
Developing a Causal Linkage between High Performance Work Practices and Employee Engagement

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With a budding number of researches linking systems of High Performance Work Practices to employee engagement, recent scholars have pushed for revelation of the underlying factors that enable this connection. In this study, based on thirty-five HPWPs, the role of awareness level of employees and that of employees' perception regarding effectiveness of high performance practices is explored in depth. The study provides insights into how high performance work systems influence the engagement level of the employees. Both i.e. employees' awareness level and their perception are found to explain significant variation in employee engagement. Further, when thirty-five HPWPs are subjected to factor analysis, it results into reduction of data to nine performance factors. The nine extracted performance factors are investigated for linkage with employee engagement through regression equation.

Key Words: Employee Engagement, High Performance Work Systems, HR Practices, Team Orientation, Employee Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Employee Engagement at work has seen increased interest in this new era of Strategic Human Resource Management. One can easily observe the growth in the number of practitioners, theories and writings on concepts, constructs, drivers and utility of employee engagement. Employee engagement is the connection people feel to their work and to their organization that results in higher levels of performance, productivity, commitment and loyalty. It has gained prominence as one of the pivotal topic in the sphere of human resource management (Baldev and Anupama, 2010). The greater an employee's engagement, the more likely the employee is ready to 'go the extra mile' and is keener to deliver the results. In addition, engaged employees are expected to have longer stay with the organization. Engaged employees are stated to play a key role in achieving organizational success and competitive advantage in the environment of throat-cut competition. A large number of studies explore the relation between employee engagement and performance based outcome variables. Shuck et al. (2011) suggested that ensuring higher employee engagement could create convincing competitive gains for the organizations across the globe. Employee engagement is the vital element affecting organizational effectiveness, innovation and competitiveness (Welch, 2011). Higher level of

employee engagement results into higher productivity, efficiency and effectiveness, lower absenteeism and less turnover intention, superior service quality, more satisfied and loyal customers, high job satisfaction, and increased organizational citizenship behavior. Employee engagement is not a naturally occurring phenomena rather it has to be induced through sustained efforts. Various HR practices are implemented to enhance engagement of the employees. Researchers have highlighted various positive associations of different human resource department interventions with engagement level of the employee. Wright et al. (1994) concluded that HR practices could shape up the employee perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors and hence greater employee engagement and loyalty could be induced. Company's investment in employee facilitation and development leads to greater employees' obligation towards the organization and therefore increase employees' motivation to work hard to support organizational effectiveness (Asad et al., 2011). With the advent of High Performance Work System (HPWS), there is renewed interest among scholars and practitioners to explore association between employee engagement level and various aspects of High Performance Work Practices. The present paper tends to investigate the relationship between employee engagement and two different aspects of HPWS i.e. awareness of employees for various high performance work practices and employees' perception regarding effectiveness of HPWPs. A brief review of previous studies on employee engagement, HPWPs and on importance of study of employees' awareness and perception is given below.

LITERATURE REVIEW

HPWPs and Employee engagement

Previous researchers have highlighted the positive alliance of implementation of various human resource practices with engagement level of the employees. Masroor and Fakir (2009) conducted a

research on nurses of Malaysia. The study revealed that with effective use of HRM practices, the level of intentions to leave the job is considerably reduced. HRM practices are viewed by employees as a 'personalized' commitment of organization for them. This systematic organizational effort for the betterment of employees is reciprocated back to the organization by employees through positive attitudes and behavior (Hannah and Iverson, 2004). Scott et al. (1994) suggested that whether employees give their best wholeheartedly to the organization and works to their potential depends to a large part on the way they feel about their job and work environment. And employees' perception for work and environment is dependent on how well HRM practices are implemented. Many other researchers also come up with the findings that human resource practices like the employee participation, team building and total quality management results into lower turnover intentions and increased satisfaction and engagement of the employees (Huselid, 1995, Pfeffer, 1994, Cho et al., 2006).

Further, contemporary research work on 'best practice' i.e. high performance and human capital instrumental human resource management (HRM) revealed that organizations offer resources and opportunities that improve the motivation, skills, attitudes and behaviors of their employees (Kuvaas, 2008). And hence involvement and commitment of employees increases. These modern best HR practices have been synchronized to institute a system known as High Performance Work System. High Performance Work System has been defined as 'a group of separate but interconnected HR practices designed to enhance employees' skills, knowledge and efforts' (Takeuchi et al., 2007). Major constructs of HPWS includes practices related to structured and holistic approaches to recruitment and selection, training and development of both general and job specific skills, pay based on performance and merit, other incentive based compensation plans, information sharing and Management Information Systems, rigorous performance and potential appraisal processes (Datta et al., 2005, Huselid, 1995).

Owing to strong relationship between performance practices and employee engagement, these practices are also known as 'high commitment' or 'high involvement' practices. Guthrie et al. (2009) concluded that High Performance Work Systems, a set of complementary HRM and management policies and practices tend to have lower rates of employee absenteeism and voluntary turnover along with high labor productivity and lower labor costs. HPWPs are thought to endow employees with greater levels of skills, information, motivation and discretion. Wright et al., (1994) regarded human resource practices as an instrument through which employees' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors could be guided. Hence, they affirmed that the role of human resource practices in enhancing employee engagement cannot be overlooked. Asad et al. (2011) and Sardar et al. (2011) conducted two different studies to find out the impact of human resource practices on employee engagement in the banking sector of Pakistan. The results of both studies were quite same and they articulated a significant relationship between human resource practices (Coordination, decision-making, Performance Reward and Employee Involvement) and employee engagement.

Despite growing body of work highlighting the positive association between HPWS and indirect performance parameters like motivation, engagement, morale, theorists have highlighted a lack of clear understanding of the key employee related mediating factors that link the utilization of HPWS to these parameters (Becker and Huselid, 2006, Chadwick and Dabu, 2009). In simple words, academicians could visualize that High Performance Work Practices are beneficial for a firm but they are less clear as to exactly how relationship between employee related factors like their awareness, perception for HPWS affect employees engagement level. Numerous researchers have recommended that HPWS operate by acting on employee skills, motivation, and opportunities to contribute (Lepak et al., 2006, Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009). Thus same HR practice could not

induce similar level of engagement among all employees of the firm. Kumar (2014) clarified that individual differences like attitude, perception, awareness, belief and value system mediates the connection between HPWS and employee engagement. This approach has tended to emphasize on employees' perception, awareness and attitude towards HR systems of the organizations.

Importance of Employees' awareness and perception:

Das (2012) stated that HPWS and its benefits like contribution to employee engagement have been studied in great depth. But most of the work discussed HPWPs from the point of view of management or employer and workforce's aspect is highly ignored. Yadav and Yadav (2013) stated that employees' perception and their willingness to adapt new work system have significant effect on success of HPWS and hence on benefits associated with it. Combs et al. (2006) found considerable relationship between employees' perception of success towards ongoing change effort and perceived sense of competence. Datta et al. (2005) concluded that employee retention, revenue, sales and profits are positively correlated with employee attitude and perceptions of work conditions. Nishii et al. (2009) also gave similar sort of conclusion. They elaborated that perception of employees for HRM practices is related with organisational outcome and productivity. Further innumerable other researches also indicate importance of employees' perception. A group of employees having positive and favourable perception for any practices is essential for optimization. Same is more relevant in the case of High Performance Work System as it consists of bundles of practices. Differences in employees' perception could arise because employee tends to observe same situation or information through different cameras. They experiences same HRM practices differently. According to Nishii et al. (2009) people have an inbuilt mechanism to filter external information. This filtering mechanism depends

upon a number of factors like experience, attitude, belief system, aspiration, qualification, surroundings etc. Thus it differs from person to person. As a result of which same external information is filtered differently and thus elicit various attitudinal and behavioural responses.

Further other studies have suggested that awareness of any practice or phenomenon is of utmost importance as this leads to its proper implementation and facilitation. When the employees are aware of these practices they will resort to innovative work practices which will ultimately affect the individual and organizational performance in an affirmative way. Kumar (2014) stated that awareness for a practice reduces the fear of uncertainty and apprehensions regarding changes undergoing within an organisation. Aware workforce adapts to new practices relatively easier than unaware employees.

Though relevance of employees' perception for accruing maximum benefits from HPWS has been studied by previous scholars but work on exploring direct association between perception and employee engagement is still in nascent stage. Literature review highlights the dearth of research work done in the field. Research on awareness and its utility is even more neglected than employees' perception. The present study explores these two deserted but important aspects of individual differences.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The main aim of the present research was to study linkage between HPWS and employee engagement. This linkage was studied from the relatively newer dimensions of the organisational behaviour. The dimensions are employees' awareness and employees' perception regarding effectiveness of HPWPs. Although employee's perception has been a topic of much discussion among scholars and practitioners but study of perception regarding effectiveness of a practice and that of awareness level is a novel idea.

The study is based upon exploratory-cum-descriptive research design. Primary data is collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of 35 HPWPs has been used. Part A of the questionnaire captured the respondents' demography such as age, gender, work experience and educational qualification and was analyzed using the descriptive statistics. Part B and Part C consisted of 35 HPWPs questions. Part B measured employees' awareness for HPWPs and Part C accessed worker's perception regarding effectiveness of HPWPs. Five-point rating scales ranging from highly available to unavailable and from highly effective to ineffective were used. Part D investigated employee engagement level with the help of 72 statements. The main constructs of employee engagement were work environment (14 statements), leadership and direction (11 statements), relationship with immediate seniors and co-workers (14 statements), compensation programme (4 statements), job security and career development (7 statements), policies and work procedures of the company (6 statements), work life balance (6 statements), and workplace wellbeing (10 statements).

Random sampling has been used to collect data from various organisations. The industries mainly includes banking, insurance, textile, BPO, sugar, shoe, consultancy, cold drink, rice, etc. Sample size is 210. Employees were taken from top and middle level as they are more likely to encounter HPWPs. For analysis purpose, it has been strictly ensured that an array of manufacturing, service, private, public, Indian and foreign companies are approached. Further, while administering questionnaire, it has been ensured that data come from all categories like men, women, highly experienced to less experienced ones, aged personnel to fresh recruits, etc. Factor analysis was employed to reduce data. Further regression analysis is used to explore relation between extracted factors of HPWPs and employee engagement.

RESULTS

Demographical Profile

Female respondent comprised of 49.5%, which means 104 of the total respondents and male employee contributed 51.5% that is 106 of the total respondents. The study revealed that out of the total sample surveyed, 11.91% of them were below the age of 25 years. 44.7% of respondents were found within the age category of 26-35 years. 19.5% were within the age range of 36-45 years. 14.20% were within the age group of 46-55 years and the remainder 9.52% were found above the age of 55 years. The majority of the surveys participants (38.09%) have been employed for more than 5 years. 33.33% of employees were within the category of 5-10 years of work experience and 28.52% falls within the category of more than 10 years of work experience. 57.10% of respondents were found to be Graduate. Out of 200 respondents 70 were under Graduate and only 20 were Post Graduate.

Table-1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Variables

Table 1 stated the mean and the standard deviation of the variables of the present study. Awareness and

effectiveness were taken as Independent Variables thus there correlation significance was required to be studied. It was noticed that significant correlation of $r = 0.54$ (5% level of significance) existed between awareness and effectiveness level. But t-test showed a significant difference, $t = -2.014$ (at 5% level of significance). These results clarified that although awareness and effectiveness level correlates but both measures are significantly different for participants of this research.

Table-2: KMO, Bartlett's Test and Cronbach's Alpha Test

Table 2 indicated results of KMO, Bartlett's and Cronbach's Alpha test. The values of various tests confirmed sampling adequacy, validity, normality, factorability and reliability of questionnaire. Field (2000) stated any value of Cronbach's Alpha greater than .08 shows higher reliability. Higher value of KMO and Bartlett's test established data is appropriate for application of factor analysis. Thirty-five High Performance Work Practices were studied for awareness and effectiveness level of employees. When factor analysis was applied to reduce data into easily interpretable form, factors for which factor loading exceeded 0.4 were considered. Principal component factor analysis resulted into following

| Table-1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Variables | | | |
|---|-------|--------------------|-----|
| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | N |
| Awareness Level | 119.4 | 4.352 | 210 |
| Perceptual Effectiveness Level | 123.9 | 4.028 | 210 |
| Employee Engagement | 224.1 | 3.852 | 210 |

| Table-2: KMO, Bartlett's Test and Cronbach's Alpha Test | | |
|---|--------------------|----------|
| Type of Test | | Value |
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy | | .720 |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | Approx. Chi Square | .720 |
| | df | 1378.453 |
| | Sig. | .595 |
| Cronbach's Alpha | | .871 |

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nine performance factors.

F-1: Reward Oriented HPWPs included incentive pay, flexi timing, team reward, job rotation, job enrichment and job sharing. The factor has an Eigen value of 4.752 and it defines 13.577 % of variance.

F-2: Traditional HRM Practices consisted of regular performance appraisal, competency and potential test, postretirement benefit plan, training and development, and formal recruitment and interview. The factor has an Eigen value of 3.905 and it defines 11.157 % of variance.

F-3: Value Creating HPWPs incorporated human resource audit, human resource accounting, multi-skilling and yoga and meditation. The factor has an Eigen value of 3.140 and it defines 8.972 % of variance.

F-4: Employee Engagement HPWPs integrated attitude surveys, feedback mechanism, human resource information system, highlight best employee, counseling session, and formal grievance redressal procedure. It has an Eigen value of 2.947 and it defines 8.420 % of variance.

F-5: Team Oriented HPWPs included problem solving team, continuous improvement team and semi-autonomous team. It has an Eigen value of 2.854 and it defines 8.155 % of variance.

F-6: Social and Safety Need Driven HPWPs comprised of social gathering, family insurance plan and Safe, healthy and happy workplace. The factor-6 has an Eigen value of 2.478 and it defines 7.081 % of variance.

F-7: Employee Empowerment HPWPs summed up employee stock option plan, management by objective and quality circle. The factor has an Eigen value of 2.387 and it defines 6.819 % of variance.

F-8: Procedural Improvement HPWPs summarized staff suggestion scheme and team briefing. The factor has an Eigen value of 2.303 and it defines 6.581 % of variance.

F-9: Psycho-Strengthening HPWPs incorporated corporate social responsibility and surprise factor.

The factor-9 has an Eigen value of 2.13 and it defines 6.088 % of variance.

Further, regression analyses were conducted to study linkage between awareness and perceptual effectiveness of nine extracted factors of HPWPs with employee engagement. Two regression equations: first for awareness of employees for HPWPs and second for perceptual effectiveness of HPWPs were used. Following equation is formulated to access relation between employee engagement and employees' awareness for nine extracted factors of HPWPs.

$$EE = \beta_0 + \beta_1 F_1 + \beta_2 F_2 + \beta_3 F_3 + \beta_4 F_4 + \beta_5 F_5 + \beta_6 F_6 + \beta_7 F_7 + \beta_8 F_8 + \beta_9 F_9$$

Here, EE refers to Employee Engagement, β_0 , β_2 β_9 are constants, F1, F2.....F9 are nine factors of HPWPs.

Table-3: Multiple Regression Analysis Results of Nine Factors Predicting Engagement (Awareness Level)

Hair et al. (1998) stated that optimum value for tolerance and VIF have to above 0.10 and below 10 respectively to avoid problem of multi co-linearity. Hence, the result above indicated that there is no multi co-linearity problem in this study.

Table-4: Model Summary and Result of ANOVA (Awareness Level)

Results from table 3 and table 4 suggested that awareness of employee is significant predictor of engagement of employees in the organizations. 44.89% of variance in employee engagement could be explained through awareness of employees for HPWPs. All nine factors of HPWPs were found to contribute positively (standardized coefficient beta>0) and significantly (Sig. value<.05) at 5% level of significance.

Similar methodology was adopted to study linkage between employee engagement and employees' perception regarding effectiveness of High

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Table-3: Multiple Regression Analysis Results of Nine Factors Predicting Engagement (Awareness Level)

| Predictor Variables | Unstandardized Coefficient β | Standardized Coefficient β | t-value | Sig. | Tolerance | VIF |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|------|-----------|-------|
| Constant | 5.087 | | 7.412 | .000 | | |
| F1 | 0.058 | 0.064 | 6.254 | .001 | .780 | 1.125 |
| F2 | 0.235 | 0.847 | 2.012 | .004 | .845 | 1.114 |
| F3 | 0.233 | 0.007 | 5.697 | .002 | .774 | 1.255 |
| F4 | 0.058 | 0.254 | 5.421 | .000 | .695 | 1.480 |
| F5 | 0.680 | 0.748 | 4.687 | .047 | .214 | 2.041 |
| F6 | 0.753 | 0.075 | 4.410 | .032 | .950 | 1.058 |
| F7 | 0.572 | 0.716 | 3.698 | .000 | .170 | 4.202 |
| F8 | 0.078 | 0.081 | 6.385 | .001 | .768 | 1.322 |
| F9 | 0.510 | 0.680 | 2.658 | .004 | .652 | 1.547 |

Table-4: Model Summary and Result of ANOVA (Awareness Level)

| Regression Model Summary | | | ANOVA | |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------------------|---------|------|
| R | R Square | Std Error of Estimate | F-Value | Sig. |
| 0.67 | 0.4489 | .4502 | 74.514 | .044 |

Table-5: Multiple Regression Analysis Results of Nine Factors Predicting Engagement (Effectiveness Level)

| Predictor Variables | Unstandardized Coefficient β | Standardized Coefficient β | t-value | Sig. | Tolerance | VIF |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|------|-----------|-------|
| Constant | 6.924 | | 5.685 | .002 | | |
| F1 | 0.050 | 0.058 | 2.354 | .014 | .110 | 4.685 |
| F2 | 0.606 | 0.614 | 7.655 | .000 | .588 | 2.540 |
| F3 | 0.354 | 0.004 | 1.871 | .004 | .432 | 2.002 |
| F4 | 0.021 | 0.024 | 6.247 | .007 | .411 | 1.659 |
| F5 | 0.065 | 0.071 | 3.647 | .000 | .435 | 1.697 |
| F6 | 0.274 | 0.287 | 5.937 | .040 | .620 | 3.621 |
| F7 | 0.521 | 0.534 | 3.627 | .002 | .115 | 4.652 |
| F8 | 0.428 | 0.439 | 8.352 | .031 | .546 | 2.354 |
| F9 | 0.530 | 0.537 | 8.652 | .013 | .410 | 1.611 |

Table-6: Model Summary and Result of ANOVA (Effectiveness Level)

| Regression Model Summary | | | ANOVA | |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------------------|---------|------|
| R | R Square | Std Error of Estimate | F-Value | Sig. |
| 0.70 | 0.490 | .3704 | 68.279 | .039 |

Performance Work Practices. Here also regression comes out to be:

$$EE = \delta_0 + \delta_1 F_1 + \delta_2 F_2 + \delta_3 F_3 + \delta_4 F_4 + \delta_5 F_5 + \delta_6 F_6 + \delta_7 F_7 + \delta_8 F_8 + \delta_9 F_9$$

Here, EE refers to Employee Engagement, $\delta_0, \delta_2, \dots, \delta_9$ are constants, F_1, F_2, \dots, F_9 are nine factors of HPWPs (Perceptual effectiveness of HPWPs).

Table-5: Multiple Regression Analysis Results of Nine Factors Predicting Engagement (Effectiveness Level)

Here also value of tolerance and that of VIF was above 0.10 and below 10 respectively. Hence, the result above indicated that there is no multi collinearity problem in this study too.

Table-6: Model Summary and Result of ANOVA (Effectiveness Level)

Again, results from table 5 and table 6 recommended that employees' perception for effectiveness of High Performance Work Practices was a significant predictor of employee engagement in the organizations. Here 49% of variance in employee engagement could be explained through perceptual effectiveness for HPWPs. All nine factors of HPWPs were found to contribute positively (standardized coefficient $\beta > 0$) and significantly (Sig. value $< .05$) at 5% level of significance.

DISCUSSION

Berg (1999) argued that HR practices were designed to motivate workers in different ways and encourage them to put forth their best efforts. These practices link job resources with organizational outcomes via employee engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Based on this premise Guthrie (2009) concluded that HRM practices as a predictor of employee engagement. Direct researches on the relationship between human resource practices and employee engagement are currently scarce and hard to come by (Guthrie, 2012). HPWS is new concept in Indian

context thus its relation with engagement is not explored much. This study is among the pioneer work that explores the linkage between High Performance Work System and employee engagement. Another contribution of the study is regression equation that relates nine different factors of HPWPs with employee engagement. Organizations can target more contributing practices or factors to consolidate employee engagement. For interference factor 2 i.e. Traditional HRM practices contributes most to engagement thus these practices could be emphasize. Value creating HPWPs that included HRIS, HRA, Yoga and meditation etc. are weakly but significantly linked with employee engagement. Thus organization could seek to actualize the potential of these modern practices.

This study also addresses the concern about lack of academic literature on awareness and perceptual effectiveness. Previous studies have not emphasized on employees' perception angle while dealing with effectiveness of HR practices. Both awareness and perceptual effectiveness are found to be significantly related with employee engagement. Therefore, organisations are required to construct the high performance work system of the organization based employees' awareness and perceptual effectiveness to enhance employee engagement. Another option is organizations must enhance the awareness level of the employee and mould their perception before institutionalizing any HPWS. This would help to bridge the gap between the appropriate high performance work systems to what is actually practiced in the organizations.

CONCLUSION

The present study has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretical it could highlight the scarcity of studies on employees' perception and awareness for HR practices. The present work will help to establish perceptual effectiveness and awareness as two important paradigm of optimization of HPWS. Linkage between HPWPs

and employee engagement has been recognized but more importantly nine constructs/factor of High Performance Work System has been associated with employee engagement. The study concludes that organizations are required to focus on awareness and perception of employee to derive utmost benefits from linkage of HPWPs and employee engagement.

The study is marred with few limitations too. Firstly, a larger sample size would have made the study more worthwhile. Secondly owing to lack of previous observations, results of the study could not be compared for continuity or deviation. Future researchers could take this initiative to higher levels. Individual related factors like attitude, belief system, values etc. could also be explored for their possible mediating effect. Now employee engagement could be enhanced further by utilizing results of the present research work.

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