

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORK SYSTEMS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR

Md. Shamsul Arefin, PhD Scholar

Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, P. R. China

Ishthiaque Arif, Assistant Prof.

Muhammad Raquib, Lecturer

Southeast University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Abstract

This study develops a mediation model in which high-performance work systems (HPWS) affect organizational citizenship behavior through psychological empowerment. Using a sample of 247 employees employed by three large manufacturing firms in Bangladesh, results from structural equation modeling and hierarchical regression analyses showed that psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between HPWS and organizational citizenship behavior. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: High-performance work systems, psychological empowerment, organizational citizenship behavior

Introduction:

The changing nature of jobs and uncertainty in the work environment influence organizations to direct employees toward more discretionary efforts beyond their assigned tasks. The organizations are ever curious how employees are motivated to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). In general, OCB is viewed as a discretionary, voluntary, self-initiated behavior to enhance the social, psychological, and organizational contexts (Farh, Zhong, & Organ, 2004). OCB is treated as the indispensable element that is beneficial to organizations. Perhaps OCB is the most extensively studied constructs in organizational behavior literature. Over the years, the OCB literature has been devoted to unfold the antecedents of OCB (Organ & Ryan, 1995; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996; Podsakoff,

MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). However, the causal relationships among the different antecedents and OCB demand further research (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Prior research has identified the influence of HR systems on OCB (Aryee, & Law, 2007; Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Snape & Redman, 2010; Sun, Wei, Han, & Hsu, 2010).

High-performance work systems (HPWS) can be defined as a group of separate but interconnected human resource (HR) practices that involve selective staffing, extensive training and development, developmental performance appraisal, competitive compensation, flexible job assignments (Takeuchi, Lepak, Wang, & Takeuchi, 2007). Prior research suggests that these practices increase employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities (Delery & Shaw, 2001) and the result is greater job satisfaction, enhanced commitment, lower employee turnover, and higher productivity (Becker, Huselid, Pickus, & Spratt, 1997). However, research reveals that the intended HPWS are found different from employee perceived HPWS (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). In line with this finding, we intended to consider employee perceived HPWS in this study. We further propose psychological empowerment, which represents the individual's feeling of some control over their surroundings and experience meaning in what they do, may act as a possible mediating mechanism. Psychological empowerment is defined as a motivational factor that explains the individual's perception of empowerment (Menon, 2001; Spreitzer, 1995). Psychological empowerment instills employees toward work-related attitudes and performance. Although previous research reveals the relationship between employee perceived HPWS and psychological empowerment (Aryee, Walumbwa, Seidu, & Otaye, 2012; Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009), little is known about how psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between HPWS and employee discretionary behavior such as OCB. However, we propose that HPWS may undertake psychological empowerment as a mediating mechanism through which the valued organizational citizenship behaviors are enacted.

The present study aims to contribute the extant strategic human resource management (SHRM) research identifying the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between human resources (HR) systems and OCB, which has been received less attention in SHRM research.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses:

High-performance work systems:

The human resources management system is constituted such HR practices that may motivate employees to exert the desired behavior that is consistent to the organizational strategy. More specifically, HPWS can be

defined as a group of separate but interconnected HR practices designed to enhance employee's skills and effort (Datta, Guthrie, & Wright, 2005). HPWS encompass such HR practices that impact employees' ability, motivation and opportunities to develop. Moreover, HPWS play a synergistic role with the organizational strategies that lead to higher performance (Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Schuler & Jackson, 1987). Although researchers debate differently on which HR practices will be included in HR systems, a shared agreement has been argued for those practices which increase employees' ability, motivation, and opportunity to develop (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000; Wright & Boswell, 2002). In line with this agreement, the present study entails HR practices comprised in HPWS, such as participative management, recruitment, training, performance-based compensation systems, developmental performance appraisal systems, and flexible work environment.

Organizational citizenship behaviors:

Organ defines OCB as "behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (1988, p. 4). Furthermore, Organ accentuates such behaviors that contributes "to the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports task performance" (1997, p. 91). As OCB is a spontaneous act, employee motivation is essential to instill employee to participate in OCB. Research reveals that several employee attitudes act as antecedents to OCB, such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Employee displays OCB beyond the formal job requirements that are related to employee task performance and with having no intention to gain any rewards from the organization. Although employees are not certain to be benefited directly from displaying discretionary behavior, it is obvious that the organization is benefited.

Previous research has revealed the impact of HPWS on employee OCB (Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Snape & Redman, 2010; Sun et al., 2007; Wei et al., 2010). As the adoption of HPWS motivates employees, it is argued that employees feel responsible to do extra effort beyond their work-related task. We employ social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) to explain the relationships between HPWS and OCB. According to social exchange theory, individuals generally try to pay back those who have helped them. Furthermore, when employees get benefit from their organization, they are more likely to take initiative to sustain mutually beneficial relationships with their organization. When employees see any favor to them from an organization that incorporates favorable policies and practices, they are more likely to give the feedback by performing their job, even doing more than the desired

performance (Sun et al., 2007). HPWS send signals from organizations to its employees that employees' capabilities are valued by organizations and in turn, they exhibit citizenship behavior (Snape & Redman, 2010). When employees perceive signals from their work environment that they are valued and important, they are more likely to show citizenship behavior.

Psychological empowerment:

Empowerment is defined as the process of increasing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members (Conger & Karungo, 1988). Empowerment concept is viewed as more commitment-oriented that is the opposite of control-oriented perspective (Walton, 1985). Psychological empowerment encourages employees to think about their capabilities to accomplishing the jobs, develop meaning for the task, and have some impact on their work environment. Spreitzer (1995) has categorized psychological empowerment into four dimensions: meaning, competence, autonomy or self-determination and impact. Meaning refers to the importance that an individual has in his or her work roles. Competence signifies the feelings of self-efficacy that is defined as the extent to which an individual believes that he or she has the capability to accomplish the assigned task. Impact refers to the degree to which an individual perceives that he or she has some influence to his or her working environment. Autonomy refers to the freedom of choosing an individual's own way to accomplish the task. To constitute the overall construct of psychological empowerment, these four dimensions are necessary; any lack of single dimension decreases the overall extent of perceived empowerment.

The influence of work context on the psychological empowerment is recognized in the empowerment literature (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1996; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Organizations that adopt HPWS have encouraged employees to participate in decision making and this practice is liked by employees. Participative management is imbedded with increased job autonomy and empowerment (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). As HPWS is associated with high job autonomy, employees feel to have more autonomy and freedom once HPWS is undertaken (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Castanheira & Chambel, 2010; Carvalho & Chambel, 2014). The compensation systems subject to employee performance will motivate employees to feel self-determination at work. Extensive training and development program will increase the skills, abilities and knowledge of employees, which further motivate them to be confident in making an impact on the organization. Moreover, participative management enables employees to feel more control over their work and find meaning in their work, experience they are making an impact in their organization.

Despite the numerous antecedents of OCB, relatively less research has been accentuated to link psychological empowerment and OCB (e.g., Alge, Ballinger, Tangirala, & Oakley, 2006; Taylor, 2013). Empowered employees feel more comfortable and less constrained by their jobs, such that they are more likely to help others and be spontaneous in their jobs. Moreover, empowered employees feel more identification with their jobs that further motivate them to help organization. Spreitzer (1995) has identified the contribution of psychological empowerment to performance by enhancing employees' desired attitudes and behaviors. More specifically, meaning instills employees to be committed and action focused. When employees feel their jobs as meaningful, they are more likely to collect information from various sources enthusiastically and spend more effort to solve the problems deliberately (Gilson & Shally, 2004). Competence gives confidence to overcome all problems that are contingent to situations. Self-determination and impact also encourages diligence. The feeling of greater empowerment through enhanced self-determination motivates employee to engage in OCB. When employees are more encouraged with high empowerment and autonomy, they are more likely to engage in such efforts that ultimately help organization.

Mediating role of psychological empowerment:

Psychological empowerment, as a psychological mechanism, can mediate the influences of contextual factor such as HPWS, on employees' extra-role behaviors such as OCB. As employees' attitudes and behaviors are contingent to organizational practices, we argue that psychological empowerment acts as an important mediating mechanism through which employee perceived HPWS influence their OCB. Prior research has identified the mediating role of psychological empowerment on the relationship between employee perceived HPWS and service performance (e.g., Aryee et al., 2012; Liao et al., 2009), little is known about the mediating role of psychological empowerment on the influence of employee perceived HPWS and employee OCB. Recently, Kehoe and Wright (2013) have identified the indirect relationship between HPWS and OCB through affective commitment. In line with their argument, we propose that the HPWS-OCB linkage is mediated by employee perceived psychological empowerment. We argue that through the HR practices included in HPWS, employees feel enhanced psychological empowerment and in turn, exhibit OCB. Therefore, we can predict the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between HPWS and OCB is mediated by psychological empowerment.

Research method:

Sample and study design:

To investigate our hypotheses, we collected data from three large private pharmaceutical firms in Bangladesh. All items in the questionnaire were originally in English. Following procedures suggested by Brislin (1980), we back translated into Bengali. The Bengali version questionnaire was back translated into English. Two sets of questionnaires with cover letters were prepared to get the responses. Employees were asked to respond on their perceived HPWS and psychological empowerment. Employee's supervisor was asked to rate subordinate's OCB. The questionnaires were distributed with the help of human resource manager during the work time. In the cover letter, the purpose of the survey and guidelines to respond were mentioned to get the highest response. Each employee's ID was taken and mentioned on the envelope of each set of questionnaire so that matching with his or her supervisor was tracked. All respondents were assured to keep confidentiality of their responses. We received completed and usable questionnaires from 247 employees, with a response rate of 76 per cent. Among employees, 68% (168) were male. In terms of education, a total of 118 (47.8%) employees had received Higher Secondary School certificate. Most of the employees' age 80.2% (198) were below 40 years and organizational tenure 81.3% (176) were below 10 years.

Measures:

Existing measures from past research were used. All of the constructs were measured using multiple items and anchored by a five-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).

High-Performance work Systems: We measured employee perceived HPWS by using 18 items frequently used in prior research (e.g., Chuang & Liao, 2010; Lepak & Snell, 2002; Sun et al., 2007). Those items involve six typical practices of HPWS –staffing (e.g., “Selection emphasizes traits and abilities required for providing high quality of performance”), training (e.g., “The subsidiary continuously provides training programs”), developmental performance management (e.g., “Performance appraisals provide employees feedback for personal development”), performance-based compensation (e.g., “Employees receive monetary or nonmonetary rewards for great effort and good performance”), flexible work design (e.g., “The company considers employee off-work situations (family, school, etc.) when making schedules”), and participative decision making (e.g., “Employees are often asked to participate in work-related decisions”). The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .91 and we calculated the mean scores of all practices to represent this variable.

Psychological empowerment: Spreitzer's (1995) twelve-item scale was adopted to measure psychological empowerment. Sample items: "I am confident about my ability to do my job" (competence), "The work I do is meaningful to me" (meaning), "I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job" (self-determination), "I have significant influence over what happens in my department" (impact). Following prior research (Aryee et al., 2012; Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000; Seibert et al., 2011; Spreitzer, 1995), we added the four dimensions to form a composite measure of psychological empowerment. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .96.

Organizational citizenship behaviors: A nine-item scale developed by Farh et al., (2004) was used to measure employee citizenship behaviors rated by supervisor. This construct consists of altruism, voice and conscientiousness with three items each. The sample items are "Employee initiates assistance to coworkers who have a heavy workload" and "Employee actively raises suggestions to improve work procedures or processes". The Cronbach's alpha was .88.

Control variables: we controlled for employees' age, gender, education, and organizational tenure. Age was measured on a scale from 1 (18 years to 29 years) to 6 (70 years and above) with 10-year intervals. Gender was measured as a dichotomous variable (i.e., 1 = male, 0 = female). Education level included five categories ranging from "1 = middle school or below" to "5 = master's degree or above". Organizational tenure was measured in years.

Results:

A series of maximum likelihood confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) in Amos 17 was tested finding the discriminant validity of all constructs. We compared fit of the hypothesized three-factor model with four alternative models: two-factor model combining HPWS and OCB (Model A), two-factor model combining psychological empowerment and HPWS (Model B), two-factor model combining psychological empowerment and OCB (Model C), and a one-factor model combining all three variables. Table 1 shows the result of confirmatory factor analysis describing a significantly well data fit for hypothesized three-factor model ($\chi^2 = 387.43$, $df = 196$, $\chi^2/df = 1.98$, $p < .01$, CFI = 0.95, GFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.06). Therefore, the results satisfy the conditions for discriminant validity. Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics and correlations among all variables.

Table 1. Confirmatory factor Analysis

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	GFI	TLI	RMSEA
Null model	4174.37	219					
Three-factor model	387.43	196	1.98	0.95	0.92	0.94	0.06
Two-factor model A	575.87	198	2.91	0.89	0.85	0.87	0.08
Two-factor model B	683.34	198	3.45	0.86	0.83	0.85	0.09
Two-factor model C	792.67	198	4.00	0.83	0.76	0.81	0.12
One-factor model	1578.45	199	7.93	0.72	0.65	0.68	0.14

Notes. CFI = comparative fit index; GFI = goodness of fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation. Two-factor model A: HPWS and organizational citizenship behaviors were combined into one factor; Two-factor model B: psychological empowerment and HPWS were combined into one factor; Two-factor model C: psychological empowerment and organizational citizenship behaviors were combined into one factor; One-factor model: HPWS, psychological empowerment and organizational citizenship behaviors were combined into one factor.

To test the Hypothesis, we analyzed the data using regression analysis. Hypothesis 1 proposes that psychological empowerment is a mediator of the relationship between HPWS and OCB. To test this hypothesis, we followed the procedure outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). According to their four-stage process, mediation can be said to occur when, firstly, the independent variable (IV) significantly affects the mediator. Secondly, the IV significantly affects the dependent variable (DV) in the absence of the mediator. Thirdly, the mediator has a significant unique effect on the DV. Fourthly, the effect of the IV on the DV shrinks upon the addition of the mediator to the model. At the first stage, HPWS is positively related to psychological empowerment ($\beta = 0.56$, t -statistic = 7.76, $p < 0.001$, Model 1) and at the second stage of analyses, HPWS is positively related to OCB, ($\beta = 0.43$, t -statistic = 4.58, $p < 0.001$, Model 2 in Table 3). As shown in Table 3, HPWS is positively related to psychological empowerment (stage 1), and psychological empowerment is also a significant predictor of OCB (stage 2). Next, in testing the third step, we verified whether psychological empowerment was significantly related to OCB. We found the positive relationship between psychological empowerment and OCB ($\beta = 0.35$, t -statistic = 6.53, $p < 0.001$, Model 3). In addition to step three, the fourth step further identified the relationship between HPWS and OCB. However, when HPWS and psychological empowerment were both entered, in Model 4, the effect size of HPWS on OCB was reduced (from $\beta = 0.43$ to 0.38), though its effect remains significant. In other words, the significant relationship between HPWS and OCB declines slightly when psychological empowerment is added to the equation. Thus, psychological empowerment partially mediated the relationship between HPWS and OCB. Following the procedure of Baron and Kenny (1986), we further attempted to examine the mediation effect of psychological empowerment. We used the Sobel test

(Sobel, 1982) to identify the significance level of the indirect effects. The outcomes indicated that the test statistic for HPWS ($z = 3.81, p < 0.001$) predicted psychological empowerment as a significant mediator. Thus, the hypothesis 1 was supported.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	1.98	0.73							
2. Gender ^a	0.68	0.47	0.01						
3. Education level	4.02	0.83	0.00	-0.14*					
4. Organization tenure	2.88	1.15	0.64***	0.07	-0.14*				
5. HPWS	4.11	0.48	0.02	-0.05	0.05	0.02	(.91)		
6. PE	4.32	0.61	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.45***	(.96)	
7. OCB	4.08	0.57	-0.02	0.03	-0.01	0.05	0.37***	0.28***	(.88)

Notes. *N* = 248 employees. Reliabilities (coefficient alpha) appear in parentheses on the diagonal. HPWS = high-performance work systems, PE = psychological empowerment, OCB = organizational citizenship behavior.

^a Male = 1, female = 0

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion:

The primary objective of our study was to examine the mediating role of psychological empowerment on the influence of employees' perceptions of the use of high-performance work systems on employee OCB. We posited and found that employee psychological empowerment mediated the positive relationship between HPWS and employee OCB.

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis

Variables	PE		OCB	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Control variables</i>				
Age	-0.00(0.06)	-0.01(0.04)	-0.01(0.05)	-0.01(0.04)
Gender ^a	0.09(0.08)	-0.02(0.05)	0.03(0.06)	0.03(0.06)
Education level	0.02(0.04)	0.01(0.03)	-0.02(0.05)	-0.01(0.04)
Organization tenure	0.02(0.04)	-0.02(0.04)	-0.04(0.06)	-0.04(0.05)
<i>Independent Variables</i>				
HPWS	0.56*** (0.07)	0.43*** (0.09)		0.38*** (0.08)
PE			0.35*** (0.06)	0.26*** (0.06)
<i>F</i>	12.41***	24.65***	21.36***	26.53***
<i>R</i> ²	0.21	0.28	0.20	0.33
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.19	0.26	0.18	0.31
ΔR^2				0.05

Notes. Values in parentheses are standard errors; entries are unstandardized coefficients. HPWS = high-performance work systems, PE = psychological empowerment, OCB = organizational citizenship behaviors

The present study provides some of the first evidence linking employee experienced HPWS to important psychological and discretionary behavioral

outcomes. Specifically, this study contributes to SHRM literature by explaining how HPWS impact employee OCB. This study reveals that employee perceived HPWS is positively related to psychological empowerment. This finding is analogous with the previous researches (e.g., Aryee et al., 2012; Liao et al., 2009), which identified employee experienced HPWS as a situational cue motivates employee to experience high level of psychological empowerment. Moreover, a very few studies examined the impact of HPWS on employee psychological empowerment the past research, such as in Ghana (Aryee et al., 2012) and in Japan (Liao et al., 2009). This study confirms the linkage between HPWS and psychological empowerment in Bangladesh context, an emerging country in South Asia. Furthermore, although prior research has revealed the relationship between the employee perceived HPWS and employee OCB (Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Snape & Redman, 2010; Sun et al., 2007; Wei et al., 2010), we argue that HPWS may take an intervening mechanism through which it impacts on OCB (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). We predicted and found that psychological empowerment mediated the positive relationship between HPWS and OCB. Although, empirical work in this area has engaged in finding the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between HPWS and employee's service performance (Aryee et al., 2012; Liao et al., 2009), a complete ignorance has been paid revealing employee OCB as an important outcome. The current study found that employee perceived psychological empowerment mediated the positive relationship between HPWS and OCB.

As like most, this study has some limitations. Firstly, due to the cross-sectional nature of the study, we cannot confirm the causal relationships among the variables. Future study can replicate the model with longitudinal data to identify the causal link. Secondly, to reduce the common method bias, this study sought sample from both employees and their immediate supervisors. Furthermore, the discriminant analyses also revealed that common method bias is not a serious problem in the current study. Thirdly, as the sample of the present study has been drawn from Bangladesh, an emerging country in South Asia, we cannot confirm the generalizability of the findings to the western countries.

Conclusion:

The present study may suggest the practitioners how employees are more likely to exhibit OCB. The results suggest that organization may stimulate employees by empowering them. Managers should be cautious in not only designing, but also implementing HPWS in their organizations, because HR practices send messages to enhance employees' psychological empowerment that further impact on OCB. Managers should use all possible communications, so that employee can perceive the right messages that

HPWS entail. In sum, this is the first study to examine the mediating effects of psychological empowerment on the relationship between employee perceived HPWS and employee OCB. More specifically, this study reveals that the perceptions of HR systems influence employees to increase psychological empowerment that in turn, impact OCB.

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