

An Analysis of the Literature Surrounding HRM Practices: Establishing a Direction for Future Research

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This research paper aims to analyze the past literature on HPWPs and HPWS due to their importance in both an academic and professional context. A comprehensive comparison from various sectors has been conducted to generalize the findings. Relevant studies that were published over the last 25 years (1991-2015) have been included in this review. It is observed that HPWPs have been used at both an organizational and individual level. Positive outcomes have been observed between HPWPs and organizational outcomes. Based on the findings of the study, various future directions have been proposed. A better understanding of HPWPs can help HR directors to develop the right policy for their organizations in order to achieve desired organizational outcomes.

Key words: *Human resource management practices (HRM), high performance work practices (HPWPs), high performance work systems (HPWSs), Literature review, Organizational Performance.*

Introduction

Delery and Doty (1996) stated that researchers have agreed that methods used by organizations have effects on the organizational outcomes. High performance work systems are HRM bundles that have a multiplier effect related to each individual practice, which improves the workplace effectiveness (Toh, Morgeson, and Campion, 2008). This concept has been used in a variety of ways including high-performance HRM systems, high commitment work systems, high-involvement work systems, or HPWSs. Such systems help enhance productivity, performance, and employee commitment (Posthuma et al., 2013). Organizations that have implemented high performance work systems have reportedly shown

an increase in performance and human capital (Becker and Huselid,2006). This helps organizations by motivating and empowering employees, enhancing their abilities, skills, and knowledge. However, management scholars have no mutual consensus over the specific HRM practices (Combs et al., 2006). In addition, there has been little research into the contextual environments which might help in choosing the right HRM practices for an organization (Datta et al.,2005). It is well understood that monetary and nonmonetary rewards are helpful in enhancing human capital, however, research on how and these methods could be optimized is not well studied (Buller & McEvoy, 2012). The focus of past HRM studies has focused on the manufacturing industry (Combs et al. 2006). Other sectors such as the service industry, banking and call centers have not been widely researched by the academics.

The focus of the current study is to identify work practices which help in value creation. Related studies published between 1991 and 2015 are included in this review. of the intention of this review is to assess the future direction of HRM literature. The objectives of the study are (1) to summarize and conceptualize studies related to HRM practices across different contexts, countries, and environments, (2) to recommend future agenda related to HRM.

Literature Review

There has been considerable change in HRM literature over the past few decades. Since the mid-1970s, HRM research has been studied in different dimensions related to purpose and design (Ferriset et al. 1999). As this research has evolved over the years, several modifications have been conducted in HRM literature and its focus has been diverted from personnel management to sustaining a competitive advantage (Wright and McMahan, 1992). The application of HRM practices is contextually based. Each organization applies certain HRM practices based on the demands of the organization. There is a longstanding debate on whether or not high-performance work practices help in providing a long-term competitive advantage (Barney et al. 2001). HR functions might be applied to other organizations, but high-performance work systems are unique to organizations which help enhance human capital. According to Wright et al. (2001), empirical research has failed to determine that HR practices are imitable or path dependent. In addition, there is also lack of literature which determines the effect of human resource practices on employee's behaviors, skills, or organizational performance (Barney et al. 2001).

Based on the objectives of the study, this research will only be focused on studies which are related to high-performance work practices and systems. Additionally, only empirical studies have been included in this review to generalize the findings of HRM literature over the past years. The following keywords are used to search the relevant studies: HPWSs, HPWPs, strategic human resource management, higher performance HRM system and high

commitment work system. Newspapers and magazines, unpublished literature, and case studies are not included in this review. Only empirical or peer reviewed studies are included in this review. It is ensured that multiple articles by the same authors are not included in the review. Studies which used same HPWPs are also excluded. Only studies published during the period 1991-2015 are included in this review.

Business Research

Strategic human resource management is an interesting area of study in organizational theory. Traditionally, human capabilities are regarded as an intangible asset that can bring value creation. Traditionally, it is viewed as revenue-producing approach which enhances productivity. Kaufman (2012) stated that HR literature has failed to determine the boundaries regarding the application of specific HR practices which help in enhancing organizational performance. Furthermore, Kaufman (2012) stated that the existing literature failed to consider the law of diminishing returns while discussing HR literature. This states that the application of more HR practices leads to better performance.

To answer how firms can build competitive advantage, Boxall (1998) combined resource based view of HRM with rest of the other HRM concepts. According to Boxall (1998), competitive advantage can only be met when human resources are aligned with organizational ability, relative immobility, and rare value. Additionally, employee development should also be focused. The review in the next section is divided into empirical and theoretical research for better understanding of HPWSs and HPWPs.

Empirical research

It is quite challenging to examine the causal relationship between certain HRM practices and organizational metrics like financial performance or its impact on customers. However, many studies have examined causal relationships to explore this aspect of HRM research (Delaney & Huselid, 1996). Such studies have been able to support the findings of previous studies, stating that various HRM practices enhance organizational performance and also enable organizations to sustain a competitive advantage (Huselid, 1995). Most of these studies have demonstrated positive impact of HRM practices across countries at individual and organizational level (Cheng-Hua et al. 2009). Meta-analytic review by Combs et al. (2005) shows more influence of HPWSs on organizational performance as compared to HPWPs. It is found that the correlation between HPWSs and organizational performance is 0.20, while the correlation coefficient between HPWPs and organizational performance is found to be 0.11.

Patel et al. (2012) conducted a study to examine the impact of HPWPs on organizational growth. It was found that HPWPs have direct influence on firm growth. Additionally,

organizational ambidexterity plays the role of mediator between both variables. Organizational ambidexterity is defined as a firm's ability to use current market situations while also looking at possibilities of future markets (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009). Huselid (1995) conducted a study in the US to examine the impact of HPWPs and organizational performance of 1000 firms. Findings of the study suggested that certain HPWPs have significant impacts on employee productivity and employee turnover. Similar findings are observed in the study of Delaney and Huselid (1996) when they studied 590 financial and non-financial firms. It was stated that HRM practices are significantly associated with the financial performance of organizations. Koch and McGrath (1996) conducted a study to examine the impact of HRM practices of employee productivity. It was observed that recruitment and selection and planning are directly associated with employee productivity.

Several studies examined the impact of HRM practices on firm performance across different countries by using different measures. For example, Ahmad and Schroeder (2003) used Pfeffer's (1998) measures of HR practices to determine organizational performance. Firm performance was measured across four different countries by analyzing 107 manufacturing plants. Plant performance was measured by speed, delivery, cost and flexibility. Findings of the study show that HRM practices have a positive impact on plant's performance. A study by Hartog and Verburg (2004) also supported the previous findings stating that performance of Dutch firms is enhanced due to application of various HRM practices. Hartog and Verburg (2004) stated that region or country plays an important role in predicting the relationship but overall findings of the literature shows that HPWPs affect firm performance across different countries.

A study by Rabl et al. (2011) in Algeria found that HPWPs have a significant impact on individual level outcomes like employee motivation and positive work attitudes. It is equally possible that culture, employment practices, economics and employment laws might impact the effectiveness of HPWPs. Beside organizational level outcomes, several studies have focused on individual level outcomes associated with HPWPs. For example, García-Chas et al. (2014) stated that HPWPs are positively associated with employee motivation, procedural justice, and job satisfaction. Messersmith et al. (2011) conducted a study to examine the impact of HRM practices on several employee outcomes. It was found that HRM practices are positively associated with psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. Yanadori and Jaarsveld (2014) used Canada Workplace and Employee Survey statistics and concluded that HRM practices are helpful in enhancing profitability and job satisfaction among employees. In another study, Selden and Sowa (2015) found that HPWPs help in reducing employee turnover. Bae et al. (2011) stated that HPWPs are helpful not only enhancing workplace productivity, but also assist in quality enhancement. Although HRM research has produced various results, still there is need to fill the gap by identifying

the processes which assist in attaining its potential or the circumstances which help in attaining competitive advantage.

Theoretical research

Earlier research examined high performance work practices in order to determine the impact of HR practices on workplace effectiveness (Becker et al. 1997). The US Department of Labor issued a report in 1993 stating the specific HPWPs. These include training, recruitment and selection, information sharing, job description, job design, employee participation programs, compensation and incentives packages, promotions, and performance appraisal mechanisms. Pfeffer (1994) first reported 16 HPWPs but later reduced it to 7, which includes job security, selection of new personnel, decentralization, compensation packages, training and development, promotional strategies, and information sharing. Furthermore, Delery and Doty (1996) also reduced the number of practices from 16 to 7. These include training and development programs, promotional strategies, mechanized system of appraisal, job security, profit sharing, and voice mechanisms. Although these practices help enhance workplace effectiveness, still there is lack of implementation of such practices (Blasi & Kruse, 2006). Recently, Posthuma et al. (2013) suggested eight HPWSs which include compensation packages, job design, training and development, recruitment and selection, managing turnover, performance appraisal system, employee relations, and promotional strategies.

Despite these developments, researchers are still looking for common HPWSs which can be operationalized for most of the organizations. Researchers suggest that only those practices which yield good outcomes should be used., Posthuma et al. (2013) recommended 10 best HPWPs which include rewards, benefits plans, authority distribution, selection of right employee, appraisal system based on objectives, goal specific appraisals, appraisal for job ladders, cross functional teams, and a strict hiring policy. Depending upon unique business features, authors have designed specific HPWPs. For example, Mazzei et al. (2016) suggested 9 HPWPs for SMEs. This includes public recognition, employee development programs, information sharing, job security, equal employment opportunity, incentive systems, job autonomy, onboarding and recruitment, and selection strategies. Keeping in view these strategies, a general question arises about the applicability that whether these practices can be applied equally in every organization regardless of size and nature of industry?

For the successful achievement of HR practices, Rogers and Wright (1998) proposed a model that links HR practices with business. Their focus was limited to consumer product markets, political social markets, employment and business markets. Their model consists of seven strategies for the measurement of HR strategies in order to reach the top level of the suggested model. It starts from “defining a clear business strategy” to “HR scorecard”. Buller

and McEvoy (2012) argue to measure the performance which results due to the application of HRM practices. For this purpose, researchers developed a model which generates human and social capital and these help in the suitable generation of organizational effectiveness. Another model is proposed by Jiang and Liu (2015) which helps in examining the role of HPWPs to determine organizational performance. According to Jiang and Liu (2015), the shared code, cooperation and interaction density are the three social capital aspects which determine influence of HPWPs on organizational effectiveness. The gap in strategic human resource management lies in the development of HR which can help in gaining a competitive advantage.

Strategic human resource management (SHRM) desires to develop a modern theory. There is vast field for successful development of theoretical basis for managing complex organizational structures. Keeping this mind, HPWSs and worker participation is an important ingredient of competitive advantage of firms. There is an increasing need for expansion on the current theory. This can be achieved through further qualitative research (Wright & McMahan, 2011). According to SHRM, workers are considered as a part of social capital which yields a competitive advantage. HPWSs are the source of provision of this social capital. Thus, HRM systems have an important place in the organizational structure as they helps in attaining firm performance (Becker & Huselid, 2010).

Application of HPWPs to measure organizational performance

HPWPs are widely used to enhance organizational performance. Many production and service organizations are able to gain mass production due to generalizability of HPWPs. Empirical studies have shown that there is positive relationship between HPWPs and individual-organizational level outcomes. For example, Bailey et al. (2001) conducted a study on the imaging industry to measure the impact of HPWPs and firm's performance. Upon analysis, it was found that HPWPs positively affected the firm profitability. Fan et al. (2014) conducted a study to examine the influence of HPWPs on employee attitudes. It was found that HPWPs help in reducing employee burnout. In another study, Fu et al. (2015) discovered innovative performance and innovative behaviors of employees are due to the application of HPWPs. Wood et al. (2006) found that there is little influence of HPWPs on firm performance in a study of 145 UK call centers. In another study Gelade and Ivery (2003) found that work climate plays mediating role between HPWPs and organizational performance. In banking sector, Gibbs and Ashill (2013) found that HPWPs play an important role and has a positive influence on worker's behaviors and satisfaction. As a result, the customers can obtain benefits. In addition to these findings, Chuang and Liao (2010) reported that effectiveness of HPWPs is affected by national and organizational culture. These findings are observed when they examined 133 retail stores in Taiwan. They found that HPWPs are more influential to firm and employee performance when

organizational culture is conducive to employee efficiency. In another study, Jones et al. (2010) found that employee's performance was better when they are given opportunities to participate in organizational matters and when information is shared with them, compared to other organizations who failed to do so. Such findings show that an employee participatory model works better even for those employees who don't have complicated tasks. Buller and McEvoy (2012) suggested drawing a conceptual model explaining the path modeling between HRM practices and organizational performance.

Discussion

Although in the past 25 years HPWPs have been exhaustively studied, their evolution, regarding business practices is still modest (Paauwe, 2009). SHRM is in the development stages and many of the new mediators, moderators and other contextual variables are yet to be discovered in relation to HPWP and organizational performance. This is supported by the studies that have been published over the last 25 years (Posthuma et al. 2013). Currently, extensive research on the measurement of HPWP is carried out and it can be summarized that cultural and country settings play an important role of gaining maximum output out of such HPWPs.

It is evident from the past literature that authors suggest four main streams of HPWPs as (1) what are high performance work practices (Murphy & Williams, 2004), (2) which industrial and country settings are suitable for application of HPWPs (Gibbs & Ashill, 2013), (3) impact of HPWPs in measuring performance and organizational outcomes (Muller & DiPietro, 2006) and (4) "the black box" of HPWPs and organizational performance (Buller & McEvoy, 2012).

Earlier studies have attempted to seek out the specific practices which are helpful in workplace effectiveness. Following this research, several models have been designed which included more than five practices in each model (Delery & Doty, 1996). This literature is useful for HR scholars, but there is still questions that must be answered. This includes what defines these high-performance work practices? How mutual was the mutual agreement between professionals and academic scholars established? Also, it is equally important to understand whether these practices are helpful in attaining high organizational performance or if they are just hygiene factors needed to improve the functioning of the organization? In future, the Delphi model or expert's opinion can be used to ascertain the applicability of HPWPs. Furthermore, it can also be assessed that whether HPWPs can be used in modern settings while they were used by previous scholars. The existing literature shows that HPWPs play an important role in enhancing positive organizational outcomes and are dependent on country settings and organizational culture (Muller & DiPietro, 2006).

Future studies might use both the individual and combined bundle of HPWPs for various industries. It can be seen from literature that HPWPs help in enhancing organizational productivity, job satisfaction and reduce turnover. HPWPs have been studied extensively in business research and have had positive outcomes. For example, Combs et al. (2005) found 0.20 correlations between HPWP and organizational performance while correlation coefficient was 0.10 when individual practice was used. Future studies might try to explore why HPWPs are important and also find the factors which are responsible for successful implementation of these practices. Case studies can be helpful to identify companies that applied HPWPs and can be helpful to explore their results.

Although scholars have identified the relationship between HPWPs and organizational performance, they lack significant research. Buller and McEvoy (2012) employed the term “line of sight” to explain the link between the variables (HPWPs and organizational performance). One of the major concerns with this term is the presence of various factors associated with these two variables. Future studies might examine the benefits derived from the association with these practices.

Theoretical Implications

Several theoretical implications can be drawn from the current study. Based on debates and key trends, this study has produced useful insight for academicians and professionals. Current review has presented HPWPs in a different pattern, including their relationship in a different context with variety of outcomes at individual and organizational levels. Understanding the application of HPWPs in industries can be helpful to expand the knowledge about their applicability. By applying various bundles, researchers can determine whether or not there is need to further modify the current bundles. Noticing the positive influence of bundles on various factors, researchers can determine the mechanisms by how they react. By adapting the current models in future research can be helpful for future researchers as they can use it in different cultural and organizational contexts.

Managers can establish from this review which practices have high output values. Based on the findings of the study, managers can find the various ways of measuring effectiveness of their respective HR programs designed for their organizations and employees. This study can be helpful to managers as they can choose the most relevant practice depending upon the size, sector, and type of workers. Based on this theory, it can be summarized that individual practices are not so helpful as compared to combined bundles. Therefore, managers can combine all practices in the form of a bundle in their respective organization.

Future Research

From the previously mentioned literature, it can be established that Posthuma et al. (2013) proposed different topics of study which have gained attention in recent era. Some of the practices include cross functional teams, greater autonomy, mechanized appraisal systems, and developmental opportunities. Despite the interest of scholars, Blasi and Kruse (2006) stated that very few professionals have implemented such practices in their respective countries. Kaufman (2012) identifies that principles for the application of such practices might be an interesting area of future scholars. This is due to the notion that the application of more HR practices leads towards enhanced performance is against the law of diminishing returns. Future researchers should determine which practices are helpful within different sectors in order to diversify the existing literature. The review shows that most of the HPWPs have been studied in industrial or manufacturing sector. Applying such practices in other sectors, like education sector, would be a valuable contribution to the literature. By applying the Delphi technique, future scholars can identify various practices which are helpful for their respective sector. With the help of expert review, important practices related to industries can be identified, which might be helpful for future scholars and managers. In addition, the identification of the associated factors which are helpful in the successful implementation of these practices would be a valuable contribution.

Conclusion

HPWPs are helpful in enhancing organizational performance at organizational and individual level. Though scholars have shown a great interest in various HPWPs, some have been identified for various sectors (Cho et al. 2006). However, there is no consensus among scholars over the best practices. The reason is that labour rules, government policies, and economic conditions affect the practical implementation of these practices. The review shows that HPWPs positively influence organizations at an individual level and an organizational level (Huselid, 1995). Furthermore, these practices are combined to make a complex system (Becker & Huselid, 1998) and have different associated outcomes, depending upon the size, country and culture. Future scholars need to keep this factor in mind. It can be concluded that human resource management practices are only helpful to organization when the relevant fit is observed between practices and an organizational context (Daud et al. 2018; Malik & Khan, 2013).

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