

THE EFFECT OF HIGH PERFORMANCE HR PRACTICES ON KNOWLEDGE SHARING BEHAVIOR: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Since Bangladesh has been experiencing a rapid expansion of higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly in private sector, there has been a rising concern with regards to their quality of research and education. The evidences highlight that there is a lack of academic research, lack of knowledge and experiences, and poor quality of teaching in these institutions. Scholars argue that enhancing knowledge sharing practices among the faculty members can serve as a powerful lever for improving academic research and quality of education. However, literature shows that faculty members are usually less inclined to share knowledge voluntarily with their colleagues. Therefore, it is important to explore the factors that may stimulate knowledge sharing among the faculty members in the HEIs. Accordingly, this paper attempts to develop a conceptual framework that introduces employee engagement as a mediator in the relationship between high performance HR practices (HPhRPs) and knowledge sharing among the faculty members serving in the private universities in Bangladesh.

Keywords: high performance HR practices (HPhRPs), knowledge management (KM), knowledge sharing, knowledge sharing behavior (KSB), employee engagement

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are the hubs of knowledge creation and dissemination; and a significant way of doing so is knowledge sharing (Buckley, 2012). Promoting a culture of knowledge sharing, especially among the faculty members, is crucial for creating a culture of learning, collaborative research, knowledge creation, innovation, and academic excellence in HEIs (Buckley, 2012; Tan, 2016). Therefore, it is quite reasonable that universities would undertake a proactive approach to ensure that their academics actively engage in knowledge sharing (Fullwood, Rowley, & Delbridge, 2013).

However, it seems that knowledge sharing among the faculty members is hardly prevailing in the HEIs these days (Ali, Gohneim, & Roubaie, 2014; Chalak, Ziae, & Nafei, 2014; Ramayah, Yeap, & Ignatius, 2013). In particular, academics are reluctant to share knowledge voluntarily with their colleagues (Norulkamar & Hatamleh, 2014; Santosh & Panda, 2016; Tan, 2016). Moreover, knowledge hoarding, an opposite to knowledge sharing, is a serious concern in organizations like academic institutions (Alsuraihi, Yaghi, & Nassuora, 2016; Cheng, Ho, & Lau, 2009; Muqadas et al., 2017; Ramayah et al., 2013; Santosh & Panda, 2016). Literature indicates that the lack of knowledge sharing also prevails among the faculty members in universities in Bangladesh (Islam, Ikeda, & Islam, 2013). Therefore, scholars are increasingly getting interested to explore how to expedite knowledge sharing among the academics of HEIs (Fullwood et al., 2013; Shahzadi, Hameed, & Kashif, 2015; Tahir, Musah, Abdullah, Musta'amal, & Abdullah, 2016; Tan, 2016).

In particular, expediting knowledge sharing in HEIs in Bangladesh is crucial as the government in its Vision 2021 puts utmost importance on transforming the country's HEIs into centers of learning, research, and academic excellence (The Banglagesh Planning Commission, 2010). As a matter of fact, Bangladesh has mainly been experiencing a rapid growth of HEIs, especially in private sector (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, 2017). However, it is frequently alleged that these institutions suffer from the lack of quality teaching, learning, academic research, and supportive environment (Blanco Ramírez & Jahirul Haque, 2016; Hossain, 2016; Huq, Huque, & Banik, 2016; Kitamura, 2015). Enhancing knowledge sharing at these institutions might be a probable mechanism in order to get rid of the present situation and move forward to the realization of the Vision 2021.

Scholars argue that an organization's HRM practices, if managed effectively, are in an ideal position for developing a favorable organizational climate that stimulates desired employee behaviors including that of knowledge sharing (Llopis & Foss, 2016). Accordingly, HRM practices are gradually being recognized as essential organizational factor for promoting knowledge sharing behavior of academic staff (Jyoti, Rani, & Gandotra, 2015; Runhaar & Sanders, 2016). However, the effect of HRM practices on knowledge sharing behavior is not straightforward which, in turn, results in need for the resolving the 'black box' or mediating mechanisms (Aklamanu, Degbey, & Tarba, 2016; Andreeva & Sergeeva, 2016). Past studies indicate that employee engagement may serve as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between HRM practices and knowledge sharing behavior of the academics of the HEIs. Relying on extensive review of literature, the paper intends to conceptualize the relationship among the variables which can suitably be explained by the social exchange theory (SET). However, the paper focuses on knowledge sharing behavior of the faculty members of the private universities because these institutions, in contrary to public universities, vary in terms of the extent and types of HRM practices used. Each private university has separate HRM policies and practices decided by its top authority. Conversely, the paper keeps the public universities out of focus as they follow almost similar HRM practices largely decided by the government. However, finally, a conceptual model and the future direction of research have been proposed.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Description of Variables

2.1.1 High Performance HR Practices

The universalistic notion of HRM posits that there are certain HRM practices which are always better than the others and are likely to be universally effective and are favorably associated with organizational outcomes irrespective of the contexts (Flores, Posthuma, & Campion, 2016; Kundu, Kundu, Gahlawat, & Gahlawat, 2016; Lai, Saridakis, & Johnstone, 2016). These HRM practices are usually labeled as ‘best practices’ or ‘high performance HR practices (HPhRPs)’ (Ma, Long, Zhang, Zhang, & Lam, 2017). These practices are also known as ‘high performance work practices (HPWPs)’, ‘high commitment HR practices (HCHRPs)’, and ‘high involvement HR practices (HIHRPs)’ (Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget, & Varone, 2013; Jyoti et al., 2015; Ma et al., 2017). In general, HPhRPs refer to a set of HRM practices designed to promote employees’ ability, motivation, and opportunity to use the ability and motivation, which in turn lead to favorable employee and organizational outcomes (Flores et al., 2016; Karatepe, Karatepe, Olugbade, & Olugbade, 2016; Ma et al., 2017). However, due to the lack of consensus regarding what constitutes best HRM practices or HPhRPs (Jyoti et al., 2015; Latorre, Guest, Ramos, & Gracia, 2016; Ogbonnaya & Valizade, 2016), the paper includes selective staffing, extensive training, job security, promotion opportunity, compensation, performance appraisal, autonomous job design, and participation which have been widely used in previous studies (Aktharsha & Sengottuvvel, 2016; Boxall, Hutchison, & Wassenaar, 2015; Dhar, 2015; Jyoti et al., 2015; Karatepe & Vatkankhah, 2015; Ma et al., 2017; Mostafa, 2016; Mostafa, Gould- Williams, & Bottomley, 2015; Schopman, Kalshoven, & Boon, 2017; Sikora, Ferris, & Van Iddekinge, 2015). Out of them, selective staffing and extensive training are effective for improving employees’ skills and abilities (Delery & Gupta, 2016); promotion opportunity, compensation, job security, and performance appraisals are useful for motivating them (Aklamanu et al., 2016; Chowhan, Pries, & Mann, 2017); and autonomous work design and participation are effective in facilitating the employees the opportunities to utilize their acquired skills and abilities (Aklamanu et al., 2016; Mostafa, 2016).

2.1.2 Knowledge Sharing Behavior

Knowledge, as postulated by the knowledge-based view, is the most important strategic resource among all the probable resources an organization may possess (Agarwal & Marouf, 2014; Chen et al., 2016; Nieves & Haller, 2014). Due to the importance of knowledge in the organizations, the concept ‘knowledge management’ emerges in the mid-1980s and gains much interest in managerial and academic fields since 1990s (Oliva, 2014; Schmitz, Rebelo, Gracia, & Tomás, 2014). Knowledge management (KM) refers to “the process of capturing, sharing, developing, and using the knowledge efficiently” (Navimipour & Charband, 2016, p. 730). However, among all the activities of KM, knowledge sharing is acknowledged as the central and most vital part (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2016; Edwards, 2017; Wang, Sharma, & Cao, 2016). Therefore, scholars are paying particular attention on how to promote employees’ knowledge sharing behavior in the organizations (Aklamanu et al., 2016; Kettinger, Li, Davis, & Kettinger, 2015; Pervaiz, Imran, Arshad, Haq, & Khan, 2016; Tan, 2016).

In general, knowledge sharing behavior (KSB) facilitates the exchange and application of scattered information, practices, uncommon understandings, insights, and experiences of

individual employees in the organization (Wang et al., 2016), and thereby transforms individual knowledge into a precious organizational asset (Islam et al., 2013). KSB can take place at the individual, group, departmental, or organizational level (Yi, 2009). However, knowledge sharing usually originates from the individual level (Yeo & Gold, 2014). In addition, scholars generally view KSB as either unidirectional (i.e., disseminating knowledge) or bidirectional (i.e., disseminating and collecting knowledge) (Hussein et al., 2016). Moreover, organizational knowledge comprises of explicit knowledge (e.g., information) and tacit knowledge (e.g., experiences and insights embedded in individuals) (Loebbecke, van Fenema, & Powell, 2016; Mat, Alias, & Muslim, 2016). The paper focuses on sharing of both tacit and explicit knowledge at individual level within the organization and considers it as unidirectional. Accordingly, KSB is defined as the individual behavior of disseminating one's job-related knowledge voluntarily, either tacit or explicit, to other members in the organization (Wang & Noe, 2010; Yi, 2009).

2.1.3 Employee Engagement

In recent years, research has shown dramatic interest in employee engagement due to its strong contribution to employee and organizational outcomes (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017; Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017; Kang & Sung, 2017; Karatepe et al., 2016). However, academic interest in employee engagement emerges from Kahn's (1990) seminal work on personal engagement (Carter, Nesbit, Badham, Parker, & Sung, 2016; Ruck, Welch, & Menara, 2017) in which employee engagement is defined as "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, emotional), and active, full role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). Later on, Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006, p. 702) defines employee engagement as "a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption". In this regard, vigor is reflected in the high level of energy, mental resilience, willingness, and persistence while working even at the time of difficulties. Dedication means an employee's strong involvement in his/her work and having a sense of enthusiasm, inspiration, significance, and pride. Finally, absorption refers to an employee's full concentration and happily engrossment in his/her work, whereby time passes fast and it becomes hard for one to detach him/herself from work. In general, employee engagement is defined as "an active, fulfilling and work-related state of mind that includes a strong identification with the organization and self-expression" (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017, p. 526). This paper uses the terms 'employee engagement' and 'work engagement' interchangeably.

2.2 High Performance HR Practices and Knowledge Sharing

Recently, scholars are increasingly putting their attention on the organizational factors in order to promote employees' knowledge sharing behavior (Carmeli & Paulus, 2015; Foss, Pedersen, Reinholt Fosgaard, & Stea, 2015; Lee, Shiue, & Chen, 2016; Li, Shang, Liu, & Xi, 2014; Ma et al., 2017). Particularly, scholars are paying attention to HRM practices that can elevate employees' motivation, abilities, and opportunities concerning knowledge management and knowledge sharing (Aklamanu et al., 2016; Iqbal, Toulson, & Tweed, 2016; Ma et al., 2017; Pervaiz et al., 2016).

In fact, scholars recognize effective use of HRM practices as a significant means of creating a positive impact on employees' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors towards successful

knowledge sharing (Abdul-Jalal, Toulson, & Tweed, 2013; Aklamanu et al., 2016). In particular, *selective staffing* emphasizes hiring people with adequate skills and competencies which are prerequisite for successful sharing knowledge (Abdul-Jalal et al., 2013). Moreover, selecting right people through the appropriate process indicates that the organization values its people, which may induce positive employee attitudes beneficial to the organization, thus may stimulate KSB (Kim & Ko, 2014). *Training* itself is a formal mechanism for sharing knowledge because training courses not only equip the employees with enhanced skills and abilities to share knowledge, but also offer an opportunity for doing so (Chen, Chang, Tseng, Chen, & Chang, 2013). High *job security* reflects an indication of the employer's long-term investment and trust in its employees (De Meulenaere, Boone, & Buyl, 2016), which may induce them to reciprocate with discretionary behaviors including KSB (Kim & Ko, 2014; McClean & Collins, 2011). *Promotion* opportunity serves as a means of stimulating employees' sense of belongingness, long-term attachment and commitment to the organization (Rubel & Kee, 2015), which in turn may promote KSB (Li, Zhang, Zhang, & Zhou, 2017). *Compensation* is one of the important organizational means of promoting employee motivation (Lee, Raschke, & Louis, 2016). *Performance appraisal* with effective feedback system promotes a supportive work environment that facilitates employees to express their ideas and knowledge freely (Ma et al., 2017). Employees with high *job autonomy* will be more intrinsically motivated towards engaging in the behaviors of their choices such as sharing knowledge (Tangaraja, Mohd Rasdi, Ismail, & Samah, 2015). *Employee participation* directly facilitates sharing an employee's thoughts, feelings, and ideas with others in the organization (Yoerger, Crowe, & Allen, 2015). Moreover, employee participation promotes a sense of belongingness, healthy relations among employees, and commitment to the organization (Alsughayir, 2016), and thus may stimulate discretionary behaviors including KSB (Li et al., 2017).

Moreover, according to social exchange view, HRM practices can provide a positive signal to the employees that the organization is concerned for their well-being and desires to establish long-term relationship with them (Gould-Williams, 2016). In return, employees are expected to exhibit positive attitudes and behaviors including KSB (Kim & Ko, 2014). In fact, several scholars have tested the effect of HRM practices on knowledge sharing behavior (Flinchbaugh, Li, Luth, & Chadwick, 2016; Kim & Ko, 2014; Manafi & Subramaniam, 2015; Mustafa, Lundmark, & Ramos, 2016; Mustafa, Richards, & Ramos, 2013; Pervaiz et al., 2016). The findings of these studies indicate that HRM practices are significant predictors of KSB. Therefore, the paper assumes that HPHRPs will promote KSB among the faculty members in the HEIs.

2.3 High Performance HR Practices and Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is being increasingly recognized as the 'new best friend' of HRM, especially in the mechanism through which HRM practices lead to promoting individual and organizational outcomes (Huang, Ma, & Meng, 2017; Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013). In fact, scholars are gradually recognizing HRM practices as important levers for stimulating employee engagement (Akhtar, Nawaz, Mahmood, & Shahid, 2016; Aybas & Acar, 2017; Huang et al., 2017; Presbitero, 2017; Ugwu, 2017). According to the social exchange view, effective HRM practices are deemed as the organization's commitment towards the employees who are supposed to reciprocate with increased commitment and engagement (Garg, 2015). In fact, HPHRPs can convey a positive signal to the employees by enriching their jobs,

improving their skills and abilities, enhancing their motivation, and promoting participative decision-making, which in turn will stimulate them to reciprocate with greater level of employee engagement and commitment (Aybas & Acar, 2017; Huang et al., 2017). Indeed, several studies confirm that HPHRPs can significantly boost up employee engagement (Akhtar et al., 2016; Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013; Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees, & Gatenby, 2013; Aybas & Acar, 2017; Boon & Kalshoven, 2014; Cooke, Cooper, Bartram, Wang, & Mei, 2016; Garg, 2015; Garg & Sharma, 2015; Karatepe, 2013; Karatepe et al., 2016; Muduli, Verma, & Datta, 2016; Nawaz, Hassan, Hassan, Shukat, & Asadullah, 2014; Presbitero, 2017; Sattar, Ahmad, & Hassan, 2015; Ugwu, 2017). Therefore, it is assumed that if HEIs employ HPHRPs, they will be able to simulate the level of engagement of their faculty members.

2.4 Employee Engagement and Knowledge Sharing

Very recently, scholars have started to shed light on the role of employee engagement on promoting knowledge sharing behavior (Kim & Park, 2017; Tamta & Rao, 2017; Tanaka, 2016). Since engaged employees are enthusiastic and dedicated to their work, they are more likely to share their work-related expertise and ideas with their co-workers (Kim & Park, 2017). Moreover, spontaneous KSB is regarded as a sort of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Chang & Chuang, 2011; Fang & Chiu, 2010). Accordingly, employee engagement is likely to enhance knowledge sharing behavior, since greater sense of engagement enhances OCB (Demerouti, Bakker, & Gevers, 2015; Matta, Scott, Koopman, & Conlon, 2015; Zhang, Guo, & Newman, 2017). In addition, Chen, Zhang, and Vogel (2011) argue that employee engagement can be an essential forecaster of KSB due to the fact that engaging in tasks is likely to facilitate the employees to share task-related knowledge proactively with other employees. In fact, several studies discover that employee engagement is favorably associated with KSB (Chen et al., 2011; Kim & Park, 2017; Tamta & Rao, 2017). Moreover, employee engagement is found to significantly promote positive attitude towards knowledge sharing (Tanaka, 2016). Therefore, it is assumed that faculty members with greater work engagement will put extra effort into sharing their job-related knowledge with their colleagues.

3.0 PROPOSED RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The following research framework has been proposed based on the literature that portrays that HPHRPs have a direct positive influence on knowledge sharing behavior. Moreover, HPHRPs have an indirect positive influence on knowledge sharing behavior through employee engagement. It is expected that HPHRPs will serve as a bundle of HRM practices in order to create synergic effect on the employee outcomes.

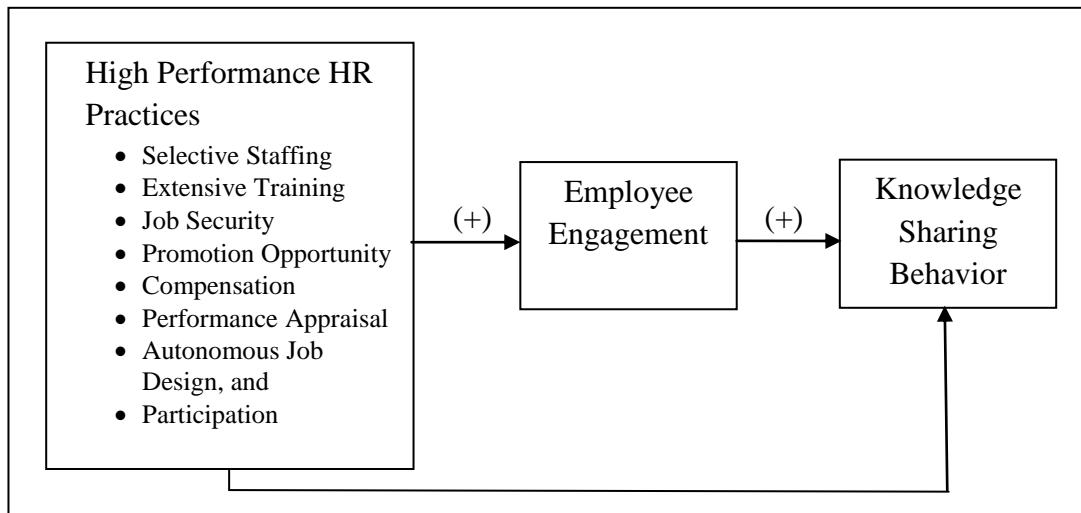


Figure 1
Proposed Research Framework

4.0 PROPOSITION TESTING

Based on the proposed research framework, the paper presents the following propositions that should empirically be tested in future research.

Proposition 1: High performance HR practices will be positively related to employee engagement.

Proposition 2: High performance HR practices will be positively related to employees' individual knowledge sharing behavior.

Proposition 3: Employee engagement will be positively related to employees' individual knowledge sharing behavior.

Proposition 4: Employee engagement will mediate the positive relationship between high performance HR practices and employees' individual knowledge sharing behavior.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The growth and prosperity of a HEI mainly arise from the knowledge of its academics; hence, it's imperative to stimulate and foster knowledge sharing among them (Skaik & Othman, 2016). In fact, effective knowledge sharing among academics is critical to strategic planning, quality of academic programs, curriculum development, quality of teaching, interdisciplinary research, and competitiveness of HEIs (Howell & Annansingh, 2013). However, it is found that faculty members are usually reluctant to share knowledge voluntarily with each other. Therefore, universities should undertake organizational initiatives for improving knowledge sharing practices among the faculty members. In this regards, HPHRPs have already been proven

effective as organizational factor for stimulating knowledge sharing practices in the organization. However, employee engagement seems to play an important mediating role with respect to the relationship between HPHRPs and individual knowledge sharing behavior. Accordingly, the paper presents a conceptual research framework which should be justified in future empirical studies.

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