

# CROSSING THE GREAT DIVIDE: SOUTH ASIA HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORK SYSTEMS

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## Abstract

This study discusses qualitative research to profoundly understand South Asia's high-performance work systems (HPWS) development based on the Ability, Motivation, and Opportunities (AMO) model. Further, this study classifies three distinctive types of human resource (HR) practices — Takeuchi et al. (2007), Sun et al. (2007), and Chuang and Liao (2010) — into different sets of HR practices. Obtaining the conceptual concepts from the HPWS literature, this study tries to enhance our understanding by acquiring realistic ideas to propose a conceptual model involving several open questions that may provide scholars and practitioners more insights into understanding what HR practices constitute South Asia HPWS.

# Keywords

South Asia High-Performance Work Systems, Ability, Motivation and Opportunities Model, Human Resource Practices

## I. Introduction

As the business world has primarily competed across national borders to South Asia, developed countries try to approach the region, especially those with geographical proximity and cultural similarity. Human talent and HRM fields have stimulated scholars' interest in formulating their own regional HR systems. Existing HR research has paid enough attention to the cultural differences in responses to HR policies and practices (e.g., Reiche et al., 2019) and the appropriateness of local HR strategies (e.g., Reiche & Minbaeva, 2019). Hence, research on HR systems in South Asia has thus far remained largely separate in HRM research streams since specific HRM context topics continue to be underrepresented. The development of South Asia HR systems ties in international firms in South Asia, and many issues and questions remain unexplored.

Hence, this study would like to investigate the effects of South Asia HR systems on employee performance, the underlying mechanisms, and the boundary conditions. The present study addresses this problem by developing the South Asia High-performance Work Systems Scale. This scale is designed to assess employees' perceptions of the High-performance Work Systems (HPWS) in their work environment, focusing on how employees, in general, are treated in their organizationally assigned HPWS. Given these challenges, this study aims to elaborate:

- (a) the specific South Asia HPWS scale development,
- (b) the dynamics through which South Asia HPWS relates to employee outcomes, and
- (c) to provide multinational firms in South Asia to manage their human capital more effectively.

Overall, this study is being written with the confidence that it will help multinational firms to link the South Asia HPWS in the local context in their organizations to understand better the common conceptualizations of HPWS composed of skill, motivation, and opportunity-enhancing HR practices for multinational firms invested in South Asia.

### **II. High-performance Work Systems**

Moving towards the 21st century, in the research literature, 'high-performance work practices' (HPWP) has been instituted to forge practices by reinforcing one another in order to create synergistic effects in enhancing organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Campion et al., 2019; Dastmalchian et al., 2020). HPWS is based on specific coordinated HR practices that maximize employee commitment, knowledge, motivation, skills, and satisfaction and combat burnout and turnover (Bayo-Moriones & Galdón-Sánchez, 2010; Sun & Mamman, 2022). Bundles of HR practices work better than individual ones (e.g., Lin et al., 2020) and build a particular human capital of aggregate knowledge, skills, and abilities (Lepak et al., 2006; Lin et al., 2022) to encourage personal effort (e.g., Faisal et al., 2023). A thorough HPWS should be able to boost and reinforce employee ability, motivation, and opportunities (Lepak et al., 2006), and also employees benefit from meaningful performance, attitudes, and behaviors (cf. Boxall et al., 2011; Jensen et al., 2013; Kehoe & Wright, 2010).

Several researchers have developed instruments designed to tap constructs related to employee perceptions of human resource management in the workplace. For example, Huselid (1995) developed a 13-item scale focusing on employee skills, motivation, and organizational structure. Similarly, Bae and Lawler (2000) developed an instrument to measure high involvement human resource management (HRM) strategy with dimensions of extensive training, empowerment, highly selective staffing, performance-based pay, and broad job design. However, these two sets of HR systems were examined in Western contexts. Next, the HPWS was designed via employee- and manager-perceived HPWS in a Japanese context (Takeuchi et al., 2007). Sun, Aryee, and Law (2007) developed a 27-item scale to measure integrated high-performance human resource practices in the People's Republic of China. Although this HPWS focuses on the employees' and managers' perceptions of organizational HRM, it has been revised upon Western contexts (Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Delery, 1998; Wright & Gardner, 2003). Further, Chuang and Liao (2010) developed a 35-item scale related to staffing, training, involvement and participation, performance appraisals, compensation and rewards, and caring, focusing on the organization's HR practices toward employees. Still, this HPWS scale has been reproduced with permission from Lepak and Snell (2002) and Batt (2002) in the service context in Taiwan.

None of the existing instruments designed to measure various aspects of HR practices in South Asia tap employee perceptions of HPWS in multinational firms in South Asia. To address the lack of a reliable and valid measure of employee perceptions of HPWS, the South Asia High-Performance Work Systems Scale will be developed, measured, and validated based on the ability, motivation, and opportunity of the AMO model (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Hence, this study will follow Jiang et al. (2012) study, a meta-analytical investigation of three dimensions of HR systems: skills-enhancing, motivation-enhancing, and opportunity-enhancing.

Skills, motivation, and opportunity-enhancing HR practices are constructed with employee-oriented work practices, which aim to improve employees' skills, knowledge, motivation, satisfaction, and commitment as well as to combat burnout and turnover (Bayo-Moriones & Galdon-Sanchez, 2010). Hence, a thorough South Asia High-performance Work Systems Scale should be able to boost and reinforce employee ability, motivation, and opportunities (Lepak et al., 2006) to endow with personal efforts into organizational effectiveness and efficiency (e.g., Huselid, 1995; Wright et al., 2005; Zacharatos et al., 2005).

Nevertheless, the existing scales may need to account for the South Asia context. Thus, this study suggests additional developmental efforts in measuring South Asia HR systems. Given the influence of South Asia culture on the perception of HPWS, this study will adjust the existing HPWS measures, further report on the factor structure and reliability of this new scale, and describe an initial examination of this scale's construct validity by exploring its relationship with several critical working attitudes and behaviors.

Comprehensively, I target a broader scope of separate but interconnected practices, namely staffing, training, involvement and participation, performance appraisals, compensation and rewards, and caring (Chuang & Liao, 2010) into skill-enhancing HR practices, motivation-enhancing HR practices, and opportunity-enhancing HR practices (Gardner et al., 2011; Jiang et al., 2012; Lepak et al., 2006) in constructs (see Table 1) since Chuang and Liao's HPWS scale has been developed in Asia context as well as this study draws upon AMO theoretical perspective. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated based on the above reasoning:

*Proposition 1:* The South Asia High Performance Work Systems Scale is reliable and composed of three dimensions: (a) skill-enhancing practices, (b) motivation-enhancing practices, and (c) opportunity-enhancing practices.

HR practices Category	Description	Examples
Skill-enhancing practices	Practices are designed to build specific relevant skills, knowledge, and abilities of focal human capital pools to ensure the execution of business processes.	Staffing; Training
Motivation-enhancing practices	Practices are designed to elicit employees' motivations and willingness to perform assigned roles with discretionary efforts to go above and beyond stated expectations.	Performance appraisals; Compensation and rewards
Opportunity- enhancing practices	Practices provide employees with opportunities and information to contribute to work-group and organizational success.	Involvement and participation; Caring

 Table 1: Categories of HR Practices Comprising High Performance Work Systems

Descriptions are revised based on Gardner et al. (2011) and Jiang et al. (2012)

# III. Attitudes, Behaviors, and South Asia High-performance Work Systems

Explaining the relationship between employees' perception of skill-enhancing, motivation-enhancing, and opportunity-enhancing HR practices and working attitudes and behaviors, this study utilizes the notion of the AMO model. AMO perspective can be used to argue that HPWS triggers employee motivation, which encourages employees to exchange skills, knowledge, information, or other resources and leads to enhanced employee OCB (e.g., Alfes et al., 2012; Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Yang& Arthur, 2021; Zhang et al., 2023) and core performance (e.g., Miao et al., 2021; Snape & Redman, 2010). HPWS' investment in employees helps foster employee OCB and in-role, job, service, task, and work performance. This includes higher commitment, empowerment (e.g., Boxall et al., 2011), individual human capital (e.g., Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009; Zhai & Tian, 2022), and psychological contract (e.g., Kakkar et al., 2020; Uen et al., 2009), which all certainly contribute to nurturing social exchange relationships. Also, building on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), HPWS stimulates employee trust in HRM and induces commitment, involvement, and satisfaction, serving as a driving force to reciprocate efforts to improve organizational performance (Allen et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2003). The effects of HR practices have been suggested by social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity in explaining which employee perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors are shaped (e.g., Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Gürlek & Uygur, 2021).

Evidence suggests that HPWS works in a way that gives employees the latitude to participate in decisionmaking, improve skills and motivation, and seize opportunities to contribute effectively (Appelbaum, 2002; Harley et al., 2010; Ho & Kuvaas, 2020), such as commitment (e.g., Ang et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2024), engagement (e.g., Alfes et al., 2021; Bal et al., 2013), job satisfaction (e.g., Alothmany et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2013; Wu & Chaturvedi, 2009), decreased turnover intentions (e.g., Jensen et al., 2013; Xi et al., 2021), job performance (e.g., Chang & Chen, 2011; Wang & Chen, 2022), service performance (e.g., Liao et al., 2009; Jo et al., 2020), and organizational citizen behaviors (OCB) (e.g., Edgar et al., 2021; Kehoe & Wright, 2013). Hence, the following hypotheses are formulated based on the above reasoning:

*Proposition 2a*: Skill-enhancing HR practices will be positively related to employee positive working attitudes and behaviors, such as work engagement, job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational citizen behaviors.

*Proposition 2b*: Motivation-enhancing HR practices will be positively related to employee positive working attitudes and behaviors, such as work engagement, job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational citizen behaviors.

*Proposition 2c*: Opportunity-enhancing HR practices will be positively related to employee positive working attitudes and behaviors, such as work engagement, job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational citizen behaviors.

Proposition 3a: Skill-enhancing HR practices will be negatively related to employee turnover intentions.

*Proposition 3b*: Motivation-enhancing HR practices will be negatively related to employee turnover intentions.

*Proposition 3c*: Opportunity-enhancing HR practices will be negatively related to employee turnover intentions.

According to the regulatory focus theory, Higgins (1997, 1998), individuals with a prevention focus only care about fulfilling "ought self" and obligations. They try to avoid mismatches to the goals of safety and security and strive to mitigate negative outcomes. In contrast, individuals with a promotion focus aim at fulfilling their "ideal self" and aspirations. In the aspect of HPWS, different regulatory traits evoke different motivational processes, which, in turn, lead to different aspects of the information and different employee behavioral reactions

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and attitudes (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Park et al., 2023). Owing to the recognition of individual promotion or prevention focus (Higgins, 1997, 2005), perceived HR systems will affect how employees view HR practices as either resources or demands based on employee regulatory foci.

#### **Prevention Focus.**

Employees with a prevention focus may view HPWS as additional constraints. The negative sensing and feeling of HPWS will weaken the positive relationships between HPWS and employee work engagement, job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational citizen behaviors, whereas it will strengthen the positive relationship between HPWS and employee turnover intentions. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated based on the above reasoning:

**Proposition 4a:** Prevention-focus orientation will moderate the relationship between HPWS and employee work engagement, job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational citizen behaviors, in such a way that the relationship is weaker when prevention-focus orientation is high than when it is low.

**Proposition 4b:** Prevention-focus orientation will moderate the relationship between HPWS and employee turnover intentions, in such a way that the relationship is stronger when prevention-focus orientation is high than when it is low.

#### **Promotion Focus.**

Employees with a promotion focus are expected to be particularly responsive to the beneficial effects of HPWS. They are likely to have a tendency toward striving for maximal goals, long-term perspective, personal growth, change, and ideals. As a result, promotion-focused employees are alert to information in the work environment, which incorporates promotion goals. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated based on the above reasoning:

**Proposition 5a:** Promotion-focus orientation will moderate the relationship between HPWS and employee work engagement, job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational citizen behaviors, in such a way that the relationship is stronger when promotion-focus orientation is high than when it is low.

**Proposition 5a:** Promotion-focus orientation will moderate the relationship between HPWS and employee turnover intentions, in such a way that the relationship is weaker when promotion-focus orientation is high than when it is low.

Figure 1 depicts the theoretical model of the effects of three HR dimensions on employee outcomes.





# **IV.** Expected Implications and Contributions

This study has provided an emic perspective of South Asia HPWS based on regulatory focus theory and AMO perspective. Through the in-depth qualitative studies, this study has come up with some constructive suggestions for those multinational firms invested in South Asia to develop the appropriate human resource management systems and better manage their human capital via the provision of insights and direction for firms to develop customized HPWS as well. After the exploratory study described above, future research can proceed to the empirical studies, which can generalize our theoretical arguments to test the theoretical arguments and design a questionnaire to measure the concepts and variables.

Hence, an in-depth understanding of the AMO HR practices that constitute the South Asia HPWS which will influence employee working attitudes and behaviors. In other words, by conducting qualitative and qualitative studies, both scholars and practitioners can thoroughly investigate skill-, motivating-and opportunity-enhancing HR practices, respectively. It is expected that the results will be able to depict the key factors and the significant

components of South Asia HPWS. Furthermore, it is expected that we can not only disclose the distinctive characteristics of South Asia HPWS but also discover the commonality.

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The author declares that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could appear to influence the development or publication of this paper.

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