

## **MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE BETWEEN HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORK PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE SERVICE PERFORMANCE**

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### **Abstract**

*High-performance work systems have been viewed as a black box over the last decade and there is a need for better understanding of the mechanism through which employee performance can be enhanced significantly. High-performance work systems and employee resilience remain critical issues for both academia and HRM practitioners. Research on resilience has accumulated a vast body of knowledge which has assisted in comprehending complex HRM issues in diverse organizational settings yet, the existing studies have not paid sufficient attention to the multifaceted aspects of resilience and in specific employee resilience. The recent pandemic of Covid19 has increased the need for justification in investing in high-performance work systems and also the need to look at possible ways of increasing employee resilience. This study provides empirical evidence on the relationship between high-performance work systems and employee service performance and the mediation of employee resilience on the relationship of high-performance work systems and employee service performance among banking sector employees of Sri Lanka. Data was obtained mainly by using an online survey from 384 frontline employees working in seven locally owned Listed Commercial Banks in Sri Lanka. The findings indicate that high-performance work systems help in enhancement of service of frontline bank employees, and the employee resilience mediates this effect. The outcomes of this study will help top management to implement high-performance work systems to increase their resilience and service performance.*

**Keywords:** Employee resilience, employee service performance, high performance work practices.

### **Introduction**

The Sri Lankan financial system, historically, has been characterized as one of the financial systems having a predominant banking sector since banks play a critical role within the Sri Lankan financial system, providing liquidity to the entire economy, while transforming the risk characteristics of assets. Banks also play an important role in the process of economic development and improving the social welfare through its involvement in mobilizing and investing majority of the savings of the society. Thus, in the bank dominant Sri Lankan financial system, the maintenance of the efficiency of banking system remains a critical concern in facilitating economic growth. The banking sector in Sri Lanka, comprises Licensed Commercial Banks (LCBs) and Licensed Specialized Banks (LSBs). The Central Bank of Sri Lanka website has listed 24 banks under the category of Licensed Commercial Banks (LCBs) this study included seven LCBs.

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) research has focused on improving organizational performance through its workforce. This paper examines one of the most recent SHRM approaches, high-performance work systems (HPWS) practiced in LCBS in Sri Lanka. HPWS can be referred to as a group of separate, but interconnected HR practices designed to enhance employees' skills and effort (Takeuchi et al., 2007). Researchers have reported that HPWS has a positive relationship with desired employee attitudes and behavior such as affective commitment, Organization Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Kehoe & Wright, 2013), job satisfaction (Dyer & Reeves, 1995), occupational safety (Zacharatos et al., 2005) and negatively related to undesired outcomes including employee turnover (Batt, 2002; Dyer & Reeves, 1995; Huselid, 1995), intention to quit, and absenteeism (Kehoe and Wright, 2013) and employee burnout (Kroon et al., 2009).

This paper looks at the impact that HPWS has on employee service performance (ESP), and the role of employee resilience in this phenomenon. Bowen and Waldman (1999) defined ESP as "an employee's behaviors of serving and helping customers". In the service encounter context, task performance (In-role service performance) refers to the production and delivery activities directly related to efficiency, and contextual performance (extra-role service performance) refers to the supportive activities to customers and organizations, or social environment (Bettencourt and Brown 1997). Employee resilience is attracting increasing attention in management literature currently, especially in light of today's tumultuous corporate environment and the Covid19 pandemic. Luthans (2002) defined the concept of resilience as a "positive psychological capacity to 'bounce back' from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure, or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility". According to Luthans et al. (2006), resilience-related practices worked proactively, and investing in human resource

management practices for psychological capital development (especially resilience) can help employees cope better with the global financial crisis and changing workplace dynamics. Bardoel et al. (2014) attempted to link employee resilience as an important pillar of Human Resource Management (HRM) that can aid in the reduction of work-related hurdles and improved performance. They presented a set of HRM practices that can lead to increase the resilience and called them resilience enhancing HRM practices which they defined as “HRM practices that are intended, implemented and perceived to offer employees opportunities to ‘spring back’ from adversity and to develop and maintain resources that strengthen the resilience dimension of psychological capital.” This paper hence attempts to add to this literature by looking at resilience as a mediating variable between HPWS and ESP.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The next section provides a theoretical foundation for the study by reviewing connected theories and prior empirical studies. After that, the paper explains the methodology used in this study, which is followed by the discussion of the study’s results. The last section provides conclusions and implications of the study, followed by its limitations and future research avenues linked with this empirical investigation.

## Literature Review

Organizations have been forced to embrace innovative approaches to improve their internal performance as a result of globalization and strong competition. Human capabilities are incomparable, inimitable, and can be a greater source of competitive advantage than any other internal resource. (Barney and Wright 1998). From the Resource Based View (RBV) of organizations (Barney and Wright 1998) to social exchange theory (Blau 1964), SHRM research currently focuses on improving organizational performance through its workforce. This research intends to examine one of the most recent SHRM approaches, HPWS. The idea behind the latest approach of SHRM called HPWS is to promote decentralized decisions, equip the employees with necessary information, skills, incentives and make the employees responsible for on spot decisions particularly for improvement, innovation, and rapid response to changes. The concept of HPWS has been branded in a variety of ways including HPWS, high-involvement work system, high commitment work system, high performance management system and high-performance human resource management system (Becker & Huselid, 1999; Gittell, Seidner & Wimbush, 2010; Murphy & Olsen, 2009). Despite the differences of its name, the core of HPWS remains the same. This term can be referred to as a group of separate, but interconnected HR practices designed to enhance employees’ skills and effort. (Takeuchi et al., 2007).

Enhancement of employees following HPWS implementation is often associated with improved organizational commitment and productivity leading to superior financial performance (Delery, 1998; Becker & Huselid, 2006; Boxall and Macky, 2009; Posthuma, Campion, Masimova & Campion, 2013). Social exchange theory explains the relationship of HPWS and various types of employee behaviors. In context of employee performance, researchers have reported that HPWS has positive relationship with desired employee attitudes and behavior such as affective commitment, Organization Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Kehoe and Wright, 2013), job satisfaction (Dyer & Reeves, 1995), occupational safety (Zacharato et al., 2005) and negatively related to undesired outcomes including employee turnover (Batt, 2002; Dyer & Reeves, 1995; Guthrie, 2001; Huselid, 1995), voluntary turnover (Guthrie et al., 2009) intention to quit, and absenteeism (Guthrie et al., 2009; Kehoe and Wright, 2013) and employee burnout (Kroon et al. 2009). In this research it is aimed to look at the impact a HPWS has on ESP. Bowen and Waldman (1999) defined Employee service performance as “an employee’s behaviors of serving and helping customers”. In the service encounter context, task performance (In-role service performance) refers to the service production and delivery activities directly related to efficiency, and contextual performance (extra-role service performance) refers to the supportive activities to customers and organizations, or social environment. These behaviors include politeness, possessing accurate knowledge of products and policies, greeting, calling customers by name, saying “Thank you” and cross selling of firm’s services (Bettencourt and Brown, 1997).

Employee resilience is attracting increasing attention in management literature currently, especially in light of today’s tumultuous corporate environment and the Covid19 pandemic. The role of resilience in organizational settings has begun to emerge as a means of preparing employees to handle current and future challenges. Avey et al. (2009) argued that positive emotions of an individual increased their resilience. Employees that are resilient have a firm acceptance of reality, possess deep belief, supported by strongly held values, that life is meaningful, and an amazing ability to create and adaptability toward change (Avey et al., 2006). Resilience promotes emotional stability (Masten and Reed, 2002) and provides a positive impact with coping with difficult life situation (Fredrickson et al., 2003). Luthans (2002) defined the concept of resilience as a “positive psychological capacity to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure, or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility”. Individuals with strong resilience, according to Luthans et al. (2006), adapt to adversity by

understanding and recognizing the impact, energy, time, and resources required to return to equilibrium. Furthermore, resilience enables an individual to use setbacks as 'springboards' and opportunities for growth. According to Luthans et al. (2006), resilience-related practices worked proactively, and that investing in human resource management practices for psychological capital development (especially resilience) can help employees cope better with the global financial crisis and changing workplace dynamics. Jiang et al. (2012) urged that a specific set of HRM practices might be considered important to accomplish the desired outcomes (e.g. enhanced resilience). Bardoel et al. (2014) attempted to link employee resilience as an important pillar of Human Resource Management (HRM) that can aid in the reduction of work-related hurdles and improved performance in a recent study. They presented a set of HRM practices that can lead to increase the resilience and called them resilience enhancing HRM practices which they defined as "HRM practices that are intended, implemented and perceived to offer employees opportunities to 'spring back' from adversity and to develop and maintain resources that strengthen the resilience dimension of psychological capital." Following the concept introduced by Bardoel et al. (2014), a stream of research on employee resilience, particularly regarding HRM practices, has begun. Cooke et al. (2016) found that HPWS is positively associated with employee resilience and that employee resilience mediates the association between HPWS and employee engagement in a recent study from China's banking sector. According to Bustinza et al. (2016), the relationship between technology skills and organizational success is mediated by resilience capacities acquired through HR practices. Similarly, Cooke et al. (2016) established that resilience mediates the relationship between HPWS and employee engagement. Furthermore, according to Meneghel et al. (2016), team resilience influences the relationship between collective positive emotions and team performance, both in-role and extra-role performance. This paper hence attempts to add to this literature by looking at ER as a mediating variable between HPWS and ESP. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are formulated for this study.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): HPWS is positively associated with ESP of front line employees in LCBs.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): ER mediates the positive association between HPWS and ESP of front line employees in LCBs.

## Methodology

### Collection of Data

The unit of analysis of the study was individual. Data was collected from front line employees rather than the employer or management. Sample was selected using the non-probability sampling technique of exponential discriminative snowball sampling. The size of the sample was determined using Morgan's Table according to Krejcie & Morgan (1970). Population of the current study (N) i.e. approximate number of employees interacting with the customers in the selected banks which is approximated at 17,238 employees as presented in table 1. As N=17,238, sample size of the study should be 377 cases. Data was collected from 384 employees since the sample size was approximated.

Table 1: Total number of employees in selected LCBs

Licensed Commercial Bank	Total number of employees as per last published annual report	50 per cent of total employees
LCB1	4,836	2,418
LBC2	5,057	2,529
LCB3	2,832	1,416
LCB4	1,816	908
LCB5	3,360	1,680
LCB6	8,479	4,240
LCB7	8,093	4,047
Total	34,473	17,238

Source: Author construct 2023

The data obtained was primary data and collected by administering an online questionnaire. The employees were invited via senior HR officers in the selected banks to participate the survey.

### Test of Reliability and Validity

The reliability of the data collected from this questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, as given by Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha value is a good measure for measuring the reliability of a data set. If the Cronbach's Alpha value is greater than 0.7, the reliability level of the data set is at an acceptable level (Merchant, 1985). Table 2

shows that the Cronbach's Alpha values of independent, dependent variable and mediating variable of the study are greater than 0.7, indicating an acceptable level of reliability.

Table 2: Reliability of the Variables

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Independent variable: HPWS	9	0.872
Mediating variable: ER	6	0.825
Dependent variable: ESP	6	0.876

To ensure that the correct HRM practices were being measured to logically represent all the facets of the HPWS construct, the HPWS indexes were developed and evaluated for content validity through a 3 phase process according to Churchill (1979): (1) Item generation, (2) pre-pilot study, and (3) pilot study. Also, this process was implemented to evaluate the length of the survey to ensure a reasonable response rate. First, an extensive and comprehensive review of the literature was conducted to identify the content and conceptual definitions as well as the dimensions of each variable. The questions included in the data gathering technique were widely used in previous studies. For HPWS and ESP questions were taken from a study carried out by Chuang and Liao (2010). They developed the scale of HPWS and service performance by reviewing the literature and interviewing with several store managers and front-line employees and was used in the service sector. The pre-pilot study involved detailed discussions with HR managers in the banking sector to further refine the definitions and dimensions of the measurement. The third phase was a pilot study. Collectively, all the dimensions and questions used for this study have been adopted from previous studies in the broad general organizational behavior and HRM literature. In particular, the majority of the questions are directly from strategic human resource management and HPWS literature. Further factor analyses were used to determine construct validity and criterion validity is maintained.

### Data analysis

The study design is cross sectional. All the data gathered from the survey questionnaire was analyzed using statistical tools i.e. frequency analysis, measures of central tendency, correlation analysis and regression analysis. SPSS 23.0 software was used for analyzing data. Multiple regression analysis was carried out to test the mediating role of ER in the relationship between HPWS and ESP. With publications by Judd and Kenny (1981) and Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation became popular in HRM research. Mediation or an indirect effect occurs when the causal effect of an independent variable (A) on a dependent variable (C) is transmitted by a mediator (B). In other words, A affects C because A affects B, and B, in turn, affects C. The mediating role of employee resilience is tested based on multiple regression suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986).

## Findings and Discussion

### Descriptive Analysis

Mean and standard deviation were used to identify the degree of responses for each variable in the study. To identify the association between each variable, correlation matrix was also used. Table 3 shows these statistics for the variables of the study.

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation Coefficients of Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Correlation Coefficients		
			ER	HPWS	ESP
ER	4.21	0.433	1		
HPWS	4.53	0.736	0.423**	1	
ESP	4.24	0.477	0.723**	0.470**	1

\*\*Correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 3, mean values of ER, HPWS and ESP are high. These higher mean values are consistent with literature. Iddagoda & Opatha (2018) conducted a descriptive analysis in order to identify the intensity of the implementation of HPWPs in opinion of the executives and managers of selected Sri Lankan companies. They concluded that the intensity of the implementation of HPWPs is "high" in opinion of the executives and managers of selected Sri Lankan companies. The mean value in their study was 4.018 and the standard deviation was 0.656. The mean value in this study for HPWS was 4.53 with a standard deviation of 0.736. On the basis of the mean value and standard deviation, the majority of the respondents "agreed" and "strongly agreed" on the Likert scale of this study. Hence, our study supports the study done by Iddagoda & Opatha (2018) that the implementation of

HPWS are high in Sri Lanka with special context to the front-line staff in selected LCBs in Sri Lanka. In addition, HPWS as an independent variable was found to be positively and statistically significantly associated with ESP and ER. The results of correlation analysis clearly indicate that there is a positive significant correlation between all the variables. It has been viewed that moderate correlation exists between HPWS and ESP (0.470,  $p < 0.01$ ). Employee resilience was also positively correlated with HPWS (0.423,  $p < 0.01$ ) and ESP has a strong positive correlation with ER (0.723,  $p < 0.01$ ).

### Regression Analysis

As shown in Table 4, The estimate of the path coefficient of HPWS→ESP is 0.130 which is significant at 1 percent level. Thus, HPWS has direct positive association with ESP. The extent of this effect is an increase of ESP by 0.130 standard deviation units for one standard deviation unit of HPWS. The findings also reveal that HPWS is positively associated with ER ( $p < 0.01$ ). An increase of one standard deviation unit of HPWS increases ER by 0.255 standard deviation units. In addition, according to the results presented in Table 4, the path coefficient of HPWS→ER→ESP is statistically significant at 1 percent level. Thus, ER mediates the relationship between HPWS and ESP. Table 4 shows that the direct relationship between HPWS and ESP is significant and positive. Hence, ER has a partial mediation on the relationship between HPWS and ESP.

Table 4: Results of Regression Analysis

Path	Coefficient	t-statistic	p-value
HPWS→ESP	0.130	5.318**	0.000
HPWS→ER	0.255	9.126**	0.000
ER→ESP	0.687	16.915**	0.000
HPWS→ER→ESP	0.175	5.448**	0.000

Note: \*\*denotes significance at 0.01 level.

### Discussion of Results

As indicated by H1, this study established the direct relationship between HPWS and ESP, which is supported by the findings of the study. Iddagoda and Opatha (2018) pointed out that High-performance work practices are beneficial when used in bundles since the correct bundle of HPWPs leads to organizational effectiveness. This study adds to the body of literature on HPWS in Sri Lanka and confirms the positive effects of HPWS. Nadeem, Riaz & Danish (2019) looked at the telecommunications industry and based on qualitative analysis of interviews with managers and employees found that HPWS is the one of the major contributors towards ESP and employee resilience. They found that HPWS creates an environment in which employees feel a high level of resilience and that employee resilience plays a vital role in the achievement of ESP. This research confirms with their findings and broadens the studied industry by expanding it to the financial industry and adds to the body of knowledge in Asia on the studied variables by adding in a Sri Lankan perspective to the available research body.

As indicated by H2, this study further established the relationship between HPWS and ESP is mediated by ER, which is also supported by the findings of the study. Bardoel et al (2014) point out that the resources that promote employee resilience in the face of massive technological change may be relatively distinct from those promoting resilience following a natural disaster. This hence stresses the importance of more study on management actions that can promote employee resilience to face the Covid19 pandemic. This research empirically supported that HPWS have a positive impact on employee resilience during natural disasters since it was carried out during a time that the world was facing a large pandemic.

### Conclusions

The results clearly indicate that the hypotheses proposed in this study are empirically accepted. The study will contribute to the literature of HPWS-performance relationship by measuring the relationship between HPWS, ER, and ESP at the individual level in a Sri Lanka context with specific reference to LCBs of Sri Lanka. Most importantly, the study tested employee resilience as a mediating mechanism or processes through which HPWS has an impact on ESP. In conclusion, it was established that HPWS have a significantly positive effect with ESP and that employee resilience does play a significant mediating role in this relationship with the selected locally owned LCBs in Sri Lanka. The results confirmed that there was significant positive relationship between HPWS, ESP and employee resilience in frontline banking sector employees of Sri Lanka. These findings are consistent with the previous studies. Similarly, mediation analysis revealed that employee resilience partially mediated the relationship of HPWS and ESP. It indicates that HPWS helps in improving the service performance of frontline employees working in LCBs by enhancing their resilience.

The outcomes of this study will help top management to implement HPWS to increase their service performance and resilience. It is recommended that banks who intend to gain competitive advantage should focus on HPWS and such HPWS provide the base for competitive advantage because it increases ESP. The research findings further helps the managers to face the challenge of economic justification of their activities and transform them accordingly. The researcher suggests that by properly selecting and implementing such HPWS the organizations can perform better. Does this study imply that it is always in the interest of firms and employees for management to invest in HPWS? Existing studies suggest that HPWSs are not always cost-effective for firms (Cappelli & Neumark, 2001; Godard, 2001, 2004; Datta et al, 2005; Guthrie, 2001; Way, 2002). Rather, they need to be evaluated by firms or business units based on whether their benefits exceed their costs in their specific context. This study does not include labour productivity or financial variables (which need to be provided by managerial respondents) and, thus, the commercial benefits to firms are not something taken into account. However, what this report supports is that by adding more HPWS practices should lead to increase in ESP, via employee resilience.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Not all dimensions of the studied variables were used, other dimensions identified in literature can be included in the future. This study could not establish causality because this study was based on a cross-sectional set of data and to establish causality longitudinal set of data was required which was not possible to collect under the circumstances. The research has focused on only seven locally owned LCBs in Sri Lanka and only included selected designation of employees based in the branches. This study conceptualized and tested HPWS as a system (Bae and Lawler 2000; Guthrie, 2001), rather than its subcomponents (Liao & Chuang, 2004) it is possible that some subcomponents of HPWS have differential impacts on the mediating and dependent variables. For example, it may be the case that selective staffing and comprehensive training shapes employee resilience or ESP more strongly than other HR practices. Data was gathered only from employees and hence will be based on employee perceptions of the three variables. Due to the current pandemic and time constraints in conducting the research it was not possible to incorporate the views of the management of the organizations.

### **Need for Future Research**

As Boxall and Purcell (2003) point out that 'Studies of HPWS should include data on costs and benefits for both companies and workers because worker motivation and broader legitimacy are unlikely to improve if only management gains.' This research studied the perspective of employees but not the cost and benefit to them. Hence it is suggested that future research is done in this area to cover this gap. The HPWS implemented by the banks and found in this are relatively expensive as per the bank's annual reports and are high-skill model of labour management. When does investing in such expensive HR practices make sense in terms of cost effectiveness? Such questions can be considered in future studies taking the multiple goals of HRM into account. Future work, can be done to specifying how HPWS should be configured in LCBs in Sri Lanka, and most importantly, how they are embedded within the larger strategy implementation process. This is the challenge confronting HR managers under pressure to craft a HPWS in their own firm. Researchers and HR managers will benefit most from new theoretical and empirical work that continues to broaden the focus of HR research and attempts to integrate HR more fully into the essential strategic foundation of the organization. Future research should pursue examining the circumstances under which employees experience HPWSs as negative intensification rather than as positive improvements in their quality of working life, and whether both effects occur simultaneously in an antagonistic fashion. It is also important to do further research on what bundle of HR practices best fits the banking sector in Sri Lanka. Guest et al. (2004: 83) comment that 'a major conceptual and empirical challenge for HR research concerns how to identify and measure the bundles or systems of practices.' Contingency theorists argue that there may be many different HPWSs that emerge and work only under specific conditions. A contingency view might therefore explain prior research findings of considerable variability in the degree to which HR practices associated with HWPS have been implemented (Shaw et al, 1997; Pil and MacDuffie, 1996), and the failure so far to identify a consistently replicable bundle or cluster of HPWS practices (Guest et al., 2003; Wright and Boswell, 2002)

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