

***Examining the Mechanisms linking Commitment-based Human Resource Practices,
and Employee Job Performance: The Roles of Organizational Socialization***

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Introduction

Given the rapid changes in industrial structures, the methods used by employees to enhance employee work attitudes and deliver high-quality service have become critical issues to achieve a high rate of productivity and to provide better goods and services to customers (Lu, Tsang, & Peng, 2008).

Strategic human resource scholars have argued that companies can effectively influence the interactions, behaviors, motivation, and performance of employees through different human resource practices (Huselid, 1995; Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001). Even though the positive relationship between human resource management practices and human capital resources have been empirically proven (Youndt & Snell, 2004), there is little research that discusses how commitment-based HR practices enhance the organizational socialization and lead to better job performance. Specifically, existing research could not empirically answer what kinds of employee attributes are improved by commitment-based HR practices.

Commitment-based HR practices are considered as a unit level variable whereas organizational socialization, employee work attitudes and job performance are all considered individual level variables. Thus, there are cross-level relationships between these four variables. First, using resource-based theory as the backbone, we attempt to examine whether commitment-based HR practices influence employee job performance. Second, organizational socialization are shaped and maintained by human resource management practices. Since HR system is a set of HR management practices, employees job performance will be affected their organizational socialization. That is, commitment-based HR practices would like to create or foster employee organizational socialization to improve their job performance.

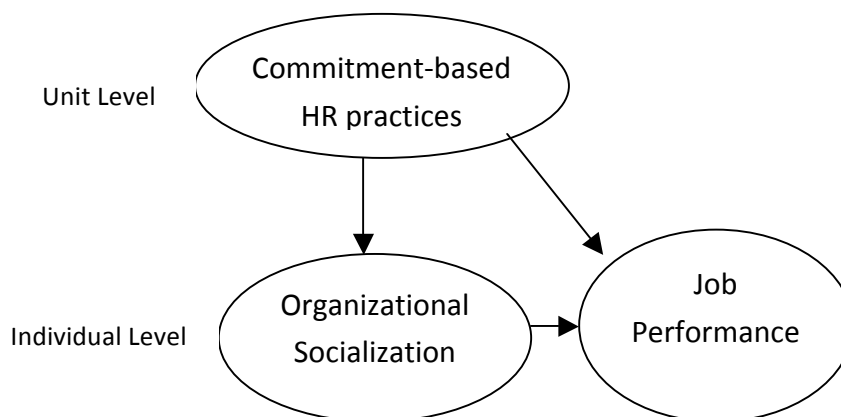


FIGURE 1

The Cross-level Model of Commitment-based HR Practices, Organizational Socialization, and Employee Job Performance

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Linking commitment-based HR practices to job performance

Commitment-based HR practices focus on mutual, long-term exchange relationships (Arthur, 1992; Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Hite, 1995) and meanwhile transaction-based HR practices emphasize individual short-term exchange relationships. To that end, a growing body of evidence suggests that commitment-based HR practices are more positively related to firm performance than are practices that are transaction-based.

Commitment-based HR practices are based on comprehensive training which encompasses intensity and scope (Youndt & Snell, 2004). Intensity focuses on the depth and duration of the programs and the degree to which they are continuously updated; in contrast, scope focuses on the breadth and types of training, as well as the utilization of cross-training. The amount of training received by employees was significantly related to professional commitment and job performance (Saks, 1996; Loi et al., 2004). Because commitment-based HR practices must include training programs with high intensity and scope for firms' human capital enhancement, they could enhance employees' job performance to their organizations. In other words, commitment-based HR practices will improve employee job performance and we propose the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Commitment-based HR practices will positively associate with employee job performance.

The mediating effects of organizational socialization

Organizational socialization is the process by which employees gain social knowledge and skills necessary to their organizational roles (Van Maanen et al., 1979; Feldman, 1981; Chow, 2002; Carr et al., 2006). Organizational socialization from the employee viewpoint can be further defined as "the process by which a person secures relevant job skills, acquires a functional level of organizational understanding, attains supportive social interactions with co-workers, and generally accepts the established ways of a particular organization." (Taormina, 1997; Loi et al., 2006).

Taormina (1998, 1999) concluded that the four dimensions of organizational socialization that include training received, employee understanding of his or her role in the company, co-worker support, and future prospects within the employing organization, specify several job-related domains (such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment). The basic objective of organizational socialization is to maintain control by ensuring the employees conform to and share the same norms and values as those of the organization.

Job performance refers to the behaviors exhibited when an individual tries to fulfill organizational expectations or the required performance for a specific role. Job performance can be task performance and contextual performance. Task performance means workers' contributions to organizational core technology and the exhibited skillfulness and effectiveness within job domain; contextual performance means the skillfulness and effectiveness which contribute to organizational efficacy outside the job domain (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993; Campbell, 1990).

Because commitment-based HR practices helps employees become familiar with their jobs, roles, organizational goals, and methods of functioning (Taormina, 1994), it is useful in helping them to reduce mistakes and yield effective performance. Therefore, when employee commitments and job involvement increase, the job performance consequently increases. Because of employee who are high job involvement genuinely care for and are concerned about their work. Firms may improve the work attitudes of their employees and thereby their job performance improves. Therefore, enhanced commitment-based HR practices builds a stronger employee organizational socialization and, in turn, creates greater job performance. Thus, we assume that commitment-based HR practices positively influences employee job performance through organizational socialization. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Organizational socialization mediates the relationship between commitment-based HR practices and job involvement.

Method

Sample and Procedures

Data for this study will be drawn from service corporations in Taiwan. All of these companies are listed or have employees numbering over one hundred. I will contact firms employing more than 100 employees to focus on firms that are most likely to have formally established HR management systems (Huselid, 1995).

According to Tekleab and Taylor (2003), immediate managers are considered to be more capable of speaking about contracts with specific employees, and treat as the agent representing the organization. They are suitable for completing the commitment-based HR practices scales. Consequently, in the research design, immediate managers need to complete the commitment-based HR practices and employee job performance while employees need to answer the organizational socialization.

Measures

Commitment-based HR Practices

Collins & Smith's (2006) 16-item scale is adopted to measure the extent to which an organization's commitment-based HR practices is focused on human capital enhancement.

Organizational Socialization

To measure organizational socialization, we will adapt Taormina's (2004) 20-item scale in four dimensions including training, understanding, co-worker support, and future prospects (each dimension containing five items).

Job Performance

To measure job performance, we adopted MacKenzie, Podsakoff & Fetter (1991) 5-item scale referring task performance.

Data Analysis

Because commitment-based HR practices, organizational socialization, and job performance are considered to be in different levels, we will use Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) for our analysis. In addition, we also follow Krull & MacKinnon's (1999) suggestions to examine whether organizational socialization mediate the cross-level relationships between commitment-based HR practices and employee job performance.

Expected Contributions

First of all, this study contributes to the literature by providing more in-depth exploration on the relationship among commitment-based HR practices, organizational socialization, and employee job performance. The finding might help clarify the missing part in the study of the influence of strategic human resource practices on employee job performance.

Secondly, the thesis empirically examines commitment-based HR practices, organizational socialization, and job performance. Most studies only focus on the influence of the organizational socialization on employee job performance rather than discussing the cross-level relationship between commitment-based HR practices and employee job performance or the linking mechanism of organizational socialization between commitment-based HR practices and employee job performance. Thus, the framework of HR practices-organizational socialization-employee work attitudes provides by this study serves as a starting point for further studies in cross-level.

Thirdly, most of the studies on socialization have been conducted mainly within US companies. Despite the rapid growth in Asian countries, relatively little is known about the organizational socialization in Asia. This study might also contribute to the literature by focusing on Taiwan rather than a developed western economy as employed in related work. This point shows a clear need for more cross-cultural study on organizational socialization.