Relationship of Management-Rated High Performance Work System and Competitive Advantage: Mediating Role of Collective Human Capital

Saima Batool
Assistant Professor, Qurtuba University of Science & IT Peshawar
Sajid Rahman
PhD Scholar, Department of Management Sciences NUML
Naveed Akhtar
Acting Dean, Department of Management Sciences NUML

Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the relationship between high-performance work system (HPWS) and competitive advantage (CA) through a mediating role of collective human capital (CHC) in the banking organizations of Pakistan. The sample of the study consists of 76 branch managers of both public and private sectors banks operated in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The finding shows that collective human capital fully mediate the link between high-performance work system and competitive advantage. The study also found that private sector banks managers highly practice HR practices in their respective branches as compared to their public sector banks managers. Also, female managers practice more HR practices as compared to their male counterpart, and managers of higher experience practice more HR practices in their respective organizations. Implications of the results, limitations and future directions have also been discussed.

Keywords: *High-Performance Work System, Collective Human Capital, Competitive Advantage*

Employees are considered the most important asset of today's business. Indeed, competitive advantage will be achieved through proper management of employees in the organizations (Peters, 2014; Allen& Wright, 2006; Boxall, P., 2003; Boxall, P. F., Purcell, J., & Wright, P. 2007). Traditionally people view competitive advantage on such barriers to entry; like access to capital, economies of scale, and regulated competition. Today people believe that competitive advantage will be achieved through the management of human resources, which is difficult to imitate or acquire (Bamberger & Meshoulam, 2002). Management of people is important and critical foundation of competitive advantage because of organizations faces global competition, while others factors like business strategy, technology, structure, and manufacturing processes, can easily be acquired or imitated. Therefore, organizations are trying to understand how to manage their human resources in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM)is defined as the planned Human Resource (HR) activities incorporated in the organization for the purpose to achieve its goals. SHRM deals to implement all those activities which affect individuals' behavior in the organization.

Normally people views HRM and SHRM are the two same phenomena, but both are distinct and interrelated concepts. The main difference between HRM and SHRM is that HRM research mainly focuses on individual level, while SHRM research focus on organizational level or business unit of analysis. Recent evidence indicates that using system of HRM practices is more appropriate and has a strong impact on organizational performance as compared to HRM practices in isolation (Heffernan &Dundon, 2012; Lepak et al. 2006a). For example, recent HR research mainly focused on High-Performance Work System (HPWS), which is a system of HR practices design to enhance employees' productivity, commitment level, ability, and skills in such manner that employees become a source of competitive advantage (Datta, Guthrie, & Wright, 2005, p. 136).

The link between HPWS and organizational performance have been studied by various authors (Gittell, Seidner, & Wimbush, 2010; Chuang & Liao, 2010; Liao et al. 2009; Sun, Aryee, & Law, 2007). So, researchers are still confused to find out the processes that bring about this relationship (Chuang & Liao, 2010; Liao et al. 2009; Sun et al. 2007; Evans & Davis, 2005).

Although processes that bring about the HPWS and performance relationship much is now known about it, but there still a gap regarding the solidity of the knowledge.

First, the link through which HPWS impact organizational performance is still unclear (Lepak, 2007; Gerhart, 1996). Research to dare mainly focus on the link between managers' perceptions regarding the use of HPWS and organizational effectiveness (Heffernan &Dundon, 2012; Liao et al. 2009; Nishii & Wright, 2007), and little work has been done regarding employee perceptions of HR practices. Employee perceptions regarding HR practices are considered the originator of employee attitudes and behaviors (Nishii & Wright, 2007). Only Liao et al. (2009) studied employee perceptions of HR practices up to now, so only studies regarding this relationship will limits our thoughts about the processes through which HPWS impact employee attitudes, behaviors and motivation.

Second, to better understand the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance, there is a need for multi-level approach (O'Regan, 2011; Ostroff& Bowen, 2000), except few studies (Kehoe & Wright, 2010; Gittell, Seidner, & Wimbush, 2010; Liao et al. 2009), to understand this relationship macro approach were used (Chuang & Liao, 2010; Sun et al. 2007; Takeuchi et al. 2007).

In light of the preceding research gaps, and grounded in resource-based view (RBV) this study seek to investigate the relationship between HPWS and competitive advantage through a mediating variable collective human capital.

Literature Review

Resource-Based View (RBV)

RBV states that a firm's can achieved competitive advantage through acquisition and development of its organizational, physical, and human resources in such a way that it will become difficult for competitors to acquired or imitate (Barney, 1991). The RBV proposes that, in order to get competitive advantage firms should considered both physical and intellectual resources internally. The main tenets of RBV (Ghafoor& Qureshi, 2013; Newbert, 2008; Takeuchi et al. 2007; Barney, 1991) are resources having considered valuable, non-substitutable, rare, and inimitable will lead to competitive advantage.

Before the advent of RBV concept, company profitability was measured through external factors like industry position (Allen & Wright, 2007). However, after the introduction of RBV concept, firm performance is now measured through internal factors (Allen & Wright, 2007).

Hypotheses Development

Human capital refers to the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) of employees that are valuable to a firm (Peters, 2014; Subramaniam &Youndt, 2005). Through higher knowledge and skills, human capital adds value by enhancing productivity. Researchers considered HR practices enhance motivation and skills (Huselid, 1995), and that HPWS helps to develop human capital, customers, work process, and knowledge about firm's products that make employees to effectively interact with their customers.

One plausible reason of the relationship of HPWS and human capital as that organization gains competitive advantage through its inimitable, valuable, and rare resources they possesses (Barney, 1991). Through their HRM practices firms can achieve competitive advantage through the development of rare, and unique valuable human capital pool (Barney & Wright, 1998), because these practices affect workforce motivation and influence knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) (Huselid, 1995). The extensive use of HPWS tells about the firm's investment in human capital.

In those organizations where HPWS systems are applied, such organizations pay more attention to comprehensive training and selective staffing because both of them is necessary for high level collective human capital of workforce (Peters, 2014; Takeuchi et al. 2007; Huselid, 1995). HRM practices mainly focus on hiring high quality and also try to enhance skills and abilities of current workforce or both (Delaney &Huselid, 1996). Secondly, in order to attract and select and retain high caliber employees, HPWS encourages extensive benefits and competitive compensation packages to employees (Arthur, 1994; Huselid, 1995). Takeuchi et al. (2007) found a significant relationship between HPWS

and collective human capital. Based on the preceding discussion, we hypothesized that:

H₁1: Management-rated HPWS is significantly related to Collective Human Capital.

According to Barney (1991), the degree to which a firm neutralized threats, exploit opportunities, and reduced costs is called competitive advantage. Firms will get competitive advantage when they have the resources, capabilities, and quality to reduce costs and positively respond to threats and opportunities (Barney, 1991). They also argued that firms cannot achieve competitive advantage if they exploit such resources and capabilities which are widely held. Instead, exploitation of rare resources and capabilities will lead to competitive advantage.

In contrast, because a firm's human capital enhanced firm's productivity through higher knowledge and skills and thus adds value to the firm. Also, human capital has the potential to enable a firm to respond to threats, opportunities, and cost reduction. Accordingly, a firm will get competitive advantage if they effectively use their human capital.

Hatch & Dyer, (2004) stated that organizations can attain and sustain competitive advantage through human capital because it's difficult to imitate. They also concluded that organizations will achieve cost advantage through the effective use of its human capital because it is inimitable. Similarly, Newbert (2008) also found that a firm having combinations of rare human resource capability, the more it will attain a competitive advantage. Based on this discussion, we hypothesized as follow:

H₁2: Collective Human Capital is significantly related to Competitive Advantage.

RBV proposes that sustainable competitive advantage will be achieved through HR systems because it promotes human resource development and capabilities which lead to tacit organizational knowledge (Barney, 1992). HPWS create synergistic effect on competitive advantage (Oladapo, &Onyeaso, 2013; Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Wright & Snell, 1991). That is why such synergistic effect and interrelatedness of the system components can create difficulty for competitors to copy (Peters, 2014; Barney & Wright, 1998). This notion is also supported by various researchers (Delery& Doty, 1996; MacDuffie, 1995; Youndt, Snell, Dean, &Lepak, 1996). Thus we expect a relation between HPWS and competitive advantage.

Although we hypothesized that there exist a relation between HPWS and competitive advantage, but we also expect that this relationship is indirect through collective human capital. Conceptually, RBV proposes that through firm specific HR capabilities (human capital) HR system can contribute to competitive advantage (Barney, 1992; Lado

&Wison, 1994). In simple words, HR system plays an important role in developing human capital that provides competitive advantage (Barney & Wright, 1998). MacDuffie &Cochan, (1991) also found that a higher level of productivity will be achieved by those firms who invest more on employee training. Similarly, Snell & Dean's (1992) also argued that those firms who invest more in their human capital through development, equitable compensation, selective staffing, performance appraisal, and comprehensive training were more successful than those who have not invested in the implementation of new technologies and total quality management. Lepak, (2007) also argued that through human capital HR practices influence competitive advantage. Based on the above literature we hypothesize as follow:

H₁3: Collective human capital will mediate the relationship between Management-rated HPWS and competitive advantage
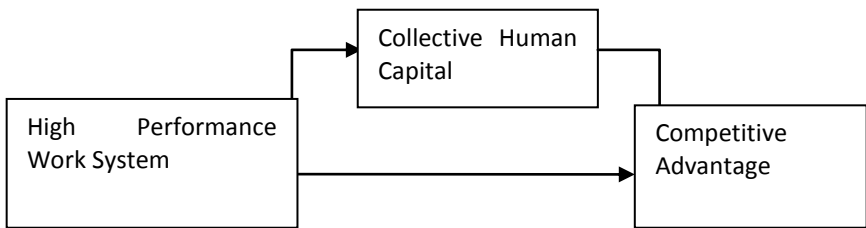

Figure 1. Proposed Model of the Study

Research Methodology

The present study is mainly Quantitative in nature however it does comprise qualitative data too. Nature of data was primary data collected from the sample mentioned in sampling section. Headquarter level HR Directors noted that all branch managers follow central HRM strategy, however it will depend on branch manager's that how much they implement HR practices in their respective branch, so branch managers play an important role on the implementation of HR practices. Therefore, mediating roles are played by branch managers between employees and HR practices.

Sampling

The present study was conducted in the banking sector of Pakistan. Population of the study consists of branch managers of the selected banks. Sample of the study consist of 76 branch managers of selected banks.

Measurement

Data was gathered through survey questionnaire. Reliability of this questionnaire is checked and found satisfactory. A 20-item Likert scale developed by Liao et al., (2009) is used for the study. Respondent were asked to answer from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree".

MHPWS have five dimensions: including six items from service training, two items from interdepartmental service, five items from service discretion, four items from performance appraisal, and three items from pay. The Cronbach's Alpha of is found satisfactory .917. For collective human capital a five items scale developed by Subramaniam &Youndt (2005) are used for the study. Respondent were asked to answer from five point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Reliability statistic shows satisfactory results .992. For competitive advantage a three items scale developed by Newbert (2008) are used for the study. This scale includes three subscales i.e. CA1- cost reduction, CA2- market opportunities, and CA3- competitive threats. Respondents were asked to answer on five point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". The Cronbach's Alpha value is .850.

Data Analysis and Results

Table 1. *Correlation Matrix*

		MHPWS	CHC	CA
MHPWS	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
CHC	Pearson Correlation	.899[**]	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
CA	Pearson Correlation	.582[**]	.608[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

     As we shown form the table the relationship between all these variables is statistically significant. Table 1 shows a strong association between management-rated high performance work system and collective human capital. This association is sufficiently large which lead to a problem called multi-collinearity. As we see from the correlation matrix, all the necessary conditions to check the mediating role have been met.

Table 2. *Coefficients*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-2.951	2.354		-1.253	.214
	MHPWS	.186	.030	.582	6.152	.000
a. Dependent Variable: CA						

Baron & Kenny (1986) proposed a four steps model for the purpose to check the mediating effect, we will follow each steps suggested by Baron & Kenny (1986). Table 2 shows the relationship between independent variable and dependent variable. In this study the dependent variable is competitive advantage and independent variable is management-rated high performance work system. The result shows a positive significant relationship (β = .186, ρ = .000) between management –rated high performance work system and competitive advantage. One plausible explanation for this result is that HR practices like compensations, pay, training, performance appraisal have positively impact individual attitudes and behaviors regarding organization's performance, hence it will also influence competitive advantage. The results are consistent with Liao et al. (2009), Nishii & Wright, (2007), and Barney, (1991).

Table 3. *Coefficient*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.315	.930		3.565	.001
	MHPWS	.210	.012	.899	17.636	.000
a. Dependent Variable: CHC						

In the second step we run independent variable with mediating variable. Here our mediating variable is collective human capital and independent variable is management rated high performance work system. A positive and significant (β = .210, ρ = .000) relationship is found between these two variables as shown from the above table. One plausible reason of the relationship of HPWS and human capital as that organization gains competitive advantage through its inimitable, valuable, and rare resources they possesses (Barney, 1991). Through their HRM practices firms can achieve competitive advantage through the development of rare, and unique valuable human capital pool (Barney & Wright, 1998), because these practices affect workforce motivation and influence knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) (Huselid, 1995). The results are consistent with Takeuchi et al. (2007), Barney & Wright, (1998), and Huselid, (1995).

Table 4. *Coefficients*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-4.840	2.484		-1.948	.055
	CHC	.830	.126	.608	6.587	.000
a. Dependent Variable: CA						

The third step of mediation analysis includes the relationship between mediating variable collective human capital and dependent variable competitive advantage. As shown from the table a positive significant (β = .830, ρ = .000) relationship is found between collective human capital and competitive advantage. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), in order to occur a mediation role, there should be a significant relationship from the entire three steps, here all of the relationship was significant, but this not always true (MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007). One possible reason is that firms will get competitive advantage when they have the resources, capabilities, and quality to reduce costs and positively respond to threats and opportunities. Also, a firm will get competitive advantage if they effectively use their human capital because it's difficult to imitate or copy. The results are in line with Newbert, (2008), Hatch & Dyer, (2004), and Barney, (1991).

Table 5. *Coefficients*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-4.955	2.492		-1.989	.050
	MHPWS	.059	.067	.183	.870	.387
	CHC	.605	.288	.443	2.101	.039
a. Dependent Variable: CA						

The last step of mediation process is to use both mediating and independent variable is used as a predictor variables of dependent variable. Here we use both management-rated high performance work system and collective human capital as an independent variables and competitive advantage as a dependent variable. As we know that if the relationship between mediating variable and dependent variable is significant in the presence of independent variable, and it will become independent variable insignificant in the presence of mediating variable we will say that there will be full mediation. While in case where both mediating variable and independent variable is significant there will be a partial mediation. So, as we can see from the above table collective human capital fully mediate the relationship between management-rated high performance work system and competitive advantage, because it has positive significant (β = .605, ρ = .039) relationship with competitive advantage (CA), and MHPWS have insignificant (β = .059, ρ = .387) relationship with competitive advantage (CA) . Hence, all of the study hypotheses are accepted.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to find the relationship between MHPWS and competitive advantage through a mediating role of collective human

capital. For this purpose a branch level managers of banking sector were selected. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed and received 76 usable ones. The study found a positive and significant relationship between MHPWS and competitive advantage. We also found that collective human capital fully mediate the relationship between MHPWS and competitive advantage. So, all of our study hypotheses are accepted.

The finding of the study shows the relationship between Management –rated high performance work system and competitive advantage to be indirect through collective human capital. Previous studies tested RBV, and showed the relationship of HPWS and organizational performance through collective human capital (see Takeuchi et al. 2007). However, these finding revealed that collective human capital mediate the link between HPWS and competitive advantage or branch level performance. In other words, collective human capital acts as an important link in the relationship of HPWS and competitive advantage or branch-level performance.

We compare the mean score of public and private sector banks responses regarding practices high-performance work system in their respective organizations. The results show that the mean value of public sector managers is 74.41%, and a private sector manager is 78. 56% which tells that private sector managers practices HPWS more in their organizations than that of public sector managers. We also compare the mean score of gender regarding their HR practices. The results show that female managers have more focus (mean value 85%) to implement HR practices as compared to their male counterpart (mean value 74%). We compare the mean value of managers' experience regarding HPWS practices in their organizations and found that managers having more experience (mean value 85% having 25+ years' experience) implement more HR practices in their organizations. It means that managers, having more experience have more knowledge, skills, and abilities regarding employees' behaviors, attitudes, perceptions, training need, performance appraisal, pay, promotions, job design etc.

Implications

The implication of these results for resource-based view is that testing the relationship between high-performance work system and competitive advantage, focus should be given to collective human capital. This is because in order to achieve competitive advantage, a firm should focus on its human capital. The study is important for two reasons. First, this study provides the conceptual difference between performance and competitive advantage. Second, the results also confirm Newbert's (2008) observation regarding the direct relationship between human capital and competitive advantage may be incomplete. Therefore, this study extends the previous research regarding resource-based view

by testing the role of collective human capital in the relationship between HPWS and competitive advantage.

Recommendations

Although this study provide meaningful inside to the literature of RBV, however, there are also some limitations as well. First, this study will not test the link between HPWS and organization performance, it only test the link between HPWS and competitive advantage. So, one may work on the relationship between HPWS and organizational performance. Second, this study test the relationship at management level, it will be more helpful if it was checked at individual level. So, in future one may consider the relationship at both management and individual level to better understand the link between HPWS and competitive advantage. Third, the sample size is relatively small and also from one sector, so there will be an issue of the generalizability of results. In future one may select a large sample size and also select different sectors to better explain the phenomenon.

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Appendix: A
Descriptive Statistic

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MHPWS	76	47.00	93.00	76.4342	15.38166
CHC	76	7.00	23.00	19.3947	3.60029
CA	76	3.00	15.00	11.2500	4.91291

Reliability Statistic of HPWS Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.917	20

Reliability Statistic of CA Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.992	3

Reliability Statistic of CHC Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.850	5

Mean Score of Public and Private Sector Banks

MHPWS

Organization	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
public	74.4103	39	16.80338
private	78.5676	37	13.62910
Total	76.4342	76	15.38166

Mean Score of Male and Female Managers

MHPWS

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
male	74.9231	65	15.66077
female	85.3636	11	10.11210
Total	76.4342	76	15.38166

Mean Score of Managers Experience

MHPWS

Exp	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
0-5	51.0000	1	.
6-10	77.2500	12	17.28439
11-15	76.8000	25	15.16575
16-20	74.0333	30	15.73155
20+	86.2500	8	4.77344
Total	76.4342	76	15.38166