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The intensity of the implementation of high-performance work practices in selected Sri Lankan companies

Introduction

According to Brigitte Kroon et al., high-performance work practices (HPWPs) are human resource management (HRM) practices designed to increase organizational performance while motivating the employees[1]. There are still shortcomings in the literature such as confusion about the term of HPWPs and about the HPWPs bundle. A working definition of HPWPs helps to minimize the confusion about HPWPs. Identifying the intensity of the implementation of HPWPs in opinion of the executives and managers of selected companies from Sri Lanka is also noteworthy. According to Sudatta Ranasinghe, in Sri Lankan business context, HPWPs in HRM are implemented in industries such as IT and telecommunication[2]. Ranasinghe further states that lack of awareness of the role

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[1] B. Kroon, K. Van De Voorde, J. Timmers, *High performance work practices in small firms: a resource-poverty and strategic decision-making perspective*, "Small Business Economics" 2013, vol. 41, no. 1, p. 71–91.

[2] S. Ranasinghe, *HR challenges in a developing economy: towards multiple roles of HR professionals in a competitive business environment*, in: S. Ranasinghe, A. Dharmasiri (eds.), *HR challenge: dynamics of value creation and competitiveness through people*, Colombo 2013, p. 1–39.

that HRM may play in business development, with a resultant disinclination for change in HRM structure and processes, is obvious[3].

In the above-mentioned context, this paper endeavors to address the issue of the confusion regarding synonymous terms for HPWS, a bundle of HPWPs, a working definition of HPWPs, operationalization of the variable of HPWPs, reliability and validity of HPWPs, and to identify the intensity of the implementation of HPWPs in opinion of the managerial employees in selected Sri Lankan companies.

Methodology

The archival method was used as recommended by David Tranfield et al.[4] This approach involves describing data that existed before the time of the study. The questionnaire used to collect data was developed with proper conceptualization and operationalization. The respondents were the executives and managers of selected Sri Lankan companies. The scaling technique employed in this study was the 5-point Likert scale with the following items: "strongly agree", "agree", "neutral", "disagree" and "strongly disagree". The researchers used non-probability sampling. The sample of this study totaled 272 respondents. When forming the sample, we adhered to the rule given by John T. Roscoe[5], as cited in Uma Sekaran[6], that the sample size should be larger than 30 and less than 500. The population was 614 and the response rate – 50 percent. For the analysis, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 23 (SPSS 23) was used.

High-performance work system and its synonyms

It is evident that today's business world focuses more on the high-performance work system (HPWS) than in the past because of, according to Peter Boxall & Keith Macky, its strong effect on value addition of an organization

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[3] Ibidem.
[4] D. Tranfield, D. Denyer, P. Smart, *Towards a methodology for developing evidence-informed, management knowledge by means of systematic review*, "British Journal of Management" 2003, vol. 14, no. 3, p. 207–222.
[5] J.T. Roscoe, *Fundamental research statistics for the behavioral sciences*, New York 1975.
[6] U. Sekaran, *Research methods for business: a skill building approach*, New Delhi 2006.

through HRM[7]. Gary Dessler states that the high-performance work system is an integrated set of human resource management policies and practices[8]. Michael Armstrong points out that the objective of HPWS is to establish a high-performance culture. The combination of norms, values and HR practices in an organization enhances high levels of employee job performance[9].

Different synonymous terms are used to describe the high-performance work system. They include "high-performance work practices", "high-involvement work practices", "high-commitment employment practices", "alternative work practices" and "high-performance human resource management" (see table 1). David N Ashton & Johnny Sung, Jody H. Gittell et al., and Pedro Ferreira et al. believe that there is a common thread among all these terms[10].

Table 1. Synonymous terms for HPWS

Synonyms for HPWS	Importance	Practices	Authors
High-performance work practices	Increase empowerment of the employees, enhance their skills, arranging appropriate incentives, formulating ways to stay them motivated and eventually create a powerful, dedicated workforce that would keep on matching with organizational, market and social requirements.	Flexible work conditions, profit sharing, teamwork, job rotation, flat hierarchy.	H. Ramsay, D. Scholarios, B. Harley, 2000, p. 501–531; P. Ferreira, N. Porto, M. Portela, 2010.

7   P. Boxall, K. Macky, *High-performance work systems and organisational performance: bridging theory and practice*, "Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources" 2007, vol. 45, no. 3, p. 261–270.
8   G. Dessler, *Human resource management*, Upper Saddle River – New Delhi 2009, p. 91.
9   M. Armstrong, *Armstrong's handbook of human resource management practice*, London – Philadelphia – New Delhi 2014, p. 58; see also: G. Dessler, op. cit., p. 56.
10 D.N. Ashton, J. Sung, *Supporting workplace learning for high performance working*, Geneve 2002; J.H. Gittell, R. Seidner, J. Wimbush, *A relational model of how high-performance work systems work*, "Organization Science" 2010, vol. 21, no. 2, p. 490–506; P. Ferreira, N. Porto, M. Portela, *Women's participation in high performance work practices: a comparative analysis of Portugal and Spain*, paper presented at the 19th International Conference AEDEM "Global Financial & Business Networks and Information Management Systems", Minsk (Belarus), 2–3 September 2010.

High-involve-ment work practices	Bring improvements in employee auto-nomy, their skills and knowledge.	Teamwork, information sharing, flexible job design.	P. Boxall, K. Macky, 2007, p. 261–270; F.K. Pil, J.P. Macduffie, 1996, p. 423–455.
High-commit-ment employment practices	Increase organizational commitment and influence organizational performance.	1) Sophisticated selection and training, emphasi-zing values and human relation skills as well as knowledge skills. 2) Behavior-based appra-isal and advancement criteria. 3) Single status policies. 4) Contingent pay sys-tems, especially pay for knowledge, group bonu-ses and profit sharing. 5) Job security. 6) Above-market pay and benefits. (7) Grievance systems.	E. Farndale, V. Hope-Hailey, C. Kelliher, 2011, p. 5–23; J. Godard, 2004, p. 349–378.
Alternative work practices	Increase organizatio-nal performance	1) Alternative job design practices, including work teams (autonomous or non-autonomous), job enrichment, job rotation and related reforms. 2) Formal participatory practices, including quality circles or pro-blem-solving groups, town hall meetings, team briefings and joint steering committees.	J. Godard, 2004, p. 349–378; M. Armstrong, 2010.
High-perfor-mance human resource management	Develop the skill and motivation of the workforce, is consi-dered to contribute to the "bottom-line" of companies.	Incentives systems, training, sharing arran-gements, guidance and selective recruitment.	J. Horgan, P. Mühlau, 2006, p. 414–439.

Source: P. Ferreira, I. Neira, E. Vieira, 2010.

High-performance work practices

According to Michael Armstrong, the high-performance work system (HPWS) is the most commonly used in both academic and practitioner circles[11]. Researchers prefer to call it "high-performance work practices" (HPWPs). *Longman dictionary of contemporary English* defines "system" as "a group of related parts that work together as a whole for a particular purpose"[12] while *The concise Oxford dictionary of English etymology* defines "scheme" as a "proposed or operational systematic arrangement"[13]. In this light, "pay for performance" is a scheme, but when we use it continuously, it becomes a practice.

Brigitte Kroon et al. reveal that HPWPs are HRM practices aimed at increasing employee performance and organizational efficiency[14]. Pedro Ferreira et al. state that HPWP is a HR system made up of new structures of work organization, including flexible human resource practices based on empowerment and employee involvement[15]. David N. Ashton & Johnny Sung point out that HPWPs create a working environment that fosters employees' personal growth and organizational productivity. They state that HPWPs consist of novel ways of getting employees to participate in the decision-making process, organizing work and rewarding performance[16]. According to Ashton & Sung, HPWPs produce a win-win situation[17]. Y. Anuradha Iddagoda & Henarath H.D.N.P. Opatha[18] state that the impact of HPWPs on organizational performance is self-evident. The organization that practices HPWPs produces outcomes such as increased productivity and profits[19], and thereby provide competitive advantage for the relevant organizations[20].

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[11] M. Armstrong, *Armstrong's handbook of reward management practice: improving performance through reward*, London – Philadelphia 2010, p. 109.

[12] Entry: *System*, in: *Longman dictionary of contemporary English*, Harlow 1995, p. 1463.

[13] T.F. Hoad, *The concise Oxford dictionary of English etymology*, Oxford 1993.

[14] B. Kroon, K. Van De Voorde, J. Timmers, op. cit., p. 71–91.

[15] P. Ferreira, I. Neira, E. Vieira, *The influence of human capital of the workforce in the adoption of high-performance work systems: the case of Portugal and Spain*, paper presented at the 19th Meeting of the Economics of Education Association, Saragossa (Spain), 8–9 July 2010.

[16] D.N. Ashton, J. Sung, op. cit., p. 1–2.

[17] Ibidem, p. VII.

[18] Y.A. Iddagoda, H.H.D.N.P. Opatha, *Identified research gaps in employee engagement*, "International Business Research" 2016, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 63.

[19] P. Tamkin, *High performance work practices*, Brighton 2004, p. 13.

[20] B.J.H. Arachchige, A. Robertson, *The effect of human resource management high performance work practices on organisational outcomes: a Sri Lankan perspective*, "Sri Lankan Journal of Human Resource Management" 2015, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 17–30.

A bundle of high-performance work practices

HR practices, when grouped in a sensible way, are known as a "bundle". The correct bundle of HPWPs can be used to improve employee performance. John Paul McDuffie and David N. Ashton & Johnny Sung believe that the bundles of internally consistent and interrelated HR practices are more suitable than individual HR practices[21]. Many researchers present high-performance work practice sets (see table 2). Michael Armstrong observes that there is no standard list of features or components of a bundle of HPWPs[22].

Table 2. High-performance work practices

Author	Year	High-performance work practices
Pfeffer	1994	1) Employment security. 2) Selectivity in training. 3) High wages. 4) Incentive pay. 5) Employee ownership (share ownership and profit sharing). 6) Information sharing. 7) Participation and empowerment. 8) Teams and job design. 9) Training and skill development. 10) Cross utilization and cross training. 11) Symbolic egalitarianism (equality of treatment among employees). 12) Wage compression (the size of the pay differences among employees is reduced). 13) Promotion from within. 14) Long-term perspective. 15) Measurement of practices. 16) Overarching philosophy (underlying management philosophy connecting the various individual practices into a coherent whole).
Huselid	1995	1) Compensation and performance management systems. 2) Extensive employee involvement and training.

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[21] J.P. Macduffie, *Human resource bundles and manufacturing performance: organizational logic and flexible production systems in the world auto industry*, "Industrial & Labor Relations Review" 1995, vol. 48, no. 2, p. 197–221; D.N. Ashton, J. Sung, op. cit., p. 56.

[22] M. Armstrong, *Armstrong's handbook of reward management practice*, p. 109.

Guest	2000	1) Realistic job previews.
		2) Psychometric tests for selection.
		3) Well-developed induction training.
		4) Provision of extensive training for experienced employees.
		5) Regular appraisals.
		6) Regular feedback on performance from many sources.
		7) Individual performance-related pay.
		8) Profit-related bonuses.
		9) Flexible job descriptions.
		10) Multi-skilling.
		11) Presence of work improvement teams.
		12) Presence of problem-solving groups.
		13) Information provided on the firm's business plan.
		14) Information provided on the firm's performance targets.
		15) No compulsory redundancies.
		16) Avoidance of voluntary redundancies.
		17) Commitment to single status.
		18) Harmonized holiday entitlement.
Ashton & Sung	2002	The four bundles of HPWPs:
		1) Work design / employee involvement (multi-skilling, quality circles, TQM, team working, self-directed teams).
		2) Support for performance/training (annual performance reviews, peer review / 360-degree appraisal, personal development plan, job rotation / cross training, mentoring, training for trainers).
		3) Rewarding performance (group-based compensation, profit sharing, employee share ownership).
		4) Communication and information sharing (regular meetings of the entire workforce, consultative committees, staff attitude surveys).
Appel-baum et al.	2000	1) Work is organized to permit front-line workers to participate in decisions that alter organizational routines.
		2) Workers require more skills to do their jobs successfully, and many of these skills are firm specific.
		3) Workers experience greater autonomy over their job tasks and methods of work.
		4) Incentive pay motivates workers to extend extra effort on developing skills.
		5) Employment security provides front-line workers with a long-term stake in the company and a reason to invest in its future.
Sung & Ashton	2005	Bundle of 35 complementary work practices covering three broad areas:
		1) High employee involvement work practices, e.g. self-directed teams, quality circles and sharing / access to company information.
		2) Human resource practices, e.g. sophisticated recruitment processes, performance appraisals, mentoring and work redesign.
		3) Reward and commitment practices, e.g. various financial rewards, family-friendly policies, job rotation and flexi hours.

Hor-gan & Mühlau	2006	1) Selection. 2) Training. 3) Mentoring. 4) Incentives. 5) Knowledge-sharing mechanisms.
Dessler	2009	1) Employment security. 2) Selective hiring. 3) Extensive training. 4) Self-managed teams. 5) Decentralized decision-making. 6) Information sharing. 7) Contingent (pay-for-performance) rewards. 8) Transformational leadership (e.g. in terms of inspirational motivation).

The most common practices considered under the concept of HPWPs are recruitment and selection, training and development, pay management and performance management[23]. *Aon Hewitt's 2013 trends in global engagement* considers HR practices as a driver of employee engagement[24]. Among the HPWPs mentioned in table 2, researchers give attention to realistic job preview, pay for performance, staff attitude surveys, self-directed teams, extensive training, regular appraisals and symbolic egalitarianism. Though there are many HPWPs studied by previous researchers, only seven HR practices are selected for this study for three reasons. The first reason is that all these practices were used by the majority of previous researchers. Jeffrey Pfeffer, Eileen Appelbaum et al., and Gary Dessler use the term "pay for performance"[25]. Ashton & Sung present four bundles of HPWPs[26] and a bundle of 35 complementary work practices, covering three broad areas[27]. In both proposals, priority is given to self-directed teams. David Guest selected "presence of work improvement teams" as a component of the HPWPs bundle[28].

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[23] J. Pfeffer, *Producing sustainable competitive advantage through the effective management of people*, "The Academy of Management Executive" 1995, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 55–69; D. Guest, *Effective people management: initial findings of the Future of Work Study*, London 2000; D.N. Ashton, J. Sung, op. cit., p. 28; B. Kroon, K. Van De Voorde, J. Timmers, op. cit., p. 71–91.

[24] *Aon Hewitt's 2013 trends in global engagement: where do organizations need to focus attention?*, Bingley 2013, p. 22.

[25] J. Pfeffer, op. cit., p. 59; E. Appelbaum, T. Bailey, P. Berg, A.L. Kalleberg, *Manufacturing advantage: why high performance work systems pay off*, Ithaca 2000; G. Dessler, op. cit., p. 391.

[26] D.N. Ashton, J. Sung, op. cit., p. 109.

[27] Ibidem, p. 86.

[28] D. Guest, *Effective people management: initial findings of the Future of Work Study*, London 2000.

Gary Dessler considers "self-managed teams" as an important HPWP[29]. These different terms basically mean the same. Justine Horgan & Peter Mühlau and David N. Ashton & Johnny Sung prioritize training in their bundle[30]. Jeffrey Pfeffer & John F. Veiga, Gary Dessler, Mark A. Huselid and David Guest use the term "extensive training" correspondingly[31]. The second reason is that some of the selected practices were used at least by one researcher. The third reason is that, as far as the local context is concerned, researchers believe that these practices seem to be very important for improving business performance. Effective people management gives competitive advantages to an organization. Researchers believe that uniform remuneration is not suitable for a high-performance entity. Salaries should vary depending on performance. In order to achieve the organizational vision, mission and goals, wage differentials among all levels of employees should be at a minimum level (see diagram 1).

Working definition of HPWPs

Michael Armstrong notes that there is no generally accepted definition of high-performance work practices. Therefore, researchers give their own working definition as "a bundle of certain human resources practices which make a relatively higher impact on organizational effectiveness"[32].
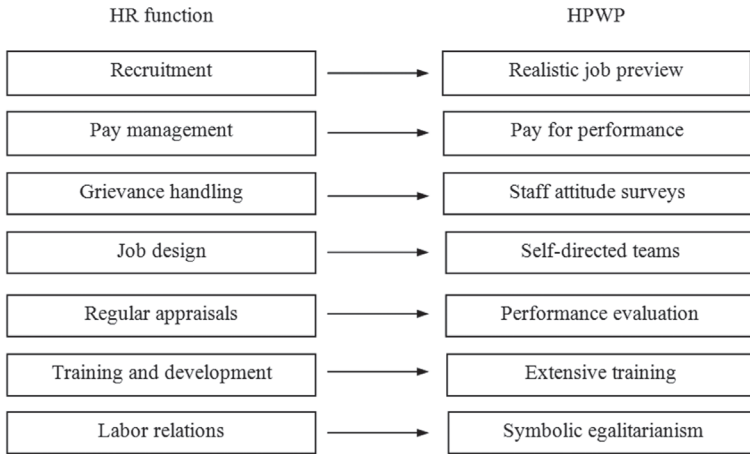
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[29] G. Dessler, op. cit., p. 289.

[30] J. Horgan, P. Mühlau, *Human resource systems and employee performance in Ireland and the Netherlands: a test of the complementarity hypothesis*, "The International Journal of Human Resource Management" 2006, vol. 17, no. 3, p. 414–439; D.N. Ashton, J. Sung, op. cit, p. 110.

[31] J. Pfeffer, J.F. Veiga, *Putting people first for organizational success*, "The Academy of Management Executive" 1999, vol. 13, no. 2, p. 37–48; G. Dessler, op. cit., p. 95; M.A. Huselid, *The impact of human resource management practices on turnover, productivity, and corporate financial performance*, "Academy of Management Journal" 1995, vol. 38, no. 3, p. 635; D. Guest, *Effective people management: initial findings of the Future of Work Study*, London 2000.

[32] M. Armstrong, *Armstrong's handbook of reward management practice*, p. 109.

Diagram 1. HR function and HPWPs

HR function		HPWP
Recruitment	→	Realistic job preview
Pay management	→	Pay for performance
Grievance handling	→	Staff attitude surveys
Job design	→	Self-directed teams
Regular appraisals	→	Performance evaluation
Training and development	→	Extensive training
Labor relations	→	Symbolic egalitarianism

Operationalization of the variable of HPWPs

Operationalization means operationally defining a concept or giving an operational definition[33]. According to Alan Bryman & Emma Bell, an operational definition is the definition of a concept in terms of the operations to be carried out when measuring it[34]. The authors refer to that dimension as an aspect of their concept[35].

Dimensions of HPWPs

HPWPs are conceptualized as a system that fundamentally consists of seven dimensions, i.e. realistic job preview (RJP), pay for performance, staff attitude surveys, self-directed teams, regular appraisals, extensive training and symbolic egalitarianism.

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[33] U. Sekaran, *Research methods for business: a skill building approach*, New Delhi 2006; A. Bryman, E. Bell, *Business research methods*, Oxford 2011.
[34] A. Bryman, E. Bell, op. cit., p. 716.
[35] Ibidem.

Realistic job preview (RJP)

John E. Baur et al.[36] identify realistic job preview (RJP) as a popular recruitment procedure. *Concise Oxford English dictionary* defines "realistic" as "having a sensible and practical idea of what can be achieved or expected" and "representing things in a way that is accurate and true to life"[37]. RJP is a technique that gives job applicants a realistic view of what they should expect from the organization[38] and can potentially bring the expectations of prospective employees "down to earth"[39]. In opinion of James A. Breaugh & Mary Starke, unrealistic high expectations about the organization make it harder for the employee to integrate into the organization and lead to lower job satisfaction and increased turnover[40]. This is why M. Ronald Buckley et al. state that it is ethical to provide job candidates with actual information[41]. This is confirmed by Gary Dessler who argues that providing realistic details about the job and the organization will become the best screening tool[42]. Baur et al. reveal that RJP is a conversation between the interviewer and interviewee regarding the positive and negative characteristics of a job[43]. Julia Richardson et al. point out that RJP ensures congruence between new employees' expectations and their subsequent work experience[44]. Baur et al. state that RJP is an alternative to the "seductive" method called "idealistic job preview", in which only positive information is disclosed[45]. According to Tope Adeyemi-Bello & Will Mulvane, sometimes organizations give only positive

[36] J.E. Baur, M.R. Buckley, Z. Bagdasarov, A.S. Dharmasiri, *A historical approach to realistic job previews: an exploration into their origins, evolution, and recommendations for the future*, "Journal of Management History" 2014, vol. 20, no. 2, p. 200–223.

[37] Entry: *Realistic*, in: A. Stevenson, M. Waite (eds.), *Concise Oxford English dictionary: luxury edition*, New York 2011, p. 1197.

[38] J.E. Baur et al., op. cit., p. 200–223.

[39] T. Adeyemi-Bello, W. Mulvaney, *The development and administration of realistic job previews*, "Equal Opportunities International" 1995, vol. 14, no. 5, p. 1–7.

[40] J.A. Breaugh, M. Starke, *Research on employee recruitment. So many studies, so many remaining questions*, "Journal of Management" 2000, vol. 26, no. 3, p. 405–434.

[41] M.R. Buckley, D.B. Fedor, J.G. Veres, D.S. Wiese, S.M. Carraher, *Investigating newcomer expectations and job-related outcomes*, "Journal of Applied Psychology" 1998, vol. 83, no. 3, p. 452–461.

[42] G. Dessler, op. cit., p. 193.

[43] J.E. Baur et al., op. cit., p. 200–223.

[44] J. Richardson, K. McBey, S. McKenna, *Integrating realistic job previews and realistic living conditions previews: realistic recruitment for internationally mobile knowledge workers*, "Personnel Review" 2008, vol. 37, no. 5, p. 492.

[45] J.E. Baur et al., op. cit., p. 200–223.

information in order to maximize the attractiveness of the position but it will have negative impact on work environment[46]. In this situation, it is the best to give both positive and negative information. See table 3 for elements of and statements on the dimension called "realistic job preview".

Table 3. Elements of and statements on the dimension called "realistic job preview"

Element	Statement
Giving actual information	We have a practice of providing deliberately actual information to the applicants or the new employees with regard to the organization expectations of the job holder and the work environment.
Giving both positive and negative information	Both positive and negative aspects of a job are communicated to the applicants during their recruitment and selection.

Pay for performance

Longman dictionary of contemporary English defines "pay" as "to give someone money for something you have bought, or for something they have done for you"[47]. According to Henarath H.D.N.P. Opatha, pay can mean either wage or salary[48]. The same dictionary defines "performance" as "the act of doing a piece of work, duty" or as the appraisal "how well or badly you do a particular job or activity"[49]. Many organizations believe that pay for performance is an important compensation objective[50]. Researchers view pay for performance as being closely linked with individual efficiency. Steven H. Appelbaum & Loring Mackenzie note that some cost-conscious companies believe that pay for performance motivates employees and that the organization can control payroll expenses[51]. The report by Neil A.G. McPhie et al. reveals that from a well-functioning pay for performance system, brilliant performers will receive supreme rewards as an acknowledgement of their

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[46] T. Adeyemi-Bello, W. Mulvaney, op. cit., p. 1–7.

[47] Entry: *Pay*, in: *Longman dictionary of contemporary English*, p. 1039.

[48] H.H.D.N.P. Opatha, *Human resource management*, Colombo 2009, p. 569.

[49] Entry: *Performance*, in: *Longman dictionary of contemporary English*, p. 1050.

[50] D.P. McAdams, *Biography, narrative, and lives: an introduction*, "Journal of Personality" 1988, vol. 56, no. 1, p. 1–18.

[51] S.H. Appelbaum, L. Mackenzie, *Compensation in the year 2000: pay for performance?*, "Health Manpower Management" 1996, vol. 22, no. 3, p. 31–39.

superior contributions and as a motivator to continue their high performance. Average performers will receive smaller compensation which may persuade them to work harder so as to get a raise in future. Poor performers will receive no increase which is intended to persuade them to improve their performance or leave the organization[52]. According to Russell C. Swansburg & Richard J. Swansburg, pay for performance (compensation) programs take the form of merit pay, gain sharing, lump sum payment, pay for knowledge, employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs), individual incentives, small group incentives, instant incentives and recognition programs[53]. According to Appelbaum & Mackenzie, the most popular forms of pay for performance are lump sum bonuses (30 percent), small group incentive plans (14 percent), gain sharing (13 percent) and pay for knowledge (5 percent)[54]. The authors add that many of these plans are difficult to distinguish clearly since they are intermingled. Under uniform pay schemes, the organization does not differentiate between high performers and low performers. Irrespective of the degree of performance, the organization gives the same pay for employees in the same job rank[55]. Gary Dessler states that variable pay is known as any plan that is connected to productivity or profitability[56]. Researchers identify two elements of pay for performance, i.e. "linkage between pay and individual job performance" and "differentiation between high performers and low performers". See table 4 for elements of and statements on the dimension called "pay for performance".

Table 4. Elements of and statements on the dimension called "pay for performance"

Element	Statement
Linkage between pay and individual job performance	We have a variable pay linked with the degree of individual job performance.
Differentiation between high performers and low performers	We differentiate with the high performers and the low performers and we give a high pay to high performers and a low pay to low performers.

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[52] N.A.G. McPhie et al., *Designing an effective pay for performance compensation system: a report to the President and the Congress of the United States by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board*, Washington, DC, January 2006, p. 1.

[53] R.C. Swansburg, R.J. Swansburg, *Introduction to management and leadership for nurse managers*, Sudbury 2002, p. 619.

[54] S.H. Appelbaum, L. Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 31–39.

[55] Ibidem.

[56] G. Dessler, op. cit., p. 395.

Staff attitude surveys

Concise Oxford English dictionary defines "attitude" as "a settled way of thinking or feeling"[57]. An employee attitude survey provides a picture of the organizational needs of a business entity. Paul R. Knapp & Bahaudin Mujtaba state that in today's competitive work environment, employee attitudes, opinions and suggestions are of utmost importance. They add that when the management has an understanding about the employee's feelings and concerns, it is easier to manage their behaviors. This will lead to organizational growth[58]. Staff attitude surveys are conducted not only to assess job satisfaction, employee morale and attitudes toward the company[59] but also to focus on strategic imperatives of the organization[60]. According to Benjamin Schneider et al., in these surveys, employees are asked about their experience of the policies and practices, and their view on specific strategic goals of the organization[61]. Researchers identify two elements, i.e. "conducting surveys" and "using the results of the attitude surveys". Table 5 shows the elements of and statements on the dimension called "staff attitude surveys".

Table 5. Elements of and statements on the dimension called "staff attitude surveys"

Element	Statement
Conducting surveys	Usually we conduct surveys to measure job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior of our employees.
Using the results of the attitude surveys	We have a practice of using the information and finding of the surveys for various decision making.

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[57] Entry: *Attitude*, in: A. Stevenson, M. Waite (eds.), op. cit., p. 84.

[58] P.R. Knapp, B.G. Mujtaba, *Designing, administering, and utilizing an employee attitude survey*, "Journal of Behavioral Studies in Business" 2010, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 1–14.

[59] A.C. Higgs, S.D. Ashworth, *Organizational surveys: tools for assessment and research*, in: A.I. Kraut (ed.), *Organizational surveys: tools for assessment and change*, San Francisco 1996, p. 19–40.

[60] B. Schneider, S.D. Ashworth, A.C. Higgs, L. Carr, *Design, validity, and use of strategically focused employee attitude surveys*, "Personnel Psychology" 1996, vol. 49, no. 3, p. 695–705.

[61] Ibidem.

Self-directed teams (SDT)

According to Jennifer Rowley, self-directed teams (SDTs) refer to a small group of employees who have day-to-day responsibility for managing themselves and their work[62]. Michael W. Piczak & Reuben Z. Hauser describe self-directed teams as semi-autonomous work groups or self-managing teams, where people are no longer segmented into functions that only control a part of an organizational process. Each team consists of a group of employees with responsibility for an entire process, product or customer relationship[63]. Everyone shares equal responsibilities, which lead to increased empowerment and organizational commitment[64]. Piczak & Hauser state that companies like Coca-Cola, Federal Express, General Electric, Motorola, Procter & Gamble and Xerox implemented the concept of self-directed teams as a means of achieving employee participation and getting closer to the customer[65]. Based on this information, researchers can say that an effective culture is essential for effective functioning of teams[66]. "Existence of teams" and "effective functioning teams" form the elements of this concept. See table 6 for the elements of and statements on the concept of self-directed teams.

Table 6. Elements of and statements on the dimension called "self directed teams"

Element	Statement
Existence of teams	In my organization, there are small groups of employees with day to day responsibilities for managing themselves and their work.
Effective functioning teams	We have a team culture where team members usually plan and schedule work, handle job assignment and make related decisions to solve problems.

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[62] J. Rowley, *Academic leaders: made or born?*, "Industrial and Commercial Training" 1997, vol. 29, no. 3, p. 78–84.

[63] M.W. Piczak, R.Z. Hauser, *Self-directed work teams: a guide to implementation*. "Quality Progress" 1996, vol. 29, no. 5, p. 81–87.

[64] P.S. Appelbaum, T. Grisso, E. Frank, S. O'Donnell, D.J. Kupfer, *Competence of depressed patients for consent to research*, "American Journal of Psychiatry" 1999, vol. 156, no. 9, p. 1380–1384; J. Rowley, op. cit., p. 78–84.

[65] M.W. Piczak, R.Z. Hauser, op. cit., p. 81–87.

[66] P.T. Nowakowski, *Psychologiczno-pedagogiczne aspekty środowiska pracy*, in: M. Czapka (ed.), *Psychospołeczne i pedagogiczne uwarunkowania pracy*, Bytom 2005, p. 54–55.

Regular appraisals

Henarath H.D.N.P. Opatha[67] remarks that performance appraisal (PA) is an integral part of performance management (PM), and indeed the heart of PM is PA. *Longman dictionary of contemporary English* defines "regular" as having "the same amount of time or space between each thing and the next"[68]. Therefore, regular appraisal means a performance appraisal that is arranged in a pattern, especially with the same space between one thing and the next. Nelda Spinks et al. state that conducting performance appraisal interviews at frequent intervals is essential since it makes the employees aware of where they stand. The intervals may vary in reference to particular job but the appraisal interviews should be conducted more than once a year[69]. Considering all these facts, researchers identify two elements called "existence of formal evaluation" and "intensity of giving feedback". See table 7 for elements of and statements on the dimension called "regular appraisal".

Table 7. Elements of and statements on the dimension called "regular appraisal"

Element	Statement
Existence of formal evaluation	Job performance of our employees is regularly and systematically evaluated.
Intensity of giving feedback	We have a strong practice of giving a feedback to the appraisee in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses and plans for improvements.

Extensive training

Concise Oxford English dictionary's definition of "extensive" is "covering a large area" and "large in amount or scale"[70]. Gary Dessler mentions that both new and present employees need to be trained as and when required. He also states that training is the process of teaching new employees the basic competencies needed to perform their job[71]. According to Henarath H.D.N.P. Opatha, such training should teach knowledge, skills and attitudes. The ultimate result is

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[67] H.H.D.N.P. Opatha, op. cit., p. 451.
[68] Entry: *Regular*, in: *Longman dictionary of contemporary English*, p. 1196.
[69] N. Spinks, B. Wells, M. Meche, *Appraising the appraisals: computerized performance appraisal systems*, "Career Development International" 1999, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 94–100.
[70] Entry: *Extensive*, in: A. Stevenson, M. Waite (eds.), op. cit., p. 503–504.
[71] G. Dessler, op. cit., p. 247.

a high level of organizational performance[72]. Jeffrey Pfeffer and Kamal Birdi et al. state that extensive training provides a range of development opportunities for all employees rather than trains people occasionally to meet specific job needs[73]. Based on the views of Pfeffer and Birdi et al., "giving more priority to training" and "continuous increase in the hours of training" were identified as the elements of the dimension called "extensive training"[74]. See table 8 for elements of and statements on this dimension.

Table 8. Elements of and statements on the dimension called "extensive training"

Element	Statement
Giving more priority to training	We give a more priority to train our employees.
Continuous increase in the hours of training	Year by year, there has been a continuous increase of number of hours of training for our employees.

Symbolic egalitarianism

The concept of symbolic egalitarianism proposed by Jeffrey Pfeffer is a high--performance work practice that gives a competitive advantage. It implies the use of symbols to minimize differences among all levels of employees working to achieve a common organizational goal[75]. According to Pfeffer, the symbols are visible signs such as dress and the use of physical space. Symbolic egalitarianism can be implemented in an organization through consistent dress codes, common cafeteria, common parking area and permanent office arrangements. Therefore, one element of symbolic egalitarianism is "equality in office facilities". Pfeffer's view is that egalitarian symbols take many forms[76]. Lee G. Bolman & Terrence E. Deal write that New United Motor Manufacturing, Inc. (NUMMI) also has the same practices and their motto is "There are no managers, no supervisors,

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[72] H.H.D.N.P. Opatha, op. cit., p. 451.
[73] J. Pfeffer, op. cit., p. 62–63; K. Birdi, C. Clegg, M. Patterson, A. Robinson, C.B. Stride, T.D. Wall, S.J. Wood, *The impact of human resource and operational management practices on company productivity: a longitudinal study*, "Personnel Psychology" 2008, vol. 61, no. 3, p. 480.
[74] J. Pfeffer, op. cit., p. 55–69; K. Birdi et al., op. cit., p. 471.
[75] J. Pfeffer, op. cit., p. 63.
[76] Ibidem.

only team members"[77]. Pfeffer further mentions that Japanese organizations, almost invariably, have pins with the organization's insignia or logo that virtually everyone wears. It symbolizes their identification with the organization. Pfeffer states that reduction of various subdivisions of the organization diminishes "us" versus "them" thinking, and leads to a sense of everyone working towards a common goal[78]. Thereby, Pfeffer and Bolman & Deal consider another element of symbolic egalitarianism as "the belief in treating employees equally"[79]. Table 9 shows elements of and statements on symbolic egalitarianism.

Table 9. Elements of and statements on the dimension called "symbolic egalitarianism"

Element	Statement
Equality in office facilities	All the employees park in the same car parks, eat in the same dining rooms and use the same toilets without considering their job rank.
The belief of treating the employees equally	We believe that treating employees equally will improve corporation and team working among employees by reducing grudges and hostilities which exist.

Generally, there are seven dimensions of the variable of HPWPs, each containing two elements. Thus the number of all the items is 14. The relevant dimensions and elements of the variable are depicted in diagram 2.

Reliability and validity of HPWPs

Mark Saunders et al. mention that when measuring the validity of a questionnaire, its content validity, construct validity and criterion validity should be considered[80]. Since Michael Armstrong observes that there is no standard list of features or components of a "bundle of HPWPs"[81], it is essential to develop an instrument of HPWPs that is both validated and well-adapted. Reliability of the measure is

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[77] L.G. Bolman, T.E. Deal, *Reframing organizations: artistry, choice, and leadership*, Chichester 2003, p. 155.
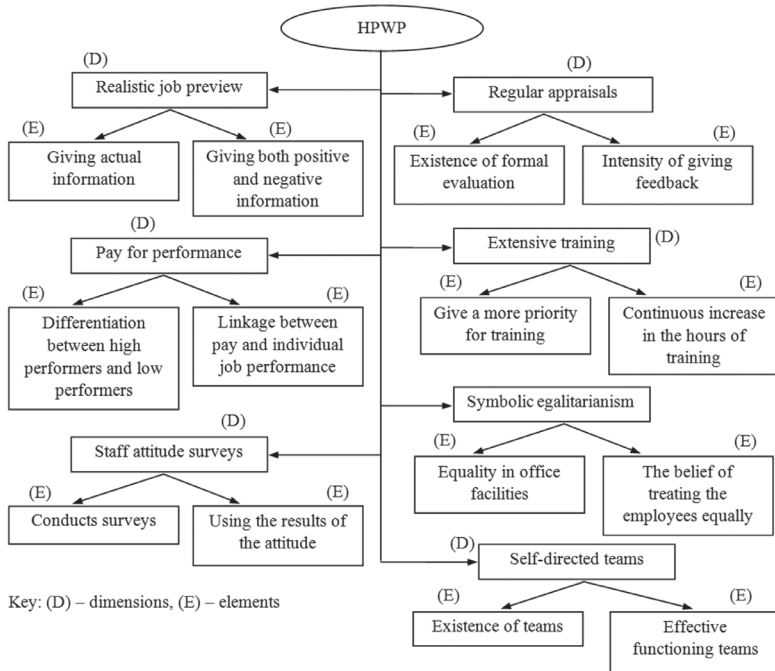
[78] J. Pfeffer, op. cit., p. 63.

[79] Ibidem, p. 64; L.G. Bolman, T.E. Deal, op. cit., p. 155.

[80] M. Saunders, Ph. Lewis, A. Thornhill, *Research methods for business students*, Harlow 2007, p. 598.

[81] M. Armstrong, *Armstrong's handbook of reward management practice*, p. 109.

Diagram 2. The dimensions and elements of the variable of HPWPs

Key: (D) – dimensions, (E) – elements

Key: (D) – dimensions, (E) – elements

essential since low reliability weakens the statistical power of the instrument used in data analysis. Cronbach's alpha reliability is 0.797. This means that these items are highly correlated and thus highly reliable for measuring the HPWPs' level of employees. The variable of HPWPs has seven dimensions: realistic job preview, pay for performance, staff attitude survey, self-directed teams, regular appraisal, extensive training and symbolic egalitarianism. There are 14 items in the variable of HPWPs. In the first step, the researchers guaranteed content validity through conceptualization and operationalization. Saunders et al. consider content validity as the extent to which a device, e.g. a questionnaire, provides "adequate coverage" of the investigative questions[82]. The same authors add that "adequate coverage" can be ensured through a careful literature review[83].

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[82] M. Saunders, Ph. Lewis, A. Thornhill, op. cit., p. 386.
[83] Ibidem, p. 60.

After ensuring content validity, the researchers measured construct validity through exploratory factor analysis (EFA). There should be seven latent variables of HPWPs based on theoretical insights. By operationalizing the construct of HPWPs, two items were distinguished in each dimension. Exploratory factor analysis shows that there is one latent variable in HPWPs. The recommended level of factor loading is 0.5 or above[84]. EFA shows that a few items are below the recommended level. Barbara G. Tabachnick & Linda S. Fidell suggest that five cases for each item are adequate in most instances[85]. Since there is no accepted level for the items of EFA, the researchers do not remove any of them. In social sciences, values at or above 0.7 are desirable according to Jum C. Nunnally & Ira H. Bernstein[86], as cited in Damon P.S. Andrew et al.[87] Cronbach's alpha is 0.812 for the construct of HPWPs. It means that these 14 items are a highly reliable gauge for measuring HPWPs. The statistical output related to internal consistency, reliability and content validity of HPWPs is depicted in table 10.

The intensity of the implementation of HPWPs

A descriptive analysis was conducted in order to identify the intensity of the implementation of HPWPs in opinion of the executives and managers of selected Sri Lankan companies. The analysis includes descriptive statistics of minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation of each variable. As mentioned before, the construct of HPWPs, consisting of seven dimensions, is measured with 14 questions. The elements of each dimension and the statements related to the elements are depicted in tables 3–9. The score of this construct was in the range of 14–70. The difference in the range of values can be computed as $(70 - 14) \div 5 = 11.2$.

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[84] D. de Vries, *Leveraging patents financially: a company perspective*, Wiesbaden 2012, p. 137.
[85] B.G. Tabachnick, L.S. Fidell, *Using multivariate statistics*, Boston 2001.
[86] J.C. Nunnally, I.H. Bernstein, *Psychometric theory*, New York 1994.
[87] D.P.S. Andrew, P.M. Pedersen, C.D. McEvoy, *Research methods and design in sport management*, Champaign 2011.

Table 10. Advantages of HPWPs measure

Variable	Items	Principal component of factor loading	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted reliability coefficient	Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient (α)
High-performance work practices (HPWPs)	HPW1	0.357	0.854	0.812
	HPW2	0.569	0.844	
	HPW3	0.542	0.846	
	HPW4	0.624	0.842	
	HPW5	0.610	0.843	
	HPW6	0.681	0.838	
	HPW7	0.477	0.850	
	HPW8	0.660	0.839	
	HPW9	0.740	0.835	
	HPW10	0.719	0.836	
	HPW11	0.733	0.834	
	HPW12	0.742	0.833	
	HPW13	0.338	0.855	
	HPW14	0.361	0.857	

Source: Survey data

Table 11. A continuum for HPWPs

Scale	Range of points	New values
Very low	14–25.2	1
Low	25.2–36.4	2
Moderate	36.4–47.6	3
High	47.6–58.8	4
Very high	58.8–70	5

According to table 12, the minimum is 2.00 and the maximum 5.00 on a 5-point Likert scale. That means that all the respondents answered within the range of "disagree" to "strongly agree". The mean value is 4.018 and the standard

deviation is 0.656. On the basis of the mean value and standard deviation, the majority of the respondents "agreed" and "strongly agreed" on the Likert scale. The mean value of HPWPs is "high" and the level of dispersion is small. The results reveal that the intensity of the implementation of HPWPs is "high" in opinion of the executives and managers of selected Sri Lankan companies.

Table 12. Descriptive statistics for the construct of HPWPs

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std deviation
HPWPs (HPWPs5)	272	2.00	5.00	4.018	0.656

Source: Survey data

Discussion

Thuduwage Lasanthika Sajeevanie found that Sri Lankan companies from her study practice Human Resource Management (HRM)[88]. Therefore, the researchers also decided to collect data from the executives and managers of selected Sri Lankan companies for their research. The results reveal that the intensity of the implementation of HPWPs is high in opinion of the respondents. Despite Sudatta Ranasinghe's view that information technology (IT) and telecommunication have adopted HPWPs[89], the results of this study show that it may be also true in reference to other sectors in Sri Lanka. The survey was conducted by the authors after Ranasinghe's research, which enabled them to observe how things had changed positively with more improvements.

Conclusions

There are different synonymous terms for "high-performance work systems", i.e. "high-performance work practices", "high-involvement work practices", "high--commitment employment practices", "alternative work practices" and "high--performance human resource management". The researchers' view is that there

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[88] T.L. Sajeevanie, *Organization-related factors influencing the practices of strategic human resource management*, paper presented at the 4th International Conference on Business Management, Colombo 2007.

[89] S. Ranasinghe, op. cit., p. 1–39.

is a common thread among all these terms and it is better to use the notion "high-performance work practices" (HPWPs). Seven dimensions, i.e. realistic job preview, pay for performance, staff attitude surveys, self-directed teams, extensive training, regular appraisals and symbolic egalitarianism, were identified. The relevant elements under each dimension were distinguished as well. Finally, the dimensions were used to develop an instrument to measure HPWPs. HR practices, grouped in an effective way, are known as a "bundle". High-performance work practices are also beneficial when used in bundles since the correct bundle of HPWPs leads to organizational effectiveness. A validated and well-adapted instrument was developed with proper conceptualization, operationalization and statistical analysis. It helped to research and understand the intensity of the implementation of HPWPs in opinion of the executives and managers of selected Sri Lankan companies. The survey results reveal that the intensity is high.

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Abstrakt

Powszechność zastosowania wysokoefektywnych praktyk pracy w wybranych firmach na terenie Sri Lanki

Wysokoefektywne praktyki pracy (ang. *high-performance work practices*, HPWPs) można zdefiniować jako pakiet praktyk odnoszących się do zasobów ludzkich, mających relatywnie większy wpływ na efektywność organizacyjną. Literatura dotycząca zachowań w organizacjach (*organizational behavior*, OB) i zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi (*human resource management*, HRM) przywiązuje duże znaczenie do pojęcia wysokoefektywnych praktyk pracy, gdyż przekładają się one na większą wydajność organizacji. W artykule zaprezentowano zestawienie wysokoefektywnych praktyk pracy, instrument do ich mierzenia, potwierdzenie jego rzetelności i trafności, jak też analizę powszechności zastosowania wysokoefektywnych praktyk pracy w wybranych firmach na terenie Sri Lanki.

Słowa kluczowe: wysokoefektywne praktyki pracy, zachowania w organizacjach, zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi, efektywność organizacyjna, kontekst Sri Lanki

Abstract

The intensity of the implementation of high-performance work practices in selected Sri Lankan companies

High-performance work practices (HPWPs) can be defined as a bundle of human resource practices that make a relatively higher impact on organizational effectiveness. The literature on organizational behavior (OB) and human resource management (HRM) attaches greater prominence to the concept of HPWPs because it enhances the organizational performance. This paper presents a list of high-performance work practices, the instrument to measure them, the evidence of its reliability and validity, and the analysis of the intensity of the implementation of high-performance work practices in selected Sri Lankan companies.

Key words: high-performance work practices, organizational behavior, human resource management, organizational effectiveness, Sri Lankan context