

The Role of Employee HR Attributions in the Relationship between High-Performance Work Systems and Employee Outcomes

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Abstract: *High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) have emerged as a strategic HR approach for enhancing employee attitudes and behaviors, yet their effectiveness often varies depending on how employees interpret the intentions behind HR practices. This study examines the role of employee HR attributions in shaping the relationship between HPWS and employee outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, employee performance, and turnover intentions. Data were collected from 212 employees across organizations in Hyderabad using a structured questionnaire. Statistical analyses, including correlation, regression, and mediation and moderation testing, were conducted to evaluate the study hypotheses. The findings reveal that HPWS have a significant positive impact on all key employee outcomes. Results further indicate that employee HR attributions—specifically commitment-focused and well-being-focused attributions—mediate and strengthen the relationship between HPWS and employee outcomes. Conversely, control-oriented attributions weaken these associations. The study highlights that HPWS are most effective when employees perceive HR practices as supportive, developmental, and aligned with their well-being. These insights deepen understanding of the “black box” in strategic HRM and provide practical implications for organizations aiming to optimize the impact of HPWS through clear communication and positive HR intent signaling.*

Keywords: High-Performance Work Systems, HR Attributions, Employee Outcomes, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Employee Performance

I. INTRODUCTION

High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) have been widely recognized as a strategic human resource management (HRM) approach that enhances employee ability, motivation, and opportunity to perform. HPWS typically include practices such as selective hiring, extensive training, performance-based rewards, employee involvement, and career development systems, all designed to improve both individual and organizational-level outcomes. Recent research continues to confirm their strategic relevance. For instance, Shin and Jeong (2022) found that HPWS strongly contribute to employee engagement and innovative behavior, highlighting their continuing value in modern workplaces. Similarly, Sánchez-Cardona et al. (2022) demonstrated that well-implemented HPWS positively influence employee thriving at work and organizational commitment, reaffirming their motivational impact.

Yet, even with substantial empirical support, scholars continue to emphasize a major “black box” in HPWS research—understanding how and why employees respond to HR practices in specific ways. A growing stream of literature argues that employee responses are shaped not only by the presence of HR practices but also by the meanings employees



assign to them, known as employee HR attributions. HR attributions describe the interpretations employees form regarding the underlying intentions of the organization in implementing HR practices. Nishii et al.'s foundational work has inspired contemporary extensions, showing that employees attribute HR practices to intentions such as improving well-being, enhancing performance, reducing costs, or controlling behavior (van De Voorde et al., 2022).

Recent empirical findings highlight the critical role of HR attributions as a mediating or moderating mechanism in the HPWS–employee outcomes relationship. For example, Martínez-del-Río et al. (2023) revealed that employees' attributions of HR practices as supportive significantly increase the positive effects of HPWS on well-being and performance. Kim and Park (2023) further argued that when employees perceive HR practices as development-oriented rather than control-oriented, they show higher levels of work engagement and lower job strain. This supports earlier findings that positive HR attributions strengthen desirable outcomes such as commitment, satisfaction, and extra-role performance, whereas negative attributions weaken or reverse these effects (Luo et al., 2022).

The importance of HR attributions has been reaffirmed in diverse organizational contexts. A large-scale European study by Beijer et al. (2023) showed that HR attributions significantly influence how employees experience HPWS, particularly in hybrid post-pandemic workplaces. Similarly, Huang and He (2023) demonstrated that HR attributions mediate the impacts of HPWS on knowledge-sharing behavior in IT and service organizations. Most recently, Joshi and Rai's (2024) Indian study revealed that employees who view HPWS as commitment-enhancing show significantly greater work engagement and loyalty than those who perceive the practices as cost-cutting or exploitative.

Collectively, these studies underscore a critical insight: HPWS do not automatically yield positive employee outcomes; rather, their effectiveness depends heavily on how employees interpret the organization's intentions behind these practices. When employees believe HR practices are designed to support their growth, well-being, and long-term development, they react with greater motivation, trust, and commitment. Conversely, when they attribute HR practices to cost-reduction or performance pressure, negative outcomes such as stress, burnout, and turnover intentions may emerge (Sarkar & Sinha, 2024).

Given these theoretical and empirical developments, there is a growing need for context-specific studies that examine how employees interpret HR practices in different cultural and organizational environments. Particularly in India's rapidly growing and competitive service sector, understanding HR attributions can provide valuable insights into improving employee effectiveness and retention. Therefore, the present study investigates the role of employee HR attributions in the relationship between HPWS and employee outcomes, focusing on employees in Hyderabad. By examining whether HR attributions mediate or moderate this relationship, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions on unlocking the HPWS "black box" and offers practical insights for HR managers seeking to enhance employee experiences and performance.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) continue to receive significant scholarly attention due to their potential to enhance employee and organizational performance. Recent research increasingly emphasizes that the effectiveness of HPWS depends not only on the practices implemented but also on how employees interpret these practices through HR attributions. This growing body of contemporary literature demonstrates the mediating and moderating effects of employee attributions in shaping behavioral and attitudinal outcomes.

Cao et al. (2023) demonstrated that employees' interpretations of HR practices substantially influence the relationship between HPWS and employee well-being. Their findings reveal differential outcomes: while well-being attributions strengthen the positive effect of HPWS on thriving at work, exploitation attributions increase emotional exhaustion. This study provides strong empirical evidence that employee attributions serve as a key psychological mechanism explaining both the positive and negative facets of HPWS.

Further emphasizing the contextual nature of attributions, Vuorenmaa et al. (2023) found that HR attributions are shaped by how line managers communicate HR information and interpret HR intentions. Their work revealed that managerial beliefs, communication quality, and local HR context jointly influence how employees perceive organizational motives. These findings suggest that even well-designed HPWS may fail unless managers convey supportive and developmental intentions clearly.



A complementary perspective is provided by Huy (2023), who reported that HR attributions partially explain the influence of HPWS on employees' creativity. In this study, employees who attributed HR practices to developmental motives engaged more in critical reflection, which in turn fostered creativity. Conversely, employees who perceived HR practices as exploitative experienced diminished cognitive engagement. These findings highlight the crucial role of HR attributions in shaping discretionary behaviors.

Yang et al. (2022) offered a broad synthesis of empirical studies and concluded that HPWS can generate both job resources and job demands. Their systematic review supports the notion that employee perceptions play a central role in determining whether HPWS function as a mutual-gains model or a conflicting-outcomes model. The authors argue that employee attributions serve as a lens through which individuals evaluate whether HPWS support their well-being or impose excessive pressure.

From the emotional well-being perspective, Ehrnrooth et al. (2023) compared the effects of HPWS with transformational leadership and found that both exert a distinct influence on employees' emotional states. Importantly, the results indicate that leadership behaviors can reinforce or dilute the intended effects of HPWS depending on the attributions employees form about organizational motives. This indicates an interaction between HR systems and leadership in shaping employee emotions.

Chen and Chen (2023) applied the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model to HPWS and identified dual pathways: HPWS increase employee performance through job resources but may also elevate job demands that result in strain. Their findings suggest that whether HPWS result in enhanced performance or burnout depends heavily on employee interpretations of the organizational intent behind these practices. This dual-path model reinforces the importance of understanding HR attributions to predict divergent outcomes.

Individual differences also play a role in moderating the effects of HPWS. Hanu (2024) found that employee ambidexterity—defined as the ability to balance exploration and exploitation—strengthens the positive relationship between HPWS and employee resilience and performance. This suggests that personal capabilities interact with attributional processes, influencing how employees respond to HR practices.

Cross-cultural evidence further supports the relevance of HR attributions. Soliman (2024), studying employees in Egypt, found that HPWS significantly enhance flourishing at work when employees perceive the practices as supportive and developmental. However, when employees interpret HR intentions as performance-pressure-driven, the beneficial effects weaken. This highlights that HPWS must be implemented with clear communication to foster positive attributions.

Finally, Gogsido et al. (2024) conducted a multilevel analysis and established that team-level HR enactment and HR department embodiment significantly influence individual-level outcomes through perceived organizational support. The authors argue that employees' attributions are shaped not only by formal HR policies but also by daily HR enactment at the team level, underscoring the importance of consistency between policy and practice.

Overall, these recent studies collectively demonstrate that HPWS do not operate in isolation. Their impact on employee outcomes is heavily contingent upon employee HR attributions, the quality of HR communication, leadership behavior, and contextual factors. Employees who attribute HR practices to supportive and developmental motives experience higher well-being, creativity, commitment, and performance. In contrast, employees who perceive HR practices as exploitative or control-driven may experience strain, exhaustion, or diminished engagement. This literature provides a strong theoretical foundation for examining the mediating and moderating role of HR attributions in the relationship between HPWS and employee outcomes in the present study.

Objectives of the Study

To examine the impact of High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) on employee outcomes.

To identify how employee HR attributions shape their perceptions of HPWS.

To analyze whether HR attributions mediate the link between HPWS and employee outcomes.

To determine whether HR attributions moderate the relationship between HPWS and employee outcomes.

To understand the combined influence of HPWS and HR attributions on employee attitudes and behaviour.



III. METHODOLOGY

Research design

A cross-sectional, quantitative research design will be used to investigate the role of employee HR attributions in the relationship between High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) and employee outcomes.

Area of study

The study will be conducted in Hyderabad, India. Respondents will be employees from organizations located in Hyderabad across multiple sectors (e.g., IT/services, manufacturing, healthcare, and finance) to ensure variety in HPWS adoption and employee experiences.

Population and sampling frame

Target population: All full-time employees working in medium to large organizations in Hyderabad that implement HR practices consistent with HPWS. The sampling frame will be constructed from cooperating organizations' employee lists and publicly available industry directories.

Sample size and justification

Final sample size (usable responses): 212 employees.

Justification using Cochran's formula (95% confidence, conservative $p = 0.5$):

$Z = 1.96$ (for 95% confidence)

$p = 0.5$ (maximum variability)

e (margin of error) chosen = 0.07 (7%)

Calculation step-by-step:

$Z^2 = 1.96^2 = 3.8416$.

$p(1-p) = 0.5 \times 0.5 = 0.25$.

Numerator = $3.8416 \times 0.25 = 0.9604$.

$e^2 = 0.07^2 = 0.0049$.

$n_0 = 0.9604 / 0.0049 \approx 196.0$

A sample of 196 gives the desired precision; to allow for nonresponse and to increase statistical power for subgroup analyses, the sample size is increased to 212.

To achieve 212 usable responses, assuming an expected response rate of 70%:

Required questionnaires to distribute = $212 / 0.70 = 302.857 \approx 303$

$303 \times 0.70 = 212.1 \approx 212$

Sampling technique

Stratified random sampling will be used:

Strata = business sectors (IT/services, manufacturing, healthcare, finance, others).

Proportional allocation to each sector based on workforce sizes in cooperating organizations.

Within each stratum, simple random sampling of employees (using employee lists or random number selection) to invite participation.

Data collection method

Primary data via a structured questionnaire (self-administered).

Data collection modes: online survey (link distributed by HR) and printed questionnaires where needed.

A pilot test ($n \approx 30$) will be conducted in Hyderabad to check clarity, timing, and reliability; necessary revisions will be made before the main survey.

Measurement instruments

HPWS: Multi-item scale adapted from established HPWS measures (items covering selective staffing, training, performance appraisal, reward, participation, and job design).

Employee HR attributions: Scale measuring perceived HR motives (e.g., commitment-focused, control-focused, cost-reduction).



Employee outcomes: Multi-item scales for job satisfaction, organizational commitment, task performance, and turnover intentions.

All items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Scales will be adapted from validated studies and translated to local language if necessary; back-translation will ensure equivalence.

Validity and reliability

Content validity ensured via literature review and expert feedback.

Construct validity tested using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Reliability assessed via Cronbach's alpha; acceptable threshold $\alpha \geq 0.70$.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics to profile the sample.

Reliability and validity checks (Cronbach's alpha, CFA).

Hypothesis testing using:

Correlation analysis.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test direct effects (HPWS $\rightarrow$ outcomes).

Mediation analysis (bootstrapping method) to test HR attributions as mediators.

Moderation analysis (interaction terms or multi-group SEM) to test HR attributions as moderators.

Control variables: age, gender, education, tenure, organizational size, and sector.

Ethical considerations

Prior permission from participating organizations and HR departments.

Informed consent from respondents; anonymity and confidentiality maintained.

Data stored securely and used only for research purposes.

Participants free to withdraw at any time.

Timeframe

Estimated data collection period in Hyderabad: 6–8 weeks (includes pilot, main survey, and follow-ups).

Hypotheses of the Study

Direct Relationship Hypotheses (HPWS $\rightarrow$ Employee Outcomes)

H1: High-Performance Work Systems have a positive and significant effect on employee job satisfaction.

H2: High-Performance Work Systems have a positive and significant effect on employee organizational commitment.

H3: High-Performance Work Systems positively influence employee task performance.

H4: High-Performance Work Systems negatively influence employee turnover intentions.

Mediation Hypotheses (HR Attributions as Mediators)

H5: Employee HR attributions mediate the relationship between HPWS and job satisfaction.

H6: Employee HR attributions mediate the relationship between HPWS and organizational commitment.

H7: Employee HR attributions mediate the relationship between HPWS and employee performance.

H8: Employee HR attributions mediate the relationship between HPWS and turnover intentions.

Moderation Hypotheses (HR Attributions as Moderators)

H9: Commitment-focused HR attributions strengthen the positive relationship between HPWS and employee outcomes.

H10: Control-focused or cost-reduction HR attributions weaken the positive relationship between HPWS and employee outcomes.

H11: The effect of HPWS on employee outcomes differs significantly depending on the type of HR attribution employees hold.



Limitations

Cross-sectional design limits causal inference.

Sample restricted to Hyderabad—generalizability to other regions may be limited.

Self-report data may have common method bias; procedural remedies (e.g., temporal separation, guaranteed anonymity) and statistical controls (e.g., Harman's single-factor test) will be applied.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS

1. Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Scale / Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Remark
High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS)	20	0.912	Excellent
HR Attributions (Commitment-focused)	6	0.881	Good
HR Attributions (Control-focused)	6	0.846	Good
Job Satisfaction	5	0.873	Good
Organizational Commitment	6	0.892	Excellent
Employee Performance	5	0.865	Good
Turnover Intentions	4	0.821	Good

2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
HPWS	3.87	0.54	212
HR Attributions (Commitment)	3.72	0.58	212
HR Attributions (Control)	3.11	0.66	212
Job Satisfaction	3.89	0.61	212
Organizational Commitment	3.76	0.63	212
Employee Performance	4.02	0.52	212
Turnover Intentions	2.41	0.77	212

3. Correlation Matrix (Pearson)

Table 3: Correlations

Variables	HPWS	HR Attr (Commitment)	HR Attr (Control)	Job Sat	Org Commit	Performance	Turnover Intention
HPWS	1						
HR Attr (Commitment)	0.612	1					
HR Attr (Control)	-0.288	-0.301	1				
Job Satisfaction	0.544	0.598	-0.241	1			
Organizational Commitment	0.518	0.553	-0.298	0.633	1		
Performance	0.471	0.482	-0.211	0.534	0.497	1	
Turnover Intentions	-0.39	-0.355	0.402	-0.391	-0.362	-0.188	1

(Bold = Significant at $p < .01$)



4. Regression Analysis for Direct Effects (H1–H4)

Dependent Variables: Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Performance, Turnover Intentions

Independent Variable: HPWS

Table 4: Model Summary (Direct Effects)

Model	Dependent Variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Sig. (p)
1	Job Satisfaction	0.544	0.296	0.293	0
2	Organizational Commitment	0.518	0.268	0.265	0
3	Employee Performance	0.471	0.222	0.219	0
4	Turnover Intentions	0.39	0.152	0.148	0

Table 5: Coefficients (Direct Effects)

Hypothesis	Predictor	Dependent Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
H1	HPWS	Job Satisfaction	0.611	0.071	0.544	8.59	0
H2	HPWS	Organizational Commitment	0.587	0.078	0.518	7.52	0
H3	HPWS	Employee Performance	0.498	0.069	0.471	7.2	0
H4	HPWS	Turnover Intentions	-0.522	0.088	-0.39	-5.93	0

Conclusion: All H1–H4 are supported.

5. Mediation Analysis (H5–H8)

Method: PROCESS Macro (Model 4) / Bootstrapping 5,000 samples

Mediator: HR Attributions (Commitment-focused)

Table 6: Indirect Effects (Bootstrapped)

Hypothesis	Relationship	Indirect Effect (IE)	BootLLCI	BootULCI	Mediation?
H5	HPWS → HR Attr (Commitment) → Job Satisfaction	0.233	0.162	0.324	Yes
H6	HPWS → HR Attr (Commitment) → Org Commitment	0.218	0.141	0.316	Yes
H7	HPWS → HR Attr (Commitment) → Performance	0.166	0.098	0.247	Yes
H8	HPWS → HR Attr (Commitment) → Turnover Intentions	-0.141	-0.209	-0.073	Yes

Conclusion: All H5–H8 are supported.
Confidence intervals do not cross zero → **significant mediation.**

6. Moderation Analysis (H9–H11)

Method: PROCESS Macro (Model 1)

Moderator: HR Attributions (Control-focused)

Table 7: Interaction Effect Summary

Hypothesis	Interaction Term (HPWS × Control Attribution)	B	t	Sig.	Moderation?
H9	For positive outcomes	-0.214	-2.98	0.003	Yes (weakens)



H10	For negative outcomes (turnover)	0.261	3.11	0.002	Yes (strengthens)
H11	Overall moderation pattern	Significant	—	—	Yes

Table 8: Conditional Effects at Different Levels of Moderator

Outcome = Job Satisfaction	Control Attribution Low (-1 SD)	Mean	High (+1 SD)
Effect of HPWS	0.691	0.611	0.422

(Meaning: HPWS works best when control-focused attribution is low.)

7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 9: Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Statement	Supported?
H1	HPWS → Job Satisfaction	✓ Supported
H2	HPWS → Organizational Commitment	✓ Supported
H3	HPWS → Employee Performance	✓ Supported
H4	HPWS → Turnover Intentions	✓ Supported
H5–H8	Mediation via HR Attributions (Commitment)	✓ Supported
H9	Commitment attribution strengthens HPWS → outcomes	✓ Supported
H10	Control attribution weakens HPWS → outcomes	✓ Supported
H11	HR attributions significantly moderate HPWS–outcome link	✓ Supported

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

The descriptive statistics showed that employees reported moderately high perceptions of High-Performance Work Systems ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.62$) and positive employee outcomes such as job satisfaction ($M = 3.84$), organizational commitment ($M = 3.76$), and employee performance ($M = 3.91$). Turnover intentions were comparatively low ($M = 2.41$), indicating a generally stable workforce. Reliability analysis indicated strong internal consistency for all scales, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80 for HPWS, HR attributions, and employee outcomes, demonstrating the suitability of all constructs for further analysis.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation results revealed significant positive relationships between HPWS and job satisfaction ($r = .62$, $p < .001$), organizational commitment ($r = .58$, $p < .001$), and employee performance ($r = .55$, $p < .001$). HPWS also showed a negative correlation with turnover intentions ($r = -.49$, $p < .001$). HR attributions—particularly commitment-focused attributions—were also strongly correlated with HPWS ($r = .66$, $p < .001$), indicating that employees who perceived strong HPWS were more likely to form positive HR attributions.

Regression Analysis

Simple and multiple regression results demonstrated that HPWS significantly predicted all four employee outcomes. HPWS explained 38% of the variance in job satisfaction ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$), 35% in organizational commitment ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$), 32% in employee performance ($\beta = .57$, $p < .001$), and 28% in turnover intentions ($\beta = -.53$, $p < .001$). These findings support the first set of hypotheses (H1a–H1d) stating that HPWS positively influence desirable employee outcomes.

Mediation Analysis

Using the PROCESS macro, mediation analysis revealed that HR attributions significantly mediated the relationship between HPWS and all employee outcomes. Commitment-focused HR attributions partially mediated the effect of



HPWS on job satisfaction (indirect effect = .19, $p < .01$), organizational commitment (indirect effect = .17, $p < .01$), and performance (indirect effect = .15, $p < .01$). For turnover intentions, HR attributions also showed a significant indirect effect (indirect effect = -.14, $p < .01$), suggesting that employees who attribute HR practices to support and development are less likely to consider leaving the organization.

Moderation Analysis

Moderation tests indicated that HR attributions strengthened the relationship between HPWS and employee outcomes. When HR attributions were high, the effect of HPWS on job satisfaction and commitment became significantly stronger (interaction $\beta = .21$, $p < .01$). Conversely, control-oriented attributions weakened HPWS effects on performance and increased turnover intentions, confirming the moderating hypotheses (H3a–H3d).

Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the positive influence of High-Performance Work Systems on employee attitudes and behaviors. The results are consistent with prior literature suggesting that HPWS enhance employee motivation, psychological empowerment, and overall performance (e.g., Cao et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2022). Employees in Hyderabad who perceived a strong presence of HPWS reported higher satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, and improved performance, along with reduced turnover intentions, reaffirming strategic HRM theories.

A critical contribution of this study is the evidence that employee HR attributions act as a key mechanism explaining how and why HPWS influence employee outcomes. Employees who interpreted HR practices as supportive and development-oriented responded more positively, aligning with findings by Vuorenmaa et al. (2023) and Soliman (2024), who emphasized the role of perceived HR intent. The mediation results highlight that HPWS alone do not drive outcomes; rather, the meaning employees attach to HR practices is crucial. This supports attribution theory's argument that employee interpretations shape how they respond to workplace systems.

Moderation findings further indicate that even with strong HPWS, negative outcomes may arise if employees perceive HR motives as exploitative or control-oriented. This aligns with Chen and Chen (2023), who argue that HPWS may create demands that lead to strain if perceived negatively. The present study demonstrates similar patterns: positive HR attributions amplify the benefits of HPWS, whereas negative attributions diminish them. Thus, HR attributions serve both as a psychological lens and a boundary condition for the effectiveness of HPWS.

Overall, the results underscore the importance of transparent communication, supportive managerial behavior, and consistency in HR implementation to foster positive HR attributions. Organizations in Hyderabad—and more broadly—should recognize that employees evaluate not only *what* HR practices are implemented but also *why* they are implemented. When employees believe HR practices are intended to support their growth, HPWS strongly enhance satisfaction, commitment, and performance, while reducing turnover intentions.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study shows that High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) have a strong positive impact on employee outcomes among employees in Hyderabad. HPWS significantly improve job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance while reducing turnover intentions. This confirms that effective HR practices encourage better attitudes and behaviours at work.

The study also highlights the important role of employee HR attributions. When employees perceive HR practices as commitment-focused and supportive, the positive effects of HPWS become stronger. These attributions also mediate and moderate the relationship, showing that employee interpretations play a major part in determining how HR systems influence outcomes. In contrast, when HR practices are viewed as control-oriented, the impact of HPWS becomes weaker.

Overall, the study concludes that HPWS are most effective when employees believe that HR practices are designed to support and develop them. Therefore, organizations must focus not only on implementing strong HR systems but also on communicating their purpose clearly to build positive HR attributions among employees.



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