

IMPACT OF SKILL ENHANCING HR PRACTICES ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE; MODERATING ROLE OF CENTRALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Bundles of HR practices and job performance relationship is very essential to understand for any organization as better the job performance, better would be the organizational performance. The main purpose of this study was to explore the impact of skill enhancing bundle (training, effective recruitment and selection, effective job description) on employees' job performance in the public sector tourism industry in Pakistan; to what extent skill-enhancing bundle would influence employees' job performance when centralization is low or high in the organizational structure. The data was collected (using a questionnaire) from both supervisors and employees working in tourism corporations under provincial and federal government of Pakistan. The sample size was 222. The findings indicate that employees working in service organizations like that of tourism, that follow a centralized authority structure are more likely to exhibit lower job performance because of ineffective implementation of skill enhancing HR practices.

INTRODUCTION

Managing a successful organization requires a clear and an effective performance management, and an improved system so that everyone in the organization can perform well (Russell, 2008). There are many functions, practices, monetary & non-monetary rewards, cognitive, psychological, and personal factors identified by researchers as predictors of employee's job performance in an organization. Performance is also contingent on ability and skills to perform; therefore, skill-enhancing practices like job description and training, if practiced, can have a positive impact on employee job performance (Peter & Henry, 1962; Talbert, Carroll and Ronan, 1976).

It is important to measure the job performance of employees in order to know whether the task/job assigned to each individual is achieved in successful manner. Ridely (2007) identified seven important job performance elements using Human Factor Approach, which clearly demonstrate the significance of measuring job performance for the success of the organization. In this regards, HR practices are one of essential tools for facilitating and making the grounds available for the employees to perform the job/task effectively. HR practices are the kind of investment on staff, and it demonstrates the organization's commitment to them and their well-being.

HRM practices and bundles of high performance work practices, if appropriately implemented, translate

into superior organizational outcomes (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004), along with individual outcomes in the form of effective job performance. This kind of performance can be translated into a competitive advantage for the organization. Therefore, the role of HRM is established as a source of competitive advantage (Barney & Wright, 1998). HPW practices are the important factors to generate employee commitment, which proves to be a predictor of better job performance (Indridason & Wang, 2008) and even beyond, i.e., citizenship behavior.

Employee's job performance measures are found to be the means for accountability and transparency in public sector organizations (Wickersham, 2012). The Public sector organizations are the good examples of bureaucracies, mostly having tall hierarchies. Centralization is one of the dimensions of these organizations, identified by Pugh (1968). Previously, centralization was known for improved efficiency, coordination, and control, which ultimately resulted in improved performance both at individual and organizational level (Atherton, 1977). Most of the organizations in public sector around the world are decent cases of centralization. However, due to globalization and continuous changes in business environment, today's organizations can perform only if they have the capacity to align with its environment (Caruana, Morris & Vella, 1998). This alignment, in some cases, is achieved by having centralized authority structures, or decentralized authority structures. Now a

days, centralization in service sector is considered to be an obstacle in delivering quality services.

This study investigates the moderating role of centralization on the relationship of skill enhancing HR practices (training, effective recruitment and selection, effective job description) and job performance in public sector tourism corporations. In academic research, the effect of HRM practices on employee attitude/performance is mainly focused on the experience of private sector workers, while in the case of the public sector workers it is mostly unexplored (Legge 1995; Wood 1999). This study deals with the task aspect of job performance that requires skills, and competencies to perform the job. The study will answer the question: “are skill enhancing HR practices influenced by the centralized authority structure in tourism corporations in Pakistan?” Tourism industry is on the verge of risk and initial stage of development in Pakistan. Tourism is the most neglected sector from the viewpoint of research in management. This study will bring on the surface the underlying problems related to skill enhancing HRM practices and the role of suitable organizational structure for effective implementation of these practices that will ultimately result in enhanced performance of employees and the organizations.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Job performance

Performance is carrying out the actions or accomplishment of some task (Madgett, 2005). Job performance is the multifarious phenomenon, which is influenced by many human, cognitive, physical, emotional and organizational factors. It is considered as the building blocks for the existence of any type of profit or non-profit organization. It is the function to performed number of activities, complexity level, responsibilities and so on (Peter & Henry, 1962). It is an important construct in industrial and organizational psychology. Hughes, Ginneth and Curphy (2009) regarded performance as a behavior that is directed towards the organization’s mission or goal. Similarly, McShane and Glinow (2005) documented the opinion that performance is goal directed behavior controlled by the individual that support organizational objectives. Job performance theorists have developed a range of latent dimensions of performance which includes, generally, extensive range of jobs (Campbell, McCloy, Oppler, & Sager, 1993; Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Campbell, McHenry & Wise, 1990). Campbell et al., (1993) developed the most comprehensive model of the job performance, which included eight factors: (1) job-specific task proficiency, (2) non-job-specific task proficiency, (3) written and

oral communication, (4) demonstrating effort, (5) maintaining personal discipline, (6) facilitating peer and team performance, (7) supervision/leadership, and (8) management/administration. In this way it is evident that such factors enhances the skills of the employees which ultimately lead them to perform better. Fine and Wiley (1971) suggested three core-job factors that redirect the extent to which employees execute interpersonal activities, intellectual activities or physical activities as compulsory job duties.

HRM and Job Performance

Human Resource Management is a philosophy and system of practices that can affect the behavior, attitudes and performance of employees (Gerhart, & Wright, 2010). HR personnels are recognized as strategic partners of the business (Wright & McMahan, 1992). Therefore, business strategy and the HR strategy must complement each other in order to enhance the employees’ job performance and the overall organization performance.

HRM practices are considered to fulfill employees’ needs, which enhance positive attitudes, and subsequently improve performance outcomes (Kuvaas, 2008; Edgar & Geare, 2005; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Particularly, effective recruitment and selection practices provide the organization with the right candidate for the right job (Ramlall, 2003). Likewise, training and development enhances knowledge, skills and abilities, coupled with employee’s experience, which are predictive of better job performance (Tubre, 2000). Olorunsola (2013) identified that professional knowledge and skills as important job component that contributes in predicting job performance. Teclmichael and Soeters (2006) found selection, training and compensation as some of the most important HR practices effecting employee outcomes.

Besides effective recruitment, selection, Training and development, effective job descriptions are also very essential, contributing towards better job performance. Effective job descriptions are the scheme of job design; it is the statement of desired performance outcomes to be achieved along with means to achieve those performance outcomes. Often job descriptions are vulnerable to be incomplete and most often it lacks the task aspect of job performance. It also plays key role in execution of other HR practices like selective hiring and Training (Grant, 1997). Hence, implementing skill-enhancing practices, preferred by employees, would make the employees feel obligated to the organization; thus, will result in progressive change in discretionary efforts (Williams, 2003). Therefore, organizations must have an adequate recruitment and selection process with adequate training to enhance the employee’s performance that will help employees nurture their career in the organization as

well. Employees should also be providing information about their work performance (Apella'niz, Sa'nchez, & Vinces 2013); it will also predict the improvement (if any) in performance.

Different human resource practices are linked and related to each other in the way that resulting HRM programs in any organization contribute to the improved organization performance (MacDuffie, 1995; Arthur, 1994). This integration of particular HR practices is known as bundling of HR practices, like skill enhancing, motivation and empowerment enhancing grouped together in a bundle. Thus, high performance work system (HPWS) are the source of concern for employee-centered climate, which turn the employee's attitude in favor of the organization (Takeuchi, Chen & Lepak, 2009) which has a positive effect on performance. High performance work systems works through the employee job performance to enhance the organizational performance (Ramsay, Scholarios & Harley, 2000). Bundles of HR practices are being implemented rapidly because complimentary HR practices, when grouped in particular combinations enhance the employee's outcome/performance. Likewise, effective selection and hiring programs can result in effective training programs output (Toh, Campion & Morgeson, 2008).

Based on the above literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1. Skill enhancing HR practices are positively related to Job performance.

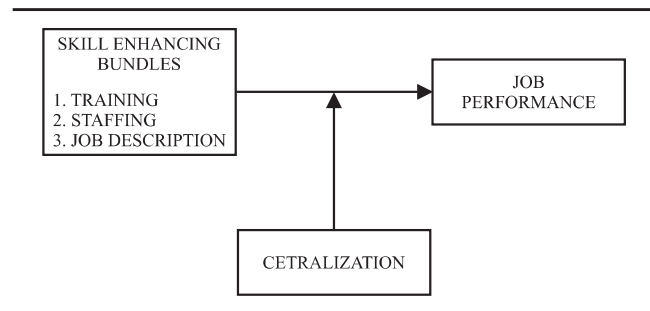
Centralization, HRM Practices and Job Performance

Organizations of all kinds have some structure. Structure of the organization functions in two ways: "first, structures regulate the influence of individual on the organization," and "secondly, structure is the setting in which power is exercised, decisions are made, and the organization's activities are carried out" (Hall, 1997). When the power is concentrated relatively to a few individuals, the structure is considered as centralized. However the degree of centralization can be determined with the diffusion of decision making power in the organization (Dalton, Todor, Spendolini, Fielding & Porter, 1980). The degree of centralization for HRM can be determined by environmental factors along with unionization in the organization (Fenton-O'Creedy, Gooderham & Nordhaug, 2008). Centralization and formalization also have an effect on human resource management practices like training (Dastmalchian & Blyton, 1992). In addition, the relation of centralization with job performance at subunit level has been reported negative in the past studies (Miller, 1967; Harrison, 1974; McMahan and Ivancevich, 1976). Another study of Kim

and Lee (2006, 2010) reported the negative association of centralization with knowledge acquisition and application capabilities of employees. Centralization is positively associated with job stress (Azzat, Ramayah & Yeoh, 2006) and stress always effect the job performance negatively. It is therefore evident from the literature that centralization has an association with HRM practices and with the job performance. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

Hypothesis 2. Centralization moderates the relationship between skill enhancing HR practices and job performance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



METHODOLOGY

Sample and Procedure

Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires using 5-point likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The unit of analysis for the study was dyadic i.e. employees and supervisors. The data was collected from the tourism corporations working under the provincial and federal government of Pakistan. The sample size was 222. The convenient sampling technique was used and data is collected single time from respondents during the winter season 2014. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed and 222 returned were usable making the response rate to be 63%. The Cronbach's alpha value for Job performance is 0.825, HR practices is 0.828 and Centralization is 0.793.

Measure

Skill Enhancing HR Practices

The presence of skill enhancing HR practices: training, staffing, and job description were measured by adapting scale by Patel, Messer Smith and Lepak (2013), which consists of eleven items. Some sample items include: "employees will normally go through training

programs every few years”, “considerable importance is placed on the staffing process”, “the job description for a position accurately describes all of the duties performed by individual employees”. The Cronbach’s alpha value of this measure for this study was 0.828.

Centralization

Centralization was measured using scale by Ferrel and Skinner (1988), which consists of five items. Some sample items include “any major decision that I make, has to have the company’s/boss approval”, “I have to ask high authority before I do almost any-thing in my business”, “in my dealings with this company, even quite small matters have to be referring to higher authority”. The Cronbach’s alpha value of this measure for this study was 0.793.

Performance

Performance was measured using scale by Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1989), which consists of five items.

Some sample items include “this worker fulfills all responsibilities required by his/her job”, “this worker never neglects aspects of the job that he/she is obligated to perform”, “this worker often fails to perform essential duties”. The Cronbach’s alpha value of this measure for this study was 0.825.

RESULTS

The data for the proposed model of the study was analyzed using SPSS simple regression method. Skill enhancing HR practices bundle was taken as co-variant while performance acted as the dependent variable for the study, and centralization was used as a moderator in the model.

Table.1 shows the mean, standard deviation, correlation and reliabilities for all the constructs. The mean for HR practices is 3.65 and job performance is 3.71, the correlation among them is 0.320, which shows that HR practices are significantly and positively correlated with job performance. Moreover, the correlation among centralization and job performance is also significant.

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviation & Correlation

Variables	Means	S.D.	1	2	3
1 HR Practices	3.65	0.608	1		
2 Centralization	3.62	0.64	.404**	1	
3 Job Performance	3.71	0.75	.320**	.148*	1

*N=222; Reliabilities in parenthesis; *P>0.05, **p>0.01 & ***p>0.001*

Regression Analysis

The regression test was applied to measure the impact of HR practices on job performance. The results showed β value of .382 indicating that HR practices significantly predicts the job performance with value of $t=4.80$ and $F=7.74$. Therefore H_1 : HR practices are positively associated with job performance is accepted.

TABLE 2
Regression for Outcome

Predictors	Performance		
	β	R ²	ΔR^2
Step 1			
Control variables		.032***	
Step 2			
HR	.382***	.125***	.093

Control variables: Experience, Gender, Qualification
*N=222, ***p<0.01, **p<0.05*

Regression for Moderation

For testing the second Hypothesis H_2 : centralization moderates the relation of HR practice and job performance, interaction term HRxCent was developed and moderation regression test was applied. In the 3rd step the introduction of moderator made the relation of HR and jib performance insignificant; whereas, with the introduction of interaction term, the relation became significant and negative moderation was observed as β was improved and became negative at -1.63, which shows that centralization moderates and weaken the relation. Therefore, H_2 is also accepted.

TABLE 3
Moderation

Predictors	Performance		
	β	R ²	ΔR^2
Step 1			
Control variables		.032	
Step 2			
HR	.382***	.125	.093***

Step 3			
Cent	.020**	.125	.000
Step 4			
HRxCent	-1.631**	.156	.031**
<i>Control variables: Experience, Gender, Qualification</i>			
<i>N=222, ***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p>0.05</i>			

DISCUSSION

The results supported all proposed hypothesis. Performance varies with various types of environment, systems, procedures, and actions of the management in any organization. In this study, the impact of skill enhancing HRM practices on performance was explored in the public sector tourism corporations of Pakistan. It was found that the HR practices were significant contributors towards better performance of the employees. This link of skill enhancing practices and performance was already established by many previous studies (for example, Telemichael & Soeters, 2006; Ramlall, 2003), but this study also explains the role of centralized decision making authority while implementing the skill enhancing HR practices like training, effective recruitment & selective hiring and effective job descriptions. Through this study it is established that centralization negatively moderates the relationship of HR practices and job performance.

Pakistan in the Asia Pacific region is known for its natural beauty and cultural heritage attractions, but as it is one of the developing economy facing serious economic downfalls due to the unstable political activities and terrorism in the country, the tourism industry of the country is very under developed. However, the private sector of the industry is somewhat contributing in the industrial growth, but the public sector tourism corporations in Pakistan are still the good example of old bureaucracy with centralized authority and timeworn concept of personnel management.

Tourism sector is purely the service sector, and decentralization and authority delegation throughout the organization is crucial for the service sector to perform well (Bowen & Lawler, 1995; Douglas & Judge 2001). However, unfortunately the public sector tourism corporations in Pakistan are having highly centralized structure as found by results of this study and interviews with managers there. Therefore, this contraction of authority to very few people at top is adversely affecting the tourism corporation and preventing it from growth. This study is concerned with the effects of centralized decision making for

execution of HR practices like training and staffing. The results indicates that HR practices are augmenting the job performance of employees but when intervened by centralization, the level of effectiveness decreases, because employees want their involvement and a kind of say in the decisions like training, staffing and about job description. Job description and training are recognized by the employees as essential practices in which they consider their involvement in decision making important.

Job performance of employees rated by supervisors was satisfactory, but employees and managers wanted innovation and gave impression of change and growth. Unfortunately, they are bound to follow just what ultimate authority floats. Therefore, centralization can be considered as a big hurdle for the growth and development of public sector tourism corporations. Similarly, there is no concept of motivation, empowerment in the organization; top management just adhere the personnel management concept and the employee development is ignored to a large extent.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

The study was cross sectional and limited to one type organization i.e., public. A comparative study of public and private sector organizations with different authority structures can give clearer picture of the impact of centralization on HR practices and performance.

The study was limited to just tourism industry, the similar model can be tested in other industries as well. In this study, only one dimension i.e. degree of centralization of organizational structure, identified by Pugh (1968), was included in the model; however, a study where all other dimensions like span of control, degree of formalization and hierarchical distance can also be included in the model for a more comprehensive understanding.

IMPLICATIONS

The study has significant implication for the government ministries running the tourism corporation in Pakistan. This study has shown the need for decentralization overall and specifically the human resource management and development practices. Similarly, the study also realizes the urgency for implementation of HRM practices like empowerment enhancing and motivation-enhancing practices because, if employed, would double the improvement in the performance and overall growth and service quality of the tourism sector.

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