

A Review of Research on the Impact of High-Performance Work System on Employee Job Performance

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Abstract. With the increasingly fierce market competition, high-performance work system has become the focus of strategic human resource management. Previous research has mainly focused on exploring whether high-performance work systems can actually improve organizational performance, while, employee performance, as a proximal human resource result, has a more direct and definite relationship with high-performance work systems, and is a key variable linking the relationship between high-performance work systems and organizational performance. Through combing and analyzing the previous literature, this paper summarizes the research mechanism of high-performance work systems on employee job performance, reviews the previous research, and puts forward suggestions for future research directions, in order to provide useful references for the research on high-performance work system and employee job performance.

Keywords: High-performance work system; employee performance; resource-based theory; social exchange theory.

1. Introduction

Under the background of big data and artificial intelligence, uncertainty and competitiveness in the era of knowledge economy make employees become "sharp tools" for organizations to maintain competitive advantages, posing a higher challenge to the level of organization management. Organizations effectively manage employees through various human resource management practices, but the mutual support of various practices in human resource management is often more important than any single practice (Fu et al., 2017)^[1]. With the support of digital technology, human resource management activities are bound to change the traditional mode of operation. According to the diversity, relevance, hierarchy, integrity and openness of system science, organizations can integrate various human resource management practices by building high-performance work systems.

Most previous studies have focused on organizational-level performance, because various non-human resource factors, such as politics, economy and social culture, organizational performance shows a more flexible relationship with human resources practice outcomes. On the contrary, the relationship between employee performance and human resource practice outcomes is closer and more stable. Therefore, employee performance is a key variable linking the relationship between high-performance work systems and organizational performance, so that the black box research between high-performance work system and organizational performance can be transformed into a black box with employee performance. Although, compared to the past focused research on the impact of enterprise-level results, the impact on employee-level results has begun to focus in recent years, but employee performance has not been paid enough attention, which has led to the emergence of research gaps in high-performance work systems.

At the same time, at the beginning of the research, scholars usually regard the high-performance work system as an organizational-level construct, and use the general manager or HR manager to evaluate it. With the deepening of research, literature on employee-perceived high-performance work systems began to appear (Kehoe & Wright, 2013^[2]; Piening et al., 2013^[3]). After all, a high-performance work system developed by an organization must be perceived by employees in order to have an impact on organizational and employee outcomes. That is, employee-perceived high-performance work systems are more predictive of employee job performance than organizational-implemented high-performance work systems.

To sum up, for the needs of theory and reality, this study starts from the high-performance work systems perceived by employees, and studies its impact on employee job performance through reading and analyzing previous literature, so as to enrich the impact of high-performance work systems on employee performance and provide reference for organizations to implement high performance human resource practice and improve employees job performance.

2. A Review of Research on Basic Concepts

2.1. Employee Job Performance

2.1.1 Concept of job performance

In the field of management research, job performance has always been the focus of research. Since the concept of job performance was put forward, it has been widely and deeply discussed and studied in the academic circles. Job performance can be divided into organizational performance, team performance and employee performance according to the hierarchy. Since the purpose of this study is on individual employees, it mainly focuses on employee job performance. In terms of employee performance, the concept of job performance is not the same due to the different definition angles and research focuses, but it mainly includes the following three views: performance result view, performance behavior view, and performance comprehensive view.

First, the view of performance results. Scholars who hold this view believe that the purpose of work is to accomplish work objectives, and job performance is the measurement of work results. Bernardin & Beatty (1984)^[4] believe that employee performance is the work result produced by activities or behaviors carried out in a specific position within a certain time frame. Tuten et al. (2004)^[5] pointed out that work performance is the work carried out by members of the organization to achieve organizational performance, and its foothold should be placed on the final work result.

Second, the view of performance behavior. Scholars who hold this view tend to define job performance in terms of behavioral orientation. For example, Campell (1993)^[6] summarizes job performance as the work behaviors taken by members of the organization to achieve specific organizational goals. Borman et al. (1993)^[7] defined job performance as the related behaviors that employees perform in the process of work in order to achieve organizational goals and that can be observed by certain means. These behaviors are measured based on the level of individual contribution to organizational goals. Herman Aguinis (2012)^[8] argues that performance is about behavior or what the employee does, rather than what the employee produces or his work results.

Third, the comprehensive view of performance. This view integrates the above two views and believes that job performance includes not only the work result but also the process of achieving the results, and the employee's ability, attitude, working style should all be considered. For example, Borman & Motowidlo (1997)^[9] proposed in their research that performance has rich connotations, which is composed of multiple dimensions that can be measured, and performance may be intermittent. Generally speaking, it is a comprehensive reflection of employee behavior and results. Chinese scholar Han Yi (2007)^[10] proposed that in the comprehensive view, work performance not only includes results and behaviors, but also includes work ability and work attitude.

This study believes that job performance should not only pay attention to employees' behaviors at work, but also pay attention to the results produced by the behavior, that is, the comprehensive concept of job performance.

2.1.2 Dimensions of job performance

Although there are some differences in the definition of job performance among scholars at present, one thing is consistent, they all agree that job performance is multi-dimensional.

Two dimensions. Katz & Kahn (1966)^[11] considered that job performance includes in-role performance and out-role performance from the perspective of whether it belongs to job responsibilities. In-role performance refers to the performance of employees within the scope of their job responsibilities, and extra-role performance refers to employees' behavior outside their job

responsibilities. Borman et al. (1993)^[7] proposed to divide job performance into task performance and contextual performance. Task performance is a behavior related to work itself, and contextual performance refers to proactive, positive behaviors exhibited in organizational, social, and environmental contexts.

Three dimensional. Allworth et al. (1997)^[12] believe that the development of science and technology would constantly promote management practices. The ability of employees to adapt to new knowledge and skills, as well as the ability to learn, absorb and apply new knowledge and skills to adapt to complex work environments and solve work problems directly determines job performance. Therefore, on the basis of task performance and contextual performance, adaptive performance related to adaptive behavior is added. Sun Jianmin et al. (2002)^[13] combined with the background of the high degree of "power distance" and "superior-subordinate relationship" in domestic enterprises, and after analyzing the enterprise managers, pointed out that job performance will be affected by interpersonal relationships and personal characteristics. Therefore, on the basis of task performance, interpersonal performance and personal trait performance are further incorporated into the scope of job performance.

Four dimensions. Wen Zhiyi (2005)^[14] empirically studied the job performance of enterprise managers based on China's national conditions, and proposed a four-dimensional construct of job performance, including task performance, interpersonal performance, adaptive performance, and dedicative performance. Han Yi and Liao Jianqiao (2007)^[10] pointed out that learning ability directly determines whether employees can adapt to the environment. They finally divided job performance into four dimensions: task performance, interpersonal performance, learning performance and innovation performance.

2.2. High-Performance Work System

2.2.1 Concept of high-performance work system

High-performance work system has always been widely concerned, and different scholars have carried out related research from different perspectives, but no consensus has been reached so far. Representative views can be broadly divided into three categories:

Universality view. For example, Way (2002)^[15] defined high-performance work systems as a combination of different but related human resource management practices that an enterprise uses to select, develop, retain, and motivate employees. Heffernan and Dundon (2016)^[16] believe that high-performance work systems can be broadly understood as a set of innovative human resource practices and job design processes, when they are bound together in a certain way, they reinforce each other and produce synergies. Zhang Junwei et al. (2017)^[17] believe that high-performance work systems is a whole composed of a series of human resource practices involving the selection, employment, education, and retention of employees, which promote and relate to each other.

Matching view. For example, Huselid et al. (1997)^[18] defined high-performance work systems as a series of human resource management policies and activities that ensure that human resources are aligned with organizational strategic goals. Miao Rentao and Cao Yi (2020)^[19] believe that high-performance work systems refers to a series of human resource practices with internal fit (consistency between human resource practices) and external synergy (consistency with organizational strategy).

Model Theory View. For example, Appelbaum et al. (2000)^[20] proposed a representative AMO model, which defines high-performance work systems from three aspects: improving employees' ability, enhancing employees' motivation, and increasing employees' participation opportunities.

On the basis of synthesizing the existing literature, this paper argues that high-performance work system is an organic combination of human resource management policies and practices, including selection, training, assessment and salary incentive, which can improve employees' ability, motivation, participation and then promote performance.

2.2.2 Components of high-performance work system

Despite high-performance work system is essentially a management model formed by a series of human resource management practices that can stimulate employees' work motivation, it has been recognized by a large number of scholars, but, what elements can form an effective high-performance work system for the organization, different scholars have different understanding and view.

Representative views include: Appelbaum (2000)^[20] proposed the AOM model, arguing that the system consists of employee capabilities, motivation and participation opportunities, and then based on the model, he proposed nine practices as the dimensions of a high-performance work system: employee skills (including employee selection, rigorous training, competitive compensation and internal promotion), employee motivation (including performance compensation, results-oriented evaluation), employee empowerment (including employee participation, complaint resolution system, team work design). Sun et al. (2007)^[21] believed that high-performance work system includes employee selection, training, internal promotion, occupational safety, job description, results-oriented performance evaluation, salary incentive and employee participation. Su Zhongxing (2010)^[22] proposed eight dimensions of competitive flow and discipline, salary, extensive training, strict recruitment, results-oriented assessment, information sharing, employee participation in management, and internal labor market.

3. A Review of Research on the Impact of High-Performance Work System on Employee Job Performance

3.1. The Direct Impact of High-Performance Work System on Employee Job Performance

The relationship between high performance work system and employee performance can be explained by resource-based theory and social exchange theory. Resource-based theory believes that high-quality, organization-specific human capital is scarce, valuable, and has the characteristics of inimitable and irreplaceable. This human capital can help organizations maintain core competitive advantages. High-performance work system can attract, cultivate and retain talents, thus contributing to the improvement of employee job performance. Social exchange theory focuses on the pay and return of the exchange subject from an exchange relationship (Blau, 2017)^[23]. Such exchange is based on the principle of reciprocity, that is, both parties can gain benefits from the social exchange. Practices such as recruitment, selection, training, and development-oriented performance management send a signal to employees that the organization is investing in them. Based on the norm of reciprocity, employees will be rewarded for showing high job performance.

The above theories can fully explain the relationship between high-performance work system and employee performance. Although there are few studies on the relationship between the two, some scholars have carried out relevant studies. For example, the research of Snape and Redman (2010)^[24] shows that high-performance work system has a significant positive impact on employee job performance and organizational citizenship behavior. Jiang et al. (2012)^[25] believed that high-performance work system can improve employees' knowledge and skills (such as comprehensive recruitment, strict selection, extensive training) and work motivation (such as development-oriented performance management, performance-based compensation), and give employees work autonomy (such as flexible working system, participation in decision-making), which will improve the performance of employees. Miao Rentao et al. (2013)^[26] found through research that employees' perceived high-performance work system has a significant positive impact on both task performance and contextual performance. Luo Zhengqing et al. (2018)^[27] based on AMO theory research and concluded that high-performance work system has a significant positive impact on the innovation performance of the new generation of knowledge workers. Nadeem et al. (2019)^[28] found through research that high performance work system can promote employees' service performance and organizational citizenship behavior.

To sum up, most studies show that there is a positive correlation between high performance work system and employee performance. Employee job performance represents the employee's work behavior and results related to work or organizational goals, and high-performance work system includes high-standard selection, systematic training, strict assessment, incentive compensation, employee care and other management practices, these practices affect employee job performance by creating opportunities for them, developing their abilities, and motivating their motivation, and become a key factor in promoting employees to achieve job performance.

3.2. The Effect of Mediating Variables

In the process of studying the impact of high-performance work systems on employee performance, many scholars have found that the relationship between the two is not a simple linear, so they continue to explore the mechanism of action. There are many mediating variables proposed by scholars. Through reviewing the previous literatures, this paper finds that most of the mediating effects of high-performance work systems and employee job performance are focused on the psychological state and behavioral characteristics of employees at the individual level.

Karatepe (2012)^[29] found that employees' job involvement will have a mediating effect when studying the impact of high-performance work systems on employee performance in the hotel industry. Some form of structured management practice in a high-performance work system is a key factor in determining the behavior and performance of frontline workers in the workplace. Gibbs and Ashill (2013)^[30] surveyed front-line employees of Russian commercial banks, showing that high-performance work systems have a significant positive impact on employee satisfaction and organizational commitment, but only employee satisfaction will further affect job performance. Therefore, employee satisfaction is a more valuable lever for job performance. Compared with cultivating employees' organizational commitment, management needs to improve employees' job satisfaction. Li et al. (2019)^[31] verified the significant positive impact of high-performance work systems on employee job performance through a stratified sample survey of 250 employees in the textile industry, and found job satisfaction, organizational support, and employee engagement played an mediating role in it. Qi Yujue et al. (2018)^[32] tested the survey data of 1,083 employees in 32 manufacturing enterprises, and found that value consistency played a partial mediating role in the relationship between high-performance work systems and employee task performance and contextual performance. Zhou Li et al. (2021)^[33] based on the JD-R model, found that the employee-perceived high-performance work system can ensure and improve employee performance by inhibiting emotional exhaustion and reducing counterproductive behavior.

From the above studies, it can be found that almost all the mediation effect studies can prove the significant correlation between high-performance work systems and employee job performance, and most of the mediating effects focus on the psychological state and behavioral characteristics of employees at the individual level. It can be seen that the human factor occupies a very important position in the production and operation of an enterprise, and the vitality and operation effect of an enterprise largely depend on the enthusiasm and creativity of each employee in the enterprise.

3.3. The Effect of Moderator Variables

Studies have shown that the effect of high-performance work systems on employee performance is moderated by some variables. The study of the moderating effect makes the effect between the two more significant and the research more targeted, so the study of the moderating effect is very important. Summarizing the previous literature, it is found that scholars generally study the moderating effect from two aspects: employee level and organization level.

For example, Zhang Junwei et al. (2016)^[34] examined the moderating effect of environmental uncertainty, difficulty of performance goal and employee achievement motivation on the relationship between high performance work system and employee work performance from the perspectives of environment, task and employee personal factors. The results show that the higher the environmental uncertainty is, the stronger the positive effect of high-performance work systems on the employee job

performance; the higher the difficulty of performance goal and employee achievement motivation, the greater the positive impact of high-performance work system on employee job performance. Zhang Junwei et al. (2017)^[22] conducted research from the perspective of self-concept and found that differences in high-performance work systems moderate the mediating effect of employees' organizational-based self-esteem between high-performance work systems and employee job performance. The greater the difference in high-performance work systems, the smaller the mediating effect. Miao Rentao et al. (2013)^[25] found that organizational procedural justice moderated the complete mediating effect of leader-member exchange on the high-performance work system and employee performance.

4. Research Conclusions and Prospects

4.1. Research Conclusions and Discussion

By sorting and summarizing the previous literature, this paper divides the research on the relationship between high-performance work systems and employee job performance into three aspects: main effect, mediating effect and moderating effect. And draw the following conclusions: First, high-performance work system has a positive effect on employee performance, therefore, in the face of various challenges, organizations can improve the individual performance level of employees by building a high-performance work system. Second, the relationship between high performance work systems and employee performance is not a single linear relationship, there are mediating variables between the two, or a more complex relationship, which requires us to further study the "black box" mechanism between the two, and study the relationship between the two from different perspectives, so that enterprises can find a suitable path to promote employee performance.

The conclusions of this paper have the following theoretical and practical significance: The first is the theoretical significance. Based on the fact that employee performance is the proximal result of human resources and a key variable between high-performance work systems and organizational performance, this paper transforms the black box with organizational performance into a black box with employee performance, which enriches the high-performance work systems at the employee level to some extent.

The second is the practical significance. This study provides evidence of the impact of employee-perceived high-performance work system on job performance, which means that the high-performance work system formulated by organization must be perceived by employees; otherwise, even if the organization develops an extremely perfect high-performance work system, it will be difficult to play its due effect. Managers are the implementers of the high-performance work system, and they play the role of uploading and distributing in the process of information transmission of the high-performance work system. Therefore, in practice, on the one hand, managers should effectively implement the high-performance work system and strengthen communication with employees, fully consider the characteristics and needs of employees, and pay attention to and improve employee performance. For employees, after they feel the investment of the company, they will increase their sense of dependence on the company, and then improve the quality of their work. When the performance of employees continues to increase, the performance of the enterprise will also improve accordingly, which will enhance the competitive advantage of the enterprise. On the other hand, enterprises should train managers in communication skills, human resource management knowledge and skills, etc., which will not only help employees perceive the high-performance work system formulated by the organization, but also enables managers to formulate more targeted Relevant human resource management practice activities, according to the actual situation and development needs of the enterprise, continuously optimize the high-performance work system, so as to promote the long-term development of the enterprise and achieve a win-win effect.

4.2. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Through the reading and analysis of previous relevant literature, this paper finds that there are still some shortcomings in the research on the impact of high-performance work systems on employee job performance, which can be further improved and discussed in the future.

First, whether the high-performance work system proposed by the West, especially the content structure characterized by authorization, employee participation, and self-management, is fully applicable in the context of Chinese enterprises, and whether high-performance work system in the context of Chinese enterprises have different content structures, whether high-performance work system can improve employee performance and bring competitive advantages to enterprises in an increasingly dynamic competitive environment remains to be further verified through localized research.

Second, cultural factors may affect the degree to which high-performance work systems work, making differences in employee outcomes. These factors mainly include collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, etc., but few studies have examined the influence of these cultural characteristic variables. For theoretical and empirical requirements, future research can combine the Chinese background to explore different cultural characteristics variables to further enrich the theoretical study of the impact of high-performance work system on employee performance.

Third, this paper only discusses the relationship between high-performance work systems and the employee level, and most scholars also tend to separate the organizational-level performance from the employee-level performance when they study the mechanism of high-performance work system. In fact, there is a close relationship between the two. At present, few studies have brought the impact of high-performance work systems on organizational performance and employee performance into a unified framework, so it is impossible to form a complete understanding of the mechanism of high-performance work systems on performance. Future research can further propose a theoretical model of the cross-level impact of high-performance work systems on performance, and deeply reveal the mechanism of high-performance work systems on performance.

Fourth, there are two research paradigms of high-performance work system: content and process. The content paradigm holds that high-performance work system can have a positive impact on organizational and employee performance as long as they have characteristics that improve employee knowledge, skills, and motivation; the process paradigm holds that the design and implementation of high-performance work system will have different results due to the inconsistent experience and interpretation of employees to it, thus affecting the effect. Therefore, individual employees play an important role in explaining the mechanism of high-performance work system. Previous research has mainly focused on the content of high-performance work system, ignoring the discussion of its process. Some scholars believe that the consistency between employees' perceptions of high-performance work system and the human resource practices implemented by managers will affect the effectiveness of the system. When there is inconsistency between the two, it will be difficult for the organization to manage or control the attitude and behavioral outcomes of employees in the expected way. (Jiang,2013^[35]; Karina,2015^[36]). Therefore, future research can integrate the two research paradigms, from the dual perspectives of managers and employees, to study the connection and difference between the high-performance work system implemented by managers and perceived by individual employees, and conduct an in-depth analysis of the complex process of converting high-performance work systems into performance, so as to make up for the research gap between the mechanism of high-performance work system and the cause of the difference in employee performance.

Fifth, most studies use cross-sectional data, and cross-sectional studies cannot determine the causal relationship between variables. Does the high-performance work system improve employee job performance, or does the improvement of the employee job performance prompt the organization to implement high-performance work system? There is no definitive answer to this question. To address this question, it is necessary for future research to combine cross-sectional and longitudinal studies to conduct more rigorous tests.

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