

What makes HR Professionals Effective? Qualitative Evidence from Telecom Sector of a Developing Country

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the determining factors which assist firms in driving human resource professionals' effectiveness in the telecom sector of Pakistan. The data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews from ten HR executives who had vast experience in the HR profession working in various telecom companies in Pakistan. The thematic analysis was implemented to analyze the data and interpret the findings. The qualitative evidence reveals that by developing human capital, providing strong organizational culture, and by a comprehensive HR system in place, firms can advance HR professionals' effectiveness, which in return helps them to attain sustainable competitive advantage. Further, this research has indicated the elements of the abovementioned determining factors, which are significant for HR professionals to augment their effectiveness. This study acts as a pioneer research study to explore the determining factors of HR professionals' effectiveness using qualitative research. The study also offers the intuitions for policymakers and HR experts of telecom companies to align their HR strategies with the strategic vision of the organization. Though numerous studies have provided valuable insights into the phenomenon of HR professionals' effectiveness, yet all the reviews were unable to offer profound understandings on factors that extend the effectiveness of HR professionals using qualitative research.

Keywords: Human Resource Professionals' Effectiveness, Human Capital Development, Organizational Culture, High-Performance Work System, Qualitative Research, Telecom Sector, Pakistan

JEL Classification: M1, M2, F2

INTRODUCTION

Today global economies are transforming their focus from agriculture to industrial to service and currently to knowledge-base. Similarly, a desirable need to transform human resource management (HRM) functions to sustain pace with the changes taking place (Ahmad, Kausar, and Azhar, 2015). Pakistan is also shifting its focus from an agricultural economy to an industrial and knowledgeable economy. As the former Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Reforms, Ahsan Iqbal Quoted on the April 18th,

2017, while addressing a three-day international conference on the topic of "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Political, Economic and Social Perceptive" at Pharmacy Auditorium University of Sindh Jamshoro (Iqbal, 2017). He stated that:

"The government is fully committed to make the country an economic zone for the region to address the issues of the country, particularly unemployment, like the developed countries have achieved their tasks by converting the agriculture economy into the industrial economy and currently Pakistan is also moving towards industrial economy to reap the fruits of development..." further he added, "the government has worked very hard by leveraging the resources, investing in human capital, infrastructure, and transformation of science and technology, and also to improve the educational standards to achieve knowledgeable economy in the country..."

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Currently, Pakistan's economy establishes considerable challenges for HR functions through forming a competitive environment, especially in a time when massive foreign direct investment (FDI) in the shape of the China-Pak Economic Corridor (CPEC) is placing their feet in the economy. In such a milieu, Pakistan needs the pool of trained human resources with state-of-the-art technologies 'to get the concrete reimbursements, to reap the greater benefits from CPEC, and to speed up the economic growth with this massive project and also for sustaining competitive advantage.' To sustain competitive advantage and to perform critical roles more effectively, HR professionals must need to be effective (Fareed et al., 2016b). Yet, not much attention has been given on the issue of HR professionals' effectiveness in the telecom sector of considering the contribution of the sector in the country's GDP (8.5%) (Ministry of Finance, 2014) and also the significance of the sector as the engine of the economy (PTA, 2012). However, owing to the rapid advancement and intense competition in the telecom sector, the necessity to have skillful and talented HR professionals is essential for organizational effectiveness and for sustaining the competitive advantage of a firm. This competitive pressure has resulted in the shifting business environment with threats of aggressive competition centered on changes in ICT, which has affected an unfavorable dynamics swing in the industrial environment (Porter, 2008). As a result, it drives to the need to transform the required skills and capabilities set of the organization's human resources.

The scholars have conducted many pieces of research on the effectiveness of HR in the western contexts, such as (Caldwell, 2008; Guest and Conway, 2011; Huselid, Jackson and Schuler, 1997; Lawler III and Mohrman, 2003; Richard and Johnson, 2001; Ulrich et al., 2011; Wright et al., 1998, 2001). Nonetheless, the research to determine the effectiveness of HR professionals in academic research is quite at an early stage in Pakistan (Ahmad, Kausar, and Azhar, 2015). Furthermore, scholars have also witnessed the reflection of weaknesses of the HR professionals' traits and competencies in Pakistan, and it is an obstruction to organizational effectiveness (Ahmad, Sharif and Kausar, 2014). Fareed, Isa, and Noor (2016a) underlined that in the telecom firms, HR professionals are incapable of developing or executing profound HR practices and strategies, which ultimately result in dissatisfaction of employees who are not able to perform effectively. HR professionals in the 21st century

should drive the value for the organization; therefore, they should have all the vital competencies to advance the level of effectiveness (Ahmad, Kausar, and Azhar, 2015). Consequently, the effectiveness of the HR professionals is under scrutiny (Sultan, Wajid, Omar, Waseem & Rustam, 2012) as cited in (Fareed, Isa, and Noor, 2016a). It is believed that HR professionals are not loaded with core competencies and are provided with the culture which empowers and develops their aptitudes. Despite the fact, human capital is essential to facilitate HR professionals to perform a task or to maintain the desired organizational culture and growth (Ulrich et al., 2009). Therefore, this study attempts to offer new avenues into the body of knowledge by determining the factors which impact HR professionals' effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the evolution of the 21st century, organizations can't afford to occupy their competitive advantage position for granted anymore. Due to such an intense competitive environment by the globalization and revolution of the information and communication technology (ICT) threatens of the higher level of competitive rivalries centered on changes in ICT, which has caused an unfavorable dynamics to shift in the industrial environment. Prior studies have underlined that HR professionals can enhance value more effectively to the organization's growth by improving their competitive advantage. HR professionals are the ones who make the physical and intellectual investment valuable and productive (Singh et al., 2012). Over the years, the value of HR has grown from being just one source of production in the industrial economy of the 20th century to being a key source of sustainable competitive advantage in the knowledge economy of the 21st century. Progressively, the role of personnel managers has expected to be more significant as HR has turned out to be the strategic partners – not only inside the HR division of the organization but also inside the inclusive decision-making process of the organization.

Human Resource Professionals' Effectiveness

HR professionals perform their tasks and duties at the head office of an organization (Dessler, 2010). While performing these tasks and responsibilities, they can be either an HR generalist or HR specialist. Both kinds of HR professionals need to complete an extensive amount of work practices in the discipline of HRM (Fareed, Isa, and Noor, 2016b). Being HR

generalists, the HR professionals are expected to cope with all aspects and fundamentals of HR-related work, and they are obliged to have a wide range of competencies (KSAOs). HR generalist is also responsible for engaging and contribute to the strategic planning process and make sure those strategies would be implemented inside the organization. Whereas, Dessler (2010) addressed that HR professionals in more influential organizations usually oversee many different departments. Every department may be supervised by a manager who must be the HR specialist in the particular HRM function, such as staffing, training and development, compensation, and performance appraisal. The organizations expect HR professionals would execute these functions efficiently and effectively.

Recently academicians and practitioners have focused on the effectiveness of HR, particularly in developing economies (Ahmad, Kausar, and Azhar, 2015; Mangi et al., 2012). Several scholars identified that HR professionals achieve their tasks in the organization and accomplish their responsibilities associated with organizational performance (Huselid, 1995; Wright, Dunford and Snell, 2001). Research studies on SHRM somehow overlooked the impact of HR professionals' capabilities with the association between HR professionals' effectiveness and organizational performance (Ahmad, Kausar, and Sharif, 2012). Organizations who are willing to enhance their performance must emphasize on developing their HR professionals. Given that, Geimer, Zolner, and Allen (2017) argued recognizing the KSAOs that successful HR professionals need is critical. It is, however, observable that HRM, by way of management discipline, is in relatively early stages in Asia paralleled to the western countries is as yet under-researched in these environments (Ahmad, Kausar, and Azhar, 2015).

Human Capital Development

The exclusive abilities, competences, and expertise of employees within the organization are termed human capital (Campbell, 1995). Ployhart and Moliterno (2011) defined human capital development as a unit-level resource that develops from the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) of individual employees. Kor and Leblebici (2005) outlined human capital as a firm's strategic HR, for instance, 'HR professionals' loaded with specific knowledge and expertise. Hitt et al. (2001) highlighted human capital elements such as education, experience, and skills of top managers affect firm outcomes, such as; organizational

performance and effectiveness. It is believed that human capital development is the utmost vital element in the intellectual capital of an organization. Human capital theory firmly postulates the belief that human resources must be equipped with updated KSAOs. The fundamental proposition of this theory is that individuals are being treated as a form of capital for productivity (Ahmed et al., 2017).

The fundamental argument is that organizations may enjoy the latest equipment and modern technology, but that equipment is inadequate without innovative, well trained, highly motivated, and competent employees. An organization can achieve a higher level of employees' performance through comprehensive training of its employees, which may vigorously improve the employees' KSAOs critical for the development of employees (Snell and Dean, 1992). Employees feel empowered to accomplish organizational goals through effective HRM practices that promote human capital. However, a promising development of human capital can be achieved by executing a high-performance work system (Wang and Chen, 2013). The prominence of developing human capital can extend high performance. It has been recognized as a useful tool for fostering human capital within an organization (Wang and Chen, 2013). In recent times, developing human capital is evolving as an essential discipline of scientific research that suggests scarcity in the body of knowledge to address this issue (Vaitkevicius et al., 2015).

Organizational Culture

Organizational Culture is defined "*in a way people think,*" which influences how they behave (Arnold et al., 2005). Eldridge and Crombie (2013) classify organizational culture as a unique pattern of values, beliefs, norms, and ways of doing things that depict how individuals and groups come together to finish their jobs. Thomya and Saenchaiyathon (2015) labeled organizational culture as visible objects, for example, rituals, symbols, behaviors, stories, or central values, which are difficult to classify. Additionally, Fareed, Isa, and Noor (2016b) stated that organizational culture is a custom in which a group of individuals thinks, which precisely influences how they behave within the organization.

Numerous researches have reviewed organizational culture as a competitive advantage (Barney, 1986; Fareed, Isa, and Noor, 2016a; Galperin and Lituchy, 2014; Sadri and Lees, 2001; Uddin, Luva and Hossain, 2012). Wagner III (1995)

affirmed that organizational culture strongly influences employees' behavior and attitudes. In comparison, Denison and Mishra (1995) indicated that specific traits of organizational culture might be useful predictors of performance and effectiveness. Once employees recognize with organizational culture, the work environment is likely to be more pleasing, which increases the morale of the employees, the teamwork, information sharing, and openness to new ideas (Goffee and Jones, 1996).

Although organizational culture offers an employee a shared structure of position for variations in an organization, thus it is an essential factor for successfully executing any variations in the system, structure, or process to enable employee creativeness (Škerlavaj, Song and Lee, 2010). Sadri and Lees (2001) underlined organizational culture intensely plays an influential role within organizations to affect employees and organizational operations throughout a firm. Besides, organizations that can form and nurture a robust organizational culture are more profiled. The common theme is that to achieve and sustain high levels of performance, and an organization needs a constructive work setting that advances and leverage employees' KSAs to generate value (Appelbaum, Gittell, and Leena, 2011). Highly effective organizations own a culture that inspires employee involvement, which ultimately leads to employees' productivity. However, employees show a willingness to become involved in such a culture where goal-setting, decision-making, or problem resolution have always been encouraged, which successively leads to more significant employees' performance (Hellriegel, Slocum Jr, and Woodman, 1998). Consequently, firms need to identify that their HR developing practices are essentially harmonized with the organizational culture.

High-Performance Work System

Wang and Chen (2013) defined a high-performance work system (HPWS) as it refers to "*a set of separate but interrelated HR practices that are designed to attract, retain, and motivate employees.*" Shih, Chiang, and Hsu (2006) used the term HPWS for a set of HRM practices that can enhance firm performance, including financial and non-financial performance. Huselid (1995) denoted HPWS as a system which comprises rigid staffing protocols, managing performance, incentive management systems, and training and development activities that are intended to obtain, polish, and highlight employee skills and behaviors

essential to implement the firm's competitive strategy. Organizations that implement HPWS often recognize as per "high-performance culture organizations." These organizations practice distinctive managerial method, which ensures high performance through individuals (Tomer, 2001).

Even though positive evidence of the effectiveness of HPWS, research studies up till now point out that the implementation of these types of practices is slightly limited and infrequent (Godard, 2004; Posthuma et al., 2013; Roche, 1999). Many scholars (Bartram et al., 2007; Huselid, 1995; Purcell et al., 2008; Stanton et al., 2010; Zacharatos, Barling, and Iverson, 2005) have studied HPWS to enhance employees' and organizational effectiveness. Further, Purcell et al. (2008) argued that HR has an influence on performance by leading or contributing to the expansion through practical implementation of HPWS, which explicitly focuses on job and work design, flexible working environment, resourcing, employees' development, rewards and by giving employees the freedom of expression. Therefore, it is crucial to customize HPWS as a viable instrument inside and beyond the industries (Batt, 2002).

Resource Based-View as Theoretical Foundation

This study uses resource based-view (RBV) of the firm as an underpinning theory by way of HR professionals as a source of competitive advantage for the firm. Referring to RBV, organizations that possess superior resources that are rare, unique and there should not be an adequate replacement for these resources, such organizations might perceive and execute distinctive strategies that competitors could not imitate easily (Barney, 1991). The hypothetical argument is that employees' unique skills are likely to be the source of competitive edge, which is difficult to replicate by others, at least in the short term. As rivals permit to replicate the superiority of physical and financial resources, experts and scholars have focused on the distinctiveness of HR as an aspect that can bring a firm's sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Barney et al., 2001). In conformity with the RBV of the firm, it is required for organizations to classify, evaluate, and improve key HR professionals' competencies permitted to achieve an adequate level of competitive advantage. It is HR professionals' primary obligation to enable the organization's corporate vision, mission, and objectives through individuals since they are the ones who contribute to the organizational goals (Priem and Butler, 2001). RBV

also recommends the HR system can contribute to sustainable competitive advantage through facilitating the development of HR professionals' capabilities that are firm-specific and also via establishing organizational Culture (Barney, 1992; Wright and McMahan, 1992).

HR is also an infrequent resource because it is challenging to find employees with similar skill-set, mind-set, and cultural-set in the organizations. Inyang (2010) claimed that the essential notion of RBV of the firm is resource heterogeneity. It identifies that the resources that organizations have are unlikely to be identical, and they must encounter four requirements. They must be valued, exceptional, unique, and non-compatible. Moreover, (Snell, Youndt, and Wright, 1996) believed that HR comes across these four requirements, which eventually can create a vital source of competitive advantage for the firm. Ever since Barney (1991) has drawn the elementary theoretical model and measurement for the sources of sustainable competitive advantage, the RBV theory has become the most frequent philosophy in the discipline of SHRM, both in the expansion of theory and the foundation for empirical research (McMahan, Virick and Wright, 1999). Consequently, this study intended to use RBV as a foundation to explore those determinants, which might lead to a sustainable competitive advantage in the shape of HR professionals' effectiveness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the research objective of the study, a qualitative study through semi-structured interviews was carried out. Semi-structured interviews included in-depth but open-ended questions (Interview Protocol), which followed the guidelines given by Jacob and Furgerson (2012). The researchers have developed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) through an extensive literature review. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) elaborated the interview protocol as a procedural guide for directing a researcher through the interview process. A group of practitioners and academicians has substantiated the interview protocol in Malaysia and Pakistan to reflect expert interpretations. Moreover, it was refined based on the external validity checks by these experts who are specialized in the content area. These experts endorsed that the interview protocol predominantly is relevant and appropriate to achieve the focal research objective.

In the beginning, emails were sent to each human resource department of Pakistan's telecom

firms for asking their permission to conduct an interview. In the email, the research objective and methodology were briefly explained. Once the human resource department of the telecom firms responded, and HR professionals indicated their willingness to participate in the study, they were further contacted to fix the time and place. Primarily, the researcher has established contacts with the initial tier of HR professionals from telecom firms. Based on the responding behavior and pattern of participants, the study has used a convenient sampling technique. This is because HR professionals were too resilient and busy in performing day-to-day responsibilities; therefore, those HR professionals who have shown willingness to participate and who were convenient to reach were approached to be a part of the study. However, it should be noted that all the HR professionals who were involved in the field study were HR executives of telecom firms who have enormous exposure and experience in the area of HR within and outside the country.

Kadir and Noor (2015) stated that qualitative field studies could help society understand the complexities that business organizations face today. Further, semi-structured interviews are usually constructed on a flexible procedure that offers a loose arrangement of open-ended questions to examine the experiences and viewpoints of the participants (Pope, Van Royen and Baker, 2002). The population of the study was not vibrant, and it was challenging to find the appropriate HR professionals. Hence, the study has used convenient sampling due to its subjective nature and because it is advantageous when the researcher has limited resources, time, and workforce (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). Zikmund et al. (2013) also suggested that a convenient sampling technique can obtain extensive information quickly and effectively.

Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) suggested that in qualitative research, mostly sample size relies on the idea of 'saturation.' They endorsed that for most research initiatives in which the purpose is to understand shared perceptions and experiences among a homogeneous group, six to twelve interviews are sufficient. Consequently, interviews were conducted with ten HR managers/executives of the five telecom firms, which are; Mobilink, Telenor, Ufone, Zong, and Warid. Interviews were led at the offices of the HR professionals as per their comfort. Each interview took about 40 to 50 minutes, and it was recorded by a Micro-audio recorder (MP3) with the permission of the participants. The most

challenging thing in qualitative research is data analysis and its formulation (Folkestad, 2008). Numerous tools and techniques were available; nonetheless, the selection of tool(s) or technique(s) must be based on the objectives of the study. Since it is stated previously, each interview was recorded through (MP3) recorder. Subsequently, the data was apprehended by interpreting the interview tapes into the interview transcripts. Therefore, content analysis has been recognized as an appropriate technique for analyzing the interview transcripts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As stated earlier, data has been collected from HR executives of five telecom firms. These firms are the leading telecom firms in Pakistan as per their market share and subscribers. They hold 99% of the market share in the sector as per PTA Annual Report (2012). Researchers have interviewed two HR managers/executives, each from all five telecom firms. The aim behind was to precisely point out the experiences related to the performance of HR managers themselves. It is supported by Ahmad, Sharif, and Kausar (2014), who encouraged future researchers to study HR managers in assessing HR professionals' effectiveness. The intention behind taking two HR managers from each telecom firm was to retain the consistency of the qualitative data by pointing out the experiences related to the effectiveness of HR managers. Letter A, B, and C are indicated with each participant (HR executive/manager) in the document to signify first, second or third

participant from each telecom firm.

A Brief Overview of Human Resource Professionals

Table 1 indicates that the total number of HR professionals who have been involved in the qualitative field study are ten participants. However, out of ten participants, seven participants are HR executives, and one each participant is the HR director, HR manager, and manager of organization development (OD). Each participant has sufficient experience in the field of HR within their current company, which assisted the researcher in getting profound information and in gaining insight into their experiences at the workplace. The table shows working experience for each HR professional ranges between 5 to 11 years, whereas 7 of the HR professionals had six or more years of working experience and three HR professionals had five years of working experience in their current position. It must be noted that these HR professionals also had previous working experience in the HR department before their current company has recruited them. Their companies have endorsed them to key HR positions after specific years of working experience and training. All of the HR professionals are having a master's in HR as their highest qualification. HR professionals' working experience and their qualifications symbolize them appropriate for the interviews to gain insight into their experiences and to recognize the progressions. Consequently, these HR professionals were reliable for qualitative field research.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Information

Participants	Company	Current Position	Working Experience	Highest Qualification
1	C1A	HR Executive	11 Years	MBA (HR)
2	C2A	HR Operations Executive	6 Years	MBA (HR)
3	C3A	HR Executive	6 Years	MBA (HR)
4	C3B	HR Executive	7 Years	MBA (HR)
5	C4A	HR Executive	5 Years	MBA (HR)
6	C5A	HR Executive	8 Years	MBA (HR)
7	C1B	HR Director	6 and half Years	MBA (HR)
8	C4B	HR Manager	5 Years	MBA (HR)
9	C4C	Manager (Organizational Development)	5 Years	MSC (HR)
10	C5B	HR Executive	6 Years	MBA (HR)

Note: C1 = Telenor, C2 = Warid, C3 = Mobilink, C4 = Ufone, C5 = Zong

A = First, B = Second, C = Third

Human Resource Professionals' Effectiveness and Human Capital Development

HR professionals have underlined various key ideas in developing human capital besides the advancements of KSAOs. For instance, they believe

developing human capital is a comprehensive process of developing, retaining, and enabling key talent and their potential to achieve targets. It is gratifying employees' needs in terms of functional, behavioral, and leadership; it also includes career progression, succession planning, on the job training, and e-learning. It is verified by the responses of HR professionals, for example:

"Human capital development is a process of an employee's life cycle, which starts from acquiring, developing, and retaining the key talent. So, human capital development starts with identifying the functional and competency requirements of a job. Moreover, it assesses and develops the potential of an employee." (HR Manager, Ufone-B)

"I think human capital development is about enabling your employees, looking at their performance gaps and how they are performing in their current role and how they need to be developed in terms of their career plan." (HR Executive, Mobilink-B)

"Human capital development is not only the behavioral part. It is functional needs along with behavioral and leadership needs. These are three dimensions that we have to consider while developing any individual." (HR Executive, Telenor-A)

"Human capital development is employees' on the job training, succession planning, e-learning, educate them and make them able to do their job." (HR Executive, Zong-A)

"I believe human capital development is providing employees with development opportunities in terms of career progression and in terms of train those in the right skills set. In whatever they lack, it is offering the route to improve upon that through consoling them, through mentoring them." (HR Executive, Ufone-A)

In addition to that, HR professionals also certify that developing KSAOs are extremely important to comprehend their effectiveness. If companies are unable to develop competencies' KSAOs' of their people and if these individuals stay in the organization, ultimately, it impacts negatively on the organizational effectiveness. Nevertheless, organizations must develop their human capital through formal or informal training programs. Precisely, in this highly competitive environment, companies strive for a sustainable competitive advantage, which is not likely without developing their human capital. Even though employees also seek developmental opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills-set, especially in this dynamic environment where every day, there is something new to learn and every day is a new challenge. Indeed, organizations are required to develop their

human capital with updated knowledge and skills to encounter new challenges and to achieve their tasks effectively. HR professionals' responses also affirm that developing human capital has a decisive positive impact on their effectiveness. Such as:

"Absolutely, KSAOs enhance the effectiveness. Because whenever we can grasp the new knowledge and skills, we can apply these things into the modern one. It's a dynamic world; every day is a new thing, so it's better that any HR professional he/she should be able to deal with the new things which will help." (HR Executive, Telenor-A)

"As I mentioned earlier, through training, we develop the skills, knowledge, and abilities of employees, making them able to do their job effectively. It is vital for the organization as if we grow our employees, then our organization grows as well. It is challenging to achieve our targets and encounter new challenges without having updated knowledge and skill." (HR Operations Executive, Warid-A)

"If I will be fully loaded with advanced knowledge and skills, it will help me to face radical challenges and accomplish my tasks effectively. I believe Mobilink must develop human resources to sustain competitive advantage since Mobilink is the market leader in Pakistan." (HR Executive, Mobilink-A)

Technology is changing every day. The telco is a very dynamic industry. Now we have a license of 3G and 4G, so if we will not educate our employees or give them training on these technologies, then I think our competitors will have a competitive advantage over us, and we will be less effective." (HR Executive, Zong-A)

Based on the above findings, it is incredibly crucial for organizations to focus on developing KSAOs of their HR professionals. It is because technological changes require HR professionals to tackle advanced talents to survive in a competitive environment. Nonetheless, organizations should develop various training sessions for HR professionals to enhance competencies, which will ultimately result in higher HR professionals' effectiveness. These findings support the results of earlier studies which highlighted that developing human capital can advance individuals' and organizational effectiveness (Albanese, 1989; Hsu et al., 2007; Pfeffer, 1994; Selvarajan T et al., 2007; Ulrich et al., 2009; Wang and Chen, 2013). Equally important, the findings also provide strong support for the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm, which specifies that distinctive capabilities (KSAOs) of HR can acquire employees' effectiveness, which ultimately advances the

sustainable competitive advantage of the firm (Barney, 1992; Wright and McMahan, 1992).

Human Resource Professionals' Effectiveness and Organizational Culture

HR professionals state that strong organizational culture constructively can lead to employees' effectiveness as it enables employees to perform the best they can. Constructive organizational culture similarly empowers employees and give them decision making autonomy in the light of cultural values which inspire employees to perform their tasks effectively. Such cultural values are the building blocks of employees' daily interactions between themselves and all other stakeholders. Moreover, constructive organizational culture sets an organization apart from its competition and sustains a competitive advantage.

HR professionals believe that they are all driven by organizational ethics and values, the first important thing which they have to practice and preach. In fact, organizational culture, organizational beliefs, values, and ethics, are the bible for any organization, thus, employees and essentially HR professionals have to live by it and they have to set the example in these values and descriptive behaviors. Since it is HR professionals who have more responsibility to provide the right kind of tools, the right information, the right knowledge and the right behaviors to the employees. In addition to that, HR professionals are accountable to make organizational culture as a win-win culture for all stakeholders, internal 'employees, and management' or external stakeholders' customers,' since they are the custodians of the organizational culture. It is not only what employees are striving to achieve, culture is also how they are determined to accomplish. Therefore, HR professionals can create a winning culture by focusing on both measures 'what and how'. Eventually, HR professionals play a pivotal role in implementing cultural interventions, so having a healthy organizational culture aligned with organizational philosophies makes it easy for HR professionals to perform effectively. For instance, various HR professionals verify that:

Culture is essential for any organization as it teaches employees how to behave with each other and within the organization. In Warid telecom, we have six values that shape our organizational culture. These values are; integrity, ownership, unity, care, openness, and clarity. Our values shape our culture, and our culture is our strength. Here people treat each other with respect, they trust

each other by fulfilling their commitments, help and support their colleagues, and communicate openly, which impacts every employee's effectiveness." (HR Operations Executive, Warid-A)

"We have a robust Culture because Telenor is built around people. So culture is driving very strongly from the Telenor group. And we have a talent and culture team as well, and we feel that it is our culture that sets us apart from our competition. So anything we do today, we are accounted for our culture. In fact, everything that we do shapes our effectiveness. Because as HR where supposed to walk and talk, we are the custodian of the culture, so if we don't do it, then we can't ask people to do it as well." (HR Director, Telenor-B)

"I believe that our culture is strong because of its core values which are; leadership with passion, teamwork and innovation, entrepreneurship, freedom with responsibility, commitment with fun, and humility in relationships. Our core values are the pillars upon which our organizational culture and business practices are based. We call this the Ufone way, and it is all about translating our basic cultural ingredients into our lifestyle." (Manager OD, Ufone-C)

"Yes, we have firm culture because our values are teamwork, passion, openness, integrity & accountability, and efficient execution, which enable employees to behave professionally within the company. Our values teach our employees to show descriptive behaviors that bring effectiveness, and the same goes to my effectiveness as well." (HR Executive, Zong-A)

"Our culture is so strong, and that is our strength. And the main pillars for us are our values and our people. Because everyday behavior which we are exhibiting that is the culture. We do not have cubicles; we do have open-door policies. I can simply go and discuss with the CEO or VP, and this is the beauty of this culture, which brings a lot of innovation and creativity." (HR Executive, Telenor-A)

Arguably, organizations are required to create a high-performance culture, which enables employees to augment higher effectiveness. Such a culture helps organizations to realize employees' commitment, involvement, and participation. Once employees recognize with the organizational culture, the work environment prospective to be more gratifying, which enhances the morale of the employees, teamwork and information sharing, also openness to new ideas (Goffee and Jones, 1996). It leads to increased interaction and continuous learning among employees, and

employees tend to be more effective in accomplishing their tasks and responsibilities (Fareed, Isa, and Noor, 2016b). Organizations need to strengthen their culture with constructive ethics, norms, and values if they want to have a high-performance culture. Cultural values also help nurture specific standards in a high-performance culture where employees can exceed the performance expectations set by higher management. Findings have revealed that effective organizations can create a healthy organizational culture where employees' creativity, innovation, engagement, and commitment are encouraged to boost employees' effectiveness. Since the telecom industry is a vivacious and ICT extensive industry, it demands a robust and influential organizational culture that inspires employees' development for sustaining competitive advantage (Fareed et al., 2016a). It is inconsistent with Fareed, Isa, and Noor (2016b), who stated that organizations should develop a strong organizational culture where growth and empowerment of employees are encouraged to achieve common goals and to attain competitive advantage. Further, if management wishes to achieve and sustain high performance, it needs a constructive workplace environment that is probable owing to the strong organizational culture which advances and leverage employees' competencies to create value (Appelbaum, Gittel, and Leena, 2011). An organization that can maintain a positive culture is likely to enjoy higher employee effectiveness (Sadri and Lees, 2001).

Human Resource Professionals' Effectiveness and High-Performance Work System

The responses of HR professionals reveal that although their organizations are practicing various systems with different names, for instance, HR information system, HR management system, 360° performance system, performance evaluation/appraisal system, and talent review system. However, components of all of these HR systems are associated with the elements of a high-performance work system.

HR professionals identify various components of a high-performance work system in the current study. These components enable HR professionals to attain organizational goals and objectives, enhancing HR professionals' effectiveness. For example, HR professionals certify that high performance work system embraces 'SMART goals, teamwork, collaborations, and identified behaviors, rewards and recognition, development opportunities and promotions, empowerment,

engagement, transparency and fairness. It also incorporates greater opportunity in strategic decision making, training & development, performance appraisals and technology, leadership support and commitment, effective talent management, useful feedback, open communication, and taking responsibility in making decisions are the crucial components which focus on the key business processes rather than individual HR practices. High performance work system is the combination of all of these components, which help organizations to create a high-performance culture, which is the fundamental of HR policies and practices. Besides, HR professionals also endorse that high performance work system supports them to enhance their effectiveness. For instance;

"We have programs developed in place, which promote and support high-performance culture. I believe that there is an element of competitiveness. And we also have the mechanism to identify the high performers. We identify high performers, we offer them development opportunities, and we support them." (HR Executive, Ufone-A)

"Yes, it is. At the end of the year, there are very few high performers, so everyone tries to compete with each other and tries to perform high. We are promoting high-performance culture within our company as we started sessions, and we just did psychometric exercises with our high-performance employees to help them in developing their future goals and career plans. Those high performers are the mentors of other employees who are unable to perform high in a way low performers tend to learn from high performers which enable effectiveness." (HR Executive, Zong-A).

"Yes, absolutely high performance work system enhances effectiveness. Since we do have a high-performance culture and talent differentiation culture which is part of HR policies and practices. I know if I will perform better, then I will be rewarded higher accordingly. The need to perform higher would be much greater instead that if I would know I would get the same benefits as the one who performs low because talent differentiation needs to be there." (HR Director, Telenor-B)

"I think a high-performance work system is a system that creates a competitive environment in terms of setting the right kind of goals and objectives for the employees. We are practicing this system because our performance appraisal system is considered to be very fair and transparent. It is the most important part of

developing a high-performance culture. So you have transparency and fair kind of performance appraisal system where employees feel that they have been treated equitably." (HR Executive, Mobilink-B)

It is believed that organizations have to give equal importance to every component of high performance work system, or else it might not work effectively. Organizations also need to have specific standards in a high-performance culture where employees can exceed performance expectations. As writing SMART goals sets the baseline for effective performance. Setting the goals right along with mapping the expectations to achieve them helps the employees and line managers to stay on the same page. Previous literature confirms the effect of high performance work system on HR professionals' effectiveness (Purcell et al., 2008; Ryu and Kim, 2013). Additionally, RBV theory also endorses the HR system can assist firms in triumphing sustainable competitive advantage by enabling employees to develop their competencies and embedding organizational Culture (Barney, 1992; Wright and McMahan, 1992).

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Theoretical implications

The theoretical arguments and findings of the present study contribute to HR literature in several ways. First, we offer a theoretical and insightful explanation of the positive association between human capital development, organizational culture, and high performance work system with HR professionals' effectiveness. The existing literature on HR effectiveness has focused only on the competency-based model to enhance HR professionals' effectiveness, paying insufficient attention to the factors undertaken in the current study, despite having a robust association amongst them. Drawing from RBV theory (Barney, 1991), we propose that attention should also be given to strategic or resource-based factors (human capital development, organizational culture, and high performance work system) to sustain the competitive advantage. Theory notes that the distinctiveness of an employee's skills and capabilities is a critical requirement for gaining a competitive advantage. The RBV perspective inspires a shift in prominence towards the essential characteristics of employees' skills and their relative contribution to value creation (Wright, Dunford, and Snell, 2001; Barney et al., 2001).

Second, our study makes experimental contributions to the literature. To the best knowledge of the researchers, prior studies on the subject matter have focused merely on quantitative field studies. In contrast, the current study contributes to the concept of HR professionals' effectiveness by adopting a qualitative research approach through determining the originating factors which add to the phenomenon. Additionally, the current study offers the additional components and elements of determining factors which previous studies have not yet established. The study also adds to the literature by offering experimental evidence of the strong association between human capital development, organizational culture, and high performance work system with HR professionals' effectiveness in the context of a developing country (Pakistan). It is well documented that the emerging economies of Asia, for instance, Pakistan has experienced little academic research in the area of HR professionals' effectiveness (Ahmad, Kausar, and Azhar, 2015; Han et al., 2006). At the same time, the importance of the country in the global business community has grown enormously, particularly once heavily foreign direct investment by China inwards in the country in the shape of the China-Pak Economic Corridor (CPEC). By exploring the contributing factors to advance HR professionals' effectiveness, this study offers new insight into strategic HRM in the emerging Asian economy.

Practical Implications

This research paper offers implications for HR practitioners and organizations to assume a resilient and active role in revealing issues embedded in HR professionals' effectiveness, which are often underemphasized in the organization. The study is also essential for HR specialists and decision-makers as it offers suggestions and guidelines for a managerial understanding of the importance of HR professionals' effectiveness to sustain competitive advantage. A primary message of our findings for HR practitioners is that competent HR has a high potential to benefit organizations. Another significant practical implication of our findings is that organizations should ensure that HR professionals are loaded with advanced knowledge, skills, and abilities and provided with organizational support in the shape of strong organizational culture and HR systems to develop HR strategies which will help organizations to enhance employees' and organizational

effectiveness. Further, HR professionals not only need to be certain that they have all the necessary competencies for using HR systems, but they must also be able to measure the effectiveness of these systems. The usefulness of these HR systems can also reduce extra responsibilities and managerial tasks of HR professionals to allow them to perform more strategic roles in the organizations.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

First of all, the results of the study are only limited to telecom firms. They might not apply to other industrial sectors of Pakistan even though the study offers novel insights into the phenomenon of HR professionals' effectiveness. Future researchers can explore other industrial sectors along with obtaining data from the diverse level of employees to determine the factors which can contribute to HR professionals' effectiveness. Forthcoming research studies should also empirically examine the theoretical research model of this study by quantitative field research through testing hypotheses. Upcoming studies might explore other contextual factors that can contribute to HR professionals' effectiveness. Additionally, imminent researchers can extend the sample size to other settings and backgrounds to make the findings more appropriate and comprehensive.

CONCLUSION

The present study intended to determine the factors that enhance HR professionals' effectiveness in the telecom sector of Pakistan. Due to speedy growth in Pakistan's telecom sector and the competitive environment, it demands competent and effective HR professionals to preserve the sustainable competitive advantage. Findings of the qualitative field study revealed that human capital development, organizational culture, and high performance work system are substantial drivers to advance HR professionals' effectiveness in the telecom sector of Pakistan. HR professionals must be loaded with advanced KSAOs to dispatch their duties and responsibilities effectively. Further, organizations must provide HR professionals with a strong organizational culture where empowerment, open communication, engagement, commitment, and support are promoted to accomplish organizational goals. Besides, organizations should use high performance work system for delivering distinctive and consistent HR practices to enhance HR professionals' effectiveness. Such visibility of HR

practices is crucial for organizations to achieve a higher level of HR professionals' effectiveness and to sustain the competitive advantage.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Demographic and Work Information

- How long have you been working with the current company?
- How long have you been in this field/ in the current position?
- May I know your highest qualification as regard to your current position?
- Could you please explain your responsibilities and duties that you need to perform as (your position)?

2. Human Capital Development

- Do you understand what human capital development is?
- Why is human capital development crucial to the organization?

- To what extent would you agree with developing your knowledge, skills, and abilities can enhance your effectiveness?
- How often does your organization conduct training programs to enhance your knowledge, skills, and abilities in performing your job effectively?

3. Organizational Culture

- Do you believe that your organization has a strong or weak culture?
- Does your organizational culture influence in shaping the HR professionals' effectiveness?
- What are the elements of organizational culture which shape HR professionals' effectiveness?
- How these elements facilitate you to enhance your effectiveness?

4. High Performance Work Systems

- Does your organization practices high performance work system?
- What are the essential components in high performance work system?
- Do you think high performance work system support you and your co-workers to enhance the effectiveness? If yes, then please explain which components?