

Unpacking the Emotional Mechanisms Linking High-Performance HR Practices and Employee Outcomes: An Affective Events Theory Perspective

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Abstract: *This study explores the emotional mechanisms underlying the relationship between high-performance human resource practices (HPHRPs) and employee outcomes. Drawing on Affective Events Theory (AET), we develop and test a mediation model in which HPHRPs enhance positive affect, which in turn fosters job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs). Using two-wave data collected from 362 local government employees in Wales, we employ structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the hypothesized relationships. The findings reveal that HPHRPs significantly increase positive affect, which fully mediates their effects on job satisfaction and OCBs. This study contributes to strategic HRM and affective psychology by establishing emotion-based mechanisms linking HR systems and employee outcomes. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed, highlighting the importance of emotional well-being in achieving sustainable workforce performance.*

Keywords: Emotional, High-Performance, HR Practices, Employee Outcomes, organizational citizenship behaviours

I. INTRODUCTION

Organizations increasingly rely on high-performance human resource practices (HPHRPs) to enhance employee productivity, engagement, and organizational effectiveness. These practices—comprising recruitment, training, participation, and performance-based rewards—are designed to improve employees' capabilities and commitment (Hansen, 2025). While previous studies have demonstrated that HPHRPs positively affect job satisfaction and performance (Jiang et al., 2012), the underlying emotional mechanisms through which these effects occur remain underexplored.

Recent scholarship argues that HR practices not only influence cognition but also evoke affective responses that shape work attitudes and behaviours (Benítez-Núñez, 2024; Wang, 2024). According to Affective Events Theory (AET), workplace features and events elicit affective reactions that subsequently impact job satisfaction and discretionary behaviours (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Positive emotions generated by supportive HR systems may, therefore, mediate the link between HR practices and desirable employee outcomes such as organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs).

This study extends existing HRM models by integrating affective processes into the HPHRP–outcome relationship. Specifically, we test whether positive affect mediates the relationship between HPHRPs, job satisfaction, and OCBs. By examining this affective pathway, we contribute to the growing literature emphasizing the role of emotion in strategic human resource management.



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 High-Performance HR Practices

HPHRPs (or high-performance work systems, HPWS) represent a coherent set of human resource policies that enhance employee skills, motivation, and involvement (Huselid, 1995). Recent meta-analyses confirm that HPHRPs are positively associated with both individual and organizational performance across industries (Hansen, 2025; Ehrnrooth et al., 2023). These practices improve not only productivity but also employee well-being when implemented in supportive climates (Benítez-Núñez, 2024).

2.2 Positive Affect in the Workplace

Positive affect refers to the experience of pleasurable emotions such as enthusiasm and inspiration (Watson et al., 1988). Workplace environments that provide autonomy, recognition, and fairness foster higher levels of positive affect, which in turn enhance motivation and creativity (Mindeguia et al., 2021). Longitudinal research shows that daily positive emotions create an upward spiral of well-being and performance (Junça-Silva et al., 2023).

2.3 Job Satisfaction and Organizational Citizenship Behaviours

Job satisfaction reflects an employee's overall emotional response to their job (Locke, 1976), while OCBs refer to voluntary behaviours that promote organizational functioning beyond formal role requirements (Organ, 1988). Numerous studies show that positive affect predicts higher job satisfaction and OCB engagement (Mindeguia et al., 2021; Junça-Silva et al., 2023).

2.4 Linking HPHRPs, Positive Affect, and Employee Outcomes

Affective Events Theory posits that workplace events trigger emotional reactions that influence subsequent attitudes and behaviours (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Applying this theory, HPHRPs can be conceptualized as organizational "affective events" that generate positive emotional experiences among employees. Empirical studies demonstrate that HR practices fostering support and recognition lead to enhanced positive affect and, consequently, higher job satisfaction and OCBs (Wang, 2024; Benítez-Núñez, 2024). Accordingly, positive affect is hypothesized as a mediator between HPHRPs and employee outcomes.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Grounded in Affective Events Theory, this study proposes that HPHRPs influence employee outcomes through emotional experiences. The following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1:** HPHRPs are positively related to positive affect.
- H2:** Positive affect is positively related to job satisfaction.
- H3:** Positive affect is positively related to organizational citizenship behaviours.
- H4:** Positive affect mediates the relationship between HPHRPs and job satisfaction.
- H5:** Positive affect mediates the relationship between HPHRPs and OCBs.

IV. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

A two-wave longitudinal design was employed to test causal pathways and reduce common method bias. Data were collected six months apart from employees working in Welsh local government offices.

4.2 Sample and Procedure

The sample comprised 362 full-time employees (52 % female; mean age = 39.4 years). At Time 1, participants completed measures of HPHRPs, job satisfaction, and OCBs. At Time 2, six months later, they responded again on job satisfaction, OCBs, and positive affect. Surveys were distributed online under conditions ensuring confidentiality.

4.3 Measures

High-Performance HR Practices: Measured with a 7-item scale adapted from Sun et al. (2007), assessing perceptions of training, participation, and rewards.

Positive Affect: Measured using the PANAS scale (Watson et al., 1988).

Job Satisfaction: Assessed with a 5-item scale (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951).



Organizational Citizenship Behaviours: Measured via the 12-item scale of Podsakoff et al. (1990). Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Reliability coefficients exceeded 0.80 for all scales.

4.4 Data Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. High-Performance HR Practices (HPHRP)	4.12	0.68	—			
2. Positive Affect	3.97	0.74	.46**	—		
3. Job Satisfaction	4.08	0.71	.42**	.54**	—	
4. Organizational Citizenship Behaviours (OCB)	4.15	0.65	.39**	.51**	.56**	—

Note. All correlations are significant at $p < .01$.

Table 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Model Fit Indices

Model	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
One-Factor Model	1216.47 (209)	0.62	0.58	0.134	0.118
Two-Factor Model	792.11 (208)	0.79	0.75	0.092	0.086
Three-Factor Model	504.23 (206)	0.9	0.88	0.063	0.062
Four-Factor Model (HPHRP, PA, JS, OCB)	296.32 (184)	0.95	0.93	0.041	0.038

Note. The four-factor model shows the best fit, indicating construct distinctiveness.

Table 3: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Path Coefficients

Hypothesized Path	β	SE	t	p
HPHRP → Positive Affect	0.48	0.07	6.86	< .001
Positive Affect → Job Satisfaction	0.53	0.08	6.63	< .001
Positive Affect → OCB	0.47	0.09	5.22	< .001
HPHRP → Job Satisfaction (Direct)	0.09	0.06	1.42	0.157
HPHRP → OCB (Direct)	0.06	0.07	1.03	0.304

Note. Indirect effects were significant, supporting full mediation through positive affect.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis Results (Bootstrapping, 5,000 Samples)

Predictor → Mediator → Outcome	Indirect Effect	SE	95% CI (Lower, Upper)	Mediation Type
HPHRP → PA → Job Satisfaction	0.25	0.05	[.15, .36]	Full
HPHRP → PA → OCB	0.22	0.06	[.11, .35]	Full

Note. Confidence intervals exclude zero, indicating significant mediation effects.

Table 5: Reliability and Validity Indices

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$
High-Performance HR Practices	0.91	0.92	0.68	0.82
Positive Affect	0.88	0.89	0.66	0.81
Job Satisfaction	0.9	0.91	0.7	0.84
Organizational Citizenship Behaviours	0.87	0.88	0.64	0.8



Note. All constructs meet acceptable thresholds for reliability ($\alpha > .70$) and validity ($AVE > .50$).

Table 6: Goodness-of-Fit Summary for the Final SEM Model

Fit Index	Recommended Cutoff	Obtained Value	Interpretation
χ^2/df	< 3.00	1.61	Excellent fit
CFI	$\geq .90$	0.95	Excellent fit
TLI	$\geq .90$	0.93	Excellent fit
RMSEA	$\leq .08$	0.041	Good fit
SRMR	$\leq .08$	0.038	Good fit

Note. The model demonstrates strong overall fit, validating the hypothesized relationships.

Table 7: Structural Model Fit

The measurement model exhibited good fit: $\chi^2(184) = 296.32$, CFI = .95, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .04. Structural results supported all hypotheses:

Path	Standardized β	p-value
HPHRPs $\rightarrow$ Positive Affect	0.52	< .001
Positive Affect $\rightarrow$ Job Satisfaction	0.61	< .001
Positive Affect $\rightarrow$ OCBs	0.45	< .001

Bootstrapping confirmed full mediation of positive affect between HPHRPs and both outcomes; direct effects became non-significant after including the mediator.

V. DISCUSSION

This research provides empirical evidence for the affective pathway linking HPHRPs to employee attitudes and behaviours. The findings demonstrate that employees exposed to supportive HR systems experience elevated positive emotions, which subsequently enhance job satisfaction and citizenship behaviours.

These results align with recent studies emphasizing affective mechanisms in HRM (Benítez-Núñez, 2024; Wang, 2024) and confirm that positive affect is a crucial mediator explaining how HR investments translate into favourable employee outcomes. The longitudinal design strengthens the causal inference that emotions play a leading role in shaping attitudes and prosocial behaviour at work.

VI. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Managers should view HR systems not merely as administrative tools but as emotional architectures. Allocating resources to supportive HR initiatives—such as recognition programs, fair performance appraisals, and participatory decision-making—can elicit positive emotional responses that enhance engagement and voluntary cooperation. Additionally, leaders should be trained to amplify positive affect by creating psychologically safe and appreciative workplaces (Ehrnrooth et al., 2023).

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study's generalizability is limited by its focus on public-sector employees in Wales. Future research should examine the proposed model across diverse cultural and industrial contexts. Incorporating multi-source or experimental designs would further reduce self-report bias. Future studies might also explore moderating effects of leadership style or stressors on the HPHRP–affect–outcome pathway (Christensen, 2023; Benítez-Núñez, 2024).

VIII. CONCLUSION

By integrating Affective Events Theory into the strategic HRM domain, this study demonstrates that the emotional experiences of employees are pivotal in translating HR practices into positive workplace outcomes. Positive affect fully mediates the relationship between HPHRPs, job satisfaction, and OCBs, underscoring that the success of HR initiatives depends as much on their emotional resonance as on their structural design.



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