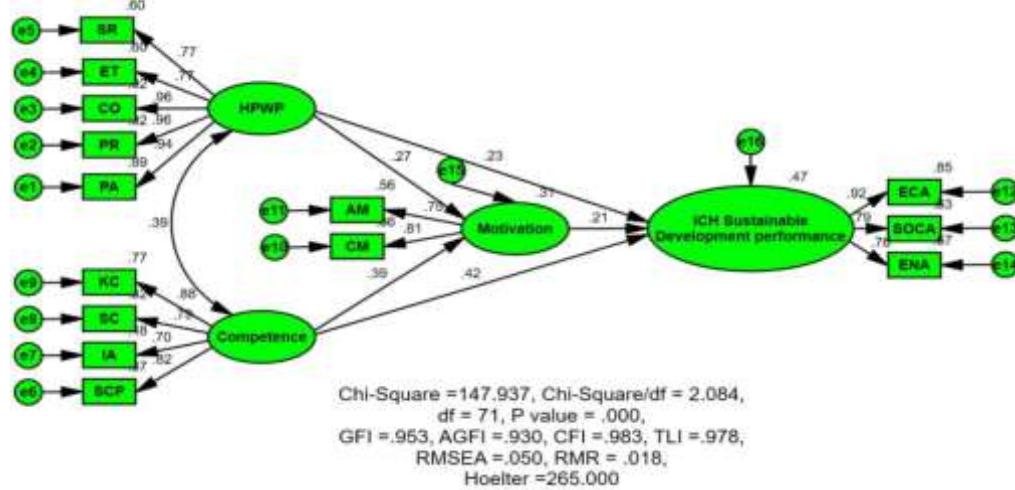


Figure 3: SEM Model.

#### 4.4. Path Analysis and Hypothesis Verification

Table 4.3: Path Analysis Descriptive Variables in Model (SEM) Independent Variable.

Dependent Variable	Effect	HPWP	Competence	Motivation
Motivation	DE	0.27	0.388	0
	IE	0	0	0
	TE	0.27	0.388	0
	$R^2$		0.306	
ICH Sustainable Development performance	DE	0.227	0.416	0.21
	IE	0.057	0.082	0
	TE	0.283	0.497	0.21
	$R^2$		0.469	

Based on the above path analysis and the examination of direct, indirect, and total effects, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the hypothesized relationships. High-performance work practices (HPWP) have a significant direct effect on the ICH Sustainable Development performance ( $\beta = 0.227$ ), supporting H1, and a significant direct effect on Motivation ( $\beta = 0.27$ ), supporting H4. Competence

and ICH Sustainable Development performance ( $\beta = 0.416$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, Motivation has a significant positive impact on ICH Sustainable Development performance ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings indicate that HPWP and Competence not only directly enhance employee Motivation and cultural inheritance capacity but also indirectly promote the ICH Sustainable Development performance through the mediating role of Motivation. Competence plays a pivotal role in advancing cultural transmission and innovation, while HPWP provides sustained momentum for ICH Sustainable Development performance through accumulated practical experience.

also has a significant direct effect on ICH Sustainable Development performance ( $\beta = 0.416$ ) and Motivation ( $\beta = 0.388$ ), supporting H2 and H5, respectively. Motivation significantly influences ICH Sustainable Development performance ( $\beta = 0.21$ ), supporting H3. In terms of indirect effects, HPWP exerts a mediated influence on ICH Sustainable Development performance through Motivation ( $\beta = 0.057$ ), confirming H6, with a total effect of 0.283. Competence also indirectly affects ICH Sustainable Development performance via Motivation ( $\beta = 0.082$ ), supporting H7, with a total effect of 0.497, which is the largest among all examined variables. Overall, these results confirm that all proposed hypotheses are supported, highlighting the critical roles of Competence and HPWP in enhancing Motivation and promoting the ICH Sustainable Development performance.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Discussion

This study provides robust empirical evidence

that high-performance work systems (HPWS), practitioner competency, and employee motivation are key drivers of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) sustainable development. Consistent with prior research, the findings indicate that ICH sustainability increasingly depends not merely on intrinsic cultural value or policy protection, but on the strategic alignment of human capital, institutionalized management practices, and motivational mechanisms. In line with recent scholarship, practitioners' competencies, psychological capital, and supportive organizational contexts emerge as foundational conditions for sustaining transmission continuity, stimulating innovation, and enhancing the socio-economic performance of ICH initiatives (Mankar, D. D., 2024; Bortolotto & Skounti, 2023; Bos-Nehles et al., 2023; ).

Among all predictors, practitioner competency exerts the strongest direct effect on ICH sustainable development performance ( $\beta = 0.416$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), underscoring its central role in shaping project viability, market adaptability, and cultural continuity. This finding is highly consistent with existing empirical evidence that identifies competency as a decisive factor in the long-term sustainability of ICH practices (Ekpenyong, M. M. D., 2025 ; Yan & Li, 2023; Moayerian et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2024). HPWS also demonstrates a significant direct impact ( $\beta = 0.227$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), thereby confirming the applicability of contemporary human resource management systems in traditional cultural settings. Prior studies likewise show that structured training, performance-based incentives, and organizational support enhance operational efficiency and market resilience in ICH enterprises (Hansen et al., 2025; Alkhazali et al., 2021).

By contrast, the relatively weaker mediating effect of motivation reflects the intrinsically value-driven nature of ICH transmission work. Practitioners' motivation is largely anchored in cultural identity, moral commitment, and creative fulfillment, rendering it relatively stable and less responsive to external managerial interventions (Zhao et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Rather than functioning as a highly elastic transmission mechanism, motivation operates primarily as a psychological reinforcement that amplifies the effects of existing competencies and institutional support. Recent studies support this interpretation, suggesting that HPWS enhances motivation indirectly through empowerment and psychological ownership, while its performance effects remain predominantly structural and capability-based (Fan, 2025; Benítez-Núñez et al., 2024; Dorta-Afonso et al., 2021).

Accordingly, this study argues that within the ICH context, motivation serves a complementary rather than a primary driving role. This context-sensitive mediating pattern reveals a distinctive sustainability logic in which practitioner competency and institutionalized management practices constitute the dominant forces, while motivation provides auxiliary psychological reinforcement. By articulating this mechanism, the study extends HPWS and AMO theory into the cultural heritage domain and offers a refined theoretical perspective on the culturally embedded pathways through which ICH sustainability is achieved.

## 5.2. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three key theoretical contributions to the field of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) sustainability. First, by integrating High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) with the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) framework, it demonstrates that HPWS functions not merely as a management tool but as a structural mechanism for sustaining living heritage. Through enhancing employee competence and motivation, HPWS establishes employee-centred processes as fundamental to long-term cultural transmission, extending AMO theory into a non-traditional, culturally embedded sector. Second, the research introduces an enterprise-level analytical perspective to ICH studies, addressing a critical gap. Previous work has largely focused on community participation, cultural value, or policy interventions, while overlooking organisational systems as active drivers of heritage sustainability. Finally, by empirically identifying competence and motivation as micro-foundations of ICH sustainability, the study provides a mechanism-based explanation of how human capital processes influence long-term cultural preservation and adaptive revitalization. Collectively, these contributions offer a theoretically robust, empirically grounded framework for understanding how structured organizational practices intersect with human capability development to promote sustainable heritage transmission in contemporary economic contexts.

## 5.3. Practical Implications

Empirical results highlight that employee competency is the strongest driver of ICH sustainability, while HPWS and motivation also exert significant direct and mediating effects. These findings underscore that human capital development and organisational systems are foundational to sustaining living heritage.

At the policy level, institutionalising HRM-oriented capacity-building mechanisms—such as competency certification, integrated multi-stakeholder training platforms, and balanced incentive schemes—is essential for strengthening both intrinsic cultural commitment and extrinsic professional development. Embedding ICH into cultural, tourism, sustainability, and rural revitalisation policies can expand economic, Socio-cultural, and environmental benefits, positioning ICH enterprises as strategic contributors to multiple SDGs.

At the enterprise level, adopting HPWS offers a practical pathway for professionalizing talent development, enhancing craftsmanship innovation, improving productivity, and expanding cultural-creative value chains. Practices such as fair compensation, transparent promotion pathways, structured apprenticeships, participatory management, and competency-based training effectively enhance capability and motivation while preserving cultural authenticity.

For inheritors, cultivating multidimensional competencies—traditional craftsmanship, innovation capacity, digital literacy, and cultural interpretation—is critical for maintaining adaptability and authenticity. Strengthening the intrinsic cultural mission and actively engaging in structured training and organisational processes further support long-term vitality.

At the community level, cooperative models, participatory governance, cultural education, and environmentally responsible practices can reinforce cultural confidence and foster inclusive, sustainable heritage ecosystems.

Collectively, these insights provide a scalable, evidence-based framework to enhance the cultural vitality, economic viability, and long-term resilience of ICH industries.

#### 5.4. Contributions to SDGs

This study demonstrates that intangible cultural heritage (ICH) enterprises can strategically leverage High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) to translate cultural assets into measurable, sustainable development outcomes. By enhancing human capital, fostering professional competence, and generating sustainable employment, HPWS-driven enterprises contribute directly to multiple SDGs: SDG 1 (No Poverty) by providing stable livelihoods; SDG 5 (Gender Equality) through inclusive participation; SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) via skill professionalization and innovation; SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure)

through expansion of cultural-creative value chains; SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by empowering marginalized artisans; and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities) through community-centered heritage initiatives.

These findings provide a robust, replicable framework for using culture as a driver of inclusive, economically viable, and socially resilient development. They highlight the strategic role of enterprise-level management in simultaneously preserving living heritage and advancing sustainable growth, offering clear guidance for policymakers, practitioners, and heritage-based communities.

#### 5.4. Recommendations for Future Research

This study has several limitations. It relies on cross-sectional data from a regional sample, limiting generalizability, and provides only partial control for sector-specific variations within ICH enterprises. Additionally, some mediating path coefficients, particularly for motivation ( $\beta = 0.057-0.082$ ), showed modest significance, highlighting areas for further investigation. Future research should address these gaps by integrating local management theories with ICH preservation frameworks, conducting large-scale, nationwide studies to enhance representativeness, and employing longitudinal designs to capture dynamic sustainability processes. Investigating diverse ICH types and industry contexts will refine management models, while deeper exploration of motivation as a mediating mechanism can clarify causal pathways. Collectively, these directions aim to strengthen the theoretical foundation of ICH sustainability research and provide actionable, evidence-based guidance for the effective management, professionalisation, and long-term preservation of ICH enterprises.

Against the backdrop of uneven global progress toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—with only 35% projected to be on track by 2025—this study highlights the strategic role of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as a culturally embedded pathway to sustainable development. By preserving traditional knowledge, strengthening cultural identity, generating employment, and fostering social cohesion, ICH contributes directly to multiple SDGs and offers development solutions that are both locally grounded and globally relevant. Focusing on ICH enterprises in Guizhou, China, this study develops and empirically validates an integrated strategic management model that links high-performance work practices (HPWP), practitioner competence, and employee motivation to ICH sustainable development outcomes. The

model demonstrates strong explanatory power and robust fit. Empirical results indicate that practitioner competence is the most influential determinant of ICH sustainability ( $\beta = 0.416$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), followed by HPWP ( $\beta = 0.227$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and motivation ( $\beta = 0.210$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Moreover, HPWP and competence jointly explain 30.6% of the variance in motivation, while all three factors collectively account for 46.9% of the variance in ICH sustainable development performance. These findings underscore that capability development and institutionalized management systems constitute the structural foundation of sustainable heritage transmission, while motivation plays a complementary, reinforcing role.

Beyond its empirical contributions, the proposed

model offers a practical and scalable framework for strengthening the resilience of culture-driven enterprises and communities. By professionalizing human capital development, enhancing organizational capacity, and expanding value-added heritage-based livelihoods, HPWP-enabled ICH enterprises can improve self-reliance and socio-economic resilience while safeguarding cultural authenticity. More broadly, the study demonstrates how enterprise-level governance and human capital investment can translate cultural assets into measurable sustainable development outcomes, providing clear evidence that culturally embedded management strategies can simultaneously advance multiple SDGs and ensure the long-term preservation of living heritage.

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