

# High performance work systems



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What is a high performance work system? The components of such a system have been best described as “ a group of separate, but interconnected human resource practices that together recruit, select, develop, motivate and retain employees” (Zacharatos et al. 2005, p. 79). These systems of management practices see to raise the level of authorisation of employees and develop their skills to allow them to be motivated in taking control of this new increased authorisation and empowerment.

So do these performance systems work? They have been put under speculation and heavy criticism from many theorists for not being able to produce such preferred successful results. There is obviously a change when these systems are in effect but this essay serves to analyse whether these changes are positively challenging workers and emerging a powerful, well working task-force or rather employees pushed beyond their boundaries and skill level producing only a mediocre output.

We must also distinguish between organisational performance and HPWS' as to see if these systems are actually successful or do not see to aid the workforce then of course the organisational performance of the firm is obviously benefited or disadvantaged. The organisational performance is basically what the end product that a groups or members of workforce produce through tasks addressed to them and the HPWS is what motivates them to complete these tasks effectively and efficiently. Do these systems work?

Or are they too stressful against employees? Over the years of HR practise, theorists of strategic human resource management often tend to direct their

attention towards many different HR practises built from years of strategies that see to improve motivation, involvement and commitment within the organisation. HPWS' are practices that sees to develop and increase levels of performance. Research suggests that the use of the HPWS within companies demonstrate an economical impact on how employees perform and their productivity (Guthrie et al., 2002).

However from other existing research on HPWS it seeks to address the issue that this system has two main disadvantages, which are relation between performance and HPWS and the lack of any agreement to the essentials of these practises. It is often difficult to understand whether HPWS' are in fact beneficial to the organisation when there is often a wide debate that it does not see to aid organisational performance.

The research behind these systems seems to be irrelevant to identifying how they work and if they are successful. A way in which present-day research on HPWS is weak can be highlighted on what represents a high-performance work system. Becker and Gerhart(1996) discovered 27 alternative ' variables' used as agents of HPWS throughout five studies and only four of these were identified to be ' common' within about three of these pieces (Bradford et al. 2006 p. 741).

Ichniowski (1990) discovered that a combination of these certain practises including an improved job design did see to provide a higher worker performance. The interest in HPWS by researchers came from factory production. Many were fascinated by the way the Japanese management style that included teamwork, job rotation and employee involvement

produced great productivity and an overall effective and efficient work quality (Womack et al. , 1990). These studies then grew on to other types of business such as service and health care industries.

However it would often again become an issue, no matter how many researchers or theorists may have provided substantial claims of how HPWS increases worker performance, this employee involvement such as comprehensive training or decentralised decision-making does not add to the intensity of work or effort employees in their tasks. Workers are challenged by different tasks or different methods of obtaining successful performance by employers but not all employees are the same.

This is in itself a downfall of these systems, basically the way in which a worker reacts to these strategies, plans and alternatives to intensify work and make employees perform to their maximum potential. Through these certain studies we can identify that there are other companies that demand an enhanced worker performance that definitely would witness the demise of worker performance, however, almost every business does contain a certain practise of HR that increases worker performance and employ skills of these workers to the organisations advantage.

Delery and Doty (1996) that the main HPWS are ‘ job security and job infrastructure’ (Chi, Chiang, Hsu, et al. 2006 p. 4). These are two categories that are seen by many scholars that can explain some way a HPWS works and if they do intensify work and exploit workers. Job infrastructure explains the skills, motivation and abilities either required, possessed or given by employers that allow employees to perform efficiently and effectively.

Very similar HR practices include worker selection and different skill building training programs, employee involvement methods and promotion opportunities that all are founded or developed from the HR roots. These must all be combined to form an ideal system that does provide better work performance. These training and skill building programs work to strengthen an employees knowledge, abilities and skills in order to increase their performance.

Today it is all about how these employees retain this information and the haste of how quickly this information of training is absorbed so that it then develops and becomes stronger throughout the future to meet more difficult challenges (Chi, Chiang, Hsu, et al. 2006 p. 4). This can be seen as an investment to organisations, as time can be more valuable than money in training workers through presence of these HPWS. This investment does seem to have a return of increased skill and worker performance and productivity (Rumberger, 1987).

Thus these systems have generally known to increase worker skills in advantage of their competitors succeeding them in the world's organisational surroundings. Cooke (1994) also claimed that these systems and the job infrastructure explained before raise the level of efficiency and knowledge within a workplace. Businesses throughout the world are finding it much simpler to discover the many new areas of change within the workplace. It is no more a time where one would expect to change or alter a component of a workplace and as a result would want a whole organisation to experience a result from this change.

Although some scholars may believe that HPWS see to eliminate motivation and decrease efficiency and effectiveness through either arduous tasking or over flow of information, they are still implemented across the world.

Researchers have also discovered that by having a good flow of information through redesigning the workplace and employee empowerment through training of decision-making, the overall quality of results and productivity rises dramatically (Aghazadeh , Seyedian 2004). The cost of these systems can be a disadvantage to companies, however governments are aiding organisations so that they are able to benefit from these systems.

Moreover defining information sharing and employee involvement categories within HPWS highlight structures in which these high-performance systems do seem to intensify work and exploit workers. It is often workers are not the best processors or analysers of information and managers often do not understand the relationship between their troubles and their tasks (Kahneman et al. 1982). Often managers may make mistakes or wrong decisions and in these situations so it necessary to have aid from a fellow employee to help aid the problem and carefully understand their decision.

That is why participation and employee involvement are shown to be very effective in advertising an increase in organisational performance. Hence the decentralisation and worker involvement within organisation sees to build skills, enhance worker performance and emerge the workers potential to the employers advantage. That is why within an organisation such variables or themes such as job infrastructure and flow of information with employee are involvement and decision-making must be necessity within most job settings.

These systems do work successfully to eradicate problems of poor work performance and unmotivated workers (Chi, Chiang, Hsu, et al. 2006 p. 6). As stated before the information of flow and worker involvement can only be a major part of the HPWS if it works together with a strong job infrastructure and in this case within firms there must be a link or connection either through training or skill building for these two categories. One of the third categories described before under the HPWS is performance management and how well executed it is.

It is all about motivation and those who are not motivated are said to have poor work effort, even those who are very skilled and possess abilities to perform well, still find it difficult to motivate themselves to produce efficient and effective workloads. Therefore under HPWS proper performance management must also be in correlation with worker involvement and strong job infrastructure. Even “ proper promotion and compensation systems can motivate skilled employees to engage in effective discretionary decision-making in response to a variety of environmental contingencies” ( Chi, Chiang, Hsu, et al. 2006 p. 5).

All these HR practises demonstrated previously, combined together within an organisation can definitely produce the intensity of work performance and allow workers to use their maximum potential. Also when these are combined, it also becomes simple to understand any problems as these systems provide almost an overview or neat structure that allows for quick analysis thus making it much easier to respond and address any problem within the organisation.

Mac Duffie (1995) suggests that when all these variables HPWS are put together they are able to produce a maximum output of information to workers involving employees, increasing their motivation in achieving the organisational goals. Job infrastructure is a necessity within a firm to help aid workers to understand what customer are asking while also having knowledge on how competitors take action in the market. This information is then passed throughout the organisation and thus the infrastructure creates a base for these workers or employees who find it difficult to intensify their work effort.

Thus these systems aid the employee training them on how to adapt to different scenarios, how to take information from managers, aid managers in decision-making and worker involvement thus making workers feel much more confident increasing motivation and overall performance. Many different several organisations reported that the implementation of HPWS within their firm were highly successful. They are now know around the world for the increase in financial and operational performance through their HR practises that see to intensify workloads and achieve overall high quality performance.

These organisations have also reported that stress levels decrease immensely as workers are comfortable with workloads and through job infrastructure they understand what information is being addressed thus allowing them to be confident with their job. These high-performance systems cannot exploit workers as mentioned before even those employees with high skills and abilities can be exploited if pushed but however if they



are put within an organisation that does see to have a foundation developed through HPWS.

Nadler (1989) states that HPWS construct a change in the firms general behaviour and the management practices such as rewards impact the financial and operational performance of these firms positively. HPWS do intensify work, however, they do not see to exploit workers. They see to benefit employees rather than hinder their work efforts. If these systems do exploit workers and only demonstrate that employees are exploited then stress would be involved and as mentioned before if stress is involved then no maximum effort can be made.

Exploit, often emerges negative connotations of using a persons skills no matter what the result is for them, so it is rather a selfish act. However through many theorists claims, HPWS see to give knowledge to employees, make them feel confident and more responsible when involved into decision-making opportunities. HR practices are definitely strongly in correlation with future performance, but can also be related to the past achievement. The only problem in really understanding whether these systems increase work performance is to definitely seek to highlight more information on HR practices.

There is not enough analysis that delves deep into the HR world to define whether HR practices of HPWS are successful within an organisation. From many theorists and scholars, it seems a balance of a combination of practices including the existence of job security, infrastructure, employee involvement and decentralised decision-making are all what is need to

intensify work and achieving the best work quality from workers without exploiting them. If the word exploit produces any positive connotations such as receiving the best possible output then these systems do seem to evoke it.