

## **HR Professionals' Effectiveness Through Human Capital Development, Organizational Culture and High Performance Work System: A Proposed Framework**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to explore the potential of Human Resource Professionals (HRP) to accelerate ideas and innovation towards achieving a sustainable competitive advantage in a swift technology changes. Likewise, this study further discusses the theory and practices of the Human Capital Development (HCD), Organizational Culture (OC) and High Performance Work System (HPWS) in the telecom sector of Pakistan. Despite, there being a substantial amount of discussion about HR Professionals' Effectiveness (HRPE) which is featuring massive challenges and opportunities, there is a paucity of information concerning the extent of this subject matter in Pakistan. Hence, there is every reason to expect that this remarkable growth and transformation will continue at a hasty pace in Human Resource Management Practices (HRMP). A synthesis of literature was reviewed, leading to the identification of numerous situational or contextual factors impacting the HRPE. The development of HR also cannot be achieved without the support of appropriate HCD specifically the soft skills. In spite of this, organizations should create such an environment in which employees feel empowered, thus they can take strategic decisions and achieve higher productivity. Finally, presenting the factors and practices together makes an important contribution to the literature on HRPE by addressing from both conceptual and practical aspects.

**Key words:**HR professionals' effectiveness, human capital development, organizational culture, high performance work system, Malaysia

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In the new era of twenty first (21st) century, Human Resource (HR) function is experiencing unprecedented changes. The role of the HR function in organizations has emerged from central to business competitiveness. Those days, HR role was relatively considered to be an administrative; however, practitioners and scholars frequently viewed HR procedures as a commodity. Consequently, managers are revolving to the HR function to execute competitive strategy of the organization (Ulrich, 1997). Moreover, Lawler and Mohrman (2003) insisted that HR is emerging as one of the key resources within the organizations. This paradigm shift will generate new opportunities for the HR function and it will help to develop a broader role in the operations of an organization. Similarly, the advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have shaped intense competition due to customers and suppliers' awareness. Consequently, it demands higher level of skilful HR Professionals (HRPs) in the

organization to sustain long-term competitive advantage. Hence, it gives a main impetus to the importance of HRPs to be more effective.

Now a days, the industrial nations around the globe are giving prominence and enormous challenges and opportunities including environmental norms, clean and energy efficient technologies, investment and technology promotion and human capacity building as to compete successfully in the global environment. Moreover, the business situations are rotating into more subtle and competition is growing stronger day by day (Ulrich *et al.*, 2009). Additionally, considering economic transformation from agriculture to industrial, formerly industrial to services and lately to information economy, one of a source of competitive advantage for any business is its HR (Becker and Huselid, 1998). Furthermore, Kirwan and Birchall (2006) professed that competent and capable managers "HR professionals" are vital for the success of any organization in gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage. Whereas, Schaufeli and Salanova in 2008 argued that to survive and successfully compete in

challenging and turbulent working environment, organizations must develop their employees who are highly motivated and willing to work effectively.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**HR professionals' effectiveness:** Dessler (2010) averred that HR Professionals (HRPs) typically perform their tasks and duties at the head office of an organization. However performing their tasks and duties at the head office, they can be either HR generalist or HR specialist. Both kinds of professionals need to perform an extensive amount of work experience in the discipline of HRM. As HR generalist the HRPs are expected to cope with all aspects of HR work and they are obliged to have wide range of competencies. Ulrich *et al.* (2008) proposed that HR generalist is consigned to work with organizational unit. He/she is also responsible to engage and contribute into the strategic planning process and make sure those strategies would be implemented after using the HR Professionals' Competencies (HRPC). Whereas, Dessler (2010) addressed that HRPs in bigger organizations usually oversee many different departments. Each and every department may be supervised by a manager who must be HR specialist in the particular HRM functions such as staffing, training and development, compensation and performance appraisal. The organizations expect HRPs would execute these functions efficiently and effectively.

Rastogi and Dave (2004) claimed that effectiveness is best viewed as output which HRPs construct from a given situation. Whereby, the HRPs achieve their goals set by the organization. At the present time, effectiveness of HRM is a condemnatory element in the expansion process of developing countries. Even though, HRM is still under robust criticism in numerous developing countries along with momentous reservation about their effectiveness (Budhwar and Debrah, 2001; Wang *et al.*, 2008).

Several researchers preserved their argument that HR effectiveness is gigantic concept. Likewise, numerous researches also emphasized in how HRPs accomplish their tasks in the organization and how their responsibilities are associated to the organizational performance (Huselid, 1995). Whereas Ruel *et al.* (2007) accentuated that if HR staff wants to be effective they must be loaded with upgraded skills and then only they can contribute and add value to their organization. Han *et al.* (2006) contended that HRM by way of a management discipline is in rather early stages in Asia paralleled to the western countries and as such the HRPCs "Knowledge, Skills

and Abilities" (KSAs) and effectiveness have not comprehensively studied in Asia including in South Asia.

Conversely, Shehzad (2010) argued that effective HR department must be ought to necessary KSAs to improve the level of achievement and competitive advantage. Same argument is supported by Guest and Conway (2011) who proposed that the HR professionals' effectiveness (HRPE) is more vital, compared to the HR practices. HRPs' ability is an essential first step towards the HRPE. HRPs can enhance their ability through developing their KSAs. Organizations which are willing to enhance their HRPE must emphasize on developing their human capital. Studies on HRM by and large, somehow ignored the impact of HRPC (KSAs) with the association between HRPE and performance (Ahmad *et al.*, 2012). On the other hand, research has correspondingly absorbed on several issues such as determining the managerial effectiveness, scrutinizing the process of ensuring managerial effectiveness and constructing models of managerial effectiveness.

**Human capital development:** The exclusive abilities, competences and expertise of employees within the organization are termed as human capital (Campbell, 1995). Ployhart and Moliterno (2011) defined Human Capital (HC) as a unit-level resource that emerges from the Knowledge, Skills, Abilities and Other characteristics "competencies" (KSAOs) of individual employees. According to Schultz (1993) HC is outlined as a crucial component in refining a firm's asset. Over and above, to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, firms have to invest resources to ensure that their employees do have all the necessary KSAs to work efficiently in a fast moving and composite environment (Marimuthu *et al.*, 2009). Additionally, Harrison (1992) described Human Capital Development (HCD) as it refers to such investments which are made by an organization to advance the core competencies (KSAs) of their employees to accomplish competitive edge.

Nyberg *et al.* (2014) constructed that academicians often vary in their conceptualizations and operationalization HCD. Whereas Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) refers HC as knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes exhibited in individuals that enable the establishment of personal, social and economic well-being (Cote and Healy, 2001). Furthermore, Kor and Leblebici (2005) outlined HC as firm's strategic HR such as; HRPs loaded with specific knowledge and expertise. Hitt (2006) highlighted that HC elements such as education, experience and skills of top managers affect firm outcomes. HC is the utmost vital element in the intellectual capital of an organization (Schultz, 1961).

Additionally, Harrison (1992) elucidated that organizations and even individuals can be effective by enhancing their KSAs and passion of HR at every level.

Albanese (1989) enlightened that there is no single set of competencies that can absolutely execute the managerial role and there are numerous job related skills that leverage the effectiveness of the manager's job. Quinn and coauthors in 2000 established the understanding of competency that identifies the importance of KSAOs as well as the association between having these competencies and carrying out certain tasks more effectively. Previous literature upheld the fact that firm performance is positively impacted by the existence of HC practices (Youndt *et al.*, 2004). Further, studies certified that HCD is essential for high performance (Delaney and Huselid, 1996; Wang and Chen, 2013). Moreover, the importance of organizational HC with respect to firm performance is additionally supported by Hsu *et al.* (2007).

By distinguishing suitable applicants from unsuitable ones, inclusive recruitment practices improve the quality of HC and therefore add to the organization's stock of HC (Wright *et al.*, 1995, 2001). Employees feel empowered to accomplish organizational goals through effective HRM practices that promote HCD. Wang and Chen (2013) anticipated that by developing job related knowledge we can presume a promising HCD through the implementation of High Performance Work System (HPWS). Consequently, HPWS is presumed to have an effect on employees' performance by improving employees' KSAs and commitment and through making them available the information and prudence necessary to make the most of their skills and commitment in completing their jobs (Guthrie, 2001; Preuss, 2003). It is claimed that the development and prominence on HCD will result in high performance. It has been recognized as an operational means of promoting HC within an organization (Wang and Chen, 2013). Hence, this study propositions that:

**Proposition One:** Human capital development has a significant impact on HR professionals' effectiveness.

**Organizational culture:** Organizational Culture (OC) is defined "in a way people think", which directly influence in a way in which they behave. Schein (1985b) described OC as shared norms, values and assumptions within an organization. Additionally, Martins and Terblanche (2003) refers culture to as group of values, norms, beliefs and understanding which direct organizational members to behave within. Thormya and Saenchaiyathon (2015)

further specified that OC can be observable objects (for example; stories, symbols, behaviors and rituals) or fundamental values which difficult to perceive (for instance; beliefs, feelings and attitudes). It is a unique pattern of norms, values, beliefs and ways of behaving that characterize the manner in which groups and individuals come together to get things done. Moreover, they emphasized that OC is the practical approach of the organization which is collected and developed over a long period of time through different "formal and informal" social process. Denison and Mishra (1995) indicated that specific traits of OC may be useful predictors of performance and effectiveness. OC includes standards and norms that suggest how an employee should behave within the organization (Martins and Martins, 2003).

Over the last two decades, OC has been a very important subject matter in the literature of organizational studies. OC has concentrated on the culture of an organization as a consideration of its forefather and top managers (Hofstede *et al.*, 1990). Additionally, Hartnell *et al.* (2011) emphasized on the importance of OC from the industry point of view by highlighting the standpoint of president of Southwest Airline who stated that:

Culture permeates every aspect of our company. It is our essence, our DNA, our present and our future

Numerous researchers have inspected OC as a source of competitive advantage (Barney, 1986; Ott, 1989; Pfeffer, 1994), however, the fact that explicit theories are insufficient and empirical evidence is very limited (Denison and Mishra, 1995). At the same time theories which do exist (Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Denison, 1990) are established and functional solitary in US. While theory indicates that OC may effect on the positive behaviors of organizational members and such positive behaviors are important for employees' effectiveness (Schein, 1985a). Once organizational members recognize with the OC, the work environment is likely to be more pleasing which increase the morale of the employees along with the teamwork, information sharing as well as the openness to new ideas (Goffee and Jones, 1996), it leads to increase interaction and continuous learning among employees and employees tend to be more effective in accomplishing their tasks.

OC has received much devotion in the literature of OB (Hofstede, 1986; Schein, 1990). Hartnell *et al.* (2011) believed that the momentum of the research on OC is the belief that OC is an imperative social characteristic that impacts individual, group and organizational behavior. The hypothetical argument about culture is that

it is a composite system of norms and values that is shaped over time (Schein, 2010). However, these values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, philosophies, principles and assumptions that offer the organization or individual its inimitable character could be vocal or non-verbalized behavior that defines the ways in which things get done (Brown, 1998). Culture is not just a tool for dealing with people but it also intends to create awareness or learning (knowledge) among employees. It reinforces human activities and helps to clarify much of human behaviors (Zawawi, 2008).

Permitting to Martins and Martins (2003) OC is a classification of collective meaning detained by members/employees which distinguishes the organization from other organizations and individuals from other individuals. Arnold *et al.* (1998) disclosed that OC is the unique norms, beliefs, principles and ways in which employees behave and that gives each organization its distinct character. Despite, OC offers an employee a shared structure of position for variations in an organization, and thus it is an essential factor for successfully executing any variations in the system, structure or process to enable employee creativeness (Skerlavaja *et al.*, 2010). Sadri and Lees (2001) underlined OC intensely plays momentous role within organizations to affect employees and organizational operations throughout a firm. Moreover they pointed out that those organizations which are able to form and nurture positive cultures are more profiled.

Previous scholars (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982) asserted on the strategic prominence of OC that offers employees to be strategic partners of the firm which can enhance their effectiveness through teamwork and communication. Kotter and Heskett (1992) extended this by investigating the significance of flexibility and the adequacy among an organization and its environment. The common theme is that to achieve and sustain high levels of performance, an organization needs a constructive work setting that advance and leverage employees' KSAs to generate value. Further, scholars explicated that in understanding the relationship between OC and effectiveness is also partial due to unfortunate measures of effectiveness (Fey and Bjorkman, 2001; Fey and Denison, 2003; Shekshmia, 1998), even though they have found the strong effect of OC on effectiveness and efficiency of employees as well as overall organization (Clugston *et al.*, 2000; Rowe *et al.*, 1994; Wasti, 2003).

Highly effective organizations own a culture that inspires employee involvement which ultimately leads to employees' productivity. However, employees show willingness to become involved in such culture where goal setting, decision-making or problem resolving undertakings have always been encouraged which successively lead to greater employees' performance

(Hellriegel *et al.*, 1998). Consequently, firms need to identify that their HR developing practices are essentially harmonized with the OC. Nevertheless, some of the researchers have recommended an association among OC and HRM practices (Palthe and Kossek, 2003; Ferris *et al.*, 1999; Sheridan, 1992). Therefore, it can be propositioned that:

**Proposition two:** Organizational culture has a strong positive influence on HR professionals' effectiveness.

**High performance work system:** The definition of High Performance Work System (HPWS) depends on industry and background (Bartram *et al.*, 2007; Stanton *et al.*, 2010). However, Huselid (1995) referred to HPWS as a system which comprises rigid staffing protocols, managing performance, incentive management systems and training and development activities which intend to obtain, polish and highlight employee skills and behaviors essential to implement the firm's competitive strategy. It has been discovered that HPWS includes ten components which are selective hiring, training and development, contingent reward, security, effective teams, decentralized decision making, decreased status differences, information sharing, transformational leadership, high-quality work and also the measurement of management practices (Zacharatos *et al.*, 2005).

Organizations may enjoy the latest equipment along with the modern technology but that equipment is inadequate without innovative, well trained, highly motivated and competent employees. Pfeffer (1998) supported this argument by proposing that HR is a vital feature that could affect the performance of an organization. Therefore, HPWS is a perception where organizations are determined to attain its objectives and mission by people "HR Professionals (HRPs)"; it further grasps HRPs as an invaluable asset. The fundamental argument of HPWS is that organizations can create conducive environment in workplace with the intention to motivate employees to achieve the organizational goals (Whitener, 2001). Nevertheless, organizations which implement HPWS often recognize as per "high performance culture organizations". Therefore, these organizations practice unique managerial approach that permits high performance through people (Tomer, 2001). This managerial approach is extensively assumed to increase organizational performance by their influence on employees' competencies (KSAs), flexible authority and motivation (Combs *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, by developing HR competencies, providing employees an opportunity to grow, participative working environment, teamwork, fairness and consistency in management practices can enhance the effectiveness of HRPs and these HR practices are the outcomes of HPWS.

Additionally, Bohlander and Snell (2007) acknowledged that HPWS “is a detailed arrangement of HR practices, work structures and processes that makes the most of employees’ knowledge, skill, commitment and flexibility”. While Nadler *et al.* (1992) clarified that HPWS is an organizational structural design that takes along work, individuals, technology and information in a way that increase the correspondence among employees in order to generate employees’ effectiveness. Overall, HPWS can be seen as an important strategic device by means to develop and sustain core competencies, and as an essential circumstance for strategic execution (Dyer, 1993; Levine, 1995; Pfeffer, 1994).

Despite, the fact that positive evidence of HPWS on effectiveness, research studies up till now point out that the implementation of these types of practices is slightly limited and infrequent (Godard, 2004; Posthuma *et al.*, 2013; Roche, 1999). Though in theory, HPWS can deliver win-win remunerations for organizations and employees (Machin and Wood, 2005) but at the same time it can also cause win-lose combinations or even lose-lose outcomes (Boxall and Purcell, 2003). Nonetheless extensive evidence shows that HPWS is positively related to individual and organizational performance (Batt, 2002, 1999; Delaney and Huselid, 1996; Youndt *et al.*, 1996, 1995). Many scholars (Stanton *et al.*, 2010; Bartram *et al.*, 2007; Zacharatos *et al.*, 2005; Snell and Youndt, 1995; Huselid, 1995; Pfeffer, 1994) have studied HPWS to enhance employees’ and organizational effectiveness. However, HRPE is mainly the result of HPWS because it empowers the employee to utilize their competencies effectively. As Boxall and Purcell (2003) argued that HR has an influence on performance by leading or contributing to the expansion by the means of an effective implementation of HPWS which explicitly concerned with job and work design, flexible working environment, resourcing, employee development, rewards and by giving employees the freedom of expression. Consequently, it is seen critical that how organizations might custom HPWS as a competitive instrument within and across the industries (Batt, 2002; Boxall and Purcell, 2003).

**Proposition three:** High performance work system positively associate with HR professionals’ effectiveness.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Initial research framework has been developed based on the extensive review of the literature and theories. Conferring to the Resource-Based View (RBV), organizations which possess superior resources might be able to perceive and execute distinctive strategies that

competitors could not imitate easily. As rivals permit to replicate the superiority of physical and financial resources, experts and scholars have focused on the distinctiveness of HR as an aspect that can bring firm’s sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Barney *et al.*, 2001). In conformity with the RBV of the firm, it is required for organizations to classify, evaluate and improve key HR Professional Competencies (HRPC) permitted to achieve an adequate level of competitive advantage. According to RBV it is HRPs’ main responsibility to enable the organization’s corporate objectives through people since they are the one who contribute to the organizational goal (Priem and Butler, 2001). The RBV also recommends HR systems (HPWS) can contribute to sustainable competitive advantage through facilitating the development of HRPs’ KSAOs that are firm specific, produce composite social relationships that are entrenched in a firm’s history and culture, and generate organizational tacit knowledge (Barney, 1992; Reed and DeFillippi, 1990; Wright and McMahan, 1992).

However, in Pakistan the research to determine the effectiveness of HRPs is still limited as Ahmad *et al.* (2013) identified that HRPE being an area of academic research is quite at early stage in Pakistani setting. In the light of this, Aycan *et al.* (2000) disclosed Pakistan as under-researched country in the field of HRM, subsequently, HR department is still justifying the reasons of their existence in the organizations (Bhatti and Qureshi, 2007). Similarly, it is observed by Chaudhry and Roomi (2010) that mainstream enterprises in Pakistan are merely raising slogans concerning the significance of training and development of human capital for achieving sustainable competitive advantage but most of them do not invest properly in the development of HR. Further, the reflection of weaknesses of HRPs’ traits and competencies in Pakistan have also been witnessed and anticipated as an obstruction to organizational effectiveness (Ahmad *et al.*, 2014). HR development is also one of the crucial issues in the Pakistan (Halepota and Shah, 2011). Despite, human capital is essential to facilitate the HRPs to perform their tasks or to maintain the desired organizational culture and growth (Ulrich *et al.*, 2009). The common theme is that to achieve and sustain high performance, it needs a constructive workplace environment and HR practices which advance and leverage employees’ KSAs to create value.

Additionally, researchers have uncovered that OC has an effect on effectiveness of employees and overall organization (Clugston *et al.*, 2000; Rowe *et al.*, 1994). However, instudies of HPWS, though, researchers have dedicated their attention on economic performance criteria

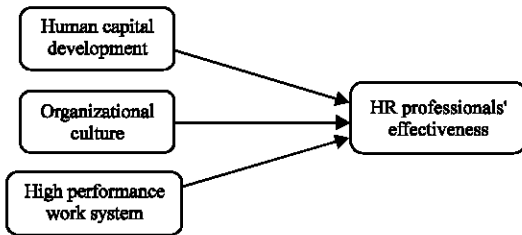


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework of HR professionals' effectiveness through human capital development, organizational culture and high performance work system

(Godard, 2004); very few of the previous researches have considered HRPE as per performance criteria as earlier studies (Guest, 2002; Shih *et al.*, 2006) discovered clear evidence between the relationship of HPWS and HRPE. Hence, it is important to study the influence of HCD, OC and HPWS on HRPE in the context of Pakistan (Fig. 1).

## METHODOLOGY

This study highlights the important factors that influence HRPE in Pakistan. Mixed-method approach has been proposed by the researcher to test the phenomena. However, in the first phase, this study will utilize a qualitative research approach to confirm the proposed constructs, which contribute to HRPE. Whereas in the second phase, this study will test the proposed constructs by the quantitative research approach. Constructed on this, it is revealed that mixed-method research approach is not simply collecting qualitative data from in-depth interviews or observations, or various kinds of quantitative evidence. It includes the deliberate collection of both qualitative and quantitative data and the permutation of the strengths of both to answer research questions. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) suggested that both qualitative and quantitative approaches are appropriate techniques for recognizing the phenomena and can be combined. Therefore, mixed-method approach is deployed in order to achieve the research objectives.

## CONCLUSION

As aforementioned, this study is to explore the potential of HRPs to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage for a firm in a swift technology changes. It is seen that HRPs must be fully loaded with upgraded competencies (KSAs) to perform effectively. And, further organizations should provide employees with strong OC where empowerment of employees is promoted to accomplish organizational goals. Moreover, organizations

should use HPWS an instrument for sustainable competitive advantage as it is found to have its strong effect on HRPE.

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