
The role of benevolent human resource attributions in reducing occupational stress: empirical findings from the emerging market

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Abstract: Stress levels in the organisations have been increasing which has been damaging employee's wellbeing and causing serious illnesses. Mutual gains model of human resource management endorses employee's well-being in the organisational sphere. The study aimed to deploy mutual gains models for determining either stress levels of the employees can be reduced through the intervention of HRM attributions. Furthermore, it was estimated how gratitude interventions can improve mental wellbeing of employees and help in reducing occupational stress. Positivist research doctrine was deployed, and primary data was collected from the respondents using non-probability sampling method. Structural equation modelling technique was executed for the testing of causal relationships among constructs. Empirical outcomes affirmed strongly knitted theoretical connotations among the constructs. This study contributes to human resource management literature by proposing a framework which can improve mental wellbeing, and can reduce employees stress levels in the organisations.

Keywords: employee performance; employee stress; mental well-being; MWB; HRM attributions; gratitude.

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1 Introduction

Prior studies have indicated that stress leads to deteriorate employee performance and significantly effects mental wellbeing (MWB) (Hameed and Khwaja, 2022; Kowalski and Loretto, 2017). Consequently, employees with high stress levels have mental and physical wellbeing issues. Stress reduces employee's productivity, increases demotivation and these factors lead to organisational inefficiency (Khwaja and Ahmad, 2013). As stress levels have been increasing, it has become eminent to configure how stress levels at the workplace can be reduced. The role of human resource management (HRM) primarily remains to play a bridging role between employees and the organisation (Zaman et al., 2021). Although there has been a debate in terms of human resources department aligning with senior management and not taking care of employees, but still the issue has been considered subjective at times (Malik et al., 2022). Meanwhile, it remains essential that the HRM would be ensuring that the stress level at the workplace gets reduced or elimination. Furthermore, there are arguments regarding management of stress levels too as a moderate amount of stress push certain chunk of employees in the completion of tasks. In this regard, mutual gains model of HRM is regarded as one of the best frameworks to reduce stress, ensure operational wellbeing and enhance organisational performance (Guest, 2017). Ultimately, this leads to win-win situation for both the employees and organisations.

Mutual gains model is considered to be of two facets; the first facet argues that HRM practices would lead to improve employees' wellbeing and organisational performance (Peccei et al., 2013). The second facet argues that HRM practices will not only improve employee's wellbeing and organisational performance, but employees' wellbeing would eventually lead to strong organisational performance (Khan and Malik, 2017). The second facet is regarded as strong mutual gains model. Prior research has primarily focused on enhancing employee's performance only (Beer et al., 2015; Hameed and Khwaja, 2022), and there has not been focus in terms of improving both organisational and employees' performance simultaneously. The effect of HRM practices on employees' stress has also produced mixed results, through which thorough deductions cannot be made (Khwaja and Ahmad, 2013). According to Ogbonnaya and Messersmith (2018), organisational performances tend to improve at the cost of increasing employees stress levels. These arguments have empirical backgrounds as sales-centric organisational normally tend to ensure high optimal outputs by increasing employees' stress.

In this regard, researchers like Peccei and Van De Voorde (2019) have pointed out that it remains pertinent to determine that how HRM practices can simultaneously increase employees' wellbeing and elevate organisational performance too. Due to the widespread of COVID-19, organisations have now switched to work from home (WFH) which is deemed to improve work life balance. Even in the emerging economies, WFH has been implemented (Dingel and Neiman, 2020). This has certainly reduced

commuting hours of the employees, which has led to low levels of stress (Irawanto et al., 2021). Researchers like Hameed and Khwaja (2022) and Guest (2017) have emphasised that accommodating the interests of both employees and employers at the same time can be effective, as the organisations are unlikely to promote well-being on ethical grounds alone. Considering the aforementioned discussion, the study deploys mutual gains framework to ensure that the interests of employees and employers get accommodated at the same time.

Perceived stress (PS) has been coined by considering the theoretical foundations laid by Cohen et al. (1983). In the respective study, the construct of perceived stress (PES) has been deployed, which is based on the transactional or appraisal theory of stress, presented by Lazarus (1966). According to Cohen (2014), stress becomes extremely toxic when employees feel that they are not emotionally and physically sound to manage stressful events, and people perceive certain events as stressful or threatening. Researchers like Gbadamosi and Ross (2012) have already deployed PS in their previous study to determine employees' wellbeing.

The second facet of mutual gains models emphasises that HRM practices enhanced employees' performance. For this purpose, the study uses the construct of engagement for measuring performance in the organisational setting. Researchers like Saks (2022) and Albrecht et al. (2015) have used engagement as a proximal employee performance measuring construct. Employees' engagement is a vital component in terms of employees' performance as engagement level indicates that how much employees are aligned to work optimally at the workplace. Usually in the multinational corporations, employees' engagement surveys are conducted after every two years to determine how much employees are engaged to work for the organisation. Employees' resentment and concerns get also noticed in this regard. For ensuring smooth transition, data was collected from those organisations where employee engagement surveys are conducted.

Researchers like Boon et al. (2019) and Boxall et al. (2016) have argued that theories need to be developed which should discuss how HRM practices can positively influence employees' performance, wellbeing and organisational performance. Based on the discussion above, the study emphasises on configuring the effects of HRM attributions on employees' engagement and stress. In this context, gratitude has been accounted for as a mediator among HRM attributions and employees' engagement, and stress.

2 Review of literature

2.1 HRM attributions

Predominately, the research on human resources is focused on the selection of best practices and their effects on diverse outcomes. Researchers like Malik et al. (2022) and Hameed and Khwaja (2022) have argued that the respective approach of measuring certain HRM practices on performance is not robust as it is completely content-based approach. Therefore, it is eminent to deploy psychological protocols and follow process-based approach as it has more rigor and precision. According to Nishii et al. (2008), the subjective interpretation of HRM practices is a matter of concern, as employees-level comprehension is different than the organisational-level. Henceforth, it is projected that perceptions effects on tangible outcomes like performance and wellbeing would be interesting to investigate.

Considering that there has been a paramount literature and arguments on human resource practices, the study was confined to explore human resource attributions. In this regard, the literary foundations crafted by Nishii et al. (2008) were taken into consideration. Furthermore, it was ensured that the context is further explored using attributions theory. According to Kelley (1967), attribution theory states that there are initiations and interpreters of behaviours. Based on the theoretical foundations laid by Kelley (1967), researchers like Nishii et al. (2008) have comprehended that at the firm level, organisations exhibit behaviours through HRM practices, and the interpretations are being done by the employees. The comprehension and interpretation of the HRM practices is critical and eminent as it can be at times beneficial for the organisations, and at times it can affect organisational performance (Khan and Malik, 2017). Meanwhile, HRM attributions are those interpretations which employees conduct when a behaviour (through HRM practices) is carried out by the organisation (Nishii et al., 2008). For organisations sustainability, it is vital that the management exhibits behaviours with utmost consideration as any deplorable measure through HRM practices can directly affect employees' attitudes and behaviours (Akhtar and Malik, 2016).

2.2 Benevolent HRM attributions and employees stress management

Wellbeing human resource attributions (WHRM) and performance human resource attributions (PHRM) are taken as the two core HRM attributions in this study. In general, they are regarded as benevolent HRM attributions (Nishii et al., 2008). Employees can have manipulative intent towards their firm while interpreting about a certain HRM practice incorporated by the management. The intent can be benevolent in nature too. According to Csikszentmihalyi (2020), benevolence can be argued as an act of goodwill and kindness, and it can be reflected in different ways. Benevolent HRM attributions are perceived positively by the employees with an orientation that employee's wellbeing will be improved through newly designed HRM practices (Malik and Khan, 2020). At the same time, manipulative attributions underscore that organisation wants to put more burden on the employees by introducing new HRM practices.

PHRM is perceived by employees as those HRM activities which enhances job performance at the workplace (Alfes et al., 2021; Shantz et al., 2016). According to Hameed and Khwaja (2022), organisations goal must remain to initiate such HRM practices through which overall performance (in general) and employee job performance (in specific) must be boosted. These kinds of initiatives eventually lead to higher job commitment levels, organisational citizenship behaviours, job satisfaction, and low employee turnover (Khwaja and Ahmad, 2013). Researchers like Malik et al. (2022) indicate that employees feel as if they are valuable resources if there are certain initiatives taken by the organisation which are precisely knitted to optimise performance. In summation, a PHRM initiative clearly gives an indication to the employees that there is organisational support in terms of performing their tasks. In return, the employees also tend to stretch an extra mile for the completion of tasks.

There are two types of coping mechanisms in the stress theory, emotion focused coping and problem focused coping. Biggs et al. (2017) suggests that regulation of negative emotions arising from stress is managed in emotion focused coping, meanwhile, strategies deployed to deal with stressors are managed in problem focused coping. According to Van De Voorde and Beijer (2015) WHRM tends to improve job satisfaction and reduce work stress. Meanwhile, Shantz et al. (2016) found PHRM to be crucial in

terms of reducing emotional exhaustion at workplace. The emergence of stress at workplace is a natural phenomenon and it tends to take place when the employees feel that organisational justice is absent at the workplace (Khwaja, 2014). The management of stress is eminent in every regard as it may lead to serious repercussions at the workplace. Overall work performance gets substantially effected when there is a considerable amount of stress being put on the employees (Mahmood et al., 2019). However, there are cases in which employees tend to out-perform when there is stress (Malik et al., 2022), but consequently, there physical and MWB gets affected (Hameed and Khwaja, 2022). Employee stress management (ESM) is a mechanism through which the employee manages work stress and executes tasks in a precise manner. From the discussion above, the following hypotheses can be postulated:

H₁ WHRM has a significant effect on ESM at the workplace.

H₂ PHRM has a significant effect on ESM at the workplace.

2.3 Benevolent HRM attributions and employees well-being

Staines (1980) provided spillover model explaining MWB. Sok et al. (2014) explains spillover in the organisational context stating that behaviours and emotions experienced at workplace have the tendency to spillover at the home environment. The effect of work environment on an individual is quite natural, and it consequently gets transmitted at home environment too (Akhtar and Malik, 2016). If the work culture has positivity, then eventually there would be positive energies transmitted by the employee at home; and it can be vice-versa if the work culture is toxic. Henceforth, researchers like Kopp et al. (2008), suggest that work environment and job-related stress effects MWB of the employees.

Benevolent HRM attributions have the tendency to improve work culture and environment. The introduction of employees-centric and stress-free initiatives from the HR is proposed to reduced work stress and improve MWB (Khan and Malik, 2017). If the employees MWB is at peace, then there would be substantial optimisation in the execution of tasks. The creation of competitive work environment is essential but unnecessary push and stress to the employees may adversely affect on the organisation in the long-run (Akhter et al., 2018). The overall objective of organisations remains to enhance organisational performance and ensure that the employees are not feeling stressed, overburden at the workplace (Hameed and Khwaja, 2022). The induction of PHRM and WHRM practices at workplace can certainly boost MWB of the employees, therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₃ WHRM significantly improves MWB of the employees.

H₄ PHRM significantly improves MWB of the employees.

2.4 Benevolent HRM attributions and gratitude

Gratitude (GE) is regarded an emotional state of being thankful (Fehr et al., 2017). Harvey and Weary (1984) explained attribution theory by identifying that emotions are triggers by beliefs and thoughts. Gratitude can be either benefit-triggered-gratitude, or other-directed gratitude. The execution of gratitude at the organisation should be at both

levels, from the employer and the employees (Hameed and Khwaja, 2022). The employer needs to be grateful towards the employees for the performance and completion of tasks. It is eminent to understand that the exhibition of humility and gratitude acts increase general acceptance among the masses, and these measures create a strong goodwill too. The employer needs to understand that employees spend a considerable amount of time at the workplace, therefore, the efforts must be recognised and respected in every regard (Malik and Khan, 2020).

Progressive organisations normally initiate such HRM practices through which gratitude level among the employees increase. Benevolent HRM attributions are direct to increase gratitude, and improve employee's performance at workplace (Khan and Malik, 2017). The association among benevolent HRM attributions and gratitude must be of positive nature, as the wider goal and objective remains to improve MWB of the employees and reduce stress (O'Leary and Dockray, 2015). The improvement in the MWB of the employees and reducing stress levels is a considerable significance too. In summation, the study proposes the following hypotheses stating that benevolent HRM attributions are positively related to gratitude at workplace.

H₅ WHRM is significantly associated with GE in the organisations.

H₆ PHRM is significantly associated with GE in the organisations.

2.4.1 Gratitude, ESM and MWB

ESM at the workplace is prudent for the precise completion of tasks, sustainability and organisational growth. Prior studies have pointed out that even if the stress levels in the organisations are high, demonstration of gratitude from the organisations can be helpful in managing stress (Youssef-Morgan and Ahrens, 2017). Sales-centric organisations have a lot of workplace stress as the business model is quite objective, and the organisation is sales-target oriented. Transactional rewards are put in forward by the employers for motivation purposes for the employees (Nielsen et al., 2019), but it is eminent to understand that transactional rewards do not mean that it is a gratitude exercise. In general, the study hypothesises that gratitude interventions manage stress at the workplace:

H₇ GE tends to reduce work stress in the organisations.

MWB tends to get sabotaged if the stress level in the organisations is high and there is minimal or no organisational support from the employer's end (Malik et al., 2022). It is essential to know that workplace issues and concerns arise when the employees feel that their efforts are not being respected, neither the organisation owns the tasks they perform. Moreover, toxic work environment negatively effects on the MWB of the employees (Obrenovic et al., 2020). According to WHO (2022), multiple factors effect mental health, like, poor communication and management practices, low levels of support for employees, unclear tasks or organisational objectives, inadequate health and safety policies, inflexible working hours etc. MWB can be improved through gratitude endeavours exhibition by the employer. Therefore, considering the aforementioned discussion, following hypothesis is proposed:

H₈ GE improves MWB of employees in the organisations.

3 Research methodology

Positivist research doctrine has been used in this study and deductive method has been deployed. The data was collected from the salesforce working in the telecommunication sector of Pakistan. Telecommunication sector of Pakistan is known to be one of the most competitive and intense sectors (Naseem, 2018). Certainly, due to evolving telecom business model, it is becoming even more competitive in order to keep the business sustainable. Consequently, salesforce faces the heat as they are responsible for revenue generation. Prior studies have also supported the notion of work stress in the telecom sector of Pakistan (Ramay et al., 2017). Thus, workload pressure is immense among the salesforce. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was deployed for the collection of data. Structured questionnaire was used for the collection of data and the items were adapted from the prior studies. The questionnaire was based on a five-point likert scale. The study was cross-sectional as the data was collected in a single timeframe. The total numbers of respondents for this study were 294. Variance-based structural equation modelling (VB-SEM) approach was deployed for the estimation of theoretical model. IBM-SPSS 24.0 and SmartPLS 3.2.8 was used for the data analysis. For conducting structural equation modelling (SEM) using VB-SEM approach, sample size of more than 200 respondents is suitable for analysis (Hair et al., 2017; Hameed and Khwaja, 2022).

4 Findings

For the estimation of the collected data, assumptions of regression were fulfilled. The initial data normality tests were conducted on IBM SPSS, and further data estimations were done on SmartPLS. Factor loadings analysis, convergent validity, discriminant validity and measurement model were conducted in order to ensure causal relationships among constructs.

4.1 Data normality

In data estimations, the first and foremost step is the conduction of data normality. For this purpose, data normality of the constructs was determined through descriptive statistics. Multivariate normality tests were conducted to examine if there are any normality concerns in the collected data. Multivariate data normality of all the core constructs of the study, namely, MWB, ESM, gratitude (GE), WHRM, and PHRM was examined. As the likert-scale was based on 1–5, therefore, mean value should be greater than 2.5 (Mahmood et al., 2019; Khwaja et al., 2019). Mean values reported in Table 1 illustrate that all the values are in the tolerable range. For standard deviation (SD) and variance, the values must be between +2, kurtosis values be between +3, while skewness values must be also between +2 (Tabassum et al., 2020; Khwaja, 2014). The results reported in Table 1 illustrate that all the values are in the permissible range.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics (N = 294)

| <i>Constructs</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Variance</i> | <i>Kurtosis</i> | <i>Skewness</i> |
|-------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | <i>Statistic</i> | <i>Statistic</i> | <i>Statistic</i> | <i>Statistic</i> | <i>Statistic</i> |
| MWB | 3.179 | 0.823 | 0.678 | -0.546 | -0.187 |
| ESM | 3.099 | 0.917 | 0.841 | -0.267 | -0.203 |
| GE | 2.997 | 1.006 | 1.014 | -0.867 | -0.050 |
| WHRM | 3.505 | 0.852 | 0.726 | -0.292 | -0.587 |
| PHRM | 2.959 | 0.902 | 0.814 | -0.953 | 0.172 |

Notes: MWB: mental wellbeing; ESM: employee stress management; GE: gratitude; WHRM: wellbeing human resource attributions; PHRM: performance human resource attributions.

Table 2 Measurement model (N = 294)

| <i>Constructs and items</i> | Γ | Ψ | <i>CR</i> | <i>AVE</i> |
|--|----------|--------|-----------|------------|
| <i>Well-being HRM attributions (WHRM)</i> | | | | |
| WHRM1 | 0.755 | 0.751 | 0.872 | 0.580 |
| WHRM2 | 0.804 | | | |
| WHRM3 | 0.842 | | | |
| WHRM4 | 0.806 | | | |
| WHRM5 | 0.673 | | | |
| <i>Mental wellbeing (MWB)</i> | | | | |
| MWB1 | 0.786 | 0.735 | 0.813 | 0.595 |
| MWB2 | 0.846 | | | |
| MWB3 | 0.804 | | | |
| MWB4 | 0.710 | | | |
| MWB5 | 0.670 | | | |
| <i>Performance HRM attributions (PHRM)</i> | | | | |
| PHRM1 | 0.816 | 0.727 | 0.852 | 0.542 |
| PHRM2 | 0.783 | | | |
| PHRM3 | 0.713 | | | |
| PHRM4 | 0.822 | | | |
| PHRM5 | 0.980 | | | |
| <i>Gratitude (GE)</i> | | | | |
| GE1 | 0.828 | 0.680 | 0.859 | 0.671 |
| GE2 | 0.832 | | | |
| GE3 | 0.796 | | | |

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; Γ = factor loadings of PLS-SEM; Ψ = KMO and Bartlett's test; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

Table 2 Measurement model (N = 294) (continued)

| <i>Constructs and items</i> | Γ | Ψ | CR | AVE |
|--|----------|--------|-------|-------|
| <i>Employee stress management (ESM)</i> | | | | |
| ESM1 | 0.779 | 0.760 | 0.843 | 0.575 |
| ESM2 | 0.769 | | | |
| ESM3 | 0.661 | | | |
| ESM4 | 0.816 | | | |
| <i>Model fit indices</i> | | | | |
| $\chi^2 = 741.440$, NFI = 0.710, SRMR = 0.072 | | | | |

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; Γ = factor loadings of PLS-SEM; Ψ = KMO and Bartlett's test; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

4.2 Data estimation using SEM

After the attainment of data normality, factor loadings analysis on SmartPLS was conducted. For the items to be acceptable, outer loadings must be greater than 0.5 and less than 1 (Hair et al., 2017; Khwaja et al., 2022; Zaman et al., 2021). Factor loadings have been denoted by Γ in Table 2. The results indicate that there are no loadings less than 0.5. Furthermore, for construct validity, KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity was conducted. KMO and Bartlett's value (Ψ) must be between 0.6 and less than 1 (Zaman et al., 2022). The results indicate that WHRM had Ψ value to be 0.751, MWB 0.735, PHRM 0.727, GE 0.680 and ESM 0.760 respectively. Composite reliability (CR) was conducted to measure that either the constructs are reliable or not. CR values must be between 0.7 and 1, and the results depicted CR values as WHRM 0.872, MWB 0.813, PHRM 0.852, GE 0.859 and ESM 0.843 respectively. For convergent validity, average variance extracted (AVE) was estimated and the values must between 0.5 and 1 (Khwaja et al., 2020). The results revealed AVE values to be WHRM 0.580, MWB 0.595, PHRM 0.542, GE 0.671 and ESM 0.575 respectively. The model fit indices were measured through chi-square (χ^2), normed fit index (NFI) and standardised root mean square residual (SRMR). NFI value was 0.710 and SRMR was 0.072, and both of them are acceptable. Henceforth, the data was precise and there were no measurement model issues.

Discriminant validity outcomes are projected in Table 3, which reveal that all standardised factor loadings for all items, and square of the correlations between factors are significant (Bashir et al., 2021; Tabassum et al., 2020).

Table 3 Discriminant validity (N = 294)

| | <i>ESM</i> | <i>GE</i> | <i>MWB</i> | <i>PHRM</i> | <i>WHRM</i> |
|------|------------|-----------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| ESM | 0.758 | | | | |
| GE | 0.362 | 0.819 | | | |
| MWB | 0.377 | 0.378 | 0.703 | | |
| PHRM | 0.461 | 0.47 | 0.435 | 0.736 | |
| WHRM | 0.389 | 0.391 | 0.443 | 0.376 | 0.762 |

4.3 Hypotheses testing

As the measurement model reported precise outcomes, therefore, it was mandatory to test hypotheses using path analysis. For the acceptance of a hypothesis, path coefficients or beta (β) value needs to be significant, t-stats should be greater than 1.96, and p-values must be less than 0.05 (Malik et al., 2021). The first hypothesis stated that there is a strong causal relationship among WHRM and ESM. The results indicated that beta value was 0.219, t-stats 3.461 and p-value less than 0.05. Second hypothesis stated about positive relationship among PHRM and ESM. The outcomes indicated β to be 0.320, t-stats 5.610 and p-value 0.000. The third hypothesis of the study argued that WHRM positively influences MWB, and the β value showed 0.285, t-stats 4.901 and p-value 0.000. Fourth hypotheses of the study stated that there is a positive association among PHRM and MWB; the results revealed that β value was 0.267, t-stats 4.292 and p-value less than 1.96.

Table 4 Results of hypotheses

| <i>Hypotheses</i> | <i>Relationships</i> | β | <i>SE</i> | <i>t-stats</i> | <i>p-values</i> | <i>Outcomes</i> |
|-------------------|----------------------|---------|-----------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| H ₁ | WHRM → ESM | 0.219 | 0.063 | 3.461 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H ₂ | PHRM → ESM | 0.320 | 0.057 | 5.610 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H ₃ | WHRM → MWB | 0.285 | 0.058 | 4.901 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H ₄ | PHRM → MWB | 0.267 | 0.062 | 4.292 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H ₅ | WHRM → GE | 0.248 | 0.061 | 4.038 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H ₆ | PHRM → GE | 0.374 | 0.053 | 7.049 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H ₇ | GE → ESM | 0.126 | 0.054 | 2.333 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H ₈ | GE → MWB | 0.141 | 0.061 | 2.311 | 0.000 | Supported |

Fifth hypothesis of the study coined positive association among WHRM and GE. The results indicated beta value to be 0.248, t-stats 4.038 and p-value 0.000. Sixth hypothesis argued that PHRM influences GE, and the outcomes provided β value to be 0.374, t-stats 7.049, and p-value 0.000. The seventh hypothesis of the study crafted that GE tends to reduced stress among the employees, and the beta values supported this notion as they were 0.126, t-stats 2.333, and p-values less than 0.05. The last and final hypothesis of the study argued that GE improves MWB of the employees. The outcomes indicated β value to be 0.141, t-stats 2.311 and p-values less than 0.05. Henceforth, all the established hypotheses of the study were accepted.

5 Discussion

Benevolent human resource attributions, comprising of PHRM and WHRM emphasised that how they can improve gratitude among the employees, can manage stress levels at workplace, and can enhance MWB of the employees. The coined theories and concepts had substantial value and significance as the theoretical knitting were taken from contemporary research studies. Especially after COVID-19, the patterns of operating in the workplace have changed significantly. Mutual gains model proposes a win-win situation for the organisation and the employee as in the long-run, both entities are

gaining. The strive remains that how human resource attributions are precisely managed. The systematic review of literature suggests that employee well-being has been overlooked in the HR literature (Hameed and Khwaja, 2022; Malik et al., 2022). Studies of researchers like Ogbonnaya and Messersmith (2018) reveal that at the expense of increasing employee stress levels, HRM practices can improve performances.

The researchers are also confining to explore that how stress levels at the workplace can be reduced through the introduction of HRM practices, in line with the framework of mutual gains (Hameed and Khwaja, 2022). Considering the aforementioned factors, the study was focused on exploring the knitted mutual gains and HRM model. The theoretically established model was consequently tested in the stressful telecommunication organisations. For the construction of theoretical framework, two core benevolent HRM attributions were taken into consideration, WHRM, and PHRM. For mutual gains framework fulfilment, MWB, and ESM were coined as outcome variables. Furthermore, gratitude (GE) was taken as a mediating construct. Meanwhile, sequential paths were determined, by proposing that GE would be positively influencing on all the relevant constructs.

It is important to understand that the role of gratitude is of profound importance in this regard. The humble and work-oriented approach of the employees is significant for long-lasting success and triumph. Employees tend to put time, resources and energy for the completion of tasks, and if they are not appropriately rewarded, then naturally there are lots of concerns for them. In the respective study, it was envisioned that HRM attributions would be reducing stress levels of the employees and also enhance MWB. Recent studies have emphasised to cater MWB of the employees (Clifton and Harter, 2021; Fetherston et al., 2021; McFadden et al., 2021; van Agteren et al., 2021), thus, it remained eminent to explore how HRM attributions would be impacting the MWB in the telecommunications sector.

The theoretically constructed framework was eventually statistically estimated by conducted necessary tests. For data analysis, SPSS 24.0 and SmartPLS 3.2.8 software were used. It was ensured that the assumptions of regression are fulfilled in this regard. Therefore, core aspects like data normality, construct validity, reliability, and correlations were taken into consideration. Furthermore, for the estimation of model using SEM, variance-based SEM technique was applied. Initially, assumptions of regressions were tested on SPSS, along with the conduction of exploratory factor analysis. Common method bias (CMB) test was executed to ensure that there are no biasness issues in the dataset. After the attainment of precise outcomes of initial statistical tests, data was estimated on SmartPLS.

Measurement model ensured that all the necessary estimations are conducted, in which CR, AVE, and NFI values were taken into consideration. Factor loadings of any item below than 0.5 were not considered. However, all the items had factor loadings more than 0.5. Discriminant validity was also examined in this regard. Once all the mandatory checks were completed, path analysis was conducted. Bootstrapping approach was deployed in order to ensure that there are no concerns in the dataset. Bootstrap size was 1,000 as it is proposed that bootstrap size should be three-fold than the dataset. The results indicated that all the established paths are significant. Hence, the theoretically coined foundations had substance.

The established theoretical and empirically tested model is based on the social exchange theory. The research study was conducted in the emerging market of Pakistan.

Asian and specifically South Asian contexts are eminent to be discussed in the HRM literature as they provide diverse operating models. Research endeavours on organisational psychology are at infancy stage in Pakistan, and studies like these would help to further explore organisational spheres of various progressive sector of the country. The research therefore provides a unique framework, focused on reducing stress levels among employees, increasing gratitude levels and improving MWB.

5.1 Theoretical and practical implications

On the theoretical levels, the study contributes to the HRM literature by blending HRM practices with the mutual gains model, and consequently proposing, mutual gains HRM model. The two selected aspects of HRM attributions, namely, wellbeing HRM attributions, and performance HRM attributions have been unfolded and their precise impact on employee wellbeing, ESM and gratitude has been measured. An extended mutual gains model would be eventually helping upcoming researchers to explore this important area further and find new horizons. Practical implications of the study include that the organisations can introduce a thorough employer/organisation branding strategy. The organisation branding strategy focuses that intra-organisational communications should be at zenith, so that the participating employees should feel accomplished, heard and listened. This provides them a sense of accomplishment and achievement, as the management acknowledges their efforts. These sorts of efforts are essential for motivating the staff at the workplace.

Furthermore, the study emphasises on the need of having gratitude among employees. Gratitude can be nurtured and cultivated among people as it significantly reduces stress levels. Gratitude interventions should be done by the HR professionals among the departments as it certainly improves the wellbeing of the employees. Not only for the employees, gratitude interventions for the employer/organisations are also important, therefore, continuous recognition of employees' efforts can improve workplace. Researchers have proposed to embed gratitude in the culture of the firms, and the organisations should be recognised for their gratitude-centric work cultures. Moreover, the organisations should conduct training and seminars for improving organisational commitment, and gratitude among the employees. Wellness programs are a great way to connect with the employees and improve overall organisational performance.

5.2 Limitations and future recommendations

The limitations of the study must be taken into consideration before generalising the results. The study opted for VB-SEM approach. Future studies should deploy covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) for more rigorous outcomes. The study had a limited sample size and it use cross-sectional approach for the collection of data. Future studies should use longitudinal design, as collection of data in different time frames may provide diverse outcomes. The study followed positivist approach, and only quantitative estimations were conducted to coin the relationship among constructs. Future researchers can use grounded theory approach to extract subject matter from the context too. The deployment of realism research philosophy will be prudent in that regard.

The study was conducted specifically in a highly stressed telecommunications sector of an emerging market. Future studies may use sales-centric stressful industrial sectors to

test the established framework, like banking, fast moving consumer goods (FMCG), etc. Only two benevolent attributions were taken into account for the respective study. Further studies should unfold further HRM attributions. Moreover, constructs like perceived organisational support (POS), organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and organisational justice can be deployed in future studies. Signalling theory can be used as an underpinning theory in future research as model-driven theories have their own limitations.

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