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Leveraging Employees' Social Capital for Organizational Resilience in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: The Role of High-Involvement Work Practices

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ABSTRACT

Employees' bridging social capital (EBSC), conceptualized as the collective bridging social capital that employees bring into the organization, has been recognized as a potential resource for fostering organizational resilience (i.e., the ability to survive and thrive when confronted with unexpected disruptions and challenges), especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in a turbulent business environment. However, the questions of how and when EBSC relates to organizational resilience remain underexplored. Drawing on dynamic capabilities theory, we propose that knowledge sharing—a dynamic and emergent process where knowledge is introduced, exchanged, combined, and integrated within organizations—represents a key process through which EBSC may be associated with organizational resilience. We further propose that this mechanism is stronger in organizations that extensively implement high-involvement work practices (HIWPs). Using data from 1131 participants (including top management team members, middle-level managers, and entry-level employees) across 175 SMEs in Nigeria, we find that the relationship between EBSC and knowledge sharing, as well as the indirect association between EBSC and organizational resilience via knowledge sharing, is stronger when HIWPs are high rather than low. These findings highlight the importance of HIWPs in leveraging EBSC to enhance organizational resilience, providing practical insights for SMEs seeking to harness EBSC for organizational advantages.

1 | Introduction

In a fast-changing environment characterized by frequent natural disasters, technological discontinuities, and shifting customer preferences, organizational resilience, the capability "to cope with unanticipated dangers as they become manifest" (Wildavsky 1988, 70) while also capitalizing on new growth opportunities (Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011) has become essential. This is especially true for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are particularly vulnerable due to resource constraints that hinder their ability to respond effectively, making resilience building both more difficult and more vital (Harney and Alkhalaf 2021; Zahra 2021).

Existing literature emphasizes human capital, employees' aggregated knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes (KSAOs), as an internal driver of organizational resilience (e.g., Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011; Pereira et al. 2020; Zhou et al. 2023). However, growing evidence points to bridging social capital (i.e., the connections an organization forges with various external stakeholders in the broader community) as an additional resource for SME resilience (e.g., Cao et al. 2015; Wadhwa et al. 2017; Yezza

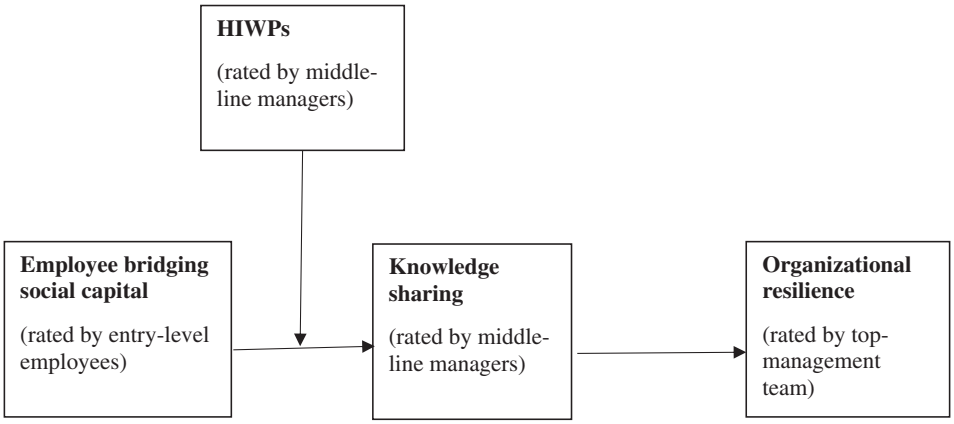

FIGURE 1 | The hypothesized model.

et al. 2021; see also in disaster contexts: Jia et al. 2020; Torres et al. 2019; Ozanne et al. 2022). By providing access to diverse resources and information from outside the organization, bridging social capital enables SMEs to acquire novel information and knowledge, identify opportunities, and avoid intraorganizational information stagnation (Adler and Kwon 2002; Inkpen and Tsang 2005) when navigating disruptions.

Yet most studies center on owners' or senior managers' external ties (e.g., Chowdhury et al. 2019; Santoro et al. 2020), leaving employees' bridging social capital (EBSC)—formed through their connections to external stakeholders—comparatively underexplored, despite employees' diverse, boundary-spanning networks (Carmona-Lavado et al. 2010; Granovetter 1983).

This gap is consequential in SMEs, where leveraging social capital, especially EBSC, for organizational advantage is complex. Unlike bridging social capital accrued through formal partnerships and alliances (Gulati 1998), EBSC involves informal, decentralized ties embedded in employees' networks. These ties often function as boundary-spanning mechanisms (Ancona and Caldwell 1992; Tushman 1977), providing access to new, diverse ideas, market intelligence, and stakeholder expectations. However, their informality and dispersion make them difficult to recognize, coordinate, and strategically leverage (Zahra 2021). Without the right internal systems, the knowledge and information embedded in these ties may never diffuse or recombine within the firm. Thus, EBSC is not automatically a usable resource for SMEs but a potential resource whose value depends on organizational processes.

Against this background, the goal of this study is to investigate how and when EBSC can be related to organizational resilience for SMEs. We conceptualize EBSC as the collective, organizational-level resource comprising employees' external ties that span organizational boundaries and connect the firm to external actors such as customers, suppliers, and professional peers. These employee connections provide access to diverse knowledge and information beyond firm boundaries, which can be mobilized to enhance organizational learning and adaptability (Ellinger et al. 2011; Subramaniam and Youndt 2005). EBSC therefore reflects the organization's potential to leverage employees' externally embedded relationships as a shared resource for strategic advantage. This conceptualization is in line with prior research (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Nyberg et al. 2014), which treats social capital as a collective organizational attribute that can be aggregated into a strategic resource.

Drawing on dynamic capabilities theory (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Teece et al. 1997; Teece 2007; Winter 2003), we propose that knowledge sharing (i.e., a process that involves employees engaging in disseminating, exchanging, and transferring knowledge and information and expertise within the organization) (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998) serves as the mechanism through which EBSC can be transformed into organizational resilience. The theoretical lens also helps us identify high-involvement work practices (HIWPs), a bundle of human resource management (HRM) practices designed to foster employee involvement, motivate collective contribution, and support learning and personal growth (Datta et al. 2005), as the boundary condition for the knowledge-sharing mechanism. Figure 1 presents the proposed moderated mediation model. We test our model using multi-source data from 1131 respondents across 175 Nigerian SMEs operating in turbulent environments.

Our study makes three contributions. First, by conceptualizing EBSC as an organizational-level construct and examining it in relation to organizational resilience, our study augments prior research that has largely emphasized employees' human capital (e.g., KSAOs) as the sources of organizational resilience (e.g., Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011; Luthans 2002; Zhou et al. 2023). In doing so, we also extend our attention from SME owners' or senior managers' networks to the collective external ties of employees. While most studies treat employees' external networks as personal assets that primarily benefit their own career advancement (Burt 1992; Perry-Smith and Shalley 2003; Seibert et al. 2001), we highlight their underexplored implications for organizational outcomes when these networks are aggregated and leveraged collectively.

Second, despite the emerging discussion on leveraging employee social capital to achieve organizational advantages (Apascaritei and Elvira 2022; Soltis et al. 2018), including the development of organizational resilience (Lengnick-Hall et al. 2021), there remains a limited understanding of the intervening mechanisms and organizational processes that underpin this transformation. By identifying knowledge sharing as the

mechanism through which EBSC is related to organizational resilience, our study highlights how EBSC can facilitate an internal process within the organization and hence become a resource for resilience. This contribution extends existing research by unpacking the process through which a dispersed and informal resource such as EBSC becomes consequential for organizational outcomes. By demonstrating that its value depends on internal knowledge dynamics (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998), we integrate social capital and dynamic capabilities perspectives (Lengnick-Hall et al. 2021), showing that external employee networks contribute to resilience not automatically but through firm-level learning and knowledge recombination processes. This deepens the theoretical understanding of how intangible employee-based resources are transformed into adaptive organizational capabilities.

Third, our examination of the moderating effects of HIWPs contributes to the dynamic capabilities literature by identifying the role of HRM practices as a boundary condition for leveraging EBSC. Specifically, EBSC should not be automatically regarded as an organizational resource, but rather as a potential resource whose value depends on the presence of enabling practices. Prior research has predominantly emphasized managers' role in resource orchestration for developing dynamic capabilities (Sirmon et al. 2007, 2011; Schoemaker et al. 2018), often assuming that managers have complete awareness of the available resources, a view that overlooks latent, difficult-to-identify resources, such as EBSC. By considering the hidden nature of EBSC in SMEs (Zahra 2021) and recognizing HRM's role in fostering social integration via employee deployment and team configuration (Apascaritei and Elvira 2022; Soltis et al. 2018), we offer a complementary perspective: carefully designed HRM practices (i.e., HIWPs) can help surface, capture, and integrate these intangible resources. In so doing, our work enriches both the dynamic capabilities and HRM literatures by highlighting how HIWPs can help leverage otherwise latent social capital into resilience building capabilities, thereby responding to calls for greater integration of social capital into strategic HRM (Boon et al. 2018; Collins and Clark 2003; Hollenbeck and Jamieson 2015; Jiang and Liu 2015; Lengnick-Hall et al. 2021; Soltis et al. 2018).

2 | Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

2.1 | Dynamic Capabilities Theory

Extending the resource-based view, which highlights the importance of the valuable, rare, and unique resources for competitive advantage (Barney 1991), scholars of dynamic capabilities theory argue that merely possessing resources does not guarantee a firm's success, especially in high-velocity markets (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Teece et al. 1997). Rather, a firm's competitiveness depends on its ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external resources (Apascaritei and Elvira 2022; Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Teece et al. 1997). Thus, organizational resources, such as social capital and the related knowledge resources (Grant 1996), when effectively leveraged and integrated into organizational internal routines, can enable firms to survive and thrive in rapidly changing environments (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Grant 1996; Zahra et al. 2006). The effective management of these resources requires not only identifying and reconfiguring them but also the management skills necessary to create the conditions for their integration (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Sirmon et al. 2011; Teece et al. 1997). Specifically, scholars emphasize that managers and entrepreneurial owners often need to shape the organizational environment to promote knowledge sharing and resource integration, particularly for tacit and "difficult-to-trade" resources (Teece et al. 1997, 509).

Following dynamic capabilities theory, we first argue that EBSC, which provides access to diverse and new information and knowledge, could be a resource for organizations seeking to build organizational resilience. This transformation occurs through knowledge sharing, an organizational process in which new and dispersed information and knowledge are introduced, selected, combined, and reconfigured for the company's use (Zahra et al. 2006). Dynamic capabilities theory also suggests that an appropriate management strategy is needed to facilitate a process (i.e., knowledge sharing) that transforms a potential resource (i.e., EBSC) into organizational capabilities in the face of disruptions (Teece 2007). In our research context, the effectiveness of this transformation depends on the extent to which the firm supports employees' opportunities, skills, and motivation to share and build new knowledge (Apascaritei and Elvira 2022; Lengnick-Hall et al. 2021; Soltis et al. 2018). In this regard, we propose that HIWPs create the necessary conditions for employees to share and transfer knowledge derived from external networks, enhancing the firm's ability to learn and adapt. Specifically, HIWPs provide opportunities, promote motivation, and build employees' abilities, factors that have been recognized to facilitate knowledge sharing (Adler and Kwon 2002; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). As elaborated below, we argue that HIWPs serve as a management strategy to leverage EBSC for driving knowledge sharing and subsequently building organizational resilience.

2.2 | EBSC and Knowledge Sharing: The Moderating Effect of HIWPs

In line with the strategic human capital resource literature, the aggregated relationships embedded among employees can be viewed as public goods that can benefit the collective (Apascaritei and Elvira 2022; Collins 2020; Nyberg et al. 2014). Moreover, EBSC is distinct from two other forms of social relationships. First, unlike bonding social capital, which emphasizes the resources available for the organization through strong, cohesive ties among individuals or groups within an organization but which may risk information stagnation (Adler and Kwon 2002; Aldrich and Meyer 2015), EBSC emphasizes weaker, outward-facing ties that expose the firm to new ideas and opportunities. Second, unlike interfirm relations, which typically involve formal agreements, partnerships, or collaborations between organizations at the managerial or strategic level (e.g., strategic alliances, joint ventures, equity partnerships) (e.g., Gulati 1998; Gulati et al. 2000), EBSC is largely informal and embedded in everyday employee interactions with external stakeholders. These attributes make EBSC both valuable and

difficult to manage. While it provides access to diverse knowledge flows, its dispersed and informal nature means it may not automatically benefit the organization unless effectively leveraged (Zahra 2021).

EBSC has the potential to facilitate knowledge sharing, which we define as the exchange and integration of information and expertise within the organization. External ties expose employees to novel ideas and diverse information, providing opportunities to gain external inputs such as updates on customer demands, supply chain changes, policy and regulatory shifts, or technological trends (Burt 2000; Cuevas-Rodríguez et al. 2014; Hargadon 2002). When brought into the firm, those inputs could challenge established assumptions, spark curiosity, and stimulate thinking and conversation, via which the organization can select, integrate, and reconfigure into its existing knowledge repertoire (Grant 1996). In other words, EBSC can serve as a conduit for new knowledge and perspectives that broaden internal conversations and facilitate the exchange and interpretation of information (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). However, the extent to which this potential is realized depends on whether the organization actively engages employees by providing opportunities for participation and promoting their motivation and ability.

In the context of utilizing EBSC to facilitate knowledge sharing within organizations, opportunities refer to how easily employees can introduce knowledge from their external networks into the organization, even when the knowledge or information is still ambiguous and its relevance and application unclear. Motivation refers to employees' perceived value of sharing new information from their own external networks in the work domain. Finally, ability relates to employees' capacity to recognize and communicate valuable knowledge.

We propose that HIWPs, which provide opportunities and enhance employee motivation and abilities, may moderate the relationship between EBSC and knowledge sharing. When HIWPs are extensively adopted, employees have more opportunities to engage in social interaction across different functions and levels within the organization. This allows knowledge resources from EBSC to be introduced, assessed, and selected, enhancing knowledge flow. Practices such as teamwork and job rotation facilitate interactions with colleagues from various parts of the operation, leading to close working relationships. These relationships make it safe for employees with external networks to introduce new knowledge into the shared work domain (Cabrera and Cabrera 2005; Collins and Smith 2006; Gittell et al. 2010). Meanwhile, under higher HIWPs, employees engage in important decision-making and problem-solving processes collaboratively, which helps them recognize the value of combining and exchanging information (Quinn and Bunderson 2016). Employee involvement practices have been frequently linked to identification with the company (Newman et al. 2016; Zhao et al. 2021), motivating employees to seek out useful information (Rana 2015; Oppenauer and Van De Voorde 2018) and thus enhancing the impact of EBSC on the knowledge sharing process. Finally, HIWPs, especially practices supporting empowerment, provide the environment and resources necessary for employee learning and skill development (Shuck et al. 2013). As a result, employees are equipped to evaluate options and discuss alternatives with colleagues (Boxall and Macky 2014). Therefore, the broad adoption of HIWPs equips employees with the opportunities, motivation, and skills needed for information scouting, knowledge recombination, and knowledge integration, thereby strengthening the links between EBSC and knowledge sharing.

In contrast, when HIWPs are not adequately implemented, employees have fewer opportunities to share new information and knowledge with their colleagues or management. They are also less motivated to seek out useful information in their external networks if the HRM practices do not provide the necessary communication channels or encourage participation. Additionally, with fewer practices like teamwork and job rotation, employees are less likely to develop a strong understanding of workplace issues. Consequently, employees with external connections may see little value in their new knowledge or be unsure of its relevance, reducing the likelihood of brokering new knowledge and limiting its potential contribution to knowledge sharing. Based on the above reasoning, we propose:

H1. *HIWPs moderate the relationship between EBSC and knowledge sharing such that the relationship is stronger when HIWPs are high rather than low.*

2.3 | Knowledge Sharing and Organizational Resilience

We further argue that knowledge sharing plays a crucial role in promoting organizational resilience. This is because knowledge sharing not only helps organizations identify fundamentally novel solutions to organizational or environmental threats and disruptions but also allows them to capitalize on new growth opportunities emerging from these disruptions.

Specifically, when knowledge is shared within organizations, it triggers the integration and reconfiguration of resources. This process facilitates the dissemination and exchange of new insights (De Clercq and Pereira 2020), strengthening both the organization's problem-solving capabilities in times of disruptions (Weick 1995) and its ability to identify and capitalize on new opportunities (Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011). This integration and configuration of knowledge resources is especially crucial for SMEs, as it contributes to the cognitive resources needed for organizational resilience (Williams et al. 2017). With high levels of knowledge sharing, SMEs can not only respond to disruptions quickly and efficiently, but also develop a deeper understanding of the evolving business environment and adapt accordingly (Salavou et al. 2004), thus fostering resilience capability. For example, in a case study of an SME, Demmer et al. (2011) report that sharing knowledge and experiences across different levels and functions is a key factor contributing to the company's continuous improvement and resilience. Similarly, De Clercq et al. (2015) highlight the role of internal knowledge sharing in fostering entrepreneurial orientation, which is essential for SMEs to navigate uncertainty and exploit new opportunities. Taken together, we propose:

H2. *Knowledge sharing is positively related to organizational resilience.*

2.4 | A Moderated Mediation Model

Guided by dynamic capabilities theory, we propose a moderated mediation model in which knowledge sharing acts as a mediating mechanism between EBSC and organizational resilience. Specifically, EBSC enables the organization to access new information and knowledge, which in turn facilitates knowledge sharing by challenging current understanding, provoking questions, and stimulating thinking and dialogue. This knowledge sharing process can broaden the organization's cognitive and behavioral repertoire for responding to disruptions (Harrison and Klein 2007; Lengnick-Hall and Beck 2005; Lengnick-Hall et al. 2021). Through extensive knowledge sharing, decision-makers gain a deeper understanding of the nature and scale of disruptions, as well as the need for change and innovation in existing processes and practices. This enhanced understanding, in turn, sets in motion the organization's efforts to recalibrate and reconfigure practices and resources, enabling the development of varied actions that depart from established routines and respond more effectively to changed conditions. Such reconfiguration may involve, for example, reallocating employees across tasks, engaging alternative suppliers, rapidly modifying products or services, or redeploying resources to enter new markets. By cultivating such deep understanding and adaptive action, organizations are better positioned to capitalize on emerging opportunities arising from disruptions and sustain their long-term viability (Demmer et al. 2011; Lengnick-Hall and Beck 2005; Williams et al. 2017). As Ferrier (2001) observes, organizations with strong bridging relationships "can match complex competitive challenges and uncertain contexts with a requisite level of cognitive and experiential variety" (p. 858).

In addition, the model specifies that such a mediating mechanism is more prominent when HIWPs are extensively adopted, as they create an environment that encourages employees to share their knowledge and learn from their external networks within the organization, which, in turn, enhances the organization's ability to better navigate disruptions and capitalize on new growth opportunities. Essentially, HIWPs provide the discretion, participatory structures, and developmental support needed to translate externally acquired knowledge into concrete and valuable knowledge resources shared within the organization. Such knowledge-sharing processes enable the organization not only to integrate but also to reconfigure resources required for effective responses to disruption. In organizations where HIWPs are only partially implemented, employees may lack the opportunities or motivation to bring knowledge from their external networks into the organization, which prevents organizations from cultivating their resilience capability, even if they have access to that knowledge. To formally examine the moderated mediation effects implied in our model, we propose:

H3. *HIWPs moderate the indirect association between EBSC and organizational resilience* via *knowledge sharing, such that the indirect relationship will be stronger when HIWPs are high rather than low.*

3 | Method

3.1 | Sample and Procedures

As part of a larger research project on organizational resilience in SMEs, we obtained cross-sectional data for this study from SMEs operating in Lagos State, Nigeria, the commercial center of the country, with the highest number of businesses of all sizes (Ogunyomi and Bruning 2016). We chose to focus on SMEs (employing 10–250 employees) in Nigeria because, in a developing context like Nigeria, SMEs drive economic development, provide employment opportunities, and help alleviate poverty (Ayyagari et al. 2011). This constitutes an important and relevant context for our research topic. This research project received ethical approval from the Humanities and Social Science Ethics Committee of the University of York, United Kingdom, where the first author was affiliated at the time of data collection.

We randomly selected and contacted 350 SMEs from the Lagos State Ministry of Commerce and Industry listing (2670 in total). We ensured the sample was balanced in terms of company size. Thus, we identified and contacted 175 small enterprises (10–49 employees) and 175 medium-sized enterprises (50–250 employees) to participate in the research. To mitigate the potential for common method variance (CMV) and to ensure that participants were conversant with the variables examined, we asked the CEO or managing director of each company to randomly identify three members from the top management team (TMT), middle-level managers, and entry-level employees and invite them to participate in the study. They were instructed to nominate participants across different functional areas to minimize bias and to select employees with at least 12 months of tenure in the company. This was to ensure that respondents had sufficient time to build relationships, interact with colleagues, and develop a sound understanding of the organization. In SMEs without TMT members, senior managers were invited instead. Through the communication of the CEO or managing director, all these identified participants were asked to participate in the survey voluntarily. They were further assured of the anonymous nature of the study and informed that the data would be exclusively used for academic research purposes.

After the initial communication, the CEOs or managing directors made no further contact with the identified employees regarding the survey and allowed the research team to correspond with the participants directly. The research team hired and trained two survey assistants, who were responsible for delivering and collecting the questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed in a sealed envelope to participants in each participating SME. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter that informed participants of the research aim, that participation was voluntary, and that their responses were entirely anonymous.

We developed and distributed a different questionnaire for each employee group. TMT members were asked to rate

organizational resilience, entry-level employees were asked to rate EBSC, and middle-level managers were requested to rate knowledge sharing, HIWPs, and human capital as a control variable. Meanwhile, TMT members were also asked to provide data for the age and size of the firm and industry. On average, participants completed the questionnaire within 3 weeks.

In total, 175 SMEs with valid responses from all three employee groups were retained in the final sample, resulting in a response rate of 50.0%. The sample consisted of responses from 361 TMT members, 380 middle-level managers, and 390 entry-level employees (1131 in total), with response rates of 68.8%, 72.4%, and 74.3%, respectively. Among the 175 SMEs, 100 (57.1%) provided all three raters, 13 (7.4%) provided two raters, and 62 (35.4%) provided one rater for entry-level employees. For TMT members, 81 (46.3%) provided all three raters, 24 (13.7%) provided two raters, and 70 (40.0%) provided one rater. For middle-level managers, 92 (52.6%) provided three raters, 20 (11.4%) provided two raters, and 65 (37.1%) provided one rater. Of the 1131 participants, 66% were men (73% of TMT members, 62% of middle-level managers, and 63% of entry-level employees, respectively). The participants reported an average age of 33 years (37.2, 33.0, 29.5 years, respectively) and an average tenure in their current positions of 4.4 years (6.5, 4.2, and 2.5 years, respectively). It is worth noting that among the final sample of 390 entry-level employees, 26 (7%) did not indicate their tenure, and 53 (14%) had less than 1 year of tenure (including 20 with less than 6 months). These employees were included in the final sample to ensure a robust sample size for analysis. Moreover, their ratings were consistently aggregated with those of employees who had more than 12 months of tenure. Consequently, the rating of the SME's EBSC did not rely solely on individuals with less than 1 year of tenure. On average, 50% of the participants had an undergraduate degree or above (45%, 52%, and 53%, respectively). The majority of the SMEs in the final sample were from the services sector (including hotels and restaurants, banking, and information technology) (134, 76.6%). The rest were from manufacturing (25, 14.3%), and trade (16, 9%). Unless otherwise noted, response options ranged from 1 ("*strongly disagree*") to 5 ("*strongly agree*").

3.2 | Measures

3.2.1 | EBSC

A three-item scale adapted from Subramaniam and Youndt (2005) was used to measure EBSC. Following a referent-shift model (Chan 1998), which has the advantage of using a representative sample of employees and aggregating their responses to capture a shared organizational attribute (Barrick et al. 2015), we asked entry-level employees to report EBSC at the organizational level based on their observation. Entry-level employees are well positioned to observe and assess the bridging social capital among their colleagues, given the flatter structure and more open communication channels in SMEs (Ellinger et al. 2011), thus better capturing EBSC among employees rather than that of senior executives. We did not use an additive model, primarily due to practical infeasibility, as it would require surveying all employees in the company about their bridging social capital to derive a variable capturing EBSC at the organizational level. Consistent with the referent-shift approach, the three items we used were "employees of my company learn from employees of other firms," "employees of my company maintain personal contact with employees of other firms (e.g., suppliers) to develop solutions," and "employees of my company obtain valuable information from employees of other firms." In these items, the phrase "employees of my company" refers to employees as a collective entity, rather than to specific individuals within the organization. The alpha reliability for this scale was 0.72. The mean ratings of entry-level employees within each firm were averaged to obtain a score for bridging social capital $r_{wg} = 0.87$; $F(174, 387) = 3.55$, $p < 0.001$; ICC1 = 0.54; ICC2 = 0.72.

3.2.2 | HIWPs

An eight-item scale adapted from Prieto and Santana (2012) was used to measure HIWPs in SMEs. The study specifically used a subset of Prieto and Santana's (2012) measure to assess HR practices that empower frontline employees, encourage employee involvement in decision-making, and develop teamwork and skill variety. Sample items include "our company transfers extensively different tasks and responsibilities to employees," "employees in our firm are often asked to participate in decisions," and "our company emphasizes employees' teamwork and network collaboration." The scale's alpha reliability was 0.80. The mean ratings of middle-level managers of each firm were used to obtain a score for HIWPs ($r_{wg} = 0.93$; $F(174, 377) = 5.68$, $p < 0.001$; ICC1 = 0.68; ICC2 = 0.82).

3.2.3 | Knowledge Sharing

A four-item scale developed by Faraj and Sproull (2000) and adapted by Chuang et al. (2013) was used to measure knowledge sharing. Sample items include "employees in our firm share their special knowledge and expertise with one another" and "there is virtually no exchange of information, knowledge, or sharing of skills among employees" (reverse coded). The alpha reliability for the scale was 0.70. Ratings of middle-level managers of each firm were averaged to obtain a score for knowledge sharing ($r_{wg} = 0.93$; $F(174, 377) = 3.19$, $p < 0.001$; ICC1 = 0.51; ICC2 = 0.69).

3.2.4 | Organizational Resilience

We used a five-item scale measure developed and validated by Zhou et al. (2023) to measure organizational resilience. The TMT members or senior managers of each firm answered questions about their organization's ability to handle disruptions, including irregular changes in government policies and regulations, unexpected shifts in customer tastes and demand, new technology, heightened competition, and supply chain disruptions. Sample items are "our firm has the ability to use opportunities in disruptive situations to develop new capabilities" and "our firm has the ability to use disruptive situations

as opportunities to develop new growth paths for a viable future." The alpha reliability for the scale was 0.74. The mean ratings of TMT members or senior managers within each firm were averaged to obtain a score for organizational resilience capability ($r_{wg} = 0.95$; $F(174, 359) = 4.46$, $p < 0.001$; ICC1 = 0.63; ICC2 = 0.78).

3.2.5 | Control Variables

Given the documented effects of human capital resources on organizational resilience (Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011; Zhou et al. 2023), we controlled for these resources, measured by an eight-item scale developed by Lepak and Snell (2003). A sample item is "employees in our organization have skills that directly affect organizational efficiency and productivity." The scale's alpha reliability was 0.70. We also controlled for several firm demographic variables, including firm size, firm age, and industry, to account for the influences of these contextual factors on SME organizational capabilities (Arend 2014). Firm size was measured as the total number of employees. Given that most of the SMEs in the sample were from the service sector, we used the service sector as the baseline to create two dummy variables: Sector A (services vs. manufacturing) and Sector B (services vs. trade).

3.3 | Measurement Analysis

Because middle-level managers rated more than one study variable (i.e., HIWPs, knowledge sharing, and human capital), there is a potential concern about CMV. To address this, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to establish the distinctiveness of these variables. The CFA results support the distinctiveness of the variables rated by the middle-level managers. Specifically, the hypothesized three-factor fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 43.89$, df = 32, $p = 0.079$, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.031, SRMR = 0.036). Furthermore, it provided a better fit than (1) a two-factor model A (combining knowledge sharing with human capital) ($\Delta\chi = 54.83$, Δdf = 2), (2) a two-factor model B (combining HIWPs with knowledge sharing) ($\Delta\chi = 42.46$, Δdf = 2), (3) a two-factor model C (combining HIWPs with human capital) ($\Delta\chi = 34.9$, Δdf = 2), and (4) a one-factor model (combining all three variables) ($\Delta\chi = 86.94$, Δdf = 3). These results suggest that CMV was not a concern.

Additionally, we assessed the convergent validity of all study variables by calculating the composite reliability for each scale (Fornell and Larcker 1981) and the discriminant validity by comparing the average variance extracted of each variable with its shared variance with all other variables (Farrell 2010). The composite reliability was 0.85 for HIWPs, 0.81 for EBSC, 0.80 for knowledge sharing, 0.83 for resilience, and 0.85 for human capital, all of which exceed 0.70, indicating an adequate level of convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Finally, the average variances extracted (AVE) for each scale (0.42 for HIWPs, 0.59 for EBSC, 0.51 for knowledge sharing, 0.50 for resilience, and 0.42 for human capital) were always larger than the variance shared among two variables, indicating good discriminant validity (Farrell 2010). Although the AVE values for HIWPs and human capital fell below the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker 1981), the constructs still demonstrated acceptable levels of composite reliability and discriminant validity. Moreover, as indicated by Nunan et al. (2020, 800), "AVE is a more conservative measure than CR [composite reliability]. Based on CR alone, the researcher may conclude that the convergent validity of the construct is adequate, even though more than 50% of the variance is due to error". Taken together, these statistical tests suggest that the scales for our study have an adequate level of validity and reliability.

4 | Results

As our model was conceptualized at the firm level, we aggregated all the measures. We then used PROCESS (Hayes 2022) to test all our hypotheses by specifying a moderated mediation model. This model examined the moderating effect of HIWPs in the relationship between EBSC and knowledge sharing, as well as the mediating effects of knowledge sharing in the relationship between EBSC and organizational resilience. Following a well-established framework for testing moderated mediation (Preacher et al. 2007), we first estimated a simple mediation model and then an integrated model that included the moderating effects of HIWPs. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the key study variables aggregated at the firm level.

Table 2 shows that EBSC had a non-significant relationship with knowledge sharing ($b = 0.09$, s.e. = 0.05, $p > 0.05$) after controlling for human capital, firm size, firm age, and two dummy variables for sectors. In contrast, human capital was positively related to knowledge sharing ($b = 0.33$, s.e. = 0.07, $p < 0.001$), and knowledge sharing had a positive relationship with organizational resilience ($b = 0.24$, s.e. = 0.09, $p < 0.05$). Thus, H2 was supported.

As shown in Table 3, the interaction term of EBSC and HIWPs was positively related to knowledge sharing ($b = 0.20$, s.e. = 0.07, $t = 2.68$, $p < 0.01$). We plotted the interaction effect using values one standard deviation (SD) above the mean and one SD below the mean of HIWPs to interpret the nature of the significant two-way interaction (Aiken and West 1991). As shown in Figure 2, the relationship between EBSC and knowledge sharing was stronger when HIWPs were high rather than low. Furthermore, simple slope tests showed that the relationship between EBSC and knowledge sharing was positive and significant when HIWPs were high (1 SD above mean) ($b = 0.19$, s.e. = 0.07, $p < 0.01$) but non-significant when HIWPs were low (1 SD below mean) ($b = -0.04$, s.e. = 0.07, $p > 0.05$). Taken together, these results supported H1. Finally, results based on 10,000 bootstrapped samples showed that the index of moderated mediation (Hayes 2015) was significant: 0.047 (BootSE = 0.03, 95% CI: 0.002, 0.110). The indirect effects of EBSC on organizational resilience capability via knowledge sharing were positive and significant (estimate = 0.05, BootSE = 0.03, 95% CI: 0.001, 0.104) when HIWPs were high but non-significant (estimate = −0.01, BootSE = 0.02, 95% CI: −0.061, 0.038) when HIWPs were low. Thus, H3 was supported.

TABLE 1 | The means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables.

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Company size	55.79	53.26									
2	Company age	52	13.46	0.48**								
3	Sector A			0.16*	0.12							
4	Sector B			−0.13	−0.05	−0.13						
5	Human capital	3.96	0.51	0.09	0.09	0.12	−0.01					
6	Organizational resilience	3.94	0.58	0.06	0.03	−0.02	−0.01	0.32**				
7	EBSC	3.81	0.68	0.03	−0.04	0.03	−0.04	0.26**	0.22**			
8	Knowledge sharing	3.93	0.58	−0.02	−0.04	−0.07	−0.06	0.35**	0.30**	0.21**		
9	HIWPs	3.80	0.61	−0.03	−0.07	−0.11	−0.04	0.40**	0.25**	0.28**	0.31**	

Note: $N = 175$.
Abbreviations: EBSC, employee bridging social capital; HIWPs, high-involvement work practices; Sector A, manufacturing; Sector B, trade.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.

TABLE 2 | Results of PROCESS for the simple mediation model.

Variable	Knowledge sharing	Organizational resilience
Company size	−0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Company age	−0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Sector A	−0.17 (0.10)	−0.07 (0.12)
Sector B	−0.12 (0.12)	0.02 (0.15)
Human capital	0.33*** (0.07)	0.26**(0.09)
EBSC	0.09 (0.05)	0.10 (0.06)
Knowledge sharing		0.24*(0.09)
R^2	0.16	0.16

Note: $N = 175$; unstandardized and standard errors are reported.
Abbreviations: CI, confidence interval; EBSC, employee bridging social capital; LL, low limit; Sector A, manufacturing; Sector B, trade; UL, upper limit.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

TABLE 3 | Results of PROCESS for the moderated mediation model.

Variable	Knowledge sharing	Organizational resilience
Size	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)
Age	−0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Sector A	−0.14 (0.10)	−0.07 (0.12)
Sector B	−0.12 (0.12)	0.02 (0.15)
Human capital	0.29** (0.08)	0.26**(0.09)
EBSC	0.08 (0.05)	0.10 (0.06)
HIMPs	0.16*(0.06)	
EBSC × HIMPs	0.20**(0.07)	
Knowledge sharing		0.24*(0.10)
R^2	0.21	0.16
ΔR^2	0.03	

Note: $N = 175$; unstandardized and standard errors are reported.
Abbreviations: EBSC, employee bridging social capital; HIWPs, high-involvement work practices; Sector A, manufacturing; Sector B, trade.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.

5 | Discussion

This study aims to examine how EBSC is related to organizational resilience in SMEs, as well as the mechanisms and conditions under which this relationship unfolds. By drawing on dynamic capabilities theory and using data from 1131 participants (including TMT members, middle-level managers, and entry-level employees) from 175 SMEs in Nigeria, we found that HIWPs moderate the relationship between EBSC and knowledge sharing, as well as the indirect association between EBSC and organizational resilience through knowledge sharing. These associations are stronger when HIWPs are high rather than low.

5.1 | Theoretical Implications

Several important theoretical implications can be derived from our findings. First, we advance the literature on organizational

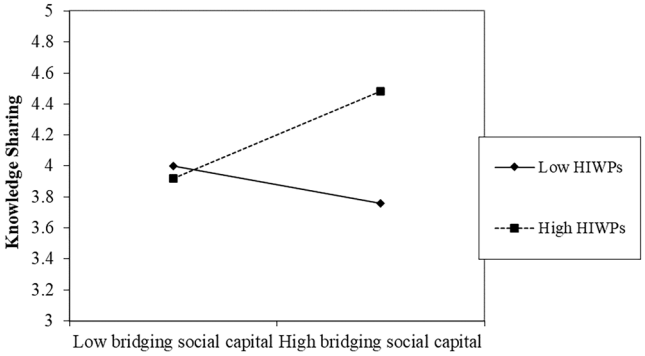

FIGURE 2 | The moderating effects of HIWPs on the relationship between employees' bridging social capital and knowledge sharing.

resilience by broadening the predominant human capital perspective (e.g., Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011; Pereira et al. 2020; Zhou et al. 2023) to include EBSC as a complementary, organizational-level resource. While prior research has emphasized employees' skills and expertise, far less attention has been given to how their external networks can serve as a valuable organizational resource (Lengnick-Hall et al. 2021; Nyberg et al. 2014; Pattinson and Dawson 2024; Soltis et al. 2018). One potential reason for this neglect is that bridging social capital is often conceptualized as an individual-level asset (e.g., Perry-Smith and Shalley 2003; Seibert et al. 2001), making it difficult to theorize how organizations can leverage it collectively. In contrast, we conceptualize EBSC as an organizational-level construct and reframe EBSC as a collective pool of knowledge channels. By considering EBSC collectively, we redirect organizations' attention to the overall structure, diversity, and reach of external linkages embedded within their workforce and HRM strategies to leverage them for organizational benefits (Lengnick-Hall et al. 2021; Soltis et al. 2018). As such, we encourage future studies to further examine how EBSC, as an organizational-level construct, can enable organizations to identify strategic opportunities, enhance knowledge acquisition, and foster innovation through more intentional engagement with employees' external networks.

Second, while prior research highlights that bridging social capital constitutes an organizational resource for building organizational resilience (Lengnick-Hall et al. 2021), the field lacks a clear understanding of the "black box" involved in leveraging such dispersed, elusive, and intangible resources to gain a competitive edge in organizational resilience. Drawing on dynamic capabilities theory (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Sirmon et al. 2007), and focusing on knowledge sharing as the internal process that enables organizations to seize, combine, and transform knowledge resources into organizational capabilities (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Grant 1996), our research is among the first to shed light on the "black box" by which EBSC is related to organizational resilience. By demonstrating that the mediating effect of knowledge sharing on the relationship between EBSC and organizational resilience is moderated by HIWPs, our research reveals the complex, context-dependent mechanisms through which EBSC is associated with organizational resilience. This advances theory by clarifying how and when dispersed and informal employee connections become strategically valuable. Rather than focusing solely on getting access to external ties, we show that their value depends on the internal knowledge sharing processes that transform dispersed knowledge into collective capability. Thus, we extend the role of knowledge sharing beyond its traditional internal function to be a conduit for capturing, integrating, and reconfiguring external knowledge—when conditions such as HIWPs are favorable.

Finally, our research contributes to HRM literature by complementing the existing focus on HRM's role in building internal resources. Although organizational scholars have long emphasized the importance of equipping the focal actors with the opportunity, motivation, and ability to broker the information and knowledge they acquire, ensuring the informational benefits of social capital can be materialized (Adler and Kwon 2002), prior research has focused on the direct effects of HIWPs on knowledge sharing within the organization (Apascaritei and Elvira 2022; Currie and Kerrin 2003; Flinchbaugh et al. 2016) and the development of internal social capital (Jiang and Liu 2015), overlooking the role of HIWPs in facilitating knowledge sharing across organizational boundaries. Our research provides initial evidence that HIWPs serve as a boundary condition, determining the extent to which EBSC accumulated outside the organization can be channeled inside to facilitate knowledge sharing and, ultimately, enhance the capability of organizational resilience.

Specifically, our finding suggests that HIWPs foster an environment where employees are not only willing and capable but also have the opportunity to share new information acquired from their external social networks, thereby strengthening the relationship between EBSC and knowledge sharing. In so doing, HIWPs help organizations capture and capitalize on the information and knowledge resources emerging from employees' external networks. This finding is particularly relevant for SMEs, which often face resource constraints (Harney and Alkhalaf 2021) and unique challenges in achieving growth and innovation through building their internal resources (Messersmith and Guthrie 2010; Pattinson and Dawson 2024; Zahra 2021).

5.2 | Practical Implications

Our findings also offer several important practical implications. First, SMEs and their managers should not view informal employee networks as personal resources used solely for the individual benefits of employees. Instead, these networks as a collective should be seen as a crucial strategic resource that can be intentionally supported and leveraged. In the context of our research, this resource can be a powerful factor that drives SMEs' learning, adaptation, and ultimately resilience capabilities in a fast-changing environment. This means that SMEs should encourage and facilitate employees' engagement with external networks to allow bridging social networks to emerge and accumulate among employees. For example, Inkpen and Tsang (2005) suggest that a company's location in an industrial district encourages the formation of informal ties between companies. SMEs can also sponsor employees to join professional associations, encourage employees to attend industry workshops and conferences, and cross-firm collaborations and contributions. These are particularly important in the Nigerian context, where informal networks often substitute for formal structures (Meagher 2010).

To translate these external linkages into tangible organizational benefits, managers must also focus on the internal processes that allow such knowledge to circulate and take root. For practitioners, recognizing knowledge sharing as the pathway between employees' external networks and organizational resilience underscores the importance of creating HR systems that actively encourage the circulation of externally acquired knowledge within the firm. SMEs should thus strive to design HIWPs to leverage EBSC to foster knowledge sharing and subsequent organizational resilience capability. Given EBSC is dispersed and may be inaccessible to management, it is crucial to implement enabling HRM practices that provide employees with the opportunities, motivation, and ability needed to harness these benefits effectively. HR practices that encourage employee participation

in decision-making and problem-solving while also developing teamworking skills can enhance employees' opportunity, motivation, and ability to share the new information acquired from their external networks (Collins and Smith 2006; Flinchbaugh et al. 2016). Therefore, when encouraging employees to build bridging social capital, companies should simultaneously implement employee involvement practices such as HIWPs to amplify the impact of EBSC on knowledge sharing and resilience development.

These insights are particularly relevant for service sector SMEs, which comprise over three-quarters of our sample. In service-oriented SMEs, where value creation relies less on tangible assets and more on intangible resources such as employees' knowledge, skills, and external networks, encouraging employees to engage in knowledge sharing is critical to enhancing service quality, innovation, and adaptability (Salunke et al. 2019; Swart et al. 2014; Kor and Mesko 2013). Managers should use these insights to design mechanisms that motivate employees, particularly those in customer-facing roles, to build external networks and participate in HIWPs that facilitate cross-boundary knowledge sharing, thereby strengthening organizational resilience.

5.3 | Limitations and Future Directions

This study has some limitations that suggest directions for future research. First, although our model—linking EBSC to organizational resilience via knowledge sharing—is consistent with dynamic capabilities theory, the causal effects implied cannot be clearly determined due to the cross-sectional nature of our design. Scholars have also noted that understanding how SMEs transform resources into organizational capabilities requires attention to temporal dynamics (Zahra 2021). Future research can address this limitation by employing longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs to disentangle these effects more robustly.

Second, we only considered one boundary condition, HIWPs, in the relationship between EBSC and knowledge sharing. Future research should explore how other organizational factors, such as leadership, may influence the impact of EBSC on organizational outcomes, given the documented role of frontline managers in influencing the implementation of HRM practices (Arthur et al. 2016) and the development of dynamic capabilities through their actions and leadership style (Schoemaker et al. 2018). For example, leaders' supportive behavior for knowledge sharing (Carmeli et al. 2013) is an important construct for future research, as this leadership behavior is critical for both internal and external knowledge sharing. Future studies should examine whether such leadership substitutes for or complements HIWPs. Additionally, future research can benefit from other aspects of HRM, such as rewards and training, that are specifically designed to leverage EBSC to facilitate knowledge sharing and resilience (Wang and Noe 2010; Andreeva et al. 2023), particularly in work contexts where knowledge sharing is central to organizational survival and success.

Third, while collecting data from multiple sources was a strength of our study, we had to compromise by collecting data from three respondents from each employee group. Similar designs have been used in prior research (Barrick et al. 2015, who used four respondents per group). Although participants were randomly selected to ensure representativeness, and the statistics justified the aggregation of our study variables, future research could strengthen the design by recruiting more raters, especially for larger SMEs, to enhance reliability and representativeness in capturing organizational practices and activities.

Fourth, although we base our rationale for the moderating effects of HIWPs in the relationship between EBSC and knowledge sharing on previous empirical evidence, we did not measure how employees actually experience HIWPs—an aspect more proximal to knowledge-sharing behavior. Thus, the microfoundations of how organizational resources such as EBSC are effectively transformed to build organizational capabilities remain conceptual. Future research should address this gap by collecting data not only on macro-organizational variables but also on micro-level variables that capture employees' experiences, motivation, and attitudes. Such a design can help answer questions such as how organizational level management practices (e.g., HIWPs) influence employees' experiences of opportunities to share and exchange knowledge with others, and how these individual experiences emerge and accumulate at the organizational level to form organizational resources such as collective work engagement (Barrick et al. 2015), ultimately influencing organizational outcomes like resilience.

Finally, our study was conducted in a relatively dynamic business environment with SMEs in Nigeria, a fast-developing economy, and so our findings could be context-specific. While Nigeria represents a unique case of an emerging market with a diverse cultural landscape and distinct institutional challenges, there are significant similarities between Nigeria and other African countries. Many of the challenges SMEs face in Nigeria, such as regulatory constraints and limited access to finance, human capital, and infrastructure, are also prevalent in other African nations (Beck and Cull 2014; Endris and Kassegn 2022). As a result, our findings may apply to SMEs in other African countries with similar economic and institutional contexts.

Indeed, broadly speaking, our findings are consistent with the conclusions of other emerging economies in Africa. For instance, our findings on the role of social capital in fostering knowledge sharing closely mirror research from Ghana (Amoako-Gyampah et al. 2021), reinforcing the idea that extensive external social networks can drive knowledge exchange across diverse settings. Similarly, our findings on HIWPs and their role in leveraging EBSC to enhance knowledge sharing are consistent with studies emphasizing the impact of HRM practices on knowledge management in Africa (Nansubuga et al. 2019). This consistency suggests that our findings hold a certain level of generalizability across different national and organizational contexts. However, the specific context of our study and its potential implications cannot be ignored. In particular, the generalizability of the findings to more stable or developed economies, where SMEs face different competitive pressures, regulatory environments, and institutional frameworks, may be limited (Peng et al. 2008). Future research should extend our model by testing its applicability in various African countries and other developing countries, as well as in more established market environments where

SMEs may have greater resource access and encounter different challenges.

6 | Conclusion

Our research examines how and when EBSC at the organizational level is related to organizational resilience. Using a moderated mediation model grounded in dynamic capabilities theory and data from a sample of SMEs from Nigeria, our findings reveal that the relationship between EBSC and organizational resilience, mediated by knowledge sharing, is more pronounced when HIWPs are implemented at a high rather than a low level. These results underscore the valuable contribution of employees' bridging social capital and highlight the importance of HIWPs as an effective strategy for SMEs to leverage this crucial resource for enhancing resilience. Our study should encourage future research to explore further how employees' social capital formed outside the organization can be accumulated and integrated over time to make an organization more resilient.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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